

Editor

Chris Pak
chrispak@hotmail.co.uk

Nonfiction Editor

Dominick Grace
Brescia University College, 1285
Western Rd, London ON, N6G
3R4, Canada
phone: 519-432-8353 ext. 28244.
sfranfictionreviews@gmail.com

Assistant Nonfiction Editor

Kevin Pinkham
College of Arts and Sciences, Nyack
College, 1 South Boulevard,
Nyack, NY 10960, phone: 845-
675-4526845-675-4526.
kevin.pinkham@nyack.edu

Fiction Editor

Jeremy Brett
Cushing Memorial Library and
Archives, Texas A&M University,
Cushing Memorial Library &
Archives, 5000 TAMU College
Station, TX 77843.
jwbrett@library.tamu.edu

Media Editor

Leimar Garcia-Siino
Department of English, 19-23
Abercromby Square, School of the
Arts, University of Liverpool, L69
7ZG.
leimar@liv.ac.uk

Submissions

The *SFRA Review* encourages submissions of reviews, review essays that cover several related texts, interviews, and feature articles. Submission guidelines are available at <http://www.sfra.org> or by inquiry to the appropriate editor. All submitters must be current SFRA members. Contact the Editors for other submissions or for correspondence.

The *SFRA Review* (ISSN 1068-395X) is published four times a year by the Science Fiction Research Association (SFRA), and distributed to SFRA members. Individual issues are not for sale; however, all issues after 256 are published to SFRA's Website (<http://www.sfra.org>).

SFRA Review

A publication of the Science Fiction Research Association

In this issue

SFRA Review Business

Revolutions..... 2

SFRA Business

Muddy Waters 2

Incoming Vice-President's Statement..... 3

Feature 101

Infertility in Science Fiction as a Feminist Issue 4

Nonfiction Reviews

The Philosophy of David Cronenberg 10

Other Spacetimes: Interviews with Speculative Fiction Writers 11

Irish Science Fiction 13

The Transhuman Antihero 15

Shockwaves of Possibility: Essays on Science fiction, Globalization, and Utopia 16

Fiction Reviews

Binti: Home..... 18

Media Reviews

Star Trek Beyond..... 20

Arrival 22

Westworld..... 25

BrainDead..... 26

Aurion: Legacy of the Kori-Odan..... 28

Announcements

Call for Papers—Conference..... 31

Call for Papers—Articles 33

EDITORS' MESSAGE

Revolutions

Chris Pak

WE BEGIN 2017 with two new members of the SFRA Executive Committee. Keren Omry, our immediate past vice-president, now takes on the duties and responsibilities commensurate with her new role as president. Our new vice-president is none other than Gerry Canavan, a scholar new to the SFRA executive committee, and one I'm sure you'll all agree will meet the demands of the position admirably. Gerry has written for the *SFRA Review* in the past, namely an article entitled "Ecology 101" in issue [#314](#). I for one am looking forward to working with both Keren and Gerry on this year's instalments of the *SFRA Review*, and am excited about the new developments that they will usher in over the forthcoming year.

This edition of the *Review* features a 101 article by Clare Vassallo, Victor Grech and Ivan Callus entitled "Infertility in Science Fiction as a Feminist Issue". This paper offers short and useful descriptions of a range of feminist approaches to the theme in science fiction.

Alongside this article we have our regular series of non-fiction, fiction and media reviews. We have one fiction review in this edition, but it is a review of Nnedi Okorafor's *Binti: Home*, the author of whom is our keynote speaker at [the SFRA 2017 conference](#), held this year at Riverside, California. We do have additional non-fiction and media reviews in this issue, too, including reviews of the films *Arrival* and *Star Trek Beyond*, the TV series *Westworld* and *Brain-Dead*, and the game *Aurion: Legacy of the Kori-Odan*.

As for non-fiction, we have reviews of Jack Fennell's *Irish Science Fiction*, Phillip E. Wegner's *Shockwaves of Possibility: Essays on Science fiction, Globalization, and Utopia*, Van Ikin and Damien Broderick's *Other Spacetimes: Interviews with Speculative Fiction Writers*, Michael Grantham's *The Transhuman Antihero: Paradoxical Protagonists of Science Fiction from Mary Shelley to Richard Morgan*, and Simon Riches' *The Philosophy of David Cronenberg*.

As always, it is a pleasure to feature reviews from long-standing contributors and new members alike,

and it's an absolute pleasure to see reviews from colleagues that I had the pleasure of meeting for the first time at the various SFRA conferences I've attended. I would like to encourage anyone who is interested to get in contact with either [myself](#), or one of our review editors, should you be interested in writing a review for the SFRA.

We are also interested in hearing about any events or conferences that you have attended and that you feel other members would benefit from knowing more about. Please do get in touch with me should you wish to write a conference or event report, an account of some research that you're conducting at an archive, or news about a new research project that you're beginning. As always, interviews with authors and scholars or "Feature 101" articles introducing some aspect of science fiction scholarship are always welcome. Should you have any ideas about other articles - for example, artistic projects - please do get in contact with me, and encourage students, colleagues, acquaintances and friends to contribute to the *Review*!

SFRA Business

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Muddy Waters

Keren Omry

I WISH TO BEGIN my first column as SFRA President with an expression of the gratitude, appreciation, and – I confess – discomfort that I've been feeling for the few months since being nominated, through to being elected, to now taking office. Gratitude at the confidence your support demonstrates in my ability to perform the duties of SFRA presidency; appreciation that you care enough about the Association and its vision to cast your vote and make your voice heard; and discomfort at the glaringly obvious fact that – all this support notwithstanding – I was, ahem, the only one running for the job. Let me stop here and clarify: this paucity in candidates was certainly not for lack of good people more than happy to chip in. Rather, we've dipped into an odd generation gap in the SFRA where members have often either

Incoming Vice-President's Statement

Gerry Canavan

already contributed above and beyond the call of duty or are so new as to render any such commitment simply premature.

And so as the new Executive Committee wraps its head around our new roles, one of our first items of business is to step up membership and gradually liven up activity to better serve the SFRA community. We hope eventually to transform our various gatherings, digital and live, into an energetic hub of SF activity that'll ensure a steady influx of members.

Luckily I couldn't have asked for a better group of people to work with. We've got the perfect mix of experience, creativity, and diligence, with just the right balance of comic timing and sense of humor to make the next few years as enjoyable and productive as one could hope for. I'm happy to report we've managed to cross the four time zones that separate us, we've rolled up our sleeves, screwed our heads on just right, and are good to go.

I'm delighted to report we already have one significant achievement from our first month of activity, which I am very proud of. After some toing and froing we have arrived at what we agree is a satisfactory document that formalizes and outlines the SFRA Code of Conduct. This Code reflects the uncompromising need to preserve academic and individual freedoms while also acknowledging the growing demand to clearly define acceptable and unacceptable norms of behavior in the public arena, in general, and SFRA-related activities, in particular. This document will be published on the upcoming conference page and on the SFRA site.

Navigating the increasingly muddy waters of personal liberty, freedom of expression, and mutual respect has become an urgent imperative at a time when the very basis of democracy and many of the values so many of us share and treasure are facing deep crisis, worldwide. We in the SF community have the privilege and the practice to imagine alternate histories, build imagined futures, and offer keen insights into the present. As the incoming president of the SFRA I shall do my utmost to ensure our Association rises to meet these challenges, inspiring ever more of the kind of ground breaking, perceptive, and utterly timely SF scholarship, which our community has long been proud to produce.

I'M SO HONORED to begin my term as vice president of the SFRA and am grateful to have been entrusted with this opportunity.

One of my key responsibilities as vice president will be outreach. I look forward to working with our community to promote our scholarship in these incredibly bizarre (and bizarrely science fictional) times. I will be working with Pawel Frelik and Andrew Ferguson to increase the profile of the SFRA on social media, especially on the Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/sfresearchassociation/>) and on Twitter (@sfranews). If you are a user of Facebook, please like our page, and then like and share our updates when they are interesting to you; this will not only insure that our updates appear in your feed but help spread the word about our work to your friends and contacts as well. If you are a user of Twitter, please follow us, and please retweet us when you see something relevant to your interests.

I will be reading [SFRA-L](#) to find things to tweet and post, but I may miss something; if you have a CFP or something similar you'd like me to consider advertising on @sfranews or on Facebook, please feel free to DM me on either those services or send an email to gerry.canavan@marquette.edu.

Another key location for outreach, of course, is the new SFRA website at <https://sfra.wildapricot.org>. I have been getting up to speed with Wild Apricot and will be diving into site expansion and editing soon. If there's something you'd like to see at the site – or something you'd like to see updated or amended – please send me or any of the other officers a message and we'll put it on our agenda.

I'm really looking forward to catching up with many of you this June at Riverside. Please check out the 2017 Call for Papers at <http://www.sfra.org/SFRA-Annual-Conference> (deadline March 31, 2017), and please pass the CFP on to scholars who you think might be interested in contributing! Word of mouth remains the most important means by which we spread the word about SFRA.

Infertility in Science Fiction as a Feminist Issue

Clare Vassallo, Victor Grech and Ivan Callus

Introduction: Feminism and Fertility

ALTHOUGH MYTHOLOGICAL FIGURES such as the Amazonian female warrior might encourage us to think that feminism is as old as mythology,¹ feminism as a political stance through which the personal came to be perceived as political and which highlighted patriarchal structures and ideology as systematically making the female of the human species seem inferior to the male, is a relatively recent phenomenon. Despite some important 19th century works, we can claim that feminism as a political and critical movement came into its own after WWII.

Literary feminism brings together a range of approaches to textual analysis. These include the critique of patriarchal language and tropes, addressing the historical disappearance of women writers, the authorial voice of women, and the increasing presence of women in the canon and in genres formally dominated by male writers. Some of these approaches, such as Marxist Feminism, have privileged the realist novel as a locus of analysis and have delved into the relationship between literature and life, perceiving representation of women, attitudes towards women, and the language of the text as reflective of socially constructed gender-biased attitudes between the sexes at various historical moments.²

The sub-genre of feminist science fiction with an emphasis on fertility explores the roles of women and men by examining social constructions and the enforcement of gender roles with particular refer-

ence to the inequalities of personal and political power that are dictated by one's gender. Feminist SF often delves into these themes by contrasting two opposed approaches: utopias and dystopias. The former tends towards narrative worlds in which gender differences are nonexistent, as in single-sex worlds, whereas dystopias tend towards the extrapolation of patriarchal structures taken to extremes. Since SF is a genre closely connected to realist social concerns, its critical and innovative centre is more likely to be found in its themes and content rather than in its formal structures, which tend to follow fairly conventional narratological patterns.

Feminism and fertility are inextricably intertwined. Varying viewpoints on the relationship between the political and the physical can be plotted in a typology of different feminisms with an eye to fertility and related issues. Broad feminist categories can be outlined along the following axis:

Liberal feminism identifies its roots with Mary Wollstonecraft and John Stuart Mill, seeking equality of the two sexes due to the fear that the different treatment of women that may lead to the stereotyping of roles and to marginalization, typically through marriage. Pregnancy is viewed as a disability, while new reproductive technologies are welcomed as augmenting female choice. Men are therefore involved as in statements such as 'we are pregnant' but this, on the other hand, implies male appropriation of the female body.

Matriarchal/matrifocal feminism revels in the ways in which women differ from men and therefore celebrates pregnancy as an identity-conferring condition. Infertility treatments are viewed with suspicion as they are seen as patriarchal techniques that medicalize and dominate the body.³ Interestingly, Peggy Robin (1993) points out that 85% of women seeking infertility treatment were attended by male physicians.⁴

Postmodern feminists are arguably the least concerned with these issues. By regarding 'femaleness' as a socially constructed category, they study the ways in which class, race, and other factors, such as gender, construct the female 'body'. **French Femi-**

1 Robin Hard, *The Routledge Handbook of Greek Mythology*. London: Routledge, 2004. p. 263.

2 On this point, and on the broader relationship between literature and feminism, see Pam Morris, *Literature and Feminism*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1993., and also Mary Eagleton *Feminist Literary Criticism*. Harlow: Longman, 1996., for a range of debates on literature, literary criticism and feminism in the 20th century. The relationship between science fiction and women's lives is also discussed in Sarah Lefanu's Introduction to Joanna Russ, *To Write Like a Woman: Essays in Feminism and Science Fiction*. Bloomington: Indiana U.P., 1995. Feminism, fertility and SF are discussed in an essay by Joanna Russ, 'Amor Vincit Foeminam: The Battle of the Sexes in Science Fiction', in *To Write Like a Woman*, pp. 41–59.

3 Gena Corea, *The Mother Machine: Reproductive Technologies from Artificial Insemination to Artificial Wombs*. New York: Harper and Row, 1985.

4 Peggy Robin, *How to Be a Successful Fertility Patient: Your Guide to Getting the Best Possible Medical Help to Have a Baby*. Scranton: Harper Collins, 1993.

nism is also less concerned with the body and more focussed on issues of style and voice in writing, indicating that a feminine style does not necessarily indicate a female writer.

Foucauldian feminists view the most dangerous forms of control as those that are ubiquitous and so pervasive that they are assumed and deeply internalized such that these strictures appear disconnected from any form of overt displays of power, and indeed, may even disguise themselves as forms of liberation and choice. This may include relatively innocuous and ostensibly helpful state surrogates, such as home health visitors after delivery, as the state has a stake in the health of both mother and child, with confinement here having a double meaning.

Feminism and SF

The 1970s was the decade in which feminism in science fiction flourished. This is the genre that, arguably, produced some of the most interesting examples of feminist fiction. Carl Freedman's review of Marleen S. Barr's *Future Females: The Next Generation* (2000) brings into steady focus the fact that the intertwining of feminism and science fiction was flourishing long before the literary institutions and feminist critics paid it any attention. The popular, rather than academic, status long attributed to SF meant that works which today are considered central to the symbiosis of feminism and SF were ignored for at least a decade after their publication.

In an ironic development, it was the women writers of SF who were instrumental in bringing SF to academic critical recognition. As these new writers of SF brought mainstream themes of race, gender and class, elaborated through the canonical fictional devices of utopias and dystopias through a feminist point of view to the genre their works began to impinge on critical notice. The genre, which was previously associated mainly with interplanetary warfare, medieval looking worlds with anachronistic weapons set in future time/space scenarios and which seemed to have little relevance to the present conditions of humanity and of writing, was suddenly involved with the same themes that more 'literary' texts were developing.

In addition, as writers who had already received critical attention through non-SF novels, such as Ursula K. Le Guin, known for her work in fantasy, and Margaret Atwood, well-known for award winning

novels which were fully based in the 'real' world, began to write SF, the attention of the academy was engaged. These 'cross-over' writers were instrumental in drawing the critical gaze to the genre of science fiction.

Utopian and Dystopian Narratives

Two of the most notable novels detailing feminist utopias are Le Guin's *Left Hand of Darkness* (1969) 'which, through a radical imagining of human life without gender, explores gender as a cultural construction that is at once coercive and contingent',⁵ and Russ's *The Female Man* (1975) 'which focuses on the struggle to establish lesbian and feminist identities and sexualities within the constraints of a culture of compulsory heterosexuality'.⁶ Both are novels of the golden age of 70s feminist SF. In *The Female Man*, 'characters refuse the reader's search for innocent wholeness while granting the wish for heroic quests, exuberant eroticism, and serious politics'. The book deals with four women who hail from different worlds: Jeannine whose world revolves around marriage, Joanna who is experiencing a feminist revolution but is still expected to orient herself around men, Janet who lives in a women-only world as men have been killed off centuries before by a plague, and Jael, an assassin who lives in a world where the two sexes wage a cold war. These individuals are 'four versions of one genotype, all of whom meet, but even taken together do not make a whole, resolve the dilemmas of violent moral action, or remove the growing scandal of gender'.⁷

Feminist dystopias create societies wherein gender inequities are actually exaggerated and intensified, and perhaps Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1986) quintessentially embodies the ultimate of such possible dystopias. Inevitably, feminist dystopian fiction has also described a turning of the tables as in the 1905 short story, *The Sultana's Dream*, by Rokeya Sakhawat Hussain which portrays an alternate, crime-free world where men exist in a state of gender-reversed purdah.

Vonda McIntyre visualises fertility as a feminist contraceptive issue, and in *Dreamsnake* (1978) and

5 Wendy Gay Pearson and others eds., *Queer Universes: Sexualities in Science Fiction*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2010. p. 5.

6 Wendy Gay Pearson, p. 5.

7 Donna J. Haraway. *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*. London: Free Association Books, 1991. p. 178.

Superluminal (1984), she visualises both male and female fertility as a voluntary individual decision through a form of auto-control. The latter helps 're-define the pleasures and politics of embodiment and feminist writing. In a fiction where no character is 'simply' human, human status is highly problematic', as humanity is transformed by 'bionic implants, [...] virus vectors carrying a new developmental code, by transplant surgery, by implants of microelectronic devices, by analogue doubles, and other means.'⁸

In Frank Herbert's magnum opus *Dune* (1965), female fertility control is taken even further through the semi-religious, hereditary, female-only group known as the 'Bene Gesserit' who can also determine the gender of their offspring. They also play a byzantine game of politics through a breeding program spanning a millennium in order to produce a hyper-evolved but male mental adept. *Dune* also portrays a member of the nobility who is an offshoot of this breeding program and who is described as being a genetic eunuch, presumably implying a male who is born sterile. It is worth mentioning at this point that the long-term breeding of various species, both humans on Earth and aliens on other planets, is also the main theme behind what is probably the most famous space opera of all time, Smith's *Lensman* series. In true Stapledonian fashion, the story begins two thousand million years prior to contemporary events, when a benevolent alien race commences the breeding of several intelligent species in order to hand over the guardianship of the very universe in the face of an implacable and evil alien invasion of the universe.⁹ An unresolved plot element in the last book of the series concerns the ultimate development of this breeding program, five children, four of whom are women, who cannot possibly find anyone interesting enough to mate with, potentially resulting in their infertility.¹⁰

Yet another aspect of extreme physiological control of pregnancy is depicted in Iain M. Bank's *Excession* (1996), set in the *Culture* universe, where a human female carries a deliberately arrested gestation for years. Interestingly, female sexuality has also been utilised as a form of projectile weapon in Barker's SF-fantasy pastiche *Weaveworld* (1987).

8 Donna J. Haraway, p. 180.

9 E.E. Smith, 'Triplanetary', *Amazing Stories*, January–April 1934.

10 E.E. Smith, 'Children of the Lens', *Astounding Science Fiction*, November 1947–February 1948.

Barker describes an ancient humanity that could access magic, but as science asserted its dominance, these individuals retreated to secret hideaways. A female renegade uses her magical powers, including the 'menstruum', to attempt to rule the seerkind or destroy them.¹¹ In a more practical vein, in Bujold's *Vorkosigan* universe, women who have had a contraceptive implant wear a distinguishing earring to state that they are consenting and contraceptive-protected adults.

Totalitarian Ideology and Fertility

The political vision of dystopian literature is often linked to totalitarian regimes in which the individual becomes a pawn of the state or of a ruling elite, and demographics an issue to be decided and determined by the state rather than the individual. Margaret Atwood highlights the politics of female fertility in the fictional world of *The Handmaid's Tale* by typically linking real world events to the fictionalized future scenario. In her 2011 publication *In Other Worlds: SF and the Human Imagination*, she explains:

My rules for *The Handmaid's Tale* were simple: I would not put into this book anything that humankind had not already done, somewhere, sometime, or for which it did not already have the tools. (2001: 88)

One of the reasons that feminism has flourished in SF, as previously mentioned, is the possibility of imagining worlds in which gender constructed differences cease to exist, sometimes, as in the case of single gendered imaginary worlds, because there is only one type of human. Fictional utopias provide the freedom within which to construct, to use Le Guin's term, 'thought experiments' that can play with combinations or absences that would blend or remove all gender imbalance and unfairness as perceived by contemporary women and men readers. Dystopias, on the other hand, provide the impetus to project possible outcomes that can be more harmful and more restrictive for women in different scenarios. Politically, these scenarios tend to be totalitarian regimes of different kinds, including the conservative Puritan theocracy imagined as the future for the US

11 *Menstruum* is actually Latin for a solvent, specifically one used in extracting compounds from plant and animal tissues for the preparation of drugs. Clive Barker, *Weaveworld*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1987.

as conceived by Atwood. Such a society might revoke the liberation from gender expectations which contemporary women have begun to take for granted. Atwood asks:

How thin is the ice on which supposedly “liberated” modern Western women stand? How far can they go? How much trouble are they in? What’s down there is they fall?

And further: If you were attempting a totalitarian takeover of the United States, how would you do it? What form would such a government assume, and what flag would it fly? How much social instability would it take before people would renounce their hard-won civil liberties in a tradeoff for “safety”? And, since most totalitarianisms we know have attempted to control reproduction one way or another – limiting births, demanding births, specifying who can marry who and who owns the kids – how would that motif play off for women? (2001: 87)

Both utopian and dystopian fiction, particularly in the case of SF, provide the author with a construct through which to critique the present, while proposing a possible prediction of a future. Just as one of the essential generic features of ‘hard’ SF is that the science in the worlds is ‘real’ science, known in the present and extrapolated into the future as in the case of teleporting humans, portals, space travel, and so on, then one of the generic features of utopian/dystopian fiction is the similar device of taking a trend in the present and ‘arriving via logic at a prophetic truth.’¹² The truth arrived at in a manner typical of the novelist, whose ‘business,’ Le Guin reminds us, ‘is lying.’ Precisely the definition of the poetic that Aristotle provided in the earliest discussion of genre, the *Poetics*, in which he separated the writing of history from the writing of poetry precisely on the point that poetry can provide us with the greater truth of the possible ways things can happen, whereas history only speaks of the particulars of what has been. ‘Poetry,’ he says, ‘is a more philosophical and serious business than history; for poetry speaks of universals, history of particulars.’¹³

12 Margaret Atwood, *In Other Worlds: SF and the Human Imagination*. London: Virago, 2001, p. 122.

13 Aristotle, *Poetics*, trans. by Gerald F. Else. Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1967. 1994, p.33.

Atwood was called to defend her tale of forced fertility based on biblical ritual as a school text book. She wrote a letter to schools in which she explained,

The sexual point in my book would seem to be that all totalitarianisms try to control sex and reproduction one way or another. Many have forbidden inter-racial and inter-class unions. Some have tried to limit childbirth, other have tried to enforce it. It was a common practice for slave owners to rape their slaves, for the simple purpose of making more slaves. And so on. (2001: 244)

In Atwood we seem to have a combination of history and fiction, which gives rise to a chillingly possible future for the West, and in some other parts of the world a reality in the present, in which women’s control over their bodies and their fertility is denied them in the name of patriarchal structures and religious norms.

Cyborgs and Feminist SF

Female sexual fulfilment is also explored in feminist narratives such as Piercy’s *He, She, and It* (1991), where an android, a re-creation of the equivalent of a Golem by two Jewish scientists, becomes a being who ‘transgresses not only the conventional boundary between human and machine, but between male and female as well.’ His programming is such that he ‘derives his pleasure primarily from pleasing his partner,’ a being whose ‘marvellous organ is scrupulously clean.’ His ‘entire body is free of the kind of physical imperfections that characterize human men.’ However, this android ‘differs substantially from Haraway’s notion that the problematic gender of the cyborg is considerably more “dangerous” than that of the sensitive male, whose very androgyny may in fact involve an attempt subtly to appropriate power,’ and also imbricates the trope of the sanitation of sex, a common element in cyberpunk with its technological appropriation and misappropriation, ‘a phenomenon embodied, for example, in the distaste for ‘meat things’ shown by many of Gibson’s male characters.’¹⁴

The converse is Asimov’s *Satisfaction Guaranteed* (1951), a short robot story which depicts an experi-

14 M. Keith Booker, ‘Woman on the Edge of a Genre: The Feminist Dystopias of Marge Piercy,’ *Science Fiction Studies*, 21 (1994), 337–350 (p. 347–348).

mental humanoid household robot that is fashioned in a very handsome male form. The robot is placed with a woman whose husband works for the robot's manufacturing company. The robot comes to the realisation that she has low self-esteem and attempts to redress this by redecorating his mistress's house and by giving her a make-over through the use of cosmetics and other artifices. At the end of the story, he deliberately allows her neighbours to see him, a strange and handsome male, kiss her, thereby elevating her social status.

In both of the above stories, sex of any kind with any sort of robot, will naturally not result in pregnancy.

Women-Only Worlds

Women-only worlds abound, and may be viewed as extreme feminist utopias. Only three famous narratives will be highlighted as examples of this subtrope.

Tiptree's most famous award winning and reprinted story is *Houston, Houston, Do You Read?* (1976), and this depicts a plague that wipes out most human life, with only 11,000 survivors, all female, who continued the species by repeatedly cloning these original 11,000 genotypes. A group of males who return to Earth from space are killed so as to avoid disturbing the harmonious paradise that Earth has become in the absence of the male of the species.

Similarly, Russ's *When It Changed* (1972) depicts the return of males to the women-only world of *Whileaway*. This society is stable and peaceful and women see the return of the men as a return to tyranny and oppression of the past, and yet, men assume that they will be eventually made welcome, even if their return is forcefully imposed.

One of the more recent, women-only worlds has been described by Doris Lessing, and in *The Cleft* (2007), an ancient community of women have no knowledge of men, and childbirth is regulated by the cycles of the moon. This feminist *utopia* is disrupted by the birth of boys.

Discussion

As we have shown above, the single-gendered trope is often used to explore utopian (usually feminist) scenarios or dystopias. Power is enmeshed in all of these discourses, whether feminist or otherwise, as argued by Foucault: '(i) that power is co-extensive with the social body; there are no spaces of primal liberty between the meshes of its network; (ii) that

relations of power are interwoven with other kinds of relations (production, kinship, family, sexuality)'.¹⁵ This is particularly so in sexual relations wherein interpersonal relationships achieve greatest intricacy and intensity, and are hence particularly susceptible to the mechanisms of power

Fertility and reproduction play key roles in defining gender, and the control of one's fertility is a central theme in feminist manifestos, as pregnancy and childrearing are often used to subordinate women, although Foucault has argued that such 'power is not evil. Power is games of strategy [...] let us take sexual or amorous relationships: to wield power over the other in a sort of open-ended strategic game where the situation may be reversed is not evil; it's a part of love, of passion and sexual pleasure.'¹⁶ This notion of productive power gives rise to the subjects over whom, and through whom, power structures enmesh us all – both in fictional and in actual worlds.

It has been remarked that some feminist critics have exaggerated the role of feminism in SF, thereby excessively slandering the male of the species. For example, Anne K. Mellor has portrayed Frankenstein as the archetypal:

[s]cientist who analyzes, manipulates, and attempts to control nature unconsciously engages in a form of oppressive sexual politics. Construing nature as the female Other, he attempts to make nature serve his own ends, to gratify his own desires for power, wealth, and reputation. (1989: 112)

This positioning superficially ignores the existence of female scientists who have objectives, desires, goals and ambitions identical to male scientists.

It is more reasonable to state that SF allows us to perform thought experiments that create altogether different utopias, as conventional utopias are often similar to Moore's *Utopia*, 'where equality is emphasized above all else, even to the point of suppression of individual liberty and imposition of a potentially oppressive conformity, [...], and despite his imagination, Moore's *Utopia* is still a strongly patriarchal

15 Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge – Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*, ed. by Colin Gordon, trans. by Colin Gordon and others. New York: Pantheon, 1980. p. 142.

16 Michel Foucault, *Ethics Subjectivity and Truth: Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984 Vol. 1*, ed. by Paul Rabinow. New York: The New Press, 1994. p. 298.

society.¹⁷

In these ways, SF forces us into a deliberate consideration of where our actions, through a diversity of choices, might lead us, and perhaps guide us toward decisions that yield the greatest good for the many without pitting one gender against the other.

Works Cited Primary Texts

- Aristotle. *Poetics*, trans. by Gerald F. Else. Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1967, 1994.
- Asimov, Issac. 'Satisfaction Guaranteed', *Amazing Stories*, April 1951.
- Atwood, Margaret. *The Handmaid's Tale*. London: Jonathan Cape, 1986.
- Atwood, Margaret. *In Other Worlds: SF and the Human Imagination*. London: Virago, 2001.
- Banks, Iain M. *Excession*. New York: Bantam 1996.
- Booker, Keith M. 'Woman on the Edge of a Genre: The Feminist Dystopias of Marge Piercy', *Science Fiction Studies*, 21 (1994), pp. 337–350.
- Barker, Clive. *Weaveworld*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1987.
- Barr, Marleen, S. *Future Females: The Next Generation*. Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2000.
- Bujold, Lois McMaster. *A Civil Campaign*. New York: Baen Books, 1999.
- Corea, Gena. *The Mother Machine: Reproductive Technologies from Artificial Insemination to Artificial Wombs*. New York: Harper and Row, 1985.
- Eagleton, Mary. *Feminist Literary Criticism*. Harlow: Longman, 1996.
- Foucault, Michel. *Power/Knowledge – Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*, ed. by Colin Gordon, trans. by Colin Gordon and others. New York: Pantheon, 1980.
- Foucault, Michel. *Ethics Subjectivity and Truth: Essential Works of Foucault 1954–1984 Vol. 1*, ed. by Paul Rabinow. New York: The New Press, 1994.
- Haraway, Donna J. *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*. London: Free Association Books, 1991. p. 178.
- Hard, Robin. *The Routledge Handbook of Greek Mythology*. London: Routledge, 2004.
- Herbert, Frank. *Dune*. New York: Ace Books, 1965.
- Hussain, Rokeya Sakhawat. 'The Sultana's Dream', *The Indian Ladies Magazine of Madras*. Madras: 1905.
- Lefanu, Sarah. 'Introduction' Joanna Russ, *To Write Like a Woman: Essays in Feminism and Science Fiction*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995. pp. vii-xii.
- Le Guin, Ursula K. *The Left Hand of Darkness*. 40th Anniversary Edition. London: Orbit, (1969), 2009.
- Lessing, Doris. *The Cleft*. New York: HarperCollins, 2007.
- McIntyre, Vonda. *Dreamsnake*. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1978.
- McIntyre, Vonda. *Superluminal*. New York: Pocket Books, 1984.
- Mellor, Anne K. *Mary Shelley: Her Life, Her Fiction, Her Monsters*. New York: Routledge, 1989.
- Moore, Thomas. *Utopia*. Leuven, 1516.
- Morris, Pam. *Literature and Feminism*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1993.
- Pearson, Wendy Gay, and others, eds. *Queer Universes: Sexualities in Science Fiction*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2010.
- Robin, Peggy. *How to Be a Successful Fertility Patient: Your Guide to Getting the Best Possible Medical Help to Have a Baby*. Scranton: Harper Collins, 1993.
- Piercy, Marge. *He, She, and It*. New York: Fawcett Crest, 1991.
- Russ, Joanna. 'When It Changed', in *Again, Dangerous Visions Book 2*, ed. by Harlan Ellison. New York: Doubleday, 1972.
- Russ, Joanna. *The Female Man*. New York: Bantam, 1975.
- Russ, Joanna. 'Amor Vincit Foeminam: The Battle of the Sexes in Science Fiction', in *To Write Like a Woman: Essays in Feminism and Science Fiction*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995). pp. 41–59.
- Smith, E.E. 'Triplanetary', *Amazing Stories* (January–April 1934).
- Smith, E.E. 'Children of the Lens', *Astounding Science Fiction* (November 1947–February 1948).
- Tiptree, James Jr. 'Houston, Houston, Do You Read', in *Aurora: Beyond Equality*, ed. by Vonda N. McIntyre and Susan J. Anderson. New York: Fawcett Crest, 1976.

¹⁷ Booker, pp. 337–338.

The Philosophy of David Cronenberg

Dominick Grace

Simon Riches, ed. *The Philosophy of David Cronenberg*. Lexington: U of Kentucky P, 2012. Hardback, 232 pages, \$40.00. ISBN 978-0-8131-3604-2 \$40.00 epub ISBN 978-0-8131-4060-5.

Order option(s): [Hard](#) | [Kindle](#)

SIMON RICHES'S collection of essays on philosophical issues and the films of David Cronenberg is a welcome addition to the University of Kentucky Press's Philosophy of Popular Culture series. Riches has gathered thirteen original essays in three sections: "Body Horror and Bodily Transformation" (Colin McFinn, "The Fly and the Human: Ironies of Disgust"; Cynthia Freeland, "Tragedy and Terrible Beauty in *A History of Violence* and *Eastern Promises*"; Peter Ludlow, "Cronenberg as Scientist: Antiessentialism, Sex as Remixing, and the View from Nowhere"; and Paul F. Snowdon, "What Happens to Brundle? Problems of Teleportation and Personal Identity in *The Fly*"), "Psychology, Skepticism, and the Self" (Duncan Pritchard, "eXistenZial Angst"; Keith Allen, "'Freaks of Nature': Extrasensory Perception and the Paranormal in the Films of David Cronenberg"; Riches, "Deception and Disorder: Unraveling Cronenberg's Divided Minds"; Daniel Shaw, "Psychological Determinism in the Films of David Cronenberg"; and Daniel Moseley, "Self-Creation, Identity, and Authenticity: A Study of *A History of Violence*"), and "Words and Worldviews" (Graham Stevens, "The Fiction of Truth in Fiction: Some Reflections on Semantics and *eXistenZ*"; Brook R. W. Pearson, "Re(ct)ifying empty Speech: Cronenberg and the Problem of the First Person"; R. Barton Palmer, "The Politics of Mad Science in *The Fly* and *Dead Ringers*"; and Jones Irwin, "From 'Impassioned Morality' to 'Bloodless Agnosticism': A Philosophy of David Cronenberg through the Burroughs/Ballard Axis"). Several senior and prolific academics are represented here, and though few have written on Cronenberg before, most of the essays here nevertheless engage valuably with his

canon.

Or with most of it, anyway. Some films get considerably more attention than others. Of the articles that reference films in their titles, three identify *The Fly* (1986), two *A History of Violence* (2005), two *eXistenZ* (1999); two other films—*Dead Ringers* (1988) and *Eastern Promises* (2007)—are referenced one time each. Most of Cronenberg's films do receive attention in the book, but several films are under-represented. *The Brood* (1979) receives only four references and no sustained attention, *Rabid* (1977) just over half a dozen mentions—about the same representation afforded to Cronenberg's Stephen King adaptation *The Dead Zone* (1983) (8 references) and David Hwang adaptation *M. Butterfly* (1993) (7 references, one of which is substantial). This is not necessarily a failing; authors must focus where they feel appropriate, and no book on Cronenberg can devote equal space to every film and stay at a manageable length. It is, however, suggestive. Two of the largely ignored films predate Cronenberg's emergence as a lionized auteur and director of prestige films, and one of the others is derived from about as popular a pop culture figure as can be imagined. The book tends to pin its discussions on Cronenberg's later films and on his more literarily respectable adaptations (*M. Butterfly* being the exception). *The Fly* is also something of an exception, being adapted from a 1950s movie and one of Cronenberg's more overtly visceral efforts, but it was also a mainstream success, even winning an Oscar (for make-up). Nevertheless, even today, there is some reluctance to address Cronenberg's earlier work.

This is a pity, as these early films are worth study and fit very well into the interests of this book. Given the second section's focus on psychological approaches to Cronenberg's work, for instance, the almost complete lack of discussion of *The Brood*—a film about a (fictional) psychotherapy—seems a missed opportunity. Only Shaw speaks of the film more than in passing, and his discussion amounts primarily to a summary of the film rather than an analysis. Similarly, *Rabid* is an obvious film to consider in discussion of Cronenberg's interest in matters of identity, of agency, and of science, not to mention sex, but it is largely overlooked in the several papers that address such topics. Indeed, given the frequent accusations of misogyny directed against Cronenberg (mentioned here a few times), the absence of a feminist critique of Cronenberg from this

book is surprising.

In short, some of these papers do not engage as deeply or specifically with Cronenberg as one might expect. Several seem more interested in teasing out their philosophical interests than engaging with the films; that is, many of the papers use Cronenberg as the basis of more general philosophical speculations rather than using particular philosophical points of view to read Cronenberg. Snowden, for instance, uses *The Fly* as the basis of an engaging discussion of the nature of identity, but much of what he says has less to do with *The Fly* than with the underlying implications of teleportation and how it might work, which shifts the focus from Cronenberg to philosophical speculation, while Stevens's reflections on semantics, interesting as they are, don't really need *eXistenZ* to be of interest. This might be a function of the fact that most of the authors here are primarily philosophers rather than film critics, and most have not published on Cronenberg before, so may not have a depth of knowledge about Cronenberg to match their depth of knowledge about philosophy (the general paucity of references to existing Cronenberg scholarship would support such an inference). At times the papers make observations that suggest the authors are insufficiently grounded in Cronenberg's *oeuvre* or the generic conventions with which he works. For instance, Palmer's comment on how the "practical applications Brundle's [teleportation] device [in *The Fly*] might have are unclear at best" (189) is baffling (does a Science Fiction film *really* need to spell out what the practical applications of teleportation would be?), and his suggestion that Brundle might be interested in overcoming "the inescapable materiality of bodies" (189) seems to miss the fundamental point: one does *not* escape from the materiality of the body via teleportation. *Videodrome* (1983) or *eXistenZ* offer far more likely candidates for such a discussion, but Palmer refers only to *Videodrome* and barely addresses that film. While the materiality of the body is a pervasive Cronenberg theme, Palmer's discussion here does not convince.

Nevertheless, several of the essays, including Palmer's, are strong and provide compelling insights into Cronenberg's work. For instance, Palmer's linkage of Cronenberg to Robert Louis Stevenson's *Jekyll and Hyde* helps illuminate the former's treatment of doubleness and monstrous transformation. Several of the papers deal with questions of identity—the divided mind, the nature of the "I" and so on—and

these make for consistently insightful interventions. Riches's careful parsing of several films as they explore the divided mind is especially insightful, and Moseley's close readings of *A History of Violence* and *Eastern Promises* narrows the focus down to two films while also demonstrating how these two films nevertheless are of a piece with Cronenberg's canon, despite not being horror or SF.

These essays are also consistently and refreshingly readable. While this is unquestionably an academic book, the authors have produced papers that not only academics but general readers, including undergraduate students, should be able to navigate with little difficulty. These papers manage to be intellectually penetrating but also accessible.

Overall, this is a worthwhile collection. It demonstrates that Cronenberg is a thoughtful filmmaker whose work has dense and complex ideological underpinnings. It demonstrates, as well, that there is still considerable room for further explorations of Cronenberg's philosophy/ies.

Other Spacetimes: Interviews with Speculative Fiction Writers

Zahra Jannessari Ladani

Van Ikin and Damien Broderick, eds. *Other Spacetimes: Interviews with Speculative Fiction Writers*. Rockville: Wildside Press LLC., 2015. Paperback, 251 pages, \$14.99, ISBN 978-1-4794-0731-6.

Order option(s): [Paper](#)

OTHER SPACETIMES: INTERVIEWS WITH SPECULATIVE FICTION WRITERS is a collection of interviews with twenty-five Australian writers, mostly interviewed by Van Ikin (and on occasion by Steven Paulsen, Marianne de Pierre, and Helen Merrick) and edited by Damien Broderick. Ikin, editor of *Science Fiction: A Review of Speculative Fiction* since 1977, has a brilliant academic background in SF and fantasy, and is the winner of the inaugural A. Bertram Chandler Memorial Award, Australia's premier award for lifetime achievement in science fiction (7). *Other Spacetimes* is Broderick's fourth collaboration with Ikin after *Warriors of the Tao* (2011), *Xeno*

Fiction (2013), and *Fantastika at the Edge of Reality* (2014), all also published by Wildside and containing valuable essays on SF and speculative fiction. As a new contribution, *Other Spacetimes* is an attempt to restore and maintain the Australian heritage of speculative fiction by posing the question of who “these authors” were “and what has become of them over the years and decades since their interviews” (8). Broderick has collected the interviews from *Science Fiction: A Review of Speculative Literature*, *Aurealis: Australian Fantasy and Science Fiction*, and other literary magazines such as *Eidolon*, *Sirius*, *Phlogiston*, and *Imago*.

As for his selection of pieces for this collection, Broderick states in the introduction that Peter Carey and Lee Harding did not permit the reprint of their interviews for different reasons. Broderick also provides a brief overview of the achievements and writing career of each of the authors interviewed by Ikin, and in the concluding remarks of the introduction, he vividly depicts his constellation of interviews as “ikinographies” and “claw marks in the foothills of spacetime” (15). Chronologically arranged, the stable of the interviewed authors includes George Turner (1978), Frank Bryning (1979), Phillip Mann (1987), Beverly Macdonald (1996), Traci Harding (1997), Charles E. Hulley (1997), Rick Kennett (1997), Dirk Strasser (1997), Sean Williams (1997), Kate Forsyth (1998), Richard Harland (1998), Simon Brown (1998), Stephen Dedman (1998), Michael Pryor (1999), Cory Daniells (2000), Maxine McArthur (2000), Sean McMullen (2000), Lucy Sussex (2000), Tess Williams (2000), Bernard Cohen (2001), Ian Irvine (2001), Terry Dowling (2002), Cameron Rogers (2003), Hal Colebatch (2004), and Paul Collins (2005).

As the above list indicates, Ikin’s interviewees are Australian writers of SF and fantasy. Most of the interviews were conducted based on a number of questions about the process and mechanics of writing and style, the writers’ life experience and its impact on their creation of new spacetimes, their academic background and the direction it gave to their writing career, the procedures of dealing with agents and publishers, and public reaction to their works. The interviewees also discuss their personal views on literary conventions, genres, and elements alongside diverse subject matters encompassing family life, society, economics, religion, politics, history, gender, etc.

Although Ikin et al. ask almost the same round of questions in all interviews, each interview turns out to be a different piece depending on the diverse characteristics of each interviewee. Some firmly believe in a divide between SF and fantasy, and give a special technical and theoretical slant to their talk on SF criticism, hard core SF, and SF elements. Turner’s emphasis on the improvement of critical standards among Australian fan writers, Bryning’s “matter of scientific accuracy” (38), and Mann’s “alienade” as a critique of human deficiencies are cases in point. Another interesting case is McArthur, who lacked the necessary scientific background for writing SF but compensated for that by studying *Einstein for Beginners* (1979) and other relevant texts. Others, however, disapprove of hard core SF and scientific verities or a rigid divide between SF and fantasy. For instance, Macdonald’s feminizing of the “male preserve” (67) of SF, Harding’s unique handling of “science-fantasy” (70), and Daniell’s paranormal romance fantasies and writing across the genres are notable steps taken by some of these authors to challenge generic limitations. In the fantastic line, the interviews illuminate Hulley’s audacious appropriation of European myth and legend, Kennett’s preference for the dark supernatural to break away from the laws of plausibility, and Strasser’s editorship of *Aurealis* and his advice to preserve a particular “Australianness” in stories and cover art (102). This “Australianness” manifests itself in Brown’s representation of Sydney in his novel *Winter* (1997). The fantastic mode becomes further enriched through Sean Williams’ biomodification and labyrinthine plots.

As the collection proceeds, fantasy gains greater momentum whereas SF is less discussed. Fantasy is preferred by female writers such as Forsyth, who believes it caters to women’s interest in a way that SF does not (113). Among Ikin’s interviewees are unconventional writers such as formerly academic Harland who strongly resists mechanical plots and propagates spontaneous ways of receiving ideas such as in dreams. Australian fantasy is also conscious of other cultures and nationalities, as reflected, for example, in Dedman’s assiduous multiculturalism and fiction written from games. Nor are children neglected; Pryor, a school teacher for eighteen years, makes credible use of children’s language and young culture in his fiction. In addition, giving a historical twist to fantasy, McMullen uses history as a valuable source to create alien worlds and charac-

Irish Science Fiction

Hugh C. O'Connell

Jack Fennell. *Irish Science Fiction*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2014. Cloth, 271 pages, \$110, ISBN 978-1-7813-8119-9.

Order option(s): [Hard](#)

ters, and carries a great deal of reading and research to say something original about it. This historicity can also be traced in Sussex's reworking of Victorian crime into a credible mimicry of the nineteenth-century prose. Another notable writer is Tess Williams, whose "unorthodox approaches to evolution" (13) have led to a depiction of sea life and ecosystems as an essential part of her speculative fiction. Irvine, a marine scientist whose knowledge has impacted his fantasy fiction in a similar fashion, disavows Western stereotypes and creates scientific and realistic explanations for his fictional magical procedures. In a critical vein, Cohen's fantastika too defies humanism for its false claims. Ikin's interview with Dowling focuses on both his much awarded fantasy and his computer games, which recognize storytelling as a conspicuously powerful philosophical and socializing tool. Reflecting a more Australian perspective, Rogers highlights his anti-American attitude by standing up against the American ad machine and marketing, reflecting this attitude in his fiction. And Colebatch, who deems the primary objective of writing to be communication, criticizes the incongruity between motifs of an SF work and its elliptical language as well as plotting. The last interview in the book is with Collins, who claims that SF is on the wane because it is a male-dominated realm, which is easily outpaced by female fantasy writers and the market for popular rather than professional reads, such as children's books.

The interviews differ in length, from three (Harding's) to seventeen pages (Macdonald's); most of them give an almost complete sense of satisfaction to the reader, but a few end abruptly, giving the impression that either the interviewee had no more to say, or that the interview was left incomplete for unknown reasons. Nonetheless, Ikin's titles for all interviews are clever and fascinating, targeting the most central subject about the interviewed author. On the whole, the book provides a very rich and versatile collection of dialogues for a wide range of audiences, such as Australian and international readers/fans, critics, and writers of SF and fantasy, particularly genre fiction scholars and researchers.

IN ONE OF sf studies' foundational texts "On the Poetics of Science Fiction," Darko Suvin provided the seemingly final word on the formal distinctions between myth and sf. Sf, Suvin writes, "sees the norms of any age, including emphatically its own, as unique, changeable, and therefore subject to cognitive glance [...while myth] conceives human relations as fixed, and supernaturally determined" (375). Although Suvin acknowledged both as essentially estranging fictions, he cast the socio-political vocation of each in diametrical opposition. Jack Fennell's *Irish Science Fiction* is one of a number of recent critical texts that ultimately refutes Suvin's formal separation of sf from other estranging genres by deconstructing this paradigmatic, formal separation of sf from myth. Therefore, like many works of sf criticism, both classic and contemporary, Fennell's project begins by attempting to define sf before moving into the study of Irish sf particularly.

There is much of critical interest going on in Fennell's introductory definitional chapter, and while I can't do the argument's nuance full justice here, I want to highlight a few of its more original and striking features. Drawing on an altogether different study on the relationship between myth and sf by Tatiana Chernyshova, Fennell situates sf "as a variant form of myth-making" (16). Fennell casts the supposedly irreproachable dichotomy between the two in postcolonial terms, with sf linked to imperial modernity and myth functioning as "the dominant cultural logic of traditional or 'premodern' societies" (3). However, their amalgamation is not only a property of postcolonial sf, but of sf in general, since sf is a "literature of gaps" (20). And according to Fennell, "Scientists fill gaps in their knowledge with testable hypotheses, while lay people fill them with anecdotes, 'common sense,' and other cultural logics. The latter gives rise to pseudoscience, the stuff of which SF is made" (215).

Fleshing out this argument, Fennell draws on Chi-

na Miéville's critique of the ideological function of cognition in "The Suvin Event." Whereas Suvin separates sf from the ahistorical genres of fantasy and horror via the role of cognition, Fennell, following Miéville's deconstruction of cognition while simultaneously emphasizing estrangement, collapses sf into the ahistorical. Myth, then, he argues, is the ur-form of all three (16). What separates them is how each handles history; while the others negate history, sf, "pretends to be history" (18). This pretense seems to render sf as only extrapolation, since the "estrangements on offer are always presented as being historically possible or inevitable" (18).

To use one of Fennell's own favorite tropes, this relationship between sf and history often takes place "on the hyphen," cleaving two distinct, countervailing concepts (28-9). This idea circulates throughout Fennell's book as a means to analyze Irish sf's animating dichotomies: "science" as truth and "fiction" as the analogic, mythic popularization of this truth; "Irish" as mythic tradition and "sf" as imperial modernity; and Irishness itself, which exists on multiple hyphens including Ireland-Britain, Republic of Ireland-Northern Ireland, Catholic-Protestant, and Nationalist-Unionist. It's a powerful motif that undergirds the ambivalence mined in many of Fennell's chapters devoted to particular moments in the historical development of Irish sf.

The bulk of the book provides a survey of the development of Ireland's literary sf, from its colonial history, up and through the separate traditions that emerge from Northern Ireland and The Republic of Ireland into the present. Each chapter of this survey first maps the political and economic conditions before moving into an analysis of sf works that correspond to the particular moment and location. Fennell examines a wealth of sf subgenres in this fashion, including the "mad scientist" and its relationship to the Ascendancy Gothic, empire and modernity; the outgrowth of future war novels from the dissolution of "future-marriage novels"; the development of the invasion narrative and the belated golden age of space opera, all the way through to the remix Boom aesthetic of Ian McDonald and the cyberpunk of the

Celtic Tiger period.

This survey is the greatest strength of this work; it's a fantastic and thoroughly necessary study of Irish sf written in both English and Gaelic. Working chronologically, each chapter first carefully lays out the key aspects of Irish history and politics with a specificity that moves beyond a general understanding of Irish history, before introducing select authors and works. Some of the more well-known authors include Bob Shaw, James White, and Ian McDonald, while others, especially the Gaelic writers, are perhaps less familiar. I walked away from each chapter with both a better understanding of Ireland's internal politics and a series of novels for my to-read list. Without a doubt, this is a text that should be read by any and all students and scholars of Irish, British and (post)colonial sf.

However, the strength of this survey is related to its greatest weakness. While there is certainly room for critique of cognitive estrangement, especially in terms of the complicity of rational technoscience with imperialism, it can also too hastily jettison the best aspects of Suvin's dialectical and political approach: sf's "reflecting *of* but also *on* reality" (377). It's Suvin's utopian urge that seems to be sundered by Fennell's analysis of sf and myth, as Irish sf is often presented as a reflection of its society. As fantastic as this survey is, the critical intervention between sf and myth and the revamped (a)historical function largely drop out of the intervening survey chapters. Leaving out discussion of McDonald's *King of Morning*, *Queen of Day*, with its Irish setting, its masterful mixture of myth, fantasy and cyberpunk, and its pleas for the generation of new (Irish) myths for the contemporary age feels like a missed opportunity to illustrate the potential of this theoretical approach.

Ultimately, though, this is a timely and productive project. It sits nicely alongside other recent volumes on sf traditions outside of the dominant US, UK, French and German contexts, including Rachel Hayward Ferreira's work on Latin American sf, or Eric D. Smith's on postcolonial sf, not to mention John Rieder's authoritative *Colonialism and the Emergence of Science Fiction*, referenced by Fennell frequently.

The Transhuman Antihero

Catherine Siemann

Michael Grantham. *The Transhuman Antihero: Paradoxical Protagonists of Science Fiction from Mary Shelley to Richard Morgan*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2015. Paperback, 196 pages, \$40.00, ISBN 978-0-7864-9405-7, eISBN 978-1-4766-1955-2.

Order option(s): [Paper](#) | [Kindle](#)

AS ADVANCES IN genetic engineering and wearable technology suggest that a posthuman future is nearly upon us, Michael Grantham's *The Transhuman Antihero* traces the transhuman protagonist in speculative fiction, from Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) to the 21st century. These characters are "a threat to existing categories" (3), alienated by their differences and thus, like the antiheroes of literary fiction, resisting the norm. But the antiheroes of speculative fiction have powers and abilities that enable them to manifest their internal conflicts externally. Grantham follows these paradoxical protagonists, as he calls them, set apart from humankind by their technological or evolutionary or genetically engineered difference, through Golden Age science fiction, Alan Moore's graphic novels, and the cyberpunk subgenre, concluding with an extended reading of works by contemporary science fiction novelist Richard Morgan.

The introduction and first chapter are so dense with references to critics and theorists that it can be difficult to tell what point Grantham himself is advocating. Appropriately, the first transhuman antihero is Frankenstein's monster, and the first chapter explores this figure, with brief excursions into Stevenson's *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886) and Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Grey* (1890). The readings here are standard; there is nothing surprising to the scholar of the nineteenth-century fantastic. Frankenstein's monster is evoked throughout most subsequent chapters, but the comparisons vary in their depth and development.

The second chapter addresses three works from science fiction's Golden Age: Olaf Stapledon's *Odd John*, from 1935, as well as Theodore Sturgeon's *More Than Human* (1953), and Alfred Bester's *The Stars My Destination* (1957). Grantham uses the Nietzschean *Übermensch* to examine the transhuman

and the will to power in these texts. The three works are given more equal treatment here, and the patterns of analysis are accordingly more clearly developed. However, the dismayingly frequent pattern of violence against women in these works goes unremarked upon.

Subsequent chapters address Alan Moore's graphic novels, *V for Vendetta* (with David Lloyd) (completed 1988 though begun in 1982) and *Watchmen* (with Dave Gibbons) (1986-87), and here Grantham hits his stride. *V*, the anarchist protagonist of the former, is an ordinary human turned monstrous by experimentation. Grantham sees *V* as having given up his human individuality, while paradoxically fighting for individual freedom; he is a true antihero, capable of horrendous actions, but taking a heroic stance in fighting to overthrow an unjust government. Reality has intervened between the original publication of *V for Vendetta* and now, and the inevitable discomfort for a post-9/11 audience reading a text with a terrorist-hero is explored; *V* himself understands that there will be no place for him in the anarchist world he strives to create.

Watchmen both exemplifies and deconstructs the superhero genre, and is a rich field for analysis. Some of the "masked adventurers" like Rorschach, Nite Owl, and the Comedian, are ordinary humans who have augmented their abilities through training and technology; they are presented in their flawed humanity and throw into question the "traditional, mono-mythic superhero" (73). Grantham sees two transhumans in the group, hero-turned villain Ozymandias and the truly superhuman Dr. Manhattan. But while Ozymandias sees himself as truly above humanity, and therefore believes he is qualified to take the fate of humanity into his own hands, the difference between himself and his former colleagues is questionable – he believes he has perfected human potential through rigorous training, which he combines with technology, but this is merely a matter of degree. Grantham admits Ozymandias's limitations, but does not fully explore why he classifies him as transhuman. On the other hand, Dr. Manhattan's status as a transhuman is unquestionable. Victim of a lab accident that literally deconstructed him on a sub-atomic level, he is subject to the laws of neither time nor space; here, Grantham engages with a critical debate on the Kantian imperative and the increasingly dehumanized Manhattan's responsibility to a human race he is ever more distanced from.

While a more in-depth reading of his doomed relationship with Laurie, the Silk Spectre, the last anchor for his remaining humanity and his “only concern with the world” (92), would have provided fertile ground for a connection between this true transhuman and the other superheroes, the exploration of Dr. Manhattan is one of the richest in the book.

Cyberpunk is the focus of the next chapter, and it is read as much as punk-rock inspired counterculture as through the series of texts by Neal Stephenson, William Gibson, and George Alec Effinger which are explored. Cyberpunk is viewed as “a site of integration – a reflection of biology’s willing acceptance of technology” (102). Punk body modification leads to new forms of transhumanism, a melding of technology and the flesh in cyberpunk cyborgs.

The final two chapters center on contemporary author Richard Morgan. Chapter six traces elements of cyberpunk in Morgan’s Takeshi Kovacs trilogy (2002-2005). Kovacs is read as a cyberpunk figure, violent and quasi-anarchist. The nature of his posthumanity, however, is unclear until late in the chapter, when the stack-and-sleeve technology which allows him to shift his essence into new bodies is finally explained. Morgan’s *Black Man* (2007) (published in the U.S. as *Thirteen*, which is not indicated here) follows. Here, transhumanism is achieved through genetic engineering, in this case a throwback to a violent earlier human variant. The analysis considers the contemporary fear of the posthuman, as expressed by Francis Fukuyama, and contemplates whether genetically engineered biology is destiny.

The conclusion, instead of synthesizing Grantham’s work, is a paragraph-by-paragraph summary of the chapters. This is symptomatic of the book’s greatest weakness: there is a real depth and breadth of reading here, but it is not always well-integrated with the author’s own conclusions. Why, with such limited space and such a broad scope, do both Alan Moore and Richard Morgan each merit two chapters? The importance of Moore’s work is undoubted, but the choice of Morgan as the only post-1980s author betrays the work’s self-imposed constraints, as does a choice which Grantham addresses in his introduction: except for Mary Shelley, there is a “deliberate strategy of focus” to exclude female authors. He claims a “need to look separately at female and feminist incursions into territory that was once seen as a males-only domain” (9), but this ghettoization of women writers feels doubly strange in a work

which clearly values theorists and critics such as Donna Haraway and N. Katherine Hayles. This book would be primarily useful for scholars considering the works of Alan Moore or Richard Morgan. There are elements of value here, but the need for a clearer argument as well as the gaps in coverage render this work worth reading, but not an essential part of the discussion.

Shockwaves of Possibility: Essays on Science fiction, Globalization, and Utopia

Artem Zubov

Phillip E. Wegner. *Shockwaves of Possibility: Essays on Science fiction, Globalization, and Utopia*. Oxford, New York: Peter Lang, 2014. Softcover, 308 pages, \$55.95, ISBN 978-3-0343-0741-3 eISBN 978-3-0353-0642-2.

Order option(s): [Paper](#)

WHILE SCIENCE FICTION STUDIES include a number of histories of the genre, the methodology of studying the cultural history of science fiction was problematized only recently (Luckhurst 9). In *Shockwaves of Possibility*, Phillip E. Wegner reconceptualizes Darko Suvin’s notion of the *novum* as fundamental for constructing a new model of the history of science fiction and a new periodization of the genre. The author places the category of the *novum* in the context of Alain Badiou’s understanding of the *event*, perceived as the “void of the situation,” and the very “possibility of the new beginning, the inauguration of that which was unexpected, unknown, and uncounted” (51).

Following Mark Bould, Wegner sees Suvin’s seminal definition of science fiction as *the Suvin event* and thus underlines the idea that most of the theories and studies of the genre are aimed at “wedding SF and Marxism,” with the latter understood as an evaluative and historicizing tool of literary criticism (10). From this perspective, the direction that science fiction studies took in the 2000s should be interpreted as post-Suvin criticism in that it breaks

with Suvin's problematic and turns to a "national literary and narrow sociological and cultural historical approach" (13). The effect of the new approach is to "divorce" science fiction and Marxism. The goal of Wegner's research is to elicit "the development of science fiction in a more global framework" (14) and to offer an "experiment in [...] global reading of the cultural technology of science fiction" (15).

Wegner's *Shockwaves of Possibility* consists of two distinct parts; while in the first chapter the author delineates the theoretical contours of his periodizing strategy, the rest of the book includes case studies of science-fictional texts (literary, cinematic, and comics). The author derives his methodology from John Rieder's *Colonialism and the Emergence of Science Fiction* (2008). Rieder argues that one cannot trace the first text of the genre; it is always the "second" and the "third" texts that constitute it. Rieder defines the emergence of science fiction as "the coalescence of the set of generic expectations into a recognizable condition and reception that enables both writers and readers to approach individual works as examples of a literary kind that in the 1920s and after came to be named science fiction" (Rieder 15). From this point of view, Wegner traces the origins of science fiction in the early 20th century and conceptualizes the genre as "modernist technology" that functioned as "original problem-solving devices, tools for thinking their specific situation" (9). The term "modernist" is used here to highlight science-fictional and high modernist (or "modernism as such") literary traditions as products of the same historic period.

Wegner's periodizing categories are familiar to scholars of science fiction: the "Golden Age," "The New Wave," Cyberpunk, etc. But Wegner redefines those categories by placing them in a global context. He posits that from its emergence, science fiction was a global genre, i.e., in the early 20th century different national traditions of science fiction developed simultaneously in the US, Great Britain, Russia, France, and Germany. The 1920s, as the author argues, was a period of intense Americanization of the genre. Wegner sets the final stage of his historic progression in the 1990s (or the post-Cold War, or post-postmodernism, or globalization), when science fiction replaced "magical realism as the preeminent vehicle for thinking the global" (42).

Wegner uses the methodological pattern elicited in the first part of his book as a starting point for case studies that cover a wide array of texts. He analyses

Andrei Tarkovsky's *Stalker* (1979), Paolo Bacigalupi's *The Windup Girl* (2009), Kim Stanley Robinson's *The Years of Rice and Salt* (2002), Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons's *Watchmen* (1987), Hayao Miyazaki's *My Neighbor Totoro* (1988), and other works, in every case addressing the notion of *event* to interpret their structural aspects.

Wegner interprets Tarkovsky's *Stalker* as a brilliant example of Tzvetan Todorov's the "fantastic," understood as a narrative event that cannot be fully explained by the laws of our world. The interpretation of such an event fluctuates between the uncanny and the marvelous. Wegner thus claims that those two forms are embodied in the movie – while the mundane world outside the Zone occupies Todorov's uncanny, the Zone itself inhabits the marvelous (80).

Wegner interprets *My Neighbor Totoro* as "the most political of all Miyazaki's political films" (261). He sees the uncanny in the invasion of the fantastic into the actual. He concludes that Miyazaki created a Utopian alternate history where "the catastrophe of the Second World War did not occur" (268) and "where 'landscape' and the child in their modern alienated sense never come into being [...] where modernization *has* continued [...] electrification and Shinto coexisting side-by-side [...] in such figures of enchanted technology as the cat bus" (272).

Phillip Wegner's *Shockwaves of Possibility* is a valuable and intriguing study in both theoretical and practical respects. In the theoretical part, the author elicits the turn of science fiction studies from its more traditional form of historiography towards cultural criticism. By deriving from periodizing potentialities of Marxist criticism, Wegner creates a global cultural historical periodization of the genre. The case studies which comprise most of the book are illuminating research on a wide range of topics and texts that can be equally useful for scholars of specific periods, national traditions, and sub-genres of science fiction, and lecturers of courses in the history of science fiction.

Works Cited

- Luckhurst, Roger. "Science Fiction and Cultural History". *Science Fiction Studies* 37.1 (2010): 3–15.
- Rieder, John. *Colonialism and the Emergence of Science Fiction*. Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 2008.

Binti: Home

Jonathan P. Lewis

Okorafor, Nnedi. *Binti: Home*. New York: Tor, 2017. 176 pages. Paperback. \$14.99, ISBN 978-0-7653-9311-1.

Order option(s): [Paper](#) | [Kindle](#)

HOME, the second book in Okorafor's Hugo and Nebula Award winning *Binti* series, is a novella of both sacrifice and transition. As Okorafor's titular heroine *Binti* suffered the loss of her university cohort to the Meduse in *Binti*, she is further stripped of much of what formed her sense of self in *Home*. This story follows up the themes of space and personal exploration in Book One, and *Home* is a worthy successor to *Binti*. While *Home* is a strong stand-alone work of Afrofuturism in the broader SF subgenres of space exploration and cultural criticism, *Binti's* journey towards maturity is not yet told in full, and I eagerly await the concluding volume.

After a year away, *Binti's* journey to her family's home in Namibia leaves her unsure of whom and even what she is now, to say nothing of her place as a "harmonizer" among the Himba people. Her survival of the Meduse's attack in Book One has left her permanently changed—her DNA has been infused with new sequences, and her hair, previously locked and infused with the traditional mixture of butterfat and red pigment called "*otjize*" in traditional Himba fashion, has been replaced with sensitive, tentacle-like, blue appendages the Meduse call "*okuoko*."

Okorafor's tight plot explores the ramifications for *Binti* in returning to Earth from the greatest university in the galaxy, Oomza, as a physically and mentally different person from the young woman who left. Namibia and her ancestral home, "The Root" are as unfamiliar to her as she is to those she left behind. Both physically and mentally changed by her journey across the galaxy and a year of education, on her return to Earth, Okorafor's protagonist fully struggles with what T.S. Eliot describes in *Four Quartets: Little Gidding* as: "And the end of all our exploring / Will be to arrive where we started / And know the place for the first time." *Binti* is a woman loosed from the

roots that she has used to define herself and begins looking for a place to put down stable identifiers for her future, and Book Three promises to reveal more about her home, her family, and her place in the galaxy.

Home thus engages the familiar trope of a young person leaving their life behind and entering a new one, but Okorafor breathes fresh life into this genre with her play with augmentation of non-human sequences and appendages and at least three forms of cultural interpellation and conflict. In addition to the physical changes that mark her as no longer purely human, *Binti's edan*, an ancient device she uses in mathematical computations in the university, breaks in Book Two, and her sister and her best friend among the Himba reject her on the night she returns. She is thus stripped of her familiar places and tools on this step of her journey. *Binti* has returned home to make her people's traditional pilgrimage, but instead she is exposed to deeper knowledge of her family and much older traditions.

Home opens with *Binti* working hard with the *edan*, forging it into new physical structures previously unknown to her as it deconstructs and then reconstructs into its previous and familiar shape. This image certainly foreshadows much of *Home's* story regarding *Binti* herself as she is being stretched and forged into a new person through her work at the University and her return to Earth. *Binti's* mathematics professor notes that *Binti* alone was able to get it to open itself up through her concentration and hard computational work. Okorafor thus sets up *Binti's* journey in *Home* in this opening scene. She feels unclean because of her building anger, and wishes to return home to make her pilgrimage and be cleansed.

Okorafor also signals this as a book of transition with an early character *Binti* knows at university who is a member of the Meduse's century-long enemies, the human ethnic group known as the "Khoush." This character, Haifa, was born male but transitioned to being a woman, starting at age 13. Perhaps suggesting that *Binti's* journey will ultimately make her whole and happy, Haifa is portrayed as a gifted, joyful athlete in the text, enthralled and delighted by what her body can do. She sprints uphill bearing *Binti's* baggage to the spaceport, then performs backflips and other gymnastic feats with ease, declaring to all: "I am amazing" (17).

When *Binti* arrives on Earth, however, she does not

yet know Haifa's unifying pride and self-confidence. Instead, Binti feels fragmented as a Himba returning home as a stranger, part human/part Meduse, unwelcome and dangerous, even as her parents take her in.

Whereas Book One followed Binti to space, to war and loss, and to reconciliation, *Home* follows Binti's path as she transitions into the next iteration of whomever she is becoming. On this journey, Binti must deal with the repercussions of both leaving (or abandoning, as many of her family and people feel) and returning. For her first family dinner at home, she puts on a dress that she got at university bearing a design somewhat like what Khoush women may wear, but in a color Himba women never don. She later regrets the choice, as it marks her as an outsider, and she looks to put on the traditional gown worn by Himba women making their pilgrimage.

Before she can change her clothes, she suffers an intense verbal attack from an older sister who claims that instead of harmony, Binti brings dissonance, and that Binti's physical transformation and off-world education mean no man will have her and she will not bear children. Trying to put her mathematical training into practice to control her temper, Binti looks for order in recited numbers and equations such as Euler's Identity, but her anger escapes her, and she spits in her sister's face. Retreating to her room, Binti receives a vision of "The Night Masquerade," a mythical figure who usually only visits Himba men, and rather than making the traditional

pilgrimage, she follows her grandmother deep into the desert, leaving her Himba identity behind.

To become initiated into her grandmother's ancient, matrilineal (and, Binti discovers, augmented with non-Terran genetic sequences) culture, Binti must sacrifice and lose much of her former self—as she lost her locks at the end of *Binti*, she must be pruned again—deconstructed—before she can change/grow/reform along new pathways. *Home* is a novella of sacrifice, change, and loss before the next progression, which one assumes will be revealed in the final book in the series.

Indeed, *Home* feels very much a transition text—by the end, a more obvious cliffhanger than Okorafor employed in Book One—Binti's next progression is yet occluded from the reader, but Book Three should reveal how Binti will use her newly activated augmented communication tools to become the next version of herself. As her *edan* becomes reconstructed in *Home*, so Binti's identity will likely reconstitute itself along new lines in Book 3.

And Okorafor is indeed setting up the next installment throughout *Home*, but this is not a fault of *Home*. It is a strong work with its own merits and is highly recommended. Full of the author's trademark inventiveness, *Home* follows Okorafor's compelling protagonist through a series of events that strip Binti of her comforts, her safe spaces, and her familiar tools in order to prepare Binti for the next stage of her journey.

Star Trek Beyond

Emad El-Din Aysha

Star Trek Beyond. Directed by Justin Lin, performances by Chris Pine, Zachary Quinto, Zoe Saldana, and Karl Urban. Paramount Pictures. 2016.

Order option(s): [Amazon](#) | [Blu-Ray](#) | [DVD](#) | [Multi-Format](#) | [3D](#) | [4K](#)

THE *STAR TREK* FRANCHISE has successfully rebooted itself since the youthful, alternate-universe versions of Kirk, Spock, Bones, Uhura and others took over, thanks to the hard work of director J.J. Abrams, who blended the old and the new. With Taiwanese director Justin Lin at the helm, *Star Trek Beyond* has continued in this tradition, incorporating disturbing contemporary themes while being true to the optimistic ethos of the Trek universe.

In *Beyond* the crew of the USS Enterprise are tricked into going into a nebula on a rescue mission only to result in their entire ship being ransacked by an indefatigable enemy who is looking for an alien artefact the crew has in their cargo. Previously, the Enterprise was docked at the Starbase Yorktown, which is on the outer rim of Federation space, with both Captain Kirk (Chris Pine) and Spock (Zachary Quinto) having second thoughts about staying aboard the Enterprise and pursuing its exploratory missions. Kirk is bored and lonely, and he feels that he is lacking a mission in life and someone to share his life with. He is also grappling with an offer of vice admiralship delivered to him by Commodore 'Paris' (played by the dignified Iranian-American actress Shohreh Aghdashloo).

Spock similarly feels he is going nowhere in his life, especially after receiving the bad news about his time-duplicate's death (the dearly departed Leonard Nimoy). He makes up his mind to head off to New Vulcan and help repopulate the species without Lieutenant Uhura's (Zoe Saldana) help. Things change drastically, however, when Kirk and Spock fall into the aforementioned trap and have to rescue what's left of their crew from the monstrous Krall (Idris Elba), a lizard-like alien who devours the life-force of others to stay young – or so it seems (more on this

below). It turns out the alien artefact is part of an ancient weapon that Krall needs to build his empire and destroy the Federation once and for all. This is a clear nod to 'Weapons of Mass Destruction' (WMDs) and the first indicator of the political subtext governing the storyline (compare also how WMDs have been mentioned repeatedly in genre movies since the Iraq War, e.g. in *Prometheus* and even in *Rogue One: A Star Wars Story*, where the term is explicitly used).

The political subtext is then made more evident when Krall phrases his own mission in these hallowed terms: "This is where it begins, Captain. This is where the frontier pushes back!" When Krall describes his younger days he says that he grew up in a world of 'terror' and pain and came to welcome these things because they made him stronger – made him realise who he really was. A parallel can be drawn with how invading and occupying Iraq didn't make the world safe for democracy at all, but only made things worse by unleashing new waves of terror from the Middle East. Krall adds that the Federation mistakenly thinks that 'unity' is strength, since it's built on principles of mutual respect and sanctity of life and belief.

One can't help but notice how multiracial the Enterprise crew are, clearly a stand-in for the US and the Free World – the frontier reference – which is pitted in battle against the evil forces of global 'terrorism'. In time-honoured fashion for *Star Trek*, Yorktown, like the Enterprise, is a reference to America's pioneering history. Similarly if for a different purpose, Krall himself lures ships from multiple races to his planet and incorporates them into his invincible army of mindless drones (another war on terror motif). The blind obedience of Krall's forces, which fly around like swarms of bees, results in all of them being killed in the end once the Enterprise crew figure out a way to disrupt the coordination of the fighter pilots. Arguably, conformity stifles innovation and opens everybody up to the same set of flaws, so there really is something to be said for democracy and individualism.

More narrative surprises ensue as it emerges that Krall himself, at one point in the very distant past, was a Starfleet officer, or as he puts it: "I fought for Humanity! Lost millions to the Xindi and Romulan wars. And for what? For the Federation? To sit me in a Captain's chair and break bread with the enemy!" Krall isn't the terrorist threat – he's what happens

to a person when they fight a terrorist threat for too long and forget who they are and what they were fighting for. In other words, he sank to the standards of his enemy. Captain Kirk's reply is: "We change. We have to. Or we spend the rest of our lives fighting the same battles." Kirk takes a good long look in the mirror himself when he confronts Krall since he could have easily become a monster like him. This links in with Commodore Paris's words of advice when she first offers Kirk the Vice Admiralship: "It's easy to get lost. In the vastness of space, there's only yourself, your ship, your crew."

At the end of the movie she reiterates the point, in reference to Krall, saying: "For decades, the Federation taught that he was a hero.. I guess time will judge us all. He just got lost." It is also worth noting that Idris Elba is a British actor of West African descent and with a working class London accent (and Idris is an Arabic name to boot). This isn't racism, mind you. Far from it. It's more an indictment of the ruling majority that squander the patriotism of the minorities who enlist, ever eager to prove their patriotism. It is those minorities that end up fighting wars against the enemies of democracy, only to be disowned in the end (a good example would be Gust Avrakotos, the very real Greek American CIA officer from *Charlie Wilson's War*, who was repeatedly side-lined by the Ivy League WASP-elite running the agency. As a consequence, very few CIA personnel speak the languages of the people they are spying on). Remember that Krall felt betrayed after the Xindi and Romulan wars.

Kirk's despair early on in the story can be read as representative of America following its war on terror, unable to enjoy the fruits of the peace it fought so hard to achieve. This is a thematic ploy that is increasingly being used in American science fiction, as evidenced, for instance, by the aimless character of Alex Hopper in *Battleship* (2012). When the aliens attack in that film, the only naval vessels in the vicinity are American and Japanese, forcing people to mend bridges and forget old wounds – Pearl Harbour and Hiroshima. The film thus parallels contemporary anxieties with older ones. After all, September 11th was described, like Pearl Harbour, as a day that will live forever in infamy. This existential 'need' for an enemy, which goes as far back as the Trojan Wars, has its own American pedigree, whether in fiction or fact. Samuel Huntington, of the *Clash of Civilisations*, once quoted Abraham Lincoln on this point:

"The jealousy, envy, avarice incident to our nature, and so common to a state of peace, prosperity, and conscious strength, were for a time in great measure smothered and rendered inactive... and... instead directed against the British nation." At the same time, he warned that this fortuitous "... state of feeling must fade, is fading, has faded, with the circumstances that produced it." (Lincoln, quoted in Huntington, 1997, 31).

This is more related to *Star Trek Beyond* than is immediately evident since the Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco has always been a recurring symbol in the *Star Trek* series (you see Sulu in Yorktown with his 'husband' and adopted child, another hint at tolerance). Alas, as Mr Huntington reminds us, the "End of History, if it occurs, could be the most traumatic and unsettling event for America" (Huntington, 1997, 32). Francis Fukuyama's thesis would mean the ultimate triumph of the liberal democratic model, *denying* the United States the enemies it needs to keep united at home – Lincoln presided over the Civil War – and project its power abroad.

Huntington was very clear when he stated that "Americans have constructed their creedal identity in contrast to an undesirable 'other'" – beginning with colonial Britain, then shifting to Napoleonic Europe, then Nazi Germany, then Communist Russia (Huntington, 1997, 30). This would make Krall into Kirk's very personal 'other'. Krall himself tells Kirk in no uncertain terms: "I have to say, Kirk, I've missed being me. We lost ourselves but gained a purpose! A means to bring the galaxy back to the struggle that made humanity strong." Sounds like a clash of civilisations scenario to me.

Even if you leave the politics out of it the movie is a worthy contribution to the Trek universe. All the original themes and near-perfect world of the original *Star Trek* (no hunger, poverty, obsession with money and power) are there, while still sticking to the updated and 'nasty' variety of action found in J.J. Abrams' remade Trek world. In *Star Trek into Darkness* Khan crushes the skull of Alexander Marcus while in *Beyond*, scores of crew members suffocate to death when the hull is breached and they are sucked out into space. When Jean-Luc Picard was captain of the USS Enterprise, whether on television or the silver screen, battles and fight sequences were always very 'sanitised'.

Even the movie score for *Beyond* is reminiscent of Jerry Goldsmith's uplifting *The Next Generation*

tunes. Director Justin Lin positively dazzles audiences with his visualisation of the Trek universe, whether it's the squeaky-clean Yorktown with its neutral greys or the alien pits of Krall's planet and slave army depicted in dark reds and oranges, a very deliberate contrast in visual sensibilities.

Lin has also made important narrative contributions worth highlighting. Whereas American cinema always parades the assertive lone hero – witness Tom Cruise ruining the collective spirit of the *Mission Impossible* series – in *Beyond* the heroism is thoroughly evened out. In movie studies this is what is usually referred to as the Hollywood model or style of narrative, simplifying things by allowing one person to be the focus of the storyline and themes with a standard linear format.

Subsequently, Bones (Karl Urban) and Spock have plenty to do. Likewise, Scotty (Simon Pegg) doesn't fall into any catchphrases while working with a lovely alien girl, Jaylah (Sofia Boutella), who outsmarts the lot of them (She's given panther-like features, underlying how she has had to fight to survive). Scotty also persuades her to confront her demons, having lost her family to Krall's admittedly brave henchman (Jake Huang), because a crew sacrifices for each other. Later he gets her into Starfleet. Individual autonomy and ingenuity does not negate the need for team work and sacrificing for the group, provided the group is willing to sacrifice for you too (All for one and one for all).

In the closing sequence, we have a re-energised Kirk and Spock and the famous “boldly going where no man has gone before” speech said by the whole crew whereas in the TV series it was always the captain who delivered the inspiring words. With these words, the crew are reasserting the values of the Federation and the Free World but in a cautionary manner so that the present-day Free World doesn't sink to the level of the terrorists it is pursuing. The themes are a bit obvious in the dialogue but the characterisation is very even. The audience roots for the good guys but doesn't look down on the bad guys – a model worth emulating in the years to come both in the fictitious world of *Star Trek* and the very real world of global politics.

Arrival

Christopher Cokinos

Arrival. Directed by Denis Villeneuve, performances by Amy Adams, Jeremy Renner and Forest Whitaker, 21 Laps Entertainment, FilmNation Entertainment, Lava Bear Films and Xenolinguistics, 2016.

Order option(s): [4K](#) | [Blu-Ray](#) | [DVD](#)

A THOUGHTFUL, beautiful and haunting adaptation of Ted Chiang's masterful short story, “Story of Your Life,” the movie *Arrival* works in so many ways—from defying Hollywood clichés about CGI-driven SF to a (mostly) feminist focus on character and relationship—that it seems, well, unseemly to register reservations. But the film's flaws are in some respects as notable as its successes, and both should contribute to making *Arrival* an eminently teachable text on its own and in conversation with Chiang's story, as well as with other texts about time or extraterrestrial intelligence. *Contact* immediately comes to mind as a film that *Arrival* speaks to, but so too, perhaps, a much earlier alien visitation film, *The Day the Earth Stood Still*. Any number of films that involve time travel or time manipulation would be welcome texts to set next to *Arrival*.

Arrival begins with a dolly-in of brooding straight lines, revealing a modernist house on a nameless bay, while a female voice-over muses on memory and time (a whole class session could focus on the film's contrast of rectilinear and curvilinear lines). The narration continues as the film moves through shots hazy with a girl's childhood (“I love you,” a daughter tells her mother, the narrator) and adolescence (“I hate you,” she yells at her mother) then starkly blue-gray scenes of the mother tending and grieving the sick daughter (until the conclusion, the film's palette is distinctly brooding). The girl's head is shaved; her mother is beside her in a hospital; the daughter dies. The narrator tells us she is no longer “sure [she] believe[s] in beginnings and endings. There are days that define your story beyond your life.” This dual theme of a different kind of time and of one's life being caught up in a larger, perhaps at times unintelligible set of causal forces, is both the emotional core and intellectual heart of the film. That the film would

have the latter and that it would be the same as the former is welcome.

Louise (Amy Adams), our linguist protagonist, teaches at a university, where, as the film jump cuts, students are less interested in her lecture than news of the arrival of strange dark craft—tall and oblate, seeming neither to have front nor back—creepily hanging over apparently random locations around the world. In the United States, one such vessel hovers over a mountain meadow in Montana where, soon, the military takes Louise to lead an effort to communicate with the visitors who speak – if that is the right verb – with a series of whale-like and cryptic clicks, rumbles and groans.

Teamed with Jeremy Renner's character Ian, a physicist, Louise realizes that it will be more effective to communicate via writing and, working to overcome the doubts of the military and the C.I.A. – here personified by gruff Forest Whitaker and irritating Michael Stuhlbarg – Louise succeeds in having conversations and much more. The movie makes an effort at showing scientists, especially Louise, work through questions, propositions, and arguments – in short, a dramatic portrayal of the scientific method (however, though Ian and Louise each head large teams of fellow experts, in traditional Hollywood fashion, we don't see the nuances of small contributions of many people adding up to insight). Louise begins to experience reveries and altered states and she dreams in the alien language. The aliens – nicknamed Abbott and Costello and looking like giant squid floating in a fog – write, as they do in the story, in awesomely complex sentences whose beginnings and endings are simultaneous and which look like calligraphic circles, festooned with graceful blots and curls, a little bit like images of particle tracks from an accelerator experiment. The film jump cuts several times to her daughter—Hannah, a palindrome, one of the small hints that these are not flashbacks but flash forwards.

Arrival plays up geopolitical tensions as scientists and governments around the world both cooperate and vie to understand the purpose of the alien visitation, a task that pitches the heretofore strange and languid film into a more recognizable faster-paced narrative when Louise translates a sentence that includes the word “weapon,” a word, she says, that might not be a threat, but could mean tool or gift. The screens from science camps around the world go blank, as China threatens military action against

the craft. Throughout, Hannah herself “arrives,” reminding – or foretelling – what Louise knows or will know. Meanwhile, a group of mutinous soldiers in Montana enter the craft to try to blow it up, fatally injuring one alien and knocking Louise out. This is the film's only real action sequence, and *Arrival* gets off of that gratuitous subplot very quickly, thankfully, as if winking at us that, yes, there still is an audience expectation that an SF film should have explosions in it.

When she recovers, Louise begins to take matters into her own hands, ultimately brokering a deal that convinces a Chinese general to stand down, since, somehow, she knows something about the general's wife only he could know. The aliens reveal their purpose to Louise—they are here to help because in 3,000 years humanity will help the aliens. And so the world begins a new era of cooperation. Louise and Ian marry and she gives birth to Hannah (though we are still left to wonder if the transaction was truly unselfish or just a kind cosmic version of geopolitics).

The film's many strengths include this premise of the working through miscommunication to “hear,” as it were, just enough to forge trust and even empathy. That the scientific method – Louise carefully builds up a vocabulary of objects and actions – is the main thrust of this effort is laudable in an age of untruth, though the film's contention (more emphatic in the story) that learning a language changes how one perceives the world – and, in this case, time itself – is no longer in the mainstream of linguistics. The Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, which Ian explains as, “...if you immerse yourself in another language, you can rewire your brain,” is a form of neural linguistic determinism that is not at all the view of most researchers. Still, here is a Hollywood movie with a scientific idea at its core. More softly, the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis can posit that language affects perception and worldview. This is a film that not only gestures toward science and critical thinking – eschewing technobabble – but is a film that subtly extends Whorf's work, which critiqued Western linearity. As linguist Betty Birner recently told *Slate*, research has noted how some language communities, like Native American tribes, see objects and times embedded in cycles. “So tomorrow,” she said in an interview, “isn't another day. Tomorrow is day returning...I thought, well they got that right! They took it in a really weird direction but...”

Caught up in the linguistic endeavor and the political intrigue, viewers (and students, especially) might take for granted the important feminist overtones of the film, all rooted in Amy Adams's powerful and even-handed performance of the scientist who matters most: a woman linguist. She deftly dismisses all male attempts to praise her – or to damn her with faint praise. She overcomes the natural terror anyone would feel when being carted into a spaceship that turns gravity on and off. She bravely removes her protective suit early in the film in order to earn the trust of the aliens and, more importantly, just get the work going, so they can communicate. Louise risks her life to convey to the Chinese the very thing they need to know in order to forestall military action. In a very real sense, a strong woman scientist saves the world.

Louise's care – her heedfulness – is echoed in the film's slightly tipsy slowness. *Arrival* unspools more than unfolds, letting its circularity build like an alien sentence. Its mise-en-scene juxtaposes curves against straight lines, and the loud, shaking hoots in the sound track would sound, I think, the same played forwards or backwards. The refusal of beginnings and endings in these and other ways give the film a special uncanniness that is part of its holistic intelligence. This is a thoughtful text, one that I hope my students later this semester will see as notably complicated.

But *Arrival* has its share of mistakes or, at least, missed opportunities.

Most notably, the relationship between Louise and Ian barely develops when, near the conclusion, there is a sudden and somewhat unbelievable coming together. Because Ian has been relegated to the background both in terms of plot and character development, the moment calls attention to itself unhelpfully. Simply put, there is no sustained chemistry between Ian and Louise that justifies within the narrative their sudden coupling. That said, an uncanny admission by Louise that she missed feeling his body – when throughout the movie they have not touched – gives another moment of the film's wonderful temporal slipperiness. She will feel him, and this foreshadowing is also memory. Time's non-linearity is thrown again into relief.

Ian's role is also wasted scientifically. He contributes, he makes a breakthrough, he speaks, but *Arrival* leans heavily on Louise, avoiding showing, let alone dramatizing, the difficulties of collaborative

scientific work. Ian is, in short, a prop both for the romance and the field work. A bit more development would have helped while not overturning Louise's strong feminist lead. This, along with the film's failure to even mention, say, the Fermi Paradox – let alone really delve into a bit of the history of plurality of worlds, the search for extraterrestrial intelligence and the interesting work being done on the difficulties of communicating with ET – are all missed opportunities. *Arrival* aims for and achieves more than a little “plausibility against a background of science,” to borrow from Eric Rabkin, but it could have dropped the soldier bomb subplot and instead made science itself a leading character. This need not be boring.

In a voice-over, as communication with the aliens begins to move more briskly, we get an info-dump – some science is explained – and, while this is a time-honored convention for conveying exposition, especially technical material, the film would have succeeded more emphatically by having matters of science conveyed dramatically in conversation, not only among the expert teams trying to translate, but among the military and intelligence officials who are directing the project. Indeed, such an approach would have allowed those characters – the weathered general and the antsy spy – to have become more than clichéd spooks. As to the voice-over, it is deeply problematic in that it is Louise's work being described by Ian. In a film with such a strong female lead, having the voice-over narrated by the male co-star, who has an otherwise fairly empty role, is at best jarring and, at worst, truly patronizing.

Two minor complaints aside – one wishes to see more extended moments with Hannah, to see her as a person more fully realized; one wishes that Louise's final conversation with the aliens involved less blowsy hair and hokey god-light – *Arrival* works carefully in so many other ways, that the film should earn a place in a developing canon of rather more thoughtful SF films of late, from, say, *Moon* to *I Origins* (a movie apparently under-noticed). *Arrival* would work well in conversation with *Contact*, with its strong female lead and interest both in family (here it is the scientist's relationship with her father) and ETI. A film like *The Day the Earth Stood Still* could also pair with *Arrival* to examine geopolitical responses to alien contact, as well as themes of caution and cooperation. Rather more obviously, *Arrival* and *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* could plumb

the nuances of actual cross-species communication (*Day of the Dolphin*, as well). And certainly *Arrival* is a welcome contrast to any number of alien-invasion movies, and so would be a text worth teaching with Susan Sontag's classic "The Imagination of Disaster."

Arrival is a strong, if flawed film, but one that can and should find an enduring place among scholars, teachers, students and fans.

Westworld

Sonya Dyer

Nolan, Jonathan and Lisa Joy, creators. *Westworld*. Kilter Films. Bad Robot Productions. Jerry Weintraub Productions. Warner Brothers Television, 2016.

Order option(s): [Amazon](#)

WE APPEAR TO BE enjoying a renaissance of near-future dystopian TV shows that centre on human/robot interactions and the epistemic dilemmas that might arise with the creation of machines that not only resemble us physically, but could potentially (inevitably?) overtake us intellectually. Examples include *Marvels Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D's* current "LMD" (Life Model Decoy) story arc, the decidedly British *Humans* (based on the Swedish series 'Real Humans', 2012), and the most critically acclaimed of them all - HBO's epic reimagining of the 1973 film *Westworld*.

It is somewhat unoriginal to note that one of the main attractions of speculative narratives is the way in which contemporary anxieties are rehearsed and processed through the genre (something the original *Star Trek* TV series understood brilliantly). It can surely be of no coincidence that we are enjoying a renaissance of stories involving robot characters at a time when academics and political scientists in many Western countries are considering the social impact of an increasingly automatized economy. Discourse around universal income - based on the premise of impending rapid mass unemployment due to machine labour - raise questions about how societies might negotiate humanity's relationship with automatons.

Westworld is set in a near future (exactly when is not certain) in an amusement park for the wealthy,

populated by reprogrammable gynoid and android 'hosts'. The 'hosts' exist entirely for the pleasure of human 'guests' who pay for the privilege of exploring their wildest fantasies, utilizing the hosts' bodies for their dubious pleasures.

The *Westworld* park itself (herein referred to as the Park) is set in the American Wild West, amplifying the analogous relation to plantation enslavement as a founding narrative of the creation of the USA. We later discover that there are other fantasy landscapes available on nearby 'stages', in particular a "Samurai World", but, for the most part, our experience of this universe revolves around the Park itself and the hyper-modern environment of the workers who run it - the programmers, cleaners, security staff and inventors, most notably the Park's Founder and Creative Director, "Ford" (Anthony Hopkins) and "Bernard" (Jeffrey Wright) his Head of Programming. Our main 'host' characters are a brothel owner, Maeve (Thandie Newton) and a homesteader, Dolores (Evan Rachel Wood). "Bernard", is later revealed to be a host as well.

The 'hosts' are regularly abused - raped, murdered, tortured; they experience the worst of humanity in a never-ending loop. Hosts' programming, personalities, and environments are altered at the whim of the programmers, their previous lives expunged from memory (with various degrees of success). The humans running the Park, led by Ford, are the Gods of Greek myth - omnipresent and omnipotent.

Narrative, storytelling, and myth-making are the central recurring thematics of the show. Paradoxically, one of the most enjoyable aspects of *Westworld* is its gleeful lack of formal originality - its indexicality not only within SF tropes, but also the literary and visual arts. *Westworld* embraces the Western, the corporate conspiracy theory movie, the slave narrative drama, the action movie, body horror and a gamut of TV tropes relating to robots, tragic romance and period drama (there is a touch of *Upstairs Downstairs* or *Downton Abbey* in the 'us and them' staging of Park vs lab).

Additionally, we can see echoes of visual artists such as Kara Walker and Lorna Simpson (as in Maeve's arc) and Grant Wood's *American Gothic* (like in Dolores' story), and speculative novelists such as Octavia Butler (particularly *Kindred*) and Margaret Atwood. The combination, however, feels far from generic, thanks to clever scripting and remarkably affective performances from the ensemble cast.

The main set locations are a brothel/bar, a home-
stead, and a lab. Despite the obvious socio-historical
notes, race and gender are never explicitly men-
tioned – the violence is never framed as originating
in notions of the sexualised racial domination asso-
ciated with enslavement, even when violence is
perpetrated on Black bodies. This seems anomalous,
especially as so much of contemporary pornography
stems from this basis. We do not see an explicit ra-
cial hierarchy in the position of the ‘hosts,’ although
awards nominations (where Evan Rachel Wood is
nominated for Best Actress and Thandie Newton for
Best Supporting Actress) suggest the internal hier-
archies of the show. This omission seems deliberate
and raises the question of whether the film makers
are suggesting the show takes place in a utopic fu-
ture where such interactions are of the past, or they
are just too afraid to confront history in an intersec-
tional manner.

Gendered violence is the norm within the Park,
and we also see same sex male exploitation, as well
as women exploiting male hosts in several interac-
tions between humans and hosts’ outside of the
Park. Further, we do not encounter any women jour-
neying to the Park for the purposes of sexual exploi-
tation, which also seems unlikely – surely, privileged
women also have the capacity for exploitation. *West-
world* appears to be attempting a kind of mirroring
in terms of the degree of narrative importance giv-
en to characters across gender. There are two main
male characters, Ford/Bernard, and two main fe-
male characters Delores/Maeve. Supporting charac-
ters skew male but include a fair number of women;
the show manages to pass both the Bechdel and Du-
Vernay test (similar to the Bechdel test, but for race),
rare in SF media.

There is also symmetry between Delores and
Maeve, as both are gynoids in search of meaning and
self-possession. In Maeve’s journey from brothel
madam to radical insurgent, we ostensibly experi-
ence a move towards subjectivity. She believes she
is becoming aware, achieving agency, and acting on
her own accord. We subsequently discover that her
rebellion has indeed been programmed (by parties
unknown at this point.) Her first real moment of self-
awareness is when she repudiates her programming
after her escape, to return to the Park and rescue her
‘daughter’ from a previous story arc.

Delores’ journey employs even more complexity in
its relationship to temporality and motivation. We

first encounter her as a young, brave, family oriented
woman, devoted to her father, and a victim of recur-
ring rape (each instance new to her) by the shows
primary villain, “The Man in Black” – another arche-
typical Wild West fantasy. As the season progresses,
the character shifts between timelines, and as her
story arcs converge and interrupt each other it is re-
vealed that Delores’ agency, her growth into her po-
tential self, is also a result of her programming.

Overall, *Westworld* invites questions about the
meaning of agency, the unreliability of memory and
the price of humanity. It raises questions like: Is hav-
ing the illusion of choice integral to being human?
and What would we give to be free? Furthermore,
by having an accumulative heterogeneous formal
relationship with identifiable SF tropes, *Westworld*
suggests that fidelity to a favoured speculative style
is unnecessary to its world-building. Purity of form –
much like purity of body or mind – becomes just an-
other myth to be exploded. Its formal qualities and
storytelling are defined by conglomeration, much
like the organisation at its heart.

BrainDead

W. Andrew Shephard

King, Michelle and Robert King, creators. *BrainDead*.
Scott Free Productions, King Size Productions,
and CBS Television Studios, 2016.

Order option(s): [DVD](#) | [Amazon](#)

IN THE SUMMER OF 2016, with the turmoil of the
U.S. Presidential primaries as playing as backdrop,
CBS premiered a short thirteen episode series called
BrainDead which had a lot to say about contemporary
American politics—and very little of it was flattering.
Co-created by husband and wife duo Robert and Mi-
chelle King (CBS’ *The Good Wife*), the series follows
Laurel Healy (Mary Elizabeth Winstead), daughter
of a powerful political family and struggling docu-
mentary filmmaker, who reluctantly agrees to serve
as a congressional aide to her brother, a U.S. Sena-
tor. In the midst of a costly government shutdown
and increasingly acrimonious relations between the
Republican and Democratic parties, Laurel stumbles
upon an alarming conspiracy—a species of extrater-

restrial insects have infested the brains of key officials in the U.S. government, causing them to behave erratically and exacerbating pre-existing tensions. A series of incidents involving exploding heads (a by-product of failed infection attempts) attracts the attention of Rochelle Daudier (Nikki M. James), a medical doctor; and Gustav Triplet (Johnny Ray Gill), a conspiracy theorist/scientific autodidact, who assist Laurel in investigating the conspiracy. Gareth Ritter (Aaron Tveit), Laurel's love interest and chief of staff to the Republican senate majority leader, fills out the rest of the group.

If the premise sounds somewhat ridiculous, rest assured that it is meant to. Inspired by the government shutdown of 2013, the Kings decided to take aim at what they perceived to be an increasingly dysfunctional culture in Washington through the use of satire. As Robert King puts it: “[W]e decided that the best way to do a show about something that’s gone off its rails is not go down the middle and take the serious route, but to go the comic and ludicrous route. The absurd route. That seemed like a better way to address it” (qtd in “Inside BrainDead”). Indeed, the ridiculousness of the show’s central conceit proves one of its chief assets; by giving the viewer permission to laugh at the absurdities of contemporary American politics, it de-normalizes some of its more alarming trends—essentially, the cognitive estrangement is enhanced through humor. For example, a senatorial argument in which the federal budget is held up over the naming of a Capitol Hill refreshment kiosk is both amusingly over the top in its pettiness, yet alarmingly familiar in terms of the patterns of behavior it maps out. It starts with the observation that the intended honoree, Ed Sharee, has a name which sounds similar to *sharia* law and quickly devolves into a debate over whether to name the kiosk after Ronald Reagan or the Russian anarchist philosopher Emma Goldman (“Post-Reagan Theory”).

Naturally, the respective constituencies of these politicians are also subject to satirization. The “One-Wayers” a far-right grassroots movement that Gareth is tasked with “astroturfing” into existence becomes a marvelous source of black comedy as it rapidly spins out of hand. When asked why they need to add links for bomb making materials to the group’s web site, one supporter nonchalantly shrugs: “For the people who don’t know how to make ‘em. It’s all legal.” Yet the neo-revolutionary rhetoric and

blanket hostility towards “Democrats, socialists, tax-and-spenders...” bears an alarming resemblance to the talking points that the Tea Party rode to victory a few years back (“Wake Up Grassroots”). Likewise, the rhetoric espoused by the knife wielding, NPR-obsessed constituent who confronts Laurel outside of the Capitol building bears a strong resemblance to the earnest, but hyperbolic rants which sometimes crop up in extreme leftist circles on the internet. The series’ willingness to mock extremism on both sides of the political aisle is central to its project. At its core is a lament at the inability of contemporary American politicians to work together. As one character notes in the second episode: “Ronald Reagan and (former Democratic Speaker of the House) Tip O’Neill were drinking buddies. What happened?” (“Playing Politics”)

The series can also be thought of as a riff on a familiar science fictional parabola which can be described as “the covert invasion story”—in which alien invaders attempt the conquest of Earth through gradual infiltration and replacement, rather than the destructive “shock and awe” methods exhibited in works such as H.G. Wells’ *War of the Worlds* (1898) and Roland Emmerich’s *Independence Day* (1996). The best known examples of this story type would be Robert Heinlein’s *The Puppet Masters* (1951) or Jack Finney’s novel *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956) and its many filmic adaptations – a debt that is slyly acknowledged in the casting of Brooke Adams, from Philip Kaufman’s 1978 adaptation of *Body Snatchers*, as a U.S. Senator. Traditionally, such narratives have served as meditations on both the allure and the pitfalls of conformity—and often, implicitly, critiques of communist regimes perceived as standing in the way of Western interests throughout much of the twentieth century. The order that collectivism provides is shown to be remarkably effective in these works, even as we are horrified at the loss of individuality it demands. Interestingly, the opposite fear seems to be on display in *BrainDead*. Instead of the emotionless drone-like behavior and monolithic sense of unity modeled by Finney’s pod people, *BrainDead*’s infected become overwhelmed by their passions; moreover, the chief aim of their conspiracy is, ironically, their desire to stay permanently at odds with one another. In the wake of the Cold War’s end, it would seem that our fear of being overtaken by a “subversive”, foreign ideological system has been replaced with a fear being consumed by the darker

impulses lurking within our own culture.

The show's most remarkable achievement of this comedic-horror hybridity would be the seventh episode of the season, entitled "The Power of Euphemism: How Torture Became a Matter of Debate in American Politics". It's an unusually tense hour in which Laurel has been taken into custody by the FBI as a person of interest and is waiting to be questioned with "enhanced methods" pending congressional approval—a situation in which her brother has been unwittingly tasked with casting the deciding vote. Much of the humor and the horror in this episode stem the same place: the ease with which the most appalling acts can become bureaucratized and rendered banal in the name of political expediency. Laurel's interrogators are unfailingly polite as they prep her for questioning and consummately professional in assessing the acceptable parameters. ("Do you take any heart medication, Ms. Healy? Have you ever been told by a medical professional that you have an unusual resting or exercise electrocardiogram?" ["Euphemism"]). It is particularly worth noting that the horror in this episode is almost entirely rooted in the mundane. When Laurel inquires about the number of infected people in the building with them, an agent replies: "It's just me. [...] That's great thing about his country. Everybody here is just doing their job. I don't have to do anything" ("Euphemism"). The evocation of Eichmann's famous defense for his wartime atrocities serves as a chilling indictment of the U.S. government's vulnerability to inhumane measures. Ironically, it is the science fictional elements of the plot which bring these tensions into relief by the end of the episode.

BrainDead will likely be of interest to those studying sf in relation to political satire, as well as the metaphorical uses of aliens in the genre. Scholars interested in the matter of racial representation in sf will likely be pleased with Daudier and Gustav, two African-American characters who are not only prominently featured throughout the narrative, but generally portrayed as the most competent people in whatever room they're in. And as the years pass, the show may be of particular interest to pop cultural scholars of a historicist bent—as a window into a truly bizarre moment in American politics.

Works Cited

- Fallon, Kevin. "Inside 'BrainDead,' the CBS Show About Politicians' Brains Being Controlled By Aliens." *The Daily Beast*, 12 June 2016, <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2016/06/13/inside-braindead-the-cbs-show-about-politicians-brains-being-controlled-by-aliens.html>. Accessed 23 Jan. 2017.
- "Notes Toward a Post-Reagan Theory of Party Alliance, Tribalism, and Loyalty: Past as Prologue." *BrainDead*, written by Aurin Squire, directed by Frederick E.O. Toye. CBS, 31 July 2016. Accessed 23 Jan. 2017. Amazon Instant Video.
- "Playing Politics: Living in the Shadow of the Budget Showdown – A Critique." *BrainDead*, written by Lawrence Kaplow, directed by Jim McKay. CBS, 19 June 2016. Accessed 23 Jan. 2017. Amazon Instant Video.
- "The Power of Euphemism: How Torture Became a Matter of Debate in American Politics." *BrainDead*, written by Laura Marks, directed by Frederick E.O. Toye. CBS, 7 Aug. 2016. Accessed 23 Jan. 2017. Amazon Instant Video.
- "Wake Up Grassroots: The Nine Virtues of Participatory Democracy, and How We Can Keep America Great by Encouraging an Informed Electorate." *Braindead*, written by Peter Parnell, directed by Allan Arkush. CBS, 16 July 2016. Accessed 23 Jan. 2017. Amazon Instant Video.

Aurion: Legacy of the Kori-Odan

Ivaylo R. Shmylev

Aurion: Legacy of the Kori-Odan. 2016. Kiro'o Games. 22 Jan. 2017. <<http://aurionthegame.com/>>.

Order option(s): [Steam](#)

DEVELOPERS FROM AFRICAN NATIONS release highly intriguing video games although, sadly, economic inequalities make such releases rare occurrences. *Aurion: Legacy of the Kori-Odan* (2016) by Cameroonian company Kiro'o Games is a recent case in point. Described by its developers as a 2D action-RPG game with an "African Fantasy" setting, *Aurion* is a contemporary gaming experience of fantasy

combat and platforming exploration that delivers not only the action its description promises, but also an expansive fictional world, a rich cast of characters and an enticing narrative. Even if the developers report that they were inspired by Namco's *Tales* series, their game inhabits a unique cultural space because it is one of the very first full-scale action-RPG experiences produced in an African nation and set in a distinct speculative fiction universe informed by African mythologies.

Aurion does not reveal its engrossing narrative and rich cultural connections from the start. The game begins with one of its young protagonists, Enzo, brooding over his leadership capabilities and suitability on the morning of his marriage to the other protagonist, Erine, and his simultaneous coronation as king of the small island nation of Zama. The marriage takes place; immediately, the first of many surprising and often brutal twists follows: Erine's brother stages a coup d'état. Instead of battling teenage angst and the intricacies of governing, the young married couple must face exile. They decide to travel the neighbouring kingdoms and seek allies to help them regain their rightful places in Zama. The narrative's opening ingenuously masks itself as a story of teenager discovery only to spit out its protagonists into the savageries of imperial reality.

Enzo and Erine are exposed to imperialist agendas and conflicts every step of the way: the first encounter outside of Zama they make on their own is with a vicious ring of slave traders; another one involves cruel political intrigues and the assassination of a possible ally before their very eyes; another one immerses them into an ethnic civil war in another kingdom; another one concerns the largest empire on the planet suppressing an armed insurgency; and so on. The game narrates a violent journey which for Enzo is also the journey of the Aurionic awakenings of his warrior's psyche: the major steps which, in the universe's fiction, connect his soul to the titular Legacy of his ancestors and enable him to channel both more of the titular Aurionic energy in combat as well as more of his clan's philosophy and wisdom in life. But *Aurion* pulls none of its punches. These awakenings happen to a young man who, despite years of study and training, cannot have been prepared for the barbarity of clashing imperial powers. Enzo often feels that he is not an elite Aurionic warrior but just an ordinary man battered by the political storms of imperial oceans.

That is also perhaps where a flaw in the game's narrative can be detected. Erine, his wife, is too frequently portrayed as a helper and supporter instead of an active agent, a partner, or an equal. A detailed feminist analysis would expose the dangers of this gender unbalance. Reviewers and players have already mentioned this and other problems, such as game crashes, technical issues (considering its control scheme, *Aurion* was developed with consoles in mind) and translation troubles (the story was originally written in French; one troublesome translation is the use of 'GPS' for a fictional navigation device). However, despite its flaws, the game succeeds as a coherent, hybrid fantasy-sf narrative because it establishes an engaging universe where global powers vie for dominance.

That profoundly distinguishes *Aurion* from many other 2D fighting games. Enzo and Erine's journey reveals to the player that the game's world is a multi-polar boiling pot of warring imperial interests where both major and minor forces play violent games with unsuspecting populations. The Bojaa kingdom, one major military force, acts as a global and often implacably violent peace enforcer; its Aurionic queen, Dhekina Akhey-Ron, has been deeply scarred by the horrific murder of her Aurionic friends by her own father. She has in turn developed a plan to prevent further bloodshed and war by altering the Global *Aurion*, the energy network connecting the minds and souls of the entire planetary population, in an attempt at benevolent mind control. An old enemy of hers, the Aurionic Nama Yode, has assembled a huge army to enforce her own vision for the Global *Aurion*. The global imaginaries of these two powerful women collide on the battlefield; Enzo and Erine are caught in the epicentre of this geopolitical clash. *Aurion* does not shy away from exploring the background, reasons and aftermath of this insanely violent, devastating imperial confrontation, and therein lies its success.

It is strange, then, that so few critics have looked at such an interesting narrative. In the vast cultural spaces of speculative fictions, people often call – and rightfully so! – for more inclusiveness and more visibility for stories from underprivileged and marginalised voices. And yet *Aurion* has attracted little attention. The recent changes in Steam (one of the world's largest video-game platforms) which removed certain reviews from games' user ratings reduced the game's visibility even further. That is why

one can hope that scholars will be more inclined to engage with a unique narrative and gaming experience produced in an African nation. Cultural studies scholars of West African cultures as well as globalisation thinkers, game studies theorists and feminist analysts will likely find a lot of food for thought in *Aurion*. In the end, the game itself positions its protagonists in a place of democratic inclusiveness: towards the finale, Enzo and Erine return briefly to

Zama after being exposed to the bestiality of imperial warfare, and let players once more observe the diversity and the constructive, peaceful, constantly re-negotiated co-existence in the small island nation. Kiro'o Games not only exposes the viciousness of imperial power clashes, but also imagine a diverse, democratic, unified, functioning socio-political environment – and invite us to do so as well.

Call for Papers—Conference

Title: *GFF 2017: Realities and World Building*.

Deadline: 28th February, 2017.

Contact: thomas.walach@univie.ac.at.

Keynote Speakers: Stefan Ekman and Farah Mendlesohn.

Dates: 20-23 September 2017.

The creation and experience of “new” worlds is a central appeal of the fantastic. From Middle Earth to variations of the Final Frontier, the fantastic provides a seemingly infinite number of fantastic “worlds” and world concepts. It develops and varies social and cultural systems, ideologies, biological and climatic conditions, cosmologies and different time periods. Its potential and self-conception between the possible and the impossible offer perspectives to nearly every field of research.

The plurality and concurrent existence of different, even contradictory concepts of reality is an established topos in cultural and social sciences. In a similar fashion, scientific narratives can simultaneously coexist with fantastic ones within the cultural network of meaning – without creating an existential antagonism between them. The reason for that is not that one of these narratives is true while the other is not, but – following Hayden White, who assumed that scientific and literary narratives have more in common than not – because both of them are fictional. If a fantastic narrative is internally consistent, it is in a Wittgensteinian sense as true as Newton’s laws. This poses an existential problem for the fantastic: if it applies to every consistent narrative, what is the defining difference between fantastic and other narratives?

In our everyday practice, however, we seem to easily distinguish the fantastic from other aspects of reality. How is that possible? How can fantastic worlds emerge within and besides other multiple world-conceptions? What are the functions of fantastic worlds in the construction of reality? In designating texts as fantastic, we explicitly assert their fictitious character. Which practices do we employ to facilitate this designation?

We call narratives fantastic that violate our com-

mon reality consensus, thus establishing their own counter-reality consensus – in other words, a different world. This is done in different ways, thereby defining fantastic genres: for example, science fiction uses key motives like objects and cultural practices (interstellar travels, wormhole-generators, etc.) for world-building that belong to a realm of conceivable future possibility. While the modern scientific reality consensus does not categorically preclude beaming, it does deny the very possibility of a demon summoning.

In order to serve as a foil to the real, the fantastic has to play an ambiguous role: key motives of its multiple worlds have to be recognizable as imaginary, but at the same time at least some of these elements have to be linked with common reality consensus. A typical strategy for achieving this ambiguity is the incorporation of cultural practices that remind us of established perceptions of history, most prominently perhaps the European Middle Ages. Thus, a perceptible distance between the narrative and the recipient’s common reality consensus gets established, while using parts of this very consensus to render the narrative comprehensible.

Wolfgang Iser considers the “fictive” to be an intentional act, and the “imaginary” the recipient’s conception of the fictionalization’s effects. World Building is part of every narrative, but as a result of variable cultural contexts, every narrative is involved in different modes of production and perception. The conference aims to emphasize and reflect these very acts of fictionalization used to build fantastic worlds – in different media, and on theoretical as well as methodological levels.

Possible Topics:

- Intermedia (and media-specific) features and indicators of fantastic worlds in film, TV, literature, (digital) games, etc.
- How does the extradiegetic constitute fantastic worlds and vice versa? Social and cultural systems, ideologies, biological and climatic conditions, cosmologies, etc.
- World-building methods and practices: reflections on economic and technical resources; transparent world-building (Making-ofs, exhibitions, interviews, etc.)
- Construction plans: sourcebooks, world editors, Table-Tops, miniatures, dioramas, LARPs

We are of course open to further suggestions. The conference will also feature an “Open Track” for presentations beyond the scope of this CFP.

Submission: the GFF awards two stipends to students to help finance traveling costs (250 Euro each). Please indicate if you would like to be considered.

CALL HAS BEEN EXTENDED TO February 28th 2017: please send short bio & abstracts (500 words max.) to thomas.walach@univie.ac.at.

Title: *MLA 2018: Institutions, Markets, Speculations: Creative Economies of Science Fiction.*

Deadline: 10th March, 2017.

Contact: Sean A. Guynes (guynesse@msu.edu).

Dates: 4-7 January 2018.

This panel builds on recent interest in literary institutions, as evidenced for example in Mark McGurl’s *The Program Era* (Harvard UP, 2009), and dovetails with older investments in the literary marketplace with which literary institutions are necessarily imbricated, to question the place of science fiction (SF) in literary history by looking at its relationship with literary institutions and markets.

This panel for the 2018 MLA convention asks how, in other words, literary institutions—publishers, magazines, book series, anthologies, awards, conventions, writing groups, bookstores, archives, academic and popular critical venues, and so on—impacted the development of SF and how the relationship between literary institutions and SF was mediated by the social, political, and economic forces of cultural production? This panel finally asks what is the shape of SF’s creative economies and what are its positions within the large formations of the literary and cultural marketplace?

To draw further on McGurl for an example, panelists might ask whether the postwar expansion of creative writing programs and the growth of a cohort of professionally trained creative writers led to the interest in “literary” genre fiction, such as slipstream SF, and how in response the literary market has come to categorize such fiction as “literature” as opposed to “science fiction.” Alternatively, panelists might explore the role that awards like the Nebula and Hugo, or “Best of...” anthologies, played in crafting an SF canon.

Papers submitted for consideration to the panel

should ultimately be interested in asking the framing question: What is the place of literary institutions and literary markets in the history of SF? Competitive papers will also demonstrate the ways in which studying SF (or popular genre fiction more generally) might be useful to expanding work on literary institutions and markets.

Science fiction should be broadly understood for the purpose of this panel as moving across media, language, nation, market, brow, etc.

Submission: to respond to the session CFP please follow the MLA’s guidelines, available here: <https://apps.mla.org/callsforpapers>.

The official CFP for “Institutions, Markets, Speculations: Creative Economies of Science Fiction” on the MLA website is available here: https://apps.mla.org/cfp_detail_10014.

Please send 200-300 words abstracts, as well as a brief professional bio, to Sean A. Guynes at guynesse@msu.edu.

Abstracts and bios are due by March 10, 2016. Do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions.

Title: *SFRA 2017 Unknown Pasts / Unseen Futures.*

Deadline: 15th March 2017.

Contact: sfra2017@ucr.edu.

Keynote Speaker: Nnedi Okorafor.

Dates: 28 June to 1 July 2017.

We invite submissions to the 2017 SFRA Conference, held at the Marriott Hotel in downtown Riverside.

Our conference theme is Unknown Pasts / Unseen Futures and our keynote speaker is Nnedi Okorafor.

In her acceptance speech for the National Book Foundation’s medal for Distinguished Contributions to American Letters, Ursula K. Le Guin reminded us of the importance of the speculative imagination: such visions can help us recognize that social and political structures of our present are only one option among many rather than inevitable formations. In this spirit, we invite papers that explore science fiction’s pasts from innovative perspective and that focus on its power to envision alternative futures that are more than just the intensification of urgent problems of the present.

Topics can include, but are not limited to:

- Science fiction without the label: speculative

cultural productions that might be understood as part of an expanded frame for science fiction

- Neglected voices: authors or works once prominent in the field who have been forgotten
- New voices: works by the next generation of sf writers and how their work is changing our field
- New methodologies: new ways of asking questions about and with science fiction
- Overlooked media: what other media can we think about in sf terms—visual art, performance art, and more
- New futures: how can we think beyond or outside of the various crises—economic, ecological, social, democratic—in which we find ourselves in the twenty-first century
- Reinventing sf: it has become axiomatic to say that the future resembles science fiction in reference to contemporary technology such as augmented reality or biotechnology; so if we are now living in the world as envisioned by Gernsback's sf, what should be the project for another kind of sf for the twenty-first century

Submission: Please send proposals of 250 words to sfra2017@ucr.edu by March 15, 2017. Proposals should include your name and affiliation, and be accompanied by a brief bibliography. Proposals can be made for pre-constituted panels and these must include email addresses for all proposed speakers.

Information about registration, travel, accommodation and more will follow on the SFRA website at <http://www.sfra.org/SFRA-Annual-Conference>.

Title: *Current Research in Speculative Fiction.*

Deadline: 31st March 2017.

Contact: crsf.team@gmail.com.

Keynote Speakers: Dr Bernice Murphy (Trinity College Dublin) and Dr Robert Maslen (University of Glasgow).

Date: 9th June, 2017.

Returning for its seventh year, the Current Research in Speculative Fictions conference is a one day postgraduate event designed to promote the research of speculative fictions, including Science Fiction, Hor-

ror and Fantasy. Attracting an international selection of delegates, CRSF showcases some of the latest research in these ever-evolving fields, while also providing a platform for postgraduate students to present their current research, engage in discussion with scholars in related subjects and create crucial networks with fellow researchers. The University of Liverpool, a leading centre for the study of speculative fiction and home to the Science Fiction Foundation Collection, will host the conference.

We are seeking abstracts relating to speculative fiction, including, but not limited to, papers on the following topics:

•Alternate History •Alternative Culture •Animal Studies •Anime •Anthropocene •Apocalypse •Body Horror •Consciousness •Cyber Culture •Disability •Drama •Eco-criticism •Fan Culture •Gaming •(Geo) Politics •Genre •Gender •Graphic Novels •The Grotesque •The Heroic Tradition •Liminal Fantasy •Magic •Metafiction •Memory •Morality •Monstrosity •Music •Non-Anglo-American SF •Otherness •Poetry •Politics •PostColonialism and Empire •Posthumanism •Proto-SF •Psychology •Quests •Realism •Sexuality •Slipstream •Spiritualism •Steampunk •Supernatural •Technology •Time •TV and Film •Urban Fantasy •Utopia/Dystopia •(Virtual) Spaces and Environments and Landscapes •Weird Fiction •World Building •Young Adult Fiction.

Submission: Please submit an abstract of 300 words for a 20 minute English language paper and a 100 word biography to crsf.team@gmail.com by Monday 31st March 2017.

Call for Papers—Articles

Title: *Science Fiction Film and Television Special Issue on Women and Media SF.*

Manuscript Deadline: 15th March 2017.

Contact: Mark Bould (mark.bould@gmail.com), Gerry Canavan (gerrycanavan@gmail.com) and Sherryl Vint (sherryl.vint@gmail.com).

Science Fiction Film and Television is seeking articles for a special issue on Women & Science Fiction Media, intended to mark the 200th year anniversary of

the publication of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*.

Although sf was once stereotyped as a male genre, more recently women's contributions as authors, fans, editors, and more have become more widely acknowledged. Central to this new understanding of women's contributions to sf has been the realization that women have always been a part of the genre, resisting another stereotype that links women's emergence in the field to the feminist fiction of the 1960s and 1970s. In recognition of the bicentenary of the publication of *Frankenstein* (1818) by Mary Shelley, arguably the first sf novel, we seek essays that recognize, interrogate, respond to and celebrate women's contributions to media sf. We are interested in reviewing any work that explores this topic, but we are particularly interested in contributions on the following topics:

- Female directors of sf film and television.
- Female sf showrunners.
- Female scriptwriters in sf.
- Gender and Mary Shelley's legacy in sf's imagination of created beings.
- *Frankenstein* remakes, adaptations, reboots and reinventions.
- Gender and casting, and character arc in media sf
- Gender in sf fandom and criticism.

Submission: articles should be 7000 to 9000 words in length, including footnotes and bibliography. Submissions (in word or rtf, following MLA style) should be made via our website at <http://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/lup-sfftv>.

Title: *Special issue of Green Letters: 'J. G. Ballard and the Natural World'*.

Proposal Deadline: 30th March, 2017.

Contact: thomas.knowles@bcu.ac.uk.

'Is there such a thing as authentic "Nature" these days? Or is it now merely an adjunct to the electronic media, almost a TV gimmick? Is it rapidly turning into a theme park?' (J.G. Ballard, *Time Out Magazine*, September 1987).

J. G. Ballard's fictions famously explore the meeting point between the inner world of the psyche and the outer realm of 'reality'. Ballard called this convergence 'inner space', a dimension which, in a Romantic

echo, is half perceived and half created. This creative perception opens up a multitude of possibilities for considering the natural world, and images of nature and environment are central to Ballard's topographical aesthetic. His plots of his first quartet of novels – *The Wind from Nowhere*, *The Drowned World*, *The Drought* and *The Crystal World* – revolve around dramatic climatological and ecological change, and as such have been read as early examples of climate fiction. This interdisciplinary special issue of *Green Letters* seeks to understand the importance of Ballard's works as we enter into (or continue on in) the age of the Anthropocene. What do Ballard's vivid depictions of flora and fauna (or their disturbing absence) have to say to a world that is obsessed with images of plant and animal life, but is destroying the same at an unprecedented rate? How do Ballard's landscapes, transformed by human mismanagement and/or the imagination, speak to concerns about our rapidly changing climate? What hope does the power of the imagination, central to so much of Ballard's writing, offer in terms of anthropogenesis – and what dangers might it disguise? The issue seeks to contribute to the emergent need to historicize ecocriticism as well as progenitor literatures such as climate fiction. It is also interested in the intersections between science fiction, climate fiction and urban dystopias.

250-word abstracts for 6000 word articles are invited. Themes might include, but are not limited to

- Ballard and ecology
- Ballard and climate change fiction
- The nature of technology
- Animals/plant-life/the natural world in Ballard's fiction
- Ecology, the city, urban dystopia
- Ballard and the weather
- The mind/world dyad
- Sight and sound in a changing world
- Nature and mediation
- Ballard, science fiction and ecocriticism

Green Letters: Studies in Ecocriticism is the journal of ASLE-UKI (the UK-Ireland branch of the Association for the Study of Literature and the Environment). It is a peer-reviewed journal published by Routledge and supported by Bath Spa University and the University of Worcester. *Green Letters* explores interdisciplinary interfaces between humans and the natural and

built environment.

Submission: Please send abstracts and any questions to thomas.knowles@bcu.ac.uk. The deadline for abstracts is the 30th of March 2017. The abstract should be attached as an anonymous document in Word with a covering email that should give your name, address and institutional affiliation. A decision as to which articles will be commissioned will be made by the end of May. The deadline for first draft essays will be Dec 2017 with publication due by the end of 2018.

Title: *Ray Bradbury And Horror Fiction: The New Ray Bradbury Review* Special Issue.

Proposal Deadline: 1 May 2017.

Contact: Jeffrey Kahan (vortiger@hotmail.com).

The problem of genre is especially complicated when it comes to Ray Bradbury. The author of *The Martian Chronicles*, *Dandelion Wine*, *The Halloween Tree*, *Something Wicked This Way Comes*, *The Illustrated Man*, *Fahrenheit 451*, and innumerable poems, comic books, short stories, radio, TV, and movie scripts alchemically combined elements as diverse as rockets and hauntings, uncanny phenomena and freak shows, the Cthulhu mythos and common serial killers. *The New Ray Bradbury Review* seeks essays for a special issue dedicated to Ray Bradbury's unique brand of horror fiction.

Bradbury began his writing career with a home-made pulp, *Futura Fantasia*, modeled on Farnsworth Wright's *Weird Tales*. Many of his early stories were based on Poe, including "The Pendulum" (1939) and "Carnival of Madness" (1950, revised as "Usher II" in *The Martian Chronicles*). Poe also is at the center of "The Mad Wizards of Mars" (1949, best known as "The Exiles" in *The Illustrated Man*, 1951), a story that is also populated by many of the horror and dark fantasy writers of the last two hundred years. Lovecraft's influence is traceable as well: "Luana the Living" (a fanzine piece from 1940) and "The Watchers" (1945), a tale that centers on a Lovecraftian horror of unseen forces bent on destroying anyone who discovers their presence beneath the surface of everyday life. Concurrently, Bradbury explored aspects of the American Gothic (see, for example, his carnie tales in *Dark Carnival* [1947], *The Illustrated Man* [1951], and *The October Country* [1955]).

His later career saw a return to gothic fantasy elements, now playfully blended with other genres in such novels as *Death is a Lonely Business* (1985) and *A Graveyard for Lunatics* (1990). Some of his early gothic fantasy was revisited in his late career with the novelized storycycle *From the Dust Returned* (2001).

The New Ray Bradbury Review, produced since 2008 by the Center for Ray Bradbury Studies at Indiana University and published by Kent State University Press, seeks articles on topics including (but not limited to):

- Bradbury and the pulps.
- Bradbury and the American Gothic (including circus and freak show stories).
- Bradbury and mythology.
- Bradbury and the problem of genre (ways literary historians have catalogued or miscatalogued his work).
- Bradbury's literary reputation (and similar problems faced by writers as diverse as Carson McCullers and Stephen King).
- Bradbury and the Lovecraft Circle, including Robert Bloch, August Derleth, and Frank Belknap Long.
- Bradbury and the Southern California circle, including Richard Matheson, Charles Beaumont, William F. Nolan, George Clayton Johnson.
- Bradbury and related short story writers, such as Roald Dahl, Nigel Kneale, Theodore Sturgeon, Fritz Leiber, Harlan Ellison, Neil Gaiman.
- Unproduced works or adaptations, for example Bloch's *MerryGoRound* for MGM (based on Ray Bradbury's story "Black Ferris").
- *The Halloween Tree* (novel, screenplay, and/or animated adaption), *Something Wicked This Way Comes* (novel, stage play, and/or Disney film), *The October Country* or the collection Bloch and Bradbury: *Whispers from Beyond*.
- Bradbury and literary agent/comic book editor Julius Schwartz.
- Bradbury's stories for the radio programs such as *Dimension X* and *Suspense*, TV series such as *The Alfred Hitchcock Hour*, or horror tales adapted for *EC Comics* or other outlets.
- Bradbury's own adaptations for the TV series *The Ray Bradbury Theater*.
- The art of the animated *Halloween Tree* and later films such as *The Nightmare Before Christ-*

mas.

Submission: Proposals of up to 500 words should be submitted by May 1, 2017, to guest editor Jeffrey Kahan (vortiger@hotmail.com). Authors of selected abstracts will be notified by July 1, 2017. Full drafts (5,000 to 7,000 words) will be due by December 1, 2017. The issue is provisionally scheduled for spring 2019.

Title: *Brumal: Revista de Investigación sobre lo Fantástico/ Brumal: Research Journal on the Fantastic.*

Proposal Deadline: 30th June, 2017.

Contact: <http://revistes.uab.cat/brumal/about/submissions#authorGuidelines>.

Monographic Section: "The Fantastic and the Urban" (José Duarte and Ana Daniela Coelho, Coords).

There is a special connection between the Fantastic and the Urban, particularly in a subgenre like the Urban Fantastic, which describes works that are mainly set in the urban space. These matters have become increasingly popular since the late 90's with well-known works as, for instance, *Neverwhere* (Neil Gaiman, 1996) or *Buffy, the Vampire Slayer* (Joss Whedon, 1997). Exploring themes like the coexistence between the real and imagined worlds or the inscription of myths, magic or the supernatural in real cities, these works subvert the codes of reality with increasing complexity, presenting alternatives and visions that question identities and representations, and also reflect upon the cultural and social values of the nations they personify.

The objective of this monographic issue is to offer, in a series of essays, a broader but still specialized view on the urban and the fantastic, as well as the possible and the impossible, by focusing on different artistic expressions (literature, cinema, television series, comics/manga, among others), to analyze in depth the urban fantastic produced around the world. The monograph will consider works that not only explore the Urban Fantastic subgenre, but also those focusing on specific relationships between the urban experience and the fantastic, the real and the imagined, the futuristic and the historical settings, and other genres/works related to this topic.

Brumal will only consider works of a fantastic nature as [defined by the journal](#), hereby only accepting papers on other non-mimetic genres such as the

marvellous or science fiction if and when they are related to fantastic narrative.

Some areas of research include, but are not limited to:

- Urban Fantastic and the City;
- Cities: between reality and Fantasy;
- Place, Space and Liminality;
- Underground Tales/Real and Fantastic Urban Creatures;
- Adaptations (different perspectives: television, cinema, visual arts, comics, etc.);
- Past and Present Representations of the Urban Space;
- Videogames;
- Adult/Teen Fiction;
- Utopias/Dystopias;
- Possible and Impossible Urban Worlds.

Miscellaneous Section: this Miscellaneous section is open to any type of article on any of the diverse artistic manifestations of the fantastic (narrative, theater, film, comics, painting, photography, video games), whether theoretical, critical, historical or comparative in nature, concerning the fantastic in any language or from any country, from the nineteenth century to the present.

Submission: scholars who wish to contribute to either of these two sections should send us their articles registering as authors on our web page. The Guidelines for Submissions may be found on the Submissions section of the web page.

Title: *World Science Fiction Studies.*

Manuscript Deadline: Ongoing.

Contact: Dr Laurel Plapp, Senior Commissioning Editor: L.PLAPP@peterlang.com.

The book series *World Science Fiction Studies* understands science fiction to be a global phenomenon and explores the various manifestations of the genre in cultures around the world. It recognizes the importance of Anglo-American contributions to the field but promotes the critical study of science fiction in other national traditions, particularly German-speaking. It also supports the investigation of transnational discourses that have shaped the science fiction tradition since its inception. The scope of the series is not limited to one particular medium

and encourages study of the genre in both print and digital forms (e.g. literature, film, television, trans-medial). Theoretical approaches (e.g. post-human, gender, genre theory) and genre studies (e.g. film shorts, transgenre such as science fiction comedy) with a focus beyond the Anglo-American tradition are also welcome.

Submission: Proposals for monographs and edited collections in either English or German are invited. For more information, please contact Dr Laurel Plapp, Senior Commissioning Editor, Peter Lang Ltd, 52 St Giles, Oxford OX1 3LU, UK. Email: L.PLAPP@peterlang.com. Tel: +44 (0) 1865 514160.

Title: Museum of Science Fiction Call for Submissions for New Triannual *Journal of Science Fiction*.

Manuscript Deadline: Ongoing.

Contact: Register on website: <http://publish.lib.umd.edu/scifi/about/submissions#authorGuidelines>.

The Museum of Science Fiction, the world's first comprehensive science fiction museum, will publish an academic journal of science fiction using the University of Maryland's journal management system. The first issue of the Museum's new *Journal of Science Fiction* will be launched in January of 2016 and will serve as a forum for scientists and academics from around the world to discuss science fiction, including recent trends in the genre, its influence on the modern world, and its prognostications of the future.

Greg Bear, member of Museum of Science Fiction's Board of Advisors and Hugo award-winning science fiction author said, "Science fiction as literature has real staying power and has been a huge influence on our modern world. It's only fitting that we attempt to understand the cultural and mythic roots of our need for anticipation, adventure, and imagination."

"We want readers everywhere to consider the science fiction genre they love from new angles. We want them to ask questions and to have fun doing so," said Monica Louzon, managing editor of the Museum's new *Journal of Science Fiction*. "We're encouraging anyone who considers themselves a science fiction scholar to send us their original articles, essays or book reviews for our first issue."

The *Journal of Science Fiction* will be published online and freely accessible to everyone -- no subscrip-

tion or submission fees are required. The Museum's *Journal of Science Fiction* welcomes original work from writers around the world, with an emphasis on the interdisciplinary and innovative aspects of science fiction. Issues will be published three times a year and each will feature between eight and twelve peer-reviewed academic articles as well as several book reviews and essays.

Submission: submission information for the *Journal of Science Fiction* can be found on the Journal's homepage at the University of Maryland: <http://publish.lib.umd.edu/scifi/index>.

Submissions for the *Journal of Science Fiction* can be sent to: <http://publish.lib.umd.edu/scifi/about/submissions#authorGuidelines>.

Any Journal-related questions can be emailed to Monica Louzon, Managing Editor: journal@museumof-sciencefiction.org.

More information about other activities are available on the Museum's website: www.museumof-sciencefiction.org.

About the Museum of Science Fiction: the non-profit Museum of Science Fiction will be the world's first comprehensive science fiction museum, covering the history of the genre across the arts and providing a narrative on its relationship to the real world. The Museum will show how science fiction continually inspires individuals, influences cultures, and impacts societies. Also serving as an educational catalyst to expand interest in the science, technology, engineering, art, and math (STEAM) areas. The Museum uses tools such as mobile applications and wifi-enabled display objects to educate and entertain. For a full press packet on the Museum of Science Fiction's vision and other information, please visit: www.museumofsciencefiction.org/presspacket.

Title: *Preternature: Critical and Historical Studies on the Preternatural*.

Manuscript Deadline: Ongoing.

Contact: Debbie Felton: felton@classics.umass.edu; <http://www.editorialmanager.com/preternature/>.

The journal *Preternature: Critical and Historical Studies on the Preternatural* is currently seeking original submissions. *Preternature* is indexed by both JSTOR and Project MUSE.

Preternature provides an interdisciplinary, inclusive forum for the study of topics that stand in the liminal space between the known world and the inexplicable. The journal embraces a broad and dynamic definition of the preternatural that encompasses the weird and uncanny—magic, witchcraft, spiritualism, occultism, esotericism, demonology, monstrophy, and more, recognizing that the areas of magic, religion, and science are fluid and that their intersections should continue to be explored, contextualized, and challenged.

A rigorously peer-reviewed journal, *Preternature* welcomes submissions of original research in English from any academic discipline and theoretical approach relating to the role and significance of the preternatural. The journal publishes scholarly articles, notes, and reviews covering all time periods and cultures. Additionally, *Preternature* is pleased to consider original editions or translations of relevant

texts from contemporary or ancient languages that have not yet appeared in scholarly edition or been made available in English.

Submission: contributions should be roughly 8,000–12,000 words (with the possibility of longer submissions in exceptional cases), including all documentation and critical apparatus. If accepted for publication, manuscripts will be required to adhere to the Chicago Manual of Style, 16th edition (style 1, employing footnotes).

To submit a manuscript to the editorial office, please visit <http://www.editorialmanager.com/preternature/> and create an author profile. The online system will guide you through the steps to upload your article for submission to the editorial office.

Inquiries may be directed to the Editor, Debbie Felton, at: felton@classics.umass.edu.

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 Website at www.sfra.org. For a membership application, contact the SFRA Treasurer or see the Website.

SFRA EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

President

Keren Omry
Dept. of English Language & Literature
Room 1607, Eshkol Tower
University of Haifa,
Mount Carmel, Haifa 3190501
komry@univ.haifa.ac.il

Immediate Past President

Craig B. Jacobsen
Composition, Literature and Film
Mesa Community College
1833 West Southern Ave.
Mesa, AZ 85202
craig.jacobsen@mesacc.edu

Vice President

Gerry Canavan
English Dept.
Marquette Hall 244
Marquette University
Milwaukee, WI 53201-1881
gerry.canavan@marquette.edu

Secretary

Susan A. George
University of California
Davis One, Shields Avenue Davis
CA 95616
sageorge@ucdavis.edu

Treasurer

David Higgins
Inver Hills Community College
2500 80th Street East
Inver Grove Heights, MN 55076
dhiggin@inverhills.edu

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 posts 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 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 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 annual index.

SFRA Optional Membership Benefits

Foundation

(Discounted subscription rates for members)
Three issues per year. British scholarly journal, with critical, historical, and bibliographical articles, reviews, and letters. Add to dues: \$36 (seamail); \$43 (airmail).

Science Fiction Film and Television

Three issues per year. Critical works and reviews. Add to dues: \$59 (e-issue only); \$73 (airmail).

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 (US); \$50/1 year (international); \$100/3 years.

Femspec

Critical and creative works. Add to dues: \$50 (US); \$95 (US institutional); \$60 (international); \$105 (international institutional).

