51/4
Fall 2021

SFRA Review
THE OPEN ACCESS JOURNAL OF THE
SCIENCE FICTION RESEARCH ASSOCIATION

ISSN 2641-2837

SFRA Review is an open access journal published four times a year by the Science Fiction Research Association (SFRA) since 1971. *SFRA Review* publishes scholarly articles and reviews. As the flagship journal of SFRA, the *Review* is devoted to surveying the contemporary field of SF scholarship, fiction, and media as it develops.

Submissions

SFRA Review accepts original scholarly articles, interviews, review essays, and individual reviews of recent scholarship, fiction, and media germane to SF studies. Articles are single-blind peer reviewed by two of three general editors before being accepted or rejected. *SFRA Review* does not accept unsolicited reviews. If you would like to write a review essay or review, please contact the relevant review editor. For all other publication types—including special issues and symposia—contact the general editors. All submissions should be prepared in MLA 8th ed. style. Accepted pieces are published at the discretion of the editors under the author's copyright and made available open access via a CC-BY-NC-ND 4.0 license.

SFRA Review History

SFRA Review was initially titled *SFRA Newsletter* and has been published since 1971, just after the founding of SFRA in 1970. The *Newsletter* changed its named to *SFRA Review* in 1992 with issue #194 to reflect the centrality of an organ for critical reviews of both fiction and scholarship to the SF studies community. The *Newsletter* and w*Review* were published 6 times a year until the early 2000s, when the *Review* switched to a quarterly schedule. Originally available only to SFRA members or sold per issue for a small fee, *SFRA Review* was made publicly available on the SFRA's website starting with issue #256. Starting with issue #326, the *Review* became an open access publication. In 2020, the *Review* switched to a volume/issue numbering scheme, beginning with 50.1 (Winter 2019). For more information about the *Review*, its history, policies, and editors, visit www.sfrareview.org.

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The Science Fiction Research Association is the oldest professional organization for the study of science fiction and fantasy literature and film. Founded in 1970, the SFRA was organized to improve classroom teaching; to encourage and assist scholarship; and to evaluate and publicize new books and magazines dealing with fantastic literature and film, teaching methods and materials, and allied media performances. Among the membership are people from many countries—students, teachers, professors, librarians, futurologists, readers, authors, booksellers, editors, publishers, archivists, and scholars in many disciplines. Academic affiliation is not a requirement for membership. Visit the SFRA Website at www.sfra.org. For a membership application, contact the SFRA Treasurer or see the Website.

SFRA Standard Membership Benefits

Science Fiction Studies — Three issues per year. This scholarly journal includes critical, historical, and bibliographical articles, review articles, reviews, notes, letters, international coverage, and annual index.

Extrapolation — Three issues per year. The oldest scholarly journal in the field, with critical, historical, and bibliographical articles, book reviews, letters, occasional special topic issues, and annual index.

SFRA Listserv — Ongoing. The SFRA listserv allows members to discuss topics and news of interest to the SF community, and to query the collective knowledge of the membership. To join the listserv or obtain further information, visit https://www.jiscmail.ac.uk/sfra.

SFRA Review — Four issues per year. This newsletter/journal surveys the field of science fiction scholarship, including extensive reviews of fiction and nonfiction books and media, review articles, and listings of new and forthcoming books. The *Review* also posts news about SFRA internal affairs and updates on works in progress.

SFRA Optional Membership Benefits

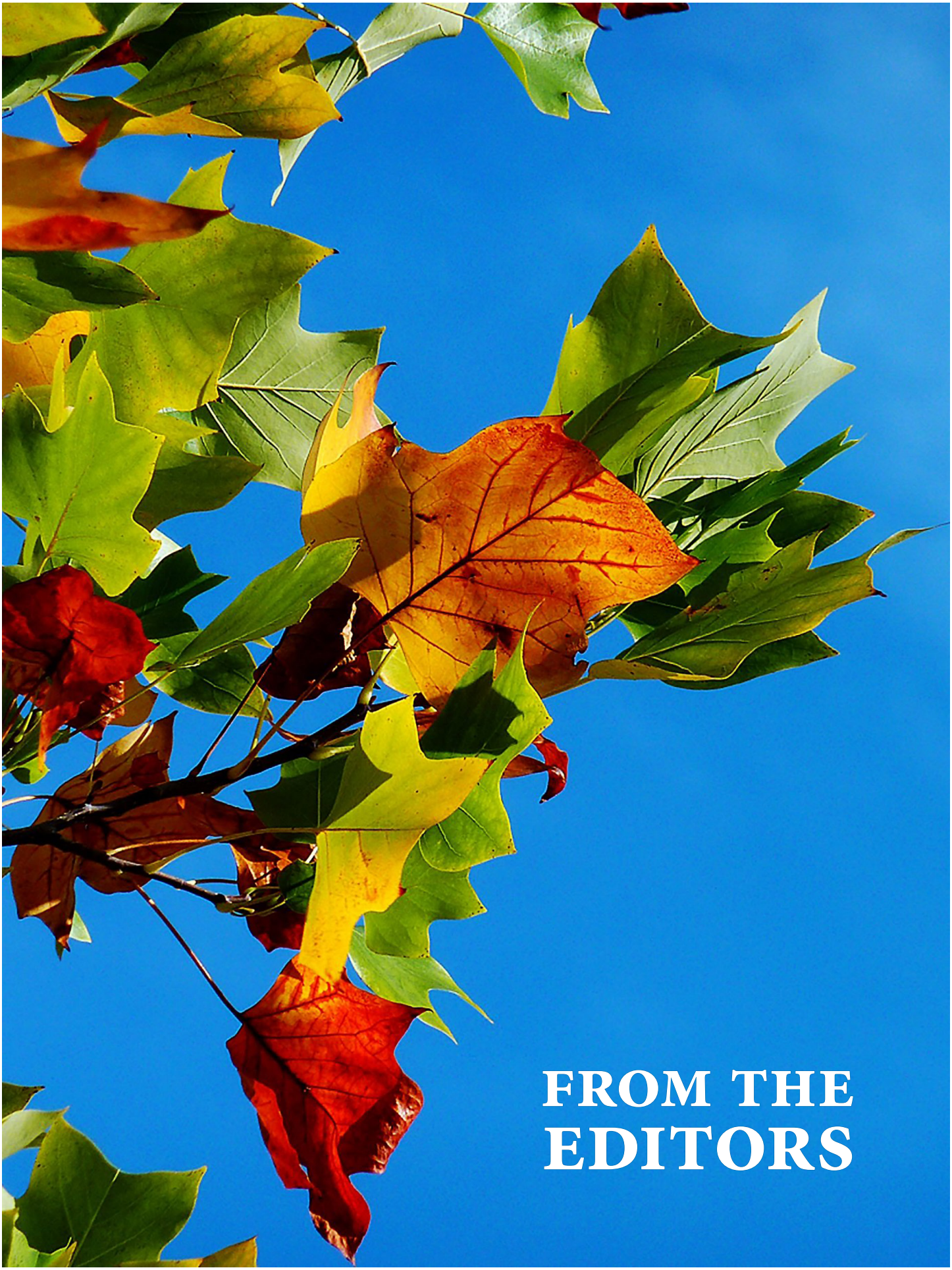
Foundation — Discounted subscription rates for members. Three issues per year. British scholarly journal, with critical, historical, and bibliographical articles, reviews, and letters.

Science Fiction Film and Television — Three issues per year. Critical works and reviews.

Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts — Four issues per year. Scholarly journal, with critical and bibliographical articles and reviews.

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

SFRA
Science Fiction Research Association



FROM THE EDITORS

Image by moritz320

Fall 2021

Ian Campbell

My memories of last fall are of constant anxiety and insomnia. I genuinely believed that monster was going to win re-election, and that my daughter and every other woman would be soon reduced to de jure as well as de facto second-tier citizenship. Now, I'm no less anxious, but the fear is not so immediate; yet unless we begin to think of ourselves as a coalition against fascism rather than a fractious party divided into two groups with very different agendas, we're headed toward authoritarian minority rule, all while the climate apocalypse keeps ticking away. A 74-year-old coal baron and a proudly out queer woman who was once a member of the Green Party are keeping us from addressing that apocalypse, while the other party actively denies its existence or even exacerbates it. Imagine an agent or publisher finding any of this plausible as a work of SF. Now imagine a work of SF that estranges a modern society facing the climate challenge by having its foundational document written with a feather on a sheepskin by an all-male group of aristocrats who were mostly slaveowners.

I say all this well aware that I personally have a great deal of societal privilege: were I able to plausibly claim that I'm a Christian, I'd pretty much run the table on it. In this issue of *SFRA Review*, we present to you two different perspectives on SF from folks who can plausibly claim they've already suffered through the, or an, apocalypse.

In our Features section, we have a roundtable discussion on the state of Black Indie SF, centering on how a group of people often excluded from mainstream publishing both put out their work and deal with both the exclusion and the still-imperfect attempts at inclusion. The discussion is fascinating in itself, but its organizers have also included links to publishers, sites, authors and events: please take the time to introduce yourself to this most excellent discourse. Our symposium in this issue, Trans-Indigenous Futurity, examines SF by and from Indigenous authors from North America. Much of the fiction examined by the scholars in this symposium addresses the apocalypse that for many of these groups is and has always already happened. Please take the time to explore these fascinating and valuable perspectives.

In addition, we introduce our Fiction section in this issue. We urge you to submit your own works of SF for subsequent issues. And as we move toward peer review, please make sure the graduate students and emerging scholars in your network are aware of the opportunity for peer-reviewed publication through *SFRA Review*.

The *SFRA Review*'s Transition to Partial Peer Review

The Editorial Collective

With the explosive growth in scholarship on SF in recent times, the Editorial Collective feels that there are more scholars who need peer-reviewed scholarship to obtain and advance in their positions. As of the Winter 2022 issue, the *SFRA Review* will move to a peer-review model for some of its feature articles. This will happen gradually over the course of 2022: by the end of that year, we hope to be publishing three or four peer-reviewed articles per issue. We will of course need established scholars to perform peer review: you are more than welcome to volunteer by emailing us at sfrarev@gmail.com.

Scholars wishing to submit their articles for peer review should take care to properly edit and format their manuscript before sending it to us, and to clearly notify us that they wish their article to go through the peer-review process.

- Articles should be a maximum of 8000 words in length, including notes and works cited.
- Articles should conform to MLA 8th edition standards throughout.
- MS Word .docx format only, or Google Docs should you not have access to Word.
- Your first page should be a title page containing only your name and affiliation and the paper's title.
- Please anonymize your manuscript by making sure your name appears only on this title page; we will take care of disabling the automatic user tagging before sending the manuscript to peer reviewers.
- Please make sure pages are numbered.
- Please use endnotes, not footnotes. Do not link the note to the in-text number; this will require you not to use Word's automatic notes.
- Please avoid discursive notes when possible.

Articles not conforming to these guidelines will be returned rather than sent to peer review.

Once an article is received, two of our editors will review it and discuss its suitability for peer review. If we do not believe it suitable, the editors will either return it or propose that it be published as a non-peer-reviewed article. If the editors do believe it suitable, the submitter will be informed that it has been sent for peer review. For such articles, our intention is to have it reviewed by two scholars who are qualified to evaluate the work. Our intent is to spend no more than sixty days on the peer-review process.

After receiving the results of the review(s), the editors will decide whether the article in question should be accepted as-is, perhaps with a few minor edits, or accepted only after major revisions, or rejected entirely. We will notify the submitter as soon as is practically possible after this decision is made.

Again, we will be doing this slowly and carefully. While scholars are encouraged to submit their work for peer review beginning now, please note that we will only accept two articles into the process for the Winter and Spring 2022 issues. This is not because we do not value your contributions; rather, we want things to move as smoothly as possible and are therefore being as careful as possible.

We are also planning a move away from WordPress to an established academic publishing platform, one that will allow for indexing in scholarly databases and DOI numbers. This will also be a gradual process, not least because it involves the appropriation of funds; we will keep you posted as the process unfolds.

We look forward both to your submissions and to bringing the Review, gradually, into the ranks of peer-reviewed journals in SF.

FROM THE SFRA EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

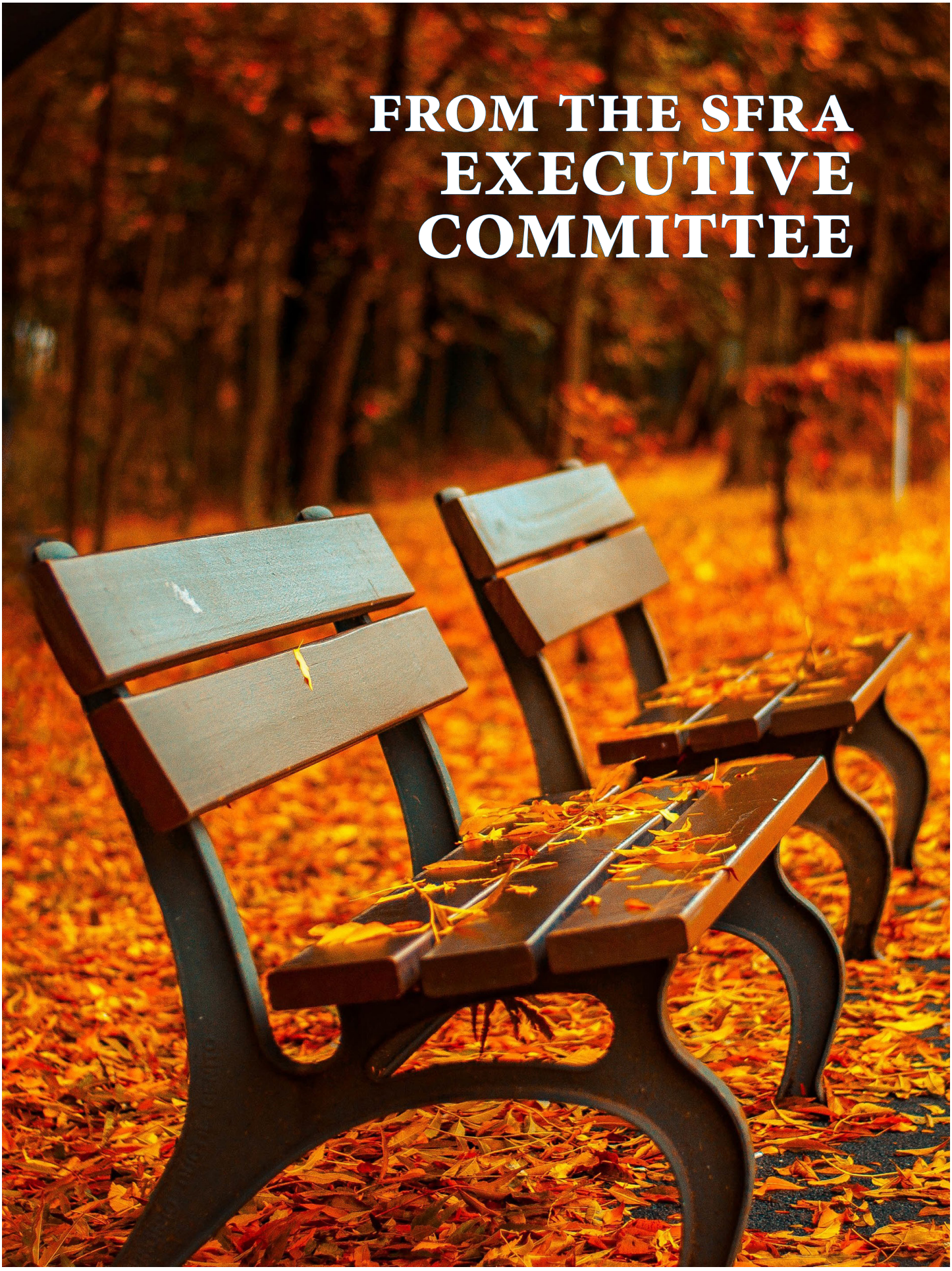


Image by Pepper Mint

From the President

Gerry Canavan

Thanks so much to everyone who participated in the elections, and thanks to Ida Yoshinaga and Jessica FitzPatrick for taking on new leadership roles on the executive! Thanks also to everyone who worked on and voted to support the new bylaws, which will take effect over the course of the next year and allow the organization to evolve in ways that I believe will be to the benefit of us all (including the election of new "at large" members to the executive board and the establishment of a standing conference committee). Thanks also to Sonja Fritzsche and Hugh O'Connell, who will be rotating off the executive at the end of the year; your work has been so important and vital in these very challenging years for the organization and I want you to know how grateful I am to both of you for stepping up as you have on behalf of the group.

I hope by now you've seen the teaser for SFRA 2022, which will be headed up by Bodhisattva Chattopadhyay of the University of Oslo in collaboration with the CoFutures research group and the "Theory from the Margins" project. (If you haven't seen it, it's here: https://twitter.com/co_futures/status/1446007301148659713). The full CFP will be out soon. I could not be more excited about this opportunity for SFRA; the Theory from the Margins group has a staggering global reach and can put our collective in conversation with people we haven't begun to dialogue with yet. We will have to bring our A games to Oslo.

A quick technical note: Membership renewals will be turned off the SFRA site beginning Monday, November 1 in prepared for our migration off Wild Apricot to a new host. More on this as it develops!

As always, please reach out to me or to Sonja Fritzsche with any calls for papers, conference announcements, special issues of journals, and more that you'd like us to promote; I'm very happy to put work from SFRA members in front of as many eyes as we can manage. I can be contacted at gerry.canavan@marquette.edu or via the @SFRANews Twitter. Stay safe and I hope you have a terrific end to the semester, and I look forward to when we can all meet again in person soon.

From the Vice President

Sonja Fritzsche

The SFRA Support a New Scholar Grant deadline will have closed when this goes to press on November 1, 2021 for the independent and non-tenure track scholar competition. For those interested in the graduate student competition look for that call in the early fall of 2022.

We are excited to be discussing plans for a hybrid conference in 2022 hosted by Bodhisattva Chattopadhyay of the CoFutures initiative at the University of Oslo in Norway. Dates are Monday, June 27, 2022 through Friday, July 1, 2022. This will no doubt be one of our most compelling and international conferences yet!

The SFRA Country Representatives have continued their quarterly meetings and brainstormed ways to support/mentor graduate students and early career scholars in the respective cultural and geographical contexts at the last meeting. The next meeting will be in January 2022. We continue to look for new representatives so please e-mail me if you are interested (fritzsc9@msu.edu) and share your global events on Facebook, Twitter, and the SFRA list. The current rep list is: http://www.sfra.org/Country-Reps. Look for the contributions of the country reps in each SFRA News to learn more about what is going on in various places in the world in the study of SF.

And finally, I bid you farewell with sadness as the outgoing Vice President since I will finish my three year term at the end of December 2021. The past three years have been a joy as I have worked with such dedicated colleagues on the executive committee who have put in so much work on conferences and in other organizational matters during a time of significant upheaval. Some important bylaws changes were recently passed that should help to make the society more inclusive in a variety of ways. We are all responsible for ensuring that happens in the way that it was imagined, so consider putting yourself forward or nominating deserving others for some of the new openings as excellent stewardship opportunities. Congratulations to incoming VP Ida Yoshinaga who will bring much creative energy to the position. You all are in excellent hands! Thank you to the other candidates who ran as well. We hope you will run again in the future and/or help out with other various SFRA functions, as there is always the need for service from people dedicated to the furthering the study of science fiction. Ciao for now!

FEATURES

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The SF in Translation Universe #13

Rachel Cordasco

Welcome back to the SF in Translation Universe! Fall in Wisconsin is my favorite time of year: it's chilly but not cold, pumpkins are everywhere, and I get to wear my favorite sweaters again. What better time, then, to curl up and read some of these figuratively chilling works of SFT about reeducation facilities, curses, and bizarre new species? And though I've only found five works of SFT that come out between October and December this year, these books are worth savoring, preferably while drinking hot chocolate as a cat purrs on your lap.

Speaking of reeducation facilities: Czech author Petra Hůlová's novel *The Movement* (tr. Alex Zucker) imagines what could happen if basic human attraction was eliminated and replaced by a more cerebral appreciation not dependent upon physical characteristics. Those men who resist this change and continue to be attracted to women's bodies, rather than their brains, are sent to an Institute to learn the "correct" way of finding a mate. Here, Hůlová asks readers to consider just what it would take for an ideology to suppress one of our basic human instincts.

With *Life Sciences* (tr Laura Vergnaud), French author Joy Sorman takes on the limitations of modern medical science. When Ninon, descended from generations of women afflicted with strange and inexplicable diseases, begins experiencing one of her own, the doctors and scientists whom she consults are unable to help her. Even the most sophisticated tests can't provide any answers. A meditation on the often inscrutable nature of our own bodies, *Life Sciences* invites us to think more broadly about our embodied experiences.

Un-su Kim's *The Cabinet* (tr. Sean Lin Halbert) explores this theme of human embodiment via characters who also experience strange symptoms, though these people may be the harbingers of an entire new species. Each of them has a file housed in Cabinet 13, overseen by the harried and overworked Mr. Kong. This theme of species transition and the future of the human race makes me think of Dempow Torishima's wildly unique work of body horror, *Sisyphean*. Humorous and weird, *The Cabinet* highlights the unexpected that lies at the heart of each person's seemingly mundane life.

Like *The Cabinet*, Djuna's collection *Everything Good Dies Here* (tr. Adrian Theiret) adds to the ever-growing corpus of Korean speculative fiction in English translation. Djuna's work has appeared in English before: her "Squaredance" and "Trans-Pacific Express" were featured in *Acta Koreana* in 2015, while "The Second Nanny" appeared in *Clarkesworld* four years after that. *Everything Good* includes the six stories that make up her "Linker Universe," in which a mutating virus alters its host's genetic structure and merges it with its environment. Zombies, vampires, and more combine in this book to produce a dizzying yet enticing reading experience.

Finally, we have *Sinopticon* (ed. and tr. Xueting Christine Ni), an anthology of thirteen never-before translated stories showcasing the richness and variety of turn-of-the-century Chinese science fiction. With fiction by Jiang Bo, Regina Kanyu Wang, Anna Wu, and others, readers will be inspired to check out previous similar anthologies (*Invisible Planets*, *Broken Stars*, and *The Reincarnated Giant*) for more by these creative and innovative writers.

Thanks for reading, and I'd love to hear what you're reading now and what you're looking forward to: rachel@sfintranslation.com.

Until next time in the SFT Universe!

Chinese Science Fiction Studies in Japan

Noriko Yamamoto
Translated by Jin Zhao

1

In Japan, the study of Chinese science fiction started quite late, and only one outstanding academic book, Chinese Science and Fantasy Literature Museum (2001), written by Takeda Masaya and Hayashi Hisayuki, has previously been published. Since then, no book has been published, including translations, that surpasses this masterpiece. This means that if a Japanese person wants to learn about Chinese science fiction, they would have no other options but to read this book. It is fair to say that for a long time, Japan's understanding of Chinese science fiction has been extremely limited and outdated. Admittedly, the Chinese Science Fiction Research Association, with Hayashi Hisayuki as its president, has persistently introduced and translated Chinese science fiction works into Japanese over the years, but the fact is that as it is only a doujinshi[1] (同人誌), its influence is inevitably modest. Its activities are well known to a small group of fans and enthusiasts, yet remain completely unknown to most.

2

In 2007, the situation began to change. At the World Science Fiction Convention in Yokohama, a number of guests from the Chinese science fiction community came to Japan and had a series of discussions with Japanese science fiction writers and editors. It was this meeting that prompted Hayakawa Publishing's *S-F Magazine* to publish a special issue of Chinese science fiction the year following (*S-F Magazine* September 2008 Issue), in which works by major writers such as Liu Cixin, Han Song, and Jiang Bo were published, along with a column by Yao Haijun. This was the first time that an entire issue was exclusively dedicated to Chinese science fiction, which was a huge step forward. However, although this special issue successfully introduced Chinese science fiction to the Japanese science fiction community, the reality is that to most Japanese people, Chinese science fiction is still little known and inaccessible, and as a result, hardly attractive.

The situation suddenly changed with the appearance of Chinese-American science fiction writer and translator, Ken Liu, whose *The Paper Menagerie* (2015) became a huge success as soon as it was released in April 2015. This book was so well-received in Japan that even people who don't normally read science fiction started to read it. As a result, Chinese science fiction came under the spotlight for the first time since its brief popularity in 2007. Readers eagerly looked forward to reading Ken Liu's translations, firmly believing that as long as they were translated by Ken Liu, they would be interesting. Since then, a series of works such as Chen Qiufan's *The Year*

of The Rat and Han Song's *Security Check* have been translated into Japanese through Ken Liu's initial English translations and subsequently introduced in *S-F Magazine*. The point, however, is that these works were not translated from Chinese into Japanese, but from their English versions into Japanese. Admittedly, Ken Liu's English translations are excellent, but the question that inevitably sprang up in the reader's mind was, "Why not just translate these works directly from Chinese into Japanese?" However, the sad fact is that at the time Chinese science fiction was not yet acknowledged by the Japanese market, and it was still a product that had to be tagged with Ken Liu's name before it could be approved.

It was not until 2019, when Hayakawa Publishing published Liu Cixin's *The Three-Body Problem*, that we could be rescued from this embarrassing situation in any real sense. Upon its release, the book immediately became a bestseller, with sales of over 100,000 copies, an unprecedented figure for foreign science fiction publications in Japan. The book has a huge readership, and many businessmen in particular are keen to read *The Three-Body Problem*. It is safe to say that *The Three-Body Problem* fever has already evolved into a social phenomenon in Japan.

It was also thanks to *The Three-Body Problem* that Chinese science fiction began to be translated directly from Chinese into Japanese, changing the old tradition wherein Chinese science fiction had to be translated into Japanese via English. A new model of translation has gradually taken shape. With this model, editors will read the English translations to get a good understanding of the stories, but in the meantime people who are proficient in Chinese will preview the relevant works. They will then recommend those works that are suitable for translation, offering suggestions and consulting with editors over details. In the subsequent years, a series of Chinese science fiction works have been translated and published, including *The Ladder of Time: Selected Works of Modern Chinese Science Fiction* (2020); the second book in Liu Cixin's *The Three-Body Problem* trilogy, *The Dark Forest* (2020); Chen Qiufan's *The Waste Tide* (2020) (translated from its English version into Japanese); and Hao Jinfang's *The Other Shore of Man* (2021). In May 2021, the third book in *The Three-Body Problem* trilogy, *Death's End*, will be released as well. With many more works scheduled to be published in the coming years, it is expected that there will be many more opportunities for Japanese readers to read Chinese science fiction in Japanese.

3

Thus, under such a situation, how should we study Chinese science fiction in Japan? First, there are virtually no universities or institutions in Japan that specialize in the study of science fiction in general, let alone Chinese science fiction. Certainly, we do have distinguished scholars such as Professor Tatsumi Takayuki at Keio University, who enjoys a high reputation not only in science fiction, but also in American literature. Arguably, his accomplishment in science fiction studies is entirely outside of his high professional competence. However, when we look at the current situation of science fiction studies in Japanese universities as a whole, we find that science fiction studies are not yet well-organized, and there is not even a professional academic

group devoted to their study. The truth is that, in Japan, science fiction studies can only be done through the efforts of some individual professors. As a result, the first thing to do when you try to study science fiction is to look for a competent teacher. Moreover, since American and English science fiction is the predominant genre of science fiction nowadays, we are thus faced with the dilemma that we find neither teachers nor majors when we try to study Chinese science fiction in a symposium or a university graduate school. Actually, until very recently, it was practically impossible to study science fiction on a professional level other than to study under the tutelage of Professor Takeda Masaya at Hokkaido University. Fortunately, thanks to the translation boom of Chinese science fiction, many Japanese scholars of Chinese literature have finally begun to draw attention to Chinese science fiction, among whom are professors specializing in pure literature[2] (純文学). Some of them have begun to read science fiction, and many others project to write theses on science fiction as their subject. Hence, it is our expectation that in the forthcoming years, we will see a field dedicated to the study of Chinese science fiction taking shape and taking root in Japan.

Notes

1. Doujinshi (同人誌) is a Japanese term for self-published print works, such as magazines, manga, and novels. Being part of a wider category of doujin (self-published) works, doujinshi are usually derivative of existing works, and are often created by amateurs, although some professional artists are also involved in order to publish material outside the regular industry.
2. Pure literature (純文学) is a term in Japanese literature that refers to novels that place more emphasis on artistry than entertainment, as opposed to popular novels.

Noriko Yamamoto, known by her pen name Tōya Tachihara, is a Japanese scholar, translator, novelist, and associate professor of literature at Hokusei Gakuen University. She is the translator and editor of the Japanese edition of *The Three-Body Problem* series. In 2020, she was awarded the Nihon SF Taisho Award for her contribution to translation and introduction of Chinese science fiction works.

Jin Zhao is a science fiction enthusiast, science fiction scholar, science fiction translator, and science fiction writer. For many years, she has devoted herself to the comparative study of Chinese and Japanese literature and culture and the study of science fiction literature. Currently, she is working on a dissertation devoted to the study of Japanese science fiction culture.

Hidden Stars: A Conversation on Black Indie Speculative Fiction

Jalondra A. Davis and LaRose Davis

Hidden Stars: Black Indie Speculative Fiction *is a roundtable discussion with independent Black writers, creators, publishers, and organizers. This roundtable continues conversations within the 2021 SFRA conference regarding the need for more critical attention to the nontraditional publishing of BIPOC authors, with a focus on Black indie publishing in science fiction, speculative fiction, comics, fantasy, and horror. The conversation addresses themes and subgenres, institution building, and the relationship between the indie scene and mainstream.*

The idea for this roundtable had its genesis at the 2021 SFRA Conference. Over the course of the conference, which included papers on Baldwin, Butler, and Okorafor, we realized that so many of the authors being studied were the same ones who have received critical attention in the genre for many years. In her keynote address, Joy Sanchez-Taylor illuminated one reason for the frequent repetition of the same coterie of black science fiction authors; namely the continued existence of roadblocks to traditional publication for Black authors in the genre. Even in overcoming the obstacles to publication, traditionally published black authors still face challenges with visibility in the spaces where speculative fiction is disseminated and discussed, including at fan conventions and academic conferences. As a result, the pool of available texts by Black authors might seem rather shallow.

Black speculative writing has not diminished as a result of these obstacles. Rather, a vibrant and innovative community of independent authors and presses exists that addresses the gap and meets the need of audiences (both Black and Non-black) that demand more representative speculative fiction canons. As an indie author who has been writing in the genre for over a decade, LaRose Davis (pen name L.M. Davis) asserted understandings of Black speculative production that rely solely on the work coming out of larger traditional publishers are incomplete, both in their definition of the scope of the offerings and their perceptions of how black speculative literature is innovating the genre. In order to fully understand the evolution of Black speculative production, the independent scene must be more completely engaged and studied.

Thus, "Hidden Stars" was born. LaRose (L.M.) Davis, independent author and scholar, and Jalondra A. Davis, black feminist writer and scholar of speculative fiction and culture, convened this roundtable with independent authors and publishers working throughout the genre, from comics to novels to film. Our intent was threefold: 1) we wanted to begin to document the decades-long project of creatives to build these independent spaces and networks; 2) to document the contributions and impacts of independent authors to the larger field, and 3) begin to assemble a resource guide by identifying and cataloguing some of the most innovative, independent authors writing right now.

What follows is the result of a wonderfully rich, two-hour conversation with some of the pillars of the independent scene. For the sake of brevity, we have trimmed the transcript, in places removing portions from individual responses, but in no way did we change the original meaning or intent of the speakers.

Jalondra A. Davis: So I think where we want to start is if everyone can just tell us a little bit about yourself and your work in the Black speculative fiction community.

Nicole Sconiers: My name's Nicole Sconiers and thank you LaRose, LM, and Jalondra for inviting me to participate. It's interesting because I didn't always call myself a spec fiction/sci-fi writer. I guess I didn't feel smart enough to be writing sci-fi, but I have since claimed that title. I'm the author of a collection of spec-fic stories called *Escape from Beckyville: Tales of Race, Hair and Rage*. And that's how Jalondra and I met, because I was driving cross country to promote my stories in this huge van that was wrapped in the cover of my book. And just going around to different indie venues, spoken word places to talk about my stories, to read my stories. I've been published in *Lightspeed*, different sci-fi, spec fiction publications. I have a story out this week actually, in *Speculative City*. I've also directed a spec fiction short, that's based on *Escape from Beckyville*. So I direct and I write spec-fic and sci-fi and horror. I was in *Sycorax's Daughters* with Nicole. And also *Black from the Future* with Nicole, which is a collection of speculative fiction by Black women writers. So, I'm excited about this conversation and talking to you guys. Thank you.

Jarvis Sheffield: Once again, my name is Jarvis Sheffield. I am the creator of Black Science Fiction Society…It's an online social network that's created for black creators and this is our thirteenth year. I'm also the Coordinator of Tennessee State University's media centers on both campuses. We also manage the creator space, actually the Makerspace called the Imagineering Lab, and I'm also the Director of Dragon Con's diversity track. This is our fourth year.

Nicole Givens-Kurtz: I can go next. My name is Nicole Givens Kurtz. I am a science fiction, mystery writer. I write speculative mysteries basically. And I write weird westerns. I'm also the Science Fiction Geek Track Director for Multiverse as well as a programming…part of the programming community for Boskone. So, I do a lot of panels at science fiction conventions, and I am also a writer, but I am also running a very small press called Mocha Memoirs Press and we aim to amplify marginalized voices in speculative fiction. Our most recent anthology was called *Slay: The Stories of the Vampire Noir*, which is an anthology of vampire and hunter story, slayer stories from the African diaspora. So, I do a little bit of everything [laughter] publishing, editing, writing, and programming for science fiction conventions as well.

Hannibal Tabu: Alright. Well, hi, my name is Hannibal Tabu. Thank you all for having me here. I am an award-winning journalist, novelist, and comic book writer. I'm the head comic book reviewer at BleedingCool.com. I worked for, I think it was, gosh, sixteen years, at Comic Book Resources before I moved on to that. I am the winner of the 2012 Top Cow Talent Hunt, the 2018-2019 Cultural Trailblazer Award from the city of Los Angeles. In this specifically Black speculative fiction space, I've been published in the *Steam Funk* and *Cyber Funk* anthologies from MV Media

as well as their Black Superhero Anthology, *Black Power*. I've written two novels, *Far Away* and *The Crown Ascension*. And I've completed a manuscript for a third called *Rogue Nation*, which I am now shopping out to agents and managers. I'm also the writer of *Project Wildfire*, which will be in comic bookstores this November. It just became available for pre-order yesterday, actually. And that will be coming to comic bookstores wherever you are. So, feel free to ask your local comic book retailer for *Project Wildfire*. I'm also the writer of *Time Core* for Wunderman Comics, which is like a time travel book and the upcoming supernatural western, War Medicine, which I'm getting art from issue number two from the artist now. I specialize in the comic book space. I have a degree in creative writing from the University of Southern California. And I am not as awful as white people would have you think, just to some of them.

L.D. Lewis: I think I'm the last one. So I am L.D. Lewis, L. or LeKesha if you can spell it properly. If not, just go with L. I am one of the founders of *Fiyah Literary Magazine* for black speculative fiction. Been there about five years. Absolutely exhausting, but I love it. I directed this year's Nebula conference. I'm the director of FiyahCon, and Nicole and Mocha Memoirs Press is actually paneling. I noticed that I'm kind of tangentially like a Jarvis, Jarvis, you won something at the Nebulas this year. You were one of the special award winners, honorees. And then I'm here with Nicole, and then LaRose will be editing an upcoming issue of *Fireside Magazine* of which I am publisher. So I have little connections with everyone. Most of my published short fiction is, let me see, *Anathema*, *Fiyah*, *Fireside*, *Lightspeed*, Neon Hemlock Press. I've been in a couple of anthologies, one of which is with Scholastic. I'm kind of all over the place. So, I also edit and write and publish and do event things. And then I also author studies like the, like *Firesides*. *Fireside* and *Fiyah*, they both put out iterations of black speculative fiction reports, which study experiences and output specifically regarding the presence of Black voices in short, genre fiction. The last one of those came out in 2018. We'll be bringing it back this year. Looking forward to seeing how the market has improved, because it has ever so slightly. But I like to put numbers to the numerous complaints we have about the industry. So, that's my whole thing.

LaRose: Okay. Great! So now we have our panelists. And I think actually, your introductions kind of transition into our next question, which is, how are you defining indie?

Nicole G-K: So the question is, what does it mean to be independent? And what does independent mean? For me.

LaRose: I think it's both, what does it mean to you? But then how does that look in the field? So, I don't want to frame, but I may redirect after I hear your responses.

Nicole G-K: [Laughter]. Okay. So, for me, independent or indie is not having one of the major—as a writer, independent for me is self-publishing. Me guiding my own work, producing my own work or not using a traditional press, whether it's a small press, a medium press, or one of the larger like Tor or Edge or someone framed in being my own publisher. I am independent of these other major publishers in producing my work. It could also mean to a certain degree, you're unagented, right, and kind of operating on your own, solo, through the publishing streams.

Hannibal: In the spirit of our people, I would "yes and" our sister's response there and say in the comic book world it's all those things plus more. In comic books, there are two major publishers. And those two major publishers have 70% of the market cornered. And everybody else who shows up is an afterthought, literally. No matter if they're a large international publisher like Humanoids, where I did a graphic novel called *MPLS Sound*, or if they're, you know, eight people in an office space in West LA, which is another publisher that I worked with. So, indie comes, in my mind, first of all, with, you're walking into the market without a bankroll. You're walking into the market without the machinery of a large company, promoting, producing, and verifying the quality of your work.

And indie has a certain stigma from a consumer standpoint…, even if it's something as big as *The Walking Dead*, which is an indie book that was independently produced and put out through Image Comics when Robert Kirkman had zero money or if it's someone like myself on Second Side Publishing with *Wildfire*. All those are painted with a broad brush with the term indie.

For the creators, it is a mark of pride. It is you know, David versus Goliath. It is standing against an establishment that has denied and marginalized people who look like me, people who look like you for almost ever [laughter]. And we are more than proud to wear that title and claim it as we will build something on our own and something independent in the spirit of my other sister, Ava DuVernay.

Nicole S: To Hannibal's point, there is this stigma of being considered an indie writer, because it's like you weren't good enough to have a mainstream publisher backing you. But when I first wrote *Escape from Beckyville*, I didn't reach out to mainstream publishers. My goal was, I'm going to self-publish this, and I'm going to do all the legwork. I'm going to drive across the country. I'm going to talk to the indie bookstores. And I wouldn't replace that experience, because a lot of those Black indie bookstores that I went to are no longer in existence, you know. So, it was great to be able to get out into the community to talk to people. I mean, they saw me coming basically in my little pink van. So, to just get out there and talk and say, hey, this what I'm doing, and I'm writing spec fiction. And they're like, oh, they had never heard of spec fiction, some of the communities that I went to. So, to me, it was a give and take. They embraced me as an indie writer, and I was introducing them to a genre that they hadn't heard of before. So, it was a fulfilling experience for me.

LaRose: And to your point—I'm just gonna interject here—the stigma is particularly around writing. Because I don't think that you have that kind of stigma around other types of indie production, independent film….I think that people are more open to the idea and understand a pathway to success through film, for music, for musicians, as independent artists, as opposed to looking at writers and thinking you weren't good enough. As opposed to, as Nicole said, making a deliberate choice to be independent… for a lot of the same reasons that other artists and others working in other mediums choose to be independent, a lot of which has to do with creative control.

Jarvis: Right. I think I'm really simple in most things. Operating outside the mainstream primarily is my definition of being independent. Primarily having complete ownership of your creative work, which gives you the opportunity to have creative control over your characters…. I've seen other comic book creators that have submitted their work to major corporations—Nickelodeon, Disney, things of that nature—and it's like, oh okay, that's great, that's really… oh, we really like what you're, what you're doing, but we're going to…can you change this character to a white character? You know what I'm saying? And so, that's value in itself. Also, I've seen a lot of times people want to have that recognition or verification from the mainstream to feel as though their work or what they're doing is culturally significant. I'm kind of the opposite.

Nicole G-K: So, one of the things I think is super important about being an independent author is not…is that, what Jarvis said which in that creative control, but it also puts you right in what Nicole said, right, lock in step with your people, with your readers, you're a lot more connected. Because you have to go out and work for them, you have to go find them, you have to go out there and make connections with them. And so, that is and to our point, we talked about Black Science Fiction Society, The State of Black Science Fiction. Prior to the rise of social media, which is when I first got my first novel contract was in 1998… I felt completely disconnected, right, because I would go to cons with my one little book. And that's what they tell you, right, go to science fiction conventions, you wrote a sci-fi book. And I would go to my vendor table with my one little book.

And first of all, people were like, who is that? And then I was the only one in that space [chuckle] with my one little book. And people were very much, who published it? That's number one. Oh, you're not published by Baen. You're not published by, you know, the larger people. So, you're not really a writer. But you're buying all the books with the white guy next to me who self-published all his UFO books. Got it. [Laughter]. So, okay. And two…I actually made a point of having a Black woman on the cover, because growing up I didn't see that a lot. I didn't see it…unless it was like an urban contemporary story, right. *The Women of Brewster Place* or Terry McMillan. Some of those more contemporary stories had Black women on the cover, but not always. And so, I was really hungry as an adult to see myself reflected on covers, and a darker me, right. Like me. [Laughter]. Not, not the racially ambiguous female on my cover. So, I made a point of doing that. But it was really difficult. That was because I was able to as an indie author, right or with a small press to demand that. And it wasn't a risk for the press, because everything was a risk. Cause everything was e-book, right. This is like 2000, super long ago. But people looked at that, and they would pick it up and say, "you know, I don't think I can identify with this." "I don't know if this book is for me." But you can identify with a shapeshifting tiger. But you can't identify with another human being who's going through, right, trials in a speculative setting. So, being independent allows you to find, to root out those people and actually find those who are actually just as hungry and just as interested in Black speculative fiction as you are, as a fan, as a writer.

LaRose: So, the reason we asked this question is we wanted to get everybody kind of on the same page in terms of what we're discussing, and what the sort of scope is of what we're calling

the indie community. And so some people mentioned small presses. But Nicole, in your initial response, you were saying that you think for writers, it is independence from all presses. It's completely guiding the process yourself. So, just in terms of the rest of the conversation, this is the scope. So, we can think about maybe small presses, we can think about self-publishing, completely guiding every part of the process. What it means to have no budget, right, in terms of what you're creating, even if you're creating through a small press. So, that can be the scope of what we're thinking about as we answer the other questions. Jalondra?

Jalondra: So, we wanted to ask, what are some of the most exciting developments that people see happening right now in the indie community? And this can include things you're doing, things you're seeing of other authors, things that are happening in presses, with institutions, with specific works, collections...

Nicole S: Can I talk about something that's… a little subversive in spec fiction and sci-fi is, I'm seeing a trend toward joy. Like I'm seeing these calls for, publications having calls out for, we want stories about joy. Khadijah Queen, and I think it's Kiini Salaam, are working on an anthology about the POC gaze and utopias from a Black perspective or a POC perspective. I think it's *Escape Pod* has a call for their next issue is on joy. *Apparition Lit* has a call out for wonder. And I think that living in a pandemic in the country is so much, you know, turmoil, tumult, and divided. People want, not Pollyanna-ish stories, but more affirming stories of the future. And so, and that was and that was subversive for me, because all my stories are dark. I don't think I've ever written a happy ending. So, I'm like, joy, I don't think I can do that [laughter]. But now it's, it's got me thinking like, how can I include more uplifting elements in my writing?

Jalondra: Yes, that is so real Nicole, I've been noticing that too. And I think that my dissertation project, and even writing that I've done has tended towards… I don't like to use dark, but you know, just unsettling. That was one of the things I wrote about your collection. It's very unsettling. So I understand the turn towards joy. It's really interesting, and it's really complex.

Hannibal: Well, I've specifically made a move towards joy myself. Choosing it in both my personal life and in the fiction that I'm writing. I was talking to my creative partner Quinn McGowan about the character Will Watson from *Project Wildfire*, and our goal with him was to present the inherent goodness that is installed into Black, most Black people in the south, from values, from aunties, from relatives, from being cared for by community. And from that set of values that comes up outside of what is traditionally thought of as a southern idea, which comes across very white, very racist, very exclusionary.

He's a superhero, but literally the first time he meets any conflict, he tries to talk, every time. It rarely ends up with him being able to do that, but he at least tries every time. And as a self-described horrible person, I always say when I'm writing Will, I think what would I do, and I do something completely unlike that. [Laughter]. And that's come across with the project. And I'm hoping when it comes to stores in November that people will really be able to latch on to it.

In the fantasy space, my friend Sebastian Jones is working very hard with HBO Max on his show, *Asunda*, which is going to be set in his fictional universe that he's been working on for, since before I met him, 30 years ago [chuckle]. And to see that come to fruition from a guy who was just making his own little Dungeon and Dragons characters to seeing it realized with contracts at HBO Max is very gratifying. And I would be remiss if I didn't mention a sister named C. Spike Trotman.…she posted the other day that she's about to launch her thirtieth Kickstarter. She has made literally more than two million dollars kickstarting projects, speculative fiction, Black specific fiction, very, very niche cast material, and she has created an industry of her own, a lane of her own that nobody else is in and that she dominates.…Now there's a lot of notice from bigger publishers for smaller writers, I see Brandon Thomas writing a lot more stuff at DC Comics, which is great to see after he did *Miranda Mercury*, which is like a love letter to Black women in science fiction, or after he did *Excellence*, which is a very strong family drama based in magic that he did for Image Comics. So there's a lot of great things happening. As for myself, I'm doing this speculative fiction story called *False Flag*, which is like GI Joe meets wrestling, but in a world of superheroes. It's super evil. It's so the worst. And I'm doing it for free on operative.net. I'm doing that with illustration from Demar Douglas, and I'm really enjoying finding these spaces of joy under this cloud of doom. That's where a lot of these stories happen. That Will Watson shines, because there needs to be light. That these stories are presenting, you know, finding your sliver of happiness, even when everything else is going wrong. Oh, I'm sorry, I almost missed Tee Franklin, who wrote the very brilliant Bingo Love graphic novel for Image Comics. She's also getting some more notice. I hear she's writing television now, which I'm enormously happy to hear. So, there's a lot of great movement from people who were not in the mainstream, being able to take mainstream money and then bring it home to the family, which I really appreciate.

LaRose: I feel like L.D., Fiyah, you all had a call for joy, last year. That you all actually had been thinking about in 2019, or something before, I feel like I remember Davaun saying that this was the moment for it. But you had already determined that was going to be a topic in 2019.

L.D. Lewis: Yes.

LaRose: So maybe you talk a little bit about that. But I think it gets to another point that we're trying to make about how what's happening on the indie scene sort of anticipates or not even anticipates, but drives kind of what happens in the larger sphere.

L.D. Lewis: Let me see, so we settle on themes for issues the summer prior to the publication year. So, our Joy issue was our October issue last year. And it was really well received. But the reason we did it was because you know, state of the world type stuff. But also because the bulk of our submissions normally are based in trauma. And we publish exclusively Black writers… and it's to the point where acquiring editors kind of need a break from those sort of heavy topics. So, the core of the theme was to give our readers a bit of a break there. And it just turned out to be timely. I mean, we do that work to kind of anticipate where there's shortages.

Fiyah became a thing, it was born out of a void in the industry. There was a lack of Black voices. We were like, okay, well, here's a publication, it's all entirely Black voices. And so, there was a dearth of Black joy on the scene. And so that's what we're doing. So next year, it'll probably be more Black horror, or we'll get into some punk themes or whatever. But I think that across the board, especially at *Fireside* as well, we receive a lot of narratives that are rooted in trauma. So, I think that the joy theme was sort of to dare us to tell stories outside of that home zone, that sort of finding joy in dark places, or just not having the dark places at all. We're so used to kind of pigeonholing ourselves in that way.

Jarvis: Alright, I'm excited about three specific things. I believe that creators have to hit the industry on both the independent front and the mainstream front, to hit, to push on all of those. And I'm excited about the individuals that Hannibal mentioned, in addition to Sebastian, Brandon Easton, Kevin Grevioux, LaSean Thomas have been making a lot of waves in terms of mainstream. But then on the other side, I'm excited about the explosion,…with the Black sci-fi creatives, and I've seen from when I first started, of maybe a dozen people that I would buy stuff from and share with my friends to hundreds now, and that's comics, that's books, that's e-books, independent movies, and shorts. So, now we have a plethora of things to read and enjoy and share with other people. And then lastly, I'm a big fan of the events. Some of the people here I met at events. So, I'm excited that I started off going to maybe two or three events a year and before, pre-COVID, I was up to like fifteen events a year. I was at everything. [Laughter]. If it was a Black event, I was there…But events, like The Black Age of Comics, which was really the first one that started almost thirty years ago in Chicago, and it kind of spread and became…some other people picked up the mantle and started the East Coast Black Age of Comics. The Motor City Black Age of Comics. The Atlanta Sci-Fi and Fantasy Expo, Onyx Con, and the African Street Festival here in Nashville…. And so, I really enjoy going to those events. And it's a real community when you go there.

LaRose: I was going to follow up with Jarvis to talk about actually Cons and events. I've been going to Dragon Con, I think my first time was maybe in 2011. So minus a pandemic, 10 years. [Laughter]. And I have noticed and I kind of want to think about that a little bit, how our presence in those spaces is changing the field…I remember one of the first panels we had for the State of Black Sci-fi, there was even this sort of conversation about whether we call ourselves science fiction and fantasy authors, right. And it was this back and forth between, well, no, I don't write that, I write weird stories. I don't know if I want to embrace that label because of how so often that label pushes us out. So, now in the last ten years, in terms of my experience—and Jarvis can speak more to this, but it sounds to me like he was saying a similar sort of thing—I have seen us more in these spaces, cosplaying, on panels, doing those sorts of things. And can we talk a little bit about how we think that might also be impacting our presence in the space, as writers and as creators, as opposed to just as participants and consumers?

Hannibal: …for me, you know, because I've been going to like San Diego Comic Con since '99, but going to something like Black Speculative Arts Movement or Black Comix Day in San

Diego—which is run by Keithan Jones—to go to those places, is a much different, much warmer environment.

For a Black creative at San Diego Comic Con or Wonder Con, you're in there, your eyes are going left and right, you're looking for opportunities, you're looking for vulnerabilities, you're looking for a place to make yourself welcome, because the energy isn't always there. When you're at, you know, Black Comix Day, everybody loves you. Everybody's happy to see you. Everybody's happy to be there. There's a shift that is happening from our presence. We're showing up, and we are, we're building up certain people. We're building up your N.K. Jemisins. We're building up, as you said, your Brandon Eastons, who also wrote on the Netflix series, the *Transformers* series… So, seeing us…if we elevate our people, then other people are forced to accept them. But it is a community effort. It is a work of banding together in that regard. And it cannot work if, as the old folks used to say, a rising tide raises all boats and we all got to put something in the water.

LaRose: I just want to take a minute to underscore, because I think that's a really important point Hannibal, about our presence shows that there is an audience, which is what drives mainstream or traditional interest in our work. And I think, we can also then look back at the Black Science Fiction Society and the State of Black Sci-Fi as these massive online communities that also show mainstream publishers, you got, 20,000 people in the State of Black Sci-Fi, who probably would be interested in this work by this Black author. Milton is not here, he has talked about that in the past. That was one of his interests in creating that community, was just to show the audience existed.

Nicole S: I have to shout out Rasheedah Phillips, who is one of the originators from the State of Black Sci-Fi, she has this amazing event in Philly, the Afrofuturist Affair, and she's always been such a strong advocate for her fellow writers, creating this safe space for Black writers of sci-fi and spec fiction to come in, read their work, barter with other writers, bring their products to sell. She has an immersive experience this month. I think it's called the Black Quantum, Black Quantum Futurism that's taking place at the Hatfield House, which is this historic house here in Philadelphia. And it's going to be like time capsules and time travel and just bringing Black people in to see what Black people, what our future could look like. Like can you imagine the possibilities of a Black future and also bringing in people to read their work, to get on the mic to talk about what they're doing. So, Rasheedah has always been super supportive.

Nicole G-K: So, I have noticed that at Boskone a few years ago, there was the State of Black Sci-fi meetup. But when I was at Worldcon in Dublin, there was a specific Black sci-fi writer meetup as well, that was just us. And it literally said in the program, if you're not Black, do not attend. Because it was just a safe space in a much larger area. And as Hannibal mentioned it may not always be inviting or warm to us to be able to find others to network, to vibe as Nicole was saying in those spaces. But I also know that from working with programming for a couple of different conventions, that the goal has shifted towards being more inclusive beyond just having a diversity panel, right. Because we are fans of science fiction and fantasy. I can speak to more than

just diversity in spec. And so, I know that from programming from Multiverse in particular, as well as Boskone and ConGregate, they were definitely working towards having panels that were inclusive of different people across the board for every panel, not just that corner here, let's have a diversity panel. And I think Jarvis's track at Dragon Con just demonstrates and kind of amplifies at such a large, it's like the largest con, sci-fi con in the United States after Worldcon, that's not a comic con, that's Dragon. Here we are…it's even worth noting that having a track devoted to Black and people of color speculative fiction tells the other readers, right, in other fandom and other participants, this is something you might…this is not a small thing. This is actually a bigger thing. It's something that you may want to give your attention to or notice. And even at Worldcon in Dublin, they had highlighted a section in their dealer's room, a large section that was just devoted to Brazilian science fiction art.

Jarvis: Oh, I just wanted to piggyback. Thank you for mentioning the diversity track at Dragon Con, I think that track is the first track at any major event. Cause in the past, you had your Black panel, and then everybody goes home and goes back to normal, and before the Diversity Track. And with the Diversity Track, we have a whole week of stuff all day, all day long. So, it's not going back to okay, we're gonna just do a Black panel and send everybody home again.

L.D. Lewis: So, FiyahCon, which was… which I started yesterday, last year with Brent Lambert, who's the Social Media Manager over at Fiyah, it is dedicated specifically to centering black, indigenous, and people of color and their experiences and contributions to spec lit. And we are Hugo nominated now for it…because we set that as our focus, it allowed us to do, beyond 101 programming. So, there are no diversity panels. It's just all of these people from all of these different backgrounds who are able to actually talk craft, without having to properly orient people as to what Afrofuturism is, you know, for the eleventy-billionth time. And it was super well received. We had like eleven, twelve hundred attendants, something like that. Twelve hundred attendants last year. This year, we are at about eight hundred so far. And we've added an additional day of programming and it's really robust and really interesting conversations. Even as different organizations are doing like year-round kinds of panels and things, we were able to still find conversations that haven't been had yet. So I got the Nebula conference gig off of having directed FiyahCon and I was able to diversify some of that programming, some of the social spaces there as well. And it's… it's been really interesting to see how well it's been received. It's been interesting to see how a lot of Con runners from predominantly white teams are trying to poach my team members to try and get them to contribute something organically to their space. And I'm like, well, why do you have, you know, a white person who only has white friends trying to diversify their programming, maybe they're not the person for that job just because they want it. And so, that's a class I had to teach at Clarion West to just kind of like, these are pretty basic questions you should be asking yourself when staffing your events.

Jalondra: So, I just want to follow up. I'm so glad that you are talking about the importance of institution building. How Black people build institutions and build spaces and build community. And that's actually the thing that carries up and supports artists and builds audiences and

cultivates new talent. Because when I was in a creative writing program, I wasn't connected to any of these communities. And I was really pushed to do realist fiction. I think about how transformative it would have been to be connected to these communities. One of the things I find myself within the academy frustrated about, is I feel like with Afrofuturism and all of this excitement—and there's a lot of white people doing Afrofuturism work, right—I feel like there is kind of a narrative that the white people did it first and then the Black people, then Octavia Butler, and Samuel Delaney came… I feel like there's a little bit of this linear narrative, because the only space being looked at is that…mainstream science fiction institution, you know what I mean? Like, because the only site being looked at is these particular publications, these particular venues, these particular associations, they're only seeing the people who…. somehow managed to be included within those spaces and not seeing all of this other stuff that's happening.

Nicole G-K: So, we're just not going to talk about like, "The Comet," right. Like, W.E.B. DuBois, right, "The Comet." It's the first…for me, I feel like.

LaRose: Well, yes.

Nicole G-K: The first like, like… the first science did it first.

LaRose: Pauline Hopkins serialized the novel.

Jalondra: Pauline Hopkins, yes.

LaRose: Called *Of One Blood* in the 1800s.[1]

Jalondra: Yes. Yes.

LaRose: You know, and within academia, obviously, where white people, and I, you know, we're not even going to call it mainstream or whatever, just white people ignore again, the sites of, the places and spaces that Black folks are using to get these stories out. And just because you ignore it, just cause you kind of decide that it's not worth talking about, or that you're not aware of it, that doesn't mean that it's not there and hasn't been happening.

Jalondra: And I mean, I do see people talk about those older texts… Within the institution, Black people have done that genealogical work of saying, like, oh, DuBois, Pauline Hopkins, all of that.…but then I still don't really see critical engagement of those works. Still not the engagement of how Black people are engaging with these themes of utopia, time travel, body transformation.

Nicole G-K: Gender. Yep.

Jalondra: Like what Black people are doing in these conversations. That's kind of what I'm doing now with the mermaids project. Like, it's not just this thing over here, like, look at this cool example of Black people being mermaids. It's like, no, Black people are transforming what the mermaid means. Black creators are advancing and creating and innovating certain concepts, but

still not really getting engaged through those concepts, because it's still being engaged as, look at this cool example of Black people also doing this, you know what I mean?

Nicole G-K: Like it's an anomaly.

Jalondra: Yes.

Nicole G-K: We're looked at as anomalies versus being…a living, breathing entity, right…. and again it goes back to the idea that there could be only one. That's why when you see examples of list of "Black Authors You Should Be Reading," it's the same five authors over and over again, because there's this concept that… and they're only looking at this very narrow—it's like they're looking at Florida, instead of looking at the whole United States. They're only looking at this one area, when it's a much, much larger canvas to be observed. Wait a minute, this isn't just this one small [chuckle] state, it's a whole country.

LaRose: But also… it's a question of even having the tools, right?

Nicole G-K: Right.

LaRose: To understand what they're encountering. And a lot of times, you know, in the year of our Lord 2021… white academics specifically are still not being trained to even have that nuanced conversation Jalondra that you pointed to about how Black folks are not just taking sort of Eurocentric or mermaid mythologies that come out of a European history and lineage, but they're adding to it. They're bringing things that are coming out of African traditions, they're bringing things that come out of Caribbean mythologies. And that quite honestly, those things have been present… were present in these communities prior to contact… So it's not we're taking the notion of mermaid and kind of flipping it—though, that's sometimes what's happening—but we're also… we've always had this idea of this water creature, right, that gels in some ways with European mermaid mythologies, but it's completely different in other ways… because they don't have the tools necessarily to do a complex, thoughtful reading of what is distinctive… about the way that that figure appears in Black texts in sort of African diasporic texts.

Jalondra: I think that that leads well into the subgenres question. What subgenres that were or are being incubated in the indie community have crossed into the mainstream?

Hannibal: Well, I can think of one from the comics books sphere that there's a very common element that happens with Black creators where we'll look at something and say, that doesn't make any sense. That's stupid. It's got to be fixed.

Nicole G-K: To piggyback on Hannibal's point, the demand often comes from us. If you look at Black Twitter, or social media, we are a loud voice. Those shows that don't have us in the writing room, they don't do well. The chorus that arises from Black Twitter and from Black social media around things, wait a minute, no, that's racist, or no, that's not us, or no, that doesn't flow, or who's in your writing room, has kind of forced the hand for major studios to rethink how they

present things, and who is in that writing room. Which is why we're getting a lot more diverse talent in the room. But I think that conversation of, if you look at *Lovecraft Country*, what Misha Green was able to do with Mark Ruff's text blew it out the water. Just, I mean, her, just from her experience, episode seven, *Name Yourself: Who Am I*, right?… the whole love letter to Black women and speculative fiction. That whole episode was phenomenal. And it was so well received. If you look at *Lovecraft Country*, it had like 12 or 15 Emmy nominations. It's stuff that we've been doing forever, right. Black horror, Black sci-fi, but because it's been elevated to such a state, more people are gonna do it now, right, cause it's popular. Because it's successful. It's been proven that there actually is a chorus or an audience for that. And that's the note for indie, right. We do things. And it has a small blip of popularity amongst us in our niche. And then someone else says, "hey, what's this ripple over here." And they take it, and they amplify it, which is what Hannibal was saying. And now suddenly, it's popular. And you'll see more opportunities grow from that. But as LaRose said earlier, it does tend to ebb and flow. I remember in the early '90s, when *Waiting to Exhale* came out, and there was like a gazillion other authors who were writing similar girlfriend books, and it was like, oh my gosh, we've arrived. We've arrived. And you can't even name five of 'em now. You can't find three of 'em on a shelf. And so, [chuckle] it does tend to ebb and flow. But one of the things that is consistent is Black independent authors and Black independent publishers continuing to produce work that reflects the needs and wants of our communities.

Jalondra: Yes, I want to follow what you just said Nicole about Black audiences and social media. I think there's a way in which I see independent writers, because they're in control of the process, because they're not at the behest of the schedule of a press and trying to find an agent they are responding more immediately, being a part of these conversations. That's something that I wrote about *Escape from Beckyville* is that there are these conversations that black women were already having about the *Psychology Today* article that said Black women were ugly, and the film *The Help*, that the stories were directly engaged with. And I think that's really powerful, because it provides a window into this work for Black people that's not only through the window of science fiction. Like people who weren't already fans come into a lot of this work in different ways.

LaRose: Does anybody have any other thoughts on things that are happening right now that you're seeing in the indie world, that we're going to see in like two years in the mainstream? Or that we potentially will see, as long as this interest in representing us actually persists? Which, who knows when it will ebb again? But what's happening now? What do you think is poised to break through into more mainstream spaces? And I think we have to think about that language as well, because it continues to be problematic.

Hannibal: I would keep an eye on *LaGuardia* by Nnedi Okorafor. It's a science fiction comic that she did with one of the smaller publishers, not one of the big two. And it posited the idea of plant consciousnesses and human consciousnesses living side by side in the societal thing. The development of the idea was really deep, and I just, I was reading it like, yeah, I can see this in the movie, this could check out. So, whether she does it or someone tries to steal it, I don't know. But I

would not be surprised to see some elements of *LaGuardia* on your screen within the next few years.

Jarvis: I'm going to piggyback off of Hannibal. You're going to continue to see more independent work making its way to mainstream like William Hayashi's *Discovery*. Where it centers around Black people who have been living on the dark side of the moon before Neil Armstrong. There's been like a Jack and Jill type of recruiting that's been done with the geniuses and people of that nature. A Black ilk, they've created their own society, and have been in hiding and they get discovered. That has already, from what I understand, been picked up by, I think Netflix.

Nicole G-K: That's right. Yep.

Jarvis: Yvette Kendall has a series called *God Maps*, where they explore where the soul actually goes after you die. These scientists have created this technology to… at the moment of death, it kind of tags the soul as it leaves the body, and they've been tracking it. And she has had her stuff picked up, and is in the process of development. So, you're going to see a lot of cherry picking of successful work. Sort of like the entertainment industry. I was privileged to be in the room with… I can't think of his name right now. Record executive. He came to Tennessee State University years ago, and I taped his speech. And he was basically telling us like, how do we get on. People were trying to give him tapes and DVDs of their work and stuff, and he's like, that's not how it works. We pick up people that already have a buzz, that they've proven that they have an audience. And if you can have an audience in your region, or state or whatever, we pick those people and then work with them. So, you'll see a lot of cherry picking like that happen. Which can be a good or a bad thing.

LaRose: And are there genres? I think about for instance, steamfunk, as something that we definitely saw going very strong in the indie community and P. Djèlí Clark with *A Dead Djinn in Cairo* and *The Black God's Drum*.

Nicole G-K: *The Black God's Drum*. Yeah. I love that book.

LaRose: Where we're starting to see more steamfunk and Nisi Shawl had a steampunk novel And we're starting to see that more in the mainstream. But we definitely saw that in indie writers before it had that kind of crossover. I think a lot of that is coming out of Tor right now. So, are there other genres right now that we haven't seen in the mainstream, but that we're seeing in the indie community that you think we're going to see in the mainstream later? Because we want to talk about it right now, so we can point back to it in two years and be like, look. We said it. They said it. Now respect their authority.

Nicole G-K: So, I write futuristic noir, which is basically cyberpunk slash futuristic noir. They're all mysteries set in the future, with a PI, think *Blade Runner*, but with a Black female lead. And I used to be the only Black woman who did that. But I'm starting to see a growing number of Black women authors writing mystery speculative noir. I'm very happy about that because I was

the only one for a very long time. But I definitely see that they're not tagging it as futuristic noir, it's either cyberpunk, or they're just tagging it a regular science fiction story. But at its origins, it's a mystery in a speculative setting. I think that genre is going to tend to grow because people love mysteries. There is a rise of people who are watching true crime as they go to bed at night, or just to calm down. People who like a good mystery, but are kind of sick of the ordinary settings, are turning to that genre.

Hannibal: I was just going to piggyback on what Nicole was saying, because earlier this year, I was in two anthologies, from Milton Davis, of course, *Cyberfunk!* and *Noir is the New Black* from Fair Square Comics, where I was writing, as she said, a mystery of sorts in a futuristic setting. I definitely think that's the aesthetic, because when costume designers and production designers look at things, the lines and the aesthetics of that being applied to black aesthetic are very visually appealing. A lot of people have learned from the way that Issa Rae used lighting in *Insecure* to light dark-skinned people. They are like, oh, we can do this now. We've learned something we can steal. So, I definitely think that will definitely be a factor. I've always seen ironically, that Milton is ahead of the curve, because he was the one who did the steamfunk anthology. I was in that.

Nicole G-K: He was. Yep.

Hannibal: He had *Cyberfunk!* His new plan, I believe he talked about, is doing spyfunk.

Nicole G-K: Spyfunk. Yep.

Hannibal: Which is a black spy thing, because they won't make Idris Elba, James Bond. They're like, okay, suckers, we can do it ourselves.

Nicole G-K: We got it!

Hannibal: And off we go. So if you see Will Smith popping back into, you know, the spy thing in a few years, that's probably why.

Nicole G-K: I'm also in *Cyberfunk!* And actually Milton and I had long conversations about… I'm a huge cyberpunk fan, obviously. I'm a big Philip K. Dick fan. And so, one of the things that we actually talked about a lot with the *Cyberfunk!* anthology is, where do we want it to go? Because cyberfunk by its definition is high tech, low life, which is really depressing. But he was like, I don't want to do the same stuff that cyberpunk has done before hence *Cyberfunk!* And it's a very different anthology as Hannibal can probably attest. These are not your ordinary cyberpunk stories. They have elements of hope. They have elements of other things that aren't oriented in trauma. They don't all have to have a murder, or some horrific thing that happens, or discussions on what it means to be human. It's just how do I exist in this space and find joy? I love the idea of cyberfunk, I hope it catches on. I hope it grows. I expect that it will, because it's a very unique twist on cyberpunk. Milton's diesel funk is ahead of the curve as well. With futuristic noir, the noir anthology that Hannibal was talking about as well. We write those things. If you think about the Sherlock Holmes comic that was written, set in Harlem, *Watson and Holmes*. I mean, we're just

always ahead of the curve with these types of things. Even though they may not be labeled as such, they're definitely part of a growing trend of, here's what we do that's awesome. And how we make twists and turns and transform things. That's kind of just… that's the beauty of who we are. We take what is on the table or something and then we reconstruct the table to fit our needs.

Hannibal: That's a hip-hop aesthetic. Everything that you're talking about is hip-hop, or jazz, or blues, or griot. I mean, that's, that's the black aesthetic inside and out all day.

Jalondra: Speaking of cyberfunk as a movement towards hope, one of the things I've been noticing at academic conferences lately are critiques of dystopia. And trying to talk about hope more in the midst of these kinds of genres. One of the things I would like to see is for the Black writers that are doing this to be centered, or at least factored in and read in the context of that conversation. Not read after the fact like, oh look, they're doing it too, but like, oh, no, this is actually a driving factor, not just an afterthought.

Nicole G-K: And that's the thing though with indie. That's why we ask people to read indie, because they are at the forefront of the next large movement. By the time it's mainstream, it's already been active in indie circles for a while, right?

LaRose: I'm going to tell the story about my series. I truly believe that one of the problems that I had when I was shopping my series in 2010, that people didn't know what to do with something that wasn't about Black trauma. I really think that was one of the massive things that I encountered. But now Black people are saying… we're tired, our experiences are more than our trauma. We are more than our trauma. Our experiences are more than trauma. And we want to see that reflected in books as well.

Jarvis: One theme that has been emerging is the strong Black female lead. I want to see that continue to thrive. That's been in the independent world for as long as people been writing. But stuff like *Lovecraft Country*, *Discovery*, *Sleepy Hollow*, and anything that Janelle Monáe is in. Those are strong Black female leads that have been coming to the forefront.

Nicole S: The flip side of what Jarvis was saying about the strong Black woman lead is the woman who's dealing with trauma. And I'm seeing more writers talking about their struggles with PTSD ,with trauma. Zin E. Rocklyn talks about writing as a woman who has suffered PTSD and writes about trauma in her work. And I love Sumiko Saulson, her book *Solitude*.

Nicole G-K: Yes, Sumiko. We publish her.

Nicole S: Yes. She's awesome. In her book *Solitude*, she talks about just having this radical self-acceptance, and how mental health challenges are stigmatized in the Black community, and how it is transgressive to talk about being a woman who suffers from a mental illness. One of her characters is a woman who is housebound and an empowered character. So I am seeing more women speaking out about their own trauma, their own PTSD, their own feeling othered whether it's in their community or in their own skin, and how they transcribe that into their work.

Nicole G-K: In my *Fawn & Briscoe* series, the protagonist Fawn actually has PTSD from the job that she actually does as a detective. It's in this futuristic setting, of course, but it kind of enables her ability to do some of the work she needs to do. And it's dealing with that because I think especially after the year we just all collectively had–

Nicole S: Yeah.

Nicole G-K: There's definitely a lot of residual mental health that we need to look at. But I also think to Jarvis's point, a strong Black female lead, it depends on who's writing the character. I go back to this again and again, who is in your writing room? Because sometimes… it's a Black female lead, and it's not authentic. It's not… it's kind of destructive in how she's depicted. So, it's really important, I know "I'm rooting for everybody Black!" but I need to see who's writing that character. Because Misha Green writing a character is very different from J.J. Abrams writing a Black female lead. And so, I need to know who's behind that work, because that's very important in how that character shows up in the movie, or film, or TV show.

LaRose: I think that that's an important point, because a lot of what you all have been talking about as to how these ideas are moving out of the indie space into the mainstream is through film. So, now we're talking about a whole other sort of apparatus that we have to think about, because it's not just that you're dealing with publishers and trying to make sure that the resulting book stays true to your vision, but also that now we're talking about where we have writers' rooms, and where they may option the rights to your story, but then you don't know who is writing the story, who is translating your character, and whether or not that person has the insight to be able to authentically translate that character, especially if you as the writer are not involved in that process. I know N.K. Jemisin, a couple of her things have been pulled for adaptation, and I know that with *The Hundred Thousand Kingdoms*, I think that's the one she's actually adapting herself. But yeah, that becomes a massive factor. Because what gets lost? What gets flattened out? What gets jettisoned? Because people don't understand the significance of it in the first place. Because there are not enough people reflecting, who are connected to those identities in the writers' room.

Hannibal: Real quickly. Could I just tell a real quick story. One of my friends, Lamont Magee, was one of the writers on *Black Lightning*. And when they were doing the Crisis on Infinite Earths crossover, there was a moment when Black Lightning walks into the room with Diggle and Lamont spent three weeks arguing with people and producers and writers that when they walked in the room the dude gave him a head nod. Gave him the nod.

Nicole G-K: The head nod.

Hannibal: The head nod. What's up.

Nicole G-K: The head nod. [Laughter].

Hannibal: He was like, you have no idea how hard I fought for that. And the importance of it, that it would be on screen. That it would be recognized. Because it was important that when these two Black men in a space with mostly white people walk in, there was that moment of recognition.

Nicole G-K: The head nod. Oh my god. Yes.

Hannibal: And I was like, yeah, that's what's up. That's why we got to be in the room. Exactly what you're saying.

Nicole G-K: And Black Twitter erupted. I cannot tell you how many people tagged me and did you see that head nod? Did you see it? Yasss! Oh my god, it was perfect. Okay. I'll calm down now.

Hannibal: [Laughter].

Jalondra: Do you all in your platforms and your work, intentionally seek to move the genre or genres or in new directions? And if so, how?

Jarvis: With all of my platforms and the little writing that I actually do, I think it's important that we are socially responsible and put images and themes out there that we want to see repeated. Not just, okay, I'm gonna go with what's going on right now. And not just copy what somebody else is doing. We see that in all the little inventions that you've seen on *Star Trek* our whole life, whether it's the cell phone, or the tablet, or the flat screen TV. And so, just like people see those inventions on sci-fi, and okay, well they figure out how to make that a reality. We need to put the images out there that we want to see in the future. So, other people can figure out, okay, how can we move this, move our country and our world toward that reality?

Hannibal: I totally agree with what Jarvis is saying. And I'm gonna piggyback on that. One of my elders in the Los Angeles poet community is this sister named V. Kali. When she first met me, I'd been writing all these break-up poems and that kind of stuff. And she was like, "have you ever thought about writing what you want to happen, and not what did happen?" And it changed my entire perspective on things. And I really, I really looked at that as science fiction being tomorrow's science fact, in the way that Jarvis was saying. And really thought about what we're doing as writers, we are creating these myths, we're creating these paradigms, we're creating these ideas that will then influence the actual lives of actual people. And that's very important in the work that I'm doing, because I got two kids, that they always see me, to quote another one of my poetic mentors, Michael Datcher, that my Black man life lives up to my Black man rhetoric. That the work that they see me put out is work that verifies them, that lifts them up, that shows them in a light of possibility and what can be. So, yeah that's super important to me. I'm writing a superhero book called *Project Wildfire*. It has a very aspirational element, even though most of the people in the book are awful, horrible liars, doing terrible, terrible things, and smashing up stuff. But there has to be a light in all of that. And that light has to shine.

Nicole S: I've been more intentional in my writing about writing older Black women characters as the main characters, because I think a lot of sci-fi and spec fiction leans toward

younger characters. And I'm guilty of that in my own work, like, okay, she's got to be 25 to 30. And as I'm getting older, I want to see middle-aged women not just seen as the elder, but in their full humanity, like being on a dating app or something. Just saying that older Black women exist and not just to save the world, as Whoopi Goldberg said. But they exist to, you know, do things in their community and be these complex characters. So that's what I'm working on and being intentional about.

L.D. Lewis: I do something similar. My novella *A Ruin of Shadows* from 2018, the protagonist is in her late 50s. And then it still got shelved somehow as YA, but that's another conversation entirely. All of my short stories have so far been kind of just personal experiments. So, that one came about… well, I don't know how to write fight scenes, and it turns out that I do them really well. And it became a thing. And my short *Moses* ended up reprinted at *Lightspeed*, long listed in one of the "best of" anthologies, I don't remember which one it was. That one was centering an addict, but who had super powers. So, trying to balance those two things. Because I had never seen an addict portrayed in a speculative literature setting. So, I don't know about trying to push things forward, but I'm just trying to fill gaps in the stories that I'm seeing.

Nicole G-K: So, I write mysteries, as I mentioned before, but one of the things I do write also are weird westerns. I may be the only Black woman writing weird Western fiction set in the 1900s New Mexico Territory. I love westerns… but there's a gap there, right? It's a gap with westerns. They're usually depicted as, with the exception of Maurice Broaddus' *Buffalo Soldiers* and a few others, they're often depicted as, white folks in the West. And they negate the stories of Native people there. They negate the story of the Chinese immigrants who are building the railroad. They negate the former slaves that escaped to that area. They negate all the people of color in those spaces. Like L.D., I love westerns, but I saw a gap. And so, I wrote stories—and of course, they're speculative because I'm a nerd—about experiences in New Mexico. I lived in New Mexico for six years, which actually helped feed the magical quality of those stories. And I center Black women in almost all of those stories, because those stories don't get told. I did a lot of research, a lot of writing. I don't know if it pushes anything forward, but it definitely adds other stories or additional voices to the weird western genre, which is almost exclusively white male. Because I like those stories… first and foremost, the writer pleases the writer. But also, I didn't see those stories, I thought those stories should be added and told. Secondly, I write speculative mysteries. Again, you don't often see Black female protagonist PI stories set in the future. And so, my Cybil Lewis series, my *Kingdom of Aves* series, which is speculative fantasy, mystery fantasy, and then my *Fawn & Briscoe* series, they all star Black women detectives, doing what you normally see white male detectives doing in those spaces. I write those stories because I like them. And the repeated thing I tell people is that Black folks aren't a monolith. We all have very different interests and things that we love. And so, the stories that I write are the things that I love. I love mysteries. I love spec. I love fantasy. I love westerns. Does that help another reader who's like, "oh, you know, I like mysteries, I like mysteries in the future, but I never see this character." I hope so. Growing up I didn't see a lot of the things I love reflected as Black women doing it. My goal with the work that I produce, is that

it finds a reader who feels validated and seen by reading, you know, Cybil investigating a crime or Prentiss using her Hawk abilities and her magic. So that's my goal as a writer. Our mission is to amplify marginalized voices in speculative fiction over at Mocha Memoirs Press. And so, the stories that we tend to pick, not always, but most of the time, are those that are kind of hard to fit. Sometimes they're mash-ups. Sometimes they're just a little odd and outside of what the mainstream would like, either the voice it's being told in, or the subject matter. And so, we try to produce works that fall into those cracks that don't often get heard or seen or read or accepted.

LaRose: So, I think that a lot of us who write are writing in some ways to what we wish we would have seen, or what we wish we could see now or what we wish we would have seen as kids. When I started writing and decided to self-publish, it was because you weren't seeing hardly any—I guess they might have been out there; if they were I don't know what they were—stories of Black boys in fantasy worlds. And you still barely see that. But the landscape has definitely changed since my first novel became available in 2010. And I wrote it because I had a cousin who loved fantasy. And I'm like, he should be able to read about people who look like him. And when I couldn't think of a book to buy and couldn't find any books to buy, that's when I started writing. And the other thing that was always on my agenda was, again, that notion that we're not a monolith. And so much of what you see, particularly written about Black children, is Black children engaged in these really serious adult issues, right. I mean, obviously, a lot of times to have a book and to have conflict, it's not "my peanut butter and jelly sandwiches is missing" for a teenager. That's not the conflict. But… Black children don't always have to be the next Civil Rights hero. They don't have to be facing down the police. We can tell stories about other kinds of conflict for Black children. And particularly when that's something that we see all the time, Black kids need escape, you know. Like, this is on the news all the time. This is happening in the streets. And yes, it is important to talk about that. And it's important to give them books that help them think through those experiences, but it's also important to give them places that say, you can have other kinds of possibilities for your life. And so, for me, when I started writing my *Shifters* Novel series, I wanted to start from a space where these Black children were empowered. And the world that matters is not this world. It's a whole other dimension that I created, where everybody is like these Black children. And that was purposeful. Sometimes let kids breathe different air. And again, those books are really important. I'm not saying that they're not important, I'm just saying kids deserve other stories as well.

Jalondra: I think it speaks to balance and variety. We need to have range and encompass and bigness to the art. And I think what tends to get the attention and the support tends to be that that coheres most with what is already familiar. So, my critique wouldn't necessarily be of the author, but of the larger context for what is getting emphasized versus what we don't see. Like, what's the larger context for that? And how do we keep creating? I think this kind of institution building that all of you've been involved with is really key to how you create a larger canvas, you know, so that everyone can find what resonates with them.

Hannibal: I was just going to say real quickly, that one of the things that motivates me in my writing was growing up watching the *Flintstones* and the *Jetsons* and saying, there's no place for me in the future or the past. So, I was like, yeah, I can fix that. I can, I can do something about that. I got these right here. And I started writing. And later on, I heard the story of Martin Luther King encouraging Nichelle Nichols to stay on *Star Trek*. So yeah, I just think it's really important that we just keep pushing the discussion and making the work for ourselves, because we have to be the first audience. And we have to satisfy the reader that we are before we can satisfy anybody else.

Notes

1. Hopkins serialized *Of One Blood* in *The Colored American Magazine* between 1902 and 1903.

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Events

African Street Festival: https://www.aacanashville.com/african-street-festival

Afrofuturist Affair: https://www.afrofuturistaffair.com/

Atlanta Sci-Fi and Fantasy Expo: https://www.atlantascifiexpo.com/

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Presses and Publishers

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Black Science Fiction Society: https://blacksciencefictionsociety.com/

Onyx Pages: https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC_reNHCI5mUeKGbvkN2_bTA

Sistah SciFi: https://sistahscifi.com/

Operative.net: http://operative.net/

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As L.M. Davis, **LaRose Davis** is a YA/MG author who writes about shapeshifters, aliens, immortals, and witches. L.M. Davis is author of *Interlopers: A Shifters Novel*, *Posers: A Shifters Novel*, *Forgers: A Shifters Novel*, and *skinless: A Novel in III Parts*. Additionally, Davis is a scholar of African American and Native American literatures and cultures, with particular interest in the speculative production of these communities. Finally, she has worked as a background actor on a variety of SFF projects including "Black Panther," "Raising Dion," "Spiderman: Homecoming," and "Lovecraft Country." She has recently written and directed her first speculative short film, titled "Fevered Dreams."

Image by Stock Snap

New Call for Submissions: Fiction

The Editorial Collective

The SFRA Review welcomes well-written and carefully edited pieces of short fiction that conform to the following guidelines:

- Submissions (stories, poetry, drama, etc.) should be no more than 4000 words.
- Submissions must be original works that have not been previously published; if, for example, a submission has been previously posted on a blog or similar medium, please include a note explaining when and where.
- Submissions should be clearly recognizable as SFF.
- Submissions should not be thinly disguised social or political rants.
- Submissions should be clearly germane to the issue's topic.
- Submit Microsoft Word .docx files only. If you are unable to access Word, please use Google Docs.
- All files must include a brief (100 words or fewer) bio of the author and proper contact information; however, stories can be published under a pseudonym.
- All stories must be sent as attachments to sfrarev@gmail.com with the subject "Fiction Submission: Autumn 2021".

Stories will be read and edited by at least two members of the collective. We will be much more likely to reject submissions out of hand than to request revision, though we may do the latter.

The Autumn issue does not have a particular topic, so feel free to submit stories on whatever topic you desire.

Subsequent issues will have different topics which will be revealed in the issues immediately preceding them.

"Wireheads"

Michael W. Clark

"It's not fair." Broad Back was from Earth. He liked sunrises. Even though it was officially morning, he couldn't tell if it was morning or dusk on the Second Grade. The space platform was stationary. The sun was always in the same place. Hot on one side, cold on the other. It was a procedure to generate electricity, the heat gradient. Of course, most of that power was used for the artificial gravity (AG) generators. But the AG wouldn't be necessary if they just spun the platform. Keeping it properly spinning would require 10% of the power needed for the AG. The spin wasn't done because the leaders of the platform didn't like the stars moving in circles. The citizens called the platform "the Second Grade" because the leaders acted like second grade schoolteachers to everyone. The leaders clearly didn't care; the citizens weren't really anything more than staff to the leaders. They were under paid because of a lack of respect. The Second Grade's main revenue generator (RG) was teenager rehabilitation. It was why Broad Back was on a station without a sunrise or sunset.

Broad Back was one of those teenagers in need of rehabilitation. Of course, he hated the place. "The sun is always right there." He pointed at the sun. The platform's dome components filtered the light and radiation, so it was at the proper level for most humans. The Second Grade was further away from the sun than the Earth, so Sol was much smaller than he was used to. The AG on the platform was set at 0.75 G. Clients from Earth were fitted with a belt that augmented the platform gravity to 1 G immediately around them. There were no superpowers on the Second Grade. Only the leaders had power on the Second Grade. The diurnal cycle of day and night was maintained though by a migration from one side of the platform to the other. The Second Grade was riddled with routine. Routine was part of the rehabilitation. Broad Back walked with the other clients. Walking everywhere was part of the routine. Broad Back scratched at the back of his neck. "Hate this too."

"Scratch not." Phalyn whispered. "Implants are expensive. To replace is extra fee." Phalyn was no Earther. It showed in her physique. She was born in microgravity. Her belt augmentation reduced gravity further. Everyone had a right to their own gravity. It was written in the contract.

"Gov pays. What would caring matter?" Broad Back didn't put a tone in his voice. They were monitored every moment. A harsh tone was demerit worthy.

"The family. The family balance sheet. The Gov will reconcile." Phalyn's tone was always moderate. Her volume always low. In a space craft, quiet was the only privacy available. Where she was from, all citizens were quiet.

Binky was a smartass. He was proud of it. "Why bother with Earth geography? If it will just change?" He smiled at the teacher. The other client-students remained quiet. They didn't think they were smart and none wanted to be an ass.

"Over millions of years, yes. You are correct, but that is not relevant to this class, or the question I asked." The teacher reached over to the sky board class rooster. She pushed the red button beside Binky's picture. "You know the rules. You know the consequences. A demerit is appropriate."

Binky's smile evaporated. He started to cry. The teacher scanned the class; the client students looked at their desktops and nothing else.

After dinner, there was a free period lounge. The lounge was large. There was popcorn, salted with no butter. There were videos of all kinds. There were video games. All covered by their tuition. The video games were unused by the most recent client students. Broad Back, Phalyn, and Binky watched a CGI animation that was on when they sat down. It was full of action, loud and brightly colored with little dialogue. Each animated situation lasted less than ten minutes. It was attention span appropriate. It was in the contract too. Binky laughed at all of it, Broad Back only once and a while, but Phalyn never laughed. She just ate the popcorn. There was no amusing food where she came from. Food was rationed. Food added mass. Food used fuel. Fuel was rationed too.

With the sounding of the bell, they all walked back to the dark section of the platform where their beds were. Broad Back wanted to rub his neck where the implant was, but what happened to Binky made him reconsider such behavior. Phalyn had been correct this morning: it was against the rules. In their beds, supine was the only position. On the ceiling above, written in the appropriate language, was "Sweet Dreams!" It was there even when the lights were out. And then, there was bliss. It was like floating in a warm bath. It was like eating too much but not feeling full. It was like a touch by your mother. A long touch. It was disorienting. Even though Binky started to cry, Broad Back remained with bliss. As did Phalyn. Demerits reduced the duration of the bliss event. It was one of the rules. Bliss was rationed here.

The teacher pointed at Broad Back. "Where are you from?"

Broad Back blinked. His face reddened. "An Earth dome."

"On which continent?" The teacher didn't smile. The classroom A/C moved her hair slightly.

"The Americas." Broad Back was concerned about getting a demerit so he answered immediately and briefly.

"North or South?"

Broad Back frowned at his answer. "North."

"Which dome?"

"Southwest dome." Broad Back was breathing heavier.

"Good. What did you do there?"

Broad Back blinked back a tear. He wasn't sure what was happening. "I watched the weather most of the time. I liked the sleet the best. The way it crashed on the dome. I could hear the thumps."

"Did you ever wonder what made sleet differ from rain?" Still no smile on the teacher, but no frown, either.

Broad Back almost cried. "No. Both fell from the sky."

"Both are water." The teacher nodded. "Not curious about what makes them act differently or about the Earth weather? The constant storms. The Gore – Schmitt Ice age?"

Broad Back shook his head.

"But you have heard of it?" The teacher was beginning to smile.

Broad Back swallowed while nodding.

"Have you heard of Dopamine Deficiency Syndrome?" She raised her eyebrows.

Broad Back nodded again. "DDS. Yes. The reason I am here."

The teacher smiled. "Yes. Yes. It is why you are not curious. Did you ever wonder why you were not curious?"

Broad Back looked around the classroom. None of the student–clients were doing anything other than looking at the desk's top. He swallowed. "Curious about not being curious?" He knew it would generate a demerit. He closed his eyes.

"Very good. Very good. To my point, exactly." She smiled and clicked her tongue.

Broad Back opened his eyes, slowly. "I, it, was relevant?"

"Yes. Exactly relevant. Very appropriate. You see class, questions related to the topic are what we desire." She waved her hands in the air before the bell rang. "Class dismissed."

The student–clients were slow to respond. The teacher had never smiled before. Class had never gotten out early before. It was confusing. Confusion made them all hesitate. But when the

teacher left the classroom, they all thought it was appropriate for them to leave too. Also, the bell had just rung.

Binky was annoyed, so annoyed. "I ask a question, demerit. You ask a question, reward. I don't get it." He was keeping his voice down, so the tone didn't matter.

Broad Back shrugged. "Me neither."

"Teacher's pet." Binky muttered.

Phalyn ate the popcorn. She even crunched quietly. "Relevance. She said relevance."

"Not the questioning, but the question?" Broad Back looked at the monitors in the lounge. They were functional and functioning.

Binky went to turn something over, but he knew the monitors were monitoring. "I didn't want to come here."

"No one asked me." Broad Back turned to Phalyn. "Anyone ask you?" Phalyn shook her head. "I was told on the way here it was for the good of humanity."

"What does that mean?" Binky rolled his eyes. "Was that relevant enough?" Binky stared at one of the monitor cams. It didn't reply. It never did.

"Curiosity required." Phalyn said with a mouthful of popcorn. "Relevant curiosity."

"It is stupid." Binky burst out. Two of the monitors cams turned to focus on Binky. Now, there were three. Binky started to cry. Broad Back and Phalyn looked at the CGI dancing in the screen. Another monitor cam focused on Binky. Now, there were four.

But to everyone's surprise, bliss came to everyone this night. No tears necessary.

Broad Back's mother was crying. She sat where he usually sat and watched the weather. She was too upset for the weather. She had never left the Earth. She had never left North America. Her status and education level kept her in the dome. She ventured out very seldomly because of the severe weather. Her son, Broad Back, though: he was in space now. His status had changed. The Administrator had changed it, not her. She had won the privilege to have a child in a lottery. A year without contraception was the actual prize. Population in the dome had to be controlled. It was by mandatory contraception food additives. She had gained 20 pounds that year. The food seemed to taste better then. She didn't get pregnant until the last month. She put in an extra effort to get Broad Back. She knew who the father was only by the genetic tests.

She cried for him. He was her goal in life. But now he was in space being cured. She didn't

think he was ill. He just liked to watch the weather.

"The human race needs inventors." The Administrator had told her.

She had not disagreed. "You want Broad Back to be an inventor?" She had never met anyone who was an inventor. She just knew the dictionary definition.

The Administrator smiled, knowingly. They all gave that same expression to her. She hated it but never said anything to them about it. "We want him to want to be an inventor. Good inventors are very difficult to find."

"Do they get lost, easily?" She was confused with what was being said. She only understood that they wanted to take Broad Back into space and that she had no power to stop them.

The hated expression came back. "Dopamine Deficiency Syndrome causes a loss in curiosity. No invention without curiosity."

Again, she didn't disagree. "Isn't there a pill?" There were pills for every mood.

"We need relevant and sustainable curiosity." The Administrator had a different smile. "Treatment is necessary."

"But I won the Lottery." She started to cry at that moment and hadn't stopped since.

"Good luck is a rare item, too." Back was the hated expression.

So, she spent her free time sitting where he had sat watching the weather. She cried harder when there was sleet. It was his favorite. "But I was told not to ask too many questions and I haven't. Isn't asking questions curiosity?" She didn't understand a great many things. That made her cry, too.

Broad Back was thinking of his mother less and less. He never had a problem with learning the class material. It had been the assignment. He always did the assignments. Phalyn hadn't had any trouble, either. Binky just did what got him by without punishment. He never asked the right questions but finally they weren't the wrong questions. He was satisfied with that. Broad Back, though, started to wonder about the gravity augmenter. Even though it could stand up to water without damage, Broad Back started taking his gravity augmenter off when he took a shower. It was the shower water drops. They didn't look like the ones on Earth. It had to be something with gravity effecting the water. When he took off the device for the first time, he hit the ceiling of the shower. He felt so powerful. It made him laugh to feel that way. The shower was the only time they had privacy so he only experimented with gravity there. He wasn't sure if it was against the rules, but he was cautious about it. He final asked Phalyn. "Have you taken off your augmenter?"

Phalyn paled. She shook her head. "I would die, I think."

Broad Back nodded slowly. "Yes, yes. It is not the same. Yes." Broad Back wasn't confused. It made sense. "Is there a rule against it?"

Phalyn frowned. "Doesn't need to be. It is dangerous."

"So, no punishment likely." Broad Back smiled.

Phalyn frowned more deeply. "What are you thinking?"

"Why walk if you can fly." He nodded. "Tomorrow. You will see." With the bliss sleep came quickly. His excitement didn't keep him awake.

Broad Back had found the device's power circuit breaker. He didn't need to take it off his person, just switch off the power. The next morning, he walked to the light side up to the open area of the central park. Then he switched off his gravity augmenter and jumped high and long. He made it all the way across the park before anyone noticed. Everyone usually looked down. But Broad Back's yell of glee made everyone look up.

"How did you get over there?" Binky shouted. It was a reasonable neutral question.

Broad Back just leaped back to them. All the student-clients laughed. Laughing was appropriate. Then they all looked at the Administrator for a sign of disapproval. The Administrator didn't show any negative reaction. Broad Back didn't wait and leapt to the other side of the park. Broad Back was breathing heavily from excitement more than effort. "What is gravity? I have to find out." He was surprised at how he felt. He wanted to know how it worked. The artificial gravity and real gravity. The science section wasn't until the afternoon. It was disappointing.

Broad Back switched the augmenter back on and walked the rest of the way with the other student-clients. They walked in their approved ques but they were noisy now, giggling and yelping for no reason. Broad Back just smiled quietly. He had pushed enough for one day, he thought. An Administrator was standing at the school entrance. She waved at Broad Back to come with her. This action quieted everyone. They all looked back down as they entered the school. Broad Back walked to another building behind the female Administrator. Broad Back could only think, "Blissless night." But he so enjoyed the leap. It was worth it.

"Where am I?" Broad Back had never been in this section of the Second Grade.

"Excellent!" The older female Administrator snapped. "Such progress."

The younger male Administrator nodded. "Good question. This module in front of you is the artificial gravity generator."

Broad Back's eyes widened. "Really? How does it work?"

The older female Administrator clapped her hands. "It is not a simple answer, but we will be working here with you. Is that something you would enjoy?" She emphasized the last word.

Broad Back smiled. "I certainly would."

"Excellent!" was said by all.

Phalyn didn't understand Binky's anger. She was happy for Broad Back. He was happy so she was happy. "But you don't care about gravity, do you?" She spoke in low tones. She was afraid of bliss demerits. Binky cared about them too.

"It's not gravity!" Binky pulled off his augmenter and immediately collapsed. He too was born in microgravity.

"It is." Phalyn said softly.

Binky turned the augmenter back on and stood up. "Why him and not me? That's an appropriate question." Binky was breathing heavily from his anger.

"We don't define appropriate." She sighed. She didn't quite know what was appropriate herself.

Binky jumped up at the video game monitor. He pulled at it but it was firmly anchored to the wall. "How does this work?" He yelled. "That's what you want to hear." He tried to smash the screen with his fist but only hurt himself. It made him cry. Phalyn started to cry, too. She wanted to go back home. She didn't care about the treatment. She wanted to be with her family. Binky had no family. It didn't matter to him. But they both cried in the corners of the lounge. Everyone else had left when Binky got loud. Broad Back wasn't in this section anymore. He had advanced. Phalyn missed Broad Back too. There were no goodbyes. Broad Back's leaps had been the last she saw of him. When she asked about him, the reply was hurtful. The Administrator had said. "He has moved ahead. He must be quarantined. So, he won't be contaminated. His progress must be maintained." She hadn't told Binky the last part. He was upset enough.

Broad Back couldn't sleep the first night. He was so excited about learning the artificial gravity generator. He didn't care about the bliss. It occurred to him that it was artificial bliss just like the artificial gravity. He touched the relays on his neck and smiled. "How do these work?" He really wanted to know, just to know. It made him laugh. Only much later in the night, when he was getting tired, did he think of Phalyn. "Hope you will complete the treatment ok." He said to the ceiling. There was nothing written there. Only a three-dimensional projection of the galaxy and its billions of stars. Broad Back watched the stars slowly move and fell asleep.

"Papa and the Steam Rifle"

Suzanne Church and Stephen Kotowych

Papa promised to design and build me a steam rifle for my eleventh birthday. One that would fire straighter and farther than the gunpowder rifles my friends received for their eleventh birthdays.

"You will carry the best possible weapon in your hands."

I smiled up at him. "Merci, Papa."

"My Georges deserves the best, the moment he becomes a man, *oui*?"

"*Oui*, Papa."

"Since the English attacked us over the Montréal Question, all able men must be prepared."

I nodded, but kept my fears to myself. I was less enthusiastic than my older brother, Rollan, to go to war. News of the Question had spread to our corner of Quebec. The airship factories in Quebec's largest city had joined the underground revolution, secretly shipping parts to the United Kingdom's great enemy, the German-Boer Alliance.

While the Anglos in Canada welcomed the United Kingdom's fight against the Alliance, we Quebecois felt only sympathy for them in their struggle against Queen Victoria and the forces of her empire. Once the Dominion of Canada's answer to the Montréal Question became clear—our troops massed on the Ontario border, Her Majesty's Navy blockading *le Fleuve Saint-Laurent* and staged troops in New Brunswick for invasion—partisan groups soon sprang up to defend us, declaring alliance with the German-Boers, and demanding a Quebec free from the self-centered English-speaking conservatives.

The Anglos in Montréal fled west to Ottawa, or south to Vermont as refugees, fearing reprisals and the inevitable bombardment by the Royal Navy.

The previous Saturday afternoon, I witnessed Papa's first test of my rifle. The bullet shot out of the barrel in a spectacular explosion of steam and lead. I stood with my mouth open and Papa took the Lord's name in vain. In a good way, of course, he dared not incur Maman's wrath.

The re-charge cycle took slightly more than two seconds, but I could fire up to twelve times before the pressure dropped too low for the gun to function. So many rabbits and foxes would come home as meat because of the quality of my weapon. Like Papa, I would bring food to our table. My steam rifle would keep us fed, as men were meant to do.

"*Venez ici*," Maman shouted from the front porch. "Dinner, Georges." Then she coughed. And coughed.

I wished that she wouldn't yell. Too many times she struggled to find her breath afterwards.

"*Oui*, Maman," I shouted, hurrying to her side, and offering my handkerchief. She smiled and waved her own, which was always stained with her blood, no matter how many times she washed it in the large pot on the stove.

"Papa?" she managed to ask between coughs.

"He's almost done for today. The rifle is nearly finished."

She shook her head, but said no more. So many women scoffed at guns, as though men treated them as toys rather than tools. How else did she expect our family to eat?

Papa washed up, sat at the table, and Maman spoke her thanks to God.

We all looked up, and Papa said, "I've a mind to make a steam hand-pistol as well."

"No!" Maman's eyes blazed. "The boy is too young for such nonsense."

"Not for Georges." Papa devoured a huge mouthful of stew before he continued. "For Rollan. The design is nearly identical, save for the barrel's length."

Maman made the sign of the cross. "Rollan, bless his soul, must have no more excuses to die."

"The British rushed to land their ships in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick," said Papa. "They made a huge error. If our forces don't dispatch them by Christmas, then *les patriotes* will bring airships from Montréal to finish them before Rollan is truly in peril."

"Unless the Americans choose a side." Maman coughed again and said no more.

I stared at Rollan's empty chair, amazed at the changes to our dinner table since he'd left us.

Rollan wouldn't be eighteen for three more weeks, but that was old enough for *les patriotes*, who enrolled him in basic instruction without a second thought. That way, he could join his compatriots on the train to New Brunswick on his birthday.

Maman noticed me staring at Rollan's place, and said, "We all miss your brother. But God will watch over him." She made the sign of the cross again and whispered a prayer.

She hadn't been well these past weeks, so she'd missed the honor of sewing Madame Moussa's party dress for the November festival. It was strange, seeing her at the dinner table without her stitching an arm's length away. Madame had engaged the services of Maman's rival seamstress, Agathe Travail, instead. We would miss the pennies. And our thin stew tonight spoke the truth of our misfortune.

Agathe's son, François, was in my grade, his birthday the same day as my own. His father had already purchased a gunpowder rifle for François, and he'd brought it to the schoolhouse, two days before, hidden inside his long wool coat, to show it off behind the coal shed before our teacher rang the morning bell.

Francois's rifle fired true, but the calibration was a little off and he was forced to repeatedly re-adjust his targeting. I would spend more time picking up the rabbits I'd hit than I would adjusting my aim. After Papa finished tinkering with the trigger action, of course. He didn't want me blowing off a finger because the design had been rushed.

"My steam rifle is more precise," I'd boasted to Francois that morning.

My friend had shaken his head, and said, "The tanks for steam guns are noisy and heavy."

"But the weapons are more accurate."

"They're cumbersome and unreliable."

"No, they aren't."

"Then why don't *les patriotes* use them? Such weapons could give us the edge against the British Empire and their Anglo supporters here."

Such questions had been debated in our household many an evening before Rollan left. The smoke from the tiny steam engine could give away one's location, if one was trying to hide from attack, Rollan argued. Yes, but the engine need only be engaged once the steam reservoir emptied, my father would counter. The whistling was loud but so was the explosion from any gunpowder rifle, I offered once, earning a smile and tousle of my hair from Papa.

So many times, I'd wished I'd paid more attention to Papa's explanations about his steam micro-engine's design. It seemed near impossible to produce steam in such a tiny chamber, and store it under enough pressure to shoot a bullet out the barrel. And yet Papa could manipulate the tiny parts, assembling them in the right fashion with care and love.

Perhaps his love was the underlying reason why the guns could not be produced in large numbers. Too many men would rush the job, and then, of course, fingers would be lost. Or worse.

My papa was a genius. I licked the stew drippings from my plate, wiped my mouth, and defended his work. "Both Rollan and I will be invincible with our new weapons at hand."

"Unstoppable, at best," Maman corrected. "None of us are invincible. We all die, don't we?" She coughed after that, so hard and for so long that her handkerchief was soaked with her blood.

"Rest, Maman," I told her, nudging at her elbow in the manner that made her smile. I relished her joy, especially as her health deteriorated. The thought of losing my mother made my throat close and my heart ache.

I felt close to crying, but men didn't cry. I had only days until I became one.

Maman's cough would never improve. One of her last wishes was for the town elders to hurry and build a Catholic Church in Mégantic, so she might be put to rest in consecrated soil. Our small town, south of Québec City, had only been founded fifteen years previously, when the CP and QC Railway junctions were completed, connecting us to Montréal and Saint John.

Maman coughed once more, bringing my attention back to our table. Papa was staring at her with more worry than he normally displayed.

He said, "Georges, your steam rifle will be ready on Sunday for your birthday."

"No." Maman spoke the word quietly but with such intensity that Papa and I bit our lips. "No gun worship in the house on the Sabbath." Again she made the sign of the cross, but said no more.

"Saturday evening, then," said Papa. "I'll take you to the woods myself and we'll catch Sunday's dinner."

Maman smiled at the promise. Papa and I tried to contain our enthusiasm.

Dinner was turnip and squirrel pie, so light on the squirrel that it tasted sour. Or perhaps it was the flour that Maman had used to fashion the crust. Rats had gnawed and soiled our last sack of flour, down in the cellar where Papa kept Grand-Père's locker and Maman stored her baubles for church, if she was ever able to attend a proper Mass again and resume taking regular communion.

I finished my serving and asked for seconds, knowing we might not eat again until I caught a meal. Maman showed no pleasure at my eagerness to eat, no doubt dreading my upcoming gift.

Sure enough, Papa finished his meal, excused himself, and headed out to his work shed. When he returned, he held my steam rifle in his hands, cradled inside a soft, brown cloth.

"Here she is. *Joyeux anniversaire*, Georges."

"*Beaucoup de joie, sincère*," said Maman.

I reached out and with my heart pounding, took the steam rifle and the cleaning cloth into my hands, stroking the cloth along the barrel. "*Merci beaucoup!*" I could hardly contain my eagerness as I added, "Can we head out to the woods, Papa?"

He said, "Now? In the dark?"

I nodded. "We could take our packs, sleep outside. My first hunting trip. So that we might celebrate from the earliest moment of my birthday."

Papa looked to Maman and they exchanged glances I couldn't decipher. Finally Papa smiled and said, "*Oui*. A hunting expedition. But we're to return as soon as we have enough meat for our feast. I don't want to leave Maman for too long."

Before either parent could change their mind, I hurried to my bed-corner to pack a roll with supplies for a night in the woods. The air felt damp with rain, and the ground was still a mixture of the green of fall grasses and the oranges, reds, and browns of autumn's fallen leaves.

"We'll head to the shores of Lac Mégantic," Papa told us both. Then I heard him whisper words to Maman. Hiding in the shadows, I watched them embrace. In our small home, privacy was difficult to find, but I gave my parents what I could.

When Papa and I were ready, we headed out the door, him with his gunpowder rifle and me with my new steam one.

The moon was low and about half-to-full, giving us enough light to walk with. My roll was heavy and burdensome, but I barely noticed, so excited to be on the cusp of my transition to adulthood. I wondered if Rollan had felt this way when he and Papa had celebrated his eleventh birthday. Rollan possessed Maman's pious disposition and tended to keep his feelings close to his chest. I wondered what he and his fellow partisans-in-training were doing this night.

Was he holding his own rifle tight to his chest like a lover? Did soldiers sleep outdoors or only in their hideaways? He had only sent us one letter so far and the details had been frustratingly brief:

> *October 20, 1899.*
>
> *Soon, the New Brunswick front. I'm healthy, perhaps more than I've been since the summer I worked at the mill with you, Papa. They push us all hard, through the days and sometimes the nights as well. Soldiering requires a fit body and mind. Although there has been no mention of the health of our souls, Maman. I pray for you all each night.*
>
> *Love and prayers,*
>
> *Rollan.*

I wondered if there would still be a war when I turned eighteen. But such ponderings were dangerous, taunting the darkness of hell with the un-Christian allure of battle.

Papa reminded me of the hunting rules as we walked. We must wait until we were safely beyond town limits, stick to lands without fences, and always say a *Hail Mary* before pulling the trigger so the soul of the animal was welcomed into His kingdom. The last rule was a sign of Papa's love for Maman and her devotion. Papa's parents had been more grounded, the first of their families to work at the mill and not count on farming to feed their kin.

Grand-Père, like Papa, had been so smart-minded that he tinkered and experimented when he could make the time. All of his best inventions, though, had been of little use in a logging town

like Mégantic, so they remained in his trunk in our cellar.

My mind could not stop racing, from rule to rule, story to story, Rollan to Maman to Grand-Père and back to Papa. Then my nose caught the smell of open water.

"We're close?" I asked quietly.

Papa nodded. "We must stop speaking now, Georges. So as not to scare our prey."

I nodded, hoisting my rifle a little higher in my grip.

We moved through a heavily forested patch, the brambles catching at our trousers, and then Papa held me back, pointing at his lips to shush me.

Up ahead, we could hear activity. A great deal more commotion than a herd of deer or warren of rabbits could produce. Papa motioned for me to crouch down, so I did, following his movements until we came close to the lake's shoreline.

Soldiers! Hundreds of them.

I scanned their camp, eager to find a sign of Rollan, in case we'd stumbled upon one of his training exercises.

Except that my brother was miles and miles away.

Papa grabbed my arm tightly, pulling me back the way we'd come. When we'd reached the thick woods once more, we dodged this way, and that, always staying low.

Then Papa found an overhang of granite that created a small cave-like enclosure from the elements. He gestured for me to wait while he checked for trouble within. When he returned, he pulled me inside, signaled for me to set down my pack, and then spoke in hushed tones.

"Americans," he said.

"How do you know?"

"Their uniforms. The symbols on their sleeves are not Dominion or of the Empire."

"How could they be here?" I asked. "So far from the New Brunswick border?"

"I think the Americans have finally chosen sides, and I fear it makes them more foe than friend. War has come to our doorstep."

My eyes opened wide with shock. Our townsmen would be caught in the middle and our soldiers were too far away to help us.

Papa said, "Did you see their airship?"

I shook my head.

"It was well hidden; the air-sacks partly packed away so that they looked like mounds of cloth. But the gondola was too distinctive to miss."

Papa reached out his hands, and gestured for my steam rifle. "Its range and aim is superior to my own," he explained. "I will only fire if I must. You have my word, Georges."

"Can I come?"

"No. It's too dangerous. You wait here."

"I don't want to wait."

"Young men listen to their fathers. They don't squabble like immature boys. And you're a young man now, Georges."

Understanding my responsibility for the first time, I nodded.

Papa patted my head and said, "I'll learn more and then come back for you." He kissed both my cheeks, in the same manner he'd used to say goodbye to Rollan on his soldiering journey.

I waited in that small cavern, holding the gunpowder rifle close to me, wondering if I would ever see my brother or Papa again. The thought of their deaths was too much to bear.

Thrusting my bedroll over my shoulder, I hurried out of the cave. The mud held Papa's footprints well and with the assistance of the half-moon's light I was able to pick and find my way.

Up ahead I heard grunts and a commotion. Abandoning caution, I raced through the woods and caught sight of Papa and a soldier battling to take control of my steam rifle. The soldier knocked Papa to the ground and grabbed hold of the steam rifle, but before the frightful man took two steps I dove at him, my whittling knife in hand. With a desperate slash I raked the back of his leg, cutting through his pants and into flesh.

The man screamed and turned, but Papa was quick. He shoved the man to the dirt, covered the soldier's mouth to keep him quiet, and then said, "Georges. Look away."

I had already defied my father once and could not do so again. I turned my back and listened to the sound of the struggle.

Papa said, "It's safe now, Georges."

I turned and looked at the man. His slashed throat oozed his red lifeblood, painting red-brown into the fallen leaves and mud. I reached for the steam rifle but Papa snatched it first.

"We must hurry," he said. "Before this scout is missed." Blood stained Papa's left sleeve and dripped from his fingers.

"You're hurt," I said.

"It's not bad. Maman will sew it later."

"I'm scared, Papa."

"*Moi, aussi*."

We hurried back toward Mégantic, taking a different route, closer to the railroad tracks. Papa explained that we should watch for trains. Make sure one of them wasn't full of the enemy, ready to overrun our town.

Mégantic was so small. A fraction of the size of places like Québec City or Montréal. What could our community's men do to ward off an advancing army?

Papa and I said little on our hurried trek. No trains came and soon we were back in Mégantic, close to the station and the local inn.

I followed Papa inside and listened while he told the drinking men about what he'd seen. Too many of the patrons had not seemed surprised, as though they'd also stumbled across the troops at the lake. Many hurried out to take up arms against the enemy. The ones who remained lifted their tankards and laughed. Men like them—hard-muscled lumberjacks and rail-men—mistrusted the words of thinkers like Papa.

Finished with our warning, we rushed home. I flew through the front door, shouting for Maman, words streaming out of me about the soldiers, the airship, and my heroism in the face of danger. I wondered why she wasn't sewing at the table.

Nor did she hurry from her bed to meet me by the hearth.

"Maman?" I called.

No answer.

I considered rushing to the shed, but she would never venture out there when Papa wasn't home.

"Maman?"

I ran to her room, and then my bed-corner but she was nowhere inside our home.

Then I saw blood droplets. Near the front door and on the handle.

I ran outside and found another trail of blood, this one leading towards the privé. Papa must've seen it, too, because I could hear his voice coming from that direction.

"Papa?"

He emerged into the light from the house, Maman limp in his arms.

"Clear the table, Georges."

I hurried to do as he asked. Papa gently placed her on the hard table's surface, rolling his coat and placing it under her head. I reached for her hand and found it cold.

Frigid.

I yanked my hand away. Tears filled my eyes and I managed to ask, "Papa?"

"She's strong. *Très forte*." He pressed his face to hers, kissed her lips, and said, "I can't lose you, my love."

But I knew. Her hand was too cold. Maman was already lost to heaven. Like my mother and brother so often did, I made the sign of the cross and began to faintly murmur a *Hail Mary* for her. Then a second.

Papa did not join my litany. Instead, he wept and shrieked, kissing her cold body and begging her to come back to him. His behavior frightened me.

For hours we mourned Maman in our own ways. I snuck into their bedroom to touch a few of her trinkets—her hairbrush and mirror. Papa would not stop crying and touching her body. I wanted to shout at him to leave the flesh alone, that the heat of the fire had caused her to begin to smell. But even I could not admit that Maman's body could spoil so.

At dawn, the sounds of airship fans and gunfire drowned out Papa's wailing, distracting us from our sorrow.

Battles that occur in towns the size of Mégantic don't last long. We were soon under the control of the American Army, bolstered by men from the New England militia. Papa did not return from the mill on Tuesday, and I was forced to live with François and his family.

Smart men like Papa could create more technology, better ships and weapons to spread the invasion deeper into Quebec, like Maman's blood turning her handkerchiefs brown.

The British and Canadians had expected a fight against poorly trained partisans, not a battle against professional soldiers. They were totally unprepared. After a month of fierce fighting between the American invaders and the Dominion and British troops, much of Quebec and the whole of the Maritimes fell to the Americans.

They had come to restore stability, claimed the new military governor of Québec. They had come to protect life and liberty from the British invaders, he explained from amid the still-smoldering ruins of Montréal.

But the Americans showed no sign that they would leave us to our own devices.

The British would be back, the Americans said; the situation was too unstable for them to leave. The military bases they began to build were for our protection, as was the call for martial law.

Everyone I knew whispered how the Americans had pounced on our rebellion as an excuse to gain control of the St. Lawrence and perhaps to finally annex the whole Dominion of Canada.

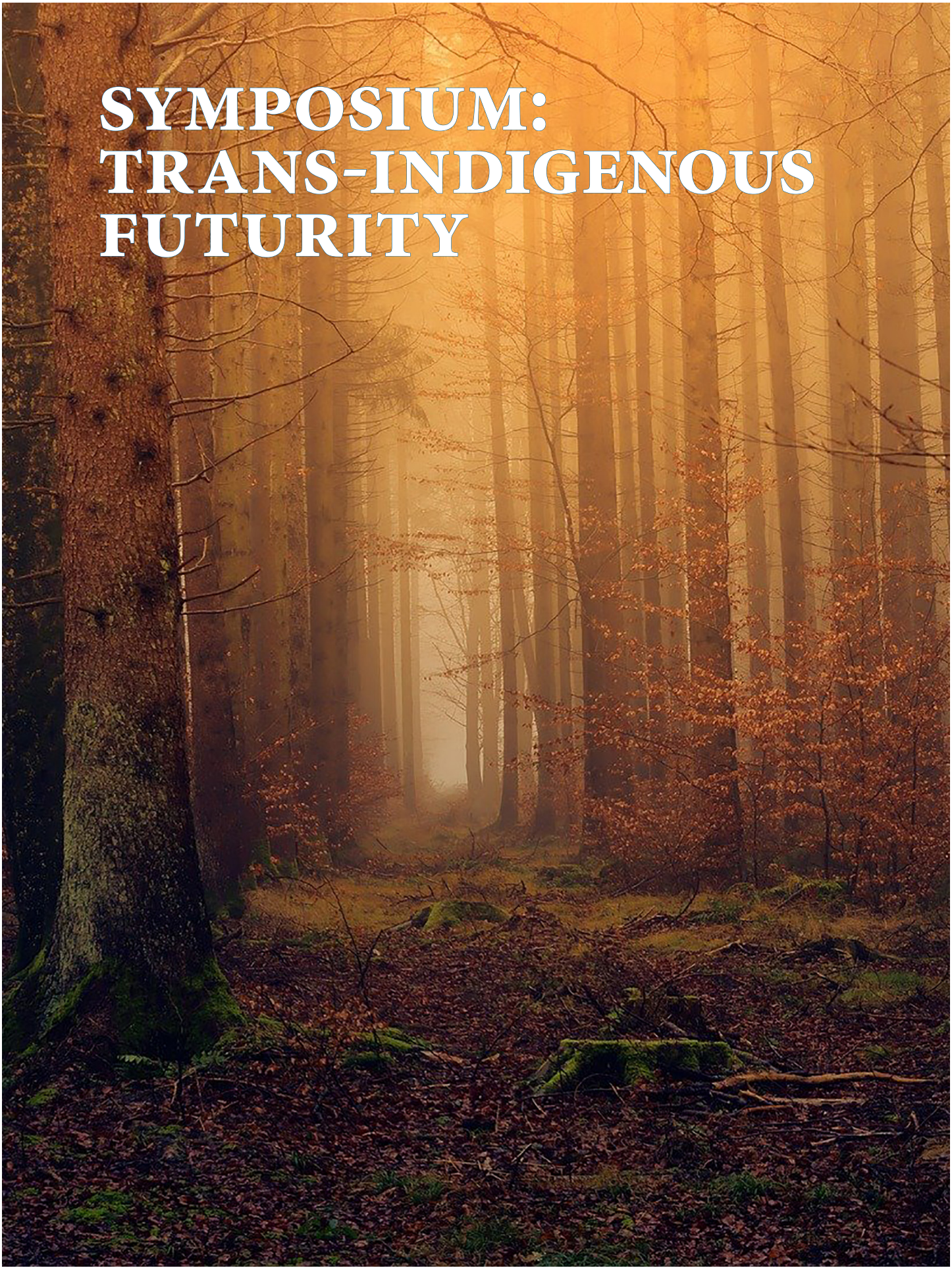
A package arrived at school one day, addressed to me. Rollan had been killed along the New Brunswick front and someone had sent me his personal items. The most precious was the crucifix mother had given him, so that their God might protect him from a bullet. I wore his crucifix from that day forward. Not because I had suddenly grown closer to Maman and Rollan's God, but because I loved and missed them both so much.

I poured all my faith into my clever and resourceful father. He would make more steam rifles. And pistols. Whatever uses he could think up for steam that seemed to help the invaders. But I knew him. He would build falsities that would cut off fingers or blind men with backfires.

My faith was firmly enmeshed in my belief that one day, one of Papa's steam inventions would allow him to escape and find his way back to me. In the meantime, I shall devote my attention to my studies so I might create a steam masterpiece of my own.

Between them, **Suzanne Church** and **Stephen Kotowych** have a Writers of the Future grand prize win, Spain's Ictineu Prize, and an Aurora Award for short fiction, Canada's top SF prize. As individuals they have published dozens of stories in venues like *Clarkesworld*, *Interzone*, *OnSpec*, *Intergalactic Medicine Show*, numerous anthologies, and had work translated into a dozen languages. They both live in Canada.

SYMPOSIUM: TRANS-INDIGENOUS FUTURITY



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Introduction: Composing Trans-Indigenous Futures

Jeremy M. Carnes

I still remember, early in my Ph.D. program, when a colleague mentioned the collection *Walking the Clouds: An Anthology of Indigenous Science Fiction*, edited by Grace L. Dillon (Anishinaabe). This collection was my own first real foray into the world of Indigenous sf. It was the first time I considered "the excitement and depth of Indigenous futurisms—the responsibility of each moment, each fold, each time, imagined or not, because each imagined moment contains within it *already* our presence, not our absence. The visibility of Indigenous space-time creates an event horizon we can all slip into, a responsibility we all share" (Dillon 239). In so many ways, Indigenous sf has built around that same activist call so popular in the *Idle No More* and *#NoDAPL* movements, "We are still here." Indigenous sf is inherently anti-colonial in the assumption that Indigenous peoples are and will continue to be a part of the future, as opposed to colonial notions of their disappearance.

Thus, as indicated by its anti-colonial nature, Indigenous sf is inherently different from sf in the Euro-American tradition. As Dillon notes, "Writers of Indigenous futurisms sometimes intentionally experiment with, sometimes intentionally dislodge, sometimes merely accompany, but invariably *change* the perimeters of sf" (3). Indeed, notions central to Euro-American sf are distinct experiences within Indigenous worldviews, from relations between human and other-than-human beings, to temporalities and spatialities, to technologies and that ever-problematic specter of "progress." Indigenous sf pushes at the boundaries of the possible in the past, present, and the future; it alternatively considers connection through time, space, and technology; it reconsiders the structures of oppression stemming from settler colonialism and capitalism. But perhaps more than anything it considers the question posed by Joshua Whitehead: "What better way to imagine survivability than to think about how we may flourish into being joyously animated rather than merely alive?" (11).

From Cherie Dimaline's (Métis) *The Marrow Thieves*, a story about connection and the power of one's language in a future that looks so much like the past, to Claire G. Coleman's (Wirlomin Noongar) *Terra Nullius*, a tale that extends the label of victim in order to rethink settler colonialism and its attendant labels, to Daniel H. Wilson's (Cherokee) *Robopocalypse*, a story that reconsiders the affordances of technological advancement as well as its many dangers, Indigenous sf is continually pushing and prodding our expectations and considerations of the generic underpinnings of sf itself. In many ways then, Indigenous sf embodies Mohawk scholar Audra Simpson's conceptualization of "refusal," which she defines as "a political alternative to 'recognition,' the much sought-after and presumed 'good' of multicultural politics" (11). Rather than stories that remain palatable to settler readers, Indigenous authors enshrine

political Sovereignty for Indigenous communities, an inherent right that outlasts the seemingly indestructible towers of the settler colonial fortress. Even in the face of further oppression, as in Dimaline's novel, Indigenous authors understand "that as long as there are dreamers left, there will never be want of a dream;" they consider "just what we would do for each other, just what we would do for the ebb and pull of the dream, the bigger dream that [holds] us all" (231).

This special symposium, titled "Trans-Indigenous Futurity," draws on the seminal work of Grace Dillon as well as Indigenous literary scholar Chadwick Allen (Chickasaw) to consider sf and futurities across. For Allen, trans-Indigenous scholarship is about "purposeful Indigenous juxtapositions" which help "develop a version of Indigenous literary studies that locates itself firmly in the specificity of the Indigenous local while remaining always cognizant of the complexity of the relevant Indigenous global" (xix). One of the joys of editing a special section like this one is the ways that authors take an idea and expand beyond what I could ever have imagined. The *trans* of trans-Indigenous comes to mean beyond the spatial and the temporal, the familial or ancestral, the (para)normal, the ontological, the epistemological. Perhaps I shouldn't be surprised. Allen notes the possibility of this prefix, *trans*, when he writes, "*trans*-Indigenous may be able to bear the complex, contingent asymmetry and the potential risks of unequal encounters borne by the preposition *across*. It may be able to indicate the specific agency and situated momentum carried by the preposition through. It may be able to harbor the potential of *change* as both transitive and intransitive verb, and as both noun and adjective" (xiv-xv). While I came into this issue expecting to consider the relationality between the global and the local, the authors of these essays have pushed my own thoughts, and the scholarship of Indigenous sf and futurity, further.

I consider the contributions of this symposium in three interrelated sections. Works in this first section focus on the way Indigenous futurities are always defined by the present and relationships to the past. These contributions reflect on the legacy of boarding schools in the United States and Canada, paying particular attention to the ways past events can help us re-evaluate the work possible through sf. In Melissa Michal's short story "Ghost Hunt" and reflective essay "On Writing Ghost Hunt and Preparing My Own Spirit," we come face-to-face with this palpable and sordid history of residential schools or boarding schools, which focused on the violent assimilation and "re-education" of Indigenous children. Michal's story, written before the devastating news of unmarked mass graves found at Kamloops Residential School, St. Eugene's Mission School, and Marieval Indian Residential School, examines what it might be like to encounter the spirits of children like these. Through a futuristic story about friendship and connection, even across the boundary of life, Michal reminds us, "The system isn't made for our healthy passage through education. It was and is still made for our demise." E. Ornelas's contribution, in similar fashion to Michal's, considers the history of boarding schools through the specific story of Louis Ornelas, the author's grandfather and survivor of the Sherman Institute located in Riverside, California. In working through this history, one not shared by their grandfather, Ornelas considers an experience of disassociation as associating with her grandfather's story through what Dillon, among others, calls Native slipstream. According

to Dillon, Native slipstream "views time as pasts, presents, and futures that flow together like currents in a navigable stream. It thus replicates nonlinear thinking about space-time" (3). For Ornelas, then, chrononormativity is an understanding of temporality that does not, indeed cannot, contain or explain Indigenous communities and ancestries. Native slipstream, then, becomes a form of methodology for Ornelas, rather than just a subgenre of Indigenous sf.

The second section of this symposium, containing a single essay by Nicole Ku'uleinapuanan iolikowapuhimelemeleolani Furtado, considers the ways the past affects our relationship to the present through the continuities of violence in settler colonialism. Furtado's contribution analyzes Christopher Hakunahana's film *Waikiki* as an example of what scholar Lawrence Gross calls Post-Apocalyptic Stress Syndrome. Furtado follows Dillon in noting that the apocalypse is not a coming event in the future, but an event past and present for Native communities. The apocalypse has already happened, is already happening (Dillon 8). The structure of settler colonialism is itself the structure of the apocalypse for Indigenous peoples the world over. Furtado contends that *Waikiki* highlights the colonial reality of Hawai'i obscured by the tourist imaginary of "paradise." The end of worlds through the settler colonial machine embeds cycles of trauma, alcoholism, homelessness, and violence within Native Hawaiian communities. As such, the future of the apocalypse, the futurity of sf, is also contained within the present of Indigenous sf.

The third and final section of essays for this symposium is comprised of essays that explore stories of the future, which can help us to understand the pasts and presents. These contributions examine place, language, epistemology, and the Anthropocene in order to highlight the stories of present and future joy, hope, love, connection, community, and kinship. Malou Brouwer and Camille Roberge offer a particularly trans-Indigenous methodological approach in their consideration of *Wapke*, an sf collection of stories by Indigenous authors writing in French. They rightly argue that a collection like *Wapke* is itself trans-Indigenous in the juxtapositions of various Indigenous communities, yet Brouwer and Roberge are particularly interested in the interplay these juxtapositions have on the local relationships between Indigenous languages and French as well as Indigenous considerations of the temporal contra settler ones. By privileging these juxtapositions of the collection, Brouwer and Roberge show the ways that these stories "build tomorrows rooted in Indigenous resurgence by creating alternative temporalities and reflecting on linguistic diversity."

For Kelsey Lee, studying speculative fiction from Indigenous communities is incomplete without including work by and about the arctic, which she argues is a landscape often incorrectly viewed and valued by settler sf authors. Lee examines two texts—*Moon of the Crusted Snow* by Waubgeshig Rice (Wasauksing Nation) and "Wheetago War II: Summoners" by Richard Van Camp (Tłı̨chǫ Nation)—noting the ways the landscape in these stories functions different from novels like Mary Shelley's *Frankenstsein*. Rather than the arctic landscape operating as villain or antagonist in these texts, the horror is and always will be the settler colonial mentality at work in settlers and their desire, sometimes implicit and sometimes not, for the erasure or death of

Indigenous bodies, communities, and lifeways. Whether post-apocalyptic or not, the beast, the monster is the one that has been here for 500 years.

In his essay, Jesse Cohn considers the very definitional fabric of sf and Indigenous sf by returning to an influential definition by Darko Suvin that focuses on the "interaction of estrangement and cognition" in a setting "alternative to the author's empirical environment." Cohn notes the subjectivity of Suvin's definitional moves, a subjectivity that becomes even more pronounced when considering the markedly different relationship Indigenous communities have to the genre conventions and markers of sf. Examining what he calls "rhetorics of incredulity" and "rhetorics of believing," Cohn argues that Indigenous sf is itself a multifaceted genre that has within itself various approaches to considering story and futurity, among other things. Perhaps, then, the trans-Indigenous is also, as Allen notes, about considering genre across these differences.

Finally, Abdenour Bouich offers a trans-Indigenous reading of two novels: Joseph Bruchac's (Abenaki) *Killer of Enemies* and *The Interrogation of Ashala Wolf* by Ambelin Kwaymullina (Palyku). Bouich first analyzes each text to highlight the ways these authors conceptualize a future defined by disconnection between humans, other-than-humans, and the land. Bouich then considers the ways that these authors, within the bleak societies of their respective post-apocalyptic futures, construct visions of possibility for Indigenous communities and ways of knowing, which have, especially since the onset of colonialism, privileged ways of seeing beyond the "end of the world." In one way then, we can consider these novels within our current epoch of the Anthropocene as indications of the importance of attending to Indigenous knowledges and forms of relationality between humans, other-than-humans, and the land.

These essays, when taken together, highlight the complexities of temporality, relationality, the arc of settler colonialism, and the tradition of resistance in Indigenous sf. Ancestors of Indigenous communities are always present, even in their pastness, teaching, affecting, speaking and resisting; under the veins of capitalist "beautification" there are sinister layers of mire and muck defined by violence, poverty, and settler oppression in areas like the "paradise" of Hawai'i; and the future is something worth considering, not just for the potentialities of decolonial moves, but for the returns to Indigenous knowledges and lifeways crucial to a future beyond the end. The texts examined here, and the essays themselves, show that Indigenous authors composing Indigenous futures is about composing the then, the now, and the yet-to-come in one bundle, offering it up as a gift to ancestors, to relations, and to descendants. For, as Thomas King (Cherokee), writes, "The truth about stories is that that's all we are" (2).

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"Ghost Hunt"

Melissa Michal

Seven of them stood in the twilight. The one building left from the schools rose in front to be outlined by clouds and a gray sky fading into black. The brick expanded to the east and to the west, one long, large block of rooms and rotting wood. This was no mansion, no castle, no estate, however. In size, yes. Not in history. Not one had admitted to being there before, maybe tossing stones when young, or writing on the brick as part of a dare.

Even in 2071, they still heard the stories from other kids of seeing shadows and hearing crying starting in elementary school—getting less concrete as the people telling them grew older. They made a pact that once June came, graduation weekend to be exact, they would explore the school grounds. Really, they would ghost hunt. Brenner had brought the plan to them, the one excited about uncovering mysteries and revealing "truths." He wanted to know what was left there.

"What really happened? Shouldn't we know. For sure. Shouldn't we?" His brown eyes turned round and browner.

The quick static of his words pushed them. His adventures were often fun…in the end. They could feel the excitement, or at least curiosity, float to their own blood. Well, most of them.

"Should we be bringing that to the surface?" Carrie had asked. "The spirits—We could find anything." She had shivered then when he first brought up the idea. But long-time friends often agreed to things they normally wouldn't.

"Spirits?" said Brenner. He sighed. "Maybe they need us to do this. Why else would I see it so clearly?"

Carrie stared into his eyes, then carefully searched his face for answers. He seemed serious. She shrugged.

So there they were. Graduated. Holding gear and covered in it. Ground detection devices. EVP machines. Special spirit sonar signaling things that only he knew the function of. Another Brenner desire. He searched around the internet for deals on rentals of the stuff. Gear was so easy to get, ghost hunting a big business in every town now.

Carrie didn't understand the need. Wasn't it all there everyday without boxes of electric static and heat readers? But they mostly did everything together—grew up side by side through blood relation and parents who were best friends.

Lena had agreed. They sat on Carrie's bed in the middle of a Chilkat blanket with ovoids and formlines worked into a sea monster. Carrie's aunt by another marriage, not blood, lived in Alaska, married to a Tlingit man. The ghost hunt had made Lena giggle. "Those boys and their toys. It will be fun, though."

They all stared at him, waiting for their directions, Lena and Carrie exchanging glances. Brenner grinned wide. He put the two cases in his hands down on the grass. "We need to get our stuff organized. Let's turn everything on and set up some kind of meet room as a main space."

"Do we know what's safe? Where to walk or stay away from?" Shenan asked. He pushed his glasses up to the bridge of his nose. Wavy blonde hair fell across his eyes. Always practical, he was on safety that night. Or so he decided.

"Yeah. Maybe let's check the blueprints," said Tim.

Jayden stepped forward and strode over to the stairs. "Just go in," he said. He rolled his eyes, which no one else could see. They all knew he did it, though. He dragged his wheeled bag full of equipment up the stairs, scraping wood as he went.

Nonie followed and nearly hopped up the stairs, Brenner right behind her.

A dog howled close to the house. His eyes lit in movements of green and yellow.

Carrie turned to glance behind her and saw the dog's glowing eyes. "This should be fun."

The dark didn't fully dissipate with their headgear and flashlights. Brenner wanted the air to remain mostly black anyway. That way, perhaps the ghosts will feel less disturbed. They decided to use the front room to the left, which appeared to be an office complete with desk and filing cabinets and a screen of cobwebs.

They popped open cases with clicks and snaps. Tripods and other stands set up with one button. Shenan unwound cables and cords. Most everything worked on battery. The small lights emerged from the cases and cast light enough to shine around the room. Yellow spread across their faces and sent shadows along the walls in the shapes of their bodies.

Brenner directed the set up.

The phone implant buzzed music into his mind. Another latest. No one really understood how the implant worked. That had been kept secret. One day in surgery, and there the information began. Feeds ran through his head of phone numbers calling him. Literally contacting him. His brother. His cousin. He ignored them and swiped them away in his mind.

"These cameras will capture the human form. We can then see who they were." He typed on the tiny keyboard and brought up a program. It cast a green light off of the screen when the

camera sent information back. Nothing showed. "Pose in front of the camera." Brenner pointed to Carrie.

She stood there, her hands behind her back.

"Lighting seems good enough," said Brenner.

Carrie stepped immediately aside.

"Didn't your aunt explore caves?" asked Jayden.

Tim shook his head to stop Jayden.

Lena threw Carrie a look, her eyes going from blue to gray.

"Yeah. She did," Carrie said.

"Well, didn't she teach you tips for looking for ghosts?" asked Nonie.

Carrie stared for a minute, blinked, then said, "No. No tips. That wasn't ghosts."

Nonie shrugged.

"That was sooo long ago," said Lena. She waved her hand to move away the moment, and put her arm through the crook of Carrie's. The two steered toward Shenan and his cables.

"You know, she doesn't talk about her family," said Jayden. He moved a camera over a few inches, and then peered through the lens.

"Why did you ask, then?" said Nonie. Her red curls bounced around her shoulders.

"Why not? She could use some prodding."

Nonie laughed and leaned over closer to the camera cheek to cheek with Jayden. He also ignored the buzzing in his head full of numbers and noises.

Brenner sat at the desk, hands crooked behind his head, he leaned back in the creaking chair and took it all in.

Tim and Nonie were the first to put on the equipment, pushing buttons, and setting dark lights to flame. The stairs creaked under their weight with each careful step. Brenner made it clear they went slowly to fully capture everything.

"Turn your heads around. Allow the whole picture to come through." Brenner adjusted their small headgear until he was satisfied. "We want to capture everything!"

With his hand up behind him, Tim kept Nonie just next to him from running ahead.

"What'll we find?" she asked.

"I don't know," he said. "I think maybe it's best that we don't."

"Oh, but to talk about it. We have to. Then we actually proved that they're here. All those things that people don't know about. You know." Nonie peered up at him. He towered over her, he in his six-foot frame and she at five-foot three. Her eyes appeared serious, not the usual bright.

"What do we have to prove?" he asked.

"Their existence, silly. You know, we're not just talking to the air when they're around." Light entered her face.

At the top of the stairs, she sprinted ahead. He let her go. A small smile lifted around his mouth. Before moving in her tread, he caught the edges of a window, dark night hanging on, with moonlight streaming through the glass.

Lena turned on her light and adjusted her equipment. The boxy heft of it all fell mostly on her shoulders.

Brenner pointed to Jayden to go with her. They would cover the grounds outside taking with them a detector—something that wasn't light or easy. There were a number of crumbled buildings out there that might hold some answers.

"Jayden knows the stuff. And he can explore that out there in the pitch black with nothing else if need be," said Brenner.

Lena figured out why. Some of those writings on the walls looked familiar. Words in old language she had heard elders whisper. She sighed. Lena and Jayden had dated for about four months when they were fifteen. The group thought they would get married, considering how Jayden stared at her in hidden moments. So the boys thought. And Carrie. He lost interest really quickly when some new girl with larger breasts gave him saucer brown eyes at his locker every morning. Probably also didn't help that his dad had just gotten out of jail and settled back at home.

"Careful," said Carrie after them. "Some wild dog was out there earlier."

They opened the back door, quite a few rooms away from the front office, and stared out at black. Clouds shifted over the moon, covering most of the orb.

"Well, put on the goggles," said Jayden. He tilted his down on to his nose. "Where's that dog?"

Lena put her goggles on. Ghost hunting became popular again in Rochester in Mount Hope Cemetery the previous summer. A team of paranormal investigators said they had caught Frederick Douglass on camera chatting with Susan B. Anthony. Ghost hunting skyrocketed.

"I don't see him. Think he's gone?"

"This way," said Jayden. He pointed to a large willow in the back, hanging down in strings of leaves.

The goggles gave them night vision without all the bulk.

"Well come on." Jayden tugged on her jean jacket and practically steered her.

"Good lord. Let me go and figure out my own way."

"Stop the feisty act." He paused at the tree and took out the detector. "It doesn't suit you."

Lena yanked a camera out of her backpack. "You're a smart ass." Fiddling with the buttons and the screen, she pulled up the setting for nighttime, outdoors, and ghost apparitions.

"You used to like that."

"Yeah, well, I grew up."

"Off to Yale in the fall?"

"Maybe."

"Seriously. Maybe. All that intelligence going to waste."

She laughed. "Look in the mirror." Even in the dark, and even with night goggles, she could just make out a frown and his turned eyes. "Let's just get this done."

Jayden snapped parts together. With a whir and a flashing light, the detector blinked on.

Nonie stepped across the wooden floor, which gave way to old age and boards grating against each other. She thought she saw something down at the end of this hallway. Tim followed behind her. He couldn't quite keep up. Most people couldn't quite keep up with Nonie.

"Something's here," she said. "Can you feel it?"

"No," he said. He leaned on the wall and stared down the hallway. The corner of their glasses showed the camera's output—where those of the other side might appear. Nothing.

"Keep going." She waved him on.

They passed a room where the door stood slightly ajar. Nonie pushed the door open. The darkness took over corners. This didn't seem to bother Nonie. She rushed around the room, then shrugged.

Tim wondered, though, and paused. The hairs on his arms prickled and he felt a movement spread up his arms. With a whir of air, Nonie left the room.

She slowed down only long enough to let questions spin out of her mouth. "What do you think of the new implants?"

"Don't know as I would want voices in my head." He shook his head. Tim couldn't imagine anything good could come from metal in the head that rang in phone calls and music and all manner of other things. It was supposedly a private company start-up, inventing what only science fiction had ever imagined. But where does anyone get that kind of money?

"Well, it's only as you would choose. You know." She pointed to her head. "All the music of your choice. Talking with no phone in your hand." Her legs carried her forward again, into the next room. The words echoed against the walls.

They continued down the hallway, in and out of rooms on either side. Most of the building stood empty. Perhaps people had ransacked the rooms and walked away with items. Some rooms still held objects, left just as if the person would return. Dressers, glistening metal beds, clothes hooks on the walls, and one mirror with corrosion over half the image. Dust and dirt caked everything. A spider sat very still in its web as the two passed by. The silk strands shook ever so slightly.

Tim remained in the room with the beds a bit longer than in the other rooms. Long gone were the mattresses. Empty frames almost said no one was here.

"Tim," called Nonie.

He sprinted toward her voice.

Her eyes bright, and perhaps frightened, too, blinked. "I saw them."

Brenner sat in the office flipping from camera channel to camera channel. Nothing but darkness. But he knew something would appear. They would have to be attracted to this attention. These were their ancestors.

The air in the office hung heavy with dust and the smell of wet dirt. It had rained a few days before. And the chill from that lingered in all aspects, even though mud patches around the yard had begun to dry up and become manageable again.

Still, sweat dripped down his forehead. The humidity of the area normally saved for the end of July came earlier—in that moment, in that space.

The music app in his head played "Brokenpromisedland" by Bon Jovi startling Brenner. He hadn't called up the music and immediately told the notes to quiet.

Darkness crawled into the corners around him, as well. Where there was no light, there was no need to see. So the rooms said.

This didn't bother Brenner. Or really, he didn't notice. He never wavered from his laptop and from the cameras of others. He didn't notice the drawers of the filing cabinets slowly slipping out out out, along the old tracks.

On the first floor, Carrie swung her flashlight around. The strange intensity of the night goggles and the cameras appearing in the corners of their eyes bothered her. She knew it would. Shenan walked next to her, his goggles on over his glasses, creating a strange bulging out along his face.

He continued to try to put his hand on the small of her back, a habit of guiding women, not out of a need to touch her. She saw this, and each time, walked ahead, just out of reach.

"We should slow down a bit," he said. With his head down, he tapped his foot on the boards, checking for rot.

"They made this place pretty indestructible. Not a lot of air gets in here," she said.

Carrie appeared to own the place with her shoulders straight, long strides, and blank eyes. He knew this way she was trying to push back what she felt. She didn't want to give herself away.

"Here," she pulled on a doorknob. Behind the door were stairs, working their way down into the unknown black. Shining her light, they both noted the footprints in the dust. "It's the basement. Maybe one of the others went down."

"Those look fresh." He swiped his fingers in one of the feet. "Yeah." Shenan held out his hand and pushed her back. "Maybe not this way right now."

"Why not?" She steered around him, her shoes hitting stairs with their swift movement.

Back and forth, Jayden moved the detector in slow pivots along the ground, along the trees, along the night air. Lena waited with her hands on her hips. The night noises invaded their space. Cicadas echoed each other, buzzing on low with consistent vibrations. A peeper frog joined, with high pitched peep peep peeps. Then an owl called out. This particular call, she recognized as the hunter aiming for his prey. Trees hung over them, forming motionless straggly arches.

"Nothing," said Jayden.

"Maybe that's a good thing." She stared at the night's deep blackness beyond them. Even though she had passed this place many times during middle school dares, she still couldn't imagine what had occurred here. There were rumors…

Jayden shrugged. "He swears there must be something here. Somewhere."

She pushed her thoughts away. "He has spent a little too long planning this out."

Jayden smiled. "Our whole high school existence." He admired Brenner's intelligence and passion. He had his own thing, which Jayden hadn't yet found.

"What was that?" A twig snapped, close enough to cause her to turn in a 360.

"Nothing is out there." He held the detector steady, but his voice waved her off. He remembered that she got scared easily.

"Then why are we here?"

"I mean nothing out here will hurt us," he retorted. "That dog is probably a neighbor's dog." He walked further and further back, sweeping, crossing his path twice, and then crossing over it again. Electronic waves emanated over the area and outlined trees and momentarily even the dog. But nothing beyond that.

Lena held up the camera, panning it around, also crossing her own digital path.

Jayden stopped.

Lena almost ran into him. She stopped.

He swept the area again. Fast, then slow. Slow, then fast. A dog howled in the distance, or maybe a coyote.

The music in his head turned off, then on. Off, then on. Maybe Beethoven.

"What the fu—"

Tim had caught up to Nonie. They came to the end of the second floor and she finally slowed with fewer places to explore.

"What was in this building, do you think?" asked Nonie.

"Beds, dressers, dorm rooms? Some kind of living quarters. I don't know."

"Medical center?" Her voice went quiet. The last room, this one on the right, stood darker than the rest. If that was possible. The window faced the backyard. However, the moon still held back behind clouds. A long, gray metal table fallen over on its side, and the sink by the door, created a distinct difference between this room and the rest. A stethoscope looped over the clothes hooks.

Tim's heart sunk and quivered. Nonie stood still.

"Those stories…" Nonie whispered.

"Nothing good came of any of these places." He closed his eyes.

Scratching came from the closet now behind him.

Nonie grabbed his sleeve and stared from him, then to the closet. Nothing showed in her goggles.

The basement's musty air floated around them. Carrie had made her way to the center of the room. Or at least what they could see. Nothing hung back in this room. No objects, no leftover materials.

"It just looks like a basement," said Shenan. He scuffed his foot in the dirt floor, sending swirls up in the air he could not see, but felt when he swallowed.

"There isn't anyone else down here," she said. She had shown her light all the way around. The footprints ended at the stairs.

"That a door?"

Carrie squinted her eyes. Far in the right-hand corner, a gleam revealed a doorknob, perhaps. A cobweb marked her face and grabbed onto her hair. She tried to pluck the strands out, but felt it useless. The strings lingered, sending twitches along her arms in response.

Once closer, the door stood only as tall as she and disappeared into the wall, built to match the corners.

"This space isn't as long or far back as the house." Shenan ran his hands over the sides of the hidden door.

"What does that mean?" Carrie asked.

"This can't be all of it."

"Clearly. There's a door." She laughed. The sound floated along the walls and out into the house.

"No. I mean—" He stopped. "That might not be all." He slowly, slowly turned all the way. Nothing else in the room.

The door creaked and groaned. "Come on," she said. She passed through to the other side before Shenan could pull her back in.

His goggles continued to see only outlines of walls and braces rising up not too far above them. He didn't like the sheer emptiness of the space, not for all he knew the brick and wood had once held.

The ceiling dipped in the middle and they would need to bend to continue on through the door.

"It doesn't go any further," she said. This was a small room, smaller than what they had just walked through. The square space was dark, sure, but also empty. A person couldn't hide in that space. But staring inside gave her deep chills. What was the room for?

"Any other doors?"

"No."

They both bent and leaned in to peer all the way back.

The office grew warmer with all of the clicks and whirs of equipment and lights. Brenner leaned back. He should have been out there. But he couldn't leave. His eyes remained on the screens.

The front door slammed.

He couldn't decide between the screen and the door. Screen or door. Finally, he pushed his chair back and broke himself away. The hallway was clear. The extra pair of goggles helped him to see. No people. Or rather no past people. He smirked to himself.

He didn't hear any wind outside or even bursts of breezes.

Out onto the front porch, he scanned the night. Satisfied that he only heard some wind or animal, Brenner headed back to the office. He noticed the filing cabinet drawer rolled out partway.

It wasn't like that before, he thought.

Inside, lined up in rows, stood files upon files. He assumed the other drawers held the same. They wouldn't open. So he flipped through these names. His aunt called and called, her numbers scrolling through his mind, which he ignored as his fingers touched old, old paper.

The scratching stopped. Nonie and Tim stood still. Nonie's eyebrows raised and her hands swayed a bit.

"I am not opening that door," said Tim in response to Nonie's pleading eyes.

"Well, *I'm* not either."

They both stared at the door.

He leaned on the windowsill. She tapped her foot.

"We can't stand here all night," said Nonie. "Why don't the goggles show anything?" She tapped the ends of her frames.

"The wood? …The closet is by the only exit. I don't know. Brenner didn't exactly explain how all of this works." He paused. "Wait, why aren't we all in communication with one another, or at least with Brenner."

She shrugged. "That's not the only exit." She twisted her thumb toward the window behind him.

He leaned back and peered down to the grass below. It was too far for them to jump, over… just a ghost. "No."

They both sighed.

"I could've sworn I saw something." Her voice lost most of its perk. As much as she wanted to see one of her ancestors, this was not the way. Her father had told her that her great great aunty and great great grandmother had attended this school. The thought that she could interact with her relatives made her giddy, up until now.

"I know." Tim wanted to relieve her fears. But something began to work up his spine. Their experience reminded him of his cousin warning him not to disturb what couldn't be seen. When he was a child, he had seen shadows and wanted to talk to them.

"Dude, that's Hollywood shit," his cousin had said, shutting Tim down. He had pressed everything back and back after that.

"They were *real* figures. Not ghosts," she emphasized.

"I know." He turned to look out the window again. Jayden and Lena remained side by side. But they had moved, were moving. Lena's hand laid flat against her mouth. And her body may have been trembling.

A yell came from the backyard. Glowing light, the only light, beamed from the detector they leaned over.

"They found something," he said.

"We have to look in there, you know." Nonie touched his arm. He didn't move.

Facing the closet again, he said, "I know."

He arched the detector in circles. And more circles. It continued to pick them up. They were all over the yard in that area past the tree. The notes ran all over his head, in his ear drums, vibrating his blood. Voices from the metal device pushed in.

"How…" Lena stopped. She had been trying to speak for ten minutes. Her words came out in starts. She never finished them. "I…"

He paused at one spot sometimes. But he couldn't help but keep rotating and making more appear on the screen. He couldn't help what was below. But he knew he had to find them all. And he also knew that wasn't possible. He began to use the beat banging along his brain cells, to move with the tone's drive.

"Who…"

He couldn't help her. He couldn't speak. He couldn't stop.

She sighed. Bumps had already worked their way over her arms and legs. The prickles began shortly after. All sounds in the yard seemed to fade into the far back of her ears and mind.

"Shouldn't we…"

She noticed that the grass didn't grow very tall in this area. It did far far back from there. Nobody mowed the property that she knew of. Brown clumps of dirt and moss spread across the entire expanse. Stubby shoots pushed out here and there.

"Nothing grows here."

He stopped and then pivoted around. She was right. They met eye to eye.

That whole area. There could be *hundreds* of them.

The moon pushed away the clouds and filtered down into the basement. Gritty dust and dirt over the panes of glass made the light appear fractured and cloudy.

"There's nothing down here." Shenan felt the walls. The crumbled texture bit at his fingertips and left a damp after touch to them. "Here." He reached for her flashlight. She held on even when he took it. Finally, she let go. He swiped his longer brown hair behind his ears as the strands had fallen across his eyes.

Following the walls, Shenan stooped and stepped around the entire room. He touched each crack, checking for any gap or any other way into the rest of the basement. "It has to be here."

"What?" She turned another 360 degrees slowly, taking in each crack and each shadow.

"More ways under the house."

"Do you think there might be other stairs in another part of the house?"

"Maybe." His voice showed distraction. Once he covered the entire room, he threw his hands up. "Can't find anything more. It just seems so strange."

"The whole place is strange. The whole idea is strange." Carrie shivered and rubbed her hands up and down her arms.

"What do you mean?"

She stared up at the ceiling. Her eyes adjusted to the dark without her flashlight. The lines of the wood showed careful craftsmanship. Grooves fit together just so. Yet knowing its age, she assumed there must be dry rot underneath in the veins of the boards. How did this building still stand, so caught in time?

"There's nothing here and everything here."

Shenan searched her eyes. They had turned downward, and he knew she was sad. He didn't wish to see her that way.

"Let's just go look for other ways down to the other side," she said.

The closet door made no noise as it opened. Tim stepped back, assuming the worst. When nothing ran out, he peered around into the inner depths. His goggles didn't pick up anything. No figures.

Nonie put her hands on his shoulder and leaned in.

"Wow."

"What is going on?" He scratched his head.

"I don't know. They were here. I just know it." She squealed out the last line.

"Well, we've looked at everything. There's nothing here." Maybe mice or something had scrambled about through the rafters, he thought. That seemed more…realistic. "Let's go outside," he said. "See what they found."

As they wandered back through the maze of hallways, around and around, the dark rooms pulled back inside themselves, even just as the light turned outside.

Jayden and Lena startled when Nonie and Tim stepped up next to them.

"Find anything?" asked Tim.

Jayden kept his eyes on the detector. Lena's eyes appeared wild and shifty. Neither spoke.

"Oh, come on. Share," said Nonie. When she peered down into the screen of the detector, she choked on her own saliva. That sent shivers down Tim's spine. She held up her hand to keep him away. Tim pushed past her.

"Good God," said Tim.

Nonie's entire body began shaking. Her arms around herself did not stop this. They followed each other, kind of like geese. When one turned, the rest instinctually reacted in the same turn or step.

"How many?" asked Tim. He had already counted twenty-five in the five minutes they stood there, back and forth, back and forth.

"More," said Lena. "More."

"Should we catalogue them?" asked Tim.

"Catalogue?" said Lena. She stopped, then got close enough to Tim so that they were chest to chest. "They don't belong in a catalogue. Do. You. Hear. Me." Her finger on his chest resulted in a hard swallow from him. She turned back to the screen, then looked back at the house. A deep purple spreading along the skyline changed the hue of the landscape. But the deep brown of the house remained the same, dark.

"Brenner?" Lena peered toward the house, wondering if he saw. If he knew.

The downstairs held many doors. So Shenan and Carrie spent precious time moving around the space and in and out of rooms.

"How is it that this building is so intact?" asked Shenan. He expected to find floors they couldn't cross, ceilings falling down, doors off of hinges. Cobwebs and dust were about the only things that seemed normal about the old place.

Carrie turned every knob and peered into every room. She chose to focus on what was inside rather than Shenan. Every detail, every nook behind each door, she took in and filed away in her memory. These spaces had stories to reveal that perhaps weren't something that evening could offer them. "Maybe a way in doesn't exist."

"It would have been a great waste of space back then if they didn't use all areas."

"Doesn't mean it was built that way. It could have just been filled in from the beginning, concrete or something." She paused at one room in particular, closer to the front of the house. Carrie thought she heard a noise down the hallway and paused. Nothing. This room she stepped into. It was small, perhaps only large enough for a desk and shelves, which no longer existed. What surprised her was how dark the room was, even with their headlamps. Not even a small amount of starlight could alter this darkness. She almost thought she saw a figure writing at a desk, scribbling names, and then it was gone. Carrie shook her head.

"I suppose. Hey, shouldn't we be slowing down as we open those doors? You know, check every room out?"

"I just want to find it if it's here." He hadn't seen her doing just that. Her scans might have been quick, but she would never forget how the rooms made her feel and what she imagined in each piece of wood.

The next door, the one farthest to the left side of the house, released must and damp from its space sealed so long. She smiled and started down.

It was like a large box. Smaller than the other side. One shine of the flashlight, and they could see that there was no other door. No other anything.

"Dust and cobwebs and dirt floor," said Shenan. "Let's go back and check out the other rooms." He wanted to keep them moving and not let her settle into the darkness.

Shadows moved, cutting by the tiny, rectangular windows.

"Fine."

Rooms were small, like the second basement room. Identical box next to identical box.

"These must have all been administrative," said Shenan. "It's odd that there's no living room or dining room or the like."

"It's got to be the main house, then, for sure." Carrie's body and voice revealed defeat. "Everything processed here."

"I haven't heard a thing from anyone else. Where are they all?"

"Don't know." A rising sun caught her attention. From a window in that room, the four others stood still, right at her vantage point. They stayed, locked in their stance as Carrie stared. Lena stared right back at her. "There," she pointed.

She didn't wait for Shenan.

The two emerged on the back porch. Shenan's headlamp flickered off and he saw darkness suddenly flow over him. The only light the glow from the detector. At the site, the others didn't stir. Carrie had run ahead of him, but he knew to take his steps slowly.

"Have you seen Brenner?" asked Lena. Both shook their heads 'no.' "He's not responding to the walkie. I'm going in then. He's got to come out here."

"I'll come with you," Shenan offered. She waved him away.

"What's going on?" asked Carrie. "Lena?" She watched her friend walk away, back straight, and for her, tense. "Y'all?"

Nonie pointed to the screen, still glowing, blue and yellow and white. Glowing.

Her aunt who had cave explored had always told Carrie that the unexpected happened when you believed in those occurrences. But what happened was never what you assumed. The unknown could be more shocking and it could be nothing at all.

"What the hell?" said Carrie. She yanked the detector from Jayden. His grip had tightened so that his knuckles were white. She somehow pried it away with one pull. He stood there, his face contorted into disbelief, disbelief that he had stopped. Disbelief that he could no longer see the screen, see them. He couldn't turn off the music in his head, no matter how much he willed the waves gone.

Carrie held the detector up close to her face, staring down into the light and into the outlines of many small bodies.

"Brenner! Brenner! Where are you?" Lena made her way from the back to the front. "Why aren't you on the walkie?" Once at the office, she found him, eyes on the screens in front. Just as they had left him. "Brenner?"

"Yeah?"

"I've been calling you. On the walkie. Throughout the house."

"Oh." He checked the walkie, pressing buttons. "Battery's dead. Strange. I replaced all of them."

"Maybe it's a dud…Brenner. You need to come outside. Haven't you seen us all out there?"

He looked around. Everything was in order, it seemed. He had visuals for all cameras. And now, they stood outside. All of them. How had he missed that? He shook his head. "No, I didn't notice."

"Jayden and I have been out there nearly three, maybe four hours." She lost her breath and couldn't slow her words down. Her lungs had to work more than usual and all she wanted to do was drag him outside.

Brenner's eyes remained blank. He really hadn't seen them. She snapped her fingers a few times. Then she took his hand and led him out of the room. When he walked ahead of her, she turned back to the room. Everything hummed and whirred and worked. She couldn't see anything to cause worry. The cameras really were fine. Did Brenner fall asleep? After all this planning?

Carrie counted. Just as they all had. The outlines of what used to be bones lay in various positions, curled into a ball, flat out, face up, face down, intact, not fully all there. All white with a blue glow around them from the camera. All in their own suspended, small space. When bones decayed, their degraded materials stood out differently from the rest of the soil. There were marked graveyards at other schools. Carrie had even heard rumors that years ago long before they were born, Canada had findings of mass unmarked graves. But that searching stopped when the long sickness stopped. None of it taught in history class in the US. That much she knew. No one paid attention to human rights when their own life wasn't hanging in the balance. She sighed. And then stopped after a while. She got to twenty. That was enough for her. She knew there were more without asking. She knew the site went back far beyond their scope. When Brenner and Lena returned, she handed the detector over to Brenner.

He stared for a moment. "This isn't what I thought," he said.

"None of us thought," said Shenan. "It's still…something. It's still what we need to know."

"It's not them," said Brenner.

"What the fuck, man. Who is them?" Jayden barked. His hands swung around with his words. "This…Uuughh."

"You know, talk to them. Talk to ghosts. Interact with them. With our ancestors." Brenner blinked. He was serious.

"Nonie heard something. Even saw something, too," said Tim.

Nonie kept her head down, but nodded. "Yeah. I guess. I don't know anymore."

"You did?!" Brenner grabbed her shoulders. "What did they look like?"

"Didn't you get the moment on film?" she asked. "I don't know. I didn't talk to them. It was a fleeting moment. God, Brenner." She threw his hands off of her and leaned on Tim. He put his arms around her.

"Sorry," Tim said. "I thought there was more, I guess."

"Maybe it is on film. But I didn't see anything while watching your walkthrough." Brenner hurried back inside, practically running, running.

"He was weird when I found him," said Lena. "It's like he phased out—maybe the whole time. Maybe part of the time. It…It's like he wasn't there."

They all turned to each other and then back to the house.

They put their equipment away with clicks and pops of cases the only sound. Arms and legs moved slower than set up. The excitement had left everybody.

"It's for the best," said Carrie. When she looked back down the hallway, a shiver passed down her spine. This was not the place to talk to their ancestors. Something terrible lived here. Or maybe nothing at all could be captured there, barren of life.

Lena nodded, as did Shenan. Lena hid a tear sliding down her cheek. The rest kept to themselves, engrossed in packing up.

The seven of them stepped outside into the morning. Some of the cases gleamed. They trudged down the steps and toward the road over the hill.

"It's just an old building," said Jayden.

"You saw those bodies." Shenan's voice rose. He could feel heat rise throughout his chest and face.

"I know. But that doesn't mean the school's haunted. It's not the same…" Jayden shrugged, his arms fully out like he might fly or flap those arms.

"We came for nothing." Brenner's voice spoke softly. The lines of the house stood behind him, just lighting with dawn.

Nonie shook her head. She wrapped her arms around her body. Prickles on the back of her neck had been rippling for several hours. No, maybe it was the whole night or half the night. "I don't think it was nothing," said Nonie.

Tim continued to hold Nonie.

Lena remained quiet. She picked up her equipment.

No one else spoke.

Their silhouettes disappeared, hills rising beyond them.

From behind one corner of the house, shadows hang, maybe watching. Maybe waiting.

Melissa Michal is of Seneca, Welsh, and English descent. She is a fiction writer, essayist, photographer, and a professor. She received an NEH summer fellowship and has been grateful to read at the National American Indian Museum in DC and Amerind Museum in Dragoon, AZ. Melissa has work appearing in *The Florida Review*, *Arkana*, *Yellow Medicine Review*, and other spaces. Her short story collection, *Living Along the Borderlines* (2019), out with Feminist Press, was a finalist for the Louise Meriwether first book prize. Her first novel, *Along the Hills*, and non-fiction lyric essay collection, *Broken Blood*, are both finished. She is at work on a new dystopian novel.

On Writing "Ghost Hunt" and Preparing My Own Spirit

Melissa Michal

We who are Indigenous have been erased in the academy, Hollywood, education, politics, and technology. Any space that you can imagine, we do not exist because oftentimes, even if you find us there, we have been interpreted, wrangled, rearranged, and crafted to fit Euro American ideologies, even though most often those are entire fabrications. In the past few hundreds of years, we must imagine our own futures, because it was presumed we would not have futures. In fact, it was even desired that we have no futures. In an annual report from the Commissioner of Indian affairs dated October 24, 1881, he states, "There is no one who has been a close observer of Indian history and the effect of contact of Indians with civilization who is not well satisfied that one of two things must eventually take place, to wit, either civilization or extermination of the Indian. Savage and civilized life cannot live and prosper on the same ground. One of the two must die." He recognizes here a long history of settlers wanting us exterminated. Erased. There is no white savior then or now. What they didn't count on for their futures is that we are still here.

Some of us are working hard to take the walk back to our communities after erasures have taken over. My great grandfather was ashamed of his Seneca identity and walked away. My desire to kick down the hefty walls and all the boxes courses through my blood. He may have felt shame, and hopes that I won't, yet I too, am left shamed all of the time for being too white-coded, for being too Indigenous-minded, for being too sensitive and empathic, for being a woman, for working on genocide and truth and reconciliation for Native American genocide, for being a woman desiring a family and lost without one, for having dreams, and for speaking truths. It seems I cannot thrive in the eyes of others no matter which part of me I assert. Someone will always have something negative to say. I sometimes wonder how we can truly be ourselves here on land that is ours, that has been stolen, that is continuously being colonized. And then I remember community teachings. We do because our ancestors hover there, with us, wanting different lives for us, wanting our futures to be stronger and less trauma informed. Wanting our true sovereignty.

In this erasure state, I feel like a ghost sometimes, drifting there right in front of folks, but never really seen unless I move an object valuable to others. When I realize this, a different future begins appearing to me, but only after I understand the past histories that have been forcibly removed from my education. In graduate school, I work with Indigenous mentors and accomplice mentors, who assign Indigenous-centered texts and critical work from emerging BIPOC scholars which all help me turn a pivotal point of what will be many of my own shifts and changes.

The community of "Ghost Hunt" begins with an entirely different character, first. I wrote a separate novel chapter where a mother searches for her daughter during the boarding school

period. She comes to me while listening to Indigenous female writers who include female leads in their work. I have already been centering women as the heroines to their tales, something I still don't see often in American Indian stories. I am not surprised then when a mother knocks within my brain, entreating me to write, to tell her story. The first chapter, of what would years later become a novel, involves this mother uncovering the bones of her daughter. I can't stop writing her story until it's finished—multiple flash pieces upon flash pieces challenging what it means to craft psychological breaks of a character who remains both broken and hopeful that her daughter is somehow alive.

But her daughter is a Lost One.

Lost Ones are children who never return home from boarding schools centered on forcibly educating American Indians to assimilation and stolen minds. I wonder why I am uncovering bones in this dark, dark basement and making this character enter the worst moment of her life. That's when I realize that I wrote this particular chapter to teach those who don't know our traumas exactly how those emotions rise and fall and tear apart. To show how trauma appears in full, daily, we are still breathing, form. Because the trauma doesn't take us down how settlers want those breaks to occur. At least not most of us. That complete realization doesn't occur to me for several more years of working on this novel.

Shortly after the spring when this first chapter and the mother's character pours out of my pen, I spend a summer week in the archives at Carlisle Indian Industrial School in Carlisle, Pennsylvania. I work between the archives at Dickinson College, the Cumberland County Historical Society, and the War College. All of the people in these spaces are extraordinarily nice. But I'm not sure they know what it means to thumb through pages, photos, interviews, and student newspapers aimed at extinction and erasure.

I notice that many of the students' voices are either left out, unbalanced, or reframed through white perspectives. The newspaper is controlled and edited by the "man on the bandstand." Letters home are closely monitored for inappropriate complaints and comments about the school. When DeWitt Smith III later completes interviews throughout the late '70s he only interviews three folks related to direct student experiences: John Alonzo, a student at Carlisle, and Mr. and Mrs. George Sarracino, both of whose fathers were students. We also hear from many white community members. All of this makes me feel more and more uncomfortable, including the cold, orange and brown 70s inspired modern architecture of the buildings I have to sit in to read such materials. At that time, archives are at the very beginnings of digitizing this boarding school collection. Now, you can scroll through these files at home in your own space. Back then, it's against the rules to seek to take the pages anywhere but in the specific rooms for viewing. I understand the idea around protecting vulnerable documents—vulnerable to decay and oils in our hands. What I can't comprehend, and still don't, is that we have to ask permission to do so—that this is considered keeping documents safe. When were those students kept safe and valued? Parents have been promised that. And of course, the schools break those promises.

On the last day of my research, I visit the barracks where the first ever government-run boarding school had been converted into school grounds in 1879—built to kill us, but yet to save our humanity. It isn't our humanity that needs saving. The space has been turned back to a war barracks after the school closes in 1918. I am glad to be outside, but the discomfort doesn't leave my body. Just at the barracks' entrance stands a graveyard from the time-period of the boarding school where both students and other staff are buried. Mind you, this has been moved from the very back of the grounds. I still wonder why they had to disturb those bodies. Why move these vulnerable, sacred children?

Moving Indigenous bodies or bulldozing over our burial grounds is not new to us. The #NoDAPL movement received attention for a summer, fall, and part of a winter, then disappeared, even though digging on Indigenous burial grounds against our permission continues. I think that our bodies are ignored because they can't see our spirits. We then again become ghosts. There are still important energies and ancestral knowledge tied to those graves, however.

I notice a light in Carlisle at the barracks that surrounds the area, even though clouds cover the sky. That's why the bones glow at the end of this story, which I only recognize now. I also notice dream catchers and small bags of tobacco by the stone entrance of the cemetery. Someone has been looking after these children. Tobacco bags also sit along many of the students' gravestones. As difficult as this experience is, I sigh in relief to see these other knowledge holders lining the space, a protectant that the children don't have while at that school. A line created of love and care which they also don't have on these grounds until now, but which had certainly spread out from their communities.

I won't talk here of boarding school stories. Readers can do research on their own about Carlisle and other schools, much of which is done by other Indigenous scholars now. But I can say these were, and still are, toxic spaces. Strong ceremonies need to clear these spaces because of the harm, violence, and multitudes of atrocities that occurred here.

What I remember about the two interviews with the student survivors are their stories of friendships. Out of horror, our youth, our interrupted seven generations, make lasting relationships. Relationships that I can only hope help them through the trauma of the moment—although these could not be enough to keep the trauma from happening. It's vital to point out here that these students remember their friendships, picking strawberries, and playing ball. I try to see that while on the grounds, but I fail and can only imagine the man on the literal bandstand, a white gazebo in the middle of the grounds used to closely monitor students—a gazebo modeled after the center of a prison where prisoners are watched for misbehaving.

My walk across the grounds of the former school leads me to write "Ghost Hunt," and wondering how we move forward to begin healing from boarding schools. Those characters have called out to me to place them carefully on paper and to take a similar walk with them on the grounds of a boarding school up near my home. Thus, seven characters, seven best friends,

growing up on a reservation sometime fifty years from now, have moved through my dreams and out onto my computer screen.

I am often surprised at what does and doesn't emotionally and mentally impact me in the moment—how I am able to let some stories work through me, but not break me. I would only realize years later how rocked my body is from visiting the school grounds. I am shaky afterwards and I experience this feeling of not wanting to leave, but being pushed bodily to go immediately after walking around the entire space. I cry while watching a documentary on the schools the year previously, but I can't cry here. I take those stories, energies, and images in, straight in, and they sit in my body.

Writing "Ghost Hunt" does not release toxins from my body. That would be too easy for this work. For this depth of trauma and loss. However, the story then unrolls from my fingers quickly, making words pop up as the pages scroll on. When visiting Carlisle, I know there are secrets there under the dirt and along the horizon. I can see, too, that we will never know the whole story.

During my research, I find that there is a mass grave site of now 82 known graves in Florida at Dozier School for Boys, a place that abused those from infant to teenage years, of both young white and black men. All I need to know is that the US has one mass grave that they have hidden, to know that there is a large capillary system of lies through the bedrock of bones, dirt, and decaying buildings across the country. The US is built on the belief that if you can control human bodies, whether through education, prison, slavery, cheap labor, laws, or religion, then you can also have control of the land. But nature doesn't concede to this kind of relationship. It's easier to hide something when you literally bury the secret. And the secret is that children are forced to horribly alter their identity and their minds in ways their bodies can't always survive. Those schools kill the children who die under their "care" because our Lost Ones are never cared for at all. Because remember, these students aren't seen as human yet. That has to be beaten into them whether verbally or physically. Let me return to that letter: "Savage and civilized life cannot live and prosper on the same ground. One of the two must die." Die either by assimilation or by body.

And so the "Ghost Hunt" character Brenner creates a quest for his friends to bring them together. He is that elusive character that takes adventure to extremely strange levels. But he doesn't want to do this particular adventure without his friends. Throughout the novel from which this story derives, he goes off on his own self-discovery without them or the readers and I think he knows this is that last moment before they part for a while. As much as he continues to call this a ghost hunt, Brenner really knows that this is simply a label which means family members. He wants to connect to his ancestors just as much as some of the other characters who are hiding this from themselves. Others of them don't need to connect here because they can in other ways, they just don't know it yet. Some need the tangible quest, while others will journey in their dreams.

But in the here and now of this story, they are in shock. Shock and first reactions will look different for everyone, just as it does for me. Some are angry, some sad, some numb, some oblivious. There are a wide range of emotions when grieving the Lost Ones. I was numb then. Am

numb still sometimes. I see and hear so much violence against Indigenous bodies that if I don't let quite a bit of those stories ride over me in those first moments, I wouldn't still be here. But don't think that means I never feel the violence reverberate through me.

Late at night, I sometimes rock with the pain, pain brought out by reading other stories, or hearing other stories, or simply by being alone. These are often tears and shakes. The anger, which turns to rage during Covid and the responses of unwoke folks to the activism and the major health crisis, enters my body too, just more often than it used to. I rock with that emotion, too, and rage and anger rise when people don't understand, when they say and do racist things and then mask their harm with liberal ideals, and when they refuse to do the work and dig settler colonialism out of themselves. The scar from the digging will heal, but they don't want to feel the small, biting pain that comes with the digging.

They will never know microaggressions and that constant biting, searing pain which marks each day that those like them create by being unsafe spaces which cause harm, and sometimes are abusive. So then, I'm angry again, and then they do something again and I find it harder and harder to let those moments roll off of my back where I say nothing.

When there is a war scene in a movie, I sometimes imagine that is us conquering settler colonialism for good. Until I return to reality where we are erased from Hollywood. And then I become even more angry, and I take my imaginary self and I re-create Hollywood our way. I am one of those heroines on the front lines, charging through the fray ready to stop at nothing to rid the world of all its terror and violence and Twisted Mind. Someone once said to me, it's loving to tell an oppressor that they are being violent. Fighting back is not succumbing to their ways because the fight takes care of us and can be protective.

And so these characters emerge and they take that fight on for the future. In order to do so, in order to push them forward, they must first see the trauma from a different angle, down under the dirt, from their ancestors. This discovery will become their motivation, much like it becomes mine.

For readers experiencing only this story here in this special edition, this discovery is our daily tangle with managing trauma and being our resilient selves anyway. We step in, we step out. It's not always that smooth or complete.

I step back in when I hear about Kamloops.

Years after writing these seven characters and their first chapter, someone says, "Did you hear?" I then find myself sweeping through news articles. I'm not just finding the stories in Canadian newspapers, as I hear a week after the discovery. The US reports this news, too. 215 bodies radar detected in Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc, the village where Kamloops Indian Residential School, one of the largest in Canada, is located. And I'm shocked.

I'm not shocked at the discovery. My story foresaw this occurring—including the detectors—

just perhaps not right now. I do, however, have a momentary retreat to awe. Awe at those doing the work. Awe at ensuring the news picks up the story. I *am* shocked that the US has an ear on the story. Maybe they are comfortable writing about the mass graves because the discovery isn't in the US. US newspapers don't mention then that there were other discoveries here, that people have been working to detect similar sites on US boarding school grounds—including unmarked graves at Carlisle. A few spaces will later report this, but the part about the US does not make the major news channels. Instead, they continue to question Canadian residential schools.

When something is far enough away that you can't imagine it on your own land, critiquing those actions becomes very easy and there seems an anger that goes along with the critique.

But this trauma doesn't run through their blood.

I hear many stories from other Indigenous folks. I believe all of them and take their words in as precious beings that deserve careful and kind care. I have heard several stories already about Indigenous writers and teachers encountering folks who had thought "all the Indians had died." People simply walk up to them and tell them they can't possibly exist because history classes or movies tell them otherwise. I have yet to experience that myself until a few years into teaching.

One day, a student sits in my office discussing her paper. She has just been home visiting for either fall break or Thanksgiving.

"I brought up our class to my family," she says. She explains that there are a number of older relatives gathering for a meal. "My dad said that he thought all the Indians had died a long time ago. He didn't understand why we were studying them."

A chill runs up my back and then I pinch myself so that she can see. "Well, I'm still here, so…"

She laughs. "I know. I tried to tell him. But he wouldn't believe me."

We move on to discuss her paper topic. But that moment remains embedded in my skin and my brain. I already know this is a common experience and I don't feel alone. But yet, this is a common experience to be *so* invisible.

These moments are pricks to the skin. Hearing about Kamloops is a prick to the skin. Hearing US newspapers ignore their own history is another prick. Making major revisions to a department letter about the discovery is an even deeper prick that bleeds. There are these scars all along my body and my brain that come from the constant and consistent breaches into trauma. When relegated to a ghost, a disappearing trick, there is this moment of others looking right past the problem. You see, a ghost is still there, still present, but unless the spirit can move objects, that presence can't be seen by most people. That is what microaggressions do—they turn us into ghostly apparitions. Our experiences can't possibly happen, can't possibly be racist, can't possibly be homophobic, can't possibly be narcissistic, according to those outside this realm of injustice. By my very existence I prove that the vanishing Indian is *the* myth told by outsiders rather than

our stories being the myths. When I make choices to ensure that I am seen, I risk a sense of safety that I create and what I want from that is respect and to be believed. Those are the first steps in reversing erasure and invisibility.

How do I prepare my spirit for injustices then? I can have someone brush me off. Or I can smudge myself. Or I can go out by the beach or the woods and let nature soak into my skin. But honestly, there is not always a way to prepare. I recently speak with another Indigenous artist. Kamloops weaves into our conversation because this is a steady presence for all of us right now. She has offered to help write her university's letter addressing the continued discoveries of mass graves. And she wondered the exact same thing, how do you prepare to enter that darkness?

As we move through our conversation, the lines of connection we already have deepen just then and I can see the lines strengthening. She then suddenly says, "We're preparing every day." By rising and meeting the day and by living our own community's ways, we are preparing. We *have* to because we experience the pricks every day. Maybe, too, we center ourselves. Maybe we have a conversation like this. Maybe we put up boundaries. Maybe we say no to something. Maybe we speak up. But it is our focus on our community that guides us through.

If you felt unprepared to read the short story, then that seems appropriate, that seems realistic. No one deserves trauma. There cannot be silence around the experience. People unprepared still need to read the story and move through trauma with the characters. Otherwise, how else do we understand except through story? Many of us don't live in the trauma every moment. Settlers cannot have that power over us and don't. However, genocide and erasure lives and breathes around us because settler minds are still present. That's what needs preparing. That's what needs shedding in all of us—the ways of genocide and the inching around that evil does in our everyday lives. So I continue to write the erasure, the harm, and the trauma out of me, out of my characters, and out of my community. New worlds can then be born and scaffolded for future generations.

Students who attended Kamloops didn't know where their friends had gone. One day, they simply disappear. Their friends presume that they have escaped or been sent home. I cannot imagine finding out they have died and that this was kept from me. A future pre-apocalypse world then is the only setting where I think, non-Indigenous people might understand such a discovery.

I struggle to find the words to describe what it means to have Kamloops stream across the news. To have the Lost Ones found and brought home. To have non-Indigenous people, including my dean, talking about the discovery now. Right here before the future. To have people asking what residential schools are.

We are in a moment—the kind of moment that if we stop talking about the schools, they will bury us again. They will put our bones underneath dirt to become one with the dirt so that we cannot be found. So that our voices are choking on the minerals. What they don't know is that we see these minerals as relatives. That's why they find, and will continue to find, our Lost Ones. That's why news keeps breaking of even more mass graves found because the chain has begun.

When I finished writing this story, I did not feel complete or fulfilled. And it's okay if readers don't either. The novel these characters move through fulfills this in some ways. However, as I write more and more about the futurity of my community, I realize this is a series, a continuing on, a fighting for daily sovereignty. And I'm still figuring out how we get that sovereignty for our land and for our sacred sites, when in reality, we already have sovereignty for our bodies. You can't mind control us anymore. We are figuring out that you wanted and still want us dead in both body and mind. And I don't know about you, but that will make many survive the unimaginable. White futurity is now. Our futurity is the future. Which by the way, the future begins tomorrow.

A few summers ago, I visit a campus that had been a former boarding school. When I pull in, the air held this lightness to the movement of the trees. The sky is a pale blue with a few clouds in the center. Students have talked about seeing figures and hearing voices in the old dormitory. A colleague says that she saw the students in the windows sometimes. Briefly. They feel their spirits have been caught in a limbo they can't escape because of the traumas they experience.

The previous year before I arrive there, a community member holds a ceremony for those Lost Ones. The grounds when I am there are quiet until I meet with my colleague. We catch up and have a conversation with another colleague. As we leave to go to lunch, she points out a few places in the courtyard, including a statue of Grandmother and two children created to honor the past, present, and future of the many Native American peoples who attended the boarding school that once stood there.

In that courtyard, I hear children laughing and playing—children who are not physically there. Some of them stay behind to protect other Indigenous students attending school there. They gift me right there with their laughter and their love. We can all learn from them. The system isn't made for our healthy passage through education. It was and is still made for our demise. A few weeks after I leave, a Native American girl has committed suicide and counselors attempt to offer other Indigenous students help.

I recognize that the characters in this particular story are not in a world without traces of settler colonialism. I suppose that's because at that point in my writing, I couldn't imagine far beyond now, until I wrote this novel. I experience settler colonialism every day. It's simply right there hanging in front of my face as I work in the Ivory Towers. I have to labor through the trauma with the characters before fully seeing that there are other worlds, most right now in the liminal spaces in our minds, where there is no settler colonialism.

The story must go on. And the characters must persevere. And so I continue to write through the anger and the sadness and the passionate beliefs in our futures. And these characters will continue to hunt down their histories, live the present, and fight evil with the resilience that only the now can build. There is both resilience and perseverance here in what I have written, and in what other Indigenous writers craft. Our future visions that we've been having in our re-imaginations of speculative works are not so far off. They are right here. Waiting for us to enact them. Waiting for the rise-up. Which my characters will do.

Sherman Slipstream: (Dis)Associating Settler Time

E Ornelas

> As I read the Board of Anthropological Research expedition reports, our family records from the SA Museum, State Aboriginal Records and SA Link-Up, *I am transported*. I am with my family at the hands of the scientists being measured, bled, poked and prodded as their object of fascination-titillation-subjugation. I am standing before Inspector-'State-Ladies' and Probation Officers being inspected, watched from shadows, and shamed in the great Australian assimilation-experiment.
>
> –Natalie Harkin, "The Poetics of (Re)Mapping Archives: Memory in the Blood," 11

> Native peoples occupy a double bind within dominant settler reckonings of time. Either they are consigned to the past, or they are inserted into a present defined on non-native terms. From this perspective, Native people(s) do not so much exist *within the flow of time as erupt from it as an anomaly*, one usually understood as emanating from a bygone era.
>
> –Mark Rifkin, *Beyond Settler Time: Temporal Sovereignty and Indigenous Self-Determination*, vii

In the spring of 2021, the remains of over one thousand Indigenous children were located on the grounds of multiple former Canadian residential schools, including St. Eugene's Mission School, Marieval Indian Residential School, and Kamloops Residential School. Reports mark these as "discoveries" as if something previously unknown or unseen has finally been made known or visible. According to "settler reckonings of time," these children are "emanating from a bygone era," constantly consigned to a dead-end past, as Rifkin's epigraph explains. But Indigenous peoples subjected to state- and church-run boarding schools have known and seen the effects of these sites of incarceration for centuries (Trafzer, Gilbert, and Sisquoc 2; Trafzer, Smith, and Sisquoc 3). These children are testament to "a past that is not past"[1] that ruptures the flow of settler time. Chief Bobby Cameron of the Federation of Sovereign Indian Nations (FSIN) notes, "These children are sitting there, waiting to be found" (Austen and Bilefsky). Cameron's words indicate that these children are present, not past. Even though they are "sitting there, waiting," they are active not passive, making themselves known and demanding to be acknowledged.

Although St. Eugene's, Marieval, and Kamloops were operated by the Roman Catholic Church and not (directly) under the auspices of the settler government, these children's experiences no doubt resonate with those of Indigenous students at the hundreds of other boarding schools that operated throughout Turtle Island (e.g. North America) well into the twentieth century. Such schools have rightly been considered "death factories" for "the most vulnerable portion of the Native population," who were seen by whites as more assimilable than their adult counterparts (Keller 8; Trafzer and Loupe 21). While perhaps not a *physical* "death factory,"[2] the Sherman

Institute—a Native boarding school located in Riverside, California—was far from a healthy living environment, since "separating children from their parents for the purpose of assimilation" and "eliminating traditional lifeways for the sake of 'civilization'" is decidedly unhealthy, itself a certain kind of death. Indeed, "deceased pupils were usually buried at the school's cemetery," a space carved out of "a one-acre plot of land" in "the southwestern corner of the school farm" (Gilbert xxviii; Keller 8; Trafzer and Keller 160). In this way, youth buried at Sherman were kept like the ones "sitting there, waiting" at St. Eugene's, Marieval, and Kamloops. On the one hand their "voices are silent" and yet, on the other hand, "their voices live on" (Keller 9).

I am dedicated to exhuming the voice of one such Sherman Institute student, one who was kept but at the very least released alive: my paternal grandfather, Louis Ornelas, or Grandpa Louie as he was affectionately called. Grandpa Louie exists mostly in stories, narratives, family histories, pictures, and memories. His image sits in a dusty picture frame, on a dusty shelf, in a dusty corner—or an even dustier realm in the corner of my mind. I only met him in person on a few occasions as a child. So his image has been warped since those moments. Yet sometimes I slip into the bending stream of time and meet Louis. This is a story of one such instance, similar to that of Narungga scholar Natalie Harkin's account of being "transported" to moments throughout Harkin's family history of navigating Australian settler violences.

This essay attempts to trace the ripples of Native and Indigenous slipstream, (ancestral) memory, and (dis)association, through critically fabulated accounts of Louis's years spent at Sherman, my family's own oral history, and the official chronicle of the Sherman Institute. I argue that Native boarding schools were meant to *dissociate* Indigenous children from culture, language, tradition, kinship, and lifeways. Yet through the power of science fictional time travel or, more accurately, Indigenous slipstream, I am able to associate (rather than dissociate) with my grandfather's traumatic experiences and survivance. As a feeling and witnessing of a past that is not past, this essay serves as an Indigenous refusal of hegemonic time and history as well as an affirmation of Indigenous knowledges and realities.

Dominant settler conceptions of time view it as "a linear ordering of the flow of experience" (Al-Saji 339). But Indigenous thought would have it that memory and remembrance have their own "natural current" that is sovereign from this progressivist flow (Vizenor 103). This is why I am drawn more to "slipstream" as a concept than "time travel" to explain my experiences of associating with Louis, because the latter implies that the past is a separate place on a linear timeline that can be *travelled to*, perhaps requiring elaborate Westernized machinery, know-how, and technology. Instead, the tendency or genre (if one could call it that) of slipstream has been categorized as being, well, *slippery*. Called "assemblaged," "hybrized," "permeable," "porous," "incomplete," "disruptive, experimental, and counter-realist," with "no fixed or even provisionally demarcated boundaries," slipstream is in good company with Indigenous epistemologies, ontologies, and modes of thinking about and with time (Butler et al. 12; de Zwaan 2; Frelik 27; Rossi 346; Rossi 355). It is widely (and falsely) believed that Bruce Sterling coined the term "slipstream" in the '80s[3] as a way to disparagingly "refer to mainstream works that take advantage

of sf tropes" and later "referred to any sf- or fantasy-like work published or marketed outside the genre, or written by non-genre writers" (Wolfe 19). Sterling himself said that at "the heart of slipstream is an attitude of peculiar aggression against 'reality.'" Slipstream texts, according to Sterling, "tend to sarcastically tear at the structure of 'everyday life'" and tend "not to 'create' new worlds, but to *quote* them, chop them up out of context, and turn them against themselves." Although the originator's commentary has been debated (and rightly so), I adopt Sterling's definition insofar as this "tearing," "chopping up," and "turning against" is precisely the utility—rather than the failure—that slipstream yields.

Indigenous speculative fiction and, in particular, slipstream could be said to foster an "aggression against 'reality'" and take things "out of context" by refusing hegemonic time, history, and narrative structure. Grace L. Dillon (Anishinaabe) specifies that "Native slipstream" is similar yet distinct from Sterling's settler slipstream: "Native slipstream views time as pasts, presents, and futures that flow together like currents in a navigable stream. It thus replicates nonlinear thinking about space-time" ("Imagining" 3). While there may be some overlaps with slipstream as a "catchall" term in "other contexts," Native slipstream is a "reflection of a worldview" and a "cultural experience of reality," therefore differentiating it as a uniquely *Indigenous* epistemology (Dillon, "Imagining" 3-4). And it is certainly "nothing new," as Dillon also tells us that "incorporating time travel, alternate realities, parallel universes and multiverses, and alternative histories is a hallmark of Native storytelling tradition" ("Native" 345). Indigenous science fictional elements are, therefore, an affirmation of Indigenous knowledges and realities that help to navigate the current of ancestral memory. Just as a single drop of water becomes indistinguishable once it slips into a stream, I see the pasts, presents, and futures of my grandfather and I as flowing together.

What I remember of Grandpa Louie is minimal and vague. As a small child, I visited his home in Albuquerque, New Mexico, where he lived with my paternal grandmother, Rafaela Concepción (or Connie, for short), and my aunt, who acted as caretaker to them both in their old age. I was fascinated by their single-story house full of knick-knacks and sweets in an arid desert climate, a far cry from the overcast, wet environment of my childhood spent in Portland, Oregon. When I was in New Mexico, I thought of (space) aliens, Area 51, and *The X-Files*. I was also, for the first time in my life, entirely surrounded by my brown family members: grandparents, aunts, and cousins. I barely knew them, yet I felt the need to connect with them and was drawn to this place they inhabited. Louis never seemed particularly interested in me, however. He was quiet and withdrawn, hunched over a bowl of food, more fixated on it than the people around him. At the time, I attributed his stoicism more to his age and declining mental and physical health. My father told me that Grandpa Louie had, on numerous occasions as a septuagenarian, found himself lost and confused in various parts of Albuquerque. His dwindling memory was exacerbated by several small strokes. Now I wonder if his alienating demeanor was also a symptom of retreating into his own bodymind as a coping mechanism for the trauma he endured in his formative years.

I am 8 years old and I have just watched a documentary television show about alien abduction. The image of a grey's face filling up the screen is still burned into my eyes as I retire to bed on the

fold-out couch in my grandparent's living room. I lay awake for the next several hours thinking about how close I am to Roswell, New Mexico, the supposed proximal location of a 1947 sighting of an unidentified flying object. My sleep is fitful, as I envision strange lights and visitors in the room.

On one hand, my 8-year-old self sympathized with this elderly man. On the other, the stories my own father told me about their relationship deeply troubled me. Many of my earliest memories of Grandpa Louie were tinged with the upsetting accounts of my father's childhood. He was candid about the physical and verbal abuse that he and the rest of the family endured at Louis's hands. My grandfather's anger was explained by my father not as the result of a generational norm ("That's just how it was back then"), nor as one individual's irrational tendencies ("He was a sonofabitch"), but as the tragic, but logical outcome of Grandpa Louie's own subjection to violence, death, and grief starting at a very young age. As Kaba and Hayes remind their readers, "it is hurt people who hurt other people" (69). Or as my father put it, Louis enacted "trickle down abuse." I was told that Grandpa Louie had been placed in an orphanage as a child, only to have later gone into the U.S. armed forces,[4] where he was deployed to Pearl Harbor and witnessed the events there on December 7, 1941, as well as participated in the Pacific theater of World War II. Early life abandonment and post-traumatic stress seemed the likely culprits to characterize his actions later on.

I am 13 years old and I live in Fontana, California, in 1960. I have spent the school day worried about being held back yet again for speaking Spanish, my mother's native tongue, in class. I proceeded across the street to my after-school job working in chicken coops for 50¢ an hour, nauseating work that leaves me with a ripe odor of bird droppings. Other children bully me, cut me, and call me "smelly," a "dirty Mexican," or worse. Despite these things, what I fear most today is going home to my father, his rage, his belt. Neither my siblings nor my deferential mother can help. So I go to my room to avoid any interaction.

However, what was recounted to me throughout the first three decades of my life was not the entirety of what Louis endured. In the summer of 2017, as I was preparing to enter a PhD program in the fall, I travelled to the Pacific Northwest to attend a ceremony to scatter my late sibling's ashes into the ocean. During this trip, my father informed me that he had found the name and location of the place his father was held as an adolescent: the Sherman Institute in Riverside, California. After some initial web searches, I realized that the "orphanage" that Grandpa Louie stayed at was, in fact, a Native boarding school. Although he survived the Sherman Institute, he was literally and figuratively orphaned—not only were both of his parents deceased when he was released from Sherman as a teen and thus he had no immediate biological family to return to, but he had also been indoctrinated and assimilated into white supremacist, settler colonial societal and linguistic norms and was therefore orphaned from his culture. My father and I don't have firsthand accounts of Louis's experiences at Sherman because, as my aunt put it, it was a terrible place and a terrible time in his life. He didn't *want* to talk about it. But it's not hard to imagine, considering the reverberations of these experiences throughout our family's history. For example, there was a deep fear and obsession in my father's family about him and his siblings being molested by strangers,

which leads my father and I to presume that Louis was abused or witnessed abuse by fellow classmates and teachers at Sherman.[5] It's also not hard to imagine Grandpa Louie's experiences if I utilize Indigenous slipstream[6] to transport myself and think beyond settler reckonings of time.

I am barely a teenager and I am alone for the first time in my life. Taken. Discarded. Trapped. Abandoned. They all mean the same thing here. My father wasn't always kind but at least we had each other. My mother and father are gone now—first my mother, then my father—so I was given a new family. Now I am surrounded by others just like me. Alone.

Most scholarship on the Sherman Institute has, up to this point, relied heavily on archival records—themselves initially created and curated by school administrators and settler bureaucrats. Official documents tell "only one version of the truth," though, and "are sorely lacking" in Indigenous students' voices (Keller xviii, 3). "Institutional time," Vizenor (Anishinaabe) contends, "belies our personal memories, imagination, and consciousness" (101). Rather than accepting settler institutional history "as a factual and objectively recorded account of the past," I align with those scholars who "view history as just another type of narrative" (Ibarrola-Armendariz and Vivanco 29). Creative counter narratives that employ a "disorientating" and "surreal maelstrom of time-traveling and body jumping" are of great use for the purposes of (re)asserting the importance and validity of Indigenous epistemologies and temporalities (Ibarrola-Armendariz and Vivanco 30, 42).

One such form of counter narrative is critical fabulation. Hartman defines this manner of speculation thusly:

> 'Fabula' denotes the basic elements of story, the building blocks of the narrative. … By playing with and rearranging the basic elements of the story, by re-presenting the sequence of events in divergent stories and from contested points of view, I have attempted to jeopardize the status of the event, to displace the received or authorized account, and to imagine what might have happened or might have been said or might have been done. (11)

Through critical fabulation, Hartman is able to shift stories away from a primary focus on the violences done to captured and enslaved Black girls and women, and refocus to "fill… in the gaps" and "paint as full a picture… as possible" (Hartman 8, 11). More than that, though, critical fabulation insists that there are ways of seeing, witnessing, and knowing the past other than those the white supremacist, settler imaginary has provided. This is similar to the "imaginative histories" and the "remembrance past the barriers" that Vizenor urges for in the face of institutional timekeeping (101). If official accounts of Black enslavement or Native genocide are created and kept by supposed experts[7] in documenting human life—accountants, clergy, historians, etc.—then telling "our own stories" is an act of resistance against such claims to authority (Justice 2). We are the authors of our own lives—who better than us to narrate the lives we live? Even what has been written on our bodies from the outside is best recollected from our own unique vantage point (Harkin 4). What I hope to demonstrate is that this vantage point is not singular nor individual;

it is plural and collective. I am able to fabulate and associate with my grandfather's experiences because they are part of a past that is not past and, therefore, still present for me and other survivors and descendants of Native boarding schools.

The official history of the Sherman Institute is a narrative of white bureaucrats steeped in the violent pedagogical lineage of earlier iterations of Native boarding schools, such as the Carlisle Indian Industrial School in Pennsylvania. Originally founded in 1892 as the Perris Indian Industrial School located in Perris, California, U.S. Senate funding was approved in 1900, allowing Indian agents like Harwood Hall and businessmen like Frank Miller to successfully advocate for the relocation of the school to Riverside, California in 1902, where it continues to this day as the Sherman Indian High School (Keller 1, 12; Trafzer, Smith, and Sisquoc 6; Whalen, "Labored" 153). At its height as a site of incarceration, it held youth from "indigenous communities and mixed-race Native families from California, Arizona, New Mexico, Idaho, Oregon, Nevada, Oklahoma, Montana, Utah, South Dakota, Wisconsin, and Nebraska" (Smithers 44). Sherman was one of twenty-five federally-run off-reservation boarding schools, the purpose of which was assimilation through education or, more accurately, indoctrination (Gilbert xxi; Smithers 44; Trafzer, Gilbert, and Sisquoc 3; Trafzer, Smith, and Sisquoc 7). Upon arrival, students were stripped, deloused, had their hair cut, and were issued utilitarian clothing (Trafzer and Loupe 25). On a day to day basis, students at Sherman would've been subjected to military-like regimentation, with half of their lessons on rote academic work and the other half spent in highly gendered vocational training (Gilbert xxvi; Trafzer and Loupe 24; Trafzer, Smith, and Sisquoc 3). Administrators further endeavored to indoctrinate Indigenous youth through "outing programs," meant to lift up these children into a settler capitalist workforce serving white communities (Archuleta, Child, Lomawaima 34-5; Trafzer, Smith, and Sisquoc 8, 10; Whalen, "Beyond" 277; Whalen, "Labored" 151). Records of children's experiences at Sherman range from excelling academically to actively resisting and attempting to run away (Archuleta, Child, Lomawaima 48; Gilbert xxvii; Smithers 46-7; Trafzer and Loupe 26; Trafzer, Gilbert, and Sisquoc, 7; Trafzer, Smith, and Sisquoc 10). Surely some students were able to gain knowledge and resources that helped them and their communities, especially once Sherman turned toward more Indigenous-affirming programming in the mid-twentieth century and beyond (Trafzer and Loupe 30; Trafzer, Smith, and Sisquoc 1-2; Whalen, "Labored" 152). Some families even consented to this process, however reluctantly (Archuleta, Child, and Lomawaima 16; Trafzer, Smith, and Sisquoc 6). These experiences are not dichotomous, though, as noted by both Gilbert[8] (Hopi) as well as Trafzer (Wyandot), Keller, and Sisquoc[9] (Cuhilla/Apache). That is to say, students and their families exercised agency—though constrained—within and beyond the permeable boundaries of the Sherman Institute (Whalen, "Beyond" 277). However, just like other Native boarding schools, Sherman was ultimately founded on and acted in service to settler colonial practices of elimination—in this case the elimination of association between young people and their communities.

I am 17, not yet old enough to enlist in the military but old enough to be subjected to the discipline of a 5:30 AM wake up and roll call starting an hour later. I couldn't say whether or not

I enjoy my classes, but at least they provide me with distraction. The relentless cleaning and the mandatory physical activities are the same. No enjoyment. Only distraction. I need distraction. Distraction from the things I want to forget. It's only after the last roll call at 8 PM and the bugle call at 9 PM signaling lights out that I'm left inescapably isolated with my thoughts.

Settler colonial boarding schools for Indigenous peoples the world over were meant to *dissociate* Indigenous children from culture, language, tradition, kinship, and lifeways. That is to say, young people were forced to sever ties and connections to the people, places, and selves that made them who they were and are, in service of connecting them to white supremacist, settler colonial ideologies. The verb "associate" comes from the Latin *associare* ("to unite"), itself a combination of the prefix *ad-* ("to join") and *sociatus* ("companion"). Adding *dis-*, a Latin prefix meaning "apart," "asunder," or "away," to the beginning of "associate" qualifies a move from—even destroying of—union and companionship. *Dis-* has a markedly different feel than, say, the prefix *un-*, which simply indicates "not." To be "not united" is not the same thing as to be "apart from union." The latter implies spatial and perhaps emotional and psychological distance; certainly all of these forms of removal and being apart are present in boarding schools (Archuleta, Child, and Lomawaima 19). I don't invoke a Eurocentric etymology as a way to eclipse Indigenous language. Rather, this terminology illuminates that settlers did exactly what their words intended. At one time united with their community and companions, Native and First Nations children were stolen and intentionally orphaned—boarding and residential schools moved apart, tore asunder, ripped away, and utterly devastated their associations. In the specific case of Cherokee students at Sherman, Smithers emphasizes that the intention of such a space was to "sever linguistic, cultural, or any emotional *connections* to Cherokee identity" thereby making it significantly difficult for youth to cultivate and maintain "a meaningful sense of self or *attachments* to family and community" (47-8, emphasis added). Other scholars describe these experiences of being "disconnected" and "alienated" from Indigenous communities and epistemologies (Trafzer, Gilbert, and Sisquoc 5-6). Even decades later, Harkin describes the "yearning" to reconnect with more than just the "archive" of colonial documentation: "I remember aching to touch something, anything more of our recorded past to understand this journey and the particular impacts of colonialism on my family" (3). The feeling of "aching to touch something" implies that Harkin and other family members were unable to and actively disallowed from touching and connecting with one another, whether across space, time, or psychic gulfs.

I have never been to Riverside, California, let alone the Sherman Institute. Yet when I first heard the more complete story of my grandfather's childhood, I was transported to that place. No one had told me what the buildings looked like, I hadn't yet seen the photos or read the books about it, and my father had yet to imbue in me a sense of what Grandpa Louie's time there had been like. All I had been given was the name and a grainy cellphone photo of the line in the Sherman Institute's ledger indicating my grandfather's stay. So what I saw when I slipped "back" to the 1930s was alarmingly real and unanticipated. My body was "here" in 2017, located physically in the Midwest and the Pacific Northwest, while my consciousness wandered freely to the

Southwestern coastal region in an era almost a century before I currently existed, a half century before I was even conceived. Here were children half my age, structures that have long since been transformed, if not completely razed, all swirling in my mind. It wasn't "in my mind," though, in the sense that I wasn't "imagining" it; it was as real as any memory or experience of my own. But it also wasn't "my own." Whose eyes were I seeing through? I didn't see my grandfather in these slipstream memories, so I quickly understood that I was with him, seeing with him. These snippets of life at Sherman came and went for weeks in August of 2017 as I sought to uncover more about the space and place he'd been held. Intense moments of grief followed these slips into the stream of time. Eventually the unofficial narrative buttressed the knowledge I gleaned about the official narrative.

I am 31 years old and I haven't yet been born. I am in a school with gleaming, waxed floors, immaculately cleaned by some small, unseen hands. I am primed to enter a terminal degree program in the Midwest. The halls are cool despite the heat of the California summer blaring outside. The faculty welcome me with reassuring smiles. I am still processing the loss of my father to a train yard accident. I am still processing the loss of my sister to cancer. I see a girl about my age, round face and dark brown skin. She wears a white smock and a blank stare, unaware of my presence, absent-mindedly engrossed in whatever menial task she's been assigned. I think, "She's like me." I think, "She's nothing like me." I think we share the same fate. I wonder what she's thinking about, who she is and where she came from, who and what she left behind. There is a wooden door to a closet or an office or some other confined space that none of us can enter and none of us want to.

At first glance, this might appear to be a form of "blood memory," but I assert that the ancestral association I experienced was Indigenous slipstream, a form of science fictional time travel technology. Blood memory or "memory in the blood" is itself a contested term, originally brought to prominence by Kiowa author N. Scott Momaday (Allen 93). In Momaday's writing, there is a "blurring" of experiences in which the writer is "coincident with indigenous ancestors and with indigenous history" (Allen 101, 106). Even in its creative and playful form, blood memory is controversial for its potential similarities to the use of blood quantum for official federal tribal enlistment and recognition (Allen 96-7; Mithlo 106). Nevertheless, Mithlo (Chiricahua Apache) claims that the term is not necessarily regressive or essentialist. "Blood relationships," Mithlo counters,

> reference not only the common understanding of what is considered biological heritage or race but also, in an expanded sense, the internalized memories of communal history, knowledge, and wisdom. Blood memories are powerful political tropes mobilized to call attention to the legacies of colonialism in contexts as diverse as battlefields, boarding schools, and sacred sites. This common tribal value of multigenerational remembrance runs directly counter to prevailing Western traits of individual achievement, lack of transgenerational memory, and transcendence of one's genealogical fate and place of origin. (106)

Similar to Mithlo's warning against the "prevailing Western traits" of individualized experiences of knowledge and time, the most compelling argument for a more generous, abstract reading of memory in the blood comes from Harkin's poetic (re)telling of history. In searching beyond the official records, Harkin calls upon a nonlinear narrative relationship between past-present-future that rethinks Momaday, whose "memory in the blood… is not about genetic or biological determinism, notions of fixed identity or timeless essences, but can be understood as an evocative synonym for culture, reconstructed and reimagined on the record" (Harkin 7). I'm certainly not invested in espousing genetic essentializing or authenticating tropes that reproduce settler ideas of blood quantum. Instead, I'm interested in how Indigenous slipstream—offering *association* through alternative models of knowledge, memory, and history—operates as a kind of technology that counters settler colonial narratives.

When I recounted these experiences of slipping between time periods and consciousnesses to a white friend, they replied that it sounded like I was "dissociating." They based this on the fact that I was not fully in my bodymind, was not cognizant of (current) reality, and therefore feeling something akin to the psychological phenomenon correlated with trauma responses. Černis et al. define dissociation as containing "a subset of dissociative experiences sharing the phenomenological common denominator of a 'felt sense of anomaly' (FSA)," a "subjective feeling of 'strangeness'" that "can take various forms" (461). At first, I agreed with my white friend insofar as the invasive thoughts of settler colonialism were clearly an expression of a traumatizing history and surely weren't emotionally stabilizing. Plus, my friend has felt dissociated as a trauma response in their own life, so I trusted their firsthand knowledge. Later on, I spoke with a Sámi friend whose grandparent was also forced into a boarding school imposed by Scandinavian policies (Trafzer and Loupe 28). Relating the same experiences as well as my friend's assessment, my Sámi friend countered that rather than "dissociating" it sounded more like I was "associating." To them, I was uniting across time and space with my grandfather. I realized that they were right, that my grandfather and I were joining as companions in a shared history, separate and parallel from settler time. This reality was not "away" or "apart" from one another or from Indigeneity, as the settler colonial imperative of elimination would have it. Louis was no longer orphaned from kin and culture in those moments when I slipped to the Sherman Institute of the 1930s.

In these slips, I was chafing against the settler timeline and tearing at the fabric of coloniality in a way that Al-Saji discusses as "critical hesitation." The "chrononormativity" of time, as conceived in the West, is unidirectional and progressive, a smooth controlled surface that is dictated by particular monolithic epistemes (Rifkin 185). Critical hesitation works to question and interrupt this. When hesitating, Al-Saji describes pausing long enough to see the ways in which "the colonial past remains with the present," running parallel to and informing one another at all times (337). Hesitation then connects these seemingly discrete timelines so that those of us who hesitate within and against settler time actually perform a "*critical reconfiguration of the past*" (Al-Saji 338, emphasis in original). In other words, by stopping to acknowledge and associate with my grandfather's experiences, I was able to cause such a hesitation or rupture to

Western chrononormativity, to resist its totalization, thereby reconfiguring the past to a fuller representation of its actors. Rather than the singular, "masterly, or direct, reiteration of the past" that settler colonial history demands, hesitation is "indirect and faltering," since "it delays a habitual or unreflected line of action" and "creates an opening into which memories could come flowing back" (Al-Saji 338). Al-Saji's emphasis on faltering, delayed, crucially imperfect timelines, and uncontrollable, flowing memory are valid sites from which knowledge and resistance might spring. Grandpa Louie and I were in "cross-time proximity," bridging the span of linear time as well as the gulf imposed by the forced assimilation and dissociation of boarding schools (Rifkin 131).

In some ways, Louis represents the things that I seek to abolish through my personal and professional work. He was indoctrinated into settler colonial epistemes, by complicity, force, or both, never again returning to his linguistic and cultural roots. He joined in military activity, part of an imperialist tradition. He physically and emotionally scarred the people he was supposed to care for. He retreated into an unemotive masculinity, not sharing his own experiences or feelings, let alone seeking reconciliation or healing. Still, recounting the past—not through official channels but through the Indigenous technology of slipping into the stream of ancestral memory—allows me to *associate* with, connect to, and understand this man's troubling life. Like Harkin's poetic exploration, I too "enter those hidden in-between places full of mystery, pain and possibility; to peel back layers of memory and flesh and liberate our stories and skin" (3). Like discussions of Native literature, "time-traveling and body-migrating devices perfectly serve [the] purpose of delving into the cycles of violence…" as well as help "to forgive those who have hurt…" (Ibarrola-Armendariz and Vivanco 42; Johnson 144). Fortunately, Louis was returned to us. Countless youth incarcerated in boarding and residential schools never made it out alive. All the same, we cannot accept that their "voices are silent," because as Chief Cameron's words inform us, these children are "sitting there, waiting."

In the epigraph, Rifkin articulates, "Native people(s) do not so much exist within the flow of time as erupt from it as an anomaly" (vii). Borrowing from this notion of Nativeness as ruptive and anomalous rather than flowing with time, I maintain that it is not so much that we as Indigenous peoples are anachronistic but rather that chrononormativity is such that we cannot be explained by and contained within its current. To paraphrase Rifkin, Indigenous time is not an affirmation of settler time, reducible to, or nested within it (2). Our narratives are not (science) fictional—they are real and valid. And yet, using speculative tropes like slipstream to (re)tell our stories, our memories, and our associations, exceeds the bounds of settler time.

Notes

1. We now lay, as Sharpe might say, *in the wake* of a half-millennia-long genealogy of violence (13).
2. Despite "funding constraints and a lackadaisical attitude," youth held at Sherman Institute were "a relatively healthy student population" compared to their reservation and white peers (Keller xvii).
3. However, Dillon corrects this oversight by clarifying that "Anishinaabe author, scholar, and activist Gerald Vizenor (White Earth Chippewa) clearly 'coined' the genre in his 1978 essay 'Custer in the Slipstream'" ("Native" 344-5).
4. Writing about World War I, Medina concludes that Sherman "students carefully weighed their decision to enlist for military duty," many choosing to enlist "for a variety of reasons other than patriotism," such as "economic necessity" or "experience" (65-6).
5. "Boarding schools could be violent places," but less commonly "told are the stories of sexual abuse" (Archuleta, Child, Lomawaima 42). Considering that adolescents were sent into the world to work for complete strangers—often in the intimate proximity of whites' homes—and were not always well supervised even when on-campus—leading to grave physical harm and even death—then it's likely that sexualized violence also befell Sherman students, despite purported attempts to protect them (Whalen, "Beyond" 278; Whalen, "Labored" 158).
6. Dillon uses the term "Native slipstream" but throughout this essay I will refer to this as "Indigenous slipstream" (3).
7. As Harkin avers, the "supposed agents of protection and integrity determined what data was important, relevant and interesting for the record" (9).
8. In an in-depth study of Hopi strategies of coping with boarding schools like Sherman, Gilbert states that while some Hopi "saw little benefit in allowing American ways to enter Hopi society and culture," still others "strategically learned to adopt components" (xxiii).
9. Trafzer, Keller, and Sisquoc refer to this as "turning the power" (*Boarding* 28).

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Wandering the World's Most Isolated Metropolis: Structured Dispossession & Post-Apocalyptic Stress Syndrome in the Film *Waikiki*

Nicole Ku'uleinapuananiolikoawapuhimelemeleolani Furtado

Introduction

Waikiki, by Christopher Kahunahana, is a kaleidoscopic, speculative vision of surrealist and experimental filmmaking that deconstructs the colonial imaginary of Hawai'i as a tourism-based "paradise." The film unearths the sickness colonialism brings upon Indigenous peoples through homelessness, mental illness, domestic abuse, overdevelopment, and the loss of Hawaiian identity. Kahunahana's cinematic vision elucidates navigating the metropolis that is Honolulu and its dark underbelly of inflated houseless populations. These populations are disproportionately Native Hawaiian and most live in tent cities throughout the island of O'ahu, a painful truth that doesn't fit into the tourism industry's narratives of Hawai'i. *Waikiki* is centered around the main character Kea. Her plight operates as a stand-in for the hard realities of many Native Hawaiians who are homeless within their own homeland. Kea, played by actress Danielle Zalopany, is a young Kanaka Maoli woman who supports herself through hula dancing in Waikiki, being a bar hostess in Chinatown, and serving as a Native Hawaiian cultural teacher to children. By following the life of Kea, Kahunahana's film embodies "Post-Apocalyptic Stress Syndrome" (PASS) of Native peoples who, through the advent of colonialism, experienced the end of their worlds (Gross). *Waikiki* conveys these issues by stretching boundaries of time and space to embody a Native Slipstream that comments on the dystopian elements of living in Hawai'i after the apocalypse has already happened for Native peoples. As Grace L. Dillon (Anishinaabe) has stated, the Native Apocalypse has already happened (Dillon 8). Therefore, Gross's theory on Post-Apocalyptic Stress Syndrome is vital to showcasing beyond a "thought-experiment" format of speculative storytelling and instead illuminates lived realities. PASS can be identified in multiple levels of loss and cultivates intergenerational trauma through the severance of land or 'ike 'āina [to know the land]. Therefore, this cultural trauma of surviving the apocalypse is implicated throughout Kea's life of struggle and survival. Through a visual reading of *Waikiki*, I engage Glen Coulthard's "structured dispossession" and its capitalistic endeavors and emphasize the importance of reigniting connection to Kānaka Maoli epistemologies.

The film begins by following Kea through her different jobs she has to survive living in Honolulu. An altercation with her abusive boyfriend outside of a bar after work causes Kea to escape in the van she lives in until she runs over a homeless man named Wo. Kea takes Wo, played by Peter Shinkoda, into her life and thus the film takes a turn wherein past, present, future, and fantasy begin to blend together. Although it is commonplace for folks who live in Hawai'i to

survive by working multiple jobs, Kahunahana's choice to have Kea work in the tourism industry and in sex work, interpersed with her connection to teaching Native Hawaiian language and culture, illuminates the complexities and messy entanglements of the lived realities and challenges contemporary Native Hawaiians face. By surviving the apocalypse and having connection to land severed, Indigenous peoples endure systems of violent dispossession that "ensur[e] that Indigenous land and resource bases remain open for exploitation and capitalist development [and futures]" (Coulthard 77). Surviving the Native Apocalypse means living within structural systems of extractive frameworks. The film, aptly named *Waikiki*, beckons to the militourism leviathan of cultural commodification that happens to Native Hawaiian culture. As formative Kanaka Maoli scholar Haunani-Kay Trask, who has extensively written about cultural exploitation, states, "The attraction of Hawai'i is stimulated by slick Hollywood movies, saccharine Andy Williams music, and the constant psychological deprivations of maniacal American life" (Trask, *From a Native* 137). Hawai'i represents a form of desirable escapism ripe for touristic consumption.

Film therefore becomes the medium and message to relay Kahunahana's sentiment that "Hawai'i is much more than Hollywood's backdrop" and to chronicle a story of failure within a colonial matrix as well as cultural survival (Sanders). The saccharine, slick Hollywood vision that is commonly accepted of Waikiki and the overall image of Hawai'i Nei to visitors is powerfully refused in Kahunahana's story.[1] The film portrays a gritty realness to aspects of Hawai'i that the tourism industry actively attempts to conceal in order to sell the idea of Hawai'i to the rest of the world. The accepted spelling in 'Ōlelo Hawai'i (the Hawaiian language) is actually Waikīkī, however, Kahunahana has stated that he chose to name the film after the touristic version (without diacritical marks) to highlight the commercialized aspects of Kānaka culture that have proliferated throughout Hawai'i's history. Surprisingly, most of the film does not actually take place in Waikiki. Though Kea's journey throughout the film begins there, the majority of it takes place in Chinatown, the Sand Island industrial area, and the metropolitan outskirts of Waikiki—all considered the extra 'dirty' areas of O'ahu for its high influxes of tourists and houseless populations.

Promotional Shot for Waikiki. *Kea wears a haku and visually confronts viewers with a traditional form of cultural expression and a dead-locked stare.*

Promotional Shot for Waikiki. *The two main characters, Kea and Wo, in front of a fake illusion of the "paradise" image of Hawai'i.*

Waikiki reignites the need for rebuilding and maintaining ʻAuwai [caring and tending for the ʻāina or land and ecologies of kalo] through the praxis explained by Noelani Goodyear-Kaʻōpua. She states, "We need all the resources of our pasts and innovative capacities of our peoples to help us shape those transitions in ways that can bring us into preferred, non-imperial futures" (Goodyear-Kaʻōpua 246). In referencing cultivating ʻauwai or developing sustainable wetland cultivation, Goodyear-Kaʻōpua is utilizing a metaphor for restoring pathways of cultural knowledge transmission (particularly in educational systems) against continued imperialism by rehabilitating economic and ecological systems that "will again allow us to feed ourselves and our ʻāina." This dire need for reconnection to land is set up early in *Waikiki* and repeated with the phrase "*He aliʻi ka ʻāina, he kauwa ke kanaka*." In one of the most powerful scenes that haunts the rest of the film, Kea arrives to work late after experiencing domestic violence from her boyfriend and having to show up to teach with Wo alive but injured in her van. Kea, a fluent speaker of ʻŌlelo Hawaiʻi, discusses with her elementary students the literal translation of the phrase to mean "The land is the chief and the people are the servants." Sonically, the scene differentiates itself as it happens completely in the Hawaiian language. Kea then instructs her students that the kaona or deeper meaning behind "*He aliʻi ka ʻāina, he kauwa ke kanaka*" is actually "We all must care for the land. Because in turn it will take care of us." While the film takes place in the densely populated metropolitan areas of Honolulu, echoes of ʻāina (land) are cut and interspersed as images of Hawaiʻi's lush landscapes, bountiful rivers, waterfalls, and forests. These intersperses call on the viewer to recognize this ancestral truth of Hawaiʻi that Kea, who is mentally, physically, and spiritually lost a majority of the time within the metropolis that is Honolulu, conveys to her *haumana* (students).

The importance of connection to land within the film is part of a larger genealogy of Hawaiian cultural beliefs and worldviews. Many Kānaka feminst scholars have called upon this genealogical connection to land to highlight a praxis of *Aloha ʻĀina* or love of land. As Haunani-Kay Trask has stated, "Our survival depends, especially today, on understanding and connecting to this land of our ancestors... Aloha ʾĀina means in economic terms agriculture and aquaculture—not hotels and not military bases… [it means] a profound cultural belonging to the land as our ohana, or elder brother, elder sister, those who went before…" (Trask, "69"). Therefore, the viewing audience of

Waikiki is confronted with the hyper-overdevelopment of Honolulu and as "*He aliʻi ka ʻāina, he kauwa ke kanaka*" reminds us: we must, as a people who have survived the apocalypse, rebuild our worlds and sacred connections. Grace L. Dillon has noted of the Native Apocalypse that telling our stories is a "returning to ourselves" and a recovering of our ancestral traditions in order to adapt to a post-Native Apocalypse world (Dillon 10). *Waikiki*, through its interspersed edits/cuts of the realities of living in Hawaiʻi, highlights these truths through Kea's plight of cultural loss and survivance centuries after Native Hawaiians experienced the apocalypse.

Surviving the Apocalypse

"Post-Apocalyptic Stress Syndrome," a term created by Lawrence Gross (Minnesota Chippewa), indicates how American Indians have experienced the end of their respective worlds and also survived the apocalypse. His work is incredibly important to highlight how the effects of surviving imposed cultural destruction lingers and results in personal trauma and social dysfunction that can be combated by the rebuilding of American Indian communities that recognize conditions of both the past and the present. While describing the structured collapse of Native American livelihood and sovereignty and the need for cultural world-building, utilizing a trans-Indigenous approach with Gross's work is necessary to begin to understand the destruction of Kānaka Maoli worlds that occurred. While the sheer depth of "unabridged sovereignty" that existed in precontact Native cultures and subsequent destruction of our ancestors' worlds is hard to fully grasp, Haunani-Kay Trask describes the decimation of Hawaiian culture as such:

> Like most Native peoples, Hawaiians lived in our mother's keeping until the fateful coming of the haole [or] Western Foreigners in 1778. Then our world collapsed from the violence of contact disease, mass death, and land dispossession; evangelical Christianity; plantation capitalism; cultural destruction, including language banning; and finally, American military invasion in 1893, and forced annexation in 1898. During the course of little more than a century, the haole onslaught had taken from us 95% of our Hawaiian people, 99% of our lands and waters, and the entirety of our political sovereignty. As the 20th century dawned, we were but a remnant of the great and ancient people we had once been. ("The Color" 11)

Thankfully, due to the foundational works of many Kānaka scholars and activists like Haunani-Kay Trask, a Hawaiian Cultural Renaissance has flourished since the 1970s. Further, in the present time, the Native Hawaiian population is over 500,000 in Hawaiʻi and across the Hawaiian diaspora. There is a rebuilding of worlds occurring every day, all the time, and in different contexts. However, living in the post-apocalypse causes tremendous stress institutionally and personally upon Indigenous communities that can result in pervading intergenerational trauma. These stressors can manifest this trauma in ways succinctly described in Gross's research:

On the personal level,

1. An abandonment of productive employment

2. An increase in substance abuse
3. An increase in violence, especially domestic violence
4. An increase in the suicide rate
5. An increase in the rate of mental illness
6. The abandonment of established religious practices
7. The adoption of fanatical forms of religion
8. A loss of hope
9. A sense of despair
10. A sense of survivor's guilt

These prevalent issues can hit close to home for many Indigenous families. Gross's work delineates a clear and important connection between the cultural traumas Native communities must face and endure. Homelessness is the issue at the heart of *Waikiki*. Kahunahana highlights the bitter truth that over 15,000 folks are estimated to be homeless in Hawai'i and suffer lower life expectancy, high rates of mental illness, addiction, and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder ("Homeless in Hawaii: Facts and Resources"). The homeless population in Hawai'i is also overwhelmingly Native Hawaiian. The historical and material conditions that have produced this situation are directly related to the apocalyptic cultural devastation that Native Hawaiians experienced and the critical severing of land-based pedagogies that are central to Kānaka worldviews. The film *Waikiki* sees Kea living out this sense of incredible loss on a personal level. Kea desperately attempts to survive in a post-apocalyptic environment while enduring domestic violence, battling her own mental illnesses, her own despair and loss of hope, and (outside of her work as a cultural teacher) being employed in the prostitution of her own culture.

Kea dancing Hula 'Auana (contemporary hula) for tourists in the film as one of her jobs.

Kea's plastered smile for the guests of a touristy lū'au in Waikiki. *Her smile is haunting as viewers know the truth behind her living situation. Adorned in ornamental Hawaiian-esque clothing that does not reflect traditional practices, girls in coconut bras and mishmashed versions of other Polynesian cultures dance for tips from tourists.*

Early in the film, we see Kea dancing hula in Waikiki for tourists in a resort. Like a distorted mirror in a carnival funhouse, Kea's cultural dancing no longer reflects the sacredness the dance holds. At this point in the film, the audience knows Kea is homeless and struggling to make ends meet. The scene showcases a sea of tourists that is a typical sight of Waikiki lūʻaus (parties) where visitors go to get an "authentic" Hawaiian experience. In reality, these types of resort spaces embody very little of Kānaka culture. Famously, Haunani-Kay Trask in *From a Native Daughter: Colonialism and Sovereignty in Hawaiʻi* tackles issues of cultural prostitution and the pernicious grasp of manufactured Hawaiian cultural expression that multinational resort complexes utilize to entice tourists. Trask is adamant that Hawaiian culture *cannot be ornamental* as seen in spaces such as Waikiki:

> ...hula dancers wear clownlike makeup, don costumes from a mix of Polynesian cultures, and behave in a manner that is smutty and salacious rather than powerfully erotic... In the hotel version of the hula, the sacredness of the dance has completely evaporated, while the athleticism and sexual expression have been packaged like ornaments. The purpose is entertainment for profit rather than a joyful and truly Hawaiian celebration of human and divine nature. (144)

This striking critique of resort-based hula reverberates to Kea's own dancing to survive in a capitalistic system. Her makeup emphasizes the need to focus on her "customer service" smile. The focused and lingering shot on Kea's smile turns eerie as the subsequent startling cut scenes to her real world are less colorful and vibrant. Hula, a sacred expression of culture, turns into a job and not part of erotic cultural pleasure. The viewer is then confronted with the transformation of Kea and the defacing of hula and Waikiki (a place once known for its spouting waters and lush wetlands) as it once was. Hawaiʻi, as an idea, becomes packageable and consumable for the tourists, non-Natives, and visitors. It is marked "for sale," thereby removing true Hawaiian cultural context and rendering the tourist versions of Waikiki as capitalistic and meaningless.

As a symptom of PASS, Kea is unable to secure enough stable employment to gain permanent housing. Kea uses public utilities such as beach park showers to maintain hygiene amongst tourists and beach goers while she survives by living out of her van—a familiar and harsh reality that can be witnessed all throughout Hawaiʻi. This sense of personal loss also culminates in a fiery and distressing one-sided argument Kea has with Wo. Unsure of what to do with Wo after hitting him with her car, she begins spouting vitriol as he sits silently. Kea's boyfriend, who had previously assaulted her, tells her over the phone to "get rid of him" and that Wo is "...using you. Fucking pilau bum, drop him off Waiʻanae, get rid of him!" Kea, in a manic spiral afterwards, screams at Wo:

> "What am I supposed to do with you? Homeless pilau bum! What would your family think? They must be so fucking ashamed of you. Stupid ass pilau bum! Stop looking at me! Don't you sit there fucking judging me!"

The dialogue in this moment is significant. The signaling of Kea's boyfriend to get rid of Wo in the Waiʻanae area of Oʻahu is a direct reference to the high houseless population in that part of the

island. Waiʻanae has the highest concentration of Native Hawaiians in the world and is famously known for having high levels of houselessness. Kea's boyfriend's demands to drop Wo off and forget about him because Wo is using Kea indicates the State of Hawaiʻi's willful ignorance of the crises that occur on Oʻahu and the State's desire to erase unsightly problems. Kea interpellating Wo as a "pilau bum" means he is a dirty, distressing, and parasitic problem. While Wo sits there and just listens to Kea's abusive words, it seems to us viewers that she is actually screaming her own hate for herself and her situation.

Witnessing Kea spiral downwards into a path all too familiar for local families showcases the blatant struggles of homelessness in Hawaiʻi. Kea screams at Wo because he is a reflection of herself and the consequential severing she has experienced in her own Native lands. The irony of being unable to find a safe place to live on her ancestral lands is the result of many factors: mental health, economic status, and structural dispossession. Kea feels shame and guilt for the situations she finds herself in, even though her situation is symptomatic of the structural inequalities beyond Kea's control.

After Kea's van is towed, she passes out with Wo under a makeshift tent in Kakaʻako Park. In a desperate attempt to secure a place to stay, Kea is told paying in all cash is not an acceptable form of payment from a Waikiki-based realtor and that "[she's] not gonna get a place from anyone… [and] need[s] paystubs." Kea defiantly states, "I had cash. I need that room. I don't have any place to stay," only to be hung up on as the realtor states, "You're not going to qualify for anything." This scene parallels a subsequent moment in which Kea watches Honolulu Police Department officers harassing a homeless man pushing his shopping cart full of possessions near a highly gentrified, high-income area of Oʻahu. As the film progresses, viewers are unsure if Wo is real or just a figment of Kea's imagination. This uncertainty is a directorial choice on Kahunahana's part. The central sentiment is simply that Wo and Kea's journeys are deeply intertwined. Kea and Wo strike up a tentative friendship and reliance on each other during Kea's spiral into further disconnection from herself, her family, and her friends. Therefore, much like her berating of Wo feels like self-flagellation, Kea's attempts at comforting Wo by saying, "I know things have been shitty… We are going to be alright. Everything's going to be alright" feels like an empty and hopeless reassurance to herself amongst immense hardships.

Past, Present, & Future Momentums: Native Slipstream in Film

The realities of living in this post-apocalyptic moment in Hawaiʻi are illuminated through Kahunahana's use of Native Slipstream throughout the film. These temporal movements of slipping between past, present, future, and potentially Kea's own fantasies encompass visual sovereignty through the medium of film. Kahunahana's film engages visual sovereignty by "employing editing technologies that permit filmmakers to stage… Indigenous notions of time and space that are not possible through print alone" (Raheja 1163). Native Slipstream best describes the experimental and surrealist cinematography and pacing of *Waikiki*. Kahunahana himself has stated that film doesn't follow a linear or A-B-C structure as a harkening to Kānaka conceptions of temporality.

For Kahunahana, the audience needed to be able to "see through/behind/as/in spite of/in contrast" to Kea (Sanders). By exposing different ruptures and self-representations, Kahunahana engages with the Hawaiian praxis of *makawalu* or "eight eyes." This multi-relationality, multi-dimensional, and holographic way of thinking speaks to the need of looking at things from at least eight different perspectives. These perspectives aren't limited to humans but include the concepts of time, or even the natural elements of the planet.

A young Kea chants with her grandmother.

Waikiki follows a timeline that swirls together past, present, and future that is interspersed with shots of Kea within the modern landscape of Honolulu, temporality-breaking moments of tenderness with her grandmother, and being in ʻāina. Audience viewers are not sure whether they are viewing Kea's past, present, or future at any given moment. Kahunahana explains that Kea's "flashbacks to traumatic events were left intentionally muddy as a means to present memory almost as a form of time travel, and to note the relativity of time" (Sanders). We are taken into the mind of Kea, whose state of being slowly devolves into an enmeshed and increasingly panicked predicament by the end of the film. Visual sovereignty is therefore expressed within a framework of Native Slipstream to engage in a multiplicity of lived realities that have already occured, are happening now, and will happen in the future.

The organization of the film can be thought of as occurring in two simultaneous, yet psychically different, spaces. The first is the dystopian metropolis of Honolulu and its surrounding districts. Kahunahana emphasizes this dystopian landscape by including prolonged shots of concrete buildings and glassy skyscrapers. While most of the film surrounds Kea's work in the tourism industry, her boyfriend works in construction and the development of luxury apartment complexes in Honolulu. Scenes that take place in the metropolis are sonically signaled with jetliners and military airplanes that create deafening sounds. The metropolis of Honolulu is in stark contrast to the scenes of Aloha ʻĀina that ground the viewer in what Hawaiʻi actually means.

Juxtaposed against the harshness of metropolis is Kea's longing for re-connection to land. The ultimate message of the film centers around Kea's journey to (re)connect. In scenes where nature appears in the film, Kea occasionally touches base, as a child, with her grandmother while they sing the *mele* "Ke Ao Nani"—a song about connecting with land and nature. Despite all the chaos that happens in the film, the mele works its way back into the film in unexpected moments, especially when Kea's struggles to survive increases. While sounds of air travel signal the metropolis, Aloha ʻĀina is sonically signaled with Kea and her grandmother's chanting, the


A scene of lush waterfalls juxtaposed against the development of Honolulu.


Kea stares at the statue of Queen Lili`uokalani at the State Capitol.

sounds of birds, and the powerful grounding of the ocean currents/waves. Kahunahana highlights that removal of Hawaiians from land with structured dispossession results in intergenerational issues of violence, anger, and abuse. He marks these intergenerational issues on the film by mixing the temporalities and spatialities of the lands and bodies of Hawai'i. In much the same way that viewers are unable to tell past from present from future, they are unable to temporally or spatially differentiate the Hawai'i of the metropolis from Aloha ʻĀina.

Conclusion

Wandering with Wo through the metropolis of Honolulu, leads Kea to become broken and exhausted. Eventually she comes to the State Capitol, where she stares at the statue of Queen Lili'uokalani, beckoning for answers that will not come. By the end of the film, we see Kea make her way to Sand Island Park as her boyfriend pursues in an effort to bring her back home after accusing her of mental instability. The film ends on an ambiguous note. We don't see Kea get a job, secure housing, or reconcile with her family. None of the problems that we see Kea attempt

The final scene of Waikiki *is of Kea chanting in the middle of Honolulu.*

to navigate are solved. The final shot of the film is Kea on her knees desperate for connection to ʻāina as she grasps red volcanic earth in her hands. A solemn stare and last chant from Kea end the film as she faces water and the high-rise buildings in front her. The phrase that echoed from the beginning of the film *He aliʻi ka ʻāina, he kauwa ke kanaka* resonates again with what has been lost for Kea and what urgently needs to be (re)connected.

Waikiki ignites the dire need for reconnecting Kānaka epistemologies to land. Christopher Kahunahana's film highlights the struggles Native Hawaiians face with the ever-increasing threat of being priced out of their own homelands and the cultural trauma that accompanies structured dispossession. Through the struggles of Kea, we see how failure is relegated to Hawaiians who are coping with Post-Apocalyptic Stress Syndrome. While we do not see Kea achieve a typical movie magic ending to her story, the *kahea* or call, to see from multiple perspectives through Kahunahana's ruptures of colonial common sense leaves us, like Kea, seeking more answers.

Notes

1. Other promotional shots for the film featured a bloody "Shaka" image. The Shaka is a hand-gesture associated with Hawai'i as a form of greeting that has frequently been appropriated by outsider surfing culture (particularly California-based) to mean "hang-loose." These promotional images indicate Christopher Kahunahana's commentary on the taking and misappropriation of Hawaiian values and culture.

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Trans-Indigenous Sci-Fi in French: Language and Temporality in *Wapke*

Malou Brouwer and Camille Roberge

An examination of the depths of trans-Indigenous science-fiction would not be complete without paying attention to Indigenous sf produced in French. Published in May 2021, *Wapke* is the first short story collection of Indigenous anticipation stories in French in what is colonially referred to as Quebec. It brings together fourteen authors from different Indigenous communities who imagine wapke, or "tomorrow" in Atikamekw. From time travelling Indigenous warriors to rebellious language and knowledge keepers, from Big Trees in a lake to a human sausage factory, from living on the land to living in cyberspace, these stories provide a trans-Indigenous colonial critique. Crossing communities, generations, languages, times, and places, *Wapke* is indeed inherently trans-Indigenous in form. Moreover, when read together, these stories convey trans-Indigenous messages about language, temporality, colonialism, and decolonization. Thus, in this article, we aim to demonstrate how Wapke goes beyond the confines of settler colonial ideologies and imagines decolonial futures. Closely reading *Wapke* and drawing on Leanne Betasamosake Simpson's theory of Indigenous resurgence, Daniel Heath Justice's take on Indigenous wonderworks, and Chadwick Allen's notion of trans-Indigenous methodologies, we seek to answer the following questions: As a trans-Indigenous wonderwork, what messages about language and temporality does *Wapke* communicate? How are these enriched by its trans-Indigenous form? We argue that, on the one hand, by offering criticisms of "civilization" and settler colonial structures, these stories dismantle colonialism, and, on the other hand, they build tomorrows rooted in Indigenous resurgence by creating alternative temporalities and reflecting on linguistic diversity.

As settler scholars in what is now called Canada, we are committed to engaging with Indigenous literatures in ethically appropriate and respectful ways. To us this means continually learning about the cultures and communities from which these artistic expressions arise, privileging the work of Indigenous scholars, writers, and community members, and critically engaging with these works and texts – as Sam McKegney points out, "healthy skepticism and critical debate are signs of engagement and respect" (85); all of which we aimed for in our analysis of *Wapke* as a trans-Indigenous wonderwork.

Situating *Wapke* as Trans-Indigenous wonderwork

Wapke is characterized as "le premier recueil de nouvelles d'anticipation autochtone au Québec", as the book's back cover indicates.[1] Although associated, anticipation and science fiction are not synonymous: while both imagine other worlds, science-fiction can be set in the past, present, or future while anticipation always portrays a future. Anticipation stories are not

necessarily science fiction either, since they can portray futures without "sci-fi elements". In reading *Wapke*, we found this Western genre distinction to be counterproductive as it would classify some stories as sci-fi but not others. In our understanding of Indigenous sci-fi, we follow Indigenous writers and scholars like Daniel Heath Justice (Cherokee) and Grace Dillon (Anishinaabe) who argue that Western genre categorizations are limited, and can even be dangerous to Indigenous sci-fi, literatures, and people, since they are "so deeply entangled in settler colonial logics of dead matter, monolithic reality, and rationalist supremacy" (Justice 152). As an alternative to colonial understandings of Indigenous sci-fi, Justice proposes to think about these works as Indigenous wonderworks:

> Wondrous things are *other* and *otherwise*; they're outside the bounds of the everyday and mundane, perhaps unpredictable, but not necessarily alien, not necessarily foreign or dangerous – but not necessarily comforting and safe, either. They remind us that other worlds exist; other realities abide alongside and within our own. Wonderworks, then, are those works of art – literary, filmic, etc. – that centre this possibility within Indigenous values and towards Indigenous, decolonial purposes. (153)

Indigenous wonderworks remind the reader that there are other ways of being in the world than the colonial ways we have been taught to accept. Indeed, as Grace Dillon writes in *Walking the Clouds*, these works "return us to ourselves by encouraging Native writers to write about Native conditions in Native-centered worlds liberated by the imagination" (11). Indigenous wonderworks offer a future, even if it is only an imagined one – for now (Justice 156). *Wapke*'s anticipation stories do exactly that: they offer the reader other futures and worlds—some still colonial, others decolonial.

Wapke is not only an Indigenous wonderwork, but also a *trans-Indigenous wonderwork*. To Chadwick Allen, the trans-Indigenous centers Indigenous communities and relations; trans-Indigenous methodologies are "a broad set of emerging practices designed explicitly to privilege reading *across*, *through*, and *beyond* tribally and nationally specific Indigenous texts and contexts" ("Decolonizing Comparison" 378, emphasis in original). Additionally, Allen asserts that trans-Indigenous methodologies are "*purposeful* Indigenous juxtapositions" (*Trans-Indigenous* xviii).[2] As a collection of short stories, *Wapke* intrinsically embodies the notion of trans-Indigenous: short story collections are, in essence, purposeful juxtapositions of stories, and *Wapke* is a purposeful collection of Indigenous anticipation—or wondrous—short stories. Indeed, it brings together authors from different communities,[3] generations,[4] places, and traditions, inherently shaping *Wapke* in a trans-Indigenous form. In that respect, a trans-Indigenous approach on our part is appropriate: we read *Wapke* in a trans-Indigenous way, keeping in mind the local contexts from which the stories emerge, all the while staying cognizant of the whole of this short story collection. The question arises then as to what a trans-Indigenous reading of these stories brings to the fore. We focus our analysis on the themes of language and temporality to explore how these function as sites of resistance to settler colonialism and of Indigenous resurgence and self-determination.

From Indigenous Language Revitalization to Indigenous Resurgence in *Wapke*

Multiple stories in *Wapke* deal with language, although in different ways. While some focus on linguistic diversity between French and Indigenous languages, others portray a universal language created through mixing various languages. Whereas some stories offer the reader a critique of colonial languages, others center language revitalization and linguistic resistance as essential components of Indigenous resurgence.

Wapke's first short story is Innu poet Marie-Andrée Gill's "Dix jours sur écorce de bouleau," which is composed of ten diary entries written by the main character, an unnamed boy. He reflects on French, writing "je sais pas quoi écrire. Le français, j'aimais pas ça. Les seules choses que j'aimais quand on était au village, c'était jouer au hockey quand on pouvait encore, jouer à ma console et monter dans le bois" (Gill 16).[5] The boy's assertion that he did not like French reads, on the one hand, as an adolescent's dislike of the school subject French, and, on the other hand, as a critique of this language being forced on Indigenous people through colonialism. Indeed, in the last diary entry, the boy recounts how another small community found theirs:

> On voulait tous leur poser des questions mais on était aussi un peu gênés, c'est bizarre de voir du nouveau monde. C'est comme si les mots restaient pris dans la gorge parce que le cœur bat trop fort. Je pense que ça leur faisait ça à eux aussi. Ils devaient être habitués de juste parler leur langue entre eux. Avec Simba, Jack et kukum Denise par contre ils pouvaient parler en atikamekw et ils se comprenaient super bien. Moi je poignais juste des bouttes, comme un radio qui poigne un poste à moitié. (Gill 18)

The community that found them had been speaking solely in Atikamekw[6] until they arrived there. In the boy's community, only three out of twelve people were still fluent in the language, the others – including the boy – spoke mainly French with some Atikamekw words. The metaphor of the radio is quite significant too since earlier in the story the boy recounts how there was less and less communication over their radio until it completely stopped – apart from the signal they picked up hearing people speak with an Atikamekw accent, who turned out to be the people who later found them. In this quote, the radio detecting only half the signal is a reflection of how the boy only catches half of what is said in Atikamekw. His grandfather was the only one who knew about how to work with electronics and had tried to teach the boy, but he was not interested at that time. To the boy, his former disinterest in his grandfather's teachings "n'a plus de sens aujourd'hui" (Gill 11); it would have been useful if he had paid attention to his grandfather's teachings back then.[7] The idea that he missed out on learning from his *nukum* indicates that he is now interested in relearning the language, not necessarily to get rid of his French, but rather to be able to communicate with the Atikamekw communities close to him.

In the story "Kanatabe Ishkueu" by Innu poet Natasha Kanapé Fontaine, Innu-aimun appears beyond rescue at first. Even though Kanatabe, a future version of what is now called Canada, has implemented Indigenous knowledges to survive the new ice age, the language has not fully endured: "cependant, la technologie ne nous a pas permis de sauvegarder notre langue maternelle,

l'innu-aimun" (Kanapé Fontaine 164).[8] In this world, their language has disappeared apart from some names and states that have been named by taking a word from an Indigenous language or by coming back to the roots of the word:

> le Keb était autrefois une province, le Québec, aujourd'hui un état libre au sein des États unifiés du Kanatabe. Le Canada et le Québec, comme d'autres États du monde, ont été renommés, soit en reprenant un nom issu d'une des langues autochtones du territoire, soit en revenant à l'origine de leur nom. Kanatabe (*Kanata-Ahbee*) signifie 'terre des nombreux villages', et Keb provient du Kebeq, 'là où le fleuve se rétrécit', pour désigner la capitale, la ville de Québec. (Kanapé Fontaine 164-5)[9]

These names appear to be the only traces of Indigenous languages throughout the first part of the story and can be considered a form of tokenism; the Kanatabe government has only symbolically given Indigenous names to the states and cities all the while maintaining the oppression of Indigenous people, partly through the further erasure of their language. However, the story turns around after the main character's *Traversée* (or Crossing): the person who found her addresses her in Innu with "kuei", and throughout the second part of the story, other Innu words are used (such as *mushum*); in this alternate, separate world *Innu-aimun* is still alive. Quite like Gill's story, Kanapé Fontaine's story ends on a hopeful note. The character explains she was able to make the *Traversée* guided by a book explaining how to get to this other place. This underscores the power of literatures; as Jo-Ann Episkenew (Métis) asserts, Indigenous stories have real-world effects "as [they] move outside the boundaries of a text to affect the material world" (193). Or as the main character in Gill's story writes: "C'est puissant, les mots, quand même" (10).[10] Since she left the book in Kanatabe, "ca veut dire qu'il y en a d'autres qui viendront" (Kanapé Fontaine 177).[11] Not only are Innu-aimun (Innu language) and Innu-aitun (Innu culture) very much alive, but others will also be able to join this community and live within Innu traditions. Gill's and Kanapé Fontaine's stories thus provide a hopeful image of Indigenous language revitalization in their imagined futures, hinting towards Indigenous resurgence as a possibility.

Virginia Pésémapéo Bordeleau's story "Les enfants lumière" paints a different picture in which languages are morphed together into a universal language. In the story, the world has completely changed due to capitalism's continued extractivism, and attacks on the earth. Among the Survivors of "L'Événement" (the Event) are the original people from the Abitibi region: in line with their traditional values of "l'accueil chaleureux" and "une large conscience sociale" (59), they welcomed the refugees, among them Chinese students, people from African countries and Haiti, and a descendant of the Aboriginals of Australia. This resonates with Leanne Betasamosake Simpson's (Anishinaabe) idea of solidarity between Indigenous peoples and people of color as an essential part of radical resurgence: "If we recognize settler colonialism to be dispossession, capitalism, white supremacy, and heteropatriarchy, that recognition points us to our allies: not liberal white Canadians (…) but Black and brown individuals and communities on Turtle Island and beyond that are struggling in their own localities against these same forces, building movements that contain alternatives" (*As We Have Always Done* 228-9). This story shows that co-resistance and

solidarity are essential to building an alternative reality rooted in renewed, traditional values such as hospitality and relationality. After the Event, most people renounced having children, as their mentalities had radically changed. However, Sam, a member of the Anishinaabeg, and his wife Bella still had hope, and did have a child, Nibi. The third and last part of the story indeed focuses on Nibi and "les enfants lumière" (the light children). They bring joy and hope to the new people; after couples were formed among the other community members, they gave birth to a new generation that will carry forward the knowledge of the People:

> Le savoir serait transmis. [...] Au fil des années, des enfants de toutes les nuances possibles du genre humain animèrent les maisonnées et le grand village cosmopolite. Ils parlaient plusieurs langues à la fois en mêlant les mots, inventant ainsi un langage unifié tout comme ils créeraient avec le temps une humanité sans races. (Pésémapéo Bordeleau 67)[12]

This universalization of the language is born out of solidarity between Indigenous peoples and other people of color. Here, traditions are reactualized rather than staying put in the past: the story shows tradition as a living entity that adapts to and through time and space. Tradition can and should be recalled and used in ways that reflect and suit present life. The decolonial world imagined here by Pésémapéo Bordeleau is then built on the "very best practices of our traditional cultures, knowledge systems and lifeways in the dynamic, fluid, compassionate, respectful context in which they were originally generated" (*Dancing on our Turtle's Back* 18).

While the authors mentioned above have taken up language as a theme, others use Indigenous languages in their stories. The title of the collection underscores the importance of using Indigenous languages: "Le titre, *Wapke*, un mot atikamekw qui veut dire demain ou avenir, n'est d'ailleurs pas anodin dans les circonstances et représente un message fort" (Yvon).[13] These circumstances include the continued extractavist practices targeting Indigenous land, the environmental crisis, missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls, Québec's refusal to acknowledge systemic racism in the province, not to mention the current and ongoing Covid-19 pandemic.[14] Although the writers had not gotten any specific assignment, all stories reflect on and connect through such social, political, and environmental themes; through sharing such elements, these stories portray trans-Indigenous content. Cyndy Wylde (Anicinape and Atikamekw) said that "c'est un peu décourageant qu'on se projette tous comme ça," but also emphasizes that she wanted a positive end to her story: "je voulais qu'on soit les gagnants dans l'histoire" (qtd. in Yvon), which is a goal that *Wapke*'s contributors seem to share.[15] Indeed, as the title reminds us, these short stories offer a tomorrow from an Indigenous perspective.

Some authors have used words, phrases, and expressions in an Indigenous language in their stories. Natasha Kanapé Fontaine, for example, uses *mushum* in her story to refer to the main character's grandfather and *kuei*, an Innu greeting, to signal the continuance of the Innu language in the other world (as we have discussed above). Joséphine Bacon, in turn, uses Innu words like Uatan (the village in which her story takes place), *Nutshimit* (the inland), *Tshishikushkueu* ("la femme de l'espace qui veille sur la Terre" (203)) and *teueikan* (drum). In using Innu words, these

authors underline the continued existence of Indigenous languages, cultures, and peoples into the future, especially since the words used here are mostly related to family and to inherently Innu places, traditions, and knowledge. In a similar vein, Atikamekw language teacher, actress and writer Janis Ottawa's story includes many Atikamekw words, especially those that refer to traditional knowledges of the land ("*wikwasatikw*, le bouleau blanc" (180), "minihikw, une épinette blanche" (181), "awesisak, le gibier" (181), etc); traditional ways of living ("nous allons apprendre le *kotosowan*, la façon dont nos ancêtres le faisaient, pour appeler l'orignal juste à temps pour la chasse" (182)); people in the community ("awacak, les jeunes" (181), "*kokom*, grand-mère" (181), "*moshom*, grand-père" (181), etc), and the others ("*ka wapisitcik*, des Blancs" (182)). Miko, the story's main character, indeed uses Atikamekw language and his life in the community is rooted in traditional practices. Nevertheless, Miko has a strong desire to leave the island and go to the city to find his lost love. Towards the end of the story, he even says to himself that he does not want to be Anicinape anymore: 'Je ne veux plus être un Anicinape", se dit-il. Puis il regrette; c'est insensé de vouloir changer d'identité, aussi bien de mourir (186-7).[16] Miko realizes that he should not try to change his identity as Anicinape. He becomes aware of the interconnection between the island where he and his community live, the way they live there (including their language use), and his identity as Anicinape. In that sense, the story exemplifies Jeannette Armstrong's concept of interdependence and the centrality of land and language to Indigenous existence: "language was given to us by the land we live within" (146).

Ottawa's, Bacon's, and Kanapé Fontaine's stories also have in common an Indigenous place setting: Bacon's story takes place in the village of Uatan in Nutshimit; Ottawa's story on the island, and Kanapé Fontaine's story partly in Kanatabe, which is still colonial, and partly in the Innu world. In these places, Indigenous people lead a life practically separate from a colonial world, and it comes as no surprise, if we keep in mind Armstrong's idea about the land speaking, that their languages are spoken in these places. These stories thus exemplify Indigenous resurgence and its relation to language. For Simpson, Indigenous resurgence is strongly rooted in Indigenous languages: she argues that Indigenous resurgence and decolonization involve learning from Indigenous languages as they carry Indigenous epistemologies, philosophies, and meanings in their structures. Indigenous resurgence centers self-determination and Indigenous resistance. The imagined futures by these three authors are indeed centered around self-determination of the community in their own spaces, speaking their own languages, and living on the land. They move away from a politics of recognition focused on reconciling with the settler state to root their lives in their own values, traditions, epistemologies, and lands (Coulthard).[17]

The idea of Indigenous resurgence and self-determination becomes even more clear in Cyndy Wylde's story. "*Pakan* (Autrement)" begins in 2022 and takes us to 2063 following a line of Anishinaabeg women beginning with Kanena and followed by Nibi and her daughter Maïka. These three women are confronted by the decisions of a hegemonic government, but they find ways to actively resist, notably by using their language:

> Tout était donc susceptible d'être entendu, mais une barrière demeurait pour les fonctionnaires du régime actuel: les langues autochtones. Nibi s'était fait un devoir de transmettre sa langue à Maïka. Tous les Autochtones de sa génération devenus parents avaient fait de même. La revitalisation de l'identité était un moteur, mais elle roulait dans l'ombre pour ne pas susciter les foudres de l'État. Nibi elle-même avait dû user de plusieurs ruses pour conserver sa langue maternelle. Née de parents chez qui les pensionnats avaient ciblé la destruction de l'identité autochtone en interdisant d'utiliser leur langue, Nibi s'était promis d'honorer ses ancêtres et de confidentialité qu'il permettait l'aiderait à préserver quelque chose de tout aussi vital. (…) Les deux femmes marchent au bord de l'eau, reconnaissantes d'avoir peu de risques d'être écoutées ou, du moins, comprises. En parlant anicinape, Nibi ajoute une obstruction qui la rassure. (Wylde 101-2)[18]

Nibi then continues to explain to her daughter how the government has oppressed Indigenous peoples in the past, and how they continue to do so. Nibi had relearned the Anicinape language to honor her ancestors and to continue the Anicinape language, knowledges, and traditions. In that sense, this act of Indigenous language revitalization forms an act of Indigenous resurgence, as does the fact that she transmits it to her daughter. At the same time, speaking the language also serves as a layer of protection as well as an act of active resistance. Since the authoritarian government listens to everything that is being said, they could not have this honest conversation in French. Speaking in Anicinape allows them to criticize the government without retribution and, thus, to actively resist oppression.

Although in different ways, Gill, Kanapé Fontaine, Pésémapéo Bordeleau, Bacon, Ottawa, and Wylde deal with language—as a theme and/or as a practice—to embody Indigenous resurgence. Language is a path to resisting settler colonialism and building a future rooted in Indigenous languages and epistemologies. Another way these authors resist settler colonialism is by putting forward different conceptions of time and temporality, which are another form of resistance and resurgence.

Dismantling Time: Stories of Temporalities as Indigenous Resurgence

Time and temporality are not synonymous, as "[t]emporality is subjective progression through moments, while time attempts to objectively measure and mark that progression. Time is necessarily temporal, but temporality can exist plainly without time—a slow clock still measures temporality, even if it doesn't do so in a timely fashion" (Joelle). Time is associated with "objectivity," measurable and detached from context, while temporality is deeply embedded in subjectivity, place, and relationships. Time works in a linear way, pulling apart temporality to analyze it without the set of relations that makes it whole. Although our settler backgrounds necessarily influence our understanding of time and temporality here, we attempt to follow, as much as possible, Indigenous conceptions throughout our analysis. *Wapke*'s Indigenous anticipation stories makes it possible to link story and history together, creating new narratives for relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. As the authors play with

temporality to make visible the horrors brought on by colonization, past, present, and future collide in the stories to make space for an allyship between the readers and the authors. While offering insightful criticism about the ongoing story that is colonialism, these stories demonstrate that "other realities abide alongside and within our own" (Justice 153). As the authors (re)build their houses, they give the readers the necessary space to feel and think about the issues brought forward.

Wendat writer Jean Sioui's short story, "Les couleurs de la peau", takes place in 1534 with the "discovery of Canada" by Jacques Cartier, and challenges the notion of *Terra Nullius*:[19] "Ils sont restés sur le territoire qu'ils *prétendaient* avoir découvert" (88, emphasis added).[20] The story then moves on to the year 2234, when a new mutation of the smallpox virus—the same one that decimated the Hurons-Wendat in the early 1700s—strikes the newborns of Kanata, making their skin blue—but not affecting Indigenous peoples. From there, it does not take much "pour que les horreurs d'un temps à oublier ressuscitent" (88):[21] the children from the story being taken away from their communities to medical laboratories remind the reader of the forced placement of Indigenous children in residential schools,[22] including the medical testing some of these children suffered.[23] This imagined future is rooted in the past and stems from preconceived ideas:

> Au début des années 2000, les gouvernements parlaient de pardon et de réconciliation avec les peuples autochtones. À l'aube de 2270, trente-six ans après le début de l'épidémie, les Autochtones sont toujours sous l'emprise de préjugés et de racisme systémique. Presque quarante ans à vivre avec le nouveau virus. Les politiciens, les complotistes et les médias accusent effrontément la nation wendat de sorcellerie. Ils prétendent que des chamans ont jeté un sort aux Canadiens pour se venger de leur inaction après plusieurs études, des rapports gouvernementaux nombreux et des promesses qui sont restées lettre morte. Des promesses qui devaient pourtant corriger les injustices commises envers les Premières Nations. (89)[24]

Demonstrating the failure of recognition and reconciliation policies, Sioui emphasizes how colonization is not a fixed moment in history, but a process that persists by constantly reinventing itself.[25] This reminds us of Glen Coulthard's deconstruction of the policies of recognition and reconciliation—empty words of action which are not about change but about appeasing Indigenous claims, allowing governments to retain all power. Moreover, the narrative of recognition and reconciliation also serves to naturalize colonization as an historical event; but settler colonialism is not "an anomaly of time and space—it's an ongoing process of violent self-justification through the erasure of Indigenous peoples as anything but an empty symbol" (Justice 10).

While Sioui's short story warns us about the emptiness of the recognition and reconciliation discourses, Janis Ottawa's short story emphasizes the dangers of giving into that same narrative. In "*Minishtikok* (l'île)", reconciliation is subtly discussed through Miko, the main character. Growing up, Miko dreams of reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. But it quickly

becomes clear that reconciliation is not an option: water and animals are getting harder to find; they are searching shelter from non-Indigenous people; they are in continuous danger of being found; and the men chosen to leave the island to bring back food and materials (like Miko's father) do not come back. Towards the end of the story, it becomes clear that reconciliation is a trap set to capture Indigenous people in erasure. When Miko asks his mom what happened to their people, she tells her son about the dangers of hospitals, the construction of pipelines on stolen land, the communities poisoned by the government's alimentary help provided to families with low income, how these deaths were covered-up by the medias as collective suicides, and how his father always believed in reconciliation only to leave the island and never come back.

In reminding us of the colonial history that led to the death of tens of thousands of Indigenous people, Sioui and Ottawa demonstrate clearly that it could happen again, that it is *still* happening in more pernicious ways. Indeed, colonialism is perpetuated through government policies of recognition and reconciliation. For Vanessa Watts (Mohawk from Bear Clan, Six Nations & Anishinaabe), this act of remembering "is not a question of accessing something, which has already come and gone, but simply to listen. To act" (32). In this sense, the authors invite the readers to become allies by listening to their stories and by speaking up. Here, remembering "is not a question of "going backwards", for this implies there is a static place to return to" (Watts 32), but rather is embedded in a juxtaposition of temporalities.

In Cyndy Wylde's short story, the juxtaposition of temporalities is embodied in form and content. Indeed, "*Pakan* (autrement)" starts with an ending, the drowning of Maïka. The story then jumps to the year 2022, when Kanena, an Anicinape woman living in Kepek (Quebec), is deeply concerned about the impacts of the recent pandemic on Indigenous people, as discrimination and racism continue to exist in public services and educational institutions. In 2042, Kanena's daughter, Nibi, is stunned by the news of her pregnancy given that she never had intercourse. She cannot get a second opinion since hospitals specific for Indigenous people were created after the pandemic—although they are staffed by Quebecers only. She cannot talk about this with her mother either, because Kanena disappeared one day: "La disparition d'une femme autochtone avait laissé la plupart des gens dans l'indifférence la plus totale" (98).[26] A year later, Nibi opens a letter from the government in which her daughter's Indian status is denied because the father is unknown. But when, in 2063, Maïka announces to her mother that she is pregnant (again, without being sexually active), Nibi's suspicions are confirmed: "L'histoire se répète, ce n'est pas une coïncidence, c'est clair" (100).[27] She explains to her daughter—in Anicinape—that in 2022, a secret government policy was instituted, in which the doctors were ordered (under penalty of disbarment) to insert into every Indigenous baby a programmed chip that assured a pregnancy within eighteen to twenty-five years of their installation. The babies born from this process also get a chip. Without a known father, the children could not be recognized by the law, releasing the government from any obligation towards them, especially economically. Here, we can draw a clear parallel to the Indian Act's regulation of status—and how it has disproportionately impacted Indigenous women[28]—as well as to the coerced and forced sterilization of Indigenous women that

is still happening to this day in Canada.[29] Furthermore, the fact that the doctors in Wylde's story are "ordered" (with a negative incentive) rather than forced shows the degree to which they are complicit: as much as they (should) want to help, they do not when they risk losing their privilege. This example of complicity asks readers to think about their own complicity in settler colonial structures. Completely overwhelmed by this revelation, Maïka starts running and ends up falling in the water near her—bringing back the readers to the beginning of the short story. But this is not *the* end, as the narrative continues towards the (re)creation of the earth: "L'île de la Tortue renaîtra, et Maïka deviendra la grand-mère de tous les êtres humains sur cette nouvelle terre" (107).[30] Then, the Creator explains to Maïka that the first Mother Earth is falling apart and that they are responsible for the next one: "Vous êtes les protecteurs de la tortue, vous appartenez à la terre et non le contraire. Dorénavant, il ne faut plus laisser le mal prendre autant de place sur son dos. Protégez la Terre mère" (108).[31] Here, the last words of Wylde's short story remind us that acting, and listening is everybody's responsibility, the settlers as well as Indigenous people.

As the story starts with an ending and ends with a beginning, the temporalities are juxtaposed in ways that demonstrate the continuity of colonialism while moving towards change—the recreation of Mother Earth. To us, this represents resurgence, as the author builds on ancestral knowledge about time and temporality to create a "new" narrative deeply embedded in a traditional Creation story. Indeed, Wylde's story embodies a conception of time that is not linear. This reminds us of what Grace Dillon, quoting Gerry William (Spallumcheen Indian Band, Enderby, British Columbia), writes about:

> the Okanagan sense of time in space-time traditions of aurality. He explains that his writing follows "the Okanagan beliefs that linear time is something from western paradigms. Time in our stories is not circular, but perhaps more in keeping with the Irish tribal traditions of the cone, where time spirals along a path which never repeats, but is also always there in the past, present and future." The space-time shifts [...] follows a spiraling trajectory through memories conveyed in the narrative (Dillon 77-8).

This is also reflected in Louis-Karl Picard-Sioui's (Wendat from Wendake) short story, as the characters travel through time and space. In "La hache et le glaive", Yahndawara' is charged with protecting the Strendu, a technology that allows both traveling through and altering time, against the *Glaive*, an all-powerful sect (39) that is trying to gain power over the machine to rule time. Created in 2124, the Strendu was an experiment that went horribly wrong: "la machine avait été aspirée par la brèche qu'elle avait elle-même générée. La surface du temps avait été fissurée" (39).[32] Yahndawara' has been running for a long time across spatiotemporal currants trying to prevent this catastrophe, to stop this system that could cause "assez de paradoxes et d'anomalies pour déchirer la toile de la réalité elle-même et briser de façon définitive le cercle sacré de l'existence" (37).[33] Here, the idea of movements across spatiotemporal currants is echoed by Diane Glancy's (Cherokee) explanation of time, which is like:

> a rubber band, stretchable, or as little loops. Millions of years can be 'kinked up and crawled over. There are wormholes you can fall down and get lost in and then come back up and move on and travel. So time is certainly not really circular, and it's certainly not linear. There are lapses and times within times, and coils, and other geometrical patterns that time can follow. It can undulate, and be wavelike, going back and forth... History is a multiplicity... [akin to] the unrolling of many scrolls... going back and retrieving what was there but has not had a voice.' (Dillon 26-7)

Yahndawara' is coming from far away, in space and in time, as she was born in the 16th century when her city was among the first to be invaded by the colonizers. As an Indigenous woman, she is a guardian of this sacred circle of life. As she comes close to succeeding in her mission, meeting general Providence, the leader of the Glaive, becomes inevitable. Their encounter illustrates the clash between two conceptions of time, as for the general, time is something controllable and the Strendu is a given right: "Bientôt, il pourrait récupérer ce qui était sien. Il pourrait corriger le passé" (45).[34] But for Yahndawara', the Strendu is an aberration that does not belong to anybody. Indeed, when Yahndawara' and the general meet, it becomes clear that you cannot solve an issue with what caused it in the first place, as the Sorcerer also affirms in the story: "On ne peut régler un problème avec l'outil qui l'a causé" (40).[35] This not only refers to the Strendu being unable to resolve the breach of time, but also of the impossibility of settler colonial logics to solve settler colonialism: there can be no decolonization without dismantling settler colonial thinking, policies, and structures, nor without Indigenous resurgence, which provides a sustainable alternative.

Conclusion

At the beginning of this article, we asked ourselves what *Wapke* teaches us through its trans-Indigenous nature as a short story collection. The ways that the authors deal with language and temporality demonstrate resistance to settler colonial structures and center Indigenous resurgence as an effective way forward. Indeed, on the one hand, *Wapke* offers a sharp critique of the devastating effects of colonialism. Despite the open instructions the authors had received, they tended to take up and criticize similar issues: colonial hegemony, government control, institutional and personal violence, land exploitation, language loss, etcetera. These critiques effectively dismantle the master's house, to borrow from Audre Lorde, in order to affect change. On the other hand, the authors move beyond a colonial framework, which is often damage-centered and recognition-based, to imaginative futures where Indigenous resurgence and resistance are central to the continuity and life of Indigenous people. The tomorrows envisioned in *Wapke* are rooted in Indigenous resurgence through the creation of alternative temporalities and realities and through the reflection on linguistic diversity often centered around Indigenous languages. In this way, bringing together fourteen authors with different backgrounds, experiences, and histories, *Wapke* offers a trans-Indigenous perspective of what the future could be.

As a trans-Indigenous wonderwork, *Wapke* teaches the reader about how Indigenous resurgence is not only rooted in language and conceptions of time and temporality, but also in place, space, (renewal of) traditions, presence, ethics, and more. Further exploration of this topic would benefit from a land-based approach reflecting on how language and temporality as parts of Indigenous resurgence inherently come from the land.

In our analysis of *Wapke*, we came to understand that Indigenous resurgence is strengthened by the trans-Indigenous as it centers Indigenous-to-Indigenous relations; the short story collection embodies Simpson's idea of a constellation of active co-resistance: "Individual stars shine in their own right and exist, grounded in their everyday renewal of Indigenous practices and in constellated relationships, meaning relationships that operate from within the grounded normativity of particular Indigenous nations, not only with other stars but also the physical world and the spiritual world. Constellations in relationship with other constellations form flight paths out of settler colonial realities into Indigeneity" (Simpson, *As We Have Always Done* 217-8). Each story shines in its own right, but read together they recreate the future "*pakan*, autrement" (Wylde 108).

Notes

1. "The first Indigenous collection of anticipation short stories in Quebec" (our translation).
2. Juxtaposition is understood broadly here as placing texts close together.
3. Marie-Andrée Gill, J.D. Kurtness and Michel Jean are Innu de Mashteuiatsh. Katia Bacon, Natasha Kanapé Fontaine, and Joséphine Bacon are Innu from Pessamit. Alyssa Jérome is Innu from Uashat Mak Mani-Utenam. Louis-Karl Picard-Sioui, Isabelle Picard, and Jean Sioui are Wendat from Wendake. Virginia Pésémapéo Bordeleau is Métis-Cree from Rapide-des-Cèdres. Cyndy Wylde is Anicinape and Atikamekw from Pikogan. Elisapie Isaac is Inuit from Salluit. Janis Ottawa is Atikamekw from Manawan.
4. *Wapke* comprises stories of writers of different generations. The younger generation includes emerging authors such as Katia Bacon and Alyssa Jérome as well as more established authors such as Natasha Kanapé Fontaine and Marie-Andrée Gill. *Wapke* also includes stories by those who are Elders in their communities such as Joséphine Bacon.
5. "I don't know what to write. French, I didn't like that. The only things I liked when we were in the village were playing hockey when we still could, playing on the console and going up to the woods" (our translation).
6. "We all wanted to ask them questions but we were also a little embarrassed, it's weird to see new people. It's like the words are stuck in your throat because your heart is beating too fast. I think they felt that too. They must have been used to just speaking their language to each other. With Simba, Jack and kukum Denise however they could speak in Atikamekw

and they understood each other very well. I could only pick up some parts of what they were saying, like a radio that is not quite tuned." (our translation)

7. "today that doesn't make sense anymore" (our translation).
8. "However, technology has not allowed us to save our mother tongue, Innu-aimun" (our translation).
9. "Keb used to be a province, Quebec, nowadays it's a free state within the United States of Kanatabe. Canada and Quebec, like other states in the world, had been renamed, either by retaking a name from one of the territory's Indigenous languages, or by going back to the origin of their name. Kanatabe (Kanata-Ahbee) means 'land of numerous villages', and Keb comes from Kebeq, "there where the river retreats' to refer to the capital, the city of Quebec" (our translation).
10. "Words are powerful though" (our translation).
11. "That means that there are others who will come" (our translation).
12. "The knowledge would be transmitted. [...] Over the years, children of all possible shades of the human race animated the houses and the big cosmopolitan village. They spoke several languages at once, mixing words, thus inventing a unified language, just as they would in time create a humanity without races" (our translation).
13. "The title, *Wapke*, an Atikamekw word meaning tomorrow or future, is not insignificant under the circumstances and represents a strong message" (our translation).
14. "La pandémie était aussi un terreau fertile pour imaginer le pire comme le meilleur" [The pandemic provided also fertile ground to imagine the worst as well as the best] (Yvon, our translation).
15. "it's a little discouraging that we all project ourselves like that" (our translation); "I wanted us to be the winners in history" (our translation, emphasis added).
16. "'I don't want to be an Anicinape anymore,' he says to himself. Then he regrets; it is insane to want to change identity, might as well die." (our translation)
17. In *Red Skin, White Masks*, Dene scholar Glen Coulthard argues that a politics of recognition does not challenge the Canadian state; it only upholds current power relations. A politics of recognition refers to the range of recognition strategies and models that try to 'reconcile' Indigenous assertions for nationhood and self-determination with(in) settler state sovereignty. Coulthard argues that instead of creating mutual recognition and reciprocity, a politics of recognition only serves to uphold and reproduce colonialist, racist, patriarchal state power that Indigenous peoples sought to transcend.
18. Everything could be heard, but one barrier remained for the officials of the current regime: the Indigenous languages. Nibi had made a point of passing on her language to Maïka. All the Indigenous people of her generation who had become parents had done the same. The revitalization of identity was a driving force, but it was carried out in the shadows so as

not to incur the wrath of the state. Nibi herself had to use many tricks to keep her mother tongue. Born to parents for whom residential schools had targeted the destruction of Indigenous identity by forbidding them the use of their language, Nibi had vowed to honour her ancestors and perpetuate her own. She had managed to keep Anicinape alive with her daughter, and now the confidentiality it allowed would help her preserve something equally vital. (…) The two women walk along the water's edge, grateful that they have little chance of being heard or, at least, understood. Speaking Anicinape, Nibi adds an obstruction that reassures her. Suddenly, she stops and looks Maïka right in the eyes. (our translation).

19. Indeed, the settlers rationalized their asserted right to the land, its resources, and its history through the myth of "terra nullius—the racist legal fiction that declared Indigenous peoples too "primitive" to bear rights to land and sovereignty when they first encountered European powers on the continent, thus rendering their territories legally "empty" and therefore open for colonial settlement and development" (Coulthard 175).
20. "They stayed on the territory they pretended to have discovered" (our translation).
21. "For the horrors of a time to be forgotten to resurrect" (our translation).
22. For more information about the forced removal of Indigenous children, see *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future*. Summary of the Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. 2015.
23. For more information on this matter, see Mosby, Ian. "Administering Colonial Science: Nutrition Research and Human Biomedical Experimentation in Aboriginal Communities and Residential Schools, 1942–1952". *Histoire sociale / Social History*, vol. 46, no. 1, 2013, pp. 145-172.
24. "In the early 2000s, governments were talking about forgiveness and reconciliation with Indigenous peoples. At the dawn of 2270, thirty-six years after the epidemic began, Indigenous people are still in the grip of prejudice and systemic racism. Almost forty years of living with the new virus. Politicians, conspiracy theorists and the media brazenly accuse the Wendat Nation of witchcraft. They claim that shamans have cast a spell on Canadians to avenge their inaction after several studies, numerous government reports and promises that have gone unheeded. Promises that were supposed to correct the injustices committed against First Nations" (our translation).
25. In "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native", Patrick Wolfe indeed asserts that settler colonialism is a structure not an event.
26. "The disappearance of an Indigenous woman had left most people in total indifference" (our translation). This points to the missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls in Canada. See, for example, National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. *Reclaiming Power and Place: Executive Summary of the Final Report*, 2019, available at https://www.mmiwg-ffada.ca/final-report/.
27. "History repeats itself, it's no coincidence, that's for sure" (our translation).

28. For a detailed analysis of how Indigenous women were disproportionately affected by the Indian Act, see, for example, Barker, Joanne. "Gender, Sovereignty, Rights: Native Women's Activism against State Inequality and Violence in Canada." *American Quarterly* vol. 60, no. 2, 2008, pp. 259-266.
29. See Delphine Jung. "'Je ne me sentais plus femme', raconte une Autochtone stérilisée malgré elle." Radio Canada: Espaces Autochtones, March 24, 2021, https://ici.radio-canada.ca/espaces-autochtones/1779442/ligature-trompes-femmes-premieres-nations-sterilisation (accessed August 15, 2021); Boyer, Yvonne and. Judith Bartlett. "External Review: Tubal Ligation in the Saskatoon Health Region: The Lived Experience of Aboriginal Women." July 22, 2017, https://www.saskatoonhealthregion.ca/DocumentsInternal/Tubal_Ligation_intheSaskatoonHealthRegion_the_Lived_Experience_of_Aboriginal_Women_BoyerandBartlett_July_22_2017.pdf.
30. "Turtle's Island will be reborn, and Maïka will become the grandmother of all human beings on this new land" (our translation).
31. "You are the protectors of the turtle, you belong to the earth and not the other way around. From now on, you must not let evil take up so much space on your back. Protect Mother Earth" (our translation).
32. "the machine had been sucked in by the breach it had itself generated. The surface of time had been breached" (our translation).
33. "enough paradoxes and anomalies to tear the fabric of reality itself and definitively break the sacred circle of existence" (our translation).
34. "Soon, he could reclaim what was his. He could rectify the past" (our translation).
35. "You can't fix a problem with the tool that caused it" (our translation).

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Decolonizing the Post-Apocalyptic Landscape: Narratives of Fear, Hope, and Resilience in the Indigenous Arctic

Kelsey Lee

Introduction

At first glance, the circumpolar Arctic possesses many characteristics that seem apt to be tropified in apocalyptic, post-apocalyptic, and/or horror speculative cinema and literary fictions. Among these characteristics are a typically sparse human population, challenging or even deadly climatic and environmental conditions, potentially dangerous wildlife, and limited access to other parts of the world in terms of geography and, in some cases, technology (Hansson). Widely perceived as inhospitable by those who are unaccustomed to circumpolar Arctic territories (as well as the polar regions), remotely located tundra and icescapes have served as recurring backdrops for survival and Gothic horror since the 19th century, from Samuel Taylor Coleridge's *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* (1798) to H.P. Lovecraft's *At the Mountains of Madness* (1936). In these texts (notably, by non-Indigenous authors), the frozen Arctic is generally typified in a couple of different ways. The circumpolar or polar regions often serve as hazardous settings within which predominantly male, foreign explorers demonstrate their heroism and capacity for survival against insurmountable odds (Lewis-Jones). On the other hand, particularly in survival horror and in related sub-genres, the Arctic is often represented as a place that can bring out the worst inclinations of mankind as otherwise honorable characters succumb to madness, violence, or cannibalism amidst the chilling terror and isolation of the frozen North (Craciun). In fact, during the Victorian era, these tropes were so prevalent that a popular proto-genre of literature emerged known as the "Polar Gothic," in which the Arctic and polar regions were popularized in fictions like Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* as spaces of fear. Here the 19th century human desire for mastery over his environment often went catastrophically awry (Bowers).

These characterizations of the Arctic and Antarctic as liminal spaces within which human survival tales and colonialist dramas play out, of course, have been applied primarily to stories featuring non-Indigenous explorers, scientists, and adventurers (Lam). As Hansson maintains, these tropes rely heavily on "conventional ideas of the Arctic as an empty space," and concomitantly as a "natural rather than a social world" (69). However, in fiction penned by those peoples indigenous to the circumpolar Arctic territories, these tundra regions are characterized quite differently. Rather than being represented as inhospitable, stark, or barren, in Indigenous Arctic fiction the region is characterized as a social and cultural landscape lavishly occupied by spirits, legends, life, and culture. Further, rather than being presented as victims of the conditions of a fundamentally hostile territory, Indigenous characters written by Indigenous authors are often strategic, resourceful, and innovative, with deeply rooted familial and spiritual connections

to their land that allow them to survive and thrive in potentially difficult environments or even amidst horrific circumstances.

In this article, I will be focusing on the circumpolar Arctic and near-Arctic as settings for post-apocalyptic horror fiction written by Native and First Nations authors. I will emphasize that, while the themes of dread and terror that distinguish these kinds of speculative fictions are still ubiquitous throughout their texts, Indigenous authors often approach representations of their land and their people in a way that emphasizes resilience drawn from the continuance of cultural tradition, adaptability, and active "survivance" (as coined by Gerald Vizenor). Thus, Indigenous styles of post-apocalyptic and/or survival horror literatures set in the Arctic or near-Arcticstand in stark contrast to the corpus of similar texts by non-Indigenous authors. As I will elucidate through analyses of the novel *Moon of the Crusted Snow* by Waubgeshig Rice (Wasauksing Nation) and a short story from *Taaqtumi: An Anthology of Arctic Horror Stories*, "Wheetago War II: Summoners" by Richard Van Camp (Tłı̨chǫ Nation), horror elements in Indigenous fictions arise amidst a complex network of culturally specific themes and motifs. These elements will often blend frightening characters from mythology and folklore with contemporary issues that continue to impact First Nations and Native populations including colonialism, displacement, and environmental degradation and exploitation, among others. In other words, the fear does not necessarily arise from the isolation and austerity of the Arctic environment; it arises principally from settler colonial issues *impacting* the Arctic, its cultures, and its peoples.

I will also note here that I am concentrating thematically on the notion of apocalypse-as-horror in this article. This is because apocalypse serves as a particularly apt metaphor in an Indigenous context. In the words of Grace Dillon, editor of *Walking the Clouds: An Anthology of Indigenous Science Fiction*, "it is almost commonplace to think that the Native Apocalypse... has already taken place" (Dillon 8). More specifically, I will be focusing on the ways in which Indigenous authors use apocalypse as an allegory for the colonization and brutalization of Indigenous peoples by settlers and/or outsiders. As Weaver puts it, "the apocalyptic paradigm of revelation and disaster can work effectively to interrogate the history of colonization and relations between white and [Indigenous peoples] and propose spaces of hope for the future" (100). Indeed, I will explore the ways in which the Indigenous literary use of apocalypse-as-horror utilizes the common literary horror themes of apprehension and fear while concomitantly investigating the ways in which apocalypse allows for possibilities for survival, renewal, and the continuance of Indigenous resilience.

Moon of the Crusted Snow

Moon of the Crusted Snow by Waubgeshig Rice is a post-apocalyptic horror novel set on a fictional Anishinaabe reservation in the Canadian North. The people of this particular reservation have been displaced from their native homeland in the South because of assimilatory and colonial policies in Canada; nevertheless, they have managed to survive and thrive in the remote North. Indeed, Rice makes it clear that the "proud rez lifer[s]" enjoy a "comfort and familiarity [in their]

community," and that they are able to navigate deftly through the variable obstacles inherent to life in a relatively isolated far Northern community (20). Many of those challenges are environmental and cyclical. For example, in the beginning of the novel, our protagonist Evan Whitesky is preparing for what he describes as the "great annual test," the near-Arctic winter (Rice 13):

> In the coming weeks, the temperature would drop… and the snow and ice would be with them for six months. Like people in many other Northern reserves, they would be isolated by the long, unforgiving season, confined to a small radius around the village only as far as the snowmobile's half tank of gas (Rice 11).

Indeed, Rice does not shy away from conveying how difficult the winter can be for this community. On the other hand, the "great annual test" is presented as something Evan and his community are well-equipped to weather (Rice 13). In fact, Evan maintains that during the frozen winter he feels "more relaxed in some ways, falling into the natural rhythm of the days and the tasks that [need] to be done" (72). Among these tasks is, perhaps most significantly, hunting to provide sustenance for his partner and two children throughout the long winter months. The novel opens with Evan slaying a moose, after which he offers a prayer of reverence and gratitude for the life he has taken in accordance with the Anishinaabe ethos:

> 'Gchi-manidoo,' he said aloud, 'Great spirit, today I say miigwech for the life you have given us….' Evan expressed thanks for the good life he was trying to lead… He finished his prayer with a resounding, solitary miigwech before putting the tobacco on the ground in front of the moose. This was his offering of gratitude to the Creator and Mother Earth for allowing him to take this life. As he took from the Earth, he gave back. It was the Anishinaabe way, as he understood it (Rice 5).

Here the reader is offered some insight into what Aamold describes as the "unseen" landscape of the Arctic, that which is rich with Indigenous values, aesthetics, and spiritual cosmologies (85). Evan's hunting tactics and principles offer a glimpse into the complex cultural and spiritual relationships that bond the Anishinaabe people, the land they occupy, and the non-human lives that inhabit the Northern territories. Immediately, we have established that Evan has a profound relationship with the cultural landscape of the Indigenous near-Arctic, but he also exhibits a keen understanding of, mastery over, and intimate familiarity with his far Northern home.

Rice makes clear many of the challenges unique to living in a small, relatively isolated, near-Arctic community in Northern Canada. For example, it is established that the reservation has relatively limited and sporadic access to technologies and resources that are more abundant down South. One of the first indicators that something is going wrong down in the more populated southern territories of Canada happens early in the novel when cell service is unexpectedly terminated on the reservation. However, as Evan reminds the reader, "cell service outages were common. The cell tower had gone up only a few years before, when the community was finally connected to the hydro grid" (Rice 14). For this community, cell service is more of a recent luxury than a necessity. Many reservation residents confirm lightheartedly that the "moccasin telegraph"

will do the job of transmitting essential news (22). We are immediately presented with a pervasive sense of isolation, but also keen self-sufficiency among the "rez lifers" (20).

Nevertheless, concern rises in this Anishinaabe community as television, phone service, and Internet all go down at once. After all, these modalities of communication constitute their only connection to the more densely populated and resource-abundant South. Further, they receive diesel from the southern regions, so these connections are somewhat critical. As questions and apprehensions arise among the reservation residents, their Chief, Terry, calls a meeting to discuss a strategic plan for community safety. Before the meeting commences, Evan assists an Elder, Aileen, in conducting a prayer and a smudge. This action "[represents] a cleansing of the spirit, and the ceremony [is] believed to clear the air of negativity" (Rice 53). While once forbidden by the church and outlawed by the government, Rice explains, cleansing ceremonies such as these were kept alive by "people like Aileen, her parents, and a few others [who] had kept the old ways a secret… even when they were stolen from their families to endure forced and often violent assimilation at church-run residential schools far away from their homes" (53). Described as "soothing" and "calming" for the attendees, the smudging ceremony represents one of many instances in which Evan and others seek comfort and strength in their culture and tradition, even against a backcloth of apprehension and adversity (Rice 52).

The reader begins to understand how truly dire the situation is when two young college students from the reservation, Kevin and Nick, escape from their university lodging in the South and return to the reservation via snowmobile to attend to their families and update their community. During the subsequent reservation meeting, Nick explains to his community that, like Evan, neither he nor Kevin were too alarmed when a blackout hit their school. However, they explain that panic escalated further at their university as it became clear that power, food, water, heating, phone and Internet service, and all other modern amenities were failing to return. When the first student starved and died alone in his dormitory, violent riots ensued, indicating to Kevin and Nick that they needed to escape and return to the reservation. Finally, the reader understands after a long, measured build-up that the situation—in Canada at least—is apocalyptic.

With that being said, over the next four chapters or so, Evan and the other members of this Anishinaabe community endure their seemingly apocalyptic circumstances in relative peace. Rice indicates to his reader that the lack of panic on the reservation emerges from a very particular cultural context. He emphasizes that adherence to Indigenous values and ways of living coupled with a longstanding history of active survival and adaptability have allowed the Anishinaabe people to endure and thrive in the midst of apparently insurmountable adversity:

> Despite the hardship and tragedy that made up a significant part of this First Nation's legacy, the Anishinaabe spirit of the community generally prevailed. There was no panic on the night of this first blizzard, although there had been confusion in the days leading up to it. Survival had always been an integral part of their culture. It was their history. The skills they needed to persevere in this northern terrain, far from their original homeland

> farther south, were proud knowledge held close throughout the decades of imposed adversity (Rice 48).

It is not until an outsider arrives from the South that the true horror materializes in *Moon of the Crusted Snow*. A colossal traveler called Justin Scott comes to the reservation, having followed Kevin and Nick's tracks via snowmobile. He is an imposing figure, a massive white man dressed in all black, with a "wide, bald dome," "bulbous nose," and "square jaw" (Rice 101). The man immediately makes an argument for his semi-permanent presence on the reservation: "'I can help provide for your community. I'm a survivalist. I know how to live on this land without the comforts and luxuries people in the South have become too dependent on. I know all about emergency management'" (107). Ironically—and patronizingly—he continues: "I can help your people adapt to this situation" (107). Evan is immediately put off by Scott's excessive bravado and condescension, but Chief Terry tentatively accepts Scott as a member of the community as long as he contributes to the well-being of the collective.

Scott starts causing problems on the reservation almost immediately, with deadly consequences. For example, one evening Evan finds him inappropriately cavorting with many of the younger community members at a house party, during which alcohol—a pervasive taboo in this Indigenous community—is flowing in abundance. The next morning, two young women who were at the party are found frozen to death. The situation only escalates further when three more non-Indigenous strangers arrive via snowmobile, having followed Scott's trail. Scott promptly shoots one of them after he rushes Chief Terry in a wild, starved panic. "'There'll be more coming, Terry,'" Scott tells the Chief, "'We gotta make a stand'" (Rice 141). Evan observes that Scott is covetous of power and has already made allies to that effect. At the same time, paranoia and, tragically, suicide rates are on the rise on the reservation.

The quiet, creeping horror in *Moon of the Crusted Snow* ascends to a climax as it is ultimately revealed that Scott has begun to cannibalize the dead. Aside from the general, conceptual dreadfulness of human cannibalism, Scott's flesh-eating serves as a source of terror that derives from a very specific cultural context in *Moon of the Crusted Snow*. Rice presents Scott as, in his own words, an "allegory for colonialism" through the cultural metaphor of the Windigo, a frightening cannibalistic creature in many Indigenous stories (Rice). In the Anishinaabe mythos, the Windigo is often described as a human who has morphed into a flesh-eating monster, having succumbed to the vices of spiritual weakness and greed (Smallman). Rice states:

> …the Windigo isn't explicitly discussed in the story itself—only hinted at in a few subtle ways. It's a figure in Anishinaabe and Cree stories that exploits communities at their weakest during the wintertime… As kids in our community, we learned that Windigo stories were told to warn people from cannibalizing one another and succumbing to evil and weakness in winter (Rice).

Here I return to an idea presented at the beginning of this article. Specifically, in non-Indigenous survival horror and/or post-apocalyptic literature set in the Arctic, readers often

observe cannibalism used as a literary device representative of the "devastating effects of the icescape on the minds and bodies of foreign explorers" (Lam 196). This trope is especially relevant in the mythos of Canada's Arctic North, the location of perhaps the most notorious example of (alleged, but highly likely) cannibalism in the nation's history: the doomed expedition of Sir John Franklin, who set sail from Greenhithe, England with his crew on 19 May 1845 (HMS *Erebus* and the HMS *Terror*) on an ill-fated expedition to Baffin Bay (McCorristine). According to Dr. John Rae's (October 1854) historical claims, much to the horror of the Inuit people, Franklin's stranded crew members began to cannibalize each other in a tumult of madness and desperate starvation (Keenleyside et al). While this was a real event, the mystery and horror of the Franklin expedition has become almost a mythological part of Canada's history and has served inspiration for many Canadian novels (such as Rudy Wiebe's *A Discovery of Strangers*) and short stories (Margaret Atwood's "The Age of Lead").

Conversely, in Indigenous literatures such as *Moon of the Crusted Snow*, cannibalism instead serves as a "a metaphor for the imperial consumption of lands and bodies, implying that colonial conquest leaves its lasting marks on the bodies of those who live in the Arctic, as well as those who came to claim it" (Lam 196). In Rice's novel, Justin Scott represents colonialism-as-cannibalism. He is illustrative of the material consumption of Indigenous lands, resources, and bodies, but also the defilement and desecration of Indigenous values. Indeed, Scott's disregard for life and disrespect for the legacies of Indigenous lives lost stands in stark contrast to Anishinaabe values, which have been repeatedly and clearly articulated in the novel through the act of hunting; hunters always give thanks for the life that has passed on, and it is plainly established that they must never take more than what is necessary ["It's not the Anishinaabe way to take more than you need," explains Jeff, Evan's friend, to Scott during a hunting mission (Rice 125)]." Scott, in contrast, is presented as a pragmatic, unscrupulous, power-seeking survivalist whose primary aim is to preserve his own life and satisfy his appetite at any cost. Like the cannibalistic Windigo, Scott is an insidious, sinister figure who takes advantage of the vulnerability of an Indigenous community under unusually challenging circumstances.

Scott represents an additional dimension to the colonialism metaphor in an Indigenous context; specifically, he signifies colonialism-as-apocalypse. In *Moon of the Crusted Snow*, the termination of cellular services, internet, radio, and other amenities signals the commencement of a widespread "apocalypse," but it is not the end of the "civilized" world as one knows it that truly brings terror for our First Nations characters. This is because, for Indigenous peoples, the "apocalypse" has already happened, and has been managed and dealt with repeatedly throughout history. During a private discussion between Evan and the Elder Aileen, the reader is provided some insight into what the "end of the world" means to this First Nations community. To note first, Aileen maintains that there is no such translation for the term "apocalypse" in their language. "'Yes, apocalypse!'" she declares, "'What a silly word. I can tell you there's no word like that in Ojibwe'" (Rice 149). She continues:

> 'The world isn't ending. Our world isn't ending. It already ended. It ended when the Zhaagnaash [colonial settlers] came into our original home down south on that bay and took it from us. That was our world. When the Zhaagnaash cut down all the trees and fished all the fish and forced us out of there, that's when our world ended. They made us come all the way up here. This is not our homeland! But we had to adapt and luckily we already knew how to hunt and live on the land' (Rice 149).

"'Yes, apocalypse,'" she says, "'We've had that over and over. But we always survived. We're still here. And we'll still be here, even if the power and the radios don't come back on…'" (Rice 150). Indeed, the arrival of Justin Scott and his ghastly actions are directly reflective of the consumption, abuses, and defilement of Indigenous bodies and values that are part and parcel of settler colonialism. However, as Aileen maintains, Indigenous peoples have already encountered these atrocities and injustices through forced, often violent, assimilation and other aggressive colonial policies. While they have signified the end of a certain way of living for their communities, Indigenous peoples have nevertheless actively—and repeatedly—survived, adapted, and endured.

At the end of *Moon of the Crusted Snow*, Evan and two of his friends are compelled to take Scott down in a violent final face-off. In the epilogue, we follow Nicole as she loads her children and her belongings in their truck to meet with Evan, who has been scouring for new territories to settle with a few companions. "There was no use staying somewhere that had become so tragic," Rice explains (211). Further, "the collapse of the white man's modern systems…withered the Anishinaabeg here. But they refused to wither completely, and a core of dedicated people had worked tirelessly to create their own settlement away from this town" (Rice 212). Finally, Nicole, Evan, and a few other survivors "begin a new life nestled deep in the heart of Anishinaabe territory" further South (213). *Though Moon of the Crusted Snow* ascends to a violent and disturbing climax, the conclusion provides space for hope and revitalization for this Indigenous community. Though the "white man's apocalypse" has deeply disadvantaged the people of this reservation, they continue on as they always have, creating new possibilities for their collective future, while rooting their existences in the continuance of Indigenous values, knowledge, and tradition.

Wheetago War II: Summoners

"Wheetago War II: Summoners" by Richard Van Camp is the third short story installment in *Taaqtumi: An Anthology of Arctic Horror Stories*, which is comprised almost entirely of contemporary tales of Arctic terror written by Indigenous authors. In Wheetago War II, we follow a nameless narrator as he guards a bush school field trip through a perilous landscape during a near-future in which monstrous creatures have been awakened by global environmental degradation and misuse. These creatures are called "Wheetago," or "Body Eaters," and are loosely analogous to the legend of the Windigo. These barbarous beasts freeze humans with their petrifying screams and suck the brains out of the victims through their eyes while they are frozen, subsequently possessing and then consuming their bodies. While these beings eat adults, it is

revealed that they abduct children: "And why do they want our children? You ever think of that? It ain't killing. It's something more. Something…for their rituals. We seen their altars out there on the land. Some of our scouts have seen them smudging with human hair" (Van Camp 32).

Despite the ominous premise, it is made clear in "Wheetago War II" that this Inuit community has continued to live effectively off their land and maintain their cultural traditions even against a post-apocalyptic backcloth. Our nameless narrator explains that bush schools have been established in the community to teach children how to survive and manage their environment efficiently. For safety, each child embarks on expeditions with Silencer rifles around their chests along with brightly colored life jackets. Further, the narrator explains, "Each [child] was marked in the way of the walrus or the caribou: this signified if they were guardians of the land or the sea" (Van Camp 21). I suggest that this signification indicates a perpetuation of Indigenous ways of teaching in terms of practically and spiritually sound environmental ethos, which overwhelmingly emphasizes responsibility and guardianship in relationship to the land in the Indigenous lifeworld (Kawagley). Concomitantly, the narrator demonstrates a keen affection and appreciation for his Arctic environment even amidst a series of circumstances that ought to make the landscape seem overwhelmingly threatening: "It was a beautiful day," the narrator states as he leads a group of children into the wilderness. "The leaves were yellow, gold. Frost had been on the grass just that morning. No wind. You could hear for miles" (Van Camp 24). Like Evan in *Moon of the Crusted Snow*, the narrator of "Wheetago War II" sees beauty through brutality in the frozen tundra, an ability that I suggest is heavily informed by Indigenous values and land relations.

"Wheetago War II" also emphasizes storytelling as a vitally important way of Indigenous tutelage (Barnhardt & Kawagley). For example, a teacher called Norma cites an Inuit legend to the children on their trip: "A long time ago, there were Na acho, the giant ones… See that mountain? Look along the sides. That was all scraped smooth by giant beavers as they made their way south for war" (22). Additionally, much like in *Moon of the Crusted Snow*, the characters in "Wheetago War II" adhere to the Inuit way of honoring the dead. The children, for example, are taught to harvest porcupine quills ethically and with respect for the deceased being:

> [Norma]…motioned for us all to approach the body of a dead porcupine as she pulled on thick gloves… 'I saw this little one yesterday when we were picking berries. We drop tobacco in honor of this little life's passing' …So the teachers and students dropped tobacco and offered it to the earth and to our mother (Van Camp 23).

Like in *Moon of the Crusted Snow*, in "Wheetago War II" there is much to be found in the "unseen" spiritual and cultural landscapes of the Indigenous Arctic North through the actions and values of its characters (Aamold 85). Despite the apocalyptic conditions rendered upon the landscape, the characters of "Wheetago War II" use their Arctic environment to find meaning and utility, as well as gratitude. As Norma further explains during the bush school field trip, "Today... we give thanks for all we have. My husband's birthday is soon approaching, and I want to make him new moccasins...you can use porcupine quills to decorate just about anything if you know

what to do (Van Camp 23)." But tragically, as Norma bends down to conscientiously harvest the porcupine quills, it is revealed that a Wheetago has possessed the body of the dead animal. The creature attacks Norma, seizing possession of her body and snapping her spine in half. The narrator and other guards swiftly pursue the Wheetago, shooting it with their Silencers while attempting to protect the group of children from abduction. It is a gruesome scene, resulting in several disappeared children and countless adult bodies ripped apart and devoured.

In "Wheetago War II," our narrator elucidates a theory regarding the events and circumstances that caused the Wheetago to emerge to his nameless listener. Specifically, he refers to pervasive environmental degradation and resource exploitation and overpopulation resulting in climatic warming:

> Let me think about this: they say that Earth had seven billion humans before the Wheetago returned, right? I think that was their magic number. I think they warmed the world and unthawed themselves from whatever Hell they came from. I think seven billion was the magic number for the food they'd need to make the world maggoty with them and their kind (Van Camp 30).

The narrator of "Wheetago War II" offers a critique of industrialization in excess while the events of the story champion the sustainability of Indigenous ways of caring for the environment, which inform their relationship to the land. Despite the intensely graphic nature of this story, the narrator of "Wheetago War II" can't seem to help but hope: "I think if I make it, I'm gonna witness an answer to all our prayers," he asserts (Van Camp 30). He continues, "…we have to take back our kingdom. But, first things first, we have to find our children" (Van Camp 33). It is heavily implied that the resilience of his Indigenous community and its collective values are part of what provides him with this courage and resolution: "The Outpost was growing. Again, we had hope. Strength in numbers" (Van Camp 25). Much like in *Moon of the Crusted Snow*, the apocalypse described in "Wheetago War II" often results in brutality and violence, but also provides a discursive and actionable place for the resilience of Indigenous peoples, whose traditions and community values endure while much of the rest of the world dramatically changes or even perishes. Further, I suggest that the characters of "Wheetago War II" demonstrably ground the root of their survivance in community land relations; rather than being solely apocalyptic and desolate, the Indigenous Arctic as depicted in this short story maintain their collective values, eco-folklore, and environmental ethos, both drawing out and offering life and character to the Arctic landscape.

Conclusion

In the corpus of global literature thematizing "Indigenous issues" or centralizing/utilizing Indigenous characters, outsiders' literary voices have been historically paramount. This discrepancy has, in recent years, given rise to what has been described as an "Own Voices" movement, which attempts to decolonize the literary sphere by championing the works of Indigenous writers so that Native and First Nations communities may enjoy ownership over their own stories and their own portrayals in both fiction and non-fiction (Jensen 2020). This

movement is important for several reasons; first, Own Voices novels and short stories allow Indigenous writers to rectify stereotypes and humanize the Native experience through narrative. Further, Indigenous storytelling is essential for the survival of Native and First Nations ethos and cosmologies, and, most relevantly for the purposes of this paper, values regarding land relations, which critically underpin Native systems of ethics. *Moon of the Crusted Snow* and "Wheetago War II" serve as critical examples of Own Voices fictions that champion the survival of Indigenous environmental ethics and values through a very specific lens – through the post-apocalyptic horror narrative – and through very specific settings – the near-Arctic and Arctic North. Indeed, in both of these texts, the characters exemplify Indigenous resilience and active survivance through the maintenance of Native values and land relations, lending social, ethical, spiritual, and cultural character to a tundra environment that has been historically portrayed as frightening, barren, and desolate by outsider novelists. In this way, I suggest that Own Voices literature possesses the opportunity to portray Indigenous characters empathetically, but also to portray Indigenous environments and landscapes with greater depth and complexity.

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The Pursuit of Rhetorical Sovereignty in Indigenous Futurisms

Jesse Cohn

> The greatest technical problem facing the writer of scientific fiction is that of securing belief.
>
> –James O. Bailey, *Pilgrims Through Space and Time*, 203.

> Imagining potential futures, or alternative worlds in any time, is not merely an exercise of imagining; I assert it as an act of what Scott Lyons calls rhetorical sovereignty…
>
> –Chelsea M. Vowel, *Where No Michif Has Gone Before*, 10.

I write this from Cession 180, the swath of so-called Northwestern Indiana from which the Neshnabék (Potawatomi) were expelled by force of arms not quite two centuries ago; I write as a settler with insufficient knowledge of Indigenous histories and cultures, an academic with much to learn. I hope not to have misrepresented the Cherokee, Ojibwe, Ohkay-Owingeh, Métis, Nishnaabeg, Dene, and Apache persons and peoples spoken of here. In view of a long history of struggles for sovereignty, I am propelled into thought by the phenomenon—both "new" and "not so new" (Dillon 2)—of Indigenous peoples reaching for the cultural "toolkit" (Doctorow) of science fiction, fantasy, and horror, fields in which they have been historically unwelcome. My sense is that while the very genre structures comprising the "toolkit" are also a "structure of settlement" (Warburton 34), the rhetoric of the fantastic affords them tools with which to pursue sovereignty.

Science fiction, writes Darko Suvin, is "*a literary genre whose necessary and sufficient conditions are the presence and interaction of estrangement and cognition, and whose main formal device is an imaginative framework alternative to the author's empirical environment*" (7-8). This influential definition, excluding fantasy and horror as inferior forms, has been contested on several grounds, not the least of which concerns its somewhat naïve empiricism. The question of who determines what "the author's empirical environment" is, and therefore what is "strange" to it, becomes even more difficult in a settler colonial context, where colonial accounts of empirical truth are imposed over and against the accounts given by Indigenous people. All of this complicates our very understanding of what counts as science fiction at all. To give just one example, in Kai Minosh Pyle's (Métis/Baawiting Nishnaabe) "How to Survive the Apocalypse for Native Girls" (2020), we are told the following explanatory story about how the apocalypse in question came to be:

> We call that time the hungry years not just because people often went without enough food, but also because there was often another kind of hunger. The kind of hunger that causes people to do terrible things: wiindigo hunger.… Wiindigoog are more than just

> cannibals. They are possessed by a hunger that only increases every time they try to fill it. That hunger can be for anything—food, drugs, sex, love, but most of all, power. (85)

Why does violently antisocial behavior ("terrible things") need an explanation beyond ordinary hunger? Why are Wiindigoog an explanation rather than a thing-to-be-explained? These questions are perhaps better formulated as "for whom": for whom is a complete breakdown of social norms in times of material want the expected outcome? For whom are Wiindigoog—once-human monsters with hearts of ice—simply another item to be found among an inventory of "the furniture of the universe" (Bensusan and Ribeiro Cardoso 287[1])? It is tempting to answer that a certain group, the "kinship-based" Northern Algonquians (a linguistic/cultural group which includes Pyle's Nishnaabe family), is the collective subject for whom the Wiindigoog are a given, and that members of non-"kinship-based" societies, "modern" societies in which the social fabric is already rather tenuous, are the ones who are ready to accept the premise of social "apocalypse" without much further explanation. The late settler anthropologist David Graeber cautions against such an easy compartmentalization (51-53); it is quite possible one might encounter Nishnaabeg who regard Wiindigoog as mere legend or settlers who don't find post-apocalyptic Mad Max scenarios credible. If it is not so easy to determine the whoms in question for either case, it is clearer that we are dealing with some fundamental questions about what counts as an "alternative" framework—in other words, a "heterocosm" (Stableford) or "secondary world" (Wolf)—and perhaps more importantly, what is the nature of the "primary world" in which the author and the readers are situated, of "reality" as such.

Like perhaps most definitions of interest, Suvin's definition of SF is an attempt to set the terms for all future discussion of its subject—a largely successful attempt, in fact; even the micro-genre of critiques of Suvin bears ironic witness to the persuasiveness of its rhetoric. Scott Lyons speaks of a "rhetorical imperialism" which consists in "the ability of dominant powers to assert control of others by setting the terms of debate," for "he who sets the terms sets the limits" (452). In contrast, Lyons defines "rhetorical sovereignty" as "the inherent right and ability of *peoples* to determine their own communicative needs and desires," to exercise control over the parameters of the discourses in which they are involved (449). Where SF is concerned, Suvin has set the parameters of discussion in ways that immediately problematize a good deal of Indigenous futurist writing, in so far as Indigenous futurists often make reference not only to the future but to "old things that rumbled under the surface of the world," as Adam Garnet Jones (Cree/Métis/Danish, 2020) puts it (41), often placing such pieces of ontological furniture as the Wiindigoog, ghosts, and spirits of all kinds on the same metaphysical ground as the more common furnishings of science fiction. The place that SF reserves for scientific knowledge as explanatory principle is shared by the wisdom of grandmothers, by oral traditions and visions. As Blaire Topash-Caldwell summarizes: "Indigenous science fiction privileges autochthonous, localized, and historically situated knowledge systems instead of Western science with its ties to the Enlightenment in Europe" (46). For Suvin, this would place these works in the category of the "subliterature of mystification," presenting

"estrangement" without the rational, scientifically-grounded, materialist character of "cognition" (8-9).

My intention here is not to defend the claim of Indigenous futurisms to be considered as part of the genre of science fiction (or fantasy or horror, for that matter); rather, I want to look at how these futurisms have pushed not only at genre boundaries but also at ontological and epistemological boundaries. In particular, to borrow Farah Mendlesohn's question, I want to see how this kind of transgression of colonial borders is effected *rhetorically*—how Indigenous futurist writers persuade skeptical readers from both settler and Native communities to "accept as normal" accounts of things which, to readers with cognitivist biases, appear "fantastical." In short, I want to investigate how Indigenous futurist writings strive to assert their rhetorical sovereignty.

Rhetorics of Incredulity

> The keenest pleasures of satire may be the moments at which one *dis*believes — keenly, explicitly, and acutely.
>
> –Joanna Russ, *To Write Like a Woman*, 18.

One of the most common rhetorical strategies employed by Indigenous futurists appears to sidestep questions of truth and reality altogether by what I will call *rhetorics of incredulity*, strategies such as satire and irony that serve to produce disbelief. As Kristina Baudemann notes, "the comic… is an often-overlooked structuring principle in North American Indigenous literatures" (84). Trickster figures such as the Cherokees' Jistu, a rabbit who is always disguising himself as other animals to make mischief, personify this humorous streak. Drew Hayden Taylor's (Cherokee) "Take Us to Your Chief" (2016) adopts the guise of settler SF while also undercutting its tropes in staging the encounter of benevolent aliens, the Kaaw Wiyaa, with a group of Ojibwe men on the rez, Teddy, Tarzan, and Cheemo—just three buddies intent on quietly sitting on couches, fishing and drinking beer. Their attitude toward the sudden arrival of extraterrestrials is not characterized by the "sense of wonder" canonized by settler SF, nor do their Ojibwe identities supply them with profound thoughts or words to match the solemnity of the occasion: one wonders whether the aliens' unearthly appearance "must freak the girls out," while another is reminded that he "[hasn't] had calamari in a long time," and a third ponders "[whether] that thing with calamari arms had farted" (140). The Chief to whose office the Kaaw Wiyaa are ultimately led is just a minor tribal bureaucrat, beneficiary of a "luxurious band office salar[y]," for whom the aliens constitute an unwanted hassle: he briefly wonders "if this was how the Beothuk and Mi'kmaq chiefs felt five hundred years ago," but soon concludes that "[h]e'd better do something to get this thing out of the building before it triggered any lawsuits" (142-43). Hastily appointed as cultural ambassadors from Earth and ushered aboard the Kaaw Wiyaa starship, the three friends find that its interior has been revamped so as to make them "feel at home," complete with beer and couches for fishing (144-46)—a happy ending, by their lights. "We should have done this years ago," Cheemo reflects (146).

The comic rhetoric of Taylor's story is designed to achieve humor by reproducing a clichéd plot while subtracting from it all the lofty emotions (like "wonder") with which it is normally associated. The protagonists' responses to the irruption of a Suvinian *novum* in their midst all fail to match the occasion in an unexpected way, not unlike the reaction of Gogol's barber Ivan Yakovlevich to realizing that a customer's nose has inexplicably appeared in the bread his wife has baked for him—namely, to worry that this will get him in official trouble of some kind—or Kafka's deadpan announcement that his protagonist is now a bug. It's easy enough to see that Taylor is poking fun at the whole drama of the First Contact conceit, but at the same time, he is sabotaging romanticized versions of the *indian* as a noble people, stoic in the face of their own tragic "vanishing," etc. In both of these senses, the primary rhetorical strategy of "Take Us to Your Chief" targets the smug white liberal humanism of David Brin's "Dogma of Otherness," the supposed tolerance for the new and different that purportedly establishes the superiority of Western civilization.[2] Taylor denies settler readers the kind of Otherness that serves to confirm the colonial Same.

The expected (colonial) scenario invoked by "Take Us to Your Chief"—the vanishing Indian is saved by the superior technology of an alien race—is exploded, here, by the story's heroes: that is, not any of the human protagonists, but the bottles of beer that insouciantly occupy the story's foreground. In Daniel Heath Justice's words, within the tragic framework of a "deficit model" for which "'real' Indigenous peoples are always Other, always diminished, always the reduced shadow of our former greatness," beer would serve as a symbol of "deficit and loss"—the firewater that destroyed the once proud people, and so on (Moreton-Robinson xiii). Settler readers are not made to witness the expected scenes of inebriated disgrace (another sign of deficit); rather, beer is merely that which pleasantly passes time. The aimless, empty time of the three Ojibwe friends, marked by the leisurely consumption of one bottle after another, is a non-productive, non-progressive temporality that is only briefly troubled by First Contact: "Tarzan realized his beer was empty, and this was definitely a time for extra beer" (139). Beer gently annihilates seriousness: the silence of the three, which so intrigues the Kaaw Wiyaa ("If I may speak freely, what truly impressed us [was] your… ability to communicate without interacting verbally. Almost a form of telepathy" [144]), is not the silence of the Taciturn Indian, a sign of great wisdom and sorrow, but a refusal to produce signs, to reproduce the narrative of deficit, to participate in the history of colonial progress. Thus it is that the friends' first instinct, in the face of historic events unfolding at their fishing spot, is "to relocate to a less historic location" (139). The story's happy ending does not see the Natives (representing, no doubt, the past of the human race) elevated into a transcendent future, à la *Cocoon* or *Close Encounters*; it presents instead a return of the Same in the form of survivance (Vizenor 15). Native Americans, Cheemo reminds us, "have done this"—survived—for a long time. The non-historical temporality of Indigenous SF satire is the temporality of stubborn immovability.

A similarly anti-chronological animus animates Craig Strete's (Cherokee) signature work, "A Horse of a Different Technicolor" (1975). Unlike Taylor, who at least ironically honors the

narrative structure of the Freytag Pyramid, Strete's New Wave-style experimentalism eschews linear temporality altogether; the narrative, such as it is, jumps around with such frequency and violence that it presents a collage more than a montage. Rather than engage in the usual settler SF exercise of worldbuilding, Strete cuts up and radically *rearranges* images of worlds, at least one of which is an (unsystematically) imagined 2074 which is never over ("2074 happened twice," we are repeatedly told), others seemingly belonging to the 1974 in which the story is written, perhaps others representing an 1870s which is never over (and perhaps never began) (77, 82). Instead of providing us with any single unified narrative voice, Strete gives us a "playback" of multiple voices, none of which seems authoritative or trustworthy (77). In Gerald Vizenor's terms, it's unclear whether any of these voices are Natives (real presences); most seem to represent *indians*, empty simulacra, parodies of Hollywood and TV images (Vizenor 15; Baudemann 94). "[W]e made and remade every dream ever played and put them on the screen," one voice tells us, while another (?) performs the endless martyrdom of fake death ("I fell off horses so well… I always fell off horses so beautifully") before yet another colonial voice (?) who admonishes an indeterminate complainant to "[r]emember, you have your place with your race, and are taped accordingly" (81, 79, 78). "Take comfort that no one ever dies," a voice instructs us (?): "Although the original telecast has ceased, we promise you shall live on in reruns and syndication" (80). As each voice replaces the last in a "*precession of simulacra*," the procession of colonial time crashes to a halt (Baudrillard 1).

Strete's rhetoric aims not at Bailey's "suspension of disbelief" (203) but at the proliferation of disbelief; by repeatedly "playing back" images of Iron Eyes Cody[3] and John Wayne films, he attempts to inoculate the reader against the spectacular, phantasmatic figure of the indian. Indeed, he seems to warn us against belief in his own identity: Strete's games with authorship (e.g., writing introductions to his collections signed by the names of Jorge Luis Borges and Salvador Dalí) do nothing to assuage the doubts that have been raised concerning Strete's claims to Cherokee identity (Baudemann 77). Could the strategies that Baudemann and I identify with Native American tricksterism be, in fact, the strategies of a white man "playing Indian"? As Philip Joseph Deloria reminds us, "[p]laying Indian did not fail to call fixed meanings—and sometimes meaning itself—into question" (184).

While it would be easy to place Strete in the canon of American postmodernists such as Donald Barthelme and Robert Coover, his interest in motivating readers to resist floating signifiers of Native American identity and history is perhaps even more reminiscent of Rebecca Roanhorse's (Ohkay-Owingeh/Black) "Welcome to Your Authentic Indian Experience™".[4] Unlike Strete, however, whose machineries of disbelief are designed to prevent anything like identification with a character, Roanhorse draws on one of the oldest and best-known rhetorical devices of fiction by placing the settler reader within an unfamiliar subject position: "You maintain a menu of a half dozen Experiences on your digital blackboard, but Vision Quest is the one the Tourists choose the most. That certainly makes your workday easy…" The second person voice interpellates "us" into Jesse Turnblatt, a.k.a. Jesse Trueblood, a Native VR actor whose job is to provide intimate but cinematic "Experiences" of Indianness to the clientele of Sedona Sweats. The daily grind of

reenacting the most worn-out clichés for "Tourists" to "Experience" at one remove is bad enough, but the day one customer demands "something more authentic"—a friendship with the "real" Jesse, with his "aging three-bedroom ranch and a student loan —a fatal mimetic process begins: it is as if, as the indian wannabe extracts more and more of Jesse's Native essence, the more he comes to resemble Jesse, to the point of replacing him, taking away his job, his house, his wife, and his very identity. That is to say, the white settler intruder has done all this to "us," the readers, in so far as the second person has worked its rhetorical magic on us. On the one hand, then, the story solicits our belief in this process of cultural vampirism; on the other hand, the culmination of that process issues in this performative irony: in effect, we have had an Authentic Indian Experience™. The story has successfully simulated the experience of dispossession, erasure, Removal, and as a result, we/Jesse feel "[t]hat same stretching sensation you get when you Relocate out of an Experience," as if we/Jesse had been electronic phantoms all along.

Rhetorics of believing

> As Basil Johnston (Anishinaabe) might remind us, *w'daeb-a-wae*, "a telling of the truth," casts our voices and words only as far as vocabulary and perception allow.
>
> –Grace L. Dillon, "Imagining Indigenous Futurisms", 2.

The credence in and currency of spurious representations of Indigeneity, whether romanticized, degraded, or both, is one continuing problem; the discredit attributed to Indigenous self-representations is another. Many commentators have noted this problem in connection with the very genre definitions attributed to Indigenous Futurist works: insofar as "science fiction," "fantasy," and "horror" denote departures from ordinary realism, do we "run the risk of trivializing Native voices and communities, of reducing lived experiences to mere superstition" by labeling them as such (Spiers 53)? Grace L. Dillon objects to this reductive reading: "our ideas of body, mind, and spirit are true stories, not forms of fantasy" (qtd. in Vowel 6). Accordingly, the pursuit of rhetorical sovereignty may also entail a *rhetoric of believing*: that is, running the engines of satirical incredulity in reverse, aiming to produce a more traditional suspension of disbelief, to evoke another kind of "wonder."

Richard Van Camp's (Dogrib Tłı̨chǫ Dene) "Aliens" plays a sophisticated game of believing, beginning with his first paragraph:

> I wanna tell you a beautiful story. And I've been waiting for somebody very special to tell it to. I guess it's no secret now: the aliens or "Sky People" are here. We can see a ship way up high: its outline. No lights. It's like a big, dark stone in the sky and most people just watch TV or Facebook now, waiting for something to happen. Some people call them "Obelisks." Apparently, there's one huge ship miles high over every continent and the oceans are boiling, gently, but no fish are dying. Just simmering, and scientists are saying that the oceans and rivers are being cleansed. It's like the "Star People"—that's what our Elders call them—are helping us. (20)

The "ship" in question is a mute presence, "dark" and motionless; it is effectively a technological "black box," not unlike the Monolith in Arthur C. Clarke and Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey*. This places Van Camp's novum beyond the understanding of reader and protagonist alike, where it is safe from questioning. The silent, inscrutable alien craft, familiar to us from innumerable films from *The Day the Earth Stood Still* to *Arrival*, is a piece of "off-the-shelf" imaginary, a borrowing from what Damien Broderick has named the "sf megatext" (xi): as readers come to it already "knowing" what this is ("it's no secret," indeed), it requires no special argument. Recasting Indigenous concepts of "Sky People" in terms of the science accepted by settler society ("aliens") allows a settler reader to accommodate one with the other.

Van Camp allows us to believe, for a moment, that the "beautiful story" will be about these aliens, before shifting focus to his "quiet," "gentle" friend, Jimmy from the hardware store in Fort Smith. "I guess you could say me and Jimmy are related in the medicine way," the narrator tells us, explaining that

> they say my grandfather pulled a hummingbird of fire out of a little boy's mouth, from under his tongue. And he showed that little boy this little bird that had been living in his mouth. And he explained this was the reason that little boy couldn't speak like other people, and this is why his voice kept locking. And hundreds of people saw this little hummingbird that my grandfather pulled out of this little boy's mouth, and my ehtse let that little bird go… And my grandfather walked all the way back to that little boy, and he said, "Now speak." That little boy started to speak… And that little boy never stuttered again. (21)

This magical event will not be the primary *novum* of the overall story, either, but it is framed as what Daniel Heath Justice prefers to call a "wonder": "Wondrous things are *other* and *otherwise*; they're outside the bounds of the everyday and mundane, perhaps unpredictable, but not necessarily alien…" It is a wonder presented in the matter-of-fact tone that W.R. Irwin calls "quiet assertion" (69), reducing its novelty by adding it to the ordinary inventory of ontological furniture. We have been put on notice: this world is a magical kind of world, a world where this is simply the kind of thing that happens from time to time.

But Van Camp's assertion of rhetorical sovereignty is not yet exhausted. The bulk of the story is about a somewhat over-familiar process of heterosexual courtship, in which Jimmy shyly works up the nerve to ask out Shandra. The slot of *difficult-to-believe* is no longer occupied by aliens in the sky or mysterious hummingbirds living in young boys' throats, but by the fact that Jimmy is interested in Shandra and not her more popular sister, Roberta (22-23). A certain accumulation of banal detail—steak and lobster, banter about the old days in elementary and how the town's changed, etc.—grounds what we might otherwise read as the fantastic, estranging elements in the bedrock of the expected, the everyday, and the already-known. The alien craft is just another local "sight" that a couple on a date might drive out to see (25). (They decide not to: "Well, I gotta see your house. I wanna see how you decorate" [26].) No, the story's true novum (another black

box) is the revelation Shandra conveys to her friends the morning after: "Jimmy's different… he's *beautiful*" (27-28). In other words, "he's what the Crees say: Aayahkwew: neither man nor woman but both"; "two-spirited… or transgender, or both, or perhaps something we've never heard of before — even under these new skies" (28, 30). Jimmy is the *novum*, the wonder at the heart of the story. Van Camp's efforts have all been aimed at persuading us to imagine a Native gender/sexual identity that is beyond what "we"—settler and Native alike—know.

Yet Van Camp's story preserves a "deficit" of Indigenous knowledge in the figure of the "something we've never heard of before"—an internal non-knowledge that operates as a sign of possibility. Something similar is at work in the fiction of Darcie Little Badger. In "Nkásht Íí," Little Badger invokes the authority of ancestors:

> *Great-grandmother taught me everything she knew about death before it took her.*
>
> *Never sleep under a juniper tree. They grow between this world and the place below.*
>
> *Bury the dead properly, lest their ghosts return.*
>
> *A ghost is a terrible thing.*
>
> *Someday, we will all be terrible things.*
>
> *Great-grandmother, you were right.*

All of these warnings are borne out by the narrative that follows, as Josie and Annie investigate the death of a man's daughter near Willowbee, Texas. This death *has* a mundane explanation: father, mother, and daughter were all in a car crash, and only the father survived. However, this account is belied by a supernatural experience: the father testifies that the infant survived the crash, but was borne away by an "owl-woman" with the mother's face. "There are legends…" Annie murmurs, "The kind my great-grandmother knew."

Here, the invocation of the numinous (the force of which is carried by the ellipsis that follows Annie's "there are legends…") is abetted by a folkloric megatext: Native or settler, we have probably heard a story like this one. "Ghosts? Huh, maybe he met La Llorona," Josie muses. "¿Dónde están mis hijos?... It's possible, right?" And once again, the gravity of the known grounds the otherworldly: mundane details such as empty coffee cups, cell phones, bus rides, and Best Westerns undergird the *mysterium tremendum*. The gesture of the grieving father who reaches out to grip Annie's shoulder prompts Josie to reach for her Mace—unnecessarily, in the event, yet the same pragmatic instinct also protects her from accepting the offer of a ride from a man[5] who then drives his pickup truck off a bridge and "into the water… [without] caus[ing] a single ripple." This is a universe in which, for instance, "karma" seems to operate (Josie and Annie are "paid" for their investigation by lucky lottery tickets), but also one in which the driver who pulls over to offer a ride to two young Native women may be not an ordinary predator but *something worse* (ominously, his sunglasses don't reflect their faces…). "After dark, with its baby-killing

ghosts and doomed pickup truck drivers, Willowbee seemed unbearably creepy," Josie reflects. The reader, too, is unsettled, as "autochthonous, localized, and historically situated knowledge systems" displace modern, Western ones. In such a so-called America, it's best to expect the unexpected, to distrust the signage, and to listen instead to one's Apache great-grandmother.

Kai Minosh Pyle draws the dystopian scenario of "How to Survive the Apocalypse for Native Girls" from the sf megatext, saving them much of the effort of justifying and explaining broad changes to society:

> Shanay's grandma is one of the best doctors, because she was trained both Anishinaabe-way and in one of the old universities before the borders broke down. She likes to joke that it's a good thing the apocalypse happened, because that way she didn't have to pay off her student loans, which were apparently a thing that, like money, used to be a big problem for people. (82)

Retrospection (money "*used to be* a big problem") makes the collapse of colonial governments and capitalism and the resumption of full tribal autonomy into a *fait accompli*, no longer a distant ideal but a self-evident response to practical problems. Kinship, *inawemaagan*, offers a ready-made local communism, so that, as Mark Fisher writes, the dystopian scenario affords a small space for utopian reimagining (2).

This defense of utopian imagination is opened to critical inspection, however, as the protagonist, Nigig, struggles to distinguish between emancipatory and oppressive inheritances, to know when what the Council says reflects internalized colonialism—in this case, anti-blackness and the colonization of genders and sexualities—more than any authentic tradition. Here, questions of sovereignty are complicated by legacies of self-hatred: despite the authority of Kinship, as a two-spirit girl, Nigig and her kind are despised by some of their kin. In a tense scene, she confronts a hostile Council member, a woman from the Eagle Clan, about her rejection of Nigig's two-spirit friend Migizi (a name which, ironically, means "bald eagle" [Livesay and Nichols]):

> "You can't exile someone just because you don't like them," I said hotly. "Kinship–"
>
> "Kinship is exactly the reason why that freak had to be gotten rid of," she spat… "They're dead, child. No one survives long outside the protective network of the Nation." (89-90)

Nigig's narrative, conveyed in sixteen "instructions" for how to survive the apocalypse, culminates in a recognition of others taking part in the internal struggle ("Maybe this, too, is Kinship") and a final instruction: "I know now that the only way to survive the apocalypse is to make your own world" (94). All of Pyle's rhetorical craft has been in support of this utopian call to self-recreation, to the assertion of another kind of (Indigiqueer) sovereignty.

Sovereignties

The concept of sovereignty, of course, is open to multiple, competing interpretations among Native activists and artists. It is interesting to note, in this inevitably too-brief survey, that Indigenous Futurist writings participating in rhetorics of incredulity, as I have termed them, seem the least disposed to raise questions about the nature of the Indigenous sovereignty that is being sought, and that those manifesting rhetorics of believing seem to do so more often. Is this simply an artifact of selection, since the most reflexive and complicating stories were drawn from anthologies of Indigiqueer writing? How do these rhetorics respond to different historically and/or culturally specific needs? These are questions for further scholarship. What seems more certain is that the enterprises of "mak[ing] your own world" imaginatively and politically are mutually implicated.

Notes

1. Translation mine ("o mobiliário do universo").
2. "Perhaps," Brin muses, "we ought to be proud of America as the prime promoter of a dogma of difference and choice" (91).
3. Cody is best remembered as the "crying Indian" from the Keep America Beautiful commercial that first ran on TV in 1971.
4. Roanhorse's claims to Native American identity, too, have been subjected to scrutiny (Agoyo, Klingensmith-Parnell) ironically, in light of the story's fierce critique of cultural appropriation.
5. The spectre of the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG) hovers over this page (Carnes, personal communication).

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Beyond the End: Indigenous Futurisms' Interventions in the Anthropocene

Abdenour Bouich

Introduction

In *Walking the Clouds*, Grace Dillon refers to science fiction works produced by Indigenous authors as "Indigenous futurisms," a growing movement that encompasses, inter alia, literature, films, and even video games. As indicated by its name, Indigenous futurisms is inspired by Afrofuturism, defined by Mark Dery as "speculative fiction that treats African-American themes and addresses African-American concerns in the context of twentieth-century technoculture—and, more generally, African-American signification that appropriates images of technology and a prosthetically enhanced future" (180). Similarly, for Dillon, Indigenous futurisms arise as a subversion of what she calls "reservation realisms" that often define expectations surrounding Indigenous literatures (2). Sometimes combining Indigenous sciences with recent scientific theory, sometimes exposing limitations of western sciences, this fiction, Dillion states, combines "sf theory and Native intellectualism, Indigenous scientific literacy, and western techno-cultural science, scientific possibilities enmeshed with Skin thinking" (2). As such, one characteristic of Indigenous futurisms, Dillon explains, is to posit Indigenous sciences "not just as complementary to a perceived western enlightenment but indeed integral to a refined twenty-first-century sensibility" (3). In fact, Indigenous interventions in science fiction could be perceived as a decolonising project, or better yet, as an *Indigenizing project*. Commenting on "Indigenizing processes" within Indigenous research, Linda Tuhiwai Smith explains that "Indigenizing" is anchored within "a politics of indigenous identity and indigenous cultural action" (245). Quoting M. Annette James, she explains that the process of "Indigenizing" is anchored in Indigenous worldviews and ways of knowing to "counters the negative connotations" of "Indiginism" in "Third World countries, where it has become synonymous with the 'primitive', or with backwardness among superstitious peopies [sic]" (qtd. in Smith 245). Thus, the process of Indigenising science fiction is evident in Indigenous futurisms' mobilisation and centralisation of Indigenous epistemologies and ontologies alongside elements pertaining to mainstream science fiction.

This article proposes a trans-Indigenous reading of two Indigenous futurist novels that emanate from different Indigenous literary traditions: *Killer of Enemies*, written by the Abenaki writer and storyteller Joseph Bruchac, and *The Interrogation of Ashala Wolf*, written by the Palyku novelist, illustrator, and scholar Ambelin Kwaymullina. In *Trans-Indigenous*, Chadwick Allen states that a trans-Indigenous mode of reading is a methodology based on "*juxtapositions*" of different Indigenous artworks emanating from distinct Indigenous contexts (xvii, original italics). He explains that purposeful trans-Indigenous juxtapositions would "develop a version

of Indigenous literary studies that locates itself firmly in the specificity of the Indigenous local while remaining always cognizant of the complexity of the relevant Indigenous global" (xix). The first part of this article explores the narrative registers and aesthetic techniques employed by these authors to capture dystopic and anthropogenic futures resulting from the severing of bonds between humans, other-than-humans, and the land, a process initiated by colonialism and later exacerbated by extractive capitalism. The second section examines the novels' potential in offering Indigenous visions beyond the Anthropocene and beyond "the end of the world." Through their imaginative power and an assertion of Indigenous knowledge systems, these works of Indigenous futurisms reflect on Indigenous perspectives and views of personhood and kinship to imagine balanced futures beyond the apocalypse, tragedy, and annihilation.

Colonial Genocides, Colonial Ecocides

Killer of Enemies is set in a near future in what is now known as the United States of America. In this future characterized by major technological and genetic advances, a new form of governance emerges controlled by an authoritarian and repressive nomenclature composed of upgraded "human beings." This cast implemented to their bodies all sort of techno-genetic implants by which they increased their senses. However, a global cataclysm occurs when a cloud from outer space settles on the planet, making all electronic devices obsolete and plunging the world into a neo steam-age. This "Silver Cloud," as it is called in the novel, causes the death of many of these upgraded "humans" due to the failure of their electronic implants. In what is called "New America," four members of this previous upper-class cast survive. Adamant to maintain their superior position, these four "Ones" establish a prison/workcamp ironically called "Haven" located in the Sonoran Desert where the lower-class survivors are provided with rudimentary sustenance and security from the outside world that is plagued by famine and water scarcity against their total servitude and obedience to the Ones. In addition, these lower-class survivors face the danger of being killed by genetically modified creatures created prior to the "Silver Cloud" apocalypse and which are now wandering freely in this post-apocalyptic world.

The novel is told from the first-person point of view of the main character and protagonist Lozen, an Apache teenager and member of the Chiricahua nation located in southwest America. Lozen lives with her family in Haven where they were forcibly removed after some of the Ones' mercenaries and recruiters found their hidden village. There, she protects her family by accepting to be recruited by the Ones to kill the genetically modified creatures that were once kept in the "pleasure parks of the most powerful Ones" (2). Being a skilled warrior with a good grasp of firearms and the ability to sense the danger of the Gemods before they approach Haven, the Ones choose Lozen as their favorite "monster hunter" (11). Nevertheless, Lozen knows pertinently that the Ones are vicious and selfish and would not hesitate to eliminate her if they find out that she is too dangerous to be controlled. Therefore, she must feign loyalty and carry on doing her job while planning her family's escape from Haven.

While *Killer of Enemies* is a work of Indigenous futurisms that depicts a post-apocalyptic future, the cultural and historical contexts that defines the protagonist's background are explicitly conveyed throughout the novel. Lozen's name is based on the historical figure of Lozen, a Chiricahua warrior and prophet who lived during the Apache wars (1849-1924). Indeed, the real Lozen fought alongside other important figures such as her brother Victorio and later with Geronimo. In the "Author's Note" of the novel, Bruchac writes: "Born around 1840, the first Lozen never married and died in 1890 in Alabama where the entire Chiricahua nation had been sent into exile by the United States government" (360). Throughout the novel, Lozen explicitly refers to the collective traumas that the Apache peoples endured during the American westward expansion and particularly during and after the Apache Wars, thus presenting a counternarrative to those Eurocentric historical accounts that portray colonisation as a benign civilising act or a heroic story of adventure and discovery. In addition, the novel aims at engaging non-Indigenous audiences by projecting these stories of contact, invasion, and subjugation to a narrative of futurity where the whole planet is under authoritarian and oppressive elites that remove, subjugate, and enslave any human being that does not pertain to their casts. As such, *Killer of Enemies* reflects what Dillon calls a storytelling tradition of "ironic Native giveaway" that positions readers, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, within the "diasporic condition of Native peoples" (6).

The Interrogation of Ashala Wolf is set in a post-apocalyptic future during which earth is recovering from an ecological cataclysm called "The Reckoning" that resulted from a longstanding environmental crisis due to humanity's excessive pollution and resource extraction. "The Reckoning" left the humanity nearly extinct and caused the disappearance of separate continents giving birth to a single Pangaea-like continent that consisted of eight sophisticated cities ruled by elected representatives, yet they are all subject to a federal-like governing entity called the "Council of Primes" where each city is represented by a "Prime." The Council of Primes established a new system and passed a number of "Accords" to maintain the "Balance" and avoid "the pollution, the overcrowding, and the terrible disparity between rich and poor" that characterised the "old world" and led to the Reckoning (29). However, the most important change in this post-apocalyptic world is the birth of children endowed with superpowers: for example, Firestarters can start fires, Rumblers can cause earthquakes, Menders can heal others, and Runners have a superhuman speed. These children with abilities are feared and hated by the rest of the population, as such the Council of Primes pass Citizenship Accords that distinguish the "normal" population from what is now called the "Illegals." The Citizenship Accords states that each fourteen-year old child must be tested by a government enforcer to determine if they have any superhuman ability. Citizen tattoos are granted for those who display no superhuman abilities or have benign powers that can be exploited for the government interests. In contrast, children with "dangerous" powers are forcibly removed from their parents and confined in detention centres for the sake of general "safety" and to maintain the "Balance." Indeed, the novel opens in Gull City's "Detention Centre 3" where the protagonist of the novel, Ashala Wolf, is imprisoned. Ashala is one of the children with abilities who were able to escape the Citizenship test. Being "Illegals" now in the eyes of the government, some of these children formed a group called "Tribe" and found refuge in a forest called the

"Firstwood" under the leadership of Ashala. As such, Ashala is hunted down and interrogated by Neville Rose, the Chief Administrator of the Centre, in an effort to make her divulge information about the Tribe.

The socio-political and historical dimensions on which *The Interrogation of Ashala Wolf* is grounded are subtly expressed and implicitly embedded into the text. Indeed, in the post-apocalyptic world depicted in the novel, what is known today as Australia no longer exists. Nevertheless, it is not difficult to discern parallels between this post-apocalyptic world and the historical and contemporary realities of the Indigenous peoples of Australia after the invasion and colonisation. In the novel, The Citizenship Accords that grant the government the power to assess children and subsequently remove and detain them in detention centres if they manifest any superpowers is reminiscent of the dark colonial and settler-colonial history of Australia and its treatment of Indigenous peoples. These accords echo the Aborigine Protection Act of 1909 by which the Australian settler-colonial state forcibly removed Aboriginal children from their families under the subterfuge of "neglect" from their Aboriginal parents. These children were placed under "the protection" of the government and were given for adoption to white families. Child removal in Australia lasted from the beginning of the twentieth century until the 1970s engendering what is known today as the collective trauma of the Stolen Generations. *The Interrogation of Ashala Wolf* conjures the traumatic legacies of the Stolen Generations and projects the colonial policies of child removal in Australia into a futuristic narrative, thereby addressing Australia's historical amnesia towards its colonial past and its treatment of Indigenous peoples. Moreover, the novel succeeds in implicating non-Indigenous audiences in the story by abstaining from making any explicit reference to the historical and contemporary realities of "Australia." The story of the novel creates a déjà vu effect with which Indigenous and non-Indigenous audiences are invited to identify. Indeed, in "Non-Linear Modes of Narrative," Annika Herb writes: "The reader is invited to become an active participant in coding meaning by applying their own understandings of the context and connections, creating an inter-subjective dialogue between reader and text, and Indigenous and non-Indigenous knowing."

Although different in their approaches, Bruchac and Kyawmullina ground their respective novels upon significant socio-political and historical contexts to draw attention to the historical and contemporary realities of the Indigenous people within the settler-colonial states that encase them, and expresses the need for historical accountability and social justice from these settler-states societies that are yet to be achieved. In addition, while both *Killer of Enemies* and *The Interrogation of Ashala Wolf* imagine worlds devastated by cataclysms, either of cosmic origin or of climatic nature, the authors' depictions of the post-apocalyptic futures in the novels differ greatly. Indeed, as explained above, the post-Reckoning world portrayed in The Interrogation of Ashala Wolf is characterised by a sense of "development" in the way in which resources are exploited and wealth is distributed according to the Accords passed by the Council of Primes in order to avoid another catastrophe. In contrast, the post-Silver Cloud world in *Killer of Enemies* is characterised by major regressions, thus contradicting the often-accepted idea that conceives the future and

modernity in terms of a continuous development of science and technology that would bring about new human conditions. Instead, the future is conceived in terms of a reverse process of development in which humanity plunges back into a neo-steam age.

Nevertheless, both novels seem to agree on the fact that apocalypse is the result of a failure of a global system due to humanity's longstanding abuse of nature and the environment, as well the misuse of technology. In "On the Importance of a Date, or Decolonizing the Anthropocene," settler scholar Heather Davis and Métis anthropologist Zoe Todd call for a re-evaluation of the start date of the Anthropocene by linking it to western colonisation, approaching it not as a distinct phase that begins in the twentieth century, but as a continuation and accumulation of colonial dispossessions, genocides, and ecocides (761). They argue that colonialism and settler colonialism "[were] always about changing the land, transforming the earth itself, including the creatures, the plants, the soil composition and the atmosphere. It was about moving and unearthing rocks and minerals. All of these acts were intimately tied to the project of erasure that is the imperative of settler colonialism" (770). The logic of the Anthropocene, they assert, resides in colonialism and contemporary petrocapitalism's severing of the bonds between "humans and the soil, between plants and animals, between minerals and our bones" (770). This parallel between the Anthropocene and western colonialism highlights the different perspectives that Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples tend to have regarding climate and environment crises, suggesting that Indigenous peoples are well acquainted with the Anthropocene and its repercussions. Indeed, in "Indigenous Science (Fiction) for the Anthropocene," Potawatomi scholar Kyle P. Whyte argues that what constitutes non-Indigenous peoples' speculations about dystopic ecological futures are mostly a reality Indigenous peoples endured and continue to endure under colonial practices and policies (226). It is, therefore, important to note that when the Anthropocene is explored in works of Indigenous futurisms, it exceeds mere speculation.

Killer of Enemies provides several examples that depict the anthropogenic character of the future described in the novel. Lozen talks about the ways in which "[b]ack in the mid-twenty-first century [...] rivers had been poisoned by gold mining. [And] the great forests of giant trees had been clear cut", and how "anyone annoying our nation was blown up with unmanned drones and guided missiles" (168, 114). Yet, perhaps the most poignant anthropogenic example in the novel is the extinction of horses that, as Lozen puts it, "had their own apocalypse" before the Silver Cloud (111). In fact, what decimated horses is a disease called "equine pneumonia" that resulted from a biologically engineered "symbiotic microbe" inhaled by horses to make them stronger and faster on racetracks (110). She declares: "the symbiote mutated. It got faster. A year or two turned into a week. The infected lungs filled with blood, yellow mucus poured out of the horses' nostrils. And they died" (110-11). In addition, the disease becomes a pandemic spreading all around the world and "mov[ing] into other hooved domestic animals as well. Cows, sheep, even the semi-wild private herds of buffalos that still existed" (111). The advanced technological level reached by humanity in this futuristic world, however, cannot explain the Silver Cloud.

During one of her missions where she is sent by the Ones to kill a monster, Lozen encounters what she describes as an ancient being "who lives in the stories of not just my people but those of Indians all over the continent" (155). She declares: "All of our Native people have stories about him or his relatives. They've called him by many different names. Big Elder Brother, Sasquatch, Bigfoot. To us he was just Tall Hairy Man" (155). It is during another encounter with this being that Lozen now calls Hally that she finds answers about the origin of the Silver Cloud. Hally explains that his people walked the Earth long before humanity, and, like humans, advanced in knowledge and technology. He declares "*We, too, became powerful. We could fly. We could shape the courses of the rivers with the work of our thoughts, dig into the roots of the mountains, raise great structures up to the sky*" (304, original Italics). This feeling of might made Hally's people believe they were more worthy than other life forms, that they would even "*dream a way to rise up beyond the Life Giver*" (304, original italics). Yet, he adds, "*the Maker sent us a message. It came, a big light streaking across the sky. And there was a great explosion*" (304, original italics). Hally remarks that the cycle is repeating now, as humans "*were behaving as we did long ago. Your leaders believed they were wiser and stronger than Creation. They were crushing all other life on Earth beneath their weight*" (305, original italics). Excessive use of technology, he adds, creates an "*attractive field,*" drawing things from outer space (307, original italics). In the same way this attracted the "*meteor*" that destroyed nearly all of Hally's people before humans inhabited the Earth, it now attracted the "*Silver Cloud*" (307, original italics). As such, the apocalypse in Bruchac's novel responds to the ways in which humanity, specifically the planetary elites, use technology to control other life forms, fostering a dynamic of oppression on the land, the environment, and on human and other-than-human conditions.

Similarly, in *The Interrogation of Ashala Wolf*, the apocalypse called the "Reckoning" is caused by humanity's abuse of the environment, making "'the life-sustaining systems of the Earth collapse'" (12). Ashala, born long after the Reckoning, has no clear idea of humanity's relationship with the land and environment in the old world; she soon gets a glimpse, however, when she arrives at the Firstwood. After fleeing her house, Ashala, along with her friend Georgy, takes refuge in the Firstwood since government enforcers avoid it for fear of dangerous giant lizards, called the saurs, that emerged after the Reckoning. On their way, they are stopped by a saur and discover that they can communicate with humans. The saur informs Ashala that the trees of the Firstwood "grew from seeds that survived the great chaos. They carry within them the memories of their ancestors […]. They do not forget what humans have done" (187). As such, if Ashala wants to live in the Firstwood, she must seek permission from the trees, and "whatever bargain you make with them, the saurs will ensure you keep it. And if the forest decides you must go, then we [saurs] will finish you" (188-9). Ashala speaks directly to the trees, promising that if they can live among them, they "won't eat any of the animals, or cut down any tree" (192). It is here that the trees share memories of the old world with Ashala: "Images poured into my mind, nightmarish pictures of things I'd never seen before. Strange vehicles with metal jaws, weird saws with teeth that roared, and humans, always more humans, cutting and hacking and slashing and killing" (193). While Ashala is unfamiliar with the images the trees share, readers can identify these as characteristics of

today's extractive capitalism. The Reckoning is, therefore, a direct consequence of the exacerbation of the utilitarian relationship that humanity has with nature and the environment.

Post-Apocalyptic Balance

The dystopic futures in both novels result from what Davis and Todd call the severed bonds between humans, other-than-humans, and the land, caused by colonialism and later exacerbated by extractive capitalism. While Indigenous peoples did face countless anthropogenic scenarios that unfolded alongside colonisation, Davis and Todd assert that they "contended with the end of their worlds, and continue to work to foster and tend to strong relationships to humans, other-than-humans, and land today" (773). As such, rather than conceiving of human liberation and salvation from the anthropogenic horrors of climate change within science and technology, they "call here for a tending once again to relations, to kin, to life, longing, and care" (775). This is what works of Indigenous futurisms advocate, offering artistic and activist interventions to the current anthropogenic realities. Indeed, in *Why Indigenous Literatures Matter* Daniel Heath Justice explains that, though works of Indigenous futurism present violence, cruelty, and suffering that ravage a world destroyed or on the verge of destruction by "settler colonialism's limited sense of kinship and personhood," it endeavours to expose the destructive racial logic of the state which affects both the human and other-than-human world (168-9). He argues that, when the state's "[b]lood rhetorics" appear to be the cause of catastrophe in these works, an Indigenous vision of "reciprocal kinship becomes, if not a full solution, part of the return to wholeness. The broken world may be overturned, but another world awaits—or at least, its potential lies at the ready" (169). Indeed, the two novels do not simply paint a bleak picture of the future. Rather, through their imaginative power and assertion of Indigenous perspectives and views of personhood and kinship, they offer visions of a future beyond apocalypse, tragedy, and annihilation.

In *Killer of Enemies*, Lozen learns from an early age that human beings are but a small part of a greater creation, and that human life is not the only one that must be respected and protected. In *Our Stories Remember* Bruchac asserts that "all created things are regarded as being of equal importance. All things— not only humans and animals and plants, but even the winds, the waters, fire, and the stones— are living and sentient" (11). Speaking of her fear of snakes, Lozen recalls her father saying that there is no need to be afraid as "[t]he God of Life made [them], too. [They have] as much right to live as we humans" (130). This vision of personhood also applies to kinship. Lozen asserts the strong bond between her people and dogs, remembering her mom saying that "'[o]ur dogs made us more human,'" calling them "four-legged *allies*" (emphasis added, 225–6). Similarly, *The Interrogation of Ashala Wolf* reflects this vision of personhood and kinship with other-than human beings. In "A Land of Many Countries" Kwaymullina explains that when colonisers arrived to what is known today as "Australia," they did not understand "that life in all its shapes watched them anxiously from the ground, the water; the sky; and there was not a single grain of sand beneath their feet that was not part of a thinking, breathing, loving land" (11). She states that the colonisers considered land an object, "not as grandmother, grandfather, mother, father, sister, brother and family" (11). In the novel, the Firstwood becomes a stronghold for

Ashala and her companions. The trees allow her to live there because the two recognise in each other the violence they are subjected to. Upon receiving the trees' memories, Ashala declares: "'there is no reason. Do you hear me? There's no reason good enough to hurt my sister, or to kill a forest'" (194). Indeed, Ashala asserts that the Firstwood "'count as much as [her],'" adding that "'if anyone ever comes for you with machines or saws or axes or anything, they'll have to get through me first'" (194). Here, Ashala affirms the personhood of the Firstwood, pledging to respect and protect it at the expense of her own life.

Commenting on personhood and kinship with the other-than-human, which is central to many Indigenous knowledge systems, Justice argues that in various Indigenous traditions being human is a learnt process achieved through respectful and meaningful affiliation to the land and kinship with the other-than-human (*WILM* 76). He writes: "The earth speaks in a multitude of voices, only some of which are human. […] these plants, animals, stones, and other presences are our seen and unseen relatives, our neighbours, our friends or companions" (86). It is this expansive perspective on personhood, kinship, and life that leads both Lozen and Ashala to realise that their role in their respective worlds cannot be limited to protecting themselves, their families, and friends. Rather, they must devote their abilities to preserving all forms of life.

In *Killer of Enemies*, after hearing Hally's explanation of the origin of the Silver Cloud, Lozen corroborates it with stories that her mother used to recount, where many worlds before hers were destroyed "because of the misdeeds of humans or of Coyote, who is a sort of embodiment of all the craziest, most powerful and irrational aspects of humanity" (306). Lozen comes to understand the Silver Cloud as retribution to the imbalance caused by humanity's oppressions and destruction of other forms of life. She declares: "What we need to do is to find the balance again to make it right" (306, emphasis added). While Lozen escapes from Haven with her family, she states that she must return and fight the Ones, because "if they have their way, they and others like them will claw their way back to control the whole world" (293). Approaching Haven, Lozen finds herself on a mountain: the "Place Where Birds Flew. Just one ridge away from Haven" (315). Seeking a way down the mountain to avoid one of the Ones posted on the path to Haven, Lozen states that "[t]here's another, more precarious way" (328). She remembers her uncle advising her to not just "see the "'mountain,'" rather "[b]e the mountain'" (331). Far from being metaphorical or romantic, these words find concrete manifestation when Lozen starts descending the cliff: "I'm part of it," she states (331). The stones of the mountain, Lozen affirms, are as warm as "the skin of a living being" that as she touches, the feeling of weight disappears giving place "to immeasurable lightness" (331). She realises that this is "this mountain's spirit" that, as she holds, she begins "to know some of what it knows, feel the life that shimmers all over it, every plant, every insect and small animal. […] And with the mountain's spirit helping [her], [she] take[s] a deep breath and move[s]" (331). Lozen acknowledges the sentience of the land, regarding it as alive from a physical and moral perspective. Reflecting on the land's ability to exert influence on human and the other-than-human beings, Vanessa Watts writes: "Our truth, not only Anishnaabe and Haudenosaunee people but in a majority of Indigenous societies, conceives that we (humans) are made from the land; our

flesh is literally an extension of soil" (27). This conceptualisation that Watts calls "Place-Thought" is "based upon the premise that land is alive and thinking and that humans and non-humans derive agency through the extensions of these thoughts" (21). Lozen illustrates this concept of "Place-Thought" in the way her body becomes an extension of the mountain, whose spirit shares its thoughts and knowledge with her, strengthening her agency as she moves down the cliff with ease.

In the same way that the historical and socio-political contexts are not explicitly delineated in *The Interrogation of Ashala Wolf*, so is the cultural context that informs the protagonist's identity and cultural heritage. Kwaymullina subtly and tactfully integrates epistemologies and knowledge systems of Aboriginal peoples into the text that the protagonist (re)visits simultaneously as the readers are introduced to them. This, according to Herb, reflects the author's endeavour to centre Indigenous "knowledge in its own right, rather than in direct opposition to Western epistemologies." Indeed, after hearing Ashala's plea, the Firstwood responds to her and manifests its consent in its own way. Indeed, Ashala states that after uttering her words, "something started growing in the emptiness" making all forms of life within the Firstwood grow and flourish (195). Kwaymullina explains that Aboriginal peoples call their homelands "Countries," and while "Australia" does not exist anymore in Ashala's world, Kwaymullina states that "every landscape in The Tribe Series is inspired by one of the many biodiverse regions of Australia" ("Author's Note," *The Interrogation*). The significance of the concept of Country to Aboriginal peoples, however, exceeds the physical; Kwaymullina writes, "Country is not simply a geographical space. It is the whole of reality, a living story that forms and informs all existence. Country is alive, and more than alive—it is life itself" ("A Land" 12). Indeed, Ashala states that "beneath and within and between" the blooming life in the Firstwood "was a shining shape that was somehow the beginning and the end of everything. The glowing thing flowed around me, and my whole body hummed with life. I found myself shouting out, giving words to the joy and defiance of the Firstwood. 'I live! We live! We survive!'" (195, emphasis added). Not only is the Firstwood sentient, but it also infuses life into everything that lives within it, including Ashala herself. Her words to the Firstwood convey the imperative of an interrelated existence. For Aboriginal peoples, Kwaymullina explains, the world as it is created by the Ancestor spirits consists of a "web of relationships" between all forms of life ("A Land" 13). She writes: "it is by maintaining and renewing the connections linking life together, that country—and so all of reality—*is balanced and sustained*." (10, emphasis added).

The Balance is the driving force behind the events of *The Interrogation of Ashala Wolf*. The government considers children with abilities not only outside the Balance, but also a threat to it. Chief Administrator Neville Rose's desire to destroy Ashala and the Tribe makes him break the Benign Technology Accords by developing an interrogation machine to question detainees about Ashala and the Tribe. Discovering this, Ashala declares that "everyone knew the dangers of advanced tech. It had isolated the people of the old world from nature, shielding them from the consequences of imbalance. [...] That was one of the reasons why we *had* Benign Technology Accords, to stop us from making the same mistakes" (288, original italics). Ashala realises that it is

not only herself and the Tribe that are in jeopardy, but also the Firstwood and all that lives within it. This, for her, constitutes the Balance. She declares: "'I'd always heard about the Balance before that. But that was the first time I actually felt it. That was when I knew that there was something greater than all of us. Those trees, and the Tribe, and even the saurs – *that's the heart of me. The essence of who I am*'" (303, emphasis added). The Firstwood is Country for Ashala, defining her identity and giving meaning to her existence. She understands the Balance as that where all forms of life, human and other-than-human, are intimately bound and of equal importance. Offering herself to the enforcers as bait, she succeeds in stopping Neville Rose's plan, freeing the detainees, and protecting the Firstwood.

Conclusion

Killer of Enemies and *The Interrogation of Ashala Wolf* present Indigenous perspectives in which life, agency, and subjectivity exceed the category of the human, encompassing the-other-human and the land itself. In both novels, the apocalypse and the Anthropocene are approached as an imbalance in the bonds that tie these life forms together. The authors register what Davis and Todd call "ruptures and cleavages between land and flesh, story and law, human and more-than-human" caused by colonialism and extractive capitalism (755). Nevertheless, in both novels, the apocalypse is not the end of the world because, as Kwaymullina explains, "in an animate, interconnected existence, where everything has consciousness and agency, life is not easily overcome. Its nature is always to adapt, to change, to make itself anew—and in so doing, to remake all else" ("Author's Note"). Both novels embody Indigenous perspectives and visions of land and environment, positing what Dillon calls "Indigenous scientific literacies" which are "sustainable practices used by Indigenous peoples over thousands of years to reenergize the natural environment while improving the interconnected relationships among all persons (animal, human, spirit, and even machine)" (7). In *Killer of Enemies*, Lozen's source of survival and agency is largely informed by the history of her ancestors' resistance who contended with their own apocalypse through their knowledge of the land and the environment that they regard as alive and sentient. In *The Interrogation of Ashala Wolf*, Ashala and the Firstwood live in a harmony defined by mutual respect and protection. Indeed, Ashala understands that these bonds and relations are what define the Balance.

The novels' assertion of Indigenous scientific literacies and their projection into futuristic narratives register a twofold objective that reflects the healing and decolonising processes of Indigenous futurisms. On the one hand, they offer Indigenous representations of Indigenous knowledge systems away from Western misconceptions that either consider these forms of knowledges primitive and inferior to Western epistemology and knowledge or romanticise them as pure fantasy and fabrication. In both novels, these Indigenous scientific literacies are not only relevant but define the identities and strengths of the protagonists. In addition, the projection of these knowledge systems to futuristic narratives reflects the authors' endeavours to inscribe the presence of Indigenous peoples and their knowledges in humanity's future. In "Coming to You from the Indigenous Future," Danika Medak-Saltzman argues that Indigenous futuristic works

offer an imaginative potential which asserts the relevance and indispensability of Indigenous peoples and their knowledge systems to humanity's future, strengthening Indigenous communities as they "work to negotiate within and beyond settler colonial realities" (143). On the other hand, these novels contribute to discussions about the Anthropocene and the current global environmental challenges. They call for the importance of attending to Indigenous knowledge systems and environmental practices that, as Davis and Todd put it, constitute "a necessary political corrective, alongside the self-determination of other communities and societies violently impacted by the white supremacist, colonial, and capitalist logics instantiated in the origins of the Anthropocene" (763). *Killer of Enemies* and *The Interrogation of Ashala Wolf* are two such works of Indigenous futurisms that endeavour to imagine balanced futures beyond present dystopias and beyond the Indigenous-settler dichotomies, futures where "living together"—humans and other-than-humans—is a possibility, if not an imperative, for collective survival.

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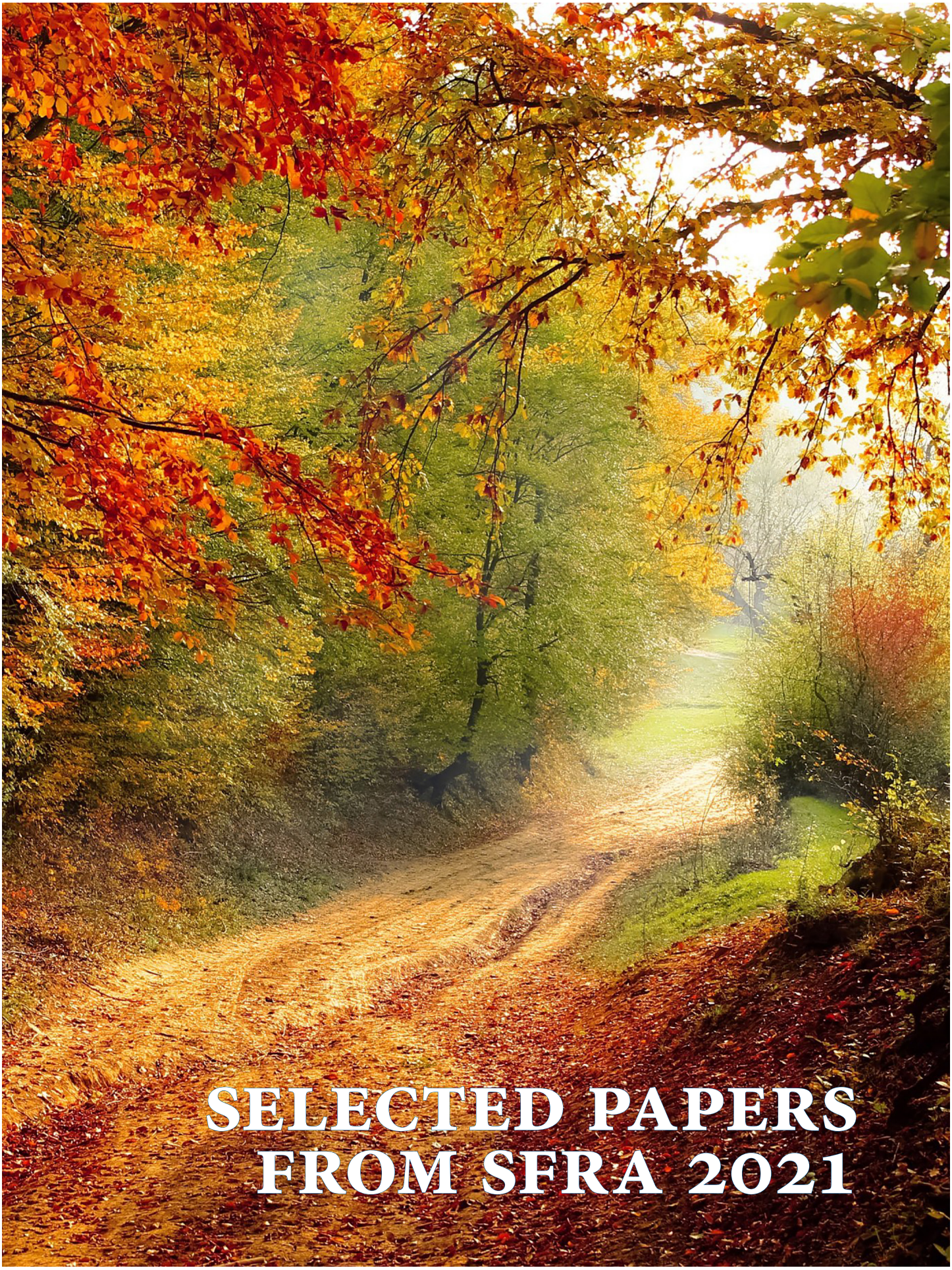

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Economics of Poverty Between the Posthuman and the Other in *Ancillary Sword*

Amanda Pavani Fernandes

Narratives about cyborgs, artificial intelligences, and genetically modified beings have contributed to criticism regarding previously closed definitions about humanity, about sentience, and especially about gender. Ann Leckie's literature, notably her award-winning *Imperial Radch* trilogy, has been particularly relevant to all these areas of study. However, research about her writing has not considered as profoundly the intersection between posthumanism and economic structures of inequality. While there is much scholarship regarding the tension between corporeal and virtual experiences for posthuman characters on the one side, and solid arguments for Leckie's colonial criticism and political debate, these perspectives have rarely intersected. In this paper, I propose a discussion focused precisely on the liminal figure of Breq, Leckie's protagonist.

Counterintuitively, Breq's previous experiences as a being with reduced agency and subjectivity have led her to a position in which her actions foster communal empathy and even subvert economies of poverty. When I use the term "economies of poverty," I refer to all systems whose function depends on fabricating and maintaining poverty—that is, capitalist and colonialist societies in fictional environments. For this analysis, I focus on Ann Leckie's *Ancillary Sword*, published in 2014, the second instalment in her Radch series. This study centres around Breq, former ancillary and current Fleet Captain, from two main perspectives in relation to her actions in the plot of the novel: as a multiple entity that must deal with a sudden and cruel individuality, and as an empire representative. I propose that her inner conflict resulting from the loss of her ship and multiple bodies unravels a sequence of events that results in the exposure of a slave trade in one of the empire's systems, provoking a strike amongst the oppressed peoples and realignment between governance and colonial values. To accompany my thesis, I consider David Le Breton's remarks about corporeality in cyberpunk and cyberspace in *L'Adieu au corps*[1] for my first section on Breq's conflict as a newly found individual, Kathi Weeks's feminist and Marxist analysis in *The Problem with Work* on the association between value and work, as it creates positions of hierarchy, and Dillon and Dillon's links between sovereignty and governance in Leckie's first novel. I propose that Breq escapes common artificial intelligence tropes, and that her unique set of experiences—as a Ship, as an ancillary, as a Fleet Captain for the Radch—puts her in a position to challenge the supposed unity of the sovereign, as she aligns herself, through governance power, with the oppressed ethnicities in the Athoek system.

In the first part of this paper, I look specifically at Breq's subjective trajectory. In *Ancillary Sword*, the character makes it explicit that she was born a "normal" person—that is, a common human with an individual body—but that around the age of seventeen she was kidnapped, her

mind emptied of the person she used to be, and later transformed into in ancillary. In Leckie's universe, ancillaries are human-born enhanced series of servants, or, as Breq puts it, "part of the Ship. There was, often, a vague, paradoxical sense that each decade [each series of ancillaries] had its own almost-identity, but that existed alongside the knowledge that every ancillary was just one part of the larger thing, just hands and feet—and a voice—for Ship" (*Sword* 57). Ancillaries, then, are humans implanted with a technology that grants them inhuman strength but, more importantly, a near-immediate constant experiential connection with other ancillaries of their series, known as their "decade" in the novels, and with their ship. The first novel in that series, *Ancillary Justice* (2013), focuses on her previous experiences as the Ship *Justice of Toren* and subsequently as the isolated ancillary, One Esk. Although the first instinct would be to read Breq, through all her subjective perspectives, as a typical cyborg whose existence is largely virtual, clad with enhancements, or even with a longing for her lost human identity, the protagonist is actually marked by her several experiences of body, her "corporealities," even.

In Le Breton's *L'Adieu au corps*, the thinker approaches at large the issue of body and mind in classical cyberpunk, highlighting the trend of abandoning the body as obsolete in order to transcend towards more evolved or elevated experiences. In *Sword*, however, Leckie gives her readership a cyborg-like creature for whom bodies and their experience are central to existence. While Le Breton claims that, "connected to cyberspace, bodies dissolve. . . . The infosphere traveller no longer feels imprisoned in a physical body" (124, my translation); for Breq, her experience as *Justice of Toren* and One Esk consisted of navigating the empirical world through multiple bodies. She had always been able to tap into whichever ancillary was looking and experiencing without thinking about it: her subjectivity, thus, is rooted on bodies and on sharing their experiences.

In *Ancillary Sword*, however, the reader watches her grapple with being an individual, even if a partially connected one. As Fleet Captain, she can monitor her crew through the Ship, but now she is not integral to the artificial intelligence behind it all; she becomes a commander and passes as human. Roosa Töyrylä, in her master's dissertation, observes that Breq can now "perceive the world via other people's senses, but she does not perceive it via their knowledge, emotions, or ideologies" (25). Therefore, while cyberspace stories tend to focus on the dissolution of bodies, Leckie's ancillaries highlight the shared experience of having multiple bodies, instead, which brings a new perspective for cyborgs, automatons, and artificial intelligences. While the latter tend to be similarly omnipresent, they are rarely corporeal. In addition to that, Leckie's narration includes the many ruptures and instances of trauma involved in going from being a human person to a Ship, to an ancillary, to an enhanced individual passing for human again.

Breq explicitly mentions her trauma when confronting another recently emptied human. Upon revealing that her Lieutenant Tisarwat was in fact an empty vessel for Anaander Mianaai to spy on her, she tells her, "I was the same age when it happened to me" (*Sword* 55). Moreover, Breq is an individual profoundly marked by isolation and by the experience of being reified into an ancillary, despite not remembering her original self. That is one of the factors that enables her

to become an agent of economic and social change in the Athoek system as a Fleet Captain for the Radch Empire. Her experiences make her, ancillary or not, rooted in collective experiences, but these experiences would not resolve by themselves: the events in *Sword* make her question her trajectory. The novel opens with a conversation she has with one version of Anaander Mianaai. The emperor says, "I'll miss you, you know . . . few have the . . . similarity of background you and I have," hinting at the fact they are both multiple and yet separated from their former parts. However, Breq does not consider that an equal position. Her inner monologue comments, "Because I had once been a ship. An AI controlling an enormous troop carrier and thousands of ancillaries, human bodies, part of myself. At the time I had not thought of myself as a slave, but I had been a weapon of conquest, the possession of Annander Mianaai, herself occupying thousands of bodies spread throughout Radch space" (4). Her collective-oriented character results both from trauma and from reflection about her condition.

Throughout the novel, as she navigates political forces and corruption around inequality, she is also grappling with a loneliness that is unique to her: she misses being connected, not merely virtually, but in terms of body. She does not miss sex, but the lack of bodily and mental connection affects her deeply. Seivarden, the only lieutenant who knows her true identity, speculates about the effects of her trauma, saying, "it must be like having parts of your body cut off. And never replaced" (46), but Breq refuses to elaborate on it. Later, when describing decade quarters, she comments on the enclosed space, restless for human officers, but somewhat comforting for ancillaries (27). Breq, then, is a cyborg that is in conflict with the bodily experience; Leckie's protagonist is evidence that virtual and enhanced intelligences may be more than an escape from supposed limitations of the flesh, but to expand on how one perceives the world materially. Le Breton's view, then, of the body as prison, is subverted: the body, in Leckie's series, comforts and empowers. That materiality, added to her conscience about slavery, instrumentalises her to act towards change in Athoek.

That perspective provides a window into the second section of this argument: Breq the Fleet Captain. Sarah Dillon and Michael Dillon, in their chapter for *AI Narratives* (2020), look into the structures of sovereignty and governance in Leckie's universe. In *Ancillary Sword*, Breq represents governance, or the "changing contingent and particular circumstances" (334), that is, as the administrative labour enforcing the rules dictated by the sovereign, the multiple-bodied Anaander Minaai. However, that sovereign is also multiple, incongruent, and at war with herself through (at least) three factions. While the sovereign, in its figure, must be a symbol of unity, its breakage provides an opening from which governance, that is, the instrumental staff in the *Mercy of Kalr*, does not take over, but manages based on partial empirical ideology. By partial empirical ideology, I mean that their management is based on the image of empire values they have and the experiences they have retained about Mianaai—which is, incidentally, at times as broken as the subject of the sovereign herself. As Dillon and Dillon emphasize, governance is inherently heterogeneous (335), in its negotiation between regulations and enforcement in practice. In *Ancillary Sword*, Breq does not hide that she is operating under the order of Anaander Mianaai

nor that the sovereign has been fractured for more than a thousand years. Some characters question her authority under that knowledge, at which Breq only replies simply, "But I really do have orders" (*Sword* 122). That response is often successful to the extent that these other characters recognise her as a powerful subject, as well. It also functions by reminding them that no action there is autonomous, recalling the image of the sovereign (while thinly reshaping what the image of the sovereign may be) and its supposed unity.

Of course, Breq is not entirely disinterested in her choice of location to intervene. Athoek is the birthplace of former Lieutenant Awn, her superior when she was *Justice of Toren*. While seeking to compensate for Awn's demise to her living sister by making her Breq's heir, the Fleet Captain discovers an economics of poverty that had been feeding off citizen bodies like they were ancillaries. Other colonialist practices of fabricating poverty include, for example, indentured work and exorbitant systems of debt upon wages, added to a fetishization of luxury products such as hand-picked tea leaves.

Athoek, the narrator establishes early on, is a planet whose economy revolves around the production of tea leaves. Several ethnicities seem to compose its population, each with its own economically assigned role and subsequent stereotypes. Athoeki are, according to the people in power, mainly the Xhai; the Samirend are described as a people who were colonised "successfully" and who achieved certain level of success; the Ychana and the Valskaayan, on the other hand, are described as uncivilised and "good for nothing." The richest tea farmer describes them as lazy, echoing typical coloniser discourse on people who refuse to be assimilated:

> They have plenty of opportunity to become civilised. Why, look at the Samirend! . . . The Valskaayans have every opportunity, but do they take advantage of it? I don't know if you saw their residence—a very nice guesthouse, fully as nice as the house I live in myself, but it's practically a ruin. They can't be bothered to keep their surroundings nice. But they go quite extravagantly into debt over a musical instrument, or a new handheld.
> (213, emphasis in original)

Fosif Denche, said tea farmer, criticises his[2] workers for using their wages (and more) to acquire consumer products, ignoring that he is the one providing and setting the prices for these products. Sisix, the Ychana character who accompanies Breq, reveals the true side of that subordinate relationship, saying,

> There are generally some garden plots if they want to grow vegetables, but they have to buy seeds and tools and it's time out from picking tea. They're houseless, so they don't have family to give them the things they need, they have to buy them. They can't any of them get travel permits, so they can't go very far to buy anything. They can't order things because they don't have any money at all, they're too heavily in debt to get credit, so Fosif sells them things—handhelds, access to entertainments, better food, whatever—at whatever price she wants. (199)

As Kathi Weeks notes in *The Problem with Work*, "waged work remains today the centerpiece of late capitalist economic systems" (6); as such, Leckie's tea farmer exploits the people picking tea by following the rules whilst bending them through a monopoly of entertainment, sustenance, and general survival. Such a practice of isolation and indentured work has many examples in the many years of class struggle—a notable one, for example, is the Massacre of Eldorado dos Carajás, in 1996, in the Brazilian state of Pará, when workers revolted by invading a farm. Later, they gathered over four thousand people to march to Belém protesting for land rights; on the way, they were brutally shot at by the state's military police; nineteen people died, and many were injured.[3]

Weeks also observes the discursive practice of making work individual and private, not structural and collective. According to her, "this effort to make work at once public and political is, then, one way to counter the forces that would naturalize, privatize, individualize, ontologize and also, thereby, depoliticize it" (7). She also adds that the analysis of work relations of subordination and domination are at the root of wage contracts—a notable phenomenon in the economic and social system at Athoek.

Considering the system's configurations, there are both Fleet Captain Breq and the longstanding economy of poverty in Athoek. Upon her arrival at the Station, she takes residence at Undergarden, an abandoned section of the old station, inhabited by many Ychana, among others. When there is an accusation of vandalism in that territory, she does not assume that Fosif's daughter was innocent simply from her house name. Called an "uncomfortable company" by the governor (*Sword* 75), Breq mediates the conflict towards the resolution of the novel, revealing on top of the exploitation and alienation imposed upon the colonised peoples in Athoek an ancient structure of sexual abuse and slave traffic. Although Breq justifies her intervention through Radch ideology ("if there's injustice here, it is only because the Lord of the Radch isn't sufficiently present" [231]), she simultaneously and purposefully ignores that the Lord of the Radch has not been one for a long time and, therefore, that the ideology of assimilating peoples, providing them with citizenship, right of passage, and fair work, remains a part of the sovereign.

Governance power, originally meant to reinforce political power, exposes an economy of poverty that leads the Valskaayan to exert for the first time their refusal of work. However, that chain of events is unlocked as a result of Breq processing her own corporeal trauma, becoming capable of identifying similar systems of inequality and oppression around her, and using her position of governance to enact change. As the novel is concluded, the Valskaayans strike and begin bargaining for labour rights. Breq's unique position, which lets her visualise structural flaws (her broken identity and previous multiple bodies) pushes her to act upon them at the same time, enabling a reform in economic and societal norms.

Notes

1. In this paper, I refer to the Brazilian Portuguese version, translated by Marina Appenzeller (2003).
2. *Editor's Note*: We do not know the biological sex nor the gender of Denche nor of most of the other characters in the series.
3. There are not many sources in English; one of them is the Amnesty International's website <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/press-release/2016/04/the-eldorado-dos-carajas-massacre-20-years-of-impunity-and-violence-in-brazil/>. Other sources in Brazilian Portuguese include <https://mst.org.br/2021/04/16/25-anos-do-massacre-de-eldorado-dos-carajas-marca-a-luta-internacional-camponesa/> and <https://reporterbrasil.org.br/2021/04/massacre-de-eldorado-dos-carajas-25-feridos-nunca-foram-indenizados-diz-associacao/>. All pages were accessed on Aug. 18, 2021.

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Human and Animal Futurity: Survival, Flourishing, and Care in Margaret Atwood's *MaddAddam* Trilogy and Bong Joon-ho's *Okja*

M. Sousa

Introduction

When humans generally think about the future, their thoughts are often primarily concerned with what the future will be for themselves. Animals are easily excluded from their thoughts regarding the future. As Claire Colebrook asks in *Death of the PostHuman*, "How is it that humanity defines itself as that being that inevitably chooses life, and yet has done so by saving only its own life?" (204). Colebrook asks this in her discussion of human extinction, yet the question also suggests a focus on a wider range of human destruction towards nonhumans. While humans literally kill animals for their own preservation (for food, medicine, research, clothing, etc.), the act of excluding nonhumans from thoughts of ensuring the future acts as a metaphorical killing. These recurring literal and metaphorical killings acted out by humans in the present implies a future of inequality, where humans remain at the top of the hierarchy of moral and ethical concern. How can we, as humans, move beyond this oppressive mindset? One of the places we can begin to look to reevaluate the enforced inequality between beings of different species is the genre of science fiction. Many works of science fiction stand as influential tools teaching or reminding us that to move beyond a future of inequality, we must first recognize the ways we too often treat animal life as below ours, and then begin to practice care responses.

Yet, we should not simply think that an animal's permission for survival and keeping them alive is equal to them having a sufficient quality of life. Animals, including genetically engineered animals that were originally created for human consumption, should also be empowered to flourish. In demonstrating this argument, this paper examines the representation of genetically engineered pigs and their relationships with humans in Margaret Atwood's *MaddAddam* trilogy—*Oryx and Crake* (2003), *The Year of the Flood* (2007), and *MaddAddam* (2013)—and Bong Joon-ho's film *Okja* (2017). Atwood's post-apocalyptic trilogy contains many genetically engineered creatures, including the humanoid Crakers, as well as many nonhuman animals. For this paper, I choose to focus on the pigoons, the transgenic pig hosts carrying fool-proof human organs for future transplants. In Joon-ho's film, the "super pigs" are excessively large pigs genetically engineered for future meat consumption. *Okja* follows a young girl named Mija and her relationship with Okja, her "super pig" companion animal. When Okja is crowned as the best pig, she is taken away from her home in South Korea and brought to New York for the public revealing ceremony, and then to be slaughtered afterwards. Mija embarks on a journey to save her super pig. In contemporary Western culture, pigs are, indeed, commonly eaten and are often considered the best candidate for xenotransplantation. Both Atwood's and Joon-ho's works are culturally

relevant to contemporary Western society and human attitudes towards pigs. Yet, these works also demonstrate the ways we can see genetically engineered animals less as products, and more as subjects who are worthy recipients of care.

Through an animal ethics of care lens, this paper explores the imagined possibilities in these works on how we can relate to genetically engineered animals that were originally created for sustaining and extending human life. How would care practices consider not only the animal's survival, but also their ability to flourish? Martha Nussbaum states that the ethical treatment of human and animal subjects revolves around how our actions enable or impede their flourishing: "to shape the human-animal relationship . . . no sentient animal should be cut off from the chance of a flourishing life, a life with the type of dignity relevant to that species" (351). In proving my argument, this paper will first analyze the decision in creating these engineered pigs and the lack of care towards them, and then consider the cooperative, trusting, and/or fulfilling relationships between the humans (or posthumans) and the pigs.

Ethics of care believes that moral actions focus on the relationships we have with others, and emphasizes actions such as care, attention, and benevolence as virtues, as well as the importance of emotional compassionate responses such as empathy and sympathy. Ethics of care asks for flexibility and careful attention to individual situations, rather than emphasizing absolutes or a set of rules. Joan Tronto defines care as "a species activity that includes everything that we do to maintain, continue, and repair our 'world' so that we can live in it as well as possible. That world includes our bodies, our selves, and our environment, all of which we seek to interweave in a complex, life sustaining web" (142). Some scholars in animal ethics approach animal welfare by connecting ethics of care with animal ethics to form an animal ethics of care. Their goal is to focus on the personal relationships that humans have with animals. As Daniel Engster states, care ethics opposes animal suffering "not because we wish to maximize utility or consistently apply our rights theory across species, but because we have relations with animals and care about them" (521).

A Lack of Care

In Atwood's trilogy and Joon-ho's film, the oppressive systems that created the genetically engineered pigs are clearly lacking in care responses. In their works, genetic engineering technologies are practiced in a society that lacks appropriate care ethics. In *Oryx and Crake*, the first installment of Atwood's trilogy, we learn about the pigoons, who are genetically engineered to serve as hosts growing human-tissue organs for future transplant. They are spliced with a "rapid maturity gene" so they could "grow five or sex kidneys at a time." Atwood writes, "[s]uch a host animal could be reaped of its extra kidneys; then, rather than being destroyed, it could keep on living and grow more organs" (27–28). In *Okja*, the Mirando Corporation genetically engineers twenty-six "super pigs" to be sent to farmers around the world, and then crowns the best pig ten years later. Lucy, the CEO, explains their goal for the super pigs: they will be "designed to leave a minimal footprint on the environment, consuming less feed and forage, producing less excretions. But most importantly . . . They'll need to taste fucking good" (00:05:03). As the audience later

learns, it is this last point that is truly the most, if not the only, important aspect in the eyes of the corporation. After this point in the film, members of the Mirando Corporation show no signs that they are truly concerned with their environmental footprint. Rather, the super pigs (as well as the pigoons in Atwood's trilogy) are defined solely as bodies and reduced to what Giorgio Agamben in *Homo Sacer* calls "bare life," a social system that actively separates political citizens and individuals from beings that are regarded as mere bodies, and thus, killable. While Agamben's "bare life" does not explicitly include animals, human beings that are stripped of citizenship (prisoners or people in refugee camps, for example) are treated as if they are reduced to the status of animal. Laura Hudson explains that "[a]s the representation and embodiment of nature, the animal becomes the marker of bare life" (1664). Indeed, the genetically engineered animal is especially a marker for this category. While companion animals can be seen with sentimentality and as more than mere bodies, too often the genetically engineered animal is defined by its body and what its body can do.

Also, the genetically engineered pigs in the *MaddAddam* trilogy and *Okja* are developed under the assumption that people's concerns and motivations are purely self-serving and individualist, rather than caring and relational. The creators of the pigoons and super pigs do not assume that people could form bonds with these creations. While I would not argue that a strong, intimate bond is portrayed between a human and a pigoon in the *MaddAddam* trilogy, Okja and Mija in Joon-ho's film certainly convey a strong, intimate bond. Regardless, the Mirando Corporation does not care about intimate bonds between humans and super pigs. Rather, they care about how they can portray it to the media. The Mirando Corporation takes advantage of their bond by paying for Mija to come to New York City and be reunited with Okja in a public event because they want to minimize public relations damage to the company.

To Be Granted Survival

While the lack of care is certainly evident in Atwood's and Joon-ho's works, the *potential* for care ethics is also embedded throughout. Before we examine this potential for care ethics, let us first consider how and why, by the end of Atwood's and Joon-ho's works, the pigoons and Okja—and another super pig—are granted survival. The pigoons and the two super pigs become survivors of the capitalistic systems that created them for human consumption, either in the form of sustaining or extending human life. In *MaddAddam*, when a violent group of humans called the Painballers are after the human survivors and start regularly eating pigoon piglets, the pigoons want revenge and turn to the humans and the Crakers for help (269). In asking for help, the pigoons are aware that they require care from the humans in order to ensure their survival from the excess and the hyper-consumption which the Painballers symbolize. In exchange, the pigoons will agree to a truce, stop eating the humans' crops, and strive to co-exist harmoniously.

Near the end of Joon-ho's film, an economic exchange ensures Okja's survival. Mija, however, refuses to see Okja in terms of economic value until the moment she is *forced* to do so by an uncaring system so she can save Okja's life. When Okja is about to be slaughtered, Mija offers a pig

figurine made from solid gold to Nancy, the new CEO of the corporation. Mija states, "I want to buy Okja. Alive" (01:45:13). It is this act that saves Okja from the slaughterhouse. Nancy remarks that the figurine is "worth a lot of money" (01:46:04), then congratulates Mija on her purchase. While typically it would not be viewed as caring to treat Okja in terms of economic exchange, the conditions in which Mija is operating forces her to be flexible and to consider the fact that in order to care *about* and care *for* Okja, she must start thinking in terms of economic exchange.

Yet, while Okja's survival is approved, almost all the other super pigs at the slaughterhouse do not receive this privilege. Near the film's end, when Mija leaves with Okja after the economic exchange, hundreds of super pigs watch them through a feedlot fence. Two of these super pigs then engineer the escape of a piglet (presumably their baby), pushing the piglet through the fence. As Mija and Okja leave the feedlot (while Okja hides the piglet), they—and the audience—hear the cries of the hundreds of the super-pigs left behind. Sherryl Vint states that "[i]f we are to learn to see animals as others who can make ethical appeals upon us . . . humans have to accept that much of what animals may want to communicate to humanity is not what we might want to hear" (86). What we hear echoed back to us with the sound of their cries is human guilt—for our mistreatment of animals, and for the fact that we may not be doing enough to save them. Yet, we must also not forget that Mija, a young child, is certainly in no position where she can save and care for all the super pigs. It is also important to acknowledge that her decision to save the one piglet demonstrates caring *about* and reveals her compassion towards the rest of the super pigs.

Caring-for, Caring-about, and Flourishing

What we also see here in these examples of how the pigoons, Okja, and the piglet are able to survive is a difference between caring-for and caring-about. As Nel Noddings explains, "Caring-for describes an encounter or set of encounters characterized by direct attention and response. It requires the establishment of a caring relation, person-to-person contact of some sort. Caring-about expresses some concern but does not guarantee a response to one who needs care" (xiv). Noddings acknowledges that it is impossible for us to provide care for everyone in the world; even if we care about animals, we are limited by time, resources, and space. Mija is only in the position to care *for* two of the super pigs. Nonetheless, Mija has gained awareness of the mistreatment of animals through her exposure to the cruel system that created and abused Okja. Caring-about, then, also aligns with Josephine Donovan's assertion that animal care ethics requires attention: "Attention to the individual suffering animal but also . . . attention to the political and economic systems that cause the suffering" (3). In contrast, while the humans do provide care for the pigoons by helping them and honoring their truce, it remains ambiguous at the end of *MaddAddam* whether the humans are doing this because they care about the pigoons, or if they mostly care about peaceful co-existence.

In comparison to the ending of *MaddAddam*, a scene in *Oryx and Crake* shows Jimmy caring-about the pigoons, but he cannot, at the time, care for them. As a child, Jimmy feels distress when the men at his father's work make jokes about the pigoons being in the meals: "he [Jimmy] didn't

want to eat a pigoon, because he thought of the pigoons as creatures much like himself. Neither he nor they had a lot of say in what was going on" (24). Jimmy cares about the suffering of the pigoons, sees them as "creatures much like himself," and can recognize their inability to speak against their own oppression. While the use of the pigoon for medical reasons is accepted by the general public, there are many objections to eating the pigoons. Their objection is not because of any compassion towards the creatures, but because human DNA exists in them. While the public are only opposed to eating pigoons because they are concerned with the disgrace of the human (through the consumption of pigoons), Jimmy cares about the pigoons' wellbeing.

While it would be ideal for caring-for and caring-about to always work in conjunction, it is caring-for that allows the genetically engineered pigs the widest opportunity for flourishing. In *MaddAddam*, years after the battle with the Painballers, the humans and pigoons are still respecting their truce. The final pages of the novel show us that the pigoons are living happily in forests, untroubled by the human survivors. They are able to live this untroubled life because the humans, after helping them with the Painballers, allow them the space to live their lives undisturbed and as they wish. Yet, this form of caring would not have been possible without the Crakers first caring-*about* the pigoons. It is the Crakers who inform the humans that the pigoons need help, through their form of telepathy. It is the fact that the Crakers, this group of humanoid posthumans created by Crake, initially care about the pigoons and then express this caring to the humans which allows the humans to then care for the pigoons. Lars Schmeink notes that it is through the Crakers where "Atwood . . . introduces compassion for the pigoons" (93). Compassion, which is a sympathetic concern for the suffering or misfortunes of others, implicitly indicates a caring-about. Throughout the trilogy, the Crakers are characterized as benevolent and nurturing. The fact that they are the ones who can easily feel compassion towards the pigoons and show their caring-about them by voicing their concern to the humans suggests a vision for a future of posthumanity: what comes after human-centric mindsets. Caring-about other species, even ones that were originally created for human consumption agendas, is a frame of mind that can be cultivated and practiced.

In *The Year of the Flood*, Toby (a protagonist in the novel and a member of an environmental religious group) often treats the pigoons as abject nuisances. She shoots one of them to protect the food supply in her garden, and when witnessing them having a funeral for the boar she calls it "truly frightening" (328). Yet, in *MaddAddam*, her mindset shifts, and she even accepts that the pigoons have a culture. As Nussbaum writes, "[p]art of respect for other species is a willingness to look and study, learning the internal rhythms of an animal community and the sense of value the way of life expresses" (372). Toby also shows the potential for care and multispecies cooperation. When Jimmy wonders if the pigoons are leading them astray to ambush and then eat them, Toby responds: "I'd say the odds are against it. They've already had the opportunity" (348). In the face of uncertainty, Toby chooses to believe in the intellect and potentially compassionate capacities of the pigoons. She recognizes the fact that the pigoons are able to think about themselves as well as the humans and the Crakers—and that humans should adopt that same empathetic practice.

In Joon-ho's film, Okja is given the chance to have a flourishing life. When Johnny the zoologist, in awe of how well Okja was raised, asks Mija's grandfather what his methods were, the grandfather responds: "I just let her run around" (24:54). Indeed, Okja is given lots of space outside to run, play, and carry out the life of a regular pig. While it is true that she needs to be raised well to eventually carry on her super-pig duty (to be slaughtered for meat), by the end of the film Okja and the other piglet are running around outside, this time without the oncoming threat of slaughter. Okja also flourishes by having a compassionate caregiver. While one does not necessarily have to truly care about someone in order to be in the position of caregiver, Mija does indeed care about in addition to caring for Okja. Even before Okja is taken away, Mija shows compassion in many ways, ranging from removing burrs from Okja's paws, and treating her body for injuries when Okja hurts herself. These moments are shown early in the film, which allows the viewer to recognize early that care requires work as well. Near the beginning of the film, Mija also shows compassion by showing great distress when Okja falls off the cliff that she saves Mija from falling off. As the two of them embrace, the camera captures Okja's eye, and the gaze exchanged between her and Mija. By showing Mija whispering in Okja's ear and the close-up of Okja's eye, we can recall Jacques Derrida and his cat in *The Animal that Therefore I Am*. When Derrida looks at his cat, and sees her looking back, he is not looking at Cat as a representative of the entire species or as a metaphor or an allegory, but at an individual cat (6). The first step in connecting with the Other is to recognize it is not simply a placeholder of a group or a symbol. By showing Mija whispering in Okja's ear and the close-up of Okja's eye, the audience sees how Mija is looking at an individual super pig—not just an animal bred for productive purposes. In these moments of touch, gaze, and senses meeting, we see interspecies communication. Donna Haraway explains that "touch ramifies and shapes accountability" and emphasizes the importance of "accountability, caring for, being affected, and entering into responsibility" (36). When species meet—as Haraway would put it—we see a moment of encounter that can arouse care and empathy.

On the Question of Autonomy

Donovan asks, "how does one generalize beyond the individual particular instance of caring or compassion to include all creatures within an ethic of care?" (184). One important critique of ethics of care is the idea that it is more well-suited for individual animals that have been domesticated and that people have personal, close encounter relationships with, and not as useful when talking about wild animals or other animals that people typically do not have intimate relationships with. Grace Clement shares this concern and argues that when considering wild animals, ethics of care should still be present, but it should also be willing to incorporate elements of what care ethicist Carol Gilligan refers to as justice-based ethics, which is a type of ethics that encourages moral choices based on a measurement of rights. Factors such as autonomy and respect are key ideas in justice-based ethics, and Clement argues that animal ethics also needs to also incorporate these factors. As she points out, "an ethic of care which does not value autonomy tends to result in forms of 'caring' which are oppressive to either the caregiver or the recipient of care" (309). In *MaddAddam*, the pigoons want to be able to live their lives in the wild unbothered,

with respect, and separated from humans. In respecting their wishes, the humans care for them by allowing them their autonomy. In comparison, Okja spends a lot of time outside, but I claim that she is more domesticated than the pigoons. While domestic animals certainly rely on human support more in comparison to wild animals, there is a fine line between caring for a domesticated animal and limiting their autonomy.

Ultimately, an animal ethics of care needs to also be attentive to this justice-based tenant of autonomy. I would argue that ethics of care already hints at recognizing this through its assertion that a proper ethics of care, as Adams and Donovan explains, is attentive to the political systems that shape certain oppressions (3). As I previously mentioned, Mija is undoubtedly affected by her experience seeing Okja and the hundreds of other super pigs in the slaughter factory, even though she only comes home with two of them. While she is only in the position to allow the autonomy of those two super pigs, Mija is certainly aware that the hundreds of other super pigs are denied their autonomy. Mija's discovery of where Okja came from and the larger group of which she is a part demonstrates how an ethics of care needs to recognize that the individual is never entirely separate from the collective of which they are a part—nor should they be.

Conclusion

While some may worry that animal ethics of care is anthropocentric in how it draws attention to the humans performing the care, animal ethics of care does try to jettison this implied anthropocentrism and instead foreground other significant elements that this ethics emphasizes, such as interconnectedness and responsibility. Furthermore, an element of ethics of care is reciprocity; this reciprocity does not imply that there needs to be an equal trade between both participants, but instead implies reciprocation in the sense that when the caregiver gives, the care recipient will have a response to that care. It is up to the caregiver to pay attention to the care recipient and how they respond to the care. By using what partial knowledge they possess to interpret their response, they should then re-evaluate, if need be, or learn more about how to provide that care for that individual. This willingness to learn, evolve, and transform can allow for posthumanism and care ethics to compliment each other. This reciprocity is suggested in Atwood's and Joon-ho's works. In *MaddAddam*, the pigoons can flourish by living a life undisturbed in the forests, with the humans and Crakers separated but close enough, respecting them and their wishes. In Joon-ho's film, Okja and the piglet can flourish not only by living a life with the freedom to roam, but also through their compassionate relationship with Mija. The pigoons and the super pigs desire different types of care, which demonstrates their role as active participants in their care relations with humans.

In this paper, I examined Atwood's *MaddAddam* trilogy and Joon-ho's *Okja* to argue for human care towards the flourishing of genetically engineered animals originally created for human use. These works of science fiction demonstrate how the genre is not only a useful vehicle for showing us different ways of being, but also for emphasizing a multi-species interconnection or kinship. Yet, why genetically engineered animals? Why specifically care about their flourishing?

Genetically engineered animals are created/altered through biotechnology. Both animals and machines are traditionally seen as separate from humanist constructions regarding the human condition, and so connecting the two may lead to feelings of abject horror. Since genetically engineered animals are discoursed in this unfair way and have no say in what is done to their bodies, humans especially have a sense of responsibility and especially owe them possible opportunities for flourishing.

As Nussbaum writes, "[t]he purpose of social cooperation, by analogy and extension, ought to be to live decently together in a world in which many species try to flourish" (351). To heighten our chances of moving beyond a future of inequality, we should foster mindsets and practices that encourage both caring-for and caring-about. What is ultimately at stake in not doing so is not only the lives of nonhumans, but a future notion of humanity that is caring, empathetic, cooperative, and considers the livelihoods of both humans nonhumans.

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The Quiet Structures of Violence in Mennonite Science Fiction

Selena Middleton

Introduction to Mennonite Science Fiction

While Mennonite literature is well-established in Canadian literary studies—where it is known as a subgenre of wide prairie landscapes, diasporic narratives, and quiet challenges to oppressive politics—Mennonite speculative fiction is new. In a recent issue of *The Center for Mennonite Writing Journal*, editor Jeff Gundy outlines the sparsely populated history of Mennonite speculative writing, which is comprised of Leigh Brackett's *The Long Tomorrow* (1955) and the works of A.E. van Vogt, "who hid his Mennonite roots carefully" (n.p.). Increasingly, however, contemporary Mennonite writers are turning to speculative fiction to counter the cultural suppression of ideas and identities that conflict with the Mennonite status quo. As a Historic Peace Church known for nonresistance and conscientious objection, Mennonites can be seen as isolationists ill-suited to the imaginative expanses of science fiction. Andrew Swartley, however, counters this idea when he states that "Mennonites avoid conflict better than most, to the point of actively, viciously silencing 'fringe' voices in both public and private forums . . . [so] we need stories that defy our habits of silence and conflict avoidance. We need stories that start conversations" (n.p.). New voices are emerging now to challenge Mennonite silence. This is done not with malice, but with a deep love of Mennonite traditions. One such writer is Sofia Samatar, whose father is a Somali scholar and mother a Swiss-German Mennonite from whom Samatar takes her religious affiliation. Samatar's generation ship story, "Fallow," is the focus of this brief study as its treatment of silence and the violence of conflict avoidance is exemplary of some of the major movements of an emerging subgenre. These themes are increasingly important as we interrogate what it means to make a home—and fight for it—in the context of the deepening climate crisis.

Exodus, Survival, and Silence

Before delving into Sofia Samatar's "Fallow" and the land relationships in that story, it is important to contextualize Mennonite silence, which stems from pacifist nonresistance. The Mennonite relationships to nonresistance and pacifism are a response to The Sermon on the Mount, in which the blessed are described as meek, persecuted, and as peacemakers (*New Revised Standard Version*, Matt. 5.1-10). Further, "the Anabaptist vision was the ethic of love and non-resistance . . . applied to all human relationships. The Brethren understood this to mean complete abandonment of all warfare, strife, and violence, and of the taking of human life" (Bender 21). Religious ideals, however, often come into conflict with social norms and individual human experience. The Mennonite cultural relationship to silence is linked to a history of religious persecution which included torture, martyrdom, and an exodus which forced the community

across continents in search of religious freedom. Mennonite poet and scholar Di Brandt links the Mennonite separatist impulse to this traumatic persecution and how that persecution has been preserved in the culture. She says: "The founding events of Mennonite culture were told and retold to us as children. They were also memorialized in . . . *The Martyr's Mirror*, which came complete with graphic illustrations and inspiring death scene testimonials by the condemned" ("je jelieda" 108). The hymns still sung by Mennonites also feature stories of martyrdom, enforcing a sense that the community is "surrounded by a host of great martyrs and of living in an atmosphere of witnessing" (Stauffer, qtd. in Redekop 17). Magdalene Redekop connects the prevailing presence of the martyr experience to contemporary Mennonite silence, stating that "torture was frequently directed at the mouth" (17), the site of religious speech which the Mennonites refused to give up. In refusing to be silent about their religious beliefs and in becoming refugees for these convictions, a paradoxical tension came into Mennonite culture that resulted in a kind of silence that is markedly different from that demanded by a religious adherence to tenets of humility and peace. In 1985 Dyck wrote that "the motif of suffering has become a major ingredient in Mennonite identity" (qtd. in Redekop) and Redekop qualifies this when she says that the "'tension between martyrdom and survival' may be at least as important in Mennonite writing as the theology of martyrdom itself" (Redekop 13). Perhaps a parallel can be drawn between the way Western societies venerate the sacrifices of soldiers, a veneration used in military recruiting material, and the spiritual honours bestowed upon Mennonite martyrs. Early Mennonites died in tongue screws and Brandt explains that the venerated suffering passed to future generations manifests as a quiet but persistent violence turned inward (*So this* 3). Given the closeness many Mennonite communities feel to the land through both their agricultural practice and their isolationism, it should not be a surprise that the land sometimes becomes the recipient of internalized violence.

Silence and the Land

Scholar of diaspora, Robin Cohen, writes that diasporic communities are marked by their "break event" (qtd. in Zacharias 187) and so the persecution of Mennonites is imprinted on their culture. Mennonite nonresistance becomes intertwined with horrors that Redekop argues were "experienced . . . as unspeakable" (18). But given that the original persecution also includes removal from original homelands, and many Mennonites experienced further exodus in the face of continuing persecution, the "break event" that is inscribed on the community also necessarily influences an attitude to the land. Brandt states that Mennonites demonstrate no desire to return to their homeland even though "the ancestral lands . . . are still so much part of [Mennonite] cultural imagination" ("je jelieda" 125). Despite the continuance of a community that remains connected to the land through agriculture, that land is theologically less relationship than resource. Writing about growing up in rural Manitoba, Brandt stresses that "not once did [she] hear a single [preacher] talk about the land, except to pronounce gleefully that we 'shall have dominion over it'" (*So this* 7). Brandt's work contends with the pacifist ideal's conflict with the reality of Mennonite farms as part of the Canadian colonial project (2). Even Mennonite nonresistance during wartime is marked with colonial violence: Mennonites cut timber in

conscientious objector camps, both harvesting resources and opening up Indigenous land to further exploitation. Thus nonresistance on this land is a quiet complicity in the violence of colonization. This same quiet complicity in acts of violence shapes Sofia Samatar's colonization narrative in "Fallow."

Sofia Samatar's Exo-planetary Diaspora

"Fallow" uses science fictional tropes to examine Mennonite exile, and to interrogate settler culture and the ways that homesteads can remain separate from a sense of community or belonging. When Mennonites are given their own world in a text, the characters' internal attitudes rather than external corruption guarantee continued violence and, as Daniel Shank Cruz puts it, through this story, Samatar "makes the argument that [Mennonites] should interact with the world to make it a better place instead of shunning it" (221). The novella addresses this moment of cultural recovery and what a struggle for reconnection, however painful, could look like in individual characters—and, perhaps, how individual accounts when recorded and submitted to the community archive, could signal communal change.

Samatar's "Fallow" is divided into three parts, each focusing on a character that defies the strict structures of the community and bears the consequences. Each section includes a short epigraph, which I use to frame a discussion of the story's quiet violences and how they relate to the lands of Fallow and the Earth these characters left behind.

Miss Snowfall and the Peaceable Kingdom

The story opens with Miss Snowfall the schoolteacher and her epigraph, which marks Fallow and perhaps specifically Miss Snowfall's classroom and external life as an example of "the peaceable kingdom" (Samatar 206). The children of Fallow love their schoolteacher, who teaches through experience and narrative and shapes her lessons to her students' curiosity and passion. Agar, the story's narrator, calls her method "idiosyncratic" and "associative" (211) but points out in light of Miss Snowfall's suicide that she taught "the proper curriculum" (212). It is Miss Snowfall who teaches the children about themselves and about the Ark generation ship on which their ancestors travelled to Fallow. The story of leaving Earth teaches the children about conflicts among their people too—conflicts so embedded that they resurface on Fallow, even though the people had to put aside their differences to gain a spot on the ship. Miss Snowfall teaches that there were sects within their religion that "practiced seclusion" (213). Of these sects, those who boarded the Ark decided to "accept a life dependent on advanced technology, rather than a life of war or a stillness amounting to suicide" (213). Out of those who stayed behind on a beleaguered Earth "on burnt farms, [and] among the cattle who were dying in the dust" some "shook out their sheets and curtains for the last time and went to bed, resolved not to rise until Judgment Day" (213). Perhaps Miss Snowfall recognizes herself in the histories she shares. Her experience parallels the isolated struggles of the Mennonite community on Earth and the way she labours at both teaching and keeping a peace which is referred to as "yieldedness" (226). Miss Snowfall's story begins with the announcement that "here is the peaceable kingdom" (206), and so over the course of this first

section, the reader learns that a peaceable kingdom on Fallow is one where creativity is quashed, where curiosity yields to rigid structure, where peace dies quietly at the end of a rope. If members of this community are given names based on their attributes or function in society, the reader questions whether Miss Snowfall is named after the purity of the landscape after a winter storm, or for the way the community covers that which is unwanted with a cold blanket that smothers undesirable elements.

Brother Lookout and the Earthmen

The second section, titled for Brother Lookout, underscores the paradox of the narrator Agar's past and present positions in her community, first as a powerless child discovering truths about her people, and then as a writer who documents those truths and seeks to archive them for posterity. Agar's paradox is underscored, too, by Brother Lookout's name and epigraph. Brother Lookout is named for the thick glasses he wears, an irony that highlights an unfulfilled potential, the juxtaposition of desired insight with culturally enforced myopia. Brother Lookout is the community's only psychiatrist, but later, when psychiatry is banned, he is the man Agar knows as "the shambling village street sweeper" (230), demonstrating a focal shift, perhaps, from the psyche of the community to how that community relates to the land as he takes up a humble form of service to put that relationship to rights. Most importantly, Brother Lookout is the character who reveals Fallow as a concept—that this exo-terran space is not a true home, but a holding place where the community waits out the death of humankind back on Earth, to return once "peace" has been restored. The cause of the anguish with which Brother Lookout entreats Brother Pin to relate the revelation of Fallow's origin is apparent in Pin's use of both Biblical allusion and natural imagery:

> Like the priest and the Levite, we have passed by the dying man in the road. Unlike true Christians, we have given no thought to our neighbors. We have not considered those who have perished since we departed Earth long ago, their souls crying out for peace. How many have been born since our departure who, had they only been alive at that time, would have joined the trek? Are they to be punished simply for being born too late? How can we receive Gabriel's reports so complacently? Every quarter century produces a catalogue of horrors, yet we sit here . . . like the carrion birds, the eagle and the ossifrage, waiting for others to die so that we might inherit the Earth. (236)

At Brother Lookout's urging, Brother Pin reveals that travellers from Earth have periodically arrived at Fallow and been kept separate from the community while they are schooled in religion. These refugees are shunned if they refuse to accept community beliefs. On Fallow, exile outside of the careful technological management of the planet's atmosphere means death. Thus the community quietly accepts death on two fronts, allowing the land to maintain their borders without admitting that they are a part of those systems. Samatar's careful use of both Biblical and animal references in this section underscores the two fronts on which the inhabitants of Fallow

have strayed from relationship and suggests an intimate connection between human and non-human relationship which have not been maintained away from Earth.

Temar's World Is Not a Home

The conditions that force the narrator's sister Temar to escape from Fallow are revealed as Agar comes to terms with the planet as a place that facilitates the greatest Mennonite experiment in separatist violence. The epigraph for Temar's section—"This world is not my home"—underscores a relation which makes a parallel of Fallow and Earth and Earth and Heaven; the former places both temporary residences for the religious adherent whose faith attests that believers will eventually gain a true home elsewhere. But Temar knows Fallow in a way that other members of her family do not. Through her work at the castle—the mysterious hub which houses the technology which makes Fallow habitable, the machinery that the low-tech agrarian residents ignore—the mythologies that sustain others are revealed to Temar as hollow or even hypocritical. Following the "Rule of Mary" (249) so as to not reveal the mystery by which they live, the community maintains the guise of a simple lifestyle that Temar knows does not reflect the truth of life on Fallow.

It's unclear what happens to Temar after she rescues the Earthman from the castle and leaves Fallow with him. Temar's family grieve her transgression and hold a funeral for her, an action which could be interpreted as an act of shunning the severity of which matches the gravity of Temar's behaviour, interpreted by the community as anti-social. Holding a funeral for a family member who may not be dead indicates that the community remains locked into social structures that do not respond to the human lives that exist within those structures. But Temar's flight is also a kind of resurrection which works to dispel the quiet but violent illusion of Fallow, leaving Agar with the knowledge that she lives in perpetual exile ensured by the harmful silences of her community. As Agar says at the end of the story, "There is a land flowing with milk and honey . . . and we will never go there" (261). This final statement reconnects the Biblical paradise with Earth and in so doing removes Fallow from the spiritual relationship the Mennonites assumed would follow them to another planet. But the questions of Temar's survival and continued resistance, and Agar's efforts to document the horrors of Fallow and therefore force her people to reckon with them remain unanswered points of generative possibility.

Conclusion

Why is an examination of Mennonite culture and the speculative fiction that critiques that culture important to non-Mennonites? Those of us who value peace and resistance as political positions and are concerned about settler attitudes to the land in a time of immense ecological change can look to the ways both pacifism and resistance become internalized and institutionalized. But Mennonite speculative fiction also offers a way forward from that somewhat static position through works like Samatar's "Fallow," works which use speculative forms to interrogate the connections between social structures and the human beings that live within them and in the space find a way toward resistance, resiliency, and growth.

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Silicon Valley as Cult? Mystifying and Demystifying Surveillance Capitalism in Alex Garland's *Devs* (2020)

Miguel Sebastián-Martín

In an old essay that speaks very directly to the purposes of this panel,[1] sf writer and critic Joanna Russ warned us:

> Hiding greyly behind that sexy rock star, technology is a much more sinister and powerful figure. It is the entire social system that surrounds us, hence the sense of being at the mercy of an all-encompassing, autonomous process which we cannot control. If you add the monster's location in time (during and after the industrial revolution), I think you can see what is being discussed when most people say technology. They are politically mystifying a much bigger monster: capitalism in its advanced industrial phase. … It is because technology is a mystification for something else that it becomes a kind of autonomous deity which can promise both salvation and damnation. (246-47)

Russ was clear enough about the mystifying potential of technology –insisting that we avoid its fetishism so as to re-consider it critically. But to what extent do sf creators and critics remember this in the so-called age of surveillance capitalism? To what extent do we keep mystifying, and to what extent do we keep a critical distance from contemporary technologies? In this paper, I propose the ideological and aesthetic ambivalence of Alex Garland's *Devs* (2020), an sf series which both demystifies and re-mystifies the world of Silicon Valley. But what is that world? What is surveillance capitalism, the central object of cognitive estrangement in *Devs*?

If that concept is now so popular, it is in a large part because of Shoshana Zuboff's bestseller critique *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism* (2019), which theorises and historicises a new phase of capitalism based on the commodification of behavioural data. Although this lengthy study is "somewhat Marxish" in Rob Lucas's words (132)—in the sense that it presents itself as a moderately anti-capitalist critique of the "rogue capitalism" of digital platforms—it seems that is as much a critique as it is a *symptom* of the hegemony of surveillance capitalism. As elaborated in Cory Doctorow's heretic sequel *How to Destroy Surveillance Capitalism* (2021), Zuboff's critique in many ways conforms to a common-sense "technological exceptionalism" which hinders a full demystification of this mode of capitalism.[2] In fact, in Zuboff's monograph, one can observe an unjustified lenience—and sometimes reverence—towards Apple,[3] as well as, perhaps more importantly, an overestimation of the manipulative influence of these kinds of corporations. Under the hegemony of technological exceptionalism, even expert critics seem to share one core belief with surveillance capitalist corporations: the belief that, as Doctorow ironically puts it, "if you collect enough data, you will be able to perform sorcerous acts of mind control" (n.p.).

Extrapolating from that belief, many claim that we are on the verge of a threatening singularity, even speculating that free will shall be forever lost once corporations develop the technology to *predict and predetermine* individual decisions.[4] Therefore, if this critical discourse can be called anti-capitalist at all, it is perhaps only so in an extremely deterministic, mechanistic manner—anti-capitalist in a manner that rules out the possibility of resistance against almighty capitalist technologies *supposedly* capable of infiltrating our minds. Even though these ideas raise critical questions and fuel antagonism towards the surveillance capitalist god, they seem to imply that, in the end, we cannot escape from under the new god's omniscience and omnipotence: that it would be futile to "seize the means of computation," as Doctorow invites us to do (n.p.). In these ways, much of the discourse on surveillance capitalism in fact re-mystifies as much as it demystifies, since it is overestimating and even deifying the power of the system. But what is the relevance of these polemics for Alex Garland's series? My argument is that the show both exposes and deepens these ambivalences, illustrating how, as Joel Dinerstein says, "technology is the American theology" (569).

Against the discursive background on surveillance capitalism, plot-wise *Devs* focuses upon a top-secret R&D group of Amaya, a fictional San Franciscan corporation. It characterises that group as a tech-fetishistic, cult-like community that is building a supercomputer capable of predicting in all directions of time-space, a project aptly named DEVS—Latin for God. Narrated primarily from the perspective of Lily (Sonoya Mizuno), a mathematician at Amaya whose boyfriend was killed after an attempted leak of information about DEVS, the series follows her trying to infiltrate and sabotage the project. In so doing, her goal is to get the justice that she couldn't get against such a powerful company, one with massive resources and close ties to the state apparatus.[5] In these ways at least, the series positions itself as a classic dystopian narrative, focused on the futile rebellion of a powerless individual against an almighty socio-technological apparatus—but does Lily's anti-capitalist struggle mean that the series on the whole functions as an allegorical anti-capitalist critique? A priori, it would seem that Garland's show is (potentially) the locus of a critique of "capitalism as religion," à la Walter Benjamin, since it imagines a surveillance capitalist corporation as "a pure religious cult" where "everything only has meaning in direct relation to the cult: it knows no special dogma nor theology" (Benjamin 259).

Obsessed as Amaya's developers are with engineering a computer God, this cult-like, top-secret group shows absolute devotion towards their creation. Especially once it seems to function, they all begin to believe that the universe must be predetermined, necessarily conforming to the computer's data-driven extrapolations and audio-visual recreations. Fascinated by these recreations in particular—and notably, by reconstructed images of Christ's crucifixion—these developers are turned from god-like creators into the passive spectators of their creation. They, and especially CEO Forest (Nick Offerman), often behave like fanatical believers, willing to protect their sacred object at whatever cost. As Marx might have said, these people (if not all of us under capitalism) are now unknowingly ruled by their own creations, since they fetishize the computer as a godlike entity, totally independent of human will. Moreover, the series masterfully highlights

the characters' devotion towards the computer with lengthy contemplative shots of their "sacred" facility, and this beautiful cinematography is accompanied by a haunting, quasi-religious musical score—all of which invites viewers to understand and even share the characters' enthrallment. In these ways, surveillance capitalism is blatantly exposed as the fanatical cult of a sublime technological power and, at the same time, its technological apparatus is re-mystified as an object of adoration and admiration. This is why I would classify this narrative as a paradigmatic example of what I have elsewhere called "the beautification of dystopias"—deeply ambivalent dystopias in which the object of critique and the object of pleasure are one and the same (cf. Sebastián-Martín).[6]

On another front, reading *Devs* as an anti-capitalist critique (even if an ambivalent one), would give us a convincing counter-argument against a very common objection raised about its supposed "flaws." Against the claim that the series' philosophical discourse is logically unsound, and hence not "proper" sf from a hard definition,[7] we could suggest that *Devs*'s characters are voicing a profoundly contradictory version of philosophical determinism because theirs is rather *the pseudo-deterministic ideology of surveillance capitalism*. In other words, theirs is not an attempt at theorising any form of determinism, but rather a sign of their commitment to the project of rendering the world controllable through data collection. In this sense, my assumption is that the series is both criticising and extrapolating from the counterfactual-but-popular belief that data-driven prediction can eventually become predetermination—a belief that obscures *both* the responsibilities of the minority in power and the potential agency of everyone else. As one developer tells the CEO character, "if DEVS works, determinism precludes free will; if it doesn't, then you're guilty [of murder and many other crimes]" (episode 5). And ultimately, the series seems to favour the conclusion that the world is not predetermined, but full of divergent potentialities, since the DEVS machine only works properly *once it is re-coded upon a many-worlds interpretation of quantum mechanics*, a controversial theory that assumes that all possible measurements of quantum states are simultaneously real or true in some parallel universe.[8] Nonetheless, despite the fact that the DEVS computer works upon a many-world hypothesis, it continues to enforce one single predetermined future, which far from being a logical plot hole could be read as an illustration of how surveillance capitalist technologies are not designed to predict, but primarily to dominate by predetermination. Thus, even if surveillance capitalism (and its technologies) have to operate with an awareness of the diverging potentialities of time-space, they nonetheless operate as a repressive totalising force that disavows those alternative futures.[9]

Taking such an interpretive path could at least make us suspect that *Devs*'s seemingly contradictory treatment of quantum physics is probably not a mere plot hole, or maybe even convince us of the de-mystifying intent of the series, given how it apparently exposes surveillance capitalism as a corporate environment inherently bent towards total techno-domination—or at least, in a more modest conclusion, towards a more entrenched monopoly power. But does the series really favour this critical, demystifying conclusion, shifting blame away from mystified techno-divine powers and placing the focus on the politics of surveillance capitalist

corporations? By way of conclusion, we should observe how the series' ending re-introduces a set of ambiguities, especially through its re-evocation of religious iconography and symbolism, and its character-centric individualistic narrative. In the finale, Lily dies after falling into the facility's security vacuum, and Amaya's CEO, Forest, dies of asphyxia with her. Here, the crucial detail is that Lily, willingly and knowingly, contradicts the computer's prediction of that moment—and this could suggest that individual agency can after all subvert technological power; that surveillance capitalism's data-driven domination can never be total. However much distorted and disempowered, free will and individual power is thus shown to persist, but there is further ambivalence in the narrative denouement.

After death, Lily and Forest are uploaded into a virtual simulacrum of reality run by the DEVS supercomputer: an alternate reality where they can reunite with their deceased relatives and partners. Leaving aside the myriad readings of this world as a digital or postmodern simulacrum, my assumption is that this re-opens the field of interpretation, and perhaps can serve as the starting point of further debate. According to Walter Benjamin's reading of capitalism as a religion, Löwy explains that it would appear "the only salvation consists in the intensification of the system, in capitalist expansion, in the accumulation of more and more commodities [or, in this case, data]; but this remedy results only in the aggravation of despair" (68). From this perspective, we could ask: Is *Devs* suggesting, in a critical way, that surveillance capitalists (like Forest) are false prophets that re-appropriate religious anxieties for purposes of domination, or is Devs also suggesting, in a re-mystifying way, that technology will nonetheless, in divine, mysterious ways, eventually deliver us a digital utopia? And more generally, we could also ask: Does *Devs* function as a critical dystopia that rekindles transformative hopes for the present historical moment, or does it function as an anti-utopia that reinforces what we could call "surveillance-capitalist realism"? Personally, I believe that the series' ideological ambivalence merits a deeper analysis than what could be sketched in this paper. Indeed, Amaya's CEO Forest may be clearly exposed as a high-tech false prophet, but he is nonetheless a successful entrepreneur who, despite his fanatical immorality, ultimately manages to construct a heavenly virtual afterlife that compensates for the valley of tears that can be life under capitalism. But of course, the series ends showing another character's concerned gesture while watching the simulacrum from the DEVS computer screen. Thus, considering that gesture, we may also ask ourselves: Will this really prove to be a digital utopia, or will it merely be surveillance capitalism's gilded cage? De-mystification, or so it appears, is in *Devs* inseparable from re-mystification.

Notes

1. This paper, with added explanatory footnotes and slightly adapted in response to questions raised by the audience at the SFRA 2021 Conference, was originally delivered within the panel "Technologies and Capitalism," on June 19, 2021.
2. Doctorow uses the term "technological exceptionalism" to refer to the over-estimation of surveillance capitalist technological power: an implicit ideological assumption that the dynamics of surveillance capitalism are essentially derived from technological innovations, whereas, in fact, many dynamics cohere with neoliberal and capitalist tendencies which are autonomous of technological developments. Using one of Doctorow's clever puns, the growth of Big Tech is inseparable from "the growth of Big Inequality" (n.p.)
3. Zuboff is lenient towards Apple because the company does not incorporate advertising in its platforms in the ways that other companies do (which is central in her critique of and indignation towards surveillance capitalism), but we should remember that this does not exonerate Apple's monopolistic and exploitative practices, which are arguably much more harmful and serious than being eye-bombarded with unwanted ads.
4. Of course, assuming that predetermination is technologically possible is entirely counterfactual, but "Big Tech has been so good at marketing its own supposed superpowers" that many (including critics) are led to overestimate their capacities if they take their marketing literature and patent filings at face value (cf. Doctorow).
5. In an allegorically obvious manner, Amaya clearly stands as a (potentially) critical analogue of real surveillance capitalist corporations (the so-called FAANG oligopoly), since it illustrates how tolerance towards monopolistic practices and government-industry revolving doors generate hypertrophied companies like Amaya that feel entitled to act beyond justice.
6. It is important to clarify that, in proposing the notion of "beautified dystopias," my intention is neither to reject the ideologically ambiguous character of such dystopias nor to dismiss them as pure re-mystifications, but to theorise them dialectically. Even though "beautified dystopias can (unwittingly or not, in excess to authorial intention or not) present sociopolitical dystopian scenarios under a positive, consolatory light," they also "seem capable of self-consciously thematizing Benjamin's maxim that 'there is no document of civilisation which is not at the same time a document of barbarism' (1969, 256)" (Sebastián-Martín 290). My assumption here is therefore that *Devs* should be not rejected for its ideological ambivalence, but rather valued for thematising such ambivalence in a non-Manichean manner.
7. Taking IMDB user reviews as a sample, one can find claims that "this is not science fiction" because it is "full of logical holes" (griper), that it is a "Failed attempt at deep sci fi" (pandrews2104), or that is an "Anemic quasi-philosophical let down that looked promising" (martin-tosterud).

8. Cf. the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* for a general-interest definition of the theory.
9. For these discussions of quantum physics (which are an addition to the paper originally read at the conference) I am indebted to Steven Shaviro's thoughtful questions during the panel, who encouraged me to speculate upon the significance of *Devs*'s references to the many-world interpretation of quantum mechanics within the context of *Devs*'s (and other texts') critiques of the capitalist drive towards totalisation and/or (in Marxist terms) real subsumption.

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"Daughters of Earth": Experimentations in Domesticity

Robert Wood

As Diane Newell and Victoria Lamont note, "Daughters of Earth" was originally published in 1952 as part of a shared universe between three authors with set expectations for the worlds described in the volume. Judith Merril wrote the novella at a moment of crisis in her life, during the collapse of her second marriage with author Frederik Pohl. Merril felt that the instability in her life caused her to write the draft too quickly, leading to a story that she argued "leaves much to be desired" (Newell and Lamont 53). Many of her contemporaries agreed with this assessment, criticizing the story as a part of the often-disparaged subgenre of domestic science fiction. Falling into this tendency, Damon Knight argues, "Judith Merril's 'Daughters of Earth' is a truly sick-making combination of soap opera and comic book, honest ignorance and deliberate hypocrisy. Merril has a respectable talent and is in private life nobody's fool, and certainly nobody's weepy housefrau; I wish she would stop pretending otherwise" (249). Knight's analysis transforms the story into something deeply conventional, a narrative that does not live up to either the genre's or Merril's potential. His reading entirely misses the experimental elements of the text and its reworking of the conventions of the genre. However, the story's reputation has drastically changed over the years and has been embraced by authors and critics such as Victoria Lamont, Dianne Newell, Lisa Yaszek, and Justine Larbalstier, who have seen Merril's work as precursor to later feminist science fiction. It also represents an early effort to bring a more experimental approach to the genre and an effort to break out of the galactic suburb.

Merril's work needs to be placed within the context of the destruction of the popular front of the 1930s and 1940s, alongside the rise of the Cold War and McCarthyism. Ideological purges were a defining aspect of the era, occurring in locations as disparate as the university and the steel foundry. Chandler Davis notes that between the years of 1947–1950, "most institutions, from the government through the unions and universities to the American Civil Liberties Union . . . declared Communists unwelcome," setting a precedent for the years to follow (272). Loyalty oaths utilized by those institutions not only restricted the involvement of members of the Communist Party, but also organizations with associations with the Communist Party. Radical artists had to navigate this minefield to find legitimate spaces to offer critiques of the society and avoid censure. Failure to negotiate these dangers could lead to the blacklists; that is, being unable to publish or work in the industries of popular media. The House Un-American Activities Committee deliberately sought to exclude radical artists from popular media, whether in the form of film, television, or radio, often with the collaboration of the owners of those industries. In a few cases, it led to criminal charges or expulsion from the country. Through this process, the specter of McCarthyism destroyed an entire set of cultural and aesthetic forms, as well as the organizations that helped create them.

Within that void, we began to see artistic and intellectual experimentation, albeit within the extraordinarily constrained circumstances created by the destruction of both the political and cultural infrastructure of the Popular Front. The radicals that survived the purges and the deportations of the period had to create a new style and form to be heard. While the decade of the 1950s is conventionally known for its political quiet, we can see a variety of political projects developing in a variety of manners. From an intellectual direction, writers as diverse as Herbert Marcuse, C. Wright Mills, and the slightly later work of Betty Friedan were attempting to create a type of political engagement that escaped the often-informal censorship of the Cold War period. The decade also saw a renewal of the Black freedom movement in the form of legal strategies and protest. Additionally, as Lisa Yaszek points out, a maternalist anti-war politic also became a way of escaping the censorship of a variety of political discourses and became a place of refuge for several radical and reformist projects, shifting their focus from the transformation of the country into an anti-war direction, particularly focused on the threat of nuclear war (109–13).

Judith Merril operates in the intersection of those two discourses, using the language of science fiction to avoid the forms of political censorship of the era, and to create a new discourse to engage with middle- and working-class women, drawing from and mutating the dominant literary form of the domestic melodrama. Merril creates an intersection between domestic melodrama and science fiction to accomplish that exploration, drawing on the forms of cognitive estrangement found in science fiction to begin to mark the political contours of the present, by beginning to imagine it as a contingent historical moment. Merril explicitly frames her engagement within these terms, noting that the genre allows for an exploration of forbidden topics, radical possibilities foreclosed by the political repression of the era. The generic work of Merril begins to explore the cracks and fissures contained in the newly created domestic sphere, connecting it to the larger political structures that had been obfuscated. She begins to create a new feminist aesthetic, engaging with and criticizing the variety of expectations put upon women to stabilize the structures of Keynesian mass production. We can see the inklings of the rise of a series of new feminist struggles, struggles against the newly created domestic structures designed to preserve capitalist accumulation through the common labor of women as consumers and mothers.

That experimentation took its fullest form in "Daughters of Earth." The novella is concerned with the everyday life of domesticity and women's experiences within that sphere, but the narrative spans several generations and moves from the confines of the household to the outer reaches of the solar system and beyond. The narrative shifts out of the confined critique of *Shadow on the Hearth*, and its inability to imagine an alternative to the conventional post-war nuclear family, to the possibility of the breakup of that formation. As Yaszek notes, it is constructed through a fictionalized account of "journal excerpts, newspaper clippings, and oral stories" producing a story that is far more discontinuous, fragmented, and scattered than the more conventional domestic melodrama. She continues, "[l]ike other feminist authors ranging from Virginia Woolf in the 1920s and 1930s to Joanna Russ in the 1970s and 1980s, Merril refuses to subsume the experiences

of women into a single voice but rather insists on the multiplicity of women's subjective experiences" (37).

The novella follows multiple generations of women as they take part in the expansion of humanity throughout the solar system and beyond. The story opens with Martha's experience watching the first flight to colonize Pluto. It then moves to the perspective of her daughter, Joan, and her contributions to that process. The story shifts to its focus, the effort of Joan's granddaughter, Emma, to help settle a planet, Uller, outside the solar system. This thread of the story follows her as she lands on the planet, loses her husband to one of its native inhabitants, and gradually learns that his death was caused by his inadvertent attack of the indigenous Ullern. Emma's storyline is intertwined with a story of the debates between the settlers on whether they should develop lines of communication and collaboration with the indigenous inhabitants of the planet, or annihilate them. It then ends with her daughter's diplomatic efforts between the two settler groups that establish peace between them and also allows for cooperation with the indigenous residents. Stemming from this, the humans and Ullerns together plan a mission to move to even more distant planets, a mission that Emma's granddaughter, Carla, will take part in.

The opening passage immediately establishes the scope and ambition of the narrative as one that proposes to radically rewrite the conventions of the genre. It promptly enters into conversation with three major genealogical traditions. First, Yaszek notes the immediate resemblance with the patriarchal narrative of the Bible (36). However, it deliberately reverses the patriarchal lineage of that text, shifting to a lineage of mothers, rather than fathers. The passage moves quickly from that logic into a set of tropes more closely linked to the expectations of the science fiction audience for the second genealogical tradition: the enlightenment narrative of the Promethean scientist revolting against the gods to bring light to the masses, and a parallel narrative of the birth of the genre and subculture of science fiction. However, these narratives, too, are challenged through the implications of the previous paragraph, which notes that, "this story could have started anywhere" (Merril, "Daughters" 55), marking the contingency of the beginning of the scientific narrative—the third tradition—even its arbitrariness. Each of these origin stories gestures towards the inability of those narratives to represent a set of experiences conventionally and socially linked to women. The two familiar narratives, science and science fictional, are then themselves implicitly marked as patriarchal, and set aside as the model for the narrative arc, which then offers an alternative to the singular promethean figure through an alternative pairing of an anonymous man and woman.

The concluding statement, "But in this narrative, it starts with Martha," provocatively offers a kind of year zero for the story (56). We are promised a new narrative, a genesis that will translate into a new genealogical formation, operating in a matrilineal manner. At the same time, we are promised a new way of imagining the future, a new form. This promised futurity moves beyond the simple explanation of a strategy to avoid the censorship that Merril offers as her reason for writing science fiction. It gestures towards a radical alterity and the possibility of a social symbolic that no longer operates in the register of patriarchy. Merril's narrative attempts to

produce rhythmic tension between domestic convention—the desire to settle—and the desire to explore, discover, and colonize. Those alterations and that sense of alterity are then framed in the experience of the body as it adjusts to different spaces in the cosmos:

> But however we learn to juggle our bodies through space or time; we live our lives on a subjective time scale. Thus, though *I* was born in 2026, and the *Newhope* landed on Uller in 2091, I was then, roughly, 27 years old—including two subjective years, overall, for the trip.
>
> And although the sixty-one years I have lived here would be counted as closer to sixty-seven on Earth, or on Pluto, I think that the body—and I *know* that the mind—pays more attention to the rhythm of planetary seasons, the alterations of heat and cold and radiation intensities, than to the ticking of some cosmic metronome counting off whatever Absolute Time might be. (59)

Change is mapped on to the body in its experiences "on a subjective time scale." One must understand that basic fact to engage with the shifts of historical time, which cannot be understood as "the ticking of some cosmic metronome counting off whatever Absolute Time might be." Absolute time then stands in for empty homogeneous time, which is supplanted by the time of revolution in its most literal sense. The subjective time of the body is produced through the revolution of planets around the sun, "the rhythm of planetary seasons, and the alteration of heat and cold and radiation intensities." Rather than gesturing towards some form of geographical anthropology, the subjective experience of the body is defined by the dialectic of environment and the social structures designed to survive it. The naturalized structures of days and years become contingent within the context of space travel. At the same time, the narrative continually emphasizes the third part of the dialectic in rhythms of planetary seasons and planetary travel, which is most directly captured in the way that social reproduction is made analogous to the experiences defined by the revolution of planets:

> We still progress through adolescence and education (which once ended at 14, then 18, 21, 25 . . .) to youth, marriage, procreation, maturity, middle age, senescence and death. And in a similar way, I think, there are certain rhythms of human history which recur in (widening, perhaps enriched, but increasingly discernible) moderately predictable patterns of motion and emotion both.
>
> A recognition of this sort of rhythm is implicit, I think, in the joke that would not go away, which finally made the official name of the—ship?—in which you will depart *The Ark* (for *Archaic*?). In any case, this story is, on its most basic levels, an exposition of such rhythms. Among them is the curious business of the generation, and their alterations: at least it was that thought (or rationale) that finally permitted me to indulge myself with my dramatic opening. (59–60)

The conventions of social reproduction and the revolution of the planets are linked through the common concept of 'rhythm.' The 'rhythms' of human history are linked to the cyclical rhythms of the developmental phases of human life, "to youth, marriage, procreation, maturity, middle age, senescence and death," and therefore implicitly linked to the seasons. The cyclicality of the rhythm is put in tension with the progressive narrative of expansion. These contradictory concepts are held together by the dialectical form of "the curious business of the generation, and their alterations." The story claims to explicate the slow and evolutionary expansion of this structure, which evidently allows for its own explication. It not only makes the claim that the narrative will provide a description of profound transformations in everyday life due to space travel, but also in the meaning contained in the continuing patterns that are revealed by those transformations. Within this context, the passage both recognizes and disavows the religious dimension of revelation through its reference to the Ark, while refusing to acknowledge the biblical reference, dismissing it as a shorthand term for the archaic. If we take the disavowed metaphor of the Ark seriously, spaceflight becomes a secularized version of that narrative, gesturing towards a new social compact. The flood is replaced by the vacuum of space and each new planet points to the creation of a new social symbol. In effect, God's promise not to flood the Earth is replaced by a rewriting of the norms of the family.

At the same time, the stability of the narrative is continually undercut to emphasize its fragmentary and partial nature. The story uses the narrator's, Emma's, voice as a prime technique to disrupt any real sense of a conventional narrative. That voice enters the story to apologize for tangents and distractions. It also constantly rejects any position of authority within the narrative and goes as far as to continually slip between first and third person when describing what she did as a child and as a younger woman. That element is established after the first section of the novella.

> Frankly, I hesitated for some time before I decided it was proper to include such bits in what is primarily intended to be an informational account. But information is not to be confused with statistics, and when I found myself uncertain, later, whether it was all right to include these explanatory asides, done my own way, with whatever idiosyncratic eccentricities or godlike presumptions of comprehension might be involved. (58)

The narrative at this moment marks itself as an interstitial one, refusing to embrace any sense of authority or conventionality. The "information" provided in the narrative is contrasted with "statistics," creating an implicit opposition between the personalized and individualized "information" provided in the story with the homogenized knowledge that is then represented by statistics. Instead, the story will be frequently interrupted by the narrator and will be told with "whatever idiosyncratic eccentricities or godlike presumptions of comprehension might be involved." The narrator is working with fragments and refuses to weave those fragments into any semblance of a whole. In effect, the narrative brings together a fictionalized ethnography of everyday life that will later define many feminist texts with a strongly modernist fascination with the fragmented self. That experimental writing is combined with science fictional figuration that

would be recognizable to readers of the genre. It's a narrative that synthesizes modernism, pulp, and conventions of domestic melodrama.

Those intertwining stories span generations as a way of projecting the possibilities of other forms of domesticity and family structure. It opens from the perspective of a mother, Martha, whose daughter will eventually be involved in space colonization, as she watches the first flight to Pluto. Her perspective is defined by the domestic melodrama, dependent on the normative complaints of the nuclear family. Martha, as a mother, is terrified of the prospect of space flight and resentful of its intrusion into her family's life. Her interior monologue develops this sense of complaint, through her sense of disconnection from the official narrative, both from the nationalist narrative of the journey as represented by the canned speech of the president and the expectations put on her as a mother that she has internalized. The interiority of Martha becomes the small voice of protest against these narratives, a disruption to the hegemonic force of the Cold War space race. However, this stalled dialectic of complaint radically shifts with each succeeding space journey. Although the narrative oscillates between domestic conventionality and exploration, each succeeding generation of women lives a profoundly different type of life than the one before, destabilizing the naturalization of any form of domestic arrangement. Those shifts are captured in the description of the colonization of the planet Uller, generations after the initial story of Martha and through the experience of her great granddaughter Emma after her husband's death.

Despite the hardships of the early years of settlement, the colony is distinguished from its Midwestern antecedents. Rather than producing "typically frontier-puritan monogamous family patterns, divorce was, of necessity, kept easy: simply a matter of mutual decision, and registration" (97–98). The colony, while still implicitly operating within a hetero-normative logic, shifted towards a far more informal social contract of marriage. This shift in the practices of marriage is presented in moral terms, as a part of the 'enriching' of the rhythms of history. The shift from the general history of the colony to the history of Emma reinforces this change. After the death of her husband, Emma takes on multiple lovers and remains the moral center of the story. Her actions allow her to feel empowered as an individual, but they also let her recognize the multiplicity of emotional and romantic relationships that are possible. The narrative moves towards an abandonment of the idealization of any type of relationship along with the need to compensate for the inevitable failure that is tied to that idealization. Just as significant is Emma's working relationship with Jose Cabrini, the main advocate for cooperation with the Ullerns, and their combined effort to understand the alien life form, creates a relationship that is emotionally foundational, but not romantic. The passage gestures towards a pluralistic approach to family structure, while never fully explicating that multiplicity. That gap points to a recognition of the contingency of any family structure, but it also cannot concretely imagine what that might look like.

At the same time, the inventiveness of the narrative, its attempt to create a fictionalized memory of the experience of generations of women, continues to reproduce the private/

public binary that defines the far more claustrophobic narrative of *Shadow on the Hearth*. The exclusionary nature is most directly evident in the description of the conflict between the native Ullerns and the colonists. The novella refuses an easy narrative of either presenting the indigenous population as monstrous or radically innocent. Instead, the understanding of the conflict and resolution is presented through the loss of Emma's husband, and her attempts to understand that death. She eventually realizes that the death was an accident due to a lack of knowledge on both sides of the conflict. At the same time, this somewhat sentimental journey excludes a thorough political examination of the social and political arrangements that defined the situation. We are offered little detail on how the colonists divided themselves into two opposing camps, or the nature of the forms of cooperation between Ullerns and humans, or the kind of society that is produced through that cooperation. Instead, we are offered a brief comment, putting those questions to the side:

> Thad Levine wrote the story of the bitter three years' quarrel in the colony, and wrote it far better than I could. You have heard from me, and probably from a dozen others, too, the woe-filled history of the establishment of Josetown. Jo himself wrote a painstaking account of the tortuous methodology by which the Ullern code was worked out, and I know you have read that, too. (107–08)

This passage elides any attempt to explore the social transformation that is intertwined with these changes in the domestic sphere. It ducks this question by claiming a lack of competency, placing the political narrative into the hands of the conveniently off-stage Thad Levine. While the story's length made the inclusion of long didactic passages on economics, sociology, and political conflict impossible, its near absence keeps the story ensconced in the domestic sphere. Despite the text's attempt to re-imagine social reproduction outside the regulatory norms of domesticity, those norms continue to have a profound hold on the imagination of the text. Just as significantly, the refusal to place the political questions of the impact of colonization within the text neutralizes the potential anti-colonial critique of the text, leaving the ethical question of the engagement with the Other intact, but erasing the questions of power and racialization central to that critique. In effect, the occlusions of the text are perhaps as significant as its engagements. The violence of colonization is condemned, but egalitarian cooperation cannot be represented.

Merril's work begins to challenge the conventions of the domestic melodrama by showing the limitations of the isolated nuclear family in *Shadow on the Hearth* and by imagining transformations of the domesticity and marriage in "Daughters of Earth." However, neither narrative entirely escapes the regulatory structures of the genre that it attempts to subvert. Merril offers a critical and symptomatic engagement with her present, a present that is powerfully defined by the mutually implicated ideological formations of the Cold War, McCarthyism, and the "Feminine Mystique." That engagement allows for a critical exploration with those intertwined formations, exposing the structures of domination and coercion contained within them and gesturing towards the possibility of an alternative form of domesticity in the future. However, it will take the later work of Joanna Russ, Ursula Le Guin, and Samuel Delany to move questions of

social reproduction from the space of the privacy of the household into the political space of the public sphere through a renewed engagement with the utopian form.

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Originally from Minnesota, **Robert Wood** received his dissertation in comparative literature from the University of California-Irvine. His dissertation focused on feminist science fiction in the twentieth century, from Charlotte Perkins Gilman to writers such as Judith Merril, Ursula Le Guin, and Samuel Delany. It critically engaged with the formal shifts in the subgenre of feminist science fiction as the authors respond to changing social conditions and narrative conventions. The dissertation looked at the genre as a critical lens that can help understand the creation of a disciplinary regime of domesticity in the United States and its resistances. His broader interests are social movements and subcultures, science fiction, fantastic literature, modernism and the avant-garde, and literature of social critique. His theoretical interests include cultural studies, feminism, historical materialism, literary criticism, and other forms of critical theory. He has taught at the University of California, Irvine, Santiago Canyon College, Irvine Valley College, and other schools. Along with these academic concerns, he has been involved in a variety of activist projects, ranging from anti-war movements, the anti-globalization movement, to union activism and efforts to create a truly public university.

Fragmentation, Coherence and Worldbuilding in *Magic: The Gathering*

Chris Pak

Wizards of the Coast's *Magic: The Gathering* is a popular Trading Card Game, or TCG, that offers a case study of a transmedia enterprise that extends the critical debate about worldbuilding (Pak). *Magic*'s development as a game and storyworld depends on the fragmentation and reconstitution of elements that are continually arranged and re-imagined to build coherent narratives in multiple worlds. TCGs are suited to transmedia extension and highlight issues related to narrative, the mechanics and culture of gameplay, and the multiple constituencies that Wizards seeks to engage.

Magic's formal properties offer us ways to think through issues related to transmedia, play, and worldbuilding. Reflecting on *Magic* also raises fascinating parallels to meaning-making and engagement for other games and other forms of speculative fictions. I focus today on the expansion of *Magic*'s narrative elements in relation to play, along with the collaborations between players in constructing stories from fragmentary elements represented by the cards themselves. I consider *Magic*'s early development to reflect on the logic of its worldbuilding and some of its early narrative strategies but will show how these approaches are still relevant to how *Magic* works today vis-à-vis worldbuilding.

First, some background on what *Magic* is. *Magic* is a TCG created by Richard Garfield for the games publisher Wizards of the Coast. It was the first-ever TCG upon its release in 1993 and it prepared audiences and markets for the development of the TCG industry. The first core set, called *Alpha*, contained 295 cards; since 1993 well over a hundred core sets and expansions have been released, along with merchandise, novels, comics, digital games and platforms, and a wealth of fan-created content. Although Wizards has managed a long-standing professional competitive scene, this year that professional support has been withdrawn and the future of competitive play is uncertain.

Figure 1

Magic can be played in a number of ways, with various formats using different rules and card pools drawn from the total archive of cards. Many professional and casual players stream their games, for example, a competitive player, Luis Scott-Vargas, whose Twitch chat has been known to host spontaneous fantasy book discussions and to a visiting Brandon Sanderson (Figure 1). What is important about this brief introduction is how *Magic* exists as a multi-format analog and digital enterprise with official and unofficial products, discussions, and gaming contexts organised around the core experience of play. As demonstrated in the clip, it's typically played between two players, who nominally take turns accruing resources and establishing control over the play environment (ChannelFireball). At the start of the game players draw seven cards from a deck, known as the library, and then draw one card per turn. They are also able to exert control over space by playing one land per turn, and may "tap" these lands for mana to play a variety of spells—visually represented by turning cards ninety degrees to the right or left.

This is important for *Magic*'s worldbuilding: each of these elements invites meaning-making through narrative. *Magic* is a context-dependent play environment that draws on situated knowledge for narrative meaning-making. Deckbuilding is a form of worldbuilding, while gameplay is narrative. Meaning-making in relation to *Magic*'s approach to worldbuilding is based on juxtaposed elements within a rule-bound and thematically systematic frame. As Autumn M. Dodge argues in relation to literacy, *Magic* players able to interpret the sequence of meaning from this complex can build narratives during deck construction and gameplay (175). Explaining the rules of the game often relies on connecting game actions to the underlying assumptions of the *Magic* universe. Indeed, the library itself and the player's hand take on functions in this world: there is a card called "Thoughtseize," which enables a player to force another to discard a card of the caster's choice (Figure 2).

Figure 2

Another card conceptualises the hand as a mind that is incrementally replenished each turn from the library. A third card, "Brainstorm," enables a player to draw three cards and to place two from their hand back on top of their library (Figure 2). The hand is thus positioned as the player's mind with the cards comprising thoughts or ideas. The library, as a source of knowledge, are thoughts that can be actualised through spellcasting. However, any given element might take on different aspects of the world, depending on play context. For example, the library itself is also temporal, given the "draw one" card a turn rule and the sequential arrangement of cards in the library. A card like "Approach of the Second Sun" involves replacing the card after it is cast seven cards below the first, thus drawing a relationship to time, as each turn passes the sun approaches (Figure 2). Thus the game's mechanics encourage narrative meaning-making.

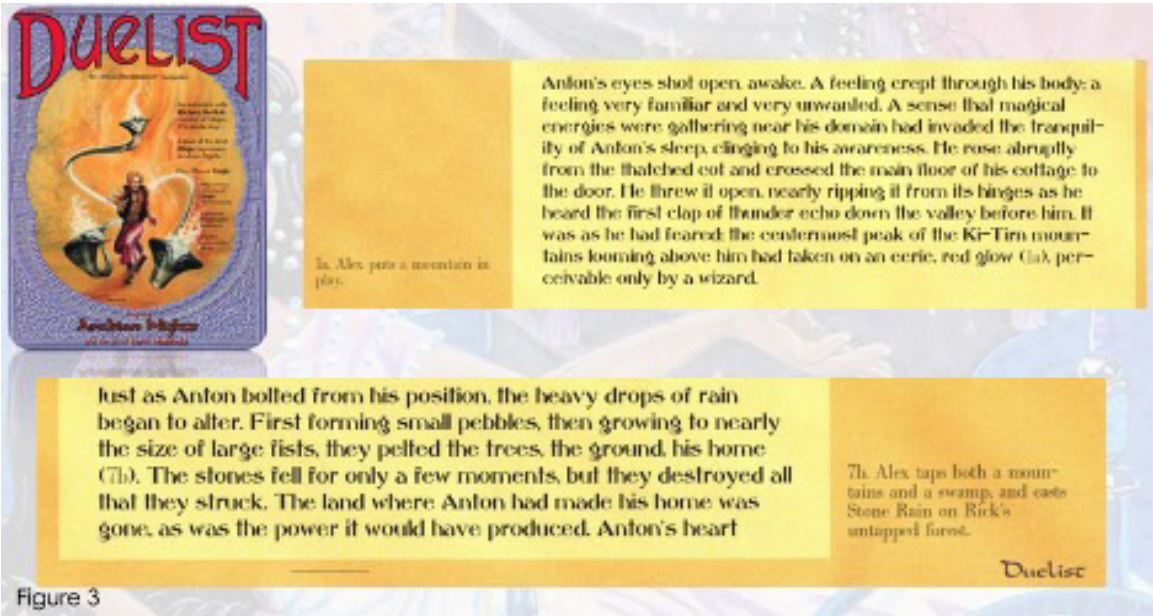

Figure 3

To emphasise what is going on, narratively speaking, in a game of *Magic*, I'd like to appeal to an article in the first issue of the magazine *Duelist*, a long-defunct publication produced by Wizards early in *Magic*'s history (Figure 3). This article, "Duel for Dominia," written in 1994 by the head of the Duelists' Convocation—the body that oversaw competitive play—narrativises a competitive game of *Magic* (Bishop 42–45). This story is imagined by a spectator who is positioned to engage in official, though unplanned, experiments in worldbuilding. In the story are references to the sequence of plays made by two players in the final round of the 1993 GenCon tournament. Each of the players is assigned a persona and each of their discrete plays is re-imagined as moves in a struggle for dominance over the plane now known as Dominaria, then called Dominia. There are footnotes in the narrative that direct you to each of those discrete plays, detailed in the margins. The most basic of game actions—playing a land card—is an opportunity to set the scene: to construct a landscape upon which this duel plays out. A sorcery is played: "Stone Rain," which destroys a land, imagined in the story as unfolding amidst the character-players' dramatic reactions in the storyworld. From its early development gameplay was imagined as a story-building endeavour that called on players to engage in their own imaginative acts of worldbuilding. Indeed, more contemporaneously, one player on Reddit evidences just this kind of storytelling but complains of how some of the more recondite strategies inhibit their ability to do so (Anon "My Need for Storytelling") (Figure 4). A respondent offers a narrative to help make sense of the game actions being undertaken, which points to how these narratives are discussed, reflected upon and shared within the various *Magic* communities to make coherent the fragments that are juxtaposed within any given deck and gameplay sequence.

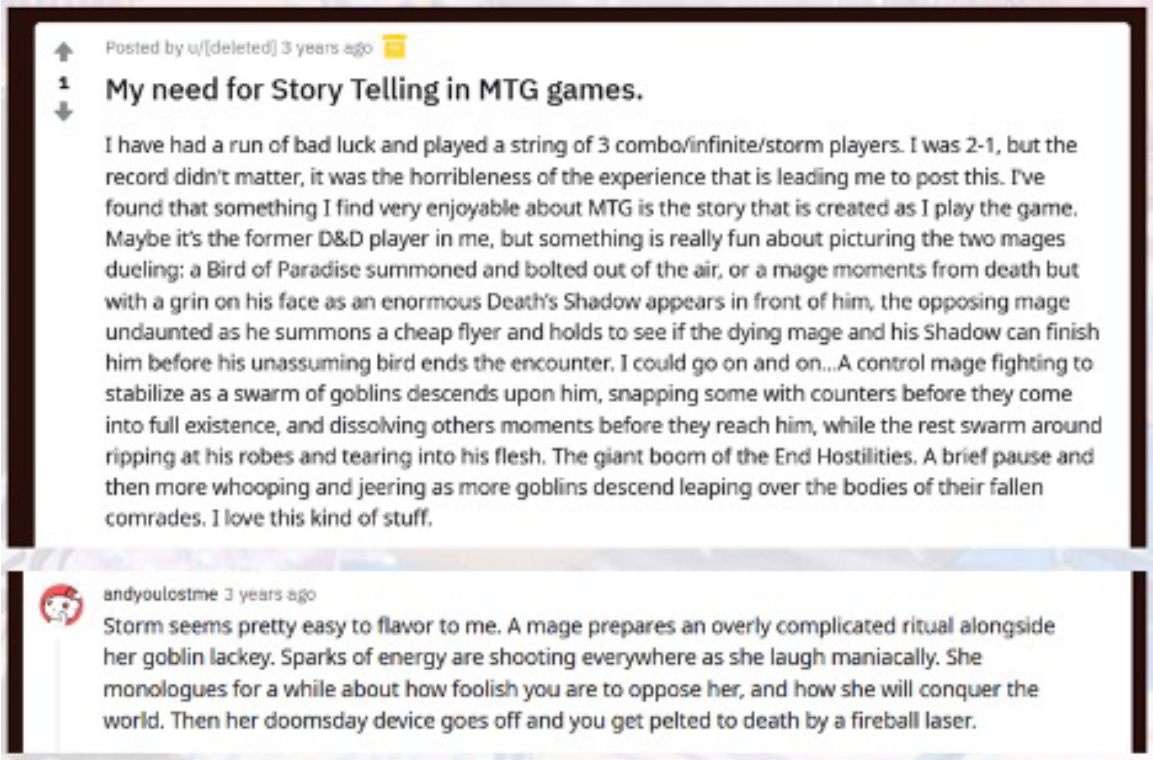

Figure 4

This storytelling property is informed by fantasy narratives and roleplaying, in particular Dungeons & Dragons, which Garfield cites as one of several sources for the game's development in the same issue of *Duelist* (8). GenCon attendees and D&D players were some of the target audiences for the game. Wizards would go on to acquire the role-playing game company known for publishing Dungeons & Dragons, Tactical Studies Rules (TSR) in 1997. The eagerly awaited though ultimately disappointing expansion of *Magic* called *Dungeons & Dragons: Adventures in the Forgotten Realms*, was released on July 23, 2021, and brings this connection full-circle (Figure 5). So *Magic*, while it engages in worldbuilding for its own unique worlds, also invites imaginative play in other worlds. *Magic*'s fragmentary nature, then, offers intertextual connections and transmedial extension across worlds as much as it remediates other gaming forms.

Figure 5

This kind of worldbuilding from fragments represented by cards is intimately tied to stories and to literature. The allusion to D&D has precedents, which I'd like to end the discussion with because it offers a useful metaphor for *Magic*'s narrative and worldbuilding. Magic's first expansion—as distinct from a core set—remediated the *One Thousand and One Nights*. The expansion, *Arabian Nights*, also released in 1993, included cards such as "Aladdin," "Shahrazad," "Bazaar of Baghdad," and "Library of Alexandria" (Figure 6). An article in the first issue of *Duelist*, written by *Magic* head and editor Beverly Marshall-Saling, provides an account of the history of the *One Thousand and One Nights* to scaffold this imaginative habitation of another world (4–5). Garfield writes in the same issue that not only *Arabian Nights* but also Neil Gaiman's *The Sandman* inspired the development of the first *Magic* expansion (6). Framing *Magic* as a game but also as a collection of gaming environments that implies a sequence of games, each with its own story

to tell, aligns with Shahrazad's storytelling endeavour and positions this literary figure as *Magic*'s spiritual hero and a model for transmedia worldbuilding and storytelling. The card itself—banned in all official formats—demands that players suspend their current game to play a game-within-a-game with their remaining resources before returning to the original game—an apt figure, then, for the multiplication of stories and games.

Figure 6

Magic is a series of different games and stories reconstituted from fragments and from players' and spectators' creative labour, all of which are scaffolded by worlds that are established through the cards and its associated media. *Magic* exemplifies a transmedia enterprise that is negotiating aspects of Jenkins, Ford, and Green's conceptualisation of spreadable media as sticky (4). Worldbuilding in *Magic* is a collaborative process involving critique, compromise and negotiation between designers, players, writers, artists, and others, whose interactions and claims of ownership contribute to *Magic* worldbuilding. I have only been able to discuss *Magic*'s narrative potential in broad terms, but there is a wealth of fan-generated critique and extension of these worlds.

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Roundtable: Can Chinese Science Fiction Transcend Binary Thinking?

Mia Chen Ma, Angela YT Chan, Yen Ooi, Frederike Schneider-Vielsäcker and Regina Kanyu Wang

Mia Chen Ma: Hello everyone, welcome to our roundtable discussion on Chinese science fiction. Our discussion today will be driven by one central question: Does Chinese SF inspire us to transcend binary thinking—and how?

Amid the popularity of contemporary Chinese SF across the globe, there is still a lack of examination on the ambiguity and complexity of gender representation in Chinese SF. In the meantime, we can see how an increasing amount of SF stories, across cultures and languages, have addressed that there are more genders than two, and how gender exists in many forms—gender can be fluid. Under this context, there are so many questions that still remain unanswered by Chinese SF writers and researchers. For example, are the majority of Chinese SF works still producing gender stereotypes? In what ways have Chinese SF stories demonstrated their potential of writing resistance, generating a reconsideration of gender inequality? How do we understand the outcome of such resistance, does it inspire us to take actions in real-life context, or has it involuntarily produced even more binaries? With all these questions in mind, we want to ask if and how Chinese SF can join the global discussion in terms of post-binary gender.

We are hoping to bring awareness to the importance of rethinking how gender bias/diversity are presented in some well-known Chinese SF works, and also the importance of rediscovering the HERstory of Chinese SF, including stories from other marginalized genders in contemporary China. By doing so, we want to discuss how Chinese SF can transcend binary thinking and point to a more gender equal and sustainable future.

The first question we want to discuss is: **How exactly are gender roles depicted in contemporary Chinese SF?** For audiences who have not read many Chinese SF works, some of our panelists can give a few examples and share their thoughts on how genders have been presented in contemporary Chinese SF.

Yen Ooi: In thinking about gender roles depicted in contemporary Chinese SF, I'm going to generalize and categorize them into three different groups—this is also how I feel about fiction in general. First, there's a group of stories that when you read or when you consume them, you don't really think about the gender of the characters. I think these stories feel gender neutral and most of the time you could probably swap genders and no one cares while they're reading it. Then, there's another group which purposely challenges the norms of gender representation. And there's a third group which then re-emphasizes gender stereotypes. I've picked an example

for each and I've purposely picked female writers to promote more female writers and their writing. When we think about stories that feel gender neutral and don't pay much attention to what gender is, I suggest *The Strange Beasts of China* (*Yishouzhi* 异兽志, 2012) by Yan Ge (颜歌, b. 1984) which I recently read in English (translated by Jeremy Tiang, 2020). There are obviously spots where there are actions that are gender-specific, but in general, if you read the whole book, you can probably swap the gender roles of the characters and not feel too annoyed or bothered by it—the story would still stand. On the other hand, a book that really challenges gender norms or gender thinking is *An Excess Male* (2017) by Maggie Shen King. In her debut novel, Shen King places all of the people in the female gender role. She places the state or the government in the male patriarchy role, so the power lies with the state, and everyone else—the people—becomes feminized and is looked down upon. That's a very interesting story if you've not come across it yet. And in terms of stories that emphasize gender stereotypes, unfortunately there are still quite a lot of those out there at the moment. One that I will mention is *Vagabonds* (*Liulang cangqiong* 流浪苍穹, 2016)[1] by Hao Jingfang (郝景芳, b. 1984). Throughout the novel, there are a lot of problematic descriptions that really emphasize the female in the characters and it's really hard to ignore them when you're reading the story. She's a brilliant writer nonetheless. I think all these kinds of stories are good in bringing awareness to the reader in terms of challenging gender representation or being aware of how gender is represented in contemporary Chinese SF.

Frederike Schneider-Vielsäcker: I agree with Yen that there are these three types of gender representations in Chinese SF literature. In my research, I pay a lot of attention to women's representation and female roles in contemporary Chinese SF. I have observed that in most of the works, women are still depicted in a stereotypical role even though in reality they receive higher education and are professionals. This is a point that I would like to discuss a little more as Yen has already given us some very good examples. In contemporary Chinese SF writings, there are three stereotypical female roles: first, we still find the woman as the male protagonist's love interest; second, as the prostitute, and third, as the mother. Interestingly, the mother's role is also prevalent in many works written by female authors.

There are a few stories in which female characters possess some kind of knowledge and thus enlighten the male protagonist. On the other hand, we also encounter male protagonists who are anti-heroes. For example, in "The City of Silence" (*Jijing zhi cheng* 寂静之城, 2005)[2] by Ma Boyong (马伯庸, b. 1980) and "Ether" (*Yitai* 以太, 2012) by Zhang Ran (张冉, b. 1981),[3] the male protagonists suffer from depression. In these two stories, it is the female character who leads them to their remedy. But overall, women play insignificant roles in most of the stories. This gender representation is connected to and reflects the patriarchal Chinese society that still constructs femininity as passive and reduces women to their reproductive functions. Since these gender norms are internalized by some female writers in China, it becomes problematic because their stories reinforce stereotypical gender roles. As Yen mentioned, Hao Jingfang's novel *Vagabonds* is a really good example of this issue. Works like hers also reveal the resurgence of Confucian values in twenty-first-century China. Nonetheless, there are some outstanding examples that portray

women as strong female protagonists that we are going to explore this a little more later on in our discussion. After all, it is among the young writers' generation that more and more female authors are gaining awareness of gender inequalities and touching upon them in their writings.

One last thing I would like to mention now is that the works of female Chinese SF writers tend to use the strategy of a "double-voiced discourse," a concept coined by Mikhail M. Bakhtin and adapted by feminist literary studies. It means that the stories written by women seem to comply with patriarchal power structures and traditional roles, but at the same time they articulate their dissent in the subtext. According to Elaine Showalter, "women's writing is a 'double-voiced discourse' that always embodies the social, literary, and cultural heritages of both the muted and the dominant" (201). In my opinion, this is the case with Hao Jingfang's writings. For example, in her novella *Folding Beijing* (*Beijing zhedie* 北京折叠, 2014)[4] men are the ones in charge of the future city, whereas the female protagonist works as a part-time assistant to the management of a bank and is married to a rich business man instead of being with her true love, a student, because she does not want to give up her luxurious lifestyle. In addition, there are the robot waitresses with short skirts and the sexist remarks of the male protagonist that reduce women to their appearances. These aspects can also be read as a critique of the patriarchal society.

Mia Chen Ma: This is a very interesting point. While reading *Folding Beijing*, I am also bothered by such a construction, possibly involuntarily, of the "ideal woman" in a much less obvious way than some other male writers like Liu Cixin. Yiyan is depicted as an "ideal woman" who is desired and admired by people from different social classes, and Lao Dao wants to raise his stepdaughter Tangtang to become another Yiyan, another ideal woman. To some extent, the story seems to imply that it is the obsession with ideal women that motivates the male characters Lao Dao and Qin Tian, to break space and time barriers, challenging the very strict system of social hierarchy. Such fantasy about the "ideal woman," representing gender inequality to the greatest extent, then strangely, becomes the hope of initiating resistance to social inequality in this story.

In comparison with such ideas of the "ideal woman," there are also narratives of a "mad woman," which can be traced way back to traditional Chinese literature. And in contemporary Chinese SF, there are also many examples of "mad woman": they exist in the forms of cyborgs, human-animal hybrids, etc. They often represent destructive power, and such power can be written in a very feminist way, with madness becoming resistance. However, it somehow feels that no matter what, women are so easily instrumentalized, regardless if they decide to stay calm and content or spiral into madness.

The depiction of female roles is generally meant to fulfill a specific purpose that often caters to the male gaze. It is worth noting that such problematic presentations of women can be traced not only in the works of male authors, but also of some women and non-binary authors as well—Hao Jingfang, for instance. This explains why it is so important that we pay more attention to the complexity and ambiguity that lie behind gender representation in Chinese SF. Not only does it facilitate misconceptions on gender, it also produces even more cultural stereotypes, navigating

toward a grotesquely unequal future. From this instance we want to ask the second question: **What should we do to possibly change the current situation? Can the science fictional mode be used to sensitively contend with the body as a site of conflicting powers to resituate agency and empowerment?**

Angela Chan: When we are thinking about what the body actually means, it is quite interesting to think of its finiteness. From birth to death, that whole cycle of drama and activity and processes is really interesting as a kind of span for us to start interrogating these ideas of power dynamics. A famous example of the body and rebirth is Wang Jinkang's (王晋康, b. 1948) short story "Reincarnated Giant" (*Zhuansheng de juren* 转生的巨人, 2005), which is about an extremely wealthy, aging man who fears death. He undergoes the most advanced technological procedure to have himself reincarnated as a baby, so that he is reborn with his mature, adult consciousness remaining intact. It allows him to continue with his business empire and stay on top of the legalities of his changed personhood. Throughout the story he extracts and exhausts numerous natural resources, such as the food of his own nation. Particularly disturbing is how this also includes human resources, namely the wet nurses that he feeds upon. This speaks to the gendered exploitation of labour, as well as the disposability of working bodies, with the story detailing how the wet nurses' contracts are calculated to effortlessly favour the neoliberal campaign of the elite. Eventually the protagonist grows into a baby that is as big as a mountain, and finally, he passes away from the unsupportable weight of his head. We can observe his strategy of physical manipulation of the body as a metaphor for unsustainable growth.

To give a rather different narrative of the body as a contested site of power, we can look to SF pieces in contemporary art. For me, with a background as an artist and curator, I think it is really exciting to see SF not just in the container of literature, but also as something expansive that has always flowed throughout artistic disciplines, and as a vehicle for different ways of thinking. I think about Lu Yang (陆扬, b. 1984), a media artist whose work reestablishes our perceptions that are beyond the binary, beyond gender. Exploring concepts like the meaning of existence and death through religion, like Buddhism, Lu Yang inquires what it means to have a body that you then perhaps materially exhaust, and in death you put it away while moving on to another type of vessel for your consciousness afterwards, which may be more immaterial. Throwing this together with neuroscience, psychology, technology, and hypercaptialist consumerism through pop sub-culture and animé motifs, a lot of the artworks are actually reinvented avatars of the artist: an androgynous person, without genitalia, usually naked, bald. This avatar moves through different types of gamified worlds, which is really thoughtful as well as fun. One video or game piece made back in 2013 is *Uterus Man*. With this superhero character you zoom into the biological structure of the body, like analysing the anatomy of the uterus. There is a lot of humour too. For example, this character uses a Sanitary Pad Skateboard to travel, there is a Pelvis Chariot Flying Mode in the game, and then attacks can be made with things like DNA Attacks, an Umbilical Cord Whip and even a Baby Beast Mode. I think this humour is very useful to play on the binary set of gender

norms, as it also makes it more appealing to conversative outlooks to start rethinking the body and our existence in more empowering liberations beyond the gender binary.

I will finish by introducing a game that is still a work in progress, with a preview called *Material World Knight—Game Film Ver1* (2020). The Material World Knight protagonist begins by being confused about their own body and what it means to exist in this very material world of saturated media driven by capitalist consumerism. They also question the biological self, where the elements of water, earth, fire, and wind are very finite, and their flows determine when you pass on. They go into an MRI machine and enter into another world where they attempt to seek a lot of answers to questions, such as "Confined by binary oppositions, can we see anything that's beyond our preconceptions of this world?". Beginning with these examples, I think it is really insightful to look at the representations of the body across SF in wider arts.

Frederike Schneider-Vielsäcker: I also think that SF in general allows the writers to imagine futures or far-away planets where all genders are equal and I also see this in contemporary Chinese SF where the body is used as a trope. One striking example is "Nest of Insects" (*Chongchao* 虫巢, 2008)[5] by Chi Hui (迟卉, b. 1984). Unfortunately, there is no English translation yet, but I can quickly summarize the plot. On the planet Tantatula lives a peaceful matriarchal alien society until the harmony is disturbed by human colonizers. The Tanla species only gives birth to female children who plant and carry their humanoid tree male partners around in a flower pot. Through this metaphorical vision, the story partly solves the issue of women's reproductive responsibility. Interestingly, after adolescence the alien female and male bodies merge into one, and through metamorphosis they become a huge insect. This can be interpreted in various ways, but one reading is that gender should not matter since all human beings combine female and male qualities. After all, what is considered a female or male characteristic is constructed by society. The narrative further questions this social construction of gender and emphasizes that in the end we are all human beings. I think this is a really good message.

Another example is "Reflection" (*Daoying* 倒影, 2013)[6] by Gu Shi (顾适, b. 1985). The omniscient male protagonist has a split personality, in which the clairvoyant personality is female. Possessing the ability to see into the future, the female character is not only very powerful, but also crucial to the story. However, this powerful female can only exist in a male body. Similar to Chi Hui's "Nest of Insects," Gu Shi's story raises the question of what is male and what is female or if it is necessary at all to think in these categories. By imagining a male protagonist with a female personality inside, the story blurs gender boundaries and highlights that a man can very well be feminine. Thus, it transcends the heteronormative gender roles and representation—it constructs and deconstructs gender.

Mia Chen Ma: I think both Rike and Angela have offered some great examples about how Chinese SF works, like Chi Hui's "Nest of Insects," Gu Shi's "Reflection," and Lu Yang's artistic pieces, have addressed gender fluidity, with questioning how gender binary is completely

unnecessary and significantly preventing us from enriching the meaning of "body." It keeps producing and reproducing problematic interpretations of humanity.

I want to add that in the canon of Chinese literature, including SF, writers of different genders are being asked disparate questions when it comes to their depictions of bodily sufferings and struggles. For example, when male writers write about the suffering or transformation of the human body (usually women's bodies), it is often treated as a representation of the trauma of the society, or the traumatic past of the entire nation. And when women write about similar bodily struggles, it is often considered to be a reflection of and associated with their own personal experiences. There is an invisible discrimination that male authors write more about the society and the world, and take on more social responsibilities, whereas women writers are expected to write more about personal emotions and struggles. However, all writers, regardless of their gender identification, are actually writing about both themselves and the world. In the meantime, we should encourage more narratives from women and non-binary authors, using SF as a powerful site to initiate resistance and to clearly specify their own stance.

As Angela briefly mentioned, Lu Yang borrowed some Buddhist concepts to develop her artistic piece. In this instance, we want to address our next question: **Can the main philosophies and theories from ancient China, for example Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism, be integrated into Chinese SF to imagine a more sustainable, gender-equal future?** Recently, many Chinese SF writers seem to resort to concepts and themes from ancient Chinese thoughts, to enrich the cultural profoundness of their narratives.

Regina Kanyu Wang: Influences of those ancient philosophies may not be so obvious, but instead, they have a subtle impact on Chinese culture and the daily life of Chinese people in general. We may draw from those philosophies consciously or unconsciously. Sometimes we can see Confucian, Buddhist, or Daoist thoughts represented in some stories, but maybe the authors don't even think about that. Since the modernization of China, we don't really learn about those ancient philosophies in school as subjects. We do recite some of the classics, but not in a structural way at all. However, in our daily lives, we are still immersed a lot in various cultural branches influenced by those philosophies, for example Chinese medicine, Taiji (太极), Fengshui (风水) and more. They penetrate into our daily lives at such a deep level that we don't think much about them. My research interest focuses on gender and environment in Chinese SF, so here I want to focus on an important conceptual pair in ancient Chinese cosmology, *yin* (阴) and *yang* (阳), which still have a huge influence in contemporary China. Dai Jinhua, who is a famous female Chinese scholar, said that female as a gender concept was constructed in China early in the twentieth century, introduced from the West during modernization; and in pre-modern China, we used *yin* and *yang* to refer to female and male, but this gender view differs a lot from the absolute gender dualism (32–33). They can represent many other conceptual pairs as well, such as darkness and light, non-living and living, river and mountain. And they are never dualistic or static, but always interdependent on and interchangeable with each other, seeking a neutral balance. In some of the Chinese SF stories, there is a tendency to show this balance, in the interaction and

interdependence of *yin* and *yang*. Those stories don't necessarily focus on gender, but they do showcase two forces interdependent on each other and seeking balance. For example, in both Nian Yu's (念语, b. 1996) "The Equilibrium Formula" (*Hengping gongshi* 衡平公式, 2018)[7] and Congyun "Mu Ming" Gu's (慕明, b.1988) "The Heart of Time" (Shijian zhi xin 时间之心, 2018),[8] both yet untranslated, there are two imagined symbiotic species living in an alien world, facing a challenge like global warming or catastrophic heat wave, which can be seen as a metaphor for climate change. Those two species have to collaborate with each other, seeking coexistence and survival in their world. I see that as a representation of seeking a balance between *yin* and *yang*.

Mia Chen Ma: There have been many confusions and even criticisms on the yin yang concept. For example, I have been asked before: "Isn't yin yang a binary itself?" But actually, it's not what Daoism refers to. James Miller's construction of "liquid ecology" might provide an apt explanation on how the yin and yang are embedded within each other, constituting liquid vitality (*qi* 气) (44). It stresses on the distribution of agency among various subjectivities, rather than separating one from another. In this instance, the circulation of liquid vitality among different entities and subjectivities constitute the core element of individuality rather than gender differences.

Echoing what Regina just said, I agree that Daoism can inspire both Chinese SF writers and SF researchers. Similar to ecofeminism, Daoism also treats nature as an important lens to look into the construction of gender and subjectivity. However, different from the ecofeminist approach, Miller clarifies that Daoism clearly specifies that the subjectivity of nature "dwell[s] within" the human body (34). And "the mode of transaction," which refers to the distribution of agency among all entities, generates creative power to achieve four important goals: transformation, alignment, prosperity, and simplicity (39–41). From this respect, Daoism conveys two important messages about gender that can often be found in Chinese SF as well: first, the uniqueness and individuality of every human being, regardless of gender, are celebrated and informed by the subjectivity of nature, and their further development depends on how the Dao is specifically constructed in each life; and second, all actions are generated by the transactional agency of Dao, which is context-specific and relies on the reactions from the various subjectivities of the world, not the gender difference. It is the circulation of liquid vitality, instead of the gender difference, that determines who we are and where we are heading. In this respect, Daoism unlocks the truly transformative power to transcend binary thinking, reshaping our understanding of the problematic discourse of gender differentiation and bias.

Yen Ooi: Yes, one of the important things about SF in terms of the Western concept in the Western genre is rationalism—to be rational in thinking, to be scientific in thinking. Rationalism in the West is very much binary, influenced by the development of Greek mythology (Hui 16–17): life/death, black/white, man/gods, etc. I think this is where we're going to get to see a lot more interesting writing coming out of Chinese SF, because Chinese SF is able to take from the non-binary of Daoism, of *yin* and *yang*, of all these kinds of ancient philosophies and thinking that can create new kinds of texts or new kinds of fiction that will generate thinking around multiplicity and diversity, while also emphasizing a balance on the ability to complement each other rather

than oppose or go against each other. I think that's a really important point in terms of ancient philosophies and thought. I also just want to quickly mention Confucianism, because it is an area that I've been researching in more detail recently. One of the really interesting things is if you take Confucius away from the inherent problems and politics of the period that he lived in—for example if you take away the issues of patriarchy and state control—what Confucius tries to teach is actually a very balanced way of thinking in terms of how humans interact with other humans and how humans interact with the world around us. It's about knowing your place in terms of your role—what your agency is, where you can influence positivity and affect that on the world. So, if we start to take everything word for word and just assume that everything that comes from the ancient times is patriarchal and is problematic and all that, we won't be able to move on. But the truth is, these philosophies and teachings have been in East Asian and Southeast Asian lives for the last three, four thousand years and they have developed themselves into a place that actually exists in modern society. So, I think there is a really good place for it in contemporary Chinese SF and that it will generate new and more positive stories coming out.

Mia Chen Ma: I think sometimes we also need to disassociate these ancient texts from their specific political and historical contexts. First and foremost, we should acknowledge that these texts might have once been produced and interpreted in a very politically driven way, but they are not entirely political and can be depoliticized. One of the most common conceptions of Confucianism is that it constitutes the dominating cultural infrastructure in China, playing a vital role in the attempt to promote a positive image of the country. We should note that such assumptions, although being partly true, easily overshadow what Confucianism may inspire us about other aspects of contemporary society, for instance, its interpretation of the sense of community and its impacts on ecology.

The re-examination of some ancient Chinese texts, including going back to our traditional cultural roots, also drives us to explore a variety of Chinese SF texts. For example, there have been many discussions about how to uncover the existence of HERstory in Chinese SF. Our next question will be: **Can the discovery/rediscovery of HERstory in Chinese SF facilitate the uprising of gender equality?**

Regina Kanyu Wang: Yes, recently I have been looking at the HERstory of Chinese SF. A few years ago, I contributed a piece on the brief history of Chinese SF, which was first translated for the Finnish fanzine *Spin* (February 2015). The English version was published in *Mithila Review* (2017) and then included in *Broken Stars* (2019, edited by Ken Liu). Later on, I found that the history was very much written in the narrative of a male dominant way. So, I composed another essay about the HERstory of Chinese SF. Actually, one of the earliest translators who brought SF into China, Xue Shaohui (薛绍徽, b. 1866–1911) was not only a female translator and intellectual, but also one of the early feminists in China. Together with her husband Chen Shoupeng (陈寿彭， b. 1855–?), Xue translated Jules Verne's *Around the World in Eighty Days* into Chinese under the title *Bashiri huanyouji* (八十日环游记, 1900). In the late Qing dynasty (1840–1912), there were also examples of feminist SF, like Haitianduxiaozi's (海天独啸子, b. ?) novel *The Stone of Nüwa* (Nüwa Shi 女娲

石, 1904), in which the protagonists seek to create a female utopia and save the country, although the author seems to be a male.

Recently, there have been many exciting projects going on, including several anthologies dedicated to all-female and non-binary authors. For example, *The Way Spring Arrives and other Stories* (*Chuntian lailin de fangshi* 春天来临的方式, forthcoming 2022), co-edited by me and Yu Chen (于晨, b. 1982), is forthcoming next year with Tordotcom in English and Shanghai Literary and Arts Press in Chinese, in collaboration with Storycom (*Weixiang wenhua* 微像文化). In that anthology, we not only include all-female and non-binary authors, but also translators, essayists, editors, and artists, trying to provide a larger context of Chinese speculative fiction writing from those historically marginalized groups. Another project is called *Her* (*Ta* 她, 2021), only in Chinese now but also seeking to be published in English. It's edited by Cheng Jingbo (程婧波, b. 1983) and initiated by Ling Chen (凌晨, b. 1971), who are both established female SF writers. They focus on the thirty years of history or HERstory in Chinese SF and include representative Chinese women SF authors from the earliest ones who began to publish in around the 1980s till the very recent years. And one other project is edited by Chen Qiufan (陈楸帆, b. 1981), which is a four-volume book including a series of women authors' stories, named *Her Science Fiction* (*Ta kehuan* 她科幻, 2021). More and more projects in the same vein are in the planning stage, and at least one Chinese female SF anthology is being translated into Japanese via Future Affairs Administration (*Weilai shiwu guanliju* 未来事务管理局). All those different projects are suddenly emerging because now we are at the point when feminism is a heated topic in China, not only within the SF community, but also in the larger society. Also, I want to point out that someone may say "Okay, yeah, but there have never been all-male anthologies in Chinese SF," but the truth is that they used to publish anthologies featuring only male authors but were not marketed as all-male projects. Such books are still being published these days. It doesn't mean that it's wrong, just that we should pay more attention to gender balance. So, I see those book projects featuring all-female and nonbinary authors as a manifestation. This year, I have been very lucky to be supported by the Applied Imagination Fellowship Program at the Center of Science and Imagination of Arizona State University, in which I plan to do a series of interviews with female authors, editors, fans, and more from the Chinese SF community, to discuss with them ideas about gender, the future, and nature. This is also related to my PhD project as part of the CoFUTURES project at the University of Oslo. I want to feature more female faces for the international audience. I'm really looking forward to that!

Mia Chen Ma: It is so interesting when you mention how the male authors complain about the lack of anthologies of male authors, being completely unaware of their long-standing publishing privileges. This is further evidence of the importance and urgency of discussing gender issues in contemporary Chinese SF. **Our last question wants to address how Chinese SF possibly un/mis-gendered humans, as gender studies grows to utilise gender in wider theories**.

Angela Chan: I think about this question in terms of what is human in the first place as well. I look to an artist who I believe poses very interesting questions to ask right now on this issue we're

raising. Sin Wai Kin, formerly known as Victoria Sin, is a London-based multimedia artist using SF within their performances, as well as moving image films and writing. These works challenge what the normative processes of desire and identification and objectification do for us, when we rethink what binaries mean as we write our own narratives. I want to refer to what others have been talking about in terms of Taoist allegories, and I quote Sin that these "undo binaries that have to do with just being human. So, they're not only about gender, but also thinking about life, death, self and the other, dreaming and waking." Many of the characters that Sin fictions in their narratives, especially in their performances and video work, namely *A Dream of Wholeness in Parts* (2020–2021), are constantly evolving and Sin takes a lot of inspiration from Octavia E. Butler's notion of creating change by storytelling. Pointing out another of Sin's projects, *Dream Babes* (2016–present) they have been putting on workshops and SF reading groups, centering queer people of colour. I will read a sentence from the introduction: "The speculative imagination of *Dream Babes* has included drag as embodied speculative fiction, clubs as queer heterotopias, pornography as pedagogy, and queer collectivity as the means of survival." When we really think about what it means to have plural forms and narratives by a diverse range of voices in SF, this is what I really look to and feel empowered by. In *Dream Babes Zine 2.0* (2019), I interviewed Xia Jia (夏笳, b. 1984), who is a Chinese SF writer, and she talks with me about her writing processes. So I think about your question, Mia, in a way that reassesses that feminism—we need trans-feminism that is inclusive of all genders.

Thinking further about what types of justice we want to reach, beyond the human as well, when we think about a more cosmological sense, it's really fun! Another artist, Angela Su, who's a Hong Kong-based practitioner, works a lot with bacteria. Actually, before the COVID pandemic happened, she opened her show called *Cosmic Call* (2019), which looks at viruses and bodies changing. She imagines how external influences of bacteria are coming from extraterrestrial life forms. When we play with SF in this kind of way, we not only speculate what it's like inside our bodies but also outside them and beyond the planet as well. I think it's really interesting that we can bring in the bodily, environmental, and medical explorations to interact with our day to day in a more holistic way.

Yen Ooi: I think it's also important to add that the issues of gender and body that we talked about today aren't new to Chinese literature. The Chinese legend, The Butterfly Lovers, is a classic example that deals with all of that, and more. In a quick summary, it is a story about a woman who pretends to be a man in order to pursue an education. She falls in love with her roommate but isn't able to tell him. After they complete their course, she returns home to be betrothed, and when her roommate learns that she's actually a woman and realises that he is in love with her too, he is too late. He dies, heartbroken, and on her wedding day, she stops by his grave and jumps in to join him. After the chaos, right in the end, butterflies appear. This story that originated over 2,000 years ago and has seen version after version throughout the years, engages directly with all the points that we talked about today. And this can act as an important reminder to us that concepts of gender and bodily fluidity aren't new or modern.

Mia Chen Ma: I think like Angela just emphasized, and all our other speakers have also similarly touched upon, the gender issue is never just about gender differentiation or gender bias. It has always been associated with all the other marginalized groups within our society, being embedded within all the inequalities that are prevalent in every aspect of our contemporary life.

It is utterly important that we call for a more inclusive approach when analyzing gender issues, always probing into those invisible yet powerful underlying contexts. A broader approach will guide us to achieve gender equality, navigating toward a more sustainable future.

Notes

1. The novel was originally published in two parts: *Wandering Maerth* (*Liulang Maesi* 流浪玛厄斯, 2011) and *Return to Charon* (*Hui dao Karong* 回到卡戎, 2012). In 2016, it was republished in its entirety under the title *Wandering Under the Vault of Heaven* (*Liulang cangqiong* 流浪苍穹). Ken Liu's English translation titled *Vagabonds* appeared in 2020.
2. In May 2005, the short story was originally published in China's leading SF magazine *SF World* (*Kehuan shijie* 科幻世界). Ken Liu's English translation is included in his anthology *Invisible Planets* (2016).
3. In September 2012, the short story first appeared in *SF World*. In January 2015, the English translation by Carmen Yiling Yan and Ken Liu was published in *Clarkesworld Magazine* (http://clarkesworldmagazine.com/zhang_01_15/, accessed 16 Sept. 2021).
4. In December 2012, Hao Jingfang posted her novella online on the student's forum of Tsinghua University (*Shuimu Qinghua* 水木清华). In 2014, it was issued in two Chinese literature magazines, *The Literature Breeze Appreciates* (*Wenyi fengshang* 文艺风赏) and *Fiction Monthly* (*Xiaoshuo yuebao* 小说月报). Ken Liu's English translation was published in *Uncanny Magazine* in 2015 (http://uncannymagazine.com/article/folding-beijing-2/, accessed 16 Sept. 2021) and was reprinted in his anthology *Invisible Planets* in 2016.
5. In December 2008, the story was originally published in *SF World*; thus far, it is still to be translated into English.
6. In July 2013, the story was originally published in the magazine *Super Nice* (*Chaohaokan* 超好看). Ken Liu's English translation appeared in his anthology *Broken Stars* (2019) and was reprinted in December 2020 in *Future Science Fiction Digest*.
7. The story was originally published in Chinese in Nian Yu's individual collection *Lilian is Everywhere* (*Lilian wuchubuzai* 莉莉安无处不在, 2018) and translated into English by Ru-Ping Chen under another title, forthcoming in Yu, Chen, and Wang, Regina Kanyu editors. *The Way Spring Arrives and Other Stories*. Tordotcom, 2022.
8. The story was originally published in Chinese in *Time Non-Exist* (*Shijian bucunzai* 时间不存在, 2018), not available in English.

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Posthuman Mysticism: From the Zero Point of Humanity to the Parallel Worlds in *The Gift*

Sümeyra Buran

Göbeklitepe, located at Örencik village in Şanlıurfa, a city in southeastern Turkey, is the world's first and largest temple in history. It has recently been discovered as the zero point in time that shifts human history back to more than 12,000 years ago—7,000 years before the great Egyptian Pyramids and 6,000 years older than Stonehenge. Şanlıurfa is called the town of prophets and is mostly linked with the prophet Abraham, the ancestor of the whole of humanity in monotheistic religions, Islam, Christianity, and Judaism. Urfa is associated with the town Ur from the Bible, and Edessa (modern Urfa) is also known as the first home of the Holy Mandylion-Christ icon on the Taurus Mountains. Göbeklitepe was built in the pre-pottery Neolithic period and is a significant point in the evolution of religions, as the root of monotheistic religions. With the temple's 14-tonne pillars, Göbeklitepe has been on the UNESCO World Heritage Site list since July 2018. Göbeklitepe, which translates to "Potbelly Hill," was discovered in 1963 during joint research by Istanbul University and the University of Chicago, and it was unearthed by the 1995-2006 excavations led by the German archaeologist Klaus Schmidt. In the studies carried out in Göbeklitepe and its surroundings, it was revealed that religion, not agriculture, caused humans to shift to a sedentary lifestyle. So, Göbeklitepe has rewritten the history of the beginning of human civilization.

The 2019 Turkish Netflix series *The Gift* tells the (hi)story of (post)humanity by the archaeological discovery of a gate in Göbeklitepe that leads to parallel universes. Inspired by Şengül Boybaş's novel *The Awakening of the World*, the series is about the "mystical" story of a young and beautiful painter named Atiye (meaning gift) who opens the doors to the past and begins to question everything between the past and the future, between the real and the spiritual. The mysterious gate is tied to the extraordinary artifact buried for millennia and to

the (her)story of Atiye, who explores her post-Goddess power throughout the history of humankind by her mysterious journey to parallel worlds.[1] As an artist living in İstanbul, Atiye discovers that she has been drawing the same symbol since childhood when she meets the archaeologist Erhan. It was Erhan who found the symbol in Göbeklitepe, which then becomes the connection point between Atiye's different selves that exist in the parallel worlds. The series weaves the topics of awakening after death, rebirth within history, and her story of parallel worlds. The series has a plot that feeds primarily on mysticism, anthropology, and cosmology. I explore the strains of posthuman mystic reception of cosmology in Turkish SF film in the context of the myth of the mother goddess.

Metaphysical Space and Time in Myth

The Gift is an interesting representation of the posthuman condition, achieved by mixing together Turkish mythology and posthumanist ideology. There is a close relation between posthuman and mythological narratives that both live beyond time, place, and space of existence. According to Mircea Eliade, historian of religions, "the myth relates the events that date back to the origins, to the primordial and legendary time of beginnings. In doing so, it refers to realities that exist in the world, explaining the origins: cosmos, man, plants, animals, life" (6). Thus, we cannot decrease myth to a mere fantasy, fairy tale, or scientific fact. Myth "does not have a claim of realistic and historical reconstruction of the facts; it does not relate the history of the genesis and development of a reality: it says something profoundly real, that mere scientific explanation of the facts could not explain" (Valera and Tambone 354). The dimensions of space and time are sacred in the myth since, as Elaide claims, events in mythical time "make up a sacred history because the actors in the drama are not men but Supernatural Beings" (13). Thereby, the Netflix series *The Gift* is a symbolic expression of historical reality through the mythical expression of metaphysical nature that is not natural.

As Julien Ries explains, "[t]he myth is a symbolic expression through which the human being interprets the relationship between the current time and the origins" (6). Following Donna Haraway's claim that "[b]y the late twentieth century, our time, a mythic time, we are all chimeras, theorized and fabricated hybrids of machine and organism; in short, we are all cyborgs" (150), Atiye is the cyborg goddess, a chimera hybrid of human and supernatural mythical organisms. The first scene of *The Gift* shows Atiye watching her own funeral from a distance, which symbolizes her

rebirth. The posthuman narrative in *The Gift* deconstructs the Western dichotomies of organic/inorganic, death/life, nature/culture, male/female, fact/fiction, human/environment, natural/supernatural, past/present, soul/matter, etc., so *The Gift* moves beyond Western real time and space and instead enacts its own time and space.

As a mythological heroine, Atiye gets rid of the past and the future by realizing her power over the moments she can control. This is what it takes to be eternal, and the hidden mythical element is the present, so Atiye finds her power when she stays in the present: "Eternity does not mean having endless time. It means timelessness. If you want to experience infinite enlightenment, you need to get the past, the future out of your mind. And stay in the present" – Shams-i Tabrīzī (S1, E3). The show depicts the idea that as humans, we have always been posthumans in a divine/eternal plan and that we cannot change the past, but we can shape the future as it is also stated in the series: "Maybe time is not linear as we are told, my son, maybe the past and the future have melted into each other and we are in a dream and a delusion/illusion" (S1, E8). In this sense, as in Pepperell's "Posthuman Manifesto," "[t]he future never arrives" (5) because we live in the past, present, and future at the same non-dimensional time and space that depict the posthuman turn of integral metaphysical understanding. The series depicts the past, present, and future happening at the same time:

> There is no such thing as time. Everything in the universe happens at once. We only perceive things sequentially because that's what we were taught. Yet every choice we made leads to a new possibility. We affect everything in a timeless place even if we don't realize it. (S3 E2)

The metaphysical time and space in *The Gift* explain how "[e]verything that exists anywhere is energy" (Pepperell 12); that there is no need for matter in the flow of energy. There is no ultimate time and space in the posthuman myth of the Göbeklitepe as the turning point of humanity. The fluidity of Atiye's posthuman body without physical boundaries moves beyond the spatial limits in parallel worlds and becomes whole in the eternal time of past, present, and future in human history. We see the posthuman goddess coinciding with the whole Atiye in each multi-parallel universe.

Sun and Moon Myth

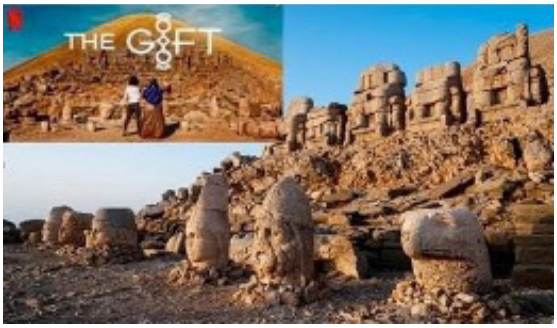
The most important mythical element in *The Gift* is the Sun and Moon iconography, which is also found on the actual pillars of Göbeklitepe. Archaeologist Schmidt believes the "H" sign motif located above the *Kün-ay* (sun-moon) motif is a reference to marriage (God-goddess) in spring, which is a kind of symbol of male and female togetherness. This type of *Kün-ay*/god-goddess reunion ceremony brings us to the origin of *hıdırellez* festivals, which is how the spring equinox

is celebrated in Turkey, when nature awakens and the earth is reborn (Çığ 2014; Esin 2001). *Kün-ay* symbols are also seen in many ancient artworks, such as Sumerian and Akkadian cylinder seals and Proto-Turkish culture (from the Chu Turks, Hun Turks, to the Gökturks), as well as to the flag with the crescent and star used by modern Turks. The pillar also symbolizes the life-death-rebirth cycle and reminds us of the sacred marriage ceremony of Inanna, goddess of fertility and love, and shepherd Dumuzi (who is also called Tammuz)[2] in Sumerian civilization. Göbeklitepe is the first home for the fertility cults in the Anatolian and Mesopotamian civilizations.[3] That is, Atiye and Erhan are depicted as "Adam and Eve, Jesus and Magdalene, Isis and Osiris, call them what you will" (S1, E8). Atiye represents the goddess Umay, Mother Earth (also called Ayasin or Ece); Umay is the symbol of birth and fertility, the protector of pregnant women, animals, nature, and non-humans in Turkish mythology. In Season 2, Atiye's symbolic meaning is directly conveyed in an inscription written in the Göktürk alphabet in tunic letters:

You are the mother of the universe, nature itself, the sum of divine spirits from beyond time, the queen of souls, you are life and light, you are always the one who will always be Venus or Isis. You are the one that begins in every realm, you are the goddess with ten thousand names and you are the only one for me. (S2, E6)

The symbol of Göbeklitepe in Atiye's art consists of the Moon, Sun, and Womb (referring to a baby in the uterus). The moon and sun are depicted on Atiye and Erhan's foreheads and symbolize the awakening of nature and the rebirth of posthuman earth.[4] The series shows that Göbeklitepe gives birth to human and superhuman beings which then attribute it a posthuman feature. Atiye, as the representative of the fertility goddess, is captured in the caves in Nemrut Mountain,[5] and her emergence from the cave symbolizes her rebirth. Atiye realizes the dream of Antiochus I Theos, (considered a god in human form), who built a huge mortuary with enormous statues of

himself, other gods, and animals to be protected and live forever. Atiye achieves immortality as a posthuman goddess so she can protect all creatures in all universes. This rebirth scene portrays the notion that nothing dies and disappears, only time flows, so that the past might be our future, or the future may be lost in our past:



> Don't worry, everything is as it should be, we are all parts of the divine plan, we are all a continuation of each other. You couldn't have stopped what happened, but creating what will happen is in your hands. A gift was given to you, Atiye. You really can do whatever you want. (S1, E8).

The Gift references collective consciousness and divine unity, which is also the cosmology of Sufism in Turkish culture; as Simurg explains, "[a]nd the real journey is the one where we realize we are all One" (S3, E5). Resurrection after death is explained in the series in the religious/spiritual/Sufi way as in the following quotes:

> God removes the living from the dead, the dead from the living and revives the earth after his death. Thus, you shall also be removed.—Qur'an (S1, E6)

> Birth begins with death. Our last day is the beginning of the first day. And when the time comes, a new age will begin with the first seed. She will come. She will open the door to real life. (S3, E3)

> Death is not the end but an interlude. Really. They took me out of that interlude . . . beyond what we think we know. (S3, E4)

These lines illustrate how Atiye travels through time and places in order to complete her own inner spiritual journey. Atiye discovers her way by realizing her posthuman mythological power of resurrection in alternative universes. For example, when Atiye passes through the womb/gate of Göbeklitepe, she finds herself in a different universe where her dead sister Cansu continues her life as a different character, Elif, and does not recognize her. When Atiye, as a posthuman mythological heroine, understands her power can resurrect the dead, she brings her sister back to an alternative universe. As it is said in the series: "There is no time, no separation, everything is as it should be" (S1, E8).

Tree of Life

There is also a reference to the mythological Turkish tree of life—the great beech Ulu Kayı—in the second season, which takes place in a dystopian parallel world where women cannot get pregnant for an unknown reason. According to a belief in Turkish mythology, tying rags to trees, parks, and elsewhere to ask Mother Earth for children.[6] This more-than-human nature, tree, is believed to have posthuman features as it holds the sky with its arms, one touching the sun and the other the moon, and its roots reach the deepest point underground. The tree is the symbol of posthuman rebirth in the series:

> The door you are looking for is beneath that tree.
> That tree which joins the heavens/skies and earth.
> That has been here forever.
> That tree has been entrusted to you for generations and
> That will exist forever. (S2, E7)

The great beech, Ulu Kayın, was planted by Kayrahan, the son of Tengri, the Sky God, and from the tree nine human species descended from nine branches. This also demonstrates how posthuman species have always existed in Turkish mythology and *The Gift* is one of the good examples of Turkish posthuman culture.

Snake-Woman: Şahmaran

The ouroboros,—a snake biting its tail—represents the multiverse; in mythologies, it describes the cyclicity of time. Superheroes are the most well-known examples of posthuman figurations in narratives. In *The Gift*, we encounter them in the characters of Atiye, her grandmother Zühre and her daughters, Atiye's daughter Arden; Atiye in particular is a posthuman superheroine who tries to save the world from infertility. Atiye comes across her grandmother Zühre who suddenly appears and disappears and seems to come from another universe. Zühre represents the Şahmaran (Shahmaran), a posthuman mythological creature called the "Queen of Snakes" from a Middle Eastern mythological half-human half-snake being:

> Everyone thinks that snakes are dangerous, that they're poison, the devil itself. But in reality, snakes are defined as knowledge and the mean rebirth. They are tasked with protecting what's sacred. Shahmaran was the beautiful and graceful queen of snakes. She reigned a secret garden of paradise

> hidden underground. But then, one day . . . people came and found her and killed her, believing her dead body would create miracles. But don't worry, when Shamaran dies, her soul passes to her daughter and continues to live within her. (S1, E6)

The story of Şahmaran is important for the series, which depicts the posthuman mythological figures shaping the history of humankind. The miraculous abilities to heal and all the supernatural power that pass from mother to daughter in the series evoke the matriarchal system[7] that posthuman mythological goddesses de- and reconstruct the history of time, space, and existence.

Conclusion

The most important message from this posthuman mythological SF is to accept what comes from the gift of life itself. I want to close my talk with Şems's sayings in *The Gift*: "Instead of resisting to changes, surrender. Let life be with you, not against you. If you think 'My life will be upside down' don't worry. How do you know down is not better than upside?" — Shams-i Tabrīzī (S1, E3).

Notes

1. *The Gift* focuses on parallel universes as in other series, such as *Finch*, *Dark*, and *The OA*.
2. Tammuz, in Turkish Temmuz, was also the name of the month July.
3. These symbols also have cosmic references that attribute Göbeklitepe to be built as an observatory place to observe planets and celestial objects.
4. The symbol of Sirius in the series is used as a sign of posthuman power.
5. Statues of gods and goddesses are located in Nemrut Mountain (southwestern Anatolia in Turkey), home for the Commagene Kingdom (163 BCE–72 CE).
6. Trees are also planted even in cemeteries in Turkish culture. Tying rags also dates back to the old Turkish belief shamanism, to the Turk-Mongolic native religious movement which is called Tengrism.

7. The villagers attack Zühre's house because they think her abilities are those of a wizard and devil. They also kill her husband and burn one of her daughters by throwing her in the fire. Zühre's daughters bear a star shaped birthmark and are healers who can travel through time and universes. Zühre and her dead daughter, with the star-shaped birthmark on her forehead, help Atiye get out of the cave of Nemrut.

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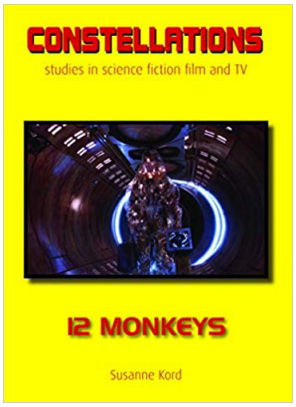
NON-FICTION REVIEWS

Image by Valiphotos

12 Monkeys, by Susanne Kord

Dominick Grace

Susanne Kord. *12 Monkeys*. Auteur, 2019. Constellations. Paperback. 102 pg. $24.99. ISBN 9781999334000.



Auteur's Constellations series of short monographs on key SF films and TV shows is uneven. Susanne Kord's *12 Monkeys*, which focuses primarily on Terry Gilliam's film but also devotes a short chapter to the TV show, is a strong addition to the growing series. Kord, a Professor at University College London and author of several books and articles on popular culture, especially film, demonstrates intimate knowledge not only of the film but also of the critical tradition surrounding it. While one might quarrel with the back cover copy's claim that *12 Monkeys* is Gilliam's best film (a claim not made within the book itself), Kord argues persuasively that it is Gilliam's "least understood film" (13) because audiences and scholars alike have failed to see past the ways the film "deliberately confounds viewer expectations" (13). Kord cites numerous reviews and studies that express bafflement about the film, noting that commentators can't agree "even on plot fundamentals" to a "startling" degree (8). Kord sets out to untangle the film's knots, and she does so by exploring carefully and thoroughly how it deals with the implications of time travel.

Key to Kord's reading is an explication of how the film denies the idea that time is linear, choosing instead to follow Einstein's ideas (Einstein is even referenced in the film) of spacetime. Though the film repeatedly has characters point out that time cannot be changed, Kord argues that the implications of this fact have been insufficiently recognized in studies of the film, which often want to read some sort of hope or optimism into it—to see *12 Monkeys* as the kind of time travel story in which one can change the past (or the future)—despite the fact that the film itself forecloses on that possibility. Kord's chapter on the TV series notes that this is a key aspect of the film discarded by the television show, which is predicated on the notion that the past can indeed be changed, if only one finds the right antecedent event to undo. Following the first chapter, which offers Kord's synopsis of the film, Kord provides two chapters, "Pushing the (Reset) Button: Why You Can't Start Over" and "'Thank You, Einstein': Why You Can't Turn Back Time," in which she offers a detailed reading of the film's time travel theory and some of the implications of that theory for concepts such as free will and determinism, a subject to which she returns in chapter 6, "Free Will, Determinism and Doing What You're Told." These aspects of Kord's study constitute her most significant contribution to *12 Monkeys* scholarship and should be illuminating to anyone interested in the film, whether as a fan or as a scholar.

Kord is interested in other questions raised by the film, notably about the implications of point of view and perception. The film itself provides a meta commentary on this topic when Cole, while in a movie theatre watching Hitchcock's *Vertigo* (1958), comments on how the movie itself can't change but that one sees something different every time one watches it. Kord reads this not only as a commentary on the nature of the relationship between films and audiences (a relationship endorsed by Gilliam himself, who Kord quotes in the book's coda as believing that there are multiple equally valid interpretations of his films, regardless of his intent) but also as a commentary on the nature of time in the film: time itself is fixed and immutable, but how one perceives it varies. This is of course very much in keeping with Einstein's relativity. Kord makes much of the fact that a key problem in the film is that what is true is very much a matter of perspective; what seems like Cole's insane babbling from the perspective of Railly in 1996 is, from Cole's perspective, literally the truth.

Kord also looks carefully at Gilliam's filmic technique. She devotes considerable attention to the ways Gilliam fills the screen with significant information. This ranges from visual elements such as set dressings and objects shown on screen through camera point of view (e.g. the frequency with which characters are shown contained or enclosed, or even viewed through obstacles such as fences), the color palettes (e.g. how Cole frequently blends into the drab surroundings in which he is placed, or how the absence of color differentiation creates confusion even about which time frame we are in), camera angles, etc. Gilliam is a master of cinematic form, so it is unsurprising that so much of the film's meaning is communicated not by dialogue and acting but by the visuals, but Kord expertly demonstrates how this is the case in clear prose that makes Gilliam's technique evident even to those who are not film scholars.

Indeed, one of the most admirable aspects of this book is Kord's clear, engaging writing. This book is not only insightful but also a pleasure simply to read for the vividness and elegance of its prose. Kord is adept at communicating complex scholarly ideas in understandable language. That she can say so much of value in a mere hundred pages is impressive. This book makes an important contribution to Gilliam scholarship and should be read by anyone interested in the study of his films, but it is also eminently readable by a general audience. Given its relatively low cost, it would make a useful resource for students covering the film in a course, but it would be a worthwhile addition to any library's Film and/or SF studies holdings.

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An Ecotopian Lexicon, edited by Matthew Schneider-Mayerson and Brent Ryan Bellamy

Ray Davenport

Matthew Schneider-Mayerson and Brent Ryan Bellamy, eds. *An Ecotopian Lexicon*. Minnesota UP, 2019. Paperback. 344 pg. $24.95. ISBN 9781517905903.

Many scholars have acknowledged the need to expand our current conceptualizations of the complexity and scale of climate change, and of the Anthropocene more widely. Matthew Schneider-Mayerson and Brent Ryan Bellamy's *An Ecotopian Lexicon* takes an unusually direct approach to this task by offering a collection of essays, each of which makes a case for adding a specific new loanword to English from another language. In the foreword, Kim Stanley Robinson suggests that this text can function as "sourcebook, clarification, diagnostic, and stimulus" (xiv) for conceptualizing contemporary climate issues. Each of the thirty essays and fourteen pieces of art in *An Ecotopian Lexicon* draws attention to crucial issues through examining a specific loanword. Most helpfully, each essay begins with a pronunciation guide and an example for its respective loanword. These loanwords aim to broaden the imagination and are highly diverse in origin; some, such as "heyiya" and "terragouge" are derived from speculative novels and science fiction. Others, such "Qi," "nahual," and "solastalgia" find their roots in Confucianism, Mesoamerican cultures, and ecopsychology, respectively. What they all appear to share, however, is the ability to address an existing gap in the English language. In other words, each loanword provides a concrete term for an existing concept, emotion, or movement that engages with environmental challenges but has yet to be articulated by the English-speaking world.

An Ecotopian Lexicon offers two ways in which to navigate these loanwords. The first contents pages alphabetize the essays while the second groups them into the following themes: Greetings, Dispositions, Perception, Desires, Beyond the Human, and Beyond "the Environment." Many may consider the latter option more helpful, given the unfamiliar nature of loanwords. However, if reading this text in alphabetical order, ~*~ is the first loanword presented. According to Melody Jue, in the "Apocalypto" entry, this loanword is pronounced by blowing softly on the back of your hand (15). In addition to its curious pronunciation, ~*~ is the most glyphically unusual loanword contained in *An Ecotopian Lexicon*. Inspired by Dolphinese, ~*~ can be described as the "vibratory jouissance" (17) felt when dolphins use soundwaves to tickle each other, often across considerable distances. In terms of its practical usage, Jue suggests that ~*~

can function as a metaphor for figurative language in relation to the aquatic within terrestrial and human contexts. Indeed, the example she provides at the beginning of her essay elucidates her suggested usage nicely: "That USB comedy sketch about a BP board meeting struggling to clean up all the coffee spilled at their table really ~*~ me when I watched it on YouTube" (15).

Through drawing attention to a method of communication used by Dolphins and why we should also make use of ~*~ as a metaphor, Jue inadvertently subverts the Anthropocentric binary notion of "us" (humans) and "them" (animals). As noted by Matthew Calarco, this idea has continued to pervade Western philosophies since Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics suggested an innate separation between humans, animals, and other forms of nonhuman life alongside a corresponding hierarchy (8). While many may consider the subversion of this idea to be a worthy ambition, particularly as it has been used to justify countless ecological atrocities against nonhuman species, practical utilization of ~*~ is potentially problematic in many circumstances. This, unfortunately, undermines its presence within a text that seeks to embed the usage of useful loanwords into the English language. While it may be relatively easy to type ~*~, as demonstrated by the example that Jue provides, using it in lectures, presentations, and more casual conversation would be somewhat tricky, thus diminishing ~*~'s potential for widespread usage.

Carolyn Fornoff's essay, "Nahual," occurs approximately halfway through the text, finding itself placed before ~*~ within Beyond the Human. It is not entirely clear why this essay was placed first (the decision was evidently not based on alphabetical order) but Fornoff's exploration of the loanword "nahual" is both interesting and engaging, nonetheless. Like Jue's essay, Fornoff's criticises the notion of humans as being separate from the animal kingdom and the suggestion that "humans and nonhumans occupy separate, discrete realms of activity and knowledge" (163). The term nahual, which can be pronounced as "na-wal," represents a Mesoamerican concept that suggests every human is linked to an animal alter-ego. In this sense, the daemons featured in Phillip Pullman's *His Dark Materials* (1995-2000) could be considered reminiscent of this idea. For example, in both, the form of each person's nahual or daemon is determined according to key characteristics of their personality. Understood metaphorically, nahualism, Fornoff suggests, can offer a crucial counterpoint to current Western conceptualizations of humans as separate from animals and provide a way of conceiving our human selves as innately bound to non-human life. Furthermore, she suggests that a better understanding of the inseparability between humans and animals can shift our ethical relationship with nature from one that is generated by individual moral codes to a relationality-based code of ethics (169-170). Indeed, nahualism has the potential to provoke decisive action against ecological degradation and what scientists such as Samuel T. Turvey have described as the Holocene extinction. Although this research on nahualism provides an interesting insight into Mesoamerican worldviews and a symbolic method of visualising the interconnectedness between humans and non-human animals, it does little to help us conceptualise the complex relationships that exist within ecosystems.

Destabilising separatist views is clearly a recurring theme within *An Ecotopian Lexicon*; in some essays, it is a key motif while in many others it is a more peripheral motif. Janet Tamalik

McGrath's thought-provoking essay on the loanword "sila" critiques this view through her examination of the English language at a structural level. Given that *An Ecotopian Lexicon* aims to harness the power of language to expand our conceptualization of climate change, essays such as this one seem appropriate for inclusion. The term sila, which can be pronounced as "see-lah," is a noun derived from Inuktut (one of several Inuit languages) and, unlike ~*~ and nahual, is placed in Beyond "the Environment." Although McGrath acknowledges the difficultly of a direct translation of this loanword, sila can be thought of as a concept that suggests humanity is responsible for preserving nature due to our ability, as a species, to influence its progress. Of course, concepts that promote this sort of stewardship are not unfamiliar to the English-speaking world and can be found in Christian, Islamic, and Jewish doctrines alike. However, according to McGrath, sila differs from these ideas as it can be thought of as a "superconcept" that emphasizes the interconnectedness between abstract ideas such as intelligence, spirit, and the cosmos. In this essay, McGrath also highlights how the linguistic structure of Inuktut is used to convey the highly relational worldviews held by many Innuits. Unlike English, Inuktut utilizes transitive verb agreement endings (subject and object as a single unit), is ungendered, and does not distinguish between animate or inanimate objects. In addition to being a highly relational language, Inuktut places the subject at the end of the sentence rather than the beginning as English does. For example, in English we may say "I am going to the store." In Inuktut, however, the morphology would be more akin to "the store-going to-will-I" (260). Through exploring sila in the context of the linguistic structure of Inuktut, McGrath raises intriguing questions about how the structure of language itself has the ability to shape our perception of and relationship to the world. In addition, McGrath raises intriguing questions as to what effect putting ourselves at the end of the sentence may have on how we react to climate change.

Overall, this text is highly thought provoking and has the potential to be widely influential. However, its level of influence is altogether dependent on how it is used. For example, if those who read it actively incorporate these loanwords into everyday conversation, presentations, academic work etc., it could significantly develop our conceptions of climate change. Therefore, perhaps this book can be used most effectively by educators, academics, and researchers. That being said, those with an avid interest in climate change and the Anthropocene would be likely to find its contents interesting and informative. The inclusion of artwork to represent selected loanwords is also a nice touch and acknowledges the role that art, as well as language, can have in allowing us to better visualise climate change. Overall, I would recommend this book to anyone seeking to expand their understanding of climate change as well as to those seeking to educate others on this topic. However, a revised edition of *An Ecotopian Lexicon* with further loanwords that address its complex temporal aspects, and perhaps even climate change denial, would be a welcome addition to literature on climate change and the Anthropocene more widely.

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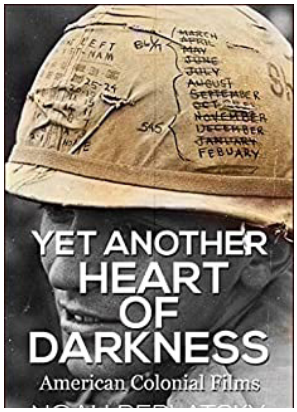
Yet Another Heart of Darkness: American Colonial Films, by Noah Berlatsky

Frances Auld

Noah Berlatsky. *Yet Another Heart of Darkness: American Colonial Films*. Self-published, 2018. $5.14. ASIN B07GYBHQ1G.



Yet Another Heart of Darkness: American Colonial Films by Noah Berlatsky is a digital collection of essays previously published in magazines such as *Playboy*, *SpliceToday*, *Pacific Standard*, the subscription service Patreon, or the author's blog, the *Hooded Utilitarian*. Berlatsky's essays cover film, fiction, non-fiction, and 21st Century U.S. Politics. If that sounds eclectic, it is an eclectic book. However, the collection is united by certain touchstone fictional texts such as H.G. Wells's *War of the Worlds* (1897) and *The Time Machine* (1895), as well as Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Lost World* (1912). Berlatsky also references the critical work of John Reider, *Colonialism and Science Fiction* (2008) throughout many of his essays, demanding the reader see the underlying colonial and imperial motifs in popular film, television shows, and fiction.

The text is organized by sections: The Lost World of Colonialism (an introduction to his thesis on colonialism and his touchstone texts, including *Heart of Darkness* [1899]); American Colonial Films (16 essays on war films that include *Aliens* [1986] and *Predator* [1987]); Invasion of the Mummies (four essays on Mummy films from 1932-2017); Invasion of the Superheroes (three essays on superhero films primarily from the Marvel Comic Universe); Invasion of the Science Fiction (six essays primarily about science fiction novels, although some films are mentioned for context of tropes); Off-Screen Imperialism (four essays concerning non-fiction texts and 21st century political narratives); Coda: Full Metal Bunny (a single essay that returns the reader to Berlatsky's touchstone texts).

Berlatsky's organization is hyperpermeable because as a digital text it allows for links within the essays. Thus, a reader might be reading the Coda, find a reference and a link to an essay on *Rambo* [1985] and be offered the jump to an earlier essay in a different section. This flexibility makes up for categorization which at times feels awkward or oddly drawn. *Aliens* seems to be excluded from the section on Science Fiction based on its genre (film), yet Berlatsky intentionally moves between film and text in his discussion of other Science Fiction novels and films or television shows. In addition, not all of his touchstone texts appear in all the essays. Seen as a collection of individual expositions written for different venues over time, this makes sense, as

does the occasional repetition of a point made in an earlier essay. What makes the collection work is his scrupulous cinematic analysis, the depth of his comprehension and range of familiarity with films across genres (War Films, Horror Films, Science Fiction Films), and his consistent commitment to reading visual and written texts for their colonialist text and subtexts, as well as the occasional subversion of imperialism.

While this last comment may suggest a theory-heavy read, this book eschews deep theory or even a genuine literature review. Instead, the essays function as a series (not a sequence) of examples of colonialism in popular culture spread over more than a century. Berlatsky adds links to Angela Nagle's *Kill All Normies* (2017), as well as links to sources such as *Slate* and *The Guardian*, rather than offer a bibliography, reference pages, or pages of footnotes. Like the organizational structure, the selection and use of references is not slapdash, it is simply designed for a more popular audience, and a comparatively relaxed reading.

Yet Another Heart of Darkness: American Colonial Films belies its title. Rather than a text purely focused on "American colonial film" it is an application of select components of theory (America's colonial past reappears in 20th century films; contemporary films are still busy domesticating America's past; viewers pleasurably participate as colonizers in these films and other texts) applied to various genres, mediums, and time periods. The language and tone befit the essays' previous publication in magazine and blog formats. There are some spelling/format errors which may be attributed to self-publishing, and they occasionally distract from the text.

Overall, this is an enjoyable and fascinating read. Select essays would be particularly effective for undergraduates being introduced to colonial theory, feminist theory, and popular culture. Some essays may lack the critical foundation for more advanced academic researchers, but they offer detailed readings in historical context. Berlatsky's essays cover both British and U.S. historical imperialist actions and their sometimes obvious, sometimes subtle, inscriptions in fiction and film. However, despite the historical underpinnings, the book does speak to fantasy. Even when he is writing about a non-fantastic visual text (*Rambo*, *Full Metal Jacket* [1987]), Berlatsky identifies the colonialist, time-travel fantasy that allows film makers and audiences to replay, recast, and rewrite historical events. The science fiction and horror texts he discusses exemplify the public's desire and the authors' impulse to continue colonizing (even if they have to do it in the center of the earth or outside the galaxy).

Berlatsky's rendering of American War film as an expression of a science-fictional attitude toward history is perhaps the most fascinating focus of his essays. His critique of whitewashing in Marvel Comic Universe's Superhero films is clear and solid, but rethinking the fantastic cultural displacement underlying *Rambo* or *Apocalypse Now* (1979) and seeing it as kind of time travel narrative is especially thought provoking, as is his recognition of viewers' ongoing attraction to the fantasy of colonization from the viewpoint of the good guy/superhero/colonizer.

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Children of Men, by Dan Dinello

Zachary Ingle

Dan Dinello. *Children of Men*. Constellations. Auteur, 2019. Paperback. 133 pg. $24.95. ISBN 9781999334024.

Constellations is a series of small volumes (in the vein of the long running BFI Film Classics series) published by Auteur that focuses on individual science-fiction films and television series. By mid-2021, there had already been sixteen volumes published in the series, with several more on the horizon. Dan Dinello surely had a tough task in writing the entry on Alfonso Cuarón's apocalyptic/dystopian *Children of Men* (2006), lauded as one of most enduring science-fiction films of this century, a rich text worthy of intense scrutiny that has only become more timely since its release with its "salient critique of anti-immigrant xenophobia and ultranationalism" (12). The film is set in 2027 at a time when there has not been a new human birth in over eighteen years. Britain has "soldiered on" even though most of the rest of the nations of the world have crumbled under environmental, nuclear, viral, or another form of destruction. Just as we inch closer to the film's temporal setting, *Children of Men* has renewed relevance in light of Brexit and Trump, the Syrian refugee crisis, and the caging of immigrants—not to mention Covid-19.

Cuarón's film is an adaptation of P. D. James's acclaimed 1992 novel, and Dinello does devote a few pages to the differences between it and the film adaptation before rightly focusing on the film, not overly concerned with issues of fidelity. For instance, while the novel was more overtly Christian, the film still retains numerous parallels to the Gospels—from the obvious to the much less so—as Dinello scrutinizes in Chapter 6. However, the film focuses more on fascism, xenophobia, racism, and inequality—i.e. "tyrannical apartheid politics" (69)—that Cuarón enhanced for the film, inspired by his post-9/11 milieu. But as Dinello notes, the anti-immigration rhetoric promoted by the media in *Children of Men* seems less concerned with terrorism (as it would have been at the time of the film's release), but more about "medical nativism" as immigrants are constantly shown in locked cages in several key moments of the film for fear of microbial invasions from the Other. Though his book was published in 2019, Dinello now seems quite prescient of the xenophobic rhetoric surrounding Covid-19 (e.g., Trump's "Chinese Virus" moniker).

The author invokes Camus more than anyone else, fittingly due to Camus's "conception of fascism as a contagious plague against we must happily and relentlessly rebel" (123). Dinello

delineates frequent connections to Camus in the latter half of the volume, from characters who exhibit his existentialist philosophy to the main protagonist Theo (Clive Owen) as quite similar to Camus's protagonist in *The Stranger* (1942). Throughout, Dinello writes in a clear style that is accessible even for those with little background in existential philosophy.

Yet there are numerous reasons why *Children of Men* has become so acclaimed; certainly some are grounded in Cuarón's use of long takes, moving cameras, and a cinema-verité approach, atypical at the time for the science-fiction genre. Dinello does not ignore an aesthetic analysis, offering a concise summation of André Bazin's theory of realism (for those less familiar with film theory), a formal style that fits the content. Dinello considers *Children of Men* the most realistic science-fiction film ever. Indeed, Dinello devotes an entire chapter to the film's visual design and how it enhances the film's key political concerns (e. g. via the backgrounds which offer an "ambient apocalyptic" look) (61).

One potential negative, at least for readers of *SFRA Review*, is the lack of contextualization within the genre. Those readers looking for comparisons of *Children of Men* to other SF film and literature (and there are certainly interesting parallels that could be made to other dystopian texts on British fascism such as *V for Vendetta*—graphic novel by Alan Moore and David Lloyd, 1989; film adaptation directed by James McTeigue, 2005) will need to look elsewhere, as Dinello proves to be more deeply fascinated with philosophical and political connections.

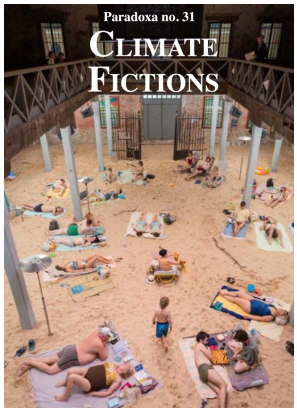
Overall, this Constellations entry is highly recommended, illustrated with 42 black-and-white stills and enhanced by Dinello's impeccably well-written prose that offers an intense textual analysis that never resorts to tedium. The brevity and affordable nature of books like those in the Constellations series make them excellent for the classroom setting and particularly recommended for a week-long focus on a film. Whether for classroom use or personal research, this volume is certainly endorsed as a study of a film worthy of further exploration (as those of us who have shown it recently in classes can attest). Despite the dystopian nature of *Children of Men*—and the depressing realization of its growing applicability—the film does end on a hopeful note, presenting the possibility of "an egalitarian, altruistic and non-authoritarian society that pursues the common good, accommodates plurality, and amplifies the sense of human and social possibility" (126).

Zachary Ingle is a Visiting Assistant Professor of Film at Hollins University in Virginia. He received his Ph.D. in Film and Media Studies at the University of Kansas. Ingle has edited four volumes: *Robert Rodriguez: Interviews*; *Gender and Genre in Sports Documentaries*; *Identity in Myth in Sports Documentaries*; and *Fan Phenomena: The Big Lebowski*. His articles have appeared in *Post Script*, *Literature/Film Quarterly*, and *Journal of Sport History*.

Climate Fictions, edited by Alison Sperling

Bruce Lindsley Rockwood

Alison Sperling, ed. *Climate Fictions: Paradoxa #31*. Paradoxa, 2019-20. Print, 451 pg. $48.00, ISBN: 9781929512416. PDF $42.00. Available for order at https://paradoxa.com/no-30-climate-fictions-2020/.



Climate Fictions is an interdisciplinary collection of 30 short essays, offering critical interpretation and exploration of the role of art, performance, music, digital games, and stories in understanding the climate challenge and possible responses from diverse perspectives. In an introductory essay, editor Alison Sperling reviews the various terms for the genre, whether "Climate-change fiction, climate fiction, cli-fi, or in this introduction also denoted as CF" that she notes "was coined (and since championed, now policed) by blogger Dan Bloom in 2007, and popularized by a retweet from speculative fiction author Margaret Atwood in 2012" (9). The volume is divided into three parts: Part I: Simulation, Part II: Narration, and Part III: Speculation. Each part is further divided into Dialogues and Essays. Each contribution is documented by footnotes or lists of sources, and many include photographs or other illustrations of the work discussed.

The collection offers contributions that reflect "crucial insights that reveal the many ways in which climate change is bound to innumerable forms of oppression due to colonialism and extractivism, environmental racism, homophobia, and ableism" (17).

Sperling notes at the conclusion of her introduction, "Schneider-Mayerson has recently written that 'in the very near future, almost all literature will become a form of what we now think of as climate change fiction, defined broadly' (Schneider-Mayerson, "Climate Change Fiction" 318). It is possible that the more climate change comes to dominate the fictions and imaginative realms in the future, the already unstable category of cli-fi may prove to be overly capacious. [. . .] But the issue as a whole worries less about cli-fi as a category and more about the ways that climate fictional works interrogate inter-related histories and systems at work in a changing climate, as well as about how the fictions we tell ourselves also shape the climate" (18-19).

Cli-Fi's importance is illustrated by a link showing 291 books under the term: https://www.goodreads.com/list/show/36205.Cli_Fi_Climate_Change_Fiction, and numerous reviews on the subject, e.g., "Cli-Fi: Birth of a Genre," by Rebecca Tuhus-Dubrow, Dissent (Summer, 2013), and resources at http://www.asjournal.org/62-2017/cli-fi-american-studies-research-bibliography/.

This volume recognizes and responds to that reality while opening it up to new and wider perspectives.

The visual and performance arts center the first four dialogues in the collection. In "Tomorrow You Are a Cactus," Simon(e) van Saarloos and Paula Chaves Bonilla discuss the role of performance in presenting their reality "[a]s queer people, as racialized artists," (28) and explain "*Omni Toxica* [2019] is inspired by a myth about the message of the coca plant" (27). Chaves Bonilla affirms, "Speaking about climate change, *marica*, it's important to say: the end of the world already happened a thousand times for marginalised communities, habibi. It's been more than five hundred years of ongoing fight against the complete erasure of our peoples. More than five hundred years since the white Europeans came and the fight against the extraction and colonisation of our lands started. The end of the world already happened" (24).

In "Balance is Possible," Stina Attebery carries on a conversation with Elizabeth LaPensée, "an award-winning artist who both creates and researches Indigenous Futurisms in media. She is Anishinaabe with family from Bay Mills, Métis, and Irish" (31). LaPensée's work includes computer games *Coyote Quest* (2017) and *Thunderbird Strike* (2017), and the comic *Deer Woman: A Vignette* (2017) (32-33). They explore the role these pieces play in reaching young people. LaPensée notes, "My greatest hope is to reflect the importance of the land and waters as they are, to facilitate reciprocity, and to give space for people to make their own meaning" (36).

In "The Future was Yesterday," Dehlia Hannah interviews Charles Stankievech to discuss his installations and video work projects, including "The Drowned World" (2019) (based on J. G. Ballard's novel) for the Toronto Biennial (38), and the video installation LOVELAND (2009-2011) and its relationship to M. P. Shiel's 1901 novel *The Purple Cloud* (40-41). Stankievech asserts that "Good science fiction at its core is always conceptual, and some of the earliest pieces were more impressive as conceptual ponderings than written craft" (42).

In "Sun & Sea (*Marina*) Performing Climate Change," Alison Sperling explores with creators Lina Lapelytė, Vaiva Grainytė, and Rugilė Barzdžiukaitė their work which "took place as an opera-performance in the Lithuanian Pavilion [. . .] as an adapted durational work in English at the 2019 *La Biennale di Venezia.*" It "took place on a constructed beach inside of a warehouse off-site from the main grounds of the Venice Biennale, where performers in beachwear and reclining on beach towels sang their respective parts of an ecological-libretto lasting about one hour" (47). The performers are largely white, "vacationers sipping planetary resources as a Pina Colada" (50).

Part I's essay section begins with Bogna Konior's "Modeling Realism: Digital Media, Climate Simulations and Climate Fictions," which argues that climate change is "a phenomenon that we know only through computerized simulation and statistical probability" (57). We can't observe it except through elaborate computer models, which help us talk about the future in ways we can use to address the present. "Climate models are like petri dishes for growing fictional Earths so that we can learn about our real Earth" (66). Given the heat dome in the North American west in 2021, which is highly visible to all, this claim that climate change can only be observed through

models is open to question. See, for example: https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2021/jun/28/portland-seattle-heatwave-heat-dome-temperatures.

Péter Kristóf Makai then addresses the role of board games in talking about climate change, in "Climate Change on Cardboard: Ecological Eurogames," to clarify the abstract nature of climate change to lay audiences (77). "The four board games presented here—*20th Century*, *Rescue Polar Bears*, *Keep Cool* and CO_2—all work based on the assumption that humans make a difference; it's also what makes the process adaptable to the board game medium" (82). He discusses the difference in American and European board game design traditions, and notes the emergence of cooperative games which play a role in some of those he reviews (84-89). He concludes that games "may also provide our best method for consciousness-raising, because they place human agency at the center of their rule-defined mechanics" (97).

In contrast, Cameron Kunzelman brings a skeptical eye (105) to "Video Games as Interventions in the Climate Disaster," proposing that "modeling, affect, and direct intervention are modes of innervation that tie into distinct ways of politicizing play and generating some kind of player response around questions of climate" (107). Games reviewed to illustrate modeling and affect include *Civilization IV* (2005) and *VI* (2016), *Frostpunk* (2018), *Fate of the World* (2011), *Subnautica* (2018), and *Gathering Storm* (2019) (107-115). Kunzelman concludes by arguing that the third approach, direct intervention, by combining elements of modeling and the affective relationship with climate, is the best way for games to make a significant "ideological impact on players who might be either neutral or hostile to arguments about the necessity of addressing climate change. I see both *Eco* (Strange Loop Games, 2018) and the *Minecraft* (Mojang, 2011) mod *GlobalWarming* (Porillo, 2018) as emblematic of this synthetic mode that place [*sic*] players within a subject position within a broader system that models climate change" (116).

In "Nodding Off from the Anthropocene: Picnolepsy and Rehearsing Disappearance in Space Exotic," Andrew Wenaus reviews a post-World War II musical subgenre, space exotica, "an eccentric take on popular mood music" that "at once prioritizes an optimistic escape from Earth while intimating a need to leave the planet" (123). The world may end but we can ignore this as the music "offers at once picnoleptic blips of escape from the anxieties of global catastrophe" (125).

The concluding essay in Part I is "The Legend of Zelda in the Anthropocene," by Gerry Canavan (143-167), which contains a detailed and thoughtful examination of the entire Zelda/Link/Ganon franchise story line framed as an examination as well of the deeply pessimistic Anthropocene worldview that the current generation of game players face. "The game's breathtaking visuals and acclaimed open-world gameplay are thus part and parcel of what I will argue here is its sourly dyspeptic vision of climate crisis in the Anthropocene [. . .]; *Wild*'s Hyrule is no longer a site for wish-fulfillment and juvenile power fantasies but a grim premediation of a depopulated and (multiply) destroyed civilization, whose inevitable, always-already ruined future can only be partially and provisionally mitigated, not prevented or saved. In a twisted version of Jameson's famous 'nostalgia for the present' (279 and passim), then, we therefore see registered

within Hyrule's collapse our culture's anticipation of its own coming disruption by the climate crisis" (145-146).

Parts II and III similarly address important themes in climate fiction's place in the diverse and cross-cultural world of the 21st century. The dialogs in Part II include "Stories of Where We Come From" by Viola Lasmana and Khairani Barokka, a conversation "where we spoke about the possibilities of language and imagination (what Okka expresses as 'cosmologies within languages'), the fictions already embedded in what one might think of as facts, and the inextricable links between capitalism, the environment, climate change, colonial violence, disability justice, and indigenous cultures" (169-174). Stef Craps follows with "Last Aboriginal Person Standing in a Climate-Changed Australia: A Conversation with Alexis Wright" (175-181). Jim Clarke converses with SF scholar and author Adam Roberts in "The Malign Flipside of Fluke," including a discussion of Roberts's novel *The Black Prince* (2018) (183-187). In "Dear Environment: Dialog with Anna Zett," we explore Zett's on-going "project Deponie (Dump), which includes video works as well as sculptural installations deploying piles of gravel and remnant ashes from industrially incinerated household waste" (190-195). Callum Copley concludes with "Documenting Fictions" in conversation with Federico Barni, discussing his work on "how climate operates at the intersection of fiction and fact in literature and filmmaking" (196-202).

The essays in Part II explore the "Stories We Tell About the End of the World: (Post) Apocalyptic Climate Fiction Working Towards Climate Justice" by Julia D. Gibson (204-228), "Tracking Climate Change from Ancient Times" (230-245), an essay on J. G. Ballard's *The Drowned World* (246-266), and an examination of the Australian author James Edmond's 1911 short story, "The Fool and His Inheritance" (267-288). The concluding essay explores climate change and "Cosmic Horror in John Langan's *The Fisherman*" (289-304).

Part III's Speculations include the dialogues "Ruins and Erosion: Reflections on the CaseDuna Project" in Brazil (305-313); an exploration of the art of Janet Laurence in "Through the Portal" (315-323); "Architectures of Seed Banking" (323-331); a conversation with the educator, author, editor, and public speaker Walidah Imarisha, co-editor of *Octavia's Brood: Science Fiction Stories from Social Justice Movements* (2015), in "There Are No Givens" (333-339); and M. Ty's interview with artist and filmmaker Shu Lea Cheang in "Uncertain Harvest" (341-351), including a discussion of Cheang's 1994 film *Fresh Kill*, about an "outbreak of radioactive fish lips" in a New York restaurant (341). Cheang discusses her 2017 film *Fluidø*, and concludes by commenting, "To invite people for a dinner these days involves a survey of dietary situations, and certainly this takes us back to environmental and health issues, to ethical beliefs, body natures, and the demise of immune systems. Food is political. Sex is political. Being is political" (351).

In the concluding essays in Part III, Suzanne F. Boswell in "The Four Tourists of the Apocalypse" addresses "Figures of the Anthropocene in Caribbean Climate Fiction" (353-371). Alexander Popov and Konstantin Georgiev explore Paolo Bacigalupi's *The Water Knife* (2015) and Kim Stanley Robinson's *New York 2140* (2017) in "Crises of Water and the New Maps to

Utopia" (373-395), while Conrad Scott examines "Ecocritical Dystopianism and Climate Fiction," including the works of Atwood, Butler, Erdrich, Jemisin, Kingsolver, and others, and the criticism of Fredric Jameson and Slavoj Žižek. Tyler Austin Harper examines the "Climate Fiction, Paranoid Anthropocentrism, and the Politics of Existential Risk," discussing Alfonso Cuarón's 2006 film *Children of Men*, and a British tradition of "paranoid anthropocentrism" (420) seen in such works as J.B.S. Haldane's *The Last Judgment* (1927) and Jeanette Winterson's *The Stone Gods* (2007). Harper argues "that paranoid anthropocentrism is intimately bound up with a disavowal, not of the possibility of utopia—paranoid anthropocentric depictions of the struggle for human survival are often deeply (and perversely) utopian—but of specifically emancipatory utopias in which responsibility for the survival of the human race would be democratically distributed" (427). Harper cites Kathryn Yusoff in *A Billion Black Anthropocenes or None* (2018), who he says "argues that whiteness functions as a place of power from which to organize and administer the dispensation of environmental risk in an age of climatic crisis" (428). Glyn Morgan concludes the volume with "Economies of Scale: Environmental Plastics, SF and Graphic Narratives." He cites Amitav Ghosh's *The Great Derangement* (2016) for the claim that climate change "defies both literary fiction and contemporary common sense" (436) and offers to "examine comic book forms of SF to reinsert them into our discourse around climate change and genre fiction" (437), including a discussion of the *Great Pacific* (2013-2015) comic book series, William Gibson's *The Peripheral* (2014), and Richard McGuire's *Here* (2014).

No review can do justice to every contribution to this fascinating and stimulating volume. It introduces the reader to specialist texts and insights that one would not otherwise encounter, while providing comprehensive critical essays on a range of SF texts that fall within the broad scope of Cli-Fi or Climate Fiction. It is a useful reference tool for researchers in the field and should be in any academic library collection.

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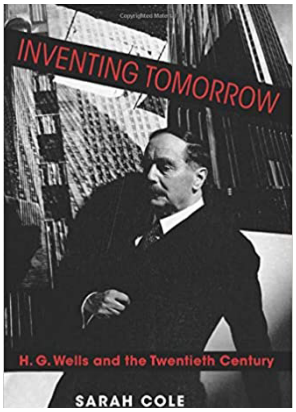
Inventing Tomorrow: H. G. Wells and the Twentieth Century, by Sarah Cole

Stephen Mollmann

Sarah Cole. *Inventing Tomorrow: H. G. Wells and the Twentieth Century.* Columbia UP, 2020. Hardcover. 392 pg. $35.00. ISBN 9780231193122.



In her article "Rereading H. G. Wells's *The Time Machine*: Empiricism, Aestheticism, Modernism" (*English Literature in Transition*, vol. 58, no. 4), Caroline Hovanec calls for an alternative history of modernism that places H. G. Wells at its vanguard, rather than Joseph Conrad: "it [would] challenge[ ] us to think beyond the heroic narrative of modernism rising up against a complacent positivism, and to imagine a literary history in which modernist epistemology is seen not as a radical break from Victorian positivism and realism, but instead as an evolution of a particular species of Victorian thought" (480). Hovanec argues that critics have been too accepting of Wells's own claims about his distance from modernism.

Sarah Cole's monograph proposes a different alternate history of twentieth-century literature, one where Wells's ideals for "how literature would engage the public world" won out over the modernists' (4). Cole argues that Wells's writing—with its strong didactic bent, its grand projects, its lack of focus on interior life—seems strange from our current vantage point because the modernists won. She argues Wells benefits from being read outside the context that modernism created in literary analysis, which "uncover[s] a thriving form of literary accomplishment, germinating alongside the more familiar works from this period […] producing, perhaps, a broader and more capacious modernism" (4). The introduction to *Inventing Tomorrow* explicates the differences between Wells's approach to literature and that of the modernists, exemplified by Virginia Woolf, but also shows how Wells and the modernists were allied in their reactions to the new century.

Cole argues that her analysis of Wells is distinct because of its capaciousness; Wells wrote voluminously in many genres across a long career, but most contemporary studies focus on his science fiction or a couple of well-regarded literary texts. Cole covers it all, from textbooks to autobiography to novels to pamphlets to short fiction to film scripts. The first chapter tries to lay out an overall sense of Wells's attitudes, techniques, style, and tone across the totality of his writing. The other three chapters each focus on a key theme of his work: "Civilian" on his explorations of wartime and calls for peace, "Time" on his attempts to communicate new

understandings of history and futurity, and "Life" on the role of biology and evolution in his thought.

I found the first chapter the least successful because of its amorphousness. It has some keen insights, such as Cole's discussion of Wells's propensity for self-insertion (61-3), and how his novels tell the reader how to read them, but not heavy-handedly (72). Wells had many novels with protagonists that were essentially him (e.g., *The History of Mr Polly* [1910], *Love and Mr Lewisham* [1900], *In the Days of the Comet* [1906], *Tono-Bungay* [1909], *Ann Veronica* [1909], *The New Machiavelli* [1911]), and one could see this as egoistic, but Cole argues that the primary feature of his self-writing is argument: his "voice discussing the problems of our world and offering solutions" (67). Even Wells's autobiography, she claims, is more about his ideas than his actual life (66). There are other good insights, but limiting a discussion of darkness and light in Wells to just over four pages suggests more than it compels. (It was unclear to me, too, why and how these topics all fit into the theme of "voice.")

The other chapters, though, are compelling, specifically for the breadth of Wells's writing that they cover. The chapter on "Life," for example, takes in SF such as *The Food of the Gods* (1904), *The Island of Doctor Moreau* (1896), and *The Time Machine* (1895), book-essays such as *The Conquest of Time* (1942), *The Future in America* (1906), and *Mankind in the Making* (1903), the popular science book *The Science of Life* (1929-30), the religious parable *The Undying Fire* (1919), and literary novels including *Ann Veronica* and *Tono-Bungay*. Cole doesn't force all this into a single trajectory, however, as Wells is too diverse and self-scrutinizing a writer for that. Rather she explores how for Wells, life is all about energy (often unfulfilled) and waste (often necessary) in a variety of different contexts, from Doctor Moreau's attempts to reshape evolution to Ann Veronica's inability to achieve a political awakening. For the SF scholar, the real benefit is in seeing how the familiar SF texts interact with the less familiar literary and nonfiction ones. Most of Wells's scientific romances are clustered at the beginning of his career, but Wells continued to explore the ideas in them throughout his life.

After the introduction, Cole's placing of Wells in the context of modernism is usually implicit more than explicit, but one of the book's strengths is in showing how Wells was influenced by his world and how he then made the world others reacted to. Many scholars note Wells's claim about what such an influence Thomas Henry Huxley was on his thought; Cole actually incorporates discussion of a couple of Huxley essays into the chapter on "Life." She also analyzes the scenes in Woolf's *Between the Acts* (1941) in which a character is reading Wells's *The Outline of History* (1919-20). Cole shows how Wells was reacting to his era—but also creating it.

The scale of Cole's analysis is impressive, but in a sense, it just reflects the scale of Wells. He had a plan for the entire world, and that is what let him essentially invent the genre of SF, and what set him apart from his modernist contemporaries. Cole's conclusion emphasizes this point: "Wells […] set literature on a path to social amelioration, seeing its *forms* as mutable and impermanent but its power and purpose as firm.[…] [W]riting need not be diffident […] change need not seem

impossible" (319). It's an almost inspirational conclusion: "I hope that, in considering Wells's lifetime of writing, that reader—you—will feel motivated to ask of literature, what can and should it do for the world, for tomorrow?" (320).

It's a big ask. And so too are the alternate histories that Cole and Hovanec propose. Wells is so big a writer that an alternate literature with Wells at its center is almost impossible to contemplate. For what Cole shows is that, like the sun of the dying Earth at the end of *The Time Machine*, Wells absorbed everything before the end.

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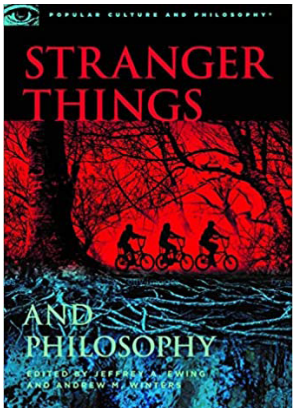
Stranger Things *and Philosophy*, edited by Jeffrey A. Ewing and Andrew M. Winter

Nicole C. Dittmer

Jeffrey A. Ewing and Andrew M. Winter, editors. Stranger Things *and Philosophy: Thus Spake the Demogorgon*. Open Court, 2019. Popular Culture and Philosophy. Paperback. 256 pg. $19.95. ISBN 9780812694703.



Stranger Things is a retro-style Netflix series that indulges viewers in gratuitous 80's tropes reminiscent of Steven Spielberg's films of epic childhood adventures, pastel and neon clothing, gravity-defying Aquanet hair, and devil-worshipping role-playing games. Drawing from such popular culture groups as the misfits from the Goon Docks in *The Goonies* (1985) and the Losers' Club from Stephen King's *It* (1986), the Duffer Brothers offer their take on the child collective through a modern lens. While this series offers a visually appealing aesthetic shell of science fiction immersed in popular culture from the 1980s, its core is rich with philosophical concerns that target real-world issues, such as Cold War fear, the AIDS epidemic, and personal identity. Striking a balance between cultural entertainment and substantial matters of existence, *Stranger Things* is replete with themes for both enjoyment and critical exploration.

This edited collection, with a parodic title referencing Friedrich Nietzsche's *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, offers varied philosophical approaches to the Duffer Brothers' critically acclaimed series *Stranger Things*. Similar to Nietzsche's themes of the *übermensch*, will-to-power, and the values of good and evil, this volume explores these subjects through the telekinetic abilities of Eleven, the strength of the child collective, and the invasive energies of new species. Broken into five sections, this philosophical investigation of *Stranger Things* offers an easy read both to those familiar with the series and those new to it. Whether purposefully or accidentally, this collection alternates its sections between the fictional and real-world issues represented in the series to present a juxtaposed jigsaw that conjoins thematic elements and offers varied approaches. Sections one, three and five, "Strange Thoughts," "Nothing is Stranger Than Reality," and "How Do We Cope with the Strange?" address the fictional world, while sections two and four, "The Joy of the Creepy" and "How Strange Are We?" explore the comparable real-world concerns.

The sections focusing on the show's fictional universe delve into the primary themes prevalent throughout the series: 80's tropes, Barb, and the Demogorgon. With focus on these subjects, each essay examines familiar theories of hyperreality, childhood and illusions of happiness,

friendship, and anachronistic perspectives of 1980's aesthetics. Specifically, the essay "Abnormal is the New Normal," written by Fernando Gabriel Pagnoni Berns, Diego Foranda, and Mariana Zarate, explores and offers clarification to some questionable moments within the series. For those of us familiar with the behavior of so-called parental "normalcy" in the 1980s, such things as discussions of sexual preference or overt expression of sexuality were not typically held between parents and children (i. e. Joyce's acknowledgement and acceptance of Will's orientation or Karen's meaningful "talk" with Nancy over her intimate relationships with Steve and/or Jonathan). This essay, however, suggests that *Stranger Things* and the behavioral techniques employed by the showrunners are constructed by the "use of a millennial voice packaged in 1980s aesthetics" (183). Exploring the show's anachronistic modern perspective beneath the façade of an 80's style, this chapter not only deconstructs common questions of "inauthenticity," but reinforces the other chapters sharing similar themes.

The sections focusing on real-world issues, "The Joy of the Creepy" and "How Strange Are We?," while cleaving to the themes of the 80s and consciousness, examine nature and the self through theories of the grotesque, phobias, fear, and reflections of horror in reality. Offering a seamless transition between the bracketing sections, these chapters provide insightful justifications of monstrosity (both symbolic and real). The chapter "Horror Appeals to Our Dual Nature," by Franklin S. Allaire and Krista S. Gehring, juxtaposes previous theories of the Mind Flayer, or the Shadow Monster, and Demogorgons as embodiments of evil from the Upside Down by suggesting that these figurations are symbolic representations of realistic 80s fears and phobias (e. g. the AIDS epidemic). By relating these fantastical depictions of monstrosity to a terrifying and enigmatic real-world concern, this chapter provides a perfect example of the balance between fiction and reality which mirrors the overall collection.

This edited collection is highly recommended for both fans of *Stranger Things* and those who wish to revisit their childhood in the 1980s. While there are some repetitive theories applied throughout the collection, these scholars each demonstrate a unique approach to the varied elements of *Stranger Things*. Much of this volume represents a clear understanding and knowledge of the decade in which the series is embedded, as well as the theories that necessitate each critical analysis. Although not free of minor grammatical or mechanical issues, and the occasional incorrect reference to character names, this collection perfectly situates itself in the canon of *Stranger Things* philosophy. By providing alternating sections exploring the fantastic versus the realistic that fluidly transition into one another, the collection disrupts any repetition of theories which could ultimately detract from the purpose of the text. Many of these chapters offer a deeper understanding of perspective through intertextual analyses of good/evil, identity, and nature/culture, which would be valuable in an academic environment.

Unfortunately, this volume was released prior to the release of the third season of *Stranger Things*; therefore, it covers only the first two seasons. However, for those interested in philosophy, horror, or a science fiction series that perpetuates the legacy of the 1980's phenomenon, this collection is essential for your journey.

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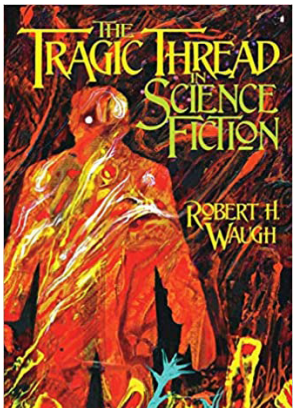
The Tragic Thread in Science Fiction, by Robert H. Waugh

Dennis Wilson Wise

Waugh, Robert H. *The Tragic Thread in Science Fiction*. Hippocampus Press, 2019. Paperback. 236 pg. $20.00. ISBN 9781614982463.



Robert H. Waugh's latest collection of critical essays is an odd book—a throwback, really, to bygone days filled with humanist values and New Critical precepts. Virtually absent from *The Tragic Thread in Science Fiction* is historical context. Authorial biography fares a little better, but only just. Yet no matter how deeply readers look, they'll not find any critical terminology, no theories or critical topics, from the last thirty years. In a way, this makes sense. The oldest essay in this collection hails from 1985, the second oldest from 1990. To be fair, Waugh significantly revised both essays—though not his third reprint, an article from 1997—for *The Tragic Thread in Science Fiction*, evidently in a sincere (if uneven) attempt to make this book read *as* a book rather than as a disjointed collection of essays. Still, this stylistic facelift leaves the articles' core arguments untouched—and it shows. In neither case do Waugh's revisions, despite a few updated citations, address major recent works or trends in SF criticism. Likewise, although Waugh's nine other non-reprint chapters forego any dates of composition, they too exude the faintly musty aura of Rip van Winkle. These essays are formal, intelligently written, and sometimes even charmingly learned, but they nonetheless retain the terms and methodologies of our New Critical forebears. The real connecting thread in *The Tragic Thread in Science Fiction*, far from the "heroism, grandeur, and tragedy" stated in the introduction (7), is Waugh's resurrection of close reading for imagery, quest functions, literary influence, source hunting, thematic oppositions, and aesthetic form and structure—especially aesthetic form and structure, in fact—in isolation from broader historical and cultural concerns.

Still, we should be careful not to dismiss a book too quickly simply because it stubbornly evades several decades of mainstream academic criticism. Sometimes, the old can teach us what the new no longer remembers it has forgotten. Yet, alas—in *The Tragic Thread in Science Fiction*, Waugh never once defends his critical methodology. Like a rhinoceros barreling on heedless of the new landscapes through which it travels, Waugh sets forth his arguments without much regard or interest for how other contemporary academic critics might see his approach. This leaves his collection a significant problem of audience. On one hand, the refusal to engage contemporary trends in SF studies—even if only to defend his own approach—means that relatively few academics will find his discussions particularly helpful to their own research. On the other hand,

I suspect Waugh's style remains much too formal to hold much appeal for general lay readers, a core audience for Hippocampus books, though he occasionally adds a few lively autobiographical touches. Waugh for instance, sounding very much like Frederik Pohl, mentions on his first page how "suddenly science fiction became an article of faith for me, a genre to which I became devoted" (7). Yet this passion seeps only infrequently into the collection. At the end of the day, *The Tragic Thread in Science Fiction* remains too traditional a book, too beholden to the great span of time over which its essays were written, to attempt a more reader-friendly (and more contemporary) autoethnographic style.

As mentioned already, Waugh's introduction states his subject as "heroism, grandeur, and tragedy" in certain select SF writers (7). This is a noble claim, but also an attempt—a thin one—at imposing thematic unity upon the volume. Only a fraction of Waugh's essays specifically deal with heroism, grandeur, or tragedy. Still fewer do so as their main focus. For example, on Waugh's second page, he briefly outlines the "order of parts that occur in Greek tragedies," but he undercuts himself almost immediately by admitting, "I will not press this nomenclature in my analyses of these books" (8). And, indeed, Waugh does not—almost another seventy pages pass before Waugh finds reason to cite the structure of Greek tragedy again, and then merely in passing (on page 77). Likewise, Waugh's emphasis on SF itself is another thin attempt at unity, something to help along a pithier title for his book. Obviously, texts like David Lindsay's *A Voyage to Arcturus* (1920), Mervyn Peake's *Titus Alone* (1959), and Fritz Leiber's *Fafhrd and the Gray Mouser* stories are all fantasy, not SF. Waugh attempts to sidestep this objection by calling these writings "Gothic"-style texts (7), but the Gothic mode itself, of course, maps imperfectly onto SF. But even if Waugh's *arguments* rarely study the nature of the tragic within his chosen texts, his *selection* of texts showcases more clearly his preferences as a reader. Perhaps unsurprising in one who has written two previous non-fiction collections on H. P. Lovecraft, Waugh generally prefers fiction that imagines the infinite minuteness of humanity within the universe. For Waugh, this creates a sense of cosmic loneliness and a tragic falling off from older, more anthropocentric visions of humanity—a sense reinforced by German philosophers such as Nietzsche and Schopenhauer.

After this introduction, Waugh dives straight into the essays. The first three concern David Lindsay's *A Voyage to Arcturus*. In "The Drum of Arcturus in Lindsay's Strange Music," the oldest reprint, Waugh presents a convoluted argument that tries explaining the novel's structure through an analogy with movements in music. Although Waugh presents so many qualifications that his proposed structure risks losing its usefulness, he nevertheless denies *A Voyage to Arcturus* to be an allegorical novel (23)—perhaps this chapter's most interesting and counterintuitive claim. Next, Waugh turns to the séance in Lindsay's first chapter. Here, he detects certain resonances—but few apparent direct influences, he hastens to add (28)—between *A Voyage to Arcturus* and Goethe's *Faust II* (1832). The third of Waugh's Lindsay essays presents his speculations on the names of various characters. This chapter best represents one of Waugh's most idiosyncratic critical tics—namely, that names generally mean *something*. Sometimes, Waugh finds a good example. Other times, Waugh allows his undeniable erudition to get the better of him. In Lindsay's novel, for

instance, Waugh links the name of Lindsay's psychic medium, Backhouse, to the Dutch painter Lodolf Bakhuysen—although what, if anything, hangs upon this identification remains unclear.

This Bakhuysen example is far from isolated in Waugh's collection, and a few more are worth citing. In James Tiptree Jr.'s *Brightness Falls from the Air* (1985), we are told, the character name for Star / Sharon Roeback recalls the "erotic moments in the Song of Solomon" (199). For another example, Waugh reports as meaningful the name *Hilvar* in Arthur C. Clarke's *The City and the Stars* (1956), since it is an "imperfect anagram" of the name Alvin from the same book (111). This is not exactly wrong, I suppose, but it's weak. Likewise, the misspelling of Akeley's name in Lovecraft's "The Whisperer in Darkness" (1931) leads Waugh into confidently asserting that, "*if misheard*… [this name is] phonological cousins" with Whateley's name in "The Dunwich Horror" (216, emphasis added)—a rather tenuous connection at best, though certainly both names share the last syllable in common. Yet the most egregious example occurs in Waugh's discussion of *Childhood's End* (1953). Here, he brings up the name of Earth's alien colonial administrator:

> Karellen's name teases us the most, referring clearly to a carillon, a parallel to that voice calling out over Jan in his dreams. A Christmas carol may also lay in his name; but with a slight change of accent the name becomes Carolyn—and the name of George's mistress is Carolle. (98)

In other words, if we deliberately change Karellen's name slightly (which no character in the novel ever does), it *almost* resembles the name of a minor character who has no impact on the plot. This insinuation ultimately means nothing.

I mention this critical tic about names that almost-but-don't-quite resemble other names, not exactly to disparage Waugh's tendency toward free association, but to indicate something of the old-fashioned humanism that underlies *The Tragic Thread in Science Fiction*. Waugh, after all, hardly limits his free association to names. Anyone reading this collection should prepare themselves for a scholar steeped in classical and Biblical learning, not to mention the "traditional" Western literary canon. Waugh also knows German fluently, a point he likes to show off; he also knows enough Latin to get by. No fewer than five epigraphs introduce readers to his collection, ranging from Joyce to Shakespeare to Einstein. Waugh subsequently finds further occasion for allusions to Mathew Arnold, T. S. Eliot, St. Thomas Aquinas, Spinoza, Epictetus, Hegel, Dante, Goethe, Snorri Sturluson, Herman Hesse, Thomas Mann, John Barth (from *The Sot-weed Factor* [1960]), Thomas Pynchon (from *Mason & Dixon* [1997]), and more. At this point, given all I've said already, it seems almost unkind to point out the gendered and Western cultural homogeneity of all these authors, but there it is.

Still, these constant literary allusions do enliven Waugh's frequent New Critical analyses. In chapters 4 and 5, respectively, he first discusses the music-like "aesthetic form" (53) of Olaf Stapledon's *Last and First Men* (1930) and *Star Maker* (1937), then tackles the "archetype of the mountain-climber" (70) in several Stapledon novels. The next two chapters belong to Arthur C. Clarke. The former discusses *Childhood's End* as a novel of lament built around certain imagery

and themes, the latter various oppositions that structure *The City and the Stars*. Chapters on Mervyn Peake and William Gibson follow before Waugh devotes three separate chapters to Fritz Leiber. Here, I should highlight "The Word in the Wilderness" as deserving special praise; one section of this long essay (specifically pages 155 through 160) contains a remarkably lucid description on Leiber's highly literate fantasy style—a style, according to Waugh, rich in "terms of rhetoric, vocabulary, and allusions, which consistently makes use of comic devices" (160). The last of these three chapters puts Leiber's *The Big Time* (1958) in tandem with Tiptree's *Brightness Falls from the Air*. Both novels are considered by Waugh as "neo-Aristotelian drama[s]" (192).

Finally, Waugh rounds out his collection with a chapter called "The Deeps of Eryx." Nominally, this chapter concentrates on a little-known short story Lovecraft co-wrote called "In the Walls of Eryx" (1936), but Lovecraft's other short fiction occupies half the chapter, evidently in Waugh's hopes for taking this last opportunity to reinforce his initial claims about a "tragic tradition" in science fiction (208). Unfortunately, too many potential threads have been dropped already—too many opportunities for more significant arguments missed. To cite just one instance, Waugh briefly links (or more accurately *implies* a link) between Stapledon and Gibson by citing Stapledon's "agonistic attitude toward the body" (75) against *Neuromancer*'s (1984) implicit Gnosticism, which holds the material body in contempt, yet Waugh somehow neglects to mention *A Voyage to Arcturus* as written by someone who literally believed in the gnostic Demiurge. To be sure, Waugh certainly knows this about Lindsay's text, but I suspect incorporating that knowledge into a coherent, thesis-driven claim about SF and the body would have required too drastic a revision to individual essays whose essential organization he had already considered set. Waugh therefore attempts a patchwork solution that leaves readers the hard work of drawing the most interesting potential connections.

Overall, *The Tragic Thread in Science Fiction* will likely not launch any new research programs. Probably its prime usefulness lies in quotable snippets on authors whom various academics might be researching. Nonetheless, as far as modern New Criticism goes, Waugh applies his chosen methodology with competence and care, even if *The Tragic Thread in Science Fiction* might have been better left a collection of disparate essays rather than a purportedly unified monograph. More importantly, Waugh keeps the conversation going on a number of important SFF authors, some more neglected than others. This point holds especially true for Waugh's three chapters on Leiber—a writer whose place within modern fantasy's history even scholars of the genre fail to appreciate properly.

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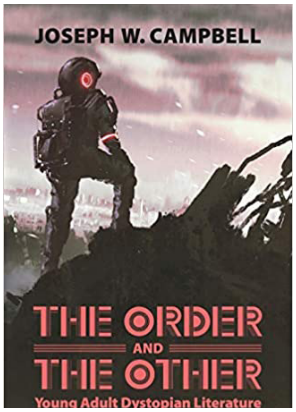
The Order and the Other: Young Adult Utopian Literature and Science Fiction, by Joseph W. Campbell

Thomas J. Morrissey

Joseph W. Campbell. *The Order and the Other: Young Adult Utopian Literature and Science Fiction*. UP of Mississippi, 2019. Children's Literature Association Series. Paperback. 200 pg. $30. ISBN 9781496824738. Hardback. 200pg. $99.00. ISBN 9781496824721.



Joseph W. Campbell is a man on a mission. His goals are to differentiate SF from dystopian literature and to demonstrate "how essential it is for adolescents to come into contact with dystopian literature and science fiction and to understand these genres on their own terms" (5). For him, texts in both genres have a "use value" in the classroom, which is to say that texts in each genre invite an understanding of either othering (SF) or social critique (dystopia). *The Order and the Other: Young Adult Utopian Literature and Science Fiction*, consists of an Introduction, five chapters that take us from the theoretical underpinnings of the genres to observations about their future course, thorough notes, a bibliography, and an index.

Chapter One, "Interpellation, Identification, and the Boundary Between Self and the o/Other," establishes ways of looking at subject formation and its relationship to cultural and state power. The sources—Althusser, Žižek, Foucault, Burke, Trites, and others—will be familiar to most critics. Campbell demonstrates that adolescents are themselves othered, that they are under surveillance, and that society wants the literature written for them to reenforce prescribed social constructs. However, SF is built upon the novum (Ernst Bloch) and cognitive estrangement (Darko Suvin). Paraphrasing Carl Freedman, Campbell writes that "the novum is the object or place that creates radical alterity, the 'new thing' that immediately pulls readers out of their assumptions about how the world-within-the-fiction works" (34-35). Furthermore, "what we might think of as normal ideological beliefs and rhetorical positions are estranged" (35). On the other hand, "dystopian fiction is a genre where the author can readily engage contemporary social situations and theoretically project what is to come for an audience that is perhaps not always as theoretically and politically aware as an academic one" (37). Campbell introduces Althusser's Ideological State Apparatuses (ISA) and Repressive State Apparatuses (RSA). The former are the means of indoctrination and cultural hegemony; the latter are the violent methods that dystopian societies employ when ISA fail. ISA and RSA recur throughout the text.

The second chapter, "'The Electric Boy Grows Up': Science Fiction for a Young Adult Audience," discusses the use value of YA SF. Unlike YA literature in general, which Roberta Seelinger Trites says is primarily designed to reinforce established discourses and values, YA SF benefits from cognitive estrangement; hence, "science fiction can be used to help adolescents examine the 'us/them' orientation of the discourse that surrounds them" (43). Specifically, YA SF should be eye-opening. Campbell writes that "contemporary science fiction is engaged with the encounter with the other and exploring the nature of othering itself" (49), both of which endeavors result from the destabilizing effect of cognitive estrangement and the new opportunities inherent in the novum. Openings are created for newer discourses. Feminism and other critical perspectives emerged in SF precisely because the form invites them. Campbell gives attention to several texts that help illustrate his contention that the genre is "a literature of critical advocacy" (55).

Chapter Three, "'The Treatment of Stirrings': Dystopian Literature for Adolescents," seeks to define the scope and use value of the form. The chapter's title is an unmistakable nod to Lowry's *The Giver* (1993), a discussion of which concludes the chapter. Lowry's sexless world is devoid of youthful hormones. Furthermore, the adults in the book experience infantilization. Hence, Campbell agrees with Lyman Tower Sargent's observation that dystopias for adults and young people are not all that different. Campbell dismisses the argument that dystopia is about hope or the lack thereof. He points out that YA dystopia offers the opportunity for social critique. But the form also highlights the passage from childhood utopia to adult dystopia. This is precisely what happens to Jonas in *The Giver* when he moves from restricted childhood to the lonely and painful status of Keeper of Memories. There are informative discussions of several other novels including Todd Strasser's *The Wave* (1981), Robert Cormier's *The Chocolate War* (174), and Suzanne Weyn's *The Bar Code Tattoo* (2004).

Having taught both SF (YA and Adult) and utopia/dystopia for over forty years, I enjoyed Campbell's discussion in Chapter Four, "Teaching the Fantastic": Using Science Fiction and Dystopian Texts in the Classroom." His intention is to help give students the tools they need to read the texts with the goal that they will come to their own critical perspectives. One point on which he is adamant: "Studying science fiction and dystopian literatures can create a learning community within the classroom space" (129). I agree wholeheartedly. Teaching these texts requires that teachers allow students to own them. Since both forms employ social criticism, it is important to recognize that in order for students to recognize the ISA which trap them, they must be empowered. To teach top down is to miss the point entirely. While failure is implicit in adult dystopias, dystopia for younger readers must not be entirely hopeless, which does blunt, to some extent, the dire warnings. The remainder of the chapter surveys a number of pedagogical uses of the genre by multiple teachers, including engaging observations based on Campbell's own teaching. Of particular note is the idea that instructors have a responsibility to deal with the impact on students of reading critical texts that might upset preconceived ideas.

Chapter Five, "'Signs of Life': Consideration for the Future of the Genres and Their Critique," is where Campbell shows his passion for his pedagogy, the goal of which is helping teachers to better grasp the immediate use value of two closely aligned genres. The boundaries between the genre are permeable. While the task of YA SF is to defamiliarize, to catch off guard, the job of YA dystopias is to create fictive societies that clearly resemble the world in which the YA audience lives and that offer hope for and pathways to life beyond adolescence. Campbell tells us that dystopias "tend to share one thing in common: a sense of totalitarian fascism" (157-8). Fascism is alive, well, and resurgent, and students need the tools to deconstruct it. This chapter also features strong individual discussions of films and texts.

This a multi-faceted book. It is an erudite and lucid discussion of critical theory as applied to SF and dystopia. It is a source book for instructors who want to learn how better to employ such texts. It is also a call to action. Teachers are urged to think more systematically about the two genres and choose texts that will develop in students an ability to appreciate new ways to look at the self, the other, and the struggles inherent in living in a largely dystopic world.

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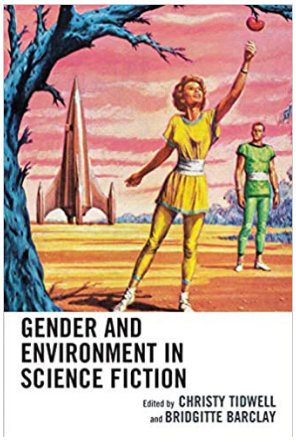
Gender and Environment in Science Fiction, edited by Christy Tidwell and Bridgitte Barclay

Patrick Sharp

Christy Tidwell and Bridgitte Barclay, eds. *Gender and Environment in Science Fiction*. Lexington Books, 2019. Ecocritical Theory and Practice. Paperback. 238 pp. $39.99. ISBN 9781498580595.



This anthology from Christy Tidwell and Bridgitte Barclay is a part of Lexington Books' series on Ecocritical Theory and Practice. As Tidwell and Barclay explain in their introduction, the purpose of the volume is to engage the ways in which science fiction narratives take up, challenge, and transform the "often flawed scientific narratives" of scientists and "popular science writing" that are centrally important for examining "environmental and gender issues" (xii-xiii). The essays in the volume focus primarily on science fiction film and literature, with one essay on mid-century comics. Like most anthologies of this kind, there is not a tight coherence connecting all of the essays to one another, but this is not a flaw. The purpose of the volume also seems to be to open a broad-based conversation between branches of feminist science studies and the scholarly science fiction community on increasingly urgent environmental issues. As a result, each essay weaves together a new provocation from different disciplinary threads and theoretical approaches. While the overall book might seem eclectic to some, I enjoyed the variety of the essays and think that it provides a welcome and timely addition to the growing body of SF scholarship grappling with climate change and environmental themes.

The first section of three essays focuses on "Performing Humanity, Animality, and Gender," and begins with Barclay's essay on *Mesa of Lost Women* (1953) and *Wasp Woman* (1959). Both of these mid-century B movies focus on monstrous, hyper-sexualized "wom-animals" designed clearly to titillate (3). However, as Barclay argues, the films' blurring of boundaries between "nature and science, humans and animals, masculine and feminine," work to "destabilize both gender and human/nonhuman constructs" and open up rich possibilities for camp readings (3). As drag shows expose the artificial nature of gendered performances, such low-budget B movies expose the artificial nature of filmmaking (through clunky effects and non-sensical stories that destroy the suspension of disbelief). Barclay shows how they also expose master narratives and mid-century hierarchies of power, and proffers a camp reading through "ecocritical and feminist frames" that queer such narratives and hierarchies (5). Through her camp readings of these films, Barclay shows how their "sf *warnings* about" violating boundaries become "a *pleasure*" in violating those boundaries (6). In *Mesa of Lost Women*, a scene of mad science where "arachnid women

[…] with super intelligence and beauty" work feverishly in a laboratory becomes a vision of the traditional objects of the male scientific gaze—women and animals—becoming "empowered" by actively "undoing […] traditional gendered and anthropocentric boundaries" (10). In *Wasp Woman*, a businesswoman overcomes the condescension of men by "becoming the experiment and the experimenter," reaching into the animal kingdom to give herself the power of a queen wasp (10). Barclay demonstrates how this appeal to alternative gendered arrangements in the animal kingdom shows the artificiality and mutability of the "sex/gender constructs of human culture" (13).

The second essay in the first section is by Tidwell, who takes up gendered performance in two recent films—*Her* (2013) and *Ex Machina* (2015)—and argues that they are narratives of escape and "freedom for […] female characters, who are not punished for their flight and who do successfully escape" (30). Tidwell rejects the readings of the films that try to limit them to standard exercises in male fantasy projected onto technology. What is more problematic, she argues, is the way in which the films "privilege the machine at the expense of the garden" and "take for granted human control of nonhuman nature" (36). By glorifying liberation for female characters at the expense of nonhuman nature, Tidwell shows how the films highlight "the need for stronger connections between feminist and environmental concerns" in science fiction (38). In the third essay of the section, Amelia Z. Greene addresses the embodied quality of knowledge in Octavia Butler's novel *Wild Seed* (1980), focusing on the abilities of main character Anyanwu to read bodies and transform herself into any body—regardless of sex or species--that she could read. Greene shows how Butler rejects the masculinist eugenics associated with the novel's villain Doro, opting instead for a kind of utopian queer ecology through the ways in which Anyanwu gathers and adjusts bodies and develops "alternative models of familial care" as a site "of ethical world-building" (47). As such, Greene argues that *Wild Seed* provides one possible alternative to the heteronormative, "future-oriented environmentalist thinking" that focuses on protecting nature for the benefit of future human generations (58). Anyanwu's building of families as a father and mother, and also as a dolphin, queers the "category of the human […] as one piece of a much larger planetary organism or arrangement" (59). Though limited by Butler's adherence to "reproductive futurism," Greene shows how Butler "calls on readers to emulate Anyanwu" and "deviate from the scripts we have been given" (61).

The second section has two essays on "Gendering the Natural World." The first is an examination of speciesism in the films *Womaneater* (1958) and *The Gardener* (1974) by Fernando Gabriel Pagnoni Berns and Juan Juvé. More specifically, they look at how the "vegetal monsters" are coded as "passive and feminine" objects of "imperialism and capitalism," while also being coded as violently masculine threats to the social order (70). Using ecocritical theory that highlights the "interwoven nature of speciesism" with "misogyny" and other "forms of oppression," Berns and Juvé show how the woman-eating Amazonian tree of *Womaneater* is an active phallic monster, while at the same time it serves as a passive and feminized extension of the colonial British explorer who captured it (71). Where *Womaneater* shows a critique of speciesism similar to

the nascent counterculture movements of the 1950s, Berns and Juvé argue that *The Gardener* is an example of such critique during the full flowering of the consciously ecological "nature-run-amok" films of the 1970s (79).

The second essay, by Steve Asselin, looks at the gendering of nature in Mary Shelley's *The Last Man* (1826). Using a "queer ecocritical" approach, Asselin notes how male characters think of the novel's global plague in terms of feminine roles such as mother, lover, and female tyrant (91). Asselin makes clear that nature is "a nonhuman entity forced into a human and gendered persona," and dismantles the "heterosexist assumptions" that Shelley's characters use when they confront nature and the plague (92). Asselin also celebrates Shelley's rejection of "reproductive futurism," or the belief that people should think about "subsequent generations" as a motivating force for doing good (94). The novel makes clear that there will be no future generations, and Asselin makes clear that it also deconstructs "masculine cultural practices" that will vanish along with humanity (99).

The third section has two essays on "Contemporary Queering." The first is by Tyler Harper, whose examination of Kim Stanley Robinson's *2312* (2012) emphasizes the importance of "alternate ways of thinking about nature" that help "combat […] forms of environmental and bodily violence and subjugation" (116). Harper argues that Robinson's cyborg main character—and the novel's critique of terraforming—lead to a "post-naturalism that would not presuppose to transcend nature" (124). Harper concludes that the strength of Robinson's novel comes through its insistence on an awareness of making as an activity that exists within nature, and that must also contend with the limitations of the boundaries we create with our knowledge. For Harper, this means avoiding putting "the world […] under the thumb of techno-scientific mastery" and also avoiding the rejection of knowledge as radically contingent (127).

Stina Attebery provides the second essay in this section, "Ecologies of Sound," in which she explores the sound elements of *Upstream Color* that further "feminist biopolitics" and lead to "queer forms of human and non-human reproduction" in the film (132). A story of cross-species parasitism that leads to heightened sensory awareness, *Upstream Color* (2013) uses sound to foreground the main character's journey from trauma to understanding, particularly in her linkages in a "queer community of species" akin to Stacy Alaimo's formulation of "trans-corporeality" (134). Attebery shows how the intimate sensual connection between the main characters and two pigs—created through "mediated listening" in a complex series of medical interventions and gestations—offers a "new political framework" for understanding "forms of reproductive futurity" that "are explicitly queer" (137).

The fourth and final section, entitled "'We Don't Need Another Hero," has three essays that critique the gendering of hero figures in comics and film. The first, by Jill E. Anderson, focuses on "Ecoqueer Hybrid Heroes in Atomic Age Comics" put out by branches of the U.S. government to teach ecological lessons. Analyzing such characters as Smokey the Bear and Nature Boy, Anderson shows how their campy stories and connections to nature make them particularly transgressive figures in the ultra-conservative era of the Comics Code Authority. Anderson convincingly reads

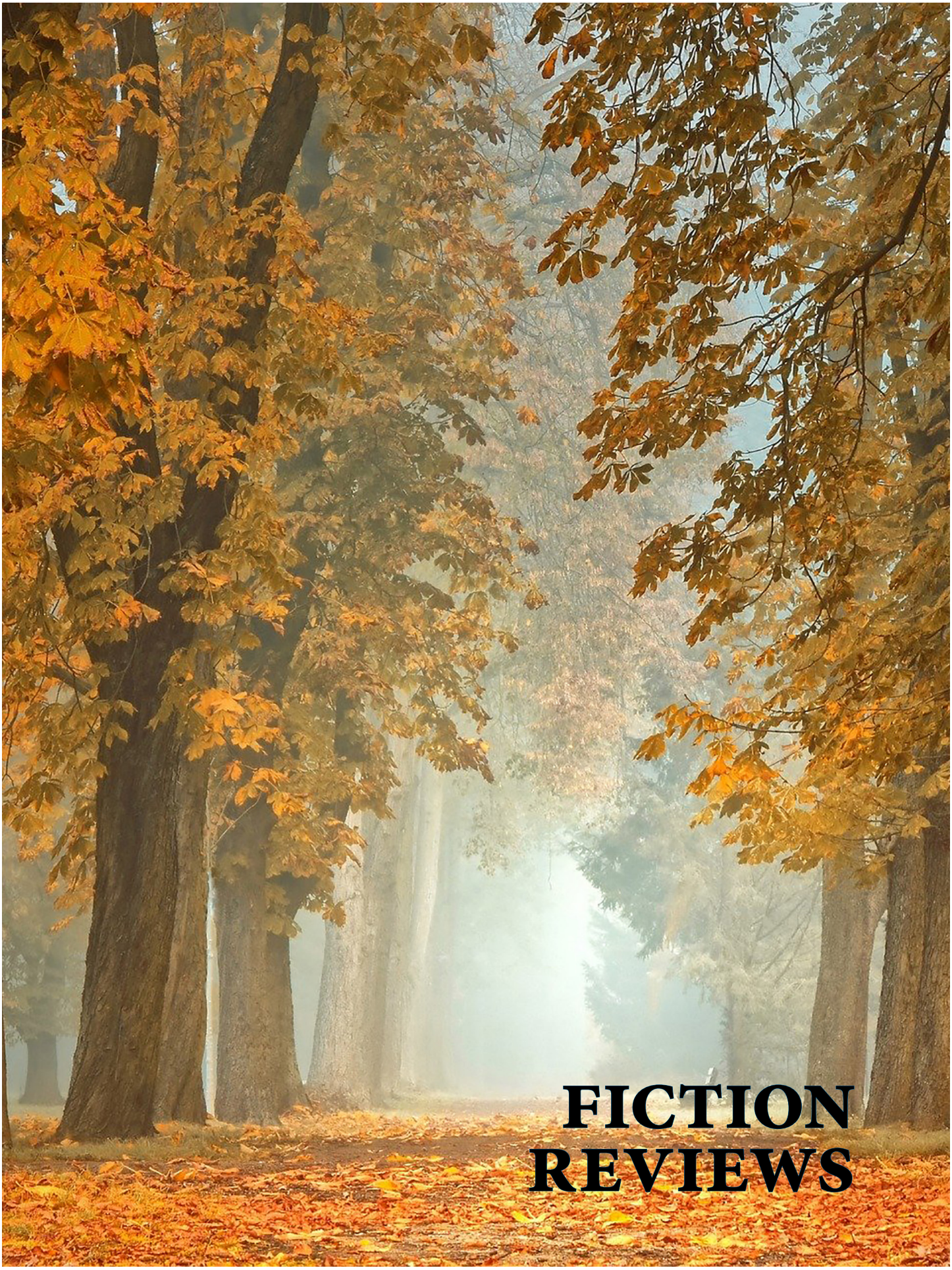
Smokey as a ruggedly masculine "gay bear" who shows the folly of human treatment of nature while redefining "masculinity as forgiving, undemanding, and inclusive" (155-156). Anderson reads Nature Boy as a hilariously campy master of nature who rides phallic lightning bolts, uses his powers to fight "humankind's violence, greed, and corruption," and approaches conflict with "empathy and benevolence" (158). Anderson's discussion of Swamp Thing and Aquaman reinforces the case that such hybrid characters effectively commandeered mid-century masculinity to show the interdependency of humanity and non-human species.

The second essay, by Michelle Yates, breaks down Eden imagery in *Soylent Green* (1973) and *Wall-E* (2008), in particular the nostalgic quests of white men in after-Eden stories looking to restore (feminine) nature and (masculine) civilization. As Yates shows, both films rely heavily on eco-memories of pristine nature and romanticize "a past when […] white people were seemingly in a harmonious relationship with extra-human nature" (174). Like much political nostalgia, however, these films romanticize something that never in fact existed, and use it to reinscribe hegemonic patriarchal whiteness at the center of modern eco-discourse in ways that obscure material relations of power and privilege. They also reveal the persistence of such white masculinist fantasies in eco-media.

The final essay in this section (and the anthology) is Carter Soles's piece on petroleum culture and feminism in the *Mad Max* franchise. Soles shows that the rise of feminist characters beginning in the third film, *Mad Max Beyond Thunderdome* (1985), undercuts the "patriarchal constructions of women as passive" and instead recasts them as the builders of ecologically sustainable civilizations (189). The move away from the petroleum culture of the first two films to a nuclear frontier setting in *Thunderdome* and *Mad Max: Fury Road* (2015), Soles argues, allows the films to connect patriarchy with the environmental devastation of capitalism. However, Soles shows that the films remain committed to a globalized capitalist economy supported by an "unsustainable dependence upon fossil fuel" (199).

The essays in this volume provide very different and engaging theoretical and methodological approaches to gender and the environment, and each speaks to the power of SF to provide transgressive and transformative possibilities necessary for building more ethical (and survivable) futures. One particular strength of this collection is this: the essays in this anthology will bring those unfamiliar with eco-feminist and eco-queer theory up to speed as they cover large swaths of the field and ground these theories in detailed readings of SF texts. Science fiction scholars should ensure that their library has a copy of this fine collection, and scholars interested in the intersections of gender, sexuality, and the environment in SF should get the paperback for their personal libraries.

Patrick B. Sharp is Professor of Liberal Studies at California State University, Los Angeles. He is the author of *Darwinian Feminism and Early Science Fiction* (2018) and series co-editor of *New Dimensions in Science Fiction* with the University of Wales Press.



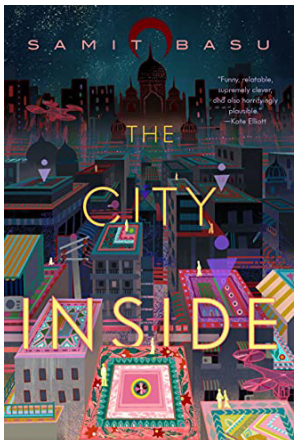
FICTION REVIEWS

Image by Peggychoucuir

Review of *Chosen Spirits/The City Inside*

Ruchira Mandal

Chosen Spirits, by Samit Basu. Simon & Schuster, 2020. To be republished by Tor in 2022 as *The City Inside*. 256 pp. Price/ISBN yet to be established.



Chosen Spirits by Samit Basu is a novel set in the late 2020s in a New Delhi that still carries the scars of real, recent political violence, albeit hidden beneath the glib veneer of technological advancement and a plethora of distractions. Dubbed as a "capitalist technocrat's wet-dream" (Deepanjana) by one reviewer, this near-future view of the city unsettles the present-day reader both by the familiarity of its history and the strangeness of its present. The people now live under constant surveillance from their gadgets, houses, and even toothbrushes all watching and listening; they are distracted from dissent via the stories they are fed from their omnipresent screens. This distraction is primarily in the form of the new-age social media platform, the Flowverse, a cross between reality television and live-streaming. The Flowstars are the new celebrities/influencers of this era, streaming artificial, scripted stories about their lives, the content of which is pre-determined by their teams in accordance with the policies of their corporate bosses. It is not only the Flowverse, but also the actual reality of ordinary people that is largely controlled and curated by a combination of safety filter settings on the television channels, a firewall around the country's internet, and the manipulation of information by the powers that be. As Nikhil, a potential investor, tells Indi, the Flowstar, "Bro, you have no idea who even runs the country.… It's certainly not the dumbfucks on the hoardings" (Basu 106).

It is appropriate then, that the protagonist of this novel, Joey, holds the designation of a "reality-controller," a professional image-builder and storyteller whose role it is to curate the feeds of Flowstars assigned to her. However, Joey's own position as one of the objects of constant surveillance and her lack of control both over her own reality and over her Flowstars' actions renders the job-title of "reality-controller" ironic. The opening sentence of the novel sets the mood for this world of mundane but sinister compliance: "Sometimes Joey feels like her whole life is a montage of randomly selected, algorithm-controlled surveillance-cam clips, mostly of her looking at screens or sitting glazed-eyed at meetings" (3). As a professional storyteller, Joey notes the lack of structure and story qualities in her own life, sometimes fantasizing herself as the star of those perfect montages she curates for her clients. In a world watched by some undefined, multi-entity Big Brother, life is a series of social media stories. While Orwell had the Thought Police, Basu's characters are watched not only by their devices but also by their own bodies. Smart tattoos on

their wrists can monitor their hormones and stress levels for the personal AI assistant called Narad,[1] who can order the coffeemaker to make coffee, order takeout, schedule a therapy session, and even send puppy gifs and loving emojis to their phones. Basu brings Orwellian dystopia and satire closer home with click-bait headlines that you may have read last week (Chattopadhyay). However, despite this omniscient surveillance, there are hints of an undercurrent of resistance. Surveillance cameras are mysteriously smashed and roadside *kolams*[2] with QR codes lead to secret protests with maximum bloodshed ratings.

Unlike many cyberpunk novels written by Western authors, Basu does not create a lone, male protagonist fighting the system. Rather, his protagonist, Joey, is a more relatable Indian, upper-middle-class woman, trying to do her job, look after her elderly parents, and survive without getting into trouble with the authorities. In creating an upper-middle class protagonist with a privileged social standing, Basu ensures that the readers are given entry into the world of the powerful while simultaneously sharing in her helplessness and insignificance. Rudra, the secondary protagonist and disfavored second son of a powerful family, is another character who functions as an observer of this world through all his cameras and VR sets. In his Dear Reader interview, the author declares that:

> …this is a book about people who I might have known if they'd really existed, set in a world that's pretty much identical to ours right now, and will be wholly so very soon. Which is why what the protagonists want is a normal, everyday life; peace, happiness, clarity — not adventure, not escape, not any form of saved or improved world; just the ability to cope with a regular day. (Deepanjana)

This is perhaps the reason why, unlike his earlier, more fantastical work such as the *Gameworld* trilogy, there is no grandstanding, saving-the-world scenario in *Chosen Spirits*. The protagonists of *Gameworld* learn to view all grand narratives with a degree of cynicism and irony, but they are nevertheless players with stakes in the game, rulers, powerful sorcerers, and prophesied heroes. In *Chosen Spirits*, the characters would simply like to get by without getting into trouble. Basu's primary milieu is of "a middle-class family, complete with domestic help, facing the usual problems—ageing parents, a younger brother who isn't 'settled.' Basu even posits a kind of 'jugaadpunk'[3] aesthetic in his depiction of the semi-formal cyberbazaars of Delhi" (Unudurti).

What makes *Chosen Spirits* specifically Indian and particularly disorienting is its rootedness in current Indian socio-political events. Basu wrote this novel in a milieu of protests relating to, among other issues, the Citizenship Amendment Act or CAA, which could compel citizens to prove their citizenship (*The Hindu*); the Farm Laws, which farmers allege would leave them without legal recourse against traders' hoarding and arbitrary pricing (Chaba); and the attack on the students of Jawaharlal Nehru University (BBC News). More popularly known as JNU, the university has long been one of India's premier educational institutions as well as a stronghold of Left-Wing student politics. In November 2019, an MP of the ruling party proposed that the

university be closed for a period of two years "to curb the presence of antisocial elements" (Press Trust of India). In *Chosen Spirits*, we are casually informed that the mall selling the world's largest air-conditioning machine has been built "over the ruins of what was once Delhi's most prestigious post-grad university, demolished after three years of demonstrations, terror strikes and bloodshed the city pretends hard to forget" (Basu 122). Likewise, Shaheen Bagh, the hotbed of anti-CAA protests, "exists only in memory" (7) in the novel, with a new name that Joey refuses to learn. It is this near familiarity with the real world that paradoxically gives the novel its quality of displacement. As the author says, unlike classic sci-fi, there is "no central sci-fi or fantasy plotline or regular-physics-distortion in *Chosen Spirits*, so physical and digital objects, places, and character transformations based on both real (and imaginary near-future) historical events are where the dislocation from here and now comes from" (Deepanjana). Instead of taking a dive in an unspecified far future, Basu takes us on a ride through the dystopia of a possible near future, and the effect is both fascinating and discomfiting. In Joey's world, our present has become 'the Years Not To Be Discussed' (Basu 14), a time when opinions could still be expressed before:

> the Blasphemy laws in several states, … the mass de-citizenings, the voter-list erasures, the reeducation camps, the internet shutdowns, the news censors, the curfews, … data-driven home invasions… the missing person smart-scrolls on every lamp-post…. (15)

Joey's parents, belonging to an older generation, continue to cling to a lingering faith in the idea of protests and standing up for what is right. But in a world where anyone from pest-control or app-based cleaning crews can plant *molka* cams in one's kitchens and bathrooms and young girls may disappear a few days after attending a protest of the demolition of their schools (18), the individual has very little agency to do anything to change the state of things.

The ubiquitous surveillance technology described in the novel is very similar to an early 2000s Georgia Tech project called 'Aware Home' (Kidd 191-198), a "human-home symbiosis" consisting of a network of "context aware sensors" embedded in the house and wearable computers worn by the home's occupants. The network of smart tattoos, personal AIs, smartphones and kitchen appliances in the houses of Joey or her parents in *Chosen Spirits* recalls this concept of 'aware home.' However, whereas the original intention of the scientists might have been optimistic and idealistic, the idea of a truly 'aware' house takes on a far more sinister connotation in Basu's novel where the idiom about walls having ears comes true in the most literal and frightening sense. As Joey tries to explain to her uncomprehending parents, while one could still express one's opinions in the good old days when surveillance was run by people, it was "your own house spying on you now" (Basu 16). While the scientists at Georgia Tech assumed that the knowledge produced by the new data systems would belong exclusively to the people who live in the house, the data in *Chosen Spirits* is subjected not just to government surveillance but also to corporate espionage. Shoshana Zuboff in her book *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism* discusses how this original benign idea might have influenced a present-day smart home appliance such as the Nest Thermostat, which uploads its personalized data to Google's servers "to be shared with other smart devices, unnamed personnel, and third parties for the purposes of predictive analyses and sales to other

unspecified parties" (Zuboff 6). The project, in the year 2000, "imagined a digital future that empowers individuals to lead more effective lives" (7). Writing in 2019, nearly two decades later, Zuboff observes how those inalienable rights to privacy and knowledge have given way to the age of "surveillance capitalism", which "unilaterally claims human experience as free raw material for translation into behavioral data" (7). And writing just a year later in 2020, Basu predicts a future in which personal data is not simply sold for marketing purposes but is also monitored to ensure the maintenance of the status quo of inequality and injustices that allows for more profitable trade.

While Joey leaves for work from her posh gated community, the militia is busy herding out people in rags, possibly to some detention centre. She wonders if they have become non-citizens already or if they are going to lose their organs, but can't voice any of her concerns because "she'll hear they were illegal terrorists or Pakistani spies, and her concern will be noted in the Welfare Association's ledgers, marking her out as a potential troublemaker" (Basu 27). Meanwhile, a Singapore real estate tycoon advertises for partners for an organ-farm business and the debate on the news centers not around human trafficking and slavery, "but around the maximum allowable percentage of foreign ownership of these farms" (29). Farmer protest processions still happen, but in single file as they submit to face scans and searches through data implants installed on their necks (30). While a fraction of this makes its way to the Newsflow, real news is to be found in the gatherings of the powerful, as Rudra discovers during his father's funeral by shadowing Chopra, an 'access-caste' elite, one of the people with access to people's data and the means to use them (63). As Zuboff notes, "Surveillance capitalism's actual customers are the enterprises that trade in its markets for future behaviour" (10). As Rudra learns from this gathering, there are new plans in place to implement a new system of social-credit ranking, an automated, algorithm-based system where the average citizen will be ranked according to "every transaction, every observed adherence to or violation of every unwritten rule, every movement, every word spoken or messaged, every act of consumption, participation or expressed emotion…" (Basu 64) to be filtered and categorized by their biometrics and their role in family and community against their optimum, ideal potential as a member of society. The resultant data will only be available to people like Chopra to be used while the ordinary citizens, thus judged, will never even know about it; "Surveillance capitalists know everything about us, whereas their operations are designed to be unknowable to us. They accumulate vast domains of new knowledge *from us*, but not *for us*" (Zuboff 11).

The surveillance capitalists in this new world continue to grab for even more control, not just for data but for the very identities of individuals. As Zuboff says, "the competitive dynamics of these new markets drive surveillance capitalists to acquire ever-more-predictive sources of behavioral surplus: our voices, personalities, and emotions. Eventually, surveillance capitalists discovered that the most-predictive behavioral data come from intervening in the state of play in order to nudge, coax, tune, and herd behaviour toward profitable outcomes" (8). In *Chosen Spirits*, Basu posits a future where faceless corporations not only control the social media content of the influencers but eventually control their digital identities—for all time—where this new digital

icon/filmstar/influencer might become the face and voice of anything without the consent or even involvement of the actual individual. According to this estimate, in some undefined but not far off future, the individual may not even exist, and celebrities would be created from scratch, without the need to sign up an actual human being (Basu 115). This is the offer that is made by a potential investor to Indi and Joey, an offer they refuse at first, because in a world where every action performed by the body is recorded and measured, "talking is all we can do…" (116). Thus, digital expression via the Flowverse, however scripted, remains one of the last vestiges of freedom of expression, or an illusion of it at least. But the oligarchs in this world get what they want, and Indi is soon convinced into signing to save his career when a video-clip of him sexually assaulting a makeup-artist mysteriously finds its way to the feed of a rival Flowstar. In the ensuing damage-control measures, the issue of justice for the victim is of course buried.

Surveillance capitalism thus depends upon knowing and thereby shaping human behaviour towards goals that suit those in power. While Basu's dystopian Delhi has neighborhood armies marching in jingoistic uniforms, simultaneously advertising vegetarian restaurants and flushing out *undesirables*, the real power of the state is exerted not via "armaments and armies" but "through the automated medium of an increasingly ubiquitous computational architecture of 'smart' networked devices, things, and spaces" (Zuboff 8). Thus, while Indi dreams of the poor rising like a zombie herd someday to overthrow the current order, Joey is aware of the difficulty of achieving that in a regime that has foreseen every possible means of insurrection and taken measures to prevent it.

Basu's dystopian Delhi can be described as a cyberpunk cross between the Orwellian world of surveillance and Huxley's *Brave New World*, where instead of Soma, the people are drugged by the constant diversion of catchy, clickbait entertainment. Moreover, this distraction is often a conscious and necessary choice in a world where "not looking away means seeing terrible things" (Basu 28). Early in the novel, Joey and her brother attempt to prevent their parents from having "a full-scale fight about the State of the Nation…. She barges in and makes the standard gestures—they stop immediately, and stare back at her with their usual mix of rage and shame" (14). The crisis is then more properly averted as Joey sets the television to a puppy adoption show, which acts as a 'smart pacifier' to distract the elderly from ranting about the government; "There will be no van full of murderers pulling up outside their house today" (16). When Tara, aspiring Flowstar, speaks of participating in protests as a student while promoting the supermarket built at the site of the former university, she manages to disturb the audience who would rather forget student protests when "the mall and the accompanying religious park… are an attempt at dazzling the city into distraction" (122).

Even Joey, who is more adept than her parents at keeping her opinions unheard, and less tone-deaf than Tara, is often tormented by having "Real Thoughts" and must distract herself with the work of creating stories for her clients. A major theme of the novel therefore is that of storytelling and narratives. *Chosen Spirits* looks at how stories are constructed, which stories are told, and which ones are buried beneath the onslaught of relentless entertainment. While Joey selects the

stories that might get maximum engagement from Indi's followers, another slum not far from her upper-middle class, respectable neighborhood is being evacuated by the police and the builder-militia.

Although written from the perspectives of the upper-class elites of the city, the novel manages to highlight this clear line between the privileged and the poorer section of the population. Basu posits the 'Chosen Spirits' of the title as the privileged, 'chosen', conformist elites who have always been a part of the city's top brass, "the chosen ones of the age" (Basu 1) mentioned in the Mir Taqi Mir poem used as an epigraph. In a private Twitter conversation, Basu states that the poem reflects "both the timeless nature of Delhi" as the city of the powerful and "the representative/popular/conformist nature of the workspace of the protagonists." Joey herself is aware of this "low-level court intrigue" (12) that makes her feel a little out-of-place amongst her Delhite friend circles despite belonging to the same social class. Although she has adapted herself to this new position of being in the surveillance state, this sense of discomfort never really dissipates, much like the constant itching of her smart tattoo. Similarly, the privileged may pretend that everything is perfect, protected as they are by their air-sealed, air-conditioned apartments and cars, but even for them stepping out on the streets entails packing essentials such as water bottles, smog masks, and pepper sprays. Even for the chosen ones, the problems of environmental pollution and social degeneration are hiding just around the corners, and neighborhoods must hire private militia (wearing patriotic uniforms with sponsorship logos in a beautiful marriage of jingoism with capitalism) to ensure that their ration of weekly drinking water is not raided by someone less fortunate. This state of being is maintained by a combination of surveillance and the dissemination of too much information that drowns out news that matters, such as the new age slave-trades and environmental disasters.

> Although the book, toward the latter part, does consider the possibility for change, Basu's main focus is to dig into the mechanics of oppression, the way those in control silence or marginalise the "other"—whether it be Muslim, Dalit or LGBTQIA+ voices—by feeding an eager audience with spectacle and distraction. (Mond)

Flowstars are often willing participants in this circus of 'spectacle and distraction.' Indi may speak of uprisings and the freedom to use his own voice and Tara may speak of her struggles and trauma from participating in student protests in her hometown. Yet, in truth, they have very little agency or even intention beyond building their own careers. Even celebrities less selfish than Indi or Tara can do nothing to change this state of affairs. Joey has seen other reality controllers and Flowstars fade and disappear from the industry after being seen at protests. Even looking at inspiring photographs of protestors braving police brutality and fascist mobs across the world is of no help, if not downright dangerous as potential ID traps (Basu 28). This is in contrast to the Shaheen Bagh and Jantar Mantar protests, which Joey remembers as a time of hope, of people coming together from all walks of life for a common cause: "…they'd thought they were alone, that most people in the country had been swallowed up by a tide of bigotry and hate. They'd never been happier being proved wrong" (5). Those people from 'the Years Not To Be Discussed' were united

by stories of faith against a common enemy, and as history will show, stories are important as tools that can both make or break a civilization. As Yuval Noah Harari says in his famous work, "The ability to create an imagined reality out of words enabled large numbers of strangers to cooperate effectively.… Since large-scale human cooperation is based on myths, the way people cooperate can be altered by changing the myths- by telling different stories" (Harari, 36).

In the fictional near future of the late 2020s India, all possibilities of cooperation and collective protest have been nullified through a multiplicity of stories. As Nikhil tells Indi during their business meeting, "They wouldn't know if there was another epidemic happening right now, or a genocide, or a civil war. Even if they knew, they wouldn't know how to join it. They would have no idea what to do. They're that easy to distract" (Basu 116). Unlike the protestors from the past, the oppressor in *Chosen Spirits* is faceless, even more so than Orwell's Big Brother:

> …it isn't just the government snooping any more, but a peak-traffic cluster of corporations, other governments, religious bodies, cults, gangs, terrorists, hackers, sometimes other algorithms, watching you, measuring you, learning you, marking you down for spam or death. (Basu 16)

In an interesting conversation between Joey, Indi, and Nikhil where the latter proposes to make Indi a global icon in exchange for his digital identity, the reader is offered an insight into what it means to be an 'influencer' and the mechanics of garnering an audience in India and in the West. In this new age of 'Cultural Warming,' the digital identity of the icon can be constantly altered to stay relevant to public demand, becoming a film-star or spiritual healer or social justice activist as the need be. Whatever public dissatisfaction exists may be weeded out without causing any real impact: "The state funds and controls the resistance, so there's no left or right, everything's a distraction, everyone's observed and under control" (Basu 120).

The real resistance in the novel is offered by tertiary figures who have learned to subvert the system to their benefits, sometimes using VR gaming platforms: DesiBryde, a radical porn-star who performs while wearing the masks of religious leaders, creating a Flowstream powerful enough to circumvent all culture-policing and censorship; E-Klav, a Banksy-like Dalit graffiti artist who has somehow managed to stay hidden while vandalizing the symbols of the establishment; and Zaria Salam, an investigative journalist who has managed to build up an online notoriety despite her videos disappearing off the Indian internet within seconds of release. There is also cyberbazaar, the market for pirate-tech run by working class people where Rudra and Zaria get their smart-tattoos removed when they go off-the-grid. At the end of the novel, Basu does not offer revolution, only the possibility of change through slow, long-term efforts as Desibryde and Joey begin to discuss the possibility of working together. This leaves the novel open for sequels, but also makes it more realistic. As history might prove, the mass uprising of the poor, as envisioned by Indi, rarely affects a sustainable shift in the dynamics of power imbalance, especially against an insidious, all-pervasive system. Basu thus creates a cautionary tale of a possible future, leaving us only with an outline of how to navigate it.

Notes

1. Narad or Narada is a god-sage in Hindu mythology famous as a travelling musician and storyteller.
2. *Kolam* is a form of traditional decorative art made of a series of dots joined by lines and loops that is drawn by using rice flour, generally seen during festivals and celebrations.
3. *Jugaad*, a Hindi word meaning hack or makeshift solutions. Cyberbazaar in the novel is a market for pirate tech.

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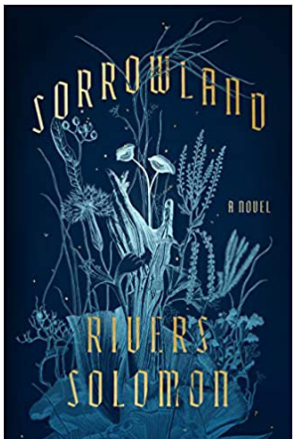
Review of *Sorrowland*

Julia Lindsay

Solomon, Rivers. *Sorrowland*. MCD Books, 2021. 368 pp, $14.45, ISBN 9780374266776.



In relation to both gender and genre, Rivers Solomon pushes boundaries. Their first novel, *An Unkindness of Ghosts* (2017), launched them into the literary scene and was shortlisted for several awards. Solomon maintains *Unkindness*'s queer and Afrofuturist themes in their subsequent novels and continuously engages with African American history. *Sorrowland* (2021), Solomon's third and most recent novel, features a cast of queer characters, including intersex protagonist, Vern. The novel follows Vern as she evades a Black separatist commune-turned-religious-cult, the Blessed Acres of Cain, from which she has fled. In the first half of the novel, Vern hides from her pursuers in the woods of a speculative contemporary American South, an unconventional setting for the SF genre. The novel further toys with the reader's generic expectations, employing tropes and figures traditionally associated with the gothic and the fantastic.

The novel is queer from the opening pages, as Vern gives birth to twins Howling and Feral and does not bother to look at Howling's genitalia after birth (the sex of the babies is never revealed to the reader). She decides not to gender them, concluding that such matters are of no concern in the woods. Vern and the children's relationship with the woods may trouble readers in the first half, as Solomon's initial characterization could potentially stabilize the problematic nature/culture binary. However, the latter half of the novel, which follows Vern and the children after they leave the woods, complicates such a reading. As Vern and the children come into their own, she realizes the naivete of her escapism. Vern's time in the compound and the years she and the children live in the woods, in fact, leads them to encounter the novel's speculative United States as strangers. Solomon utilizes free indirect discourse and reading through Vern's, and later Howling's, perspectives defamiliarizes the novel's setting, evoking the same sense of cognitive estrangement common to temporally or spatially distanced SF.

Solomon uses gothic and fantastic conventions that are particularly associated with Southern and African American literature, continuing the push to open SF to the experiences and voices of authors whom the genre has excluded based on race and region. Further, Vern's ambiguous references to "hauntings" and to a "fiend" stalking her in the opening scenes, evoking the gothic or fantastic, unmoor the reader, making it difficult to place the novel in place or time. These

"hauntings" originate in Cainland and appear to follow Vern after her escape. For Vern, they materialize in human form, featuring both familiar and foreign faces, increasing in number and intensity as the plot unfolds. The science fictional nature of *Sorrowland* is not confirmed until the latter third of the novel, a move that, while not unique to SF, sidesteps the norm and contributes to the novel's interrogation of genre, particularly as it pertains to Black experience. Vern discovers that her hauntings, and the strange developments in her body that she begins to notice shortly after the birth of her children, are the result of a government conspiracy with Cainland at its center: Cainites are being used for medical experimentation. Joining the gothic/fantastic and science fiction through hauntings displaying the history of violence on black bodies highlights how these genres can both reflect and be limited by an antiblack culture.

Vern is forced out of the woods when the symptoms of this experimentation take a turn for the worse, making her fear she will die and leave her children abandoned as a rapidly developing exoskeleton leeches her body of energy. Once the novel moves out of the woods, the introduction of Gogo, a queer woman of Lakota descent, provides a welcome shift in plot and intensity, the novel's underlying detective structure becoming more realized with Gogo taking on the role of co-investigator and love interest. Gogo identifies as *winkte*, a term from her Lakota heritage that is definitionally fluid, pushing against the binary constructs of gender and sexuality in the Anglo world as well as those in fundamentalist Cainland. Gogo enables Vern to not only become more comfortable with her sexuality but also to better understand her changing body.

Solomon thus forges a unique and fruitful link between the novel's queer and posthumanist themes. Their inclusion of queer and intersex characters and of Black characters with albinism brings to the fore the many ways bodies naturally resist categorization, and this queer lens compliments the novel's science fictional rendering of posthumanist perspectives. Together they undermine notions of fixity and autonomy and the naturalized, humanist hierarchy placing the human above the non-human. Solomon instead favors the cyborg, the porous being, the process of becoming, the mutual interpenetration of human and nonhuman nature, the rhizome. Vern refers to her developing exoskeleton as her "little passenger," an echo of the language she uses to explain germs, viruses, and sickness to her children. Vern does not see her passenger as a separate entity threatening her bodily autonomy; rather, she sees it as an organism doing what it needs to do (the same way she views her body's adaptation to it). Near the end of the novel, she acknowledges that her passenger has turned her into her "true self."

Sorrowland presents scholars with a case study of how queerness, Blackness, and science fiction intersect. The novel reframes African American history with science fictional tropes, like P Djèlí Clark's *Ring Shout* (2020), where grave-robbing "night doctors" and Klansmen are likened to literal alien body snatchers, or Bill Campbell's *Koontown Killing Kaper* (2013), which extrapolates from the government-made crack epidemic in a darkly funny monster-noir narrative. Foregrounding the incredibly science fictional nature of Black history and experience, Solomon draws a genealogy between the novel's fictional experimentation and its historical precedents,

referencing MKUltra, Project 112, Edgewood, and Tuskegee. These novels together ask: how fictional is science fiction?

Themes such as trauma and collective memory connect *Sorrowland* with African American literary predecessors across genres, its spectral figures, of course, evoking *Beloved* (1987). However, Solomon moves beyond the trauma narrative, as these undead are neither psychological manifestations of trauma nor merely tragic figures. Because Vern's passenger is a mycelium, she becomes part of a subterranean matrix, tied through the earth to the knowledge and experiences of the dead who have carried this fungus.

These are not ghosts to be excised; they are part of an Afrofuturist-networked consciousness, inseparable and codetermining. Solomon's play with genre and history provides scholars with fruitful ground, highlighting how their science fictional fungus is just one iteration of this kind of Afrofuturist work. Drawing from and celebrating subversive and/or non-Western knowledges and technologies and connecting Black people across time and space through various engagements with collective memory sits at the core of the African American literary tradition. *Sorrowland*, as such, can serve as a point of departure in conversations about the ever-evolving definitions of Afrofuturism and SF.

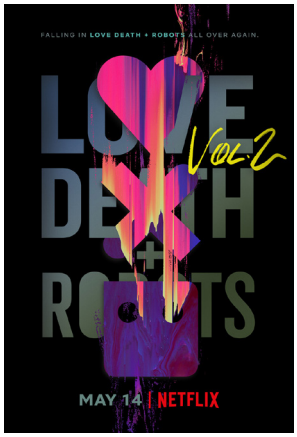
MEDIA REVIEWS

Image by 165106

Love, Death & Robots, season 2 (Netflix)

Jeremy Brett

Miller, Tim, creator. *Love, Death & Robots*, season 2, Netflix, 2021.



Reviewing an anthology television series can be tricky. With exceptions, perhaps, like *Black Mirror*, which has a central theme (the societal and personal dangers of new technologies) around which critics and scholars can work a targeted thesis, most anthologies are too varied, too diverse in theme and tone and story and quality, for a single opinion to cover an entire production run. *The Twilight Zone* has been rightfully enshrined in the pantheon of great SF television programs, but any fan or regular viewer will testify that many episodes are, to put it charitably, clinkers. It's a phenomenon reminiscent of the slew of publications from the Pulp Era: certainly literary treasures could be found within their pages, often in great numbers, but for every Bradbury or Asimov or Heinlein or Lovecraft, there were examples of equal and opposite hackery, best forgotten except as curiosities. The same applies to *The Outer Limits*, *Tales from the Crypt*, or *Masters of Science Fiction*: the tonal and thematic varieties are so great that it's really impossible to consider the anthology series as a discrete object. The closest *Love, Death & Robots* (*LD&R*) might have to a thematic predecessor is the 1981 animated film *Heavy Metal* (as well as the groundbreaking magazine on which the film is based); it's hardly a coincidence that the show started life as a reboot of that production. Both are constructed with a comic book sensibility in mind, marked by powerful imagery, and heavily steeped in adult themes with instances of both erotica and intense violence, love and death together. But *Heavy Metal* had a (thin) framing story connecting its vignettes together, whereas in *LD&R* and its fellow genre anthology programs there is no such narrative linkage. In that sense the series is much more like *Analog* or *The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction*.

However, shows like these can certainly be analyzed and judged on their ability to tell an entertaining or enlightening story, and that intrinsic storytelling quality is the essence of *Love, Death & Robots*. The show is best examined not for any ethical lessons (arguably, the only story in Season 2 that outright provokes moral inquiry is "Pop Squad", based on a story by Paolo Bacigalupi—a dark tale of a future where overpopulation is countered by a special police unit tasked with killing unregistered children), but more for the visual and emotional impacts the episodes provide the viewer. The intensity of these impacts is heightened by the stories' brevity and, I would suggest, the shortness of the second season (8 episodes, down from the first season's 18) which encourages binge viewing and more emotions hitting the viewer in a briefer period. It appears that the show's producers are taking their cues from Season 1, which was also marked

by small-scale stories that ranged in their emotional and narrative impact from the whimsical to the action-packed to the gut-wrenching. *Love, Death & Robots* reflects less the Rod Serling-style of didactic, thoughtful morality and more a consciousness of the emotive and cathartic power of storytelling. There is a great imaginative power in the ability to tell a good story well, and the show succeeds in this for the most part.

There is Love; in "Ice" (story by Rich Larson), two brothers, Fletcher and Sedgewick, live on a bleak industrial colony planet covered in ice and snow. Sedge is an "extro", a human without cybernetic mods that enhance speed, strength, and agility, while his younger brother Fletch is, like most of the colony's population, modded. Sedge is seen as an outsider by Fletch's friends and as a weakling by his rough father, weighed down by an inferiority complex, ("Different. That's what the grown-ups say, but they mean 'better.'") He resolves to join Fletch and his friends in a dangerous race across the ice to outpace the massive 'frostwhales' before they breach. During the race, Fletch risks his life to allow Sedge the chance to save him, giving Sedge a new cachet with the modded teens and demonstrating a deep love for his brother. "Snow in the Desert" (story by Neal Asher), also set on a hostile planet—this one a desert—brings together a widowed hermit named Snow, who is being relentlessly pursued by bounty hunters for his genetic immortality, and the mysterious Hirald, carrying her own secrets and her own key to long life. The two form a romantic bond centered on their shared loneliness and on being mutually set apart from the rest of the universe around them. And in the aforementioned "Pop Squad", parents' love for their children drives them to break the savage anti-overpopulation law that mandates those children's deaths. When Squad investigator Briggs traces one mother to her home, he is struck by her fierce commitment to her daughter, who "makes everything new and gives [her] life." Briggs' realization of the strength of this love, combined with his growing PTSD caused by his legal murder of children, results in his death at the hands of his squad partner.

There is Death; the largest example of this—literally so—comes in the season's final episode, "The Drowned Giant" (story by J.G. Ballard), in which the corpse of a giant naked man has washed ashore on the English coast. The story is an extended meditation by an academic investigator named Stephen on the realization of mortality and inevitability of change, as well as the frivolous nature of humanity. The giant corpse quickly becomes a tourist attraction and a spot on which people pose for pictures, skate, and scrawl graffiti. Stephen is nearly alone in his respect and consideration for the sheer presence of the giant, while workers systematically cut the body up and haul it away, popular interest dimming in the body as it decays and becomes smaller. In time, the giant is forgotten about or misremembered, leaving only Stephen with a memory of this vanished colossus. In "The Tall Grass" (story by Joe R. Lansdale, in one of his typical thoughtfully creepy tales), a train passenger, stopped in a lonely prairie, encounters a herd of ghoulish, demonic creatures that try to kill him. They are driven off by the conductor, who posits that in this little lonely section of the world, "it's like a window opens up out there, I figure it leads to some other world", one populated by people once alive, now lost and become savage terrors.

And there are Robots; in the comedic season opener, "Automated Customer Service" (story by John Scalzi), a woman and her dog reside in "Sunset City", a retirement community where robots do all the menial work. The woman's robot vacuum is accidentally set to "Purge Mode", pursuing her and the dog across her house and attempting to eliminate her. While this death hunt is going on, the woman frantically tries to connect to VacuBot's customer service line, where an automated voice takes the woman through increasingly nonsensical levels of options and useless advice on how to stop the rampaging bot (including hurling her dog at the bot as a distraction). The final conflict ends with a cheery recorded "Congratulations! You've stopped the unstoppable killing machine that is VacuBot!" from the customer line, followed by the unwelcome (though delivered equally cheerily) news that all VacuBots have now been signaled to attack the woman. Rather than pay for an upgrade that will add her to the do-not-kill list, the woman, newly determined (and royally angry), flees town with her dog in a commandeered golf cart, pursued by countless robots.

In a more serious tale, "Life Hutch" (story by Harlan Ellison), a space fighter pilot crash-lands on an airless planet; reaching an automated shelter, he must also battle a malfunctioning robot intent on murdering him. Trapped in a small space by a robot that tracks by sound and movement, the pilot has to call upon his own deepest resources to survive (the episode bears some resemblance to Season 1's "Helping Hand", in which an astronaut cast adrift faced a likewise intense kind of mental and physical challenge in a hostile environment).

Even when the stories themselves are a bit thin dramatically, or rushed (some, like "Pop Squad" or "Life Hutch," would benefit from a longer runtime), the animation is detailed and nuanced, which helps capture the viewer's eyes and imagination. ("Ice", from Passion Animation Studios", is particularly lovely in its spareness and starkness.) In an age of popular cartoons marked by cheap-looking or outright unpleasant animated stylings, *LD&R* has a certain rich aesthetic to it that helps set it apart from other televised SF.

In the end, what *Love, Death & Robots* does well is to reinforce the nature of science fiction as story, as a tale to be told. It more than adequately fulfills SF's traditional function of using fantastic settings as stages for telling and retelling the classic stories about humanity and the ways with which we engage with each other and the universe around us. In small and easily digestible doses, it asks the same universal questions about our existence that we have asked since we began telling each stories long ago, in new but still recognizable ways. And, to my mind, one of the deepest and most existential questions comes at the conclusion of the show's shortest and most frivolous episode. In "All Through the House", two children are awoken on Christmas Eve by noises coming from downstairs. Hurrying down to catch Santa Claus, they discover that "Santa" is a hideous, clawed, Xenomorph-like monster, that vomits up wrapped presents and departs with an ominously hissed "Stay…Good." Back upstairs, now gifted but traumatized, one child asks the other "What would have happened if we weren't good?" Indeed.

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Loki (Disney+)

Zahra Rizvi

Loki. Created by Michael Waldron, Disney+, 2021.

Apocalypses have long been a fascination for SF and dystopian fiction, whether it is to look at possibilities for alternate futures or exploring the horrors of the present which carry within themselves roots of impending, near-future disaster. Often narratives dealing with apocalypses place themselves in a post-apocalyptic universe, where irreversible changes have caused an impossibility of going back to a pre-apocalyptic existence. *Loki* too seeks to participate in the mythmaking of the apocalypse by trying to reinvent this engagement in new and interesting ways.

Loki (Tom Hiddleston) is introduced to the Time Variance Authority (TVA) when he is picked up by the organization and tried as a 'Variant'. The story starts off as a divergent thread of a hand-picked scene from *Avengers: Endgame* (2019), a possibility of which was already teased in the film. The throwback to the film—the Avengers traveling through time to reverse the effects of an apocalypse of their own—works to set up the premise of the series: a combination of time, technics, and the persistence of the apocalypse. The TVA endeavours to ensure that order is upheld by strictly regulating the Sacred Timeline, or the decided timeline of the Time-Keepers, the three elusive beings who are said to have differentiated between the multiversal disorder of multiple timelines (and their respective alternate universes) to decide on the one timeline that is now protected by the TVA against any divergence from this set path.

Director Kate Herron has described the series as "a big love letter to sci-fi" and it is the TVA where the mood and tone of this love letter is set up (Polo). There is a certain quality of timelessness to the TVA and yet at the same time, it seems to carry anachronisms of all sorts that serve to make the fabric of this celestial space even more unique and strangely, believable. This can be attributed to the identifiable popular SF influences of Herron and her team. Miss. Minutes, the adorable yet infuriating, animated AI mascot of the TVA is the *Loki* version of Jurassic Park's Mr. DNA (*Jurassic Park*, *Jurassic World*, *Jurassic World: Camp Cretaceous*), and primarily functions as a posthumanist, cheerful explicatory trope to fill in details of the story that are more economical to conveniently tell rather than show. The design of Miss. Minutes is much like the overall design of the TVA, a strong retro-futuristic style that is a memento of not only popular SF but a nod to what Herron calls 'the golden age of comics', with the tech deeply reminiscent of the bureaucratic, corporatist technocracy of Brazil (1985) and its eerie, dystopian undertones. The technology,

including archaic computers with *Alien*-inspired font and *Dune*-esque timedoors, is placed within an architecture that is an oddly well-made mix of Brutalist and Midwest architecture, and the uncanny oxymoron serves cleverly to house the misplaced even repressive 'heroism' of the TVA. These allusions and the overall intertextuality of *Loki* no doubt enrich the SF tradition it is a part of, but at the same time, they rupture it instead of securing continuity of it, and at this early outset itself present the multiversal chaotic potential present in the otherwise sanitized order of the TVA. The series upholds this pendulum-like debate between order and chaos throughout its six episodes, and it is embodied in its titular character's struggle at the brink of the age-old question of fate versus free will.

Again and again, Loki is brought face-to-face with the futility of his 'glorious purpose' in the light of being shown that all of his life, his decisions, his choices and even his death, are predetermined. Anything he does off-course is picked up as a variance and demolished, a fate that would be his own if he hadn't been tasked to catch a dangerous version of himself—Sylvie (Sophia Di Martino)—who he finds out has been hiding in apocalyptic events. Loki and Sylvie go from one apocalypse to another and it is interesting that even on the Sacred Timeline, free will is surprisingly possible in a time-space where one least expects it to be so. This apocalyptic chronotope is one of the strengths of *Loki*, as it presents the endless possibility of life at the end of the world, of a forever, short but existent present. It is in one such chronotope that the transformative power and redemptive possibility of love and companionship is revealed and the series presents it with moving emotion and feeling.

In the later episodes, Loki faces the anarchic multiplicity of his variant selves, in scenes that pay tribute to the superhero genre (see, for example, DC Comic's Crime Syndicate) and, especially, Marvel comics history and its continuing engagement with alt-universes of the Marvel multiverse of as early as the 1960s. For example, in 1962 the Fantastic Four often come across alternate Earths, one of which is even inhabited by a variant of Kang the Conqueror, as seen in *Strange Tales #103* (1962) and *Fantastic Four #19* (1963). In another story, multiversal travel takes Doctor Strange and the Fantastic Four to alternate universes in *Strange Tales #126* (1964) and *Fantastic Four Annual #6* (1968). MCU's open acceptance of the multiverse in Loki is supposed to spearhead MCU Phase 4 and it is interesting to carry out a comparative analysis of the multiverse in *Loki* as part of the MCU against the multiverse in the Marvel Comics revealing "one big, odd MCU/Marvel Comics coincidence (or planned synchronicity?) between the kick-off of the MCU Multiverse and its comic book counterpart" (Marston). Indeed, *Loki,* by carrying out a bricolage of sorts with comics/superhero history, SF, and more importantly, specific Marvel history, hints at the increasing instances of retcons in upcoming MCU creations.

The fracturing of the 'ustopia' of He Who Remains (Jonathan Majors) presents the simultaneous co-existence of all SF, retcons and more, and it is with immense speculation that the promised Season Two will be awaited for studying more of the multiverse.

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