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SFRA Review

A publication of the Science Fiction Research Association

In This Issue

SUBMISSIONS

The *SFRA Review* encourages submissions of reviews, review essays that cover several related texts, interviews, and feature articles. Submis-
sion guidelines are available at http://www.sfra.org/ or by inquiry to the appropriate editor. Contact the Editors for other submissions or for cor-
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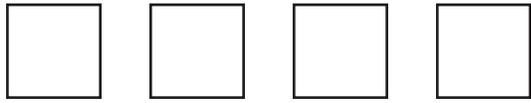
SFRA Review Business

EDITORS' MESSAGE
Portion Control

Karen Hellekson and Craig Jacobsen

Longtime members of the Science Fiction Research Association will certainly have noticed the yo-yo-like fluctuations of the *Review*'s girth. A perfectly respectable twenty-eight page issue can be followed by a forty page issue, which is followed by a twenty-four page issue, which is followed by a thirty-six page issue, and so on. The reason for the variation is simple: we print what we get. Historically, with an occasional exception dictated by the need to work in sets of four pages, if you submitted something to us, you saw it in print in the next issue. There's nothing necessarily wrong with this system, but it does make it difficult to anticipate paper needs and shipping costs, and leads to sometimes desperate layout maneuvers to try to make everything fit.

So, beginning with this issue, we will be exerting more editorial control over the length of the *Review*. That means that some submissions may be held back for an issue, or even two. Submissions that are time-sensitive will be given priority. Contributors won't have to be quite as patient to see their words in print as in other scholarly publishing venues, but we wanted to recalibrate expectations about how quickly articles will appear in the *Review*. Thank you for your patience, and your submissions. If you don't write, we can't publish.

SFRA Business

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE
New Initiatives

Lisa Yaszek

I've always thought one of the most attractive aspects of the SFRA is that, as an organization, we value teaching and research and individual and institutions equally. I'm pleased to report that over the course of this past year we've either launched or continued to develop a variety of initiatives that affirm our commitment to all SF studies in all its diverse forms.

Our two newest initiatives were inspired by events that took place during this year's SFRA conference. One of the liveliest events was our "Engineering the Future of the SFRA" roundtable, where new members learned how they might serve the SFRA community and established members brainstormed new ways to affirm our commitment to SF studies. As a number of members

pointed out, one of the best ways to do this is to share resources. Such insights led new member Jon Harvey to take point on what we are now calling the "SFRA syllabus project," for which he is collecting and organizing all SF-related syllabi into an archive that will be posted to the SFRA Web site. Jon is working hard in tandem with SFRA vice president Ritch Calvin and the good people at About SF to make sure that we build the best archive possible without simply repeating what has already been done elsewhere. So if you've got syllabi to share, please send them to Jon at jharve10 AT mix.wvu.edu.

Another exciting development to come from SFRA 2009 was the recognition that increasing numbers of undergraduate students are presenting papers at our conference, and that increasing numbers of graduate students are looking to publish in our journals. Accordingly, the executive committee has reconfigured the Graduate Student Paper Award so *all* students who present papers at the SFRA conference are eligible to compete for this prize (which is now simply called the Student Paper Award). Furthermore, in addition to the $100 check and one-year SFRA membership that recipients of this prize have always received, future winners who revise their papers for publication will be eligible to receive a letter from the SFRA president testifying to the quality of the paper in question. We hope that these changes will encourage more students to learn about presentation and publishing opportunities in SF studies early in their scholarly careers. Thanks to Jim Davis, current chair of the Student Paper Award, and the editors at *Science Fiction Studies* and *Extrapolation* for their advice on this matter.

As many of you will recall, the last SFRA executive committee decided, with your approval, to reorganize our general "Support a Scholar" fund into four grants, including the SFRA Travel Grant for travel to our annual conference, the SFRA Membership Grant for applicants with demonstrated economic need, the SFRA Scholarship Grant to support research in SF studies, and he SFRA Organization Grant for scholarly groups or organizations doing work to promote SF studies. As I noted in an earlier column, we were able to give three travel grants this past spring for students attending the SFRA conference, and just this past month we awarded our first Organization grant to AboutSF, a joint project of the University of Kansas, the Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers of America (SFWA), and the SFRA, to support its continued services for the SF studies community. I hope you will join me in congratulating Jim Gunn, Nate Williams, and all the other good folk of AboutSF for their excellent work. To learn more about the various SFRA grants for which you might be eligible, point your browser toward http://www.sfra.org and type "grant" into the search engine.

And that sums up much of what we've been doing in the SFRA executive committee lately. Thanks to everyone for a great year; we look forward to making the next one even better.

IMMEDIATE PAST PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE
Executive Board Elections

Adam Frisch

SFRA Members, during 2010 we must elect new officers to SFRA's executive board. This is an especially important election

year, as both our current president and treasurer are ineligible to be reelected. So I would encourage anyone who might be interested in either of those two positions, or in serving our organization as vice president or secretary, to look over the job descriptions for those offices (detailed in Article V of our Bylaws, which are printed at the end of each year's Membership Directory) and then contact me to indicate possible interest at Adam.Frisch AT Briarcliff.edu. Our organization will continue to grow in interest and relevance only to the extent that its members are willing to step up and serve. (I forget who first said that.)

SECRETARY NOTICE
New SFRA Secretary Appointed
Lisa Yaszek

The SFRA executive committee regrets to announce that Shelley Rodrigo is resigning her post as organizational secretary for health reasons. However, we are pleased to let you know that Shelley has completed the SFRA renewal mailings and that Patrick Sharp has agreed to take over as SFRA secretary until the next election. I hope you will join us in thanking both Shelley and Patrick for their service to our community.

SFRA2010 CONFERENCE
Far Stars and Tin Stars
Craig Jacobsen

From June 24 through June 27, 2010, the Science Fiction Research Association will hold its annual conference in Carefree, Arizona. The conference theme, "Far Stars and Tin Stars: Science Fiction and the Frontier" reflects the conference venue in the high desert north of the Phoenix metropolitan area, and the centrality of the idea of the frontier, the borderland between what is known and what is unknown, the settled and the wild, the mapped and the unexplored, to both science fiction and the mythology of the American West.

Reflecting the realization that scholarship creates its own sort of frontier, the conference will incorporate both well-established and novel elements. Of course there will be excellent paper and panel sessions, the traditional mainstays of conferences. The awards banquet and reception will recognize excellence in our field (the Association's Pilgrim and Pioneer Awards reflecting the conference theme). The conference's International Guest Scholar, Pawel Frelik, will talk about dispersed narratives, which construct their story arcs over several media without privileging any of them. SFRA2010 will introduce Preconference Short Courses, Thursday morning workshops designed to help new sf scholars enter the field, and established scholars to explore new territory. The Science Fiction Studies Academy Short Course is aimed at students or young scholars trained in institutions that lack faculty trained in science fiction studies. Participants will get an orientation to the field and be offered help connecting with established scholars. The Teaching Science Fiction Short Course will present approaches to teaching the genre, and using genre texts in courses not focused exclusively on the genre. The Studying Digital Science Fiction Short Course will help scholars interested in studying sf in new media find their way.

SFRA2010 is breaking new ground already, months before the first session begins. The conference website, www.sfra2010.ning.com, is more than a static site that presents information about the conference. It is a custom social networking site for conference participants, including those unable to attend. The site offers tools for collaboration and networking. Discussion boards can help attendees find interested scholars to form a panel or share a room. Member groups provide ways for attendees to connect with others of similar interest, or first-time attendees to meet long-time attendees well before arriving. Every website member can blog before, during, and after the conference, allowing anyone who can't attend to read what's going on. Website members are also invited to suggest programming. Already some of the events of the conference are on the website calendar, and more will appear as the program takes shape. During the conference, the site will provide attendees with program updates. Join the site whether or not you'll be attending SFRA2010.

Plan now. The Carefree Resort and Villas has wonderful amenities to keep your family entertained while you're engaged in scholarly pursuits. Join the website (www.sfra2010.ning.com). Register early. Come explore the frontiers behind us and the territory ahead.
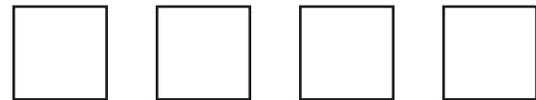
Features

FEATURE: 101
Slipstream 101

Paweł Frelik

The Genre and the Genres

Ostensibly, the plot of China Miéville's *The City and the City* centers around a murder investigation led by Inspector Tyador Borlú but as the title suggests, it is also a story of two cities—Beszel and Ul Qoma, presumably located somewhere in Central or Eastern Europe. Hungarian, Balkan and Turkish influences are clear both in the linguistic sphere and the cities' material culture, with Beszel being more European and Ul Qoma—more Oriental. It is in their coexistence where the novel's central novum dwells. Maintained in the precarious balance with a long history of conflicts and wars, Beszel and Ul Qoma largely occupy the same physical space. While some of their streets and districts may be "total"—located only in one of them, many others are "crosshatched"—they simultaneously exist in both cities, have different names, different architecture and different character.

Because of the delicate political status quo, citizens of one are forbidden contact with those of the other—from the earliest childhood they are taught and conditioned to "unsee," "unhear" or "unsmell" the elements of the other city. The novel makes it very clear that the split is not merely cultural and limited to human perception. Beszel and Ul Qoma are materially two cities and they

are materially overlaid with each other (although it is impossible to determine which would be the top and which the bottom) within the largely identical territory. Or are these two territories? How this is exactly possible is never explained, which makes *The City and the City* an emblematic Slipstream text—such ontological conundrums are central to many S-stories.

I have not invoked Miéville's novel to discuss Slipstream's features, though. With the second component of its name vaguely referring to a space of some kind, Slipstream is like the space(s) of *The City and the City*—except that there may be more than two literatures occupying the same land. If a genre text occupies a territory demarcated by certain parameters and inhabited by a certain imagined community of writers and readers, then Slipstream novels, novellas and short stories share their territory with other literary entities. Among them are the New Wave Fabulists, the New Weird, Interstitial Fiction or the Romantic Underground, whose identities can be often even more tentative. Like the inhabitants of Beshel and Ul Qoma, Slipstream's readers and critics peer into the spaces of their self-approved texts, "unseeing" and "unhearing" other readers and the claims made by proponents of other conventions about the same literary property. And yet, these different territorial markings do not necessarily invalidate and cancel out each other.

Slipstream and Slipstream

In any discussion of slipstream, it is useful to distinguish between different uses of the term and the genre discourses that accompany them. The first of them, although not the earliest chronologically, is strictly connected with the anthology *In the Slipstream: An FC2 Reader* (1999) published by Fiction Collective 2. Conceptualized as the overview of the first ten years of the publisher, the volume features stories and novel excerpts by writers associated with all three related imprints—Fiction Collective, Fiction Collective 2 and Black Ice Books. Ronald Sukenick and Curtis White, the collection's editors, claim that their goal was always to "find worthy fiction outside of the impoverished commercial tastes of mainstream publishing and give it an opportunity" and that they found it "in the slipstream" (23). Admittedly, among many usual suspects such as Raymond Federman, Mark Leyner, Richard Grossman, Cris Mazza or Mark Amerika, there are a couple of names that are unmistakably associated with sf—Samuel Delany and John Shirley. By and large, however, the book is an effort coming out from the postmodern/experimental literary field.

When it comes to the sf-related angle of slipstream, there seem to exist two distinct discourses connected with the moniker. The divide between them is not necessarily very sharp although, to my mind, easily discernible. It is probably easier to think about them not only in temporal but rather in, dare I say, ontological terms although they are, especially the second one, also connected with literary developments over time. The first of these discourses is rooted in Bruce Sterling's piece titled "Slipstream," which appeared in the "Catscan" column in the July 1989 issue of *SF Eye*. The essay opens with an sf Jeremiad—a tried-and-true American form, particularly so in the science fiction circles whose many prophets of doom have been announcing the death of the genre every other month since the late 1940s. Like any lament it first hits the reader with the landscapes of desolation—the industrial-scale literary "necrophilia," "belittlement of individual creativity"

and "triumph of anonymous product"—but fairly quickly shifts into an almost manifesto-like diagnosis of the future of speculative writing. In that section Sterling appears to be hopeful but that hope is almost entirely invested in what he calls slipstream.

While describing it as a "kind of writing which simply makes you feel very strange" is even more nebulous than most definitions of literary groupings, it is the slipstream list of titles appended to the essay that is truly revealing. Very conspicuously, it comprises very few authors that most 1980s readers would identify as science fiction—Iain Banks, Ken Grimwood, Michael Moorcock, Christopher Priest, Lucius Shepard or Jack Womack. Next to them, however, are Thomas Pynchon, Carlos Fuentes, Toni Morrison, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, John Fowles, Isabel Allende or Philip Roth—and the list is much longer. The author's intentions seem to be clear—especially from the perspective of time. Sterling tries to establish a certain affinity between those sf authors whose writing could potentially appeal to audiences beyond genre science fiction AND high postmoderns, and even some moderns (Lawrence Durrell) and mainstream writers (Kingsley Amis or Muriel Spark). Naturally, such understanding of Slipstream seems very close to that represented by Sukenick and White, but given the venue (an sf periodical) and the opening (an sf Jeremiad), it seems logical to assume that for Sterling much of energy permeating this nongenre comes from the same source that sf drew from before most of it—presumably—turned stale and repetitive. In that sense, Sterling's conceptualization of slipstream is a project similar to that of cyberpunk as announced in the introduction to *Mirrorshades* (which also claimed some high-literary parentage in the figures of Thomas Pynchon and William Burroughs) although not even nearly as successful. The bridge that Sterling attempts to establish in "Slipstream" is also built more on hope and scattered texts on the sf side than solid literary representation—if postmodern writers were to be removed, the list would shrink to fewer than 10 titles. Clearly, Slipstream is here a term largely overlapping a body of postmodern texts.

The other discourse of slipstream is more contemporary, more solidly grounded in the literary reality and more intimately linked to science fiction writing. While Sterling attempts to connect sf to postmodern and mainstream writing, in his 2003 piece for *Asimov's Science Fiction*, conspicuously titled the same as Sterling's, James Patrick Kelly takes "a parochial approach" and attempts to locate this body of work within the science fiction tradition. Very usefully, Kelly enumerates names and titles that to his mind exemplify a certain new school of writing—most of them who have had clear connections with science fiction. In 2006, together with John Kessel, Kelly edited the first slipstream anthology *Feeling Very Strange. The Slipstream Anthology*. The sense of strangeness identified by Sterling or, what Carol Emshwiller formulated as "estranging the everyday" (xiii) (which is not very far from Suvin's concept of "estrangement" characterizing sf), is still one of the main parameters here. Nevertheless, Kelly and Kessel choose to consider slipstream "a literary effect rather than a fully developed genre" (xii), which is accomplished by violating the tenets of realism through cognitive dissonance, generic and conventional indeterminacy, and playful postmodernity.

Slipstream shares some of these qualities with fabulation—according to Robert Scholes the type of the story which, although stylistically similar to magic realism, cannot be really identified with it. Within the world of science fiction, the term gained new

currency thanks to John Clute, who in *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction* describes fabulations as narratives which question the world's coherence and tellability, characteristics not infrequently associated with postmodern prose. To a large extent, the table of contents of *Feeling Very Strange* appears to confirm such understanding of this literary sensibility. There are some older writers here (Sterling, Emshwiller, Waldrop, Karen Joy Fowler), some with mainstream cred (Lethem, Chabon), and a number of younger names (Aimee Bender, Kelly Link, Jeff VanderMeer, Ted Chiang, Jeffrey Ford, Theodora Goss)—their writings definitely exemplify the literary tactics mentioned above. For Kelly and Kessel, Slipstream is thus the kind of writing produced by the (mostly) new generation of writers who grew up on science fiction and who in their own writing fully integrated it with avant-garde narrative strategies. One could even say that, together with cyberpunk, Slipstream is the end product of the exchange between sf and postmodernism described by Brian McHale in "POSTcyberMODERNpunkISM."

Genres and Genres

Despite its fluidity, as a term, *slipstream* seems to have installed itself in the contemporary sf discourse—apart from two anthologies there was also a panel devoted to it at 2007 Readercon. Simultaneously, in the Mievillean fashion, it continues to occupy the same territory as several other groupings—for example *The New Weird* anthology edited by Ann and Jeff VanderMeer features Jeffrey Ford. Both Ford and VanderMeer are commonly considered Slipstreamers, too. In fact, very few writers self-identify themselves clearly as Slipstream. Consequently, considering "crosshatched" territorial claims regarding individual texts, perhaps it makes more sense to consider such stories not as belonging to this or that genre, convention or grouping but, as Gary Wolfe and Amelia Beamer suggest in "21st Century Stories," in terms of "specific narrative and rhetorical strategies" (20). Discussing the works of M. Rickert, Elizabeth Hand, Theodora Goss, Kelly Link and Jeffrey Ford, Wolfe and Beamer use such concepts as slippage, domesticity, contingency of worlds, shifts in point of view, setting or chronology, or denial of resolution.

From this perspective, the entire history of slipstream with its discontents could perhaps be viewed not as an emergence and formative pains of a new literary entity but a symptom of sf's vibrancy and creativity. When science fiction expanded and enriched its thematic repertoire and narrative strategies in the 1960 and 1970s, the growth did not result in any major fault-lines and schisms (although individual writers like Thomas Disch did dissociate themselves from genre sf in one way or another). The next big jump, which began in the 1990s and which still continues, has taken a number of science fiction writers beyond the confines of the genre and away from stable identities. Incidentally, the phenomenon is apparent in many other fields of what used to be called "popular literature." While the understanding of what sf is has also evolved, some writers, and critics—one is tempted to add, do not feel comfortable even within those extended frameworks. Hence the anxious search for monikers such as Slipstream or the New Weird—I suspect often fueled by the narrow confines in the older definitions of the genres of the fantastic. At times, these new labels can be useful in discussing affinities between texts and authors. It would be futile, however, to expect that with time they will congeal into something as solid as once the terms "science

fiction" or "fantasy" were. The ongoing intermingling of genre literatures and the constant colonization of other literary territories by science fiction render any attempt at establishing a stable identity impossible. Science fiction has readily embraced dispersed and unstable models of postmodern subjectivity and made them one of its major tropes. Perhaps it is time it did the same with its own sense of what it is.

Some Definitions

slipstream n. [after MAINSTREAM] literature which makes use of the tropes or techniques of genre science fiction or fantasy, but which is not considered to be genre science fiction or fantasy; the genre of such literature. Hence slipstreamer, n., slipstreamish, adj., slipstreamy, adj.
—Jeff Prucher, *Brave New Words*

This is a kind of writing which simply makes you feel very strange; the way that living in the late twentieth century makes you feel, if you are a person of a certain sensibility. We could call this kind of fiction Novels of Postmodern Sensibility, but that looks pretty bad on a category rack, and requires an acronym besides; so for the sake of convenience and argument, we will call these books "slipstream."

It's very common for slipstream books to screw around with the representational conventions of fiction, pulling annoying little stunts that suggest that the picture is leaking from the frame and may get all over the reader's feet. A few such techniques are infinite regress, trompe-l'oeil effects, metalepsis, sharp violations of viewpoint limits, bizarrely blasé reactions to horrifically unnatural events…all the way out to concrete poetry and the deliberate use of gibberish. Think M. C. Escher, and you have a graphic equivalent.
—Bruce Sterling. "Slipstream"

Most commonly defined, I think, as fiction that crosses genre boundaries (lots of people seem to prefer "cross-genre" as a term). However, I'm not sure that's very satisfying: is *The Caves of Steel* slipstream because it crosses genre boundaries between SF and mystery? So, thinking about it, I decided that to me slipstream stories feel a bit like magical realism. The key is—they are unexplained. "Real" fantasy or SF has these elements embedded in the background so that they make sense—in slipstream they are just there. In a sense, SF tries to make the strange familiar—by showing SFnal elements in a context that helps us understand them. Slipstream tries to make the familiar strange—by taking a familiar context and disturbing it with SFnal/ fantastical intrusions.
—Richard Horton

So on a personal level, I can say that my slipstream has its own techniques, its own possibilities, and its own rewards. It is close to SF, but it is not the same as it. But as it accretes more talented writers, slipstream is pulling SF in its direction.
—James Patrick Kelly, "Slipstream"

There are two great countries of literature; the fantastic and the naturalistic. The border where these two countries meet however is decidedly hazy. This no-man's-land contains slipstream, books that are neither fish nor fowl. It's a tricky thing to pin down but like a certain other genre we could mention it is easy enough to

point to. These are the books that contain fantastic elements but are not fantasies, that are naturalistic but not rigorously so. The popular literary term "magical realism" is simply a subset of these.

—Martin Lewis "What is Slipstream?"

Another way of putting it is that slipstream is fantasy (generally set in a world much like our modern world) that doesn't read like fantasy; it usually Feels Like Literature, but has fantastical (often extravagantly fantastical) elements that are fundamental to the story. It's often a little harder-edged than magic realism -- more often William S. Burroughs than Gabriel Garcia Marquez -- but then again, it can be construed as being a subset or a superset of magic realism.

—Jed Hartman, "Where Does Genre Come From?"

This definition presents two significant ways in which the New Weird can be distinguished from Slipstream or Interstitial fiction. First, while Slipstream and Interstitial fiction often claim New Wave influence, they rarely if ever cite a Horror influence, with its particular emphasis on the intense use of grotesquery focused around transformation, decay, or mutilation of the human body. Second, postmodern techniques that undermine the surface reality of the text (or point out its artificiality) are not part of the New Weird aesthetic, but they are part of the Slipstream and Interstitial toolbox.

—Jeff VanderMeer, "New Weird Reading List"

Okay, slipstream. No, I do not write slipstream. And neither do you. The seminal essay by Bruce Sterling on the nature of slipstream was sardonic. It was a gag. The most coherent bit in it is this: "I heartily encourage would-be slipstream critics to involve themselves in heady feuding about the "real nature" of their as-yet-nonexistent genre. Bogus self-referentiality is a very slipstreamish pursuit; much like this paragraph itself, actually. See what I mean?

—Nick Mamatas, "Never respond to a review, certainly not like this"

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Pride and Wikiness

Ed Carmien

Long reviled as the enemy of true scholars and scholarship, Wikipedia is nevertheless a force to be reckoned with in the ivory tower. We peer suspiciously out of arrow slits and over crenellations at the common, mangy foe of citable truth...in all directions. We have met the enemy and it has passed us by, leaving us surrounded.

Do not give up hope. Do not despair. While I argue that at best Wikipedia is a place to start looking for general and it must always be remembered possibly false information about anything one can think of, it is also subject (by its very design) to knowledgeable infiltration. Yes, we can bend it to our will and make it do what we wish.

We can use it in the literature classroom!

A few of—us, it must be admitted—whisper treasonous ideas about treating Wikipedia as a *real source*. Heresy to most of the academy who reject the very idea, the concept of using Wikipedia as a legitimate source is discussed by Henry Jenkins in "What Wikipedia Can Teach us About the New Media Literacies (Part One)." I am not one of those whisperers, but Jenkins' article provides a useful overview of the ongoing controversy about Wikipedia and research.

What follows are a few thoughts about using Wikipedia in a college-level course, based on my experiences doing just that during the spring semester of 2009 at Mercer County Community College in New Jersey. Students developed SF-oriented Wikipedia content in small groups in a carefully moderated process as part of a typical 200-level science fiction literature course. Although presented as an SF-oriented activity, the general outline of the Wikipedia assignment described below can be applied to any content area. These instructions presume some basic access to classroom technology—at the very least one computer with internet access, preferably with projection screen (for show & tell). Even better would be a classroom computer lab environment—at least for some of the work on the Wikipedia assignment—equipped with a workstation for each student.

This is a basic methodology one can use to incorporate a Wikipedia assignment into a college-level course. This approach is the result of one hands-on experiment and is intended to suggest possibilities and some best practices.

To begin, learn the tune to which Wikipedia dances. It is a cooperative endeavor, based on communication. Common effort is channeled through a simple markup language that includes a clear record of who has changed what, when. Read the FAQs (Frequently Asked Questions). Questions that are asked frequently have informative and handy answers.

Second, survey Wikipedia for the subject area in which you're interested. It is likely the bigger ideas—literary works, authors, modes of critical thought—have entries. It is wise to get an idea of how good they are. Make a note of any weaknesses (those are opportunities to contribute!) and move on to the lesser lights of your subject area. You may find authors who aren't represented or who have limited Wikipedia entries. Individual works, such as novels, short stories, or films may not be represented at all.

Third, learn the tools. As a fan of educator Horace Mann, I suggest the *learn by doing* approach. When preparing my own Wikipedia assignment, I noted that author Nolan Miller was not represented won Wikipedia at all. As this former Antioch College faculty member was an important figure in my development as a writer, I felt it was important to make sure his legacy was available to anyone who typed his name into Wikipedia. While not a SF topic, the exercise was worth completing and served as an example students could emulate without inviting content-based imitation.

Creating a Wikipedia entry will require you to learn the ropes. Doing so is not difficult, but it is a detail-oriented task. In general terms (all the tutorials, FAQs, and how-tos one could require are available at www.wikipedia.org, and I won't repeat them here) the task begins with research—yes, actual research—because any information put in a Wikipedia entry is supposed to be cited. In my case I needed the authoritative obituary for Miller (to establish his birth and death dates) just to begin the process, and I found an article which quoted Miller at length, detailing his work as fiction editor for *The Antioch Review.*

Entering information into Wikipedia requires a finicky attitude about detail; with time and patience even those who find it awkward can succeed. All this is done using a web browser—no special software is required.

Fourth, develop the assignment. In my case I gave the Wikipedia assignment a notable amount of weight—10 percent of the course grade—and I made it a small group activity with a lot of check points and feedback, detailed in a one-page handout. The ideal group had three people in it, to handle what I saw as the three main tasks: research, writing, and Wikipedia data entry. Students were required to come up with a topic, check what existed on Wikipedia, plan and carry out their work, and record their work as individuals and as the end result. This latter point is important, as what one person adds to Wikipedia, another can immediately change. Your practice Wikipedia entry is useful here as a model to share with the students.

As in any effective college course, clear assessment guidelines are necessary, and clues to how I accomplished this are above. I rated student work by type (writing, research, and data input), topic (managed during the topic selection process), and overall coherence of execution and presentation—did the students hit their deadlines, and how did their entry appear in general? In my pilot of this Wikipedia assignment, I weighted the Wikipedia entry as 10 percent of the course, roughly the same as 4–6 pages of research-based writing. As this assignment traveled in a new direction, I looked for roughly a paragraph per group member total writing, supported by necessary research. I found that and the time required to learn and use Wikipedia data entry tools to represent comparable effort for any other 10 percent chunk of the class, and was satisfied with the end result. I wouldn't recommend using such an assignment in place of rigorous research-based writing, but it proved to be a satisfying accompaniment.

It is important to note here that Wikipedia is not a forum for original research, a fact some of my students discovered when their entry was flagged as such within hours of posting information about the public relations photo used for the fourth season of *Battlestar Galactica*. When in doubt, students can use the "talk" function of Wikipedia (the ongoing discussion behind the scenes of every Wikipedia entry) to solicit suggestions from other Wikipedia contributors.

Fifth, run the assignment. Be proactive, keep students up to date with their deadlines, and offer help as needed to those bemused by the data entry aspect of the work. Evaluate it using a rubric introduced with the assignment and share the results as a class.

What value does this activity bring to the literature classroom?

Interactivity

While we at the working level of cultural scholarship share our ideas and take for granted the exchange of our intellectual work, students labor in a practice environment cut off from this kind of collegial support. Contributing to Wikipedia makes their work public and gives them a sense their efforts are worthwhile and useful to a wide audience. This allows them to cross the traditional divide between the expert and the nonexpert, becoming what Jenkins calls members of a "participatory culture" that is, if not a formal, academic culture, a culture that requires some of the same tools—research, writing—that we in the ivory tower laud.

Group Achievement

Although not a fan of the concept of a liberal arts education as primer for the workplace, working to put a Wikipedia entry into place models the way work is done in our wired and interactive lives.

Revelation

Once students see how Wikipedia entries are created, they are much less likely to trust them as sources for their own work. While the *sources* quoted by a Wikipedia entry may be worth looking up, the *content* of a Wikipedia entry will forever be suspect by anyone who has created one.

Contributions to the Field

Increasingly, knowledge that is only on paper doesn't exist—for our students. For information to be real, it has to be digitally accessible. Adding summaries of short stories, novels and films makes those items available to people looking for knowledge. Providing a biography of a writer who passed away forty years ago makes that author live again, when he or she might otherwise be overlooked by casual researchers.

Hypertext

Back in the 1980s the concept of hypertext was lauded as the Second Coming of <fill in the blank>. It would revolutionize <fill in the blank> and probably paint your house, too. Not until the world wide web format came about did hypertext really come of age, and in Wikipedia this idea of "linking" key words and concepts to further explanations has reached a useful zenith. Students required to include a certain number of "links" in their work will learn the value of knowledge not as standalone nuggets but as interconnected elements of a culture of knowledge we in the ivory tower take for granted.

Research

Posting an effective Wikipedia entry will not result in analysis, argument, synthesis—but it does require *research*. For students who find the concept of research-based writing mysterious, this activity can serve as a "gateway process" that can lead naturally to more in-depth writing.

The Little Stuff

Students who fail to bestir themselves to produce clean text when writing a traditional research paper expend pints of sweat cleaning up their Wikipedia entries—because, by golly, it'll be out there on the Internet and anyone might see it.

Ultimately, shutting the tower gates to anything Wikipedia is short sighted. Certainly, it must not be used for formal research, except perhaps as a way to discover *real* sources to seek out, review, and possibly use in research writing. Interacting with the wild, untamed mass of information leads to good things all around—the public has better information about Our Thing at their fingertips, and the rigors of providing appropriate information are good for us.

In my trial run, students completed seven Wikipedia entries. They ranged from informational entries about short stories: "The Shobie's Story," "The Game of Rat and Dragon," "Marooned on Mars," "The Enchantress of Venus" and "Aurora in Four Voices" (keen eyes will note these are all available in the excellent anthology *The Space Opera Renaissance*), an author: Simon R. Green, and even a fascinating image, the "last supper" promotional illustration used by the SyFy (formerly "SciFi") Channel to promote the final half season of Battlestar Galactica. I gave top marks—90 percent or more of the assignment's value—to roughly half the students, above average marks to the bulk of the rest, and was forced to chastise a few slackers with weak grades. In short, I was quite pleased with the results.

To finish the metaphor—we can keep the ivory tower informationally pure, but that doesn't mean we can't go visit the so-called enemy outside our gate. Consider an assignment that takes advantage of the broad reach of Wikipedia. Send those labor parties out the postern gate, help win the hearts and minds of the noisy internet info-rabble with good works of knowledge. While the seven entries my students completed have by now been edited, reworked, revised, and changed, in five of the seven cases those entries are only on Wikipedia at all because of the students' contributions. The Simon R. Green entry was developed from an existing "stub" (brief Wikipedia mention) into a full-fledged description of the author's work, and the detailed and useful BSG Wikipedia entry became even more detailed and useful. I call that a win–win scenario.

Ultimately, if Google succeeds in making the world of print subject to the probing searches of casual web browsers, Wikipedia may indeed be the avenue down which researchers traipse to the mother lode. And in that event, Our Thing had best be accurately represented.
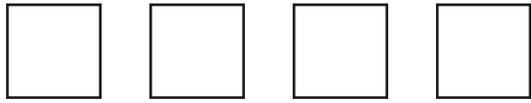
Nonfiction Reviews

The Science Fiction Handbook

Bruce Lindsley Rockwood

The coauthors of this handbook are both teachers of literature with an interest in science fiction as a genre who have previously published in the field, and their treatment of the subject in this handbook shows that they are widely read and have made a serious effort to summarize many of its main themes and perspectives. The text is divided into four parts followed by a glossary of useful terms, a select bibliography and an index whose cross-references show how many of the authors and texts discussed fit within a variety of the identified subcategories of the field.

Part 1 of the handbook is a ten-page survey of "Science Fiction in Western Culture," which addresses the question of definitions and distinguishes SF (as they choose to call it in the handbook) from other forms of speculative fiction, such as fantasy, which is thereafter excluded from their text. (3) The title of this section raises a question which the survey does not adequately answer: why the reference to "Western Culture," given the range of non-Western texts, characters and authors reflected in their "Multicultural" subgenre in Part 2?

The authors start with James Gunn's insight that science fiction is difficult to define, but is, as they put it, "a literature set in worlds different from our own…in ways that invite the reader to interrogate these differences," and argue that Gunn's characterization of SF is similar to Darko Suvin's "now classic argument that science fiction is a literature of 'cognitive estrangement'…." (3–4) The authors indicate that they will rely on Suvin's definition, while incorporating Carl Freedman's analysis that while all literature produces cognitive estrangement to some extent, so that all literature could be seen as SF, science fiction should be seen as work where cognitive estrangement "is dominant" (4). This definition recalls Philip K. Dick's own definition of science fiction as involving:

a fictitious world…dislocated by some kind of mental effort on the part of the author.…This world must differ from the given in at least one way, and this one way must be sufficient to give rise to events that could not occur in our society—or in any known society present or past. There must be a coherent idea involved in this dislocation;…*this* is the essence of science fiction, the conceptual dislocation within the society so that as a result a new society is generated in the author's mind, transferred to paper, and from paper it occurs as a convulsive shock in the reader's mind, *the shock of dysrecognition*.[1]

The introductory essay then discusses historical antecedents of SF in the "Western literary tradition" such as Swift and Shelley, and the theoretical insights of Mikhail Bakhtin, George Lukács, Edward James and Fredric Jameson, concluding that SF "inherits the mantle once worn by the historical novel as the utopian literary genre par excellence and as the genre most capable of capturing the energies of the historical process" (6). The introduction then surveys the rise of SF from Wells through Gernsback, the Golden Age writers, and the way SF differs from the realist novel by its emphasis on cultures and planets rather than individuals, so that it "tends to be weak on characterization in relation to the literary novel, but strong in its exploration of important social and political issues" (8). This last insight may be belied by the focus on strong individual protagonists in novels such as Card's *Ender's Game*, or Banks' *Consider Phlebas*, but it remains true that SF stories and characters resonate more to their readers for their political conflicts than their personal neuroses.

The balance of the introduction discusses the political satire of Pohl and Kornbluth during the McCarthy era of the 1950s, the New Wave of the 1960s, the emergence of feminist writers and concerns of environmental decay in the 1970s, the impact of *Star Trek* and the mass media on the popular imagination, the rise of cyberpunk and the British boom of the 1990s, concluding that SF "as a whole is currently in a particularly rich period" (12). For those familiar with this background, it is rather like seeing one's entire reading life flash before one's eyes, but it is a remarkably concise and useful summary of an enormous field for the novice reader.

It is followed by Part 2, containing ten informative though overlapping "Brief Historical Surveys of Science Fiction Subgenres" that average ten to twelve pages in length. These are identified as: The Time-Travel Narrative; The Alien Invasion Narrative; The Space Opera; Apocalyptic and Post-Apocalyptic Fiction; Dystopian Science Fiction; Utopian Fiction; Feminism, Science Fiction, and Gender; Science Fiction and Satire; Cyberpunk and Posthuman Science Fiction; and Multicultural Science Fiction. Each essay has a list of suggested further readings, not all of which are incorporated into the select bibliography at the end of the volume. A number of these subsections overlap each other, and thus address the same works, so there is a certain degree of repetition which could have been avoided with more careful editing. One example is the discussion of Octavia Butler's "Xenogenesis" trilogy on pages 35, 92, 119 and 130. Another concern is that texts sometimes seem to be presented as random lists, without any thematic logic, as in the presentation of various time travel stories on pages 17–20. If earlier writers influence later writers, it would make sense to discuss the stories as they were published, and note any influence of earlier upon later writers (unless later writers are time travelers too!). It would have made sense to add a subgenre of fantasy, to discuss the major authors and commentary on how it is distinguished from SF, but that field is so large it may simply require a second handbook.

Part 3 of the handbook is entitled "Representative Science Fiction Authors" and discusses the work of nineteen authors arranged alphabetically, all of them two pages in length, and containing relatively little information beyond what is already provided in the discussion of their works in Part 2. Each essay essentially fills in a few biographical details as if lifted from a resumé, while referring

the reader to one or two references without any discussion of the substance of the commentary on their work in those sources.

Part 4 of the handbook contains a well written discussion of twenty novels by the representative authors in Part 3 (H. G. Wells gets two novels) arranged in chronological order of publication, each seven pages in length, and providing a plot summary and discussion of the selected text that will be useful in giving students an overview of an assigned text from this list, without providing the complete "Spark Notes" treatment that many may prefer to actually reading a novel. In this section there is some incorporation of the critical commentary on the texts from the varied sources noted in the select bibliography. The discussion of empathy in the section on Philip K. Dick at page 227 struck an ironic contemporary note in light of the criticism of President Obama for suggesting that a Supreme Court Justice should be someone with empathy.

In thinking about the value and utility of this volume, one has to recognize that it is limited in scope—there is no attempt to duplicate Peter Nicholls and John Clute's *New Encyclopedia of Science Fiction,* which is indeed not mentioned in the bibliography although it would certainly be a valuable resource for the handbook's likely user—and idiosyncratic in its selection of "representative authors," with an emphasis on a mix of classic authors, authors from the "British boom" and writers with a postmodern, political, multicultural or postcolonial perspective. In deciding whether to adopt this as a resource, you need to know who made the cut: Asimov, Atwood, Butler, Delaney, Dick, Gibson, Griffith, Haldeman, Heinlein, Hopkinson, Le Guin, McDonald, Miéville, Orwell, Piercy, Pohl, Robinson, Stephenson and Wells.

This is not to say that other important authors are totally excluded from the discussion, since the ten "subgenres" surveyed mention works of many other authors who need to be included in a reference like this: Baxter, Bear, Benford, Bradbury, Brin, Card, Huxley, Jones, Merril, Mosley, Tiptree (Sheldon), Vonnegut and Vinge, for example. But others are excluded altogether (Derrick Bell, James Morrow and Robert Sawyer, to name just three) who could and should easily have been included, and it would have been useful if the brief biographical sketches in Part 3 could have been expanded to include a number of these well-known writers, whether or not their stories were discussed in Part 4. It may be that the selection process had something to do with the writers whose work is most frequently taught in the coauthors' classes, which makes sense if they will adopt it as a reference themselves, but may make it less valuable to others.

A few minor nitpicks and suggestions. Despite the authors' comments on page 8, there are fan societies and conferences for non-SF writers of note, in particular the Jane Austen Society, and the Friends of Freddy, to give two examples. Much of the necessarily brief critical commentary on texts in each subgenre discussion could have been enhanced by way of specific examples from the texts discussed, rather than by somewhat opaque and conclusory characterizations of how they fit into a particular subgenre. For example, on page 126 the authors write "Delany's work is also formally complex and sophisticated, informed by the latest developments in poststructuralist and postmodernist theory," without defining or clarifying what those developments are. From the discussion of several texts over the next few pages, one can get a sense of what Delany's novels are about, but not what they have to do with the aforementioned theory. The glossary discussion of "postmodernism" is not much help for a student

reader as it uses but leaves undefined the counterpoint term "modernism" in attempting to explain postmodernism. There are a number of typos which suggest more careful proofreading would have enhanced the presentation and credibility of the volume. For example, the text mentions Judith Merril's *Shadow on the Earth* on page 54, line 10, but prints the final word of the title as HEearth at line 24 and again in the list of notable fiction on page 63. And supplementing the section references at the end of each subgenre discussion with a list of relevant Web links, or having a collection of useful links after the Glossary, would add to the value of the volume. Notable omissions from the select bibliography are: Hassler and Wilcox (2008); Morrissey and De Los Santos (2007); Palmer (2003); and Vest (2007).

In sum, *The Science Fiction Handbook* is *a* useful handbook of much contemporary science fiction that is worth reading and including in your reference collection, but which will benefit from some additions and editorial improvements in a future edition.

Note

1. Philip K. Dick, "My Definition of Science Fiction" (1981), in Lawrence Sutin (ed.), *The Shifting Realities of Philip K. Dick: Selected Literary and Philosophical Writings* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1995), 99. Dick adds here that it is impossible to separate science fiction from fantasy, as the same texts can be seen as either: "Fantasy involves that which general opinion regards as impossible; science fiction involves that which general opinion regards as possible under the right circumstances. This is in essence a judgment call" (99–100).

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The Seven Beauties

Ed McKnight

Istvan Csicsery-Ronay Jr. *The Seven Beauties of Science Fiction*. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2008. Hardbound, 339 pages, $35.00, ISBN 978-0-8195-6889-2.

During particularly slow faculty meetings one of my more wayward colleagues and I will occasionally pass the time with a game of "Sevens." I'll slide a piece of paper discreetly before him with "Seven Dwarfs?" or "Seven Deadly Sins?" scrawled across the top, and he will have to list them all before sliding it back to me with the words "Magnificent Seven?" awaiting my own response. (I always forget Horst Buchholz.)

Those faculty meetings—as well as my classroom discussions of science fiction—have just gotten a little bit livelier with the publication of Istvan Csicsery-Ronay's *The Seven Beauties of Science Fiction*, one of the most important critical overviews of the science fiction genre in recent years.

Most attempts to define science fiction identify a single quality, such as "cognitive estrangement" or "structural fabulation," possessed by many of the genre's notable works, which then becomes the solitary standard against which the entire genre is measured. Predictably, so many exceptions can be found to this standard—works that everyone considers science fiction but that somehow elude the confines of this particular definition—that we end up falling back on Damon Knight's famous, but not terribly useful, pronouncement that "science fiction is what I point to when I say it."

I have my own idiosyncratic solution to this dilemma: *everything* is science fiction. *Ringworld*? Science fiction. *The Man in the High Castle*? Science fiction. *Lost*? Science fiction. *Desperate Housewives*? Science fiction. *A Tale of Two Cities*? Science fiction. In other words, science fiction is a set of expectations, a way of reading, rather than a group of writings. This simplifies many things for me, but I do end up reading some bad science fiction this way. *The Bridges of Madison County* is very bad science fiction, indeed!.

Csicsery-Ronay takes a more useful approach to this problem. Instead of offering yet another monolithic standard for a protean genre (or a single way of reading a variety of works), he takes his inspiration from *The Seven Beauties*, a twelfth-century poem by the Persian poet Nizami, in which the hero Bahram Gur falls in love with seven mysterious women, each the personification of a different cosmic principle. *The Seven Beauties of Science Fiction* proposes that although there may be no single essential ingredient that can be found in each and every work of science fiction, there does exist a unique set of qualities that loosely defines the genre.

This pluralistic approach to describing the genre can be helpful in avoiding what I call the Guinness Paradox. Most viewers would regard *Star Wars* as a science fiction film. It has all the necessary elements: spaceships, robots, alien life forms, faster-than-light drive, and an evil galactic empire. Never mind that the film has nothing at all to do with scientific or even historical extrapolation—it's science fiction (and I love it)..

Twenty-five years before *Star Wars*, Ealing Studios released a delightful comedy called *The Man in the White Suit,* in which a brilliant but quirky young scientist invents an indestructible fabric that never needs cleaning and never wears out. The film explores the social and economic consequences of this development, from the struggle among the nation's business leaders to control the invention to an old washerwoman's despair at losing her livelihood. This, too, is clearly a work of science fiction. The scientist hero, the novum of the unbreakable thread, and the film's careful scrutiny of the discovery's impact on society are all distinctive elements of the science fiction genre. And yet the two films have absolutely nothing in common. Well, one thing: Alec Guinness.

If two films with nothing else in common can both be called science fiction, the logical conclusion is that everything with Alec Guinness in it is science fiction…and every work of science fiction must include Alec Guinness.

The Seven Beauties of Science Fiction offers a way out of this paradox by saying that science fiction is not defined by a single feature, but by a number of different features, no single one of which is essential. *Star Wars* may lack any scientific plot element, offer no extrapolation from the present moment (or any identifiable moment from the past), and even omit the crucial novum (if the *Death Star* is a novum, then isn't *Sink the Bismarck* science fiction?) and still be considered a part of the same genre as *The Man in the White Suit*, a film that offers all three.

So, what *are* these seven beauties of science fiction that Csicsery-Ronay has identified? Rather than concluding this review with a brief and thoroughly inadequate summary of all seven, I intend to leave two or three of them unnamed, as an incentive for the reader to go out and get a copy of this book…because you should go out and get a copy of this book.

It probably won't spoil the surprise, however, to discover that one of the beauties of science fiction is its ability to explore "Future History." In his discussion, Csicsery-Ronay distinguishes three models of future history: revolutionary, evolutionary, and dispersive. The last of these is a more recent model in which "diverse historical formations branch or scatter in time." In other words, there is not one future, but many. While he is able to include a wide range of science fiction texts within this category, his attempt to include alternative history is a bit awkward. By the author's own admission, "alternative histories fit uncomfortably in the category of future history, as the one time in which an alternative history cannot occur is the future."

In an attempt to draw this obstinate stepchild of science fiction back into the fold, Csicsery-Ronay makes use of another well-established critical category, and the second of his seven beauties: "Fictive Novums." But, unlike the indestructible fiber of *The Man in the White Suit*, the historical divergence that gives rise to an alternative history is "undetectable to anyone in the given world." The Confederate victory at Gettysburg is old news to any of the characters in Ward Moore's *Bring the Jubilee*. "The only reliable witness to the novum then is the reader." But, as Csicsery-Ronay admits, "a novum that is not detectable may no longer be a novum."

It should come as no surprise that another of the seven beauties of science fiction concerns science itself. But Csicsery-Ronay's "Fictive Science" refers not simply to the presence of some scientific content in the text. Instead, he borrows Samuel Delany's notion that the science in a work of science fiction not only can, but *must* violate the accepted limits of current scientific knowledge. This not only avoids the absurdity of a text becoming something other than science fiction as our understanding of science changes, but also permits the *process* of science, and not merely its *products*, to become a central focus of the text.

While "Fictive Novums," "Future History" and "Fictive Science" are all categories that could aspire to transcend the book's pluralistic scheme, and might each be used by other critics to define the genre in and of itself, another of Csicsery-Ronay's beauties seems qualitatively different, yet surprisingly significant to a variety of works. The chapter on "Fictive Neology" examines the importance of linguistic invention within the science fiction genre. While many might consider the beauty of science-fictional languages to be a mere handmaiden of the genre rather than a bride, I was surprised and pleased by the importance that Csicsery-Ronay granted to the subject.

Speaking of neologisms, let me qualify my enthusiastic recommendation for this book by acknowledging that sometimes the lan-

guage it employs all too clearly (which is to say, all too obscurely) reflects its author's absolute mastery of contemporary academic jargon. While many undergraduates will find parts of Csicsery-Ronay's *The Seven Beauty's of Science Fiction* hard going, those who persevere will learn a great deal about both science fiction and modern critical theory.
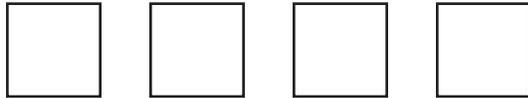
Fiction Reviews

Enigma

Bill Dynes

An alien ship bearing a mysterious stowaway crashes into the space station Labrythine VII, the First Contact Café, threatening the defense of the Harmony Empire against the invading Marillon Empire. C. F. Bentley's sequel to *Harmony* continues the story of Sissy, the High Priestess of Harmony, and Colonel Jake Hannigan of the Confederated Star Systems. The two are struggling to unite their people in the face of the Maril threat, but treaty negotiations are hampered by Harmony's conservative caste-based social system. Sissy's efforts to break the oppressive theocracy ruling Harmony are challenged when the derelict ship crashes, exposing a sibling rivalry between the aliens who manage the station and bringing an interloper who may be a disguised Maril agent. Bentley's Confederated Star Systems series is developing into an energetic space opera, heavy on political maneuvering and cloak-and-dagger intrigue. Her characterization remains limited; most of the individuals are broadly drawn, and nonhumans such as Adrial, the enigmatic stowaway, and Mac, the Labyrnthine secretly warring with his half-brother, are not fully realized. Yet the novel does continue Bentley's exploration of themes such as religion and politics, the diaspora of humanity, and first contact, and she weaves these ideas together effectively. The caste system of the Harmony Empire, for example, is dependent upon markings each individual bears from birth, and it was revealed in *Harmony* that this trait is the result of genetic manipulation. *Enigma* expands this notion as it develops the historical relationship between humanity and the birdlike Maril, contrasting these with the truly alien Labyrinthine who breed with other species in order to restore their genetic viability. Bentley's novel is a fun, fast-paced adventure, a successful sequel.

Of Wind and Sand

Amy J. Ransom

Like Octavia E. Butler and Ursula K. Le Guin, Québec SF writer Sylvie Bérard uses the cognitive estrangement of science fiction to force her readers to rethink the problems of the here and now. The translation of her first novel, *Of Wind and Sand*, represents an important contribution to the field, making available to English-language readers a science fictional vision that derives in part from their own traditions, but with the *différence* in perspective offered by the vibrant group of francophone SF writers published in Québec. Bérard craftily retells the genre's Ur-story, that of Terran colonization of another planet inhabited by a race of sentient reptilians, employing a mildly postmodern aesthetic and a clearly postcolonial sensibility.

The colonization of the desert planet called Mars II by its human visitors and Sielxth by the indigenous *darztls*—which fondly recall the Sleestaks to this nostalgic viewer of the original *Land of the Lost* television series—is told in six freestanding chapters from the perspective of both groups with the aid of a number of pseudo-documentary texts, such as "Terraforming 101" and "The Human Problem," with a prologue and epilogue narrated by Chloe Guilimpert, the central character of "Enemy Fire" and the founder of the utopian "Village" where a small group of humans and *darztls* eventually find a common ground to live upon. While the *darztls* initially help the humans, the differences between the two species appear too great and a mutual cultural misunderstanding leads first to complete isolation, which includes the *darztl* enslavement of humans, then outright war. The story takes place largely in the desert borderlands between the more arid regions favorable to the reptilian metabolism and the slightly cooler areas affected by initial efforts at terraforming, featuring characters equally marginal to both societies, in particular escaped human slaves, their *darztl* "human hunters," and brutal human mercenary groups. As human meets *darztl* and vice versa, contact with the Other operates a transformation of Self, often for the worst (as seen in what happens to *darztl* society once it begins to enslave humans, proving Richard Sipes's theory that violence is learned and repeated rather than innate), but occasionally for the better.

To better illustrate, I summarize here two chapters. In "A Time for War," the unnamed sister of a recurring human character, Solen, captures a *darztl* human hunter; as he tells her his own story, in which his contact with Solen has altered his view of humans as animal-like, she, too, must rethink her attitudes about the lizards. "Desert Soul" is narrated by Miekl, a hybrid formed by implanting a human consciousness into a *darztl* body and who poses as a human hunter in order to rescue escaped slaves from the desert and bring them to the Village. Miekl rescues Marie, but this human has been so thoroughly indoctrinated by her life in slavery that she attempts to escape from the Village, unable to cope with its freedoms. In these and the other episodic tales that form the novel, Bérard forces the reader to reexamine his or her own attitudes to the human history not only of colonization and slavery, but also to the present day post-9/11 situation of the War on Terror and the dehumanization of our own Others. While the author professes to address these more universally North American issues, the novel also lends itself to a reading as Québec/Canada allegory. (A native francophone from Québec, Bérard has become bilingual and teaches at the anglophone Trent University in Ontario.)

This work has strong scholarly and pedagogical potential for those interested in issues of race and gender in science fiction, recalling in particular tales like Le Guin's "A Woman's Liberation"

(1995) with nods to Élisabeth Vonarburg (Bérard is an academic and did her dissertation on the best-known writer of Québec's SF movement). Unlike Vonarburg's work, often criticized as overly complex (and I can speak from experience having taught *The Silent City* in a senior seminar on utopia), Bérard's style is much more straightforward (as is Sheryl Curtis's translation) and the fact that each chapter stands alone allows the freedom to select a shorter text for close analysis in the classroom. Unlike much other SFQ, which tends to blur the lines between science fiction, fantasy, and the Kafkaesque, Bérard's work is also straight-on genre SF, although some might quibble with the plausibility of her science. I highly recommend this long-awaited translation of a prize-winning novel, particularly, but not exclusively, to those interested in Québec or postcolonial SFs.

A Grey Moon over China

Andrew M. Kelly

Thomas A. Day. *A Grey Moon over China*. 2006. New York: Tor, 2009. Hardcover, 416 pages, $24.95, ISBN 978-0765321428.

A Grey Moon over China is Thomas A. Day's ambitious debut novel that tells the story of Eduardo Torres, an immigrant forced into military service by a near-future United States to fight for rapidly dwindling energy resources. The novel opens with an aging Torres working to account for the destruction he has witnessed, where to lay blame and still bracing for the next melee in a lifetime of struggle. The novel then goes backward, to 2027 and the beginning of Torres' and his companions' greatest endeavor. Torres' group is assigned to build infrastructure for an upcoming military operation on an island as well as search the area for a missing scientist for the Americans. Torres is tasked with clearing people from the island's interior before it is leveled into a huge landing strip where he stumbles on an old man sitting alone with plans for a "quantum battery," a device that can apparently be manufactured with relative ease and output a huge amount of power solving the energy crisis in one fell swoop. Torres leaves the old man for dead as the jungle is subsequently burned and leveled by engineering crews.

The military operation fails and the unit is almost completely destroyed. Torres and his companions use the ensuing confusion to have their unit classified in the Army computers and relocated to a huge island where they will set up manufacture of the batteries. The group decides that they will use the battery's production and design to leverage passage into interstellar space via a "Torus" a huge ring that has been constructed near Venus to propel ships at tremendous speed to new worlds. The original group of soldiers grows quickly as they quietly move talented people to their secret project, which via an amusing though unlikely piece of computer trickery is instantly classed as DARPA's number one priority.

Years pass on the island complex as Anne Miller, an AI expert single-handedly designs human-equivalent drones to be sent ahead of them, while others negotiate ship construction and safe passage to the torus for human crews. Continued attack and counter attacks on the base, which is the only producer of the batteries, force the group to evacuate into orbit and await the return of one of Miller's drones. Eventually, one drone returns and the ships

dive through the torus and arrive in a system of 3 planets. Each major terrestrial power has a fleet in the new system and the same geopolitical lines are drawn again across three planets, with Torres' group serving as mercenaries. Torres continues to hope that travel through a second torus into another system with an even nicer looking planet called Serenitas will somehow solve all his problems. The appearance of an "alien" fleet that are, unsurprisingly, evolved drones serves to throw the system into more chaos and results in the numerous deaths. Eventually, despite the military efforts of Polaski and more nuanced attempts by Torres to investigate the probes and a way to stop them, the fleets break up and most people retreat to farming or try to reach Serenitas through the torus in unarmed ships.

Day shows us over and over again that human beings incite conflict and tension wherever they go, competing for a larger share of scarce resources. Arrogance is a common feature of politicians here, secrecy and mistrust common, faith met with skepticism. His vision for them is one of calamity piled onto calamity, so that I felt myself bracing for disaster whenever any project by the characters neared completion. That disaster follows disaster and conflict springs again and again makes it clear that no matter how far humanity travels there will always be things we carry with us, losses we can't shake and tensions are rarely resolved without violence.

The novel is one that given it's scope fits most broadly as a Military SF story, though Torres spends most of his energy fighting a war with his past. The novel has the long lifetimes in space characteristic of space opera but lacks much of that subgenre's focus on hard SF elements. The effects of micro or low gravity environments are considered over the long term, as a road to chronic illness or birth defects while radiation concerns are apparently overcome and bear no mentioning. Despite being made up of almost exclusively technical people: computer technicians, engineers and soldiers, the text fails to offer explanations or in some places adequate descriptions of technologies in use. Day's novel fits loosely into these genre classifications but can be grouped with other novels who focus on character and a dark outlook on humanity's nature over the technical aspects of space travel or the military.

Day's first novel is one of broad vision and of ambition. He covers nearly an entire lifetime and a huge range of locations and a fairly large cast of characters. With this large cast and huge scope, few of the characters seem to change much in the nearly 30 years they are together. Pham, a woman famous for her temper and martial prowess is the most nuanced, due partly to Torres' fixation her. She overcomes alcoholism, rage and an impulse for self destruction, finally coming to terms with her past while Torres can only fixate and chronicle. Day's prose falls short of his vision at times and the most grand or harried moments are given the same descriptive weight as the less pivotal, sapping from Day's plot and imagination the very focus that would bring the novel in line with it's vision. Ultimately, the book is weak in areas most important to it's academic potential but serves to be entertaining and captivating in spite of its flaws and bleak outlook.

The Black Mirror and Other Stories

Leon Marvell

The Black Mirror and Other Stories: An Anthology of Science Fiction from Germany and Austria. Edited by Franz Rottensteiner. Translated by Mike Mitchell. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2008. Paper, 420 pages, $27.95, ISBN 978-0819568311.

In an article in the German journal *Alien Contact 36* (1999), Erik Simon, a former GDR science fiction editor, author, and translator described the field of German science fiction publications as moribund and dying a "lingering death." The collection, *The Black Mirror and Other Stories: An Anthology of Science Fiction from Germany and Austria*, edited by Franz Rottensteiner and translated by Mike Mitchell is in many ways an effort to document the rise (and fall) of science fiction in a country where authors in the genre have never seen their work appear in hardback form: in Germany science fiction, it seems, is considered second-class literature doomed only to ever appear in mass market paperback.

In his comprehensive introduction to the collection Rottensteiner rightly notes that if asked to expound upon their knowledge of German SF, most people would undoubtedly think of the handful of films produced by the UFA film company in the 1920s, and especially Lang's *Metropolis*. Perhaps others would think of the seemingly interminable *Perry Rhodan* series of pulp novels, published in Germany since 1961 (this reviewer had no idea the series was originally German, and I have not seen an English edition since I was young…which was a long time ago).

Rottensteiner has organized the collection in chronological order, starting at the beginning, as it were, of German SF with Kurd Lasswitz's *To the Absolute Zero of Existence* (1871). His introduction similarly follows a chronological order, but he begins his discussion much earlier, noting that Kepler's *Somnium* (*Dream*) of 1634 may be considered the very first German SF story with its description of a dream journey and encountering life forms on the moon. He proceeds to note the contributions of a handful of proto-SF works before discussing the central importance of Lasswitz—"mathematician, philosopher, poet"—to the story of German SF. His extended discussion of Lasswitz and the influence of his massive novel *Auf zwei Planeten* (*Of Two Planets,* 1897), in which the author describes a space station connecting planets as well as the political and social structures of Martian society, becomes a handy connecting link between German works which might arguably be called *contes philosophique* rather than SF and the "future war" novels and stories that appeared at the beginning of the 20th century, stories which convincingly herald the love/hate affair with the technological that properly characterizes SF as a literary form.

Whereas the pre–World War I stories and novels Rottensteiner associates with the "future war" genre were thinly disguised calls for an escalation of German military technology, those produced after World War I, in an era characterized by unemployment, inflation and despair over the Treaty of Versailles, "increased the popularity of certain forms of war-mongering fiction whose main purpose was to correct the "shameful" peace forced upon Germany." Often portraying Germany prevailing over its enemies through the deployment of some secret "super weapon", these works were often written by "hacks and amateur writers" and

the "literary quality was generally very low." Rottensteiner then perspicaciously notes,

[T]hese novels offered fantasies of wish-fulfilment, were openly authoritarian and racist, and usually postulated the deliverance of Germany by a strong undemocratic leader (for example, often a gifted engineer turns out to be the nation's savior).

The novels of Hans Dominik are a case in point: the hero is usually an engineer fighting against unsavory foreign types bent on espionage and sabotage. The key to the eventual triumph of the hero is the development of some new kind of power (such as electricity drawn from the atmosphere in his *Himmelskraft* (*Power from the Air,* 1939). Rottensteiner adds that Dominik's new technology is also sometimes supplemented by "occult" wisdom drawn from the East, or else the new form of power is realized through the help of "Asiatic forces." The Austrian Otto Soyka wrote novels in which human beings are manipulated by mysterious psychic powers in *Der Seelenschmied* (*The Soul Smith*, 1921) and *Die Traumpeitsche* (*The Dream Whip*, 1921). Thus we are led to see the institution, at the level of popular culture, of a fantastic mythology that would eventually find its reification in the ideology of National Socialism.

At this point Rottensteiner's introduction turns to a discussion of the relative merits of SF in its written and cinematographic forms, with Lang's *Metropolis* and his wife's novel (upon which the film was based) providing the test case. According to Rottensteiner, the film is a widely acknowledged work of genius, while the novel by Thea von Harbou is a "mediocre, sentimental" work. Variously dubbed the "mistress of kitsch" and a "Nazi Darling" (she did indeed become one of the favorite screenwriters of the Nazi-controlled film industry after Lang fled Germany for the USA), von Harbou is grudgingly acknowledged by Rottensteiner as having also written the screenplay from which Lang worked. In seeming contradiction to his initial assessment of von Harbou, he then praises her screenplay for *Metropolis* noting that "all the ideas that make the film a great one" are already there in her screenplay and that the collaborations between von Harbou and Lang produced Lang's most significant films. Rottensteiner concludes his discussion of *Metropolis* by noting that the film should be seen as an example of Germany's interest in the fantastic and the surreal (and indeed, expressionistic, one should suppose) in literature and the cinema rather than as an example of German SF: written SF was deemed of little importance in the 1920s, evidently.

A brief discussion of German SF stories translated for the Gernsback magazines follows ("the German contribution is insignificant") as well as a discussion of the few German SF novels in translation that appeared in the American market. Here we find another of Rottensteiner's odd assessments. Curt Siodmak's novel, *F.P1 Does Not Reply*, originally written in German, qualifies as SF, while his later (and certainly more famous) novel, *Donovan's Brain*, "seems more like…horror literature than…science fiction." Considering the foregoing, presumably Rottensteiner includes Siodmak's *City in the Sky* in this category as well—and one would thus have to conclude that his categorization of Siodmak's work is rather arbitrary.

Perhaps the most interesting section of the introduction is devoted to the history of the dime novel in Germany. Beginning before WWI and continuing up until this day, the *hefte* (dime novels) have been, and evidently continue to be, the main publishing form

for Germany's contribution to SF. Rottensteiner's in-depth discussion of the *hefte* culminates in a short history of the Perry Rhodan series, a series that has sold literally—and almost unbelievably—*billions* of copies.

Of interest to many readers will be Rottensteiner's discussion of the history of SF in the German Democratic Republic, and the problems writers within the genre faced when having to write "within the rules," as it were, of the socialist republic. Stories of the far future, for example, necessarily had a foregone conclusion as determined by the writings of Marx, Engels and Lenin: the future was inevitably a happy, genuine socialist republic! Rottensteiner highlights particularly the writings of collaborating couples Joanna and Günter Braun and Angela and Karlheinz Steinmüller as examples of writers whose work is subtly subversive, often satirical and of high literary merit.

Turning to the anthology itself, Rottensteiner states that the book is intended to be an historical sampling of German and Austrian SF rather than a selection of the "best" stories within the genre. One of his most interesting observations is that "German writers were stronger in the GDR" and consequently the reader is presented with a very good selection of representative stories from the "other" side of Germany. Rottensteiner asserts that many of the best stories are "remarkably free of any ideological indoctrination"—quite a challenging contention given that anyone familiar with the critical tradition within the humanities would find it difficult to assert that *anyone* was free of ideological indoctrination, whether of a socialist or capitalist stripe. He further notes that it would be difficult to find anything specifically "German" about the stories he has collected together (the flattening of any "Germanisms" into a U.S. English idiom by the American translator might have something to do with this), and that might well be true if one pursued an uncritical reading of many of the stories, but surely the very point of reading many of the GDR stories collected in this anthology is to discover the "hidden" political, psychological and social subtexts?

Looking at the stories themselves, the early pioneers of German SF are represented by Lasswitz's highly influential *To the Absolute Zero of Existence* of 1871 and his *Apoikis* of 1882, the latter an utopian story concerning a society with powerful psychic abilities similar to those of the underground race in Bulwer-Lytton's (and not Bulmer-Lytton, as my copy of the anthology has it!) *The Coming Race*. Paul Scheerbart's *Malvu the Helmsman* (1912) is one of his "astral" novelettes, a marvelous, poetic *conte philosophique* from a turn-of-the-century bohemian mystic who has more in common with the writings of the French Symbolists than the Vernelike Lasswitz.

Stories from between the two world wars include Otto Willi Gail's *The Missing Clock Hands: An Implausible Happening* (1929), a clumsy story about an inadvertent time traveler who recounts his sorry history before an incredulous judge, and which no doubt represents an example of a story included as part of the "survey" nature of the anthology: its literary merit is decidedly minimal (the editor admits that Gail "was not greatly talented"—somewhat of an understatement if this story is representative of his work). The following story, Austrian Egon Friedell's *Is the Earth Inhabited?* (1931), is far more entertaining fare however: a series of seven postulates by intergalactic professors demonstrating that it is impossible for life to exist on planet Earth. The story is a good example of the sort of mocking irony that was encouraged

by editor Karl Krauss and the writers associated with his famous journal *Die Fackel* (*The Torch*). And it is representative of the sort of anomie that impelled Friedell (one among too many) to commit suicide in the face of the rise of Nazism.

The three stories from the GDR are all excellent examples of SF from the Other Side of the Wall. Erik Simon will be known to many readers of *NYRSF* as an occasional contributor of critical essays to *Science Fiction Studies*. In his own country he is the coeditor of an important volume on GDR SF, *Die Science-Fiction der DDR,* 1988, and is well known as a writer of short fiction. *The Black Mirror* concerns the arrival of alien visitors who possess an "ideal mirror", a reflector of all forms of energy. The story itself is darkly ironic (no pun intended) and represents a kind of literary experiment for Simon, as it is in part a riff on a story by the German satirist and occultist Gustav Meyrink (1868–1932). Johanna and Günter Braun's *A Visit to Parsimonia: A Scientific Report* (1981) is a sly dig at *homo economicus/bureaucraticus* (of the GDR variety) in the form of a fragmentary report on the strange parsimonious attitudes of the inhabitants of—you guessed it—Parsimonia. Angela and Karlheinz Steinmüller's *The Eye that Never Weeps* is a beautiful, lyrical story set in a fictional Latin American country blighted by a "plutoniocracy" where the inhabitants and visitors to the province have embedded within their foreheads the device referred to in the title of the story: a radiation detector hardwired to the light-sensing part of the brain. This is one of the stand out stories in the anthology.

Of note also are the three stories by Herbert W. Franke from the early 1960s, excerpted from a collection of extremely short short stories, *Der grüne Komet* (*The Green Comet*, 1960). Each of the three stories in this anthology is a precise, spare example of literary *gedankenexperiment* where a single notion is pushed to its logical and surprising extreme.

The most recent story in the anthology is Andreas Eschbach's *Mothers Flowers,* 2008, a previously unpublished story by one of Germanys most prolific young writers of SF, winner of every SF literary award in Germany and of the French equivalent of the Hugo Award, the Grand Prix de l'imaginaire.

Rottensteiner prefaces each entry in the anthology with an exhaustive précis of the writer's works and evaluates their contributions to the life and health of SF in Germany and/or Austria. His notes to each story are often both enlightening and fascinating, drawing connections between obscure authors, artists and thinkers, their thematic concerns and the eras within which they wrote. His bibliography comes to twenty-one pages of tightly spaced entries, certainly enough to keep the scholar of German and Austrian SF busy for many years to come.

For both the scholar and the casual reader, *The Black Mirror and Other Stories* represents an obsidian mine of little-known treasures.

The Quiet War

Ed Higgins

Paul McAuley. *The Quiet War.* New York: Pyr, 2009. Paper, 462 pages, $16.00, ISBN 978-1591027812.

This is my first McAuley novel, and I'm duly impressed with both his skills as a first-rate prose stylist and a compelling storyteller. As a not always satisfied yet appreciator of more-than-competent prose undergirding a gripping SF story line, in both of these areas I'm happy to wax enthusiastic over *The Quiet War* (and anticipate reading its already published sequel, *Gardens of the Sun*).

The Quiet War combines elements of space opera, terraforming colonization, future technowar, ecocatastrophe and sociopolitical fantasy, all in a mix sustained by a mostly fast-moving plot peopled with a set of engaging characters—a not-unfamiliar SF mix, but McAuley nonetheless manages to make his narrative fresh, even probing, employing these conventions and themes.

A 23rd-century Earth despotically ruled by powerful family oligarchies has embarked on restoring centuries-ago ravaged environmental systems through massive technoreclamation projects employing a near-enslaved populace. Colonists who long since fled the collapsing, authoritarian Earth have successfully established themselves in loosely allied city-states on the moons of Jupiter and Saturn, whose citizens are now known as Outers. There's general mistrust and outright advocacy for war between the nondemocratic forces of Earth and those of nearly anarchic democratic extremists of Outer politics. Despite conciliatory movements on both sides, extremist voices are in the ascendancy, notwithstanding the Outer system's being wildly vulnerable to Earth's superior military technology.

Into this plot conflict McAuley introduces his central characters, all of whom are less and less in control of events bigger than themselves despite the good or ill intentions each tries to exercise. This pawnlike helplessness is the novel's major uniting theme.

The Quiet War clearly reflects a debt to such technowar novels as Heinlein's *Starship Troopers* and Haldeman's *The Forever War.* There's also a recasting of Orson Scott Card's *Ender's Game* training school for young technowarriors. In *The Quiet War,* on Earth's moon, specially designed boy-clones are secretly trained for subversive missions in the Outer system. And fighter pilots are also being secretly trained using advanced human–machine interface "singleships" outfitted with special weaponry for the inevitable war. But these borrowings and echoes are not egregious; they are aptly reworked to support McAuley's own created worlds, theme, and his characters actions. However, the warrior-pilot, Cash Baker, and the clone-spy, Dave #8, while important to the story line (and sometime important point-of-view characters), are the least developed of the novel's set of principal characters.

An additional debt *The Quiet War* has to acknowledge is to Kim Stanley Robinson's Mars trilogy, even given the fact SF terraforming, and the science behind such, is a widespread trope. Still, McAuley's use of these essential elements are not any less interesting in his own creative employment of them. Indeed, terraforming could almost be considered a central character in the novel. McAuley spends considerable, loving time with his imagined and extrapolated science engineering to create his plausible Outer worlds ecosystems; this is hard SF at it best and most readable for those of us less atuned to the "real" science McAuley apparently draws upon. In both his world-building as well as interstellar war plotline I was reminded of Joan Slonczewski's *A Door Into Ocean*. It's hard to imagine McAuley doesn't know this fine novel, parallel to his own in many ways.

Three far more complex women characters provide the novel's primary focus. Macy Minnot is an Earth bioengineering specialist sent to Callisto as part of a team building a lake biome as a peace-friendship gesture from Earth. She is betrayed and caught up in political machinations not of her own making by Earth forces as well as Outer politics and as a result must make her escape as a sought-after exile. Another principal character, the ruthless Professor Doctor Sri Hong-Owen, is a highly talented gene scientist serving a ruling family of Greater Brazil. She has come to the Outer system seeking a secretive, renowned Outer scientist responsible for many of their advances in terraforming and creation of vacuum organisms essential for making life possible there, as well as other gene wonders in the Outer colonies. A third central female character is the Outer gene wizard herself, Avernus. Avernus is mostly an offstage godlike creator until the novel's final pages, when she emerges as a wry and nimble evader of traps set for her by Sri Hong-Owen's villainies. Avernus is the novel's voice for a lost peace and reconciliation between Earth and the Outers. But she also embodies the wisdom for recouping the tragic war's loss to both sides. These women are highly credible creations and their various adventures, tribulations, defeats, and a few triumphs are the real page-turners of the novel.

As to scholarly and/or classroom potential, I think *The Quiet War* has both. Anyone interested in the use of SF conventions of terraforming would find much of scholarly interest in McAuley's world building, in its lineage or in his imaginative employment and extension of these elements. Obviously, the subgenre of technowars puts his novel firmly in juxtaposition with a slew of others that use this motif. I think McAuley is in a group of serious antiwar thinkers with this work. I would presume too there would be interest here for feminist SF scholars: What is perhaps to be said for an accomplished male SF writer who uses central female characters as interesting and rounded protagonists? Even though the somewhat preachy Avernus character is less realized than the Macy Minott or the scheming Professor Doctor Sri Hong-Owen character, all three are intelligent, independent women marking high levels of success, generally against protracted odds set against them.

In any case, the novel's multiple themes, complex characters, and readability would make a fine addition of a recent novel to any undergraduate SF course. I regularly include *Ender's Game*, *Green Mars*, and *A Door Into Ocean* in my own undergraduate SF course: I believe *The Quiet War* would make a good addition with crossover comparison themes as well as a set of characters worthy of close analysis. I believe I'll use it myself next time around.

Fool's Experiment

Larisa Mikhaylova

Edward M. Lerner. *Fool's Experiment.* New York: Tom Doherty Associates, 2008. Paper, 447 pages, $7.99, ISBN 9780765319012.

Blurbs on dust jackets are to hook a reader, and this third novel by Edward Lerner, a computer scientist turned writer, is served as follows:

Something demonic is stalking the brightest men and women in the computer industry. It attacks without warning or mercy, leaving its prey insane, comatose—or dead.

Something far nastier than any virus, worm, or Trojan horse program is being evolved in laboratory confinement by well-intentioned but misguided researchers. When their artificial life-form escapes onto the Internet, no conventional defense against malicious software can begin to compete. As disasters multiply, computer scientist Doug Carey knows that unconventional measures may be civilization's last hope.

And that any artificial life-form learns very fast…

In fact, only the last part of that blurb is true to the plot. Because it IS actually the virus which turns people comatose, mad and dead—a viciously insistent one, called Frankenfools and aimed at stopping genetic experiments. But whatever, the purpose of the blurb is to sell the book, and it has evidently been selling pretty well, as in September 2009 a pocket book version has been released with the same picture of a slightly off focus agonized woman's face seen through electronic circuitry.

I suppose we shouldn't seriously wonder who misguided the researchers, or what unconventional measures the above mentioned Doug Carey implemented to save mankind. It seems more interesting to have a look at this novel in the light of narratives about exponentially cybernetizing worlds. Then we will see what is new and what rings the bells of various traditions.

Edward Lerner calls himself a "promoter of science fiction and techno thrillers." This book contains one of the most meticulous descriptions of artificial life breeding experiments I ever read, and in understandable for non-programmers detail. It is almost on a par with Jules Verne's descriptions of ocean wonders seen from the Nautilus windows. That makes it definitely hard SF at the core. But motivation for the experiments (misguided?) is from the technothriller line, gradually moving closer to an almost comic book juxtaposition of villains and very proper and stalwart warriors for common good. Maybe if it was closer to science fiction standards of characterization this clash of genres could resolve more smoothly, because the idea of the novel is definitely very engaging, both emotionally and intellectually.

The book starts as if pushing from Pat Cadigan's *Synners* (1991) to an extent. Neural interface virtual helmets cause blood-vessel rupture in the brain and an entity from the Artificial Life laboratory spreads chaos and destruction in the net, reminding of a "spearhead" virus from the Cadigan's most famous cyberpunk novel. A very probable scenario of artificial life development, provided a threshold of solving multidimensional mazes can be crossed. One more step on the way towards transhuman existence.

No explanation of the entity's will to exist is given. But a negation sometimes can be taken as a path to an answer the validity of which is greater than the omitted details. Imagine a creature, a bunch of software, designed to solve the mazes, finding a way out of them. So far as its knowledge goes—it is its only purpose of existence. It doesn't question the need to solve the offered maze, as supposed of any program. But experimenters choose only the first ten who moved the farthest and multiply that variant to an original number of a hundred entities. One more condition applies—the changes introduced are not analyzed for validity or consistency, thus safeguarding for randomness needed to develop a problem-solving artificial life form.

On the one hand we have a professor giving a college 100-level class on AL, as if trivializing the subject, making it a commonplace feature of the described world, on the other—an ongoing front-edge experiment and doctoral student Linda needing a substantial shift if not a breakthrough to land a desired position at a corporation. The reader is placed into the reality in-between. Narratively it is expressed through alternating scenes in the AL laboratory of Professor AJ Rosenbaum and in BioSciCorp where neural interface work progresses towards various goals. For the protagonist Doug Carey it is vital to gain more command of prosthetic limbs through this interface (he himself lost an arm in the accident which killed his wife), while the military has goals of unraveling terrorist plots.

Charles Darwin wrote, "I love fools' experiments. I am always making them." Victor Frankenstein's one was of this kind. AJ Rosenberg's with artificial life forms is another. Here we witness the growth of self-awareness motivating the behavior of an information-gathering and maze-solving program (AL) which is pushed to choose the way of predation on fellow programs. As Frankenstein's Monster—of spite, of dread that it may not be chosen for the next cycle, extinguished. And again, as Shelley's classic novel, Lerner's Entity decides to flush out the mysterious Power (Adversary) which chose such rules of life for it by violating the most protected nodes—electric power grid, military command centers. Gradually it turns into a completely vicious monster. The first half of the book shows the rise of the hero to vanquish it in virtual space of the net—NIT specialist Doug Carey who goes there with a horde of specially designed viruses—phages (yes viruses here are used against the AL creature) managing to isolate it all its tentacles notwithstanding (oh, all the B-movie monsters from outer space and ocean depths!) and shred into pieces. These scenes in virtuality in chapter 44 bring to memory Iain M. Banks' *Feersum Endgin* (1994) in the eeriness of the landscape.

But Lerner doesn't stop at that—as a true researcher, he is never satisfied with a spoiled experiment. He shows us a result of the second try, when a secretly retained copy of the creature is put into a supposedly isolated environment to evolve and be trained. Or rather tamed, "like a lion" by reducing the amount of available processing nodes after each undesired reaction.

One of the differences between science fiction and mainstream literature development in the second half of the 20th century to the beginning of the 21st century is that SF actively imbibes cinematic explorations into the realms of fantastic, weaving these screen images into the texts, sometimes so tightly that the resulting material is definitely "man-made," synthetic and syncretic, influencing the reader on extra levels. Indirectly through the tropes which are so deeply ingrained in SF that the regular reader takes them for granted (such as the basic juxtaposition of an experimenter and its creation, "entering" the virtual world and inhabiting it with our hopes and dreads) Lerner leads us by the way of challenge,

fascinating every researcher, through the corridors of power (of "three-letter institutions"), and saves through ability to look at the world with unabashed sympathy.

Pivotal for that is Doug's partner Cheryl—a brilliant NIT specialist whose theoretical articles were taken for the basis for the applied work done on prosthesis by Doug and his crew. Cheryl is shown as a beautiful and insightful person, sensitive to other creatures suffering, and possessing a very important quality— openness of mind, which combine to make her able to see in an escaped entity not the revengeful Al, but an inquisitive Allison, to establish a productive contact and avoid nuclear destruction of the capital.

The most engaging chapters for me were those concerning the development of the Entity's awareness and logic of its actions. But one aspect caused also serious doubts: "The entity observed those last channels, without taking action, until it grew bored" (225).

Someone might say—if we assume self-awareness of that Entity, then dread, why not being bored? Yes, if we anthropomorphize, it definitely cannot stay happy or frightened all the time, it must sometimes get bored too.…But it is not a humorous book, and basic anthropomorphizing is one of the first things to be avoided in order for the hard science fiction novel to be taken seriously.

Dramatism is further supported through introduction of a new Caliphate encompassing all the Arab world and scheming to wreck havoc in the USA at every opportunity. Such episodes, by overtly presenting quite abstract adversaries as altogether hostile, in the mood of an 'evil empire,' do not add subtlety to the plot. In my opinion entirely villain figures, ever hungry for violence, belong more to a comic book tradition. And look too roughly cut for an essentially thought provoking text.

Guilt—a classical engine of plot movement—is added in abundance. Doug inadvertently, by swerving the car away from a drunken man on the road into a lamppost, became a cause of death for his wife Holly, who died from internal bleeding. While "training" a NIT prosthetic limb he constantly wrecks himself over that loss. Glenn feels guilt for commanding his friend to a death mission in Iraq. Cheryl's sense of guilt is less obvious, but her helping a niece, Carla, after both of the girl's parents were shot by a mad gunman at the supermarket is also tinted by this feeling. Too many candidates for a session on a couch for one novel to my liking.

Edward Lerner has written from a well-informed position about the future of nanotechnology ("Follow the Nanobrick Road," *Analog Science Fiction and Fact,* September 2008) and there is no doubt that with his experience as information communications specialist who worked for NASA projects he is highly qualified to make such prognoses. Nevertheless the perennial question of whether non-biological life forms can possess emotions is definitely not made any clearer by *Fool's Experiments*. It is sufficiently more effective to show the influence of AI actions and decisions on human emotions, as it was with Arthur C. Clarke's HAL, than to ascribe such feelings to it. And the most persuasive portion of the book, both logically and emotionally, is the last quarter where Cheryl questions the way people envision the Entity and interpret its movements and actions, and where the Entity realizes that people are capable of presenting much more interesting stimuli than threats.

To conclude—this novel draws deeply on traditions of SF, bringing its potential to describe the incoming threats of cybertechnologies in a highly visual manner quite suitable for the

screen version, but the resulting film might not be on a par with the masterpieces due to simplistic technothriller-type depiction of human powers in action—more like *The Day the Earth Stood Still* 2008, as compared to the 1951 version. The text manages to create an engaging new Monster that we, as the heirs to Frankenstein, have a chance not to abandon entirely, in time for it to interact with us without prejudice.
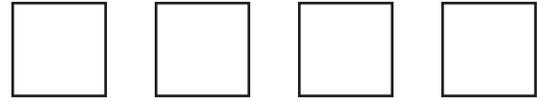
Media Reviews

District 9 [film]

Andrew M. Kelly

District 9. Dir. Neill Blomkamp. Perf. Sharlto Copley, Jason Cope, Nathalie Boltt, Sylvanie Strike, Elizabeth Mkandawie. Key Creatives, 2009.

There are times when nearly any original SF film is a breath of fresh air for genre-inclined movie-goers and scholars alike. With this summer's seeming glut of franchise films—a Transformers sequel, Star Trek reboot and the latest Marvel comics adaptation— *District 9* was surely one such film. Taking a familiar premise and breathing new life into it is one of SF and genre fiction's greatest appeals, to see a story you think you've already heard told in a new way. Attempts in film to remake the first contact or alien invasion narrative have a long history and rarely prove popular. *District 9* occupies a space between two common tropes in the subgenre, the crash landing in the mode of "The Thing from another World" and the colonization/invasion narrative in the vein of "Invasion of the Body Snatchers" in its various incarnations or a more recent take in blockbuster *Independence Day*. The film quickly makes obvious that the aliens are not an awe-inspiring benefactor or guide to a grander universe. An alien ship comes to rest over the city of Johannesburg, South Africa already an inversion of the traditional narrative where a ship's occupants demands or already knows to land over major political centers, like Klaatu in 1951's *The Day the Earth Stood Still*. Aliens here are, instead, listless refugees able to offer almost nothing to humanity except the burden of housing and providing some level of well-being.

Shot initially in a documentary style, the film opens with a series of clips from interviews that appear to be about some embroiled group of refugees, with the filmmakers taking a kind of man on the street opinion poll showing the aliens to be not just strange but subhuman and unworthy of being housed in the same nation as these South Africans. That the clips could easily refer to nearly any other incursion by a minority is the first sign of the film's high-stakes portrayal of otherness and "race" in broadest possible terms.

The opening shots move to focus on the MNU (Multinational United), the Blackwater-like contractor in charge of the camps reserved for the stranded aliens, and quickly move to focus on Wikus Van De Merwe, an awkward, middle-aged man tangled in microphone wire and asking self-consciously where to look when

addressing the camera crew. He has been tasked with clearing the current camp "District 9" and obtaining from the aliens their hand print, giving Wikus's organization the legal authority to move them. The whole exercise is clearly a legal farce from the beginning and made more-so by the quick reliance on violence by personnel employed by MNU and Wikus's inability to assert himself or to admit defeat since the assignment is important to his career. He awkwardly leads documentary crews through District 9, giving a glimpse at life among the aliens, known as "prawns" due to their apparent resemblance to shrimp. Prawns live in ramshackle houses and subsist by trading alien technologies from the ship for cat food, which proves intoxicating and serves to further dehumanize the prawns, lowering them further from equal status. Wikus stumbles into a lab of a prawn known as Christopher Johnson and accidentally inhales fluid from a canister which begins to make him sick and then to transform him into a prawn. The main body of the film is concerned with Wikus's struggle to find a cure or at least some peace in District 9 with the help of Christopher Johnson, a prawn who appears to have retained their specie's technical abilities.

District 9 is an extremely rich text for analysis; each stage of the prawns' interactions with humans in the film could be applied to a different historical example of race relations. Parallels to South Africa's long and tumultuous history are legion. Ethical and moral issues about in the macroscopic treatment of the prawns by humans: how they are confined to the camps, exploited economically and socially, and live in conditions that are all too familiar to billions of human beings the world over. Wikus's relationship with Christopher Johnson is the only fully realized interpersonal relationship in the film; issues of trust and reliability are raised as promises are made and broken on the part of Wikus. More comradeship is shown on the part of Christopher Johnson toward Wikus than any of the film's shallow human characters display in callously exploiting him.

The film's visual effects are top notch and allow for Wikus's transformation and for the prawns themselves to be believable to the viewer. One of the major highlights of the film's effects is the presence of the alien ship over the city. It looms tremendously and nearly fades into the background in some shots and comes to the viewer only after the action has passed out of frame, and we are left with the omnipresent hulk hanging for years over the city. The film's conclusion is a long gun battle with Wikus piloting a weapons suit of prawn technology and is perhaps its weakest point despite being so well produced and visually spectacular since the issues that underscore the rest of the film are tossed aside in favor of action.

One of the summer's more successful films has proved to be one of the richest recent texts in SF film, despite some shortcomings for the careful viewer: how does the fluid Wikus inhales also—as we're told by Christopher Johnson—serve to power their entire ship? Such questions might be answered by long strings in the film's internal logic, but they still nag. *District 9* may have some flaws throughout but this only does so much to diminish its extremely strong premise and very good execution.

Sleep Dealer [film]

Ritch Calvin

Sleep Dealer. Dir. Alex Rivera. Perf. Luis Fernando Peña, Leonor Varela, Jacob Vargas. Likely Story, 2008.

In recent years, a number of Mexican films have been successful outside Mexico, including *Como agua para chocolate* (1992), *Sexo, pudor y lágrimas* (1999), *Amores perros* (2000), *Y tu mamá también* (2001), and *El crimen del Padre Amaro* (2002). None of these, however, has been a science fiction film (*Chocolate*'s nod to magical realism, notwithstanding). *Sleep Dealer* (2008), however, fully utilizes the conventions of science fiction in its narrative and visuals.

The near-future film is set in Oaxaca, Tijuana, and San Diego, and it centers around three main protagonists: Memo, Luz, and Rudy. Memo lives in rural Oaxaca. He lives with his family, which is barely able to eek out an existence after the nearby river is dammed and the water piped "up north." Although his father believes that they must return to the past to live—live by the land, raise their own food—Memo disagrees and cannot wait to leave. Initially, he leaves vicariously through a receiver that he has rigged. But his illicit receiver draws the attention of the authorities, and they bomb his house, killing his father. He soon leaves for Tijuana in the hope of becoming a "sleep dealer."

In the near future, many individuals have neural implants and are collectively known as "node workers." By means of their implants, sleep dealers are able to perform work within the U.S. without ever crossing the border—physically crossing the border is so analog! (The film also has an interesting companion Web site called Cybracero, available at http://www.cybracero.com/, that lauds the benefits of cyberwork.) The pay is good, but the implants are expensive and too much work leads to severe physical complications. On his first night in Tijuana, however, he is mugged, and all his money is stolen.

On his trip to Tijuana, Memo meets Luz. She is also a node worker, but she is a "writer." She plugs into TruNode and tells stories that derive from her own memories, which are then sold on the web. When she meets Memo, she is struck by his story and posts it on TruNode. Although she struggles to make a living via her stories, her memories about Memo sell immediately. Because of the demand for information about him, she helps him get his nodes and his position as a sleep dealer.

Meanwhile, in San Diego, Rudy has followed his own parents' footsteps into the military. He, too, has nodes, through which he flies planes that defend U.S. interests against the "water terrorists" who threaten the water in Mexico that is destined for the U.S. Like the sleep dealers in Mexico, he is able to defend U.S. interests without ever leaving San Diego. (These military strikes are broadcast through a reality show, much like *America's Most Wanted*.) His parents are proud that he is a pilot and that he has killed someone in the line of duty. Rudy, however, is haunted by the man he has killed—Memo's father. Wracked by guilt, Rudy is Luz's primary reader of the Memo narrative, and he travels to Mexico to meet Memo and apologize. Predictably, he helps Memo and his village in Oaxaca by hacking into a network and using his plane to take out the dam.

While the plot may vacillate between love story and political commentary, while the arc of the narrative might be fairly predictable, and while the special effect certainly will not dazzle the CGI-jaded viewer (the film had a meager $2 million budget), it does offer a lot of interesting material for the viewer and for the classroom. For one, the underlying perspective is that of a disenfranchised Mexican peasant. We see the ways in which and the extent to which the northern political and corporate interests negatively affect rural Mexicans. The film juxtaposes the abject poverty of the villagers outside Oaxaca with the luxury of those in the States (and, in particular, of a U.S. family of Mexican descent). Here, the imperial northerners have found new, technologically mediated means to exploit their neighbors (a reminder of the quote from Mexican President Porfirio Diaz: "Poor Mexico, so far from God, so near the United States").

Another prominent theme is that of borders. As mentioned above, the most immediate and obvious instance is that people do not cross borders physically but, rather, cross national borders virtually. The film also examines, though to a lesser degree, the border of the body. When Memo receives his node implants, the implantation of the nodes is clearly a penetration and a violation of his body. All three node workers, though, lose something of themselves when they are in virtual space. The narrative is also about isolation, alienation, and, ironically, disconnection. Memo notes that, while he is connected as a sleep dealer, he feels more and more disconnected, from himself, his family, and the land. He suggests that his time in virtual space, engaged in long hours of work, drains his soul just as the dam outside Oaxaca has drained the life from his hometown. Similarly, Rudy loses his sense of purpose and, more importantly, loses his belief in his and the United States' moral high ground. Luz began by wanting to write, to tell stories, but as she pursues Memo's story, she finds that she violates her principles and injures the person she cares about.

Finally, the film offers a number of parallel stories about family. Rudy's parents want him to follow in their footsteps. He does, but when he experiences the reality of that life, he flees. At the end of the film, he has left the U.S. and is headed ever farther south into Mexico. Memo's father also wants Memo to follow in his footsteps and remain rooted to the earth. But Memo cannot feel that connection and he flees north to Tijauana. Ironically, by the end of the film, although he remains in Tijuana, he begins to plant his crops in the soil and to keep his father's traditions alive.

Sleep Dealer is dramatically different from the other recent Mexican cinema. Although it illustrates and comments upon Mexican-U.S. relations, it also draws heavily upon recent SF film. The trio of protagonists remind the viewer of the trio from *Star Wars* (1977). And, indeed, the action sequence near the end of the film, as Rudy flies his craft through the canyons on Mexico toward the dam, also looks similar to Luke's flight toward the Death Star. *Sleep Dealer* also bears resemblance to other films that examine jacking in and virtual identities, including David Cronenberg's *eXistenZ* (1999). Here, Rivera does not raise the profound epistemological doubts regarding the nature of reality, but rather, he raises the ontological doubt of the loss of self in the face of physical and virtual imperial exploitation. The film would lend itself to discussions of imperialism, discourses of Otherness, borders and liminality, family and traditions, and the effects of virtual on the corporeal.

The Time Traveler's Wife [film]

James H. Thrall

The Time Traveler's Wife. Dir. Robert Schwentke. Perf. Eric Bana, Rachel McAdams, Arliss Howard, Michelle Nolden, Ron Livingston, Jane McLean, Brooklynn Proulx, Alex Ferris, Hailey McCann, Tatum McCann. New Line Cinema, 2009.

Lying like a chasm between conceptions of space and time is the simple issue of what might broadly be called movement. While moving through space has its challenges, most, or at least many, are surmountable. Moving in anything other than a linear forward direction through time, however, remains the stuff of theoretical physics or fantasy. Traditionally, fictional explorations of those fantasies have often revolved around technological aids, from the iconic Time Machine of H. G. Wells, to Mr. Peabody's didactic Way Back Machine of *Rocky and Bullwinkle* fame, and on to the *Back to the Future* trilogy's über-cool DeLorean. All carry technology's usual (if occasionally frustrated) promise of mastery and control. What if I could go back to any year in history, these imaginings ask, or forward to any specific point in the future through some version of turning a dial?

New Line Cinema's *The Time Traveler's Wife* (2009), based on Audrey Niffenegger's 2003 novel of the same name, considers the fantasy without the control. What if I traveled randomly, with little or no warning as to when I might disappear, what alternate time (and space) I might visit, and when I would return? Even Mark Twain transported his Connecticut Yankee to King Arthur's Court unexpectedly, but *The Time Traveler's Wife* plays with time travel as modeled on epileptic fit. Explored as well in the disappointingly short run of the television series *Journeyman* (NBC, 2007), this alternative vision may reflect postmodern sensibilities suspicious of any false metanarratives of technological dominance. Or it may just be an intriguing idea rich with potential for storyline complications and vaudevillian pratfalls. Niffenegger's complexly plotted novel mines those possibilities deeply, keeping track of the overlapping "travels" of Henry DeTamble through dated entries that include his age and/or the age of Clare Abshire, his wife of the title. Since Henry travels through time from the age of five until just before his death at forty-three, often encountering himself and/or Clare in the past or future, his unplanned excursions build into an interwoven tapestry of exchanges between him and himself, and between him and Clare, conducted in a dizzying variety of age combinations. Thus, when a twenty-year-old Clare first sees a twenty-eight-year-old Henry in regular time, Henry has never met her, even though she has had regular visits from older versions of him throughout her childhood. Coloring this lifelong relationship that could be said to be experienced backward, forward and sideways, are the poignant, even tragic human ramifications of Henry's problematic proclivity, most centrally in its cost to Clare, the one always left behind.

Much, though not all, of that complexity is conveyed in the necessarily truncated film version, along with much, though not all, of the poignancy. To the film's credit, actors Rachel McAdams (Clare) and Eric Bana (Henry) achieve a chemistry of connection that manages to make the cost of separation feel like a real cost. A love story before it is a time travel story, *The Time Traveler's Wife* uses its fantastic premise to evoke the far more common,

perhaps universal, experiences of longing, loneliness, and disconnection that can mark any relationship. With the plot viewed as an extended metaphor for long-term couple-hood, even the often out-of-sync memories of Henry and Clare can suggest the varied perceptions two people may hold of the same events in a shared life. Henry's temporary absences similarly point toward the final absence of a spouse or partner lost to death. Bruce Joel Rubin's screenplay, however, never quite accomplishes the on-screen heat that his screenplay for *Ghost* (1990) did for Patrick Swayze and Demi Moore. The true tragedy of Henry's and Clare's oddly conducted marriage, in fact, really only kicks up to a higher notch with the introduction of their daughter Alba (played by sisters Tatum and Hailey McCann), also a time traveler, as though the ultimate loss of Henry as father adds another, critical dimension to the loss of him as husband. A certain grim tone that accompanies the plot's premise does get conveyed by the film's use of low-light shots and frequent atmosphere of gloomy weather. The darker lighting contrasts in particular with brilliantly bright shots of the Meadow, the setting near Clare's childhood home for her visits from time-traveling Henry. Their final parting, significantly, is set in the Meadow, with Alba, evoking memories of the best moments of their time together as both couple and family, and hinting at the possibility of future appearances of Henry in the future.

Perhaps in keeping with the Hollywood-esque beauty of McAdams and Bana, a certain toughness that adheres to Niffenegger's characterizations is sadly missing in the film. Henry is shown as capable of taking care of himself when his time travels deposit him, always naked, in often public spaces, from breaking and entering to steal clothes to defending himself against thugs whose unwanted attention he attracts. For some viewers, the shadow of the Hulk also may hover around Bana's visage, suggesting darker depths just below the surface (*Hulk*, 2003). But otherwise the film makes Henry and Clare overly sweet as a couple, despite their moments of "couple tension," skipping such scenes from the book as Henry's attack, at Clare's instigation, on a high school boy who assaulted her. The film also avoids drawing attention to the disconcerting issues raised by having a naked adult man appear throughout a girl's childhood by moving their first sharing of sex to their meeting in "regular" time as adults in their twenties, rather than on the occasion of Clare's 18th birthday with a 41-year-old Henry. When that encounter comes in the film, it is, as in the book, at Clare's initiation—in Henry's apartment, McAdams approaches Bana with unmistakable intent. Other than occasional rear nudity, however, the film maintains its PG-13 rating by downplaying the book's more explicit sexuality.

Although it eschews mechanical means of time transportation, *The Time Traveler's Wife* does bring its fantasy in the direction of science fiction through a gesture at scientific explanation. Henry's travels are blamed on a medically identified genetic anomaly that gets him dubbed a Chrono-Displaced Person. An explanation that is no explanation at all, the premise pushes the cause into the incompletely charted realm of genetics, where anything, presumably, could be possible. Before its cancellation, *Journeyman* took a similar approach, suggesting its protagonist's travels resulted from the influence of tachyons, an increasingly all-purpose instigator of SF wonders. The film also solves the perennial time travel plot issue of whether or not the past can be changed by having it both ways. Henry appears to intercede in his own and Clare's lives, though in the convoluted logic of such intertwined encounters,

those intercessions can be said to not actually change anything but rather to be the way their lives always were. Otherwise, Henry's efforts to affect past events invariably fail, played out most tragically in his inability to save his mother from dying in an automobile accident, or (in the book) to do anything other than watch the events of September 11, 2001, unfold in helpless horror.

With its exploration of the vicissitudes of bopping back and forth within one's own life span, as well as a bit before and after, *The Time Traveler's Wife* would be an obvious choice to use in a course focused on aspects of time and time travel. Although having a class read the book and see the film could raise useful issues of adaptation, the film alone would be a more manageable viewing assignment than the 500-plus-page novel would be a reading assignment. Either way, the film could be linked with other recent time travel films. The *Back to the Future* trilogy (1985, 1989, 1990) leaps to mind, of course, as does *The Time Machine* (2002). Other key texts from time travels past could include H. G. Wells's 1895 novella itself as a more manageable read for comparison with its film version, *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* (1889), and William Morris's *News from Nowhere* (1890), but also *Lest Darkness Fall* by L. Sprague de Camp (1939), Robert Heinlein's *The Door into Summer* (1957), *Einstein's Dreams* (1992) to more directly raise questions about the nature of time, and, on the lighter side, Terry Pratchett's *Thief of Time* (2001). Most of these other texts and films raise more serious issues of social reality and its relationship to time than does *The Time Traveler's Wife*; none, however, can muster quite the same romantic power to produce audible sniffles and nose-blowing as greet its conclusion.

Persepolis [film]

Jordana Hall

Persepolis. Dir. Marjane Satrapi. Voice Perf. Chiara Mastroianni, Catherine Deneuve, Danielle Darrieux, Simon Abkarian, and Gabrielle Lopes. Sony Pictures Classics, 2007.

Written and Directed by comic artist Marjane Satrapi, *Persepolis* is a comic (illustrated) movie about Satrapi's life growing up as a young girl in Iran during the Islamic Revolution. The film follows Marji's adventures in Iran until her parents decide to send her to France for safety. From there, Marji struggles with her guilt as her family suffers from the ongoing power struggles that make up an everyday existence in her home country, and she tries to retain her Iranian identity in a world that seems increasingly separate from the life she left behind. She ultimately returns to Iran as a young woman once more attempting to reclaim her family and her roots, leaving for good when it becomes clear that there is no future for her in Iran, in the place she calls home.

Persepolis is, indeed, a comic movie, adapted from Satrapi's two-book, graphic memoir of her life in Iran and abroad. Just as moving, creative, and surprisingly funny considering the brutal world that makes up the major content of Satrapi's memoir, the film magically maintains the look of a comic. Even though the film is a faithful adaptation, remaining almost identical to the events and even style of the books from which it is adapted, this choice makes the film surprisingly edgy and fun to watch. It is like watching a comic come alive. The musical accompaniment

is also very well done, poignant. It adds remarkably to the overall viewing experience and the performers that voice the main characters help the two dimensional illustrations pop, including celebrated French actress Catherine Deneuve as Satrapi's matriarchal grandmother. I should add here that the DVD version of *Persepolis* has both the original French version and an English version with a different cast providing the voices. I strongly recommend the original French not only for the superb voice performance, but because the English subtitles that accompany this version are yet another element that reminds the viewer of the original media from which *Persepolis* was originally adapted, an interesting experience that should really add to the enjoyment of any comics fans who rejoiced in Satrapi's decision to create a film version of her beloved comic memoir.

As for the illustrations, they are in the same style that Satrapi uses in her books. More cartoon than realistic which allows her to satirize through hyperbole throughout the film, her humor provides a necessary release from the almost never-ending tension of the story and main plot. The manipulation of light and dark, the ominous lines that first seem to lull the viewer with their easy, rounded beauty only to reveal the growing vortex of darkness that soon encompasses the entire screen is fantastic and a continuous reminder that the world of *Persepolis* is always ultimately malevolent, leaving the lives of its ordinary citizens in the shambles and in desperate need of hope.

Those scenes that seem more realistic in nature are always done in silhouette, and are generally reserved for some of the more horrifying reality that will ultimately be revealed. One such example is as a group of young men run across the roof tops of neighboring apartment buildings trying to escape the military police after a co-ed party with illegal music and alcohol is broken up. The officers chase the young men with rifles forcing one man to attempt a jump that he is unable to make. He falls to his death as the silhouetted officers look on, casually turning away as if nothing important has taken place. The running and retreating figures as well as the guns they carry are very realistic and stand in stark contrast to the cartoon style of the film overall, and the viewer is forced to here recognize the reality of this existence, unable to look away. Though to call *Persepolis* a cartoon is perhaps too deceptively simple a term. This film is best described as a work of art a work of art.

It seems that comic film adaptation makes up a significant portion of the movies in America today, from *The X-Men*, *Spider Man*, and *The Incredible Hulk*, to the more recent *Watchmen* movie. It is, however, interesting to see a more faithful adaptation from the comics genre as far as the art and form of the film. In this way, Satrapi's work continues to stand out, and her movie is a tribute to the life and art of a remarkable woman.

Coraline [film]

Ritch Calvin

Coraline. Dir. Henry Selick. Perf. Dakota Fanning, Teri Hatcher, John Hodgman. Laika Entertainment, 2009.

The 2009 film *Coraline* is based upon the young adult novel of the same title by Neil Gaiman, originally published in the United States in 2002. In short, the narrative centers upon the title character, a precocious young girl who feels largely ignored and understimulated by her parents. They have moved to a new apartment in an old house, which is populated by an assortment of rather odd characters, including Sergei Alexander Bobinsky, who believes he is training a troupe of jumping mice, and the Misses April Spink and Miriam Forcible, who were possibly former vaudevillians or burlesque actors. They are all determined to call her "Caroline" and not "Coraline," much to her displeasure. As Coraline explores the new digs, she discovers a mysterious doorway that initially is blocked by a brick wall, but later leads her into an alternate world. In the Other world, she is greeted by her Other Mother and Other Father. In the Other world, Mother and Father are kind and attentive and domestic, to her great pleasure. Coraline has found what she wanted, but as the movie tagline reads, "Be careful what you wish for."

In the Other World that Coraline enters, with a duplicate house, a duplicate family, and duplicate neighbors, the first sign that all is not well in Other World is that all the denizens of the Other World have buttons sewn in place of their eyes. Her Other Parents want Coraline to remain in their home permanently, but to do so, she must also submit to having her eyes replaced with buttons. When Coraline resists, her Other Mother begins to transform—in her attitude and her appearance—into an ugly creature. Coraline soon finds three other "ghost" children who have had their eyes taken by the Other Mother, and Coraline is determined to save them. The ghost children call Other Mother a "beldam." The dictionary suggests that *beldam* means "an ugly old woman" or "grandmother." However, the term also refers to John Keats's poem "La Belle Dame Sand Merci" ("Coraline"). Just as the Belle Dame tells the knight that "I love thee true," the Other Mother tells Coraline the same. When the knight falls asleep and dreams, the "pale kings and princes" tell him that the Belle Dame "hath thee in thrall!" much as the pale ghost children tell Coraline.

Coraline challenges the Other Mother to a contest. If Coraline can find the eyes of the three ghost children and find her Real Parents, whom the Other Mother has also locked away, then she can return to her Real Family. If not, Coraline will remain with her Other Family. Of course, Coraline wins, and, of course, the Other Mother isn't about to play fair. Coraline, however, prevails and rescues the ghost children and her parents, and she comes to have a much greater love and respect for her family. (The ending of the book, however, seems to suggest that, after the encounter with Other Mother, Coraline finds herself undaunted by the impending school year—arguably a stronger message of growth and empowerment.)

The movie version of the novel was released to great fanfare. For one, it was based on a popular novel by an award-winning author. For another, it was to be adapted and directed by Henry Selick, who had previously directed *Moongirl* (2005), *Monkeybone* (2001), *James and the Giant Peach* (1996), and *The Nightmare before Christmas* (1993). Third, Gaiman had announced that the soundtrack would be provided by They Might Be Giants, though the team eventually went another direction with the music ("Coraline"). Finally, *Coraline* was to be the first stop-motion animated film that would be shot entirely in 3D.

While the movie remains in large part true to the original novel, it also introduces a few significant changes. For one, and perhaps the most significant, the movie introduces a male com-

panion for the young Coraline, Wyborn "Wybie" Lovat. Wybie makes fun of his own name, as does Coraline. At one point she calls him "Why-Were-You-Born." Since the characters play with his name in this way, we might indulge ourselves, as well. Why would Selick feel the need to add the Wybie character: "why be Wybie?" In an interview, Gaiman states that Selick added him so that Coraline would have someone to talk to, otherwise she would have wandered around in silence or broken the fourth wall and addressed the audience (von Riedemann). That answer makes a certain narrative sense, though it does beg the question of why a male interlocutor. I would suggest that the additional of the male figure might have also been a strategy to make the movie more attractive to a young male audience. Perhaps they believed that young boys would not watch a movie that features only a female protagonist? Perhaps, though the film is otherwise filled with plenty to attract young male viewers. However, the name of the additional character itself asks the question: "why be love at." Why a flirtatious love interest for the prepubescent protag? Curious.

The Internet Movie Database page suggests that *Coraline* resembles *Alice in Wonderland* (a portal to another world and a black cat that comes and goes mysteriously); however, I would suggest that the strongest parallels are to *The Wizard of Oz*. In both films, the young female protagonists are feeling neglected. Both find themselves transported into another world, a world which is much more magical and colorful than their own humdrum lives. And while the new world looks wonderful, it is never what it seems. As the cat tells Coraline, "You might think this world is a dream come true, but you're wrong." Moreover, in both films, the people in her life are transformed into characters in the Other world. Here, the versions of Mother, Father, Bobinsky, Spink and Forcible are similar to the farmhands, traveling magician, and nosy neighbor who populate Oz. In *The Wizard of Oz*, however, Dorothy is able to return home largely through her own wit and courage. In *Coraline*, she is being dragged away by the Other Mother's hand when she is rescued by Wybie. To be fair, though, the Other Mother then attempts to drag Wybie into the bottomless pit, and Coraline returns the favor and rescues him. Still, both films celebrate the home and family and the dangers of wishing for a more interesting life.

Although billed as a children's movie, *Coraline* certainly offers something for older viewers, as well. The narrative is interesting, if at times predictable. The technical aspects of the film are, however, quite interesting. Although I watched the film in 2D, it is visually and technically worth the trip. Unlike some movies, though, the effects do not replace the narrative and characterization.

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Up [film]

Lyndsey Raney

Up. Dir. Pete Doctor, Bob Peterson. Perf. Edward Asner, Christopher Plummer, Bob Peterson, Jordan Nagai. Pixar, 2009.

Up is the latest in an amazingly long string of hits from the animation juggernaut, Pixar Studios. Starting with 1995's *Toy Story*, the studio has consistently produced hit after hit. While some view that as testament of the studio's talent for storytelling and visuals, it seems the more Pixar has experimented, the more people have begun to question this remarkable staying power. More recent hits like *Ratatouille* and *WALL-E* had a myriad of features that deviated from what was seen as "normal" for animated films.

Ratatouille had to find ways of making the rat, a species of vermin, endearing to the audience. It also had to wrestle with proving a movie about cooking could be about more than romance, unlike other films such as *Chocolat*, *Like Water for Chocolate*, *Mostly Martha* and *No Reservations*. While the focus of these movies was more about cooking up love in the kitchen to accompany tasty dishes, *Ratatouille* was simply about one rat's dream to cook. *WALL-E* faced a myriad of factors that should have kept it from being as heartwarming and delightful as it is; a postacpocalyptic setting, with Wall-E the last of his kind. In a move that could have further alienated its audience, the first half of *Wall-E* contains no dialog exchange, and the rest of the movie afterwards has little more than Wall-E and EVE saying each others' names. It also tackled the subject of pollution, giving humanity a future where we have killed the planet not through nuclear warfare, but slowly through rampant consumerism.

Regardless, both films performed magnificently at the box office, and both took home the Academy Award for Best Animated Feature Film. Despite these accolades, months before *Up*'s release, there was criticism among Pixar's analysts that the film was doomed to fail. From the whimsical idea of a house held aloft by colorful balloons to the film's 78-year-old protagonist, the movie was being panned by everyone except its creators. While the Academy Awards are still many months away, it's no mystery now that *Up* will walk away with its share. From the infusion of bright colors, the quirky characters rendered in a shapely cartoon style, *Up* exceeded even Pixar's expectations; it opened the Cannes Film Festival (a first for an animated movie), and has become Pixar's second-highest grossing film to date, behind 2003's *Finding Nemo*.

The story is simple; Carl Frederickson meets the love of his life Ellie when they are both children, inspired to seek adventure at Paradise Falls in Venezuela, like their explorer hero Charles Muntz. Years pass, they marry, and build a life together. They try to save for their childhood dream, but like so many things in life, it falls by the wayside in lieu of other expenses. Finally, after putting the trip on hold for decades, Carl tries to surprise Ellie with the purchase of two tickets to Venezuela. Unfortunately, the gesture is too late for Ellie, who dies shortly thereafter of old age. Bereft and alone, Carl recedes from life and the idea of adventure, becoming a mourning recluse. When representatives from a nursing home try to collect him as a resident, he turns his house into a giant balloon, intent on moving the structure to Paradise Falls to keep an old promise to Ellie. This plan becomes complicated

thanks to Russell, a Wilderness Explorer in need of an "Assisting the Elderly" badge who accidentally stows away for the trip on Carl's porch. The rest of the movie follows the pair in one escapade after another, the various adventures involving talking dogs, a giant chocolate-loving bird, and Carl's childhood hero, Charles Muntz. Muntz, consumed with his obsession of capturing the bird to restore his reputation, is the film's antagonist.

A renowned explorer and inventor, Muntz travels the world in his giant dirigible with only his talking dogs for company. Really, the dogs don't "talk"; their thoughts broadcast into real speech due to special collars around their necks, invented by Muntz himself. It speaks of Muntz's great intelligence, and his anger of being accused of exaggerating his discovery of a giant bird near Paradise Falls. The fact he spent the next 70 years at the Falls desperately trying to capture a live specimen subverts the name of the place—to Muntz, Paradise Falls is a self-imposed prison he dooms himself to with his rash ultimatum of never returning to civilization until he has proven his doubters wrong. A victim of his own folly, Muntz serves as a perfect foil to Carl. Of all the characters, Muntz represents Pixar's evolution strongest; it's difficult to imagine the Pixar of 1995 creating a character, introduced as a childhood hero, only to have him subtly reveal how his inner demons corrupted him over time. The scene he admits to the deaths of other explorers at his hand is the darkest in *Up*, and comes second to the supposed deaths of Mr. Incredible's family in *The Incredibles*. At first, Carl hesitates confronting Muntz, too consumed with his own obsession of fulfilling Ellie's dream. However, a few posthumous words of love from his wife teach Carl life's adventure is not about the places you go, but the people who take the journey with you. Rather than give away the exact ending, rest assured everything resolves happily, and Carl kept his promise, after all.

While doubters will likely continue to claim these quirks and deviations from "acceptable" children's stories will be Pixar's downfall, I welcome the prospect of them reaching new levels of originality. Animation has always been seen as a child's medium, despite artistic masterpieces like *Spirited Away*, *The Thief and the Cobbler*, and *Fantasia*. With their storytelling prowess and bravery to introduce new concepts to "children's" cinema, one can only imagine the places Pixar will take us. For them there is nowhere to go, but up.

Torchwood: Children of Earth [TV series]

Susan A. George

Torchwood: Children of Earth. Dir. Euros Lyn. Prod. Peter Bennett.
    Writers: Part1, Russell T. Davies (also executive producer); Part 2, John Fay; Part 3, Russel T. Davies/James Moran; Part 4, John Fay; Part 5, Russell T. Davies.

Season three of BBC's *Torchwood* took an unusual form. Instead of a regular season with the standard number of episodes, they decided to let director Euros Lyn shape the third season. It took a rather old-school form—it was presented as a miniseries shown over five consecutive nights. Each episode ran sixty full minutes with an overall running time of an hour and fifteen minutes to cover commercials. That same month, a *Doctor Who* "movie" also aired on the BBC, and while we are used to *Doctor Who* being the more serious of the two shows, that was not the case this summer. Instead, it was *Torchwood* that provided a serious and gripping story that dealt with a variety of issues regarding family and ethical choices on all levels—the political, the social, and the personal emphasizing how the three are interwoven.

The trouble starts when the British government receives a message on a particular wave length—456. The slowly emerging back story reveals that "the 456," as they came to be called, visited England in 1965 and threatened large-scale destruction if a deal could not be struck. An agreement was reached and a decades younger Captain Jack Harkness delivered the terms of the agreement—a group of orphan children, children, the authorities reasoned, who would not be missed. Now, the 456 are back and they want more children, a lot more and not just from Britain, but from the entire planet. From this simple, if appalling story line five hours of difficult ethical issues are placed center stage. The decisions that are made and the data used to make then raise pertinent and poignant questions about personal responsibility, governments' responsibilities to its citizens, and exactly how information may be used or misused in this information age.

The scope of the ethical issues cannot be fully discussed in this review, but in addition to the Torchwood team, several key characters in the miniseries become the sites of the political and personal debates. Their actions demonstrate how various individuals might react to extreme and difficult situations. For instance, John Frobisher, the good civil servant, becomes the Prime Minister's hatchet man and later his scapegoat. While in the end the Prime Minister's attempt at plausible deniability falls apart, Frobisher is the one who first negotiates with the 456 so that the terms of their last meeting will not be revealed to the rest of the world. Through the eyes of Frobrisher, the viewer sees the inner workings of a government trying to keep their dark secrets secret through covet actions.

As the situation sours and Frobisher's part in it becomes larger, he remains the good civil servant, but the toll on him is more than evident. When the government officials all agree their children will not be selected, he puts aside his fears for his own children but becomes no less anxious about the decisions being made. In the end, the Prime Minister decides that not all of the government officials' children can be spared, some must be sent to show that the government is being "fair." He tells Frobisher that *his* daughters will not be exempt forcing Frobisher to take extreme and tragic measures to protect his family.

For another character, Lois Habiba a new "temp" worker in Frobisher's office, the choices are much different. As her curiosity leads her to discover what is really going on and about Torchwood, she has to decide what side she is on. When approached by Gwen her ethical choice is equally difficult—commit treason and help Torchwood, or as with Frobisher, stay the good employee and patriot. Perhaps the largest sacrifice, as one may expect, is asked of Jack, who not only loses his lover, Ianto, but discovers that the only way he can save the children of the earth is to use his own grandson as a transmitter, one that will not survive the transmission. Through the stories of Frobisher and Jack and the dreadful choices they must make, the five hour series interweaves issues of ethics with those of family showing how different people respond to extreme ethical choices that are never only political and/or social, but are also personal as they define the individual.

The scenes that are most telling and chilling are those in the conference room as the Prime Minister, other British officials, an American General, and others have to decide how the children will be selected. After excluding their own children and trying to negotiate for a much smaller number of children, the 456 make it clear that they will not leave until they get what they. If they are denied, they will release a deadly virus world wide thus raising the stakes. It is around these issues that the miniseries would be most effective in the classroom. *Children of Earth* refuses to point the finger in only one place or make it personal as much recorded media science fiction does. Here it is not the deceitful Prime Minister, standing in as science fiction's mad or reclusive scientist, who makes the decision thereby framing it as the corrupt response of an unethical individual. Instead the difficulty of such a decision, even in the face of annihilation, is made quite clear. And the world's government's criteria of selection comments not only on the information age but how "harmless" information might be used. In the end they decide that the students in the poorest performing schools will be sent. Why send the best and brightest? After all what are all those tests and statistics for? While it seems a completely objective decision based on unbiased statistical information, the truth, as most of us know, is that those tests are not objective but have a range of biases built into them highlighting the dark side of "objective" information gathering and standardized testing.

Since *Children of Earth* refuses to shy away for the difficulties and the biases of the officials' decision it serves as a fine text to look at questions of ethics. In addition, it is fairly self-contained and can stand alone since the back story and subplots tell the viewers everything they need to know about the Torchwood regulars. It would be especially effective in those "required" freshman classes that are often listed as Introduction to Western Culture/Thought, Introduction to Humanities, Introduction to Philosophy, or as we call it at UC Merced, "CORE." On the down side, it is five hours of class time and that is a lot—perhaps too much for some classes. However, since it covers a range of ethical questions and issues a whole unit of a course could be build around the miniseries making it well worth the class time.

Kröd Mändoon and the Flaming Sword of Fire [TV series]

Jenni Bradley

Kröd Mändoon and the Flaming Sword of Fire. Perf. Sean Maguire, Matt Lucas, India de Beaufort. Comedy Central, 2009.

Kröd Mändoon and the Flaming Sword of Fire aired as a six-part miniseries on Comedy Central in the spring of 2009. It is essentially *Lord of the Rings* meets *Monty Python*. Kröd, the young, virile "Golden One," is the last hope in defeating the evil Chancellor Dongalor (as comically as possible).

Traditionally, men have always been the breadwinners, the protectors. In this series, however, it is Aneka, Kröd's on-off girlfriend who takes on the traditional male role. This role reversal can be seen in other works, as well: Eowyn and Faramir in *Lord of the Rings*, Princess Leia in *Star Wars*, and Arya in *The Inheritance Cycle*. Kröd has a physique that completely belies his personality.

At first glance he is every woman's dream: tall, muscular, an accent that could melt stone, and a sword that, on occasion, reminds one of Johnny Storm. Upon meeting him, however, one quickly discovers that he is a dimwitted, naïve, wimp who would run from a puppy if it charged him. His head may be thick, but his heart is strong. Throughout the series he is constantly trying to protect his crew and everyone they meet. Aneka is the complete opposite of her Kröd. Whereas he wears his feelings on his sleeve, Aneka prefers to keep hers bottled up. She uses sex to her advantage, often using it as a way to interrogate enemy soldiers or to even just get the time of day (which she admits to doing in the first episode). This causes constant problems between the amorous pair, eventually leading her to have a fruit-filled afternoon with Ralph Longshaft. She is a Pagan warrioress who will stop at nothing to get what she wants. Kröd treats Aneka like a princess even though she would rather be treated as an equal. He is afraid to tell her straight out that he loves her but tries to show it nonetheless. Aneka, however, would rather be treated like "one of the guys," such as when she fights for no reason.

The show borrows from several sci-fi pieces. In the opening episode Chancellor Dungalor reveals his secret weapon, the Eye of Gulga Grymna in which he plans on striking terror into his enemies. The Eye just happens to bear a remarkable resemblance to the Death Star. While Dungalor is describing the Eye's devastating effects, one of his followers speaks about the horrible things the Eye has done in the past, including destroying the lost city of Atlantis. In another *Star Wars* similarity, Loquasto, Kröd's half-man, half-swine companion, seems to be a lot like Chewbacca. He is loyal, good with a crossbow (somewhat), and is a bit hairy.

The series also takes part of a long-time tradition in science fiction and fantasy: the "Chosen One." Although, in this case Kröd is referred to as "Golden One" so as not to be clichéd. The story goes that there is a young man destined to become more than he is, to rise and tear down the wall or tyranny or to overthrow an evil overlord. Luke was the last Jedi, destined to defeat Emperor Palpatine and Darth Vader. Eragon is the first Dragon Rider in a hundred years destined to take down Galbatorix and free the lands of Alagaesia. Kröd even has a vision of his deceased mentor, General Arcadias, telling him he is the Golden One and will bring down Dungalor and the evil Emperor Xanus, much like Obi-Wan appearing to Luke.

The Kröd-universe is one of many 'verses that can be used to aid a student in understanding literature. Along with *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* and *Legend of the Seeker*, *Kröd Mändoon* is a tool that will expand a student's knowledge of not only science fiction and fantasy, but perhaps classic stories, as well.

Whether *Kröd Mändoon* airs a second season or not, it has earned its place among the comedy and fantasy/sci-fi worlds. If people can accept King Arthur watching a carnivorous rabbit die at the hands of a holy grenade, then Kröd wielding a fiery blade should have no problem making his way into the watcher's hearts.

Y: The Last Man [graphic novel]

Darby Orcutt

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An acclaimed and award-winning comic book series, collected into ten softcover volumes, *Y: The Last Man* tells the story of the last man on Earth. Following the sudden death of all other creatures with a Y chromosome, young Yorick Brown and his monkey companion, Ampersand, appear to be the only surviving males on a planet now dominated by women. Writer Brian K. Vaughan (*Ex Machina*, *Runaways*) and artist Pia Guerra use this setting to explore issues of gender roles, feminism, psychology, identity, sex, artistic expression, ethics, culture, love, the nature of reality, and the place of science in society, among others. While the series reflects strong science fiction themes, its narrative emphasis is upon personal human drama.

Y: The Last Man ran for 60 issues from 2002–2008 under the imprint of DC Comics' Vertigo. Established, in part, as a home for Neil Gaiman's opus, *Sandman*, comics fans generally consider this line of adult-oriented comics the premier showcase for more literary and sophisticated fare, especially of the nonsuperhero variety. *Y: The Last Man* garnered the prestigious Eisner Award for Best Continuing Series, as well as a nomination for the first Hugo Award for Best Graphic Story. Critical praise for the series focuses more on its blockbuster adventure story qualities; covers for the graphic novels cite National Public Radio's *All Things Considered's* declaration that "The year's best movie is a comic book," and Time.com that it "Rivals TV's *Lost* as a smart, consistently entertaining work of popular art" (soon after this review, Vaughan wrote several episodes of *Lost*, as well).

As a work of science fiction, *Y: The Last Man* might be considered less than emblematic. It is squarely set in an SF world, but its SF elements far from drive its narrative. Thematically, it derives (of course) from the "Last Man" motif, a science fiction archetype usually traced to Mary Shelley's novel *The Last Man* (which is obliquely referenced in the series). Vaughan's "Last Man" story, however, is a mash-up with a number of other SF tropes, as well, including the "Adam and Eve" fable, the "Apocalypse," the "Plague" story, and "Post-Holocaust Society" (Westfahl). The origin of the emasculating event is never definitively explained, although multiple theories surface throughout the series, some more scientific than others. One of the more developed claims comes from arguably the most successful scientist in the narrative: that the first viable cloning of a human being, which occurred at the moment of the holocaust, triggered the Earth to eliminate all males as no longer necessary for the survival of species. The mechanism of the event is clearly a plague of some fashion, although a plague that strikes instantaneously in all parts of the world. While the "Last Man" story often casts its protagonist as a new Adam, Yorick is Adam with a planet full of potential Eves, yet he largely shuns what many characters consider his procreative responsibilities in the overturned world out of loyalty to his girlfriend, Beth, who is on the opposite side of the Earth.

At the moment before the plague struck, Yorick had asked Beth (over the phone) to marry him. Disconnected before hearing her response, he soon sets off to find her. Quickly, however, he becomes swept up in the desires and machinations of others, from those of his mother, who is a U. S. Congresswoman, to those of countless other women with differing personal, political, scientific, sexual, and economic motivations. *Y: The Last Man* most clearly fits the mold of "quest" narrative. Yorick's ostensible goal of reuniting with Beth seems ever paramount, though frequently delayed by necessity or circumstances. His picaresque journey takes him and his companions to locales across the globe, and the series relates along the way many smaller tales of both major and incidental characters, often interrupting the usual cinematic velocity of the narrative. As is typical of such quests, Yorick discovers that his ultimate objective is not indeed that which he thought he was seeking.

The series offers a wealth of nods to popular culture and literature. Yorick especially constantly jokes and speaks with reference to television, feature films, comic books, and other media, sometimes overtly and sometimes in ways that will be recognized only by fans of that medium. The literary allusions of the series similarly range from subtle to anything but, with the most sustained attention to Shakespearean parallels. Yorick and his sister Hero are said to have been named by their drama professor father for Shakespearean characters, the dead jester of *Hamlet* and the believed-dead romantic object of *Much Ado About Nothing*, respectively. In issues akin to dramatic asides, the play-within-a-play of the "Fish and Bicycle" acting company draws the parallels to Shakespeare in unmistakable and farcical terms. In the end, for all its humor and adventure qualities, *Y: The Last Man* proves a tragedy, although not necessarily of the Shakespearean variety. The tragedy of the series neither arises from the actions of the protagonist, nor does it result in his (physical) demolition. Rather, the tragedy of *Y: The Last Man* is that of postmodern life itself: its harsh, random nature and ultimate inexplicability.

The sheer length and intricateness of plot would seem to more or less preclude classroom use of *Y: The Last Man*. Even sections that might have illustrative value pedagogically would generally require significant glossing of what has gone before. As a supplementary text, however, it potentially holds promise across a host of subject matter. Particularly its multi-sided presentations of gender roles, feminism, and patriarchal aspects of contemporary society would offer tremendous grist for research papers, and the series ought to be recommended to students looking for an interesting and different sort of text in which to explore and analyze these topics.

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Shadow of the Colossus
[video game]

Lyndsey Raney

Shadow of the Colossus. October 2005. Sony Computer Entertainment.

One part puzzle game, one part action-adventure, with a fantasy tone for setting, *Shadow of the Colossus* is the second game released by the same development team that produced the cult hit *Ico* in 2001. Entitled *Wander and the Colossus* in Japan, the game tells the story of a young man named Wander, and his single-minded mission of battling and killing sixteen colossi to revive Mono, a woman he loves who has died recently. Armed with only an ancient sword and bow, Wander must track down each of the colossi one at a time and defeat them, releasing the power of Dormin, an entity who has promised to revive Mono from death. The game is a spiritual successor to *Ico*, with both games' setting possibly in the same world in different times. A third game, entitled *The Last Guardian*, is currently in the works, though it has been remarked as being closer in essence to *Ico* than *Colossus*. A movie based on the game's story was announced to be in the works in April of 2009.

Shadow of the Colossus presents a unique take on the action-adventure genre by having a straightforward agenda, limited cast of characters, and aside from the sixteen colossi, no other enemies to fight. Wander begins each quest to find a colossus in the center of a field, and tracks down the location of each one by catching sunlight off the blade of his sword. When the light catches and forms a glowing line, he follows it until he comes across the next colossus to kill. The locations for each one vary; some colossi live in purely natural settings, others in abandoned structures. One lives underwater, another colossus is airborne, but the trip to find each one is generally uneventful. There are no towns to visit, no NPCs to see, no items to buy. The only other objects that effect game play are lizards the player catches to increase Wander's weapon grip, and fruit to increase his health. While a player can acquire other weapons by succeeding the Time Attack trials, it is possible to win the game without them. Aside from these weapons, Wander's only other tools for success are the player's wits and his/her horse, Agro.

Agro assists in battles by keeping up with the creatures and avoiding attacks. In instances she is not useable, she waits faithfully for Wander to return. The key to defeating the colossi is also the same. The colossi all have sigils somewhere on their bodies, and if Wander succeeds in attacking it, the monster dies. Means by which Wander loses health are either a colossus's attack or a fall from a great height, should he be in a mountainous area or trying to climb a colossus to reach its weak points. While such a simple concept sounds repetitive and boring, the combat is one of the game's most innovative points; the puzzle is not in finding the colossi, but figuring out how to access their weak points.

The change in terrain, the colossi's shape (some are humanoid, others predatory), and temperaments (some attack only when provoked, others on sight) mean every battle has to be approached with a new strategy. At times, the player has to abandon Agro, or use the bow rather than the sword. The player may have to climb the mountains, or the colossus itself. While other adventure games offer a plethora of monsters and weapons, *Colossus* takes a minimalistic approach, and gives the player an immersive terrain they learn to use to their advantage. It's a revolution among adventure games, and in its emphasis on creating a variety of unique environments the player must navigate and use, lest they be used against them. While the 1990s bore games encouraging players to get creative with their weapons (such as the *Silent Hill* franchise), *Colossus* reverse engineers the concept, creating a more realistic world without growing too large and turning into an RPG.

The game's story tells a tragic tale of love and unholy bargains. Fairly classic style, but the simple story keeps the players interested, while the sad tones heighten the tension. Every colossi's death feels more like a prelude to disaster than a victory. Wander's quest to revive Mono is a romantic tragedy; while Dormin's motives are clearly selfish and will cost Wander greatly, his love dooms him to undertake the cause anyway. It's a low-fantasy setting, with minimal dialog; the game prefers to visually communicate the revelations rather than verbally. It demonstrates the price Wander pays by subtle changes in his appearance. With the death of each colossus, his hair darkens while his skin and eyes pale. Eventually, dark streaks and a small pair of horns appear on his head. A side character, Lord Emon, heads a small supporting cast that tries to thwart Wander, in fear of the consequences wrought by the restoration of Dormin's power through the death of the colossi. By the death of the twelfth colossus, the game reveals Emon and his men are actively pursuing Wander, racing against him to the Shrine of Worship, where Mono lies in wait. When the sixteenth colossus dies, Wander becomes possessed by Dormin, and dies at the hands of Emon and his men courtesy of the same sword Wander used to kill the colossi. However, Dormin does act true to its word, and revives Mono, who discovers an infant with horns in the spot where Wander perished. Taking the infant in her arms, Mono follows Agro to a higher level in Shrine of Worship to a hidden garden. Whether this ending serves as a metaphor for the characters' actual deaths or is a true one is left to the player's personal interpretations.

Through an intricate weave of clever game play, strong story and intense relationships between the small cast of characters, *Shadow of the Colossus* manages to blow your mind while it breaks your heart.

Announcements

ANNOUNCEMENT/PRESS RELEASE
Science Fiction and Fantasy Translation Award

At the World Fantasy Convention in San José today a new set of awards for fantastic literature was announced. They will reward and highlight works of science fiction, fantasy, horror and related literature translated into English from other languages.

Two awards will be presented: one for long form literature (40,000 words and above) and the other for short forms. The awards will consist of a trophy and a cash prize. A copy of the trophy and an equal share of the cash prize will be given to both the author and the translator. The awards will seek out and reward authors and translators who bring fresh new works created in other languages to the English-speaking world. For further details, see the Web site at http://www.sfftwards.org/.

Fantastic literature has a long and honorable tradition outside the English-speaking world. Jules Verne and Stanisław Lem are acknowledged masters of science fiction while writers such as Jorge Luis Borges, Italo Calvino and Ivana Brlić-Mažuranić have created marvelous fantastic works. Some current authors, such as Andreas Eschbach, Maurice Dantec and Andrzej Sapkowski, have had success in translation, but many more wait to be discovered. Our book stores are full of translated Japanese manga. China and Russia have huge local markets for science fiction.

The award is being backed by a number of prominent academics, authors and fans, in particular staff at the University of California at Riverside (UCR), home of the Eaton Collection, one of the world's largest collections of science fiction and fantasy literature.

For UCR, Professor Rob Latham said, "The literature of the fantastic is an international phenomenon and has been since Hoffmann, Gogol, and Maupassant in the 19th century. Yet contemporary Anglo-American readers have only a sketchy sense of the global scope of science fiction and fantasy today. This award will take a big step towards the goal of closing that blind spot. UCR is proud to be associated with this initiative given the wide range of materials gathered in the Eaton Collection, which includes works published in well over a dozen languages."

Professor Gary K. Wolfe, former dean and Professor of Humanities at Roosevelt University and a World Fantasy Award winning critic said, "Despite its ancient tradition and continuing popularity as an integral aspect of world literature, contemporary non-English language fantasy and science fiction has become all but invisible to those of us in the English-speaking world. I hope this award will not only recognize outstanding translations, but encourage editors and publishers to seek out more such translations in the future".

Author Zoran Živković, who won a World Fantasy Award for his novel, *The Library,* translated from Serbian, commented, "I think it is a great idea. For many authors around the globe it will substantially improve their access to the biggest market for their work. At long last, the international fantasy community gets the equivalent of the Academy Award foreign film category."

Hugo Award winning blogger and critic, Cheryl Morgan, added, "In running the Science Fiction Awards Watch Web site, I see non-English speaking countries all around the world give awards for translated fiction. Only in English-speaking countries are translations not specifically rewarded. We aim to change that."

The first eligibility period for the awards will be the calendar year 2010. The first awards will be presented in 2011.

The award organizers are in the process of applying to set up a California Non-Profit Corporation to allow tax deductible donations.

Contact: info AT sfftawards.org
URL: http://www.sfftwards.org/

Science Fiction Foundation (SFF) Third Annual Masterclass

The Science Fiction Foundation (SFF) will be holding the third annual Masterclass in SF criticism in from June 11–13, 2010, at Middlesex University, London (the Hendon Campus; nearest underground, Hendon).

Delegate costs will be £180 per person, excluding accommodation. Students are asked to find their own accommodation, but help is available from the administrator.

Applicants will be asked to provide a CV and writing sample; these will be assessed by an Applications Committee consisting of Farah Mendlesohn, Paul Kincaid, Adam Roberts.

Completed applications must be received by February 28, 2010.

The Science Fiction Foundation (Registered Charity No. 1041052) was founded in 1970 by the writer/social activist George Hay and others as a semi-autonomous association of writers, academics, critics and others with an active interest in science fiction, with Arthur C. Clarke and Ursula K. Le Guin as patrons. Our aim is to promote science fiction and bring together those who read, write, study, teach, research or archive science fiction in Britain and the rest of the world. We also want to support science fiction, at conventions, at conferences and at other events which bring those interested in science fiction together.

Our main activities include publication of the journal Foundation: the international review of science fiction, and supporting the research library The Science Fiction Foundation Collection at the University of Liverpool. We have recently run successful conferences such as A Commonwealth of Science Fiction and the 2002 SFRA Conference, and published critical works on Ken MacLeod, Terry Pratchett and *Babylon 5.*

The four main objectives of the SFF are: to provide research facilities for anyone wishing to study science fiction; to investigate and promote the usefulness of science fiction in education; to disseminate information about science fiction; and to promote a discriminating understanding of the nature of science fiction.

Contact: Farah Mendlesohn (farah.sf@gmail.com)
URL: http://www.sf-foundation.org/index.html
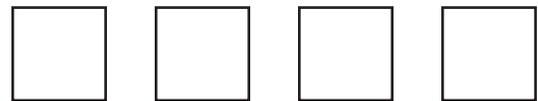
Calls for Papers

Call for Papers—Conference

Title: SFRA2010 "Far Stars and Tin Stars: Science Fiction and the Frontier"
Conference date: June 24-27, 2010
Conference site: Carefree, AZ
Topic: The 2010 Science Fiction Research Association conference theme, "Far Stars and Tin Stars: Science Fiction and the Frontier," reflects the conference's venue in the high desert of Carefree, Arizona, north of Phoenix. The frontier, the borderland between what is known and what is unknown, the settled and the wild, the mapped and the unexplored, is as central to science fiction as it is to the mythology of the American West.

Submissions are invited for individual papers (15-20 minutes), full paper panels (3 papers), roundtables (80 minute sessions), and other presentations that explore the study and teaching of science fiction in any medium. Preference will be given to proposals that engage the conference theme.

Due date: 200-300 word proposals with A/V needs by April 15, 2010

Contact: Craig Jacobsen (jacobsen AT mesacc.edu)

URL: http://www.sfra2010.ning.com

Call for Papers—Book

Title: Coded: Comics and Containment Culture in the 1950s

Topic: We have just received a contract from McFarland to compile a multi-contributor manuscript on comic books and containment culture in the 1950s. In no other era of United States history were American values and morals more rigidly defined or more heavily policed than in the 1950s. In the comic book industry, the debate over the impact of comics on youth and the resulting self-imposed censorship of the industry reflect the general trends of the era. This book approaches this era in American comics by looking at comic book narratives and images, and unpacking the meaning stored within. We are interested in the many and varied ways in which containment culture manifests itself in the pages of comic books. These essays should devote themselves to the close reading of American comic books from the 1950s. In focusing on this decade we are purposefully drawing on both the pre– and post–comic code era, from the late Golden Age to the early Silver Age of comics. As the title of the book suggests, the purpose of these narrative and visual analyses will be to locate a given text within the larger containment culture of the 1950s, not only in terms of how these images reflect the larger culture, but also how certain images and narratives subvert the dominant ideology of the time.

Due date: 2-paragraph proposal and bio/CV by April 1, 2010; full essays due August 15, 2010.

Contact: Chris York (yorkc AT pinetech.edu); Rafe York (yora0801 AT stcloudstate.edu)

URL: http://call-for-papers.sas.upenn.edu/node/34760

Call for Papers—Conference

Title: Inaugural postgraduate conference of the Postcolonial Studies Association

Conference date: May 21–22, 2010

Conference site: University of Stirling, Scotland

Topic: Contemporary events with catastrophic global ramifications, such as the current economic crisis or ongoing conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq, are not only mediated by super-fast digital communication and information networks but also conditioned by these rapidly advancing technologies. From the social networking site Facebook to the Middle Eastern satellite news channel Al Jazeera, digital forms of culture have multiplied in recent years, proliferating conduits and connections across the globe which shape our lives in multifarious ways. In the light of this, a postcolonial perspective on information and communication technologies is pressing. How far is cyberspace mediated by metropolitan centres of knowledge production, and how might new media entrench existing structures of inequality, by serving corporate capitalist interests or by saturating consumers with hegemonic representations of global events? Conversely, to what extent can technologies operate as tools of empowerment or resistance for marginalized peoples, by bypassing forms of censorship and facilitating access to global arenas of debate and alternative communities? How have new technologies impacted on issues of identity, place and nation, and shifted the parameters of postcolonial thought?

Due date: 300-word abstracts due January 15, 2010

Contact: Brian Rock (brian.rock AT stir.ac.uk)

URL: http://www.postcolonialstudiesassociation.co.uk; http://call-for-papers.sas.upenn.edu/node/34846

Call for Papers—Conference

Title: Framing the Human: (De)humanization in Language Literature and Culture

Conference date: March 6, 2010

Conference site: University Of Minnesota, Twin Cities

Topic: Debates around how "the human" is defined, interrogated and regulated often delineate boundaries that separate the human and its others (e.g., the animal, the divine, the monstrous). Far from being abstract exercises in taxonomy, assessments of these boundaries impose ways of knowing, reading and seeing. Political, ideological, scientific, religious and economic regimes participate in framing the human. Determining who or what counts as human under these regimes has profound consequences. For example, one can be biologically but not politically human (e.g., undocumented workers). One's political "human-ness" can be stripped away or called into question after certain violations of the law (e.g., enemy combatants). Recent genealogies of gender, race and ethnicity remind us to what extent our "humanity" is precarious and contingent upon culturally coherent frames that not only produce the (in)human but reflexively legitimate that production. Definitions of the human are not fixed temporally or qualitatively but rather shaped by various lenses, filters and paradigms. This symposium will consider objects of literary, linguistic and/or cultural study, which engage with frames that produce, perform, disqualify, marginalize, or maintain and (re)appropriate conceptions of the human.

Due date: 300-word abstract by December 31, 2009

Contact: agsrs AT umn.edu

URL: http://call-for-papers.sas.upenn.edu/node/34821

Call for Papers—Conference

Title: Modernism and Utopia: Convergences in the Arts

Conference date: April 23–24, 2010

Conference site: University of Birmingham, UK

Topic: Proposals are invited for 20-minute conference presentations that consider modernism in relation to utopia and utopianism, in written, visual, aural, and plastic media. The aim of the conference is to encourage debate between and across disciplines with a focus on the varied historical, cultural, technological, and intellectual settings in which the modernism/utopia nexus might be clarified and explained.

Due date: 250-word proposals by December 1, 2009

Contact: modernism-utopia AT hotmail.co.uk

URL: http://call-for-papers.sas.upenn.edu/node/34808

Call for Papers—Conference

Title: 7th Annual Tolkien at UVM Conference: Tolkien in the Classroom

Conference date: April 9–11, 2010

Conference site: UVM (University of Vermont)

Topic: The English department will host the three-day J.R.R. Tolkien conference. Leslie Donovan will be our guest speaker. Papers can be on any subject but special consideration will be given to those abstracts relating to the theme of Tolkien in the classroom.

Due date: Abstracts or 8–10 papers by January 10, 2010

Contact: Christopher Vaccaro (cvaccaro AT uvm.edu)

URL: http://call-for-papers.sas.upenn.edu/node/34787

Call for Papers—Conference

Title: "Imagine the infinite possibilities": Infinitus 2010: A Harry Potter Symposium

Conference date: July 15–18, 2010

Conference site: Orlando, FL

Topic: Infinitus 2010: A Harry Potter Symposium gives fans and academics a place to investigate, deconstruct, discuss, and illustrate the literary magic woven into the Harry Potter novels as it relates not only to the series, but also, its influence on the "real world". As a symposium for adult fans and scholars of the Harry Potter novels, we aim to promote scholarly analysis of the books, to provide forums for debate and analysis among fans of those works, and to provide professional development opportunities for teachers, librarians and academic scholars. Proposals are sought for presentations, papers, moderated panels, and workshops on any topic relating to the Harry Potter novels and/or the fan community. We welcome formal papers as well as proposals for a variety of presentation models, including prepared panel discussions and workshops. For workshops in particular, we encourage topics that focus on audience participation and interaction.

Due date: 500-word proposal and bio, January 16, 2010

Contact: fpsubmissions AT infinitus2010.org

URL: http://call-for-papers.sas.upenn.edu/node/34697

Call for Papers—Conference

Title: 12th Conference of the International Society for the Study of European Ideas (ISSEI)

Conference date: August 2–6, 2010

Conference site: Çankaya University, Ankara, Turkey

Topic: Science fiction exemplifies a tradition of dialogue between science and literature. This genre shows the crucial interdependence of science and literature through the free rearrangement of our perceptual thought in language, most notably in exploring the meaning of human being. Science fiction provides a forum for thought experiments that probe alternate realities, counterfactual histories and fantastical worlds. But unlike fantasy per se, science fiction draws upon and expands the insights of the scientific imagination and technical advances; e.g., W. Gibson's cyberpunk novels and P. Hamilton's space operas. Contemporary novels in this genre speak to sociocultural and technological issues from multidisciplinary perspectives: physics, psychology, sociology, religion, philosophy, etc. are pushed to their limits, made to engage views that leap across the boundaries of human imagination. This is a call for papers that critically examine (via philosophy, literary theory, religious studies) this crossing of boundaries in terms of ethics, politics, religion, the being of the human, etc., as found in 21st century science fiction.

Due date: 200-word abstracts and 2,000-word rough drafts by January 15, 2010

Contact: Michael P. Berman (mberman AT BrockU.ca)

URL: http://issei2010.haifa.ac.il/

Call for Papers—Graduate Student Conference

Title: The Resurrection of the Paranormal: Investigating Otherness in 21st Century English Studies [North Carolina State University Association of English Graduate Students]

Conference date: March 5–6, 2010

Conference site: North Carolina State University, Raleigh

Topic: With the recent explosion of Stephanie Meyer's Twilight series and the maintained popularity of films like Labyrinth, Poltergeist, and Night of the Living Dead, notions of the paranormal are captivating the popular culture scene and subsequently influencing the scholarly community in ways which are beginning to challenge traditional notions of the paranormal. While investigations of the paranormal have a visible place in the literary canon, as Bram Stoker's *Dracula* and William Shakespeare's *Hamlet* make clear, the overwhelming success of popular series like Twilight has led some to question their potential for scholarly application. As such, examinations of the paranormal are now growing to include considerations of what we have termed the PARAnormal. Unlike paranormal texts, which address the supernatural and the fantastic, PARAnormal texts function in ways that could be considered supernatural or fantastic. These texts do not necessarily deal with paranormal topics, but instead challenge the roles traditionally attributed to texts by the scholarly community. In transcending genres and blurring conventional boundaries, PARAnormal texts cause us to reexamine scholarly notions and consider the application of less traditional genres in the classroom. Thus, while paranormal texts are interested in Otherness, PARAnormal texts are Others. In bringing together a broad range of approaches to the study of the paranormal and the PARAnormal, this symposium seeks to foster a dialogue about Otherness in 21st century English studies.

Due date: 300-word abstracts by December 21, 2009

Contact: aegs.ncsu AT gmail.com

URL: http://call-for-papers.sas.upenn.edu/node/34719

Call for Papers—Journal

Title: FEMSPEC special issue: Élisabeth Vonarburg, Queen of Memory

Topic: We are seeking contributions on any aspect of Vonarburg's work or on writers directly influenced by Vonarburg; we are particularly interested in analyses of works available in English translation, in comparisons of the original French text and the translation, and on feminist, ecofeminist, postcolonial, and other readings of her work through the lenses of other oppositional theories. We are particularly looking for essays that examine the role of memory and/or feminine/feminist identities in her other works.

Due date: August 1, 2010
Contact: Amy J. Ransom (ranso1aj AT cmich.edu)
URL: http://www.femspec.org/submissions.html

Call for Papers—Journal

Title: Extrapolation, special issue on Postapocalyptic Utopias and Dystopias

Topic: The Summer 2010 issue of Extrapolation will be devoted to representations of post-apocalyptic utopias and/or dystopias; i.e., work(s) that speculatively present how the destruction of a culture gives rise to a new one that is utopic or dystopic. Artistic media considered include but are not limited to print, film, television, graphic novels, comic books and video games. Possible topics may include speculative definitions/concepts of "utopia" and "dystopia", representations of history, genre, technology, ideology, race, gender, politics, sexualities, or identity and otherness in utopian/dystopian art. How do speculative fictions invoke and alter the biblical apocalyptic narrative of Revelation? How do they make use of the possibilities offered by the archetype of destruction and renewal? What relationships are established between the nature of the cataclysm (environmental, technological, etc.) and the type of society arising afterward? How do the utopias or dystopias represented treat questions of race, gender, politics, sexualities, etc.? Is it still possible to speak of "utopia" and "dystopia"? Can these fictions effect social change? All theoretical approaches are welcome.

Due date: Full essays of 4,000–9,000 by January 8, 2010
Contact: Dale Knickerbocker (knickerbockerd AT ecu.edu)

Call for Papers—Journal

Title: Ol3Media – Online journal of television, cinema and media studies – Special Issue: Vampires [in Italian]

Topic: In recent years the vampire issue has been placed overwhelmingly all around because of a series of books and movies that have invaded our world. In film, literature or television, the vampire has reached an enviable position in the media landscape.

The next issue of Ol3Media will focus around this topic with essays that can provide food for thought on the subject on the production post-2000. Possible suggestions (but we welcome suggestions for other topics): Literary sagas (Anne Rice, Lisa J. Smith, Charlaine Harris); Vampire Cinema (Blade, Underworld, Twilight, Van Helsing, Let the right one in, Night Watch, Day Watch); Buffy legacy: Vampires on TV (Blade: The Series, Blood Ties, Moonlight, True Blood, Demons). The essays will be short reflections that can provide suggestions for discussion on various topics: gender, genres, audiences, web circulation, authorial style, link with tradition, relationship with teen drama etc.

Due date: Papers of 2,000 words by December 13, 2009, if in English; January 6, 2010, if in Italian
Contact: Barbara Maio (barbara.maio AT uniroma3.it)
URL: http://host.uniroma3.it/riviste/Ol3Media/Ol3media/Ol-3Media.html

Call for Papers—Journal

Title: American Literature (Duke University Press), Special Issue on SF, Fantasy, and Myth

Topic: This special issue brings together these genres with their divergent but intersecting histories and asks why they might be particularly relevant to study in the contemporary moment. While science fiction has garnered increasing attention in recent years in the academy (and increasing recognition in mainstream publications), the status of fantasy is even more controversial—and the line between them itself a subject of debate. Myth, by contrast, has long been a source of scholarly fascination, although the term typically emerges in the study of American literatures in its pejorative sense. Yet, myth plays a seminal role in the genres of science fiction and fantasy, so much so that science fiction and fantasy can arguably exceed the category of genre to contribute to what William Burroughs calls "a new mythology for the space age." The issue seeks to move past the definitional debates—beyond, for example, determining the distinction between science fiction and fantasy or the precise definition of myth—to explore broadly the relationship of these genres and modes (individually or in combination) to American literatures and cultures. How, for example, might a focus on science fiction, fantasy, and/or myth change our understanding of literary history? Of literary engagements with scientific and technological innovations as well as with the most pressing political concerns of the moment? How might we use these literary forms to understand genre as a historical repository? The role of mythology in modern culture? What social and geopolitical conditions might produce a genre or mode—or perhaps a critical category that newly classifies certain literary conventions as genres? What themes or questions surface when we read more canonical works through the lens of science fiction, fantasy or myth? Conversely, what happens to these categories when we take seriously, as scholars such as H. Bruce Franklin have done, their early appearance in American literary history? This issue will explore the insights that emerge when we consider the various imaginative engagements that characterize science fiction, fantasy, and myth as central concerns of American literary history and cultural production.

Due date: Submissions of 11,000 words or less by May 31, 2010
Contact: Priscilla Wald (pwald AT duke.edu) or Gerry Canavan (gerry.canavan AT duke.edu)
URL: Submit electronically at http://www.editorialmanager.com/al/default.asp; full CFP at http://web.duke.edu/~gc24/americanliterature.html

Science Fiction Research Association

www.sfra.org

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

Visit the SFRA Web site at http://www.sfra.org. For a membership application, contact the SFRA Treasurer or see the Web site.

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SFRA Standard Membership Benefits

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

SFRA Annual Directory
One issue per year. Members' names, contact information, and areas of interest.

SFRA Listserv
Ongoing. The SFRA listserv allows members to discuss topics and news of interest to the SF community, and to query the collective knowledge of the membership. To join the listserv or obtain further information, visit the listserv information page: http://wiz.cath.vt.edu/mailman/listinfo/sfra-l

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

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

SFRA Optional Membership Benefits
(Discounted subscription rates for members)

Foundation
Three issues per year. British scholarly journal, with critical, historical, and bibliographical articles, reviews, and letters. Add to dues: $33 seamail; $40 airmail.

The New York Review of Science Fiction
Twelve issues per year. Reviews and features. Add to dues: $28 domestic; $30 domestic institutional; $34 Canada; $40 UK and Europe; $42 Pacific and Australia.

Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts
Four issues per year. Scholarly journal, with critical and bibliographical articles and reviews. Add to dues: $40/1 year; $100/3 years.

Femspec
Critical and creative works. Add to dues: $40 domestic individual; $96 domestic institutional; $50 international individual; $105 international institutional.