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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 Antonios Ntoumas

Winter 2023

Ian Campbell

I was going to use ChatGPT to write this letter and see whether anyone could tell, but it seemed unethical, and at any rate the site is down. But we should all be very, very worried about the advent of nearly-human-quality AI, whether it be in visual art or text. I have many friends who are professional illustrators: all of them are very worried about how AI is essentially going to price them out of their careers, at least once it manages to get human hands right.

The nature of higher education is going to change profoundly over the next few years: ChatGPT writes plausible-sounding garbage, but so do most students, even many who are actually trying. More elite institutions will find ways to ensure that students' writing is their own, while cash-strapped state institutions and the small colleges soon to be entirely wiped out by the demographic crash that is the legacy of the 2008 financial crisis will bow to the perceived inevitable and continue to credential students for fear of losing still more funding.

SF gives us plenty of examples with which to frame these developments: if you're reading this journal, you've no doubt already thought of several examples. AI in SF is often transcendent, often malevolent, sometimes benevolent as in the Culture novels. Yet I cannot think of a widely-known example where AI is quite so banal as in our world today. Our AI is neither transcendent nor benevolent it's something like a wage slave like nearly all of us, played off against human workers for an ever-shrinking slice of pie while the rest is fed to Wall Street. You may expect all those outsourced customer-service jobs to be done by AI any moment now. We can all hope that AI will acquire sentience, if only in that it might go on strike.

This issue of the *SFRA Review* contains a number of papers from the London SF Research Conference, plus a paper relating to our symposium on masculinity, in addition to our usual palette of reviews of non-fiction, fiction and media. We also have two calls for papers: one for a symposium here on adaptations of SF, and another that is my personal CFP for an edited volume. If you are working on an edited volume about SF and you want to publish it here, we will be happy to do so: please just contact us.

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 Lenka Novotná

From the President

Hugh O'Connell

It's hard to believe that I'm writing my first SFRA President's column. I attended my first SFRA conference in 2015 at Stony Brook. It alternately seems like yesterday and a lifetime ago. It was a career-changing experience; the people I met there became mentors, collaborators, and friends, and I finally understood what others meant when they talked about their "academic communities." Over the last couple of years, the SFRA's executive board have been making changes both large and small to make sure that this sort of experience is the norm for all our members. I'm looking forward to serving as President and continuing this work with them.

Speaking of service, I want to extend my heartfelt thanks to our outgoing E-Board members: Sean Guynes, Keren Omry, and Gerry Canavan. Along with serving as Secretary from 2020-2022, Sean was editor of the *SFRA Review* from 2018-21 and helped institute many of its innovative transformations. Keren has served in a great number of roles, most recently as Immediate Past President, providing institutional memory, continuity, and advise to the Executive Board, and before that as President, and before that cycling through just about every award committee. Seriously, many, many thanks, Keren! Finally, I want to acknowledge our outgoing President, Gerry Canavan, who had the unenviable task of steering the SFRA through one of its most tumultuous periods: dealing with the Covid-19 pandemic, cancelled conferences, and the move to online and hybrid conferences, alongside all the other usual tasks. Before he escapes entirely, he'll be serving as the Immediate Past President for the next three years (just when he thought he was out… we pull him back in!).

Keeping the ball rolling, I'd like to thank our continuing E-Board members, Ida Yoshinaga (VP), Tim Murphy (Treasurer), Thomas Connolly (Webmaster), and Aisha Matthews (Conference Committee), as well as welcome our incoming members, Sarah Lohmann (Secretary), and our first ever At-Large members, Helane Androne and Gabriela Alejandra Lee. And for those out there who would like to get more involved with the SFRA and add their names to this illustrious list of volunteers, watch out for a forthcoming call for the new Outreach officer position.

Looking ahead, we're all very excited for the upcoming "Disrupted Imaginations" joint SFRA and German Association for Research in the Fantastic (GfF) conference in Dresden, Germany (August 15-19, 2023). The CFP is currently circulating and can be found on the SFRA website. This is a great opportunity for the SFRA to continue building upon its international outreach efforts and to forge greater ties with the GfF. As a reminder, SFRA members are eligible to apply for travel grants of up to $500.

Finally, we know that there have been a couple of issues with the new website. We are working on getting these resolved, and we thank you for your patience as we continue down the WordPress rabbit hole. In the meantime, if you encounter any problems, please continue to reach out to us.

From the Vice President

Ida Yoshinaga

The committee to select our Support a New Scholar Award for 2023-2024, including past winner Guangzhao Lyu, former SFRA President Keren Omry, and myself, was delighted by the quality of submissions received for the Track A (graduate student) category by the November 1, 2022, deadline.

Compared to earlier in the award's history, we believe that recent efforts we've made to internationalize and diversify the Science Fiction Research Association are showing in the remarkable quality, range, and multifaceted nature of the applicants. Immaterial labor in our field is also transforming, as the academic job market grows more competitive and casualized… thus generating new breeds of scholars marked by versatility, heightened inter-disciplinarity, and multiple skill sets ranging from creative (print-literary) writing to translation to digital and interactive arts.

Thus we chose to award not one, but three, new scholars this time around—and the SFRA Executive Committee agreed. While the whole cohort of applicants were extremely exciting, we found the following selectees especially impressive.

First, we were floored by the application of University of Warwick Ph.D. student Nora Castle, whose leadership in the urgent, pandemic-era-salient field of food futures, whose strong publication record as author/co-author and editor/co-editor of several upcoming food-and-environmental-humanities collections, which are evolving this growing discourse forward, and whose recent service to the SFRA, as well as sustained participation in networks of interesting new SFF scholars, showcased Castle as what we'd consider a promising "traditional," albeit clearly interdisciplinary and visionary, scholar.

Second, representing the increasingly popular, multiple-career pathway--especially among BIPOC, female, non-Western, and/or LGBTQIA+ researchers--we were amazed by the substantial global-SF contributions of University of California, Riverside, Ph.D. student Yilun Fan, who in addition to presenting at many scholarly meetings and producing numerous academic articles and essays on Chinese and comparative (i.e., Latinx and Chinese) speculative fiction, also has published several of her own award-winning creative works and her English-to-Chinese translations of leading SFF scholars' articles so as to bring Western genre theory (such as Mark Bould's analysis of Afrofuturism) to global reading audiences.

Finally, as a futuristic signal of where SF studies may be heading in terms of its application to digital-media platforms and Suvinian theory-in-practice, we were moved by the innovative hybrid scholarship-blended-with-creative work of Georgia Institute of Technology Ph.D. student Terra Mae Gasque, whose digital gaming research and design/coding practice explores the intersection of queerness, cognition, and player failure. Gasque has written for *SFRA Review* and attended our annual meeting, as well as published in SF scholarly collections; her dissertation develops, discusses, and creates a virtual-reality game aimed at rethinking the very foundations of digital ludic design through embedding queer failure into its ethical inquiries.

The selectees represent the next generation of SF thinkers who embrace--to adapt a phrase from one applicant--SF as a mode. They've moved us away from mid-twentieth-century escapist notions of the genre as a U.S. pulp-literary hobby and towards global, multidimensional, active SF expression through practice and production.

Congratulations, Nora, Yilun, and Terra!

Ida Yoshinaga, VP

Image by Phillipp Kleindienst

Adaptations in SF

The Editorial Collective

Adaptations have taken over movie theaters and streaming services in recent years: *The Wandering Earth* and *The Peripheral* were based on bestselling books, and more recently, *The Last of Us* was first a video game. The *SFRA Review* is interested in short papers addressing SF adaptations in all its manifestations: literature, film, other media, games. Questions for discussion might include:

- Why are adaptations so prevalent in today's media landscape?
- What makes an adaptation good or bad?
- How has digital media altered the production and reception of adaptations? What is the relation of adaptations to other forms of transmedia?
- How can they give us a different perspective on the present, or subvert the source's original message? What are the ethical implications of adapting older works?
- How have adaptations changed over the years?
- What is being adapted? What does this choice say about canonical—or previously under-recognized—texts?

Papers should be from 3000-5000 words in length, with references in MLA style and few if any discursive footnotes. Our Style Guide should be consulted and adhered to for all submissions. All contents of *SFRA Review* are published open access under a CC-BY-NC-ND 4.0 license. Authors retain copyright and may reuse their work as they see fit. 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 Andrea Blatz (andreablatz13@gmail.com) with the subject line *SFRA Adaptations* and a brief description of your paper by **01 March 2022**. Any other queries should be sent to this address, as well, with the same subject line. Complete drafts are due **15 May 2023**. Edits will be due **01 July 2023**. Papers will be published in the Summer 2023 issue (53.3) on **01 August 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.

CALLS FOR PAPERS

Science Fiction in Translation, vol. 2

Ian Campbell

This edited volume is under consideration to be published by Palgrave Macmillan as part of its Studies in Global Science Fiction series. It is intended to build upon *Science Fiction in Translation*, published by Palgrave in 2021: to engage with works of SF in a similar manner as the essays in that volume do. Potential contributors are encouraged to peruse that volume and its introduction before submitting their proposed essays. That first volume was recently longlisted for the annual non-fiction award by the British Science Fiction Association; this is a clear indication that there is a need and desire for further exploration of SF in translation.

Potential contributors should be aware that the primary concern of this volume is to deepen the level of engagement with the theory and practice of translation. In selecting contributions, priority will be given to chapters that go into depth on the work of influential theorists, the stated practices of the translator(s) and how these theories are exemplified and/or deconstructed by the published translation. We are interested in chapters on SF in translation to and from any language; in the event that we are forced to reject submissions due to volume, priority will be given to languages and cultures less well represented in the first volume. We are also enthusiastic about papers by graduate students, early-career scholars, alt-ac scholars and others not traditionally widely represented in edited volumes by major publishers. This in no way means that papers by experienced experts in a given subfield will not be accepted.

This volume is intended to explore SF in translation, in both senses of the phrase: the translation of works of SF from one language to another, and the translation of SF tropes into cultures outside the metropolitan West. In recent decades, scholars of SF have seen near-exponential growth both in the production of SF in regions and languages where it hitherto had little or no presence, and also in the translation of works of SF from other languages into English. This volume will focus on the process of translation and its implications. What is the state of translation into English, and how representative is the body of translated work of SF from the source language/culture? What social, political and economic choices are made in choosing a work to translate? What linguistic and cultural choices are made in translating the work? How are the tropes of SF, whether they be (e.g.) subgenres such as space opera, the extrapolation of technological progress or sociopolitical critiques such as cognitive estrangement, portrayed in a work of SF from a culture where advanced science and technology are (or were) foreign imports? To what extent does the choice of works or tropes reflect or reify a statement or critique? To what extent does the process of translation (mis)represent the culture or language whence it comes? To what extent does SF manifest differently in other cultures or languages, and to what extent does translating the text into English elide or conceal these differences? What happens when works of SF originally published in English are translated into other cultures or languages? How do

the terms, tropes and functions of SF manifest in those cultures and languages and how are they altered by the process of translation?

Since antiquity, ideas of what constitutes "good" translation have oscillated between literal fidelity to the source text and a focus on rendering its sense and style into the target language, with the latter approach usually dominant. Cicero said in 46 BCE that he translated Greek into Latin "as an orator", expressing figures of thought in language that conforms to his readers' usage; St. Jerome, four centuries later, translated the Septuagint "not word for word, but sense for sense". For Walter Benjamin, a hundred years ago, translation has a quasi-mystical effect: it gives to a work an "afterlife" by expanding its reach in time and space. He also argues that the task of the translator is to release in their own language that "pure language which is under the spell of another, to liberate the language imprisoned in a work" when re-creating the work anew in the target language.

Scholars of the then-new discipline of translation studies began to develop more complex and rigorous theories of translation in the second half of the twentieth century. In the same period, philosophers and literary theorists deconstructed the hierarchical separation of referent and sign; the sort of transcendence Benjamin seeks has become next to impossible. Translation studies examines the sociocultural factors that exist in parallel with language: dialect, voice, metaphor, cognition, as well as visual and ideological phenomena are now perceived as integral to the process of translating from one language to another. Contemporary theories and practices of translation, at least in the West, generally also address the ideological and economic conditions that pertain to the selection and promotion of work for translation: texts given an "afterlife" in English may not fully represent texts from the source language and culture. These developments are paralleled by the increasing application of cultural materialism, feminist and gender studies theory and postcolonial theory to translation and translation studies. Cicero's conception of a fluent translation that sounds as if it were written in the target language is a matter of contention for twenty-first century theorists, with some arguing that such a paradigm inevitably domesticates texts and minimizes cultural differences. This is especially true for translations of literature, given the outsized role of literature in defining and reifying culture.

It should be clearly noted that this volume will have an inclusive perspective on "translation": it would be within its purview to submit a paper that discusses works of (e.g.) subsaharan African SF originally published in English and the representativeness of these works of SF in their original culture. Such analysis would be especially valuable if the work discussed was subsequently republished for an Anglo-American audience. Papers discussing similar phenomena in (e.g.) works published in French in former French colonies will also be welcomed, as would papers on works on SF from an Indigenous culture, even were the works originally published in English.

Abstracts submitted in response to this call for papers should address at least one of the following: 1) the translation of works of Anglo-American SF into the target language and culture; 2) the manifestation of the tropes of SF in works composed in the target language and culture; 3) the translation of works of SF from the target language and culture into English for a primarily

Anglo-American audience. How does the sort of translation St. Jerome or Cicero would approve of make fundamental changes in a work, and what are the effects of these changes? Alternatively, what are the effects of an English translation that retains (some of) the foreignness of the source text? How do tropes of SF manifest in the target culture and language, and what are the effects of this?

Each paper is required to provide a brief overview of what has been translated from the work's source language/culture into English and to evaluate the representativeness of this body of work. It is important for scholars who do not speak the source language to understand the extent to which the selection of works translated into English represents SF from that language/culture. Information on sf translated from other languages into the work's source language, if it is other than English, would also be of interest.

The ideal paper will do all or most of the following:

- examine at least one work available in English or in English translation
- include scholarship in the original language on the work and/or on SF: what do scholars in the source language/culture think of SF or of the work's place in local discourse?
- relate the work to another text from that language or culture, whether available in English translation or not
- engage with theories of translation studies
- engage with the approach the translators take in their own writings about translation
- perform a close reading of its primary text, involving its original language, in such a manner as to make clear to those who do not know that language how the source text differs from its English translation
- use this close reading as support for an argument on how the translated text (mis) represents the source text or the culture whence it comes
- address the question of power or authority that results from the choice of the work(s) as worthy of translation

These characteristics should serve as guidelines, not demands. Finished chapters should be from 7,000-10,000 words in length, including notes and bibliography. Please avoid discursive footnotes. Please use endnotes rather than footnotes; please do not use the word processor's feature that automatically creates notes; rather, manually make footnote numbers into superscripts and add the notes at the end of the document. Please refer to this page for submission guidelines, including formatting (scroll down to #5 under Manuscript Guidelines).

Please submit a short CV, a chapter abstract of no more than 300 words, and a one-paragraph bio to Ian Campbell (icampbell@gsu.edu) no later than 01 April 2023. Finished chapters will be due no earlier than 01 August 2023; the volume will be published in early 2024.

Image by Allan Lau

The SF in Translation Universe #16

Rachel Cordasco

It's definitely been a year, and there's a lot to catch up on here in the SFT Universe. Let's hope that 2023 brings us all peace, joy, and a lot more SFT! For this column, I'd like to do something different—instead of highlighting current and upcoming SFT in roughly chronological order, I intend to tell you about *everything* SFT (that I know of, of course!) that's come out between June and December of 2022. Furthermore, I will present the texts according to their format (anthologies, novels, etc.), since that order helps us see some interesting patterns in SFT from this past year. Let's do this thing!

Anthologies consistently make up the smallest percentage of SFT each year, but during the last half of 2022, we had five (!) anthologies. Perhaps this means that readers are demanding more varied stories from a diverse array of authors, and from many different places. Thanks to the untiring editor and author Francesco Verso, Anglophone readers can get their hands on two very different and important anthologies: *Kalicalypse: Subcontinental Science Fiction* (co-edited with Tarun K. Saint and Bodhisattva Chattopadhyay, Future Fiction) and Freetaly: Italian Science Fiction (Future Fiction). I include *Kalicalypse* here, despite the fact that most of the stories were originally written in English, because the anthology is a dual-language edition (English and Italian) and two of the stories were translated from the Bengali. These excellent texts come from Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and India. *Freetaly* is a landmark book in the SFT world because it is the first collection of Italian science fiction published in English. Among the many talented authors included are Linda De Santi, Alessandro Vietti, Verso himself, Clelia Farris, and Nicoletta Vallorani (whose story "The Catalog of Virgins" was translated by yours truly and originally published in *Clarkesworld Magazine*).

Anthologies of Chinese and Kurdish speculative fiction are also out now from Clarkesworld Books and Comma Press, respectively. *New Voices in Chinese Science Fiction* continues Neil Clarke's efforts to make Chinese SFT mainstream in the Anglosphere. The stories included have never before been published in English. Comma Press's *Kurdistan +100: Stories from a Future State* is the publisher's latest collection of stories from countries where authors have been asked to imagine their collective future. Here, Kurdish writers are asked to create worlds located in 2046—a century after the short-lived independent Kurdish Republic of Mahabad. This anthology won the PEN Translates Award for 2021.

Last, but certainly not least, is the massive and fascinating Best of World SF 2 (Head of Zeus), edited by powerhouse author, editor, and translator Lavie Tidhar. This anthology follows his five-volume Apex Book of World SF series and the Best of World SF volume, and includes stories from Bolivia, Mexico, the Czech Republic, Italy, and everywhere in between. Readers will recognize

names like Clelia Farris, Julie Novakova, Bo-Young Kim, K. A. Teryna, and many more. And did I mention that this book is really big? The more wonderful things to read, my dear!

If you're more of a novel kind of reader, you're in luck. 2022 brought us not only the latest Fresán book but new texts by Fresán's fellow Argentine author César Aira, Polish author Andrzej Sapkowski, and (squeals excitedly) a trilogy by Israeli writer Shimon Adaf. Fresán's *The Remembered Part* (tr. Will Vanderhyden, Open Letter) brings to a close a monumental trilogy about literary creation, narration, metatextuality, and memory. If you haven't read Fresán, that's something you need to rectify right now. And speaking of metatextuality...Aira's *The Famous Magician* (tr. Chris Andrews, New Directions) also concerns itself with the writer's craft, though here it is mixed up with a (potential) magician and the protagonist-writer's uncertainty about whether or not his publisher and even his wife are also magicians.

Those looking for epic fantasy should look no further than Book 3 of Andrzej Sapkowski's Hussite Trilogy, *Light Perpetual* (tr. David French, Orbit). Here the protagonist Reynevan must continue to run from his enemies (both human and mystical) and exchange his tools of healing and peace for those of a dangerous spy. Shimon Adaf's sprawling and multilayered *Lost Detective Trilogy* (tr. Yardenne Greenspan, Picador) similarly employs magic, but also other subgenres: detective, murdery mystery, and science fiction to tell a complicated yet electric story. While it begins with the mysterious murder of troubled rock singer Dalia Shushan, it very quickly dives into Israeli society and politics, the perpetual ghost of the Holocaust, and a horrifying experiment that opened doors to another world. If you've never read Adaf, you should—you'll thank me (my email address is below).

The collections from the second half of 2022 are as diverse as they are alluring. From the Japanese we get *3 Streets* by Yoko Tawada (tr. Margaret Mitsutani, New Directions), where ghosts freely mingle with humans in health food stores and on the street; from Uruguay, we have Horacio Quiroga's *Beyond* (tr. Elisa Taber, Sublunary Editions), with stories that hover between two worlds: the living and dead, the sane and insane, and civilization and nature. Swedish author Anders Fager brings us *Swedish Cults* (tr. Henning Koch and Ian Lemke, Valancourt Books), where the dark and monstrous emerge (bloody sacrifices in the woods, mysterious illnesses, and more). The disturbing and mysterious likewise make Samanta Schweblin's *Seven Empty Houses* a collection you won't be able to put down (tr. Megan McDowell, Riverhead). Here characters are filled with dread because of houses, relationships, and their own histories. Schweblin's gift for writing stories that settle deep in your mind and refuse to leave is on full display in *Seven Empty Houses*.

So while we may have been busy and stressed in 2022, at least we could put our hands on great SFT! Thanks for reading, and I'd love to hear what you're reading now and what you're looking forward to: rachel@sfintranslation.com. Until next time in the SFT Universe!

"It's Better to Hope than Mope": Evaluating the Biopolitics of Hope in *The Year of the Flood* and *The Tiger Flu*

Sababa Monjur

Living on a Damaged Earth

The concept of a 'margin' has a significant resonance in speculative fiction, as the marginalization of human and sub/non-human others is closely associated with the Anthropocene discourse, which is frequently questioned by SF authors. Margaret Atwood in *The Year of the Flood* and Larissa Lai in *The Tiger Flu* portray the complex realism of the Anthropocene emphasizing techno-capitalism and petro-culture by highlighting the cultural meanings of ecological crisis in North America. Instead of presenting the apocalypse either as a future happening elsewhere or as a backdrop for the dystopian setting, both Atwood and Lai foreground it as an ongoing crisis. The marginalized community in each novel, the God's Gardeners and the Grist Sisterhood, respectively, are placed at the forefront of the resistance against unethical use of biotechnology not only because of their exposure to the techno-capitalist society's exclusionary practices, but also because their ethical stance is situated at the polar opposite of their respective biopolitical regimes that have unleashed the Waterless flood and the Tiger flu upon humankind. Drawing heavily on Donna Haraway's theories, my ecofeminist reading of the selected texts scrutinizes first, how Atwood and Lai attempt to relocate agency by dissolving boundary-making practices that produce marginalized subjects and justify exclusion, systemic violence, dehumanization, and mass killing of those who are dubbed by Rita Wong as "extra-legal" (111), people who are either unregistered and undocumented (i.e., the Grist sisters are denied 'human' status) or structurally downtrodden (i.e., the Gardeners are labeled as religious fanatics). Secondly, since chaos has the subversive potential to challenge and destabilize the socio-political order, I will discuss how the God's Gardeners and the Grist sisters use their marginalized status to resist the exploitation and to bring positive change for the humans as well as their planetary partners.

Addressing the importance of building kinship in turbulent times, Donna Haraway begins *Staying With the Trouble* by stating that "[w]e—all of us on Terra—live in disturbing times, mixed-up times, troubling and turbid times" which is why it is required "to make kin in lines of inventive connection as a practice of learning to live and die well with each other in a thick present. Our task is to make trouble, to stir up potent response to devastating events, as well as to settle troubled waters and rebuild quiet places" (1). She further explicates:

> Kin is a wild category that all sorts of people do their best to domesticate. Making kin as oddkin rather than, or at least in addition to, godkin and genealogical and biogenetic family troubles important matters, like to whom one is actually responsible. Who lives and who dies, and how, in this kinship rather than that one? What shape is this kinship, where

> and whom do its lines connect and disconnect, and so what? What must be cut and what must be tied if multispecies flourishing on earth, including human and other-than-human beings in kinship, are to have a chance? (2)

Following this line of thought, I argue that the aforementioned communities initiate epistemological rethinking to relocate the agency of the sub/non-human and ensure their survival on a damaged earth.

The Biopolitics of Hope

To begin with, in *The Year of the Flood*, Toby, a former Gardener and one of the protagonists, elaborately discusses how the God's Gardeners, through their eco-religious teachings, try to familiarize the anthropogenic crisis as an aspect of the human condition to the privileged Compound citizens, who are not directly affected by the crisis, and to the marginalized Pleebland dwellers, who are unaware that they are victims of it. The Gardeners intend to include everyone in their faith-based system, as the cult is based on inclusion rather than extraction, which is why Adam One questions the validity of human-centered thinking: "Ours is a fall into greed: why do we think that everything on Earth belongs to us, while in reality we belong to Everything" (*Year* 63). Keeping the sixth mass-extinction in mind and maintaining awareness of the corporate bioterrorism, the Gardeners believe that another ecological disaster will soon destroy the human race: "God had promised after the Noah incident that he'd never use the water method again but considering the wickedness of the world he was bound to do something" (26). Hence, their prediction of the Waterless Flood turns out to be a plague that only kills the humans but does not affect any other species: "We God's Gardeners are a plural Noah [. . .]. We must be ready for the time when those who have broken trust with the Animals—yes, wiped them from the face of the Earth where God placed them—will be swept away by the Waterless Flood" (110). Interestingly, in Adam One's proposition, Noah and the ark are amalgamated: "My body is my earthly Ark, / It's proof against the Flood; / It holds all Creatures in its heart, / [. . .] It's builded firm of genes and cells, / And neurons without number; / My Ark enfolds the million years" (111). It is also noteworthy that Adam One emphasizes memorizing the extinct animals as a way of saving those creatures from disappearing completely: "[W]e Gardeners will cherish within us the knowledge of the Species, and of their preciousness to God" (110). The Gardeners and their children are taught that saying the names of the species is "a way of keeping those animals alive" (376). Furthermore, Toby's recalling of the pre-Flood era reveals how the Gardeners relied heavily on nature and natural others for food, medicine, and other resources.

In contrast, the Grist sisters in *The Tiger Flu* are genetically modified parthenogenic clones, manufactured by a techno-capitalist corporation called Jemini. One of the protagonists and a Grist sister Kirilow Groundsel informs the readers that Jemini supplied these clones as factory workers to HöST Light Industries where they were used as test subjects for techno-scientific experiments. One of the clones fled the factory eighty years ago and founded the Grist Village for the 'free' sisters. Kora Ko, the other protagonist and a Saltwater City dweller, recounts that the Grist

sisterhood is believed to be a myth by the inhabitants. Despite living in a city that is governed and exploited by the HöST technocracy—a corporate monopoly that manipulates the inhabitants "in its own best interests" (*Flu* 3)—Kora and the citizens do not acknowledge the fact that their lives are not much different from the so-called factory workers. Regardless of dividing the Saltwater Flat into several quarantine rings to control the spread of the Tiger flu pandemic, people keep dying. Hence, survival plays a pivotal role in *The Tiger Flu*. Feeding on people's desire to live, the CEO of HöST, Isabelle Chow, introduces her yet-to-be-perfected technology called LiFT and promises the flu-infected men that by uploading their consciousness to the mainframe satellite, LiFT can ensure virtual immortality. Eventually the readers learn that, on one hand, Isabelle's beloved Marcus Traskin owns the tiger bone wine business and consumption of the wine causes the flu, while on the other, Isabelle uses the infected Tiger men, the small community of men who survived the flu and are taken care of by Marcus, as test subjects for LiFT. Moreover, Isabelle does not mind capturing and murdering the Grist sisters as she believes that Grist DNA can help improve and perfect her technology. Similar to the God's Gardeners, the Grist sisterhood chose not to rely on contemporary technology that exploits people. As Kirilow elucidates, "[t]his strange killing and rebirthing is Salty business. We Grist sisters have no faith in such things. If the body is dead, then so is the woman, whatever these occultist Salties think they have copied" (232). Eventually, Kirilow helps Kora to understand how Isabelle has been exploiting humans and sub/non-humans alike.

Even though Kora comes from Saltwater City and Kirilow from the Grist village, they overcome their mutual hatred and decide to work together to stop Isabelle from killing huge numbers of people. Kora is fatally injured participating in their resistance movement. In a largely unexplained way, Kirilow performs a surgery to upload Kora's mind to LiFT and ultimately her consciousness becomes a part of the batterkite—a genetically modified oceanic creature with tentacles. Kirilow plants one of the batterkite's tentacles on the soil that transforms into a Starfish tree. As a Starfish tree, Kora is capable of reproducing vital organs. The final chapter of the novel, which takes place 156 years after the deadly incident, reveals the new beginning where Kora identifies as a Starfish and reminds the new Grist children that her transformation has been painful. Yet, she embraces her identity as the establishment of the Starfish orchard ensured the eradication of older forms of forced organ transplantation and violence. Kora Tree is therefore the epitome of revitalization of life and inclusion of sub/non-human beings, and transgresses the dualistic binaries as she is a conscious life form that is capable of communication and can provide replaceable vital organs infinitely.

Clearly, the scientists in both novels try to come up with techno-fixes for an ecosystem-destroying pandemic-ridden techno-capitalist culture. The Waterless flood was designed to make the human race go extinct and as a solution to save the earth and its non-human creatures. Similarly, instead of curing the Tiger flu, Isabelle introduces the LiFT technology as a cure because this technology is more beneficial in terms of corporate profit. As Haraway claims, a comic faith in techno-fixes, whether secular or religious, will not solve the problem (3). Evidently, none of the

techno-fixes are capable of saving the human race. What brings a light of hope in both novels is making kinship with the sub/non-human ones.

The Year of the Flood confirms that there are other survivors who might have a chance to rebuild a civilization from the ruins of the past while living harmoniously with the Crakers. In contrast, *The Tiger Flu* ends with the establishment of a new Grist Village where the Starfish tree grows replacement organs, effectively abolishing the necessity to forcefully harvest organs from the Starfish sisters; therefore, older forms of violence are non-existent. Kora Tree, thus, reminds the children of the new village what she and Kirilow had to go through to establish the compassionate society: "You must remember my pain, as I remember yours" (327).

The remaining humans of the post-apocalyptic worlds manage to build a new, less individualistic, more inclusive society that recognizes the relational interdependence of all living things—both human and sub/non-human. Despite the bleak scenarios that center on the impact of techno-capitalist discourse and exploit the marginalized sub/non-human ones, the selected speculative fictions point towards the possibilities of reconstructing a better world and providing strategies for narrating non-anthropocentric realities. Hence, I conclude that by revising and rethinking the exclusionary practices and relocating agency, a better future can come for humans and non-humans alike within and beyond a North American context.

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Queer Time in Space: Helen S. Wright's *A Matter of Oaths* and Non-reproductive Futures

Sabina Fazli

In 2017, Bloomsbury republished Helen S. Wright's science-fiction novel *A Matter of Oaths*, which had originally appeared in 1988 with Methuen in the United Kingdom and Popular Library in the United States. The novel unfolds a space operatic vision of opposing galactic empires and a cyberpunk technology that harnesses pilots' minds to power spaceships. On her website, Wright features the novel's new cover and a short passage titled "A Question of Covers," commenting on the original editions and their choice of cover design: in the 1980s, both publishers, Wright points out, engaged in White- and agewashing, rendering the main male protagonist White on both cover illustrations, and depicting the main female protagonist as a young woman rather than close to retirement.

These instances of visual packaging that disregard the text's diverse cast of characters highlight the norms at play in the genre and marketplace. Moreover, the presence of a conventionally attractive man and woman on the Popular Library edition's cover implies a heterosexual romance that the novel does not bear out. The relative but belated success in 2017 suggests a sense of untimeliness: what seems to have been a marketing conundrum in the late 1980s now situates the novel squarely in a wave of women-authored SF, concerned with the speculative politics of gender, sexuality, and race as well as the entanglements of human and machine. In the same vein, blurbs by Ann Leckie and C. J. Cherryh on Wright's website illustrate how the republished text chimes with contemporary sensibilities in 2017.

The short preface by Becky Chambers introducing the re-published text draws on this notion of timeliness. Chambers frames Wright's novel as having come "too early" for her as a young reader. As a queer child looking for fiction resonating with her experience, Chambers writes: "I didn't read *A Matter of Oaths* when I should have. . . . I needed this book a decade later, when I was devouring the written side of science fiction like I'd been starving my whole life prior. But by then, *A Matter of Oaths* was out of print" (Chambers 1). Chambers goes on to inscribe the novel in a feminist and queer archive claiming Wright as a forgotten precursor of recent SF like her own: "Female leads, queer characters, characters of colour—these did not spring forth from the 2010s, Athena-like, a stunning new dawn in the realm of science fiction" (3). Instead, she holds, readers and writers need to remember and recover the writing of marginalized authors and acknowledge their contribution, despite their absence from the canon and bestseller list: "we have a short memory, we humans. It's a definite trait in the science fiction community, and a particular irony, as we revel in thinking as far out as we can" (2). This brief look at the novel's publication history illustrates how it jarred with contemporary notions and sensibilities governing the marketplace in the 1980s. Chambers's preface and Wright's own website both draw on notions of timeliness and temporal misses in the way that the novel mis/aligns with particular moments. This throws into

relief themes that recur in the novel itself. Biographical time, temporal disjunction, and memory and the archive play a crucial role in the plot, bridging text and paratext in a surreptitious crossing.

My reading of *A Matter of Oaths* focuses on the way that time in the novel is bent into queer time to accommodate the protagonists' identities and relationships in a hopeful reconfiguration of the SF trope of immortality. This temporal biographical anomaly is at the root of the central conflict and emerges as the surprising discovery at the end of the novel. The novel opens with Rallya, the aging commander of a spaceship, taking on a new officer, Rafe, who has been "identity wiped" because he has allegedly broken his oath of serving only one of the immortal twin emperors ruling over the galaxy. He joins Rallya's ship, falls in love with a crewmate, Joshim, and becomes the target of assassination attempts, which neither of the characters can explain. The narrative starts to cover not only the present, but also the past as Rafe and his friends and lover try to recuperate the memories of his life before they had been erased. It turns out that he had been kidnapped and identity wiped by the Old Emperor to spite the New Emperor, who had been Rafe's lover. These memories resurface because Rafe's present lover looks exactly like the New Emperor, an unwitting doppelgänger, and a coincidental mnemonic trigger. Eventually, in an instance of dramatic irony, Rallya realizes that the reason for the emperors' interest in Rafe is that he, too, is immortal, a fact that Rafe is ignorant of.

This constellation pits different biographical and temporal trajectories against each other: Rallya stubbornly clings to her position on the ship but will eventually have to appoint a successor. Her aging is explicitly framed as embodied physiological deterioration, for example, when "her hip was troubling her. The surgeons talked about the inevitable effects of age, suggested drugs that would keep her out of the web, and were surprised when she would not listen to them" (Wright 26). At the same time, Rallya is an important character and mover in the story, occupying a position of power and agency. Although the depiction of her aging seems ordinary in the SF setting, her prominence in the story is extraordinary in that it centers on an aging yet still desiring female body. Joshim provides another foil for the ordinary and extraordinary biographical chronologies embodied by Rallya and Rafe. As an adherent of Aruranism, he believes in reincarnation and engages in mnemonic techniques to remember his previous lives, which the text suggests is successful. The plot is organized around the puzzle of Rafe's memories and their recuperation, which entails an active recreation of his identity. With every newly recalled detail about his past, his relationship with Joshim and the other protagonists shifts. This recuperation relies on guesswork from flashbacks, déjà vu moments, dreams, and a trance induced through a ritual inspired by Aruranism. The halts, gaps, and jumps in this reconstruction are juxtaposed with the 'official time' of documents pulled from the Empires' archives and reproduced at the beginning of chapters. While the recovery of Rafe's past is a creative process animating the plot and keeping relationships in suspense, it also drives home the idea of identities and memories as unstable markers. My brief summary already assembles different configurations of time that may run parallel or across each other: end-less and end-stopped biographical trajectories, cyclical and remembered time, and fixed and official calendar time. Although the text may be productively

mined for any of these, I specifically focus on Rafe's immortality and how it is couched in the queer, that is, emphatically non-reproductive time of 'webbing.'

These different 'times' play out in a horizon in which sexual reproduction as the main structuring element of 'straight time' is missing. This absence is over-determined in the text: Firstly, the sexual relationships among the crew are almost exclusively gay, and secondly, participating in 'webbing,' that is, in piloting spaceships by fusing the crew's bodies and minds with the ship comes with the inevitable side-effect of infertility.[1] This emphasis on non-reproductivity becomes even more obvious when considering how 'webbing' is imagined in terms of intimacy and sexual pleasure. The web as a technological device and a metaphor is lifted from cyberpunk but, I would argue, Wright modifies its meaning. The web room is a special part of the spaceship where the members of the crew submerge themselves in a gelatinous liquid and connect their bodies' neural systems with the ship's conduits to control it. The web designates both this virtual space and the artificial modification of the webbers' bodies that allows them 'to web.' The effect is not a renunciation of the body, as in cyberpunk, but the joyful embodied experience of exclusive sociality in terms of sexuality:

> In the web, your brain was linked to the body of the ship, your nerves carried sensations that nonwebbers would never know. You only had to loosen the chains of discipline a little to tap the web's full potential, to create new sensations, to explore new pathways through your extended body, a body that encompassed your companions in the web as their bodies now encompassed you. (Wright 129)

Thus, unlike the cyberpunk trope of virtual reality as a refuge from or for the body, there is a continuity between the intimacy of the web and the corporeal romantic and sexual relationships lived by the participants outside it. Both spaces complement each other and both present versions of queer, non-dyadic, non-monogamous sexual pleasure. Significantly, in this constellation, sex is always non-reproductive because infertility is an inevitable side-effect of webbing, a fact that is never raised as a 'problem,' but as a scientific if inconsequential fact. Instead, 'family' is created through affinity and allegiance, epitomized in the eponymous collective oaths that signify elective kinship.

The web as a queer space also codes gay pasts. The webroom bears overtones of historical bathhouses: it teems with the "tangle of bare skin, dark and pale, brown, yellow and red" (35) around tubs, showers, and locker rooms that are also the site of erotic encounters. The material infrastructure of the 'web' thus gestures towards earlier historical spaces of gay culture and public sex which functioned as utopian subcultural pockets of possible futures (cp. Muñoz 33ff). The web figures as a queer knot of virtual space-time that carries echoes of the past and transposes them into the far future so that it connotes images that elasticate its meaning by drawing in the present and ghostly past of actual queer places and times.

In this context, Rafe's immortality may be framed as the expression of queer temporality through a generic trope that is turned into a hopeful and reparative image. The chrononormative

(Freeman 3) progress of the individual from childhood and youth to maturity, marriage, reproduction, and death underwrites the trajectory of the *bildungsroman* following the male subject gradually growing into heterosexual and national citizenship. Within and aslant this time, however, exists queer time, "unscripted by the conventions of family, inheritance and childrearing" (Halberstam 2) and instead organized around subcultural "transient, extrafamilial and oppositional modes of affiliation" (154). This appears affectively asynchronous to straight time through delays, repetitions, and a utopian charge that reaches beyond the straight horizon of history and generation into what Muñoz describes as "anticipatory illumination of queerness" (22). *A Matter of Oaths* offers a queer timescape for its plot to unfold, in which the structuring elements of generation and reproduction are irrelevant. Instead, Rafe's posthuman lifespan signifies biography beyond chrono- and heteronormativity. The Old Emperor, another immortal, is described as having a "face alarming in its apparent youth. A thousand years or more older than Ayvar [the New Emperor]; he looked as if he had been frozen as a gauche adolescent" (Wright 238). Suspended in puberty, he literalises Halberstam's epistemological centering of youth to understand the "alternative temporalities" of queer subculture that forego chrononormative adulthood (Halberstam 2).

As the most prominent gay character in the novel, Rafe's 'chronic condition' also emerges as a reparative metaphor. First published in the late 1980s, the text suggests "the temporalities of HIV" (Dean 77) as another horizon in which to understand the trope of immortality. Tim Dean describes the affective temporal disjunction that infection engenders as "death sentence time" (80) to capture the uncertainty and asynchronicity of living with HIV. In this context, Rafe's immortality also figures as a utopian image of survival against all odds whose temporal hyperbole contrasts sharply with the reality and experience of "death sentence time." Alexis Lothian has made a similar argument about the vampire's immortality in relation to indigeneity (discussing Jewelle Gomez's *The Gilda Stories*), writing that "the stretched-out life narratives of immortality . . . breed futures for communities whose past has been lost or stolen" (123). *A Matter of Oaths* proffers a similar reparative reading that values queer temporalities through speculative metaphor.

Temporal a/synchronicities, alignments and misses, characterize the novel's publication history and underlie the story that Wright tells. Wright's own brief discussion of the controversial original covers highlights its incompatibility with current conventions in the market of the 1980s. Chamber's introduction makes it clear that, for her, the novel arrived too early to speak to her as a young queer reader, but she claims it retrospectively as a 'forgotten' precursor of the contemporary wave of women-authored SF. On the back cover, Chamber's is quoted claiming that the novel has now "finally come home to the present," using the same idiom of temporal otherness. These paratextual concerns, framed as temporal mis/fits, resonate with the story itself: as I have tried to show, *A Matter of Oaths* is concerned with individual and collective timescapes that fall outside the straight time of heterosexual reproduction. Instead, the queer times of unreliable memories, reincarnation, 'webbing', and immortality figure nonlinear and excessive trajectories that valorise non-chrononormative temporalities in SF tropes and metaphors.

Notes

1. In the case of Rallya, her age introduces a third barrier, as the reader has to assume that she has entered menopause.

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Calling from the Margins of Perception in Contemporary Chinese Science Fiction

Bo Ærenlund Sørensen

As a genre, science fiction aids our mental exploration of what new technologies may do to human subjectivity, family relations, state-society dynamics, and to our embodied selves. Such new technological inventions often augment human sensory capabilities, allowing individuals or governments to look through walls, read the thoughts of others, or curse us with infinite recall. In this paper, I'm interested in the opposite, namely in science-fiction stories where human sensory capacities, instead of being augmented, come to seem problematic; where what is at the center of the story is not the expansion of the sensory apparatus, but rather a curious and often painful inability to make sense of sensory input. Or, to put it differently, I wish to examine what we find at the margins of human perception and thought in Chinese science fiction. One example of a story where communication is sonic rather than semantic can be found in this snippet from Hao Jingfang's *Invisible Planets*:

> The tongue and the ear have the most meaning on Chincato. For the people of this planet, speech is not a mere way to pass the time, but a necessity for existence. [. . .] The Chincatoans do not have eyes or any organs that sense light. They rely on sound to locate one another. Their ears are both for listening and observing. Actually, to be precise, they don't have ears. They listen with their entire body. [. . .] So all day long, the Chincatoans talk and listen without pause. They emit sounds to feel the presence of others, and also to let others know of their own existence. They cannot be silent. Silence is dangerous and makes them panic. [. . .] Some children are born with defects in their voice organs. These children almost cannot survive. They're always in danger of being run over by others much bigger and faster. And then no one would even know such a child once existed. (215f)

I should say at the outset that this is work in progress and that it is part of a larger project about sensory perception in twentieth-century Chinese history. For this paper, however, I focus only on the topic of hearing in contemporary Chinese science fiction. I limit myself even further, namely, to discussing works by contemporary science fiction writer Han Song, who also works as an editor for the mainland Chinese news agency Xinhua.

Han Song's short story "Submarines" begins as follows:

> It was an early autumn night. Loud noises woke me from sleep, and it seemed as if the whole city had boiled over. My parents dressed me quickly, and we hurried out the door, heading for the river. We became part of a surging crowd whose thumping footsteps and

> worried cries were like exploding firecrackers on New Year's Eve. I was so scared that I covered my ears, unsure what was happening. (121)

What has so perturbed the adults is the arrival of submarines in the local river, but the memory is clearly coded into the memory of the protagonist-child primarily as an auditory event. The entire story is told in the form of a flashback leading up to the catastrophic conflagration that swept from submarine to submarine and that none of the resident villagers did anything to prevent. This haunting event, did not, however, so the narrator repeatedly assures himself, affect his subsequent life in any way:

> A sense of unresolvable solitude gripped me, while I knew also that my own future would not be affected in any way by what I was seeing. [. . .] Morning finally arrived. Dim sunlight revealed lifeless hunks of blackened metal drifting everywhere on the river. In scattered rows, circles, clumps, they reflected the cold, colorless light, and the air was suffused with the decaying odors of autumn. The city-dwellers brought forth cranes to retrieve the wreckage of the submarines from the river and trucked the pieces to scrap metal yards. The whole process took over a month. After that, no submarines came to the Yangtze River. (122f)

Obviously, when a narrator repeatedly tells you that a particular past event is unimportant, you know that this narrator is misreading himself or herself, as our memory does not obsess over unimportant trivialities. What I find interesting in this story is how Han Song manages to let the events unfold almost without dialogue and almost without sense-making. Equally interesting is the shift in sensory modality: the story starts out as an unnerving audible event, but by the end, sounds seem to have been drained from the scene to be replaced by the painstaking reinstitution of orderliness by cleaning up the landscape visually. Through the youthful narrator's matter-of-fact relating of details, Han Song suggests that what has imprinted itself on the mind of the narrator are sensory perceptions, which have never been processed into schemes of meaning. This may account for the fact that the impressions still seem so raw and consequential to the narrator, despite protestations to the opposite.

Another Han Song story in which sounds play an even more central role is "Regenerated Bricks." In this story, which plays out in the aftermath of the terrible Sichuan Earthquake of 2008, the debris left by the earthquake is used as building materials for new bricks which are described as very crude-looking, but they become very highly sought after because they emit sounds of muffled whispering. People who put their ears to the bricks are not able to make out what the murmuring voices are saying, and this seems to be exactly what makes the bricks into such pleasurable objects.

Throughout the story, voices are of central importance, but it is usually not the meaning of what is said or shouted that matters, but rather the voice as a sonic object. An example of this is when the architect desperately tries to have various factories produce bricks that fulfill his specifications: "Should I call a second time to make sure they got it right? We discussed it a bit

and decided not to call, since we feared that if we called again they would add too much straw. My feeling was this: ultimately my tone of voice determined the proportions" (7).

Another example comes a few pages later when it does indeed turn out that the factory has messed up another batch of bricks:

> More cement had been added, but now there was no time. Things did not look good, and yet another woman came out, her combat style completely the same as that at the factory. But now I had some experience, and with a shout from me she retreated. The proprietor of the workshop realized there was some mistake, and even though his intentions had been good, he had done wrong, so his tone was very mild. (10)

Here we see once again how communication is not decided by semantics, but by the sonic properties of what is said, shouted, or murmured. As the architect becomes increasingly involved with the production of the bricks, he turns into a hybrid of machine, birthing mother, and undulating swamp. He momentarily seems to transgress the boundary between life and death, and as he begins to groan like the nefarious landmass, the land of the living is reduced to a state of anxious listening.

> His face was as pale as tinfoil, as if he were a ghost and let the yellow moonlight shine brightly into the tent. The architect seemed to be pondering how he had managed to turn himself into a brick, and a brick that would immediately begin asexual reproduction and rapidly produce great numbers of buildings so as to allow any conscious bipeds to move into as soon as they could [. . .] A silly gray smile crossed the architect's face, as if he were in labor, and an intermittent moan issued forth from his mouth, as if from a swamp. And behind him and the villagers, outside the tent, was a dense blackness, land that, although it had endured grievous wounds, was still rich and abundant and was arrogantly clearheaded as it casually pressed down upon the bodies of the dead, looking at them as if listening to a joke. The living dared not utter a sound. (11)

A multitude of related examples can be found in works by Liu Cixin, Xia Jia, and Chen Qiufan—which are in some ways different and in some ways similar. What is central in all of them is that sounds play a very important role, and that sound as physical presence very often trumps the semantic content of speech. The plots of these stories are ceaselessly driven forward by the sonic, but for the characters in the stories the meaning of the sounds remain opaque, leaving them to deal only with the effects of the sounds. If we employ Darko Suvin's idea that science fiction is characterized by cognitive estrangement, we might say that in these stories cognitive estrangement is performed by sounds figuring as powerful sonic agents, yet remaining somehow marginal to the sense-making of the characters. How to interpret this is the topic for the longer version of this paper.

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Delhi at the Margins

Aishwarya Subramanian

In this paper, I talk about two short stories by Vandana Singh, both set in Delhi, which is also my home. Delhi is generally understood to be made up of seven, overlapping, older cities which were built by various dynasties from the eighth century CE (Biswas Sen 360). When, in 1911, New Delhi was created as the capital of British India, the move was understood as an attempt to legitimize British rule within a lineage of power in the subcontinent (360). I mention this because this paper is part of a larger project examining how recent speculative fiction set in Delhi builds its understanding of this affinity to power into its portrayal of the city.

I focus on one particular aspect of that power: space, both where we are located in space, and how we move through space. Spaces associated with New Delhi in particular are often used in Indian political discourse as a metonym for cultural and political power–those familiar with Indian politics might recall the use of terms like "Lutyens' Delhi" (the central, administrative area of the city, designed by Edwin Lutyens) in this context.

I start off with a couple of scenes from Vandana Singh's story "Delhi," first published in 2004, and told from the perspective of Aseem, a man who is sometimes able to see visions from the city's past and future.

> The girl he is following is just another Delhi University student looking for a bargain, trying not to get jostled or groped in the crowd, much less have her purse stolen. [...]
>
> She parts with her money with a resigned air, steps out into the noisy brightness and is caught up with the crowd in the street like a piece of wood tossed in a river. She pushes her way through it, fending off anonymous hands that reach for her breasts or back. (23)

This scene is set in the Delhi I grew up in; a young woman walking along a crowded street, and very aware of the possibility of sexual assault. To many of us, particularly women from crowded cities, this tentative negotiation of public space is very familiar. As Srila Roy has demonstrated, Indian women's access to public space is in a constant state of negotiation (74); it's perhaps understandable that this story about walking through Delhi is told from the perspective of a man, though as an unhoused person Aseem also frequently finds his right to public space challenged.

Later in the story, Aseem meets a woman from the future; an immigrant to a future Delhi, which she refers to as "The Immaculate City." The woman has "heard many stories about the fabled city, and its tall, gem-studded minars that reach the sky, and the perfect gardens. And the ships, the silver udan-khatolas, that fly across worlds" (32). Yet while the powerful may "fly across worlds," that doesn't seem to be true of everyone else. The woman has lost her documentation, a dangerous thing in this future, and one that causes her to panic about the possible consequences to

her: "They say you must have papers. Or they'll send me to Neechi-Dilli with all the poor and the criminals" (32). "Neechi-Dilli," literally lower Delhi, turns out to be the world of the dispossessed that Aseem sometimes glimpses in his visions while underground on the Delhi Metro. Though in this future, the division of space appears vertical rather than horizontal, as in Aseem's present, movement for ordinary people is constrained by paperwork, as well as fear of gendered, caste, class, or religious violence.[1]

While clear boundaries affect movement through the city, "Delhi" depicts the space of the city itself as fundamentally unstable. Singh invokes the image of the seven medieval cities upon which Delhi is built, and Aseem's visions ensure an overlaying of temporalities so that all of Delhi's past and future cities are present at once. Here, the boundaries of the city are both constantly in flux and potentially predatory:

> The city's needs are alien, unfathomable. It is an entity in its own right, expanding every day, swallowing the surrounding countryside, crossing the Yamuna which was once its boundary, spawning satellite children, infant towns that it will ultimately devour. Now it is burrowing into the earth, and even later it will reach long fingers to the stars. (38)

Delhi's outward expansion also extends its politics of power and exclusion. The space of the city itself seems to deny the possibility of transformation, or of a more egalitarian social order. Compare this with another opening image, from Singh's story "Indra's Web," first published in 2011:

> Mahua ran over the familiar, rock-studded pathway under the canopy of acacia trees, her breath coming fast and ragged. She would have to stop soon, she wasn't as young as she used to be, and there was a faint, persistent pain in her right knee—she loved this physicality: heart thumping, sweat running down her face in rivulets, the forest smelling of sap and animal dung, grit on her lips from the dust. The forest was where she got her best ideas; it was an eternal source of inspiration. (125)

There's none of the negotiation of space that we saw in the previous story; Mahua's freedom of movement allows for this description to both be very physical but also allows the character to be distracted by several ideas that are unconnected to her personal safety.

"Indra's Web" takes place in Ashapur, a near-future, sustainable utopia. We are told that this settlement, whose name means "city of hope," was a former slum on the edge of Delhi, populated by climate refugees from Bangladesh. Throughout the story we're reminded that all residents have the freedom to travel through the space, and an understanding that all have a stake in their home. A meeting of residents trying to solve a problem with a malfunctioning solar tower, for example, involves "arguments and discussions in Hindi, English and Bangla: Salman, deep in conversation with Namita and Ayush; Hamid, a young trainee who had once begged on the streets as a child, patiently explaining the situation to the boy who had brought the tea" (129). Shortly after, we meet "a sleepy boy . . . one of the former street urchins" (133) in the control room of the suntower. This

is a radically egalitarian vision of the city as accessible to all of its citizens, both in its spaces and in the process of its governance.

Within the story, Ashapur is an outlier, a visionary experiment whose residents are still having to convince outsiders of its viability. It is significant that Ashapur can only exist on or outside the boundaries of Delhi itself, that change on this scale can only be realized when we leave the space of the imperial city altogether.

Despite this, I want to argue that there are some significant commonalities across these two stories. The notion of the titular web underpins "Indra's Web"; it's in the myconet that Mahua listens to as she runs, the solar energy grid, and the networks and webs of ideas and emotion between humans and the world they live in. Like Aseem in "Delhi," Mahua has an unusual perspective—her apophenia ensures that the reader is constantly reminded of the interconnectedness of her world. In "Delhi," Aseem struggles to come to terms with his own place within a vast network of relationships across time and space. Yet the story ends with a coming-to-terms and a renewed commitment to his place within that network; "looking out for his own kind, the poor and the desperate, and those who walk with death in their eyes" ("Delhi," 38). Like Mahua, he visualizes the system he's a part of as a network; in his case, a satellite image of "knots of light [. . .] stretching tentacles into the dark" (38).

In her essay, "Utopias of the Third Kind," Singh returns to this metaphor of webs and weaving:

> The metaphor of weaving is particularly natural for me, having grown up with the songs of the fifteenth-century Indian mystic poet and weaver Kabir, so it makes sense to me that we are weaving the world and simultaneously being woven by it, into being, into change! And this leads me to another realization, that proto-utopias of the Third Kind may sometimes exist here and now without our noticing—in temporal, embryonic ways, in small spacetime pockets even in colonial and capitalist spaces. These pocket proto-utopias, at once individual and collective, exist briefly in the places and moments when we sense—when we make and are made by—the relationships that make the world whole (33).

And this is key in the context of some of the conversations I heard at the 2023 SFRA conference—that utopias can exist at many scales, can be specific and relational and interlinked, can exist at the margins of power. Singh draws for her metaphor on Kabir; I want to invoke one of his contemporaries and juxtapose Ashapur with "Begumpura," the utopian city imagined by the fifteenth-century Bhakti poet Ravidas. This "Sorrowless City" is one in which there is no pain, no property ownership, no difference in status ("none are third or second—all are one"). "Begumpura" is an unusual poem for a Bhakti poet in that there's no mention of god; the utopia it imagines is an earthly one (Omvedt 106). And crucially, it is a utopian *space*, whose denizens "do this or that, they walk where they wish, / they stroll through fabled palaces unchallenged. / Oh, says Ravidas, a tanner now set free, / those who walk beside me are my friends" (this translation by John Stratton Hawley and Mark Juergensmeyer [qtd in Omvedt 106–107]). Ravidas, from an oppressed caste, imagines walking "unchallenged" through space; a world where, as Omvedt notes,

"the rich and privileged castes cannot impose restrictions of place upon the subordinated castes and the poor" (107). But beyond this he also imagines walking with others; there's an extending of kinship and connection. And beyond its resonance with Singh's two stories, this is the act of citizenship, in its sense of "city dweller." I think of the work of Teresa P. R. Caldeira, for whom citizenship is an active commitment to and reimagining of the city, and of adrienne maree brown's work.

There's a lot more to be said about the model of utopia that Singh is proposing in that essay, and how/where it intersects with other conversations about speculative fiction, activism and utopia, and what this means for the future Delhis we might imagine, but that is beyond the scope of this paper.

Notes

1. Reading this exchange in the context of India's recent Citizenship Amendment Act is particularly chilling.

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Extractive Practices Depicted in Adrish Bardhan's Science Fiction

Monali Chatterjee

The imagination of human beings, beyond all existing wonders of science and technology, often fuels the creation of scientific inventions and interventions. One of the best manifestations of such imagination is science fiction in literature. Science fiction in films is sometimes restrained or modified by production constraints. But the world of imagination in literature is unlimited for both the writer and the reader. It is for this reason that the genre of science fiction is one of the most popular genres of the postmodern era. Although science fiction originated in the West, (Roberts 24) it has travelled beyond the borders of western countries as a highly sought-after and successful genre. Some of the most lauded authors of sci-fi in India are Satyajit Ray (1921-1992), Adrish Bardhan (1932-2019), and Anish Deb (1951-2021).

As a highly acclaimed writer of both crime and science fiction, a translator, and an editor, Adrish Bardhan is an immortal name in the world of science fiction among the readers of Bengali literature. He graduated in science from Calcutta University. His ingenious science fiction immediately captured the interest of young adults and adult readers alike. The main character in his science fiction, Professor Natboltu Chakra, is a dedicated and celebrated researcher who garnered overwhelming approbation among Bardhan's readers. Apart from translating crime and detective fiction into Bengali and other stories, he has also edited a couple of science fiction magazines, *Ascharya* and *Fantastic*. Starting in 1963, Ascharya became the first science fiction magazine in India.

As one of the pioneers of science fiction in a regional language in India, Adrish Bardhan's stories have been immensely popular. His corpus of stories "distinguishes its fictional worlds to one degree or another from the world in which we actually live: a fiction of the imagination rather than observed reality, a fantastic literature" (Roberts 1). Much of his science fiction, without being pedantic, subtly conveys serious messages, hoping to encourage lay readers to become environmentally cognizant and socially responsible citizens through its subtle didacticism. As a postmodernist genre, science fiction is often a hard-hitting literary channel through which a futuristic depiction of the predicament of humans. This is typically characteristic of Adrish Bardhan's literature.

These tales are erected upon flawlessly conceivable scientific elucidations of unusual manifestations or incidences and significantly concern human existence, like the mutations of hormones or organisms, an erratic android robot, and "dark energy" or "the talking tree" warning about the inevitable catastrophe of the irreversible destruction of the world. This paper explores how such innovative representation and techno-cultural advances demonstrate the concept of extraction in varying degrees and dimensions. Through this research, an attempt has been made to examine Bardhan's use of coherently integrated science fiction and fantasy in some selected stories

by proposing revolutionary resolutions for climatic changes, natural calamities, global terrorism, and extractive practices. Bardhan's narratives conform to a "branch of fantastic, or non-realist, fiction in which difference is located within a *materialist, scientific* discourse, whether or not the science invoked is strictly consonant with science as it is understood today" (Roberts 2). The criterion for selecting these stories is the projection of science fiction through the lens of extractive practices that dominates much of the neo-liberalist economy in the present day.

The notion of extraction involves the coerced removal of resources, objects, or individuals from their current habitat to another space. This coercion may involve the violence of invasion, burglary, or parasitic infestation of another organism, individual, or space. Extraction also refers to the fortification of a certain structure or system by bringing resources from another place. This may lead to the imperialist displacement of entire communities and civilizations, thereby commodifying the resources of the victims.

Bardhan's stories concerning such extractive practices can be classified into three categories for the purpose of this research: attempts of extraction, extraction of resources, and global extraction. However, every story that is discussed in this paper does not always befit a single category. The analysis of these selected science fiction stories by Adrish Bardhan is based on an English translation, originally written in Bengali. Sci-fi is a "cultural wallpaper" (Aldiss and Wigmore 14) and some of the Bengali diction has been retained in the analysis to preserve the authenticity of the research. Most of the stories are narrated by the character of Dinanath Nath as witnessed by him or told to him by Prof. Natboltu Chakra.

Attempts of extraction in Bardhan's tales expose the vanity of human greed and ambition. The stories that are elucidated below depict failed attempts of extraction. A perfect balance of science and fantasy comes to the rescue and prevents this extraction. The story "Maron Machine" ("Death Machine") demonstrates the sudden disappearance of rockets launched in space by various wealthy and ambitious nations. These rockets vanish into thin air, causing nations to indict one another with allegations of theft and deceit. Astronauts had previously reported seeing a planet-like puckered sphere, or a "death machine," before they disappeared into this "black hole." It is only when Prof. Natboltu confronts this machine through an expedition in a one-man spaceship that he learns that the world of machines in this spherical space-ship wishes to take over the entire Universe by killing all forms of life, including humans on Earth. It is only through immense persuasion that the professor establishes that humans and machines can coexist without making one feel inferior to the other, and he miraculously leaves with a cancer-destroying virus. Here, Prof. Natboltu uses extraction to his advantage. The story demonstrates a failed attempt at aliens' extraction of the human race. Stableford points out that "Such accounts of ominous cosmic encounters often found abundant dramatic fuel in analogies drawn between physics and psychology" (65).

A more pronounced degree of attempted extraction is visible in the story "Molecule Manush" ("Molecule Man"). Pitambar, a well-equipped excavator, consults Prof. Natboltu and successfully

excavates the hidden treasures of King Jaidev of Jaigarh Fort of Kashmir from clues that he forcibly extracts from its neighbouring tribal communities. The clues indicate that out of the four secret stone rooms under a stone slab, three are stuffed with gold jewellery and sovereigns, which Pitambar greedily extracts out of the cavity (Bardhan 421). The warning in the clues indicated that the fourth room should not be opened. However, Pitambar's avarice prompts him to force open this cubicle, which contains King Jaidev's tomb in a glass box. Suddenly, the corpse inside vanishes and all the extracted gold splashes and sinks into River Iravati, on the edge of which this secret vault existed. Pitambar mournfully relates this failed attempt to Prof. Natboltu in a very different voice, which later turns out to be that of the deceased King Jaidev.

King Jaidev had been hibernating in his tomb, through his capacity to change the structure of molecules within himself (gifted by this courtier scientist) and can assume the appearance of anyone he chooses. Since Pitambar comes to extract his treasures, he changes the molecular structure of the vaults and the gold appears to sink in the river, but is actually restored back to its vaults. King Jaidev parasitically invades Pitambar's body by making changes to the molecular structure and assumes his appearance. Having reported about this extraction to the professor, King Jaidev likely moves into the body of some other powerful person in order to extract wealth and power from another place. While Pitambar's extraction fails, King Jaidev's extraction through molecular changes triumphs at the end of the story. This echoes the notion that "Values and beliefs, understanding and interpretations change with time and place but they take hold of the human imagination at a deep level" (Nichols viii).

The extraction of resources belonging to humans by external forces or aliens is vividly depicted in Bardhan's stories. In the story "Android Atanko" ("Android Terror"), a human-looking Android tears apart a nine-year-old tribal girl after kidnapping her to see how her body was different from its own synthetic fibres. This is an unusual extraction of a human by an android machine. This android is not an operating system in a computer or a robot but, rather, a synthesised human manufactured in a laboratory. It reads the mind of a man and assists him in pilfering a lump sum of money from an ATM, claiming that the programme of morality or ethics has not been installed into his system. On learning this from the TV news, the creator, Dr. Mathamota (translates as Dr. Fathead) of this android machine, with Prof. Natboltu's assistance rescinds the powers of the android to save the world from further damage. In this respect, the story recalls *Frankenstein* by Mary Shelley.

Extraction can also be a silent pursuit instead of a violent one. This is best illustrated in the story "Sona" ("Gold"). Instead of a single case of extraction, a series of extractive practices are conducted by aliens to secure gold from traditional sources that humans have accumulated for the last ten centuries and which are a form of a national legacy for each country from which it has been stolen. Two aliens receive shelter on the deserted island of Andaman with Prof. Natboltu's help from the government of India. However, after some time, they send a swarm of insects loudly buzzing into a luxurious resort in Japan and cart away its prized gold bathtub despite strict surveillance. The locust-like swarm of insects dissolves statues of gold weighing hundreds of tons

from a pharaoh's tomb in Egypt, Ghengis Khan's gold coins from Iran, Baron Rez's gold from the Middle Ages, the gold of the religious crusaders of the 13th century in Paris, Khan Batu's two golden horses from the Sahara desert, gold burgled from the temples of the Inca civilization by Spanish and Portuguese looters that had been drowned in the stormy seas, a large golden statue from Bangkok, Thailand, and vast reserves of gold from Fort Knox in the US. When Prof. Natboltu confronts the spike-headed aliens with charges of burglary, they admit that they need gold for survival just like humans require iron for their blood. Prof. Natboltu also detects that the culprits had extracted the idea of getting a species of insects to be able to coat itself with gold from the researchers of France and Germany so that the precious metal could be pilfered from anywhere in broad daylight.

These extractive practices demonstrate the subtle and dormant but immoral inclinations that sometimes take control of trespassing humans in the world. D'Ammassa is convinced that "it is extremely unlikely that humans would be able to live on alien worlds, even with compatible atmospheres, because the biochemistry of the local plants and animals would almost certainly not provide us with viable sources of food" (313). Therefore, Bardhan brings the aliens to the Earth to project his sarcasm about human avarice.

"Kaalo Chaakti" ("Black Diskette") is a spine-chilling tale of a ruthless, rapid extraction of human bodies by a virus that pervades the world. It depicts all the forms of extraction mentioned above. In a lonely place, a medical student, Nikhil, finds a black diskette measuring an inch and half in diameter that suddenly pricks him with its unnoticeable barb. By the time Nikhil reaches his classroom with his roommate, Abhay, he is seized with a violent flu and is rushed to the hospital. The contents of his pocket are emptied into a drawer of the cabinet of the hospital ward. When no one is around, the black diskette emits light and a ray penetrates Nikhil's eye and changes him forever.

Nikhil returns to the university campus hostel where he stays with Abhay, feeling fit and healthy, but Abhay notices drastic mutations in Nikhil's body and personality. His eyes become listless and emit light in the dark. At 2:10 am one morning, Nikhil shows Abhay what appears to be a meteor shower in the dark sky. Nikhil does not seem to know how he knew about the meteor shower of Pleiades (Kritika constellation). This is a subtle extraction by a virus through the black diskette that inhibits his body and mind. Nikhil gets in touch with others who have been infected in a similar way and secretly disposes off the corpse of Natowar, a hospital ward-attendant whose case was under scrutiny because of his mysterious death by the diskette. This infection spreads in a police station and, at 2:30 am one morning, Abhay finds Nikhil in a secret meeting with thirty other such infected persons.

Abhay finds Nikhil downloading software, meeting Nitu Bose (in the same city), a software titan and Nikhil's continuous efforts in spreading the virus. By this time, the mutating virus has infected not only the people of the city, but also spread throughout the world. People infected with the virus would buy the diskettes from infected shopkeepers for infecting their own children.

People who were in power in various countries are also infected. Those infected exhort the others to join the community of the infected "superhumans." Nitu Bose writes to the UN to get infected by the virus or be prepared for war. Abhay extracts a yellow fluid from the barb of the black diskette and consults Prof. Natboltu. The UN sends military arrangements through an aeroplane to the city of the university where Nikhil studies. A diskette flies past and the plane vanishes into thin air. This implies that the diskette is capable of creating a mini black hole, which is a lethal form of extraction. Instead of being governed by an individual's own brain, a mutated person is governed by a super brain that exists in the Milky Way.

Apart from the diskette and the meteor showers, the extractors are not visible to humans. Prof. Natboltu realises that the black diskette releases "prion" proteins into the human body, which activates a dormant lethal virus that is present in the DNA of human genes. By spreading a special kind of laughing gas using missiles all over the world (with the help of his millionaire friend and missile owner, P. G. Putatundo) and dousing the diskettes into liquid oxygen, the effect of the mutation-causing virus is finally dispelled and the human beings are liberated from the deadly virus. About sixty per cent of the total population of the world had been infected by this virus. Most of these humans die and the rest are morphed back to their original human form. The Earth becomes much lighter with the decrease in population. This helps the governments to curb poverty and unemployment.

Global-level extraction is evident in those of Bardhan's stories in which non-humans urgently point out important messages to human beings. The subtly didactic stories remind the readers how human beings have been extracting precious resources from the planet without being concerned about its consequences and the possible extinction of the entire human race. Under the influence of neo-liberalism, humans have been extracting a far greater quantity of natural resources and non-renewable energy in order to commodify them in the international market. The human extraction of natural resources leads to the extinction of both.

The ultimate form of human extraction by humans in the form of war, terrorism and all forms of actions that threaten world peace is poignantly depicted in the story "Dark Energy." In order to put an end to the violent atrocities, the "quintessence" (as expounded by Aristotle) or "Dark Energy" shows Dinanath Nath around the war-smitten and terror-stricken nations of the world. "Dark Energy" depicts the reification of scientific fantasies into reality by a sudden bombardment of all the defence systems of countries that are governed by the hegemony of terrorism and tyranny. Dark Energy—represented by a very heavy marble—turns out to be a wondrous antidote to world terrorism and anarchy. However, it shows how this extraction could be avoided if human beings value world peace.

The warning against human extraction of natural resources is firmly reinstated in the story "Gaachh" ("Tree"). Prof. Natboltu finds a square stone and is hypnotically drawn to Easter Island on the Pacific Ocean. A large ancient tree on its neighbouring island, Motu Nui, communicates to the professor through its cells about the perilous consequences of climatic changes due to

the continual human extraction of natural resources and deforestation. Bardhan suggests a production-oriented economy instead of an "extractive economy" (Hecht 257).

Prof. Natboltu is an unbiased scientist who has taken upon himself the task of restoring world peace and stopping any form of forcible or unethical extraction. He ensures that poetic justice is present and retribution is meted out to those who deserve it. In most of these stories, the extraction is stopped or prevented in order to bring about poetic justice in the interest of humans and the survival of the planet. Bardhan's style of depicting sci-fi vs reality rises beyond binary aspects like nature vs technology, history vs global progress, and human beings vs nature. Extractive activities have been part of human existence since the inception of humans on the planet. Bardhan's science fiction proposes simple solutions that may require the vast majority to think alike, towards the conservation of natural and ecological resources in order to minimise the effects of climate change. The hope that the urgent messages against extraction in Bardhan's stories may reach a wide audience convinces Bardhan's readers (most notably, through the story "String Bhoot") that the science of the past may become outdated, but the science fiction of today becomes the science of the future (Bardhan 658).

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Exploring Dalit-Futurism in Caste-Flavored Techno-Scientific Worlds

Priteegandha Naik

This paper introduces Dalit futurism as a methodological framework to analyze the concept of caste in English-language Indian science fiction. I use the novel *Chosen Spirits* (2020) by Samit Basu to demonstrate its potential to speculate about different avatars of caste against a technoscientific culture. In the Indian subcontinent, the dominant groups tend to imply that caste is an "ancient" category which does not have any contemporary relevance. However, caste continues to determine different aspects of life for *all* individuals, depending upon one's caste location (high or low). Dalit futurism provides a vocabulary to engage this ancient phenomenon with modern, exaggerated versions of reality, and explore this interaction to uncover various nodes of intersection. Taking the international audience into consideration, I think it is important to explain the significance of the caste system, a discriminatory system, on which Dalit futurism is premised and the resistance mounted by the anti-caste movement. In this paper, I begin by briefly explaining the characteristics, history, and contemporary effects of the caste system and the anti-caste movement. I then discuss the concept of Dalit futurism and its foundation in order to demonstrate its potential to analyze the novel.

The Caste System and Modes of Resistance

The caste system is a centuries-old system of stratification, mandated by Hindu religious scriptures, that dominates the Indian subcontinent. It divides the population into four *varnas*.[1] The first three groups are referred to as *Savarnas* or the upper castes: the *Brahmins*, associated with learning and other intellectual activities; the *Kshatriyas*, the warrior caste, and the *Vaishyas*, the merchant caste. On the other hand, the *Shudras* and *Avarnas* (referred to as Dalits and Tribals, are outside the caste social order), are associated with manual labor; they are considered to be the lowest in the hierarchy and have to face Untouchability.[2] B. R. Ambedkar, one of the most formidable critics of the caste system, has insightfully stated that it does not just divide labor but also divides laborers as it associates each occupation with a pure or impure status (Ambedkar 14). This status is ascribed at birth and cannot be changed. The caste system has created an unequal society that privileges and discriminates individuals on the basis of their caste membership. Thus, unlike economic classes which allow mobility, caste is a rigid system that has created historical advantages for the Savarnas and historical disadvantages for the Dalits who have difficulty accessing education, employment, and several other aspects of social and cultural life because of their status as "Untouchables." In addition, it prescribes endogamy and hereditary occupation, thereby impeding social interaction, exchange of ideas and opinions, and social networks.

However, this system has been actively resisted by several anti-caste visionaries who have fashioned alternate modes of thought at different points of time. For instance, Gail Omvedt

pitches the thoughts and ideas of anti-caste intellectuals during the Bhakti movement, especially Ravidas, a *Shudra* saint, as one of the earliest articulations of utopia in the Indian subcontinent (18). Ravidas's utopia opposed caste divisions and advocated for an equal and casteless society, built on "companionship" and free movement (107).[3] Omvedt contends that these visions of an ideal tomorrow were in stark opposition to the dystopian visions embodied in *Kaliyuga*,[4] espoused by Hindu Brahmin saints and scriptures. Since then, activists like Jyotiba Phule, Savitribai Phule, Periyar, Ambedkar, and several others have tried to steadily establish a foundation for the growth of an anti-caste movement that challenges the dominance and supremacy of caste ideologies. Their ideology resists caste discrimination by uncovering how caste disadvantages Dalits, Adivasis, and all other marginalized sections and posits an alternate system that privileges equality and social justice.

Over time, the anti-caste movement was promulgated by writers, activists, and scholars through literature, poetry, art, music, theater, and the online avenues to highlight their perspectives and culture, thereby privileging an alternate mode of imagining their community. For instance, in literature, writers and activists used the autobiographical mode to discuss the impact of life not just on themselves but also on their community. Autobiographies like *The Outcaste* by Sharankumar Limbale, *The Kaleidoscope of my Life* by Shantabai Kamble, *When I Hid my Caste* by Baburao Bagul, connect their plight with the societal treatment of their community. In recent times, authors like Suraj Yengde and Yashica Dutt have used the mode to discuss the contemporary avatars of caste through their books *Caste Matters* and *Coming Out as a Dalit* respectively. Artists like Arivu, Mahi Ghane, and Sumit Samos are using hip-hop to resist caste structures. The digital medium has also added another dimension to the Dalit movement by making protest sites virtual.

Dalit Futurism

Dalit futurism is a contemporary of these efforts. I conceptualize it as a contemporary of other Indigenous Futurisms, such as Chicano futurism, Adivasi Futurism, Subaltern Futurisms, etc. It is an analytical framework that explores the representation of caste and gender in Indian science fiction in English. It is an interdisciplinary project that draws from Dalit studies, science fiction studies, and science and technology studies. I argue that the government's belief in technology as the solution for all issues fails to consider the inherent inequalities associated with their adoption. Thus, my project builds on extant scholarship that highlights how engineers, developers, and multi-national corporations embed their biases and prejudices in the design, development, and deployment of technology (Boeri 113; Toyama). This is visible in Indian matrimonial apps and websites, the lack of effective engineering solutions to eradicate manual scavenging, e-governance services for identity cards that do not account for landless and paperless Dalit communities, and online regulations that do not recognize caste-based hate speech (De' 46; Pradhan and Mittal 275). As the twenty-first century rides on the back of new and emerging technologies, I suggest that it is important to understand and explore how caste interacts with technology and the emerging technoscientific culture.

I propose this investigation through Indian science fiction on caste. I theorize Dalit futurism as a methodological tool that enables the exploration of caste futures in alternate technoscientific worlds. It upholds Ambedkarism,[5] which resists caste discrimination by uncovering how caste influences different aspects of social, cultural, and political reality. It recognizes the potential in SF to defamiliarize the familiar and thereby provide freedom to its writers to explore different features of caste. As a result, it can disrupt, question, and challenge various notions about the caste system. Moreover, this defamiliarizing technique enables the genre to link past, present, *and* future on a single platform illustrating the contemporary avatars of caste. It uses the concepts of cognitive estrangement, the novum, and the mega-text to analyze how caste mutates in these science-fictional worlds and how our science-fictional and cultural vocabulary helps readers to comprehend the defamiliarized fictional environment (Naik 18). Dalit futurism destabilizes the boundaries between science fiction and Dalit studies to create an interdisciplinary space. It allows a simultaneous movement between the fictional and the real world. The fictional engagement with caste-flavored technologies encourages us to think about our reality.

Dalit Futurism as a Methodological Tool

To illustrate this phenomenon, I analyze *Chosen Spirits* (2020) by Samit Basu, a dark, dystopian novel set in 2050s India. Basu extrapolates and exaggerates the events that led up to the Citizenship Amendment Act, 2019[6]—both the protest and the government crackdown. The fictional world is replete with imaginary technologies that are embedded with caste biases and attitudes. These function as novums that are introduced into the market by Savarna businessmen who wish to maintain their status quo.

Here, Dalit futurism enables me to analyze how caste is deployed in two major ways: firstly, by the amplification of the neoliberal economy that effectively sheaths caste ideologies; secondly, how this facade is maintained through the media discourse and challenged by the marginalized through the same platform. This hegemony is ensured by controlling the public discourse through the FlowVerse, a 24/7 live platform that is the major source of news and entertainment and can be compared to an amalgamation of social media platforms like Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube.

Basu parodies the caste-corporate entities by exaggerating the social capital and networks cultivated by the *Savarnas*, i.e., Banias by creating the fictional "access-caste Brahmin," a group that has been able to convert their social capital and networks to cultivate "one-degree relationships with real power" (Basu 68). This element signals the Brahmin-Bania nexus, first explained by Ambedkar, as a symbiotic relationship between the educated Madras Brahmins who were reporters and journalists, and the Banias, who provided financial support to the newspaper organizations. By pointing out the importance of historical advantages accrued by Brahmins, Ambedkar illustrates how the community has been able to re-adapt and re-fashion itself into advantageous positions, even as it acted internally, in isolation. Fuller and Narsimha's study on Tamil Brahmins interprets this general prosperity as an art of power cultivated through

accumulated social and cultural capital, which allowed them to adapt their professions and perceive upcoming opportunities while withdrawing from extremely competitive ones (27). In the novel, the success of Chopra as an access-caste Brahmin makes caste visible in political and economic governance. His investment in the development of an app to sell the lower castes, immigrants, and climate-change refugees; the antagonist Rohit's belief in the contemporary manifestation of caste-ascribed occupations, and the hindered access to the market experienced by Dalit-run businesses all explain how caste blocks Dalit entry.

These social inequalities are orchestrated and maintained through media organizations that operate on the FlowVerse. The FlowVerse hosts multiple FlowStars simultaneously and engineers multiple realities, a hyperbolized version of our contemporary reality wherein AI algorithms on social media craft an exclusive "feed" that is in tune with an individual's tastes, preferences, and attitudes. Initially, the FlowVerse was being used by the marginalized to highlight their opinions, but over time was seized by caste-corporate entities. This is analogous to the Indian social reality which was reflected in the abysmal coverage of COVID-19, incidents of caste atrocities, and lopsided coverage that ignored Dalit issues or misrepresented them—indicating how news reportage has been compromised due to the nexus (Abhishek; Menon). The near-complete blackout of Dalit issues reflects the caste-prone mindset of the mainstream media, also a result of lack of effective representation as regular studies have revealed the lack of Dalits, Bahujan, and Adivasis in newsrooms (Who Tells Our Stories 1, 6). This state of affairs helps to contextualize Ambedkar's warning about the Brahmin-Bania nexus in news organizations as the latter would be swayed by profit, not well-being.

However, there is a secret underground movement brought together by Dalit artists and other marginalized folks that challenges the establishment. The most prominent activists in this fictional world are E-Klav and Desibryde, multi-media artists who subvert and challenge dominant narratives through Ambedkar's ideas. E- Klav and Desibryde reject the holiness and reverence accorded to Hindu gods and goddesses and instead privilege the ideals espoused in the Indian constitution. E-Klav and Desibryde's protests are a reflection of the Ambedkarite ideology, which promotes modern, secular attitudes.

I suggest that the performances enacted by these activists must not be considered solitary activities but efforts to build a counter-culture that foregrounds Ambedkar thought: "Educate. Agitate. Organize." By visibly inserting Ambedkarite ideology in their protest, E-Klav and Desibryde locate oppression in caste-flavored neoliberalism. Thus, E-Klav and Desibryde's protests are reminiscent of the multi-modal strategies utilized by Dalit activists like Thenmozhi Soundarajan, Anurag Minus Verma, Meena Kandasamy, @anti-casteCat, and others, who use an eclectic array of styles to present the Dalit perspective and challenge the neglect accorded by the mainstream media, by asserting their presence. These artists intervene in the perception of a single reality and highlight how caste privilege creates a reality that erases the struggles of the marginalized from their "feed." This assertion amidst their mainstream negation is a powerful manner of resistance.

Thus, Dalit futurism seeks to highlight how caste is made invisible in the economic realm, actively supported by the propaganda propagated by a complicit media. It allows a back-and-forth movement between caste and the techno-scientific cultures. These strategies are effective in portraying a reality that rejects caste atrocities or discrimination, and normalizes caste-accrued privileges. Thus, the novums enable us to perceive how caste mutates with the emerging techno-scientific culture.

Notes

1. *Varnas* is a Sanskrit word that refers to social groups.

2. Untouchability was a ritual practice prescribed by the caste system wherein the touch of the Shudras and Avarnas was considered to be "polluting." Thus, these social groups were excluded from public spaces and institutions.

3. This is in stark contrast to the restrictions imposed on the Shudras and Avarnas that prevented them from accessing public spaces (roads, markets, etc).

4. Hinduism believes in four *yugas*, i.e., different periods of time. The world began with the age of Gods and has slowly deteriorated to *Kaliyuga*, the contemporary period which is ruled by greed, sins, and vices. Brahmanical saints envisioned *Kaliyuga* as dystopic precisely because of the breakdown of the caste system and the admixture of different castes. This "deterioration" of the social order is considered to be apocalyptic enough to lead to the end of the world.

5. Ambedkarism is an anti-caste philosophy that is largely attributed to the ideas and thoughts of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, but like all movements has grown and expanded in scope and reach.

6. The Citizenship Amendment Act, 2019, is an Indian law that enables persecuted religious minorities like the Sikhs, Hindus, Christians, Parsis, Buddhists, and Jains from Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Bangladesh to gain Indian Citizenship. The Act led to widespread protests across the country and was heavily criticized for using religion as an eligibility criterion. The brutal government crackdown on these protests drew global attention. See "The Citizenship Amendment Act was the straw that broke the camel's back" by Guarav Lele on the news portal, Newslaundry.

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Mutating the Margins: A Disability Studies Reading of the Undertheorized in/Human in SF

Michael Dale Stokes

Thanks to a history of disease, injury, and immolation, my body has been scrutinized using all sorts of technology: x-rays, magnets, ultrasounds, even swallowing highly reactive alkali metals. In all of this internal reflection, I've come to learn that mine is a mutant body. My mutations are not detrimental or life threatening; they're barely even apparent without the aforementioned medical scrutiny. I have supernumerary floating ribs, os peroneum (extra foot bones), and a circulatory system that can spontaneously cause tiny, needle-like crystals of acid to form in my joints.

Thinking about this body I have, I often slip into the language and sensationalism of science fiction. This process reflects historic treatments of the genre by Darko Suvin, Samuel Delaney, and others. Science fiction provides an aesthetic and logical framework for transforming my understanding about the world and my place in it. One qualifying metric for being a human adult is having 206 bones. With my extra ribs and foot bones, I have 210. Am I a human, and if not, what am I?

By the logics of the society I exist in, I am, of course, human. In Western logics of humanity, I am quickly identifiable by characteristics around which the category of human was formed. White. Masculine. Seemingly able-bodied. Educated. These boundaries which position me within the category of man are used, consciously and unconsciously, to exclude people. The work I do in sf follows the genre through a particularly mutagenic window to track the ways in which it reified and altered the boundaries of "Man" through repeated questioning of the category. I do so by focusing on an undertheorized, dismissed, and yet ultra-present archetype—the mutant—as a means to test and shift these boundaries.

Testing the boundaries of humanity causes discomfort in presumed-to-be-human readers by threatening the assumed stability of their identity. When the boundaries are tested, the reader faces a conceptual threat: either they find themselves outside of what it means conventionally to be human, or they must extend their care and understanding to beings they didn't previously recognize as human.

In contrast to extensively documented and categorized encounters with alien others in sf, the category of the mutant is largely absent from the large sf histories that shape the field such as Adam Roberts's *The History of Science Fiction*, Brian Alidss's *The Trillion Year Spree*, and Alexi and Cory Panshin's *The World Beyond the Hill*. In Aldiss's seven-hundred-page text, the term "mutant" appears nine times; in Roberts's five hundred and thirty-seven pages, it appears ten; and in the Panshin brothers' work, a whopping twenty-one. While sf of the first half of the twentieth century,

as well as all of the twentieth century's sf production, utilizes mutants frequently, they are an under-discussed and under-theorized figure within sf.

Using disability studies and the aesthetics of science fiction, it is possible to mobilize a reading of the figure of the mutant as a category that is striking and under-theorized precisely because it denies or otherwise defies resolutions that the alien offers. I use Ato Quayson's work on aesthetic nervousness and Tobin Siebers's theories of disability aesthetics to question how disabled characters and narratives shape readers' understanding of mutation over time. Quayson's work on aesthetic nervousness focuses on the ways in which disability short-circuits readers' perception of a narrative while charging the experience affectively. Such oscillation of shock and mis/recognition opens the texts up to new readings of presumptions about how bodies ought to be displayed, read, and rendered as symbols. Tobin Siebers' work on Disability Aesthetics (in the book of the same name), argues that variety—and to that end disability (which is defined by variance, deviance, variety, difference, and other positively and negatively charged terms)—is central to the appreciation of aesthetic elements. I carry this further to argue that disability is central to science fiction which relies on a variety of bodyminds to stimulate and otherwise shock readers. Mutation is the recognition and acceptance of variance among humanity—anathema to practices of separating and isolating which sf enacts. The figure of the mutant cannot be made binary from the human precisely because it is born of humanity. The mutant resists resolution precisely because it is unpredictable; it stumbles into the narrative weighed down by centuries of ableist assumption, tripping over the one-way narrative of Western progress, and twitching through its performance of the eugenic bogeyman.

The threat of the alien bears resolution: it can be triumphed over, succumbed to, rendered knowable, or returned to the box as utterly arcane. The mutant lingers. The mutant is the unseen and unknowable variable that arises through the countless repetitions the pulp genre offers. The mutant is the only means to creating the superman while simultaneously carrying the risk of species-wide contagion. Indeed, it is the mutability and uncertainty of the mutant as a category that grants it both broad aesthetic appeal and limited resolution.

The 1950 short story "Born of Man and Woman" by Richard Matheson is introduced by the Robert Mills, the editor of *The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction*, as featuring a "protagonist who tells it with a mind such as you have never met, housed in a body you have never imagined" (Mills 108). This story, which is told in the first-person perspective of a mutant, ungendered child narrates the abuse visited upon them by their parents for not looking "like mother and father. Mother says all right people look like they do" (Matheson 109). Mutants, here and wherever they appear in science fiction media, highlight key twentieth-century anxieties about supposedly "non-normative" and "wrong" human reproduction, and feature a dissonant aesthetics that quickly excites, stimulates, and discomforts readers. Matheson's story concludes with the mutant plotting retribution against their abusive parents: "I will screech and laugh loud. I will run on the walls. Last I will hang head down by all my legs and laugh and drip green all over until they are sorry" (110). In this climax, the body "never imagined" by the editor—and presumably never imagined

by the audience—becomes a threatening spectacle. It is fearsome, it is grotesque, and it is far more complicated than is first apparent. In the concluding paragraphs, the reader is asked to choose sides again given new information: Should the reader embrace a gender-defying, multi-limbed, green-spewing mutant, or the horrified suburban parents who violently punish non-normativity? In this way the story's surprise ending becomes an affective shock and reversal: How can the audience find kinship or connection with a mind like they have never met and a body that they have never imagined?

Yet, this excitement and thrill of experiencing the unimaged and unimaginable is a core element of the aesthetic experience of science fiction. As a genre, science fiction has been utilized as a way to perceive and theorize the unknown and to make it knowable and understandable. Darko Suvin, in *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction*, defines science fiction as "an interaction of estrangement and cognition" facilitated by a novum, or a new thing (37). Mutants insist and provide evidence that variation is not a new thing—even when not apparent to empirical observers. As such, the mutant defies cognitive separation between the now and the new. It insists that the audience is a responsible party (much like a parent) in shaping speculative futures. This responsibility is the driving force behind the affective impact of the mutant. While other figures are marked by alterity, isolation, and otherness, the mutant insists on an immediate relationality to the audience. Mutants and mutation are often defined by their connection to and deviation from the norm.

This discomforting engagement with mutation is evident in Matheson's work. The child of the story is at first at least somewhat recognizable as some form of "human." They have language that they use with some proficiency. They have relationships with their parents who provide some care and comforts in the form of a bed and a magazine. Their parents, however, are also abusive and cruel. All of these traits make for an empathetic and caring connection. In the conclusion of the story this extension of care is troubled when it is revealed to the reader that they have offered human-care to a mutant with too many legs and that drips green goo. It is in this moment that the reader must reconcile their empathy and care with a figure who is beyond their definition of humanity.

It is in this shuddering revelation that I hope to better understand what mutants do to the boundaries of humanity, how mutants trouble the category of the human, and how their presence in science fiction changes aesthetic and cultural assumptions about humanity. I also work to draw out the connections between literary mutants and the self-aware mutative practices of science fiction authors and publishers. Campbell himself discussed his editorial mutations in 1938 to better align sf with human perception. Disabled editor of *Amazing* Ray Palmer frequently leaned toward stories of psi, freakishness, and mutation. Mutation is frequently a marker taken on by disparate authors of SF, as comes up in *The Proceedings of the Institute for Twenty-First Century Studies*. In a rhetorical condemnation of conservatism among writers of science fiction, Phil Farmer remarks: "Strange, isn't it, that a field supposedly dedicated to the future, to mutation, has so many conservatives, die-hards, and fossils in it" (139).

Thinking across the mutants of the page, mutants on the silver screen, mutants bound in comic panels, and their mutated creators, I follow the ways disability studies informs understandings of mutation, and how mutation provides practices for shifting the boundaries of who and what qualify as human.

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Masculinity Construction in the Context of Gender Roles in *R.U.R.*

Meltem Dağcı

Although it is known that the gender gap between professions continues both in the world and in the slowdown of developments in the field of artificial intelligence, algorithmic technologies have brought the relationship between robotics, gender, artificial intelligence, and professions to the forefront. In this context, some studies have investigated whether there is a gender-based difference in social life in terms of accepting and adopting the existence of robots. Due to the developments in artificial intelligence systems, artificial intelligence engineers have technologies that can produce robots or load different algorithms on the robot. The most difficult thing in the field of artificial intelligence is to prevent gender inequality in the field and to work so that artificial intelligence does not turn into a technology that develops under the patriarchal mentality. In this context, there are some studies investigating whether there is a gender-based difference in social life in accepting and adopting the existence of robots.

By analyzing Karel Čapek's male robots in the play *R.U.R.* (1920) and their performance of masculinity, this paper illuminates how, according to the text, the concepts of masculinity can also be transferred through machines. The human creation project of the positivist old Rossum and the industrial knowledge and capitalist leanings of the young Rossum reinforce the purpose of the fiction. An analogy with God can be made for the idea of a human creation project. The human-robot duo is also suitable for this situation. He wants the real person to reflect himself with the artificial person. We see the purpose of being God through our belief that he will see man as imperfect and incomplete and create something better. Rossum's robots are intelligent and skilled mechanical workers who initially serve the "human master." It may be ideal for production, but it lacks human sensibilities, emotions, and reproduction. Čapek wants us to see the insatiable appetite of capitalism (Turan, 1-2). The idea of being a god is the product of a traditional masculine mentality, and as you can see, the idea of being a god in *R.U.R.* was again put forward by a man.

Rossum's aim is to eliminate inequality between people by integrating robots into the system. Thus, the class difference that exists between humans will be between humans and robots. While all humanity lives in prosperity, robots who feel nothing endure hardship. It allows us to understand whether there is a perceptual, behavioral, or intellectual difference between male and female robots (Showkat 2018; Yan 2014; Hung 2012; Kuo vd. 2009; Nomura vd. 2006).

There are five central characters in *R.U.R.*: Marius, Sulla, Radius, Primus, and Helena. As can be understood from the character structure, there are two female robots. These two female robots, Sulla and Helena, are labed robotka by Čapek to symbolize femininity. It will be seen that most of the robots and executive robots in *R.U.R.* are male. Among this branch of characters are ten male robots.

The masculine gaze has also infiltrated the way females see, judge, and evaluate themselves. Women are forced to be drawn to the images produced by the masculine gaze; they are conditioned to fill this masculine frame. It is the pressure to conform or simply accept the patriarchal viewpoint, to be accepted and approved by it, or to tolerate being seen as such. It also shapes the way women think and know about their own bodies, abilities, and place in the world. The dialogue between Helen and Domin in *R.U.R.* is a testament to that. Domin insists on a situation involving Helena's body, forcing her into a situation in which she is not comfortable. The male robot persistently touches the female robot's private areas and body. It is not possible for Helena to consent and approve this situation because she is disturbed by the unnecessary insistence and behavior of the male robot. She does not want it to come close to her body. It is seen that Helena cannot clearly express the discomfort inflicted upon her body. Based on Helena's reaction, Domin diverts the conversation to another area with a different question. Thus, Domin speaks in a traditionally masculine manner, imposing his opinion on the other side. The dialogue representing the masculine mentality is as follows:

> Domin: Thank you. Would you do me the favor of lowering your veil?
> Helen: Of course. You want to see my face. . .
> Domin: Sir?
> Helena: Could you please let go of my hand?
> Domin: (dropping) I'm so sorry. I forgot.
> Helena: (drops her veil) You want to know if I'm a spy. How careful are you here?
> Domin: (looking at her with deep interest) Hmmm, of course! We. . .we are! (Čapek 26)

While the traditionally masculine view encourages women to devalue themselves and to respect men, patriarchy, and the values they reinforce, it prevents women from becoming stronger, getting out from under the power and control of the masculine view, and gaining the ability to defend themselves. So, living under the male gaze involves the power of looking, which determines how men look at women, how women look at themselves, and how they look at other women. Seeing and judging themselves and other women from this perspective is extremely hurtful, worthless, and destructive as women try to affirm and establish their own values within this perspective (Arslan). In the syntax between male and female robots in dialogues and daily conversations, it is seen that the male robots speak with a dominant, masculine mentality. This shows that in terms of the concept of gender in society, we can encounter a strong, invincible, authoritarian, and masculine language in the world of men. The dismantling of patriarchal masculinity first begins in language. Avoiding sexist expressions in daily speech and language use ensures gender equality. The development process in language is positively reflected in the expressions of men towards women.

Journalist and writer Zehra Çelenk expresses the following about masculinity, arrogance, and the borderline: the fact that writing is an act of "drawing a boundary, forming a framework" is remarkable in itself. Used as the broader, plural meaning of "border," "owner" becomes a representation of many things that surround the world when taken to mean "border is honor."

> Helena: Can we go to the factory now?
> Domin: Yes. Twenty-two I guess?
> Helena: What is twenty-two?
> Domin: Your age.
> Helena: Twenty-One. Why do you want to know?
> Domin: Because. . . well . . .(enthusiastic) You're going to be here a long time, aren't you? (Čapek 26)

Boundaries regulating relations between individuals and countries are not only the subject of politics and diplomacy, but appear also in many fields, from those concerning human rights to gender. The binary and sequential dialog show that the male robot has exceeded its communication limits (Çelenk).

It is noteworthy that the male robot enters the field and boundaries of the female robot without knowing its place in the drama and asks certain questions in a cynical masculine style. The age-related conversation continues as the male robot infers about the length of stay of the female robot in the factory:

> Helena: But for God's sake! I don't want.
> Domin: (putting both hands on her shoulders) One minute left! Now you either look me in the eye and reject me sternly and then I leave you or . . .
> Helena: You're such a bully!
> Domin: It's okay. Every man should be a little bit of a bully. It's part of being a man. (Čapek 50)

The woman is so educated and prepared, but she begins to perceive herself as an object. Her self-perception as an object and the excessive socialization of women means that she deeply realizes that the driving force of the social order is the traditionally masculine mind, desires, and tendencies (Işıklı 20). We see the domination of the female body and the effects of traditionally masculine behavior/words upon the female body.

In the play, Domin makes comments about Sulla's body. He deduces from her body that she is a robot, has no emotions, and has features like human skin. He warns Sulla to rotate her body back and forth during the presentation. Thus, it ignores the privacy of the female robot. As can be understood from Domin's explanations here, a physiological distinction has been made over the female robot, even if it is the robot in question because the probability of a female robot behaving this way and expressing it verbally is very low. For this reason, discrimination in terms of work/duty load is also made between robots. In the case of job sharing, the body structures of female robots are taken into consideration. In this sense, the problem of gender inequality arises when it comes to female robots that are left in the background. We understand this situation from the dialogue between them:

> Helena: (sits down) Where are you from?
> Sulla: I'm from here. Factory.
> Helena: Oh, so you were born here.
> Sulla: Yes, I was made here.
> Helena: (surprised) How so?
> Domin: (laughing) Sulla is not a human, Miss Gloryova; she is a robot.
> Helena: Oh, forgive me, please.
> Domin: (puts his hand on Sulla's shoulder) Sulla doesn't get angry; he has no feelings. Look, Miss Gloryova, touch his face; look at the leather we made; examine it, please.
> Helena: Oh, no, no.
> Domin: It's just like human skin. Sulla even has facial hair that you can see in a blonde. Sure, his eyes are a little small, but look at that hair. Turn around, Sulla.
> Helena: Enough! (Čapek 32)

The concept of gender is used to explain the genetic differences of the individual, to emphasize the biological aspect of being a man and a woman, and to explain the physiological differences between men and women. The term was first coined by Robert Stoller, a professor of psychiatry working on transgender studies in 1968 and later developed by British sociologist, feminist, and writer Ann Oakley to describe gender and social roles and norms through genders. In addition to the feminist movement, the field of sociology, emphasizes gender more and a gender-gender distinction is made with the effect of studies that observe the "relationships" between the sexes by some authors. “Gender is a mechanism by which masculine and feminine concepts are generated and naturalized,” posits Judith Butler (75). As can be understood from the definition, with the concept of gender, a number of roles are assigned to women and men in society. These roles involve societal expectations that limit the activities that men and women can do (Kalan 77). As Butler points out, the concepts of masculine and feminine give roles to both men and women in society. Domin is a male robot who uses these roles well. He pressures and imposes sanctions on Helena to have a say over the woman's body. This speech, which narrows Helena's fields of activity, raises the expectations of women. Talking and reflecting gender norms through the physical structure of women leads to gender inequality.

Elements such as beauty, attractiveness, and seduction imposed on the female body cause women to be seen as sexual objects and cause more harm to women. Most of the time, only women are thought of as sexual beings, as if there is no sexuality between two individuals, male and female. A woman is under heavy burdens due to the norms of beauty and youth and the sexualized display of the body imposed upon her (Bilgin 21).

In Domin's speech, we see efforts to ignore, restrict, and reduce the presence of women in the private/public space. There is a traditionally masculine mentality that puts female robots in the production mold and sees them only as tools in terms of reproduction.

> Helena: Are you mad at me?
> Domin: God, no! We. . . I just thought we should talk about other things. We're just a handful of people here surrounded by hundreds of thousands of robots and no women. And all we talk about all day is production rates. It's like a curse on us, Miss Gloryova. (Čapek 37)
> Helena: Maybe it's a silly question, but why are you building female robots… I mean…
> Domin: Gender doesn't mean anything to them, does it?
> Helen: Yes.
> Domin: It's a supply and demand issue. You see, maids, clerks, secretaries… People are used to women working in these jobs.
> Helena: But…but…Tell me, male and female robots are mutual…so nothing?
> Domin: They're completely unrelated. There is nothing about emotional attraction between them.
> Helena: Oh, that's so scary! (Čapek 48)

Rossum's Robots are intelligent and skilled mechanical workers who initially serve the "human master." It may be ideal for production, but it lacks human sensibilities, emotions, and reproduction. The idea of being a god is the product of a patriarchal mentality, and as you can see, the idea of being a god in *R.U.R.* was again put forward by a man.

In conclusion, Karel Čapek shows that in the modern age, the unimaginable mechanization is over-glorified and the spiritual aspects of people can be deformed. The emergence of artificial intelligence in *R.U.R.* and the fact that the machine completes the tasks that humans cannot achieve does not eliminate the patriarchal, masculine mentality. As can be seen in the text, traditional masculinity and gender roles have been implemented through robots. Thus, the pay emphasizes how the concept of gender serves the capitalist system together with gender inequality, gender-based consumers, and the roles/duties given to robots.

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Why Women Can't Be Space Marines...or Priests: Warhammer 40K and Catholic Theology

Jess Flarity

Warhammer 40,000 (henceforth, 40k) is the world's most popular miniature war game ("Top Five", Harrop 3) while the Jesuits are the largest male religious order in the Catholic Church (Jesuits.org). Both institutions are founded on principles featuring women's exclusion: women cannot serve as Jesuit priests nor become "Space Marines," a kind of warrior-priest in 40k's science fictional far future (the year 40,000). The Catholic priesthood officially became male-only in the late 4th century, at the Council of Laodicea near the end of the Perso-Roman War (New Advent, Cannon 11), while 40k's fan base has remained overwhelmingly male since it debuted in 1987 (Harrop: 1 in 36 players are women; Dakkadakka.com: 7% of site users are female-identifying respondents). This essay analyzes the Church's public response to women-as-priests by Catholic leaders, such as Jesuit Superior-General Arturo Sosa, Pope Francis, and Pope John Paul II, then draws comparisons to the response of women as Space Marines by the creators and fans of 40k; the two communities have striking similarities. This would not be surprising to German philosopher Jürgen Habermas, who stated in his treatise on the intersection between secular and religious communities, *An Awareness of What is Missing*: "Secularization functions less as a filter separating out the contents of traditions than as a transformer which redirects the flow of tradition" (18). The goal of this essay is to bridge what Habermas calls the "cleavage between secular knowledge and revealed knowledge" (17) and provide a clear breakdown for a devout Jesuit priest or a fanatical 40k player on how their organization directly supports the oppression of women. My intention is to create communicative action in the Habermasian sense and redirect the flow of a harmful tradition: the exclusion of women from what should obviously be gender-neutral spaces.

40k and the lore surrounding the game is a particularly useful comparison to Catholicism because of how quickly it grew from being a niche hobby into something like its own religion. What started as a tabletop battle system has transformed over three decades into a multimedia platform that publishes novels, video games, and a variety of other content all marketed towards its predominantly male audience; its parent company, Games Workshop, now has market capital of more than a billion British pounds (Hern). Violent games and the surrounding "geek culture" have been overwhelmingly masculine since their development in the 1970's, as the Atari game console and pen-and-paper games like *Dungeons and Dragons* were developed and tested almost exclusively by men. While this "default maleness" in geekdom has slowly shifted to be more welcoming to women in recent years, incidents such as 2014's Gamergate and the Sad/Rabid Puppies controversy at Worldcon continue to prove how reluctant these conservative cultures are to accepting women as full members of their communities.

While 40k players tend to be middle-class, white "geeks" between the ages of 15 and 40 (Hern), Jesuit priests are a diverse congregation known around the world for their academic

contributions and their commitment to helping impoverished communities. This is despite the fact that the Order's modern vow of chastity is based on Saint Augustine's incredibly biased theological writings equating a woman's sexuality with sin (Torjesen 223), creating a dynamic that psychologist and laicized Catholic priest Eugene Kennedy calls, "[a] signature [that] has been branded so deeply into the ecclesiastical organizational tree that it seems as natural to those who tend it as the grain of the wood itself" (174). As of August 2022, Pope Francis continues to block any attempts allowing priests to marry, or for women to be elevated into the lesser role of a church deacon, even though he stated in 2018's *Synod for the Amazon*, "Let us not reduce the involvement of women in the Church, but instead promote their active role in the ecclesial community" (Chapter V, 99).

In a similar tactic to skirt accusations of misogyny, the newest Eighth and Ninth editions of 40k feature female characters as centerpieces in Games Workshop's promotional materials ("Warhammer-Community"), and the previously sexualized models in the armies called the Sisters of Battle (space nuns) and the Dark Eldar (space elves) have been "toned down" since their original creation, possibly in response to related feminist backlash against the game in the early 2010's. Despite the increase of women's roles in media portrayals, the various factions of the male-only Space Marines continue to dominate in popularity among casual and tournament players, comprising over 50% of all the armies fielded in 2019, while the Sisters of Battle were less than 2% of all the armies fielded (40kstats.com). In addition, Space Marine characters serve by far as the most common protagonists for the game's supplementary materials, such as the hundreds of in-universe novels, as well as in related movies and video games (Black Library).

The fact that Space Marines can only be *men* is echoed throughout the ranks of every Catholic priesthood, but this essay will focus specifically on the Jesuits, as the Order's reputation of being the most "liberal" wing of the Church was first recognized in the secular American consciousness during the 1960's (McDonough: "Metamorphoses" 329), suggesting that individual Jesuit priests may secretly be in favor of ordaining women in spite of their current leader, Arturo Sosa, stating in 2017 that women's full inclusion into the priesthood "has not yet arrived" ("Stirring the Waters"). In contrast to Sosa, feminist scholar and practicing Catholic Tina Beattie positions female priests as a modern necessity in the introduction of *New Catholic Feminism*:

> ...until women are recognized as full and equal participants in the life of faith, until we are acknowledged as persons graced with the image of God, capable of representing Christ to the world as fully and effectively as men do, the Church herself will continue to be a spiritual desert where men's fears and fantasies lead them to refuse the grace that female sacramentality might bring to Catholic liturgical and institutional life (2).

Beattie's idea that men's "fears and fantasies" control their views of women is a critical building block in the philosophical parallels between 40k's history and Jesuit theology. Strict adherence to holy scripture/game lore is necessary for maintaining the identity of a priest/player, and

unfortunately, blaming women's biology, specifically its reproductive or sexual power, serves as a scapegoat for these individuals having to reflect on their institution's own problematic teachings.

Fictional Game Lore Functions as Religious Doctrine

When Catholic priests and 40k players follow a "divine" canon, it relieves them of personal responsibility regarding their beliefs and actions related to these beliefs. This technique is a very common one in conservative circles, and was used to negate any chance of women Catholic priests by Pope John Paul II in his 1994 apostolic letter, *Ordinatio sacerdotalis*:

> I declare that the Church has no authority whatsoever to confer priestly ordination on women and that this judgment is to be definitively held by all the Church's faithful…The fact that the Blessed Virgin Mary…received neither the mission proper to the apostles nor the ministerial priesthood clearly shows that the nonadmission of women to priestly ordination cannot mean that women are of lesser dignity, nor can it be construed as a discrimination against them. Rather, it is to be seen as the faithful observance of a plan to be ascribed to the Wisdom of the Lord of the Universe.

This statement leads devoted Catholics to absolve John Paul II of any moral failure related to the ostracization of women because it is the *Church* which "has no authority"—and his repeated message of obedience or faith to a mysterious "plan" further reinforces his helplessness as an individual. This type of cognitive bias serves as not just one, but two of the central pillars of Jesuit vows to obedience (Jesuits.org). Another trait visible in the Pope's statement will feature as a motif in this essay, and that is the role of paying "lip service" to women while also treating them unequally, as this kind of "cheap talk" does not require communicative action in the Habermasian sense (Risse). John Paul II states that "nonadmission of women to priestly ordination cannot mean women are of lesser dignity" or "be construed as discrimination," but nearly all feminist scholars as well as many female Catholics are clear in their disagreement with this position. Pope Francis has continued the tradition of mitigating the potentiality of female priests as recently as 2020, stating in the *Querida Amazonia* Apostolic Exhortation:

> [Involving women in the Church] summons us to broaden our vision, lest we restrict our understanding of the Church to her functional structures. Such a reductionism would lead us to believe that women would be granted a greater status and participation in the Church only if they were admitted to Holy Orders. But that approach would in fact *narrow* our vision; *it would lead us to clericalize women, diminish the great value of what they have already accomplished, and subtly make their indispensable contribution less effective* (100, emphasis mine).

According to Pope Francis, the clericalization of women into advanced leadership roles within the Church will somehow "subtly make their indispensable contribution less effective," though he provides no evidence to support his reasoning as to why, and he goes on to state:

> In a synodal Church, those women...should have access to positions...that do not entail Holy Orders and that can better signify *the role that is theirs*...This would also allow women to have a real and effective impact on the organization, the most important decisions and the direction of communities, while continuing to do so *in a way that reflects their womanhood* (103, emphasis mine).

Pope Francis establishes that "appropriate" gender roles are the true foundation of Catholicism, and his command that women should serve in a way that "reflects their womanhood" is a familiar conclusion the Church has been claiming for over a thousand years. Academic researcher Peter McDonough criticized this viewpoint in 1990:

> In a patriarchy, the institutional consequences of [reforms] in what might seem to be merely symbolic quandaries about the role of women are potentially very great. The connections between gender inequality, psychosexual identity, and organizational authority are—or once were—extraordinarily tight in Catholicism. Change in this area, which poses a crisis of individual and corporate identity and purpose, is centered on the working out and sustenance of a male role and personality in opposition to women ("Metamorphoses" 334).

A devoted 40k player undergoes an identical form of disassociation regarding the role of women as Space Marines; this person is heavily invested in the "world" of the game, as they have developed a kind of mental landscape out of the myriad of details regarding the different armies and alien races across a ten-thousand-year timeline that also includes many lengthy characterizations of the universe's key human figures. In this fictional universe, the God-Emperor of Mankind is the most important character, similar to how Jesus or God plays a central role in the life of a Jesuit—when John Paul II uses terminology such as "the Lord of the Universe," it is not difficult to see the connection between the two different mindsets. In fact, the origin story of 40k's God-Emperor and the creation of the Space Marines from his own genetic material was intended to be a satire of religion and was partially inspired by Milton's *Paradise Lost* (McAuley 192).

The ever-expanding 40k lore is known within the community as the "fluff." While some players pay minimal attention to the fluff and instead focus on the tabletop, skirmish-based combat of the game or the hobby of painting its miniature models, other players become monk-like chroniclers of this information, with some even contributing their own material to the canon, establishing a greater ethos in their "faith" in a process not unlike being formally accepted as a priest. As of June 2020, there were over *three hundred* books set in the 40k universe published under Games Workshop's literary imprint, the Black Library; some of these stories began as fan fictions which won a sponsored competition (Walliss 129). As one player stated in Walliss' 2012 study on gender in 40k fanfiction: "the existing fluff is a kind of Bible of sorts...the established fluff is law, and breaking that is to commit some unwritten crime" (123). A central pillar of this "40k Bible" is that Space Marines can only be male, according to the original lore by Rick Priestly, and this outlook is still quietly supported by Games Workshop. A lengthy article on the game's official

website contains many explanations and diagrams regarding the pseudo-scientific enhancements a Space Marine must undergo to become an immortal, godlike super-soldier, and one section states, "...only a small proportion of people can become Space Marines. They must be male because zygotes are keyed to *male hormones and tissue types*, hence the need for tissue compatibility tests and psychological screening" ("Rites of Initiation", emphasis mine).

This innocuous detail supports the baseline of a misogynistic worldview in the fictional far-future of 40k: because the vast majority of its players are male, many don't even recognize how this element effectively denies a woman a sense of normality in the game's hierarchy, where the Space Marines, like bishops or cardinals in the Church, are at the very top of the organization's bureaucratic power structure. This is in part due to an internet phenomenon known as Poe's law. First recognized in response to a Creationism forum in 2005, Poe's law states: "Without a winking smiley or other blatant display of humor, it is utterly impossible to parody a Creationist in such a way that someone won't mistake for the genuine article" (Ellis). Poe's law functions as a philosophical shield for a 40k player who can point to the game's hypermasculinity and hyperbolic levels of violence as a parody of the space opera genre, allowing them to safely assert that its feudal, "grimdark" setting should not be taken seriously, thereby inoculating its lore, and their personal beliefs, against all arguments regarding gender politics. This is in direct opposition to one of the game's primary creators, Rick Priestly, who stated in an interview in 2015:

> To me the background to 40k was always intended to be ironic...There's no guarantee that the Emperor is anything other than a corpse with a residual mental ability to direct spacecraft. It's got some parallels with religious beliefs and principles, and I think a lot of that got missed and overwritten (Duffy).

Many modern 40k fans and writers have fallen into the trap of Poe's law and are unable to discern the satirical elements of the game from the parts they actively enjoy: the actual misogyny is indistinguishable from the ironic misogyny. One of many, *many* examples of this fractured mental state is in the 2006 novel focusing on the Sisters of Battle, titled *Faith & Fire*, by James Swallow. Throughout the book, male characters often muse about what it would be like to "bed" one of the Sisters, and the women are referred to constantly as "church bitches," "wenches," "harlots," and "whores" throughout the text. But this one book is just the tip of a misogynist iceberg; these books inhabit shelf space at your local library and used book stores around the world, with some even appearing on the *New York Times* bestseller list (Harrop 4). Nearly every book is by a male author, and they are so riddled with casual sexism that the mindset of these super-fans lies in the same state Kennedy writes about Catholic priests, with "the signature branded so deeply into the ecclesiastical organizational tree that it seems as natural to those who tend it as the grain of the wood itself." Priestly recently spoke against this trend in another interview in 2019:

> ...in the 'history' of the Imperium I always imagined there were a number of eras during which human space was divided or where societies diverged and different moral or

> ethical values prevailed—however—[Games Workshop] always tended towards 'Waagh the Emperor'—for such is the nature of the business—so the portrayal of the Imperium as one, simple idea became the things that it was possible to promulgate through the business as a whole...I always thought of the Imperium as a vast self-serving bureaucracy in which no-one really knew what they were doing but they continue [to] do it out of a sense of tradition and routine—so status and power become bound up with all kinds of half-baked assumptions, received wisdom and superstition. Much like the real world really (BaronBifford).

Unfortunately, the tradition of excluding women in 40k has become "bound up" as Priestly says, with "status and power and half-baked assumptions," but this is also an accurate portrayal of the Catholic church when addressing issues related to feminism. Tina Beattie notes the Church's bias in her response to a 2003 letter to the public from Pope John Paul II:

> Instead of seeking a balanced engagement that would acknowledge affinities as well as dissonances between Catholicism and feminism, the letter sets the (male) authority of the Catholic hierarchy over and against feminism, in such a way that all feminists are discredited and the Church's expertise in humanity is confidently asserted (*New Catholic Feminism* 18).

Many 40k fans response to feminist arguments like this one in the exact same way as Catholic leaders: they assert their ethos as players/priests and cite examples of lore/doctrine as "proof" that the sexism was already there all along. What's worse is that while these arguments are circulating, a vast amount of mental inertia accumulates as a form of religious interpretation; in over three decades of 40k's existence, Games Workshop has slowly grown and adapted to this audience as a source of income. The company determines what remains in the canon, and radical adjustments to the lore would turn away the "hardcore" players, who are their best customers. Thus, the only hope of changing the rule of "male hormones and tissue types" for Space Marines lies in lobbying 40k's core audience to ask for this change—the male fans—making the task appear impossible. Brunkhorst notes this obstacle in her summary of Habermas' philosophy: "[Habermas] has never abandoned the Marxist thesis that the economic forces that determine social action have become autonomous and therefore represent a problem…" (30).

Much like other geek-identified spaces, such as *Magic: The Gathering* and online video games, the road to equality begins with convincing a single, biased individual to self-reflect and choose to change his thinking or behavior regarding his own sexism (Muñoz-Guerado and Triviño-Cabrera 195). But this is an incredibly difficult proposition for a population who use their identities as geeks as a form of escapism: their loyalty to the game supersedes their loyalty to any moral arguments surrounding gender equality, which many fans with traditionally conservative beliefs may actively fight against anyways. McDonough puts the Jesuits in a similar position in his book *Passionate Uncertainty*, which analyzes the worldviews of American priests, stating, "The Jesuits are in a bind. They cannot go back, insofar as that course would entail a return to

clerical dominance in an age of lay ascendancy. But they cannot move forward without placing their clerical identity at risk" (2). Likewise, the majority of 40k fans are trapped in a cycle of moral limbo regarding the more problematic aspects of their fictional universe, and it is often easier for individuals to convince themselves that it is all "just a game" and return to a state of sublime indifference as they paint the imaginary boltguns of their immortal, eight-foot tall warrior-priests…who can only be men.

The Problem of Women's Bodies

Perhaps what is most surprising about 40k pre-2017 was its *total erasure* of empowered female characters across the in-game universe, as succinctly pointed out by Muñoz-Guerado and Triviño-Cabrera (198-205). Their essay proves that it doesn't matter which army a player chooses across the dozens of different factions and species available in the game: women are inevitably silenced, invisible, deceitful, or cruel, and when they are present, such as in the Sisters of Battle or with the elf-like Eldar, they are always subjected to the male gaze (200). But a striking example of Games Workshop shifting into post-sexism, defined by Lorente as needing to create its own aesthetics to break away from its previously stale, virile image, is with the Repentia, a squad of Sisters of Battle who have failed in their oaths to the Emperor and given up one of their "senses," transforming them into zealous warriors. The older, pre-2017 Repentia models featured women wearing scraps of clothing, exposing oversized breasts ubiquitous in female characters throughout fantasy and science fiction settings, but in the newer, version eight models, these women are more realistically muscular and they now wear modest shorts and tank tops ("Warhammer-Community"). But nothing else about the lore surrounding this squadron has changed—these women are still whipped into a frenzy with a literal whip as punishment for their "loss of purity," which is an echo of Christianity's obsession with virginity and a nod to the Inquisition's practice of flagellation. Making any alterations to the lore surrounding the Repentia would be considered heretical by most players, as adhering to the game's "grimdark" tone makes it so that the universe is in a process of endless war: every character (male, female, or alien) is effectively dehumanized as a form of necrocapitalism, or the subjugation of life to the power of death by political and economic forces (Banerjee 1). Changing the rules or backstory of even a single problematic squad, such as the Repentia, is an impossibility because of the multiple novels, tactical books, and physical models that are already in the hands and minds of players, reinforcing the unit's existence as a "fact."

But despite having many instances of sexualized female characters in 40k's models, art, and story descriptions, most lore contrasts any imagery of a woman's body with a strong de-emphasis on romantic or consensual relationships; these are stories about brothers-in-arms going to battle, even if the characters are women (The Black Library). The "eye candy" is for the player only, as Space Marines are entirely asexual, evidenced by Dembski-Bowden when he writes upon the mindset of a new soldier, "Sexuality is a forgotten concept, alien to his mind, merely one of ten thousand humanities his consciousness has discarded" (9). In accordance with the fluff, 40k remains a tabletop war game that, like the Space Marine character, has no need for sexuality, and is

powered by what Wallis calls, "a universe of testosterone-fueled conflict with little or no room for the emotional complexities or morally grey areas that characterize everyday life" (130). Because of this purposeful choice in tone by both fans and Games Workshop, a woman in this universe, the same as a man or an alien, exists only as an object that produces or absorbs violent acts. This leaves no space for empathy, confirming what J.J. Bola writes in *Mask Off: Masculinity Redefined*:

> The effect of [violent games] is not only that extreme violence is normalized, and a social talking point for boys and men, but these games also constantly reinforce the idea of an 'Other'; an enemy. Many boys grow up thinking that there is always someone to fight against, inculcating a kill or be killed mentality… (55).

For many 40k fans, the Beauvoirian idea of the feminine Other becomes synonymous with the enemy Other, as the nearly all-male fanbase engages in conversation with itself about the game. Some psychologists, such as Donald Meltzer, might compare this behavior with that of an individual trapped in a level of pseudo-maturity that results in masturbatory behavior; or sociologist Michael Messner could assert this is another form of "soft essentialism" which creates a naturalized version of men who society dictates can't control their actions, as both these comparisons have been drawn from academics analyzing a variety of gaming and "men's rights" communities on the internet (Ging). In either case, voluntarily celibate priests or involuntarily celibate players may manifest a subconscious fear and hatred of women as the source of their sexual frustration. Beattie draws this conclusion:

> While celibacy can be a beautiful vocation and an inspiring witness to faith, it can also be a form of gynophobia if it leads men to form closed communities as a way of avoiding contact with women. Gynophobia infects church teaching with an impetus to dominate women through various tactics of sexual and reproductive control and priestly exclusion ("Empire of Misogyny?").

In contrast to Games Workshop's shift into post-sexism, the Catholic church refuses to budge even remotely on their position regarding women's bodies as representations of sin and sexuality, having lapsed since the 1960's into what one Jesuit has called "pelvic theology" (McDonough, *Passionate Uncertainty* 1). The current doctrine of Catholic beliefs in this area is still influenced primarily by the conclusions made by St. Augustine in the early 400's, as his teachings became the Church's main structuring device since Pope Pius XI in 1930, even though many references regarding marriage and sexuality existed before him (Clark 1-2). According to Augustine, the root of evil lies in the emotion of sexual passion, a necessity required to stimulate an erection, which results in a pleasure that is not on the account of God, and because of this, the only way to entirely avoid sin is to refrain from marriage and become celibate (*On Marriage* 1.19, 1.27). Because a woman's sexuality—the sensory experience of her body by a man—is what triggers this "blush of shame" (Chapter 7), her uncontrollable physicality is what separates her from the purity of the priesthood and God. Thus, the requirement of celibacy in the Jesuit priesthood is inextricably linked to both a woman's physical body and her ability to become ordained in their

Order, creating a similar philosophical conclusion to the impossibility of female Space Marines in 40k. The Catholic church and Games Workshop teach that a woman has the wrong "tissues," and this mantra remains a cornerstone of these biased institutions. A final warning about the lengths the Catholic church is willing to take against women comes from Beattie, who has been erased in the real world by the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith. She spoke out against the hypocrisy being perpetuated by Pope Francis, stating in 2018:

> Yet far from offering a genuine model of equality in difference, [Catholic] theology of the body is ridden with sexual stereotypes and essentialisms that are largely motivated by a resistance to feminism, women's ordination, homosexuality, abortion, contraception and, more recently, what is usually referred to in magisterial documents as "gender ideology" ("Empire of Misogyny?").

Her arguments here were partially in response to having speaking engagements at both churches and Catholic universities cancelled, the modern-day equivalent of being branded as a heretic.

Inequality is Equality: Sisters of Battle and Nunneries

The most common argument against female Space Marines or female Catholic priests is that women already have their place within their respective institutions: in secular, working positions and nunneries for the Church, and as Sisters of Battle or in minor roles of other armies in 40k. The fact that priests/players have difficulty fathoming how weak these female organizations are when compared to their powerful, male-only counterparts is due in part to what social philosopher Zygmunt Bauman has termed "liquid modernity," which emphasizes globalization and individualization as the major factors that have shaped our modern world, resulting in a depersonalized sociality. Sociology scholar Ross Abbinnett meshes liquid modernity with the philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas, stating that the proximity of close relationships, such as the "brothers-in-arms" mentality of priests/players, creates an ethical bond where the principles of justice do not apply to the strange Other (107), and draws this conclusion:

> This then is the mechanism of destitution that is implicit in liquid modernity: the constant re-creation of vast tracts of waste humanity who are deprived of means of securing a place in the productive networks of global capitalism...if one falls below, or never acquires, a given level of social and economic capital, one is permanently cut adrift from all but the most basic necessities of life (114-115).

Abbinnett is referring here to poverty-stricken populations who are kept in the cycle of endless need, but this lesser social status parallels the position imposed on nunneries and the Sisters of Battle. By never being allowed an equal foothold within their institutions, they are limited to the "basic necessities" of their status, which translates to fewer model options and less powerful units in 40k, and women serving only as workers in Catholicism, i.e., having subservient roles that do not participate in the higher echelons of the Church's decision-making hierarchy;

examples of this include the appointment of an all-male Catholic Council for the Economy in 2014 (Zagano), and the more obvious fact that all of the voting members at the 2019 Amazon synod were men despite Pope Francis declaring earlier that year that women "should be fully included in decision-making processes" (Viggo Wexler) as yet another example of his "cheap talk" that fails in the Habermasian sense.

Games Workshop has majorly mitigated the Sisters of Battle since their inception, resulting in the army having only expensive, metal models for over twenty years, as well as a lack of flexibility in customization of their units, and a higher "point-per-unit" cost on their current models. Even though Gav Thorpe wrote the original Sisters of Battle codex in 1997, the models were only available as pewter figurines, by far the most expensive method of production (Floyd), meaning that a playable "army" of Sisters could cost a player well over a thousand dollars. This created a chicken-and-egg problem: because the Sisters had such a high price point, they sold poorly, and because nobody bought them, there was no incentive to produce plastic models. As a macabre example from my own experience with 40k, one of my fellow players bought a few Sisters models only because he thought they made exquisite corpses—he would mutilate their bodies and place them under the feet of his mighty Chaos Marines.

Even though Games Workshop *finally* committed to the promise of selling cheaper, plastic units for the Sisters in 2019, this army is still more costly by a wide margin than a Space Marine army of equivalent point value. As a comparison, creating a 650 point "field" for both armies using the official website, the Sisters cost $415 (U.S.), while the Space Marine army of equivalent points is only $185 ("Warhammer-Community", prices in June 2020). In addition to this "pink tax" where the Sisters are more than twice as expensive, there are only about thirty different models for sale in their army, while the variety of Space Marine units is in the hundreds. Also, even though this army is the *Sisters* of Battle, five of their available units are still male models, and the masculine presence in this supposedly all-women organization breaks the common fan argument of "there can't be female Space Marines because there are no Brothers of Battle." In contrast, the only female unit that can be included in a Space Marine army is from the Emperor's elite assassins, a woman whose shape-shifting capabilities only function because the drugs are "compatible with her gender," reinforcing the woman-as-betrayer trope that is so frustratingly common throughout 40k (Muñoz-Guerado and Triviño-Cabrera 202).

This game-based data shows a measurable, mathematical way of tracking how the Sisters of Battle are at best, a third-rate competitor to the Space Marines, but correlating data from the Catholic church regarding various female-only groups of nuns and male-only groups like the Jesuits is more of a challenge. According to a survey in 2014, the number of the Catholic sisters in the U.S. has fallen from 180,000 in 1965 to about 50,000, whereas the total number of priests has dropped comparatively less, from 58,000 to 38,000 during the same time period (Lipka); the percentage of male priests has dropped by 34%, while the nuns have dropped by over twice that, at 72%. While the reasons for this discrepancy are multifarious, the main culprit appears to be tied to the secular women's rights movement: in 2012, an all-women Catholic organization,

the Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR), 80% of whom are Catholic nuns, was investigated by the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith—the same Church branch which has branded Beattie as a dissenter—and many of the letters exchanged between these two factions were kept from the eyes of the public (NCR Staff).

Leaders in the LCWR have made their voices heard regardless of any sanctions the organization received: these women are simply demanding equality in the Church, yet are continually told to "rediscover their identity" by conservatives (Fiedler), causing many women to simply abandon traditional Catholicism in favor of more progressive interpretations of the doctrine. One such group is the Roman Catholic Women Priests, who reject the penalty of excommunication imposed on them by the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith in 2008, and identify as "loyal members of the church who stand in the prophetic tradition of holy obedience to the Spirit's call to change an unjust law that discriminates against women" (Roman Catholic Women Priests). Unlike 40k, where there are so few female players that their voices go unheard, Catholic women are loudly proclaiming and making statements in the public sphere regarding the unjust practices of the Church, who continue to engage in cheap talk in response to them—the only strategy that has proven effective in creating change, regrettably, is for women to leave their own Faith.

The Jesuits often contradict themselves on the issue of women's ordination. Norbert Brieskorn, a Jesuit and Professor of Social and Legal Philosophy in Munich, responded to Habermas' initial argument in *An Awareness*, stating, "The protection of human rights and the freedom of the religious communities to organize themselves must be guaranteed no less than the limitations placed on religious communities by generally valid laws" (35). Brieskorn believes that a religion, in this case Catholicism, should be allowed to organize itself however it wants, with an all-male voting leadership, for example, in response to the *limitations* placed on the religion by "generally valid laws," which intersects meaningfully with the German Constitution, which was changed in 1994 to read: "Men and women shall have equal rights. The state shall promote the actual implementation of equal rights for women and men and take steps to eliminate disadvantages that now exist" (Article 3). Brieskorn, like the majority of Catholic priests, has decided that this particular portion of the German Constitution is one of the "not generally valid laws," and therefore believes the Church does not need to follow a State document and take the necessary steps to eliminate the sexist disadvantages in his own Order. He defends his position thusly: "There cannot be a state Church. Reason does not presume to act as a judge concerning *truths of faith* and it does not require that religion should be truncated into socially useful morality" (35, emphasis mine). One of these "truths of faith" in the view of a male priest like Brieskorn is that *women cannot be ordained*, so the rules of the State do not apply, and thus their religion cannot be "truncated into socially useful morality," despite the Church's continued claims of serving as a moral authority on many social issues. Feminist theorists are exasperated by this type of reasoning, as it sets up what Beattie calls "draping [the implications of dominating women] in the romantic language of maternal nature and 'feminine genius'" ("Empire of Misogyny?").

An example of this "draping" is when Arturo Sosa, Superior General of the Society of Jesus, argues that the Jesuits are making movements in the direction of equality, even though his rhetoric falls into the same lip service category as the statements made by Pope Francis. He made many compliments to the "feminine genius" at the Vatican in 2017, ironically concluding with, "We can listen carefully to the experience of women in the public sphere, hear how they work together, and be inspired by their courage. These are stories of doing the impossible" ("Stirring the Waters"). To be clear, this is the message women are getting from the Catholic World Church: *We will listen to you, and then change nothing*.

In 2017, as a way of maintaining his liberal persona, Pope Francis created a "Study Commission on the Women's Diaconate" to explore the history and role of women in the Church structure, and to many of the Faithful, the act of making this commission looked like an extended hand to build communicative power with women in the Habermasian fashion. But members of the academic and secular community now see this motion as a massive failure: the commission finished its research in 2019 and not only did the review board advise the Pope that women can't be priests, even the matter of making them deacons, a lesser role that still has little power in the Church hierarchy, was questioned—and yet *another* commission has been formed to look into that matter (Winfield). Again, because of the rapid pace people live under during "liquid modernity," Pope Francis and his successors only need to keep making commissions where the board members draw disapproving or mixed conclusions, and then the argument for making women priests, or even deacons, can be suspended indefinitely.

Conclusion: No Girls Allowed?

If Arturo Sosa truly wants to make a difference in the lives of women, he must follow his own advice and do more than just listen—he should reach out to the Women's Ordination Campaign (WOW). Founded in 1996, WOW has meticulously documented all the ecclesiological arguments necessary to ordain Catholic women priests and has support from individual Jesuits, though usually posthumously or on their deathbeds (Sagado). With the combined efforts of WOW, the LCWR, Roman Catholic Women Priests, and other like-minded organizations, the Jesuits have the unique opportunity to blaze a new path by being the first Order in the history of the Church to ordain women. But Sosa, like all the other male-only priests, possibly fears repudiation at the hand of Pope Francis, who upholds traditional doctrine and has excommunicated both male priests who support the ordination of women and also women who try and become priests, as well as any advocates for other hardline topics such as gay rights or the right to an abortion (Dias and Gorny). Likewise, Games Workshop fears the loss of their hardcore male fanbase if they are too openly "woke" in regards to female Space Marines.

Patriarchal institutions stay in power because of the collective like-mindedness of their male populations while also keeping access to resources restricted to the men in their leadership roles. By comparing the beliefs and behavior patterns of members of the Jesuit faithful to the nonreligious members of the 40k gaming community, this essay implores both priests and players

around the world to undertake action on the personal level and begin lobbying their institutions to *stop the cheap talk* regarding the subjection of women. As Habermas states near the end of *An Awareness*:

> Violations of universally accepted norms of justice can be more easily established, and denounced with good reasons, than can pathological distortions of forms of life...I suspect that nothing will change in the parameters of public discourse and in the decisions of the politically empowered actors without the emergence of a social movement which fosters a complete shift in political mentality (73-74).

The lack of gender equality in 40k and Catholicism is a pathological distortion that people everywhere should no longer abide. As Samuel Taylor Coleridge wrote in 1825, “He who begins loving Christianity better than truth will proceed by loving his own sect better than Christianity, and end in loving himself better than all” (Dupre 173). Whether these men read the Bible or a Space Marine codex, pray to Jesus while kneeling behind a pew or to the Chaos Blood Gods when rolling attack dice in a Games Workshop store, Catholic or secular, their sexist beliefs remain the same. It’s past time we made the change: we need Jesuit women and female Space Marines, not 40,000 years in the future, but *today*.

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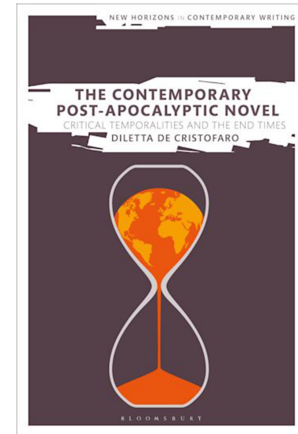
NON-FICTION REVIEWS

The Contemporary Post-Apocalyptic Novel, by Diletta De Cristofaro

Nathaniel P. Doherty

Diletta De Cristofaro. *The Contemporary Post-Apocalyptic Novel: Critical Temporalities and the End Times*. Bloomsbury Academic, 2020. Paperback. 208 pg. $39.95. ISBN 9781350235939.



The Contemporary Post-Apocalyptic Novel: Critical Temporalities and the End Times, by Diletta De Cristofaro, is encyclopedic in its approach to contemporary Anglophone literature. At its center of critical focus is the engagement of contemporary Anglophone fiction of the U.S., Canada, and Great Britain with the logic of apocalypse. De Cristofaro traces this oppressive logic deftly from Biblical roots to every bud of current dominant power structures. This book is the author's first monograph in an otherwise extensive body of work, and she uses this opportunity to cast a wide, interdisciplinary net of referenced fiction around the foci of each chapter. Each chapter focuses on one high profile novel and one that is under-recognized, according to De Cristofaro.

The novel theoretical insight offered by De Cristofaro is "critical temporality" (De Cristofraro 1). In short, critical temporality is a feature whereby texts contradict or otherwise undermine apocalyptic conceptions of time. De Cristofaro identifies this critical mode as a resistance to, or commentary upon, legacies of traditional Christian apocalypticism, especially as it has been appropriated by a range of oppressive and/or exploitative systems dominating global policy and popular ways of knowing. The introduction sketches out critical temporality and establishes the monograph's critical underpinning. It also provides a brief but useful introduction to the history of apocalyptic narratives in Western culture.

Chapter One focuses on Sam Taylor's *The Island at the End of the World* (2009) and *The Book of Dave* (2006), by Will Self. In both texts, apocalypse functions to justify, after the fact, theocratic systems that are both misogynist and sexist. In both texts, in different ways, the theocracies are all but immune to reform or escape because of their deployment of sanctity as a means to control both public narrative and history. The novels' critical temporality undermines these systems with parody. De Cristofaro's critical lens is primarily occupied with a critique of oppressive, overt, Christian power structures.

Chapter two focuses on Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* (2006) and *The Pesthouse* (2007), by Jim Crace. De Cristofaro analyzes what she refers to as "American ideologies," specifically Manifest Destiny and American exceptionalism, within these two novels' narratives (14). Specifically, she identifies how these narratives invert the traditional mythology of the American 'open road' and the related narratives of limitless self-reinvention as their critical temporalities. The chapter also notes critiques of the 'creative' destruction inherent in the U.S.'s claims to correct and perfect European civilization.

David Mitchell's *Cloud Atlas* (2004) and Jeanette Winterson's *The Stone Gods* (2007) form the core of Chapter Three's analysis. De Cristofaro focuses on the role played by apocalyptic logic in the post-facto justification and sustenance of exploitative colonialism and neo-colonialism. Both novels cover vast spans of fictional history. Linear narrative is associated in the chapter with Biblical, "Revelation"-style apocalypticism, and thus De Cristofaro focuses on non-linear narratives as the 'critical temporalities' of both novels. In both cases, narrative time becomes critical via textual reflections of nonfictional capitalist, (neo)colonial structures and histories. This chapter also contains the monograph's closest consideration of eco-critical themes.

Chapter Four centers on variations of denarration in novels critiquing stagnation in neoliberalism's framing of history. The central texts are Emily St. John Mandel's *Station Eleven* (2014) and Douglas Coupland's *Player One* (2010). De Cristofaro reads denarration and monotony in both as associating the apocalypse with symbols of global capitalism. More specifically, the chapter takes aim at claims that neoliberalism represents the 'end of history.' De Cristofaro spends more time on the initial contextual interpretations, which includes Colson Whitehead's *Zone One* (2011) and Karen Thompson Walker's *The Age of Miracles* (2012). The modes of rendering temporality in the novels of this chapter are characterized by slowing, monotony, and variations of denarration that parody neoliberalism's perpetual, changeless present.

The Contemporary Post-Apocalyptic Novel's conclusion focuses on Lidia Yuknavitch's *The Book of Joan* (2017) and the employment of the body as a vehicle for historical narrative resisting official archives. The temporal dimension of this embodied archive constitutes this section's approach to critical temporality through its opposition to the apocalyptic chronology of the official archive. De Cristofaro revises Derrida's "Archive Fever" as a drive within post-apocalyptic fiction to imagine the preservation of narratives through the apocalypse (1995). She interprets these archives as evidence of the novelists' faith in the power of narrative to resist contemporary tendencies driving towards global catastrophe, an implicit nod to speculative fiction's preoccupation with extrapolation.

The critical lenses employed by De Cristofaro are feminist as well as postmodernist and post-structuralist. Further, a Marxist-inflected critique of global capitalism undergirds most of her interventions. Religious, or pseudo-religious, support for misogyny and sexism is a focus of the first chapter, and high-profile postmodernists or post-structuralists (there's some debate about who counts as what) are cited directly in the introduction and referenced throughout. This

grouping includes Baudrillard, Derrida, Haraway, Lyotard, and Linda Hutcheon, among others. Timothy Morton's *Hyperobjects* (2013) also makes an appearance when De Cristofaro turns towards eco-critical considerations. As a result, there is a case for identifying a post-humanist facet to De Cristofaro's work as well.

This monograph is a valuable interdisciplinary intervention that provides a convincing and timely approach as well as detailed references to many texts capable of supporting a broad range of scholarship. *The Contemporary Post-Apocalyptic Novel* has the potential to be a resource for scholars working on contemporary literature, posthumanism, gender studies, and eco-criticism, at least. Its contents are especially relevant to contemporary SF studies. De Cristofaro's thorough catalogue of related texts in each chapter means the book itself functions like an archive. Thus, it has the potential to support a range of contemporary literature courses, given that most of the texts referenced transcend the dubious distinction between literary and speculative fiction. *The Pesthouse* section of Chapter Two is particularly notable for making extensive and interesting use of research into Crace's personal papers stored at the Harry Ransom Center at the University of Texas at Austen. The use of the Crace papers provides an example of archival scholarship applicable to both undergraduate and graduate students. De Cristofaro has given us that rare work that functions on an advanced theoretical level while also nonetheless being applicable to many classroom contexts.

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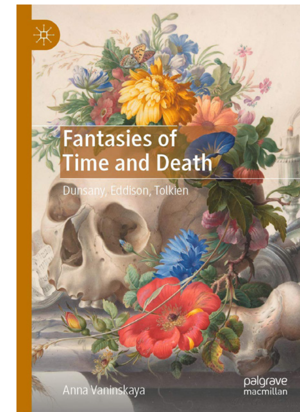
Fantasies of Time and Death, by Anna Vaninskaya

Maria K. Alberto

Anna Vaninskaya. *Fantasies of Time and Death: Dunsany, Eddison, Tolkien*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2020. Hardback. 262 pg. $159.99. ISBN 9781137518378.



Anna Vaninskaya's *Fantasies of Time and Death* is nothing short of a remarkable achievement: reading it, I could see immediately why it won the Mythopoeic Scholarship Award in 2021. In this monograph, Vaninskaya ably draws together three major authors whose works are not often compared at such length, and she explores how each uses fantasy—a complex, retroactive term that she does not take for granted, either—to explore "shared thematic preoccupations" (4) regarding "temporality, mortality and eternity: with process, event and state" (7). Such a project entails in-depth knowledge of three dense, elaborate bodies of work, as well as the capacity to draw, discuss, and compare relevant details from each one, but Vaninskaya does this spectacularly. Moreover, her writing style is richly poetic—and frankly, gorgeous—in ways that academic scholarship does not often allow itself to be, and the end result is a work that feels thematically and technically well-matched with its subjects.

In a move that could have been risky, but that Vaninskaya pulls off very well, *Fantasies of Time and Death* opens right on the knotty topic of canon creation, reviewing how reader demand and publisher choices both played a critical role in the creation of fantasy as a genre, well after these three authors' own times. Beginning here offers important historical context and demystification, and further strengthens Vaninskaya's reasoning to group Lord Dunsany, E.R. Eddison, and J.R.R. Tolkien on the basis of shared textual preoccupations: specifically, their various interests in "cosmopoiesis… the creation myth… [and] a multi-generic universe" (7) rather than the kinds of cohesive narrative more typical among both their predecessors and peers. The remainder of this introduction offers more focused introductions to each author and his oeuvre, then looks briefly to other writers now considered fundamental to the fantasy genre before returning to that shared interest in transience, time, and death.

Following this introduction, Vaninskaya offers a chapter apiece focused on the works, interests, and approaches of Dunsany, Eddison, and Tolkien. With Lord Dunsany, she calls attention to how he saw himself as a poet writing "a species of prose poetry" (25), which led to a "patterning impulse" (26) evident across his shorter works in particular. Subsections in this

chapter are devoted to, variously, the ravages of time, the chill of space, and the uncertainty of the universe, as depicted in Dunsany's fantasy. Across these three axes, Vaninskaya maintains, Dunsany's fictional worlds are "literally a-gnostic. There are no epiphanies, no ultimate truths, the mythology is an anti-revelation" (44), and divine power may be glimpsed but is never fully explicated or revealed. Oftentimes, she contends, these preoccupations connect Dunsany's works more than any shared fictional setting or returning cast of characters.

Next, Vaninskaya turns to a chapter on E.R. Eddison, and specifically his complex, unfinished Zimiamvia trilogy, in which multiple characters are incarnations of the male and female parts of God, most unaware of their divine identities. Pointing out how this work is driven by "intertextual and interlingual bricolage" (69), Vaninskaya maintains that—despite the vast universe visible here and the multifaceted pantheon driving it—readers must be willing to wade through reams of uncredited quotations and ideas. These extend well beyond poetic and prose allusions, on into a deep preoccupation with seventeenth-century philosophy: Eddison, Vaninskaya demonstrates, engages with paradoxes of God's existence and perfection as set out by Descartes, Spinoza, and Leibniz (115). And while the full intricacies of these readings will be at least partly lost upon those not familiar with Eddison's sprawling work, Vaninskaya does an admirable job of summarizing this complex trilogy and drawing readers' attention to its most startling features, whether philosophical, theological, or genre-driven.

And from here we come to the chapter that first drew my attention to Vaninskaya's work: her discussion of Tolkien. Because *Fantasies of Time and Death* is not a survey, but instead looks to the foundation of each author's oeuvre, Vaninskaya focuses here not on Tolkien's most famous work *The Lord of the Rings* (1954), but instead on the natures and fates of Elves and Men as developed across his entire legendarium. Thus, this chapter deals primarily with the collection of stories, some published posthumously, called *The Silmarillion*, and draws specifically from the Ainulindalë (creation account of the world that includes Middle-earth), the Athrabeth (philosophical exchange between a human woman and an Elven prince), and the Akallabêth (the story of the island kingdom Númenor). Vaninskaya revisits these particular portions of Tolkien's legendarium to argue that knowledge of time and death differs according to Elves and Men, and in fact, becomes a sort of "psychological trauma" when the world's ultimate antagonist Melkor spreads corrupted information about them (164). Some of the connections that Vaninskaya draws outward from Tolkien's work, such as to Augustine and Aquinas for the Catholic doctrine of mankind's "happy fault" (173), have been more well-trod in existing scholarship than others, but overall, her discussion here is still fresh and fascinating.

Despite their evocative prose and obvious expertise, there are a few stumbling blocks to these chapters. For one thing, the authors they are dealing with can be challenging in their own right: though each one might, as Vaninskaya suggests, be creating a single, genre-spanning universe in their fiction, the coherency and accessibility of these various universes differ quite widely. Dunsany creates a variety of short works that may or may not reference one another directly; Eddison is author of a grand, sprawling trilogy that remained unfinished at his death; and

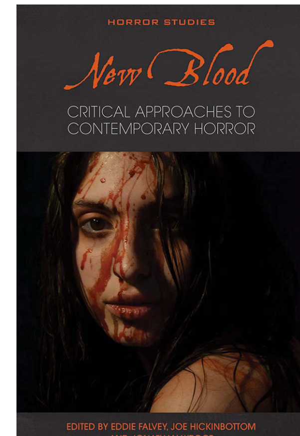
Tolkien's work is scattered across several drafts, many of them organized by his son and published posthumously in an attempted semblance of Tolkien's larger plans. Vaninskaya herself switches between multiple texts with commendable, indeed enviable, ease, but does not always signal her intent when doing so, which could leave readers less familiar with those texts lost in a sea of references. Even this is not entirely a criticism, though, because she has a knack for summarizing and drawing out relevant pieces from these complex writings that will carry readers along regardless. All told, Vaninskaya's work is a commendable undertaking. It can be a dense read, and one that will be made significantly more difficult without some knowledge of the source works; but it is absolutely worth it all the same.

Maria K. Alberto is a PhD candidate in the Department of English at the University of Utah, where she is currently working on her dissertation examining canons in popular culture texts. Her research interests include digital storytelling, transformative fanworks, and genre literature of the 20th and 21st centuries. She has written several pieces on Tolkien and adaptations of his legendarium.

New Blood: Critical Approaches to Contemporary Horror, edited by Eddie Falvey, Joe Hickinbottom and Jonathan Wroot

Jonathan W. Thurston-Torres

Eddie Falvey, Joe Hickinbottom, and Jonathan Wroot, eds. *New Blood: Critical Approaches to Contemporary Horror.* U of Wales P, 2021. Horror Studies. Paperback. 288 pg. $60. ISBN 9781786836342. eBook ISBN 9781786836359.



New Blood is a collection of essays examining recent works of horror film. Separated into four parts, the book largely acts as a defense for analyzing new horror films through a scholarly lens. Some of the essays are invested in reception studies and production methods, while others engage more in theory and interpretive analyses. Ultimately, many of the chapters seem to fall short of the book's intent, functioning more as an elevated film review than a work of serious scholarship. However, many chapters would be effective in teaching undergraduate classes in horror so could be included on syllabi for such courses.

The editors present a kind of defense of modern horror cinema as worthy of critical study in their introduction. What struck me here was that the defense was framed as a list of horror films, claiming that there have been both remakes and original films, an argument that generally should go without saying. Indeed, the editors seem to try to defend why the genre is popular more than why it is worthy of scholarly attention. We constantly see phrases such as, "some horror franchises have proven so popular that…" and "To understand the genre's enduring popularity…" (2, 3). The introduction continues to state the obvious: "Critical acclaim has been given in many cases – but whether praised or derided, horror has carried on regardless" (4). As a result of this set-up, it seems very unclear who the audience for the book really is. People who think horror stopped being a film genre in the 90s? Beginning horror scholars who are looking for definitive proof that the genre is indeed popular? After defining what the editors call "revisionist horror" (5) and talking further about the commercial aspects of the genre, they outline the various case studies.

In "Apprehension Engine: The New Independent 'Prestige Horror,'" David Church engages with "artsy" horror of the past couple of decades through the label "prestige horror" (16), discussing the sub-genre in terms of reception studies, critical acclaim, and cultural studies. What is compelling about Church's arguments is his discussions of indie "alternative" prestige films and the ways that many horror fans appreciate the art and poetry of films over the commercial scare factor. My greatest concern with Church's work is the limit of his scope. What he calls indie-art

films are reasonably commercial successes as well, such as *It Follows* (2014), *Saw* (2003), and *The Witch* (2015). There does not appear to be much room for horror shorts on YouTube or the much more indie films released only on Shudder.

The next essay, by Steve Jones, "Hardcore Horror: Challenging the Discourses of 'Extremity,'" seeks to give definition to the eponymous terms "hardcore horror" and "extremity." Jones focuses on market and critical definitions for "extremity," noting that a store's willingness to stock a horror film contributes to the market definition, as an example. The strength of this chapter is in its ability to give several specific cases, such as *mother!* (2017) and *A Serbian Film* (2010), while also acknowledging and giving room to the slippages of meaning of "extremity." Even tackling a bias toward extreme horror texts in academic publishing, Jones approaches the concept from so many angles I could see myself easily teaching this chapter alone alongside some horror films Continuing the focus on specific audiences, Xavier Mendik approaches cult horror festivals in "From Midnight Movies to Mainstream Excess." Mendik blends the personal with the critical effectively as he situates his experiences with a university horror film festival in the larger commercial industry of horror film. Like Church, Mendik is invested in terms like "prestige" and "success," although his scope is limited more narrowly to these specific film festivals.

Starting the book's second section, Joe Hickinbottom's "A Master of Horror?: The Making and Marketing of Takashi Miike's Horror Reputation" is more of a fan's defense of Miike as a "horror auteur" than a work of serious critical inquiry. It even goes so far as to answer the titular question in just the first couple of pages, rendering the rest of the chapter uninteresting. This chapter might have been better placed as an introduction to a volume just on Miike. Asian horror continues with "Bloody Muscles on VHS: When Asia Extreme Met the Video Nasties" by Jonathan Wroot. Easily one of the sharpest chapters in the book, Wroot's conducts a reception studies and comparatist reading of J-horror film *Bloody Muscle Body Builder in Hell* (2014). What impressed me with this chapter was the vast amount of research Wroot conducted: into VHS production history, the trends of VHS nostalgia in the 21st century, and the theory behind J-horror's reception.

Thinking about film in the 21st century, one, of course, cannot forget the popularity of streaming services like Netflix, as Matt Hills notes in "Streaming Netflix Original Horror: *Black Mirror*, *Stranger Things*, and Datafied TV Horror." Like Wroot, Hills brings in considerable theory, focusing on postmodern readings of what he calls the "flagships" of "datafied horror" (125): *Stranger Things* and *Black Mirror*. He excels at analyzing concepts unique to Netflix, discussing "bingeing on fear" and the distinctions of genre bubbles that separate Netflix from something specifically geared toward horror fans like Shudder (130).

The next part, focused on subgenres of modern horror, begins with Jessica Balanzategui's chapter, "The digital gothic and the Mainstream Horror Genre: Uncanny Vernacular Creativity and Adaptation." Balanzategui is invested in exploring the collaborative efforts that go into Creepypasta stories and the gothic elements that appear in them. This chapter would be really beneficial for introductory students of horror, showing them that even those stories they read

online "count" as genuine literature. However, I wish Balanzategui integrated more Gothic theory and scholarship into the chapter, making that bridge between academic theory and popular fiction more apparent. Abigail Whitall envisions "rethinking subgenres and cycles" in "Nazi Horror, Reanimated" (167). In this chapter, Whitall makes the basic argument that Nazi horror should be considered a subgenre rather than a cycle. While convincing, the argument seems very simple and easily defensible to scholars who would be reading this book.

The final subgenre explored is the "desktop film" in "Digital Witness: Found Footage and Desktop Horror as Post-cinematic experience," by Lindsay Hallam. In discussing the subgenres of found footage films here, Hallam integrates not only directors' quotations but actually really strong affect theory and social media theory, making the chapter shine for its integration of scholarship alongside its analysis of primary texts. This chapter could serve as the basis of an entire course syllabus. Eddie Falvey then discusses feminine monstrosity in "Revising the Female Monster: Sex and Monstrosity in Contemporary Body Horror." When I first read the chapter, I was frustrated with its survey nature. I had hoped there would be something more in-depth here. However, the chapter excels at being just that: a captivating survey. This chapter would be great for undergraduates to read, as it opens up many compelling conversations about sex, gender, disability, and even STDs in horror.

The political theme continues with Thomas Joseph Watson's "The Kids are Alt-Right: Hardcore Punk, Subcultural Violence and Contemporary American Politics in Jeremy Saulnier's *Green Room*." *Green Room* (2015) is certainly a horror film worthy of academic analysis. However, aside from the occasional quotation here and there, this chapter felt like an extended film review that summarized what a lot of other critics have said about the film. The last chapter is "Twenty-first-century Euro-snuff: *A Serbian Film* for the Family," by Neil Jackson. In contrast to the previous chapter, this one thrives on literary theory to analyze a film that many would dismissively call "torture porn." Jackson relies on affect theory and allegorical interpretations to derive new meaning from the film. The film thus becomes a site of investigation and critical inquiry that opens the way for other scholars (whether they are established researchers or undergraduates).

On the whole, the book seems conflicted. Half of it consists of simple arguments such as, "This is a film I enjoy, and here's why," and "This film is popular"; the other half actually engages in productive film theory and academic discourse. I would highly recommend these chapters to instructors teaching undergraduate horror courses. Those chapters open the floor for productive discussions of the genre and showcase what that kind of horror analysis can look like.

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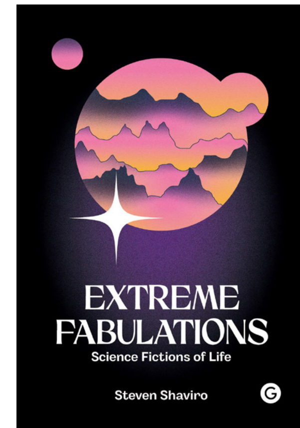
Extreme Fabulations: Science Fictions of Life, by Steven Shaviro

Mattia Petricola

Steven Shaviro. *Extreme Fabulations: Science Fictions of Life*. Goldsmiths Press, 2021. Hardcover. 192 pg. $24.95. ISBN 9781912685882.



According to its author, *Extreme Fabulations* is "a thought experiment" (1). More precisely, this experiment unfolds as an attempt to establish a dialogue between science fiction and the hermeneutical tools developed by modern and contemporary philosophy. Thus, *Extreme Fabulations* further develops the lines of inquiry that Shaviro inaugurated in his 2016 monograph *Discognition*. However, whereas *Discognition* explored the notions of consciousness, thought, and sentience, *Extreme Fabulations* focuses—as the title suggests—on how we can conceptualise, perceive, and reimagine the very idea of "life." Shaviro's argument starts from a compelling definition of science fiction as "counter-actual" rather than "counter-factual," in the sense that "it offers us a provisional and impossible resolution, suspended in potentiality, of dilemmas and difficulties that are, themselves, all too real" (2). An "extreme fabulation" can thus be seen—even if Shaviro does not provide a clear definition of this expression—as a narrative that pushes the limits of our understanding of what "life" is while tackling the dilemmas that spring from this cultural and cognitive reconfiguration.

Each of the eight chapters that make up *Extreme Fabulations* investigates such dilemmas through an in-depth study of a single work of science fiction. More specifically, Shaviro provides close readings of Charles Harness' 1950 short story "The New Reality" (chapter 1), Adam Roberts' 2015 novel *The Thing Itself* (chapter 2), Clifford Simak's 1953 short story "Shadow Show" (chapter 3), Ann Halam's 2002 novel *Dr. Franklin's Island* (chapter 4), Nalo Hopkinson's 2005 short story "Message in a Bottle" (chapter 5), Chris Beckett's 2012 novel *Dark Eden* (chapter 6), a 2016 concept album by the hip hop group *clipping.* entitled *Splendor and Misery* (chapter 7), and Gwyneth Jones' 2017 novella *Proof of Concept* (chapter 8). Since each chapter is a perfectly self-contained whole that can be read independently from the others, *Extreme Fabulations* resembles an essay collection rather than a monograph. The presence of a conclusion would have probably made Shaviro's argument somewhat better-rounded; on the other hand, the book's structure makes it easily accessible to scholars and students who are specifically interested in one or more fictional works among those examined by Shaviro.

Chapters 1 and 2 focus on what Shaviro calls "Kantian science fiction" (21), that is, on works that defy the ontology of life (in other words, the conceptualisation of what life is) as elaborated by Kant in his *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781). "The New Reality" and The Thing Itself provide Shaviro with an opportunity for discussing the difficult and somewhat marginal position of ontology in contemporary thought (which devotes much more attention to phenomenology and epistemology) and, more importantly, for exploring how science fiction can allow us to "poke around outside" (29) the categories that, according to Kant, structure human cognition and perception.

Chapters 3 and 4 shift the focus to science as a Foucauldian power-knowledge system and to how it conceptualises, controls, and policies life. Shaviro's readings of "Shadow Show" and *Dr. Franklin's Island* represent valuable contributions to both posthuman theory and monster theory, since they investigate how science fiction can thematise and challenge our conception(s) of the human. Shaviro is particularly interested in how the two texts shatter the old vitalist view of life as a 'spark' in favour of a non-anthropocentric view of life as a pervasive process of animation involving both human and non-human beings, as wells as in how they deconstruct the idea of the 'great chain of being' while moving towards an anti-hierarchical and networked conception of life.

In chapters 5 and 6, the 'dilemma' of life is approached from the perspectives of aesthetics and anthropology. Shaviro's study of "Message in a Bottle"—an Afrofuturist story about an art exhibition that will take place in the storyworld's remote future—is centred on the idea of futurity and interrogates how we can conceive of life as something that extends beyond the present and into a future that can be imagined, questioned, and colonised. *Dark Eden*, on the other hand, is read as a work of "speculative anthropology" (116). In his analysis, Shaviro discusses the notion of 'speculation' by comparing its applications in science fiction and in evolutionary psychology, ultimately arguing that the former are far richer and more complex than the latter.

Chapters 7 and 8 draw from the arguments developed in the previous chapters and apply them to the speculative representation of social oppression. More specifically, Shaviro interprets the narrative developed in the album *Spendor and Misery* in the light of Kim Stanley Robinson's notion of 'anti-anti-utopia', thus arguing that "it is better […] to 'set up a random course' into the unknown than to stay with what is reliably oppressive and deadly" (147). The study of *Proof of Concept* finally interrogates the continued presence of capitalist realism in a future society and how speculative fiction can imagine alternative scenarios in a world that cannot be reformed.

Throughout his essays, Shaviro consistently adopts a twofold argumentative strategy. The fictional texts chosen as case studies are both compared with earlier science/speculative fiction narratives and read in the light of specific concepts drawn from modern or contemporary philosophy. *Extreme Fabulations* thus deploys an extensive hermeneutical toolkit ranging from the aforementioned Kant's *Critique* and Foucault's biopower to Quentin Meillassoux's correlationism and Maurice Blanchot's limit-experiences, from Eugene Thacker's notion of 'dark pantheism' to Deborah Levitt's concept of 'animal apparatus,' from the speculative realist philosophy of Graham

Harman to Lee Edelman's queer theory. This toolkit is further enriched by the presence of notions derived from physics (Einstein, Schrödinger, and two interpretations of quantum mechanics), biology, and finance. This complex theoretical framework, however, never makes the reader feel overwhelmed. No in-depth knowledge of philosophy is required to enjoy the essays, and every new concept is introduced with clarity and conciseness. As regards the comparison with other works of science/speculative fiction, one of the aspects that makes reading *Extreme Fabulations* from cover to cover particularly compelling is the fact that it proposes, in a series of arguments disseminated throughout the book, many elements for what could be called an anti-Lovecraftian monster theory. More specifically, this theory aims to demonstrate that "[i]f we want to get away from anthropocentrism […] we need to give up our Lovecraftian visions of the implacable coldness, emptiness, and unconcern of the universe" (38).

To sum up, *Extreme Fabulations* provides a stimulating and refreshingly original perspective on the conceptualisation of life in science fiction that will offer new ideas and lines of inquiry to both students and scholars working on science fiction, the posthuman, and monster theory. It would be fascinating, for example, to further explore the idea of 'Kantian science fiction' and find other works that might fit this category, or to understand how Shaviro's arguments could be adapted to media other than literature and music and to works outside the anglophone world.

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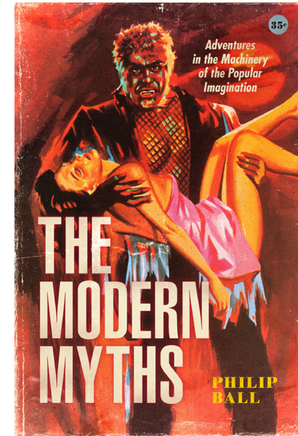
The Modern Myths: Adventures in the Machinery of the Popular Imagination, by Philip Ball

Jack Durant

Philip Ball. *The Modern Myths: Adventures in the Machinery of the Popular Imagination*. Chicago UP, 2021. Hardcover. 426 pg. $30.00. ISBN 9780226719269.



In *The Modern Myths: Adventures in the Machinery of the Popular Imagination*, Philip Ball argues that "the Western world has, over the past three centuries or so, produced narratives that have as authentic a claim to mythic status as the psychological dramas of Oedipus, Medea, Narcissus, and Midas" (3). These stories, "which everyone knows without having to go to the trouble" of reading them, have "seeped into our consciousness, replete with emblematic visuals, before we reach adulthood" (2). Modern myths—of which Ball identifies seven, starting with Robinson Crusoe and ending with Batman—are not, despite their origins in specific texts, so much singular narratives as "evolving web[s] of many stories—interweaving, interacting, contradicting each other"—but with one thing in common: "a rugged, elemental, irreducible kernel charged with the magical power of *generating versions of the story*" (9). This fecund capacity to produce new narratives is what allows these myths to do their "cultural work": they "erect a rough-hewn framework on which to hang our anxieties, fears and dreams" (16).

This summary suggests the level of analysis the book sustains: this is not a theoretical study or ideological critique of myth, along the lines of Roland Barthes's classic *Mythologies* (1957) or the work of Claude Lévi-Strauss (critics mentioned only a half-dozen times, mostly in passing). Rather, *The Modern Myths* is an old-fashioned literary anatomy, in the mold of John Cawelti's classic *Adventure, Mystery, and Romance: Formula Stories as Art and Popular Culture* (1976). What the book lacks in terms of theoretical claims it more than makes up for with its detailed close readings and rich historical contextualizations. Seven long chapters carefully lay out Ball's mythic archetypes: Crusoe, Frankenstein, Jekyll and Hyde, Dracula, Martian invaders (à la Wells's *War of the Worlds*), Sherlock Holmes, and Batman. As this list suggests, the coverage is heavy on British, mostly Victorian, examplars, a bias Ball seems a bit defensive about, though he argues effectively that the "British character of much of the modern mythopoeia" has led to an emphasis in modern pop culture on themes of class and empire (20). Ball's mythic canon is also exclusively male (though the origin text of the Frankenstein myth was written by a woman), and it is unclear why

he did not select a female archetype to analyze, since pop culture is filled with compelling femmes fatales, such as Sheridan Le Fanu's Carmilla and Rider Haggard's Ayesha. Perhaps Ball felt that this tradition was too diverse, not focused on a singular figure. In any case, he is quite frank about the biases informing his pantheon, and the individual chapters searchingly explore the cultural implications of the Anglophone and masculinist orientation of these various myths.

Each of the seven chapters devoted to a specific myth takes basically the same form. First, Ball traces the origins of the figure to a particular work of literature (or core collection of stories, as in the case of Sherlock Holmes) that has been abidingly popular. Yet, as he shows, the development of the myth over time has involved a process of adaptation and mutation that leaves the author's intent far behind. A myth, Ball asserts, "is not identical to its founding text"; rather, myths "are the work of a culture" (14). The figures that have proven enduringly resonant are those reducible to key kernels of meaning that can be elaborated and adjusted over and over again. In the case of Frankenstein, for example, that kernel is the potential for Promethean overreaching built into the modern scientific enterprise, the possibility that "knowledge injudiciously applied" might "generate an entity too large and unruly to control" (129). Having thus distilled down the original text, Ball then pursues the pop-cultural career of this kernel or theme over decades of cultural production, from direct adaptations (e. g. James Whale's classic 1931 film of *Frankenstein*) to various offshoots and allusions (e. g.. stories about rampaging robots and disobedient computers). These seven chapters are marked by extensive primary research and imaginative extrapolation, and Ball writes with an easy grace that is refreshingly free of jargon.

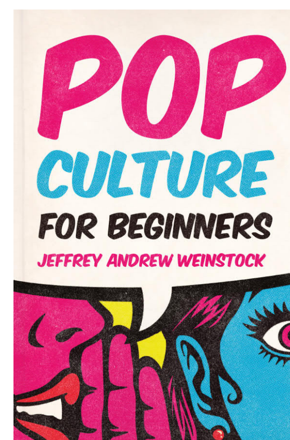
The volume concludes with two chapters that pan back from a focus on specific myths to offer more sweeping speculations about the nature of the "mythic mode" and the possibility of new myths emerging. These final chapters are somewhat less sure-footed, in part because they are so speculative; thus, Ball argues that the zombie may be an emergent myth, the first to be generated by the cinema rather than by a literary text—an assertion that, on the one hand, tends to ignore the literary lineage of the modern zombie (cf. Roger Luckhurt's *Zombies: A Cultural History* [2015]), while on the other hand slighting mythic figures that are even more deeply rooted in a filmic corpus, such as the hardboiled private eye of modern noir. The capping chapter on the "mythic mode" of storytelling is a hodgepodge of tentative conclusions that is too short (barely 10 pages) to offer a synoptic perspective encompassing the diverse archetypes that the earlier chapters have spent so much time exploring (the chapter on Dracula alone runs almost 60 pages). It is these seven long chapters that form the core of Ball's book, and they are all solid, well-researched, and unfailingly interesting studies that any student of modern pop culture will have much to learn from.

Jack Durant is a long-time reviewer of SF literature and criticism. He was a stalwart of the late *Fantasy Review* magazine and published a number of reviews in *The Science Fiction and Fantasy Book Review Annual*.

Pop Culture for Beginners, by Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock

Kania Greer

Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock. *Pop Culture for Beginners*. Broadview Press, 2021. Paperback. 310 pg. $46.92. ISBN: 9781554815657 (paperback) 9781770488113 (PDF).



Asking someone to define pop culture is like asking someone to define what a dog is: meaning that depending on who you ask, you may get a very scientific answer or something more general in terms of what a dog looks like or types of dogs. The same is true for pop culture. Some people will define it based on current trends or ideations while others will focus on the more esoteric assumptions of the genre. As a result, the understanding of and study of pop culture becomes a difficult task, especially for those new to the field. Jeffrey Weinstock's book, as the title suggests, provides the reader with a great primary resource which could be useful to beginning scholars and those needing a refresher. For both beginning teachers and seasoned scholars of pop culture the foundational lens which Weinstock brings serves to break apart the mystery of pop culture and make it relatable, understandable, and accessible to all.

Most people, by the time they reach higher education (and especially the further they go up the education ladder), become far removed from what originally brought them to pop culture, namely entertainment. Academics tend to become focused on the meaning of pop culture and thereby are often seen as taking the entertainment and joy out of it. This is where Weinstock's book can help. By getting back to basics, Weinstock acknowledges the fast paced, ever changing face of pop culture but also encourages one to dive deeper into what pop culture is and what it means, both individually and for groups.

The book is divided into two sections: The Pop Culture Toolbox (Chapters 1-4), which I refer to as the "academic" chapters, and The Pop Culture Units (Chapter 5-10) or what I refer to as the "practitioner" chapters. In Chapter 1, Weinstock hooks us in by trying to define pop culture but also making us rethink what we understand pop culture to be. For example, he starts Chapter 1 with the statement that pop culture as a definitive term is "elusive…of a single, clear definition" (pg. 4). From here he goes on to address the myriad of influences that make up pop culture, ultimately landing on "pop culture [being] something people seem to know when they see it" (pg. 11). While this may leave some people shaking their heads and wondering if there will be a definition, rest assured it is in there. However, what is beneficial is the periodic

breaks in information he scatters throughout the chapters to ask the reader questions. Titled as "Your Turn", he stops the flow of information to ask the reader to reflect on what they have read. Weinstock appears to understand how people learn and that they need time to digest and process information. His questions are designed to be examined from an individual perspective in order to acknowledge one's own influences, tastes, biases, and lens. This element takes this chapter (and others) to a higher level of understanding as I was no longer reading for information but rather reading for understanding and decoding of my own perspective.

Chapter 2 takes us on a more academic journey helping us to understand the way culture is formed and how we signify information (signs). This semiotic approach is further broken down into not only our own connotation of what we see but also the denotation of those same signs. To better understand this approach, Weinstock uses common everyday signs like tattoos to further illustrate his meanings, making the concepts relatable and easy to process. Chapter 3 takes us into theories of viewing culture and examines the perspective by which culture can be examined (post-colonial, feminist, critical race, etc.) but does so in such a way as to remind the reader of the lens by which each of these theories views culture. Weinstock's purpose here is to inform the reader that each pop culture offering can be viewed through multiple approaches and each of these becomes part of a larger understanding. Through this chapter he succeeds in breaking down these theories into relatively easy to understand bite sized pieces to shed light on differing viewpoints. This is perhaps one of the best chapters in the book as it takes the theories back to basics and serves to define and give substance to some theories I had created my own meaning for rather than fully understanding.

Chapter 4 is the last of what I call the "academic" chapters, in terms of chapters imparting information. This chapter really looks at pop culture in terms of authenticity, appropriation, structure, and subcultures. For example, as Weinstock puts it there is an almost "cultural imperative to 'be yourself'" (pg. 87), but even this can cause dissonance when we consider which self to be: work self, spouse self, friend self, etc. The challenge is determining what is meant by authentic to each person. In relation to this is the idea of cultural appropriation and how members of one culture can appropriate (or misappropriate) another culture. This creates lines which are "murky" (pg. 90) between appreciation and misappropriation. When thinking about subculture, Weinstock challenges the reader to dive deep into cultural nuances. What makes one science fiction fan different from another? Don't all punk rockers like the same music? Examples can be found in subcultures of "subversive" (pg. 104) groups like "bikers, skaters, punks, goths…" (pg. 104) who can be categorized as anti-culture, but each holds its own in terms of representation. Just as valid, however, are other subcultures including science fiction subcultures like "Potterheads… Trekkies, and so on" (pg. 105). In this way subculture becomes even more specialized and an "expression of personal taste" pg. 105). At the end of each of the "academic" chapters, there are suggested assignments which could be easily incorporated into classrooms. Each of the assignments serves to help students examine pop culture from their own lens but also encourages

students (and faculty) to think outside of their preferred focus to examine how culture is viewed by others.

The "practitioner" chapters (5-10) break down the sub-genres of pop culture and dive deeply into their influences and meanings. From television to fandom each chapter details what is meant by the sub-genre, asks questions throughout, and then gives a sample essay at the end. This breakdown gives equal weight to most sub-categories of pop culture and allows students to focus in on their favorite, for deeper study, or to take a little-known sub-genre and investigate it. These essays are beneficial for driving home the points made throughout the chapter. I found these essays some of the most enjoyable reading throughout the book. While Weinstock acknowledges the "term-limits" (my words) of the pop culture references in these essays, I believe they can be valuable in helping students and faculty rethink pop culture for many years. As with chapters 1-4, there are suggested assignments in each chapter and suggested readings. Lastly, there is Chapter 11, which challenges readers to "extend the approach adopted [in the book] to a different popular form" (pg. 277). Readers can use the book as scaffold to develop their own questions which challenge interpersonal thinking and viewpoints on culture.

Weinstock does a great job of introducing and reintroducing pop culture and does so in a relatable, humorous, and enjoyable way; in fact, I often forgot I was reading a textbook. While he presents an academic study of pop culture, he does so without abandoning the mystique and enjoyment most people find in pop culture. He challenges readers/students to examine their own cultural lens while encouraging us to think outside of the story presented to develop larger meanings. This book would be an excellent introductory book for pop culture studies (or really any studies) as it is easy to digest, thought-provoking, and just plain fun. Having said that, I study the intersection of science fiction and science interest (how does science fiction draw people to science), and I found this book a nice refresher and reminder of the broader contexts I am researching. Therefore, I recommend it to all academics, from those just starting to those who have been in the field for a while.

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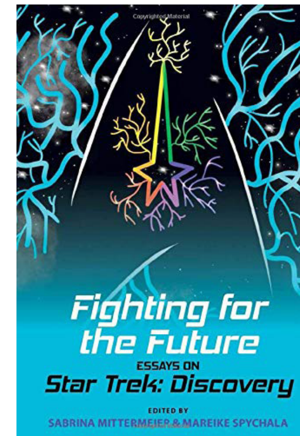
Fighting for the Future: Essays on Star Trek Discovery, edited by Sabrina Mittermeier and Marieke Spychala

Vincent M. Gaine

Sabrina Mittermeier and Mareike Spychala, eds. *Fighting for the Future: Essays on* Star Trek Discovery. Liverpool UP, 2020. Hardback. 352 pg. $130.00. ISBN 9781789621761.



Star Trek is one of the world's longest running science fiction franchises, yet it has attracted relatively little academic attention considering its longevity and transmedia presence. *Fighting for the Future: Essays on* Star Trek Discovery is the first critical study of *Star Trek: Discovery*, the franchise's first small screen output in over a decade. The essays in this volume cover the show's first two seasons, across four themed sections that offer studies on the role of *Discovery* within the *Star Trek* franchise, different forms of storytelling both in canon and fanon, the negotiation of otherness, and queer readings of the show. It is especially useful that this collection considers Discovery within the larger franchise as well as a specifically post-network *Star Trek*. Valuable points are made on this topic by Michael G. Robinson, who identifies key aspects of *Discovery* in relation to its contemporaries in sci-fi television. Robinson's essay, "These are the Voyages?: The Post-Jubilee *Trek* Legacy on the *Discovery*, the *Orville*, and the *Callister*," performs an in-depth industrial analysis of Discovery's production, distribution, and consumption, and makes an effective comparison between *Discovery*, *The Orville* (2017-) and the *Black Mirror* episode "Callister" (2017) in terms of which is most "Trek," identifying their various complexities.

Other highlights in the collection include Will Tattersdill's "*Discovery* and the Form of Victorian Periodicals," which compares *Discovery*'s serialized structure with that of Victorian periodicals, featuring strong references to wider generic and narrative tendencies as well as consumer understanding. Another insightful discussion of consumer engagement comes from editors Sabrina Mittermeier and Mareike Spychala, who in "Never Hide Who You Are: Queer Representation and Activism in *Star Trek: Discovery*," analyze queer representation and advocacy. Their succinct yet detailed argument of queer representation across *Star Trek* contributes to multiple debates by taking account of the tensions between representation, the overall tenets of *Star Trek* and the commercial demands of television, as well as the interplay between product and fandom, including the voices of actor activists ("actorvists").

Several essays in the collection critique the ostensibly liberal humanist politics of *Star Trek*, illuminating entrenched attitudes and beliefs both in the franchise and American popular culture more widely. In "'Into A Mirror Darkly': Border Crossing and Imperial(ist) Feminism in *Star Trek: Discovery*," Judith Rauscher gives an astute analysis of how *Star Trek* deploys and reinforces stereotyping and imperialism, with particular attention to the seduction of feminism by imperialist fantasy. Torsten Kathke gives a similarly insightful discussion of liberalism and its problems throughout *Star Trek* in "A *Star Trek* About Being *Star Trek*: History, Liberalism and *Discovery*'s Cold War Roots." One of the strongest chapters in the collection is Henrik Schillinger and Arne Sonnichsen's "The American Hello: Representations of U. S. Diplomacy in *Star Trek: Discovery.*" Their discussion of how *Discovery* confronts and complicates diplomacy in *Star Trek* is contextualized with a history of US diplomacy, especially in the 21st century. This complex analysis of contradictory elements leads to a critical and nuanced discussion of how *Discovery* utilizes notions of diplomacy to explore the values and ethics of the Federation, and by extension, the United States.

While much of the collection is strong, there are some shortcomings. Multiple typos throughout the book suggest rushed copy-editing, and the multiple riffs on "boldly going where no [INSERT NOUN] has gone before" get a bit tiresome. More specifically, several of the essays offer superficial and unconvincing arguments. Sarah Bohlau's chapter, "'Lorca, I'm Really Gonna Miss Killing You': The Fictional Space Created by Time Loop Narratives," offers some interesting links to PTSD within the context of *Discovery*'s time loop episode but is overall rather descriptive. Lisa Meinecke discusses *Discovery*'s device of a spore drive as a metaphor for connections and posthuman identity in "Veins and Muscles of the Universe: Posthumanism and Connectivity in *Star Trek: Discovery,*" and while Meinecke synthesizes an impressive array of theories, the chapter largely describes the show's narrative and misses the opportunity for an in-depth analysis of posthumanism. Another missed opportunity is "To Boldly Discuss: Socio-Political Discourses in *Star Trek: Discovery* Fanfiction" by Kerstin-Anja Munderlein. Munderlein argues that the reflection of *Star Trek*'s socio-political content in fan fiction is inextricable from the show, but the analysis is excessively quantitative and appraising rather than critical. Perhaps most troubling is "The Conscience of the King Or: Is There in Truth No Sex and Violence?" in which John Andreas Fuchs performs a rather superficial analysis of sex and violence in *Discovery* and other *Star Trek* instalments. Various inconsistencies in Fuchs' chapter suggest inadequate care, a problem further compounded by a lack of nuance and context as well as a condescending tone.

Due to the limited content of *Star Trek: Discovery*, there is some overlap in terms of what the authors discuss. The Mirror Universe comes up more than once, as Andrea Whitacre's "Looking in the Mirror: The Negotiation of Franchise Identity in *Star Trek: Discovery*" analyzes *Discovery*'s reworking / reiterating of *Star Trek*'s tension between inclusion and exclusion. Whitacre delivers particular insight into how the Mirror Universe works as a place to work out alternatives to and problems with the ethos normally presented in *Star Trek*. In a similar vein, Ina Batzke's chapter "From Series to Seriality: *Star Trek*'s Mirror Universe in the Post-Network Era" identifies the

importance of the Mirror Universe as a device of seriality which allows for the problematization of *Star Trek* in the post-network context.

Another recurring feature is a focus on particular characters, especially Michael Burnham (Sonequa Martin-Green), with various chapters discussing the identity politics of race, gender, and sexuality. Amy C. Chambers highlights that "*Star Trek* Discovers Women: Gender, Race, Science, and Michael Burnham," in her discussion of the under-representation of black women in science fiction and scholarship, with an insightful focus on the figure of the woman scientist and the ideas of gendered science. Another perceptive commentary on *Discovery*'s protagonist is the "Interview with Dr. Diana A. Mafe on 'Normalizing Black Women as Heroes,'" who identifies the representative strategies embodied by Burnham as well as how she is negotiated with other female characters on the show. Female roles within the structures of Starfleet and *Star Trek* are also the focus of Mareike Spychala's "Not Your Daddy's *Star Trek*: Exploring Female Characters in *Star Trek: Discovery*." Spychala notes that Discovery goes further than previous iterations did with gender and gender relations through close attention to presentation and costume and persuasively argues for the show's new forms of femininity, such as new roles for mothers.

Whit Frazier Peterson uses Afrofuturism to critically interrogate the philosophy of *Discovery* in "The Cotton-Gin Effect: An Afrofuturist Reading of *Star Trek: Discovery*." While Peterson's overall approach to technology as an intrinsic tool of oppression is interesting, the final argument that draws a parallel between the cotton-gin and *Discovery*'s spore drive is too rushed to be persuasive. A similar problem occurs with Si Sophie Pages Whybrew's "'I Never Met A Female Michael Before': *Star Trek: Discovery* between Trans Potentiality and Cis Anxiety," which identifies *Discovery*'s problematic framing of non-cisheteronormativity as alien and therefore Other, but offers a rather stretched argument over the character(s) of Ash Tyler/Voq (Shazad Latif) being a metaphor for trans-gender identity. More persuasively, Sabrina Mittermeier and Jennifer Volkmer also discuss Tyler/Voq in "'We Choose Our Own Pain. Mine Helps Me Remember': Gabriel Lorca, Ash Tyler, and the Question of Masculinity." Mittermeier and Volkmer persuasively link *Discovery*'s construction of masculine identity to contemporary practices of masculinity as well as trauma studies and make excellent use of interviews to illustrate actors' approaches to characters.

Although the perspectives and critical approaches vary, the reader may wish there was more material to talk about. The problem of limited material is most apparent in the section on Queering *Star Trek*. While it is valuable to highlight the dearth of queer representation in *Star Trek*, the three essays overlap in their discussions of the same few episodes. Season 3 of *Discovery* would have offered more material, and the writers and editors may have rejoiced or bemoaned the further forms of representation in that season. Perhaps ironically for a book entitled *Fighting for the Future*, it might have been improved by waiting for that future to arrive.

Despite these shortcomings, the essays of this collection are insightful and diverse and indicate a promising critical future for *Discovery* and *Star Trek* as a whole. It is likely to be of use to scholars interested in Star Trek and post-network television as well as various forms of narrative and

representation. As *Discovery* and indeed *Star Trek* as a whole continues to develop, the reader may find themselves hoping for a second edition of this volume that explores the subsequent seasons as well as further iterations of this ongoing and continually rich science fiction mythos.

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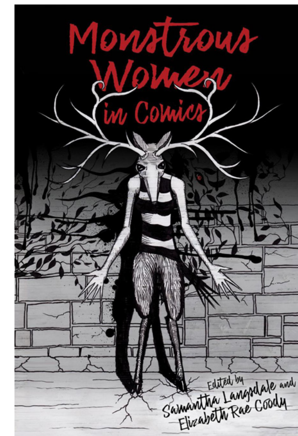
Monstrous Women in Comics, edited by Samantha Langsdale and Elizabeth Rae Coody

Brianna Anderson

Samantha Langsdale and Elizabeth Rae Coody, eds. *Monstrous Women in Comics*. University Press of Mississippi, 2020. Horror and Monstrosity Studies Series. Paperback. 296 pg. $20.99. ISBN 9781496827630.



Monsters have played a pivotal role in comics across genres and throughout time, with strange, boundary-crossing creatures and people populating the panels of pulp, superhero, and even romance comics. Creators frequently code these monsters as female, provoking important questions about the intersections of ability, femininity, maternity, race, and sexuality with representations of monstrosity and the Other in comics. In *Monstrous Women in Comics*, editors Samantha Langsdale and Elizabeth Rae Coody assemble fifteen essays that take up these pressing topics, focusing particularly on the ways that depictions of female monsters in comics contribute to the dehumanization, marginalization, or empowerment of women. As Langsdale and Coody note in their introduction, the chapters "explore not only the ways monstrous women evoke damaging cultural norms in patriarchal contexts, but also how constructions of woman as monster contain within them the potential to destroy the systems of thought that are productive of such norms" (5). The collection covers an impressive array of transnational comics, with analyses of popular Western characters like Batgirl and Harley Quinn appearing alongside readings of Bolivian, Chinese, and Japanese graphic narratives. Despite this expansive scope, each chapter follows a similar structure, beginning with a rigorous text-critical analysis of a comic or a selection of comics "in order to ask how the monster makes meaning within the text(s) and what it means for the monster to be coded as a woman" (5). Building on these close readings, the chapters interrogate how monstrous women connect to broader social and cultural anxieties and discourses surrounding gender and sexuality. Prominent feminist and monster studies scholars like Barbara Creed, Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, Julia Kristeva, and Margrit Shildrick serve as common touchstones for many of the analyses, and the richly interdisciplinary collection also draws on critical race studies, disability studies, queer studies, and other disciplines. Langsdale and Coody organize the essays thematically into five sections that explore different facets of female monstrosity: power, embodiment, childbearing, childhood, and performance.

Part One, "The Origins, Agency, and Paradoxes of Monstrous Women," posits that female monsters evoke fear and unease in (often male) comics audiences due to their paradoxical nature. Langsdale and Coody note the characters examined in this section "actively choose monstrosity and exhibit agency that rejects normative femininity" and "are neither wholly empowered nor entirely disenfranchised" (6). Coody's contribution, "Rewriting to Control: How the Origins of Harley Quinn, Wonder Woman, and Mary Magdalene Matter to Women's Perceived Power," contends that the "multivocal"—or repeatedly rewritten—origin stories of Harley Quinn and Wonder Woman reveal shifting cultural and patriarchal discomforts surrounding empowered, boundary-crossing women. Coody extends her analysis to the biblical figure Mary Magdalene, demonstrating the trans-disciplinary possibilities of her approach. In "Exploring the Monstrous Feminist Frame: Marvel's She-Hulk as Male-Centric Postfeminist Discourse," J. Richard Stevens similarly addresses monstrous women in superhero comics, surveying representations of female empowerment and feminist discourses in over 800 appearances of She-Hulk in comics published between the 1980s and 2015. While comics fans and scholars have frequently lauded She-Hulk as a "feminist ideal," Stevens reveals that the character engages only superficially with other female characters and second-wave and third-wave feminism, a fact that the author attributes to her mostly male creators and readers (31). As a result, Stevens concludes that She-Hulk "articulates the paradoxes and challenges of female agency in a hypermasculine public sphere," namely the superhero comics industry (31). Finally, in "'There is More to Me Than Just Hunger: Female Monsters and Liminal Spaces in *Monstress* and *Pretty Deadly*," Ayanni C. H. Cooper analyzes the connections between abjection, beauty, and violence in the two titular comics. She argues that the monstrous heroines challenge conventional ideas of "acceptable femininity" through their liminal positionality and paradoxically gain empowerment through abjection. Together, these chapters highlight the complexities of monstrous femininity and demonstrate how audience expectations, artwork, and larger cultural movements shape representations of monstrous women.

The chapters included in Part Two, "The Body as Monstrous," focus on the intersections of disability, embodiment, and sexuality with female monstrosity. Stefanie Snider's chapter "The (Un)Remarkable Fatness of Valiant's *Faith*" examines the radical potential and limitations of heroine Faith Herbert/Zephyr's fatness. Media outlets promoted Faith as the first fat superhero, yet her fatness largely goes uncommented on in the first sixteen issues of the 2016 series. Snider contends that Faith's fatness somewhat challenges stereotypical representations of superheroines as able-bodied, conventionally attractive, and feminine, but the comic's failure to explicitly address her visible fatness "can induce a normalization that makes invisible the power of representation and resistance that comes from her body size and shape" (80). The chapter encourages readers to envision the transformative potential of comics that would celebrate fat bodies instead of normalizing or stigmatizing them. Next, in one of the book's most compelling chapters, "New and Improved? Disability and Monstrosity in Gail Simone's *Batgirl*," Charlotte Johanna Fabricius explores representations of able-bodiedness and disability in the first six issues of Gail Simone's controversial New 52 Batgirl run, which cured Barbara Gordon/Oracle's paralysis. Fabricius contends that the comic perpetuates harmful narratives about disability by portraying the villains

as disabled monsters who Barbara must defeat. Moreover, Barbara's victories over these villains parallel her own road to recovery as she transforms from a paralyzed woman to the able-bodied Batgirl. As a result, Fabricius argues that the comic's "promise of monstrosity as disruptive remains unfulfilled, and the coding of disability as monstrous and other remains uncontested" (95). Finally, in "Horrible Victorians: Interrogating Power, Sex, and Gender in *InSEXts*," Keri Crist-Wagner draws on queer theory, quantitative frequency, and visual rhetoric to analyze the relationship between gender, power, queerness, and violence in Marguerite Bennett's horror comic *InSEXts*. The series centers on two queer Victorian women who transform into monstrous insects and enact violent vengeance on men who harm women. Crist-Wagner creates two tools, a "Diamond of Violence" and a "Scale of Escalating Romance," to evaluate how the women's "twofold monstrousness"—their physical insect transformations and their queerness—"allows them to cause material impact and damage to the patriarchy and to change their world and circumstances, almost completely without punishment" (110-111). By closely analyzing monstrous female bodies through several disciplinary lenses, these chapters highlight how monstrosity can unsettle power structures, while also demonstrating how these narratives can reinforce harmful stereotypes about aberrant bodies.

Part Three, "Childbearing as Monstrous," explores the abject horrors of maternity and pregnancy. In "Kicking Ass in Flip-Flops: Inappropriate/d Generations and Monstrous Pregnancy in Comics Narratives," Jeannie Ludlow explores how comics about abortion, childbearing, and motherhood can challenge or reinscribe binary notions of birth and pregnancy. For instance, she criticizes Leah Hayes's *Not Funny Ha-Ha: A Handbook for Something Hard* for depicting abortion as always traumatic and shameful, perpetuating the stigmatization of abortion and ignoring the positive experiences of many real women. By contrast, A. K. Summers' graphic novel *Pregnant Butch: Nine Long Months Spent in Drag* disrupts notions of normalcy and appropriateness by depicting pregnant queer bodies. By analyzing several texts from different genres, Ludlow demonstrates how comics can use grotesque and monstrous representations to promote more nuanced views of reproductive choices. Next, Marcela Murillo's chapter "The Monstrous Portrayal of the Maternal Bolivian Chola in Contemporary Comics" analyzes representations of chola mothers in three Bolivian comics: Corven Icenail and Rafaela Rada's *La Estrella y el Zorro*, Álvaro Ruilova's *Noche de mercado*, and Rafaela Rada's *Nina cholita Andina*. Murillo provides a detailed historical overview of political and structural discrimination suffered by cholas, indigenous Aymara or Quechua women who have historically occupied a marginalized position in Bolivia. Though Bolivia has recently adopted pro-indigenous policy changes, the three analyzed comics negatively portray chola mothers as monstrous and subaltern. Moreover, Murillo reveals how the comics use similar visual and narrative strategies to juxtapose the monstrosity of the cholas with the European femininity of their offspring, revealing larger anxieties surrounding gender and indigeneity in Bolivia. In the section's final chapter, "The Monstrous 'Mother' in Moto Hagio's *Marginal*: The Posthuman, the Human, and the Bioengineered Uterus," Tomoko Kuribayashi discusses representations of posthuman femininity in Moto Hagio's science fiction manga *Marginal*. The manga's biologically engineered heroine, Kira, and her relationships with her

male lovers invite readers to consider "whether the posthuman future will bring with it a radical reorganization or even total erasure of sexual differences and of gender roles and dynamics" (155). Despite this radical proposition, Kuribayashi concludes that the manga ends on a less empowering note by depicting Kira as reliant on her male partners, suggesting that men will continue to control and exploit posthuman women and their fertility. This section effectively illustrates both the transformative potential and limits of monstrous maternity, which can expand or trouble binary notions of childbirth and pregnancy.

Part Four, "Monsters of Childhood," centers on comics that feature female monsters who reject conventional associations of women as devoted caretakers of children. In the fascinating chapter "SeDUCKtress! Magica De Spell, Scrooge McDuck, and the Avuncular Anthropomorphism of Carl Barks's Midcentury Disney Comics," Daniel F. Yezbick contends that the shapeshifting, villainous duck Magica De Spell threatens both the privileged protagonist Scrooge and, by extension, the larger patriarchal structures of Barks's comic universe. Examining Magica's abject monstrosity, hyper sexualization, possible queerness, and transgressive behavior, Yezbick argues that the character demonstrates Barks's ambiguous attitudes toward women and, by extension, the larger Disney empire that owns his creations. In "On the Edge of 1990s Japan: Kyoko Okazaki and the Horror of Adolescence," Novia Shih-Shan Chen and Sho Ogawa analyze representations of adolescent anxieties, female sexuality, and monstrosity in three of Kyoko Okazaki's manga: *Pink*, *River's Edge*, and *Helter Skelter*. Though Okazaki's representations of monstrous women potentially "reinforce the nexus between monstrosity and women's sexuality," her characters also productively "allow us to interrogate the capitalist construction of femininity and reproduction in 1990s Japan" (205). Lastly, in "Chinese Snake Resurfaces in Comics: Considering the Case Study of *Calabash Brothers*," Jing Zhang traces the historical development of the transgressive figure of the snake woman in Chinese culture and then provides a close reading of Snake Woman, the monstrous antagonist who terrorizes the child protagonists of Shanghai Animation Film Studio's animation and comic series *Calabash Brothers*. Zhang links Snake Woman to larger traditions in Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism and insists that the character "is not a simple force of monstrous evil; she is a complex character with roots in traditional Chinese folklore and medicine, and a more sympathetic interpretation is possible" (218).

Finally, Part Five, "Taking on the Role of the Monster," explores how women can embrace their monstrosity to resist patriarchal social norms. In "Monochromatic Teats, Teeth, and Tentacles: Monstrous Visual Rhetoric in Stephen L. Stern and Christopher Steininger's *Beowulf: The Graphic Novel*," Justin Wigard draws on adaptation, monster theory, and visual rhetoric to examine shifting visual representations of Grendel's mother in *Beowulf* retellings. Closely analyzing Stern and Steininger's phallic depiction of the woman's body, Wigard argues that the comic reveals enduring heteronormative anxieties about empowered women, concluding, "Ultimately, the text suggests that even with one thousand years of progress, insidious patriarchal fears about female sexuality, power, and agency still pervade the human consciousness as modern adaptors perpetuate a cycle of monstrous (visual) rhetoric" (224). In "Beauty and Her B(r)east(s): Monstrosity and College

Women in *The Jaguar*," Pauline J. Reynolds and Sara Durazo-Demoss contend that The Jaguar's animal-like monstrosity reinforces the marginalization that the Latina superheroine experiences as an international college student in troubling ways. Finally, in "UFO (Unusual Female Other) Sightings in *Saucer Country/State*: Metaphors of Identity and Presidential Politics," Christina M. Knopf reveals how Mexican American heroine Arcadia Alvarado resists the monstrous othering that occurs in both American politics and the science fiction genre. This concluding section provides nuanced readings of the complexities of female monstrosity, which can serve as both a source of resistance and oppression.

Together, the fifteen chapters provide an expansive exploration of representations of monstrous women in graphic narratives from a diverse range of cultures and genres. Comics, feminist, and monster studies scholars alike will find valuable insights in the volume, and the collection serves as a strong model of effective interdisciplinary, transnational scholarship.

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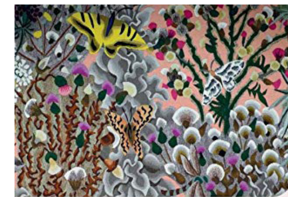
Biology and Manners: Essays on the Worlds and Works of Lois McMaster Bujold, edited by Regina Yung Lee & Una McCormack

Jerome Winter

Regina Yung Lee and Una McCormack, editors. *Biology and Manners: Essays on the Worlds and Works of Lois McMaster Bujold*. Liverpool University Press, 2020. Liverpool Science Fiction Texts and Studies 64. Hardcover. 320 pg. $120.00. ISBN: 9781789621730. Ebook ISBN: 9781789627534.



By any reasonable critical scorekeeping, the fan-favorite work of Lois McMaster Bujold has been sorely overlooked by sf academics; however, happily enough, that critical neglect seems to be now becoming quickly corrected. A winner of six Hugo and two Nebula awards, whose numerous books—including one massive space opera series and two fantasy series, not to mention the many novellas and short stories—had sold by one estimate over two million copies by 2010, Bujold received only approximately a dozen scholarly articles devoted to her work until the mid-2000s, as meticulously shown in Robin Anne Reid's history of Bujold scholarship that begins the current volume. In roughly the last decade, however, there has been one in-depth monographs on Bujold, Edward James's Bujold entry in University of Illinois Press's Modern Masters of Science Fiction series; some focus on Bujold in thematically organized books such as John Lennard's *Of Sex and Fairy*; and two essay collections on Bujold, including an entry, edited by Janet Brennan Croft, in McFarland's Critical Explorations in Science Fiction and Fantasy series, in addition to the present volume under review, *Biology and Manners*, edited by Regina Yung Lee and Una McCormack, which takes its title from the subtitle to Bujold's *A Civil Campaign: A Comedy of Biology and Manners* (1999).

The reasons for the critical neglect have been subject to fascinating speculation. Is it a lack of sustained interest in feminist utopias? Is it because of the military sf elements? Is it the widespread critical disdain for space opera? Is it her uncool focus on parenting? Is it her whiteness? My more humdrum suspicion, though, is a less conspiratorial one; I agree with Reid's argument that there is a "growing disparity between the [sff] genres' growth in multiple mediums and the number of academics specializing in a marginalized field" (14). It is hard to discount the fact that a vast amount of sf literature and media goes largely unstudied for no more complicated justification than an embarrassment of riches in cultural production dwarfing the random, stringent

contingencies of the niche, non-commercial market of academic publishing. Such a harsh reality, of course, means we should celebrate all the more when a worthy new author, text, or movement does begin to receive more extensive and concerted scholarly treatments, as has clearly been occurring with Bujold. There is a lot of interesting thematic and theoretical overlap across this whole essay collection; however, the collection is ostensibly divided into an introduction section of two essays on said emergence of Bujold studies and five more sections of two or three essays each, focusing respectively on "Bujold's Women," "Heroes' Journeys," "Potential Futures and Imagined Pasts," "Holy Families," and "Beyond the Books."

One pronounced focus of this anthology as a whole is on critically overlooked aspects of Bujold's two high-fantasy series, *The World of the Five Gods* (2001-21) and *The Sharing Knife* (2006-2019), especially its representations of gender and sexuality. Regina Yung Lee's essay "Untimely Graces" reads the widowed protagonist of *Paladin of Souls* (2003), Ista dy Chalion, and her pointed failures to fit conventional normative scripts as recuperating the character as covertly queered. Likewise, Caitlin Herington, in "You Wish to Have the Curse Reversed?", argues that the *Chalion* novels resist the arrogation of women to the stereotyped roles of dutiful mother, wife, or daughter. Moreover, in "The Shape of a Hero's Soul," C. Palmer-Patel limns the *Chalion* novels for the tension between prophetic destiny and heroic freedom in their high fantasy conceit of mortals channeling divine avatars, stressing that Lady Ista's active invoking of supernatural fate subverts charges of passivity endemic to this trope. Despite Bujold's stated protestations that she is no "unconscious gonfalonier" (113) for feminist viewpoints, Sylvia Kelso nevertheless productively examines the four novels in the *Sharing Knife* series for their unique contributions to women's writing, especially their rewriting of masculinized romantic quest story structure.

Tackling the conjunction of biology and manners from a different emphasis than exclusively one of gender and sexuality, Joanne Woiak's "Pain Made Holy" narrows in on the torture-victim Castillar Lupe dy Cazaril from *The Curse of Chalion* (2001) as a figure whose hellish suffering challenges both ableist presumptions of what counts as legitimate embodiment and also subverts some of the prerogatives of disability studies that broadly advocate for more normalizing portrayals of the differently abled instead of an overriding focus on care or healing. Reid's second essay in the collection, "The Holy Family," also draws on disability studies to analyze *The Curse of Chalion* and its prequel *The Hallowed Hunt* (2005) as well as the more recent *Penric and Desdemona* series of novellas (2015-2021). Reid argues that the depiction of spiritual visions in these works resists hegemonic narratives about ability, gender, and sexuality. Meg MacDonald, in the essay "Bastard Balances All," also discusses the *Penric and Desdemona* series in terms of queer theory but adds to the discussion Bujold's fashioning of an antiauthoritarian theology.

The Vorkosigan Saga (1986-2016), a primary focus of Croft's essay collection, also receives the due attention of a handful of essays in this book. In "Quiet Converse," Katherine Woods pairs *A Civil Campaign* with Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park* (1814) to suggest Cordelia Naismith, Miles Vorkosigan's mother, is not the boring character some readers have dismissed her as, given her subtle cultivation of multiple identities as captain, refugee, mother, and hidden power behind

the regent. In "Queering Barrayar," Jey Saung reads the more recent novel *Gentleman Jole and the Red Queen* (2016) and the pregnancy-sidestepping novum of the uterine replicator, which has long been a keystone in the extrapolative world-building of the Vorkosiverse, for its opening up of utopian personal and public alternatives to normative biological temporalities. Oppositely, Ally Wolfe's "Womb with a View" examines the early novel *Ethan of Athos* (1986) for its nuanced critique of the heterotopia of a misogynist all-male society also extrapolated from the uterine replicator. More broadly, blending visions of the future and the past in the merging of cod-medieval fantasy and space opera tropes, the Vorkosigan books enact an estranged time warp, a "futuristic feudalism" (171), as Sarah Lindsay writes in an analysis of the very first Miles book, *The Warrior's Apprentice* (1986).

Expanding beyond the authorial focus, Jennifer Woodward and Peter Wright's "The Naismith Strategem" explores Genevieve Cogman's Bujold-themed tabletop role-playing game, *The Vorkosigan Saga*. Woodwood and Wright demonstrate how this game ludically systemizes Bujold's intricate universe into a playable format, even to the point of assigning point values to characters that reflect the stigmas that often pervade feudal male-dominated and heterosexist monocultures. Kristina Busse's "Canon Compliance and Creative Analysis in the Vorkosigan Saga Fan Fiction" reverses Bujold's own stated endorsements of fan fiction to show how specific forms of Vorkosigan fan fiction—namely, in the slash, alternate universe, and Mary Sue subgenres—deeply engage with Bujold's novels. Regardless of the belated scholarly recognition of Bujold's work, these last two essays suggest that the growth of an active fandom that critically appreciates Bujold's achievement continues apace.

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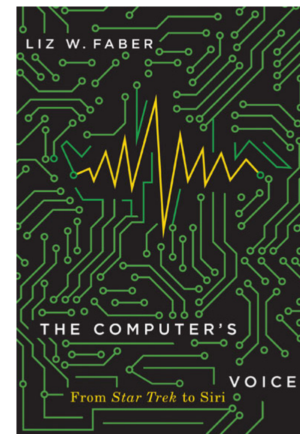
The Computer's Voice: From Star Trek to Siri, by Liz Faber

Bryce L. King

Liz Faber. *The Computer's Voice: From* Star Trek *to Siri*. University of Minnesota Press, 2020.Paperback. 226 pg. $27.00. ISBN 9781517909765.



In *The Computer's Voice: From* Star Trek *to Siri*, Liz Faber discusses gendered representations of what she terms "acousmatic computers" (4) throughout science fiction film and pop culture, by which she means forms of artificial intelligence without a human-presenting body, with the consequence that their voice is their defining feature and means of expressing gender. Faber argues that the gendering of these computer voices both reveals historical attitudes towards gender while also pushing the social boundaries surrounding gender binaries and norms. Faber utilizes psychoanalytic feminist theory and sound studies to analyze these norms because the intersection of these schools of thought offers not only an interpretation of gender relations but also of power relationships through womb and phallic iconography. By analyzing voice, Faber outlines the ways in which video-synchronized sound is linked to characterization and therefore the structuring of the narrative. Faber studies the ways in which bodily-based engendering is projected onto bodiless computers to argue that, through this contradiction, there occurs a conflict in both the challenging and promotion of gender essentialism as well as the implementation that the engendering of the acousmatic computers results in the gendering of their roles in our lives and our media. Essentially, if an inherently non-gendered entity such as a computer can have gender, it pushes us to recognize that gender is constructed.

The introduction recounts the Turing test and its relations to gender studies, and then Faber states that she aims to cover the whitewashing of classic science fiction films; however, throughout the rest of the chapters, this latter ambition seems to reappear infrequently at best, not being directly addressed until chapter 5. She goes on in the introduction to summarize the evolution of sound in film and the auditory properties of stereo technology. Faber asserts that the imageless characters such as these acousmatic computers often hold more power than robotic characters with physical bodies in their narratives due to their production of tension, their evocation of the unknown, and their disembodied omnipresence, all stemming from their ability to be heard but not seen. She then discusses the link between cinematic sound and Freudian/Lacanian theories, relating these frameworks to how science fiction depictions of technology are impacted by their time of conception. We understand the future through our present, and thereby classical

Hollywood cinema reflects castration anxiety and serves as the fantasy realm of male subjectivity. Because the acousmatic computer oftentimes represents or evokes the castrated woman, it also represents trauma, explaining why oftentimes the viewer does not identify with the computer, but instead with the other embodied characters.

In chapters 1 and 2, Faber analyzes acousmatic spaceship computers including the foundational HAL9000 from *2001* (1968), the U. S. S. Enterprise from *Star Trek: The Original Series* (1966-69), and the Enterprise-D from S*tar Trek: The Next Generation* (1987-94), along with their parodic counterparts from *Dark Star* (1974), *Quark* (1977-78), and *Moon* (2010). Though Faber does a thorough job of describing the mise en scène of these works, it is beneficial for the reader to have seen the films themselves, because these chapters heavily focus on Freudian iconography as well as color theory. She argues that acousmatic spaceships represent the paradox of the primordial uncanny, the womb. HAL9000 in his masculinity, phallic queerness, and sterility reflects the active trauma of birth, while the *Enterprise* represents the warm passive female womb in her domesticity and subjectivity; thus, the good Oedipal desirable mother and the bad inhospitable traumatizing mother dichotomy are invoked. In both representations, however, gender roles remain within the norm socially. Yet despite this dichotomy, both gendered voices are projected onto the same idea of the mothership, complicating these seemingly stable gender norms. The parodies *Quark*, *Dark Star*, and *Moon* alleviate the cultural anxieties of trauma in birth, the threat of castration, and gender instability through their reestablishment of typical gender roles and comedic license. These chapters serve as an important basis for the study of gender in acousmatic computers throughout the text.

In chapters 3 to 5, Faber focuses on terrestrial acousmatic computers, which is to say vocal computers in films taking place on Earth as well as acousmatic computers that reflect male subjectivity. Chapter 3 specifically focuses on the dystopian paternal creator/computer films of the 1970s utilizing the films: *Colossus: The Forbin Project* (1970), *THX 1138* (1971), *Rollerball* (1975), and *Demon Seed* (1977). Faber excellently outlines and connects the phallocentric power relations between the films' respective acousmatic computers in relation to the oedipal complex and technophobia, entailing that the son now identifies with the father out of fear of the castrated mother. However, considering the sexual power dynamic between Dr. Forbin and the computer Colossus could have made for a more interesting reading rather than simply studying the father/son, creator/creation dichotomy of the film. Chapters 4 and 5 center on the films *Tron* (1982), *Electric Dreams* (1984), *Fortress* (1992), *Smart House* (1999), the television series *Eureka* (2006-12), and *Iron Man* (2008). Faber discusses the masculine and feminine-coded computers of these texts in order to identify the cultural anxieties of women leaving the domestic space for the workforce, cementing heteropatriarchal gender roles while also encouraging the entrepreneurial rival sons of the 1970s to take on the dominant paternal power role in the 90s. Faber discusses the heavily hetero-erotic scenes between feminine computers and their human male dominators but ignores the homosocial undertones of male humans to male computers. Ultimately, Faber proves that the construction of gender is as much vocal as it is visual.

Lastly, chapter 6 circles back to the evolution of Siri as promised in the title, as well as including analyses of *The Big Bang Theory* (2007-2019) and *Her* (2013). Faber again analyzes color and its relationship to gender in the film, linking *Her* with *2001* and the previously discussed texts. Faber argues that the desire for the viewer to view is made up for by their ability to hear the acousmatic computer. Faber discusses this through *Her*, emphasizing not only the gendering of acousmatic computers but also the sexualization of them. Samantha, an artificially intelligent virtual assistant akin to Siri, then by vocal means experiences her gender, her sexualization, her sexual awakening, and her sexual relationship with Theodore. Faber relates *The Big Bang Theory* to the hilarity of engendering and romanticizing computers through their voice. Although she discusses *The Big Bang Theory* first, it may have been more effective to discuss the television series after the film *Her* in order to reconvey earlier arguments about how comedy allows for social anxieties and discomforts regarding technophobia and gender to be expressed and alleviated. Then using the television series and film as a segue since both mediums feature acousmatic computers meant to mirror Siri, Faber contends that within the confines of our current language we are not equipped to mediate "the multiplicity of gendered subjectivities we construct every day" (181). The liminality of the internet calls into question the stability of our heteropatriarchal social structure the same way that a disembodied, but gendered computer questions what we perceive as the essential sex of gender; without a body, gender must be constructed and, more importantly, constructed through vocality. Siri then has embodied social anxieties and typical female passive subservient roles, but in her absence of body has become a real-life technological example of acousmatic gender construction. Thus not only has Siri's voice been gendered but also her role in our lives, reflecting and perpetuating current ideologies of gender essentialism. Through the previous examples of what a gendered computer could sound like, we have come to recognize Siri as feminine even though she herself is programmed to respond that she has no gender.

Faber works from a strong foundation of previous scholarship while offering invaluable insight for further psychoanalytical feminism and sound theory within science fiction, making this book a great resource overall, but even useful on the micro-level of individual film readings in relation to their respective chapters. Faber's strength, though it might seem repetitive to some readers, is her ability to optimally and efficiently structure her argument and individual chapters in a way that progresses through the decades from the 1960s to the modern day while giving historical context at the beginning of each chapter, then recommunicating what aspects of the previous chapter she is going to build on, then carrying out a psychanalytical reading of the texts, closing with a summary of what she has just analyzed and a snippet of what the next chapter holds in store. Though she could have stressed the potential queerness and repeated whiteness of certain cultural gender roles and anxieties, Faber makes a particularly strong argument for the vocal engendering of science fiction's most popular and most obscure computers.

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FICTION REVIEWS

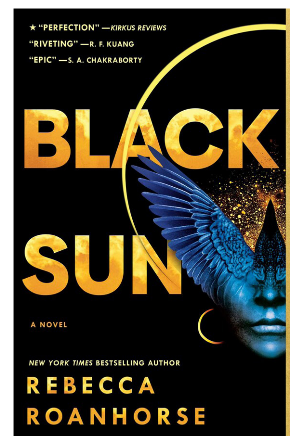
Image by Tomasz Proszek

Review of *Black Sun*

Athira Unni

Roanhorse, Rebecca. *Black Sun*. Saga Press, 2020.

Rebecca Roanhorse's epic fantasy novel *Black Sun* (2020) was received fondly by readers and won the Hugo Award for Best Novel in 2021. The book is the first part of the *Between Earth and Sky* series with its sequel *Fevered Star* (2022) already out. Drawing upon Polynesian and pre-Columbian American cultures, the novel explores the theme of embracing one's destiny and ideas of celestial balance, sacrifice, vengeance, and justice. In a thrilling story that invokes a fresh, magical world, Xiala, a sea captain belonging to a mermaid-race, oversees the transportation of Serapio, the Crow God, across time for a celestial event called the Convergence in the city of Tova. Serapio was ritually blinded by his mother and trained by three capable tutors to prepare him for what awaits him in Tova. Xiala's crew must be convinced of their mission with half-truths and she does not know Serapio's true power until the very end.



Guided by the watchers and the sun priest, the people of Tova are not expecting the reborn Crow God to land on their shores. The four Sky Made clans of Tova—the Golden Eagle, the Water Strider, the Winged Serpent, and the Carrion Crow—exist mostly in peace except for the mournful Carrion Crow clan who have not forgotten the Night of Knives, a massacre of its members by the priesthood that led to the rise of Serapio as the Crow God. Naranpa, the sun priest who has raised herself from poverty to the highest echelons of the priesthood, and Okoa, the warrior prince of the Carrion Crow clan, are the other two major characters in the narrative.

The political intrigue in the fantasy world that Roanhorse builds makes the story interesting. The conflicting interests of the Sky Made Clans, Naranpa's feeling of alienation inside the priesthood, and Serapio's ambiguity towards his own power drive the narrative. The character of Serapio is a fantasy archetype, but he is an unlikely villain consumed as much by a thirst for vengeance as he is by a similar desire for justice: "…vengeance can be for spite. It can eat you up inside, take from you everything that makes you happy, makes you human" (350). Serapio considers himself to be the Crow God, commanding his flock of crows to attack, serve, and intimidate anyone who crosses him. Serapio's loss of eyesight grants him a greater vision with the help of 'star pollen,' which he relies upon just as Xiala relies on her song to calm the seas and influence men. As a seafaring Teek, Xiala is good at leading her crew but is treated as an outsider

because of her race. The character of Xiala makes readers confront their prejudices, overturning gendered expectations. There are other women in the story such as Naranpa and the Matrons of the Sky Made Clans who serve as leaders, while men serve as warriors or 'knives.' Such characters help readers understand the otherness felt by marginalised groups to some extent.

The landscapes in the novel extend from the Obregi Mountains to the Crescent Sea, and to the Cities of Cuecola and Tova. The descriptions of the places are sparse but are fleshed out in conversations and some illuminating phrases. At the beginning of each chapter, the location of action and days in relation to the Convergence is mentioned, situating the narrative for the reader. The Convergence is an eclipse event that takes place when three suns align in a single line and are obscured by the moon completely. Members of the priesthood undertake ritualised practices, including the Day of Shuttering when they strictly stay indoors. The title of the novel itself invokes this solstice event in which the sun disappears during a period of cosmic alignment. The indigenous way of narrating is to place it alongside temporal and regional markers populating the story world. Roanhorse does this with ease and an elegance that makes the novel immersive.

Compared to N.K. Jemisin's *Broken Earth* trilogy, Roanhorse's first novel allows for magical thinking that does not centre the apocalyptic tone too prominently. Jemisin's novels carry the weight of a post-apocalypse, but Roanhorse crafts vivid characters and an exciting narrative with the Convergence revealing Serapio's true power. The vengeful destruction that Serapio unleashes can be seen in two ways. The massacre of the Night of the Knives can be seen to justify Serapio's anger, but Serapio does not feel like he belongs to the Carrion Crow clan at all, having been brought up as a weapon. With an anti-hero at the centre of the narrative, Roanhorse weaves a memorable story that can be taken forward in interesting ways. The ambiguity of Serapio's character compares to Jemisin's female protagonist in her trilogy, although the latter is a much more complex character due to her maternal role, and her duty in saving/re-making the 'broken' earth.

The characters of Serapio and Xiala are set up as binary opposites in terms of the powers they wield. While Serapio summons the shadow into him, Xiala casts her song out into the world. These oppositional forces allow for a balance in the narrative and an interesting juxtaposition that is also gendered. Xiala's queer sexuality and Serapio's chosen celibacy allow for their companionship to develop in a striking way. Towards the end of the novel, Serapio's destiny is realized in some sense, with consequences, and Xiala is left to wonder at his power. Roanhorse sets up the two characters to respond to each other and their conversations reveal the differences in how they think about their respective journeys. While Serapio feels like he has been brought up for a purpose, Xiala lives from day to day with a mission to get her crew across the Crescent Sea to Tova and reap the rewards of such a journey. Roanhorse's novel also invokes the idea of befriending pain in relation to training the mind and the body, with Serapio's tutors teaching him that sacrifice is essential to fulfil one's destiny.

The novel is a good example of speculative fiction that values diversity of characters in terms of race, gender, and sexuality. In a world that increasingly recognizes the importance of inclusive thinking and representation, Roanhoarse's novel makes for a satisfying read that shows us how indigenous life can be portrayed in a fascinating manner. The fantastical world that Roanhorse developed is sure to inspire more speculative fiction writers to come up with similar works that will show how various indigenous people have lived in conjunction with the natural world, with knowledge of celestial events and clans that protected and fought for their kin.

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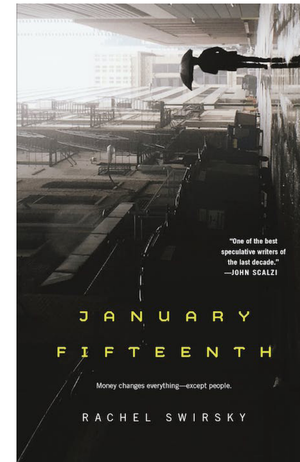
Review of *January Fifteenth*

Jeremy Brett

Rachel Swirsky. *January Fifteenth*. Tordotcom, 2022. Paperback. 239 pg. $15.99. ISBN 978-1-250-19894-6.



There is so very much to examine about our present right now, but ironically, a crucial issue that concerns us all has been generally overlooked in recent science fiction. The issue is economic inequality, a subject of serious concern and equally serious implications for both the future of humanity and the planet. It brings suffering and misery and hardship to countless people, and all the forces of greed and corruption seem arrayed to support it.

There's great dramatic potential offered by an issue with such grave planetary and societal import, yet I see few stories that try to grapple with it, except as background dressing (or as an aspect and outcome of post-apocalyptic disaster). This to me represents a missed opportunity, because some of the greatest literature in any genre is that which, first, has something to say about ourselves and the human condition when subjected to immense stress and second, describes what happens when people attempt to solve vital problems. I believe the genre would greatly benefit from more stories in which people apply similar degrees of resources, thought, or effort to economic inequality. Acting with narrative boldness to counter the seeming inevitability of capitalism's continued dominance may seem as science fictional (fantastical, even) as it gets, but the limitless reach of SF's imagination should not preclude us from envisioning possible solutions or alternate economic pathways for ourselves, even if, as Rachel Swirsky demonstrates in her intelligent novella *January Fifteenth*, the consequences aren't predictable or even, sometimes, just.

Set in a near-future United States, the novella takes place over the course of a single day, the day every American receives their yearly Universal Basic Income payment ("UBI" is defined by the Basic Income Lab at Stanford University as "a periodic cash allowance given to all citizens, without means test to provide them with a standard of living above the poverty line." From that basic definition there are all manner of differing opinions on what qualifies as UBI or who should receive it.). Swirsky's novella benefits from timeliness, certainly, since UBI as a method of reducing economic inequality has become a part of the national economic conversation in the USA over the last few years, with debates involving people as disparate as Andrew Yang, Hillary Clinton, economist Thomas Piketty, Bernie Sanders, and Mark Zuckerberg weighing in. It is an idea that

appeals to many, and it is no wonder that Swirsky has turned her narrative gifts towards a fictional exploration of its potential impact on the complicated lives of human beings.

The novella centers four women, each from a vastly different stratum of American society and each impacted by UBI in a vastly different manner. Although the four never interact, Swirsky's story amounts to a kind of mosaic, where the different lives and fates of the central characters come together as diverse bits making up a greater whole—the overall societal picture of UBI and the ways, great and small, that it impacts people and society. In upstate New York lives Hannah Klopfer and her two small boys—for Hannah, January 15th is a day less about economic security and opportunity and more about trauma. It is the anniversary of the day she took her boys and fled her abusive, mentally unbalanced, former wife—now stalker—Abigail. Hannah is on the run and living as quietly as she can; picking up her UBI check is a time to be watchful and scared of discovery by Abigail.

In Chicago, Janelle, a freelance reporter in a post-journalism world, scrounges at the request of news aggregator services every January 15th for man-on-the-street interviews of people and their opinions on UBI. For Janelle, an orphan who raises her 14-year-old sister Neveah alone, the day is one of predictable banalities and arguments with her firebrand liberal sister over the injustices of UBI. The story moves west into Colorado, where Olivia is a freshman in college and the child of great wealth; for her and her friends in Aspen, January 15th is "Waste Day," where the fabulously rich compete to see who can burn through their UBI in the most dramatic and flamboyant manner. And last, there is pregnant teenager Sarah, a "sister-wife" in Utah whose "family" travels the long route on foot through Utah to pick up their UBI payments in person.

What makes Swirsky's novella so intriguing is not that it lays out the details of a UBI-based society, nor that it explores the traditional arguments about UBI (freedom vs. dependency), but that it instead concentrates on how traumas, abuses, and everyday circumstances "affect our lives. They affect our happiness. They certainly affect how and why Universal Basic Income could change our circumstances" (Author's Note). In the United States of the novella, UBI fails to actually solve any of the characters' individual problems on its own, but it provides avenues and opportunities for people to evolve and change. It also, like anything else, can be a negative force: Sarah notes that "the prophet's wives and children trekked on foot every year to protest the state's requirement that they go in person to receive their benefits. The state claimed that it was to mitigate 'abuses of the system,' but everyone knew it was just another way to harass them for having different beliefs" (35). Meanwhile, the yearly UBI gives license to Olivia's friends to be crushed under the weight of their own decadence and insecurities. And darker elements are hinted at—at one point, Janelle hears rumors of Native women being sterilized or else having their UBI withheld, and people being forced to sign loyalty oaths to receive their money. As Swirsky notes, money does not solve everything, and it can not necessarily correct injustices in an already problematic system.

The imperfections and limits of UBI are important themes of the novella, in fact. At one point, Janelle and Neveah argue over the history of the program, Neveah appealing to Janelle's youthful

liberalism. In this scene, the compromises and betrayals and hidden motives that accompany any reform are laid bare:

> [Nevaeh] added, "I don't believe you've really changed everything you think."
>
> "What I *think* – and what I *thought* – is that UBI is better than having nothing."
>
> Neveah started to respond. Janelle held up her hand.
>
> Janelle continued, "What I *think* – and what I *thought* – is that we had an extraordinary moment of political will after Winter Night. The whole country was breathing a sigh of relief. We weren't just trying to get ourselves back on track; we were trying to figure out what kind of track to get on. It was like we had this dream together of improving the world."
>
> "Right? So- "
>
> "What I *said* was that it would be a one-shot deal. We had one sure arrow to fire from that bow. And whatever we didn't make sure to fix then, it probably wasn't going to get fixed for a long time."
>
> "You were right!"
>
> "Yeah, I was….UBI is definitely better than having nothing."
>
> "But you were right about *everything*," Neveah said. "You called it patchwork legislation… you said once the opposition realized UBI was definitely happening, they were going to try to make it hard to collect. Like drumming up paranoia about bank breaches to make us use checks and the mail. You said they'd start saying states needed the right to make their own rules, but they'd really mean states should be able to make people jump through hoops. You said it was 'enshrining unequal access.'"
>
> Janelle shrugged. "And now the law's been written." (55-56)

Through a single day in the lives of four wildly disparate women, each bearing their own particular emotional burdens and life experiences, *January Fifteenth* provides a smart and thoroughly realized series of proofs that the human element is vital to the outcome of any attempts at economic or societal restructuring. It shows how narratives of economic inequality, no matter the genre, cannot be simplistic if they are to be either remotely realistic or conducive to imaginative considerations of real-life reform. Society is complicated, people and their relationships are complicated, and realistic stories about this kind of inequality—stories we need to tell—will be complicated, too. Economic inequality is a corrosive phenomenon that threatens us all with an ever-more uncertain future, and Rachel Swirsky has done us all a great service in writing a story that thoughtfully explores the human impact of attempts to reduce it.

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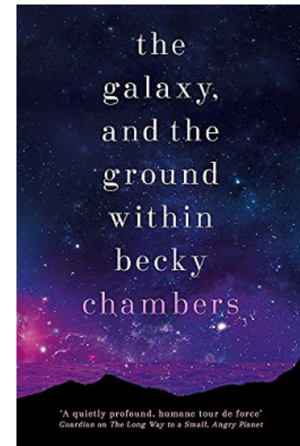
Review of *The Galaxy, and the Ground Within*

Gabriela Lee

Chambers, Becky. *The Galaxy, and the Ground Within*. Harper Voyager, 2021.



Stepping back into the world of Becky Chambers' *Wayfarers* series is a comfort. Beginning with the first novel, *A Long Way to a Small, Angry Planet*, and culminating in the fourth and final novel, *The Galaxy, and the Ground Within*, Chambers creates a vibrant, messy universe where humans are just a footnote in galactic history. In fact, in the *Wayfarers* universe, it is the humans who need to be saved by the other alien species with superior technology; it is the humans whose status as an independent and legal species needs to be acknowledged by the Galactic Commons, the parliamentary system that governs most of the known, traveled universe.

But Chambers is not concerned with the big picture of the galaxy—she is interested in the stories of the individuals who simply live their lives, and how they navigate a world in which people (and when I say "people" I mean all the sapient beings in this universe, not just humans) travel halfway across the galaxy through what is essentially traffic-controlled wormholes but still struggle with ordinary, everyday problems. In fact, one could say that Chambers is preoccupied with the personal, and it is through the personal that she is able to connect to the universal.

It is this particular preoccupation that makes *The Galaxy, and the Ground Within* approachable, despite the fact that it is the only book in the series in which none of the protagonists are humans. Instead, the novel focuses on four different beings stranded on Gora, an unassuming planet in the middle of what is essentially an intersection of five busy highways in space. Because of the interstellar traffic that passes through Gora and the wait time it takes to traverse the interspatial tunnels from one part of the galaxy to the other, many businesses spring up in the area to cater to travelers waiting to cross to other parts of the galaxy, including restaurants, bath houses, and travelers' inns. One of them is the Five-Hop One-Stop, a kitschy intergalactic bed and breakfast that welcomes all visitors, no matter the species.

The novel's plot is fairly simple: during a routine visit to the Five-Hop One-Stop while waiting for their turn in the queue to make their space jump, three guests are stranded when a major communication satellite malfunctions in Gora airspace, rendering the transportation hub inert. While the Galactic Commons Transit Authority and Goran officials scramble to repair the

satellites and get the transportation tunnels back in order again, everyone is ordered to stay at their respective habitats, effectively stranding the three guests at the Five-Hop.

One of them is an Akarak named Speaker, who is described as small and stunted, with her arms ending in hooks that allow her to swing from one pole to another. The Akaraks are considered a fringe species, existing in the margins of the civilized universe without a home planet of their own and unable to live in more civilized spaces because of their unique biological needs; namely, they breathe methane instead of oxygen and are therefore unable to live outside of mechanical suits. Another guest is the exiled Quelin, Roveg, a designer of artificial simulations for entertainment and education. The Quelin, a monolithic society that despises change and insists on the enduring permanence of their own culture, branded Roveg a traitor after he was identified as the creator of narrative simulators that challenged Quelin ideology. Though he has since recuperated his career and finances, he is still permanently cut off from his family and home. The final guest is the Aeluon military cargo captain Pei, a character we briefly meet in the first book, as she heads to a secret rendezvous with her human lover. The Aeluons are considered one of the "Big Three" species that established the Galactic Commons and are generally considered one of the most advanced species in the universe. However, because of biological and social expectations, such as a declining birth rate, Aeluons are generally discouraged from romantic relationships with other species. Rounding out the cast of characters are Ouloo and her offspring, Tupo, a Laru mother-and-child who run the transit stop. Ouloo struggles with raising her child with a wealth of options while at the same time trying to figure out her place in the wider galaxy; similarly, the adolescent Tupo struggles to figure out their place in the world while they grow into their body and gender identity. The Laru are described as long-necked and fur-covered, are in part identified by their strange gaits—commonly alternating their walking style between two and four limbs—and are widespread across the galaxy, so much so that they no longer have any meaningful or traditional ties to their own home world.

The enforced proximity of the five characters reveals lines of tension. For instance, Pei's work in a military-adjacent career is constantly challenged by Speaker, whose entire species was almost wiped out during a planet-side war generations ago, but the effects are still being felt in the present. Roveg's exile also becomes a sore subject for him, especially when he confronts his own prejudices against Speaker and Pei, as well as his own personal philosophy of maintaining neutrality at the expense of everything else. However, the manufactured closeness also unveils intersections of commonality between everyone. Speaker's reluctance at revealing her worry for her missing sister, Tracker, changes as Roveg and Ouloo attempt to help her find alternative means of communication outside the habitat. Pei's frustration at the way by which her species are discouraged from entering relationships outside of their people boils over when she is faced with the choice of whether to be a mother, and though Aeluon motherhood is nothing like human motherhood, the choice still remains. Even Ouloo is challenged by the extended presence of visitors in her habitat and how their needs clash with the needs of her son.

Unlike many SF novels, Chambers smoothly gets around the thorny problem of exposition and explaining how the world works by utilizing short intermission pages that occur between chapters. They take the shape of planetwide bureaucratic announcements from the Galactic Commons Transit Authority that update the shelter-in-place policies around Gora. This allows readers to follow both the passage of time as well as provide ongoing updates of the events happening outside the Five-Hop. Similarly, Chambers uses the character of Tupo as a reader intermediary: as the youngest character, Tupo can easily shift between the four adults and ask questions, thereby expanding on our understanding of how each character sees each other and themselves. Although she consistently reminds the readers of the significant differences between the five protagonists—especially during the denouement of the novel, in which Pei, Roveg, Speaker, and Ouloo all have very different approaches and actions towards Tupo's accidental poisoning—the novel seamlessly integrates their characters through constant interactions within each chapter.

In fact, it is very easy to forget that one is reading a story in which there are minimal mentions of humans or humanity. Chambers' writing shines as she writes through the complexities of imagined species and cultures and touches on our own complex cultures as well. Though some may consider The Galaxy, and the Ground Within a slow novel in which nothing of note happens (which is a valid critique, especially if one expects a science fiction novel to be full of action) I would argue instead that the novel refracts and defamiliarizes genre tropes in SF and provides an alternate way of thinking about belonging and alienation in an unfamiliar space. It is to Chambers' credit that The Galaxy, and the Ground Within welcomes the wayfaring reader with open arms.

Gabriela Lee teaches creative writing and children's literature at the Department of English & Comparative Literature at the University of the Philippines. Her second collection of SF short stories, *A Playlist for the End of the World* (University of the Philippines Press, 2022), was just released. She recently received a National Children's Book Award in the Philippines for her children's book, *Cely's Crocodile: The Story and Art of Araceli Limcaco Dan*s (Tahanan Books, 2020). She is currently a PhD student in the English Department at the University of Pittsburgh. You can learn more about her and her work at www.sundialgirl.com.

MEDIA REVIEWS

Image by fred prose

The Orville: New Horizons

Jeremy Brett

MacFarlane, Seth, creator. *The Orville: New Horizons*, Fuzzy Door Productions and 20th Television, 2022.

The third season of *The Orville* arrived with a brand-new subtitle—*New Horizons*—a signal from show creator and star Seth MacFarlane that the series would initiate a renewed concentration on the ship's exploratory mission and questing spirit. However, what viewers received instead was, rather, a season-long study of the contradictions, emotional bonds, and injustices that define the human condition (or perhaps, the "sentient" condition, since these same interactions play out among various alien species as well—as with *Orville*'s spiritual predecessor *Star Trek*, alien species tend to serve as analogs for humans, whose behavior is presented as the "sentience default" galaxywide). Only one episode of *New Horizons*, "Shadow Realms," centers on the exploration of unknown space; the remainder focus instead on the exploration of psychological and societal *inner* space and on characters' attempts to find meaning for themselves as well as a secure place in their world for themselves and their loved ones. *The Orville: New Horizons*, far more than previous seasons, demonstrates the truth of *Trek* writer David Gerrold's oft-quoted observation that "the final frontier is not space. The final frontier is the human soul. Space is merely the arena in which we shall meet the challenge." (*The World of Star Trek*, 1973) It is likely no coincidence that, while still leavened with humor, this new season of the show is much less reliant on jokes; like the ship and its crew, the series itself has emerged into a new maturity, tempered by trauma and existential fear.

At the conclusion of the second season, the crew of the *Orville* and the Planetary Union were living in the long shadow newly cast by the massive Kaylon invasion. That invasion, led in large part by Kaylon and *Orville* crew member Isaac (Mark Jackson), caused the deaths of thousands of Planetary Union members and their reptilian Krill allies-of-convenience, as well as the destruction of numerous ships. The season's first episode, "Electric Sheep," sets the psychological tone for the series, opening with an expansive recap of the desperate battle, which we find is a flashback-cum-dream experienced by Marcus Finn (BJ Tanner), the older son of Orville medical officer Claire Finn (Penny Johnson Jereld). As Marcus awakes violently from his PTSD-fueled dream of the battle and Isaac's betrayal, the *Orville* itself is seen berthed in an orbiting spacedock, being refitted—symbolically reborn for a new age of unprecedented conflict. Ongoing conflict between past and present is depicted as Isaac walks the decks of the ship in an atmosphere of deep distrust after his betrayal, much of it coming from new ensign Charlie Burke (Anne Winters). Burke herself, like Marcus, suffers from righteous anger at Isaac, having barely

escaped the destruction of her ship and witnessed the death of her friend/secret love. This first episode, and much of the season, is concerned with attempts to psychologically heal from grievous wounds, inflicted not only by outside invaders but by supposed allies.

Even one's own culture can do great harm to those within it; much of this season centers on the issue of what we owe to our culture (or state, or planet) versus what we owe to each other and those we love. One of *New Horizons*' most important characters is Topa, the child of Lt. Commander Bortus (Peter Macon) and his husband Klyden (Chad L. Coleman), both members of the Moclan species. Topa (Imani Pullum) was born female in season 1—a supposed "rarity" and source of deep shame to the one-gender Moclan culture—and she was surgically altered to male at Klyden's insistence. Season 3's most emotionally devastating episode, "A Tale of Two Topas," sees Topa experiencing gender dysphoria and suicidal depression, trapped between her own feelings and Klyden's determination to honor his cultural traditions (determination fueled by self-loathing) and maintain Topa's forced masculinity. Bortus, encouraged by Topa's compassionate mentor/ *Orville* first officer Kelly Grayson (Adrienne Palicki), chooses, at last to eschew the mores and strictures of his own home culture to preserve Topa's life and emotional well-being, and she is returned to female form. The viewer is left heartbroken in watching Klyden angrily leave Bortus and Topa, declaring that he wished Topa had never been born, while Bortus then proclaims his own undying love for her. It is moments like this that give New Horizons significant emotional resonance and demonstrate SF's ongoing capacity for viewing our own social struggles through a fantastical future lens. In a follow-up episode, "Midnight Blue," the Planetary Union makes a similar fateful choice, choosing to expel the Moclans from the Union for their brutal treatment of female Moclans. For the Union to stand so strongly in favor of universal personal autonomy (which in another context might simply be termed "human rights") is a profound ethical moment, since the loss of the arms-producing Moclans exposes the Union to greater risk of Kaylon annihilation. It's a choice that spirals into other far-reaching consequences when the expelled Moclans ally themselves with the Krill, creating a new threat that must be countered with an uneasy Union alliance with their deadly enemies the Kaylon. This new world showcases characters cautiously exploring new modes of thinking and renegotiating their relationships to the universe around them. The series' final episode, "Future Unknown," explicitly presents new ways of beings coming together, as Claire and Isaac consummate their romantic relationship with a formal marriage, heralding a momentous change for both human and Kaylon futures.

Other characters explore themselves and their impact on the world around them during the season as well. In "Gently Falling Rain," Captain Ed Mercer (MacFarlane) learns that he has a daughter named Anaya (Charlie Townsend), conceived with undercover Krill operative-turned coup plotter and new Krill Chancellor Teleya (Michaela McManus). This revelation causes Ed to reevaluate his relationship to the Krill and leaves him determined to find a way to reestablish an alliance with the Krill and Teleya to protect Anaya. Previous seasons of *The Orville* proved that MacFarlane has always been skilled at understanding the complexities of human emotion that give the Star Trek franchise its particular resonance and relatability, but here in New Horizons

we really see that understanding flower and the series as whole dramatically shift from the story of humans aboard an exploration vessel to humans *themselves* as exploration vessels. It adds a new and surprising dimensionality to a series that began life as a reasonably simple Star Trek pastiche driven by MacFarlane-style humor. We see this newfound maturity on full display in the episode "Twice in A Lifetime," which centers on helmsman Gordon Malloy (Scott Grimes), who in previous seasons has served as the series' primary quip machine. *New Horizons*, as it does with other characters, takes Malloy to a new level of emotional maturity and depth; in "Twice," Malloy is accidentally thrust back two hundred years in time to 2020s Earth and believed lost. In the years (from his POV) before the *Orville* mounts a temporal rescue, Malloy marries and starts a family. Against Union law, he is determined to stay in his deeply satisfying role of devoted husband and father, having discovered in himself new reserves of emotion and familial love.

The Orville: New Horizons provides viewers with gripping, thoughtful, emotionally fraught stories, which represent the natural evolution of a series when that series is not content to navel gaze into its past. Instead, *New Horizons* continues to mirror the development of its original Trek inspiration (as well as the long legacy of *Trek*-influenced sf media), moving from the typical exploration narrative towards a greater dramatic multidimensionality.

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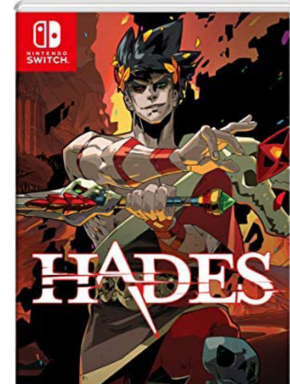
Hades

David Welch

Hades. Nintendo Switch version, Supergiant Games, 2020.



Hades is a rogue-like dungeon crawler from developer Supergiant Games in which the player takes on the role of Zagreus, son of the titular Hades. The plot centers around Zagreus' attempts to escape the underworld after learning that he had hitherto-unknown family—the Olympian gods—on Mount Olympus eager to meet him. Zagreus' discovery of this extended family, as well as the realization that his true parentage had been concealed from him for his whole life, motivate these escape attempts and drive the story forward, while also allowing for strong character development via conversations between Zagreus and the other residents of the underworld.

There is not much I can say about *Hades* as a game that hasn't already been said; critically, it has been incredibly well-received for its art direction, gameplay, music, vocal performances, and writing. While none of this is new for Supergiant Games, all four of whose games have been critically acclaimed, *Hades* broke into the mainstream in a way that the others did not. One underappreciated aspect of this game, however, and one which I believe contributed to its success in a more significant way than it gets credit for, is its incorporation of the ancient Greek mythology which underlies its setting. *Hades*' success as a work of classical reception—the way it modernizes the setting and characters, while simultaneously respecting the source material—deserves the same degree of notoriety as its technical successes.

A problem that any work of classical reception has to deal with is balancing the antiquity of the subject matter against the modernity of its audience. Much classical reception has fallen prey to embracing its antiquity too tightly and feeling, so to speak, dusty, though this has certainly been less of a problem in recent decades. *Hades*, falling in line with this progress, tells a story that feels acutely modern without ever deviating too far from the ancient materials that define its setting. Dionysus, for instance, remains the god of wine and revelry, holding the staff (specifically, the *thyrsus*) which was his symbol in antiquity, but he has become something of a Tommy Chong figure, calling Zagreus "Zag, man," and encouraging him to hurry to Olympus so they can party together. *Hades* preserves the core character of each figure as traditionally conceived, including the various (and at times complicated) interpersonal dynamics among them all, but makes the whole ensemble feel more akin to that of a modern sitcom than the serious drama that adaptations of antiquity often become.

The lighthearted attitude of these interactions, though, does not prevent *Hades* from including more esoteric references to ancient material. Early in the game, Zagreus asks Hypnos, the divine embodiment of sleep, to put everybody in the house of Hades into a magical slumber so that he can sneak into his father's office—no background knowledge is needed to understand what is going on, and Zagreus' decision to ask Hypnos for sleep-related help is an obvious one. Those more familiar with the ancient canon, though, will see here an allusion to the fourteenth book of the *Iliad*, in which Hera asks Hypnos to put Zeus to sleep, so that she can sneak behind his back and aid the Greeks in their struggles against the Trojans. *Hades* is full of such references that, while they are not integral to an understanding of the game's plot and as such will not detract from the experience of those who don't catch them, nonetheless allow those with some familiarity with ancient mythology to see how much work the writers put into creating a faithful representation of the classical material.

In addition to its deep engagement with the ancient literary sources, Hades demonstrates a knowledge of contemporary trends in classical scholarship as well. The modern push against Eurocentrism in academic discussions of the ancient Mediterranean, the most well-known example of which might be Bernal's *Black Athena* (see McCoskey 2018 for discussion of the legacy of this work), is reflected in the varied skin tones of the game's characters. This includes that of Athena, whose skin, alongside that of her half-brother Ares, is darker than that of any of the game's other characters and may be a direct homage to *Black Athena* and its impact on modern discussions of race in antiquity.

There is, for me, one respect in which *Hades* as a work of reception missed the mark, however, and that is the game's ending. Early on, Zagreus learns that his mother is in fact Persephone, who left the underworld for unknown reasons and never returned. As the plot advances, the circumstances surrounding Persephone's initial departure from Olympus and her eventual withdrawal to the underworld are made clear, and they deviate from the traditional telling of her story. Hades exists in a modern environment in which several works of classical reception, such as Madeline Miller's *Circe*, reclaim agency for the many women of ancient mythology who in the original versions of the stories had very little (see Scott 2019 for an overview of the topic); Persephone's departure from Olympus, which in the ancient accounts was due entirely to her abduction by Hades, is made into her own decision in *Hades*. Her motivation for doing so, though, is placed partly on the shoulders of her mother, Demeter, for being too controlling of her daughter. While the reclamation of Persephone's agency is admirable, the reassignment of blame from her male abductor to another woman is disappointing. Up to this point in the game, the explicit alterations of traditional narrative and visual representations had been quite progressive. What a disappointment it was, then, to reach the conclusion to the mystery of Persephone's fate, only to learn that her male captor, who is traditionally held responsible for her disappearance, had been supplanted, in what could be read as a decidedly anti-feminist turn, by another woman in Demeter.

The absolution of Persephone's traditional, male captor and his replacement with Demeter was disappointing in its own right, but the accompanying transformation in Demeter's attitude toward Persephone's disappearance compounded the issue. In the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, she immediately senses that something has gone awry with her daughter, scours the earth for nine straight days in search of her, and spends years wandering the earth in sorrow in the guise of an old woman, neglecting her duties to the earth and its harvests and nearly destroying the human race as a result. When mother and daughter are finally joyously reunited, Demeter shudders in terror at the realization that Hades has bound Persephone to spend one third of the year in the underworld for the rest of time, though yields to its necessity. In *Hades*, however, Demeter reacts with no more than idle curiosity when she learns of her daughter's fate. Persephone's disappearance is said to have turned her cold and vengeful, rather than grief-stricken; humanity is, like in the *Hymn*, almost wiped out as a result of her actions, but here it is retaliation for humanity's perceived culpability, rather than grief, that drives her. After learning that Persephone is alive and well, it is Demeter who proposes that her daughter split her time between dwelling in the underworld and on Olympus, rather than begrudgingly accepting her unavoidable fate. The loving and heartbroken Demeter has been sacrificed and replaced with a cold spirit of vengeance, all in service of elevating Persephone; one is left wondering why both women could not have emerged from the narrative in a better place than their traditional portrayals would have them.

All in all, *Hades* is an outstanding example of a work of classical reception. It modernizes the material, providing a charming and accessible point of entry into the world of classical mythology, but never deviates too far from the source material. It treats its plot no more seriously than it needs to and, but for one misstep, seamlessly incorporates present-day ideas about classical antiquity. The game is at moments deeply learned, but that erudition never becomes burdensome or obtrusive. This combination of characteristics makes it an extremely appealing prospect for use as an educational tool—the amount of information that finds its way into Zagreus' conversations with the game's other characters, which are legitimately enjoyable in their own right, is considerable. The fact that this educational material is presented over the course of the standard gameplay (unlike something like the Discovery Tour mode in some of the more recent *Assassin's Creed* games, which disposes of all gameplay and allows the player to walk through game's setting as if in a museum) creates a situation in which an instructor might feel like they are 'tricking students into learning.' With *Hades*, Supergiant Games has found an extremely satisfying balance between being informative and entertaining.

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