SFRA

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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.

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FROM THE
EDITORS

Image by the James Webb Space Telescope

FROM THE EDITORS

Fall 2022

Ian Campbell

On 15 October, the person whose flat is two floors directly above ours decided to do some DIY work, and in the process managed to cut our Google Fiber cable, plunging our flat back into the darkness of the twentieth century. Dear readers, it was horrible: a perfect storm of both my wife and me having worked from home for so long that I could no longer do my whole job from the office—and my wife not having even had an office for more than two years—and the "Kafka was taking notes" nightmare of modern corporate customer "service". It was a full week before the metaphorical lights came back on, whereupon my wife sang "Hallelujah" from the balcony—and someone called the police on her.

Being cut off from the Internet is the twenty-first century form of solitary confinement: you have no idea how many times one of us said "I need/want to…" and then realized we simply could not. I know this complaint sounds picayune—and it is, in comparison to, say, the Supreme Court deciding that American women and girls are rightsless breeding animals, or whatever the next round of horror they might unleash upon us will be. Nevertheless, the Internet, something I graduated from college without and still turned into something that from a very particular angle might have resembled a functioning adult, has become so critical to the very existence of anything like a knowledge-based occupation that we are worse than useless without it. It's just another part of that future that's already here, but unequally distributed.

Our issue this quarter is quite short: a raft of papers we intend to publish as a group proved to need too many edits to bring it in under the deadline. Nevertheless, in addition to our usual palette of reviews, we also have our symposium on Conflicting Masculinities in SF, which we sincerely hope you will find as interesting and à propos as we do. We do hope you enjoy the images from the James Webb Space Telescope in the PDF edition of the journal.

Martin Luther King once said "the arc of history bends toward justice", which might sometimes be hard to see in current times, but Steve Bannon is in prison now, and that paragon of the SF community, Theodore Beale aka Vox Day, had a million dollars stolen from him. Beale was trying to produce a film, *Rebel's Run*, about a conservative superhero in a Confederate flag bustier, and parked his money with a firm called Ohana Capital Financial, because they were the only ones who would do business with someone with such a well-documented history of racist and sexist statements. Turns out, Ohana was the extremely common multiclass character of cryptocurrency miner and scam artist, and walked away with Beale's money. I guess old Vox Day is a sad puppy now.

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

The Editorial Collective

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

FROM THE SFRA EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Image by the James Webb Space Telescope

From the President

Gerry Canavan

It's hard to believe this is my final President's Note! As challenging and chaotic as the last three years have been in some ways, they also seem to have passed by in the blink of an eye. I look back on what we have accomplished, including two successful annual meetings with previously unprecedented virtual formats and the first major revision of the organization's bylaws in many years, with gratitude and pride, and I want to thank everyone who has contributed to the (mostly) smooth running of this organization over my term as president of SFRA, especially the elected members of the two executive committees I've worked with (Keren, Sonja, Ida, Sean, Hugh, Jess, and Tim) and the organizers of the recent and upcoming annual conferences (De Witt, Rebekah, Graham, Bodhi, Moritz, Julia, and Jaak), as well as everyone who has taken on extra work to serve on a policy or awards committee. I really look forward to supporting the group in my new role as Immediate Past President, and trust that you'll be hearing from me again when it comes time for populating election slates and committees next year.

Keren Omry recently sent out the candidate statements for the next election, which will take place in mid-December. You can find those at the SFRA website, or elsewhere in this issue. As a reminder, here is what the new bylaws say about elections:

The immediate past president, in consultation with the Executive Committee, shall submit a slate of candidates for each position to be filled at least 60 days prior to the election day. These candidates will be nominated by current members (self-nominations and nomination by current members of the Executive Committee will be allowed). The immediate past president shall notify the membership in the SFRA Review, and all other appropriate and available electronic and social outlets, of this slate of candidates. Within 30 days of the publication of this slate of candidates in the SFRA Review, additional candidates may be nominated by submission of a petition signed by at least five persons of the membership in good standing entitled to vote in the election to the secretary of the association. At the end of this 30-day period nominations shall be closed and the ballot shall be prepared.

We have crossed that 60-day threshold and are fast approaching the 30-day threshold, after which the ballot will be closed; if you would like to supplement this slate of candidates with a new name, please, do so soon!

As always, reach out to me if you have any questions or concerns, or if you would like me to promote anything on SFRA's social media. Thanks so much for entrusting me with the responsibility of leading this group for a time, and I look forward to seeing you all in Dresden next year.

From the Vice President

Ida Yoshinaga

Aloha, SFRA members,

As we, the networks of Earth, flow towards mid-twenty-first century singularity from a wide spacetime perspective and we enter yet another holiday season from the smaller sense of human affective momentum, I find myself thinking about my own, small-f "futurisms." Perhaps for the first time ever—very odd for a lifetime learner in science-fiction studies.

The collective that taught me how to think will turn into a "majority-minority" society in another 22 years, so I envision myself in Future Georgia, watching my students from this semester evolve into full persons, enchanting what's been red and purple into a deep indigo-like blue in another 10.

The collective of my ancestors will spin its centuries of modernist love for artificiality, commerce, and form into a line of pleasingly mannered, sentient and multi-gendered, service workers. They'll be facing that classical Nipponese dilemma—order and pleasure, or discomforting revolution—in another 80 (crossing into the twenty-second's threshhold).

And I will labor at my present factory, the STEMmy mothership, tirelessly, relentlessly, until my favorite organ crepes into spotted curtains draped from my elbows and tailbone. I'll drain my spirit turning human storytelling into one of those new monsters, a growling electrical beast who can generate fables and novels and screenplays autonomously. Like the scientist in the story, I will be shocked when the creature turns on me, on humanity. In another 30.

But mostly, a week before we take out the costumes and for the first time since the virus, join in on the parades…Before our souls homecome to family and community with three rounds of seasonal fantasy make-pretend (ghosts, unpredatory colonial settlers, Klaus)…I'm looking back. As part of my small-f futurism; otherwise, how can one grasp the meaning, the impact, of the flow towards all these someday-presents?

So: Thank you, Jessica Fitzpatrick, for your attention to detail, conscientious and necessary financial work, positive demeanor and imaginative orientation, and for doing what's probably the second-hardest job (next to Gerry's) in our Executive Committee.

Thank you, Sean Guynes, whose egoless service to SFRA of course eclipses the minute and diligent secretarial duties you've offered up these past years. I see you: your systematic and long-term questions, fixes, quiet administrative contributions.

Mahalo, Keren Omry, who along with Sean and Gerry, ushered me into this association. Global feminist leadership modeled; now the IAFA is fortunate to benefit from your hefty organizational smarts.

Crushingest of kaiju-sized hugs to Gerry Canavan, whose stewardship has honestly felt a little like that of the mythical space captain in that syndicated live-action series I'd watched as a child on Maui in the '70s. Intuitive, action-oriented when needs be, thinking always of crew and community. Funny on occasion (albeit not in a Shatneresque way). I know you hate the term praxis, so let's simply ignore that you're the embodiment of the best of this. Very glad you're still on board.

I'm here for another few.

Ida Yoshinaga, VP

Candidate Statements for the 2023-2025 SFRA Executive Committee

Keren Omry

Below, please find the statements from the candidates for two Executive Committee positions that are open this year: President and Secretary. Each successful candidate is expected to serve for a three-year term. In addition, you can see the candidates for our one-year pilot At Large positions. Please read and consider all the candidates' statements and, when we open our online voting page in early December, cast your vote.

I want to take this opportunity to express my warmest gratitude and greatest appreciation for everyone I've had a chance to serve with during my eight years on the SFRA Executive Committee. A volunteer association is only ever as good as its members make it and it's been a true privilege to watch the Association grow and change, always striving to do more and better for the incredible community to which we belong. May the next stewards of this ship always roll with the waves and sail true. Finally, I want to send my sincere thanks to all the candidates who are putting their names in the hat and wish them good luck!

PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES

Hugh C. O'Connell

I've been a member for the SFRA since 2015, and during this time I've served on the Student Paper Award Committee (2016-2018) and as the organization's treasurer (2018-2021). Over the last couple of years, the organization as a whole has worked hard to diversify the core membership and to increase member representation on the Executive Board. If elected as president, my main goal would be to continue working with the membership and E-Board on the new programs that have been put in place, while also seeking new avenues for members to help guide and shape the organization. In many ways, my experiences through joining the SFRA, attending the conferences, and working within the organization created that first sense of having an academic home, and it would be a privilege to continue to serve the organization and hopefully extend that feeling for both new and longtime members.

Peter Sands

I've been a member of the SFRA for most of my professional career, stretching back to the 1990s, when I was the first webmaster for the group, and published Rich Erlich's *Coyote's Song: the Teaching Stories of Ursula K. Le Guin* as the first digital publication of the SFRA. Much of my professional energy has also been directed to the steering committee of a sister organization, the Society for Utopian Studies, where I am currently finishing my term as President; I have a good deal of experience in caretaking of scholarly societies. For many years I have also been the liaison

between SFRA and SUS. Most of my publications are in utopian studies as well. My academic career has trended recently more toward administration; my experience as undergraduate chair for a large English department in a R1 university, and as Director of the Honors College since 2014 have been good preparation for managing the business, communications, and continuity of groups such as ours. My primary focus and success as an administrator has been improving the diversity of the student body and of the staff in the honors college; I believe that scholarly societies as well need as soon as possible to look less like me and more like the diverse rests of the world. I'm eager to give back to the SFRA, which has been a congenial home and intellectual engine for so many of us and for so long, and to continue the good work of those who kept us all going through the recent very weird years.

SECRETARY

Sarah Lohmann

It would be an honour for me to be considered for the position of SFRA Secretary. The SFRA has been an academic home for me since the 2016 conference in Liverpool – one of my first conferences – and I have been looking for opportunities to become more actively involved. I think the position of Secretary would be ideal given my background in academic organising, which I will briefly bore you with.

Firstly, during my undergraduate and MA years at the University of St Andrews, I served as Secretary and then President of three student societies, significantly increasing membership and hosting well-known speakers (like Iain M. Banks!). Following this, during my PhD at Durham University, I organised a well-received museum exhibition on time travel narratives, convened two successful lecture series, and served as PhD student representative. Finally, in my postdoctoral position at the University of Tübingen, I have become involved with the new College of Fellows and am designing a comprehensive orientation course for international MA students. All this has given me a great deal of committee experience, insight into academic procedures, and event management practice, which I would particularly like to make use of as SFRA Secretary during this time of change in the association: I would love to help mediate this transition, as I especially enjoy facilitating dynamic processes.

In addition, I would like to contribute the collaborative potential that comes with being a bilingual (English and German) and trinational (German, American and British) academic: for instance, I am well-positioned to help the EC unpack the international complexities of diversification and representation.

My work in this position would also, of course, be informed by my love of SF, which has been my central academic focus since I stumbled across a wonderful SF class in my undergraduate years. I am now preparing to publish my PhD thesis on feminist utopias as science-fictional thought experiments modelling complex systems, and other recent projects include a chapter on

utopias as living organisms in a Festschrift for Lucy Sargisson, edited by Lyman Tower Sargent and Raffaella Baccolini, as well as several contributions to *This is Not a Science Fiction Textbook*, edited by Mark Bould and Steven Shaviro. My teaching also features SF or science-fictionality across speculative genres: I always find ways to explore the critical potential of cognitive estrangement and other science-fictional narrative mechanisms, which often incites great interest in the genre, and I am currently planning courses on SF and the Anthropocene.

I am unsure what the future holds, but having recently had the honour of being interviewed as an 'up-and-coming SF scholar' by current Secretary Sean Guynes for the SFRA Review, I have no intention of deserting this amazing field anytime soon: I have two SF-based academic books in the pipeline, plenty of SF-informed teaching material lined up, and many plans for SF-focused events up my sleeve. Serving as SFRA Secretary would be a wonderful addition to these endeavours, and I would do so with pleasure and to the best of my ability.

AT LARGE

Helane Androne

I am happy to stand for the At-large position on the Executive Committee of the SFRA. I am currently Professor of English at Miami University of Ohio Regional campuses, and an Affiliate of the Global and Intercultural Studies Department. I teach courses in African American literature, Latine literatures, Critical Race and Ethnic Studies, Women's Studies, and SFF–all of which engage my primary focus on the sacred. I am committed to teaching and learning practices that engage non/traditional students through multidisciplinary and multi-modal learning, and I seek to reflect that concern both in my courses and in my scholarship. My current project uses Chela Sandoval's *Methodology of the Oppressed* alongside Malidoma Patrice Somé's rite of passage teachings to point out how myth and magic operate as an activism of radical survival in black womanist SFF. I have recently engaged SFF to present on Love Theory, on anti-racism, on activism and resistance, on intersectionality and the image of God, and on methodologies of emancipation. Along with scholarly interests, I have concrete experience and skills that enhance my candidacy: I have successfully written and co-written almost $200K in external and internal grants; presented for more than 70 conferences, workshops, and lectures; published 2 books and written more than 15 other publications. I have chaired a department; been an independent magazine editor and writer; chaired the 1921 Award for 2 cycles at the American Literature Society; and have served on several editorial boards and in multiple literary societies. As an At-large member of the SFRA, I believe I'll bring a balance of academic experience, administrative conscientiousness, and scholarly aptitude, as well as energetic support for the diverse and expanding role of SFF.

Gabriela Lee

As an academic and author from the Global South, I am very excited to run as an at large member of the SFRA. I am looking forward to highlighting and raising up voices from my side of the world and bringing them into conversation with other scholars and writers from the Global North. I am also looking forward to more actively supporting regular activities that the SFRA currently has and encouraging new initiatives, and I intend to bring my energy and work ethic to these projects. Outside of the SFRA, I am also the co-editor of an upcoming sourcebook on Philippine speculative fiction, soon to be published by the University of the Philippines Press. I am also currently a graduate student at the University of Pittsburgh, as well as a faculty member (on leave) at the University of the Philippines, where I teach creative writing, children's literature, and Philippine literature in English. Broadly speaking, my creative and critical work has usually focused on intersections of children's literature, speculative fiction, and the post/de/anti-colonial, especially the ways in which it manifests in Philippine literature. I hope that through the at large member position in the SFRA, I can contribute to making visible many creators and scholars who may not have had opportunities to be seen and heard, as well as learning from a community of like-minded scholars and writers. I look forward to serving SFRA community in imagining and moving towards a kinder, more compassionate world.
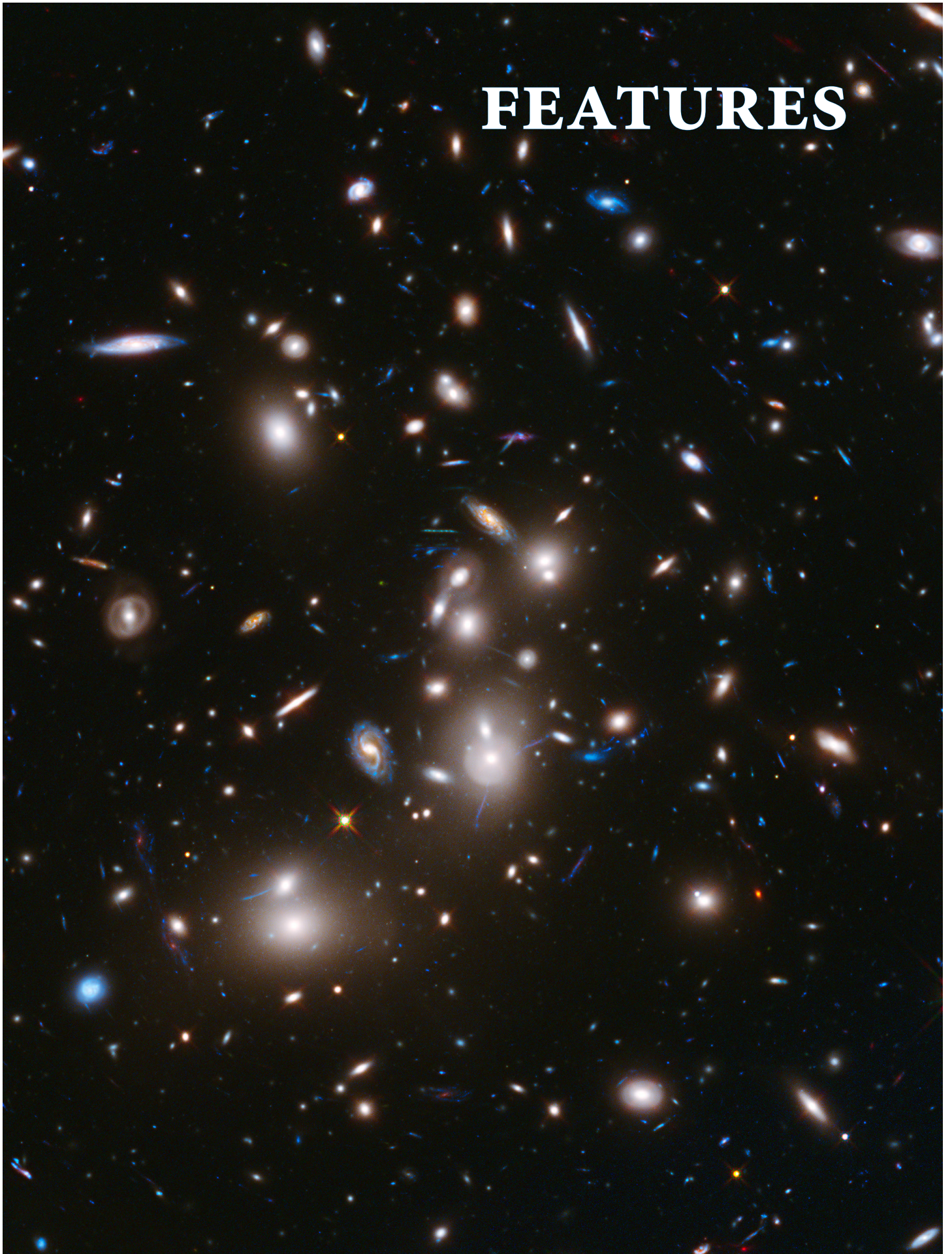
FEATURES

Call for Papers: Conservative/Right-Wing Science Fiction

The Editorial Collective

Editor's Note: We are extending the deadline for this symposium in order to further publicize it: we did not receive the volume of submissions this topic deserves, and encourage scholars of SF to consider submitting a proposal.

While the dramatic resurgence of conservative, right-wing, and openly fascist movements became more visibly mainstream once the Trump 2016 campaign began to develop momentum, the SF world had already been introduced to this growth in unapologetically right-wing discourse via the controversies surrounding the various Puppies movements and their attempts to hijack the major awards in the years immediately prior. With the dramatic success of right-wing movements in the years before and since 2016, we of the SF community are well-suited to explore the works and worlds of SF created by right-wing authors as well as authors estranging right-wing discourse.

The *SFRA Review* is interested in short papers addressing conservative/right-wing SF in all its manifestations: literature, film, other media, games. We are also interested in papers addressing the science-fictionality of right-wing discourse outside of explicitly SF media.

- Papers should be from 3000-5000 words in length, with references in MLA style and few if any discursive footnotes.

- Our primary areas of interest are how right-wing discourse manifests in SF, how SF estranges right-wing discourse and how 21st-century conservative discourse takes on a science-fictional aspect.

- Papers *by* conservative writers, or papers that take a conservative stance on works or the genre of SF, are absolutely welcome. Racism, etc., will not be tolerated, but a good-faith conservative argument is well within the purview of this collection.

- Papers that engage with conservative theorists or media figures are also absolutely welcome, insofar as the papers address the science-fictionality of their discourse. Again, good-faith argumentation is our goal here; so long as the argument of the paper itself does not engage in (e.g.) gender essentialism, we welcome papers that address such tropes in the writing/speech of conservative theorists or figures.

- Papers that engage with conservative/reactionary approaches by fandom to changes in works, genres or the overall discourse of SF, broadly defined, are also welcome.

- Metacommentary about (e.g.) the Puppies is welcome; however, we are more interested in literary analysis, in the broadest sense, of works of SF and/or right-wing discourse.

- Much right-wing SF is of questionable literary quality: we are less interested in papers whose primary rationale is to point this out than we are in how and why right-wing tropes manifest or are estranged in works of right-wing SF or discourse.

- Images should be at least 2000 pixels wide; given that this is literary analysis, the exceptions to copyright for fair use will apply.

- Please send email to Ian Campbell (icampbell@gsu.edu) with the subject line *SFRA Conservative SF* and a brief description of your paper by **15 September 2022**. Any other queries should be sent to this address, as well, with the same subject line.

- Complete drafts are due **15 February 2023**.

- Edits will be due **15 April 2023**.

- Papers will be published in the Spring 2023 issue (53.2) on **01 May 2023**.

We sincerely hope that you will be interested in what we feel is an important aspect of SF in these current times and encourage you to submit.
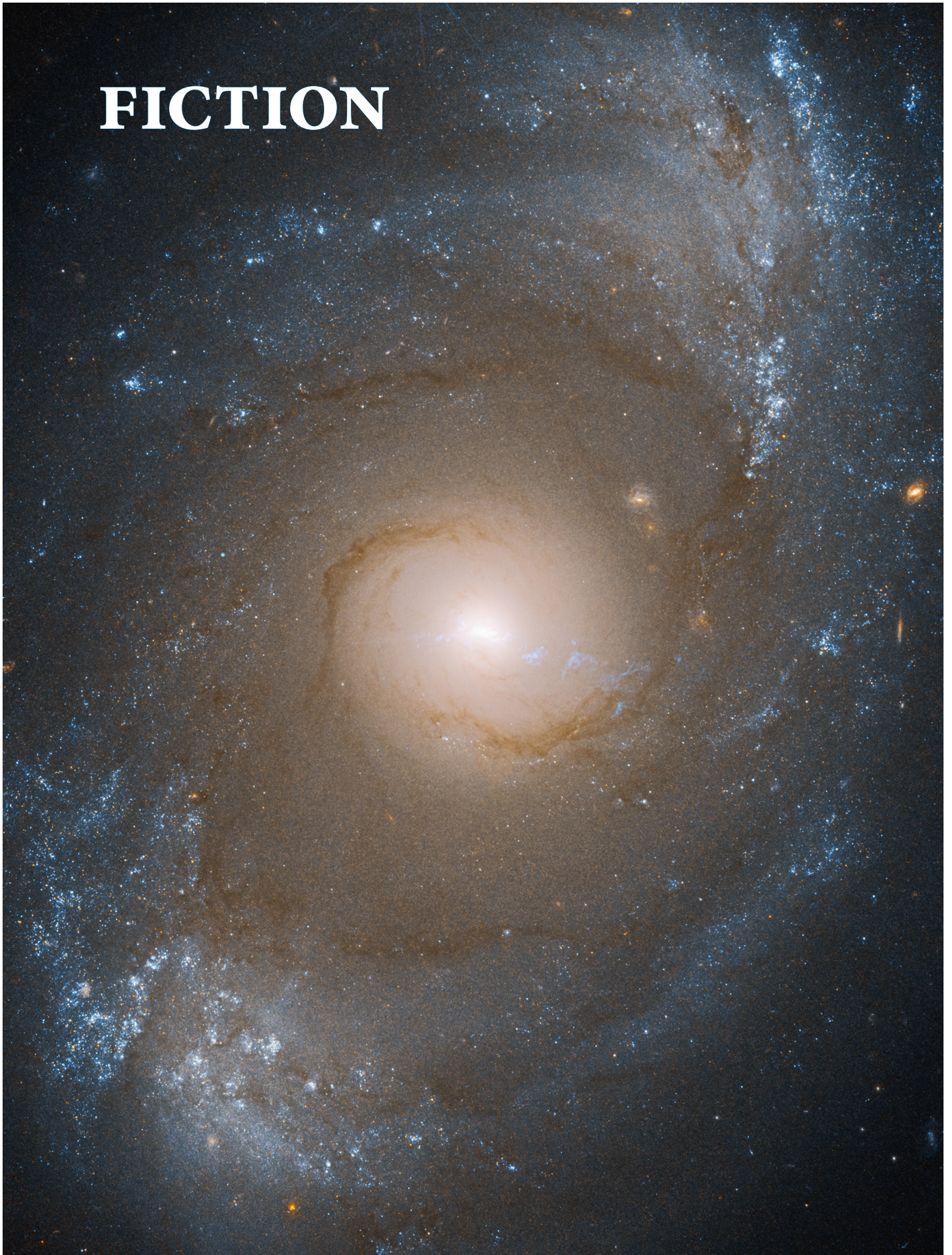
FICTION

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: Winter 2023".

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.

SYMPOSIUM: CONFLICTING MASCULINITIES IN SCIENCE FICTION

Introduction to Masculinities and Science Fiction Symposium

Michael Pitts

This special issue on masculinity and science fiction is in many ways timely. Current popular discourse surrounding sex, sexuality, and gender frequently hits upon the ongoing so-called crisis of masculinity. Every segment of society is plagued with heated discussions surrounding the future and validity of contrasting masculinities. In global politics there has been a return of the "strong man" persona as authoritarian leaders utilize patriarchal gender scripts to appeal to their voter bases. Online social platforms capitalize upon the supposed crisis, funneling aimless young men into ever more dangerous corners of the internet where pick-up artists offer their male listeners misogynistic strategies for seducing women, and other groups such as Men Going Their Own Way (MGTOW) and Men's Rights Activists (MRA) foment anger into real social and political action. From this side of the aisle arise accusations of anti-male bias in contemporary society. Men, it is argued, face historical levels of criticism simply for behaving "like men."

Yet, there is a simultaneous, opposing push to broaden the borders of masculinity and disrupt traditional conceptualizations of gender. Such efforts are bolstered by sociological accounts of the crisis as one resulting not from some lost essence of masculinity but rather from patriarchal entitlement. Dan Cassino and Yasemin Besen-Cassino note the centrality of male aggrievement to the crisis, which they define as "the tension between how men view their own roles at home, at work, and in society, and the reality of a society in which their privilege is being reduced. Men still enjoy a lot of advantages in our society, but those advantages—especially for white men in working-class jobs—are not as great as they used to be" (1). The crisis of masculinity is, therefore, not a legitimate response to supposedly anti-male societies but rather a dispute over how men must approach gender in a changing world. As the social advantages afforded men dwindle, they face the options of either reevaluating their beliefs concerning gender or of fortifying and intensifying their original, patriarchal conceptions of masculinity. The study of masculinity is therefore vitally important to this particular moment in history since as a discipline it provides tools and avenues for men to recognize the ideological underpinnings and real-world repercussions of their gender performances and it grants them, through the rethinking of gender, a new, better way to express and fully realize their identities.

This rethinking of gender incorporates the theoretical apparatuses established since the inception of masculinity studies as an organized subset of feminist theory in the 1990s. Originating in the 1970s in opposition to the anti-feminist men's right movement, critical men's studies initially focused predominantly upon normative masculine gender identities in the United States and Europe. Such approaches were problematic in the way they overlooked important

factors such as race and sexuality and did not analyze the experiences of men marginalized according to these and other non-normative identity elements. What followed in the 1990s was the introduction of complexity and nuance to the burgeoning field. Notable texts such as Raewyn Connell's Masculinities (1995), for example, consider the connection of cultures and masculinity, tracing links between patriarchal gender identities and a greater system of power or gender order. Recent scholars build upon Connell's efforts to trace such pivotal connections between masculinity and power. Todd Reeser, for example, theorizes about the gendered nation, which normalizes particular, often patriarchal, gender identities to preserve its current networks of power. Eduardo Bonilla-Silva and Evelyn Nakano Glenn, broadening the scope of this analysis, illuminate how white men in North America and Europe buttress social constructs that work to legitimize their power over, among other groups, nonwhite and economically disadvantaged men. Building upon this scholarship, the scholars contributing to this symposium apply the sociological apparatus developed within masculinity studies to SF narratives in order to determine how these texts work to either normalize or challenge disparate masculine gender identities.

Such an application of masculinity studies to literary analysis is ideally suited to SF, a genre that enables the imagining of new societies, human interactions, and identities and which is therefore uniquely equipped to critique and rethink gender. In the introduction of *Gender and Environment in Science Fiction* (2018), Bridgitte Barclay and Christy Tidwell note this suitability of SF texts for gender readings since such "texts often ask questions such as *where is nature*, *what is natural*, and *who is equated with nature*" (ix). SF is certainly capable of normalizing patriarchal gender norms. Since its inception, the genre has played host to the aforementioned crisis of masculinity. Fearing the loss of a mythologized, essentialized man, adherents to traditional ideals of manhood have contributed speculative works that attempt to stabilize essentialist, patriarchal views of manliness. Yet, SF may also call into question traditional, essentialist understandings of femininity and masculinity. Writers across the eras of SF have contributed diverse works united by their socially-situated, radical presentations of masculinity. The close analyses of gender in speculative texts making up this special issue of the *SFRA Review* illuminate how the genre enables writers to both normalize and in turn marginalize contrasting masculine gender identities.

The suitability of the genre to host such conflicting views on masculinity is a recurring theme in my own research. In my examinations of golden age SF, I, for example, consider the super man character and his role as a central symbol of masculinity. I posit that such characters, empowered and emboldened by newfound or developed supernatural abilities, act both as idealized, hegemonically gendered figures and, in other, fewer narratives, as challengers of patriarchal masculinity. Such a divergence of masculinities illustrates once more how central the so-called crisis of masculinity has been to SF historically and the ways by which the genre acts as a battleground for opposing perspectives on gender. My research has likewise led me to the feminist utopias of the 1970s and 1980s and the alternative approaches these narratives take, essentialist or materialist, in framing masculine behavior. In Alternative Masculinities in Feminist Speculative Fiction: A New Man (2021) I, for example, consider how integrationist feminist utopias rethink

masculinity as part of the larger project of imagining the better society. What unites my own research and the work of the scholars making up this symposium on the conflicting masculinities of SF is our mutual interest in how the genre uniquely allows writers to comment upon the crisis of masculinity.

This special issue seeks broadly then to understand how masculinity, presented as divorced entirely from or inextricably linked to biological sex, is negotiated in speculative fiction. Accordingly, the articles in this issue seek to complicate the history of science fiction and illuminate conflicts between its competing portrayals of masculinity. Brad Congdon, for example, traces important connections between the character of Conan in Robert E. Howard's fiction and the racist nationalism prominent in eugenic thought of the time. As Congdon illustrates, Howard's Conan narratives and specifically the protagonist's gender performance acted as cultural tools by which patriarchal understandings of gender were disseminated and fortified. Similarly, R.B. Lemberg considers what Arkady and Boris Strugatsky's *The Snail on the Slope* (1965) reflects about Russian society and theories of masculinity in the mid-twentieth century. Through a careful analysis of four characters central to the novel, Lemberg considers the ways the novel presents their various traits, including complacency, determination, and absence, and models gendered behaviors specific to the Soviet era.

Similarly considering connections binding the nation and gender, Rachel Harrison examines separatist and integrationist feminist utopias of the 1970s and 1980s and the transformations of masculinity they present as central to the utopian project. Somasree Santra considers non-traditional portrayals of male characters, analyzing the protagonist of A.S. Byatt's *The Biographer's Tale* (2001) as a transgressor of the traditional gender line. Through her examination of two contemporary novels, Sara Alegre Martín illustrates how SF as a genre uniquely enables writers to examine and critique traditionally masculine overcommitments to work and careers. Jordan Etherington, like Brad Congdon, examines patriarchal texts, three novels under the *Warhammer 40K* banner, possessing a mutually constitutive relationship to hegemonic masculinity. As Etherington explains, these novels, though presented as satirical, reinforce problematic notions of masculinity. Concluding the issue by shifting its focus onto military masculinities, Ezekiel Crago emphasizes the manner by which the recent television program *The Expanse* problematizes such gendered behavior, which stabilizes patriarchal networks of power.

Each of these contributions illustrates the instability of masculinity, which shifts across geographic space and time, responds to outside social and political pressures, and may act as a tool both of hegemony and subversion. As this scholarship emphasizes, the crisis of masculinity is hardly new. In reality, it has been a fixture of SF since its inception.

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Conan's Iron Thews: Masculinity and Degeneracy in the Age of Eugenics

Brad Congdon

The increased popularity of American pulp fiction in the 1930s coincided with the rise of eugenic thinking. Eugenics influenced governmental policies regarding immigrant restriction, anti-miscegenation, and the sterilization of the "feeble-minded."[1] Eugenic thought was widely disseminated in literature, popular art, and film.[2] These supposedly scientific ideas appeared in early genre fiction, since the fear of dysgenics is rightly the realm of horror, while the scientific guidance of birth (by promoting "eugenic" marriages and the sterilization of the so-called "unfit") and the existence of a "superman" are suited to science fiction. *Weird Tales*, a magazine that blended these imaginative genres, circulated eugenic thought while transforming it into gendered fantasies. Perhaps nowhere are these fantasies more apparent than in Robert E. Howard's sword-and-sorcery tales of Conan the Cimmerian. In "Red Nails" (1936), Howard invests eugenic fantasies in the body of Conan, a hero who thwarts "degenerate," racialized others. An exemplar of masculinity, Conan invites a connection between idealized masculinity and racist, nationalist biopower, by embodying the Nordic myth promulgated by Madison Grant in *The Passing of the Great Race* (1916), who referred to Nordics as "the white man par excellence" (167).

Raewyn Connell defines hegemonic masculinity as "the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women" (*Masculinities* 77). During the early twentieth century, patriarchy was "threatened" by "social upheaval, including economic changes, immigration, labor unrest, and black and women's rights organizing" that "challenged the social and political power of white middle-class men" (Stein 170–71). Masculine domination was increasingly justified by eugenic notions of evolution and the biological superiority of white men.[3] In this context, the Nordic ideal acted as an exemplary form of masculinity. As Connell explains, exemplars of masculinity "express ideals, fantasies and desires, provide models of relations with women and solutions to gender problems and above all 'naturalize' gender difference and gender hierarchy" ("On Hegemonic" 90). Exemplars of masculinity are explicitly fantasy figures, such as those that populate Howard's sword-and-sorcery genre. Though "the Hyborian Age" setting of the Conan stories is meant to be "Europe-like and medievalist," Howard's fantasy fiction filters his historical understanding through contemporaneous, popular beliefs in eugenics (Young 28). These popular beliefs include Nordicism, physical culture and fitness, the threat of degeneracy, and the problems of "overcivilization." Howard's Conan embodies idealized masculinity for this era of American

eugenics, standing in for "the Nordic white statuesque male, who had arrived imaginatively to save the country from racial destruction" (Nies 2).

Conan and Nordicism's "Iron Thews"

Even before Arnold Schwarzenegger played Conan in the 1980s, the character was defined by his muscles, and it is the barbarian's "iron thews" that best qualify him as a eugenic exemplar of masculinity. When Bêlit, "The wildest she-devil unhanged," first sets eyes on Conan, she exclaims, "You are no soft Hyborian! … You are fierce and hard as a gray wolf. Those eyes were never dimmed by city lights; those thews were never softened by life amid marble walls" ("Queen of the Black Coast" 125, 127). Bêlit's response explains Conan's attractiveness while evoking Howard's eugenic views of civilization, degeneration, and masculinity. Bêlit suggests that civilization leads to "softness" at the individual and cultural level, echoing many race scientists who believed so-called "overcivilization" led to increased effeminacy in men, often associated with homosexuality or "inversion" (Stein 197). Conan has avoided degeneracy by being less civilized and thus more animalistic: he is "fierce and hard as a gray wolf" ("Queen of the Black Coast" 127). As we will see, though, Conan does not represent atavism, but the pure-blooded, un-degenerated Nordic.

Howard's Conan stories are redolent with descriptions of the Cimmerian's muscles, which exaggerate his already overwrought masculinity. Readers are confronted by Conan's "broad muscular breast" and the "muscles of his heavy bronzed arms" ("The Devil in Iron" 329), or they are asked to visualize how his "great muscles quivered, knotting like iron cables" ("A Witch Shall Be Born" 268). This fixation on Conan's hard body gains significance when considered in the context of American eugenics, an era when "the physical body both reflected and determined the character of the social body" (Stein 4). The muscular, white male body was of particular interest, for example, to creators of popular images (e.g., posters, caricatures, cartoons) in the 1930s, who, as Kerry Soper has argued, popularized eugenic thought:

> by visually identifying and categorizing individuals into racial, pauper, or criminal classes; by promoting or rationalizing the sterilization or extermination of insane, defective, or criminal classes through demonizing caricature; and by justifying societal divisions between "superior human stock," and degenerate (often racially based) classes through a contrast between idealized, "classical" bodies and distorted, "defective" bodies. (270)

By the 1930s, eugenic notions of superior white male bodies and degenerate defectives and criminals had become a demotic visual language. Conan's iron thews aligned him with contemporaneous notions of "superior human stock."

Readers of *Weird Tales* could have looked to the burgeoning world of bodybuilding, then known as "physical culture," as a real-world reference for Conan's muscular figure. In America, the figurehead for physical culture was Bernarr Macfadden, the man behind *Physical Culture*

magazine, which by the late 1920s sold more than half of a million copies each month (Stieglitz 246). As Shanon Fitzpatrick explains, Macfadden's company:

> linked outward bodily appearance, physical health and ability, and inner racial value in ways that idealized heterosexual white bodies... Its media brokered representations of vitalized Anglo-Saxonhood that framed muscular, light-skinned physiques—particularly those in procreative heterosexual unions—as the apotheosis of civilizational advancement and suitability for power. (62)

Macfadden suggested that overcoming the degenerative effects of overcivilization required appropriating "barbarian virtues" from so-called primitive societies (Fitzpatrick 73). In this way, he echoed earlier arguments like those forwarded by G. Stanley Hall, the founder and president of Clark University, who in 1899 claimed that "the key to building powerful virility in American men … was to encourage primitive savagery in American boys (Bederman 78). As a purely fantasy figure, Conan can fully embody these masculine "barbarian virtues" lauded by Macfadden and other eugenicists; his strength and virility represent both what has been lost by a modern, changing social world and what can be regained through physical culture and the eugenic breeding of "superior stock."

"Red Nails": Conan Among the Degenerates

Macfadden's readers would have been familiar with the fitness guru's slogan, which spoke to the cultural zeitgeist: "Sickness is a sin; don't be a sinner. Weakness is a crime; don't be a criminal" (qtd. in Currell 47). Conan is never sick, never weak: his exemplary masculinity comes into focus against the contrasting masculinity of these supposed sinners and criminals who were popularly characterized by fin-de-siecle descriptions of criminal physiognomy.[4] Within a patriarchal culture, Conan's muscles take on ideological meaning, because the barbarian is seen as the answer to the threat to white male superiority posed by de-evolution and degeneracy. Both Jeffrey Shanks and Justin Everett have commented on evolutionary and eugenic thought in Howard's Bran Mak Morn stories. The Conan stories share this quality, placing Conan within a drama of civilization, viewed as a cycle of evolution and degeneration.[5] This link between civilization and degeneration is most clearly argued in "Red Nails." Howard described the plot to H.P. Lovecraft in a letter dated December 5, 1935: "I have been dissatisfied with my handling of decaying races in stories, for the reason that degeneracy is so prevalent in such races that it can not be ignored as a motive and as a fact if the fiction is to have any claim to realism" (qtd. in *The Conquering Sword of Conan* 385). "Red Nails" would prove to be the last story of the Conan cycle and Howard's definitive word on degeneration.

"Red Nails" begins not with our barbarian hero, but with an introduction to Valeria of the Red Brotherhood. Unbeknownst to her, she is being pursued by Conan, who is following for unwanted, amorous purposes. Together, they evade a "dragon" and discover the walled city of Xuchotl. Believing it abandoned, the pair enter and encounter two degenerate races of men, the Tecuhltli and the Xotalancs, locked in a generations-long conflict. Conan and Valeria initially work with the

rulers of Tecuhltli—Prince Olmec and Princess Tascela—to defeat the Xotalancs. Then, Olmec and Tascela turn on Conan and Valeria; nevertheless, our two heroes triumph.

The complex history of Xuchotl attests to Howard's interest in the supposed degeneration of masculinity. Briefly, a race from "Old Kosala" originally conquers the land, building the city with slave labor, and then raises dragons from the earth as protection. Locked inside the city's walls for generations, the inhabitants grow decadent before being betrayed by a slave named Tolkemec. Tolkemec opens the city gates to a conquering army, "a tribe of Tlazitlans," led by brothers Tecuhlti and Xotalanc (346). The brothers rule peacefully for five years, until a woman (eventually revealed to be Queen Tascela, a vampiric immortal) comes between them, leading to a feud lasting 50 years—a feud predicated upon a competition between men over a woman, and on the violence this competition entails. For Howard, Xuchotl is a petri dish for the experiment of civilization: the longer a "race" of people is civilized, the more it degenerates.[6]

Conan's masculinity is antithetical to the degeneracy of the Xuchotlans, whom Olmec describes as "a perishing race," admitting that they had produced no children in the past fifteen years (248). The first Tecuhltian we encounter, Techotl, is described as "very dark, though not negroid... He was built with an economy that was almost repellent" (232). The rest of the men of Techuhlti are "of the same type as Techotl, and the women were equally dark and strange-eyed, though not unbeautiful in a weird dark way" (242). The primary physical signifier of their supposed degeneracy is their darkness, though beyond the characteristic of their skin colour is an unsettling quality: they are described as "weird" or "repellant." This degeneracy means that the Tecuhlti have lost the masculinity that Conan represents. To emphasize this point, Howard compares Conan and Olmec: while both men "presented a formidable picture of primitive power," Olmec's physiognomy includes "something abysmal and monstrous that contrasted unfavorably with the clean-cut, compact hardness of the Cimmerian" (273). Both are powerful, but Conan presents a superior, streamlined version of Olmec; as Christina Cogdell has argued, streamlining was a design process that paralleled eugenic thought (33–83). In this way, the Cimmerian represents both the start and end point of eugenic notions of masculinity: he is the pure-blooded Nordic, untainted by civilization, and the goal of eugenicist breeding programs that sought a "purely Germanic and Nordic super race, enjoying biological dominion over others" (Black 7).

In contrast to Conan, the Xuchotlans are victims of "overcivilization." Having lived too long within city walls, their race has degenerated physically and sexually. Indeed, many eugenicists saw race and sex as inextricably intertwined. Melissa Stein explains that evolutionary theorists "argued that distinct gender roles and distinctly sexed bodies marked higher evolutionary stages. The disruption to gender norms posed by homosexuality and 'inversion' … thus threatened both white manhood and the white race as a whole" (171). This racial/sexual drama of degeneration plays out in Xuchotlan society, and in the narrative of Conan's female companion, Valeria.

"Virile Manhood and Superb Womanhood"

Nordic masculinity cannot regenerate "white" civilization alone. A fitting partner is needed. Eugenicists aimed to improve humanity through breeding, either by restricting childbirth via sterilization or promoting eugenic marriages. Ultimately, eugenics centered the female body and the role of the mother in both its scientific and rhetorical concerns. The exact figure the ideal mother would cut was debatable: Macfadden, for example, championed the notion of "superb womanhood," and "framed virile manhood and superb womanhood as complementary ideals that would achieve their greatest expression in physical culture marriages" (Fitzpatrick 69). Valeria is the type of woman that Macfadden had in mind, and the narrative of "Red Nails" seeks to show the superiority of Conan's virile manhood and Valeria's superb womanhood before ending with them as a potentially procreative couple.

Though Valeria's fitness will later be seen as an asset, she first figures as a potential threat to masculinity. Valeria evokes concerns of homosexuality and inversion, both of which were seen by some eugenicists as signs of atavism and evidence of racial degeneration (Stein 180–81). Valeria's initial description suggests anxiety around gender norms: "She was tall, full-bosomed and large-limbed, with compact shoulders. Her whole figure reflected an unusual strength, without detracting from the femininity of her appearance" ("Red Nails" 211). Howard notes Valeria's strength and therefore her suitability as Conan's partner; however, he also emphasizes her femininity to assure readers that she's a fitting object of Conan's heterosexuality.

Similarly, Valeria's actions are threateningly masculine. She asks of Conan, "Why won't men let me live a man's life?" Conan replies that the answer is "obvious," while "his eager eyes devoured her" (214). The cultural practices of patriarchy mean that Valeria's femininity stands in the way of her goal to live "a man's life." Significantly, when Valeria first sees Conan, her response is suggestive: "'Conan, the Cimmerian!' ejaculated the woman" (213). Valeria responds in appropriately heterosexual fashion, but it is suggestive of a (stereotypically) masculine orgasm. Valeria's desire for "a man's life," her self-determination, and her masculine response to Conan all imply inversion, and female "inverts" were understood as a threat to national and racial superiority (Stein 179).

In addition to gender nonconformity, Valeria's narrative evokes homosexual attraction, threatening a potential union with Conan and the chances of eugenic futurity. When Valeria catches Yasala, Tascela's servant, attempting to poison her, she punishes the woman in a homoerotic passage:

> "You sulky slut!" she said between her teeth. "I'm going to strip you stark naked and tie you across that couch and whip you until you tell me what you were doing here, and who sent you"

> Then for a space there was no sound in the chamber except the whistle and crackle of hard-woven silken cords on naked flesh … Her body writhed and quivered under the chastisement. (254)

Though this scene depicts same-sex eroticism, it is meant to cater to the heterosexual interests of the male reader; however, such non-productive sexual activity would have been deemed a perversion that "threatened 'race suicide' by diverting sexual activity from its true purpose—reproduction" (Stein 174).

Subsequently, the tables are turned when Valeria encounters the vampiric Tascela, who is similarly poised as a sexualized threat. Echoing eugenic notions of heredity and breeding, Tascela states that Valeria's life will "mak[e] me bloom again with youth and with life everlasting," countering the degeneracy she has suffered ("Red Nails" 276). When Valeria is overcome by Tascela, her reaction is confused and sexual: "her shame at being manhandled by Olmec was nothing to the sensations that now shook her supple frame …. She scarcely resisted at all when Tascela forced her into a chair" ("Red Nails" 270–71). The "sensations" Valeria feels are unexplored, but akin to shame, leading her to "scarcely resist" the ancient vampire woman. Just as Valeria's attack on Yasala is sexualized in the narrative, so too is Tascela's violence toward Valeria eroticized, with the dominant-submissive dichotomy reversed. Valeria's non-heteronormative activities, like her desire for masculinity, are threats raised only to be overcome, proving her worth as the partner to the ideally masculine Conan.

Valeria's movement towards gender and sexual conformity has many steps, but Conan's masculinity is the critical factor that sets her on the journey. By the second chapter, we learn that though she typically resists men's offers of protection, "she found a secret pleasure in the fact that [Conan] had done so… After all, she reflected, her companion was no common man" (228). As an exemplar of masculinity, Conan naturalizes gender hierarchies: his obvious superiority guides Valeria into her proper place. At the end of the story, Tolkemec—the slave who betrayed the city's original inhabitants—returns, only to be vanquished by Conan. Valeria kills Tascela, and with this queer threat slain, Valeria immediately affirms her heteronormativity: she insists on caring for Conan's wounds, before the two kiss, leading Conan to declare "There's nothing we can't conquer" (281). Valeria enters the tale pursued by Conan and declaring that she wants to live "a man's life," and ends the story nursing Conan and submitting to his embrace. The degenerate masculinity represented by the Xuchotlans confront our heroes only to emphasize the superiority of Conan's Nordic masculinity. The queer threat of the vampiric invert, Tascela, is only presented to be ultimately cast aside for Valeria's superb womanhood. Eliminating these threats is a victory for traditional gender roles and "racial hygiene." The narrative of "Red Nails" demonstrates Conan and Valeria's fitness for each other as they face the threat of what they view as sexual deviancy and racial degeneration, both of which they violently overcome.

Conclusion

Howard's "Red Nails" demonstrates Conan's role as an exemplar of masculinity for the age of eugenics, when eugenicists reasserted "white male authority in their fantasies of the invincible Nordic …. as white males sought to retain complete social and economic control of white women through narratives of domestication and patriotism" (Nies 7). Following Connell's formulation of exemplary masculinity, Conan "expresses ideals, fantasies and desires" of Nordic virile manhood, naturalizing both racial and gender hierarchies ("On Hegemonic" 90). The comparisons between Conan and the degenerate Xuchotlan men, particularly Olmec, serve to make obvious Conan's supposedly superior heredity and "racial stock," asserting that such superiority is legible at the level of the body. Moreover, it is Conan's superior masculinity that domesticates Valeria's potentially errant femininity, transforming her "masculine" desire for agency into a desire for heterosexual partnership, opening the possibility of a reproductive futurity that must be read in the light of America's eugenic program.

Notes

1. For the political effects of eugenics, see, e.g., Black.

2. For the popular dissemination of eugenic thought, see, e.g., Currell & Cogdell.

3. For the scientific defence of hegemonic masculinity in the early 20th century, see, e.g., Stein.

4. For criminal physiognomy (as a reflection of atavism), see, e.g., Boies; Nordau; Lombroso and Lombroso.

5. See, e.g., the Conan tales "Rogues in the House" and "The Tower of the Elephant."

6. Howard's terminology can be confusing. "Xuchotlans" refer to the people of the city; "Tlazitlans" refers to the race of men; "Tecuhltians" and "Xotalancas" refer to members of the two warring tribes.

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Modeling Masculinities in Brothers Strugatsky's
The Snail on the Slope

RB Lemberg

The brothers Arkady and Boris Strugatsky are considered the most influential writers of science fiction in the Soviet Union in the 1960-1980s (Khagi). Their novel *The Snail on the Slope* (1965) deals with gender and ecology on an alien planet where humans of the Forest Administration supposedly manage and research a mysterious Forest and its indigenous population.[1]

The novel is told in alternating "Administration" and "Forest" chapters, which have different protagonists, and are different in tone and composition. The Forest chapters tell the quest-like story of Kandid, a person from the Administration who is stranded in the Forest after a helicopter crash and, in trying to find his way out, discovers the Forest's many secrets, as well as his own moral core. The Administration chapters are focused on the workplace dynamics of a Soviet-style bureaucracy, with Perets as the protagonist who unsuccessfully attempts to leave it. Instead of ac-complishing often conflicting goals, which include colonization and the preservation of and re-search into the forest, the humans of the Administration bicker, flirt, engage in office gossip, re-ceive mysterious communications from the never-seen director of the Administration, and generally avoid the forest. Many of the characters of the Administration chapters know and discuss Kandid, but they think he perished in the forest. The two strands of the narrative never intersect directly.

The novel faced difficulties on the path to publication. The authors finished the manuscript in 1965, a year when censors were paying increasingly negative attention to their work. After the Strugatskys' attempts to place the novel in its entirety proved unsuccessful, the authors split the book into two parts. The Forest part was published in 1966 in the anthology *Ellinskij Sbornik*. The Administration part was published in 1968 in the regional *Bajkal* magazine and was almost imme-diately subjected to significant critique and removed from circulation (Strugatsky, *Kommentarii*). The first full Russian-language edition of the novel was unauthorized, and published in Germany in 1972. While unauthorized foreign translations proliferated, the first Soviet edition of the entire novel appeared only in 1988.

The Snail on the Slope is the only Strugatsky novel to foreground issues of gender, and one of the very few works of Soviet speculative fiction to do so. Yet, there is little scholarship focusing on the treatment of gender in this work. A notable exception is Diana Greene's feminist critique. In this short but impactful article, the author proposes that the Administration is patriarchal while the forest is matriarchal, positing a "literal war of the sexes" between the two (99). Greene examines key female characters in the novel and situates them in the context of Soviet gender

roles, with an emphasis on the inequalities that Soviet women faced despite the professed ideals of gender equality. She then takes the argument further by speculating about the authors' biases about women: "… a careful examination of the connection between women and the forest makes clear that the Strugatskys drew on some of their darkest, perhaps unconscious fears of the former in describing the latter" (102).

It is important to note that *The Snail on the Slope* is not a feminist novel. Western-style feminism did not exist in the 1960s Soviet Union, and the authors were certainly not invested in, or familiar with, feminist issues. Without a doubt, gender equality was not truly achieved under the Soviet regime. Gendered disparities and injustices became unspeakable (Gal and Kligman 46-47). Western feminist literature was not translated and virtually unknown in the Soviet Union. While important and relevant, Greene's critique fails to consider how the Strugatskys modeled gender in the novel. They were writing from the vantage of their own cultural context (the post-WWII Soviet Union) and their own personal positioning as Jewish, male writers who were members of the intelligentsia. In T*he Snail on the Slope*, the Strugatskys present three models of gendered society: the bureaucratic, Soviet-like world of the humans of the Administration, where men and women seem to be on equal footing, but men seem to hold leadership positions, and misogyny is commonplace; the society of the Villagers, which resembles Russian village culture with its traditional gender roles; and the biotechnologically advanced society of podrugi ('women comrades'), who exclude men from their society and reproduce by parthenogenesis.[2]

Within these different societies, the Strugatskys showcase differing attitudes to gender through multiple characters. With its diverse lineup of male characters who are juxtaposed to each other, I argue that modeling of Soviet-era masculinity is a key concern of the novel. Masculinity was an important concern in the post-World War II Soviet Union. Losses of life in the Great Patriotic War, as well as in the Stalinist concentration camps, disproportionately involved men, resulting in a demographic crisis. The first Soviet census after WWII showed the population at 94 million men and 114 million women, a difference of about 20 million (Petrov 333). Survivors of WWII and the Stalinist purges were often traumatized, without access to mental health care. The unspeakable gendered inequalities of the Soviet system were exacerbated by the demographic crisis: men were expected to participate less actively, if at all, in the life of the family.[3] Since men were now perceived as a rare and precious resource, society encouraged women to compete for men and to shield them from extra labor in the domestic sphere. In addition, many people (and specifically men) who returned from the front after WWII were impacted by trauma and yet unable to access mental health supports, resulting in maladaptive behaviors, such as alcoholism. Common stereotypes presented men as uninvolved, unmotivated, lazy and alcoholic. This post-WWII demographic crisis was in the public eye and actively discussed in Soviet news outlets (Zdravomyslova and Temkina 44).

Against this background, a juxtaposition between members of the intelligentsia and non-intelligentsia men was the focus of many Strugatsky novels.[4] I argue that *The Snail on the Slope*

introduces multiple models of gendered behaviors, with an emphasis on models of masculinity rather than femininity.

Masculine Models

Masculine models in *The Snail on the Slope* present a wide range of traits and behaviors. The male characters can be complacent, traumatized, determined, timid, intelligent, lacking intelligence, driven by criminal intent and by lust, and—perhaps most notably absent. In this article, I will focus on four key male figures: Kandid, Tuzik, Perets, and the director.

Kandid, the hero of the Forest chapters, is the ideal member of the intelligentsia—the hero who overcomes adversities not so much because of his physical strength. He is smart, first and foremost, but also determined to achieve his goals. Kandid is not a perfect character, but he is dedicated to his search for moral clarity, and by the end of the novel, obtains it. Notably, during his at-tempts to leave the forest, he acquires a surgeon's weapon, a scalpel. Beyond the phallic symbolism Greene identifies in this object, it is clearly the weapon of someone who belongs to the intelligentsia—sharp, thin, precise, dependent upon skill and determination rather than physical strength. Kandid, out of all the characters of the novel, is a person with a future. Every single, male-assigned character in the novel is measured against him—and found wanting. However, Kandid only partially fits into the model of hegemonic masculinity (Connell) due to his liminal positionality.[5] Kandid is originally from the Administration, where he is respected and admired, but after the helicopter crash, Kandid is presumed dead by his Administration colleagues. He does not seem to have any close friends in the world of Administration: he is remembered, but not mourned. During the events of the novel, Kandid never reaches the Administration and does not interact with its people.

Kandid's hegemonic positioning does not translate to the forest society, at least not initial-ly. After his helicopter crash, Kandid enters another society (that of the villagers), where he is a silent outsider who needs to learn the language and customs anew. Kandid is viewed by other villagers as strange and damaged, but through his journey, Kandid relies on strength of will and his moral principles in order to gain important tools which, upon his return to the village, position him as someone who is a protector, and who is both respected and feared.

During the Forest chapters, Kandid develops his masculinity in contrast and in opposition to the women of the novel, highlighted in his interactions with Nava—a young village woman Kandid sees as his daughter—and with the forest's podrugi. Kandid's role as a protector is an integral part of his masculinity. He successfully protects Nava from male bandits, but ultimately fails to safeguard her against the podrugi, who take her away to become a part of their separatist society. By the end of the novel, Kandid has lost Nava, and been unable to defeat the podrugi, but he is better equipped to continue his fight against what he perceives as the podrugi's genocidal agenda. His hopeful ending reframes his goal from simply returning to Administration (as it was initially) to the goal of triumph of his masculinity model: determined, informed, empowered,

self-reliant, and—perhaps most significantly—in opposition to powerful women who exclude and dismiss him.

Another important model of Soviet masculinity is provided by the director, a looming and yet absent Administration figure. Perets, the viewpoint character of the Administration chapters, is always looking for him, but is never able to find him. Others speak about the director, but it is unclear if he can ever be found within the labyrinthine structure of the Administration. The director is a stand-in for the absent and absentee men of the post-WII era: the paternal and leadership roles associated with hegemonic masculinity go unfilled while everybody else scrambles to provide the missing labor and cover up for the absences created by the demographic crisis.

Tuzik (called "Acey" in Myers's translation) is an overlooked but crucially important character and a member of the Administration. He provides a model of non-intelligentsia masculinity, and the novel frames him in opposition to both of its viewpoint characters—Perets, a man of the intelligentsia who is passive and tentative, and the absent, heroic Kandid. In the beginning it is not clear whether or not the narrative frames Tuzik in a negative light, but as the novel progresses, Tuzik's framing is increasingly negative. A truck driver with a penchant for objectifying and dehumanizing women, Tuzik represents the worst kinds of stereotypically masculine behaviors. In the beginning of the novel, the reader comes to view this character as unintelligent, crude, and frustrating, as presented through his exaggeratedly aggressive, heterosexist and lascivious speech. For example, Tuzik gossips about the mysterious forest "mermaids" (those are, most likely, the alien podrugi). From Tuzik's perspective, the most interesting fact about the mermaids is that they lie naked in the lakes. When discussing the absent Kandid, Tuzik explains that the forest is like Kandid's woman, using the colloquial and often disparaging word for woman, *baba*:

> "I didn't see the mermaids myself," repeated Acey… "but I entirely believe in them. Because the boys have told me. So did Kandid even, and he was the one who knew everything about the forest. He used to go into that forest like a man to his woman, put his finger on anything. He perished there in his forest." (Myers's translation 29)

Tuzik presents Kandid as a picture of dominant masculinity. In Tuzik's framing, true masculinity is associated with dominance over women—both real women and metaphorical ones. In Russian, the word "forest" is grammatically masculine, but here the forest is feminized; Kandid knows the forest through an allegorical heterosexual relationship, in which the man is the possessor. We have seen that for Kandid, masculinity is associated with qualities of a protector; for Tuzik, the protective qualities of positive masculinity are missing entirely.

Perets, the main character of the Administration chapters, is at first uncomfortable and then increasingly repulsed by Tuzik. Tuzik narrates to Perets some of the details of his sordid past, which involve sexual assault presented as if it were funny. Tuzik explains that he is sexually frustrated, and boasts that he is ready to commit sexual assault against the forest "mermaids." Perets becomes increasingly upset, and has to restrain himself from hitting Tuzik. During a trip to the forest, Tuzik acts inappropriately towards Rita, a scientist from the Forest Administration.

Unable to endure Tuzik's behaviors any longer, Perets hits him and knocks him out. This first—and last—act of violence committed by Perets emphasizes the negative framing of Tuzik. Tuzik is a kind of man whom the forest podrugi see as the representative of all masculinity, which needs to be eradicated. Even the most timid member of the intelligentsia has a moral obligation to actively resist this kind of masculinity, demonstrating the protective qualities of positive masculinity Kandid exemplifies.

Perets, the viewpoint character of the Administration chapters, presents an interesting model of non-hegemonic masculinity and gender-nonconfirmity. Perets's arc presents a commentary on the weaknesses of intelligentsia masculinity. Perets is a shy, soft-spoken expert on medieval Japanese philology who has written his dissertation on the "Stylistic and Rhythmic Characteristics of Feminine Prose in the Late Heian based on Makwa-no Sosi" (Myers's translation). He arrives at the Administration dreaming of visiting the forest, although it is not initially clear what motivates this desire. For a number of chapters, Perets is barred from visiting the forest and becomes increasingly enmeshed in the life of the bureaucratic Administration. The other coworkers give him confusing directions, push him around, send him on odd errands, and poke fun at him—all ostensibly in a friendly manner. Unlike many of the other male characters in the novel, Perets is dreamy, passive, and indecisive, and yet possessing a lyrical internal monologue. He thinks constantly about the mysteries of the forest, which he is not allowed to visit. While other characters think about the forest using words in masculine or feminine grammatical forms, Perets is the only one who uses the neuter grammatical gender to refer to the forest in his internal monologues, and does so repeatedly in the early parts of the novel. Bolded are words in neuter grammatical gender, which refer to the forest:

> …**Зеленое пахучее изобилие. Изобилие** красок, **изобилие** запахов. **Изобилие** жизни. И **все чужое**. Чем-то **знакомое**, кое в чем **похожее**, но по-настоящему **чужое**. Наверное, труднее всего примириться с тем, что **оно** и **чужое**, и **знакомое** одновременно. С тем, что **оно** — **производное** от нашего мира, плоть от плоти нашей, но **порвавшее** с нами и не **желающее** нас знать.

> **Green odorous abundance**. **Abundance** of colors, **abundance** of smells. **Abundance** of life. And **all** of it **alien**. Somehow **familiar**, a **resemblance** somewhere, but profoundly **alien**. The hardest part was to accept **it** as **alien** and **familiar** at one and the same time, **derived** from our world, flesh of our flesh—but **broken away**, not **wishing** to know us. (Myers's translation 31)

Since the Russian word лес "forest" is grammatically masculine, selecting nouns in neuter gram-matical gender to describe it is a clear stylistic choice. Previously, I showed how Tuzik's use of feminine forms for the forest is also marked, showcasing Tuzik's view of masculinity in terms of dominance over women. I argue that Perets's consistent gender-neutral reference to the forest marks him as outside the binary dichotomies of male and female; he is presented as gender-nonconforming.

Perets's gender-nonconformity is underscored in a surrealist episode in Chapter 3, in which workers of the Administration are about to receive a phone address from the mysterious director. Each person is assigned their own phone. Later in the chapter, it is revealed that each worker gets a phone that matches that particular worker's gender. Perets, unable to locate his phone, panics and runs around, observing others at their phones, attentively listening to the address. Finally, Perets barges into an office with a free phone and listens to the address delivered in an "unfamiliar squeaky voice." He cannot understand the address. Finally, another coworker reveals to Perets that he had picked up a phone on the desk of a female coworker currently on maternity leave: Perets had picked up a "female phone." Perets also finds himself in a number of homoerotic situations with himself in the receptive role. All these and other features reinforce the reading of this character as gender-nonconforming and existing outside of heteronormative expectations of masculine behavior.

We also discover hints of Perets's backstory: his wife was killed by a random, violent drunk person. Perets is a common Russian Jewish last name; the Jewish subtext is reinforced by the name of his wife, Esfir' (Esther), a markedly Jewish first name in a Soviet context. The Strugatskys routinely inserted Jewish references into their novels, including through naming conventions.[6] In 1965, the year *The Snail on the Slope* was written, the appearance of the name Esfir' was strikingly marked as a part of the lost world of Soviet Jewry. Esfir's senseless death is an allusion to the senselessly perished Jews, and the grief of their loved ones who are powerless to defend them. We discover that it was Esfir' who dreamt about visiting the Forest, and it is her dream that Perets has been pursuing.

After Perets strikes Tuzik, he reasserts his masculinity and earns a place among the workers of the Forest Administration. He stops thinking about the forest with words in the neuter grammatical gender, and begins to think about it in words marked masculine. He enters into a sex-ual relationship with Alevtina, a librarian who is friendly with Tuzik. These actions and choices might be interpreted as Peret's realignment with hegemonic masculinity: he has exhibited protective features, he has acted aggressively against a character who behaves negatively, and he has abandoned gender-nonconforming speech and behaviors in favor of heterosexuality. However, in the world of the novel, Perets's masculine turn is negative in nature. It marks his full integration into the Soviet-style bureaucracy of the Administration. His relationship with Alevtina is indicative of his moral defeat. Alevtina appears maternal, but their relationship is neither warm nor joyful. Perets tells her about his perished wife, and abandons his attempts to either leave the Administration or visit the forest. In the very last chapter, he suddenly finds himself thrust into the role of the new director, only to discover that it is Alevtina who is pulling the strings. Perets's ending sends a stark message to the novel readers about the dangers of passive or complacent masculinity within the Soviet context. Despite his new leadership role, it is clear that Perets's choices led him to a life devoid of meaning and agency—he is simply a part of a bureaucratic machine.

Conclusions

The masculine models explored in this essay, as well as additional side characters, present primarily negative features of post-World War II Soviet masculinity. The novel showcases men who are complacent, fearful, traumatized, criminally lustful, violent, passive, hopeless, and absent. The only positive masculine model in the novel is Kandid, but even his arc does not culminate in victory.

In *The Snail on the Slope*, models of masculinity are used to discuss dilemmas and issues affecting post-WII Soviet men. The post-war demographic imbalances are allegorically explored through the novel's absent figures. Kandid, though an active protagonist in the Forest chapters, is absent from the Administration, and his absence is keenly felt. Another absentee is the director. Both men are supposed to be role models, almost parental: Kandid as a model of decisive and driv-en intelligentsia masculinity and the director as a model of leadership. Yet neither of them is physically present in the lives of the novel's humans. Kandid's heroic struggle is confined to the alien forest. As for the original director, it is not clear if he ever existed.

The traumatizing effects of WWII and the dangers of complacency under the Soviet regime are explored in Perets's arc. Perets, who takes on the role of the Administration's director at the very end of the novel, is traumatized by past violence. His narrative arc begins with consistent gender-nonconforming choices, but it culminates in Soviet-style, complacent masculinity. While his choices—both narratively and linguistically—become more markedly masculine, this outcome leads him to failure.

To understand the treatment of gender in *The Snail on the Slope*, we need to explore not only femininities, but also masculinities. I have argued that the novel critiques Soviet masculinity, reinforces some traditionally masculine actions (especially as it pertains to intelligentsia), and com-ments on the crises that faced Soviet men in the post-World War period. The Strugatskys explore the stark absences that the war and Stalinist repressions created in the gendered fabric of Soviet life and outline directions for hope. As the novel illustrates, hopeful masculinity in the Soviet context is exemplified by men who are intelligent, decisive, thoughtful, protective of others, and willing to persist despite trauma and loss.

Notes

1.   The original Управление is translated as the Directorate (Myers translation, 1980), the Administration (Bormashenko translation, 2018), and the Forest Authority (Greene, 1986). I use the Administration throughout this essay. In the original, Управление/Administration is capitalized, while лес/forest is not. Scholarly literature usually capitalizes both the Administration and the Forest when referring to the two different strands of the narrative, and I have followed this

convention in expressions such as "the Forest chapters". The word *forest* is not capitalized in other contexts.

2. On *podrugi* and the gendered language of *The Snail of the Slope*, see Lemberg.

3. Ashwin; Wanner.

4. For a discussion of the intelligentsia in works of the Strugatsky brothers, see Tammaro.

5. Connell's classic study discusses four types of masculinity: hegemonic, subordinate, complacent, and marginal. Connell views hegemonic masculinity as focused on male domination in society, exercising authority and power over women, as well as other men.

6. On Jewish references in the Strugatskys' work, see Greenberg.

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Exploring the Banishment and Reformation of Masculinity in Scientific Gynotopias

Rachel Harrison

The Scientific Gynotopia depicts not just an ideal society, but one in which technological advancement is used to create a community women may consider utopian. However, the Scientific Gynotopia (SG) is not always an ideal space for men. Among SGs there are two main models for dealing with the 'male problem.' There are two parts to this problem: first, what role to grant men in a female utopia and, second, how to stop men from destroying it. This second part is a primary concern as many SGs depict a world rebuilt from the ashes of one destroyed by men. The first approach I examine I have dubbed the Separatist Model, which segregates men either socially or physically from female society. The second, less common approach I will refer to as the Integrational Model, in which ideas about both femininity and masculinity are completely reformed to create an androgynous, equal society.

I have selected three case studies to demonstrate these models and how they vary. The Separatist Model is encapsulated in Katharine Burdekin's *The End of This Day's Business* (1989) and Pamela Sargent's *The Shore of Women* (1986). The Integrational Model is depicted in Marge Piercy's utopia, Mattapoisett, in *Woman on the Edge of Time* (1976). These SGs explore the problem of containing the more regressive elements of patriarchal versions of masculinity such as violence and irrational thought. The Separatist Model seeks to contain regressive masculinity by limiting the reach and power of men: "the authors are not subtle in their reasons for creating separatist utopias; if men are kept out of these societies, it is because men are dangerous" (Russ 140). Communities practising the Integrational Model, however, believe in reforming masculinity through strong communal bonds in a society that looks after all its members. These novels provide an important contribution to discussions of speculative fiction and masculinity as they encourage debate around the ethics of gender segregated societies. Furthermore, they expose the gender dualisms and power dynamics present in our own time by presenting us with alternatives of varying extremes. They ask the question: "'what if the world were feminist' (which is not the same as 'what if the world were perfect?')" (Pfaelzer 291). They are not utopian blueprints but instead suggest that the road to utopia requires a reformation of traditional, masculine expectations and behaviour.

The Separatist Model

Both Burdekin's *The End of This Day's Business* and Sargent's *The Shore of Women* depict matriarchal societies that view the reduction of men as necessary for human survival. This represents a channelling of contextual anxieties; to Burdekin, the rise of fascism in the 1930s and

its patriarchal ideology were a looming threat, and Sargent was publishing towards the end of the Cold War. This led to their imagining of male-less societies in which these threats of devastating conflict no longer exist—although this is not to say these societies are better; they are merely an alternative. The gynocracies of the SGs are used as tools of critical defamiliarization. They depict to the reader a familiar place (our own world) with an unfamiliar social structure and history (as these novels are set in the future). This uncanny mix of the familiar and unfamiliar allows the reader to see these societies as possibilities rather than feel completely removed from them; hence, it opens the reader's mind to societal reform. Authors present a subservient male sex ruled over by a matriarchal system that regards traditional masculine behaviour as universal, unchangeable, and a block to social progress. The authors encourage men to embrace the feminist cause by putting them through an extreme version of the female experience: "Because of the alternative realities of science fiction, women writers have particularly effective ways to force male characters to undergo what real women of all ages have undergone: rape, the physical dangers of reproduction, sexual harassment, and gender discrimination" (Donawerth 127). For example, the supposed unchangeable psychological state of men in these novels and the ways by which it is distorted and weaponised may be compared to the weaponised diagnoses of women as "hysterical" in our own recent history. Despite this, both novels ultimately depict a man and a woman breaking societal taboos by interacting with and teaching one another, disproving the social orthodoxy that men are violent and incapable of learning.

Burdekin depicts England in the year 6250 when women govern as the intellectually superior sex; however, this 'natural' superiority is manufactured by the women as a component to their systemic 'reduction of men.' Burdekin's society has manipulated men into inverted versions of twentieth-century masculine values regarding gender hierarchy: "it's perfectly natural to obey women"; "men were naturally modest, and would not bare more than their arms, legs and heads in a public place" (Burdekin 41; 7). Burdekin employs a common tactic of the Gynotopia, as observed by Jean Pfaelzer: "the feminist utopia has challenged the Lockean notion that patriarchy is a natural right" (Pfaelzer 283). However, Burdekin creates a hybrid of gender expectations, pairing obedience and modesty with patriarchal masculine values traditionally associated with 1930s fascism. Men are encouraged in some violent behaviours such as fighting (but only with other men) precisely to enable their subjugation. Men are allowed to be content in their 'natural state,' which society perceives as a less superior version of Fascist appropriations of Friedrich Nietzsche's übermensch, or superman, a type of advanced hypermasculinity seen as natural male behaviour (Nietzsche). In this society, men can be supermen without the political power to cause wider harm: "a man had to do what his strong muscles and weak mind and masculine nature fitted him for" (Burdekin 4). Burdekin appropriates the hypermasculinity of the supermen to justify the incompatibility of this masculinity with politics and learning. Thus, she undermines some of the most patriarchal and dangerous notions of masculinity in her own time in her writing.

Neil, the male protagonist, struggles with the limitations of his enforced masculinity. This leads to an existential crisis: "If he stopped enjoying a man's life, what other life was there for him?

Would death be better?" (Burdekin 6). The hypermasculinity forced upon Neil and his seemingly unnatural rejection of it causes him to experience body dysmorphia; he begins to hate the parts of himself that present as masculine: "he opened his shirt and glanced at his muscular male chest. He hated it. But if he hated his body, then he hated himself, for it was part of himself. Neil hated Neil" (7). Neil has been conditioned to believe that his identity consists of his masculinity rather than his human individuality and by rejecting it, he loses his sense of self. Neil wants to be himself beyond the limits of what this Separatist model of sex allows him to be, echoing twentieth-century pressures on women.

Neil's biological mother, Grania, disagrees with single-sex rule. She explains to Neil how he has been conditioned: "A psyche *cannot* grow unless it's content with its sex. If it's proud of it and thinks the other is inferior it will overdevelop, if it's ashamed of it, it can't develop at all" (43). Men have been taught to see their sex as a weakness, which in turn represses their sense of self, allowing them to be subjugated. Women are seen as superior due to their ability to give birth; men are seen as only capable of destruction. When discussing the history of patriarchal rule, Grania says, "They were the Lords of Creation [. . .] And if they hadn't turned themselves into Lords of Destruction they might have kept their place" (48). It is this fear of the supposed uncontrollable destructive tendency of men that drives the matriarchal regime. However, they place the blame on the men who ruled rather than the patriarchal structure of the regime. Women are still fearful of their own history of oppression and wrongly believe the only way to avoid going backwards is to invert this dichotomy completely.

A necessary component of the Separatist Model is rebellion. The catalyst for Neil's rebellion against the matriarchy is the revelation of his father by Grania and subsequent feeling of familial wholeness: "he felt himself the small precious core, the very kernel of a proud and valuable whole" (24). This is the first time Neil has felt a part of something, specifically love that is not driven by lust but by familial bond: "he had a pride and pleasure that had nothing to do with his muscles, his physical courage, his work, his outward position among men, or his sexual successes" (24). Grania's act breaks a social taboo, the "elimination of fathers," leading to her crime of teaching men their history and their ability to develop individual consciousness (91). Grania voices her contempt for gender-segregated rule: "This female world, I think, is not *right*. It is safe, reasonable, uncruel, loveless and *dull*. The men's world was not right either. It was absurd and too unsafe, cruel and stupid" (105). Burdekin's message can be summed up in Grania's statement that "no race can ever be mature while one sex is infantile" (143). Despite the deaths of the protagonists, the novel ends on an optimistic note of potential future reform reflective of Burdekin's wishes for women to be granted more rights in her own time. Burdekin's novel highlights the harmfulness of traditional notions of masculinity, not just to women but also to the men upon whom these standards are imposed. She argues for a society in which gender does not inform participation in any sphere of life, be it politics or learning. Crucially, she disproves the alignment of traditional patriarchal models of masculinity with men themselves and protests the dehumanising capabilities of biological determinism.

The second case study in the Separatist Model is Sargent's *The Shore of Women*. In this SG, men are exiled from civilised female strongholds. Ironically, to become free from men these women physically entrap themselves within their city walls. Sargent's women use a mix of technology and religion to keep men subjugated. Men are forced to live by primitive hypermasculine codes of conduct in tribal conditions in which displays of strength and violence dictate their survival. Younger men are often victims of sexual abuse by more dominant males, behaviour which the women of the enclave dismiss as inherent to male nature; however, this does not exist in the comfort of the civilised enclave. Sargent highlights the absurdity of the belief that this violence is genetically encoded rather than a result of primitive conditions.

The men have been tricked into believing women are corporeal forms of a goddess and only come to the female enclaves for purposes of reproduction, executed medically and without female contact. Those selected for breeding are done so through careful consideration by the women to keep the gene pool healthy and varied but also strong. Same-sex relationships are the norm in both societies. Therefore, the sexual relationship between protagonists Birana and Arvil, particularly the natural conception of their child, disgusts the majority of the female enclave. This is prompted by the belief that men are universally prone to violence: "Your natures are violent ones. You must be kept from bringing destruction to the world again" (Sargent 207). Men are blamed for the state of the earth, devastated in a nuclear holocaust forcing society to be dismantled and rebuilt by women. Ultimately, the women believe that masculine urges to destroy are irremediable and therefore men themselves are a lost cause.

Men have become the dangerous and alien 'other' as their banishment and segregation has turned them into unknown bogeymen-like figures in the eyes of the women. In this way Sargent reverses what has been a traditionally female role in science fiction, the woman as 'other': "part of women's cultural role has been to play the Other that allows men to see themselves as the norm" (Attebery 90). The women see themselves as the rational and non-violent norm to the unchecked violence of the male Other. They are thus guilty of dehumanising men, seeing them as universally bound by biologically determined impulses: "One boy is like another" (Sargent 8). Sargent depicts this misandrist and determinist viewpoint as unfair and contradictory by presenting complex and flawed characters in both communities. Through the character of Arvil in particular, she presents a man who proves these fears wrong: "He had the traits of a man, and yet he had tempered them. [. . .] I had glimpsed some intelligence and even gentleness in his eyes. Hard as his world was, he struggled against the worst of its cruelties. Ignorant as he might be, he thought and questioned and reasoned his way to a truth" (229). Arvil disproves the gender discrimination dictating the matriarchal system.

Sargent's women believe themselves superior due to their reproductive capabilities. Women are aligned with creation and men with destruction: "they cannot give life and so must deal in death" (10). However, Sargent undermines this ideology by proving women to be quite merciless towards one another. The novel begins with the heroine, Birana, being unfairly sentenced to exile alongside her criminal mother. Sargent depicts the irony of a society that shuns masculine 'nature'

yet commits horrific acts of violence itself, including genocide against male communities that grow too strong or learn too much.

By the end of the novel, Laissa, Arvil's biological twin sister, conducts a study of the male communities. She comes to the realisation that men are counterparts to women in society and cannot be separated from them due to biological relationships; all families contain men and women thus the world must contain men and women: "They are our fathers and our sons. There is something of us in them and something of them in us" (555). Again, familial bonds become catalysts for change, specifically the overcoming of violent masculine impulses and female paranoia alike. Unfortunately, this is a realisation for few characters in the novel and it ends less optimistically than Burdekin's text. However, Sargent's message is encapsulated in Brian Attebery's statement on SGs: "the excluded sex is never completely excluded. [. . .] men are present [. . .] in the form of the unlamented past, the pressure no longer felt, the horrible example, the stolen prerogative" (Attebery 116). The Separatist Model therefore has an attitude toward gender that does not support the binary or the exclusivity of either gender. These novels experiment with patriarchal societal structures, pushing them to their extremes with an inversion of the privileged sex to depict the ridiculous pseudoscience that is dualistic social structure.

Neither of the SG societies undergoes immediate change, but both carry the message of dissatisfaction with the segregated structure. Darby Lewes describes utopian literature as "the literature of dissatisfaction" and specifically feminist utopias as "the discontent of the outsider" (Lewes 29). In these novels, the outsider role becomes that of the men who are either literally on the outside of the enclaves in Sargent's novel or on the fringes of society in Burdekin's narrative. Ultimately, the authors achieve the goals of the Separatist model which Donawerth lays out in four key points: "subvert the male narrator or point of view to their own ends, [. . .] the male narrator converted to a woman's point of view; the male narrator as dumb man (a parody of masculine authority); and the male narrator forced to undergo feminine suffering" (Donawerth 115). The Separatist Model follows a pattern in its approach to masculinity: the inversion of the familiar followed by the reformation of this inversion into something representing gender equality or at least a desire for it. These novels most notably highlight that it is men and not just women who can be harmed through traditional, patriarchal conceptions of masculinity.

The Integrational Model

The second model dealing with the 'male problem' in the SG is Integrational. In this model, gender is integrated into a society that is a communal, familial, and androgynous whole. This model eliminates not only masculinity but also femininity, deconstructing the separate categories of gender in a way only science fiction can. In Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time*, the author rejects notions of dualism in terms of gender, adjusts dehumanising categories of femininity and masculinity, and proposes a concept of personhood in which the individual is divorced from biologically determined traits.

Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time* depicts the imagined future utopia of Mattapoisett, a version of a town in Massachusetts in the year 2137. Connie Ramos, a woman in a mental institution in the twentieth-century United States, communicates with an androgynous time traveller, Luciente. Luciente reveals that Connie's actions in the present will impact whether the future Mattapoisett comes to pass or whether a darker hypermasculine dystopia will emerge instead. In Mattapoisett, traditional understandings of gender roles have been dismantled, resulting in an androgynous society with little stigma and much greater equality. The price is the sacrifice of the binary notions of masculinity and femininity, the outcome is a mix of these qualities that embodies only the healthiest attitudes and creates a society in which sex does not dictate behaviour.

Male and female pronouns no longer exist, replaced by the gender neutral 'per,' short for "person" and applied to everyone. When Luciente first appears, Connie believes them to be a man due to their confident behaviour: "Luciente spoke, she moved with that brisk unselfconscious authority Connie associated with men. Luciente sat down, taking up more space than women ever did" (Piercy 68). This is the result of being raised in a society where acceptable traits of one's biological sex do not dictate behaviour. The poverty and racial inequality in Connie's 1970s New York encourage the type of regressive and violent masculinity displayed by the mistreated men in the Separatist Model: "men without jobs proved they were still men on the bodies of other men, on the bodies of women" (233). These harmful, gendered traits are eliminated in Luciente's future. People in Mattapoisett may present in any gender, although the concept itself is now irrelevant: "biological males, biological females, or both. That's not a useful set of categories. We tend to divvy up people by what they're good at" (232). Neither masculinity nor femininity in their traditional forms have any place in Mattapoisett.

At first, this reformation of gender seems ideal; however, Connie is soon horrified to see what can only be described as maternalised masculinity. In this extreme reformation of the traditional masculinity of Connie's time, men in this world are mothers too; "mother" is no longer a gendered word: "Romance, sex, birth, children [. . .] that isn't women's business anymore. It's everybody's" (274). Each child has three comothers. Birth is eliminated and babies are cultivated in laboratories (unlike in *Brave New World*, these babies are not produced eugenically but receive a mix of genes to ensure ideas of racism, classism, and sexism are eliminated). For Connie, the most shocking aspect of Mattapoisett is the male appropriation of mothering: "How can men be mothers!" (110). She witnesses Barbarossa, who has been given the power to breastfeed hormonally: "He had breasts. Not large ones. Small breasts, like a flat-chested woman temporarily swollen with milk" (142). Barbarossa is male, yet this act does not emasculate him because ideas of masculinity in which traditionally female roles are degrading have been eliminated. Michael Pitts writes of the interconnection between males and mothering in Mattapoisett, arguing that male breastfeeding "illustrates the enriching capabilities of new masculinities" (Pitts 12). Connie suffers mixed feelings about this as for the first time in her life she witnesses a tender and nurturing man: "She

could almost hate him in the peaceful joy to which he had no natural right; she could almost like him as he opened like a daisy to the baby's sucking mouth" (Piercy 143).

Much as the Separatist Model postulates, women see their power in their ability to give birth and nurture a baby. Luciente argues with Connie that by giving this up, women put themselves on an equal plane with men, who in turn give up their societal dominance and take part in raising children. "Finally there was that one thing we had to give up too, the only power we ever had, in return for no more power for anyone. The original production: the power to give birth. Cause as long as we were biologically enchained, we'd never be equal. And males never would be humanized to be loving and tender. So we all became mothers" (110). No activity or life event in Mattapoisett is gender specific, which eliminates sexism. Discussing androgynous societies in fiction, Attebery notes: "The unconscious masculine view of androgyny is an image of something taken away [. . .] while the feminine perspective sees Value Added" (Attebery 135). Piercy corrects this. She imagines characters who give up their gendered behaviours and advantages to create true equality unhindered by gender. This in turn creates a reformed or what Pitts describes as an alternative masculinity, one that is nurturing and kind. This contrasts with traditional patriarchal models of masculinity displayed in Connie's society that depict manliness in tandem with violence, possessiveness, and control.

Conclusion

To summarise: in the Separatist Model we perceive male tendencies to violence that are not genetically encoded but are shown to be a systemic, 'woman-made' masculinity, a result of artificial male subjugation. Despite being gynocracies, these fictional societies still perpetuate the gender dualism that enables patriarchal systems. Instead of misogyny, they promote misandry and the competitive hierarchies inherent to traditional notions of masculinity remain in place. The Separatist Model provides a platform for the deconstruction of male and female alignment with creation and destruction as both are shown to be capable of each. These novels show the limits of gender polarisation in society and conclude that those who continue to engage with and allow this segregated ideology are as responsible for its damaging effects as those who created it. The Integrational Model builds upon this philosophy as it eradicates the binary and therefore abolishes essentialist notions of masculinity and femininity. The societal androgyny of this model allows for collective freedom and safety. The Integrational Model differentiates between the male and the masculine, viewing personal identity as the more crucial characteristic.

Despite dystopian undertones, Separatist SGs are ultimately catalysts for change. Men disprove ideas of regressive masculinity and undermine the regimes that confine them by coming together with women to exchange knowledge as equals. The Separatist Model therefore exists to illustrate the problems of the author's own society by imagining an inversion of inequalities experienced by women. They promote the idea that gender inequality in any form is dystopian, as noted by Attebery: "gender itself can become a dystopian system. Forcing all members of either sex into a single pattern will inevitably result in dystopia, while the most positive visions of society are

those in which women and men are similarly free to defy norms" (Attebery 128). By this logic, the Integrational Model is the more positive of the two as it presents a reformed masculinity, whilst the Separatist model functions differently as a thought experiment, an extreme 'what if?' in which regressive masculinity is either abolished or contained as a stage towards potential integration. My findings are that these SGs fall into two categories of approaching the role of men in a feminist utopia: banishment or reformation. What the two models have in common is a shared understanding that there is no place for masculinity as we know it in an inclusive utopia.

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A Deconstruction of Masculine Hegemony: Identifying the Gender Pluralities through Byatt's *The Biographer's Tale*

Somasree Santra

The analytical endeavour based on British novelist, short story writer, and critic A.S. Byatt takes into concern the notions "Theorizing Masculinity" (17), "Masculinity in Disguise" (119), and "Non-Male Masculinities" (131) included in Todd W. Reeser's Masculinities in Theory (2010). If we take Reeser's views on "Non-Male Masculinities" (131), we observe that he examines masculinity "in its recurring relation to other kinds of bodies besides male ones" (132). Reeser even takes on Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's view in *Constructing Masculinity* (1998) when he writes "sometimes masculinity has got nothing to do with… men" (12). Reeser yet again subverts the established notion of masculinity by conversing on "Female masculinities" (131) and depicting the traits of "power or virility" (131) ascribed to the female body. He even extends his views on such masculinity by taking Judith Halberstam's observations in *Female Masculinity* (1998) where she writes that "far from being an imitation of maleness, female masculinity actually affords us a glimpse of how masculinity is constructed as masculinity" (1). Therefore, Reeser uses the concepts of "effeminacy" and "female masculinity" (133) as tools to "destabilize imagined binary oppositions between male masculinity and female femininity" (133). He specifies these as "power [which] is so closely linked to masculinity that it may appear as inherently masculine" (133). The subversions of Phineas's masculinity are thus analysed through the theoretical framework propounded by Reeser.

Through the very beginning of "Byatt's *The Biographer's Tale*", one can observe the particular traits of Phineas Nanson laid down by the writer. This clearly does not resonate with the definite characteristics of masculinity which "can be easily ascribed [as]… "muscular," "strong," "hard," "brave," and "in control" (Reeser 1). Masculinity as depicted by Todd W. Reeser "is the opposite of femininity. We can also make a list of adjectives that do not describe masculinity- such as 'weak,' 'soft,' and 'emotional'" (1). Even "The man who ignores and overcomes his sickness or illness can be seen as masculine" (Reeser 12). In Reeser's view, "We may think of masculinity as hard, solid, stable, or reliable, but that illusion may simply be part of the way in which it functions" (5). Even though "Masculinity is very often tied to power," Phineas appears to be a male who is intensely willing to play the submissive and inferior role in a relationship (Reeser 7). According to Reeser, "any study of masculinity has constantly to take femininity, homosexuality, and other common forms of alterity into account in order to articulate definitions of masculinity fully" (40).

As the narrative progresses, Phineas joins as a part-time dog's body in the hope of visiting the Maelstrom soon enough and resolving the mystery surrounding Destry-Scholes's death. It was in this very place that Phineas got introduced to the owners, Erik and Christophe. They were

"one large and blond, one slight and dark. They both wore oil-coloured seamen's sweaters, wide-necked and cable-stitched. They both wore large, round spectacles, with frames in that iridescent multi-striped light-weight metal" (Byatt 106). Phineas could very well sense that "they were almost certainly a couple, from the way they looked at one another" (Byatt 107). This brings us to the very brink of doubts that revolves around masculinity. In Reeser's opinion, "We all know certain men whom we would not label as 'masculine' or whom we might call 'effeminate' or something else denoting an absence of masculinity. When we see such men, masculinity becomes visible because of its perceived absence" (1). These men sharing a love relationship is considered effeminate according to the societal norms. They fail to fulfill the very dictums of heterosexual masculinity according to the perceived norms of the conventional social order. They even subvert the societal idea of perfect masculinity by being least bothered about the certainty of lack of productivity in their relationship: "'We shan't have *any* children, dear...Or maybe a few anonymous test-tube ones'" (Byatt 205). This very textual instance proves that "If masculinity's hegemonic operations can be hidden, they can also be subverted, male power can be destabilized, and experiences outside hegemony can be created" (Reeser 8).

It is through Erik and Christophe that we observe "two heterosexual men [posing] as a gay couple to procure certain domestic partner benefits" (Reeser 126). In Reeser's opinion, "Becoming gay can be a way, then, to create a bond, with homosexuality serving as a trope for a kind of male-male intimacy often viewed as lacking in heterosexual men. In these kinds of representational flirtations, the idea of a male-male relationship is viewed as attractive—and becoming gay (metaphorically or temporarily) can be a way to deconstruct certain traits of masculinity. Appropriated male homosexuality can thus serve as a technique to move into a new space of masculinity critical of the gender status quo" (126).

While masculinity is constructed as an ideology "we are given the message that a certain kind of masculinity is valid or more valid than another" (Reeser 21). As Phineas comes in close affinity to these individuals and begins to share an intimate friendly bond with them, his masculinity too falls under the very domain of doubt. Phineas could retrieve a whole new latent self that had been lying dormant until now. He thinks "for the first time in my [his] life" that "it would be the right, nor the wrong thing" (Byatt 107). According to Phineas, "The expressions of male-male intimacy are more likely to reaffirm their masculinity" (Reeser 2). This actually proves the mental ability of Phineas to acknowledge homosexual love. This indeed makes him an individual who has strange likeness for the unlikely. His growing desire to "fit into their intimacy," shows his emotional necessity to be a part of this different world (Byatt 107). This, in fact places several challenges against the male identity of Phineas. Phineas not at all feels uncomfortable with the strange behaviour of his employers. Rather he enjoys the way in which they "seduced" their clients "by words and images" (Byatt 107). This makes Phineas one of them. He is unable to realize the concealed emotional aspect that detaches him from the masculine dictums of the world. His extreme likeness of these men brings about a question regarding his "sexual orientation" (Byatt 108).

Notably, Phineas constantly harbours the intense desire to get "suited" to this new environment and belong to their intimate world (119). The more Phineas strives to be a part of this new world, the more he gets detached from his actual quest. He eventually begins to feel "claustrophobic" in the intellectual environment. He seems to "perceive an increase in the mustiness or fustiness of the air" in the Linnean Society. He happens to be more comfortable in the non-intellectual "human space" (Byatt 122). He projects the utmost necessity to belong to the world of the unfamiliar male figures, Erik and Christophe. Phineas claims Puck's Girdle to be his "first human space I [he] had ever enjoyed sharing" (Byatt 122). This shows his utmost abhorrence towards the life that he has been living until now. This "human space" (Byatt 122) exhibits the "positive models of masculinity in which masculinity operates in a non-hegemonic way, moments in which men break or attempt to break their own hold over power" (Reeser 8). Phineas's masculinity also falls under the premises of unresolved doubts and constant series of questions. This can be observed through his delightfulness in being the tool of possession of these men.

According to Reeser, "The common understanding of Adam's creation, for example, makes the original man a heterosexual victim of a woman's seduction, and some believe that these aspects of Adam's creation apply to all men…Images can be turned into myths when they become so widespread that culture takes them for granted as a narrative of masculinity" (23). But such a narrative of masculinity seems to get totally overturned by Erik and Christophe. Phineas seems immensely fascinated by the unconventional utopic world of these men. They subvert the societal notions of gender roles. They share responsibilities in both the masculine and feminine duties "as they moved about kitchen and office" (Byatt 124). Their relationship seems to be a perfect one to Phineas the more he observes them closely: "They brushed hands, they touched each other" (Byatt 124). Phineas gradually starts growing a tremendous need to become an object of acceptance in their world. Phineas never has a feeling of irritation or annoyance because of their "brush of fingers" ruffling his hair or the "touch [on his] shoulder" (Byatt 124). He rather asserts, "I have to say, I was grateful" (Byatt 124). This reveals the hidden self of Phineas that constantly struggles to break through the societal shackles. Phineas's "queer masculinity" seems to find an expression through Reeser's viewpoint who claims that "For a heterosexual man that sees the possibility of appropriating femininity as difficult or undesirable, queer heterosexual masculinity may provide an outlet to question gender normativity" (126). Phineas's being comfortable in such an unconventional milieu exposes the concealed desire of homosexuality that rests within his very being.

Phineas seemed more obsessed with his newfound sexuality than his quest for intellectual stability. His growing dependency on Erik and Christophe gradually erodes away the small speck of strength and individuality left within him. His very existence becomes merged with terror as he finds himself the only one to deal with the strange customer, Maurice Bossey. The very gigantic physique of Maurice and his bizarre outlook make Phineas encounter "sweet images of terror and pain" (Byatt 171). His incapacity and tepidness overshadow his mind with a growing number of questions: "Had they left me alone with Bossey as a *test*?" (Byatt 171). Phineas even

confirms his volatile state of mind and his unmanly traits himself. He confirms being "in a state of continuous terror" at Puck's Girdle during the absence of Erik and Christophe, who were enjoying their holidays (Byatt 200). Phineas himself asserts that "I am not a brave man" (Byatt 200). He subverts the conventional belief of the society by attributing the manly qualities to the men who are considered to be effeminate owing to their sexual orientation. He finds his job "so delightful because of the openness and insouciance of Erik and Christophe" (Byatt 201). This again makes him the societal being that is able to locate manliness within effeminate creatures. Phineas's growing eagerness about the return of Erik and Christophe makes him more restless. He tried to be "sensible and rational, worked harder and harder both on photographs and the quotations, and on my [his] work at Puck's Girdle" (Byatt 200). His "over-excitement" while waiting for their return can never stand in comparison with his desire in searching for the facts to aid up his research work (Byatt 200). His undeterred interest in fulfilling their expectations can never be witnessed during his intellectual quest when he is striving to write a biography on Destry Scholes.

Incidentally, Phineas is able to discover the perfectness of life through the behaviours and traits of these men who are socially imperfect beings. He becomes increasingly aware of his inferiority the more he gets to know about their friendly connections: "They were full of laughter…[and] chattered with a mixture of affection and malice about their new acquaintances" (Byatt 202). Phineas agrees on envying "their world of endlessly interconnected friends and acquaintances" (Byatt 202). Although Phineas claims to be aware of their unconventional intimate relationship, he seems to admire "their grave and settled affection—love—for each other" (Byatt 202). This again raises many questions regarding Phineas's masculinity. An entirely undiscovered side of his physicality gets revealed through his intense willingness to belong to the world of these imperfect men. Such doubts regarding Phineas's maleness also arises in the minds of these men. Even though they are impotent themselves they reveal themselves as strong enough to bring their doubts regarding Phineas's masculine self to the forefront. Their impression regarding Phineas gets exposed through the presents that they bring for him after spending a long holiday together. They are doubtful about Phineas's manliness and decide to give him something that he is lacking, "a Japanese netsuke with a tiny gnome-like person with an enormous phallus" (Byatt 202). They prefer to present Phineas with a tiny gnome that resembles his own short, tiny physique. Along with that, the "enormous phallus" totally brings about the manner by which they have visualized Phineas till now (Byatt 202). This can also be observed as the main reason they have allowed Phineas to enter their unconventional, utopic world.

They have been harbouring a strong doubt regarding Phineas's masculinity since the very beginning. This perception about Phineas ultimately gets revealed through the type of presents they give him. Their baffling thoughts regarding Phineas's sexual desirability can be located through the other present that they bring for Phineas, "a beautiful silver paperknife with a handle in the form of a naked Janus-figure, young and nubile, male one side, female the other" (Byatt 202). It can be clearly observed through this that Phineas's entire existence is clouded with confusion. He gets immensely furious after detecting the challenges against his masculinity:

The next few minutes were horrible. I do not remember them clearly. I do remember throwing the Easter eggs with some violence at both of them. I remember hearing my own voice screaming incoherently… I remember screaming and growling and howling- yes, and weeping- in complete sentences. (Byatt 203)

It was right after his visit to the Linnean Society that Phineas develops an association with the "pollination ecologist," Fulla Biefeld (Byatt 110). He had been in search of more facts about Destry-Scholes's subjects of the unfinished biographies. It is at this very place where he meets the Swedish woman "who reminded me [him] of a Picasso ceramic" (Byatt 109). Phineas is busy observing the "stout" physique of Fulla, which was "Like a squat S, with breasts pushing forwards and buttocks pushing backwards, and solid calves under a denim skirt with a leather belt" (Byatt 109). Phineas is so deeply engrossed in observing the "form" of Fulla that he "did not notice her face" (Byatt 110). The fact that Phineas has been deeply enamoured by the voluptuous body of Fulla proves that he is also attracted towards the female gender. This shows that Phineas is not only suffering from psychological confusion but also a physiological one. His sexuality gets divided between his attractions towards the male as well as female sex.

But Phineas's attraction towards Fulla's body cannot be related simply to the notion of objectifying women and visualizing them as the element of sexual desire. Phineas is rather charmed by the essence of masculinity that vehemently lies within the feminine self of Fulla. Although "the male body is the most common purveyor of masculinity," the notion seems to differ as we observe Fulla (Reeser 17). Her masculinity is indeed something that Phineas as a male is lacking. "The stalwart legs furred with strong, brass-gold hairs" (Byatt 117) seems to provide a sense of security to Phineas. Phineas became "claustrophobic" in the "mustiness" (Byatt 116) of the Linnean Society Library. This shows his inability to perceive new knowledge. It also brings out his hidden self that is frightened to confront the depths of intellectuality. At this very moment, Fulla becomes his saviour: "I slipped to my knees, losing consciousness, and my hands ran down solid thighs, strong knees, warm, muscular. The door opened and I found myself at the feet of Fulla Biefeld" (Byatt 117). He regards Fulla as someone on whom he can be heavily dependent. This brings out his realization of the submissive nature within him and his lack of dependence on himself. Fulla's masculinity becomes more vivid and it becomes apparent that "the cause or the origin of masculinity cannot be directly linked to the male body" (Reeser 18).

In Reeser's view, "masculinity should be examined in its recurring relation to other kinds of bodies besides the male ones" (131). The fact that he regards Fulla as a masculine figure can be detected through the manner by which he constantly associates her with males: "Fulla Biefeld put on wide, narrow oval-lensed glasses, surrounded like those of the male couple in Puck's Girdle, with iridescent titanium" (Byatt 118). This seems similar to Reeser's opinion that "we all know women who we consider to have certain amount of masculinity and men who we do not" (36). It seems that Phineas is more attracted towards the masculine stature rather than feminine, reticent

beauty. He seems to be enticed by the masculine aspects in Fulla that he himself is lacking. Phineas meticulously observes Fulla's face for the first time while conversing with her regarding his research. He observes that:

> Her face is not beautiful. Her nose is sharp, her eyes too deep under the bristling ledges of her pale brows, her mouth too big for her (smallish) face, and set in what is almost a permanent expression of disapproval. Her eyes are not blue but greenish, flecked with brownish streaks. Her eyelashes are actually quite thick, but so pale that they are only visible in certain lights. (Byatt 119)

Fulla's masculine essence seems to get a profound expression through Reeser who proposes his views on "a woman in a male-dominated world" where the "culture does not automatically accord her the possibility of having masculinity" (18).

Fulla's projection of masculine traits reverberates Reeser's observation of "non-male masculinities" (132). He asserts that "Masculinity inscribed on the female body is not simply male masculinity transposed, however, but should be viewed as another type of masculinity that may nonetheless have connections to male masculinity" (132). Taking the views of Judith Halberstam in her ground-breaking work *Female Masculinity* (1998), we locate her assertion that "far from being an imitation of maleness, female masculinity actually affords us a glimpse of how masculinity is constructed as masculinity" (Reeser 132). Similar to effeminacy "female masculinity destabilizes imagined binary oppositions between male masculinity and female femininity" (Reeser 132). It "may contribute to a larger cultural anxiety about what a woman is or should be, or it may evoke a threat that men will lose their supposedly natural hold on masculinity if women do not take flak for breaking out of their assigned gender" (Reeser 132-133). "Female masculinity opens up a space for male masculinity to question the very naturalness of the link between sex and gender or between the male body and masculinity" (Reeser 134).

Even though "masculinity plays an important role in the exertion of power," we can detect a reversal of roles here (Reeser 31). While Phineas regards Fulla as his rescuer, at the same point of time he resents her presence. He looks at her as the one who destroys his happy existence in the utopic world of Erik and Christophe. He regards Fulla as the "Valkyrie" who swept in "to defend me [him]" (Byatt 206). At the same moment, he feels that he could have resolved the matter by kissing his admired men: "I might have injured one, or both of my employers seriously. Or we might- so to speak- have kissed and made up" (Byatt 206). Even at such an importune moment, he is extremely unwilling to leave his happy abode. He is so very comfortable with these men that he is certain of the fact that he can kiss and make up with them.

Moreover, Phineas is not only inferior to Fulla in terms of intellectual ability. He seems rather much more comfortable in playing the role of a submissive partner while sexually bonding with her. Phineas's sexual attraction towards Fulla becomes visible right from the very moment when he observes her "stout" structure at the Linnean Society that resembles a "Picasso ceramic" (Byatt 109). He is so very enamoured with Fulla's "breasts pushing forwards and buttocks pushing

backwards" that he has hardly any interest in looking at her face (Byatt 109). Fulla exhibits both her oozing sexual appeal as well as her strong masculine traits through the "solid calves under her denim skirt" (Byatt 109). These traits indeed make her Phineas's saviour who had been feeling utterly "claustrophobic" in the intellectual environment (Byatt 116). Phineas is rescued from his gradual descent into suffocation and unconsciousness as his "hands ran down solid thighs, strong knees, warm, muscular" (Byatt 117). Even inside this brawny, fibrous structure, it is only possible for Phineas to encounter "yielding soft flesh" (Byatt 117). "The stalwart legs… furred with strong, brass-gold hairs" appeared to Phineas as a site of security where he can "lose consciousness completely" (Byatt 117). Phineas discovers the light of consciousness inside the darkness of Fulla's "skirt" (Byatt 117). He could revive his senses after attaining the sight of "the slight wiriness of her pubic hair pressing against what appeared to be alternately crimson and emerald knickers" (Byatt 117). As Phineas's nose becomes "alive with Fulla Biefeld's sex," we can easily derive his attraction emerging out of his discovery of Fulla's masculinity concealed within the female self (Byatt 117). Phineas deliberates on his "weakness" as well as his tendency to "tremble" (Byatt 117). These can be viewed as evidences of his own awareness of his lack of masculinity. Getting "slipped to my [his] knees" right at the first encounter with Fulla, proves his acceptance of submission against the traits that he is lacking since the very beginning (Byatt 117). This again brings out the latent feminine self within Phineas. Such a characteristic aspect of Phineas finds its prefect revelation through Reeser who claims that "There are traditionally feminine aspects in many brands of masculinity. The sensitive man, for instance, is one brand of masculinity dependent not on a rejection of femininity but on its necessary incorporation into what a man is or should be" (37).

Even though he is "alive with Fulla Biefeld's sex," Phineas is too afraid to enter in a sexual rendezvous with her (Byatt 117). He appears to be rather comfortable playing the role of the submissive partner during sex. Here, Phineas subverts the accepted notion of masculinity which believes that "sexual virility provides one ontologically seeming trait of masculinity" (Reeser 45). His meek self seems to have "trembled and exploded" at the very thought of a woman being dominant in a relationship (Byatt 213). He seems totally benumbed after witnessing the compelling vigorousness of a woman to sexually advance even before a man. We rarely talk about "her masculinity" in the way we talk about "his masculinity" or "her femininity" (Reeser 134). Fulla seems to project the "power" that is "so closely linked to masculinity that it may appear as inherently masculine" (Reeser 133). This very thought happens to make Phineas shudder: "And she opened the top two buttons of her shift, so I could clearly see her freckled brown breasts in their lacy cups... And when she saw me looking, she put up her quick little hands and pulled my face down between them. All of me, all of me, trembled and exploded" (Byatt 213). This again brings out the effeminate aspects within Phineas. Regarding effeminacy as something that "can actually masculinize a man", Reeser proclaims that "Effeminacy often signifies the threat of a man becoming like a woman, but effeminacy is not necessarily the opposite of masculinity" (210).

Fulla seems to manifest the masculine traits and Phineas the feminine ones. He follows her whole-heartedly and derives his happiness and satisfaction through the fulfillment of Fulla's sexual

expectations. The very being of Fulla protruding out through her "amazing" features and her "severe little face" is "like an electric pulse" to Phineas (Byatt 260). Each and every movement of Fulla, even "her sturdy feet in their Ecco sandals", makes Phineas regard her as "an independent creature" which is totally opposite to his own entity (Byatt 260). Phineas's constant realization of Fulla being "at the top" proves her strong ability that is vigorous enough to undermine the existence of Phineas (Byatt 260). Phineas demonstrates a discourse of masculinity that "evokes an anti-traditional masculinity, the image of the "new age sensitive man" and repositions masculinity as kindler, softer, and in touch with its feminine side. Given these differences, such discourses have the ultimate effect of constructing contradictory discursive masculinities. Similarly, masculinity may be contradictory within the context of a single discourse" (Reeser 33). According to Reeser:

> In this gendered linguistic scenario, 'masculinity' would refer to something that would be obvious to anyone hearing the word, would have a stable referent, and would stand in direct opposition to 'femininity'.… An ontology of masculinity is dependent on an assumed stability of other words linked to that essence as well, including perhaps 'man,' 'power,' 'virility,' or 'penis.' (36)

Such an assumption gets totally subverted through Phineas's physique, which seems to oppose the proposed notions of masculinity. Focusing on several "phallic symbols," there exist "myths [which] function as a way to make certain forms of masculinity seem eternal and unchanging, not open to change or variation, and not ideological in nature" (Reeser 22). Struggling with several conflicting ideas in his mind and constantly suffering from an inferiority complex owing to his not-so-sharp and "small" features and being someone who "was a little person, the child of a little person," Phineas seems to raise several questions within his self regarding his masculinity (Byatt 3). This clearly emerges out of the associations of several bold features and physical traits with perfect masculinity by the society. Fidelma Ashe justifies this through the opinion of R.W. Connell in her work *The New Politics of Masculinity* (2007) where she brings about the argument "that masculinity is a relational term that only exists in contrast to what it is not, namely femininity" (145). There happens to sustain profound doubts regarding the masculinity of Phineas Nanson throughout the novel, which he himself realizes but is immensely afraid to resolve or even encounter.

Conclusion

Phineas, as a male projecting feminine traits, exhibits a predominant femininity and timid nature within his male self. The masculinity of Phineas, which deviates from the conventional form of masculinity, can be established by the theoretical ground propounded by Connell. She argues and wishes to "bring to light the conflicting interests of different groups of men" (*Masculinities* 238). She even argues that, "it is possible for men to refuse hegemonic masculinity" (*Masculinities* 220–24; *The Men and the Boys* 205). This becomes expressed through Reeser as he asserts that:

Instead of considering the two genders as opposites, one might think in Derrida's terms of femininity as "supplementary" to masculinity, meaning that masculinity can exist only by virtue of its dependence on femininity. While masculinity might be defined in language as inherently different from femininity, the very fact that it is the opposite of femininity suggests that its definition requires femininity. (37)

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Being the Other, the Other Being: Masculine Insecurities in Matthew Haig's *The Humans* and Blake Crouch's *Dark Matter*

Sara Martín

In "Why Compare?" David Ferris discusses the "crisis of definition," which affects Comparative Literature as a methodology with ill-defined boundaries, or, as Ferris refers to it, an "indiscipline" (33). Comparative analysis highlights key factors that may pass otherwise unnoticed in the exploration of a single novel and, so, here I compare two science-fiction novels set in in the present and written by male authors of the same generation: *The Humans* (2013) by English author Matthew Haig (b. 1975), and *Dark Matter* (2016) by American novelist Blake Crouch (b. 1978). Haig's novel is a satire and Crouch's a thriller but, despite their differences, both address a basic issue of contemporary masculinity: namely, how men can successfully combine the demands of an ambitious scientific career with a pro-feminist family life. These novels could use Gothic horror to narrate how a woman and her teen son gradually realize that their husband and father is a stranger. Yet, both are instead characterized by first-person narrations that use science fiction (in a light vein) to portray a male individual forced to understand how men must function in the contemporary world.

"Caring," as an aspect of critical studies of men and masculinities, dates back to the mid-2010s. As Karla Elliott explains, "the central features of caring masculinities are their rejection of domination and their integration of values of care, such as positive emotion, interdependence, and relationality, into masculine identities" (241). In Haig's novel, a nameless alien learns to be a caring (hu)man by rejecting the behaviour of the uncaring workaholic male it replaces. The family man in Crouch's novel must defend his well-balanced, caring masculinity from assault by another uncaring workaholic: his own doppelgänger. Both authors use science fiction to endorse a positive masculine model, focused on caring for women and children. Neither author explains, however, why parenting should necessarily involve sacrificing professional careers, though this is the circumstance on which their plotlines hinge. In each case, the birth of a son transforms the lives of at least one parent into a less publicly rewarding existence. Thus, while both novels value family life highly and endorse caring fatherhood, they also express an anxiety regarding the negative impact of parenting for career men and women in competitive societies that offer the parents of young children no help.

Criticizing the Workaholic Man

The word 'workaholic' first appeared in Wayne E. Oates's *Confessions of a Workaholic: The Facts about Work Addiction* (1971) to describe an addiction still lacking an official psychological

or psychiatric diagnosis. For decades 'workaholism' was discussed exclusively in relation to men, even though many women might also be categorized as workaholics. Despite this, Yaniv still uses male pronouns in his 2011 discussion of the workaholic's marital problems, arguing that the workaholic husband perfectly understands the strain that his job places on marital life. The workaholic husband, Yaniv maintains, "makes a choice about how much to work today taking account of the future consequences of this choice," being perfectly willing to sacrifice family life (108). In contrast, Palkovitz noted a decade before, in 2002, that the patterns linking men and work were changing. For most men, the "idea of career advancement and job stability take on greater importance" once they become fathers (403). However, while those who regard themselves primarily as providers may fall into the trap of workaholism, many new twenty-first century fathers "reported decreased commitment to work" preferring instead the pleasures of caring fatherhood (404).

In *The Humans*, workaholic Andrew Martin is killed when the alien narrator snatches his body. In this gentle satire, Haig hints that the usurping alien can be a better family man than a human male. In *Dark Matter*, Crouch has his happy American husband and father kill, in a vicious way, the workaholic he might have been, another version of himself. Haig and Crouch are very critical of the workaholic career model that makes family life dysfunctional for men and relegates women to a supporting role. Nonetheless, in each novel the author presents a talented woman who has chosen motherhood over her career while the situation of the husbands, both gifted scientists, is different. In *The Humans*, top Cambridge mathematician Professor Martin is a selfish career man, and a disappointing family man, who cheats on his wife, Isobel, and lacks any empathy for his literally suicidal teen son, Gulliver. He seems to be the kind of man who, Yaniv warns, may "find it optimal to take a course that will eventually destroy his marriage" (108). In *Dark Matter*, Chicago physicist Jason Dessen is a happy man; he is in love with his wife, Daniela, in good syntony with their teen son, Charlie, and apparently unconcerned by having ditched his promising career. Still, he frets inwardly as the plot subtly discloses how different his life could have been.

Neither Haig nor Crouch imagine their scientific male geniuses (for this is what Martin and Dessen are) being capable of combining professional success with a rich family life. For both, the arrival of a child at an early stage in their careers is a major crisis that forces them and their partners to make crucial choices. Palkovitz stresses that in dual career families, "work/family issues" are "central to the everyday functioning of men, women, and children," yet the burden of choice still falls on the women's shoulders, as Haig and Crouch show (418).

Andrew's wife, Isobel, abandons her own career to be a mother and to support her husband's career, later taking up teaching. When the alien impostor tries to grasp the concept of marriage, since "Where we are from there are no names, no families living together, no husbands and wives, not sulky teenagers, no madness," it finds itself at the receiving end of Isobel's deep disappointment (95). "Glory is what motivates you," she complains. "Ego. You want your name everywhere. Andrew Martin. Andrew Martin. Andrew Martin. You want to be on every Wikipedia page going. You want to be an Einstein. The trouble is, Andrew, you're still two years old" (70).

Isobel also complains that her husband has never been a good father—"You'd fly off the handle about anything that got in the way of you and your work"—and laments that she sacrificed her own career (182). The alien concludes that Isobel, a historian exploring "woman's place" in history, has failed to protect herself from Andrew's workaholism: "the irony," the alien writes, is that she "placed herself in the margins voluntarily, giving up work for family, because she imagined that when she eventually arrived at her death-bed she would feel more regret about unborn children than unwritten books. But as soon as she made that move, she had felt her husband begin to take her for granted" (208).

In *Dark Matter,* the unexpected pregnancy of Jason's girlfriend, Daniela, makes them abandon their dream careers—hers as an artist, his in quantum physics—to become teachers (like Isobel). Daniela was a promising new artist but, Jason notes, "Then came life. Me. Charlie. A bout of crippling postpartum depression" and "derailment" (3). Daniela is now a private arts tutor to middle-grade students, whereas Jason teaches quantum mechanics to undergrad physics students at their local community college. Ryan, a former college roommate and, according to Jason, his "successful other," angers him by insisting that Jason could have "changed the world" if only he had "stuck" to his path (10). Annoyed, Jason replies that "We can't all be superstars like you, Ryan" (10). Later, Jason acknowledges to "Jason2," a version of himself from a universe in which he pursued his career, that "My life is great. It's just not exceptional. And there was a time when it could have been" (34). He claims that his ambition "died of natural causes. Of neglect" after baby Charlie was conceived, as Daniela and he "were having fun, but it wasn't love" (34).

Jason was then twenty-seven and in a career in which scientists usually peak by thirty. The "major medical issues" from which baby Charlie suffered put Jason in a quandary: "Daniela needed me. My son needed me. I lost my funding. Lost my momentum. I was the young, new genius for a minute, but when I folded, someone else took my place" (35). Jason claims that he does not regret having formed a family with Daniela and Charlie, yet Crouch's choice of a multiverse narrative indicates that he still needs to convince himself. As Robert Vogt notes, multiverse narratives "provide a causal frame by depicting the consequences for the characters' lives in the different actual worlds. As a consequence, the recipient can compare and evaluate the different trajectories" (117). This is what Jason does obsessively and compulsively as he explores his many possible lives before determining that he wants to be primarily Daniela's husband and Charlie's father, not the workaholic doppelgänger that tries to supplant him. In contrast, it never occurs to Andrew Martin that he could have been less selfish and more caring, which is why, ultimately, Haig replaces him with the alien.

Man's Mid-Life Crisis

As noted, *The Humans* is a satirical text with a gentle sense of humour. Its main predecessor is Douglas Adams's *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* (1979), though Haig's novel is not "Pythonesque," as M. Keith Booker and Anne-Marie Thomas label Adams's work (104). These scholars stress, somewhat unfairly, that Hitchhiker is a "work of high silliness" which offers,

nonetheless, "a great deal of social satire," though they doubt whether it is "a parody of social satire rather than social satire proper" (104). They also claim rather dogmatically that Adams's work is "more a parody of science fiction than science fiction proper" since it treats the genre's "staples… with anything but respect and seriousness" (104). The same criticisms may well be applied to Haig's novel, though both *Hitchhiker* and *The Humans* are more insightful than their easy, very English sense of humour suggests.

On the other hand, although she is discussing multiverse narratives, and *The Humans* is not one, Marie-Laure Ryan's "notion of counterparthood" is useful for close analyses of Haig's novel (659). By concentrating "on the personal relations of characters to those individuals who are at the same time themselves and somebody else as well as on the plot possibilities that these variations create," Haig's exploration of 'counterparthood' allows us to see Andrew Martin from the alien's point of view as an alienated man, pun intended (659).

In *The Humans* and *Dark Matter*, the two couples are in their early forties and have been in their relationships for long periods of time: twenty years in Andrew and Isobel's case, fifteen in Jason and Daniela's. The novels narrate, then, a sort of mid-life crisis, perhaps more conspicuous in the case of the English couple. In the report that the alien is addressing to his fellow Vonnadorians, he notes that Andrew is forty-three, Isobel forty-one, and their son, Gulliver, fifteen. Andrew, as I have noted, is killed instantly when the alien, who arrives on Earth using anti-matter, occupies his body and mind. The impostor has been sent by its superiors, the Hosts, to prevent Professor Martin from announcing his resolution of the Riemann Hypothesis, as this would fast-forward human progress in ways the Vonnadorians distrust. The professor's new oddball behaviour is attributed to a breakdown caused by overworking, though it results from the alien's many difficulties in navigating human life. The body-snatcher, for its part, is resisting its orders to murder all who might know of Martin's mathematical breakthrough. The alien refuses to kill Isobel and Gulliver, though it does murder the rival to whom a boastful Martin had communicated his discovery. Taking in the many certificates of distinction in this man's office, the alien feels "thankful to come from a place where personal success was meaningless" (89).

As the alien starts begins to value Isobel and Gulliver on its own terms, it discovers that Martin was totally focused on his career, that his wife was unhappy but unable to divorce him, and that Gulliver could not cope with being the son of a genius. Enjoying the pleasures of caring for the boy and of being cared for by Isobel, the alien decides to become fully human, since "No one in the universe cared for me" (127). An attack by a second murderous alien sent by his superiors, however, forces the impostor to disclose its real identity. Gulliver welcomes the revelation with relief. As the alien reports, the boy "seemed to accept me as an extraterrestrial life form far more easily than he had accepted me as a father" (264). Isobel, though, is crushed by the loss of her suddenly romantic husband. After this episode, Haig sends the alien abroad, still posing as Martin. Yet, being a comedy, *The Humans* ends happily. When Gulliver invites his ersatz dad back home, claiming that Isobel misses their life, the alien asks whether she misses the original or the alien

Martin. "You," Gulliver replies. "You're the one who looked after us" (289). In this way, the alien's caring masculinity is celebrated and Andrew Martin's workaholic, ego isdismissed for good.

In *Dark Matter*, Jason2, coming from a universe where Jason rejected fatherhood, Daniela underwent an abortion, and Jason built the box granting access to the multiverse, is successful but lonely. He starts envying the modest life that Jason and Daniela enjoy with their son, Charlie. As Jason comments, "If I represent the pinnacle of family success for all the Jason Dessens, Jason2 represents the professional and creative apex. We're opposite poles of the same man, and I suppose it isn't a coincidence that Jason2 sought out my life from the infinite possibilities available" (265). Jason2 kidnaps Jason and, wrongly assuming that he will be thrilled to take his place as a single, selfish career man, swaps lives with him. In fact, Jason is devastated and only uses the box to get back home and terminate his usurper.

When the usurper, Jason2, starts his new life as Jason, he tells Daniela that being almost run down by a car has scared him, and now he thinks all moments of life are precious, which justifies his new behaviour. Daniela is perplexed but welcomes the change, believing it refreshes their marriage: "They haven't been *unhappy* these last few years, quite the opposite. But it's been a long, long time since she felt that sense of giddy love that effervesces in the pit of your stomach and spectacularly upends the world" (81, original italics). As for Jason, as he continues his frantic efforts to return home by exploring more and more alternative universes, he is consumed by jealousy:

> It's one thing to be lost in a world that's not your own.
> Another thing entirely to know you've been replaced in yours.
> That a better version of you has stepped into your life.
> He's smarter than I am, no question.
> Is he also a better father to Charlie?
> A better husband to Daniela?
> A better lover?
> He did this to me.
> No.
> It's way more fucked up than that.
> *I* did this to me. (167, italics in original)

Following Max Tegmark's theorization of the four levels of the multiverse (see his volume *Our Mathematical Universe: My Quest for the Ultimate Nature of Reality*), Joseph Gelfer and Joseph Organ develop (in their witty, tongue-in-cheek article "Quantum Masculinities: Doing Gender with Max Tegmark's Mathematical Universe Hypothesis") the thesis that:

> First, masculinities are infinite given the infinite nature of the multiverse, and that those masculinities may follow different histories that share our same laws of physics (Level I multiverse) or may follow different histories and take on different localized laws of physics (Level II multiverse). Second, superposition functions as an interesting analogy (albeit not

extendable very far) for explaining why masculinities can simultaneously be in different and/or contradictory states. (221-222)

Revealing in their conclusion that "quantum masculinities do not contain a shred of science," Gelfer and Organ (who appear to be two versions of the same scholar), maintain that quantum masculinities "offer a scenario for describing the possibilities of multiple masculinities that is at least novel, and potentially 'true' by the standards of external reality" (225). For them (for him?), the superposition of multiple masculinities is "clearly farcical" but also a useful instrument "to describe the often contradictory and paradoxical variables that arise when discussing masculinities" (225). It might be argued that femininity is also in a state of superposition, and that both femininity and masculinity must now incorporate the non-binary into that state, but Gelfer/Organ's hypothesis makes sense not only of Crouch's multiverse narrative but also of the simultaneous position of modern masculinity inside and outside toxic patriarchy.

After Jason manages to restore family life after eliminating the impostor, Daniela and Charlie accept his revelation that they have been living with Jason2 (for a month) with mild puzzlement. Jason interrogates his wife about the differences between him and his other self and, although Daniela avoids giving any details, she eventually apologizes for having enjoyed the romantic moments and the sex. Absurdly, Jason believes that her 'infidelity' is annulled by his own night of sex with the celebrity artist she is in another universe, even though Daniela is never intentionally unfaithful as he is. After enjoying sex again together, Daniela insists to Jason that he is not replaceable: yet despite the reassurances of wife and son that Jason2 was not a better man, a certain doubt lingers. Since Jason's family never distrusted this other man, it appears that Jason *is* replaceable. Jason may have been temporarily robbed of his life but Jason2 is, on the whole, a good enough replacement, as if the original Jason's roles as husband and father were just performances and not an expression of a deeply felt identity.

Interestingly, the key to the endless search for a better universe for the family unit is Charlie, who has until this point had a rather limited role. Alexandra Macht writes in *Fatherhood and Love* that "boundaries in relationships are created and dissolved by paying attention to emotions; it is in this manner that emotional reflexivity is important to the process of constructing emotional borders" (43). Considering his own emotions, Jason realises that the only way to get rid of the many Jasons trying to access his own world, after he kills Jason2, is to trust his son, hoping that Charlie will choose a better universe. About to open the door in his father's box, the teen boy looks, Jason notes, "as brave and strong as I've ever seen him," and is finally "a man" (37). The world he chooses, full of light, promises to be the right one.

Conclusions: Promoting the Good Family Man

To sum up, Haig and Crouch use science fiction to reject the workaholic male genius who refuses to be a good family man. Martin is replaced by an alien who is better at performing human masculinity than he ever was. As for Jason, by killing Jason2 he eliminates his workaholic self and regains his lost happy family life. Crouch, though, cannot wholly erase the impression that this

man is replaceable because he can never prove that Jason is unique. Ultimately, whether a man is selfish or caring, his choices may make him vulnerable. In Haig's and Crouch's novels, the 'other being' embodies the choices not taken and men's struggle to combine professional ambition and a rewarding family life. It is, therefore, important to highlight science fiction's contribution to the discussion of these male anxieties and to the endorsement of a newly detoxed masculinity.

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Satirical Sleight of Hand in Warhammer 40K: Space Marines and Hegemonic Masculinity

Jordan Etherington

To a Space Marine the boltgun is far more than a weapon, it is an instrument of Mankind's divinity, the bringer of death to his foes, whose howling blast is a prayer to the gods of battle.

–Warhammer 40,000 5th Ed. Rulebook

Satire (n.): a literary work holding up human vices and follies to ridicule and scorn

–Merriam-Webster

Warhammer 40K has grown by leaps and bounds in recent years. It started in 1987 as a tabletop miniatures game named *Warhammer 40,000: Rogue Trader*, published by Games Workshop. Although it began as a science-fiction version of Games Workshop's already existing Warhammer Fantasy game, it has since eclipsed Warhammer Fantasy in popularity, becoming one of the largest active science-fiction IPs today (Heseltine & Pointon). In the 35 years since it was first released, its brand presence has spread to numerous mediums, including video games (the *Dawn of War* series, *Space Marine*, *Mechanicus*, and *Necromunda*, to name only a few), movies (such as the straight-to-DVD movie *Ultramarine*), numerous stand-alone board games (*Space Hulk*), and a live-action television series under development (as of writing) based on the novel series *Eisenhorn* (Clarke). In this article, I focus on tie-in media that is produced by The Black Library, the book publishing division of Games Workshop.

This article examines how norms of hegemonic masculinity are portrayed and reproduced in the dystopian setting of three novels set in the Warhammer 40K universe. The novels are *Dawn of Fire: Avenging Son*, *Legacy of the Wulfen*, and *Azrael*. These novels were chosen because their content is chiefly concerned with the most iconic and popular part of the Warhammer 40K brand, the Space Marines. I assert that while Games Workshop claims that the setting of Warhammer 40K is meant to satirize and critique authoritarian norms (Warhammer Community), no substantive satirical content is found in these three novels in regard to the Space Marines, the most popular part of the Warhammer 40K brand (Jones & Kelling). This absence is particularly apparent in relation to the tropes associated with hegemonic masculinity. The lack of satirical content significantly weakens Games Workshop's claim about the satirical intent of Warhammer 40K. Instead, it indicates that the label of 'satire' is selectively deployed to resist symbolic association with authoritarian groups, providing a cover for the use of hypermasculine signifiers

in Warhammer 40K content. I provide supplemental context with the concept of the 'masculine nation' during the overall analysis (Reeser).

Theoretical Framework

The framework for this article is R.W. Connell's theory of hegemonic masculinity as presented in *Masculinities*. In this text, Connell describes gender norms and relations between genders as being socially constructed frameworks rather than inherent to any biological sex. Within each society there exists a form of each gender that is socially dominant, or 'hegemonic,' and this category is made up of the ideal attributes associated with each gender. For example, a few of the gender norms that make up hegemonic masculinity in Western society include: an ability and willingness to commit violence to 'defend' one's family, property, and dignity; stoicism; success in sexual relationships with women; physical strength; independence; and a general lack of vulnerability, be it emotional or physical. Concerning Warhammer 40K, Connell's ideas help us understand that the game is a product sold within a hobby space in the West that is still largely dominated by white males (Pobuda). This incentivizes Games Workshop to ensure that their products engage in tropes that reinforce hegemonic masculinity to appeal to those consumers (Petando Cateli and Rodrigeuz Pilar, pg. 509).

Novel Content Analysis

The novels covered in this essay focus on the most recognized icon of the Warhammer 40,000 brand, the Space Marines. This analysis considers how these novels use hegemonic masculine ideals to reframe warriors in service to a self-described "monstrous civilization" (Warhammer Community) into heroic characters in which brand consumers can become emotionally invested. These novels are discrete works by different authors, and none of them are in the same series. This selection allows me to provide a wider perspective on the portrayal of the Space Marines and ensure that the entirety of that presentation was not the result of a single author's voice.

Because Space Marine existence is defined by warfare, the plots of the three books are structurally similar. A planet in the Imperium faces attack from a threat that is too powerful for ordinary humans to defeat, or in the case of *Legacy of the Wulfen*, the home system of the Space Wolves Chapter is threatened (Annandale and Macniven, Ch. 1). The Space Marines battle the threat, making sacrifices and losing members until eventually they can defeat the enemy through the superior application of violence. The main antagonist in all three of these books is Chaos, a supernatural force that is represented by extradimensional demons. More specifically, in *Dawn of Fire: Avenging Son*, the newly revived son of the God-Emperor, Roboute Guilliman, prepares a new military crusade to take back worlds recently lost to the Imperium after an invasion by Chaos. In *Legacy of the Wulfen*, a demonic invasion of the Space Wolves system is accompanied by the return of the Wulfen, werewolf-like Space Wolves whose presence risks the Chapter being declared enemies by the Imperium. Finally, in *Azrael*, the titular character is initiated into becoming the leader of the Dark Angels after the previous leader is killed while fighting a demonic invasion of another planet.

Here, a brief explanation of Space Marines will be helpful for understanding the rest of my analysis. The Space Marines are genetically and cybernetically enhanced super-warriors that are taken from different parts of the Imperium's population in childhood and put through intentionally deadly trials. The surviving members are then put through the series of implants and treatments that change them into roughly eight-foot-tall superhuman warriors. Afterwards, their entire lives are dedicated to fighting the enemies of the Imperium. Different groups of Space Marines are called Chapters. Most significantly, they are exclusively male. Women cannot become Space Marines, and there have never been any examples of or references to Space Marines that do not present as cisgender males.

The Space Marines exist to defend the Imperium of Man, a massive, highly fractured state that can be best described as a brutally authoritarian fascist theocracy. The Imperium violently enforces a social order defined by unthinking devotion to the God-Emperor of Mankind and his representatives, hatred of anything that is not defined by the authorities as sufficiently human, and a constant state of war with everything in the galaxy that is not the Imperium of Man. Anyone who is not directly involved in brutal and dehumanizing combat must support it through brutal and dehumanizing labor. Every Black Library novel set in the Warhammer 40K universe illustrates this premise with an opening statement about the setting, describing the Imperium as "the cruellest and most bloody regime imaginable" (Thorpe, "Warhammer 40,000"), or in an updated version in *Avenging Son*, as a society "where an existence of grinding servitude is the best that can be hoped for, and a quick death is seen as the kindest mercy" (Haley, "Warhammer 40,000").

Games Workshop directly states that the Imperium is meant to be understood as satirical in a blog post entitled "The Imperium is Driven by Hate, Warhammer is Not" (Warhammer Community), stating: "The Imperium of Man stands as a cautionary tale of what could happen should the very worst of Humanity's lust for power and extreme, unyielding xenophobia set in. **Like so many aspects of Warhammer 40,000, the Imperium of Man is satirical**" (Warhammer Community, emphasis in original). However, it should be noted that Games Workshop created this blog post in response to fans appearing at a Warhammer 40K tabletop army game tournament wearing clothing associated with hate groups, and therefore clearly intended to disassociate the Warhammer brand from toxic elements of the fandom. According to this blog post, the satirical elements are to be found in the exaggeration of humanity's worst tendencies, such as authoritarianism, fanaticism, and xenophobia, to a self-destructive degree. However, taking a closer look at the novels I chose for analysis—*Dawn of Fire: Avenging Son* by Guy Haley, *Legacy of the Wulfen* by David Annandale and Robbie Macniven and *Azrael* by Gav Thorpe—will provide examples of how Games Workshop fails to commit to satirical commentary by neglecting to satirize hypermasculine norms as embodied by the Space Marines.

Dawn of Fire: Avenging Son

Dawn of Fire: Avenging Son provides the most nuanced perspective on Space Marine characters because multiple characters, only a few of whom are Space Marines, tell the story

through their own viewpoint. Space Marine characters very rarely externally display uncontrolled emotion, in keeping with Western norms around stoicism. This emotional withdrawal is framed as a benefit of training that allows them to face evil enemies (including literal demons) that ordinary humans (referred to as "mortals" by Space Marines) would not be able to fight without being overcome by fear. This is shown with the passage: "Thousands of red-skinned monsters born of fear and sin scaled the outer ramparts, fury and murder incarnate. The mortals they faced quailed. It took the heart of a Space Marine to stand against them without fear" (Haley, Ch. 1). Such emotional detachment could have been used to satirize toxic masculinity by pushing stoicism to such an extreme that its adherents have a difficult time relating to the humans they are supposed to defend; however, the reader is simply presented with the situation without further comment. In other words, *Avenging Son*'s portrayal of Space Marine emotional expression is generally restricted to expressions of tactical professionalism, comradely affection, and cold anger, all of which serve to make them better able to commit violence against their enemies. However, even though the book gestures at how their stoicism makes social interaction with others difficult, it fails to engage in satirical exploration of these toxic masculine norms, implying that these traits are meant to be engaged with uncritically.

Avenging Son implies that while the existence of Space Marines is in many ways inhuman, it is also necessary because the universe of Warhammer 40K is so hostile that the conversion of human beings into weapons of violence is required for humanity's continuing existence. In fact, the creation of a massive army of Primaris Space Marines is treated as a vital part of heroic character Roboute Guilliman's plan to save and reform the Imperium. This novel is the most critical of the experience of being a Space Marine, which is illustrated by the description of the new Primaris Space Marines—upgraded Space Marines that have spent millennia in cryogenic hibernation—as alienated from reality due to most of their experiences resulting from mentally implanted knowledge and tactics, and, in the case of one character, literally entering an unpleasant depersonalized state during a battle. However, at no point is the ethics of the use of Space Marines questioned or criticized outside of concerns that the leader of such an army would become morally corrupted by power. Furthermore, while this book does have the most actual satirical content, such as when an administrator named Fabian is accused of heresy for saying that the Imperium had not existed for eternity (Thorpe, Ch. 9), these elements are never used to satirize the Space Marines themselves. Their existence is strange, violent, and often unpleasant but never actually an impediment to their goals. If satire exists to "hold up vice and folly to ridicule and scorn" (Merriam-Webster), then a satirical portrayal of Space Marines would show how their inhuman existence works against them. The failure of *Avenging Son* to do so therefore indicates that Space Marines are not intended to be satirical.

Legacy of the Wulfen

Descriptions of emotional expressions are more varied in *Legacy of the Wulfen*, with the Space Wolves Chapter characterized as more given to express emotion than the Space Marines in *Avenging Son*. It should be noted that these characters' emotional expressions are still within

hegemonically masculine norms; they are merely less stoic. The aesthetics of the Space Wolves are derived from popular depictions of Viking-era Norse culture, and thus they are characterized as more open to joyful expressions like laughter or grinning, all of which are still placed within the context of battle (Annandale and Macniven, Ch. 1; Ch. 4). This expressiveness does not extend to emotional vulnerability with some form of masculine compensation. For example, all three times Space Wolves are described as experiencing grief, that grief serves to motivate them to enact violent retribution against their enemies (Ch. 1; Ch. 3). In other words, not performing masculinity through stoicism is allowed because it makes them better at performing masculinity through violence. The fact that Space Wolves consistently experience grief as a motivator for violence is never brought up in a critical way. To be fair, this all occurs during combat, but it is still remarkable that it occurs three times and the authors never comment on it.

Azrael

Finally, the emotional expressions of the Space Marine characters in *Azrael* contrast much less with that of *Avenging Son* than that of *Legacy of the Wulfen*. The one notable subversion from the norm is an open expression of sorrow coupled with "a moment of very human frailty…" (Thorpe, Ch. 21) during a scene in which the psychic Space Marine Ezekiel explains that his great power required him to face greater tests of loyalty than anyone else in the Dark Angels Chapter. However, Ezekiel compensates for this expression of emotional vulnerability by framing it as resulting from how powerful he is. If he did not have to constantly resist the temptation to exercise his supernatural powers for his own benefit, he would not experience a lapse in stoicism. Otherwise, the masculine norms of stoicism, with emotional expressions of affection being restricted within a framework of fraternal warrior bonding, remain the default. A dogged commitment to remaining as masculine as possible prevents Space Marine characters from being targets of critical/satirical commentary, with subversions of masculinity quickly compensated for and then never brought up again.

Common Elements

All three of these novels depict Space Marines as violently hypermasculine. Whether part of the Space Wolves, Ultramarines, or Dark Angels Chapters, they are all superhumanly large, powerful, and exclusively male characters that are defined chiefly by their capacity for inflicting violence on their opponents, and their relative physical and emotional invulnerability (particularly with regards to fear) when compared to regular humans. This is consistent with many of the idealized traits of hegemonic masculinity in Western society (Connell), albeit exaggerated beyond human capacity.

In a satire, the Space Marines embodiment of superhuman hegemonic masculinity could result in toxic hegemonically masculine traits being amplified to a superhuman degree as well, allowing for commentary on how unhealthy expressions of masculinity traits, such as the urge to dominate one's surroundings to compensate for feelings of insecurity, can lead to self-destruction. Instead, these books view the hypermasculine existence of the Space Marine as a vaguely

disturbing (Haley, Ch. 21) but ultimately necessary sacrifice for the greater good of humanity which does not come with any negative consequences that keep them from carrying out their duty. Those hypermasculine traits are instead portrayed as necessary for the Space Marine's duty to defend those who cannot defend themselves. For example, the violent nature of Space Marines is justified by the existence of foes described as overwhelming existential threats to the population of the Imperium, such as the Chaos Space Marines or daemons.

A satire could also discuss how a Space Marine's duty to defend the citizens of the Imperium is incompatible with their duty to preserve the Imperium itself, as the Imperium represents the greatest source of harm to its citizens. However, while Roboute Guilliman expresses disdain for how the Imperium has fallen from its idealistic origins, it only extends to a desire to reform the Imperium rather than outright reject it (Thorpe, Ch. 9). That the Space Marines themselves are portrayed as unambiguously heroic characters despite their complicity in the preservation of the explicitly tyrannical Imperium indicates that their mutually incompatible duties are not intended to be a source of satirical commentary, but instead ignored or absorbed uncritically by the audience.

The most interesting way that that Space Marines manage to avoid satirical scrutiny is through the portrayal of their quasi-autonomous relationship with the rest of the Imperium. This is particularly the case in *Legacy of the Wulfen*, wherein the Space Wolves are described as holding control over their "sovereign territory" (Annandale and Macniven, Ch. 13) of the Fenris System. This is a star system over which the Imperium has granted them "full rights" (Ch. 13). Leaders of the Dark Angels and Space Wolves are both depicted as being able to defy the Inquisition, a secret, police-like force with unlimited jurisdiction, powerful enough to command the destruction of entire planets (Ch. 11). Thus, the Space Marines essentially exist as sovereign states within a state—literally in the case of the Ultramarines—allowing the authors frame them in a non-dystopian manner. This indicates a symbolic separation between the satirized self-sabotaging tyranny of the Imperium and the non-satirized violent hypermasculinity of the Space Marines.

Space Marines and the Warhammer Brand as Masculine Nation

This de facto separation between Imperium and Space Marine governance is more interesting when one considers the concept of the 'masculine nation.' As described by Reeser, this refers to how "connections are often made between the nation and gender as human traits are ascribed to the nation to put forth a certain image of what it is or should be" (171). While the Imperium is certainly a gendered nation, as it is called "the Imperium of Man," and its ideology is based around such masculine traits such as aggression, competitiveness, violence, and stoicism in the face of pain and death, the Imperium itself is egalitarian with regards to gender. For example, one of the most important space admirals in *Avenging Son* is a woman. However, the Space Marine 'nations' in the books are literally gendered, the nature of the Space Marine transformation precluding anyone who is not male from being able to take a leadership role. While there are non-Space Marines present, baseline humans are restricted to being "Chapter serfs," assistants, and servants

to those Space Marines. This allows the Space Marines to exist without any possibility of feminine 'interference,' which then allows the Space Marine to indirectly fulfill the hegemonic masculine ideal of being able to dominate the feminine.

The relevance is in the fact that while the Imperium and Space Marines keep their distance, this separation allows the Warhammer 40K setting to remain firmly masculinized if one looks at the Warhammer 40K brand as a nation. As Reeser explains, "When key elements, (such as the military), are considered as unwaveringly masculine, the nation by extension may be seen to assume that gender coding as well" (174). The Space Marines are *the* key element of the Warhammer 40K brand, and they are literally unwaveringly masculine. The separation from the Imperium is necessary to provide an even more purely masculine 'place' within the setting, because the Imperium itself is too large to function without any female characters without stretching credulity.

By making the 'face' of the brand be a faction composed wholly of hypermasculine bodies, the Warhammer 40K setting can be discursively constructed as a 'masculine nation' while still being marketed as inclusive of consumers of all genders. This may also account for the lack of satire directed at the Space Marines. They are meant to signal that the Warhammer universe is still a hegemonically masculine space. Attempting to criticize them may be interpreted as a criticism of masculinity itself by male consumers, risking pushback from the consumers who rigidly identify with hegemonic masculine ideals.

Conclusion

Warhammer 40K is a setting that is explicitly described as a dystopian satire of humanity's worst impulses. One would expect the Space Marines to symbolize hypermasculine norms of violence, stoicism, and emotional alienation taken to a self-destructive extreme. Disappointingly, my examination of Black Library novels finds that the authors ignore this potential. While the Imperium itself is described as cruel and tyrannical, the Space Marines are allowed to keep the most toxic elements at an arm's length while still engaging with the preservation of a tyrannical regime that is simultaneously described as an indefensibly monstrous state yet also treated in the narrative as necessary for the survival of the human species, enacting what I refer to as the satirical sleight of hand. Games Workshop benefits from the reinforcement of hegemonic masculinity, particularly with the Space Marines. However, Games Workshop also claims their product to be satirical when it benefits them to deny their role in reinforcing hegemonic masculinity. My analysis casts doubt on that claim, as there is very little substantive satire to be found here regarding hegemonic masculinity. If Games Workshop truly intends for Warhammer 40K to be taken seriously as satire, then it will need to show willingness to express "ridicule and scorn" (Merriam-Webster) at the same tropes of hegemonic masculinity used to market Warhammer 40K products so profitably (Heseltine and Pointon).

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Expanding the Possibilities of Manhood: Competing Masculinities in *The Expanse*

Ezekiel Crago

Originally produced by the SyFy channel but picked up in its second season by Amazon Prime Video, *The Expanse* is a hard SF TV show. It is based on a series of books by James S.A. Corey and Ty Franck, and imagines a possible future of space exploitation that contrasts with the utopian leanings of a softer SF show like *Star Trek*. As a hard SF narrative, the show is presented as realistically as possible with the only novum—that part of a SF story that departs from current history—being the colonization of the entire solar system and extraction of its resources for Earth and Mars. This is made possible via a super-efficient spaceship thrust technology discovered by accident. The contract the genre of hard SF makes with its audience requires that any future technology presented be based on real science and engineering as we know it presently. For example, the show has no artificial gravity or faster-than-light travel. This mode of realism changes when scientists discover an extra-solar substance on Saturn's moon, Phoebe, which they dub the "protomolecule." The protomolecule seems capable of defying the known laws of physics and becoming anything, hijacking organic material like human bodies in the process. This toxic molecule is not the only danger in the show; rather, its danger primarily lies in the ambitions of men who want to use it in their own personal quests to consolidate power over the solar system.

The Expanse follows a primary storyline of a ship crew working around the asteroid belt and outer planets who find themselves caught up in a clandestine struggle for control over the protomolecule. This is supplemented by an intrigue-based plot concerning the solar politics of the Earth's governing body, The United Nations, and the Martian governing council, factions always on the brink of war. The asteroid belt and outer planets become a contested space in this struggle, which can be usefully seen as an analogue of Afghanistan, casting the Belters as third-world workers and victims used by both major powers, who label the Belter liberation army, the Outer Planet Alliance (OPA), a terrorist organization. These liberationists do indeed resort to guerilla and terrorist tactics, as these are their only available strategies of resistance without a fleet of warships of their own.[1] The show is explicitly about power.

All of this political violence, both state-sanctioned and otherwise, is examined in the show through a network of competing masculinities, with some being shown as "healthier" than others. This ordering of gender performance does not "exalt one conception of masculinity above others" but rather devalues other masculinities as not suitable for "real men" (Griffin 377). Ultimately, the space of this show's narrative is dominated by military masculinity, a form of manhood usually centered around the warrior archetype, but often in the practice of state violence depicted as a

peacekeeper who only uses force when necessary to be a "helpful hero" (Wegner 8). This military masculinity is shown to be necessary for the governance of the system, much like the ways that "political elites wield military gendered ideal types to justify the use of violence internationally" in the real world (Wegner 6). *The Expanse* foregrounds this model of manhood, problematizing it while simultaneously showing its utility to those in power. The show troubles and questions what acts are morally justified by "helpful heroes."

This article examines two of the characters' performances in the show as case studies problematizing masculine hegemony: James Holden (Steven Strait) and Amos Burton (Wes Chatham). The show continually reminds viewers how vulnerable all of the people are, both physically, due to the dangers of vacuum and high-gravity maneuvers through a war zone, and emotionally, via caring about the welfare of others.

Helpful Heroes and Hegemony

The concept of hegemonic masculinity describes the historically situated naturalization of patriarchal power, a system that dominates women and those masculine models that do not fit the currently accepted model through "subordination, complicity [with the hegemonic ideal] and marginalization" (Griffin 379). Nicole Wegner argues that the trope of the helpful hero, the current hegemonic model of military masculinity, obfuscates the use of violence by employing signs of helpfulness (7). This model lives in an "ongoing social construction of masculinity in the military that defines the 'ideal soldier,' an archetype that reflects the perceived gendered identity of the nation/state" (Wegner 7). Thus, this masculine ideal is established as hegemonic for a nation. The ideal soldier has varied over time and place, but always takes the role of performing state violence and making it lawful. "Characteristics of strength, toughness, rationality, and aggression have been historically associated with militarized masculinity" (Wegner 8). Thus, thinking of a soldier as a "peacekeeper" is problematic in this regard because it is contradictory. The helpful hero archetype not only obscures the negative aspects of violence; it makes the application of force for power seem good for those it is being used against, and as a hegemonic ideal it defines a "real" man.

Hegemony itself is a complex topic. Raymond Williams observes that it "supposes the existence of something which is truly total, which is not merely secondary or superstructural [...] but which is lived at such a depth, which saturates the society to such an extent [...] that it corresponds to the reality of social experience" (1428). Hegemonic masculinity, first suggested by R.W. Connell almost 40 year ago, not only posits what a "real man" looks like, but also, crucially, naturalizes patriarchal power (Griffin 379). Challenging hegemony challenges social reality as such, but only within the "communication communities" that circulate the hegemonic discourse, the habitus of a certain milieu, like the military (Griffin 385). This is how hegemonic masculinity varies by class, race, region, and sexuality. It defines a set of structured dispositions available to certain privileged men, and, due to the vicissitudes and contradictions of actual existence, meeting its standards is impossible for most others (Griffin 393).

Since before SF was what we would call "science fiction," beginning with Lost World novels in the 19th-century as documented by John Rieder in *Colonialism and the Emergence of Science Fiction* (2008), it has been a masculine melodrama. This melodrama often occurs in a military context, to the point that we now have a sub-genre of "military sf." As the last century progressed and feminism made strides—especially during the 1970s with its wave of feminist science fiction—more SF work was published by women about women, but also crucially about men.[2] Even though at first glance it appears to be just a spectacular CGI-infused SF show that celebrates the manhood on display, *The Expanse* enters the discussion of manhood initiated by feminist authors such as Ursula K. Le Guin and Marge Piercy in the last century and works against the naturalization of patriarchal dominance by making it strange and obvious.

James Holden, the Quixotic Hero

We first see James Holden (Steven Strait) in the nude, displaying a muscular, largely hairless torso. Concurrent dialogue with his girlfriend establishes him as a sensitive company man who refuses leadership because he does not want the responsibility. We later learn he is an ex-navy officer who had moral apprehensions about his job in the military, setting him up in opposition to military masculinity, and his later alliance with the Belters positions his individual manhood as being subordinate to the military of Mars and Earth. He cannot help responding when he hears the recorded voice of Julie Mao in a distress beacon, and this need to respond to another in need leads to the destruction of his ship, the *Canterbury*, and all of his coworkers except those with him on the rescue mission. These survivors become his new family, placing him in the role of reluctant captain/patriarch.

As a helpful hero, Holden contrasts with the warrior masculinity of other soldiers and characters in the show. At first, he just wants revenge for his lost shipmates, but soon he is trying to save every human being alive against the threat of the protomolecule. In the seventh episode of season one, we meet his mother and learn that he was raised on a commune, composed of the genetic mix of all the adults there. He is not the typical son. His birth was a ploy to help them save their land, and he left because he failed to be their savior, but he never leaves behind the urge to save others. He was raised to speak truth to power and say "no" when morality dictates, and he acts as a moral center for the show's narrative. This impulse, however, rests on his entitlement as helpful hero and white Earth man.

Holden is narratively linked to Don Quixote through the naming of their ship, the *Rocinante* (Quixote's horse), and his need to fight giants and take on lost causes. He is challenged in this role by Amos in episode seven as they repair the ship. In contrast to Holden, Amos is pragmatic about death and violence, only resorting to it to protect himself or others, but willing to use lethal force when necessary. He calls their predicament "the churn," a time "when the rules of the game change." This could be taken as a reference to gender politics in our current society. The discourse over pronouns, the inclusion of non-binary genders, and media attention to "toxic masculinity" are a few examples of this. Much of the ire that the debate over gender engenders in our society

comes from how queering gender challenges the old rules. When Holden asks him what the game is, he simply replies, "The only game, survival." Holden later tells Naomi, "Whatever leash you had him on, get him back on it," as if his "toxic masculinity" needs to be contained. Naomi, who usually functions as a figurehead for stating important truths in the show, reminds him that Amos is not her dog.

In addition to performing the helpful hero role, Holden performs "other guy" masculinity. The other guy is the hegemonic masculine model for a liberal discourse community. Derrick Burrill notes that "hegemonic masculinity" is a negotiation between "power and powerlessness" in the gender order (32). In this power game, the "other guy" maintains power through being helpful and available. Burrill explains, "Other guys are always trying to be real. Real with their feelings, real with their actions" (37). They are "keenly aware of their relationship to power edifices large and complex, including how they remain interwoven with ideologies of traditional masculinity" (Burrill 38). The other guy is at-odds with warrior "alpha males" as well as father figures, vying for hegemonic status instead (Burrill 38). But he is also "at-odds with his own at-odds-ness even though his anxieties and desires are still front and center" (Burrill 92). He is an ironic answer to patriarchal power. Holden gets by with help from his friends and is not afraid to ask for help, but he is always calling the shots. In episode six of the second season, he says, "We're all in this together, otherwise we're all lost." This solidarity is something that Amos values in him and which Amos tries to emulate.

Holden and another character, Miller, compete when they first meet because Holden's idealism clashes with Miller's cynicism, and they argue the merits of justice versus revenge. As the second season begins, we see Holden helping Naomi fix things. He keeps trying to fix things in a larger metaphorical sense throughout the narrative. He also has moments of rage, like in episode three of the second season when he nearly kills Miller, whose life is only saved when Amos is physically restrained. He often, instead of fixing things, makes them worse. Amos, on the other hand, tries to fix himself. In this regard, Amos concerns himself with becoming more fully human by becoming more humane while Holden acts as savior in an inhumane world.

Amos Burton, the Recovering Sociopath

Violence permeates Amos's performance of manhood, as this was his learned survival practice. He displays his large, muscular, tattooed arms most of the time, as a warning and threat, but does not go around trying to dominate people. We first meet him as the sidekick of ship engineer Naomi Nagata (Dominique Tipper). As they fight for their survival in the show's second episode after their ship is destroyed and they must salvage another, he follows her orders. He later follows Holden's directives as well. We soon learn that he has poor impulse control and has difficulty making moral choices, relying on Naomi and others to do this for him. He is aware of his sociopathic tendencies and looks at her with affection, which is unlike how he gazes at others, sizing them up as possible threats. After she loses his confidence by lying to him, he finds similar solace in his friend "Peaches" (aka Clarissa Mao, played by Nadine Nicole). Fred Johnson (Chad L.

Coleman) calls him "quick to trigger, slow on the uptake" like he is only a brute. But the more we learn about him, the more complex Amos becomes.

He was not born this way. In episode six, we learn that he is a former prostitute, a position he describes as an "honest living, more honest than most." His mother was similarly employed, and he grew up on the streets of Baltimore, which is even worse off in the future than it is currently. This is where he learned to wear his character's metaphorical armor, as both his "hard" body and rigid personality, for protection and in order to fight and kill to survive. Amos also helps Naomi fix things, even volunteering to repair the ship in the second episode of season two when it places his life in danger, but his relationship with her demonstrates his goal of fixing himself with her help. He wants to be a "good man." In season five, episode two, we see a flashback to his childhood and his first mentor, a woman named Lydia (Stacey Roca), explaining, "When someone hurts you, it is easy to hurt them back. It takes strength to not." She leads him in his process of trying to be a better person by caring about and for others, and the episode demonstrates this effect by showing him risk his life to save Lydia's widower from being thrown out of his home, someone Amos never met before.

While the crew are recovering on Tycho station, he sees a doctor about magnetic treatment that might reverse his sociopathy, but finds that it only works the other way, making scientists sociopaths so they act as better scientists. The process is irreversible. Amos is able to use this to his advantage when he interrogates one of these altered scientists, identifying with his instrumental reasoning and lack of empathy or remorse. He explains to another character, Alex, in episode six of season two that "there's only three kinds of people: bad people, those you follow, those you protect" but his attempts to make moral choices on his own indicates that he wants to be a fourth kind, someone who protects those who need it, like Holden.

The rhetoric of disease and health employed in discourses of toxic masculinity posits manhood as an illness men have, positioning them as victims contaminated by testosterone rather than moral agents (Waling 368). "Masculinity is reified as the cause rather than the product of social relations," obfuscating and naturalizing it (Waling 368). It also tends to reduce intersectional differences down to an essential masculinity practiced by all. It also disregards masculine behaviors that are helpful, like the times when it is necessary to put emotions aside to act in dire situations. It erases the historical causes of masculine crisis while also allowing men to blame their behavior on an abstract cause. Such rhetoric still devalues women. If being vulnerable and emotional are considered "healthy" then men could be encouraged to be more feminine, valuing femininity as a social good, rather than enclosing these traits as masculine.

When Ceres Station has a refugee crisis after the war begins on Ganymede, Alex is shown cheering up kids, but Amos just hands out rations, repeating "one each!" In an altercation, he meets a dirty refugee boy that reminds him of himself as a child; the scene is shown in slow motion with music rising above the sound effects. He looks around and we see POV shots of the rest of the crew smiling and laughing. He walks away not smiling at all. Later, he tells the

sociopathic scientist that the "boy looked at me like I was a monster." The scientist tells him, "Love gets in the way of progress," but the look in Amos's eyes indicates that he needs love like every human and has no wish to be a monster. The scientist tells him, "You want to be that real boy again," but Amos says he cauterized that part of himself after the world broke him. He has no idea how many people he has killed to stay alive, but he explains to Miller in episode ten of season two, "I'm not a homicidal maniac." He simply believes that "some people deserve to be punished" if they dominate others.

Season three shows Amos trying to be better without Naomi's help. He works with a botanist who has joined the crew, learning gardening and nurturing nature. The botanist becomes his new best friend. In the second episode of the season, he risks his life to save him and encourages him to keep searching for his lost daughter. This search for the girl is a major plot line in the season, and Amos becomes invested in it because there is a parallel drawn between her and him. She is being held by another sociopathic scientist who is developing a human hybrid with the protomolecule as a tool of war. Amos wants to save her from being changed into a dangerous weapon, the way his childhood already did to him.

This personal odyssey changes him, allowing him to adopt more healthy behavior, but he does not accomplish this through self-control. He accomplishes this goal via help from others like Naomi, the botanist, and Peaches. Through his gradual transformation over the course of several seasons, the show demonstrates how a man performing warrior masculinity can become something else by confronting his behavior, owning its consequences, and seeking help. That being said, the show struggles to pass Burrill's masculine "Bechdel Test," which borrows from Bechdel's model for testing the feminist message of a film. Burrill's masculine "Bechdel Test," by contrast, posits that a film cannot be considered feminist in its depiction of men if it does not meet these criteria:

1. It must have at least one positive male role
2. That communicates without ever resorting to violence
3. In a way that promotes gender and sexual parity. (145)

The only characters who meet this are ancillary men who either die, like Avasarala's husband, or disappear from the show after the story arc of their crisis of fatherhood ends, like the botanist and a Belter father in season four. Amos tries to be better, and the show demonstrates his struggle to do this, which is a step in the right direction as it problematizes hegemonic masculinities and the gender order they maintain. In contrast to Holden as an ideal masculinity, Amos displays the nuance of what it might mean to confront masculine performance as a personal and political problem instead of as an answer to humanity's problems.

Notes

1.   See Elizabeth Pearson's article, "Extremism and Toxic Masculinity: The Man Question Re-posed" in *International Affairs* 95:6 (2019) pp. 1251-1270 for more on this subject as it regards manhood.

2.   See Alternative Masculinities in *Feminist Speculative Fiction: A New Man* (2021), by Michael Pitts for details.

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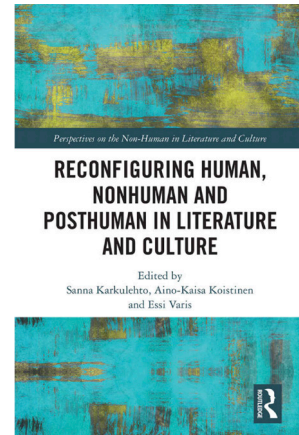
NON-FICTION REVIEWS

Reconfiguring Human, Nonhuman and Posthuman in Literature and Culture, edited by Sanna Karkulehto, Aino-Kaisa Koistinen and Essi Varis

Anelise Farris

Sanna Karkulehto, Aino-Kaisa Koistinen, and Essi Varis, editors. *Reconfiguring Human, Nonhuman and Posthuman in Literature and Culture.* Routledge, 2019. Perspectives on the Non-Human in Literature and Culture. Hardcover. 400 pg. $160.00. ISBN 9780367197476.

A post-anthropocentric worldview rejects the primacy of human beings and seeks to encourage more ethical cohabitation between humans and nonhumans. In this vein, the anthology *Reconfiguring Human, Nonhuman and Posthuman in Literature and Culture* offers a collection of essays that aim to encourage serious reflection on the intra-action of various forms of matter.

The editors, Sanna Karkulehto, Aino-Kaisa Koistinen, and Essi Varis, acknowledge that this line of inquiry has become increasingly popular across disciplines as the destructive impact of human life on the planet can no longer be ignored (1-2). However, what sets this collection apart is its literary and cultural studies methodology and its subsequent attention to both real and imagined figures. They argue that art's capacity to induce reflection on "subjective, embodied aspects of (nonhuman) experience…is likely to have notable epistemological and ethical repercussions" (5)—in ways that other disciplines are not able to achieve. In addition to effectively demonstrating the need for such an approach, the editors' introduction identifies the significance of narrative studies to the processes by which posthumanism, and by extension new materialism, interrogate forms of embodiment.

The anthology is divided into five sections. The first section contains essays that focus on theoretical and methodological concerns. In the opening chapter, Carole Guesse, questioning whether literature can ever really be posthumanist, ponders what a literary studies framework has to offer posthumanism. This chapter is followed by essays on the summoning of nonhuman entities through art and engaging in a mode of reading called "becoming-instrument" (57). This latter chapter in particular, by Kaisa Kortekallio, offers a useful way for thinking through the essays in the second section, which reflect on the depiction of nonhuman characters in a variety

of media: comic books, video games, and children's literature. Each of these chapters posits that fictional characters "can be used as a tool for approaching other, actual or imaginary, nonhuman creatures" (Varis 87). In their chapter "Wild Things Squeezed in the Closet: Monsters of Children's Literature as Nonhuman Others," Marleena Mustola and Sanna Karkulehto conclude that such a tool (like a monster in a children's book) reconfigures the boundaries between humans and nonhumans through the cultivation of empathy. The third section addresses the relationship between humans and nonhuman animals. Mikko Keskinen opens the section by positioning the deceased dog narrator in Charles Siebert's *Angus* (2001) as a hybrid, "quasi-human character" (159). Similarly, the other chapters in this section examine the transboundary relationship between humans and pigs, as well as disabled humans and guide dogs.

The fourth section analyzes the agency afforded to human-created machines. Among calls for "renewed narratives about digital machines" (Collomb and Goyet 203) and "resisting the capitalist agenda of colonialism and docile subjectivity available for the player in *Minecraft*" (Huuhka 220), Patricia Flanagan and Raune Frankjœr offer the most distinctive chapter in the anthology: "Cyberorganic Wearables: Sociotechnical Misbehavior and the Evolution of Nonhuman Agency." They contend that the "techno-genesis of the body [via wearable technology]…has the potential to foster interconnected ways of understanding our place within the Neganthropocene" (Flanagan and Frankjœr 236). The chapter is filled with images of cyberorganic technology like the *Bamboo Whisper*, and the authors make a compelling case for how such wearables force us to rethink what it means to be human, nonhuman, and everything in between. Thoughtfully placed, the final section, which consists solely of Juha Raipola's "Unnarratable Matter: Emergence, Narrative, and Material Ecocriticism," considers the limitations of seeking to understand that which is not human through a narrative lens.

As evidenced by the range of content contained in this collection, the diverse texts and modes that are addressed is commendable. As with any anthology, some of the essays are stronger than others, but this is a collection that conveys a sense of cohesion, of each chapter being essential and in conversation with each other, in a way that anthologies don't always achieve. If there's a weakness, it's that the contents vary in terms of their accessibility both stylistically and in their subject matter. Accordingly, this is a collection for the posthumanist scholar who is already well-versed in posthumanist thought. Despite the heavy subject matter, however, there is a refreshing sense of playfulness to *Reconfiguring Human, Nonhuman and Posthuman in Literature and Culture* that manages not to undermine the urgency of the topic but instead demonstrates the imaginative potential for more ethical cohabitation. Ultimately, this is a significant contribution that reminds us what art and literature have to offer an endangered planet.

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Child and Youth Agency in Science Fiction: Travel, Technology, Time, edited by Ingrid E. Castro and Jessica Clark

Adam McLain

Ingrid E. Castro and Jessica Clark, eds. *Child and Youth Agency in Science Fiction: Travel, Technology, Time*. Lexington, 2019. Hardback. 304 pg. $105.00. 9781498597388. Paperback. $42.99. 9781498597401. EBook. $40.50. 9781498597395.

The conceptualization of children as agents has been an often-overlooked factor in academic conversations. This collection, edited by Ingrid E. Castro and Jessica Clark, contains twelve essays that serve as an excellent introductory point for those studying depictions of agency in science fiction. It also sets the stage for further development by beginning specific lines of inquiry and creates theoretical foundations by which future studies can interrogate cultural conception of the child and childhood. Although the collection lacks in its theoretical engagement with science fiction as a genre, favoring the application of sociological theories of agency and childhood to a chosen text, the essays provide arguments about child and youth agency that can be brought into many future studies of science fiction.

The introduction by editors Castro and Clark and the first chapter, Joseph Giunta writing about *Stranger Things* (2016-), lay an excellent groundwork for the rest of the collection. Castro and Clark establish the dearth of scholarship on children in science fiction. Giunta's chapter further elaborates this history of children's agency by outlining the "'new' sociology of childhood, [which] embraces agentic youth and their active participation within hierarchies of social order" (25). This "new" sociology of childhood—that children are beings that fully act in and influence the world—is the foundation on which the essays engage with their chosen science fictional texts. Indeed, none of the essays argue that children do not have agency: a core supposition in each essay is that the actual agency of children is often overlooked, and therefore, almost all the essays outline how the characters in their chosen texts use agency. However, most of the essays don't take the added step of detailing how the use of agency then affects the theory of agency or genre of science fiction.

For many of the essays, agency is most visible in oppositional acts. In Jessica Clark's riveting assessment of masculinity and boyhood in the anime film *Akira* (1988), Clark declares that the use of agency shows that "adult status, political authority, and ideological principles are all questioned and transgressed" (123, emphasis mine). This transgression of strictures, systems, and hierarchies

around the characters is what forms the ability to see the character's agency at work. Similar to Clark, Megan McDonough argues that each book in Suzanne Collins's *Hunger Games* trilogy (2008-2010) "culminates in one major *agentically defiant* act against the powerful government in charge" (134–35, emphasis mine); for McDonough, then, agency is about defiance and is thus a reaction to power. This approach to agency always already assumes agency as an act of opposition: a response rather than a decision. Essays like Clark's and McDonough's do well at showing agency, but in future studies, we must consider how an agency that emphasizes "impacting" or "subverting" rather than being in and of itself might hide some forms of agency.

Agency is also outlined in the relationship between child and parent. In Kip Kline's chapter on *Back to the Future* (1985), Marty McFly is given power over not only himself but also his parents in a reading of his use of time travel as reversal of who determines whose futures: McFly becomes the metaphorical head of his family as he changes the past to align his present with his wants and desires. Kwasu David Tembo and Muireann B. Crowley look at the relationship between the X-Men characters Jubilee, X-23, and Wolverine, arguing that Jubilee and X-23 make agential actions but that those actions are always marked by Wolverine's influence, the cultural experience of gender, or the influence of the bio-power of the controlling hegemonies. Whereas Tembo and Crowley find a frustration of agency within this relationship, other chapters, like Joaquin Muñoz's chapter on *Ender's Game* (1985) and Castro's essay on David R. Palmer's novel *Emergence* (1984), find agency in the rebellion against parents or figures of authority. Muñoz argues that in *Ender's Game*, the protagonists "operationalize their agency for gaining power and control over their respective situations" (223); in other words, for Muñoz, the agency of children exists in an exerted influence on surroundings, contrary to what is controlled by the adult characters. In *Emergence*, Castro argues that the posthuman and biological relationships (e.g., with animals, with the surrounding world) is a place in which agency finds "purchase and context within their new intersectional and interdependent relationship" (259); in other words, a child's agency is not determined only by a relationship with adults but by the child's contextual world. The relationship of parent and child is also seen in Stephanie Thompson's argument that youth agency in Ernest Cline'*s Ready Player One* (2011) and Neal Shusterman's *Unwind* (2007) is found in the child's transgression and subsumption of the adult's role of home provider.

This relationship between child and adult as space for agency creation is navigated in different ways in Erin Kenny's article on fanfiction of *The 100* (2014-2020) and Jessica Kenty-Drane's essay on *Black Mirror* (2011-). Kerry's article shows how the fanfiction communities that navigate and imagine diverse sexualities of youth characters in *The 100* gain power over the narrative and their own sexualities by using their agency to pen alternative couplings than what the adult creators of *The 100* intended. Kenty-Drane writes about how adult authors fear and speculate children's use of technology as potentially binding of agency in two *Black Mirror* episodes. While these articles aren't necessarily about how children gain power or voice through their use of agency, as in other articles, they do show agency as an interaction and conversations between adults and youths.

The collection is a good tool to establish one's self in the conversation of agency in children and youth. However, even though the collection centers itself on science fiction, the theory of science fiction seems secondary to arguments about the conception of agency. While the texts considered in the collection are all science fictional in nature, the science fiction nature of the texts isn't discussed. The collection favors describing agency and what that means to our cultural conceptions of agency to its engagement with science fiction as a field. This choice, then, leaves room for further investigations between conceptualizations of children's agency and theorization about science fiction media, especially those that speak to science fiction studies and science fiction as genre.

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AKB48, by Patrick W. Galbraith and Jason G. Karlin

Amber A. Logan

Galbraith, Patrick W. and Jason G. Karlin. *AKB48*. Bloomsbury, 2020. Print. Paperback. 144 pg. $22.95. ISBN 9781501341137.

AKB48 is a short monograph that is part of the broader series of books called "33 1/3 Japan." This series aims to provide a deep dive into contemporary Japanese popular music, ranging from the soundtrack of Cowboy Bebop (the classic anime series) to the music of Hatsune Miku (a vocaloid star). This particular volume provides an in-depth analysis of the girl group AKB48 (so named because of its origins in the Akihabara district in Tokyo, and the originally intended 48 group members). While the subject matter of the book is analyzed academically, the content is fascinating enough (and the size of the book small enough) to appeal to a more general audience—particularly if they are fans of the band, or of Japanese popular culture more generally.
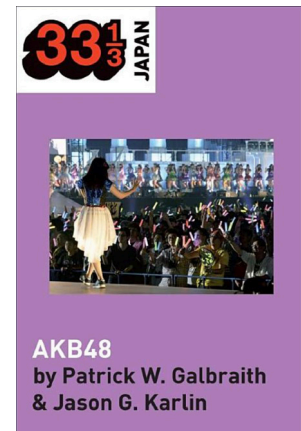
Formed in 2005, AKB48 is now the most commercially successful female group in Japan (which is itself the second largest music market in the world). This popularity alone is not necessarily worth scholarly analysis, but clearly Patrick W. Galbraith and Jason G. Karlin, the authors of this book, saw behind the success of AKB48 a greater and more fascinating business model in contemporary Japanese pop culture. This business model relies upon the idols monetizing their fans' enthusiasm and affection through personalized interactions and fan-led elections to determine which girl gets top billing. The authors then utilize critical theory to extrapolate beyond this specific idol group to speculate about Japanese culture and beyond.

From the group's beginning, the idols cultivated a sense of personal connection with their audience; AKB48's slogan is literally "idols that you can meet" (*ai ni ikeru aidoru*). Their humble beginnings were in a small Akihabara theater where live performances took place in front of intimate crowds where idols could make eye contact with individual fans. Fans are encouraged to see themselves as supporters of a specific idol by calling out her name at live events, buying her specific merchandise, and visiting her at the special hand-shaking events where fans can both see their favorite idol up-close-and-personal and be seen by her, as well. The catch? Hand-shaking may only be accessed with the purchase of CDs packaged with special tickets for the events. To take things even further, AKB48's overseeing company designed a General Election which allows fans to vote on which idol gets the top spot in the group—not unlike the highly successful

American television show *American Idol*, in which fans participate in voting for their favorite singer. Again, fans must purchase CDs with special ballots inside in order to participate in the General Election, allowing the group to monetize the fans' devotion to their particular idol and their desire to support her—both emotionally and financially.

Galbraith and Karlin point out that this style of interactive support is a key example of affective economics, which involves harnessing the power of a relatively small number of enthusiastic loyalists to monetize the relationship between them and their objects of desire. Some fans will buy hundreds of copies of the same CD in order to buy the chance to vote for their favorite idol; the actual content of the CDs, the music product itself, becomes secondary or even trivial. In fact, the idols are not known for being skilled singers or performers; instead, they are beloved for their relatability, their vulnerabilities, their intense striving to do better—hence making them girls who need the fans' support in order to succeed.

In essence, the idols are selling a relationship between themselves and their fans, similar to how in Japanese host clubs, the host (while actively convincing the patron to buy expensive food or drink) is selling the perceived relationship between host and patron, demonstrating yet another example of how affective economics are at play in Japanese culture. But even if the specific appeal of AKB48 seems largely limited to Japan, the rise of idol groups in South Korea demonstrates how this phenomenon is not specific to Japan.

AKB48 provides a fascinating look at the history of idols in Japan and how they led to the success of AKB48 in recent years. While the book clearly would appeal to fans of AKB48, pop idols, or the Japanese music scene in general, the authors do an excellent job of connecting the specifics of the band's business model and social interactions to broader concepts of business, marketing, economics, psychology, and sociology. *AKB48* could be used as an engaging case study for any of these fields, as well as for students of Japanese culture or music studies.

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Terry Pratchett's Ethical Worlds: Essays on Identity and Narrative in Discworld and Beyond, edited by Kristin Noone and Emily Lavin Leverett

Maria Alberto

Kristin Noone and Emily Lavin Leverett. *Terry Pratchett's Ethical Worlds: Essays on Identity and Narrative in Discworld and Beyond*. McFarland, 2020. Paperback. 155 pg. $39.95. ISBN 978-1476674490.
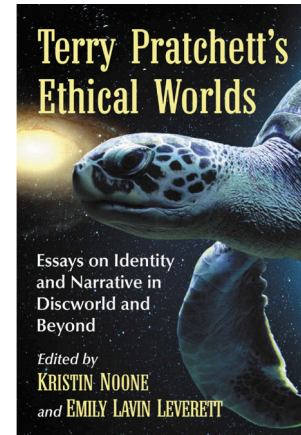
There is no getting around this fact—Terry Pratchett's work is funny. Powerfully amusing, we might even say, in every sense of the term. However, as any of his multitudinous readers could also report without a second's hesitation, Terry Pratchett's work is likewise thoughtful, deliberate, and nuanced, offering pointed satire, incisive social commentary, and gentle moral reflection filtered through the worldview of witches, watch-members, and other fantasy characters whose experiences both replicate and reveal our own.

Likewise, Kristin Noone and Emily Levin Leverett's 2020 collection *Terry Pratchett's Ethical Worlds* offers an illuminating—and, honestly, just plain fun to read—addition to the growing body of scholarly work on Pratchett's oeuvre. Noone and Leverett characterize their work as an exploration of the means through which Pratchett "constructs an ethical stance that values and valorizes informed self-aware choice, knowledge of the world in which one makes those choices, the value of play and humor in crafting a compassionate worldview, and acts of continuous self-examination and creation" (2). These four themes, the editors and their contributors find, run throughout Pratchett's canon, from his well-known Discworld novels and co-authored *Good Omens* (1990) to more clearly science fiction works such as *Strata* (1981), the *Long Earth* series (2012-2016), and the less-discussed short story "#ifdef DEBUG + 'world/enough' + 'time'" (1990). From the introduction onward, too, Pratchett's interest in forms of intertextuality, identity, and genre-switching is also noted and explored (1-2). As Noone and Leverett point out, Pratchett constructs worlds and narratives "in which questions of identity, community, and relations between self and other may be productively discussed, debated, and reshaped" (4), in turn leading to their definition of the "ethical worlds" named in this collection's title: rich, multifaceted "fantasies in which language always matters, stories resonate with the past and the future, and the choices characters make reflect the importance of self-aware and ongoing acts of compassion and creation" (4).

Overall, collection contributors build from a shared interest in Pratchett's inventiveness and creation—of secondary world(s), of language, and of characters' selves as well as our own—to offer nine chapters drawing from a diverse range of critical lenses and perspectives. Here readers will find highly-enjoyable pieces examining acts of creation in science fiction (ch. 1), hypermasculinity and adaptational influence (ch. 2), the ethics of choice (ch. 3), free will and growing up (ch. 4), Old English influences (ch. 5), identity construction through language (ch. 6), rhetoricity and magic (ch. 7), "golempunk" and ownership of the means of production (ch. 8), and grappling with the ethics of neomedievalism and aftershocks of colonialism (ch. 9).

In their introduction, Noone and Leverett identify three primary strands of Pratchett scholarship—one apiece focusing on his genre fiction writing, his YA authorship, and his Discworld stories (2)—and position this collection as an attempt to bring various elements of these strands together. In this light alone, the collection is a success. For one thing, while the Discworld novels do feature heavily here, most of Pratchett's work also receives mention—and in many cases, full chapters—that are characterized by as much attention and detail as his most well-known work. Noone, for instance, looks to Pratchett's early science fiction and its depictions of acts of creation, maintaining that these texts "offer insight not only into prototype versions of the later Discworld but into the evolution of Pratchett's moral stance" as these develop across genres and narrative forms (3). As Noone correctly notes here, Pratchett's work as a fantasy or a YA author, as often prioritized by those existing strands of scholarship, is greatly enriched when considered in light of his science fiction roots, where we find him first sketching out the ethical stances and foundations that he would build later works upon.

For another thing, the chapters that do focus on Pratchett's best-developed and most extensive work, Discworld, also span a wonderful variety of the characters, narratives, and locations that readers encounter in Ankh-Morpork and beyond. This collection's contributors bring their insights to familiar faces from Tiffany Aching and her community (friends and enemies alike) to Cohen the Barbarian and his complicated relationship with violence, the Watch and their different arbitrations of justice, and Moist von Lipwig and the technological advances he reluctantly shepherds into the big city. In so doing, the collection thus reiterates the sheer range of subjects to which Pratchett brought his stance on compassionate, self-aware, and humorous creation: capital-b Big topics that include gender roles, the dangers of sexual and gendered essentialism, war and warfare, the legal and justice systems, capitalism, and the all-too-common violence of minority communities' integration into even heterogeneous societies. It is quite a balancing act, to give these topics the space and thoughtful treatment they deserve in the limited word count of single chapters—particularly while also extricating them from the writing and perspective of a cis, white male author from a former colonial world power, radical as his worldview was and beloved as he himself is—but this collection and its chapters do so admirably.

Finally, and very aptly indeed, I also found that this collection is just a delight to read. Its ambitious project and often complex topics are bolstered by contributors' obvious enjoyment of the texts themselves, which shines through in the writing of just about every chapter. While

definitely an academic work, complete with the criticism and bibliographic work that entails, *Terry Pratchett's Ethical Worlds: Essays on Identity and Narrative in Discworld and Beyon*d also struck me as accessible and exciting, one of those uncommon works of scholarship that I would also pick up on a rare day off just to enjoy seeing rich new perspectives on a favorite fantasy world.

All things considered, this collection's emphasis on compassion, creation, and self-awareness, as Pratchett uses genre fiction and its attributes to broach such topics, is well worth a read. Those interested in examinations of the fantasy genre (and in particular, continuations of work by Farah Mendlesohn, Edward James, and John Clute) or seeking out complications of its science fiction counterparts will appreciate the collection's focus, while those still keeping #TerryPratchettGNU alive and well will value its thoughtful revisitation of a gentle giant in the genre.

Maria Alberto is a PhD candidate in literature and cultural studies at the University of Utah. Her research interests include adaptation, popular culture, digital media, and fan studies, and her recent work includes essays in *Mythlore*, *M/C Journal*, and *Transformative Works and Cultures*, as well as forthcoming book chapters on digital-born romance, fan studies methodology, and queer readings of Tolkien's legendarium. At this very moment, she is probably working on her dissertation on "canon" in popular culture texts or playing D&D. Either way, coffee is definitely involved.

NONFICTION REVIEWS

Ethical Futures and Global Science Fiction, edited by Zachary Kendal, Aisling Smith, Giulia Champion and Andrew Milner

Tristan Sheridan

Zachary Kendal, Aisling Smith, Giulia Champion, and Andrew Milner, editors. *Ethical Futures and Global Science Fiction*. Palgrave McMillan, 2020. Studies in Global Science Fiction. Ebook. 335 pg. $79.99. ISBN 9783030278939.

Ethical Futures and Global Science Fiction belongs to the Studies in Global Science Fiction series, edited by Anindita Banerjee, Rachel Haywood Ferreira, and Mark Bould. This particular entry emphasizes non-Anglophone literatures in its ethical examinations of futurity within the SF genre and builds off of existing scholarship within the cli-fi and utopian subgenres as well as postcolonial theory. From its first chapter, "Science Fiction's Ethical Modes," *Ethical Futures* seeks to examine the ethical underpinnings of the SF genre, raising the question of "whether SF has a predisposition to a particular ethical outlook" (3). While the author of the chapter, editor Zachary Kendal, acknowledges "the politically and socially regressive traditions of American pulp SF"—traditions often founded in colonialist and fascist ideologies—the collection as a whole stresses how vital SF is as "a primary mechanism—perhaps the primary mechanism— by which our culture imagines its possible futures, both positive and negative," as Andrew Milner states in a later chapter, "Eutopia, Dystopia and Climate Change" (8, 77). Indeed, careful envisioning of the future may be more relevant now than ever given impending environmental catastrophe, a relevance that *Ethical Futures* seeks to emphasize, given its final chapter on the modern prevalence of dystopian narratives in contrast to utopian narratives: Nick Lawrence's "Post-Capitalist Futures: A Report on Imagination." If we look to fictionalized versions of the future as a guide when moving towards our own, as *Ethical Futures* purports, it becomes especially important to incorporate non-Anglophone literature and to decenter Western perspectives when conceptualizing futurity.

Divided into four parts—Ethics and the Other, Environmental Ethics, Postcolonial Ethics, and Ethics and Global Politics—*Ethical Futures* offers both historical overviews in reoccurring themes throughout SF futurisms, such as Joshua Bulleid's "Vegetarianism and the Utopian Tradition," as well as close readings of individual texts such as Jamil Nasir's *Tower of Dreams* (1999) and Ahmed Kaled Towfik's *Utopia* (2008) in Anna Madoeuf and Delphine Pagès-El Karoui's "Cairo in 2015 and in 2023." The collection does significant work to unseat the colonialist dogma that many

of SF's most prominent texts have historically operated under, building off of scholarship such as John Rieder's *Colonialism and the Emergence of Science Fiction* (2008) in addition to Fredric Jameson's work on utopian narratives. It does so not only by arguing for anti-colonial and anti-capitalist alternatives, but also by identifying the underlying commonalities between SF and other postcolonial efforts: both literatures "seek alternate futures for the human race, both look beyond the joint nightmare of colonial modernity, both are profoundly involved in future thinking, and both offer a clear platform for the utopian," as Bill Ashcroft observes in "Postcolonial Science Fiction and the Ethics of Empire" (165). The range of literatures covered in *Ethical Futures* is extensive, including French, Macedonian, Haitian, Mexican, and Indian literature; however, they are frequently analyzed alongside those from the Anglosphere; futurism and ethics are what most tie this collection together.

The essays contained within *Ethical Futures* are in clear conversation with one another thematically, even across the differing sections, although these potential connections are often left unexplored more explicitly due to the nature of the collection and its lack of direct collaboration among authors. For instance, Ashcroft's analysis of the Oankali's ethical culture in Octavia Butler's notable *Xenogenesis* series would have benefitted from Kendal's own discussion of ethical obligation towards the other earlier in the book, as the alien Oankali and their drive to "seek [otherness], investigate it, manipulate it, sort it, use it" echoes the totalizing ideology that Kendal problematizes as violent and imperial in his critique of Asimov's Foundation trilogy and Zamyatin's *Мы* (*We* [1920-21]) (172). Even so, Ashcroft still reaches the conclusion that the Oankali are not as morally superior to humans as they initially appear to be on the basis of their lack of ethical "responsibility to otherness," rather than their totalizing efforts towards the other (179). It is a strength of the collection nevertheless that its individual pieces have clear intersections and develop one anothers' arguments, however inadvertently. Some essays could be more fully developed, such as Lara Choksey's examination of Nalo Hopkinson's *Midnight Robber* (2000) in relation to dependency work and the politics of care; her argument would have been improved had it explored—or even directly mentioned—the novel's theme of labor as a practice which its protagonist turns to in order to heal from her trauma, in direct opposition to Hopkinson's representation of the postcolonial state of Toussaint and its desire to avoid work altogether in the aftermath of slavery. This exploration would have neatly connected to Lawrence's discussion of automation in the book's concluding chapter, but it is worth noting that Choksey makes a compelling argument about the role of feminized labor in decolonial states.

On the whole, *Ethical Futures* makes meaningful contributions to the study of utopian and dystopian literatures and reminds its audience of the importance of collectively imagining a future that is less destructive than our present. Even as *Ethical Futures* contains thoughtful analysis of dystopian literature and does not begrudge said literature of its abilities to offer needed insights regarding our ethical responsibilities in the present, it is significant that *Ethical Futures* spends its concluding chapter on the relative absence of modern utopian literature. As Lawrence observes, "there is no outstanding example of utopian thought in the twenty-first century that has achieved

success on a mass scale" (318). The final question that *Ethical Futures* raises, then, regards our seeming inability or unwillingness to imagine beyond the destructive systems under which we live and therefore our turn to dystopian fatalism over utopian hopefulness. In doing so, *Ethical Futures* marks itself as relevant not only to academic scholarship, but to all those who seek to imagine a better future than the one toward which we seem to be heading.

Bradbury Beyond Apollo, by Jonathan R. Eller

Rafeeq O. McGiveron

Jonathan R. Eller. *Bradbury Beyond Apollo*. U of Illinois P, 2020. Hardcover. 376 pg. $34.95. ISBN 9780252043413. eBook ISBN 9780252052293.

Jonathan R. Eller's *Bradbury Beyond Apollo* completes a biographical trilogy begun a decade ago. The 2011 *Becoming Ray Bradbury* took us through the early 1950s, and the 2014 *Ray Bradbury Unbound* actually does touch upon the Apollo era and even Bradbury's 2012 death, but it is the 2020 *Bradbury Beyond Apollo* that truly delves into Ray Bradbury's work and life from the 1960s to the end. The tale is a wide-ranging and sometimes a frustrating and even sad one, told in detail with authority and with compassion and yet also with a true scholar's evaluation and critical judgment. As with Eller's previous two installments, the approach here falls somewhere between, say, that of the more theoretical and bibliographically encyclopedic 2004 *Ray Bradbury: The Life of Fiction* by Eller and William F. Touponce and that of a more popularly oriented biography such as Sam Weller's 2005 *The Bradbury Chronicles: The Life of Ray Bradbury*.
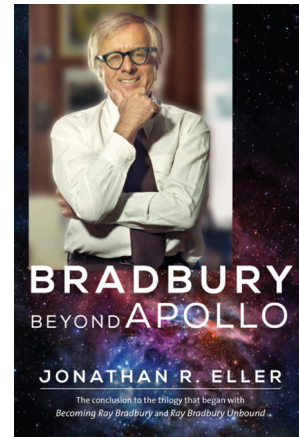
The book is divided into five sections, each of which comprises easily approachable chapters generally between five to ten pages each. Part I, "The Inherited Wish," covers the period of the late 1960s through the late 1970s, from Bradbury's awe and joy at NASA's crewed lunar landings through the Viking I robotic mission to Mars and the publication of *Long After Midnight*. "Beyond Eden" runs from 1977 through the mid-1980s, including Bradbury's deepening friendship with Federico Fellini and his work on Disney's EPCOT. Part III, "1984 Will Not Arrive," discusses the period of the early 1980s through the early 1990s, in which Bradbury spent a great deal of effort on, among other projects, often-abortive film work, *Death Is a Lonely Business*, and cable television's *The Ray Bradbury Theater*. "Graveyard for Lunatics" covers 1990 through the late '90s, with projects such as the sequel to Bradbury's previous mystery novel and *Green Shadows, White Whale* (1992), and ever more effort for non-print media, along with further NASA honors. "Closing the Book," the last section, takes us from the late 1990s until Bradbury's death in 2012, including further awards and honors, the author's final novels, and ever more story collections as well.

No one can deny the wide-ranging creativity of Ray Bradbury's efforts in many different genres across seventy-odd years. Certainly Bradbury's name looms huge, not just in the fantasy

and science fiction genres but in broader culture as well. Sought out by NASA "as a validating witness and celebrant—and also perhaps as a talisman"—during "key moments of exploration" (9), reprinted in his own "perennially popular collections" (104) and in school textbooks as well, and lauded with honors from awards for his writing to the naming of sites on the Moon (7) and Mars (1) and even of an asteroid (218), the difficult-to-pigeonhole Bradbury is remembered widely in a way that most other contemporary SF and fantasy greats are not. Three volumes of biography indeed may be necessary. And, Eller reminds us, this volume, like the previous two, covers not only familiar events of Bradbury's life and career but also "a number of adventures that the public knows little about; yet these were things that he cared a great deal about, whether they succeeded in grand fashion or failed to reach the public eye at all" (2-3).

It is this unevenness of Bradbury's output and the changes in trajectory of his creativity—a "story…so complex and so full of unrelenting (and sometimes uneven) creativity" (2), as Eller puts it—in the second half of his life that are perhaps the most eye-opening here. On the one hand, despite certain "significant" (3) and "enduring works" (308) appearing in these later decades, "the stories and fables that define Ray Bradbury's twenty-first-century legacy were almost all written during the first two decades of his seventy-year career" (3). On the other hand, "Bradbury's pace of writing never slowed, but most of his time at the typewriter was devoted to new adaptations of his stories for stage, television, and film. Newer versions of older adaptations inevitably involved a great deal of new writing as well" (41). Even pieces released brand-new to the public, though, nevertheless still "were often nourished from the safe harbors where he had crafted his earliest stories of fantasy and suspense" (308). Alongside "isolated but significant achievements" of the later part of Bradbury's career, such as "The Toynbee Convector," various essays, and *The Ray Bradbury Theater* (309), after all, stand "late-life fulfillments of major prose projects mapped out half a lifetime earlier, such as *From the Dust Returned* [2001], *Farewell Summer* [2006], *Somewhere a Band Is Playing* [2007], and *Leviathan 99* [2013]…" (3).

For any reader or critic of Bradbury's art, Eller's investigation is well worthwhile. *Bradbury Beyond Apollo* is impressively comprehensive, covering not only print works but also "the constant parade of lectures, creative consultancies, and adaptations for stage, television, and films that bled off his once broad channel of original short story production" (308), along with personal and business dealings with a host of famous names throughout the United States and Europe as well. And at the same time that Eller through his thoroughgoing and meticulous research can detail with insight and appreciation the various topics like no other, he is no uncritical panegyrist. Whether it is with a judgment of "Bradbury's sometimes unreasonable ego" (55) or of the fact that the author "was not always the best judge of his own stories" and in later collections often picked personal favorites "that lacked the tight, emotionally powerful plots of his best work" (105), or with an acknowledgement of the "blunt" critiques, to put it mildly, from "various experts" of the Air & Space section of the Smithsonian Institution to Bradbury's proposal for a planetarium show (109) or of Thomas Disch's scathing review of *The Stories of Ray Bradbury* (105-106), this text puts Bradbury's work into perspective rather than on a pedestal.

Bradbury's "true trajectory in the final four decades of his life," we are told, "would be that of a visionary, asked over and over again to tell us why we desire to explore, why we should go to the stars, and what we might become when we get there" (310). For a widely renowned author whose "unusual brand of science fiction—powerfully emotional studies of the human heart and mind mounted on a barely perceptible armature of science and technology—had inspired many scientists, engineers, and astronauts" (9) right along with countless ordinary readers, this was a worthy undertaking. So, too, was the writing of Jonathan R. Eller's *Bradbury Beyond Apollo*.

Rafeeq O. McGiveron has published articles, chapters, and reference entries on the works of authors ranging from Robert A. Heinlein and Ray Bradbury and George Orwell to Willa Cather and Truman Capote and Shakespeare. His edited collections include *Critical Insights: Fahrenheit 451* (2013), *Critical Insights: Robert A. Heinlein* (2015), and *Critical Insights: Ray Bradbury* (2017) from Salem Press. His novel, *Student Body*, was released in 2014, and *Tiger Hunts, Thunder Bay, and Treasure Chests: A Memoir of the Path to Fatherhood* was published in 2020.

Reality, Magic, and Other Lies: Fairy-Tale Film Truths,
by Pauline Greenhill

Megan Spring

Pauline Greenhill. *Reality, Magic, and Other Lies: Fairy-Tale Film Truths.* Wayne State University Press, 2020. Paperback. 268 pg. $32.99. ISBN 9780814342220.

In her book *Reality, Magic, and Other Lies*, Pauline Greenhill posits that while the terms "fantasy and reality," and "magic and science" might seem mutually exclusive and at odds, the two sets of ideas should be considered, at times, synonymous. Greenhill equates the English verb lie as synonymous with "*story, fairy tale, and folklore*" in order to expose the nuance between how individuals perceive deceit and how they might perceive narrative in the form of fairytale and folklore (Greenhill 13). She plays on the conception of truth as it is revealed through fictional fairy stories—stories that require the audience to engage with some type of "lie" perpetuated by the creator in both film and book in order to attain truth.
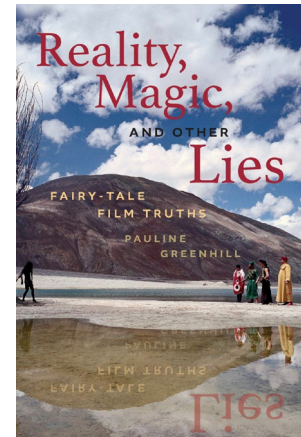
Greenhill's book is divided into two parts containing a total of eight chapters. Part one, "Studio, Director, and Writer Oeuvres," discusses films with fairy tale-esque elements, each chapter dwelling explicitly on the relationship between the fantastic and the real world, always exposing the intersectionality between the two. In chapter two, Greenhill closely analyzes four films from LAIKA entertainment studios (*Coraline* [2009], *ParaNorman* [2012], *The Boxtrolls* [2014], and *Kubo and the Two Strings* [2016]), discussing the symbolic overlap between stop-motion animation and the malleable nature of human beings. She ultimately comes to the conclusion that "the linking of animation with reality also thematically connects it to real-world concepts—how films instantiate hegemonic or anti-hegemonic viewpoints, and sometimes both…" (65), thus nuancing her thesis that while fantastical in nature, fairytales speak more truth to the "real world" and its power structures than perhaps participants actually functioning in the real world. In chapter three, she again highlights the intersectionality between the fantastic and reality. Greenhill progresses from animation to focus on live-action media (*The Fall* [2006], *Mirror Mirror* [2012], and *Emerald City* [2017]) by Tarsem. Greenhill focuses more specifically on the intersectionality of magic and science in this chapter, referring to claims she introduced early in the book that magic and science can be synonymous. Building upon her argument in chapter two, in which she posits the relationship between animation and reality as a means to express the relationship between fantasy and reality, in chapter 3 Greenhill presents issues of heterospatiality and heterotemporality as they are manifested in *The Fall* and *Mirror Mirror* respectively, in order to convey a synonymous

relationship between magic and reality. Similarly, she uses *Emerald City* as a means to further her initial claim that depending on one's situated history, science can be seen as magic or vice versa, appealing to her argument that fantasy and reality are foundationally rooted together. Chapter four functions as Greenhill's linchpin as she moves from animation to live-action and then finally includes herself in the action through a pseudo-autoethnographic study of Luc Picard's work (*Babine* [2008] and *Ésimésac* [2012]), as she travels to Saint-Élie-de-Caxton to record and experience the real life and fictional aspects of Picard's films, who quite literally creates fantastic tales based upon real people and events.

In part two, "Themes and Issues from Three Fairy Tales," chapters five through seven shift from analysis of specific films to use of queer, feminist, and critical race theory to analyze modern renditions of the popular fairy tales "Hansel and Gretel," "The Juniper Tree," and "Cinderella," respectively. Greenhill furthers her argument by looking at perpetuated narrative as a means to decode how reality is represented. Through her readings of the tales, she equates reality (manifested through accepted norms) with a type of fantasy in and of itself. She asserts that accepted reality exists as a means to deceive, as it perpetuates the fantasy of hetero, patriarchal, and Eurocentric norms. Her reading using the aforementioned literary theory adds another perspective to the fairytales, again muddying the line between fantasy and reality even further and, thus, evidencing her initial claim regarding the intersectionality between fantasy and reality, magic and science, deceit and truth. This section of the book answers the call put forth in the title to address the "Other Lies" perpetuated throughout society manifested through the relationship between fantasy and reality.

While no doubt the generally curious would benefit from reading this book, the text is best suited to those with an interest and background in folkloric studies, as some of the jargon and theory (especially in the second half) would require substantial supplementary reading for the lay reader. In addition, while the concept of narrative as fluid irrespective of medium furthers her argument regarding the transcendence of magic, some of Greenhill's nuance could be lost on those not at least somewhat familiar with the films and stories presented throughout the book, even with her ritual plot synopses.

These synopses leave Greenhill's style paradoxically brilliant and mundane, perhaps purposefully so, as her argument is founded on the paradoxically synonymous nature of the fantastic and reality. The self-referential nature of her overarching structure combined with the repeating structure within the actual chapters (she introduces the primary film/story, offers context, then plot summary, and concludes with analysis) serves to represent the repeated formula of fairy tale. While Greenhill's writing can appear formulaic at times and, as a result, become a tad monotonous to wade through, the formulaic structure also serves to facilitate her argument rather brilliantly. Siphoned into two parts (each part containing three subsections) with an introductory and concluding chapter, Greenhill's book essentially mirrors itself—an homage to her cover, which features a shallow pool reflecting the pictured landscape. She quite literally reflects her argument through her structure—fairytale reflects reality…or is it reality that reflects fairytale? Regardless

of the question Greenhill leaves the reader to answer, one can conclude the two are the same. Her autoethnographic journey exploring a remote town in Canada in chapter four poses this question, as it symbolically functions as a portal, a "through the looking glass" scenario where the second half of the book mirrors the first, thus structurally mirroring her argument regarding the blurred boundaries between fantasy and reality, fiction and truth as she moves from animation to actual participant and scholar, getting closer to the fantasy she writes about and the questions she poses.

Megan Spring is a PhD student in Florida Atlantic University's Comparative Study Program with a concentration in the intersectionality of language, literature, and culture. Her research interests include the dualistic binary that exists between folklore and literature, ghostlore and possession in American culture, and narrative structure within American literature. Megan's creative contributions appear in the *Cedarville Review*.

Futuristic Cars and Space Bicycles: Contesting the Road in American Science Fiction, by Jeremy Withers

Fred Motson

Jeremy Withers. *Futuristic Cars and Space Bicycles: Contesting the Road in American Science Fiction*. Liverpool UP, 2020. Hardcover. 256 pg. $120.00. ISBN 9781789621754.

As technology continues to advance, it can increasingly feel as though the (first) world is coming ever closer to transportation methods from "science fiction." Jeremy Withers' *Futuristic Cars and Space Bicycles: Contesting the Road in American Science Fiction* provides a timely and wide-ranging survey of how many methods of transportation, but most predominantly the car and the bicycle, have been portrayed in the past century of speculative fiction.

Withers identifies six eras of speculative fiction, each of which has produced works which include representations of cars and/or bicycles. These eras are identified by Withers as: the pulp era (c. 1926-40); the 'Golden Age' of sf in the 1950s; the New Wave era (c. 1960-1975); postcyberpunk in the 1990s; and in recent times both postapocalyptic cli-fi and 1980s-nostalgia sf. For each of the six eras, Withers focuses on three exemplar works. The majority of the authors selected will be familiar to the sf enthusiast, although the specific works identified are not necessarily their best-known texts. Thus authors such as Hugo Gernsback, Ray Bradbury, Ursula K. Le Guin and William Gibson are represented, with a roughly even split in the texts examined between short stories and books. The final chapter goes beyond the written word to also consider film and television works.

In the introduction, Withers stresses the multidisciplinary nature of his studies, and while the theme of transportation vehicles is present throughout, it is difficult to categorise the book as belonging to a particular discipline. Withers himself suggests that it sits between ecocriticism, environmental humanities, and mobility studies. I would not underestimate the sociohistorical elements of the book either. Much of the discussion expressly draws connections between wider social concerns and the perspective taken in the texts discussed. This is done particularly well in relation to authors' individual and often ill-fated histories with automobiles. Many of the authors examined in the book were avowed non-drivers, albeit for a wide range of reasons (Bradbury saw a shocking and gory car accident as a teenager; Octavia Butler was prevented by her dyslexia). Most shockingly of all, Hugo Gernsback's three-year-old daughter was struck and killed by a taxi in 1928. The two factors which seem to arise again and again are the physical dangers of automobiles (especially to pedestrians) and their environmental impact.
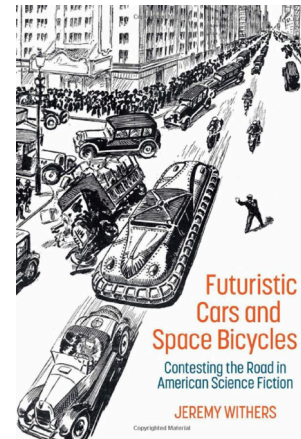
As this might suggest, Withers' own view is clear. "Two wheels good, four wheels bad" is perhaps an unfair reduction of the argument that pervades the book, but this is very much a critique of the automobile rather than a simple exploration of its portrayal. The methodical structure maintained throughout the book does mean that it is of considerable value in tracking how (some) sf has represented and interpreted the (futuristic) car and bicycle over time; but it should always be borne in mind that the author has chosen the examples to support the argument.

It is usually a mark of good writing when a reviewer would have appreciated a fuller treatment of the subject. Both elements of that sentence apply here. The book is engagingly-written and was an ideal companion for post-lockdown trips to the coffee shop: trips usually followed by a search for some of the lesser-known short stories discussed in the book (although do be aware that the discussion does contain plot spoilers). My one regret is that during the author's necessarily limited tour of a hundred years of sf, there was not space for a little more reflection on the wider literary context of each era. As the book progressed, so did the scope, as skateboards, airships and tanks enter the scene. I felt that at times the narrative broadened to a more general comparison of 'harmful' and 'benign' (again, in the sense of safety and particularly environmental impact) methods of transport – an interesting discussion but arguably one better explored in a further book. A similar point could be made about the final substantive chapter relating to the increasingly iconic 1980s nostalgia trope of "kids on bikes." Withers discusses these recent texts with some authority and raises some interesting points, particularly related to gender, but the chapter feels a little disconnected from what has come before. This is perhaps at least in part due to the fact that the bikes and cars involved in these texts are nostalgic representations of what was (at least in a certain idealised America) rather than futuristic representations of what may be.

Futuristic Cars and Space Bicycles is a valuable contribution to a wide range of fields which touch on transport and imagined futures. From my own legal perspective, I found sections on how regulation of various forms of futuristic transport has been portrayed in sf particularly interesting, especially given the ongoing debate as to how the law should react and adapt to advances such as autonomous vehicles and e-scooters. I would suggest that the book is of interest to a wide academic audience and while the (seemingly inevitable) price point of a hardback specialist academic work places it outside the budget of the general sf enthusiast, hopefully library access and perhaps a future paperback edition might ensure the book receives a deserved wider audience.

Fred Motson is a Lecturer in Law at the Open University, UK. Fred's research interests include sports law, property law and environmental law. He has a particular interest in the intersection between law and technology, both in how technology can shape or change the practice of law and in how law responds to technological advances. Fred has a number of forthcoming projects exploring how representations of the law in sf can inform legal policy today.

Fantasy, by Lucie Armitt

Audrey Taylor

Lucie Armitt. *Fantasy.* Routledge, 2020. The New Critical Idiom. Paperback. 208 pg. $22.95. ISBN 9781138677029.

Fantasy scholarship has developed rapidly over the past half-century, and a well-informed discussion that grapples with the wide range of current research is certainly more than welcome. Lucie Armitt's attempt at such a discussion in *Fantasy*, part of The New Critical Idiom series, is unfortunately not quite successful. However, before I begin my review in full, I feel I should give a warning. I opened this book expecting something entirely different, and this colored my reaction to it. Armitt was the first critic I discovered who took fantasy literature seriously, and so it was with delight that I dove into her latest book, over ten years after first encountering her work. The book I was expecting was an overview of the fantasy genre, particularly literature, as it stands two decades into the 21ˢᵗ century. There are probably other books offering such an overview, but this is not that book. This book takes a very broad look at the concept "fantasy" and explores it in a much wider cultural context, far beyond literature, or indeed, the 21ˢᵗ century. If you treat *Fantasy* as a book about the non-mimetic in a very broad sense, then you will likely have a very different, more positive, experience with this text. Armitt offers keen analyses and makes some interesting points. It is a shame that few of them concern the fantasy genre as it is commonly understood today.

Armitt begins with some of the, today, quite old-fashioned arguments about fantasy the genre as a whole and fantasy literature particularly. She brings up a number of points in her introduction that she follows with "as we will see throughout the book" (9), but I was generally hard pressed to find them more than sporadically hinted at. Her overall argument seems to be that "fantasy" is the driver for narratives and feelings across genres, and is in opposition to the real. The book contains five main chapters and a very brief conclusion. Though loosely bound by theme, the chapters tend to be collections of miniature arguments, but the structure or overarching argument is often fairly vague. This means that good points are sometimes buried in descriptive passages and details rather than holding the argument together.

Armitt's introduction runs through several, older, definitions of fantasy before she makes her own claim. Her contention that "the key aspect of any fantasy narrative is the mechanism whereby the reader is permitted entry into another world" (10) was extensively argued by Mendlesohn in *Rhetorics of Fantasy* (2008). *Rhetorics* is only mentioned after several pages of Armitt's own

argument, but it is never made clear that Mendlesohn argued the same thing more than ten years ago. Mendlesohn is then left behind without real engagement.

In chapter 2, an overview of the fantastic from "Ovid to Game Boy," Armitt makes a short argument for Ovid as fantasy. Discussions of Ovid quickly make way for Orpheus and his tale (without any explanation for why this particular story and not one of the many others in Ovid's oeuvre), on to the operas staged from that story, and then to the problem of how to theatricalize fantasyland, all in a couple of pages. Some of the connections she makes are intriguing, while others are tenuous at best. For example, linking Puck's ability to move quickly in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1595/96) to Harry and Hermione's trip back in time in *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* (1999) (42) is less than convincing. Connecting *The Nutcracker Suite* (1892) with the movie *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang: The Magical Car* (1968) might have been interesting, but the discussion is cut too short for it to be more convincing.

The third chapter concerns animal fantasy. Mickey Mouse is discussed without much notice of his "animalness," however, and the brisk tour of *Fantasia* (1940) includes bits of plot and music but little real analysis of the other animal characters found throughout. Places where more research would have been welcome include Armitt's assertion that "animated animal characters hold a particular attraction for child readers and viewers of film and television fantasy is clear" (62) or when she states that "in their identification with fantasy animals, children are clearly working through their fears in relation to adult humans" (63). She spends far more time "reminding" (63) the reader that not all animal stories are fantastic—*Black Beauty* (1877) and *War Horse* (1982) are her cases in point—than on explaining what animal fantasy is.

Chapter 4 is "Fantasy Quests." This includes a quick dive through various quests—King Arthur's quests, quests for knowledge, and others— without any detailed examination of any particular quest types. Armitt discusses *The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe* (1950), but only from the point where Edmund and Peter have different perspectives on a greening Narnia, leaving me wondering about the quest connection. Armitt's point that there are horizontal as well as vertical quests is a valuable contribution to fantasy quest scholarship, but is unfortunately buried among sidelines and minutiae. This could have been the chapter's central theme, but coming as it does after a meander about Robert Graves's *The Golden Fleece* (1944) and King Arthur, it loses much of its impact. She engages here with Freud and Frasier but not with Mendlesohn or other, newer fantasy critics working with portals and quests.

Chapter 5 deals with politics and fantasy, and it was the chapter in which I was the most sorry for Armitt's broad and vague use of "fantasy." It begins with a brief look at three texts that have caused controversy, *The Water-Babies* (1863), *Babar* (1931), and some of Enid Blyton's books. It then moves on to comics and a quick comment that superheroes can be tied to the rise of fascism. What troubles me here is that very little of this chapter seems to be about fantasy and its uses to fight for political causes, rather than fantasy as reactionary, conservative, or useless daydreaming, as is often argued outside of fantasy scholarship. I also failed to understand her choice of sub-

categories. The same could be argued for *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949). Her reasoning is that she is discussing what happens within the text to Winston, that he "layers" fantasy around himself (123). It is unfortunate that with the escapist bad press the fantasy genre receives generally Armitt could not have found more titles that are explicitly fantasy, rather than science fiction, anime, or other genres. Her more intriguing claim that political fantasy, as she calls it, "typically operates as much through *defamiliarization* as invention" (127) is largely buried in pieces of plot and discussions of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*'s protagonist. Other points are similarly buried in examples from texts usually considered science fiction (*The Handmaid's Tale* [1985], *Oryx and Crake* [2003], and more).

"Fantasy and the Erotic" is the rather bold title of Armitt's last chapter. She argues in the beginning that "whenever critics write 'seriously' about sex and the erotic in fantasy, it is surprising how coy or full of obfuscation they become" (140). Armitt begins the chapter with a welcome discussion of her terminology and argument. She contends that all fantasy has an element of the sensual and vice versa, but does not, for this reader at least, convince. She argues that all erotic thought and writing is a form of fantasy, as it takes place in, or is produced by, the mind (142). She admits that sample texts "are recounted through narrative realism and this raises one key difficulty for a book on fantasy," but her justification that "the relationship between fantasy and narrative realism is complicated by the erotic content" (143) is especially thin. Armitt's overall points about the erotic, and particularly women's place both within the erotic (as more than the object of desire) and the critical (as having worthwhile, un-phallocentric things to say), are intriguing; however, I would have liked to have seen them brought to bear on more overtly generic fantasy texts. The fantastic genre, in literature, movies, and more, certainly has texts that bring eroticism to the fantasy (Anne Bishop's books, or the movie series *Twilight* [2008-2012] for example), and thus their absence here is doubly disappointing.

Given her lavish use of citations and research in some places, it is obvious that Armitt put a lot of time into research. However, the weaknesses in the text cluster around two main problems. The first is Armitt's tendency to include everything under her loose definitions, and the second is the curious use of assertions rather than research in some areas, and a concurrent lack of depth in others. It feels as though one has but just landed on an idea or train of thought before being whisked away to the next. The literary and critical sources that Armitt uses are often quite dated. Calling *Miss Peregrine's Home for Peculiar Children* "one of the freshest recent examples of portal fantasy" (15) is especially odd for a book published in 2011, at the point of this review ten years ago. She also continually returns to fantasy as the realm of the child, and the child-like, something that fantasy has been trying to move away from at least since Tolkien's "On Fairy-stories" (1947), if not before.

One of the key challenges that the book is unable to overcome is that almost everything gets its chance to be considered, leaving little room for discussion of that which is usually considered genre fantasy. Armitt includes comics without a qualm, for example, a medium that is usually

considered on its own generic terms, or, in the case of superheroes, is almost expressly presented as science fiction, not fantasy.

Unchallenged assumptions abound. For example, in a discussion of the first *Gormenghast* book, Armitt asserts, "If we, as readers, feel a sense of one-to-one identification with a walking protagonist, how much more closely do we hold our breath as Steerpike ascends slowly, fingertip by fingertip, stone by stone, until safely sitting astride the apex roof" (93). This assumes the reader has any wish to identify with Steerpike, and given his nasty personality, this is not the given Armitt seems to think it.

Fantasy appears uncertain about what it wants to achieve, and for whom. There is little newness there: the critical idiom Armitt outlines is sadly outdated in terms of fantasy scholarship; much of the criticism and theory produced in the last thirty years is missing. A general scholar of literature would gain a strange impression of the fantasy field as a whole, and certainly not a particularly accurate description of how it stands in terms of criticism, or even definitions, in 2021. Armitt certainly makes several thought-provoking and valuable points regarding a range of texts, but regrettably, these points alone are not enough to support the implied claim of the title.

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Re-Enchanted: The Rise of Children's Fantasy Literature in the Twentieth Century, by Marie Sachiko Cecire

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Apparently an attempt to popularize and expand upon a flawed 2011 dissertation, *The Oxford School of Children's Fantasy Literature: Medieval Afterlives and The Production of Culture* (Oxford University), this book begins with a shorter reprise of that work. Cecire believes that the work of J.R.R. Tolkien and C.S. Lewis in establishing an Oxford University English curriculum that focused on pre-Nineteenth Century English, and drew upon their scholarship in Old, Middle and Early Modern English literature, resulted in shaping an "Oxford School" of writers of "medievalist children's fantasy" (4). Besides Tolkien and Lewis, in some of their work for children, this includes the writers Susan Cooper, Diana Wynne Jones, Kevin Crossley-Holland and Philip Pullman.
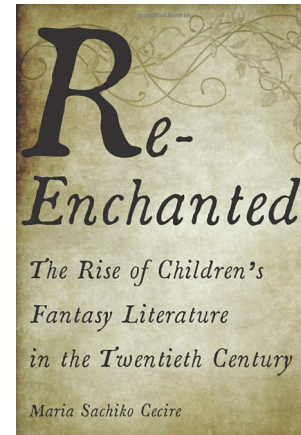
The discussion of Tolkien and Lewis, including their academic interests and their use of aspects of 'medieval' literary antecedents, particularly in their own fiction, is good. But it mostly revisits what many other critics, historians and biographers have had to say. Cecire does provide some discussion of the curriculum at Oxford, including such details—new to me—as brief descriptions of some of the questions presented to students to write their final exams. Later, she offers some careful readings of scenes from her 'school' writers, tracing motifs and themes from some of the medieval texts that were part of the reading program at Oxford. This is well-done, and Cecire demonstrates her own familiarity with some of these medieval sources. It seems reasonable that writers who read Malory or Chaucer might indeed have been influenced when they went on to write their fantasy stories for children. But Cecire fails to account for the similar approaches and achievements of other writers drawing upon such medieval texts without the 'shaping' of the Oxford curriculum. She also fails to consider other medieval influences on her writers, for example via Diana Wynne Jones's marriage to the prominent medievalist, John Burrow—though he, too, studied the English curriculum at Oxford—or Crossley-Holland's extensive career as a medievalist, both in translating and editing *Beowulf* and other Anglo-Saxon texts, and as a professor of English for many years before writing his Arthur Trilogy (2000-2003).

Many other writers, beginning well before Tolkien and Lewis, and continuing up through the twentieth century, have written what can only be described as work similar to the Oxford school 'medievalist children's fantasy' without direct recourse to that Oxford curriculum, or even influence from its fiction. Indeed, the impact of this school cannot be much felt in broader children's fantasy until the second half of the century—besides the outlier, Tolkien's *The Hobbit* (1937), not terribly influential though respected in the forties, fifties and sixties, the Narnia stories don't appear until the second half of the century, when Tolkien's adult romance, *The Lord of the Rings* (1954-55), was also published. The influence of these works on other fantasy can hardly be seen until the publishing phenomena of the 1970s, mostly in adult fantasy and science fiction, and the other Oxford school writers only begin to impact the literary scene in the later 1970s. The fantasy by Crossley-Holland and Pullman discussed by Cecire was not even published until the end of the 1990s (1995-2003).

As far as discussion of the works of these writers go, Cecire does not really attempt to differentiate their 'medievalist fantasy' from that written by other Twentieth Century writers, such as Henry Treece, Alan Garner, Lloyd Alexander, Mollie Hunter, or many others. She does offer a straw-man attack on T.H. White's *The Sword in the Stone* (1938), as a "Cambridge fantasy" (114), but is unclear about what other texts might fit into this alternative school. She suggests that the comic and ironic tone of White's narrative is modernist, against and counter to the Oxford school, which is anti-modernist and thus free of irony and comedy. This is due to the roots in that medieval heritage that Tolkien and Lewis introduced into the Twentieth Century.

This is absurd on the face of it, ignoring the comic and ironic work of Tolkien (not only in *The Hobbit* and sections of *The Lord of the Rings*, but in *Farmer Giles of Ham* [1949] and *The Father Christmas Letters* [1976], among other texts), and in C.S. Lewis's *The Screwtape Letters* (1942), but also the later work of Susan Cooper (the fine *Boggart* trilogy [1993-2018]), and Diana Wynne Jones (practically everything she ever wrote, but consider *The Tough Guide to Fantasyland* [1996]). Even Cecire doesn't attempt to argue that Pullman isn't ironic but explains his irony as a direct response to and dialogue with Tolkien and Lewis. Nor does Cecire attempt discussion of the majority of these writers' work which is not so clearly displaying 'medieval' tropes. In arguing that Tolkien and Lewis are anti-modernist, Cecire is not very careful to describe what she intends, with the consequence that when she starts employing these distinctions and arguing that Lewis and Tolkien channel racism and imperialism and sexism from the medieval texts that they study, one must suppose that she is contrasting this with the modernist writers—but to attempt to see T.S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, and other modernists as free of medieval influence and of racism, sexism and so forth requires a difficult squint in perspective. Similarly, although many other critics of the Inklings have seen them as anti-modernist, citing for instance Lewis's ironic send-up of Eliot's "The Love-Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" (cited by Cecire, p. 53), this overlooks the clear modernism of much of the Inklings' work in response to their war experience, as well as the familiarity of Eliot and other writers with the medieval heritage. Not to mention friendly interactions between the Inklings and Eliot and other Modernist writers.

But Cecire adds a significant writer to her 'school' without any account of exposure to the Oxford curriculum, or particular literary influence from medieval writers, or from the other Oxford school writers. This is J.K. Rowling, who didn't begin publishing her Harry Potter books until the last couple of years in the Twentieth Century. Linking Rowling to her Oxford school is a serious flaw in Cecire's dissertation, and it is not further explained or defended here. Rowling acknowledges reading Tolkien's fiction, and probably Lewis's Narnia stories at least, but only along with the work of many other writers. The ostensible evidence that Cecire cites for Rowling's inclusion in the 'Oxford school' even more than writers who attended Oxford and wrote medievalist children's fantasy, such as Alan Garner or Katherine Briggs, is the Oxford-like school setting in the stories, even though it's a twentieth-century Oxford, and there is little medievalism in the stories. (Interestingly, Rowling has described her Harry Potter as an heir not of Bilbo or Frodo, but of modernist T.H. White's Wart, in *The Sword and the Stone*). Indeed, Rowling and her works come in for rather more attention than the actual medievalist in her Oxford School second generation writers, Kevin Crossley-Holland, who receives about three pages of discussion. There is no discussion of his extensive scholarly work as a professor and translator-editor of *Beowulf*, and other medievalist studies, his opera libretti, or even his Carnegie winning children's book, *Storm* (1985). The work that Cecire only briefly discusses, his Arthur trilogy, was actually published in the twenty-first century.

The next phase of Cecire's argument is hinted in her dissertation, but developed, or rather, sketched out in this book. Unlike the earlier, more careful and documented work on Lewis and Tolkien and medieval roots in some of the fiction of the later writers, Cecire claims that her Oxford school writers—including Rowling—are the key writers in the whole of twentieth century fantasy, and that they ultimately dominate fantasy more generally, not only in books but in television and film and online discourse for adults, such as *Game of Thrones* (2011-19) and Lev Grossman's *Magicians* (2015-2020), and thanks to the pop psychology of the 'Inner Child,' have a huge influence on popular culture and on channeling or focusing medieval roots of imperialism, racism, anti-semitism and sexism in Anglo-American and European culture, through the Tolkien-Lewis anti-modernist pedagogy. Cecire offers some acute critique of Lewis's imperialism in *Voyage of the Dawn Treader* (1952), and some interesting views not only of other Oxford School writers but of American fantasy in general, including (apparently) Ursula K. Le Guin's "Earthsea," and Tamora Pierce, and especially J.K. Rowling, but offers otherwise very sketchy discussions and odd emphases and readings of other critics.

For instance, besides citing Le Guin's famous "The Child and the Shadow" essay (1975) exactly backwards in details (though, in fairness, not necessarily wrongly in making her point), she finds in Brian Attebery a justification for dispensing with all non-Tolkienien fantasy as apart from the center of the main stream of fantasy. But this is a bizarre mis-reading of Attebery's insight, that in the wake of Kathryn Hume's magisterial discussion of Fantasy as a mode in *Fantasy and Mimesis* (1984), Attebery offered a powerful image of fantasy as a genre typified in "fuzzy sets"—radiating from multiple centers of exemplar texts, and Attebery playfully offers a mock scientific polling to

settle on Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* as a starting point—but significantly, over the course of his book (*Strategies of Fantasy* [[1992]]) Attebery discusses many other texts which depart from that model or establish alternative streams. (James Gifford's *A Modernist Fantasy* [2018] develops an alternative strain focusing on Modernist anarchist fantasy, traced from Morris through Peake and Mirrlees and Treece up through Poul Anderson to Samuel Delany, and Neil Gaiman—the latter two writers that Cecire also mentions and would seem to bizarrely claim into her Tolkien-Rowling axis).

But Cecire is not just tracing one line of fantasy development, examining one alternative "fuzzy set," setting some of these Inklings fantasies as her 'starting place,' but arguing that her Oxford school is the primary descent for a medieval heritage that bypasses interim fantasy to flower in contemporary culture and superseding all other previous fantasy to affect culture much more broadly. To make this argument, she needs the Rowling publishing success in addition to the Tolkien and 'Tol-clone' publishing.

For an illustration of how this argument goes wrong, consider Cecire's discussion of the 2012 Olympic Opening Ceremony (19-22). After carefully limiting the 'Oxford School' fantasy writers to six who will be considered in this book, the text describes how in this television event "medievalist children's fantasy grows out of and is reinscribed in major national and cultural institutions" (19). Following a breathless paean to "children's fantasy [as] one of Britain's most important exports and gifts to the world" (20), the production, "Isles of Wonder," is described.

J. K. Rowling reads from an early Twentieth Century fantasy story, Barrie's *Peter Pan* (1911), leading to a dramatic sequence with characters from *Alice in Wonderland* (1865), Smith's (and Disney's) *The Hundred and One Dalmations* (1956—film 1961), Rowling's own "Harry Potter" stories (1997-), and finally a "squadron of Mary Poppinses" (21) who shoo away threatening characters and deliver a rescue from scary threats, assisted by Doctors and nurses from the NHS, and a giant, inflated baby that represents Scottish advances in obstetric ultrasound technology.

Nowhere in this scenario is there any appearance by Bilbo Baggins or Prince Caspian, Jones's Chrestomanci, or Pullman's Lyra. All of the works and their writers mentioned in this description have indeed played a role in the development of Children's Fantasy, but clearly Barrie, Carroll, Smith, and Travers were not much influenced by Tolkien or Lewis. So, Cecire shoehorns in the 'Oxford School' by reading its influence into Rowling's participation. The status of Rowling's books, as medievalist fantasy, "thanks to the traditions of the Oxford School" (20), is based on elements such as the flowing black cloaks of Tolkien's Ringwraiths, and the "Green and Pleasant Land" of the Hobbits' Shire.

It is likely that Rowling was influenced by the works of Tolkien and Lewis, but unlikely that she was much influenced by the Oxford English curriculum established in the 1930s. Furthermore, it's pretty clear that flowing black cloaks on villains or even ambiguous characters, such as Drosselmayer in *The Nutcracker* (1892), or the SouthWest Wind in Ruskin's "The King of the Golden River" (1841) and right through countless mustached figures in stage melodrama, are not

specific to the Oxford School. The very phrase "Green and Pleasant Land" is not from Tolkien but from Blake's introduction to "Milton" (1808). Though of course, it may have contributed to Tolkien's vision of Hobbiton and The Shire, far more influenced by 18ᵗʰ and 19ᵗʰ and 20ᵗʰ century literature and Tolkien's own experience in England than any medieval manuscripts.

Cecire moves through an outline of fantasy permeating US and internet popular culture, and pretty much leaves children's fantasy behind—busy with grand pronouncements about shaping western culture through television and the wider cultural impact of *Game of Thrones* and other adult works. Then, suddenly, she finds that somehow the overall sweep of cultural development has empowered new writers to move beyond the sexism and racism to a post-ironic children's fantasy in writers like Nnedi Okorafor. This is perhaps a welcome idea, but it has nothing to do with her starting point with Tolkien and Lewis's introductions from medieval literature. It is also a poorly developed idea, in that she barely discusses the works she is praising, and even her ideas of post-irony, apart from citing an inspiring critic, Lee Konstantinou, aren't well explained. One might expect her to tie this back to the 'ironic' Cambridge school of medievalist children's fantasy, but this is not again discussed.

Cecire also discusses the darker sexism, imperialism, racism and anti-semitism that she finds in Tolkien and Lewis. To a limited degree, she also describes this as a dark side of medievalism, and cites some medieval portrayals of the Saracen, and the like. She finds some parallels in later writers such as Cooper, Pierce, Rowling and Pullman, and describes her own analysis as similar to work being done by Helen Young (*Race and Popular Fantasy Literature* [2015]) and Ebony Elizabeth Thomas (*The Dark Fantastic* [2019]). However, the work of these critics is far more convincing and extensive, with Cecire's approach twisted by her failure to consider the broader context from the Nineteenth and earlier Twentieth Century writers of children's and adult fantasy.

Being so focused on Tolkien's medievalism is also a mistake in this and other regards—if fairly common in many other Inklings-focused critical works that approach their work too much from the perspective of medieval studies. Though it's fair to recognize Tolkien's scholarship in Old and Middle English, he was a man of his age as well, growing up reading E. Nesbit, George MacDonald, and all of the great Victorian writers and poets, as well as many Twentieth Century writers of even science fiction. His own prose in *The Lord of the Rings* owes far more to H. R. Haggard than to the Pearl Poet. Likewise, C.S. Lewis read everything, and (while I am always more reminded of John Gower reading his prose than of Haggard) he was also a writer of his time, and he saw himself in dialogue with SF pulp writers and novelists such as Olaf Stapledon and Arthur C. Clarke. They didn't exclude the nineteenth century from their English syllabus because they didn't expect their students to read such literature, but because they didn't think it was necessary to include it when their students had the necessary foundation in earlier literature to read it on their own. The 'sources' of imperialism, sexism and racism in medievalism are almost lost in the flood of influences from post-1650 writers. As in this book, exaggerating the importance of Lewis and Tolkien and their work results in missing other achievements in Children's and other fantasy from the Nineteenth through the Twentieth centuries.

It seems problematic that the Oxford School doesn't exist apart from Cecire's description. The four younger writers might well have acknowledged their common debts to their Oxford reading (though both Crossley-Holland and Pullman did not do well as undergraduates, and only later came to appreciate the medieval literary heritage—and neither had direct contact with the Lewis or Tolkien lectures), but they never worked together or even shared the same social circles while at University. This is discussed at much greater depth in *Four British Fantasists: Place and Culture in the Children's Fantasies of Penelope Lively, Alan Garner, Diana Wynne Jones, and Susan Cooper*, by Charles Butler (2006). Cecire avoids discussion of this fine earlier study of two of her writers, which offers far more in-depth discussions of their work, and a much more thoughtful and nuanced discussion of "Oxford Fantasies" in its first chapter, even giving Philip Pullman some attention. Butler offered consideration of the work of these writers in the context of the second golden age of children's fantasy that Cecire mostly ignores. Perhaps Cecire avoids discussing Butler's book because it contradicts many of her own premises. Cecire only cites Butler directly once (123), and as a secondary source in quoting Cooper, who was quoted in Butler's book. But Cecire's own description of 'medievalist children's fantasy,' apart from attributing it to her Oxford School, and vaguely including some other writers, notably Rowling, is remarkably thin in definition—it's very difficult to figure out just what other children's fantasy might be included or excluded.

This actually reflects a curious practice in this book—although studded with citations of critical work and studies, some of them literary criticism or history, mostly the book does not explicate how these authorities and sources are being cited. Often, their use seems intended to support vague assertions that are not defended—but, in some cases the sources are at variance with the assertion at hand. Some of these unsupported assertions may be critical to the overall sweep of Cecire's tour through children's and adult fantasy in popular reception, via television spectaculars and series like *Game of Thrones*. It may be that in some cases Cecire means for the reader to find a contrary opinion by consulting a particular work, but mostly she seems to cite these works as not only inspiring her observation, but establishing facts of cultural and social science in support of such observations and assertions.

Cecire's discussions of Cooper and Wynne Jones can be fine, but they're really part of a discussion of Children's fantasy in the late Twentieth Century, and the discussion of Pullman—and even Rowling—is really opening discussion for the next century, and ties into the developments with new writers. Cecire totally ignores Cooper's work in the new century, and indeed, the discussions of the earlier work of these writers really need more context in that many things she asserts apply to other Twentieth Century writers. The roots of most of this writing in Children's Fantasy of the twentieth century don't owe that much to Tolkien, Lewis or their Oxford curriculum. They probably owe more to the broad Nineteenth and earlier Twentieth Century sweep of Children's Literature, and particularly fantasy. In the Twentieth Century the dominant influences are such classic writers as Nathaniel Hawthorne, Lewis Carroll, Rudyard Kipling, E. Nesbit, L. Frank Baum, and John Masefield, on up through such contemporaries of Lewis as

Philippa Pearce, Edward Eager, Walter R. Brooks, and contemporaries of Cooper (whose first novel was undertaken in homage to E. Nesbit, not Tolkien or even Malory) such as Alan Garner, Natalie Babbit, Jane Yolen, Maurice Sendak, Margaret Mahy, Patricia McKillip, Mollie Hunter, Jane Langton, Lloyd Alexander, Penelope Lively, Robert Westall, and William Mayne.

When Cecire attempts to broaden the strands of medievalist study to sweeping conclusions about children's fantasy, and more broadly fantasy in adult and non-literary forms, ignoring the development of the broader context leaves her critical approach incapable of considering developments in response to that broad stream which begin much earlier than the 'post-ironic,' antiracist new fictions of the 2020s. And these new developments deserve a much more careful and critical description than a mere listing of important new writers.

In the relatively few places where Cecire settles in to discuss the actual fiction of Oxford school writers, I very much appreciate her close attention to the text and sensitive discussion. For instance, her critical analysis of racism in the Narnia stories, or her appreciation of Pullman as a critic of 'his' Oxford school, but also her critical observation about Pullman's own, and Cooper's time-bound myopias, compared with the enlightened 2020s. Her discussions of Christmas scenes in Cooper and Crossley-Holland are penetrating and sensitive. At the same time, the overall implicit argument presented here seems to be that the Oxford school is responsible for bringing Christmas stories to the Twentieth century, brought forth from such medieval traditions as the story of *Sir Gawaine and the Green Knight*, taught by Tolkien and Lewis at Oxford.

Certainly, the tradition of Christmas stories was carried forward by the great Nineteenth Century writers in such a poem as Tennyson's "The Epic/Morte D'Arthur" as presented in the 1842 *English Idyls and Other Poems*, or Dickens's various Christmas stories, or many, many others. I think that Tolkien himself was following this tradition in part in his *Father Christmas Letters* (curiously, ignored by Cecire). These Oxford writers are not really introducing anything new, and if their "Medieval" focus is unique, Cecire has not explained how.

Most of Jones's work is similarly ignored in these discussions, perhaps because it's less 'medieval'? If so, though, the constant discussion of Rowling is curious, insofar as her 'medieval' antecedents are pretty slender in writing these school stories with more debt to a tradition that supersedes the Oxford school as well—C.S. Lewis barely dips his pen into this stream in *Prince Caspian* (1951) or T*he Silver Chair* (1953), and even he acknowledges E. Nesbit, directly in *The Magician's Nephew* (1955)—an actual twentieth century writer who anticipates nearly all Children's Fantasy in the century, providing some foundational ideas to Tolkien, as well, but who is not even in Cecire's index.

Perhaps if Cecire had omitted her discussion of the Oxford School, and focused instead on the overall response to implicit racism and imperialism and sexism in Children's Fantasy writers of the recent decades this book could have been a valuable addition to scholarship. Certainly, a critique of and response to issues in Tolkien's and Lewis's children's fantasy might be found in many writers, but she might broaden this to looking at responses to many other writers as well.

The writers she praises in her final chapters, including Gaiman, Junot Díaz, Catherynne Valente, and Nnedi Okorofor, are not responding only to her Oxford school writers, but to a much broader context. Omitting that dimension in the way that she does is confusing. Increasingly as the book progresses, Cecile also blurs the distinction between children's and adult fantasy. This is not explained or justified along the way, and the result is a very confused narrative.

It would truly be fine to see a discussion of fantasy and its development that includes children's literature, but if she is to specifically limit her discussion to children's fantasy—as implied in early chapters and even her book title, her extensive discussion of Lev Grossman's "Magicians" series seems out of bounds, as it clearly was written for adult readers. In fact, in her extended discussion of these novels, she never even acknowledges the curious aspect of writing an adult novel which largely responds to children's stories (also to Rowling's Harry Potter stories). Alternately, and despite suggesting that critique of Oxford School fantasy was largely absent earlier, she might have considered the 1960s work of Carol Kendall, whose three children's fantasy novels implicitly critique Tolkien in a remarkably thoughtful and acute narrative for children (see particularly, *The Whisper of Glocken* [1965]). A more careful and comprehensive discussion of "The Problem of Susan" (as a critical theme preceding the Neil Gaiman story by that title, which focuses on the issue) and other responses to the Narnia books would also be worthwhile, and it might give context to Cecire's insufficient (though worthwhile) discussions of work by Pullman and Grossman. Such a discussion would have to consider also Laura Miller's *Magician's Book* (2009), Gaiman's story, and books such as *The Light Between Worlds* (2018), by Laura E. Weymouth.

Jamie Williamson's *The Evolution of Modern Fantasy* (2015) discussed the often overlooked categories of verse fantasy, and children's fantasy—at least in the earlier overview. *A Modernist Fantasy*, by James Gifford (2018), includes some consideration of E. Nesbit's and Henry Treece's children's books, appropriate to his historical Modernist and Anarchist authors' circles.

Speaking of Henry Treece, and so many other writers who evoke and draw from the medieval period in their fantasy, Cecire also never explains how the treatment of this material from the Oxford School is different from that by other authors. If the comedic and ironic treatments of his subjects by T.H. White are antithetical to the Oxford School, how do irony and comedy in the Oxford writers' works differ? How are Susan Cooper's wonderful stories of a Boggart to be differentiated from William Mayne's Hob stories, or Katherine Briggs's *Hobberdy Dick* (2009)? (Briggs might be an interesting case with her history of study at Oxford both before and after the English curriculum was reformed, though I think her path was not through either English curriculum, and as a student in a woman's college in the 1920s, her exposure to the regular students and faculty may have been much more circumscribed than the later study there by Jones and Cooper. Still, she may have heard Lewis and Tolkien lecture when pursuing her doctorate in the 1950s). Mayne and Alan Garner and Mollie Hunter and L.M. Boston are certainly acclaimed as among the finest writers of children's fantasy; how are their treatments of medieval subjects *different* from the handling by Lewis or Crossley-Holland? Maybe even more significantly, how

is Rowling more a member of the 'Oxford School' than Garner, or Jane Yolen (with her earlier wizards' school story, *Wizard's Hall* [1991]).

Cecire offers belabored expositions of why Children's Fantasy is important (many pages are unnecessarily devoted to defending the genre from dismissals as insignificant), and citations of sociological and popular cultural books celebrating the 'Inner Child,' and the like in support— she might have cited C.S. Lewis and Eleanor Cameron and left it at that—certainly by the time of Stephen Prickett's *Victorian Fantasy*, in 1979, this was no longer necessary, and Butler also included a brief discussion that directly rebuts Cecire's suggestions. This approach undermines confidence that, apart from several cited critical histories, she is really all that familiar with a very broad genre, featuring hundreds of writers and thousands of texts in the Twentieth Century. Could this be the reason for such breath-takingly mistaken observations as, "Following the publication of *The Lord of the Rings* and The Chronicles of Narnia in the 1950s, the shape and texture of most fantasy landscapes remained remarkably similar until the start of the twenty-first century. . ." (12).

From this book, one really wonders if Cecire has even read most of Diana Wynne Jones's books, or the later work of Susan Cooper. Focusing on a few writers in her dissertation made sense, but I am far more confident that author Gregory Maguire is conversant with this genre in his 1990 dissertation, *Themes in English Language: Fantastic Literature for Children*, 1938-1988, which discusses hundreds of books intelligently, and in his fiction and criticism which displays a wide familiarity with critical approaches, literary history and appreciation of children's books. In so many ways, that is missing in this book. As far as the acceptance of fantasy in 'mainstream' or academic circles, discussions such as Stephen Prickett's (cited in her dissertation) or Ruth Berman's 1979 U of MN dissertation, *Suspending Disbelief*, have certainly traced some of this history of criticism in the 19th Century. By the 1950s, Children's Fantasy had certainly come into its own, with many awards and attention from critics in Education and Library Science. Admittedly, regular English departments would be slower to follow C.S. Lewis's call to consider children's literature alongside adult literature. But by 2020, I suspect that there are few English departments that don't routinely offer classes in the sub-field, and PhD dissertations are prepared on many children's writers.

Then again, in a book cheerleading for popular culture, and celebrating Rowling and *Game of Thrones* and other television and cultural events, perhaps Children's Fantasy Literature is no more than a mounting block, beyond which Cecire hopes to leap to some apotheosis of a television Olympic spectacular. I did appreciate the spotlight on the new work being done that Cecire praises in her final chapters, and which is well worth the attention. Yet, it seems little related to the two hundred pages that have gone before, and in the end, apart from Junot Díaz—again, not really writing for children—most of these writers receive little more than appreciative mention. An exploration of the achievements of these books would be a far more worthwhile 350 pages, and Cecire demonstrates in some passages that she can capably and insightfully illumine such texts, and in consistently smooth and often sparkling prose.

FICTION REVIEWS

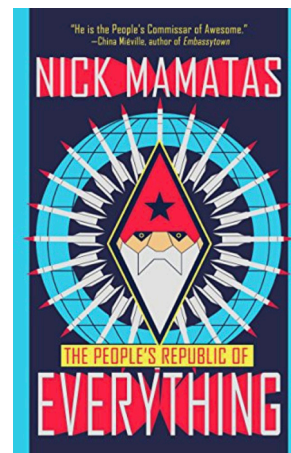# Review of *The People's Republic of Everything*

Sébastien Doubinsky

Mamatas, Nick. *The People's Republic of Everything.* Tachyon
Publications, 2018.

Nick Mamatas (born 1972) is an award-nominated American
fantasy, horror and speculative fiction and non-fiction writer, known
for his anarchist political commitment. His most well-know works are
the novels *Move Under Ground* (2005), *I am Providence* (2016), *Second
Shooter* (2021) and his non-fiction book, *Starve Better: Surviving the
Endless Horror of the Writing Life* (2011).

The People's Republic of Everything is his fourth short stories
collection. It is comprised of 14 short stories and *Under My Roof*, a
novella-length story. It draws upon multiple genres, from political
steampunk ("Arbeitskraft") to science fiction ("Walking with a Ghost"),
social-realism ("North Shore Friday") and dystopian fiction ("Under My
Roof"). Although there is no real narrative nor thematic unity in the
volume, Mamatas's peculiar irony and political views can be seen as the red thread connecting
the stories.

We can, however, loosely regroup them under three main categories: political, realistic and
poetic. The works making up the first of these categories are "Arbeitskraft", "The People's Republic
of Everything," "The Glottal Stop," "We Never Sleep," and "Under My Roof." Under the banner
of "realistic" are "Tom Silex, Spirit Smasher," "The Phylactery," "North Shore Friday," "A Howling
Dog," and "Lab Rat". Finally, "Walking with a Ghost," "The Great Armored Train," "Slice of Life,"
"The Spook School," and "The Dreamer of the Day" form the poetic corpus.

The stories that are contained in the political category perfectly illustrate Nick Mamatas's
anarchistic views. "Arbeitsskraft," for example, imagines Engels, Marx's friend and co-author, as a
Frankenstein-inspired steampunk character set on creating a collective, revolutionary mind based
on dialectal materialism with the help of cyborg-like match girls. In the same manner, "We Never
Sleep" features Rudolf Diesel, the inventor of the fuel bearing his name, as a crazy scientist living
in an underground laboratory in a parallel world setting and creating a brand new ideology with
the help of a pulp writer. In these stories, Mamatas uses his anarchist position to make fun of and
criticize both capitalism's and communism's positivist ideology, putting them back-to-back in their
dangerous delusion. With the novella "Under My Roof", Mamatas turns to a more Pynchonesque
or Vonnegutian style of story, in which family man Daniel Weinberg builds a nuclear weapon in
his basement with the help of his son and secedes from the United States by founding the free state

of "Weinbergia." Beyond the wacky humoristic narration, Mamatas tackles the notions of nation, freedom, and domestic politics in a way reminiscent of Hunter S. Thompson's political writings.

The realistic stories uncover a lesser-known and more personal aspect of Mamatas's narratives. Although they more or less belong to the noir, speculative fiction or weird horror genres, they stand out as being built on more personal aspects of Mamatas's life. It is an interesting choice of works and it pushes the collection towards a fictional self-portrait of the author that we could definitely link with some Philip K. Dick's works. "The Phylactery," for instance, is based on Greek traditions and family anecdotes before moving into specific territory. It also gives the traditional Mamatas reader or a newcomer insight into how his fiction can be built on personal references and how it is transmogrified in the stories. Obvious non-genre references that come to mind are Jack Kerouac's *Dr. Sax*, which is a pulp horror tale combined with childhood memories told in stream-of-consciousness style, or William S. Burroughs's series of novels, which blend first-hand experiences and nightmarish visions. In that way, Mamatas seems to be continuing the Beat tradition and pointing at creative possibilities in their wake, an echo of what he did with his 2005 Beat and Cosmic Horror novel, *Move Under Ground*.

Finally, we come to a set of stories that moves away from classical genre definitions and that could fall into the "poetic" field in the largest sense possible. In "Walking with a Ghost", the main character, Melanie, creates a virtual version of Lovecraft, which has become sentient. By blending the figure of the founder of cosmic horror into a speculative fiction A. I. narrative through anecdotes linked to Melanie's life, Mamatas displaces the traditional tropes of horror and future technology to the periphery of the story, and chooses to focus instead on the strange relationship between his main character and Lovecraft, creating a strangely poetic moment. The same can be said of "The Great Armored Train", in which Leon Trotsky is confronted by a supernatural phenomenon during the 1917 Russian Revolution, more precisely the ability of a young woman to transform into a lethal owl. Here, by leaving the truth undecided (is the transformation real, or, as Trotsky is convinced, just an illusion?), Mamatas manages to suspend the reader's disbelief, which is one of the essences of poetry. Once again, Mamatas proves his reluctance as a writer to be easily categorized and the fact that a genre cannot be reduced to a list of tropes and styles.

If *The People's Republic of Everything* is not a truly coherent collection, it will nonetheless be of interest to the classic Mamatas readers precisely because of its wide range of styles and stories and for any reader because of the multiple influences that one can find within or behind their constructions. It also questions many definitions of genres (from horror to speculative fiction, and even steampunk, for that matter), as it chooses to veer towards the literary instead of the usual plots and structures. Yevgueny Zamyatin, Karel Čapek, Kurt Vonnegut, Jack Kerouac and William Burroughs are more obvious references than, say, Michael Moorcock, H.P. Lovecraft, Philip K. Dick and Vernor Vinge. *The People's Republic of Everything* is therefore a bit of a side-track in Nick Mamatas' works, but interesting precisely because of its undefinable and undefining nature.

Seb Doubinsky is a bilingual French dystopian writer and poet. He is the author of the *City-States Cycle*, comprising, among others, *The Babylonian Trilogy, The Song Of Synth*, *Missing Signal*, *The Invisible*, and *Paperclip*. *Missing Signal,* published by Meerkat Press, won the Bronze Foreword Reviews Award in the Best Science-Fiction Novel category in 2018. He lives in Denmark with his family and teaches literature, history and culture in the French department of Aarhus University.

Review of *"The Conquest of Gola" and Other Stories by Leslie F. Stone*

Sue Smith

Weinbaum, Batya, editor. *"The Conquest of Gola": and Other Stories by Leslie F. Stone.* JustFiction, 2021.

In her edition of *"The Conquest of Gola" and Other Stories*, Batya Weinbaum convincingly argues for a closer critical evaluation of the work of Leslie F. Stone, a Jewish-American woman author who wrote during science fiction's pulp and golden ages. In brief, Weinbaum's intent is to highlight Stone's contributions to science fiction written from a Jewish female perspective and understood from within the context of 1930s America. According to Weinbaum, the value of exploring Stone's work in this period is to acknowledge and appreciate her unspoken political view and desire for a more inclusive world. For Weinbaum, Stone's political outlook can be found in her science fiction work in a subtext of race and gender that presents a complex negotiation between insider-outsider identities vying for acceptance and ultimately, assimilation. This recurring theme in Stone's work, according to Weinbaum, presents the plight of the Jewish immigrant in alien form at a time when Jews were persecuted and viewed with suspicion in America. As Weinbaum argues, sensitive to the Jewish predicament, the key theme in Stone's stories is the Jewish desire for Americanization, a goal pursued by both first- and second-generation Jews.
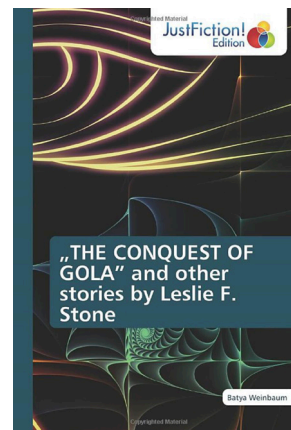
To give an overview of the collection, the edition begins with a preface, an introduction and five main stories, which are bookended by two short pieces of writing. The first is titled "Letters of the Twenty Fourth Century" (1929) and the second is the appendix, which is titled, "Day of the Pulps" (1997). To give a brief overview of these works, "Letters of the Twenty Fourth Century" features a male narrator who produces an up-beat letter to a friend about life in a bright new technological future. "Day of the Pulps" is Stone herself addressing a contemporary readership in 1997. In this address, Stone provides commentary about her writing career during the 1930s alongside her expressed desire to restart her career in later years. In a more sombre tone, Stone also includes in her discussion the reason for exiting science fiction at the end of World War II. As Weinbaum points out in her comment on the final piece, it was Stone's Jewish beliefs in Kaballahism, in which words are believed to give life to what they describe, that brought Stone to the idea that it was her writing of science fiction that contributed to America's decision to use nuclear weapons to end the conflict with Japan.

Situated between Stone's initial optimism for the future and final dismay at the technological turn in WWII are the five main stories that showcase her utopian ideas of acceptance and the assimilation of diverse populations. At the start of each story, there is Weinbaum's supporting explanation of cultural trends in science fiction alongside the social and historical events at the time, which help to foreground the relevance of Stone's work. To sum up briefly: the five main stories are in chronological order and map out Stone's science fiction that covers common themes of evolution, eugenics, sex, and race by using the trope of the human-alien encounter. In "Men with Wings" (1929) and "Women with Wings" (1930), two stories that focus on genetic engineering and the evolution of the human species, humans have progressed by evolving and developing the ability to fly. To ensure their survival, social progress depends on cooperation between the sexes by accepting human and alien alike in order to create a single species of winged human founded on a mutual respect for species diversity and racial difference. In contrast, "The Conquest of Gola" (1931) presents a battle-of-the-sexes scenario as an all-female society fights off a male invasion. "The Conquest of Gola" explores the limitations placed on women by an American patriarchal society as formidable female aliens refuse to be assimilated by their male counterparts. Instead, they, as a species, remain intact, and with their knowledge of science, keep their power and independence. Finally, in "The Fall of Mercury" (1935) and "The Human Pets on Mars" (1936), Stone turns to the tale of the space pioneer as humans from Earth meet aliens on Mercury and Mars. Again, it is the human-alien that Weinbaum argues reflects anxiety felt at the time over the Jewish presence in America. While the key idea in these stories is to promote similarities between species in order to establish a common ground in which to gain acceptance and find agreement, it is, as in "The Fall of Mercury," the niggling persistence of the "foreign body" that threatens the stability of identity in these opposing societies.

Weinbaum's academic quest to collect Stone's writing into a single volume is motivated by a desire to let the voice of a Jewish-American woman writer be heard. Indeed, Weinbaum's passion and choice to focus on Stone is a worthy project offering insight into one woman's response to the precarity of gender and race between the two World Wars. Although Weinbaum makes it clear that Stone often wrote from the perspective of a male character, Weinbaum's insight into cultural trends in science fiction, which she thoughtfully interweaves into the social and historical events of the time, provides a rich context within which to read Stone's work from a Jewish feminist perspective.

Sue Smith has an interest in feminist science fiction with a focus on cyborgs, disability and gender. She has published articles on disability and cyborg fiction in *FEMSPEC* (2010), David Bolt's edited book, *Changing Social Attitudes Towards Disability* (2014), *BMJ: Medical Humanities* (2016), *Journal of Literary and Cultural Disabilities Studies* (2017-2020); *Journal of Transcultural Psychiatry* (2020); and she has provided book reviews for a range of journals.

MEDIA REVIEWS

Image by the James Webb Space Telescope

MEDIA REVIEWS

Moon Knight

Jeremy Brett

Slater, Jeremy, creator. *Moon Knight.* Marvel Studios, 2022.

It is interesting to watch the Marvel Cinematic Universe begin to explore the wider cosmologies that undergird the franchise's framework. Generally speaking, it wasn't until the introduction of Dr. Stephen Strange and Dormammu's Mirror Dimension in 2016 and then T'Challa's visions of Wakanda's Ancestral Plane in *Black Panther* (2018) that audiences started seeing how the MCU consists of overlapping dimensions populated by what we would refer to as gods, magic-users, and vast alien entities, combining into a boundless cosmology humans experience through radical shifts in reality. The most intriguing example of the MCU's cosmological perspective and its relationship to human existence comes with the Disney+ series *Moon Knight*. The series is also a fascinating exploration of the ways in which humans, emotionally broken and scattered, construct their own identities and realities as crucial survival strategies. *Moon Knight*'s central conceit, in fact, involves the physical and psychological impact of clashing perceptions of reality—on an intimate personal level as well as a multidimensional universal one.
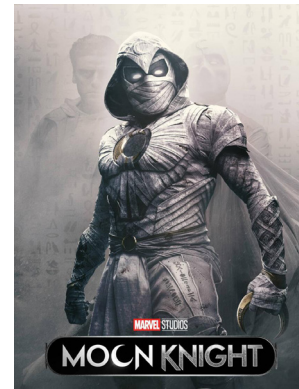
Moon Knight is fascinating in part because of its cosmological infusion with elements of Egyptian mythology that in the MCU form an actual dimensional plane of reality. The Ennead are the Egyptian pantheon, and include the moon god Khonshu. Khonshu has adopted American mercenary Marc Spector (Oscar Isaac) as his avatar and dispenser of justice—his Moon Knight. Overtly, the series pits Spector/Khonshu against cult leader Arthur Harrow (Ethan Hawke): Harrow seeks to revive the goddess Ammit, who balances a person's virtues against their sins and directs their posthumous fate accordingly. However, a far deeper conflict is at work, giving the series a much more complex and profound dramatic richness. The show features another chief protagonist, Steven Grant (also Isaac), a humble museum gift shop employee. Before too long, we see Steven and Marc are separate personalities sharing Marc's body at different moments. Radically different personalities, in fact—Steven is bumbling and nonviolent, Marc effortlessly physical and a skilled fighter. They even appear as Moon Knight differently - Marc as the classic comic book image of Moon Knight (a caped, cloaked Batman-like figure) while Steven is dapper in a snow-white suit.

The MCU's new emphasis on structural cosmic complexity is skillfully mirrored in the series' dramatic demonstration of human psychological complexity. It is interesting to note how Steven and Marc both work at self-definition through the establishment of distinct identities—

particularly Steven, who until the series' conclusion strenuously defines himself in opposition to Marc. Convinced of the truth of his own values and personal history, Steven insists on his existence as an independent being with autonomy. His experiences may resonate with viewers conscious of the personal and psychological importance of controlling and defining their own identities and the ways in which they present themselves to the world at large. Moon Knight may not become an icon for gender identity, but his/their struggle with their own sense of being will be familiar to those needing such an icon.

On a grander level, the struggle for the world plays out on two distinct levels in the series. The last episode makes this explicitly visible in the series' final fight, where Ammit and Khonshu battle each other unseen on one plane of existence while Marc/Steven and Marc's wife Layla (May Calamawy) fight Harrow and his devotees in the "real" physical streets of Cairo. It is a concrete expression of the ways in which reality is perceived differently at different moments by different people. On an emotional level, however, this struggle for a fair and workable reality is much more poignant in reference to Marc's character evolution. We find that Marc, as a child, suffered grievous emotional and physical abuse at the hands of his unbalanced mother, who blamed Marc for the death of his younger brother. The traumatized Marc created Steven as a psychological shield to insulate the best parts of himself from his mother's abuse. The intimate battle at the series' heart - the work that Marc and Steven do to, if not reunite, then reconcile themselves and their realities to one another—is what gives *Moon Knight* its emotional complexity. Indeed, this struggle is made most manifest when, during the hallucinatory journey via boat towards the Duat (the afterlife), Steven sacrifices himself to save Marc, leading Marc towards the realization that the two need each other to be whole, that each gives to and supports the other in ways that make them into a full human being together. Marc confesses to Steven, frozen and dead outside the Gates of Osiris, "You are the only superpower I ever had." Shared realities can give strength and endurance where a single reality cannot do the job.

Moon Knight complicates the issue of perceiving reality by presenting Steven and Marc as holding drastically opposing emotions, worldviews, and life experiences. Which of their realities is "true" if both individuals are experiencing vastly different lives? *Moon Knight* asks its viewers to question our relationships to the world around us and the complicated connection between mind and body. Of course, that last connection has long been a part of humanity's relationship to its various conceptions of the divine—when we touch the metaphysical, how much of our experience is tangible and how much an intangible projection of our inner selves? As the series progresses, we see an ongoing deepening of the levels of existence through which humanity moves day-to-day, as well as continuing evidence of the MCU's new focus on the relationship between humans and the divine, or at least the multidimensional beings identifying as "divine." (I appreciate, speaking of this, the reveal that Marc is Jewish—the first identified Jewish superhero in the MCU.)

There are many good things about *Moon Knight*: Isaac's demonstration of his skill at physical and verbal comedy as well as dramatic acting; the welcome humor of any scene with hippo-headed Tawaret; Hawke's soft-spoken, nurturing villain; creepy, well-shot set pieces; and the clear evidence

that the MCU can tell smaller, more self-contained stories without any notable reference to the wider franchise. But what really makes Moon Knight stand out is its willingness to grapple with the complexities of human identity beyond the usual run of superhero media, and the window the series opens into the expanding divine cosmologies that give new depth to the MCU.

Jeremy Brett is an Associate Professor at Cushing Memorial Library & Archives, where he is both Processing Archivist and the Curator of the Science Fiction & Fantasy Research Collection. He has also worked at the University of Iowa, the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, the National Archives and Records Administration-Pacific Region, and the Wisconsin Historical Society. He received his MLS and his MA in History from the University of Maryland – College Park in 1999. His professional interests include science fiction, fan studies, and the intersection of libraries and social justice.