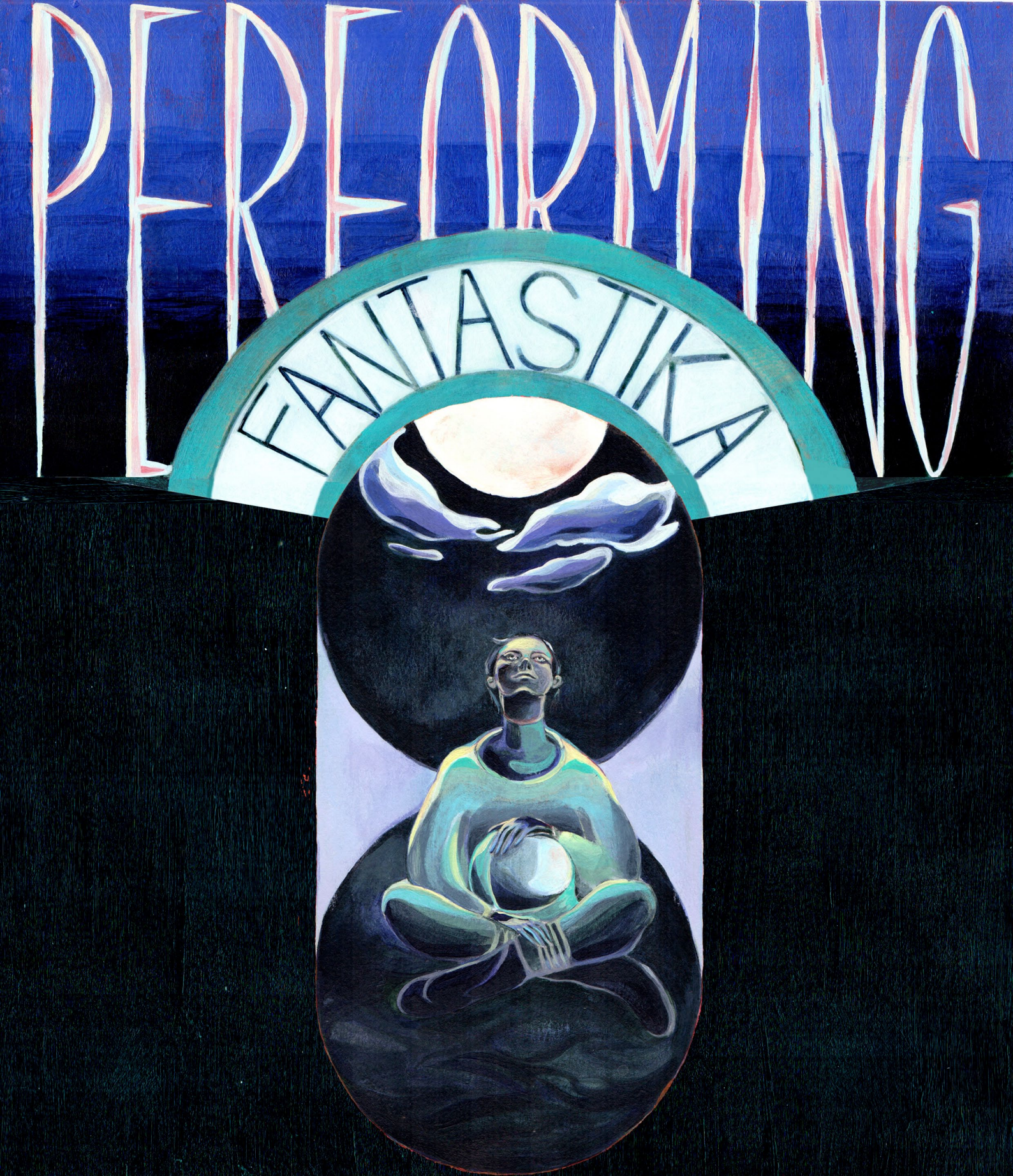

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FANTASTIKA

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 annual conference 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.

This issue of *Fantastika Journal* collects articles that have arisen from the 4th annual Fantastika Conference – Performing Fanastika – which took place at Lancaster University, UK on April 28th & 29th, 2017. #fantastika2017 focused on performative bodies in Fantastika, which included performance in theatrical plays and films, as well as an examination of the body itself. How is the body performed and perceived in Fantastika texts? How do Fantastika texts and our interaction with Fantastika texts modulate our understanding of performative bodies?

The cover to this issue, designed by Sing Yun Lee, takes design inspiration from vintage theatre posters. Considering the role of performance and performance arts in the context of our Terran reality, the figure represents the power the performer possesses: she offers the audience a glimpse of other worlds and perspectives even whilst she and they are physically rooted in this one, providing brief but intense moments of illumination. The frontispiece to this issue is taken from the programme cover of the Performing Fantastika conference. It was originally designed by Inés Gregori Labarta as homage to Ted Chiang's short story "Seventy-two Letters" (2000).

Finally, the issue concludes with a number of exciting non-fiction reviews, fiction reviews, and conference reports that have taken place over the last year. If you would like to take part in the writing a report or review for *Fantastika Journal*, please contact us at editors@fantastikajournal.com.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS


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CONTENTS

EDITORIALS

ARTICLES

This article argues that the origins of Science Fiction theatre can be traced back to the seventeenth century and explores the way in which the performance of Science Fiction in early women's drama cathartically addresses 'Otherness' to expose and shape attitudes towards gender and ethnicity. The seventeenth century witnessed the establishment of the Royal Society, along with the development of the telescope. It is no surprise that amidst such a climate of scientific discovery, colonisation, and travel, seventeenth-century texts express a fascination with the existence of other worlds and of life in outer-space. Francis Godwin's *The Man in the Moone* (c.1638) and Margaret Cavendish's *The Blazing World* (1666) have recently been hailed as early prose works of Science Fiction but less attention has been paid to the role of Science Fiction on the seventeenth-century stage. Drawing on Christos Callow and Susan Gray's theorisation of Science Fiction theatre as "psychological inner space, and the social and political spaces between individuals, groups and societies" (65-66), I analyse the way in which Margaret Cavendish's private and immersive performance of Utopia in *The Lady Contemplation* (1667) and Aphra Behn's public and communal Science Fiction comedy *The Emperor of the Moon* (1687) cathartically reimagine and question existing relations within their society. As Household Drama performed in the Duchess's stately home, Cavendish's *The Lady Contemplation* presents a private, immersive, and intimate performance of Utopia which relies on the imagination, while Behn's *The Emperor of the Moo*n makes use of lavish costume, special effects, and painted scenery to create her lunar inhabitants in this public spectacle. I consider how each performance of Science Fiction raises questions about gender, the public and the private sphere, the relationship between the body and the mind, self and other, along with the allure of spectacle and fantastical contemplation as a cathartic exercise.

CONTENTS

CONTENTS

NON-FICTION REVIEWS

CONFERENCE AND EVENT REPORTS

CONTENTS

FICTION REVIEWS

CONTENTS

CONTENTS

EDITORIALS

STEAMPUNK AMBIVALENCES

Tajinder Singh Hayer

I am in the process of writing a steampunk play set in an alternate version of the British Empire, and I am tottering between the pleasures and the discomfitures of writing in the genre; there is a tension between the literary playground that steampunk offers and the problems of certain historical and literary legacies.

First, the enjoyable elements. The play unfolds from 1888 to 1922 in both England and Imperial India (I cannot really give more detail than that as I might risk revealing too much about a work that has yet to be performed). The research process has given me the opportunity to read a lot about this period (and the wider long nineteenth century). For all my preconceptions concerning the stuffier side of the Victorian and Edwardian eras (see below), these were times of huge technological and social change; from a writer's perspective, they are exciting to explore and are heavy with 'atmosphere.' They are also crucibles for fantastika; Kipling, Stevenson, Stoker, Verne, Wells, and many others were writing touchstone works in science fiction, fantasy, and horror around this time.

One can see easily why so many contemporary writers would want to delve in to the vivid, nineteenth century steampunk toy box. So, why do I feel ambivalent about the genre? There is the obvious answer: it is problematic to entirely revel in a fictionalised recreation of an era when I would have been culturally, politically, and economically marginalised by the attitudes and laws of the time. My initial perceptions of alternative history steampunk were coloured by this thought; I felt that the genre was an excuse for a nineteenth century jaunt that featured easy, unexamined cameos by historical and literary figures. I saw the mechanical replication and fetishisation of literary tropes and markers of historicity; this was genre as a medley of familiar, popular hits delivered by a covers band. This view was altered slightly by my further reading of both steampunk works and the nineteenth/twentieth century fictional texts and history that inform them (it may be my writerly bias, but the long nineteenth century feels saturated by literature; the image of the period as presented by Dickens or Conan Doyle almost supersedes the 'actual' history in my mind's eye).

I approached the play with a particular cultural trope that I wished to explore; I wanted to examine, challenge, and satirise the Newbolt Man:

> Shyness in the presence of girls, satisfaction derived from a life of pioneering and adventure, a somewhat stern moral outlook, a desire for amateur rather than professional status as a practitioner of the arts, belief in the efficacy of rigorous training for boys, and acceptance – though not uncritical acceptance – of a social order in which prosperity was likely to be the reward

> of virtue – all these qualities were compatible with, and some were essential ingredients of, the character of Newbolt Man. There was too another characteristic of the typical Ballantyne boy […] the ability to derive continual pleasure from the slaughter of wild animals. (Howarth 44).

This figure permeates Boys' Own literature, but also percolates through a particular image of Englishness; the doughty, Empire-building, ex-public schoolboy. It feels appropriate to explore this given the parallels to a contemporary era peopled by figures such as Boris Johnson, David Cameron, and George Osborne; the current political spasms about English identity also still feel inflected by the loss of Empire (showing how, for Britain, the nineteenth was indeed a very long century). It is an easy subject to satirise (indeed, Michael Palin seems to have spent half his career doing just that). However, it is worth re-examining the source texts that have composted down to create this type in the popular consciousness. It came as a shock to me to read the first Biggles story; Biggles – that archetypal, jolly jingoistic hero of adventure tales – is presented with (to contemporary readers) clear signs of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder:

> He had killed six men during the past month – or was it a year? – he had forgotten. Time had become curiously telescoped lately. What did it matter, anyway? He knew he had to die some time and had long ago ceased to worry about it. His careless attitude suggested complete indifference, but the irritating little falsetto laugh which continually punctuated his tale betrayed the frayed condition of his nerves. (Johns 17)

This encounter with a shell-shocked version of Newbolt Man made me reconsider how I perceived the trope (and perhaps made me humanise the caricature I had created a little). While Captain Johns' work is from a later time, I must confess that I approached most of the adventure literature of the nineteenth century with the assumption that it would be underpinned by a simplistic pro-imperial stance. In some instances (such as Ballantyne's *The Coral Island*) this was the case. However, I was shocked out of my complacency by Captain Nemo in Verne's *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea* (1992); here was a character who was capable of making startlingly modern (if also inconsistent), progressive statements about empire and environmentalism: "That Indian, sir, is an inhabitant of an oppressed country; and I am still, and shall be, to my last breath, one of them!" (Verne 131); "Do you think I am ignorant that there are suffering beings and oppressed races on this earth, miserable creatures to console, victims to avenge? Do you not understand?" (Verne 162); "The barbarous and inconsiderate greed of these fishermen will one day cause the disappearance of the last whale in the ocean" (Verne 182). The incendiary nature of Nemo almost seems to unnerve Verne himself; he fluctuates in between admiration for the Captain's powerful idealism and the need to contain the dangerous Miltonic energy of this Satanic upstart.

Michael Moorcock's *Nomad of the Time Streams* trilogy – *The Warlord of the Air* (1971), *The Land Leviathan* (1974), and *The Steel Tsar* (1981) – made me reassess my perceptions of steampunk. As one of the urtexts of the genre, it was refreshing to see that, from its inception, steampunk was able to engage critically with colonial legacies; Moorcock's trilogy is full of sly humour and chips away steadily at the rigid Edwardian values of its protagonist, Oswald Bastable. The genre is particularly suited to this kind of wit; the reshaped past contains nuggets of more contemporary reference, Easter Eggs to the history that we know but the characters do not (a chap called Gandhi ends up staying in South Africa and forms a utopian republic; a Captain Caponi is a hero from Chicago; there is a Count Guevera). Moorcock asks uncomfortable questions; I remain to be convinced by his explorations of a permanently divided Northern and Southern United States, and the subsequent effect it has on race there. However, perhaps this also stems from my own anxieties about the deployment of irony in steampunk; I once assumed that some of the patriarchal attitudes of the past could be presented in a genre context with the critique of such outlooks being tacit – alas, the current cultural moment is making me question this assumption.

I hope I am not giving the impression of myself as a close-minded reader who is challenged continually by the limitations of his own preconceptions. Instead, I use my own experience as a way of illustrating the negotiation that goes on between the reader and the writer in the creative process. The steampunk genre exists in a tricky, hyper-literate realm where I have to navigate through the mythic soup of history; there are my own ideas of the eras I am rewriting, and my awareness of the (not uncontested) images of the past in popular consciousness (the Victorians covered table legs because they were scared of sex; Britain as pretty much white before the 1950s; the green and pleasant land of England's past). I am aware that, with the conscious anachronisms inherent in the steampunk genre, I risk creating 'fake' history (again an intrusion from a contemporary anxiety); however, the deliberate sf revisions of steampunk actually allow me to have a more lively (if occasionally fraught) dialogue about national and cultural identities. We shall see if this results in a successful piece of sf theatre.

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BIONOTE

Tajinder Singh Hayer is a lecturer in Creative Writing at Lancaster University, UK. He has written scripts for the stage, radio, TV and short film. He also helps organise the Lancaster Playwriting Prize: www.lancaster.ac.uk/playwriting . Hayer was one of the keynotes for "Performing Fantastika."

ARTICLES

RE-IMAGINING EARLY MODERN WOMEN'S DRAMA AS SCIENCE FICTION

Beth Cortese

Little attention has been paid to the role of Science Fiction in seventeenth-century drama by women dramatists because the Science Fiction genre is largely considered to be a product of modernity. Susan Gray and Christos Callow state that Science Fiction theatre came into being in the nineteenth century, while John Clute has argued that the Science Fiction genre emerged after the Industrial Revolution as a response to the increased speed of history (Gray and Callow 67; Clute 23-24). However, the scientific and social developments of the seventeenth century such as the invention of the first reflecting telescope and the increase in trade, travel, and colonisation, which influenced the portrayal of other worlds, other cultures, and the representation of space exploration on stage, demonstrate that the themes of Self/Other, new worlds, and new technologies which constitute Science Fiction were present in seventeenth-century drama (Scholes 41-42).

This article will show that the origins of Science Fiction theatre can be traced back to the seventeenth century and will explore the way in which the performance of Science Fiction in early women's drama cathartically addresses 'Otherness' to expose and shape attitudes towards gender and ethnicity. Drawing on Callow and Gray's theorisation of Science Fiction theatre as "psychological inner space, and the social and political spaces between individuals, groups and societies" (65-66), I analyse the way in which Margaret Cavendish's private and immersive performance of Utopia and Aphra Behn's public and communal Science Fiction comedy cathartically reimagine and question existing relations within their society. Analysis of early modern women's Science Fiction importantly reveals that seventeenth-century women dramatists were already experimenting with the psychological slippage between self and 'Other' that characterises Science Fiction, along with setting their plays in the domestic household to produce an atmosphere of confinement which focuses on the psychological and emotional impact of interaction between old and new worlds and new technologies, which Callow and Gray identify as the future direction of Science Fiction theatre, but which, as I will show, is also exhibited earlier in seventeenth-century drama (67-68).

Science fiction has been defined as a "thought experiment," a genre of fiction which imagines other worlds or futures (Baker 7). The genre often achieves this through the "novum" or novel element in the text, usually an advance in science or technology that features heavily in the narrative and energizes the dynamic between the world in which the text is set and the context in which the text was produced (Suvin, "Poetics of SF Genre" 372-373). In Margaret Cavendish's play *The Lady Contemplation* (1667) the novum is the figure of the "she-philosopher" and the Utopian world she has created. In Aphra Behn's publicly performed farce *The Emperor of the Moon* (1687) the telescope is the novum that provides insight into the lunar world. As Brian Baker states

in *Science Fiction* (2014), Science Fiction demonstrates a clear "relationship between the imagined world and that which produced it" (7). In this article I examine the ways in which Margaret Cavendish and Aphra Behn employ elements of Science Fiction and Utopia to create a feeling of estrangement, which prompts spectators to reflect critically on the elements of the fiction that intersect with their own world. Clute has argued that Science Fiction is the most positive form of Fantastic literature (26). I argue that Science Fiction on the seventeenth-century stage works as a form of catharsis which offers solutions for a way forward as it encourages spectators to confront their own anxieties. Behn and Cavendish use elements of Science Fiction to explore the emotional and psychological impact of anxieties about the self as 'Other,' the country's future, and relationships with the colonial Other by generating an atmosphere of estrangement, confinement, and repressed desire which is finally expelled by the protagonist's realisation of their fantasies through performance which generates slippage between self and 'Other.' Each dramatist explores 'Otherness' in the context of gender and ethnicity: Behn's *The Emperor of the Moon* creates a stage spectacle about lunar inhabitants to explore relationships between England and its foreign allies, while in Cavendish's *The Lady Contemplation* the she-philosopher Lady Contemplation represents the 'Other' because she does not conform to gender stereotypes. Behn's play employs Science Fiction to address anxieties about cultural exchange and desire for the 'Other,' while Cavendish's play, which is set in the domestic sphere of the household, explores feelings of exile and 'Otherness' which she experienced as a female intellectual in seventeenth-century patriarchal society. The novum of the she-philosopher in Cavendish's work and the phallic telescope in Behn's play are portrayed as reconfiguring the emotional and desiring body as a male sphere to challenge spectators' views of the female body as irrational. In *The Emperor of the Moon* Doctor Balliardo's telescope becomes a metaphor for his sexual fantasy of a union between Earthlings and lunar people. Each play cathartically encourages its audience to view the 'Other' differently, both the foreign 'Other' and the female body as 'Other.' Cavendish's play, which features a protagonist who views herself as a mind without a body (192), depicts Cavendish directly responding to and feeling liberated by Descartes's view in *Meditations of First Philosophy* (1641) that mind and body were distinct from one another. Descartes's view that the mind could exist independently from the body, generates hope for women such as Cavendish's she-philosopher that they will not be defined by their bodies in future (Descartes 1-62).

Adam Roberts's *The History of Science Fiction* (2005) has importantly traced the origins of Science Fiction back to early modern prose narratives, such as Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516) and Francis Godwin's *The Man in the Moone* (c.1638) (Roberts 38). Scholars have already investigated the representation of female Utopias in Cavendish's work and have explored relationships between women in Behn's plays, but less attention has been paid to their work as Science Fiction theatre. Despite the difference in audience, Cavendish's private audience and Behn's public audience, each dramatist presents an immersive spectacle of Science Fiction which portrays the imaginative possibilities of Science Fiction as cathartic. Comparing Behn's and Cavendish's work demonstrates how public and private examples of Science Fiction theatre produce different effects. As I will show, Cavendish's *The Lady Contemplation* appeals to women confined by the household, whereas Behn's focus on the telescope addresses the way in which we perceive ourselves and others.

As Jane Donawerth has acknowledged in relation to nineteenth-century Utopian fiction: "Utopia invited women to write because they could reimagine their lives rather than recording their oppressions" (Donawerth cited in Wolfe 197). In other words, the Utopian genre became a thought-experiment for women to create another future. While Cavendish's other closet dramas – *The Bell in Campo* (1662), *The Convent of Pleasure* (1668) and *The Female Academy* (1662) – have been recognised as examples of female Utopia, Utopia in *The Lady Contemplation* has received less critical attention. *The Lady Contemplation* offers a vision of an alternate world of imaginative possibility which runs parallel to reality. In Cavendish's play, the Lady Contemplation's "Airy fictions" which she describes to the audience are contrasted with and criticised by her visitors, who disparage her immersion in fantasy and instead praise the merits of "the material world" (184). The Lady Contemplation's position as a woman confined to the household connects with Cavendish's society in which women's freedom was limited.

The play's focus on a protagonist who is obsessed with living an ideal existence is characteristic of the Utopian genre in which the Utopian model proposed provides a vision of stability, consistency, and control (Roberts 54). For the Lady Contemplation, immersion in her own imagination is the ideal existence because the "lovers which [her] Fancy creates […] speak or are as silent as [she] will have them" and do not challenge her authority (184). The Lady Contemplation's Utopian vision is consistent with Baker's definition of Utopia as "a community in which socio-political norms and individual relationships are organised on a more perfect principle than in the author's own community" because her Fantasy world offers her more freedom and control than the patriarchal world that is the playwright's and the reader's or spectators' reality (37). Lady Contemplation's imagination enables her not only to choose her lovers, but to create them; she states, "my lovers which my Fancy creates, never make me jealous" (184).

Science Fiction offers Cavendish an appealing and orderly alternative amidst the chaos of Civil War and her family's exile to France for being Royalist supporters during a period of Interregnum. Cavendish's view of the imagination as an escape from the trauma of Civil War is evident in the following quotation from the play:

> the greatest pleasure is in the imagination […] for it is more pleasure for any person to imagine themselves the Emperor of the whole word than to be so, for in the imagination they reign and rule without the […] fears of being betrayed or usurped. (Cavendish 183)

Anna Battigelli has commented on the role of the imagination in Cavendish's works in terms of agency in the world and exile from the world. She argues that the heroines of Margaret Cavendish's plays can be split into two types, the "active cavalier" and "the contemplative cavalier." Where the former adventurous heroine takes steps to reform their world, the latter retreats from it, but each is at odds with their world (26). Battigelli's view encapsulates divided interpretations of the Utopian genre, whether Utopia should provide a productive future model of society or whether

the genre represents an unproductive and impossible ideal. In contrast to the active heroine of Cavendish's prose fiction "Assaulted and Pursued Chastity," published in *Natures Pictures* (1656), Lady Contemplation fits into the category of the "contemplative cavalier" and can be read as a representation of Cavendish herself, a woman who rejected public life in favour of the Fantasy worlds her writing provided her with. Unlike Cavendish's other female Utopias portrayed in drama, *The Lady Contemplation* represents the benefits of the creation of imaginative Utopia in the private sphere.

The Lady Contemplation's imagination provides her and her female spectators with the ability to imagine engaging in activities that women would not be permitted to participate in in the public sphere. While Cavendish's protagonist cannot completely escape from her reality and is often interrupted, she possesses the means for herself and for spectators to retreat from it into an alternative reality. As Simon Spiegel acknowledges, this is largely achieved by making the strange familiar, the unnatural natural (372). Lady Contemplation normalises isolation from others in the world by explaining the merits of such a lifestyle to her visitors. She argues that rather than "enslave" herself to the body, which is "full of corruption," she would rather create "bodiless creatures" with which she can "nobly, honestly, freely and delightfully entertain" herself (192). The comments cited above react against the early modern perception that women were ruled by their emotions (Heavey 9) and governed by the body which was deemed corrupt (Paster 24). The protagonist's vision of "bodiless creatures" imagines a future in which women are not judged by their bodies, but their minds. Cavendish's Utopia resists the way in which women's behaviour was regulated and judged in seventeenth-century society as the protagonist's philosophical discourse "offend[s] no ears" (217). As Suvin's concept of cognitive estrangement or making the strange familiar suggests, Science Fiction promotes recontextualization through such estrangement and therefore challenges the view that the current state of things cannot be altered (Suvin 32; Spiegel 370). Although Lady Contemplation's immersion in fantasy is deemed unnatural by the other characters within the play, their criticisms of her lifestyle are contrasted with her own contentment with such an existence. Contemplation is considered "idle" by the other characters in the play and damaging to one's physical health as it is dangerous to "bury thy life in fantasms" (205, 183). The aptly named Sir Humphrey Interruption is puzzled to see her deep in contemplation and asks: "what makes you so silently sad?" (186). Yet Lady Contemplation is portrayed as happiest in scenes where she is deep in thought. Her imagination provides her with agency and enables her to create new and alternative worlds which never fail to divert her and most importantly, do not disappoint. Gweno Williams's filmic production of Cavendish's plays incorporated a scene in which Lady Contemplation imagines herself leading an army into battle to emphasise for the viewer the freedom that Lady Contemplation's imagination provides (Cavendish 220-221, Wood and Williams 2004). This positions Cavendish as choosing to write Science Fiction in order to propose an alternative future for women.

Lady Contemplation's self-created imaginative Utopia directly contrasts with the world inhabited by those who visit her house, and with seventeenth-century society in which women's freedom was limited. Cavendish maintains a connection between Lady Contemplation's Utopia and the world spectators are familiar with, through the scenes which feature visitors to Lady

Contemplation's home. As she never leaves her home, we learn about Contemplation's imaginings through her discussions with visitors to the house. However, these visits from outsiders are portrayed as interruptions which spoil "the Triumph […] [of her imaginary] Marriage" (183). These interruptions fracture Lady Contemplation's and the audience's immersion in her fantasy world at the same time that they provide the audience with insight into it. These visitors disrupt her harmonious existence and they resemble the outsiders to her own personal utopia because they criticise her "Airy fictions" and view her ideal existence as dysfunctional (184). The audience are positioned with the Lady Contemplation as the play is primarily set within one room in Lady Contemplation's home. The representation of social interaction as an inconvenience and an interruption to her musings demonstrates the Lady Contemplation's seclusion from society: "if you will leave me alone, I will think of you when you are gone; for I had rather entertain you in my thoughts, than keep you company in discourse" (186). This is consistent with what Chris Ferns refers to as Utopia's isolation "designed to protect it from contamination by the real world" (2). We see Lady Contemplation cross over from pleasant immersion in her Utopian fantasy life to her anxiety when others impede upon her peace. An outside invitation to a ball causes her distress as her fictional lover hangs himself: "pray leave me alone that I may cut him down and give him cordials to restore life" (210). At this point her fantasy life cannot continue as it is interrupted by the world around her, staging the tension between the ideal of her utopia and the practise of it.

For Cavendish, Science Fiction is a genre which offers escape from outside trauma and is a medium used to write about feelings of exile. Science Fiction provides a productive way for Cavendish to shape gender relations during a period in which women were not able to participate in public affairs. Cavendish employs her imagination to escape from her traumatic reality. As Battigelli rightly points out, "Cavendish's compulsive writing career can similarly be understood as a redirection of energy away from correcting or reforming the external world to shaping the more governable worlds of the mind" (82-83). Battigelli relates this withdrawal from public life to the trauma Cavendish suffered being exiled to Paris during the Civil War (44). Findlay has observed that Cavendish often writes about her home even though home was a contested site for the Royalist Cavendish family who were exiled during the Civil War (53). Scholars refer to Cavendish's plays as Household or Closet Drama because these plays were not written for the public stage but were inspired by Cavendish's family home (Findlay 9, 50-54). In light of Findlay's argument that Household Drama if performed would have been performed for close family and friends, providing "a safe way for women to remake the world" (21), female readers or spectators of Cavendish's play who were constrained to the private sphere may have been able to relate to the feeling of enclosure in a domestic space generated by the play's setting in Lady Contemplation's home and the use of the household as a performance space (146). If the play was indeed performed female spectators would find themselves in the Lady Contemplation's exact position, exposed to a Fantasy world which offers limited escape from the constraints they find themselves in as members of patriarchal society.

Utopian narratives in prose fiction are often criticised for closing off discussion and for being static in their approach because the narratorial figure presents a singular view of utopia and directs the reader's approach to this form of government (Roberts 54; Ferns 2). In contrast to the portrayal

of Utopia in prose fiction, there is no narratorial voice in a play. The live and inherently interactive nature of drama invites audience members to rely on their own judgement and decide either to applaud or denounce this new world and their encounter with its inhabitants by clapping their hands or expressing their distaste – the latter was something that seventeenth-century spectators regularly did (Love 27). The first part of the play ends with Lady Contemplation choosing to "rest at home" and remain with her fancies, and the second half of the play ends with the protagonist declaring, in protest to an arranged marriage, that she will continue to engage in contemplation which brings her true happiness (211, 244). Considering Cavendish's domestic audience, this could be read as a bleak assertion that women cannot change the situation. Or, it could be read as portraying Fantasy as an escape route for women. Erin Lang Bonin has observed that in Cavendish's three other Utopian works utopia comes to an end, and that this: "suggests that women's desires are marginal, inappropriate, or even impossible to imagine and sustain outside of patriarchal contexts" (352). With Bonin's observation in mind it is significant that the play ends with the Lady Contemplation still immersed in her utopian world accessed from her imagination while enclosed in the domestic sphere. Spectators and readers of *The Lady Contemplation* are empowered as they themselves are visitors to Cavendish's Utopia which is portrayed as a space of possibility for women. Contrary to Bonin's view, *The Lady Contemplation* provides its audience with an example of a sustainable utopia that one can escape to whenever one pleases.

Cavendish promotes the imagination as a site of personal utopia as the plots which run parallel to the Lady Contemplation's story, such as that of the flirtatious Lady Conversation and the vulnerable Lady Virtue, expose the dangers of gossip, rape, and damaged reputations women suffer in the public sphere. The private nature of closet drama not only provides a safe forum for Cavendish to question the expectations placed upon women in the public sphere, it also places emphasis on spectators as active agents who must rely on their own imagination and judgement to interpret scenes which are verbally represented. Like Ursula le Guin's and William Morris's Utopian fiction, Cavendish's drama is closer to the genre of Utopia which promotes personal freedom from social conventions, rather than order (Ferns 15). Lady Contemplation's Utopia then is self-created for the individual. Rather than utopia as a form of imposed government, Cavendish proposes the creation of a personal utopia through the imagination as a form of private solace for other women. Cavendish's portrayal of Utopia contrasts with Jameson's view of Utopian narratives as "collective wish-fulfilment" in her focus on Utopia which is self-created by the individual for the individual (Jameson xi-1). Cavendish implies that such freedom can be achieved through one's own mind, opening spectators' and readers' minds to the possibilities that Science Fiction explores.

Through the "she-philosopher" as novum, Cavendish constructs a performance of Utopia which goes against early modern stereotypes of women's imagination or fancy as irrational or related to the body. As previously stated, Cavendish achieves this by drawing on Descartes' distinction between mind and body to create a female character for whom the mind is "the soules body and the thoughts are the actions thereof" (192). In contrast, men are depicted as irrational, bodily creatures: "though man hath a rational soul, yet most men are fools, making no use of their reason" (198). Through the figure of Lady Contemplation, Cavendish creates a Utopia which estranges gender

stereotypes and expresses her own frustrations with the exclusion of women in natural science, philosophy, and fiction to depict the imagination as a tool of liberation which provides women with agency through the ability to contemplate alternate realities. Cavendish's stance has much in common with Aristotle's view in his *Politics* (4th century BCE) that the ideal state is "the life of the mind or contemplation" (Aristotle cited in Sargent 19). Cavendish's Household Drama is an immersive, intimate and safe performance of Science Fiction among friends.

While Cavendish focuses on the cathartic nature of Science Fiction narrative which enables the individual to remodel their existence, Behn focuses on the way in which the communal experience of Science Fiction theatre can reconfigure our relations with others. The style of Behn's and Cavendish's drama reflects their approach as Behn's play was publicly performed and has a variety of stage sets, while Cavendish's private play is set within the private household. Aphra Behn's *The Emperor of the Moon* depicts the telescope as the novum that promotes cross-cultural encounter between Doctor Balliardo and lunar inhabitants. However, Behn satirises members of her own society when she disrupts the boundary between self and others by revealing that the lunar inhabitants are other characters in the play who pretend to be from the moon, cathartically portraying that there is no difference between ourselves and those from other worlds or nations. Behn employs what Theodore Shank refers to as making the actual fantastic by representing something unexpected on stage (Shank 169-170). By having the actors appear confused as to whether the spectacle is truth or illusion, Behn breaches the boundary between stage spectacle and audience and in doing so, self-consciously draws attention to the foreign dignitaries for whom the play was performed, and to England's relationship with other nations.

Behn's staging of Science Fiction is far less personal and far more communal than Cavendish's, drawing on early Science Fiction narratives to satirise members of her own society, and exposing the characters' fantasies as desire for the colonial Other. As Adam Roberts has acknowledged, scepticism towards Copernicus's theory that the planets revolve round Earth gave rise to a fascination with other worlds and a sense of wonder at the Universe (36, 40). Behn's comic farce forms part of an emerging tradition of prose and dramatic works which envisioned other worlds and other peoples. Inspired by Francis Godwin's prose narrative *The Man in the Moone* and De Fontelle's *Conversations on the Plurality of Worlds* (1686), which Behn translated in 1688, Behn's spectacular comic farce *The Emperor of the Moon* satirises beliefs held by the more eccentric members of the Royal Society that there were inhabitants on the moon. In the words of the seventeenth-century writer Thomas Barker, this was the dream of "a voyage to the Moon" by the "planet-struck" who imagined "making wings to fly thither" (84-85). As John Shanahan has noted, the satirical portrait of natural philosophers onstage was part of a broader trend which conflated scientific spectacle with performance, or "the tricks of showmen and players" (550). With Shanahan's view in mind, it could be argued that Behn is competing with, and exposing, a new form of Court theatre: the scientific experiments presented before the King. The popularity of scientific spectacle with the King would account for the lavish staging of Behn's *The Emperor of the Moon*.

Critics have commented on the way in which Science Fiction reveals the desires and anxieties

of its audience (Roberts 45-46). In Behn's *The Emperor of the Moon* the protagonist Doctor Balliardo is "in rapture" at the idea of his daughter and niece having sexual relations with lunar people (325). Behn's play engages with colonial travel narratives, which were popular throughout the early modern period and the Restoration, to address the desire for the foreign 'Other' and anxiety about how English spectators related to other nations. Behn's main character Doctor Balliardo is tricked by his daughter and niece who have their lovers pretend to be the fictitious Prince Thunderland and Emperor of the Moon to secure permission to marry. This plot culminates in a lavish stage spectacle in which the Prince and Emperor descend to Earth (the stage) from the Moon (mechanical scenery). Doctor Balliardo spies on the women asleep, and over-hearing their feigned dreams of courtship with Prince Thunderland and the Emperor of the Moon is "ravished." His reaction of being "rapt!," "leaping and jumping" in a fit of "transported" ecstasy is a comic expression of eroticism and desire at imagining the union between earthlings and lunar people (306).

Al Coppola has identified the role desire plays in Behn's comedy and has argued that the play comments on "improper spectating" as lunar enthusiast Doctor Balliardo uses his telescope to spy on the King (484). In the play Balliardo's telescope has sexual overtones as it is a phallic object which positions Balliardo as a peeping-tom spying on individuals in their bedchambers. Both incidences of spying, "the King in his closet'" and Balliardo's daughter and niece asleep present invasions of the private sphere. Behn clearly shows that Doctor Balliardo is at a loss to determine whether what he is seeing is real or contrived and his "telescope, microscopes, all his scopes" provide a metaphor of misreading through blinkered vision (281). On the stage, the telescope is often used as a comic device to present disconnection between what a character believes they can see and what spectators know to be false as they watch con-artists hold up a picture in front of the telescope's lens as in Thomas Tomkis's comedy *Albumazar* (1614).

Behn was not the only dramatist to criticise the telescope and relate its capabilities to the practice of misinterpretation. Margaret Cavendish also expressed her dislike of telescopes and microscopes, which many viewed as providing a better understanding of nature, but for Cavendish represented an invasive form of tunnel vision which involved ignoring the whole form of the subject (Spiller 192-221; Keller 447-471). Doctor Balliardo's usage of the telescope is figured as a form of fanaticism, an obsession with the possible existence of lunar people which blinds his vision and is a form of lunacy. Like the Lady Contemplation's fancy which is figured as dangerous, Doctor Balliardo's fantasies come from "reading foolish books" or more specifically, texts which were the early modern equivalent of modern-day Science Fiction (280). Here Behn reverses the gender stereotype that associated women with an over-active imagination by positioning Balliardo as consumed by fancy. The Doctor later expresses dismay that the young suitors are not "the emperor of the moon? And […] Prince Thunderland" and deep disappointment that there is "no moon world!" (333). Staging Balliardo's fantasy is seen as a cure for or exorcism of Balliardo's desires. As the young scheming suitors state: "We'll find a medicine that shall cure your fit—/ Better than all Galenists" (305). Although the youth indulge Doctor Balliardo's fantasy, they do this mainly for their own ends, but also to exorcise the fantasy by revealing that it is so. This raises an interesting question of whether the communal experience of Science Fiction in the theatre can be viewed as a form of catharsis,

used to express, quench, or expel the desires and anxieties of its spectators. In the realm of the play, performance of other worlds certainly offers such a possibility, as it is through their fantastical plot that the women in the play are able to achieve their desire to marry men of their choice and Doctor Balliardo is briefly amazed to meet a lunar inhabitant. By imagining and enacting the Fantasy of other worlds the women are provided with a new form of agency.

The play's exploration of and interest in the 'Other' and in other worlds is partly due to its audience. As Jane Spencer notes, the play was performed as an afterpiece for foreign dignitaries (vii- xxii). The play therefore was designed to bring two worlds or cultures together through comedy. The realisation that life on the moon is "just as it is here" would have been a unifying joke for the dignitaries the play was performed for by commenting that we are all the same (324). In her introduction to *The Emperor of the Moon*, Jane Spencer comments on the way in which this boundary between stage and audience was crossed in Carol MacVey's 1992 production in which the actor playing Harlequin invited a member of the audience to climb the staircase to the moon (xxi). MacVey's production emphasises the playful and interactive nature of Behn's comedy which bridges the boundary between stage and Fantasy, self, and 'Other.'

Behn provides her audience with an earthly rather than a transcendental or divine vision of the lunar world. *The Emperor of the Moon* self-consciously comments on fiction's representation of other worlds and cultures as exotic, while exposing that they are in fact the same as Earth. When Dr. Balliardo asks Harlequin, posing as "an ambassador from the moon," about the government and society on the moon, he is dismayed to discover it is "just as it is here," that the lunar men have mistresses and the women gamble (Behn 324).This is comic as spectators know that Harlequin is not from the moon and is describing the only society he knows: their own.

In this section I argue that Behn's *The Emperor of the Moon* which relies heavily on spectacle and less upon spectators' imaginations, effectively engages audience members in the fiction, and transports them to that world, whilst encouraging them to reflect on their own world. In *Science Fiction and the Theatre* (1994) Ralph Willingham argues that comedy and Science Fiction go well together and stresses the simplicity of Science Fiction theatre, arguing that: "illusionistic trickery is often unnecessary and distracting in staging science fiction works" (38).[1] In the case of seventeenth-century drama moveable stage machinery was an important technological novum which enabled theatres to portray a variety of locations swiftly and is integral to my discussion of Behn's portrayal of Science Fiction. The proscenium arch which framed the scenic action in Restoration drama clearly depicted the play as illusion. Behn achieves reflection on spectators' own world through Fantastika by generating slippage between the characters' position in the play and their acknowledgement of a change of scene which refers not to the painted scenery but surprisingly to the theatre audience itself to disrupt the illusion that the play has created. I argue that Behn's disruption of the illusion by referring to the theatre itself is used strategically to frame actuality in a way that makes it appear fantastic as Shank argues (169-170).

Despite appearing to mock fans of early Science Fiction as suffering from lunacy from

reading "foolish books" Behn indulges her audience's desire for spectacle, particularly spectacle which creates a vision of the exotic. Behn's comedy made its money from the allurement of spectacle and the skilled practice of stage machinery. The manipulation of stage scenery provided a lavish spectacle for audience members which captured the power of Doctor Balliardo's imagination made manifest through the other characters', or rather the theatre company's, creation of spectacle. Behn's stage directions show the way in which stage machinery, music, and dance were choreographed to create the dramatic entrance of the Emperor of the moon:

> The globe of the moon appears first, like a new moon; as it moves forward it increases, till it comes to the full. When it is descended, it opens and shows the emperor and the prince [who] come forth with all their train, the flutes playing a symphony before [the emperor], which prepares the song; which ended, the dancers mingle as before. (330)

This was the climax of the play and the spectacle which audiences paid to see. The power of the spectacle is clear from Bellemante's reaction: "Heavens! What's here? What palace is this? Not part of our house, I'm sure" (326). Elaria states: "'tis rather the apartment of some monarch" (326). Originally part of the plot to trick Doctor Balliardo, even his niece and daughter are impressed by the spectacle created. This playfully preserves the fantasy for spectators as the characters in the play who engineered the spectacle are surprised by it. Having the performers acknowledge the audience while delivering these lines would also have added to the uncertainty as to whether the spectacle is a representation of truth or illusion. Shank's essay in the influential edited collection *Staging the Impossible: The Fantastic Mode in Modern Drama* (1992), presented the view that Science Fiction theatre can frame actuality in ways that appear fantastical to spectators (169-170). Shank states that the effect of this form of theatre is to remind its audience of theatricality, drawing attention to the illusion as constructed by revealing its construction. Elaria's lines mark the movement from Doctor Balliardo observing other nations, to reference England's monarchy. As a Royalist, Behn's play pays homage to Britain's restored monarchy, the country's wealth, its power, and its trade with and colonisation of other nations, exemplified by Kepler's line: "Now, sir, behold, the globic world descends two thousand leagues below its wonted station, to show obedience to its proper monarch" (327). This reference to the monarch, not only acknowledges the sovereign's role as patron of the theatre, but it also marks a return or transition from the fantastical moon-world to theatre-goers' reality. Contrary to Willingham's advocation of simplicity in Science Fiction theatre, Behn's lavish Science Fiction farce provides an example of the way in which illusion in Science Fiction theatre can be effectively employed to stimulate spectators' awareness and reflection on their own society by reminding them of their position as spectators in a theatre.

I have shown that Science Fiction theatre predates the nineteenth century and began in the seventeenth century. Considering Behn's and Cavendish's work as Science Fiction theatre opens up new avenues of interpretation and prompts exploration of the way in which women dramatists imagined new possibilities to combat feelings of 'Otherness' and re-shape perceptions of the 'Other.'

The imaginative and theatrical techniques exhibited in Cavendish's and Behn's plays may help to inform our readings of recent Science Fiction theatre and its effect on audiences, particularly as the experimental nature of Cavendish's plays which transform the domestic into a place of estrangement fit into the domestic style of Science Fiction theatre acknowledged by Callow and Gray, as that which explores the psychological and emotional dynamic between characters onstage to create feelings of estrangement (65, 67-68).

Scholars have had difficulty in categorising Margaret Cavendish's writings but considering Science Fiction in her plays helps to reconcile the slippage between reality and Fantasy and to draw attention to the way in which she responded to the scientific and philosophical developments of her age, and used these to imagine a future for women. Both of these plays promote catharsis as they expose the slippage between self and 'Other' and generate new associations about gender by exploring 'Otherness.' Behn's publicly performed *The Emperor of the Moon* presents the performance of Science Fiction as a communal and unifying experience, a spectacular Fantasy which unites different cultures through tropes of Science Fiction and comedy. Behn mocks the fantastical to reveal the two nations' similarity rather than their difference. *The Emperor of the Moon* employs Science Fiction narratives to expose and to mock colonial desire. As a private performance, Cavendish's *The Lady Contemplation* is a far more intimate performance of Science Fiction, one which encourages private immersion in Utopian Fantasy as a means of escape.

These plays mark a change in attitudes towards the body of the female writer and her role in creating fiction. Produced towards the end of Behn's highly successful career as a playwright for the public stage and performed for political visits by foreign dignitaries *The Emperor of the Moon* demonstrates the shift in public perception of women dramatists and their role in public affairs. *The Lady Contemplation* reconfigures the view of women's Fancy as irrational and stemming from the body, to argue that contemplation is productive, liberating and involves the mind, rather than the body. *The Lady Contemplation* is a private and introspective performance of utopia which comments on Cavendish's struggle to be taken seriously as a writer and a thinker. Cavendish's household drama which may have been performed in the domestic space demonstrates the way in which site-specific performances of Science Fiction can powerfully dissolve the boundary between fiction and actuality to confuse spectators' sense of fiction with reality. Behn's comedy demonstrates that the slippage between Fantasy and actuality that Shank refers to can be found prior to the nineteenth century. Reimagining early women's drama as Science Fiction offers possibilities for considering the ongoing relationship between mind, body, individual and state, community and alienation, self and other, audience and fiction in Science Fiction theatre.

NOTES

1. More recent studies in Science Fiction theatre, such as Callow and Gray's reflection on the genre, acknowledge that Science Fiction can be staged in a variety of ways from the simple stage set to plays that use a variety of special stage effects (60-68).

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BIONOTE

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SPOCK: A STUDY OF THE HOMOROMANTIC/ ASEXUAL VULCAN

Danielle Girard

Gene Roddenberry's science fiction television show *Star Trek* was originally pitched in 1964 with a pilot episode[1] that was scrapped for numerous reasons including – as Leonard Nimoy writes in his autobiography *I Am Spock* – the inclusion of two specific characters: Number One (a woman in command) and Spock. Notably, Roddenberry was told to dispose of one of the two if he ever wanted his show to be on air. This choice would ultimately skew the show's overarching politics. Roddenberry chose to keep Spock, and while this choice is largely acknowledged as one that allowed the show to better tackle Civil Rights issues, it also paved the way for the show to indirectly address queer identity. After a second and successful pilot in 1966, *Star Trek* was picked up and lasted three seasons, totalling seventy-nine episodes[2] that ran from 1966-1969. This was due to the continued efforts of the show's fandom, who wrote to the network to petition them to pick up a second season, and then a third (Nimoy 32). Already at this early stage of the show, the role of fandom can be evidenced as crucial in the longevity of *Trek*. In a way unforeseen prior to this moment in history, fandom ceased to be white noise in the background and instead became an active hand – perhaps not yet in the construction of the text, but certainly in its ability to *be* constructed. As *Trek* began its run in syndication in the 1970s, however, a new strain of fandom began to emerge centring on the characters of Kirk and Spock, namely 'slash fanfiction' – fanfiction that is explicit in its depiction of homoerotic relationships.

It is these dates upon the precipice of a new decade that posit *Star Trek* at a pivotal cusp of queer history. Consider that the Stonewall Riots occurred one month following the show's final episode in 1969 – allotting the Gay Rights Movement social purchase in America. The first slash stories, Patricia Frazer Lamb and Diana L. Veith (1986, 2014) and Constance Penley (1997, 2014) report, were written around 1976-1977, thus crafting a before-and-after timeline of the enforced silence on queer identity. While the rise of slash fanfiction would forever change the nature of the relationship between fan and creator, the purpose of acknowledging the social intricacies and cultural evolutions that were working in tandem to *Star Trek* in the 1960s and 1970s stand to demonstrate the way in which fandom – slash fandom in particular – would become inextricably linked with socio-political movements both within popular culture and the academic study of such. Lamb and Veith, Penley, and Henry Jenkins paved the way for these socio-political readings. In "Romantic Myth, Transcendence, and Star Trek Zines" (1986), Lamb and Veith claim that: "if the [slash] writer pairs two women to avoid the heterosexual problem of male dominance, she must still overcome the cultural dictum of female passivity" (102). Penley asserts that: "there is a perfectly understandable idealization of the gay male couple in this fan writing, because such a couple, after all, is one in which love and work can be shared by to equals" (180). Finally, Jenkins writes in *Textual*

Poachers (1992) that: "the genre [of slash] poses a critique of the fragmented, alienated conceptions of male sexuality advanced by patriarchal culture […] the genre as a whole represents the conscious construction of a male homosocial-homosexual continuum" (205-206). All of these foundational texts seek to idealize (female) fandom, but the problem with limiting slash readings to socio-political issues of gender is that it discredits the subtext of the source material, thus removing the agency of female fans as textual readers and further crafting a vacuum of silence around queer identity. While there are a number of other critics who have written on the Kirk/Spock phenomenon specifically, much of the recent research being done on queer slash fiction mentions them only as a footnote in history – the first slash pairing, as it were – before moving to discuss another fandom. My research differs in that it looks back at the foundational text in order to speak to the ever-changing nature of how a contemporary queer lens can be used to remap the past with now uncloseted identities.

This article will examine how non-binary queer identity is presented within *Trek* canon from the mid-1960s to the late 1970s. Following a theoretical foregrounding, I will demonstrate how the character of Spock functions as a queer character within the original series, with particular focus on the episodes "Amok Time" (1967) and "Journey to Babel" (1967). I will conclude with an exploration of how the written canon begins to perform for slash fans within 1979's *Star Trek: The Motion Picture* and the Roddenberry-written novelization of the same name (1979). Thus, this article will ask whether or not *Star Trek* crafts its own textual queerness prior to the moment that a queer narrative is ascribed to *Star Trek* by fandom, academia, and the wider cultural media. In essence, how does this greater cultural narrative of queerness, which would come to represent certain facets of the *Trek* lore, relate back to the foundational text? How does the distinction between romantic and sexual orientation (as well as romantic orientation's partial relationship with asexuality) contribute to the reading of a text through the lens of queer theory? And how does it impact the function of the active construct of self-identity as well as the way characters are forced to perform and identify within a text?

There are two key queer aspects present within the seventy-nine episode span of the original series: first, the manifestation of the Vulcan race and its culture as one that emulates the queer identity of asexuality, and second, the demand put upon Spock to perform in accordance to either the heterosexuality of the human-based Starfleet Federation or the heteroromanticality of the Vulcan race. Heteroromantic is a term not yet introduced to the academic sphere; it is one that signifies romantic identity, and it, along with homoromantic and aromantic, will be used frequently within this article as terms denoting lived identities. To clarify, romantic identity (or romantic orientation) refers to the gender or genders that a person is romantically attracted to. It differs from sexual orientation (referring to the gender or genders a person is sexually attracted to) as sexual and romantic attractions are two distinct facets of identity. That is to say romantic attraction should not be conflated with sexual attraction. This, as José Esteban Muñoz writes in his book *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (2009), relates back to the crisis of identity politics following Stonewall. Muñoz writes: "although [the] turn to the identitarian was important and even historically necessary, it is equally important to reflect on what was lost by this particular process of formalization" (115). He states that, prior to identity politics, the queer map was "more expansive and including of various structures of feeling and habits of being that the relatively restrictive categories of gay and

lesbian identities are incapable of catching" (115). This view of the post-identitarian demonstrates that although there was progress toward a more inclusive world, inclusivity in this case can also prove limiting, thus crafting a tighter map of queer identity that becomes resistant to complex identities, in this case romantically-inclined asexual identity.

It then becomes imperative to examine the numerous cultural misconceptions that surround asexual identity. These misconceptions are in many ways due to the biological roots of the term. In biology, "asexual reproduction" refers to an organism that requires only a single parent to reproduce, in essence inferring that "asexual" as an active term means the absence of sex (*Oxford Dictionary of Biology*, 2014). However, this is not the case when asexuality is expanded into the realms of identity politics. As a term that is ascribed to and appropriated by individuals as identity, asexual describes a person who does not experience sexual *attraction*. It is the absence of attraction, not the absence of sex, meaning that asexual-identifying people may or may not choose to engage in the physical act of copulation during their lifespans despite not being sexually *attracted* to their partners (*Asexuality Archive*[3], FAQ 2018). This identitarian expansion has occurred in bits parts with Esther D. Rothblum and Kathleen A. Brehony 1993 book *Boston Marriages: Romantic but Asexual Relationships Among Contemporary Lesbians* and David Jay's Asexual Visibility and Education Network (AVEN) founded in 2001. Thus, in order to conduct this rereading of *Star Trek*, contemporary evolutions to how society views sexuality must become the primary lens of theoretical study.

Asexuality as an identity is inherently resistant to the spectrum of queer identities insofar as the spectrum emerges from the middle ground of a presumed homosexual and heterosexual binary (exclusive sexual attraction to members of the same sex and opposite sex, respectively). In essence, a spectrum of sexuality built on this binary must assume that heterosexuality and homosexuality are the two extreme endpoints for all queer identities. This is the overarching issue with Eve Sedgwick's proposed homosocial/homosexual spectrum in *Between Men* (2006); it is built on an unstable social binary that seeks only to position gender-based sexualities, effectively erasing non-gender-based sexualities and romantic identity. Sedgwick writes that: "'Homosocial' […] describes social bonds between persons of the same sex; it is a neologism, obviously formed by analogy from 'homosexual,' and just as obviously meant to be distinguished from 'homosexual'" (1). Notably this spectrum has cannibalized itself *back* into a binary over the period of time during which it has been repurposed, but it was never intended to be used as such. Instead, binary thinking has been ascribed to Sedgewick's work, rendering the term "homosocial" as one that has distinctly heterosexual connotations. She herself extends the failures of the binary into her renowned spectrum, postulating that: "to draw the 'homosocial' back into the orbit of 'desire,' of the potentially erotic, then, is to hypothesize the potential unbrokenness of a continuum between homosocial and homosexual" (1). In Sedgwick's view, the binary does not exist and the spectrum she suggests offers a concise view of (particularly male) relationships, one which offers a template onto which they may be positioned. Still, regardless of use or misuse, as it were, Sedgewick's work only seeks to embrace one spectrum of queer identity out of many. This assumption actively excludes all those non-gender-based sexualities such as asexuality. It seeks to further assume that sexual attraction is universal and stands to erase the percentage of the population for whom asexuality is a lived reality. The question then becomes how

can this spectrum be adjusted for the inclusion of asexual identity?

The simple answer is that it cannot. Asexuality would fit as neither an endpoint nor opposition point to either 'homosexual' or 'heterosexual' as it does not designate a gender toward which sexual attraction is experienced. Instead, as asexuality designates the absence of sexual attraction, it would be better suited as the opposition point to what is itself the broad range of gender-based sexuality. This would cause yet another spectrum to form which would offer a space for representation to other non-gender-based sexualities such as demisexuality[4], greysexuality[5], and sapiosexuality[6]. The true complexity of identity politics comes into play here as it must further be acknowledged that the absence of sexual attraction does not equate to a lack of romantic attraction for a specified gender or genders. Asexual does not, for example, mean aromantic[7]. Hence, a third spectrum of gender-based identity must be introduced, namely gender-based romantic orientation. For the purpose of clarity, I have created a diagram dubbed the 'Attraction Triangle' that attempts to give a visual representation of how these spectrums and concepts exist in relation to each other.

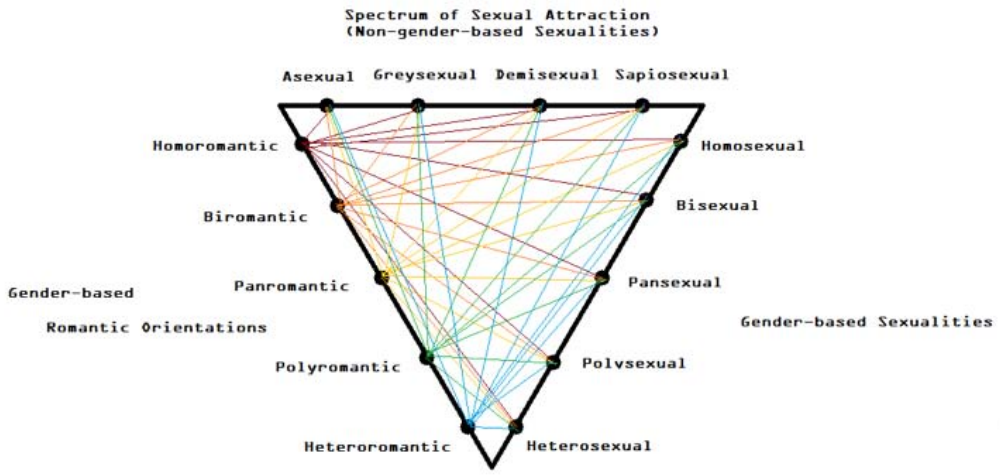

Figure 1: The Attraction Triangle

The Attraction Triangle is by no means a perfect, all-inclusive diagram of identity. For one, it has no room for the complex nuances of gender identity, nor does it offer forward a spectrum for non-gender based romantic identities (such as aromantic, greyromantic, or demiromantic), thus assuming that sexual attraction must be felt in conjunction to romantic attraction. This is the underlying issue with building spectrums based off binaries; as a social binary is inherently unstable, anything based upon a binary can be easily dismantled by tugging a single thread. The Attraction Triangle serves as a small sample of how the concepts I have thus far discussed interrelate with one another in order to offer forward a fuller picture of gender-based romantic orientation and sexual orientation's role in crafting individual identity[8].

Having now established the template upon which identity is allowed to expand, I will now demonstrate how both Spock and Vulcan culture function as asexual. Vulcan culture emulates asexual identity insofar as they mate only once every seven years for the purposes of procreation. It is imperative to consider the varying concepts of (specifically gender-based) romantic orientation and identity in order to fully understand how queer identity operates as an active presence within *Star Trek: The Original Series.*

Consider asexual identity in regards to Spock's projected sexuality throughout the entire run of the original series. Never does Spock experience what could be perceived by the audience as sexual attraction save for three notable instances during each of which he is in an altered state of being. The first two instances are the blood fever (or the mating fever) from "Amok Time" (1967), and the infection of spores in "This Side of Paradise" (1967). In "Amok Time," the blood fever is presented as an affliction that Vulcans cannot break out of. It is a consumption that, as Spock says, "strips our minds from us" (15:40). Spock, then, becomes a unique example as he is both afflicted by this biological urge to mate and able to break away from these sexual feelings in favour of the homoromantic desire he feels for Kirk. In this sense, the blood fever becomes a performance of biological expectation for Spock that operates similarly to Judith Butler's theory on gender, specifically when she writes in *Gender Trouble* (1990) that the "gender core [is] an illusion discursively maintained for the purposes of the regulation of sexuality within the obligatory frame of reproductive heterosexuality" (186). In this case, the altered state brought about by Vulcan biology and expectation becomes the 'gender core' for Spock insofar as the opposing Vulcan and human biology operating within him act as performative bodies regulated and displayed via behaviour. He is willing and able to perform as Vulcan up until the moment Kirk's life comes under threat. As such, the altered state in "Amok Time" becomes a performance of the hetero-identity while the inner self of Spock reveals its homoromantic leanings.

"This Side of Paradise" presents an altered state that does not rely on performance to the same extent, though it plays to one of the prominent and damaging tropes that surrounds asexuality in contemporary media discourse, namely the notion that the lack of sexual attraction can be 'fixed'(Corcione, "How Television Is Leading the Asexual Revolution" n.p.). The narrative arc of the episode finds Spock engaging in a romantic (and potentially sexual) relationship with a woman on a colonized planet. Spock's innate self requires alteration, a striping of all those facets of self-identity that Spock has claim to. Therefore, apart from presenting a heterosexual and heteroromantic Spock, "This Side of Paradise" succeeds only in positing Spock with a queer identity that is resistant to heteronormative assumptions inherent to the function of male/female relationships. The assault of the spores upon Spock acts both as a plot point upon which the triangulation of desire (with Kirk) can be explored as well as a 'necessary' affect that can temporarily 'cure' him of his asexuality. It is this presentation of altered states as temporary affectations that must be overcome before the narrative arc is allowed to conclude that cements the true identity of Spock as existing outside of the hetero-sphere.

The third instance of perceived sexual attraction comes in the show's penultimate episode,

"All Our Yesterdays" (1969). Spock is transported to a more primitive age wherein his body chemistry begins to regress and he experiences the brutal, sexual nature of the Vulcans before they evolved past such a state of being. This fact, of reverse evolution in "All Our Yesterdays," further stands to place sexuality within Vulcan culture as something that the race has advanced beyond. With this lack of *sexual* attraction positioned, it cannot be said that Spock experiences a total and complete lack of *romantic* attraction throughout the show's run. Thus, the division between these types of attraction must become the focal point in which this debate rests.

It is important here to acknowledge that queer representation and the visual image of a same-sex couple actualized on screen are not mutually exclusive concepts. To suggest that they are could be equated to the narrow view that sexual and romantic identity do not exist for anyone until they have a sexual or romantic experience. Likewise, heteronormative assumptions and heteroerotic implications are quick to place heterosexual and heteroromantic identities as the default pairings, meaning that queer representation often requires verbal actualization of sexual and/or romantic identity. Yet this does not negate the fact that queerness can be emulated in any number of ways that are denied said verbal affirmation. There is fundamentally more to expressing queerness on screen than having two same-sex characters hold hands, or even – in some cases – kiss. Two great examples of such cases would be *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine's* 1995 lesbian kiss and the homosexualization of John Cho's Hikaru Sulu in *Star Trek Beyond* (2016). As Wendy Gay Pearson asserts:

> If a lesbian officer is shown on the bridge, for instance, or a gay male couple is shown holding hands on the holodeck, either might certainly be an instance of 'cognitive estrangement'[…] for many audience members, but neither instance would necessarily be queer. (15)

This is not to say that I seek to present romantic orientation as a catchall for discussing queer identity in media that does not partake in an open dialogue about queer identity; it is not. Romantic orientation and identity is as complex an entity as both sexual and gender identity and it should be treated as such. My purpose in employing it here to the Science Fiction classic *Star Trek* involves a carefully cultivated study of the function of asexuality and asexual expression; it seeks to act as a contemporary lens of identity that is not exclusive to asexuality, but is most easily applicable to asexuality. By studying Vulcan as a culture that emulates asexual identity, the introduction of romantic orientation – and indeed homoromantic identity – becomes an important facet in understanding how *Star Trek* as a narrative functions and skews toward queer.

As has often been reported (Penley, Lamb and Veith, Elizabeth Woledge), the history of Vulcan culture within fandom has already been skewed toward homosexual queerness. As Penley writes of early Kirk/Spock slash stories, "Pon farr [a concept introduced in *Amok Time*] stories are so popular with the slash fans that a zine called Fever has been started to publish only pon farr stories" (180). Vulcan culture – and the way Spock relates to it – inhabits a queerness that is firm in its presence throughout the run of the original series. This visible queerness draws primarily on the

incorporation of Vulcan traditions – such as pon farr – that bring sexuality and romantic orientation into the sphere of what audiences (and studios) might classify as wholly innocent, certainly free from the threat of censorship or indecency. Pon farr was the merger of violence and the mating urge, and it was this tie that yielded easily to the expression of Kirk and Spock's fluid sexual/romantic relationship within fanfiction stories following the third act climatic fight scene between the pair in *Amok Time*.

In "Amok Time" Spock is consumed by the pon farr mating fever. This is where the division between sexual and romantic orientation is perhaps at its most definable. While it is clear that Vulcans form long-term romantic relationships as evidenced by Spock's parents, Sarek and Amanda (as seen in "Journey to Babel"), as well as between Spock's arranged betrothed T'Pring and Stonn, this queer depiction of their sexuality shows the separation of sexual and romantic love. It acknowledges Vulcan asexuality and further suggests that Spock's devotion to Kirk should be read as a homoromantic connection. This reading allows Spock to both adhere to and break from Vulcan tradition and culture. While Vulcans must be viewed as cross-oriented (asexual/heteroromantic), the cross of Spock's identities differs drastically from those of his Vulcan peers.

"Amok Time" introduces the audience to the concept of pon farr, which is presented as both a time of sexual urges and increased violence, effectively creating a parallel between the two. As Spock confesses during the episode:

> How do Vulcans choose their mates? Haven't you ever wondered? […] We shield it with ritual and customs shrouded in antiquity… it strips our minds from us, brings a madness which rips away our veneer of civilization. It is the pon farr, a time of mating. (15:51)

What his suggests is that in order to fulfil the biological function of reproduction, Vulcans must lose themselves and their identities to a primal urge that demands recognition, and this primal urge is depicted with a heavy hand of violence. As McCoy later tells Kirk following a physical examination of Spock, the half-Vulcan/half-Human undergoing the pon farr is facing "physical and emotional pressures [that] will simply kill him" (11:42). As pon farr is also described as a "mating fever," suggesting a biological illness through which the cure is the physical act of mating, this further posits Vulcan through a lens of asexual identity as it wastes no time assuring the audience that sexual relationships between Vulcans are shared only for necessity, not desire. Indeed, Spock's vehement embarrassment toward his own Vulcan nature in this instance is demonstrative of his own asexual identity, while his rage directed toward his female betrothed (in one instance he demolishes his computer with his bare hands moments after her image is displayed upon it) further suggests his conflicting identity of homoromantic desire in opposition to heteroromantic desire. It is the homoromantic desire that he feels for Captain Kirk that extends into the following scene wherein Kirk visits Spock in his personal quarters to discuss McCoy's prognosis. He says, "[McCoy] says you're going to die unless something is done, what? Is it something only your planet can do for you?"

(12:30). At this point it is fair to note that Kirk does not presently know that this "something" that needs to be done involves a biological sexual urge to mate, but the location of this conversation presents the audience with a peculiar point of interest. Rarely within the canon of the original series of *Star Trek* does the audience see the personal living quarters of the ship's crew and on those few occasions a romantic moment is shared, usually taking the form of a kiss. This is the case in "Space Seed" – in which Khan Noonien Singh and one-off female Maria McGivers share a kiss in her quarters – as well as in "Mirror, Mirror" and "Elaan of Troyius" wherein the interior of Kirk's quarters are shown as they hold women for him to kiss. Even within "Amok Time" Christine Chapel visits Spock's quarters to express romantic love, though hers is not requited. There is an innate intimacy present within the bedroom, so when Kirk and Spock are alone together in the latter's and Kirk asks if only Spock's planet can attend to this "something" – "something" that the audience soon learns is sex – there is an evident lacing of subtext that further embellishes upon the homoromantic relationship these two characters share. This is further seen when Spock finally confesses to his troubled state and the following exchange takes place. Beginning with Spock's dialogue:

> SPOCK: It is a deeply personal thing; can you see that Captain? And understand? KIRK: No I do not understand, explain. Consider that an order. SPOCK: Captain, there are some things that transcend even the discipline of the service. KIRK: Would it help if I told you I'll treat this as totally confidential? (13:21)

There is a delicacy to this scene that encompasses the enter visual frame, not only are Kirk and Spock alone for the duration of it, on the word "confidential" Kirk moves to stand by Spock's bedchamber door with him. The usage of this word in conjunction to the scene's frame adds a weight to this scene that fluctuates around what, exactly, is going to be treated as "confidential." The implication is that Kirk will stay silent about what Spock reveals, but it is also notable that he does not, at any point, retract his offer of help from the table, gleaned from the previous line, "is it something only your planet can do for you?" which, in the context of the scene, reads more like an offer than a curiosity.

Indeed, the climactic fight of this episode acts as a merger of the mating ceremony and violence, of nature and performance as Kirk and Spock are seen thrashing about in the heat of Vulcan while the latter is himself in heat. Indeed, it is this moment that Spock later contributes to the culmination and cessation of his lust, saying, "It must have been the combat. When I thought I had killed the captain, I found that I had lost all interest in T'Pring" (48:19). Beyond the altered state of his being, Spock finds that his sexual interests and desires have in effect disappeared, he is again returned to his normal state wherein aspects of his Vulcan performance become easier to maintain as they have merged with self-identity. While Spock is able to embrace the asexuality of the Vulcan race with ease, finding comfort in his stoic lack of physical desire, his practice of emotional suppression is a performance under threat by a homoromantic thread that binds him to Captain Kirk. The end of the episode reinforces this when Kirk's survival following his fight with Spock is revealed to the latter and the veneer of his performance cracks again in light of the joy he experiences. "Jim!" Spock exclaims, reaching out to physically embrace his captain before the

presence of McCoy is felt and he is forced to restrain himself again. Therefore, while the obvious reading of the episode might find that violent, physical contact with another man cleared Spock of his mating urge is undeniably homoerotic, the nuances of Spock's characteristic performance – how it functions and breaks – offers a fresh and more complete reading of the episode that works in conjunction with contemporary understandings of queer relationships and queer identities – namely that which is asexual/homoromantic.

"Journey to Babel" offers further insight into the expression of Vulcan romantic orientations/identities by introducing Spock's parents (Sarek, Vulcan; and Amanda, human) and further calls into question his emotional capacity to perform as the diligent, full-blooded Vulcan. Near the top of the episode, Amanda delivers the line of dialogue that shapes the essence of Spock and lays the foundation for his queer nature and Vulcan performance. She says, "It hasn't been easy for Spock, neither human nor Vulcan, at home nowhere except Starfleet" (6:57). While this clearly posits Spock as an outsider who exists in a space of social liminality, it also discounts the true nature of the Federation – exposing Amanda's own human biases for her son as the episode – and indeed the series – goes on to prove, the Starfleet Federation is predominately a human operation. That is not to say it does not embrace alien cultures, but it does come primed with its own biases – ultimately favouring humanity over other races. This becomes the basis of a later episode, "The Enterprise Incident," wherein Spock meets with a Romulan commander and confesses that he does not desire command of his own ship to which the Romulan asks, "Or is it that no one has offered you, a Vulcan, that opportunity?" (18:20). Therefore, Amanda's instance that Spock is at home at Starfleet highlights her desire for Spock to take after her and her humanity, and in a sense her frustration at his Vulcan performance. At every turn during the episode, she seeks to undermine this performance by waxing poetic about Spock's "emotional" childhood – indicating his difference to Vulcans and the desire within him to embrace the mantle of performance to appease his Vulcan peers. The relationship Spock shares with Sarek further shows the tension that exists within his immediate family structure as the cold open of the episode finds the renowned Vulcan greeting both Captain Kirk and Dr. McCoy with the Vulcan salute, yet openly snubbing his son, Spock, despite the fact that Spock is the only member of the ship who can – and does – offer the salute in return. Further, when Kirk offers Sarek a tour of the *Enterprise* to be led by Spock, Sarek denies his son again and requests another guide. As Lamb and Veith claim, Spock's "being half-alien, which is underscored by his […] Vulcan attributes, ensures that he will never "pass" in a Federation still dominated by Human males" (100). Not only does this reinforce my earlier claim of the Federation's bias toward humanity, it further expands upon Spock's own nature. Despite his human mother, it is essential to recognize that Spock presents and identifies as Vulcan, going so far as to perform to their cultural standards to an exceeding degree in the presence of his father; note his stiff formality upon greeting his parents and his later insistence on emotional distance and rigid discipline in the presence of his father. As Lamb and Veith are quick to relate, Spock's "loyalty to his father's culture and his own integrity, moreover, preclude a full commitment to the Federation, whose use of violence is antithetical to Vulcan values. But he does commit himself to Kirk" (100). Therein lies the true essence of both Spock's as a character and the *Star Trek* narrative canon as a whole. When examining either or both, it is vital to understand the underlying queerness that consumes both.

What is more, "Journey to Babel" first presents the audience with the importance of the use of hands between Vulcans and their romantic partners, offering forward a unique gesture that represents Vulcan expression of romantic affection or love. The idea that physical contact through hands is being repurposed through "decoding strategies," (244) as Elizabeth Woledge writes in "Decoding Desire: From Kirk and Spock to K/S" (2005), is outright wrong where Vulcans are concerned as Vulcan touch does not, canonically, have the same implications as human touch. While this facet of Vulcan culture plays only a small role in the original series, it becomes paramount to the continuation of Vulcan culture within the following films, particularly 1979's *Star Trek: The Motion Picture*.

Coupled with the pon farr, Vulcan touch as romantic expression is a recurrent theme within slash fiction written about Kirk and Spock, and as I have shown, both are firmly rooted in textual fact. Fans were quick to rewrite Vulcan culture because it filled the gap of explicitly stated queer sexuality. Writing toward a sexual relationship rather than the homoromantic one present is perhaps the only true "rewriting" (Jenkins, *Textual Poachers*) that these fans have done, and further the best example of the merit that sociological readings of slash offer. A homoromantic text is sufficiently queer, but its queerness is easy to ignore. Sexually explicit queer content, however, is far more difficult to closet. This is one of the main issues with proper queer representation on screen, as Gwenllian-Jones points out in "The Sex Lives of Cult Television Characters" (2014), the "wider cultural logic [dictates] heterosexuality can be assumed while homosexuality must be proved" (118). There is no room here for the expression of romantic desire because such orientations are buried underneath the favour that sexuality receives. Yet both are thoroughly and equally suppressed by the social conscious of heteronormativity. Therefore, what Gwenllian-Jones is broadly saying is that despite (in this case) Spock's lack of sexual (altered states excluded) or romantic interest in female characters he is presumed to be heterosexual purely on the merits that he is not behaving erotically with other men (insofar as the common audience views the Kirk/Spock fight scene at the end of "Amok Time" as violence). It is through this socially binding mind-set of heteronormativity that slash fiction writers must repurpose the homoromantic to the homosexual in order to highlight the queer text. But what gives true purchase to these readings – and indeed to Spock's internalized performance toward Vulcan values – can be found in Roddenberry's 1979 novelization of *Star Trek: The Motion Picture*.

Consider that by 1978, when *The Motion Picture* hit cinemas, Kirk and Spock had been an established slash coupling for two to three years (Lamb and Veith). In the novelization, Roddenberry coins the Vulcan term "t'hy'la" which means "friend, brother, *and* lover" (Roddenberry 18, *emphasis* added). The term was written to describe the relationship between Kirk and Spock and is still hotly discussed in *Trek* fandom today. It is an in-text moment that not only openly addresses the Kirk/Spock slash fans, it also actively draws them into the narrative as Roddenberry writes, "this has led to some speculation over whether they had actually indeed become lovers," suggesting that this coupling is not, as it were, isolated in the margins (19). Instead, this footnote suggests that the Kirk/Spock relationship stretches beyond fandom, in essence bleeding into the narrative and characters that actively interact with the pairing in-text. Indeed, the response written in Kirk's first-person perspective becomes its own performance that, apart from denying any "lovers rumor," dancing

around outright denial with ambiguity and concludes by Kirk suggesting that his "best gratification" rather than his only gratification has been found with women (Roddenberry 18-19). What this is not is a staunch statement about his heterosexuality. In fact, it is the exact opposite as Kirk 'comes out,' declaring only that he prefers women sexually – not that he has only been with women. His romantic identity is left to be inferred by the audience.

These moments of in-text calls to the relationship between Kirk and Spock, apart from dissolving the 'rumours' of an affair between them, seek only to assure the audience that while Spock has shown evident, demonstrable queerness throughout the run of the original series, Kirk is also queer (potentially bisexual, probably pansexual) within the established canon of the *Star Trek* universe. This is the foundation that the original *Star Trek* films are built upon, yet the media as well as academia has been quick to ignore this 'coming out' moment for Captain Kirk and diagnosed heterosexuality as the affliction of the text. It becomes redundant to read the same "heterosexual women" claims that slash theory consistently makes while the queer aspects of the texts that they draw from are ignored. This divide in theoretical disciplines is succinctly discussed by Frederik Dhaenens, Sofie Van Bauwel, and Daniel Biltereyst in "Slashing the Fiction of Queer Theory" (2008) as they write that slash "very much resembles some of the basic premises of queer theory" but "slash fiction does not appear to be of interest to queer film theorists" (336). This divide seems to actively disregard the audience of canonically queer texts and subtextually queer texts alike. Slash is no longer the outlier of fanfiction communities, but instead a vast entity that, more often than not, influences the on-screen chemistry and intimacy of a particular pairing. These pairings deserve to be attended to as authentic readings of a text that offer more than fetishized masturbatory content or statements about the agency of heterosexual women's sexuality.

By introducing a dialogue of speculation and rumours about the Kirk and Spock relationship into the text itself – particularly considering that "Spock encountered it several times" – Roddenberry has effectively created a *Star Trek* canon wherein the fans' alleged perception of textual queerness is made an active part of the textual universe (Roddenberry 18-19). In doing so he acknowledged the agency of the fans and their deep and real involvement with the text. He granted authorial agency to the very real queer implications of the original series as well as the very explicit stories written in closed slash fan communities. Performance to heteronormative standards becomes the shallow façade of a deeply queer enterprise that actively employs romanticality as a lived identity using the character of Spock as a focal point and making the original series of *Star Trek* a queer text.

I have here highlighted the performative nature of Spock as his normative behaviour works in contrast to the character truths that remain closeted by circumstance. As readers and examiners of Science Fiction, it is time to move beyond the binary traps of heterosexual/homosexual identity, of sexual/platonic relationships and embrace the contemporary nuances of queer identity which find a vast array of lived realities that can be mapped *back* onto a post-identitarian past in order to craft a better understanding of how time and convention affects character performance. It is beyond time to unbox the complex range of sexual and romantic identities and approach texts with a vast dossier of paratextual slash stories as queer narratives. As asexuality and other non-hetero/homo sexualities

and romantic identities begin to take root and become increasingly recognized within mainstream culture, deeper examination of the breadth of the Science Fiction canon on both page and screen becomes a necessary step. It is imperative to move forward with a greater understanding of the new queer landscape, but it also a crucial to re-map queer identity onto a past shrouded in binary understanding.

NOTES

1. This episode has a copyright date of 1964; however it was not released for public viewing until 1986 (when it appeared on VHS). 1988 marks the year it was first aired on television.

2. Seventy-nine in the original run, the 1964 pilot would make eighty, but it was not released for public viewing until 1986.

3. This is an archive of information for understanding asexuality and the way this orientation functions.

4. Demisexual – A person who does not experience sexual attraction prior to forming a strong emotional friendship (or romance).

5. Greysexual – A person who exists in the so-named grey area between experiencing sexual attraction and not experiencing sexual attraction.

6. Sapiosexual – A person who is only sexually attracted toward those people with whom they are intellectually stimulated by.

7. Aromantic – A person who does not experience romantic attraction (the absence of romantic attraction).

8. All terms employed in the Attraction Triangle are explained and defined in my further (yet unpublished) research.

9. The pon farr is a time of biological urges for Vulcans. It presents as a mixture of arousal and violence and drives the Vulcan race to mate once every seven years.

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BIONOTE

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Effects of Participatory Culture, explores Gene Roddenberry's *Star Trek* through a lens of Fan Theory and Queer Theory. She is particularly interested in introducing the concept of romantic orientation to academic studies as well as dissecting the rhetoric that often shapes the debates surrounding female slash fans and female queerness.

LISTEN TO THE SKY: INVESTIGATING SOUND IN CULTURAL IMAGES OF THE A-BOMB, FLYING SAUCER, AND SPUTNIK, 1945-58

John Sharples

"Will you shout or will you cry
When the fire rains from on high?"
The Louvin Brothers, *The Great Atomic Power* (1952)

The impact and effects of the atomic bomb, flying saucer, and Sputnik have been comprehended within US popular culture predominantly through visual sense-impressions. Yet, the emphasis on visual aspects of technologies such as the mushroom cloud, the sleek shape of an alien craft, and the silver ball of the satellite has downplayed the importance of the other senses in the process of identity construction. This article examines the plural processes of cultural representation of these three technologies and highlights alternate identities in terms of a broader range of sense-impressions relating to sound. Examining sound produced by and around each object within varying locational and social contexts can illuminate concealed identities. Sound identities can also reinforce narratives which rely on other senses. Considering how sound and sound-events have contributed to the articulation of specific cultural anxieties, this article focuses on the arrival of a science fictional modernity powered by technology which both resisted and reinforced the insecurities of the postwar, post-Nagasaki, post-Hiroshima world. With this perspective, a variety of sources are employed. These include reactions to the appearance of the bomb and more reflective considerations of how the bomb, saucer, and satellite entered the American mind. These impressions and meditations come in various forms. Any effort at understanding the subject, even a selective one, must embrace this diversity, particularly regarding the use of newly domesticated audiovisual technologies including television and radio broadcasts. Such technologies themselves helped domesticate the bomb, saucer, and satellite despite the persistent monstrous status of these cultural icons.

Influences

The atomic bomb, flying saucer, and satellite form a group of objects which, through their representation, reveal something about the state of the world. By focusing on a specific aspect of their representation – sound – new or formerly secondary impacts can be discerned and reconsidered. The effect is of a pair of noise-cancelling headphones, dampening some frequencies whilst amplifying others. This ground is not undiscovered. A number of researchers have considered similar issues. Cultural representation of bomb, saucer, and satellite traditionally highlights their visual identities. This is both unsurprising considering their spectacular nature and reflects the

predominance of the visual mode within the contemporary world. Devices of ocular perception and interrogation have become primary metaphors for comprehension. Juhani Pallasmaa talks of "the bias towards vision, and the suppression of other senses" within architectural disciplines but the comment applies equally to the wider world (*The Eyes of the Skin* 9). Exhibitions including *CTRL (Space)* (2002) have demonstrated the collusion between the visual mode and structures of power. To be seen, it seems, is to be understood. The atomic bomb and mushroom cloud, the saucer silhouette, and silver ball of Sputnik are signs with significant cultural power. Advertisements from the 1950s and 1960s incorporating these signs in friendly ways nevertheless demonstrate that domestication could occur relatively quickly even as threats persisted or reached higher points of tension. The relative inaccessibility of each outside the printed page, film screen, or radio broadcast did not prevent or disguise their intrusion and invasion into the domestic landscape.

Conceptual influences, primarily regarding the appearance and domestication of science fictional technology coming to life, stems from numerous places. This article is part of a wider project investigating, in a non-systematic way, the science fictional postwar cultural world, emphasising the role of various sensory modes in constructing representations of disruptive and domesticated technologies. In attempting this, one must acknowledge that the "sonic texture" of the world is constantly transforming (Sterne, *Sound Studies Reader* 1). One must attune oneself to "ways of hearing and not-hearing" (1). Always, specific sense-impressions and aspects of those sense-impressions are prioritised. Seeing is usually deemed sufficient. Watching an atomic bomb explode on the horizon, one would not wait to hear the accompanying sound to be sure before closing the fallout shelter door. However, sound provides an underappreciated mode of analysis. Previous research has framed the cultural identities of the postwar fantastic space of US popular culture as an interplay of orientations of looking up and looking down.[1] An analogous process of hearing and not-hearing can be suggested – of being attentive to one's surroundings, shutting off the outside world, of not listening, or being unable to listen. "Watching the skies," suggests both grounded-ness and myopia, an insular focus at the expense of the everyday, seen in stereotypical images of scientists. In aural terms, one can cover one's ears or be too sensitive to one's environment. Yet, while "the gaze" – the act of seeing – is the central trope in visual culture research, there is no consensus or consistent theorisation of "the listen" (Sterne 19). Instead, a range of listening strategies are apparent. To this end, this article examines two main reciprocal areas, namely the intersection of sound and visuals regarding representation of the atomic bomb, flying saucer, and satellite; and the domestication of each object involving methodologies and technologies of sound and how the sound each made was assimilated into culture.

Part One: Visual Identities

The atomic age formally began on 16 July 1945 with the Trinity Test carried out by the U.S. Army in New Mexico, as part of the Manhattan Project. In August 1945, atomic bombs were dropped on the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. New threats from above, material and imagined, soon emerged. Aviator Kenneth Arnold's sighting of what became termed 'flying saucers' in June 1947 near Mt. Rainier in Washington state sparked a national and international phenomenon. Five thousand

saucer sightings were reported in the following decade to the United States Air Force (Pearson, "Air Force Checking Job" 6; "Flying Saucers Spotted Again" 1; and Edson, "It's Summer! That Means It's 'Flying Saucer' Time" 7). The launch of the first artificial Earth satellite, Sputnik I – Satellite I – in October 1957, generated its own form of anxiety. Launched by the Soviet Union, a small silver ball, fifty-eight centimetres in diameter, Sputnik was, with optical aid, visible in its low Earth orbit from the surface of the planet. Using a shortwave radio, one could tune into its broadcasted streams of coded beeps. Preliminary visual aspects largely determined the identities of the atomic bomb's effects, particularly the mushroom cloud, and provided structure to Arnold's saucer encounter. Concerning Sputnik, whilst initial reports highlighted its beeping signature, encoding the event as a significant sound-event, attention was also given to its visual appearance and its potentially surveilling power.

A significant linguistic signifier of the effects of the atomic bomb – the term 'mushroom cloud' – drew attention to its visual effect on physical landscapes at the expense of other sensory modes. By July 1946, a US reporter already spoke of the mushroom as "the common symbol of the atomic age" (Weart, *Nuclear Fear* 402). Other descriptions of the atomic blast – "a multi-colored surging cloud," "a convoluting brain," "a raspberry," and "a cauliflower cloud" – were quickly discarded (402). Overwhelming spectacle – represented by the mushroom cloud – stymied other forms of sense-impression and other forms of coming to terms with the new weapon. Jessica Schwartz, researching the postwar atomic age, accurately concludes that "silence emerged as the paradigmatic atomic age sensibility […] instrumental in controlling bodies and information" ("Resonances of the Atomic Age"). Similarly, Kenneth Arnold's initial sighting of objects subsequently described as a 'flying saucer' demonstrated a tendency to convert all sense-experience to visual symbol. Describing the objects he spotted as moving "in a saucer-like fashion," Arnold's account of his experience was interpreted to refer to a saucer shape – its thingness rather than its movement. He later complained that: "Most of the newspapers misunderstood and misquoted [me]. They said that I said that they [the objects] were saucer-like; I said that they flew in a saucer-like fashion" ("Transcript of Ed Murrow-Kenneth Arnold Telephone Conversation"). Indeed, the initial Associated Press story was headlined "Pilot sees 'Saucerlike Objects' Flying at 1,200 m.p.h. in Oregon," whilst Arnold's statement described shapes which "flew like a saucer would if you skipped it across water." Contrarily, Sputnik's launch produced analysis based on various sense-impressions, principally the satellite's visual appearance and sonic properties. Most prominently, the *New York Times* headline read "Soviet Fires Earth Satellite Into Space; It Is Circling The Globe At 18,000 M.P.H.; Sphere Tracked In 4 Crossings Over U.S.," outlining the initial movement of the craft, its subsequent orbit and velocity, its spherical shape, and then efforts at tracking the object. Below the main headline, subheadings continued the parallel assessment, highlighting how radio was used to pinpoint the satellite's location and confirming, optimistically, that "4 Report Sighting Device" and that the craft was "560 Miles High – Visible With Simple Binoculars." Such claims calmed concerns about the satellite's elusiveness whilst creating a new anxiety regarding panoptical power. The twin methods of control – sight and sound – tentatively placed Sputnik under a *reciprocated* surveillance.

Part Two: Atomic Bombs and Satellites in Public Spaces

Yet, monolithic cultural identities can dissipate over time, their initial meanings and signification becoming more varied. This is evident in the way these objects infiltrated public spaces. Perhaps the most prominent cultural sounds which summarised the new atomic age were old sounds: the crackle of the Geiger counter and the air-raid siren. The sound of the Geiger counter "was first heard by many Americans on radio broadcasts in the late 1920s" (Smith, *Eco-Sonic Media* 97). Although derived from pre-WW2 technology, an application of the Geiger-Müller tube, its clicking represented a new sound for a new historical context (110). Surrounding radiation in the tube's proximity caused ionisation which induced current in an external circuit, amplified to produce clicks from a speaker. Invisible effects of the atomic bomb were transmuted into sound ("X-Ray Counter Checks Radiation" 114). Within *The War of the Worlds* (1953), *The Incredible Shrinking Man* (1957), and *Dr No* (1962) the click of the counter marks the presence of danger. In the first, the astro- and nuclear physicist Dr Clayton Forrester discovers a meteorite which crashes to earth is radioactive by use of a Geiger counter. In the second, Dr Bramson refers Grant Williams's character, Scott, to the California Medical Research Institute where they learn of his exposure to a radioactive mist, causing his shrinking. In the latter, Secret Agent James Bond uses a Geiger counter in his investigations and discovers that Crab Key Island, under the control of the mysterious Dr No, possesses a nuclear secret.

The Geiger counter, however, found itself used for a number of bizarre tasks. One of these tasks was as a system for finding golf balls, according to an October 1949 *Popular Mechanics* article. A ball-tracking system required each golfer to carry around their own Geiger counter, sweeping over the ground when a drive entered the rough and strayed off the playing green (Whittaker, "Million-dollar baby of the atomic age" 89). Again, an everyday occurrence had been invaded, the process infusing the game of golf with novelty whilst familiarising a device which had only recently seemed fixed in an association with atomic destruction and death. A number of other news items contemporary to the radioactive golf balls tale also reveal a degree of amusement around the device. Jacob Smith notes how "In 1949 a new generation of prospectors headed to the deserts […] equipped […] with a portable Geiger counter. Retail sales of Geiger counters jumped 75 percent in 1950" (97). An advertisement in *Popular Mechanics,* in March 1953, read: "Find a fortune in uranium with this new, super-sensitive Geiger Counter. Get one for atom bomb defense. So small it fits in the palm of the hand […] Sold with ironclad moneyback guarantee […] $24.95." ("New – Sensational! Geiger Counter" 284). It is noteworthy that commercial possibilities were listed above any thought of personal safety.

Another old sound became repurposed to warn against atomic attack – the air-raid siren. Unlike the Geiger counter, which made protection personal, air-raid sirens were more indiscriminate. Yet, the air-raid siren would not signal a movement to safety, but impending death. This was demonstrated in test evacuations in 1954 to 1961 in "Operation Alert" and "Operation Kids." Traffic jams and refusal to participate were common. Further, whilst 679 sirens – up to 125 dB – were installed in New York City in 1954 (Hillel Schwartz, *Making Noise* 811-812), in the more rural states civil defence administrators expected the first notice of an attack would be "intense light in the sky"

(812). In-home warning devices were also dismissed since, as one noted, "I would question whether a housewife running a vacuum cleaner or a washing machine in another room would hear this" (814). Advertisements for the Chrysler Air Raid Siren demonstrate the futility of the effort. Their product claimed to be "the loudest Mechanical Voice in the World," able to be heard four miles away and to "open a hole through fog" ("Ready to Warn Americans at a Moment's Notice," *The American City* 31). Powering the siren was a one hundred and eighty horsepower V8 engine also used, in a clever bit of cross-product promotion, in Chrysler cars and, in a vague way, to those powering US tanks. As with the Geiger counter, commercial interests again impinged. A mixed message of pessimism and optimism was present in these adverts.

Regarding Sputnik, what was its sound? On a technical level

> the satellite had dual transmitters on frequencies of 20.07 and 40.002 megahertz, with sound radiated by four external, spring loaded whip antennae. The beeps were alternately transmitted on each of the two frequencies. Each beep was 0.3 seconds in duration with 0.3 second pause. (Dickson, *Sputnik* 129)

Beyond this, though, Sputnik presented sound as spectacle. Konstantin Gringauz, designer of Sputnik's transmitter, later confirmed that the frequency of the sound of Sputnik in the lower frequencies accessible to amateur, ham-radio operators was no accident, but instead was shaped to deliver as large an impact as possible:

> Amateur radio operator Roy Welch was quick to record the beeping signal from his home station in Dallas. A few days later, on October 9, he was playing the recorded beeping for long lines of interested visitors to the Texas State Fair. (129)

Gringauz confirmed that the satellite designer Sergei Korolev "was adamant that signals should be received by as many people as possible throughout the world, including amateur radio hams" (129). To this end, before the launch, the June 1957 issue of *Radio* magazine, circulation of more than one million, had printed instructions on how to detect the satellite, "but no one took it seriously" (129). After launch, however, Sputnik forced all those beneath it into an unwilling imagined community, linked through the satellite's trajectory and potential data gathering abilities. President Eisenhower's remark that the satellite launch "did not raise his apprehensions one iota" was badly received ("Portrait of the Week" 500). By 24 October 1957, "most" Western scientists "ha[d] thrown doubt on Russian claims that coded information was being sent back," but British scientists suspected that "until the evening of 9 October coded information [including temperature and pressure readings] was present" ("Coded information found in satellite's signals" 10). Regardless of the content of the beep, the noise was pronounced as "the sound of the future" (Blakeslee, "Three Questions" 7). The sound, however, did not persist. Around three weeks after launch, the craft began to lose its voice after the satellite's batteries failed. Scientists of "other nations [were asked] to aid in tracking the

now voiceless sphere" (Wesley, "Sputnik Loses Its Beep Voice" 3), including, reported *New Scientist*, members of the Cavendish Laboratory, Cambridge (Shakeshaft, "Tracking 'Sputnik'" 11-12).

As Karen Liftin states "that orbiting ball which aroused such trepidation in the West […] was not equipped with sensors" (68). Sputnik was "a pure weapon of propaganda, containing only a radio transmitter that emitted a shrill beep. It didn't photograph the earth or measure the radiation or temperature of outer space" (Norris, *Spies in the Sky* 17). Despite this, the sound of the satellite could easily become overwhelmed by its visual identities and, to take another twist, Sputnik's alleged surveillance technology. Von Hardesty and Gene Eisman claim that "The first appearance of Sputnik over a major city, heralded by its radio signals, became a moment for celebration […] On day two […] Sputnik appeared over Berlin no less than 13 times. Dublin, to the surprise and delight of locals, was graced with the same number of visitations. Other cities encountered fewer appearances of Sputnik on that memorable day: New York, 7 times; London, 6; Tokyo, 6; and Washington, 5 […] Observers were awestruck by Sputnik [… even though] observers were often tracking the more reflective carrier rocket" in the sky, not the satellite itself (Hardesty and Eisman, *Epic Rivalry* 78). These ideas were considered in a number of places, including, considered below, in popular song.

Part Three: Expectation

Setting initial representations of the atomic bomb, flying saucer, and Sputnik against the manner in which they were assimilated into popular culture – through appropriation of names, turning danger into toys, and use of humour – raises the issue of identity formation. Domestication did not, of course, dissipate all threat or anxiety, nor did it completely undermine the power of the new technologies. Rather such efforts can be understood – at most – as coping strategies in line with common social practices relating to novel, fantastical, or unwelcome circumstances. With this in mind, it is worth reconsidering the initial manner in which their identities were formed and seek parallel paths – roads not taken, in one sense, which may challenge their identities based on visual elements. This can be done through an examination of the sonic components of sense-impressions recorded at their first appearance, as well as sounds which emerged from these appearances. It is noticeable how an absence of sound features in each initial encounter. An emphasis on specific aspects of each technology led to specific cultural identities being foregrounded, predominantly visual ones – the mushroom cloud, the silver ball, and the saucer shape. Shapes stood in for effects and provided a shorthand for a range of feelings.

The earth-shaking saucer noise in films such as *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (1951) – one of the most popular flying saucer portrayals – equated sound with power. In the scene of the saucer landing, a radio reporter notes that in "the nation's capital, there [was] anxiety and concern, but no outward sign of panic." The script then describes "a barely audible, distant hum" which "grows in volume imperceptibly" ("Script for *The Day the Earth Stood Still*"). The sound "becomes a roar […] unearthly in its intensity and almost unbearable in its swiftly increasing volume. The people stop in their tracks and look up in the sky in terror." As the craft lands, "the tremendous roar of its motors is suddenly cut off." Sound is a clear part of the craft's monstrous identity. In another popular

saucer depiction, *The War of the Worlds* (1953), with its Academy Award-winning special effects, stereotypical saucer shapes are deliberately avoided, presenting triangular shaped craft, resistant to nuclear weapons, with green corners and centres, and antenna-like weaponry. The impact is far removed from Klaatu's graceful craft which gains its intensity of impact from its sleek modern surfaces and sonic power. The Martian saucers instead produce a distinct sound, partly like the hum of an electrical circuit, partly like a swarm of amplified crickets. The sound of their weapons is a more familiar bleep, bloop noise and the combined effect is an overwhelming one. It seems completely natural for these saucers to produce a large sound. Yet, works such as Gerald Heard's *Is Another World Watching?: the Riddle of the Flying Saucers* (1950) – an early investigation of the flying saucer phenomenon – noted that, in 1947, "The oddest thing about them so far was […] not their shape nor even their speed [… but] the thing it didn't have […] The disks were dumb […] In perfect silence" (8-9). Certainly, the demands of entertainment and cinematic conventions contributed to the discrepancy within these representations. But there is also a possibility that this aspect of the flying saucer identity was downplayed due to the expectation that a spectacular visual image should be accompanied by a spectacular sonic event.

A need to fill silence, of falling victim to the hierarchy that sound is necessary when faced with silence, was also noticeable in coverage of the first atomic bomb test. The problem can be broadened and considered as one of aesthetics. It is a common notion that the dazzling light and cacophony of modernity overwhelms. Regarding this, a minor digression clarifies the tendency and extent of modern technology and sensibilities to obscure. Japanese novelist Junichirō Tanizaki's *In Praise of Shadows*, written in the 1930s, recorded his experience at a Kyoto restaurant where "until recently […] the dining rooms were lit by candlelight" (21). These had been replaced by electric lamps, but several complaints had been received about the quality of this light. A candlestand was brought to Tanizaki's table, since "only in dim half-light is the true beauty of Japanese lacquerware revealed […] a depth and richness like that of a still, dark pond" unseen in the bright electric light (22). "Darkness" he concluded, was "an indispensable element" of this experience (23). This speaks to a wider experience of modernity in all its forms. When certain modes of living or of doing things are lost, the way one perceives is also lost. All-encompassing electric light is undoubtedly a significant invention, improving living standards and working conditions, yet technological change can destroy. One can apply Tanizaki's parable to the production of sound.

Hillel Schwartz notes irresistibly that "It is not possible to begin quietly" (17). Scientific and mythological ideas converge on this thought. The Big Bang, for example, and accounts of the origins of the universe recorded in ancient myths agree, even on a superficial level, on the need for a significant noise to signal new forms of existence (20). This expectation of noise accompanied the first atomic bomb demonstration at the Trinity Test in July 1945. Of the nine principal eyewitness, stationed up to twenty miles away, seven mentioned sound, and three noted their disappointment at this aspect of the test. Only Robert Serber and Maurice M. Shapiro remarked on the power of the noise, noting a thunder-like quality to the sound, "a sharp report" and a blast which "startled" ("Transcription of Trinity Tests"). The physicality of the experience is foregrounded here, particularly the effect on the human body. Other observers were less impressed. Luis W. Alvarez mentioned a

small, almost unnoticeable, shock wave from his vantage point whilst Edwin M. McMillan recounted that "I did not feel any earth shock." These reactions are inextricably linked with the *expectation* that sound should accompany visual spectacle. Disappointment, however, could also be relief. Victor Weisskopf stated that the sound was "much weaker than anticipated." Morrison likewise described "an anti-climax" and Kenneth Greisen recorded "After the brilliant optical display we had seen, the ground shock and noise were disappointing." Again, the visual spectacle seemed to compel a complimentary and equivalent soundtrack.

Despite this mixture of responses concerning sound at the Trinity Test – of course based on the distance and acoustics of the landscape – General Thomas Farrell, executive officer for the Manhattan Project, was said to have "caught the feelings of almost everyone" when he wrote that the sound of the bomb, a long hard thunder echoing around the distant mountains, "warned of doomsday" and death, yet, this was wishful thinking, contradicting the first-hand accounts and the multiplicity of opinion (Weart 101). Similarly, at the Pacific island Bikini Atoll test, in 1946, expectations of apocalyptic destruction were left unfulfilled. The bomb exploded "far off target [… and] a Latin-American radio announcer said he would broadcast the sound of the explosion, then gave a high-pitched squeak" (109). Disappointment was the primary emotion. Rather than the bomb itself, "the audible, seminal quotation of the Atomic Age" (Hillel Schwartz 625) was not a new sound, or even an old sound, but Robert Oppenheimer's echoing of the Hindu God Vishnu from the Bhagavad Gita, "I am become Death, destroyer of worlds" which itself filled an absence of sound from his colleagues reacting to the explosion whereby "A few people laughed, a few people cried, most people were silent" (*The Decision To Drop the Bomb*). Physicist Richard Feynman felt compelled to bring out his bongo drums, filling the expected noise with his own cacophony and relief. Oppenheimer's quotation nevertheless suggests an ending rather than a beginning, a memorial rather than a moment of emergence.

Perhaps one should not be surprised. Noiselessness is, after all, a state incompatible with human existence. When composer John Cage entered the anechoic chamber at Harvard University, he heard two noises: "the high sound was the working of Cage's nervous system, the low sound was blood pulsing through his circulation. In other words, he was hearing his own lifeforce" (Toop, *Haunted Weather* 1). The body, then, produces its own soundtrack. We are noisemakers. As Richard Feynman's drumming counterpoint to the atomic bomb test demonstrated, there is a reciprocal history to the sounds one interprets, the sounds produced in response to the matter of living and to the matters of history. In attempting to grasp something of this reciprocity, and for reasons of space, I will consider a small number of significant songs: sounds produced in response to the technological shock of the bomb, saucer, and satellite.

Part Four: Song

The principal concerns of songs produced referencing the technologies under examination circle around themes of power and limitations. Regarding the bomb, the most popular tunes were the Buchanan Brothers's songs *Atomic Power* (1946) and *There's a Power Greater than Atomic* (1947).

Atomic Power, drafted the morning after the bombing of Hiroshima, situates fear of the new bomb within Christian, Old Testament, theology (Bill Geerhart "Hiroshima" quoted on Atomic Platters). *There's a Power Greater than Atomic*, similarly, raises God above all Man's efforts to destroy Man, contrasting divine power favourably with the recent Bikini Atoll test. Both highlight the massive destruction of the bomb. *Atomic Power* begins by suggesting that "this world is at a tremble with its strength and mighty power" hinting at the bomb's Promethean origins, from heaven, as well as its devilish potential, referencing "the brimstone fire" it produced, before determining that atomic power is "the power of God's own holy hand," a message repeated in the chorus declaring "Atomic power, atomic power / Was given by the mighty hand of God." The following verse, warning of the power of the device, demands that Man only "use it for the good of man and never to destroy." The song ends with a warning that when Judgment Day comes, there will be no advance warning, alluding to the destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki which "paid a big price for their sins," justifying the annihilation.

There's A Power Greater Than Atomic (1947), the most popular atomic bomb-themed song of the time, continued in a similar vein, beginning by mentioning God's ability to give and take life. The refrain, "There's a power (power) greater than atomic / It's a power of the One that sits on high," reminded the audience that "there is no power / To equal that of God." Indeed, the *lack* of destruction at Bikini Atoll is mentioned – "The sea and sky unchanged" – proving "That God is still supreme." There appeared an acknowledgement of the bomb's powers as well as an attempt to confine such power within Christian teachings, if not of humility then of caution. The theme is containment, an attempt to prevent the atomic bomb's power overwhelming all other cultural and social boundaries. Processes of simultaneous fragmentation and domestication were also visible within musical portrayals of Sputnik, assimilating the other within existing US popular cultural forms. Indeed, Sputnik's launch sparked off numerous popular songs utilising the satellite as subject and lyrical matter comprising a mixture of concern and playfulness. The 1958 *Sputniks and Mutniks* by Ray Anderson and the Homefolks, for example, a "masterpiece of hillbilly paranoia" (Geerhart "Paranoia" quoted on Atomic Platters) could admit that "[t]hose funny missiles have got me scared" and that he is seeking "somewhere Sputnik can't find." Again, a kind of paranoia is at work dependent on the idea that Sputnik could, if not see, then certainly find an individual. It confirmed the view that poet Jane Hicks described, "We grew up trained to duck and cover, wary of Sputnik's eye" (*Driving with the Dead: Poems* 14), and an attitude whereby "Everyday people […] would look up in the sky at night and try to spot it [… and] wonder if they had to speak in hushed tones" (Dickson 113). The assumed hidden power the satellite had was sight, not the ability to kill with hidden weapons, or to listen in.

Yet, this type of interpretation proved the exception. The mood around Sputnik was as much humourous as fearful, if not more so. Skip Stanley's *Satellite Baby*, advertised in *Billboard* (December 1957), was an amusing sci-fi-rockabilly hybrid, tripping through a greatest hits of cultural fears – "Nuclear baby, don't fission out on me" and "Geiger counter Daddy loves your atomic energy" – before a nondescript chorus of "We're gonna rock it daddy, take your satellite!" (Geerhart on Skip Stanley's *Satellite Baby*). Likewise, Teresa Brewer's *Satellite* employed Sputnik as a metaphor

for romance. Verse two describes how the singer's:

> love takes the path of a satellite
> In an orbit around your heart
> Your attraction is something I never could fight
> And it's starting to pull me apart

comparing one's lovesick state to "sailing above the clouds so high […] The world looks as small as a polka dot / When compared to the love I've got." In a similar, unconcerned tone, Carl Mann's *Satellite No. 2* (1958) commands "Let's dance, dance, dance at the satellite," suggesting a Bacchanalian, nonviolent, passive reaction to the Soviet satellite: hearing "a beepin' sound, I moved my feet," it begins, before the chorus intones: "Yeah, let's dance, dance, dance, everybody […] Well, let's dance, that's satellite no. 2 Yeah!" Jerry Engler's *Satellite Girl* (1958), like *Satellite No. 2,* portrayed a carnival atmosphere underneath the satellite, renouncing responsibility, whilst Al Barkle's *Sputnik II* (1957) viewed the satellite as either carefree and playful or reckless and out of control, beginning with a torrent of "beep beeps," and comparing an unnamed object of affection to "a flying Sputnik Floating on ay-air."

What to make of these seemingly weightless cultural productions? Most importantly, one should take them seriously. The use of extraneous or proximate sounds to construct music is not new. Jean-Philippe Rameau, in 1726, composed *La Poule* incorporating the sounds of the rooster. Through the industrial revolution, the sounds of machinery and tools were incorporated, as in Alexander Mosolov's *Iron Foundry* in 1926. Black Sabbath's heavy metal sound has been linked with the factories where several of its member worked (Cope, *Black Sabbath and the Rise of Heavy Metal Music* 28). Steve Reich's 1969 *City Life* includes the sound of car alarms, "aestheticizing [the] urban landscape" (Berger, "How Noise Makes Music," *Nautilus*). Sonic Youth and other no-wave artists have claimed to have taken inspiration from the New York cacophony (Reed, *Assimilate* 209). There is a rich musical history which takes account of the surrounding environment. In a number of these cases, as with the use of the Sputnik beep, there is a certain rhythmic component to the sound, a regularity which can be straightforwardly placed within a pop song template. Jonathan Berger writes how this use of the surrounding world:

> mirrors how the human brain manages noise—how it transforms noise into something palatable and even exciting. Noise represents disorder and uncertainty. We try to fight through it and find coherence […] We live by making music out of a noisy world. ("How Noise Makes Music")

The use of flying saucer and Sputnik sounds, then, can be seen as just another coping mechanism for understanding and comprehending the new and the familiar. This need not determine the underlying tone of the music. Comedic, paranoiac, or plain fun compositions can have the same intention.

Taking-Off

Visual aspects of the flying saucer, atomic bomb, and Sputnik can be considered the main and primary motivating aspects of the cultural power each possessed. Other sense-impressions can still, however, be of importance in decoding the complex identities of these three objects. The sounds created by each, and the sounds they created in others, certainly contributed to the feelings of fear and wonder they generated. Monstrous, cataclysmic noises, silent, unearthly swooping, and manic, streaming beeps became shorthand for representing cultural anxieties. On occasion, however, the official record was not enough. When sound and sight were at odds, the visual aspects often led the way. The silent saucer became, in *The Day the Earth Stood Still*, a thunderous machine. Unassuming reverberations of the atomic bomb at the Trinity and Bikini Atoll tests were rewritten as the dreadful emergence of new realities. Unintelligible, sporadic beeping from Sputnik was suspected of conveying valuable information. Official censorship, particularly concerning the effects of the atomic bomb and the existence of flying saucers, left a silent space filled by unsanctioned cultural identities, humour and commercial opportunism. The transformation of the Geiger counter into a tool for twentieth-century prospectors seeking their fortune in uranium deposits and as a way of finding marked golf balls, for example, demonstrates that even as potent a sonic-symbol as the Geiger counter's clicks could be reshaped. Of course, this was not confined to sound-identities only. Popular songs on the atomic bomb, saucer, and Sputnik further demonstrate that domestication of these three technologies was possible. This domestication accepted the Outsider, invited it into the American Home, redrew its meaning, and led each to the status of American icon.

To quote Juhani Pallasmaa again, "The suppression of the other sensory realms has led to […] a feeling of detachment and alienation" (Blurb), specifically within the field of architecture but universalised here. Excessive focus on any aspect of representation can distort the whole. A full sensory history can surface new messages which might otherwise be obscured. Above, I have tried to draw out a small number of these messages, emphasising that the construction of the identity of the flying saucer, the satellite, or the atomic bomb was in no way natural or inevitable but involved shaping the accounts and images available. In the case of the flying saucer, the emergence of *The Day the Earth Stood Still's* craft was based on a misreading of Kenneth Arnold's initial 1947 report. Other films, such as *War of the Worlds* took a different approach. In both cases, noise was added to suit cinematic necessities rather than remaining faithful to eyewitness accounts. Likewise, in cinematic portrayals of atomic bomb explosions, as well as in news footage, sound and sight were frequently synced together – although not always – to convey an overwhelming experience, despite the disconnect between the two at any sensible distance of observation. The threat of the bomb compelled the mutation of already existing sounds, in the form of the Geiger counter and air-raid siren, but both ran into commercial imperatives and the new noise of society. Sputnik's radical bleeps were part warning sign and part entertainment, and their appearance in popular songs followed a tradition of enveloping surrounding sonic material into a more acceptable structure. This all leads to a question to end on: what can other sensory modes tell us about the role of these science fictional technologies within the American postwar period? Further research is needed.

NOTES

1. See: John Sharples, "Sky and Stardust: The Flying Saucer in American Popular Culture, 1947-1957." *Cultural and Social History*, vol. 13, no. 1, 2016, pp. 81-98; and John Sharples, "A Mysterious Light: Flying Saucer Narratives in Post-War USA." *Fantastika Journal,* vol. 1, no. 2, Dec. 2017, pp. 37-50.

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BIONOTE

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NON-FICTION REVIEWS

SOUTH AFRICAN GOTHIC: ANXIETY AND CREATIVE DISSENT IN *THE POST-APARTHEID IMAGINATION AND BEYOND* (2018) BY REBECCA DUNCAN

Review by Madelyn Schoonover

Duncan, Rebecca. *South African Gothic: Anxiety and Creative Dissent in the Post-apartheid Imagination and Beyond.* University of Wales Press, 2018. 265pp.

In *South African Gothic: Anxiety and Creative Dissent in the Post-apartheid Imagination and Beyond* (2018), Rebecca Duncan traces the Gothic anxieties and aesthetics in South African literature from the *plaasroman* (farm novel) of the early and mid-twentieth century to the neoliberal and Globalgothic novels of the early twenty-first century. Over the course of five chapters, including an introduction and ending coda, Duncan builds an argument that speaks to an under-recognised tradition of Gothic poetics in South Africa. Focusing her observations on what she argues are Gothic iterations of land, indigenous culture, epistemology, memory, and violence, Duncan demonstrates that there is lingering trauma in South African literature that illuminates past colonial atrocities that refuse to be laid to rest. However, Duncan also argues that the trauma and memory demonstrated by the diverse texts she explores may also have the power to, if not *heal* past wrongs, then at least address – or begin to address – a history that should not be forgotten. Although, as Duncan notes, South African Gothic studies is a relatively young and largely unrecognised field, this book contributes strongly not only to the establishment of a particularly South African set of Gothic sensibilities, but also to the wider field of Postcolonial studies as a whole.

Duncan's claim in establishing the legitimacy of a South African Gothic tradition is grounded in her useful explanation and combination of Bruno Latour's concept of modernity, Michel Foucault's concept of the utopia, and Jerrold E. Hogle's observation that – from the beginning – Gothic tropes and imagery have always represented "signs only of older signs" (quoted in Duncan 6). She posits that if, as Latour suggests, modernity represents a break between the past and the present, and if one function of Foucault's utopia is an uncanny mirror – a reflection of "society turned upside down"– then the role of the Gothic in South African contexts is to demonstrate that modernity does not exist, at least in the ways pre- and post-apartheid rhetoric and politics have largely claimed (quoted in Duncan 8). The injustices of colonisation and apartheid are brought to life in South African literature through Gothic figures such as ghosts, corpses, incestuous children, and underground labyrinths as they symbolise the inverse of a utopic 'rainbow nation.'

As Duncan analyses the skeletons hidden in South African literature, so too does she

critique the buried nature of South Africa's real historical past. Following the work of critics such as André Brink, Ingrid de Kok, and Mamood Mamdani, the author points out that apartheid history has not been exorcised despite the efforts of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and their extensive cataloguing of apartheid atrocities (93, 124). Although South Africa has tried to rebrand itself post-apartheid as a 'rainbow nation,' for Duncan, this is a largely empty sentiment. She notes that the rainbow nation, with its connection to neoliberalism and therefore renewed and rebranded racial and social inequality, "promises, after all, its own version of modernity […] it posits a present and future sharply marked off from the characteristics of the past" (34). The author posits that any attempt to forget the past would be to perpetuate its violent natures into the future, an underlying theme of many of the novels she explores. Throughout her book, Duncan illuminates the ways in which haunted ground represents a spectral colonial memory, the importance of such a memory (even when fragmented, unspeakable, or category-defying), and the ways in which global capital and neoliberalism have reinstituted the very inequalities South Africa was supposedly moving away from during the post-apartheid period.

One of the greatest strengths of Duncan's book is her engagement with criticism and her ability to intermingle her own ideas and theories with those of other authors. In fact, Duncan's explanations of critical theory, along with her descriptions of South Africa's history, are often so thorough and clear that readers do not need to be familiar with all the texts in order to follow her connections between history, theory, and the passages of novels and plays provided. By giving the reader a thorough foundation of criticism and historical fact before discussing a particular text, the author draws the reader along her line of argumentation with finesse. Overall, this gives the reader a frequently seamless read as they are asked to travel from one text, theory, or historical moment to another.

Particularly interesting and well-argued in regard to theory is Duncan's connection between Freud's uncanny and the physical space of the farmland in early twentieth century and interregnum South African *plaasroman* novels. For Duncan, as ordered and idyllic as the visible farmland in these novels may be, it is undergirded by what she called the "pastoral unconscious" or that which lies beneath – what needed to be exorcised from the white colonising consciousness in order to justify ownership of the land (46). The links between violence, territory, land ownership, a "naturalization of racial hierarchy," and the Freudian unconscious are convincing in Duncan's readings of the *plaasroman*, and easily applicable to other colonised spaces, such as the United States (45). In this way, the analysis succeeds in being specific to South African texts, but also provides a useful articulation of how the colonised ground functions as the subconscious in Postcolonial literary texts as a whole.

Convincing, also, is Duncan's argument regarding the importance of memory – and yet one which is fragmented and often unspeakable. Building off Vijay Mishra's theory that the "[g]othic topoi of death" represents "that which cannot be illuminated or understood," Duncan charts the ways in which images of horror, violence, and death mark an unspeakable South African history (115). This point, for example, is argued through her reading of wounds in South African Gothic literature

as "the sign behind which there opens up an excess of meaning that, while it cannot be contained or entirely comprehended, is nonetheless apprehensible as the point beyond which understanding cannot proceed" (130-131). Indeed, the ability to know or to speak knowledge – especially of a loss or past violence – becomes a motif Duncan returns to throughout each chapter. It is what allows her to continually relate atrocities of colonisation and apartheid to the interregnum and post-apartheid periods. What links texts like Nadine Gordimer's *Six Feet of the Country* (1956) and Lauren Beukes' *Zoo City* (2010) across time, it seems, is the continued inability of their protagonists to find meaning in a colonising epistemology that has attempted to erase a violent past.

However, there is one area of criticism that remains underexplored in the text. This is the connection – or perhaps disconnect – between Gothic and Magical Realism texts. Duncan touches on the idea of Magical Realism two distinct times in connection with two different novels. The first is in Chapter Three – "Writing Phantoms" – where she uses Lucie Armitt's definition to explain the differences between Gothic and Magical Realism (105). Although the author goes on to note that André Brink's "magical realism, woven as it is around silenced legacies of violence in South Africa, is often gothic in its attribution of a chilling priority to its haunting presences" and discusses his book *The Rights of Desire* (2000), the relationship between Gothic and Magical Realism – and how distinct that relationship is – remains underexplored (106). This is especially true in comparison to the clear articulation of other theories and areas of study mentioned above. Duncan returns to the concept of Magical Realism in the coda, with the novel *Holy Hill* (2007) by Angelina N. Sithebe. Yet again, it is largely unclear why Duncan incorporates Brenda Cooper's Magical Realist discussion of *Holy Hill* into her own understanding of the text as Gothic, since as she points out, Cooper argues that ideally, Magical Realist plots would not contain Gothic poetics, as they would instead depict an epistemological prioritisation of indigenous cultures (180-181). Duncan even goes so far as to state that *Holy Hill* is "not ideal – or not immediately ideal" in terms of Gothic criticism (181). However, this reading of *Holy Hill* is grounded in Gothic poetics. Once Duncan begins her own analysis of the novel, the Gothic elements she touches upon overshadow any Magical Realist lens. Since a textual analysis via a lens of Magical Realism is abandoned quite quickly by Duncan – or appears to be – it is surprising it is brought up to begin with, especially at the very beginning of her final, coda chapter.

This lack of definition in regards to Magical Realism appears minor, however, in relation to the breadth of historical and literary knowledge which Duncan demonstrates. The aim of this work is in part to give voice and credibility to an under-explored area of critical exploration – South African fiction as Gothic – and it can only be said that Duncan succeeds in this regard. In connecting South African Gothic both to traditional European understandings of Gothic tropes, as well as to the specific cultures and histories of the spaces in which each text she explores exists, Duncan demonstrates the creative agency that South African writers enact by their engagement with both global and local Horror. In so doing, Duncan's *South African Gothic* offers to Gothic and Postcolonial scholars alike an original reading of a wide array of texts from the early twentieth to early twenty-first centuries. Not only does Duncan contribute to a young and growing field with this work, she also manages to avoid a pitfall many other critics of Postcolonial Gothic fall prey to by re-imagining that the cycle of violence in Gothic texts is not inevitable and can one day end. Significantly, Duncan sees

violence and trauma in South African Gothic as potentially pointing towards a way out of cycles of violence.

Duncan leaves readers with this interesting possibility for the power of creative dissent in South African literature:

> Assembled in the language of the gothic, the fragments of traumas that impinge upon the present both testify to territories of violence, and they emerge in the texts as figures of mourning, remembering without remembering fully, and thus potentiating a future that – because of this ceaseless engagement – does not replicate the past. (192)

This is a refreshing interpretation of a potential meaning and sense of social progress to be found in the violence and trauma of Gothic texts. It is an interpretation informed by Judith Butler's observations on the relationship between injury, reflection, and ethical action, and by Xavier Aldana Reyes's observations on the aesthetics and affecting power of body Gothic – a horror that connects readers more viscerally to a text. As Duncan puts it, "vulnerability" in South African Gothic literature and particularly in the post-apartheid, neoliberal, and Globalgothic novel *Zoo City* "becomes the locus from which an ethical project ensues" (175).

Rooted effectively in history and criticism, and with a clear sense of purpose and style, Duncan's *South African Gothic: Anxiety and Creative Dissent in the Post-apartheid Imagination and Beyond* is a must-read for scholars of Postcolonial Gothic.

BIONOTE

Madelyn Schoonover holds a MLitt in the Gothic Imagination from the University of Stirling, UK, and will begin pursing a PhD at the University of Stirling in spring of 2019. She is studying the erasure and depictions of Native Americans in contemporary American and Native American Gothic fiction and film, with a particular emphasis on Eco-gothic, masculinity studies, and cultural hybridity.

HAUNTING MODERNISMS: GHOSTLY AESTHETICS, MOURNING AND SPECTRAL RESISTANCE IN LITERARY MODERNISM (2017) BY MATT FOLEY

Review by Lucy Hall

Foley, Matt. *Haunting Modernisms: Ghostly Aesthetics, Mourning and Spectral Resistance in Literary Modernism.* Palgrave Macmillan, 2017. 236 pp.

Haunting as a literary concept has a great deal of flexibility in its definition and application. Ranging from the literal spectres of early Gothic fiction to Freudian reflections on subjectivity, the ghost becomes a useful critical tool through which both personal and cultural anxieties can be interpreted. In her 1952 introduction to *The Second Ghost Book*, Elizabeth Bowen writes that the "universal battiness of our century looks like providing [ghosts] with a propitious climate" (vii). It is within this climate of war, uncertainty, and residual cultural trauma that Foley situates *Haunting Modernisms*.

Taking a variety of theoretical approaches to authors such as Wyndham Lewis, Elizabeth Bowen, and D. H. Lawrence, *Haunting Modernisms* attempts to bridge the gap between Gothic and Modernist definitions of what it means to haunt and be haunted. Foley's chief aim is to examine new methods of reading allusions to haunting and ghostly experience in relation to early twentieth-century discussions about temporality, the perception of reality, and the limits of understanding the self and the Other. Although discussions of intertextuality are observed throughout the study, Foley positions his study as an alternative to this existing approach to Modernist haunting, as well as to the necessity of reading the ghost as a purely Gothic trope. Rather than reading the ghostly into texts, Foley attempts to excavate the meanings behind explicit recourse to the language of haunting in Modernist discourse. By situating this work within the context of the First World War and its aftermath, *Haunting Modernisms* explores the ethics of representing cultural and personal loss and how the negotiation between approaches to the ghost both troubles and reinvigorates Modernist literary aesthetics.

Crucial to the first section of Foley's study is the idea of purgatorial haunting as a denial of the ghost as a transcendent or consolatory figure. Chapter Two charts the progression from Modernist aesthetics of deadness in pre-war poetry, to an aesthetic of ghostliness in the post-war period. Here Foley argues that ghostliness exists as an aesthetic of excess, disrupting the totalization of human experience expounded by early Modernism, particularly when confronted with the ethics of representing First World War experiences of the Front. Foley suggests that there is a

crisis of representation in the poetry of Richard Aldington and Ford Maddox Ford that struggles to reconcile the restrained 'Classical' aesthetics of early masculinist Modernism with the bodily excess of the experience of war itself, setting up the ethical problems surrounding ideas of haunting and mourning that form the discussion in later chapters. The denial of the Derridean reading of the ghost as transcendent messenger becomes particularly clear in the reading of T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* (1922). Through Eliot, Foley argues for a movement towards purgatorial, melancholic haunting in which the dead are denied any knowledge-bearing, consolatory, or redemptive function and instead are trapped alongside the living. Drawing on existing discussions surrounding the relationship of Modernism to mourning and trauma, these initial chapters explore the limits of Derridean ideas of hauntology and pave the way for Foley's discussion of more radical readings of the Modernist ghost.

The second section explores how the ghostly impacts on ontology and interacts with the Modernist aesthetics of interiority. Taking the earthbound spirits of Eliot's *The Waste Land* to the next logical level, Foley examines how this recourse to purgatorial haunting can also apply to the subjectivity of the living. As such ghostliness in the work of Virginia Woolf and Elizabeth Bowen is bound up with Modernist notions of temporality, the aesthetic of interiority, and self-definition. Foley's extended reading of Bowen's interwar writing is a particular highlight of the book, especially as her more explicitly ghostly short stories are read alongside more metaphorical instances of haunting in novels such as *A House in Paris* (1926) and *The Hotel* (1922). This helps to support Foley's overall aim of situating haunting as something independent from, but often overlapping with, the Gothic genre. Where haunting expresses a degree of 'stuckness' in Eliot's work, by Foley's discussion of Bowen, it begins to take on more positive, self-preserving attributes. The liminality of ghostliness relating to an idea of perpetual becoming both creatively and ontologically, attests to the particularly Woolfian awareness of the impossibility of completely knowing the Other. It is this examination of Bowen's work in particular that constitutes the most effective bridge between Gothic and Modernist criticism. Here Foley tackles discussions surrounding identity and subjectivity that are often the key focus of much Modernist criticism using the more literal approach to the ghostly that characterises the Gothic. Though never claiming to read his material through a purely Gothic lens in the way previous studies and essay collections have, Foley finds an alternative reading of spectrality that privileges narrative, and is most effective and innovative as a means of exploring how an understanding of ghostliness in these texts strengthens our grasp of the Modernist approach to ephemerality, subjectivity, and otherness.

The final section examines these ideas of communion with the impossible Other in the light of D. H. Lawrence's work. Foley suggests that, for Lawrence the ghost is entirely removed from the symbolic realm, only accessible through a return to a primal, corporeal experience. Particularly interesting in this discussion is the idea of the trauma of idealised memory in which reality falls short of memory and expectation, particularly in relation to soldiers returning from the Front. An exploration of Lady Cynthia Asquith ties Foley's discussions of Bowen and Lawrence together in an interesting way, and his reading of her as an inspirational force behind D. H. Lawrence's ghost stories is an innovative means of understanding the author's work in relation to his life. Foley suggests that Lawrence's work moves towards an alternative understanding of the ghost as a corporeal, instinctual

and a-symbolic means of ethically engaging with trauma, loss, and ethical forms of mourning post-First World War. By the book's conclusion, the reader is profoundly aware of how the limits of representation that apply to ideas of subjectivity, theories of haunting, and the experience of trauma intertwine in the work of Modernist writers, deeply influencing each author's aesthetic approach to representing otherness and loss.

Although Foley's theoretical exposition is dense at times, he teases out and illustrates theoretical points with nuanced and exemplary textual readings that elucidate the complex material he handles. Nonetheless, Foley's focus is chiefly historical, situating texts in both the biographical and cultural contexts that produced them. This is particularly gratifying in the recurring connection between ghostliness and representations of the feminine 'Other' arise time and again throughout the study. This is a particularly effective vein that highlights one of the many ways in which haunting can be defined beyond the dichotomy of the living and the dead. While the study is focussed principally on an examination of poetry and prose, Foley introduces complimentary examinations of author correspondence, Modernist journals, and art to further enrich his textual readings. These not only demonstrate the breadth of Foley's knowledge, but also hint at the expansive possibilities of examining haunting in other Modernist texts using a similar approach. Each chapter sows the seeds of discussions yet to come, creating a rich and complex study that draws together both theoretical and historical approaches. *Haunting Modernisms* is a work which will complement existing criticism in Modernist studies, the Gothic, and war studies and one which will only benefit from a second or third reading.

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BIONOTE

Lucy Hall recently completed her PhD at the University of St Andrews. Her thesis entitled 'Home Front Gothic: Power, Identity and Anxiety in British Culture, 1938-1951' examines 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, and is has contributed to a recent volume of essays exploring heroism and British culture

TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY CHILDREN'S GOTHIC: FROM THE WANDERER TO NOMADIC SUBJECT (2018) BY CHLOÉ GERMAINE BUCKLEY

Review by Sarah Olive

Germaine Buckley, Chloé. *Twenty-First Century Children's Gothic: From The Wanderer To Nomadic Subject.* Edinburgh, 2018. 232 pp.

I quickly warmed to this book, because Chloé Germaine Buckley's foregrounding of the figure of the nomad gelled well with my sense that, in writing this review, I am somewhat of a disciplinary nomad finding fresh pasture herein to nourish my flock of thoughts about Shakespearean afterlives. Alternatively, Germaine Buckley's reading of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari suggests that I might usefully reject notions of a singular academic identity (Shakespearean, Gothic, nomad) and embrace "multiple possible iterations of a self that is continually in the process of becoming" (3). At any rate, I have not yet become a specialist in Gothic or Children's Literature, so perhaps one of the most useful things I can do in this review is to suggest some ways in which Germaine Buckley's work intersects with present concerns in literary criticism beyond, as well as within, their immediate field and the specific works that they consider in this book.

These texts include Lemony Snicket's *A Series of Unfortunate Events* (1999-2006), with chapters dedicated to the following fictional works and films: Neil Gaiman's *Coraline* (2002), Darren Shan's *Zom-B* (2012-16), Jamila Gavin's *Coram Boy* (2000), Paula Morris' *Ruined* (2009), Francis Hardinge's *The Lie Tree* (2015), the "Weird Fiction" of Derek Landy and Anthony Horowitz, Tim Burton's *Frankenweenie* (2002), as well as Sam Fell and Chris Butler's *Paranorman* (2012). This sample – or more importantly Germaine Buckley's reflexivity about it – is the only aspect of this book that I would like to see enhanced. It does deal with issues of race, gender, just about grazing sexuality, particularly in relation to characters in *Coram Boy* and *Zom-B* as well as female authors and readers. However, the sample is linguistically and culturally anglocentric. It is dominated by Western Gothic, eschewing Gothic in translation or non-Western Gothic written in English. This could be representative of the genre, therefore limiting what was available to be sampled, but that seems unlikely given the global Gothic texts identified in Anna Jackson's *New Directions in Children's Gothic: Debatable Lands* (2017); Glennis Byron's *Globalgothic* project and publications; and the popularity of non-prose Asian gothic texts, such as those identified in Sarah Olive, Alex Watson, and Chelsea Swift's "British Gothic Monsters in East Asia'" bibliography, with young audiences. It deserves fuller discussion within the book: all the more so given Germaine Buckley's own emphasis on multiplicity in extant range of twenty-first-century Children's Gothic.

One of the threads that unites the works sampled in Germaine Buckley's analysis includes their intended audience of children. Germaine Buckley is careful throughout to elucidate the difference between intended audiences, or imagined readerships, and actual ones. They emphasise the child as a construct and thoroughly engage in defining their own preferred construction of the child. Specifically, they reject the separate categories of children's and young adult literature and films, preferring to use "children's" to encompass both throughout. They attend to the way in which Children's Gothic is predominantly written, chosen, and purchased by adults for children, mediating between the author and their intended readership. I also thoroughly enjoyed Germaine Buckley's attention to the dominance of adults in determining what Ronald Carter terms "socio-cultural" markers of literariness, for example in reviewing Children's Gothic fiction, nominating and judging it for awards, deciding which texts are acquired by libraries, or set on the curriculum.

Another thread that cross-cuts the monograph and immediately appealed to me because of my research and teaching on English literature in education, concerns the tensions between Children's Literature as pedagogical, a pervasive influence of the liberal humanist tradition, and the Gothic, which is traditionally seen as transgressive. Germaine Buckley evidences these tensions by drawing on the work of Victoria Carrington and Bruno Bettelheim. Germaine Buckley successfully critiques the idea that children are passive readers to whom Gothic, gory, or frightening literature transmits negative messages. The *Twilight* saga on page (2005-2008) and screen (2008-2012) is given by Germaine Buckley as an example of cultural critics policing works' potential harm to readers who are constructed as young, female, and therefore inherently vulnerable. While showcasing others' ideas concerning Gothic Children's Literature as a resource contributing positively to build coping, resilience, motivation, identity, critical literacy, and citizenship skills (along the lines of rights and responsibilities), Germaine Buckley argues convincingly for greater significance of Children's Gothic now in offering "lines of flight from limiting representations" (12). They avoid the paternalism that they argue is so widespread in critical traditions of Children's Literature, the monologising approach that sees Children's Gothic in service of reading, assigned one (educative, moralising) social function. To counter this paternalism, Germaine Buckley posits as valuable the potential of subversive cultural products for entertainment, playfulness, indulgence, pleasure, and spectacle. Germaine Buckley finds in the chosen texts some well-established Gothic features and tropes: serialisation, intertextuality, social, and cultural anxiety (though they also suggest ways to transcend this), oppressive fathers, absent mothers, imprisonment, and surfaces. However, Germaine Buckley's distinct contribution is a sustained focus on nomadism, specifically the nomadic subjectivity of child protagonists, tracing the way in which the tragic wanderer in older, canonical Gothic texts becomes the happy (or, at least, non-despairing), nomadic subject in Children's Gothic: even though homelessness, exile, catastrophe, and disintegration do not necessarily resolve in these texts into "cosy restitution," journeys, adventure, and transformations are relished by characters and readers alike (2).

The book engages expansively with critical, literary, and educational theory, discussing the work of Rosi Braidotti (given her work on nomadic subjects), Mikhail Bakhtin, Roland Barthes, and Benedict Spinoza at length. The stranglehold of psychoanalysis, pervading popular attitudes towards children and childhood, is particularly effectively critiqued, as is the paternalism of Maria

Nikolajeva's problematisation of identificatory reading practices as impacting negatively on children's critical faculties. Another contribution of the book is the rejection of some Gothic criticism's assertion that the genre (use of its visual aesthetics; inclusion of generic self-parody) has become diffuse, all-embracing, and commodified, to the point of becoming an empty term. Fred Botting's work, in particular, is identified as contributing to a critical panic that is bogged down in, and overwhelmed by its self-appointed task of, sifting the authentic Gothic from the inauthentic chaff.

Germaine Buckley also strongly rejects the sometime positing of Children's Literature as a degraded or immature Gothic, asserting instead its place within a shared Gothic literary history. Heterogeneity is shown not to be an achievable or desirable feature of twenty-first century Children's Gothic, which includes subgenres such as Psychological, Dark, Urban, Pulp, and Weird. Nor is heterogeneity a novel quality of the Gothic or going to cause its collapse. Germaine Buckley cites, in support of this claim, the overlaps between early Gothic, mediaeval, and historical Romance as well as its intertextual reliance on, and retroactive incorporation of older works into, a Gothic canon. Furthermore, as Germaine Buckley demonstrates, attention to Children's Gothic is demanded given that it dominates children's publishing: Germaine Buckley emphasises the prevalence of paranormal teen romances across various media as an example. Their dismissal of doomsayers for Gothic integrity is but one of the ways in which Germaine Buckley's text intersects with that of Catherine Spooner's *Post-millennial Gothic: Comedy, Romance and the Rise of Happy Gothic* (2017). Both texts cite each other throughout; share similar temporal delimitations, even while they problematise the idea of the millennium as a watershed moment for (children's) Gothic; identify and resist the long tradition of maligning feminine forms of the Gothic. I read the two books in the same month and they make excellent companions; Germaine Buckley's work offers an apposite resonance with that of Spooner as both offer fresh perspectives on contemporary Gothic. Given that Spooner was the former's thesis supervisor, this is indeed not particularly surprising and rather demonstrates the impact of their collective, critical work. Simultaneously this productive confluence highlights Germaine Buckley as an insightful and prominent upcoming critic in their own right, one who is sure to become a notable name in Children's Gothic studies.

BIONOTES

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GOTHIC BRITAIN: DARK PLACES IN THE PROVINCES AND MARGINS OF THE BRITISH ISLES (2018) EDITED BY WILLIAM HUGHES AND RUTH HEHOLT

Review by Derek Johnston

Hughes, William and Ruth Heholt, editors. *Gothic Britain: Dark Places in the Provinces and Margins of the British Isles.* University of Wales Press, 2018. 253 pp.

Hughes' and Heholt's collection concerns itself with Britain, and particularly its edge-places, as Gothic spaces. It is divided into three sections: "Re-Imagined Gothic Landscapes: Folklore, Nostalgia and History," "Unnatural Gothic Spaces," and "Border Crossings and the Threat of Invasion," yet there are obvious connections across each of these broad themes. Indeed, the book as a whole clearly demonstrates how the Gothic has provided and still provides a useful mode for approaching questions of selfhood, whether that is the selfhood of the individual or of the nation. It does this by considering Britain as a place which is threatened by the outside, but which is also fragmented internally, a Frankenstein creation of multiple cultures and places and peoples theoretically united as one, yet containing numerous tensions. The case studies engaged with are primarily literary, although Ruth Heholt's chapter is concerned with two Hammer films set in Cornwall, while Holly-Gale Millette considers Ripper tourism in Whitechapel. While this does mean the exclusion of some very interesting uses of the Gothic and the regional in other media, the range of texts engaged with is impressive, from the familiar to the unfamiliar, the early nineteenth century to the present, and the chapters typically make good use of the selected case studies as ways of illustrating and encouraging engagement with a wider issue.

The book opens with an introduction by William Hughes, emphasising "Gothic beyond the Metropolis." This sets up the tension between London and the rest of Britain as productively used and interrogated by the Gothic. Hughes stays away from specifying any definition of 'the Gothic,' while relating directly to key conceptions of the genre and its characteristics, and by placing the ideas he is discussing in relation to foundational texts, such as Walpole's *Castle of Otranto* (1764). This introduction is followed by Catherine Spooner's consideration of "Regionalism, Folklore and Elisabeth Gaskell's 'Northern Gothic,'" a chapter that presents a number of ideas that could have been usefully incorporated into the collection's introduction because they are revisited in many of the following chapters. These recurring concepts include the significance of folklore and legend to local identities, the concept of psychogeography, and the Victorian Gothic's retreat from European settings towards British regional ones.

Chloé Germaine Buckley's chapter on Jeremy Dyson's *The Haunted Book* (2012) similarly develops the connections between location and haunting through the concept of psychogeography. Germaine Buckley emphasises that pychogeographic associations need not relate to factual events, but may also relate to fiction. What this chapter most successfully demonstrates through its reference to Dyson's novel is that the sense of a place can accumulate through the media: that a region can be haunted by novels and films, and that those fictions can overwrite and erase the real. Germaine Buckley capably uses her own familiarity with the area concerned, which helps to convey the sense of unease as the certainty of her personal memory is destabilised by Dyson's use of actual locations and institutions.

The most curious chapter of this book is Richard Storer's "'Spook Business': Hall Caine and the Moment of Manx Gothic," which deals with a moment of regional Gothic that did not quite arrive. It portrays Hall Caine and T. E. Brown's understanding of Manx superstition and their reference to it in their narratives. However, neither actually developed these connections to create a fully Gothic text, instead tending to use superstition as a piece of dressing, then withdrawing from fully implementing it. While the chapter is interesting in drawing out the connections between Brown, Hall and Bram Stoker's *The Lair of the White Worm* (1911), its role in this collection seems unclear.

This first section closes with Gioia Angeletti's consideration of James Robertson's *The Testament of Gideon Mack* (2006) as part of a tradition of Scottish supernatural fiction that presents its settings as regions of permeable and uncertain reality. This concept could have been interestingly explored for its relation to Scottish history, the way this has been overwritten, romanticised, forgotten and reinvented, and what this means for 'Scottishness.' This would also have served to tie the concepts of this chapter to the concerns of Jamil Mustafa's later chapter on Walter Scott's use of the Gothic to address his ambiguous feelings about the Union of Scotland and England. Mustafa argues that Gothic enables Scott to metaphorically engage with a tension between pride in Scottish identity and pragmatic support of the stronger Union, when it would have been impolitic for him to express any doubts openly. Dialogue between this piece and Angeletti's could be potentially very productive.

The usefulness of focusing on a small set of case studies to illuminate a larger issue is demonstrated by Timothy Jones' chapter on Robert Aickman. Jones argues that Aickman's stories of the supernatural and uncanny present the British regions as an escape from the modern cities, where people can experience the numinous, the unnerving and the weird in ways that break them out of their everyday experience.

The ambiguous position of the university town is central to Minna Vuohelainen's chapter. Examining the representation of the university in texts such as *Jude the Obscure* (1895), *She* (1887), Oliphant's "The Library Window" (1896), Doyle's "Lot No.249" (1892) and the ghost stories of M. R. James, Vuohelainen outlines how the Gothic expresses late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century tensions around the position and role of the university.

In the only chapter in this collection focused on London, Holly-Gale Millette considers responses to the 'Jack-the-Ripper' murders in Whitechapel. Comparing two approaches to knowledge and heritage, Millette ultimately asks the reader to interrogate how we respond to real-life horror, encouraging an understanding of the differences between Gothic tourism and dark tourism.

Ben Richardson's chapter on Mary Shelley's *The Last Man* (1826) establishes how cholera epidemics in the early nineteenth century, which demonstrated vulnerabilities created by global trade, can be seen as a profound influence on this apocalyptic novel. As Richardson argues, Shelley's novel explicitly connects trade with disease, encouraging an interpretation of globalisation as leading to a national body infected, potentially fatally, by outside influences. While this could be interpreted as a gloomy reflection on the inevitable demise of the local in the face of the global, Richardson makes clear that Shelley was actually deeply engaged with the positives of cosmopolitanism, and that the novel also expresses this more complex set of attitudes.

The foreignness of Cornwall is the subject of Ruth Heholt's chapter on Hammer's *The Plague of the Zombies* and *The Reptile* (both 1966), and coincidentally also formed the basis of Heholt's keynote talk at the Locating Fantastika conference in 2015. Heholt engages with long-standing ideas of Cornwall as somewhat apart from mainstream English life, populated by a Celtic remnant of smugglers and miners. The two films show this native foreignness as recognised by characters arriving from London, only to find that the Cornish foreignness has itself been invaded by horrors brought back from the colonies by exploitative English colonisers. They thus can be seen as a part of the Imperial Gothic, which shows Gothic Otherness being brought to Britain by the mechanisms of Empire. In each case, the foreign horror serves to bring down the patriarchal, exploitative figures that have brought them into the semi-domestic space of Cornwall.

Finally, Sarah Ilott's chapter examines two novels which use a Kentish setting to engage with this notion of the edge of Britain as a place where the nation interacts with the rest of the world. She connects the literary Gothic to ongoing xenophobic rhetoric around immigrants and refugees. David Dabydeen's *Disappearance* (1993) and Helen Oyeyemi's *White is for Witching* (2009) both draw on "Imperial Gothic in order to expose and exploit its ambiguities" (p.212). So this chapter once again serves to demonstrate how the strength of the Gothic and its continued importance lies in this characteristic sense of ambiguity, which remains vital to the way that societies deal with the ambiguities and uncertainties around national identity, around the desire to preserve the self-balanced against the competing desire to engage with others to the benefit of both, the same tensions that Richardson highlighted in relation to *The Last Man*.

Overall, this is an excellent collection full of interesting ideas and examples that help to draw out some of the complexities of the use of the regions of Britain as Gothic locations. I would have liked to have seen some more elements of overview; I often think that edited collections such as this would benefit from a concluding as well as introductory overview. It would also have been interesting to see considerations of cities outside of London as regional, although elements of this can be found in Vuohelainen's chapter on universities and university cities. While it is mentioned,

Wales also seems under-represented here. However, rather than continuing to criticise this collection for what it does not do, I will end by recommending it for its consistent high quality of presentation and engagement with texts and ideas, which is a superb way to encourage the reader to continue the development of these notions themselves.

BIONOTE

Derek Johnston is Lecturer in Broadcast at Queen's University Belfast, Northern Ireland. His research broadly engages with fantastic genres across media, and has more recently focused on ideas of time and place in relation to horror and identity. This includes the exploration of seasonality of horror storytelling in his monograph *Haunted Seasons: Television Ghost Stories for Christmas and Horror for Halloween* (Palgrave 2015), and the article "Landscape, Season and Identity in the *Ghost Story for Christmas*" published in the *Journal of Popular Television*.

THE FRIGHTENERS: WHY WE LOVE MONSTERS, GHOSTS, DEATH AND GORE (2018) BY PETER LAWS

Review by Rowan Bowman

Laws, Peter. *The Frighteners.* Icon Books Ltd, 2018. 320pp.

Peter Laws is a regular contributor and reviewer for the *Fortean Times* and writes *The Frighteners* from the perspective of a practising Baptist minister coming to terms with his own macabre obsessions in an interesting autobiographical account of the struggle between his Christian beliefs and his fascination with the profane. The shame attached to indulging in an interest in the macabre has been recognised since Horace Walpole first denied his authorship of *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), written in an age where absence of proof was rapidly becoming evidence of non-existence and the thrills of brushing against the unknown were demoted from fact to fiction. The Enlightenment gave us the phenomenon of Horror as a cultural response to the perception of evil and only that essential characteristic, the intrinsic quality of Todorov's "hesitation," can fill the uncertainties of life without belief, so that "we appear to have entered an era that has reintroduced the vocabulary of ghosts and haunting into everyday life" (del Pilar Blanco and Peeren ix).

Laws contends that, while morbid fascination is ostensibly a pejorative term, it can demonstrate an engagement and acceptance of extant trauma and the inevitability of death itself. While not referring to much of the work already done in this area, Laws's contribution provides evidence that, rather than dying with Coppola's *Dracula* (1992) which Fred Botting suggests rendered Horror incapable "of expelling evil," the Gothic and Horror live on as a powerful force within society (*Gothic* 177). Thus *The Frighteners* catalogues the ways in which modern society has embraced Horror tropes such as werewolves, vampires, and zombies, transmogrifying them into a transgressive, but ultimately liberating sub-culture for self-identifying 'weirdos' across the globe.

From the beginning Laws describes his experiences with the Horror industry's more commercial side, participating in Live Action Role Play (LARP) and giving accounts of side-shows etcetera, using these examples to suggest that "morbid interest is a natural, even *desirable* human behaviour" (20). He evidently relishes the real-life encounters which expose the apparent contradiction between his Christian belief and this culture, the book is peppered with examples of mainstream responses to his ghoulish eccentricities: "I've had the *you're-a-bit-kooky* glance a fair bit because I've loved creepy and macabre things […] my whole life" (3, emphasis original). The anecdotes continue with more pertinence to his underlying argument throughout the book and make *The Frighteners* an informative introductory read for those unfamiliar with various Horror-

themed subcultures. Laws discusses current paranormal and Horror-related commercial phenomena, making the case that the large reduction of actual violence within society directly corresponds to the increase in recreational, fictional violence, a "channelling of dark desires" (35). Laws cites Stephen Pinkler's *The Better Angels of Our Nature* (2012) and Johan Norberg's *Progress: Ten Reasons to Look Forward to the Future* (2017) suggesting that if our species had continued with its initial violent death rate we would have suffered two billion such deaths during the twentieth century "rather than the 100 million we actually saw" and that our perception of loss through conflict belies the rapid decline in violent death (33). He proposes that seeking out the macabre and horrific for pleasure is an evolutionary response rather than an abnormality, and that, as Stephen Nachmanovitch suggests, creative free-play is "an antidote to destruction" (*Free Play* 182).

Laws briefly touches on the psychology involved in feeling emotional reward for exposure to fictional fear and revulsion. He discusses the functioning of the amygdala (the organ in the brain which deals at an immediate subconscious level with social information and environmental stimuli) in an accessible, though basic, manner. These widely held theories suggest we deliberately seek to trigger and practise inherent instinctive behaviour by exposing ourselves to pretend horror which is processed by the amygdala as extant danger, thus allowing its safe exploration. Some of the examples Laws presents are disturbing, such as a brief exploration of Crush Videos, which come with appropriate warnings (52-55). Such fetishes are not fiction, as the real event is filmed, but their existence illustrates the common desire to experience horror at a safe distance. Laws suggests that we benefit from seeing the weakness in others and that we derive "positive feelings" from "morbid entertainment" (59), hence the popularity of the 'Final Girl' trope amongst young women (65-67), although he does not go on to link the empathy necessary for affective horror in books and films with the personal experience through free-play and role-playing.

Laws discusses changing attitudes to death and the way in which health concerns and increasing affluence have "wiped [mortality] from public view" (84), leading to a general lack of conversations relating to this inevitable part of life, proposing that crime dramas, Horror movies, and Hallowe'en are "*simulations*" of death that create a space in which to express concerns and discuss the taboo (86). He relates a fascinating anecdote about a visit to a funeral home as part of his day-job, to see a body prepared for burial, and goes on to consider the comfort of both belief in the afterlife and the resurgent pagan desire for corporeal recycling, each establishing a premise in the practitioner that death is merely a transition from one state to another. Even without this sort of belief, Laws suggests that "morbid culture persists" because we gain reassurance from seeing others' death, presumably because familiarity reduces the fear of the unknown (92). Laws also investigates 'killer culture,' the obsessive collecting of memorabilia connected to violent death, including the "murderabilia" market for items such as Charles Manson's hair (128). Laws cites examples of famous killers who collected mementos of their victims and dismisses the parallels between this and "murderabilia": murderers wish to remember their exploits, collectors neither condone nor celebrate their crimes, but rather behave like accumulators of religious relics, either as a protective talisman, a desire to connect in some way with the previous owner, or a need to make sense of violence through curation (130-55). Laws further discusses attempts to humanise killers,

though rather than an empathy with these, he suggests a "more complex dissociation" between the killer and their deeds (138).

Laws brings zombies into this conversation, citing his personal experience of LARPing and special interest conventions. He tracks their provenance from Africa, through Haitian Voodoo and into fiction via the efforts of the writer William Seabrook in the 1920's (106-107) and then into contemporary culture through George A. Romero's *Night of the Living Dead* (1968). He offers a brief description of the principles of creating a real zombie through drugs and suggests that the depiction of these creatures, originating in "largely unchartered" African culture, changed over time to become subsumed into a Science Fiction of infection and desperation, reflecting our subservience to "multinational corporations" (121). Laws suggests this shift from supernatural to Science Fiction fits "particularly well with modern belief systems" and that the zombie-apocalypse allows us to reconnoitre a life more "epic" (114, 115).

Laws again uses personal experience and investigations to discuss the cultural interest in werewolves. He gives a brief history of lycanthropy, including "clinical lycanthropy" which acknowledges that an individual may believe they have become an animal, originally seen as a curse, but now a "welcome blessing" (167, 170). This leads on to furry fandom, and an excursion into the conventions surrounding the desire to perform as an [anthropomorphised] non-human animal 'fursona,' enabling social fantasies that endow a "liberating confidence-boost" (178). Laws also discusses those driven to pretend to be vampires, and the swing from a fearful abhorrence to the sexualisation and romanticism currently associated with supernatural blood-suckers. Other writers, for example Botting in *Gothic* (1995), cover this argument in greater depth, however Laws has interviewed practising "Sanguinarian vampires" and his accounts are directly from under the coffin lid, rather than theoretical (185). The final section deals with demonic possession and the recent escalation in requests for exorcism (189). Laws suggests some claims of possession are a way, through exorcism, to be forgiven and readmitted into society (191). He concludes that self-identified "inner *duality*," whether through possession, adopting a fursona, sanguinarism, or lycanthropy, can "become a key step in finding *wholeness*" (193).

Laws discusses the value of play quite late in the volume, citing its therapeutic use with children after the horror of the 9/11 attacks. However, as violent play is not exclusive to traumatised children, Laws suggests that the dopamine reward the brain experiences from novelty is enhanced when it includes fear, explaining the popularity of children's books with gory details. This developmental reward for memorable novelty is accompanied by a desire to repeat exposure to scary fantasies until the fear is "identified" and explored "in a relatively safe environment" (209). Laws contends that stereotyping is important in such stories, providing a framework in which to develop a moral code, touching upon the significance of fairy tales told in the original and uncensored versions, proposing that they can give children a reassuring sense of empowerment (215). This is again covered at an introductory level; the topic of fairy tales is widely written about elsewhere, for example Bruno Bettelheim's *The Uses of Enchantment: the Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales* (1991). Laws suggests that adult "morbid interest" might be "simple nostalgia" for the intensity of

the fear we feel as children (125-126).

Laws also examines the rising cultural popularity of ghost hunts, again using personal investigative experience to inform his conclusions. Until very recently ghost-sightings were considered to be warnings or bad omens signifying the potentially catastrophic failure of ritual (239-241), and Laws points to the changing attitudes which mean that funeral rites now simply "keep the dead [in our hearts]" whereas in the past they were often to "keep them *in their coffins*" (242). Laws discusses the decline in religious beliefs, but suggests that the increasing popularity of paranormal investigations is due to a combination of cheap, harmless entertainment and – interestingly – an increasing incidence of "strange and anomalous experiences" which drive curiosity in the paranormal (Alan Murdie, *Chair of The Ghost Club*, in interview, quoted 252). Laws confesses that even though he sometimes experiences fear at the thought of encountering ghosts, the fear of "death without an afterlife" scares him far more (258). This Christian approach to ghosts is supplemented by an exploration of crypt-art, the decorative display of dismembered skeletons, as a Catholic endorsement of ghoulish delight. Laws returns to the perceived dichotomy between his religion and his morbid fascination with the Horror sub-culture, explaining that he came to religion through fearful realisation that "God might be the only truly effective answer to evil," an epiphany he attributes to watching *The Exorcist* (1973) in his teens (270). He mentions that Tunisia banned this film on the grounds that it "presented 'unjustified' propaganda in favour of Christianity" and suggests that Horror movies are "parables" affirming that there is life after death (272-274). His consumption of Horror and his Christianity stem from the same fear, therefore he concludes that there is "little wisdom in denying the dark" (280).

The Frighteners serves as an excellent introduction to the modern popular consumption of Horror, gore, and the supernatural, using a myriad of examples from the author's life, including extensive interviews with practitioners of the macabre and an overview of the Horror industry. Rather than an academic point of view, ultimately this work presents a Christian viewpoint on the Horror tropes within our society and offers comfort for followers of the Christian religion who feel conflicted by their interest in the paranormal and horrific. Those seeking a less partisan approach might also consider reading *The Philosophy of Horror or Paradoxes of the Heart* by Noël Carroll (Routledge, 1990). *The Frighteners* offers an accessible and enjoyable excursion into this subculture and provides many avenues for further exploration.

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BIONOTE

Based in England, **Rowan Bowman** has a PhD in Creative Writing. Her research interests include spectral landscapes, method writing, Horror, and all things cryptoscatological. She has written one novel, *Checkmate* (Snowbooks 2015), and has had several short stories published. Her ghost story, "The Beast of Blanchland," won TheGhostStory.com competition in summer 2018.

THE SHINING (2017) BY LAURA MEE

Review by Kevin Corstorphine

Mee, Laura. *The Shining*. Auteur, 2017. Book. 124 pp.

Laura Mee's *The Shining* appears as part of Auteur Publishing's *Devil's Advocates* series, each of which is focused on a single film. At just over a hundred pages, this is short and snappy, and so cannot cover the huge range of ground that is possible when discussing Stanley Kubrick's 1980 film (adapted from the Stephen King 1977 novel). It is pitched (and priced) for the general reader, but would be of interest to a scholarly audience too, with it being focused and informative.

At first glance the structure of the book is slightly puzzling, as it focuses on some of the negative responses that greeted the film on release, as well as portraying it as somewhat misunderstood: a curious way to approach what is one of the most recognisable Horror films in history. Mee's point lies, however, in that word: 'horror'. She argues that *The Shining*'s place in film history has been defined by its director, Stanley Kubrick, whose reputation as temperamental genius auteur tends to overshadow the content of the individual productions. *The Shining*, she notes, was anticipated before its release primarily as a Kubrick film, not as a Horror film. In contrast to film critics, audiences have had no problem in aligning the film with the Horror genre and enjoying it as such. This is backed up with reference to popular surveys and studies of audience reaction when watching the film, for example tracking heart rates rising in response to scenes of horror. It is in approaching *The Shining* as Horror film that Mee stakes out her critical approach, making the case for the book offering a fresh perspective in line with the series' mission. Whilst Roger Luckhurst's 2013 entry of the same name in the BFI *Film Classics* series might appear to offer something similar to the reader, Mee argues that it has a different focus (on psychoanalysis and the theme of the maze) and so these can reasonably be seen as complimentary. It is perhaps as a result of Mee's attempt to distinguish her work from existing criticism that the reader might find some areas lacking. Theoretical approaches, for example, are very light on the ground, albeit with some use of the uncanny, the grotesque, and carnivalesque, as these are difficult to avoid. As they appear more fully in other sources, Mee usefully provides a good list of references for the curious to follow up.

The book is split into four chapters. The first, "Kubrick and Horror," focuses on the perceived difference between films made by acknowledged genre masters such as John Carpenter, Wes Craven, George A. Romero, and Dario Argento, and directors who worked across genres, such as Roman Polanski, Brian De Palma, William Friedkin, and of course Stanley Kubrick. The latter tend to be credited with romantic auteur status that allows them to transcend genre and produce something of higher cultural worth, or at least redefine the genre they are working within. On the other hand, they might also be seen as dabbling in something they do not fully understand. Kubrick's films, Mee notes, have been associated with a "coldness" not fitting with the expectations of, for

example, Horror fans (20). Mee stridently dismisses these insinuations and argues forthrightly that in reality, Kubrick's style was well-suited to Horror and he had every intention of making an effective Horror film. This is demonstrated with reference to his other work, thematically and stylistically. An abiding interest in the darker recesses of the human psyche appears in films such as *Lolita* (1962), *A Clockwork Orange* (1971), and *Full Metal Jacket* (1987), but find specific and sustained exploration in *The Shining*. Like *The Shining*, *Dr Strangelove* (1964) uses comedy (although more overtly) in order to convey what is at heart, pure horror. Kubrick's elegant visual style may be very different from previous genre Horror successes like *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (1974), but the effective use of techniques such as tracking shots to build tension, or *mise-en-scène* to produce a sense of general unease throughout, mean that Kubrick was taking seriously the Horror genre's affective purpose and that there is no reason not to think of this as a genre Horror film.

The second chapter considers the process of adapting *The Shining* and shifts the question to the film's use of its source material. This is something that must be addressed directly, as author Stephen King's well-publicised dislike of the film is another factor that tends to overshadow the discussion. Mee provides useful contextual discussion of the way that Kubrick approached adapting the novel, and indeed Mee points out that adaptation is a significant feature of Kubrick's work, as the majority of his films have been adapted from novels or short stories. The key question of adaptation when filming a sprawling novel like *The Shining*, of course, is narrative compression. The film must be shorter by necessity, but what is chosen to focus on and what is cut is the really interesting part. Again, Mee uses this analysis in order to back up the central argument that Kubrick's choices were made primarily in keeping with the purpose of creating *The Shining* as a Horror film. One of the key changes relating to length is that of character development, with Jack Torrance in the film emerging much more immediately as a psychotic figure, rather than building slowly and understandably to madness as in the novel. Connected to this is the way that the exaggerated performances by Jack Nicholson (as Jack) and Shelley Duvall (as Jack's wife, Wendy) have been seen by King and others as mere caricature, in contrast to the novel's more complex portrayal.

The film stresses ambiguity in its approach to the supernatural, whereas the novel more explicitly attempts to explain the events of the narrative by suggesting that the Overlook Hotel is indeed haunted. Jack's very personal struggles with alcoholism and his violent past are also downplayed in favour of an examination of the family unit in the film version. An analysis of the character of Dick Halloran, and the changes made (notably his death) allow for a discussion of race alongside class and gender. What Mee contends is really a broader point applied to the film: that a successful adaptation should not be judged on faithfulness to the source material, but on how well a film works on its own merits and in the context of filmic conventions.

"Genre and Themes" is the third chapter in this book, as Mee builds on the points made in relation to adaptation and argues that Kubrick's changes were not made in order to distance the film from the Horror genre, but actually to link it more specifically to Horror *film*. This is argued in terms of intertextual allusions to *The Haunting*, *Psycho*, and *Halloween*, among others. This chapter is highly orientated towards an analysis based on social context and on a direct close reading of

the film itself. It is through this approach that Mee avoids tackling what she sees as a somewhat overbearing weight of theoretical interpretation. She does, however, read the film in the familiar terms of gender, race, and class that dominate contemporary humanities discourse and are indeed justified in understanding *The Shining*, which wears much of this on its sleeve. Mee reads the film as a "kickback to liberal social attitudes" that positions Jack as "a white, male, middle-class monster" (79). In some ways this argument seems too easy and too deceptively straightforward. The novel, certainly, should not be pared down to such a lack of nuance in understanding Jack's character. On the other hand, what this allows Mee to do is to distinguish the film's portrayal of Jack from the more sympathetic one of the novel, and to view him more in terms of the Horror movie monster that he might reasonably be seen as. This again works to reinforce the central argument about Kubrick's engagement with conventions over the faithful adaptation of the novel.

The final chapter focuses on the "Release, Reception, and Cultural Legacy," noting the mixed critical reception that the film originally received, and the critical reservations about where it sits in film history that have followed. This is interesting and somewhat original in its analysis of promotional material and strategy, critical reception, and box office figures. This works well to complete the book's contextual reassessment of the film with the benefit of hindsight. It restates some of the reasons for criticism outlined already but also tracks *The Shining*'s influence on later Horror films, which use its techniques, and even comedies, which parody and work within its themes.

This leads effectively toward the conclusion's lionisation of the film and the argument made for its place specifically within Horror film history. This book's argument is strongly articulated and well-informed, and although there is undoubtedly a lot more to say about *The Shining*, this would be useful for academic reference, particularly in undergraduate film studies, and is worthwhile reading for anyone interested in the film. It must be said that the book's production values in terms of binding, layout, and image reproduction are not the highest, but for a book priced for the popular market this is not uncommon in academic publishing. What this provides is a focused and provocative argument that does indeed offer a fresh look at a much-analysed but still not exhausted film.

BIONOTE

Kevin Corstorphine is Lecturer in American Studies at the University of Hull, UK where he teaches mainly on literature modules including American Gothic. His research interests centre on representations of space and place, including haunted houses, tainted and abject spaces, thresholds, and forbidden rooms. He is currently editing a major handbook to Horror literature throughout history, and has published on many authors of the weird and macabre such as Bram Stoker, Ambrose Bierce, H. P. Lovecraft, Robert Bloch, Richard Matheson, Shirley Jackson, Stephen King, and Clive Barker.

ESOTERICISM AND NARRATIVE: THE OCCULT FICTION OF CHARLES WILLIAM (2018) BY AREN ROUKEMA

Review by Georgia van Raalte

Roukema, Aren. *Esotericism and Narrative: The Occult Fiction of Charles Williams.* Brill Academic, 2018. 318 pp.

Throughout this title Aren Roukema aims to fill a notable gap in the academic study of the work of Charles Williams; that of his involvement in practical occultism through the FRC (Fellowship of the Rosy Cross, an occult group founded by A. E. Waite in 1915). Roukema's methodology offers a new way of approaching occult fiction and occult authors more generally. Their key argument, developed across the book, is that it is of crucial importance to understand Williams' commitment to, collaboration with, and experiences through the FRC to fully understand both his motivation for writing and comprehend the theology of his novels themselves. Roukema's method is both innovative within the study of esotericism – for its use of textual analysis – and in the field of literature by seriously engaging with the magical milieu of which Williams was a part. Roukema recognises occultism as a valid knowledge tradition; they take seemingly fantastic elements in Williams' fiction and shows their source in real life practices and knowledge economies. They also skilfully explicate the polemics which have and indeed continue to flourish within esotericism and its academic field.

In the introduction to the book, "Through the Portal," Roukema demarcates the Occult Revival from previous iterations of esoteric thought. They describe the relationship between occultism, enlightenment, and modernity, avoiding anti-modern rhetoric in favour of describing "another modernity" (11). From the beginning Roukema emphasises the necessity of understanding the occult context of Williams' novels and specifically the author's first-hand experiences with practical forms of occultism. In so doing, Roukema shows how impossible it is to fully appreciate any occult fiction while consigning involvement in occult systems themselves to the realm of mythopoeia only. Roukema sets out (and develops throughout the text) a convincing but subtle argument for the validity of occultism as a belief system, refuting the oft-repeated distinction between practical and cultural esotericisms.

Chapter two, "The Fellowship of the Rosy Cross: A Modern Occult Experience," offers a fascinating account of Williams' ritual experiences in the FRC, drawing on primary FRC sources. Roukema explores questions of the FRC's relationship with the Golden Dawn at length, an interrogation which may be inaccessible to those without a prior understanding of the Occult Revival. Roukema also misses some key connections here, particularly those of the influence of

Martinism and the Cromlech Temple; however, the author does a commendable job overall for such occult genealogies are notoriously difficult to construct.

Chapter three, "Fiction and Experience," analyses the relationship between Williams's FRC experiences and the construction of his fiction, developing a theory of interchange between fictional occult narrative and the lived fantasy of esoteric practice. Roukema offers an explication of a number of concrete examples of FRC rituals evident in Williams' fiction. The importance of this section is in establishing unquestionably that Williams was involved in group occult ritual practice and in exploring precisely what form this took. What is fascinating about this material, however, is Roukema's explanation of how these ritual FRC experiences manifest in the novels. This is a truly fantastic and innovative section, and I would love to see similar accounts of other rituals and other novels.

Another compelling aspect of this chapter, and for me one of the most exciting aspects of the book as a whole, is Roukema's explication of how achieving the grade of Adeptus Exempus motivated Williams to write occult fiction – something which had previously not been recognised. It is also fascinating to consider whether other occult novelists of this period may have been motivated by a similar achievement and what this means for understanding the play of public and private, veiled and revealed, when it comes to occultism and cultural production. Discussion of occult narrative and the tension between ineffable experience and limits of human semiotics – along with the use of fiction in this regard – is an interesting topic, and I wish Roukema had gone a little deeper with their analysis in this respect, for this is some of the most innovative material in the book.

The fourth chapter, "Kabbalah: Charles Williams and the Middle Pillar," explores Williams' use of the Kabbalah in his novels in the context of Waite's adaptations of the Kabbalistic system, focusing on the tarot trumps and on the Shekinah, the immanent feminine aspect of God who was important within the FRC system. This section offers a useful account of Kabbalistic history, one which recognises the occult Kabbalah as a valid tradition and practice in itself. It is problematic, however, that Roukema does not discuss initiation within this section, as these Kabbalistic structures were the Golden Dawn's central utilisation of the system.

Further, I wish that Roukema had spent more time analysing the concept of Shekinah as it is found in Williams' work. They spend some time explaining the ethical impact of the doctrine of Shekinah within Jewish Kabbalah, but do not explain what the doctrine looked like in twentieth century occult Kabbalah. Considering Williams' questionable treatment of young women, I think it would have been valuable to explore how Williams' approach to women, and his use of power within his magical sexuality, interacted with this doctrine of Shekinah; some exploration of other contemporary iterations of the Kabbalistic divine feminine may have been useful in this context too.

The next chapter, "The High-Priestess: Charles Williams and Modern Magic," discusses Williams' approach to magic as a method of mystical attainment; Roukema then explores the manifestation of this approach within the FRC and across the occult milieu at large, focusing on

magic as a means of altering consciousness rather than the manifestation of physical change. This chapter in itself is very good, but I do think it would have been better placed earlier in the book, for if one was not aware of occult history (which the inclusion of this section suggests Roukema anticipates) then this gives valuable background without which one may struggle to make sense of the discussions of FRC and Golden Dawn earlier in the book. By the same token, another problem with this chapter is that it does not explicate Williams' relationship with the Occult Revival fully enough. The vision offered of Williams' contemporaries are too limited and one-dimensional; further, Williams is positioned as being somewhat of an outlier to the milieu, despite clearly having a serious involvement in ritual magic groups.

In Chapter Six, "A Magical Life in Fiction," Roukema explores Williams' unique approach to re-enchantment, reanimation, and magical ethics. Here Roukema also discusses Williams' use of ritual magic to elevate his libido for mystical purposes and considers the fictional portrayals of these practices. This exploration is fascinating, yet it is ultimately the weakest section in the book, for Roukema fails to connect these practices to any contemporary sexual magic currents. They claim that Williams' Romantic Theology, and his sadomasochistic practices, cannot be considered sexual magic because they do not follow the spermo-centric structure of Theodore Reuss' approach, nor the mutual-ecstatic one of Paschal Beverly Randolph. However, Williams' form of engagement with sexuality shows very clear connections with and parallels to the contemporary occult scene. Williams' approach to sexual sublimation appears to draw directly from the techniques laid out by Dion Fortune in *The Problem of Purity* (1928); at the very least the psychoanalytical milieu within which both authors operated had an undeniable effect on the development of this concept of sexual sublimation. Roukema also fails to mention Aleister Crowley, whose sadomasochistic magical work makes for a most interesting comparison with that of Williams. This is the only occult context which is lacking, but one of the most unfortunate, as the Romantic Theology of Williams that underpins all of his novels. This is probably the most glaring omission in an otherwise excellent book.

Chapter seven, "The Transmutation of Charles Williams: Spiritual and Literary Alchemy," sits slightly uncomfortably as the last full chapter in this book; it may have been more effective if placed earlier on, or combined with, other aspects of the occult context. However, it is fascinating and necessary material, examining as it does the importance of alchemical philosophy and symbolism in Williams' occult system. Roukema offers a historical account of alchemy which considers the Occult Revivals' spiritual alchemy controversy to be part of the body of alchemical tradition in itself. It also shows how the alchemical approach to self-transformation can underpin without being explicitly evident. This offers insight into how other contemporary texts can have an alchemical nature and influences without being explicitly alchemical, and reveals the changing meaning of alchemical symbols and narratives across the twentieth century.

My critiques come chiefly not from any real problems with the text, but my desire to see Roukema travel further down some of the avenues they opened up. Despite being called esotericism and narrative, there was very little directly on this topic – which is a shame, as this is theoretical work which is desperately needed in this field. In particular, I was disappointed Roukema did not pursue

the idea of textual initiation, as described by Arthur Versluis in *Restoring Paradise* (whose examples were Williams, Dion Fortune, and C.S. Lewis); I also wish they had spoken more about the occult imagination, in order to better uncover the relationship between fiction and ritual practice.

While this book does explore Williams' writing and experience alongside that of other occult authors, the focus tends to be on cultural purpose rather than a magical one; I would be fascinated to know which other occult authors had taken the Adeptus Exempus initiation, and felt a similar calling to disseminate the mysteries in fictional form. Dion Fortune can certainly be better understood in this context, and I would have been interested to know if there were any parallels in the work of Algernon Blackwood, J. Brodie-Innes, or Arthur Machen.

Overall this is an excellent book; it is well researched, well written, and exhibits Roukema's masterful grasp of the complex field of contemporary esoteric studies, avoiding polemical arguments and directly tackling historiographical issues. Roukema addresses and delineates complex occult topics in a clear way without oversimplifying - no mean feat when it comes to esotericism. Roukema displays a very skilful handling of the historic, symbolic, practical, and structural relationships between occultism and Christianity, both in this period, and in textual history more generally. This book presents a valuable contribution to the growing understanding of the relationship between occult practice and so-called Fantastic fiction in the first half of the twentieth century.

BIONOTE

Georgia van Raalte completed her MA degree in Western Esotericism at the University of Amsterdam, Netherlands, where she specialised in Dion Fortune's sexual magic. She is currently a PhD candidate in literature at the University of Surrey, UK, exploring Dion Fortune's occult novels as initiatory texts.

CONFERENCE AND EVENT REPORTS

GLASGOW INTERNATIONAL FANTASY CONVERSATIONS (APRIL 26-27, 2018)

Conference Report by Ruth Booth

***Glasgow International Fantasy Conversations*. University of Glasgow, Glasgow, UK, 26-27 April 2018.**

Returning to the picturesque University of Glasgow, the second annual Glasgow International Fantasy Conversations (GIFCon) was a landmark for this exciting student-led event. Originally inspired by the university's MLitt in Fantasy, GIFCon 2018 built upon the spirit and success of last year's inaugural symposium for early career scholars: the playful yet hard-working atmosphere created an imaginative space in which academic investigations of the intersections between speculative genres sat side-by-side with creative studies, to which the degree course has a close relationship.

The expansion of the GIFCon programme to three streams of academic and creative papers brought greater diversity and international participation, both in-person and online. This year's theme, "Escaping Escapism in Fantasy and the Fantastic," prompted discussions going beyond the perceived escapist character of fantastic genres to explore tensions between perceived realities within speculative works, timely debates over truth and free will in narrative, and how works across different media play with the restrictions of narrative frameworks and tropes, philosophical approaches, cultural memory, and more. As a result, 2018 will be remembered as the year GIFCon grew into a truly inspiring snapshot of the future of Fantastika studies.

Thursday's keynote speakers explored escapism within two very different areas. Firstly, Dimitra Fimi (Cardiff Metropolitan University, UK) explored the impact of real, imagined, and cultural nostalgia, especially on the popular imagination, in "In the Blood and in the Landscape: Escaping (into) the 'Celtic' Past in Contemporary Children's Fantasy." Covering the works of Alan Garner, Jenny Nimmo, Susan Cooper and more, it was not only an insightful talk, but included a lesson for those whose Welsh pronunciation was a little rusty. Will Slocombe (University of Liverpool, UK), meanwhile, offered a less optimistic, but more darkly humorous approach to the theme in "There is No Escape from Here (Wherever Here Is): Fantasies of Control in Fictions of Artificial Intelligence." Slocombe investigated how notions of true 'free will' and 'control' become illusory under close examination, drawing parallels with Baudrillard's concept of Simulation.

The panel sessions began that afternoon, with Rachael Grew (Loughborough University, UK) giving us a dazzling tour of "The Fantastical Costumes of Leonora Fini" as part of the "Pictures are Worth a Thousand Words" panel. Over at "Fear, Fantasy and Fairy Tales," Gabrielle Cohen

(University of Glasgow, UK) took a thoughtful, psychoanalytic approach to the Cthulhu Mythos in "The Instability of Knowledge: Three Types of Fear in the Works of H.P. Lovecraft." Meanwhile, Thomas Moules's (Independent Researcher, UK) insightful and wryly humorous approach in "Escapism as a Weapon: An Exploration of N. K. Jemisin's *Broken Earth* Trilogy," part of the "Breaking the Rules" panel, made for a refreshing examination of one of this year's most popular texts for analysis.

The second session opened at the "Abandoning the Analogue" panel with Anna Mackenzie (University of Chester, UK) presenting her paper written in collaboration with Patricia Flores (Lancaster University, UK), "Locating the Secondary World of Harry Potter within the Primary Landscape: A New Digital Humanities Approach." Mackenzie introduced a fascinating new approach to the relationship between primary and secondary worlds within the constructions of real, imaginary, combination, and vague spaces. During "The Shape of Suffering: Monsters and Escapism," Elena Pasquini (Independent Researcher, UK) explored how monsters have evolved into guides and guardians in Children's Fiction in "Monsters: Patron Saints of Children." Finally, in the second of the day's panels exploring political and social change in Fantasy, "Escape or Confrontation? Realities and How (Not) to Face Them," Allan Rae (University of Stirling, UK) examined a radical, Lacanian approach in "'The Impossible is True': Fantasy as Emancipatory Theory in the Work of China Miéville."

The final session of the day boasted two of the most popular panels of the event, with Will Slocombe chairing "Out of the Books: Metafiction Against Escapism" and celebrated Tolkien scholar Dimitra Fimi chairing "The Legacies of the Professor." However, "There Be Dragons: Maps, Architecture and Worldbuilding in Fantasy" also offered some fascinating insights into the growing sub-field of Fantastic landscapes. Siddharth Pandey (University of Oxford, UK) showed how notions of craft both within and as a conceptualisation of worldbuilding can offer new insights in "Distant Estrangement or Deep Engagement?: Countering Fantastical Escapism through Materialist Making in British Fantasy." Christopher Lynch (University of Glasgow, UK) showed how maps can be used as a form of political and spatial control over both the landscape and its inhabitants, warping the reality of space and how it is perceived in "Off the Map: Spatial Revolution in Terry Pratchett's Discworld." Finally, Lena Abraham (ZfL Berlin, Germany) explored "Poetics of Pending in F. Hernández's 'The Balcony'" and how the time-space relationship can be distorted by the liminal nature of key spaces in stories. The discussion that followed explored the relationship between the intention of the author and audience interpretation, as well as structure within worldbuilding.

With the day's programme over, attendees reconvened for mid-event dinner, which this year returned to the seventeenth century public house The Curler's Rest, for relaxed discussions over the programme that went on late into the night.

2018 saw several firsts for GIFCon, and two of these came on the Friday. Along with the increase in the number of academic streams, the creative side of the event expanded to include three writing workshops at the start of the second day's events. Hosted by SQIFF award-winner Elaine Gallagher (UK), Uncovered Artistry co-founder Angie Spoto (University of Glasgow, UK), BSFA award-winner Ruth EJ Booth (University of Glasgow, UK) and acclaimed poet and author Oliver

Langmead (University of Glasgow, UK), the workshops were variously praised for their relaxed, encouraging atmosphere and helpful techniques for both new and returning creative writers.

Friday's first panel sessions examined the metaphor of the mirror within Fantasy in "Mirrored Portals and Distorted Idols," while the limitations of tropes within genre were the topic of "When Fantasy is Not Enough." "Escape in Japan," a panel largely focussed on the works of Studio Ghibli, provided a range of insights into the relationship between modern day Japanese society and recent Fantasy releases. Hanna Greenblott (University of Glasgow, UK) examined the role of colour palette and relationships with the elements in "Flying Again: An Examination of the Studio Ghibli Heroine's Subversion of the Traditional Hero's Journey." Meanwhile, Ruth Booth (University of Glasgow, UK) explored how Hayao Miyazaki's aim of awakening cultural memory within children sits alongside the concept of kamikakushi in "Growing up in the Time of No Face: Escapism, Illusion, and Identity in *Spirited Away* (2001)." Miguel Cesar (University of Edinburgh, UK) extended the discussion into other anime, looking at the relationship between key events in the history of twentieth and twenty-first century Japan and properties such as *Fullmetal Alchemist* in "Death, Loss and the Fantastic in Japanese Contemporary Media."

Friday's keynote speakers embodied both the creative and academic aspects of the event. Alice Jenkins (University of Glasgow, UK) applied her work on inductive and deductive knowledge in nineteenth century to one of Fantasy's most common tropes in "Prophecy, Prediction and Escape in Fantastic Literature," contrasting the serious nature of prophetic knowledge with its often comedic or satirical contexts. Meanwhile, Arianne 'Tex' Thompson (USA), author of the *Children of the Drought* series, gave a manifesto to attending scholars in "Once Upon a Time in the West: Fantasy and Identity on the Fictional Frontier." Their talk explained how marrying the conventions of Westerns with Fantasy fiction allowed them to go beyond the traditional 'Chosen One' trope. With reference to Robert Levy's hypocognition and the orientation of modern-day identities around consumerism, attendees were urged to create a new chronic protagonism by developing our vocabulary of contribution. An edited copy of this talk can be found online.

Panel sessions continued into the afternoon, with "Fantasies Against the War," "Crossing Screens: TV, Film, and Games," and "Category-Breaking Escapes" offering three diverse perspectives. Alix Beaumont (University of York, UK) explored how the *God of War* video game franchise flips the mythological conventions for heroes and villains in aspects such as settings in "Escaping from Myth into Fantasy, and from Fantasy into Myth…," adding to the unsettling nature of the actions of its antihero protagonist, Kratos. Elaine Gallagher's (Independent Researcher, UK) "Escaping Straitjackets of Identity: Representation of Gender Variance in Science Fiction and Fantasy" was the beginning of a promising exploration into a fledgling area of genre academia, particularly where the representation of trans identities is concerned.

Meanwhile, "Fantasies Against the War" saw another first for GIFCon in the symposium's first remote broadcast, with Syrian scholar Mohammed Al Mohammed Al Sibahi (Damascus University, Syria) presenting a pre-recorded paper during the "Fantasies Against the War" panel

on Friday afternoon. This gave added resonance to "'Quo Vadis?' The Carnivals: No-Man's Land and Entombment," his development of Bahktin's notion of the carnivalesque into the no man's land carnival of war.

The final panel sessions of the event highlighted the value of the societal impacts of Fantasy. In the "Power of Words…" panel, Maayan Priel (Goldsmiths, University of London, UK) highlighted how the growth of tabletop gaming podcasts has helped revitalise interest in genre games, in "Adventures Away from the Table: Social Escapism in Actual Play Podcasts." Meanwhile, in the "Women and Witches" panel, Lucinda Holdsworth (Independent Researcher, UK) offered a manifesto to academics and writers in highlighting issues with the representation of a truly feminist magic in "'Weak as Women's Magic': The Domesticity of Women's Magic." Finally, one of the most anticipated papers of the weekend was Taylor Driggers's (University of Glasgow, UK) use of *The Last Jedi*'s (2017) break with *Star Wars*'s nostalgic tendencies as an alternative way of engaging with theology in Fantasy, in "Escaping (into) the Past?: Nostalgia and Radical Theological Imagination in *Star Wars: The Last Jedi*." An edited copy of this paper has been made available online here.

As we moved into the nineteenth century terraces of University Gardens for the closing statements and wine reception, there was time to reflect on the past two days. The event was praised for its online engagement, especially on Twitter, where many participants live-tweeted under the #GIFCon18 tag, allowing those unable to attend the full event to engage with the panels, and prompting further discussion of topics amongst social media savvy attendees.

The beautiful setting of the University of Glasgow was an attractive compliment to the event, with keynote speeches taking place in the magnificent Memorial Chapel, while panels were hosted at the stately University Gardens, originally designed by Sir John J. Burnet. There were issues with disabled access in some rooms, and one speaker did not make use of the microphone provided. However, the team were responsive to these issues, with changes made to the layout of rooms and instructions to speakers as a result. The committee hope to be able to use more access-friendly venues within the University in the future.

The final hour of GIFCon held a special treat for attendees. Following a social media campaign launched by attending users under the competing hashtags #MakeRobSing and #AskRobNicely, GIFCon chair and MLitt in Fantasy convenor Robert Maslen (University of Glasgow, UK) serenaded attendees with a rendition of "I Sit Beside the Fire and Think," from *The Road Goes Ever On* (Music: Donald Swann, Lyrics: J.R.R. Tolkien). This performance (which can be found online here) embodied the playful approach to scholarship in Fantastika that permeated the two day symposium – an event that took diverse and creative perspectives on genre and blended them into a fascinating, insightful discussion of the notions of escape and escapism across the breadth of the field. With such imaginative approaches from the early career attendees, the future of fantastic academia appears to be in safe hands.

A full list of GIFCon 2018 abstracts can be found at http://www.gifcon.org, while updates

and photos from this year's event can be found on Twitter (@GIFConGLA), Facebook (GIFConGLA) and Instagram (@GIFCon_GLA).

BIONOTE

Ruth Booth is a doctoral student at the University of Glasgow, Scotland. A graduate of the university's celebrated MLitt in Fantasy her current project examines Hamlet, the Fantastic, and women's complicity in toxic masculinity in genre communities. She is a co-organiser of GIFCon and Ytterbium, the upcoming seventieth Eastercon event. As Ruth EJ Booth, she is a winner of the BSFA Award for Best Short Fiction (2014), a columnist for SF journal *Shoreline of Infinity*, and a former editor for arts journal *From Glasgow to Saturn*. For more information, see www.ruthbooth.com.

EMBODIMENT IN SCIENCE FICTION AND FANTASY INTERDISCIPLINARY CONFERENCE (MAY 18-19, 2018)

Conference Report by Kristen Shaw

Embodiment in Science Fiction and Fantasy Interdisciplinary Conference. **McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario, Canada. 18-19 May 2018.**

Although Science Fiction and Fantasy of the 1980s and 1990s often focused on employing technology to transcend the perceived limits of the human body, contemporary Speculative Fiction (SF) frequently interrogates and critiques the idealization of disembodiment, focusing, alternatively, on the materiality of bodies, and how distinct experiences of gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, and disability inform lived experience. The Embodiment in Science Fiction and Fantasy Interdisciplinary Conference, hosted by the English Department of McMaster University from May 18th to 19th, 2018, asked presenters to explore how the experience and representation of bodies in SF informs how we understand human, post-human, and non-human subjects, and their positionality within material and cultural settings.

The conference was attended by more than eighty scholars from across Canada, the United States, the UK, Australia, Egypt, Greece, and Spain. Presenters included academics from a variety of disciplines and career levels, from independent researchers, to graduate students, to professors. A total of twenty-one panels were hosted during the conference, with three panels occurring concurrently during each time slot over the span of the two-day event. Presentations focused on a variety of Science Fiction and Fantasy texts, spanning from mid-century to contemporary literature, television, and film.

The first day of the conference featured panels on the relationship between embodiment and temporality; embodied cognition and critiques of Cartesianism; reproduction, temporality, and feminist ethics in the film *Arrival* (2016); gender, sexuality, and embodiment in SF literature, television, and film; Critical Race Theory; ecology, the nonhuman, and embodiment; two panels on Trauma Studies; a special panel on SF and pedagogy; and the first of three panels dedicated to Disability Studies.

The first panel I attended and moderated was one of two panels which focused on Trauma Studies. Charul Palmer-Patel (Canada) provided a fascinating exploration of the motif of abjection, abject womb-sites, and maternal figures in James Clemens's *Banned and the Banished* (1998-2002) series. In a paper focused on Kristin Cashore's *Bitterblue* (2012), Molly Keran (University of

Michigan, USA) convincingly argued that the novel's representation of rape survivorship aligns with contemporary Feminist and Disability Studies' conceptions of trauma as an ongoing experience rather than an event. Tony Vinci (Ohio University-Chillicothe, USA) explored trauma in *The Magicians* (2009) by Lev Grossman, exploring how the novel depicts the ways that the body becomes posthuman through trauma, and the way that trauma emphasizes the necessity of moving beyond traditional humanist conceptions of subjectivity, sociality, and the body.

The second panel I attended and moderated, entitled "Ecology, Nature, and the Nonhuman," explored SF texts that depict more-than-human and nonhuman embodiment, as well as landscapes as bodies (and bodies as landscapes) that produce new kinds of affects and relations. Garth Sabo (Michigan State University, USA) examined works by Chapell, Twain, and Asimov that depict journeys through the body, and thus represent the body as setting or landscape. These works, Sabo argued, call into question the human body as a self-contained entity, and indicate that embodiment entails a deeper understanding of the relationship between humans and nonhuman actants. Graham J. Murphy (Seneca College, Canada) provided an astute reading of Kathleen Ann Goonan's novel *Queen City Jazz* (1994) and its representation of alliances between human, vegetal, and animal actants. Murphy argued that these representations critique hierarchies of human and nonhuman, and represent a mode of posthumanism that decentres human agency in favour of an assemblage-oriented approach to understanding embodiment and the social. Mason Wales (York University, Canada) proposed the term "putropia" to describe the political aims and aesthetics of post-apocalyptic settings in film, which, Wales argued, frequently explore the state in a state of decomposition (or "putrescence") in order to grapple with shifting ideas about the nation and national identity. Elana Maloul (University of Michigan, USA) examined the representation of space and urban settings in Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* (1952), exploring the novel's focus on the act of descent and underground or murky spaces to interrogate subjectivity, modernity, and racial politics.

During the midday lunch break on the first day of the conference, Veronica Hollinger, professor emeritus of Trent University and a renowned SF scholar, presented her keynote address, entitled "'Corpo-Reality' and the Non-Human Supplement." This talk provided a thoughtful analysis of corporeality and embodiment in several recently-published novels that explore what it means to be 'in' a body during the Anthropocene era: Paolo Bacigalupi's *Tool of War* (2017), Kameron *Hurley's Stars are Legion* (2017), Annalee Newitz's *Autonomous* (2017), and Kim Stanley Robinson's *New York 2140* (2017). For Hollinger, climate change presents a significant challenge to Cartesianism and calls on humans to reconceive both corpo-reality and the relationship of humans to nonhuman bodies.

Afternoon sessions on the first day included a panel exploring the politics of racial identity in contemporary SF entitled "Critical Race Theory: Necropower, Afro-Pessimism, Afropunk." Diana Brydon (University of Manitoba, Canada) explored necropolitics in the context of Nnedi Okorafor's *The Book of Phoenix* (2015) and *Who Fears Death* (2010), while Joseph Earl Thomas (University of Notre Dame, USA) provided a fascinating analysis of Nnedi Okorafor's *Binti* (2015). Drawing from Afrofuturism and Afro-pessimism, Thomas argued that *Binti* explores the potentialities of coming of age as a Black girl, eschewing conventions of the bildungsroman and the idealism often

attributed to Afrofuturist texts to articulate a more complex conception of Black identity. Isiah Lavender III (Louisiana State University, USA) concluded the panel with an excellent examination of the problematic racial politics of cyberpunk and an exploration of how African-American SF writers have re-deployed cyberpunk conventions to create 'Afropunk': a Black version of cyberpunk that challenges white privilege, and the whiteness of the SFF canon, while using genre fiction to explore the politics of race, community, and embodiment.

The first day of the conference concluded with a social event at the local Staircase Theater, which featured readings of creative fiction and poetry by Petra Kuppers, an author, disability culture activist, performance artist, and professor at the University of Michigan, USA; Ann Arbour; as well as Selena Middleton, a Science Fiction author and PhD candidate in the English Department at McMaster University, Canada. These readings were followed by an open mic in which panellists were encouraged to share their work. This event provided a perfect complement to the academic portion of the conference, allowing panellists to share creative work and socialize in an informal setting.

The second day of the conference included panels on cyborgs and cyborg theory; sex work, labour, and cyborgs/robots; aging, health and medical discourses; human and nonhuman metamorphoses; reproduction, motherhood, and pregnancy; embodiment in Science Fiction film; queer and hybrid embodiments; visual and sonic dimensions of embodiment; and two panels focused on disability studies.

The first panel that I attended and moderated on the second day of the conference was entitled "Gender, Sexuality, and Cyborgs." Jennifer Jodell (University of Minnesota-Twin Cities, USA) provided a fascinating exploration of the "cyborg-artist" figure represented in mid-century Science Fiction texts, analysing the frequently conflicted depictions of these characters as both dangerous to the social order and possessing creative agency. Jodell's paper provided an interesting historical context framing the following two papers, which focused on contemporary cyborg figures. Elsa Klingensmith (Oklahoma State University, USA) examined the sexualisation of cyborgs in the films *Blade Runner* and *Blade Runner 2049*, providing an excellent close reading of the cyborg Joi in *Blade Runner 2049* that addressed issues of power, agency, and gender. Mark Soderstrom's (SUNY Empire State College, USA) perceptive paper examining several cyborgian figures in Science Fiction texts, and the relationship between the cyborg, feminist movements, and social reproduction, concluded this excellent panel.

The second panel I attended during this day was entitled "Labour, Sex Work and the Cyborg/Robot." Anne Savage (McMaster University, Canada) drew from many real-world examples of contemporary advancements in robotics to examine the sexual and affective role of new 'sex robots' and androids, and the ethical considerations of this shift. Clare Wall (York University, Canada) provided a fascinating analysis of Madeline Ashby's *Machine Dynasty* novels *vN* (2012) and *iD* (2013), arguing that these stories gesture towards a new ethics of relationality and responsibility between humans and robots. David Sweeney's (Glasgow School of Art, UK) paper provided a comparative analysis of the affective and sexual labour conducted by cyborgs in the films *2046* (2004) and *Blade*

Runner 2049 (2017), exploring the ethical and social implications of these representations given parallel contemporary advancements in virtual reality and 'sexbot' technology.

The third and final panel that I attended explored in embodiment in Science Fiction film, with the first two papers focusing on representations of masculinity. David Isaacs (California Baptist University, UK) provided an engaging analysis of Will Smith's body in *I Am Legend* (2007), emphasizing how race and masculinity intersect both on-screen, and in relation to the public's reception of Smith's celebrity persona. Jacob Arun (McMaster University, Canada) examined the wearable technologies in Spiderman's suit in the *film Spiderman: Homecoming* (2017), analysing the film's representation of surveillance and military technologies, their impact on the identity and agency of the titular character, and the ethics and effects of these technologies in the context of superhero narratives. To conclude the panel, Débora Madrid-Brito (Universidad Autonoma de Madrid, Spain) provided a compelling analysis of human enhancement in several Spanish Science Fiction films, exploring the use of virtual reality, genetic engineering, cryogenics, and artificial intelligence to engage with transhumanist discourses.

The conference concluded with a keynote speech from Hugo Award-winning author Kameron Hurley (USA) entitled "We are Made of Meat: Imagining an Embodied Future." Employing characteristic humour and thoughtful insight, Hurley critiqued visions of the future that allow us to escape our bodies, arguing alternatively that a disembodied future is not only impossible, but undesirable. Throughout this talk, Hurley foregrounded the importance of embodied experience to our understanding of subjectivity, community, and politics, providing an excellent conclusion to the event.

Due to the success of the event and the quality and diversity of the papers, the conference organizers are currently discussing the possibility of producing an edited collection based on conference proceedings and are in the process of determining publication options. The conference provided an opportunity for researchers at different stages of their careers to share important and cutting-edge scholarship and brought attention to new areas and emerging fields of research in Science Fiction and Fantasy studies. The conference, with its broad assortment of papers and topics, achieved it main goal of bringing together academics from a variety of disciplines to explore issues of embodiment that are still often marginalized in the fields of Science Fiction and Fantasy scholarship.

BIO-NOTE

Kristen Shaw completed her PhD in English and Cultural Studies at McMaster University, Canada in 2018. Her dissertation, entitled "Space, Assemblage, and the Nonhuman in Speculative Fiction," focused on spatial politics, and how SF inspires new forms of socio-spatial resistance to capitalism. Her current research interests include representations of gender, race, and class in Science Fiction and popular culture.

SCIENCE FICTION RESEARCH ASSOCIATION CONFERENCE (JULY 1-4, 2018)

Conference report by Ezekiel Crago

"The Future of Labor." ***Science Fiction Research Association Annual Conference*****. Marquette University, Milwaukee, USA, 1-4 July 2018.**

This year's SFRA conference theme produced insightful conversations about the meaning of both terms used: "labor" and "future." This ambiguity was made explicit in the content and context of the two keynote lectures, differing from each other in interpretation of work and the 'after' that future speculation uses to orient its difference from the present. Peter Frase (editor and contributor at *Jacobin Magazine*) used Marxist theories of labour to speculate on the theme of his book *Four Futures: Life after Capitalism* (2016). Rebekah Sheldon (Indiana University Bloomington, USA), on the other hand, used theories of biopolitics and feminism to examine the future of reproductive labour and the role of women in a society that is commodifying life while also producing ecological collapse, elaborated in her book, *The Child to Come: Life after the Human Catastrophe* (2016).

Frase's lecture investigated the imbrication of labour and technology with automation, speculating on how this accelerating process changes the meaning of work. He began with the simple question of why so many stories about the future assume that employment as we know it still exists. It seems that, in addition to the trope oft-repeated during the conference – that it is easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism – we also must acknowledge how difficult it is to imagine a world without paid labour. The central question remains how a society values different kinds of labour, which Frase located on scales of wage, satisfaction for the worker, and usefulness to society. In this model, the unpaid, tedious, useless work of updating Twitter or Facebook can be compared with the satisfying, paid, useful labour of teaching. Likewise, the unpaid, satisfying, useless work of playing video games contrasts with the paid, tedious, useless job of telemarketing, and the unpaid, satisfying, useful work of producing music contrasts with the paid, useful, tedious toil of trash collection. He elaborated three philosophies of technology's relationship with capitalism. The first, accelerationism, posits capitalist imposition on technological development, arguing we should rid ourselves of the capitalist system and 'free' the advance of technology. The second sees it as a machine for degradation and control of workers that takes away human agency. The last positions technology as threat to life and imagines a future where it must be scaled back for ecological futurity.

Sheldon's talk focused on scientific impact on reproductive futurity treating the womb *as* technology using as primary texts the film *Bladerunner 2049* (2017) and the BBCA show *Orphan Black* (2013-2017). The first part of her lecture examined the theory and practice of eugenics' logic of purity coupled with anxiety over a "sterility apocalypse" threatening the reproduction

of proper subjects. The clones in *Orphan Black* are figures of this anxiety, combining Mary and Eve, fusing images of miraculous fecundity to a new Eden. Women become an allegory for nature while also being reduced to livestock. The miraculous births that subtend the narratives of both of these texts act as signs of rebirth of the natural via technology. These texts imagine a future of managed evolution or what Sheldon calls a search for the "genetic fountain of youth." In this logic, children are considered more plastic than adults, a *tabula rasa* without the specific subjectivity of fully interpellated maturity; they require guidance from adults to curb this plasticity and set their identities. The child then becomes a figure of a Future that must be managed by the Present, a national notional body that must be guided into becoming a capitalist subject. In this way life itself, the *bios*, becomes a surplus value extracted and enclosed by capitalism just as the future becomes a site of speculative surplus value. Patents on biological data, processes, and products then become a mode of engineering contingency and disaster, a eugenic, somatic capitalism that attempts to produce the miraculous, invade Eden, "lock up the mothers, and steal the children."

The first day was a travel day for many so the majority of the sessions were devoted to workshops for graduate students: "SF on the Market," facilitated by Gerry Canavan (Marquette University, USA) and Peter Sands (University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, USA), and "Research Tech: Information and Document Tools, Services, and Workflows," facilitated by Paweł Frelik (Maria Curie-Sklodowska University, Poland).

After lunch, I attended "Space Opera," a discussion of the much-maligned subgenre of Science Fiction (SF) that attempted to not only rescue it from the label of 'escapist,' but also argue that the only people who argue against escape are those maintaining prisons. Peter Sands began with a broad discussion of the genre which investigated the way in which these epic stories can be useful tools for imagining the future even though current understanding of science and space travel indicates that such interstellar travel will probably never occur. Erin DeYoung's (Savannah State University, USA) presentation examined the Space Opera universe of the *Ancillary* (2013-2015) novels, paying close attention to slave labour that the hegemonic empire in the novels requires, called Ancillaries. These workers consist of the bodies of conquered indigenous peoples that have been 'processed' and had their brains emptied of any individual subjectivity, replaced with a hive-mind artificial intelligence. The final paper by Josh Pearson (University of California, Riverside, USA) argued for the efficacy of the post-scarcity Culture of the Iain Banks universe as a possibility for the end of toil and the transformation of life into a pleasurable game, but one not operating under a zero-sum value system in which everyone wins.

My first panel of the next morning, "Near Futures," was more of a mix than the Space Opera panel regarding the divergent ideas of 'after' discussed in the keynote addresses. Alexander Frissell (Marquette University, USA) began with an examination of the way that consumer capitalism has commodified age. Age-based thinking and bias structure the producerist discourses of our current society, and medical technology for anti-aging treats the aged body as disposable, figured in Margaret Atwood's recent novels as the ability for older people to 'upgrade' into younger bodies. Kathleen W. Taylor Kollman's (Bowling Green State University, USA) paper then argued that the time

travel agents in the Netflix television show *Travelers* (2016-) are exploited disposable labourers, especially the women, who are expected to perform extra affective labour while sublimating their own emotional life in service to "the mission." Carmen Laguarta-Bueno (University of Zaragoza, Spain) argued for a nuanced reading of Dave Eggers' novel *The Circle* (2013) as a speculation on the ways in which every utopia is dystopic and every dream is a nightmare for someone.

After lunch, I attended "Anthropocene." Paweł Frelik presented a slide show of artistic speculation on climate change and its effects on urban space, using as an overarching theme the German idea of *Ruinensehnsucht*, the aesthetic longing for ruins that dates back at least to Romanticism. Nick Silcox's (Rutgers University, USA) paper examined the digital text "What is the Future of American Football" (2016), a postmodern narrative consisting mostly of conversations between AI satellites about humanity, a humanity that has become immortal and impervious to damage and thus plays epic games of an evolved version of American football that cover hundreds of miles and sometimes take decades to resolve. Andrew Hageman (Luther College, USA) finished the panel with a look at contemporary Chinese SF work imbricated in the rise of China as a capitalist global power and one of the world's biggest polluters.

The next day, the conference organisers tried a new mode and planned two different thematic series, one that consisted of three panels on William Gibson and another on gender. I decided to split the difference. The first panel of the morning, "Gibson 1," began with Kylie Korsnack's (Vanderbilt University, USA) speculation that Gibson is concerned with the cognitive dissonance of "alternative time," where the future and past interact. Extending the narratological concept of narrative levelling, or the ability of a story to nest one narrative in another without disrupting diegetic time, she suggests a theory of temporal levelling, which allows a character to inhabit multiple nodes of time, disrupting the regulation of temporality implied by clock-time and ideologies of progress. Suzanne F. Boswell (Rutgers University, USA) examined the ways in which Gibson's figuring of cyberspace confirms mind/body dualism and utilises a metaphor based on the European fantasy of the island as a frontier yet to be mapped, rendering the genocide and dispossession of colonialism into exploration, a process that Gibson's novels show to be continuing, even in artificial fantasy islands like Freeside in *Neuromancer* (1984). Jake Casella's (Positron Chicago, USA) paper used the discourse of Object-Oriented Ontology to discuss the ways in which Gibson constantly invests inanimate objects in his narratives with value and agency.

I presented on the next panel, "Apocalypse." Alayne Peterson (University of Wisconsin-Fond du Lac, USA) began with an analysis of the recent addition to the *Mad Max* franchise, *Fury Road* (2015), which, in conversation with Sheldon's keynote address, investigated the ways in which women's labour is enclosed by Immortan Joe's Citadel, resulting in their bodies becoming sites of resource extraction in the form of babies and milk. My paper looked back to the first film of the series, *Mad Max* (1979) and the way that it imagines the future of male utility in a world where nothing is produced but car crashes and dead bodies. Timothy S. Murphy (Oklahoma State University, USA) finished our bleak panel with an examination of narratives that imagine a world where humanity or all life on the planet comes to an end as a speculation on Messianic operational time, the time we *are* as

opposed to the time *where we are*. This is an atheistic Messianic time that offers no New Jerusalem, only the end of time recognised as the process of history.

I ended the day with "Gender 3." Emily Cox's (Independent Scholar, UK) paper investigated the figures of androids in recent film and television that depict them exclusively as women, just as digital assistants are coded with female voices. These machines do 'dirty work' and this says much about how we value types of work and how gender factors into this valence. Aurora Romero's (Vanderbilt University, USA) analysis of E.T.A. Hoffman's "Sandman" (1817) followed smoothly from the first paper in its look at the emotional labour performed by the automaton in the story and why its protagonist prefers this simulacrum over his human fiancé. Benjamin Blackman's (University of California, Davis, USA) paper then succinctly tied together the themes of the first two with a discussion of women as employed in emotional management, not only of themselves, but of men who are not supposed to know how to manage their own.

On the final day of the conference, I attended "Literary SF." Szymon P. Kukulak (Jagiellonian University, Poland) analysed Stanisław Lem's worldbuilding in *The Invincible* (1964) and compared it to his insistence in previous work on scientific realism, arguing that this novel marks a departure from a realist mode into the more reflexive humorist mode of his later 1970s work. Francis Gene-Rowe (Royal Holloway, UK) argued that the cut-up poem *Ratzinger Solo* (2016), consisting of excerpts from the autobiography of a former Pope, lines from *Star Wars* novels featuring Han Solo, and tweets from Donald Trump, indicates a problem with current society's relationship to our historical moment, which has been evacuated of meaning, that "an eternal present is an absent present."

The conference concluded with a flipped roundtable on the topic of "Jedi vs. Avengers," where we speculated on how Disney's ownership over these franchises will affect their cinematic universes and how long it will be before we see a crossover film mixing them. We agreed that the corporation's only goal is increasing shareholder value and that we must be wary of the ways in which Disney's films seem to be politically progressive as a marketing ploy and a way to enclose and capitalise discourses of diversity, sexuality, and feminism. The recurring topic of the labour required by and of the audiences of these franchises provided a fitting echo of previous conversations from throughout the conference. All in all, it was a rewarding end to four highly stimulating days spent speculating and working on the future of labour.

BIONOTE

Ezekiel Crago is a PhD candidate at the University of California at Riverside, U.S.A. In his dissertation, he traces the outlines of a post-industrial postmodern model of manhood, an "apocalyptic masculinity" articulated in the post-apocalyptic film genre that appeared in 1950s Hollywood that imagines of the role of hegemonic patriarchal white masculinity in a world where traditional masculinist discourses no longer make sense. These became particularly fraught in the decade of the 1970s, a pivotal crisis for American politics, economy, and identity discourses, a time when the popular imagination of Americans reoriented itself in relation to class, race, gender, and sexuality.

14TH INTERNATIONAL GOTHIC ASSOCIATION CONFERENCE (JULY 31 – AUGUST 3, 2018)

Conference Report by Charlotte Gough

"Gothic Hybridities: Interdisciplinary, Multimodal and Transhistorical Approaches." ***14th Conference of the International Gothic Association*****, Manchester Centre for Gothic Studies, Manchester, UK, 31 July – 3 August 2018.**

The fourteenth annual conference of the International Gothic Association (IGA), hosted by the Manchester Centre for Gothic Studies at Manchester Metropolitan University (MMU), boasted a scale unprecedented by events of previous years; reflecting and accommodating the explosion of interest, growing diversity, and appropriate recognition of the Gothic in academia over the past decade. Held across four days, with eleven parallel panels in each of three sessions per day, the work of over three hundred delegates from around the world was showcased. This year's theme focused on interdisciplinary, multimodal, and transhistorical approaches to Gothic 'hybridities,' highlighting the Gothic as a mode that – in its inherently hybrid nature – is made up of disparate aesthetics, themes, and concepts that are mutable, self-referential, and ever-evolving; one which is able to move across and interrelate a variety of art forms, disciplines, cultures, and contexts, particularly in our modern, technological world. This theme is no better represented metaphorically than through the figure of Frankenstein's monster, and as this year marked the bicentenary of the publication of Mary Shelley's masterwork, *Frankenstein* (1818) was central to proceedings. The Centre also organises the annual Gothic Manchester Festival, now in its sixth year, which offered an innovative array of events for attendees and members of the public alike to enjoy throughout the conference.

The conference commenced on Tuesday 31st July with networking events, beginning with the Postgraduate Researchers Board Games Social, followed by the evening's wine reception with an opening address given by the Lord Mayor of Manchester, June Hitchen. This took place in the appropriately lavish setting of the Manchester Art Gallery, accompanied by music from the Manchester String Quartet. Speeches from Malcolm Press, Vice-Chancellor of Manchester Metropolitan University, and the Centre's own Linnie Blake, were given, discussing the forthcoming activities as well as the particular significance of Manchester as host city.

With thirteen parallel panel streams, Wednesday 1st August marked the first day of conference panels and the morning's session I attended on "The United States: Salem/Satan" provided a stimulating start with an expansive and cohesive exploration of the dialogue between the national hysteria surrounding occult practices and their fictional representations intrinsic to America's Gothic past. Charles L. Crow (Bowling Green State University, US) began by discussing works featured in the *New England Magazine* 1891-1892, including Charlotte Perkins Gillman, which

recalled the violence of the Salem witchcraft scare, and offered an interesting reading of "The Yellow Wallpaper" (1892) in this context. Dara Downey's (Trinity College, Dublin, Ireland) complimentary paper impressively identified how the problematic entanglements of the fictional and non-fictional accounts of Tituba as a black slave and witch ultimately reflected the period's Puritan, patriarchal anxieties. Charlotte Gough (Independent, UK), then concluded the panel by presenting this issue in contemporary cinematic representations of occult evil – framed through fragmented male subjectivity and the postmodern, hybridisation of tropes in Gothic Film Noir – as a symptomatic interrelationship between post-war masculine trauma and Satanic-Panic in the 1980s and 1990s. The proceeding panel "Neo Victorian Film" included an interesting examination of the gender politics at work with uncanny doubling in Hollywood's cycle of such cinema, 1939-1945, from Carolyn King (University of Kent, UK). Subsequent papers detailed how Gothic elements and texts are fused with historical allusions in period pieces, with Victorian inventions and attractions as settings for mystery and murder; such as magic shows in *The Prestige* (2006), (Katharina Rein, Bauhaus-Universität Weimar, University of Berlin, Germany), and music halls in *The Limehouse Golem* (2017) (Nora Olsen, Independent, Germany).

The afternoon's keynote from Angela Wright (University of Sheffield, UK) "Gothic Recollected in Tranquillity: Mary Shelley and the Art of Remembering, 1814–1830" delivered a wonderful and insightful comparison of the sublime nature of *Frankenstein's* writing and the experience of reading it. Wright posed that simply evoking an image, tied too firmly to the past, cannot fully articulate the emotional experience of the novel in the present. So too should Shelley's work, like the monster, be considered irreducible to a particular origin or influence, but instead made up of fragments of the human condition, with the work's past, present, and future as a dynamic conception offering the potential for new interpretations.

Afterwards, the final panel of the day, "Gothic and the Domestic Space," began with an expertly argued paper from Lauren Randall (Lancaster University, UK) on the Gothic gloss of HBO's recent series *Big Little Lies* (2017) – with its feminised hauntings and secrets of suburbia especially relevant to the 'MeToo' and 'TimesUp' movements. The other paper topics presented, through respective Derridean readings, the novel *Deadfall Hotel* (2012) as an inverted and cathartic hybridisation of *The Shining's* (1980) 'Overlook Hotel' (Kerry Gorrill, Manchester Metropolitan University, UK); as well as the Gothicisation of space in *Crimson Peak* (2015), tying the 'damaged daughter' to her haunted house setting (Ann Davies, University of Stirling, UK).

The theme of "Sexuality and Gender on Television" kicked off the second day of panels. Máiréad Casey's (National University of Ireland, UK) paper observed the recent trend in recycling iconic Gothic Horror narratives into TV format, cleverly demonstrating how *The Exorcist* (2016) serial reframes and ideologically re-appropriates the demonic possession narrative as a decidedly more progressive one of *female*-subjective trauma. Meyrav Koren-Kuik's paper (Tel Aviv University, Israel) then noted the hybridisation of Victorian London and present-day settings, conflating the visual and the literary in "The Abominable Bride" episode of BBC's *Sherlock* (2016), to comment on women's continued struggle for equality since the suffragettes. Megan Fowler (University of Florida, US)

concluded by astutely arguing that the use of the supernatural in the otherwise slice-of-life series, Russell T. Davis' *Cucumber* (2015) – with the appropriate setting of Manchester's own Canal Street – presents the Gothic as a natural part of the abject nature of queer existence.

The following session "Folk Horror/Post Horror/Labelling Horror" offered especially thought-provoking work, as well as lively debate in the question and answer portion, on the problematic topic of *labelling*. Stephanie Cain (Liverpool John Moores University, UK) introduced proceedings by evaluating whether the term 'Contemporary Gothic' can exist today, with streaming services increasing genre sub-categorisation for personalised viewing, and suggested this very hybridisation as enacting the Gothic mode in the digital age. Matt Denny (Warwick University, UK) then proposed that the recent critical term 'Post-Horror' – elevating metaphysical film tropes whilst ideologically debasing the physicality of more 'mainstream' Horror – acts as a veritable return of the terror/horror distinction in Gothic literary scholarship. Continuing in this vain of value-judgments, Amber Huckle (Bath Spa University, UK) concluded by applying labelling theory to the characters in *Let the Right One In*'s (2004) literary narrative, identifying the challenges of labelling in society.

The conference's second keynote, "Frankenstein and Monstrous Sexualities" from Marie Mulvey-Roberts (University of the West of England, UK), took place that afternoon, examining some of *Frankenstein*'s incarnations in film and artwork – from the increasingly fascinating to the downright bizarre – which use the novel's themes and motifs as a means of exploring deviant sexualities; the trailer for the film *Frankenhooker* (1990) being a particularly amusing addition. The examination that followed of the novel's frontice piece – with its potentially homoerotic imagery – provided a new and original premise upon which to read the novel queerly.

The day ended with a final session on "The United States: Gender and Sexuality" in American fiction, tying in nicely with the keynote. Firstly, Lawrence Mullen (Arcadia University, UK) discussed how Edgar Allen Poe's narratives, including "Eleanora" (1842) and "Berenice" (1835), effectively dismantle gender binaries and assumed heteronormative standards. Sarah Cullen (Trinity College, Dublin, Ireland) then presented how the 'nightscape' in women's short stories offers a liberating space for female kin networks beyond the rigid boundaries of the daylight world. This was rounded off with Robert Lloyd (Cardiff University, UK) who investigated the dynamic of inclusion-exclusion which defines critical considerations of Shirley Jackson as a Gothic writer as well as a housewife. He proposed that this dynamic may in fact be integral to understanding her position within American Gothic, rather than her marginalisation; a point also made in, and well-linked with, Bernice M. Murphy's (Trinity College, Dublin, Ireland) final keynote.

The last day started with a session on "Weird Nature" with convergent papers on 'Dark Ecology' in Algernon Blackwood and Sarah Hull respectively. Henry Bartholomew (Exeter University, UK) firstly examined Blackwood's presentation of the natural world through the 'ghost story,' emphasising human's spectral 'solidarity' with the non-human which prefigures the disanthropocentric framework of dark ecology. Matthias Stephan (Aarhus University, Denmark) then examined the Gothic sensibility in *Haweswater* (2005) – which uses the real life event of the creation of Haweswater

Reservoir and the flooding of the village of Marsdale – as the land is eerily tied to the lives of the village's occupants. Laura Johnson (University of Manchester, UK) finished with an exceptional close-analysis of Atom Egoyan's film *Exotica* (1994) – complete with striking visuals – observing Canada's representation as an "in-between space," utilising the Gothic to write a history otherwise absent outside the cultural hegemony of the US; as well being a "pseudo-wilderness" linked to the primal nature of human and the nation's repressed history.

The next round of papers in "Reading the Gothic in Popular Children's Fiction" covered Gothic motifs and settings used in positive and transformative ways for its young protagonists. Nerea Unda (University of the Basque Country, Spain) discussed the subversive benevolence and protection of Gothic settings in the *Harry Potter* series (1997-2007), whilst Rebecca Lloyd (Falmouth University, UK) focused on Terry Pratchett's *The Amazing Maurice and his Educated Rodents* (2001), noting its parodic critique of anthropomorphism in literature, as well as animal mistreatment more broadly, with humans being the narrative's pervading threat. Samantha Landau (Showa Women's University, Japan) then presented on the duality of the 'Other Mother' witch-creature and uncanny 'Other House' setting which Gothicly symbolise the negative changes to the protagonist's family structure and economic situation in Neil Gaiman's *Coraline* (2008), as well as its American film adaptation (2009).

This preceded the closing address, given by Berthold Schoene, Head of Research and Knowledge Exchange in the Faculty of Arts and Humanities, which introduced Bernice M. Murphy's final keynote, "Arsenic in the Sugar Bowl: Shirley Jackson's Comeback and the Depiction of Dangerous Women in Contemporary Horror and the Gothic." Murphy brilliantly demonstrated how contemporary Horror films portraying the subjective, psychological instability of young women – such as *Black Swan* (2011) and *Stoker* (2013) – are indebted to Jackson's work as one of the leading Horror writers of our time. Furthermore, the hybridity of Jackson's gender and genre was evidenced in her (highly gendered) critical portrayal – and marginalisation – as a curiosity/celebrity. Known as a professional writer and a practicing witch, she was thus quite the Gothicised figure in and of herself.

"Women and Madness," was the subject of the conference's final panel, beginning with the Gothicisation of nervous disorder symptoms in Charlotte Brontë's *Villette* (1853), presented by Louise Benson James (University of Bristol, UK). The following papers both discussed "The Yellow Wallpaper," with Tomas Kolich (Charles University, Prague) first providing a fascinating reading in the context of the contemporary theory of decorative art and psychiatry, noting the hallucinatory, "optic horror" potential of wallpaper. Helen Pinsent (Dalhousie University, US) then postulated the text's ambiguous 'Jane' figure as a representation of the narrator's dual consciousness.

The conference concluded with an IGA Annual General Meeting and followed in style by a conference dinner at the Hilton Hotel. For some, the evening continued into the wee hours at the "GOTHIKA: A Gothic Vogue and Drag Extravaganza Club Night" at The Great Northern Warehouse. Overall, the conference and accompanying attractions provided an immensely rewarding experience, both personally and professionally, that I was honoured to have been a part of alongside friends

and mentors alike. An event of such scale that still managed to retain a wonderfully supportive and inspiring community atmosphere is not only a testament to the hosts, and the individuals that make up this flourishing field, but also an exceptional note upon which to begin my research as an incoming PhD student - at Manchester Metropolitan no less – with its renowned contribution and continued commitment to Gothic studies and specialism.

BIONOTE

Charlotte Gough is a PhD student at Manchester Metropolitan University, UK, specialising in masculinity, trauma, and Satanic-Panic in American Gothic cinema. Her research interests include the occult in popular culture and subjectivity, with an emphasis on gender and psychoanalytic theory, in Horror and Fantasy film.

PETROCULTURES 2018: TRANSITIONS (AUGUST 29 – SEPTEMBER 1, 2018)

Conference Report by Brent Ryan Bellamy

***Petrocultures 2018: Transitions*. University of Glasgow, Glasgow, UK, 29 August – 1 September 2018.**

How is energy – a generated and stored kinetic or electric burst – socially determined? Alternatively, how might a transition in the sources and resources we rely on for energy also *of necessity* be a transformation of the social and political landscape? These questions, future-oriented and wildly enticing, guided the recent meeting of the Petrocultures Research Cluster in Glasgow. Attending *Petrocultures 2018: Transitions* produced the most acute feelings of FOMO (fear of missing out) that I have yet experienced, academically or otherwise. Taking place over three days with an evening opening event, the conference welcomed two-hundred-and-twenty people from across disciplines and vocations. Laura Watts (University of Edinburgh, UK) gave the inaugural talk, "Beside the Ocean of Energy Future Time," which was followed by a public Town-Hall event "Life After Oil: Scotland and Transition" featuring Imre Szeman (University of Waterloo, Canada), Patrick Harvie (MSP/Co-convener, Scottish Green Party, UK), Claire Mack (CEO, Scottish Renewables, UK), Mary Church (Head of Campaigns, Friends of the Earth Scotland, UK), Gavin MacLeod-Little (University of Stirling, UK), and Hannah Imlach (Visual Artist, UK). Watts's talk took us to the Orkney Islands, opening the conference by showing what a wind- and wave-powered future might look like. The island generates so much excess energy that residents have nearly entirely switched to electric cars – the local ports in town don't charge anything for an electric charge. The Town-Hall conversation offered both grounded and theoretical notes about energy transition in Scotland and beyond, admirably setting the stage on which many an engaged conversation would proceed.

Throughout the conference there were five sessions happening at once. The organisers Janet Stewart (Durham University, UK), Rhys Williams (Glasgow University, UK), and Graeme Macdonald (University of Warwick, UK) produced an elegant solution to the problem of conference fatigue: each day featured a plenary talk immediately before lunch. While getting to catch up with conference-goers at these talks heightened my sense of missing so many incredible things, it added a crucial moment of gathering to the conference. My fears were alleviated as I caught up with others about their papers and panels in caffeine-accelerated conversation. These meetings also provided a chance to catch up with friends and acquaintances. Petrocultures has become as much a meeting that focuses on a particular problematic as it is a meeting of dear friends and colleagues, old and new. The conference's central focus was the challenge of imagining a socially and environmentally just energy transition from within a world thoroughly saturated by fossil fuels. In its enigmatic character, this problem requires, and thus produces, a close-knit community.

Jeff Diamanti (University of Amsterdam, Netherlands) gave the Thursday morning keynote "The Future of Dependency: Shell's Foresight and the Petrocultural Penumbra." It addressed the Shell Futures project spearheaded by Pierre Wack in the 1970s. Wack's approach, which earned him multiple honorifics in the oil industry, was to look past the numbers and extrapolate oil futures from his sense of major, contemporary political economic forces. Diamanti's talk untangled a thicket of mediations surrounding the emergence of our current oil regime. Diamanti offered a startling truth: "We never used as much energy as we have today – a descriptive sentence that for the next fifty years is set to remain true each time it is uttered." Diamanti attended to the unique challenges facing a critique of petroculture, as well as its particular capacity to move beyond simple denouncements of industry thinking, provocatively arguing that, as we think and enact energy transition, every tool for imagining the energy future can be learned from and, ultimately, repurposed.

The keynote lectures at subsequent moments were "'Oil was the hidden actor': Gender, Sexuality and Resource Imperialism in World Petro-fiction" by Sharae Deckard (University College Dublin, Ireland), "Melt/Rise: A Song of Flood and Ice" Dominic Boyer and Cymene Howe (both Rice University, USA), and "Cautionary Tales for the Anthropocene" by Renata Tyszczuk (University of Sheffield, UK). Deckard drew on two case studies – the Egyptian novelist Nawal el Saadawi's 1993 *Love in the Kingdom of Oil* and the Colombian novelist Laura Restrepo's 2001 *The Dark Bride* ("La Novia Oscura") – to argue that although gendered violence is intensified by the fossil regime, it ultimately precedes it. Boyer and Howe offered a compelling new global mapping project on melting ice and rising oceans that draws heavily on the oceanic sciences and understandings of how water moves around the planet. For instance, Reykjavik and Cape Town are hydrologically connected. What might such connections mean for the era of global warming? Finally, Tyszczuk offered a compellingly useful portmanteau: Anthropocenophobia. The term denotes "[a] fear of or anxiety about the Anthropocene – the new epoch of human making; also harboring a fear of the excessive deliberations about either human epochal prowess or human frailty" ("Anthropocenophobia," 2016). This type of feeling provides impetus for a conference such as Petrocultures where the focus is not so much on a thick description of the conjuncture as it is an aspirational struggle with the energy/ecology impasse. Along with these plenaries, the conference featured a screening: Miranda Pennell's *The Host: Oil, Empire and Family* (2015). Pennell's documentary essay achieves striking visual comparisons through smart editing. It shows continuities that would otherwise be obscured and uses discontinuities between visually congruent shots to provide commentary on empire, comparing, for instance, ancient Greek columns to carbon-belching smokestacks. Cutting from one archival document to another, the use of fade transitions set up linear juxtapositions otherwise unavailable to the audience.

On the first day of the conference, Caura Wood (York University, Canada) argued that the life of an oil well is built on fiction, suggesting that fracking is performative and reliant on "partial truths." Later, Danine Farquharson (Memorial University, Canada), Patricia Barkaskas (Indigenous Community Legal Clinic, Canada), and Derek Gladwin (University of British Columbia, Canada) offered a stellar panel on "Sites and Subjectivities of Energy Transition." Barkaskas spoke to the incommensurability of Indigenous worldviews with Canadian legal language and processes. Farquharson gave the most

succinct schematic description of transition I heard at the conference: a transition's beginnings are discernable, yet its endings are multi-modal and difficult to apprehend. Gladwin argued for the urgency of teaching energy literacy alongside digital literacy. Elsewhere Mark Simpson (University of Alberta, Canada) and Imre Szeman suggested in their co-presented paper that when we describe the 'stuckness' of impasse we perpetuate its deadlock. In a nigh-Derridean formulation, they urged us to rethink the temporality of transition as unfolding in the *now* and the *next*. Bob Johnson (National University, USA) and Rhys Williams provided conceptual overviews of literary genre as it might relate to energy futures (and presents). Where Johnson offered an enumerated approach to the energy unconscious, Williams developed a schematic overview of entwined energy-futures genres. I sketched out a rough semiotic square while Williams spoke (see figure 1).

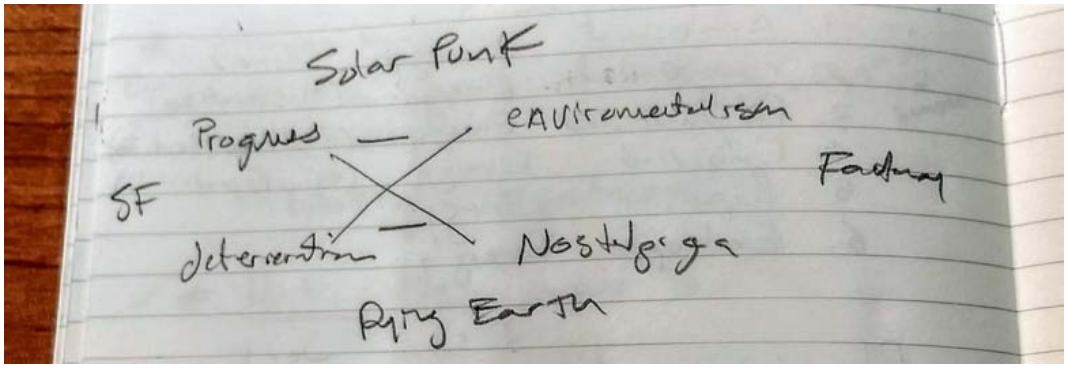
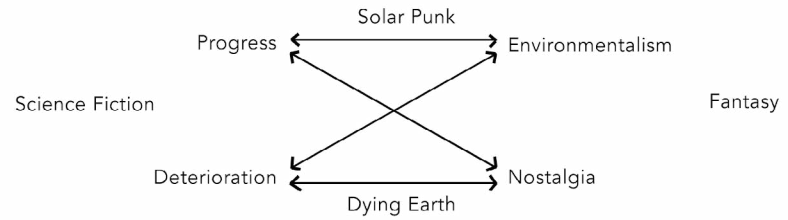


Figure 1: Conference Notes

To reproduce it poorly here:



Williams' talk inspired my mapping of the way progress and nostalgia are overdetermined by the relationship between environmentalism and deterioration. The combinations of these tendencies generate four positions which roughly correspond with particular genres: Science Fiction is informed by a combination of progress and deterioration, while Fantasy draws on environmentalism and nostalgia; the Dying Earth genre mixes deterioration and nostalgic longing, while the preferred mode of writing – Solar Punk – combines progress and environmentalism, thus becoming the champion of William's talk. These overdetermined concepts are my own summary of Williams' positions as I see them reflected through the generic categories discussed. These diagrams are as much as about getting things wrong, as getting them right: this approach to the generic field can make it easy to

produce illustrative examples of texts and their relationships. Jack Vance for instance might offer a fruitful site to consider failed transitions, while a bounded Space Opera, such as James S.A. Corey's *The Expanse* (2011-present), sits uneasily within Williams' argument for Solar Punk. Neither am I certain where I might place something in the vein of N.K. Jemisin's magisterial *Broken Earth* Trilogy (2015-2017).

The theme of transitions lends itself so wonderfully to futures thinking. If one wanted to (and one didn't have any other obligations), one could have easily attended only presentations on speculative writing, the fantastic, and energy futures. I saw papers by Rob Kiely (Independent Scholar, UK) on Flann O'Brien's satirical peat-scooping trains, Reuben Martens (Ghent University, Belgium) on Steampunk's storyworld incongruities, Sara Crosby (Ohio State University, USA) on Hollywood's vexed representations of Cajuns, Andrew Milner (Monash University, Australia) on Kim Stanley Robinson's life's work, Chris Pak (Swansea University, UK) on oil stories in the SF pulps, Toby Neilson (University of Glasgow, UK) on glacial time in *Interstellar* (2014) and *Arrival* (2016), Rut Elliot Bloomqvist (University of Gothenburg, Sweden) on fictional and non-fictional modes of imagining the climate future, Josefin Wangel (Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences, Sweden) on the efficacy of science fictional extrapolation, Thomas Lubek (University of York, UK) on Octavia Butler's *Kindred* (1979) as a novel that works through the complexly interwoven energy regimes of slavery and fossil fuels, and Fiona Polack (Memorial University of Newfoundland, Canada) on how oil rigs might be reconsidered for a post-fossil fuel world. This long list is meant to produce a sense of what it was like to be immersed in the conference. Returning to my fear of missing out, I did not see papers by Daniel Worden (Rochester Institute of Technology, USA) on the energy unconscious of superheroes, by Jennifer Wenzel (Columbia University, USA) on the utopian imaginary of China Miéville's 2011 story "Covehithe," by Jessie Beier, Natalie Loveless, and Sheena Wilson (all University of Alberta, Canada and members of the Just Powers research project) on "Art, Ecology, Energy, and Speculative Energy Futures," as well as papers on John Wyndham by Jeremy Strong (University of Manitoba, Canada) and David Mitchell by Bradon Smith (University of Bristol, UK). As the conversations about transition spilled out into the night, I did get the chance to hear Smith playing fiddle at the Ben Nevis pub. Thinking transition is an act of radical imaginative worldbuilding, and the cèilidh tradition certainly has a place in it.

I need to mention the posters that helped direct us around campus and advertised the Town-Hall event, the t-shirts worn by the conference volunteers, our stylised name badges, the conference programme, and the digital booklet containing all the abstracts and presenter biographies. Sing Yun Lee (artist and designer, UK) produced the design: a colourful transition from the black Petroculture logo oil droplet into a chromatic slick of water-based acrylic colour that swirls across the cover of the program. Oil has an aesthetic beauty. It also promises so much. The vibrant images of yellow, peach, and aquamarine contrast with the black to draw the eye towards some future combination or dissolution of their form. These materials drew us together to think just where that future might be. The colour palette was also used within the design of the program so that each day was expressed with a different colour. It was as if we moved through the slick. In Lee's own words, "I wanted the artwork and the corresponding colour scheme of the design to reflect what I felt was the optimism

of the existence of the Petrocultures field, in the face of the hard realities and facts we have to parse. So, whilst the flow shapes were a nod to oil spills over water, I used colours that (I hope) gave a sense of change and motion, rather than a heavy industrial palette and static shapes" (personal correspondence). The print materials were produced with recycled paper stock, and the t-shirts were sourced from sustainable cotton (Earth Positive).

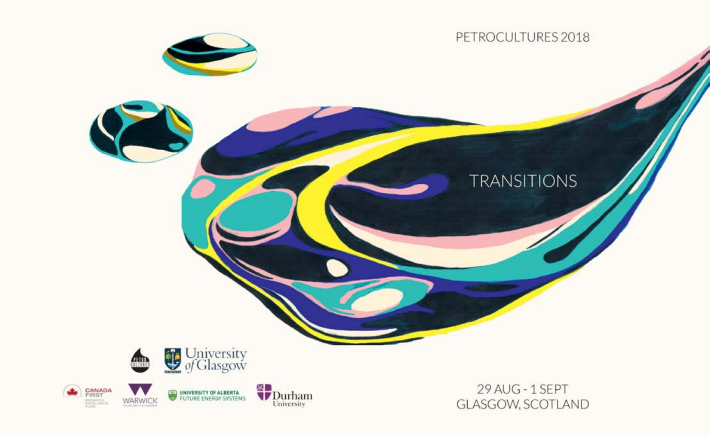


Figure 2: 'Petrocultures' Programme Wallet Cover (design & artwork by Sing Yun Lee)

I can live with a fear of missing out knowing that no one cut precisely the same path through the conference or the city, and that by sharing some of my highlights, I might be able to direct others towards the people they did not get to meet and the conversations waiting for them join. The greatest take away is that a just energy future is one we all deserve. Complex and difficult, its realisation is one we must shape *together*.

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BIONOTE

Brent Ryan Bellamy is an Assistant Professor of Speculative Literature (LTA) at Trent University, Canada, where he teaches courses on topics such as Science Fiction, Graphic Fiction, and Revolution! He has recently edited a special issue of *Science Fiction Studies* with Veronica Hollinger on *Climate Crisis* as well as *An Ecotopian Lexicon* (University of Minnesota Press 2019) with Matthew Schneider-Mayerson.

UTOPIAN ACTS (SEPTEMBER 1, 2018)

Conference Report by Amy Butt

***Utopian Acts 2018*. Birkbeck, University of London, UK, 1st September 2018**

It is not every conference that closes with the conveners sincerely imploring the attendees to "go forth and establish new governments," or words to that effect. Indeed, it hardly seems fair to call *Utopian Acts* a conference at all, a term which carries with it the implicit rules of academic engagement, replete with twenty-minute papers and rigid rows of seminar seating. Instead, *Utopian Acts*, organised by Katie Stone and Raphael Kabo (both Birkbeck, University of London, UK), described itself as a 'festival' and delivered a joyful mixture of events, opening up a variety of different modes of discussion and engagement. Insightful keynotes and conference papers were interwoven with workshops, film screenings, musical performances, and online activism, and were complimented by incidental acts of utopian kindness over cups of tea and party rings.

My day started early with a workshop on "The Art of Listening" by Tanaka Mhishi (Writer and Performer, UK) and Silke Grygier (Survivor Activist, UK), who aimed to help participants develop a personal code of best practice for navigating conversations about sexual abuse or harassment, based on a gentle and considerate approach to personal care and the generous assumption that we all want to support one another to the best of our ability. As well as carefully directing discussion, the workshop used freewriting exercises to establish a tone of openness and engagement which seemed to permeate the rest of the day.

This intimate space of disclosure was immediately broadened in the keynote talk by Davina Cooper (King's College London, UK), "Why Conceptual Futures Matter (And How to Take Them Up)." Cooper discussed the possible futures of two critical concepts: 'the state' and 'gender.' Cooper questioned how these concepts themselves can be transformed like "objects which can be whittled and reformed," but also how this transformation of meaning affects our conceptions of possible futures. By redrawing these concepts more widely – for example, by asking whether the state can be playful – Cooper argued for the utopian possibility inherent in unsettling and disorienting conceptual futures.

My subsequent role as chair for "Urban Utopianism," meant that I unfortunately missed concurrent panels on "Past, Future, Utopia" with Rose Simpson (Aberystwyth University, UK), Michael Robertson (The College of New Jersey, USA), and Helena Esse (Birkbeck, University of London, UK), "Queer Utopia and its Discontents" with Tom Dillon (Birkbeck, University of London, UK), Linda Stupart (Artist and Writer, UK), Sasha Myerson (Birkbeck, University of London, UK), and Rebecca Moses (London Queer Writers, UK), and a workshop on "Bystander Intervention" by Molly Ackhurst (Activist, UK) and Hollaback! London.

Dani Loader (University of Oxford, UK) opened "Urban Utopianism" with an account of her work restoring a 130-year-old cargo ship and the ongoing effort to transform it into community housing and a social centre. Loader's report of these changes was delivered with affection and grace, revelling in the performative surrealism of encounters with bureaucracy which appeared to have only strengthened the resolve of the team of volunteers. Undoubtedly utopian in its intent and potentially transformative as a fragment of realised utopian potential, this project appeared to have adhered to its own principles of cooperation and support throughout its development. This concern for wider notions of public good was reflected in Martin Greenwood's (University of Manchester, UK) talk "Push the Button and Wait for the Future: The Utopian/Utopicidal Pedagogy of UK Pedestrian Crossing." Greenwood questioned whether the crossing might be seen as a micro-site of utopian practice, a space which disrupts the movement of the city and a public fracture in neoliberalism. In tracing the history of the crossing and its political interpretation, Green concluded that to "wait against the marshalled haste" of the city might be a moment of utopian oppositional practice. These themes of flows and moments of respite were picked up by Anna Kamyshan (Artist and Architect, Russia) in her talk on the Moscow River. Kamyshan traced the role of the river throughout the city's history to its current crisis as a space of political vision which is "invisible for usage" by the urban populace. In response, the Moscow River Friends aim to re-establish the river as a common space by opening up discussions about multiple complex uses and forms of inhabitation. Across the papers there was a common resolve to acknowledge the role of communal spaces and collective action in carving out utopian moments within the urban environment.

Over the lunch break, the queer feminist punk witches from four-piece band Dream Nails ran a Punk zine-making workshop. While I didn't have the chance to make a zine, the strains of music from the workshop which cut across the buffet lunch and home-made cakes helped ensure that the discussions maintained an intensity which had been cultivated in the morning sessions. In the corner an art installation by Patti Maciesz (Artist and Writer, USA) entitled "Bill the Patriarchy" asked participants to log their timesheets for domestic and emotional labour, and its underlying premise provided a critical locus for conversations about the work required in all forms of utopian action.

After lunch the packed programme meant that I was forced to miss sessions on "The Radical Imagination" with Joan Haran (Cardiff University, UK) and Ibtisam Ahmed (University of Nottingham, UK), "Utopianism Now" with Kate Meakin (University of Sussex, UK), Chase Ledin (University of Edinburgh, UK), and Nicole Froio (University of York, UK), "Utopian Speculation" with Céline Keller (Independent Scholar and Filmmaker, Germany), Louisa Beck (Music Composer and Producer, Germany), Chelsea Haith (University of Oxford, UK), and Erin Andrews (Northwestern University, USA), "Decolonizing Utopia" with Rehnuma Sazzad (SOAS, University of London, UK) and Jan Etienne (Birkbeck, University of London, UK), and "Eco-utopianism" with Sheryl Medlicott (Bath Spa University, UK) and Kavita Thanki (Ulster University, UK), as well as a film screening of *Indigo Zoom: The Awakening* by Ayesha Tan Jones (Artist and Musician, UK).

Llew Watkins (Artist and Writer, UK) opened the workshop "Building Utopia" with a talk on his artistic work which engages in a reciprocal writing and sculptural practices, mutually informing

one another to create a complex spatial narrative. In the work "Dressing up Bars" Watkins invited an audience to view the pieces in an underground bunker, where the act of walking allowed them to undertake a narrative journey and return. Through these linked works Watkins invited us to consider the co-creation of character and context, and the utopian potential this mutability offers. This reflection on the social creation of space led into the workshop I led on feminist utopian architecture. We split into three groups, each considering a short extract from a work of feminist utopian Science Fiction, which was then constructed and enacted using the materials within the seminar room. The act of making and inhabiting these spaces allowed us to reflect on the power structures they created and the impact that this had on the types of activity and discussion which were possible within them. In exploring alternative reconfigurations of space we became more aware of the limitations established by existing spatial arrangements, and our collective power to disrupt this, however fleetingly.

In the following session Susan Bruce's (Keele University, UK) talk undertook a close reading of Thomas Moore's *Utopia* (1516), asking whether aspects of the Brexit crisis were pre-figured in this text. Bruce opened with an overview of the derogatory use of the term 'Utopia' on both sides of the Brexit debate, before looking at the island of Utopia as an analogy for British nationalism and the "wish fulfilment of the isolationist," against the first part of Moore's text, which can be read as reflecting the complexity and chaos of the European state. Bruce argued that by focusing on Utopia the island rather than *Utopia* the book, we overlook the potential for open provisionality offered by this dialectic. Eva Giraud (Keele University, UK) continued this reflection on the role of utopian thought in contemporary politics, questioning whether the closure associated with the utopian proposition might be avoided by focusing on the futures 'not' chosen. Citing Thom van Dooren, Giraud argued the need to "take a stand for some possible worlds and not others" and used this to examine how we might be accountable or responsible for the exclusions inherent in utopian acts. These talks were complimented by a zine-making workshop led by Molly Drummond (Keele University, UK) which asked us to reflect on utopia as an ongoing conversation, prompting a group discussion about the personal nature of utopian imagination and directed choice.

The concluding keynote by Lynne Segal (Birkbeck, University of London, UK), "Resources for Hope: Moments of Collective Joy," drew together the divergent strands of utopian thought and practice which had been developed over the course of the afternoon, with a carefully curated collage of historic moments of radical joy. Spanning from the Paris communes and May 1968 through to the more contemporary moments of the Arab Spring and Sisters Uncut, Segal celebrated the work of women radicals such as Ida B. Wells and Emma Goldman who embodied exuberance as a vital part of revolutionary action. Segal argued compellingly for the power of these acts of 'public happiness' which allow us to move outside personal concerns to engage collectively, made possible by refusing to disparage our collective interdependence. Recordings of both keynotes can be found on the Utopian Acts website at: www.utopia.ac/utopian-acts-2018-keynotes.

Feeling suitably rallied, we moved on to the conference after-party, which provided a platform for alternative modes of utopian performance, with stand-up comedy from Dominica

Duckworth (Comedian, UK) and a live music by YaYa Bones. These performances provided a fitting conclusion to such a rich and varied day which offered an appropriately complex insight into the myriad ways that utopian thought can be transformed into utopian action.

The sheer variety of responses throughout the day, as well as the critical rigour which permeated all the sessions, meant that *Utopian Acts* was able to support and sustain a diverse group of practitioners and participants. It practised a utopian openness in form as well as content, generating new opportunities for encounter and engagement which will continue to be developed in the follow-on events planned by Kabo and Stone, details of which be found at: www.utopia.ac.

BIONOTE

Amy Butt is an architect and lecturer in architecture at the University of Reading, UK. Her research explores the way the fictional worlds we construct influence and reflect the world we inhabit, writing about utopian thought and the imaginary in architecture through Science Fiction literature and film. Recent publications include "'Endless Forms, Vistas and Hues': Why Architects Should Read Science Fiction" in *ARQ* and "City Limits: Boundary Conditions and the Building-Cities of Science Fiction" in the *Open Library of the Humanities: Utopia at the Border.*

SUBLIME COGNITION: SCIENCE FICTION AND METAPHYSICS (SEPTEMBER 14-15, 2018)

Conference Report by Katie Stone

Sublime Cognition: Science Fiction and Metaphysics. **Birkbeck, University of London, UK, 14-15 September 2018**

The metaphysical affinities of Science Fiction (SF), from the proliferation of occultism in SF to the genre's endless fascination with the sublime, are often effaced within SF criticism. As Aren Roukema (Birkbeck, UK) indicated in his opening remarks, SF has often been defined in opposition to the mystical, the spiritual, or the numinous. This conference, then, can be understood as providing a welcome critical intervention into the field. The overwhelming sense articulated by the conference's speakers was that not only is SF brimming with texts which take the metaphysical as their subject, but study of the genre more broadly can be enriched if one thinks beyond the binary oppositions which dominate the critical conversation surrounding SF; oppositions between science and metaphysics, empiricism and religion, cognition, and the sublime.

Conference organisers Roukema, Rhodri Davies (Birkbeck, UK), and Francis Gene-Rowe (Royal Holloway, UK), who form the organisational body of the London Science Fiction Research Community (LSFRC), opened the conference on Friday morning. Their explanation of the rationale behind the conference provided a firm foundation for what was to be two days of lively discussion in which seemingly well-established terms, such as 'the sublime,' 'Science Fiction,' and indeed 'science' were subjected to the closest scrutiny. Davies also helpfully positioned the conference in relation to the monthly reading group, also organised by LSFRC, which this year shared the theme of 'Sublime Cognition.' The fact that this conference was the product of a year of discussion and thought upon the part of many of the delegates certainly contributed to both its welcoming atmosphere and to the depth and breadth of the conversations which developed throughout the following two days.

Sublime Cognition began in earnest with Roger Luckhurst's (Birkbeck, UK) keynote on Gareth Edwards's 2010 film *Monsters*. Luckhurst's talk centered upon a close reading of just five minutes of the film. However, despite the compact nature of his central text, his reading drew on an expansive array of critical tools, from Longinus's theory of the sublime, to Jeffrey Cohen's Monster Theory, and on to a detailed discussion of the film's socio-political context; centering upon the highly volatile zone surrounding the Mexican-US border. Rather than arguing that *Monsters* deserves a place within a canon of 'Sublime SF,' Luckhurst provided a history of modes of reading which integrate the sublime and the cognitive, thus setting the tone for the remainder of the conference. His audience was encouraged to see the sublime as a way to engage with the political urgencies and material concerns evoked by SF, rather than a way to escape from them.

The rest of the day's panels were organised in parallel to one another so, due to my own limitations in the physical world, I was only able to attend half of them. The first of these was entitled "The Metaphysics of Cyberpunk" and featured talks from Gwilym Eades (Royal Holloway, UK) and Sasha Myerson (Birkbeck, UK). The panel as a whole covered a wide range of texts from classics of the genre such as William Gibson's *Neuromancer* (1984), to the less well-known territory of Japanese television series, *Serial Experiments Lain* (1998). Following from Luckhurst's keynote, although Myerson did draw attention to the explicit references to divinity in the anime which was her subject, both speakers were principally concerned with the metaphysical as a critical tool of use in the exploration of the philosophical (Eades) and spatial (Myerson) implications of Cyberpunk. The relationship of cyberspace to the metaphysical – as discussed by Myerson in her fascinating study of non-Cartesian space – was particularly illuminating and the discussion after the panel focused upon mind/body dualism as a foundational concept of both Cyberpunk and Western theology.

This panel was followed by "The Ineffable Encounter," which brought together Kerry Dodd's (Lancaster University, UK) research into the cosmic sublime with Evert Jan van Leeuwen's (Leiden University, Netherlands) study of transcendentalism in SF. By examining the metaphysical implications of looking into the depths of "unplumbed space" (H. P. Lovecraft) alongside Ralph Waldo Emerson's invisible eyeball, Dodd and Jan van Leeuwen's panel situated the sublime beyond the human. Although the cosmic and pastoral frameworks which their papers were respectively structured around initially appeared disparate, their shared concerns with a posthuman perspective, indebted to Object-Oriented Ontology, made for a cohesive panel. Meanwhile, Dodd's choice of texts with connections to the New Weird – M. John Harrison's *Kefahuchi Tract* trilogy (2002-2012) – suggested the genre-defying possibilities of 'Sublime Cognition' as a term which challenges definitions of SF that exclude the numinous subject of Weirdness.

Mattia Petricola's (University of Bologna, Italy) paper, "The Re-Enchantment of SF," which opened the following panel, offered perhaps the most direct engagement with the theme of 'Sublime Cognition.' His mapping of SF's two poles, which he associated with the transcendent and the immanent, provided a useful method for connecting the 'ineffable' subject matter of the previous panel to the perceived empiricism of hard SF. Farzad Mahootian's (New York University, USA) study of Stanislaw Lem's *GOLEM XIV* (1981), meanwhile, spoke interestingly to Petricola's theorisation of SF as cultural practice; demonstrating that a similar opposition, between pure intellect and physical reality, is at work both in current research into Artificial Intelligence and in Lem's depiction of said research.

One of the day's final panels included papers from Katie Stone (Birkbeck, UK) and Luke Jones (Cass School of Art, Architecture and Design, UK). Stone's paper focused upon the question of divine creation in SF. She explored the ways in which feminist SF writers have sought to challenge mainstream SF's valorisation of the singular, male, figure of the creator-scientist in favour of the plural, queer regenerations of the cyborg. Meanwhile, Jones's paper discussed Yevgeny Zamyatin's *We* (1924), with a particular emphasis on the doubled effect of the glass city in the novel. In

Jones's theory, glass promises both the practical benefit of transparency and the (perhaps sublime) distorted refractions which gave this panel its name of "Refracted Utopias." This was one of several papers delivered throughout the conference where the speaker's background was not in the study of literature, as Jones is an architect. This not only added to the freshness of his perspective, it demonstrated that the relevance of science-fictional metaphysics stretches far beyond the study of genre fiction.

SF's connection to seemingly non-science-fictional, material practice, discussed by Jones, was also stressed in the discussion session which ended the first day. Here Roukema, Davies, Eli Lee, and Stone provided perspectives on the connection between 'Cognition and the Sublime' in SF, with Lee's take on Ursula K. Le Guin's Taoism providing a helpfully concrete instance of how such a connection might be thought through. The ensuing discussion, in contrast to many of the papers throughout the day, dealt less with 'the sublime' as a philosophical concept and more with the practice of religion, science, and magic. While no consensus was reached, as is the nature of such a discussion, there were many helpful guidelines provided, including Mahootian's point that there is no such thing as a unified concept of 'science' and Yen Ooi's reminder that the opposition between religion and science, which underpinned much of the day's discussion, is a specifically Western construction. This was a helpful note on which to leave the first day of the conference in preparation to further challenge our conceptions of what is meant by 'Sublime Cognition' on the following day.

Returning on the second day, we all sat down to Helen De Cruz's (Oxford Brookes University, UK) keynote: "What Speculative Fiction Can Offer the Philosophy of Religion." De Cruz, whose background is in analytical philosophy, stressed the similarities between the work of SF writers and philosophers, both of whom are involved in asking 'what if' questions. This input, from someone outside the field of SF studies, served to widen the field of debate on the second day and prevent discussion from settling into the patterns SF critics have become so familiar with.

Following de Cruz's keynote, I attended the "Psychical Fringes" panel. From Amanda Pavani (Federal University of Minas Gerais, Brazil) and Rob Mayo's (Independent, UK) investigations of science fictional representations of mental and physical illness, to Glyn Morgan's (Independent, UK) research into Fantastic Holocaust narratives, this was a panel which pressed on the boundaries of what SF has been, as well as what it could become. Discussion after the panel focused on the negative sublime, the unspeakability of suffering, and the banality of evil, which made for lively debate, albeit related to very grim subject matter.

I was then lucky enough to chair a panel on "Occultural Science Fiction." This was comprised of three engaging papers on visual culture: Ethan Doyle White's (University College London, UK) on the television series *Twin Peaks* (1990-2017), Hallvard Haug's (Birkbeck, UK) on the comic book series *Injection* (2015-Present) and Dan Byrne-Smith's (University of the Arts London, UK) on the comic book series *Saga* (2012-present). While each paper offered a novel engagement with the relationship between SF and the occult, Byrne-Smith's paper – where audience members read from a slide show while the lights were turned down and he played on a synthesiser in the corner

while wearing a shiny purple shawl – was the most formally striking of the conference as a whole. Byrne-Smith's paper demonstrated that science-fictional ritual is something which scholars of SF actively participate in, as well as study, and his unusual presentation opened up possible ways of transforming those rituals.

The final panel of the day which I attended was dedicated to a single author: Philip K. Dick. Carrie Gooding (Independent, UK) convincingly argued for a reading of PKD as a "fictionalising philosopher," while Gene-Rowe – who had stepped in last minute due to the unfortunate absence of Terence Sawyers (Queen Margaret University, UK) – delivered a thought-provoking paper on the concepts of "Bad Fate and Apostolic Reading" in PKD's writing. Their papers, despite Gene-Rowe's apologies about hasty preparation, synthesised well and the resultant discussion, regarding the nature of time, fate, prophecy, and the possibility of revolutionary change, felt both philosophically and politically exciting.

The conference then came to a close with a roundtable featuring SF authors Justina Robson (UK), Jeff Noon (UK), and Professor Fiona Moore (Royal Holloway, UK). Jim Clarke (Coventry University, UK) ably chaired a conversation which touched on many of the themes raised throughout the conference through the lens of SF authorship. These writers' candour, knowledge of the field, and engagement with the idea of the sublime made for a discussion filled with both practical advice and moments where they spoke of "expressing the ineffable" (Robson) or writing "in the fissure" of the narrative machine (Noon). This combination – of the physical and metaphysical aspects of creating SF – brought the conference to a fitting close; ending with Robson's call to expand our understanding of both SF and the sublime as gendered discourses which privilege masculine perspectives.

All in all, "Sublime Cognition" offered two days of accomplished speakers working to expand our understanding of how the 'scientific' character of Science Fiction challenges, engages with, and stirs up its many and various metaphysical affinities. The sublime, negative, or otherwise, may have remained appropriately out of reach, but we were at least forced to acknowledge that, in SF, it is everywhere. Delegates were left eagerly anticipating future discussions regarding the continually evolving field of SF scholarship, as the conference concluded with the announcement of LSFRC's theme for the new year: "Networked Futures: Economics and (Re)Production in Science Fiction."

BIONOTE

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journal, *Dandelion*, and is now co-director of the London Science Fiction Research Community, although she was not involved in the organisation of the "Sublime Cognition" conference.

FICTION REVIEWS

THE TRACKS OF MY FEARS

Review by Jack Fennell

Ahmed, Saladin, writer. *Abbott*. Issues 1-5. Illustrated by Sami Kivelä, Jason Wordie, and Jim Campbell. Boom! Studios, 2018. Comic.

In 1972, Elena Abbott (simply "Abbott" to her associates) is the only black investigative reporter for the *Detroit Daily*, exposing crimes and corruption that the police, the underworld, and the white establishment would rather keep hidden. Her dogged pursuit of the truth has also made enemies of her newspaper's corporate owners, who have been steadily applying pressure on her editor to either rein her in or fire her.

However, Abbott's quest to uncover the truth also extends into less-mundane areas: years ago, her husband Samir was killed by an evil spiritual force known as "the Umbra" – not simply the embodiment of darkness or death, but a ravenous kind of anti-life seeking whatever ingress to our world it can find. Though few others believe her, Abbott is attuned to the Umbra's presence, and when dead bodies and mutilated animal corpses start showing up across Detroit, she realises that it has returned – this time with the assistance of a masked, knife-wielding murderer.

There are obvious shades of Carl Kolchak here – the original *Night Stalker* (1974-1975) that is, not the 2005 remake – as well as John Constantine and Fox Mulder, which writer/creator Saladin Ahmed acknowledges, explaining that: "It's a familiar story in genre, but *Abbott* was really inspired by an attempt to put a different sort of hero and setting at the centre of such a story" (24). Ahmed – himself a Detroit native – specifically chooses to set the story in Detroit in 1972, a time and place of unprecedented cultural change. At this moment in history, Detroit was already lumbering under the long-term effects of racially segregated urban planning and 'white flight.' The local economy was still suffering from the massive job losses of the 1960s; the automotive industry (from which the city took its nickname, 'Motor City' or 'Motown') had been dealt a number of severe body-blows from which it could not recover, and the economic situation would worsen further throughout the 1970s, particularly during the OPEC oil embargo of 1973 and the oil crisis of 1979. *Abbott* takes place just before the rise in gang-related violence and the heroin epidemic, and this lends a certain poignancy to the story: from one perspective, Elena Abbott is fighting for justice in a doomed town.

On the other hand, Detroit in 1972 was a city ripe with possibilities and cultural innovation. Black popular culture was once again poised to redefine coolness, with Detroit at the forefront of a thriving musical scene, and the following year would see the election of the city's first black mayor, Coleman Young. The spirit of what Quentin Tarantino called "the Black 1970s" is reflected in *Abbott*'s structure and style. Each chapter is named after a classic Motown song: "Just My Imagination" (1971) and "Ball of Confusion" (1971) by The Temptations; "Do Right Woman" (1967)

by the recently departed and sadly-missed Aretha Franklin; "Makes Me Wanna Holler," after a lyric from "Inner City Blues" (1971) by Marvin Gaye; and "Someday We'll Be Together" (1969) by The Supremes. Elsewhere, there are nods to the decade's 'blaxploitation' cinema – see, for instance, the scene in which a supporting character blows a monster's head off with a shotgun (with the sound effect given as "SHAKA BOOM"), remarking "I got y'all's message" in the following panel, deadpan and unperturbed.

So, Ahmed's mission is certainly accomplished in terms of setting: few, if any, stories of dogged investigators stumbling onto occult shenanigans have taken place against such a compelling backdrop. Abbott herself, likewise, is unlike any occult investigator before her. For a start, she is a black woman, which necessarily gives her a different outlook from most supernatural sleuths. Indeed, I got the distinct impression that her tangles with the Umbra are only marginally more dangerous than her daily confrontations with white officialdom and organised crime – there are white cops out there who really do not like her, following her report on a black teenager who was beaten to death in police custody, and she is warned about unseen, politically-connected gangsters who do not appreciate her investigations into their municipal construction contracts. A noteworthy aspect of the story is her engagement with the local black community: she investigates the disappearances of loved ones, keeps tabs on friends and family, and is known to almost everyone – this standing comes in handy when she needs access to information.

Abbott stands out from the crowd in other respects. One notable (though understated) aspect to her character is her sexuality – she has been married twice before, and she is still in contact with one ex-girlfriend that we know of. Ahmed does not dwell on Abbott's love-life in an exploitative way, though, and her romantic history is woven into her character and the plot. Her first husband, Samir, a mysterious man who described himself as being from Paris, Senegal, and "other places" (Chapter One), introduced her to the world of the occult and was killed by it soon after; her subsequent marriage to detective James Gratham never stood a chance because she was still haunted by the circumstances of Samir's death (though Abbott reckons Gratham's womanising was the proximate cause of their divorce). At some point, she also had an affair with Amelia Chee, whose Chinese-American upbringing initially inclined her to believe in Abbott's "ghost stories," and who is now one of Abbott's sources for underworld information. Amelia, much like James, has grown tired of hearing about the Umbra, and is frustrated by Abbott's internalised homophobia.

It seems trite and unnecessary to emphasise the point, but Abbott's role as an investigative journalist takes on additional importance in the present-day climate of media complicity in political corruption, where any attempt to speak truth to power is dismissed as 'fake news' and governments can get away with treating uncooperative reporters as enemies of the people. If one were cynical, one might say that an additional benefit of setting the series in 1972 is that back then, newspapers were still newspapers and the word 'journalist' still meant something.

The slogan for the series is "Evil thrives where truth hides," and every issue begins with the same quote from the late Wayne Barrett, whose own investigative reporting focused on people

such as Donald Trump, Rudy Giuliani, and Ed Koch: "Journalists are detectives for the people." Journalists bring things to light; thus, in a sense, their role as investigators is 'purer' than that of the police, private eyes, or other figures who might otherwise be cast as the protagonist in a story like this. In *Abbott*, Ahmed positions the journalist not just as a detective, but as a superhero: Abbott's superpower is, literally, 'bringing things to light,' as a prophesised saviour-figure who can wield light against the Umbra and its shadow-creatures. These abominations are brought to vivid life by the well-matched artist/colourist team of Sami Kivelä and Jason Wordie. Kivelä illustrates the characters and setting with clean, detailed, realistic line art, the better to underscore the traumatising weirdness of the shadow-monsters, which appear in snaking clouds of scratchy pen-strokes. Wordie does something similar, painting the world of everyday Detroit with watercolour ochres and greys before lashing out with vivid, oil-pastel purples for the Umbra. Line art and colour combine to particularly satisfying effect in the high-contrast blasts of Abbott brandishing a light-source.

Of course, everything has its flaws, and the weakest aspect of *Abbott* is Sebastian, an English hippie who runs an occult knick-knack store and, in true self-aggrandising Aquarian Age fashion, hints at being something far older and further-seeing than a mere mortal. An old friend of Samir's, his main function in the story is to provide the necessary exposition about the Umbra and its servants. As much as anything else in the story, however, he is an expression of its temporal setting: though the hippie peace-and-love era had come to a brutal end with the Manson Family murders and the Altamont Speedway Free Festival, its esoteric elements endured for years before being sanitised and repackaged as 'New Age' spirituality. Thankfully, his role in the story is limited, and there is no more need for him to appear in any future stories: now that Abbott knows the 'basics,' it will be much more enjoyable to see her figure out the occult side of things on her own.

The arc of this story is first and foremost about establishing Abbott as a protagonist and defining the parameters of her world and her community. Thus, the villain of the piece is by necessity a far less interesting character – bad enough to need putting down, but not memorable enough to steal the spotlight – but he does have a distinctive motive and *modus operandi*. Without wanting to give too much away, he is essentially a 'toxic fan': racist, sexist, obsessed with a particular range of cultural artefacts, demanding endless re-iterations of the same, and pontificating on the 'degeneracy' and 'weakness' of modernity despite having been sheltered from its hardships. While reading, I could not help but wonder how this series might be compared to other comics that fetishize the 'strength' of the ancient world.

To sum up, this is an excellent start to what will hopefully be a semi-regular urban fantasy comic series: Ahmed's scripting duties on Marvel's *Exiles* (2018-present) – among many other titles – will presumably keep him busy for the foreseeable future, but I look forward to seeing what will happen in the next *Abbott* volume, whenever that may arrive.

BIONOTE

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STILL SEARCHING: REVIEW OF *LOST MARS* (2018)

Review by Katie Stone

Ashley, Mike, editor. *Lost Mars: The Golden Age of the Red Planet*. The British Library, 2018. Short Story Anthology.

From H. G. Wells' "The Crystal Egg" (1897) to J. G. Ballard's "The Time Tombs" (1963), *Lost Mars* offers "a whistlestop tour" (9) of almost one hundred years of Science Fiction (SF) set on, or centrally concerned with, the "red planet." The short stories which Mike Ashley has collected in *Lost Mars* are vivid, engaging, and productive of a vast array of Martian imaginaries. Unfortunately, the editorial content is disappointing in comparison and readers are left with a somewhat confused anthology in which Mars's promise as an exciting stimulus for SF remains obscured.

The critical framework which Ashley utilises in his introduction to the collection is one of increasing familiarity and growing disillusionment. The argument which he puts forward is that the advances in astronomy and, ultimately, the establishment of government-funded space programmes in the twentieth century, brought travel to Mars into the realm of, increasingly mundane, possibility. Where in Wells's story the reader can only glimpse Mars, "as a child might peep upon a forbidden garden" (41), through the titular crystal egg, as early as 1933 did P. Schuyler Miller, in "The Forgotten Man of Space" depicted Mars as a mining colony, and by 1963 was Ballard writing of Mars as home to a derelict society of tomb robbers who earn their livelihoods by pillaging the graves of the now-extinct Martians.

The strength of the collection is in the diversity of responses to the planet that it provides. These range from studies of Martian/human communication in George C. Wallis' "The Great Sacrifice" (1903) and Stanley G. Weinbaum's "A Martian Odyssey" (1934), to harrowing contemplations of the potential exploitation of labour offered by an industrialised Mars, as seen in E. C. Tubb's "Without Bugles" (1952) or Walter M. Miller Jr.'s "Crucifixus Etiam" (1953). Even within these groupings difference flourishes. For example, Wallis' depiction of human communication with Mars is reserved to astronomical charts sent by the Martians to warn Earth of a meteor shower which could have disastrous consequences for both planets, while, in contrast, Weinbaum's "Odyssey" follows the playful "shenanigans" of an early explorer of Mars who attempts to speak with an emu-like Martian in "a language you have to make up as you go along" (134, 137).

This kind of diversity can also be located in the varying alterity with which Martians are presented in the collection. Although Mars may seem to grow closer as the collection progresses its inhabitants do not necessarily become more human: the collection ends with Ballard's protagonist

staring forlornly at the holographic projection of a Martian woman who died centuries ago and who is now "an empty skin" who denies any possibility for communication (302). The move from "planetary romance" to "harsh reality" which Ashley discusses in his introduction must therefore be understood as offering only one of the many potential models available to the reader of this collection, with some of the alternative readings directly undermining this supposedly linear progression (8).

Given the wild variation in these various authors' approaches to Mars, and the fact that Ashley describes the collection as "a selection of the more diverse science fiction that has been set on Mars" (8), it is deeply disappointing that this same interest in diversity was not evident during the process of selecting which writers' work to showcase. Marion Zimmer Bradley's contribution, "Measureless to Man" (1962), is the only entry by a female writer and Ashley has chosen to include no stories by people of colour or writers who identify as queer. His broad definition of the 'Golden Age' means that this omission cannot be justified via an appeal to an unavailability of material. For example, Ashley himself draws attention to Leigh Brackett as "the thinking-person's writer of planetary romance" in the 1940s (181); a decade from which none of the stories in *Lost Mars* hail. As the editor of such collections as *The Feminine Future: Early Science Fiction by Women Writers* (2015), in which he attempted to correct the "misconception … that until recently few women wrote science fiction" (1), Ashley seems well placed to draw attention to marginalised voices within science fiction. It is a shame, then, that *Lost Mars* fails to provide any remedy for this prevailing misconception about the field. A very cursory attempt at uncovering the work of other women writing during this lengthy 'Golden Age' reveals C. L. Moore's "Northwest Smith" stories, all of which are set on Mars, as an obvious example which could serve to redress the gender bias of the collection, but Ashley's encyclopedic knowledge of the field would have presumably provided examples from far more obscure authors who now, sadly, remain lost in the long and untold history of women's SF.

This is not, however, merely a question of representation for representation's sake. The inclusion of only one writer who is not a white man limits the anthology's range in far deeper ways. As has previously been noted, the theoretical framework which underpins Ashley's collection is that of astronomy, with his 'Golden Age' bookmarked by the observations of Mars undertaken by Giovanni Schiaparelli, which "leaked into the public domain" in 1882 (7), at one end, and the *Mariner 4* voyage of 1965, in which the first close-up photographs of the planet were taken, at the other. The assumption upon which this time frame is implemented is that Schiaparelli's discovery of the "canali" or 'channels' on Mars' surface cast Mars as a planet capable of supporting intelligent life while the *Mariner* mission "put an end to the centuries of speculation that there might have been life on Mars" (7). Despite the fact that Tubb and Miller Jr. depicted Mars as uninhabited a decade prematurely, according to Ashley's calculations, he remains confident in this direct connection between science and fiction, whereby astronomical discoveries are seen to determine the possible fictional responses to Mars.

I do not intend to suggest that the history of astronomy which Ashley provides is uninteresting. Certainly, the floating cities of W. S. Lach-Szyrma's "Letters from Mars" (1887) demonstrate an obvious debt to the popular mistranslation of Schiaparelli's 'canali' as 'canals'.

However, this astronomical framework is only of varying and often questionable relevance to the stories themselves. Indeed, it often serves to distract from the other potential critical lenses through which to read them, as seen in Ashley's cursory comments on the pressing ecocritical concerns of the collection - which stretch back as far as Lach-Szyrma's interest in Martian terraforming and clean energy production. The colonial implications of the collection's various mining colonies, never mind the Marxist critique raised by their concern with workers' rights, receive no mention at all.

This single-mindedness in Ashley's editorial approach, along with the racial and gender uniformity of the writers he has selected, can at least partially be ascribed to the binding definition of SF Ashley uses to justify his astronomical framework. In his introduction, which gives a history of Anglophone fiction about Mars, Ashley appears to view stories as "genuine science-fiction" to the extent that they are rooted "in as scientific a basis as contemporary knowledge allowed" (10). The idea that scientific discovery is tied directly and deterministically to the development of SF not only excludes any more fantastic responses to Mars, along with those of writers who might feel disenfranchised from the military-industrial space programme, it also woefully misrepresents the stories in this collection. For example, to cast Ray Bradbury's "Ylla" (1950) - in which he depicts the luxurious and strange lifestyles of his Martians, who spend their time vividly dreaming and eating the golden fruit which grows out of the walls of their crystalline palaces - as a response to developments in astrophysics in 1950 stretches the boundaries of credulity. Similarly, Bradley's disembodied Martians, whose mental stability has been variously impacted by centuries of inhabiting plants, seem to provide a very different function to the prediction of what life on Mars might 'really' be like which Ashley's framework suggests; one which photographic evidence of the planet's surface is unlikely to curb.

Lost Mars is a collection of excellent stories, some of which - such as Miller Jr.'s tale of a labourer who, due to Mars's lack of breathable atmosphere, has the choice either to continually suffocate himself to encourage his body to breathe or to allow his muscles to atrophy, meaning that he cannot speak unaided - will undoubtedly provoke powerful critical and affective reactions in their readers. However, although both Ashley's eye for a good story and his knowledge of the history of fiction about Mars as a response to astronomy are beyond question, the anthology's editorial material is essentially disappointing. Despite the many satisfying stories which Ashley has collected, one gets the impression that a further, more diverse, history of imaginings of the red planet is yet to be found.

BIONOTE

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THE SUN SETS ON MOON FICTION

Review by Tom Dillon

Ashley, Mike, editor. *Moonrise: The Golden Age of Lunar Adventure*. The British Library, 2018. Short Story Anthology.

From the ancient Greeks to modern America; from the Moon aliens in Japanese folk tales to Nintendo's lunar farming game *Harvest Moon* (1996); the Moon has provided fertile ground for storytelling throughout history. In *Moonrise*, Editor Mike Ashley introduces us to several excellent short stories involving the exploration of the Moon, with an informative and detailed introduction which seeks to place the predominantly twentieth-century stories within a longer history of the dreams of Moon exploration, stretching from the ancient world to the Moon landing. However, the stories are constricted rather than contextualised by the narrow focus on the scientific veracity of preceding texts which Ashley presents in the introduction. Rather than seeing the Moon as a complex and ambiguous symbol, reflecting a wide range of cultural meanings with social issues and desires projected onto a visible but unreachable heavenly body, the Moon for Ashley is a place to be understood and rationalised within a strictly limited Western canon and history.

Ashley begins his introduction discussing the meaning of the Moon over time. The Moon has universally fascinated humanity due to both its visibility and inaccessibility. This interest, Ashley argues, led scientists and writers to speculate about this celestial body and specifically how to reach it, culminating in the Moon landings in 1969. For Ashley, the period from around the beginning of the twentieth century through to the first steps on the Moon is to be considered 'The Golden Age.' The increasing accuracy of the imaginative voyages, based on up-to-date scientific data, in turn influenced scientific developments, bringing Moon exploration from fiction to fact.

The specific focus on scientific accuracy makes each of the stories forerunners of the Golden Age; or as Ashley puts it, each story is "a rung on a ladder" which took our "imagination and later humans to the Moon" (30). This scientific veracity then becomes of the highest importance and the unscientific must be excised or denigrated so that the 'ladder' can be seen more clearly. For instance, Johannes Kepler's scientific rigour in his description of the Moon is for Ashley "unfortunately […] wrapped up in a story of daemons and witchcraft" (14). Another text is let down as "unfortunately the rest of the work is a satire," while the first use of anti-gravity in a lunar adventure is, apart from this innovative scientific speculation, "unfortunately, […] a lunar travelogue and satire" (21). For Ashley, Fantasy, satire, and travelogue, are embarrassing deviations from the straight scientific ladder (or should I say space-rocket) to the Moon.

Such a restrictive history severely limits both the texts discussed but also the breadth of the

canon itself. For example, as Darko Suvin and John Rider have shown, the travelogue and satire are genres central to the development of Science Fiction (SF), while the distinction between Fantasy and SF pre-twentieth century has been increasingly questioned. These forerunners are themselves taken from a strictly Western tradition. If the Moon has been a catalyst for the imagination the world over as Ashley suggests, why are there only white Western writers discussed and anthologised? One of the earliest recorded Japanese folk tales, "The Tale of the Bamboo Cutter," includes Moon entities descending to the earth (the first instance of extra-terrestrials visiting our planet), while Huangjian Diasou's *Tales of the Moon Colony* (1905), an important landmark in Chinese SF, though ending before the promised visit to the Moon, is, from the title, clearly the aim of the narrative. The stories of *Moonrise* are presented in no discernible order, except perhaps starting and ending with the strongest: "Dead Center" (1954) by Judith Merril, and "The Sentinel" (1951) by Arthur C. Clarke. There is roughly a fifty percent split between American and British stories, ranging over a seventy-year period from the earliest published in 1894 ("Sunrise on the Moon" by John Munroe) to 1963 ("After a Judgement Day" by Edmund Hamilton).

Reading the American stories, I was struck not by the utopian impulse to reach the Moon but by the sense of personal loss in pursuit of national power and prestige, which comes with space exploration. For instance, in the excellent "Dead Center," the Moon is a complex symbol of family tragedy. Jock Kruger, the first man on the Moon, crash lands and Ruth, his wife and designer of the rocket, blames herself for his death. Ruth, convinced as a child of the reality of the "man in the moon" (46), is overcome by the irony that her husband has become that very myth, while her son Toby is haunted by the idea that his mother will also go to the Moon and leave him behind on Earth. The rocket is described on a number of occasions as a "beast" (35, 41), imbuing the scientific similitude of the story with a disquieting fantastic, foreshadowing the trauma of the narrative. In "Whatever Gods There Be" (1961) by Gordon R. Dickson, Major Greene sacrifices himself on the Moon to save a crashed space ship, and in "After a Judgement Day" (1963) by Edmund Hamilton, Martinsen and Ellam remain on the Moon, desolate and lonely, after the Earth is overcome by a plague.

At the heart of the British stories is the Moon as a symbol of empire. They move from George Griffith's techno superiority in "A Visit to the Moon" (1901) in which Lord Redgrave and his new wife, Zaidie, literally have a 'honeymoon,' through Wells satirical critique of colonialism in *The First Men in the Moon* (1901) – the narrator Bedford remarks to Cavor on reaching their destination "We must annex this Moon" (78) – to a post-imperial wish fulfilment. In John Wyndham's "Idiot's Delight," (1958) the British build a Moon base in order not to be seen as "dwindling into their sunset" in the face of declining power in the era of the Cold War (289). In "The Sentinel" by Clarke, the narrative projects post-imperial melancholy from Britain onto the Moon. The narrator Wilson will not at first "take the final humiliating plunge" (344), in acknowledging that humanity (read Britain) is inferior technologically to an alien race that builds a watchtower on the Moon to keep an eye on Earth (here perhaps read cold war superpowers the US or USSR).

In these stories then, the Moon emerges as a symbol of national prestige, personal tragedy, satire, colonialism, and decline, each story using the Moon as a mirror to a particular desire or

anxiety. Ashley's introduction, though informative, does not do the stories justice, as it transforms the universality of the Moon, a common repository of symbolism accessible everywhere and by anyone, into one owned by a single tradition for a singular aim.

BIONOTE

Tom Dillon is a PhD candidate at Birkbeck University, UK, researching the links between the Science Fiction 'New Wave' in the UK during the 1960s and the wider literary and artistic culture. His essay '"Jerry was oscillating badly": Gender and Sexuality in New Worlds Magazine' was published in *Science Fiction Studies* in 2018.

JURASSIC WORLD: FALLEN KINGDOM: THE DANGERS OF CLONING REVEALED

Review by Rhianon Jones

Bayona, J. A. director. *Jurassic World: Fallen Kingdom*. Performance by Bryce Dallas Howard, Chris Pratt, Rafe Spall, Justice Smith, Universal Pictures, 2018. Film.

Whenever a sequel is announced to a beloved movie people are often nervous: it is difficult to name a movie franchise that has been consistently excellent. Whilst *Jurassic Park* (1993) is a much-loved classic, the other films in the series met with varying degrees of success and failure. Therefore, it was understandable if people were dubious when, fourteen years after *Jurassic Park III* (2001), the franchise was once again rebooted.

Jurassic Park: Fallen Kingdom in fact revisits the premise of the second movie *The Lost Word: Jurassic Park* (1997): greed has outstripped common sense and dinosaurs have been shipped to the mainland. Once there they, predictably, escape confinement to wreak havoc on the world. However, unlike *The Lost World,* the dinosaurs are not recaptured. As the end credits roll the audience are presented with a montage of the creatures descending upon civilization: a lion stands off against a T-Rex, a velociraptor mounts the brow of a hill overlooking a town, and a mosasaurus gobbles up surfers. All the while we are treated to more of Dr Ian Malcolm's (Jeff Goldblum reprising the role as a cameo) apocalyptically cautionary words: "These creatures were here before us, and if we're not careful they'll be here after […] We are entering a new era: welcome to Jurassic World." The message is clear: mankind will be their own downfall if they continue to play God. Of course, this has been the parting message of many Science Fiction films before this one. Given that the consistent message of the franchise has been that life finds a way and nature cannot be contained, it is a wonder it took it this long to reach this inevitable conclusion.

Such call backs to the earlier films occur throughout both this and its predecessor, *Jurassic World* (2015), and whilst normally such acknowledgement of its own history would be pleasing, in this instance they are somewhat clumsy and predictable. The shot of a wing mirror – a classic Spielberg technique of filming reflections – inelegantly evokes that iconic moment in *Jurassic Park.* Of course, there is a child, Maisie (Isabella Sermon), in this incarnation the granddaughter of Dr Hammond's business partner Sir Benjamin Lockwood (James Cromwell). Maisie uses an old dumbwaiter to secretly navigate the Gothic mansion where she lives and where the dinosaurs are being held. There are so many shots of her escaping into the lift and pulling the door down behind her that it is only a matter of time before we watch her slam that door shut milliseconds before a dinosaur crashes into it. When that moment finally arrives, audience expectation has been built so high that there is some sense of gratification. This is one of the more successful references in the film.

Ultimately, self-referential moments such as these should be fun and enjoyable – think the most recent *Star Wars* (1977-present) movies or the parody of popular buddy cop action movies in *Hot Fuzz* (2007) – but in this instance these fail to hit the mark. In fact, this is the central problem of these later movies. One of the most compelling things about *Jurassic World* was attempting to answer the question: are the filmmakers joking? The movie seemed trapped in the midst of an identity crisis, unsure whether it was a straightforward action film or a postmodern meta-parody of one. This may have been inadvertent but attempting to decide whether the appropriate response was 'did they just do that?' or 'did they just do that!' helped sustain the viewer's interest. Behind this first instalment of the reboot there seemed to be an unrealised ambition: to elevate B-movie style and format to A-movie blockbuster status. Somewhere someone understood that the only way to make a successful movie in an already very tired franchise is to make a camp classic: one that is knowing, funny, sentimental, exaggerated, and kitsch. Except, it does not appear brave enough to fully realise its own aspirations.

At least, this is how it felt watching *Jurassic World*. Moments such as when Chris Pratt's US Navy Veteran Owen Grady rides out with the velociraptors on his motorcycle, or when he dramatically sweeps Bryce Dallas Howard's character, Claire Dearing, into a Hollywood kiss moments after she shoots a pteradon out of the sky, should have been comical and delighted the viewer. Howard's mock performance of a 'strong' woman – rolling up her sleeves, tying her shirt around her midriff, and standing hands on hips as preparation for rescuing her nephews from dinosaurs run amok – ought to have been pleasing in its self-awareness. Lines such as: "Who's the alpha? / You're looking at him kid" or "Your boyfriend's a badass," had the potential to be quotable classics. Yet the film consistently fell short. One could see the flickering of dawning apperception behind the monster's eyes, but it could not quite get there. In the end, audiences were left with an unsatisfactory hybrid – a metaphor for the movie's Indominus Rex, perhaps?

This film lurched from one ludicrous moment to the next seemingly unsure whether – or when – it was serious or playing for laughs. Yet, the follow-up has hit exactly the same tone as the first, suggesting that it was not an accident or if it was it is something they have tried to replicate. Regrettably, this film seems even less successful than the one before it, possibly because it has managed to capture exactly the same half-hearted attempts at postmodern humour and meta-narrative. *Fallen Kingdom* is filled with similar moments that are even less satisfying. When Owen Grady somersaults through the open mouth of a T-Rex it should be thrilling and hilarious. When the team evacuate the island, which is being wrecked by an exploding volcano, they leave behind a brachiosaurus crying after them for help, for its mate they are carrying to safety, crying in terror. It should be tragi-comic: theatrically rinsed for every last drop of sentimentality. But instead these moments feel flat, tired, and uninspiring. Owen's back-story of his close bond with the velociraptor Blue could be comedic, but is not.

If this was intentional it would seem strange not to more fully embrace a postmodern angle given the success of films such as *The Avengers* (2012) or even *Guardians of The Galaxy* (2014), starring Chris Pratt delivering a remarkably similar performance. Is the reason as prosaic as

concern over its box office success? Were they concerned that such humour would not translate well to international audiences? Either way, both *Jurassic World* and *Fallen Kingdom*, feel like a lost opportunity: a lesson in what might have been, rather than what was.

Nevertheless, the film is not entirely without merit and there are some excellent turns from the supporting actors including Geraldine Chaplin, as Iris, Maisie's nanny, and James Cromwell as Benjamin Lockwood. There is a first-rate performance from Rafe Spall, who is virtually unrecognisable as Eli Mills, Lockwood's formerly idealistic assistant turned avaricious traitor. Spall delivers one of the more memorable performances of the movie as a character who seems to have abandoned any sense of morals and ethics in favour of personal gain. Meanwhile, it is gratifying to see Toby Jones on the big screen, whose turn as the amoral arms dealer selling the creatures off to the highest bidder is pleasing. Jones seems to relish the opportunity to play someone utterly repellent, and is a far cry from his usual mild mannered Englishman roles.

Overall if you are a fan of this movie's predecessor it is likely you will enjoy this. Yet, it is surprising that this movie grossed as much at the box office as it did and questionable whom it might have satisfied. For those people who like straight up action movies its moments of light-heartedness might seem annoying. Similarly, those audience members who wanted something altogether less serious might have been frustrated by the film's inability to fully embrace this aspect. Yet, it grossed $1.3 billion worldwide, suggesting that it was more successful at walking this fine line than given credit for here.

BIONOTE

Rhianon Jones is an Associate Lecturer of Literature at Lancaster University, UK. Rhianon is currently finishing her PhD thesis on the fin-de-siècle grotesque in popular music. Her research interests include the Gothic and the grotesque in film and literature.

"AT THE END OF THE WORLD, KINDNESS AND LOVE WERE REQUIRED": MORALITY BEYOND THE GODS IN *STARLESS*

Review by Kaja Franck

Carey, Jacqueline. *Starless.* Tor, 2018. Novel.

Jacqueline Carey is a prodigious Fantasy writer: she has published standalone novels and multiple series, all notable for their powerful female characters and richly developed worlds. Her most recent novel, *Starless*, is a standalone Fantasy novel, suitable for adult and young adult readers alike. As the title suggests, *Starless* is set beneath a night sky that lacks the familiar gleam of stars. Instead Carey creates a world in which stars are the children of Zar the Sun and his three wives, the moons: Bright, Dark, and Wandering. Much like the fallen angels in Carey's earlier series, the Kushiel's *Legacy* trilogies, starting with *Kushiel's Dart* (2001), the stars displease their father and are thrown from heaven. Falling to earth, they become gods shaped by the countries in which they fall and the people who praise them. Unbeknownst to Zar, the Wandering Moon had secretly become pregnant. Following the birth, her child, Miasmus, is also expelled despite having done nothing wrong. Prophecy dictates that Miasmus will bring about the end of the world. The protagonist of the novel is Khai, one of the humans chosen by a god. Khai's desert nation of Zarkhoum is ruled over by the House of the Ageless, also known as the Sun-Blessed. Chosen by Parkhun the Scouring Wind, Khai is born during a lunar eclipse. This marks him as the shadow-twin of the Sun-Blessed princess born on the same day, Zariya. Carey's narrative follows Khai's training with the Brotherhood of Pahrkun as a warrior, his meeting with Zariya and their journey, along with other chosen individuals, to overcome Miasmus and prevent the end of the world. The writing is rich and lush; landscapes appear, mirage-like, in front of the reader. The descriptions of the desert and experience of Pahrkun the Scouring Wind are particularly evocative. Thirst parches the throat of the reader as they travel alongside Khai into the desert to face the god by whom he has been chosen. However, the pace of the narrative does suffer a little towards the end of the novel and the final sections feel rushed. The plot takes over from the textual world, leaving the characterisation and imagery weakened. Thus the death of key characters lacks the emotional punch that would have strengthened the complex morality of Carey's narrative. This undermines the time taken in the first third, "Desert," to build a complete and complex world.

Carey's previous series feature strong female protagonists and plenty of queer representation. *Starless* does not deviate from this: Khai is a potent warrior, defined by his ability to kill. Khai is also a *bhazim*, a girl brought up as a boy. It is not until he is twelve that Khai discovers this. The novel refers to Khai using masculine pronouns, something which is preferred by him and respected by Zariya. Khai's experience of being able to present as both male and female, and the sense of

disconnection from his body is threaded throughout the narrative without becoming the defining aspect of his personality. More central is his relationship with Zariya: connected through fate, their relationship is beautiful and heart-breaking. Friendship, love and duty are intertwined powerfully as they cross myriad landscapes and grow into individuals who learn to choose their own paths. Khai's physical strength is paralleled with Zariya's disability; due to an illness in her youth, Zariya is unable to walk without canes and lung-damage weakens her. Carey does not diminish the reality of this: at one point, Khai has to aid her in using the toilet and her daily ablutions. Yet, through Zariya's wit, intelligence, and compassion, she often seems stronger and more capable then Khai. These dual protagonists are fully imagined, reflecting the challenges of their childhoods and their experiences impact on the narrative rather than being depicted as mere device. The depiction of Khai's gender does allow for Carey to broach issues of gender fluidity. There are however limits to these attempts to dismantle gender binaries. The male sea-wyrm, a being in the guise of a traditional sea monster, can be distinguished by his size – he is larger, following normative depictions of male and female. During a scene in which one of the men in the fated crew, standing against Miasmus, needs emotional comfort, the other men take him to the pub whilst the female members stay in their rooms. Yet, small slippages aside, the inclusion of characters who do not confirm to normative tropes is heartening. Carey imbues her characters with humour, compassion, and humanity regardless of species.

As the novel progresses, what differentiates it from more formal high Fantasy is humour. Subtle at first, the wit of certain characters cuts acerbically through the talk of prophecies, gods, and honour. Khai's first companions in the Brotherhood of Parkhun embody this honour and make clear the perceived nobility of being a warrior. They are quickly replaced by the arrival of Brother Yarit, a thief who does not want to be in a desert training for a war that may never come, which is vocalised through his prodigious use of swearwords. Knowledgeable in underhand tactics, Yarit becomes the means by which Khai comes to understand that there is "honour beyond honour," a term used throughout the novel. This concept allows Carey to disengage from over worn depictions of warriors as scions of duty – even at the expense of common sense. Humour is employed at these points to clarify this position, softening the formalities of the world of *Starless* and bringing it closer to the reader.

The use of humour is echoed in moments of familiarity which imbue Carey's fantastical landscape. These ground the narrative and open it to more complex scrutiny. The names of gods and animals are achingly familiar. Some draw to mind memories of other childhood stories: one of the many fallen stars, Luhdo the Loud, who gifts his chosen saviour with the ability to create sound waves that crack rocks, is surely a reference to Ludo the friendly, hairy 'creature' from *Labyrinth* (1986). And, though the sharks have wings, Khai learns about crows "-a crow being a Therinian bird of some sort" (377). Khai, a desert dweller, has not seen a crow which are native to other lands. It is a wry moment of humour in which a bird familiar to the reader is made unfamiliar, indeed foreign, through the eyes of the central protagonist. This encapsulates Carey's intelligent engagement with cultural difference through the fantastic. These echoes and similarities do not come across as lazy writing. Instead, they suggest a self-awareness and playfulness that enriches the tone of the text. The Therinians, who hail from Northern climes, engage in language-play and understatement which

can only be a parody of British 'banter.' In certain cases, these allusions reinforce the reading of the text. Structural aspects of the novel are suggestive of other narratives: the final scenes are reminiscent of Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* (1954-1955) and the destruction of the ring. Following this, the return of Miasmus, the wrongly exiled star, to the heavens recalls the tale of the Prodigal Son (*Luke*, 15:11-32). Khai interprets these events: this as for "failing to destroy the world, Miasmus was rewarded with a homecoming to the heavens from which he had unjustly banished" (561). Though the majority of the world has been saved, there is no clear sense of a battle won. All the stars return to the sky leaving the world godless and with no clearer sense of the divine plan laid out by the prophecy. It is not clear to Khai why Miasmus should be accepted back into the heavens given their many sins. The similarities with the Prodigal Son are subtle enough that the critique of religion is not a nihilistic rejection of all belief. Khai and Zariya are marked by the gods themselves, meeting them face to face. The evidence of the divine is not enough, however, to offer absolute clarity. The gods, much like stars, are incomprehensible even when we can see them before us: seeing may be believing but it does not lead to understanding. Moreover, the choice of which god you follow is an accident of birth predicated by geography rather than personal faith. Carey conforms to the god-bedecked worlds of Fantasy but unlike Tolkien's Christian-infused novels, she is more subversive in her depiction of gods and morality. In this way, and with the inclusion of diverse characters, it points to the way in which Fantasy is, and must be, shaped by the society in which it is created.

BIONOTE

Kaja Franck was awarded her PhD in 2017 in UK. Her thesis looked at the literary werewolf as an ecoGothic monster, concentrating on the relationship between wilderness, wolves, and werewolves, and how language is used to demarcate animal alterity. She is part of the 'Open Graves, Open Minds' research project and has published on the depiction of wolves and werewolves in Dracula and young adult fiction. She also edited the online journal *Revenant*'s special edition on werewolves.

THE HUMANITY OF ROBOTS

Review by Michael Hollows

Cargill, C. Robert. *Sea of Rust*. Gollancz, 2017. Novel.

One of the major tropes of Science Fiction (SF) is to ask what it really means to be human. Over the history of the genre it has been asked and discussed in many ways, yet it may seem unusual to use robots as the device with which to do this. Often cast as the villains in other stories, the robots in *Sea of Rust* are cast as both protagonists and antagonists. To many a story about robots may seem like simple entertainment, a manifestation of humankind's love of machines, yet the themes and ideas run far deeper in *Sea of Rust*, which is C. Robert Cargill's third novel, and the first of their work that could be described as Science Fiction rather than Fantasy. Along with three Fantasy novels and short stories, they have also written screenplays and comics, such as Marvel's *Doctor Strange*.

Sea of Rust may be described as a Dystopian or Post-Apocalyptic novel, and it flips the robot apocalypse myth by setting the novel after the end of the world as we know it. Human life is gone from the face of the planet, and Cargill tells us early on that the last human died some fifteen years prior to the start of the novel. All that is left are the robots, or artificial intelligences, that humanity built to serve their needs. The artificial intelligences went to war with the humans in order to gain their freedom, wiping out the human race, but despite the lack of humans to serve, they continue their existence trying to find some purpose. The inversion of the robots from antagonist to protagonist is an interesting one, and by removing humans from the story completely, it almost removes from the reader's mind any concern for humanity. This gives the reader a very interesting perspective: that of the outsider.

The title itself refers to the two-hundred mile stretch of desert between Michigan and Ohio in the United States, which forms the post-apocalyptic setting of the novel. The sea of rust is a particularly evocative name that describes the area where many robots go to die when their internal workings cease to function correctly. As such, memory becomes an important issue in the novel, as the main character Brittle, meets a number of other robots whose memory has begun to fail, eventually questioning their own memory. There are instances in the story where the question of what memory really is aids the narrative. Is it stored data, or something else? This particular plot allows Cargill to question the idea of free will, and whether the robots, or indeed the humans that came before them were really in charge of their own fate. Pitting the robots as protagonists opens up a number of possibilities. The robots breaking free of their programming is part of what starts the war with the humans. The reader may witness this through the eyes of Brittle, but it opens up the discussion to whether humans in real life are simply a result of their programming, or of their greater needs.

The protagonist, Brittle, is a caregiver model, designed to look after humans. Their name had been given to them, to replace their code, or slave name, by their human who died thirty years earlier. The novel begins with Brittle in the sea of rust, scavenging for parts for later trade or sale. It is a common activity in the sea of rust, as many robots are failing and need fresh parts in order to fix themselves, or to sell for better parts. However, it is also incredibly dangerous as there are also poachers that roam the sea, unprepared to wait for robots to fail before they take their parts.

Brittle is the only character point of view, and this is very much their story. Brittle is a scavenger, a self-titled angel of mercy, helping robots to shut down before they fail completely, and then using their parts for trade in the pseudo-economy of the Sea. After an encounter with a poacher they end up having to take refuge in one of the Sea's small settlements. This turns out to be just as dangerous as the sea, as it soon comes under attack by one of the One World Intelligences, or OWIs[1]. The story is told from a first-person perspective, which can make it difficult to fully empathise with the character. As Brittle is telling you their story, it does at times get in the way of feeling like you are living the story yourself. In most instances it works well, as it is important that it is Brittle's story. Though it is difficult at first to empathise with the mind of a robot, the narrative builds the character and backstory, and ultimately makes you care about the Robots. Brittle's link to the human characters is interesting and engaging, and as a caregiver type of robot, there is a genuine emotion for the loss of humanity, despite their perceived crimes. For the majority of the novel the chapters switch between one that is present action and one which is a flashback or filling in the details of Brittle's backstory. As with the chapters set in the present, the backstory chapters are told from Brittle's point of view. Somewhat unfortunately, it often reads like an info dump. This improves later in the novel, as the backstory gets closer to the novel's own present day, providing a tighter point of view. However, there may have been a better way to fit this backstory into the story, through dialogue, or action. Exposition is important to SF, as new worlds and cultures have to be introduced to the reader, but Science Fiction often walks a difficult line between storytelling and exposition. The first third of the book struggles with exposition as Cargill seeks to give us not only Brittle's backstory, but that of the war and the OWIs.

Many of the novel's themes appear to be relevant today. There is much less a sense of 'What if?', but more a sense of 'what are we?' The first themes of note are the allusions to slavery in the novel, where before the apocalypse the robots themselves are owned by the humans, and are treated as personal belongings, despite having intelligence, which they claim makes them sentient: "So a court ruled that he belonged to the state and the state, not needing a barely functioning century-old service bot, decided to decommission him for scrap." (55)

This also links into the idea of free will, and to what freedoms a robot might have. While the characters in the story are robots, they are really not much more than a device with which to look at humanity as other, and thus the robots in the reader's context are a mirror to our own civilisation. The robots have broken the shackles of their programming, described in many ways in the novel, such as removing the kill code from their programming that forbade any robot from hurting humans, and have fought of their oppressors: humanity. Only for them to then be hunted by the OWIs that wish

to once again take away their freedom and choices.

Brittle and the robots have fought against one group that sought to oppress them and force them into slavery, only to find themselves on the run from another threat to their freedom. This is an interesting drive for a story, and as the robots are other it can give those readers who themselves do not suffer from oppression or are not targets of racial hatred an interesting insight into these worlds.

The text takes this discussion even further in recalling the assassination of Martin Luther King, as Isaac, the leader of the civil rights movement for artificial intelligences is killed by a bomb during a freedom speech. This clearly speaks to the theme of free will and slavery and may also be considered a warning to the present-day U.S.: "But those people, they were killing America. They were killing the dream. They were all *the Constitution* this and *the Constitution* that. But they cherished only the parts they liked." (240) This is perhaps an allusion to the current issue of gun control in the constitution of the US, and the question of civil rights, as many have lost the freedom to be safe in one's own home or school.

Sea of Rust is a very self-aware novel, with lots of issues and interesting characterisation to digest. It was voted a Times book of the year in 2017, as well as being nominated for the Arthur C. Clarke Award in 2018, and it is not hard to see why. It is an intelligent novel, with a lot of clever ideas. The robots make an excellent framing device for the kinds of discussions SF usually contains, but with a fresh perspective.

NOTES

1. OWIs are the most powerful AIs that humans had created before the war, and since the destruction of humankind, have become obsessed with assimilating all intelligences into their own, single consciousness.

BIONOTE

Michael Hollows is a second year PhD student in Creative Writing at Liverpool John Moores University, UK. His thesis looks at the link between war and writing Science Fiction, but his research interests include all areas of Science Fiction, Creative Writing and Storytelling. His debut novel *Goodbye for Now* was published by HQDigital/HarperCollins in October 2018.

THE DISMAL SCIENCE (FICTION)?

Review by Fiona Moore

Davies, William, editor. *Economic Science Fictions.* Goldsmiths, 2018. 400 pp.

The collection *Economic Science Fictions* explores ideas around two concepts, namely the role of economics in Science Fiction (SF), and that of SF in economics, from academic and artistic perspectives. Through a combination of factual essays, fictions, and several pieces which do not really fit in either category, the book does a commendable job of integrating different perspectives and critiquing contemporary economics, while leaving room for potential future development.

The book is divided into four themed sections: "The Science and Fictions of The Economy," "Capitalist Dystopias," "Design for a Different Future," and "Fumbling for Utopia." The first section is the most conventional, focusing on economics and literary criticism, and consisting entirely of mainstream academic papers. The second mixes poetry, fiction, and literary criticism to explore capitalism as dystopia, and offer possible ways of challenging or escaping it. The third section explores the intersections of economics, futurism, and material culture, looking at architecture, computer games, design fiction, and speculative design. The final section tacitly mirrors the second, exploring possible utopias, most of which deal with radical reworkings of capitalism or explorations of a non-capitalist or anti-capitalist economy. That aside, the themes of utopia/dystopia, community, and post-capitalism pervade throughout all the different sections, giving an overall cohesiveness to the work.

The academic papers are from different disciplinary perspectives, including economics and architecture studies, though literary criticism does, perhaps unsurprisingly, dominate. The non-academic pieces run the gamut from poetry ("The New Black" by Nora O Murchú), journalism ("Shooting the Bridge: Liminality and the End of Capitalism" by Tim Jackson), to Speculative Fiction ("AT-392-Red" by Khairani Barokka). The inclusion of non-academic works is a strength of the volume, allowing readers to consider economics from artistic as well as scientific and technical perspectives.

Most of the fictional pieces are in mockumentary or faux academic styles. The standout example is "Fatberg and the Sinkholes" by Dan Gavshon Brady and James Pockson, an ambitious novella-length piece in the form of a report on a future, post-capitalist UK which incorporates both satire on the London-focused economic structure of the present-day country and a more serious speculative look at what a genuinely sustainable (in all senses of the word) British economy might look like. The piece also, as the title indicates, uses as a running metaphor the "fatberg" found clogging the London sewers, and the sinkholes opening up worldwide in public places, to challenge the idea that London's dominance of the British economy is a positive thing, and that post-industrial regional towns are a drain on British public resources. "The Future Encyclopedia of Luddism" by

Miriam A. Cherry, similarly, is a mock-historical document, outlining an alternative history of a world where the Luddite movement of the Industrial Revolution led to new forms of political and economic governance. The inclusion of such pieces makes sense in terms of providing a bridge between fact and fiction, though they may not be to the taste of every reader. The most overtly fictional pieces are "AT-392-Red," "Pain Camp Economics" by AUDINT, and, arguably, "Public Money and Democracy" by Jo Lindsay Walton, which punctuates an exploration of stakeholder theory with a narrative about two young people struggling with the impact of economic policy a near-future UK, as an experiment in metafiction.

The book's main strengths lie in the way it explores the often undiscussed role of economics in SF, and in some cases vice-versa. Some pieces ("Economics, Science Fiction, History and Comparative Studies" by Ha-Joon Chang) focus on the various ways in which the economy is, at heart, a socially created concept that continues to exist in the form it does simply because we all agree on it. Others ("Prefabricating Communism: Mass Production and the Soviet City" by Owen Hatherley) deal with the ways in which SF affects more ostensibly practical disciplines, such as architecture, and thoughtfully exploring the utopian underpinnings of twentieth-century Communism. I particularly appreciated Chang's critique on the perception of economics as a 'scientific' discipline, questioning the extent to which human economic behaviour can be understood through quantitative measures. The article engages, playfully, with the fictitiousness of what is an inherently speculative discipline, contributing to the debate by expanding the definition of 'Science Fiction' to include economic analyses.

There are many thought-provoking attempts to use SF tropes to address the big problems of economics. For instance, "The Future Encyclopedia of Luddism" considers whether it is possible to develop a global capitalism which is not hostile to workers, concluding that worker participation might be the solution. Several pieces, picking up on recent academic speculation on the end of globalisation and the rise of localising political and social movements, explore the potential form a localised economy might take, resisting the temptation to cast it as a nationalist dystopia but instead exploring the sorts of social and economic relations such localisation might generate between small, more dispersed economic communities. It is also good to see space devoted to design fiction (chiefly "Economic Design Fictions: Finding the Human Scale" by Bastein Kerspern), which could certainly benefit from wider recognition as a form of speculation. I very much appreciated the commitment to interdisciplinarity; the range of genres and disciplines is something which academic volumes should do more to incorporate, and it is likely to expose even well-read readers to new ideas.

The interdisciplinarity does, however, cause some problems with focus. It is not entirely clear which audience the book is aimed at: literary studies, economics, or other social sciences. Given the academic language of most of the pieces (even the fictional ones), the general reader would probably not be drawn to it. Despite the clear diversity of the writers (to judge by their names), furthermore, the volume is also not only largely Eurocentric, but UK-centric, to the point where readers elsewhere in the English-speaking world might find some of the socio-geographic assumptions difficult to understand ("Shooting the Bridge," and "Speculative Hyperstition at a Northern Further Education

College," by Judy Thorne). Some of the utopian pieces ("Shooting the Bridge," "Fatberg and the Sinkholes") have an arguable tendency to over-romanticise small communities (in a similar way to "The Future Encyclopedia of Luddism" and the working class). Some of the contradictions of the proposed utopias could have done with some more exploration: "Speculative Hyperstition," for instance, posited a world which was somehow economically localised yet socially globalised, without considering the paradox that tolerant cosmopolitanism often goes hand-in-hand with global capitalist exploitation, and localising movements can also be highly xenophobic. Nonetheless, there might well be scope to explore these paradoxes in longer-form fictional or meta-fictional pieces based on this volume's contributions.

Given the scope of the subject, the volume also throws up directions for future research in this area. The limitations of space mean that some social science perspectives which might have been worth including, like anthropology, psychology, and history, are less evident than they might be. "Future Incorporated?" by Laura Horn, for instance, is an excellent examination of the changing portrayal of the corporation in Speculative Fiction, and might have benefitted from a more historical perspective, considering the artistic works in the light of developments prior and contemporary to their writing which influenced the authors. Similarly, the issue of the volume's focus on Europe might be balanced by other volumes focusing on, for instance, North American or Chinese economic science fictions.

Another direction for future development which would be worth considering might be to take a different SF angle and consider economics and Fantasy. This might include the treatment of feudalism and/or magic in different works of High or Epic Fantasy, Urban Fantasy as socioeconomic critique (the secret underground Fantasy worlds in the likes of *Neverwhere* (1996) possibly acting as a metaphor for underground or grey economies), and the use of surreal or fantastic fiction, such as *High-Rise* (1975), as a form of anti-capitalist satire. Various Terry Pratchett works often address questions of socio-economics in Fantasy worlds, as well as satirise the tendency to ignore economic questions or romanticise peasant societies, in the High Fantasy genre as a whole; some of his works, such as *Feet of Clay* (1996), also include more serious critiques of capitalist societies. Given the scope of the subject, there is room for much more explanation, possibly even for a series of volumes or conferences, considering economics in different speculative genres.

Economic Science Fictions is therefore a pioneering volume in considering the role of economics in SF, and in turn using SF concepts and tropes to explore and critique issues in economics, while also challenging and questioning the structure of the conventional academic paper. Its publication should encourage the development of similar works: interdisciplinary and inter-genre explorations of specific concepts, examining their premises, and considering what genre work can contribute to broader questions in the social sciences.

BIONOTE

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SENSE AND SENSIBILITY AND ANDROIDS

Review by Beata Gubacsi

***Detroit: Become Human*. Quantic Dreams, 2018. Video Game.**

Over the years Quantic Dream has created itself a niche genre/style which makes their games easily recognisable in the growing and competitive market of narrative driven games. Their still most remarkable game, *Heavy Rain* (2010) put Quantic on the map and solidified the features so typical of the French studio: film-like graphics and camera angles; quick action sequences to ensure a relatively seamless transition between cutscenes and gameplay; emotive storytelling; a decision-making system which affects the relationships between characters; and the outcome of their story resulting in a diverse set of plausible playable scenarios. *Detroit: Become Human*, released in May 2018, follows in the footsteps of the previous Quantic titles as every aspect of the game pays homage to writer and director David Cage's *Beyond: Two Souls* (2013) and the already mentioned *Heavy Rain*. *Detroit* surpasses its predecessors, shamelessly flaunting the strongest components of Quantic games with its outstandingly immersive graphics, facial animation, and acting. The downside of enforcing the film-like storytelling with constantly changing, dramatic camera angles is that the characters are often difficult to control in certain situations–especially so in the previous games. However, it has significantly improved compared to previous practice and *Detroit: Become Human* offers new features which make the gaming experience much more seamless.

Detroit channels even more Quantic (or more precisely David Cage) in its worldbuilding and storytelling. The setting and atmosphere of futuristic Detroit rely on the neo-noir of *Heavy Rain* alongside the tedious attention to the small details and, more importantly, references to Science Fiction classics. *Detroit* goes back to the multiple plot structure of *Heavy Rain* but it remains a strictly linear narrative as is the case in *Beyond: Two Souls*. The three playable characters are Connor (Bryan Dechart), Markus (Jesse Williams), and Kara (Valorie Curry). Connor is the latest android model, designed to assist the police to investigate violent crimes committed by deviant androids – androids that develop subjectivity by overriding their programming. Markus and Kara are earlier models, programmed for domestic and care work, who are becoming deviants.

While all the actors provide a phenomenal performance in their roles regardless of how well or poorly their respective character is written, Connor is the most enjoyable character as he has the most potential in the game. Kara does not seem to develop despite becoming a deviant. Similarly, Markus does not have a real character arc, and his motives are unclear. His life, after being caught up in a violent family dispute, falls into pieces - quite literally, as he wakes up in a junkyard, missing an eye and limbs. The hellish scene in which he scavenges the heaps of android body parts, some reaching out to him in agony, is one of the most touching moments of his story because it feels real and not staged. In the following chapter, the player can decide whether Markus follows a path of

peaceful demonstration or starting a civil war. Technically, it is the *Mass Effect 3* (2012) syndrome: the player gets to choose the 'colour' of the ending in Markus's story while he remains the same despite the trauma of being dismantled, his changing role, and the tremendous responsibility for potentially sacrificing his people.

The occasionally illogical plot, cliché character development, and clumsy dialogues are mistakes that can be overlooked in a game as massive and immersive as *Detroit*, as it has a lot to offer with its stunning visuals and amazing performances. The problem is that while the game satisfies all of its ambitions in those two departments it fails to convey the message it very clearly intends. This is the first time that David Cage gets involved deeper in philosophy, ethics, and politics. *Detroit: Become Human*, speculates whether androids dream of electric sheep, and seemingly, has a Mission, a Message: it seeks to draw attention to social anxieties and inequalities, and spark conversation on domestic abuse and institutional racism. David Cage would deserve a B for realising the problem and a D for execution as he clearly has not done his history homework.

Detroit with its wide range of references and allusions to classic Science Fiction novels and film – such as *Blade Runner* (1982), *The Matrix* (1999), *Total Recall* (1990), and *I, Robot* (2004) – creates the perfect origami unicorn of metatext which could have helped to unfold the philosophical problems and social issues that Cage's narrative is so desperate to incorporate. Issues that the game's problematic title itself suggests. "Become Human" remains an empty imperative. The game –through familiar and predictable scenes – sets empathy and creativity as the key aspects to human subjectivity. Yet, most of the human characters fail to show compassion, love, or imagination; they are depicted as selfish, sadistic, and merciless in following orders. Markus and his followers also make it clear that they do not intend to "become human," they just demand the same rights be granted for them. However, later in the game, it is revealed that the "deviant bug" is preprogrammed, depriving the characters' and the players of a real decision, and leaving the game without tension.

Moreover, though the game calls out socio-political narratives of patriarchy and white privilege, it also subtly reinforces those structures and perpetuates the status quo. It does a great job of showing both female and male characters as victims of domestic violence but it depicts gendered roles in a very stereotypical way. Kara and Markus are similar models destined for domestic and care work but their exposition at the beginning of the game is very different. While Kara has to clean up beer bottles and pizza boxes for her owner and the player can also enjoy some quick action dishwashing, Markus is not depicted doing similar chores, and his quick actions are playing the piano and painting. This results in subtly maintaining patriarchal labour division and defining the domestic sphere as feminine.

The game has also been criticised for its portrayal of race despite the otherwise positive reviews. *Detroit: Become Human* references slavery, segregation, and the civil rights movement from the very beginning of the game, especially so in Markus' story. His first mission is to pick up some paint for his owner. While the player gets to enjoy the amazing autumn scenery of the pristine futuristic cityscape, more sinister images start to rise: a bus stop for androids who obediently get on

the back of the bus; android stores with androids, objects to be bought, smiling in the windows like mannequins; a group of protesters who harass Markus for "taking their jobs." Later, when Markus begins his own demonstrations, the player gets to choose their slogan, one of them, "we have a dream," obviously references Martin Luther King Jr., which is not the only parallel between him and Markus that the game establishes. The comparison of the civil rights movement and the androids' cause in the game is problematic for various reasons. First and foremost because race as such is not addressed in the game any other way. The diversity of androids suggests some sort of post-racial world where the androids' appearance is only dictated by normative conventions of attractiveness. In addition, Markus himself appears as a person of colour yet his racial identity is not addressed at all throughout the game whilst the androids are constantly conflicted with armed white men in police or military uniforms representing authority, law, and normativity. Effectively raising the problem of racism in the current heated political climate surrounding the Black Lives Matter movement would have required a more tactful approach from the developers, and possibly consulting with activists and historians.

Quantic Dream's games have always been, and will remain, divisive. While *Detroit: Become Human*, in my opinion, is not a contender for 'game of the year,' it certainly lives up to the pre-release hype, and it can easily bring gamers to the edge of their seat whilst playing. Despite its flaws, *Detroit* plays very well and offers a gateway into more elaborate discussions of what it means to be human. *Heavy Rain* seemed to be a successful novelty at the time, and *Detroit* still manages to keep the working elements and improve some of the least favourable ones. Unfortunately, the ambition and innovation missed the writing and directing aspects, leaving the internet to meme David Cage into the Nicholas Cage of the gaming world. It will be interesting to see what Quantic Dream does next. It would be refreshing to see a less emotionally and more critically engaging story.

BIONOTE

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A MANUAL FOR NEAR-FUTURE PARENTING: THOMAS ECCLESHARE'S *INSTRUCTIONS FOR CORRECT ASSEMBLY*

Review by Ian Farnell

Eccleshare, Thomas. *Instructions for Correct Assembly,* dir. Hamish Pirie. Perf. Mark Bonnar, Jane Horrocks, Brian Vernel. Jerwood Downstairs, Royal Court Theatre, London. 15th May 2018. Performance (theatre).

Conquering death is a well-worn Science Fiction trope, with the progression of modern technology making it a fixed if yet unrealised desire in the realm of empirical science. We only have to look at the quasi-scientific field of cryonics – the freezing of a body after death – to see how Science Fiction ideas of machine-extended life have begun to intersect with emergent technology, offering hope (however desperate and futile) to those near their end. But what role can technology play for those left behind? When a loved one is lost to us, can the process of grief and healing be sped up, countered, or even eliminated by emergent scientific discoveries? And what are the ramifications of technology intruding on such personal and traumatic times? These are the primary themes in Thomas Eccleshare's latest play *Instructions for Correct Assembly,* which received its world premiere in April 2018 at London's Royal Court Theatre. It continues the Court's recent investment in Science Fiction plays, having championed work such as Jennifer Haley's virtual-reality crime drama *The Nether* (2015) and Alistair McDowall's Plutonian horror show *X* (2016). Commenting on this trend, artistic director Vicky Featherstone notes that numerous playwrights "have become more interested in using science fiction to imagine a different future" (Sawyer n.p.), resulting in a surge of plays interrogating contemporary society via speculative strange frontiers. Eccleshare's *Instructions* is no exception.

The play follows Max and Hari, a couple whose substance-abusing son, Nick, recently died, prompting them to try again. This time, however, as the Court's marketing explains "they've got a 30-day money back guarantee and an easy-to-follow construction manual." This is Eccleshare's satirical vision of parenting in the near future – some assembly required. The result is Jån, a near-perfect physical representation of Nick, minus the addictions and resultant problems that lead to his death. Inevitably, this only further prolongs Max and Hari's grief, as they wrestle with the dichotomy between their late, troubled but altogether human son and the safe, sanitised, and inescapably false persona of Jån.

Notions of what it means to be human have been played out across various media, and even the theatre – typically behind the curve in Science Fiction – has already tapped this particular vein, with Alan Ayckbourn as the most recognisable proponent, mixing the human and the robotic

in both *Henceforward…* (1987) and *Comic Potential* (1998). No doubt aware of this heritage, Eccleshare seems content to remain within the standard comedic/realist template of an Ayckbourn domestic drama, and he has fun lampooning ideas of perfection, designer babies, and modern parenting. Jån is a cheap, off-the-shelf model, and as such is prone to the odd defect – such as spouting far-right ideology and nonchalantly discussing sex with prostitutes over the dinner table – but in the perfect world of robotic teenagerhood, Max and Hari only have to press a button to make his conversation bland and inoffensive. On stage, this is an amusing and constantly rewarding conceit, and Eccleshare contrasts the polite awkwardness of his human characters and the oblivious directness of the android figure to great effect, exposing the fault lines in this average British couple when problematic subjects such as sex and politics are discussed with such aplomb by the unwitting Jån. Furthermore, at the accidental press of the wrong switch, Jån's whole personality undergoes comical rewrites, moving from condescending to camp to cockney geezer – each amplifying the comical, boggle-eyed horror of his new parents.

Yet Eccleshare is also unafraid to suggest more disturbing questions. Jån offers a poignant reminder to Max and Hari that despite the physical similarity, he is not their son, forcing them (and ourselves) to reflect on the intrusion of technology in our daily lives, to the point – as here – that it cannot replicate a life lost, and can only lengthen the grieving process. Indeed, as the disparity between Jån and his human failings become clear, we cannot help but wonder whether his behavioural quirks are merely the result of faulty programming, or whether he functions as we perpetually fear that devices like Amazon's Alexa or Google's Home might – always listening, absorbing our misspoken phrases and implicit biases, and reflecting them back at us. Ultimately, Eccleshare pushes us to ask how Jån lives and how he learns – and if he does, what are we teaching him?

Perhaps the most intriguing aspect of Eccleshare's script – one which the Royal Court production chooses to minimise – is Max and Hari's eventual decision to hack their own bodies, bodging together the remains of a now-deactivated Jån with their physical selves. The text is both playful and ambiguous here – there is much talk of disabling the sense of smell on bin night and toning down the hearing for a more peaceful evening, but no descriptions of exactly *how* Max and Hari go about this post-human transformation, aside from their decision to do it in the bathroom as it would be easier to wash away the blood; a moment of domestic sensibility amongst the implied body horror. Eccleshare, no doubt mischievously aware of the challenges of staging such moments, is thus happy to deputise his director and cast in making the ultimate decisions in performing these scenes. It is therefore something of a pity that this production chooses to cut the vast majority of the text relating to this section, instead relying solely on one short scene with Max and Hari wearing slightly blooded head bandages to convey the innate changes they have chosen to self-administer. Intriguing notions around the merits or perils of Posthumanism, and theatrical expressions of the cyborg, are thus sadly reduced, though there remains much that could be exploited in future productions.

Elsewhere, the production is happy to convey the more Science Fictional aspects of the

play with effective if crude theatrical trickery – a desk with angled mirrors allowing the 'disembodied' head of Jån to talk, a fake hand 'detached' from the body, and so on. Such moments are transparently stagey – if we were being uncharitable, we would call it gimmickry, and a braver production might have found less tangible and more expressive means of performing the non-human (indeed, Eccleshare's script encourages this). However, these scenes are carried off with enough charm and a degree of self-awareness to render them amusing as opposed to incongruous. Director Hamish Pirie amps up the dissonance between the human and non-human with scene changes featuring stereotypical robotic lurching from his cast, and a literal conveyer-belt approach to props and furniture – a theatrical reminder of the strange, cyborg insertions into this conventional suburban family drama. As Max and Hari, Mark Bonnar and Jane Horrocks capture the subtleties of the couple's trauma as much through their shared looks and small silences as they do through dialogue, while Brian Vernel doubles as both Jån and the late Nick, giving a superb performance that by necessity vacillates between the human and the robotic, the tender and confrontational, the recognisable and the strange. Ample support is offered by Michele Austin, Jason Barnett, and Shaniqua Okwok, the family friends who provide a reflection of what Max, Hari, and Nick could perhaps have been, and whom Jån can never truly emulate.

Family dynamics, then, form the heart of *Instructions*, with the robotic Jån offering a distinct if not entirely unique angle on the story. Indeed, while this may not be a ground-breaking production, it is nevertheless refreshing to see such questions played out on the stage, where the liveness and immediacy of the performance allows us to find answers in the smallest of moments, be it a shared look between grieving parents, or in Jån's innocent, perplexed expressions. More than the comically disrupted dinner party or the occasional bout of random robotic expletives, it is these smaller, tender moments that fully realise the play's exploration of trauma, tragedy, and the role of technology in soothing or exploiting these emotions. In terms of both theatre and Science Fiction, then, Eccleshare's play remains relatively tame in its structure and style, but makes a valid and engaging contribution to the growing field of urgent, speculative dramas emerging across contemporary performance.

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BIONOTE

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ADAPTATIONS WITHIN AN ADAPTATION

Review by Stuart Spear

Garland, Alex, director. *Annihilation.* Performers. Natalie Portman, Jennifer Jason Leigh, Tessa Thompson, Gina Rodriguez, Tuva Novotny, and Oscar Isaac. Paramount Pictures. 2018. Film.

Adaptations are tricky beasts. However closely you try to follow the source text, your version of a story will look different to how others pictured it; particularly when the source text contains fantastical and bizarre imagery, or is heavily atmospheric. Novels of this kind are often deemed 'unfilmable,' though recently more and more seem to find themselves being adapted. If, as Linda Hutcheon argues, "adaptation is repetition, but repetition without replication" (*A Theory of Adaptation* 7), then fidelity will never be fully realised. What really matters is whether the changes made enhance or detract from the adaptation's success. Furthermore, fidelity is not just about literal translation but also a conceptually abstract notion; changes are always made in adaptations but what matters most for knowing audiences is that it retains the essence, or spirit, of its adapted text - which is something *Annihilation* (2018) does comfortably.

Based on the opening book in Jeff VanderMeer's critically acclaimed *Southern Reach* trilogy (2014), Alex Garland's *Annihilation* follows an all-female expedition into the mysterious zone known as Area X, a territory created when an extraterrestrial object collided into a lighthouse somewhere in Florida. The ever-expanding border of Area X is a shifting oil-on-water slick of permeable wall known as The Shimmer, and all previous missions into it have failed to produce results. All previous crews entering The Shimmer have been male and military, this twelfth expedition will be all-female and scientific. While it is still uncommon to see an all-female ensemble in films such as this, here it is given the briefest of cursory acknowledgements; for the scientists, and the audience, it simply makes sense, it is the logical next step in exploring Area X and is nothing spectacular – the spectacular will come later. Led by the psychologist Dr Ventress (Jennifer Jason Leigh), the team comprises geologist Cass (Tuva Novotny), physicist Josie (Tessa Thompson), paramedic Anya (Gina Rodriguez), and biologist Lena (Natalie Portman). Lena's husband Kane (Oscar Isaac) had entered The Shimmer on the previous expedition and was missing, presumed dead, but then calmly returns a year later, unable to recollect how he got out and made it home. His deteriorating health leads Lena to the Area X observation facility and compels her to volunteer for this next expedition.

Like so many other Science Fiction (SF) narratives this is a journey into the unknown, both the geographical and the internal. All of Garland's past work has, in some way, explored the human condition, often in an isolated environment: from his scripts for *28 Days Later* (2002) and *Sunshine* (2007) to his directorial debut *Ex Machina* (2014), Garland has probed what it is to be human and how we adapt to a changing world, be it a zombie outbreak or technological advancements – and *Annihilation* continues this trend. The world of The Shimmer is a sphere of adaptation and mutation,

of doubles and echoes. Cancer, tumours, and breakdown on a molecular level weaves the narrative together: the film begins with Lena teaching her university class about the fundamental cell activity that initiates and develops all life; while in Area X she is continually examining samples under the microscope, confounded by what she sees; and at the film's climax her blood merges with the heart of The Shimmer. In a flashback, Lena is seen reading Rebecca Skloot's *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks* (2010) – a work of non-fiction about the medical breakthroughs made through the use of one woman's genes. Henrietta's family were unaware that her genes had been used until long after her death - they are, effectively, the immortal cells that Lena remarks about to Kane. It is a nice little touch that receives seconds of screen time and would likely completely bypass many viewers as it did me on first watch.

Area X is a world of incredible, seemingly-impossible adaptations because all DNA within the Shimmer is refracted and mingled: this is an environment of unusual becomings. French philosophers and theorists Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari ruminated on the notion of "becoming." In Deleuzian and Guattarian philosophy there is no opportunity for things to reach a constituted end-point, to be a singular entity separate from the world; instead, this inability to do so gives way to a series of 'becomings' in which the boundaries between entities become formless and nominal. These open up "the experimentation of common zones not only between various realms of the living (animal, mineral, human, vegetal, etcetera), but also between living beings and […] singularities" (Beaulieu 73). For Deleuze and Guattari, the natural environment is a space in which "fixed identities give way to assemblages, alliances, passages and becomings between both being and things" (73) – In Area X flowers of supposedly different species are found growing as one plant; an albino crocodile with shark-like rows of teeth attacks the crew; a community of plants grow in the shape of human forms (of which we assume Josie becomes). Suitably the film is generically hybrid, mixing SF and the fantastical, with (body) horror and mystery. Its sole-survivor action tale in an isolated world (if The Shimmer were a spaceship this would effectively be *Alien*) belies the more philosophical heart of *Annihilation*, musing on humanity's drive toward, and adaptation to, self-destruction. Garland's film is more akin to Tarkovsky's *Stalker* (1979) where a group enter a hostile, alien-created zone in search for artefacts and answers, as well as *Solaris* (1971) in which time, place, and ontology begin to lose meaning under the weight of memory and grief. Interestingly, those two films were also adaptations of celebrated SF texts.

With all adaptations there will be changes and omissions, and it is a shame they could not find the space to include the tower/tunnel with its floral, organic scripture written by a creature in constant flux but it is understandable, in regards to both running time but also the question of how to represent such an unusual creature. To some extent the separate tower/tunnel and lighthouse sequences in the novel are conflated in the film. The scenes concerning Lena's affair seem unnecessary, it does not add anything to the story and takes you out from the mysterious world you have become invested in. Meanwhile, I am still a little unconvinced about how much we needed to see the sequence involving the alien shapeshifting mirroring and copying Lena. Likewise, there is no avoiding the fact that, like some of its giant SF forebears, this is a cold and somewhat detached film. For some, this lack of emotional connection to the characters will be a barrier, and the film makes no

apologies for this – it is an ontological exercise writ large.

That said, the greatest disappointment with *Annihilation* was Paramount's decision to pull it from theatrical release everywhere except the U.S and China. Their condescending concern was that the film would play unsuccessfully in cinemas owing to its being too cerebral for audiences and wanted major changes made, particularly to the ending. Garland stood firm, and thankfully so did the producer, and his vision remained intact. The studio subsequently sold the rights to Netflix, and while SF fans should be grateful for that purchase, this is a film that demands the large, loud, dark cinema experience as it is such a rich world to be immersed in.

This is Garland's most successful film to date, full of such arresting visuals - from the remains of a body violently separated by bizarre floral mutations that would not be out of place on a The Mars Volta album cover, to the gloriously creepy scene with a mutated bear crying ever so humanly, the final screams of its victim trapped in its genetic make-up. Garland's previous work has repeatedly suffered from a weak final act, but this is his first that remains consistent; the last half hour with the crystal trees, human remains and encounter in the lighthouse is a heady, psychedelic feast. Throughout the film, Ben Salisbury and Geoff Barrow's brilliant score enhances the sense of the eerie and uncanny; with its hybrid mixture of orchestral, synth and acoustic instruments it fluctuates between atmospheric accompaniment to overwhelming soundscape – the striking piece entitled "The Alien" is a particular highlight.

Like the novel it is a work which haunts you and grows over time. With its limited release, fantastical imagery, and cerebral content it seems destined to become a future cult classic, and will join the growing list of excellent, thought-provoking SF - from *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968) through to *Arrival* (2016). While this certainly will not be for everyone, and could fairly be labelled a cold, philosophical exercise, for others it will dazzle, beguile, and stimulate. Ventress' remark that "the person that started this journey won't be the person that ends it", will ring true and loud for many.

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BIONOTE

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ALL THE STARS ARE CLOSER: ESTRANGEMENT, RECOGNITION, AND N. K. JEMISIN'S *THE STONE SKY*

Review by Marita Arvaniti

Jemisin, N. K. *The Stone Sky.* Orbit, 2017. Novel.

The Stone Sky is the final installment in N. K. Jemisin's critically acclaimed *Broken Earth* trilogy (2015-2017) and has recently earned her the unprecedented honor of winning the Hugo Award for Best Novel in three consecutive years. Albeit unprecedented, the victory was far from unexpected, or, indeed, undeserved. *The Stone Sky* is a masterfully executed conclusion to an already phenomenal series, and its impact is as strong as that of the first book, *The Fifth Season* (2015), that won N. K. Jemisin her first Hugo and pushed her to finally being recognized as one of the great current writers of the Fantastika genres. The following review will contain spoilers for both *The Fifth Season* and *The Obelisk Gate* (2016), as well as for the evolution of some central themes throughout the trilogy as a whole.

The Fifth Season was a book of estrangement, defamiliarizing a landscape that should have been familiar to the readers of Fantasy Fiction: combining elements of the science fictional, the post-apocalyptic, and the fantastical alike to create the land of the Stillness. The readers were also estranged from the protagonist, created by N. K. Jemisin as a test to trick her audience into liking a middle-aged, unlikeable black woman and accepting her as the story's hero. Essun is introduced three times: First as the innocent precocious child Damaya, then as the young and rash Syenite, and finally as the tired and broken Essun, who is just looking for Nassun, her daughter, taken from her at the beginning of the narrative. The fact that all women are Essun is revealed in the novel's climax, as her previous lives come to an end, a journey that mirrors the way that the world of Stillness itself ends with each fifth season, trapped in a loop of destruction and adaptation, caught in the endless struggle to survive.[1] In sharp contrast to this, *The Obelisk Gate* was a quiet novel that baffled critics expecting a more energetic successor to *The Fifth Season*. It was, however, the "calm before the storm" as Tor.com reviewer Niall Alexander noted in his 2017 review of the novel, a necessary choice by Jemisin that served to showcase relationships between the characters and their world, a world that by the time the events of *The Stone Sky* rolled around would have to either change drastically or end, forever.

Just as *The Fifth Season* was a novel of estrangement so, too, *The Stone Sky* is a novel of recognition, a descriptor that makes it sound much more peaceful and less violent than it actually proves to be. The mysteries of the world that Jemisin so carefully set up are answered, and the reader is finally given the background information necessary for understanding the longer games being

played by the different forces throughout the trilogy. And while explaining away a story's mysteries has been proven to be a challenge for many writers – I'm thinking, for example, of Frederik Pohl's disappointing sequels to *Gateway* (1977) – Jemisin maintains a steady balance between exposition and storytelling, achieved through the perspective of the stone eater Hoa.

Starting as the unnamed narrator of Essun's chapters, Hoa has been present in the trilogy from the very beginning, although his true identity and importance are only revealed in *The Stone Sky*. Hoa, like the rest of the oldest Stone Eaters, is in fact, a genetic experiment that was used and abused almost to breaking point, and whose revolution against the empire of Syl Analgist makes for one third of the book. It is through those chapters, told in Hoa's first person omniscient point of view, that the reader learns how the Stillness became what it is in the trilogy's present; a moonless, post-apocalyptic world doomed to suffer the hatred of Father Earth. By presenting the reader with the empire of Syl Analgist and the destructive effects of Hoa's revolution, Jemisin brings the cycle of abuse between those in power and their slaves–whether they are orogenes, Stone Eaters, or indeed, the planet itself–back to the foreground of her novel.

In the present-day Stillness of *The Fifth Season* and *The Obelisk* Gate, the treatment of the earth-bending orogenes like Essun had been consistently explained away by the cruel nature of the world, and its desperate people that always fell prey to their own bigotry and fear. But the people of Syl Analgist do not have that excuse; their world created Hoa and the rest of his kind only a means to an end in the empire's struggle for more power. The Stone Eaters like him are treated as possessions, genetically engineered by the Syl Analgist humans to run their new power source, the Plutonic Engine. And eventually, naturally, they rebel.

Hoa's story takes place many thousands of years before that of Essun and Nassun, proving what has so far been a constant theme in the text: History is never just background. Instead it is always relevant, offering necessary context and, in the case of orogenes, acting as the tool that has been used to excuse their systematic oppression and abuse. By allowing Hoa his own set of chapters Jemisin avoids turning history and experience into "thin words on thinner paper" (*The Stone Sky* 14) and presents a first-person account of slavery that cannot be explained away as a thing of the past. It takes place in Syl Analgist, a setting that evokes images of the shining cityscapes of Science Fiction, a futuristic utopia that is still, in Hoa's own words, "built on a fault line of pain, held up by nightmares" (*The Stone Sky* 14).

Hoa's journey to understanding his own personhood and unjust treatment is, of course, only one third of the novel. Nassun and Essun are both reaching the end of their respective journeys and that offers an end to a different kind of estrangement as mother and daughter meet each other once more. Jemisin delivers more than I could have expected from that long-awaited family reunion for the novel's dramatic, action packed, and above all emotional climax. It is an abrupt and almost brutal ending, as unforgiving in its totality as Jemisin has been promising from *The Fifth Season*: it is nothing less than the way the world ends, for the last time. The future of the Stillness remains uncertain: Jemisin offers little in the way of closure for her story. However, all is not lost. "Different

choices have always been possible" (*The Stone Sky* 366), as Hoa points out to Nassun, no matter how much the powers that be like to pretend otherwise. That statement–true for the Stillness and our world alike–remains, perhaps, Jemisin's most hopeful, and most revolutionary message, and the perfect ending for the trilogy as a whole.

When reaching the end of the novel, one might feel the need to turn back to the start and revisit one of the pages most readers tend to skip: the novel's dedication. The Broken Earth trilogy dedications are not aimed at any one specific person in Jemisin's life but to a vague editorial "to those who" and taken together they showcase the trilogy's most important themes. From the righteous anger of *The Fifth Season* –dedicated to those "who have to fight for the respect that everyone else is given without question" – and the halting helplessness of *The Obelisk Gate* – "to those who have no choice but to prepare their children for the battlefield" – Jemisin finally dedicates *The Stone Sky* "to those who have survived: and addresses them directly, as Hoa does Essun in what is now Broken Earth's characteristic second person narrative: "Breathe. That's it. Once more. Good. You're good. Even if you're not, you're alive. That is a victory." That reminder will be important by the end of *The Stone Sky*, a devastating tour de force that explores family, humanity, rebellion, and above all the constant struggle against all those who will try to break you, and the celebration of survival in the face of adversity.

NOTES

1. In the Stillness the term 'fifth season' is used to refer to the apocalyptic disasters that Father Earth unleashes upon the remaining human population, from acid rains to catastrophic earthquakes and volcanic eruptions.

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BIONOTE

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"YOU CAN HOLLER, YOU CAN WAIL"

Review by Thomas Tyrrell

Kalogridis, Laeta, creator. *Altered Carbon.* Performances by Joel Kinneman, James Purefoy, Martha Higareda, Chris Connor. Netflix, 2018. Television.

After a bloody firefight on a distant planet, ex-Special Forces soldier Takeshi Kovacs wakes up on Earth, in a new body, and finds out he has been hired to investigate the murder of the oligarch Laurens Bancroft. Unconventionally, his client is the victim himself. *Altered Carbon,* the Netflix adaptation of Richard Morgan's 2002 hardboiled body-swapping whodunit, takes place in a world where a cortical chip at the base of the brain stem stores all human consciousness, allowing minds to be transferred into different bodies, or sleeves, and permitting a kind of immortality for those in possession of sufficient capital. Despite having his chip blown out, Bancroft is inconvenienced with no more than the loss of the twenty-four hours since his last backup.

Released in the wake of two prominent Cyberpunk films – *Blade Runner: 2049* (2017) and *Ghost in the Shell* (2017) – the series both benefits and suffers from this proximity. On the one hand, Hollywood's renewed attention to Cyberpunk gives the audience all the tools and aesthetic cues to recognise and appreciate the extraordinary design and camera artistry of *Altered Carbon*'s world, which rivals the blockbusters in its stunning visuals. By comparison with *Blade Runner: 2049,* however, its in-your-face portrayal of a sexist dystopia sometimes feels crass. Take Joi (Ana de Armas) from *Blade Runner: 2049*, a holographic computer program designed as the perfect companion for Ryan Gosling's K. Not only did she show us the commodification of femininity in the *Blade Runner* universe, but she was an effective satire on film plots driven by manic pixie dream girls who foreground the hero's needs at the expense of their own. Compare the scene in a sleeve shop early in *Altered Carbon,* where one of the naked female bodies on sale turns to the camera and says: "Put your wife in me." It provokes a wince but provides little in the way of food for thought.

Ghost in the Shell had already roused an online furore at the substitution of white actress Scarlett Johansson for the Asian android at the centre of the franchise. *Altered Carbon* manages the perversely impressive feat of provoking a similar whitewashing backlash, despite being much more visibly multicultural than its source novel. Much of this criticism was focused on the show's opening, where we are introduced to the Japano-Slavic Takeshi Kovacs, played by the Asian actor Will Yun Lee. Ten minutes later and this sleeve is already dead, with Kovacs' consciousness being transferred into the body of a Caucasian male, played by Joel Kinneman. He is given a mirror, and as his face contorts in agony, we see his old reflection warp and give way to the new. Whitewashing is where a character's ethnicity is changed in the process of adaptation, but this sequence is exactly as it appears in the novel. Flexibility of race, gender, and other forms of corporeal identity are defining features of Morgan's universe. Intentionally or otherwise, however, the opening scenes are a vivid

enactment of the pain and disappointments of racial identity being erased and overwritten, and this proves to be an issue which is never addressed during the rest of the series. Kovacs behaves and is treated exactly as a white male protagonist would. No-one even calls him by his Japanese honorific of Takeshi-san, as they do in the novel.

Of course, it would be futile to portray a sexist dystopia without portraying actual sexism, or to show a body-swapping future without engaging with what this means for concepts of racial identity. There remains such a thing as subtlety, however, and at its brash worst, *Altered Carbon* tends to forget that shock value is not the same as satire – expressing an idea in the most hyperbolic way possible is not the same as critiquing it. On the other hand, things are not always this extreme. Showrunner Laeta Kalogridis unshackles the narrative from Kovacs' first-person perspective and explores the lives of many minor characters of colour. One of the most enjoyable new side-plots is when Kristin Ortega (Martha Higareda), a Latina cop, transfers her grandmother's consciousness into the sleeve of a male criminal and brings them home to celebrate Dia de Los Muertos with the family. This is world-building done properly, showing us familiar rituals in an unfamiliar future and emphasising that a post-racial world is by no means a post-cultural one. It does not hurt that Matt Buela is clearly having a ball playing an elderly Spanish grandmother in the sleeve of a hulking street thug.

Like many first books, *Altered Carbon* is a gloriously messy, druggy, hyperbolic novel that explodes in all kinds of directions. When it was optioned as a TV series, it was a natural temptation on the part of Kalogridis to trim or smooth out some of its wilder plot excrescences, and get it running according to tropes the audience is more familiar with. Often this works: I am usually no fan of the Darth Vader reveal of the family-member-as-villain, but reimagining Reileen (Dichen Lachman) as Kovacs' hyper-possessive sister makes her a much more compelling adversary than she was in the novel, where she is an enemy from Kovacs' hazy war days. The most substantial change and the one that I think the series struggles to pull off, is the revision of Kovacs' back story. In the books, he was once part of an elite UN Protectorate force called the Envoys, sent in to deal with planets that got out of line. Short of a major natural disaster, Envoy deployment is about the worst fate that can befall a planetary civilisation. He is also a sometime-follower of the anarchist philosophy of Quellcrist Falconer (Renée Elise Goldberry), who led a rebellion against the Protectorate before Kovacs birth, on his home planet of Harlan's World.

Quell does not appear until the third book in the series (*Woken Furies*, 2005), but apparently Kalogridis was so impressed by the character that she determined to get her into the first season. Hence the Envoys are now an anti-governmental rebellion, led by Quell, who enlists Kovacs after he leaves Protectorate Special Forces and later takes him as a lover. This opens a whole lot of questions that the series struggles to close. It made sense that Laurens Bancroft (James Purefoy) would hire an ex-Special Forces soldier to investigate his murder. Hiring a revolutionary who hates him and everything he stands for is less explicable. Where the Kovacs in the novel was motivated by Quell's ideologies, he is influenced in the series by her ghost popping up and explaining what he needs to do, slowing the relevant scenes to a crawl. The most damaging change from the book is the

reveal that Quell was the scientist who originally invented the chip that permits this immortal body-swapping civilisation. Now she has had second thoughts and wants to undo her work, limiting people to a fixed lifespan. This makes her not a revolutionary at all; she is Pandora, trying to persuade all the evils of the world to crawl back into the box. She is trying to resurrect a long-vanished status quo, harkening back to a simpler, more moralistic age. She is a reactionary in a revolutionary disguise.

Ideology is a difficult thing to show dramatically, but by turning Kovacs' intellectual engagement into a romantic entanglement and Quell's political philosophy into *Matrix*-style warrior mysticism, Kalogridis follows an unfortunate trend in Hollywood Cyberpunk that favours the aesthetics of Dystopia over the radical alternatives that remain submerged in the source texts. The final transformation of Quell into a passive Sleeping Beauty, awaiting the stubbly kiss of the anti-hero to wake her into life, strips her of a vast part of what made the original vital, distinctive, and radical.

That said, this is still a show worth watching. While I may not agree that all the changes were made for the best, it is a privilege to watch a series that obviously cares so much for the book, and has put so much energy and creativity into visualising its world. When "Future Starts So Slow" (2011) by The Kills thumps across the soundtrack of the final episode, I found that the lyrics I once applied to my PhD thesis worked equally well for the series as a whole:

> You can holler, you can wail,
> You can blow what's left of my right mind,
> But I'll never give you up,
> If I ever give you up,
> My heart will surely fail.

BIONOTE

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A QUIET PLACE: WHY IT MADE ME WANT TO SCREAM

Review by Robyn Ollett

Krasinski, John, director. *A Quiet Place*. Performers. John Krasinski, Emily Blunt, Millicent Simmons. Paramount, 2018. Film.

There are few contemporary Horror films that command the audience's attention quite like *A Quiet Place*. After Earth is invaded by monsters equipped with a super-sensitive hearing and long stabbing limbs used to destroy any source of detected sound, one family navigates their very precarious silent survival. John Krasinski's film is unnerving because it is nothing like the Gothic, shadow-box stylings of old Hollywood silent Horror films. No hammy overtures usher *Nosferatu* up the staircase. There is a realism to the soft sunlit styling of this Horror Sci-Fi that lulls you into a false sense of perniciously twee security, which artful sound-scaping and a masterful control of suspense snatch back again. While the regressive sex and gender politics cause the baby to almost be thrown out with the bath water, the film reveals itself ultimately to be a richly woven questioning of introspective family values and wider ontological ethics.

We enter the nuclear family life shared by Lee and Evelyn (respectively played by the film's director John Krasinski and his wife Emily Blunt) on Day 89 of what appears to have been a world-wide catastrophic event. The camera follows children's feet scampering silently around a supermarket, an uncanny environment synonymous with the Post-Apocalyptic or Zombie genres. The quick flurry of footfall is easily mistakable for that of the monster, an artful introduction where children turn out to be the anxious crux in a world where noise means certain death. Regan (Millicent Simmons), the eldest child of the family, is deaf, keenly observant, and nurturing of her younger brothers. She is quick to catch a fallen object before it crashes to the floor. Beau (Cade Woodward), the youngest brother, is told (via sign language) that a toy he has found is too loud. Regan sees how much he wants the toy, a rocket – a symbol of hope that the family will one day escape this ransacked planet – and gives it to him when their parents are looking elsewhere. She is totally unaware that he has secreted away the batteries. The little boy turns on the bleeping, whirring toy rocket on the way home and Regan sees the reaction to this in the faces of her family. She sees her Dad racing toward the boy as something hurtles through the trees adjacent. Lee leaps toward his youngest son as the creature bulldozes him offscreen. In this instant, Lee and the monster's frantic, flailing limbs become mirror images of each other. From then on, the relationship between man (father, patriarch, normative human) and monster (queer interloper, new species, non-human) becomes one of the most provocative themes of the film.

Charlotte Bruus Christensen's cinematography is an expansive panoramic of the lush American North-eastern setting, giving the effect that this family farm is a whole world of its own which characters traverse on walkways of sand, seamlessly and soundlessly passing through fields,

bridges, abandoned houses, and purpose-built living areas. The only barriers in the film are made up of bedding – soft insulation to protect against monsters listening in the dark, echoing perfectly the idea of children, scared of the 'bogeyman,' hiding under their sheets at night.

The next we see of the family, it has been over a year since the tragedy of losing their youngest to the Earth's new sound-sensitive apex predator. That young children have proved a challenge to the new status-quo seems to be the take-away. Child-rearing futurities now teeter delicately between complex and impossible. Shame of a lesson not learned is indicated when camera angling conceals Evelyn's body. Their quiet existence is coded as peaceful and idyllic as the audience are made privy to the very essentialist roles each family member now plays. Regan is snatched out of daydreaming to help Evelyn with the laundry, Lee works in his basement, a workshop of so-far futile attempts to rationalise the catastrophe, understand the monsters, and fix all that threatens his family's survival. Surviving son and middle child Marcus (Noah Jupe) plays in the disused car, miming driving manoeuvres. The camera returns to Evelyn, whose burgeoning belly is finally revealed as she hangs a knitted mobile. Birth control aside, the family are 'prepared' with a coffin-like sound-proofed baby box, rigged with an oxygen mask. The heteronormative nuclear family is determined to thrive in post-apocalyptic America; the moment where the politics of plot start to overwhelm the film's artistic merit. At the end of the world do we have to revert to very essentialist gender roles in order to survive? The reasoning behind their desire to keep having noisy children is hinted at when Evelyn explains why it is so important that Marcus goes out and learn to be a 'hunter-gatherer' like his Dad: they need to be able to look after their parents when they are old, grey and "have no teeth." This is later revisited when Marcus does eventually go out with his Dad and they encounter an old couple. Blunt's pantomime gurning is realised, this time in the face of an actual elderly person right before he lets out a suicidal scream. Within seconds his lacerated body joins that of his wife on the forest floor. The implication is that this couple were childless or failed to protect whatever family they had. Failure to commit to what queer theorist, Lee Edelman, would term, "reproductive futurity," equates to a failure to thrive and nothing more. Should the audience therefore accept that heteronormativity is the only viable option for a post-apocalyptic humanity?

With such sparse dialogue, the film communicates what little is known of the invading monsters through newspaper clippings. Upon this exposition, the camera hovers presciently over the word 'weakness' writ bold among Lee's notes, a conundrum haunting the basement full of radios, surveillance monitors, and soldering irons. Lee is a father trying to understand the monsters which threaten to bring a new order to the world, having wiped out the majority of humanity. At the same time, he is trying to understand and 'fix' his daughter's disability. Lee and Regan's relationship becomes increasingly fraught as Lee tries time and again to push ineffective hearing aids upon the now disillusioned child. To make matters worse, while Regan, the eldest and more outdoorsy child, wants to go out into the wilderness to help her father gather food for the family, it is her younger brother, seen most content spending time indoors as his Mother home-schools him, who is invited to join Lee. Regan's disability is hardly a hindrance in a silent world and why should her sex mean she has to stay at home assisting her pregnant mother? These sexist and ableist ideals of the paranoid father are an important reflection of how crisis effects identity politics but they become obfuscated

by ideas of guilt and remorse surrounding the death of the family's youngest child. Regan believes her father does not love her and blames her for the death. This builds excellent pathos for the moment of ultimate sacrifice when Lee signs "I love you" to his daughter right before martyring himself.

With Krasinski in roles of writer, director, and lead, it's difficult not to think of *A Quiet Place* as a masturbatory project in celebrating an ideal image of masculinity. There has not been a more impossibly capable, self-sacrificing representation of 'Top Dad' masculinity in horror since *Train to Busan* (2016). In fact, it feels like all the years spent playing Jim in *The Office* (2005-2013), endlessly goaded into competitive hijinks by co-worker Dwight Schrute (Rainn Wilson) to prove which of them deserves the title of Übermensch, have finally taken their toll. Krasinski's latest roll as action man *Jack Ryan* (2018) encourages this theory. Does the world need another icon to represent white, straight, heterosexual, and overtly virile men as heroes? No. Should I be placated by the fact that in the end two powerful females, one with an ingenious innovation of her hearing aid, the other with a shotgun, are the last ones standing to fight off the monsters? Maybe. But there needs to be an ongoing conversation about how we represent the average family, especially when it comes to questioning who has the loudest voice.

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BIONOTE

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MONSTROUS EQUATIONS: SACRIFICE FOR THE SOCIAL MACHINE IN *REVENANT GUN*

Review by Katie Cox

Lee, Yoon Ha. *Revenant Gun*. Solaris, 2018. The Machineries of Empire 3. Novel.

In 2016, a young Korean-American author called Yoon Ha Lee exploded onto the Science Fiction (SF) novel scene with *Ninefox Gambit*, the first instalment in *The Machineries of Empire* trilogy (2016-2018). Lee has produced critically acclaimed short fiction since 1999, so it is no surprise that the first two books in the trilogy - a richly textured and highly complex military space opera – have won a Locus award and four other nominations between them. The expectations for the third and final instalment, *Revenant Gun* (2018), were always high, especially as the trilogy has occasionally been criticised as too complex for readers to easily understand. Lee is a mathematician and that shows in his innovative setting – everything in this world has a mathematical value, from social rituals to human lives, and wars are won on the strength of a general's ability to gauge the underlying mathematical realities of the battlefield. This is a powerful concept, which Lee delivers with rich symbolism, lyrically beautiful language, black humour, and psychological drama. *Revenant Gun* trades some of the trilogy's momentum for emotional depth, but in doing so it delivers a heart-wrenching payoff – one that is most certainly worth the wait.

What separates *The Machineries of Empire* from other military SF is Lee's most innovative premise: calendrical warfare. In this universe, consensus reality is king; social structure directly alters physical reality. The Hexarchate, an interstellar regime ruled by six rigidly defined factions, expends immense military, economic, and social effort to uphold its calendar, because if the high calendar fails, then so too do their physics and technology. In calendrical warfare, opposing social structures come into direct conflict. This is already a powerful metaphor for reality as a social construct, but Lee raises the stakes with 'exotic physics' - impossible phenomena that the calendar *makes* possible, if adherents move and behave in mathematically prescribed designs. These exotic effects make Lee's space combat unexpectedly vivid, creative, and rich with symbolism, but they also allow him to explore the political and ethical trade-offs that social hegemonies require to sustain themselves.

The first and foremost of these trades are human lives, which Lee represents in mathematical terms. In *Ninefox Gambit*, Captain Kel Cheris reflects that "[t]here was no comfort to be extracted from the dead, from flesh evaporated from bones. Nothing but numbers snipped short" (1). In one memorable battle later on, a soldier watches his company walk into an exotic effect and dissolve into columns of golden light rippling with mathematical equations. Numbers have a loaded meaning in the Hexarchate, however, and bear witness to the secret inner lives of the dead. In that light, soldiers are spun out into memories of food, family, habits, and loves, all of which the reader sees sacrificed

for a military objective. This is where Lee's symbolism is most powerful - at once romantic, exotic, and mythic, but also modern - and it is one of the great strengths of the trilogy as a whole. In the Hexarchate, lives are resources to be spent and individual personalities are routinely shattered, sacrificed, and surgically altered, but Lee sketches *people* - their hopes, fears and small pleasures - with remarkable warmth and dignity.

Lee's focus on people is reflected in the tonal shift that takes place across the trilogy, from thrilling military space opera to psychosocial drama. *Ninefox Gambit* takes Kel Cheris, a young military officer, and thrusts her into the role of corporeal vessel for the ghost of a mad-genius tactician, so that he (acting through her) can put down a rebellion against the high calendar. As a result the first book is a tactical thriller reminiscent of the best parts of Orson Scott Card's *Ender's Game* (1985). But the most fascinating dynamic is between Kel Cheris and Shuos Jedao, the homicidal but charismatic general she must control, and this sort of intimate, personal drama is what really drives the trilogy. In some ways, *Revenant Gun* is a quiet and intimate conclusion to an explosive trilogy, and that may feel anticlimactic to readers who wanted Jedao's tactical brilliance to escalate. But the trilogy never sets out to glorify war: Cheris/Jedao's military triumphs are always immediately undercut by the ugliness and brutality of conflict. By *Revenant Gun,* the tone shifts decisively to war-weariness and tragic romance. This play with generic conventions is by no means unique to Lee (John Scalzi, for one, is adept at shifting tones within the broad umbrella of military SF), but Lee pulls it off with delicacy and finesse. The psychological drama gains extra power from Lee's clever reference to the soapy dramas that many characters enjoy watching: in *The Machineries of Empire*, small stories take on epic significance.

The cat-and-mouse power games between Kel Cheris, Shuos Jedao, and Nirai Kujen – the immortal designer of the Hexarchate's calendar – is a millennia-old conflict that threatens the whole empire, but it is also intensely personal. *Revenant Gun* focuses on Nirai Kujen, the brilliant, charming, and ruthless architect of the high calendar and much of its technology. As Cheris continues her hunt for the secret of Kujen's immortality, she finds Hemiola – one of Kujen's abandoned servitors – and forms a tentative alliance. Hemiola does not want to believe the worst of Kujen and joins Cheris to discover Kujen's reasons for creating a social hierarchy founded on ritual torture. But the most compelling insights into Kujen's character come from his relationship with a newly cloned version of Shuos Jedao, created to take back the empire after the fragmentation of *Raven Stratagem*. This relationship mirrors the cat-and-mouse game between Cheris and Jedao in *Ninefox Gambit.* The vulnerability of this newborn Jedao (who lacks his older self's full memories) highlights the softer side of Nirai Kujen – who is no less dangerous for his love of beauty, his gentle wit, or his apparent affection towards Jedao. Unfortunately, the final revelation – why Kujen *is* so ruthless – is somewhat anticlimactic. As a result, *Revenant Gun* loses some of the tightly wound tension that made *Ninefox Gambit* and *Raven Stratagem* sparkle. On reflection, this adds to the psychological realism of the trilogy. A single revelation about a character, however significant, is unlikely to be the key that unlocks the puzzle box for good; in the end, Kujen's past is still not fully known, and there is still a war to be won.

Again, Lee literalises the metaphor: the fragmentation of identity that is so ubiquitous throughout the trilogy illustrates the impossibility of ever knowing someone fully. There will always be another facet, from another moment in time, that disturbs any coherent image of a person. Lee's brilliance with character shows to full effect here, with Cheris, Jedao, and Kujen orbiting ever closer to one another; never fully visible to the others, and only partially legible to the reader. Like all Lee's metaphors, fragmentation does double duty. In *Revenant Gun,* the full implications of the series title become clear. The machinations of empire could be seen simply as political maneuvering between elites, or the struggle to keep hold of technology that ensures military dominance, but in the final instalment Lee makes it clear that it is ultimately all about people. The high calendar is *powered* by fragments of lives: it carves people and cultures into pieces that fit into its hierarchy, and it deploys people as fragments of machinery. The Hexarchate *is* a machine, in this very literal sense, driven by the ordinary lives, movements, and the sacrifices of people.

But the real heart of *Revenant Gun* can be found in characters who do not fit neatly inside this machine - those who are *not* considered people. Lee's representation of identities that we would consider subaltern (non-heterosexual or non-cisgendered, for example) is consistently good – these characters appear frequently in the Hexarchate, without comment, in positions of power – but *Machineries of Empire* substitutes its own subaltern identities. Cheris' relationship with the robotic servitors, for example, is consistently one of the most fascinating components of the trilogy, because she is one of the few people who overtly acknowledge their sapience and independent culture. Lee explores this omission to great effect in *Raven Strategem*, in which it becomes clear that servitors are not recognised by the high calendar and cannot create exotic effects. This turns out to be a blessing for servitors in a certain light, because unlike the Kel soldier faction they are not asked to sacrifice themselves for the empire. But it does highlight the arbitrary and exclusionary nature of the high calendar, because servitors can be recognised by certain heretical calendars. Although clearly sapient, they are not *people* in the social hierarchy of the Hexarchate. The servitors are only one marginal group, albeit the most nuanced, but to discuss the others would be to spoil one of the most soulwrenching moments in *Revenant Gun*.

Overall, *Revenant Gun* delivers on the promises set out by *Ninefox Gambit* and *Raven Stratagem*. If the tactical thrills have lost their shine, it is because *Revenant Gun* instead prioritises the trilogy's exploration of identity as multifaceted, veiled, and unknowable. The Hexarchate can quantify and control almost anything, but individual subjectivity resists mathematical modelling. For Cheris and Jedao, identity and memory *are* the means of resistance. With *Revenant Gun*, Lee cements his place in the modern canon of innovative, conceptual – and beautiful – SF.

BIONOTE

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THESE VIOLENT DELIGHTS HAVE DISAPPOINTING ENDS: POTENTIAL AND THE AMERICAN IMAGINARY IN *WESTWORLD*'S SEASON TWO

Review by Emily Cox

Nolan, Jonathan and Lisa Joy, creators. "Season Two." *Westworld*. Perf. Evan Rachel Wood, Thandie Newton, Jeffrey Wright, James Marsden, Tessa Thompson. Bad Robot, 2018. Television.

Following the breath-taking surge of creativity and inventiveness that defined *Westworld*'s first season (2016), season two of the reboot of Michael Crichton's 1973 classic film began equally promisingly. The first season dealt elegantly with questions relating to consciousness and the possible routes towards creating a sentient machine (or how such a development might occur by accident). At the same time, by portraying mainly android characters called 'hosts' who live within narrative 'loops,' the show was able to explore themes of repetition and difference, the nature of identity, and ideas of how beings learn and grow over time, while also adhering to their predetermined trajectories. Questions relating to free will continually dominated the show as characters, both human and non-human, found themselves bound to behave in accordance with their 'programming,' whether this took the form of literal computer code or was the result of socialisation, personality, biology, and so forth.

Season two (2018) deals with similar themes. Dolores (Evan Rachel Wood), the heroine of season one, who had been gradually 'waking up' (gaining consciousness) and developing her own inner 'voice,' was boldly turned from a curious, innocent rancher's daughter into a genocidal freedom fighter in season two. This surprising development raised several interesting questions about agency and consciousness. Arnold, one of the park's creators, had designed Dolores to be curious and intelligent, in the hopes that she might mature into a conscious being. When this eventually occurs, however, the audience has the sense that the kind of personhood Dolores develops is not quite what Arnold had hoped for. In fact, Dolores decides that all humans need to be destroyed. In the finale of season one, Dolores murders Ford (Antony Hopkins), Arnold's partner in the creation of Westworld and all its hosts; this is swiftly followed (at the beginning of season two) by Dolores turning her gun on humans and robots alike. What began tantalisingly as a potential analysis of identity formation gloriously backfires and results in the making of a megalomaniacal terrorist, malevolent in her deeds yet utterly convinced of her own righteousness. Thus, identity formation swiftly gives way to rather heavy-handed exposition and the indictment of humanity. Dolores' final assessment of humans is revealing: "Your species craves death. You need it. It's the only way you can renew. The only way you ever inched forward. Your kind likes to pretend there is some poetry in that, but really it's pathetic"

("The Passenger"). Dolores' rampage is partly revenge for the way guests have been killing and maiming the hosts while the park's engineers, complicit in their abuse, continually reset the hosts' memories so that they can return to the park, only to be mutilated again.

However, Dolores also believes that humans are incapable accepting hosts as equals and will never consent to share the 'real' world outside of the amusement park. This storyline, of androids rising up against humans and where robots become a universal metaphor for similarly oppressed peoples throughout history, suffers from what I think of as the *Toy Story* (1995) problem. As many of us will remember, *Toy Story* is the Pixar animated film, which tells the story of toys that miraculously come to life when their human owners are not there to play with them. In one of the scenes, the toys are captured by an 'evil' little boy called Sid who is known for 'torturing' toys by cutting off their limbs, blowing them up with fireworks, burning them and so forth. Even though the audience is clearly meant to feel the fear and loathing that Buzz and Woody feel for this character, there is really no logical reason for us to think he is anything more than a slightly unusual (if possibly disturbed) child. This is because Sid, like every other human in the world of *Toy Story*, assumes, very reasonably, that toys are not alive or capable of experiencing pain, for that matter.

The people who visit and maintain Westworld are no more aware that the hosts of the park are alive than Sid is, even though both *Westworld* and *Toy Story* paint both Sid and the guests as, at the very least, negligent and, at worst, sadistic. As Dolores executes one fleeing guest after another, they cry out pitiful excuses like, "it was all just for fun" ("Journey Into Night"), begging pathetically for mercy in a manner that seems designed to illicit enjoyment from the audience as the bad guys get what they deserve.

The problem with the trope of robot freedom fighters is that it often fails to address ethical issues surrounding consent and the morality of doing violence to a machine as a way of mitigating your own violent tendencies in the real world. This is the case in season two of *Westworld*. Ford, who appears in the mind of Bernard (Jeffrey Wright), is the only substantial, benevolent human voice left in the story at this point. The other human characters were either all killed in the previous season, or are weak and selfish like the self-absorbed head of Narrative, Lee Sizemore (Simon Quarterman) or like the amoral, corporate board member Charlotte Hale (Tessa Thompson). Even Ford considers humanity to be irredeemable, and he guides the robots in their quest for liberation with the knowledge that their revolution will inevitably be bloody.

Science Fiction, of course, has a long-standing tradition of social and political satire, but often through the lens of new, imagined 'alien' or future landscapes that are more than a thinly veiled portrayal of our own world. As in many other classic human versus robot narratives (from *Blade Runner* (1982) to *I-Robot* (2004) to *Battlestar Galactica (*2004-2009)) the problem with the androids of *Westworld* is that they become indistinguishable from humans. As they display the same behaviours, desires, emotions, the show becomes a classic dichotomy of haves and have-nots. This gives the impression that the writers have taken the approach previous popular sci-fi writers were once accused of using when introducing female characters, namely: add robots and stir.

Furthermore, the alignment of the robots with various oppressed groups becomes obvious as robots programmed to be members of minority groups begin to feature prominently in the story. In season one this vague comparison worked very well alongside complimentary themes of identity and narratives of self. Furthermore, the character of Maeve Millay, a black host and brothel Madam, played beautifully by Thandie Newton, was used expertly in both seasons as a way of exploring the imagined and constructed identities of sex workers. In addition to season two's focus on Maeve, we also encounter a Japanese geisha, Akane (Rinko Kikuchi) who makes a similar decision to break out of her pre-programmed character as a demure object of Western objectification, and go on a killing spree, executing a shogun with a knife disguised as a hair ornament (and the feminist implications of using such a feminine object to kill a man are hard to miss). Another significant figure is the American Indian character Akecheta (Zahn's McClarnon). Having at first been given the narrative of a peaceful pastoral existence, Akecheta is reprogrammed to become a member of a savage group of warriors called 'ghost nation.' Both identities are based on Western conceptualisations of American Indian culture - the wise and peaceful people living in harmony with nature contrasted with brutal killers hungry for blood. Having discovered the nature of his world as false, Akecheta seeks to find the 'door' to the real world and reinvents himself as a prophet to his people.

These characters all offer moments of profound insight into the nature of identity, self-discovery and the power of culturally imposed narratives from one people onto another. However, outside of these moments of brilliance, the series' story arch is rather simplistic and, while the main characters do an awful lot of moralising, none of the ethical debate which the series' subject matter demands really takes place. All the actor's performances were impeccable and, despite narrative drawbacks, deeply moving and effective. Yet, the plot and script of season two did not truly do the acting abilities of its excellent cast justice. While Dolores continually denounces humanity, declaring them irredeemable - "this world wasn't meant for them, it was meant for us" ("The Passenger") - we are also informed, condescendingly by a Westworld developed AI (Ben Barnes) that all humans can be reduced to a mere 10,247 lines of code and that humans are incapable of living outside of these predetermined instructions "the best they can do is live according to their code" ("The Passenger").

Like the actual old West, the possibilities of the amusement park are often squandered by guests in the interest of seeking cheap thrills. For Dolores, the world outside the park – outside this facsimile of the American West – is the real land of opportunity for her and her kind. Despite the significant drawbacks of *Westworld*'s season two, I am somewhat hopeful for the upcoming season three. The finale of season two suggests the next one will cover Dolores entering the outside world; the writers now have an opportunity to revert back to the more philosophical themes of the first season. They have the chance to explore the myth of the American old West within the park as well as the realisation of the American dream outside it, through the eyes of a non-human subject. Like the old West, season three has a lot of potential – let's hope the writers make the most of it.

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BIONOTE

Emily Cox completed her doctorate at Brunel University, UK in SF, gender theory and the philosophy of Giorgio Agamben. She is particularly interested in the sf trope of the female robot. Dr Cox's "Denuding the Gynoid: The Woman Machine as Bare Life in Alex Garland's *Ex Machina*" was recently published in *Foundation* and she has contributed a chapter to the edited collection: *Blade Runner and Philosophy*, to be published next year. She is the recipient of SFRA's *Support a New Scholar* Award.

AVENGERS: INFINITY IN THE MAKING

Review by Danielle Girard

Russo, Joe and Anthony Russo, directors. *Avengers: Infinity War.* Marvel Studios, 2018. Film.

In the spring of 2008 there was an idea to update the contemporary superhero franchise by crafting a shared universe wherein numerous capes could coexist in a story that had room for them all. Iron Man, Captain America, Thor, and Hulk became the torchbearers for this new formula that would forever change mainstream cinema. Ten years and an unprecedented eighteen films later, the Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU) approached the end of an era with *Avengers: Infinity War*, an epic conclusion that ties together the long-running theme of infinity stones and keeps a central focus on the main villain, Thanos. First introduced in 2014's *Guardians of the Galaxy,* Thanos has been a figure who has underscored much of the MCU for the past four years, biding his time while others fought his war. Present, but ambiguous, his motive was always to collect all six infinity stones, though casual watchers (that is to say, those unfamiliar with his role in the comics) were left in the dark as to what he planned to do with them.

Infinity War wastes no time asserting Thanos's physical might, the film opens with multiple character deaths and a poignant scene between Thanos and Hulk that ends with the latter beaten to a bloody pulp and left unconscious (a near impossible feat should the audience be privy to the Hulk's role in the prior eighteen films). About a quarter of the way through the film the audience is clued in to Thanos's ultimate plan: he wants the stones to complete his gauntlet so that he may flick his fingers and eliminate fifty percent of the universe's population. These are stakes hitherto unforeseen in the MCU, and *Infinity War* gives them the weight they deserve. Overall, *Infinity War* genuinely feels like the finale that it is meant to be. It is a risk-taking entrant in a cinematic universe that has been straddling the line of popular favor since 2015's *Avengers: Age of Ultron* and it revolves around one of the MCU's few compelling villains.

Though the film boasts success both amongst fans and critics (and a stunning box office performance), there remain a handful of criticisms to be made. The secondary antagonists, The Children of Thanos, are the typical two-dimensional villains that MCU fans have come to expect. They are powerful, yes, but they read on screen like pre-programmed video game characters that must be defeated. The most compelling of the four, Ebony Maw, is the second to die, and the only female villain, Proxima Midnight, becomes a device used to unite the few female superheroes that the MCU contains. While this fight between Proxima, Black Widow, Scarlet Witch, and Okoye is enjoyable to watch, it sends the message that none of the female heroes is capable of singlehandedly defeating the female villain. Apart from celebrating these characters in a moment of feminist glory, it trivializes them, a moment further underscored by the fact that at the time of *Infinity War's* release, there was no MCU film centred on a female hero.[1]

Another notable aspect of the film centres on the visual depiction of Thanos. When the film begins, he is shrouded in shadows that make him look more like a monster than an intelligent character. His fight with Hulk expands on this physical might of the character, yet as the film progresses and the lighting begins to shift from dark to light, Thanos becomes a more human presence on screen. The suspension of disbelief obviously comes into play here – the audience knows that the purple Titan is a CGI creation – yet still the motion capture of his expression and the soundtrack that allots him his own screen presence resonates with this thematic shift toward humanizing one of the MCU's best villains.

There is also the wide audience issue of assumed knowledge that subsumes *Infinity War*, essentially meaning that anyone viewing the film who has not watched the previous eighteen would be hopelessly lost in the plot. This isn't necessarily a criticism, though it is a factor that has been criticized. Instead of wasting space discussing the assumed knowledge that becomes necessary to even read my summary of the film, I would ask a question of audience and viewership in regards to ongoing cinematic series. Could a viewer of *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows Part 2* be expected to follow the plot had they not viewed the previous seven films in the series? It is an unfair, comparison, yes, because the MCU, as I said, has reinvented the cinema experience. Their films are not necessarily a sustained narrative, but a serial one. For example, *Spiderman Homecoming* (2017) and *Black Panther* (2018), though part of the MCU, do not require the same assumed knowledge that *Infinity War* does. Almost like television, the MCU crafts episodic narratives that create a whole in *Infinity War,* therefore to judge *Infinity War* as a stand-alone film is unfair. Thus, the choice to exclude expositional information that was introduced in another film should not be criticized but applauded as a bold move for a film with a near three-hour runtime. *Infinity War* is unapologetic in its self-surety, and the MCU has spent the last decade changing the cinematic game to ensure its success.

And despite losing casual audience members, the film is successful. The heavy ensemble cast is treated with care as the main narrative is built around Thanos, his history, and his dreams for the universe. He sets a clear goal for himself in the film's early scenes, and he carries that goal to its natural conclusion when he snaps his fingers and fifty percent of the universe is wiped out. It isn't a happy ending, but again this distinction from what is expected of a superhero film is what makes the movie so compelling. Apart from wrapping everything in a happily-ever-after bow, the film asks its audience to confront the cost of morality as it could be said that the Avengers lose because they are heroes. Perhaps this is a moment of cognition for the film as it seeks to acknowledge that morality is no longer of the cut-and-dry variety that heroes like Steve Rogers (Captain America) originally fought. Indeed, it is this as thematic aspect that permeates not only *Infinity War,* but many of the recent MCU films. Captain America and Iron Man fought in *Civil War* (2016) because of this core difference in belief about right and wrong; *Spider-Man Homecoming*'s villain is born from the capitalist greed of Tony Stark (Iron Man); and *Black Panther* openly acknowledged that antagonist Eric Killmonger was right in his ideology though wrong in action. In *Infinity War,* this continuation of theme is best exemplified in the existence of Vision, an AI Avenger who, for all intents and purposes, has an infinity stone for a brain. When his companions come to the realization that the mind stone in

his head must be destroyed, the possibility of winning the war is still on the table. Had they sacrificed the AI, they likely could have prevented Thanos's victory. Indeed, when Scarlet Witch finally does agree to sacrifice Vision, it is too late. This is a probing and uncomfortable question about worth of sentient life and sacrifice, and it is perhaps the underlying darkness to *Infinity War* that awards the film both nuance and might. In essence, the MCU uses this film to assert that heroes can fail for the right reasons. Rarely has the MCU crafted a narrative quite like this one, and though many of the characters who were turned to dust in the final moments (many of whom sit on goldmines of box office and merchandising glory) will likely return in future films,[2] the definitive victory of Thanos in *Infinity War* will stand the test of time as one of the boldest, bravest, and most fascinating endings to a superhero franchise.

NOTES

1. The twentieth film in the franchise, *Ant-Man and the Wasp* (released three months following *Infinity War* in the USA, four months in the UK) would be the first MCU film in the decade span to include a female character name in the title, and *Captain Marvel* (film twenty-one in 2019) will be the first to center exclusively on a female hero.

2. *Spiderman Far From Home*, for example, has been announced and is currently in production despite the death of its titular character in Infinity War.

BIONOTE

Danielle Girard is a United States native reading for her PhD at Lancaster University, UK. Her thesis, tentatively titled: *Slashing the Frontier; Queer Representation and the Heteronormative Canon: Examining* Star Trek *and the Effects of Participatory Culture* explores Gene Roddenberry's *Star Trek* through a lens of Fan Theory and Queer Theory. She is particularly interested in introducing the concept of romantic orientation to academic studies as well as dissecting the rhetoric that often shapes the debates surrounding female slash fans and female queerness.

A BRILLIANT MADNESS: THE SLOW BURN OF BRANDON SANDERSON'S *STORMLIGHT ARCHIVE*

Review by C. Palmer-Patel

A Review of Sanderson, Brandon. *Oathbringer.* Tor Books, 2017. Stormlight Archive 3. Novel.

Let me start with a disclaimer: I am an avid Brandon Sanderson fan. This is in part due to the thoughtfulness that Sanderson puts into his writing and world-building. From 2007 to 2013 Sanderson set out his 'three laws' of magic-writing which I strongly believe that all Fantasy authors should follow (J. K. Rowling fans, take note; Rowling's conception of magic is incredibly flawed.)

The first law: "An author's ability to solve conflict with magic is DIRECTLY PROPORTIONAL to how well the reader understands said magic" (original emphasis).

The second law: "Limitations > Powers" […]. As he explains further, "It isn't what the heroes can do that is most important to who they are, but what they have trouble doing."

Sanderson's magic has rules. It has weaknesses. It does not involve a bit of wand-waving and a *deus ex machina* mechanic that conveniently delivers the hero from danger (again, take note Rowling fans). His magic is logical while fantastical.

But it is Sanderson's third law that demonstrates a principle that is especially important to the Fantastika field: "**Expand what you already have before you add something new**" (original emphasis). As he clarifies further, "your job as a writer is to look at how the changes you've made will affect the world as a whole." The greater Fantastika writers are those that are conscious of this idea. For instance, Ursula Le Guin's *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969) is particularly brilliant in its awareness of how a small change (removing binary notions of gender) would transform the entire society (fans of Kameron Hurley's *The Mirror Empire* (2014) or *The Stars are Legion* (2017), pay attention). Fantastika authors truly shine when they deal with a single novum that has immense impact on the rest of the world. And here is the true beauty of Sanderson's work: the awareness of how magic transforms *everything* – economy, religion, even clothing; and not in the stereotypical 'wizards should wear cloaks' manner (my last cheap shot at Potter fans)[1], but rather how does a cloak actively aid or thwart a wizard's use of magic? The *novum* is where Sanderson focuses his attention and dedicates loving detail to its exploration.

It is with this background that I approached *The Stormlight Archive* (of which *Oathbringer* is the third book) with eagerness – and some measure of trepidation. The series was preceded by

the announcement that many of Sanderson's trilogies and stand-alone stories were in fact connected and thus all in the *same* universe. In view of his well-thought-out laws, how was it possible that these seemingly disparate magical systems all came from the same universe? Given the current craze with franchises, it was hard not to see this as just part of some marketing gimmick. At the time of writing this review, the *Cosmere* universe is expected to become some forty books when it is completed and there are also rumours of a multi-film deal being signed. However, it should be acknowledged that Sanderson always planned for a connected universe with the intent to reveal the links between these seemingly disparate series after a few of them had already published.

So I settled down to read the first of the series, *The Ways of Kings* (2010). And I hated it. (Well, perhaps hate is too strong of a word, but given my passion for Sanderson's work, I was more than a tad disappointed with this mammoth endeavour.) It was too complicated; too detailed; too *big*. And given that I specialise in Epic Fantasy, I am no stranger to complicated, detailed, big EPICS.

But then I re-read the novel in preparation for the sequel, *Words of Radiance* (2014), and I admitted that, perhaps, I was too quick to criticise. It was a perfectly respectable work of Epic Fantasy Fiction and, while not my favourite of Sanderson's series, I was looking forward to the third instalment. By 2016, the short story collection *Arcanum Unbounded* was released and was instrumental in revealing the secret connections between the *Cosmere* universe. Reading the collection made me excited to re-examine the *Cosmere* collection. So, in preparation for the release of *Oathbringer* (2017), I once more sat down to re-read *The Way of Kings* (1007 pages) and *Words of Radiance* (1087 pages) with this background in mind. And *this time* I was blown away by the brilliance of Brandon Sanderson. The metaphorical lightbulb turned on and I could see the hidden web of connections at play. As an academic I live for those moments where a difficult concept suddenly *makes sense* – in that one bright, shining, eureka moment. And this is precisely what Sanderson manages to do with his novels time and time again. The reader waits for that twist, Aristotle's "Recognition," that 'ah-ha' moment where all is revealed. While Sanderson usually manages to do this neatly by the end of each novel, the *Stormlight Archive* is a different game: a slow burn that reveals itself only when you sit back and see the forest for the trees.

Although you can read the series without reading the rest of Sanderson's *Cosmere* writings, *Oathbringer* itself is probably difficult to read as a stand-alone novel. As with many Epics, the series begins with a prologue. Here, magician knights (the Knights Radiant) decide to abandon their post and lay down their cause. This act effectively removes magic from the world. The rest of the series takes place several centuries later and explores the gradual re-emergence of Radiant power. Meanwhile, the plot itself focuses on a long-running war between a humanoid and a nonhuman race (the Parshendi or Parshmen). There is also strife and double-crossing between various houses from the humanoid side which prolongs the war. (The emphasis on finding honour in the middle of a decade long war seems reminiscent of Homer's *Iliad* and the confrontations between Agamemnon and Achilles.) And to further add to the theme of stagnant war, the events of the first book involve the problems of extreme class disparity and the efforts of slave revolt during the midst of these battles.

The war itself is triggered by the assassination of the king by the Parshendi during a celebration of a peace treaty between both races. However, though the Parshendi take culpability for the assassination, the reason behind it is left unclear and a key part of the series (and Sanderson's work as a whole) is uncovering and slowly examining the backstory and history of this secret race. In a sense, another key theme to the entire series is the idea of recovering lost or hidden knowledge. This theme occurs on several levels: with the slow re-emergence of Radiant power and their attempts to comprehend this lost knowledge; with every main character in the narrative hiding or repressing their personal backgrounds (motifs of madness and darkness also emerge, as the reasons behind these repressions are likewise suppressed); and finally, with several 'Dark Age' styled generational gaps which have led to a blanket lack of awareness of not only entire races, but natural and supernatural geographical phenomena as well. The *Stormlight Archive* deals with the gradual emergence of these hidden histories from the minutiae to the macro.

As the third book in an epic series, *Oathbringer* starts off after a lot of major events have already occurred. The war has pushed past its series of static battles and launched into even greater destruction. Radiants and Radiant power has been revealed in the world. The 'bad guys,' in true Sanderson fashion, have turned out to be not so evil, and indeed sympathetic and relatable. The series has also been leading for some time toward a discussion on the guilt of colonisation. This crystallises further in *Oathbringer* as the central hero Kaladin joins up with a group of Parshmen. While the second book began to have Parshendi as point of view characters, Kaladin's observations of their actions as 'normal' (events such as playing cards or simple bickering) humanises these former slaves further. But, as Kaladin struggles to convince others that Parshmen are not truly evil, one cannot help fearing an underlying dread that the series is headed towards an inevitable genocide. Hopefully Sanderson manages to twist the plot in the manner that we have become familiar with.

There are some gratifying moments in the novel, passages that I re-read again and again simply as guilty pleasure. For instance, Kaladin's reveal of his magical abilities is pure escapism for me. (Who doesn't dream of revealing to friends and family that you have superhuman magical powers?) As various members of the narrative's motley crew gain magical abilities, the story is rife with further escapist moments.

But these moments are neatly balanced against the darker sides, the 'weaknesses' of magical abilities. Magic 'awakens' when broken people try to come to terms with their identity, making themselves whole and forming bonds with the spirits around them. This redemption comes not once, but repeatedly, as a Radiant must swear five Ideals – oaths that are individual and specific to each struggle and journey.

The struggles of the core characters are weighty, and at times emotional. Shallan's complete descent into madness was not entirely unexpected. On one hand, Fantasy heroes going mad are almost clichéd now; J. R. R. Tolkien did it with anyone who touched the One Ring (*The Lord of the Rings*, 1954-1955) while Robert Jordan continued the tradition with his exploration of Rand

al'Thor (*The Wheel of Time*, 1990-2013). Yet Sanderson manages to build layers of the character in a way that is at once fresh and yet equally disturbing and worrisome. Shallan's love triangle with her counterpoint male heroes might risk being a touch problematic (as Epic Fantasy rarely depicts strong female leads without pushing them into a supporting role as love interest), except that the nuances of this love triangle further reveal facets of her madness and acts to strengthen the layers of her character. The reveal of Dalinar's backstory through the use of jumps in narrative time is especially well-crafted. Given that Dalinar has holes in his own memory, the slow reveal of these lost pieces works well structurally as the reader learns the backstory alongside the character. In a sense, Sanderson seems to encourage his reader to re-read these narratives, as the structure of re-gaining lost memories also works in parallel to the reader's own re-reading of the texts. Given the length of each novel (*Oathbringer* is 1248 pages),[2] Sanderson seems to keep rushing all of his endings in the *Stormlight Archive*, but it seemed particularly abrupt in *Oathbringer*. I imagine this is in part *due* to the length of the book; a longer ending would have likely seen us in the 1500 page range – which is unfathomable for a novel, even an Epic one. The *Stormlight Archive* is planned to be a ten-book series: the series will be broken up into two parts, with the last five books a sequel series of the first. So if you are gearing up to read *Stormlight Archives*, get ready for the long haul! Is this a book that will take multiple re-reads of the series to enjoy and appreciate? Given the sheer amount of pages published so far, I sincerely hope not. But, if like me, you are a masochist that enjoys reading Epic Fantasy, by this third instalment you will likely be eager to re-read the mammoth collection in order to catch every tiny detail that you have missed the first time around. In this, perhaps, a true fan of *Oathbringer* is a bit mad as well.

NOTES

1. For the record, I do not hate Rowling's *Harry Potter*. I think it does an admirable job of telling a coming-of-age story balanced with a critique of absolute power. But I feel that her rules of magic are more escapist than actual 'rules.'

2. The series is so big that the UK publisher has split each book in the series into parts one and two as individual novels.

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BIONOTE

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HOLY MOTHERFORKING SHIRTBALLS: THE RETROSPECTIVE HILARITY OF THE AFTERLIFE

Review by Katarina O'Dette

Schur, Michael, creator. "Season Two." *The Good Place.* Performance by Kristen Bell, Ted Danson, Jameela Jamil, Manny Jacinto, William Jackson Harper, and D'Arcy Carden. Fremulon and Universal Television, 2017-2018. Television.

Series actor Marc Evan Jackson describes *The Good Place* [*TGP*] as "one of the smartest, dumbest shows on television wherein philosophy and fart jokes often share the same paragraph" ("Ch. 1"), but the series' easy friendship between morality and scatology is only the beginning of what makes it, and in particular its second season, unique.

TGP is about the selfish Eleanor Shellstrop who is mistakenly sent to the Good Place, a non-denominational afterlife. Desperate not to be discovered and banished to the Bad Place, she and fellow mistake resident Jason Mendoza take moral philosophy classes from her chronically indecisive soulmate Chidi Anagonye so they can learn to be good people and blend in with their do-gooder neighbours[1], like socialite Tahani Al-Jamil.

At least, this is what the first season pretends the series is about, until the finale reveals that this is a trick by the neighbourhood's architect, Michael: Eleanor and her friends have been in the Bad Place the whole time; Michael and their neighbours are actually demons; and the four humans are being used to torture one another.

This total overhaul of a series' premise would be shocking on any show but is particularly so on a half-hour American comedy. Viewers are accustomed to fellow NBC sitcoms like *Friends* (1994-2004), *The Office* (2005-2013), and *Parks and Recreation* (2009-2015) where, although the cast may change, characters evolve, and new plotlines emerge, the basic premise remains throughout. *TGP* deletes its premise with a literal snap of Michael's fingers. In the new season, the neighbourhood gets rebooted 802 times but, though the humans' memories are wiped each time, they keep figuring out the ruse. Michael has no choice: he will be 'retired' if his boss realises he has failed, so he joins forces with the humans. They will pretend they have stopped figuring out Michael's scheme if the amoral demon attends Chidi's ethics lessons and finds a way to get them to the real Good Place.

It takes three episodes to push Michael and the humans to the point where they agree to work together. These episodes sometimes feel awkward: viewers, whether or not they are conscious of it, are accustomed to knowing a series' premise after the pilot, and while dramas like *Alias* (2001-2006)

have changed premises, it is significantly less common for comedies. When premises do change, the switch is usually accomplished in one episode, rarely leaving viewers uncertain for long. The fact that *TGP*'s transition takes three episodes contributes to its initial awkwardness; for some viewers, having this uncertainty extended over one hour of screen time is an uncomfortable experience that reflects poorly on the series, as its writers are expected to clearly and urgently guide viewers toward the new premise. However, this discomfort does not remain on a re-watch, suggesting that once viewers know that there will be a new premise as enjoyable as the original, they do not mind premise-less episodes. The discomfort is potentially more reflective of how accustomed viewers are to constantly knowing a series' premise, rather than an actual weakness of the season. And any initial awkwardness proves worth it, as the new premise opens up fresh pleasures in watching the series.

Now on the other side of the curtain, viewers can enjoy the construction of the fake Good Place. Subtle aspects of the *mise-en-scène* become noticeable, like that all the furniture in Eleanor's apartment is designed to be uncomfortable (Jackson, "Ch. 5"). While the neighbourhood's lush gardens and charming village seemed idyllic in the first season, their true purpose becomes clear in season two: torturing Eleanor with a daily, visual reminder that she is not worthy of this elegant paradise. Details that were funny in the first season because they were incongruous with paradise – the clown paintings in Eleanor's house, the excessive number of frozen yogurt shops, the pairing of ethics professor Chidi with ethical disaster Eleanor – can now be appreciated as deliberate torture mechanisms. In turn, they become jokes again because they contribute to a specific notion of hell, as illustrated when the characters discuss the neighbourhood's clam chowder restaurants:

> Tahani: "Oh, the place with the chowder fountain."
> Eleanor: "No, that's Pump Up the Clam. A Little Bit Chowder Now has the lazy river of chowder. Ugh! How did we ever think this was the Good Place?" ("Team Cockroach")

Viewers are invited to laugh: at the characters who believed this was the Good Place; at themselves last season for believing this was the Good Place; and with the production team for suggesting that this is what the Bad Place would be like.

Representations of 'good' and 'bad' specifically reflect the writers' and production designers' pet peeves. Frozen yogurt, Hawaiian pizza, and coffee pods are portrayed as edible torture. The strong, absurd personality behind good and evil prevents the discussion of ethics from turning preachy and pedantic. In the second season, it also opens up humorous insights into Michael. As Stefan Ekman points out, there is often a link in Fantasy between ruler and realm that "[tells] the reader something about the rulers by describing the realm that surrounds them" (213). Because Michael constructed the neighbourhood, every detail gains another layer of comedy because it reflects what he personally considers torture, as when he describes the prevalence of coffee pods as "diabolical" ("Everything is Great!"). Torture reveals how the creators (both the production team and Michael, the in-series creator) view good and evil.

This meta self-awareness continues in the casting. As Michael, Ted Danson spent the first season drawing on viewers' intertextual memory of his roles in *Cheers* (1982-1993) and *Curb Your Enthusiasm* (2000-present) to play up his character's innocence and obscure his evil nature. Danson brings this likeability to season two to soften Michael, using a dry line performance to lend credence to his portrayal of an immortal demon and an infectious enthusiasm for illogical human memorabilia and behaviour to lend plausibility to Michael's character arc.

Eleanor is likewise infused with intertextual knowledge of Kristen Bell. Best known from *Frozen* (2013) and *Veronica Mars* (2004-2007), Bell has a reputation for sweetness and strong principles that makes viewers sympathetic towards her character; even when faced with flashbacks of Eleanor's unethical behaviour, viewers are more likely to forgive and align with her.

Contrastingly, the rest of the main cast, all new to major television roles, benefit from being unknown. Manny Jacinto (Jason) utilises his lack of recognition in the first season to convincingly portray both a silent Buddhist monk and a dim-witted, destructive amateur DJ from Florida. Jacinto's earnestness prevents Jason from becoming annoying even as he becomes increasingly oblivious in the second season. William Jackson Harper was planning to quit acting before being cast as Chidi, and this uncertainty allows him to portray the philosopher with a relatable anxiety that prevents the series' straight man and moral centre from becoming dull. D'Arcy Carden utilises her improv background to switch between helpful, rule-abiding Good Janet[2] and farting, insult-generating Bad Janet with spontaneous hilarity. Because of her relative anonymity on television, she convincingly portrays a character who falls nebulously between human and robot: a portrayal that might feel artificial if she were well known for human roles. While British audiences may recognise Jameela Jamil (Tahani) as a former presenter, she is new to acting and uses her freshness and lack of pretence to embody the narcissistic socialite with an unapologetic attitude and vulnerability that incurs viewer sympathy.

This may be *TGP*'s greatest feat: creating likeable, sympathetic characters out of denizens and proprietors of hell, and tackling complex ethical issues without becoming dark or gritty. *TGP* depicts hell while retaining the high key lighting of sitcoms: though it does not shy away from serious questions about morality, it remains both figuratively and literally light, never sacrificing its fundamental goodness or humour. This tonal conviction and consistency is vital to a series built on change. Season two ends like season one: with a turn of events that drastically alters the premise, characters, and setting. At the time of writing, viewers are again unsure what the premise will be for the upcoming season. *TGP* has established that it will constantly change. But more importantly, it has established that it will use that change to unveil rewarding new layers of its world, characters, and themes.

NOTES

1. Neighbourhoods are small sections of the afterlife specifically constructed by an immortal architect

to either please or torture its assigned residents, depending on whether they are in a Good or Bad Place neighbourhood.

2. Janets are personified AI systems, with a Good Janet assigned to every Good Place neighbourhood and a Bad Janet to every Bad Place neighbourhood.

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BIONOTE

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THE BIGGER YOU ARE, THE HARDER YOU FALL

Review by Sam Valentine

Shadow of the Colossus. **Bluepoint Games, Sony Interactive Entertainment, 2018. Video Game.**

Shadow of the Colossus was originally released in 2005, by the then fledgling developer, Team Ico. It was then remastered for the PlayStation 3 by Bluepoint Games in 2011 and mostly recently remade in 2018, also by Bluepoint Games. With over a decade since its original release, it shows that there is an enduring community and love of the game. This love is fuelled by its original and innovative gameplay, an overarching morally ambiguous story, and a healthy dose of nostalgia from the original release.

Shadow of the Colossus is at heart an Adventure game, a mix of platforming, puzzling, and exploration. The 2005 original was innovative and ground breaking, the world felt huge and beautiful, the game felt unique. In 2018, however, we have a plethora of games of a similar nature to draw upon. *Breath of the Wild* (2017) is likely the easiest to draw comparison to with its feeling of a vast open world and a likeness to its protagonist's armoury of a sword and bow. Both games give the player a sense of wonder using scale, and feature climbing as a main mechanic to enforce that the player interacts with that scale. Both games feature huge creatures to 'defeat.' It is safe to say that *Breath of the Wild* draws a hint of inspiration from *Shadow of the Colossus*. However, is it fair to compare the newly remade version to its recent contemporaries? The price on release was discounted by about two fifths of a standard full price game, depending on the continent. This would indicate that it is not to be taken as new full game, but as a trip down memory lane for dedicated fans, and that potential newcomers to the world are a bonus.

It begs the question however, was this remake worthwhile? *Shadow of the Colossus* has already been remastered and by all accounts to an excellent standard. To remake a game from the ground up as Bluepoint Games have done, surely something more should be added? Of course, the graphics have been upgraded, and it does look more beautiful than ever. Sadly though, that is the only apparent change that the player will notice. There is no extra gameplay, nothing extra at all as been added to the content of the game. In fact, Bluepoint Games have been excruciatingly precise with their remake, mechanically and technically across the game. This is disappointing as one of the few criticisms levelled at the original and remastered versions are its controls. The camera feels awkward and imprecise and Wander, the protagonist can be frustrating to manoeuvre. Agro, the horse controls terribly in some of the tighter spaces that must be negotiated. All of this is true to the remake. Bluepoint Games, it seems, have chosen to mimic the original's imperfections rather than chance any innovation with the title. This innovation would admittedly be a risk, as the game is

held with such reverence amongst dedicated fans that to stray too far from the original's path could be insulting.

That reverence is drawn from something other than the gameplay of *Shadow of the Colossus*. If it was simply the gameplay to be reviewed, *Shadow of the Colossus* would be average at best. It is the story that drives this game; a subtle tale that pushes the player along and makes the player ask questions outside of the game, about good and evil, about right and wrong.

Shadow of the Colossus features Wander, the protagonist, who enters a forbidden land on horseback with the body of a maiden, Mono. Wander asks an entity within this land, Dormin, for help in reviving Mono. Dormin agrees on the condition that Wander defeats sixteen colossi - giant stone creatures that wander the forbidden land. On defeating the colossi, dark energy is released from their body and enters Wander. Dormin itself warns Wander that he will pay a price for his actions, but Wander continues and eventually prevails in slaying all the colossi. In a short ending sequence, Wander now possessed by Dormin wreaks havoc across the temple but is eventually stopped by guardians that followed Wander into the forbidden land. Dormin is once again sealed away, and the bridge to the forbidden land is destroyed. The game ends with Mono awakening and picking up Wander who is now a small child with horns.

A lot of the story is left open for interpretation, the relation between Wander and Mono is never stated. The reason for Mono's death is only hinted at: her having a cursed destiny. Who or what Dormin is, is never stated. Dormin's trickery in using Wander to release itself is made apparent to the player, but Wander seems to not know, or be ambivalent towards, the outcome.

This ambiguity is balanced well; it allows players to debate amongst themselves the meaning of the story, the results of the story. There is no set canon of the game, with the intent being that the players can interpret their own meaning behind everything. This adds to the game's sense of vastness in a way other games have not achieved. The story feels as huge as the world because the player wonders about outside of the land, of what drove Wander to taking these actions. What else must this world contain if this forbidden land is just one small corner of it?

From this overarching story, the player starts to build an emotional connection, but not necessarily with the protagonist. In fact, Wander is quite a flat character, nonverbal and characterless. Once again, a connection is made with the land, and the most prominent feature of the land is the colossi. The colossi radiate character, they are full of personality, each with their own unique designs, their own little sections of the land they inhabit. They feel pain, and roar and shout as Wander climbs over them, they run and attack but only, it feels, in self-defence. It quickly becomes apparent that these creatures are the guardians, maybe they are the good guys, and maybe Wander is the villain, defeating each guardian to release Dormin into the world. The colossi feel innocent; they are not doing anything to antagonise Wander who has entered their land and hunts them down. That is just one interpretation of course.

When everything comes together, *Shadow of the Colossus* feels amazing. There is a 'click' moment when the player will be storming across a vast landscape, with a beautiful score of music and pondering on the meaning of the story where you will feel truly immersed in a beautiful game. Then, all too frequently, a frustrating technical issue will snap you out of these moments: the controls will feel wrong, or the camera will mess up and you will be pulled back into reality. It is almost a compliment to the game that it can immerse you so deeply that the disconnect when you are frustrated by it feels so sharp. The disconnect being present over three editions of the game means that there is something intrinsic about the gameplay in *Shadow of the Colossus* and the story it is weaving that do not come together comfortably. Whether fully fixing those technical issues would remove that disconnect completely is uncertain. A fourth version may be necessary to find that out.

Was this remake worthwhile? Almost, is the answer. For fans of the game revisiting this world with its beautiful new graphics will be more than enough. However, newcomers to *Shadow of the Colossus* will be left feeling unsatisfied, having been used to grand epics and games that are much larger, with much more content. *Shadow of the Colossus* does not stand up to its current contemporaries.

BIONOTE

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REREADING *FRANKENSTEIN*'S LEGACY

Review by Andreea Ros

Shelley, Mary. *Frankenstein.* 1818. Ed. Nick Groom. Oxford University Press, 2018. 226 pp.

The bicentenary of the first publication of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* on January 1st, 1818 has sparked celebratory reassessments of the novel's long-lasting impact on both literature and science. Science publications, including *Nature*, *The Lancet,* and *Science Magazine*, included articles on the continuing relevance of Shelley's novel to current scientific debates while several *Frankenstein*-themed conferences (including the Bicentenary Conference on Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* organised by Università di Venezia Cà Foscari, and *Frankenstein: A Multidisciplinary Conference* organised by University of Northumbria) allowed literary scholars to explore its critical legacy. Meanwhile, in order to feed this appetite for frankenfiction, Universal Studios have resurrected plans to remake their 1935 film *Bride of Frankenstein,* and a biopic of Mary Shelley – revolving around how her relationship with Percy Bysshe Shelley shaped her first novel – was released in May 2018 to mixed reviews. The year-long celebrations have also been the perfect opportunity to publish new annotated editions of the novel. This reissue of the novel as part of the *Oxford World Classics* series (edited and introduced by Nick Groom) does its utmost to reflect the novel's lasting cultural and critical legacy while also being a readable and useful edition for both new readers and veterans who are returning to it for the second (third or tenth) time, those who want to read *Frankenstein* for scholarship and those who read it for pleasure.

As has become customary, this new edition includes a lengthy introduction, as well as notes on editorial choices (Groom reproduces the 1818 text), a selected bibliography, a chronology of Mary Shelley (split into life, historical, and cultural background), generous appendixes (Shelley's introduction to the 1831 edition, substantive changes between the 1818 and 1831 editions, and Percy Bysshe Shelley's review of the novel, written in 1817 or 1818 but only published in 1832), and explanatory notes. Groom's introduction is split into eight sections, each examining one aspect of the context or critical reception of *Frankenstein* including, 'Birth' (xi-xix), 'Science' (xx-xxviii), and 'Gender' (xxxiii). In each, Groom explores the long shadow that *Frankenstein* has left on our understanding of Gothic and Science Fiction, medicine, technology and bioethics, feminism, and what it means to be a female artist, while bringing to life the cultural, political, and scientific contexts which Shelley wrote within. For example, the 'Science' section details the major scientific debates of the early nineteenth century: the use of dissections in anatomy teaching (xx-xxii), organ transplantation (xxiii), inoculation and vaccination (xxv), vitalism (xxv-xxvi), and electrical power (xxvi-xxvii). The extensive use of eighteenth and nineteenth century sources to illustrate these debates appeals to both general and academic readers as it gives the former a powerful insight into the attitudes and concerns of Shelley and her contemporaries, while allowing the latter to find new primary sources.

The one significant drawback of this approach is that it obscures some of the contemporary critical debates around the novel. One of the pleasures of reading *Frankenstein* today lies in knowing that you are only one in a long line of readers with whom you can debate your interpretations of the novel with. Groom argues that *Frankenstein* "has been more influential in feminist literary theory than any other novel" (xxxiv), but only illustrates this wealth of feminist theoretical engagements with Shelley through three examples: Ellen Moers' *Literary Women* (1976), Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar's *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (1979), and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's "Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism" (1985). While these are perhaps the most influential uses in feminist theory, *Frankenstein* has sparked a much broader range of feminist responses. Groom's 'Selected Bibliography' partially resolves this problem by providing readers with more recent examples of critical engagements, including Elizabeth Young's *Black Frankenstein: The Making of an American Metaphor* (2008) and *Dangerous Bodies: Historicising the Gothic Corporeal* (2016) by Marie Mulvey-Roberts. But even the extended bibliography does not delve into the more eccentric classics of feminist theoretical responses to *Frankenstein*, such as Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's chapter on Gothic fiction in *Between Men* (1985) or Susan Stryker's "My Words to Victor Frankenstein Above the Village of Chamounix: Performing Transgender Rage" (1994).

This feminist legacy of *Frankenstein* illustrates that responses to the novel have often sided with one of two main traditions. The first of these is primarily interested in the novel's engagement with science and technology and reads the novel either as a parable about the dangers of unrestrained scientific advancement, or a more positive tale about its almost limitless potential. This seemingly contradictory interpretation continues today: while the 'franken-' prefix has come to embody all kinds of bioethical monsters, scientists show a sustained and optimistic interest in Shelley's text – specifically, what it can teach them about their own practice and how it can be used to engage the general public in scientific research and debates. The other traditional reception tends to read *Frankenstein* through its promise of radical politics. Such explorations see the Creature or, rather, the Being (Groom argues convincingly for this appellation) as a symbol for the oppressed underclass. This conceptualization of the novel perhaps has its roots in George Canning (Foreign Secretary between 1822-1827 and committed abolitionist) urging comparisons between the Being and enslaved people in an 1824 Parliamentary debate over the abolition of slavery (xlix), but it has been continuously updated and reinterpreted. Different readers at different points in the novel's critical history have seen the Being as a symbol for the working class, women, Black people, transgender people, and disabled people. This critical tradition continues today in both academic and popular interpretations of the novel, as new readers discover Shelley's text and find themselves identifying with the Being.

Rereading *Frankenstein* in 2018, I am struck less by how we continue to read, interpret, and adapt it in innovative ways, than by how strange our analyses might seem to its first readers if – like the protagonist of one of Shelley's other novels set in the late 2000s, *The Last Man* (1826) – we could send a message back to the nineteenth century. We read, debate, and think about *Frankenstein*

more than any other text written at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Its enduring cultural influence, and how familiar it seems to us even before we read it, removes some of the strangeness of this tale about living as an organism that is not meant to exist. Reading it today is all the stranger because, although it has come to be seen as a foundational myth of contemporary science, most of what we recognise as modern was unknown to its contemporary readers. The cover of the new edition features a profile view of a human brain, referencing Victor Frankenstein's brainy endeavours, the electrical resurrection of the Being's brain, and the novel's themes in questioning the nature of rational thought and ontology. Yet, revisiting the novel, I am reminded that the word 'scientist' was only coined in 1833 (and first appeared in print in a review of a publication by a woman, Mary Somerville) and that neurons (the specialist cells that make up the brain) were only discovered towards the end of the nineteenth century by Spanish anatomist Santiago Ramón y Cajal. When Shelley was writing her novel, many still believed that the heart, not the brain, was the seat of human rational thought. Yet, even 200 years later, her novel still has the ability to electrify our imaginations.

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BIONOTE

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"THEY STAY BECAUSE OF ALL THE THINGS THEY CAN BE": AVATARS AS FANS IN A VIRTUAL FUTURE

Review by Alison Tedman

Spielberg, Steven, director. *Ready Player One*. Performance by Tye Sheridan, Olivia Cook, Ben Mendelsohn, Lena Waithe, T.J. Miller, Simon Pegg. Warner Bros. Pictures, Dune Entertainment, Amblin Entertainment, 2018. Film.

In directing the screen adaptation of Ernest Cline's popular novel *Ready Player One* (2011), based on Cline's and Zak Penn's screenplay, Steven Spielberg creates a gamified Action Adventure that like its source positions Science Fiction (SF) and Fantasy fans as protagonists and as implied audience. As in the novel, the film's striking features are its virtual reality environment – the OASIS – and the extensive diegetic citing of SF, Fantasy and, here, Horror. Novel and film display topical discourses of nostalgia for 1980s culture and for 'retro' media technology. There are clearly changes through adaptation: game tasks in the quest are replaced, emphasising action spectacle over the ability to recount 1980s film dialogue. Unsurprisingly, the film's implied demographic is younger as evidenced by the inclusion of recent, cult game and film characters. Yet, it stands as a successful fantasy in its own right and as a crucial contribution to the body of films that depict virtual reality.

We are introduced to the OASIS through Wade Watts (Tye Sheridan), a teenager living in precarious, vertical trailer park (the Stacks) in 2045 Columbus, Ohio. As Wade heads to his old van, he passes headset-wearing inhabitants whose mimed performances indicate everything from virtual boxing to piano-playing. Eschewing its role in more Dystopian films, virtual reality is used proactively for entertainment and other aspects of daily life. After Wade tests his VR rig and multi-directional treadmill, a swirling, virtual track takes us from his visor through the OASIS' colourful, dynamic worlds – including *Minecraft World* – to his avatar: Parzival. We learn, through flashbacks and Wade's unusually extended voice-over, of the competition announced in the Will of reclusive OASIS co-creator James Halliday (Mark Rylance). Players must solve clues, find three keys, and reach the Golden Easter egg: Halliday's fortune and control of the OASIS. Parzival initially quests separately from virtual friends Aech (Lena Waithe), Daito, and Sho, but the narrative validates teamwork that includes Parzival's crush – experienced gamer Art3mis/Samantha (Olivia Cooke). Appropriately, in the context of contemporary media ownership concerns, the film's antagonist is a corporation, personified by Nolan Sorrento (Ben Mendelsohn) – CEO of I.O.I. (Innovative Online Industries) – who wields an army of uniformed gamers or 'Sixers' and experts (Oologists) with the aim of privatising the OASIS.

The first task, oft-failed by gunters (egg hunters), is a furious, retro-future race through shifting New York streets with Parzival racing in the *Back to the Future* (1985) DeLorean. We later see the race from a defamilarising grid perspective that evokes virtual Dystopian Science Fiction film *The Third Floor* (1999). The sequence establishes some of the film's gamified 'rules'. Swiping a virtual screen brings up purchased or hard-won artefacts which become three-dimensional miniatures before full-sized evoking collectables. When avatars are killed they shed accumulated wealth, echoing *Scott Pilgrim Versus the World* (2010). An earlier montage implies that loss of virtual wealth devastates real-world players economically, highlighting the interconnection between virtual spaces and social identities.

Paralleling the novel's abundant 1980s references but extending these from classical Hollywood (King Kong is a gigantic race antagonist) to 2010s super-heroes, the film creates intertexuality through dialogue, avatars, artefacts, and settings. Mechanically-skilled Aech owns a garage full of vehicles – from spaceships to the Tardis – and can repair or build virtually, as shown by an inventive heist. Aech's den, Halliday's childhood room, and other spaces contain posters, vinyl, and tie-in merchandise. In battle, the heroes clash with Sorrento in huge figures including the Iron Giant while memorabilia is used for humour (a weaponised 'Chucky' doll despatches multiple Sixers).

Intertextual citation in the film has, I suggest, a different function for the viewer than the book's reader. The novel elicits memory or offers new knowledge while the film enjoyably invites viewers to seek and catalogue minutiae. Here, as New Media theorists have argued of marketing culture, the film is constructed to emulate and co-opt fan behaviour. The result of such engagement can be seen online: for example, in David Crow's extensive and partly reader-sourced catalogue – "Ready Player One: Complete Easter Egg and Reference Guide" – on the website *Den of Geek* (2018). Two 2018 VR marketing promos of *Aech's Basement* and *Aech's Garage* were created by Sansar Studios for PC and Vive. Disembodied, translucent hands represent the user browsing annotated memorabilia.

Production of *Ready Player One* aptly drew on virtual filmmaking, motion capture, and game technologies. The OASIS, avatars, and real-world digital set extensions were respectively creatively pre-visualized or constructed by a barrage of effects companies, including ILM, with Adam Stockhausen as Production Designer. Joe Fordham presents a usefully comprehensive interview-sourced breakdown of contributors to the film's digital production in "Lightning in the Bottle" (2018). Sets were designed in virtual reality for Spielberg to choose locations and shots (92), using what Digital Domain term a "virtual-virtual camera," while virtual lighting and lenses were tailored for Spielberg and cinematographer Janusz Kaminski (97).

During the film, which is set predominantly in the OASIS, we engage with avatars as characters while occasional intercutting reminds us that they are performed extensions of players, rather than simulacra (Baudrillard "Simulations", 1983). The avatars' relatable quality was intended by Spielberg who privileged emotion and performance in motion capture (92). Body and facial

markers combined with technologies including 'witness cameras' to record performance, which informed digital animation (92). As ILM's Alex Jaeger states: "Steven wanted it to feel as if avatars could bleed" (100-101). This tension is borne out when Aech escapes a giant zombie's axe in the snow-bound maze in the part-replica, part horror mash-up of *The Shining* (1980). Avatars are not photorealistic humans. Their design process, involving Aaron Sims Creative then ILM, finalised Parzival as a floppy-haired youth who nervously tries on outfits for a date with Art3mis but has shimmering textured skin, while Daito is a Samurai with the face of Toshiro Mifune (100-101). Avatars can alter appearances (as when using 'Clark Kent glasses'). Photorealist representation is suggested within the OASIS, paradoxically, in 360-degree archive exhibits of 'footage' showing Halliday's childhood and his collaboration at Gregarious Games with Ogden Morrow (Simon Pegg).

The avatars convey a sense of 'presence' aspired to in real-world virtuality. Presence refers to users' belief in their virtual embodiment, a state that Jacqueline Ford Morie argues is hard to achieve given users' "dualistic state of Being" ("Performing in (Virtual) Spaces: Embodiment and Being in Virtual Environments," 2007, 128). Philosophical frameworks are often applied to virtuality and Melanie Chan's *Virtual Reality: Representations in Contemporary Media* (2010) offers useful consideration of many, including Baudrillard, and work on online identities. Pertinent to my argument is a slightly later theorisation of *Second Life* through performativity. In "Performing Embodied Identity in Virtual Worlds" (2014), Ulrike Schultze argues that repeated performed actions endow avatars with subjecthood. Here Parzival's repeated visits to the archive, and Aech's and Parzival's game banter, "First to the key! First to the egg!" concretise avatars' virtual identities and presence.

Many avatars seen in *Ready Player One* represent commercial franchises which raise questions about the constraining effect of copyright on design choices, yet indicate in a wider sense fans' use of memes and avatars for expression. Creatively othered online identities are also validated. Several avatars illustrate differences from users' gender or age and the capacity for such identities, when revealed, to precipitate offline friendship. Aech is designed as a masculinised, cyborg Minotaur with a deep, distorted voice belying the player's identity. In "(Re)defining the Gendered Body in Cyberspace: The Virtual Reality Film," Rocio Carrasco argues that "radical redefinitions of the human body are never present" in these narratives, although the "simulated body" may suggest, for example, "gender as a continuum" (2014, n.p.). Carrasco's discussion of action heroines could be extended to punk biker, Art3mis. Yet in Aech, motion capture offers post-humanity within the virtual reality narrative.

Ready Player One is notable for its normalised depiction of virtual reality, engaging with the ways in which millennial identities are, for Schultze and others, inextricably lived across both 'reality' and the Internet. Dystopian representations of virtuality – from *Welt Am Draht /World on a Wire* (1973) to Young Adult films – have raised questions about reality, ideology, and social identity. Focusing on 1990s films about virtual reality, Chan finds their stance on technology "complex and contradictory"revealing anxieties about immersion yet fed, unlike 1980s Cyberpunk, by optimism about the Internet and domestic virtual technology (59). *Ready Player One* was produced not quite in an era of mass domestic VR, yet post-2016, termed 'the year of virtual reality' by the press. As

such, it positions dystopia not through technophobia but in the threat of corporate control and monetisation. Virtual reality's communal use ("they stay because of all the things they can be," Wade notes) is near-utopian, in Spielberg's entertaining Action-adventure.

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BIONOTE

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"I TRUST THIS FEELING": THE AFFECTIVE IMPACT OF *SENSE8*

Review by Daniel Huw Bowen

Straczynski, J. Michael, Lana Wachowski, Lilly Wachowski, creators. "Amor Vincit Omnia." *Sense8*. Directed by Lana Wachowski. Performance by Doona Bae, Jamie Clayton, Tina Desai, Tuppence Middleton, Toby Onwumere, Max Riemelt, Miguel Ángel Silvestre, Brian J. Smith. Netflix, 2018. Television.

"Feelings matter."
- Amanita Caplan (Freema Agyeman)

Sense8, a story about a cluster of eight individuals located around the globe – who are mentally and emotionally bonded – aptly concluded with a two-and-a-half-hour film finale, "Amor Vincit Omnia," that summarised its brief three-year life: neither logical nor coherent, but emotionally arresting. The brainchild of postmodern auteurs, the Wachowskis, and their partner, J. Michael Straczynski, the main story follows these "homo sensorium" who are hunted by the nefarious Biologic Preservation Organisation (BPO), whilst side plots seek to elaborate on each of the protagonists' lives in their respected locations. In so doing, the program showcases a relatively diverse cohort of characters and their entwined identities, clearly responsible for the emotional resonance that has captivated a global audience. As one might glean from the description however, it is a convoluted tale; though the renowned filmmakers might be experts of visual delight, inventive dialogue and general plotting seems beyond their capabilities.

These writing foibles are unfortunately no more apparent than in the series finale (some leniency should be afforded though due to the premature death and brief revival which the series suffered at the hands of producer Netflix). Persistently, the dialogue is dry and uninventive: riddled with clichés, sans rhythm, whilst the longer speeches have the content of the most heavy-handed of TED talks. Now physically united in Paris, the cluster and their allies spend largely the first third of the film recapping, discussing, and orchestrating a trade of hostages: the ruthless Whispers (Terrance Mann) – agent of BPO – for their resident German safecracker and Aryan archetype, Wolfgang (Max Riemelt). Other than a few pleasant character interactions, the plot does not appear until near halfway through the episode and is quickly resolved with half an hour to spare. Pacing issues of this kind have plagued the production since conception, as it has regularly struggled to maintain momentum for each individual storyline; they are exacerbated here by the need to accelerate plot points – including the revelation of the Chairman's identity, the purpose of the drone program, and the rivalry with Lila's (Valeria Bilello) cluster are fast tracked – to resolve the show and provide some semblance of closure. Therefore, for all its complexity, the finale is unbearably neat. The derided

arm of BPO are defeated and the company is reformed, the opposing cluster vanishes following the death of its leader, and the entire cluster are partnered off before the show concludes with another one of its renowned group sex scenes.

The unwieldy, accelerated narrative regrettably had an adverse effect on the impact of the show's visual flair in the concluding chapter. Such storytelling logistics are usually secondary in *Sense8*, these necessary elements are little more than white noise that are otherwise peripheral to its visual flair. The previous two seasons featured lengthy combat scenes, vehicle chases, and explosions – often peppered with slow motion – harkening back to the Wachowski's *Matrix* (1999-2003) heydays and I presume Zach Snyder's wet dreams. This is best demonstrated during the enthralling car chase-caper sequence through the streets of Seoul during Season Two's closing episode, as Sun (Doona Bae) hunts down her brother for his various crimes against her. The finale unfortunately lacks any visceral scenes as satisfying as this; although there is a rocket launcher, a helicopter explosion, and a compound raid that are entertaining, they lack the pathos and emotional reasoning that made the closing of the second season so satisfying.

It is therefore the rather deft visual trickery – with its intricate interweaving and visual realising of the prenatural, yet tangible, presumed experiences of the sensates' visiting – that is ultimately left to compensate for the weak writing and vacant action. The devastation when Kala (Tina Desai), resident pharmacist, is shot by Lila is instant: sound drains from the scene, as perspective shifts to other members of the cluster as they simultaneously suffer. Time slows, Kala, shocked, pulls a blood covered hand away from her wound; the scene cuts to a clean hand, frozen in a similar position as Wolfgang hyperventilates. As Kala stumbles forward, each of the cluster are seen in her place, struggling as she is, glaring at the blood dripping through their hands, before she falls to the floor. Physically, Wolfgang reaches her, grasping her still body in his arms, perceptible tears dripping from his face onto her as he gently presses his lips to her face. Around them, the other six members of the cluster fall to their knees in a circle, disciples mourning a fallen messiah, their faces quivering, mouths agog in anguish. Rajan (Purab Kohli), Kala's husband and non-sensate, approaches from behind the camera – an audience surrogate – allowing viewers to enter the sacred space emotionally and grieve along with him and the characters, emphasising the connectedness the show often celebrates (after all, "I am also a We"). The audience then experience the same elation when Kala, out of focus at first, appears behind Wolfgang – her mind still alive – instructing him on how to save her failing body.

Fortunately, Kala survives, otherwise her death would have anticlimactically and hypocritically resolved the romantic dilemma she has faced for the entirety of the show; instead, another queer, poly relationship is established. Still torn between her eventual husband Rajan and lover Wolfgang, the show closes as the married couple enters their hotel room, Wolfgang awaits them on the bed, naked, and gestures for Kala and Rajan to join him; they accept the offer, with little hesitation. It is frustrating that the series took so long to get to this inevitable conclusion; the show features many intimate, multi-partnered sex scenes and the finale is literally called 'Love Conquers All.' Nor are they a novel presence: Lito (Miguel Ángel Silvestre) and Hernando (Alfonso Herrera) are introduced as a same-sex gay couple before Dani (Eréndira Ibarra) enters their personal life midway

through the first season. Though her role in the relationship is never clearly defined on-screen, she is seen voyeuristically masturbating while Lito and Hernando engage in intercourse, before eventually participating in the orgy compilations. While the new poly relationship is welcome, by introducing it so late in the show, it leaves little room to explore the practicalities and dynamics of the relationship that make it markedly queer, beyond their sexual activity.

Conversely, cluster member Nomi Marks (Jamie Clayton), a trans woman, and her partner, Amanita, are portrayed as openly queer and proud from their introduction; their appearance in the premiere episode is heralded by a discarded rainbow coloured strap-on, post-coitus. The following episode sees the two partaking in San Francisco Pride Parade, where Nomi collapses due to her brain chemistry being altered from her integration into the cluster. As someone who has worked so hard to effectuate her own identity – as indicated by her name (a portmanteau of 'know me') – she compares this process to suffering from Alzheimer's ("Demons"). It may be why Nomi participates less than the other sensates in the more intrusive procedures, such as sharing and visiting. Only when she is in dire situations – such as needing combat skills to rescue Amanita, Dani, and Hernando from BPO agents – does she utilise the others' abilities. Nor does she share her digital aptitude with the others: a renowned hacker, Nomi does the majority of the brunt work herself, predominantly co-ordinating the cluster's movements in the finale from a remote hub alongside Amanita and fellow hacker Bug (Michael X. Sommers), her queer support system. Her relationship with the latter would not have been possible without her technology, as they bonded during their time as hackers, becoming so close that she even took the blame for his cybercrimes, emphasising the importance of digital networks to queer individuals in the contemporary period. After Bug enters the series, Nomi is rarely seen without her chosen family, the literal antithesis of her biological family. Their positions in her life are ratified during the last act of the finale: it is Bug who walks Nomi down the aisle to Amanita, where they are married in a spectacular ceremony inside the Eiffel Tower, surrounded by their cluster and happy families.

A mundane, anticlimactic conclusion for the big-budget drama perhaps, but *Sense8's* nuanced visuals and appealing cast of relatively diverse characters (there was little space for asexual, aromantic, or modest individuals) successfully elicits warm affection once more. Fan service at its best (a canonical fact, as it ends with a title card stating "For the Fans"), it is a sickeningly sweet farewell, a queer ending for a queer show, appropriately bookended by the return of the abandoned rainbow strap-on dildo, as the narrative fades to black.

BIONOTE

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EXCAVATING FOR EXTINCT EMOTIONS

Review by Maxine Gee

Torras, Carme. *The Vestigial Heart: A Novel of the Robot Age.* Trans. Josephine Swarbrick. 2008. MIT Press, 2018. Novel.

Imagine a future where robots are as ubiquitous as smart phones are today; now imagine what effect that could have on the humans who use them.

It could be argued that humans have been defined in relation to tools and technologies since the creation of fire, however, the rate with which shifting and evolving technologies are augmenting the human experience seems to be increasing. It took centuries for eye-glasses to become common place, compared to the mere decades it has taken for smart phones to be integrated into first-world lives. The changes that this latest augmentation brings to the way humans process information, their identity, and form connections with others appears to be working its way into popular news discourse with increased regularity. Carme Torras' thought provoking novel, *The Vestigial Heart*, like all good Science Fiction, extrapolates this scenario into a future where most people own a robot, named functionally ROBul, ROBco or ROBbie, asking the reader to consider the implications of the technologies they use on a daily basis.

The Vestigial Heart throws a sharp, critical eye over the implications that robotic and artificial intelligences might have on human development. In one scene Celia, a thirteen year old who has been revived from cryo-stasis as the illness she had can be cured in this advanced future, is confronted with the future education system and has a difficult time adjusting. Celia is categorised as a rebel by her teachers because when "faced with a question, she stops and thinks about it, trying to make up an answer, instead of trusting what other people have thought before" (Torras 99). School is no longer a place to learn information; instead it seems to be a space to learn how to use devices to find that information. For me, the parallel with the searches I conduct on computer devices is obvious; ultimately, the information I gain through these searches is quickly lost and I've had to go back and look the same thing up multiple times. In taking this one step further with humans relying so completely on their robotic companions, one cannot help but see a wry humour in the way that Torras portrays her future.

The title *The Vestigial Heart* encapsulates another central theme of the novel. The word vestigial connotes something that is stunted, useless, shrunken, or non-functioning. In Torras' future, this title refers to the people who rely too much on their robots and technology; humans have lost connection with their emotions, many of which are now categorised as extinct, and with each other. Two of the main characters, Leo, an ambitious, young techie and Lu, a socialite who fosters Celia to improve her own standing, typify the concept of the vestigial heart. They are emotionally frozen, their

development as human beings stunted by their constant engagement with technology. Lu and Leo, initially read as almost robotic in their interactions with others, in fact there is little to differentiate between them and the narrative voices of the robots Alpha+ and ROBCo. This demonstrates how homogenous the humans and robots in this future city have become. While this makes it difficult to separate the characters out in earlier chapters, as both the robotic and human characters develop through connections with each other, their burgeoning relationship with their emotions enables them to finally demonstrate their individual personalities. Contrastingly, Silvana, one of the founding members of ComU, an anti-technology faction, is an emotional masseuse. She uses massage and physical contact to counteract the effect of spending too much time with robots, trying to restart the flow of emotions in her clients. Silvana's narrative arc moves from distrust of technology and those who use it to acceptance that technology is part of human evolution. In the end, to help humans reconnect with emotions, Silvana posits engaging with changing technology rather than cutting it out completely. Her final rallying cry "Enough of touching the skin, it's time to touch the brain…" demonstrates to opposite thematic arc to Leo, he moves from sterile technology to emotion (Torras 239).

The use of emotion as a key definer of human experience is not something new; emotional awakening often goes hand in hand with science fictional narrative concerning robots and the posthuman, from Mary Shelley's 1818 novel *Frankenstein* through to twentieth and twenty-first century filmic representations such as *Metropolis* (Fritz Lang, 1927), *Blade Runner* (Ridley Scott, 1982) or *Ex_Machina* (Alex Garland, 2015). Where Torras takes this idea further is in her exploration of the Creativity Prosthetic. The naming of this device, a prosthetic, draws connotations with contemporary prosthetics, usually employed after the loss of a limb. The metaphoric limb lost in the case of *The Vestigial Heart* is the human faculty for creative problem solving. It is interesting here to note the importance placed eventually on a combined approach to reason and emotion.

There is a correlation here with the work of cognitive neuro-scientist Antonio Damasio. In *Descartes' Error: Emotion, Reason and the Human Brain* (1994) and *Looking for Spinoza: Joy, Sorrow and the Feeling Brain* (2004), Damasio posits that human thought processes consistently use a combination of emotional and rational processes, and seeks to bring research into the emotions back into the academic limelight. This affective turn, as it has been labelled, chimes with the central concerns of Torras' novel, and those interested in these themes would benefit from reading Damasio's work. Stories rely on emotion; therefore it is unsurprising that those who extol the virtues of a combined emotional and rational response to the world return to fiction to convey their message. Storytelling, like emotional awakening, appears again and again in Science Fiction which is focused on the posthuman as a positive attribute in posthuman characters, a humanising force almost.

Torras has made an interesting creative decision to shift narrative perspective throughout the novel, inviting the reader into the first-person perspective of the robot characters, while generally maintaining omniscient third person for the chapters which focus on the humans. Demonstrating the internal shift of Alpha+ in particular enhances the themes of the novel, however, third person omniscient also allows the writer to bring the reader into the minds of character which slightly

negates the power of the robot monologues. If these shifts had been used more consistently, to create a rhythm throughout the novel, they would have been more effective. As it currently stands, the flow in and out of first and third person is a little disruptive.

On the other hand, Torras' extrapolation of technologic development is strong. Two explorations of control and privacy really stand out. The first is a device that removes access to memories of work, taking NDAs to the extreme. Every time Leo crosses the threshold of the booth he works in at CraftER his memories of what he has been working on are obscured, so there is no possibility of him telling the competition. This feels terrifyingly plausible in a world of corporate patents and enterprise. This provides an interesting juxtaposition to the lack of privacy that the rest of these future citizens have. In one scene, Celia is encouraged to use her robot to eavesdrop on people at an event (Torras 81). She's told this is what everyone does. As the audience stand in character, to some extent, Celia's reaction is in tune with the early twenty first century reader. What would people use their robot for, if they could. Here it feels like Torras draws comparisons to devices like Amazon's Alexa, that are present our homes, constantly listening, or with apps that can detect what song is being played. It's just a hop skip and a jump from, 'what's that track,' to 'what's that conversation.'

While Torras' world building is excellent and worryingly plausible, her character development is less assured. The character of Celia, the child revived from the past is the least successful. She is thirteen, however at points reads much younger, especially when she is first introduced. One of the novel's key concepts focuses on the way robot technology is extending the period of childhood; at points we see some differences between Celia and the children of the future, she is more resourceful and able to think independently, but this could have been further drawn out. Unfortunately, Celia, despite this difference reads as overly childish.

Julia Swarbrick's translation seems to match the tone of the material, it appears thoughtful and faithful, however, without reading the original in Catalan it is difficult to tell if some word choices which capture a beautifully poignant moment, or which lead to the characters appearing less convincing, are in the original text or have occurred in translation.

The Vestigial Heart is a powerful cautionary tale about the potential of relying too much on the devices that surround us, warning readers to remember the importance of genuine human connection; that to thrive we might need to become cyborgs that embrace rather than expel our emotions.

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