Science Fiction and Psychology, by Gavin Miller

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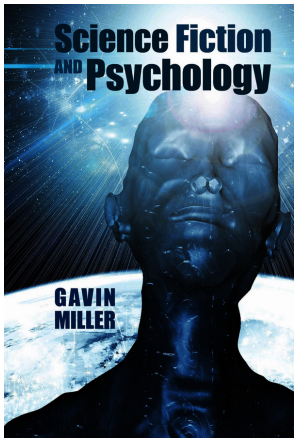

In *Science Fiction and Psychology*, Gavin Miller explores the intersection of science fiction and psychological discourses as they change and shift across different historical moments. Starting with the late nineteenth century and the emergence of "science fiction as a type" and "psychology as a discipline" and ending with the "'psychologicalization' of Western society" in the 1990s, when the rise of neuroscience marked the "decade of the brain" (13-14), Miller covers five key schools of psychological thought and asks: what is psychology doing in science fiction, and conversely, what is science fiction doing in psychology? Within this framework of inquiry, Miller explores the importance of understanding the place of psychology in science fiction literature as well as the potential role of science fiction to narrativize psychology theory and practice (39). As Miller argues, it is science fiction's kinship with psychology and its process of "cognitive estrangement" that the convergence of the two is crucial for realizing the impact of social oppression and its practices on human differences, such as gender and race (40).

Structured to cover the emergence and development of both disciplines, *Science Fiction and Psychology* consists of an Introduction and five chapters: Chapter 1 "Evolutionary Psychology," Chapter 2 "Psychoanalytic Psychology," Chapter 3 "Behaviourism and Social Constructionism," Chapter 4 "Existential Humanistic Psychology," Chapter 5 "Cognitive Psychology," and finally the Conclusion, "Science Fiction in Psychology." Testimony to Miller's expertise in the field of psychology and science fiction, the Introduction carefully outlines the book's purpose, which is to introduce and juxtapose dominant narratives of psychology with their alternative counter-narratives as they appear in science fiction. Miller explains that his book does not offer a comprehensive overview of the subject matter but should be treated as a starting point to stimulate further research. Chapters are sequenced in chronological order "in relation to each school as they emerged over time, from proto-psychologies to psychology as a newly emerging science" (41).

The first chapter covers evolutionary psychology and references John Tooby and Leda Cosmides's work on human selfishness, aggression, and survival of the fittest of the 1980s. Miller also looks to earlier schools such as Social Darwinism and socio-biology to examine the anti-

utopian thread found in works such as H.G. Wells's *The Time Machine* (1895) and Octavia Butler's *The Parable of the Talents* (1998). Examined in these two texts is human progress hampered by a re-activated dormant evolutionary mechanism that destroys any hope for an idealised vision of a civilised society in the future. To offer a contrast to this view, Miller turns to Naomi Mitchison's book, *Memoirs of a Spacewoman* (1962), whose take on evolutionary biology draws upon John Bowlby's "attachment theory" to offer a "renewed feminist ethic of compassion" for "estranging our dominant ethical systems" (42). As Miller explains, Mitchison's feminist interpretation offers a more hopeful vision of a human society that is open to others.

In the second chapter, Miller turns to the school of psychoanalytic psychology and Freud's anti-utopian, Nietzschean idea of civilization as a thin fragile veneer "concealing displaced instinctual gratification" (42). Here Miller explores the edict that the human mind is incompatible with society as the psychological drive is to break free from social constraints to access unfettered desire (81). The science fiction works chosen for analysis are Barry N. Malzberg's *The Remaking of Sigmund Freud* (1985), Ursula K. Le Guin's *The Word for World is Forest* (1972), and Daniel Keyes's *Flowers for Algernon* (1966) (42). In his analysis of these three narratives, Miller discusses the shift from Freud's anti-utopian vision of humanity and the inability to change, to exploring the creative imagination of the collective consciousness in Le Guin's Jungian text of connection and transformation. Finally, Miller focuses on Keyes's examination of the social values attached to cognitive difference and intelligence in *Flowers for Algernon* and the consideration of the existential potential of being and becoming (81–123). At this point, Miller reveals how science fiction does not faithfully adopt psychology as it is presented in society but creatively sifts through and adapts elements for its own narrative purposes, challenging the discursive authority of Freud's pessimistic prognosis of society (126).

In Chapter 3, "Behaviourism and Social Constructionism," Miller discusses how science fiction is informed by two psychological paradigms that insist on the malleability of human psychology. Examining behaviourism, Miller explores B.F. Skinner's near-future utopian novel, *Walden Two* (1948). Also questioning Skinner's behaviourist model, Miller turns to Anthony Burgess's *A Clockwork Orange* (1962), Ursula K. Le Guin's *The Lathe of Heaven* (1971), and William Sleator's *House of Stairs* (1974). Next, in considering social constructionism, Miller examines the issue of contingency and unpredictability alongside science fiction's tendency to allow the experimental thought of dissolving present psychological and cultural givens into an alternate future scenario. Texts that typify such a thought experiment are Joanna Russ's *The Female Man* (1975), Edmund Cooper's 1972 novel *Who Needs Men?*, and Naomi Mitchison's *Solution Three* (1974). As Miller explains, the three texts chosen explore utopian and dystopian reconstructions of gender relations, but remain troubled by issues of nature and cultural diversity (43).

In Chapter 4, Miller looks to "Existential-Humanistic Psychology" and its anti-systematic school of psychological thought that questions behaviourism and psychoanalysis for its reductionist accounts of humans governed by biological and instinctual drives. Miller's discussion draws on the work of Viktor Frankl and Abraham Maslow to examine proto-discourses such

as Vincent Hugh's *I Am Thinking of My Darling* (1943), which critiques an "emerging ideal of personal authenticity" to question "the American Dream" in 1940s New York (44). A later postwar example that Miller examines is Marge Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time* (1976), which critiques the instrumental tendencies of mainstream psychology.

In Chapter 5, "Cognitive Psychology," Miller examines the founders of cognitive theory in psychology and science from George Miller and Noam Chomsky to Ulrich Neisser in order to look at Jack Finney's *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1955), which uses earlier proto-cognitivist discourses to contend that "the mind as machine" operates like "a biased, limited capacity information processor" (44, 205). Looking further at science fiction texts that unsettle ideas about everyday perception, Miller analyses Ian Watson's *The Embedding* (1973), Samuel R. Delany's *Babel-17* (1966), and Ted Chiang's "Story of Your Life" (1998). The aim of focusing on these texts is to explore how science fiction has asked broader questions about "the nature and accessibility of ultimate reality" (44). In this chapter, Miller examines science fiction that asks whether we ever have access to an authentic reality or whether it is always in a process of construction and prone to faulty perception (203-204).

Finally, in the conclusion, "Science Fiction in Psychology," Miller discusses the potential of deploying science fiction tropes within official psychological literature at a popular and scholarly level. In particular, Miller examines the way science fiction can be exploited in psychology as a didactic tool, as he cites psychologists such as Sandra and Daryl Bem, Randy Thornhill and Craig Palmer, and Steven Pinker, who readily use speculative narratives of the future to "legitimate their particular psychological claims" (44).

To sum up, *Science Fiction and Psychology* is a rich, densely-argued study in how science fiction and psychology overlap and share the critical power to examine the human condition through the lens of historically situated psychological discourses and science fiction's key concepts of the novum (plausible innovations) and cognitive estrangement. It is a book for an academic audience, for students studying medicine and literature and/or the medical humanities and science fiction, as well as those interested in popular science fiction culture. *Science Fiction and Psychology* is incredibly detailed and painstakingly outlined in its aims and goals, which is to initiate an inquiry into the fruitful intersection of science fiction and psychology. Importantly, Miller's work is perceptive about the potential of science fiction to foreground the shifting attitudes that accompanied new movements in psychology during different historical moments. In his account, science fiction does not slavishly adopt accepted views of psychology but instead, intended or not, Miller demonstrates how science fiction uses psychology in thought experiments that either reveal the inherent contradictions of social formations in modern society or plainly work to question and oppose them. As Miller affirms, "Wittingly, or unwittingly, psychology allows the telling and performance of narratives based on supposedly real, or imminent, psychological technologies–stories that, like those of literary science fiction, take the reader to an estranged, critically distanced, version of their own reality" (258).

Sue Smith's interest is in disability in cyborg fiction. She has written articles that primarily intersect the cyborg soldier, disability and medicine. Her most recent article is an essay on Imperator Furiosa that features in *JLCDS*'s Science Fiction Special (14:4).