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FANTASTIKA

EDITOR'S NOTE

"Fantastika"

A term appropriated from a range of Slavonic languages by John Clute. It embraces the genres of Fantasy, Science Fiction, and Horror, but can also include Alternate History, Gothic, Steampunk, Young Adult Dystopic Fiction, or any other radically imaginative narrative space.
The goal of *Fantastika Journal* and its conferences is to bring together academics and independent researchers who share an interest in this diverse range of fields with the aim of opening up new dialogues, productive controversies, and collaborations. We invite articles examining all mediums and disciplines which concern the Fantastika genres.

Welcome to this latest issue of *Fantastika Journal*, one which brings together a truly wonderful array of responses and pieces produced during the unprecedented circumstances of the last twelve months and beyond. We open with an editorial from Rob Maslen as a celebration of the opening of the 'Centre for Fantasy and the Fantastic' at the University of Glasgow, UK, and its significance for Fantastika studies. Maslen's editorial not only documents how such a centre came into existence, but productively asks what such a centre should 'do' or what it should be 'for,' and how that can help us to interrogate what we mean by Fantasy, the Fantastic, or Fantastika itself.

Our first article from Eilis Lee explores the representation of female characters from Naomi Novik's *Uprooted* (2015) and challenges whether the apparent progressivism of its central protagonists are effective in fulfilling escapes from objectification or consumption. From this, we transition to Carey Millsap-Spears who also fruitfully engages with the representation of the central female character – Vanessa Ives – in the television show *Penny Dreadful* (2014-2016) in the context of colonial attitudes and Male/Female Gothic depictions and how the show may open the way for a new version of the Gothic heroine. Following on, Mike Ryder focuses on the role of the super-soldier in relation to the Warhammer 40,000 universe, illuminating how the franchise's representation of military ethics and states of exception are more relevant than ever in a modern-world of black ops and drone strikes. To conclude, Derek J. Thiess explores the notion of 'prepping' in relation to Latourian philosophy by putting into dialogue fantastical and real representation of apocalypticism in a manner that keenly resonates with contemporary circumstances – one which is echoed later in Oliver Rendle's review of *Notes from An Apocalypse: A Personal Journey to the End of the World and Back* (2020) by Mark O'Connell.

We round out the issue with a wide range of reviews and reports, including reflections on both physical and virtual conferences that have recently taken place. Including contributions on Korean Science Fiction, Indian Children's Fiction, Alternate History, utopian futures, and Weird Fiction from the *fin de siècle* to contemporary innovations to name a few, such a sample demonstrates the wonderful creative and critical Fantastika publications released in the last year and beyond.
We are deeply thankful to all our authors, reviewers, peer-reviewers, and readers for their contributions and hope you enjoy reading this issue.

Kerry Dodd and C. Palmer-Patel
Co-head Editors

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Dragons, hedge-witches, dashing princes, and a menacing forest: Naomi Novik's Nebula-winning novel *Uprooted* (2015) draws on many traditional Slavic and Franco-Germanic fairy-tale patterns, archetypes, and tropes. Continuing the adaptation work of many female writers before her, Novik places women at the heart of her novel, offering its female figures – protagonist Agnieszka, village girl Kasia, scandalous queen Hanna, and the monstrous Wood-queen – roles and powers beyond those which their fairy-tale ancestors could possess. Crucially, Novik attempts to destabilise the dynamics of consumption intrinsic to fairy-tale, in which women are objectified, made passive, and consumed by male gazes and desires.

Drawing on the work of folklorists like Cristina Bacchilega and Marcia R. Lieberman, alongside (eco)feminist theory and popular culture scholarship, this article considers the efficacy of Novik's intervention into these physical, sexual, and figurative consumptive patterns. I assert that through moments of rupture, regeneration, and transformation, *Uprooted* attempts to break free from the gendered restraints of the fairy-tale model. This transformation is often intrinsically connected to nature: the sentient Wood, *Uprooted*'s antagonist, is both a corrupting and empowering force, giving Kasia, for example, superhuman strength whilst Othering her from society. Using the scholarship of J. Halberstam, Val Plumwood, and Elizabeth Parker, among others, I thus consider whether naturalisation – a transformative mode typically used to delegitimise and disenfranchise women's agency and sexuality – and the embracing of dangerous natural forces allow Novik's women to subvert archetypal fairy-tale stereotypes. Ultimately, however, *Uprooted*'s interventions into fairy- and folk-tale are not entirely progressive or successful. The novel's male characters perpetuate damaging stereotypes and consumptive behaviours, including attempted sexual assault; many of its women are punished for expressing their sexuality, ultimately remaining bound to oppressive

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EDITORIALS

THE CENTRE FOR FANTASY AND THE FANTASTIC AT THE UNIVERSITY OF GLASGOW: PRACTISING THE IMPOSSIBLE

Rob Maslen

September 2020 saw the founding of the Centre for Fantasy and the Fantastic at the University of Glasgow, UK. It was the culmination of a long process, which began with the teaching of Fantasy at undergraduate level in a course that proved immensely popular with students, then went a step further with the establishment of an MLitt in Fantasy in 2015, and broke into a run with the advertising of two dedicated appointments in the field in 2018. This led to the arrival in Glasgow of two key figures: the Lord Kelvin Adam Smith Research Fellow Rhys Williams, a specialist in climate futures, and the respected Fantasy scholar Dimitra Fimi, whose expertise in Tolkien placed her work at the very heart of the so-called 'fuzzy set' of Fantasy. As far as we know, these two were the first academics ever to have had their job titles specifically linked to the concept of 'Fantasy', and their arrival marked something of a sea change in academic attitudes to the fantastic. They joined the two Fantasy enthusiasts already working in English at Glasgow, myself and the indefatigable Matthew Sangster, a Romanticist with an encyclopaedic knowledge of Fantasy fiction, film, TV, comics, and games. Our efforts were already being strongly supported by the German fairy tale specialist Laura Martin, the gaming scholar Matt Barr, Maureen Farrell – an expert in Scottish children's Fantasy in the School of Education – and a rapidly growing cohort of doctoral students and MLitt students past and present. So all at once we had ourselves a community or fellowship, the first prerequisite of any attempt to engineer changes large or small.

With Dimitra's appointment it began to seem inevitable that a Centre would soon be founded, given her phenomenal energy as an agitator for the genre as well as a scholar. Two years later the Centre was duly launched, its launchpad having been a major symposium Dimitra organised in 2019 at which students, scholars, writers, artists, and fans gave up a day to the question of how such a Centre might function and what it might achieve. But what exactly *is* a Centre for Fantasy and the Fantastic? Or to ask the question again as formulated by the participants in Dimitra's symposium, what does it do? The question is well worth asking given that such a Centre has no physical presence, despite our dreams of acquiring a castle with space enough in its dungeons for a world-class archive, room in the Great Hall for a theatre and gallery, and banks of state-of-the-art computers in the Keep. Given, too, that we live in the Age of Covid, when the Climate Catastrophe has been acknowledged by multiple governments as an emergency of unprecedented proportions, a Centre for Fantasy might look to many like a piece of reckless self-indulgence. What, then, is it *for*?

The first answer is simple enough: to focus minds on a range of questions about what Fantasy does. These questions were deemed worth asking six years ago by my colleagues in the College of Arts at Glasgow, when they first gave permission for the setting-up of an MLitt in Fantasy, largely on the basis of the case we had made for it: that Fantasy is making its presence felt with increasing forcefulness in the twenty-first century, as the Science Fiction (SF) and Fantasy section of bookshops expand exponentially, infiltrating shelves once dedicated to realist fiction; as Fantasy TV shows dominate the output of major streaming services; as Fantasy movies emerge as among the most successful in cinema history, and Fantasy computer games outperform the bulk of their 'realistic' rivals in the industry. During Covid, much of the world has been wedded to an online fantasy environment, for better or worse. Is there a connection, here, to the increasing dominance of fantasy politics in global affairs, a politics that chooses to ignore the facts in favour of sometimes disturbing dreams of personal gratification? Or to the fantasy that climate catastrophe might be a lie – the dark flip side of benign environmentalist fantasies about a general Return to Nature? Is fantasy mere escapism? Is escapism itself 'mere,' or is it an essential need, as many have found it in the context of repeated lockdowns, whether imposed by governments or by the requirement to protect our families, friends, and vulnerable strangers from a disease that resembles the fantastic in making the unthinkable suddenly, urgently present? Why is Fantasy everywhere these days, and why do we love it? Why do *I* love it, given that my affections may differ from yours? Has Fantasy got a history? Will it have a future?

The second answer is not so simple: a Centre invites us to ask what we *mean* by Fantasy. How useful is the term? Why Fantasy rather than SF, or Horror, or one of those catch-all categories, Speculative Fiction or Fantastika? This question I can only answer – like everyone else – from a personal angle. I first began to hear the term fantasy as a child in the 1970s, when it began to be used to describe the fiction I liked, where impossible things happened, such as spontaneous metamorphosis into animal, plant, or supernatural being, the appearance of dragons, trolls or other, stranger creatures, activities wholly outside the capabilities of ordinary people, such as flight, invisibility, light production at a click of the fingers, the discovery of worlds fit for human habitation in wardrobes, hills, woods, mirrors, the sea or the sky. At the time, I was not interested in fiction that described the sorts of things I came across in my daily life; I knew enough about those already. What I wanted was what I hadn't got, and in excess, in superabundance; not just friendships with animals but conversations with *talking* animals, or animals that don't exist, or animals who were formerly humans, or would be again, possibly not at the most convenient moments. And I have gone on wanting these things, although I have also come to recognise how stories about them serve to enrich the everyday, investing the hedgerows and streets with a mystique they would otherwise lack.

What I like about using the term fantasy in an academic context is its free acknowledgment of the contempt an interest in such things can generate; a contempt to which we fantasy-lovers were often subjected – in youth, at least, and sometimes now – to such an extent that we felt the need to conceal our artistic allegiances, or defend them in self-deprecating terms as soon as they had been confessed, as I never needed to defend my work as a scholar of Renaissance Studies. It's important that this set of lived experiences be acknowledged when we pay attention to the fantastic;

embarrassment, mockery, shame. What I like, too, is the fact that the term fantasy contains within itself the admission that we don't *really* know how things work, and that as a result we will always live in a world of wonders; a fact that we can either ignore or embrace, as fantasists do. There are other, more political reasons for loving fantasy – one of them being incapsulated in the evocative phrase used by Lucinda Holdsworth in a recent blog post, that "Fantasy is the first step of all activism"; another being something of a mantra with Rhys Williams, that fantasy provides what might be called a placeholder for the things we don't yet have, but can *dream* of having, now, not just in the future or the imagined past: a healthy working relationship with plants and animals, for instance, or power that is not reliant on fossil fuels. Certainly, it's to fantasy that I can partly ascribe my own burgeoning sense of political commitment as I grew up and grew rapidly older, though Fantasy here shades into Science Fiction, utopianism, the capacity to share other lives imaginatively which is the province of all fiction.

I like the way 'fantasy' changes things when it's applied to them. For instance, you can call Virginia Woolf's *Orlando* (1928) a Modernist text, or you can call it Fantasy because of the impossible things it takes for granted: a man who lives for hundreds of years, becoming a woman along the way. The different terms, Modernism and Fantasy, make different things happen. Modernism focuses the mind on a web of experimental artistic movements that sprang up in the 1910s and flourished through the 1930s and beyond, while Fantasy enables us to link those experiments with the web of fictions being woven at the same time, in which the world of the twentieth century (or in *Orlando*'s case, the world of the last four centuries) is acknowledged as fantastic because of the unpredictable changes it has hosted, changes one might confidently have branded impossible before they happened. The term 'fantasy' brings *Orlando* into conversation with texts and other artworks from which it is usually segregated, and *Orlando* is altered in the process. This is why I apply the term quite freely, in the interests of finding out what might happen if it should stick.

A Centre dedicated to Fantasy provides a focus for such questions and cogitations – a focus that has the blessing as well as the financial and social clout of an institution behind it, as it might not have done in the past. It provides a safe haven where fantasists can meet and discuss their rival dreams; not that fantasists were necessarily *persecuted* for those dreams before this, but frequent disparagement can have a wearing effect on even the most ebullient of personalities. It provides a forum for events; since the launch of the Centre in September 2020 there have been four of them, all online, and by the time this editorial sees (virtual) print there will have been two or three more. It provides a launchpad for activities, such as the founding of a new series of academic monographs dedicated to Fantasy that was recently announced by Bloomsbury (Perspectives on Fantasy), and whose editorial team is headlined by members of the Centre and their friends and associates around the world. It generates works of art, having welcomed creative people and fans as well as scholars from its inception; one of our forthcoming events is the launch of a novel which the author began while studying for the MLitt in Fantasy. It forges alliances: we will be holding an international Fantasy conference co-sponsored with the USA-based International Association for the Fantastic in the Arts (IAFA), while the British Library turned to the Centre when it began to plan for a forthcoming exhibition on Fantasy, now deferred because of Covid but still very much in the works.

It presents new opportunities for learning, such as the Fantasy Summer School, which starts this year. The Centre, then, is a field of dreams, which attracts activities, objects, and people into its magic circle; people and objects that would otherwise be scattered in ones and twos across the globe. We have already had some donations, of archives and fantasy-related objects as well as funds, and without a Centre it's hard to imagine how such donations could be made. Finally, the Centre gives us an online presence we would not otherwise have had, and this extends its influence well beyond the bounds of Glasgow, Scotland, or Europe.

The fact is, though, that we don't yet know what a Centre for Fantasy and the Fantastic does, and will not and should not know exactly what it does until it has done it. That's because in the end it's a collection of people rather than a concept, many of them young, many of them still thinking about where and how to make their first move within the compass of the strange artefacts, places, and texts that obsess or haunt them. We're waiting to find out; and the waiting itself bears daily fruit in the shape of ideas, adventures, causes, dreams. Come join us, then, in the antechamber of the impossible. It almost certainly won't be.

Further information can be found at the Centre's website and its blog.

BIONOTE

Rob Maslen is co-director (with Dr Dimitra Fimi) of the new Centre for Fantasy and the Fantastic at the University of Glasgow, UK. He is the author of two monographs, *Elizabethan Fictions* (1997) and *Shakespeare and Comedy* (2005), and three editions: Sir Philip Sidney's *Apology for Poetry* (2002), Mervyn Peake's *Collected Poems* (2008), and (with Peter Winnington) Peake's *Complete Nonsense* (2011). He has published many essays on speculative fiction, and blogs at The City of Lost Books.

ARTICLES

"ALL OF HER MADE PART OF [...] THE WOOD": CONSUMPTION, TRANSFORMATION, AND THE LIMITS OF SUBVERSION IN NAOMI NOVIK'S *UPROOTED*

Eilis Lee

Uprooted (2015), Naomi Novik's horror-inflected, Nebula-winning fantasy novel, continues a well-established history of women writers intervening in and revolutionising folkloric narrative. Consuming, cannibalising, and re-animating her folkloric and fairy-tale sources, first-generation Polish American Novik weaves an unmistakably Slavic-influenced tale from various narratives, ranging from children's tales like "*Agnieszka Skrawek Neiba*" to wider Eastern European folk-tales and epics (Novik, *Uprooted* 436). Planting elements of these in "the fairy-tale Poland of [her] childhood," *Uprooted* follows protagonist Agnieszka's fight against the dark enchantments of a corrupting forest, whilst navigating war, magic, and courtly intrigue (Novik interviewed by Schwartz 2011, n.p.). In addition to these Slavic roots, *Uprooted* draws on features found within more familiar Franco-Germanic fairy-tale sources, like "Rapunzel," "Sleeping Beauty," and their retellings, like Stephen Sondheim's *Into the Woods* (1986). Such similarities emphasise folklore's transnational appeal, but in appropriating these sources, *Uprooted* establishes clear yet problematic gendered tropes. Women are figured as intensely ripe, deeply sexualised foodstuffs and are then abducted, trapped in towers, and threatened with total consumption. A seemingly impenetrable, villainous natural force is subtly and dangerously coded as female, and a heroic princely figure tries to claim the trapped maiden as his prize. While she engages with these traditional fairy-tale tropes, Novik interrogates her sources' treatment of women. Through Agnieszka's evolution into vigilante heroine, secondary character Kasia's monstrous transformation from powerless maiden to naturalised cyborg, and the Wood's physical-representational feminine anger and sheer power, Novik attempts a feminist intervention into these patterns. This article, however, asserts that whilst *Uprooted* attempts to break free from the gendered restraints of the fairy-tale model, the efficacy of these interventions is limited. Ultimately, Novik's female characters can never fully come into their own power and escape their status as consumable.

Uprooted is more than simply a site of textual consumption and adaptation. Magical, sexual, and literal consumption become equally crucial to *Uprooted*'s narrative due to the gluttonous appetites of humans and Novik's primary antagonist, the menacing, sentient Wood. Set in the country of Polnya, an analogue for medieval Poland, *Uprooted* is centred around Agnieszka, a plain village girl who is forcibly taken by the local wizard, the Dragon, to be his housekeeper. After

showing a hidden magical talent, she becomes his apprentice, and the two reluctantly work together to develop her powers. When her home is attacked by this supernatural forest, Agnieszka must use her newfound magic to rid the land of the Wood's curse. The Wood's corruption is spreading across the country: in her home-town of Dvernik, which sits in a valley that is slowly being taken over by the forest, as well as in Polnya's royal court, which becomes dangerously, fatally corrupted by the Wood's magic.

Significantly, the abduction of women like Agnieszka, an act intrinsically linked to the battle against the Wood's ceaseless growth, forms the narrative catalyst. The Dragon, the most formidable wizard in the land, "takes" a girl from his valley to be kept in his tower for ten years, in exchange for magical protection from the encroaching forest (Novik, *Uprooted* 3). There is both a distinct lack of consent from the young women who are lined up to be taken and a fatalistic bind in the valley-people's acceptance that a girl must be chosen each decade. In a sinister mirroring of a marriage feast, the villagers even offer their misanthropic wizard-lord a banquet upon the taking-day: "The feasting tables were set out in a square, loaded [with] tribute of the entire valley […] Sacks of wheat and oats were piled up on the grass" (11). Such feasting, associated with harvest and environmental fertility, highlights what ecofeminist scholar Emily Douglas terms women's "edibility," a status catalysed by society's impulse to connect female corporeality and sexuality with food (243). Douglas astutely notes that throughout history and in our current moment:

> Women are edible only as flesh, and primarily as a metaphor for sexual consumption This association of women with edibility is not an inherent property, but a social construction. In contrast, the concept of being eaten is erased from the ideal of masculinity: men are portrayed as and disciplined to be the consumers, not the consumed. (245-246).

Novik's fictional culture clearly and rather uncomfortably reflects Douglas' observations of our own society. The girls of *Uprooted* become naught but a rich, erotic bounty for the Dragon's unknown desires: "a strange creature on another plane entirely," the true motivation for the Dragon's abductions is as unclear as the nature of the Dragon himself (Novik 150).

Indeed, the Dragon's kidnappings are assumed to be inherently carnal. Though he is human, the wizard's chosen name belies a devouring appetite that strengthens his abductions' implicitly sexual natures. Whilst Agnieszka notes that the "Dragon doesn't eat the girls he takes," they are obviously "ruined, even though the girls all say he never [touches] them. What else could they say?" (3). This assumption that the Dragon assaults the girls dynamically represents what popular culture scholar Laura Mattoon d'Amore acknowledges as "an acute knowledge of rape culture" held by young women within contemporary society and addressed within contemporary folkloric retellings, "a pervasive threat […] inscribed on the bodies of girls and women who are under constant attack by forces that desire to possess […] and contain them" (386-387). Certainly, the Dragon's choosing forces the girls to confront their status as bodies to be (sexually) consumed.

Though Kasia, Agnieszka's closest friend and the Dragon's assumed victim, asserts that "He's taken girls for a hundred years […] one of them would have admitted" to being assaulted, she still asks Agnieszka's mother "to tell her how it happened when a girl was married" to prepare for her own violation (Novik 16). Terror lies at the heart of this interaction: Dragon as beastly predator, women as choiceless, intensely corporeal prey.

Even the matrilineal bequeathing of feminine knowledge only partially challenges this terror. Stolen by the Dragon herself, upon Agnieszka's realisation that she is now at risk of sexual violation, she cannot enact her mother's advice to control her body: "I wasn't brave—I didn't think that I could take deep breaths, and keep from clenching up tight […] so it wouldn't hurt" (16). Fear of rape rids women of bodily autonomy before the act even occurs and shows them to be defenceless within an already imbalanced power dynamic. The drastic age difference between the Dragon and his victims worsens this imbalance and the horror of his purported actions. As Agnieszka emphasises, "He should have been old and grey" but "at a quick glance in the street I might have thought him a young man […] someone I might have smiled at across the feast-table, and who might have asked me to dance" (11). A magical deception, only the "crows-nest of lines by his eyes" betrays the fact that the wizard is well over one hundred years old compared to Agnieszka, who is seventeen (Novik 11); this age gap is, frankly, disturbing.

That the young women's abduction and potential sexual consumption is the cost of fighting the Wood reinforces women's classification as prey within Novik's constructed society. A dark cousin of the "Innocent Persecuted Heroine", this notion reflects common themes found within countless fairy-tales, with the protagonists of "Sleeping Beauty" or "Snow White" forming prescient examples (Bacchilega, *An Introduction* 1). Continuously, as Simone de Beauvoir highlights in *The Second Sex* (1949), within story and reality "Woman is a special prize which the hero [is] destined to win […] What would Prince Charming have for occupation if he had not to awaken Sleeping Beauty?" (215). *Uprooted*'s opening repeats this ceaseless pattern of woman-as-reward. The valley-people accept their daughters' potential fates, loving "a Dragon-born girl differently as she gets older […] knowing you so easily might lose them," a passive phrase reinforcing the abductive status-quo (Novik 5). Even Agnieszka, at risk of becoming "tribute," acknowledges that "He [The Dragon] protects us against the Wood" and people are consequently "grateful" enough to give their daughters as sacrifices (13, 4-5). Though "they knew it wasn't right," villagers would only challenge their wizard-lord if he literally "wanted to eat one of [their daughters] every ten years" (62, 3). Compounding the heroines' innocence and persecution is that, as folklorist and scholar Kay Stone highlights, the popularised heroines like those of the Brothers Grimm and Disney are not only passive and pretty, but unusually patient, obedient, industrious, and quiet (16). Narratives containing such female characters, who are admired for and retain their redemptive, positive qualities even in the face of persecution, only celebrate and normalise female sacrificial behaviour in relationships. These women will be persecuted, and they will (or can) often do little, if anything, to alter their fates.

Some critics, like Anna Faktorovich, read the novel's premise as intrinsically damaging and even dangerous for its readership. In her review of Novik's work, Faktorovich evaluates that:

> The trouble is that [*Uprooted*] is not being sold as a pornographic masochistic fantasy, but rather has a painting of a castle, a princess in a tower and other fairytale components on the cover and the blurbs and description also mention the words fairytale, stressing that it is intended for young adult readers. (75)

Whilst a detailed discussion of folk- and fairy-tale adaptations' audiences and readership is outside this article's scope, it is vital to note that assuming that fairy-tales cater solely for younger audiences is problematic. Such criticism ignores that, as Maria Tatar in "'Violent delights" in Children's Literature" (1998) notes, "Fairy tales may now belong to the culture of childhood, but they have always been of adult making" (71). Though fairy-tale adaptations such as *Uprooted* or Angela Carter's seminal short story collection *The Bloody Chamber* (1979) often feature younger protagonists, particularly young women, this does not mean they are aimed at younger readers. They are often graphically adult, drawing on the latent violence and sexuality of their sources: Carter's work is especially dark, featuring many instances of abuse, alongside necrophilia, incest, and rape. Elise Bruhl and Michael Gamer note that even among university students, generally aged over eighteen, "Carter's texts have a polarizing effect on students" (135). Many are shocked by Carter's "violent, ornate and highly sexualized" versions of well-known tales, though she draws on their original content (135). Younger readers should not be prohibited from reading works like *The Bloody Chamber* and *Uprooted*, which Novik has explicitly stated was "written for adults," but many fairy-tale adaptations are definitively not Young Adult (*naominovik.com* 2015).

Criticising adult works for adult content thus seems redundant. Certainly, describing *Uprooted* as "Pornographic" is hyperbolic (Faktorovich 75). Sexual acts occur in the novel, but they are relatively realistic, avoid gratuity, and signal consent: for example, Agnieszka asks, "Do you *want* me to go?" before she sleeps with the Dragon (Novik, *Uprooted* 353, emphasis in original). Both wizard and apprentice consume and are consumed; though an underlying asymmetry in their statuses remains, further complicated by their master-pupil dynamic, their desire is mutual. However, Faktorovich's allegation that *Uprooted* often tends towards worrying elements of "masochistic fantasy" seems accurate (75). Whilst the novel's emphasis on female pleasure is a refreshing break from the conventional literary focus on male sexual satisfaction, this does not redeem one of *Uprooted*'s most challenging narrative threads: Prince Marek's sexual assault of Agnieszka.

Another generic fairy-tale figure, Marek is the younger son of the King of Polnya and the late Queen Hanna, whose disappearance into the Wood before the novel's start has cast a dark shadow over the kingdom. As an archetype, Marek clearly descends from the hero of epic romance; a "tall, golden haired, broad-shouldered" warrior (Novik 40), he is a near-angelic figure immortalised in "at least a dozen stories and songs" for killing "three or four or nine giants" (40-41), although his authority is weakened by Agnieszka's doubt of these tales' truth. His behaviour towards women also perpetuates the role of hypermasculine champion, continuing the incessant pattern of fairy-tale

damsel as consumable pleasure. Like many folkloric princes, Marek views women as his right: it is he, rather than the Dragon, who enacts the rape-fantasy assumed to take place within the wizard's obtusely phallic tower. Within pages of their meeting, Marek attempts to forcefully "overcome" Agnieszka, comforting her as he kisses and touches her without consent "as though [she] were a horse to be reined in and made calm" (43-44). Though Novik has Agnieszka successfully resist his assault by using her innate magic, this uncomfortably narrow escape does not diffuse the power of rape culture. Rather, this early episode within *Uprooted* clearly exemplifies folklorist Cristina Bacchilega's assertion that fairy-tales possess "rigid sexual patterns [that] teach fear and masochism as tenets of femininity" (*Postmodern Fairy Tales* 51). Not only does Agnieszka attempt to rationalise the prince's actions, commenting that "It's not that he was taking pleasure in overcoming me" (Novik 43), but the Dragon excuses Marek's behaviour by asserting that Marek "thought of it as cuckolding" the wizard (49). Here, the Dragon vindicates Marek's actions as being spurred by a toxic masculinity that views women as men's property and, consequently, fuels men to sexually claim women as a form of (intra)masculine domination. Doing so, the Dragon completely ignores Agnieszka's trauma to focus on threats to his own power and virility. He relegates her suffering, excuses Marek's wrongdoing, and continues to force women into the role of object to be feasted upon by male desire.

Immediately, then, *Uprooted* adheres to typical fairy-tale tropes that, amongst other consequences, fundamentally code women as consumable and men as their consumers. The Wood forms an antagonistic threat to the status-quo. Two powerful, predatory males dominate the narrative. A woman becomes their heroic bounty; she is abducted and trapped in a tower, unable to escape. However, Novik stages a seemingly feminist intervention into these traditional folkloric patterns part-way through her narrative. Such an intervention echoes the ways in which Angela Carter re-approached and re-visioned the narrative principles of traditional Franco-Germanic fairy-tales from a second-wave feminist perspective in *The Bloody Chamber*, which became a touchstone of modern Gothic women's writing. Centring women, female bodies and female experience in her adaptations, Carter transported "new wine into old bottles" when constructing her stories (Carter and Uglow 37), attempting to create modern, adult and yet progressive tales within the skeletons of traditional fairy-tales. With *Uprooted,* Novik enacts a similar transformation, endeavouring to subvert the expectations that readers may have established and the structures of folk-tales themselves.

The most obvious way in which Novik attempts to break the folk-tale's spine is through Agnieszka's characterisation. Upon her abduction, Agnieszka immediately rejects the status of persecuted heroine and embodies a spirit akin to d'Amore's concept of "vigilante feminism" (387). In this positive feminist mode, women address matters of justice: they combat gender-based prejudice and violence, protecting anyone attacked by patriarchy through direct female action. Protecting herself and others against instances of violence, abduction, persecution, and the Wood's corruption, Agnieszka does not let her stereotypically fairy-tale situation force her into passivity. Instead, she plays the hero-part that male characters, like Marek, typically inhabit. When Agnieszka's home is attacked by the Wood, for example, she defies the Dragon's orders to "*do* absolutely nothing" (Novik 58, emphasis in original). Stealing his potions and realising her magical potential, Agnieszka enacts her own rescue, becoming a Rapunzel who needs no prince in her metamorphosis from

helpless village girl to gifted witch. Significantly, she uses the "ridiculous gowns" that the Dragon wills her to wear (35), themselves symbolic of his patriarchal power and desire to make her more visually consumable, "to make […] a rope," abseil down the tower, and race to save Dvernik (60). Agnieszka similarly rejects social acceptance when she later stands before the royal court as a budding witch. Defying socio-political and magical hierarchy, she champions two women who are to "die by the flame" after being potentially corrupted by the Wood (299): Kasia and Queen Hanna, the latter of whom is rescued by Agnieszka and her allies after being trapped by the Wood for almost twenty years. Here, and throughout *Uprooted*, Agnieszka enacts d'Amore's vigilante feminism, being "strong on behalf of others" and continuously seeking "paths of justice that deeply unsettle the structures of power implicit in patriarchy" (d'Amore 390). Doing so, Agnieszka becomes Stone's "active" heroine (19), one of the women who "are not victims of hostile forces beyond their control but are, instead, challengers who confront the world rather than waiting for success to fall at their pretty feet" (19). *Uprooted*'s female characters possess welcome depth; they are not simply strong, nor blankly confrontational. Agnieszka may be magically powerful enough, even as a supposed novice, for her to fall under the Mary-Sue label, but it is important to note that she remains equally flawed, straddling gender roles and defying patriarchal impulses to be contained or labelled.[1]

Embracing stereotypically female domestic responsibilities alongside demolishing gendered expectations, she cooks for the Dragon and undertakes most of their household tasks, and in doing so finds soothing purpose. Here, food is not a threatening symbol and consumption is not a sexual act. Rather, they become connections to the homely and familiar, to other women rather than the Dragon: "to cure [her] loneliness" post-abduction, for example, Agnieszka makes "a small feast" for herself (Novik 56). This gastronomic ritual is inspired by thoughts of home, by rustic images like her mother "basting the great ham" and "turning the potatoes into the dripping pan beneath" and Kasia "rolling the beautiful fine senkach cake" (56). Food and cooking foster sisterhood, an intensely feminine connection that provides comfort during Agnieszka's imprisonment in the threatening, masculine space of the Dragon's tower. This is echoed in the later connection between Agnieszka and the Dragon's previous abductees. Drawing on the *"Courage!"* that ends one of the other women's recipes (20), Agnieszka uses these female bonds to drive her quest to save her loved-ones and herself when she escapes the tower to save her hometown. Whilst the domestic sphere remains ideologically attached to traditional patriarchal oppressions and gendered roles that demand that women be homemakers, it also nurtures important connections to other women that inspire Agnieszka's empowerment, self-belief, and definitive valour.

An even greater dismantling of fairy-tale stereotypes takes place within Kasia's characterisation. From *Uprooted*'s start, Kasia is portrayed as the flawless fairy-tale heroine, a gentle country girl explicitly connected to the land and harvest: "She had thick wheat-golden hair […] her eyes were warm brown, and her laugh was like a song that made you want to sing it" (5). Cunningly acknowledging her metafictional subversions, Novik has Agnieszka concede that: "I know I'm making her sound like something out of a story. But it was the other way around. When my mother told me stories […] I imagined [the heroines] all a little like Kasia" (5). Kasia's identity is plainly established. Within a typical fairy-tale narrative, she would be a heroine or an innocuous maiden.

Almost mystically virtuous, she is the valley's "most special" girl (5). Everyone is certain she will be taken: her prescribed destiny is to be reaped and consumed by the wizard-lord.

However, Novik distinctly breaks from folkloric structure here. Marcia R. Lieberman asserts that within traditional folklore and fairy-tale "the immediate and predictable result of being beautiful is being chosen," but with Kasia, Novik destabilises this convention (385). The explicitly beautiful, almost ripened girl is not spirited away by a beastly male, as may be expected, but is chosen by a rather different, implicitly female organism altogether, the Wood. This development, however, is not wholly progressive. Agnieszka is abducted in her place, continuing the pattern of kidnap-and-control dominating the novel's plot, even if she quickly achieves freedom. Neither can Kasia escape her consumptive destiny. In imagining her friend as perfect fairy-tale heroine, even Agnieszka forces Kasia into this position. Though not sexually consumed within the villagers' imagined rape-fantasy or by the double bind of a marriage-motherhood destiny, Kasia becomes an obvious, significant target for the Wood's corruption due to her extremely close friendship with Agnieszka. To attack Kasia is to attack Agnieszka and her allies, who are the Wood's prime enemies by this point in the novel. Hence, Kasia is fertile ground in which the Wood quite literally plants its thirsty roots. Emulating the phraseology of the Dragon's abductions, the Wood's monstrous creatures eventually "[take] her" (Novik 99). When Agnieszka finally discovers her, Kasia is "bound" to a tree, nearly fully consumed: "Her back was against the trunk and her arms drawn backwards around it […] the bark had already grown over her […] the grey skin smooth and hard, as though she had been swallowed into the trunk whole, all of her made part of the tree, of the Wood" (106).

This horrific arboreal consumption does more than simply parallel the forceful sexual domination elsewhere in *Uprooted*. The Wood's attempted entombment enacts a feminist transformation within Kasia's character arc and *Uprooted*'s wider narrative: Kasia transcends the role of helpless heroine, being saved not by a Marek-like "hero [of] the songs" but by her closest female friend (133). Vigilante magician Agnieszka risks her own life and defies unspoken societal rules to enter the Wood, free Kasia from the heart-tree, and purge any corruption using her newfound, powerful magic. Following this, Kasia is changed physically and in relation to the narrative. Entombment within the heart-tree and exposure to the Wood's corruption turns her wooden: "Her skin was soft, but beneath it her flesh was unyielding […] Her hair shone […] curling into whorls like the knot of a tree. She might have been a carved statue" (151). Once valued for her beauty, she is now "some new kind of monstrosity put forth by the Wood," an inescapably visual hybrid of nature and woman (151).

Significantly, Kasia's transformation allows her to escape the objectification that, as a young woman expected to be abducted, have defined her existence. Her metamorphosis blurs the boundaries between the familiar and the arboreal unknown, figuring Kasia within the liminal, powerful space between human and nonhuman. In this moment, as J. Halberstam asserts of wider Gothic horror, "the human, the façade of the normal, [becomes] the place of terror" (162). After surviving the Wood, an incomprehensible feat for those around her, Kasia is inextricably phyiscally altered by her experience, becoming a half-wooden "monstrosity" that exists beyond her peers'

cognisance (Novik 151). Thus, she becomes feared and ostracised from a culture that valued her solely for her feminine aesthetics. Though remaining "beautiful […] unearthly so, preserved and shining," Kasia becomes Othered by her strange appearance and can no longer follow a path of marriage-then-motherhood (151). Like the girls the Dragon takes, she becomes a different kind of woman to those in the valley; the Dragon stresses this, doubting Kasia could find any "farmer […] who wouldn't mind his wife is made of wood" (149). The supernatural strength bequeathed by her monstrosity only further separates Kasia from the passivity of her previous life. Her heroic virtue sets her up not as inactive victim but as an active heroine, similarly to Agnieszka. Certainly, Kasia uses her "pure brute strength" to protect those in need, such as Polnya's royal children, whose parents are killed by the malevolent forces of Wood mid-way through the text (335). The Wood's magic, itself drawing from equally powerful and monstrous women, makes Kasia strong enough to knock swords "straight out of" men's hands and shove horses "bodily back" with her bare hands, feats she would not have been able to accomplish before her transformation (335, 336). Her starkly literal naturalisation, a phenomenon discussed later in this article, is not oppressive but radical, denying her the fate of traditional fairy-tale damsel through offering her the role of dynamic, grotesque heroine.

Despite the character journeys discussed above, the overall efficacy of Novik's feminist interventions into traditional fairy-tale narrative remains questionable. Novik may begin to uproot the traditionally masculinist narrative structures of folklore and fairy-tales, but her efforts are limited. Often, she seems unable to fully deliver upon crucial points of her transformations. Certainly, Kasia's newfound, fantastical strength gives her purpose outside her previous prey-like existence, allowing her to become a superhuman "champion" to Polnya's new king in a role that continues in the lineages of a character like Tamora Pierce's lady-knight Alanna (Novik 429).[2] Though she is not disguised and experiences a much more non-consensual transformation than Alanna, Kasia similarly rejects hegemonic, gendered expectation to become a sword-wielding guardian figure, using her traumatic experience to defend others against the Wood.

By the novel's end, however, Kasia takes on an overtly maternal protector-role for Polnya's royal children which foils and ultimately weakens her post-transformation freedoms. Agnieszka is complicit in this, instructing Kasia to "Keep the children safe" rather than fight when the Dragon's tower is attacked towards the novel's dénouement (373). Hereon, though she later becomes "champion" and "captain of the guard" (429), Kasia seems tied to the young royals, evacuating them to the safety of a city far from the Wood and acting as their protector whilst there (428). This may be her active choice, one emphasising that maternal behaviour and female strength are not mutually exclusive. Having Kasia reject any form of motherhood completely and become a "champion" outside of a mother-protector role would have been far more radical, however, allowing her transformation to completely disrupt her initial status as the perfect potential bride and mother (429).

Though the Dragon quickly becomes a reluctant hero and the novel's love interest, too, his and Agnieszka's relationship is an uncomfortable one due to the disparity between their ages, powers,

and statuses. Furthermore, their romance only reinforces a blanket fairy-tale heteronormativity that ignores potential queer female identity in the novel. Agnieszka's and Kasia's intense connection not only seem much stronger than that between Agnieszka and the Dragon, it also solicits a romantic reading: consistently, the women's interactions are intensely tender and physical, even during the novel's gravest moments. After discovering Kasia bound to the Heart-tree, for example, Agnieszka "caught Kasia's hands in [her] wet, dirty ones and pressed them to [her] lips, [her] cheeks" (106). When Kasia starts to recover after being purged of the Wood's magic, too, Agnieszka expresses her relief through intimate touch: "I cupped her face in my hands, smiling through tears, and she managed to close her claw-like hands around mine and smile back" (148). Agnieszka's gaze is even described as "too loving" (151), and the novel's opening reads as a doomed star-crossed romance, with Agnieszka crying herself to sleep and "[clinging] to her" friend in the face of their impending separation (6, 7).

Yet, to echo Patricia Duncker's sharp criticism of Carter's totalising heterosexuality, it seems that Novik "could never imagine Cinderella in bed with the Fairy Godmother" (Duncker 8), though a romantic relationship between *Uprooted's* central female characters would be a welcome, extremely believable subversion of fairy-tale and folkloric romantic archetype. Equally as questionably, Marek's character arc fails to truly critique his actions at the novel's beginning. His attempted rape is never addressed in a way that offers Agnieszka justice: rather, the Dragon gives Marek a fabricated "memory of enjoying [Agnieszka's] favours," reinforcing a wholly false image of Marek as predacious victor (Novik 51). Alongside this, his valiant death in the assault against the Wood-queen and his life's mission to "bring his mother back" further gives him a completely undeserved redemptive journey (246). The lasting image as he dies trying to free his mother is one of familial love, sacrifice, and nobility – "he looked for a moment like a child, or maybe a saint, pure with want […] he looked like a king" (385). But in framing Marek as martyr, Novik completely ignores and perhaps even excuses his prior attempted assault.

The Wood itself is also a complicated entity. Though blessing Kasia with a freeing, powerful monstrosity, the Wood is a problematic, if fascinating, phenomenon. Elizabeth Parker rightly identifies the forest as "a space in which we are eaten," a site of horrific and fear-instilling consumption (277), and Novik's forest is indeed an egalitarian consumer, uncaring of what or whom it devours in its expansion. The Wood perfectly embodies Parker's "bad" forest of literary horror, a "terrifying wilderness" and "a voracious and consuming threat" (277, 275, 288). It is cursed, unnatural: "fires always died when they reached the shadow beneath the dark trees" and "a savage song" dwells in its boughs (, a hideous warping of idyllic birdsong that "[whispers] of madness and tearing and rage" (Novik, *Uprooted* 105). Its creatures possess insatiable bloodlust and its fruit is a strange, corrupted bounty that punishes human consumption and enthrals its victims: "Anyone who ate of [the Wood's produce] grew sick with anger, struck at their families, and in the end ran into the Wood and vanished" (8). A transient space in which identity is easily lost, the Wood is inescapable, ensnaring, and polluting. The ultimate consumer and most dangerous consumable, Novik's forest and the women changed by it are equally as dangerous and unsettling as canonical Horror's most threatening creatures and predatory men.

Far too little attention has been paid to the Wood's gendered implications. Much greater focus is generally placed on the novel's central relationships in any discussion or examples. But the Wood is not genderless, as may be assumed due to its non-human form. Rather, it is subtly coded as female due to its primary victims, a dyad of queens consumed and corrupted centuries apart, as well as its famous inhabitant Old Jaga. A loose and more amiable interpretation of the cannibalistic, morally ambiguous Slavic witch Baba Yaga, Jaga's wild magic is crucial in Agnieszka's fight against the Wood. Such female alignment with an impressively dangerous magical-natural entity raises difficult gendered questions, especially surrounding the concept of naturalising within the folk-tale. Connecting women to nature has, to echo ecofeminist scholar Val Plumwood, been used as a major tool in female oppression through positing women as the antithesis to reason, as passive, reproductive animals, or as beautiful things to be viewed, tamed or devoured by man (19-20). De Beauvoir also notes how woman is "the privileged object through which [man] subdues Nature" (188), and Stone similarly reads folkloric forests and flowers as explicitly Freudian female symbols suggesting either entry or entrapment (19). Such naturalising implicitly traps women within the binary of being passive consumptive or aggressive consumer, positions prime for taming by the patriarchy.

The Wood's femininity works to subvert the oppressions of female naturalisation, creating a nonconforming space that reconstitutes and strengthens female bodies and identities. An incessantly reproductive form of Barbara Creed's "archaic mother," an entity that "conceives all by herself" and exists "outside morality and the law" (27), the Wood and the women aligned with it are neither weak nor submissive. Crucially, for much of the novel, the Wood is not nurturing but is consuming, magical, and voracious, complicating conceptions of the female body as a site of redemptive nature. Robert Pogue Harrison rightly deems the forest locale as the "antecedent to the human world" (1), and whilst the forest is indeed the threatening and untamed – possibly *untameable* – space that Parker imagines, it can also form an idyllic space that offers queer, atypical freedoms that human civilization cannot. Certainly, Kasia's transformation, a moment of rupture and regeneration, creates a version of Donna Haraway's female "cyborg" that "skips the steps […] of [female] identification with nature in the Western sense" and suggests "a way out of the maze of dualisms" that define contemporary Western notions of gender and woman's relation to nature (149-179). Post-transformation, Kasia embodies qualities that medievalist, ecocritic, and queer theorist Carolyn Dinshaw associates with the Green Man, whom Dinshaw reads as an intrinsically queer figure. Both "weird amalgams," Kasia and the Green Man "place taxonomies into question, press categories up against one another, put classifications and hierarchies of the human under scrutiny" (276).

The Wood-queen may also appear the "inert and passive" woman described in *The Second Sex* (de Beauvoir 189) – a "strange" sleeper, who is "not quite alive [and] might have been carved from wood" (Novik 403) – but even as she slumbers, she is incredibly formidable. A supremely powerful representational and narrative device, the Wood-queen is a horribly powerful entity herself, able to possess and control Queen Hanna. Her and her sister's magic "made the wood" centuries before the novel's start in an attempt to protect their "wood-people" from human influence, though doing so doomed them (384, 412). Her grotesque body and desires embody, symbolise, and power

the forest and its creatures: "she was the Wood, or the Wood was her. Her roots went too deep" (386). When Agnieszka and the Dragon try to vanquish her, only *Luthe's Summoning* – a complex, story-like spell which summons the "clear, cool light" of truth itself (139) – works. Able to withstand "bursts of fire" and "torrents of flame," the Wood-queen is a witch who cannot be burnt (403, 404). Her "fury" sustains her, with Agnieszka noting that it is as if she does not know "how to die" (406, 404). Female anger is here entwined with a dangerous natural force; the Wood's dark ecology becomes a supremely effective cypher with which to express the power of female rage.

Even if Old Jaga's magics are gentle and herbal, she also remains a fierce, immensely powerful witch whose spells are crucial to Agnieszka's overpowering of the previously untameable Wood. Contrasting the logic and "perfect precision" of the Dragon's spells completely (92), Jaga's magic is intensely natural, intensely anarchic: "a few words, a few gestures, a few bits of herbs and things. No particular piece mattered" (92). Yet much like she draws on the feminine courage of her damsel forebears when in the wizard's tower, at the novel's end Agnieszka embraces and channels Jaga's connection with the environment to become a supremely powerful, Wood-conquering hedge-witch herself. Neither masculine reason nor sheer destruction is enough to thwart the Wood's corruption. Rather, the Wood's female power establishes women both as saviours and adversaries: this formidable, villainous femininity emphasises that female characters do not simply have to be heroines who reinforce the status quo.

However, that Queen Hanna's adultery is linked to this antagonistic entity complicates these gender politics: after allegedly having an affair, Hanna is said to have become trapped in the Wood when she and her lover flee into the forest to escape capture by the King's men. Female desires, especially those that destabilise accepted socio-political behaviours, are aligned with an evil, consumptive, and destructive force. A criticism of female sexual freedom seems implicit, especially when contrasted with Novik's treatment of Prince Marek. Where Marek's sexual immoralities are disregarded, his mother's form much of the source of antagonism between Novik's fictional warring countries. The popularised story of Hanna's disappearance details how twenty years before the novel's start, Crown Prince Vasily of Rosya, Polnya's rival nation, "had fallen in love with [her] and they'd run away together […] when the king's soldiers had drawn near on their trail they'd fled into the Wood" (49). This elopement started "one war after another, broken only by occasional truces and a few short-lived treaties" (49).

Complicating Hanna's fate is the ambiguity of her infidelity. Whilst Agnieszka and her fellow valley-people "agreed it had all been the Wood's doing from the start" (49), a shrewd attack on both Polnya and Rosya that would allow the forest to "[creep] a little farther into both realms each year" (50), the truth of this is unknown. Vasily may have abducted Hanna – Agnieszka details that "*He'd* fallen in love" (49, emphasis mine), overlooking Hanna's sexual agency – or Hanna's infidelity could have been an active choice, though Agnieszka struggles to comprehend this, as the Queen had "two small children" and would surely never wish to "start a war with her own husband" (49). If the latter is true, the novel's treatment of Hanna becomes even more questionable, valuing her mother- and wifehood alone. Marek is eventually redeemed by martyrdom, but his mother cannot act upon

her own desires without being killed, consumed, and reanimated as the embodiment of evil.

Uprooted ends on a near-utopian vision. Death frees the Wood-queen from her perpetual corruption and Agnieszka continues Jaga's work, cleansing the forest of evil. Fruit – consistently symbolic of female wickedness, with the Edenic apple and the death-apple created by Snow White's stepmother forming the supreme examples – becomes a purified signifier of female courage, intuition, and power. However, the novel's lasting didactics and gentle, romantic conclusion do not balance *Uprooted*'s ideological confusions. Though the association of women with edibility and food is eventually subverted through moments like Kasia's transformation from bountiful harvest to superhuman warrior and Agnieszka's final role as caretaker for the Wood, *Uprooted*'s female characters remain bound to and consumed by patterns encoded within traditional fairy- and folk-tales, and by male appetites. Female sexual agency is punished: it catalyses *Uprooted*'s political conflict and results in Queen Hanna's villainous transformation and ultimate death. Conversely, male sexual immorality is generally disregarded: the problem of Marek's assault remains, overlooking the forceful consumption of female bodies in favour of an attempted redemption arc. Equally, the disparities within Agnieszka and the Dragon's relationship make their 'happily-ever-after' ending extremely uncomfortable, even if their union is consensual and loving. At other points, too, Novik's work celebrates women for breaking gendered, canonical moulds, yet constantly undermines them for doing so, with potentially deadly ecological-magical consumption as the consequence. The Wood and the women associated with it form the perfect example. Though granting women incredible strength and subverting regressive nature-based stereotypes through consumption and physical-fantastical transformation, the Wood is intrinsically connected to female immorality and remains the punishment-site for female desire. Through vigilante feminism and inhuman strength *Uprooted's* women can destabilise archetypal patterns and modes that encode women as objects to be stolen and consumed, but Novik's feminist intervention into troubling folkloric narratives only stretches so far.

NOTES

1. The Mary-Sue trope originated in fanfiction and, as Fazekas and Vena note, often involves the author inserting "themselves—or, sometimes an idealized version of themselves—into the story, usually as the protagonist" (240).
These characters are often implausibly skilled in a way that is extremely plot-relevant, despite their context, background and often distinct lack of training in this area.

2. The heroine of Pierce's *Song of the Lioness* quartet of novels (1983-1988), Alanna lives in a society in which only men can become knights. However, she refuses to accept her preordained role as a cloistered scholar and instead disguises herself as her brother in order to become a legendary warrior, going on to protect her kingdom from countless threats.

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BIONOTE

Eilis Lee is an independent scholar from the UK. She graduated with a distinction in MSc Literature and Modernity from The University of Edinburgh (UK) in 2019, after completing her B.A. in English at Queen's University, Belfast (UK). She is currently applying for PhD programmes, and aims to examine issues of gender, agency, identity, and environmental change in speculative fiction, particularly (post) apocalyptic and New Weird narratives.

"WHITE IS NOT MY COLOUR": PENNY DREADFUL, THE POSTCOLONIAL, AND THE CHANGING GOTHIC HEROINE

Carey Millsap-Spears

"I never learned the rules," Vanessa Ives.[2]

References to Egyptology, the search for the source of the Nile, and a half-Indian/half English Dr Jekyll/Mr Hyde all hint at the postcolonial situations present in the original version of the Showtime/Sky Atlantic television series *Penny Dreadful* (2014-2016). Each episode illustrates the horror and systemic problems with colonialism through the characters and their personal relationships with colonial history set in a literary Gothic world. *Penny Dreadful,* as a Gothic television series scaffolded by famous monsters, examines Great Britain's relationship with Empire. For many of the male characters in *Penny Dreadful*, this relationship comes in the form of guilt over past misdeeds. However, Vanessa Ives, the main female protagonist, faces present danger and disruption from America and the European continent as she singlehandedly challenges the concept of a Gothic heroine. *Penny Dreadful* as Elleke Boehmer explains postcolonial literature, "subversively scrutinizes the colonial relationship," and Vanessa's possessed nature and eventual union with Dracula indeed subvert the structures present (3). The postcolonial nature of the series, and the strength of Vanessa's character arguably build on traditional Gothic structures, but instead of a fainting damsel waiting for rescue (in the vein of many seminal Gothic female characters), or a bold heroine (often labelled as the Female Gothic Heroine) investigating the third floor of a stately home, audiences meet a self-aware, self-sufficient female protagonist from the beginning.

Unlike the superheroes and demigods of contemporary media, and different, too, from the heroine of *Jane Eyre* (1847) – that iconic Female Gothic Bildungsroman – and *Dracula*'s (1897) stoic Mina Harker, Vanessa says "I am" and that is enough. She is a power in her own right, but in spite of this agency, the constraints of the Gothic structure nonetheless secure her fate, just as the British Empire eventually confronts its own past in the series. Vanessa, through her independent choices, subverts the Gothic Heroine at the same time as the Gothic in *Penny Dreadful* continues to destabilise colonial attitudes. This article will illustrate both how the conventions of Gothic fiction require the sacrifice of female characters, and how *Penny Dreadful*, though it presents as a postcolonial series, can still be discussed as a conservative text. This latter point becomes clear through interrogating Vanessa's full character arc.

Female Characters, Self-Sacrifice, and the Politics of Gothic Colonialism

Penny Dreadful communicates Gothic horrors and colonial nightmares through a literary setting. The first instalment of the series offers a complete cast of seminal Gothic names: Victor Frankenstein, Dr Jekyll, Mr Hyde, Dorian Gray, Abraham Van Helsing, Dr Seward, Dracula, and Renfield. The plot is filled with the supernatural, a dark, macabre setting, and a fear of vampire invasion. With these traditional Gothic tropes, a viewer might expect a fainting, histrionic Female Gothic victim/heroine to round out the cast, but as Vanessa tells Frankenstein, "white is not my colour," and *Penny Dreadful*'s original female protagonist does not come from a specific Gothic tradition, nor is she a Gothic Heroine (S2E4). Stephanie Green writes that although the female characters in *Penny Dreadful* are "[m]ore interesting than their mere potential to nurture and harm, theirs is nevertheless a compromised power, inflicted with darkness, uncertainty and threat" (n.p.). In addition to Vanessa, there are other fascinating and powerful female characters including Lucy Frankenstein/Brona Croft in *Penny Dreadful,* and Green calls these the Gothic New Women who are "doomed to fail" (n.p.). As a colonised female character, however, Vanessa stands apart. Despite her strength, resolve, and tenacity, she succumbs – as I have begun to suggest above – to the constraints of the genre, even though she does not easily fit any of the prescriptions for female characters that emerge across the history of Gothic literature.

An established strand of Gothic literary criticism has argued that the Gothic tradition, from the time of Ann Radcliffe and Matthew Lewis, provides two tracks: The Female Gothic and the Male Gothic. Both forms of the genre are distinguishable for their dark, dangerous settings, villains, heroes, heroines/damsels, use of the supernatural, and invocations of fears regarding bodily invasion. However, Lewis is usually associated with horror, and Radcliffe more often linked to terror. This difference sets the genres apart from each other. Ellen Moers influentially writes that the Female Gothic is the work done in the genre by women writers, but the contrasts between Male and Female traditions also cut deeper, as Yael Shapira explains:

> Yet it was perhaps in the treatment of the body, and specifically of the female body, that the two authors [Lewis and Radcliffe] reached their most profound dispute [...] The imaginative dialectic between a pristine body and a disordered one is present in Radcliffe's fiction, especially through the persistent (if unspoken) fear of rape [...] Uncanny sightings became real ghosts; the prospect of violence was realized in detail as rape and murder. […] Put simply, [Lewis's] *The Monk* overflows with bodies. Live or dead, chaste or sexual, all are depicted with the same brash disregard for delicacy, and all — with perhaps a single exception — are female. (463; 466)

In the case of *Penny Dreadful*, violence against the female characters abounds. The supernatural elements are real, and the female protagonist eventually dies.

Viewers in the twenty-first century expect to see a female character presented with modern sensibilities, and though Eva Green's Vanessa provides the audience with a strong woman, her ending is one of submission and sacrifice. Although much has been written about the traditional Gothic heroine/damsel in seminal Gothic novels, there remains a need to discuss the changing role of female characters in contemporary Gothic televisual texts, as the nature of these characters represent a changing reality for modern audiences. But what may not be clearly understood is key: The conservative nature of the Gothic requires the sacrifice of the female characters regardless of the political nature of the narrative.

To further this discussion, defining both the terms postcolonial and imperial is paramount. For the sake of my argument, *Penny Dreadful*, as being discussed here, is a form of a postcolonial text. In *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature* (1995), Boehmer defines postcolonial literature thusly: "It is writing that sets out in one way or another to resist colonialist perspectives […] To give expression to colonized experience, postcolonial writers sought to undercut thematically and formally the discourses which supported colonization — the myths of power, the race classifications, the imagery of subordination" (3). Colonialism as the act of inhabiting an occupied land, imperialism as the political nature of the colonised, and the postcolonial as the subversion of the relationships between the indigenous inhabitants and the colonisers all are intrinsically intertwined in ideas and actions throughout the series.

Penny Dreadful not only is postcolonial, but is also anti-imperial as the series highlights the problems with imperialism as well as through the discussion of protecting the larger empire through the women who inhabit it. Boehmer states that "imperialism can be taken to refer to the authority assumed by a state over another territory — authority expressed in pageantry and symbolism, as well as in military and economic power. It is a term associated in particular with the expansion of the European nation-state in the nineteenth century" (2). The women in the series, especially Vanessa, are subjects of the British Empire and risk colonisation by a foreign invader, Dracula. *Penny Dreadful*, although a modern media product, is set in the nineteenth century. What is of most importance to this discussion, however, is the Gothic, and the Imperial Gothic is also present in *Penny Dreadful*. Patrick Brantlinger in *Rule of Darkness: British Literature and Imperialism, 1830-1914* (1988) writes: "The three principal themes of imperial Gothic are individual regression or going native; an invasion of civilization by the forces of barbarism or demonism; and the diminution of opportunities for adventure and heroism in the modern world" (location 4514). Vanessa threatens not only the Empire but the world through her "regression" by accepting her past life as an Egyptian goddess, her colonised body after her union with Dracula, and her inner strength that eschews the need for a hero as she sacrifices herself.

On the surface, *Penny Dreadful* seems to articulate a postcolonial, anti-imperialist sensibility, but the constraints of the Gothic genre keep the series ultimately conservative in nature when it comes to the character of Vanessa. Since the late-twentieth century, Gothic scholars have frequently drawn on postcolonial analysis because of the complex socio-political changes registered in seminal Gothic novels. William Hughes and Andrew Smith note in "Defining the Relationships between Gothic and the Postcolonial" (2003):

> The Gothic has historically maintained an intimacy with colonial issues […] [T]he Gothic, is and always has been, *post*-colonial, and this is where, in the Gothic text, disruption accelerates into change, where the colonial encounter […] proves a catalyst to corrupt, to confuse or to redefine the boundaries of power, knowledge and ownership" (1, original emphasis).

Hughes in "A Singular Invasion: Revisiting the Postcolonity of Bram Stoker's *Dracula*" (2003) also argues that the genre of Gothic fiction has a postcolonial quality. "Gothic *has* to be the face of the postcolonial because the culture of Gothic — grandiose, oppressive, deviant and yet awesome in the power of its presence — is somehow not merely the face of the past, but of the imperialist past also" (89, original emphasis). To be sure, Bram Stoker's *Dracula* discusses racial purity through a literary rhetoric grounded in colonialism and pseudo-biology. Stephen Arata explains that during the late-Victorian period, Great Britain "as a race of people, as a political and imperial force, as a social and cultural power — was in irretrievable decline" (622). In *Penny Dreadful*, the character of Vanessa embraces the danger of this changing world.

In addition to the postcolonial, the imperial nature of the Gothic is also an approach to Gothic studies and a powerful thread in this series. Carol Margaret Davison writes that "the Imperial Gothic of the *fin de siècle* […] features the re-animated traumas of a nation's colonial past" (137). Great Britain, in many narratives of this type, must consider the possibility of losing global prominence, and, as different regions of the world become connected through colonial relations, must also confront fears of invasion. In *Penny Dreadful*, the fears of invasion come from both the European vampire – Dracula – and from Ethan Chandler, the American werewolf. Brantlinger suggests, "Imperial Gothic expresses anxieties about the waning of religious orthodoxy, but even more clearly it expresses anxieties about the ease with which civilization can revert to barbarism or savagery and thus about the weakening of Britain's imperial hegemony" (location 4496). In *Penny Dreadful*, danger comes from far away from home.

Penny Dreadful not only expounds on the fear of the Other coming to London to do ill, but also engages with the shame of colonisation through the overarching invasion narrative present in the series. Ultimately, *Penny Dreadful* confronts the taboo idea that women's bodies, like inhabited land, can also be colonised by invaders, a sense that is drawn from Stoker's invocation of reverse colonisation in *Dracula*, the main text on which *Penny Dreadful* is based. In *Colonial Desire* (1995), Robert Young explains, "Colonialism was a machine: a machine of war, of bureaucracy and administration, and above all, of power […] In that sense it was itself the instrument that produced its own darkest fantasy — the unlimited and ungovernable fertility of 'unnatural' unions" (98-99). *Penny Dreadful* specifically pushes the boundaries of Hughes and Smith's notion of "power, knowledge and ownership" through the character of Vanessa, her journey in a colonial-era London, and her (unsuccessful) fight to resist Dracula's influence and invasion. *Penny Dreadful* then reveals the struggle of both the colonisers and the colonised through the characters of Dracula and Vanessa. To quote Glennis Byron in "Global Gothic" (2012): "Gothic in these colonial contexts frequently

functions to contest the more optimistic foundational narratives of new worlds" (qtd. in Punter 532). The mixing of blood, foreign and domestic, is a constant cause of unease in *Dracula*, and as is often the case in Gothic narratives, diseased blood comes from afar.

In *Penny Dreadful,* the invading presence comes through Dracula and his vampire hordes, but Vanessa, much like Mina Harker, is chosen because of her personal brush with darkness. Vanessa's relationship with Dracula plunges the world into peril, not just because Dracula gains his ultimate bride but because his bride is colonised. A similar conundrum plays out in Stoker's novel. Mina, after being contaminated by Dracula, says to her husband Jonathan Harker that he should kill her if she is unable to be saved from vampirism. Mina says, "But you must remember that I am not as you are. There is a poison in my blood, in my soul, which may destroy me; which must destroy me, unless some relief comes to us" (286). Mina, in the novel, is saved through the strength of her male caregivers, but in *Penny Dreadful*, the men are not up to the task, and Vanessa must die because she threatens them.

From the start of the series, Vanessa is a marked outsider, much like Dracula himself, through her possession. This possession appears as a tattoo coming to the surface of her skin, and through the knowledge of her destiny to merge with Amun-Ra, now presenting as Dracula. Brantlinger explains further, "[Imperial Gothic] also led to the far reaches of the Empire, where strange gods and 'unspeakable rites' still had their millions of devotees" (location 4450). "Strange gods" and "unspeakable rites" are visually presented through Vanessa who is physically marked by an ancient society once looted for relics which are stored in the British Museum. In the episode, "Verbis Diablo," Egyptologist Ferdinand Lyle says, "most of the plundered riches […] are scrupulously ignored" (S2E2). In addition to Vanessa's personal connection to Egypt through this possession, Vanessa's guardian, Sir Malcolm embarks on a quest to find the source of the Nile. His adventuring destroys his family and illustrates some cultural tensions around England's Egyptian politics and their domestic impact. The Egyptian motif is not unique in Gothic and popular fiction during the Victorian era, with writers – including Stoker and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle – exploring what Bulfin terms the "Egyptian Question" after the creation of the Suez Canal (411-412). Bulfin further explains that "contemporaneously with developments in Anglo-Egyptian politics, a subgenre of Egyptian-themed gothic fiction began to grow in popularity, within which concerns over the Egyptian situation tended to find fictional expression in the form of the supernatural invader" (412). Brantlinger adds, "Although their attitudes and emphases often differed from those of later generations, many early Victorians took a keen interest in emigration, the 'opening up' of Africa, the Eastern Question, and even the China trade" (location 110). The Egyptian elements present in *Penny Dreadful* are more closely aligned with *The Jewel of Seven Stars* (1903) than with *Dracula*, but both of Stoker's narratives contain, according to Punter and Byron, a "powerful, often demonic woman" (167). Vanessa is this character. She, according to Joan Clayton in the episode "The Nightcomers," was born with her supernatural abilities and is more powerful than she knows (S2E3).

Even though *Penny Dreadful* discusses colonial history in a twenty-first-century language of inclusion and diversity, some characters, including Vanessa, remain hindered by the conservative

worldview presented in many Gothic narratives. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak in "Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism," (1985) discusses how British literature was used to justify colonialism through characters like Henry Clerval in *Frankenstein* (1818) and Bertha Mason in *Jane Eyre* (1847). This colonial impulse is on display in Mary Shelley's novel when Frankenstein's friend Clerval has "the design of making himself complete master of the Oriental languages" (70). Ultimately, Clerval desires to travel to India and impose English ideas on the indigenous population.

When a coloniser returns to England, their life is forever changed as Charlotte Brontë illustrates through the characters of Bertha Mason – a Creole from Jamaica – and her husband Edward Rochester. Bertha deserves her incarceration and punishment, according to Rochester (and presumably many of Brontë's readers), because of her nature, heritage, and insanity. Bertha, taken back to her husband's native England is unceremoniously locked in the third-floor room in Thornfield Hall due to her mental state. Rochester is punished for his sins through physical maiming, but he and Jane eventually live happily ever after. These characters educate the reader about the dangerous Other (person or a country) in need of civilized men from England to help them. Excluding Clerval who is stopped and killed by Frankenstein's Creature, colonisers like Rochester (and by extension *Penny Dreadful*'s Sir Malcom) somewhat acknowledge their roles in colonisation, but eventually strive to separate themselves from their past misdeeds to maintain their class, cultural, and racial superiority.

Vanessa is surrounded by a group of unsavoury male characters who suffer from their own excesses and embody Great Britain's role as a colonial and imperial force in the world. *Penny Dreadful* positions supernatural threats as reality, and these problems come from flawed characters and their experiences far from London, or from a set of haunted, personal histories. But unlike many female characters in Gothic narratives, they ultimately survive. The positioning of classic Gothic elements including family secrets and taboo sexuality in the story arcs of Sir Malcolm and Vanessa underscores the disruptive impact of colonialism on the individual characters and on the British Empire. To quote Edward Said in *Culture and Imperialism* (1994): "[T]he facts of empire are associated with sustained possession, with far-flung and sometimes unknown spaces, with eccentric or unacceptable human beings, with fortune-enhancing or fantasized activities like emigration, money-making, and sexual adventure" (64). Indeed, *Penny Dreadful* explores all the elements of the colonial imaginary that Said mentions through the character of Sir Malcolm. Sir Malcolm says Vanessa is the daughter he "deserves" because of her "cruel spirit" (S1E4). Sir Malcom and Vanessa are both 'eccentric' and each seeks 'sexual adventure.'

Vanessa and Sir Malcolm have a difficult association that reflects the relationship between Britain and its colonies. After forcing Vanessa to continue fighting her demons (rather than letting her die) Dr Frankenstein suggests that Sir Malcolm has "not a shred of decency left" because that is what happens "when you murder your way across a continent" (S1E7). "Sir Malcolm," says the actor Timothy Dalton who portrays him, is "one of those men who has profited from the great advance across the globe of the British Empire [...] Vanessa describes him as being weak, vain, lustful, vainglorious, and a few other things" (qtd. in Gosling 88). Sir Malcolm vows to protect Vanessa

from the malevolence surrounding her, but never accepts that he, too, is evil. Paradoxically, Vanessa confides to Chandler that she worries about losing her relationship with Sir Malcom to his love interest, Mrs. Poole. Undoubtedly, Sir Malcolm is a father figure to most of the characters on *Penny Dreadful*, but his character is not one to emulate. He kills and rapes while in Africa. He sentences both his son Peter and daughter Mina to die, and he has an affair with Vanessa's mother. Sir Malcom operates in the series as the epitome of colonial Britain, while Vanessa resists this colonisation, and illogically craves it at the same time.

The ultimate immorality in the series, however, comes in the form of Dracula as he appears in the guise of a zoologist, Dr Alexander Sweet. He successfully hides his true identity from Vanessa and is able to manipulate her much like Sir Malcom does. As Dr Sweet, unlike the coloniser who broadcasts his goals, Dracula operates like an invading infection and embeds himself in English society and quietly builds his vampiric army from within. Stoker's Dracula forecasts this situation as he says to Jonathan Harker, "I have come to know your great England; and to know her is to love her. I long to go through the crowded streets of your mighty London, to be in the midst of the whirl and rush of humanity, to share its life, its change, its death, and all that makes it what it is" (26).

The vampire, in the context of both *Dracula* and *Penny Dreadful*, is the true enemy because he comes from afar to wreak his hidden havoc, rather than being an Englishman going abroad to do the same as a colonial power. Saverio Tomaiuolo explains: "Vampires seem to exemplify and embody a widespread fear of invasion and contagion during a moment in which England was experiencing both its triumph as Empire — with Queen Victoria crowned Empress of India in 1876 — and was facing and confronting with the problems related to the control over the various colonies" (109). Anne Williams writes in "Dracula: Si(g)ns of the Fathers" (1991) that "Victorian patriarchy may have needed its reassuring fictions […] but they no doubt include changes in the political and social status of women, ambivalent reactions shown by faith in progress and the fear of change […] The horror of *Dracula* is the horror of a culture sensing its own limitations, man's impotence before the universe" (459). To fulfil his destiny, in *Penny Dreadful,* Dracula needs Vanessa to be 'mother' to his role of 'father.'

While white Victorian women may be associated with home and family, Gothic fiction often illustrates that both can harbour many horrors. In *Penny Dreadful*, Dracula abducts Sir Malcom's daughter Mina as bait for Vanessa, and Mina's spectre appears in Sir Malcom's home for much of the first season. In "Angel in the House, Devil in the City: Explorations of Gender in *Dracula* and *Penny Dreadful*," (2006) Lauren Rocha explains, "For Mina to be transformed into a vampire would threaten England's nationalism as well as the masculinity of the male characters by making them subservient to a foreign vampire master" (32-33). Sir Malcom orders Vanessa to use her supernatural gifts to reach Mina, but in an unlikely turn, Mina seems to relish her new life and vampire form. She says, "I am who I am supposed to be" as she displays her fangs (S1E8). Mina becoming a vampire (and relishing it) brings the political nature of the series into clear view. Mina, sexually polluted by Dracula, appears as a colonised woman. Prior to her turn to vampirism, she functions as a damsel in distress (clothed in white) waiting for rescue. *Penny Dreadful* here offers an homage

to Stoker. Dracula says, "Your girls that you all love are mine already; and through them you and others shall yet be mine — my creatures, to do my bidding and to be my jackals when I want to feed" (Stoker 267). Mina acts as the vampire's proxy and tries to lure Vanessa to him so that he can "sire generations" (S1E8). Rocha adds, "Thus, *Penny Dreadful* depicts an unstable society where gender order is unable to be restored as men fail to save women who in turn threaten to derail and reconstruct society" (38). Unlike her counterpart in the novel, Mina in *Penny Dreadful* is unable to be saved and is punished by her father. Mina says to Sir Malcom, "Why do you think I want to be saved" as he shoots her to save Vanessa, illustrating the power of the coloniser over the colonised (S1E8). What Sir Malcom forgets is Vanessa is also colonised through her possession.

Bloodlines and family histories are key issues in the series and in colonial literary history. Early in Stoker's novel, Dracula tells Harker the story of his family history and why the bloodline is special: "We Szekelys have a right to be proud, for in our veins flows the blood of many brave races who fought as the lion fights, for lordship" (33). In *Penny Dreadful*, the threat of Vanessa and Dracula creating a new race of creatures is central. Silvia Nagy-Zekmi explains that "women in (post)colonial cultures have been termed 'the twice colonised', both by the imperial and the patriarchal social order" (177). Were she to procreate with Dracula, Vanessa would bear non-English offspring thus highlighting her colonised nature, and the union would create not only unholy beings, but also miscegenation as Donna Heiland explains, "Eighteenth-century colonizers were obsessed with defining the racial status of children whose parents were of different races," and *Penny Dreadful* invokes this history through the metaphor of the vampire and his spawn (153-154). Lyle and Frankenstein discuss the implications of Vanessa's plight and realise she could bring about the apocalypse through the elimination of mankind as they know it. Frankenstein says, "We have to help her," but he really means that they must save themselves *from her* (S3E7). Victorian cultural xenophobia comes into full view during *Penny Dreadful's* third season, but is present from the start as the male characters try to keep Dracula's personal invasion of Vanessa at bay. In the struggle between Dracula and Vanessa, the fate of the coloniser is in jeopardy, and like many Gothic narratives, the female character partially triumphs through her own destruction.

Penny Dreadful and Gothic Heroines/Damsels: Radcliffe and Lewis

Gothic narratives can generally be divided into two camps, as I have mentioned above: The Female and Male Gothic. As I have discussed in "'Does he know you like I know you?': Barbara Kean's bisexual appeal, the Male Gothic and *Gotham*'s woman problem" (2021), these two strands could be considered according to distinction between Radcliffe (Female) and the Lewis (Male), since these two writers take different approaches to the Gothic in the genre's early life. The destruction of the female character, who is sometimes represented as a damsel in distress, is a fairly regular occurrence in a Male Gothic text. While in a Female Gothic narrative, the Gothic heroine, often depicted as a brave, curious young woman, survives to marry the man of her choice: the Gothic Hero. Male Gothic texts offer unexplained supernatural threats, versus the explained supernatural of the Female Gothic. Male Gothic texts provide gratuitous horror in comparison to the psychological terror of the Female Gothic; and finally, while both Male and Female Gothic texts present a main female

character trying to escape, Male Gothic texts show danger through graphic sexual encounters and brutal physicality and often death. *Penny Dreadful* – like Stoker's *Dracula*, on which it draws – fits squarely into the Male Gothic paradigm not only because of Vanessa's death, but also because the series presents the unexplained supernatural and gratuitous horror.

Even in a modern media product like *Penny Dreadful*, the conservative nature of the Male or Female Gothic still presides: death or marriage for the heroine/damsel. Vanessa is brave, like a Female Gothic Heroine, and experiences myriad physical dangers, like a Male Gothic damsel in distress; however, she refuses both Chandler and Dracula as love interests and marriage as a concept. "Vanessa," Benjamin Poore writes, "decidedly does not fit into the penny-fiction category of the helpless or hysterical virgin in need of rescue" (n.p.). The heroine/damsel often seeks escape from her situation, but Vanessa eschews the idea of a total escape. She says "There cannot be a happy end. For claw will slash and tooth will rend" (S1E8). But Vanessa is also not a "blameless heroine triumphing," as Diane Long Hoeveler describes the Female Gothic Heroine to be (9). Vanessa's strong individuality sustains her through the nightmare world of *Penny Dreadful*, but since she refuses marriage, there is no other ending – as a female character in a Gothic text – except for her own destruction.

Additionally, Vanessa stands apart from both the damsel or the Gothic heroine role because heroines/damsels typically look for their missing other halves including denied lovers and parents. Vanessa, as an orphan, has no family, but she creates her own version through the company of friends she meets throughout the series, but they are not sufficient to alleviate the danger she encounters. Without a legitimate family system in place, Vanessa lacks the originating impetus to escape a Female Gothic narrative. Additionally, as Williams explains, in *Art of Darkness*: *A Poetics of Gothic* (1995):

> [T]he family structure […] incarnates the laws fundamental to our culture and our selves: laws that also govern our thinking about property, morality, social behavior, and even metaphysics. These family 'scandals' of Gothic criticism also rather melodramatically call attention to the importance of boundaries: the literal and figurative processes by which society organizes itself […] Such lines and walls both create the possibility of transgression and suggest a proper punishment for those rebels who cross them (12).

Vanessa crosses many boundaries throughout *Penny Dreadful* as she transgresses against sexual mores, so she cannot survive as a Female Gothic Heroine or a damsel in distress because she is not Hoeveler's "blameless heroine" (9). Vanessa has sex with Mina's fiancé the night before their wedding. This is the choice that sets the action of the series effectively in motion, rather than her family trying to push her into a marriage (S1E5). Williams explains further: "[T]he Male Gothic has a tragic plot. The female formula demands a happy ending, the conventional marriage of

Western comedy" (*Art of Darkness* 103). The Female Gothic requires a return to normalcy be present at the end. The Male Gothic ending, while more ambiguous than the Female Gothic's, ultimately requires the submission of women to unknown and dangerous fates (Williams, *Art of Darkness* 104). Vanessa must be eliminated or married by conventional Gothic rules. However, in *Penny Dreadful*, Vanessa chooses her own ending, refuses marriage, and defines her own death. These choices mean she cannot be a Female Gothic Heroine or a Male Gothic damsel.

The Post-Colonial Gothic and Female Characters

Vanessa uses her possession as personal power, and thereby embraces a foreign invader rather than an English patriarchal system. During "Possession," a tattoo appears on Vanessa's chest depicting the Egyptian gods Amunet and Amun-Ra (S1E7). Sinan Akilli and Seda Öz write that the positioning of the Egyptian deity reflects "the Victorians' fascination with Egyptology […] Such intrusion of a foreign and pagan past into the late-Victorian metropolis […] is also powerfully symbolic and functional with regard to the characterization of London/Demimonde in its duality" (20-21). Vanessa's divided nature, what Dr Seward calls her "split personality" illustrates the cultural fracture in British society (S3E7). Fred Botting, in *Gothic* (2003), writes "from the eighteenth century onwards, Gothic texts have been involved in constructing and contesting distinctions between civilisation and barbarism, reason and desire, self and other" (20). Vanessa is a divided person: one inhabited by another force, she calls this a "thing" that is "always scratching to get out" (S1E7). Vanessa tries to suppress her possessed nature, but eventually in "And They Were Enemies," she stops three other women, called "Nightcomers," through embracing the power she herself holds (S2E10).

Vanessa begins her journey wanting to escape from internalised pain caused by her possession, and ends the series when she accepts all parts of herself. "I am" she tells both Lucifer and Dracula as she refuses their kinship (S3E4). Vanessa understands her weaknesses and takes responsibility for her actions. "I am like no other," she tells Joan Clayton "that is why I am here" (S2E3). She is the opposite of the complicit coloniser (Sir Malcolm) or the typical damsel-in-distress (Sir Malcom's daughter Mina). In *Penny Dreadful*, Vanessa saves herself, her country, and the larger world by refusing to remain with Dracula. This sacrifice, while heroic, is demanded by the Gothic conventions on which the series is built, as I have shown.

As Vanessa does not fit the requirements of a Female Gothic Heroine or a damsel in distress, the other characters in the series see her as the strong character she is: "Don't be naïve; it doesn't suit you," Sir Malcom tells Vanessa (S1E8). Similarly, Sembene respects Vanessa's strength. "She is a lioness" he tells Chandler (S2E4). Vanessa finds love interests in Dorian Gray, Chandler, and Dr Sweet, (Dracula's alter ego), but no Gothic Hero (or Villain) sways her. No man frees her from any patriarchal system; she ultimately frees herself. With her decision to die, she defies the Female Gothic Heroine or damsel role. In this way, series creator Logan sets up the audience for his new kind of female character in a Gothic text. He says:

> I decided to write about a female protagonist, because in 1891 London, women were quite literally corseted and constrained [...] I thought creating a woman who had to live in that society and yet within her had these monstrous yearnings, or these yearnings for liberation, would make a very compelling central character. […] Meaning, on one hand, she is tormented, she is cursed […] She most perfectly embodies both sides of that monstrous balancing act (qtd. in Gosling 122).

In the end, however, Vanessa is far more than a woman with "monstrous yearnings." She controls both the destruction and re-creation of humanity. In this way, Vanessa can be compared to another female character in a modern televisual Gothic text: Buffy in *Buffy: The Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003). Claire Knowles writes, "Buffy can be saved only through the destruction of her body. Death, is, indeed, Buffy's gift" (147). Vanessa, like Buffy, must die because the Gothic ultimately demands the sacrifice of women, either through conventional family life or through death.

Penny Dreadful offers some insight into the Victorian cultural fear about feminism. This fear is illustrated in Stoker's *Dracula* through the strong, but non-threatening New Woman Mina Harker and her brush with vampirism. In *Penny Dreadful*, this discussion is elucidated through the extended metaphor of Vanessa's demonic possession as a form of colonisation and the threat of her union with Dracula. Her possession casts doubt on the society in which she lives. Even without Egyptian tattoos or copulation with Dracula, Vanessa is a marked outsider, *an Other*, as an independent woman in a patriarchal society. With the addition of a Goddess, Vanessa, like Stoker's Margaret Trelawny/Queen Tera paring in *The Jewel of Seven Stars*, becomes overwhelming, powerful, and unnatural as she transforms into a monster. Not as popular as *Dracula*, *The Jewel of Seven Stars* features many of the narrative elements found in *Penny Dreadful,* including a distant father, a motherless daughter, her suitor, and an Egyptian mummy. One version (1903) offers an apocalyptic ending with Queen Tera raining down destruction, and the other (1912) has Margaret wearing the queen's jewels at her wedding. In both versions, Margaret is dangerous because of Queen Tera: "Again, the startling likeness between Margaret and the mummy, intensified by her own extraordinary pallor, heightened the strangeness of it all" (Stoker, *Jewel* 1125).

Penny Dreadful, like *The Jewel of Seven Stars* and many seminal Gothic texts, highlights the evil present – for dominant Victorian culture – in the everyday and in the every(wo)man. In "Ebb Tide," Kaetenay tells Vanessa in a vision that she "is a great, fertile bitch of evil and I love you for your fertility and your power. You are the woman of all our dreams and all our night terrors" (S3E7). Vanessa is called "mother" by Dracula's minions. She, through her power, could change the course of human history. No Radcliffian Gothic Heroine could save the world in this way. No Lewis-like damsel would survive *Penny Dreadful*. Here again, series creator Logan attempts to revise the role of a Gothic heroine/damsel. Unfortunately, the Gothic constraints of either death or marriage keep Vanessa from ultimately escaping the narrative.

Vanessa's story arc is foretold in the season-one episode "Possession" when she asks Chandler to kill her: "They won't stop me. They haven't the heart for it. But you do. Look into my eyes and pull the trigger" (S1E7). Vanessa's bravery and understanding of her situation is both tragic and heroic and recalls Mina Harker's decision to choose death over vampirism in *Dracula*. Mina says, "There is a poison in my blood," but unlike Vanessa, Stoker's Mina survives (286). Vanessa can never be freed from her colonised body, and in the final moments of the series, Vanessa again says to Chandler, "My battle must end. You know that […] Let it end […] You know I have a destiny. It's why we first met. It's why you are here now […] Please Ethan. Let it end. With a kiss […] With love" (S3E9). She demands his assistance to die, and they share the action since she is also holding the gun, and unlike Sir Malcom's shooting of Mina, this ending is Vanessa's choice. It is not something done to her. Vanessa chooses to die as herself rather than be subjugated to Dracula for eternity. Vanessa's ending is heroic in the modern sense through her self-sacrifice, but she is not a traditional Gothic heroine, nor is she a damsel.

The modern, postcolonial framework for *Penny Dreadful* sets up the potential for a new version of a Gothic heroine, but the constraints of the Gothic as a genre preclude that from happening in a meaningful way. Vanessa lacks the innocence to be a Female Gothic Heroine, or the naiveté to be rescued in the Male Gothic tradition; however, Vanessa is the strongest character in *Penny Dreadful* and blazes a new trail with her new form of Gothic female character. Unfortunately, the conservative Gothic conventions insist that she must die even in this modern, postcolonial narrative. Vanessa, unlike Chandler and Sir Malcom, never needs rescue. She always knows how her story will end. Dorian Gray remarks that Vanessa "doesn't want to be anyone else," and for Vanessa, being herself is a transgressive act in itself (S1E4). Vanessa's singular nature eschews a traditional Gothic world, so Vanessa's forceful self-acceptance helps her find her own way. Vanessa never falters. She is resilient from the first episode "Night Work" until the series' end in "The Blessed Dark." Maybe one day, contemporary writers will not only continue to create these rich, necessary characters like Vanessa Ives in these important and political texts, but will also find a way for them to survive the narratives.

NOTES

1. "Evil Spirits in Heavenly Places." *Penny Dreadful*, season 2, episode 4.

2. "Glorious Horrors." *Penny Dreadful*, season 2, episode 6.

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BIONOTE

Carey Millsap-Spears researches popular culture and the Gothic. Find her academic work in *Set Phasers to Teach: Star Trek in Research and Teaching*, *Studies in Popular Culture*, *The Routledge Companion to Star Trek* (forthcoming), *The Dark Arts Journal*, *Queer Studies in Media & Popular Culture*, *"This Shark, Swallow You Whole": Fifty Years of Jaws* (forthcoming), *Strange Novel Worlds* (forthcoming), and *Aeternum: The Journal of Contemporary Gothic Studies*. Carey is also a published poet and is a Professor of Communications/Literature at Moraine Valley Community College, Palos Hills, Illinois, USA.

Contact Information: millsap-spears@morainevalley.edu

Tweets @equuscholar

CONSCRIPTS FROM BIRTH: WAR AND SOLDIERY IN THE GRIM DARKNESS OF THE FAR FUTURE

Mike Ryder

"In the grim darkness of the far future, there is only war" (*Warhammer 40,000* 152).

Games Workshop's Warhammer 40,000 universe (hereafter referred to as 40k) is one of the biggest and most well-established Science Fiction universes in circulation today. While it has been critically underrepresented to date, this article seeks to assert the relevance and value of 40k for analysis within Science Fiction studies and Speculative Fiction studies more broadly.[1] From classical themes of treachery and betrayal, to modern-day questions around military ethics and the conduct of war, 40k is a deep and rich universe that engages with many complex issues around the relative 'value' of human life, and how it is used as a means of discursive control.

Indeed, the 40k universe is particularly interesting in the way it engages with issues of sovereignty and the law, with the byzantine statecraft and martial ethics of the Imperium serving as a fictionalised 'black mirror' to the "permanent state of emergency" that philosopher Giorgio Agamben claims, in *State of Exception* (2005), to be the essential practice of the modern-day state (2). In this way, the speculative nature of 40k can be used to interrogate and explore broader cultural practices concerning real-life militarised behaviour. It is not enough that 40k asks us 'what if?', but rather that it extrapolates upon existing real-world concepts – such as the super-soldier, the outcast, and the unending war – and takes them to their logical (and sometimes illogical) conclusion.

In the case of 40k, the galaxy-spanning Imperium is beset on all sides by ravenous alien foes including the insect-like Tyranids and the war-mongering Orks. It is also beset by the corrupting power of Chaos that threatens to destroy the Imperium from within. To counter these threats, Imperial armies are supported by genetically enhanced super-soldiers known as Space Marines, who stand as the last bastion of defence against the alien, the demon, and the heretic. While these Space Marines recall something of Robert A. Heinlein's *Starship Troopers* (1959), they are very much a contradiction in terms, as humanity's greatest warriors are so far removed from humanity they can barely be called human at all.

This juxtaposition makes Space Marines a fascinating area for further study. On the one hand, they stand at the pinnacle of human endeavour and are equipped with the best technology known to humankind. And yet, they are also steeped in dogma and live out a monk-like existence where they exist only to kill the enemies of the Imperium and defend humanity while never knowing

a 'normal' human life. While present-day soldiers have the possibility of returning home once the war is done, for the Space Marines there can be no respite, for as the 40k strapline reminds us: "In the grim darkness of the far future, there is only war" (*Warhammer 40,000* 152).

In this way, Space Marines stand as a paradigm for the sovereign exception. They are quite literally conscripts from birth, with their bodies altered, their memories scrubbed, and no possibility of returning to their former lives. Indeed, they are not so much an exception, but rather exception-as-the-new-norm, and as such cut to the heart of debates around sovereignty, exception, and the suspension of law. As I will argue, Space Marines are not so much a repetition of well-worn Science Fiction tropes, but rather stand as significant markers in our relationship with the modern-day biopolitical state. Not only do they expose the power structures at work in the heart of our society, but they also implicitly critique the politicisation of life itself – that which Agamben describes in *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (1998) as "the decisive event of modernity" (4).

Background

Founded in 1975, Games Workshop manufactures and sells model miniatures for its tabletop wargames Warhammer: Age of Sigmar and Warhammer 40,000. While the quality of its products has helped establish Games Workshop as "the largest and most successful" tabletop games company in the world (*Games Workshop* 2019), its ongoing success rests on its rich evocative worlds that have evolved over several decades, with hundreds of books, novellas, and audio-dramas sitting alongside magazines, anthologies, codices, and video games, such as *Warhammer: Vermintide* (2015), *Space Marine* (2011), and the *Dawn of War* trilogy (2004-2017).[2]

Of the two core game systems, the futuristic Warhammer 40,000 is by far the most popular universe and is Games Workshop's best-selling product range.[3] With its 'grimdark' aesthetic and war-torn setting, the game provides an impressive backdrop for gamers and has proven fertile ground for the literary endeavours of numerous *New York Times*-bestselling authors, including Dan Abnett, Aaron Dembski-Bowden, and Graham McNeil.[4]

The influences of the universe are many and varied. In an interview originally conducted with *The Black Library* in 2009, Art Director John Blanche described the art style of 40k as "Games Workshop Gothic," drawing heavily on Northern European culture to develop a certain dark and grimy sensibility inspired by various gothic traditions, including the likes of Rembrandt, Durer, and Bosch (n.p.). Blanche, who was instrumental in establishing both the Warhammer and Warhammer 40,000 universes, describes them as being "much darker than American High Fantasy, certainly more violent, and more oppressive," filled with evocative, flawed characters inspired by historical figures and drawn very much in the Dickensian mould ("Interview" n.p.).

Another key feature of the Games Workshop style is the extent to which both universes are willing to engage with existing works of Science Fiction and Fantasy canon. In the case of 40k, this includes a direct engagement with militaristic works such as Heinlein's *Starship Troopers* and Joe

Haldeman's *The Forever War* (1974), stories of bodily transformation such as Frederik Pohl's *Man Plus* (1976), and the child-soldiers of Orson Scott Card's *Ender's Game* (1984). The universe is also scattered with allusions to classical works and mythological tales, with the very betrayal that rests at the heart of the universe reminiscent of the fall of Satan from John Milton's epic poem, *Paradise Lost* (1667).

War in the Far Future

As its name suggests, Warhammer 40,000 is set in the 41st millennium, where humankind has spread across the stars, only to be beset on all sides by an array of deadly alien foe. From the enigmatic Aeldari to the barbaric Orks and soulless Necrons, the life of the Imperial citizen is one of hardship and toil in the daily struggle for survival. And yet, of all the many dangers posed to human life, the single greatest threat comes from within – the insidious lure of Chaos that sets the context for the never-ending war among the stars. The origins of the war with Chaos go back ten thousand years before the 'present day' of the 40k setting, to a time known as the Horus Heresy. During this time, the Emperor of humankind led a Great Crusade to reunite the fragmented human race and reconquer the stars. To do this, he created the Space Marine legions – vast armies of genetically enhanced super-soldiers, each led by a charismatic Primarch. As the Crusade neared its end, the Emperor returned to Terra (Earth), leaving his armies under the command of the Primarch Horus, whom the Emperor named Warmaster. However, bitterness and jealousy soon took hold of Horus and he fell to Chaos, taking many of his brother-Primarchs with him. This led to a galaxy-wide civil war between those loyal to the Emperor and those loyal to Horus. The war culminated in the Siege of Terra, and a single combat between the two god-like figures. At the end of the battle, Horus was slain, while the Emperor was left mortally wounded. On finding his body, the Emperor's loyal servants interred him within the Golden Throne, an ancient artefact that would preserve his body in exchange for the daily sacrifice of human blood.

Ten thousand years later and we come to the 'present day' of the 40k universe, where the Emperor remains cold and unmoving atop the Golden Throne, doing battle with Chaos in the psychic realm. Meanwhile, the human race stands on the brink of extinction at the hands of numerous deadly foes. It is only through the faith and fury of the Emperor's armies, and the Emperor's loyal Space Marines, that the Imperium is able to maintain its slender foothold in the galaxy, and humankind can live to fight another day.

Forging a Space Marine

Of all the many armies in the Imperium, the Space Marines stand at the pinnacle of human endeavour. They are the ultimate warriors: genetically enhanced super-humans who are bigger, stronger, and faster than normal human soldiers, and equipped with the best weapons and armour with which to wage war against the Emperor's foes.

While each chapter has its own recruitment strategy, typically, aspirants are selected at an early age from the chapter's homeworld, or a local region of space. These worlds are often ideologically aligned with the philosophy of the particular chapter and its approach to citizenship and war. This close relationship between homeworld, society, and the people it produces echoes many ideological societies depicted in Science Fiction, including Ursula Le Guin's *The Dispossessed* (1974). In the novel, Le Guin describes two opposed worlds of Urras and Anarres – one a capitalist patriarchy, and the other a so-called anarchic 'utopia' of sorts that turns out to be anything but. While Le Guin uses her novel to interrogate the links between society and the individual (as well as the problematic concept of 'utopia'), the Space Marine homeworlds are used in a similar way to explore the way in which certain legions and their Primarchs develop traits in response to the conditions of their existence. While some Primarchs, such as Corax of the Ravenguard, are able to overcome the difficulties of their early years, others, such as Angron of the World Eaters and Konrad Curze of the Night Lords, are unable to defeat their personal demons, and become prime targets for the lure of Chaos. This opens up the possibility that even superhuman Space Marines may be inherently flawed – as flawed as 'normal' human beings – or perhaps even more so, as their superhuman powers makes their flaws even more pronounced. While they may be created as the pinnacle of human endeavour, they are no more perfect than the flawed utopias Le Guin interrogates in *The Dispossessed*.

It is interesting then that no matter what world the Space Marines recruit from, they all operate in a similar way: scouring the land for individuals who have proven themselves in battle or fought against tremendous odds. These young warriors are then ushered aboard landing craft where they are taken away and submitted to intensive trials. Indeed, it is not unusual for many aspirants to die or suffer life-changing injuries long before they even start to undergo the transformation into a genetically enhanced super-human, a ritualistic process that echoes Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818), and which is described in great detail in William King's novel, *Space Wolf* (1999). Both novels radically confront the moral foundation of posthuman embodiment and the relationship between body and mind. Though written many years apart, they both hark back to the question of what makes the human: is it who we *were*, who we *are*, or what we become?

This question is one that underpins much of the narrative surrounding Space Marines and how they are made. For those 'lucky' few who pass the tests and survive the torturous surgery, the next stage is training and indoctrination. During this stage, the new Marines must endure many long weeks of hypnosis and neuro-conditioning to educate them in the Imperial Creed and the rites of war. This leads to a complete psychological transformation in the new Space Marines, who by this point, will have mostly forgotten about their former lives completely. It is not enough that they give over their bodies to the Imperium, but that every waking moment be dedicated to the Emperor's cause – that they become perfect weapons both physically and mentally, ready to battle the Emperor's foes.

This slow erosion of the Space Marines' humanity is similar to the process described in Pohl's *Man Plus*, where the protagonist Roger Torraway undergoes surgery to become the 'man plus' of the novel's title. Though symbolically stripped of all aspects of outward human appearance,

Torraway is at once both the most human and the least human being alive. This is because his sacrifice is itself an incredibly 'human' act – he literally gives up everything in order to benefit the human race, much like the Space Marines in 40k. In one particularly pertinent moment, Torraway wakes from an operation to find that the surgeons have removed his penis without his consent. In this wholly symbolic act, not only does Torraway lose the "diagnostic signs of manhood," but with it, the final connection to his 'human' life (94). As the narrator reflects: "The tiny little operation was over, and what was left was nothing at all" – as if his penis is the final marker of his very humanity and the cultural power that comes with being a man (94).

Orders and Obedience

One of the most interesting and applicable elements of the 40k universe is the way it engages with questions around the role of orders and obedience in a military setting. During the Horus Heresy, half of the Space Marine legions 'fell' to Chaos and betrayed the Emperor in a quest for power. However, at the precise moment of treachery, it is unclear how many of the Space Marines were actually traitors, or just individuals caught up in events. When custom and convention require, they show unswerving loyalty to their Primarch, their Captains, and their fellow battle-brothers, making it a logical paradox to hold Space Marines to account for doing what they are trained to do.

This is an issue that comes up time and time again throughout the *Horus Heresy* series and is one that many authors engage with on a philosophical level. In Dembski-Bowden's *Betrayer* (2013), traitor Space Marine Argel Tal of the Word Bearers reflects on the weakness of the excuse "I was just following orders" (196). In doing so, he makes a clear reference to the work of philosopher Hannah Arendt, as well as Heinlein's *Starship Troopers* and Haldeman's *The Forever War*. Argel Tal argues that it is a weak excuse to claim one is just following orders – and that he himself is "weak" for using it (196). This leads him to conclude that "I know that when I die, I'll have lived my whole life shrouded by that same excuse" – to which Khârn of the World Eaters replies: "So will any Space Marine" (196).

The question of weakness is an interesting one, as much of the lore in 40k emphasises the fact that Space Marines are 'made,' much like the futuristic soldiers of Heinlein, Haldeman, and Pohl. And yet, while Argel Tal believes that he should still be held accountable for allowing himself to follow the orders that brought him to Chaos, there is never any single clear decisive moment at which Argel Tal was offered a decisive 'yes/no' decision. Rather, it is more the case that a long series of orders over time create a gradual culture in which he and his fellow Space Marines have been shaped and moulded to behave in a certain way. This includes the strong but subtle influence of peer pressure exercised through comradeship and loyalty to his fellow battle-brothers that would have made the shift to Chaos seem perfectly normal and 'natural' over time.

This observation makes the question of loyalty and orders far from clear-cut, as there is no single moment at which Argel Tal can be said to definitively choose his fate. Rather, he is caught up in a series of complex interactions and power structures that make it almost impossible to distinguish

a single origin or point of departure from the rule of Imperial law. This issue of power structures is examined by philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus* (1987), in their discussion around bureaucracy. According to the philosophers:

> It is not sufficient to define bureaucracy by a rigid segmentarity with compartmentalization of contiguous offices, an officer manager in each segment, and the corresponding centralization at the end of the hall or on top of the tower. For at the same time there is a whole bureaucratic segmentation, a suppleness of and communication between offices, a bureaucratic perversion, a permanent inventiveness or creativity practiced even against administrative regulations. (250)

In this case, the very system within which Argel Tal operates is designed such that any decision is bound up in a complex assemblage that makes it deliberately difficult to distinguish responsibility for any given act. Things then become even more complex when we consider the power flows between individuals, and the impact of macrofascistic power structures that shape desire and compel individuals to behave in a certain way (Deleuze and Guattari 251).

This points to another paradox in real-world military ethics and the way we hold individual soldiers to account for crimes they may have had little say in committing. A good example would be the infamous My Lai massacre (1968) of the Vietnam War. The massacre was major news at the time, however, only one soldier, Lt. Calley, was ever tried for the crime. What is particularly interesting about this case is that, as John Pimlott notes in *Vietnam: The Decisive Battles* (1990), both the My Lai and Binh Tay massacres were officially covered up until news of the atrocities was leaked, and the Army was forced to order an investigation (137). There is a sense then that Lt. Calley stood trial not as an individual, but rather on behalf of *all* of the military personnel who took part in the engagement, and who were all following orders, or at the very least, the *spirit* of the orders laid down by US officials "who were stressing the need for aggression and a large body count" (Pimlott 137). In this way, he stands as a form in 'inclusive exclusion,' in that his exclusion from the bounds of normal behaviour, also roots him back in the military machine through which he was able to behave in the way that he did. While he and his fellow soldiers may have pulled the trigger on the helpless civilians at My Lai, Lt. Calley and his colleagues were also part of a much wider scale systematic failing on the part of the US war machine.

The ethical conundrums exposed by My Lai are also explored in the fictional massacres depicted in the *Horus Heresy* book series, in which Space Marines are expected to follow orders without question, and may even be executed for failing to do so. And yet, of course, they may also suffer similar consequences if they do follow orders and those orders are later deemed to be unlawful. This has consequences for biopolitical thinking as it exposes the tension between national and international law, and the ethical dilemma surrounding soldierly loyalty. Former US Secretary of Defense, Robert S. McNamara, makes this point in the documentary film *Fog of War* (2004). During

the Second World War, McNamara worked in the Office of Statistical Control, where his job was to calculate ways to improve the efficiency of US bombing raids in East Asia. Ultimately, his work led to the fire-bombing of Tokyo and the murder of hundreds of thousands of Japanese civilians. As McNamara points out, he and Curtis LeMay would have been declared war criminals had the Allies lost the war.[5] Indeed, had the Allies lost, then the bomber pilots would likely have been tried in much the same way as the Nazis were at Nuremberg.

This exposes a fundamental paradox in the relationship between the citizen, the state, and the wider international community. While citizens are expected to follow orders laid down by the state (especially in a military context), they are also subject to international law, should the orders of the state be deemed unlawful. Following the logic of the Nuremberg trials, the Allied pilots *should* have refused the mission to fire-bomb Tokyo, even though the mission itself arguably contributed to the Allied victory.[6] The problem here is that, with complex value judgements, the outcome is often not known before the decision is made. Had the Allies lost the war, then the belligerent act of burning Tokyo to the ground would have been deemed excessive (as would the use of nuclear bombs at Hiroshima and Nagasaki); however, as the Allies won, the actions are arguably justified. A similar case could equally be made about the treachery of the Horus Heresy: had Horus won, then the Emperor and his forces would have been the ones acting out of line, and Horus's actions would have been deemed legitimate.

Devotion and Service

This question of loyalty is an important one in 40k, and none more so than for the Emperor's Space Marines. Given the context of the Horus Heresy and the great betrayal that threatened to destroy the human race, the Space Marines of the 41st millennium are particularly vigilant about all aspects of their lives that may be perceived as being in any way lax in terms of loyalty and devotion to the Imperial creed. This leads them to adopt a wholly monastic lifestyle dedicated to perfecting the art of killing, while warding off the dangers of corruption.

The Space Marines' approach to duty and warfare raises several important questions about how modern-day soldiers think and behave on the field of battle. On the one hand, soldiers are educated, trained, and indoctrinated by the nation state of which they are a part, and sent into battle to fight wars under the orders of their superior officers. And yet, as mentioned, the state itself is also subject to international law (or the Imperial law in the case of 40k). This raises the question: to whom, or what, do individual soldiers owe their loyalty, and to what extent can they, or *should* they, be expected to think for themselves? If military training compels soldiers to fight in a standardised, robotic fashion, then how can they think for themselves when their training compels them not to? While the 40k universe as a whole does not take a direct political stance on either of these questions, what it does do is present a series of test cases, with each of the Space Marine legions and their Primarchs used to explore the extent of loyalty between battle-brothers, and to a wider ideological cause.

These 'test cases' engage with many of the same issues that military theorists and Science Fiction writers have been grappling with for many years. In Heinlein's classic work of military Science Fiction, *Starship Troopers*, protagonist Johnny Rico decides to sign up to join the Mobile Infantry. However, despite his apparent 'choice' in the matter, there is an underlying sense that he is a character without agency, who is swept along by events around him. Indeed, when he comes to enlist, he is prompted to sign-up when he learns that his classmate Carmen Ibañez also intends to enlist. As he goes on to note: "No, I hadn't made any decision; my mouth was leading its own life" (28). These ethical dilemmas then become even more pronounced when he goes through training and encounters the inimitable Instructor Sergeant Zim. Zim tells the recruits, "*We* supply the violence; other people... supply the control" – as if the role of the trooper is to follow orders to the letter and obey without question (56, original emphasis).

Meanwhile, in Haldeman's *The Forever War*, protagonist William Mandella is faced with a similar ethical conundrum when he realises:

> Back in the twentieth century, they had established to everybody's satisfaction that "I was just following orders" was an inadequate excuse for inhuman conduct... but what can you do when the orders come from deep down in that puppet master of the unconscious? (73).

This problem becomes even more pronounced later in the novel when the medic Estelle notes that "If they could condition us to kill on cue, they can condition us to do almost anything. Re-enlist" (103). In this way, Mandella and his companions discover that they never really leave the Force, as even when they think they have left, they are only ever on "inactive status," suggesting that their role as soldiers is not just a formal marker, but a psychological state of mind (150). Once they are turned into super-soldiers clad in advanced fighting suits, there can be no going back.

This tension between what-was, what-is, and what-may-be, is absolutely critical in the 40k setting, where the context for the never-ending war is based upon an ancient treachery where many Primarchs turned to Chaos and took their *loyal* soldiers with them.[7] In this case, the Space Marines of the traitor legions were faced with an almost impossible choice. On the one hand, each Marine is supposed to owe his primary allegiance to the Emperor of humankind. However, the Space Marines are also required to show loyalty to their Primarch – the charismatic figure *created by the Emperor* to lead the Space Marines into battle. This tension is made even more problematic given that the Space Marines are not encouraged to think for themselves and are often treated as weapons or tools of the Imperium, rather than free-thinking individuals.

This issue is exposed throughout many of the novels in the *Horus Heresy* series. In James Swallow's *Fear to Tread* (2012), the Space Marine warrior Kano debates with brother Annellus over just how much about a mission he should be allowed to know. Kano argues that as Space Marines they are not "automata" and that any warrior going to war should be told the reason why (135). To

this argument, Annellus responds that "You are weapons [...] We all are. Blades in the hand of the Angel, sworn to his commands" (135). If they are merely weapons (as Annellus argues), then the Space Marines do not need to know anything about their missions, or the causes for which they are fighting. This suggests that they should not be held culpable for the actions of their commanders as they are not given enough information to make a reasoned rational choice.

This same logic is interrogated in the audio drama "Raven's Flight" (2010) by Gav Thorpe, in which the loyalist human Commander Valerius wishes to break his standing orders in order to support allies who may be in trouble. This leads to a confrontation with Space Marine Commander Branne who threatens to shoot down Valerius' spaceships should he break orders. On the one hand, Branne is only following his own orders, and yet Valerius argues that it would be unfair for Branne to condemn so many innocent lives to death based on the decision of their Commander. As Valerius argues: "They're just following *my* orders [...] To do otherwise would be mutinous" (260, original emphasis). To which Branne replies: "Yet you choose to commit that crime on their behalf. I say it again – this is your doing, not mine" (260).

Both of these examples demonstrate the tension at the heart of military power structures that create an arbitrary division between commanders and soldiers in order for the war machine to function as an efficient fighting unit. After all, if each soldier were given access to the totality of all information and expected to act independently, then it would be very hard to fight a coherent battle. And yet clearly there is a paradox here in the way that soldiers are expected to obey orders without question (often through fear of execution), while at the same time being expected to *disobey* orders should those orders be perceived to go beyond the bounds of international law. To overcome this tension, the military war machine seeks to control through means of training and indoctrination, and by limiting the amount of information that any individual soldier may be exposed to at a given time.

This is the same point Mandella makes in *The Forever War*, and one that suggests that many traitor Marines had very little choice in their fall to Chaos. With the Emperor such a distant, almost unknowable entity, the battle-brothers of the Space Marine legions have no clear point of reference to which they can compare the behaviour of those around them. This leads to a sort of 'group think' taking over where the Marines' trust in the bureaucracy of war overtakes their own individual sense of right and wrong. This is akin to what Arendt notes in the case of Nazi bureaucrat Adolf Eichmann, who was tried for war crimes in the 1960s. In her book *Eichmann in Jerusalem* (1963), Arendt argues that Eichmann was not so much motivated by fanaticism or sociopathic tendencies, but that his actions were "connected with an inability to *think*, namely, to think from the standpoint of somebody else" (49, original emphasis). And yet while Eichmann's guilt is beyond doubt, the trial does raise some disturbing questions about whether any single soldier on the ground can ever be truly *responsible* in light of orders from higher up the chain of command.[8] Certainly, in the case of the Space Marine legions, no single Space Marine would have had sufficient information to make an informed choice, even if they did have the freedom to think for themselves.

Further Implications

As fictional depictions of futuristic 'super-soldiers,' Space Marines both expose and interrogate a key tension in the relationship between the citizen, the soldier, and the state – in particular, the way in which they operate outside the normal rules of war, and can at times even create spaces that Agamben describes as states of exception.[9] While some scholars, such as Derek Gregory in "Spaces of exception and enemies" (2016), make the mistake of assuming that war itself is an exceptional space, the exception is rather to be found in the particular suspensions of law that Space Marines have the power to impose upon the conduct of war on account of their 'special' outsider status within the military hierarchy. When Space Marines join an engagement, other commanders will defer to the Space Marine plan of action, even if the plan goes against assumed norms of behaviour. In this case, the mere physical presence of super-human soldiers forces ordinary human officers to bow to their demands, and in the higher echelons of military commands, all normal operations often grind to a halt when the Space Marines make their presence known.

Beyond the Space Marines, only Inquisitors have similar powers to create exceptional spaces, wherein they can take command of any forces they see fit and put them to use. They even have the power to declare *exterminatus* and destroy an entire planet and its people should the threat be deemed too great. Though the normal rule of law might suggest aerial bombardment and military intervention, if the Inquisitors deem a planet beyond saving, all normal protocols are suspended, and a planet can be virus bombed to destruction, despite the countless lives that will be lost as a result.

Given the consequences of *exterminatus* and other similar atrocities carried out in the name of the 'greater good,' it is significant then that these interventions are often posed as difficult decisions, or at least, decisions that are being made in exceptional times. However, they also reflect a sense in which the exception can become the new normal. This ethical dilemma is played out time and time again in the 40k universe and is exemplified in the argument between commanders in "Raven's Flight" (described previously). When faced with standing orders to destroy any ships that leave the system, the Space Marine Commander Branne is accused of being inhuman, as he is willing to kill innocent passengers despite the fact they have no say on their ship's course. In response to this argument, Branne simply replies: "These are inhuman times" (260).

It is quite pertinent then that this is the exact argument used by the United States to justify the War on Terror, and the operation of Guantanamo Bay, where the normal rule of law is suspended and prisoners are interred without trial and submitted to torture. Guantanamo Bay is perhaps the example *par excellence* of the state of exception to which Agamben refers. However, his theory can also be applied more widely to cases where necessity and the 'state of emergency' are used to justify non-lawful actions. In a more recent example, the US and its allies have drawn upon the "unwilling or unable" doctrine to justify drone strikes in countries deemed "unwilling or unable" to deal with terror suspects in their own lands (Egan 2016, Wright 2017). While the US and its allies argue that

they are acting lawfully, within the bounds of international legal precedent, they are arguably acting in a non-legal manner, suspending the normal rule of law (where suspects would receive a trial), by transforming legal *criminals* into military *enemies*, and thus changing the whole debate, applying the logic of war to what would ordinarily be a matter for the courts.

To justify these actions, the US and its allies argue that their actions are *necessary* in order to avoid potential catastrophe and even greater loss of life. However, this claim in itself creates a distinction between different categories of life, in which Western lives are seen as being of greater value than those of outsiders operating in distant lands. This power to suspend law out of 'necessity' is akin to the power wielded by the Space Marines and Inquisitors in 40k, who enact the "permanent state of emergency" (that Agamben describes) in order to suspend the normal operation of law and kill 'heretics' without censure, all in the name of protecting society at large.[10]

Clearly, there are many parallels between 40k's 'heretics' and our present-day 'terrorists,' whom the US has argued it can kill without recourse should they present an imminent threat (Egan 2016). Of course, the issue here is that, often, each individual 'heretic' does not pose much of a threat on a case-by-case basis, and often will not have committed any crime at all. Rather, the danger of the heretic often lies in the *potential* threat that they may pose at some point in the future. While the concept of 'heretics' in 40k long pre-dates 9/11 and the US government's 'War on Terror,' the parallels between the two settings mean it can be quite difficult to tell the two apart. While one is a grimdark dystopia of perpetual war where heretics are killed for something they might never do, so the US and its allies use drones to execute terror suspects in distant lands without trial, based solely on the possibility that they may one day become a threat.

A Modern-Day Dystopia

As the novels of the Horus Heresy series demonstrate, there are rarely ever any simple choices, and the distinction between good and evil is never clear cut. Without complete oversight and total understanding of every aspect of the situation, it is difficult, if not impossible, to decide whether Horus was right, and if victory for Chaos would indeed have proven a better outcome for the human race.

This central question of species existence and species survival cuts to the very core of biopolitical theory and the concepts raised by Michel Foucault in his lecture series "Society Must be Defended," "Security, Territory Population," and "The Birth of Biopolitics" from the mid to late-1970s. While the very term 'biopolitics' itself is open to contestation, the questions that it raises are most pertinent, and born out in the interplay between humans and super-soldiers in the 40k setting, and its future-present history, the Horus Heresy. Indeed, these works also serve as a critique for the use and abuse of bodies that are fundamentally changed by their experience in war. While the Space Marines may serve as a paradigm for futuristic warfare, they also suggest a dark vision for where the human race might end up. In a world of black ops, drone strikes, and the never-ending 'war on terror,' the 40k universe has never been so relevant. To adjust a well-worn phrase: "In the grim darkness of the *future-present*, there is only war."[11]

NOTES

1. There are currently very few academic works published on Games Workshop and the universes of Warhammer and Warhammer 40k. Typically, most publications explore Games Workshop products as tabletop games – such as Ian Sturrock and James Wallis' "Total Global Domination: Games Workshop and *Warhammer 40,000*" published in *Zones of Control: Perspectives on Wargaming* (2016). Meanwhile, in the world of art and popular culture, there have been a few minor forays into the intellectual worlds of Games Workshop. These include an article on gender norms and 40k fanfiction by J. Walliss in *Popular Culture Review* (2010) and a forthcoming monograph, *Grimdark: A Very British Hell* by Timothy Linward, set for release in 2021.

2. According to the *Financial Times* (9 April 2019), Games Workshop Group PLC is currently valued in excess of £1 billion, and sells its products in over 5,000 stores worldwide. On its Investor Relations website, Games Workshop describes itself as "the largest and the most successful hobby miniatures company in the world."

3. These figures are published in Games Workshop's Annual Report for 2019.

4. The term 'grimdark' has long been synonymous with 40k and comes from the famous tagline, "In the grim darkness of the far future." It refers to a literary or artistic style that is particularly dystopian, disturbing, violent, or bleak. Such has been the impact of 40k on popular culture that the term is now used more broadly to refer to any form of Speculative Fiction that adopts a similar aesthetic. Best-selling Fantasy author Joe Abercrombie even uses the term as part of his Twitter handle: '@ LordGrimdark'.

5. See items 4 and 5 in: *The Fog of War* (Morris 2004). McNamara argues the human race still has not sufficiently addressed the question of what is acceptable in warfare.

6. According to "The Nuremberg Principles" (1946), published in the wake of the war-crimes trials following the Second World War, Principle IV says "The fact that a person acted pursuant to order of his Government or of a superior does not relieve him from responsibility under international law, *provided a moral choice was in fact possible to him*" (107, my emphasis).

7. Not all Space Marines in the traitor legions turned to Chaos. Indeed, some of the most notable loyalists, such as Nathaniel Garro, quit their legion as the Heresy unfolded to become some of the greatest heroes on the Imperial side. Garro's tale is first described in James Swallow's *The Flight of the Eisenstein* (2007), and opens up the possibility that in some cases, one's own moral judgement could (and perhaps should) supersede any other given loyalties. However, as suggested elsewhere in this article, one's own moral judgement is not necessarily free from outside influence and microfascistic desire. Indeed, in the case of Garro it could perhaps be argued that his failure to follow orders is a *flaw* in his training and indoctrination – even if it does lead him to join the forces of 'good.'

8. Arendt alludes to this possibility in her postscript to *Eichmann* where she comments on modern bureaucracy and responsibility (290). Arendt even suggests that "Israeli law [...] like the jurisdiction of other countries cannot but admit that the fact of 'superior orders,' even when their unlawfulness is 'manifest,' can severely disturb the normal working of a man's conscience"; this is but one example, according to Arendt, of "the inadequacy of the prevailing legal system and of current juridical concepts" (294).

9. Agamben explores these concepts in two of his most important works, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (1998) and *State of Exception* (2005).

10. According to Agamben in *State of Exception*, a key component of the state of exception is the "voluntary creation of a permanent state of emergency" that is used to justify the suspension of the normal rule of law (2).

11. The original line, quoted at the start of this article is: "In the grim darkness of the far future, there is only war." Different versions of this line (with and without the comma) appear across many different 40k publications, including the front cover of the latest 40k rulebook. See: *Warhammer 40,000* (152).

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BIONOTE

Mike Ryder is an interdisciplinary researcher at Lancaster University, UK. His interests include biopolitics, Science Fiction, military ethics and war. His website is www.mjryder.net.

PREPPING FOR THE LATOURIAN APOCALYPSE, FROM *DOOMSDAY PREPPERS* TO *BROKEN EARTH*

Derek J. Thiess

On April 6, 2020, amid a rising death toll from the Covid-19 pandemic and even as state governors in the United States (US) were belatedly issuing or extending stay-at-home orders, news reports began circulating about churches defying these orders and meeting to worship. Chrissy Stroop in *The Conversationalist* wrote of this phenomenon that "Anti-intellectualism and pseudo-intellectualism are hallmarks of authoritarianism, and in the United States in particular, opposition to much modern science has come to define the mostly white, mostly Christian Republican Party" (n.p.). Yet local news in Georgia suggested this impulse was not limited to Southern Baptist evangelical churches associated with far-right evangelism. Several news agencies reported that the Church of God, the Bibleway organisation, a largely African American organisation, was also very openly defying stay-at-home orders. The reason for this defiance, as Clayton Cowart, president of the organisation, declared was because, "The Bible tells us we're to lay hands on the sick, to touch the aggrieved" (Canady n.p.). At a time when health experts were warning everyone to shelter in place and to maintain social distancing, these churches were following what they saw as a higher mandate to physical closeness. Though this defiance was far from universal among Christian organisations this essay will suggest that an inherently Christian anti-intellectualism, particularly in the context of apocalypticism, is actually more widespread than scholarship often allows, even within the study of Science Fiction (SF) and Fantasy.

The presence demanded by the mandate to closeness, to "lay hands," may also be found in the work of one of the most cited philosophers of science of the last few decades. In *On the Modern Cult of the Factish Gods* (2014), Bruno Latour traces the "opposition between the long and mediated referential chains of science – that lead to the distant and the absent – and the search for the representation of the close and present in religion" (113). This statement both offers apology to religious leaders defying stay-at-home orders and epitomises an apocalyptic mode of thinking that pervades Latour's writings. The first half of this essay will outline this apocalyptic mode of Latour's criticism through a comparison to the first season of National Geographic's series, *Doomsday Preppers* (2012). Each episode of this series relays the stories of two or three people preparing for various catastrophes that could lead to the end of civilisation as we know it. The audience is invited into the homes, bunkers, bugout vehicles, and food- and ammo stockpiles of people preparing for specific ends of the world, ranging from nuclear destruction to super volcanoes. The preppers are then rated by 'experts' on the likely duration of their survival. In just the first season, there appear to be trends, including several combat veterans, many deeply religious people, a high percentage of

people hit hard by the 2008 recession, and many more dealing with personal trauma. Such trends are not accidental as apocalypticism and trauma appear to share an intimate connection. Charles B. Strozier and Katharine Boyd, for example, stress the importance of *kairotic* time in apocalyptic psychology – the idea that a future fulfilment of time will reverse the individual's fortunes. As they suggest, "As in trauma for the individual, such experience of time is psychologically and spiritually different from history as we know it" (277). This different, alternate, timeline that ends with apocalypse in turn suggests a kind of subjective construction of time for deeply personal reasons.

The fantastic has long been concerned with alternate timelines, particularly Science Fiction, or as Hugo Gernsback first coined the term in the first issue of *Amazing Stories* in April 1926, "scientifiction." Several scholars have noted the use of this term more recently by Latour, most notably Sherryl Vint and Mark Bould in a special issue of *Science Fiction Studies* in 2006. Roger Luckhurst in the issue's introduction observes that **"**The strangest silence in SF scholarship has surely been the marginal interface between SF critics and those in Science and Technology Studies" (3). Since 2006, however, Latourian philosophy has gained a much stronger foothold within Science Fiction studies, led by such scholars as N. Katherine Hayles and authors such as Kim Stanley Robinson. It is not the purpose of this essay to critique the many productive gains made in this theoretical partnership. However, there is another aspect of Latourian thought which is highly relevant to apocalyptic fiction, because Latour's texts frequently imagine the potential for doomsday scenarios in which political involvement in the sciences results in destruction. In *Science in Action* (1987) he shows science's tenuous dependence on economy, in *Aramis* (1996) he takes this interpretation further into the realm of conspiracy, and *The Pasteurization of France* (1988) especially relates science to the military industrial complex and intends to confront science on militaristic terms. There is an act of translation that occurs between philosophy and popular culture such that, in Latour's words, the movement from one to the other is merely one of "the displacements through other actors whose mediation is indispensable for any action to occur" (*Pandora's Hope* 311).

Latour's philosophy of science is a call to arms in which the philosopher must confront the universal with the personal and the subjective. Latour challenges those who "all want to reform or regenerate those badly conceived entities, 'the sciences'" (*Pasteurization* 236). But this emphasis on the subjective, against the universal nature of the reductively empirical takes an interesting turn toward an apocalyptic alternate timeline:

> If cruise missiles gather me in the vineyard, I do not wish to have to bow down before 'reason,' 'erring physics,' 'the folly of men,' 'the cruelty of God,' or 'Realpolitik'…I will not yield to them; I will not believe in 'the sciences' beforehand; and neither, afterwards, will I despair of knowledge when one of the relationships of force to which the laboratories have contributed explodes above France (ibid).

Latour is philosophically preparing for apocalypse, the explosion of one of those "relationships of force" above his native France, but there is comfort for him in this apocalypse, as he is "sufficiently sure" of a divinity, whether his frequently expressed Catholic belief or in his arguments for a return to "natural religion." Strozier and Boyd once again offer that this "Violence is always redemptive. An ethical and spiritual ambiguity lies at the heart of any apocalyptic drama" (276). Prepping – in this case, continually reasserting the destructive nature of the sciences – offers some comfort to the religious adherent such as the Catholic, theologically-trained Latour.

This essay, then, examines the pervasive notion of religious, particularly Christian, apocalypticism in the translations and drifts between Latourian philosophy and the fantastic. Theologians have certainly not missed this connection, asserting that "the power of apocalyptic fiction, like that of SF and Fantasy, rests in its disturbing imagery […] such imagery imposes itself upon us in disturbing ways, provokes our imaginative energies, and cautions us against reasoned theologies that rob the world of its mysterious and sacramental identity" (McMahon 276). Within theology, the power of apocalyptic fiction is recognised for its apologetic and evangelistic values, while these values typically go unquestioned within studies of the fantastic. Thus, this essay will end with a brief examination of the much-celebrated, three-time Hugo Award-winning *Broken Earth* trilogy by N. K. Jemisin. Highly praised for its inclusive representation of marginalised identities and simultaneous examination of exclusionary politics, this series likewise makes use of distinctly Christian myths and ultimately leaves the role of such belief systems unchallenged in those very exclusionary politics. This final translation from criticism/philosophy back to fiction I suggest is emblematic of the inability of the scholarly fields surrounding the fantastic to deal directly, and critically, with the entanglement of religion and politics that lies at the heart of many of its works, and lends further apology to religious anti-intellectualism.

Prepping for Apocalypse, Philosophically

In their entry in *The Routledge Companion to Science Fiction*, Aris Mousoutzanis defines "Apocalyptic SF" as "the convergence of SF and catastrophe [that] may […] be interpreted in terms of their shared relationship to modern conceptions of progress and technology" (458). Astutely this entry links the preoccupation in fiction with apocalypse (or doomsday) to Enlightenment, and by extension anti-Enlightenment, philosophy. Yet for most of this entry Mousoutzanis uses catastrophe as the critical lens, epistemologically linking this "overturning" of progress and technology to fantastic disaster scenarios. In another sense, then, this entry very carefully sidesteps the term "apocalypse," which carries a much greater sense of religious eschatology. This avoidance ought to seem strange to the SF critic, as the community has long embraced the importance of religion in fantastic worldbuilding. Farah Mendlesohn, for example, notes that "In a genre predicated on the thought experiment, theological discourse comes naturally. In a genre dedicated to world-building, recognizing the significance of faith has proven crucial in generating the critical density of the 'full' science fiction text" (274-275). However, as the following comparison will show, the notion of apocalypse may bear a close relationship to the imagined religious systems of fantastic worldbuilding, but more importantly touches upon something much more subjective and personal. An analysis of the

monographs of Latour, which he self-consciously characterised as "scientifiction," and the television program *Doomsday Preppers* reveals the creation of apocalyptic scenarios as means to assert the importance of the individual in the face of personal trauma, most typically occasioned by a scientific 'relation of force.' In reading them together, certain narrative patterns coalesce which offer an insight into the apocalyptic nature of Latourian thought.

The most immediate connection between these narratives exists in the often-absolute certainty they display in the immanence of an apocalyptic event. For example, David Sarti in Episode Two, a trucker who preps because he is certain that an electro-magnetic pulse (EMP) will destroy the Earth's technological grid and cause a food shortage, declares that, "Some people think I'm obsessed about prepping, but you know, I hope they're right. I think… I hope I am crazy. I hope nothing happens – that would be the greatest thing in the world" (00:03:24-00:03:34). For Sarti, at least, there is a tension between his certainty in the doomsday scenario and his wish that he is wrong. Others display far more certainty in the event for which they prep. Bruce Beach in Episode Eight, for example, is preparing for nuclear war in an underground bunker, nicknamed ARK Z, which he plans to turn into an orphanage to protect the future of the world. To him there is "a great possibility mankind could destroy itself. I think nuclear war is inevitable" largely because "There's never a time in man's history when he's developed a weapon and he hasn't used it" (00:01:57-00:02:04, 00:04:10-00:04:15). But perhaps the most telling expression is a combination of these two responses to alternatives – a direct declaration in the face of hope that there is no hope. Take "Mr. Wayne" in Episode Eleven, who prefers not to reveal his full name and refers to his location only as central Texas. He is preparing for China's domination of the world economy, which he believes is imminent. Yet he also offers the simplest expression, and denial, of hope in the same sentence: "I want to be wrong but, I just, I'm not wrong" (00:03:02-00:03:06). The prepper's hope for the world is therefore irrelevant in the face of their certainty. While some preppers express either hope or an inability to properly prepare for other constraints, such as economic ones, there is simply no possibility that disaster will not come.

Latour is also "sufficiently sure" of more than just the divine. The Latour of his writings is a consistent believer in the connection of science and the military as well as the eventual violent outcome of that network assemblage. As he offers in *Science in Action*, "The similarity between the proof race and the arms race is not a metaphor, it is literally the mutual problem of *winning*. Today no army is able to win without scientists, and only very few scientists and engineers are able to win their arguments without the army […] by and large, technoscience is part of a war machine and should be studied as such" (172, original emphasis). Moreover, in *Pandora's Hope* (1999) he relates this networking more explicitly to his own intentions as a philosopher: "My aim is not to be reasonable, respectable, or sensible. It is to fight modernism by finding the hideout in which science has been held since being kidnapped for political purposes I do not share" (211-212). Taking a stance not uncommon in the so-called Science Wars, Latour confronts the adoption of the sciences for political purposes. And like Sarti, Latour is not worried about those who might find him obsessive or crazy, unreasonable or insensible. He is telling a 'countertale' of an 'alternative' present and future in which we are stepping away from humanity.

But it is in *The Pasteurization of France*, again, that Latour displays the most certainty of the doomsday event, the cruise missiles that may gather him in the vineyard. He echoes popular anti-Enlightenment philosophies in that "Within these enlightened clearings we have seen developing the whole arsenal of argumentation, violence, and politics. Instead of diminishing, this arsenal has been vastly enlarged. Wars of science, coming on top of wars of religion, are now the rage" (5). 'Science,' for Latour, exists primarily in the actors, not just human scientists but also the non-human entities used and abused in laboratories and typically forgotten, or 'blackboxed,' like the laboratory apparatus or the internal components of the computer, vital but unseen. The 'relationships of force' that may doom us all are the products of such systems and networks of both humans and non-humans. There is a hint that the misplacement of our trust in the scientists and their "factishes" may be reversed, much like there is a nod to hope by the doomsday prepper. However, also like the prepper's hope, Latour holds to enough certainty in the doomsday event that prepping is the only recourse. It is too late for us because "In the old days the struggle against magic was called the 'Enlightenment,' but this image has backfired. The Enlightenment has since become the age of (ir) radiation… (Perhaps it is too late. Perhaps the missiles have already been launched. In this case, let us *prepare* for after the next war.)" (213, my emphasis). The Enlightenment philosophy that placed reason before faith has itself become a translated relationship of force that heralds the destruction of the world and hope for a future has been replaced by preparation for rapture. Like the doomsday prepper, there is a professed reluctance to give up hope, but it is quickly overshadowed by the seeming inevitability of the doomsday event. Thus, Latour proclaims, "I do not say this because I want to sink our only lifeboat. I say it because I want to prevent a shipwreck, or if it is already too late, to make it possible to survive the shipwreck" (231).

Yet in this statement from Latour there is also a very pronounced sense of purpose, one that resembles those of doomsday preppers. It would be a reduction, indeed, to limit the doomsday prepper's motives to a single idea such as religious belief. The preppers featured in National Geographic's series state many reasons for making their preparations, though they bear a kind of similarity to one another in their altruism – typically preparing for some reason other than their own self-preservation. Jules Dervaes (Episode Three), prepping for genetically modified organisms (GMOs) to create a superbug and cause a food shortage, states his reasons for prepping in the negative, because "In years to come I didn't want my family to turn around and say, 'Dad, why didn't you do something.' I had to take action, so we prepare; we don't wait for something to get worse" (00:27:52-00:28:00). However, many of the preppers featured on this show go beyond family to include their community, and even humanity itself, in their reasons for preparing. Bruce Beach's orphanage is a good example, as he sees it as one lifeboat ("Ark II") in which humanity itself might survive the inevitable shipwreck. Prepping, for him, is an act of altruism, because although "Many people think that I am obsessive. I guess it depends on what one is obsessed with. If they're obsessed with dedicating their life to humanity then, well, maybe that's a good obsession" (00:11:51-00:12:03). And several of the people featured on the show display a concern not just for their family, but their community as well. Steve Pace in Episode Ten, prepping for an EMP from the explosion of a nuclear device also states "I have an internal need to be responsible for my environment. Is that responsibility or is it just common human decency? I don't know, but I got a heavy dose of it"

(00:23:50-00:24:04). But Pace is also perhaps the most explicit in stating his lofty reasons as "The main reason that I am a prepper is for family, community, freedom, and justice" (00:31:37-00:31:47). Each 'reason' acquires a wider scope, from the local family and community to the more universal freedom and justice.

The potential preservation of humanity against the threat of destruction is also why Latour preps, but he, too, has a more immediate community to think about, equally charged with lofty goals:

> Apart from those who make science, who study it, who defend it or who submit to it, there exist, fortunately, a few people, either trained as scientists or not, who open the black boxes so that outsiders may have a glimpse at it. They go by many different names […] and are most often filed under the general label of 'science, technology and society' (*Science in Action* 15-16).

The importance of science studies might be understated in some cases, but not in Latour's writing, as "The decisive importance of science studies, or the anthropology of the sciences, is becoming clear. These disciplines act as a veritable clinamen, a slight deviation breaking the invisible symmetry that allowed belief to exercise its rights" (*Modern Cult* 20). It is lucky, not just for the academic landscape but for humanity itself – both threatened with apocalypse – that Latour and his science studies colleagues are here to open science's blackboxes and defuse their relationships of force. As such, they are themselves saviour figures, prepping not just for their own self-preservation but for the good of all.

Of course, one must acknowledge a confusion of terms here, a disciplinary mingling, that the theological philosopher Latour might call a dialectic, but that the outsider might consider an irony. It is Latour who proclaims "we are all laypeople so far as disciplines other than our own are concerned" (*Science in Action* 93). And yet the philosopher moves between disciplines as diverse as biology, literature, classics, anthropology, psychology, sociology, chemistry, and perhaps the more fitting philosophy and theology. Even holding this irony aside, even insisting on the Latour of his central discipline, that which he is trained in, is no problem. This discipline, too, is an elect community in that it alone is capable of dealing with the metaphysics that Latour will continually find among the "actors" he identifies among the sciences. Philosophy in this estimation becomes an insider group – that to which one must be converted because to lie outside of it is not to see the apocalyptic truth – in that "Only a researcher trained in the conceptual calisthenics offered by the philosophical tradition could be quick, strong, daring, and pliable enough to painstakingly register what they [actors] have to say" (*Reassembling the Social* 51). Whether operating within 'science studies' or within philosophy Latour, like Steve Pace above, has a "heavy dose" of whatever it takes to prepare for the doomsday scenario.

But watching the television show, one might suspect even more unstated reasons for prepping, particularly in those who 'refuse to be a victim.' There is a sense that prepping is a means for some to cope with other traumas. Martin Colville in Episode Four, for example, preparing for an economic collapse, began prepping after his wife was diagnosed with cancer. Jason Charles in Episode Three began prepping after he realised the vulnerability of his situation during 9/11. Perhaps Preston White in Episode Six, preparing for a Fukushima-like radiation disaster in Colorado, summarises it best when he confesses "I was faced with death, decided I wasn't gonna be a victim. It changed my life; the way I live tomorrow. I can affect my picture, and that's what you do by prepping" (00:30:36-00:30:50). While such trauma mostly remains unspoken, it is intimately tied to these individuals' visions of apocalypse. Again, Strozier and Boyd note, in their discussion of the relationship between apocalypse and the "fundamentalist mindset," the "relationship of trauma and personal crisis to the conversion process. Prior to conversion is almost always some antecedent or precipitating stress, crisis, social influence, personal struggle or trauma" (286). It is no wonder, then, that so many of the preppers begin weeping openly when discussing their doomsday scenarios, such as Donna Nash in Episode Four, prepping for a worldwide pandemic. Or like Dianne Rogers in Episode Seven, who is haunted by a dream she had in college of environmental disaster, perhaps these preppers are just "trying to escape" (00:18:48-00:18:50).

As with the community of preppers, one might suggest there is motivation that lies beyond the stated reason of Latour to prep because "We must distrust those who believe in 'true' market relationships, 'true' equivalences, or 'true' scientific deductions […] they *disarm* those who might have the courage to approach the relations of force that create equivalences, machines, or knowledge. They weaken those who might, perhaps, have had *the strength to modify* that knowledge" (*Pandora's Hope* 209, original emphases). It does not take a great deal of philosophical calisthenics to find the hint of a psychological trauma in these reasons for prepping. Latour has already made many references to imagined scenarios, alternate timelines in which "cruise missiles" circle around Leviathan. Yet he also references a rather vague psychological misgiving in that "We may be uneasy about quitting our old habits of thought, but no one can say that we are abandoning reasonable positions for extravagant claims. If anything, in spite of the furious volleys of the science wars, we may be slowly moving from absurdity to common sense" (*Pandora's Hope* 135). In this landscape of furious volleys, being certain of the eschatology of these relations of force and enlisting one's community for the good of humanity is necessary for its survival.

However, once again *Pasteurization of France* offers perhaps the clearest picture of Latour's brush with trauma. It is here that he declares:

> We no longer have to fight against microbes, but against the misfortunes of reason – and that, too, *makes us weep*. This is why we need other proofs, other actors, other paths, and is why we challenge those scientists. Because we have other interests and follow other ways, we find the myth of reason and science unacceptable, intolerable, even immoral (149, my emphasis).

Do we take him at face value? Does speaking of "reason," the instigator of his personal doomsday scenario, make him weep? Whether literal or not, and whether explicitly traumatic or not, one cannot deny the personal and emotional nature of the impetus to philosophical prepping. There is one more passage of note, as it takes place "In a Pseudobiographical Style to Explain the Aims of the Author" (162). Here Latour describes how in 1972 he was on the road and forced to stop, losing his senses during an "overdose of reductionism." His recollections reveal much about his motives: "Tired and weary, suddenly I felt that everything was still left out. Christian, philosopher, intellectual, bourgeois, male, provincial, and French, I decided to make space and allow the things which I spoke about the room that they needed to 'stand at arm's length.' […] This was like an exorcism that defeated demons one by one" (163). His weariness, his psychological condition not entirely unlike those of the preppers noted above, have prepared him for the conversion to the apocalyptic.

It does not appear to be accidental, then, that critics reference religion, especially though not exclusively Christianity, in discussing the conversion to apocalypticism. This is because, as Shaefer suggests, "Popular belief in Apocalypticism is commonly associated with evangelical ideas about premillennial dispensationalism" (84). Thus, it should not surprise one to read the religious elements in Latour's own conversion, or to note that the entire process seems to echo Constantine's conversion. Yet there is a widespread tendency to overlook – even to 'blackbox' – the religious and apocalyptic aspects of Latourian thought such that they come to seem natural and universal. As he himself says of his own discipline, "By shifting attention from the theory of science *to its practice*, it has simply happened, by chance, upon the frame that held together the modernist settlement [...] Then everything followed quite logically" (*Pandora's Hope* 294, original emphasis). Given the character of his stated intentions and motivations, perhaps SF/Fantasy studies ought to be more critical of its own engagement with his ideas of science when they coexist alongside his own personal doomsday scenario. At the least the popularity of this philosophy risks an overemphasis on apocalypse in the fantastic.

At most, integrating this philosophy without calling attention to the apologetics that undergird it risks allowing the fantastic to become a vehicle for evangelism. We need no longer wonder about the religious, apocalyptic nature of Latour's appraisal of the sciences, because "There is indeed a significant religious element in the expectation that any second there might be some danger threatening us, because those to whom we owe our existence might not be able to come to our rescue" (*Modern Cult* 52). Even as his more recent writings give his millenarianism more immediacy, they do so by advocating for a "natural religion" (Gaia). The close kinship between apocalypse and religion means that a critical look at either the apocalyptic or at Latourian thought within the context of SF/Fantasy must include a consideration of religion. Yet at times, such criticism already adopts clearly apologetic stances in which, as Stephen R. L. Clark phrases it, "science fiction seems well suited to the needs and fantasies of an irreligious age, easily persuaded that there are no *transcendent* purposes […] But there are other ways of thinking of science fiction, and other ways of thinking about religion" (98, original emphasis). The "other way" of thinking for Clark is to consider SF itself a religious movement, in particular one that "sometimes exalts just that intellectual conceit, rootless ambition, and contempt for ordinary life and morals that tradition has associated with the

Devil" (109). This subtle nod to the Manichaean should remind the reader, too, of the apocalyptic, as well as the ends to which the apocalyptic may be used.

The push toward the eschatological, however, is also utopian, dovetailing with other discussions in studies of the fantastic. Like apocalypse itself, it is important to remember that "utopia is not necessarily deferred or prefigurative but rather experimental, experiential, and subjective […] a transformative and desire-affirmative phenomenon" (Firth and Robinson 382). Rhiannon Firth and Andrew Robinson, here elaborate an idea of "temporal utopianism," in which homogenous or "empty time," is disrupted in various ways according to a variety of contemporary philosophers. Central to this elaboration, however, is the disruptive power of "messianic time," which opposes the linear and teleological through its intense focus on the present moment while simultaneously valuing the past. There is most literally a kind of messianic time at play in the imagined doomsday scenarios of both the preppers and Latour, such that they begin to take on utopian qualities. How intensely they focus on the need to prepare in the present moment, for example, indicates a certain slippage in time – it embodies a temporal pluralism in that even as they prepare for a seemingly deferred end time, their central preoccupation is the preparation that occurs in the here and now. Translated to a fantastic form, this messianic moment suggests what SF critics have long identified, that critical utopias of displaced time and space speak equally as powerfully to the present, because they also typically critique a present politic or worldview.

The Deleuzian folding of time that Firth and Robinson note, the temporal shift between present reality and future desire, may also be similar to what Elana Gomel refers to as wormholing. While a wormhole typically connects two disparate places, Gomel uses it in *Narrative Space and Time* (2014) to refer to a frequent appearance of a "carceral zone" or a heterotopia. These time/spaces "are not to be seen as a valorized alternative, a sheltering space […] They are often violent, scary, and dangerous" but they are also "subversive [in] their resistance to the totalizing discourse of social perfection" (121). In other words, like the messianic moment, they disrupt the progression and the perfection of time. There is no possibility of removal or deferral, however, for the doomsday prepper. Their sense of time includes both the immanence of the destruction of the world (future) and the pressing need to prepare (present). The messianic disruption of the flow of time in this instance creates the heterotopia and in the fantastic is, regardless of being projected onto another temporal topography, almost always about the present. While the focus of this essay has been on SF, the need to criticise such messianism extends to other areas of the fantastic. As one final example makes clear, the messianism implied in prepping may likewise translate back in to Fantasy, where unlike the "argument with the universe" of SF, it may more openly act as a "sermon on the way things should be, a belief that the universe should yield to moral precepts" (Mendlesohn, *Rhetorics* 5). That is, while messianism in SF manifests in translations and shifts between future and present, philosopher and prepper, this final example of Science Fantasy engages in a more direct sermon about the place of religion in the end of the world.

The Way the World Ends

Criticism of Jemisin's *Broken Earth* series has been quick to recognise the importance of its message for the present, whether declaring it a commentary on the Anthropocene, a direct engagement with race relations as Ebony Elizabeth Thomas notes, or a combination of both according to Kathryn Yusoff. More importantly in the present context it is a story of perpetual, cyclical apocalypse, and the apocalyptic nature of the story is highly relevant in the context of prepping. The story follows Essun, a powerful orogene – one who uses magical, telekinetic powers to move the earth and manipulate the matter around them – as she attempts to find her kidnapped daughter, Nassun. *The Fifth Season* (*TFS*, 2015) predominantly focuses on three different time periods in Essun's life, in which she variously goes by the names Damaya, Syenite, and finally Essun. *The Obelisk Gate* (*TOG*, 2016) and *The Stone Sky* (*TSS*, 2017) later focus on how Essun and Nassun both end the recurring cataclysmic "Seasons," or ecological disasters that plague the continent, known as the Stillness. Interestingly, because of the frequency of these ecological disasters, there is a fairly common culture, even among the diverse peoples of the continent, centred on preparing. People have separated themselves into "comms," walled communities protected by "strongbacks," in which they dedicate themselves to increasing their caches of food and supplies. Much like the ratings of preppers at the end of each episode, each comm is frequently measured by its level of preparedness. In fact, one character summarises the entire history of the continent after the first Season as "huddling behind our walls and putting all our wits, all our learning, toward the singular task of staying alive. That's all we make now: Better ways to do field surgery with improvised equipment. Better chemicals, so we can grow more beans with little light" (*TOG* 163). While the novels are rightly praised for their diversity of representation – giving voice to peoples from underrepresented racial, gendered, or sexual identities – what unites these people is their preoccupation with continual preparation for disaster.

In fact, motivations stated by the characters and narrator of these novels recreate many of the thematic patterns noted above in the impetus of preppers and of Latour. In its focus on prepping the Broken Earth trilogy maintains a philosophical dedication to the cyclical nature of apocalypse and, though the novels will break this cycle, there is a certainty to the Seasons. The prologue assures the reader that "This is what you must remember: the ending of one story is the beginning of another. This has happened before, after all. People die. Old orders pass. New societies are born. When we say 'the world has ended,' it's usually a lie" (*TFS* 14). It is the cyclical certainty of destruction, in fact, that has given this world its intense focus on prepping. In *The Fifth Season* Damaya recites what she learned about the Seasons as a child: "Individual comms have often survived Seasons, if they were prepared. If they were lucky […] *First guard the gates*. Keep storecaches clean and dry. Obey the lore, make the hard choices, and maybe when the Season ends there will be people who remember how civilization should work" (94, original emphasis). The world has been here before and it will be here again. But also, within the certainty of the apocalyptic event, lies the transcendent purposes – those who have a 'heavy dose' of what it takes to survive. These special people include the orogenes, to whom Essun refers as the "gods in chains" as they are essentially enslaved by the aristocratic comms and exploited for their magical ability to maintain the stability of the continent

(262). However, it also ironically includes the lorists who were "warriors, storytellers, nobility. They told their truths in books and song and through their art engines" (*TOG* 214). In this landscape, it is those who tell stories (like an author, perhaps) and those with a connection to the transcendent magic who may engage the conceptual calisthenics needed to step outside the cycle of destruction.

But what few, if any, critics acknowledge is the messianic nature of this disaster, seen most clearly in the novels' antagonist. Amid the lore that records knowledge of the Seasons, there is a legend that their source is none other than the Earth itself, sentient and vengeful. Moreover this all-powerful Earth, from which all magic flows, may hate all of humanity but he hates orogenes in particular because "at the height of human hubris and might, it was the orogenes who did something that even Earth could not forgive: They destroyed his only child" (*TFS* 380). But if the Christian overtones of this detail are not enough, when Essun later learns the truth of this history she at first is resistant as it reminds her of "those weird cults that crop up from time to time. I heard of one that asks an old man in the sky to keep them alive every time they go to sleep" (*TOG* 166). The ironic humour here actually activates the mythic source of the novels' larger story arc, the messianic return of the son to orbit that will end the Seasons. Essun's own journey acts as a parallel to this redemption, as one of the "gods in chains," and at the culmination of the novels, she ultimately sacrifices herself and it is her own daughter who moves the rock of the moon back into its place. But Essun's is no simple martyrdom – this self-sacrifice, this "heavy dose" of concern for the world, results not in her simple death, but in her apotheosis. She becomes an immortal "stone eater" a being of pure magic who, the final novel implies, is going to lead a crusade to "make [the world] better" (398).

While there are many other parallels to be drawn between this trilogy and the Christian mythology from which so many of its details are drawn, there is one other detail of importance here.[1] Along with the messianic disaster and the prepping lifestyle of the comms, these novels also align academia more generally, and the sciences more specifically, with at best ineptitude and at worst being directly culpable for colonial violence. For example, when Essun first meets Tonkee early in the series, she recognises her as a geomest, a university researcher dedicated to studying the Earth. But Tonkee indignantly replies, "I know better than to pay attention to those fools at the University. I'm not stupid" (*TFS* 182). The universities themselves are never represented except as background foils to the greater achievements of the magical characters. Thus, the reader learns that the lorists have survived "despite the First through Seventh Universities disavowing their work as apocryphal and probably inaccurate" (*TOG* 2). This suppression also has a long and violent past, as the lorists are the distant descendants of the ancient magic-using people, the Niess, who during the Stillness's prehistory (and, it is implied, our own Earth's future – again that slippage of time) were conquered and colonised. During this conquest "It became easy for scholars to build reputations and careers around the notion that Niess sessapinae were fundamentally different, somehow – more sensitive, more active, less controlled, less civilized" (*TSS* 210).[2] But the novels do not stop with what is recognisably a parallel to racist 'sciences' of the nineteenth century. When these scholars fail to establish them as biologically different, the 'genegineers' take over and create the first of the orogenes with Niess features in order to validate their earlier racism.

This final explanation suggests that it is not the orogenes, the priests of this magic so parallel to Christian mythology, who are ultimately to blame for apocalypse. It is, rather, the fault of the genegineers, the scientists who sought to validate the racism of their predecessors. And it is absolutely vital to continue to document the history of sexist and racist sciences – again, there is no disputing the need for such criticism. Yet what is far less often the focus of critical study, in the humanities in general and in SF/Fantasy studies more specifically, is the role of dominant religions in our critical discourse. The fact that the overt religiosity and Catholicism of Latour is so typically overlooked alone speaks to a strong critical preference. Jim Clarke has recently noted how "the predominant mode of critical work in the area of SF and religion has been from theologians seeking to co-opt or adopt SF into their own preoccupations" (7). But coupled with – and sometimes more carefully coded under – the apocalypticism of the fantastic, this religiosity becomes a catalyst for a much more widespread negligence or outright apology (even Clarke seems to advocate for a "fruitful counterflow between [Catholicism and SF]") (24). The comparison of Latour to the prepping community and to Jemisin, too, shows that the philosophical preoccupations of one such as Latour have their own corollaries in both literature and the lived experiences of individuals. Jemisin's imagined apocalypse even more expressly maps these concerns onto a more American evangelism with its sinners in the hands of an angry God. So, it is finally worth pointing out that we (around the world, but especially those in the US) are not currently gathered in the vineyard. We are huddled in our homes – or at least, we should be.

But the relations of force have aligned during this pandemic, and they are not the scientific, military, or industrial. Rather it is the alignment of inept human governments with their capitalistic greed and an evangelical yearning for the end. And we are to blame, for years of neglecting to deal critically with the theories that we activated. For allowing the millenarianism of these theories to be a critical third rail, and for acceding to the distance of science and the 'close and present' in religion. But the defiance religious institutions are showing right now to the recommendations of scientific experts is not the only material manner in which this neglect is affecting us. In the midst of one of his history lessons in *The Fifth Season*, Alabaster tells Essun about the origins of both the now-great city of Yumenes and of racism on their continent: "Yumenes wasn't actually the capital then – and some of the bigger Sanzed comms weren't as good at preparing for Seasons as they are now. They lost their food storecaches somehow […] To survive, all the Sanzed comms decided to work together […] That's when they started calling us 'lesser races'" (417). Cannibalism is implied here, but it is also symbolic of larger, lived inequalities. Preparing for disaster, even in this current pandemic, means material preparation – and this is why grocery stores continue to suffer shortages of certain foods and goods, such as toilet paper. Just as in the pages of Fantasy, this shortage means the most privileged will have what they need and others will not. And herein lies the problem for scholarship of the fantastic that continues to dedicate its resources to the apologetic strain of religious apocalypticism: who and what is being starved, or even worse, cannibalised?

NOTES

1. For a fuller treatment of the relationship of Christian mythology and the Broken Earth novels, see my "Convert or Kill: Disanthropentric Systems and Religious Myth in Jemisin's Broken Earth" in *Fantasy and Myth in the Antropocene*, edited by Brian Attebery, Tereza Dědinová, and Marek Oziewicz, Bloomsbury, forthcoming.

2. The sessapinae are fictional glands at the base of the skull from which the novels suggest issues orogenic power.

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BIONOTE

Derek J. Thiess is Assistant Professor of English at the University of North Georgia, US. His research focuses on issues of embodiment and monstrosity, primarily in American popular fictions and his most recent book is *Sport and Monstrosity in Science Fiction* (Liverpool University Press, 2019). His next project explores the myth of redemptive violence in fantastic fictions.

NON-FICTION REVIEWS

WEIRD FICTION AND SCIENCE AT THE FIN DE SIÈCLE (2020) BY EMILY ALDER

Review by Fredrik Blanc

Alder, Emily. *Weird Fiction and Science at the Fin de Siècle*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2020. 250 pp.

Weird fiction, much like Gothic or modern Horror, seems to revel in its effortless capacity to remain unnervingly relevant. While Emily Alder's *Weird Fiction and Science at the Fin de Siècle* (2020) neither focusses on twenty-first century fiction nor does it dwell on the subject of contagious diseases, its careful consideration of the interrelationship between science and the Weird finds additional purchase in the current climate of fear and unfamiliarity as it relates to the Coronavirus pandemic. Indeed, the Weird is not content to be uncomfortably suitable to contemporary discourses surrounding climate change, for example, it must also perfectly encapsulate the feelings of dread and the unfamiliar that accompany our struggle against an invisible killer, one which has made even the most mundane social interactions ultimately uncanny, mediated as they are through masks and hand sanitisers. Covid-19 once more lays bare humanity's vulnerability in a world it had once thought tamed, but which now seems more than rebellious. This pandemic is another example of the Weird, a testament to the ontological strangeness of the human condition, that is, the gradual unmooring of humanity's own understanding of itself, as well as the epistemological difficulty to understand the world around us, which now appears ever heightened, as Ben Woodard argues in *Slime Dynamics: Generation, Mutation, And the Creep of Life* (2012), that "fears of the viral place human beings in a biological ecology full of unfriendly entities" (20). In many ways, this collapse of the familiar into a concatenation of ever-shifting boundaries that highlight new, and oftentimes terrifying, perspectives of the world around us corresponds to Mark Fisher's definition of the Weird, where the irruption of the former corresponds not in a change in the world, but as an affirmation of how wrong we are in our understanding of it. The Weird, as Fisher notes, is "not wrong, after all: it is our conceptions that must be inadequate" (*The Weird and the Eerie* 15).

In her monograph, Alder explains how the advent and popularity of the Weird tale are deeply intertwined with scientific discourses of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, so much so indeed, she argues, that a "close relationship with science is essential to the Weird's existence," a relationship made all the more salient and compelling in our era of climate change and struggles against an invisible, but deadly, virus (5). The Weird tale, with its collapsing of genre, ontological, and epistemological boundaries and its exploration of a universe often greater and more terrible than previously anticipated by its unsuspecting protagonists, ostensibly turns to science as an instrument of both doom and discovery. H. P. Lovecraft's "The Call of Cthulhu" (1928), for example, points clearly to the "sciences" as the particular apparatus through which the terrifying Weirdness of the world around us can be known (139). Alder's study carefully engages with this

characteristic of the Weird and slowly unravels how the Weird fiction of the *fin de siècle*, notably that of such authors as Arthur Machen, Robert Louis Stevenson, Edith Nesbitt, H. G. Wells, Algernon Blackwood, and William Hope Hodgson, is profoundly influenced by the scientific discoveries of that era.

In her introduction, titled "Weird Tales and Scientific Borderlands at the *Fin de Siècle*," Alder underscores the ability of the period's Weird tale to explore "radical new forms of knowledge" that not only draw inspiration from scientific inquiries of the time but push readers to re-evaluate what is and can be known of the universe around them, highlighting the "Weird's capacity to offer alternative, non-hegemonic ways of knowing the world" (3-4). Here, Alder explains her use of the *borderland* as the interplay between the scientific frontiers of the period, be they the first forays into evolutionary biology, the physics of thermodynamics, or the stranger ventures into psychical research and the possibilities of a scientifically determined afterlife, and the heterotopic spaces of fiction in which these discourses can be explored and their implications developed through the prism of the Weird. Borderlands, in Alder's analysis, foreground the ontological and epistemological underpinnings of the latter, and indeed are exemplified by William Hope Hodgson's "The Derelict" (1912) and H. G. Wells' *The Island of Dr Moreau* (1896) which "take place in liminal locations, borderland spaces in which both marginal and mainstream scientific principles can be reconsidered and reconstructed" (165). Here Alder compellingly unravels how the history of the Weird tale is largely co-dependent with the history of sciences that in themselves were enweirded, arguing that "*fin-de-siècle* science is not made Weird by fiction, but was already Weird to start with" (5). The monograph explains how, from nineteenth century occultists and spiritualists, like Helena Blavatsky, who would "saturate [her writing] with scientific language," and others such as Guthrie Tait and Balfour Stewart who, in *The Unseen Universe* (1875), drew on physical phenomena to construct a model of reality that "equivocate[d] at all points between physical and metaphysical realms," scientific discourses of the period were themselves at the heart of a renewed sense of the world's strangeness (20-21). Along with evolutionary discourses that drew attention to the weirdness of biological entities and liminality of the animal, plant, and fungal kingdoms, these metaphysical stances posited a bizarre world, one that Weird fiction would, in turn, explore, distort, and question.

The rest of the monograph is comprised of two parts. The first part, "Borderlands of Mind, Body, and Spirit" delves into such tales as Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886) and Arthur Machen's "The Great God Pan" (1894), to eloquently highlight how both the scientific stances of the period and the Weird fiction that they influenced "challenge assumptions of human intellectual superiority, capacity to know, mastery over nature, and teleological centrality in the cosmos" (33). While the Weird has long been critically articulated as challenging humanity's understanding of epistemology and intellectual certainty, the strength of Alder's analysis lies in its thorough and in-depth close reading of these particular tales and the corresponding scientific discourses that influenced them. She unveils how these tales, much like science itself at the *fin de siècle*, disconnect themselves from a traditional view of reality as a steady and monolithic entity in favour of a multiplicity of ways of knowing and experiencing the world around us. All three chapters in this section explore how such tales expand upon scientific reconsiderations of

knowledge and the self. They contest what Alder calls a "deterministic, mechanistic, [and] positivist worldview," yet at the same time borrow much from contemporary research into psychology and even psychical endeavours of the 1880s, which themselves saw vast revolutions "that challenged not only assumptions about the nature of human consciousness and selfhood, but also those about the stability and comprehensibility of reality itself" (45-47). Psychology, occultism, and the figure of the scientist are at the centre of Alder's discussion. The first chapter of this section, "Weird Selves, Weird Worlds: Psychology, Ontology, and States of Mind in Robert Louis Stevenson and Arthur Machen," as well as the second chapter, "Weird Knowledge: Experiments, Senses, and Epistemology in Stevenson, Machen, and Edith Nesbit" highlight the mutability and fragmentation of the human psyche as the vision of a wholeness of the self is replaced with "ideas of the multiplicity of human consciousness or soul" (70). Stevenson's novella, in particular, underscores this fragmentation, yet, beyond the well-studied interplay between depth and surface, Alder interestingly stresses that Hyde functions not only as a polar opposite to Jekyll, but as the product of an experiment that collapsed all boundaries between the two and dissolved, rather than strengthened, ontological barriers.

The last chapter in the section, "Weirdfinders: Reality, Mastery, and the Occult in E. and H. Heron, Algernon Blackwood, and William Hope Hodgson" examines a hitherto underexplored aspect of the Weird tale, as it carefully investigates the figure of the occult investigator. Character such as Hodgson's Thomas Carnacki and Blackwood's John Silence, rather than fall prey to their conceit as other scientific experimenters often do in *fin de siècle* weird tales, are experts of the supernatural and the psychical. Through their careful uncovering of weird phenomena, whether by ritualistic or scientific means, their weirdfinding capabilities allow for a recalibration of what can be seen and understood in an enweirded ontology, the particularity of which resides not in the understanding of a universe suddenly made strange but, rather, in a universe that was always already strange to begin with. They pointedly represent what Alder argues is "both the success and the failure of positivist science to explain and contain the phenomena of the universe" as these stories "attempt to align borderland science with the mainstream" (150). This enlightening chapter, along with the rest of the monograph, delves deep into a relatively untrodden feature of the Weird tale, eloquently offering a careful reading of the occult investigator that proves invaluable to the study of the Weird.

In the second part of Alder's monograph, "Borderlands of Time, Place, and Matter," the fifth chapter, which I personally found was the most compelling of the monograph, is entitled "Meat and Mould: The Weird Creatures of William Hope Hodgson and H. G. Wells" carefully examines how the Weird tales of Hodgson and Wells explore the implications of nineteenth century evolutionary biology. These tales question the clear-cut separations between animal, vegetal and, particularly, fungal kingdoms, eschewing traditional ontologies that required stable boundaries in order to alleviate the often uncomfortable reality of humanity's kinship with the rest of the planet's lifeforms; an anxiety that in many ways twenty-first century humans still share with their Victorian counterparts. Alder's discussion of the 'morphic potential' of the tree-like, fungal monster adorned with a human-like face in Hodgson's *The Boats of The Glen Carrig* (1907) emphasises the blurring of these categories and elicits an exceptionally interesting dive into the scientific discussions of nineteenth

century biological science. The "greedy, excessive form of life" that is the fungus becomes the embodiment of anxieties of decay at the same time as it appears overly fecund and monstrously generative (178). Tales of moving fungi and carnivorous mould as they appear in Hodgson's fiction articulate how "a resolutely material universe is nonetheless textured with wonders and terrors just beyond the limits of normal experience and comprehension" (179). The Weird, indeed, scorns the narrowing notions of ontological classification, exploring instead the possibilities of lifeforms at once far removed and yet unnervingly related to humanity, thereby further decentring the human within the vast tree, or rather rhizome, of life. The last chapter in Alder's study, "Weird Energies: Physics, Futures, and the Secrets of the Universe in Hodgson and Blackwood" examines how texts such as Hodgson's *The Night Land* (1912) and Blackwood's "The Willows" (1907) reconfigure contemporary understanding of physics, particularly the laws of thermodynamics. For Alder, the elusive and unseen characteristics of energy in physics "provided a language for conjuring non-living agency and power, a discourse for talking about interactions with the more-than-visible world" (195). At the confines of Science Fiction and the Weird, texts such as *The Night Land* utilise thermodynamics and notions of the sun's heat death to explore the strangest of borderlands, a "sun-dead abfuture," where the intricacies of physics meet the unknowable reversals of the Weird (209). Alder's detailed analysis highlights in no uncertain terms how *fin de siècle* research into the realms of physics unravels a Weird world of deep time and entropy that Weird tales, in turn, can explore, reconfigure and bring to their philosophical implications.

Alder's *Weird Fiction and Science at the Fin de Siècle*, in sum, provides a detailed close reading of the interrelationship between science and the Weird tale and, although, her study primarily concerns itself with British Weird fiction of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, much of what is explored in this volume remains relevant to the subsequent development of the Weird tale as well as to contemporary scientific advancements. It paints in elegant details the intricacies of the Weird and how the later can inform both vigorous and unnerving accounts of humanity's own position within an ever-changing and mysterious universe.

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BIONOTE

Fredrik Blanc is a PhD student at the Manchester Metropolitan University, UK. His thesis, titled '"In Deep Waters": Thalassophobia and Oceanic Transcorporealities in Modern and Contemporary Weird Fiction' explores the materiality of the sea as a Weird space and ontology. Focussing on sea monsters and hybrids as representational intermediaries between human and other-than-human agencies in the oceanic context, it investigates and re-evaluates literary and cultural discourses surrounding the sea, from evolutionary controversies of the nineteenth century to the ecological crises of the present day.

SCIENCE-FICTION REBELS: THE STORY OF THE SCIENCE-FICTION MAGAZINES FROM 1981 TO 1990 (2020) BY MIKE ASHLEY

Review by Derek Johnston

Ashley, Mike. *Science Fiction Rebels: The Story of the Science Fiction Magazines from 1981 to 1990.* Liverpool University Press, 2020. 473 pp.

Mike Ashley's monumental history of the Science Fiction magazine reaches its fourth volume with this, *Science Fiction Rebels*, covering the 1980s. The series began nearly 20 years ago, with *The Time Machines: The Story of the Science-Fiction Pulp Magazines from the Beginning to 1950* (2000).[1] In the Preface to volume three, *Gateways to Forever: The Story of the Science Fiction Magazines from 1970 to 1980* (2007), Ashley states that the volume was originally supposed to conclude his history, but that the sheer amount of material necessitated its extension into further volumes. On the back cover of *Gateways to Forever* volume four of the history was listed as *The Eternal Chronicles*. However, it is clear that the mass of material covered in this volume necessitated splitting out the decades yet again, with the next volume already announced as *The Rise of the Cyber Chronicles*.

As the series has developed, it has increasingly engaged with a wider range of material. This is partly as Science Fiction expanded into other areas of the media and their associated press, with particular interest in this volume in how magazines such as *Omni* mixed science fact and fiction or how fiction was included alongside the articles and game scenarios of magazines mainly focused on film, TV, and tabletop role-playing games. The series has also expanded its international engagement, increasing its coverage of non-English language magazines, where Ashley acknowledges the assistance of a number of people in helping provide him with information on publications from a number of linguistic and national backgrounds. This volume thus has coverage of Science Fiction related publications not just from China, Japan, Germany, and Czechoslovakia, but also Israel, Uruguay, and Mongolia, amongst many others, emphasising the global significance of Science Fiction and its fandom. The only continents unrepresented are Antarctica and Africa, and it is not clear whether that is because of lack of publications or simply lack of information. From Ashley's earlier mention of the South African SF scene in the body of the book, it suggests that lack of professional domestic publications is a significant element here, but there is still the potential for later volumes to incorporate any information that comes to Ashley's attention.

So what does this particular volume contain? Firstly, while the title refers to 'Science Fiction,' and Ashley makes clear that he is using 'SF' throughout to refer to this, the book also clearly engages with the genre very broadly, as a necessity, as the magazines considered publish a range of fantastic fiction incorporating Science Fiction, Fantasy, Horror, and related speculative genres;

'SF' is used in this review in the same broad spirit. The Preface to the volume establishes very briefly what had been covered in the previous volumes, placing the 1980s into the flow of the history of SF, and establishing that flow as one of repeated revolutions and revivals, and responses to changes in cultural, political, and technological context. A six-page Chronology acts as an introductory reference point for key events across the 1980s in terms of SF magazine publishing, mostly focusing on US and UK publications. The narrative history of Anglophone SF magazines then runs to 236 pages, followed by a 110-page appendix on non-English language magazines in the 1980s. This is followed by a 29-page appendix giving a checklist of English-language SF magazines, with a brief description, names of publishers and editors, and a listing of issue release dates and numbers. 22 pages list magazine editors and publishers and the magazine issues they were responsible for, then there is a 40-page listing of magazine cover artists and the issues they provided cover art for. The fifth appendix provides circulation figures for the decade for dominant US magazines *Analog*, *Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine*, *Fantasy and Science Fiction*, *Amazing Stories*, *Omni*, *The Twilight Zone Magazine*, and *Aboriginal SF*. A Select Bibliography is followed by three pages of additions and corrections to previous volumes in the history, followed by a detailed index.

This is a book of many parts, which is both a strength and a drawback. The narrative history details comings and goings of editorial staff and highlights changes in editorial policies and attitudes, which relate to changes in the type of stories that each magazine tended to present. In particular, it shows how different magazines served to separate out mass-media SF from 'literary' SF by addressing different audiences. This is contextualised as necessary to find different ways of dealing with a general decline in interest in the short story and short SF in particular during this period. Ashley attributes this decline to the increase in other interests for young people that might have led them to SF prose in previous decades but who were now drawn to film and TV SF, to tabletop role-playing games with similar fantastic themes, and later to computer games. As a result, the field of the SF magazine as a whole operated during this decade to rejuvenate the genre and develop new subgenres and introduce new voices, even as individual magazines established narrower, more conservative approaches to speculative fiction. The narrative history also covers aspects such as changes in format, and in cover price, and distribution, all of which are significant in considering the potential reach of these magazines, and of SF short stories as a whole, but which can be a bit dry or need more explanation. It can be hard to understand the significance of a cover price increase, for example, if there is no comparison with other magazines both within and outside the genre, or an indication of what that cover price relates to in more general terms.

Depending on the individual reader's interests, this means that the narrative can veer from fascinating to baffling from moment to moment, especially as it clearly relies on an existing knowledge of writers, editors, types of binding and printing, and wider changes in the literary and media SF field. That said, this wide view and clear depth of knowledge of the contexts exhibited by Ashley helps to emphasise how different aspects of the publishing industry and wider elements of culture influence the development of the SF magazine. In other words, by focusing on the magazines, Ashley is able to add more nuance to their treatment than can be found in more general histories of SF. The history as a whole also serves to emphasise the continued vitality and importance of

the SF magazine, which can frequently be neglected in more general histories of SF that focus on book publications and film and TV texts. While such histories typically acknowledge the importance of the early SF magazines in establishing the genre, the continued importance of the format and magazines as outlets can be frequently ignored, even though it is in the magazines that new variants of the speculative genres emerge, including in this period Steampunk and Slipstream fiction. Ashley demonstrates how much the different outlets for the genre are intertwined, with writers moving from fan publications linked to media products to writing in their own settings for the magazines, and potentially moving into editorial roles or writing for film or TV themselves, alongside publishing novels. This aids an understanding of SF as a field covering many outlets and media and where these different outlets and media are intertwined.

The fantastic detail in the appendices, and also included within the narrative history, suggests that a primary use for this and the other volumes will be for reference. Because of the way that Ashley demonstrates the interconnectedness of different expressions of SF, looking up any key SF or Fantasy figure is likely to find some connection to the magazines. This can serve as a way of opening up considerations of key figures and the ways that they interrelate, as well as tracing the development of themes and trends. Again, this history serves to show how trends such as Cyberpunk grew very much from the magazines and were sustained and developed by them as much as by anthologies in book form.

In addition to Cyberpunk and the challenge of a youth market that was engaging more with SF and Fantasy in other media, Ashley comments on a number of factors and trends. Of particular interest to the UK audience may be the development of *Interzone* as a key market and particularly the way that established an editorial stance favouring a return to hard SF, albeit a hard SF based on new understanding of science and technology including nanotechnology and genetic engineering, while continuing to represent a wide range of stories and encourage new voices in SF, particularly from a British background. Similarly, there is a consideration of the importance of writers' workshops, particularly the Clarion workshop, as routes for the discovery and promotion of new writers through their integration into professional networks. Ashley also considers the return of Horror and Weird fiction magazines and their crossover with SF magazines, as well as the rise of the small press and semi-prozines, enabled by new developments in reproduction and, eventually, desktop publishing technologies.

Taken as a whole, Ashley's ongoing history of the SF magazine is an astonishing achievement. This is vital work in uncovering and making available elements in the publishing history of SF that would otherwise be easily forgotten or neglected. As is often the case with such detailed thoroughness in relating matters of fact, it can be off-putting in its presentation, but as a source of material for reference and from which other interpretive scholarship can develop it is of enormous value. Those looking for a wider history of literary SF would be better served by existing histories such as Brian Aldiss' classic *Trillion Year Spree* (1986) or Adam Roberts' *The History of Science Fiction* (2005). Ashley's work serves as a valuable addition to these histories, though, and when the next overarching narrative history of the genre comes to be written, then I hope that they incorporate and acknowledge the understanding of the continued importance and development of the SF magazine that Ashley has documented in this ongoing history.

NOTES

1. The first two volumes of this series themselves rework and significantly expand the historical material from Ashley's four volume *The History of the Science Fiction Magazine* (1974-1978), which included key stories alongside the history.

BIONOTE

Derek Johnston is a Lecturer in Broadcast at Queen's University Belfast, UK. His research examines fantastic genres, including Horror and Science Fiction, particularly their history across media. He is the author of *Haunted Seasons: Television Ghost Stories for Christmas and Horror for Halloween* (2015), as well as a number of book chapters and articles. His chapter on 'Gothic Television' is forthcoming in volume three of *The Cambridge History of the Gothic*.

SURROGATE HUMANITY: RACE, ROBOTS, AND THE POLITICS OF TECHNOLOGICAL FUTURES (2019) BY NEDA ATANASOSKI AND KALINDI VORA

Review by Chase Ledin

Atanasoski, Neda, and Kalindi Vora. *Surrogate Humanity: Race, Robots and the Politics of Technological Futures.* Duke University Press, 2019. 240 pp.

In *Surrogate Humanity* (2019), gender and critical race scholars Neda Atanasoski and Kalinda Vora argue that present-day capitalism sustains racial and gender imaginaries through the engineering and coding of technological innovation. They examine the racial logics of categorisation, differentiation, incorporation, and elimination (5), and explore how new technologies, including war drones, sex robots, and domestic Artificial Intelligent (AI), serve as a surrogate for a "racialised aspiration for proper humanity in the post-Enlightenment era" (10). Rather than simply "freeing" or "liberating" humans from burdensome and unfulfilling work, the incorporation of new, personalised technologies (equated to enforced slavery and contract labour) sutures states of freedom and unfreedom together within a "violent process of extraction and expropriation" in the name of human universality (11). The authors unpack the colonial, imperial, and racial logics encoded within technological innovation and resist technological futures, which they call "technoliberalism," that reify contemporary neoliberal capitalism.

Surrogate Humanity contains six chapters, which explore chronologically the development of techoliberalism, capitalism, and automation. Chapters One and Two interrogate the racial and labour capacities of automation since the nineteenth century, defining the in/congruities of US "labor exploitation along colonial/racial lines" as well as the "erasure of racialised and gendered work in postcapitalist techno-utopias" (29, 57). Chapter Three interrogates the function of artificial intelligence and, what the authors call, the ethics of "invisible service" between nonhuman and posthuman bodies. Chapter Four details the relationship between AI and affect, drawing out the inherent contradictions between the posthuman and the "technological capitalist logics of service and automation that uphold the supremacy of the liberal subject" (109). For the purposes of this review, I will focus in detail on Chapters Five, Six, and the Conclusion, to engage with the book's most notable contribution: the posthuman "surrogate effect."

The book analyses how Enlightenment thinking is extended through the production of various technological innovations, including in chapter five – "Machine Autonomy and the Unmanned Spacetime of Warfare" – the use of robots to engage in distance warfare and battlefield clean-up.

Atanasoski and Vora question the extent to which the human is removed from the destruction of war, suggesting that "roboticized warfare renders the fantasy of remote control as a reconceptualization of empire that, by being human-free, can disassociate its power from earlier modes of colonial conquest" (149). The authors carefully articulate the parallels between the imperialism of drone warfare and previous forms of colonial conquest, particularly the dehumanisation of non-Western populations and the deployment of indentured, subaltern soldiers. Defining the "surrogate effect" as the "mechanization, automization, and industrialization" of the "human-machine entanglement," the authors provide a rigorous argument against the claim that robots will free humans from racialised labour (40). Indeed, recycling the imperial logics of "human autonomy (command)" within the robotic surrogate removes accountability and thus contradicts the notion of human-machine progress (150-151). The war drone, in other words, serves as a vehicle for human labour-violence, even while it purports to revolutionise the means of war.

Atanasoski and Vora are primarily concerned with contemporary US imperialism and the racialised other. As they describe in the introduction, the relationship between white loss and discourses of post-labour technology draws from current debates about the future of work. The authors discuss US liberal modernity's "obsession with race and the overcoming of racism" updated through recent fears of employment loss due to "foreign intrusion" (47). In a fascinating illustration, the authors interrogate Ale Demiani's film *M.A.M.O.N.* (2016), which portrays US President "Trump as a giant robot at the promised border wall" (51). The dystopian Science Fiction film voices the imperial logic(s) from within the robot: using an "outdated intercom system," the crudely technical outfit expels even green-card holding residents from the country. In this respect, the violence of the technological imaginary is made plain: the racial logics of technological dominance operate by way of innovation and cannot be displaced through the process of automisation. That is, the human continues to exist within the mechanisation of labour and technology. Thus, futures imagined through technological innovation will necessarily contain the human even while the human is removed in the development of personalised and 'autonomous' robots. As the film suggests, the robot is bound up in the human construct of the racialised other, and the politics of this racialisation results in casualties of both humans and machines.

In chapter six, the authors discuss the ethics and politics of "killer robots," extending the study into a philosophical discussion of the human versus the nonhuman. "Killer robots bring into crisis how violence constitutes the human against the nonhuman, subsuming racialized and gendered epistemologies of prior affirmations of authorized violence" (172). The authors embark on a critical analysis of human autonomy: discourses that enable and/or disinhibit the e/valuation of humanity. This is important for understanding the relationship between morality and suffering, which are ascribed as "human values," and consequently qualify a subject as "human" (174). Drawing from Giorgio Agamben's concept of "bare life," the authors suggest that the surrogate robot, like racialised populations throughout history, "can be made useful as economic restructuring projects in the name of justice, reaffirming the supremacy of Enlightenment man against the other (nonsecular, noncapitalist) forms of being" (178). The surrogate robot is exempt, as such, through its technological production; yet it is held accountable for its actions via its human assemblage. This,

in short, amounts to the following: as a tool of human advancement, killer autonomous robots are essentially intellectual products of humanity, perceived as nonhuman, though paradoxically and conceptually human-like. The boundaries of monitoring robot behaviour, then, become bound up in the politics of ontology, producing eternal questions about the categorisation and legitimisation of human action, identity, and feelings through corporeal embodiment.

The book concludes with a reflection on the design imaginaries implicated in the development of commercial sex robotics. The authors assert that sex robots "animate *objects* that resemble human beings in ways that keep them nonautonomous, yet *simulate* pleasure, and therefore *simulate* consent" (189, original emphasis). Crucial here is the relationship between consent and technoliberal desire: in what ways might consent be granted or erased through the mechanisation of sexual intimacy and pleasure? The authors suggest that the customizable female robot "functions primarily as a mirror that lacks its own interiority" and thus normalises a modal fantasy of a robot-subject that serves only the sexual fantasies of the human user (190). "The surrogate effect takes the structure of the unfree diminished human through which the autonomous liberal subject may feel human through feeling free, and extends it to the technology of the sex robot" (191). In short, they argue that this form of sexual control never leaves forms of liberal domination resisted in feminist scholarship on consent and body autonomy. Thus, it is essential for scholars to consider the parallels between feminist approaches to sex and sexuality and the pleasure politics of technology and the sex robot.

Surrogate Humanity is a nuanced study, which will be of use to students and scholars interested in science and technology studies, neo/liberalism, critiques of Enlightenment, and technical modernities. The book provides a rigorous approach to mechanical warfare and important questions about the ethics and future of technological innovation. As the final feminist discussion of AI suggests, the book argues that the technoliberal desire to "expand intelligence reaffirms the racialized and gendered logics producing the fully human as moving target" (196). This study, as such, provides a crucial contribution to existing debates in post-humanism. It further questions the legacies of social progress in favour of a "de-colonizing project" which seeks to disrupt the technological categories of "use, property, and self-possession" and encourage a human intelligence which is itself "something to be hacked" (196). Ultimately, *Surrogate Humanity* delivers a compelling approach to understanding the racialised human-machine relationship and the prospects of technological futures.

BIONOTE

Chase Ledin is a Ph.D. researcher at the University of Edinburgh, UK. His research explores the cultural representation(s) and epistemologies of "post-AIDS" in contemporary sociology, culture and theory. He has broader interests in the archivalisation of HIV/AIDS histories, the politics of STI treatment and prevention since the 1980s, pedagogical approaches to sexual health education, and the sociology of health and illness.

HUMAN NATURE AND POLITICS IN UTOPIAN AND ANTI-UTOPIAN FICTION (2018) BY NIVEDITA BAGCHI

Review by Peter J. Maurits

Bagchi, Nivedita. *Human Nature and Politics in Utopian and Anti-Utopian Fiction.* Lexington Books, 2019. 100 pp.

In a five second YouTube clip, an unknown editor brilliantly summarizes the legendary 1971 human nature-debate between Noam Chomsky and Michel Foucault. It starts with Chomsky carefully gesturing with his left hand and articulating that "a fundamental element of human nature…" A hard cut follows to Foucault who, bent over in his chair, bursts out laughing. The clip is an effective summary of the human nature debate as such, in which a millennia-old fundamental disagreement about if human nature exists at all engages disciplines from philosophy to neuroscience. The publication of Nivedita Bagchi's *Human Nature and Politics in Utopian and Anti-Utopian Fiction* (2019, henceforth *H&P*) is thus as timely as ever. And in a utopian studies-field based largely on repetition (cf. Maurits, 2020), *H&P* is a welcome variation.

H&P starts from the premise that anti-utopian fiction in the form of novels such as *The Hunger Games* (2008-2020) and *Divergent* (2011-2013) have lately seized the "American imagination" (ix). It considers this "amazing" because the US was founded on the "utopian ideal of the 'City on a Hill'" (ix). The book therefore aims to address this perceived discrepancy and suggests in its opening pages that anti-utopian as well as utopian fiction may be *en vogue* now because these genres have historically been "extremely successful at capturing" the aspirations, hopes, and fears of the people (ix).

The interest in anti-utopias raises an additional question for Bagchi. She considers utopias social-systems that are "right and perfect," and that shape the human beings in it in such a way that they are "harmon[ious]," behave "correct[ly]," and pursue the "right goals" (ix). Yet this would assume that human beings and their supposed human nature can be controlled by way of institutions at all. It is this assumption – the assumption that human nature can or cannot be controlled – that for *H&P* underlies all utopian and anti-utopian writing. And because (anti-)utopian fiction does not make its position explicit, the main aim of *H&P* is to "tease out the assumptions utopian and anti-utopian writers make on human nature," without offering a theory of human nature itself (x). Its "strongest claim" is that "certain views on human nature […] logically impact the writer's political views including their views on freedom" (xiv).

The study is neatly (and intentionally) structured in dialectical-like fashion, with an introduction, four chapters in which utopia and dystopia are opposed based on their human nature conceptions, and a synthesis-conclusion. The introduction outlines *H&P*'s premise: utopians think of human nature as knowable and manipulatable by (State) institutions (x). Dystopians, on the other hand, believe that the only predictable aspect of human beings is their indestructible "desire for freedom," and that humans are malleable and recalcitrant which limits State powers (xii, xvi). The notion of humans as knowable is "antithetical to human freedom" for dystopians. Hence, the "more restrictive the political system, the more the individual and the state come into conflict" in a dystopian framework (xii). Contrary to scholars who claim that one person's utopia is another's dystopia," Bagchi therefore claims that they can be distinguished based on their conceptions of human nature (xvii).

To support these claims, each chapter provides a succinct but informed overview of scholarship on one literary work and its connection to human nature and freedom. The first chapter argues that Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516) has a fundamentally pessimistic notion of human nature. According to Bagchi, More believed that it exists but that only some aspects of it can be manipulated. Education and religion, for More, may steer humans in a certain direction, which thus also facilitates the possibility of a good society. Bagchi writes that, for More, "men cannot but choose to be good" due to Utopia's social structure (9). Nevertheless, due to the way human nature is conceived by More, even a society that is good will always be flawed. The second chapter focuses on Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward* (1888). For *H&P*, Bellamy's understanding of human nature was deeply rooted in his religious upbringing. He believed that it existed, that it entailed both antisocial and cooperative characteristics (26), and that it could be shaped. One way of doing so was to change the "human conditions," which would then lead to a "new type of human" (23). The institutions in *Looking Backward* are therefore imagined in such a way as to appeal to the sociable aspect of human beings (25).

After these utopian chapters, *H&P* transitions to two dystopian works. Chapter Three focuses on Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932). *Brave New World*, it is argued, departs from the idea that manipulating and suppressing human nature through education from birth onwards can lead to the successful standardisation and oppression of human beings (36). In order for this to work, however, human beings have to be considered "knowable," which *H&P* argues is an assumption that is characteristic of utopian works (38). In line with this, Huxley in his dystopian *Brave New World* parts with that assumption, and even some of the characters in the novel that appeared to have been successfully manipulated all their lives manage to break away from the oppressive State, and "show glimpses of individuality and independence" (47). Chapter Four on George Orwell's *1984* (1949) has more difficulty proving the point about dystopians' views of human nature because "individuality and freedom are completely eroded in that novel" (49). As an aside, we may recall that Raymond Williams even said that he could not bear to read *1984* anymore, because it was so without hope. Still, *H&P* claims that even human nature in *1984*, and specifically the desire for freedom, "can be suppressed but not eliminated" (52). To argue this, Bagchi steps outside of the text and argues that even if the State in Orwell's *1984* controls characters in the novel fully, this "horrifies readers and incites a determined reaction against" it (60).

Bagchi's conclusion argues that Ursula K. Le Guin's *The Dispossessed* (1974) "neither discards utopianism nor adopts it," and maintains that "we need" both dystopia and utopia to accomplish a "better world," because the "combination of the two represents our lives—filled with hope and fear" (66, 63, 68).

H&P is written with remarkable clarity, and if this makes for a dull and even repetitive reading experience at times (some sentences are almost literally repeated on subsequent pages or even paragraphs), this is mediated by the refreshingly modest length of the book (about 80 pages). Moreover, although human nature has been a standard part of utopian studies discussions (e.g. Levitas, 1990) and has been the topic of several dedicated studies (e.g. Sargent 1975; Cooke 2002; and Beauchamp 2007), and despite the extremely canonized corpus, *H&P* does add something to the field. Particularly convincing is the idea that "utopias and dystopias […] interrogate each other" and thus the concept of human nature (63). The insightful translation of that idea in an intentionally "dialectical" organization of the study is a solid methodological base from which to show this (xiv). Some of *H&P*'s claims are pleasantly provoking. The notion that dystopian literature is the literature of liberalism because it "promotes individual liberty" certainly characterises liberalism in an interesting way, especially in the US context (xi). *H&P*'s claim that utopia and dystopia *cannot* be conflated based on the perspective of the reader counters a prominent postmodernist line of argument – which fails to historicize these genres and insufficiently takes into account genre theory.

Yet the book has a number of problems on the level of argument, method, and ideology. First, the conclusion apparently undermines the study's argument that utopia/dystopia can be distinguished based on perceptions of human nature, stating that "our perspective dictates whether we see [a story] as utopia or dystopia" (67). Second, the author is a political theorist who is aware of literary conventions and terms such as "character development" (34, 47, 49) and the so-called *death of the author* (51). Yet *H&P* insists on referring to authorial intention throughout, claims that the "views" of characters "reflect the views of More the author" (7), and argues that a character's speech in *Looking Backward* is what Bellamy "believed" (25). This begs the question if a political studies approach would have rendered the analyses more solid. Third, *H&P* is philosophically idealist and ideologically naïve. For *H&P* it is "amazing" that anti-utopianism can be successful in the US because that nation is based on the utopian model of the City on the Hill. Yet decades of Imperialism should make it evident that such narratives are ideological and thoroughly at odds with reality. Similarly, it is claimed that "utopias provide hope; dystopias provide realism" (68). It will be recalled that dystopianism for *H&P* is the literature of liberalism, from which it would follow that liberalism equals realism. But has liberalism not been the ideological vehicle and justification, at least in part, of the aforementioned Imperialism? And has its value of 'freedom' – a deeply problematic and often abused concept, on which *H&P* continuously insists as a positive, without a thorough cultural or historical contextualization – not been instrumental to that ideology in the problematic form of 'freedom of the market'?

One could thus propose in conclusion that if liberalism were indeed realism, then all hope really is lost. Despite its added value to the field, and symptomatic of its time, this would make *H&P* a dystopian text.

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BIONOTE

Peter J. Maurits is postdoctoral fellow at the University Erlangen-Nuremberg, Germany. He holds a Ph.D. in comparative literary studies (LMU, Munich), a M.A. in literary studies (UU, Utrecht), and a B.A. in Portuguese literature and culture (UU, Utrecht). His first book titled *The Mozambican Ghost Story and World Literature* will be published by Peter Lang. In his current research project, he examines the narrative utopia as it relates to African Science Fiction.

A SHADOW WITHIN: EVIL IN FANTASY AND SCIENCE FICTION (2019) EDITED BY FRANCESCA T. BARBINI

Review by Taylor Driggers

Barbini, Francesca T., editor. *A Shadow Within: Evil in Fantasy and Science Fiction.* Luna Press Publishing, 2019. 422 pp.

In the introduction to her edited collection *A Shadow Within: Evil in Fantasy and Science Fiction* (2019), Francesca T. Barbini writes that "evil isn't a static presence confined to any one given time, but rather something that constantly evolves under the influence of the author's own experience, society, the technology of the period, and even their understanding of humanity" (vi). Accordingly, the essays that follow in the collection represent a broad spectrum of approaches to, and understandings of, evil in a wide variety of Fantastika texts in the fields of literature, film and television, games and interactive media, and visual art. The result is a diverse collection of essays attempting, with varying degrees of success, to come to grips with the necessarily pliable, adaptable, and ambivalent nature of 'evil' as it is invoked in Fantastika genres.

The array of essays that Barbini has assembled in this volume represents an impressively inclusive cross-section of various spheres of discourse on the fantastic. The collection boasts essays from academics, independent researchers, fans, creative writers, and other creative industry professionals, and as such it is just as likely to be of interest to the casual reader as it is to more research-oriented audiences. This diversity of contributors is a strength, as it represents the opportunities for cross-disciplinary collaboration and popular appeal afforded by Fantastika studies, as well as a weakness. The essays are written with a wide variety of goals in mind, with varying degrees of scholarly rigour and specialist expertise in the relevant subject areas, and in a multitude of different writing styles, and there are many places where a stronger editorial hand may have been desirable to lend the collection greater coherence of purpose and consistency in quality. While this is perhaps an understandable drawback for a non-peer-reviewed collection distributed by a small, independent press that may not have the same resources of time and money available to larger publishing houses, it does often make for uneven and jarring reading from essay to essay. Nevertheless, there is much contained within this volume and its essays to recommend.

Following an all-too-brief introduction by Barbini, the collection opens with Alice Capstick's essay examining what may well be the most archetypal embodiment of evil in Western literary representations: Satan. In "The Antihero's Journey: The Influence of Milton's Satan on the Evolution of the Dark Hero," Capstick posits that the arc followed by John Milton's ambivalent but sympathetic treatment of Satan in *Paradise Lost* (1667) provided a blueprint for modern antiheroic figures that

followed. By mapping Satan's antiheroic journey along a progression of "'rise', 'reign', and 'ruin', with the potential for 'redemption,'" Capstick convincingly argues that antiheroism is not simply a variant of heroism or villainy, but a separate category worthy of careful attention, although her case for the enduring legacy of Milton's Satan could stand to be more conclusively evidenced (4). If the antihero is one way in which evil can be personified, even humanised, in Fantastika, Jason Gould identifies in M. John Harrison's short fiction an opposite tendency. "Rewriting Evil. An Alternative to Personification" (*sic*) engagingly analyses how "The Incalling" (1978), "The Ice Monkey" (1980), and "Engnaro" (1981) work as fictions in which evil "is […] free to exist, unembodied, either at the periphery of the fiction, distant from the characters and plot but wholly influential, or else suffused into every atom of a story's environment" (34).

Meanwhile, Sharon Day's essay "Through the Veil of the Digital Revolution and into the Abyss of Artificial Intelligence: The Insidious Desensitisation of Humanity" elaborates on Barbini's observation that particular evils may arise out of specific material conditions and historical contexts in its examination of how artificial intelligence (AI) – and a technologically-mediated contemporary existence more generally – may extrapolate existing human evils into ever more calculating and impersonal variants. Given its title, this essay had the potential to offer an analysis of how AI and digital technology industries participate in and often heighten the social and political violences of day-to-day life. Day, however, largely forgoes these material concerns in favour of a more abstract and generalised argument regarding "the lack of empathy" and the ostensible "rewiring" of brain patterns with each successive generation, which unfortunately leads her essay to come across more as journalistic sensationalism than as evidence-based analysis (46).

A. J. Dalton's "Embodiments of evil and reflections of social change in second-world fantasy" returns to Satanic motifs its analysis of the evolution and increasing complication of the 'Dark Lord' archetype throughout the history of the Fantasy genre. Dalton's political historicisation of popular Fantasy's changing moral landscapes from its roots in the Christian imaginaries of J. R. R. Tolkien and C. S. Lewis to a twenty-first century reckoning with the atrocities wrought by Western (especially American and British) exceptionalism brings forth many original and long-overdue insights which are similarly addressed by Matthew J. Elder and C. Palmer-Patel later in the volume. The analysis is, however, hampered by some idiosyncratic applications of terminology, particularly where genre is concerned, and some observations seem derived more from second-hand impressions of the texts under consideration than their actual content, particularly when discussing *The Lord of the Rings* (1954-1955) and Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight* series (2005-2008).

Following this are a pair of articles delving into the wider social resonances of evil and monstrosity from Science Fiction Horror cinema of the 1970s and 1980s. The first of these, Robert S. Malan's "Xenomorphobia," is the weaker of the two, rehearsing well-established talking points regarding the myriad cultural anxieties of the 1980s that are reflected in the Xenomorphs of *Aliens* (1986) but struggling to develop these observations into a sustained and focused reading of the film. More thought-provoking is Kim Lakin-Smith's semi-autobiographical reflection on the nature of evil in *Halloween* (1978) and *The Terminator* (1984). Lakin-Smith raises provocative questions

regarding the catharsis of witnessing violent acts depicted on screen, noting how John Carpenter's film positions its audience as "victim and voyeur, both afraid of and in love with the act of murder" (127). In unleashing these evils, Lakin-Smith argues, both James Cameron and Carpenter give visual form to the mundane evils that threaten to unsettle the tranquil appearances of respectable middle-class society and draw our attention to the potential for evil in ourselves. The banal presence of evil in polite society is also of chief interest in Teika Bellamy's contribution, "Bluebeard – The Eternal Predator." Drawing on a rich tradition of feminist and psychoanalytic fairy tale scholarship, Bellamy traces how the 'Bluebeard' archetype popularised by Charles Perrault has transformed from a cautionary tale about the dangers of curiosity to a tale of how powerful and wealthy men conceal the individual and systemic acts of violence against women upon which that status rests. This is well-trod territory, critically speaking, but the continued relevance of these readings to the often aggressively misogynistic political landscape of the 2010s give Bellamy's analysis a particular urgency.

The collection then shifts its attention toward secondary-world Fantasy and Science Fiction, starting with a pair of essays turning a more critical eye toward characterisations of evil, both with reference to the *Star Wars* franchise (1977-present). Lucinda Holdsworth's "The Problem of Evil in Pseudo-Taoist Secondary Worlds" is the stronger of these two, staging an original critical intervention into Western appropriations of Taoist principles in fantastic worldbuilding. When approached with nuance, as in Ursula K. Le Guin's Earthsea series (1968-2001), Taoist worldbuilding in Fantasy offers a refreshing alternative to Western moral binarism that prioritises balance and openness to difference. When handled clumsily, as Holdsworth shows through her examination of the *Star Wars* films, the television series *The Legend of Korra* (2012-2014), and the fiction of Brandon Sanderson, the result is an incoherent ethics "in which total imbalance is deemed acceptable so long as it is unbalanced in favour of the individuals the viewer cares about" (165). Some of Holdsworth's broader theological claims could stand to be more clearly evidenced, and I find her conclusion that a successful application of Taoist principles in worldbuilding is merely a matter of sincerity of intent somewhat unsatisfactory as an explanation. Nonetheless, the essay is, on the whole, a provocative and nuanced examination of an under-researched phenomenon in fantastic worldbuilding. Rostislav Kůrka's more focused examination of the shifting depictions evil in the *Star Wars* saga, meanwhile, brings forth interesting observations regarding the nature of evil in different 'eras' of filmmaking within the franchise, but I would have liked to see these further contextualised both in terms of the films' respective historical contexts as well as the conditions of their respective productions.

The historical contextualisation of depictions of evil introduced by Dalton and the construction of 'East' and 'West' as representational categories that Holdsworth analyses come together in Matthew J. Elder and C. Palmer-Patel's essay "Imperialism as 'Evil' in Epic Fantasy." Through close readings of works by David Eddings, Robert Jordan, Brandon Sanderson, and Peter V. Brett, Elder and Palmer-Patel trace how depictions of imperialist atrocities have evolved from being abjected onto orientalised 'others' (but celebrated when enacted by white-coded protagonists) in popular Fantasy of the 1970s, '80s, and '90s, to being more thoroughly examined and critiqued in literature of the twenty-first century. The authors' analysis of these works is lucid and insightful, although I worry that their acknowledged methodological decision to confine their analysis to texts

authored by white men risks creating a false sense of linear progression. On the contrary, there exists a tradition of more resolutely anti-imperialist Fantasy writing from authors contemporary to Eddings and Jordan. Still, Elder and Palmer-Patel have usefully identified a renewed popular interest in these more critical fictions as we enter the 2020s, and a need to be attentive to the cultural and racial coding of 'evil' in popular Fantasy in general.

Whether an audience identifies an act as evil, and whether the audience sympathises with the character committing said act, Elder and Palmer-Patel demonstrate, depends heavily on framing, and what a given work chooses to show or withhold from its audience. This is also the focus of Katarina O'Dette's essay "Yesterday's Tyrant," which analyses the redemption of villains in Fantasy television as "a careful public relations campaign run by the production team" (227). O'Dette's entertaining but rigorous study pinpoints four strategies deployed by television writers to win audience's sympathies: "point-of-view, flashbacks, reform checks, and relationships with protagonists" (210). Crucially, O'Dette is careful to distance the insights gleaned from her analysis from real-world ethics; as she argues, "[t]he narrative strategies used to reform villains are effective because they are fictional" (227). Reform, and the strange selectiveness of fiction when it comes to who is afforded it, are very much at play in Octavia Cade's "Spring Again," which alternately examines the role of free will in Edmund's redemption and the end of winter in *The Chronicles of Narnia* (1950-1956), and critiques Susan's eventual exclusion from Narnia for seemingly far less grievous sins.

Tam Moules' '"I have done only what was necessary"' and Barbara Stevenson's "The Nature of Evil in *The Chronicles of Thomas Covenant* by Stephen Donaldson" are two essays that would likely have benefited from stronger editorial oversight. Moules introduces compelling points of analysis regarding N. K. Jemisin's *The Broken Earth* trilogy (2016-2018); in Jemisin's texts, they argue, evil is perpetuated by individuals constrained by and participating in larger systems of power. The essay's meandering and fragmented structure, however, makes the specifics of the argument occasionally difficult to parse. Likewise, Stevenson offers a forceful critique of the muddled and seemingly protagonist-centred morality of Donaldson's work, but her chapter reads more like an informal rant than a sustained close reading of the text.

The latter portion of the collection contains some of its strongest and most rigorously researched contributions. Jyrki Korpua's analysis of the Shadows of *Babylon 5* (1993-1998) and the Reapers of *Mass Effect* (2007-present) in "Machines of Chaos" adds some disquieting notes of relativism to the anxieties over the morality of AI discussed elsewhere in the volume. Meanwhile, Tatiana Fajardo's fascinating exploration of "The Bloodlust of Elizabeth Báthory" chronicles the sensationalism with which fantastic literatures and media have appropriated the murderous Hungarian noblewoman's legacy to embody various Jungian archetypes. The ambiguity with which Fajardo approaches these archetypes, however – are they being invoked as eternal, naturally-occurring constants, or as products of a specific cultural imaginary? – does render the essay's account of Báthory's popular reception somewhat murky in places.

Dominic Riemenschneider's "From Light to Dark" and Steph P. Bianchini's "The Inquisitor's Creatures" are both highlights of the volume. Riemenschneider historicises the aesthetic principles of Gothic architecture and the multitude of reasons why this aesthetic shifted from evoking the holy in the Middle Ages to being a shorthand for ancient evil in contemporary Fantastika media by way of Gothic fiction of the Romantic era. Bianchini, meanwhile, concerns her essay with the archetype of the witch, deftly dispelling common misconceptions and demonstrating that, contrary to popular assumptions, the witch as an archetype of evil is more a product of early modern Protestantism than of medieval Catholicism. The essay ends, however, with Bianchini lamenting the necessity of conjecture when attempting to piece together an account of the origins of what ultimately became 'witchcraft' in the modern imagination; in her words, "reconstructing the history of [witchcraft] is like, at best, trying to compose a mosaic that is fragmented and, at worst, doing so with important missing tiles" (356). The following pair of essays pick up the threads of Bianchini's interest in modern appropriations of pre-Christian figures and practices, and in archetypal representations of witchcraft, respectively. Anna Milon's "Naming the Terror in the Forest" details how the Horned God, a hybrid of several different mythological archetypes evoking nature and the non-human world, evolved from a figure of abject terror in the Edwardian literary imagination to a sympathetic, albeit still strikingly 'other,' figure of ecological concern. Meanwhile, in "Evil Rewritten," Anna Köhler focuses on efforts to reclaim or rehabilitate the witches of fairy tales in contemporary revisionist literature. Köhler's essay, like Bellamy's earlier in the volume, treads familiar ground for feminist fairy-tale scholarship, but it is notable for the uniquely critical eye it turns toward the strengths and limitations of the various approaches contemporary authors take towards redeeming the witch.

I confess to finding the closing essay of the volume, Sean Z. Fitzgerald's "The Fictional Scientist as a Dichotomy of Good and Evil in Contemporary Realist Speculative Fiction," perplexing, both in terms of discerning its intended argument, and as a cap to such a widely varied collection of essays. Fitzgerald's examination of the morality of science as portrayed in Fantastika fiction from the nineteenth century to the present day, interspersed with reflections on his own writing practices, seems primarily focused on the privately held virtues of individual scientists, and on the public-facing optics of the sciences more generally. Yet as many of the essays in this volume have sought to point out, appearances can be deceiving, and good and evil are often larger matters than can be accounted for by individual agency. What unites most of the contributions to Barbini's collection is a sense that evil is elusive: concealed by the narrative and aesthetic strategies of the fantastic as often as it is revealed by them, seeming to appear in the face of the 'other' at the very moment it may be residing in our own individual or collective consciousness. *A Shadow Within: Evil in Fantasy and Science Fiction* is itself by turns frustrating, bewildering, and illuminating. Overall, it represents a worthy contribution to research in a frequently cited, but rarely examined, phenomenon in Fantastika, gesturing towards numerous opportunities for further study and likely to be accessible to academic, professional, and casual audiences alike.

BIONOTE

Taylor Driggers holds a PhD from the University of Glasgow, UK, where his thesis focused on Fantasy literature's potential to offer queer and feminist re-visionings of Christian theology and religious practices. His research interests include queer theologies of incarnation, monstrosity, religious devotion and sexual desire, post-structuralism, and the fiction of J. R. R. Tolkien, Ursula K. Le Guin, Angela Carter, and Samuel R. Delany. His first book, *Faith and Fantasy: Queering Theology in Fantastic Texts*, is forthcoming from Bloomsbury Academic.

HORROR AND RELIGION: NEW LITERARY APPROACHES TO THEOLOGY, RACE AND SEXUALITY (2019) EDITED BY ELEANOR BEAL AND JONATHAN GREENAWAY

Review by Chloe Campbell

Beal, Eleanor and Jonathan Greenaway eds. *Horror and Religion: New Literary Approaches to Theology, Race and Sexuality*. University of Wales Press, 2019. 222 pp.

In *Horror and Religion: New Literary Approaches to Theology, Race and Sexuality* (2019), editors Eleanor Beal and Jonathan Greenaway bring together contributors who consider a wide range of Horror and Gothic texts in relation to their engagement with religion and theology. As proposed by Beal and Greenaway in the introductory chapter, the collection adopts a "heterogeneous view on what theology means to different authors in various historical and social contexts" (4). In employing a selection of essays that are diverse and entirely dissimilar in their consideration of how religion can shape a text, the reader is shown how anxieties relating to the dogmatic and the divine emerge as complex and pervasive.

The first three chapters of *Horror and Religion* contemplate theological perspectives relating to eighteenth-century and nineteenth-century texts and constructions. The collection commences with Neil Syme's essay "'Headlong into an Immense Abyss': Horror and Calvinism in Scotland and the United States," which, in contemplating the influence of Calvinism, Original Sin, and predestination on numerous texts, expertly draws a thread from the works of Charles Brockden Brown, Robert Louis Stevenson, and James Hogg to H. P. Lovecraft and Stephen King, while effectively locating the Calvinist horror present in various texts from *Wieland* (1798) to the *Final Destination* (2000–2011) series. Mary Going's "The Blood Is the Life: An Exploration of the Vampire's Jewish Shadow" studies the cultural and theological impact of Christian anti-Semitism upon the construction of the vampire. Going's close reading of texts like Charlotte Turner Smith's *Marchmont* (1796), alongside an illuminating commentary on the role of sympathy in the construction of the Jewish-adjacent vampire, makes for a multi-faceted analysis of Horror's most enduring monster. Though the connection to religion and theology is less immediately comparable in Zoë Lehmann Imfeld's "Decadent Horror Fiction and *Fin-de-Siècle* Neo-Thomism," the author contemplates orthodoxy, individualism, and mysticism to suggest how Thomist perspectives are central concerns for the characters in their chosen texts.

The following three chapters lead the reader from the nineteenth century into the twentieth century. The second half of the collection continues with Rachel Mann's "Let the Queer One In: The

Performance of the Holy, Innocent and Monstrous Body in Vampire Fiction." Mann employs Queer Theory to read the vampire's body and its redemptive potential in Sheridan le Fanu's *Carmilla* (1872) and John Ajvide Lindqvist's *Let the Right One In* (2004) while masterfully reading the body of Christ as inherently transgressive. Such an exploration achieves, as the author aims, insight into the "queered possibilities for Christian sacramentality" in Horror texts and Christian-influenced discourses (79). In surmising that the holy and the horrific are wedded, Mann's question "what response do we make when the holy body is shown to be akin to the vampiric body?" invites further research and contemplation (90). Scott Midson's "More or Less Human, or Less is More Humane? Monsters, Cyborgs and Technological (Ex)tensions of Edenic Bodies" offers a theological assessment of the cyborg, a relationship that appears indistinct to begin with, but progresses to direct readers' attention to the concept of *imago dei* and Gothic creation. Following Midson's discussion of bodies and free will, Simon Marsden's chapter "Horror and the Death of God" observes Catholic metaphysics in four texts, including William Peter Blatty's *The Exorcist* (1971) and Anne Rice's *Interview with the Vampire* (1976). Marsden contextualises how these novels attempt to reconcile with the absence of, or death of, God, and seamlessly employs intertextual observations which strengthens an already engaging analysis of popular Horror texts in the late twentieth century.

The final three essays in *Horror and Religion* draw upon religious engagement around the millennium and in the post-millennial context. In the collection's main consideration of a text that engages with religion and postcolonialism, Eleanor Beal's chapter "Aboriginal Ghosts, Sacred Cannibals, and the Pagan Christ: Consuming the Past as Salvation in Wilson Harris's *Jonestown*" explores how an individual from a colonised locale negotiates trauma through a religious lens. In analysing Harris's body of work and its engagement with cannibalism, predatory dogmas, and psychic and spiritual possession, Beal highlights how Horror offers a symbolic language suited to detailing the trauma of "enslavement, colonial occupation, predatory behaviour and religious zealotry" (143). Jonathan Greenaway's chapter "Reconfiguring Gothic Anti-Catholicism: Faith and Folk Horror in the Work of Andrew Michael Hurley" certainty meets the author's aim of reconsidering the anti-Catholicism of the Gothic. Through its thorough presentation of the "almost fundamental" Catholic faith in *The Loney* (2015) and *Devil's Day* (2017), Greenaway's chapter skilfully details how Hurley's work "radically challenges the critically widespread conception of the Gothic as a fundamentally anti-Catholic mode of writing" (174). In *Horror and Religion*'s final chapter, "Deliver Us from Evil: David Mitchell, Repetition and Redemption," Andrew Tate explores how faith, in its various forms, shapes the lives of Mitchell's characters. From the perspective that many of Mitchell's critics "rarely prioritise the significance of religious discourse in his fiction" (180), Tate's analysis remedies this by considering characters' relationships with Buddhism and theological allegory that is not necessarily Judeo-Christian. Tate's analysis astutely considers twenty-first century anxieties relating to religion and theology, particularly in reference to post-secularism, humanism, and religion as a human construct.

As a collection, *Horror and Religion* successfully acquaints readers with the myriad ways in which religion, theology, spiritual belief, and dogma have influenced Horror texts since the nineteenth century. Through offering manifold analyses of religion's impact upon Horror texts,

the edited collection assuredly provides plentiful evidence to support Victor Sage's claim that the "rhetoric of the Horror novel is demonstrably theological" (4). The many astute and precise inferences made throughout the collection will no doubt inspire, and provide a framework for, further research of theological perspectives on both Horror and the Gothic. Most notably, *Horror and Religion* succeeds in both justifying and offering an alternative framework to psychoanalysis when approaching debates within Horror studies. The Horror Studies book series endeavours to expand the field in "innovative and student-friendly ways" (preface) and *Horror and Religion* is imaginative in its approach to analysing texts while remaining accessible for students. The chapters by Going, Mann, Midson, and Marsden include reference to, or analysis of, well-known and often-studied texts like Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897), Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818), *Interview with the Vampire* (1976), and *The Exorcist* (1971), which will be familiar to both undergraduate and postgraduate students alike. The essays explore a range of texts, both well-known and lesser known, which will no doubt introduce a student audience to new material and previously unconsidered parallels between texts. The range of material referenced in *Horror and Religion* does embrace the "multiplicity and plurality of religious and theological engagement," as the editors intended, because the contributing authors employ various perspectives, from Reformation-era theology to considerations of religion and Queer Theory (4). There is the opportunity to further develop the scope of this collection by considering how theology other than Judeo-Christian has impacted and influenced Horror texts.

Though *Horror and Religion* does not analyse Horror fiction in light of one particular theological tradition, most of the essays focus on applying Western theology and Judeo-Christian perspectives to Western Horror texts. While the editors outline that the intention of the collection is to consider Horror texts from perspective of Christian religious and theological criticism, the project could indeed be extended to consider more globalised perspectives (8). Two out of the nine chapters reference religion and theology outside of Judeo-Christian tradition, with Beal's chapter on Wilson Harris's *Jonestown* (1996) and Tate's chapter on the work of David Mitchell referencing non-Western folklore and Eastern religious belief, respectively. In a future volume, authors could consider the influence of Islamic and Hindu theology on Horror fiction, or the influence of Judeo-Christian theology on non-Western texts, and religion and theology in non-Western texts, more generally. The analysis offered in *Horror and Religion* could be extended to consider Iraqi Horror fiction like Ahmed Saadawi's *Frankenstein in Baghdad* (2013), Japanese Horror texts like Hideaki Sena's *Parasite Eve* (1995), and Koji Suzuki's *Ring* (1991), or Russian Horror texts like Aleksey Tolstoy's *The Vampire* (1841) and Nikolai Gogol's "Viy" (1835), to name a few examples.

Horror and Religion: New Literary Approaches to Theology, Race and Sexuality is a must-read text for those who are interested in the impact of Christian theology on literary and popular culture; the evolution of religious thought in the West; constructions of racial Otherness and monstrosity; configurations of, and responses to, deviant and transgressive bodies; the cultural effect of secularism and post-secularism; the Gothic's historic and continued engagement with Christianity; and the holistic study of literary Horror texts. Each essay is thought-provoking in its contemplation of how Horror fiction and religion intersects, offering engaging and accessible studies which reconsider

both old and new texts from varied, diverse perspectives. In successfully considering the influence of Christian theology upon Horror fiction, the volume illuminates interesting avenues for further research into how non-Christian theologies have shaped Western and non-Western Horror texts. Overall, *Horror and Religion* is successful in its intent to interrogate the ways in which religion and theology has maintained a shadowy presence in Horror texts over the centuries.

BIONOTE

Chloe Campbell is a Commissioning Editor working in academic publishing and she is based in the North West of England, UK**.** Chloe is an MA English Studies student at Manchester Metropolitan University (UK), having participated in their specialised Gothic Studies pathway. Her current research centres on masculinist portrayals of witches in popular culture, with particular focus on the figure of the witch-wife in twentieth-century literature.

TALES OF THE TROUBLED DEAD: GHOST STORIES IN CULTURAL HISTORY (2019) BY CATHERINE BELSEY

Review by Lucy Hall

Belsey, Catherine, *Tales of the Troubled Dead: Ghost Stories in Cultural History.* Edinburgh University Press, 2019. 288pp.

The tale of Dorothy Dingely is a simple one on the surface. A young boy is suspected of idleness when he becomes reluctant to go to school. When pressed, he reveals a far more surprising reason. Time and again he has passed by the same woman, Dorothy Dingley. This is an unremarkable fact in itself, until it is revealed that Dorothy is – or should be – dead. What follows is an account of confrontation with the spirit until her message is conveyed and she disappears into the ether. Appropriately, it is with this ghost story that Catherine Belsey's *Tales of the Troubled Dead: Ghost Stories in Cultural History* (2019) opens. And despite its relatively barebones account, Dorothy Dingley's story acts as an example of how tales of haunting are often filtered through layers of narrative and cultural commentary as they evolve over time. It is the ways in which such tales morph and change with social and literary convention that Belsey goes on to explore in the course of this book.

Situating the ghost stories in their cultural and historical parameters is by no means a new topic for academic study. Most notably, Owen Davies's 2007 study *The Haunted: A Social History of Ghosts* fulfils this aim successfully and comprehensively. A similar excavation of the meaning of the ghost can be seen in a wide variety of Gothic criticism, which has frequently touched on this argument as part of an overarching desire to uncover the appeal of the genre. Notably, Andrew Smith's *The Ghost Story, 1840-1920: A Cultural History* (2010) endeavours to do just this in the context of the nineteenth- and early-twentieth centuries. Belsey's study also leans significantly towards literary sources for her exploration of how the figure of the ghost has evolved in Western (predominantly, though not exclusively, anglophone) cultures, from classical society, through the middle ages, and into the iconic ghosts of modern authors like M. R. James and Susan Hill.

Belsey locates the defining moment for the modern ghost with the first staging of *Hamlet* in the early 1600s. Much like the discussion of Dorothy Dingley, this first chapter outlines the ways in which representations of a classic ghost can change throughout history. Indeed, various iterations of the ghost of Hamlet's father make uncanny returns throughout Belsey's analysis as touchpoints for the changes in cultural representations and interpretations of the undead. A great strength of the study is the way in which the author demonstrates just how interwoven the influences and similarities between texts from vastly different time periods are. Having established William Shakespeare's tragedy as a cultural touchstone, Belsey takes the reader back in time and leads them through the evolving concepts of the ghost and dominant concepts of the afterlife that influenced the spirits of the Renaissance stage, as well as those who would follow. Belsey takes us from classical theatre and

philosophy, though the oral fireside tradition of the middle ages using a plethora of examples to outline the prevalent and often contradictory traditions that inform later representations of the ghost. It is here that Belsey teases out the themes that form the bedrock of her study: the negotiation of the tangible revenant versus the intangible shade; pagan versus Christian tradition; low versus high culture.

The book continues chronologically with a particularly moving chapter, "The Ghost of Mrs Milton," that explores the ghost as an expression of loss in John Milton's "Sonnet 19" (1650s), in which his recently deceased wife appears to him in a dream. This helps to establish the consolatory function occasionally attributed to the ghost, an element that returns in later chapters. But here Belsey also draws out the multiplicity of metaphorical readings that make many ghost stories so enduring. Alongside this thematic strain, Belsey successfully incorporates extensive discussion of how nuances of ghostly representation articulate with Christian theological disputes and conceptualisations of the soul during the 1600s.

From this point on, a more thematic route is taken that weaves these early ghost traditions into a variety of texts from M. R. James to Toni Morrison, Charles Dickens to Jerry Zucker's *Ghost* (1990). In Chapters Four and Five, "Women in White" and "Dangerous Dead Women," Belsey goes on to discuss gender, agency, and misanthropy in the depiction of consoling, mysterious, and malevolent female ghosts. Chapter Six – "Unquiet Gothic Castles" – sees class and social conservatism become the focal point in an exploration of the rise of Gothic genre through the haunted castle. Chapters Seven and Nine – "Spectres of Desire" and "Listening to Ghosts" – go on to examine the operation of desire and danger, the frisson of pleasure in fear, that feeds into the compulsive telling and retelling of the ghostly narrative. This is bolstered by discussions of the connection of haunting to psychoanalysis and the uncanny that arise in Chapters Eight and Ten, respectively entitled "All in the Mind?" and "Strange to Tell." These explore ideas of the ghost as a symbol of the unnameable or unspeakable experience, as well as the metaphorical capabilities of the genre (in the Coda, "Figurative Phantoms").

One of the most effective aspects of Belsey's study is the anecdotal contextualising that precedes many of the chapters, evoking the oral fireside tale from which the ghost story tradition emerges. This frequently acts as an anchor for the reader, gently leading them into the concepts discussed more broadly throughout the chapter and helping to ground literary ghost stories in a wider social and historical context. This is valuable as it demonstrates the rich traditions (particularly British traditions) that form the cultural bedrock for later, more literary, narratives which adhere to, break from, or merge with the fireside convention.

Throughout her study, Belsey highlights of a number of interesting themes that are recalled time and again to the point where it seems many would deserve further, closer study on their own merit. The tensions between the ghost in high and low culture and its evolution from a distinctly female, oral culture to a written art form with all of the political and social baggage this entails are particularly interesting elements. Belsey's attention to ghostly apparel and the material trappings that are key to many ghost stories is especially interesting. From white ladies, ladies in black to

the cultural shifts in depicting the ghost of Hamlet's father on stage – the social significance of the clothes that spirits wear and the objects and buildings they haunt is a fruitful vein and something that would lend itself to further exploration.

The expansiveness of Belsey's scope, perhaps inevitably, leads to some areas receiving less attention than others. The discussion of the ghost as a metaphor is treated all too fleetingly. Though it is a shame that this is not developed further, it is understandably not necessarily Belsey's principal aim in this particular book. Although Belsey explicitly acknowledges that the ghosts she explores are distinctly western and largely European in origin, some further consideration of how narratives of haunting approach colonial and postcolonial contexts could have been interesting. This is touched on briefly in Belsey's discussion of Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987), but it would have been interesting to see how ghosts that do not fit easily within a originate from a classical or medieval European tradition may reject, or even uncomfortably assimilate, these culturally established traditions.

Finally, because of Belsey's early focus on the ghost story as folktale, it is a shame that the author does not take this further and consider oral ghost tales from a more contemporary standpoint. There are many apocryphal ghost stories that have influenced literature and culture throughout the twentieth- and twenty-first centuries (the 'Amityville' haunting being the most obvious example). Though these more recent ghost stories may not have been passed on in a strict oral tradition, I would be interested to see how such recent incarnations both inspire their cultural successors and are influenced by the hundreds of ghost stories that came before them.

However, these minor areas of oversight are less a fault of the book in itself, as Belsey clearly establishes the parameters of her study early on. Instead, they demonstrate how vast and fertile the study of ghosts and their cultural impact is. For a book to leave the reader with enthusiasm for engaging in further discussion is no mean feat. Overall, Belsey's study is a valuable broad sweep of ghost story tradition that would be a good primer for those interested in generic convention and its development in Western anglophone literature and culture. Belsey's writing is informative, accessible, and entertaining. Her literary and cultural references are far-reaching and the way in which the author draws out the connections between seemingly disparate texts and time periods is deeply enjoyable. Perhaps the most satisfying element of this book, is its tone. Part academic, part evocative of the fire-side recitation of ghost stories, Belsey takes the reader by the hand and guides them through this haunted history.

BIONOTE

Lucy Hall completed her PhD in 2018 at the University of St. Andrews, UK, with a thesis examining the cultural output of the Second World War Home Front and its affinities with the Gothic mode. Her writing explores the themes of tyranny, terror, monstrosity, and haunting that run through the literature, film, and art of the period. In the past she has presented on topics of film adaptation, memorial culture, and tyrannical 1940s husbands. She has chapters published in a recent volume of essays exploring heroism and British culture and a forthcoming collecting exploring mid-twentieth century women's writing.

NOTES FROM AN APOCALYPSE: A PERSONAL JOURNEY TO THE END OF THE WORLD AND BACK (2020) BY MARK O'CONNELL

Review by Oliver Rendle

O'Connell, Mark. *Notes From An Apocalypse: A Personal Journey to the End of the World and Back*. Granta Books, 2020.

It may be easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism, but the former does not necessitate the latter. In fact, according to *Notes From An Apocalypse: A Personal Journey to the End of the World and Back* (2020), a small proportion of the Western world is already securing its economic privilege, anticipating and even investing in the prospect of various immanent catastrophes. Documenting a range of Western obsessions with 'TEOTWAWKI (The End of the World as We Know It),' *Notes From An Apocalypse* is a difficult book to categorise; displaying, as it does, first-hand experience, literary criticism, and emotionally compromised bias in equal measures (25). Researched prior to 2020 (a year whose events have seen a sense of apocalypticism explode across online, print, and broadcast media), *Notes From an Apocalypse* expands on the mortal preoccupations explored through the author's award-winning *To Be a Machine* (2017). Scaling up the existential threat from the demise of the individual to the demise of the human race in its entirety, Mark O'Connell's new book is a dryly humorous and ethically disturbing exploration of the prospect of death on a global scale. By confronting the complexity of twenty-first century apocalypticism, therefore, *Notes From an Apocalypse* reflects stereotypical Western attitudes towards worst-case scenarios and the author's reluctant identification with selfish and competitive ideological positions.

Apocalyptic narratives have underpinned human civilisation for millennia – "from Ragnarok to Revelation to *The Road*," as O'Connell puts it – each vision reflecting the specific socio-historical anxieties of the culture it arose from (11). Hence *Notes From An Apocalypse* follows in the footsteps of prior studies of apocalyptic fiction (see, for instance, Heather Hicks, 2016) when it insists that its "true concern is the present moment" (18). The premise of the book itself is deceptively simple: in each main chapter O'Connell presents first-hand research and encounters with Western groups that are seriously anticipating some form of apocalypse. During the course of each account he scrutinises how said groups envision this cataclysm, their attitude towards it, and how they intend to react to its arrival. Like the subjects of O'Connell's research, therefore, *Notes From An Apocalypse* uses the looming prospect of global catastrophe to interrogate perceived flaws in the present – the difference being that O'Connell is self-consciously attempting to get ahead of this process. In so doing, O'Connell's book not only grants his readers a window into the future (or *futures*, to be more accurate), it also reveals the political ideologies that are bringing these apocalypses into fruition.

Following an introspective introduction that outlines the aims and hypocrisies of this project, O'Connell opens his book by delving into the racism, sexism, and escapism represented by "preppers": (overwhelmingly) right-wing males whose self-aggrandising discourse glorifies machismo and consumerism in their gleeful anticipation of a "SHTF ("shit hits the fan") situation" (21). O'Connell makes said groups' "good old-fashioned original style fascism" plain to see, sardonically using them as a vehicle to mock right-wing agendas before the proceeding three chapters follow this exclusionary impulse up the economic scale (29). Chapter Two therefore sees O'Connell travel to South Dakota to meet Robert Vicinio, a "real estate magnate for the end of days" who openly exploits apocalyptic fears/fantasies (44). Vicinio shows O'Connell the converted weapons silos that he trades in and, as if aware of apocalyptic fiction's externalising function, demonstrates how his sales pitch is built upon a smorgasbord of apocalyptic scenarios. It would be naïve to describe O'Connell's account as objective, yet in the image of this sexist, closet anti-Semite's utopian vision of a subterranean suburbia (lifted straight from the pages of Harlan Ellison's *A Boy and His Dog*, 1969) it is not difficult to discern a "nightmarish inversion of the American dream" (65).

While Chapters One and Two depict the desire to reclaim and preserve society respectively (namely through poorly concealed notions of social, economic, and ethnic cleansing), the next two chapters present Western groups abandoning their societies entirely. Chapter Four, for instance, explores a more glamorous alternative to Vicinio's vaults, following O'Connell to the luxury New Zealand boltholes already being fortified by venture capitalists and Silicon Valley moguls. Focusing on Paypal cofounder Peter Thiel as the epitome of this movement, O'Connell convincingly reveals how this "island haven amid a rising tide of apocalyptic unease" is becoming an exclusive lifeboat for the wealthiest minority (73). Stretching the definition of a prepper to breaking-point, Chapter Five then examines how billionaire entrepreneurs are looking to the stars to help them abandon ship. Here O'Connell meets with the Mars Society, foregrounding the prepper ideology bound up in their interplanetary colonial ambitions and revealed by their exclusionist rhetoric. These fleeing expatriates and would-be pioneers, O'Connell argues, are cherry-picking apocalyptic narratives to justify avoiding the much-resented social and ecological caretaking that present societies require.

Although O'Connell is clearly horrified by the exclusionary politics reflected by these prepper ideologies (and it would be ridiculous to call this book politically impartial), this does not mean that he finds left-wing apocalypticism more affirmatory. Chapter Six, for instance, sees the author meet the Dark Mountain Project, a group of liberal thinkers and ecologically minded individuals assuaging their eco-despair with communal trips to wilderness areas. Accompanying one such trip to the Scottish Highlands, O'Connell tries to empathise with the group's eco-fatalism, partaking in a "nature solo" to better understand his transitory role in the "sublime" natural order (165, 181). Ultimately, though, the author dismisses this defeatism as blinkered and selfish, reasoning that one cannot flee from environmental responsibilities as "[t]here is no place where you are outside of power" (182). Indeed, to try and convince yourself otherwise is a political act of wilful blindness. Reiterating this condemnation, Chapter Seven shows how actual apocalypses have already been absorbed into capitalism through a visit to the Chernobyl Exclusion Zone. Here, in a place that is both "a prelapsarian paradise" and a "post-apocalyptic wasteland," the author meets the tour

operators and (re)settlers ('samoseli') whose livelihoods are built on this "graveyard of progress," and whose local economy attests to humanity's ability to normalise and commercialise its own destruction (190, 191, 203). Somewhat an outlier in this book for focusing on a clearly demarcated catastrophe that has already happened, the salient feature of this chapter, however, is the ethical hypocrisy of O'Connell's "extreme tourism" (184). No matter how noble his motives are for visiting the Exclusion Zone (or interacting with any of these groups, for that matter), O'Connell recognises that he cannot escape the fact that he is consuming a product, that he is complicit in a system that exploits human suffering.

This hypocrisy itself comes to the forefront of O'Connell's book, the encounters ultimately serving as a framework for the author to interrogate his own apocalyptic anxieties – particularly anti-natalism, fatalism, and the sustainability of political freedom, empathy, and honesty. After all, what separates O'Connell's critique of end-of-the-world planning from much prior research concerning apocalyptic narratives is the author's personal investment in said plans' efficacy, not to mention his conviction that such preparations will be imminently necessary. Consequently, the scathing accounts that O'Connell delivers are subsumed somewhat by an overriding sense of guilt and complacency, the cumulative effect of each chapter being one of pointed introspection. For instance, even after O'Connell explains why he finds the 'preppers' socio-political values "reprehensible" and their "shared escapist fantasy about an imagined return to the American frontier" absurd, he openly admits to identifying with the existential and social fears that underpin such ideologies (39, 27). After describing how one man's survivalist lifestyle drove their wife away (lingering on the irony of a rugged individualist resorting to eating his apocalypse rations because he cannot cook), O'Connell remarks that this ridiculous man "was an outlandish avatar of [his] own anxieties and meta-anxieties" (38). Such instances epitomise and perform the personal crisis which O'Connell's book recounts: the ecologist's Gordian knot of paralysing fears concerning oneself and loved ones, the damage such obsessions can have on personal relationships, and a selfish desire to live comfortably and happily.

O'Connell's repeated consideration of his own privilege, his own collusion in the inequalities that he is so clearly repulsed by, conjures an inescapably distraught tone (or perhaps a distraught sense of inescapable-ness), one best encapsulated in the book's opening pages. From the very first line ("It was the end of the world, and I was sitting on the couch watching cartoons with my son") *Notes From An Apocalypse* makes clear what its subtitle indicates – this really is a "*Personal* Journey" – while simultaneously demonstrating that it must be (1, my emphasis). Of the many anecdotal vignettes O'Connell invokes throughout his work (including, but not limited to, discussions with his wife, therapist, children, total strangers, and a lengthy analysis of Dr Seuss' *The Lorax*, 1971) this initial tableau is perhaps the most apt vehicle for the book's message. As his son watches the *Loony Tunes*-esque hijinks of a cartoon bear, O'Connell hides a click-bait video of an emaciated polar bear scrounging through bins. The terrifying similarities between the two creatures (both suffering in the name of commercialism, prosperity, and entertainment) are not lost upon the author, nor is the irony that the manner in which he is watching this scene is, indirectly, the cause of the polar bear's suffering. Saddened and repulsed by what he sees, O'Connell hides the video from his son, not wanting this child to live in a world where such scenes exist, even while admitting that

this species-wide self-delusion is perpetuating and exacerbating the climate crisis. And, thankfully, in a book so bleak, O'Connell makes the absurdity of such a situation as plain as possible. Indeed, throughout the text O'Connell repeatedly juxtaposes the mundane with the existentially terrifying, lacing his disparagement of right-wing principals and human exceptionalism with dead-pan humour – one that inevitably returns to attack him in the form of guilt, anxiety, and unanswerable moral dilemmas.

The obvious scorn O'Connell feels towards those people and ideologies he encounters is therefore rescued from sheer vanity by the author's acknowledgement of his own hypocrisy, his own complicity, indirectly inviting the reader to reconsider the moral and ethical complexities of the current age. While the authorial voice may appear a little arrogant on occasion (no amount of ironic comments on pretentiousness rescues an author from pretentiousness, unfortunately, and what, exactly, does a "supercilious Scandinavian accent" sound like?), such instances are hardly out-of-place in a book that explicitly foregrounds the hubris of the modern subject (120). *Notes From An Apocalypse* is by no means a cheerful read, the questions it raises are mostly left unanswered, including a particularly tragic impasse regarding anti-natalism. Here, O'Connell's doubts over the ethical implications of reproduction continually appear alongside startlingly heartfelt accounts of his own children – who seem, at times, to be the author's only source of joy. Yet questions *are* raised, moral and ethical questions that are intrinsically linked to scientific research but cannot (or should not) be divorced from their emotional and inter-social dimensions.

Cathartic, witty, and often deeply tragic, *Notes From An Apocalypse* inhabits a difficult middle-ground somewhere between impersonal academic discourse and anecdotal journalism, frankly presenting various Western relationships to apocalyptic narratives – but not without an explicitly subjective agenda. O'Connell's book therefore bridges a gap between rational speculation and personal diatribe, quite appropriately combining the two approaches in its form and content. By confronting such issues without compromise, though, without resorting to soothing platitudes and pacifying affirmation, O'Connell's book presents a startling insight into the emotional and political conflicts that afflict a significant number of individuals in an age of apocalypticism. The efficacy of such a project and its ability to mediate impending disasters will remain up for debate – though not in perpetuity. Even so, this work does promise to shed light on a fascinating intersection between visions of the future and perceptions of the world in the present moment. While being neither a strictly academic work nor didactic manifesto, therefore, O'Connell's book remains a timely offshoot of apocalypse studies and a crushingly honest foray into the moral and ethical dilemmas that mark the twenty-first century.

BIONOTE

Oliver Rendle is currently undertaking his PhD at Manchester Metropolitan University's Centre for Gothic Studies, where he researches nihilistic satire, philosophically cynical humour, and their relationship to sociopolitical disillusion in contemporary culture. He is a graduate of the University of Glasgow's Fantasy MLitt program, where he specialised in humour theory and existential horror, and he has presented papers on these topics at Glasgow International Fantasy Conversations, Fantastika, and Tales of Terror.

THE NATURE OF THE BEAST: TRANSFORMATIONS OF THE WEREWOLF FROM THE 1970S TO THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY (2019) BY CARYS CROSSEN

Review by Hannah Priest

Crossen, Carys. *The Nature of the Beast: Transformations of the Werewolf from the 1970s to the Twenty-First Century.* University of Wales Press, 2019, 304pp.

The figure of the werewolf has appeared in Western literature for a very long time. As Carys Crossen rightly notes in *The Nature of the Beast* (and as many other writers have noted), the werewolf's literary history can be traced back to the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, and versions of the (hu)man who transforms into a wolf have appeared in myriad texts and textual traditions since then. On the one hand, the relative familiarity of the werewolf allows for an imagined continuity, an unbroken line of descent from *Gilgamesh* to the contemporary pop culture lycanthropes that grace the pages and screens of the twenty-first century. However, on the other, the sheer breadth and range of texts featuring werewolves, with the concomitant complexity of contextualising these within both literary and cultural traditions, undermines that sense of continuity and renders a 'literary history' of the werewolf an impossible project.

This impossibility is something that is addressed clearly and cannily in Crossen's *The Nature of the Beast*. While the book's subject matter is situated within the longer textual history of the werewolf, it is a study of a particular lycanthropic moment. *The Nature of the Beast* is not a literary history – nor does it make any claims to be one – but rather it is an analysis of specific developments in popular literature from the late 1970s.

The parameters of Crossen's study, or what we might call the 'lycanthropic moment' chosen for analysis, are both shrewd and thought-provoking. The book's overarching argument is that, over the past forty years, werewolves in literature have been in the process of 'becoming' subjects (the book draws on Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's formulations of 'becoming' in its exploration) or of 'acquiring' self-awareness and subjectivity. Crossen's introduction identifies stories in Angela Carter's *The Bloody Chamber* (1979) as formative texts in the development of the werewolf's subjectivity, but notes that, unlike Fred Saberhagen's *The Dracula Tape* (1975) and Anne Rice's *Interview with the Vampire* (1976) for vampire fiction, "there is no corresponding text that marks the advent of the werewolf's subjectivity" (23). Instead, Crossen examines the werewolf's development as a subject in terms of "gradual process," which begins in the late 1970s but – as the textual analyses she offers reveals – really begins to develop in the 1990s (23).

The first chapter of *The Nature of the Beast* explores the notion of 'werewolf subjectivity,' offering both correction and clarification of the Freudian 'beast within' conceptualisation of the werewolf. As Crossen points out throughout her argument, the 'beast within' paradigm is not sufficient for understanding 'lycanthropic subjectivity,' particularly when considering recent developments in Fantasy and Horror writing. The four subsequent chapters each take a 'key' development in recent fiction about werewolves and examine it through the lens of 'lycanthropic subjectivity' and with analysis of both individual texts and wider literary trends.

Chapter Two explores the creation of the werewolf pack as a popular trope in Fantasy and Horror fiction. Other writers have noted the 'invention' of the pack as a recent pop culture phenomenon, but Crossen's alignment of this development with the progression of 'lycanthropic subjectivity' allows for an astute and nuanced consideration of its significance. She argues that "the rise of the subjective werewolf and the receding of the beast within" has allowed werewolves to "form packs" but also to "integrate themselves among humans" (91). Identifying the presentation of the werewolf as "social animal" as beginning in the 1990s, Crossen makes a compelling case for reading these two literary trends – subjectivity and the pack – as being inextricably connected (59).

Developing the analysis of the 'social animal' further, and considering some of the ways in which the werewolf has sought to 'integrate' with humans, Chapter Three looks at the relationship between the werewolf and the law(s). Noting that "the werewolf has chiefly existed outside the law prior to the late twentieth century" and that "[t]raditionally, the figure of the werewolf has been synonymous with evil, the Devil and the outlaw," Crossen turns her attention to late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century fiction that seeks to reimagine the werewolf's relationship to "law-giving" (96, 99). Crossen contextualises the argument with reference to reading habits and trends in the twentieth century, and it is in this chapter that the divergence between page and screen werewolves begins to become apparent. *The Nature of the Beast* is, foremost, a literary study, and, as Crossen highlights on a number of occasions, the subjective werewolf is really a figure of literature, rather than film. This argument is not without its problems, particularly with regards to the blurring between media that we see both in popular culture and in Crossen's analysis. For example, several of the texts referred to in this study – most notably *Blood and Chocolate* – exist in both literary (1997) and cinematic (2007) forms. This issue becomes more apparent in the final two chapters of the book.

In Chapter Four, Crossen focuses on place and environment by analysing the relationship between the werewolf and the city. The chapter begins with an overview of the werewolf's long-standing relationship to nature and the wilderness, and of the connected conceptualisation of the 'natural' and the 'unnatural.' There is a convincing argument here about the transition from "wilderness werewolf" to "urban werewolf," which brings together formulations of "nature as a human construct" with the anonymised, yet public, urban landscape to make the case for the city's role in developing "lycanthropic subjectivity" (138). I particularly enjoyed a passing – but beautifully illustrative – observation about the urban landscape of *Blood and Chocolate* (2007) being a shared space of multiple purpose.

However, this chapter's argument becomes a little less concrete when it moves into the space (ostensibly) between the rural and the urban – suburbia. Crossen does a good job of outlining the ideological forces at work in the construction of suburbia, and offers some examples of the dominant tropes in its presentation in pop culture to explore the possible reasons why suburban werewolves are relatively rare in popular fiction. It is a provocative and convincing argument, and one that is as much a reconsideration of suburbia as it is of the werewolf, which reveals one of the more subtextual strands of the book's argument: understanding 'lycanthropic subjectivity' is inevitably bound up in our evolving understandings and imaginings of human subjectivity – our werewolves, our selves. The difficulty with suburbia, though, is precisely that so few werewolves have made it their home. As such, in order to illustrate her argument, Crossen turns to the film *Ginger Snaps* (2000), which is held up as the quintessential 'suburban werewolf' text. This is a problem that appears elsewhere in the book, as the reference above to the film adaptation of *Blood and Chocolate* indicates. Although Crossen is careful to note the difference between literary and cinematic traditions of lycanthropy, there are some slippages between media that could have been addressed more directly. Commentary on the television series *Being Human* (2008-2013) and *Angel* (1999-2004) further underline this question of media, as there is little acknowledgement of the specific format and genre conventions that might complicate textual comparison, or – conversely – might undermine a tentative argument for divergence between cinematic and literary traditions.

In Chapter Five, the issue of differing media recedes, as the chapter is focused specifically on a literary genre (or mode): Young Adult (YA) fiction. In the wake of 'phenomena' and franchises such as *Harry Potter*, *Twilight*, and (to a lesser extent) *The Hunger Games*, a body of scholarly work on YA fiction has emerged. This final chapter of *The Nature of the Beast* makes a very strong contribution and intervention in this field. Crossen very successfully synthesizes a large amount of existing scholarship and uses this to shed a new – and genuinely thought-provoking – perspective on the teenage werewolf. This begins early in the chapter, when she argues that "[t]he werewolf has been associated with adolescence since soon after the notion of 'teenagers' came into being" (175). This deceptively simple observation in fact offers a significant modification of how we might view the relationship between the 'teen' and the 'wolf,' revisiting the notion of werewolf as "well-worn metaphor for adolescence" by considering the ways in which both the teenager and the werewolf are becoming-subjects (and also becoming subjects for scholarly analysis) (175). Crossen continues this with an examination of key themes and tropes in twenty-first-century YA fiction, including rebellion, sexuality, race, and class.

The Nature of the Beast is a persuasive and engaging examination of a significant moment in the development of the literary werewolf. The argument for how, when, and why 'lycanthropic subjectivity' is developing, and why fiction has moved away from the limitations of the 'beast within' paradigm, is well-observed and convincing, and Crossen strikes a good balance between cultural theory, social context, and textual analysis.

Nevertheless, at times I found myself returning to the question of the werewolf's literary history – the history that stretches back millennia before *The Bloody Chamber*. As noted above,

Crossen is careful not to lay claim to writing about this history, being clear on the parameters of the study and recognising that an attempt to analyse the entirety of werewolf literature would be an impossible task. That said, *The Nature of the Beast* does occasionally err on the opposite side: in firmly locating its focus on the literature of the last forty years, there are moments when earlier literary creations are overlooked or misrepresented. In elucidating the paradigm against which she will be reading the contemporary 'subjective' werewolf, Crossen talks about the "classic, monster-once-a-month Freudian werewolf" (21). The word 'classic' recurs in the first chapter of the book, implying the longevity and dominance of this mode of representation. This is misleading, as the "monster-once-a-month Freudian werewolf," while undoubtedly standing in distinction to the contemporary "subjective werewolf," is a product of 1930s cinema viewed through the lens of psychoanalytic discourse. It is arguably as distinct from earlier traditions, such as the medieval romance werewolf, as it is from the popular literature of the twenty-first century. Unfortunately, as with most studies of contemporary werewolf literature and film, the only reference to medieval literature in *The Nature of the Beast* is the obligatory nod to Marie de France's *Bisclavret*, and there is no mention of, for instance, the fourteenth-century *William of Palerne*, a text that (perhaps) offers an ancestor of the subjective werewolf. The mid-nineteenth-century penny blood *Wagner the Wehr-Wolf* is mentioned but with little indication of its content or style, leaving the question of why *Varney the Vampire* might (as Crossen argues) be considered a foundational text in the development of the vampire's subjectivity, but its sibling-text *Wagner* is not considered as the lycanthropic equivalent. I do not wish to imply that *William of Palerne* or *Wagner* should be considered as participating in the same negotiations of identity and subjectivity as, say, *Twilight* or *Kitty Goes to Washington* (2006), but rather that their absence is somewhat misleading. Crossen makes a good case for seeing the development of 'lycanthropic subjectivity' as a recent and fast-evolving literary convention – but that does not mean that werewolves have never spoken for themselves before.

My comments on the absence of certain earlier texts may seem like pedantry, but, though they began as a criticism, they also serve to illustrate one of the key strengths of *The Nature of the Beast*. As I have said, this is a thought-provoking book. It offers compelling and new perspectives on literary texts and genres, but it also raises questions and encourages further analysis and interrogation of ideas (and, importantly, of texts and traditions beyond those included in the book). Crossen's textual analysis offers ways of reading popular texts that enhances understanding, not only of the werewolf, but of the contemporary Gothic more broadly. The construction of the book's overall argument brings together tropes that have not previously been studied in dialogue with one another, offering an insightful and coherent study that poses a powerful challenge to the continued centrality of the 'beast within' in werewolf studies.

BIONOTE

Hannah Priest is an Associate Lecturer in English at Manchester Metropolitan University, UK. She is the editor of *She-Wolf: A Cultural History of Female Werewolves* (Manchester University Press) and has published numerous articles and book chapters on popular culture, medieval literature, YA fiction and the Gothic. Under the name Hannah Kate, she is a short story writer and presenter of a long-running weekly literature radio show on North Manchester FM.

CHILDREN OF MEN (2020) BY DAN DINELLO

Review by Ezekiel Crago

Dinello, Dan. *Children of Men*. Auteur Press, 2019. 132 pp.

In "Exposé of 1935," (2003) Walter Benjamin observes that "empire is the style of revolutionary terrorism, for which the state is an end in itself" (4). Authoritarian states are ends for which any means are considered reasonable, and these states are the product, the offspring, the children of men. Dan Dinello's analysis of Alfonso Cuarón's film adaptation of P. D. James' novel comprehensively documents the many ways in which *Children of Men* (1992, 2006) predicts and critiques the increasing xenophobia and rising fascism of our contemporary reality. Dinello's book examines how the style of the film's presentation works in conjunction with the narrative content as a mass-media entertainment spectacle that also engages viewers affectively, encouraging them to notice marginalised and oppressed groups of people who are often invisible in popular culture and not represented in expensive Hollywood productions. Set in a near-future England, the plot traces the transformation of a middle-class white man, Theo, from a state of political malaise to one of willingness to sacrifice himself for the hope of the future. This alternate timeline is struggling through a fertility crisis: no new babies have been born for some time, suggesting the end of humanity. Theo helps a pregnant black immigrant, protecting her from both government and revolutionary forces who vie for control of her body. The film adaptation juxtaposes the terrorist bombings of revolutionaries with the state of terror that the UK has become. Dinello argues that Cuarón's realistic style, which employs extensive long takes and deep focus – what he calls the film's "visual density"– allow the frame to be filled with background images of imprisonment and torture that are hard to ignore (9). These elements are combined with the film's real-world references to form an "antiauthoritarian political critique" (9).

The book begins with an overview of Cuarón's career as a director, situating this film within his attempts to be a successful filmmaker and his class-conscious series of earlier movies like *Great Expectations* (1998) and *Y Tu Mamá También* (2001). After providing this background, it examines the P. D. James novel on which Cuarón's film is based (titled *The Children of Men*), noting the differences in the film that are the result of its historical context; released five years after the events of 9/11, the film shows a marked paranoia about terrorism and pandemics. As Dinello remarks, the film has only become more relevant over time, especially in the way that it depicts the treatment of people displaced by global turmoil: "the immigration crisis has exploded with the number of displaced people increasing more than 49%" (13). As Dinello shows using shots from the film, such people are treated worse than animals – locked in cages and dehumanised. The film's climax takes place in a walled refugee city – a decaying urban setting with no civil services, where immigrants are placed to be ignored in a policy of benign neglect. A heterotopia comprised of many cultures and languages, it acts as synecdoche for people displaced from the equatorial areas of the globe.

After discussing the difficulty Cuarón faced in making the film due to budgetary problems and the terrorist attacks of 9/11, Dinello examines an important intertext for *Children of Men*: Gillo Pontecorvo's *The Battle of Algiers* (1966). The film depicts the Algerian revolution and the atrocities committed by the French military, using a pseudo-documentary aesthetic to make the horror more real for an audience distanced from the conflict in space and time and viewing it comfortably in a movie theater. Using such a style, Dinello notes how "*Children of Men* ventures beyond standard entertainment: [for example] the character played by the film's biggest star [Julianne Moore] is shockingly murdered 28 minutes into the picture," and the camerawork and editing make it appear to be "war reportage" rather than action film footage (13).

Dinello's book then situates the film within a tradition of apocalyptic Science Fiction (SF) film and the theories of cinematic realism espoused by André Bazin. Bazin celebrated a technique of using the camera to capture reality, producing the illusion of verisimilitude wherein the camera serves as present observer of spontaneous actions unfolding, rather than following a script to portray a specific planned narrative. Dinello argues that by using this technique, and referencing actual historical events happening in the background of the action, the film creates for itself a "transhistorical mise-en-scène" that allows it to evoke past events – such as the use of Nazi concentration camps – and link these to contemporary events, like the caging of migrant populations (59).

Dinello argues that the film demonstrates the cultural logic used by a reactionary society facing an infertility crisis informed by nationalist rhetoric, resulting in xenophobia and the fear that other people's babies will populate the future – the imagining of a racial 'contamination' via a post-white world, what he calls "national apartheid" (67). According to Dinello, the film allegorises Albert Camus' figuring of fascism as a plague, a contagious social sickness, and in the film's diegesis, "the British government has succeeded in creating a counter-contagion [to the threat of racial contamination], which infects their subjects with the totalitarian virus…[and] the power of tyranny has been freely given to the government" (73). This social plague deprives people of moral choice and agency in the name of security.

Dinello's analysis of the film would benefit from an intersectional approach to the identity politics it illuminates. Although the book successfully illustrates how the film critiques the fascism of our current xenophobic nationalism, I would like to have seen more discussion of the masculinism that informs fascism, especially considering the story's name, chosen by an author known for feminist mystery novels about the evils men do. Although the book's analysis addresses the film's title as a biblical reference to Psalm 90:3, suggesting that humanity has "the opportunity to repent and find redemption," it does not interrogate the specific wording of this choice as framing device for the narrative (Dinello 109). Men do not give birth, but patriarchal society grants men ownership over children and women symbolically. This is why, as Rebekah Sheldon argues in *The Child to Come: Life after the Human Catastrophe* (2016), a fertility crisis narrative such as this often results in captive women to ensure that this proprietary relationship between men, women, and children is maintained. An analysis of this aspect of the film's messianism would complicate the redemption suggested by Dinello. By opening up a conversation about the character of a "black female Jesus"

who is also the Virgin Mary in the figure of the miraculously pregnant Kee, Kee's role in the narrative can be understood less as messiah and more as vessel – but also as threat, bearing the possibility of a post-white future (Dinello 105).

Rather than spending what I think is too much space in the text talking about Donald Trump – who is a symptom of what the book diagnoses – and rather than discussing the biological possibility of a virgin birth, the book is missing a discussion of why this mother of the future *needs to be desexualised* by the status of virginity, making her less of a threat to men. The book reaches a compelling argument near the end when it suggests that the film articulates the possibility of a post-male world through this figure of parthenogenesis – a world which would be the Children of Women – but it does not examine how this is imbricated in the imagining of a post-white future in this figure of racialised motherhood.

This book is a very good extended analysis of the film, arguing that it welds the form and content into a political and social critique of the trend of authoritarian politics currently spreading through the Western world. Its message is particularly relevant as I write this during daily protests against authoritarian violence in the United States being met with authoritarian violence. It would have been a more persuasive argument, however, if it was grounded in a broader range of current research besides just that of biology, especially that being conducted in gender studies and critical race theory. This being said, it is a useful study of how a speculative film can provide an anamorphic lens on our contemporary social situation by shocking its audience both visually and narratively.

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BIONOTE

Ezekiel Crago earned a PhD in English at the University of California Riverside, US. He specialises in Post-Apocalyptic fiction, among other genres, and has a book forthcoming with Peter Lang entitled *Raggedy Men: Masculinity and the* Mad Max *Films.* He is currently a lecturer at Morgan Community College and the University of Colorado Denver.

FUTURE CITIES: ARCHITECTURE AND THE IMAGINATION (2019) BY PAUL DOBRASZCZYK

Review by Thomas Kelly

Dobraszczyk, Paul. *Future Cities: Architecture and the Imagination*. Reaktion Books, 2019. 272 pp.

In October 2016, the United Nation Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development held in Quito, Ecuador announced the implementation of the New Urban Agenda (NUA). This agreement established a global standard of guidelines on the principals, policies, and procedures for sustainable urban development over the next twenty years. It acknowledged, as centres of social, cultural, and economic activities, cities will continue to evolve as the most opportunistic spaces for human habitation on the planet. Rather than fighting against this, it recommended urbanisation be accepted as a method of resistance to climate change, through the adoption of adaptation design strategies that merge ecological initiatives with social improvement to create sustainable and inclusive cities for all.

In his fascinating, awe-inspiring, and at times somewhat controversial book, *Future Cities: Architecture and the Imagination* (2019), Paul Dobraszczyk, a professional writer, university lecturer, and research fellow at the Bartlett School of Architecture, explores the extraordinary possibility that plans for sustainable urban development and sociological change might exist in the narratives of speculative fiction. From submerged metropolises to soaring airships, underground bunkers to sky-high skyscrapers, post-apocalyptic landscapes to shanty-town settlements, Dobraszczyk constructs a persuasive argument about the usefulness of imaginary cities as experimental spaces for addressing the countless issues of equity, liveability, and sustainability to cities currently under construction. Dobraszczyk transports the reader on a breath-taking journey into the visionary architecture of Science Fiction and their various counterparts in contemporary reality. Moving from the beginning of the nineteenth right up to the early twenty-first century, the book critically examines every type of urban fictionality, interpreting them not as meaningless fantasy, but as a conceivable reality. Through this, Dobraszczyk succeeds in "grounding these imaginary cities in architectural practice" and expands our understanding about the role imagination plays in "how cities are perceived and experienced" (10). Drawing upon a diverse range of cultural and aesthetic materials: novels, films, drawings, photographs, sketches, paintings, cartography, digital artistry, and computer games, Dobraszczyk reconnects the fictional city with the real, showing how Science Fiction can be used to envision alternative possibilities for future cities beyond the empirical restrictions that typically govern the architectural and urban planning professions.

The result is a philosophical and culturally wide-ranging study into "representations of future cities" organised into "three thematic areas": "unmoored" (submerged, floating, and flying), vertical (skyscrapers and subterranean), and ruins (salvaged and decaying) (18). Each of these sub-categories of fantastical cities is placed in the context of issues being discussed currently in architecture and urban planning in the real world. Dobraszczyk argues the alternative nature of these cities allows them to propose creative solutions to problems such as energy transition, water shortage, deforestation, waste management, air pollution, social division, gentrification, overpopulation, and others. The NUA has identified many of these as barriers to a long-term, people-centred vision of sustainable urban development that enhances both the liveability and quality of life in cities. For Dobraszcyk, it is almost ironic that the answers to these same issues can be found in the architecture of the imagination; a space often dismissed for its hyperbolic character yet an essential step for the visualisation of future cities.

This is what *Future Cities* is most successful at doing – acting as a compendium of imaginative architectures that can be useful for envisioning social and environmental transformations in urban futures. Where his argument becomes less convincing is in his political provocations for the human imagination to become a neo-Marxist weapon for fighting "the sterile alienating architecture of neoliberalism," and its dominance over the spaces, places, and cities we currently inhabit (64). He builds upon the geographer Stephen Graham's assertion that "real and imagined sci-fi cities […] offer powerful opportunities for progressively challenging contemporary urban transformation" because they exemplify "the value of multiplicity rather than the homogeneity of urbanism under global capitalism" (395). Taking this as gospel, he makes broad claims about the adoption of a shared consciousness amongst disenfranchised communities recognising that their "vulnerability and connectedness" can inspire built environments that emphasise the forging of diverse and multiplistic relationships between people in an increasingly disordered world (67). This activism would lead to the complete dissolution of architecture and urban planning as regulatory systems, opening up the stage "to allow the users […] to define (exactly) what a building should become" (214). This anti-capitalist philosophy is hardly new and perhaps overestimates the potential of these future cities for solving the biggest challenges facing contemporary global cities. Although Dobraszczyk poses valid questions on the intentions of those in charge of designing and creating cities, it is incredibly naïve of him to expect a revolutionary movement to originate from the works of speculative design fiction. This kind of grand utopian vision of community activism and widespread redevelopment Dobraszczyk proposes would lead to unregulated urban growth, deepen exclusionary divisions, and undo the environmental regulations and controls that have taken generations to put into effect. It would be a far more sensible suggestion to utilise the possibilities of the imagination to reform the relationship between architects and citizens that has been damaged in recent years encouraging them to work together to develop more socially progressive and climate-resilient cities.

In the first three chapters, entitled "Unmoored Cities," Dobraszczyk does go some way to accomplishing this task by closely examining aquatic and aerial forms of urbanisation. He echoes the NUA with his criticism of environmental policies being "focused on mitigation rather than adaptation," and that if cities are to remain suitable for human inhabitation, there needs to be a greater movement towards "long-term strategic planning, or reshaping urban governance and

socio-political life" that embraces complementary approaches to the unavoidable impact of climate change (23). Dobraszczyk proposes that imaginative visions can offer novel adaptive measures that can alter our decision-making strategies for preparing, surviving, and rebuilding cities in the event of environmental catastrophe. To illustrate this point, he compares different examples of climate-change adaptations from literary authors, visual artists, and architects. Dobraszczyk mentions Kim Stanley Robinson's post-apocalyptic novel New *York 2140* (2017), which depicts a half-submerged New York that has adapted to its flooded surroundings through the creation of island skyscrapers, interconnected with sky bridges and a thriving maritime infrastructure; and the Argentine artist and architect, Tomas Saraceno's prototype for floating spherical habitats in his marshmallow-like geodesic dome *Observatory/Air-Port City* (2008). In vastly different ways, these works all challenge the restrictive conventions that govern architectural practice, by presenting scenarios in which "architects might respond to buildings becoming partially or completely submerged" (40). This is the most effectively argued part of the book, encouraging the reader to abandon their scepticism and seriously consider these unconventional architectures as viable models for human habitation in a post-climate change future.

Dobraszczyk asserts that for adaptative solutions like this to become a universal practice in urbanisation there must be broader recognition of climate change as an inevitable moment in the history of humankind. This is a common westernised perspective amongst climate strategists that overlooks the ways environmental changes will impact non or semi-urban settlements particularly in less developed nations countries that tend to have lower urban population levels. For this to happen, we must completely abandon our survivalist perspective and develop architectures that enter into a state of "dynamic co-existence" with the transformed urban environments of the future (46). He quotes biomorphic materials like Newton Falls' Autopia Ampere (1970), an oceanic spiral-like metropolis grown from the calcium carbonate of its coral bedrock through electrodeposition; and, Lebbeus Wood's scheme for a floating city above Paris, that utilises the 'ceaseless motion and flux' of air currents to maintain its structural integrity. These spectacular projects break down the barriers between "natural and artificial" creating "fluid," "organic," and "hybrid" building materials that challenge the land-locked nature of human ecosystems (64). This is a remarkable perspective that imagines a post-climate change humanity thriving alongside nature through unprecedented engineering feats of integration and connectivity. However, it is incredibly naïve and optimistic of Dobraszczyk to expect the architectural community to be able adopt this process of material and structural symbiosis on a city-wide scale. The profession itself is founded on the manipulation of the natural world via a strong, physical barrier; a value system that would need to be radically overhauled before this state of total harmony and integration could be sustainably enacted. What is far more likely is that climate-tackling adaptations rather than as instruments of biological interconnectivity will only further highlight the widening inequalities and disparities between urban communities by becoming high-tech, ultra-privileged communes for global elites.

In the middle two chapters, "Vertical Cities," Dobraszczyk confirms this in his critical reflection on the development of multi-levelled cities, both above and below ground, which have exacerbated social polarisation and environmental degradation in urban communities. Vertical landscapes, he laments, are the tools of "globalized flows of capital," that have partitioning

society into super-tall skyscrapers, hermetical sealed spaces for "a tiny super-wealthy elite," and subterranean realms for the incarceration of "the urban poor" (107). Buildings like the Dubai's Burj Khalifa (2010) and London's Shard (2009) serve as iconic symbols to the narcissistic character of architecture that prioritises wealth accumulation over social and environmental preservation. The few examples of green skyscrapers, he critiques, such as Ken Yeang's Roof-Roof House (1984) and Stefano Boeri's Vertical Forest (2014), are "smokescreens" for "greenwashing" the urban skyline by incorporating natural features as design embellishments rather than programmatic solutions to address the destructive cost of skyscraper forms (129). By focusing on the neoliberalisation of skyscraper geographies, Dobraszczyk outlines a pessimistic future of tall buildings as an ever-expanding system of "vertical stacking that tends to isolate inhabitants" inside socially segregated and environmentally destructive cities (139).

Dobraszczyk reserves his discussion of the anti-establishment possibilities of multi-layered territories for the urban subterranean. Domes, bunkers, and other underground and enclosed geographies are praised as populist communities and alternative modes of habitation for the marginalised, "homeless people seeking shelter, soldiers forced to inhabit bunkers, graffiti writers and urban explorers, street children hounded into sewers" (166). Underground spaces, he argues, are replate with "an air of impregnability and security," whose sense of isolation and containment from the outside world, makes them well suited as countercultural settlements (141). Dobraszczyk cites the emergence of experimental utopias like Drop City, a collection of geodesic domes built in southern Colorado in 1965 modelled on those developed by Buckminster Fuller which housed a rural 'hippie commune' devoted to "ecological awareness and cosmic connectivity" (141). Underground bunkers and cities are often presented as the staging ground for revolution and subversion against the oppressive socioeconomic processes of the surface. In Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* (1927), the hidden worker communes beneath the city rebel against the wealthy superelites in the skyscraper utopia above; or, as sanctuaries against an environmental catastrophe like the infamous 'depthscrapers'; an inverted skyscraper design first detailed in *Everyday Science and Mechanic*s, 1931. Dobraszczyk argues imaginary representations of bunker and domed cities are not designed to restrict or contain but to foster deeper interconnections between "what is inside and what is outside" and, "what is above and what is below," forming an enhanced vertical perspective into the otherwise rigidly stratified and isolated territories of modern urban life (166).

In the final section, 'Unmade Cities,' Dobraszczyk critically surveys examples of degenerative architecture and ruined urbanisation. He interprets them as part of an avant-garde crusade for an egalitarian system of architecture in which people are given the freedom and independence to create buildings entirely on their terms. Rather than a city-scaled architecture, built according to a top-down hierarchical planning model, Dobraszczyk envisions a movement of grassroots architecture, in which individuals adopt a user-built and designed – "in the hands of the many" – approach to the imagination of urban spaces (222). This places unequivocal confidence in the proletariat for destroying capitalism and its monopoly over private property and public space. He predicts that these "nomadic" and "free-spirited" environments would liberate people from the restrictive chokehold of "architectural modernism" and chart an alternative vernacular for designing cities that more accurately reflects the identities and experiences of its citizens (200).

Dobraszczyk's libertarianism takes on a racial dimension through his bizarre fascination for 'informal settlements' such as slum dwellings, squats, refugee camps, and other forms of poverty-stricken, dispossessed, and ramshackle peri-urban developments. He argues that these "unconventional structures" represent a subversive practice of "architectural salvage" – one whose anarchic location at the edges or liminal spaces of urban conurbations subverts the "top-down elitist conception of architecture" that demands people operate within the restrictive boundaries of building codes and planning regulations to construct their own homes (196). Shanty-town communities like Dharavi, one of Asia's largest slums located in central Mumbai, and Torre David in Caracas, a fifty-two storey skyscraper home to 3000 squatters are praised for the "inventiveness, adaptability, and resourcefulness" for their integration of equitable materials like ruins, rubbish, and wastes as a form of liveable design (214). Such a gross mischaracterisation of urban poverty as urban development places aesthetic appreciation above the social divisions and economic inequality of the misfortunate people who reside in the settlements. This fetishisation of slum-dwellings is a common argument in urban studies that interprets its unorthodox architecture as a prospective source of experimentation and innovation in urban culture and form. It is ivory-tower attitudes of acceptance like this that potentially risk normalising the presence of slum-housing in urban centres and create unnecessary distractions from the need to develop genuine solutions that protect and improve the lives of slum-dwellers.

Regardless of his questionable attitude to community planning and architectural innovation, Dobraszczyk reveals there are many lessons to be learned from the imagination that could be useful in solving the biggest threats identified by the NUA. Whether this be as inspiration for adaptive design solutions, warnings against anti-progressive spaces, or as motivation for community-driven forms of urbanisation, imaginative architectures are shown to be useful instruments for challenging the ways we plan, visualise, and construct the cities we currently occupy. If Dobraszczyk had focused on the strategic possibilities of world-building rather than acting like an anti-capitalist manifesto, the book would have conveyed its message on the creative power of the imagination in a much less controversial fashion.

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BIONOTE

Thomas Kelly is a PhD student in the English department at King's College London, UK. His thesis examines the sociopolitical and ideological objectives of vertical modernism from the perspective of future cities and architectural fantasies. Other research interests include Science Fiction and urban planning, the construction and perception of skyscraper geographies, and explorations of the relationship between real and imaginary architectures.

SIDEWAYS IN TIME: CRITICAL ESSAYS ON ALTERNATE HISTORY FICTION (2019) EDITED BY CHARUL PALMER-PATEL AND GLYN MORGAN

Review by Paul March-Russell

Morgan, Glyn and C. Palmer-Patel, eds. *Sideways in Time: Critical Essays on Alternate History Fiction.* Liverpool University Press, 2019. 203 pp.

The old masters had it (sort of) right: "What might have been is an abstraction / Remaining a perpetual possibility / Only in a world of speculation." T. S. Eliot's "Burnt Norton" (1935) begins with a kind of alternate history, "Down the passage which we did not take / Towards the door we never opened," but does so in order to argue that "What might have been and what has been / Point to one end, which is always present" (189). Written under the shadow of Albert Einstein's relativistic theories of space-time, Eliot sought to redeem time and to recuperate memory in *The Four Quartets* (1944); what could not be redeemed and recovered – the what might have been – Eliot closed down upon. Nonetheless, Eliot's fragile evocation of "the rose-garden," inspired by Rudyard Kipling's poignant portal fantasy variant "They" (1904), contains within it the mystery and intrigue of the alternate history fiction.

As Stephen Baxter writes in his foreword to this most timely collection, alternate history taps into our innermost desires and can be traced as far back as the Roman author Livy. The desire to change the past delves, I think, into deeper emotional content: the child's anxiety/frustration with his or her parents – what if these were not my parents? What if I lived with somebody else's? What if my imaginary friend was real? The psychology of portal fantasies, from Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* (1865) to Neil Gaiman's *Coraline* (2002), feed upon such desires. But, in a sense, all alternate histories are portal fantasy variants – 'the door in the wall' or the 'door into summer' – in which the hinges that time rests upon spring apart, and for this moment, the door opens this way and not that. What lies within the uncanny chamber revealed, this crypt of secrets encased within the familiar? For, in a further sense, alternate histories – like portal fantasies – are cryptological: the movement sideways, 'through the looking glass,' is also a movement within. Alternate histories are our familiars, our doubles, our imaginary friends (or silent enemies), and this is perhaps why, at a visceral level, we are drawn to them.

Does the profusion of alternate histories indicate a form of monster theory? As Jeffrey Jerome Cohen writes, the monster appears at the fork in the road: "it will haunt that place that leads to many other places, that point of indecision" (4). Is there something monstrous, revelatory,

about the very idea of alternate history that Eliot wanted to contain? As the editors note in their introduction, counterfactual histories are considered apocryphal by the historical profession – they are no more than speculation, devoid of evidence, and playing fast and loose with the determinism of cause and effect. Yet, at the same time, alternate history – like the more recognisable monsters that Cohen deals with – gnaws away at the bones of official history; its contagious presence is to be shunned by historians as the gatekeepers of 'clean' and unvarnished historical practice. Counterfactuals, then, pose questions as to the taxonomy of what is and is not history; they are, potentially, a means by which we – writers, readers, historians – can police the borders between what is 'real' and 'fake' history. In particular, can we not, as with Cohen's monsters, do something with the *historicity* of their arrival, that always culturally constituted point of irruption into official history by the alternate?

To a large extent, the essays in this collection dance around that question, sometimes veering towards an exploration of historical taxonomy, sometimes towards a hauntological engagement with history, and sometimes moving towards more generic topics of the relationship between Science Fiction (SF) and alternate history. Adam Roberts, in his opening essay, collapses the two, arguing that Science Fiction is inherently a form of alternate history in that its empirically flawed extrapolations into the future constitute an ever-branching series of possible future histories. Taking into account the historical profession's disapproval of counterfactual histories, maybe this is a further reason as to why SF has been deemed at best – although significantly in this regard – as a 'para-literature'? Roberts' Borgesian, rhizomatic depiction of SF as an endless sequence of forking paths has its roots, though, in one of the great historical novels of the nineteenth century: Leo Tolstoy's representation of history, in *War and Peace* (1869), as an indeterminate and chaotic series of chance events. (It is a curious feature of Roberts' account that his counter-definition, like the more canonical description of SF as 'a literature of ideas' (derived from Honoré de Balzac's *Lost Illusions* [1843]), is indebted to nineteenth-century realism.) Roberts uses Tolstoy to offset the 'Great Man' thesis that underwrites Louis-Napoléon Geoffroy's *Napoléon Apocyrphe* (1841), arguably the first alternate historical novel. It is this binary opposition that is replicated in later essays within the collection although, in truth, the Great Man thesis is harder to deconstruct than the contributors suggest. For example, as the editors note, one of the most popular sub-categories of the alternate history is the 'Hitler Wins' story. Although writers of this sub-category place overt emphasis upon the character of Adolf Hitler, to downplay his personality is to omit one of the key socio-political determinants as to why Nazism was so more violent than its nearest cousin, Italian Fascism. Following Roberts' account, it is perhaps advisable to offer a more relativistic version of the Great Man thesis than to dismiss it *tout court*.

Subsequent chapters in the volume tend to do that. Chris Pak's analysis of Kim Stanley Robinson's *The Years of Rice and Salt* (2002), an archetypal alternate history insofar as it predicated upon a classic 'what if' question, argues that a discussion of historical determinism is built into its narrative structure. Pak is especially keen to redeem the narrative frame, set within the Buddhist conception of the bardo, from critics such as Farah Mendlesohn who argue that it has no place within an otherwise secular narrative. By contrast, Pak argues that the alternate history is a polysemous form and that the metaphysical narrative frame is but one thread within the whole text. The frame is

important, however, since it not only embeds a non-Western conception of metaphysics within the geopolitical shift of the novel but it also counterpoints the panoramic view of historical development lifted as much from the Annales School as from classical epic.

Whereas Pak emphasises a systemic approach to reading alternate history, Anna McFarlane's account of Lavie Tidhar's *Osama* (2011) foregrounds a subjective response based upon trauma and affect. Tidhar's private eye protagonist, who may have fabricated not only his identity but also his entire society as a traumatised response to the events of 9/11, remains permanently estranged from the movement of history. He can witness, but he has no understanding of what he is witnessing, so that his narrative teeters upon a chasm between what is known and what is felt. Within this breach, this *différance* between meaning and non-meaning, looms the monstrous truth of 9/11 that defies all comprehension. The muteness of alternate history, its inability to address 'real' history, here speaks volumes to the walled zone that is 9/11.

In-between these chapters occurs a pairing that can, more or less, be said to offer a hauntological reading of history. Jonathan Rayner's wide-ranging account, which takes into consideration alternate history but also other science-fictional narratives, explores the inability of Japan to get beyond its idealisation of military heroism during World War Two. Using retellings of the real-life kamikaze mission of the battleship, *Yamato*, as his hook, Rayner addresses the historicity of these media representations. However implausible their stories are, they speak to a deep unease within contemporary Japanese culture about how to remember their wartime legacy and the country's current global position following the collapse of its economy in the late 1990s. If the *Yamato* recurs as a spectre in Rayner's chapter, Brian Baker makes this spectral reading explicit in his response to Ian Sales' rewritings of the NASA space programme. Baker sets the initial optimism associated with the Space Age in dialectical tension with Mark Fisher and Simon Reynolds' hauntological reading of nostalgia as a retroactive fixation with what was and what might have been. Sales' quartet of alternate histories first exposes the hypermasculine sexual politics of the NASA space mission, then celebrates its optimism by reimagining the astronaut pioneers as female, before wondering what would have happened if Science Fiction itself had remained a feminine-coded literature: planetary romance. Baker argues that the increasingly self-reflexive strategies of the quartet move beyond the nostalgia diagnosed by Fisher and Reynolds to fixate instead upon the sublime pathos of the space programme.

The second half of the collection picks up on Baker and McFarlane's contributions to explore more experimental usages of the alternate history. Molly Cobb's account of Alfred Bester's forays into the genre offers the total antithesis to the Great Man view of history, in which Bester's time travellers are unable to affect history beyond their own timeline. The alternate histories which are potentially created, for example in "The Men Who Murdered Mohammed" (1958), are instantaneously nullified elsewhere in every other timeline. Cobb effectively demonstrates that Bester's negation of the alternate history as a genre complements not only his characteristic play with SF tropes but also the Cold War context in which the individual appeared to be dwarfed by impersonal and abstract geopolitical forces.

The chapters by Derek J. Thiess and Chloé Germaine Buckley explore the alternate history as apocrypha. Thiess' exploration of Juan Miguel Aguilera's hybrid novel, *La locura de Dios* (1998), argues that the imbrication of alternate history with, amongst other tropes, a lost world narrative and a Lovecraftian cosmic horror merges a materialistic reading of history with a religious explanation. Whereas *The Years of Rice and Salt* uses a metaphysical frame as part of its polysemy, Thiess argues that Aguilera collapses the two but does so in order to emphasise that apocryphal histories are always a matter of selection and exclusion. Both Pak and Thiess gesture towards a postcolonial reading of the alternate history, in which non-Western philosophies are foregrounded as part of the text's apocrypha, although neither ultimately engage with postcolonial theory as such. Germaine Buckley meanwhile focuses on the en-Weirding of the Sherlock Holmes stories in the 2003 short story anthology, *Shadows over Baker Street*. As Buckley acknowledges, only Neil Gaiman's contribution, "A Study in Emerald," is a fully-fledged alternate history; the other stories revolve around the encounter between Holmesian empiricism and the uncategorisable (although still materialistic) entities of the Cthulhu Mythos. Germaine Buckley does a fine job in elucidating these fictions through the now familiar rhetoric of speculative realism but, other than Gaiman's story, none of them has much connection with the alternate history as understood in the editors' introduction, being more like exercises in metafiction. Furthermore, they also seem to rely upon a caricature of Holmes – his louche Bohemianism has some affinity with popular representations of the male decadent; an association that M. P. Shiel would make more explicit with his Count Zaleski stories – whilst none address the gender politics that is already present in the original tales. In particular, there is already an uncategorisable and thoroughly materialistic entity in Holmes's world: namely, Irene Adler.

The final chapters, by Andrew M. Butler and Karen Hellekson (perhaps the leading critic on alternate histories), return to slightly more familiar territory. Butler adapts Brian Aldiss' accusation of the 'cosy catastrophe,' to describe John Wyndham's disaster stories, to a consideration of Wyndham's 'uchronias' (a utopian version of the alternate history), all of which turn upon thwarted love. Focusing in particular upon "Random Quest" (1962) and its film adaptation as *Quest for Love* (1971), Butler argues that 'cosy' is the right epithet for these tales. I think that is true but, equally, why would it not be since these are stories of love regained? Although going beyond the purview of the chapter, another approach might be to read the uchronias alongside the disaster fiction – let alone Wyndham's female utopia, "Consider Her Ways" (1960) – so as to gain a more rounded view of this enigmatic writer. Hellekson, by contrast, offers a taxonomy of televisual alternate histories, drawing upon examples from eight series, ranging from the BBC's *An Englishman's Home* (1978) to Amazon's adaptation of *The Man in the High Castle* (2015-2019). As Hellekson argues, the contingencies displayed in each of these narratives are ultimately there to encourage the agency of its central characters: the moral that individuals can make a difference. The contrast with the protagonists in *Osama*, *La locura de Dios* and Bester's short fiction is palpable, begging a comparative analysis between television and print fiction, and in particular the very different corporate ownerships that underwrite their productions.

The volume closes with a brief resumé by the editors that seals the impression of this being a tightly packaged collection, whilst at the same time inviting further study of the genre. Taken as a whole, it is a fine addition to Liverpool University Press' own, ever-branching series of critical reflections upon SF. Despite its preoccupation with genre, it can also be enjoyed by readers for whom SF is not their primary interest. I very much hope it finds as large a readership as possible.

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BIONOTE

Paul March-Russell is Lecturer in Comparative Literature at the University of Kent, UK. He edits *Foundation: The International Review of Science Fiction* and is commissioning editor for *SF Storyworlds* (Gylphi Press).

VIDEOGAMES AND HORROR: FROM AMNESIA TO ZOMBIES, RUN! (2019) BY DAWN STOBBART

Review by Matt Coward-Gibbs

Stobbart, Dawn. *Videogames and Horror: From Amnesia to Zombies, Run!* University of Wales Press, 2019. 304 pp.

I feel the need to preface this review with a warning. This warning is not about the book itself, which I enjoyed, but about the approach of the reviewer. As an interdisciplinary scholar that primarily falls within the discipline of Sociology this text left me with a considerable number of unanswered questions. Though, I must also note, it was not Dawn Stobbart's purpose to address these questions. Although unintended, this text has invigorated a call for closer work between the humanities and social sciences in the study of videogames, chiming with the reflexive approach which Paolo Ruffino called for in his monograph *Future Gaming* (2018).

I feel it is important to begin with the final chapter of this text. Stobbart draws on a rich body of research when she contends in the concluding paragraph of her monograph that "death is the cornerstone of videogaming, used as a method of teaching a player how to complete a game successfully" (186). This is a factor which is especially apparent when considering the majority of mainstream titles, and genres, such as First Person Shooters, roleplaying games, and action-adventure titles where death is the main roadblock to advancing the narrative and in-game progression. As Stobbart notes, "it also provides a punishment for the player's failure to successfully navigate a game" (186). Stobbart draws on her wealth of work and play experiences to argue that although the death of a player character may be trivial, the death of another can be shocking, or horrific, especially in cases wherein the game has encouraged relationships to have been built between the players and non-player characters (NPCs). Death within videogames is an expected setback, as the likes of Christopher Paul (2018) have drawn attention to, however there are also deep capitalistic and meritocratic underpinnings to be unpicked here. The final sentence that Stobbart parts with, I find, acts as a call for action and excites me: "it is death, the threat of death and the fear of death that heightens the player's responses to these questions" (187). However, this leads me to question the emphasis that Stobbart places on deep story-play, the process by which the game's narrative is central to the experience of play, and the ways in which players actively "consider the ethical and/or moral weight of these actions" (187). Jack Denham and Matthew Spokes (2019, 2020; Spokes and Denham, 2019; Spokes, 2018) have begun a series of work that engages with such questions and, which I feel, will begin to answer some of the interesting questions and considerations posed by this volume. I say this not to underplay the place of the current volume, but to emphasise the greater need for critical cross-disciplinary work.

Let us return then to the beginning. In the introduction to this monograph Stobbart sets up two major points of interaction. The first between horror and terror; the second between immersion and interactivity (3-9). In adopting a narratological framing, Stobbart works with the contention that immersion is, in essence, a social force allowing for "the player to engage with themes that might be considered taboo […] all from the physical safe vantage point of interacting with a fictional situation on screen" (4). This absorption in activity is framed by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's (2002) concept of flow, albeit briefly. There is some interesting congruence that could have been drawn out more fully here between the interfacing between notions of flow, liminality, and the omnipresent notion of the *magic circle* (see: Huizinga, 1949; Salen and Zimmerman, 2003). Of interest was Stobbart's dissection of the sub-genre of Survival Horror which in this context is very much framed traditionally, *à la Resident Evil* (1996). This, for me, was a perfect opportunity to return to a consideration of flow, in which the balance between skill required to progress and difficulty of play need to be carefully managed (28). Moreover, especially with more recent releases in the genre, such as *7 Days to Die* (2013), we see cases in which people actively find humour and enjoyment in the act of surviving, rather than it acting as a fear of horror (such as the YouTube videos of Games4Kickz). There is also a consideration here of the way in which individuals experience horror and terror. Modding culture, for example, in the *Fallout* franchise which, as Stobbart attests, "is not generally considered to be a horror game, but […] does contain many elements that are characteristic of the horror genre" (29). In cases such as these we see how videogames can be modified by player communities in order to instil more horror within them, one that links to notions of boundary transgression (the topic of Chapter Three) in which the border that exists between the developer and player is blurred. The playing of a modded game itself enacts a Freudian aspect of play in which the game becomes *unheimlich*, no longer entirely familiar to the player but close enough for the player to have a connection to it. These are questions which fall outside of the scope of the volume in question. However, it does open up avenues for further consideration.

The detailed consideration of *Spec Ops: The Line* (2012), an aspect of Chapter Three, offers a deep insight into both the game and the intricate thought processes at play around transgression and intertextuality. In considering the way in which *Spec Ops* allows for multiple endings, primarily based on actions during play, Stobbart draws on "horror that is based in real life" and highlights how the grievous actions explored, documented, or even partaken during the course of play are part of wider societal narratives of war crimes and the dehumanising of others (71). What Stobbart touches on is also the way in which increased attention to writing leads to greater levels of empathy being experienced by players that consequently impacts the seriousness of issues being tackled by mainstream videogames. For example, *Detroit: Become Human* (2018) plays with ideas around racial segregation co-opting the divide between human and non-human, while questions concerning graphical realism and its impact on younger players is part of a larger ongoing discussion about violence and videogames. The query Stobbart poses around the legitimacy of "winning" is of interest here, drawing on the wider ethical problem of engaging with difficult, or possibly traumatic, play. Writing that: "ultimately, the game poses the player a single conundrum: whether the only way to win *Spec Ops: The Line* is not to play, to turn off the game and refuse to interact with Walker and his team" (71). However, this does lead me to question the way in which individuals relate to the

games that they play. Here, I find a point of contention as I would argue that it is very unlikely that an individual may look to "win" via not playing the title itself; primarily due to the cost associated with games (at least at initial release) and the prestige associated with their completion (in the form of virtual achievements). Chiming with my initial contention around further interfacing between sub-disciplines of videogame studies, further evidence is required of the way in which people play, how they play, and why they choose to play such games. We live, after all, in platinum/completionist culture in gaming, in which rewards and badges are presented to gamers for their active engagement and attention paid to the games which they play. The rubric of "winning" via not playing sits in deep contention with the meritocratic nature of the sociocultural framing of mainstream digital gaming cultures where gaming skill becomes a form of capital and, as such, a valuable social commodity.

In the remainder of the volume, Stobbart devotes chapters to discussing storytelling in game play (Chapter Four). Of particular interest within this chapter is the way Stobbart operationalised ideas around how designed spaces are used within videogames to foster storytelling. Although Stobbart adopts Espen Aarseth's ideas around spatiality (the way space can impact actions), I wonder if it may have been more productive to speak to the mobility turn. I suggest this for a few reasons. Firstly, spatiality is purposeful and, for the most part, speaks to landscapes which are built by designers, which players are encouraged to engage with by way of missions, quests, or collectables in game and encourages such exploration. As Stobbart considers, "in environmental storytelling, narrative is embedded within the design and organization of the landscape and is constructed through the player's interaction with the landscape" (101). To consider this as a mobility, however, would allow for the recentring of the play and how play is performed. I recognise that these ideas about the performance of mobility are at their most pronounced when considering partial or fully open world games and again this speaks to the multiple ways of considering how games are engaged with. Some of these ideas are, however, considered later in the chapter in the discussion of choice (102). There is, one might argue, a pleasure associated with choice that is integral to conceiving how play is engaged with.

A discussion of identity and perspective forms the basis of Chapter Five where Stobbart considers narrative work as a form of physical participation. In particular, the consideration of the way in which videogames are responded to more actively than the more passive engagement of such other media forms as television. However, this suggests a homogenisation of player experiences, as if to say that all engage and feel the same emotional responses to horror and the horrific. These ideas around "narrative agency" lead to the development of relationships between player and their avatar or at times NPCs (116); even while such recent titles as *The Last of Us: Part 2* (2020) have further drawn into question and complicated questions about the way in which relationships in videogames are positioned.

The penultimate chapter of the volume, Chapter Six, explores questions around monstrosity and the monstrous in which Stobbart contends that "the destruction of a monster was needed for the completion of a game" (141). I did question here if destruction is the correct term to operationalise or whether it could be considered more as a form of permeant escape? Players, as Stobbart rightly

contends, "occupy an ambiguous space regarding catharsis," primarily based around the ambiguous way in which players individually respond (119). Yet, it is through these cathartic practices that horror can be operationalised and used to its fullest potential; the horror can be based in real life, but so to can the monsters (143).

In sum, Stobbart's volume works tirelessly to explore videogames and horror but meets both on their own terms, considering the nuances and contradictions between them. As Stobbart notes in her epilogue, "I chose to focus on games I could play myself […] and all the games I refer to have been subject to a primary playing experience" (189). One might consider this being an area to critique by depending only on the tastes and preferences of the author, which may lead to a limited or warped sample. However, I personally find this approach to be thoughtful and shows the attention paid by the author's deep exploration, presents these titles as rich texts across the volume. This is a fascinating and thought-provoking monograph which, as I noted at the beginning of this review, has left me with more questions; this is, however, far from a bad thing.

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BIONOTE

Matt Coward-Gibbs is an Associate Lecturer in the Department of Sociology at the University of York, UK, and part-time Lecturer in Sociology at York St John University, UK. His research considered the nexuses of death and dying; culture and community; pleasure and leisure; and deviance and transgression. Matt's ongoing PhD project presents a sociologically grounded ethnography of analog play in the UK. He is the editor of *Death, Culture and Leisure: Playing Dead* (Emerald, 2020), a steering group member of DaCNet (University of York) and the reviews editor of *Mortality* (Taylor & Francis).

https://linktr.ee/mattcowardgibbs

@MattCowardGibbs

STANISLAW LEM: PHILOSOPHER OF THE FUTURE (2019) BY PETER SWIRSKI

Review by Joe Howsin

Swirski, Peter. Stanislaw Lem: Philosopher of the Future. Liverpool University Press, 2015. 203 pp.

Summarising the life and career of an author whose published work amounts to more than forty books, which range from novels to non-fiction monographs on cybernetics and have been translated into over forty languages, seems a daunting task. Furthermore, in attempting to approach this author's texts using their own esoteric interests in the philosophy of science as a framework, Peter Swirski's *Stanislaw Lem: Philosopher of the Future* (2015) is almost as ambitious as Kris Kelvin's attempt to communicate with an extra-terrestrial psychic ocean in *Solaris* (1961). It is to Swirski's credit, then, that *Philosopher of the Future* avoids being as inscrutable as Lem's theoretical aliens, resulting in an enjoyable and informative work which sheds new light on one of Science Fiction's most intriguing figures.

Swirski approaches Lem's oeuvre from three avenues. In part one, "Biography," Swirski provides the reader with a biographical overview of Lem's life and work, familiarising English-speaking audiences with his untranslated early novels, while simultaneously contextualising them within the rest of the author's canon. In part two, Swirski analyses such famous Lem works as *The Invincible* (1964), along with lesser-known works such as the surreal *Memoirs Found in a Bathtub* (1961), in a series of essays which straddle, to use Lem's phrase, "the borderline of [the] philosophy of science and literature" (1). With these essays Swirski embarks on an interdisciplinary inquiry which moves away from traditional literary critique of theme, character, image, and form, in favour of approaching Lem's novels as scientific thought experiments. Swirski gives much the same treatment to Lem's final novel, *Fiasco* (1986), as well as the author's collection of essays, *The Blink of an Eye* (2000), in part three, "Coda"; by critiquing these final texts Swirski provides a retrospective on Lem's life and work, detailing the author's most significant and prescient themes.

The information contained within "Biography" is interesting in and of itself: as a young man Lem's Jewish background forced him into hiding during the Nazi occupation of Poland, but despite the considerable risk, he smuggled supplies (including explosives, radios, and bayonets) to the resistance under the cover of false identities. Furthermore, by detailing Lem's childhood and his later family life, Swirski provides a uniquely humanising look into his lived experiences which is often overlooked by other critics of the author's work. Though at times Swirski's listing of Lem's achievements can be dizzying, this emotive human thread contextualises and sets the tone for the analysis to come.

The bibliographical run-down of Lem's works found in "The Kaleidoscope of Books" is invaluable to any burgeoning Lem fan, as it gives a brief contextual overview of each novel and short story collection. But this section is equally beneficial to established readers of Lem, as Swirski sheds light on themes which pervade the author's entire body of work; these include the impossibility of human/non-human communication, ethical quandaries surrounding the evolution of technology, and looming Cold War-educed violence (brilliantly described by Swirski as "the transnational Thanatos syndrome" (49)). Swirski further establishes a key theme of *Philosopher of the Future* by reproducing Lem's thoughts on literary criticism itself, which the author bemoaned had placed "deconstruction and other anti-historical and anti-cognitive trends [as] the holy writ," a trend which Lem dubbed "the gospel according to Derrida" (43).

This deriding of Derrida sets the stage for the critical and interpretive challenge which Swirski sets himself: to read Lem's novels on the author's own terms. This task is more difficult than it may sound at first, as the pedestal Lem erects for his novels to perch upon (and subsequently, the quality of criticism he expects from literary theorists) is high. *Philosopher of the Future* acts as Swirski's response to Lem's preference for his books to be taken as "interdisciplinary inquiries from the borderline of philosophy of science and literature" rather than get "bogged down" in the fictionality of the works (1). Put simply, Lem "saw his novels as narrative models of our civilization" and deplored the ways in which literary theorists "dissect his style rather than his arguments" (1, 3). Lem viewed traditional literary criticism as "[l]imited by and large to thematic and structural schemata" (2). Picking up this "heuristic gauntlet thrown […] by a writer who preferred to be called the philosopher of the future," Swirski's essays employ non-traditional modes of analysis to dissect the core ideas at the heart of the texts (2). For example, in "Game, Set, Lem" Swirski approaches Lem's work from the perspective of a non-literary field (in this case, game theory) whilst largely avoiding traditionally literary investigations into character, theme, and narrative structure. In this way, Swirski analyses Lem's text as though he were gauging the utility of a very real and very literal development in technology, rather than interpreting a work of fiction from an abstract or allegorical standpoint.

"Game, Set, Lem" manages to succinctly explain the complexities of game theory in such a way that a lay reader may gain a working understanding of its methods. Swirski then proceeds to use this model to analyse the events and irrational complexities of the world of the fifth pentagon featured in Lem's *Memoirs Found in a Bathtub*. With this methodology, Swirski manages to explain how seemingly absurd decisions – like leaving your agents ignorant to the details of their own missions – can have a bizarre but comprehendible logic to them: "The power of game theory," he argues, "lies in its power to analyse the strategic basis of such paradoxes of rationality which, despite all appearances of logic or madness, can be tactically perfectly sound" (81). This essay stands out as being especially valuable to the study of absurdist narratives, Lem's fiction, and wider Science Fiction criticism, as it constitutes a compelling case for using unorthodox frameworks, like game theory, in the analysis of literature.

Another standout piece is Swirski's second essay, "Betrization Is the Worst Solution… Except for All Others." This essay analyses in depth the social and moral implications of the mandatory surgical procedure of Betrization, the key technological conceit within *Return from the Stars* (1961), which inhibits a person's capacity to enact or even conceive of violent acts. In Lem's novel this procedure enables the creation of a world without war, murder, or violence of any kind. The procedure is basically the Ludovico technique from Anthony Burgess' *A Clockwork Orange* (1962) on a global scale and it is impressive how Swirski manages to follow and challenge the moral implications of such a procedure. Swirski's thought-experiment approach – treating Betrization as though it were a viable option for humanity, lurking just around the technological corner – delves into the topic with depth and nuance, resulting in a fascinating reading of the text while also engaging with Science Fiction's fertile capacity for social commentary to its fullest extent. The essay echoes Mark Bould's sentiment, in *Routledge Film Guidebooks: Science Fiction* (2012), that "the tendency to detach science from the social world" will always inevitably come up against "the impossibility of ever doing so" (20). The importance of contextual information comes to the fore here, emphasising the significance of Swirski's earlier biographical section. Prior knowledge of the fact that Lem saw first-hand "the 1956 massacre of the Hungarian insurgents by their Soviet 'allies' with the United States and *its* allies turning a blind eye" makes clear to the reader why Lem would be concerned with "not *whether* but *where* to construct the dam to protect humanity from a deluge of self-inflicted war, murder, and death" (31, 101, both original emphasis). With this in mind, as well as knowing that Lem suffered the pain of "having been duped […] by the communist promise of a better future," it comes as little surprise that Lem would "never […] allow himself to dream of altruism and pacifism without slapping on humanity some kind of technological muzzle" (31, 30-31).

Despite the success of these essays, the criteria set by Lem continues to raise a fundamental question: is Lem asking of literary criticism something it simply is not meant for? Is it justifiable to criticise the literary sphere for discussing "postmodern absurdity rather than game-theoretic rationality" when, arguably, its evolution has been geared towards analysis of the former, not the latter? (3). Bould makes the astute observation that "different people and communities have different investments in sf […] For some, science is more or less irrelevant, but for others this relationship is profoundly debased, in need of discipline and repair" (6). Both Lem and Swirski seem to be firmly in the latter camp. However, Bould makes a compelling argument for the stance that both allegorical and grounded Science Fiction works have their own merits, as they fulfil slightly different (but equally valid) roles. In the same vein, Swirski's new science-centred approach has the potential to stand side by side with more literary focused modes of analysis in order to glean a more complete picture of the multi-faceted genre of Science Fiction.

The last section of *Philosopher of the Future*, the two-part "Coda," continues many of the themes brought up in the essay on Betrization, such as Lem's pessimism and his love of technological, futuristic concepts which act as thinly-veiled, critical mirrors aimed at both western capitalism and the Soviet Union. The only drawback to this section comes when Swirski readily acknowledges the conspicuous lack of women in Lem's novels but neglects to expand upon or critique this deficit. Swirski points out that the unisex crew featured in Lem's final novel, *Fiasco,*

damages the same "psychosocial realism" which Lem found so important; "it seems less than plausible to have a representative of the Vatican instead of a female scientist on board" (174). However, rather than interrogating what this omission means for Lem's fiction and Science Fiction more broadly, Swirski reproduces Lem's defence "that the introduction of female characters in his plots would necessitate a considerable increase in narrative complexity that could only be achieved at the expense of the cognitive issues always at the forefront of his fiction" (133). It seems a shame that, in a book which otherwise proves to be insightful in its in-depth analysis of the author's work, a clear avenue for further discussion is foreclosed. This missed opportunity has been seized on by other Lem critics such as Jo Alyson Parker, to great success. Parker's essay, "Gendering the Robot: Stanislaw Lem's "The Mask"," for example, acknowledges that "Lem's fiction is saturated with the masculine, appearing almost as a parodic extension of the traditional SF realm as male" (179). However, Parker then proceeds to criticise Lem on this point, rather than merely state it as Swirski does, identifying that "[w]hen a female does appear, 'she' turns out to be that which is not. Rheya, the most fully realized feminine character, is not a woman but a simulacrum of one" (179). But by embracing this deficiency within of Lem's writing Parker, in turn, is able to glean the argument that "the very artificiality of the woman […] enables Lem to examine the issue of gender programming" (179). This essay demonstrates that by embracing detrimental and controversial aspects of an author one can update their work and preserve their continued relevance with contemporary issues. This is indicative of an inherent limitation in following Lem's wishes regarding his own fiction to the letter, as the very exclusion of women in his novels suggests this issue is a blind spot for him. Therefore, it should be up to Swirski not only to follow Lem's directive but to expand upon it, thereby fulfilling the author's wishes in a more complete way than he could have foreseen.

Despite these shortcomings, Peter Swirski's *Stanislaw Lem: Philosopher of the Future* is perhaps the greatest single resource available for newcomers to Lem's fiction looking for an introduction to the author's key texts and themes. Swirski approaches Lem's fiction with accuracy, originality, and nuance, providing an inquisitive blueprint for further explorations into Lem's work and into wider Science Fiction from a finely tuned, more practically minded, perspective.

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BIONOTE

Joe Howsin graduated from Manchester Metropolitan University with an MA in Gothic and trauma fiction. Their writing has been published in *The Dark Arts Journal*, *NotDeer Magazine*, *Horrified Magazine* and has been shortlisted in The London Independent Short Story Prize. They also have upcoming work in *Dreich*.

THE DARK FANTASTIC: RACE AND THE IMAGINATION FROM HARRY POTTER TO THE HUNGER GAMES (2019) BY EBONY ELIZABETH THOMAS

Review by Alison Baker

Thomas, Ebony Elizabeth. *The Dark Fantastic: Race and the Imagination from Harry Potter to The Hunger Games.* New York University Press, 2019. 240 pp.

In the introduction to this timely and beautifully written book, "The Dark Fantastic: Race and the Imagination Gap," Thomas describes her life as a young Black girl, being directed away from Fantasy fiction and the world of magic by her mother and the society she grew up in: "In order to survive, I had to face reality" (1).[1] She references Rudine Sims Bishop's "Reflections on the development of African American Children's Literature" (2012) and Bishop's coining of the phrase "mirrors, windows and sliding glass doors" to describe the importance of cultural diversity in children's literature (59). Bishop's phrase refers to the way that books can act as mirrors to reflect the reader's experiences back to them; windows to watch characters having different experiences; as well as sliding glass doors to step through and have experiences along with characters. The lack of diversity in children's books also results in white children not experiencing the lives of children of colour through literature. Bishop demonstrates that African American children rarely experience seeing themselves in stories; Thomas builds on this idea by discussing the experience of watching television and films and reading popular children's and Young Adult (YA) novels as a Black American woman; moving from the dark fantastic (that is, a fantastic that uses the body of the Black (anti)- heroine) as a foil for the white heroine, to working towards a theory of the Black Fantastic. This is achieved through demonstrating how marginalised people can engage with, critique and "re-story" texts through social media and fan fiction, and how this can be emancipatory for marginalised readers and viewers (158). Thomas's book is timely, and necessary, as nearly twenty years after Bishop made that argument, the Black Lives Matters movement is continuing to protest attacks on the human rights of People of Colour.

A significant innovation that Thomas brings to scholarship of Children's and YA Fantasy fiction is the intersectional and interdisciplinary nature of the development of her theory of the dark fantastic. As outlined in the introduction, Thomas uses an autoethnography of her own development of a reader of Fantasy, her consumption of Children and YA Fantasy novels, film, and television both as a child and as a teacher of young adults, her writing of fan fiction and her experiences in social media fan communities, alongside critical race theory and reader response theory. This is significant, as the consideration of social media critique as reader response ethnography (as outlined in Radway's *Reading the Romance* (1984)) allows for otherwise marginalised voices to be foregrounded, as

Radway's suburban American housewives were in her ground-breaking interdisciplinary research, applying ethnography and reader response criticism to genre fiction.

In the first chapter of the book, "Toward a theory of the Dark Fantastic," Thomas summarises the theories of the Fantastic outlined by Brian Attebery and Farah Mendlesohn, through which she traces the thread of Tzvetan Todorov, contextualising her argument for a theory of the dark fantastic. Thomas' genre theory focus emphasises that, in order for Fantasy fiction to be successful, the reader must be willing and able to believe it. Thomas states that in the Anglo-American Fantasy tradition, the Dark Other is positioned as the "obstacle to be overcome" (23), and Fantasy readers of colour, having grown up in the Anglo-American Fantasy tradition, will receive the message that they, as the Dark Others, are the "villains… the horde…. the enemies… *We are the monsters"* (23, original emphasis). Thomas's argument echoes Ika Willis's (2009) that, 'resistant' reading has long been a necessity for marginalised readers, so that those readers can find their 'mirrors' in the text. Willis identifies fan fiction and transformative works as a locus of resistance for queer readers, focusing on minor characters, race- or gender-flipping characters. The monster is often the "Dark Other" in Fantasy fiction, whether it is the dark-haired but white anti-heroine or foil to the blonde heroine, such as Faith in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003), or evil characters described in racialised terms, such as J. R. R. Tolkien's orcs. Thomas's argument for considering fan fiction and the process of re-storying as decolonialising Fantasy fiction for children and young adults. Having established her theory, Thomas applies it to characters from literature and media.

The second chapter, "Lamentations of a Mockingjay" continues to address the way that Black readers and viewers, particularly young Black women, get to see their 'mirrors' in fiction. Thomas discusses the racist response to the casting of actress of colour Amandla Stenberg as Rue in the 2012 film adaptation of Suzanne Collins' *The Hunger Games* trilogy (2008-2010). Some white fans of the novels were unable to see a Black child as innocent, or even child-like, echoing Epstein, Blake, and González's (2017) research into the "adultification" of Black girls; that is, that institutions routinely assume that Black girls are less vulnerable, less in need of protection and nurturing, and know more about adult topics and sex than white girls of the same age. Thomas quotes from journalist Dodai Stewart's 2012 article on feminist blog *Jezebel* which collected tweets from some *Hunger Games* readers, expressing disappointment and anger that Rue is being played by a Black actor:

> Kk call me racist but when I found out that rue was black her death wasn't as sad #ihatemyself (Thomas 60)

This tweet demonstrates that even though Suzanne Collins describes Rue as having "bright, dark eyes" and "satiny brown skin", white readers cannot imagine an innocent girl as Black (Collins, *Hunger Games* 120); and that Hollywood representations of post-apocalyptic United States tend to be largely white and English speaking, as Sarah Hannah Gómez discusses in a *Lee and Low* blog. Thomas discusses the novels and the films and whiteness as innocence. Rue (who is named after the herb with a yellow flower) is linked by both physical stature and by her floral name to Katniss'

blonde, blue-eyed sister. The chapter goes on to discuss the meaning of race and colour in Science Fiction and Fantasy (SF/F): Blackness as evil, dark, and inhuman; whiteness as innocent, light, and human; themes from the fairy tale and mythic origins of Western Fantasy. However, the central image of this chapter, the death of a young Black girl at the hands of young white people killing each other for public entertainment, is an important one in the era of Black Lives Matter protests against extrajudicial violence upon Black bodies. Thomas addressing the narrative purpose of Rue's death, to create reader sympathy for Katniss and to heighten the inhumanity of the Capitol thereby dehumanising Rue, would be useful for scholars.

"A Queen out of time," the third chapter, discusses Gwen from the BBC television drama *Merlin* (2008-2012). Gwen, the future Queen Guinevere played by Angel Coulby, is a young woman of colour, working as a servant in King Uther Pendragon's court at the beginning of the show. David Tollerton in a 2015 paper discussed Merlin as Arthurian legend for early twenty-first century Britain. He argues that the country is, telling itself the story of a tolerant, multicultural (pre-Brexit) country; the BBC here acting as the sliding glass door of Bishop's analogy, allowing Britain to step through the door into the imaginary multicultural past, a past which David Olugosa among others has described. Thomas outlines the arc of Gwen from servant girl to powerful queen who unites and leads her country and deconstructs the reader/viewer questions of authenticity and historical accuracy in a Fantasy programme, where magic, witchcraft, and a dungeon-dwelling dragon are not questioned. Thomas' critique is not aimed at *Merlin* itself, but rather demonstrates how shallow the veneer of British pride in itself as a modern, culturally diverse country really was before the Brexit campaign.

Bonnie Bennett from *The Vampire Diaries* is the subject of the fourth chapter. *The Vampire Diaries* (2009-2017), adapted from the series of novels by L. J. Smith (1991-2014). The character of Bonnie Bennett is adapted from Bonnie McCullough, a red haired, green eyed witch of Irish descent. Thomas notes that, in the adaptation and casting actress of colour Kat Graham as Bonnie, the character loses agency and interiority. She serves as a foil for the (white) protagonist Elena, much as Rue does in *The Hunger Games;* the difference being that Rue did not have interiority in the source material. Thomas uses Bonnie as an example to explore the archetype of the Black Other which she introduces in Chapter 1: Spectacle, Hesitation, Violence, Haunting and Emancipation, a taxonomy that I expect to stand along with Farah Mendlesohn's *Rhetorics of Fantasy* (2008) and John Clute's Lexicon of Horror in *The Darkening Garden* (2006), as a taxonomy of the dark fantastic. Via the application of these terms to the character of Bonnie, Thomas comprehensively unpacks this taxonomy. Unlike Mendelsohn, Thomas does not suggest that it is a tool for furthering analysis. It will be interesting to see other scholars applying it to other dark fantastic texts, whether books or visual media.

The fifth chapter, "Hermione is Black," focuses on fan reception, including fan fiction. In contrast to the second chapter, which discusses fan response to the casting of a Black actress as Rue, Thomas discusses the transformative power of fan fiction to reclaim marginalised characters, giving them the interiority and agency that Bonnie Bennet and Rue lacked in their original forms. Thomas was a fan fiction author but notes that she wrote Angelina Johnson (Black British Hogwarts pupil)

fan fic, rather than writing a Black Hermione. Thomas explains this choice as her desire to deepen the depiction of race and ethnicity within worldbuilding; why, for example, would Angelina have a surname? Would African witches and wizards have been enslaved? She used African Diaspora folklore and mythology to create a narrative explaining the backstory of Angelina and the arrival of Black witches and wizards in Western Europe. The discussion of transformative works is timely, given that An Archive of Our Own won a Hugo award at the Dublin WorldCon, Summer 2019. In a 2016 article written with Amy Stornaiuolo, Thomas uses Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's 2009 TED talk as a starting point to discuss power and story: who gets to be the focus of stories, who gets to tell stories, and whose storying traditions is privileged. Through the process of "re-storying," the technique seen in *Merlin* or Susan Cooper's work, marginalised readers and consumers of visual media can write themselves into the narrative, by foregrounding background characters or by race or gender-flipping them. Thus, Thomas foregrounding Angelina gives her interiority and agency, and the stage play *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child* (2016) casting a Black actress to play Hermione gives validity to the race-flipped Hermione of online Black fandom. Thomas provides other examples of re-storying in a variety of modes: across time and space, changing locations of stories; across modes, through poetry, drama, fan art or digital storytelling; collaborating on retellings, or re-storying identities: race- or gender-flipping, or changing another aspect of identity such as sexuality. This way, Thomas argues, marginalised people can write themselves into narratives. The effect of these re-storyings are both emancipatory for their producers, but also seem to be having an effect on cultural professionals: social media gives fans access to professionals in a way that was never possible in the past.

As universities in many parts of the world seek to decolonialise their curricula, a work directly addressing race and ethnicity in literature and media is vital. Within SF/F fandom, this book powerfully addresses the imagination gap in white writers' use of Black characters as props to demonstrate aspects of white protagonists' character development, often through violence wrecked upon Black bodies. This book should be in the library of any university teaching Children's literature or Fantasy literature, and, I would hope, on the reading list of any courses in those two areas.

NOTES

1. Note that Thomas' preference throughout is to capitalise 'Black' and we have retained this formatting accordingly.

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BIONOTE

Alison Baker is a Senior Lecturer in Early Childhood Studies at University of East London (UK). Her research interests include cultural representation and picture books, and she is completing a PhD on White Working-Class Children and Children's Fantasy Fiction. She has published on social class in Harry Potter, girls' horror comics, and stepparents in Diana Wynne Jones' books.

J. R. R. TOLKIEN: A GUIDE FOR THE PERPLEXED (2019) BY TOBY WIDDICOMBE

Review by Mariana Rios Maldonado

Widdicombe, Toby. *J.R.R. Tolkien: A Guide for the Perplexed*. Bloomsbury Academic, 2019. 194 pp.

Toby Widdicombe's *J.R.R. Tolkien: A Guide for the Perplexed* (2019) is framed by its author as an attempt to answer "the particular questions puzzled or curious readers will likely have" when encountering the complexity of Tolkien's oeuvre (4). Coincidentally, albeit from a different perspective, the choice of the word "perplexed" for the title of Widdicombe's book is a fitting one, insofar this text is also bound to leave any Tolkien scholar perplexed by the end of its reading. Throughout six chapters, an afterword, and three appendixes, Widdicombe seeks to explore the interconnectedness between the different pieces of Tolkien's legendarium and the rest of his literary and academic endeavours, the relationship between the texts published by Tolkien and those published after his death, as well as the themes present in the author's works.

The first chapter of the *Guide* surveys Tolkien's literary production through the lens of his life, thus seeking to close what Widdicombe considers an important gap between the author and his texts. Widdicombe openly criticises the work of Tolkien biographers Humphrey Carpenter and Michael White for its reductive description of Tolkien as an Oxford don who led an "ordinary or uninteresting or dull" life (6). Widdicombe then proceeds to counter their depiction of Tolkien by discussing the important elements and outstanding episodes of the author's life – his orphandom, his Catholic faith, his experiences in both World Wars, his marriage to Edith Bratt, his Oxford professorship, and so on – while relating them to several features of his legendarium. Although it is not Widdicombe's objective to prove the biographical origins of the legendarium, the interlacement that Widdicombe tries to establish between fact and fiction leaves a unsatisfactory impression, as his interpretations fail to offer in-depth, in-text substantiation, especially from scholars who have cared to follow this research angle such as John Garth. Coincidentally, less than fifteen pages into the text, the first piece of misinformation about Tolkien's fictional world is to be found: Widdicombe falsely claims that "there are Galadriel and Celeborn without offspring; there is Elrond without a wife and only a daughter with whom his relationship is contentious" (12). In fact, Celebrían, Elrond's partner, was the product of Galadriel's and Celeborn's union, not to mention that she bore three children: Arwen, Elladan, and Elrohir.[1] Such a misrepresentation of one of Tolkien's most important storylines so early in the *Guide* is likely to shake the perception of veracity of Widdicombe's later claims and interpretations, thus feeding into the impression that his retellings and readings of Tolkien's work are also possibly inaccurate.

It is also in this first chapter that Widdicombe begins to address several contentious issues within Tolkien's literary production. A point in Widdicombe's favour is his willingness to engage with these complicated subjects (as opposed to dismissing or ignoring them), even though he mostly repeats well-known positions within Tolkien studies rather than articulate in detail his own stance. Amongst these is the apparently "puzzling relationship" between Sam and Frodo: "[t]o some, the relationship reeks of class privilege and homoeroticism, but when read correctly it represents Tolkien's tribute to the relation between batman (Sam) and commissioned officer (Frodo)" (18). This particular assertion stands out for two specific reasons: on the one hand, Widdicombe's choice of the word "reek" is problematic because it potentially implies that interpretations linked to class and sexuality as objectionable while conflicting with his call for more Tolkien scholarship based on critical theory located at the end of his book. On the other, Widdicombe also implies, even if indirectly, that there is 'a' correct way of reading the hobbits' relationship. One can only wonder if Widdicombe would consequently apply the same criterium to the rest of Tolkien's works, thus contravening this author's own wishes as expressed in his prologue to the second edition of *The Lord of the Rings* (1954-1955), where he argues in favour of applicability, of multiple interpretations of his text. Concurrently, Widdicombe reiterates Tolkien's authorial intent as that of creating a mythology for England, a notion that has been questioned and re-examined for well over a decade by Tolkien scholars such as Michael D. C. Drout, Verlyn Flieger, and Tom Shippey.

In the second chapter, Widdicombe sets out to cover the origins and history of Tolkien's legendarium. After listing Tolkien's literary and academic works, including the rewriting or continuation of mythical and medieval sources, Widdicombe does an excellent job in detailing briefly the texts that comprise the legendarium while chronologically glossing the dates and events surrounding their production as well as the visual art – maps and illustrations – that Tolkien created to accompany them. This is perhaps the strongest chapter in Widdicombe's guide, for it lucidly describes the elaborate development of the monumental fictional world known as Middle-earth. Special attention is placed on Tolkien's three major works – *The Hobbit* (1937), *The Lord of the Rings*, and *The Silmarillion* (1977) – in relation to three aspects: the creative process behind their conception, their structure, and the distinct evolution each one of these texts underwent to either fit the plot of the One Ring or to gain a sense, even if remote, of completeness.

Following a short exploration of Tolkien's writing habits, Widdicombe discusses a crucial element in the reception of Tolkien's literary production, to which he returns on several occasions throughout the guide: Christopher Tolkien's role as his father's posthumous editor. By stating that Christopher's "work as editor has been essential but in some respects unhelpful" and that "[s]uch an assessment extends to the work of the Tolkien family through the Tolkien Trust," Widdicombe showcases a necessary discussion within Tolkien studies regarding, first, the limited access to invaluable materials such as Tolkien's diaries and, second, the posthumous edition and publication of Tolkien's writings, which is more timely than ever given Christopher Tolkien's recent passing (42).[2] Further on, Widdicombe also proposes an interesting debate by asking if the meaning of a text not intended for publication or written for a specific audience changes when fashioned for mass-publishing, as in the case of Tolkien's essays, *The Silmarillion*, and *The History of Middle-earth* (1983-1996).

The third chapter in Widdicombe's guide focuses on the importance of languages in Tolkien's legendarium. Widdicombe approaches this subject by soundly covering a variety of angles: from discussing the episodes and appendixes in Tolkien's texts where language takes centre stage and explaining their compositional development – both from an authorial perspective as well as according to the internal history of Tolkien's fictional world – to the importance of the acoustic and visual aesthetics of these languages. Widdicombe also makes a point at mentioning theoretical and practical considerations to the subject as well as valuable scholarly sources such as the *Mythlore* and *Tolkien Studies* journals. Although Quenya and Sindarin understandably constitute the cynosure of Widdicombe's chapter insofar that they are the most well-known of Tolkien's invented languages, this section would have benefitted from an ampler exploration of other languages such as Rohirric, which is only mentioned briefly until the fifth chapter. The same could be said of Widdicombe's compact appraisal of Tolkien's essays on language, "A Secret Vice" (1931; 1983), "English and Welsh" (1955; 1983), and "Valedictory Address" (1959; 1983).

The last three chapters of Widdicombe's *Guide* give the impression of a chiaroscuro, for they present a mixed composition of brilliant reflections on important themes and subjects within Tolkien's legendarium as well as disconcerting assertions that end up shadowing the conclusion of Widdicombe's text. The book's fourth section skilfully addresses the historical ages of Middle-earth in order to explain this fictional world's internal logic regarding time and its passing. To this Widdicombe adds a description of Middle-earth's changing geography, thus providing a comprehensive image of Tolkien's creation. Widdicombe's next chapter describes the various peoples of Middle-earth following their appearance throughout the history of Tolkien's fictional world and sketches some of their most important characteristics. The unequal space Widdicombe grants to elves and hobbits in this section seems to reflect the author's opinion that even if hobbits are the protagonists of Tolkien's most successful work, elves "mattered even more to" Tolkien, an idea that could well lead to further debates on the subject (96). Crucially, throughout his text, Widdicombe demonstrates an extraordinary level of competence in referencing primary sources and Tolkien's letters. However, from a more rigorous perspective, it would be ideal to have specified that since Tolkien did not give his posthumous publications their final form, events and situations described in them should be considered cautiously when used to support readings of *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*.

The final chapter in the *Guide* lists what Widdicombe considers to be the most important themes in Tolkien's legendarium. The author prefaces this section by admitting his own biases and goes on to succinctly discuss well-known subjects in Tolkien studies, such as the role of the powerless, the importance of courage, the meaning of death, and so on. Amongst these, perhaps the most polemic theme bears the title "Men and Women Have Particular Roles in Life," which serves as a coda for Widdicombe's own questionable treatment of Tolkien's female characters throughout his guide. At the beginning of his text, Widdicombe recognises the absence and supposed unidimensionality of these characters, tracing these aspects to the all-male world and literary models that Tolkien inhabited and followed, and, consequently, to this author's own lack of insight into the intricacies of women's experiences. However, instead of actively countering this situation, Widdicombe does little more to give these figures more relevance than passing mentions or pointing out comical gestures

(such as Tolkien's reference to female dwarves). In addition, he states in the sixth chapter that Tolkien "believed men and women had particular roles in life" without offering any textual proof and spends more words discussing Rosie Cotton as a character than Éowyn, Galadriel, and Lúthien combined (139). Widdicombe hence falls into the same troublesome patterns that he claims to be aware of at the start of his *Guide*.

As for the afterword and the appendixes, these cover the latest of Tolkien's posthumous publications, *The Fall of Gondolin* (2018), Tolkien's literary influences, the different films made on the legendarium, and scholarly sources on Tolkien. Widdicombe's criticism acquires a much more personal note when discussing films inspired by Tolkien's oeuvre, especially in his careful although short analysis of Peter Jackson's versions of *The Hobbit* (2012-2014) and *The Lord of the Rings* (2001-2003). His final thoughts are dedicated to essential Tolkien scholarship, including books, journals, and websites. Although Widdicombe provides an extensive list of sources, it becomes clear – especially in light of his assertions in "Future Tolkien Research" – that he has overlooked the ever-increasing body of work in Tolkien studies derived from, but not limited to, critical theory from at least the past decade. The research of scholars such as Jane Chance, Robert Eaglestone, Dimitra Fimi, and Anna Vaninskaya come to mind, not to mention anthologies such as the Cormarë Series from Walking Tree Publishers and *Tolkien Among the Moderns* (2015).

This review values Widdicombe's effort in creating an introductory text to Tolkien's works as a noble one: creating a guide for an author as complex as Tolkien necessarily entails risks such as over- and under-explaining, or fixing the reader's experience to specific interpretative possibilities. It is extremely difficult to avoid all of these obstacles in such a short number of pages and, in any case, this review also acknowledges Widdicombe's belief in the importance of Tolkien's literary production. Tolkien's words are important not only because of their aesthetic qualities, but also because they effectively discuss matters still essential to our times, even if in the end Widdicombe may believe that "[i]t is unfashionable in this postmodern age to talk about such supposedly naïve concepts" (4). This review contests that opinion: it is neither unfashionable nor are these concepts naïve.

NOTES

1. If Widdicombe bases his reading on the Jackson's filmic version of Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*, which indeed leaves out these characters, it is not specified.

2. Widdicombe does nevertheless describe himself as "moved by Christopher Tolkien's extraordinary, selfless achievement over more than forty years" (161).

BIONOTE

Mariana Rios Maldonado completed her BA in Literature and Spanish Linguistics at the Autonomous University of Zacatecas, Mexico, and her MA in Comparative Literature at the Peter Szondi Institute in Berlin's Free University, Germany. Her research focuses on the influence of Germanic culture in contemporary literature, Germanophonic fantastic literature between the eighteenth and twentieth centuries, as well as J. R. R. Tolkien's literary production. She is a PhD candidate in Comparative Literature at the University of Glasgow, UK, with the research project "Ethics, Femininity, and the Encounter with the Other in J. R. R. Tolkien's Middle-earth Narratives" and a CONACYT-FINBA scholar. Mariana is the Equality and Diversity Officer for the University of Glasgow's Centre for Fantasy and the Fantastic.

CONFERENCE AND EVENT REPORTS

THE GOTHIC 1980S: THE DECADE THAT SCARED US (JUNE 8, 2019)

Conference Report by Thomas Brassington

***The Gothic 1980s: The Decade that Scared Us*. Manchester Metropolitan University, Manchester, UK, 8 June 2019.**

Hosted by Manchester Metropolitan University's Centre for Gothic Studies and organised by Sorcha Ní Fhlainn (Manchester Metropolitan University, UK), *The Gothic 1980s: The Decade that Scared Us* was a one-day symposium focusing on the Gothic and Horror materials produced during or about the 1980s. The papers presented explored Gothic media and literature produced in the 1980s, contemporary media that was set in, or used the aesthetics of, the 1980s, how certain pieces of 1980s Gothic have had new significance attached to them in the 2010s. Across the day long inspection of 1980s Gothic, a range of theoretical models emerged, with a few particular strands running through the papers I was fortunate enough to see.

Ní Fhlainn opened the day by welcoming attendees to the symposium, calling it the fruition of her ongoing passion for 1980s popular culture. This passion was clearly resonant with the symposium attendees, who were all excited to discuss ranges of Gothic 1980s material. Following the welcome, Ní Fhlainn introduced the symposium's keynote speaker, Matt Hills (University of Huddersfield, UK), whose address identified a series of strands that percolated throughout the symposium panels I attended. These strands were nostalgia for the 1980s, parallels between 1980s conservatism and the Western Anglophone's political climate of the 2010s, the significance of trashy objects and ephemera to 1980s Gothic, and the long 1980s as a concept. Hills' keynote was entitled "Unpicking the *Threads* of a 'Market in Anxiety': 1980s Nuclear Gothic" and presented an expansionist argument that encouraged conference delegates to think differently about the 1980s and its artefacts. Hills achieved this by focusing on the relationship between 1980s Gothic and humour, locating this relationship within the aforementioned strands. Doing so enabled the keynote to identify the political potential of humour for minoritarian groups in the context of Reaganomics for example.

The first set of parallel panels explored a collective nostalgia for the 1980s and the prominence of Horror hosts in the 1980s. I presented in the panel "1980s Hosts and TV Horrors." My paper explored 1988's *Elvira, Mistress of the Dark* using feminist camp as a conceptual lens. This was followed by Thomas Wilson (University of Wolverhampton, UK), whose paper explored the anthology television series *Freddy's Nightmares* (1988-1990) and the extended commodification of

Horror icons like Freddy Krueger. Laura Johnson (University of Manchester, UK) presented the final paper, which drew parallels between 1986's *River's Edge* and Netflix's *Riverdale* series (2017-current). These papers all dealt with the concept of the long 1980s – one of the day's running themes – with my own exploring how 1980s cult icon Elvira has developed a new significance in the 2010s, Wilson's exploration of the unnatural extension of Krueger's life span through continued market ventures of the *Nightmare* franchise in the 1980s, and Johnson's considering how *Riverdale* recontextualises 1980s aesthetics for contemporary popular culture. As well, it became apparent that the case studies in this panel were generally not considered 'good' films or television shows within a wider cultural discourse – the importance of trashiness to the Gothic 1980s was alluded to throughout the day. The Gothic mode has been consistently demarcated to these areas of non-respectability, lowbrowness, and generally as being in 'poor taste.' However, where scholars have traditionally aimed to work around this and elevate the importance of the Gothic, the papers throughout the day seemed to more readily accept the trashy state of 1980s Gothic, using it to launch investigations into how a trashy perspective may produce fresh insights into the surrounding cultures of these Gothic objects.

The second session's panels were on "Werewolves and Vampires" and "1980s Creations and Adaptations." I opted for the panel on "Werewolves and Vampires" to attend in session two. This panel's three speakers were Carys Crossen (Independent Scholar, UK), Stacey Abbott (University of Roehampton, UK), and Hayley Louise Charlesworth (Manchester Metropolitan University, UK). Crossen's paper explored lycanthropy in early 1980s films; Abbott's explored generic categories using 1987's *Near Dark* as a case study; and Charlesworth's considered 1980s vampires through a bisexuality studies lens. Crossen's paper considered how werewolves in the 1980s engage with the antifeminist backlash produced against the backdrops of Reaganomics and Thatcherism. Abbott's similarly touched on 1980s political conservatism, highlighting how Gothic's ambivalent presentation makes it difficult for us to wholly categorise 1980s Gothic as supporting or subverting the politico-cultural systems of the decade. Charlesworth's bisexual analysis of '80s vampirism tied the panel to the overarching theme of the long 1980s through her analytic method relying on current queer studies methodologies. Coordinating itself with Abbott's paper, Charlesworth's also deployed Gothic ambivalence to suggest a space for ambiguous bisexual presentation in vampirism, which is normally encoded negatively with vampiric parasitism.

The third, and final, panel I attended – "Theorising the 1980s: Satan, VHS, and Scholarship" – featured Mark Jancovich (University of East Anglia, UK), Charlotte Gough (Manchester Metropolitan University, UK), Noel Mellor (Manchester Metropolitan University, UK), and Tracey Mollet (University of Leeds, UK). Jancovich's paper sought to challenge common perceptions of 1980s horror as dominated by slasher films through a survey of 1980s Horror films and then calling to attention slasher flick's encoded right-wing sentiments. Jancovich's dual approach presented how the multitude of non-slasher Horror films in the 1980s offer material which can enable a more vibrant understanding of the cultural landscape of the period and its Horror productions, rather than the relatively fixed view looking at 1980s slasher flicks can produce. Gough's paper focused in on a series of films that perpetuated the satanic panic of the 1980s on the screen, pulling these films in line with the political climate produced by Reagan and backlash towards the progression of minoritarian rights

that bookends the 1980s. Mellor's talk laced the trashiness thread of the conference into the panel with his paper, which explored a series of direct-to-video films and their uses of the occult. Mollet's paper was moved to this panel following a last-minute absence and brought the long 1980s thread to the panel through her exploration of *Stranger Things* (2016-current). Mollet explored how 1980s aesthetics in contemporary popular culture are often tinged with a neo-conservative nostalgia and used *Stranger Things* to consider how a fusion of contemporary attitudes and 1980s aesthetics may present a method for managing that nostalgia.

Following the final session was a wine reception and book launch of Ní Fhlainn's *Postmodern Vampires: Film, Fiction and Popular Culture* (2019). The symposium closed with a screening of 1987's *The Lost Boys* that was delivered in association with Pilot Light Festival.

The Gothic 1980s: The Decade that Scared Us was well-delivered and had an exceptional atmosphere. All the papers I managed to see produced a good deal of stimulating discussions around the idea of the Gothic 1980s and the symposium's broader strands. The breadth of papers, as well as depth of conversations, clearly demonstrated the capacity for this symposium's theme to function as a vibrant area for Gothic and Horror studies. By embracing ephemera and Gothic trash, *The Gothic 1980s* worked to challenge the dominance of other artefacts as characteristic of 1980s Gothic. The symposium enabled stimulating conversations within pertinent cultural and political discussions. Given the success of the symposium, Ní Fhlainn suggested that a sequel may be in order, as well as the development of more scholarly projects on the Gothic 1980s. Indeed, at the 2019 International Gothic Association conference, Ní Fhlainn confirmed that a sequel academic event was in the works.

BIONOTE

Tom is a PhD candidate at Lancaster University, UK. His thesis, "Dragging the Gothic," uses drag performance to propose new methods of queering the Gothic. He is interested in contemporary literature, media and culture, expressions of gender and sexuality, and popular culture.

SCIENCE FICTION RESEARCH ASSOCIATION CONFERENCE 2019 (JUNE 21-24, 2019)

Conference Report by Alexandria Nunn

"Facing the Future, Facing the Past: Colonialism, Indigeneity, and SF." ***Science Fiction Research Association Annual Conference*****. Chaminade University, Honolulu, Hawaii, USA, 21-24 June 2019.**

Science Fiction (SF) has a historically fraught relationship with colonialism. The form has always relied on the tension between explorers and new worlds, discovery and its consequence, and ideas of modernism pitched against notions of regression. Due in part to the prominence of these themes, postcolonial critique of SF tends to focus on deconstructions of self/otherhood. Often lost in these decolonial conversations, however, are indigenous populations: real native bodies that complicate and challenge SF's baseline dualist assumptions. Going 'where no man has gone before' likely involves venturing where others have always been. What then, is to be said for the supposed 'discovered'? The 2019 Science Fiction Research Association (SFRA) annual conference was a reorientation of the field's priorities, interrogating the significance of putting indigeneity and indigenous theory at the centre of SF literary critique. Moreover, the conference insisted that indigeneity never belonged out of the limelight, and perhaps never quite left the hearts and minds of those writers and readers that shaped past and present works. It is this attentiveness to history and eagerness for transformation which gave rise to the conference theme, "Facing the Future, Facing the Past: Colonialism, Indigeneity, and SF."

Hardly before stepping foot on the Chaminade University Campus in Honolulu, one is reminded of the effects western Imperialism has left on the islands of Hawaii. At several points throughout the weekend, the executive committee and staff set aside time to acknowledge this colonial history and give voice to the Native Hawaiian hosts, organisers, and major contributors to the summit. I would likewise like to thank Chaminade University and the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa for their hospitality, warm welcome, and hard work, without which these incredible dialogues would not have been possible.

In the true spirit of a conference with unstable historicity at its nexus, let us begin with the end: Nalo Hopkinson's (University of California Riverside, USA) keynote speech on the subject of critical writing and creative thinking. Following several encounters with literary academics praising her ability to write creatively, Hopkinson began to wonder why creativity as a descriptor was so often attributed to fiction rather than analytical work. She conversely argued that writing as a form was

naturally creative and critical simultaneously, particularly where SF is concerned. The imaginative capacities of other distant futures are only viable so long as the present is understood, and interpreting the present is an imaginative act in and of itself. Hopkinson insisted that her approach to fiction writing and theoretical writing are in constant conversation, and moreover, that this dynamic spurs her best ideas. Hopkinson's thesis that the creative and critical faculties of SF writing should never be far apart but rather are intertwined holds a special potency coming from a forerunner in both arenas. In regard to the central theme of the conference, Hopkinson's play with genre and form mirrors the shift from limited dualisms in SF theory and temporality and insists on a nuancing of familiar tropes.

Following Hopkinson's presentation, Grace Dillon (Portland State University, USA) and John Rieder (University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, USA) hosted a dialogue on colonialism, indigeneity, and SF scholarship in the twenty-first century US. Over the course of many years, Dillon has compiled what she understands to be nearly every work of indigenous SF, many of which can be found in her 2012 anthology *Walking the Clouds: An Anthology of Indigenous Science Fiction.* Dillon asked attendees to consider the rigid genre stratifications of SF, specifically the ways in which science is read through the lens of Western methodologies and practices. A herbal medicine, for example, may often be associated with fantasy, and thereby ignored or dismissed in canonical analyses of SF texts. Throughout the panel, Dillon and Rieder explored SF works as well as native sciences and practices as viable and legitimate possibilities for exploration and advancement. Native science, in their estimation, figures not as an alternative to mainstream Western science but as a companion to it – essential to understanding the way in which society and culture understand bodies as valuable, evolving, and subject to autonomy.

While indigeneity and critical race studies remained the core topic in the majority of panels, several presenters built on themes of land and ecology to highlight the ubiquity of hyper-capitalist coloniality. Veronica Hollinger (Trent University, Canada) and Conrad Scott (University of Alberta, Canada) discussed dystopian ecologies, wherein the power of the real overlaps with SF literary cataclysms, collapsing linear temporality into a prolonged experience of the present moment; that is to say, the mere representation of climate change, social injustice, and cybernetic technology in fiction is less and less a world distinct from our own, one to which we are transported in order to transcend our mundane reality. Rather, Hollinger theorised, contemporary SF works create the present moment, as we know it, much in the same way the genre has a habit of shaping our future. If this notion is to be believed, SF's role as a speculative non-mimetic genre may be complicated by its likeness to the visible state of the world. Indeed, the act of future speculation increasingly becomes a detailed study of the present moment, particularly for the people most affected by ongoing climate change.

Blackness and representations of afro-indigeneity also proved a major theme for this conference. In addition to panels on authors Nnedi Okorafor and N. K. Jemisin, DeWitt Kilgore (Indiana University, USA) and Marcie Casey (Vanderbilt University, USA) took up depictions of African iconography and culture in Afrofuturist utopias and dystopias. Pairing a reading of 2016's

Black Panther with a closer examination of the film's costuming, Kilgore explored the implications of foregrounding cross-cultural diasporic unity in black art and cinema. This ongoing conversation between Black American and Black African portrayals of futurity has proved an interesting point of contention in past discourse, with some authors like Nnedi Okorafor arguing that true Afrofuturism must be culturally African.[1] Conversely, Kilgore argued that the revolutionary potential of Afrofuturism lied in its capacity to encourage black unity across borders, and create transcendent spaces for present and future black creators. Building on this idea, Marcie Casey discussed the effects which gentrification, community of origin, and other forms of racialised geography had on collective readings of black identity and being. In her paper "Charting Diaspora Within the Black Utopia: Liberia, Eatonville, Harlem, Wakanda, and Beyond," Casey compared real communities to fictional ones, calling attention to the ways in which the echoes of social and interpersonal relationships not only bridged genre, but history and location. In these readings of black speculative works, the moniker Afrofuturism was expansive rather than specific, with special emphasis put on its ability to evolve blackness beyond a monolithic formulation into a multi-faceted and ongoing series of representations.

Shortly before the keynotes, I was fortunate enough to participate in a panel with one of the conference's organising members, Ida Yoshinaga (University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, USA), on the subject of indigenous recording. The main themes of the conference came to the forefront during our conversation, and I have come to believe Yoshinaga's work on cognitive estrangement (as coined by Darko Suvin in his 1972 article "On the Poetics of Science Fiction and Genre") speaks back to significant issues underlying SF's foundational theory. Essentially, to be cognitively estranged is to recognise oneself and one's world in a work of fiction, to see the similarities between the fantastic and the mundane, and in so doing to reorient one's understanding of society and being. Yoshinaga's exploration of Hawaiian sovereignty and the lack thereof in American television culture quickly raised questions of the viability of SF as a means by which to express native experiences. Yoshinaga submitted a conundrum that shakes estrangement to its core, that is: what do we make of estrangement for the bodies who are always and always have been estranged? What does estrangement as a scaffold do, asks Yoshinaga, for a society that thrives off of dehumanising and 'estranging' in the first place? Should this idea be pursued further, we as a field may arrive at the next phase of our theoretical oeuvre; one that acknowledges the ever-pervasive 'weirding' of marginalised bodies, indigenous persons included, while recognising the intentional acts of imagination that feature so prominently in SF as a genre.[2]

One of the SFRA's ongoing investments has been its focus on professionalisation and pedagogy in SF and speculative fields. This year's conference went above and beyond in terms of providing accessible and insightful content from a range of scholars, for a variety of experience levels. "Pedagogy in SF" explored the state of SF in classrooms, and the means by which SF can support anti-racist discourses at predominantly white institutions. Keeping with the theme of the conference, Elsie Bell (University of Wyoming, USA) explored the ways in which SF enabled students of different backgrounds to empathise with one another outside the emotionally-charged environment of real-world socioeconomic inequalities. While Bell emphasised the importance of

drawing parallels between the real and the fictional, she found that estranging students from their own limited experiences did help to mediate the tension that can accompany critical discussions of race in the US. College classrooms are one of the few places where young people from a wide variety of experiences and backgrounds can dialogue with one another for the first time, but they are far from the only place. Benjamin Wallin (University of Chicago, USA) shared his experience teaching late elementary schoolers in inner city Chicago schools, and how incorporating SF learning and concepts into curricula helped children deal with difficult concepts like colonialism and racialised violence. In addition to questioning why is SF important, Wallin insisted that we as educators further consider the practical uses of SF works, and how they can equip students with the skills to challenge abstract ideas. In this regard, Suvin's theory of cognitive estrangement may still maintain some sway in continued SF critique as an intermediary between uncritical baseline assumptions of being and more conscious anti-racist praxis. The underlying theme of the conference pushed for a more critical understanding of SF's raison-d'être. Still, it remains vital to recognise the versatility of past and present theories alike, as the very act of facing the past and the future simultaneously is double-minded and malleable to new situation and exchange.

I find myself quite unable to substantiate anything other than satisfaction with the 2019 SFRA annual conference. With collective excitement for the ideas put forth and an appreciation for their scholarly originators permeating every level, it is with great eagerness that we faced all directions past, present, and future as they called our attention, and were left with an especially high opinion of what is to come.

NOTES

1. See, for example, "The Native Exclusive: Nnedi Okorafor on Africanfuturism and the Challenges of Pioneering." *TheNativeMag.com*. 5 November 2018.

2. This exploration of always-already estranged bodies in works of SF is one which resonates with different ways this subject has been raised by writers and scholars of Indigenous SF, Afrofuturism and Africanfuturism, Feminist SF, Queer SF, Disability in SF, and others.

BIONOTE

Alexandria Nunn is a doctoral candidate in English at University of Maryland College Park, USA. She is currently writing her dissertation *Race to the Future* on racial futurity in twentieth and twenty-first century American speculative fiction as imagined by BIPOC authors. Her chapter "For a Time and Race Unraveling: Shifting Imaginaries and Covert Resistance in Postracial Dystopias" is due to appear in the *Routledge Handbook of Alternative Futurisms* in early 2022. Her other research interests include film and media studies, critical race formation, Afrofuturism, and Techno-Orientalist critique.

QUEER FEARS (JUNE 28, 2019)

Conference Report by Daniel Sheppard

***Queer Fears*. A One Day Symposium on New Queer Horror Film and Television. The Odyssey Cinema, St Albans, UK, 28 June 2019.**

Jack Halberstam's 1995 monograph, *Skin Shows*, and Rhona Berenstein's 1996 monograph, *Attack of the Leading Ladies*, sought to liberate Queer Horror from the margins of critical discourse. Drawing across the history of Horror, then, Harry Benshoff's 1997 monograph, *Monsters in the Closet*, built on the foundation of these works to examine the multifarious ways in which queer sexuality has been referenced allusively, theorising the figure of the monster queer. Where Horror studies had previously defined audiences in relation to a normative gender binary and compulsory heterosexuality, these works were radical in accounting for patterns of queer spectatorship and provided new frameworks to consider Horror cinema in the twentieth century. From the moment that scholars were equipped with these theoretical frameworks, however, Queer Horror 'outed' itself and fundamentally changed, presenting a basis for the first ever academic symposium dedicated to the subject.

Queer Fears follows Darren Elliott-Smith's 2016 monograph, *Queer Horror Film and Television*, and sought to develop the critical discourse on New Queer Horror: a broadly defined subgenre that emerged in the twenty-first century, crafted by LGBTQ+ directors and producers whose film and television texts feature homoerotic, or explicitly queer narratives, with 'out' LGBTQ+ characters. Convened by Darren Elliott-Smith (University of Stirling, UK) and Jaysica Marvell (University of Hertfordshire, UK) with support from the University of Hertfordshire, BAFTSS (British Association of Film, Television and Screen Studies), and The Odyssey Cinema, *Queer Fears* accumulated four panels and a keynote lecture which examined how, since the new millennium, New Queer Horror has directly addressed LGBTQ+ anxieties and audiences in characteristic and narrative form.

The thematic concerns of the symposium were established during the first panel, "In and Out of the Closet." Here, panellists Christopher Lloyd (University of Hertfordshire, UK), Tim Stafford (Independent Scholar, UK), and Ben Wheeler (University of Hertfordshire, UK) explored how sex and death, trauma, and shame have informed New Queer Horror across film and television. Lloyd opened the panel by examining how FX's *American Horror Story* (2011-current) structurally manifests American queer anxieties. By interrogating the structural premise of the anthology format, Lloyd demonstrated how *American Horror Story* materialises subcultural trauma without resolution, resetting itself each season. Carrying this theme of regression, then, Stafford presented a critique of Netflix's *Chilling Adventures of Sabrina* (2018-2020) which has otherwise been celebrated for its LGBTQ+ representation. Stafford identified an ideological entanglement in the series' portrayal

of queerness, interrogating how LGBTQ+ characters are assimilated in heteronormative terms. Assimilation is far from a new development, however, as Wheeler concluded with analyses of Joel Schumacher's early films, *The Lost Boys* (1987) and *Flatliners* (1990). According to Wheeler, Schumacher's early work reads as an autobiographical reflection of shame, screening intimacies between homoerotic metaphor and death.

Complementing the thematic concerns of the symposium, questions of performance were addressed during the second panel, "Queer Performative Horror." This panel included Valeria Villegas Lindvall (University of Gothenburg, Sweden), Daniel Sheppard (Birmingham City University, UK), and Lexi Turner (Cornell University, USA), who each explored how New Queer Horror relies on performance to communicate its themes. Lindvall opened the panel by considering the abject politics of waste and filth in OutTV's *The Boulet Brothers' Dragula* (2016-current). Applying these concepts to the performance of drag, Lindvall charted the radical queer potential of *Dragula* which uses abjection to reclaim the emotion of negative affect. Lindvall preceded to neatly dovetail Sheppard's approach, as he examined how LGBTQ+ communities have reclaimed queer monstrosity in the figure of the Babadook. As drag artists embody the monster queer in LGBTQ+ spaces, Sheppard theorised their performances as utopian moments of queer resistance which literalise the emancipatory theorisations of Benshoff. Turner finalised the panel by returning to contemporary Horror and discussing the cinematic performance of queer dance in *Suspiria* (2018) and *Climax* (2018). Here, Turner examined how dance is used to paradoxically blur the boundaries that define identity, disturbing while reinforcing the discursive production of binarised difference.

The third panel, "Consuming Queerness and Other Gross Tales…," acknowledged both thematic concerns and performance in its three papers. Accordingly, panellists Robyn Ollett (University of Teeside, UK), Eddie Falvey (University of Exeter/Plymouth College of Arts, UK), and Laura Mee (University of Hertfordshire, UK) each used their papers to speculate how queer audiences might identify with New Queer Horror's cinematic narratives. Ollett opened the panel by queering the cannibal in Julia Ducournau's *Raw* (2016). Here, Ollett furthered Elliott-Smith's notion of the gay male audience to encapsulate queer audiences more broadly, and used this framework to interrogate how *Raw* uses restrained cannibalism to critique compulsory heterosexuality. Falvey then situated *Raw* among its contemporaries, drawing on *Teeth* (2007), *Thanatomorphose* (2012), and *Contracted* (2013). Falvey analysed how these films characterise the monstrous individual and their place in the world, and argued that the monstrous-feminine has evolved to capture queer subjectivities. Mee concluded with a necessary reappraisal of Lucky McKee's films which, unlike *Raw*, have otherwise been dismissed as problematic. Mee contextualised McKee's representations of misogyny, homophobia, and biphobia in their narratives and, in doing so, reclaimed his depictions of queer women, arguing that his indie horror aesthetics obfuscate his feminism.

Thematics and performance, characterisation and identification were neatly summarised during the final panel, "Frightfully Problematic Queerness." Here, panellists Siobhan O'Reilly (University of Hertfordshire, UK) and Sam Tabet (University of Strathclyde, UK) used the slasher subgenre to think about the inevitable paradoxes of New Queer Horror. O'Reilly opened the panel

by considering the transphobic politics of representation in Robert Hiltzik's *Sleepaway Camp* (1983). O'Reilly interrogated the bothersome methods used to encourage cisgender audience identification and concluded with nuanced, empathic ways of improving transgender characterisation. Shifting towards contemporary slasher, Tabet closed with a radical lesbian reappropriation of Colin Minihan's *What Keeps You Alive* (2018). Tabet adapted theories of lesbian spectatorship to conceptualise how an affective gaze draws on the anxieties of lesbian audiences and provides cathartic pleasure in the film's conclusion.

Where each panel had examined individual filmmakers, films, and television texts, Darren Elliott-Smith's concluding keynote lecture, "Unbury Your Gays: Queer Zombies, Mental Illness and Assimilation Anxieties," examined New Queer Horror's rendering of the zombie subgenre by identifying recurring motifs that characterise such film and television texts. Analysing Bruce LaBruce's *Otto; or, Up with Dead People* (2008) and *L.A. Zombie* (2010), as well as BBC Three's *In the Flesh* (2013-2014) and David Freyne's *The Cured* (2017), Elliott-Smith expanded on his previously published work to consider how New Queer Horror's rendition of the zombie subgenre articulates subcultural anxieties surrounding the gay male community, cultural acceptance, and homonormative assimilation. Specifically, Elliott-Smith emphasised the intersection between the queer zombie's sympathetic Othering and mental illness, demonstrating how queerness is pathologised, and concluded that queer masculinity is depicted in such a way that is fragile and susceptible to psychological anguish.

Preceded by an evening wine reception, *Queer Fears* closed with a public screening of the timeless favourite among Queer Horror fans and scholars alike, *A Nightmare on Elm Street 2: Freddy's Revenge* (1985). Much to the surprise of delegates, *Freddy's Revenge* was introduced by the protagonist himself, Mark Patton, with a pre-recorded video message, giving audiences a sneak preview to the trailer of *Freddy's Revenge* documentary, *Scream, Queen: My Nightmare on Elm Street* (2019).

Writing *Monsters in the Closet*, Harry Benshoff categorises Queer Horror in four ways: texts which feature 'out' LGBTQ+ characters; texts written, produced, and/or directed by LGBTQ+ creatives; texts which allude to queer sexuality by subtextual or connotative means; and, broadly speaking, any given text interpreted by LGBTQ+ audiences. New Queer Horror essentially blends these categories and updates them to create a fifth, emerging as a subgenre: texts crafted by LGBTQ+ creatives which feature homoerotic, or explicitly queer narratives, with 'out' LGBTQ+ characters. *Queer Fears* developed the critical discourse on New Queer Horror, as the symposium sought, but what further emerged from the four panels was a scholarly interest in more broadly developing the critical discourse on Queer Horror itself. Indeed, although it seems that Queer Horror was liberated from the margins of critical discourse in the late 1990s, these theoretical frameworks remain largely unscrutinised.

Queer Fears, inspired by Darren Elliott-Smith's work on New Queer Horror, marks the beginning of an essential project that does not merely accept Queer Horror's existing theoretical

frameworks. Rather, it tries and tests the limits of an overlooked discourse, bringing to the forefront a body of work that is otherwise underdeveloped. University of Wales Press recently published *New Queer Horror Film and Television* (2020), edited by Elliott-Smith and John Edgar Browning, and with a network of scholars on the horizon, Queer Horror studies is in the midst of a revival.

BIONOTE

Daniel Sheppard is a PhD candidate and Visiting Lecturer at Birmingham City University, UK. His thesis is called "Gays, Women, and Chainsaws: Queer Approaches to Characterisation and Identification in Contemporary Slasher Film and Television, 1996-2019" and is fully funded by the AHRC (Arts and Humanities Research Council) Midlands4Cities Doctoral Training Partnership. He has written for *Horror Homeroom* and *Screening Sex*, contributed to such edited collections as *Monsters: A Companion* (2020), and presented at various international conferences.

RELIGIONI FANTASTICHE E DOVE TROVARLE (JULY 3-6, 2019

Conference Report by Chiara Crosignani

***Religioni fantastiche e dove trovarle*, Velletri, Museo delle Religioni "Raffaele Pettazzoni", Italy, 3-6 July 2019.**

The conference *Fantastic Religions and where to find them: Deities, myths and rites in Science Fiction and Fantasy* (*Religioni fantastiche e dove trovarle: Divinità, miti e riti nella fantascienza e nel Fantasy)* that took place in Velletri (near to Rome) focused on the presence of ancient and new religions in contemporary Fantasy and Science Fiction. Fantastika literature does not have a great tradition of study in Italy and one of the aims of the conference was the beginning of a new academic awareness of this field. Presenters included academics from a variety of disciplines and career levels, from independent researchers to graduate students and professors. One of the most interesting aspects of the conference was, indeed, that this approach to religious studies through Fantastika came from varying points of view: anthropological, sociological, psychological, and historical were the most represented. Such an approach was possible because this kind of studies has not yet to be codified and there was a lot of potential for new research. The conference provided an academic and a creative approach to the theme as the speakers were both scholars and Italian authors.

The main theme of the morning session of July 3rd was narrative prose. Davide Burgio (Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa, Italy) analysed J. R. R. Tolkien's "Athrabeth Finrod ah Andreth" (1993), a theological and philosophical discussion between an Elda and a human about eschatological hope and despair. The perspective on religion, here, had a strong connection with the salvation of pagans in the Middle Ages and provided interesting overtures on Tolkien's outlook despite the author's dislike of openly treating religious matter in his works. Nicola Martellozzo (Università di Torino, Italy) discussed Roger Zelazny's *Lord of Light* (1967), where the notions of divine, immortality, and religion are widely present, mostly the social aspects of religions and their effect on humans. In this novel, religion (and above all Hinduism and Buddhism) allows a small group of self-defined deities to take control over humanity, as guides or oppressors. According to Martellozzo, *Lord of Light* can be perceived as a reference to the thesis of Evemerus from Messina or to Karl Marx's theories on religion. Fernanda Rossini (Ludwig-Massimilians-Universität München, Italy) analysed Robert Heinlein's *Orphans in the Sky* (1941), set on a generational star-ship, whose builders, the Jordan Company, have become a god, a kind of *deus otiosus,* according to a part of the crew. The crew's religion allows Heinlein, through the main character Hugh, to reflect on faith and its social function. The last paper on the morning panel by Lucrezia Naglieri (Independent, Italy) focused on *The Handmaid's Tale*, both on the book (1985) and on the television (TV) series (2017-current). They argued that the use of biblical references by the Galaad institutions has a great impact on the iconographical elements, such as the use of colours to signify women's role in the society.

The afternoon session was dedicated to comics: Lottie Brown (University of Bristol, UK) explained the use of Greek and Roman mythology in the world building of *Wonder Woman* (1941-current). They demonstrated how the main character looks like a World War II veteran, with references to the Greek myth of the Amazons, but also to the roman goddess Diana, in opposition to the Greek Goddess Artemis and her more warrior-like aspect. Roberta Matkovic (University of Pola, Croatia) presented on one of the most famous Italian comics, *Dylan Dog* (1986-current), and the varying ideas of hell that can be found in it: the traditional Christian hell, as it appears in the Middle Ages, but also hell as a public office, as an apparent Heaven where nothing happens, and life itself is a kind of hell. According to Matkovic, this representation of entities and places associated with evil offers a critique of moral values in contemporary Italian society. Marika Michelazzi (Independent, Italy), an Italian comics author, talked about how the act of creation can be mixed with history by analysing the gods of her last comics, *Chiantishire* (2017-current), and their roots in classic mythology. The following panel discussion, which included Michelazzi and three comics authors, Emiliano Mammucari (Independent, Italy), Matteo Mammucari (Independent, Italy) and Giovanni Masi (Independent, Italy), was focused on the problems of historical settings for Fantasy comics, above all about the differences between history and fiction.

The morning and afternoon sessions of July 4th were mostly dedicated to religions in Fantastika TV series and movies. Krzysztof Ulanowski (University of Gdansk, Poland) discussed the possibility of finding something of the historical or rather mythical Achilles in the movie *Troy* (2004): the main aim of the paper was to analyse the impiety of the modern Achilles in comparison to the Homeric one, in order to demonstrate that the modern Achilles is an interpretation of an old character from a new point of view: Achilles himself, according to Ulanowski's analysis, cannot believe to ancient Greek gods, who are too similar to humans. Pascal Lemaire meanwhile talked about Byzantine history and religion in Science Fiction. The Eastern Roman Empire included a lot of cultures with different religions, which become a source of inspiration in the publication of Robert Graves' historical novel *Count Belisarius* (1938). According to Lemaire, the Byzantine location is used in many novels because it can be utilised to criticise religions and sometimes even make fun of them, due to its distance in time and differences with the Catholic tradition. Giulia Mancini (University of Iceland, Háskóli Íslands) studied the sources of *Game of Thrones*' religion (2011-2019), searching for elements that can be attributed to Norse tradition, such as the sacred woods or the water sacrifices. Their analysis, however, showed that the quoted myths could be interpreted as *topoi* of Fantasy literature: the use of religions in *Game of Thrones* can be qualified, according to Mancini, as a phenomenon of "mythologem", specifically an entirely new mythology within Fantasy literature created thanks to traditional themes. Ilaria Biano (Istituto Nazionale di Studi Storici, Italy) compared two TV series, *Lost* (2004-2010) and *The Leftovers* (2014-2017), set in what appears to be an ordinary world, in the beginning at least, with mysterious happenings and a strong religious connotation. The two series share a sense of uncertainty and doubt, showing a strong connection between secularity and religiosity. The morning panel ended with the presentation of the book *Star Wars. Il Mito dai Mille Volti* (*Star Wars. The Thousand Faces Myth,* 2019*)* by Andrea Guglielmino, an Italian cinema journalist with a background in the history of religions. The aim of the book is to stress the importance of anthropological studies on movies by analysing the relationship between

Star Wars (1977) and Joseph Campbell's *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1949). These commercial movies, grounded on the idea of saga, present many versions of the same character and of the same narrative structure and in each movie the characters (and so the version of the myth that they represent) change and develop.

The afternoon session opened with Jim Clarke's (Coventry University, UK) paper on Buddhism in Science Fiction. Even though there are some studies on the presence of Christianity and Islam within Fantastika, Buddhism is generally less studied, despite its importance in the work of such Science Fiction authors as Arthur C. Clarke, Roger Zelazny, and Frank Herbert. The presence of Buddhism in Science Fiction has a strong connection to its increasing awareness within the United States in the twentieth century and its narrative use changes according to each author. Barbara Giulia Valentina Lattanzi (Università degli Studi di Roma Tre, Italy) approached the representation of Islamic belief in the *Riddick* trilogy (2001-2013), by reporting parts of a direct discussion between herself and the film director David Twohi. Above all, Lattanzi focused on the initial idea of the representation of a Chrislamic religion in the first movie, *Pitch Black* (2000), as a tribute to Clarke. Nicola Pannofino (Università degli Studi di Torino, Italy) analysed the Spanish movie *Pan's Labyrinth* (2006) and its emblematic representation of a modern kind of spirituality: the ordinary and extraordinary world need each other. They argued that the main theme is the encounter with that which is other than ourselves in a fairy-tale context in an undefined space and time. Roger Sneed (Furman University, USA) presented a paper on *Black Panther* (2018) and the spirituality that inspired it: Wakanda is a utopian land, with its own religion, and ancestor veneration facilitated via technology. According to Sneed, the movie cannot be considered as a form of escapism: instead, *Black Panther* aims to provide an answer for the existential questions of a part of the black community.

The sessions on 5th July were dedicated to Fantastika narrative prose. Ubaldo Bigli (Università degli Studi di Genova, Italy) presented on funeral rites and the concept of death that lies beneath the *Ayesha* cycle by H. Rider Haggard (1886-1923). Ayesha is a liminal character, between death and life and Haggard, through her, can explore his own beliefs on reincarnation, resurrection, and identity. Martina Broccoli and Veronica Orciari (Independent, Italy) analysed two short stories by Philip K. Dick, "Faith of Our Fathers" (1967) and "The Story to End all Stories" (1968). Both present an idea of God: in the first one, God shows itself to men in different ways, or maybe humans conceive the divine in a different way; in the second one, eschatological hope is broken by an act of theophagy, as the Good God is eaten by its own mother. Andrew Daventry (Independent, Italy) presented a paper on Randall Garrett's *Lord Darcy* (1964-1979). In this alternate history, the Catholic Church, which has not been reformed, is the moral authority due to its connection to magic. According to Daventry, Garrett aimed to speculate about a peaceful world, in which all religions are not simply providing their own idea about 'truth,' but are, all of them, providing Good itself: that is the reason why, none of the world's religions can be proven to be bad or undesirable. Chiara Crosignani (Independent, Italy) discussed the dualism between good and evil, order and chaos, creation and destruction in Robert Jordan's *Wheel of Time* (1990-2013), analysing the evolution of the awareness of the identity of the Dark One, the evil force, in the fourteen books of the series.

In the afternoon session, the first two panels were dedicated to H. P. Lovecraft: Elena Angelucci (Independent, Italy), Tommaso di Piazza (Independent, Italy), and Elena Tiberi (Independent, Italy) proposed a distinction of two kinds of religion in the Lovecraftian corpus: the first one is a personal cosmology, almost self-consistent whose success depends on its particular dreadfulness, of an innovative kind, which stresses the human condition as something little and poor in front of the immensity of the universe. The second kind, the use of other myths and religions, is common in the Weird context, as a literary expedient to control the reader's attention. Alberto Cecon (Independent, Italy) stressed the importance of the meaning of Lovecraft's religious inventions: his deities are not evil, but totally indifferent to human condition; the universe has no purpose and came to existence by chance. The ancient gods are not spiritual or metaphysical, they belong to a physical dimension that humans cannot perceive or understand. There is an endless distance between gods and humans, but divine existence reminds the humans that their sense of safety is not real.

The other two panels in the afternoon were dedicated to two of the most important authors of Italian contemporary literature, Italo Calvino and Primo Levi. Francesca Boldrer (Università degli Studi di Macerata, Italy) analysed Calvino's short stories in *Cosmicomics* (1965), where a protean character, Qwfwq, leads the reader in the history of our universe. Boldrer's aim is to demonstrate that Calvino's *Cosmicomics* can be read as a kind of Science Fiction, even if these short stories seem to pervert the sense of the genre, as they appear as an astrophysical interpretation of the original cosmological myths. Mattia Cravero (Università degli Studi di Torino, Italy) approached the presence of Science Fiction themes in Levi's *Natca Saga* (1966), a collection of short stories where a Promethean like character forces humans to use their sense of responsibility: these stories aim to make people think about technology and the risks of rationality. According to Cravero's analysis, Levi here tries to explain that humanity cannot have a complete knowledge, even through science, and this limit will take humanity to an inevitable catastrophe. In Cravero's understanding, it is only ethics that can prevent the disaster, and that is the meaning of Levi's reworking on ancient cultural archetypes.

The morning session of 6th July was dedicated to religions whose success has something to do with Science Fiction or Fantasy literature. Eleonora d'Agostino (Università la Sapienza di Roma, Italy) presented a paper on the experience of Ron Hubbard, the founder of the Church of Scientology, as a Science Fiction writer tied to the magazine *Astounding Science Fiction* and the authors who wrote on it. Gianni Trapletti (Independent, Italy) discussed Bokonism, a religion created by Kurt Vonnegut in *Cat's Cradle* (1963). Vonnegut was an atheist and Bokonism is clearly an invented religion, and the characters of the book themselves are totally aware of this peculiarity. Bokonism was created only as a way to stop evil human actions and to prevent political and military errors. Trapletti aimed to show how the ethical value of Bokonism can be understood as a demonstration of the commitment of Vonnegut to ethics and politics: religion may be a superstition, but it allows humans to keep the faith in an eventual improvement of our morality and Bokonism is a clear example of a false religion with a remarkable good effect. Roberto Arduini (Independent, Italy) discussed religious movements inspired by Tolkien: these movements, born in the hippie culture of the 1960s, gained more strength after the publishing of *The Silmarillion* (1977). According to some of the adherents of these religious movements, Tolkien has to be considered as the modern discoverer of a secret (but real) history, which humanity forgot. However, to other adherents of these faiths, Tolkien could

also be considered as not completely a human being, who still had memory of past lives. Arduini's contribution aimed to give an overall view on Tolkien's derived religions, in order to explain that according to some of these religions *The Silmarillion* and other related works would not be mere fictional narratives but a kind of revealed 'truth.'

The second morning session focused on religions created in a fantastical context. Marcos Bella-Férnandez (Universidad Autónoma de Madrid, Spain) and Leticia Cortina Aracil (Independent, Spain) analysed the religions created by Spanish groups playing different kinds of Live Action Role Playing (LARP) games. Giuseppe Cuscito (Vanderbilt University, USA) presented a paper on the origins of paleoastronautics, the belief in ancient inhabitants of other worlds who inhabited earth. This tradition, which took its origins in Science Fiction literature, has now instigated belief for some communities.

In the afternoon session, Liliana Tangorra (Università degli Studi di Bari, Italy) explored the tradition of fantastic beasts, from the *Physiologus* to the *Harry Potter* saga by J. K. Rowling (1997-2007). The panel particularly analysed the Italian and French editions of the seven books and their illustrated covers by Italian artist Serena Riglietti and French artist Jean-Claude Götting. Caterina Agus (Università degli Studi di Torino, Italy) presented an analysis of bear cults, in order to demonstrate how modern authors as Tolkien and George R. R. Martin were inspired by ancient fairy tales while writing their novels. Sebastian Schwibach (Istituto Italiano per gli Studi Filosofici, Italy) presented a paper dedicated to C. S. Lewis, specifically the cosmology and divine in his space trilogy, *Out of the Silent Planet* (1938), *Perelandra* (1943), and *That Hideous Strength* (1945). Schwibach aimed to demonstrate that Lewis, in this trilogy, analyses theological, ontological, and anthropological issues, through the notion of Good and, above all, of Evil, and their struggle on a physical and intellectual perspective.

The main research fields during the conference were dedicated to Fantastika religions as a way to understand the social function of religion itself in human societies. Authors facilitate this by drawing on old religions and myths while also creating new ones, in a process that we can call mythogem, according to the proposal made by Giulia Mancini. As societies quickly change, new myths arise in order to fulfil the needs of this new humanity, needs that ancient myths do not satisfy anymore. The conference showed a more investigative approach to religion in Science Fiction, while contemporary Fantasy seems more likely a way to convey new proposals on the use of religion and myths. The theme should, however, be discussed further, as only a few works were analysed in the four days of the Velletri conference.

BIONOTE

Chiara Crosignani completed her PhD in 2013 at the University of Salerno, Italy, with a dissertation on the meaning of the word 'daimon' between the Classic and the Christian Era. In 2014, she undertook a post-doctorate on the religions of ancient Mediterranean. In 2018, she undertook a Master Degree in Public History at the University Statale of Milan. She writes divulgation papers on Modern Fantasy for the Italian *Fantasy Magazine*.

15TH INTERNATIONAL GOTHIC ASSOCIATION CONFERENCE – GOTHIC TERROR, GOTHIC HORROR (JULY 30-AUGUST 2, 2019)

Conference Report by Alissa Burger

"Gothic Terror, Gothic Horror." ***15th Conference of the International Gothic Association*****, Lewis University, Romeoville, Illinois, USA, 30 July-2 August 2019.**

The fifteenth annual conference of the International Gothic Association (IGA) was hosted by Lewis University in Romeoville, Illinois, marking the first time the conference has been held in the United States. The year's theme focused on "Gothic Terror and Gothic Horror," as well as on the distinctions and intersections of these two modes, which were explored across a wide variety of media, including classic and contemporary literature, film, television, and other popular culture. Drawing more than two hundred Gothic scholars from around the world, the conference offered a wide range of perspectives and critical approaches, resulting in spirited conversation and interdisciplinary connections. There were nine sets of panels scheduled over the four days of the conference, with seven to eight parallel panel streams in each. The conference also included a variety of special events that showcased the nearby city of Chicago and the conference theme of "Gothic Terror, Gothic Horror."

The conference commenced on Tuesday 30th July with a graduate student workshop, followed by lunch and welcoming remarks. Attendees were greeted with a performance by organist Mark Downey, who played a rousing medley of classical Gothic music. There were welcoming addresses by David Livingston, President of Lewis University, and Jamil Mustafa, Professor of English at Lewis University and conference organiser, including an overview of the conference schedule and special events.

Following the welcoming remarks, the first session of the conference commenced. There were seven parallel streams, including panels on *Frankenstein* (1818), Gothic chapbooks, Edgar Allan Poe, cannibalism, and the eighteenth-century Gothic novel. This group of panels ranged from the classic to the contemporary and engaged with a wide variety of themes, period studies, and close reading of particular authors and works, a diversity which typified the conference as a whole. I attended a panel on "American (Regional) Gothic," which provided a thought-provoking and engaging start to the conference. The panellists considered a wide range of regional American Gothic traditions, including western Gothic (Joice Amorim, Federal University of Santa Catarina, Brazil), California Gothic (Bernice Murphy, Trinity College, Ireland), Native American Gothic (Aaron LaDuke, Northwestern University Qatar, Qatar), and nineteenth-century spiritualism (Jasmyn

Barrington, Boston University, United States), with presentations encompassing both literature and popular culture. The interconnections between these papers made for engaging discussion of the implications of landscape, race, gender, and history in the American Gothic tradition.

The second session was similarly diverse, offering panels on Gothic reading, body horror, Gothic cinema, the long nineteenth-century, monstrous parents, and *The Haunting of Hill House*, which was a frequent touchstone throughout the conference in considerations of both Shirley Jackson's novel (1959) and the Netflix series (2018). I attended the panel on "Anglo-American Male and Female Gothic," which drew together wide-ranging periods, influences, and mediums. Anna Shajirat (Quincy University, United States) discussed the central role of trauma and violence in the development of the traditional Gothic heroine. David Schauer (Southeast Missouri State University, United States) considered the contemporary female Gothic in Kit Reed's novels and Carey Millsap-Spears (Moraine Valley Community College, United States) presented a critical analysis of representations of gender and sexuality in the television series *Gotham* (2014-2019).

The first day of the conference concluded with a Fine Arts Open House, which included an electroacoustic concert and art gallery exhibition. Lewis University has a trend-setting department of Music, which hosts the annual Electronic Music Midwest (EMM) festival. The four works presented in the electroacoustic concert were selected from nearly one hundred submitted compositions and drew on a wide range of Gothic influences, including Mike McFerron's "Myopic Phantasy," which is a meditation on Poe's "The Fall of the House of Usher" (1839). The Fine Arts Open House also featured a collaborative film and electronic music feature titled *Walking Distance* and an exhibition of paintings by Eli Samoska, Mike Brown, and Larissa Barnat.

The second day of the conference began with the third session of panels, which included discussions of eco-terror, Spanish Gothic, and Gothic television, among others. I chaired a session on "Domestic Horrors," which included papers analysing Shirley Jackson's *The Haunting of Hill House* (Kay Keegan, Ohio University, United States), Ira Levin's *Rosemary's Baby* (1968) and *The Stepford Wives* [1972] (Elizabeth Turner, Lehigh Carbon Community College, United States), and Carmen Maria Machado's "The Husband Stitch" [2014] (Caitlin Vance, University of Louisiana at Lafayette, United States). The presenters not only developed insightful analyses of their chosen literary works, but post-presentation discussion traced connections between these texts, including women's roles within and outside of the home, as well as the significance of architecture in defining the home within many of these works.

This session was followed by the first of three keynotes, with Karen E. Macfarlane's (Mount Saint Vincent University, Nova Scotia) consideration of the question "Where Have All the Monsters Gone?" Macfarlane considered the state of contemporary Gothic, the humanisation of previously uncomplicated monstrous figures in twenty-first-century literature and popular culture, and the significance of this shift on the surrounding cultures of these works and the larger discourse of the Gothic.

The afternoon was dedicated to showcasing nearby Chicago, with a Gothic tour that highlighted the darker side of the city's history, including H. H. Holmes, the Devil Baby of Hull House, and the Congress Hotel.

The morning session of Thursday 1st August featured another diverse slate of panels, including a teaching roundtable and panels on H. P. Lovecraft, witches, and the larger social contexts of the Gothic tradition. I attended a panel on "Gothic Children," which was an excellent combination of classic and contemporary literary analysis. Lauren Nixon (University of Sheffield, UK) discussed Ann Radcliffe's *The Mystery of Udolpho* (1794) with a focus on "The Terror Experience in the Gothic as a Bildungsroman" and its role in heroine Emily St. Aubert's maturation. Adam Kealley (Curtin University, Australia) explored the trope of Gothic children in more contemporary literature, with a particular focus on "The Horror of the Lost Child in Australian Gothic YA Fiction."

The fifth session offered another teaching roundtable and panels on abjection, queerness, vampires, male and female Gothic, and "Undead Narratives from Medical History, Comics, and Cinema," with the panels again spanning a substantial range of periods and literary and popular culture media. During this session, I was a presenter in a panel on Stephen King, discussing "Terror, Horror, and Stephen King's Universe in *Castle Rock*" (co-authored with Jenny Collins, SUNY Delhi, United States). Mayssa Jaber (University of Baghdad, Iraq) presented on female killers in King's work, with particular focus on Carrie White (*Carrie*) and Annie Wilkes (*Misery*). Alejandro Gallegos Ramos (Autonomous University of Chihuahua, Mexico) provided an excellent close reading and linguistic analysis with "Stephen King's *IT*: A Linguistic Balance of Fear."

Over lunch, the Allan Lloyd Smith Prizes were announced, which are awarded for standout contributions to Gothic scholarship in the categories of monograph (awarded every two years) and edited collection (awarded every four years). Catherine Spooner's *Post-Millennial Gothic: Comedy, Romance and the Rise of Happy Gothic* (2017) was awarded the monograph prize and Carol Margaret Davison's *The Gothic and Death* (2017) won for edited collection.

The second keynote of the conference was given by Agnieszka Soltysik Monnet (Université de Lausanne, Switzerland), and titled "War Gothic." Monnet outlined four key types of war Gothic: imperial Gothic, in which the Other is depicted as monstrous; ironic Gothic, which highlights the mutually destructive nature and moral ambiguity of conflict; spectral Gothic, of which psychological injury is a central concern; and battlefield Gothic, which features graphic depiction of bodily harm as a means of critique. Monnet's consideration of these types and illustrative examples of each provided a productive framework for sociocultural considerations of and responses to the horrors of war.

Key themes in the final session of the day included vampires and gaming, with panels on "International Vampires," "Vampires, Doubles, and Race," "Gothic Video Games," and "Playing Gothic Games." The international scope of the Gothic tradition was also highlighted in this session, with a panel on "Global Gothic: Turkey, Brazil, Poland," which brought together a diverse group of scholars from a wide range of international perspectives.

Thursday concluded with "An Evening with Julian Sands," featuring a screening of Ken Russell's 1987 film *Gothic*, in which Sands starred as Percy Bysshe Shelley. This was followed by a post-film discussion and Q&A session, and a reading by Sands of poetry by Shelley and John Keats.

The first session of the conference's final day included panels on "History and Race in the American Gothic," Shirley Jackson, international Gothic traditions, and eco-Gothic. I attended a session on "The American Horror Movie," whose presenters foregrounded the interconnection of horror with a distinctively American wilderness. Brandyn Whitaker (Middle Tennessee State University, United States) addressed "The Bewildering Wilderness: Becoming Lost in American Horror Films," drawing distinctions between spatial, moral, and social disorientation, while Walter Metz (Southern Illinois University, United States) discussed "The Puritan Gothic in Contemporary American Cinema" with Robert Eggers's *The Witch* (2016) and its wide range of cinematic influences.

The second-to-last session of the conference included a panel of papers developed and presented by Lewis University undergraduate students under the teaching and mentorship of Jamil Mustafa. The presenters covered a wide range of Gothic texts and approaches, as Katarzyna Majchrowicz-Wolny presented on "The Maze of Gazes: Setting, the 'Woman Question,' and the 'Separate Spheres' in *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*," Jacob Volk addressed "Madness in the Highlands: Gothic and Romantic Features in *The Castles of Athlin and Dunbayne*," Brandon Vlach discussed "Dehumanization and Supernatural Elements: Gothic and Romantic Features of Percy Shelly's *St Irvyne; or The Rosicrucian*," and Terri Arain analysed the ways in which "*Vathek*'s Gothic Settings Problematize Gender Roles." The presenters' analysis of their respective texts was critically engaged and well-delivered, and these emerging scholars' contributions were an excellent addition to the conference.

The final keynote of the conference was delivered by William Veeder (University of Chicago, United States), and titled "Buried Narratives: A Crypto-graphic Approach to Gothic." Veeder posited an innovative approach to reading the Gothic, in which he encouraged the audience to pay as much attention to what goes unsaid as to that which appears on the page, emphasising the roles of occlusion and the unspoken in approaching the Gothic. After establishing this framework, Veeder discussed a handful of illustrative examples, including Gothic classics like Poe's "The Cask of Amontillado" (1846) and William Faulkner's "A Rose for Emily" (1930).

The final session of papers included panels on Gothic poetry, history, film, and abjection, as well as a panel on "The Gothic 70s and 80s" in which panellists explored the impact of the Gothic in 1970s and '80s popular culture, as well as the influence of the 1970s and '80s on contemporary Gothic media. Trae Toler (University of North Carolina Wilmington, United States) re-examined the trope of the 'final girl' popularised by Carol Clover and others in his consideration of "Final Girls and Maternal Influences in 70s and 80s Slasher Cinema," while Sorcha Ní Fhlainn (Manchester Metropolitan University, UK) presented on "The Rift Between Worlds, or the Gothic 1980s," including the Netflix series *Stranger Things* (2016-current).

The conference concluded with the IGA Annual General Meeting, including information on the next conference, which will be held in Dublin, Ireland in the summer of 2022 and hosted by Trinity College (which has been postponed from its original date to the Coronavirus pandemic). This was followed by a Gothic disco, which was a fun and fitting conclusion to the conference, underscoring the celebration and collaborative engagement of this inclusive, engaging, and supportive community of both established and emerging Gothic scholars.

BIONOTE

Alissa Burger is an Associate Professor of English and Director of Writing Across the Curriculum at Culver-Stockton College, US. She is the author of *Teaching Stephen King: Horror, the Supernatural, and New Approaches to Literature* (Palgrave, 2016) and *The Quest for the Dark Tower: Genre and Interconnection in the Stephen King Series* (McFarland, 2021).

GOTHFLIX: A CONFERENCE CELEBRATING NETFLIX AND THE GOTHIC (FEBRUARY 1-2, 2020)

Conference Report by Kat Humphries

Gothflix: A Conference Celebrating Netflix and the Gothic. **Lancaster University, UK, 1- 2 February 2020.**

Gothflix: A Conference Celebrating Netflix and the Gothic took place at Lancaster University across Saturday 1 and Sunday 2 February 2020. The genesis of this conference was a conversation between convenors Luke Turley (Lancaster University, UK) and Jessica White (University of Liverpool, UK), before presenting together on a panel at *Reimagining the Gothic with a Vengeance: Returns, Revenge, Reckonings* (University of Sheffield, 2019). What began as a tentative plan for another group panel the following year quickly evolved into a dedicated conference on Netflix and the Gothic, funded by the International Gothic Association, the British Academy of Film, Television and Screen Studies, and the Department of English Literature and Creative Writing at Lancaster University.

The conference began on Saturday morning with a panel entitled "Gothic Laughter," featuring papers by Shaina Paggett (Keele University, UK) and Kerry Gorill (Manchester Metropolitan University, UK). Paggett's paper, "Comedy as a Coping Mechanism? The Hidden Gothic in Netflix Comedies" was a very interesting place to start, focusing as it did on three shows that are by no means obvious examples of the Gothic: *Fuller House* (2016-current), *One Day at a Time* (2017-current), and *GLOW* (2017-current). Paggett explored how these shows feature Gothic undertones and themes relating to death and hardship, emphasising the potential use of humour to work through trauma. Gorill's paper, "Curing Toxic Masculinity: Is *Daybreak's* Adults-Only Armageddon an Effective Antidote?", focused on a show with similar comedic elements, *Daybreak* (2019), in particular its depiction of American masculinity in a world where young men no longer have father-figures to whom they can turn. Gorill touched on several models of American masculinity, in particular the enduring models of the pioneer / cowboy and the 1950s patriarch, with elements of both evident in the show's lead male character, Josh. Gorill's suggestion that toxic masculinity endures through being passed down to younger generations by older male role models was especially thought-provoking.

Of the two parallel panels that followed, I attended "Self and Selfhood," with papers by Kerry Dodd (Lancaster University, UK), Kate Harvey (University of Stirling, UK) and Matthew Melia (Kingston University, UK). Dodd's paper, "You are not in Control: Glitch Horror and the Loss of Agency

in the Digital Age," used the interactive film *Black Mirror: Bandersnatch* (2018) to demonstrate the ways in which our growing dependence on technology is matched by a rise in technological anxiety and 'user panic.' Like other episodes of Charlie Brooker's *Black Mirror* (2011-current), Dodd concluded that although on the surface the narrative of *Bandersnatch* appears to be about technology, it is really about human ethics and morality. Harvey's paper on "'Restricted Intellectual Property': Agency, Identity & Sestrahood in *Orphan Black*" explored not only the hybrid identities of the show's fictional characters, but also the interesting and somewhat convoluted production history of the show itself. Ultimately, she suggested, *Orphan Black* (2013-2017) is the story of women trying to break free from a patriarchal system. Finally, Melia's paper, entitled "*I am the Pretty Thing That Lives in the House:* Samuel Beckett and the Gothic," compared the Netflix original film of its title (2016) to the work of Samuel Beckett, noting similarities in the depiction of empathy towards monsters among other visual and contextual parallels.

After a break for lunch we reconvened for a keynote from Sorcha Ní Fhlainn (Manchester Metropolitan University, UK), chaired by Luke Turley entitled "'No Future', or the Gothic 1980s: Revisiting the ReDecade, Reagan's American, and Chasing Our Futures (Again)." This was timely, as the topic of nostalgia for the 1980s had come up several times during the morning's panels and formed the main thread for Ní Fhlainn's paper. She discussed the popularity of revivals of old television (TV) series and cycles noting that the children of the 1980s, who grew up with the works of Wes Craven, John Carpenter, James Cameron, and Ridley Scott, are the film and TV executives of today. This may account for the many attempts, for example in shows like *Stranger Things* (2016-current), to generate nostalgia for a lost time of childhood magic through use of 1980s references and ephemera.

During the parallel panel sessions that afternoon I attended "Streaming the Weird," featuring papers by Michael Wheatley (Royal Holloway, University of London, UK) and Valentino Paccosi (Lancaster University, UK). Wheatley's paper, entitled "'All Flesh is Grass': Weirding Nature in Joe Hill and Stephen King's *In the Tall Grass*," was a fascinating exploration of the Netflix film adaptation (2019) of the co-written Horror novella (2012). Wheatley discussed the ways in which Horror moves in cycles, intertwining with the cultural concerns of the time, and thus we have several recent examples of nature in Horror as an active and dominant force, encouraging audiences to question our perceptions of the natural world. Paccosi's paper, "Can we play D&D now? *Stranger Things* and the Re-Reading of the Lovecraftian through *Dungeons and Dragons*," discussed the ways in which the characters of Netflix's most successful original television show utilise their knowledge and experience of table top roleplaying games to navigate the frightening new world in which they find themselves. Though the Demogorgon of *Stranger Things* does not really resemble the creature of the same name from D&D, the children use taxonomy they *do* know to refer to a monster they cannot otherwise describe or comprehend, taming it through language, turning it into a creature they know can be defeated.

The second day of the conference began with a panel entitled "Victims and Villains" and featured papers by Emma Nagouse (University of Sheffield, UK), Evan Hayles Gledhill (University of

Reading, UK) and Katrina Jan (University of Birmingham, UK). Nagouse's paper, "When a Stranger Calls: Beauty and Blame in *Riverdale* and the Bible," provided a unique and unexpected comparison of the attempted rape of Cheryl Blossom in *Riverdale* (2017-current) with artistic depictions of the biblical story "Susanna and The Elders" in Daniel 13. Nagouse explored the ways in which visual traditions of representing rape have changed over time, and how a serialised teen drama like *Riverdale* approaches such representation for a modern audience. Hayles Gledhill's paper was entitled "'Can I be the helpless victim?': The *Scream* franchise's 20-year engagement with gender and genre," considering the Netflix original series *Scream* (2015-current) in relation to other entries in the franchise. They concluded that the serialised format, streaming platform, and show's return to older codes and conventions of Horror actually reinforce the sexist media norms that the older *Scream* films had been so effective in subverting. The final paper, Jan's "Exploring the Sexualisation of Modern-Day Serial Killers on Netflix's *You*," discussed the romanticising and sexualisation of Joe, the main character of *You* (2018-current). Audience engagement was an important factor here, as questions were raised around how far a platform like Netflix is responsible for the way in which its content is received and interpreted.

After a short break, the next panel was "Dark Inheritances," with papers by Dounia Ouided Hachelef (Manchester Metropolitan University, UK), Katie Lowe (University of Birmingham, UK) and Carly Stevenson (Sheffield University, UK). Hacelef's paper, entitled "Dark is Power: The Resurgence of a New Generation Teenage Witch on Netflix," engaged with Gothic aesthetics and representations of the witch in *The Chilling Adventures of Sabrina* (2018-2020). This was linked with discussion of the 'happy' and 'pop' Gothic and the image of female power within the character of the witch. Lowe presented "XOXO, Gothic Girl: Teenage Power and Anxiety in *Chilling Adventures of Sabrina, 13 Reasons Why,* and *Stranger Things*," exploring modern manifestations of the traditional Gothic heroine in the titular Sabrina, Hannah from *13 Reasons Why* (2017-current), and Eleven in *Stranger Things*. These characters are all teenage girls, forced into facing 'monsters' of varying forms while attempting to maintain their normality. The final paper was Stevenson's "The Ethics of Empathy in *You*," once again engaging with the representation of a charming serial killer, considering how far the show deconstructs popular romance tropes versus how far it actually reinforces damaging notions of gender, relationships, and race.

The second keynote of the conference was from Lorna Jowett (University of Northampton, UK), chaired by Jessica White, entitled "TV Horror 2.0: [Subtitle Loading]." Jowett set out to explore the ways in which Horror on TV has been affected by changes in the format's landscape, which has expanded greatly with the advent and proliferation of streaming services. There has been a vast increase in demand for content – we now expect a constant stream of content to meet our preferences, that we can watch at any time and from any location. Jowett noted that Netflix seem fairly reluctant to conform to traditional genre divisions – very few of its shows are categorised as 'Horror,' despite featuring obvious and explicit Horror content that we would immediately associate with the genre. The number of alternative streaming services alongside Netflix was also raised, as well as the inevitable fragmentation point when there are so many different platforms and so much content being generated that we have to choose between them.

During the final parallel panels, I attended "Vampires and Zombies," which featured papers by Roxanne Douglas (University of Warwick, UK), Teodora Niklova (Independent) and Stephen Curtis (University of Central Lancashire, UK). Douglas's paper, "'It feels like I'm giving my body something it needs in an intense and powerful way': The *Santa Clarita Diet* and the Feminist Encounter with Binge/Self-Care/Pleasure Politics," explored the atypical representation of the zombie presented in *Santa Clarita Diet* (2017-2019). Douglas considered the representation of the show's main character Sheila as a lucid zombie, one who inhabits a hybrid state between mother and monster, negotiating the horror of her new condition whilst also exploring the freedom it gives her from societal norms, and how this reflects concerns of contemporary feminism. We moved from zombies to vampires in Niklova's "Death by Running Water: Decolonizing the Vampire Narrative in Netflix's *Castlevania*," who discussed the show's (2017-current) restoration of Dracula to his native land of Romania following Bram Stoker's colonising act of removing him from his geographical and historical context in the 1897 novel. Then it was back to zombies in Curtis' "They're bodacious, they're voracious, but altogether too loquacious; or, why won't Netflix's zombies stop talking?". Curtis discussed the oversaturation of the zombie in modern popular culture, leading to the newer representation of the lucid zombie in shows like *Santa Clarita Diet*.

To conclude the weekend, we came together for a roundtable discussion featuring Sorcha Ni Fhlainn, Lorna Jowett, and Catherine Spooner (Lancaster University, UK), chaired by Luke Turley and Jessica White. This was a lively and thought-provoking discussion that celebrated the success of the conference whilst also noting absences, for example the lack of critical engagement with any Netflix documentaries or children's programming. The streaming format was a subject of major interest, as we contemplated the future of TV and film and the risk of consuming all our content on a single platform leading to a homogenous viewing experience. Disappointment was expressed around the loss of the film/TV show as a physical object, the paratext that comes with VHS/DVD/Blu-ray cases, the artwork, and special features. Platforms like Netflix have to produce their content with a different mindset to producers of the past, reacting to modern technology, contemporary audiences, and the sheer amount of choice we have these days in deciding what we watch.

A conference entirely focused around a streaming platform was somewhat revolutionary to attend, featuring input from the established fields of television and Gothic studies as well as covering new ground, paving the way for similar events and critical consideration in future. The team behind *Gothflix* hope to produce an edited collection from the conference, which should be of interest to anyone in the fields of television studies, Netflix, the Gothic, Horror etcetera as well as fans looking to learn more about their favourite Netflix original content.

BIONOTE

Kat Humphries is a postgraduate student of Fantasy Literature at the University of Glasgow, UK. Her dissertation explores the figure of the monster hunter hero in American Fantasy television, focusing specifically on *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003) and its impact on subsequent shows *Supernatural* (2005-2020) and *Grimm* (2011-2017). Her wider research interests include the rehabilitation of fictional villains, young adult media, and fat studies.

BEYOND BORDERS: EMPIRES, BODIES, SCIENCE FICTIONS (SEPTEMBER 10-12, 2020)

Conference Report by Beatriz Herrera Corado

"Beyond Borders: Empires, Bodies, Science Fictions." London Science Fiction Research Community. 10-12 September 2020. Online.

"Beyond Borders: Empires, Bodies, Science Fiction" was a virtual conference organised by the London Science Fiction Research Community (LSFRC). As the title reads, this event addressed borders not only as a narrative object of analysis, but transgressing the term itself, considering all the structures that usually configure conferences as 'academic' events. From this perspective, the conference welcomed various artistic expressions, academic fields, and activists. In the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, the online platform opened the possibility to participate from many places and enrich the already multi-geographical virtuality. With three simultaneous panels, workshops and roundtables, time zones and household duties were the only restrictions for attending the conference.

As a participant, I was stranded and locked down in Maryland, USA, since the airport of Guatemala City, as many others around the globe, had been closed since March 13th. I may describe myself as a Guatemalan *mestiza* specialised in dance anthropology who found a conference with a wide conception of research and creativity compelling. For this report, I have chosen the moments in which voices and activities that are sometimes excluded from academic events shook up the borders of the discussion.

The first activity I attended was the Science Fiction and Translation panel, which featured a dialogue between Sawad Hussain (UK), Emily Jin (Yale University, China), Guangzhao Lyu (University College London, UK), Sinéad Murphy (King's College London, UK), and Tasnim Qutait (Uppsala University, Sweden). Starting from a conceptual clarification of the wide Fantastika genre, the discussion addressed whether speculation necessarily entails the construction of the future, or if the hyperbolic and exaggerated tropes which enlarge the present is equivalent to a projection of the future. Speakers agreed that Science Fiction (SF) emerges as a quest for exceptionalism and innovation in contrast to the normatives of the present. In the case of Arab and Chinese translation to English readers, language innovation is complex to translate, especially when dealing with culture specific terms. They mentioned how translation is like a cognitive mapping of semantic fields, but the borders are raised from the publishers that expect the works to fit into stereotypes and orientalism. As translators, they find themselves in the dilemma of spoon feeding anglophone

readers and negotiating with foreignization. For example, Jin discussed how anglophone readers have prompted the idea that Liu Cixin's *The Three Body Problem* (2008) is a representation of all Chinese fiction, and especially, Chinese youth worldview. The panel concluded with questioning how much the SF industry still responds to ideas of modernity, and is not free of global politics of production and circulation of works.

Two workshops addressed the creative and affective reflection around SF. The first one led by Rhona Eve Clewes (UK) looked into expressive possibilities of embodied experiences and allowed a practical approach to speculation. She discussed how acknowledging that we are embodied beings is an act of subversion in the digital world. She invited us to breathe, to use analogue instruments, to be physical writing or drawing. Clewes asked us to lie on the floor and write about the border of acceptance and rejection of our body parts. The second workshop guided by Bretton A. Varga (California State University, USA) and Erin Adams (Kennesaw State University, USA) focused on the relationship between humans and machines and the affective dimension of droids. Varga claimed that posthumanism is about connectivity, but capitalism makes us forget about the connections. In order to approach the social imagination of the 'we,' Adams and Varga asked who is marginalised or made Other? How can we connect to the weird? To the world? Based on Donna Haraway's observation of who makes and who is made, they proposed to acknowledge relationships of affect and attachment with droids and machines, which are usually background characters in SF narratives.

Keynote speaker Nadine El Enany (UK, Birkbeck University of London) talked about the fictional nature and history of law enforcement and race in the British Empire. She considered Britain's legal history is based on race science, and its institutions founded on the fantasy of sovereignty. El Enany posed how the mythological roots of British history conceived race as an ordering principle that colonists used as a category which violently constructed the difference between humans. El Enany addressed British supremacy in current migration practices and described how a legal status distributes chances of life and death: Borders follow people in them, they are embodied memories and inherited in the corporeal dimension. She wondered: what do colonised people desire? What are our psyches, dreams, and futures? As she described immigration as an obstruction of movement, thus Britain is a fiction of racial inclusion. Where do migrants come from? Why are they aliens? She concluded by proposing to disrupt law's pedagogical role and posing a re-imagination of space in order to re-conceptualise migration.

The panel "Against Extrapolation: Reimagining SF" transgressed the borders between SF and science production. Filip Boratyn (University of Warsaw, Poland) presented a paper on the dichotomies in the representations of racial minorities, which are usually related to affect and emotions in contrast to the rationalised dominant races which, as sociologist Max Weber described, are disenchanted. Boratyn posed as an example N. K. Jemisin's *Broken Earth* (2015-2017), in which he analysed the dichotomy of disenchantment as an excluding category and enchantment entails an epistemic practice based on a sense of wonder and female empowerment. Following, Andrew Ferguson (University of Maryland, USA) looked into a reflection on decolonising the Novum, a term coined by Darko Suvin based on the premise that SF as a genre should search for cognitive

estrangement, but nevertheless, in the imperialist anglophone context. Ferguson wondered how to re-elaborate SF poetics without the myth of a 'first contact' linked to a colonial gaze. His inquiry on the post-coloniality and the quest that sets characters in motion was very much connected with the last paper on the panel by Alessandra Marino (The Open University, UK). From her experience in knowledge production within space science, Marino contested both the myth of male-heroes in the space industry and the myth of depletion, which is limited. By acknowledging the feminist view on care and ecology elaborated by Ursula K. Le Guin The *Word for World is Forest* (1972) and Donna Haraway's *Staying with the Trouble* (2016), Marino called for a re-elaboration on space travel, linear time, and technofixation both in space science as in SF.

Moving from academic insights towards activist milestones negotiating with 'real' life borders, the amazing roundtable "Provocations Beyond Fiction" chaired by Ibtisam Ahmed (University of Nottingham, UK) presented two perspectives regarding identity and embodied borders. Michael Darko (Freed Voices, UK) started off describing his expertise by experience in the UK immigration detention system, which he defines as a policy of ignorance. He regarded how the indefinite detention time for immigrants increases xenophobia and suicide. He questioned who detention benefits and criticised charities that operate as white saviours. Then, Jordan Wise (Notts Trans Hub, UK) addressed transgender representation in fiction and the rare possibility for transgender characters to lead narratives of their own. Wise claimed that transgender community members are not an ideology, an agenda, or a debate, but people who deserve to be included in the narrow framework of mainstream media. Wise's critique encompassed the crisis of creativity and originality related to the threat to the status quo of cisgender gaze, and the precariousness of liberal art careers (including student loans). Both perspectives addressed the battle for imagination and the restrictions of otherness in the lived and fictional worlds.

Another exciting event in the conference was the creators roundtable with Chen Qiufan (China), Larissa Sansour (UK/Palestine), and Linda Stupart (UK/South Africa). Sansour opened the discussion by addressing the trauma of the Palestinian identity and the fear of environmental disaster. For example, her recent work *In Vitro* (2019) which challenges the notion of the expected aesthetics of a 'third-world' artist, in which she addresses her own point of view of the Israel/Palestine conflict. In that particular work, SF operates as a medium that allows for different audiences to relate to a conflict without situating it under a specific nationality. Stupart shared their work *Watershed* (2019) which addresses abjection, a concept from Julia Kristeva that refers to the crossing of the body's borders, an idea of disgust and transgression. Stupart commented how bodies transgress borders in leaking, and how leaky bodies relate to melting ice caps. Chen Qiufan talked about his work as an installation artist which provides an experience that complements storytelling, in which he refers to both electronic waste and the cyborg as waste people. The creative disciplines allow them to take revenge from the conflicting realities of territorial dispute and ecological crisis. They use formats that are unexpected. Sansour mentioned the role of memories from the diaspora in terms that acknowledge the trauma and seek for a future.

Similar to Jordan Wise's claim on the representation of who gets to write SF, along the roundtable it was mentioned the need to reinvent the genre. How can creators engage with the world? They agreed on SF as a field for discussion and reflection of our own time/space identity constructions. The roundtable concluded with remarks about climate change and the continuous concern of climate change as a continuation of colonisation. More discussion on Chen Qiufan's work was done in the panel 3C "Upon the Wasteland Chinese SF 2."

Florence Okoye (AfroFuturesUK, UK) delivered the final keynote, about the development of visual representations of technology as a fictional narrative. She focused on how technology reifies social beliefs and values, and also conveys inequality as in the fifteenth century (a period recognised for innovation but also for restriction of the commons). By analysing maps of the sugar colonies, as a playground for European's new dreams, she highlighted their omissions and silences in the narrative of the conquest. Similarly, with plantation islands' sugar machinery, Okoye claimed that such technology was built for surveillance and concealment. Neither the maps nor the sugar machinery referred to the workers' realities, but float in the vacuum, highlighting the contradiction among the invisible disparities of labour versus the rationalisation of slavery as progress. Okoye wondered about the split consciousness of settlers who wish to live like royalty but do not face the labour force, as in Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516). So then, representations of land and technology portray a futurity of both indigenous and black people vanishing, and thus, genocide. Okoye connected these absences with Francis Bacon's idea of science as "action at a distance" pointing out the vanishing of the intermediate ties of humanity's relationship to nature and each other. The existence of indigenous and black people has always been the material that transmitted action into force.

The final plenary following the keynote talk addressed the notion of free labour and privilege as layers of margins existing within margins. In such a context, technology might be seen as a fiction that has served oppressive agendas, overlapping the lived and imaginary borders of identity. A topic that also resonates here is gender/sex identity and human/animal borders and representations, which were addressed in other panels that I was not able to attend.

As concluding thoughts, considering the representation of east-Asian, Arab, and black futurities, in the global scope of SF and virtual interactions, I do find a possibility of enlarging the participation of Latinx authors and scholars. As a territory that was colonised within a different regime, the debates on slavery and humanity, and the continuation of indigenous narratives from Latin America might inspire new perspectives of inquiring about Science Fiction. Still, in the midst of the lockdown, the diversity of voices presented in the conference already encompassed many possibilities of reimagining research. From the embodied experience of confinement, we might be able to strengthen the community of scholars, artists and activists who stand for an integrative view of fictions, knowledges, and human beings.

BIONOTE

Beatriz Herrera Corado (Guatemala City, US) is a researcher, dance artist, and writer. Herrera holds a BA in Anthropology and Literature and graduated from the MA program Choreomundus: International Master in Dance Knowledge, Practice, and Heritage. Trained in ballet, modern dance, and contact improvisation, she has also published the poetry book "Hacia la tempestad" and literature essays. Currently she writes about Guatemala's dance scene and co-organizes the webinar "Multílogos: Danzas, cuerpos y movimientos."

FICTION REVIEWS

THE TERROR OF THE TRANSCENDENTAL

Review by Michael Wheatley

***Roarings from Further Out: Four Weird Novellas by Algernon Blackwood*. Edited by Xavier Aldana Reyes. The British Library, 2019. Novellas.**

"What distinguishes Blackwood from other weird writers is not just his interest in the occult and his intrinsic style, but his outlook on life and its spiritual links to nature" (10). So writes editor Xavier Aldana Reyes in his brief but insightful introduction to *Roarings from Further Out*: *Four Weird Novellas by Algernon Blackwood* (2019). Yet, Blackwood has scarcely received the deification of other Old Weird authors. While contemporary figures such as H. P. Lovecraft and Arthur Machen have been canonised through numerous editions and reprints, Blackwood's writing has seen comparatively little mainstream attention. Now republished as part of The British Library's *Tales of the Weird* series, however, this collection goes some way towards redressing the dearth of fiction available from this Weird pioneer.

Blackwood's 'intrinsic style' is one of steady pace, gradual revelation, and a frequent reconceptualisation of the natural world. His characters represent a spiritual select who are attuned to the strangeness of the universe and therefore positioned at the precipice of otherworldly encounters with nature that will either elevate or destroy their souls (sometimes both). As explicated by Aldana Reyes, Blackwood's work thus reflects his own philosophy, a deeply held belief in "the connection between human beings and the Earth" (9). Indeed, with their thematic interest in nonhuman agency and uncomfortable interconnectedness, the novellas collected herein read remarkably pertinent to the climate anxieties and ecological uncertainty born a century on.

The first story of the collection, "The Willows" (1907), concerns two explorers who become stranded on a small island in the River Danube. As the waters begin to rise, their stay becomes prolonged and they come to realise that they are "interlopers, trespassers" in a region not commonly known to the human (33). The willows that surround them seem to move independently, "rustling among themselves when no wind stirred, and shaking oddly from the roots upwards" (53). Eventually, the protagonists discover that they have entered the domain of entities entirely beyond their understanding. Perfectly opening the collection, this tale establishes Blackwood's elemental approach to writing nature. The willows are not an aestheticised image but a "furious" force (23); the Danube moves "with a shouting sound […] tearing at the sandy banks" (18). If the Weird mode relies upon the presence of an intrusive, unknowable force that destabilises reality, then in this novella nature itself becomes one such hyperobject. The protagonists accept their "utter insignificance before this unrestrained power" (25). Yet, this ferocity is contrasted with an acknowledgement that although nature is violent, it loses none of its splendour: the natural

world remains one of "wonder and magic" (19). As the narrator explains, "mountains overawe and oceans terrify, while the mystery of great forests exercises a spell peculiarly its own. But all these, at one point or another, somewhere link on intimately with human life and human experience" (25). Possessing an optimism rarely found in the cosmic horror of succeeding Weird writers, "The Willows" locates the sublime even in the depths of existential dread.

First published in 1908, "Ancient Sorceries" (1908) follows in curious contrast. An example of Blackwood's John Silence series (hybrid supernatural/detective stories concerning the eponymous psychical investigator), the plot centres around a remote French village where the inhabitants transform into cats at night. These creatures simply play at being human, an "outward semblance that masked their actual purposes" (93). Reimagining the previous themes of nonhuman agency and the spiritual self, this second novella highlights that although concepts may repeat, Blackwood was rarely wanting for original ideas. Artfully constructed, for instance, the village stands as a testament to Blackwood's descriptive prowess. Prose such as, "he sat there for some time pondering, bathed in the waves of murmurs and half-lost echoes that rose to his ears," evokes an encompassing sense of the wistful and the nostalgic (89). And while the story does occasionally succumb to Weird excess, with unfortunate lines such as "the crescendos and diminuendos were so very suggestive of cat-land on the tiles at night," as with most works of its kind the mood conjured is so palpable that such flourishes are easily forgiven (91). However, in contrast to the inexplicable Weirdness which precedes it, "Ancient Sorceries" does read as rather more routine. At times the plot seems to grind to an almost glacial pace, but most jarring is the manner in which the narrative eventually resolves. Adopting the approach of the supernatural explained, the final four pages devolve into historical background and exposition in order to justify and demystify the earlier events. Abrupt and ultimately lacklustre, Blackwood appears to explicitly request the reader to excuse "this sudden tame ending" (132).

Whereas the previous tales retain a certain timelessness in style, "The Wendigo" (1910) does struggle with its antiquation. The grotesque accents, for instance, threaten to shatter any illusion of suspense from the outset. An early example, where one character exclaims, "he's just skeered … skeered stiff about some ole feery tale! That's all, ain't it, ole pard?", veers dangerously close to parody when compared to contemporary prose (145). However, such quirks thankfully subside once the story starts to gain momentum. Once more concerning explorers, this time on a hunting expedition in the Canadian wilderness, the narrative focuses on the mythological figure of the Wendigo. "The Call of the Wild personified," Blackwood's Wendigo entices its victims to run alongside it until their feet catch fire and they are thrown from a terrific height (186). Already unsettled by their primeval surroundings, this creature slowly encroaches upon the explorers' camp. Eventually, one of their number meets this beast "that had survived the advance of humanity" (197). Echoing "The Willows" in its evocation of an untouched environment haunted by an avatar of the nonhuman, "The Wendigo" proves less satisfying. Whereas the willows are a constant, suffocating presence, the Wendigo appears only fleetingly. As such, though descriptions are buoyed by Blackwood's natural turn of phrase, the pace does drag in the early chapters of exploration and camaraderie. Upon its arrival, however, the Wendigo proves as chilling as any Weird entity otherwise written.

Lending the collection its title, "The Man Whom the Trees Loved" (1912) concludes the text. The plot concerns the retired elderly couple, David and Sophia Bittacy. David, feeling a "subtle sense of communion" with trees and the Forest fringing his garden, is contrasted by his wife who fears this fascination (204). As the sentience of the Forest then becomes clear, and its intent to absorb David into itself increasingly insistent, the narrative follows Sophia's journey from fear to defiance to solemn resignation. Rivalled only by "The Willows" as the standout piece of the collection, "The Man Whom the Trees Loved" proves at-once horrific and heart-warming. David's transition from his cosy middle-class lifestyle to his true spiritual calling as part of the Forest is perhaps the closest the Weird comes to a happy ending. However, from Sophia's perspective, the loss of her husband to this "alien" force evokes only sadness (274). Though possessing frequent frightening moments, such as David's eyes shining "without recognition […] [looking] into something beyond," the tale benefits immeasurably from its ambiguity and broadened scope (238). More character focused than previous works, it considers not only on the Forest, but those it affects as well. "The Man Whom the Trees Loved" is, perhaps, that rarest of things. A Weird tale with a heart.

Introducing the collection, Aldana Reyes suggests that "the reputation of early twentieth-century British writer Algernon Blackwood currently resides with his two novellas "The Willows" (1907) and "The Wendigo" (1910)" (7). By devoting half of the collection to these tales, one cannot help but feel that the blinkered scope of Blackwood's legacy has yet to be resolved. The inclusion of some of his equally inventive and exciting short stories, for instance, may have lent further discussion to the thematic parallels of the collection.

However, these four texts do confidently demonstrate the core tenets of Blackwood's oeuvre: nature disrupted, a realm of the soul, a reconfiguration of what we know to be human. Unique among Old Weird authors, and highly influential to the practitioners that followed, the commercial disappearance of Blackwood's fiction has left an unfilled void in the canon of the Weird. While New Weird authors such as Jeff VanderMeer have continued the legacy of ecological Weird fiction, Blackwood's works highlight that this is not a uniquely modern phenomenon but situated within a wider Weird tradition. If this is the beginning of such long-deserved attention for Blackwood, then *Roarings from Further Out* proves the perfect primer.

BIONOTE

Michael Wheatley is a creative writing and practice-based PhD student at Royal Holloway, University of London, UK. Through creative and critical research, his thesis re-evaluates Weird fiction as an ecological mode that can help us engage with our current climate crisis. His debut collection of short stories, *The Writers' Block* (Black Pear Press, 2019), explores mental health, the creative process, and the perception of the tortured artist. Further creative and critical work has been published in numerous literary journals and online magazines.

FOR A WIDER WEIRD

Review by Steen Ledet Christiansen

Edmundson, Melissa (Ed.). *Women's Weird 2: More Strange Stories by Women*. Handheld Press, 2020. Ebook, Short Story Collection.

Melissa Edmundson continues to delve into the histories of Weird literature with a continuation of *Women's Weird*. Weird fiction, whether we want to use the term 'New Weird' or not, has seen an incredible expansion over the past few decades. While much of that is focused in an aesthetic and critical re-evaluation of H. P. Lovecraft's writing, there is also a strong movement that has returned to Lovecraft's ideas with the express purpose of revisiting his misogynistic and racist impulses. Many of these writers are women, among them N. K. Jemisin, Kij Johnson, Caitlín R. Kiernan, and Ruthanna Emrys. A broader conception of Weird fiction is necessary if we are to move away from the misanthropic impulses of much early Weird.

Women's Weird and now *Women's Weird 2* forcefully reveals that women were always already part of Weird fiction and that previous genre histories and genealogies must be reconsidered. Edmundson's collections serve two purposes: to broaden the Weird tradition beyond cosmic horror and to position women writers squarely within that broader field. Both aspects are much needed corrections for readers and scholars of the Weird; it is too easy for both fans and critics to become too myopic in our tastes and inclusions, or to think that only contemporary literature brings in revisions of literary traditions. Edmundson wards off such easy assumptions.

Women's Weird 2 starts off with an essay by Edmundson which provides an eminent historical overview of early critical work conducted on supernatural literature. Starting with a discussion of Dorothy Scarborough's *The Supernatural in Modern English Fiction* (1917), Edmundson also underlines the importance of early critical interest in supernatural fiction. Scarborough's work is not widely known but has recently been re-released, indicating a growing interest in the work of female critics of the supernatural as well. Edmundson continues through various introductions of short story collections to show the early critical interest in these supernatural and Weird stories. In itself, this overview is valuable as a context in which these aforementioned traditions emerged and many of the discussions of these early critics are close to ideas of the sublime that are typical touchstones in Horror and Weird studies. Alongside Scarborough, Marjorie Bowen's editorial work is included and used by Edmundson to reinforce the idea that supernatural fiction was a fecund culture in the early twentieth century and that much work is required to fully outline this literary era.

We may recognise both differences and similarities in these earlier speculations: the difficulty of categorisation remains a constant concern even today and the strange fascination that

these types of stories elicit still remains hard to put into words. The excessive psychologising of the motivations for why we read these stories may strike the reader as somewhat simplistic, however. These early critics' recourse to humanity's darkest desires made manifest in supernatural stories comes off as quaint today. Is the presence and popularity of the Weird and the supernatural really based in human psychosis? Are all Horror stories based in universal fears? Do Horror writers really 'ardently feel' a desire 'to relate the terrible, the monstrous, or the incredible'? These quibbles aside, the inclusion of these discussions does much to situate a proto-genealogy for studies on the Weird.

Still Edmundson locates the Weird equally in contemporary terms, drawing both on the VanderMeers and Sean Moreland's ideas of the Weird as hybrid. She also argues for the expansion beyond female stereotypes of fainting damsels or objects of desire and rescue. As this collection is a follow-up to 2019's first *Women's Weird*, also edited by Edmundson and published by Handheld Press, the stories range further in their geographic spread, although this remains an English-language collection. Bringing in New Zealand, Australia, Canada, and Ireland means that colonial themes unsurprisingly emerge as well. All in all, the Weird is revealed to be a bigger place after Edmundson's collections and contextualisations.

As for the stories, they are diverse in form and thematics; although the domestic sphere is often present, many of the stories range far beyond clichéd ideas of feminine interests. The first story, Edith Stewart Drewry's "A Twin Identity," (1891) speaks explicitly to this idea of gender with its cross-dressing detective. A variation on the Sherlock Holmes murder mystery, the story features a crossdressing female detective and psychically linked twins as the supernatural element. No domestic sphere here, but rather an example of the close relations with crime and the supernatural; one insists on a rational world-order, as the other one works to undo it. Drewry's detective fails to rationalise the supernatural element, creating exactly a hybrid form of crime and weird. Mysteries are also evident in Mary Elizabeth Counselman's "The Black Stone Statue" (1937) and Lucy Maud Montgomery's "The House Party at Smoky Island" (1935). Montgomery's tale is mostly a traditional ghost story, with enough humour to make it stand out. Montgomery is of course best known for *Anne of Green Gables* (1908) and her inclusion here is another testament to the many tendrils of the Weird. Framed as a party on an evening with bad weather that results in the telling of ghost stories, there are even associations to Henry James' "The Turn of the Screw" (1898). Counselman's story is a far more traditional Weird tale, complete with a bizarre alien creature that turns people to stone. This creature is the perfect thing for a sculptor who otherwise struggles to make an impact. Originating from the deep, dark jungles of Brazil, this story also contains shades of colonial fears of degeneration and devolution.

Such colonial anxieties are evident in other stories, most notably Bithia Mary Crocker's "The Red Bungalow" (1919), set in India. The colonisers, in the story, built their titular red bungalow on a temple site but are literally incapable of seeing the horrors that swirl around their house. Only their son is able to see what haunts this place, with tragic results. Less colonial is Barbara Baynton's "A Dreamer" (1902), set in Australia. Colonial themes here emerge from the threatening landscape and the strangeness of its inhabitants. Baynton's story places its characters in an uncanny non-home

location; they have moved to Australia, yet do not feel welcome there. No overtly supernatural elements are present, but intense sensations of the uncanny still place this story well within Weird territories.

Two stories sit squarely within the cosmic horror tradition, but on either side of Lovecraft. Lettice Galbraith's "The Blue Room" from 1897 and Stella Gibbons' "Roaring Tower" from 1937 are examples of untrammeled weirdness that introduce alien forces and reality-sliding scenarios. Although also couched in Gothic trappings, these stories show that cosmic horror has a long lineage and that there is much potential for research into how Weird stories construct their worlds.

Women's Weird 2 is a stellar collection of overlooked stories that rightly deserve a place in the Weird tradition. Furthermore, Edmundson has gone a long way to make this collection useful both as a scholarly and teaching resource. An extensive glossary explains archaic words and culturally specific terminology, which will certainly be a great help in the classroom. From a scholarly perspective, the collection helps the reader recognise the Weird as a much broader tradition from its outset. The Weird is concerned with a broader range of thematics than simply cosmic horror and its writers include a much larger number of women than has typically been included. With the explosion of New Weird (or New New Weird), the range of Weird writers has expanded considerably. Edmundson's collection demonstrates that this diversification has its roots in much early Weird examples too.

BIONOTE

Steen Christiansen is Professor of Popular Visual Culture at Aalborg University, Denmark. He is currently working on weird cinema and television, with particular interest in how atmospheres are produced in these audiovisual works. He is also working on ideas and concepts of time in visual culture, with particular interest in Alfred North Whitehead's ideas of time and temporality. His books include *Drone Age Cinema* (2016), *Post-Biological Science Fiction* (2019), and *The New Cinematic Weird* (2021). He has also published broadly on visual popular culture, particularly in terms of affect, posthumanism, and post-cinema.

"TRESPASSERS WILL BE PERSECUTED"

Review by Stuart Spear

John Miller (ed.), *Weird Woods: Tales From The Haunted Forests of Britain*, The British Library, 2020. Short Story Collection.

Forests or woodlands operating as a site of terror has been creatively fertile soil for authors for over millennia. These areas of shrouded, enclosed nature have for so long sat outside the borders of villages or cities, outside the realms of domestic and commercial normality, that they have become inhabited with myth and legend, with whispered warnings of para-natural activity. This latest collection in the British Library's *Tales of the Weird* series focuses on these very spaces. Edited by John Miller, it houses tales from some of the most prominent names in Horror and Weird fiction - Arthur Machen, M. R. James, Algernon Blackwood, E. F. Benson, and others - as well as a few who have been largely overlooked or neglected in more recent literary circles, such as Mary Webb and Marjorie Bowen. By selecting these short stories, Miller believes that Weird fiction – and the fringes of all those genres it co-mingles – can awaken within the reader an ethical call to arms to protect our wild and wooded spaces; that the eerie, supernatural forests of fiction will protect the real and everyday woods of Britain (and beyond).

You would be forgiven, then, for assuming the stories in this collection to all be set within a forest, or at the very least for the focal narrative moment of these stories to occur there, but you would also be mistaken. The dread and horror created in some of the stories selected by Miller emanate from a small cluster or row of trees, or, in two of the stories, from just a single, solitary tree.

The collection begins in somewhat prosaic fashion with the anonymously-penned "The Whisper in the Woods" (1880), a story Miller acknowledges to be an archetypal over-the-top Gothic tale. It begins with the disappearance of Ronald Morris who, while on his honeymoon, sets out alone into Wistman's Wood in Dartmoor. The narrative then jumps two decades and finds his son unknowingly stumbling through the very same wood, arrested by a haunting plea whispered in the wind. It is an enjoyable enough story, but one that does not deviate far from the traditional Gothic short story mode; and while it acts as a decent starting point, things become much more interesting as you progress, as one-by-one the stories become more sinister and weirder, more generically playful and fluid.

E. F. Benson's "The Man Who Went Too Far" (1904) capitalises on the late-Victorian/ Edwardian revival of paganism. It finds its protagonist Frank Halton seemingly so attuned to the natural world around him he can hear the pipes of Pan calling to him. His old friend Darcy comes to stay with him and finds Frank unnaturally revitalised and de-aged; Frank tells of his deep relationship

to the woods and everything in it, and that soon his connection will become complete. The forces of paganism which Benson employs - the transformative effect on Frank, as well as his violent demise under the hooves of Pan - shift this story out from simple supernatural horror and into Weird territory.

Marjorie Bowen's "He Made a Woman" (1923) flips the spatial dynamic, and has the forest magically enter the home. Edmund Charnock, a tired and mentally weary academic who wishes to retreat somewhere remote, finds himself in the Welsh woods with a former teacher. Refreshingly, Bowen does not create a story where seeking solace in nature results in horror for its protagonist, instead it dives deep into seductive Weird territory. The focal point of the story is the mysterious Blodeuwedd who is staying with the two men. Blodeuwedd silently comes and goes through the house, dressed in old clothing and speaking in an old tongue; she remains distant and foreign to Charnock while he finds her increasingly entrancing. But is she real? Bowen's story revels in the mythical Weird-ness of old Welsh folklore and manages to create a charming oddity of magic and cultural history with few pages.

Algernon Blackwood's "Ancient Lights" (1912), from which the quote in the title to this review appears, is a fun and darkly humorous story of a middle-aged surveyor's clerk sent to inspect a copse whose owner wishes to chop it down in order for their property to receive more light and better views. The copse seemingly has other ideas as, when he enters it for a preliminary tour, the clerk is immediately unsettled and bewildered by a wood that has come "alive": the trees move unnaturally and deliberately; the path winds, loops and disappears; the leaves and branches take human shape. It is a wonderfully spirited tale where the trees are afforded a playful agency in their desire to remain, and is one of the few stories with an explicitly eco-critical bent.

Another is Mary Webb's fantastic "The Name-Tree" (1921), in which sexual desire and patriarchal power are entwined and at odds with the fate of a cherry orchard. Julius Winter has become the new owner of Bitterne Hall and with it comes its cherry orchard. The previous owner's daughter Laura was deeply attached to that orchard, and to her name tree in particular. Winter promises it to her as a gift if she bends to his will and sleeps with him. What results is a fantastical allegory of a modern, male-dominated world ravishing Nature to sate its rapacious desires – it reads almost like an antecedent to the stories in Angela Carter's *The Bloody Chamber* (1979).

Similarly, in M. R. James' "A Neighbour's Landmark" (1924) the fate of a forest haunts a small town. Betton Wood was once a reportedly haunted wood before the owner of its adjoining estate orders its removal, believing that would remedy the situation. Instead, a trauma was inflicted on the site and the terror at the heart of this story comes from the *absence* of the forest; the destructive impact of humans upon the landscape has created a spectral mourning for what has been lost – an ecological damning of our attitudes to the natural world, echoed by Wyatt Gifford in Gertrude Atherton's "The Striding Place" (1896) when he says:

> 'The English wood is like a good many other things in life – very promising at a distance, but a hollow mockery when you get within…They need the night to make them seem what they ought to be – what they once were, before our ancestor's descendants demanded so much more money.' (57)

In Atherton's story Gifford has been missing for two days without a trace but his best friend, Weigall, still believes he can be found. Weigall's search takes him into the near-by woods where a river runs through it and at one point becomes so narrow a person may be able to step across – or be swept away to their death. Atherton's story suffers from the same problem Edith Nesbit's "Man-Size in Marble" (1887) does. In "Man-Size in Marble" a newly-wed couple move into their new home that sits near a church, separated by a wood. Within this church are two statues of armoured men that, legend has it, come alive on Halloween night. These newly-weds discover the dire consequences of a local legend when ignored. It is a fun story, with a wonderful final line, but in both this and Atherton's story the forests are separate and peripheral to the action. Miller partially acknowledges this in his introductions but he argues that the woods in both help create the tension and atmosphere, though I would disagree with this and argue that they make little to no impact on the mood of either story and would perhaps question if they were right for this collection. They are by no means poor stories, but I cannot help imagine that there must be other British stories where the forests are more active in the narrative.

All twelve stories in this collection are from the late-Victorian/Edwardian period – which makes sense as Miller is a Senior Lecturer of Nineteenth-Century literature – but it would have been interesting to have had a least one post-war story. However, by collecting these old stories together these tales themselves become a literary revenant, returning to a new generation of readers ready to unsettle and perturb all over again.

With forest coverage in the United Kingdom decreasing year on year, these tales remind us of the spectral power of trees and woods upon the imagination – as Miller suggests in his introduction: "Haunted woods are places where narrative and environment are merged, where the imagination and landscape are rooted together" (8). And, when we are next within the company of trees, these stories allow us to wonder, just for a moment, whether there was something more fantastical and menacing to that movement behind the leaves, to that shadow passing overhead, to the rustling coming from behind us…

BIONOTE

Stuart Spear is a recent MA Graduate from Lancaster University, UK. His interests include Science Fiction, eco-criticism, Modernism, and the Gothic. He is currently based in Bristol.

DO ANDROIDS DREAM OF ELECTRIC NIRVANA?

Review by Lauren Nixon

***Readymade Bodhisattva*. 2004. Edited by Sunyoung Park and Sang Joon Park, Kaya Press, 2019. Short Story and Extract Collection.**

In a Buddhist temple staffed by robots, where the Deva statues have "swivelling […] large, built-in camera eyes," is Unit RU-4#5y4925789475849; or, as he has been named by the monks, Inmyeong (23). On the surface, the key question of Park Seonghwan's "Readymade Bodhisattva," the story that gives this collection its name, is not so dissimilar to that of other Science Fiction (Sci-Fi) narratives concerning robots and Artificial Intelligence (AI): are they capable of independent thought and feeling? Park's story, however, adds a new depth to the question. The reason that the temple has called for the "aftermarket service man" to assess Inmyeong "from the perspective of a professional robotics engineer" is because they believe that the robot has reached enlightenment (29). The fact that this is a world with highly advanced technology and expansion off planet – the company that built Inmyeong has branches on Earth, the moon, Mars, and other intergalactic colonies – is more of an afterthought, an offhand comment in the narration. Park's story, at its heart, is less concerned with questioning the capabilities of AI or the potentiality of robotics but with humanity, and the way in which humankind regards itself. Inmyeong's ascension highlights less what he has gained and more what the humans regarding him have lost: "Human beings too, are born with this enlightenment within them. You have simply forgotten this" (41).

Park Seonghwan is just one of thirteen authors featured in Kaya Press' anthology of South Korean Sci-Fi, which features works – some short stories, others extracts of longer novels – that span from the 1960s to the 2010s. "Readymade Boddhisattva" serves the collection well by setting the tone of the anthology: as a formative work of South Korean Sci-Fi, Park's approach to the laws of robotics via the ideologies of Buddhism introduces the reader to the country's significance in the development of the genre. Edited by Sunyoung Park and Sang Joon Park, *Readymade Bodhisattva* demonstrates the importance of recognising Sci-Fi as a global phenomenon that has been continually adapted to enable crucial social and philosophical conversations in cultures outside of the West.[1] The introductory essay by Sunyoung Park clearly places South Korean Sci-Fi within the global canon, recognising the way in which Korean writers embraced the conventions established by the likes of Jules Verne, H. G. Wells, and Philip K. Dick, whilst simultaneously adding new elements and responding to new stimuli. For readers unfamiliar with the Korean tradition, Sunyoung Park's essay succinctly outlines the crucial framework along with insightful introductions to each of the featured stories and their respective authors. The collection, as Park notes, "is neither a historical compendium of science fiction in South Korea, nor a definitive, canonising portrait of the genre's state of the art"

(9). Rather, *Readymade Bodhisattva* is a snapshot: and a very good one. The anthology's strength lies in its selection of pieces from writers across several generations, that employ a broad assortment of styles, and with varying focuses. The collection establishes key concepts early; the role that the Korean War and South Korea's ongoing tensions with the North have played in the development of Sci-Fi writing is especially evident, as is the county's economic struggles in the late 1990s, and its more recent growth in sectors such as technology and culture. The introductions provided with each individual story by their respective translators frame each piece with added context and familiarity, but also draw reader attention to these key issues: the anxieties of a nation divided, of rapid technological expansion, and of South Korea's global identity are clearly signposted.

Although only three of the featured authors are women, the editor's approach to issues surrounding gender equality and representation is notable. In recent years, translation of South Korean fiction has steadily gained traction with Western readers, enjoying beautifully presented hardback editions on the shelves of major bookstores. Judging by bestseller lists and magazine coverage, it would seem that the novelists who have found the most popularity in translation are largely women, such as Han Kang, Bae Suah, and Cho Nam-joo. But whilst Han Kang's works (particularly her 2015 novel *The Vegetarian*) have a distinctly Gothic-esque style and Cho's *Kim Ji, Young Born 1982* (2016) borders on the surreal, the majority of these popular South Korean works are what would most likely be considered literary fiction. It would be easy to dismiss an anthology that features only three pieces by women as engaging in tokenism, but in its acknowledgement that men's voices outnumber women's in the anthology, *Readymade Bodhisattva* manages to showcase rather than stifle a discussion of the broader issues surrounding diversity in genre fiction. Despite the limited inclusion of women in the collection, the editorial notes make it clear that women's voices are fundamental in the development of South Korean Sci-Fi, adding as much depth and perspective to the genre as influences such as Buddhism or the unfinished civil war. More broadly, too, the inclusion of these stories in *Readymade Bodhisattva* resists the temptation to pigeonhole the type of fiction written by South Korean women.

What *Readymade Bodhisattva* achieves then is an anthology that avoids falling into the trap of essentialism: although there are clear threads that connect the collection, each selection is its own unique entity. In addition to the introductions, the anthology includes a closing essay on the history of Sci-Fi fandom in South Korea – exploring its origins in the early years of the twentieth century and its growth since the advent of the internet – and a series of striking illustrations by artist Lee Hongmin that proceed each story. Whilst some tales are set far in the future, depicting post-human communities in the far reaches of space, others are centred firmly in the present reality, embracing an arresting domesticity. Jeong Soyeon's "Cosmic Go" in particular stands out as a work that, as translator Kimberley Chung notes, combines "a galaxy-spanning imagination with personal, everyday storytelling" (97). "Cosmic Go" is the story of a woman whose dreams of outer-space and academic devotion are cut suddenly short by a bus accident that leaves her without the use of her legs days after she is accepted onto an expedition. Jeong's reflective, intimate style is beautiful in and of itself, but "Cosmic Go" is a powerful expression of hope in the unexpected nature of science's transformative potential. Particularly notable is Jeong's treatment of her protagonist's disability,

which avoids the ableist tropes other Sci-Fi and Fantasy authors have often fallen foul of. What "Cosmic Go" and the other tales included show, then, is the way in which the generic conventions of Sci-Fi are effectively blended with other modes and styles in the South Korean tradition.

As a collection, *Readymade Bodhisattva* reflects the significance and popularity of Sci-Fi in Korea, seen across other mainstream mediums such as pop music videos (the group EXO's *Power* (2017) and *Obsession* (2019) both feature overt Sci-Fi elements) and Korean dramas, such as *Are You Human Too?* (2018) and *My Absolute Boyfriend* (2019), both which merge Sci-Fi plots with elements of romance, action, comedy, mystery, and slice of life. This is not to suggest that, to achieve popularity, Science Fiction *must* be blended with other genres such as romance or mystery but rather that it is the conventions and aesthetics of Sci-Fi that are popular with a wide range of audiences. As scholars such as Nikki J. Y. Lee have noted, whilst dramas or art house films such as Park Chan-wook's *The Handmaiden* (2016) are most likely to be picked up by Western distributers, genre fiction – in particular genre film – is incredibly popular with South Korean audiences. AI, time travel, and parallel universes have all become popular conventions of Kdramas in recent years, indicating not only the popularity of the Sci-Fi genre with audiences but its significance as a method of storytelling in South Korea. With the inclusion of stories like Kim Changgyu's "Our Banished World," *Readymade Bodhisattva* skilfully and subtly demonstrates why. Kim's story deals with the 2014 Sewol Ferry Disaster: the sinking of the MV Sewol was a major catastrophe and a moment of widespread cultural shock in South Korea. Over three hundred people died, including a large group of students on a field trip to Jeju Island. The tragedy was significant not just because of the large death toll, the confusion of information during the reporting, or the handling of the rescue, but because many of the passengers were communicating to friends and family via smartphone apps such as KakaoTalk. By reading the Sewol disaster and its political aftershocks through the lens of Sci-Fi, "Our Banished World" demonstrates the genre's importance as a literary mouthpiece.

Although the editors assert that the anthology is "like one of those photos one might find on Instagram: intentionally rough at the edges and out of focus in certain spots," it is also, as they suggest, all the better for it (29). Each introduction is substantial without being overwhelming, with sufficient context to illuminate the stories that follow, but never obtuse or inaccessible. The presentation itself, from font choice to layout, combined with Lee's illustrations ensures that the collection maintains the "excitement and the dynamism of the subject matter" (29). By avoiding the temptation to attempt to try to be a definitive anthology or a 'complete' collection, *Readymade Bodhisattva* easily conveys both the depth and diversity of South Korean Sci-Fi. The stories included at once complement and contradict one another, demonstrating how the genre has impacted and been internalised by Korean writers. As an anthology, *Readymade Bodhisattva* showcases narratives that highlight how South Korea has embraced Sci-Fi, both as a conduit for the discussions and anxieties of a nation always engaged at a distance in an unfinished Cold War, and as a fluid, natural element of a broader literary culture. The narratives featured are at once wildly technologically advanced and painfully human, at times alienating but at others incredibly comforting. *Readymade Bodhisattva* is a timely and much needed addition to the market, reminding readers that South Korean literature – particularly its genre fiction – is a vibrant and diverse art.

NOTES

1. This review has written the names of the collection's editors using Western naming conventions as this is how they are given in the text. Discussion elsewhere uses Korean naming conventions.

BIONOTE

Lauren Nixon is a researcher in the Gothic, war, and masculinity at the University of Sheffield, UK, where she was recently awarded her PhD. Formally co-organiser of the postgraduate collective Sheffield Gothic, she is the co-founder of the digital multimedia project The Ghoul Guides and of the Reimagining the Gothic project.

S IS FOR SUPERHERO, H IS FOR HEART: *SHAZAM!* AND THE MAGIC OF AN INCLUSIVE FAMILY

Review by Zvonimir Prtenjača

Sandberg, David F., director. *Shazam!*. Performances by Zachary Levi, Mark Strong, Asher Angel, Jack Dylan Grazer, and Djimon Hounsou. New Line Cinema, DC Films, The Safran Company, 2019. Film.

"Here's the thing about power. What good is power if you got nobody to share it with?"
– Shazam (Zachary Levi)

So exclaims the eponymous protagonist of the DC Extended Universe's (DCEU) seventh instalment, *Shazam!* (2019), a playful flick which injects some welcome levity in its generally sombre cinematic universe. By contemporary superhero standards, the film's narrative is somewhat generic: when a t(w)een street urchin named Billy Batson (played with powerful emotional tact by Asher Angel) is transformed into a godlike adult superhero by the timeworn Wizard (the unrecognisable Djimon Hounsou), he must confront the power-hungry witch, Dr. Thaddeus Sivana (Mark Strong), and his minions hell-bent on conquering the world, the Seven Deadly Enemies of Man. However, as the film's good-versus-bad angle intermingles with Billy's multicultural foster family arc – throughout which he finds a loving home, a sense of identity and unity, and aid in defeating Sivana's *Gremlins*-like posse – *Shazam!* utilises several generic conventions of a family film to communicate its predominant message: no one is born a hero and not all loving families are those one is born into.

Pitched to director David F. Sandberg as *Big* (1988) with superpowers, the film does not dwell on franchise-building – a phenomenon currently oversaturating the superhero cinematic market – but focuses instead on the coming-of-age story of a troubled fourteen-year-old boy who was deserted by his mother. Navigating his way through childhood, a process itself fraught with numerous changes, Billy bounces from one foster home to another, searching for his biological mother and often clashing with different forms of authority. After one such incident, Child Protective Services arranges for him to live with the ever-welcoming Victor and Rosa Vasquez (Cooper Andrews and Marta Milans) and their five adoptive children. Alone and reluctant to settle down, Billy stubbornly refuses to bond with his seventh foster family. However, it is this very family that imbibes *Shazam!* with its appealing magic – a statement perhaps considered ludicrous given the film's depiction of mystical powers and almost carnivalesque landscapes. Despite being a pop-cultural entry, DCEU's outing is devoid of Hollywood's often cumbersome depiction of foster parents as either monstrous or sacred. Talking to *Deadline*'s Dino-Day Ramos, in "*Shazam!* Director David F. Sandberg Talks

Going Horror to Superhero and Bringing Inclusivity to Family Narrative" (2019), Sandberg insists that the film is "not just about explosions and fights," but also about "family, which is at the heart of it" (n.p.). In this regard, *Shazam!* emulates the style of films such as *The Goonies* (1985) and *The Incredibles* (2004), interweaving the importance of kinship with the larger-than-life frays between Shazam and Dr. Sivana.

Leading up to these larger-than-life frays, Billy is portrayed as grappling with an ensemble of abilities in a series of burlesque sequences. The film goes to humorous lengths to showcase his superhero growth, as revealed in popping dialogues he shares with his crutch-dependent foster brother, Freddy Freeman (Jack Dylan Grazer in a fun, show-stealing performance), who is also a wisecracking, superhero enthusiast, acutely aware of the meta-human era he grew up in. However, no matter the arsenal of superpowers at Billy's disposal, none can shield him from having his heart broken by his biological mother. In revealing she deserted him when he was a toddler because she felt inept to raise him, *Shazam!* implicitly tackles the challenges of teenage pregnancy and becomes a "vehicle for exploring Deep Issues about blended families," as David French deems it in "*Shazam!* Review – When a Boy Needs a Family" (2019) (n.p.).

Regarding blended families, the film is to be noted for its valid depiction of the first racially diverse superhero clan to appear on the silver screen. Though French's doubts that "the cultural importance placed" on superhero films usually "far outweighs their actual content and substance" may be justified for some of the genre's entries, *Shazam!* does not fall victim to a merely fleeting representation of its characters (n.p.).[1] This process is challenged by the fact that the film is preoccupied with delineating the personal growth of a white male protagonist, but central to Billy's story are undoubtedly his Latino surrogate parents, Freddy, and his other foster siblings, all who are developed non-stereotypically: Mary Bromfield (Grace Fulton), an academically driven Caucasian girl; Darla Dudley (Faithe Herman), a kind-hearted African-American girl; the tech-savvy Asian boy, Eugene Choi (Ian Chen); and the reclusive Latino boy, Pedro Peña (Jovan Armand). Additionally, with the latter confirmed to be the first LGBTQ+ superhero on the big screen, *Shazam!* broadens the general representative scope of superhero films and takes many cues from its source material, originally penned by Geoff Johns and Gary Frank in 2011 (Samuel, n.p.). As he confessed to Adam Lance Garcia of *Yahoo Entertainment*, Zachary Levi is ecstatic about such direction:

> The fact that our movie, in its own true DNA, is about a foster family made up of a very racially diverse group of kids and parents, that also includes a handicapped child, means that we have a very cool privilege to represent a lot of under-represented people. And that's very groovy. (n.p.)

Indeed, it is very 'groovy' that superhero films – as modern myths permeating popular culture – can be vehicles for role-models whom people of the same age, race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, or familial and material status can look up to and feel a sense of community. *Shazam!* succeeds in this process because it promotes the Vasquez foster family's human elements, which the viewer

immediately recognises and empathises with. Granted, the character of Billy/Shazam can be read as a limiting factor because the film is mostly preoccupied with his dual origin story, but the foster parents' and children's stories are equally important and represented organically: Freddy copes with being ostracised by his peers because of his disability; Darla grapples with her self-confidence; Pedro struggles with his performance at school; and even Rosa questions some of her actions as a foster mother. Pedro's sexual orientation is treated elegantly as well. When the foster kids are endangered by Sivana, Billy uses his magic to teleport them to the first place that comes to his mind, which happens to be a strip club he visited earlier when transformed into Shazam. Pedro's casual remark that "it's not his thing" queers him in what some may take for a blink-and-you-will-miss-it scene. However, unlike *Avengers: Endgame* (2019), which boasted introducing the first canonically non-straight character in the Marvel Cinematic Universe, but delivered a disposable cameo by director Joe Russo, *Shazam!* does not seek to profiteer off this interest and instead takes steps to advance inclusivity. As Pedro becomes a valuable member of the superhero family by the end, rather than a simple cameo, the film opens up space for further representation via his individual character arc.

Furthermore, when Dr. Sivana openly threatens his foster family, Billy stops abusing his abilities and becomes a conduit of not only wizardly power but also of the camaraderie of his true family. In the film's climactic sequence, he opens his heart, channels his magic through the Wizard's staff, and distributes it among his foster siblings. By transforming this ragtag team of misfits into the mighty Council of Wizards (collectively known as the adult Shazamily), he literally and metaphorically unlocks his greatest power. With all hands on deck, they best Dr. Sivana and the Seven Deadly Enemies of Man, leading Billy to realise, as Safran remarks in his interview with *PinkNews*' Tufayel Ahmed, "that family is not about blood, but about bond" (n.p.). This conception is only furthered by the fact that the last of Dr. Sivana's minions to be defeated is Envy – a scene highly symbolic because it harkens back to Sivana's drive to act wickedly. Continually belittled by his older brother and discarded by his father and the same Wizard who turned Billy into his champion, Sivana eventually self-destructs in his blinding quest for power because he is not supported by a heart-warming family like Billy's.

The aforementioned values are enhanced by *Shazam!* being set around Christmastime, which generally boasts togetherness, peace, and understanding, and sees its titular hero(es) roaming the streets of Philadelphia. Though it may be scrutinised as 'too American' for these creative decisions, much like it was for its disjointed pacing during the first act and the fear-inducing render of the Seven Deadly Enemies of Man, *Shazam!* embraces its flaws in the same vein that the Vasquez family embraces Billy, with and without his numerous missteps.[2] Ultimately, *Shazam!* may not be a perfectly rounded film, but its derailments are overshadowed by the curious intermixture of the superhero and family film conventions, which highlights a refreshingly endearing message: power truly means nothing if you have nobody to share it with, emphasising the importance of a family that respects you for who you are and helps you become who you want to be. Whether biological, foster, Caucasian, African-American, Asian, Latino, heterosexual, homosexual… *Shazam!* accepts and makes room for everyone. And so, too, should the world.

NOTES

1. Earlier entries which seem to have both kickstarted and furthered this trend include Matthew Vaughn's *Kick-Ass* (2010), Josh Trank's *Chronicle* (2012), Don Hall and Chris Williams's *Big Hero 6* (2014), Dean Israelite's *Power Rangers* (2017), and especially Bob Persichetti, Peter Ramsey, and Rodney Rothman's *Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse* (2018).

2. Sandberg's deliberate portrayal of the Enemies of Man imposes a real sense of danger for the Shazamily, allowing the viewer to empathise with each of its members on a much deeper level than usually presented in superhero films.

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BIONOTE

Zvonimir Prtenjača received his BA and MA degrees in History and English Language and Literature from the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Osijek, Croatia. He is a co-editor of the collection of works titled *The Student's Pen Shapes Beauty: Creative Writing in the BA Literature Classroom* and a former member of the editorial board of the student's magazine for literary studies, *Kick*. His research interests range from young adult and children's literature, graphic novels, popular culture, and film studies, to all things superhero and Fantastic (with perhaps a slightly unhealthy affinity towards Batman). He currently lives in Vinkovci, where he works as a teacher.

NOTHING IS EVERYTHING IS REALLY QUITE SOMETHING

Review by Oliver Rendle

Strantzas, Simon. *Nothing is Everything*. Undertow Publications, 2018. Short story collection.

Simon Strantzas' *Nothing is Everything* (2018) is a morosely-engaging short story collection that blends together Weird, New-Weird, and Pessimistic elements while presenting an ambivalent meta-critique of these same sub-genres. Though the tonal transitions between despair, hope, and panic may feel disjointed to some readers, Strantzas' collection uses them – alongside dramatic shifts between reality, fantasy, and surrealism – to enact the epistemological slippage it frequently depicts. As such, *Nothing is Everything* ultimately represents a break from Lovecraftian conservatism and a growing willingness to engage with a radically non-anthropocentric worldview, with Strantzas' protagonists prepared to risk an incomprehensible demise if it means an escape from daily suffering.

Without authorial fanfare the collection opens with "In This Twilight," a cleverly updated, post-modern engagement with the archetypal Weird narrative. Through the philosophical musings of a fellow outcast, music student Harriet finds an escape from her socially-constructed anxiety, loneliness, and fear. Signifying his departure from traditional Weird values, Strantzas supplants eldritch scriptures with colloquial adolescent chatter, replaces Arkham professors with socially inept students, and reframes fraught battles with eldritch monstrosities as relatable, individuated struggles with politeness and propriety. And while Harriet ultimately surrenders herself to an ambiguous, subjectless void – where "all that remained was dark" – this escape from reality is presented as nihilistically therapeutic (28).

Continuing to emphasise the ambivalence of this escape, in "Our Town's Talent" a homogeneous mass of suburban housewives discover that their nuclear family values are smothering the qualities that make them unique. Strantzas' story proclaims that this facade can only be thrust aside by a radically empowered community that has destroyed all prior relationships with the unenlightened. The implied violence and callousness embodied in this revolution, when it occurs, sours an otherwise sweet conclusion, leaving the reader more unnerved by the resultant commonwealth of enlightened individuals than the simulacra of conditioned (im)personalities that preceded it. As such, "Our Town's Talent" indicates an underlying meta-cynicism regarding the Weird escape that Strantzas' own collection glorifies.

Though she similarly rejects mundanity, Samantha, the protagonist in "These Last Embers," is yet to reach the maddening monotony depicted in "Our Town's Talent." By foregrounding the escalating uncanniness that Samantha encounters when returning to her childhood home, Strantzas

presents a surreal confrontation with existential vertigo. Samantha's "cold realization" that her assumed sanctuary is an inaccessible temporal location – not a secluded refuge – constitutes an unnerving cocktail of nostalgia and pain for her, and this ideological disruption is eerily mirrored by the breakdown of the text's realism (51). Once more concluding with carefully maintained ambiguity, Samantha embraces the last beacon of familiarity she has left in her past, ceasing to care whether her desperate departure from reality leads to salvation or destruction.

Even Strantzas' more optimistic tales subvert any potentially uplifting message. In "The Flower Unfolds," for instance, meek office worker Candice rediscovers a sexuality – and a personality – that her corporate career has warped into something unquestionably menacing. When Candice emerges from her depressive routine of mental self-flagellation she is dazzled and sickened by the sudden abundance of emotional and sensual stimulus. Though she does overcome this initial aversion, Strantzas denies his readers the catharsis we would hope to find in Candice's new-found freedom. Instead, the narratorial perspective quickly shifts to the next, similar case of self-immolation, as Strantzas is determined to leave a lingering taste of tragedy rather than triumph.

A stark outlier in the collection, Strantzas' next tale stands out due to its emphatically non-contemporary setting. "Ghost Dogs" features a trio of emotionally and psychologically damaged children, through whom the reader discovers life in a New-Weird, post-apocalyptic shantytown in an organic and disturbing way. For the narrator – as for many young trauma victims – life becomes a stifling purgatory, where violence is commonplace, healthy relationships are unsustainable, and autonomy is only found through masochistic rebellion. By blurring the distinction between the unknowns of childhood and the unknowns of Weird fiction, Strantzas unsettles reality and foregrounds the subjective experiences of fear, doubt, and isolation. Similar to "In This Twilight" and its ambiguous conclusion, "Ghost Dogs" ends with the protagonist escaping her daily suffering through a radical break from reality – and a similar bitter-sweet triumph.

From pessimistic individuality to pessimistic companionship, Strantzas follows "Ghost Dogs" with "In The Tall Grass," the story of rural farmer Heike and her disfigured child, Baum. Physicalised by his dryad-like form, Baum embodies everything that a disabled child can represent to a parent. He is literally natural to his mother – organically inquisitive, free of pollution, and full of the potential to grow and change. However, he is also psychologically demanding and a heavily emotional reminder of her husband's death. Whether the reader tries to interpret Baum's disfigurement as supernatural or "an important autosomal case" of *Epidermodysplasia verruciformis*, Strantzas deliberately confounds both explanations (117). By using the Weird elements of the story to focus, instead, on the self-destructive grief that Heike associates with Baum and her deceased husband, Strantzas emphasises the inevitability of pain in the experience of love.

Furthermore, Strantzas repeatedly demonstrates commendable nuance in his representations of existential anxiety, especially in "The Fifth Stone." Here, the unnamed protagonist epitomises life as described by Thomas Ligotti and Eugene Thacker, where innate philosophical suffering is made bearable by "the yoke of medication" and the "prison" of mundanity (138). As such, the protagonist

can only escape philosophical suffering (here represented as a plague of monstrous and "powerful" forms) by emotionally castrating herself (139). When these cosmic presences develop into a truly existential threat, the positivity imperative and successive anticlimactic life achievements have left her nothing to fight for, undermining both her civic resolve and her will to live. As such, "The Fifth Stone" subverts the archetypical martyr trope, representing a troublingly nihilistic – yet touchingly *human* – twist on the concept of self-sacrifice in Weird narratives, adding another facet to Strantzas' meta-critique of the sub-genre.

After the bleak finale of "The Fifth Stone," "The Terrific Mr Toucan" is a comparatively optimistic tale, which brings variety to Strantzas' collection without dispelling its melancholic tone. The protagonist is an ageing and estranged mother struggling to admit that she wishes her life "had turned out different" (154). Tinged with wistful longing, this particular story associates the unknown with the past, not the future – the Weird here embodied in a stage magician's distorted vision of a life that she could have had. If the young protagonists in such tales as "These Last Embers" and "Ghost Dogs" are fleeing daily suffering by grasping incomprehensible alternatives, then "The Terrific Mr Toucan" warns us, cynically, that we may regret not making the same choice.

Nowhere is Strantzas' meta-commentary as self-reflexively critical as in "Alexandra Lost." Here, an oblivious – or wilfully ignorant – partner, Leonard, and separation anxiety force the eponymous Alexandra on a road trip across upstate New York, specifically to perceive the "vastness" of the ocean (180). Through this sublime experience Alexandra unwillingly confronts her suspicion that she is "adrift in the void of the unfathomable universe," and though her fate is once more left ambiguous by the use of surreal and abstract imagery, her "excruciating pain" and "horror" are not (174; 186-187). Thus, the reader is ultimately encouraged to sympathise with Alexandra's suffering rather than the pleasure Leonard feels when experiencing phenomena that are "beyond real" (181). And, as implicit connoisseurs of these same Weird phenomena, Strantzas' readers must consider the efficacy of how they themselves introduce others to existentialist concepts and texts.

The collection's finale, "All Reality Blossoms in Flames," features Mae Olsen, an art-restorer who stumbles from a world of artistic contemplation into a (literal) labyrinth of nearly-perceived monsters and self-doubt. Having blindly traversed this labyrinth she arrives at a nightmare of perfect lucidity, where she confronts the void of meaning in modern life. Sequentially drawing on stylistic elements of Robert Chambers, H. P. Lovecraft and Thomas Ligotti, this last addition ends with the modern world being consumed by a self-destructive cataclysm – a surreal revolutionary act that is repeatedly, explicitly, and ambivalently compared to an act of terrorism. Thus, Strantzas reconstitutes the philosophy of the Weird escape as a timely and divisive political issue, foregrounding the problematic subjectivity of the Weird's philosophical liberation and providing a suitably meta-critical climax for this self-reflective collection.

In *Nothing is Everything*, Strantzas' female protagonists are doomed to ruminate on their own ennui or commit to a frantic smothering of their anxieties. Though the limited range of perspectives does undermine the purported universality of cosmic horror – as it always has – the

focus on (loosely) shared experience brings a unifying personality to the collection, turning these aesthetically eclectic tales into a thought-provoking journey through the unknowable aspects of an individual's life. Ultimately, Strantzas' collection suggests an increasing willingness to embrace a liberal view of the Weird escape, less out of true nihilism and more as a judgement on the intolerable routines that (supposedly) constitute our modern lives.

BIONOTE

Oliver Rendle is currently undertaking his PhD at Manchester Metropolitan University's Centre for Gothic Studies, where he researches nihilistic satire, philosophically cynical humour and their relationship to sociopolitical disillusion in contemporary culture. He is a graduate of the University of Glasgow's Fantasy MLitt program, where he specialised in humour theory and existential horror, and he has presented papers on these topics at Glasgow International Fantasy Conversations, Fantastika, and Tales of Terror.

"POLITICS CAN WAIT UNTIL THE KHAN IS DEAD"

Review by Charlotte Gislam

***Ghost of Tsushima*. Sucker Punch Productions, Sony Interactive Entertainment, 2020. Video Game**

The Mongols have invaded. Most of the samurai are dead. Jin Sakai is the last hope for the people of Tsushima, but not if he keeps to the traditional samurai ethical code. That is the situation which players of Sucker Punch Productions' action-adventure game *Ghost of Tsushima* (2020) find themselves in within the first hour of play. A situation which the developers use to frame a member of the most privileged class of Japanese society as an underdog and hero of the people. On completion players will have experienced a narrative which, although enjoyable, twists constantly to maintain that framing. This process discourages players from reflecting on their avatar's body count and powerful role within the political structure of Tsushima; those who do will discover that at every stage the narrative finds ways to condone and encourage the violence, both physical and structural, as violence is the main tool Sakai has for interacting with the world.

The game structures its narrative around the real invasion of the island of Tsushima by Mongols in the thirteenth century. Within that structure *Ghost of Tsushima* combines Japanese history and myth to form a Fantasy version of events for players to explore. The player controls Jin Sakai, a member of the samurai ruling class and one of very few samurai who survived the game's first set piece: the massacre of Komoda beach. The main narrative revolves around the repulsion of the Mongol invasion and the internal conflict for Sakai between his role as a samurai and the Ghost: a vigilante persona he anonymously adopts. He attempts to balance remaining true to the code of the samurai by fighting honourably while simultaneously breaking that code to become the titular Ghost by using under-handed techniques to assassinate the Mongols. The game puts this tension to the forefront of both the embedded narrative seen in cutscenes and within the game's combat system. Players can experiment with Sakai's combat abilities, combining pre-set techniques from his samurai background including standoffs and parries, and an expanding library of 'Ghost weapons' such as smoke bombs and poison darts, incorporated into his arsenal after key story missions. However, regardless of the means chosen, the result is the same, a pile of dead Mongols, an act which the game assures the player is justified. The Mongols are placed as distinctly 'Other,' an invading force that literally never stops. Kill or be killed; the only choice left is whether you should kill through face-to-face combat or stealthily.

Beyond the internal struggle of the player's avatar, *Ghost of Tsushima* explores the external struggles between the different economic classes – between the people of Tsushima, identified

in the game as peasants, and the samurai. The events of the game reveal, to both the player and Sakai, a wide gap between the two classes as well as a way for the ruling class to unite the island of Tsushima under one banner. Sucker Punch Productions shows an understanding of the power dynamics at play between the samurai and the peasants, as the game convincingly shows how politics are wielded by those who are wealthy and powerful. The promise of freedom is offered to some characters for their participation in fighting the Mongols, for others their fight for equal treatment is deliberately held off until the Mongols are defeated.

Outside of cutscenes and scripted dialogue the player can also enact this imbalance between samurai and the people when engaging with the system for upgrading the weapons and armour. The main ingredient needed across all upgrades are labelled 'supplies,' nebulous material which can be found on the corpses of enemies, around campsites, and in people's houses. The people will band together to 'gift' Sakai with supplies once he has completed a set number of missions, however, the player can also enter any house and just take the supplies that they require. This action is not reacted to in any way by any mechanic in the game, which is itself a tacit acceptance of the act. Samurai can take as they see fit, and the people have no ability to defend themselves against this theft. While it is up to the player to decide if they should take these items, the item's necessity within gameplay pushes players towards this act and as such enacting this imbalance.

Ghost of Tsushima fails to capitalise on any criticism of this dynamic partially because its narrative is constrained by its violent gameplay. It is unable to visualise a world beyond the mechanics of katanas, bows, and poison darts. Instead, the continued presence of the Mongols, even after the main story has long finished, stalls any meaningful changes to the current status quo. As Sakai states during a main mission, "politics can wait until the Khan is dead"; every Mongol must be defeated and on the fictional version of the island of Tsushima they appear neverendingly. The player can take this to extremes with the 1.1 patch which enables new game +, an option for players to reset the story and begin anew but with endgame equipment and abilities. This reset holds back any possible future beyond the violence enacted throughout the game, as Jin Sakai rids the island of Mongols only to have to do it again. Politics can wait until the Khan is dead, but when the Khan can be resurrected, waiting will forever serve the powerful and be wielded against the oppressed. The Mongols are also used to frame those who stand against Sakai as either not able to prioritise the real danger or as taking advantage of the chaos. In a side mission, Sakai faces off against the spirit of Yarikawa's vengeance, a vigilante samurai who shares many features with Sakai's persona of the Ghost. However, the spirit's tale of revenge is framed negatively, as distracting from the real issue, the Mongol invasion. The game presents the spirit as a foil to Sakai. Yet, the constant presence of Mongols save Sakai and the player from extended introspection of this foil. Anyone who is in the way of this goal is in some way evil or misguided.

These side missions, known as tales, populate each of the game's narrative acts. These are not required for completion of the main story and they are not time sensitive. As these tales must stand alone, they cannot make changes to any element of the main story, and they must return the character of Jin Sakai to the same emotional and moral state he was in before the tale began. This

results in a multitude of vignettes which aim to establish, explore, and resolve any ideas surrounding the Mongol invasion and the people of Tsushima within a short timeframe. As these vignettes are often focused on the people of Tsushima but must not affect the emotional make-up of Jin Sakai or the structure of the main story, the stories of the people appear to be either easily resolved with a samurai in the role of judge, jury, and executioner, or end tragically. For example, "The Spirit of Yarikawa's Vengeance" has the player following the spirit, seeing first-hand how they have enacted the people's vendettas against: each other, the Mongols, and finally Sakai himself. When the player duels the spirit, it is made clear that many of the people of Yarikawa wish for Sakai to die. When asked who wants him killed, the spirit responds: "the peasants who bow to you, the merchants who smile as you pay them." On completion of the duel, the tale ends and the world is returned to the state before the player started the tale. The player can read new meaning into the actions and emotions of the people around them but there is no change noticeable within the world of Tsushima. Sakai also gets the last words, ruling that: "you let rage blind you to the true enemy," therefore reframing the duel as a misdirection of anger.

Ultimately, *Ghost of Tsushima* wants players to enjoy enacting the role of a samurai but is aware of the imbalance of power inherent in casting the player as part of the ruling class of Tsushima. The game does not want players to feel uncomfortable with their role in the narrative and as such any moment for introspection is resolved within a tale, not acknowledged by the game's mechanics, or reframed via the constant presence of the 'Other' to be defeated. Players can choose to internally interact with these themes through the knowledge they gain during play, however, the possible actions available to them is limited only to violence. Potential players should expect to be ushered along the cinematic rails of the main story, constantly encouraged to interact with the twisting narrative on offer. However, when engaging with the side missions, players should beware a mixture of intrigue and frustration. An interrogation of the relationship between the samurai and the people barely begins before being halted on the edge of another camp of enemies, as the game silently interrupts – *never mind that, how will you kill these Mongols*?

BIONOTE

Charlotte Gislam is an AHRC funded PhD student at Manchester Metropolitan University, UK. Her research is focused on interrogating the ways in which Artificial Intelligence is used in the generation of narrative in digital games. Other research interests include: spatial theory, Science Fiction, Gothic, and film. She can be found on twitter @Gislam93.

TALES OF TWO TAGORES: FANTASY BETWEEN FOLKLORE AND CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

Review by Bodhisattva Chattopadhyay

Fantasy Fictions from the Bengal Renaissance: Abanindranath Tagore's The Make-Believe Prince and Gaganendranath Tagore's Toddy-Cat the Bold. **Translated by Sanjay Sircar. Oxford University Press India, 2018. Novels.**

Indian presses, including OUP India, have been consistently releasing works of fiction from the Bengal Renaissance period (nineteenth to early twentieth century) in recent years, driven partly by renewed scholarly interest in alternative modernities. This latest volume offers two well-known stories: *Kheerer Putul* (The Make-Believe Prince; 1896) by Abanindranath Tagore (1871–1951), and *Bhondor Bahadur* (Toddy-cat the Bold; 1926) by Gaganendranath Tagore (1867–1938). Although overshadowed outside India in the field of literature by the figure of the Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore, several members of the Tagore family made extremely important contributions to Bengali literary and artistic culture in the period. Thus, while the back cover makes a point of notion that the two authors represented are Rabindranath's nephews, both Abanindranath and Gaganendranath's contributions to the field of visual arts in India are widely known. Abanindranath also contributed heavily to the development of children's literature in the Bangla language, and the work translated here for instance continues to be read to this day in almost all literate Bengali homes.

The present volume is an excellent contribution not just to the field of translated literature but to the field of children's literature as a whole. The scholarly work of Sanjay Sircar, who is both a noted translator and academic, is quite simply flawless in this volume, and the introductions, notes, and appendices mark the book as a serious academic exercise well worth OUP. My goal here is to highlight the elements of the fantastic tradition that are captured in the book and its scholarly material, rather than excessive focus on the content of the stories themselves, which, after a century of quite well-known existence, do not particularly require an introduction. These two tales – indeed most early Bangla genre fiction – due to their unique style are quite challenging to render into English, and Sircar's translation is outstanding even if not always completely smooth to read.

Before proceeding, I will however take issue with the framing of the volume as a whole: the labelling of these works as "fantasy fictions from the Bengal Renaissance." I suspect that this is an editorial/press marketing decision rather than the translator's since the "fantasy fiction" label is not supported by the actual work presented by Sircar. Sircar's focus is not Fantasy, but rather folktales and children's literature, which, even if they are part of the nebulous domain of Fantastika, nonetheless

also have their own critical traditions and history of scholarly study. It is these traditions of folklore and children's literature that Sircar responds to, rather than studies of 'Fantasy' per se. Although Sircar does call *Bhondor Bahadur* a Fantasy novel, there is no real engagement with the scholarship in the field of Fantasy. 'Genres' are marketing labels and scholarly editions are typically meant for classroom use, so the chosen labelling will misguide readers when it comes to their expectations from the work. Labelling these as children's literature, or folktales, would have given this book the audience more likely to be interested in this material for classroom purposes. The labelling is thus also an injustice to the clarity and usefulness of Sircar's brilliant work here.

That said, there are also some gains with the mislabelling, especially when it comes to understanding genre history in an Indian context. As I have argued in the co-edited first survey of genre fiction in the Indian context (*Indian Genre Fiction: Pasts and Future Histories*, 2019), late nineteenth and early twentieth century Indian genre fiction does not follow the publication patterns of pulp literature that form the core of the mass cultural genre system identified by John Rieder for Anglophone Science Fiction and Fantasy. Rather, its development has to do with the blend of oral traditions, indigenous mythological and *puranic* systems, extraordinarily rich local literary traditions including epic traditions, as well as the effects (positive and deleterious) of colonial culture, including attempted language standardisation, and widespread translated materials. This also means that genre literature becomes constituted differently, epistemologically, aesthetically, as well as practically, along colonial lines experienced internally within a colonised culture, becoming simultaneously stressed by indigeneity and nativism on the one side and universalism and cultural hierarchy on the other. As many scholars of genre have noted, the genre act/genre performance is fundamentally violent in its opposition to fluid existences, and this tension is felt most acutely in Indian genre fiction.

Sircar carefully sheds light on these problems, beginning with the strategies of the Bengal Renaissance in the attempts to frame a dualistic synthetic framework within colonial Bengal that was simultaneously indigenous and universal. He also very specifically, and importantly, highlights the class and caste angle within which hybridity, indigeneity, and authenticity get constructed within the South Asian genre space, something that deserves a much more serious study of its own. He also notes the long tradition of indigenous folklore and tales in Indian classical and modern languages and how these get expressed in rewritten modern folktales/children's tales by the Tagores. Sircar places *Kheerer Putul* in AT type 459, which he then unpacks for its claims of authenticity and its retelling within both European folkloristics as well as within the genre space of Bangla written and oral literature. He also, quite usefully, creates equivalent terms for such study, for instance *ketabi-rupkatha* as the Bangla equivalent of a *Buchmaerchen* and *udbhabita/udbhabya-rupkatha* as the equivalent for *Kunstmaerchen*. Sircar's typological interests underlying comparativism extend to both tales, so for instance, while in the case of *Bhondor Bahadur* he is also interested in exploring the Lewis Carroll influences on Bangla genre fiction, he also highlights local forms of ritual narratives, generally oral, that directly affect the worldbuilding, such as the *bratakatha*. The *bratakatha* seeps into his introduction to both tales. These are ritual narratives in the praise of deities (not always canonical) that are simultaneously oral and written, often recited from memory, but generally learnt

in textual forms that cheap printing presses made possible. Thus, in *Bhondor Bahadur* for instance, folk goddess myths overshadow the Queen metaphors of Carroll's narrative.

There is too much to unpack here from the scholarly apparatus in the space of a short review, but there is hardly anything that Sarkar does not touch upon in the context of early Bangla folklore at least in passing. He also signals specifically where he deviates from the original, and his specific translation choices (for instance adding sections / chapters to the tales for readability). With each tale, he also adds annotated bibliographies and extensive notes, giving the reader many indications for further research. Unfortunately, the book lacks a much-needed index to complement these different directions taken by Sircar. Still, overall, the edition is an absolute delight, with its nursery rhymes, beautiful illustrations by Abanindranath Tagore, and an excellent re-translation of these classic tales that deserves to be read by children and adults alike. While the volume does not quite serve an immediate purpose for scholars interested in Fantasy or Indian Fantasy, it is invaluable for those rethinking genre emergence and constitution in non-Anglophone worlds.

BIONOTE

Bodhisattva Chattopadhyay is Associate Professor in Global Culture Studies at the University of Oslo, Norway, where he leads the CoFUTURES research group and network supported by the European and Norwegian Research Councils. He is a 2020 World Fantasy Award winning editor of *Fafnir: Nordic Journal of Science Fiction and Fantasy Research* and a fellow of the Imaginary College, Centre for Science and the Imagination, Arizona State University. His research website is: https://cofutures.org

"I'M THE DEVIL, AND I'M HERE TO [RE] DO THE DEVIL'S BUSINESS": ALTERNATIVE HISTORY AS POLITICAL COMMENTARY

Review by Trae Toler

Tarantino, Quentin, director. *Once Upon a Time in…Hollywood*, performance by Leonardo DiCaprio, Brad Pitt, Margot Robbie, Sony Pictures Releasing. 2019. Film.

With his film *Once Upon a Time in…Hollywood* (2019), Quentin Tarantino thrust moviegoers fifty years into the past. Being the suggested penultimate film in Tarantino's filmography, fans were curious to see how he would tackle the transformative year, 1969. Ultimately, this year was the outcome of tensions boiling to a head as tradionalists clashed with the anti-authoritarian counterculture defined by peace, love, and acceptance. While portraying his film as an in-depth take on this specific cultural moment, Tarantino's driving force throughout the film is his superb utilisation of dramatic irony as the audience is aware of the looming, omnipresent threat of the Manson Family. However, as the film hits April 8, 1969, and the audience bears witness to Charles 'Tex' Watson (Austin Butler) deliver his infamous line, "I'm the Devil, and I'm here to do the Devil's Business," Tarantino subverts his audiences' expectations by pitching his film into the realm of the fantastical. By utilising alternative history to nostalgise a fictionalised lost time, Tarantino ultimately offers a damming critique on current divisive American politics defined by walls, borders, fear, and cultural differences.

Before delving into a review of this deviation in the film, it is essential to discuss the significance of the three main characters. Ultimately, Tarantino's film is, as he claimed in an interview with Sony Pictures Entertainment, largely about time. By looking extensively at a particular temporal moment – 1969 Hollywood – Tarantino is able to magnify the social and class differences functioning together during this transformative moment in American culture. In fact, Tarantino specifically states that he is "looking at Hollywood through a social strata" ("ONCE UPON A TIME IN HOLLYWOOD - Cast Q&A" 00:01:15 – 00:01:25). In exploring this strata through representations of each characters' lifestyle and social class, Tarantino meticulously moulds an authentic representation of 1969 Hollywood. With each character also a caricature of their own social class, they then serve to both ground Tarantino's critique of 1969 Hollywood while also magnifying these social and class differences. The distinct caricaturial differences in the relationship shared between Sharon Tate, Rick Dalton, Cliff Booth, and the Manson Family allows Tarantino to ultimately ask members of his audience to evaluate their own views in conjunction with this not-so-distant past. By constructing a fictionalised nostalgia of 1969 Hollywood that is still grounded in historical reality, Tarantino creates characters who ultimately transcend time and prove to be reflective of current social and political discourse. Thus, through a deviation from mimetic history, Tarantino is able to pose the question: *can history change, or are we doomed to repeat it.*

Sharon Tate (Margot Robbie) is symbolic of an upper class defined by exuberant success, and, ultimately, an embracement of the future – a future defined by the love, acceptance, and peace displayed by the counterculture movement. Her representative ideals are what Hollywood aim to embrace – indicated by her status as a rising star in the industry. Rick Dalton (Leonardo DiCaprio) is a once successful actor who finds himself at the crossroads of the counterculture movement so readily related to Hollywood in the '60s. Hollywood is changing, and it is clear to Dalton that the past has no place in new Hollywood. Dalton struggles in positioning himself in relation to the counterculture and future as his Hollywoodian heyday was specifically grounded in the past – acting in many western films, defined by their outward expression of toxic masculine machismo and violence. In other words, the films that Dalton found success in were aligned moreso with traditionalist ideals which were directly rejected by the counterculture movement. Ultimately, in contrast to Tate, Dalton represents the past; however, Tarantino demonstrates a shift in Dalton's character when he chooses to embrace cultural change instead of fighting against it and remaining displaced.

The last of the three main characters is Dalton's stunt double, Cliff Booth (Brad Pitt). Booth is symbolic of the lower end of the 'social strata.' Although Booth is of a lower class, he embraces his socio-economic shortcomings and exhibits peace with his place in the rising counterculture. Regarding the relationship between Dalton and Booth, Tarantino, in the same interview mentioned above, states, "Rick is definitely the angsty Kerouac of the group where Cliff is definitely the Neal Cassady Holy Goof of the group, being very comfortable in his trailer full of garbage" (00:09:50 – 00:09:53). If Booth is symbolic of a tranquil lower class, then the Manson Family is symbolic of a vengeful hate-filled lower class.

Tarantino positions the Manson Family as a hybrid between Dalton and Booth. The Manson Family, similar to Dalton, must situate themselves in relation to the future of Hollywood through a perversion of counterculture ideals; yet the Manson Family never truly embraces cultural progression and instead aims to regress culture to a panicked state in which they can rise as leaders. Moreover, Tarantino associates the Manson Family with Dalton when he shows that Dalton and Booth previously filmed Western films on Spahn Ranch – the location where Manson and his followers reside. With that being said, the Manson Family physically live in the past and ultimately fail to negotiate their views and beliefs in relation to progressive Hollywood. Furthermore, the fact that they occupy an abandoned movie ranch further reinforces their similarity to Booth. Having already shown Booth's "trailer full of garbage," it is clear that both Booth and the Manson Family have living situations defined by their decrepit state. They both embrace bohemian ideals, yet the Manson Family toxifies the movement so readily associated with the counterculture.

Having charted the social strata of Hollywood, and crafted a representation of 1969 Hollywood cloaked in nostalgia, Tarantino teases his audience in the transition to the final act as Tex Watson, Susan Atkins, and Patricia Krenwinkel make their way to 10050 Cielo Drive, where filmgoers have been anticipating the culmination of the Manson Family versus Tate. However, Tarantino subverts expectations as the infamous *witchy* cult stops short of Tate's home and instead attack Tate's neighbors, Rick Dalton and Cliff Booth. As a result of this subversion, Manson's gang of toxic

bohemians never complete their notorious crimes because Dalton and Booth brutally, viciously, and unapologetically murder every member of the family. In a film designed to explore the transitional year 1969, Tarantino's deviation from reality ultimately thrusts his film into the genre of alternative history.

April 8, 1969 has often been referred to as the night the '60s died. News of the Tate-LaBianca murders spread through Hollywood like a plague, killing any preconcieved, hippie, flower-child notion of '60s' California. Because of these events, when coupled with multiple race riots and the impeachment of President Richard Nixon, it is clear that this era was a tumultuous, defining era for American culture. The Tate-LaBianca murders, and the Manson trial, were ultimately the violent culmination of traditional ideology versus liberal ideology. Tarantino could have easily followed the historical path and succumbed to his audience's expectations in having his film end with the Manson Family's successful murder of Tate. However, by deviating from history, Tarantino privileges the speculative as opposed to reality to ultimately portray his film in a fairytale-esque manner – thus solidifying the "Once Upon a Time" of the title. In doing so, he creates a narrative in which acceptance and change emerge victorious. Therefore, Tarantino suggests that the American cultural and political climate would be different today had Tate, a symbol of hope, prosperity, and success, not been massacred; however, although this implication ends his Hollywoodian fairy tale with a 'happily ever after,' this is a problematic deviation.

While it is accepted that 1969 was a metamorphic year for America, it is quite negligent on Tarrantino's part to conclude that this sole moment would have propelled America into a tunnel-view of acceptance. This depiction of America asks the audience to look past the Satanic Panic of the '80s, the 1992 Los Angeles Race Riots, and 9/11, among many other significant moments that ultimately directed the course of American culture. Though *Once Upon a Time in…Hollywood* is an entertaining film, we must be wary of the implications of a Western-centric nostaligised fictionalised past that almost appears to be in the same vein as the phrase "Make America Great Again."

In the final act, Tarantino alters history with the swift decision to visit the neighbors of 10050 Cielo Drive. Because the Manson family never reached the home of Roman Polanski and Sharon Tate, progressive Hollywood never died, the '60s' counterculture never ended, and future ideals of acceptance and openness, according to Tarantino, are victorious. The era in which 'doors remained unlocked' flourishes. Though he constructs a problematic fictionalised nostalgia, Tarrantino essentially uses alternative history to mirror current divisive American political discourse in a way that a mimetic depiction of 1969 Hollywood would have been unable. A mimetic approch would have grounded his film solely in the past, thereby creating a disconnect between his audience and his current social critiques. Ultimately, Tarantino successfully calls upon the fantastical to force his audience to negotiate their own position within contemporary divisive socio-political discourse, beyond the fairytale-esque guise of Speculative Fiction.

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BIONOTE

Trae Toler teaches at the University of North Carolina Wilmington and at Brunswick Community College, US. Toler's key area of research is grounded in analysing identity – primarily gender and sexuality – in Horror cinema through a psychoanalytic lens. He presented his research, "Kill Her Mommy, Kill Her!": Maternal Influences and Final Girls in 70s and 80s Slasher Cinema" and "Cults, and Clowns, and Kai, Oh My!": Coulrophic Horror as Political Commentary in American Horror Story: Cult" at various academic conferences in the United States. Additionally, Toler spent extensive time researching Charles Manson and the sensationalism surrounding the infamous 1969 Tate - LaBianca murders.

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