SFRA Review

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

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.

SFRA Review, vol. 52, no. 1, Winter 2022

FROM THE EDITORS

FROM THE EDITORS

Winter 2022

Ian Campbell

Welcome to Volume 52 of the *SFRA Review*. We're nearly as old as the Super Bowl and filled with more content. In this issue, we have the first half of our symposium on SF from Hungary, which contains articles and interviews; in addition, we have a wide selection of papers from the LSFRC conference held recently via the virtual meeting technology that I rather doubt will ever stop being the norm.

Technology doesn't always flatten the curves of hierarchy and privilege: all I have to do to understand this is to compare my own Facebook feed to that of my World War II veteran father. How and why it doesn't flatten these curves is increasingly the subject of twenty-first century SF: I look forward to works published in the immediate near future where the effect of simultaneous physical isolation and constant online companionship is estranged. For the very most part, I applaud the shift to virtual meetings, precisely because they flatten hierarchy and privilege.

We can hold the upcoming SFRA conference "in" Oslo, and not worry about the prohibitive costs of travel even for privileged, tenured scholars like me: now, it's trivial for graduate students, independent scholars, visiting/adjunct faculty and even regular faculty who don't have access to travel funds to add their perspectives to the discourse at conferences. Nothing can quite replace the collegiality of walking into a meeting room or the hotel bar and randomly encountering colleagues: those sorts of ad hoc discussions are the best and sometimes even productive. Nevertheless, on balance the shift has made the discourse around SF better—and more importantly, fairer.

Please see our CFP on sexual violence in SF: I very much hope you'll consider contributing. I leave you with a photograph of my daughter from 2016, when I tried to troll her into thinking that the Noah's Ark story was real. Not all SF is cognitively plausible, even within the world of the text.

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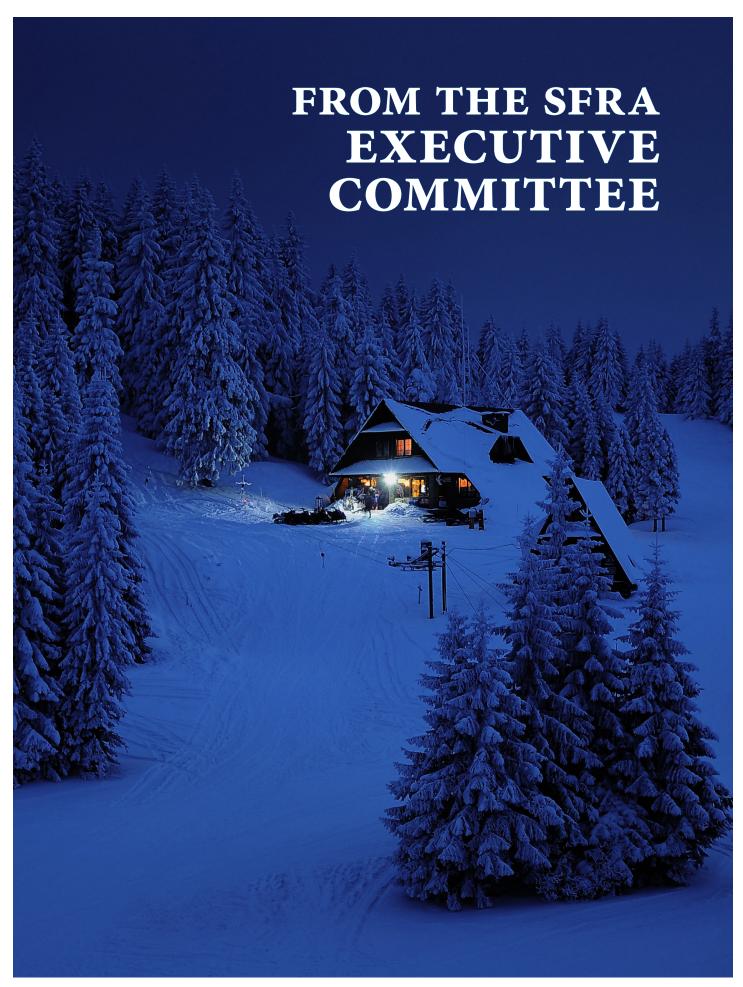
After receiving the results of the review(s), the editors will decide whether the article in question should be accepted as-is, perhaps with a few minor edits, or accepted only after major revisions, or rejected entirely. We will notify the submitter as soon as is practically possible after this decision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

FROM THE SFRA EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

From the President

Gerry Canavan

TThis is the start of my last year as president, a term which has corresponded with an incredibly tumultuous time for the globe, much less our organization. Moving on will be bittersweet, but I'm very happy about what we've accomplished (especially under these circumstances!) and I'm looking forward to the coming year with a lot of optimism, especially at conference in Oslo, which is shaping up to be a simply incredible, totally unique event in the history of our organization, in all the best ways.

Over the coming months we will be populating some of the new positions we added in the last bylaw revision, so please watch out for more information on that front very soon.

I wanted to formally welcome Ida Yoshinaga and Jess FitzPatrick to their new roles as vice president and treasurer and thank Sonja Fritzsche and Hugh O'Connell one more time for all the hard work they put in the last three years. I also wanted to thank Carma Spence for the heroic work she has put in (and continues to put in) migrating the SFRA website to its new home. As always, if there's something I can promote on social media, or some other way I can put the SFRA to work for you, please, reach out! I hope to see many of you in Orlando, and the rest in Oslo.

From the Vice President

Ida Yoshinaga

Greetings, SFRA--Hoping that your health and personal journeys thrive in the Year of the Tiger. As vice president, I am looking forward to expanding my knowledge about the speculative and fantastical genres, as I meet with you in 2022. I hope to hear about your scholarship and artistry--so do not hesitate to be in touch, especially should I run into you (virtually or in person) at March's ICFA or our annual summer meeting in Oslo!

We just held SFRA's first-of-2022 gathering of country representatives over Zoom, and I was pleasantly surprised to find out how intellectually persistent and curious SFRA members have been (thus far!) during this third year of the global pandemic. Reps from Estonia (which will host a national SFRA conference in the next few years) and South Korea testified as to how the field is growing in their regions, while others from Europe, the U.S., and Latin America spoke of intriguing hybrid and online conferences on posthumanism, AI, materialism, weird narratives, spoiler studies (!), critical futures research, and affect theory. Many have been publishing on a slew of old-reliable SF subgenres (cyberpunk, utopian studies, cinematic/televisual spec fic, area/language studies) in all kinds of fresh, necessary, fascinating collections.

Everyone has been astonishingly generative amidst the spread of corona's variants! And calls for a hopeful speculative arts, for comforting genre stories that inspire optimism and celebrate utopian communalism, have bloomed...though these have never quite been my jam. But what public-health historians are calling a mass-disabling event are giving at least some people pause to rethink anti-science ideologies. In the U.S. south (where I now reside), we are finally seeing people queue in long car lines for free COVID-19 testing. The hardcore dystopian inside me who has waited a whole life to experience the apocalypse—that films and pop culture of a 1970s childhood had once promised—is now giving way to a fresh variant. She does not bake sourdough, but she does dig into her family recipe file to re-make ancestral meals anew. If the world is ending soon, this is not what the post-apocalyptic playbook had laid out as the first step towards humanity's inevitable return to its own decisive mistakes.

We will try to freshen SFRA with mindful, engaged conversations about how to diversify our membership ranks, to (further) globalize our conversations and research, and to live lives vibrant and rich with community-centered imaginative arts. Why not share your ideas with us in this growling wildcat of a year!
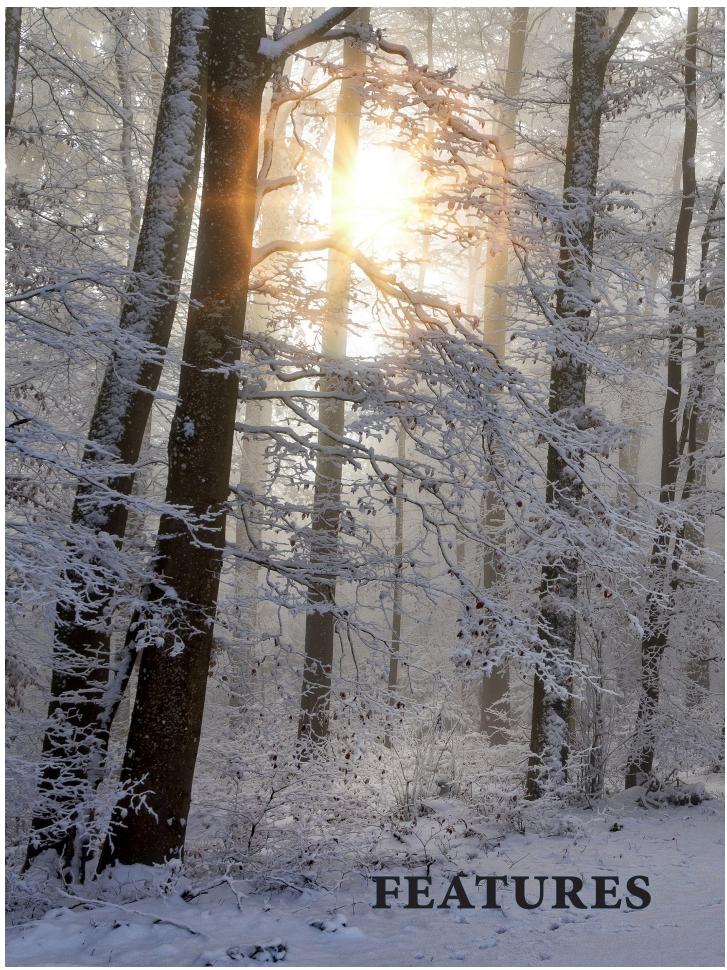
FEATURES

The SF in Translation Universe #14

Rachel Cordasco

Welcome back to the SF in Translation Universe! I don't know about you, but life's been like a rollercoaster lately. Fortunately, though, I can now devote more time to SFT, and I have so many ideas for essays and books and so many things I want to read. I've figured out that I'll need to live approximately 835 years, give or take, to read everything that looks interesting and that's already been published, so one of you needs to start building that immortality machine.

Back to SFT. This year is starting off slowly but is rich in its SFT offerings. Case in point: French author Grégoire Courtois's *The Agents* (tr. Rhonda Mullins), which came out in January. Described as "*Nineteen Eighty-Four* meets *Tron*, via *The Office*," *The Agents* is indeed a bizarre dystopian story, with humans eating, sleeping, and "working" in highrise buildings that they can never leave (many have never been outside). Their bloody cubicle conflicts and distant machine masters seem to drain the agents' humanity, until one small group of agents decides to try and take it back.

February offers us a new work in English by Dutch horror author Thomas Olde Heuvelt, of *Hex* fame. In *Echo* (tr. Moshe Gilula), Nick Grevers, a travel journalist and mountain climber, ventures into an uncharted area in the Swiss Alps with his climbing partner. Something grim and horrifying happens there, and when Gravers wakes up from a coma, he finds that not only was he badly injured and his partner is missing, but that something has invaded his soul—something terrible that he discovered on that lonely mountain peak.

Next, we have new Chinese and Japanese SFT in March, with an anthology edited by Yu Chen and Regina Kanyu Wang and a new novel by Yoko Tawada. *The Way Spring Arrives and Other Stories: A Collection of Chinese Science Fiction and Fantasy in Translation* contains stories about dining out in the far reaches of the universe, finding immortality in the mountains, watching roses put on a performance of a Shakespeare play, and more. Published in English for the first time, these stories offer Anglophone readers a new window onto modern Chinese speculative fiction.

Tawada, who has brought us brilliant speculative fiction in both Japanese (*The Emissary*) and German (*Memoirs of a Polar Bear*), is out with *Scattered All Over the Earth*, (tr. Japanese by Margaret Mitsutani). Here, she imagines a Japan that has been figuratively (and in some ways literally) splintered and scattered across the globe. That nation, in the near-future, has vanished and its survivors are roaming climate refugees who search for others who can still remember how to speak Japanese. Roaming around Scandinavia and Western Europe, they encounter material pieces of their culture's past and bond with one another. Compared to *Alice in Wonderland* and "a surreal *Wind in the Willows*," *Scattered* is the first in an expected trilogy.

If you're looking for short SFT published so far, look no further than *Apex Magazine* (Cristina Jurado's "Lamia" and Yilin Fan's "City Lights"), *Clarkesworld* (Gu Shi's "No One at the Wild Dock"), and *World Literature Today* (Yuki Fuwa's "Devour Me").

The rest of the year promises some further wonderful SFT, including a trilogy by the one and only Shimon Adaf! Can you tell that I'm excited?

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!

Call for Papers: Sexual Violence and Science Fiction

Adam McLain

In *Redefining Rape* (2013), feminist historian Estelle Freedman argues that history shows a war of words over how different groups defined sexual violence: "The history of repeated struggles over the meaning of sexual violence reveals that the way we understand rape helps determine who is entitled to sexual and political sovereignty" (11). She sees rape as a political tool used to gain power and subjugate and marginalize groups of people based on race, gender, class, and other sociological valences. Thus, in Freedman's hermeneutic, sexual violence becomes historically contingent and unshackled from a consistent and determined definition.

Through cognitive estrangement, science fiction authors envision futures and reflect on contemporary issues. Sexual violence—or, at the very least, the act of sex itself—has been written into the lifeblood of science fictional texts from Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) to Isaac Asimov's Robots series (1950-1985) to K. M. Szpara's *Docile* (2020). Freedman's definitional unshackling allows scholars, authors, and thinkers of science fiction to examine and consider the sexual ethics, morals, legislations, and violence that are presented in science fiction media in a way that does not tie the creators to their own historical period nor unites them in a single definition of sexual violence. How, then, might the estranging and alternative nature of science fiction—its weirdness, its futurity, its otherworldliness—change or affect what audiences think about sexual violence? What transformations occur when an author or a creator considers the ethical, legal, or material characteristics of sexual activity in the future?

This symposium on sexual violence and science fiction seeks papers that discuss topics at the intersection of science fictional estrangement and sexual violence, an action that has real, material effects on the ways in which different sexualities, genders, races, bodies, and people interact with and are shaped by our contemporary world. Papers can, for example, position a single text (book, graphic novel, movie, tv series, etc.) of science fiction and look at its sexual activity, ethics, legislation, morals, justice, and/or violence to better understand how sex is promulgated, replicated, and/or subverted when authors use it in their work. Papers can also look at larger trends, movements throughout history, or comparatively between texts (even cross-media). Essays should not simply show how sex/sexual violence is represented in the text; they should mainly argue about what the estranged depiction means or what it does to and for the text and to and for the audience or receiver.

Submissions

SFRA Review seeks essays of c. 2,000–3,000 words for a special issue interrogating, analyzing, and critiquing the intersection of sexual violence and science fiction. Submissions can address, but are not limited to, the following:

- Legal boundaries of sexual activity within a text's imagined empire

- Expanded or condensed sexual morals and ethics

- The effect/affect of sex within a universe

- The presentation and representation of sexual activity as dominant and/or subversive

- The use of sex as a means to power, accomplishment, or reward

- Types of bodies and their use in sex—for example, robots or alien bodies, gendered bodies, classed bodies, etc.

- Sex between (or not between) alien species and the meaning of race and gender

- Sex as work or tool and the politics of citizenship in outer space

- Mandated or limited sexual activity, including eugenics, population control, multiple partnering, forced partnering, etc.

- The utilization of the erotic

- The broadening of sexual allowance and the use (or misuse) of sexual activity

Abstracts of c. 250 words and short author bios should be submitted by email to the symposium editor Adam McLain at adam.j.mclain@gmail.com using the subject line "Sexual Violence and Science Fiction" by March 1, 2022.

Abstracts should specify the text the author wishes to write about and how they will approach sexual activity within the chosen text. Prospective authors are encouraged to reach out to Adam if they wish to discuss their essay concept; however, a discussion does not mean automatic acceptance. Authors will be notified of acceptance (or rejection) by March 15, 2022.

Accepted drafts of 2,000–3,000 words will be due in mid-May and should be prepared in MLA style with a Works Cited in MLA 8th edition. A full project timeline is listed below.

Timeline

March 1, 2022 = Abstracts due

March 15, 2022 = Authors Notified of Acceptance

May 1, 2022 = First Drafts Due

May 15, 2022 = First Draft Edits Returned

June 1, 2022 = Second Drafts Due

June 15, 2022 = Second Drafts Edits Returned

July 15, 2022 = Final Drafts Due

Early August = Publication of symposium in SFRA Review 52.3

SFRA Review Symposium Call for Abstracts

Sexual Violence & Science Fiction

Abstracts due March 1, 2022

Submission details at sfrareview.org

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FICTION

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.

Call for Applications: Fiction Editor

The Editorial Collective

The *SFRA Review* would like to invite applicants for the position of Fiction Editor. To submit an application, please email Ian Campbell at sfrarev@gmail.com and briefly outline qualifications and interest.

In collaboration with the Editor and Associate Editor(s), the Fiction Editor is generally responsible for soliciting, evaluating and editing submissions to our Fiction section. They may also choose to aid the rest of the Editorial Collective in preparing each issue, though this would not be required.

Overview of Responsibilities:

- Participate in regular meetings with the Editor and Associate Editors

- Solicit short (< 4k words) fiction pieces from scholars and the general public

- Be the point of contact with authors of fiction

- Edit and copyedit submissions (generally less than ten per quarter)

- Occasional other responsibilities

We look forward to your submission. This is a great opportunity for a graduate student or emerging scholar to gain experience in the field in a low-pressure situation.

FICTION

"The Last Issue of *Interplanetary Asteroid Mining Meta-Journal*"

Mario Daniel Martín

Trope: Last Issue of Interplanetary Asteroid Mining Meta-Journal

Category: Brain to Brain 1-d Open Message

Subcategory: Text-only Pamphlet

Code: δ1256Sagg23mondragón44FCSS7θï -ΦΩ

Date: 23 Saggiatore, 1256AG (21 December Greg-2820)

Physical Location of First Release: Asteroide Mondragón

Author: Undisclosed (triple δ-anonymity)

Language: HS-Broca-I-Classical-English

Neuro-induction devices: Not applicable

3D Synesthetic Simulation: Not available

Multisensory Arrangements: Disconnected

Genital Pathway Stimulation: Disabled

Parsing Instructions: This text message is composed of 6 parts. An optional quotation (MC-0), and 5 compulsory sections (MC-1 to MC-5) are to be read in the provided order. No response or acknowledgment of parsing is required.

Rebroadcasting Status: Unknown (δ-encrypted)

Message Content 0: Quotation (Optional).

> Of all these Formes of Government, the matter being mortall, so that not onely Monarchs, but also whole Assemblies dy, it is necessary for the conservation of the peace of men, that as there was order taken for an Artificiall Man, so there be order also taken, for an Artificiall Eternity of life; without which, men that are governed by an Assembly, should

return into the condition of Warre in every age; and they that are governed by One man, as soon as their Governour dyeth. This Artificiall Eternity, is that which men call the Right of Succession.

Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (3BG; Greg-1651)

Message Content 1: Preface

This is a one-dimensional text-only pamphlet from the Space Farm Arcadia Conglomerate in the Trojan Walden IV Belt. We are using this archaic channel of dissemination to avoid the monitoring of its source of redistribution. We apologise for the lack of multi-sense meta-data. We recommend delta-encrypting when rebroadcasting the information inside the orbit of Jupiter.

To avoid confusion about the dates mentioned in the pamphlet for those residing outside the Thoureauvian Conglomerate, we have included after the standard Galilean date the corresponding date in the obsolete Gregorian calendar.

Message Content 2: Purpose of this pamphlet

Pope Urban MVIII, the Solar System Leader of the Coalition of Leviathanian Companies and Royal Chief Executive Officer of the New Australia Mining Company, announced today in his residence in Kalgoorlie IX the closure of the scientific meta-journal Interplanetary Asteroid Mining in its neural-induction multi-sensory format. The closure has been linked to the recent acquisition, and subsequent cultural refurbishment, of the Jovian Open Space University by a consortium led by the China-Cola Corporation and the New Australia Mining Company.

As a group of scientists residing inside and outside Asteroide Mondragón, we want to repudiate this unjust measure. Also, we would like to make it known that an inter-galactic formal complaint will be lodged with the Interstellar Court of Alpha Centauri by the Thoreauvian Free-thinking Sentient Being Coalition condemning the meta-journal closure and the subsequent blocking of its archives.

Message Content 3: A brief history of the meta-journal

The journal was first published in bi-dimensional e-paper flexible display format in 955AG (Greg-2519), under the name The Interdisciplinary Journal of Asteroid Mining. The publication quickly became one of the most influential free-inquiry scientific journals in the homo-homo scientific explosion of the 9th and 10th centuries after the long climate-change-induced Penumbra Scientifica (or Scientific Dark Age) in the societies of our source planet. The open character of the journal was clear in the editorial of its first issue: 'We aim to make asteroid mining accessible to all terrestrial sentient beings, and to stimulate the peaceful use of space resources for the benefit of science'.

The journal can be undoubtedly credited with providing the tools and discussion platform for the Terran conquest of the Inner Solar System. It also defended the now almost completely

extinct assumption that space was the inheritance of all Terran inhabitants and their extra-terran descendants, irrespective of their genetic configuration and cognitive uplifting history.

The technological changes that saw the rise of neural-reasoning mental-induction science dissemination platforms in the late-10th century required the journal to change its name to Interplanetary Asteroid Mining Meta-Journal. There were many scientific milestones influenced by the meta-journal under its new name. It was a strategic outlet for the distribution of extra-solar first contact negentropic thermo-ethic information in 998AG (Greg-2562), and it coordinated the election of Terran representatives to the Proxima Centauri Treaty that resulted in the conditional incorporation of the Solar races to the Via Lacteal Scientific Confederation in 1003AG (Greg-2567). In the internal reconfiguration of Solar politics and scientific priorities caused by the rapid absorption of alien science, its most remembered achievement was, undoubtedly, the push to change the Solar System Unitarian Calendar to equate year zero with the birth of Galileo Galilei (1556 in the old Gregorian calendar) which was only successful among some planets and asteroids of the Thoureauvian Conglomerate. Unfortunately, the area of the Solar System controlled by Leviathanian companies preferred the Fordian calendar, and some of the Free asteroid-states inside the orbit of Venus still use the Gregorian calendar.

The meta-journal has a history of tolerance, showing an open approach to the socio-genomic changes of the 11th century, though it always had some critics. It was the first scientific meta-journal to appoint a Neanderthal-homo as editor of its Hominid sub-meta journal in 999AG (Greg-2563), and strongly supported the crucial intergalactic judicial case to grant full consciousness rights to homo-cetaceans and homo-canines in 1002AG (Greg-2566). It was also the first scientific meta-journal to produce specialised multi-sensory access options in non-brocal languages in 1017AG (Greg-2581), which eventually spawned a series of sister-meta-journals in most Solar languages. However, the Rodent and Pachyderm Leagues never agreed to create sister meta-journals in their languages, and have routinely dismissed the publication as an outlet for legitimating homocentric expansion and hegemony.

Today's closure of the *Interplanetary Asteroid Mining Meta-Journal* can only be interpreted as a deliberate attack on multi-speciesism. The announcement is only available in homo-sapiens-based broca-I languages. And the behaviour of Urban MVIII in the last decade suggests that there could be other motives behind the decision to cancel access to one of the key sources of Terran science, in effect, it can be argued that it is the final step in rewriting scientific history to boost the personality cult of the new Pope.

Message Content 4: A brief biography of Pope Urban MVIII

Originally born in the provincial Jovian Greek Abbott Point Asteroid as Nikita-Mustafa Arredondo-Li in 944AG (Greg-2508), Pope Urban MVIII won his first reincarnation in the Broken Hill L4 branch of the New Australia Mining Company (henceforward NAMC) for being a scientist when he was only 99. He credits himself with being the chief mental architecture engineer in the legendary scientific team that pioneered the use of nano-carbon tubes with platinum and

iridium axon skeletons in the quantum cerebellum GJ-88, the base of most reincarnation quantum cerebellums in operation today. A closer look at the scientific publications of the time in private repositories shows that he was consistently a third author in the papers published then, and he was clearly not the leader of the research team behind the momentous discovery. After the NAMC acquired the rights of the meta-journals Reincarnation and Transhumanism, Longevity Nature and Neuro-resurrective Science, Arredondo-Li obliterated them from the public record.

A neural-induction communication in Volume 368 of Interplanetary Asteroid Mining Meta-Journal outlining the procedures of implantation of the quantum cerebellum GJ-89 in homo-chimeric resurrections to speed-up the creation of new mining workforces was the only remaining evidence of the modest role the Pope had in this breakthrough. All witnesses of these facts, including the leading co-authors of the original papers, however, have been purged from the NAMC scientific institutions and denied quantum reincarnations in the Hominid Empire II. Consequently, they cannot complain about the new Pope's crude attempts to rewrite history.

Arredondo-Li was subsequently reincarnated two times in different administrative roles during the expansion of the New Australia coalition of asteroid-states to the Hildas, when he became Chief of the Board of Directors of the new overarching company-state. He is credited with the drafting of the pact that allowed China-Cola, and its associated companies to get control of the Board of Elders in the Hominid Empire I. This resulted, among other things, in the monopoly of the mining of the Hildas and the Jupiter Greek asteroids by the NAMC after the Jovian Lagrange 5 War (better known as the Free-speech War), that restricted the exercise of open access science to the Jovian Trojan Asteroids.

Pope Urban MVIII is no stranger to controversy. In spite of being the viviparous offspring of a Hobbesian homo-homo mental police father and one of his homo-bonobo sexual slaves, he chose to reincarnate as a pure homo-sapiens entity from his first reincarnation onwards. He also changed his name to Clive Joh Abbott-Palmer and refused to speak ape-based broca-II languages in public. When accused of being a human-supremacist by the Thoreauvian Chimpanzee-Bonobo Ecological Trust in the Trojan Walden Belt League he simply responded that he had the right to moral enhancement. He later justified his choice of a homo-sapiens corporal configuration as the only way to rise in the ranks of the NAMC, a fact that is even more necessary today after he himself changed the citizenship laws of the company to require all the directors and prelates to have purely hominid brain power and corporeal configurations in 1055AG (Greg-2619). This was extended in 1078AG (Greg-2642) to the civic charities run by the New Australia Public Service. He controversially excluded homo-kangaroos and homo-emus from the top ranks, in spite of their symbolic materialistic importance in a period of rapid expansion of the company-state to the Hildas and the massive increase in chimeric migration to the space farms that provided the ATP fuel for the increased sentient capital acquired.

Arredondo-Li's attempt to exclude homo-dingos from the New Australia Regal Army in 1080AG (Greg-2643), however, was repudiated by a large rebellion inspired by the homo-panda

rebellion of the China-Cola Imperial Army in 1079AG. After the rebellion of his own homo-Thylacine praetorian guard in 1082AG, homo-marsupials and homo-canines again became prominent in the middle ranks of the NAMC. Some of them were even allowed to progress to the corporate elite, especially in the frontier asteroids of the Hildas L3 frontier, where in 1096AG (Greg-2660) a homo-echidna was ordained as a governor-bishop in spite of her refusal to reincarnate in a homo-sapiens configuration. In spite of this and other similar cases, hominid (mainly sapiens) assimilation after promotion remains the norm in New Australia.

As a corporate Solar System royal, Arredondo-Li (or Professor Abbott-Palmer, as he insisted on being called publicly) is predominantly remembered as the orchestrator of the ascendency of NAMC as the leading mining company in the Solar System (mainly through the destruction, acquisition or forced amalgamation of other asteroid mining companies and cooperatives). It is estimated that by the 1090s, seventy percent of the space farms' building materials in the new frontier between the orbits of Jupiter and Saturn were provided by the NAMC. The company also secured the exclusive rights for the planetisation of Saturn in 1098AG (Greg-2662), and the controversial dismantling of its rings to provide the water needed for the colonisation of the area.

The rapid expansion and forced amalgamation of independent free asteroid-states in the Greek L4 Jovian area and the new Saturnine frontier after the usurpation of Enceladus generated the need to manage a large number of prisoners and refugees, which were derived to penal colonies scattered through the company dominions, and later to franchised penal facilities in second-tier companies such as Monsanto-Burma or K-Mart-Colombia. In 1108AG (Greg-2672) the NAMC ventured into providing penal colonies for other non-mining companies and the recycling and mental retraining of chimeric and hominid sentient capital. Their mental police also franchised the cultural assimilation techniques that made it feared and revered throughout the Hominid Empire I. In fact, it has been argued that the systematic disregard of the Charta of Chimeric Rights by the enforcing consent arms of the NAMC and its close ally China-Cola created the conditions for the creation of the primate-centric Hominid Empire II.

Under Abbott-Palmer's iron fist management, the NAMC also branched into religious-entertainment and genital technology, especially after the hostile take-over of the Berlusconi-Vatican Corporation during the collapse of the Inter-planetarian Trade-Stock Market in Ganymede in 1124AG (Greg-2688). The Amphibian Coalition denounced his subsequent transformation of the leading company of The Religiosity League into a propaganda machine for the Tantra-Biblical Movement, which, after the schism of the San Sissino Synod of Terran Churches of 1156AG (Greg-2720), effectively obliterated spirituality from the Hominid Empire II. The so-called God-spot genes were replaced with tantra-ecstasy genes in all the humanoid-based sentients, who were forced converts to Tantra-Christianity. The subsequent acquisition of the Lust and Sensibility senso-drama chain from the Disney-Monaco Corporation in 1188AG (Greg-2797) has also been linked to the need to expand the market for genital upgrading technology among the hyper-sexed newly converted chimeric masses.

In spite of his known anti-chimeric views, Abbott-Palmer stated that the new company (that resulted from the incorporation of these religious entertainment entities into the New Australia conglomerate) was open for business with all Solar System companies and Free states, irrespective of the percentage of hominids in their management ranks. This allowed him to peddle the perpetual-erection-double-penises and anal-lubrication technology that made NAMC the first exporter of those sexual enhancement devices in the Solar System since 1204AG (Greg-2768).

Abbott-Palmer is also known as a military strategist. During his second reincarnation he successfully fought with the Solar coalition that ended the brief extragalactic Vogon Empire invasion of the Jovian moons. He credited himself with leading the Solar forces in the recovery of Ganymede, even when Thoreauvian forces were the first to take over moon's presidential palace in the last offensive against the Vogon invaders.

Following becoming a signatory to The Inter-Galactic Peace of Andromeda, Abbott-Palmer was reincarnated as a hyper-homo-sapiens-sapiens. He promptly obtained the necessary votes from all Leviathanian companies operating between the Jovian and Martian orbits to be anointed Solar System Pope in 1255AG (Greg-2819). More importantly, his choice of the papal name of Urban MVIII generated a great controversy among the dwindling free scientific community, as it was the first time since the birth of the scientific method that the name of Urban was recycled to name a Hominid Pope. The fear that this would harm the free exchange of scientific ideas, which we expressed at the moment of his anointment, has been fully realised less than eight Terran months after the Pope's ascension. The purchase and prompt closure of Interplanetary Asteroid Mining Meta-Journal is another of his long list of explicit symbolic gestures to stir the hominid masses across the Solar System against multi-speciesism. In a brief communiqué, he declared 'free-loading hominid technological information is over'. Additionally, he rebuffed the Canonical Catholic Church apology on the Galileo Affair in 428AG (Greg-1992) and promised a return to the obsolete Gregorian calendar in the whole extent of the Solar System, which was interpreted as another provocation in the Thoureauvian Conglomerate. Urban MVIII also expressed that rodent, pachyderm, equine and cetacean chimeras should stop complaining and that, instead, they should be grateful for their genetic uplifting. He is quoted to have said 'without the help of the hominids, they would still be cannibalising each other in the Terran swamps.'

Message Content 5: A call to action

There is a call lead by *Cetacean Asteroid Mining*, a sister-meta-journal legally residing in the Asteroide Mondragón since 1213AG (Greg-2777), to repel the closure and restore the Interplanetary Asteroid Mining Meta-Journal archives. The call includes a request to return the benefits of space colonisation to the inheritance of all Solar System sentient beings, and not just a minority of homo-sapiens and their homo-canine and homo-marsupial allies. The call has also been strongly supported by the Eusocial Interplanetary Fraternity (and their associated meta-journal Social Insect Asteroid Recycling), as well as the Feline League, the Porcine, Bovine &

Equine Guild, the Argonautoidea-Octopodoidea Network and the Bird-Dinosaur Solar Coalition (and their associated scientific meta-journals).

Science is not just a tool to reverse-engineer the magic of the alien races or to mine methane-rich planetesimals in the Oort Cloud. Nor is it just a way of having a better simulated orgasm with your favourite stellar porno-diva/o. Science is a legitimate pursuit of all the Solar System Species. It brought us to the most remote corners of our Solar environment and it is allowing us to reach and colonise neighbouring stars. More importantly, it allowed us to survive the self-destructive path of the traditional Hobbesian homo-homo anti-ecological cultures which converted our source planet into an unrecoverable rubbish bin. We encourage all our fellow scientists, irrespective of their chimeric configuration, to defend Classical Open-Source Science at this crucial moment in the history of Solar intelligence.

Cetacean Asteroid Mining has also produced a senso-documentary on the History of the Asteroid Mining Meta-Journals to exemplify what was best in Thoureauvian Terran Cultures. It also contains an attached video-manifold with a supplementary multi-sensory chronology of the development of Thoreauvian scientific achievements, including an unbiased account of the uplifting of most Terra-based species. You will be able to access it by telepathing the 1256AG (Greg-2820) archive of the Phi-Dolphin Eco-Network, where you will also find multi-sensory-hyper-link copies of the now repudiated Sustainability Pact of Terran Churches of 659AG (Greg-2223) and the badly disregarded Solar Declaration of Chimeric Rights of 1032AG (Greg-2596).

If joining this intergalactic formal complaint doesn't jeopardise your future reincarnation prospects, we urge you to support the move, as scientists of all species have already done, and to disseminate this pamphlet among fellow researchers, scholars, digital personas and technologists. However, if open support for this cause puts the prospects of pursuing Classical Open-Source Science at risk in your area of enterprise, or will make you an easy target of the hominid mental police, simply wait until more decisive action is required in the predictably turbulent times to come.

End of message δ1256Sagg23mondragón44FCSS7θï -ΦΩ

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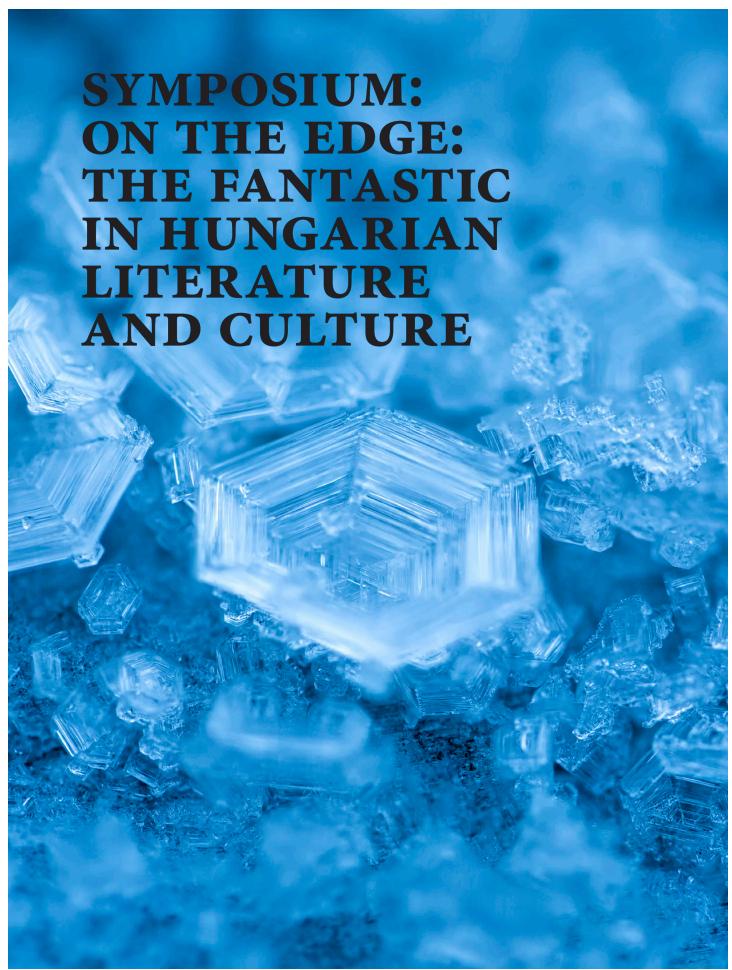
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SYMPOSIUM: ON THE EDGE: THE FANTASTIC IN HUNGARIAN LITERATURE AND CULTURE

The Austro-Hungarian Melting Pot: The Mythopoetics of Borgovia in *The Incredible Adventures of Van Helsing*[1]

Péter Kristóf Makai

Introduction: Enter the Vampire Hunter

Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897), written at the height of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, was and still is a cultural touchstone, creating one of the most recognisable monsters of European culture. It touched a cultural nerve, expressing the anxieties of the British Empire and the many menaces on its borders in a manner similar to invasion literature. The initial novel was given a new lease on eternal life within every medium that was invented after the Count originally rose from the grave. Video games are no exception.

Riding on the renaissance of vampires in novels, fan fiction, film, television, and games,[2] Dracula's foe, vampire hunter Abraham Van Helsing, gained more prominence among Western audiences after Stephen Sommers's 2004 movie, *Van Helsing*, put the son of the vampire hunter, Gabriel, played by Hugh Jackman, in the title role. Although the reimagined action hero version of the character proved to be a box office failure, it added swashbuckling action to the repertoire of a previously nerdish, scientist-type character, and inspired a slew of shock horror and comedy spoofs.

One unforeseen offshoot was Hungarian independent video game developer NeocoreGames' *The Incredible Adventures of Van Helsing*, published between 2013 and 2015. This trilogy of action role-playing games (ARPGs) is set in the fictional Eastern European country of Borgovia, which was constructed with an eye towards the times and places of Bram Stoker's original novel, but incorporating a judicious amount of magic and steampunk science to allow distinct forms of gameplay to emerge.[3]

In this paper, I highlight how the Hungarian developer infused the world of Borgovia with Central and Eastern European (CEE) influences to create *The Incredible Adventures of Van Helsing*. Taking the *Final Cut* (2015) as Neocore's definitive version and uniting the trilogy, I showcase how Transylvanian and Hungarian historical, mythic, literary, cinematic, and architectural influences have shaped the world of Borgovia. Drawing on Tolkienian mythopoesis, I specifically argue for a creation of a Central and Eastern European mythic space that arose from a mélange of cultural images propagated in late nineteenth-century Hungary and Britain as a source that has had a lasting impact in how even CEE game developers approach the region. Finally, I emphasise non-Slavic (Austria-) Hungary's presence as a cultural mediator between East and West, packaging and romanticising the region for popular consumption.

Locating *The Incredible Adventures of Van Helsing* in the Action Role-playing Game Genre

Emerging as a distinct form of computer gameplay, the ARPG is a subgenre of computer role-playing games (CRPGs) that—in its prototypical format, epitomised by *Diablo* (1997), *Titan Quest* (2006), *Torchlight* (2009), and their sequels[4]—feature an isometric, top-down view; real-time combat; one player character (PC) with quantified combat statistics; an experience point system and stratified character progression; a selection of eligible character classes with different strengths and weaknesses; a class-specific skill tree system; RPG-style inventory and equipment management; an extensive, level-based world, often randomly generated, with distinct level tilesets; a throng of (relatively) weak enemies, outnumbering the player; boss battles at the end of levels; and a loot-and-vendor system, with monsters dropping rarity-based equipable and consumable items that provide numerical bonuses to combat skills and abilities (Barton and Stacks 357–82). Unlike party-based and story-focused CRPGs, which often feature extensive dialogue trees and voluminous written exposition, the main drive of the ARPG comes from the feeling of overwhelming power as the player mows down hordes of monsters (non-player characters or NPCs) with the use of their ever-improving skills and equipment, collecting their loot and selling it for cash on the quest to face more challenging enemies. ARPGs, especially at higher difficulties, require deep familiarity with skill synergies, lightning reflexes, a careful crowd control of NPCs, and a healthy dose of luck for finding rare items that provide massive gameplay advantages.

Neocore's *The Incredible Adventures of Van Helsing: The Final Cut* (2015, henceforth *Van Helsing*) is a mature example of the genre, published a full eighteen years after the groundbreaking *Diablo*, playing straight with the conventions of ARPGs, adopting the standards of its predecessors and deliberately staying close to their commitment to visceral, fast-paced gameplay.[5] The player is put into the role of a descendant of the legendary Abraham van Helsing, who, like their forefather, is a grim monster hunter dedicated to their task of ridding the war-torn land of Borgovia from any eldritch creature or mechanical abomination to bring peace to the lands once again. Most of the monsters are drawn from Slavic mythology: from lesoviks to vilas, or from vodyanoys to rusalkas, they bank on the popularity of Slavic fantasy in the wake of the success of books like Sapkowski's *Witcher* series or the works of Naomi Novik.

Left: Dreadknechts attacking Lady Katarina; Right: A frog-like vodyanoy approaches

On the other hand, some enemy types are distinctly of a steampunk persuasion; some are massive, sentient machines, and of particular interest to us are the mechanised infantry known as the "Dreadknecht," which menace Van Helsing when they are not in the clutches of mythic foes. The Dreadknecht's name is inspired by the German Landsknecht, while their dialogue and diction are reminiscent of Judge Dredd, and their dress and appearance are more akin to toy soldiers or Austro-Hungarian hussars—this enemy already embodies the melting pot-like nature of the mythopoetics of Neocore's vision.[6]

Van Helsing is aided by Lady Katarina, an untraceably Eastern European-accented ghost of a noblewoman bound to the Van Helsing family, which in practice means that she serves as an NPC companion that soaks up damage, supports the player's attacks and holds items to be carried to vendors in town in exchange for cash. Much of the charm of the game stems from the verbal sparring of the two protagonists, and their acerbic commentary on the characters and events they meet as they explore Borgovia. Indeed, the world of *Van Helsing* is a character of its own, as the land is a distillation of cultural imagery associated with the clichés of horror fiction and nods to other media franchises. The rest of this essay is dedicated to teasing apart the dense web of allusions, inspirations, adaptations and pop cultural references that mark the gameworld as a uniquely Hungarian instance of mythopoetics.

Literary Skeletons in the Closet

The figure of Abraham van Helsing in Stoker's *Dracula* is a peculiar one: a Dutch doctor and vampire hunter with strong Catholic convictions, a notable foreign accent, his speech peppered with Germanisms—a forerunner to the eccentric German scientist trope that will come into full swing around the time of World War II. His main feat in the novel is slaying the vampires in Dracula's castle while the Count is fleeing, chased down by Mina and Jonathan Harker and their entourage through the gateway to Dracula's realm, the Borgo Pass (Pasul Bârgău in Romanian and Borgói-hágó in Hungarian). In the Sommers movie, Gabriel van Helsing retains his ties to Christianity, as he is on a mission from the Vatican, but has become a more general monster hunter (not unlike Slavic fantasy's beloved Witcher, Geralt of Rivia), who faces Mr. Hyde, Dr. Frankenstein's monster, and werewolves. On his way to Transylvania, he even travels through Hungary and is attacked by the brides of Dracula.

The Hungarian connection is meaningful, not just in terms of geographical necessity, but because Stoker himself refers to a colleague of Abraham, a certain "Arminius of Buda-Pesth University" (Stoker 282) for ethnographic advice. It is speculated, but has never been proven, that Stoker met said-Arminius, a Hungarian scientist and spy for the English, Ármin Vámbéry, personally (Norton-Taylor, Péli). Stoker was also familiar with Hungarian folktales, and used them as inspiration for his short stories, too (Heiniger 1 n3). Besides Castle Bran, the models for Dracula's castle include the castle of Vécs, Criş, the fortress of Déva, and Hunyadi Castle (Crisan), the latter of whose elements were imaginatively reshuffled by Ignác Alpár to create

"Vajdahunyadvára," an assemblage of buildings in Budapest's Városliget—a titbit that will become important soon.

At any rate, the sources distilled to create *Dracula* are numerous, and Stoker's own mythmaking served up a potent brew. Count Dracula is based on Vlad Tepes III but yet is a creature of myth himself, and the vision of Transylvania conjured for Stoker's novel is a far cry from the realities of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, a rival to the British. As a Dracula scholar notes,

> Images of Transylvania as a realm of horror, haunted by the ghosts of the past, the land beyond the civilized world where all the superstitions have gathered, are not accidental. They represent the evolution of constructs based upon stereotypes and clichés created during the centuries by our British visitors. They wouldn't have taken the apocalyptical dimensions in Bram Stoker's novel had it not been for a certain frame of mind in the West: the need of projecting one's own anguish on a neutral, harmless and conveniently distant territory. (Andras 2)

Such chauvinistic mythopoeia of the British Empire came at a time when Austria-Hungary was on the rise following the Compromise of 1867 and the 1873 unification of Pest, Buda and Óbuda into the booming metropolis of Budapest. The year prior to the publication of *Dracula* saw the 1896 Millennial Celebrations of Budapest, a universal exposition-style event marking the thousandth year of the establishment of Hungary. As with any world's fair worth its salt, massive constructions reshaped the face of Budapest, with the opening of the first continental underground railway line in Europe (after London), the Budapest Hall of Art (Műcsarnok) on Heroes' Square, and the first version of the above-mentioned Vajdahunyadvára. Counter-mythmaking was definitely the order of the day.

None understood the importance of mythmaking more than J.R.R. Tolkien, who wrote his essay "On Fairy-Stories" to explain his ars mythopoeia, and coin the important term, "sub-creation" (eds. Flieger and Anderson, 42) for the art of enchantment that brings the inner consistency of reality to the fictional universes created by writers (Wolf). As I argued elsewhere, the essay invents a fictional art form, the *Faërian Drama*, which is imagined as an interactive drama that enchants its spectators to the point where they believe it to be real. Such illusionistic realism was not possible in Tolkien's time, but we may recognise it today as a form of virtual reality, whose interactivity seems to foreshadow computer games (Makai, "Faërian Cyberdrama" 43). In fact, table-top RPGs are overwhelmingly inspired by Tolkienesque fantasy, and the nascent genre of CRPGs themselves drew on the pen-and-paper tradition, but they also brought a discrete, interactivity visuospatial representation to the storyworlds of fantasy (Makai, "Games: Playable Arda"). Tolkien's meticulous world-building is one of the prime reasons why "our current virtual worlds in video games . . . are massively dependent on fantasy conventions brought alive by Tolkien" (Makai, "Games and Gaming" 532).

In the case of *Van Helsing*, the intellectual genealogy of Tolkien is highlighted both in the several cultural references to the Professor's oeuvre as well as by the meticulous worldbuilding of Borgovia. On the way to Markovna, Van Helsing meets a mysterious Halfling, Domovoy Baggins, upon whose death the player may pick up "A Certain Magical Ring"; likewise, he may later come across the Grey Wizard in some caverns. The tabletop tradition's fondness for statistical uncertainty and its simulationist roots are palpable in the ARPG's combat system that values randomness in calculating hit chances, damage, and the mitigation of damage by separate resistances, not to mention the gameplay focus on constantly upgrading equipment with higher statistical bonuses. Like Game Masters of a tabletop session, the game prides itself on creating a fully realised and believable fantasy realm with its own geography, history, and architecture, complete with rivalling political factions and religious rituals, which the player partakes in on their own quest of heroic derring-do.

Thus, we have a conflux of real, literary, and virtual world-making at the heart of *Van Helsing*: Stoker creates an orientalised Transylvania to mitigate the economic boom of Austria-Hungary, which itself builds on nationalistic mythologies of the emerging Hungarian intelligentsia, whose tales reach the ears of Stoker. The resulting creation becomes a popular myth of its own right, to be endlessly refigured by every medium it touched, and it was inevitable that it would be picked up by a medium destined for fantastic and mythopoetic world-building. The malleability of the computer game's virtual world, as designed by animators and programmers, are the natural habitat of fantasy. And when Neocore picks up the slack to create their own version of the Dracula myth, they choose the RPGs genre as the logical form of their mythicisation of Van Helsing's descendant.

A World Built on Hungarian Soil

Van Helsing is remarkable for the range of cultural and architectural allusions that weave Hungary into the tapestry of the Dracula myth. Early on in the first game, Van Helsing enters a grim, Gothic backwater town called Markovna, a town full of stone-walled buildings with wooden-slatted roofs and tall, ornamental wooden gates peculiar to the Székely (Szekler) people of Transylvania. Curiously, the names of the townsfolk and nobles are clearly of Slavic origin (e.g., Boris, King Borislav, Grigori); however, people familiar with Hungarian animation might notice that the Romany camp outside of town is led by Gaspar and the charming Saffi. Their appearance is modelled on the characters of *Szaffi* (1985), itself an animated adaptation of Mór Jókai's novel, *A cigánybáró* (1885), set in the Banat, a border region of Transylvania. Besides the geographical proximity (and the pop cultural reference), the inclusion of the characters must also have been motivated by the Jókai text predating Stoker's work.

As the player proceeds towards the city of Borgova, Borgovia's imperial center, the architectural references move from Transylvania to Budapest. Borgova is indicated to lie at the conflux of the Borgov and the Lugosi rivers, the latter being a nod to Dracula's most famous portrayal by Hungarian-American actor, Béla Lugosi, whose bust graces the aforementioned

The Romany Camp in the Croakwood, with "Saffi" (rightmost) and "Gaspar" (exclamation mark)

Vajdahunyad Castle in Budapest. After a series of encounters in the industrial port, we move to the Old Town level, a district described by the game as "a neighbourhood of wide avenues and magnificent palaces with wrought-iron gates." However, anyone with a passing familiarity with the main sights of Budapest will immediately recognise several important landmarks that are stripped of their real-world historical detail, but they still retain their main architectural features, if one can see past the piles of enemy cadavers gracing the landscape.

A loading screen of The Incredible Adventures of Van Helsing *showing the first area of the game, including the Lugosi River.*
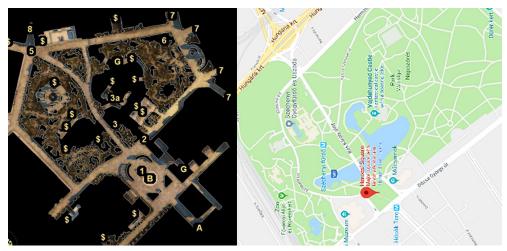
The wide avenue that serves as an umbilical cord to the central plaza bears more than a passing resemblance to that of Andrássy út, a Budapest avenue widened for the turn of the millennium, guarded by rows of stately homes of nobles which today mainly serve as embassies. The parallels are soon reinforced by a cursory glance at the plaza, which features a massive, symmetrical colonnade forming a half-circle, the columns interspersed with winged statues and

equestrian monuments. The absolute centre indicated by the two quarter circles is occupied by a bronze statue of King Borislav. Beheld as an architectural unity, the plaza is recognisably a riff on Heroes' Square at the heart of Budapest, with the Millennium Monument at its centre. And if there were any doubts as to the inspiration for the level, the plaza is flanked by two massive, Neoclassical buildings of uncertain function, which mimic the placement of the Szépművészeti Múzeum (Museum of Fine Arts) and the Műcsarnok (Hall of Art), which—as indicated above—were major landmarks of fin-de-siècle Budapest.

*The Old Town of Borgova. Note the spatial arrangement of the colonnade
and the Neoclassical buildings on both sides.*

As the player slaughters their way beyond the old town plaza, they soon find themselves in a more arborescent, park-like landscape, a vast pentagon that features a great lake with boat jetties, bisected by the continuation of the avenue. Left of the lake, we find a fountain of epic proportions, large enough for twenty people to bathe in, whereas the right side of the lake is dominated by a white boathouse and a castle with lion statues as gatekeepers. Indeed, this portion of the map is an imaginative recreation of Budapest's City Park, with its Széchenyi Thermal Baths and a Vajdahunyad Castle stand-in located at precisely the spot where it would be in real life. Granted, it is far from an exact replica, as the art style is consistent with the steampunk trappings of the rest of the game, but the layout follows that of the real-life castle, and the facades of the buildings lining the square evoke Habsburg-era bourgeois villas.

*Minimap view of the Old Town (credit: GameBanshee) and Google Map image
of the Városliget in Budapest.*

Finally, the last open-world portion of the game, *The Gables*, takes players to another reconstruction of Budapest's must-see sights: the Castle District on the Buda side. The level design is careful to lift many elements from the area most visited by tourists in Budapest: they include a massive bird statue not unlike the Turul bird featured atop a column overlooking the Pest side of the city; a triple-arched gate adorned by several decorative reliefs to match that of Buda Castle's Lions Court; and an easily identifiable copper dome identical to that atop the National Gallery. The final confrontation takes place in what is called The Palace of Machines in-game, but its domed arena, the floor's decoration and the interior design evokes that of St. Stephen's Basilica, resting on the Pest side of the Danube.

The Gables in-game and the Turul statue in Buda's Castle District.

The entire level design process for Borgova and the world of *Van Helsing* in general begs the question: Are these stylistic choices not just a whimsy of a Hungarian developer, a mere in-joke for Budapest's citizens, whose passing smile is soon replaced by gleefully murderous intent? I would argue that there is a deeper meaning at the core of this process, a sustained effort of bringing Dracula 'home,' so to speak. What the developers engage in is an active process of mythopoeia.

As Alexander Vari suggests, the decades of the Dual Monarchy were a time in Hungarian history where, in particular, the reburying of Lajos Batthyány in 1870 and of Ferenc Rákóczi in 1906, as well as the burial of Lajos Kossuth in 1894 served as prominent rites of Hungarian mythmaking:

> Nationalism . . . became inserted in a modern urban context while the technological and urban modernity of Budapest allowed patriotic mythmaking to gain more traction. Past and present melded together on these occasions, with the nation becoming a mediatic presence in the city. (Vari 225)

Similarly, through the revival of the Dracula myth and placing it in pseudo-Slavic steampunk environment, with a sustained effort to locate it in a fantastic Austria-Hungary, *Van Helsing* creates a Central Eastern European mythopoetic space that arose from a mélange of cultural images propagated in late nineteenth century, at a time when cultural and literary ties were close between the United Kingdom and the Austro-Hungarian Empire, as evidenced by the use of Hungarian folklore in Bram Stoker's work. After pop culture westernised Dracula, Neocore Games' reimagination can be read as an allegory of competing visions for a contested territory, that of Dracula's "mythic Transylvania," and the inscription of "Magyarising"[7] popular culture onto that landscape, mirroring real-world historical processes. In the primary world, Magyarisation was an act of Hungarian nationalism that promoted an exclusively Hungarian identity among citizens of different or mixed ancestry in Austria-Hungary. This was coupled with the kind of mythmaking documented by Vari, which has consistently served a political purpose in the history of Hungary, enabling the nation to position itself vis-à-vis the Slavic and Germanic populations with whom they have shared a country for hundreds of years.

This is not to say that the developers and narrative designers have viciously removed elements of Austro-Hungarian history with the intent of giving a false vision of Hungarian or Transylvanian culture. On the whole, the *Van Helsing* games are written in a snarky, tongue-in-cheek style, overwrought with pop cultural references to Western media, and they very clearly steer away from making connections with real-world history. Borgovia, as a creation, feeds on vampire lore and contemporary mediascapes far more than on any historical signifiers. However, the narrative of the games, the architectural setting, combined with the mechanics of the ARPG, present a uniquely Hungarian perspective on the Central Eastern European region and the Dracula myth. It is by this act of re-burying the undead that Neocore's mythopoetics of Borgovia come full circle, and lay the foundations for games like Zen Studios' *Operencia: The Stolen Sun* (2020), another Hungarian contribution to the RPG genre that explicitly draws on and adapts Hungarian folk-lore and legends to construct a fantastic world. It is to be devoutly wished that such trailblazers actually pave the way for future titles that would put Hungary on the world fantasy and science fiction maps once again.

Notes

1. The paper is an extended version of a talk given at the 2018 Central and Eastern European Games Studies conference, held in Kraków, Poland, as part of the Slavic Fantasy workshop. The author would like to thank the generous support he received from the Kulturwissenschaftliches Institut of Essen during the course of 2021 that enabled the writing of the article.

2. The popularity of Dracula as a subject of horror fiction is best epitomised by the extensive, if not exhaustive, list of media products enumerated in the entry "Count Dracula in popular culture" (Wikipedia 2021). For twentieth century film adaptations, see Holte 1997; for the effect of vampires on live-action role-playing culture, see Milspaw and Evans 2010.

3. Although the influence of the Sommers movie on the game would appear *prima facie* obvious, lead narrative designer Viktor Juhász confided that the 2004 movie had little influence on the world of Borgovia, and in fact proved to be misleading when gaming journalists promoted the game with posters of the film (personal communication).

4. Of particular note here is that *Diablo*'s arrival on the scene created a seismic shift in terminology. As one games journalist observed, "prior to 1996 . . . the term 'action RPG' described a number of other games and styles, foremost of which was *The Legend of Zelda*. Such has been the impact of *Diablo* that the Zelda series has been entirely recategorized as 'action adventure'" (Parish 2012).

5. A notable innovation is the inclusion of tower defence mechanics at key points in the story, which was made optional by the time *The Final Cut* came out, to preserve the flow of gameplay for people who thought it an unwelcome distraction. Nonetheless, the tower defence segments seem to have had staying power within the studio, prompting the release of a game exclusively devoted to the mechanic in *Deathtrap* (2015).

6. An earlier draft of the paper drew a direct connection between the *Warhammer 40,000* universe's Dreadknights and the game's Dreadknechts. However, Viktor Juhász, narrative designer of the series indicated that no references to WH40K property were intended at the time (personal communication). This did not prevent Neocore to later go on to design a WH40K action-RPG, *Warhammer 40,000 Inquisitor – Martyr* (2018).

7. The Hungarian demonym for the Hungarian people is "Magyar," and the name of the country is "Magyarország." Magyarisation, therefore, denotes the cultural imperial tactic of suppressing other ethnic identities in favour of the dominant Magyar culture and language.

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Hungarian Rhapsodies: A Survey of the Alternate Histories of an Isolated Literary Corpus

Ádám Gerencsér

Introduction

It is oft repeated that humankind is growing into a global village, and that seems certainly true for speculative fiction. We may pick up translated works from regions otherwise unfamiliar to us, but easily disregard their exotic origin, for the tropes of science fiction and fantasy therein will likely be of universal appeal. Science fiction, in particular, tends to be cosmopolitan in outlook and converge around contemporary or future-oriented concerns that are instantly recognizable to readers across the world. But what if a sub-genre were to buck this trend towards homogenisation and prove to be a wellspring of narrative diversity? Which brings us to the central premise of uchronia: "what if." Alternat(iv)e history, as it is better known, remains much more closely tied to national psyche and historical memory, thus appealing to familiarity with a local body of knowledge within an ethno-cultural setting which the author presumably shares with the reader. Within this context, Hungarian alternate history provides an interesting case study into the speculative preoccupations of a relatively isolated cultural topography. Examining the uchronia dreamt up by practitioners of a linguistically insular body of literature may help to shed fresh light on paths less frequently trodden in the dominant English mainstream of the sub-genre.

Alternate History à la hongroise?

Hungarian attempts to define the nation's identity in terms other than language made the search for its place in history a recurring theme in all literary genres. The second half of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries are generally considered a golden age of Hungarian narrative literature, a period that gave rise to several masterworks of early SF and future history (e.g., by Frigyes Karinthy and Mór Jókai, respectively). Apart from a few tentative examples in short prose form, however, works of genuine alternate history did not emerge until the second half of the twentieth century. The sub-genre developed throughout the 1900s against a backdrop of a cultivated sense of insularity within the Magyar microcosm surrounded by unrelated languages and hostile political entities, and subsequently as part of speculative literature being one of the few available outlets of counter-culture seeking to skirt the censorship prevalent in Soviet-occupied Hungary. This led to uchronia arising as a form of patriotic literary introspection, enticing readers with visions of how history could (or 'should') have turned out for the better.

While the uchronic sub-genre itself is rarely the subject of academic discourse, the very existence of a Hungarian ethnocultural island in a sea of Indo-Europeans is at times perceived to be akin to the setting of an alternate history scenario. As historian Ferenc Glatz puts it in István

Szakály's 2001 documentary *1000 évről 100 percben* [Across 1000 Years In 100 Minutes], Hungary lost every war over the past three centuries and yet it still exists: What is that if not an unlikely success story?

Historiography (the writing of history) is, among other things, also about claiming ownership over the historical narrative, particularly in societies where one's interpretation of the past actively informs their political allegiances. Alternate history, then, certainly in a Hungarian context, is a means of challenging 'mainstream' (commonly accepted) historical narratives by imagining that familiar turning points could have had radically different outcomes or by committing cultural sacrilege through the injection of satirical melodrama into previously hallowed historiographic subjects. As János M. Rainer puts it in his essay *Mi lehetett volna, ha…?* [What could have been, if…?], the resilience of "communicative memory" is a reason for the ongoing popularity of alternate histories: history remains "the terrain onto which political forces seek to map their identities," and use the debates of the present day to "offer historical closure for their voters in a manner they consider most beneficial to their respective cause" (Cserna-Szabó, 2016, 228).[1] Alternate history, in this sense, is therefore a form of applied hindsight, often tinted with a blend of melancholia and ideology.

The Dawn of Alternate Hungarys

The sub-genre itself may be further subdivided by themes, but also by the temporal mechanisms whereby the author introduces the alteration. Therefore, before addressing the historical themes themselves, it is interesting to note that according to the narrative taxonomy, almost all Hungarian alternate histories fall into either of the two categories of pure uchronia or time-travel alteration.[2] In the former, a past event unfolds differently from the reader's historical continuum, but for the purposes of the fictional universe and its inhabitants, their timeline is the only real one (as opposed to multiverse fiction). In the latter, our consensus reality may be the baseline, but a significant change is introduced by means of time travel, and the story explores the branching paths thus established.

The earliest example in Hungarian literature that we can consider uchronia intimates no interference by time travellers, but features another form of alternate science: alchemy. *Két Hajó* [The Two Ships] by Frigyes Karinthy, published in 1915, describes the point of departure as follows: in 1492, Columbus agrees to a wager with the mystic Synesius, and instead of Christian missionaries, he takes alchemists on his voyage to the New World. In this proto-uchronia, however, while the voyage itself is narrated, the consequences are merely hinted at in passing. Incidentally, this early example was also odd in its cosmopolitan focus—with the tragic consequences of World War I and Hungary's subsequent territorial division and economic impoverishment, the country's writers soon turned inwards to past glories and missed opportunities closer to home. Thereafter, the main themes covered by the emerging corpus of Hungarian uchronia ranged from the arcana of medieval and religious history (including the

Reformation and Islamic Conquest), to alternate outcomes of the 1848 Spring of Nations, the World Wars, and the Cold War.

During this process of accumulation, the Hungarian alternate history sub-genre accomplished its arguably most notable 'achievement': it brought forth the world's earliest known example of a novel based on the premise of an Axis victory in World War II, which can be properly considered alternate history.[3] László Gáspár's *Mi, I. Adolf* [We, Adolf the First] is undeservedly obscure. The novel fits into a long tradition whereby the amount of attention received by a work often stands in no direct relation to its literary merit. Previously unreviewed by Western philology, Éric B. Henriet estimated in 2004 that this was likely the earliest 'Hitler wins' story (205), though he was unable to quote it or provide a full reference. The novel is remarkable not only because of its genre pioneer status, but also for its stylistic choices. If one were pressed to draw parallels, Olaf Stapledon's seminal masterpiece Starmaker (1937) would come to mind, but with a healthy dose of satire reminiscent of Karel Čapek's *Válka s Mloky* [War with the Newts] (1936). Dialogues are secondary, and where they appear, take the form of transcripts of official proceedings, quotes attributed to famous personalities, or long, descriptive exposés. Thus, world-building (or, in this case, constructing the intricate political, geostrategic and technological details of this alternate timeline) takes centre stage. The novel itself follows the course of a much longer and even more devastating World War II which carries on with varying intensity (including an intermittent period of 'Cold War,' another first use of a trope which has since become commonplace in alternate history, c.f. Philip K. Dick's *The Man in the High Castle*) until March 1965, culminating in a thermonuclear exchange which destroys Berlin and indirectly leads to Adolf Hitler's death.[4]

The original edition was published in November 1945, under forbiddingly challenging circumstances amidst the ruins of the Hungarian capital. Given the noticeable number of spelling mistakes (corrected in later print runs) and the author's apparent familiarity with the effects of urban warfare (the 100-day Soviet siege of Budapest in the winter of 1944), and the atomic bombs, it is very likely that the manuscript was completed in the summer and autumn of 1945, and rushed to press as soon as printing capacity was available. It remains a mystery whether the author (or his publisher) was aware of the truly pioneering nature of his work.

The Threefold Path of Hungarian Uchronia

In the post-war decades, which we might call the Modern Era of Hungarian publishing, with large, state-owned (or state-sanctioned) printing houses and popular, annual book fairs providing a steady stream of new titles, alternate histories start to appear on a more regular basis. These take the form of both novels and short stories, the latter particularly in journals such as Galaktika, the leading Hungarian speculative magazine at the time.[5] Allowing for a measure of abstraction, uchronia of the Modern Era tend to follow one of the following three common narrative approaches:

'Serious' alternate history

At the 'academic' end of alternate history that still falls within the realm of fiction, works in this category explore the consequences of major historical departure points, not for satirical nor purely narrative reasons, but as an earnest thought experiment, with story or plot development, if any, being purely secondary. The most notable Hungarian-language example of 'serious' alternate history in epistolary form was a fictional essay written around the 1960s—in prison. Hungarian politician and academic István Bibó was held by the Socialist regime in the Vác penitentiary for political crimes, particularly his role in the 1956 Uprising. The memorandum in question, which was only published posthumously in 1990 after the abolition of Soviet censorship, purports to summarize a debate between the Canon of Vác and a bishop set in an alternate timeline wherein the Roman Catholic church managed to reconcile its internal differences in the sixteenth century and thus avoided the schism of the Reformation.

In a couple of brief pages, the essay then scales a dizzying landscape of historical, philosophical, and social ideas that shape a Central Europe radically different from (and, certainly from the author's perspective, more liveable than) the reality of the 1960s. Brimming with delicious irony and duplicitous references (what today one would call 'Easter eggs'), from the Communist Manifesto turning into a Papal Encyclical to a Hungarian constitutional monarchy ruled by a branch of the Polish Catholic dynasty, Bibó's work even provides a sort of meta-definition of uchronia itself, before concluding with a (theologically) devastating twist.

National self-irony

Perhaps the most prevalent form by volume of publications, satirical alternative history attempts to draw attention to the vicissitudes of past or present circumstances while 'taking the edge off' through enveloping its message in an oft melancholy, yet ultimately ironic tone. This can often be seen as the least confrontational manner in which to engage critically with events in the more recent past, which may be inextricably linked to personal tragedies in the families of many readers.6 A prime example of this gently ironic approach is Csaba Gábor Trenka's *Egyenlítői Magyar Afrika* [Hungarian Equatorial Africa] published in 1988. Narrated in the form of a retrospective diary, the author recounts the narrator's adolescence and adult career as a lowly government official raised and employed in a forlorn Central African colony allocated to Hungary by a German Reich victorious in World War II. Hungary, a landlocked state with little previous naval or colonial experience, is (at times comically) exposed as a half-hearted administrator of an overseas territory larger than its home provinces. Readers at the time were unlikely to miss the irony pervading the novel, as a thinly veiled criticism of the ostensibly benevolent, yet blatantly incompetent and counterproductive Socialist regime forced onto Hungary by its Soviet occupiers throughout the author's life up to the publication of his novel.

Colonial literature is almost entirely absent in the Hungarian literary corpus, yet there is little evidence of the author 'borrowing' from Western European models. Rather, the distinct self-irony of Eastern European dissident voices from the era of the Iron Curtain is transplanted

into an exotic, yet familiar environment, where one-party rule allocates favours and scarce resources on the basis of party loyalty as well as social and ethnic classes. It is interesting to note that the same author explores another fairly unusual historical scenario in a much more recent novel: *Place Rimbaud* (2013) embeds Hungary in a Europe where France is both politically and culturally dominant after its victory in the Napoleonic Wars. On account of its recourse to magic and somewhat implausible 'deus ex machina' elements, one could arguably include the novel with the earliest point of departure in this category as well: *Ezüst félhold blues* [Silver Crescent Blues] (1990) by András Gáspár (no relation to László Gáspár). In the first century BC, tectonic plate movements open up a permanent body of water between Africa and the Middle East. With the direct land connection between Egypt and the Holy Land thus removed, the direction of the main thrust of Islam's early expansion takes a different direction and Muslim conquest arrives earlier in Eastern Europe than in our timeline. Long centuries of occupation and the successful assimilation of the Balkans lead to twentieth-century Hungary being a firmly integrated part of the Islamic world, with Buda-Pest as its Western-most outpost.

At the other end of the spectrum, stories and novels with the most recent point of departure are those where the Socialist regime never falls—and these inevitably tend to include ironic elements. One such endeavour at novel length is Zoltán László's *Hiperballada* [Hyper Ballad] first published in 1998, and in reworked forms in 2005 and 2011, where the historical timeline follows real-world events until the 1960s, but thereafter imagines a Soviet Union which undertakes the necessary reforms to ensure its lead in the technological space race. Therefore, its satellites, such as the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party, remain in power well into the twenty-first century.

Consolation literature

Although rarely played 'straight,' a third strand of uchronia attempts to offer comfort and compensation, at least in imaginary form, for perceived historical slights or calamities. Such stories, due to their tendency to entice and titillate readers with particularly strong patriotic leanings, often choose to eschew abstractions and opt for a relatively uncomplicated style with a straight-forward narrative. Among such works, the best-selling novel is Bence Pintér and Máté Pintér's *A szivarhajó utolsó útja* [The Airship's Last Journey] (2012). The novel conjures up a Golden Age of political prowess and economic might following Hungary's counterfactual victory in its War of Independence (1848–49) to leave the Austrian Empire. The events of the book are set two generations later, in the "Danube Confederation," a federal republic founded by Lajos Kossuth (the ill-fated leader of Hungary's nineteenth-century revolution). The story itself employs the tropes of conventional spy thrillers, here centred around the pursuit of secret military plans for building a fleet of armed airships.

Aimed at a younger readership, the adventurous plot is nonetheless punctuated with fictional newspaper reports and quotes from in-universe history books to build an alternate geopolitical landscape consistently upbeat about Hungary's prospects in this 'better timeline.' A map included in the print edition shows the territory of the Confederation stretching from Bavaria to the Black

Sea, and one of the quotes in the book describes the state as having been richly endowed with resources and one of the fastest developing economies in Europe at the end of the nineteenth century, strong enough to embark on an attempt to colonise Egypt. These clearly address many of the 'pain-points' of Hungarians who tend to be dissatisfied with the historical achievements of the country when compared to its Western European cousins.

Latest Development: Alternate History Moves into the Mainstream

In recent years, the most significant development in the sub-genre's Hungarian field is the public success and critical acclaim garnered by two alternate history anthologies which had finally put this arcane creative niche firmly on the literary map. The first of the two was published in 2016 by Cser Kiadó under the title *A Másik Forradalom – Alternatív Ötvenhat* [The Other Revolution – Alternative '56]. Its appearance was timed to commemorate the sixtieth anniversary of the 1956 Uprising against the socialist dictatorship imposed by the Soviet occupation of Hungary after World War II. While the anthology included a wide range of approaches and angles, and about half the stories therein would rather fall in the categories of secret histories, period parodies, magical realism, and time-travel tales, the themed volume nonetheless contained noteworthy contributions to the alternate history genre.

For instance, Tibor Bödőcs's pastiche with the rather complex title of *Márai Sándor: Napló – részletek – (Részlet)* [Sándor Márai: Diary Excerpts – An excerpt], falls into the epistolary sub-genre. The famous emigré author Márai exercises his biting social critique not in self-imposed Italian and American exile, but in a Hungary 'liberated' by the Western Allies and inundated with the vicissitudes of Capitalist consumerism. In *Foxtrott*, György Dragomán imagines the victory of the 1956 Uprising ensured by the simultaneous rising of 'forest brothers' and criminal gangs hiding out in the Carpathian Mountains, whose insurrection hinders the counter-attack of the Soviet war machine. In a particularly interesting piece, *Forradalmi Naptár* [Revolutionary Calendar], Viktor Horváth offers a chronological account, broken down by calendar days, of the 1956 Uprising. While the revolution is ultimately defeated, it comes about through the Red Army mobilizing indentured people of colour against the indigenous Magyar population, thus the reader eventually pieces together that a major point of historical alteration must have occurred much earlier, since Hungarian society is portrayed as being stratified along class distinctions and racial lines reminiscent of nineteenth-century America—thus in effect constituting a work of demographic uchronia.

The publishing house timed its second anthology for the centenary of the Treaty of Trianon, which led to the loss of up to two-thirds of Hungary's territory and population, and became the cornerstone of Hungarian historical grievances for a century. Including historical studies and uchronic fiction from the *crème* of Hungarian speculative authors, the 2020 anthology sets the tone with its title *Nézzünk bizakodva a múltba!* [Let Us Hope For A Better Past!]. The volume's stories range from straight-forward consolation literature to metaphysically challenging pieces,

like Sándor Szélesi's *A volt-kávéfolt* [The Ex-coffee Stain], which uses the negotiation of the post-war order as the backdrop of its extrapolation of higher forces taking the reins of human history.

In *Expanzió* [Expansion] by László Csabai, the insurgents who declare a "Hungarian People's Republic" in 1919 receive military support from Lenin's nascent Soviet Union, which intervenes in the Carpathian basin despite still fighting its own civil war in Russia. The implied result hinted at in the story is an enduring radical socialist state in Central-Eastern Europe allied to the USSR, decades before the start of the Cold War in real history. By stark contrast, in Réka Mán-Várhegyi's *Szívek közönye* [The Indifference of Hearts], the aging members of a Hungarian urban resistance group reluctantly continue a low-intensity insurrection against the governments of neighbouring countries amongst whom the entirety of Hungary's territory was divided post-World War I. Yet positive alterations are far from absent. *Szani tévedése* [Szani's Mistake] by László Imre Horváth is akin to uchronia wrapped within another ambiguous alternate history scenario, wherein Miklós Radnóti (a prominent poet murdered by National Socialists in the closing months of World War II) becomes prime minister and the persecution of Hungarian Jews during the Holocaust haunts only the dreams of the eponymous character. Both levity as well as consolation are offered by *III. Péter király szövegírója* [King Peter III's Speech Writer] by Zsolt Kácsor, one of the highlights of the anthology. The epistolary piece, heavily laden with historical irony, imagines Péter Eszterházy (a postmodern author of aristocratic lineage) as king of Hungary in the 1970s. The tale itself takes the form of the royal speech writer's resignation letter, setting out the absurdity of King Péter's intention to publish a piece of alternate history that would detail the timeline as it came to pass in reality, complete with the abolition of the monarchy and the country's long Soviet occupation.

By gathering some of Hungary's best-selling authors, the above two volumes have almost single-handedly propelled the alternate history genre into the limelight. The establishment of uchronic writing within the literary mainstream was confirmed by the prominent reception and even anticipation of the second anthology by the Hungarian literary press, from *Élet és Irodalom* to *Magyar Hang*, from *Népszava* to *Magyar Narancs*.[7] In this context, it is worth noting that ancillary sub-genres such as secret histories are thriving, too, a prime practitioner of which is Sándor Szélesi, one of the most widely read contemporary Hungarian SF authors. In his explicitly satirical 2016 novel co-authored with László Erdős, *Sztálin aki egyszer megmentette a világot* [Stalin Who Once Saved The World], the infamous Soviet leader survives into the 1980s and shapes the history of the Cold War from behind the scenes. Thus, the novel navigates the slipstream between alternate history proper and secret history, with the overt intention to keep the reader guessing which of the sprawling list of personae are historical and which are imaginary, along with the cultural references to places, events, even signature dishes of a restaurant most Hungarian readers would be familiar with (the *Gundel* in Budapest).

To Be Continued . . .

As we have seen, alternate history appears to meet different needs or demands in a relatively small, isolated literary corpus, as compared to large languages that have at some point played a

dominant role on the world stage. In Hungarian literature, the uchronic niche serves a threefold purpose: (a) as a means for seriously exploring what might have been; (b) as a vehicle for satirical or melancholy introspection, and (c) as a source of bitter-sweet consolation. Surveys of the alternate histories of other rarely treated literary corpora might reveal similar tendencies, which are however tempered by different national circumstances. This is the case for Romania, for instance, whose territorial gains in the twentieth century's two great wars left its literature with different issues to deal with as compared to Hungary's experience of defeat and crippling losses of land, population and status.8 Of similar interest would be cross-referencing the alternate histories of 'dominant' versus 'isolated' corpora with uchronia focussing on nations and states that aren't merely diminished in importance, but have ceased to exist altogether as geopolitical entities, e.g., Byzantine or Native American alternate histories. Perhaps in an alternate timeline, this essay would have surveyed the rich tomes of Constantinople's Eastern Roman National Library, searching for imaginary tales about a long-forgotten Finno-Ugric people who had once inhabited the Carpathian basin.

As my essay above demonstrates, however, these various approaches would arguably all lead to a rather counterintuitive conclusion. Uchronia, in their multitude of insular voices, often do not speak to a common cosmopolitan audience, but rather address the retrospective concerns and regrets of specific communities. Thus, it is precisely by virtue of its localised focus, and limited accessibility to those unfamiliar with the given cultural context, that the alternate history sub-genre makes a unique contribution to the diversity of speculative fiction.

Notes

1. All translations from Hungarian works are my own.

2. See Karen Hellekson's taxonomy: (1) "the nexus story, which includes time-travel-timepolicing stories and battle stories"; (2) "the true alternate, which may include alternate histories that posit different physical laws"; and (3) "the parallel worlds story." (2001, 5).

3. This contrasts with speculative or future history, i.e., works about a theoretically possible National Socialist victory written while the war was still ong.

4. For a detailed plot synopsis and a confirmation of Henriet's hypothesis as to Gáspár's being the earliest such known uchronic work, see my essay on Hungarian alternate history in *Revista Hélice*, vol. III, issue 6.

5. Note, meanwhile, that to this day Hungarian cinema remains almost entirely untouched by alternate history.

6. Call to mind, for instance, the mass sexual violence and arbitrary deportation prevalent during the breakdown of society that ensued in the wake of Hungary's Soviet invasion, which traumatized wide swathes of the population and would have informed readers' attitudes during the following decades.

7. For some of these reviews available online (in Hungarian), see: https://nepszava.hu/3080433_vala-jovendo-nezzunk-bizakodva-a-multba--alternativ-trianon; https://www.es.hu/cikk/2020-05-22/karolyi-csaba/trianon-novellak.html.

8. For an overview of comparative developments in Romanian SF, see Rodríguez, "A Note on Romanian Science Fiction Literature from Past to Present", in: *Sci Phi Journal*, 2019/3

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Undead Culture in the East: The Hungarian Vampire Negotiating the National Past in *Comrade Drakulich*

Ildikó Limpár

Western culture's undead renaissance has a spectacular effect on European culture, and it has brought about nation-specific variations in Hungary. But while in the past two decades the West has been more invested in the vampire lover than in the political vampire (who may be as much of a seducer as the revenant in the supernatural romances), Hungary has rediscovered the political potentials of the bloodsucking undead. This phenomenon is almost self-explanatory: firstly, the figure of the vampire—the hybrid creature that is both living and dead—is a genuinely apt signifier of the haunting past that needs to be confronted and settled; and secondly, Hungary has its own historical connections to the literary vampire, as Transylvania, homeland of Dracula, used to be part of Hungary but was lost with the Treaty of Trianon in 1920. Therefore, spinning narratives with the vampire appears as a most natural Hungarian method to re-create fictive, alternative pasts to travel back and forth and thereby "harass" the present (Miklósvölgyi and Nemes). Nemes explains that practicing "a type of spectral retrofuturism, a returning which is not quite a repetition" (qtd. in Harrison, "Eastern Europe's" n.p.) is what Hungarofuturism aims to do in order to oppose the Hungarian government's essentializing view of what it means to be Hungarian (Harrison, "How a Futurist" n.p.) and to offer a new perspective on Hungarianness.

Such literary endeavors include Noémi Szécsi's parodistic novel *Finnugor vámpír* (2002) [*The Finno-Ugrian Vampire*, 2012] and Szabolcs Benedek's *Vérgróf* [Blood Count] trilogy (2012–2013),[1] both working with historical settings and the character of the vampire to radically re-imagine history, as well as Ágnes Gaura's ongoing *Borbála Borbíró* series (2012–),[2] set in a contemporary, alternative Hungary and regularly using vampire characters to reminisce and comment about the past and thus remythologize both the national identity and the present. Among these works, Benedek's lacks an ironical stance, while both Szécsi and Gaura use heavy irony as a tool to dismantle enforced, essentializing concepts about Hungarianness;[3] yet, independently of the authors' artistic techniques (and the date of their publication), they qualify as Hungarofuturist works inasmuch as they contribute to "an identity-poetic experiment in radical imagination, through which an emergent minority identity can feed into a strategy of post-ironic overidentification" (Nemes, qtd. in Harrison, "Eastern Europe's" n.p.). The same applies for the subject matter of the present study, the satirical vampire movie *Comrade Drakulich*, released in 2019 but set in 1972, which works to recreate a fictional past by connecting the protagonist vampire to the communist-socialist so-called Kádár era. While this film clearly aims at providing a critical view on a much debated, dark era of Hungarian history, I argue that its effort to utilize the motif of the undead comments equally on the Hungarian "official," that is, the government-

propagated *attitude* to its national past and this way defies the hegemonic, nationalist discourse about a normative, prescribed Hungarianness that stems from an interpretation of tradition and thus history.

As follows from the above, in order to put the film into context, it is necessary to provide a little insight into how the Kádár era and the present Orbán-regime relate to each other. Hungary's current political situation is defined by Prime Minister Victor Orbán, who started out as a young, reform politician (just like János Kádár—a fact that will be of importance later in this study). His political speech in 1989 played an important role in liberating Hungary from the Soviet military presence in 1989. However, now he is frequently criticized for having abandoned the values he fought for and seen as an illiberal,[4] far right politician, whose populist politics relies on Hungarian nationalism.[5] Having an absolute majority in the parliament, he neglected any consultation with the opposition and civil organizations when he passed the new Fundamental Law on January 1, 2012, with which he "set out the vision of a Christian-conservative political community, while also laying the groundwork for political centralization" (Bíró-Nagy), and he is the only European Union leader who has been identified as a "press freedom predator" on the list compiled by Reporters Without Borders (Sugue).

Based on his anti-democratic political maneuvers to monopolize power, Orbán is often compared to János Kádár, the symbolic figure of the dictatorial one-party regime of socialism; therefore, when a satire on the Kádár-regime is created, such as in the film *Comrade Drakulich*, several issues have very strong resonances to the contemporary audience—even to those young movie-goers who were not yet born when the one-party system was the only system imaginable in Hungary. Such accentuated issues are a strong attachment to the East and a strong criticism of western liberalism and capitalism. Hungary used to be under Soviet political-military influence after the Second World War, and the first steps towards an independent Hungary were made after 1989 when the Russian soldiers were sent home and Hungary sought political alliance with the West. However, this political opening towards the West has been slowly undone by Orbán since 2010. His rhetoric stresses an irresolvable conflict between Hungary and the West, always blaming Western forces, more notably the European Union or George Soros, as powers aiming at weakening the national identity and Hungary's national power.

Comrade Drakulich should be watched and understood in this context, as it adapts well-known Dracula-motifs, such as the East-West opposition and the threat of colonization to a specifically Hungarian situation. The movie is set in 1972, when Hungary was still under direct Soviet political influence, and János Kádár was General Secretary of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party. Kádár was appointed to lead Hungary after the 1956 revolution that failed to succeed in getting rid of the Soviet occupation. The Kádár era is characterized by Hungary's isolation from the West; it is an era when everything that comes from the West was deemed suspicious and potentially dangerous; that is, the West is successfully demonized and monsterized by a monstrous communist leadership—the very idea that the film is rooted in. However, while the first phase of the Kádár era is a clear case of ruthless dictatorship, due to Kádár's transition into what may be

termed as a "liberal communist," people tend to remember his longer, second phase of his thirty-two-year-long term; therefore, a lot of people look back on the more liberal communist years of the 1970s and 80s with nostalgia.

This nostalgic sentiment and the parallels between Kádár's and Orbán's attitudes to the West and the East are components that allow one to see *Comrade Drakulich* as an entertaining satire about Hungary's past and present, at which one is allowed to laugh. The East-West tension is dramatized by the vampire character, called Béla Fábián in the movie. The name Béla evokes Béla Lugosi, who had to leave Hungary in 1919 due to his former communist political activities and became well known for his repeated portrayal of Dracula in Hollywood. "Comrade Drakulich," whose name provides the title, surprisingly, is never uttered in the movie. Yet it informs the audience of what they may expect: "comrade" references the communist past, and "Drakulich" hints at the Dracula-motif, as well as the Russian influence with the characteristic Slavic name ending. The name suggests the party's hope that Fábián will prove to be a good comrade and will share the secret of his longevity with the Soviets. It also ironically questions what it means to be a good comrade in such a political situation, since Béla Fábián, just like Béla Lugosi, is a Hungarian communist and an ex-patriate. He used to be friends with all those old politicians who are now, in the diegetic present, in power. Once it became evident that the revolution in 1956 would not receive Western military support and was thus doomed to fail, they quickly gave up their political and moral principles and proved themselves to be good comrades for the Soviets, who again tightened their grasp on Hungary. Fábián, however, stayed true to his political beliefs and left the country in 1956 to flee to anti-Soviet Cuba, which sympathized with the Hungarian revolution and was reluctant to officially acknowledge the new Hungarian government (Horváth 64). The film does not explain when and why exactly Fábián moved to America from Cuba after 1959, but his obscure biography supports the image of the ideologically consistent comrade: as the political tension between Cuba and the United States gradually grew in the early 1960s and Cuba opened towards Muscovite power (Horváth 56–61), the only logical move for Fábián was to migrate from Cuba to the United States, the greatest Western power opposing the Soviet Union.

The plot revolves around the identity of Fábián, who returns to Hungary to organize a nationwide blood drive for the Vietnamese (who fight against the Americans at that time, which makes the Vietnam War subtly part of the East-West conflict). While Fábián's proclaimed goal to help the Vietnamese comrades is a truly communist one, the Hungarian secret police is given the task to follow him and figure out if he is a Western spy. The agents quickly note the surprising youth and the strange behavior of the old Western comrade, so the color red—the color of communism—shifts to represent vampirism, thanks to Fábián's habit of always drinking blood (camouflaged as some red soft drink) and driving his red Mustang representing Western freedom, a threat to the communist regime. To complete the symbolism, the agents give him the code name "Veres" (which means "deep red"[6] and is a common Hungarian family name) even before he could be identified as a vampire.

The English language film poster. Note the Dracula-motif as a shadow in the background.
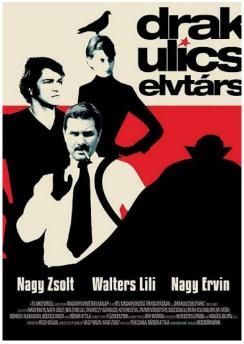
The surveillance operation mostly relies on the work of two people, whose names are, again, of importance. Trusted to lead the operation is László Kun, evoking Hungarian history in various ways. László is the Hungarian version for Ladislaus, while Kun means Cuman. These two names together reference the historical figure Ladislaus the Cuman, a thirteenth-century King of Hungary, who allied with the pagan Cumans in Christian Hungary—a relationship that Kun's serving the communists in a once religious country may subtly allude to. Yet Kun has become a wide-spread surname in Hungary, and another historical figure who may be relevant in the film's context bore this name: Béla Kun, leader of the Council Republic of Hungary in 1919, who in the Kádár era was considered a true communist hero and a martyr (as he had been ordered executed by Stalin in 1938). The other secret service agent in the surveillance operation is Kun's life partner, Mária Magyar, whose name references the whole of Hungary: "Magyar" means "Hungarian," and it is, again, a common family name. Mária is the Hungarian version of Mary; moreover, Hungary is also called Mária's country (Regnum Marianum in old Latin texts)—an allusion to the tradition which holds that before his death, Hungary's first king, Stephen I, dedicated the country to the Virgin Mary, as he had no heir of his own. This may be important to note because the communist regime after World War II did not tolerate religions, persecuted the churches, and discarded the idea that Hungary was under the Virgin Mary's protection so much so that it even tore down the Regnum Marianum Church in Budapest in 1951. Even though Magyar and Kun are a couple, their names reveal the conflict in how they relate to their mission: motivated partly by jealousy, Kun wants to serve the state effectively and capture Fábián as quickly as possible, while Magyar, under Fábián's seductive effect, ends up questioning the motivations behind her instructions and starts working on saving the vampire. Her resistance to serve the state faithfully demonstrates deviance from what is normative Hungarian behaviour in the Kádár era.

The power dynamics between Fábián and Mária are demonstrated both via their private life—most importantly, their sex scenes—as well as by focusing on Magyar's agency in a dominantly male working environment, where men are her superiors, and women can only work in various subordinate positions. László is shown as dominant in all areas: as lover—on top during sex—and as a senior agent who later also becomes Mária's superior during the secret police operation in which Mária is a bait for the suspicious Western visitor. Magyar's emphatic lack of agency as an agent in the first half of the film is also a nod towards Orbán's misogynistic politics that systematically undercuts women's equality in Hungary.[7] The open male chauvinism directed against Magyar from her boss, Comrade Cserkó, does not refrain from extensive body-shaming and objectification, which embarrasses the also-present Kun only because another man gets to look at his lover's legs—the act is seen by him as a violation of his property, not as a gesture that somehow insults Magyar as a person. Other than that, the whole scene when Magyar's body is measured up for the task of seducing is presented as normalized: Cserkó's female secretary does not appear to find the scene in any sense awkward. Magyar does feel embarrassed but has learnt to obey the instructions coming from her (male) superiors. Accordingly, when she is given the task of escorting Fábián and then seducing him, making sure they exchange kisses, she does not question the orders and tries to do her best in achieving the expected results.

Magyar's behavior, however, radically changes after she has spent some time with Fábián: she demonstrates her agency in various walks of life. Instead of following instructions blindly, she has her own initiative and takes control of the operation, which is neatly contrasted with Kun's incompetence, emphasized in conjunction with his jealousy. Béla's vampirism does not even need a kiss to transform the female agent, Magyar's feelings towards her partner. Kun famously underperforms in bed, as even the neighbors are aware, whereas the vampire's erotic vibes are irresistible, so this inevitably creates tension in the agents' love relationship—and a clear shift in their sexual life. In their brief sex scene at the beginning of the film, Magyar is a sexual object who does not receive much enjoyment from the intercourse that brings a quick orgasm for the man. Later, however, when Kun has become obsessed by the idea of his lover enjoying her task of seducing Fábián, Magyar uses sex as a tool to reach her aim: she takes advantage of Kun's utter jealousy and sexual arousal when she withholds satisfying Fábián until she gets his needed approval to work the way she wants to.

While including a number of sex scenes seems to serve mostly a comic purpose, it highlights the role of the vampire both as a sexual threat[8] and as a colonizing power[9]—two anxieties that Dracula, whose character helps Kun identify Fábián as a revenant, embodies. While Dracula attacks from the East, Fábián is a Western incarnation, but the terror he represents is of similar nature: his Western "spirit" (if one may use this term for a vampire at all) infiltrates communist Hungary and disrupts order. It poses a threat especially to the women, whom Drakulich—just as his literary predecessor—can easily seduce. In Stoker's *Dracula*, the vampire's power to transform modest Victorian women into sexual beings and monstrous predators who lack the instinct to become (not good comrades but) good wives and mothers shakes the foundations of Victorian

society. In *Comrade Drakulich*, Fábián manages to turn Magyar into a person who is able to resist the homogenizing power of the communists. In alliance with Fábián, she disturbs the order of the world that seemed unshakeable.

A more stylized Hungarian poster creates alliance by the use of black clothes among Magyar, Fábián, and Dracula and creates a contrast between this group of characters and Kun, dressed in white.

Magyar's transformation into a revolutionary has various stages and manifestations and it goes hand in hand with her liberation as a woman. Not only does her more active role in sex support her evolution in this respect but also her growing agency in her work; and when she realizes that she does not want to be an attachment to Kun's life to prove the male agent's masculinity, she can finally be her true, authentic self. The climax of this process comes when she gets to drive Fábián's symbolic red Mustang, as cars are recurring components of constructing and deconstructing gender stereotypes in the film. Magyar's extensive knowledge of the Volvo's mechanical system mocks stereotypical gender conceptions and is funnily contrasted with the scene in which Kun is forced to run after his own car in a surveillance situation, because he forgot to pull the handbrake. Yet despite her intellectual ability and her competence, Magyar's job is to play the role of a stereotypical woman, the seducer, relying mostly on her body and not on her mind. However, we soon learn that she is quick to think and act well even in unexpected situations (unlike Kun, who tends to make absurd decisions) and thus driving the car representing western freedom symbolically highlights her final liberation, her competence in a men's world and her act of rebellion against the communist state and the sexist world. The scene also foreshadows her transformation into a vampire: as an independently thinking woman with agency, she is a monster who embodies the transgressions the communist state does not tolerate.[10]

Beyond its function as a source of humor and a tool to elicit a critical reaction from both Magyar and the spectators to the patriarchal system (of not only the Kádár era but also of the cultural moment that produced Fábián as a monster, that is, the Orbán era), the emphasis on the sexist milieu as inseparable from the state apparatus symbolically suggests the impotence of the political system. The male agents' misogyny seems to result from the need to compensate for the overall inefficiency that these men serving this unproductive system display. The lack of competence displayed by the secret police is linked to a problematic masculinity, a discrepancy between image and action. Kun's weak performance in bed parallels his weak performance as an agent, and his weak performance as a "bodybuilder" to get into shape: one of the highlights of the movie are those few seconds in which Kun's training offers a fine parody of Rocky Balboa's iconic training scene in *Rocky IV*.[11] Early in the film another male agent also demonstrates his unprofessional attitude to his job when he misses Fábián's early arrival because of a blow job that he enjoys during the secret operation. All these are symptoms whose symbolic significance is summed up by comrade Kádár himself after he has been strongly kicked in the loins several times, but his body shows no reaction to the painful attack. His penis is numb, but he "can still fuck," as he assures—an old joke implied here about what politicians have been doing to the Hungarian nation and what state Hungary is in after all this activity. From this respective it is of particular importance that in the film women are not shown enjoying sex and their role is to only provide pleasure for the men—the notable exception being when Fábian has sex with the Vietnamese agent and everyone is listening to the woman's elongated orgasm.

Fábián disrupts order both on the private and on the societal level. His incompatibility with the communist Hungarian world manifests in his garlic intolerance: he is simply unable to coexist with a country in which people tend to oversaturate everything with garlic. Yet, he still offers his cooperation, contingent on Kádár's apology for the events after the revolution of 1956—a personal trauma for Fábián and a historical trauma for Hungary, plunging the country into communist terror.

His offered cooperation, of course, is about longevity. It turns out that the all-knowing Soviet spy system has been aware of Béla's vampirism for some time, and they want a vampire to be sent over to them to assure the Soviet Union's leader Comrade Brezhnev's immortality, as his health has been on the decline. The real monster, it seems, then, is Soviet communism, which longs for immortality and attempts at monopolizing the color blood red. In this context "the constant sucking of the blood of the Western working class by the bourgeois class" (Neocleous 668) that Marx highlights is subverted: the Western vampire drinks hospital blood, has a liberating effect on the female agent, and turns Magyar into a vampire only to save her from death and offer her a new, even more liberated life;[12] in contrast, Brezhnev's attempt at becoming an everlasting vampire threatens the constant sucking of the blood of the Eastern working class by the Eastern political elite. This perspective is supported by Kádár's delusional confession at the end of the film, in which he explains that he does not want the vampire's bite for he always was, is and will be

Image from the movie, the blood drive setting.

everlasting—a speech that allows us to see the political present of Hungary as still being controlled by a reincarnation of the past's monstrous power.

As a satire, this movie ridicules the communist regime that the Soviets so much tried to preserve even when its failure had been evident for a long time. It mocks communists' naïve belief in the sustainability—a kind of immortality—of communism and it criticizes the impotent political system of the 1970s that seemed to freeze time in Hungary while the Western world produced spectacular social and economic developments. It otherizes and mocks the disturbing past—and offers a relief from the present by indirectly mocking Hungary's monstrous present with a comedy on the past reflecting on up-to-date political issues. Fábián as a vampire accentuates the paradoxical relation between contemporary Hungarian society and its devouring past. Consumption is at the center in the narrative: *Comrade Drakulich* aims at coming to terms with the traumatic past by turning it into an absurd comedy in which hardly anyone smiles or laughs (especially not when a political joke is told, so the spectators are given fair warning about the seriousness that underlies the comic treatment) and making it "consumable" by introducing the monster that consumes—radically reimagining the past with the help of the fantastic. The film underscores the predatory, oppressive aspects of communism that have been softened by the nostalgic sentiment; but by means of othering what is about to be lost to the national collective, the undead monster familiarizes and stabilizes the troublesome past that Hungarians should understand and come to terms with.

Notes

1. *A vérgróf* [The Blood Count] (Libri, 2012); *A vérgrófnő* [The Blood Countess] (Libri, 2012); *A vértanú* [The Martyr] (Libri, 2013).

2. *Vámpírok múzsája* [Muse of the Vampires] (Delta Vision, 2012); *Átkozott balszerencse* [Cursed Misfortune] (Delta Vision, 2013); *Lidércnyomás* [Nightmare] (Delta Vision, 2013), *Lángmarta örökség* [Flame-Touched Inheritance] (Delta Vision, 2014); *Attila koporsója* [Attila's Coffin] (Delta Vision, 2015).

3. C.f. the brief summary about the novel on Publishing Hungary, arguing that "through the character of the cosmopolitan vampire-grandmother it deconstructs the concepts of nation and homeland" ("Finnugor vámpír," my translation).

4. Orbán himself coined the term "illiberal democracy" in 2014 to define his political practice, and he clarified what he means by this in 2019, saying that "The essence of illiberal democracy is Christian liberty and the protection of Christian liberty" (qtd. in Kovács, n.p.).

5. For a more detailed picture, see Bíró-Nagy's article.

6. The most common and neutral word for red in Hungarian is "piros," whereas "Veres" is a variant of "vörös", which is the type of red Hungarians use in compounds that relate to the symbolism of communism, such as the red star ("vöröscsillag") or the Red Army (Vörös Hadsereg) or red flag, ("vörös lobogó," in contrast with the red in the Hungarian flag, which is always "piros") as well as for the color blood-red ("vérvörös"). "Veres", on top of all, differs only slightly in spelling from "véres," which specifically means "bloody" in English.

7. Besides his regular patronizing and misogynistic comments on women in his various media performances, Orbán is infamous, among other reasons, for banning Gender Studies in Hungary in 2018 (for details, see Oppenheim) and making it clear that, as his minister responsible for families explained in a notorious video, "women should relish their roles as child bearers and caregivers [… and] that Hungarian women shouldn't give up their 'privileges over some misguided fight for emancipation'" (Gall).

8. The vampire fangs' penetration into the body has been read as a metaphorical representation of sexual intercourse since Christopher Bentley's 1972 article on *Dracula*. For more detail, see Limpár 17.

9. For details on Dracula as a colonizer, see Arata's "The Occidental Tourist: *Dracula* and the Anxiety of Reverse Colonization," Bundrick's "Covered in Blood and Dirt: Industrial, Capital and Cultural Crisis in Red Rock and *Dracula*," and McKee's "Racialization, Capitalism, and Aesthetics in Stoker's *Dracula*."

10. On the monster's transgressive roles, see Cohen in more detail.

11. It adds to the humor that the scene is an anachronistic parody, as even the first part of the *Rocky* film series was made four years after the diegetic present of *Comrade Drakulich*. Kun's training, however, directly alludes to *Rocky IV* (1985), where Rocky's opponent is from the USSR. The differences in training circumstances are the highlighted part of the film: the Russian boxer trains in an advanced training facility and uses steroids to boost his strength, while Rocky trains in nature in Siberia; therefore, Kun's parodical moves evoke the West-East conflict and the "natural" method of his training becomes not the presentation of

the perseverance and the noble fairness of his play, as for Rocky Balboa in *Rocky IV*, but a representation of communist Hungary's lack of fitness culture and Kun's failure to ever reach Rocky's representative masculine features.

12. That is to say, to let "Birdy," (which is the code name Magyar receives from the secret police) out of her cage.

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Lemon Juicers in Space: *The Adventures of Pirx* (1972–1973)

Daniel Panka

One critic jokingly describes it "[a]s if Ed Wood was on mushrooms and collaborated with Andy Warhol to remake *2001: A Space Odyssey* for television" (Sepsi 61); another claims that "even mentioning its title elicits death screams" and hopes that "its copies are hiding under thick dust in a storage room" (Géczi 4).[1] Besides introducing what I believe to be an important part of Hungarian science fiction television history, I will also attempt to explain why *The Adventures of Pirx* failed to achieve the same appeal as similar SF works of its era. I argue that it works largely within the "cynical" sentiment, one that I previously examined in relation to another Hungarian animated series (Panka 341–62). *Pirx* translates certain cultural codes of Kádárian Hungary into a future in which Hungarians (or at least, Hungarian-speaking people) are a space-faring nation, and I argue that the peculiarity of the series lies not only in the way it clumsily incorporates Kádárian material culture into its visual code, but also in its exposure of the future as the present. *Pirx* unwittingly performs an oblique critique of the then-present and embodies the cynicism that images of the Future engendered in socialist Hungary—its failure is that it does so without any self-reflection and humor.

"Electronic poetry": András Rajnai and the Blue Box Technique

The mastermind behind the technical aspects of *Pirx* was András Rajnai, a television director and entrepreneur who understood his cultural and political context especially well. As technical director Ferenc Ormos also notes in a documentary (Izing), the Hungarian audience was keen on SF, which is indicated by the popularity of TV shows such as the West-German *Raumpatrouille – Die phantastischen Abenteuer des Raumschiffes Orion* [Space Patrol – The Fantastic Adventures of the Spaceship Orion] (1966) and the Hungarian animated series *Mézga család* [The Mézga Family] (1970), as well as the success of *Kozmosz Fantasztikus Könyvek* [Cosmos Fantastic Books], a paperback series dedicated to SF. However, censorship in Kádár's Hungary did not allow for the subversive and provocative energies of SF to flourish—as Schreiber notes, "only the spectacle could stay" (40).[2] Rajnai recognized the opportunity and seized it—his efforts to popularize SF in Hungary are commendable and indisputable (Németh 13, Vecsernyés 82–83), but he also worked diligently to make his name synonymous with special effects technology (chiefly chroma keying, more commonly known as "green screen") and to monopolize the movement that he called "electronic art" (or even "electronic poetry") under his guidance. He created the "Electronic Research Group" in 1974 and later the "Video Innovation Editorial Office" in 1982 at the state-owned MTV (Magyar Televízió, 'Hungarian Television'), the only television company at the time (Vecsernyés 82). In his quasi-autobiography *Sugarakból teremtett világ* [World Created by Rays],

alluding to cathodic rays, Rajnai chronicles the "press campaign" he started in 1969, the numerous replies to his essays, and the "incomprehension" that his "theory" had to face (13–14).

Another, more practical advantage is of a financial nature: Rajnai claims that "spectacular" results can be achieved with the help of chroma keying for a fraction of the budget of Hollywood blockbusters (13). Accordingly, the originally estimated 96 million HUF (approximately 21 million USD today) budget of *Pirx* was countered by Rajnai with a 4 million HUF (876 thousand USD today) budget (Garai 19).[3] After these introductory remarks and a chronology of his works, Rajnai goes on to explain his theory of "electronics" with examples and ideas taken from evolutionary biology, ornithology, behavioral psychology, Buddhism, Christianity, and Western philosophy. Not surprisingly, this eclectic mixture fails to cohere into a unified theory of his art that would go beyond the central tenet that "electronics" opens the way to a new form of artistic expression. An illustrative example of Rajnai's long list of debates is his bout with Bernáth on the pages of the magazine *Filmvilág* [The World of Film] from 1982: Bernáth accuses Rajnai of being somewhat of a con artist who continually manages to secure funding for his ill-conceived ideas (56–58) which Rajnai counters in a response by saying that Bernáth and his cohort simply do not understand him and the possibilities of "electronics" (58–59).
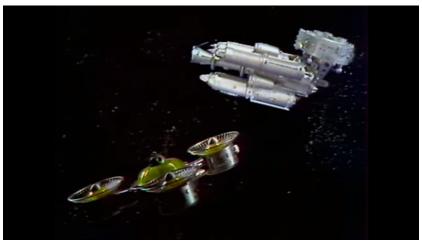
It is worth mentioning the Hungarian origin of the central technique of Rajnai's "electronics," namely chroma keying. Evidence is scarce about Hungarian inventor Theodot Vrabély, who Rajnai also identifies as the "tragic-fated inventor" of the principles behind chroma keying technology (8). To my knowledge, Vrabély is virtually unknown in the English-language literature on chroma keying, which is not surprising if one considers the scant evidence available about his life. A contemporary article from 1934 in the newspaper *8 Órai Ujság* [*8 O'clock News*] reports that the thirty-two-year-old lawyer, who is also interested in physics as a hobby, won the "city's prize" and the "gold medal" in Marseille at the competition of the "International Association of Inventors" (B. Gy. 4).[4] His two inventions are improvements upon "far-viewing technology" (a then-used Hungarian expression for television)—one of them grants a sharper image, and the other "enables us to use any moving or static image as a background for footage shot within four empty walls" (B. Gy. 4). According to Vrabély himself, he invented the fundamentals of "far-viewing technology" already in 1929 but did not have the money to make it ready for patenting. Vrabély eventually patented his invention in England but later lost the patent because he could not pay certain fees ("Vigyázzunk" 5); other sources claim that Vrabély eventually secured the patent in the UK through the Marconi Company in 1934, but he received no recognition at all for his work and died unknown as a clerk for the state-owned chain of pawnbrokers in 1970 (Vajda 32). Vrabély supposedly had other inventions as well which were destroyed by his older sister after his death (Potoczky 43).

The reason Vrabély's story is interesting here—besides my wish to record his name for an international audience—is that the tragic narrative might have fueled Rajnai's missionary spirit. In a 1990 interview, Rajnai claims to have learnt about the "tragedy" and "genius invention" (Szibilla 12) after Vrabély's death from one of the inventor's friends. I do not wish to speculate as to Rajnai's

intentions and his mindset, but it is possible that the Hungarian origins of chroma keying might have helped sell his agenda. To his credit, Rajnai mentions the inventor in his autobiography as well and seems to be striving to reinstate Vrbély's pedigree whenever he has a chance to do so.

Contemporary and Later Reactions

The final aired version of *The Adventures of Pirx* has five one-hour episodes, each of them a self-contained story with the same characters. The mini-series revolves around Pirx, who is freshly out of the academy in the first episode and becomes a more seasoned pilot throughout. Other recurring characters include his love interest Glória, his classmates and later colleagues, and various authority figures of the Space Military and its corollary agencies. The episodes are loosely based on Stanisław Lem's short stories collected in *Tales of Pirx the Pilot* (first Polish publication in 1968).

The main space station that houses the Space Academy—ingredients include lemon juicers and plastic breadbaskets.

Huge interest was generated around *Pirx* in Hungarian magazines before its premiere, but the first reviews were generally not favorable.[5] Bence Inkei and Csaba Kalmár deftly collected contemporary reactions in retrospective articles in 2019, citing criticism mostly aimed at the technical inadequacies of the show and its treatment of the source material (Inkei, Kalmár). Inkei wonders whether Bernáth's vitriolic essay from 1982 might have contributed to Rajnai's virtual disappearance and cites passages from Bernáth that also target the clumsy special effects. Rather than revisit the same writings that the two journalists found, I would like to highlight two noteworthy points from contemporary criticism: the show's lack of humor and its non-reflective vision of the future appeared as shortcomings in reviews as early as 1973.

István Gáll notes that the show "made Lem serious which does not become him" (27), but his bigger problem with the show is its "view of the future fashioned to teenage fantasy" (27). In this future, one does not have to study a lot, machinery is easy to operate, robots are there to be fought, and "girls do not understand a thing" (27). Women in *Pirx*, according to Gáll, are "concerned with their clothes[,] . . . they gossip, argue, and try to be important" (27). Pirx rehearses all the worst

1970s Hungarian stereotypes about women and projects those attitudes and power structures into the future as well.

István Pálffy argues that while excitement in Western SF like *The Invaders* (1967–1968) and *Doctor Who* (1963–) is derived from fear and by extension these nations are occupied by such feelings, Hungarians "are not afraid of the unknowns of the next century" (94). This is in line with official party ideology and completely wrong; Schreiber convincingly shows that Eastern Bloc-socialist SF was teeming with fear and paranoia (40–2). Nevertheless, Pálffy laments that *Pirx* fails to generate any kind of excitement, not just the Western type, and it also fails to supplant excitement with other things, for example humor. He cites *The Mézga Family* as a counterexample, an SF show that is humorous and overall well-made (94).

The Mézga Family is a good example not only due to the use of comical elements, but also because it is technically not very advanced. One might say that it is easier to forgive technological inadequacies for an animated series, but the backgrounds of early episodes of that show do look rather empty, not to mention the changing appearance of the principal characters. If Bernáth can liken *Pirx* to the first *Star Wars* film, then one only needs to draw a comparison between *The Mézga Family* and any Disney production and see the gaping technological chasm. Not that such a comparison would be fair, since political, economic, and cultural factors all contribute to such differences—but the bafflement and subsequent hatred that Pirx received cannot be explained solely by technological inadequacies, even more so because the reception of chroma keying was not unanimously negative. As György Sas argued in 1975, Rajnai's "method is viable" and "especially suited" for SF, "even if *Pirx* did not succeed" (27), though he does not go into detail about the reasons for its failure. Péter Kuczka, doyen of Hungarian SF in the Kádár era, wrote in 1976 that he "had and still has no problem with [chroma keying], even when others were making fun of [it]" (30).

Rajnai later disowned the series, claiming that his co-director István Kazán was responsible for removing the philosophical material from the show and replacing them with jokes and gags; Rajnai finished working on the technical aspects of the show because of legal obligations to the channel (16–17). János Papp, who plays the protagonist Pirx, claims in a 2007 documentary that he was against simplifying Lem's material from the beginning (Izing). In the same documentary, technical director Ferenc Ormos remembers that the crew were making fun of the show as they shot it, and model creator Béla Bognár complains that he only had a month before shooting to fabricate all the special effect models (Izing). It seems that the cast and crew did not harbor delusions of grandeur and knew perfectly what they were doing—but instead of creating jovial conspiratorial rapport with the audience (as it happened in the case of *The Mézga Family*), the creators only managed to annoy and *Pirx* left a bitter aftertaste.

The Future that Looks like 1970

I have already indicated two elements that I believe are responsible for *Pirx*'s failure: its lack of both humor and self-reflection. The thoughtless incorporation of Kádárian material

Pirx and Gloria in a video call. The screen is housed in a plastic lampshade.

reality into the show exacerbates these problems, though in and of itself it might have been an endearing factor. Various objects repurposed in the show include a breadbasket and a lemon juicer (combined to create a space station), a coffee maker (spaceship), a toy car in a sandbox (moon rover), car tail lights (emergency warning light), and as Bognár says, "all kinds of junk" (Izing)—the main obstacle to the suspension of disbelief is that these everyday objects remain instantly recognizable.[6] Papp argues that the "show could have had charm and humor if [co-director Kazán] had ten ideas for every model to make them come alive" (Izing). Indeed, nothing is left in the final version of the show that would indicate the kind of self-awareness that the creators themselves seemingly possessed. In the second episode ("A Galilei-állomás rejtélye" [The mystery of the Galilei station]), Pirx has to solve a locked-room murder mystery on a moon base, and the solution to the conundrum turns out to be a faulty electric skillet that fatally tricks the base's life support system.[7] This is not the only time when technology fails the protagonist: one way or another, malfunctioning equipment is central to four out of five episodes. The animated series I referred to earlier, *The Mézga Family*, also features futuristic gadgets, but the source of calamities is quite different from the one found in *Pirx*. The Mézgas are not ready to use thirtieth-century technology and that causes their downfall; in contrast, Pirx is perfectly capable of using his material environment, but it fails him constantly. In the former case, the future is advanced and awe-inspiring but not understood, while in the latter case it is almost exactly like the present.

The future in *Pirx*, be that material environment or societal and political structure, is not entirely congruent with the official dogma of perpetual progress in 1970s socialist Hungary. The future being fundamentally similar except for a few technological innovations means one of two things. Either 1970s Hungary is almost perfect, therefore there is no need for fundamental adjustments, which would clash with people's everyday experience; or the promise of incessant progress failed miserably, which would go against official ideology. These two interpretations, however, can work simultaneously and create the "cynical" attitude that Alexei Yurchak identifies as the primary mode of experience in the late-stage Soviet Union. Yurchak argues that "the late socialist subject experienced official ideological representation of social reality as largely false and at the same time as immutable and omnipresent" and that "[i]n such conditions it became irrelevant for subjects whether they believed official ideological messages or not" (162). Yurchak claims that the among the main vehicles for "intricate strategies of simulated support and . . .

'nonofficial' practices" (162) were political jokes and humorous stories that exposed the reality behind the façade and shed light on the absurdity of official ideology, while at the same time condemning the subjects and tellers of the jokes themselves for following it. As Yurchak explains: "[The jokes'] hidden message was: 'we recognize the official lie but find enough reasons to act as if we do not and to avoid even thinking about it'" (178). As I understand it, this mental attitude acts as the catalyst for the "cynical" mode, in which every seemingly appropriate ideological statement is doubly layered and contains its own refutation. *Pirx* comes close to cynicism, but it fails to fully exploit the possibilities of the attitude. Bearing in mind that at least some of the creators involved were perfectly aware of the comical potentials of the show, it is difficult to ascertain where the process has gone astray.

Consider the example of the faulty skillet mentioned earlier: it seems indeed absurd that the hyper-advanced life support system on a Moon base would be paralyzed by such a device or that the engineers of the base would not plan for such a contingency in the first place. The mystery is solved, and no one seems to notice the farcical nature of the entire affair. To be fair, two weak jokes are aimed at Pirx's behavior—he prepares the eggs as "if the maker is turned on anyway" and proceeds to eat the omelet, to which one of his friends (wrongly) says that he "ate his evidence." Between the two jokes, however, is a lengthy summation scene in which the whole mystery is laid out to TV viewers by a serene man (this scene does appear in the original text, see note 7). The fact that an electric skillet causes the death of three people in this manner is ridiculous, and the creators deliberately employ this element to make fun of the official version of 1970s Hungary in which no equipment breaks, everyone works diligently, and technological progress is inevitable. On the other hand, the lack of self-reflexive humor arrests the cynical process and prevents it from complete realization: the serious plot and tone of the episode (a triple fatal accident, the creepy isolation of the base, the tense atmosphere, etc.) do not generate the mischievous rapport with the audience. This type of cynicism only works if both the sender and the receiver are on the same page and are able to laugh at each other. Without that element of humor, *Pirx* only gives its audience a serious version of the future which exposes many aspects of their present as unpleasant but offers no comic relief.

Pirx and Gloria in a Mars resort. The robot armchair offers Pirx some refreshments—in the background, the Martian landscape.

To return to the visuality of the series, I think part of the reaction to the models and the obviously fake environments could also be explained by the imperfect operation of the cynical attitude. According to Ormos, the crew "had a good laugh" about the visuals—the problem, it seems, is that director Kazán failed to transfer this atmosphere to the show itself (as mentioned above, actor János Papp notes his lack of ideas in the documentary). If the show in any way indicated that it was not taking itself seriously, the cynical mode would have been properly established. As Bernáth notes in his article, *Star Wars Episode IV – A New Hope* masks the reality behind its illusions so perfectly that the original objects are not instantly recognizable (Bernáth 58)—a viable alternative for *Pirx* would have been to self-consciously establish these objects as both the fictional and the real, alluding to the cynical attitude towards socialist make-believe ideology. Of the better examples are the robot butlers that Pirx and Gloria encounter in their hotel suite on Mars: these are actors dressed up as United States-style lounge chairs, with the actor's hands readily recognizable as armrests. When Pirx and Glória sit down, the chairs start caressing them and they have to dissuade the chairs' friendly attempts. There are several layers of irony at work here: first, future access to comfortable "Western-style" furniture is tainted by the fact that said furniture is slightly dysfunctional. Second, the way the robots are portrayed also alludes to the tendency of Soviet-style production and engineering to use manpower over automation. These factors combine into the cynical sensibility towards the idea of the socialist automated household: the supposedly advanced devices require human oversight and often laborious manual operation, but the Western comfort level will be achieved eventually—no reason for complaints, and everyone carries on.[8] Unfortunately, these gags are not common in the show because generally the audience is expected to accept drinking glasses as glass corridors and toilet brushes as antennae.

Good Intentions, Bad Reactions

Analysing *Pirx* and putting it into context will not bring about appreciation or widespread critical re-evaluation. All in all, the show is difficult to watch and its biggest problem, contrary to popular belief, is not in the visual effects department. The models and chroma key backgrounds are ridiculous for sure—but far worse is the show's slow script and its visible effort to take itself seriously. Most of the furor surrounding the series stems from the fact that it tries to pass off a clumsy 1970s imitation of the future as a genuine Hungarian future while remaining within the socialist party's ideological coordinates. Cynicism about the regime and its visions of the future permeated contemporary Hungarian society, and very little of this sentiment made it into the show.

The Adventures of Pirx is an interesting product of 1970s Hungarian popular culture and the era's imaginations of the future. Its creation and its reception are bound to András Rajnai's name, even though the creator disowned the show subsequently. Rajnai's persistence and belief in his method (however misguided that may be) are worthy of respect, but the failure of his first widely known project9 haunted his career for the rest of his life. Critics did not react well to a version of the future that reminded them too closely of their present and that did nothing to comment on the irony of that situation. *Pirx* did garner a small cult following in the general audience, chiefly

among its then-young members who were hooked on anything science fictional and think back on the show with nostalgia, but it is safe to say that it does not attract new fans and it has not been rediscovered as a hidden gem.

Looking at the reception of *The Mézga Family* side by side with that of *Pirx*, an important observation to be made is that a humorous and cynical attitude towards the future resonated better with Hungarian audiences. Though far from being applicable as a general statement about the 1970s Hungarian science fiction scene (or then-contemporary Hungarian concepts of the future, for that matter), it is certainly curious that before the 1989 change of regime the comical or satirical vein in audiovisual Hungarian SF seems more successful than "serious" SF. Not only were *The Mézga Family* (1968–1980), *Mikrobi* [Mikrobi] (1975–1976), and *Macskafogó* [*Cat City*] (1986) all well-received, but they are still fondly remembered. Another aspect that ties these works together is that they are all animated—again, a simple explanation would be that imagined worlds and futuristic environments are easier and cheaper to render in animation, but animation is generally more conducive to humor and satire, too. *The Adventures of Pirx* is a product of a period in which the expression of a radically different future was disallowed, and a too familiar future rejected. Nevertheless, it still serves as a reminder of its creators' ingenuity in low-budget set design and their wish to depict a future in which scientific research and exploration is spearheaded by their country.

Notes

1. These and the following quotations are my translations.

2. For more on censorship in the Kádár era and its relation to it in SF, see Panka 342–48.

3. Calculations based on the HUF/USD exchange rate on 24 June 2021 and on the historical price-adjusting calculator created by Pál Danyi at https://artortenet.hu/magyar-penzertekindex-arak-es-devizak-alapjan-1754-tol/.

4. Short reports of Vrabély's success also appeared in other newspapers such as *Magyarság* [Hungarians], *Nemzeti Ujság* [National Newspaper], and *Dunántúl* [Transdanubia].

5. It is telling that *Ludas Matyi* humor magazine (roughly equivalent to the United States-based *MAD*) referenced *Pirx* twice already in 1973. One joke is about "advanced technology" (no. 16, 13), and the other is about the show having nothing to do with Lem's work (no. 19, 4).

6. Another example of the thin "futuristic" glaze is that the only remotely Hungarian name is Glória, all the others have international names—but they all speak Hungarian and there is no indication that they are using a translation device.

7. The main ideas for the episodes are taken from Lem's writings, in this case "The Conditioned Reflex." While the short story also features an electric skillet, its role is significantly smaller than in the TV adaptation. Simply put, the malfunctions in the short stories are not necessarily pivotal elements, unlike in the series.

8. Though the belief that Eastern Bloc engineering is much worse than its Western counterpart is not entirely true, there is a lot of evidence that the public imagination did indeed perceive it so. In a collection of political humor edited by János Homa, there are countless jokes that make fun of Hungarian and Soviet technology as compared to the Western (mostly, American) one.

9. Rajnai produced another experimental film in 1970 using chroma key technology, but *Ének a Galaktikáról* [Song about Galactica] was not as well-known as *Pirx*.

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Star Girl on the Time Train: Children's Science Fiction by Hungarian Women Authors in the Kádár Era (1956-1989)

Bogi Takács

Introduction

The Kádár era (1956–1989) was a distinctive period of Hungarian history in the twentieth century. After the occupying Soviet army brutally ended the 1956 anti-Soviet uprising, the regime named after Communist premier János Kádár offered a period of relative calm and slow, gradual modernization and democratization. The era lasted until the collapse of Communist rule and the end of the Soviet occupation in 1989. The Kádár era was more culturally liberal than the preceding Rákosi era, whose repressive features led to the 1956 uprising. Yet, the Kádár era was still characterized by a lack of freedom of speech affecting all areas of publishing (Czigányik; Horváth).

Censorship mechanisms in this era did not adopt the Soviet approach of centralized, regulated oversight in its entirety; but just like in the Soviet Union, works were subjected to external oversight. First and foremost, authors were expected to self-censor, and most interactions happened in an informal context between editors and authors (Gombár; Sohár; Panka). While self-censorship was also an expectation in the Soviet system, in Hungary, informal networks developed so that work would receive oversight *before* reaching an official censor.[1] Translations were often censored in a similar manner, and many foreign works were banned (Horváth)—both in literary and genre fiction.

Like elsewhere in the former Soviet sphere of influence, some Hungarian authors originally interested in writing for adults found a refuge from repression in children's publishing.[2] Science fiction was also an outlet with relative freedom. Under the leadership of Péter Kuczka, the *Galaktika* SF anthology, then magazine and attached imprints could publish writing that could not be printed as literary fiction: among others, the works of Borges and Eliade (Falcsik; Szatmári). While Kuczka himself generally worked with adult manuscripts and authors, his work allowed SF to develop a reputation for comparatively less censorship than non-genre literature, which probably also influenced children's SF. There were no dedicated children's SF novel imprints, but the main children's publisher of the era, Móra, frequently released SF novels.

Women authors fit into the Hungarian publishing landscape uneasily: massive gender disparities existed throughout the Kádár era, and even prolific and popular women writers like Magda Szabó or Erzsébet Galgóczi were often excluded from the literary canon (Várnagyi 26–27). Hungarian society in the Communist period was gender-egalitarian in terms of political rhetoric, like elsewhere in the Eastern bloc. A characteristic figure of Rákosi era propaganda, also popular later on, was the woman tractorist, demonstrating that women could perform any job (Farkas).

However, society remained sexist in everyday practice (Kiss). People were legally mandated to work regardless of gender, citing the ideological approach of Engels that this was a precondition of achieving true gender equality; but while the expression 'working woman' (*dolgozó nő*) was often used in propaganda and common parlance alike, there was no parallel 'working man' (Göndör 123-124). While most people were employed, forcibly or not, women were also expected to manage the household and child-rearing—with men often not participating in these tasks, or only to a severely limited extent.[3] Women intellectuals sometimes turned to translation as a form of work that could be performed in a flexible time frame and while maintaining a work-from-home lifestyle, or even during maternity leave (Sohár 17); and the same probably holds true for writing in general.

All these trends combined in the case of women authors of children's SF. While the publishing industry was not gender-egalitarian, the nature of the work allowed for relative flexibility: both children's publishing and SF were less affected by restrictions on freedom of speech, and the labor of writing itself allowed people to choose when and where to work. In this time period, women authors often worked full time either as writers or in some other related job in the industry (e.g., in editorial), a form of employment comparatively less common among Hungarian women authors today. Still, women writers had a variety of motivations in choosing these career paths. Some turned to children's publishing after having been excluded from adult publishing and then returned to fiction for adults after the Communist regime collapsed, but some continued to write for children.

Research Questions

To investigate children's SF by women authors in the Kádár era, I outline three research questions:

1. What were the children's SF books by Hungarian women authors produced in this time period? (i.e., a comprehensive survey of all available works produced by systematic search, which had not been conducted previously.)

2. How can we characterize the speculative settings these works presented, and how did they depict future societies? By so doing, how did they reach and/or subvert the desired aims of the Communist state?

3. How did these speculative worlds relate to women authors' social-political context, and how did they fit into their authors' oeuvres?

Methods

I constructed a comprehensive list of children's SF books by Hungarian women authors

published in the Kádár era using the following methods:

1. Searching in my own collection of Hungarian SF from this time period

2. Searching on Moly.hu (the largest Hungarian social book website akin to GoodReads) by combining the tags "sci-fi" + "ifjúsági" (kidlit) + "női szerző" (woman author), and also "sci-fi" + "ifjúsági", then reading through the results list to find Hungarian women authors.

3. Crowdsourcing titles through asking people in Hungarian SF groups on Facebook.

4. Querying current Hungarian women editors of SF.

Each method garnered books not found via the other methods, though there was some overlap.

Exclusion criteria were the following: purely fantasy, mythic and fairytale books were not included. In case of series where only some of the volumes had SF elements, volumes without those elements were excluded. (This affected the series *Pöttyös Panni* by Mária Szepes, and the loosely connected children's books of Franciska Nagy.) I did not survey short stories, but I did survey works that were novella length, because the distinction between novel and novella was not sharp in this time period. Inclusion criteria were the following: SF books with at least one woman author in case of shared authorship, and a first publication date between 1956 and 1989, were included. I also included multi-genre books as long as they had SF elements; e.g., in *Tündér Lala* by Magda Szabó, fairies use a fairy X-ray machine to determine if fairies have human organs inside their bodies. I also included books where critics disagreed about the target age range—despite expectations, this only affected one book, *Oxygénia* by Klára Fehér. I identified ten books, by six authors—see the complete list in Table 1.

Table 1

Author	Title	Publisher	Date
Klára Fehér	A földrengések szigete [The Island of Earthquakes]	Móra	1957
Magda Szabó	Tündér Lala [Fairy Lala[4]]	Móra	1965
Zsuzsa Kántor	Zenél a Zakariás [The *Zakariás* is Playing Music]	Móra	1973
Klára Fehér	Oxygénia [Oxygenia]	Táncsics	1974
Zsuzsa Kántor	Matekária [Matharia]	Móra	1974
Mária Szepes	Gyerekcsillag [Childstar]	Móra	1979
Zsuzsa Kántor	Hajszesz és bolondgomba [Hair Lotion and Toadstool]	Móra	1980
Franciska Nagy	Űrbicikli [Space Bicycle]	Móra	1984
Zsuzsa Keller	Csillaglány [Star Girl]	Kossuth	1988
Mária Szepes	Pöttyös Panni az idővonaton [Panni Polka Dots on the Time Train]	Móra	1989

Imaginary Futures and Future Societies

How did Hungarian women authors of children's SF imagine the future, and which characteristics did they ascribe to future societies? Four characteristics emerge:

1. The protagonist's perspective compared to the society shown (interior, exterior or both—are they members of the society that they observe / describe?)

2. Time

3. Speculative element (anything not commonly considered as attested in observable reality; e.g., extraterrestrial beings)

4. Utopian/dystopian societies.

I classified each book along these dimensions; the results are in Table 2.

Table 2

Author	Title	Date	Perspective	Time	Element	Mode
Fehér Klára	A földrengések szigete	1957	**Interior**	**Future**	(Future)	**Utopian**
Szabó Magda	Tündér Lala	1965	**Interior**	Present	Fairies	**Utopian**
Kántor Zsuzsa	Zenél a Zakariás	1973	**Interior**	**Future**	(Future)	**Utopian**
Fehér Klára	Oxygénia	1974	Exterior/(Interior)	**Future**	**Aliens**	Dystopian
Kántor Zsuzsa	Matekária	1974	Interior/Exterior	**Future**	**Aliens**	Both
Szepes Mária	Gyerekcsillag	1976	Exterior	Present/ Future	Time travel	**Utopian**
Kántor Zsuzsa	Hajszesz és bolondgomba	1980	**Interior**	**Future**	(Aliens)	Both
Nagy Franciska	Űrbicikli	1984	Exterior	Present	**Aliens**	**Utopian**
Keller Zsuzsa	Csillaglány	1988	**Interior**	**Future**	**Aliens**	**Utopian**
Szepes Mária	Pöttyös Panni az idővonaton	1989	Exterior[5]	Present/ Future	Time travel	Both

Works were split almost evenly along an interior or exterior perspective; five novels used a predominantly interior viewpoint, four an exterior one, and one novel showed two different future societies—one from an interior and one from an exterior perspective. Works were more clearly associated with the future, with six works having an unambiguously future setting, and two further time travel novels both starting out from the present and traveling into the future. Only two works were set in the then-present. There was a wide spread of main speculative elements, with the most common one being extraterrestrials/aliens appearing in five books. In two novels, the main element was the extrapolated future setting itself, in two others, it was time travel into the future. In one book, the speculative features involved a hidden, high-technology world of fairies coexisting with our own present. (While the fairies could be characterized as a nonhuman sentient species, they were not portrayed as extraterrestrial.)

The majority of novels were utopian, with six characterized as utopian, three showing both utopian and dystopian societies in the same setting, and only one shown as dystopian. Even in the sole dystopian novel, the assumption was that the main characters were from a utopian society marooned in a dystopian one, even if their home society was not described in detail. While works sometimes showed negative aspects of utopian and positive aspects of dystopian societies,

generally the speculative settings all had a positive or negative emotional valence and did not present a 'neutral' setting, or one with balanced positive and negative characteristics.

A striking association between these features concerned perspective and valence. Societies shown from an interior perspective tended to be utopian, modeling a hopeful future—contrary to expectations, infrequently identified as Communist, and never identified as Soviet.

Overall, science fictional elements were used to demonstrate future development of societies in a positive fashion; by contrast to e.g., contemporary American children's SF, where dystopian elements can also take front stage.

Was any of these works intended for a dual audience of children and adults? Klein Tumanov describes the phenomenon of Aesopian fiction in the Soviet Union, where works written ostensibly for children include political subtext critical of the regime aimed at adults; a function of censorship and attempts to evade it. While this phenomenon has been described in Hungarian literature (Hammarberg), and Soviet SF authors like the Strugatskys have been called Aesopian (Givens 4), it hasn't been investigated whether Hungarian children's SF used Aesopian strategies. Women authors might have been likely to use this approach as they were relatively marginalized in publishing.

To explore these topics, we will take a look at where each of these works could be situated in their authors' oeuvres, and examine what this could tell us about author motivations.

Author Motivations in Choosing Children's Literature in an Oppressive Regime

Authors who wrote primarily for an adult audience include Magda Szabó, Mária Szepes, and Klára Fehér. Authors who wrote children's books first and foremost include Franciska Nagy and Zsuzsa Kántor. (Zsuzsa Keller only had one book publication, so in her case such a distinction could not be made; but her oeuvre as a scriptwriter and playwright featured both children's and adult works.) These authors had different trajectories, and as far as it can be reconstructed, different motivations in writing for children.

Klára Fehér (1919-1996)

Klára Fehér started her career in the Rákosi era, writing journalism and political nonfiction with a heavy pro-regime slant, then also moving into children's and adult fiction. As a journalist, she became increasingly disillusioned with the Rákosi regime. Her husband László Nemes, working at the same newspaper, experienced repression and was fired, at least partially due to antisemitic reasons. After the 1956 uprising, the two of them left and did not rejoin the Party, and according to Nemes's description, agreed not to find day jobs in publishing (Várnai). Fehér only became a full-time writer in 1979 (Csuti).

She created work in a wide range of genres, from travel writing to Jewish family saga. She wrote two children's SF novels at different points in her oeuvre. Her *A földrengések szigete* [The

Island of Earthquakes] is a science-based adventure story for children set in a utopian far future, published in 1957; while her *Oxygénia* [Oxygenia] from 1974, a work aimed at an older teen audience, presents the escape attempts of a just-married young couple marooned on a planet ruled by an oppressive regime. This novel is the clearest example of a dual-readership text on our list; it was reprinted by adult publisher Gondolat in 1988.

Magda Szabó (1917-2007)

Magda Szabó, author of the adult literary classic *The Door*, is probably the best-known Hungarian woman author globally. She started out as a poet in the 1940s, but experienced a complete ban on publication between 1949–1958 due to her political views and her family belonging to the upper middle class (contrasted with working-class and/or rural writers favored in this period). In those years she worked as a schoolteacher, together with her husband, also a banned author. She kept on writing without any hope of publication; she moved from poetry to fiction. She struggled with the ban: "If [my husband] hadn't stood by me, I would've smashed my typewriter with a hammer instead of writing . . . 'Write it for me!' he asked me when I was about to quit it all for good" (n.p.).[6] The ban was lifted in 1958, and two of her novels she had drafted earlier were published in rapid succession. She transitioned to working full time as a writer and playwright in just a year, with the support of Party functionary György Aczél, leader of Kádár era cultural policy (Oikari).

Szabó wrote primarily for adults, but she enjoyed trying different approaches and writing for different age groups. Her first children's work published in 1958, *Bárány Boldizsár* [Balthasar the Sheep], remains popular to this day. She published her only SF novel for children in this time period as well, possibly as part of her newfound relative freedom: *Tündér Lala* also pushed against the boundaries of genres, using both SF and fantasy to tell the story of a young prince escaping a high-tech fairy kingdom to live among the humans. Her publisher described this work as a 'speculative fairy tale novel' (*fantasztikus meseregény*) and while she wrote children's fantasy and fairytales, she did not explore adult speculative work.

Zsuzsa Kántor (1916-2011)

Zsuzsa Kántor was a prolific author of books and short stories for children and teens, most of them focused on contemporary everyday situations, with the occasional historical work. She wrote an SF trilogy focused on far-future Young Pioneers and their adventures which included alien contact and political upheaval. She was considered a writer aligned with the Communist regime; she wrote a novel for teens (Práter utca) which portrayed the 1956 uprising as reactionary. Interestingly, her SF contained subversive elements and tackled topics such as censorship of art and large-scale breakdown in a utopian society, bringing to mind the Aesopian concept. Some of her contemporary fiction also pushed boundaries—e.g., her novella *Szerelmem, Csikó* [My Beloved, Csikó] explored gender nonconformity (Takács, in preparation).

She worked as a librarian and schoolteacher, eventually becoming a school principal (Mán-Várhegyi). She stopped publishing after the regime change in 1989, though she only passed away in 2011. Her eulogy authored by her son, poet Péter Kántor, discussed that she did not stop writing even at an advanced age (Kántor).

Mária Szepes (1908-2007)

Mária Szepes was primarily a writer of occult fiction and nonfiction, areas of state-mandated suppression during the Communist period. Her alchemical novel *A Vörös Oroszlán* [*The Red Lion*] had originally seen publication shortly after World War II, but was banned when the Communists came into power (Szepes). Many of Szepes's adult works, extant earlier in manuscript, were only published after the collapse of the Kádár regime; like her series of occult-themed novels *Raguel hét tanítványa* [The Seven Disciples of Raguel] that she considered her magnum opus. She wrote this series between 1948 and 1977, but it only saw publication in shortened form in 1990, and at its full length in 1999.

Looking for acceptable topics after the Communist takeover, she turned to children's literature—her biography by the Mária Szepes Foundation states that she "hid away in children's stories" (n.p.). She published a lengthy children's book series titled *Pöttyös Panni* [Panni Polka-Dots] with Móra, about a young girl in a contemporary everyday setting. *Pöttyös Panni* became a smash hit, and the kind and gentle stories were popular with children and their parents alike. In one of the last volumes of the series, *Pöttyös Panni az Idővonaton* [Panni Polka-Dots on the Time Train], she brought in SF themes: Panni traveled into the far future using artificially produced ball lightning. Her earlier children's SF novel *Gyerekcsillag* [Kidstar], a stand-alone work, likewise presented transdimensional travel.

Unlike any of the other women authors of children's SF in this time period, she also published several adult SF novels with Galaktika; Péter Kuczka even managed to release a revised and censored version of *A Vörös Oroszlán* in 1984.

Franciska Nagy (1943-present)

Franciska Nagy is probably the only author on the list who is still active. She studied journalism and worked as a journalist in the 1960s, then turned to writing and editing full time in 1966. She predominantly writes children's fiction, often with fantasy elements. Some of her works are set in a shared continuity, but out of these, the only one that includes SF topics is her novel *Űrbicikli* [Space Bike]. In this book, an extraterrestrial child crashlands in contemporary Hungary with his space bike, causes untold trouble while trying to repair his spacecraft, and enlists a group of children to his aid—while a detective is already on his trail.

Nagy continued to write children's books after the regime change, up into the early 2000s—in her case, we can probably say that writing for this age group was not imposed on her by the political context. In the late 1990s, she published two adult mystery novels with ghost story

elements. She currently works at the journal *Magyar Iparművészet* [Hungarian Applied Arts] (Nagy).

Zsuzsa Keller (?-present?)

Little biographic information is available about Zsuzsa Keller; she primarily worked as a playwright and screenwriter, on both children's and adult productions. Her only published book, *Csillaglány* [Star Girl], was an adaptation of one of her stage plays for children that also existed as a television recording of the theatrical performance. (She later obtained funding from national arts board NKA in 2001 to produce a script for a movie adaptation, but to my knowledge, the movie was never filmed.) In *Csillaglány*, an extraterrestrial who assumes the shape of a young woman escapes to a future Earth from an evil power, then enlists a ragtag band of kids, adults and talking animals to fight back. Earth is portrayed as idyllic and has seemingly no ties to the present day of the author. This is an unusual, atypical novel published shortly before the regime change that might be considered somewhat of a bridge to 1990s children's fiction—a period that was characterized by stylistic and thematic explorations in a rapidly changing publishing marketplace after the collapse of the Communist regime.

Discussion

Even though the ten novels presented disparate speculative approaches and used perspectives that were both exterior and interior to the societies they portrayed, they showed remarkably cohesive trends. While the futures on display were potentially Communist, these elements were underemphasized in contrast to their "international" nature, with freedom of movement—inaccessible to Hungarians in this time period—often depicted as a positive. None of the novels spoke of the specifically *Soviet* nature of society, and only Kántor's trilogy featured elements of Communist life prominently: specifically, the Pioneer youth movement. (Even this series shied away from portraying Communist ideological tenets in an explicit, didactic manner.)

Contextualizing these works in their authors' oeuvres demonstrated that even as many women authors of children's SF had experienced friction with the political regime, the bulk of these conflicts started in the Rákosi era and gradually lessened in the Kádár era.

SF was not the main genre of any of the authors; they were literary writers open to experimenting with genres and approaches, and SF was one component of that. Only one of them, Mária Szepes, wrote SF for adults. Most authors also wrote non-genre fiction for adults, with the exception of Zsuzsa Kántor.[7]

SF offered a form of experimentation to these authors that allowed them to make statements about society while evading censorship. The imaginaries presented were partially, but not entirely in line with the official ideology of the Kádár regime; just as they pushed boundaries of genre, they also pushed boundaries of what was expressible and desirable.

Further Questions

Close readings of each work could potentially reveal how the mechanisms of Aesopian fiction influence presentations of future or alternate-present societies. It might be just as fruitful to investigate author positionality and how this fits into the broader context of Kádár-era Hungarian society, especially with respect to mechanisms of oppression within publishing.

Some writers were marginalized in other ways besides gender; at least three authors (responsible for six books) were of a Jewish background. (One author was an ethnic majority Hungarian; for two others, biographical information was inadequate to determine their ancestry.) Jewish authors experienced more conflict with the regime and more censorship; a phenomenon described in Hungarian literary fiction, the arts, and public discourse about Jewish topics in the Kádár era (Szécsényi). This hints at potential intersectional aspects of censorship affecting Jewish women authors, that might be investigated also among authors of non-genre fiction in this time period.

The further development of children's science fiction, and the role of women authors in it, could likewise be explored. After a relative lack in the 1990s–2000s, the 2010s have seen many new works by women authors, with over twenty books just in the past decade. Genre boundaries have also loosened, especially with the introduction of steampunk themes. These new authors often follow and react to Anglo-Western—and less commonly also Japanese—trends in speculative media, rather than building directly on their forerunners' oeuvres. Still, they do incorporate specifically Hungarian aspects of storytelling, and not only in their choice of locales and themes, but structurally as well: for example, the *Időfutár* [Time Courier] series of novels, with multiple women contributors, is an adaptation of a radio drama series similarly to how Endre László's *Szíriusz kapitány* [Captain Sirius] series also had popular novelizations published in the 1980s. I am currently planning a follow-up article that will address some of these topics.

Many questions remain and this brief survey could only provide the first step. Hopefully it will serve as further inspiration to investigate Hungarian literatures often excluded from the literary canon, be it due to their choice of genre, audience, or the gender of their authors.

Notes

1. See, e.g., Voloncs about television writing.

2. For a Soviet parallel, see e.g., Klein Tumanov's analysis of Daniil Kharms's oeuvre (140).

3. For Soviet parallels, see Lemberg.

4. Translated into English as *The Gift of the Wondrous Fig Tree* by Noémi M. Najbauer, published by Európa in 2008.

5. Two different societies are shown, but both from an exterior perspective.

6. "Ha ő nem áll mellettem, kalapáccsal verem szét az írógépemet írás helyett . . . 'Nekem írd meg!'—kért, mikor végképp abba akartam hagyni mindent" (Szabó)

7. While this article did not survey men, men authors who wrote children's SF predominantly or exclusively did exist in the time period, like Péter Tőke or Endre László.

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Amongst You, We Are the Witnesses of Withering: Hungarian New Weird Spatial Formations in the Short Fictions of Lilla Erdei, Balázs Farkas, and Attila Veres

András Fodor

Introduction

The weird as an approach to writing presents a relatively new angle to write about reality in contemporary Hungarian literature. From its conception in 2016, *The Black Aether* fanzine gathered authors who incorporate the weird into their fiction. The fanzine supports and adheres to the Lovecraftian interpretation of the weird, but this paper argues that the presented authors have started to diverge from this perspective. Lilla Erdei, Balázs Farkas, and Attila Veres introduce the New Weird to the Hungarian audience in *The Black Aether*. The editor-in-chief editor of *The Black Aether* has considered the three as noteworthy authors in the Hungarian New Weird. Their methods differ from each other; however, all of them attempt to negotiate Hungarian literary characteristics with features of the English-speaking literary world. The former literary motifs function as a base that incorporates gritty realism in which (over)use of substances and apathy in political and social issues are typical responses to past and present crises and traumatic experiences, where other coping mechanisms are absent.

The Black Aether also functions as a devoted community for the Hungarian Lovecraft fans. There is another fanzine, *Azilum*, which was also started in 2016. It is dedicated to other weird fiction authors that are "Lovecraftian" in their stylistics. It publishes translations from lesser known contemporaries of Lovecraft, his not yet translated essays, and also contemporary weird authors such as Thomas Ligotti, Laird Barron, and Caitlín R. Kiernan. It compiled three anthologies dedicated to the weird fiction of the twentieth century. Furthermore, the Hungarian H. P. Lovecraft Society gathers the fans of Lovecraft and organises events to advertise and celebrate him. *Galaktika*, the Hungarian SF magazine, has also started to accept texts that can be considered as weird fiction.

This paper explores the changes of the spatial formations in the narrative spaces in the short fictions of Lilla Erdei, Balázs Farkas, and Attila Veres. The paper identifies spatial changes in an interpretive framework that is based on the works of Henri Lefebvre and Edward Soja, but considers narrative space as a spatial system where subjects have to constantly relate to one another and negotiate their positions. The texts present non-anthropomorphic and monstrous others as the successful negotiators, who infiltrate and subvert the spatial systems.In its conception, the GABO Publishing House decided that its anthology of *Az év magyar science fiction és fantasynovellái* [The Best Science Fiction and Fantasy of the Year] should follow the

footsteps of Jonathan Strahan's *The Best Science Fiction and Fantasy of the Year*. Their idea was to provide an opportunity for the flourishing Hungarian science fiction, fantasy, and horror scene to get published in this form, as there is a relative lack of platforms to publish short stories in these genres. This is not the first attempt to produce such anthologies: some of them are thematically connected (Hungarian folk tales in *77–Hetvenhét*) or set in a shared secondary world of a role-playing game (M.A.G.U.S), or more focused on science fiction and dystopias such as anthologies that are edited by Sándor Szélesi, Tibor Jobbágy, and Tibor Fonyódi. Furthermore, István Nemes played a significant role in popularising science fiction, fantasy, and horror by compiling short fiction collections from the 1990s. There is another anthology from the GABO Publishing House that focuses on horror and weird fiction and is thematically connected to gasping. The book titled *Légszomj* [Gasping] was published in 2021.

Weird Fiction in Hungary

This paper understands weird fiction as an approach to writing. In defining weird fiction, it relies on the understanding of China Miéville from the 2009 *The Routledge Companion to Science Fiction* where he writes, "Weird Fiction is usually, roughly, conceived of as a rather breathless and generically slippery macabre fiction, a dark fantastic ('horror' plus 'fantasy') often featuring nontraditional alien monsters (thus plus 'science fiction')" (510). In addition to that, this paper echoes H. P. Lovecraft's position on weird fiction from his seminal 1927 essay "Supernatural Horror in Literature," which explains that the weird tale consists of:

> something more than secret murder, bloody bones, or a sheeted form clanking chains according to rule. A certain atmosphere of breathless and unexplainable dread of outer, unknown forces must be present; and there must be a hint, expressed with a seriousness and portentousness becoming its subject, of that most terrible conception of the human brain—a malign and particular suspension or defeat of those fixed laws of Nature which are our only safeguard against the assaults of chaos and the dæmons of unplumbed space. (305)

Lovecraft defines it as "'the literature of cosmic fear' [that] undercuts post-Enlightenment rationalism and posits instead the co-existence of other worlds and supernatural forces" (qtd. in Weinstock 179), which as Weinstock argues, "unsettles both confidence in the modern scientific method and human pretensions to grandeur" (180). Furthermore, Benjamin Noys and Timothy S. Murphy suggest that "Lovecraft drew on modern science and on modernism to craft a weird fiction that was 'nonsupernatural.' Lovecraft, a keen amateur scientist and an antiquarian, creates an unlikely 'bridging' between an idealized past and a traumatic modernity. In the process he figures a strange 'median' position that is at once avant-garde and anterior to modernity" (120). Already in Lovecraft, the interstitial situation of weird fiction had been established.

Furthermore, weird fiction remains in strong connection not just with modernist modes, but also with the Gothic. Carl H. Sederholm points out that "both the Gothic and the weird thrive on themes of excess and transgression." He adds that "[t]he Gothic and the weird interrogate the

world in ways that powerfully demonstrate human limitations both in terms of understanding our place in the world and also how we perceive reality in the first place" (165.). Sederholm continues that new weird "embraced weird fiction's general tendency to interrogate the human experience of the world and the cosmos and added to them an interest in exploring how human beings perceive the world" (161). It jettisons and subverts the anthropocentric perspective; consequently, the interrogations "point readers toward fundamental problems of representation and reality" (164). In the case of Gothic, Ljubica Matek argues that the "Victorian Gothic domesticates Gothic figures, spaces, and themes so as to locate its horrors within the world of the contemporary reader" (17). But it is never domesticated and normalised. In overcoming anthropocentrism, weird fiction relies on two approaches through which it achieves that. On the one hand, Carl Freedman points out that weird fiction is "fundamentally inflationary in tendency . . . to suggest [that] reality . . . [is] richer, larger, stranger, more complex, more surprising—and, indeed, 'weirder'—than common sense would suppose" (14). On the other hand, Noys and Murphy argue that based on Robert Aickman's observation "weird fiction . . . can also pursue what Samuel Beckett called the way of 'impoverishment' (qtd. in Knowlson, 352), reducing our world to a 'shivering void'" (Noys and Murphy 118).

This paper connects the Hungarian New Weird to the Finnish Weird, a notion Johanna Sinisalo coined in 2011 by arguing that these:

> Courageous writers . . . are producing touching, believable and memorable stories that can't easily be pigeonholed as belonging to any pre-existing genre. Common features of their work include the blurring of genre boundaries, the bringing together of different genres and the unbridled flight of imagination. . . . They—or perhaps I should say we—are weird and proud of it. In fact, the trend is so clear that we should give it a name all of its own: suomikumma, 'Finnish Weird'. (n.p.)

Jussi K. Niemelä provides an elaborated approach toward the Finnish Weird, when she proposes that it is:

> an umbrella term that encompasses all diagonal, that is to say, non-realistic approaches to any story we can't label as science fiction or fantasy without being unjust to both the author and the readers. There might be, and usually are, quite a lot of realistic ingredients in the story, but something odd happens all of sudden that sheds a diagonal light on that reality and this is where the 'weird' steps in. (16)

Consequently, this paper interprets Hungarian New Weird fiction as an amalgamation of the English and the Finnish Weird with strong connection to the Hungarian literary convention. While the paper should also suggest wider implications in the relations between the Hungarian New Weird and the post-Austro-Hungarian Weird,[1] it has no space to pursue this topic in its present form. The Hungarian New Weird incorporates features of horror, fantasy, and occasionally science fiction, but presents its reality differently from realist fiction. It shares characteristics with the Hungarian literary convention such as the excessive overuse of substances (e.g., alcohol), the

feeling of powerlessness by being constantly subjected to authority, and the inescapable nature of the constantly oppressive Hungarian reality. Moreover, apathy in political and social issues is a typical response to past and present crises and traumatic experiences, where other coping mechanisms are absent. Traumas are never resolved, they are kept forefront to be exploited in order to gain political power. Therefore Hungarian New Weird fiction functions as a set between mimetic and non-mimetic literature, and it also presents a counterpoint to the Hungarian literary convention as it presents alternative readings of Hungarian reality. The three authors discussed in this study introduce the impossibility of the weird in the Hungarian literary convention as a valid explanation for events in the consensual reality. The examined short stories feature another space that either reveals a more intricate narrative world than the focalizor-narrator can understand or allows a peak behind the veil of the narrative space where everything becomes insignificant, thus, both approaches to overcome anthropocentrism are present. As a corollary, this new interpretation vitiates familiarity, undermines the anthropocentric vantage point, and then introduces the feeling of estrangement and awe.

This sensation of the weird is described by Mark Fisher as it "is constituted by a presence—the presence of *that which does not belong*" (103, emphasis in the original). Fisher declares that the weird allows "us to see the inside from the perspective of the outside" (10). He asserts that the weird spurs the "fascination with the outside, . . . which lies beyond standard perception, cognition and experience" (7). In the context of narratology, the diagonal perspective of the weird provides the interpretation of the narrative space that it "is ripped and unfinished. Moth-eaten, ill-made" ("Afterweird" 4447). This lack of wholeness is noticed in the construction of narrative space. These apertures remain concealed as long as the anthropocentric vantage point is in a power position in the construction of the spatial formation of the narrative space. Once the anthropocentric vantage point can no longer establish its power position in a form of complementary distribution, through the prism of the weird "the world is always-already unrepresentable, and can only be approached by an asymptotic succession of subjective pronouncements" ("Weird Fiction" 512).

Spatial Formations

The interpretation of narrative space is through language, which formulates different spatial relations and mediates everything through them. This paper interprets the relation between weird fiction and language based on Farah Mendlesohn's taxonomy. In her book, *Rhetorics of Fantasy*, Mendlesohn identifies and then concentrates on "the means by which the fantastic enters the narrated world" (13). The platform for these processes is language. I understand "rhetorics" in the Mendlesohnian sense of the word, which is a narratological viewpoint, a specific locatedness through which the focalizor-narrator attempts to make sense of the fictional reality of the narrative.

Subjects with agency participate in the construction of narrative space. This composition consists of three elements: place, space, and their corollary, the spatial system. The narrative space forms a spatial system that is a constantly ongoing negotiation between place and space. Each

subject with an agency functions as a place; its position within space has to be negotiated. Place is subordinated to space and is interpreted as a meaning-making element of space. I interpret place "as experiential, or as tied to the human response to environment," therefore, "place *is integral to the very structure and possibility of experience*" (Malpas 31, emphasis in the original). Space and the spatial system are subjected to negotiation as their constituting subjects' social and political power allows them to be. Otherwise subjects are jettisoned from them, they experience nothing, and are rendered as others. The spatial system is the result of the negotiations of its participating subjects.

The success of the negotiations into space depends on the subject's place. Political and social preconceptions play a significant part in the success. Places maintain space through the negotiation of its constituting subjects. These debates are "political in every way: governed in favour of particular interests, biased in their affordances and allocations, shot through with calculative logics and mechanisms designed to distribute unevenly, and arenas of considerable *power struggle*" (Amin and Thrift 207, emphasis mine). From the viewpoint of the subject, the spatial system becomes apparent after the successful negotiation of place and its insertion into space. The social and the political negotiation reveals the social and political dimension of the spatial system.

The subject's realisation of the spatial system stems from the change of social and political framework that is identified as the Lefebvrean notion of representations of space. Lefebvre describes them as they "are tied to the relations of production and to the 'order' which those relations impose, and hence to knowledge, to signs, to codes, and to 'frontal' relations" (33). Edward W. Soja in *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places* identifies a part of the spatial system with the same functions, which he terms "Secondspace." He explains it as it is a "regulatory and 'ruly' discourse," a representation "of power and ideology, of control and surveillance" and "also the primary space of utopian thought and vision, of the semiotician or decoder, and of the purely creative imagination of some artists and poets"(67).

The ultimate part of the spatial system is the lived space that "is the dominated space which the imagination seeks to change and appropriate" (Lefebvre 40). Lefebvre identifies representational space as part of "space [that is] . . . directly lived through its associated images and symbols" (ibid.). It "overlays physical space, making symbolic use of its objects" (39). On the one hand, representational space originates from the interpretation of the Firstspace through the lens of Secondspace. Consequently, it is both material and theoretical. On the other hand, it surpasses this identification and invites, as Soja argues, "all other real and imagined spaces simultaneously" to come together in Thirdspace (69). My interpretation of Thirdspace is that it is both abstract (imagined) and manifested (real) part of the spatial system; includes "subjectivity and objectivity, the abstract and the concrete, the real and the imagined, the knowable and the unimaginable, the repetitive and the differential, structure and agency, mind and body, consciousness and unconsciousness, the disciplined and the transdisciplinary, everyday life and unending history"

(Soja 56–57). The Thirdspace becomes infested by the sensation of the weird. The impossibility becomes possible that is realised in the successful negotiation of entities from the other space.

Hungarian New Weird in the GABO anthologies

Lilla Erdei's first book came out in 2003, titled *A halálművés* [The Death Artists], her second one was published in 2007, *A Nap gleccserei* [The Sun's Glaciers], her third in 2008, A vendég [The Guest], and the last in 2009, *Veszélyes helyek* [Dangerous Places]. She writes short fiction, poems, and novellas. She studied comparative literature at the University of Szeged, focusing on dystopias. Moreover, she has been publishing articles in relation to the topic of her PhD studies. In her interviews, she mentions Stephen King, Edgar Allan Poe, and H. P. Lovecraft as inspiration.[2]

Balázs Farkas regularly writes fiction and non-fiction. He reviews movies, series, and books. He won the Zsigmond Móricz Literary Scholarship in 2015. He has four books out via different publishing houses (*Nyolcasok* [Eights] (2013), *Ismétlés* [Repetition] (2016), *Lu purpu* (2019), short-listed for the Péter Zsoldos Award, and *Ugatás* [Barking] (2020)) and two more were self-published (*Embertest* [Human Body] (2018) and *Maszkabál* [Masquerade] (2021)). His short fiction has been accepted by literary and genre magazines in Hungary. Four of his texts have been translated into foreign languages: one into Polish, three into English. Occasionally he translates into Hungarian. His translations of Ambrose Bierce, Lord Dunsany, and W. F. Harvey have been included in *Azilum*.

Attila Veres wrote a novel, *Odakint sötétebb* (2017), and a short-story collection, *Éjféli iskolák* (2018), which won the Perished UFO Award in 2020. His fiction has been welcomed by literary and genre magazines alike such as *The Black Aether* magazine and kulter.hu. He writes in Hungarian and English. His story "Méltósággal viselt" ["The Time Remaining"] was included in *The Valancourt Book of World Horror Stories 1*, which is among the finalists of World Fantasy Award. He works as scriptwriter, his script of *Egy másik életben* [In Another Life] (2020) won the best adapted script for TV movie award of the Hungarian Movie Award. One of his examined short stories, "A világ helyreállítása" [The Reconstruction of the World] won the Péter Zsoldos Award for a short story in 2021.

The intrusion of unknown entities into the narrative space is one of the main features of the examined short stories. The first anthology (2018) includes three short stories from the authors. Balázs Farkas's "A nevetés íze" [The Heckler] is about a young, indecisive stand-up comedian who discovers some strange movements in the interstitial space among people during one of his routines. A visitor approaches and offers him an opportunity to get on stage in a theatre, where his show is always well-received. Attila Veres's "Fekete talán" [The Black Maybe] presents a deconstruction of the traditional Hungarian pig slaughter. A family of three spends a holiday in the Hungarian country, where they have their one of a lifetime experience helping the locals in the slaughter. Lilla Erdei's "A jégkorszak tanúi"[The Witnesses of the Ice Age] is set in post-apocalyptic Hungary, whose climate has changed for the worse. The protagonist escapes from the attack of this clever climate.

This paper explores two texts from the anthology of 2019. Lilla Erdei's "A tökéletes hívás" [The Perfect Call] is a story about a young woman in her thirties, who works in a call centre, where she sells language courses. One day, she makes the perfect call. It goes awry and she starts to sense that there are other forces at work during her conversation with the customer. Attila Veres's "Horváth Etele – A nagy kacagtató élete és kora" [Etele Horváth – The Life and Times of the Great Jokester] recalls a forgotten, yet ominously known and allegedly beloved comedian in a poorly written article format. The person has no written record, they lurk in the memory of their viewers, which results in the incongruity in the reader's mind of being the uncanny and well-respected comedian of the previous era.

In the 2020s anthology, all three authors are included. Balázs Farkas's "A végtelen" [Unending] focuses on the idea of transition between life and death. A solemn, unnamed city dweller has been taken by a taxi through the city to stay at a hotel and wait for further instruction to be moved to the next stop. Attila Veres's "A világ helyreállítása" [The Reconstruction of the World] invites the reader to join in the endeavour of a community to reconstruct order in the world. It is both a follow-up of an initiation ritual and a manual how to convince and involve people to join this cause. Lilla Erdei's "Cunciróka" [Stone Foxy] introduces the reader to the depth of odd adoration of red-haired women on an online platform. The narrative follows a young woman who investigates the sudden disappearance of her girlfriend, who belongs to that group.

The spatial formation of the narratives in the 2018 anthology suggests a typology in which the idea of other space emerges as a counterpoint to consensual reality of the narrative space. There are two approaches to the introduction of other space. The one that Farkas and Veres follow is where the narrative space is complemented by another one, a weird space from which unknown entities intrude. In Farkas's text, the protagonist moves to that space, where he receives a liquid compressed from the laughter he induced in his audience. The narrative space consists of bars, festivals, and a theatre. All of them echo the Foucauldian idea of heterotopias in their operating methods as they "are something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted" (Foucault 24). In Veres's narrative, the creatures to be slaughtered arrive from that space. Therefore, the texts present twofold movements between two spaces: from the outside to the inside, and vice-versa. Both of them incorporate the classical Lovecraftian framework,[3] where the outside intrudes to the consensual reality of the narrative space. But Farkas's text also exceeds this by inserting the focalizor-narrator in that unknown space. The case of Erdei differs from the previous texts. She constructs a narrative space that is an other space. Its features recall consensual reality, however, narratological details point toward a radically different reality, a secondary world.

The texts in the 2019 anthology approach space from a diagonal angle. They highlight the importance of the negotiation of places to the spatial systems. Its corollary is always an intrusion from the outside. Both narratives rely on the movement in which an entity from the outside intrudes the consensual reality of the narrative spaces. Consequently, the spatial formation of

these texts becomes weird. Erdei's story depends on the protagonist's linguistic acts, where she convinces her customers to buy a language course. Although in these sorts of negotiations the result is favourable, against the unknown, she cannot succeed. Veres introduces his main character as a transgressive one, providing many occasions in which this entity appears in two places at the same time. This suggests that he successfully negotiates himself into the spatial system of narrative space; furthermore, it bends the laws of physics.

In the 2020 anthology, the strategy of the authors slightly changes. In Veres's and Erdei's stories, the characters argue themselves to the outside from the previously known spatial formation of the narrative spaces, consequently, they move contrary to the previous practices from earlier years. All of the short stories include a non-place, a concept coined by Marc Augé, which refers to liminal spaces where all of the previously acquired identities are annulled. In these spaces there is only one power position that cannot be challenged by the characters. Farkas sets his narrative space precisely in this liminal space, in a hotel that has no distinctive marks, and from which the newly dead travel toward the unknown. The text seems to echo his previous strategy: the narrative space consists of a known space that is left behind by the protagonist to move to the threshold of the other space. The narrative space in Veres's story signifies a conscious choice to intrude then change the spatial formations of the consensual reality of the narrative space. In the text, Veres does not specify the locality of the room that functions as a pivotal step in the process of the applicants becoming an active member of Reconstructionist community, but provides a wide array of possibilities to choose from, suggesting that the room is also a non-place that is controlled by the Reconstructionist community. Erdei's text includes the cyberspace provided by Facebook and hints at the liminal space in which the protagonist's girlfriend is stuck.

The Hungarian New Weird functions as a possibility to subvert and question the Hungarian consensual reality. This amalgamation of weird approaches examines the Hungarian consensual reality and sheds different light on it. These short stories present the impossibility as possible, which is realised in the successful negotiation of unknown entities from the other space into the narrative spaces. Farkas, Erdei, and Veres take different approaches to achieve the sensation of the weird. Their other spaces intrude the narrative space and overcome consensual reality in them. These narrative spaces suggest a richer, yet occasionally bleaker, Hungary than consensual reality has it.

Notes

1. For instance, Franz Kafka, Bruno Schulz, Alfred Kubin, and Stefan Grabiński.

2. See József.

3. The language becomes disoriented and/or highly metaphorical to express the changes in the narrative space.

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Copper, Silver and Gold: Metal Woods Set to a New Purpose in Hungarian Folk Fantasy

Mónika Rusvai

Introduction

With its intricate mixture of Central and Eastern European traditions, Hungarian folklore offers unique possibilities for modern fantasy authors. However, partly due to the socialist regime's distrust of literary manifestations of the fantastic (with the scarce exception of certain science fiction), fantasy appeared relatively late on the Hungarian literary palette. Even the Hungarian translation of *The Lord of the Rings* (1954–55) came out only in 1981. As a consequence, the first boom of fantasy dates back to the 1990s. In this period, most authors stuck with imitating Anglo-American sword-and-sorcery narratives and wrote under foreign pseudonyms. András Gáspár (under pen names: Wayne Chapman, Damien Forrestal, Ed Fisher, Lampert Gordon) and Zsolt Kornya (pen name Raoul Renier) are prominent figures of this early period, and their work both in fiction and in the Hungarian RPG community remains within the heroic tradition. Thus, formula fantasy became the norm for the wider audience, and up to this day, there is a rather poor selection of more sophisticated Western fantasy fiction available in Hungarian. The situation appears to be especially dire regarding folk-mythic fantasy: the first Hungarian edition of Peter S. Beagle's *The Last Unicorn* (1968) was published in 2004; Patricia A. McKillip's *The Forgotten Beasts of Eld* (1974), the winner of the first World Fantasy Award in 1975, reached Hungarian readers in 2008; whilst Robert Holdstock's *Mythago Wood* (1984) had its Hungarian debut in 2013, and only one of the later Mythago novels have been published since then (Lavondyss, 2015). As for Hungarian fantasy authors, readers had to wait until the 2010s for writers to gradually break down the limitations of formulaic storytelling and engage in more innovative structures and themes.

This transformation towards a more creative understanding of fantasy enabled previously marginalised topics and motifs to gain more attention, thus Hungarian folklore slowly but surely found its way into critically acknowledged fantasy texts. Starting with the 2007 anthology of Hungarian folktale retellings, *77–Hetvenhét* [*Seventy-Seven*] (edited by Csilla Kleinheincz and Csaba Járdán), a great variety of Hungarian fantasy fiction applies folklore as a core component. The better-known novels include a witty urban fantasy series by Ágnes Gaura[1] that is loosely based on *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, yet applies a distinctly Hungarian setting and social satire; Emília Virág's whimsical *Hétvilág-trilógia* [*Sevenworlds trilogy*][2]; and Krisztina Timár's first volume of a would-be trilogy, *A látszat mesterei* [*Masters of Delusion*] (2016), a unique attempt at mingling elements of Hungarian literary tradition with heroic fantasy. With regard to short fiction, Alfonz I. Fekete's short story collection, *A mosolygó zsonglőr* [*The Smiling Juggler*] (2016) offers a New Wave fabulist take on lesser-known Hungarian folk creatures and beliefs. The year's best speculative

short fiction anthologies published by GABO (2018–) and edited by Csilla Kleinheincz and Gábor Roboz also include multiple folk fantasy texts both by well-known and debut authors. For instance, Attila Veres's 2018 story, "Fekete talán" [Black Mayhap] adds a folk horror twist to visiting the Hungarian countryside, whilst László R. Palágyi's "A róna gyermeke" [Child of the Plain] (2020) slightly resembles Sapkowski's *Witcher* series in a Hungarian, pre-industrial setting. As Ursula K. Le Guin observes, "[w]hat fantasy generally does that the realistic novel generally cannot do is include the nonhuman as essential" (87). Fortunately, most of 2010s Hungarian folk fantasy texts follow these lines quite literally and seem to revel in the possibility of placing the nonhuman in the spotlight. Unsurprisingly though, most representations of the nonhuman remain either anthropomorphic or bestial, like the various depictions of the 'táltos,' the shaman figure of Hungarian folklore or the Hungarian folktale dragon that is able to switch between reptilian and human form. This paper ventures to lesser trodden paths and uncovers the vegetal other by comparing and contrasting two folk fantasies that include an interesting re-interpretation of plant imagery: Csilla Kleinheincz's *Ólomerdő* [*Leadenwood*] trilogy (*Ólomerdő* [*Leadenwood*], 2007; *Üveghegy* [*Glass Mountain*], 2014; *Ezüstkéz* [*Silverhand*], 2019) and Ágnes Gaura's single novel, *Túlontúl* [*Beyondest*] (2017).[3] Kleinheincz and Gaura offer an individual take on the metal woods of Hungarian folktales. The three woods (made of copper, silver and gold, respectively) are traditionally represented as the otherworldly dominions of anthropomorphic dragons and serve as mere backgrounds. The *Ólomerdő* trilogy and *Túlontúl* populate the metal woods with sinister, human-sized fairies magically connected to their wooden realm. The paper argues that these folk fantasy novels bring plants to the foreground and turn them into literal ties that link human and nonhuman communities through space and time. To this end, the analysis tracks down the roots of plant imagery in Hungarian folklore, then moves on to discuss the various representations of vegetal otherness in the primary texts, and finally, it reveals how otherness turns into oneness through trans-corporeality.

From Folklore to Fantasy

Historically speaking, there were two decisive periods that shaped present day Hungarian folk fantasy. First, as in most European countries, the cultural and political changes of the nineteenth century brought an increased interest in national folklore. In Hungary, this involved major attempts at recreating a mythic past. Hungarian folklore, however, is such an intricate mixture of Germanic, Slavic, and Turkish elements tied together by a Finno-Ugric language, that up to this day, scholars have failed to reconstruct the 'original' pantheon of mythic creatures. Nevertheless, even severely criticised nineteenth century works such as Arnold Ipolyi's *Magyar Mythologia* [*Hungarian Mythology*] (1854) remain an important source for fantasy authors. For them, the lack of information is an invitation to fill the gaps and creatively explain what folklorists left unexplained. Csilla Kleinheincz, author of the *Ólomerdő* trilogy, also admits in an interview that Ipolyi's work proved to be a "great help" in creating her story world (Ekultura.hu).

The other important period in the shaping of contemporary Hungarian folk fantasy was the socialist era from 1949 to 1989. On the one hand, the regime encouraged the documentation of

working class life. Despite the aggressive industrialization, a large percentage of the population was employed in agricultural cooperatives—and this situation helped folklorists get away with collecting the old folk traditions and beliefs of the countryside. Among the most prominent names are Tekla Dömötör, Vilmos Voigt, Vilmos Diószegi, and Géza Róheim, whose descriptions of the Hungarian supernatural sphere have inspired many fantasy authors. On the other hand, however, an exclusive focus on the realistic (and socialist) representation of the world banished all manifestations of the fantastic from canonised literature of the time. The supernatural dimensions of folklore were not tolerated beyond the scope of children's literature. These two factors lead to the dismissal of folk fantasy as children's literature, even among critics who claim to have studied speculative fiction.

Documented literary history of the metal woods dates back to the nineteenth century. László Arany's 1862 folktale collection, *Eredeti népmesék* [*Original Folktales*], already includes the best known folktale that presents the copper, silver, and golden woods: "Fehérlófia" [The Son of the White Mare]. The tale focuses on a human boy born of a white mare who goes on a quest to the underworld. Within the Aarne-Thompson-Uther typology, "Fehérlófia" is generally qualified as type 301B ("The Strong Man and his Companions"), and it exists in multiple varieties. Yet, each version includes the concept of vertically layered worlds, and the hero descends to the underworld realm of the three dragons to rescue three stolen princesses. The copper, silver, and golden woods are properties of these dragons who also own castles (and in some versions even pastures or meadows) made of the same metals. In addition to their value as precious metals, the choice of copper, silver, and gold might be justified by their association with the celestial bodies: copper refers to the Venus, silver denotes the moon, and gold is linked to the sun, suggesting that in their more ancient forms, the anthropomorphic dragons of "Fehérlófia" might have been gods of the upper world (Berze Nagy 91).

Even though both Kleinheincz and Gaura rely on this tale in their fantasy novels, their depiction of the metal woods goes beyond picturing them as property or background. In the *Ólomerdő* trilogy, Kleinheincz raises the number of metal woods to seven (steel, silver, copper, iron, lead, gold, diamond) and they form a borderland between the horizontally positioned realms of humans and fairies. The human world is a realistic version of modern day Hungary, whereas fairyland features the pre-industrial setting of traditional folktales. The liminal space of Héterdő [Sevenwoods] is ruled by human-shaped dragons that are banished from both worlds.[4]

In her descriptions, Kleinheincz provides a vivid, sensory experience of the metal woods: trees emit a metallic odour, trunks are covered in rust, and you have to be careful not to cut yourself with the sharp metal leaves. The woods are corporeally linked to their owners through magic, and trees can serve as an extension of their lord's or lady's will. As opposed to Kleinheincz's increasing the number of metal woods, Gaura places a single wood within Túlontúl's fairy realm. This wood, however, is so closely related to its inhabitants that it changes its hue according to their mood: it turns copper when great sadness occurs, silver when fairies fall in love, and gold when the realm flourishes. There are no dragon rulers present, and the narrative focuses on the fairy

realm's historical parallels to Hungary (the land was broken into separate pieces similarly to what happened to Hungary following the Treaty of Trianon in 1920), whilst its spatial positioning in relation to the human world is undefined.

Despite these attempts at highlighting the vegetal, both Kleinheincz and Gaura create a mostly anthropomorphic, yet not quite anthropocentric secondary world. This seems to be in accordance with folklorist Tekla Dömötör's observation that the supernatural sphere of Hungarian folklore is dominated by anthropomorphic creatures (74). In addition to this, there is a limited number of magical forest dwellers described in folklore, and all of them are roughly human-shaped figures, such as the lichen-bearded tree man of Transylvanian folk belief that Géza Róheim describes (106). Following in these lines, Kleinheincz and Gaura do not include trees as central characters in their own right, yet within the hybrid bodies of the metal woods' inhabitants the vegetal becomes a significant component.

Facing Human-Vegetal Hybridity

With their parallel human and fairy realms that are linked through portals, Kleinheincz and Gaura follow classic fantasy tradition. Both the *Ólomerdő* trilogy and *Túlontúl* present a young, female protagonist (the teenage Emese[5] in the former, and early twenties Liliom [Lily] in the latter) who are expected to save the declining world of fairy. John Clute's definition of "thinning" might be adapted word for word to these places: "the secondary world is almost constantly under some threat of lessening, a threat frequently accompanied by mourning . . . and/or a sense of wrongness" (942). Interestingly though, thinning in Hungarian fantasy is in many cases equally applicable to the primary world, as the Hungarian perception of the historical past is loaded with a persistent feeling of loss.

Ólomerdő and *Túlontúl*, however, complicate the relation of their two worlds even further. From the protagonists' point of view, both stories can be defined as intrusive fantasies in which the metal woods are the intruding force. In her taxonomic system for fantasy, Farah Mendlesohn describes intrusion fantasy as a narrative in which "the world is ruptured by the intrusion, which disrupts normality and has to be negotiated with or defeated, sent back whence it came, or controlled" (115). This mirrors *Ólomerdő*'s protagonist, Emese's, experience when she first sees the metal woods intruding into her everyday reality: "A törzsek között tisztán látszottak a HÉV sínei mögött álló emeletes házak lapos tetői, a lámpasorok füzérei. A megszokott éjszakai világ előtt azonban ott derengett az erdő" [Beyond the tree trunks the tracks of the suburban railway, the flat-roofed blocks and the lines of streetlights remained clearly visible. And yet, the wood was looming in front of the ordinary night view.] (46). In *Túlontúl*, the trespasser is a so-called "travelling-book," a volume that is composed of leaves and smells like flowers. It was created by two pixie-like creatures with the intention to reunite the separated parts of the fairy realm.

The vegetal, being an intruding force into normality in these narratives, manifests human fears of the plant kingdom that the protagonists are required to face through a trajectory of learning and acceptance. "Plants lurk in our blindspot," claims Dawn Keetley in her second thesis

of plant horror (10), and what Kleinheincz and Gaura do in their novels is mobilizing plants and moving them first into peripheral, then full view. The see-through image of the metal wood that Emese glimpses over the night street appears to be dreamlike and harmless, yet a leaf cuts her finger when she ventures to touch it (47). Later on, we learn that these trees, though rooted, pose a major threat to unwanted visitors by whipping them with their metal branches. Similarly, in *Túlontúl*, plants initially lurk on the margins of the human world: Liliom works at a company with all office interiors full of plants, she buys a book that smells like flowers and she meets an awkward, young artist who exhibits a painting of a lush, copper-coloured wood. As Liliom gathers more information about the fairy realm, the plant imagery multiplies until it becomes literally overwhelming once she crosses the portal. "Plants menace with their wild, purposeless growth," says Keetley's third thesis of plant horror (13), and in line with this, both narratives present a trajectory towards an ever greater proliferation of the vegetal. At various points of the plots this proliferation reaches the level of posing immediate threat to the protagonist: in the first volume of the *Ólomerdő* trilogy Emese is attacked by the leaden wood that is magically manipulated by her step-grandmother, whilst Liliom is almost squeezed to death by an oak tree that grows around her in the climactic scene of Túlontúl.

Despite plants repeatedly being pictured as an antagonistic force, protagonists of *Ólomerdő* and *Túlontúl* eventually come to terms with what Keetley's fourth thesis of plant horror encapsulates: "the human harbours the uncanny constitutive of the vegetal" (16). Kleinheincz and Gaura confront their readers with this corporeal hybridity on two levels. On the one hand, throughout the text, we are offered more and more details about this strange symbiosis of the metal woods and their inhabitants. For instance, here is what happens in *Ólomerdő*, when Emese's half-dragon step aunt, Firene inherits the metal woods that belonged to her mother: "rátekeredtek az erdők hatalomforrásaihoz vezető fonalak" [she was intertwined into the strands that lead to the power of the woods] (345). Later on, Firene's affection for her woods is made clear: "Halványan elmosolyodott, és megsimogatta erdeinek szívét. Nem volt teljesen egyedül" [She smiled faintly, and caressed the hearts of her woods. She was not completely alone.] (346). In *Túlontúl*, we learn that fairies are not immortal, yet when they die, their bodies do not decompose as an ordinary human body would, but immediately turn into a plant—as if the vegetal component was already hidden within, waiting for its time to come. On the other hand, both Emese and Liliom have to realize that the vegetal other they first perceived as an intruder into their everyday lives has been part of their being all along: both protagonists have fairy ancestors and in order to fulfil their quest they have to embrace their own inherent hybridity.

Learning Tree Wisdom

The dichotomy of self and other pervaded the 2010s social and political discourse of Hungary. Suppressed historical traumas, ongoing conflicts with religious and ethnic minorities, and the migration crisis all contributed to an increasing fear of the other—a phenomenon that has possibly contributed to the boom of Hungarian fantasy fiction in the same decade. Fantasy does not only offer alternatives to our world, but, as Rosemary Jackson highlights, it is able "to resist

separation and difference" and helps us "to re-discover a unity of self and other" (30). Folk fantasy gives multiple possibilities for such a re-discovery, yet most times it represents the other either in human or in animal form. Despite their anthropomorphism, Kleinheincz's and Gaura's novels are honourable exceptions that include clear traces of tree wisdom.

Secondly, both *Ólomerdő* and *Túlontúl* support the concept of rootedness. As plant philosopher Michael Marder observes, plants are linked to their immediate surroundings through an ontological dependency (106). Similarly, owners and inhabitants of the metal woods are existentially connected to their realm. For instance, in *Túlontúl*, as a consequence of an old curse, fairies are required to exchange some of their own children for human babies. These changelings remain unable to perfectly adjust to the human world and their life is burdened with a longing for their wooden realm. Similarly, *Ólomerdő* protagonist Emese realizes at the end of volume one, that even though she is able to move about in the human world after her return from the fairy realm, the uncanny image of the metal woods follows her wherever she goes (346). It is only among the trees of their respective wooden realms that these characters may feel interconnected with their natural environment.

Thirdly, and most importantly, the (half)human protagonists' recognition of the other within the self serves as a moment of trans-corporeality, a realization that "the human is always intermeshed with the more-than-human world" and he "is ultimately inseparable from 'the environment'" (Alaimo 2). The above-mentioned scene in *Túlontúl* when Liliom is nearly squeezed by the oak tree that rapidly grows around her body is particularly telling in this respect. The tree is clearly an antagonistic force and quite literally an intruder as it attempts to suck all moisture out of Liliom's body. A traditional male hero would definitely cut himself loose from the aggressive tree, but Gaura follows a different track in *Túlontúl*. In place of "The Son of the White Mare" and other folktale heroes that possess overtly masculine traits, Gaura consciously creates a heroine who is a great observer and values wit and perseverance over physical strength. Initially, these characteristics make her appear rather passive and indecisive even in vital situations, but by the time she reaches this climactic encounter with the oak tree, the very traits that made her slightly awkward in everyday events, enable Liliom to initiate connection with the tree and convince it to cooperate with her against the curse that keeps the fairy realm in its hold. With Liliom's guidance, the oak's growth rate accelerates further and its great roots seam together the formerly separated parts of the kingdom.

Conclusion

Csilla Kleinheincz's *Ólomerdő* trilogy and Ágnes Gaura's *Túlontúl* are prominent novels of the 2010s fantasy boom in Hungarian speculative fiction, and they are among the first narratives that creatively incorporate a large amount of folklore material. Both authors pay special attention to the representation of the nonhuman, but unlike other fantasy writers of the decade, they bring the vegetal other into focus by a reinterpretation of the ancient image of the three metal woods. Whilst in their main source text, the folktale "The Son of the White Mare," the woods remain in

the background, Kleinheincz and Gaura connect the woods' magical inhabitants with their realm on multiple levels. Emese and Liliom, the human protagonists of the novels, engage in a trajectory of learning that leads them from seeing the woods as an ominous intruding force, through a discovery and understanding of their otherness, to the recognition that they themselves are corporeally connected to the trees.

This arc of learning tree wisdom, however, is still a limited analysis of plant imagery in *Ólomerdő* and *Túlontúl*. Both narratives, but especially *Túlontúl* would enable a detailed inquiry into how the world tree concept of Hungarian myth is re-evoked, and in addition to the two protagonists, there are other characters in both stories whose relation to plants could raise interesting questions about human-nonhuman relationships. However, an analysis like this would highly benefit from an extensive history of Hungarian-language fantasy that identifies possible, pre- and post-Enlightenment taproot texts beyond folktales and regrettably, no such volume is available at the moment. Uncovering the roots of Hungarian fantasy fiction would be a great help to promising folk fantasy authors so that they may use mythic sources to their full potential. Nevertheless, Kleinheincz and Gaura have already made major steps in that direction by showing us that fantasy can offer a way to learn about and reconnect with the nonhuman others of the natural world.

Notes

1. Volumes of the series as of 2021 in successive order: *Vámpírok múzsája* [*Muse of the Vampires*] (2012); *Átkozott balszerencse* [*Cursed Misfortune*] (2013); *Lidércnyomás* [*Nightmare*] (2013), *Lángmarta örökség* [*Flame-Touched Inheritance*] (2014); *Attila koporsója* [*Attila's Coffin*] (2015).

2. *Sárkánycsalogató* [*Dragon-Baiter*] (2016); *Boszorkányszelídítő* [*Witch-Tamer*] (2016) and *Tündérfogó* [*Fairy-Catcher*] (2018).

3. As there is sadly no English translation of these texts, all primary source quotations in this paper were made by its author.

4. Dragons of Kleinheincz's secondary world are created, not born. When a dead person (either fairy or human) is revived with the magical herb of life and death, he returns to life as a dragon. Thus, the dragon is an undead creature that can appear both in human and bestial form, and he/she is destined to devour everybody he/she used to love in his/her previous life. As they bear the mark of death, dragons are banished from the fairy realm. Nevertheless, they are able to have children, if they manage to take a partner by force.

5. Emese is a Hungarian name of mythic origin. Emese was the ancestress of the Hungarian royal house of Árpád, the dynasty that founded the Kingdom of Hungary. Before she gave birth to high prince Álmos [Dreamer], she had a dream in which a *turul* (the sacral bird of Hungarian mythology) impregnated her. Kleinheincz, however, does not refer back to this myth in her trilogy, but instead she utilizes the pun component of the name: the 'mese' part of Emese is homophone with the Hungarian word for 'tale.'

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SYMPOSIUM: THE HUNGARIAN FANTASTIC

Interview with Bogi Takács

Vera Benczik and Beata Gubacsi

Bogi Takács (e/em/eir/emself or they pronouns) is a Hungarian Jewish agender intersex author, critic, and scholar. Bogi lives in Kansas with eir spouse RB Lemberg and their kid Mati. Bogi has won the Lambda and Hugo awards, and has been a finalist for other SFF awards, including the Hexa award for advocates of Hungarian SFF. Bogi has academic book chapters forthcoming about Hungarian SFF in *Lingua Cosmica II* and in an anthology on SF in translation edited by Ian Campbell. Bogi's debut short story collection, *The Trans Space Octopus Congregation*, was published by Lethe.

The interview was conducted in writing in the summer of 2021.

Guest Editors Vera Benczik and Beata Gubacsi: You won the Hugo Award for Best Fan Writer category in 2020, and have been nominated several times. Your reviews, essays, and critical work are undoubtedly contributing to shaping the reception of the fantastic within and across borders. How do you see the development of Hungarian fantastic over the past ten years? What aspects do you consider the strengths of the fantastic in Hungarian literature and culture?

Bogi Takács: I've seen a lot of growth in Hungarian SFF in the past decade, across all aspects of community development. There are more publications, more conversations; speculative short stories are having a revival too... I think part of it is that social media has both allowed fans to organize better, and publishers to get the word out about their offerings—not just current and upcoming titles, but also opportunities like calls for submissions. SFF is also becoming more integrated into general discourse about literature.

I think SFF allows a unique way of commenting on, and engaging with, Hungarian culture. This was true before the fall of the Iron Curtain, when speculative works were less likely to be censored and/or banned due to the strong Communist Party connections of Péter Kuczka, chief editor of multiple SFF venues; and I think it remains true now, in other ways. The speculative readership in Hungary appreciates and rewards an engagement with current issues, and at the same time, there are probably different expectations placed upon SFF writers compared to non-genre writers; the entire structure of genre publishing is different from non-genre. I'm not saying one is better than the other, just pointing out that these aspects lead to varying outcomes.

Guest Editors: How does the Hungarian fantastic incorporate and/or subvert the themes and tropes of Anglo-American fantastic tradition? How does uniquely Hungarian storytelling appear in the Hungarian fantastic, and how does the fantastic as a mode itself aid and amplify

the Hungarian perspective? How does writing in both English and Hungarian and for different audiences affect your own writing and take on the fantastic?

Bogi Takács: I think Hungary is in a unique situation where Hungarian literature has both been affected by Euro-Western (more than Anglo-Western) traditions and Russian-Slavic ones, while being conducted in a language that is not Slavic or indeed Indo-European at all. So, there is this tension between being exposed to multiple different traditions and yet being in a somewhat insular position, having fewer opportunities to influence other literatures. Further, Hungarian has no mutual intelligibility with any other language, even with languages related to it. None of this is specific to SFF, but these aspects of Hungarian literature definitely affect SFF, too.

As for the second set of questions, I actually haven't written any original speculative work in Hungarian for over a decade; I translated some of my English-language stories (one of them I also lightly revised), and Csilla Kleinheincz also translated one. I really enjoy her writing—I think her recently concluded fantasy trilogy *Ólomerdő* [Leaden Forest] was spectacular—and it's been an honor to be translated by her. I also translated one of her stories from Hungarian to English this year, and it's forthcoming in *mermaids monthly* edited by Julia Rios. Back to Hungarian: I wrote a non-speculative flash piece commissioned by a newspaper last year, but I wouldn't say I write a lot in Hungarian these days. I do try to read widely both in Hungarian and in English.

I generally write for marginalized people even if audience specifics differ in each and every case. This means I also write for myself!

Guest Editors: In the field of Anglo-American SFF generic boundaries have become increasingly porous, and experimenting with different genre-bending practices has been encouraged and celebrated. How do you think fantastic genres appear in Hungarian fantastic literature and culture? How do you think this might affect your own writing?

Bogi Takács: I think this is also true of Hungarian SFF, and one trend that's even more marked compared to Anglo SFF is the newfound popularity of weird fiction. There's also been a similar tendency in Finnish SFF, and quite a few of those works are in fact available in Hungarian translation, but mostly published in non-SFF contexts; Hungarian and Finnish weird have developed in parallel and haven't interacted all that much (yet?).

Genre-bending has always been near to my heart, but that's because I've long been a fan of offbeat, mind-bending science fantasy with space magic; it's not something I'd classify as particularly new. In my own writing I like to put a bit of a twist on it and combine it with strictly science-based elements; there's no rule that science fantasy can't be heavy on the science! Except our various unstated assumptions about how science must look like, what "hard science fiction" must look like, what are acceptable and unacceptable elements in such a story, and so on…

Cosmic horror is enjoying a newfound popularity in Hungary, intertwined with the new weird; as a reader I especially appreciate the work of Balázs Farkas and Attila Veres.

Guest Editors: Anglo-American SFF has become the site and source of exploring the lived experiences of gender fluidity and neurodiversity—themes your own writing engages with sensitively and imaginatively. These conversations seem to have been lacking or entirely missing in the context of Hungarian SFF. How do you think different gendered and disabled identities appear in more recent Hungarian fantastic literature and culture, and how the fantastic can facilitate inclusive representation?

Bogi Takács: I don't think these themes are missing from Hungarian SFF; there is a discovery problem, but not an existence problem. There are fewer conversations because people find it harder to locate these titles, and also there are just fewer conversations overall because there aren't that many Hungarian speakers out there. (Though the percentage of Hungarian speakers who read SFF is proportionately probably higher than among English speakers; due at least in part to the above-mentioned historical context that in the Communist regime, SFF was more likely to contain politically subversive elements.)

Just a few recent examples I enjoyed reading: Anita Moskát's novel *Irha és bőr* [Hide and Skin] deals with intersex themes among others, a rarity even in English-language SFF, especially when it comes to thoughtful portrayals; Tamás Rojik's ongoing YA postapocalyptic/climate fiction series *Szárazság* [Drought] has a protagonist with developmental language disorder, again a topic I haven't seen all that much in English either. The long-running *Csodaidők* [Times of Wonder] far-future science fiction series by Etelka Görgey, writing as Raana Raas (with four volumes, and so far three volumes in a followup series *Időcsodák*, [Wonders of Time] has been the first time many Hungarian readers saw queer themes and heterosexist discrimination appear in fiction *altogether*, at least if the online reviews are any indication! This same series also deals with themes of physical and mental illness, especially as a consequence of military conflict, in depth. I'm just scraping the surface here and mentioning some of my favorites, but I could go on for a while.

I've been jurying for the Zsoldos award and I think most current SFF novels in Hungary attempt to say at least *some*thing about gender, and also often LGBTQIA+ aspects, if only tangentially. I can't say I always like what these works end up saying—I've certainly seen my share of ham-fisted attempts at inclusion that backfired, similarly to English-language SFF. I don't think I need to name works here, I'm sure everyone can recognize the phenomenon. What I'm getting at here is that this is a topic that's definitely part of writers' thematic awareness and repertoire. In fact, probably more so than in the current mainstream of Hungarian non-genre literature. Many people have noticed and discussed this phenomenon with respect to migration as a theme, when SFF seemed to react overall faster to current events than Hungarian literature as a whole; but I think it also applies to gender and/or queerness. (I'm not sure whether I would highlight gender fluidity in particular, that's a very specific form of gender expression I myself also don't share.)

This relative responsiveness doesn't necessarily mean increased inclusion, both on the level of narratives and on the level of actual people; I'd discuss the two separately. It seems to me that

people are often allowed and even expected to explore LGBTQIA+ topics as something of political interest, but queer *writers* are not necessarily welcome in the field.

I do need to note something else as well. I think that themes related to ethnic and/or racial minority groups are in fact much less common in current Hungarian SFF than either gender or disability themes; with the possible exception of migration. I often get the impression that majority, ethnic Hungarian authors deliberately avoid saying anything about these groups; this is not specific to SFF. Something that endlessly frustrates me is when a writer sets a work in inner-city Budapest, but there are somehow no Romani or Jewish characters. Autochthonous minority groups are especially avoided, doubly so if racialized; it is probably easier to come across *American* racialized characters in Hungarian narratives than *Hungarian* racialized characters. (While noting that racialized autochthonous minorities do not even tend to appear in a 'safely foreign' context in Hungarian stories. I'd also note here that the *targets* of racialization are sometimes different in Hungary than in Anglo-Western settings, though the mechanisms are remarkably similar.) I get an impression that authors often make these choices out of a desire to avoid causing offense locally, while still projecting some form of inclusion; but erasure is also a choice. These kinds of obvious lacunae also create an impression of an unspoken genocide—where did the people *go* in this and that particular fictional continuity? I'm going to be extremely blunt: these works always make me think, did my former neighborhood end up gentrifying in this setting, or were the people straight-up murdered; it clearly wouldn't be the first time in living memory. These scars carry across generations, and SFF tends to shy away from tackling them. To be honest, English-language SFF does too; when I wrote a story in English about third-generation Jewish Holocaust survivors in Budapest, it was the hardest sale of my entire writing career.

The flipside of the coin of these *themes* that are relatively—though not entirely—absent from Hungarian SFF is that ethnic and/or racial minority *authors* are not exactly welcomed in Hungarian SFF either, though there are some (I mentioned Csilla Kleinheincz above, who is Vietnamese Hungarian), and a new generation of second-generation immigrant authors like Omar Sayfo or Kitty Bich Thuy Ta have also begun to publish SFF in the past few years.

I don't know of any first-generation immigrant authors who published SFF; Palestinian SFF author Anwar Hamed had a novel in Hungarian, the excellent historical-autobiographic *A fájdalom kövei* [The Rocks of Pain] about life in Palestine and anti-occupation activism, but this book was not speculative at all. He currently lives in the UK and writes in English; his speculative writing can be found in the anthology *Palestine+100* among others.

I discussed in various interviews that I personally knew of several minority authors in my generation who had negative, exclusionary experiences in Hungarian SFF communities—e.g., in an [interview](#) in *Lightspeed* with Arley Sorg I mentioned queer authors in particular, but this also applies to Romani and Jewish authors, and all sorts of marginalized groups. Many people have left SFF altogether, in my generation several of them also left the country. Every time I mention this in an interview, more young writers message me on social media, telling me of similar experiences;

so, this phenomenon is sadly still ongoing and there is still plenty of work to do, despite improvements. Of course, the state of SFF is only a reflection of the state of the country. I'm not claiming that people leave because of SFF, I don't think that happens? But rather that this is one facet of larger patterns of systemic discrimination. (All the more painful because SFF has an *image* of inclusivity and progressiveness, at least.)

Guest Editors: How do you see the development of fan communities in and out of Hungary? How do they shape and reflect changes the fantastic is going through?

Bogi Takács: I'm not *in* Hungary, so I'm not the best person to answer the first half of the question! But I can comment on what I see online.

A lot of Hungarian SFF fandom discussions currently happen on Facebook; I'd especially highlight F.I.O.K. moderated by Zoltán Szujó and Szabolcs Waldmann. I'm not a heavy Facebook user, but I do try to keep my eye on goings-on and participate as much as I can. I also feel there have been an increasing number of events in the past few years, COVID notwithstanding. Something that I think is especially great to see is the ever-increasing openness toward discussing speculative work in non-genre literary spaces, also including book events. For example, *Élet és Irodalom* [Life and Literature], the major Hungarian literary weekly, regularly organizes roundtables where four critics discuss a recent work and then the discussion is printed in the journal; the next event upcoming this October will feature Katalin Baráth's novel *Afázia* [Aphasia], a far-future science fiction novel engaging with core genre themes and released by a genre publisher.

While the usual stereotypes about SFF exist in Hungarian literary circles similarly to English-language ones, it was my impression growing up that both Hungarian readers and writers of "realistic" fiction were relatively more open toward the speculative compared to many other countries. This was possibly at least in part due to the fact that I mentioned above that SFF was less censored during the Communist era than non-genre fiction, and a certain amount of translated magical-realist classics could only be printed as SFF. (SF studies scholar Anikó Sohár has plenty of work on this topic in English, and I also have some forthcoming articles.) But in the turbulent 1990s after the regime change, I feel speculative and realistic fiction grew away from each other; the gap is now closing again. There has also been a possibly unprecedented amount of academic speculative fiction studies activity from research groups at multiple Hungarian universities; there are so many people involved with these efforts that I can't even begin to list them. Margit S. Sárdi was one of the scholars who started these efforts decades ago, and by now they've borne not only fruit, but multiple other trees, if I can extend the metaphor. Many of these scholars also increasingly reach out to the general public to share their findings; literary publisher Athenaeum has published several volumes of essays on SFF Studies topics for a general readership, most recently an anthology edited by Ildikó Limpár focusing on monsters in popular culture. This publisher also has an ongoing series where scholars of various disciplines engage with SFF media—from political science to education research.

Something very different that hopefully illustrates the sheer range of new approaches within Hungarian SFF: fan communities now have their own investigative journalism, brought to us by Bence Pintér, who is a political journalist also active in SFF and not one to back down from heated topics, including financial misconduct and rights violations by publishers. His work is sometimes decried as something that stirs up controversy for its own sake, but I think that's deeply unfair. Bence has also done a lot for the visibility of Hungarian SFF both within Hungary and abroad, and the webzine and newsletter *Spekulatív Zóna* [Speculative Zone] he's running together with Péter Hetei have been consistently one of my must-reads. I would like to ask people to not only notice the occasional controversy, but also the immense amount of labor that goes into these projects day after day.

Guest Editors: Considering current trends in the production and consumption of fantastic literature and media, how is Hungarian fantastic likely to change in the future? What new directions do you think are possible?

Bogi Takács: I think the best moments happen when I'm surprised, and actively guessing at future trends would counteract the potential surprise! For example, and to pick something that came from non-genre publishing: the poetry collection *Lomboldal* [roughly 'Foliageside'] by Mátyás Sirokai was recommended to me in an SFF context—I'm no longer certain who recommended it; possibly Anita Moskát in F.I.O.K.?—and I found it both unexpected and fascinating, with its approach to identifying with plant life and merging with plant consciousness.

I don't think anything is impossible that would be impossible in other SFF traditions either; I don't consider Hungarian SFF a lesser-than. There are many works with layers of meaning that have only been possible to express in Hungarian SFF; for example, I don't think the recently passed András Gáspár's *Kiálts farkast* [Cry Wolf] and its sequel *Két életem, egy halálom* [My Two Lives, My One Death] could have been possible without the milieu of post-Communist Hungarian society in the 1990s.

One other development I'd like to note is that the field of publishers is also widening, and both independent and self-publishing are also becoming stronger. For an example of the former, I just read the Celtic historical fantasy novel *Druidaösvény* [Druids' Path] by Bíborka Farkas, the first release by startup woman-owned publisher Pergamen Libro, and I'm looking forward to its upcoming sequel. This book was completely unexpected to me and highly intriguing in its approach to religion and sacrifice. The publisher reached out and sent me a copy—which is a lot less common in Hungary than in Western countries—and I'm glad I had the opportunity to read it. I was happy to see the publisher awarded an EU grant for small business development, and I hope this means many more books to come, and I'm also glad that small presses can and do also avail themselves of these resources.

I didn't talk much about the latest developments in Hungarian awards, but I'm glad to see that there are now at least three different awards I'm aware of, and I'm honored to have the opportunity to jury for the Zsoldos award, for the third year now.

I'd also like to mention that in great measure I'm able to keep up with new developments in Hungarian SFF, and to do historical research related to the same, thanks to my mom and my brother—both avid readers of SFF themselves—who've gone to considerable lengths to send me the print books I am interested in from Hungary. I'm grateful to them too.

Interview with Theodora Goss

Vera Benczik and Beata Gubacsi

The interview was conducted in writing in the summer of 2021.

Guest Editors Vera Benczik and Beata Gubacsi: Could you tell us a little bit about yourself?

Theodora Goss: I was born in Budapest to Hungarian parents, but my mother left the country when I was still a child, taking me with her. First, we lived in Brussels, and then we immigrated to the United States, where I became an American citizen as a teenager. Unfortunately, I lost my Hungarian language—at that time, people believed that bilingual children would not become fully fluent in their second language, and my mother wanted us to be as American as possible. So, I have been relearning Hungarian as an adult. I expect that I will probably be studying it for the rest of my life! My father remained in Hungary and remarried—he is still a professor at the University of Debrecen. My two sisters from his second marriage grew up in Hungary but now live and work in London.

I grew up in Maryland and Virginia, and got a B.A. in English literature at the University of Virginia. I moved to Massachusetts to attend law school at Harvard. I practiced law for a few years, then went back to graduate school for a PhD in English and American Literature at Boston University, where I still teach. While I was in graduate school, I attended the Clarion Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers' Workshop, where I sold my first short story. I have been publishing steadily since. I write novels, short stories, essays, poetry—everything, really. After I graduated, I turned the research from my doctoral dissertation into the Athena Club trilogy, about a group of young women who also happen to be female monsters (Mary Jekyll, Diana Hyde, Beatrice Rappaccini, Catherine Moreau, and Justine Frankenstein). They meet in late nineteenth-century London and help Sherlock Holmes solve a series of gruesome murders. The second book in the series takes them to the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and eventually to Budapest, to battle the villainous Professor Van Helsing. Most recently, I wrote a collection of fairy tale-inspired short stories and poems called *Snow White Learns Witchcraft* and edited an anthology titled *Medusa's Daughters: Magic and Monstrosity from Women Writers of the Fin-de-Siècle*. I teach literature and writing in the Boston University Writing Program, but in the spring of 2022 I will be teaching at Pázmány Péter Catholic University in Budapest on a Fulbright Fellowship.

Guest Editors: How do you see the development of the fantastic in the past ten years? What do you think are the most important shifts in terms of how the fantastic is perceived and conceptualised?

Theodora Goss: I think there have been three significant shifts in our cultural perception of the fantastic. I would say these have taken place over the last twenty years—the past decade has seen an acceleration of these shifts, but they started some time before that. I saw them taking place while I was still in graduate school. The first is that genres of the fantastic have become wildly popular. This has had quite a lot to do with the success of the Harry Potter franchise, but there are so many examples of popular books and films that draw on fantasy elements—*Jonathan Strange and Mr. Norrell* by Susanna Clarke, *A Discovery of Witches* by Deborah Harkness, *The Night Circus* by Erin Morgenstern, etc. The success of these books allows other books to be written that may not capture the public imagination and rise up the bestseller lists in quite the same way, but that can be published and find their audience. So, we have a proliferation of fantastical fiction. The second is that genres of the fantastic have become much more respected as literature. They are taught in university classes, and scholars treat them with serious critical attention. This is partly because fantasy is being written by wonderful, thoughtful writers like Aimee Bender, Michael Cunningham, Elizabeth Hand, Nalo Hopkinson, Jeffrey Ford, Kelly Link, Ken Liu, Helen Oyeyemi, Karen Russell, Sofia Samatar—these are just a few examples that come to mind from my own syllabi, but there are so many more. And the dividing line between fantasy writers and writers of realistic fiction is not as rigid as it used to be, although "Literature" and "Science Fiction and Fantasy" are often still separated in the bookstores. Margaret Atwood goes on the Literature shelf and Ursula K. Le Guin goes on the Science Fiction and Fantasy shelf, even though they were doing similar things in *The Penelopiad* and *Lavinia*. But writers cross over more than they used to. The third shift is that fantasy is once more an important component of children's literature. When I was growing up, the children's fantasy I read was quite old—the Narnia books, the Oz books, E. Nesbit. There was a cultural assumption that children should be reading about the real world. But now we seem to be in another golden age of children's fantasy. So really, the entire landscape has changed. That change started at least twenty years ago, but it has certainly reshaped how fantasy is published and perceived in the last ten years. I haven't mentioned a fourth shift that I think is just beginning, which is that fantasy is becoming much more international. We see this in the popularity of the Hayao Miyazaki movies and the Witcher books, games, and television series. But I think that shift will accelerate significantly in the next ten years.

Guest Editors: As a Hungarian-American SFF writer, how do you incorporate and subvert the Hungarian fantastic into the themes and tropes of Anglo-American fantastic tradition? Do you find that engaging with elements of the Hungarian fantastic influences your writing or national identity?

Theodora Goss: I honestly don't know because I think the elements of Hungarian fantasy are so deeply buried in my head that I'm not even sure what they are. What I mean is that I read and was told Hungarian fairy tales as a child, and then after my mother left Hungary and we moved to the United States, I read Kate Seredy's *The White Stag* and Hungarian and other central European fairy tales in English. I still have an old copy of *Magyar Fairy Tales* by Nándor Pogány, as well as Hungarian classics like Sándor Petőfi's *János vitéz* and Elek Benedek's *Ezüst mesekönyv*. When

I started relearning Hungarian as an adult, I read fairy tales again because I could more or less understand them. My mind was formed by these tales so long ago, and in such a fundamental way, that I can't separate them from anything else I do. For the most part, I don't consciously incorporate them—they're just there. It's like my use of English. I think I write standard American English, but once a reviewer said that my stories sounded as though they were in translation, and I think my writing is still inflected by having first spoken Hungarian and then French. I still cross my 7's and z's because that's what I was taught in first grade, which I attended in Brussels, and my sentence structure is, in a sense, haunted by the Hungarian language. It's not completely standard English. A Hungarian editor once told me that my stories were easier to translate—perhaps because of that buried memory. The one place where it's conscious, perhaps, is in my stories about the imaginary country of Sylvania, which is located somewhere in Central Europe—but that's also deeply influenced by Le Guin's Orsinia stories. So many things have gone into how I write that I don't know how to untangle them. What I do incorporate deliberately is Hungary itself—the reality of it. I did quite a lot of historical research on late nineteen-century Budapest for the second Athena Club novel, and I've written a number of stories set in Budapest or that feature Hungarian protagonists. As for my national identity, it's complicated. I am both American and Hungarian, and I don't think I can untangle those identities any more than I can untangle the influences on my writing. But my Americanness only goes back to when I first arrived in New York as a seven-year-old. My Hungarianness goes back much longer, as far back as I can trace the history of my family. When I am in Hungary, I feel that I am somehow at home, even as I recognize that I am traveling with two passports.

When I was young, Hungary itself was fantastical to me. It was a distant land that I could not get back to, with magical food and a half-remembered language. In a sense, it was not that different from Narnia—there were even lions (on the Lánchíd in Budapest)! I'm certain that's one reason I write fantasy.

Guest Editors: In the field of Anglo-American SFF, generic boundaries have become increasingly porous and experimenting with different genre-bending practices has been encouraged and celebrated. You have edited and written for slipstream and interstitial anthologies, and your work has been associated with the New Weird as well. How do you think fantastic genres appear in Hungarian fantastic literature and culture? How do you think this might affect your own writing?

Theodora Goss: My interest in interstitial fiction came in part from reading European and Latin American literature in English translation as a teenager and at university. In high school, I read Franz Kafka and Jorge Luis Borges. At university, I read and studied writers such as Milan Kundera, Gabriel García Márquez, and Isabel Allende. Later, in graduate school, I read and taught Angela Carter. She was a wonderful surprise, because I was not used to that sort of boundary-crossing in English. When Delia Sherman and I edited the first volume of *Interfictions* in 2006, it felt as though we were doing something quite new and subversive. We were very pleased to include a Hungarian story in translation, "A Drop of Raspberry" by Csilla Kleinheincz. My impression is

that the interest in interstitial, slipstream fiction developed around the same time in Hungary as in the United States. For example, Kelly Link was influential for fantasy writers like Kleinheincz, just as she was influential for American writers. That sort of boundary-crossing fiction is still the exception in the United States, and I believe the same thing is true in Hungary—what sells are books and films that rely on and often reinforce genre tropes. Readers still take a great deal of pleasure in wizards and vampires and spaceships. But you're right that there is a greater market for experimentation, and many places where the boundaries can become porous. Alice Hoffman's *Practical Magic* and its sequels are a good example in the United States. In Hungary, the annual anthology *Az év science fiction és fantasynovellái* (The Science Fiction and Fantasy Stories of the Year), published by Gabo Kiadó, gives writers a place to submit boundary-crossing, experimental fiction.

I think my own tendency to write in that interstitial space comes in part from being an immigrant, living between two national identities. Compared to my American friends, who were born and had grown up in the United States, my life seemed fantastical. Now that I regularly travel between Boston and Budapest, I feel as though I am always looking at the world from a double perspective. I often feel a sense of displacement, which I suppose one might link to the New Weird. But we are all living in the New Weird nowadays, aren't we? Particularly now, in 2021, when so much of what we have been through recently feels disconnected from the lives we lived before. We are all suddenly living on a planet we thought we knew, but that has become strange to us—where we might be invaded by an alien life form.

But there is also something interstitial about Hungary itself, positioned as it has historically been between East and West, with fluctuating borders. It has been described that way in Hungarian literature, and of course in the Western cultural imagination as far back as *Dracula*. The Count is described as a Székely, a guardian of the border; however, like all vampires, he is an inveterate border-crosser. So perhaps that interstitial space is a natural fit for Hungarian fantasy.

Guest Editors: Anglo-American SFF has become the site and source of exploring women's experiences and role in socio-political and economic systems, which appears in your own writing as well. How does the fantastic itself negotiate women's experiences and social discussions around gender roles? How do you see the position of women's SFF and YA in the field of the Hungarian fantastic?

Theodora Goss: I think the fantastic is about our world, just as much as realism is about our world. They are simply two ways of talking about our current reality. Realism reflects it, fantasy interrogates it and dreams up other possibilities. Realism asks "What is?" and fantasy asks, "What could be?" The fantastic has negotiated women's experiences and roles as long as society itself has—in the late nineteenth century, with the rise of the New Women and the suffrage movement, we had fantastical representations of powerful female figures, such as Carmilla the vampire and Ayesha in H. Rider Haggard's *She*. They were not all negative representations—we have good and bad and complicated female characters, like George MacDonald's North Wind, Frank L. Baum's

Glinda, and C.S. Lewis's White Witch. The concept of gender has itself been interrogated since at least Le Guin's The Left Hand of Darkness, but we could go back farther to Ozma of Oz, who spent a significant part of her life magically changed into the boy Tip. I think fantasy is continually in conversation with what is going on in the real world—it is always talking back to the culture, both affecting and affected by it. In terms of literature, we see this in Sylvia Townsend Warner's *Lolly Willows*, in the writing of Joanna Russ and James Tiptree Jr., in the ways Le Guin's Earthsea evolved over time. All of these writers responded to the social roles available for, and the cultural construction of, women. Perhaps the difference between realism and the fantastic, in this respect, is that fantasy literature and film have greater latitude in discussing and envisioning what could be, in both dystopian and utopian directions. On the one hand we have Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*, on the other a story like Seanan Maguire's "Each to Each" in which women transformed into genetically modified "mermaids" by wealthy capitalist and the U.S. military create an underwater alternative to life on solid ground. They choose freedom over their programming. One important element of modern fantasy fiction, particularly for children, is the way it casually gives us heroines who are smart and capable, without making much of a deal about gender. Lyra Belacqua in the Dark Materials series by Phillip Pullman and September in Catherynne M. Valente's Fairyland series are two examples.

What I see in Hungary is women writers like Kleinheincz, Ágnes Gaura, Anita Moskát, and Mónika Rusvai, to give just a few examples, doing important, interesting work in the fantasy field. They often write from a feminist perspective, redefining both the fantastic and the role of women for our new century. The storyteller Csenge Zalka, who completed her PhD in the United States, collects Hungarian folk and fairy tales that often feature active, ambitious female protagonists. There is significant pushback against redefinition of gender roles in contemporary Hungarian politics, but one function of fantasy in society is to imagine new possibilities and futures—I think it's doing that on both sides of the Atlantic.

Guest Editors: Considering current trends in the production and consumption of fantastic literature and media, how is the Hungarian fantastic likely to change in the future? What new directions do you think are possible?

Theodora Goss: I think writers of the fantastic in Hungary are in a significantly more difficult situation than American writers. Most obviously, the market is much smaller—it's almost impossible to make a living as a fantasy or science fiction writer in Hungary. Of course, books can make more in translation, but writers usually can't afford to pay for translations themselves, so they have to rely on foreign publishers. Usually, only the best-known or most popular Hungarian writers are translated. There are three other structural constraints on Hungarian writers. First, the market for fantasy short stories is much smaller than in the United States. Short stories are often where writers experiment, because they are low-stakes: if something does not work, you can easily move on to the next story. Short stories are also an easier way to get your name out to readers— if they like your story, they might buy your novel. Second, there is no easy way to market your writing online, like Kindle Direct Publishing in the United States, where you can create a book

and make it available through Amazon. This means one way of marketing your work to readers is not available in Hungary. Finally, the publishing system is structured around the publisher. The publisher may also function as editor, distributor, and bookstore. Most Hungarian writers do not need to go through the American system of getting an agent and publicizing not only their books, but also themselves, simply to get space on a bookstore shelf. This takes significant stress off Hungarian writers, but it also offers writers fewer ways to reach readers directly or make a business out of writing. Overall, I think the Hungarian publishing system makes it more difficult for fantasy writers, who are often in a marketing niche by nature of their genre.

There are two things I would like to see happen. The first is more publishing opportunities, particularly online, for Hungarian fantasy writers. The online environment means that we are living in one world—it should be possible for me to purchase Hungarian-language e-books on Amazon as easily as I can buy ebooks published in German. I also hope there will be more opportunities for translation in the future. Here I see hope in the final shift I identified above: fantasy is becoming much more international. If *The Witcher* can become an international sensation in translation, why not a work of Hungarian fantasy? There is certainly as rich a Hungarian tradition of folk and fairy tales to draw on. In terms of its place in the culture, my hope is that Hungarian fantasy will continue to gain popularity and respect in Hungary. It still does not have the respect given to realistic fiction. The second thing I would like to see is greater access to boundary-breaking, experimental English-language fantasy in Hungary. For example, Elizabeth Hand is one of the best American fantasy writers working today, but the only books of hers available in Hungarian are tie-in novels (for example, for the *Star Wars* franchise). Hungarian readers are missing out on her exquisite short stories or novels like *Mortal Love*. The English-language books available in Hungary tend to be bestsellers, so smaller but important literary works don't make it across the linguistic border—I would love to see that change. If we can bring more English-language fantasy to Hungarian readers, and more Hungarian fantasy to English and American readers—well, that would be a wonderful cultural exchange.

I think none of us knows what the future will hold, and the last two years have certainly made me doubt my ability to prognosticate. But I can at least tell you what I would like to happen. I would like to see the Hungarian fantastic continue to draw on a rich Central European tradition, while growing bolder and more experimental in expressing the strangeness of the world we live in. I would like to see it engage contemporary issues while remaining its wonderful, fantastical self. As a genre, the fantastic expresses what it feels like to live in our world today—often more accurately than literary realism. It should be valued for what it can show us of contemporary society and the futures it can dream up. I would like to see more respect for fantasy as a genre within Hungary, and more attention to the Hungarian fantastic outside of Hungary. I suppose in the end it's up to us, as writers and scholars, to make that happen.

SELECTED PAPERS FROM LSFRC 2021

Living Beyond Stonelore: Suturing towards Multi-epistemic Literacy in N.K. Jemisin's *The Broken Earth*

Danny Steur

The Fifth Season (*TFS*), the first novel in N. K. Jemisin's *The Broken Earth* (*TBE*) trilogy (followed by *The Obelisk Gate* [*TOG*] and *The Stone Sky* [*TSS*]), opens with the imaginatively forceful promise to not succumb to dystopic pessimism: "Let's start with the end of the world, why don't we? Get it over with and move on to more interesting things" (1). Dreaming up other possible worlds and otherworldly possibilities is, of course, central to speculative fiction: Jemisin's trilogy envisions liberatory potentialities and contemplates today's modern/colonial order, as it thematizes the intertwined oppression of racialized subjects and extractivist environmental relations. Other scholars have argued that *TBE* imagines a non-exploitative relationality to the environment (Miguel 471; Iles), notably through orogeny: the "ability to manipulate thermal, kinetic, and related forms of energy to address seismic events" (Jemisin, *TFS* 462). However, an expressly decolonial reading of Jemisin's narrative remains absent, despite the coloniality of Jemisin's storyworld, wherein orogenes (people with orogenic ability) are enslaved by the imperial power of Sanze. Therefore, I perform a decolonial reading of the series, addressing especially the ethico-politics of the non-imperial community Castrima, and argue that *TBE* unsettles the coloniality of being through the formation of a multi-epistemic literacy.

Below, I outline a decolonial, Black feminist framework to appraise the coloniality of Jemisin's storyworld. Subsequently, I address how previous posthumanist readings of the series obscure the racialization central, to Jemisin's narrative, using Afro-Indigenous critiques of posthumanism, which often employ Sylvia Wynter's characterization of Eurocentric conceptions of humanity as a "liberal monohumanism" whose subject is "Man" (Wynter and McKittrick 11, 9). Following Wynter's provincialization of Western humanity, I read orogenes as performing an alternative humanism—specifically Julietta Singh's dehumanism, which unsettles Man's rationality of mastery. I read the underground community of Castrima as enacting a dehumanist becoming, which allows it to initiate a multi-epistemic dialogue. It thus sutures the mode of being propagated by Sanze and its "stonelore" (rules that guide communities [Jemisin, *TFS* 4]), with a decolonial humanism, to form a multi-epistemic literacy that enables a responsible ethico-politics of entanglement.

Imagining 'The Human' beyond Man

Foundational decolonial scholar Aníbal Quijano contends that "the model of power that is globally hegemonic today presupposes an element of coloniality" (533). Quijano formulates modernity and coloniality as coeval concepts, a binomial that Rolando Vázquez summarizes: "while 'Modernity' . . . enacts the dominant way of worlding the world, 'Coloniality' expresses

the absenting of the other" (189). Decolonial critique therefore strives to humble modernity's (purportedly universal) narratives and Eurocentric knowledge (with Eurocentrism comprising a particular rationality of knowledge [Quijano 549-550]), while fostering the opportunity to listen to suppressed knowledges (Vázquez 184). The central axis of modern/colonial power is race: a technology of domination that installs hierarchies within humanity (Quijano 533).

Black studies further develops race as a hierarchizing mechanism. Wynter pointedly provincializes Eurocentric humanity: "our present ethnoclass (i.e., Western bourgeois) conception of the human, Man, . . . overrepresents itself as if it were the human itself" (260)—though Man presents but one genre of humanity. Alexander Weheliye subsequently theorizes race as a hierarchizing mechanism with the notion of racializing assemblages, which "construes race . . . as a set of sociopolitical processes that discipline humanity into full humans, not-quite-humans, and nonhumans" (*Habeas Viscus* 4). Because of the dehumanization affected by racializing assemblages, simply conscripting excluded subjects into Man cannot undo their subjugation: "to become human without qualification, you must already be Man in its idealized form, yet Man, understood simultaneously as an achievement and bio-ontology, implies whiteness and specifically nonblackness" (Jackson, *Becoming Human* 33). Therefore, the very definition of humanness requires rethinking (Wynter 268). Various authors develop alternative humanisms, such as Weheliye's juridically-oriented notion of habeas viscus, which attends to the ways "the law pugnaciously adjudicates who is deserving of personhood and who is not" (*Habeas Viscus* 11). Man's juridical systems cannot guarantee justice, because their selective functioning precisely facilitates the violence inflicted on those touched by racializing assemblages (124). Black speculative fiction presents fecund ground for articulating alternative humanisms, by complicating Western notions of personhood (Schalk 3), and its "stubborn epistemological logics of human domination" (Brown 7).

Decolonizing the Stillness

TBE unfolds on the acerbically named continent of the Stillness, whose lands move unceasingly. Its people therefore live "in a perpetual state of disaster preparedness" (Jemisin, *TFS* 8), under the threat of apocalyptic seismic activity that could trigger Fifth Seasons: winters that can last centuries and render the Stillness uninhabitable. The continent is sparsely populated by comms, "unit[s] generally corresponding to one city or town" (459). Though the Old Sanze empire has mostly withered, "in practice, most comms still follow Imperial systems of governance, finance, education, and more" (464). The coloniality of Sanze's power thus persists, as does a coloniality of knowledge in stonelore: stories instructing comms on surviving Seasons, which advise comms to banish orogenes. Orogeny, the ability to perceive (to "sess" [465]) and redirect seismic activity, is an ostensibly useful ability considering the Earth's continuous dynamism. However, orogenes (derogatorily called "roggas" [462]), are considered a non-human species. A Sanze council ruled that "though they bear some resemblance to we of good and wholesome lineage, any degree of orogenic ability must be assumed to negate its corresponding personhood" (*TOG* 258)—the Stillness's juridical assemblages only selectively grant humanity. Orogenes are

subjected to the Fulcrum, an institution that effectively enslaves them to control the Stillness's ever-moving lands. While orogenic ability is distributed across abilities, genders and sexualities, the systemic marginalization of orogenes particularly echoes African-American experiences of racialization (Iles sec. 4.1). It is therefore fitting to read the exploitation of orogenes through the prism of Black feminist theory.

The Fulcrum is supervised by an order of Guardians, superhumanly strong persons implanted with pieces of Father Earth, making them obey his will: the Earth is alive and sentient, and wars with humanity because the ancient civilization of Syl Anagist exploited its resources. The Guardians are one of *TBE*'s various not-quite-human figures, with the most inhuman undoubtedly being Stone Eaters: a "sentient humanoid species whose flesh, hair, etc., resembles stone" (Jemisin, *TSS* 413). Through these different figures, *TBE* contests a simple notion of humanity. The series's central narrative concerns Essun, an orogene who escaped the Fulcrum. She tries to find her kidnapped, orogenically gifted daughter Nassun, who, faced with the violence inflicted on orogenes, decides to end the world's injustices by destroying the world. Essun instead strives to end the Seasons, repair the Earth, and save her daughter. Thus, both hoping to overthrow the oppressive systems enslaving orogenes, mother and daughter eventually face each other. Ultimately, Essun sacrifices herself to save Nassun, making the estranged daughter decide against her destructive determination and instead fulfill her mother's regenerative aims. The series, which describes the impending Fifth Season in a striking apocalyptic register, ends on a hopeful note, with the Fulcrum destroyed, the Guardians gone, and a truce made with Father Earth. What lies ahead for the Stillness is building the world anew—which requires decolonizing its modes of living and knowing.

Provincializing Posthumanism

Despite the persistent coloniality of the Stillness, previous authors have not engaged the series through an expressly decolonial perspective, even as they point out the colonial qualities of Jemisin's storyworld. The Stillness's coloniality is connected to its ecological cataclysms: María Ferrández San Miguel writes that *TBE* presents "the subjugation and exploitation of certain groups . . . and of nature" as coeval (474). For instance, Syl Anagist exploited a group of genetically engineered proto-orogenes, "to enslave the world itself" and harvest its resources (Jemisin, *TSS* 335). However, the Earth destroys Syl Anagist, initiating the Seasons to wipe out humanity. Both Alastair Iles and Miguel observe that *TBE* thus connects the exploitation of marginalized groups to that of Earth: what must follow from the series's conclusion is a different relationality to both orogenes and Earth. Concretizing this relationality, Miguel argues that the series proposes the "possibility of regeneration in the figuration of the posthuman being and the promotion of a posthuman form of ethics" (474). Miguel thereto reads the series's not-quite-human figures as posthuman configurations that "radically expose and threaten key dualisms of the Western philosophical tradition" (481), especially showing the entanglements between nature and culture.

Though I agree with Miguel's reading in many respects, I contend that reading the series's

characters as posthuman obscures its focus on racialization. Though considering 'the human' a discriminatory term, Miguel's reading of Jemisin's characters as posthuman subjects suggests that within posthumanism the dehumanization suffered by orogenes (and their real-world counterparts historically and today) becomes irrelevant. Even as they are enslaved by their exclusion from Man's humanity, posthumanism can incorporate these dehumanized peoples, and thereby it solves the problems plaguing pre-posthumanity. This reasoning then obscures the theme of racialization, and arguably undoes its critical potential. Miguel contends that Jemisin's "figures of hybridity embody the liberatory potential of the posthuman" (481), but we do well to heed Zakiyyah Jackson's cautioning "against a quixotic celebration of hybridity"; she demonstrates that:

> the transgression and subversion of . . . boundaries is at least as central, if not more fundamental, to the production of [antiblackness] as the semblance of an absolute distinction. . . . Antiblackness does not require choosing one strategy—strict boundaries or hybridity—over the other. (*Becoming Human* 156)

Considering hybridization a liberatory means overlooks its weaponization within Man's reservoir of antiblackness. Therefore, reading *TBE*'s dehumanized subjects as hybrid figures does not necessarily undo the subjugation effectuated by the racializing assemblages of the Stillness.

Moreover, various Afro-Indigenous critiques demonstrate the epistemic limits of posthumanism, contending that it remains predicated on whiteness and liberal humanism. As Laura Forlano summarizes, these critiques find it unproductive "to speak of the posthuman when so many people . . . have not been historically included in the category of the human in the first place" (28)—which is why Weheliye urges posthumanists to consider other humanisms rather than entirely discarding the human or equating it with Man ("'Feenin'" 40). Jackson finds that posthumanism "continues to equate humanism with Enlightenment rationality"—but "is it possible that the very subjects central to posthumanist inquiry . . . find their relief outside the epistemological locus of the West?" ("Animal" 673). Indigenous feminist Zoe Todd answers this question affirmatively, while identifying a tension between Indigenous thought either "not being acknowledged at all," or it being distorted and misrepresented by appropriation into Eurocentric frameworks (9). To work responsibly, I therefore acknowledge my embeddedness within Eurocentric frameworks. Though I do not employ Afro-Indigenous knowledges directly but rather secondary sources dialoguing with such knowledges, I nonetheless treat the strands of thought I engage carefully and with accountability, to "take responsibility for the epistemological and ontological worlds we enact" (Sundberg 40).

Orogenes Beyond Man

Thus, departing from posthumanism's limits, to return to the question of humanness. Rather than reading TBE's differentially humanized figures as posthuman, I read them as performing a humanism beyond Man. The subjugation of orogenes reflects the racializing assemblages that hierarchize humanity: Stills represent Man, and through racializing assemblages they exclude orogenes, Guardians (both not-quite-humans), and Stone Eaters (nonhumans) from their

professedly universal humanity. Regardless, many dehumanized figures proclaim their humanity. For instance, Hoa, a Stone Eater accompanying Essun, forcefully returns the question when Essun doubts his humanity:

> "Are you human?"
> At this, [Essun] cannot help but laugh once. "Officially? No."
> "Never mind what others think. What do you feel yourself to be?"
> "Human."
> "Then so am I." . . .
> "Uh, not anymore."
> "Should I take your word for that? Or listen to what I feel myself to be?"
> (Jemisin, *TOG* 281-282)

Hoa again stakes out an alternative humanism when he makes amends with a rival Stone Eater, who could not reconcile his humanity with his immortality: "Stubborn fool. There is the despair of ages on his face, all because he refuses to admit that there's more than one way to be human" (*TSS* 391). *TBE* thus opens up different ways of being human, and contests the immutability of notions of 'the human.'

To concretize the humanism of Jemisin's characters, I turn to Julietta Singh's definition of dehumanism, which aims to unsettle the modern/colonial rationality of mastery. Singh considers mastery a pervasive dimension "in the fabric of modern thought, subjectivity, and politics" (2), an impetus that "relentlessly reaches toward the indiscriminate control over something—whether human or inhuman, animate or inanimate" (10). Dehumanism instantiates a mode of non-masterful, vulnerable relationality: "a practice of recuperation, of stripping away the violent foundations (always structural and ideological) of colonial and neocolonial mastery that continue to render some beings more human than others" (4). Because dehumanism multi-directionally extends into non-masterful entanglements (145), I follow two relations in *TBE*, specifically in non-imperial comm Castrima: their environmental submersion, and their relational, decolonial governance.

Environmental Immersion and Relational Becoming

Led by orogene headwoman Ykka, Castrima is a comm (community) where orogenes and stills live together without enslaving orogenes. Notably, it remains non-imperial through its relationality to its environments: it is located underground. Rather than the ecological mastery of domination (Singh 12), they thus establish a relation of immersion. Macarena Gómez-Barris critiques modern/colonial extractivist mode of ecological domination (5), and describes a non-masterful alternative in Afro-Indigenous cosmologies that "live alongside and within intangible geographies by cultivating rather than domesticating them" (38). To escape Sanze's reach, Castrima resides in an underground geode: conventional comms would not inhabit this space because of the dangers posed by Earth's non-stop motions, but when it is inhabited by orogenes, the geode protects Castrima—orogeny powers the geode to perform tasks like filtering air and

water. Castrima thus enacts a non-masterful, submerged relationality to the environment instead of ransacking their environment, refusing an extractivist relation that "reduces, eliminates, and destroys [the environment's] heterogeneity" (Gómez-Barris 108).

Castrima's non-exploitative relationality to orogenes additionally indicates a non-masterful entanglement enacted throughout the series: a practice of relational becoming. This is reflected, firstly, in the novels' narrative form. *The Fifth Season* switches between three characters: Damaya, Syenite, and Essun, though the former two are revealed to be earlier phases in Essun's life. However, *The Fifth Season* relates the stories of Damaya, Syen, and Essun not chronologically but in parallel: a narrative form that reflects how her enslavement has fractured Essun's identity, as "often occurs when identities are—through a combination of violence, historical precedent, and social constructs—determined for a marginalized people" (Wickham 392). *TBE*'s unconventional second-person narration reiterates this fracturing: Jemisin denotes Essun as 'you,' which simultaneously addresses the reader and establishes an intimacy with Essun (Wickham 396). Damaya's and Syen's stories are instead narrated in third-person perspective, further distancing Essun from her previous lives. Additionally, the formal emulation of Essun's fractured identity "problematize[s] the sovereign 'I', [by putting] the liberal humanist Self at risk" (Jackson, *Becoming Human* 81). By fragmenting Essun's story and addressing her and the reader as 'you,' Jemisin upends the liberal sovereign 'I,' unsettling the presuppositions of Man's subjecthood and its sovereignty—a form of mastery and "a dangerous ideal as it stands in opposition to the recognition of relationality" (*Becoming Human* 146).

By upending the liberal sovereign Self, *TBE* enables a dehumanist relationality that is also enacted through its dynamic narration. Singh describes dynamic narration as:

> upturning and reshaping those narratives that have cast us as particular kinds of subjects[:] dynamic narration moves us [towards] a politics of entanglement from which other world relations can begin to flourish. Dynamic narration is therefore a gesture toward dehumanism—an act of narratively inhabiting the gaps and fissures of our own subjective constructions [to] refuse the violence of splitting ourselves off from the less agreeable aspects of our being. (120)

TFS inhabits the interstices of Essun's fractured subjectivity, forcing her and the reader to reconcile the different aspects of her identity, such as when she meets talented orogene Alabaster again after many years. Alabaster has only known her as Syenite, and so her past returns: "he returns his attention to you. (To her, Syenite.) To *you*, Essun. Rust it, you'll be glad when you finally figure out who you really are" (Jemisin, *TFS* 446). In truth, Essun is all of her identities and dynamic relations, as *TOG* beautifully illustrates: "After all, a person is herself, and others. Relationships chisel the final shape of one's being. I am me, and you" (*TOG* 1). Essun is herself, Damaya, and Syen, as well as those she encounters. Such fundamental relationality, then, can only engender an ethico-politics of individual, collective and ecological care and responsibility.

Castrima's Suturing toward Multi-Epistemic Literacy

The notion of responsibility finally brings me to multi-epistemic literacy. Gayatri Spivak, writing on human rights discourses, proposes to view not rights as a remedy to global wrongs, but rather responsibility. Nikita Dhawan summarizes: "We need to move from 'rights-based cultures' to 'responsibility-based cultures,' wherein instead of responsibility *for* the other, we are responsible *to* the other" (501). Whereas (juridical) responsibility for the other reinforces hierarchical relations, a responsibility to the other enables listening to the "call of the other" (Spivak 152). Singh advocates vulnerable listening as a practice to "produce new forms of engaged entanglement with and beyond ourselves" (139), which productively aligns with practicing a multi-epistemic (Kuokkanen 155), or, in Spivak's terminology, transnational literacy that aims to counter discontinuities between elites and the subalternized (Dhawan 499). Within this practice, Spivak proposes the concept-metaphor of suturing: weaving together different epistemic positionalities and practices to "undo the weaving of centuries old patterns of oppression" (Macdonald 48). Castrima illustrates listening and "learn[ing] to learn from below" (Spivak 170): unconventionally, its leadership mostly consists of orogenes, and even a Stone Eater is asked as council (Jemisin, *TOG* 22). Castrima thereby breaks with Sanze's coloniality of power/being/knowing.

Essun's experiences with Ykka further illustrate epistemic exchange through listening. Though Essun is trained by the Fulcrum, Ykka, an orogene without formal training, practices orogeny in ways Essun cannot: "She's a feral. . . . And yet there is a solidity to her, [an] implication of strength . . . which makes you doubt your Fulcrum-ish assessment of her" (355-356). Essun's framework cannot grasp Ykka's abilities, a different realm of orogenic sensibility. Essun realizes that "orogeny isn't about rank" (28), and consequently humbles her perspective: "Maybe [Ykka] couldn't shift a pebble because who . . . needs to shift pebbles? That's the Fulcrum's way of testing precision. . . . Maybe she failed your tests because they were the wrong tests" (359). Humbling her framework then enables Essun to learn from Ykka to sensibilize herself to magic, which Essun previously failed to do: "Alabaster failed to teach it to you because he was like you—Fulcrum-trained and Fulcrum-limited. . . . Ykka, feral that she is, with nothing to unlearn, was the key all along. If you hadn't been so arrogant. . ." (363). Essun demonstrates Dhawan's assertions about decolonizing philosophy: beyond integrating marginalized knowledges, what is needed is "a reorientation of our normative commitments, wherein instead of familiarizing ourselves with the unfamiliar, we face up to the greater challenge of defamiliarizing the familiar" (Dhawan 501). Essun's recognition of the Fulcrum's epistemic limits illustrates how recognizing "the limits of our power to know opens up possibilities of other practices of decoding ethics" (501). Humbling hegemonic perspectives and working towards multi-epistemic literacy enables new ways of being and knowing—and only through this multi-epistemic practice can Essun save the world. *TBE* thus dramatizes the process of suturing towards multi-epistemic literacies: Essun establishes a reciprocal practice, as she not just broadcasts the Fulcrum's ways but learns to listen, thereby displacing Sanze's coloniality of being and knowing.

Conclusion

Recognizing the coloniality undergirding the storyworld of N. K. Jemisin's *Broken Earth* trilogy, I offered a decolonial reading of the series. Whereas posthumanist approaches inadvertently obscure the racialization central to Jemisin's narrative, and furthermore remain predicated on the liberal humanism and Eurocentrism that *TBE* precisely unsettles, I read Jemisin's variously dehumanized figures as performing a humanism beyond Man. Reading *TBE* through a dehumanist lens illustrates how the series upends the logics of mastery and instead works towards a relational, decolonial ethico-politics. The non-imperial comm Castrima especially highlights vulnerable entanglements with both the environment and dehumanized others, and I have subsequently read its practices as enacting the formation of multi-epistemic literacy. To unsettle the coloniality of being and knowing, a reciprocal multi-epistemic practice is necessary, which entails responsibility and listening to the call of the other—and, crucially, humbling one's own epistemic positionality. *TBE* shows the imperial knowledge of the Fulcrum to be but one modality of practicing orogeny, not a universal understanding of this ability. Paralleling the series's illustration of multi-epistemic practices, throughout this article I attempted to demonstrate not only how different conceptual frameworks produce different readings, but also how we may in academic practice traverse multi-epistemic challenges responsibly and accountably, without erasing Afro-Indigenous knowledges. In this particular instance, this entails not so much incorporating subjugated knowledges but rather defamiliarizing established, Eurocentric frameworks and their institutional privileges through decolonial critique.

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Crips Claim Space: Disabled Writers Resist Eugenicist Ideology Through Science Fiction

Laura Alison Nash

Humans shape the future in many ways, from developing technology to advocating for policy change to manipulating genetic material and beyond. In her book *Emergent Strategy: Shaping Change, Changing Worlds*, adrienne maree brown even suggests writing science fiction is one way to shape the future:

> Art is not neutral. It either upholds or disrupts the status quo, advancing or regressing justice. We are living now inside the imagination of people who thought economic disparity and environmental destruction were acceptable costs for their power. It is our right and responsibility to write ourselves into the future. (197)

Science fiction presents a ready medium for imagining possible futures, but as brown asserts, it isn't neutral. Science fiction can reinforce harmful societal structures, as well as disrupt them.

American science fiction tends to reinforce eugenicist ideology, particularly regarding disability.[1] Consider the 1997 science fiction film *Gattaca*. In the world of *Gattaca*, most parents rely on genetic selection to reproduce. "In-valids"—those conceived and born without genetic intervention—face tremendous barriers. In-valid protagonist Vincent Freeman dreams of going to space. He knows he'll never be chosen, no matter how hard he trains and studies, so he turns to the black market. "Valid" Jerome Morrow agrees to sell Vincent genetic material. Armed with Jerome's blood, sweat, and urine, Vincent successfully tricks his way to becoming an astronaut.

Gattaca reveals societal anxiety about disability. When Vincent's employers finally schedule him for a mission, Jerome remarks, "They're sending you up there, for Christ's sake. You! Of all people!" He comes across as both impressed and disgusted, revealing ingrained genoism. Raised in a genoist society, Jerome feels so inadequate after winning a silver medal, he steps in front of a bus to attempt suicide, becoming paralyzed in the process. Then, when Vincent is finally on his way to Saturn, Jerome successfully commits suicide, incinerating himself. Thus, *Gattaca* falls prey to the kill-or-cure trope. As described by Jay Timothy Dolmage in *Disability Rhetoric*, "Just as a loaded gun shown in the opening scenes of a movie will eventually be fired, a disabled character will either have to be 'killed or cured' by the end of any movie or novel in which they appear" (34-35). The kill-or-cure trope perpetuates the belief that disabled lives aren't worth living.

America demands ever more able and productive citizens. In "Cripping Neoliberal Futurity," Kelly Fritsch observes, "the child of reproductive futurism is not only able-bodied, but must also be better than able-bodied or able-minded" (14). *Gattaca* illuminates this reality—neoliberal

society's reliance on hyper-ability to fuel an obsession with continuous improvement and productivity. It even offers some critique of it. But the film fails to give a glimpse of a brighter, more just alternative. One in-valid cheats his way to success through persistence and identity fraud, but he doesn't lift anyone else up in the process. Another man kills himself rather than continue to live with a disability. We're led to view Vincent as an exception to the rule: one man with sufficient drive to achieve his dreams within a broken system, but no hope of changing the system, and absolutely no hope for disabled people.

Disabled people deserve a different kind of science fiction story. Not only do we deserve disabled characters who survive into the future; we deserve disabled characters who thrive. Though they haven't yet reached mainstream audiences, these stories do exist. Disabled writers like Nisi Shawl, Mia Mingus, Erika Hammerschmidt, and John C. Ricker have gifted us with science fiction stories that confront eugenicist ideology and envision brighter futures for disabled people.

Confronting Eugenicist Realities

In her short story "Hollow," Mia Mingus describes a community of disabled people—or "UnPerfects"—living on a planet called Hollow. Years ago, on Earth, UnPerfects staged a revolution, briefly taking over the government. After only a week, the New Regime seized power and sent all UnPerfects to camps, torturing and murdering many of them. Then a leader of the New Regime had a baby—an UnPerfect baby—and, suddenly, they called off the slaughter. The New Regime put the remaining UnPerfects on a space shuttle and launched them to Hollow, where biodomes had already been established. It's clear that the leaders of the New Regime assumed the UnPerfects would die; it was simply more palatable to send them to space than continue to commit genocide, particularly when they realized they would have to slaughter their own children. Instead, the UnPerfects thrived and built a beautiful, accessible city.

Mingus spends a few paragraphs with a character named Seva, who sits on a couch remembering and grieving. At three years old, her family left her in an institution and never returned, not even to visit. Seva's experience mirrors the experience of thousands of disabled people. Throughout the 1900s, U.S. doctors and social workers persuaded mostly poor and immigrant families to send their children to state-run institutions, convincing them that institutions could provide better care and relieve the family's financial burden. In some ways, sending the UnPerfects to Hollow functions similarly to sending disabled people to institutions, removing them from family and community, banishing them from sight. "They couldn't bear to look at us," says a character named Rex, "but they couldn't bring themselves to continue killing us" ("Hollow" 113).

Kea's Flight, a novel written and self-published by wife and husband Erika Hammerschmidt and John C. Ricker, has a similar premise to "Hollow." A couple hundred years in Earth's future, protagonist Karen tested positive in-utero for a high likelihood of developing Asperger's syndrome. Her embryo was removed, cryogenically frozen, and placed on a spaceship with thousands of other embryos that had also tested positive for developmental disabilities. Once in

space, en route to a planet named New Charity III, the embryos resumed gestation. Karen and her fellow rems (short for removals) grew up in transit to New Charity III, expecting to arrive when they turned twenty-one years old. They're also accompanied by non-disabled "benevolent guardians" (BGs) tasked with caring for the rems and the ship. As they age, Karen and her friends feel more and more stifled by the structures imposed by the BGs and slowly become aware of how likely the mission is to fail. It becomes clear that Earth didn't equip them to survive, but rather constructed a spaceship with cheap technology to get disabled embryos off an overpopulated Earth as quickly as possible.

The spaceship, which the rems call the Flying Dustbin because of how Earth threw them away like trash, parallels an institution in several ways. As an illustration, I employ Oregon's state institution, Fairview Training Center, which was in operation from 1908 to 2000. The Oregon Public Broadcasting documentary *In the Shadow of Fairview* paints a vivid picture of Oregon's state institution for "the feeble-minded, idiotic, and epileptic," which was representative of similar institutions across the United States. Former patients describe it as a prison, overcrowded and underfunded, rampant with abuse and neglect, in which residents were forced to take psychotropic medication and perform unpaid labor. The people committed to Fairview had little control over their own lives, subject to strict schedules and cruel punishments. Many underwent forced sterilization before they were permitted to leave the institution. In *Kea's Flight*, Hammerschmidt and Ricker describe a fictional world clearly influenced by a very real experience like the one at Fairview. The rems are kept to strict schedules and constantly surveilled. If they make a simple misstep, robots appear and drag them to re-education rooms where they're forced to watch propaganda for hours. At meals, each rem receives an energy bar and nutrient fluid calculated for their body size, infused with psychotropic medication and contraceptives. If they refuse to eat, a robot force feeds them. The BGs consistently cover up fatal accidents, including an explosion and technical malfunctions. Similarly, Fairview attempted to cover up accidents and injuries, rape, and murder. An investigation eventually led to the closure of Fairview in 2000, and many similar institutions across the United States have also closed, but de facto institutions still exist in other forms, like psychiatric hospitals, group homes, and prisons. *Kea's Flight* imagines how these institutions might continue into the future.

Like the characters in "Hollow" and *Kea's Flight*, the characters in Nisi Shawl's short story "Deep End" have also been sent to colonize another planet. However, they weren't expelled from Earth due to disability. Instead, they're expelled from Earth because they've been convicted as criminals. Psyche Moth is a prison ship. Each passenger's mind has been downloaded into "freespace," destroying their original body, and uploaded into a clone of a wealthy individual from Earth. Due to the systemic racism of the criminal justice system and wealth inequality, most prisoners are Black or Brown, while the bodies their minds are uploaded into are White. (While privileged people remain safe on Earth, they are intent on spreading their genes throughout the universe.) This results in dysphoria, as prisoners feel unsettled in their new, unfamiliar bodies. In addition, several of the prisoners experience health concerns. For example, the main character,

Wayna, develops unexplained shooting pains.

"Deep End" reflects difficult truths about the U.S. incarceration system. In "Disabling Incarceration," Liat Ben-Moshe speaks to criminalization, institutionalization, and psychiatrization as a continuum, facets of a unified carceral system. They work together to remove "undesirable" people from communities. It's not uncommon for people to move from one carceral location to another (e.g., from prison to a psychiatric hospital). One reason for this: "the prison environment itself is disabling" (13); prisons cause mental and physical harm. "Deep End" points to this reality. Several of Psyche Moth's prisoners become disabled after they're downloaded to cloned bodies, and the ship AI refuses to take their pain and health concerns seriously, simply prescribing rest. People currently and formerly incarcerated have reported similar treatment by prison staff, who refuse them medical attention and medication. By writing from Wayna's point of view, Shawl emphasizes the absurdity of this treatment. Wayna's health, along with her fellow prisoners', is in the metaphorical hands of a cold, rule-abiding AI.

By reflecting on eugenicist realities from disabled characters' points of view, the authors of these three stories draw attention to the inhumanity of institutions, incarceration, and other practices that sought, and continue to seek, to erase disabled people. The pain and grief, love and hope expressed by the characters humanizes them. This is a subversive act. As Eli Clare writes in *Brilliant Imperfection*, "Many of us have been seduced into believing the need to eliminate disability and 'defectiveness' is intuitively obvious" (27). Too often, stories are a part of this seduction, dehumanizing disabled people by relegating them to stereotypes. But the disabled characters in "Hollow," *Kea's Flight*, and "Deep End" aren't the disabled characters we've grown to expect. Instead, Mingus, Hammerschmidt and Ricker, and Shawl write disabled characters who experience a wide range of emotions, have complex relationships, and fight tooth and nail for survival and liberation—humans worthy of life.

Envisioning Crip Futures

NASA requires astronauts to meet rigorous qualifications. Minimum standards for applicants include academic achievement and professional experience in engineering, science, or mathematics; vision correctable to 20/20; blood pressure and height requirements. Final-round applicants undergo a week of personal interviews and medical screenings. Successful astronaut candidates spend two years in strenuous training and evaluation, at the end of which NASA still may not select them for a mission ("Astronaut Selection and Training"). In short, one must be both hyper able-bodied and able-minded to become an astronaut. But what if hyper-ability isn't a necessity for astronauts? As Rose Eveleth writes in "It's Time to Rethink Who's Best Suited for Space Travel," "If you want to find people who are the very best at adapting to worlds not suited for them, you'll have the best luck looking at people with disabilities, who navigate such a world every single day." She uses the example of the Gallaudet Eleven, a group of deaf men engaged in a series of tests during the early 1960s to learn how humans might function in space, specifically chosen for their imperviousness to motion sickness. Eveleth also points to people who use ostomy

bags, a medical device that could solve the problem of human waste management in space, as well as people who use wheelchairs, who are already familiar with modes of propulsion employed by astronauts in zero gravity. It seems many disabled people would make excellent astronauts.

We see this reversal of expectations in "Hollow." The characters know the New Regime didn't expect them to survive their journey to Hollow. In a turn of events, the UnPerfects do more than survive. They thrive by transforming the planet's previously constructed living spaces to meet their needs: "They built new adaptations for their chairs, lifts, canes, crutches, braces, and their UnPerfect bodies, without thought to what was allowed or having to rely on the Perfects to do so" (Mingus, "Hollow" 118). Having escaped the ableist barriers imposed by the Perfects back on Earth, the UnPerfects build a city more accessible and welcoming than they've ever experienced before. This is a glimpse of what could be possible not only in the future on a distant planet, but here and now on Earth, if we recognized disabled people as leaders and offered supports rather than impediments.

Similarly, in *Kea's Flight*, the non-disabled BGs so underestimate the rems that they don't notice a group of friends organizing a coup right beneath their noses. Karen's special interests in linguistics and chess lead her to create a secret language using a game board so she and her friends can communicate about illicit topics in plain view. Her boyfriend, Draz, uses his coding prowess to hack into the ship's systems, allowing the rems to slowly gain more control over the ship's operations. He uses his skills multiple times to fix lethal malfunctions, saving everyone. And when they discover their destination, the planet New Charity III, is uninhabitable, their friend Lefty's knowledge of astronomy and mathematics allows them to chart a new course. The characters' neurodivergent traits—special interests, hyper focus, pattern recognition, etc.—facilitate the rems' survival and eventual takeover of the Flying Dustbin.

The idea that disabled people would make excellent astronauts and space colonists is a more literal interpretation of these stories. Another read considers the elements of space travel, colonization of extraterrestrial planets, and the genre of science fiction itself as symbols representing futurity. Space travel, both real and fictional, is inextricably tied up in visions of humanity spreading throughout the solar system and galaxy. One argument for space colonization: the survival of our species. If an extinction event occurred on one planet, at least humans would live on somewhere else in the universe. This raises many questions, of course. One question I'm concerned with here: Who would be chosen to colonize space and carry our species into the future? Extrapolating from NASA's astronaut selection criteria, only the hyper-able-bodied and able-minded would find their way onto other planets, resulting in a eugenicist project. For now, space colonization is a distant possibility, opening space for dreaming, a screen onto which we can project our imagination, our hopes and desires. So much could change in the next hundred or thousand years, which is why science fiction stories about space travel and colonization provide fertile ground for envisioning different ways of living. Hammerschmidt and Ricker, Mingus, and Shawl take advantage of this fecundity to plant visions of communities where disabled

people thrive.

Despite their limiting environment, the characters in *Kea's Flight* create a community of friends. They gather almost every day to converse via Karen's game board language. When dangers emerge, they look out for one another; they support each other to find courage and joy in the face of seemingly insurmountable challenges and loss. The rems' complementary strengths and weaknesses, and their love and respect for one another, enable them to pull off a successful coup. While only Draz possesses the necessary hacking skills to manipulate the ship's surveillance and navigation systems, each friend brings value to the group. Even Chris, who is frequently critical and picks fights, is still valued among the friends. They may grow frustrated and angry with him, but they don't discard him. Their loyalty pays off near the end of *Kea's Flight* when Chris attacks a robot, sacrificing himself to draw attention away from his friends. If not for him, they wouldn't have made it to the ship's engine control room.

Mainstream American society places a premium on capitalist productivity, esteeming bankable traits and skills over other, less lucrative skills. Neoliberal rhetoric dubs people with profitable traits and skills "productive members of society" and without placing "burdens on society." Far too often, disabled people are labeled "burdens." In contrast, disability justice affirms "that all bodies are unique and essential, that all bodies have strengths and needs that must be met … we are powerful not despite the complexities of our bodies, but because of them" (Berne). This is a direct challenge to eugenicist ideology, recognizing that *every* person is valuable and brilliant, including people who don't have "marketable" skills or who have cantankerous personalities, like Chris. According to author of *Care Work: Dreaming Disability Justice* Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha, true access is a "radical act of love" (76). It means we give each other access even when we don't like each other; no one gets tossed aside, and that benefits everyone.

Shawl also emphasizes the beauty and complexity of relationships in "Deep End." At the beginning of her story, Wayna enjoys a close romantic relationship with two lovers: Doe and Thad. Doe's mind, like Wayna's, has been downloaded into a clone body, but Thad's mind still only exists in freespace. Doe and Wayna visit him there, where they can interact with each other, appearing as their old selves. However, a crack forms in their relationship when Wayna starts experiencing pain. Doe hesitates to have sex with Wayna in her new physical form, worried she'll hurt Wayna, and Thad suggests she remain in freespace with him. "I wasn't sure I wanted to [download my mind] anyway," he says. He adds sarcastically: "Now it sounds so much more inviting? 'Defective body?' 'Don't mind if I do'" (129). In the end, Thad and Doe decide to remain in freespace, while Wayna chooses to descend to Jubilee in her clone body. Wayna establishes a new community with new friends and lovers. She builds rapport with other people experiencing the same sudden onset disability, and they swap tips and tricks for managing the pain. Shawl doesn't suggest that Wayna feels any rancor toward Doe and Thad as she grows apart from them; she simply forms new relationships with people who share her experience and meet her needs.

Karen Hammer speaks to this phenomenon of bonding over shared experiences in "A Scar

is More than a Wound: Rethinking Community and Intimacy Through Queer and Disability Theory." Hammer examines how the character Jess in the novel *Stone Butch Blues* and the author Riva Lehrer of personal essay "Golem Girl Gets Lucky" "use the surface of the scar to build community and intimacy" (167). In both pieces, the characters endure exclusion and abuse: Jess because she doesn't conform to gender expectations, and Lehrer due to her physical disability. Yet, for Jess and Lehrer, "common vulnerability creates an opportunity to embrace a sense of interdependence through mutual precarity" (Hammer 159). They build strong, caring relationships with others based on common traumas. Hammer refers to this bond as "queer/crip kinship." While Shawl only mentions Wayna's newfound kinship in passing—"She met prisoners who had similar symptoms, and they traded tips and theories about what was wrong with them" (132)—it reads as critical to Wayna's decision to continue in physical space. Crip kinship leads to community and resilience.

Mingus's story also emphasizes kinship. In the second scene of "Hollow," Mingus zooms in on a poignant exchange between three characters. Ona, Prolt, and Al Dwihn return from working in the garden, harvesting food to feed their community, and they check in with one another. Ona wipes the dirt and drool from Prolt's hands and arms and adjusts his leg to relieve pain. They all discuss how a new tool may help to ease Ona's soreness. The interaction comes across as casual camaraderie, a moment that's been repeated hundreds of times before and will happen many more times in the future. I associate this scene with a term Mingus herself coined: "access intimacy": "Access intimacy is that elusive, hard to describe feeling when someone else 'gets' your access needs" ("Access Intimacy"). These characters are relaxed around one another; caring for one another is normalized, nothing special or remarkable about it. Except, in the context of our present-day lived reality, it is remarkable.

Mainstream American society values independence. We denigrate anyone who relies on other people or systems to meet their needs, from disabled people who rely on care work to families who rely on SNAP or food pantries. Piepzna-Samarasinha offers the example of "emergency-response care webs that happen when someone able- bodied becomes temporarily or permanently disabled, and their able-bodied network of friends springs into action" (52). These types of care webs mobilize and burn out quickly when able-bodied friends expect the disabled friend to convalesce quickly and regain their independence. This approach to care hinges on a selective lens—a lens that filters out the connections and supports we all rely on. None of us thrive alone; we're deeply interconnected and dependent on one another in different ways. All three stories discussed here magnify this truth and demonstrate that we're better off when we embrace interdependence, whether it manifests as taking advantage of varied skill sets to meet a common goal, bonding emotionally through a shared experience, helping each other meet basic needs like nutrition and hygiene, or something else.

Readers may not expect to read science fiction and take away lessons about relationships, intimacy, and interdependence. Science fiction generally recalls feats of engineering, advancements in science and technology, relationships on the scale of galactic diplomacy, and

war. In comparison, human relationships come off as mundane. But what if paying attention to and developing relationships in this way is what humans need to survive into the future? "What ableism hides, as does every other interconnected system of oppression, is that our survival as disabled people instills us with powerful wisdom that is necessary now more than ever for our human and planetary survival" (*Skin, Tooth, and Bone* 95). Disabled science fiction authors offer tools and skills for the continuation of our species.

Conclusion

In *Disability Theory*, Tobin Siebers observes that even though history has unfailingly shown us human beings are fragile and mortal, we're convinced that we can achieve perfect health and immortality in the future (7). Western science fiction habitually reinforces this belief, portraying future societies capable of manipulating genes, eradicating disease and disability, and even super-enhancing ability. These visions of the future influence our behaviors in the present. They encourage us to selectively abort fetuses that may be born disabled, spend millions of dollars on researching cures rather than improving quality of life and making society more accessible, and engineer robotic exoskeletons so people with spinal injuries can "walk." Disabled people don't have to accept these futures. We can write our own.

Let's envision vibrant crip futures until we can taste, hear, smell, feel, see, and intuit them. Let's dream about disabled people thriving on Earth, in space, in fantasy worlds and alternate realities, and share those dreams with everyone. Disabled people deserve futurity; we won't be eliminated.

Notes

1. Eugenics, introduced by Sir Francis Galton in the late 1800s, seeks to "improve" humanity by regulating procreation. Many influential leaders supported eugenics, and the movement spread throughout Europe and America in the early 1900s, inspiring the Holocaust and other acts of genocide. Eugenicists deemed people of color, disabled people, and poor people unfit for procreation while encouraging "well-born" Anglo-Saxons to reproduce. In 1927, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in favor of eugenics when they upheld the legality of sterilizing inmates in public institutions in *Buck v. Bell*. This ruling has never been overturned, and eugenicist ideology continues to permeate American culture.

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Controlled (Post)Human Bodies in Minister Faust's *War & Mir, Volume I: Ascension*

Zita Hüsing

Questioning In/Equalities

Minister Faust's self-published and under-researched science fiction (SF) novel *War and Mir, Volume 1: Ascension* (2012) addresses the attempted control of (post)human bodies within fictional systems of biopolitics. As the first novel in a trilogy, the narrative recounts the turbulent story of the human protagonist Harq, a man in his thirties, who is suddenly confronted with a powerful princess, an intergalactic system of power, life beyond earth, and a journey through space. This description positions the novel as a fascinating SF space opera, a genre which scholar Sherryl Vint describes as a narrative filled with "thrilling space battles, heroic masculinity, stunning technology, and imperiled women," while it also relies on the fulfillment of prophecies and the presence of "a mysterious force" (2). In this regard, the novel shares many narrative parallels with George Lucas's famous *Star Wars* saga, a movie series that spans over four decades (2). The saga also includes a variety of masculine heroes as well and introduces the "force," which imbues Jedi knights with their powers.

However, Vint's description of the genre can be misleading or interpreted as incomplete since Faust's novel also includes a critical commentary on systems of power and possible abuses of hierarchical structures. As I observe, the novel emphasizes and condemns the horrific enslavement and mistreatments of predominantly black bodies. I elaborate through the example of *War & Mir* how the larger genre of SF works as an important tool of social critique which makes systemic racism visible. I compare the political treatment of the (post)human bodies in Faust's novel to the treatment of black, disenfranchised people who suffer amongst systems of discrimination and racism across borders. The Canadian novel includes racist structures with regards to the treatment of othered black bodies that are similar to those in the U.S. antebellum South while it also reveals how racism and black diaspora moves beyond borders and into space. Accordingly, Alexander Weheliye rightfully asserts that "questions of humanity . . . have relied heavily on the concepts of the cyborg and the posthuman," while at the same time not taking into account "race as a constitutive category in thinking about the parameters of humanity" (8). While presenting an inherently racist system, Faust's novel reflects upon the interests of leading powers in maintaining regulatory mechanisms over the life and death of these bodies. The novel arguably approaches bodies as a biopolitical problem whose control demonstrates an exertion of power in an inherently racist system, which is interested in maintaining regulatory mechanisms over life and death.

The narrative focuses on representations of black diaspora by introducing the characters Harq and Thagó. I contend that the two black men are central to the racial framing of the novel. When the protagonist Harq is confronted with the revelation of an unknown universe filled with foreign species, and unknown systems of power, he slowly begins to investigate and question the mechanisms of the regulations in place. Similarly, this analysis is going to investigate Faust's narrative, which represents attempts to control bodies within fictional systems of biopolitics that use biopower to control human and non-human populations. The French philosopher Michel Foucault famously introduced the theoretical concept of biopolitics in his lecture "Society Must Be Defended." In his lecture, Foucault provides the broad definition of biopolitics as the "State control of the biological" productivity of bodies (1440). Importantly, Foucault's construct of biopolitics does not consider systemic racism. While referring to the nineteenth century, he situates man as a living being who is under the control of the state who has the "power's hold over life," also known as "biopower" (1440). In Faust's novel, Harq experiences various systems of such "biopower."

On his journey to foreign planets, Harq not only becomes aware of his lack of control over his own (post)human body, but he also witnesses an excessiveness of wealth enabled by enslavement. Importantly, I investigate the portrayed bodies as 'posthuman' because of the transformative aspects of the ontological explorations of the human. Rosi Braidotti provides a useful definition of the complex term 'posthuman':

> The posthuman predicament is such as to force a displacement of the lines of demarcation between structural differences, or ontological categories, for instance between the organic and the inorganic, the born and the manufactured, flesh and metal, electronic circuits and organic nervous systems. (90)

Thus, the posthuman concerns the transgression of binaries between human and non-human, between subject and object, and to take it one step further while considering insights from Critical Race Theory (CRT), between free and enslaved bodies. The posthuman attempts to move away from a human-centered, anthropocentric approach. In conjunction with Foucault's observations on biopolitics, Braidotti offers an insightful observation of bodies as liminal, taking on blurry ontological positions. While Foucault observes the control of a state over *human* bodies, I inquire whether his theory is applicable to posthuman bodies as well. I ask: How are *posthuman* bodies controlled in Faust's narrative and by whom? Zakiyyah Iman Jackson also calls attention to the fact that early posthumanist scholars of the 1990s "sidestepped the analytical challenged posed by the categories of race, colonialism, and slavery" (671). It is problematic that race as a critical term is absent in much posthumanist discourse (Ellis 7). Therefore, a CRT investigation of "the relationship among race, racism and power" and its critical engagement with "the very foundations of the liberal order" serves as a guide throughout this analysis (Delgado and Stefancic 3). Thus, this essay establishes linkages between Foucault's observations, posthumanist thought, and constructions of racism.

While especially focusing on the treatment of children as slaves, the sexual exploitation of bodies and the control over bodies through systems of racism and sub-human re-categorization, this essay discusses the dehumanization of posthuman, 'othered' bodies. In this context, I investigate the co-dependent but isolated enslaved groups of humans and numans in Faust's novel within the framework of CRT. In comparison to humans, numans are the only other sentient population in the universe apart from humans (Faust 46). Posthumanism continues to rapidly evolve while establishing connections to fields such as postcolonialism, animal studies, queer studies and CRT (Jackson 674). "Numans" appear almost virtually indistinguishable from humans, apart from their skin marks. They are the only other sentient population in the universe apart from humans and are responsible for abducting humans from earth (Faust 46). In comparison to humans, numans are the only other sentient population (46).

Uncovering Biopolitical Hierarchies: Harq's Journey and Awakening

Harq begins his journey in his home on earth in Edmonton, Canada. He finds out that his friend Thagó is indeed a Suftem, or "a former human who was abducted from earth and was raised by monks" on a planet called Quorodis (Faust 37). His friend Thagó enlightens the confused Harq by describing to him the knowledge of *Yuthi*, a mysterious, magical knowledge of the universe (73). This knowledge is comparable to the dark side of the force present in the *Star Wars* franchise and already touches upon constructions of biopolitics since power is inextricably linked to knowledge as Foucault observes (1444). Similarly, Weheliye suggests the idea of "a technological assemblage of humanity, technology circumscribed here in the broadest sense as the application of *knowledge* to the practical aims of human life . . . of what it means to be human in the modern world" (12, emphasis added). The technological assemblage and the dark force of the Yuthi thus signifies the idea of a powerful knowledge that commands the fictional universe in Faust's novel. In a biopolitical hierarchy, the *Yuthi* finds itself the mediator and facilitator of such a hierarchy. Thus, Harq suddenly finds himself in a traditional SF scenario of cognitive estrangement due to his introduction to an unfamiliar "novum" of knowledge that forces him to re-establish his world-view (Vint 38).

Following this incredible discovery of life beyond earth, mysterious men chase Harq and Thagó. The two escape these alien "terrorists," who nonchalantly kill humans in their pursuit with their technologically advanced weaponry, resulting in "people hitting the ground like cows electro stunned in slaughterhouses" (Faust 26). This violent description points to a comparison of humans to chattel. Similarly, in his *Notes on the State of Virginia*, Thomas Jefferson compares the African American slave to "distributable" or "moveable" thing, to an "animal whose body is at rest, and who does not reflect, must be disposed to sleep of course" (144, 146). With this comparison between the enslaved and animals, Jefferson exemplifies the dehumanization of the enslaved and excuses slavery. Faust's narrative thus begins a similar description that dehumanizes human bodies, referring to humans as disposable bodies, a notion that continues throughout the narrative.

After freeing the beautiful and seductive Princess Azir Utto and journeying through outer space in a tumultuous journey, Harq arrives on the planet Tuwitl. In a plot twist, Azir Utto turns out to be the controlling monarch of Tuwitl, a space associated with extraordinarily cruel power structures. Azir Utto enslaves humans whose only "freedom is death" (Faust 95). Thus, on his first journey into space, Harq witnesses an excessive amount of wealth enabled by the enslavement of humans. At the top of this hierarchy are so-called "numans" like Princess Azir Utto who profit from the physical labor and involuntary sexual exploitation of the enslaved. Harq learns that numans are responsible for abducting and enslaving humans from earth (46).

Enslavement as Racial Biopolitical Violence

However, in Faust's narrative, Azir Utto struggles to maintain her power. As a monarch, the princess attempts to combine a system of medieval sovereignty with biopolitical control on the overarching structure of the astriarchy, the "(m)ajor political, economic power" in the solar system (40). Harq's companion, the Suftem priest Thagó regards himself as a protector of the Astriarchy, the underlying "star kingdom" or "star order" (38). Furthermore, the Suftem complicate the power structures as a government-sanctioned religion that prays to a powerful entity named "the Glory" (45). The narrative thus also hints at the possibility of an underlying theocracy structure that enforces a racist treatment of humans by numans. For instance, the Suftem theology states that "human are the degenerate reprobate miscegenates from an ancient misflowering, purely material beings lacking Souls, whereas the very Nature of Numans is glorious, consisting of and imbued with the Divine, radiation from deepest interior the celestial Immanence that is the essence of sublime Consciousness'" (172). The theology bears similarities to racist power ideologies (like the ones mentioned in Thomas Jefferson's *Notes on Virginia*) that utilize biological racism and prejudices to distinguish humans from "non-human" slaves. Overall, it becomes apparent that many of the various power structures in place share the characteristics of dominating and controlling human bodies. Additionally, *War & Mir* inhabits underlying systems of racism and sub-human categorizations, which further the biopolitical power structures.

Thagó shares his suspicion that the princess is indeed a *saiyarkutlet*, or unempathetic "soul-eater," a being that craves power (127). This attribution of insatiable power to the character Azir Utto certainly reflects the sovereign's power and the biopolitical structures at play. Thagó elaborates (in his local dialect):

> Saiyarkutlet not having conscience. Maybe you go back far enough, maybe they are being manipulators of us all since long-ago time, since first-times. Making the systems, societies, making all of us slaves to them, making us livestock on their farm. (127)

He evokes here Foucault and the biopolitical control over the productivity of bodies, but he is also again evoking U.S. notions of chattel slavery due to the comparison of human and enslaved bodies as a livestock. This description establishes enslaved human bodies in *War & Mir* as "posthuman" because their treatment as dehumanized slaves moves beyond an anthropocentric approach to the human. Their position displaces "the lines of demarcation" between "ontological

categories, for instance between the organic and the inorganic," between the free and the enslaved body (Braidotti 90). Due to their treatment as slaves, the humans take on a new, posthuman ontology, one which is emphasized due to their exploitation within systems of biopolitical control.

War & Mir demonstrates underlying systems of racism and sub-human categorizations which further the biopolitical power structures. Thagó recalls: "Over centuries, steal dozens-dozens-thousands. Breed millions of babies, and enslave them, too" (Faust 41). The breeding or "production" of enslaved humans is hence essential to maintain the biopolitical hierarchies. Additionally, the abduction of "millions of babies" also reveals that Tuwitl's power system especially exploits children (41). One of them is Ti-Joto, a young boy in whom Harq takes a protective and parental interest. The human child grew up in Turwitl and in an Anakin Skywalker-like twist, he evokes the pity of Harq. When Harq first thinks about freeing and adopting Ti-Joto he is confronted with the harsh bureaucratic reality of his endeavor. His companion MarAset elaborates: "You've gotta buy him and then free him yourself. But even then it's not over because if we freed him here, he's got no savings, nowhere to love" (106). MarAset reveals that the system of biopolitics on Tuwitl is highly bureaucratic and difficult to disrupt due to its complex and entangled structures.

Desperate, Ti-Joto violently attempts to break out of the system after being asked to submit himself sexually to a guest on Tuwitl with his mother. This demand reveals that the system enforces sexual enslavement. Sexual encounters become a matter of biopolitical regulation. After Ti-Joto's resistance to sexual exploitation, the princess condemns him to participate in the Taïzahfohn, an obscene gladiator-like tournament where spectators watch children massacre each other (96). In addition to the sexual regulations, the Taïzahfohn seems like the ultimate grotesque embodiment of the biopolitics in place, a control over human bodies in Hunger Games fashion, so to speak. The event evokes the question if our societies similarly are increasing to switch off between an "all work" to "all play" mentality, a change which might be amplified by the presence of information technologies (Haraway 300). The competition demonstrates here how the Princess's sovereignty over death is opposed to the regularization of life by technologies of biopower (Foucault 1446). In systems of biopower which do not include the sovereign's power, death can be reconceptualized by technologies of biopower as being less ritualized and hidden away.

After winning the Taïzahfohn, "the coliseum screams [Ti-Joto's] name, worshipping him with their collective hatred" (Faust 102). The hatred directed towards Ti-Joto reveals that despite his win, he is still regarded as sub-human due to the fact that he is a human. Ti-Joto's discrimination indicates parallels to systemic racism. Indeed, *War & Mir* reflects how "race can be placed front and center in considerations of political violence" (5). When Harq ultimately decides to free Ti-Joto from his state of oppression, he encounters Ti-Joto's mother. After Thagó elaborates his intentions to free Ti-Joto, she demands payment for her son, which Thagó submits to. In this short glimpse of her, Ti-Joto's mother is thus portrayed as unempathetic and marked by the capitalist exploitative system of Tuwitl. She lets her son go, but not without re-evaluating his material worth

as a body in the system. His mother positions his body as a consumer good or 'capital' in an economic context.

The example of Ti-Joto demonstrates how the biopolitical hierarchies on Tuwitl are maintained by representing humans as less or othered through the employment of racist mechanisms of dehumanization. I connect the dehumanization of the enslaved to Weheliye's idea of "racializing assemblages" (3). In the prominent work *Habeas Viscus*, Weheliye interprets racialization as a "conglomerate of sociopolitical relations that discipline humanity into full humans, not-quite-humans, and nonhumans," thereby facilitating the process of othering (3). In particular, black bodies are stereotypically described as akin to the non-human or animal. Similarly, Barbara Johnson observes: "Many entities that could be—or later are—defined as persons are represented as non-persons in the eyes of the law: slaves and fetuses and corporations, for example. Does it mean they are things? Not necessarily" (2). Racism reflects this struggle of which "humans can lay claim to full human status and which humans cannot" (Weheliye 3). With this inquiry Weheliye points towards "the layered interconnectedness of political violence, racialization, and the human" as well as the 'thingification' of human bodies (1). Likewise, Faust's work successfully asks questions about the complex power structures of master/slave relationships, of the sovereign's power dynamics in an intergalactic system which is also marked by what Foucault determines as structures of biopolitics or the control of the productivity of bodies.

Faust's work critiques the complex power structures of master/slave relationships and of sovereign power dynamics in an intergalactic system. Especially on Tuwitl, bodies are transformed into "private satisfaction- and utility-maximizing machine(s)" (Haraway 306). Furthermore, Faust's novel positions racism as a systemic problem that is deeply embedded in these structures. In fact, systemic racism can be read here as furthering the biopolitical power structures. This reading is especially relevant for SF narratives in general. SF creates a safe distance to discuss prevalent issues of race and power while being able to critique and challenge present structures with loosened metaphors (Vint 5). It remains important to continue investigating the "triangulation of race, sovereignty, and the human" within SF (Nyong'o 253). I found that SF novels like *War & Mir* remind us that a technically advanced fictional universe does not necessarily imply an equally "advanced" social treatment of bodies within that same universe. Our goal now is to criticize the systems at hand to dismantle them for a more socially equitable future.

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My Body, My Data: Orwell, Social Media, and #MeToo

Adam McLain

"Big Brother Is Watching You" is the doublethink watchword that shadows over the dystopian world of George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. Big Brother, the created, semi-dictatorial, full-totalitarian nickname for the governmental surveillance machine, has become a nomenclature in today's society for the government observing its citizens and enforcing its will over them. In the book and various media adaptations of Orwell's dystopia, Big Brother is usually a fictitious non-entity, a presence that is always present but never a specific character, either vested in a representative like O'Brien or given representation in a TV screen that the characters watch and that in turn watches the characters. However, in the 2016 video game *Orwell* and its 2018 sequel *Orwell: Ignorance Is Strength*, the audience takes the spot behind Big Brother's TV screen and becomes an operator, a part of the institution that runs the surveillance software *Orwell*. In this paper, I layer the positionality of various groups in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and *Orwell* and bring them into conversation to create a theoretical matrix of interaction that can be applied to online activism. I use this matrix to approach how social media and the #MeToo movement use and abuse two specific types of bodies—that of the survivor of sexual violence and that of the survivor's data—to enact sexual justice and legislative and cultural change.

Important to this paper is positionality. Positionality is a critical tool that was developed through epistemology, in which it discussed things as they were and are in relation to each other—the nature of their position ("Positionality"; Rowe). Other schools of thought have used positionality as a way to critique and interrogate their respective problems and questions. For example, in race, gender, and sexuality studies, positionality is used as a method to determine how one approaches their view to determine their intersectionality; in other words, an author's biases, viewpoints, and background position their approach to a text, a problem, or a question, influencing the conclusions they draw and the arguments they make (Mikkola). Positionality is used in this paper to determine how character and audience are employed and relate to each other in a book and a video game, two different types of media that both require the attention and engagement of an audience who can invest themselves in the created world where the events of the plot take place.

In the story world of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Big Brother is an autonomous nightmare who represents the government. Big Brother acts upon the citizens of Oceania, while Winston, a citizen once ignorant to being acted upon, is awakened as a resistant individual to Big Brother and the various governmental ministries. While the individual and Big Brother are enmeshed in this clash of the oppressor and the oppressed, Winston, O'Brien, and Julia become the ways the reader understands the relationships between the oppressor and the oppressed in Oceania. In addition,

the proles, or common folk, exist within a nebulous field of knowing they are there but never given life through character. Four positionalities, then, arise from these points of intersections: the imaginary system of Big Brother; the Resistant Individual, who seeks to undermine the influence of the government (Winston and Julia); the Enacting Individual, who brings about the will of the system (O'Brien); and the Common Individual, who lives within the system with no seeming desire to change or disrupt the system (Fig. 1).
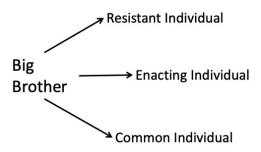
Big Brother → Resistant Individual

Big Brother → Enacting Individual

Big Brother → Common Individual

Figure 1: Representation of the three different groups that Big Brother affects in Nineteen Eighty-Four.

Along with their individual positionalities within the novel, each has relational positions to Big Brother and each other. Big Brother exerts influence over them all, as Fig. 1 shows, while the workers within the ministries and those resistant to the ministries position themselves against each other. I emphasize the relationship to Big Brother because of the hierarchical and almost-omnipotence that Big Brother exerts over the other relationships. Whereas the different individuals contend with each other, Big Brother still oppresses all. Big Brother is situated as observant, omnipresent, and almost omniscient (even though, within the novel, Big Brother hasn't yet completely penetrated the minds of the people). This positionality, then, places Big Brother over these people, gathering information on them, directing them, and being aware of almost every action. Between the three individuals, the interaction becomes more complicated, as the resistant and enacting individuals interact with each other in a battle of oppression, and the enacting individual affects the common individual's daily life through legislation and enforcement. Thus, a nexus or network of interactions is formed of the positions of each character that is both dependent upon Big Brother's influence and interdependent and interactive between the positionalities (Fig. 2).
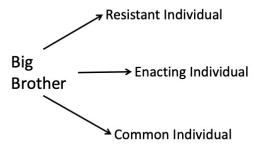
Figure 2: Lines drawn to show positionality and interaction between the various individuals Big Brother influences.

Yet outside the story world, Big Brother is not the only observer. The positionality of the reader, who observes the events of the story world through screen or page, is important to consider as well. The reader observes from an almost omniscient perspective, out of time and page, able to move back and forward through the events depicted in the novel and experience the text through their own imagination; therefore, the story world's system of interrelated positionalities becomes encircled by a solid line to indicate that it is within itself, as the reader is placed without the story, affected by and affecting the way the narrative is understood (Fig. 3). The reader, although outside the contained system of the book, makes assumptions about the world, develops relationships with the characters, and envisions the words on the page, thus interacting, engaging, and being influenced by the contained story world.
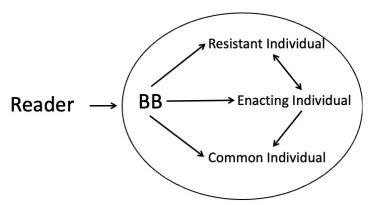
Figure 3: The system of interactions between Big Brother (BB) and the various individuals are enclosed in a story world that the Reader interacts with.

The positionality matrix of the 2016 video game *Orwell* skews the reader-text positionality matrix of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (Figs. 1-3) by an important dynamic: instead of the audience passively observing Big Brother through the entryway of the book, they are now the active player who both acts as Big Brother and enacts Big Brother's will. Hence, in the representative Fig. 4, the game world's circle is dotted and porous. Within the game world, a freelance, outsourced employee of the Nation is hired to work as an investigator of the bombing of a public square. Managing a flow of information through the new aggregate software Orwell, the investigator-player collects data on individuals through access to news sources, social media, personal communications,

and desktop computer access, and then uploads various data connected with a character to the system, which provides it to an operator. The positionality of the player and the investigator is meant to be foreign, unconnected, and distant from the software to present a veil of objectivity, yet the character is still engaged in the story, interacting with it as the player interacts through the character. However, a firm line is drawn for the story to unfold: the game is linear rather than open world, even though within that linear trajectory, many decisions can be made by the player.

Managing the player-investigator's efforts is the operator, who resides on the other side of Orwell's screen. The operator in *Orwell* is Symes, a nod to the text on which it is based. Symes can only send the investigator-player messages and cannot receive any from the player-investigator; all Symes receives is the aggregated data that is input into the Orwell system by the player-investigator. The legislative and state directive is that anyone who is plausibly involved in a crime has state action performed against them. So, once the investigator-player establishes in Orwell that a person is a target—due to the collected data and the story the operator weaves from those data—the operator activates law enforcement to arrest that person. Thus, both the operator and the player-investigator make up a form of executive government as they develop a narrative with the data and information gathered to make consequential decisions on truth and reality.

In addition to the investigator and the operator using the Orwell system to discover who set off a terrorist bomb in the Nation, various hackers and activists seek to undermine Orwell throughout the game. The game simulates these hacks of Orwell by freezing the screen or messing up the language on the player's computer. The collected data are, for the first part of the game, on the activists and hackers to discover who is the cause of a terrorist bombing; but soon, the data collection grows out of control and the player must gather data on the operator and government officials, along with the hackers. As mentioned before, this makes the gamer's experience different from the reader's experience. Instead of dealing with a closed-off story world, the gamer must interact with a game world that takes over the real-world computer and has in-game consequences.

Even with these interactive differences, the operators, personal data, and activists map on to the positionality from the source text. The resistant individuals are the activists, the enacting individuals are the operator and the investigator, and the common individuals are the data gathered. In this reading, data become simplistic but also subversive, just as the proles are the masses who have the capability to be used to overcome the government. Indeed, the efforts of the operator, player-investigator, and hackers/activists are subsumed into the gathering of data— of each other's data and of their own data. At the end of *Orwell*, the player has four branching paths to gather data on: (1) the operator (now a high-end government official who would lose her job if her data were aggregated into Orwell; Orwell gets shut down); (2) the hacker-activists (incriminates the hacker as a threat to the nation; Orwell is accepted for use within the Nation; the investigator becomes an advisor); (3) the player-investigator (Orwell is taken down because it cannot be trusted, since the player-investigator can narrate data in a way of self-incrimination, thus proving it to be a flawed system); or (4) on all of them (in which the player

tries to incriminate the government official, fails, and Orwell is brought to the public's knowledge to neither positive nor negative feedback). However, even as these operate with each other, the system is not closed as in the book's system (Fig. 3). The player-investigator represents a human being playing the game and a character within the game; this interaction creates the porous boundary between what is happening in the game and what occurs outside the game (Fig. 4).
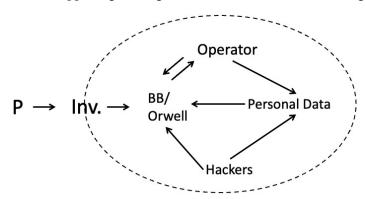

Figure 4: The system within Orwell *places the player (P) interacting on the investigator character (Inv.). The investigator acts on the Orwell data aggregate system (BB [Big Brother]/Orwell), which has multiple lines of positionality toward the operator, personal data, and the hackers/activists.*

Point of view and positionality, then, are very important in the video game. The interface is not a first-person shooter or an RPG-style game; instead, the game emphasizes the *player* doing the work of inputting information into the data aggregate system. The simulation of this aspect makes the player culpable and invested by the end of the game, since the data the player uploads affect the outcome. Indeed, this interaction could cause greater instigation for players toward activism and resistance, as they live out in the game world the consequences of a surveillance and that data are points of information that are then woven into narratives for action, rather than points of truth in and of themselves. Thus, this collapse of player and investigator, player and character, and their relationship to the Orwell system as seen in Fig. 4, shows an actionability that is not as strong within the contained system of positionality in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. Whereas *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is an expression of a fear of surveillance, *Orwell* becomes a potential catalyst for action against a surveillance state.

The two systems—George Orwell's closed book system (Fig. 3) and *Orwell*'s porous player-investigator system (Fig. 4)—provide two matrices of positionality and power to then investigate the positionality of social media that needs to be understood as online activism is sought more and more for societal improvement. In the case of the #MeToo Movement, a positionality matrix brought into conversation with *Nineteen Eighty-Four*'s and *Orwell*'s systems will elucidate the potential cost that bringing to light the interconnectedness of sexual harassment and violence through social media has on survivors' experiences.

When survivors add #MeToo to a post, they are integrating their story with millions of other sexual violence survivors around the world. The hashtag allows the poster to join in a chorus of other voices that agree that they too have had sexual violence enacted against them. The act of

posting with the hashtag performs three vital actions that resist cultural assumptions and attempt to change cultural understanding of sexual violence: (1) reveals actions usually kept silent; (2) creates a community through the network-system automation of a hashtag on social media websites that connects various public posts; and (3) raises awareness and heightens the discourse around the subject through trending topics that can keep a conversation going for days, months, and years.

While these three activities are necessary for resistance, a matrix of positionality shows that the act of hashtagging also re-enacts upon a data body—a social media account that represents the tangible body typing the post—by the communal demand and personal action of the hashtagger (Fig. 5). In brief: the survivor chooses to express to the community through a hashtag that sexual violence has occurred to their physical body. The hashtag connects them to a community that can interact with them—a back and forth of likes, retweets, shares, and comments. The hashtag not only connects the post to a community, but also to a greater public—sometimes even if the person shares their post privately (e.g., screenshots and word of mouth can spread a person's private posts farther than the supportive communal interaction of allowed followers). The hashtag also allows data aggregators to collect, collate, and correlate the hashtag into statistical or marketable data.
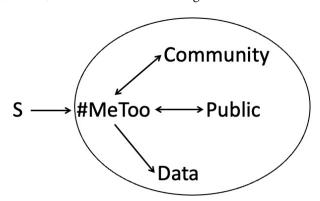

Figure 5: The contained system of the social media platform allows the post (#MeToo) of the survivor (S) to interact with a community, the general public, and data aggregation. The survivor who posted #MeToo is entering the post into the social media system.

Thus, a matrix of positionality of online posting is formed with a solid line around it to show an enclosed system. The circle in Fig. 5 represents the cohesive system within a social media website that the survivor's #MeToo post enters when they join the resistance against rape culture and sexual violence by speaking up. The matrix is similar to the one formed with *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, in which the reader is outside this internal system that is attempting to work itself out. The #MeToo post can be seen as its own body that, like Winston or Big Brother, is interacting within the system. This is not to say that #MeToo is morally or ethically similar to Big Brother, but rather positionally similar. The #MeToo post affects the rest of the interactions as the central figure to enacting the system of positions.

Social media is not simply contained within itself; it is devised to be social and shared. Thus, instead of a contained system, the social media activist must understand that social media created

a system with a porous boundary. The survivor still uses their digital, data body to send out the post with #MeToo into the social media system, but the community, public, and data have the potential to escape that system as the stories and information pass through the social media boundary (Fig. 6). This porous boundary allows #MeToo to be used to make cultural change, but it also spreads the post beyond controllable means. Once the hashtag is placed on to a post, the survivor loses control of their body again, the violence enacted on it being repeated, retweeted, and reformed through various means (from political activism to incel jokes).
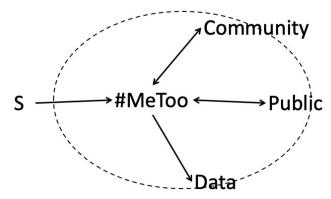

Figure 6: Instead of a contained system, social media is an open system that allows those outside the system to interact with what is posted and to then use it elsewhere, as depicted with the dotted-line circle.

This porous boundary, then, shows that the social media post is not its own creation, divorced from the creator, but rather forms two interconnected bodies, that of the survivor (S) and that of the survivor's social media presence (#MeToo), just as *Orwell* has the player and the character as two interconnected bodies. Fig. 5 makes sense when considering the data body created by the survivor, but with sexual violence, physical bodies are affected along with data bodies, and Fig. 6 shows that the knowledge of sexual violence can be spread beyond what the system.

Additionally, like the interaction between player-investigator and the Orwell system in *Orwell*, the #MeToo system can be expanded to include the action on the survivor's physical body—the sexual violence—as the instigator of the entire system (Fig. 7). Just as a game's story cannot be played without a player, #MeToo would not exist without sexual violence. In this way, we must be aware that as the collective conscious of culture encourages social media activism on behalf of cultural change, the act of #MeToo is re-ascribing violence upon survivors as they remember, reflect, and re-engage with the violence that occurred on their physical body through their digital, data body. While #MeToo can be used as an empowering moment of taking control of their body, it can also be their body being lost again to the maelstrom of social media, as retweets, quote tweets, shares, screenshots, and more take the empowering moment and twist it to other individual wills. There is resistance and power in using a hashtag to form unity and solidarity in experience, but it also reifies an act of violence upon a body, both reminding the survivor of the violence enacted against their physical body and having that same violence enacted on the data body formed through their social media interaction.
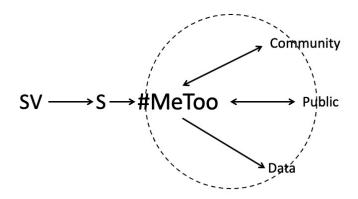
Figure 7: The porous system of social media where #MeToo is shared is performed by the survivor (S), but #MeToo and the category of survivor would not be without the first act of sexual violence (SV) on the survivor's body.

This insight is not meant to stop social media activism; it is meant to encourage activists to take a moment's pause to consider what choices of resistance do to bodies seen and unseen. In outlining these systems, I am acknowledging what might be gained and what might be lost in taking certain actions to resist and change a cultural system. These systems help activists to realize that the effects of an action have costs, and as we attempt to change culture, the desired effect and affect can expand beyond what was first envisioned or what was first instigated by an action. Indeed, these systems elucidate the need for both critical action and communal compassion in our attempts to resist.

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Dystopias in the Trump Era: Anti/Immigration and Resistance in CALEXIT

Anna Marta Marini

Approaching the 2016 United States presidential election, writer Matteo Pizzolo developed the idea for a comic book that could reflect the growing political anxiety experienced in the Californian borderlands, as well as the reality at the United States-Mexico border. Drawn by Amancay Nahuelpan and published by Black Mask Studios in 2017, *Calexit*[1] (stylized as CALEXIT) is a dystopian story set in a near future, two years after the re-election of an autocratic president who ordered the deportation of all immigrants and deployed the National Guard to occupy sanctuary cities and enforce the law. The order sparked dystopian warfare between California's liberal cities and conservative exurbs, respectively forming the Pacific Coast Sister Cities Alliance (including Tijuana) and the Rural Sovereign Citizens Coalition. Directly confronting both the National Guard and the neofascist vigilante Bunkerville Militia, an armed citizen movement called Mulholland Resistance fights for immigrant rights led by ruthless Zora Donato. Unwillingly involved in the conflict, smuggler Jamil—accompanied by his crow-shaped AI drone Livermore—is bound to take Zora to a secret militant camp on the border. In the attempt to annihilate the resistance and capture its leader, extremely violent confrontations ensue under the command of deportation enforcer Rossie—who at the same time lives with his Latinx wife and children in San Diego, raising the topic of existing Latinx conservative anti-immigrant stances as well. Filled with popular culture references, the comic book directly engages with contemporary activist and political movements—evidently referring to the controversial notion of a "Calexit"[2] secession of California. The construction of the dystopian context outlines a forebodingly realistic fictional civil war within California, as parallels with actual extrajudicial border enforcement practices can be drawn. The collected edition is also rounded out with a series of interviews done by the author with local activists, political figures, and investigative journalists whose takes on the 2016 electoral campaign Pizzolo found valuable.

Make California American Again: Discourses of the Trump Era

Calexit's plot starts halfway through the second mandate of a fictional unnamed president, whose authoritarian administration has focused on the deportation of any undocumented immigrant. As a consequence of California's rebellion against the presidential executive order, any foreign-born citizen whose documentation was issued by Californian institutions is also bound to deportation, regardless of their status.

The references to Donald J. Trump's 2016 electoral campaign and subsequent presidency are very clear, both visually and verbally. The comic book opens with a page focused on the president's

speech, announcing his upcoming visit to California and promising that he is not "gonna let murderers and illegals hold [American citizens] down" (3, Fig. 1). The few sentences evidently reproduce some of Trump's most recurrent discourse strategies and speech patterns, including the use of an informal register. The reference to recognizable, widespread images depicting Trump at his presidential lectern is evident; possibly for its recurrency during his administration, this specific configuration of silhouette and suggested gesture has become one of the most used images on the internet, often turned into memes and mocking gifs.
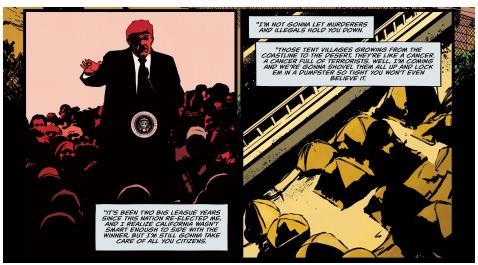

Figure 1: CALEXIT *(3).*

Right from the first page, a Manichean view of reality is outlined through the autocratic president's words, just as it happened during Trump's administration. Trump's discursive strategies and patterns have elicited Orwellian comparisons (Rodden 261-263), and his administration was based on what Gardiner has called "demographic dystopia" or the notion of an impending demographic shift for which White citizens would soon become a minority in the American society (Gardiner 64-68). Such a conviction clearly shapes White nationalist and supremacist fears of a possible loss of the privileges intrinsic to the majority status, supporting the "anti-immigrant sentiment embodied by Donald Trump" (Chan 62) and the related historical anxieties peculiar to the dominant class. Furthermore, Trump's penchant for discursive strategies related to populism and post-truth has helped structure concepts that, in a much dystopian way, "presuppose the existence of universally shared, accepted 'truths' pre-2016 which shroud the pre-Trump, pre-Brexit period in a myth of munificence and objectivity" (De Cock et al. 4). The constant mention of "fake news" and denial of patent facts gave a dystopian prominence to mis- and disinformation, favored by new technologies and the consequent false content manipulation and dissemination (Guarda et al. 5-6). The illusionary certainty that Trump's discourse offered to the electorate—and kept on fueling throughout his mandate, despite the lack of concrete, effective action—"[fed] on and fortifie[d] a deeply emotional rejection of existing social elites, constantly affirming he will not stop at anything in the defence of 'his' people" (De Cock et al. 5).

A fundamental pivot of Trump's discourse is embodied by the United States-Mexico border and immigration issues related to it, fueling—with the help of mainstream media channels—the rooted fears of an impending immigrant "invasion" and the "evidence" of crimes perpetrated by immigrants against American citizens. Drawing on Juri Lotman's definition of the semiosphere and the expansion of it by scholars who have intersected it with the notion of political hegemonic discourse (see, for example, Selg and Ventsel, "Towards a Semiotic Theory of Hegemony"), I argue that the United States-Mexico borderlands can be conceived as the embodiment of the boundary of the U.S. cultural semiosphere—its peripheral part as opposed to the core embodied by the national Anglo monoglossic dominant heritage. In the dystopian scenario imagined by *Calexit*, the disruption and boundaries that intersect and characterize the peripheral part of the semiosphere become tangible. The clash between two factions that in a way exist in reality and cohabit the geographical, institutional space represented by California, in this dystopian take becomes so strained that the fracture is irreparable and a civil war ensues.

The type of dialectic discourse proposed by Trump embodies the discourse that aims at defining and preserving the semiospheric core. The dominant semiosphere is evidently self-descriptive, according to an idealized set of values, cultural references, and signs, which are reflected in a sociocultural hierarchy. Trump's discourse exacerbates the preexisting U.S. political core discourse, that has been—often and more or less overtly—a nativist discourse. Policies focused on immigration and the border infrastructure have represented a central issue since the 1980s with the implementation of immigration regulation measures, followed by the start of the actual building of a border infrastructure in the mid-1990s. The turn of the screw represented by the aftermath of the 9/11 terrorist attacks strengthened the security measures at the borders, leading to the creation of the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agency in 2003. The Trumpian wall discourse is just an oversimplification, a symbol embodying this preoccupation with the definition of what is inside and what is outside the border of the U.S. semiosphere. The border is not directly shown on the pages of *Calexit*, but its presence is underlying throughout, as the notion of the boundary as a locus of invasion and disruption marks the story.

As Ventsel has stressed, politics "can be conceptualised as a practice for creating, reproducing and transforming social relations that cannot themselves be located at the level of the social" (9). Politics are a direct expression of the power of discourses, since problems related to the political sphere are intrinsically social, connected to "the definition and articulation of social relations in a field criss-crossed with antagonism" (Laclau and Mouffe 153). The necessity to affirm a "new" post-truth national identity intrinsic to Trump's and his supporters' discourse relies on the perceived necessity to reestablish the cultural homogeneity of the system, which corresponds to the U.S. dominant cultural core. Such perceived need of rearticulation of the core—and White culture as predominant—possibly "stems from the change of culture's position due to its inner or outer factors. In most cases the main causes for intensification of identity creation are external effects" (Selg and Ventsel, "An Outline" 465). Clearly, the borderlands embody the external

influences perceived as threatening, as the immigrants' entrance and integration could lead to the tainting of American values and heritage.

Calexit does not only refer to Trump and his discourse, but also to the White supremacist groups that supported him throughout his mandate. Any operation that would be perceived as too controversial if carried out by federal institutions is handled by the Bunkerville Militia, a sort of vigilante group operating more or less overtly in connection with deportation officials. Its members are openly Nazi, they engage in local criminal activities, and they are characterized as indulging in drug use, prostitution, and in general violence, markedly masculine activities— despite the fact that the actual mind behind their new leader Crowbar is one of his girlfriends. When the National Guard accidentally tracks Zora, the agents directly call Crowbar to inform him, as he has been—extrajudicially—put in charge of the pursuit and capture of the resistant faction's leader by Rossie. The chief deportation enforcer for the federal government purposely provokes extremely violent confrontations between the antagonist factions, in order to justify a consequent brutal intervention of the National Guard. He is ruthless and collaborates directly with the Bunkerville Militia to get the "dirty work" done, but he also visits members of the Mulholland Resistance to convince them of the uselessness of their fight—thus fomenting internal division. Significatively, at the same time Rossie's private life contradicts his ideological convictions: he has a Latinx wife and children who live in a secluded villa in San Diego. This raises the topic of the existence of Latinx conservative anti-immigrant stances, since his wife is a stern supporter of his job and its consequences. The comic book delivers a not too veiled reference to public figures who promote discourses and ideologies that do not necessarily correspond to their personal life, and in general the double standards that often characterize the political elite.

Extremism and Dystopic Resistance

Dystopian narratives have been characterized by the attempt to identify "a utopian horizon that might provoke political awareness or effort" (Moylan 163), a motive that might elicit political resistance against the grim scenarios in which the characters are forced to move. Dystopian resistance upholds forms of what Moylan has defined as "utopian hope," contemplating the possibility of radical social change based on the resistant characters' refusal to abide by the rules imposed by the dominant strata of society. Clearly, not all approaches to resistance bear the same commitment or lead to the same achievements. Building on Baggesen's notion that dystopian pessimism and its consequent reactions can be either resigned or militant (Baggesen 36), it can be argued that the construction of most dystopian narratives revolves around the opposition between an imposed hegemonic order and a counter-narrative resisting the dominant system. In particular, the dystopian fiction focusing on the construction of a totalitarian regime lends itself to parallels with reality and the articulation of storylines that draw on political action and its ethics. As Jones and Paris's study has demonstrated, "totalitarian-dystopian fiction heightens belief in the justifiability of radical political action" (982). Faced with dystopian narratives, the study subjects' responses highlighted the fact that in such circumstances violence seems necessary and even legitimate to subvert the totalitarian system (982-983). Due to the political charge of the

narrative and the articulation of the opposition to the violation of values of democracy and equity, the performance of acts of resistance is often portrayed "as admirable (even when not or only partially successful) and readers are expected to empathize with the protagonist and even imagine how they themselves might fight such value violations" (972). Furthermore, gendered dystopian fictions seem to be marked by "a subversive and oppositional strategy against hegemonic ideology" (Baccolini 519). The construction of Zora's character seems to be purposely exaggerated toward violent extremism to convey the main idea underlying the comic book: alleged neutrality does not exist, as inaction and refusal to take a stance is per se favoring the totalitarian system.

In the premises of *Calexit*'s story, it is said that the "ultimate betrayal" triggering the repressive occupation of California and the reaction of the local conservative fringes is the fact that the Pacific Coast Sister Cities Alliance—besides being formed by sanctuary cities in the U.S. territory—also included Tijuana. The inclusion is seen as inadmissible by the White supremacist, nativist segments of Californian society. In the detailed reconstruction of the dystopian context written by Pizzolo, when Tijuana joined the alliance the president felt that he could "no longer tolerate what is becoming an international conflict and decide[d] he must invade California" (106). The main character voicing this type of discourse is the enforcer-in-chief Rossie, who is leading the occupation and exploiting a paramilitary group such as the Bunkerville Militia to make the most of the local conflict. Through Rossie, the government delegates operations to an extremist civilian organization, to resolve situations by violent means that would be extrajudicial for the state to exert—even within a state of exception. Contextualizing the comic book and its dystopian depiction of an ongoing, real political climate, such delegation reminds of the existence of civilian vigilante groups patrolling the United States-Mexico border. This kind of organization started to appear along the boundary in the mid-1970s and falls within the spectrum of so-called neo-vigilantism (Brown 127-129), as they involve some types of cooperation with the federal and local enforcement. Among them, it is worth remembering the Minuteman Project, which attracted the attention of the media in 2005. Part of the broad anti-immigrant movement, these groups are unauthorized and yet to an extent condoned by border enforcement agencies such as the Border Patrol and ICE. As Doty has highlighted, the civilian border patrols interpret the border as "a war zone" and prominently employ imagery and rhetoric inherent to war and combat (125)—as the members of the Bunkerville Militia do.

Opposite the Bunkerville Militia, the Mulholland Resistance is a movement constituted by citizens fighting for immigrant rights and led by Zora Donato, who is a queer and now-illegal Mexican immigrant cyborg. She lost a leg in a past confrontation, she is very assertive and convinced of the necessity to fight the state repression and extrajudicial deportation with any possible means. The comic book starts with a sequence in which her adoptive parents are threatened to make them reveal her location; as a consequence of their reluctance, her father is killed and his head is sent to the resistance group in a box. Besides being marked by harrowing experiences, Zora is depicted as an extremist figure. If the resistance on the one hand is armed and its components defend themselves violently against the National Guard and the militia, on

the other hand she does not know where to stop. During confrontations she does not stick to the agreed plan to just repel the guards without attacking them and without provoking an exchange of fire. On the contrary, she attacks the guards first, provoking the killing of several members of the resistance.

Figure 2: CALEXIT *(68).*

Zora's stance is first made clear in a dialogue with a fellow activist, taking place on the ruins of a house whose militant owners were shot to death in a conflict that escalated when she opened fire on the National Guard. While her companion is appalled by her minimization of the casualties and insists that militants "won't fight, certainly not if they think we're just throwing bodies at the occupying army" (68), Zora opposes his view. She explains that—as it happened "in the French-Algerian war"—casualties among the resistance fighters serve as inspiration for others to join the cause, and thus more people will take part in the fight out of indignation if they see militants die (68, Fig. 2).

When Zora and Jamil are stopped at a road check—and the guards communicate their location to the leader of the Bunkerville Militia—she reacts by shooting one of the guards in the face and the reader is left with the two of them waiting for the confrontation with the militia. A dialogue ensues between them, and the smuggler realizes suddenly that the Mulholland Resistance was not aiming to get Zora to safety at the camp on the border. Rather the group was trying to get rid of her due to the damages she provoked, as her extremist views and approach to the resistance have been revealed to be too dangerous for them. If this explanation exposes the questionable consequences of her uncompromising stance, Pizzolo does not condemn them. Her character is, to an extent, constructed around the aforementioned perception of the admirable value intrinsic to the fictional dystopian resistance, whose violent acts are justifiable when perpetrated against repressive opponents. The framing of her violent resistance within the totalitarian order allows— and leads—the readers to reconcile to its consequences and accept her violent yet nearly suicidal mission.

Of Monsters and Caves: A Criticism of Neutrality

In between the two extremes represented by the Bunkerville Militia and the Mulholland Resistance, Jamil embodies the subjects that—despite being to an extent involved daily in the conflict—do not want to take a clear stance and thus juggle their relationships with both factions. Unwillingly involved in the conflict, Jamil is a smuggler working for whoever pays him, often providing National Guard agents with antidepressants and illegal drugs. He knows his way around the conflict areas, and he can move freely between the territories controlled by either the resistance or the National Guard. Albeit suggesting a critical view on the enforced occupation, Jamil seems to embody a kind of character that recurs in dystopian fiction, who "negotiate[s] a more strategically ambiguous position somewhere along the antinomic continuum" (Moylan 147).

On several occasions throughout the comic book, Jamil stresses out that he does not care to express a political position, he maintains connections with both factions for business, having "problems with no one," and that he is in the "not-making-enemies line of work" (53).

Figure 3: CALEXIT *(102-103).*

This approach of course provokes a clash with Zora, leading to an argument during which she justifies her extremist position and plans to fight her antagonists (102-103, Fig. 3). She believes that a violent insurgency is necessary to stimulate awareness in the public and that it is necessary to face directly the enemy, or "monsters" as she calls them, otherwise nothing will ever change. She accuses Jamil as being delusional—as other people like him are—and she says "you wanna believe if you're just patient, everything will go back to normal. If you're just patient, the monsters will go back into their caves" (102). She clearly hints at the fact that White supremacist groups cyclically resurge and that they are never really defeated, punished, or condemned by the dominant core of the US cultural semiosphere. When Jamil says that he is "fucking neutral. That's my job," Zora replies that her job is to make "sure no one's neutral" (102). Not taking a stance would already be a non-neutral position per se, but she highlights the fact that he sells drugs to depressed extremists while telling himself that that is a neutral position.

Despite his reluctance, it becomes impossible for Jamil to avoid getting involved in the conflict and, consequently, being forced to take a position in it. Unwittingly, Jamil happens to be the person in charge of delivering the severed head of Zora's father to the resistance; militant members thus leverage his involvement to trick him into removing Zora, lying on the plan to smuggle her to a secret camp on the border. Shortly after being caught by the National Guard, he unwillingly stands by her side, assuming the political weight of his purported neutrality and eventually taking a position. The main message of the comic book seems to be, indeed, a condemnation of self-declared neutrality and a denunciation of the real consequences of the refusal to position oneself, especially for personal interest or individual "peace of mind."

The conflict articulated in *Calexit* is based on a power asymmetry between the totalitarian core and the dissident boundaries of the fictional semiosphere it is set in. It is political, cultural, and ideological altogether, and it touches upon shared values and ethical issues; the deliberate avoidance to take a stance would betray implicitly a connivance with the dominant side of the conflict. The construction of the dystopian context outlines a forebodingly realistic fictional civil war within California, as parallelisms with actual extrajudicial border enforcement practices are evident. Despite the violent scenario, *Calexit* brings to life a dystopia aimed at celebrating the spirit of existing pro-immigrant resistance and—in Pizzolo's words—encouraging the readers to "look fascism in the face and challenge it" (CALEXIT 109; "2017's most dangerous comic").

Notes

1. For the purpose of this paper, the collected edition of *CALEXIT* (published by Black Mask in 2018) will be used as reference.

2. For a brief recap of the debate channeled by the Yes California independence campaign (2015) see for example Chloe M. Rispin, "Could California Secede? A Philosophical Discussion."

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Teaching Law and Science Fiction at the University of Mississippi

Ellie Campbell and Antonia Eliason

In his 2011 article "Making Space: Law and Science Fiction," Mitchell Travis argued that greater attention should be paid to science fiction in sociolegal scholarship for two reasons: first, that the law and science fiction are already intertwined (for example, he references a number of judicial opinions comment on science fiction texts or tropes) and second, that science fiction "allows for a space in which alternate social and legal systems, conditions, and variables can be considered" (1). Travis saw these alternate systems as useful because they reflect popular attitudes that influence law. While teaching our class on law and science fiction at the University of Mississippi, we found that science fiction also allows us to consider alternate worlds that do not reflect mainstream attitudes but are particularly good for critiquing the law from a social justice standpoint.

The legal field is currently wrestling with a number of social justice issues that cannot be solved by our current system—these include racial justice, climate change, and the effects of a worldwide pandemic, all topics addressed by three of our Law and Science Fiction modules. When teaching the course, we took a "law and society" approach, where we constructed five modules around different themes and asked students to reflect on how the works helped us think about the law, its work in the world, and how it might be changed. In this essay, we discuss our approach to teaching three of our modules: race and ethnicity, climate change, and disability.

Race and Ethnicity

Working for the University of Mississippi made it particularly important to talk about race and ethnicity, both because of the history of the institution and the events that happened while we were teaching the class. UM has a long racially fraught history—the school was founded as an alternative to Northern schools for the children of the white elite in the state, who didn't want their kids learning about abolition. Several buildings on campus bear the fingerprints of the enslaved people who built them. The entire student body quit during the Civil War and joined the Confederate Army to preserve the enslavement of other human beings; almost all were casualties in the conflict and their actions contributed to Lost Cause narratives about the university. The campus famously shut down during a two day long riot when James Meredith desegregated it in 1962. Many buildings on campus are named after white supremacist political leaders. The school's nickname, "Ole Miss," was a common term for the mistress of a plantation. In the years while we were teaching the class, students on campus organized to take down the state flag—which previously had the Confederate battle flag as part of its design—and to move the Confederate

statue from the center of campus to the periphery. Those campaigns were ultimately successful, but they were accompanied by racist backlash that included a number of racist incidents on campus, involving everyone from fraternities to major donors.

For our race and ethnicity module, we gave students a chapter from Delgado and Stefancic's *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction* that gave an overview of several key ideas from the field, including the normality of racism, interest convergence, the social construction of race, differential racialization, and voice-of-color thesis, and asked them to apply some those ideas to the fiction we read or watched for the week.

Derrick Bell's short story, "Space Traders," always led to an excellent discussion. Second- and third-year law students could easily pick out the legal references Bell makes in the story, encompassing not only the United States' history of slavery and Jim Crow, but also Indigenous removal and the incarceration of Japanese Americans during WWII. Bell's story always worked to bring our discussions into the present day; many of our students were used to narratives that place racial discrimination in the past, and Bell's story displaces those narratives by bringing that past into a near future scenario, leading us to think about how the United States has and has not changed.

W.E.B. DuBois's short story "The Comet" also worked to situate racism in American history; though it was originally published in 1920, it still resonated with our classes and helped us to discuss when and where race asserts itself in our society, and whether we have any hope of ending racism and the legal structures that uphold it.

We used several different iterations of *Black Panther*—first the comic book, and then the movie, once it was released—to talk about governance and gender issues. Students found the imaginary space of a never-colonized African country fertile ground for thinking about alternatives to the United States and its history. Discussions around *Black Panther* often involved thinking about what a truly different form of governance might look like: Governance by and for only African and African diaspora communities? Governance in which everyone is truly represented? The comic book and movie also touch on, albeit in different ways, issues of gender and colonialism, giving us room to discuss intersectional aspects of governance, and how only focusing on race doesn't guarantee equity.

At the University of Mississippi, our students didn't need us to tell them that racism is common and still exists in the present, or that race is socially constructed but still has material consequences. But giving them speculative fiction and an introduction to critical race theory as a framework helped us analyze our own experiences and begin thinking that other worlds, other social relationships, other campuses, might be possible.

Climate Change

Coming to terms with climate change is a difficult proposition. However much we may understand the science of climate change and its effects on our world, the realities of climate

change are so profound as to manifest in almost inescapable climate grief. In Mississippi, climate change is both visible, particularly in its effects on the Gulf Coast, where sea levels are rising, and where the increasing intensity of hurricanes is being felt, and yet also ignored through climate denial.

With respect to climate change, we engaged students with material that was both speculative in a visionary sense, as in Donna Haraway's "The Camille Stories," which goes far beyond our anthropocentric focus to look outside of our species for solutions, and speculative in a more traditional dystopian sense, as in Sean McMullen's "The Precedent." Apocalyptic futures with extreme legal environments (shaped by the extreme natural environment), as "The Precedent" offers, allow students a jumping point to immediate discussion—a way to point to the legal system established in the story as a way of drawing connection with our legal system and how we deal with climate change. In "The Precedent," people are prosecuted for their past actions—for their use of carbon—for charges such as "squander" or "denial" or "display" (174). For students used to thinking in legal terms, this is an open door for drawing connections to our criminal legal system.

Teaching about climate change requires more than just dwelling on the dystopian, however, even for law students. This is where the visionary writings of Donna Haraway provided a more challenging look to what the future could look like. "The Camille Stories" is a chapter from Haraway's *Staying With the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*, in which she outlines a fictional narrative following the creation of alternate social structures designed to bring humans into closer communion with endangered and extinct species. Our class guided students with discussion questions, particularly on "The Camille Stories," as we recognized this might be outside the scope of traditional science fiction formats.

Allowing the imagination of students to move from systems accounting for capitalist destruction of the planet to visions of futures that go beyond capitalism provided a platform for robust discussion of personal concerns as well as larger scale existential questions—an avenue to come to terms, or at least to engage with, climate grief.

These examinations of speculative fiction and their interpretations of our future also opened the door to fascinating discussions about actual legal instruments that are being used as tools in the fight to change our course—the public trust doctrine, for instance, which says that countries must hold in trust certain resources for future generations. This ancient Roman doctrine recognized the sea, shores, air, and water as being in the public trust. With respect to climate change, lawsuits have been brought, sometimes successfully, that a lack of action with respect to climate change is violating this doctrine by endangering future generations. This doctrine is a perfect example of where the speculative meets the law—where what may happen in the future is taken seriously in the present.

In 1972, Christopher Stone published a monograph, *Should Trees Have Standing?: Law, Morality, and the Environment*. This work, which imagined giving legal rights to natural objects, sparked a lot of discussion at the time, but was dismissed by most as being somewhat fanciful.

Today, we are seeing efforts to give rights to natural bodies, from rivers to mountains, sometimes as a response to violent acts of colonialism, such as those in New Zealand, sometimes as a means of trying to protect the environment.

Introducing our students to these areas of law, intertwined with our discussions of the speculative, was a springboard for incredible discussions that left our students, and ourselves, feeling as hopeful as one could feel in a world of climate change and destruction.

Climate change also intersects with labor. In teaching the film *Sleep Dealer* as part of our unit on labor in our course, while we centered our discussion on issues of labor rights, climate change drives the narrative in that film, and discussion of water shortages, industrial agriculture and the effects of climate change on migration were an important part of the conversation on law and labor.

Disability

Speculative fiction, much like our society and its laws, often falls short in discussing disability. Many works of speculative fiction that depict disability treat it as a problem to be solved with a technological or magical fix, rather than recognizing disability as a state of being, a process of becoming, or a part of a person's identity and worldview. In our unit on disability and science fiction, we focused on works that recognize disability as a quality or a process rather than a problem in need of a solution, without minimizing the impact of disability in different contexts.

Several of the short stories we taught came from the anthology *Accessing the Future*, which at the time of the course (Spring 2018) was one of the few disability-themed collections of speculative fiction to focus on disabled voices. Since then, *Uncanny Magazine* has published a special issue, "Disabled People Destroy Science Fiction!" in the fall of 2018, featuring many of the contributors and editors from *Accessing the Future*, and a few more collections have been published or are in the works. Speculative fiction that treats disability as something more than just a problem to be solved, however, remains rare, as does critical work that examines the connections between disability studies and speculative fiction.

Nicole Barischoff's "Pirate Songs" is the first story in *Accessing the Future*. The main character, Margo, the daughter of a wealthy ambassador, has been captured by space pirates. Margo cannot walk and struggles on the ship without her mechanical chair, though she comes to identify with her captors as she realizes that many of them also have physical disabilities resulting from the harsh life in space. She ultimately aids them in demanding her ransom and gains a greater sense of agency in her life. Barischoff's story helped our class unpack how class, labor, and disability can intersect; Margo can afford technology that makes her daily life easier, while the pirates have missing limbs from industrial accidents and harsh labor conditions, and have to live without being able to afford augmentation.

Aliette de Bodard's 2012 short story, "Immersion," won the Nebula and Locus awards for best short story and was a finalist in that category for several others, including the Hugo. Though

not a story about disability in the classic sense, the narrative follows Agnes, a character from the Rong culture, who wears an "immerser" that augments her brain and allows her to speak and think in Galactic, a culture that has colonized the Rong. De Bodard uses her fictional technology to examine colonial encounters, and this story aided our class in reconceptualizing disability and technological "fixes."

The story in "Screens," by Samantha Rich, takes place a few years after a civil rights victory was won by the Visibility Movement, which resulted in everyone being required to wear monitors that show their emotions. The tension in the story between the legal victory that resulted in invisible impairments being made visible and the right to privacy that the protagonist, a high school student, grapples with reflects our reality, where legal victories are often more complicated than they appear at first glance. In our discussion, we asked students to reflect on the nature of cures and impairments, and what visibility entails.

The short-lived near-future science fiction legal drama TV series *Century City* provided a different look at disability in the context of its episode "Love and Games." Featuring a young baseball player with a bionic eye, the episode asks whether certain adaptive technologies could act as unfair physical enhancements. Classic science fiction stories often constructed disabilities as a "problem" that needed to be "cured" with some sort of scientific or technological fix. As Kathryn Allan writes, "technology is often positioned as a solution to overcome the physical or mental limitations of the human body, but the quest to transcend the body ignores the lived realities of laboring, feeling, and suffering bodies, and is generally the luxury of the healthy and able-bodied" (11).

We also experimented with having our students read parts of the American with Disabilities Act (ADA); the first time we taught this module, they read the preamble from the Federal Register, explaining how the agencies had applied the ADA when creating regulations to enforce the statute. The technical language proved to be less interesting for our discussion than the short stories and television episode, so the next year we had them read the "Findings and Purpose" section of the ADA itself, which was both shorter and more useful for discussion. Bringing primary law into the discussion let us think through how American law conceptualizes disability, and pairing that with fiction led us to think about how the law and our society might be changed if we did not think of disability as a problem to be solved, but rather as a quality, state of being, or process. Our students often brought their own experiences with illness and disability to the discussion, reinforcing the idea that these experiences are often invisible, very common, and affect our lives in a wide variety of ways. Giving our students space to speak about their own experiences and how they were addressed—or not addressed—by our laws gave us ways to imagine very different worlds.

Conclusion

Our Law and Science Fiction course was often too relevant to our daily lives: one year, we taught our gender and sexuality module one week before #MeToo and stories about Harvey Weinstein broke in the news. Concerns over race and ethnicity were always present on our campus

in particular. Race and ethnicity week often coincided with instances of police brutality or other race-related events in the news. Climate change followed a similar trajectory. And COVID-19 has only made discussions about disability and health more relevant.

Law and Science Fiction is a course that can be continuously reorganized to incorporate new materials, reflecting a greater diversity of voices. With many of the topics we initially covered only gaining in relevance, the breadth of material to incorporate into the classroom will continue to grow. The challenge lies in finding a balance between the legal and the fictional and ensuring that students aren't overwhelmed with too much material. Our course has its limitations: ultimately, it only serves as the first step in moving students towards praxis, described by Paolo Freire as "reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it" (133). Our Law and Science Fiction course engaged students in conversation that will hopefully lead to action in their future legal careers.

In our course, we addressed various social and political topics. Throughout, students responded positively to the space for exploration of difficult topics that was given to them. Law school can be very rigid; you learn rules and are expected to conform to certain narratives. The law itself is not—or more importantly—should not be that. Law is subject to change and to imagine a better world requires imagining better ways of approaching the law. Speculative fiction gives us an avenue to explore radical reimaginings and hopefully will gain more acceptance as a means of teaching students to think more broadly about the issues of the day.

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Greg Sarris's *How a Mountain Was Made: Stories* as a Transformative Indigenous Futurism

Arwen Spicer

This is how Greg Sarris tells it: "I begin my American Indian literature course by telling a story told to me by my Kashaya Pomo elders. I then ask students . . . to repeat the story as they heard it. Invariably their stories tell them more about themselves than about the story or the speaker and culture from which the story comes" (*Keeping* 149). As a white reader of Sarris's story cycle *How a Mountain Was Made: Stories*, I am a student, my retelling inflected by where I come from. In a science fiction studies context, I identify the text as indigenous futurism, though, to my knowledge, this is not a label Sarris has claimed. By default, I read the text first and foremost as a message to me, though its primary audience is clearly Sarris's Pomo and Coast Miwok people. My engagement with these stories is partial, both in the sense of "incomplete" and "biased," yet this text is partly written to white settlers like me, especially us folx who come from the Mountain—Sonoma Mountain, that is, near Santa Rosa, California. Sonoma Mountain is my home, and these stories summon me as a white settler to be part of the work of decolonizing my homeplace, with all the hope and responsibility that work implies. In a 2012 interview, Sarris, who is the chairman of the Federated Tribes of the Graton Rancheria, discusses the benefits of the casino they had recently opened, observing, "I have a big dream that it can somehow bring us all—Indian and non-Indian—home again. And the big question for today is, how do you stop this us/them dichotomy that is a cancer that will kill us?" ("Dreaming" 19). The story cycle he published five years later is, I think, a piece of the answer. It is a call to all of us from the Mountain to come home.

Framing: The Act of Transmission

How a Mountain Was Made consists of sixteen short stories from the time when animals looked like human beings, framed by a series of conversations between Question Woman and Answer Woman. These two sisters rely on each other for the transmission of stories: Question Woman cannot remember the stories on her own, and Answer Woman cannot tell them unless asked. This structure echoes a theme of Sarris's scholarship: that stories always exist within an act of transmission. Sarris recounts how his elder relative Essie Parrish, religious leader of the Kashaya Pomo people, would add a narrative frame ("This is a story of . . .") to stories told to white scholars but not to her own daughter; in the same way, all stories are molded by the context of the telling ("Encountering"). *How a Mountain Was Made* exists within diverse contexts, and the answers it offers depend on the questions brought to it. As a story cycle, the text is recursive, looping on itself to generate multiple layers of meaning. I have structured this essay the same way.

Layer 1: What Does it Mean to Live Respectfully?

On a basic level, the stories follow a consistent pattern: some character becomes discontent with what they have and resorts to selfish, underhanded behavior to get what they want. Their malfeasance is exposed, and they face some consequence. Mole, for example, marries the beautiful Fog, but when he meets and marries a second woman, Warm Wind, he forgets about his first wife. Incensed at his neglect, Fog spurns him. Warm Wind also disapproves of his fickleness and kicks him out of her house, leaving Mole humbled and hiding in the ground. In this case, Mole's selfish behavior is his neglect of one family in favor of another, and the consequence is losing both his wives and being shamed.

The story cycle's structure teaches that the cardinal social ill is greed, whether it is Mole's discontent with one wife, Coyote scheming to get fantastic clothing, or a woman obsessed with gathering rocks for a gorgeous necklace to impress a man. Whether it is desire for more possessions or more attention, grasping after more than one's fair share damages relationships, and it always backfires on the greedy individual. Mole loses his wives, Coyote ends up looking like a fool, and the woman is left searching vainly for rocks. Greed is bad: this message sounds simple, but it stands diametrically opposed to the hegemonic assumptions of capitalism, grounded in the idea that perpetual increase in consumption is essential to preventing economic collapse. Or as infamously summed up by profiteer Gordon Gekko in the 1987 film *Wall Street*, "Greed is good."

Yet resisting greed is essential to the Honorable Harvest, which Potawatomi environmental scientist Robin Wall Kimmerer characterizes as taking only what we are given, sharing, showing respect, and minimizing harm (183). Sarris's characters break these guidelines repeatedly. They trick friends out of their possessions. They call in favors to demand an unreasonable amount of work. They break the rules set as conditions for borrowing something. Sometimes, they even act out in violence. Their missteps describe a cautionary framework for approaching the fundamental question of how to live in a respectful relationship. Kimmerer observes that while indigenous ancestors devoted immense thought to the question of how to consume respectfully, modern society largely ignores it (177). Our dominant culture does not recognize exploitation, extraction, and the greed that underlies them as problems. In fact, to centralize greed as a sickness requires reimagining our entire socioeconomic system, a visionary futurism, but one which our current ecological emergency demands with increasing urgency. Such fundamental change is not easy, however, and one of the impediments to overcoming greed is trauma, which reinforces it.

Layer 2: How Does Trauma Impact Life Choices?

How a Mountain Was Made takes place in an age before animals took on their present-day animal shapes. It simultaneously takes place in modern times, coexisting with fences, bicycles, and asphalt roads. This slippage between ancient and modern sharpens the relevance of cultural rootedness to the work of healing indigenous trauma sustained through generations of colonial violence. Sarris observes, "I try to make people conscious of the homelessness that seeps in the pores of my people. Why do we turn against one another? Why do we destroy one another?

That's what we know from colonization" (Sarris, "Dreaming" 17). The stories in *How a Mountain Was Made* condemn greed while honoring the reality that greed is an outgrowth of anxiety and self-doubt. While we all experience these feelings to some degree, trauma can endow them with outsized power, leading to destructive patterns.

In some of the stories, the patterns of greed evoke addiction, a common mechanism for coping with the stress of ongoing trauma (Maté 207). The woman obsessed gathering beautiful rocks does not need those rocks, yet her craving is so dire that she browbeats her friends into helping her make a necklace of them, overworking them until they quit and she is left alone, "wandering about, wondering how she will get someone to help her make a necklace" (Sarris, *How* 11). Though she does not really need the necklace, she does need something and is living under an unrelieved stress that urges her to seek a substitute for solving her real problem: her lack of belief in her own self-worth. This is the fundamental pattern of addiction, and Sarris's emphasis on it speaks to the twenty-first-century context of his narrative. It is a narrative for people carrying the trauma of colonization; it is also a narrative of healing.

Layer 3: How Can the Community Heal?

The stories in this cycle all involve some wrongdoing and accountability, but they don't stop with punishment. The final step is reconciliation and reintegration of the community, a stance that walks hand-in-hand with the principles of transformative justice. According to Ejeris Dixon, "*Transformative justice* and *community accountability* are terms that describe ways to address violence without relying on police or prisons. These approaches often work to prevent violence, to intervene when harm is occurring, to hold people accountable, and to transform individuals and society to build safer communities" (16). While transformative justice focuses on physical violence, the principles can apply to any kind of harm. Transformative justice differs from restorative justice in that the former seeks solutions outside state systems and the latter seeks solutions within them, by reforming them. Like many involved in transformative justice work, Sarris has expressed ambivalence about restorative justice. In conversation with Cristina Perea Kaplan, he discusses restorative justice in schools:

> I think Restorative Justice is a great idea. But again, from what little I know of it, and I have talked to some people in this area about it, you've got people who are not prepared to really deal. It's an idea. I hate to say it, it's a liberal, I hesitate to say, a white liberal idea of doing the right thing. They don't know our people. . . .

> But, fundamental change has to be in our communities. And so, if you're going to have Restorative Justice, you have to have people who are prepared to talk to our folks and council [sic] our folks, our students, and be familiar with where they are coming from and what has motivated them to fall away. (Sarris, "Learning" 13)

While restorative justice requires larger systems to reach out to communities, transformative justice originates within the community itself. It unfolds through the people directly affected.

In *How a Mountain Was Made*, the form this community reintegration takes varies from story to story: no single solution works for every situation. The price of Coyote's attempts to dress impressively is merely Coyote looking like a fool. Other times, solutions are not so easy: Mole's fickleness leaves him scorned and alone. That's the end of one story but not the end of the transformations. A full seven stories later, Mole resurfaces, this time to warn his daughters that their jealous husbands, the Bat Brothers, will do them harm. At first, they do not believe him. As the oldest asserts, "You were an untrustworthy husband and Mother had to raise us by herself . . . Why should we believe you?" (*How* 158). But when his warning helps them evade their husbands, trust begins to regrow, and Mole and Warm Wind eventually reconcile. Transformation is a process that does not answer to a timeline or follow a formula. Sometimes, it takes more than one story to hold.

One theme, however, remains constant: no one is expelled, not Mole, not the jealous Bat Brothers, no one, not even Coyote after he discovers Death by inadvertently killing his own sons. This radical inclusivity is more than just a thought experiment. The Graton Rancheria itself enacts this principle by specifying in their constitution that "no current members or their offspring can ever be disenrolled" ("Dreaming" 16). That means they are always a part of the community, regardless of any harm they may commit. It should go without saying this is not a free pass to do harm; rather, it is an expression of the principle that harm is a community phenomenon and must be addressed within the community, even when doing so is messy and solutions incomplete. Exclusion cannot be the answer. As Alexis Pauline Gumbs asserts, in the work of transformative justice, "there is no way beyond but through" (2).

And when trauma is severe, the only way through it is the promise and the pain of radical transformation. In the story "Ant Uncovers a Plot," four doctors conspire to keep Eagle sick so that they earn more pay from treating her, and in their selfish ignorance, they bind her legs so tightly that her legs become infected and fall off, thus introducing Pain into the world. In this case, the harm the doctors have caused is so heinous that only fundamental transformation can redress it. Thus, Coyote, the headman, declares the doctors will give up their former lives to become the four local mountains: Mt. Tamalpais, Mt. St. Helena, Mt. Taylor, and Sonoma Mountain, each with its own essential healing property. Ultimately, Coyote explains that while pain is now a feature of life, the four doctors "have learned their lesson well and yearn each and every day to be of service to us" (Sarris, *How* 180). They learned their lesson but had to become new beings to do it.

It is not an accident, I think, that cycle's grisliest story is also its titular story, the story of how the Mountain was made. It is a story of trauma yielding a different understanding of life. A community working through intense traumatization can never be the same community it once was. It can, however, climb higher, like the flat land transformed into the Mountain. The story of the Mountain's making is simultaneously ancient and happening now. It is a story of atonement, transformation, and healing in the midst of irrevocable pain.

Layer 4: Why Does Remembering Matter to Healing?

Remember the woman who ended up looking vainly for pretty rocks to impress a young man? That was her first story, not her last. In the cycle's final story, her father attempts to shift her attention onto a different necklace, one that contains the songs and stories of the people. She listens to him, "but only as before, with the desperate hope that she might at last capture the young man's heart" (188). Her learning is piecemeal, like any journey through trauma. There's a small change; half of a message reaches her. After several misadventures, however, the songs and stories this other necklace holds begin to capture her interest, redirecting her eyes to her home and people. Eventually, she herself becomes a storyteller, and in the end, it is her storytelling that wins the young man's heart. Transformations don't happen all at once, but step by step and sometimes when least expected.

Hers is a story of decolonization. The woman's obsession with pretty stones is symptomatic of a fundamental fear she is unworthy, that she can't "[stand] on her own merits" (11). It is a fear built on generations of derogation under colonialism. Over the course of the story, this fear evaporates as she rediscovers her cultural identity and the worth already inside her. Finally, she finds meaning not by dazzling someone into loving her but by reconnecting with her home and sharing her knowledge. Self-worth, contentment, healing: these transformations of trauma come from remembering, from looking back.

Sarris articulates the scope of this work in a 2005 speech at the Jewish Community Center in San Francisco:

> There are 1,079 enrolled members of the Federated Indians of the Graton Rancheria. All are descendants of 14 survivors. None has living memory of any of the thirty to forty aboriginal villages. None is fluent in any of the ten to twenty native languages. None has memory of the ancient redwoods, the bunch grass, or the purple needle grass. None has seen a flock of birds so thick that it obscures the sun. None has seen a single pronghorn, a wild elk, or a grizzly bear within the native landscape. None can read that native landscape well. Never mind memory, the place has been all but destroyed. . . .

> Still, we sing. We dance. We speak some old words. Humbled and hurt as we face Creation, that is, as we face this place that remains home, no matter how uncomfortable at times, we pray. . . . We hope that each new song learned, each word, each dance, each remarkable basket will do what it has always done for us: awaken us to our home, and, in turn, awaken our home to us. ("Culture" 19-20)

The full title of this story cycle is *How a Mountain was Made: Stories*, and the subtitle is the answer to the question. The stories made the Mountain and can heal it and us. Remembering is a central metaphor for the work of decolonization, but it is not only the colonized people who need to remember.

Layer 5: What Does it Mean to Remember as a Forgetter?

In "Apocalypse Logic," Cowlitz essayist Elissa Washuta states, "the most thorough answer to the question, 'What can [white people] do?' is, 'Remove your settler state from this land and restore all governance to its forever stewards.'" When I read this, I thought, "Yes, that's the truth," yet I am not sure what role it asks me to fill. If the settler state of the United States ended, would I live under tribal governance? Would the tribes want to govern hundreds of millions of non-indigenous people—and if so, how? And if not, would I be repatriated to Europe? In this case, I have to say Europe is not my home. Sonoma Mountain is my home; I am inseparable from it. Yet it's a home where I have no right to be. Indeed, for a long time, I have been aware that I do not belong in the land I belong to.

But when I first read the stories, my world tilted. I learned that I do, in fact, come from the Mountain. In "Coyote Creates People," Coyote's shenanigans end up creating duplicates of the people of his village. These new people, my ancestors, eventually learn the stories of the Mountain and most go off to create new villages. We settler colonists, metaphorically, are from the Mountain too, the descendants of the ones who left. But by the time we returned, we had forgotten the stories. As Answer Woman explains,

> [T]he Forgetters . . . killed all of the bears and the elk and the pronghorn. They cut down trees. You see, they forgot the stories. They forgot we are all one People, and the animals, indeed the entire Mountain, began to suffer. Now, we must all try to learn to live together. We must remember the stories again. (Sarris, *How* 176)

This is Sarris's futurism, a world in which everyone remembers the stories, indigenous and non-indigenous alike. It is a gentle way to speak about people who have destroyed your world and continue to destroy it. To call us not genocidal or terracidal, but people who have forgotten is more generous than we deserve, but it is also sagacious in reaching out to an audience that includes white settlers. The story is shaped in transmission, and if the message is that we need to work together, it makes sense to provide a path for that work.

I opened with Mole's misadventures with Fog and Warm Wind because this is the story of my home. While most of the stories are set on the west side of the Mountain, Mole's village, like mine, is on the east, the side where the Mountain often blocks out the cooling effect of the Pacific Ocean. The first time I read it, I could picture it exactly. Fog appears over the western slopes, singing,

> I am coming
> Singing, I am coming
> The people of your village rejoice. (32)

And I thought, "Yes. Yes, we do." Those hot summer evenings, when Fog rises in the west, I can assure you we rejoice because the next day is not going to broil us. But when Warm Wind saunters over, I wrote in the margin of my book, "No!" like a squeaky Darth Vader because I know Warm Wind too from those summer days, when she sweeps off the Central Valley like

a furnace blast and drives all prayer of Fog away. I know Warm Wind in the summer. But the story is referring to Warm Wind in the spring, the wind that brings the flowers. I know the flowers, yet truth be told, I have no particular memory of Warm Wind in the spring. I think this is because summer on the east of the Mountain has always been something to reckon with. The heat describes what we can or cannot do and what times of day we can do it. That requires communication with the land, something a little bit like the awareness of the Old People. But spring is easy to live with. And because we do not rely on the Mountain directly for our food, we are not required to observe spring very deeply. In spring, we laze and let the details flow by us. I have seen over forty years of springs on the east of the Mountain, and I never paid attention to Warm Wind. I had forgotten the story.

This liminal space between intimate recognition and revelation encapsulates my experience as a Forgetter. It is a reawakening to what has always been there. We on the east side have always been Mole, pinched tight between Fog and Warm Wind. I have always known it, and I have never known it. If you asked me at any point of my life where I came from, I would have said Glen Ellen because that is the town where I was raised. I would have said I come from the west, from the West Coast of the United States, a person of Western European descent, with no ethnic roots anywhere but Western Civilization. But now I know I come from the east, and the map of my life is reversed.

Coda: How Can We Remember the Future?

How a Mountain Was Made is a call to healing, and any such call implies action in the world. If the task is to restore the stories, the work is fundamentally educational, and the text was written with explicitly educational intent. In fact, Sarris wrote several of the stories as a collection of theatrical works already performed in over ninety schools before the book was published (Mansergh). Sarris says of the book, "I hope kids will get the message that we are all beautiful, we are all special and the minute we think we're better than, or separate from, or want to exploit somebody, or disrespect somebody, karma will happen. . . . We're going to need young people with a deep ethic of place and land if we're ever going to survive" (qtd. in Rose). I am not a kid, but I am (re)learner, and as I continue to deepen my own knowledge of my home and its Old People, I hope to live into my own responsibility to lend my partial and imperfect voice to the work of bringing the present and future back into continuity with the indigenous past and, thus, help us all to be whole again.

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Politics of the Margins in Octavia Butler's *Kindred*: Queerness, Disability, Race

Marietta Kosma

Throughout Octavia Butler's *Kindred*, the author raises numerous tensions around the notions of accessibility, disability, equality, and inclusion, exposing the crisis of black futures. My analysis focuses on the way that disability informs the protagonist Dana's experiences in the context of slavery, her positioning in the contemporary discourse of neo-liberalism, and her positioning in the prospective future. Very few scholars perceive Dana's subjectivity as an actual state of being that carries value both materially as well as metaphorically. The materiality of disability has not constituted part of the larger discourse of the American slave system. By examining how Butler renders disability both figuratively and materially, I establish a connection between the past, the present, and the future. The different figurations of space and time exposed through Dana's time-traveling help conceptualize her accessibility in different structures. Previous scholarship has focused exclusively on the origin and legacy of trauma, inflicted on the black female body of the twentieth century; however there has been too little criticism in relation to the active construction of black female subjectivity, located at the level of the body. I wish to explore how spectacles of violence against black female bodies function in the wider political imagery of the twenty-first century. The physical and psychological displacement of Dana, as a black female body, exposes her trauma and the difficulties she faces in order to reclaim her subjectivity in a society burdened by a history of violence and exploitation. Even though *Kindred* was written before the Black Lives Matter movement emerged, it can be analyzed in a way that asserts the continuity of African-American trauma, the perpetuation of systematic racism in the United States, and the crisis of blackness in the future. Systematic violence threatens black women's wholeness and renders their bodies at risk.

This article discusses how Octavia Butler's *Kindred* depicts how disability can be conceptualized as some form of ideological denaturalization of the domesticated able-bodied self. I take concern with issues of home, subjectivity, and health. *Kindred* depicts the collision of two different worlds: the antebellum past and twentieth-century Maryland. In an interview with Larry McCaffery, Butler states that *Kindred* originated from "a concern with how and why people reacted to slavery" (65). She wanted to describe the idea of how individuals engaged with the discourse of slavery. Through Dana, she describes how any person might react if transplanted to the antebellum past. The focus of this article is issues of health and disability, which I see as grounding race relations. Butler's commentary on race, gender, and disability is bound to the concept of domesticity. The novel opens up in 1976, the United States' bicentennial, when Dana and her husband Kevin have just moved to their new home in Maryland. Once they start unpacking, Dana

is violently torn away to the nineteenth century to save Rufus, her white ancestor. Over the course of the novel, Dana is involuntarily summoned to the past to save Rufus when his life is in danger. The importance of the imminent change of spatiality and temporality through Dana's time-traveling is brought to the forefront from the very start of the narrative.

Dana exists between two different homes. The concern of domesticity is clearly articulated through the first sentences of the narrative, "I lost an arm on my last trip home. My left arm. And I lost about a year of my life and much of the comfort and security I had not valued until it was gone" (Butler 9). In this passage, the ethical implications of the individual inhabiting spaces among homes arise. More specifically, "the world of healthy Cartesian subjects is a *home* of comfort and security, familiarity, and acceptance" (Comer 88). Therefore it is necessary to consider what 'home' means for Dana since none of the spaces where she exists provides her with comfort and security. Each time she goes back to the past, Dana forms a better understanding of her family's history. Dana, a twentieth-century racially conscious black woman "is made a slave"[1] in the sense that she needs to endure the physical burden of slavery, (multiple beatings, attempted rapes, lashing, and forced labor) but also the psychological burden of slavery. More specifically, Dana's ultimate torment is deciding whether to help her ancestor Alice preserve her life or whether to become complicit in Alice's rape to ensure the continuation of her African American family's ancestral line and by extension, her own life, both in a literal and metaphorical way. Dana is skeptical toward this responsibility of hers from the first time she encounters Rufus. She wonders "Was that why I was here? Not only to insure the survival of one accident-prone small boy, but to insure my family's survival, my own survival? . . . If I was to live, if others were to live, he must live. I didn't dare test the paradox" (Butler 29). The decisions she makes are impacted by the instinct of self-preservation.

Through time–traveling, Dana emerges as an itinerant subject. As a woman who belongs in 1976 California, Dana feels disdain toward her foremothers. At first, she exposes contempt and disdain towards Alice who chooses to do "the safe thing" and views her as "the kind of woman who might have been called 'mammy' in some other household" (Rushdy 163). Alice is viewed as embodying the stereotype of the Mammy, the female equivalent of Uncle Tom. Dana separates herself from Alice's stance and refuses to enact the role of the mammy. She disrupts the collective mandate placed on her to create generations. Therefore, viewing Dana as a maternal figure is extremely troubling. Beaulieu and Mitchell perform such a reading and disrupt Dana's positioning as the mother of Rufus. Even though Dana takes care of Rufus, being his mother would go against her personal strategies of self-preservation. The characters in the nineteenth century view Dana as a queer figure, as she encompasses many characteristics that were diverse to other women of her community. Her actions are acts of "resistance to being confined to the roles of motherhood and domesticity" (Miletic 273). She further develops other roles in relation to her standing in the present. More specifically, Butler states from the beginning of the narrative that Dana is a writer. Dana and Kevin meet through their common interest in writing, as they work at "a casual labor agency" that "regulars called . . . the slave market" (Butler 52).

What seemed more troubling was the fact that while at first Dana was sternly resisting her designation as an enslaved female body during the past, eventually she became accustomed to mistreatment. As mentioned during the following excerpt:

> Time passed. Kevin and I became more a part of the household. Familiar, accepted, accepting. That disturbed me too when I thought about it. How easily we seemed to acclimatize. Not that I wanted us to have trouble, but it seemed as though we should have had a harder time adjusting to this particular segment of history—adjusting to our places in the household of a slaveholder . . . and I was perverse enough to be bothered by the ease. (Butler 97)

It is troubling that as time was passing Dana became so accustomed to her new home. The degree to which she became complacent to Rufus's violence and to systemic violence overall should get questioned. It could be argued that Dana turned into a stranger in the territory she inhabits. This aligns with Du Bois's question, "Why did God make me an outcast and a stranger in my own house?" (8). Butler problematizes being at home. This is further extrapolated when Dana and Kevin observe some children of the slave community, playing an auction block game. Dana and Kevin remained hidden and look at the children while they:

> went on with their play. . . . "Now here a likely wench," called the boy on the stump. He gestures toward the girl who stood slightly behind him. "She cook and wash and iron. Come here, gal. Let the folks see you." He drew the girl up beside him. "She young and strong," he continued. "She worth plenty of money. Two hundred dollars. Who bid two hundred dollars?" The little girl turned to frown at him. "I'm worth more than two hundred dollars, Sammy!" she protested. "You sold Martha for five hundred dollars!" "You shut your mouth," said the boy. "You ain't supposed to say nothing. When Marse Tom bought Mama and me, we didn't say nothing." (Butler 99)

This passage shows that the ideology of slavery is passed on to the community from a very young age. The stance of endurance of the children is in opposition to Dana's stance as a disabled body. These children unconsciously reproduce the roles that were prescribed for them by the antebellum south. By engaging in this game through role-playing, the actual auction block becomes normalized. This is troubling because it entails children from a very young age to reiterate the structure of slavery. In this game the little girl seems to be at a more disadvantaged state than her male counterpart as she is taught by her mother to endure the commands given to her by the boy in order to avoid greater harm. She knows that she needs to follow the boys' commands and she employs endurance as a strategy of survival. In this context, having a black body is synonymous with objectification and degradation, of subjugation and dehumanization. It carries the power to suffocate and stifle the individual. The black female body is reduced to being a silent object that needs to remain invisible, unseen, protected from the male gaze, while embodying resilience. This scene brings to the forefront the way that black women are continuously negotiating questions of racialized denigration.

Dana differentiates herself from other members of her community and sets limits for her own body. Her standing as a member of the post-civil rights era helps her conceptualize the action of rape as criminal, while members of the antebellum era had to endure such criminality. Dana says to Kevin that:

> "[Rufus] has to leave me enough control over my own life to make living look better to me than killing and dying." "If your black ancestors had felt that way, you wouldn't be here," said Kevin. "I told you when all this started that I didn't have their endurance. I still don't. Some of them will go on struggling to survive, no matter what. I'm not like that."
> (Butler 246)

She believes that she has to have the right to make her own choices instead of her whole life being dominated by Rufus. Dana believes that she needs to employ nonviolence "a practice of resistance, that becomes possible, if not mandatory, precisely at the moment when doing violence seems most justified and obvious" (27). Dana's choice not to harm Rufus is a conscious one. While pursuing her self-preservation Dana makes sure to establish Rufus as the patriarch, even though her action entails violence towards a member of her community. She rather adopts an individualistic stance and tries to escape the predicament of victimization.

At the end of the novel, Dana escapes rape, as she views it as an occurrence that is even worse than death. She refuses getting raped by exposing itinerancy. She refuses the role of the victim and, for the first time, imposes her own conditions on her relationship with Rufus. She says, "I could accept him as my ancestor, my younger brother, my friend, but not as my master, and not as my lover" (260). When Rufus attempts to rape her, Dana kills him and returns to the present. Dana's newfound sense of herself leads to an emancipatory revision of history. A few seconds before Rufus dies, he desperately tries to grab Dana's arm. When Dana returns to consciousness she is back at her house in Maryland. She realizes that her arm is fused into the wall of her bedroom. Through the trope of time-traveling, Dana escapes the communal longing of reproduction and reconstructs her community's history. She manages to survive and at the same time she rewrites history by reaching a more complex understanding of her standing in the present. She operates in her best interest as she ultimately kills the person to whom she was previously committed and protecting up to this point. The ultimate strategy that Dana chooses is refusing to allow Rufus to rape her. By killing him, she asserts her own authority. She asserts her subjectivity by resisting sexual victimization. She sets Rufus's plantation house on fire, actively challenging the white master's authority. By destroying the house, she renders impossible the continuation of the lives of slaves in the plantation. She provides them the possibility to escape from Rufus's domination. By burning down the house, she gives them the opportunity to flee to the north and escape the plantation site.

I read Dana's act as libratory to herself and others, as she gives them a chance to escape their position as slaves. She also provided the other members of the plantation with the psychological outlet of escape from slavery, as she gave them the opportunity to conceptualize a different future.

However, it should be noted that she cannot be sure of the effects of her action on the slaves of plantation. Even though Dana acted in "self-defense," she is aware of the danger in which she places the other members of her community. She voices her fears that the outcome of her own choice would have a "cost . . . [on] Nigel's children, Sarah, all the others" (264). She values their lives but gives ultimate value to her own self-preservation. Dana's violence takes on an institutional form, as it is addressed against the institution of slavery that renders the female body as property. Dana contests Rufus's institutional power and intends to diminish the system that had previously enslaved her. Dana wants to protect her story as an individual, sustain herself and reach a more complex understanding of herself. There is no final resolution in the narrative, nor does Butler provide an insight to the afterlife of the other members of the plantation. As Dorothy Allison states, "Butler offers no resolutions at the end of *Kindred* . . . Dana is left wounded . . . [and] we do not know what will become of her marriage to Kevin, a white man" (476). Butler does not provide a resolution in the end, however she allows Dana to reach a more complex understanding of herself as she now understands the ways in which her past has affected her present. Dana "will always bear the mark of her kindred" (Salvaggio and McKee Chamas 33). Her individual needs and her communal obligations are in conflict but at the same time they are mutually supportive to a point. Even though she is in conversation with the history of her foremothers, at the same time she moves away from it.

In *Kindred,* disability and otherness are intricately linked. Disability "becomes an apt figure for both having one's identity (with all the domestic violence that that implies) and not having it" (Comer 99). Disability is revealed as an oscillated exposure, between agency and submission. The assimilation of otherness from the outside to a domestic inside does not fully occur, as wholeness is not necessarily synonymous to being at home. Part of Dana's arm is trapped in her nineteenth-century home and part of it rematerializes in a wall in her 1976 home. Her arm is a "literal and visceral reminder of her exposure to Rufus [as she is] physically strewn between two times, she will never be at home" (99). The loss of her arm not only reflects the eradication of the Other, Rufus, but also it is a highly performative act that functions as a reminder of a series of actions that cannot be wholly repressed. Dana's murder of the Other function as the ultimate step of self-fashioning preserving the last kernel of her individualistic self. Violence against the other entails at the same time violence against one's self. As Comer explains, "To be ontologically whole is to remain connected to others in the face of mortality—to keep the 'house' and all that it implies at some distance" (100). This is evident when Dana travels to the past in order to save Rufus when he and his home are in danger. She then returns to the future when she is faced with total eradication of herself. Even though she starts heading once at home, a closer look reveals that her healing begins once she is removed from Rufus's presence. Both spaces can become domesticated as mortality functions as the origin of her oscillation between past and present and subsequently between Self and Other.

In conclusion, homes created within a normalizing ideological context become estranged in view of a disabled body. The disabled body exists both within yet outside of spatial arrangements.

Dana is ideologically interjected in the discourse through her disability. Ideology "substantiates a status quo and uses actions to interpolate its subjects" (Comer 108). Then a crucial question arises: If identity is established through one's acts, do those who are unable to perform some acts due to their disability continuously experience defamiliarization from home? Butler's emphasis on embodiment in *Kindred* is agential in "refus[ing] to account for identity as reducible to the texts produced by political and cultural power for the purposes of oppressing those who do not merit representation" (Robertson 366). Her main focus is embodiment within the context of the United States' history and therefore places the body at the very center of larger socio-cultural concerns. Instances of empowerment emerge through the process of decolonization, through undoing the oppressor's ideology that only "able bodies" are worthy of attention. Butler's *Kindred* constitutes a continuation of Du Bois's discourse in regards to disability. Butler interrogates the privileging of wholeness, domestic boundaries, and normative bodies. Instead of dismissing the body in the pursuit of transcendence, she embraces the body, its non-domesticity, its finitude, its non-normativity, its disability and ultimately gestures toward a different way of being.

Notes

1. My reference is to a chiasmus from Frederick Douglass's *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an African Slave*: "You have seen how a man was made a slave; you shall see how a slave was made a man" (294).

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Configuring the Caribbean through sf

Jarrel De Matas

Caribbean literary engagement with questions of being emphasize a counter hegemonic practice of denying and henceforth reimagining of historical conceptions of the Caribbean place and its people. One of the main ways Caribbean writers assert this counter hegemony is through an attention to language practices, both indigenous and Creole. I propose Caribbean sf (Csf) as an extension of Jane Bryce's argument of 'outsider' fiction.[1] Bryce's claim that 'outsider' fiction is best encapsulated by Speculative Fiction excludes other kinds of 'outsider' fiction which also consider "what might happen if submerged, sublimated or suppressed stories, voices of philosophies became so dominant as to create a radically different world" (17). As a form of outsider fiction, Csf reimagines the colonial experience by bringing together all kinds of fiction that apply sf tropes such as advanced technology, time travel, inter-planetary settings, genetically modified being, alien(ated) subjects to envision certain futured states of the Caribbean space and its people. Csf resists the exceptionalism ascribed to the genre of speculative fiction, which Bryce upholds as "the genre, par excellence, by which popular fiction reimagines the present and pushes the boundaries of a possible future through the means of Caribbean myth and magic" (17). Focusing on Csf allows for a deeper reimagining of Caribbean being that is manifested across a spectrum of representations—not limited to myth and magic. Nalo Hopkinson, a Jamaican-Canadian speculative fiction writer acknowledges the dearth of 'other(ed)' experiences which have recently surfaced in Csf. Hopkinson states, "the discourse [of science fiction] is slowly coming from other experiences: the working class, women, writers of color, queer writers, disabled writers" (591).

Csf is the focus for how Caribbean writers use sf tropes—that is, tropes related to fantasy, folklore, speculative fiction, and science fiction—to develop nuanced postcolonial versions of Caribbean identity as well as challenge the traditionalist and mainstream version of science fiction that originated in pulp magazines from as early as the 1920s.[2] The designation of Csf in this follows the imperialist underpinnings of mainstream SF discussed by Eric D. Smith.[3] Smith's argument that postcolonial sf challenges imperial hegemony (6) also offers a way to address the dearth of attention paid to science fiction literature and theory by women and queer writers of the Caribbean.[4] However, unlike New Wave SF which still grappled with issues of exclusivity owing largely to American and British literary influences, postcolonial sf developed into a spectrum of Global South SF literatures.[5] One such form of Global South SF is Csf. In what follows I first map the foundations and development of Csf before analyzing works of Csf that take up matters related to affirming Caribbean linguistic diversity.

Hopkinson's *Midnight Robber* combines the experience of crossing from a high-tech planet, Toussaint, to a primitive one, New Half-Way Tree, with an intricate web of Trinidadian and

Jamaican Creole English. The protagonist, Tan-Tan, is forced by her father, Antonio, into a space-pod bound for New Half-Way Tree, the mirror planet of their home, Toussaint. Tan-Tan's journey resembles a spatial remapping of her identity. The agency she finds on New Half-Way Tree rehumanizes her by giving the space to be free of her father's ownership over her movement and her body. Hopkinson portrays a process of reconfiguring Caribbean identity through the space-pod which takes Tan-Tan to the technologically inferior, but no less culturally and linguistically significant, planet of New Half-Way Tree. Immediately, readers are immersed in the storytelling tradition as the narrator takes on the guise of a "master weaver" who proudly says, "I spin the threads. I twist warp 'cross weft. I move my shuttle in and out, and smooth smooth" (21). Through the narrator, Hopkinson directs attention to the technological machine of Creole English. This new language, nannysong, mixes new sounds with creole words to create a hybrid blend of communication. Nannysong, we are told, was developed by a calypsonian. Nanny's programming reflects its creator—an agent of socio-political commentary (153). The distinctly Caribbean voices of the novel extend the depth of science fiction past its superficial treatment of linguistic diversity as criticized in the late twentieth century by Walter E. Meyers. According to Meyers, the attention to historical linguistics in science fiction is as superficial as its pulp fixation on intergalactic difference (36-37). Hopkinson's science fiction presents a marked departure from this generalization. *Midnight Robber* places the accuracy of Creole English at the center of its introspection of the differences between the technologically superior Toussaint and its inferior counterpart, New Half-Way Tree. Where language has always been critical to creating a unique Caribbean identity—epitomized by Kamau Brathwaite's quest for nation language[6]—Hopkinson creates two worlds with disparities in technological access yet sharing the same Creole identity.

Similar to the emphasis placed on amplifying Caribbean identity through the technology of language, *Midnight Robber* draws attention to an inter-planetary Caribbean state of being. In doing so, the novel moves away from globality and toward planetarity. As discussed by Gayatri Spivak, thinking in terms of the planet suggests that "both the dominant and the subordinate must jointly rethink themselves as intended or interpellated by planetary alterity" (347). Hopkinson portrays the tenuous relationship between the two planets, Toussaint, a technologically superior world, and New Half-Way Tree, Toussaint's primitive, yet culturally vibrant counterpart. In the novel, the protagonist Tan-Tan is forced by her father to travel with him via a space shuttle from Toussaint to New Half-Way Tree. The narrator describes the process as occurring in different waves and crossing many veils: "The first wave hit them. For Tan-Tan it was as though her belly was turning inside out . . . A next veil swept through them, slow like molasses" (73). The novel is grounded in a uniquely Caribbean sensibility through the comparison between space travel and molasses, the latter being a by-product of the sugar-making process which was integral to the sustenance of Caribbean economies up to the twentieth century. Hopkinson overlays the dimensional shift to another planet with an historical account of the ways in which enslavement warped the African body. The transportation from the planet of Toussaint, named after the Haitian general François-Dominique Toussaint Louverture who led slave revolts as part of the Haitian Revolution, reflects a reversion from notions of independence and anti-Black racism. The transportation pod itself is

likened to slave ships that crammed as many West Africans as possible to offset the certain death during the treacherous journey across the Atlantic. As a science-fictional reimagining of forced exile, *Midnight Robber* doesn't only rethink history on a planetary scale, but it also reinvents the connections between technology, language, and embodiment. Hopkinson's utilization of Creole English is rooted in an understanding of language as a technological machine. Nannysong, a sophisticated language enabled through advancements in technology, is born out of calypso and overlaid with artificial intelligence. In the novel, Antonio learns from his cousin, Maka, that nannysong was created by Granny Nanny.[7] Before she dies, Maka explains that Granny Nanny uploaded her consciousness to an open-access AI platform which later came to be called nannysong. The submerged memory of Granny Nanny is reignited and established as a foundation of Toussaint's cultural identity. The historical significance of Granny Nanny also humanizes the people of Toussaint, as it is through Granny Nanny that the people were able to create the future they wanted for themselves using technology rooted in their historical icon. Hopkinson claims language, specifically Caribbean languages such as Trinidadian Creole, Jamaican Patois, and Papiamento, as a survival tool.

Granny Nanny's history, which stands in for the society's collective memory, converted into nannysong, survived because her consciousness was converted into four-dimensional memory space. The transhuman overtones of technologizing consciousness establishes an intergenerational relay anti-colonial history which sees knowledge of Granny Nanny passed down to Tan-Tan through the utilization of digital space. This digital space incorporates cloud technology wherein nannysong becomes easily accessible and of unlimited capacity. Maka's description of the birth and growth of nannysong through a sound filter engineered by a calypsonian mirrors the forms of techno-driven change discussed by Curwen Best. According to Best, innovations in art forms such as soca and calypso "demonstrate how Caribbean music was being reconfigured by technology, indeed, how Caribbean culture is presently being co-constructed by technology" (32). *Midnight Robber* overlaps cultural memory and Caribbean music with techno-driven change. Where calypso was created out of a challenge to systems of power and some technologies evolved out of a need to communicate, nannysong represents a mode of resistance to Standard English, a survival of cultural memory, and an assertion of Creole identities.

Hopkinson suggests that Creole survives and is sustained through the memoryspace of nannysong. Nannysong is Hopkinson's version of a futured language that has undergone technoscientific syncretism of Creole identities. The "four-dimensional programming code" (*Midnight Robber* 153) of nannysong propels Creole into a higher, more complex space-time dimension. In this fourth dimension of memoryspace, Caribbean existence combines multiple and alternate perspectives of historical, cultural, and linguistic change.[8] The technology of nannysong, which naturally evolved from calypso and grows through artificially intelligent machine-learning, resembles an elaboration of Kamau Brathwaite's Sycorax style. Sycorax, Caliban's mother in The Tempest, who is unseen yet imbued with malevolent power, is native to the island on which Prospero becomes stranded. By naming his computer Sycorax (*ConVERSations* 176),

Brathwaite claims the marginal figure as a muse for his own reinvention of colonial language. The videolectic style, enabled by Sycorax, takes on added proportions, and dimensions, in *Midnight Robber*. Brathwaite's videolectic style of decolonizing language and identity sees him defy typographic conventions in the search for new forms of expression. In *ConVERSations*, Brathwaite's description of Sycorax's ability to reconceptualize language foretells the ability of nannysong in *Midnight Robber* to be an evolutionary form of Creole. Beginning with orality in the same way that Hopkinson would later do through calypso, Brathwaite explains that "the/thing about 'oral po-/etry'—the Oral Trad/ition [OT] today—in a world of electronic/(s)—is that it's allowing us at last to mix the two 'traditions' into sound/visual; to convert/script into sound via/ the spirit" (217). Nannysong in addition to being language transposed in a different style—that is, tonal—substantiates the oral tradition through its extrasensory transmission among the people of Toussaint.

Nannysong contains the essential elements of nation language in that it is adapted to Toussaint's environment and the cultural imperative of historical preservation. What Brathwaite refers to as the "software" of nation language, that is the rhythm and syllables of Caribbean poetry (9), takes the form of an actual software program in *Midnight Robber*. The foundation of nannysong is its "one hundred and twenty-seven tones" sung in "basic phrases" for human intelligibility (*Midnight Robber* 154). The "impossibly intricate nannysong" speech pattern (44) resembles Glissant's claim of Caribbean speech which is "first and foremost sound" (*Caribbean Discourse* 123). The sonic structure of Caribbean speech enables its own process of reclamation. Glissant goes on to say that "This is how the dispossessed man organized his speech by weaving it into the apparently meaningless texture of extreme noise" (124). Where nannysong represents a re-possession of Caribbean identity, Hopkinson portrays a reversion of dispossession when Antonio and Tan-Tan leave the technologically sophisticated planet of Toussaint for New Half-Way Tree. Although New-Half-Way Tree is not technologically sophisticated, it is no less dynamic than Toussaint. It is also no less human than Toussaint. In fact, Tan-Tan finds that the douens might be more human than the actual humans of her technology-driven home planet.

The "dimension veil" separating Toussaint from New Half-Way Tree reveals non-human beings with human sensibilities. Existing alongside the strange flora and fauna of New Half-Way Tree are the douens—creatures with heads resembling a bird, arms with fingers, leathery chests, no genitalia, legs with knees bent backward, and feet like a goat. One of the douens, Chichibud, functions as the repository of New Half-Way Tree's history. As he guides the aliens, Tan-Tan and Antonio, from their space-pod to his home on New Half-Way Tree he interweaves the history of New Half-Way Tree with veiled criticism of the people of Toussaint. When Antonio tells Tan-Tan, "We don't know nothing about this beast" (*Midnight Robber* 270), Chichibud replies: "Beast that could talk and know it own mind. Oonuh tallpeople quick to name what is people and what is beast" (270). The exchange between Antonio and Chichibud reflects the projection of animality by Western humanist thought.[9] To some extent, the beastialization of Chichibud points to a process of queering the Caribbean human. Hopkinson shatters conceptions of who and what is

considered non/human by reconfiguring the bases of humanity. Chichibud's compassion for his daughter humanizes him and counters Antonio's reckless reproduction of colonial stereotypes which, to recall Césaire, applies thingification to beings that do not look 'typically human.' As with nannysong, a high-tech consolidation of nation-language, the douen's ability to speak Anglopatwa, Francopatwa, Hispanopatwa, and Papiamento call to mind Brathwaite's discussion of nation language as representing the vast, diverse Caribbean space.

Hopkinson uses douen folklore in the novel to challenge notions of Caribbean culture and its people as backward, insignificant, or non-human. The folkloric aspects which are submerged, to use Brathwaite's term, on the other(ed) planet of New Half-Way tree, are portrayed as essential to Tan-Tan's cultural consciousness. Despite not looking typically human, the douens are nonetheless human in their linguistic identity, sentience, and affect. Through the focus on the douens, alternate-beings, who are more human than their non-human physical features would suggest, Hopkinson replicates Glissant's call for a "defiance of a universalizing and reductive humanism" (Glissant 133). The ethnopoetics of *Midnight Robber* which to Glissant's point "belongs to the future" (Glissant 134) takes place on the parallel planet of New Half-Way Tree. Hopkinson's vision of Caribbean futurity provides a response to Glissant's argument that "The tool is the other's property; technology remains alien" (132). *Midnight Robber* uses the tools of sf to exalt nation language and folk culture. In an interview with Alondra Nelson, Hopkinson explains that the term spec-fic—which this paper incorporates into the overarching term Csf—is "a set of literatures that examine the effects on humans and human societies of the fact that we are toolmakers . . . Those tools may be tangible (such as machines) or intangible (such as laws, mores, belief systems)" (98). Both tangible and intangible tools are used in *Midnight Robber* to conceptualize Caribbean resistance and reclamation of place and personhood in futuristic, and technologically regressed planets. Like both types of tools Hopkinson uses, both planets are necessary to reimagining the complexity of Caribbean ontology.

The relatively new field of Csf reckons with the future of Caribbean identity and being that is very much rooted in its history. The emphasis on native language as a counterhegemonic tool takes the form of different Caribbean languages coalescing in *Midnight Robber*. As a writer of Csf, Hopkinson develops our understanding of native and folk ontologies through a focus on the survival of native Caribbean languages. This survival is enabled through a technological interface called nannysong as much as a cultural appreciation of indigenous folklore.

Notes

1. I use the lowercase 'sf' as opposed to the mainstream, capitalized form 'SF' which has historically been used to refer to science fiction. Because science fiction is only one component of Csf, others being fantasy, folklore, and speculative fiction, the lowercase 'sf' is more appropriate.

2. The pulp era of science fiction began under the label 'scientifiction' with Hugo Gernsback's *Amazing Stories* magazine series. These stories of science fiction more often than not tended to feature white, male, and heterosexual protagonists who fought physically and ontologically 'alien' species. Although magazines were dominated by male writers, Lisa Yaszek argues that women authors were very much present though disguised behind male pen names (10). However, when paperbacks began to rival magazines during the 1960s, Eric Leif Davin revealed that fewer women "made the transition to the new medium of novels" (306). The gradual waning of women's voices in science fiction owed to the lack of transition to the novel form is one point of restitution that is brought to the fore by Csf.

3. See the introduction to *Globalization, Utopia, and Postcolonial Science Fiction* for Smith's characterization of postcolonial science fiction as born out of a challenge to imperial hegemony.

4. Melzer argues that SF "has a tradition of conceptualizing themes of colonialism and social orders in conservative, and at times reactionary, ways. Beginning with the New Wave in the 1960s, Western science fiction texts and criticism have developed from a mainly White, male, heterosexual genre into a more diverse body of texts with the potential to radically reconceptualize power relations" (5).

5. The classification of Csf as part of a broader Global SF field is informed by O'Connell's argument that Global SF's "decentering of the West as the singular site and progenitor of futurity . . . takes places alongside a postcolonial critique that interrogates SF's relationship to technoscience" (682), amongst other things.

7. See Brathwaite for his theory of nation language which is "the kind of English spoken by the people who were brought to the Caribbean, not the official English now, but the language of slaves and labourers" (*History of the Voice* 5).

7. Granny Nanny, also called Queen of the Maroons, is credited as one of the pivotal leaders of the Maroons—a group of self-liberated West Africans who used guerilla tactics to resist Spanish and British control in early eighteenth-century Jamaica.

8. See Linda Dalrymple Henderson's "Science Fiction, Art, and the Fourth Dimension," pp. 69-84, for a discussion of the ways in which science fiction writers use references to a fourth dimension to give a deeper "space sense" of reality.

9. See Zakiyyah Iman Jackson for a discussion of African diasporic writers who "not only critique animalization but also exceed critique by overturning received ontology and epistemic regimes of species that seek to define blackness through the prism of abject animality" (34).

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Dissolving the Individual: Collective Consciousness as a Rebellion Against Neoliberalism in Tade Thompson's *Rosewater* and Chana Porter's *The Seep*

Jonathan Thornton

In this paper, I explore ideas around collective consciousness and fungal networks as a rebellion against neoliberalism's co-option of the utopian potential of the internet in the texts *Rosewater* by Tade Thompson and *The Seep* by Chana Porter. To do so I first outline some theoretical and conceptual ideas around how the internet has been used to uphold neoliberalism, how fungal networks offer a subversion of this by connecting us to each other and the nonhuman world, and how fungi, with their symbiotic and parasitic interactions with bodies, disrupt the idea of the body as discrete and inviolable. Then I explore these elements through the texts. Finally, I conclude, drawing together ideas between these two texts.

Rob McRuer has a useful definition of neoliberalism in his text *Crip Theory*, where he emphasises how neoliberalism's prioritisation of the freedom of capital destroys or transforms into target markets "the public or democratic cultures that might constrain or limit the interest of global capital," and neoliberalism's end result of "more global inequality and raw exploitation and less rigidity in terms of how oppression is reproduced (and extended)" (2-3). This is something we can see particularly clearly in the case of the internet, whose revolutionary potential has largely been squandered in favour of propping up the status quo. Prem Sikka acknowledges that while "the internet represents the biggest advance in communication technology since the advent of the printing press," its effectiveness in bringing about social change for the better is hampered because "it is colonised by corporate as well as radical groups seeking to change society" (765-766). We can see this in how social media, which is supposed to allow us to connect better, has contributed directly to the rise of the alt-right, Brexit, and Trumpism. Tracy L. Hawkins describes in "Facebook, Neoliberalism, and the Foreclosing of Imagination" how neoliberalism uses technology to reify its core beliefs in order to make it more difficult to imagine forms of resistance against it. Hawkins adds, "As a result of this, our ability to imagine new ways to organize society, to address issues of social justice, and to seek our ideal future is greatly curtailed" (137).

But there are many advantages to increased communication and increased connection, with great potential for activism. What would a network look like that wasn't so anthropocentric? In his book *Entangled Life*, Merlin Sheldrake describes how fungi participate in symbiotic relationships that allow multicellular life to exist, from trees to humans. He says, "We are ecosystems, composed of—and decomposed by—an ecology of microbes, the significance of which is only now coming to light. . . . Symbiosis is a ubiquitous feature of life" (18). I am interested in how thinking about ourselves as ecosystems decentres the idea of the individual, and emphasises how we exist as a

part of nature rather than something distinct from it. This idea is echoed in Donna Harraway's "The Cyborg Manifesto," which uses the cyborg as a metaphor to disrupt the humanist notion of the historically white male body as distinct from nature, woman, animal, and machine. She argues, "by the late twentieth century, our time, a mythic time, we are all chimeras, theorized and fabricated hybrids of machine and organism—in short, cyborgs" ("Cyborg" 61). This notion of hybridity between machine and organism extends to the biomolecular machinery of the fungi, the microbiota and the symbionts and parasites that we live intimately with. The notion of the human body as a discrete, inviable self is not compatible with our knowledge of ourselves as interactions of cellular machinery and genetic coding from varied sources both prokaryotic and eukaryotic. Haraway talks about biology as "a kind of cryptography," and in "Tentacular Thinking" she further explores the idea of humans as interacting biological systems with no clearly defined boundaries: "We are all lichens; so we can be scraped off the rocks by the Furies, who still erupt to avenge crimes against the earth. Alternatively, we can join in the metabolic transformations between and among rocks and critters for living and dying well" ("Tentacular" 56). Using Hawaray's question from "The Cyborg Manifesto"—"Why should our bodies end at the skin, or include at best other beings encapsulated by skin?" (61)—as a jumping off point, Margrit Shildrick positions hybridity in relation to the disabled body and prostheses. Shildrick argues that prostheses, whether they be replacement limbs, behaviour-altering drugs, or transplanted organs, disrupt ideas about the body as a discrete entity and force us to rethink our ideas about embodiment: "They not only demonstrate the inherent plasticity of the body, but, in the very process of incorporating non-self matter, point to the multiple possibilities of co-corporeality, where bodies are not just contiguous and mutually reliant but entwined with one another" (16). Thus, considering bodies as "contiguous," "mutually reliant," and "entwined" disrupts hierarchies of viewing non-disabled bodies as superior to disabled bodies, and allows us to rethink what constitutes a body and what its limits are. How we view embodiment also influences our ideas around subjectivity. This is explored in speculative fiction that engages with the fungal. While works like M. R. Carey's *The Girl With All The Gifts* have made the Cordyceps fungi the go-to pseudo-scientific explanation for zombies, other works, such as Tade Thompson's *Rosewater* and Chana Porter's *The Seep*, engage with the fungal to imagine exciting, if ambiguous, posthuman possibilities for connectivity that echo the early utopian ideals of the internet whilst avoiding its co-option by neoliberalism.

Tade Thompson's *Rosewater* is set in a near-future Nigeria where an alien incursion has occurred in the form of Wormwood, which has burrowed under the ground and released fungi-like spores into Earth's atmosphere. Wormwood is trapped under the dome of Utopicity, and the city of Rosewater has sprung up around it. The alien fungi, or xenoform, attaches itself to the natural fungi on human skin, forming a psychic network called the xenosphere which "sensitives" like protagonist Kaaro are able to access like the internet. In the virtual space of the xenosphere, sensitives are able to embody themselves in nonhuman forms: Kaaro appears as a Griffin and inhabits such surreal places as a palace made of meat. But the xenosphere is more than just a recapitulation of the cyberpunk dream. In *Rosewater*, everyone is connected into a

communal "worldmind," the differences between discrete individual bodies called into question as consciousness extends across fungal networks and through different people's minds.

The dome opens once a year, releasing alien fungi into the atmosphere and healing the injured and diseased. However, this process does not always work like the people who flock to visit Rosewater might wish. Whilst some are healed, others are put back together incorrectly—the deformed, or mutated or remade in new and unusual ways—known as the "remade." Even the dead are infected with xenoforms, brought back to life as soulless zombies, or the reanimates. Thus, the interaction between humans and the alien fungi doesn't so much return people to an idealised complete body, but remakes it in challenging new forms.

This is further complicated by the ways the xenosphere, like the internet, contributes to upholding some elements of the neoliberal paradigm while subverting others. Kaaro works at a bank, forming a psychic shield to prevent other sensitives from hacking the bank through the xenosphere. Furthermore, Kaaro discovers that the xenoforms are slowly replacing human cells with more xenoforms whilst replicating the original body's appearance, and that eventually humanity will be entirely replaced. This causes Kaaro to question his own subjectivity:

> I am not the same. I don't look at the dome in the same way. It's now a stye or a boil, swollen with purulence, waiting, biding its time. I don't know what my healing has cost me. How many native cells have the xenoforms driven out? Ten, fifteen percent? How human am I? I see the people touching me and the ones at the periphery staring as dead people. Conquered and killed by invaders, walking around carrying their death, but they don't even know it. (Thompson 263)

The replacement of human cells by the alien xenoforms can be read as a metaphor for colonialism, especially as this all takes place in a Nigeria where the indigenous culture has been overwritten by the all-powerful cultural influences of the West. Thus the fungal entities in *Rosewater* force us to confront not just the way we think about human bodies but how we think about the body politic in the context of Western post-colonialism.

If the xenosphere in *Rosewater* is ambiguous in how it both disrupts and upholds the paradigm, the Seep in Chana Porter's novella of the same name is somewhat more straightforwardly utopian. The Seep, "the friendly neighborhood bodiless sentience that makes your life just a little bit easier," (Porter 170) is never explicitly described as a fungus, but behaves much like one. The book is set in a world where the Seep has quietly invaded, infiltrated, and linked not just humans, but all life and matter on Earth. This vast interspecies network eliminates capitalism, poverty, and hunger by allowing an immediate empathy between humans, non-human animals and the environment:

> The aliens changed all of that. You could hold a product in your hand and feel its history, feel people's attitudes and emotions as they'd processed the materials. Struggles that had felt impossibly uphill were now suddenly so clear, as if everyone had awoken one morning from the same dream. It was insanity to poison your environment to save a dime. It was insanity to build bigger and bigger bombs to keep the peace. Guns were melted down into scrap metal. Police officers put their uniforms away. (13)

Within this network, neoliberalism's prioritising of capital above all else becomes literally unthinkable as the old paradigms are swept away by new understanding. Seeptech can alter matter directly, immediately ending scarcity, healing most diseases, and opening up new possibilities for embodiment.

Yet even within this utopian world there are problems. The Seep's fascination with humans and embodiment leads to it amassing data on every aspect of people's lives, albeit at least not to sell to the highest bidder like Facebook or Google. The people in the world of the Seep live in a state of constant surveillance:

> The Seep loved giving you everything you wanted, in exchange for information about being human. The green flash of a credit stick, at a coffee shop or a bookstore or any number of places, was a marker of where you were and what you wanted, a little dot in a vast, ever-evolving data set. Trina had resigned herself to using credit years ago, to being a little dot in the aliens' matrix . . . (68)

The narrative focuses on Trina FastHorse Goldberg-Oneka, who is struggling because her wife has decided to be reborn as a baby with no memories of her past life. Because the Seep is a disembodied intelligence, it doesn't properly understand embodiment and so has difficulty understanding why Trina is unwilling to erase her suffering to feel better. Trina's embodied life history as a trans woman with Jewish and Native American heritage are important aspects of her identity that she has fought for and has no interest in giving up: "But Trina had labored for this body! She'd fought and kicked and clawed to have her insides match her outsides, and now people changed their faces as easily as getting a haircut. Trina knew then that she wouldn't change form. . ." (145). Thus the Seep's network, whilst opening up new possibilities for exploring embodiment, like the internet before it, can also flatten and homogenise aspects of embodied identity in favour of a majority consensus.

So, fungal networks in speculative fiction give us a new way to think about the utopian connectivity promised by the internet whilst avoiding co-option by neoliberalism. Fungi allow us a new way to think about the permeability of the body and the effects this has on embodiment and subjectivity. In Tade Thompson's *Rosewater*, fungi connect humanity and its environment into a contiguous whole even as it rewrites the human body as its own. In Chana Porter's *The Seep*, the Seep's alien network connects humans with the non-human world, making capitalist exploitation of both people and the environment impossible. Both books help us to rethink the utopian possibilities of connectivity, whilst critiquing how the internet upholds the neoliberal paradigm.

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"So we can walk forward with knowledge of who we were before": Landscape, History and Resistance in Sarah Maria Griffin's *Spare and Found Parts*

Gabriely Pinto

This paper is inspired by my M.A. research on the rise of dystopian young adult fiction in Ireland after the economic boom known as the Celtic Tiger and its subsequent crash in 2008. In this article, I argue that landscape in dystopian fiction becomes a site to recover history and to reclaim it as an act of resistance to a controlling ruling body. I wish to demonstrate this through a reading of Sarah Maria Griffin's debut YA novel *Spare and Found Parts*. This paper is divided into three sections. First, I take a brief look at the role landscape plays in post-apocalyptic storytelling. After that, I analyze Sarah Maria Griffin's *Spare and Found Parts* and investigate the ways in which the landscape is regulated by the government in this particular dystopia. Finally, I examine how landscape becomes a site of resistance by allowing teen characters to access the past which led to the current dystopia, and how they actively reclaim the landscape and its history in an effort to build an informed and better future.

The Role of Landscape

Landscapes play a significant role in world-building in post-apocalyptic storytelling and often reflect the aesthetic of a particular type of dystopia—zombie apocalypse, alien invasion, climate change, etc. The dystopian landscape becomes a symbol of the pre-dystopian past, a reminder of what came before and is no more. It emerges as a space that invokes cultural memory and feelings of nostalgia. This is quite apparent in visual media, for example, such as graphic novels and video games. Games such as *The Last of Us* and *The Last of Us Part II*, significantly, are known for their reimagining of familiar landscapes, as they show cityscapes humans fled and nature reclaimed. Games such as *Horizon Zero Dawn* and *Nier: Automata* follow a similar trend and depict human landscapes and cityscapes surviving beyond the society that lived in them. In these types of post-apocalyptic role-playing games, the landscape plays a huge part in gathering lore on the past and the civilization that inhabited these decaying spaces before, as the player character collects trinkets of a past long gone or explores buildings that have lost purpose and meaning in the current society. Landscape, thus, invokes cultural memory and, in a way, immortalizes the past that came before.

In the introduction of *Arts of Living in a Damaged Planet: Ghosts of the Anthropocene*, Gan et al. poignantly state that: "Every landscape is haunted by past ways of life" (2). They say this from an ecological standpoint, citing as an example plants whose animal seed dispensers are extinct (2). However, this idea of landscape carrying ghosts of the past resonates with my reading of landscape

in dystopian storytelling, particularly in Griffin's *Spare and Found Parts*. Irish literature, notably, has shown a disposition to memorialize loss through a distinct landscape.

As suggested by Oona Frawley, "nature and landscape become signifiers, lenses through which it is possible to examine cultural and historical developments" (1). Irish literature shows a tendency to preserve spaces by means of commemoration of the physical landscape, which often "memorializes loss" (1)—be that the loss of an individual who inspired the name of a particular place, or the social system associated with a space. Owing to the circumstances of Ireland's history of colonization, and periods of large migration, it makes sense that loss often features in the literature and, as such, that landscape emerges as a space to represent it (1). Marie Mianowski, in her edited collection on contemporary Irish landscapes, similarly argues that "the experience of humans with place is preserved in landscape, mingled with the details of history and the power of myth" (4). Considering these views when reading dystopian settings enables us to see how loss and history associated with a particular space can be preserved by means of landscape.

By imagining a nightmarish extrapolation of modern-day anxieties, dystopias often feature a society that failed, and one that is trying to rebuild, however dubiously. Both often inhabit the same space at different times, albeit transformed by whatever catastrophic event brought the end of the previous civilization. That is, the past and the present are intrinsically connected in terms of place. The present would not be, if it were not for the past that preceded it. Judith Butler best summarizes this:

> Places are lost—destroyed, vacated, barred—but then there is some new place, and it is not the first, never can be the first. And so there is an impossibility housed at the site of this new place. What is new, newness itself, is founded upon the loss of original place, and so it is a newness that has within it a sense of belatedness, of coming after, and of being thus fundamentally determined by a past that continues to inform it. (468)

Landscape in *Spare and Found Parts*

The landscape in Griffin's *Spare and Found Parts* plays a key role in establishing the post-apocalyptic atmosphere of the novel and in showcasing the extent of the devastation suffered by the surviving community. Griffin's novel is a dystopian YA retelling of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. The city itself, at times, resembles a monster of decay brought back to life. Dublin—or Dublin's corpse—comes alive in Griffin's prose. The city is renamed Black Water City after the river that runs through it, Dublin's River Liffey, darkened by destruction. Likewise, many iconic Dublin landscapes are completely altered after a catastrophic event.

A hundred years before the novel takes place, technology had advanced greatly. Humanity came to rely heavily on androids which provided an endless source of information. An electromagnetic pulse in an event that came to be known as The Turn ended that world and introduced a disease that caused people to either die or be born without limbs. The surviving ten thousand inhabitants of Black Water City return to a simpler way of life devoid of technology

and attempt to rebuild despite the echoes of the epidemic caused by The Turn. It has become common for people to have an augmented limb. Protagonist Nell Crane struggles to fit in even then, as she lost her heart because of the disease and was given a mechanical one instead, which constantly ticks and makes her feel like an outsider. Her father, a Victor Frankenstein-like figure, is credited as the inventor behind the augmented limbs many seek. The landscape and the spaces people are allowed to inhabit in this small surviving community are symbolically controlled by the government. For one, all must follow three core rules:

1. The sick in the Pale, the healed in the Pasture.
2. Contribute, at all cost.
3. All code is blasphemy. (Griffin n.p.)

The rules seek to keep the population under control. All must contribute to society when coming-of-age and computers are absolutely forbidden. One of the rules, however, manifests geographically: while the healed and wealthier are allowed to live in the Pasture with its green fields and idyllic sceneries, the sick are confined to the Pale, the greyer space which still carries the scars of the one hundred years of epidemic post-Turn:

> Far outside the boundaries of Black Water City, a silent, guarded line between the Pale and the Pasture. The world changed there. The sick were raised and grew and contributed in the Pale; the healed lived and farmed and prayed in the tall grasslands of the Pasture. (24)

This spatial separation is also a class segregation: while those in the Pale are depicted as working-class and spend their days in hard labor towards rebuilding the city and serving the community, those in the Pasture seem to do minimal work, get better houses and have servants at their disposal. Significantly, those in charge of society are referred to as "The Pastoral Council." The power lies in the Pasture, and the Pale is in service of it. The "Library Complex," said to contain a relic of the old world—the written internet—is confined to the Pasture "away from civilian eyes" (15); very few are granted access to it. Nell dreams of being allowed to view such a source of information. But evidently, knowledge is strictly controlled by those in power.

As explained by Raffaella Baccolini, "dystopias show a profound interest in history and, more precisely, in its control, which often implies its revision and even erasure" (115). That impulse to control history is a theme largely explored in Griffin's novel. Besides restricting access to documents of the past and rigorously prohibiting the use of technology, "official history" perpetuates that the past was singularly bad and has nothing to offer to the present. An irony, considering the ruling government refers to itself as "The Remaining Hibernian Senate" (Griffin 220), implying they are a continuation of those in power prior to the Turn. Nell, who thirsts for knowledge more than anything, is critical of people's acceptance of this restrictive view of history:

She was sure that the rest of the folk in Black Water City were afraid only because they didn't ask questions, because they believed what they were told. If all you'd ever heard about the history of your world was horror stories about gleaming boxes full of bad knowledge, of course you'd be afraid. (28-29)

She opposes this fear of past technology, rationalizing it as born out of ignorance. She shows an awareness of the unreliability of those who are telling the story, those with authority. As noted in another instance in the novel: "Asking for a computer was like asking for a gun . . . They frightened the wrong people, and the wrong people wanted them gone." (121) "The wrong people" have the decision-making power to make them go away. The Council is very much preoccupied in concealing the past that led to the current society and suppressing any attempt to access the communal history related to this past. They "revise" and "erase" history to their advantage and to promote their version of the story. Not only do they seek to manipulate the distant pre-Turn past, but they also attempt to rewrite the recent past and memories of the last years of the epidemic. This is exercised in their control and use of the city spaces. The Gonne Hospital—a famous Dublin department store, repurposed to house the sick after the Turn—for example, is symbolically burned in front of the public, as if to exorcize the trauma that transpired inside:

Hundreds and hundreds of people had died there. The old building had become so contaminated that the council had decreed it unsafe and ordered that it be burned. Ostensibly this was to kill the ends of the virus and stop the aftershocks; but the whole city doomed gas masks and gathered to watch it, a terrible red ceremony. It felt like an exorcism, like ghosts of their sick past scorched out. (83)

The burning of the building aims to erase events related to the sick and the epidemic. It's a cleanse exercise attended by the whole community. The potential of landscapes and landmarks to invoke cultural memory informs the Council's decisions. Contrastingly to the hospital, a monument referred to as "The Needle"—the forgotten Spire of Dublin—is the first thing wrapped in plastic to be preserved after the Turn:

It had been left to stand, it was said, because it told no stories. It had no face, no body, no myth. It was just a needle, towering to the hot sky, too slim and smooth to climb, made of such stuff that nobody could even write histories upon its surface. (101)

This is indicative of the conscious totalitarian effort to control information through the regulation of landscapes and landmarks.

Landscape as a Site of Resistance

As further outlined by Baccolini, "history, its knowledge, and memory are . . . dangerous elements that can give the dystopian citizen a potential instrument of resistance" (115). Thus, knowledge of the past is crucial for the dystopian protagonist to have agency and set about changing their world. Once the Council is controlling the information passed down to people and keeping written records under surveillance at the "Library," the landscape becomes the main

source to access memory of the past, to keep its ghosts alive. The cityscape around Nell and her contemporaries is a constant reminder of pain and trauma, but also an impediment to the council's attempt to erase history. As seen in the case of the hospital, the ostentatious display of burning down the "house of failure" (Griffin 104) is ineffective. Nell recognizes the building used to be a department store, something that no longer exists and has no use to her and her peers. Moreover, when she trespasses into the hospital years after its burning: "lo and behold, there are rooms in there untouched by the fire" (83). The records of the epidemic remain in the rooms of the building, still standing. History cannot be erased or rewritten as long as the space that witnessed it remains. The next step, thereafter, is to resist attempts to censor and regulate knowledge of the past and the spaces inhabited by survivors.

A key feature of dystopian YA is the rebellious spirit of teen protagonists, as they become aware something is not quite right with their society (Sheldon 718). Accordingly, Nell and the other young people in the novel are shown to resist the push to ignore the past and technology. For Nell, the loss of the shared memory of the past and its great discoveries is an impairment and informs her decision to create a computer that looks human, so as to not alienate her peers. Others, she learns, also long to understand their past. They, however, see in the landscape around them a chance to recover their history. They defy the rhetoric that the past has nothing to offer but regret. Their resistance is exercised in the ways they interact with the landscape around them and their conscious effort to reclaim its lost history.

This type of resistance is better actualized with a young underground group of inventors. The Lighthouse Cinema, a five-story underground building, has survived as a structure which is reclaimed by young revolutionaries as a secret base to study "forbidden" technology. While by day they work as "mechanics, bakers, researchers of plants" (Griffin 171), they have been secretly caring for the building—Nell notes the strong smell of cleaning solution, "as if all the badness of this building's past was being scrubbed out" (156). The building is repurposed as a workshop where they can secretly study and try to better understand banned technology which they recover by exploring abandoned spaces around the city.

Nell's first trip to The Lighthouse nearly resembles a fairy tale, as she enters a new world hidden beside her own, full of impossibilities come to life. The smell of cleaning products, the bright lights, a contrast to the rationed electricity in the city, and the tech unabashedly used all around her. The preservation of the building is shown to be a deliberate effort to recover their lost past. At first, Nell does not understand why the building is called "The Lighthouse," however, it is explained to her:

> Because that is what it was called. Before us, before anything happened, when this city was a real city with real things to do and places to go and no disease and no war. We have to honour what came before us if we can hope to even come close to rebuilding it . . . (153)

This echoes Nell's belief that there is no future without the past. The naming is a promise to honor history and keep moving forward in the face of adversity. While the older generation seems

crippled by the traumatic past, the younger generation seeks to move beyond grief and shame and attempts to do more than just survive. The building is a testament of past achievements and signals the potential to repeat and improve on positive aspects of their past, while "scrubbing out" the bad. By allowing dystopian characters to access the past that a controlling government is attempting to silence, the building itself becomes a site of resistance, a place to exercise critical thinking and rebellion.

The type of resistance present in *Spare and Found Parts* is subtle. Within the story itself, the resistance is referred to as a "tiny revolution." And Nell thinks of her rebellious peers as "the small collective of revolutionaries and restorers" (171). The type of activism, of resistance, presented in the novel is quiet, underground, not ready to openly defy those in power yet, it lacks confidence— they keep waiting to discover "something more" in order to convince the council of their cause: "We'll tell everyone when the time's right" (164), they tell Nell. This is a quieter resistance. But the rebellious instinct is there. The spark that may start a larger-scale revolution is there. By exploring and reshaping the darker spaces of their city and the past associated with the landscape around them, the young rebels begin to access memory of the past, reclaim it and learn from it in order to respond to the injustices of their society.

We finish the novel as Nell is about to present her contribution to the council and publicly argue on the societal value of accessing their communal history. She reckons her android "can show us where the world was headed before the Turn, so we can walk forward with knowledge of who we were before, so we don't make the same mistakes" (394). The warning at the heart of the novel is clear: there is no bright future if one refuses to learn from the past. A closer reading of Griffin's novel allows us to examine a larger trend in post apocalyptic stories, where the landscape of a world in ruins becomes an unexpected instrument of resistance and can be the spark to set a rebellious spirit in a path of discovery and ignite a revolution.

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Exoplanets as Sites of Rebellion

Emma Johanna Puranen

Humans leaving Earth to live on an exoplanet, or a planet outside our solar system, is a common storyline in science fiction. Establishing a new society on an unfamiliar world, which might present unknown dangers to human biology or have a small margin of error to maintain human habitability, brings up fundamental questions of governance and forces characters to undergo a radical change. Pre-existing divisions among settlers can be exacerbated, and new ones can be created between the exoplanet settlers and the people back on Earth—either can lead to rebellion and revolt. In this paper, I discuss examples of how distance and harsh conditions on newly settled exoplanets in the novel *Aurora* by Kim Stanley Robinson, the video game *The Outer Worlds*, and season four of the television series *The Expanse* all exacerbate human rights issues and lead to conflict between settlers and people on Earth, or representatives of Earth in the form of governments or private companies. I investigate the tension inherent in the juxtaposition of these fictional revolutions to gain rights for the downtrodden with portrayals of humans moving to exoplanets that are often reminiscent of or re-enacting settler-colonialism. This paper is also inspired by the June 2021 Edinburgh Futures Institute conference *The Institutions of Extra-terrestrial Liberty*, which delved into many of these questions of governance and rights for space-faring humans. I draw on my position as an interdisciplinary scholar working between astronomy and literature at the St Andrews Centre for Exoplanet Science—itself an interdisciplinary organisation tackling ethical questions about potential human interaction with other worlds and lifeforms —to uplift science fiction as an underutilised source of scholarly thought on these matters. Lessons from science fiction regarding the potential future of humanity in space are especially crucial given recent interest in colonising Mars—after all, as Lucas Mix states, "we don't do things until we imagine them."

I will summarise three case studies of fictional revolts on exoplanets and then compare themes that emerge from the three cases. First, Kim Stanley Robinson's novel *Aurora* (2015) takes place on a generation ship en route to the Tau Ceti system, a real star system about twelve light-years from Earth. The massive generation ship hosts a population of about 2000 people, living spread across twenty-four different Earth biomes (Robinson 45-46, 51). The voyage takes about 170 years at 10 percent the speed of light, spanning the initial generation who left Earth, several caretaker generations who only know life on the ship, and finally the generation that arrives at their destination, an Earth-like moon of the exoplanet Tau Ceti e, which the settlers dub "Aurora" (46, 48). When they arrive at their new exoplanet home, only to find it uninhabitable due to deadly disease-causing prions in the otherwise breathable atmosphere, a conflict emerges among the passengers. One group of settlers from Aurora attempts to return to the ship, but they are killed by those onboard to maintain quarantine. Disagreement over this action leads to brawls among the

remaining people on the ship until the ship's AI itself takes over, physically separating dissidents and referring to itself as "the rule of law" (229). With the Aurora settlement unviable, people are divided under the AI's arbitration into one group that stays and attempts to terraform another world in the Tau Ceti system, and one that goes against their mission and returns to Earth.

In *Aurora*, the survivors, called the "returners," eventually return to Earth, resorting to novel cryosleep technology after their onboard ecosystems collapse and they run out of food. It is also revealed that the mission to Tau Ceti began with not one generation ship, but two—the other ship was destroyed in a conflict among its passengers, and the memory of this was buried so as not to provoke such a conflict in the remaining ship (232-233). Arriving back at Earth, they find that the reason for their mission was expansionism alone, and that people on Earth are still sending out generation ship after generation ship, with no indication of success from any of the missions. One space advocate argues:

> It's an evolutionary urge, a biological imperative, something like reproduction itself. Possibly it may resemble something like a dandelion or a thistle releasing its seeds to the winds, so that most of the seeds will float away and die. But a certain percentage will take hold and grow. Even if it's only one percent, that's success! (429)

This did not prove justification enough for the returners. When they made their decision at Aurora, they rebelled against an Earth they had never known, which had generations ago taken away their agency without their consent. As Aram, one of the returners, puts it, the engineering challenges of settling space might be overcome, but the biological ones are insurmountable: "Life is a planetary expression, and can only survive on its own planet" (428). *Aurora* argues that humans evolved on Earth, and living anywhere else, particularly the bottle of a generation ship, will lead to ecological collapse.

The Outer Worlds and *The Expanse* both feature class-based revolts with workers rising up against private companies from Earth that have used the harsh conditions of space to exert more control over their employees. *The Outer Worlds*, a 2019 video game from Obsidian, takes place in an alternate future in which space is ruled and settled by megacorporations. Workers and corporate elite alike have come to the fictional Halcyon system in faster-than-light ship journeys which include a ten-year cryosleep. The Halcyon system colony, ostensibly ruled by the Halcyon Holdings Corporate Board, is in disarray and features several examples of revolts on exoplanets. When colonists first arrived in Halcyon, before the events of the game, they created a colony on the world Terra-1. Terraforming Terra-1 provoked rapid mutations of the local flora and fauna that made them deadly to humans. This resulted in colonists rebelling against the Board, which then abandoned the colony and attempted to erase its existence via propaganda. By the time of the video game, a violent schism has occurred on Terra-1, now renamed Monarch, splitting the people there into two groups: one a corporate entity separate from the Board, and the other an anarchist group ("Radio Free Monarch"). The second colony attempt in the Halcyon system, on a planet called Terra-2, has gone better for the Board, but is dealing with a plague caused by malnutrition.

This plague has caused a group of deserters to leave corporate towns against the will of the Board ("Comes Now the Power"). Ultimately, the Board claims to use a "Lifetime Employment Program" to put most workers in stasis to save resources, though in reality the plan is to kill them to reduce the population so the elites may live in comfort ("The City and the Stars"). The future of the Halcyon system in the story, and the extent to which the Board's control will be weakened or strengthened, depends on the player's actions in the video game. The combination of authoritative rule by the Board, and the biological challenges of attempting to live within alien biospheres, leads to multiple situations where human rights are abused and people rise up violently.

The Expanse is unique among the media properties I investigate here in that, in its story, many of the human settlers on the exoplanet come not from Earth but from colonies throughout our own solar system. In the world of *The Expanse*, which is based on a novel series by James S. A. Corey, Earth is united under the United Nations, Mars is an independent power, and a group called the "Belters" live in the asteroid belt and the outer solar system under the control of various Earth and Mars governmental and corporate powers. The Belters have lived in space for generations, and due to the change in environment and the distance between populations have developed some biological differences from the rest of humanity. They live in cramped conditions under constant resource scarcity and cannot withstand Earth gravity without a painful and expensive course of drugs to strengthen their bodies ("New Terra").

Season 4 features a big societal change in the form of the opening of a Ring Gate built by an ancient, unknown alien civilisation that can transport people light-years away in an instant. This opens up a plethora of habitable exoplanets to humanity, and a land grab that destabilises the solar system's already precarious political situation ensues. Our protagonists are called in to mediate in a struggle between Belter settlers on an Earthlike planet, and an Earth corporation called Royal Charter Energy (RCE) that has been granted an exploration charter by the U.N. for the same planet. The conflict is reflected in the two groups' different names for the planet—the Belters call it Ilus; the RCE scientists call it New Terra. The Belters, who arrived first, destroy a landing pad just as the RCE ship is landing, causing many deaths ("New Terra"). The remaining RCE scientists try and exert control in the name of their U.N. charter, but this causes tension with the Belters, who have been under Earth's control for a long time and do not wish to see that re-enacted on this new exoplanet. At the end of the season, the groups are forced to work together against an outside threat, and the name Ilus gains favour, but ultimately the conflict between Belters and Earthers is ongoing.

Although these stories are fictional, they engage with several real-life challenges that would occur if humans were to travel to exoplanets for the purpose of settlement. Chief among these is that exoplanets are isolated. Distances just in our solar system are vast—a hypothetical Mars colony, or even a lunar one, would already be the most isolated group of humans in existence. Exoplanets are orders of magnitude farther away. For humans to reach them in real life would either require a method of propulsion that can speed a craft faster than light, which is currently far outside humanity's technological capabilities, or else a generation ship, as described in the

Aurora section above. A generation ship is still well outside current technology, though certainly much more feasible than faster-than-light travel within the next few hundred years. Many SF stories solve these problems for their narratives by using some form of stasis or cryosleep, as in *Aurora* and *Outer Worlds*, or a wormhole or portal, as in *The Expanse*. Either way, once the exoplanet is reached, the Earth becomes both physically and emotionally distant, and often the settlers either cannot communicate with Earth or can only do so with a substantial delay. This distance necessitates the creation of new forms of government, and makes it very difficult for representatives of Earth power to maintain control in those newly established governments (*The Institutions of Extra-terrestrial Liberty*). Though *The Expanse*'s Ring Gate does allow for communication, in *Aurora* and *The Outer Worlds* Earth is effectively non-existent for the settlers, who rely on the ship's council and eventually the AI's "rule of law," or the Board, respectively. These nearer bodies govern instead of Earth because it is difficult to enforce laws on people who are that far away.

A second challenge that all three stories contend with is the environments of space and the exoplanet itself. Humans living in space face a closed and fragile ecosystem that can leave them physically weaker. If they reach a planet and find it has life, they, as representatives of Earth's biosphere, must then interact with a wholly alien biosphere, and this interaction may be dangerous to one or both parties. Lucas Mix, an evolutionary biologist and theologist who presented at *The Institutions of Extra-terrestrial Liberty*, stresses that evolutionary biology shows there is a link between the distance between populations and their genetic differences, and that the mutation load would be very high in space (Mix). *Aurora* sees settlers die of prion disease upon breathing an exoplanet's air; *The Outer Worlds* sees a botched terraforming attempt render an exoplanet less human-hospitable, as well as a slow starvation of many colonists due to lack of suitable food resources. The Belters of *The Expanse*, adapted to a harsh life in space, have trouble adjusting to the gravity of Ilus, and some die after bad interactions with the drugs they need to withstand the planetary gravity. These challenges necessitate group cooperation to have a chance at survival. In a society with a low margin of error, authority and strong social norms are likely methods to achieve this cohesion—yet these can breed authoritarianism (Mix). The authorities can then craft a survivalist human-versus-nature narrative, as the Board does in *The Outer Worlds*: "Please be reminded that acting against the interests of the corporations is acting against the interests of humanity" (outerworlds.obsidian.net/en). Therefore, the environments of space and exoplanets can directly influence governments to restrict human rights.

A specific type of space environment often used to get to exoplanets is the aforementioned generation ship, presented in *Aurora*, which itself comes with a slew of ethical considerations. SF author Stephen Baxter outlined three ethical dilemmas of such worldships in his *Institutions of Extra-Terrestrial Liberty* presentation. The caretaker generations of *Aurora* somewhat successfully grapple with these dilemmas before they arrive at Tau Ceti. The first is the closure—that is, both the lack of possibility of leaving and the biological fragility and instability of a small, closed ecosystem. Second are vocational limitations, in which caretakers have limited choice in their

occupation. Third is reproductive control, in which to maintain population and diversity people are told how many children they can or cannot have, and with whom (Baxter). Common among these dilemmas is the lack of agency for the caretakers as well as the generation that arrives at the destination—none of them chose to embark on this voyage. Only the first generation made the decision to leave Earth. The Belters of *The Expanse* have, to some extent, also been living on a worldship. Generations ago, their ancestors made the decision to move to space, and now forces of employment and biology keep them there. For the first time, with Ilus, they have the opportunity to live on a planet where there isn't a constant danger of a depressurisation event killing everyone. Generation ships and exoplanets both present extremely challenging settings for any ethical system of governance.

Each of these three SF examples includes violence sparked by conditions in which human rights have been deprioritised and taken away. The exoplanet then presents a tantalising opportunity for escape, if only to a new prison—for many of those who chose to stay and terraform in *Aurora*, for example, they make their decision not out of duty to the mission bestowed by Earth, but because they cannot bear to stay on the ship any longer: "It's one zoo or another, as far as I can tell," says one proponent of staying in Tau Ceti (Robinson 263). In order to understand why all of these fictional situations led to violence, we need to examine the reasons for going to exoplanets in these stories in the first place. In each example, there are two distinct classes of people: a privileged group who go for corporate interests/expansionism (the first generation in *Aurora*, the Board in *Outer Worlds*, RCE in *The Expanse*), and an underprivileged group who had little to no choice in the matter and go in hopes of new opportunities or a better life (the caretaker and arrival generations in *Aurora*, the workers in *Outer Worlds*, the Belters in *The Expanse*). In aiming to make exoplanets their home, both groups are endorsing and practising the colonisation of these other worlds. Baxter notes the approval of colonialism as another ethical dilemma of worldships—there is no other reason to have a worldship than to build a colony somewhere. The privileged group is making the rules, and even though the underprivileged group may be going for reasons more likely to be considered morally just, their going is really a symptom of or a reaction to the privileged group's actions. The impetus for going is still a colonisation effort that places little value on human lives, or, indeed, exoplanetary environments.

These three stories, all published within the last decade, must be considered in light of concurrent and ongoing discussions on space colonisation, privatisation, and exploration. In real life, several private companies, including Elon Musk's SpaceX, are currently proposing Martian colonies. These companies do not discount that the task would be arduous—in fact, Musk himself has said, quite bluntly, and quite similarly to the space advocate from *Aurora* quoted above, "Honestly, a bunch of people probably will die in the beginning" ("Elon Musk"). I argue that before humanity sends anyone to space, we must seriously consider why we are going, and we must establish human rights as a non-negotiable priority. Jim Schwartz, a philosopher focusing on the ethics of space exploration, argued similarly in his *Institutions of Extra-terrestrial Liberty* talk: "No one has any business creating novel conditions of extreme hardship, and then forcing people

(especially future generations) to live under those conditions with no hope of progress or escape." It is imperative that those in the area of human spaceflight question why they are going, and indeed where they are going. Exoplanets, as seen in these three stories, might already have their own biospheres—how do mission proposers aim to have humanity interact with a pre-existing biosphere? The time to be asking these questions is now, not after we have the technology for such interplanetary and interstellar missions.

Science fiction is often reflective of current discussions within science. SF authors imagine possible futures, and to do so they extrapolate from the world they see around them. These three recent SF stories about the dangers of taking to space without prioritising human rights, and with only expansion and greed as goals, can be read as a warning in response to the current conversation. An alternative to using SF is often to reach for historical analogies on Earth. This happens even within SF—Murtry, an RCE security guard in *The Expanse* Season 4, and the space advocate in *Aurora* both employ verbiage supporting the frontier mentality and manifest destiny of the Wild West ("Saeculum"; Robinson 429). Philosopher and anthropologist Kathryn Denning believes that there are places and uses for such historical analogies, but also that they can be messy, and writes that "instead of using past social conditions to make guesses about what would happen if a detection occurred, we might use our knowledge of present social conditions to help ensure that the science can continue to be done" (311). Denning is writing about extra-terrestrial intelligence detections, but I argue her thesis is applicable to the area of humans on exoplanets as well. I add that SF can often provide a better place to look than history when considering the human element in scientific advances like space travel.

Exoplanets often become sites of rebellion in SF because factors including isolation and severe environments create conditions where tyrannical governance can occur. But the exoplanets themselves are only the catalysts for the more deeply rooted issue of travelling to them with expansionist justifications that do not include the guarantee of human rights. It is this lack of care that leads to revolt by the abused parties. Given current popular interest in sending humans to Mars and beyond, conferences like *The Institutions of Extra-Terrestrial Liberty* are essential for examining the ethical considerations of such proposals. SF provides a vital bridge, accessible to all from academia and industry and the general public, that explores the social ramifications of human settlements on exoplanets. If we listen, we hear that SF is telling us that we need a good reason to go to exoplanets in the first place—and that we ignore human rights in space at our own peril.

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When was Celtic Futurism?
The Irish *Immrama* as Proto-Science-Fiction

Chris Loughlin

Here begins the voyage of Máel Dúin's boat. . . .
An abundance of wonders was seen in the world on the blue ocean. (Oskamp 101)

Many remarkable things, many marvels, many mysteries [was] their pleasant story, as swift Máel Dúin told. (179)

This paper investigates the historical basis for an alternative futurism: Celtic Futurism, or "cymroddyfodoliaeth" (ap Dyffrig; "Uniting Alternative Futurisms"). Fantastical voyages, which in the Irish context are "immrama," are one of the historiographical bases for Celtic Futurism. *The Encyclopaedia of Science Fiction* presents a sceptical view of the long history of science fiction. The editors describe proto-science fiction as merely setting the stage for the self-conscious development of the genre in the nineteenth century (Nicholls). Adam Roberts, however, whilst providing a much more favourable analysis of proto-science fiction, claims there was a thousand-year hiatus between Greco-Roman voyage tales and their re-emergence, contemporaneously, with the Protestant Reformation and Copernican revolutions (33-39). Yet the topic is still a relatively under-researched area of knowledge. The opening quotations above, from *Immram curaig Máel Dúin*, demonstrate that fantastical voyages were a component of Irish medieval culture. This paper will demonstrate a strong role for fantastical voyages—the immrama ("rowing about," or voyager, tales) of Ireland in the medieval period—in the definition of science fiction. It will utilise the stories of Saint Brendan, Bran, and Máel Dúin to re-read the history of science fiction. It will present evidence to answer the question: When was Celtic Futurism? Last, it will contribute evidence to the definition, and discussion, of alternative futurisms and further discussion about the imperial gaze.

This paper will, first, examine and discuss the immrama (literally, "rowing about") tales and related texts. It will highlight the stories of Saint Brendan, Bran, and Máel Dúin as examples of fantastical voyages and demonstrate how these contribute to proto-science fiction. However, there are also other tales from the Irish medieval world which contribute to a long history of science fiction; the echtrai (adventures) and exile stories concern issues of the otherworld, for example, whilst other stories from the period also contain fantastical elements, most famously the *Táin Bó Cúalnge* [the *Cattle Raid of Cooley*]. Many of these tales can also be considered tributaries to the wider history of Irish science fiction, but this will not form the central analysis in this paper. The second section considers the primary source bases of the immrama and *Immram curaig Máel Dúin*. The publication, translation, and secondary literature on the tales will also be discussed.

Last, the immrama will be discussed in relation to definitions of science fiction. It will be demonstrated here that these tales are not only fantastical voyages, but are also examples of proto-science fiction. The stories' use of fantastical place, time, and inner worlds highlights a longer and more variegated history of science fiction. It will highlight the basis for future research on an alternative futurism: Celtic Futurism, or cymroddyfodoliaeth.

The Immrama ("rowing about") Tales

The Navigation of Saint Brendan is the first story which is accepted in the secondary literature as a voyager tale. The story exists in 125 manuscript copies, was one of the earliest published stories, and was translated into vernacular versions (Wooding xi). The earliest version of it is the Latin *Navigatio Sancti Brendani abbatis* and is probably from the ninth century CE, although an earlier version is contained in the *Vita Brendani* (Mackley 1). In this tale Brendan is inspired to visit the Promised Land of the Saints. Fourteen monks are chosen for the crew, but three further "supernumerary" monks insist on accompanying them; they subsequently leave the crew at key moments of the journey (4). The voyage lasts seven years with returns to certain locations at key dates in the liturgical year. They visit fantastical places such as an unoccupied stronghold, an island of enormous sheep, a mobile island, which is really a giant fish or whale, and an island of birds, which are the earthly form of angels. Finally, they are granted visions of heaven and hell: the former expressed by a pious hermit named Paul, and the latter by Judas Iscariot. The *Navigatio* was, however, conflated with the *Vita Brendani* and *Betha Brénnai*n during their transmission (Wooding xxv, xxvii-xxviii). The tale of Brendan probably forms the starting point of a wider ecclesiastical and secular tradition of voyager tales (Oskamp). There has been debate about the dating and location of the writing of Brendan's voyage. Carney argued for an authorship in Ireland in approximately 800 CE (46), whilst Selmer attributed it to an Irish author in Lotharingia in the first half of the tenth century (qtd. in Dumville 120).

Immram Brain maic Febul, or *The Voyage of Bran, son of Febul*, has been dated as the earliest Irish voyager tale (Carney 73). Barbara Hilliers described this tale as "a curious composition; we might think of it as a collection of poems about the otherworld, set onto the framework of a voyager tale" (71). The poem combines elements of pagan, otherworld, and Christian allegory. Bran and his companions set out after he is invited by an otherworld woman to her island. They subsequently visit inis subai, the island of joy. They also visit tir inna mBan, the island of women. However, they leave and return to Ireland due to their homesickness. When they arrive back home, however, time has passed differently for those at home, who tell Bran, "we do not know such a one [Bran, son of Febul], though the voyage of Bran is in our ancient stories" (*The Voyage of Bran* 32). There are two further extant immrama, *Immram Snédgusa ocus Maic Riagla* and *Immram curaig Ua Corra*. Whilst further Irish voyager titles exist there is no manuscript record of their contents (Wooding xii). Further complicating matters is the role of the otherworld in other Irish stories. For example, these are recorded in the echtrai (adventures), exile stories, and other literature from medieval Ireland. Mackley uses the "fantastic" to analyse the stories of Saint Brendan; he highlights the broader category through which we can understand medieval Irish

literature. However, arguably, the combination of imagination and reality in these tales makes the fantastic voyage and proto-science fiction more attractive concepts.

The most thorough reconstruction of *Immram curaig Máel Dúin* is the 1970 study by Oskamp. *Máel Dúin* combines elements of Atlantic and Irish geography with the fantastical and otherworldly. It survives in both a poetical and prose version. It is clearly influenced by both Christian and pagan beliefs. Máel Dúin, the titular protagonist, is a product of a liaison between a local king and a nun, but his father is murdered by rogues, and he is fostered by a different family and queen. As a youth he is taunted about his parentage and confronts his foster mother who tells him about his true heritage. He consults a druid, who tells him the number of companions he must take, and he sets out to avenge his father's death. His foster brothers insist on accompanying the expedition and are the supernumeraries of the voyage. They visit the island where the murderers live but are driven off course by a storm. Máel Dúin "reproaches his foster brothers that it is because of their presence that he cannot reach his goal" (Oskamp 44). They are, subsequently, forced to visit over thirty fantastical islands during their journey. They visit islands inhabited by giant ants, a horse-like monster, the giant's horse race, with a house where there are leaping salmon, wondrous fruits, the revolving beast and fighting horses, the fiery swine, the black and white sheep, the burning river, the miserly miller, and the black wailers. They also visit islands of imaginative geography, such as that of the four fences, and one with a crystal and glass bridge. They see an island of chanting birds, a wondrous fountain, and savage smiths. They also witness a sea of glass and a sea of clouds. They visit an island of silver, and one of the companions, Diurán, cuts off a piece of silver net which they bring back to the altar at Armagh. They also visit an island of women (tir inna mBan) and of different saints and hermits. Nearing the end of their voyage, they visit the hermit of Tory Island. He advises Máel Dúin to forgive his father's murderers. He states, "slay him not, but forgive him, because God has saved you from many perils, and you, too, are men deserving death" (Oskamp 172-173). They then visit the island of the rogues who murdered Máel Dúin's father, and he forgives the murder. This ends their journey, and they return to Ireland. *Máel Dúin* combines elements of pagan belief with an overarching Christian allegory of forgiveness. But the combination of fiction, imagination, and reality makes it a piece of proto-science fiction. *Immram curaig Máel Dúin*, alongside other immrama, utilises the sea literally and metaphorically. The latter makes them an interesting precursor to New Wave science fiction's examination of inner worlds, psychology, and crisis. This also links the immrama to the reaction to Norse invasions, the Anglo-Norman occupation, and science fiction discussion of colonialism (a point considered further below). Next, this paper will examine the complex primary source basis of the voyager tales and the secondary literature.

Studying the Immrama and Secondary Literature

The Irish voyager tales "have received relatively limited critical attention" (Wooding xvii). This is primarily due to their existence in a minority vernacular language. However, Wooding has also emphasised the comparative neglect: the old English *Seafarer*, a lyric of just 126 lines, has a bibliography of over 250 items; whereas the entire corpus of literature on the immrama

"warrants barely 50 items" (xvii). The *Navigatio Brendani* has also suffered from a more surprising critical neglect. Since the publication of Wooding's anthology of scholarly criticism, however, there has been a modest development of interest in the tales. Another issue has been the lack of scholarly editions of the immrama to encourage further study. The principal immrama were translated between 1888 and 1905 by Whitley Stokes and Kuno Meyer. Whilst a scholarly edition of the immrama was attempted in the later 1930s, their publication was interrupted by the war and then death of the translator, Anton van Hamel, in 1945. The latest scholarly translation of *Immram curaig Máel Dúin* was published in 1970 but did not include a glossary. Unfortunately, other immrama are only accessible in Stoke's and Meyer's translations, which are now very dated. As Wooding wrote in the first scholarly anthology of criticism on these tales, "this is a very unsatisfactory state of affairs and confusing even for the professional student of Celtic literature" (xix). An important issue for study of the immrama is, therefore, their existence in Latin and vernacular literatures, a situation mirrored in the secondary literature. Some of this secondary literature has not been translated, which has further hampered study of the tales in the Anglophone world. So, how does this relate to *Immram curaig Máel Dúin*?

Immram curaig Máel Dúin survives in four manuscript sources. Linguistically it is one of the earliest voyager tales, "as early as the eighth century or ninth" (Clancy 203). The smaller manuscript sources consist of two fragments, both held at the British Library, London (Brown and Groenewegen). *Lebor na hUidre* [the Book of the Dun Cow] is the earliest full manuscript source, dating to the twelfth century and earlier scribes (Oskamp 89-90). A more detailed version, both the poem and prose, exists in another medieval Irish manuscript, the *Yellow Book of Lecan*. Whitley Stokes translated *Immram curaig Máel Dúin* into English in the late 1880s and this version remains important for discussion of the story (Stokes "part 1"). Stokes amalgamated materials from all four manuscript sources. Kuno Meyer also translated *Immram curaig Máel Dúin* in the early 1900s and collated from the *Yellow Book of Lecan* and the Harleian manuscripts. Anton Van Hamel translated the text in his collection Immrama in the late 1930s. Oskamp in his 1970 book, *The Voyage of Máel Dúin. A study in early Irish voyage literature followed by an edition of Immram Curaig Máele Dúin from the YBL in TCD*, utilised the *Yellow Book of Lecan* as his source material. Alongside these primary source translations, there are also popular poetry and prose versions of the story. For example, Patrick Joyce wrote a popular English translation which was published in 1879, which was probably the source for Tennyson's 1880 poetical version of the tale (Joyce; Tennyson). There is also a series of beautiful illustrations to the tale by J. D. Batten, included in Joseph Jacobs's 1919 book, *The Book of Wonder Voyages*. However, there has also been a rather complex historiographical debate about the history of the immrama and other Irish otherworld tales.

The most important introduction to the immrama and the historical debates they have inspired, to date, is the J. M. Wooding anthology of criticism from 2000, T*he Otherworld Voyage in Early Irish Literature*. This book details debates which have occurred around Irish voyager literature, but one of the key questions has been the relationship between Ireland's pagan, oral

culture, and subsequent Christian literate society. Some scholars, such as Rudolf Thurneysen and Myles Dillon, felt the voyager tales were originally pagan, native productions which were later written down (Oskamp 11-12). Carney, by contrast, stressed that the texts were "all written . . . in the monasteries by the monks, and that these tales were often meant as 'Christian allegories'" (12; see also Wooding xx-xxii). Kathleen Hughes felt that the voyager tales were a reaction to Norse invasions of Ireland during the medieval period (qtd. in Oskamp 16). Further research during the twentieth century has clearly demonstrated the inter-relationship between the *Navigatio* and the immrama. There are, however, unresolved issues and avenues for further research. For example, the influence of *The Aeneid*, and other classical sources, has still been under-researched and correlates with my own claims. Mackley's work on the *Navigatio* has highlighted the inter-relationship between imagination and reality by examining that text through the prism of the "fantastic." Last, the most knowledgeable expert on Irish science fiction, Jack Fennell, has highlighted the under-appreciated contribution early Irish literature made to science fiction (*Irish Science Fiction; A Brilliant Void*). The final section of this paper examines some definitions of science fiction and demonstrates the immrama as examples of both fantastical voyages and proto-science fiction.

The Immrama as Proto-Science Fiction

Peter Nicholls, in an entry on the history of science fiction from the definitive *The Encyclopaedia of Science Fiction*, claims the genre is "impure" and did not finally take shape until the nineteenth century. Whilst elements existed in previous epochs, he has further stated that, "it requires a consciousness of the scientific outlook, and it probably also requires a sense of the possibilities of change, whether social or technological." In further entries in *The Encyclopaedia*, Stableford establishes that fantastic voyages and proto-science fiction are important precursors to the field ("Fantastic Voyages"; "Proto SF"). However, Nicholls also provides a list of five key elements which became melded into science fiction: one, the fantastic voyage; two, the utopia and dystopia; three, the philosophical tale; four, the gothic; five, the technological and sociological anticipation. Clearly the immrama combine the first three elements, but arguably the voyager tales also contain the last two components. In contrast to this sceptical view is one adopted by Adam Roberts in *The History of Science Fiction*. Roberts claims that science fiction can be understood in much less, definitive, hard-science terms, "but rather into a delineation of the continuum by which SF can be meaningfully separated out as that form of the Fantastic that embodies a technical (materialist) 'enframing', as opposed to the religious (supernatural) approach we would today call 'Fantasy'" (21). However, Roberts's view succumbs to a hard differentiation between oral and written culture: "for over 1,000 years SF fell into abeyance as a literary mode. Its disappearance was connected, very obviously, with the more general collapse of literary culture, and of literacy itself" (30). He goes on to make the point that medieval European culture was explicitly concentrated on religious themes and science fiction was only able to re-emerge following the religious changes of the Reformation and the scientific-technological changes associated with modernity and the Copernican revolution (33-39). This, however, creates a misleading chronology as it passes over

the rich fantastical voyage and journeys to the otherworld of the literatures of medieval Europe. Further, some authors have posited a relationship between colonialism, modernity, and science fiction (Rieder). As was noted previously, Kathleen Hughes noted a relationship between the Norse invasions of Ireland and the immrama. The most famous colonisation of Ireland, however, began with the Anglo-Norman invasions of the twelfth century (although the Christian invasions of Ireland could also be considered colonialist). It is therefore clear that there is a strong basis for further research into the immrama as proto-science fiction and discussion of the relationship of colonialism, modernity, and sociological and technological change. This research will further enrich knowledge of alternative futurisms and discussion of the imperial gaze.

The last area this paper will consider is the recent emergence of historiography on Irish science fiction. This work has been conducted by Fennell, Howard, and Maume. They mostly concentrate on the latter history of modernity. Fennell has mentioned that there is an argument to be made for the longer-term history of Irish science fiction, although in his monograph he concentrates on the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Fennell's highlighting of the role of myth and mythology is a useful framework within which to consider the immrama and Irish medieval literatures. Further, Mackley's work on the *Navigatio* has usefully adopted the "fantastic" as the frame within which to consider this work. Mackley's view correlates with both Fennell and Roberts. It is unarguable that the immrama are important examples of fantastical voyages and should, therefore, be considered proto-science fiction. We should heed Roberts's call for considering the field of science fiction as a spectrum, rather than a definitive literary category. Further, many of the stories of the Irish medieval societies contain either fantastical elements or voyages to otherworlds, or both. *Immram Brain* contains, for example, an important difference in experience of time: when Bran and his companions return to Ireland, they are told, "we do not know such a one [Bran, son of Febul], though the voyage of Bran is in our ancient stories" (Meyer 32). This contrasting experience of time is a motif which appears in other stories from medieval Ireland. Last, the immrama and exile tales are often discussed as expressive of Christian allegory and the sea voyage as a metaphor for spiritual journey. This fits with the expansive understanding of science fiction expressed by New Wave authors with their discussion of crisis, disaster, inner-worlds, and psychology. These themes are particularly pertinent for discussing the far-reaching impact which Christianization, Norse invasion, and colonialist occupation had on Ireland. These stories—the echtrai, immrama, and other Irish tales—offer important avenues for future research on the long history of science fiction and alternative futurisms.

Celtic Futurism

This paper tentatively set out the first evidence for the alternative futurism of Celtic Futurism. It read the immrama ("rowing about") tales as examples of fantastic voyages and proto-science fiction. The paper utilised Rodhri ap Dyfrig's "cymroddyfodoliaeth" (Welsh or Celtic futurism) as a framework within which to investigate Irish medieval literature. It has demonstrated that there are science fiction elements to the immrama, echtrai, and other tales from medieval Ireland. The evidence cited above, however, also highlights areas to consider for future research. First, we can

further investigate the immrama and other Irish stories as proto-science fiction, for example, how they utilised conceptions of technology, time, and the otherworld requires further detailed investigation. How this relates to colonialism, crisis, and psychology will add evidence to the legitimacy of Celtic Futurism. Second, considering how these stories relate to other medieval literatures would be a useful exercise, for example, how do these Irish stories compare with the fantastical voyages and other world tales of Wales and other cultures? The comparison of these stories with Norse and Viking culture would also be a useful task. The investigation of Celtic Futurism as a form of proto-science fiction is an important area of research for the longer-term history of the field. It also has something to contribute to wider discussion of the issue of indigenous futurism and the losses caused by colonialism, modernity, and progress.

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The Hero Doesn't Need a Face and We Don't Need a Hero: *3%*, Social Justice, and the Shared Protagonism of Brazilian Science Fiction

Thais Lassali

In *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, Joseph Campbell develops the theory that there is a common structure to many stories, myths, and legends called the "monomyth" or "the hero's journey." More than merely naming the main character of a given narrative, the hero is an archetype, an image that synthesizes social ideas of what heroism and valor are. This means that in a given society, all heroes share some traits, such as looking just like any other person on the outside, but having exceptional qualities on the inside (Campbell 95). And these qualities help the adventure entice him, call him to action, to travel (metaphorically or not) to achieve his own greatness; another feature of the hero is that he is meant to be great, in many cases since he was conceived or born. He is fated to be who he is.

Campbell's idea became very influential in what audiovisual narratives assume a hero is and in the way it builds this archetype and its story. But Campbell's ideas were not widely accepted when his book was first released. A great influence in popularizing Campbell's work was George Lucas and his *Star Wars* films. It is up to debate how much influence Campbell's work had on the making of the original script of the 1977 movie. Chris Taylor argues that based on early drafts, Sir James Frazer's *The Golden Bough* and a far wider range of references were more influential (533), with Campbell's book serving more as a "user's manual" for understanding Frazer's work (245).

After the movie was released, the association between Campbell's and Lucas's works became unavoidable. Influential critics such as Roger Ebert quickly recognized the relation between Lucas's film and mythology, pointing to a lexicon very similar to those Campbell used in *The Hero with A Thousand Faces*. Through the end of the 1970s and all of the 1980s, Lucas embraced this supposed influence, turning himself into a great advocate of Campbell's work. After *Star Wars*' tremendous success, the hero's journey spread like a plague in Hollywood, mainly in science fiction and fantasy film narratives, but also in other genres and media. Even a big player like Disney took advantage of that: a memo written in the end of the 1980s by screenwriter Christopher Vogler circulated inside the studio praising the monomyth and offering a guide to replicate it. Not by coincidence, all Disney's big hits of the 1990s were structured around the hero's journey.

Ursula Le Guin performs a compelling analysis of the hero in *The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction*. She underlines the idea that the hero must act to be considered heroic; thus it is fair to say that the hero's journey and, by extension, heroic stories, are centered around action-based narratives. This may sound insignificant, but it is actually important: it makes heroic narratives about those who can act and by extension, those who end up overcoming the existing power

structures. As Michel Foucault states, power exists only in relation and action; power and knowledge imply one another (26-27), and narratives play a large role in spreading knowledge and, therefore, power. It is not only about who, but also about what: the hero must travel, must fight, must hurl the spear, must shoot, must kill (Le Guin 31) to overcome what he is supposed to. So the hero was born exceptional and for this exceptionality to be shown, he must sacrifice something, sometimes even himself, for the greater good. But, most of all, he must sacrifice something for his own success. This may sound like heroism, but it is also very similar to what white men did in Africa, America, and in many parts of Asia and the Middle East.

It is phenomenal how Hollywood can make these imperialist traits so ingrained with the hero figure and, moreover, how they make it look completely apolitical. Hollywood takes away the political aspects of the hero's actions by making their narratives sound like good stories, like stories of an individual overcoming difficulties to become the hero he was meant to be. But Hollywood has also added something more to this mixture. The United States has a public self-narrative of exceptionalism and sacrifice, which some experts like Robert Bellah call the civil religion of the United States. Of course, it can be seen more clearly in politics, but it is also present in movies and especially, as one might expect, in Hollywood science fiction and fantasy.

Don't get me wrong, I like *Star Wars* a lot. I actually like Luke Skywalker, Han Solo, Obi-Wan Kenobi. And even John Connor, Neo, Capitan America, Hulk. Damn it, I like Iron Man . . . Film reception is complex; these characters aren't just part of a plain fairy tale about the hero. They are what we make of them too, how we relate ourselves to them. But the thing is: their stories are theirs; I can make them mine, for example, but as somebody who values diversity, their stories can't be the only ones that are distributed to the entire world. Not just because they all tell stories of white men, but because we should search for other ways to tell stories—stories that are different, not just with minorities playing the same parts.

It is important that we valorize diversity in how we tell stories. The Brazilian series *3%* is a great example of that. The series, produced and streamed by Netflix, is set in the near future. In the first season, we see how the population of the impoverished Inland ("Continente," in Portuguese) can take a chance when they are twenty years old to change their lives by participating in "The Process," a challenge that only three percent of the participants are able to pass. Those who are accepted by The Process go to the richer and technologically advanced Offshore, or "Maralto." In the following three seasons, we discover that Offshore hides many secrets to maintain its dominant position over Inland and its population. We watch a group of Inland youngsters in their twenties who, for many different reasons, join a rebellious movement that wants to destroy the Offshore.

From the first season, we follow the paths of Michele, Fernando, Marco, Rafael, and Joana while they try to survive and join the top 3%. While Michele and Fernando seem to take a more prominent position as the main characters, Rafael and Joana are significant in showing the viewers aspects of Offshore that, at first glance, are hidden. In turn, Marco serves as the character who shows us the complexities of Inland. At the same time, the importance of Marco, Rafael, and Joana

grows through the seasons. After a period of fighting against the Offshore, they found The Shell, an egalitarian place where those who don't believe in the Process and its hierarchy can live. With Michele taking part as a founder of The Shell, the series shows us how important the collectivity is for this place to fulfill its objective. Every one of the main characters is complex in their own way and assumes one important function in the narrative. As we might expect, Offshore doesn't accept the existence of The Shell and its people must confront the nuances of violent fighting against an oppressive system, choosing when to negotiate with it and how to help the poor population of the Inland.

3% has an action-based narrative, and the actions that characters perform are what move the story forward. They hurl the spear, they shoot, they kill. But here we can't separate characters into good guys versus the villains because their motivations are not black and white. Indeed, this is what gives their actions weight. In a heroic narrative, if the villain dies, most of the time we accept it, as killing the villain is the hero's main goal. In *3%* we can't easily accept it because we don't know who the real villain is. If there is a villain at all, it is society, and along with it, the hierarchy, the difficult circumstances in which the Inlanders live, and the conflicted relationship between Inland and Offshore.

At the same time, there are many moments in every season where the narrative takes some time to breathe, to just enjoy the complexity of each character, to contemplate joy even in a miserable reality, even if this joy might be sad. The second season has a great example of that: in a very tense moment, there is something that resembles Brazilian carnival with percussion instruments and a lot of color and happiness. But the lyric that Liniker (a Brazilian singer) is singing—"Preciso me encontrar" [I Need to Find Me], written by the famous samba singer and songwriter Candeia and made famous in the voice of Cartola—has many mixed feelings that are summarized in a popular Brazilian saying: "rir pra não chorar" [laugh to not cry], which means that in a sad situation, people can choose to laugh even if it is more rational to cry.

But what probably is the most important thing about *3%* is that it does not exemplify heroism. The protagonism here is shared: Michele, Fernando, Marco, Rafael, and Joana are important in the same way, and each one of them has a complete narrative arc (with the exception of Fernando). At the same time, none of them is exceptional. On the contrary, in *3%* we see the everyday lives of normal people who are full of flaws. People oppressed by Offshore, people who trust the placement of their lives through the Process, but, simply put, people. They are not archetypes like a hero; they are complex, working more on a gray scale, sometimes doing things that we can't understand or agree with, things that are condemnable.

If the hero works in a "one for all" way, focusing on individual greatness to achieve well-being for all, in *3%* we see both "one for oneself" and "all for all," and they can be either positive or negative, depending on the situation. It depends on how others will react, on what that will lead to. That is a great way to represent a rebellion against an oppressive society because social justice is not about one person changing everything or about a hero, but about collective change, about

creating new ways of living together in a place, about liberating everyone from oppressive chains, metaphorical or real. Moreover, achieving this is difficult, it is not a trip to Disney World.

Brazilian science fiction seems to be increasingly betting on collective solutions for its stories. The 2021 film *Bacurau* by Kleber Mendonça Filho and Juliano Dornelles, for example, tells the story of a small village in northeast Brazil called Bacurau that is attacked by a group of foreign psychopaths who intends to murder the entire population of the region just to feed their hunger to kill. To avoid that, the people of Bacurau unite to find a collective solution to their problem. It is not beautiful, but answers the attack they are suffering in the same way. With this same feeling, we also recall *White Out Black In*, directed by Adirley Queirós. This film is fictional and also a documentary depicting the lives of victims of police violence in the city of Brasilia, Brazil's capital. The fictional solution the two main characters find for all the problems Brazilian state caused them is to destroy the government buildings with a sound bomb made with pancadão, a subgenre of Brazilian funk music. Again, a collective solution solves a collective problem, not in a beautiful or heroic way, but in thinking and acting collectively.

So if there is anything that Brazilian science fiction is trying to think through, of which *3%* is a part, it is that we don't need a hero, we need hierarchical changes and social justice, and that only will be achieved if we stop and think together about the Brazil that we want. At the same time, the problems that Brazil faces are not only ours, they were established in the colonial era and deepened by capitalism in many places around the world. But Brazilian science fiction doesn't want to save the world, we want every community to unite to find solutions to their problems. That might not be beautiful and heroic, but it could be more productive than heroism.

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Bricoleurs in SF: Making Do Beyond the Walls of Utopia

Dave Hubble

'Bricolage,' as well as approximating to 'DIY' in French, is a visual arts term referring to the production of artwork from whatever materials come to hand. In cultural studies, it refers to how people acquire objects from across social divisions to create new identities, especially within subcultures—for example, punk's subversion of the safety pin as decoration (even if that was subsequently repackaged by capitalism). There is an innate element of activism and political commentary when the artist's choice of materials aims to bypass commercialism, using rubbish or detritus to devalue the art object and give value back to the ordinary and everyday, the lost and discarded. From this viewpoint, if discarded materials can be valued, so can people—or any other species.

Moving beyond artists making objects that look post-apocalyptic or fantastical in galleries, there is a rich tradition of bricoleur characters in SF who typically use whatever they find to create gadgets, often in extremis. Rocket from *Guardians of the Galaxy* is a recent popular example, and it doesn't take many episodes of *Star Trek* before the crew escape peril using something they've made or adapted. This is something anthropologists will recognise, with Lévi-Strauss for example equating engineers with bricoleurs (16-19). However, none of this is activism *per se*, so where does that aspect come in?

As a visual arts bricoleur (Hubble), I see this approach as a reflection of our own valuing of ingenuity, including movements such as maker culture, makerspaces, hackerspaces, and repair cafés. They have the potential to improve equity and empowerment (e.g., Diaz et al.), although this isn't always realised for a variety of socioeconomic reasons linked to resources, living situations, and competing demands (Barton and Tan). Regardless, the politics of using waste materials are well documented (e.g., Whiteley) and form a commentary on resource (mis)use, alongside acts aimed at decoupling from consumerism. This in turn can disrupt normative, unequal power dynamics to develop more positive imagined futures. One clear aim of bricolage is to waste less and use less, especially since the Anthropocene is here; human activity is the main driver of changes at the Earth's surface (mineral movements, temperature change, and so on) and we are arguably causing a sixth Great Extinction (Kolbert). This is happening alongside, and intertwined with, late-stage capitalism, a period when wealth is increasingly drawn toward a multi-billionaire few whose space-travel is a non-fictional leisure activity, ego-tripping while the world burns.

Given its innate thriftiness, bricolage in a broad sense can help decouple us from hyperconsumerism where we can easily find ourselves manipulated into working such long hours that we only ever have the time to discard and replace, not repair or build, something Frederick Pohl noted in the 1950s with "The Midas Plague." As Beder and Higgs note, consumerism,

including its hyper-variant, is a deliberate capitalist ploy, replacing thrift and prudence, with capitalists using it as a means of controlling the working population. 'Status consumption,' trying to improve social standing through conspicuous acquisition of consumer products (Sahin and Nasir), requires ever more working hours in an increasingly competitive environment and thus the leisure-starved work-to-consume world develops (James). In turn, the skills of making atrophy, if they develop at all. In such a system, resisting compulsory consumption or normalised over-consumption is a form of activism.

In the near-future graphic novel *Tinkerers* set in 2024, Brin et al. explore the decline of technical ingenuity and what happens when a small town is cut off by a bridge collapse. The focus is on the decline of American manufacturing, and is very much about the nation and its systems, but also celebrates individual ability and the amateur. With this in mind, note that Derrida disagreed with Lévi-Strauss, seeing the engineer as serving static systems (the railway, let's say, maybe even the concept of God) while the bricoleur (who could be any or all of us) is fluid, repurposing, potentially transgressive or revolutionary, and taking anything at hand to reuse as required or desired (chapter 10). After all, in our world, neoliberalism wants to maintain the status quo, however broken the system, while bricolage tries to move beyond this, including in the sphere of ideas, as it can co-opt the conceptual and intangible as well as the material. In this, bricoleurs can be seen as parasites, both in a literal sense and in the sense of philosopher Michel Serres, where parasitism is static interrupting the signal, a notion that also plays on 'static' as an alternative definition of 'parasite' in French (Wolfe 13). Since then, there have been numerous examples of artists using parasitism for the purpose of activism, as described by Fisher. This is not the mindless (or amorally single-minded) spread of self-replicating machines; following Drexler's 1986 coining of the term, 'gray goo' has often been featured in SF as a threat to civilisation. For example, Iain M. Banks's Culture craft, which are sentient spaceships, enjoy destroying smart matter or "smatter," and the Jain war tech of Neal Asher's Polity novels is a core plot element. Instead, though there may be some intent to weaken the host (consumerism), the aim of bricolage is typically benevolent (making society more equitable, reducing resource use, commenting critically on consumerism), or at least neutral (living more frugally but without wider societal concerns)—though of course the SF versions might see themselves the same way, just doing what they do.

So far, bricolage has typically been presented as an act of necessity, at least to some extent, a response to limited resources. However, SF explores many post-scarcity or low-scarcity utopias and near-utopias such as Banks's Culture, Asher's Polity, and *Star Trek*'s Federation. When thinking about such societies in the context of bricolage, some questions arise: What role might ingenuity or thriftiness have when there are nanotech fabricators or ships able to convert and meld energy and matter however they choose? Why make or mend something that can, in effect, be wished into being? There are a number of reasons.

Firstly, accidents happen, as do hostile acts. Any number of scenarios might mean that the relevant tech isn't working or is unavailable. The various *Star Trek* series use this plot device

regularly to prevent transporters, replicators, warp drives, and so on from functioning, forcing characters to scavenge and tinker. Aside from emergencies, there are those who live on the fringes or beyond, where bricolage is a vital skill in the absence of replicators or unobtainium. We then come to the crux of this topic as the question becomes, why would anyone leave utopia? It is worth qualifying the term 'utopia' here. In this context it is an actual utopia, at least for some inhabitants, rather than, say, an experimental living situation. For this reason, SF utopias are specified rather than real-world attempts to create them via communes and similar. A detailed examination of the latter is beyond the scope of this article but Garden covers reasons for leaving, such as reality not meeting ideals, internal conflicts, and management issues, while Bregman looks at broader changes that might be implemented, for example a universal basic income and open borders.

Returning to reasons for leaving SF utopias, some do so by choice, seeking adventure and experiences beyond their cosseted paradise. This could be seen as simply an act of privilege, an equivalent to a gap year or class tourism, going somewhere dangerous with their core selves backed up. This suggests they are just bored edgelords, but maybe they are making a point about their society and the need for self-determination. Iain M. Banks's work has plenty of examples, such as Gurgeh, the titular *Player of Games* who is blackmailed into being a Special Circumstances agent—but then, his novels are intentionally set where potentially perilous 'stuff' happens. Most Culture citizens never encounter anything of the sort, and we never hear about them except as a generalised mass of pan-humanity. However, in a society with no formal hierarchy, joining the Culture's Contact and Special Circumstances agencies has significant cachet. Even where that status has to remain secret, it is a way of determining self-worth by being one of the best among trillions of individuals, however that is defined when bodies and minds can be enhanced, rebuilt, replaced, and re-engineered.

For others it is an obligation or expectation, possibly based on a prior choice, for example, some Gzilt in Banks's *Hydrogen Sonata*. Several civilisations in the Culture novels, including the Gzilt, reach a stage where they can "Sublime," that is, advance to a godlike non-corporeal existence, but some Gzilt parents choose to stay in the "Real" because to sublime a child is considered unacceptable. By staying, they essentially exchange a utopia for its much-reduced remnants which will be plundered or colonised by less technologically developed races. They might remain amid this or relocate to the Culture or elsewhere, but their own utopia will be gone while the great majority of their civilisation exists in what is presumed to be a post-corporeal utopia of the mind.

Others, however well-adjusted in an era of perfect medicine and near-flawless mental health, might nonetheless experience ennui in the absence of a clear function. Joining the Culture's Contact or an equivalent organisation might resolve this for a few, but such opportunities are limited, so without the need to earn a living, citizens of utopias may engage in self-allotted 'work-hobbies' or 'life-tasks.' This has also been explored in the real world, for example, by Kabakov, who states:

the only way and means to lead a worthy human life is to have one's own project, to conceive it and bring it to its realization…. The project is the concentration, the embodiment of the meaning of life. Only thanks to it can one establish 'who one is', what one is capable of; can one receive 'a name'. It is only from the moment of the determination of one's project that one's true 'existence' and not just 'survival' begins. (*The Palace of Projects*, n.p.)

This also challenges some of the standard objections to progressive policies such as basic income (Standing) and a short, fifteen-hour working week (Bregman). Detractors cry that people would become lazy, bored, spend their money on 'bad' things, that the standard of living would collapse, and so on. All of this can easily be countered and it is clear that for much of human history (and presumably prehistory) people worked only as hard as they needed to. They may have been poor, and they were certainly at the mercy of their environment (life could also be nasty, brutish, and short), but there was often an abundance of time for leisure. This doesn't imply inactivity or even comfort; such time is likely to have involved making and mending in a world of limited resources—in essence, to be a bricoleur would have been the norm. Of course, individual regions varied depending on social structure, for example, a serf who has to work their feudal lord's fields before their own might be short of free time if they also have their own land to tend. However, the trend continues and what changed was the development of capitalism and consumerism, the 'time is money' ethic, which of course means 'your time is the bosses' money.' Technology allows us in principle to work less, but in practice communication devices mean we are constantly available (even when not formally at work) while also feeling uncertain about our finances, future, and well-being—a combination leading to what the World Health Organization has called a twenty-first-century epidemic of stress (Fink). We have ameliorated many horrors of the past as medicine and housing have improved, drinking water has become safer, and food supplies have become more reliable (in many places, and for now at least), but we have replaced them with contemporary problems which themselves need to be resolved if our potential utopia isn't to become dystopian.

Returning to SF and *The Hydrogen Sonata*, Vyr Cossont is a Gzilt musician and military reservist who has chosen to play the titular (and notoriously difficult) piece of music, though it is widely considered unlistenable and requires the addition of an extra pair of arms and a specially made instrument. She begins the story clearly tiring of the task, but with only twenty-three days left until Subliming, determined to play the piece perfectly once. At the end of the twenty-three days, she does not Sublime, but has completed her task. She has an offer of passage on a Culture ship, no clear purpose beyond a sense of the adventure the journey might bring, and a lighter, freer feeling despite having, in effect, left her utopia. This isn't simple contrarianism, but shows the importance of self-determination; as automated systems become less reliable post-sublimation, Cossont has to fly her small craft manually. In her world this is a significant loss; she is back in the land of the bricoleur. It's also important to remember that the decision to remain is a long-term one. Whatever the reason for remaining, Banks is careful to clarify that delaying sublimation isn't

an option for individuals as the changes wrought in the 'beyond' soon mean they will be too late to join the majority who went before:

> leaving it much more than an hour or so was risky; you'd get there and be isolated, those who had made the transition just hours before . . . would already have become so changed, so ascended in complexity, that you would have virtually nothing in common. You'd be on your own, or part of a hopelessly small group, effectively contextless, unanchored to anything greater than yourself, and so likely just to evaporate, dissolving into the generality of the fabric of the Sublime, meaningless. (*The Hydrogen Sonata* 23)

Meanwhile, some post-scarcity utopias are actually "ustopias," a term coined by Margaret Atwood to indicate that utopias and dystopias each contain a latent version of the other. Thus SF societies might be utopian for some, but dystopian for others. It may look like someone is leaving a utopia, but from their perspective they don't live in one to begin with. In such cases, some will leave out of desperation. For example, in Neal Asher's Polity, a guaranteed death penalty for serious crimes (leaving an empty body for a 'more deserving' stored inhabitant) ensures that some will flee beyond its jurisdiction. The AIs of the Polity never forget or rescind the judgement, thus there can be no return. John Pierce's introduction to Cordwainer Smith's *Rediscovery of Man* makes it clear that "The Instrumentality of Mankind" is an ustopia, shaped by the "ruthless benevolence" to create a "bland utopia." As lifespans are extended and labour is completed by machines and animal-derived underpeople, there is little risk from the unknown, but humanity becomes "deprived of hope and freedom" (xviii). It is a bleaker view than offered in Banks's Culture, but there are parallels with his peril-seeking individuals. It also highlights a sense of duty as a reason to leave utopia, in this case one that we clearly see in our own world. It could manifest in many ways such as military service to help defend their ideal society against threats, scientific or other knowledge-focused postings to less secure outposts and frontiers, exploration for the greater good or even martyrdom. There are countless examples of all these in the civilisations cited so far and they are not mutually exclusive, and many of the individuals involved survive (or ultimately don't) though acts of ingenuity—bricolage—once detached from their home utopia.

Others embrace risk culturally. In *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine*, as a Ferengi, Quark is a literal and figurative gambler who repeatedly derides 'precious Federation principles,' likening it to root beer with a distaste that the Cardassian tailor-cum-spy Garak shares, both characters acknowledging its sweet and sickly moreishness. Despite an overt avoidance of physical danger (after all, Rule of Acquisition 20 states "He who dives under the table today lives to profit tomorrow" [DeCandido]), Quark is a risk-taker, and not only at the Dabo table. He finds and acquires, whether tech or information, and uses these as he will—a bricoleur within the system but also playing his own game. After all, Rule 62 reminds us that "The riskier the road, the greater the profit" ("Rules of Acquisition"). Klingons meanwhile are famously stereotypical risk-takers, revelling in the thrill of battle and the idea of a glorious death. They are technologically advanced and presumably as post-scarcity as the Federation, but Sto'Vo'Kor, their afterlife for the honoured dead, strongly parallels the Vikings' Valhalla, and challenges are often settled by combat rather

than discussion or arbitration. Regardless, some bemoan the softening of Klingon life and leave their version of utopia as mercenaries, renegades, and the like; few if any take the 'gap year' option and such a life would likely be seen as dishonourable. Alongside this, many Federation citizens choose difficult existences, such as Kasidy Yates's freighter captain, a recurring character in *Deep Space Nine*. There is no need to do so in a system where everyone has, in effect, a huge Basic Universal Income in the form of energy use, replicator and transporter allowances, and so on. This might not be far removed from the 'bored edgelord' suggestion above, but this choice to live a harder-than-necessary existence can turn into activism.

When even utopia leaves some behind, rebellion follows, as with *Star Trek*'s Maquis, whose homes are placed in Cardassian territory by a peace treaty. Not only do they rebel openly, but they also rely on peripheral characters such as Yates who are in a position to deliver (or smuggle depending on your viewpoint) scarce supplies. This echoes our world where elites make partition plans for India, Palestine, Chagos, and so on, while the Extinction Rebellion movement sees a global threat to human survival. With limited resources, such activism requires a DIY approach; some may find themselves relocated and dispossessed, or living in ustopias—refugee camps within sight of affluent Western cities for example. Campe de la Lande, commonly referred to as Calais Jungle, existed from 2015 to 2016, fewer than 500 metres from the Port of Calais. Places of worship, eateries, hairdressers, and other amenities were built out of junk, with help from external organisations and activists, combining bricolage with solidarity.

Some inequality is of course deliberately engineered, in SF as well as reality. Independents in the series *Firefly* and its film accompaniment *Serenity* eke out a precarious living, partly as they ideologically oppose the ruling Alliance, but also because the Alliance and its core worlds are another elite overseeing inequality of resource allocation. Within this framework, Kaylee Frye endlessly and intuitively bodges the spaceship *Serenity*'s engine. She is an engineer in the literal sense, but a bricoleur in the sense of Derrida. Ultimately, her work facilitates the activism of other characters: she keeps the ship going until it can deliver an Alliance-undermining message to Mr. Universe, the techno-geek who broadcasts it across all channels. Again we see the 'official' signal being parasitised. Humans mending and scavenging tech in *The Matrix* have a similar activist role, covertly broadcasting minds from their ships to rescue others, travelling via phone lines as pirate radio signals. *Mockingjay* (the final part of the *Hunger Games* trilogy) shows limited resources being used frugally and innovatively by the inhabitants of District 13 to develop an underground rebel stronghold against the tyrannical Capitol. The approach is material in nature, but transcends this. Some of the privileged of the Capitol turn out to be rebels (e.g., Plutarch Heavensbee), or shift allegiance and agree to help (e.g., Effie Trinket), willing to threaten the stability of their own utopian enclave, as the wider Panem is dystopian for most inhabitants. In this case however, the parallel with our world has become more literal. In *The Hunger Games*, the three-fingered salute spreads, signalling an uprising (and reprisals). It has since moved into the real world, used at pro-democracy protests in Thailand and Myanmar (Quinley) and spreading via social media.

With protesters making DIY masks to counter teargas, stashing bags of essentials, making memes, placards, costumes, and so on, the bricoleur approach is clear to see.

This leads onto the realisation that bricolage doesn't have to be material or even digital—ideas can have more power. After all, arguably the Federation's biggest problem with the Maquis isn't that they attack Cardassians, or even that some have broken Star Fleet oaths, but simply that they dared to leave. They broke the status quo, reusing its components, and that is the activism of the bricoleur. Similarly, in the *Hunger Games*, when the Hob (the venue for the Black Market) is destroyed, it is done to send a message telling the citizens to comply in place of acquiring, selling, and bartering outside the system. This is ever more relevant with the rise of intangible aspects of Virtual Consumerism, which has been accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic (Wiederhold). This is not simply online shopping, subscriptions, and so on, but encompasses aspects such as the purchase of virtual goods with real money. If we have enough material things, capitalism provides non-things for us to buy.

While profiting from power and income, elites want to determine everyone else's place and to make sure they know it. Bricoleurs aim to break free of this, to do what they want with whatever they find and undermine power structures along the way—by making do, things are made better. Joseph Norman's recent *The Culture of "The Culture"* sees it as an evolving utopia, fluid rather than a static end-state—a grand exercise in bricolage. As Banks himself wrote in his 1994 essay "A Few Notes on the Culture," "Briefly, nothing and nobody in the Culture is exploited." I'm hardly the first fan to say that's where I want to live, however ambiguous a utopia it might be at times.

To summarise, bricoleurs are activists in a consumerist and unequal world, and bricolage can be a tool to help decouple from consumerism and authoritarianism, hopefully making systems more equitable in the process. Examples from SF reflect the fringe nature of such activity in our world, highlighting issues of privilege and inequity alongside environmental considerations around waste, value, and resources.

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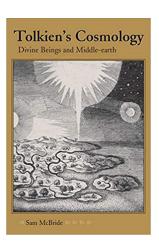
NON-FICTION REVIEWS

Tolkien's Cosmology: Divine Being and Middle-earth, by Sam McBride

Adam McLain

Sam McBride. *Tolkien's Cosmology: Divine Being and Middle-earth*. Kent State UP, 2020. Hardcover. 304 pg. $55.00. ISBN 9781606353967.

Many books on J. R. R. Tolkien and religion focus on the religion of the man himself. They attempt to piece together how Tolkien's Catholicism and Christian faith are interwoven into his text, seeing Christianity as a driving force of the books or as intricately hidden within the hundreds of pages of drafts, published texts, and notes Tolkien left. Instead of approaching Tolkien's work as representative of Tolkien's personal religion, *Tolkien's Cosmology* seeks to understand the religion within the texts as religion itself rather than representative of another. McBride takes upon himself a large and daunting task of describing not only the cosmos of Tolkien's universe but also how that cosmos involves itself with the machinations of Tolkien's terrestrial world. In this explanation, McBride finds himself grappling with a large pantheon of gods, an author's deft touch on a text to allow divine intervention, and soteriological and eschatological questions answered in primary and extraneous texts. As an approach to the cosmology, this text provides a stunning grasp of the complexities and vastness of Tolkien's texts, while allowing for newcomers to this vast universe to be welcomed into its wide depths.

McBride uses his text to provide descriptive analysis of Tolkien's mythology. Throughout much of the text, McBride describes, outlines, and summarizes the pantheon of gods (including Eru Ilúvatar, the supreme deity, and the pantheon of gods and minor deities), the genesis of creation, the divine intervention of the gods throughout Arda's history, and the eucatastrophe of the end to the world. For example, in describing the understanding of deity in Arda, McBride coins the term *polytheistic monotheism*: worshipping one ultra-deity (Eru), while also engaging with, believing in, and praying to minor deities, who at times can supersede the ultra-deity in the centrality of worship from lower beings. This term helps McBride explain how, throughout its history, the divine influence on the world can be seen not just through Eru's machinations but also through the efforts of other deities who can be believed to be the singular God or one of many gods, depending on the person or people who are worshipping (chapters 1 through 4 deal with explaining and expanding how polytheistic monotheism influences Tolkien's universe). Additionally, McBride delves into and examines the themes of evil (chapter 5), death (chapter 6), and the end of the world (chapter 7), three topics that religion, generally, should be able to at

least address. In these examinations, McBride shows his argumentative finesse, engaging with scholars who have attempted to examine these topics and using his new framework—a cosmology scaffolded by all the works of Tolkien—to show the differences a new view makes.

To approach Tolkien's oeuvre, a scholar must decide how to incorporate the copious extant notes and drafts. While many scholars of Tolkien have approached his work as developing across the course of his writings, McBride chooses to engage with Tolkien's work in its totality. Instead of tracing the chronological development of ideas, McBride unites all of the ideas, from notes to early drafts, to envision a cohesive cosmology, mythology, and theology throughout Tolkien's work. This effort helps McBride build a pantheon for the books themselves, writing an in-universe revelation of what could be; however, it stifles the understanding of Tolkien's books as Tolkien's creation. Instead, in forming this cosmology, McBride almost becomes coauthor with Tolkien, not necessarily exegetically or eisegetically engaging with the world but rather working with Tolkien to form an understandable cosmology.

Although McBride's book's genesis comes from Tolkien's assertion that *The Hobbit* (1937), *The Lord of the Rings* (1954/1955), and *The Silmarillion* (1977) contain and discuss religion, McBride spends little time problematizing or recognizing the fraught history of the term and the study of it. Indeed, he simply says there is religion and continues forward into a descriptive analysis of the deities and their interactions with the world. As a result, scholars of religion have a foundation in McBride's book upon which to understand fantastical and created religions, while also using Tolkien's work to further the study of religion. *Tolkien's Cosmology*, then, can be seen as laying a good groundwork for many future articles and books on the subject.

This robust description and analysis of Tolkien's cosmology will aid any Tolkien researcher and scholar of fantasy literature in approaching not only his work as a whole and his entire created world but also any other attempt by authors at worldbuilding. Indeed, McBride's engagement with not only the published source material but Tolkien's archive of notes and drafts provides insight into the mind of one of the twentieth century's greatest creators. His astute analysis, humbled through awareness of his different methodology, provides grounds on which the novice and experienced author can discover new things about Tolkien's work. McBride's text is meant to be one that supports wandering without getting lost.

Adam McLain researches and writes on dystopian literature, legal theory, and sexual ethics. He is currently a Harvard Frank Knox Traveling Fellow, studying twentieth-century dystopian literature and the legal history of sexual violence in the UK. He has a bachelor's degree in English from Brigham Young University and a master of theological studies from Harvard Divinity School.

The Routledge Companion to Cyberpunk Culture, edited by Anna McFarlane, Graham J. Murphy and Lars Schmeink

Michael Pitts

McFarlane, Anna, Graham J. Murphy, and Lars Schmeink, editors. *The Routledge Companion to Cyberpunk Culture.* Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2020. Hardcover. 474 pg. $225.40. ISBN 9780815351931.

The Routledge Companion to Cyberpunk Culture, edited by Anna McFarlane, Graham J. Murphy, and Lars Schmeink, aims broadly, as outlined in the text's introduction, "to track cyberpunk's diversity and far-reaching influence" (xx). Made up of contributions from more than fifty scholars, the sizable anthology is divided into key three sections: Cultural Texts, Cultural Theory, and Cultural Locales. The first section is made up of traditional analyses of the cinematic and literary roots of cyberpunk and notably replaces examinations of typical works such as *Neuromancer* (1984) and *Blade Runner* (1982) with other texts such as Pat Cadigan's *Synners* (1991) and Charles Stross's *Accelerando* (2005). Containing theoretical assessments of disparate topics such as identity, ecology, class, and political power, the second section of the anthology, Cultural Theory, explores cyberpunk through the lenses of diverse theoretical frameworks including queer theory, Afrofuturism, and feminism. The final segment, Cultural Locales, complicates assumptions that cyberpunk is an Anglo-American mode constructed through the appropriation of other cultures' imagery and tropes. As this companion emphasizes, cyberpunk, though perhaps initially a North American phenomenon, has manifested in pivotal ways within various polities. The essays making up Cultural Locales examine these cultural manifestations of cyberpunk and their relationships to the complex systems operating within and influencing these societies. This anthology is a valuable resource due to its close examinations of cinematic and literary manifestations of cyberpunk and for its analyses of identity and the political actions of cyberpunk media in relation to discussions of governing power, ecologies, and class. It is additionally pivotal due to the questions it raises about cyberpunk as a global phenomenon that reflects and shapes our understanding of living in the 21st century (xx).

This companion continues the work of scholars interested in cyberpunk as a method for better understanding contemporary life. Unique to this collection is its emphasis upon cyberpunk as not simply a genre of writing but instead "a cultural formation, a means of engaging with our 21st-century technocultural age" (xx). Recognizing the limitations of treating this phenomenon as a

mere literary school, Anna McFarlane, Graham J. Murphy, and Lars Schmeink construct a broader framework for their collection and therefore widen discussions concerning the relationship between cyberpunk and contemporary culture. Since Bruce Bethke initially utilized the term in his short story "Cyberpunk," published in a 1983 issue of *Amazing*, and Bruce Sterling edited an influential collection of fiction under this classification, *Mirrorshades: The Cyberpunk Anthology* (1988), cyberpunk scholarship has flourished but maintained a predominant focus upon literary and cinematic generic functions. Larry McCaffery's edited collection *Storming the Reality Studio: A Casebook of Cyberpunk & Postmodern Science Fiction* (1992), for example, drew together the fiction of contemporary writers and the critical commentaries of scholars to diagnose cyberpunk as the quintessential postmodern literary form through which writers use the resources of a fragmentary culture to comment on how technology shapes modern life. While subsequent major collections such as *The Cambridge Companion to Science Fiction* (2003) and *The Oxford Handbook of Science Fiction* (2014) contain minor sections focused upon cyberpunk, *The Routledge Companion to Cyberpunk Culture* is a significant resource for scholars due both to its predominant focus upon this cultural formation and its recognition of cyberpunk's influence and presence outside literary and cinematic borders.

Emphasizing such a far-reaching impact and manifestation of cyberpunk, this anthology is best suited for scholars seeking a helpful companion for undergraduate courses focused on this topic or emerging scholars desiring a guiding resource through this cultural terrain. Moving beyond the most influential cyberpunk texts, it provides a broader understanding of how cyberpunk permeates disparate genres and media including video games, music, fashion, role-playing games, manga and anime, comic books, novels, and films and therefore enables scholars to re-envision cyberpunk as not merely a North American genre of speculative fiction but instead in a more accurate sense as a global response to late capitalism. This companion additionally provides theoretical tools for young scholars and students seeking to better understand how to interrogate cyberpunk as a tool for negotiating a complex, technocultural age. By providing key critical works utilizing various theoretical foundations including feminist, race, and queer frameworks, this anthology acts as an ideal tool for young scholars and students seeking an entry point into discussions surrounding this cultural formation and its commentary on identity in 21st-century societies. Though a somewhat limited resource for advanced scholars versed in the history, theoretical apparatus, and cultural products of cyberpunk, *The Routledge Companion to Cyberpunk* is a valuable collection for developing scholars seeking a broad understanding of this cultural phenomenon.

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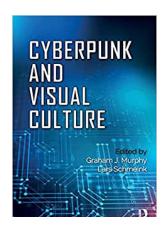
Cyberpunk and Visual Culture, edited by Graham J. Murphy and Lars Schmeink

Kerry Dodd

Graham J. Murphy and Lars Schmeink eds. *Cyberpunk and Visual Culture*. Routledge, 2018. Paperback. 326 pg. $54.95. ISBN 9781138062917.

Cyberpunk is undeniably part of our cultural fabric and has never been more visually recognizable since the 1980s than it is today. Not just a SF sub-genre craze, Cyberpunk informs contemporary technological development and lies at the heart of many mainstream realist media representations. The troubled launch of *Cyberpunk 2077* (2020) catapulted 'Cyberpunk' into prime-time news headlines and ironically revitalized cultural awareness of the genre via the very neoliberal crunch culture that it notionally interrogates. *Cyberpunk and Visual Culture*, edited by Graham J. Murphy and Lars Schmeink, has in many ways only become more critically relevant, then, since its release, particularly given the pandemic's fast-forwarding of labor and leisure into virtual spheres which have reinforced global concerns towards technological accessibility. Murphy and Schmeink's edited collection of 15 essays commendably engages with a profusion of media formats to highlight the visual styles iconic to Cyberpunk and argue for the centrality of such aesthetic paradigms within contemporary 'realistic' settings. Through this targeted focus the selected chapters exhibit a coherence of thought and criticism that is often lost within other broader collections, marking this title as both an important contribution to critical debate and companion to our current Cyberpunk-inflected times.

Part I begins with the intersection between text and image in the visualization of Cyberpunk futures, extrapolating from Gibson's iconic description of the sky being 'the color of television, tuned to a dead channel' as a refocusing of criticism between graphic and prose mediums. Christian Hviid Mortensen's opening chapter astutely notes that Gibson's vision of the future now feels anachronistic to contemporary readers, where the more common blue hue of untuned channels unwittingly inverts the original visual. Focusing on 'gonzo-journalism' in the graphic novel *Transmetropolitan* (1997-2002) Mortensen grapples with the retrofutures left behind by technological change and deploys Marshall McLuhan's concept of the 'anti-environment' to demonstrate how the text's blending of media-anachronism and media-futurism can create a space that is 'necessary to effect needed social observation, if not social critique' (13). Timothy Wilcox's subsequent chapter continues this exploration through 'failures of imagination' via the comic book series *The Surrogates* (2005-2006) by shifting the focus on the materiality of

Cyberpunk futures. Through a discussion of the text's eponymous surrogate robot bodies Wilcox critically examines the importance of visualizing physical re-embodiment to reveal the everyday manners in which we encounter ourselves and others via posthuman materialities – an important consideration that is often lost within criticism amidst the emphasis on 'cyber' futures, but one that should equally consider the non-human and ecological consequences of such speculations. Murphy's own chapter meanwhile provides a compelling extended study of animal representation and motifs in Boom! Studios' comic book adaptation of *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep* (2009). Opening with an eloquent demarcation of how *Do Androids* is not necessarily a classic Cyberpunk text but is both influential to and of that milieu, Murphy demonstrates how the original novel and graphic adaptation define empathetic understanding via animal husbandry and cruelty – a refreshing reading of an oft-cited text that emphasizes a consideration of how Cyberpunk's imagination impacts beyond the human. Stina Attebery and Josh Pearson follow by considering the importance of fashion and style within the table-top role-playing game *Cyberpunk 2020* (1998), shifting the discussion of visuality from cyberspaces and cityscapes to the centrality of self-expression and personal image to Cyberpunk through an exploration of precarious social identities within metropolitan spaces. While this chapter illuminates an oft-overlooked aspect of the field, there is only a brief engagement with the text's concerning conflation of bodily modification with a 'humanity cost' (that causes anti-social behavior) which would have benefitted from a more nuanced consideration and additional reflection of the capitalist driven generation of fashion waste. Paweł Frelik concludes the section by examining the interplay between light and Cyberpunk visions of the future. Astutely noting that many SF texts are predicated on a future of energy abundance, Frelik demonstrates how the 'near-absolute absence' of any explanation of such plenitude 'rings loud' from a contemporary perspective (94). Focusing on a variety of textual media, the chapter emphasizes how light's integral presence to Cyberpunk aesthetics is not only a retrofuturistic imagination of outdated neon technology but also emblematic of the genre's complicated relationship to contemporaneous social-political tensions.

Part II explores virtual and visual terrains, tracing developments of both the digital gaze and rendering of cyberspaces. Christopher McGunnigle begins with the cyborg posthuman body in the *RoboCop* franchise through an examination of the titular character's digitally overlaid sight as a form of 'subjective shot' (107). Moving from a consideration of the 'male' to 'cyborg' gaze, McGunnigle examines how the series challenges traditional conceptions of hypermasculinity and disembodiment to configure and reclaim human subjectivity in symbiosis with cybernetics. The discussion crucially avoids tackling who programs and controls such a gaze, however, which given historic discriminatory practices around face ID recognition underscores the necessity of understanding the biases that underpin algorithmic sight. Ryan J. Cox's subsequent chapter meanwhile provides a detailed analysis of Makoto Kusanagi within the *Ghost in the Shell* film (1995) and *Stand Alone Complex* anime series (2002-2005). Contrary to early hacker idealism towards cyberspace being free from the trappings of embodied prejudice and persecution, Cox astutely demonstrates how Kusanagi is a far cry from disembodied freedom and is rather subject to and a participant of meat space ideologies. Kusanagi's own repeated inhabitation of bodies with

similar physical characters then is 'not an attempt to seal the rupture between ghost and shell, it is an act of self definition' (136) that affirms the centrality of the body to enduring paradigms of self-expression. Mark R. Johnson's following chapter explores historic visualizations of cyberspace within video games, poignantly noting that such landscapes represent fundamentally digital objects—data comprised of zeros and ones—through human visual paradigms. Focusing on the utilization of space, color and shape within various depictions, Johnson moves from early grid-based systems to more contemporary avatar renderings in a study that highlights a lack of creative re-imagining towards virtual spheres. The discussion itself however is predominantly descriptive and limited in scope, particularly as the chapter could have formed the foundation for a more convincing argument towards the potential of revitalizing how humanity visualizes and encounters cyberspace. Stephen Joyce's chapter, however, complements the previous discussion by focusing on the potential of video games to replicate Cyberpunk agentic tensions between gameplay freedom and narrative control in the *Deus Ex* (2000-2016) franchise with a specific focus on *Deus Ex: Human Revolution* (2011). Joyce argues that the players' navigation of the game as a form of cyberspace encourages their immediate immersion within transhumanist values and demonstrates not only the medium's reflection of contemporary social-technological debates but also the 'cost' of such capitalist driven depictions, where 'the "free choice" of transhumanism is never as free as it seems' (167). Cyberpunk video game's potential for capitalist critique therefore stems from a fault that 'lies not in the medium but in ourselves' (171), where nuanced criticism of the processes that have led to deregulated market control are more effective than arguments towards nebulous concepts without any proposed alternative. Jenna Ng and Jamie Macdonald close Part II by focusing on a distinctly recognizable 'cyber' future in the video game *Watch Dogs* (2015) where all electronic devices are connected to the ctOS (Central Operating System) surveillance-state metropolitan network. Shifting from traditional discussions of jacking into cyberspace, the authors demonstrate how contemporary data-driven systems represent an entwinement of virtual and 'real' spaces, one that the game's hacker-protagonist Aiden utilizes to subvert the ctOS system and forge his own sense of urban agency. This discussion however avoids directly challenging the rather simplistic representation at the heart of Watch Dogs hacktivism, where Aiden is seemingly able to control the cityscape and freely access central databases in a manner that is divorced from contemporary practice.

Part III draws the collection to a close by focusing on Cyberpunk as a form of SF realism, where visions of the future reflect more upon the contemporary moment than any distant possibility. Evan Torner shifts the discussion away from American and Japanese stereotypes by introducing two often overlooked examples of German Cyberpunk films—*Kamikaze 1989* (1982) and *Nuclearvision* (1982)—which resonate with the concerns articulated elsewhere in the collection. Torner demonstrates how the deeply pessimistic tone of both films, particularly within their late cold war context, offers a moral and ethical ambiguity that is frequently lacking in Hollywood depictions, where glamourous and gritty portrayals of technological liberation or servitude will often depend upon the audience's own socio-political views in a manner that fails to query 'whose interests are supported by which technologies' (210, original emphasis). The danger

therefore lies in systems that are notionally beyond self-reflective critique, causing Torner to ask, in a very meta-cyberpunk manner, 'what makes the white western male incapable of grappling with these systems of his own creation' (209). Mark Bould's following chapter further critiques the anglophonic bias of mainstream Cyberpunk media through both the genre's blindness and marginalization of African people, Africa and its diaspora. While Bould notes that aspects of his cited examples may 'look very familiar to western eyes' (231)—as shown via the work of Nadia El Fani, Sylvestre Amoussou, Jean-Pierre Bekolo and particularly the Holloywood-esque spectacle of Neil Blomkamp's cinematography—his movement between the molar and molecular scales pinpoints how 'they use those pieces to play an often different game' (231). He poignantly concludes that 'no matter how things fall apart, the center will find ways to hold' (231), and when we consider that this 'center' not only represents colonizing hegemony but equally deracinated global corporations then the impetus of such a critique is not only urgent but globally relevant. Anna McFarlane's following chapter returns to the blurring between representation and reality through Katherine Bigelow's *Strange Days* (1995) and *Zero Dark Thirty* (2012), persuasively arguing that the latter may not appear as a traditional Cyberpunk film but does undeniably return to thematic and cinematographic aspects that are central to the director's wider work. For McFarlane both films are positioned either side of the epochal millennial shift, where *Strange Days* sees the future as something potentially horrifying and wonderous while the 'post' 9/11 response at the heart of *Zero Dark Thirty* struggles with the prospect of an optimistic future. The different reflections of virtual reality, surveillance monitoring, remote viewing and the tone central to both films crucially returns to the increasing manners in which the contemporary moment is both visualized and represented via Cyberpunk motifs. Sherryl Vint expands upon this notion in an excellent chapter that explores the fusing, or collapsing, of material and virtual environments in a range of military-sf films that continually align warfare with digital game culture. As Vint notes, the audience's perceived ability to differentiate what is real from representation lies in our expectation of what cyber-, military and game space should look like, where the inversion of topographical expectations in such films as *Ender's Game* (2013) and *Source Code* (2011) reinforces technological and ethical concerns around being unable to distinguish artifice from authenticity. From this Vint draws connections to contemporary remote warfare in the film *Good Kill* (2014) by illustrating how drone combat physicalizes such an anxiety in contemporary terms and thus underscores the importance of sf critical studies to a cultural appreciation of a present built upon Cyberpunk visualizations. Schmeink draws the collection to a close with an afterword that appropriately focuses on counter visuality and Cyberpunk's fundamental relationship of seeing and being seen within cities, cyberspaces and posthumanism.

While some chapters are more persuasive in their cultural and critical argumentation than others, the writing throughout is consistently engaging, making it accessible to Cyberpunk novices or enthusiasts and is a testament to the rigorous work of the editors. Far from treading pre-established ground, *Cyberpunk and Visual Culture* proves the enduring relevance of Cyberpunk visuality to understanding the 'reality' that surrounds us daily. Certainly, it would have been productive to see further discussions of texts more contemporaneous to the book's release—as

only a handful of chapters discuss media released in the early to mid-2010s—but this title is undeniably an excellent guide to our constantly developing cyberpunk present and will surely be a steadfast companion for those who look to take this research further.

Kerry Dodd completed his PhD at Lancaster University, UK. His thesis, entitled "The Archaeological Weird: Excavating the Non-human," examined the intersection between archaeology and Weird fiction. Focusing on the cultural production of the artefact encounter, his thesis explored how archaeological framings can offer a re-conceptualization of object ontology through the Weird. He is currently working on a monograph that explores the representation of materiality and objects in archaeological fiction. Kerry also works more widely in the fields of Science Fiction (particularly Cosmic Horror and Cyberpunk), the Gothic, and glitch aesthetics.

Dread Trident: Tabletop Role-Playing Games and the Modern Fantastic, by Curtis D. Carbonell

Clare Wall

Curtis D. Carbonell. *Dread Trident: Tabletop Role-Playing Games and the Modern Fantastic*. Liverpool UP, 2019. Liverpool Science Fiction Texts and Studies. Hardback. 256 pgs. ISBN 9781789620573. $120.00.

Dread Trident: Tabletop Role-Playing Games and the Modern Fantastic contributes to a growing body of interest in game studies and adds to Liverpool's UP's substantial series on science fiction and fantasy criticism by including a work exploring tabletop role-playing games (TRPGs). Several recent works in game studies have offered examinations of role-playing games including José P. Zagal's and Sebastian Deterding's edited collection, *Role-Playing Game Studies Transmedia Foundations* (2018), and Jon Peterson's *The Elusive Shift: how Role-Playing Games Forged their Identity* (2020). *Dread Trident* distinguishes itself in its specific focus on TRPGS (as opposed to digital games) and its exploration of them through the literary and cultural aspects they draw on from science fiction and fantasy literature in their realized worlds, adding critical exploration to a range of gametexts and their universes. Carbonell's focus on written gametexts as archives of popular culture makes a significant contribution to this still underrepresented area of academic study, especially in its examination of them through the lenses of the modern fantastic and trans/posthumanism to draw academic attention to the spaces for creative world/character building and game-play experience through the gametexts and modes of embodied play.

Carbonell examines six popular TRPGs through literary and cultural studies approaches to their hybrid modes of gameplay that engage both digital and analogue elements. A central aim of *Dread Trident* is to explore how our understanding of the modern fantastic is expanded through theorizing gametexts as foundational mechanisms that give rise to realized worlds through their settings, forms of gameplay, and mechanics. Carbonell concentrates his analysis on analogue gametexts and their combinations of draconic (fantastic) and post/transhuman (science fictional) genre tropes to argue that they provide a means of mediating the technologized existence of modern reality through the embodied gameplay. Carbonell weaves this hybridity into his analysis by positing a "draconic-posthuman figure" that he argues is essential to contextualize the modern fantastic (18). By engaging with posthumanist modes of thought, Carbonell suggests that these

realized fantastic worlds are built through complex hybrid combinations of digital and analogue tools, enacting, a "process of posthumanization" that directs attention to the "spaces in which subjects emerge" (3). *Dread Trident's* extensive study of analogue games makes a compelling argument for the significance of gametexts and their tools for putting the modern fantastic into context with our contemporary, highly technologized ways of being in the world by creating complex spaces where these fantastic and posthuman subjectivities can develop and exist.

Dread Trident is structured in the form of case-studies where each chapter focuses on one modern game system or gametext, placing these gametexts/series alongside works of fiction and broader genre and pulp movements in modern fantasy, science fiction, and horror in order to contextualize the draconic and posthuman elements that emerge through engaged play in the game-worlds. Carbonell examines several well-known TRPG games/game series spanning fantasy, science fiction, weird, science fantasy, and horror genres including *Eclipse Phase* (2009), *Dungeons & Dragons* (1974-present), *World of Darkness* (1991-2006), *Call of Cthulhu* (1981-2014), *Warhammer 40000* (1987-Present), and *Numenera* (2013) to ask, "what do TRPG gametexts and tools reveal in their clarification of the modern fantastic?" (51). For Carbonell, the answer is that these games offer a space where the self might be fashioned through the spaces created by their embodied gameplay and their combinations of analogue and digital game tools.

Those approaching *Dread Trident* from the perspective of genre theory may take issue with Carbonell's elision of fantasy and science fiction into opposite poles of a shared umbrella of the modern fantastic—a fact that he acknowledges. However, Carbonell's use of gametext archives in *Dread Trident* enables him to observe the generic shifts in the fantastic occurring in games through many editions and settings over time, including recognizing the way that both draconic and posthuman elements manifest across games occupying different genre categories. An example of this is in his chapter "Worlds of Darkness" where he traces the use of reimagined Gothic tropes from the original *World of Darkness* (WoD) game settings of the 1990s, *Vampire: The Masquerade* (1991) and *Werewolf: The Apocalypse* (1992), to the Weird tropes of the more recent edition of WoD, *Chronicles of Darkness* (2015), which focuses game exploration on uncovering truths about the hidden and indescribable God-Machine entity. Carbonell contends that this movement offers an example of the Gothic transitioning into cosmic horror and supports his argument for increased attention to TRPG texts by offering a means of examining them for their reflection of changing representations of tropes and fantasy/horror/science fiction features through their archive of gametext editions.

Carbonell's case studies demonstrate a great depth of knowledge of the gametexts and the archives of tools, manuals, content, and fan contributions that have become parts of these fantasy, horror, science fiction, and weird TRPG worlds. His critical examination of the multiple elements of the gametexts in their structure, imagined realities, mechanics, and engagement of players makes a convincing case for them as valid objects of academic attention, especially in their interconnections and contributions to literary and popular culture. A few of *Dread Trident's* chapters also include discussions of literary works including Bruce Sterling's Schismatrix stories,

China Miéville's Bas-Lag trilogy, and H.P. Lovecraft's fiction. Carbonell dedicates an entire chapter to examining the legacy of H.P. Lovecraft in the *Call of Cthulhu* TRPG game series in terms of both the Mythos crossing from a literary world into a gametext and Lovecraft's materialism and impulse to categorize in rich description—an impulse which Carbonell argues is also reflected in early TRPGs. While these chapters that combine analyses of gametexts with works of science fiction and fantasy literature help establish the connections and differences between the approaches to and realization of worlds in the literary fantastic and TRPG gametexts, they are successful to varying degrees. *Dread Trident*'s chapter on *Eclipse Phase* balances a pairing of it with Bruce Sterling's Schismatrix stories to facilitate further understanding of the latter's genre-blurring of the draconic/fantasy aspects with those of the posthuman through Sterling's posthuman embodiments. This blending results in the advanced technology in the game operating "in the same manner as the marvelous in fantasy roleplaying games" (71), thus creating a space for the emergence of imagined post/transhuman subjectivities under the myth of living in a singularity future. However, Carbonell's chapter examining *Numenera* alongside works by China Miéville, Jorge Luis Borges, Gary Wolfe, Thomas Ligotti, and HBO's first season of *True Detective* lacks the same coherency in its focus. The chapter offers insightful ideas about each of these works and their rich and complicated settings' relationships to the fantastic—especially the evolution of the weird and new weird—but so much is packed into the chapter that it lacks the clarity and cohesion of other chapter in the monograph and would have benefitted from greater critical attention to *Numenera* itself.

One of the most effective chapters in Dread Trident is Carbonell's chapter on *Dungeons & Dragons*' multiverse, which focuses its attention on the large archive of *Dungeons & Dragons* (D&D) gametext editions and settings as well as how that multiverse of shared world expands through fan-created materials and the inclusion of digital media and game tools. This chapter also demonstrates Carbonell's extensive knowledge of the game's archival history as he traces its evolution from its earliest editions into an assemblage multiverse where the current 5th edition "encourages new forms of entertainment beyond those found in the sourcebooks" (107). Further discussions of multiple media forms in the subsequent chapter on the *World of Darkness* series discussing the success of *Vampire: The Masquerade* and its spin-off video game, television show, graphic novels, collectible cards, and fan-created content help highlight the significant—and often overlooked—influence that TRPGs are having on the fantastic across diverse types of media and in shaping fan communities. Carbonell's recognition of these areas of cross-pollination between TRPGs and other media opens a space for further examinations on the flow of creative content across fan, popular culture, and creator communities in game studies, as well as expanded work on the effects of hybrid tools on TRPG styles of play, experience, and world creation. The presentation of the interconnections of science fiction and fantasy as two poles of the modern fantastic and the genre blurring that occurs within many of these TRPG gametexts and their realized spaces also speaks to the benefits of including role-playing games in academic studies of the fantastic, something that will hopefully increase in prevalence as the diversity and influence of these TRPG games continues to expand.

Overall, *Dread Trident* offers a theoretically rigorous and informative exploration of its focal gametexts and the use of game archives to critically explore how the modern fantastic as a genre evolves in them over time. Carbonell's approach to theorizing these gametexts as using digital and analogue tools to generate realized worlds which "encourage creativity and agency for the broadest number of persons, as well as the expansion of these fantasy spaces across a variety of platforms" (29) is innovative and compelling.

Dread Trident is best suited to more advanced levels of study and those working specifically in genre studies, popular culture, and game studies due to the complexity of the literary and cultural theories involved in approaching the different case studies including theories of genre, trans- and posthumanism, and embodiment. The arguments regarding embodied space in these realized worlds and the combinations of posthuman with draconic tropes in these games also makes it of interest to those working in posthuman studies. While *Dread Trident* would have benefitted from more attention to laying out the direction and reasoning behind each chapter to better connect its many arguments, it does make an effective case for TRPGs as objects of academic study within SF/F studies, especially in Carbonell's applications of genre and posthuman theory to tabletop role-playing gametexts and tools and the imaginary spaces they create. Carbonell's monograph offers those working in game studies an informative scholarly examination of several iconic TRPGs, and it will hopefully be joined by many future works drawing academic attention to the growing diversity, depth of content, and creative spaces emerging from the TRPG community.

Clare Wall is a Toronto-based educator and independent scholar. She holds a PhD from York University in English Literature. Her research interests include contemporary posthuman climate fiction, nonhuman agencies, and ecologies of the future. Her academic writing appears in *The Canadian Fantastic in Focus* (2014) and the forthcoming anthology *Interrogating the Boundaries of the Nonhuman: Literature, Climate Change, and Environmental Crises* (2022). Clare's creative contributions appear in the cyberpunk role-playing game expansion *The Veil: Cascade* (2018).
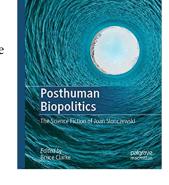
Posthuman Biopolitics: The Science Fiction of Joan Slonczewski, edited by Bruce Clarke

Bruce Lindsley Rockwood

Bruce Clarke, editor. *Posthuman Biopolitics: The Science Fiction of Joan Slonczewski*. Palgrave, 2020. Palgrave Studies in Science and Popular Culture. Hardcover. xiii+187 pg. $71.97. ISBN 9783030364854. Ebook ISBN 9783030364861.

The Preface to this collection of essays on the work and significance of the novels and other texts by Joan Slonczewski nicely sums up its purpose as addressing the "sustained output of major science fiction by a working scientist" that is "a fairly rare phenomenon" (v). The novels under discussion include the foundational *A Door into Ocean* (1986), its three successor novels in the same universe—*Daughter of Elysium* (1993), *The Children Star* (1998), and *Brain Plague* (2000)—and *The Highest Frontier* (2011). There is also discussion of Slonczewski's textbook *Microbiology: An Evolving Science*, co-authored with John W. Foster and Erik R. Zinzer, now in its fifth edition (Norton 2020), her pedagogy as a Professor of Biology integrating sf into her teaching, and her blog https://ultraphyte.com/. Clarke says that the purpose of the volume is to "ratify and consolidate the professional literature on Slonczewski's creative accomplishment and to suggest further lines of engagement" while noting that "our need for the reflective ethical practice" of her work has "never been greater" (vi).

The collection of essays, some previously published, begins with a "virtual group conversation" (1) between Slonczewski and the contributors to the text about the themes that inform her work, such as her interest in microbes and the possibility of an arsenic based ecosystem which she portrays with the planet Prokaryon in *The Children Star*. Stating "My entire writing career has focused on the question, 'What does it mean to be human?'" (7), Slonczewski wants "to expand our traditional view of 'human' to include simians (gorilla hybrids), sentients (human-like machines), and intelligent microbes" (8). Her interests include "fact denialism" as portrayed by the Centrist Party in *The Highest Frontier*, molecular biology, religion, tolerance, the invention of creationism by 20th century Christian revivalists, symbiosis and complexity, and nonviolence.

The conversation sets the stage for seven essays that explore these themes in her work in detail: "Posthuman Narration in the Elysium Cycle," by Bruce Clarke; "*A Door into Ocean* as a Model for Feminist Science," by Christy Tidwell; "'Then Came Pantropy': Grotesque Bodies, Multispecies Flourishing, and Human-Animal Relationships in *A Door into Ocean*," by Chris Pak; "Bodies That

Remember: History and Age in *The Children Star* and *Brain Plague*," by Derek J. Thiess; "Microbial Life and Posthuman Ethics from *The Children Star* to *The Highest Frontier*," by Sherryl Vint; "The Future at Stake: Modes of Speculation in *The Highest Frontier* and *Microbiology: An Evolving Science*," by Colin Milburn; and "Wisdom is an Odd Number: Community and the Anthropocene in *The Highest Frontier*" by Alexa T. Dodd.

Collectively, these essays provide a comprehensive overview of the plots, characters, ideas and conflicts presented in Slonczewski's deeply thought-through fictional universe, spread out in time and space as reflected in the first four of these novels. Implicit back stories unfold and provide lessons for the role of empathy and sharing as the question of what is human or posthuman are explored in each volume. Clarke points out in his comprehensive overview that the Elysium cycle is enormous: 4 books, 1600 pages of text, covering over 1000 years, and exploring a variety of species, some that live a normal human life span, some practically immortal, some with silicone circuits that think in microseconds, and microbes whose lives are over in hours or weeks. The diversity of size and time scale permits Slonczewski to explore "social organization, political praxis and personal autonomy in a posthuman world" (18). *A Door into Ocean* explores the conflict between the patriarchal planet Valedon and the "sharers" of the Moon Shora, who possess "life shaping" techniques the Patriarch of Torr wants (21-22). Clarke argues that *Door* is a "deep critique of modern humanity" (23): "Composed in the final years of the Cold War amidst the nuclear brinkmanship of the Reagan era [it] [. . .] brilliantly transposes the threat of human self-destruction from the nuclear to the genetic arena. An all-female society is invisibly armed with weapons 'too deadly to be used' other than as planetary applications of their preserved powers over the forms of life" (26).

Daughter of Elysium, the next novel in the Elysium cycle, tells of the fall of Torr (which turns out to be Earth) and the emergence of a planetary community called the Free Fold. On Shora mechanical servos are "cleansed" on "suspicion of sentience," but one servo is given refuge on a Sharer raft under a Sharer treaty with the long-lived Elysians who have come to live on Shora, paving the way for recognition of machine intelligence as sentient (31-35). Clarke concludes with a summary of the first contact discovery of intelligent microbes and their role in preventing the terraforming of the arsenic based planet Prokaryon in *The Children Star*, and the conflict over competing communities of microbes that lead to human fear of being controlled by them in *Brain Plague*.

Each of the succeeding essays grapples with Slonczewski's texts in distinct ways, adding to the complexity and insights found in her work. Tidwell focuses on the relative lack of women among STEM students, faculty and scientists, and the role of Slonczewski's novels in providing a corrective to this situation. Tidwell proposes that three competing approaches to feminist views of science are reflected in SF of the 1970s and 1980s: "rejecting science, attempting to control it, and embracing it" (49). Examples of the first kind of writers she cites include Sally Miller Gearhart, Dorothy Bryant, and Judy Grahn. Examples of the second kind of feminist SF, exploring how women can do science differently or even better than men, include Joanna Russ's *The Female Man*

(1975) and Sherri S. Tepper's *The Gate to Women's Country* (1988). Tidwell's "third significant approach" to feminist science accepts science but rejects it as male "without simply reversing the terms of an unequal power structure" (51). Examples she cites include Kate Wilhelm's *The Clewiston Test* (1976), Anne McCaffrey's *Dinosaur Planet* (1978), Janet Kagan's *Mirabile* (1991), and Mary Robinette Kowal's *The Calculating Stars* (2018).

Tidwell argues that there are problems with each of these often overlapping approaches, and that Slonczewski's *A Door into Ocean* "neither rejects science [. . .] nor ignores feminist critiques of science. The novel illustrates the possibility of a feminist science that is not built on femaleness or femininity, does not simply invert the power structure or leave the structures of science unchanged" (52). Instead, it shows a "realistic feminist science" that acknowledges women's past and present contributions, "challenges dichotomies and hierarchies," and makes explicit "the political and ethical ramifications of its choices" (52). Tidwell argues that the narrative illustrates scientific principles but with an "emphasis on the organic" that "recognizes the importance of the natural world and places the scientist within that world rather than above or outside it" (56). One goal of "feminist intervention in the sciences [. . .] must involve critique of the narratives and metaphors we already rely upon. [. . .] The Sharers' use of metaphor illustrates this kind of responsibility" (60).

Pak argues that Slonczewski uses pantropy to "question the values and assumptions that underlie the pursuit of terraforming. [. . .] The grotesque imagery [. . .] is fundamental to the text's challenge to colonialist domination embodied in industrial approaches to terraforming. The pantropic subjects and ecology of the planet Shora offer an alternative conception of habitation centered on responsiveness to other lives" (65-66). Through a close textual reading of *A Door into Ocean*, Pak "explores what it means to be an amborg subject made up of individuals whose relationships are predicated on both response and respect" (81).

Thiess focuses on *The Children Star* and *Brain Plague* to examine issues in the meaning of history and bodily aging, comparing a near immortal Elysian who wants to terraform Prokaryon with both the life shaped children who have relatively normal human life spans that are brought to colonize the planet, and the short-lived microbial life forms that already inhabit the planet. Thiess argues that in Slonczewski's "ecofeminist Elysium novels, matters of embodiment highlight the displacements of the history that is to be rewritten by the powerful. Moreover, in paying special attention to bodies for which a range of ages is important, this novel [. . .] can be read as drawing attention to the shortcomings of cultural theorizations of embodiment that exclude age in discussions of intersectional gender, race, sex, and orientation" (86). The Elysium Cycle "presents a biological narrative in which naturally aging bodies [. . .] call attention to the biological limitations of the human" (87).

Vint notes that "Rethinking our species beyond the limiting frameworks of the human and into the expanse of the posthuman has become a central focus of scholarship in the humanities, much of it attentive to our entanglement with the lives of other species" (111). After reviewing the

literature of the posthuman in the works of Haraway, Wolfe, and Braidotti, she cites Anna Tsing's argument that becoming posthuman may be necessary for "collaborative survival" (112). This becomes her thesis in a close reading of *The Children Star*, *Brain Plague* and *The Highest Frontier*, which she argues offer "a compelling model of Tsing's ethics of collaborative survival" (113). She includes a section on "Microbial Political Life" that discusses the idea that the human body is a supra-individual because of the microbiome that lives within it, citing the work of Lynn Margulis, Hird and Landecker. This section on the research on horizontal gene transfer in microbial life provides a scientific foundation for the fictional microbial lives portrayed in *The Children Star* and *Brain Plague*, and the concept of the invading Ultraphytes in *The Highest Frontier* (114). Vint continues with a close reading of each text, concluding that "Slonczewski's fiction offers us a posthuman ethics whose transformations aspire far beyond the mere augmented bodies of her characters" (129).

Milburn examines the "self-reflexive" pedagogy sf provides through a reading of *The Highest Frontier* and Slonczewski's co-authored textbook, *Microbiology: An Evolving Science*. He notes that each "suggests that speculation is a double-edged sword, describing both the future-generating and future-confining forces of our world. But the virtue of sf is that it can teach us to see the difference and imagine better" (134). Slonczewski is quoted as suggesting that "My science fiction offers a way out—a way forward" (140), reminiscent of Frederik Pohl's remark to me that one of the purposes of sf is not to predict but to prevent the future. Milburn then does a stimulating deep dive into how Slonczewski uses sf to teach and motivate students, and to promote the practice of creative speculation in doing science. Slonczewski's "praxis: fiction, science, and ethics" is, he argues, essential for the "adventure of education [. . .]. With nothing less than the future at stake" (155). Milburn clearly believes this, reflected in his excellent and comprehensive notes and references.

Dodd pursues a thorough analysis of the role of community, wisdom, humility and a willingness to listen across difference through an insightful and close reading of *The Highest Frontier*. Politics, the meaning of the Anthropocene, religious conservatism, and fear of the invading ultraphyte are all explored in what is also a clever academic and political satire, the first in a projected new trilogy. Dodd provides a solid discussion of the origin, literature and implications of the term Anthropocene, and then examines the plot of the novel through sections on Community, Wisdom and Humility, and Mary the Ultraphyte, before coming to an assessment of Gaia and Human Responsibility: "Mary, as an ultraphyte, can serve as yet another example for humans. Humans, like ultra, have harmed the Earth. But if we can learn to adjust to our new role as the dominant species and become a wise community, maybe we can save the earth" (175). The essay concludes with an exploration of the possibility that there is another solution to human problems, out there in space.

Collectively, these essays provide a marvelous starting point for the continued exploration of the significant work of Joan Slonczewski, in sf, science, education, and as a moral spokesperson for our troubled times. Published in January 2020 just as the novel coronavirus has us all huddling in place, with the science and policy recommendations of public health criticized by ignorant

leaders in several countries, and the challenge of the Anthropocene doubling down on a myriad of challenges facing us all, survival of a human, or posthuman, community remains in doubt. The fiction of Joan Slonczewski addresses this in significant ways and merits continued academic study as well as incorporation into undergraduate and graduate courses. *Posthuman Biopolitics* is an excellent collection. It should be in every academic library, and one can only hope a less expensive paperback version will be available in the near future to kickstart further work.

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The Shape of Fantasy: Investigating the Structure of American Heroic Epic Fantasy, by Charul Palmer-Patel

James Gifford

Charul Palmer-Patel. *The Shape of Fantasy: Investigating the Structure of American Heroic Epic Fantasy.* Routledge, 2020. Routledge Research in American Literature and Culture. Hardcover. 188 pg. $140.00. ISBN 9780367189143.

Charul Palmer-Patel shows a nearly encyclopedic scope in her innovative study of the formal traits of American Epic Fantasy, ranging across primary texts rapidly and with fluency. This book will delight readers with a similar breadth of reading in mainstream bestselling fantasy fiction from the 1990s onward while potentially dizzying some outsiders, but she is consistently engaging. The capaciousness of her argument in relation to primary materials is commendable even if some readers may skim the case studies by sticking to the critical arguments. Palmer-Patel is also specific in her scope and purpose: using the mainstream bestsellers in American fantasy fiction across twenty years from 1990 to 2010 to identify the key structural traits of the Heroic Epic as a sub-genre. This sets her work both parallel and contrary to many of the dominant trends in critical work on fantasy. Palmer-Patel echoes (while critiquing) the structuralist tendencies of Farah Mendlesohn's focus on rhetorics, an approach echoing all the way back to E.M. Forster's argument against defining the genre, and also follows in its path with a focus on structure (not form) in order to define a sub-genre. The focus on the epic and the heroic paired with a structuralist method places Palmer-Patel in line with the preponderance of major critical work from Rosemary Jackson and Tzvetan Todorov to Brian Attebery and C.N. Manlove while at the same time forcing her to break with them because "studies of Fantasy fiction have become dated" (13) and seem to largely end historically where her study begins. This leads to a critique via Paul Kincaid of Mendlesohn because "her choice of texts may lead to her criticism of the form" (12) and kindred implicit revisions of others. This is, in itself, enough critical complexity for one project, but she has a twinned thesis. This second thesis is continually present yet not with the same direct concision as her primary aim: the centrality of prophecy and determinism to the Heroic Epic sub-genre she identifies, which suggests an interest less focused on "form" itself than it is in "form" as a sublimation of "ideology."

This second thesis emerges immediately after the Introduction and shapes all of the subsequent chapters. She begins her project with Lois McMaster Bujold's *The Curse of Chalion*

(2001) based on "prophecy" and the "destined hero" (19), thereby broaching the contradictions of determinism and free will in fantasy's tropes. This, in effect, is the "shape" of American heroic epic fantasy. It remains constant across the book through to the final chapter on David Eddings, in which she contrasts her attention to the shape of free will and fate against Tzvetan Todorov's more dialectical focus on history in a straight-forward conflict followed by the temporary stability of a new synthesis (159). In the first instance, the fine distinction between fate and free will comes via Manlove and Mendlesohn, with Palmer-Patel's innovation being a dispute against her precursors who contend that "The hero does not have free will in a narrative driven by prophecy" (Mendlesohn 42; quoted in Palmer-Patel 19). This leads her to argue prophetic foreknowledge is not determinism so much as it is a matter of interpretation, but not the dodge that not knowing how to interpret determinism dissolves its conflict with free will. While Palmer-Patel then moves into archetypal criticism, mainly based on Frye and Campbell, she returns again and again to prophecy and free will without engaging with its long theological basis. There are, however, some thorny questions here. The argument uses Mendlesohn's and Richard Mathews's (contradictory) contentions that free will sits at the heart of *The Lord of the Rings* (1954-1955), although reference to the closing gestures to prophecy in *The Hobbit* (1937) would be helpful. In Tolkien, however, this conflict between fate and free will is bridged through Christian theology's long conversation about Providence, which leaves space for both. Palmer-Patel's most striking example in the chapter is not from Bujold, however, but comes from Terry Goodkind's *Wizard's First Rule* (1994), in which the heroes fulfill destiny only by rejecting it. Of course, this does not actually undermine the problem since choosing what is destined (or choosing what is not) does not alter determinism. What is fascinating, though, is Goodkind's fixation on a libertarian/Randian concept of freedom shaping his work's response to the theme of predestination and prophecy.

Once this twinned focus is established in the first chapter, Palmer-Patel proceeds to matters of time in Mercedes Lackey's *The Fairy Godmother* (2004). Here, the defining twist for fate and free will comes not through the subversion of *interpretation* as the problem surrounding fate but rather *time itself*. To Palmer-Patel, the paradox between fate and free will is structural, and that structure "captures and rearticulates current theories of time" (35). Some of this, with gestures to quantum mechanics and Stephen Hawking (35–38) or a light-cone charting of Campbell's the Hero's Path (40), may tread close to old memories of the Sokal affair, but the metafictional analysis this opens for Lackey and Robert Jordan in the third chapter is very productive. At the same time, as the work on Jordan turns to Brian Sanderson (the subject of Chapter 8) twinned again with the problem of interpretation of fate, new questions emerge. She focuses on how a protagonist's interpretation of fate mirrors our interpretation of plot and structure, both as a form of prefiguration, akin to the seeming oddity of working hard to prevent the impossible and bring about the inevitable. That oddity reveals the essentially ideological nature of fate in these instances, unveiling not the inescapability of Providence so much as our social systems of belief. This approach leads her to argue "the hero is confronted with a choice or an alternate path which provokes epistemological questions where the hero comprehends and then accepts or rejects their own identity" (61). The draw here is toward a fantasist not included in the study but whose literary

and philosophical work is deeply concerned with subjectivity, consciousness, and determinism: R. Scott Bakker, who also fits Palmer-Patel's timeframe but is Canadian not American (despite studying in the USA and publishing his novels there first).

With these critical successes in the study, there are also components likely to garner critique. Palmer-Patel's reliance on archetypal criticism in her excavation of the "shape" of fantasy recalls many hesitations, from poststructuralist challenges to these kinds of grand narratives to the self-conscious use of Campbell's works by authors after the famous promotion of it by George Lucas, who hosted Bill Moyers' interview with Campbell on Skywalker Ranch (later becoming a bestseller published as *The Power of Myth* just two years before the start of Palmer-Patel's period of study). We know that many of the authors in Palmer-Patel's study are or were conversant with Campbell's work and archetypal criticism generally, perhaps most especially Campbell's early book *The Hero With a Thousand Faces* (1949) that would prefigure his four volume magnum opus, *The Masks of God* (1968). Some of Palmer-Patel's authors acknowledge this in interviews, and others like Eddings make it more overt in their manuscripts. However, some readers will be old enough to remember (or had professors old enough to be committed to archetypal criticism to know) why archetypal criticism fell from academic favor in the same moment as it gained its greatest popular appeal. The mainstreaming of postcolonial and poststructuralist critical work in the 1990s prioritized attention to forms of difference that an archetypal method makes difficult by prioritizing forms of similarity. This means that some of the ways Palmer-Patel employs Frye and Campbell may jar particular groups of readers. While we have poststructuralist psychoanalytic theory, Palmer-Patel's contention that "Campbell's psychoanalytic approach suggests that acts that seem to be accidental are a result of suppressed desires" (2) may generate disagreement around "psychoanalysis" and the return of the repressed or sublimation. A Jamesonian understanding of psychoanalysis as the ideological manifestation of a bourgeois mode of production would also offer an alternate interpretation to her assertion that "this is not a result of suppressed desires, but instead an active declaration of free will" (24). Such a declaration could, especially in this historical moment, be aptly understood as a surrender to the coercive ideological forms of neoliberalism and its conflation of choice with freedom. These same rifts emerge again when Campbell returns in relation to messianism and David Farland (81) or the fact of repetition as the monomyth's implicit messianic mode (164).

The closing chapter on Eddings offers an effective culmination of the project, both in terms of Palmer-Patel's analysis based on the refinements each of the preceding chapters made possible, as well as Eddings's own self-conscious play with choice, determinism, and dialectical history across *The Mallorean* (1987-1991) series (the subject here) and its precursor *The Belgariad* (1982-1984). This is especially effective given Eddings's relative exclusion from fantasy criticism. As Palmer-Patel notes, the characters realize and discuss the problems of repetition, free will, and determinism. That Eddings would be the subject of the conclusion to the study is not surprising given the extent to which his works consider repetition, archetypes, prefiguration, and choice as their central themes (and as anticipated in his teaching notes held in his archives at Reed College –

these are prevalent themes in his fiction precisely because they were central concerns in his critical study of literature as a professor). In a sense, Palmer-Patel's critical summation sits in parallel with Eddings's, with both pointing to time, open form, and an ideological nostalgia for the Edenic in the "nostos" of return in Eddings's epilogue to *The Seeress of Kell* (1991): "And so, my children, the time has come to close / the book. There will be other days and other stories, / but this tale is finished" (171; quoting Eddings 374), which Palmer-Patel interprets as the "novum" enacted in repetition by a new cycle implied in "other days and other stories" (171). What strikes one here is Eddings making overt the contrition and repetition compulsion (back to psychoanalysis) in his series: he and his wife Leigh lost custody of their adopted son and daughter then spent a year in jail after being convicted of physical abuse, for which the books seem some ongoing impossible attempt at recuperation, healing, or reconciliation. This is not merely an opportunistic observation. The "novum" with which Palmer-Patel closes inevitably reminds the reader of Darko Suvin's work, which reads fantasy very differently and considers a very different sense of history, determinism, and dialectics. The newness of exploring the traumatic past through a fresh repetition and a new cycle may be an expression of free will (conjuring up the willful "fort/da" game of little Hans in Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*), but it is also the traumatic repetition compulsion crushing the free choice of the self, for which the "unexpectedly new" is also the failure to recuperate the repeated past and to move forward.

A number of minor infelicities are worth noting, ranging from "James [sic] Campbell" (22), missing adverbial forms and past tenses (161), misspelled character names (165), and some repetitions in the Index (185). These are minor slips inevitable in the nature of the production of Routledge's series. Palmer-Patel excels in her fluid ease with the primary texts of her study and her demand that fantasy criticism do more and extend its scope to a metacritical frame. Anyone at work on contemporary fantasy should respond to her challenges in *The Shape of Fantasy*. Her call for an extension of the critical "canon" on fantasy in order to respond to work of the past twenty-five years is entirely convincing. It can only be imagined what a computational "distant reading" of the sub-genre would reveal about its traits, which might both support and surprise Palmer-Patel's work. Regardless of the supports or surprises it may bring, any future work on heroic epic fantasy as genre will need to contend with this book.

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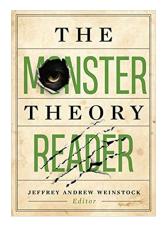
The Monster Theory Reader, by Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock

Lars Schmeink

Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock, ed. *The Monster Theory Reader.* U of Minnesota P, 2020. Paperback, 600 pg. $35.00. ISBN 9781517905255.

If you subscribe to the theory that Mary Shelley is a key figure in the genesis of science fiction, then it is only a small step to claim that the figure of the monster is as central to science fiction as it is to horror. In fact, Vivian Sobchack has commented on monsters as the primary moment of "congruence between the SF and the horror film" at which it is hard to "make abrupt distinctions between the two genres" (30). Monsters can be found in science fiction; because SF pushes the limits of what it means to be human, it breaks down categories of human/alien or human/machine. And the monster, as a cultural marker, "is the harbinger of category crisis" (40), as Jeffrey Jerome Cohen points out in his "Monster Culture (Seven Theses)," the flagpole text of *The Monster Theory Reader* and the fulcrum of monster theory as an academic discipline. Editor Jeffrey Weinstock has chosen to place Cohen's text before and outside the main structure of 23 essential essays that form monster theory, because it is the one text that "named a field" (1) and thus brought it into being. As Weinstock explains, monster theory might have been present in many different fields and approaches to a variety of texts, but it wasn't until Cohen's 1996 intervention that the field was named.

In his introduction, Weinstock then goes on to give a genealogy of the field, moving through both history and disciplines to explain the variant approaches that congealed around Cohen's terminology: teratology, mythology, and psychology (4). Supported by medieval and classical texts, Weinstock explores both scientific and supernatural explanations for how monsters come to be, moving from "supernatural theories" to "hybridization, maternal impression, accident and what we today would call genetics" (5). In his excursion into mythology a similar duality of both scientific rationale and superstition informs early mythological theories about monsters, from "monstrous races" (14) as culturally misunderstood by early European explorers to "mythical creatures" (17) and "cryptids" (20) falling somewhere between zoology, showmanship, and ignorance. In the last part of his introduction, Weinstock then moves towards psychology and its focus on human behavior and our contemporary understanding of monstrosity as a cultural and political category that can be used and abused for specific purposes.

It is important to note that *The Monster Theory Reader* is not a handbook on monsters themselves—for that I would recommend Weinstock's other editorial work *The Ashgate Encyclopedia of Literary and Cinematic Monsters* (2014)—but an exploration of what cultural impact monsters have on us and how the liminal position they inhabit maps onto different social categories or identities. Theory is the key term here, and Weinstock makes clear in his structure that the 23 previously published essays all comment on specific themes. Under the heading of "The Monster Theory Toolbox," six essays introduce the basic building blocks of engaging with monster theory. Here, you can find the by far oldest entry in Sigmund Freud's discussion of "The Uncanny" from 1919. Other well-known essays include Julia Kristeva's "Approaching Abjection," and the film theoretical explorations of monstrosity by Robin Wood and Noel Carroll. For science fiction scholars most intriguing in this part is definitely Masahiro Mori's rarely found critique of near-human replications of the human (for example in digital renderings of humans) in "The Uncanny Valley." The text is immensely important to understandings of artificial humans and fears of our becoming-machine.

The six essays that follow under the heading of "Monsterizing Difference" each address monstrosity as a tool to marginalize and separate specific groups of people. Accordingly, each chapter addresses the relation between monstrosity and an othered group, separated by religion, sexuality, or race. In terms of science-fictionality, I want to emphasize the essay by Annalee Newitz that addresses race issues in contemporary zombie fictions, which is one of the current discussions of how to address this particular monster: "The Undead: A Haunted Whiteness." For more on this nexus, an earlier and very similar work to this one in the University of Minnesota Press' catalogue comes to mind: Sarah Juliet Lauro's *Zombie Theory: A Reader* (2017).

The third part of the reader then gives room to seven essays on "Monsters and Culture," broadening the scope of cultural commentary by including approaches to psychology, religion, terrorism, migration and so forth. Each of these is more concise in topic than the essays in the parts before, and they help to focus on the cultural specificity of monsters, on how they function for unique purposes. Lastly, the reader closes with four essays that move beyond the general understanding of monstrosity and "show us how monsters can be figures not just of fear but of hope" (Weinstock 30). In this last part, then, the science fiction scholar can find explorations of how monsters come to embody posthuman potential and help us embrace otherness—highlighted in essays by Donna Haraway ("The Promises of Monsters") and by Patricia MacCormack ("Posthuman Teratology").

In all, the essays collected here for a very reasonable price are perfect for use in college classrooms of both horror and science fiction scholars. Bringing them together in such a well-organized manner and rounding them out with an insightful introduction is an important step to moving the subfield of monster theory into the high cultural critical theory curriculum and should be applauded.

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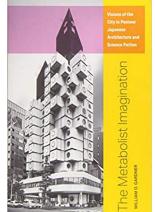
The Metabolist Imagination: Visions of the City in Postwar Japanese Architecture and Science Fiction, by William O. Gardner

Baryon Tensor Posadas

William O. Gardner. *The Metabolist Imagination: Visions of the City in Postwar Japanese Architecture and Science Fiction.* University of Minnesota Press, 2020. Paperback. 224 pg. $24.99. ISBN 978-1517906245.

An argument could be made that the idea of Japan holds an outsized position within the formation of the megatext that constitutes the science-fictional imagination. This goes back to the beginnings of the genre, with Japan's rise as an imperial power at the turn of the twentieth century prompting the popularization of yellow peril and future war narratives that served as one of the precursor genres to science fiction, which later sees a revival in the techno-orientalisms of cyberpunk in the 1980s as Japan came to be perceived as an economic rival to the United States. Yet despite this prominence, only a handful of scholarly monographs on Japanese science fiction in the English language—Takayuki Tatsumi's *Full Metal Apache* (2006), Steven T. Brown's *Tokyo Cyberpunk* (2010), Motoko Tanaka's *Apocalypse in Contemporary Japanese Science Fiction* (2014), to name a few—have been published to date.

William O. Gardner's *The Metabolist Imagination* is a very welcome and much needed addition to this short list, not only providing sustained discussions of historically noteworthy works of Japanese science fiction that have not seen much attention in English language scholarship, but, more importantly, also offering a multilayered scaffolding for articulating the historical and critical significance of these texts. At the center of Gardner's discussions is the project of reconstructing the intertextual linkages between avant-garde architecture and the genre of science fiction. Taking the example of the cross-pollination of ideas between the Metabolist movement in postwar Japanese architecture and the postwar development of Japanese science fiction as his point of departure, *The Metabolist Imagination* presents a compelling case that their respective engagements with questions of futurity—first under the historical condition of postwar reconstruction in the aftermath of the Second World War, then followed by the subsequent neoliberal turn—call attention to how both of these sites of imaginative work perform their own respective practices of cognitive estrangement.

Gardner explains that a central tenet of the Metabolist group of young architects—which includes figures who have since become well known in their own right, such as Isozaki Arata, Tange Kenzō, Kurokawa Kishō, and others—was a project of an open utopianism in urban design. As articulated in their manifesto *Metabolism 1960: Proposals for New Urbanism*, they believed that architecture is better understood not as the design of fixed permanent structures, but as a process that remains flexible to future growth and potential transformation. Drawing inspiration from both the Japanese historical legacy wherein cities were frequently destroyed and rebuilt in the aftermath of fires and earthquakes and from the modular designs emerging out of the developments in space exploration, avant-garde architects in Japan imagined such projects as massive megastructures that enclosed whole cities akin to space habitats, or buildings constructed out of capsules like cellular structures that could be organically expanded or reconfigured as needed.

In Gardner's argument, it is this emphasis on a temporal dimension to architecture that serves as the basis for its interface with science fiction, writing that "the work of the Metabolist group of architects investigated here includes a significant narrative dimension" that invites reading them in conjunction with their contemporaries in science fiction (2). In other words, the works of the Metabolist architects did not simply parallel those of science fiction authors, but were in themselves cognitively estranging projects in dialogue with other writings conventionally classified as science fiction. For Gardner, this collaboration culminates in the 1970 Osaka World Expo, which featured—placed in the same space—the imagination of the future city expressed especially in the capsule architecture that was prominently featured throughout the various exhibits and the visions of the future by science fiction authors like Komatsu Sakyō and Tezuka Osamu (both of whom participated in the event). As Gardner notes, not only did the World Expo shape the trajectory of Japanese science fiction since as later cyberpunk narratives responded to the techno-utopian visions it presented, its media coverage outside of Japan arguably also prefigured the techno-orientalist image that would come to be ascribed to Japan in the 1980s. As such, an argument can be made that the 1970 Osaka World Expo also played a role in the subsequent development of Anglophone science fiction, in effect opening up a space to consider the stakes of Gardner's discussion beyond the confines of Japan.

Although *The Metabolist Imagination* does not quite fully explore these transnational ramifications, there is something to be said for its recognition of this possibility. In part, this is because even as the field of Science Fiction Studies can be criticized for its relative neglect of Japan shaped by its Eurocentric (if not even Anglocentric) historical legacy, on the flipside, the treatment of science fiction within the field of Japan Studies often exhibits a tendency towards what Hajime Nakatani has called a "Japanological neurosis," wherein something like "Japanese science fiction" is treated as a singular coherent entity and subjected primarily to a hermeneutics of national allegory (Nakatani 528). In the end, if there is one strength in particular to Gardner's discussion, it is precisely its deft avoidance of this trap that Nakatani identifies, opening new lines of intellectual inquiry. Indeed, in putting into active conversation the discourses of architecture and science

fiction, *The Metabolist Imagination* offers an effective demonstration of Istvan Csicsery-Ronay's contention that science fiction is not merely a "genre of aesthetic entertainment" but has become "a form of discourse that directly engages contemporary language and culture, and that has, in this moment, a generic interest in the intersections of technology, scientific theory, and social practice" (Csicsery-Ronay 4). In doing so, it provides a blueprint for articulating science fiction as something that is no mere object of cultural hermeneutics, but is itself a mode of critical practice of intellectual inquiry.

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Unstable Masks: Whiteness and American Superhero Comics, edited by Sean Guynes and Martin Lund
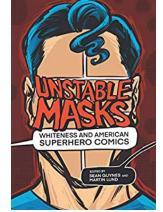
Kristin Noone

Guynes, Sean and Martin Lund, eds. *Unstable Masks: Whiteness and American Superhero Comics*. Ohio State UP, 2020. New Suns: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Speculative. Paperback. 274 pg. $29.95. ISBN 9780814255636. PDF ISBN 9780814277508.

Unstable Masks: Whiteness and American Superhero Comics, edited by Sean Guynes and Martin Lund, sets out to discuss the interstitial relationship between whiteness, American culture, and comic book superheroes, considering the complex intersections of identity, representation, narrative, production and consumption, and historical and cultural contexts for the production of American superhero comics. In this powerful and timely collection of scholarship, contributors from a variety of backgrounds explore the production, audience, and reception of superhero comic books as a means to engage with questions of what it means to be American and to be heroic, how deeply the superhero figure remains imbricated within the discourses of whiteness in the United States in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, and the great power and great responsibility of actively working to dismantle predominantly white cultural constructions of heroism.

Unstable Masks is divided into three sections, grouped by theme; each section focuses on a particular way of reading or historicizing the relationship of whiteness to the American superhero comics genre, and the sections build upon each other in a thoughtful and wide-ranging sequence. Frederick Luis Aldama's Foreword, "Unmasking Whiteness: Re-Spacing the Speculative in Superhero Comics," emphasizes the importance of speculative genres such as superhero narratives in shaking up complacent spaces and exploring questions of freedom and shared experiences, providing an overall context for the discussion to come; in their Introduction, "Not to Interpret, but to Abolish: Whiteness Studies and American Superhero Comics," Sean Guynes and Martin Lund bring together comics scholarship, critical race studies and whiteness studies, the election of American President Donald Trump and the question of American "greatness," and the Black Lives Matter movement to vividly demonstrate the critical importance of this discussion at this present cultural moment. Guynes and Lund invoke Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* to explore masks as an ongoing metaphor (reflected in the title *Unstable Masks*): the identity nonwhite people

must successfully perform in a white-dominated society becomes connected to the masks and performative identities of the superhero, examples of which will be examined in the following chapters.

The first section, "Outlining Superheroic Whiteness," contains essays that work together to think about whiteness as inherent to, and also problematic for, American superhero comics; the essays in this section explore comparisons and constructions of characters across time and storylines in order to establish an overall sense of what "whiteness" means in relation to comics. Osvaldo Oyola's essay "Marked for Failure: Whiteness, Innocence, and Power in Defining Captain America" performs a comparative reading of two versions of Captain America, Steve Rogers and Sam Wilson, to conclude that Sam is set up for failure in the role due to his inability to harness the symbolic whiteness of "Captain America," suggesting that Sam Wilson's story challenges readers to acknowledge the deep antiblackness inherent in American cultural systems, including the comics industry itself. In "The Whiteness of the Whale and the Darkness of the Dinosaur: The Africanist Presence in Superhero Comics from Black Lightning to Moon Girl," Eric Berlatsky and Sika Dagbovie-Mullins read the first *Black Lightning* series (1977–1978) alongside the more contemporary *Moon Girl* and *Devil Dinosaur* (2016–2017) to conclude that even in supposedly postracial characterizations, stereotypes of primitivism, hypersexuality, and criminality persist, which serve to define heroism by contrast, aligning the superhero with whiteness. Jeremy M. Carnes continues this discussion of the savage/civilized binary, and its role as a tactic of settler colonialism, in "'The Original Enchantment': Whiteness, Indigeneity, and Representational Logics in *The New Mutants*," and Olivia Hicks's contribution "Fearfully and Wonderfully Made: The Racial Politics of *Cloak and Dagger*" examines a specific example of the constructed nature of whiteness in the context of Reagan's America, demonstrating the ways in which the idealized white femininity of the character Dagger showcases the form of American whiteness that has historically profited from yet also disavowed black labor. Following this close historical reading with an expansion into crossovers and status-changing comics events, Shamika Ann Mitchell argues in "Worlds Collide: Whiteness, Integration, and Diversity in the DC/Milestone Crossover" that even in an event meant to highlight diversity, in which DC's heroes combine forces with the racially diverse superheroes of the Milestone universe, whiteness and white heroes remain centered and prioritized. Finally, José Alaniz concludes this section with "Whiteness and Superheroes in the Comix/Codices of Enrique Chagoya," reading the politicized art of Enrique Chagoya in terms of Gloria Anzaldúa's concept of "border consciousness," the space of ambivalence created by a clash of cultures; in Chagoya's art, Alaniz suggests, the repurposed superhero might function as a symbol of empowerment but also an implement for critique of both a dominant white culture and hypermasculinity.

The second section, "Reaching toward Whiteness," expands the discussion by delving into the instability and contingency of whiteness, noting the ongoing and precarious negotiations of who gets to be considered white in America; essays in this section investigate the ways in which comics frame whiteness in relation to other articulations of race and ethnicity. Esther De Dauw's "Seeing

White: Normalization and Domesticity in Vision's Cyborg Identity" focuses on the cyborg hero Vision, noting that the cyborg can perform white masculinity successfully, but the performance is always a construction, an active suppression of Otherness, that ultimately leads to failure and even potential villainy, which in turn suggests that only whiteness can achieve the truly moral lifestyle. In ""Beware the Fanatic!": Jewishness, Whiteness, and Civil Rights in *X-Men* (1963–1970)," Martin Lund carries this investigation of morality and whiteness into early *X-Men* comics, concluding that these stories do attempt to engage with civil rights issues, particularly in Lee and Kirby's awareness of the struggles of Jewish-American life, but follow a liberal assimilationist line rather than a radical one, fail to truly empathize with the oppressed, and ultimately read as a negotiation between different shades of whiteness. Similarly, Neil Shyminsky examines the storylines of "Decimation" (2006) and "Avengers vs. X-Men" (2012) to argue in "Mutation, Racialization, Decimation: The X-Men as White Men" that the X-Men remain privileged—predominantly white, wealthy or with access to wealthy mentorship, and physically attractive according to American cultural ideals—and remain indebted to a social order that privileges whiteness; if the X-Men or other mutants do attempt to reject the white American hegemony, Shyminksy observes, then they are necessarily figured as villains within the storyline. Finally, Sean Guynes, in "White Plasticity and Black Possibility in Darwyn Cooke's DC: *The New Frontier*," offers a detailed and eloquent reading of Cooke's work as a form of critical nostalgia that attempts to re-envision the past and think through questions of DC Comics's racial legacy, potentially opening up more possibilities for the black superhero, but simultaneously emphasizing the fundamental whiteness of existing superhero comics and characters.

The final section, "Whiteness by a Different Color," links discussions of apprehension, negotiation, and acceptance to one of the most well-known superhero tropes: the secret identity. Essays in this section examine the secret identity in terms of fluidity and invisibility, as connected to whiteness and the privileges that being white can afford. Yvonne Chireau's "White or Indian? Whiteness and Becoming the White Indian Comics Superhero" draws attention to the numerous white comics characters who become "White Indian" superheroes, arguing that these heroes reinforce white supremacy tropes by appropriating the Native American identity part of their transmutation into saviors. Continuing the discussion of cultural appropriation, Matthew Pustz examines the complicated legacy of white martial arts superheroes in "A True Son of K'un-Lun": The Awkward Racial Politics of White Martial Arts Superheroes in the 1970s," focusing on the characters of Iron Fist and Richard Dragon in the context of the 1970s explosion of interest in the martial arts in America to demonstrate the ways in which whiteness implicitly bestows flexibility, adaptability, hyper-competence, and true understanding, in contrast to a flattened and generic portrayal of Asian characters. Eric Sobel's "The Whitest There Is at What I Do: Japanese Identity and the Unmarked Hero in *Wolverine* (1982)" carries this examination into Wolverine's complex relationship with Japanese culture, observing that Chris Claremont and Frank Miller's Wolverine is shown to more successfully embody qualities of an *imagined* Japan than any Japanese characters; while the storyline attempts to portray Wolverine as simply a worthy man who takes on non–culturally specific qualities of virtue, regardless of race, he is nevertheless always a white

man in perfect health, morally and physically exceptional, making his connection to marginalized identities difficult to defend. Finally, in "The Dark Knight: Whiteness, Appropriation, Colonization, and Batman in the New 52 Era," Jeffrey A. Brown concludes that the New 52 Batman comics, in particular Grant Morrison's *Batman Incorporated*, offer a surface-level depiction of superhero diversity at a global level, but in fact perpetuate an ideology of white privilege through Bruce Wayne's appropriation of exotic skills and Batman's neocolonial approach to enlisting foreign heroes to serve as supporting characters in his personal vendetta, ending the section overall with a fitting critique of the way in which this narrative mirrors DC's—and by extension the American capitalist—corporate attitude toward these foreign heroes, simply abandoning them once they had served their purpose for the wealthy white American hero.

Noah Berlatsky, in the Afterword "Empowerment for Some, or Tentacle Sex for All," connects the films *Birth of a Nation* (1915) and *Black Panther* (2018) to Octavia Butler's Xenogenesis trilogy to offer a poignant overview of the ways in which "superness" (259), like whiteness, has always been dependent on a world in which some people are more equal than others, and to suggest that if whiteness can be decentered and detached from superpowered heroes, then perhaps empowerment will be possible for everyone. This ending note of hope is precisely why Unstable Masks is an important and powerful book: wide-ranging in terms of texts and time periods, but eloquently connected to the present cultural moment in America (and beyond), and profoundly significant for thinking through how we might reconceptualize the heroes we construct for our future.

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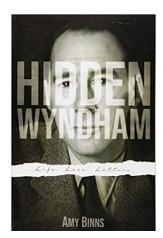
Hidden Wyndham: Life, Love, Letters, by Amy Binns

Dennis Wilson Wise

Binns, Amy. *Hidden Wyndham: Life, Love, Letters*. Grace Judson Press, 2019. Paperback. 276 pg. $14.95. ISBN 9780992756710.

At this point, it seems almost obligatory for anyone who mentions John Wyndham's life to begin by quoting his reputation as science fiction's "invisible man." Although not as mysterious as Elena Ferrante, nor as reclusive as J. D. Salinger and Thomas Pynchon, Wyndham nonetheless let personal reticence become a defining feature of his public identity. In fact, his best comparison is probably to C. S. Lewis. For most of Lewis's life, the Oxford fantasist cohabitated with a woman two decades his senior, the mother of a friend who died during the First World War, and neither friends nor his brother Warnie (with whom Lewis was quite close) ever knew the precise nature of their relationship. Considering Wyndham's deep-set disdain for religion, this comparison with Lewis would probably have irked him. It remains apt, though, and so his "hidden" life thus forms the main subject for Amy Binns's snappy new biography, *Hidden Wyndham*. For the most part, her research derives from the Wyndham Archive at the University of Liverpool. Among other documents and paraphernalia, this collection holds over 350 private letters between Wyndham and his long-term partner Grace Wilson. In addition, Binns puts her journalistic training to good use, especially when studying the earlier portions of Wyndham's life. For example, she supplements her biography with primary source material from newspapers and court cases; these documents detail the bitter, contentious, and distressingly public legal wrangle that embroiled Wyndham's self-destructive father George Harris against his (then) wife's upper-middle-class family of "new money" industrialists. To this traumatic and shameful scandal Binns attributes much of Wyndham's extreme personal reserve.

Overall, Binns's biography paints a compelling picture. As much as newspaper gossip about familial conflict may have affected the young Wyndham, she also chronicles his equally traumatic education in the British public schooling system. After her divorce, Wyndham's mother Gertrude spent her life living in hotels, and she consequently shunted her two sons—Jack and Vivian— through a series of boarding schools where pervasive bullying made their young lives almost unbearable. The only exception for Jack was Bedales, a "school for snowflakes" as Binns calls it (45), but still a desperately needed safe haven. While not terribly good at providing its students a quality education, Bedales created precisely the sort of nurturing, stable environment that

Gertrude's two children otherwise wholly lacked. This school would have a lasting influence on Wyndham. As Binns notes, the last name for the character Michael Beadley in *The Day of the Triffids* (1951) was created when Wyndham conflated the name "Bedales" with that of its visionary and highly progressive headmaster, J. H. Badley.

After her account of Bedales and a series of desultory and quickly abandoned careers, Binns then chronicles Wyndham's move into the Penn Club at London—basically, a "slightly more adult version of Bedales" (65). There, Wyndham retained just enough money from his mother's inheritance to drift along aimlessly as he tried, with mixed success, to break into the American pulp SF market. At the Penn Club in 1930, however, Wyndham also met Grace Wilson, a teacher and a major source of interest for Binns. The famous secrecy of Wyndham, says Binns, stems from more than just a scandalous family history—it also stems from the unusual nature of Wyndham and Grace's relationship. Before marrying in 1963, they'd already been secret lovers for over a quarter century. As a teacher, Grace was legally barred from marrying until 1938, but neither person much respected the institution of marriage anyway. Wyndham in particular believed marriage had "a crippling effect on women's personalities" (72), enforcing a dependency on men that was entirely anti-feminist. As proof, Binns points to Gordon Zellaby from *The Midwich Cuckoos* (1957), numerous short stories such as "Dumb Martian" (1952), but also to Wyndham's mother Gertrude. For most of her life, Gertrude rotated between male protectors—from father, to husband, to father again—without once accomplishing anything worthwhile with her privilege. In fact, although "Jack never breathed a word against" his mother in hundreds of letters, Binns argues with some (though not complete) convincingness that Wyndham's novels "tell a different story" (136)—namely, that Gertrude's absenteeism explains the dearth of quality maternal figures in Wyndham's work.

Still, Binns saves her most ambitious claim for the end of her book—the idea that Grace Wilson served as the inspiration for all of Wyndham's pro-active, feminist heroines. On a rhetorical level, this reserve by Binns represents an interesting choice. I suspect it betokens her awareness that such a rigid, one-to-one biographical correspondence might strike some readers as a reach—a largely intuitive leap from the available evidence rather than a concrete, uncontestable fact. Yet, because she saves this claim for the end, readers need not trip themselves up with this claim as they're reading. Nonetheless, the Grace thesis structures the entirety of *Hidden Wyndham*. As Binns's subtitle indicates, her book focuses on "life, love, letters." Although Binns cannot avoid discussing the novels and short fiction, literary criticism takes second stage to Wyndham's long, monogamous romance with Grace. For instance, long portions of Part Two, which covers the years 1939–1945, are only reprinted extracts from Wyndham's war letters to his lover, almost as if to demonstrate through an abundance of reproduced primary source material that Grace *did*, in fact, shape and center Wyndham's emotional life. Indeed, much as with Binns's belated forays into literary criticism, Part Two focuses less on the Second World War itself, which Binns avoids contextualizing or describing in detail, than on revealing the painful separation inaugurated by

that war between Wyndham and Grace—an anguished, painful time for them both. Yet as the letters show, Grace undeniably served as Wyndham's main psychological support.

Now, though, is probably a decent time to mention the elephant-in-the-room of Wyndham scholarship. Within SF circles it's long been known that David Ketterer, an academic, has been writing a biography of Wyndham since the mid-1990s—in fact, the entry on Ketterer for *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction* even drolly observes that this "full study is awaited with impatience" (Nicholls). Yet, throughout the entirely of *Hidden Wyndham*, Binns applies a certain cautious circumspection in regard to her fellow biographer. On one hand, she mentions Ketterer explicitly in her acknowledgements, citing his "excellent research" and his graciousness in allowing her to read "some" of Grace Wilson's personal diaries (284; see also 79, n. 24). On the other hand, Binns cites relatively little of that "excellent research," and when she does, she generally limits herself to purely factual details. The most glaring silence concerns Ketterer's almost 9,000 word article on Wyndham for *The Literary Encyclopedia*. Any direct comparison between that article and *Hidden Wyndham*, however, quickly reveals why: Binns devotes large sections of her biography to challenging many of Ketterer's key interpretations.

The most obvious sore point involves the status of Grace Wilson herself. For Ketterer, she and Wyndham were merely "good companions," and he firmly denies that Grace was the love of Wyndham's life. His main evidence stems from a comment in one of Wyndham's rare interviews. In 1961, when asked why he has remained a bachelor so long, the author replied that although he'd met the right person twice, each time the lady had met someone "righter." Ketterer takes this statement at face value, so he attempts to identify (however tentatively) those two "Mrs Rights." Binns, however, considers Wyndham's statement a red herring, a classic case of misdirection. After all, why would Wyndham blurt out the truth to a reporter after concealing it for decades, and when publicly revealing their unmarried relationship would cost Grace "her job and reputation" (218)? To my mind, the more plausible interpretation lies with Binns, but her disagreements with Ketterer hardly stop there. At one point, Binns admits to submitting Wyndham's birth certificate to a professional genealogist, who verified its authenticity (36, n. 11). With deliberate vagueness, her footnote merely mentions that "another researcher" has questioned its validity, but she is clearly referring to Ketterer here, who asserts in his revised *Literary Encyclopedia* article that "90-something-per-cent proof" exists for Wyndham being born out of wedlock; a later article in the journal *Foundation* presents Ketterer's reasoning in fuller detail. Obviously, Binns finds this reasoning unsubstantiated by the evidence.

From my outsider's perspective, Binns's need for critical discretion in *Hidden Wyndham*—her dancing around any direct challenge to Ketterer—recalls a little something of A. S. Byatt's novel *Possession* (1990), a book that depicts the hotbed of tensions and jealousies that can sometimes arise between literary biographers. Notably, although Ketterer permitted Binns to read *some* of Grace Wilson's diaries, he uncharitably refused her access to the entire collection. One can only hope that if Ketterer ever publishes a rebuttal to *Hidden Wyndham*—and I myself would consider a second biography worthwhile—that rebuttal would not avail itself, even partially, of information

denied to Binns by Ketterer himself. In any event, *Hidden Wyndham* remains an edifying, highly readable account of one of British SF's major 20th-century writers, and Binns does an admirable job in conveying the inner life of someone cagily reticent about that inner life. Even if the usefulness of a strict identification between Grace Wilson and Wyndham's most ardently feminist heroines can be debated, especially in terms of literary criticism, Grace's central importance to Wyndham himself seems undeniable. All told, any scholar interested in Wyndham's work should be glad to have this valuable biography by Binns as a resource.

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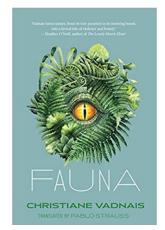
FICTION
REVIEWS

Review of *Fauna*

Susanne Roesner

Vadnais, Christiane. *Fauna.* Translated by Pablo Strauss, Coach House Books, 2020.

Christiane Vadnais' *Fauna* draws the reader into a near-future scenario where humanity has changed the planet so drastically and irrevocably that unexpected variations are occurring more and more throughout the animal and plant world. Through evocative and creative language, masterfully translated by Pablo Strauss from French into English, the text pulls the reader into a nightmare world, hauntingly different and yet strangely familiar. In ten short chapters, Vadnais' various protagonists try to make sense of this transforming and often hostile environment. Amidst them is Laura, a biologist attempting to determine the origin of the profound changes she observes around and inside of her. Parts of the earth have been flooded, altering ecosystems which take on a wilder, more dangerous shape. "Don't swim in the evening, the villagers say. The lights dancing like a bonfire are far too alluring, drawing the lake monsters from all sides" (27). The story may be set in the future, yet humanity seems to have been set back into a darker past, where nightmarish beasts roam the darkness. On four black pages inserted throughout the book Vadnais writes about the night, about dreams, imagination, and fear. She sets the underlying tone for her book already on the first black pages when she tells her audience that "To dream of a future where our species survives, we must get back to wilder times" (9). As Vadnais' protagonists struggle to comprehend their new reality and fight for survival, the reader soon learns what exactly these "wilder times" could look like.

Ecological discourses and the examination of human-nature relationships are central to science fiction literature, either in the world-building of other planets such as in Frank Herbert's *Dune* (1965) and Ursula K. Le Guin's *The Dispossessed* (1974), or in near-future scenarios of planet earth such as H.G. Wells' *The Time Machine* (1895) and Kim Stanley Robinson's *New York 2140* (2017). While Wells explores the question of human evolution in a distant future, Robinson's *New York 2140* investigates humanity's adaptation and technology in a post-apocalyptic world. Vadnais' *Fauna* combines both aspects, the ecological discourse of evolution and the apocalyptic setting, to pose questions about human evolution in an environment transformed by anthropogenic climate change.

Like many current climate fiction novels, *Fauna* contemplates the question of humanity's survival in relation to the aftermath of a drastically changed climate caused by human interference.

However, unlike Robinson's *New York 2140*, where the focus lies on various characters and their everyday business as well as adaptive technology in a now flooded city, in *Fauna* the human protagonists appear small and insignificant amongst the overwhelming forces of nature. Futuristic technology is absent. Instead, not elevated by superior technology, the characters in *Fauna* are presented as simply part of the mutating fauna on earth. Visiting a permanent settlement on the water, Laura meets one of the residents and observes his changed skin: "Curiosity makes her linger over the hard, scaly skin, a patch that grows larger by the day, increasing Thomas's likeness to the other lake creatures" (33). *Fauna* explores the changing environment caused by human intrusion but now spiralling outside of humanity's control: a parasite has emerged, infecting animals through the water and triggering rapid transformations. As the infection spreads, it is only a matter of time until all of humankind too will be affected irreversibly. The interconnectedness between humanity and nature is highlighted: as one changes, the other is bound to change as well.

Due to vivid descriptions in *Fauna*, nature takes on a life of its own, at times invasive, fierce, and almost like an alien foe. "Under a toxic green moon, the mist crawls along the centre of the zoo's deserted walkways until it reaches the strand of trees and wraps itself around the trunks" (39). The intrusive quality of the fog foreshadows the threat that a changing environment can pose, not only to our surrounding flora and fauna, but to human existence itself. By further blurring the clear borders between animals and humans, Vadnais' novel evokes a similar feel to the 2018 film *Annihilation* directed by Alex Garland, where an alien presence distorts the area around itself, causing all lifeforms in its vicinity to transform and merge in beautiful and horrible ways. Even though the transformations in Fauna are not caused by alien interference, the novel still poses questions central to science fiction literature: What does it mean to be human? And how do we imagine the future survival of our species?

Vadnais' protagonists struggle with the profound transformation of their environment and are, like this environment, shaped by these changes. *Fauna* invites the reader to look inwards. Instead of asking questions of society's large-scale adaptation to climate change, the audience is left to contemplate adaptation on a cellular level. How fast can evolution happen? How much can we transform and still be human? Fauna can be seen as a warning, showing in vivid details and through haunting language that humans are part of nature—vulnerable, fleeting, and wild—and that, as we change nature around us, we will inevitably change with it.

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MEDIA REVIEWS

MEDIA REVIEWS

WandaVision

Jeremy Brett

Schaeffer, Jac, creator. *WandaVision*, Marvel Studios, 2021.

In early 2021, the Marvel Cinematic Universe introduced its first Disney-directed television production—the limited series *WandaVision*. The show is a bold choice for the MCU's Disney+ television debut because it is not a traditional superhero story (despite the battle-heavy final episode, which features its fair share of superpowered individuals hurling energy blasts at one another). Instead, the show is a number of other things, including an exploration of the tempting power of nostalgia, a meta-commentary on television and the cliches and pretensions of the sitcom format, a study of female autonomy and the social construction of a life, and an examination of the fragility and survival mechanisms of the human psyche in the face of trauma. Each of these aspects of *WandaVision* is valid and would merit significant academic analysis. The show is certainly a feast for scholars of media studies, as well. More than one sizable study could be produced detailing the ways—through imagery, dialogue, and more subtle Easter Egg-type references—in which *WandaVision* contributes to the ongoing evolution of the MCU. The production and creative decisions behind the construction of a cohesive narrative universe are a topic of significant interest, especially as Hollywood seems to be running full tilt into the "cinematic universe" mold of filmmaking. In essence, the show is rewarding enough in its complexity to hold multiple layers of analytical weight.

But to me, *WandaVision*, at its foundation, revolves around the twinning of grief and illusion. The show's chief protagonist, Wanda Maximoff (played by Elizabeth Olsen), is driven by grief so profound that it quite literally warps herself and the people around her, as gravity warps and distorts the flow of time. Grief can be life-destroying; it is an intensely powerful emotion for regular human beings, let alone an Avenger imbued with Chaos Magic that is amplified by the power of an Infinity Stone. What *WandaVision* makes clear, however, is that the effects of Wanda's all-consuming grief are wide-ranging and catastrophic because of her power, but her desire to change fate and wrap herself in comforting illusion is a common human trait.

WandaVision opens soon after the events of the films *Avengers: Infinity War* and *Avengers: Endgame*, during which the Avengers and their allies first failed at preventing the Mad Titan Thanos' plan to erase half of the intelligent life in the universe and then—thanks to time travel—finally eliminated Thanos. The victory was achieved at great cost, however—several heroes died in the attempt to save the universe, including Wanda's love, the synthezoid Vision (Paul Bettany). In

Infinity War, Wanda must endure watching Vision die not once but twice, first by her own hands in order to stop Thanos, and again, by a time-reversing Thanos who rips the Mind Stone from Vision's head. This doubling of Wanda's trauma is added to an existing foundation of unearned guilt over destruction that Wanda caused in previous MCU films, causing an ultimately untenable burden on Wanda's psyche that triggers the events of *WandaVision*.

The show's first seven (of nine) episodes are clever in tone, writing, and production. Each one is modeled after a different era of American situation comedy, with appropriate opening themes, credit sequences, and commercials. In each episode—beginning with a 1950s show modeled on *The Dick Van Dyke Show* and continuing through to the 2010s *Modern Family*—Wanda and Vision are a happy married couple living in the idyllic town of Westview, New Jersey. It is a safe, comfortable, low-stakes life, in a town where the lawns are always mowed, Agnes the wacky neighbor is always dropping by, and all conflicts are minor and solved within 30 minutes. But the show's tone shifts from the outset, signifying that things are not what they seem. Neither Vision nor Wanda can remember their lives before coming to Westview; the radio breaks in with someone's voice calling out to Wanda; neighbors occasionally act peculiar—as if they are lost or scared. Most strangely of all, within a mere two episodes, Wanda becomes pregnant and gives birth to two rapidly growing twin boys. The increasing sense of otherworldliness and unease, even menace, is atypical of other Marvel productions and instead reminiscent of shows like *The Twilight Zone*, *Twin Peaks*, or *Carnivale*.

The secret is eventually revealed, partly through the help of government agency S.W.O.R.D., which has become aware of the situation and is observing from the outside. Wanda's dark despair has fueled her semi-unconscious creation of a dome of magical energy around Westview—within that space, she has transformed Westview into the ideal kind of town she recalls from her memories of watching American television as a child in war-torn Sokovia. Wanda's Westview captures the utopian myth of the American small town, but at the terrible price of transforming the residents into live puppets in her idyllic theater. Inside the "Hex", she can happily play at being a wife and mother with her husband, her emotional anguish buried under layers upon layers of denial. But gradually, the illusion keeps giving way to reality as Vision increasingly questions the events around him and Wanda's resets of reality keep being punctured.

The final breakdown comes because of revelations from two very different characters: S.W.O.R.D. agent Monica Rambeau (Teyonah Parris) and Wanda's neighbor Agnes (Kathryn Hahn). Monica is dealing with feelings of guilt and grief because, in her mind, she failed to be present when her mother Maria passed away. This, however, was a result of being "blipped" by Thanos in *Infinity War* and therefore not her fault. Unlike Wanda, Monica comes to accept the truth of her existence and seeks to live it, not avoid it. As she tells Wanda during one exchange, "I can't change, and I don't think I want to, because it's my truth." Monica rejects the same cycle of grief and doubt-erasing illusion that Wanda builds to escape both her past and her present.

The other character that returns Wanda to herself is neighbor Agnes, who reveals herself as Agatha Harkness, an ancient witch seeking the source of Wanda's power. Their confrontation in the penultimate episode exposes the secret about herself that Wanda never knew—she is the inheritor of a destiny marking her as the "Scarlet Witch", a magic user of unparalleled ability. Agatha ironically causes her own downfall by helping Wanda—through flashbacks—to see the truth about her past, by wiping away the illusions, and by excavating the traumas Wanda had hidden away. A flashback to Wanda's past soon after the death of her twin brother Pietro (Aaron Taylor-Johnson in *Age of Ultron*; Evan Peters in *WandaVision*) shows Vision trying to comfort her. He notes quietly to the despondent Wanda that he is too young to have known grief, or love, but he wonders, "What is grief, if not love persevering?" This conveys to the audience Wanda's ultimate motives for creating "Westview". Her final rejection of this illusion in favor of a harsher yet truer reality, her acceptance of responsibility for the mental enslavement of the townsfolk, and even her assent to her Scarlet Witch destiny, all reveals her growing recognition of illusion and denial's ultimate paucity.

Therein lies the narrative power of *WandaVision*, distinguishing it from its fellow MCU film productions. Wanda is arguably the most emotionally complex figure in the MCU to date, and the most human in how repeated traumas and violence have affected her life. Though her fellow Avengers have their own imperfect lives, their own traumas and scars, none so far (with the exceptions perhaps of Natasha Romanoff or the protagonists of the Marvel Netflix shows) have been so defined by their pasts or have entwined their abilities with such fraught and piercing emotional resonance. *WandaVision* presents the viewer and the scholar alike with a more multidimensional kind of Marvel hero. In Wanda and Vision (who, as a construction from Wanda's memories, experiences his own crisis of identity when confronting his newly reactivated S.W.O.R.D. incarnation), power is linked to trauma in an intimately, fallible human way. The show attempts to interrogate the image of the trauma-laden traditional superhero and asks its audience to consider what sorts of people result from the fusion of trauma and power. With this alone, *WandaVision* proves itself truly something new in superhero media, beyond its clever re-creation of old television in all its cliches and tropes, its multiplicity of tone, and its powerful acting from Olsen and Bettany.

The show is a meditation on the power of grief and the lengths humans go to avoid or deny it. Wanda's history in the comic books has always been marked by heightened emotional states resulting in world-changing effects—notably in the "Avengers Disassembled" and "House of M" story arcs—and the show reflects this heritage. More problematically, however, it reinforces continuing complaints about Wanda's character—that she is primarily defined by her reactions to loss and that she personifies the antiquated stereotype of women being prone to mental and emotional instability. Note how, in contrast, fellow magic-user Stephen Strange is eerily calm and composed in most situations. Conversely, science whiz Tony Stark is easily as emotionally unstable

as Wanda yet is seldom called on it as a gender-trait. It's an image that bears closer scholarly study. *WandaVision* doesn't necessarily do much to overturn this conception of Wanda, but it does effectively chronicle her pathway from broken and reactive victim of trauma to a woman cognizant of her destiny yet still wholly imperfect. Notably, Wanda flees the angered townspeople whom she enslaved rather than actively engage with a reckoning for her crimes; besides Agatha's acidly noting that "heroes don't torture people," the show ducks the ethical question of her criminal responsibility.

Heroes don't torture people. Nor, traditionally, do heroes grieve like people do, nor feel guilt for the destruction they create and inspire in the name of saving the world. Traditionally, heroes are supposed to be better, and are often rendered justified in any actions because of this assumption. Yet recent superhero film and television has started reevaluating the superhero's image in light of a more confusing, complex, and divided world. *WandaVision*, in its depiction of a woman of great power who blinds herself to emotional reality past the point of safety, joins this new group of media devoted to the fallibility and humanity of heroes.

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The Last of Us Part II

Steven Holmes

The Last Of Us Part II. Playstation 4, Naughty Dog. 2020.

The Last of Us Part II is the sequel to Naughty Dog's critically acclaimed and commercially successful third-person shooter *The Last of Us* (2013), and as of the writing of this review remains the fastest-selling Playstation 4 exclusive (a title it may hold in perpetuity given the release of the Playstation 5 in 2020). Unlike its predecessor, however, T*he Last of Us Part II* was far more controversial, and was the subject of an early review bomb—a phenomenon wherein a large number of people post negative reviews en masse—on Metacritic. With a typical playtime of 20-25 hours, and its status as a Playstation 4 exclusive, it is a title that is unlikely to make its way into many classroom settings as a primary text, although it remains significant to scholars of science fiction, horror, video games, and popular culture. There are at least three major topics that are likely to come up in scholastic discussions of the title, including: the game's attempted interrogation of the norms of violence in video games, the attempted if-limited representation of a trans character in a science fiction horror game, and as its place as, if not an epilogue, then perhaps an addendum to the social controversies surrounding the "Gamergate" harassment campaign of 2014. As such, it is a touchstone in the current understanding of the video game-related culture wars.

The main focus of the game is the representation of cycles of violence. Understanding these cycles relies on some familiarity with the first game and its plot. The first game, 2013's *The Last of Us*, presented Joel Miller (voiced by Troy Baker) as a hardened survivor in the midst of a fungal-zombie apocalypse (like MR Carey's *The Girl with All the Gifts*, the zombie outbreak is modeled on the fungus Cordyceps). In that game, Joel travels across post-apocalyptic America with Ellie (voiced by Ashley Johnson), tasked with delivering her to a group called the Fireflies in the hopes of developing a vaccine to the zombie pandemic. When it's revealed that the Fireflies will need to kill Ellie and extract part of her brain to develop a vaccine, Joel chooses Ellie's life over the potential vaccine, killing the Fireflies, including the doctor that was about to perform the operation. Given Joel's centrality to the first game and his popularity with the players and fans of that game, *The Last of Us Part II* stands out by killing Joel in the first two hours of the sequel. The game is framed around an initial cycle of violence, as Joel's killer, Abby (voiced by Laura Bailey) is the daughter of the Firefly surgeon who would have performed the operation on Ellie at the end of the first game. Abby killing Joel is the completion of this first revenge plot, but it stirs a new revenge plot as Ellie chooses to hunt down Abby in revenge for killing Joel. The game disrupts this revenge plot halfway through, however. The perspective of the game shifts from Ellie in her quest

to kill Abby, to Abby herself. The choice to shift perspectives so that the player is forced to play as the character that killed Joel for 10-12 hours of gametime highlights the game's foregrounding of theme in shaping the structure and narrative. The game wants to aesthetically be in the same ballpark as *Spec Ops: The Line* in deconstructing its own franchise and the player's relationship to violence. Like *Spec Ops: The Line*, which attempted to subvert player expectations by recasting the end boss of the game as the projection of the protagonist's guilt over war crimes he commits throughout the game, the form of subversion in *The Last of Us Part II* is to still present heavy violence throughout the game, but emphasize the guilt the characters experience for committing that violence as well as the guilt the game seems to think the player should feel.

For this interrogation of violence to work, Abby needs to have character traits established that go beyond her revenge killing of Joel. This is executed through the representation of Lev (voiced by Ian Alexander). The game's attempt at presenting Abby's redemption arc centers around her rescue of Lev and his sister Yara (voiced by Victoria Grace) from the Seraphites. In this vision of post-apocalyptic Seattle, the city is divided between the warring factions of Washington Liberation Front, which Abby is a part of, and the cult of the Seraphites, a group which, among other things, practices arranged marriage. Lev, a transman, is assigned to marry an elder man in the Seraphites. In rejecting the arranged marriage, Lev becomes a target for Seraphite violence. The apparent purpose of this sequence is to highlight that Abby is capable of rejecting the regional conflicts between the WLF and Seraphites, and that she could be viewed as a "heroic" figure if not framed around her murder of Joel. This is contrasted with Ellie who, in her own quest for revenge, kills a pregnant woman and her boyfriend in her unyielding pursuit of Abby. As a redemption arc for Abby, this presents some problems, since even if the intention is to contrast Abby's willingness to help Seraphites to Ellie's unwillingness to forgive Abby, the contexts may seem different enough that the parallels among the various characters will either be missed or feel weak. Despite the issues with how well Lev fits into the game's attempt to present a redemption arc for Abby, Lev remains one of the few earnest depictions of trans identity in post-apocalyptic narrative, and this allows the game to serve as a kind of benchmark in understanding the horror genre's evolving depictions of non-cis identity. Although the game is not interested in deeply exploring Lev's identity, its banal depiction is still an improvement from many earlier representations of non-cishet identity in the horror genre. The range of trans characters depicted in post-apocalytpic narrative further expanded with the 2021 TV series *Y: The Last Man*.

Thematically, the end of the game is likely to elicit mixed reactions; the game continues to interrogate the cycle of violence as Ellie again chooses to pursue revenge at the cost of her friends, family, and fingers, only to opt for mercy in the final moments. The final scenes, though, are undercut by the ludological structure of the game, which even up until the final moments involve Ellie shooting and stabbing her way across America in her pursuit of revenge. Nonetheless, the nuances of the ending are not central to the game's place in the cultural zeitgeist. The review bomb on Metacritic at the game's release is as much tied to the game's place as a kind of addendum to the Gamergate harassment campaigns of 2014, as it is to players who were unhappy the game kills off

Joel in the first two hours. In response to a developer looking for a source for one of the many false accusations against the studio and developers, director and co-writer Neil Druckmann lists some of the false conspiracy theories that led to its early review bomb:

> you fight homophobic Christians? Or that Anita worked on the game? Or that Abby is trans?" (@Neil_Druckmann).

Since presenting the "Ambassador Award" to Anita Sarkeesian at the 2014 Game Developers Choice Awards, Druckmann has been a target for the Gamergate harassment campaign, a characteristic that has evidently lingered in the years since. The false rumor, meanwhile, that "Abby is trans", reflected the puerile attitude of some early review bombers that took Abby's muscular appearance and the knowledge that the game had a trans character as a sign that Abby herself was transgender. The combined commercial and critical success of *The Last of Us Part II*, as a lesbian-led post-apocalyptic game featuring a transman suggests that radical attempts at changing the typical representations of video game protagonists only fuels the sales of games, even if it also elicits a backlash. That being said, that this controversy exists at all reflects that there is a vocal population of misogynists and transphobes in the gaming community. This is not to imply that there are no valid critiques of the game. Some negative reviews also focus on the clumsy attempts to humanize Abby and the uneven nature of her redemption arc, although it is this dynamic that may be the game's most interesting element for scholars.

Despite the complexities revolving around issues of representation, the game's attempt at subverting player attitudes toward violence does not really work, but the heavy-handed attempts of the game to subvert player attitudes transforms the audience's relationship with the narrative structure of the game. It's not like *Undertale*, where the player has a ludological choice between a Pacifist or a Genocide run. While players can attempt to stealth their way through some parts of the missions, the game is primarily designed as a third-person shooter. Instead, the game interrogates the audience's relationship with violence by toying with audience feelings. The audience is unlikely to forget the scene of Abby killing Joel at the start of the game, where she shoots out Joel's leg with a shotgun and then bludgeons him to death with a golf club, but by the second half of the game, they are confronted with a scene where Abby plays fetch with Bear the dog. It's a short scene, and its impact in part stems from the contrast with the twelve hours of brutal violence that precedes it. The player is probably aware of how manipulative the game is trying to be with the sequence, given the extreme violence depicted in her murder of Joel, and it is improbable much of the audience would "forgive" Abby just for playing with a dog. Instead, the player becomes more aware of the overt nature in which the game is manipulating them. The inadequacy of the dog scene in humanizing Abby is also what makes the game's meta-textual play between developer and audience interesting. The "real" game, in some sense, is being played on the level of meta-cognition between developer and player, as the player likely still abhors Abby's actions in the first half of the game. The narrative creates reflection for the player because of the discomfort and confusion they feel playing Abby, but also for their own willingness to continue engaging with the game's artistic perspective. *The Last of Us Part II* challenges the player to reflect

on what it means to choose to continue playing the game. It's this highly subjective and variable discomfort that the game seems to most want to explore, even if the game's argument about the nature of violence is extremely undercut by the necessities of its gameplay. *The Last of Us Part II* is not a masterpiece because it successfully dramatizes the complexity of cycles of violence, rather, what makes it a compelling case study in artistry are the ways it attempts but fails to do so, and in doing so creates an entirely distinct experience.

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Free Guy

Jess Flarity

Free Guy. Dir. Shawn Levy. Berlanti Production and 21 Laps Entertainment, 2021.

Director Shawn Levy's *Free Guy* is the newest "family fun video game movie," an American tradition going back to the early 1980's and Tron, but it also embodies all the dissociative elements of existing in a blurred reality, like the one currently being experienced by Generation Z. Sociologist Zygmunt Bauman calls this phenomenon "liquid modernity."

To begin, the audience is immediately thrown into the perspective of Guy (Ryan Reynolds), a non-player character (NPC) who lives in Free City, a fictional mashup of *Grand Theft Auto* and *PlayerUnknown's Battleground*, and follows him as he survives a daily onslaught of gamers who rob the bank where he works, with the initial scenes borrowing heavily from *The Truman Show*, *The LEGO Movie*, and even *Groundhog Day*. Soon afterwards, Guy meets the real-life player Molotov Girl (Jodie Comer), and the fault lines between game/reality fracture as the narrative flows between the two worlds, disrupting any attempts to distinguish one realm as more important than the other. This plotting technique mirrors the life of the modern teenage gamer, the film's target audience, and it is especially prescient considering the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, as a recent study demonstrated that most U.S. youths are spending an average of 7.7 hours per day in front of a screen, double the amount from the previous year (Nagata).

Free Guy uses astonishing visual special effects to successfully leverage the chaotic, unstable aspects of liquid modernity into its central plot: this is as much a movie-about-a-video game as it is a two-hour video game "cut scene," which is evidenced by the director's incorporation of actual "gaming celebrities" later on in the story. However, this purposeful mixing of game world/ real world elements also opens up valuable criticisms for scholars who work with critical race and feminist theories, as the more problematic issues associated with video game culture, such as racism and sexism, are repeated rather than subverted or eliminated.

From a critical race perspective, the main characters reinforce "whiteness-as-default": Guy, Molotov Girl and her real-world counterpart Millie, and the programmer Keys (Joe Kerry) are all generically white. The vast majority of side characters, in contrast, are not white and verge on being stereotypes: Guy's non-threatening black sidekick (Lil Rel Howery) serves in an emasculating role as comic relief, the unhinged Jewish-Polynesian antagonist (Taika Waititi) is

a CEO who achieved success because he stole the game's code from the white heroes, who are implied as being both honest and hardworking; and finally the Indian-American supporting character (Utkarsh Ambukar) sacrifices his individuality to ensure that the protagonists recognize their love for one another at the very end. The featured celebrity streamers are also problematic, as except for Pokimane—aka Imane Anys, a Moroccan-Canadian woman—all of them are white men. *Free Guy*'s failures here are comparable to those in *Ready Player One*, which has drawn sharp criticism due to its lack of non-white pop culture references and through the tokenism of the side character Aech, who is only revealed to be both black and gay in the final scenes of its narrative.

Similarly, from a feminist perspective there are several concerns with the portrayal of Millie/Molotov Girl, the heroine who serves as the romantic interest of both Guy and his creator, Keys. First is the notion that Guy only achieves self-awareness through his subconscious programming falling "in love" with Millie because he is a reflection of Keys, which reinforces the false ideology of men and women not being "complete" without each other's love. This is both a denial of aromantic legitimacy—it assumes Guy can't achieve consciousness without love—and an example of heteronormative bias being applied even to a non-human, artificial-intelligence construct. An even bigger problem is how Millie's "skills" are portrayed over the course of the film. While her character's introduction includes uncomfortably long shots focusing on her body as a non-ironic way of pandering to the male gaze, the audience soon learns that she is a formidable player in the game. She tells Guy he needs to "level up" in order to help her, and after an amusing montage, he quickly becomes her equal. This type of misogynist fantasy, wherein the male novice surpasses a female superior with inexplicable ease, is a surprisingly common science fictional plot device that is often overlooked, with other recent examples including *The Matrix*, *Avatar*, *Edge of Tomorrow*, and *Doctor Strange*.

A final feminist critique shows a sinister lack of agency on the part of the heroine: Millie is never shown doing anything competent related to computers despite the audience being told she is one of the programmers of *Free City*'s stolen code. Instead, quite often she is literally helpless, whether because she can't log in, the game is down, or some other reason, reinforcing stereotypes of feminine incompetence related to technology, an all-too-common talking point that continues to cut off women from STEM fields. Her male counterpart Keys, conversely, has several important instances where he uses his superior coding or hacking skills to save the day. Even the "McGuffin," a video clip that shows a hidden door in the game, can't be obtained by Molotov Girl no matter how hard she tries—but by the end of the movie, Guy has become so famous that the clip's owner goes "fanboy" and begs him to take it, further invalidating her previous efforts. This kind of wish fulfillment completes Guy's cycle in the wheel of hegemonic masculinity: like a superhero at his apex, he becomes so powerful that he does not even need to do anything for others, especially men, to be in awe of him.

Many media critics have praised *Free Guy* for its impressive use of pacing and visual delights, but further analysis suggests that many of its aspects aren't nearly as "family fun" as they first appear. There are simply too many instances where the film subconsciously echoes patriarchal

ideas of white, male dominance, a mindset often linked to the certain sectors of the video game industry and a large part of its online fan community. However, the plot should also be praised for encapsulating the fluid, nomadic quality of liquid modernity in how it shifts between zones of reality, as famous YouTube celebrities create "real" streams about the "fake" game *Free City*; for many young people today, this isn't fiction at all, but representative of what it's like to spend an entire third of your daily life watching someone else through a screen.

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Star Wars: The Clone Wars, season 7

Adam McLain

Star Wars: The Clone Wars. Dave Filoni, supervising director. Season 7, Disney/LucasFilm, 2020.

Star Wars is a series that leans on binary moral conflicts to instigate its plot and action: light and dark, rebel and empire, Resistance and First Order, Jedi and Sith. While this simplification of morality might support narrative movement and audience retention in a blockbuster movie, it limits the depth one can take in an elongated form like a television series. In *The Clone Wars* (2008–2020; hereafter, *Clone Wars*), the binary of light and dark sides of the Force and their respective Force-users are still present, but because of the longer medium, space and time is given to investigate and complicate this binary presentation of good and bad. However, even as *Clone Wars* expands this binary representation of the Force, its efforts to engage in other conversations outside the insular, pseudo-religious philosophy of the Force are frustrated as it fails to delve as deeply into or inquire as fervently after other ethical dilemmas, especially those around cloning and warfare, that it brings into question.

Occurring chronologically between *Episode II: Attack of the Clones* and *Episode III: Revenge of the Sith* (2002, 2005; hereafter, *Attack* and *Revenge*), *Clone Wars* depicts the galaxy-wide civil war between the Galactic Republic, who believes the known galaxy should be joined under an enormous senate, and the Separatists, who believe the Senate has become too bloated to take care of the needs of smaller star systems. The animated anthology series contains various arcs that follow numerous characters as they fight for or against the Republic. Season seven is separated into three distinct arcs. In the first arc (Eps. 1–4), clone troopers go on a mission to rescue a captured ally. The second arc (Eps. 5–8) continues Ahsoka's storyline after she left the Jedi Order in season five: she navigates the galactic underground and learns that a former enemy, the former Sith apprentice Darth Maul, has resurfaced. The final arc (Eps. 9–12) parallels events in *Revenge* as it details the siege of Mandalore, Ahsoka's attempt to thwart Maul, and Ahsoka's escape from Order 66—the Jedi genocide.

The complication of the binary system of Jedi and Sith in season seven provides a jumping-off point to critique contemporary American suspicions toward institutions and institutional support, particularly through the character development and interactions of Ahsoka and Maul, outcasts of the Jedi and Sith. Struggling with the Jedi Order's betrayal of her, Ahsoka seeks to find her own way in the galaxy. When she discovers Maul as a threat, she returns to her master, Anakin, and asks to be sent to Mandalore to deal with him once and for all. The final lightsaber battle

between Ahsoka and Maul exhibits the nuanced treatment *Clone Wars* provides of the light-dark duality. Because of their status as outcasts, both Maul and Ahsoka have developed non-normative, individualistic approaches to the Force that reflect but do not exactly represent the orthodoxy of the respective institutional ethics and morals in which they were raised. Ahsoka's approach centers on an ethic that cares for and looks for the good in individual people rather than defending institutions like the Jedi Council or the Republic. This individualistic care ethic is seen after Maul reveals to Ahsoka that he has seen in a vision Anakin choosing the dark side over the light side of the force and she tells Maul, "I know Anakin. Your vision is flawed" (Ep. 10). Ahsoka's reasoning is not that Anakin is good because he is a Jedi; she intertwines her belief in his goodness with her relationship and attachment to him, thus rejecting the Jedi Order's ethic of non-attachment.

On the other side of the duel, Maul seeks to work within the shadows and subvert institutional power to his own self-interest. This institutional subversive ethic of the Force is seen when Maul states, "There is no justice, no law, no order, except for the one that will replace it" (Ep. 10). Instead of the Sith ethic of "unlimited power" through sole control of institutions, as seen through Palpatine's Republic coup and creation of the Galactic Empire, Maul invests himself in the shadows, creating a network of secrets and promises that give him power yet protects him from losing his power when the inevitable institutional change occurs. This ethic requires Maul to trust, in a small way, other people, rather than invest all power within himself, as Palpatine does. Even as the battle places these two non-institutionalized ethics in stark contrast to each other, it has no clear victor in the end: Ahsoka captures Maul, but she later must use the captured Maul to save herself by releasing him from prison to cause a distraction so she can escape the Jedi purge. The uncertain victor in this battle of non-normative ethics, then, leads to a reassessment of the philosophies of the Force: instead of the Force couched in a light and dark binary institutionally presented as Jedi and Sith, the Force can now be utilized as a tool and technology to inform and complicate a variety of ethical and moral approaches to life.

This struggle for dominance reflects current American conversations around institutional trust, support, and reform. Ahsoka's ethic of care, for example, demonstrates how individuals might reject traditional authority in favor of local networks of support and solidarity, and so can be usefully read in the context of the 2020 creation of Seattle's "autonomous zone," which replaced government oversight with a utopian experiment of anti-policing and communal care. Similarly, Maul's subversion of institutional norms for personal gain recalls the ruthless use and misuse of current economic systems by wealthy individuals and institutions during the COVID-19 pandemic even as the rest of the community hemorrhages due to societal disparity and inequality. Placed in conversation with contemporary-era America, Ahsoka's and Maul's complications of the two-party Force-user system within Star Wars dramatize the varied moral and ethical positions individuals take under crippled and failing institutions that are meant to provide for and protect life, liberty, and happiness. In complicating the two-party Force system, season seven becomes a commentary on individual reaction to shifts and differentials of power, the various ways ideologies

and their idealogues vie for political control, and how individuals gain and lose their own power within hegemonic systems of control.

Even as this battle between two outcasts of institutional power shows the interrogative depth the series can provide, the show limits itself in certain conversations and constrains the thematic development it could have in interrogating ethical concerns. For example, the series shows the lived experience of the clones, soldiers bred specifically for combat. Instead of delving into the bioethics of cloning and the moral questions surrounding living, humanoid beings formed with the sole purpose of combat and extermination, the plotlines for the clones emphasize quotidian stories of individuality, identity, and teamwork. Season seven, with its introduction of mutant clones and a storyline of rescuing a prisoner of war, provides ample opportunity to interrogate the ethics of war and justice; however, the show limits itself by not diving full-heartedly into the ethical and moral quandaries that surround cloning and the political and societal repercussions of the creation of living—and dying—weapons of war. This lackluster investigation compared to the depth given to the entanglement of Ahsoka's and Maul's varied approaches to the Force, then, shows an emphasis in this season—and perhaps in future endeavors in the Star Wars franchise— on individual rather than institutional solutions to moral and ethical questions.

Although this final season of Clone Wars does not problematize all of the ethical and moral quandaries within its own story world as much as a scholarly viewer might desire, it does give a strong foundation for future investigations within the universe for these dire and important questions. It shows that there is potential, even in a franchise known for its binaries, to create nuance and space for varied experiences, perspectives, and approaches. Season seven, then, becomes a catalyst to understanding the ways new Star Wars projects—like the live-action series *The Mandalorian* (2019–present), *The Book of Boba Fett* (forthcoming, 2021), and *Ahsoka* (forthcoming, 2022), and the animated continuation of this series, *The Bad Batch* (2021– present)—might complicate, interrogate, and answer moral, ethical, and philosophical questions and problems, as those who worked on *Clone Wars* continue to creatively guide the galaxy far, far away.

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MEDIA REVIEWS

Dune (Part One)

Ian Campbell

Dune. Dir. Denis Villeneuve. Legendary Pictures, 2021.

The film of *Dune* is absolutely beautiful, a true masterpiece of cinematography and sound. The casting, acting and script are very good. For those who have never read *Dune*, and cannot fill in the blanks, the film is largely incoherent and its central conflict does not have the impact that it does for readers. This is clearly a matter of deliberate choice on director Denis Villeneuve's part, as filling in these blanks would have been a comparatively simple matter. Critics and fans have been saying for decades that *Dune* is unfilmable; Villeneuve has addressed the problem by making a film that nobody who has not read the book will meaningfully understand. On one level, this may be marketing: after all, the overwhelming majority of the people who will see the film, like the majority of readers of *SFRA Review*, have already read the book. Villeneuve can thus rely on those readers' filling the gaps with the lore and world-building of the text, and focus instead on the spectacle, which is phenomenal. Yet on another level, the film can be interpreted as both a subtle and an overt deconstruction—in the original Derridean sense—of Herbert's novel. It compels the text-familiar audience to reconsider whether what seems logical is in fact an example of privilege that reinforces hierarchies. Like Villeneuve's most recent work, *Blade Runner 2049*, this film is metafictional.

Dune has of course been filmed once before, in 1984 by David Lynch, who famously repudiated the film, replacing his own name as director with the traditional Alan Smithee in response to post-production meddling by a studio intent on commercializing the film. Notably, the theatrical version was cut down by about 25%. The film was a [critical](#) disaster and a commercial flop in spite or perhaps because of the studio's actions, whereas the Villeneuve version has been mostly well-reviewed and has made a reasonable if not overwhelming profit—enough at any rate to greenlight the second installment. In recent years, the availability of something closer to the original cut has to a certain extent [rehabilitated critical response](#) to Lynch's film.

For the purposes of this review of Villeneuve's film, the salient aspect of the 1984 version is that it [provides a reasonably clear explanation](#) of the factions, the basic conflict and the centrality of the spice to that conflict. It is unclear whether and to what extent the introduction was Lynch's work or the studio's. While this explanation of the role and importance of the spice

is oversimplified, it does frame the film in terms of the spice; the introduction continues by explaining the conflict between factions as essentially one between planets, including a planet not found in the novel.

Again, while one may critique this presentation, it does provide viewers who have not read the book a reasonable understanding of who the Atreides are, what their problem is, and why they have to go to Arrakis. Lynch's/Smithee's use of complex effects to make the eyes of spice addicts entirely blue also shows the centrality of the spice to the story. In the 1984 film, like Herbert's text, the narrator is Princess Irulan. The novel has her present Paul as Muad'Dib and as something close to Messiah right from the beginning, and of course each chapter of the book is framed by her commentary from after the fact.

Villeneuve's film does none of this; rather, the film is framed by Chani, who does explain that spice is central (but crucially, not *why* it is) and that the emperor has sent the Atreides in place of the Harkonnens to rule her planet. The voiceover ends with "Why did the emperor choose this path? And who will our next oppressors be?" From the very beginning, Villeneuve is presenting the story from the perspective of the colonized people, though to be clear, the overwhelming majority of the actual film makes Paul and the people around him the central focus.

Yet whereas the novel, and to a lesser extent the 1984 film, present Paul as Messiah as a fait accompli, Villeneuve's film does nothing of the sort. It continually frames Paul as a well-intentioned and brave but privileged and largely clueless adolescent, torn between his father's standards and his mother's training. For the most part, he's the object rather than the subject of events. To the extent that Paul has a "Destiny", this is shown through his dreams and his reaction to them rather than told by Irulan. Paul reacts to his dreams of holy war (which the film calls "crusade") with revulsion: he does not want to lead a galaxy-spanning war that will end up with billions dead.

In addition to framing the film from the perspective of the indigenous Fremen, Villeneuve also problematizes the white-savior narrative with which so many critics over the decades have also taken issue: Paul sees it for what it is and tries to reject it. Herein lies the overt deconstruction the film wreaks upon the novel: fans of the book can perceive Paul as the hero, if a slightly

reluctant one, because the novel tells us he is the hero right from the start; moreover, the Fremen are the backdrop and the conflict within the galactic aristocracy the central plot. This is not a particularly daring perspective on the film: the reframing is widely [commented](#) upon in mainstream commercial media, not just among academic analysts.

Yet there is a rather more subtle sort of deconstruction taking place in the film, and it deserves attention at least as much as the first and more overt trope. In brief, Villeneuve presents a world and a conflict that make little sense unless and until the audience fills in the background material from Herbert's book: there are several major aspects of the galaxy-spanning empire that are not explained in this film. On one level, these lacunae reinforce the overt deconstruction: these things are not explained because the film has been framed from the Fremen's perspective, and these aspects are unknown or irrelevant to the Fremen. On another level, however, they exist as a means of deconstructing what happens when we read a text, especially an SF text, and how this can itself be a problem in the real world as well as in literature.

I've written before about Villeneuve's previous work, *Blade Runner 2049*, and how it [deconstructs its own narrative](#) of liberation and the Chosen One. In *2049*, when Joi holds up Nabokov's *Pale Fire* for a few seconds and then discards it, the audience can choose to discard it as well, as a sort of throwaway scene. But those who have read *Pale Fire* may understand the seemingly-nonsensical phrases the protagonist K is required to repeat as lines from the poem within the novel. From there, the film can be read through Nabokov's novel, which perspective will give a very different reading of the events of the film—a reading that is much bleaker than the one the film seems to present. Villeneuve's *Dune* functions metafictionally in a similar way, though here, the key text is Herbert's own novel, which is also the text the film is encouraging viewers to reconsider.

Central to the metafictional reading is that the spice is entirely missing from the film. Yes, it sparkles in the air; yes, it has unclear psychoactive properties; yes, it is valuable and available only on Arrakis. The film neither tells nor shows us that the entire upper class is addicted to the spice, nor that the spice gives longevity, nor that interstellar travel is impossible without it. The film only shows it as a valuable commodity, like spices in the nineteenth century here on Earth: a source of income or colonial conflict, to be sure, but not the *sine qua non* for an empire that spans a galaxy and many millennia. If a Part Two is made, Paul's threat to disrupt spice production will make little sense: it will be perceived as disruption of a valuable but not essential resource, rather than a threat to kill everyone in the upper class and grind space travel to a halt. Again, on one level, this is because to the Fremen, the spice is part of a communal religious ritual: they don't travel between worlds. At the same time, however, anyone who's ever read the book, and many who haven't, will associate *Dune* with "the spice must flow". Unlike the book, or the 1984 film, Villeneuve's film doesn't show or tell us why it must flow. We, as viewers, are required to fill in this information, because without it, the central conflict is incoherent. What we are doing when we fill in that information is that which the film is trying to induce us to think about.

The conflict between noble houses seems similarly incoherent. The film does touch upon the idea that the Emperor cannot be seen as helping to eliminate the Atreides, lest the other houses unite against him; yet the film also shows us the Sardaukar being assigned to the conflict, which the book does not, and in the battle the Sardaukar are presented as just that rather than as incognito. None of this is relevant to the Fremen, who get an overlord anyway, and it is this that the film is framing as something to consider. Fans of the books have for decades thought "Atreides good, Harkonnen bad". Both films and the book tell us and show us this binary opposition. The Baron is obese and cruel (and, notably, queer, though Villeneuve's film does not bring this up); the Duke outranks him and is fit, kind and manly. One part of the book Villeneuve's film does foreground is that the Atreides are trying to do something new on Arrakis, by treating the Fremen like humans deserving of dignity rather than as vermin. Tragically, however, this is cut short by those dastardly Harkonnens, and because the Atreides appear to have been wiped out, we can think of them as victims.

It is this binary opposition—that one noble house is Good and the other Bad—that the film is deconstructing in a way that the book and its sequels, which constantly give near-mythical qualities to the Atreides, do not. Essentially everyone who reads the *Review* is familiar with the dominant theoretical approaches to reading SF: following Freedman's rereading of Suvin, readers accept that aspects unfamiliar or counter to reality, but which are perceived as cognitively plausible within the world of the text, are part of the estrangement function and therefore needn't be examined all that closely except insofar as they estrange some aspect of our own reality. This has had many positive consequences, notably the inclusion of far more texts under the umbrella of SF than might otherwise be possible. But it's also this that Villeneuve's *Dune* is holding up in a distorting mirror. By forcing viewers to fill in the blanks themselves in order to ground the central conflict, it encourages viewers and readers to reconsider the uncritical acceptance of these conditions.

Through reframing the film, Villeneuve not only compels viewers to consider the conflict from the point of view of the Fremen, but also to reconsider the willing suspension of disbelief for those aspects of the textual world that may seem implausible, or may seem valid or decent or humane, but only through uncritical acceptance of what the text says. Viewers who read *Dune* a long time ago, perhaps even before the 1984 film, might well feel like Team Atreides is the right team; viewers watch Villeneuve's film and struggle to explain it to others who haven't read the book may well find themselves thinking of the Atreides as just another bunch of unelected, exploitive, colonialist gangsters. We might even take Chani's position and wonder who our own next group of overlords will be. The spice must flow, because it protects the privileges of our oppressors.

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