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EDITOR'S NOTE

"Fantastika" – a term appropriated from a range of Slavonic languages by John Clute – embraces the genres of Fantasy, Science Fiction, and Horror, but can also include Alternative Histories, Gothic, Steampunk, Young Adult Dystopian Fiction, or any other radically imaginative narrative space.

The third annual Fantastika conference – Global Fantastika – held at Lancaster University, UK on July 4 & 5, 2016, considered a range of Global topics: productions of Fantastika globally; themes of contact within and across nations and borders; fictional and real empires; themes of globalization and global networks, mobilities, and migrations; and (post)colonial texts and readings, including notions of the 'other.' Some of the articles in this second issue of *Fantastika Journal* originate from the conference. The issue also includes articles and reviews from a range of international scholars, some of which are inspired by this Global theme. We are especially pleased to feature editorials from all of the keynotes speakers of the Global Fantastika conference.

We hope this special *Fantastika* issue will stimulate discussion and contemplation of topics that are becoming so crucial and imperative in the world today, as we become a truly global community.

Charul (Chuckie) Palmer-Patel
HEAD EDITOR

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This article investigates post-war flying saucer narratives within US popular culture. After the initial sighting by Kenneth Arnold in July 1947 which triggered the phenomenon, the flying saucer began appearing in a variety of media and material forms directed at numerous audiences. Newspaper reports, films, toys, and novels utilised this new cultural form. The flying saucer narrative, its beginnings, public response, and domestication, are considered as a whole and through an individual text. In particular, this article will consider Lucrece Hudgins Beale's 1954 children's story *Santa and the Mars King* – perhaps the earliest intersection of flying saucers and Santa Claus. *Santa and the Mars King* was one of the annual children's stories Beale wrote between 1942 and 1968. These stories were serialised and syndicated by the Associated Press to member newspapers, beginning with *Santa and the Skeptic* and ending with *Santa and the Hippies*. Each involved a topical theme, presenting the concerns of the time comedically, but not entirely carelessly. Appearing ten years after Arnold's 1947 sighting, Beale's story reveals the way the saucer could become intertwined with other cultural mythologies of the age. *Santa and the Mars King* begins with a flying saucer sighting, a sceptical response from the public, and its investigation by the child protagonist, named Tom. Discovering that the saucers have disturbed local witches and Santa's reindeer, threatening Christmas, Tom flies to Mars and attempts to save the day. Beale's text highlights the malleability of the flying saucer myth, particularly the disconnection between visual identity and other signifiers; the way flying saucer narratives raised issues of belief and superstition; and the way cultural processes sought to contain and domesticate unfamiliar, uncanny elements.

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This article analyses the comic book series *Hellboy*, created in 1993 by American artist and writer Mike Mignola, and the films *Hellboy* (2004) and *Hellboy 2: The Golden Army* (2008), by Mexican director Guillermo del Toro, in order to shed some light on the nature of the Lovecraftian in the graphic novel and film medium. Using the theories elaborated by Mikhail Bakhtin in his book *Rabelais and His World* (1965), I will demonstrate how the niche nature of the Lovecraftian can be mixed with other genres and modes in order to make it more appealing to a mainstream audience, without destroying its core element, but turning them into a new reading of the Lovecraftian. In my analysis I will consider the Lovecraftian not as a genre, but as a mode that has some specific characteristics which give to each genre a 'flavour.' This approach will allow me to demonstrate how *Hellboy's* comics and films, despite being very different from what is considered the 'Lovecraft canon,' are still texts which belong to the Lovecraftian and use its elements in order to renovate it. Moreover, these case studies will help setting the foundations for future studies on canon revisions and the necessity of having one at all.

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The motif of the train appears to be of great importance within the work of China Miéville, with over a third of his novels featuring them, and related elements such as rails, stations, and travel holding a central role within a number of his texts. Some references to trains in Miéville's work are overt, appearing within the titles of his novels or are visually represented on their covers. In this article, I will examine the world that Miéville crafts, exploring the role of trains within a fantastic setting; and the role of the train as coloniser, or colonial agent, one which exercises control over the landscape and populace. It will explore what the train signifies and represents in terms of aspects of mobility, technology, and innovation, as well as their narrative function within his work, focusing on the texts *Perdido Street Station* (2000), *Iron Council* (2004), *Un Lun Dun* (2007), and *Railsea* (2012). Drawing on a range of theory on both the social and cultural impact of the train, this paper examines the train's symbolic nature in Miéville's work, and concludes by reflecting on the role and function of trains within his writing, including the implications for their usage within his corpus of texts.

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EDITORIALS

FROM world sf (VIA, IF WE MUST, World Sf) TO world-sf: AN INTRODUCTION

Mark Bould

Despite the cosmopolitan and theoretical tendencies of sf studies, it is only in the new millennium that it has really turned, rather belatedly, to postcolonialism, to race and ethnicity, and to a broader global range of sf – a turn signalled by several conferences,¹ and by the appearance in quick succession of a number of monographs,² edited collections,³ journal special issues,⁴ and book series.⁵ As evidence of this turn, let us consider the field's most theoretically inclined journal, *Science Fiction Studies*.

From its launch in 1973, *SFS* mapped out sf as an international object of study. In its first four years – alongside work on such American and British writers as Aldiss, Asimov, Ballard, Brunner, Clarke, Dick, Huxley, Le Guin, London, Moorcock, Poe, Spinrad, and Wells – it published articles by and on Lem, as well as on French sf criticism, Borges, Diderot, Iambulus, Kepler, Lasswitz, Lucian, Nabokov, Jean Paul, Rosny aîné, Verne, and Zamyatin. This range reflects that found in earlier critical endeavours, and can be mapped (albeit reductively) against the experience and taste of the journal's US founder, RD Mullen, an sf fan since the early days of the pulp magazines, and his co-editor, the Croatian Darko Suvin, then resident in Montreal, whose *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction: On the Poetics and History of Literary Genre* (1979) demonstrates a preference for an older, primarily European, literature of cognitive estrangement that only occasionally coincides with Americo-British genre sf.⁶

To the extent that *SFS*'s formulation of the genre as an object of academic study is typical, sf was primarily an American and British field but always open to Anglophone and non-Anglophone sf from continental Europe (especially France) and beyond. This default position, more of a liberal humanist cosmopolitanism than a radical internationalism, can be traced back through earlier Anglophone sf criticism to (at least) the fan writing of the Futurians in the 1930s. For *SFS*, it prompted special issues on Lem in 1986 and 1992, on French sf in 1989, and has been pursued more programmatically in the new millennium, beginning with special issues on global sf (1999, 2000), and followed by others on Japan (2002), the thaw and post-thaw Soviet Union (2004), Jules Verne (2005), Afrofuturism (2007), Latin America (2007), globalisation (2012), China (2013), Italy (2015), India (2016), and Spain (2017). These issues, as well as many standalone articles focused on material from outside the Americo-British tradition, are part of a broader and absolutely invaluable development in sf studies that can also be seen in other journals and publishers' lists. But is it enough?

world sf and World sf

Writing about World Literature, Pascale Casanova cautions that "it is not enough to geographi-

cally enlarge the corpus [...] still less to try to provide an impossibly exhaustive enumeration of the whole of world literary production" (xi). Franco Moretti, wrestling with the sheer insurmountable quantity of literature produced in the world, argues that:

Reading "more" is always a good thing, but not the solution. [...] the sheer enormity of the task makes it clear that world literature cannot be literature, bigger; what we are already doing, just more of it. It has to be different. The *categories* have to be different. [...] world literature is not an object, it's a *problem*, and a problem that asks for a new critical method: and no one has ever found a method by just reading more texts. That's not how theories come into being; they need a leap, a wager – a hypothesis to get started. (55, original emphases)

The 'global' turn in sf studies – which is, I admit, an unsatisfactory way to identify several often-but-not-always-related-and-still-unfolding phenomena – coincided with instructive and overlapping developments in American Studies, Comparative Literature, and World Literature. Around the start of the new millennium, American Studies – building on earlier efforts to reshape the study of specific national literatures in a less parochial manner by opening up to *soi-disant* new voices and transnational currents⁷ – witnessed various efforts to move the field beyond its "nation-centredness" and "exceptionalist perspectives" (WReC 3).⁸ For example, in her 1998 Presidential Address to the American Studies Association Janice Radway recognised the preceding decades' work "pursued by feminists, by those working on the question of race, by ethnic studies scholars, by people working on gay, lesbian, and queer histories, by those preoccupied with the lives of the laboring classes and with the achievements of the indigenous populations of this continent," and then pointed to the violence done to this dissensus "if you already assume the unity and coherence of a distinctly 'American' history":

Is difference merely to be posed as a qualifier of some prior whole? Does the perpetuation of the particular name, "American," in the title of the field and in the name of the association continue surreptitiously to support the notion that such a whole exists even in the face of powerful work that tends to question its presumed coherence? Does the field need to be reconfigured conceptually in response? Should the association consider renaming itself in order to prevent imaginary unity from asserting itself in the end, again and again, as a form of containment? (2–3)⁹

At the same time, Comparative Literature went into a crisis so deep that Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak diagnosed the *Death of a Discipline* (2003); seven years later Revathi Krishnaswamy reported

on this apparently terminal disease's progress:

obituaries for comparative literature continue to be written apace. Some mourn the discipline's demise while others try to bring it back in a new avatar. In the wake of globalization and the rise of postcolonialism and multi-culturalism, a debate has ensued over reinventing Comparative Literature in the form of World Literature (Moretti, Damrosch, Cooppan), World Bank Literature (Kumar), Globalit (Baucom), and Planetary Literature (Dimock, Spivak). (400)

Seemingly a lone voice in this wilderness, Thomas Docherty argues that Comparative Literature is "not 'in crisis' at all," merely subject to the neo-liberal university's "market-driven demand for novelty" (27) which, lacking all modesty, thrives on the simulation of crises, not least through supposedly abrupt (and sometimes career-making) paradigm shifts and imperative new directions.

In contrast to the purported and perpetually imminent demise of Comparative Literature, World Literature became, from the early 1990s onwards, "increasingly prominent" as "a disciplinary rallying point of literary criticism and the academic humanities" (Apter 1).¹⁰ However, to the extent that this new, post-postcolonial, multiculturalist Comp Lit that has unthought its unthinking Eurocentrism actually represents the recurrence of *Weltliteratur*,¹¹ it has substantial baggage, not least a fanciful image of the globalised world as a unified space and magically-levelled playing field.

To narrow world literature, "which may be considered a descriptive catch-all for the sum of all forms of literary expression in all the world's languages" (Apter 2), down to a more manageable World Literature requires some principles of selection and judgement. From Goethe onwards, *Weltliteratur* – described by Maire and Edward Said as "universal literature, or literature which expresses *Humanität*, humanity, and [...] is literature's ultimate purpose" (1) – has sought to be more than, but has constantly fallen back into, a selection of supposedly transcendent 'great works' from different national traditions. They are the works sanctified by translation and by, in order of significance, Paris, London or New York publishers.¹² (And they are blessed by what Peter Hitchcock disenchantedly calls "the drab hierarchization of petty-bourgeois desire" (5).)

Let us consider an example Anglophone sf studies currently faces, having for decades effectively reduced early French sf to Jules Verne and a handful of other authors mentioned more or less in passing, such as Camille Flammarion, Maurice Renard, Albert Robida, and J.H. Rosny aîné. Lagging considerably behind the French academy, Anglophone sf studies is slowly reassessing Verne, thanks in large part to an array of new, high quality, unbowlerised translations¹³ – a vital trend that also threatens other early French sf writers with further obscurity. At the same time, however, Brian Stableford has translated into English more than 150 previously untranslated *romans scientifique*, and written a monumental critical history of the form, *The Plurality of Imaginary Worlds: The Evolution of French Roman Scientifique* (2016). Are the products of his astonishing labour destined merely to

be subsumed into world sf, to be the neglected foothills out of which the enhanced Verne rises to even greater heights, with the far more modestly enhanced Flammarion, Renard, Robida and Rosny aîné – all of whom Stableford translates, among many others – merely confirmed in their distinctly secondary positions? (And will Stableford's recovery of the *roman scientifique* alter – or even disturb – hegemonic understandings of sf?)

To the extent that World Literature recapitulates *Weltliteratur*'s liberal-humanist inclusiveness, which tends to mistake its own particularity for universality and thus eradicate difference, it also 'has the collateral effect of blunting political critique' (Apter 41). While languages, cultures, and literatures are functionally equivalent, encounters between them are not equal but determined by material histories and by the structures and relations of power.¹⁴ The same, of course, is true within any particular language, culture, or literature; neither singular nor monolithic nor univocal, their very particularity is a product of their internally (and externally) contested multiplicity. Even where World Literature succeeds in provincialising Europe, as Dipesh Chakrabarty urges, and does so without substituting some other -centricity, the tendency towards "cultural equivalence and substitutability" (Apter 2) often remains intact, as if texts are free to flow across a uniform space.¹⁵ But the space of Word Literature continues to be marked by styles, typologies, and periodisations derived from Western publishing and academic practices.¹⁶ Furthermore, English is:

increasingly the root language – our Latin, as it were, almost no longer a vernacular – into which everything is "resolved"; and it is the ground – spoken or unspoken – on which all Comparative Literature stands. [...] there is the implicit assumption in the institution of Comparative Literature that, in the end, all linguistic difference can be rendered a matter of commensurability: French and German literatures can be "compared," and therefore can share a common (if unspoken) ground. Although unspoken, this ground nonetheless is the foundational language [...] of Comparative Literature; and thus, language differences are resolved, finally, into superficial differences which mask an essential homogeneity. (Docherty 29)¹⁷

Casanova recognises that the "strictly literary events" are determined by "non-national [...] rivalries and competitions, [...] subversions and conservative reactions, [...] revolts and revolutions," but even she keeps the "relations of force and [...] violence peculiar" to this "international literary space" at arm's length from "the forms of political domination" upon which they "may in many respects be dependent" (xii). (She is even more reluctant to consider the economic dimensions of these international relations, despite Goethe noting the emergence of *Weltliteratur* in concert with that of the *Weltmarkt*). Ultimately, such dematerialisations perpetuate what Emily Apter describes as World Literature's "comfort zone – its ready promotion of identifying over differing and its curiously impassive treatment of 'world' and anemic planetary politics" (335).

world-sf

Building on the Marxist theory of combined and uneven development, and on world-systems theory,¹⁸ the Warwick Research Collective (WReC) proposes world-literature as an alternative term and as a method with which to address the accumulation of world literature without reiterating the shortcomings of World Literature – not least the way in which “the categorical turn, in literary studies, to world literature often ends up deflecting attention away from the anti-imperial concerns that a materialist postcolonial studies foregrounded” (Nixon 38).

Leon Trotsky argued that when capitalism is imposed on a hitherto non-capitalist society, that society's existing forces and relations of production, its social structures and cultural forms, are not swept away, but violently amalgamated into capitalism. Thus, rather than producing global uniformity, capitalism reproduces modernity in a global array of particular forms. That is, “capitalist development does not smooth away but rather *produces* unevenness, systematically and as a matter of course” (WReC 12). To perpetuate itself, capitalism requires imbalances and unevenness, and thus it is committed to “the development of underdevelopment, of maldevelopment and dependent development” (13). Understood as a world-system, global capitalist modernity is composed of cores, peripheries, and semi-peripheries. Although they may coincide with particular nation states, these terms are not primarily geographical distinctions – your place in the system is not determined by how many miles you are from the core – but relations imposed by the world-system between localities, peoples, and cultures. Markers of capitalism's necessary unevenness – even a core nation or bloc, such as the US or Europe, will have internal peripheries and, thus, also internal semi-peripheries – they are subject to change, although a core will generally exercise its accumulated capital, power, and development to maintain its position within this system of relations.

The usefulness of this model was brought home to me during a Q&A session at the *Africa of the Past, Africa of the Future: The Dynamics of Time in Africanist Scholarship and Art* conference at SOAS back in May, when someone in the audience said, “What I want to know is why capitalism doesn't work in Africa – it works here and everywhere else, but never there.”¹⁹ There was a sharp collective intake of breath at the proposition that capitalism *worked* anywhere (and perhaps at the implication that somehow Africa was essentially premodern and/or corrupt,²⁰ the very opposite of a capitalism that considers itself reasoned and reasonable). Among the flurry of responses to this provocation an important point was made. That capitalism does *work*, but it *works* precisely by *working* here and *not working* there. For example, it *works* in one part of Kensington by *not working* in another part – that part where unsafe, unmaintained tower blocks were not fitted with sprinkler systems but with flammable cladding to improve (at the lowest possible cost) the view from the first part. It *works* everywhere else by *not working* in Africa, and it *works* in, say, South Africa – the S sometimes appended to the otherwise BRIC nations – by *not working* in other African nations and also, of course, by *not working* in many parts of South Africa itself. Capitalism *works* by and through the systematic and permanent production of unevenness: of the bourgeoisie and the proletariat; of the urban and the rural; of metropole and colony; of development and underdevelopment; of core and periphery.

WReC argues, therefore, that, faced with the endless accretion of world literature, we should consider world-literature. An analytical, rather than an aesthetic, category, it is not the 'world-class' literature of 'great writers' who are elevated into a deracinated canon that ultimately preserves "an unalloyed and irrevocable Eurocentric particularism" (23). Rather, world-literature, whatever its point of origin, whatever its critical standing, "variously registers [...] in both its form and content" the "combined unevenness" of the "radically uneven world-system" of capitalist modernity (49):

We understand capitalism to be the substrate of world-literature [... and] its "political horizon" [...] we understand modernity to constitute world-literature's subject and form – modernity is both what world-literature indexes or is "about" and what gives world-literature its distinguishing formal characteristics. (15)

Inspired by Michael Taussig's work on peripheral cultures that use fantastical resources to figure and critique their violent dispossession by and incorporation into capitalism, WReC focuses in particular on works produced in the semi-periphery in times of "systemic crisis" when "forms of irrealist narrative and catachresis" seem to proliferate (66). For example, they devote chapters to Victor Pelevin and Ivan Vladislavić, whose fantastic fiction articulates the semi-peripheral experience of disaster capitalism and neoliberalism in, respectively, post-Soviet Russia and post-Apartheid South Africa, and exemplifies the necessary turn away from 'realist' forms in order to respond to the material impacts of increasingly immaterial or fictitious capital.

One recent sf story that captures the sense of combined and uneven development, as well as the shocks to which the world-system subjects its peripheries, is Muthi Nhlema's "One Wit' This Place" (2015).²¹ It is set 500 years in the future, in a world ravaged by anthropogenic climate change. The protagonist lives in the habitable strip between the Oce and the Sah, between the Indian Ocean, which has risen, sweeping away Dar es Salaam and then inundating the rebuilt Neo-Dar, and the Sahara, which has expanded southwards, devastating the Sahel.²² Ancient sea-borne wind turbines float on a sea polluted by the same oil "that had seeped into the ground, poisoning the water and rendering a livelihood impossible on land or Oce" (21). The landscape and the characters' home is an odd – or, rather, particular – mix: artefacts and social arrangements which date back through and even to before modernity, interspersed with futuristic technologies, some of which are now derelict.

The protagonist awaits the return of her lover, wondering how to explain that she is pregnant by another (the circumstances of her pregnancy are never explained). He left her some years ago, abandoning ocean-farming to join the army of the Geo-Engineers, who promised to "save the old world" (15). But they failed. Perhaps the task was always beyond their abilities, or perhaps it was because of the armed resistance they faced. Regardless, it was "a war that raged on for far too long and took more than it had given" (17). When her lover comes back, he is clearly suffering from post-traumatic stress. He refuses her touch, cuts himself off from her. He returns to the filthy sea, his fishing expeditions ranging ever more widely and hopelessly.

A tsunami strikes, and they flee into the Sah. He abandons her because, realising she is pregnant, he thinks she broke her promise to wait for him. Undaunted, she picks up the few supplies he has left her and heads on deeper into the Sah. A mutant moth flies by her ear and it climbs into the "scorched sky [...] she gazed with a smallish smirk and swore she had seen a butterfly. Fly, babi, fly!" (26).

The ironic happiness of this ending expresses the necessity of adapting to the new world being created, a world from the viewpoint of which a mutated moth – or a foetus – can seem like a thing of beauty. At the same time, it underscores the story's focus on survival in an environment shaped by forces beyond one's control. In this, it is not just about anthropogenic climate change, but also about the uneven development of capitalist modernity, the structural violence and the slow violence that have rendered Africa peripheral and continue to do so.²³ The Geo-Engineers, who are from elsewhere, fill the sky with battle drones; their human soldiers, recruited from the so-called developing world, do not see or interact with them directly. And yet the protagonist's lover fought on their side, without ever asking precisely which 'old world' they were trying to preserve.

Geo-engineering describes various hypothetical scientific projects undertaken on such a scale as to counteract the effects of global warming and other anthropogenic planetary catastrophes.²⁴ However, any attempt to engineer on a planetary scale will involve immense risks and consequences, and these will not be distributed equally.²⁵ Naomi Klein describes one Solar Radiation Management plan to slow and possibly reverse rises in the Earth's temperature by injecting vast quantities of sulphur into the stratosphere. If such injections took place in the Northern hemisphere, computer modelling projects "a 60-100 percent drop in [...] plant productivity in [...] the Sahel" (270), the consequences of which would include famine, desertification, and the turmoil that they bring. If "the injections happened in the Southern Hemisphere instead," the Sahel "could actually see an increase in rainfall," but "the United States and the Caribbean would see a 20 percent increase in hurricane frequency, and northeastern Brazil could see its rainfall plummet" (276). These scenarios not only point to the complexities of geo-engineering projects but also highlight the kinds of political choices they entail. Unsurprisingly, however, geo-engineering tends to be among the few ameliorative strategies countenanced by those who benefit most from the current global economy (or, at least, the subset who are prepared to acknowledge the already unfolding reality of climate change), not least because such projects are easily reconciled with refusing profound – and necessary – structural changes to that economy and its associated political systems. There is a fortune to be made in letting it all burn; and as we well know, since capitalism invariably externalises human misery and environmental destruction, there is way more profit to be had in insurance and treatment than in prevention and cure.

In some respects Nhlema's story is unremarkable. Thanks to sf's global perspectives and its commitment to building coherent imaginary worlds, it frequently maps out, responds to, critiques, and/or champions the world-system. Verne's many expeditions and circumnavigations bring the world into the purview of capitalist modernity, while cataloguing (or inventing) its particular and uneven forms. The not-quite-anti-colonial opening of H.G. Wells *War of the Worlds* reproduces a

racial hierarchy that considers Tasmanians as stone-age throwbacks left behind by evolution and progress, who thus had to die out (with dire implications for the Britons who genocided them, now faced with Martian invaders). But behind this racist ideology can be glimpsed a world-system of combined and uneven development, the coexistence of all within global capitalist-modernity.

In the US, the fantastic initially responded to the neoliberal turn with the relatively 'realist' mode of cyberpunk, which imagined computer network technologies so as to figure the flows of global capitalism, and embedded them in a noirish, post-national, post-society. However, as the neoliberal project unfolded – accumulating by dispossession, by impoverishing and immiserating billions – sf's 'realism' proved inadequate at imagining the growing disparities between cores and their internal and external peripheries, at figuring the sudden and violent disruptions of life and life-worlds by finance capital, market deregulation, structural adjustments, and so on. It is arguably no coincidence that the alterglobalisation movement emerged just as genre boundaries, never as rigid as some liked to imagine, seemed to evaporate, blown away in the wind by the New Weird – identified by China Miéville as "post-Seattle fiction" (50)²⁶ – and sundry interstitial, post-genre cadre.

It is significant that it is women of colour, a doubly marginalised group, who are at the forefront of finding new ways to figure uneven development during this, our time, of successive systemic crises. Imbalances between cores and (internal and external) peripheries appear in the novels of Nalo Hopkinson and Nnedi Okorafor that also brought Caribbean, Yoruba, and Igbo folk culture into the core of genre sf at the same time as working to explode it. More recently, N.K. Jemisin's *Broken Earth* novels (2015-2017) feature a fantasy world repeatedly wracked by cataclysmic geological upheavals that can easily be read as a metaphor for anthropogenic climate change. But as their coded commentary on #BlackLivesMatter, hardened borders, and refugee-panics indicate, these profound shocks are also those to which capitalist cores expose their internal and external peripheries.

It is also significant that the consolidation of Afrofuturism represented by such authors (however uncomfortable they might be with the label) has been accompanied in the new millennium by the development of self-identified Latin@futurism, Chican@futurism, and Indigenous futurism, all of which can, to an extent, be understood as responses from internal peripheries and semi-peripheries.

And by, of course, the turn to world sf, to World Sf and, maybe soon, to world-sf. (And, should that happen, no, it will still not be enough, but I think it will be one more step in the right direction.)

NOTES

1. For example, *A Commonwealth of Science Fiction* (SF Foundation/University of Liverpool 2004), *ICFA 25: Here Be Dragons: The Global Fantastic* (2004), *Global Sf: The 2011* J. Lloyd Eaton

Conference (UC Riverside 2011), and of course *Global Fantastika* (2016), the conference that inspired this issue.

2. For example, Ferreira, Kerslake, Langer, Polak, Rieder, and Smith.
3. For example, Feeley and Wells, Fritzsche, Ginway and Brown, Hoagland and Sarwal, Huang and Niu, and Raja, Ellis and Nand.
4. For example, *Foundation's* Australian (2000), Canadian (2001), and Commonwealth (2004) issues, *Extrapolation's* 'Indigenous Futurisms' double issue (2016), *Science Fiction Film and Television's* issues on *anime* (2014) and adaptations of the Strugatskiis (2015), and the run of *Paradoxa* that includes 'Africa SF' (2013), 'SF Now' (2014), 'The Futures Industry' (2015), and 'Global Weirding' (2016).
5. For example, *Studies in Global Science Fiction* (Palgrave Macmillan) edited by Anindita Bannerjee, Mark Bould, and Rachel Haywood Ferreira since 2016, and *World Science Fiction Studies* (Peter Lang) edited by Sonja Fritzsche from 2017.
6. 'Americo-British' is an ugly term, but it estranges the more euphonious and familiar 'Anglo-American' while better reflecting the hierarchy within the dominant version of Anglophone sf (including the implicit subsumption of Scottish, Welsh, and Northern Irish sf into English sf, and the relative marginalisation of other Anglophone sf).
7. Historically, of course, the proponents of such parochialism considered themselves to be championing universal rather than particular values.
8. Dimock and Buell set their contributors a similar task of "rethink[ing] the adequacy of a nation-based paradigm" (Dimock "Introduction" 2) for American literature.
9. Paul Giles argues that the "association of America, and by extension the subject of American literature, with the current geographical boundaries of the United States is a formulation that should be seen as confined to a relatively limited and specific time in history, roughly between the end of the American Civil War in 1865 and the presidency of Jimmy Carter, which ended in 1980, after which globalisation rendered "the premises of U.S. national identity" as uncertain as they were in the antebellum period (39). This periodisation broadly coincides with that proposed for African American literature in Kenneth W. Warren's 2007 W.E.B. Du Bois lectures, roughly from 1877 to 1965, that is, the period of Jim Crow. He argues that "a dim awareness that the boundary creating this distinctiveness has eroded" is indicated by a subsequent "turn to diasporic, transatlantic, global, and other frames" (8) – which is surely also a part of globalisation's unravelling of American certainties.
10. It was followed, after a decade's lag, by a notable spike in Translation Studies (Apter 4).

11. On the history of the concept, from Goethe through Marx and Engels to Jameson and Bhabha, see Pizer.

12. See Casanova.

13. By William Butcher, Sarah Crozier, Teri J. Hernández, Sidney Kravitz, Karen Loukes, Sophie Lewis, Stanford L. Luce, Charlotte Mandel, Walter James Miller, Adam Roberts and Frederick Paul Walter, among others. The editorial efforts of Arthur B. Evans are also to be lauded.

14. See Calvet, Chow, and Lanser. Within American sf, for example, whenever Afrofuturism, Indigenous Futurism, Latin@futurism or Chican@futurism are identified as specific phenomena – or grouped together as ‘alternative futurisms’ – material histories and power relationships are in play, identifying asymmetries while nonetheless (re)inscribing difference and normalising what is, sadly, never called – or called out as – Honkyfuturism or Gavachofuturism or Wašíčufuturism. This is neither to disparage these strategic identities, nor to wish the subsumption of their distinctive practices/traditions into a hegemonic sf of pallor.

15. Alongside this provincialising move, there is the contending phenomenon of “nationally and ethnically branded ‘differences’ that have been niche-marketed as commercialized ‘identities’” (Apter 2).

16. On the problem of periodisation in literary history, see Jackson.

17. This, he continues, “assumes that English is itself internally homogeneous,” whereas “the merest glimpse at the history of English demonstrates that it is not one language; and the merest understanding of its historicity demonstrates that the English spoken at any single moment in the world is multiple and various, not single and unified” (29).

18. The best introduction to world-systems theory is Wallerstein; for a rather different take on sf and world-systems theory, see Milner.

19. Apparently, some version of this question is frequently asked of Google. <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/jun/28/why-africa-so-poor-google?CMP=share_btn_fb>

20. Corruption, of course, is not an absolute or innocent term, though it is often treated as one. What gets counted as corruption is the result of an exercise of power. For example, on the day I first drafted this passage, the UK’s Conservative government, now lacking the parliamentary majority necessary to enact its legislative programme, negotiated a payment of over a billion pounds of taxpayers’ money to Northern Ireland, in return for which it obtained the support of the DUP – and the handful of votes needed to achieve a parliamentary majority. Did the former bribe the latter, and use public funds for party ends? Did the latter blackmail the former? Does this count as corruption? And if so, where now is the line between corruption and business as usual?

21. Originally published in Billy Kahora's anthology *Imagine Africa 500: Speculative Fiction from Africa*, it is now available online at <http://www.themanchesterreview.co.uk/?p=7902>.

22. It is possible Nhlema in fact intends 'the Sah' to refer to the Sahel, but in this future the Sahel is no longer a green transition zone between the Sahara desert and the Sudanian Savanna, but just more desert.

23. On structural violence, see Galtung; on slow violence, see Nixon.

24. Climate change is just one of nine non-negotiable biophysical thresholds identified by the Stockholm Resilience Centre that should not be crossed if we are to avoid catastrophic global environmental change; the others involve ocean acidification, stratospheric ozone depletion, the nitrogen and phosphorous cycles, global freshwater use, change in land use, biodiversity loss, atmospheric aerosol loading, and chemical pollution. For the first seven of these, physical measures have been developed and clear thresholds that we should not cross have been established. The thresholds for the first three are tipping points that will lead to qualitative changes on a scale that could destabilise the entire earth system; the next four thresholds merely signify the onset of irreversible environmental degradation. See Rockström et al.

25. Morton provides a good, if insufficiently sceptical, overview of geo-engineering proposals; Klein offers a sharp critique of them.

26. For Miéville's recent reflections on this, see Bould and Miéville.

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WEIRD OR WHAT? THE NAUTICAL AND THE HAUNTOLOGICAL

David Punter

In 2008, China Miéville published an essay titled "M.R. James and the Quantum Vampire: Weird; Hauntological: Versus and/or and and/or or?". In this confusingly named piece of work, he attempts to draw a sharp distinction between the Weird and the hauntological. To simplify a complex argument, he suggests that the hauntological is continuously marked by the ghost, the revenant, the return; whereas the Weird "is not the return of any repressed"; citing one of his main points of reference, Lovecraft, he claims that "Cthulhu is less a ghost than the arche-fossil-as-predator. The Weird is if anything ab-, not un-, canny."

We can certainly agree that Cthulhu is not a ghost; on the contrary, he has an all too present materiality, although this materiality can be seen as weird by virtue of its insistent amorphousness. That this lack of shape has an extraordinary cultural relevance is evidenced not only by the remarkably unconvincing shape in which Lovecraft visually represents him/it, but also by the ways in which Cthulhu has become adaptable to such a broad variety of forms, ranging at the farthest extreme to little girls' schoolbags.

We can probably also agree with Miéville that the label 'ghost story' is radically overused; many of what we call ghost stories do not contain ghosts, including those by another of Miéville's major reference points, M.R. James, where most of the manifestations, in "The Treasure of Abbot Thomas" or "The Ash-Tree" for example, are not ghosts but, to use an equally conventional term, monsters. But here is the cultural rub: for the idea of the ghost has pedigree, it has status, it belongs, in one way or another, to the realm of the spiritual, of psyche, whereas the poor old monster limps or scuttles along behind burdened with the residue of the physical, ab-ject where the ghost is supernatural; the monster is below, the ghost is above. Both may speak to our passions; but the monster, in one reflection of the term 'passion,' is all too capable of suffering, whereas the ghost is beyond all suffering, indeed the ghost suffers us on its interminable terrain.

For Miéville, the arch-type of the monster, perhaps surprisingly, is the cephalopod, and he gives any number of reasons for this, but here is where we need to think a little further into his assumptions:

The spread of the tentacle – a limb-type with no Gothic or traditional precedents (in 'Western' aesthetics) – from a near total absence in Euro-American teratoculture up to the nineteenth century, to one of being the near default monstrous

appendage of today, signals the epochal shift to a Weird culture.

But this is hardly true, or at least a far from exhaustive truth: Norse legends of the Kraken, or the Greek account of Scylla, both appear to be versions of the cephalopod, the dreaded giant squid that was, it is true, later adapted by Jules Verne in *20,000 Leagues under the Sea* (1870).

But what Miéville is making of this is not only, or most interestingly, a distinction between the hauntological (the phantomatic, the revenant, the reminder, often with moral inflections) and the Weird (the utterly strange, the unmotivated, the unexpected), but also a fissure in the term 'uncanny.' Where we are accustomed, ever since Freud, to thinking of the uncanny as that which has at least some dealing with the familiar, the Weird has more to do with the 'ab-canny' – which Miéville does not define, but which we might assume to be that which pertains to a realm which is altogether non-human, a mystery that cannot be allayed by psychological acumen, philosophical reflection or ethical righteousness.

We might helpfully – or possibly unhelpfully – connect this with psychologists' ideas on the reptilian brain, which has been said to lie at the base of physical brain structure and thus, we might say metaphorically, at the base of mental activity – and what follows from this seems appropriate to any consideration of the Weird, because the assumption would have to be that the non-human lies at the base of, is deeply embedded within, all those activities that we consider to be human. We know this, of course, in terms of the primacy of instinct and reflex action; but perhaps we do not always accept that the ab-human, the monstrous, is far from being a side-effect of our humanising categories, but rather underlies them. The monster, we might say, always comes first, a possibility which, of course, terrifies Victor Frankenstein, whether he is considering the monstrousness of his creature or that other monstrousness which he comes to half-admit might underlie his own actions.

And the monster comes first because it is the monster that lies across the boundaries of what we might consider to be human; it is through the monster that we encounter definitions of what might be viable human life. The medical profession, of course, is involved with these decisions constantly: in pre-birth diagnosis; at the point of birth, where what has organic coherence and what might be taken to be (ab-jected) as waste material has to be the object of discrimination; and in the contemplation of physical damage and trauma, where what can be saved and what cannot is critical. Teratology is now the monstrous child of medicine, as it used to be the province of witches, seers, oracles, healers of all stripes. Or, indeed, of the proprietors of fairgrounds, freak shows, circuses – one of the most remarkable novels relevant here is Katherine Dunn's *Geek Love* (1989), which centrally concerns the supply of monsters for display (monsters to be 'demonstrated') through the manipulation of drug supply to a pregnant woman.

But my main thoughts here are not about monsters in general, but about what might be implied by the specific monstrosity of those with Miéville's "tentacles"; for these monsters come from the sea, whether it in the scenario of Lovecraft's half-submerged seaport towns, in the shape

of William Hope Hodgson's derelict ships encrusted with a totally strange form of life, or in the wake of the strange, hopping thing that follows his unfortunate protagonist along the beach, over the breakwaters and eventually onto land and even into the apparently safe confines of the hotel bedroom.

At the moment, there is a great deal of critical activity about what is being termed the 'nautical Gothic,' although this is a term that may need to be rethought. 'Nautical' is itself always an unstable term; although it refers to the oceans, it does so through the lens of the telescope, the apparatus of the sextant, the rhetoric and vocabulary of navigation. It may appear interchangeable with cognate terms like 'maritime' or 'marine'; but 'maritime' carries inevitable connotations, not of the sea itself, but of the uses to which the sea may be put – trade, piracy, defence, while 'nautical' returns us to the sailor's perception. Perhaps 'marine,' then, is the most appropriate of the three terms, conveying most clearly the 'otherness' of the sea, the ways, increasingly limned by studies in the 'blue humanities,' in which it is resistant to human habitation – as of course, in its depths, it remains resistant to human exploration. We know less of the deep oceans, it is sometimes said, than we do of certain reaches (admittedly comparatively local) of outer space.

Another term, amid these voices calling from the deep, clamours for our attention, which is 'coastal.' Such an innocuous term, redolent on the one hand of seaside resorts, safe beaches, holidays; on the other of nature reserves, wild life sanctuaries, untroubled bird life. But the coastal, we might say, is becoming the very site of danger, in fantasy but also in reality. In some parts of the UK – East Anglia or Dorset, for example – we are used to a continuing process of erosion, and in Dorset it is hardly accidental that we have named part of the coastline 'Jurassic,' exposing under geological morphing, as it so frequently does, the fragments and relics of reptilian monsters from another, ab-human era.

But where is the coast – or rather, where will it be? Our problems of flooding in the UK may be comparatively minor, and to a large extent manmade. On the Somerset Levels, for example, we may complain of the collapse of house prices as well as of some of the houses themselves, but the Levels are, of course, below 'sea level': water they were, and to water they will undoubtedly return – their temporary elevation is only the result of manmade defences, put in repeatedly since the Iron Age, in part to protect and exploit salt deposits. Their being-as-land is the outcome of mercantilist practices. But elsewhere in the world, the threat of the return of the ocean is far more vivid – when for example a severe tidal wave, not quite a tsunami, hit the Maldives twenty years ago, forty islands vanished.

Vanished islands are the stuff of terror (although these particular islands were uninhabited), but also the stuff of fantasy; how many versions of Atlantis, we in the West have continually asked ourselves, will sink beneath the waves, and what kinds of creature will stalk through the destroyed columns, the fallen masonry? Well, perhaps in particular (again in fantasy) those creatures who appear equally at home on land and in water, the totally Other as represented by the crab and the octopus, which returns us in part to the cephalopod or at least to a creature defined by appendages,

limbs which are inconsistent with the human or even the mammalian world.

If it true that we (humans) have always been scared of what might come from the sea, then this might actually be seen as a cardinal example of the conflation, the inseparability of the Weird and the hauntological, for although what might emerge, dripping and incomprehensibly gesticulating, at low tide might appear to be the totally Other, it might also have the contours of a half-recognisable self, and thus relate to the feared revenant; for did we not all come from the sea, and I mean that in two senses: first in terms of the continual maritime processes – boatbuilding, navigation, barter - by which humans have travelled for so long, such that, for example, Polynesian influence in the south of Taiwan, or rather the island of Formosa is still so evident, but also in terms of our putative species origin in the waters. The (Weird) assertion of difference might say, 'We have no gills.' The (hauntological) assertion of repetition and return might say, 'We had gills once; where have they gone, and how might we mourn them?'

What continues to live in the deep is irrecoverable, that much we know: the statistics of atmospheric pressure exercise their own power of forbidding, their apparently inexorable command what will forever maintain a separation of realms, a division of powers. Yet what lives in the deep is also continually invading, or at least on the brink of an invasion: we see it in dream, in those half-formed images that can never be brought into sharp focus, we see it on the maps of many centuries, where sea-monsters and marine dragons find themselves inserted, brought under temporary control, to fill in the blank spaces of our imaginations.

"Those are pearls that were his eyes," as Shakespeare has it; in place of the unmatched power and beauty of sight, of vision, there comes a different power and beauty, a different treasure. The eye opens, the eye is opened; the pearl is secreted, it develops in closure. "Of his bones are coral made"; not biologically true, of course, but coral has its own grandeur, its own magnificence, not least in terms of the contrast (a contrast that we might justly call sublime) between the minuteness of the sea-creature itself and the size and scope of the structures which it creates and has created across the span of many centuries, millennia. But there is no coral reef without its own dangers, perhaps its own terrors: sharks, of course, but also the slowly opening and closing giant clams which signify, in our imaginations, an 'other' life that could bite off our own limbs – a secreting mechanism, to put it in Freud's terms, which could also be a castrating mechanism.

What is at the bottom of the sea? Sunken ships, emblems of our daring and our doom; treasure, our hope accompanied by our fear of its ab-human guardians; nematode worms, a form of life that can survive in temperatures and other conditions that we cannot imagine; drowned men and women, victims of tempest and giant wave, or thrown overboard from slavery's ships, or killed in maritime battle, or (in our imaginations) seized from the deck by the tentacles of the giant squid. All of them relics, just as we try to see the 'other' inhabitants of the sea as relics, as mere ancestors of ourselves, precursors of the realm of human, enlightened reason.

But what would it mean if this were not true, if the sea will indeed reclaim its own, if the

oceans (and therefore, perhaps, their inhabitants) are coming for us? Would we then have faith in our scientific foreknowledge, and what would it have us do? As I write, Houston (ironically, of course, the hub of precisely that exploration of deep space so frequently held up as a success story as opposed to our attempts to 'get to grips' with the gripless depths of the ocean) is under water; it was known that the storm was coming (although not its exact ferocity), yet we neglected enact the classic symbolic mode of defence. We failed to build an Ark, trusting instead in what appeared to be tried methods of survival.

I want by way of conclusion to return to Miéville's notion of the 'ab-canny.' Building as it does on Kristeva's 'abjection' and Hodgson's 'abhuman,' there are nevertheless so many ways other in which this could be played with. We might think for example, of the 'abyss,' a term so often used of the deep oceans. Or we might conjure up the 'abactinal,' a term that refers to a distance from 'rays.' What are these rays, we might ask? Are they, for example, the rays that structured the fantasy life of Freud's Judge Schreber, penetrating and altering his physical body at every point, rendering him monstrous? No, these are rays that have to do with 'the region of the mouth and tentacles of Anthozoa.' And after again rediscovering the tentacular, what, we might ask, are anthozoa? Well, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, they are that class of creature that includes, among others, the corals.

And so in these unplumbed depths ('unplumbed' meaning, of course, also 'unleaded,' and thus by a possible metaphorical extension 'unpolluted,' except that we know that by now serious pollution has struck the reefs), we come full circle. In the depths we find reflections of ourselves, the abhuman made over by a ceaseless process of anthropomorphisation into the human; but we simultaneously find resistant material, pearls substituted for eyes – exchange value, of course, to cite Marx, for use value. Is the Weird so different from the hauntological, or are these utter strangenesses of the seabed coterminous with the utter strangenesses in our own minds? Or to put it another way, where in these lands of fantasy can we see clearly? Diving on these reefs of imagination can be dangerous: not because of any creatures we might find there, but because of our own vision. The real problem is not the Other; it is our very own visionary parallax, that curious distortion of sight that means that what we might see (from above the surface) as, for example four feet deep is in fact twelve feet deep, well beyond, in some circumstances, a distance of safety. In searching for pearls, it may well be our own eyes that betray us, our own vision that is haunted as we dive for the Weird.

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BIONOTE

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FEMINIST REWRITINGS OF THE SPIRITUAL AND PHYSICAL WILDERNESS OF THE BUSH

Chloé Germaine Buckley and Sarah Illott

'Global Fantastika' is an important emergent area of research that rethinks the dominant capitalist imperial politics and Euro-American locations otherwise overrepresented in Fantasy fictions. The Global Fantastika conference in 2016 brought together a host of scholars working in a varied range of fields and disciplines, resulting in an energising dialogue about the role of Fantastika in negotiating pressing global challenges such as ecological crisis, neoliberal globalisation, and the enduring legacies of colonialism. In this editorial, we would like to take the opportunity to think about some of the recurring themes and concerns of the conference, many of which resonate with our keynote address, entitled "Feminist Rewritings of the Spiritual and Physical Wilderness of the Bush."

This keynote engaged with the representation of the African Bush, firstly identifying its construction historically, then considering the work of two contemporary authors – Nigerian American Nnedi Okorafor, and Nigerian British Helen Oyeyemi – who have rewritten the space, and in so doing reclaimed it for a feminist and postcolonial agenda. Historically, the Bush has been synonymous with the threat of capture and enslavement, whilst in contemporary society it has frequently functioned as an ungovernable space in which violence has been inflicted on women – in the form of female genital mutilation and rape – particularly in war-torn areas such as Sierra Leone, Liberia and Sudan. Culturally, the threat of violence has led to the Bush being represented as a space of male ritual and adventure, in which men who enter confront the supernatural and have their masculinity tested through a series of trials. This is reflected in much of the early literature by Nigerian authors, including Chinua Achebe, D. O. Fagunwa and Amos Tutuola. Critical interpretation has dwelt upon the representation of the Bush as a psychological and metaphorical space, but has rarely considered its reimagining as a space of potential resistance in feminist and/or postcolonial literature.

Constructing Fantasy literature as a space of colonial resistance was a concern identified in other papers at the conference. Thomas Brassington referenced Nnedi Okorafor, in addition to Saladin Ahmed, in his paper "Using Massa's Tools: Shapeshifting and the Decolonisation of Fantasy." Brassington suggested that shapeshifting characters in these writers' works function to challenge the Eurocentric and colonialist discourse traditionally symptomatic of the genre, thereby empowering themselves and decolonising the Fantasy genre. Rob O'Connor's paper, "Walking the Streets with a Sloth on Your Back: Notions of 'otherness' in the urban landscapes of Lauren Beukes's *Zoo City* and Nnedi Okorafor's *Lagoon*" addressed the re-centring of Science Fiction narratives to African cities, Johannesburg and Lagos. This relocation of Dystopian Urban Fiction invites an exploration of otherness, subalternity, and alienation, effectively aligning the concerns of Postcolonial critique and

the Science Fiction genre. In a comparable critical turn, Rebecca Duncan's paper, "Post-apartheid Sensoria: Beyond Imperialist Ecologies in Neill Blomkamp's *District 9*" considered the joint forces of colonialism and apartheid evident in the South Africa of Neill Blomkamp's *District 9* (2009). Duncan suggested that the film's horror provides a postcolonial and an ecological critique, revealing the legacy of colonialism and apartheid in present-day South Africa.

Our keynote address discussed the Bush as a liminal space following Victor Turner's anthropological study of tribal societies in central Africa, *On the Edge of the Bush* (1985). We returned to Turner's seminal study, in which he develops the concept of liminality in order to understand the painful ritual processes that produce ambiguous and liminal states of being. Katie Burton's paper, "'Why do people go to these places, these places that are not for them?': Negotiating identity and national allegory in Helen Oyeyemi's *White is for Witching*," likewise considered the painful dimension of liminality. Burton's reading of Englishness in Oyeyemi's *White is for Witching* (2009) argued that the haunted guesthouse, 29 Barton Road, which sits atop the white cliffs of Dover, constitutes a destructive space for both self and other created in discourses of Englishness. Burton posited that the border spaces of the novel represented characters' own internal negotiations of identity, which in turn allowed for an exploration of the changing state of national identity. Andrew Tate's paper on Young Adult Dystopian Fiction also evoked notions of liminality in its exploration of the violent rites of passages in Apocalyptic novels such as Suzanne Collins's *The Hunger Games* (2008-2010), Veronica Roth's *Divergent* (2011-2014) and James Dashner's *The Maze Runner* (2009-2011). Tate argued that these novels revise the structure of the traditional Bildungsroman by depicting the process whereby the protagonist crosses borders and social boundaries that intensify their heroic status but also make them vulnerable. This reading of Young Adult Fiction resonates with Turner's theorisation of liminality as the ambiguous quality that occurs in the middle stages of rite of passage rituals, when participants have not yet reached the status they will achieve once the ritual is complete, but when they have relinquished the identity they possessed before; this is a state that is both dangerous and liberating. Reflecting Turner's theorisation, these papers illustrate that those midway through the ritual process are outside the laws and hierarchies of their communities, leading to instances of dangerous instability of the self. Such an understanding challenges and undermines the more rigid binary allocations of conventional Fantasy Fiction in which boundaries between Good/Evil, Light/Dark, and Coloniser/Colonised are more neatly divided.

Another manner in which our paper reflected others' concerns with the radical politics of Global Fantastika was in the subversion of gendered norms. Ritual processes described in Turner's work on liminality are male dominated. Indeed, our paper considered the way that the Bush space in African Fiction has long been dominated by male protagonists and writers. We were interested in the ways Feminist writers, such as Oyeyemi and Okorafor, repurpose these spaces to tell new and vital stories that address the ongoing oppression of women. Hanan Alazaz's paper on the gendered werewolf of Arabia similarly considered feminist interventions in male-dominated spaces. Alazaz explored depictions of the female werewolves in Arabic Fiction, who roam the deserts of Arabia looking for men to devour. Alazaz argued that these narratives often invert gender structures of heteronormative discourse through the production of a 'monstrous feminine,' which turns against its

own abjection within and against the patriarchal discourse that has produced it.

We argued that Okorafor and Oyeyemi's fiction offered a feminist revisioning of traditionally male-dominated fictional spaces. Yet neither writer flinches from tackling the material and social conditions which continue to produce actual violence against women. Various papers at the conference revealed the way that Global Fantastika returns again and again to the very real inequities that exist in real physical and social spaces. Nedine Moonsamy's paper, "Women in the Writing of Nnedi Okorafor and Lauren Beukes: Animism and African Feminism" explored how Okorafor and Beukes's female protagonists are affected by and negotiate the conditions of globalisation and transnational consumerism. For Moonsamy, Okorafor and Beukes explore the possibilities of animism to resist the social and material imperatives of global consumerism, reenchanted the present for a feminist project. Hollie Johnson also considered very pressing material conditions in her paper, "Borders under Siege: Ecological Dystopia and Cyborg Insurrections in Paolo Bacigalupi's *The Windup Girl*." She argued that *The Windup Girl* (2009) responds to the need to 'think globally' in response to looming environmental crisis. This is a novel that confronts the geopolitics of global capitalism in an attempt to reveal the interwoven social, cultural, economic, and ecological networks at play.

Our keynote address reflected the feelings of many of the delegates present: that the various genres of Fantastika represent important avenues both for expressing resistance to colonial rule and its legacies, and for imagining new futures that are not realisable in Realist Fiction. Furthermore, in re-centring the Fantasy narrative in the global south, the fiction explored at this conference challenges imperial ideologies that have long-dominated the Western Fantasy canon. Delegates revealed the variety of ways that Global Fantastika challenges the imperialist tropes of Fantasy Fiction – such as racialized othering and alienation, and the colonisation and exploitation of land and resources through reversals or re-imaginings, or simply by demonstrating the material and epistemic violence enacted on formerly colonised peoples. The recent upsurge in Speculative Fiction by black African-Heritage novelists – of which Oyeyemi and Okorafor are at the forefront – calls for a shift in the discursive and critical field to account for the new people and places erstwhile rarely represented in the genre, standing as testament to the importance of Global Fantastika as a field of study.

BIONOTE

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ARTICLES

A MYSTERIOUS LIGHT: FLYING SAUCER NARRATIVES IN POST-WAR USA

John Sharples

"Strange days have found us
Strange days have tracked us down"
- The Doors, *Strange Days* (1967)

This article investigates post-war flying saucer narratives within US popular culture. Found within a wide variety of media forms targeted at diverse audiences for numerous purposes, flying saucer narratives can be considered both in relation to their status as textual sources relating to their historical context, including their treatment, transmission, mutation, and influence, as well as in relation to the content of individual texts. Below, both approaches are taken in relation to Lucrece Hudgins Beale's 1954 children's story *Santa and the Mars King* - perhaps the earliest intersection of flying saucers and Santa Claus, appearing ten years after the initial sighting by Kenneth Arnold in July 1947, which triggered the flying saucer phenomenon and provided naming conventions to a host of unidentified shapes in the sky. During the intervening decade, the phenomenon had altered substantially whilst retaining many of the original features of Arnold's vision, demonstrating the plasticity of time concerning popular cultural forms and the malleability of the forms themselves. Later popular cultural appearances which repeated the intersection of saucer and Santa include the poorly reviewed Science-Fiction-Horror *Santa Claus Conquers the Martians* (1964). Beale's tale was serialised and syndicated by the Associated Press to member newspapers, and was one of many children's stories contributed by Beale between 1942 and 1968, beginning with *Santa and the Skeptic* and ending with *Santa and the Hippies*. These stories were reissued in 2000 by Nostalgia Trims Publishers in book form. Each involved a topical theme, presenting the concerns of the time comedically, but not entirely carelessly. *Santa and the Mars King* concerns a flying saucer sighting, its investigation by a child protagonist named Tom, who seeks to reveal the mystery of the flying saucer, and the resolution of the problems which arise due to the saucer's appearance. Discovering that the saucers have disturbed local witches and Santa's reindeer, thus threatening the smooth function of the social, religious, and commercial ceremony known as Christmas, Tom flies to Mars and saves the day. Three principal elements from Beale's text can be highlighted, namely, the malleability of the flying saucer myth, particularly the disconnection between visual identity and other signifiers; the way flying saucer narratives raised issues of belief and superstition; and the way cultural processes (such as Christmas) sought to contain unfamiliar, uncanny elements.

Flying saucers can be considered as contemporary monsters in terms of their origins within the post-war USA and their distinct morphological features influenced in part by scientific advancements and popular cultural representation. The role of the flying saucer myth, however,

is not merely a historical one. Its history is not closed. Further, the term 'monster' is itself a taxonomically shifting term whose meaning has altered over time. The modern viewer may laugh at the idea of the 'catoblepas' or 'mermen' – the former described by Pliny the Elder and Claudius Aelianus as a buffalo with a lethal stare, similar to a basilisk, and the latter a human from the waist up and fish-like from the waist down. Yet, public polling from the 1990s and 2000s has recorded a persistent popular belief in the existence of modern monstrous forms, such as UFOs, as well as ghosts, witches, and haunted houses (*Ashgate Research Companion* 443). A Gallup Poll, for example, in 1996 found forty-five percent of those surveyed agreed that "UFOs have visited the earth," falling to a still noteworthy twenty-four percent in 2005. As Peter J. Dendle states, whilst "The belief in such creatures [as witches, large-headed aliens, ghosts, and so on] is rightfully rejected by the scientific community [...] just as interesting are the cultural meanings attached to such beliefs within the broader population" (444). Pushing into deliberately uncomfortable territory as this, into the acceptance that enchantment has not been dispelled from the world is the prerequisite for understanding not just the history of the flying saucer, but the cultural life of the past. Regardless of the 'why' of belief or questions surrounding the consequences of such belief for identity formation, and regardless of the predominance of the so-called rational and scientific qualities within modern life, the enchanted garden remains worthy of exploration.

Contexts

Santa and the Mars King was published in a period characterised by technological breakthrough. A science-fictional future appeared to be arriving – one which was defined by novelty and danger. New shapes which appeared in the sky included a jet breaking the sound barrier, a weather balloon, a satellite, an atomic bomb, and a flying saucer. Considering this situation, and influencing this article's approach, Ken Hollings's *Welcome to Mars* (2008) astutely noted how the period 1947–1959 was one where "weird science, strange events and even stranger beliefs" combined, and where "the possibilities for home development seemed almost limitless" (xv). Hollings's fragmentary writing style reflects his discontinuous, chaotic subject, mixing varied recollections of American science and culture. Chapters entitled "Red Planet," "Teenagers from Outer Space," "Flying Saucers over America," and "Popular Mechanics" emphasise an unclear spectrum from the fantastic to the everyday and a notion of self-awareness, of generic participation, and of acknowledging that Science Fiction (Sci-Fi) invaded life, introducing both a banality to the extraordinary and an element of defamiliarisation to the banal. An accompanying radio show to Hollings's book, of the same name, added a further sense of disorientation to his analysis, combining unscripted recollections and Sci-Fi electronic music. The permeability and creation of this Historical-Fantastic space has also been sensitively acknowledged in Susan Lepselter's *Why Rachel Isn't Buried In Her Grave* (2005), where the newly-arrived future brings loss, death, and isolation. Traditional, rural American existence is contrasted with enforced modernity. Lepselter describes the "simultaneous pride and shame in the kind of manual work that seems to hold out against the rush of high-tech futures" and the idea of "otherworldly power against the human body" (274). New myths jar with old. What Lepselter reveals is that some people didn't want to go to Mars after all. Elsewhere, most critically, Lepselter suggests the mischievous glimmer within any form of disenchantment, noting how "uncanny discourses are

stubbornly resistant to, yet inextricable from, modernity's processes" ("The Flight of the Ordinary" x) – an insight which is, less consequentially, particularly important when considering the intersection in Beale's *Santa and the Mars King* between various cultural mythologies, including witches, Santa Claus, and flying saucers.

It may seem surprising to talk of a flying saucer in similar terms as (pre-)historic figures such as witches, Santa Claus, and ghosts, yet the phenomenon of the saucers quickly became assimilated within cultural life. After American pilot Kenneth Arnold's sighting of mysterious objects in the sky led to the emergence and growth of numerous similar and related sightings termed "flying saucers," the pervasiveness of the term was assessed in Gallup Polls throughout the late forties and fifties (on 23 July 1947, 28 April 1950, 2 May 1950, and 29 August 1952). In August 1947, ninety-percent of those polled demonstrated a familiarity with the concept (although not necessarily a firm belief in the existence of flying saucers). By 1956, the term "flying saucer" was in *Webster's Dictionary* (Ruppelt 5). Whilst the term became a part of the American lexicon relatively quickly, that a whole host of objects in the sky could come under the term indicated a certain mystery in the term itself. The term "flying saucer" was a mere façade, a hollowed-out space. Whilst the silhouette of a flying saucer, in films such as *The Flying Saucer* (1950), *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (1951), and *Earth vs. Flying Saucers* (1956), solidified as the conventional visual signifier, other explanations of the concept were possible. Some of the confusion and multiplying applications of the term can be found in its origins. A related term "UFO" or "unidentified flying object," appeared in 1953, created by the United States Air Force to cover any object which did not conform to expectations of, for example, speed or appearance. The cross-overs between the use of the terms flying saucer and UFO are numerous. The *Oxford English Dictionary* definition of UFO includes the term "flying saucer" in its explanation and while "UFO" might be a more appropriate match for some of the objects described as flying saucers, in popular usage the term flying saucer was, initially at least, more pervasive. Its persistence suggests a matter more of cultural imprecision than ontological consideration.

Arnold's initial sighting, with rogue attributions, accusations of journalistic sensationalism, and subsequent qualifications, revealed two sides to the saucer as a visual reference and as a kinetic metaphor. Arnold lamented that "Most of the newspapers misunderstood and misquoted [me]. They said that I said that they [the objects he had seen] were saucer-like; I said that they flew in a saucer-like fashion" ("Transcript of Ed Murrow-Kenneth Arnold Telephone Conversation"). Precisely what Arnold meant by objects flying "in a saucer-like fashion" hardly closed the door on his meaning – a feeling of smoothness, perhaps, was alluded to. Arnold was accurate however in his claims of imprecise media reporting. The original Associated Press article was headlined: "Pilot sees 'Saucer-like Objects' Flying at 1,200 m.p.h. in Oregon," describing "nine, bright, saucer-like objects" whilst Arnold's statement described shapes which "flew like a saucer would if you skipped it across water." Regardless, the idea of movement rather than the physical object which Arnold suggested introduced a degree of abstraction into the mystery, opening up a space for visually-different objects which shared aspects of movement with Arnold's saucers. That is, whilst the Associated Press report certainly influenced one form of representation, a number of other well-known sightings seemed more in tune with the more elusive qualities Arnold described, including crystal-ball lights seen over

Kansas and Minnesota on 23 May 1951; the so-called Lubbock Lights seen over a small Texan town between August and September 1951 and likened to gracefully-flying birds ("Reports Of Mystery Objects In Kansas, Minnesota Skies..."); or even the "saucer" in Beale's *Santa and the Mars King*.

Act I: Encounter

In chapter one of *Santa and the Mars King*, we are introduced to Tom – "a very curious child. He always wanted to know things. He was always asking questions" (Ch. 1) – and the farmer who sees a flying saucer whilst tending to a sick calf. The arrival of the saucer is described, Hollywood-style, in dramatic, multi-sensory terms – "a sudden breeze snuffed out the farmer's lantern"; "a mysterious light filled the whole yard"; and "the farmer heard a whirring sound as if a giant top were spinning." An accompanying image to the story – a line drawing with colouring suggestions – recommends "flying saucer yellows" for the swirling lines and shapes. During the encounter, the farmer hides himself until the danger passes before calling the police, fire department, his family, and his friends. Tom, like the rest of the town, hears word of the flying saucer's appearance. The reactions to the farmer's story suggest both the openness of the flying saucer narrative and its opaqueness: "Of course he'd [Tom] heard about flying saucers and read about them. But this was the first time he'd ever known someone who really had seen one." This mode of encounter also highlights the nature of the flying saucer as an object experienced primarily through the printed page and gossip. Reacting to the event, Tom begins asking questions: "What could it be? What could it be?" – the event is open to all to interrogate, and "Mostly everyone in the town heard about the thing one way or another and went out to the farm to hear the strange story of the farmer's flying saucer." The exposed nature of the site (open to investigation and, apparently, invasion) and the farmer's freely-given testimony do not, however, assist in revealing the origins or the purpose of the flying saucer. Instead, the saucer sighting becomes, as it did on a national level in flying-saucer America, an open-ended source of mystery, generating numerous solutions. Some suggested "it was a rocket from a foreign country. Some said it was light reflections. Some said the farmer was silly and hadn't seen anything at all." The object momentarily defies the hierarchies of class, culture, society and science in its lack of fixed meaning, only for such earthly classifications to reappear when interpretation is attempted. As is often the case with carnival-esque spaces, rather than have any transformative impact on Tom's town, the inhabitants engage in a collective amnesia or moving-on. After a few weeks, "gradually, they forgot about it because they couldn't figure out what it was" – only Tom persists. Chapter one ends with Tom declaring, "I've just got to know what it was," he says. "I just can't stand not knowing."

As *Santa and the Mars King* suggests, by 1954, seven years after Arnold's sighting, the flying saucer was a common cultural trope – one might say a declining one as reported sightings had begun to diminish. Between June 1947 and 1957, over 5,000 reports were made to the United States Air Force. In 1950, reports arrived at the rate of five or six per day. A spike in 1952 saw 1,700 reports. 429 were claimed in 1953 before a marked fall occurred (Pearson, "Air Force Checking Job" 6; Pearson "Flying Saucers Spotted Again" 1; and Edson, "It's Summer! That Means It's 'Flying Saucer' Time" 7). Periodic sparks would later occur but the fading interest within the United States

was mirrored in *Santa and the Mars King*, as the enthusiasm of the town's inhabitants dissipates. Beale's introduction of the craft also echoes responses to a saucer report widely reported in popular media, since the sighting by the farmer shares similarities with what *Life* magazine termed "Farmer Trent's Flying Saucer" on 26 June 1950. *Life*'s story detailed how Paul Trent, of McMinnville, Oregon, took two pictures of an object flying over his house. Both *Life* and Beale's story possess an underlying doubt regarding the veracity of the claims of rural spectators. Beale's tale suggests the farmer did not see anything tangible at all whilst *Life* placed the caption "None of Trent's neighbors saw saucer" next to one image. In both cases, however, there is an initial spark of interest, whereby people felt compelled to offer an opinion and get involved, offering potential explanations even after the language and terms of reference regarding flying saucers had been partially fixed in the popular imagination. That is, questioning the 'authenticity' of a saucer sighting could still leave room for doubt. *Life* made a careful caveat, for example, that:

Herewith *Life* prints Farmer Trent's pictures: No more can be said for them than that the man who took them is an honest individual and that the negatives show no signs of having been tampered with, although there are people who would say that the object looks like the lid of a garbage can. (40)

Such a disclaimer raised the issue of the value of openness in interpretation, simultaneously hinting that the event was a genuine sighting, staged, or was a hoax. In its unusual insistence on Paul Trent's honesty, a certain scenario is hinted. *Santa and the Mars King* suggests a similar response, as the inhabitants of the area, who could be Farmer Trent's neighbours, suggest that the farmer's sighting was a rocket, perhaps a foreign-made object; that the saucer was just light reflections; and that the farmer was untrustworthy. To emphasise, these were commonly suggested explanations. *Popular Science*'s "Are Secret Balloons the Flying Saucers?" article, in May 1948, for example, suggested various explanations including weather balloons and "distortion[s] of light rays."

The openness of flying saucer 'events' within *Santa and the Mars King*, the pages of *Life* and, to a lesser extent, *Popular Science*, suggests the flying saucer object is a psychological test or public game, an interplay between absolutism and democratic interpretation. The final 'truth' of the saucers was variously considered to be beyond earthly knowledge, beyond the knowledge of US institutions, and/or beyond the knowledge of its people. In each case, absolutist authority was pushed to the exterior. At a popular cultural level, this could be seen in the development of conspiracy narratives, such as the so-called Roswell Incident or the more general idea that official institutions were concealing information. Within popular culture and within the public-sphere, such as the town in which Tom from *Santa and the Mars King* inhabits, the problem of the flying saucer is initially a democratic one, where each potential is equally plausible, if not valid. In this world, without a determined incursion and invasion of the flying saucer problem, no more than inconclusive or open-ended assumptions could be made. Tom's repeated question – "what could it be? What could it be?" – reflects a deeper cultural mystery. Questioning becomes the only appropriate mode of engagement before the door is closed on potentially destabilising elements and only Tom – a

boy, lonely, outside convention to an extent - remains to investigate, dismissing the suggested explanations.

Likewise, repeated government reports – Project Sign (or Saucer) (1947), Project Grudge (1949), and Project Blue Book (1952) – received a sceptical response from some sections of the popular media which retorted, like Tom, with a barrage of questions, in part due to the small opening left in the report's descriptions of 'unexplained' sightings which could not neatly conform to other explanations. For example, whilst Project Blue Book, reported in 1969 that, after 12,618 reported sightings, of which 701 remained "unidentified," "No UFO reported, investigated and evaluated by the Air Force was ever an indication of threat to our national security; There was no evidence submitted to or discovered by the Air Force that sightings categorised as 'unidentified' were extra-terrestrial vehicles" ("U.S. Air Force Fact Sheet"), earlier reports – Sign and Grudge – were treated far more shortly in some quarters. *Life* – the middle-class, respectable periodical – rather aggressively suggested in 1952, in an article entitled "Have We Visitors From Outer Space?," that "The [initial] project set up to investigate the saucers seemed to have been fashioned more as a sedative to public controversy than as a serious inquiry into the facts" responding, like Tom, with a list of questions concerning the "stubborn" "unexplainable" accounts – dismissed in Project Sign as "psychological aberrations" – "Who? What? And when? [...] What of the other shapes? Why do the things make no sound? How to explain their eerie luminosity? What power urges them at terrible speeds through the sky? Who or what is aboard? Where do they come from?", ending with a lingering, anxiety-inducing, "Why are they here? What are the intentions of the beings that control them?" The implications of this line of questioning, indeed its very publication, revealed a gap had opened up between authority and imagination.

Act II: Impact

Continuing the story of *Santa and the Mars King*, Tom tells his tale to his only friend – a stone statue of an elf in the town centre. Bored of listening, the statue awakens and suggests he finds Santa Claus with help from a witch (a friend of the elf) in order to more fully understand the flying saucer, reasoning that the witch's experience with flight will aid the investigation. To find the witch, Tom and the elf enter a "dark and frightful" tunnel within a large oak tree in the middle of a cemetery, thus entering nature and leaving civilisation. The introduction of the witch in the story seems rather abrupt, yet can be seen in line with the narrative's generic self-awareness of form, piling mythology on mythology. The witches explain that the flying saucers are "putting us out of business. People are no longer afraid of witches. They are afraid of saucers. [...] What will happen if we can't fly anymore or frighten people on Halloween?" (Ch. 3). An incomplete exchange between modernity and tradition is suggested in this discussion. The ability to cause fear - which the witches thought themselves the exclusive possessors of - has been seized. Pursuing the superficial distinctions between tradition and modern life, we also learn that witches make a new broom for every single flight, crafting them by hand, and living on a river bank – a clear contrast to the apparently futuristic flying saucer. Taking to the sky the witches and Tom fly before being attacked by "two spinning lights" streaking across the sky (Ch. 4). In the contest between broomstick and saucer, the saucer

wins. The lights swerve and spin around Tom, scattering the witches. As one passes him by, "one of the lights swept over him. For an instant he was bathed in a bright glare" – illuminating him in the sky (Ch. 5). Questions, however, are still on Tom's mind, reasserting his inquisitive mode – "How does it fly? What makes it work? What is it trying to do?" His high-speed dog-fight ends abruptly as the "saucers vanished as mysteriously as they had come," again signalling their seeming defiance of everyday conventions and patterns as well as their playfulness (Ch. 5).

When Tom at last meets Santa, he, like the witch, explains that the saucers have disrupted the everyday order of things. "If we cannot stop them," explains Santa, "there will be no Christmas this year" since "the reindeer have been frightened by the saucers and refuse to fly" (Ch. 7). Tom rouses the folks of Santa Land, promising to help them trap a flying saucer, weaving a giant balloon-hoisted fish net to ensnare one of the craft. Remarking on the effort, Santa declares, "It may be a wild thing that will destroy us all. Or it may be nothing but a mist that we cannot hold. Whatever it is we have to find out," aligning himself with Tom's investigatory mode (Ch. 8). Eventually, Tom discovers "a fat little man with a kind face" – not too unlike Santa himself – entangled in a thorny bush. The colouring suggestions recommend a green suit with yellow trim. "Pleh em epacse siht retsno" says the man (Ch. 9). He is, they discover, talking backwards and blind. Slowly able to communicate, the Mars King explains that, on Mars, every grown man on Mars is a king, but that children rule Mars – continuing the carnival theme. The Kings are revealed to be the flying saucers. Because the light on Mars is poorer, the children ordered the Kings to "make more," not wanting to have their own sight diminish. Eventually, the Kings devised a system to wind up a man and shoot him into orbit, producing sparks and light from spinning so fast. Only one man per six months was produced due to the length of time it took to wind a man up. The men were, alas, overwound, and shot off too far (Ch. 9). After learning that flying saucers are a form of Martian celestial-lighthouse, blindly flying around, Santa and Tom resolve to solve the problem. Santa gives the Mars King spectacles and a space suit, restoring his power (Ch. 11). Yet, the reindeer still refuse to fly. Embracing technology, Santa reveals his rocket-ship plans and Tom and the Mars King set off (Ch. 12). This passage continues the rather casual relationship between tradition and modernity. The flying saucers are revealed as primitive slingshot projectiles, able to be taken down by a simple net, whilst Santa's craftsman elves are able to construct a rocket ship from blueprints. Mythologies are mixed and previously certain foundations are upturned.

Carefully hedged off from religious practice, Beale's story – omitting any direct reference to Christian theological symbols related to Christmas – is free to examine variations of fantasy and monstrosity. As with *Alien vs. Predator* (2004); *Batman vs. Superman* (2016); or *King Kong vs. Godzilla* (1962), one feels like these separate stories should be kept separate, as if their meeting is a violation of some unspoken rule of monstrosity. Although throwing together Santa Claus, flying saucers, pagan witches, statues which come alive, and Martians seems absurd, Tom seems barely surprised. A degree of generic awareness and parody is at play – an imagined fictive realm is constructed with links to the exterior world. The conflation of the various mythologies – principally witches, Santa Claus, and flying saucers – brings several issues to the surface. Each could be described as a monster or disruptor. Each is the product of a specific cultural feeling, time, and place – devices which

"proliferate in times of crisis." Such crises followed a hard-to-define post-war mood – "a prevailing apocalyptic mood [...] triggered by political upheaval and threatening loss of control" (Kirk 7-8). The way Beale's witches and Santa's reindeer are spooked by the saucers also creates a sense of hierarchy between the three groups – amplified by the saucers initially giving the impression of being outside the conventions of domestic earthly existence such as manual labour and cooking, and so on. Although this sense of scientific and technological superiority is eventually unmasked – the flying saucers require manual labour and sacrifice – Beale initially works to suggest the flying saucers are the product of a certain emotional atmosphere – capable of scaring the human farmer and even mythological characters such as Santa Claus. Flying-saucer sceptic Waldemar Kaempffert, who appeared throughout the 1950s within the popular press as an expert on the flying saucer issue, put belief in flying saucers in the category of superstition, indicative of the fact that science had not yet reached the multitude. He claimed that "A belief in witches, devils and evil spirits may strike drivers of automobiles and owners of television sets as amusing and pathetic [acceptance of the veracity of flying saucers as alien visitation evidence] are cut from the same pattern." Yet, his patronising tone misunderstands what was occurring; the nature of myth in society, and the way monsters are *provocations*.

By having the witches and Santa as victims of the flying saucers, these mythological creatures are incorporated and domesticated – the flying saucer takes on the role of an outsider before itself being incorporated and domesticated (see below). Yet, monsters as a whole, of course, should be seen as within "the discursive elements of enlightened rationality," not outside it (Kirk 8). The paradoxical Gothic nature of the flying saucers confirms their monstrous status. The enlightenment they bring – the hinted revelation of technological progress – is accompanied by the threat of arbitrary, sudden violence, exposure, and vulnerability, leaving the individual alone in the bright glare. Foucault's thoughts on the Enlightenment position the period as a reaction to:

the fear of darkened spaces, of the pall of gloom which prevents the full visibility of things, men and truths. It sought to break up the patches of darkness that blocked the light, eliminate the shadowy areas of society. [...] the imaginary spaces [of Gothic novels] are like the negative and transparency and visibility which it aimed to establish. (Foucault, "Eye of Power" 153-154)

Beale's text sees the saucer's illumination of the witches and Santa's reindeer driving them to fear. Destruction of tradition occurs, but at the expense of another mythology being constructed around the flying saucer, which is itself collapsed when the Mars King reveals the secret. Before this point, the flying saucers, even in their brightly-lit state, function as black boxes. All that can be said of them takes the form of a question. Tom's investigations look beyond the purely visual component of the flying saucers's dazzling display which, in the air, soon turns from spectacle to terrifying animal chase and escape. He seeks true illumination, not the replacement of myth by myth. Whilst Beale's description of the flying saucers as aliens with lights on their heads flying around seems an absurdist gesture which contradicts any previously suggested formal explanation, it allows for the unfolding of

the second half of the story on Mars as Santa and Tom scheme to overthrow Martian society, whilst again highlighting the fragmentary nature of the term 'flying saucer' and the gap between its visual and kinetic definitions.

Act III: Domestication

Landing on Mars, "Tom step[s] out into a land stranger than any he ever dreamed of" – there were no trees, grass, flowers, weeds, or daisies. The surface was covered with gold dust. No food grew in the dim light (Ch. 14). Discovering the other Mars Kings, Tom and the others – again showing practicality and resourcefulness – plot to construct a machine – "a huge vacuum cleaner that could suck particles from the air" to collect the flying saucers (Ch. 15). In his space suit and spectacles, the Mars King begins to take control, silencing the children, and appearing authoritative. However, a collapsing hill breaks his costuming and illusion of power. The Kings are imprisoned once again. Only Tom remains free, discovering a society where "Everything is backwards – children command. Kings obey. Mothers go to school. You even talk backwards!" (Ch. 17). However, Tom sets his machine off and, on Earth, Santa observes twelve flying saucers being sucked away. The reindeer are able to fly once again. In the final chapter, Santa arrives. Naturally, this produces terror – "They thought some powerful spirit had come to punish them" (Ch. 18). Santa distributes glasses and oxygen tanks and helmets to the Kings who all attain the illusion of strength and authority. He then distributes toys to the children and plants a Christmas tree – as a symbol of "peace and goodness" between Earth and Mars. As a sign of this mutual respect, or, rather, in a colonialist-twist, the entire Martian socio-economic structure is overturned. The Kings will rule, the children would play, the mothers would come out of school and the children replace them, and everybody would speak "frontwards." Also, "no more flying saucers, ever." Tom takes the sleigh back home and the words ring out – "Merry Christmas! A Merry Christmas to all the world!" (Ch. 18). The abrupt ending of *Santa and the Mars King* restores a form of societal order to the mythological world of Santa, witches, and flying saucers which would be familiar to the readers of the tale – the Martians will remain away from Earth. Moreover, their "backward" ways have been "corrected." Family life prevails. Back home on Earth, Christmas proceeds.

Domestication of the flying saucer in wider flying saucer America was equally problematic. The recent edited collection *Histories of the Future* (2005) contains a chart depicting the mutations in how aliens within flying saucer, UFO, and invasion narratives were depicted. The changes are instructive in demonstrating how the shifting patterns of representation, in terms of size, number of tentacles, colour, and so on, constantly renewed the threat. Flying saucer narratives underwent similarly dramatic shifts, making the terrain unstable and unable to be fully built on and adapted, like witches and Santa Claus, into popular culture. Anxieties around the flying saucer were still present throughout the 1950s and onwards, before the launch of Sputnik gave the American public something new to worry about. Indeed, Sputnik took over several concerns surrounding the saucers, including whether the Soviet satellite possessed unlimited panopticon-like powers, able to spot an individual on the ground. The Barney and Betty Hill abduction case from September 1961 further saw flying saucer narratives of visual excess and spectacle transform into more invasive and troubling

territory. Daniel Rosenberg and Susan Harding characterise the shift as “the ray-gun Gothic of the 1930s to the noir and the endism of the 1940s and 1950s to the plastic op-art modularity of the 1960s and back again” (3). The frightening soon became kitsch or amusing but new mutations maintained the exterior nature of threats in the sky. Attempts to police visual and material culture in the 1950s, for example, took several surreal turns. Flying saucer pyjamas for children were delayed to remove scary-looking aliens; advertisements of Buck Rogers toy sets depicted the spaceman with gun trained on the monsters, “flying saucer disintegrator” in hand; and hotel advertisements for families portrayed a flying saucer landing, but its occupant expressing the same concerns as any American mother and father regarding the hotel room and missing his family¹. Yet new, more frightening, representations developed. The Hills’s testimony, for example, of losing time during their alleged abduction – which became a well-worn trope of UFO encounters – marked a radical mutation in the mythology of the flying saucer and a disruption of chronologies. With the coming of the future, time had only seemed to accelerate, reflecting what Rosenberg and Harding describe as “historical acceleration,” apparently now proceeding at such a rate that “by the late twentieth century, the problem was no longer how to account for historical acceleration but how to account for the acceleration of acceleration itself” (7).

Conclusion

The flying saucer narrative in post-war USA tied together the spheres of popular culture, scientific modernity, and centralised military-industrial authority, whilst revealing the fault-lines in this conjunction. The appearance of the new phenomenon challenged each sphere. Popular-cultural forms veered between scepticism and acceptance. Representatives of scientific modernity acknowledged a related spectrum of technological innovation. The invention and use of the atomic bomb in August 1945, rising threats to the USA’s position of superiority by an increasingly confident Soviet Union, and the science-fictional backdrop to everyday life all coalesced to open a space which refused to conform to fundamental distinctions between reality and imagination – two-lived-in spaces which are permeable – and between past, present, and future. The dream-world of science-fiction and comic-books seemed to step outside of its pages. The catch-phrase “watch the skies!” turned everyday into a potentially transcendent event (Peebles, *Watch the Skies!*). “What is it impossible to think?” asked Michel Foucault (*Order of Things* 377). Apparently, nothing when power manifested could offer no solutions. The limits of thought were free to expand. Carl Jung’s analysis that what produced the flying saucer phenomenon was “the threatening situation of the world [...] when people are beginning to see that everything is at stake” is tempting. Like sea monsters on medieval and Renaissance maps which turned real dangers into stylised signs, flying saucers made tangible a not-too-distant fear (Van Duzer, *Sea Monsters*). Projects Sign, Grudge, and Blue Book couched their explanations in language so banal that saucers evaded their dominion, becoming objects of fantasy and (im)possibility. Positioned uneasily between visual and kinetic descriptors, unlike Beale’s Martians, the flying saucers escaped the net. Open-ended think pieces maintained the provisional nature of the objects seen, evading closure with a barrage of questions, and even accusing the United States Air Force of conducting a campaign of misinformation. Truth, however, was not the only motivation. Commercial instincts, paralleling P. T. Barnum-era news strategies, meant

that uncovering the facts was frequently relegated to a supporting role as the flying saucer narrative attracted new variations and transformations. Such matters of openness, mystery, and uncertainty extended into the realm of fiction which proved capable of policing specific socio-cultural territory.

Santa and the Mars King was not an unusual story in how it depicted humans coming to terms with flying saucers. The tension between periphery and metropolis suggested by Tom's town, combining aspects of rural and urban life which vacillate between tradition and modernity and between manual labour and technology, threads through Beale's tale. A variety of explanations are given for the Farmer's sighting, suggesting how societies could come to terms with outré events by forgetting, unable or unwilling to linger on what they cannot explain. Only the curious Tom, the archetypal loner, retains his interest. Yet his investigations depend upon further enchantment. The saucer heralds a new age until unmasked, revealing a Martian world in disorder. The (problematic) re-ordering of the Martian society which ends the story occurs through several stages. Initially, the flying saucer itself is disenchanted. It is merely the product, like Santa's presents and the witch's broom, of intense labour and the sacrifice of fully-grown individuals – the emasculated Martian Kings who require earthly technologies of spectacles and space suits. The colonial subtext is furthered when Santa overturns the society of the Martians. The Kings are put back in control. The women are "allowed" to go home. The children are sent to school. The Martians will no longer speak "backwards." All are indoctrinated with the Christmas spirit. The Martian revolution is tolerated and forgiven within the carnival spirit of Christmas. The festivities provide a temporary opportunity for children to play, yet are also a time for reconciliation and the reaffirmation of societal hierarchies. The cultural figure of Santa – a kind of ur-Father – distributes gifts to the deserving, further policing behaviour. The appropriateness of the cultural values of the United States is unquestioned. The flying saucers are contained and human superiority is, with ruthless efficiency, affirmed.

NOTES

1. For more information on this, see my earlier article "Sky and Stardust: The Flying Saucer in Popular Culture, 1947-1957" 88.

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FROM LOVECRAFT TO *HELLBOY*: THE CARNIVALESQUE FACE OF THE LOVECRAFTIAN

Valentino Paccosi

In recent decades, the works of writer H.P. Lovecraft have inspired a very large number of texts all across the media, so much so that the term 'Lovecraftian' has become somewhat abused and its definition very vague. The term 'Lovecraftian' is used to describe those works which contain elements taken from Lovecraft's fiction. There is no precise definition of this term, but *The Rise, Fall and Rise of the Cthulhu Mythos* (2015) by S.T. Joshi one of the leading figures in the study of the author, has been highly influential in shaping of its meaning. Joshi provides a list of elements that an 'authentic' Lovecraftian texts should contain in order to be regarded as part of the canon: a fictional New England topography; a growing library of imaginary forbidden books; a diverse array of extra-terrestrial gods or entities; a sense of cosmicism; and a scholarly narrator or protagonist (Joshi, *The Rise* 17-19). Joshi is so strict with his vision of the Lovecraftian canon that, even though "The Dunwich Horror" (1929), one of Lovecraft's most famous short stories, presents all these elements, he declares this text is "exactly the sort of pulpish tripe Lovecraft so despised in the pages of *Weird Tales*" (Joshi, *The Evolution* 92), and for this reason it should not be considered as one of the most representative stories of the author. When discussing the works of August Derleth, one of the major contributors to *Cthulhu Mythos* (1926), the very first Lovecraftian fiction, Joshi writes: "In hindsight, it becomes astounding how Derleth could have developed so erroneous a view of the Lovecraft Mythos" (*The Rise* 204). Moreover, in two chapters of this book he writes about a number of contemporary Lovecraft-inspired fictions, basing his reviews only on his personal tastes and his very own concept of Lovecraftian (Joshi, *The Rise* 305-367), often using extremely direct judgements such as "lifeless prose" (309); "stellar contribution" (311); "disappointing feature of the novella" (329); "it cannot be considered a success" (339). Joshi, having been one of the very first scholars to take into serious considerations the works of Lovecraft, has established himself as the primary 'arbiter' of the writer's works, thus establishing a qualitative canon regarding what is in line with the 'essence' of Lovecraft and the Lovecraftian. This attitude is dangerous as it suggests both readers and academics can ignore certain texts that do not conform to the canon. Joshi himself seems to have fallen victim of his own definition of the Lovecraftian, finding difficult to include in the canon texts which do not perfectly fit the criteria.

Nevertheless, not all scholars have such an exclusive conception of the Lovecraftian and of Weird Fiction. In an article (2008), writer China Miéville defines as one of the main characteristics of Weird Fiction and the Lovecraftian, the presence of indescribable and formless monsters which are, paradoxically described with an excess of specificity that results in the destruction of their

representability. Moreover, the presence of the tentacle as the default monstrous appendage in contemporary texts is to be attributed to the influence of Lovecraft's fictions (Miéville 105). In *Weird Realism: Lovecraft and Philosophy* (2012), Graham Harman defines Lovecraft as a writer of gaps and describes his writing style as literary cubism, as the author puts many apparently unrelated images together in order to depict the indescribable (22); in *The Weird and the Eerie* (2016) Mark Fisher notes how Lovecraft's prose generates "reality-effect" by only describing tiny fragments of the *Necronomicon* (24), a fictional book of forbidden lore, in a way that many believe the book is actually real.

My approach towards the Lovecraftian is more similar to that of the aforementioned writers and critics; nevertheless, in my analysis I do not consider the Lovecraftian as part of the Weird as these two are quite different. While Weird Fiction is a literary genre to which Lovecraft's fictions belong, I will consider the Lovecraftian as a mode that has some specific characteristics which give to each genre a 'flavour.' Very often in mediums, such as graphic novel and film, the Lovecraftian is accompanied by another term, such as 'Lovecraftian Horror' and 'Lovecraftian Adventure.' The Lovecraftian is then implicitly used as a mode as the aforementioned examples are a combined genre in which the overall form is determined by the second term, defined by Alastair Fowler as "kind," while the Lovecraftian mode gives it a very specific "flavour" (*Kinds of Literature* 107). Considering that as the mode, 'the Lovecraftian,' provides more flexibility when looking at texts in which it is used together with other genres and in which it acts as a 'modifier' of them. I do not intend to ignore Joshi's definition of Lovecraftian, as elements such as cosmic fear, which is the result of discovering other forms of life that we cannot comprehend and that make human life insignificant (Joshi, *The Evolution* 82), are important elements of the Lovecraftian mode. Nevertheless, less 'philosophical' aspect such as the presence of tentacular and unnameable creatures are also fundamental elements of it and should not be ignored.

The comic book series *Hellboy*, created in 1993 by American artist and writer Mike Mignola, and the films *Hellboy* (2004) and *Hellboy 2: The Golden Army* (2008), by Mexican director Guillermo del Toro, are interesting case studies that help to shed some light on the nature of the Lovecraftian in the graphic novel and film medium and why it is very often used in relation with other genres instead of on its own. Using the theories elaborated by Mikhail Bakhtin in his book *Rabelais and His World* (1965), I will demonstrate how the niche nature of the Lovecraftian can be mixed with other genres and modes in order to make it more appealing to a mainstream audience, without destroying its core element, but turning them into a new reading of the Lovecraftian. Considering the Lovecraftian as a mode I will demonstrate how *Hellboy's* comics and films, despite being very different from what is considered the 'Lovecraft canon,' are still texts which belong to the Lovecraftian and use its elements in order to renovate it. Moreover, these case studies will help setting the foundations for future studies on canon revisions and the necessity of having one at all.

In "The Magical Spirituality of a Lapsed Catholic - Atheism and Anticlericalism" (2015), Joshi does not ignore the presence of the Lovecraftian in the first *Hellboy's* film and his opinion seems to be a positive one: "There is a powerful influence of Lovecraft throughout the film, and it is a

delicate question as to which of the Lovecraftian touches are derived from Mignola's graphic novels, and which from del Toro's elaborations upon it" (17). In his brief analysis he only acknowledges the existence of the *Hellboy* comics, and provides a very short list of Lovecraftian elements that can be found in the film, concluding that the major Lovecraftian element in the first *Hellboy* film is the acknowledgement of an alternate cosmology which poses a recurring threat to humanity (18). Joshi recognises the presence of the Lovecraftian in this film. Nevertheless, he only mentions one of the elements of his canon, specifically the cosmicism, and does not produce a deeper analysis of the film. Moreover, he completely ignores the comics that inspired it, the reason being that *Hellboy* comic books present very few elements from Joshi's 'canon.' Sometimes books of forbidden lore are featured. There are also some gods or extra-terrestrial entities, even though most of them are infernal or mythological figures, but they usually do not convey any sense of 'cosmicism.' Moreover, the lead character Hellboy, a big red devil with filed horns and a mysterious rock-like right hand, is definitely not a scholar but an action hero who punches his way through hordes of folk monsters, tentacular creatures, and even immortal Nazis. This comic book series is an interesting mix of two genres: Superhero and Horror. Hellboy is a superhero in every aspect, having super strength, being fire-proof and almost bullet-proof, and he is part of a team composed by many peculiar characters, the most memorable being his sidekick, Abraham 'Abe' Sapiens, a man-fish hybrid. However, the Horror component is also very strong in the comic series. The art, through use of heavy chiaroscuro, and Gothic settings such as abandoned cathedrals, castles, and cemeteries, suggests a constant state of suspense and mystery, and the opponents of the main character are always monstrous creatures from a very wide spectrum of literary and cinematographic sources, so much so that Lovecraftian elements never seem out of place in this pastiche.

Another element which appears in the *Hellboy* comics is that of laughter. It seems strange to have it in a Horror-oriented comic book, but laughter has been part of the genre since the very beginning of the genre: *Tales from the Crypt* (1950-1955); as Randy Duncan and Matthew J. Smith identify in *The Power of Comics: History, Form and Culture* (2009), the most famous Horror comic book series of the 1950s always had a fictional host who would tell jokes and mock the horrific tone of each issue (213). Moreover, the element of laughter appears in many Gothic novels: as Avril Horner and Sue Zlosnik summarise in *Gothic and the Comic Turn* (2005): "the Gothic text's tendency to self-parody is well expressed by Chris Baldick in his introduction to *The Oxford Book of Gothic Tales*: 'Many Gothic tales are already half-way to sending themselves up'" (Horner and Zlosnik 11). All of the previous characteristics of *Hellboy* comic books can be applied to the films as well, even though I will point out some important differences. Comedy and Horror has always been interconnected, as demonstrated by William Paul's book *Laughing Screaming* (1994), where he argues how the fraternity comedies and the slasher film of the 1980s were fuelled by the audience's interest for the low aspects of life that generate comedy. However, the kind of laughter that the Horror genre provokes in its readers/viewers is a very specific one, as it has the function of mocking and at the same time celebrating the elements of the genre. This kind of laughter has been deemed 'carnival laughter' by Mikhail Bakhtin (11), and it is thanks to this that *Hellboy's* comics and films are able to reintroduce and renew the Lovecraftian. As previously mentioned, in these texts, the elements taken from Lovecraft's fictions are not used in a way that matches Joshi's conception of the authentic

'Lovecraft Mythos,' as the red devil never experiments with cosmic fear or lack of sanity, but always defeats the tentacular horrors with brute force and explosive weapons. Thanks to carnival laughter, the Lovecraftian can then be used in a very different way, which may seem quite unorthodox and superficial but does not by any means work against the elements it portrays.

Carnival laughter is, for Bakhtin, the key element of the 'antique grotesque' found in the works of Rabelais. For him, this is the purest form of grotesque, as the exaggerated bodies, their low elements (the mouth, the bowels, the sexual organs), and all the functions connected to them have a very positive and regenerative function (Bakhtin 19). The concept of carnival is strictly connected to that of the antique grotesque, as it is during this time of the year that the lower aspects of life, thus the grotesque, are celebrated. In this period, the normal conventions of life and laws are abolished and everything is permitted. The aspect that dominates carnival is carnival laughter: this is a festive laughter that belongs to all the people, and nobody is excluded from it. It is universal and directed at everyone, including those who participate in the carnival, and it is also ambivalent: triumphant but also mocking (Bakhtin 11). The latter characteristic is very important as it is through this ambivalent function that *Hellboy* comics and films are able to re-interpret the Lovecraftian.

The concept of laughter may seem unrelated to the works of Lovecraft as his texts are always concerned with the horror that lies beyond and our incapacity of comprehending it. However, Bakhtin noticed that grotesque and carnivalesque are bound to change during different time periods. Lovecraft's fictions are then permeated by what Bakhtin would define as 'Romantic Grotesque,' a form of grotesque which is very private and whose carnival is 'an individual carnival, marked by a vivid sense of isolation' (Bakhtin 37). The world of Romantic Grotesque becomes a terrifying one, alien to man, and an element such as the mask, which had a positive and festive connotation in the Antique Grotesque, here becomes an element that deceives and often hides 'a terrible vacuum' (Bakhtin 40) behind it. As a consequence, this Grotesque cannot maintain its carnivalesque dimension and its laughter ceases to be a festive one and also loses its regenerative power. Another consequence of the disempowerment of carnival laughter is the importance the Romantic Grotesque gives to terror. While in the Antique Grotesque, fear is only the extreme expression of a narrow mind, as complete and joyous freedom is only attainable in a fearless world where the monsters are always comic and are defeated by laughter, in the Romantic period, grotesque bodies evoke pure terror and are part of an alien and terrifying world (Bakhtin 39-47). Nevertheless, despite the presence of the Romantic Grotesque in the fictions of Lovecraft, it is still possible to find examples of carnival laughter in some of his texts.

A good example of the presence of the carnival laughter in Lovecraft's fictions is the short story "The Unnamable"¹ (1925). It starts with the two protagonists, Randolph Carter and Joel Manton, sitting in a very spooky cemetery. Carter has been accused by his friend of always writing about 'unmentionable' and 'unnamable' things. All of a sudden, something terrible attacks them and Carter is knocked unconscious. Later, in the hospital, Manton reveals Carter what he saw:

It was everywhere—a gelatin—a slime—yet it had shapes, a

thousand shapes of horror beyond all memory. There were eyes—and a blemish. It was the pit—the maelstrom—the ultimate abomination. Carter, *it was the unnamable!* (Lovecraft 261, original emphasis)

This short story needs to be read against itself, as the text is very self-conscious of the nature of the language and the elements it is 'playing' with. The carnival laughter in "The Unnamable" is quite explicit as the text is, at the same time, embracing the same kind of language and elements it was previously mocking. Another example of carnival laughter is "Herbert West – Reanimator" (1922), a short story that narrates the gruesome but comedic attempt of a young doctor to revive dead human bodies in which Lovecraft quite explicitly plays with the classic trope of the mad scientist. This is another great example of carnival laughter, as this laughter is ambivalent: the readers are able to recognise the use of clichés, but at the same time they expect and appreciate them, laughing at their own enjoyment.

The carnival laughter is not one of the key elements of Lovecraft's fictions, as it appears only very sporadically. Nevertheless, its presence demonstrates how the kind of laughter in Lovecraft's works is different from the "cold humour, irony and sarcasm" (Bakhtin 38) that can be found in the Romantic Grotesque. It is very interesting to see how *Hellboy's* graphic novels have used carnival laughter, an element which per-se does not belong to the Lovecraftian, and made it a tool to re-read it. The two-page comic "Pancakes" (Mignola, *The Right Hand of Doom* 6-7) is a quintessential example. The comic opens with the image of young Hellboy petting a dog; in the next panel a serious man in uniform offers the little devil pancakes. "I don't like pamcakes [sic]!" (6), protests Hellboy; the general then suggests he tries them and feeds the kid. "Hey... I love it!" (6), cries out Hellboy. The very next panel shows a towering city surrounded by fire: it is Pandemonium, capital city of Hell. The panel below shows the silhouettes of monstrous demons screaming aloud; "What's all the noise about?" (7), asks Astaroth, Grand Duke of the Infernal Regions. "It is the boy. It has eaten the pancake" (7), responds Mammon, a goat-like demon; "He will never come back to us now" (7), adds the demon Haborym. "Truly this is our blackest hour" (7), concludes Astaroth, while the last panel depicts Hellboy's empty plate with only a fork lying on it.

The tone of the story is apparently very serious, as is suggested by the layout of the page. However, the title character of the series, the action-hero Hellboy, is presented here merely as a grotesque and funny-looking child-demon whose right hand is still as big and stone-like as in his grown-up form, an element which contrasts with the overall setting of the story. On the second page, there is a sudden shift in settings, as the comic show, Pandemonium, the flaming city of Hell. Despite using Christian elements such as demons and Hell, this new setting shares many elements with the fictions of Lovecraft. Lovecraft's texts contain many vague references to otherworldly or extra-dimensional cities with gigantic columns and non-Euclidean geometry such as R'lyeh, the sunken city where Cthulhu waits dreaming. Moreover, the comic, in the same way as Lovecraft's fictions, gives the readers a glimpse of what lies beyond our reality and highlights the ignorance of human beings regarding the true nature of the universe. However, 'Pancakes,' instead of a dimension of pure chaos

populated by reality-defying monsters and indescribable horrors, gives the readers a sort of parody of that: Pandemonium looks like a stylised mausoleum surrounded by fumes and flames, the demons that inhabit it have grotesque but well-defined forms (some of them resembling goats), and they all talk using the English language instead of the gibberish used by Lovecraft's creatures. Moreover, Astaroth, the Grand Duke of the infernal regions, has the appearance of a grumpy grandfather who is more upset than menacing. The comic strip plays with all these elements, which are well known to readers of the graphic novel and to Lovecraft fans, subverting the epic scale implied in this story: the future of humanity, menaced by the infernal hordes, is determined by the love of a little devil for pancakes. As in Lovecraft's 'The Unnamable,' here the laughter is both mocking and celebrating the Lovecraftian and its fans. It is not a sarcastic laugh, but one that, as Bakhtin says about carnival laughter, destroys in order to re-create something new and joyous.

The adventures of Hellboy have twice been adapted for the big screen by Mexican film director Guillermo del Toro. These films use carnival laughter, mixed with elements from Lovecraft's fictions, but in a slightly different way from that of the graphic novel. *Hellboy* (2004) takes all its plot elements from the comic, using the story of "Seed of Destruction"; as a result, this film is very close to the spirit of its source material as it uses the iconic Lovecraftian elements in a very plain and straightforward way. From the very beginning the film pays homage to Lovecraft as it opens with a quotation from "De Vermis Mysteriis," reading: "In the coldest regions of space, the monstrous entities Ogdru Jahad – the Seven Gods of Chaos – slumber in their crystal prison, waiting to reclaim Earth [...] and burn the heavens" (*Hellboy* 0:00:48). The quoted book is a fictional one, created by writer Robert Bloch and very often cited by Lovecraft along with his more famous fictitious book, *The Necronomicon*. The quotation also bears a strong resemblance to the legends built into Lovecraft's fictions about Great Cthulhu, another monstrous being that sleeps in the sunken city of R'lyeh, waiting to awake and rule our world. The quotation in *Hellboy's* film anticipates the attempt at releasing the monster, but its main function is that of opening a dialogue between the film and the readers of Lovecraft's texts, who will be able to recognise the reference. Even the creature itself, Ogdru Jahad, which is seen in the last part of the film, is very Lovecraftian, as it is a conglomerate of non-Euclidean polygons floating in space. However, the indescribable nature of the creature does not last long as in the following scene Hellboy battles a very tangible and well-defined tentacular creature, which he manages to blow up with a grenade. The film then creates a pastiche which uses carnival laughter in order to mock and celebrate the Lovecraftian and all the various clichés of Adventure and Action films, in the same way as the carnivalesque used in 'The Unnamable' and 'Herbert West - Reanimator' was ambivalent towards the elements of the Horror genre and the Lovecraftian.

However, in a key scene of the film, which is heavily inspired by one of the final pages of the graphic novel *Hellboy: Wake the Devil* (2004), the director decides to renounce the use of carnival laughter. The graphic novel version presents Hellboy, on the verge of death, floating in a sort of limbo. Suddenly, his filed horns grow back and he is enveloped by a burning red aura which shows his true infernal nature. A mysterious voice informs him he has two choices: unleash his destructive power, thus fulfilling his destiny as humanity's destroyer, or perish. Obviously, he chooses the third

option: he breaks his horns with his own hands, thus breaking the spell that kept him imprisoned. However, the solemnity of the moment is broken by the profanity screamed by Hellboy: "Screw you!" (Mignola, *Wake the Devil* 123). The use of obscene and abusive language, as Bakhtin demonstrates, is another important element of carnival laughter. In cursing there are always elements which recall bodily functions, in this case sex. In this way, they evoke carnival laughter as they celebrate the lower functions of the body and their regenerative power. Moreover, in this strip Hellboy 'destroys' the solemnity of the moment: the Lovecraftian doom that menaces mankind is destroyed by Hellboy's cursing and, at the same time, by the laugh of the readers.

In the film version, this scene is slightly different: Rasputin subjugates Hellboy and causes the devil's filed horns to grow back. Conquered by his daemonic side, Hellboy starts to open the trans-dimensional door that will awaken the world-destroyer Ogdrun Jahad. Nevertheless, when agent Myers tosses him the rosary of his deceased father, Prof Broom, Hellboy regains his consciousness and is able to make his choice: he breaks his daemonic horns and chooses to be human. In *Del Toro's* film, there is no space for laughter in this key moment: Hellboy's choice is dictated by love and by the character's respect for his father's teachings. The rosary maintains some religious connotation, but it is its function as a *memento* of the death of Hellboy's father that pushes the character to make his choice. While in the graphic novel, the character mocks the solemnity of the moment and seems to make his choice out of a sort of childish disrespect for destiny and authority, in the film, Hellboy is pushed to make his choice by parental authority. Thus, the moment where he exercises his free will is too important to be ridiculed, as it involves the Christian values of family and Hellboy's role as the champion of humanity against the forces of evil.

This scene also shows an important difference between the comic books and the film: while *Hellboy* comics are more oriented towards the Horror genre, the film leans towards the Superhero one. Using Peter Coogan's study on the Superhero genre, it appears that the three key elements of the superhero's character are much more prominent in the film than in the comics (Duncan and Smith 226-228). While Hellboy's powers are the same in both media, (the sole difference being that the film shows how the devil is immune to flames that are created by his love interest), the film presents a more detailed and poignant depiction of his mission and his identity. In the comics, Hellboy has to deal with a multitude of tasks due to the episodic structure of his adventures. On the other hand, the fairly straightforward plot of the film defines the character as the hero destined to defeat the immortal Nazis and prevent the apocalypse. His identity is also much more defined in the film: despite wearing the same 'costume' (his iconic duster coat), his personality is determined through his relationship with the other characters. Moreover, in the film, his nickname 'Red' is used much more often than in the comic and this, combined with the fact that in the film, Hellboy is supposed to stay out of the public sight, creates for the character a 'secret identity' that he does not have in the comic. In the *Hellboy* films, the title character is presented as a superhero but this does not mean that the carnival laughter is absent from it. The absence of laughter during the horn-breaking scene does not stop the film from using it in other sequences: Hellboy, while fighting in the subway a tentacular monster clearly inspired by Lovecraft's lore, not only delivers witty one-liners, but also holds a box full of adorable kittens. Here, not only is the Lovecraftian used in conjunction with the

superhero genre, a combination which has been used sporadically from the 1940s onward (Chris Murray and Kevin Corstorphine, "Cosmic Horror" 164-165), but both the Superhero genre and the Lovecraftian mode become the target of carnival laughter. As in the examples of carnivalesque in Lovecraft's fiction, here the key elements of the Superhero genre and the Lovecraftian are mocked and at the same time celebrated, as the audience realises the reiteration and partial misplacement of tropes they enjoy. This shift also explains why the film avoids the use of carnival laughter in the horn-breaking scene, despite using it in others: while it is appropriate to use a festive laughter regarding some elements of the Superhero genre, it is completely inappropriate to laugh at the precise moment in which the hero performs his heroic act. This also seems to establish a sort of hierarchy of values in the film. While there are some limits in the use of carnival laughter with the Superhero genre, there are no boundaries in its use with the Lovecraftian mode. This difference does not appear in the comic books: the text is a perfect pastiche made of different components which are all subject to carnival laughter.

The second film, *Hellboy 2: The Golden Army* (2008), again directed by del Toro, is a very different film to the first one. Here, the Lovecraftian elements are almost absent and are instead replaced by themes which belong to the Fairy Tale genre. It is undeniable that *Hellboy 2* has been heavily influenced by del Toro's previous film, *El Laberinto del Fauno* (*Pan's Labyrinth*, 2006), where reality and a very Gothic Fantastic world seem to co-exist. On the other hand, while his previous film has a very serious tone, in *Hellboy 2*, the element of carnival laughter and the Grotesque are maintained and amplified. The Troll Market, a secret place sited under the Brooklyn Bridge and hidden by magic, is filled with bizarre and grotesque creatures carrying on their everyday lives and businesses. In this place the weird is the norm, and the viewers are presented with a very bizarre utopian society where no one questions how different and grotesque the other looks. This sequence is a brilliant example of Gothic Carnivalesque in Contemporary Gothic, a mode identified by Catherine Spooner in *Contemporary Gothic* (2006), in which there is a continuous shift between the sinister and the comic and one of its most prominent features is the sympathy for the monster, an element derived from a combination of the modern notion of the individual subject and the sense of community found in the carnival festivities (Spooner 69). In *Hellboy 2*, there is also one scene which is worth mentioning as it is the quintessence of carnival laughter. Hellboy wanders around the Bureau completely drunk after a bad fight with his love interest. When he approaches the quarters of Abe, his man-fish friend, he catches him listening to love songs. After being pushed to talk by Hellboy, Abe confesses his love for the Elf princess Nuala. Then they drink beer and start singing aloud. The scene literally goes on for a minute, showing the two characters drunk and deeply engaged in singing through their sorrow. Here, the characters leave aside their status as heroes and become deeply human. They are not saving the world or fighting evil, but rather, they are just enjoying themselves and acting like fools. The viewers laugh at them, and at the same time, embrace the carnivalesque foolishness of the scene, becoming a part of it because, as Bakhtin explains, the carnival, and so the carnival laughter, is an event where there are no spectators as everyone is taking part in it. While the first film decided to make the horn-breaking scene a solemn moment where Hellboy not only decides to be human, but also fully accepts his role as a 'hero of light,' this sequence in *Hellboy 2* instead strips the characters of their heroic persona, showing them as

grotesque human beings. Moreover, instead of celebrating 'high' human principles such as parental love and friendship, this scene celebrates the 'low' aspects of the human body: like Rabelais's giants, Gargantua and Pantagruel, here Abe and Hellboy are excessive and carnivalesque. Nevertheless, this is still a positive depiction of the hero, one that mocks and celebrates it, as it shows how even a heroic figure can enjoy deeply human and 'low' aspects of life, thus making the viewers feel closer to these 'grotesquely human' characters.

Hellboy 2 also manages to reintroduce a fundamental aspect of the Antique Grotesque: its regenerative power. As previously stated, in the Romantic Grotesque, the regenerative power was completely lost and even in the Lovecraftian it is very hard to find instances of renewal. The monsters in Lovecraft's fiction are incomplete. However, this incompleteness has the opposite effect of the Antique Grotesque: in the latter, the grotesque bodies are incomplete as they are expanding and craving for life, while in Lovecraft's texts the creatures need to be completed by the reader's mind as their descriptions are always vague and full of narrative gaps. The incomplete grotesque bodies of Lovecraft's Horrors are the negation of life as we know it and are also impotent, as usually they are not even able to 'create themselves' and instead need to be evoked by cultists and by the active readers. Moreover, in the two short stories where the carnivalesque laughter is stronger there is no sign of grotesque renewal. In "Herbert West – Reanimator" (1922), the "grotesquely heterogeneous horde" (Lovecraft 204) of living dead created by West shreds the scientist to pieces, thus putting an end to the 'renewal' process and sanctioning the failure of the carnival. In "The Unnamable," the only possible renewal happens in the mind of the sceptical Manton: after being attacked by the 'unnamable' creature, he becomes a true believer in the Supernatural Horror, thus becoming an active part of the carnival. However, in a few short stories some form of renewal does happen, as in "The Shadow Over Innsmouth" (1936), where in the end the protagonist discovers that one of his direct ancestors has mated with the grotesque creatures from the abyss. Initially, he thinks about ending his life with a revolver, but then he embraces his heritage and decides to go down into the depths even before the change that would transform him into a man-fish takes place. The narrator confesses: "I hear and do strange things in sleep, and awake with a kind of exaltation instead of terror" (Lovecraft 858). In a sort of reversal of the Romantic Grotesque, the terror here is replaced by exaltation and joy for the possible renewal. This new life is presented in a very ambiguous way: it is going to be an underwater life in the darkness of the abyss, but still filled with wonders and 'glory.' Moreover, the protagonist will take his cousin with him because he thinks they share a curse and are locked in a 'madhouse.' This is probably the only time in Lovecraft's texts where madness is mixed with a sense of renewal. Despite the lack of carnivalesque laughter in this short story, here the two madmen (as the protagonist may just be as mad as his cousin) are infused with a 'festive madness' similar to that of the Antique Grotesque, as they are "looking at the world with different eyes" (Bakhtin 39), joyously accepting the renovation of their bodies.

Hellboy 2: The Golden Army presents instead a new form of renewal of the grotesque, even though this process is not always completely successful. The aforementioned sequence in the Troll Market presents a scene in which there is a very creative example of renewal: Johann Krauss, who is already one of the strangest characters of the cast, being an ectoplasmic life-form contained

into a sort of old-style diving suit, tries to get some information about his mission from a Troll. The Troll's look is very peculiar: not only has it a pin-shaped head, but another little Troll, which talks in a childlike voice, is protruding from its chest. After Hellboy pushes the reticent Troll to speak, Johann thanks the creature and pats the little Troll on the head, saying: "Nice baby!" (*Hellboy 2* 0:46:19). The response of the little Troll is hilarious and very surprising: "I'm not a baby: I'm a tumour!" (*Hellboy 2* 0:46:20). In this scene, the film manages not only to make the audience laugh with an unexpected joke, but also to transform something negative and deadly as a tumour in a positive element. The Troll seems to live in harmony with its little 'guest,' and Johann is not to blame for mistaking their relationship as one between a parent and its offspring. Here, the Grotesque regains its regenerative power as the exaggerated and deformed bodies of the Troll, as the ones of Rabelais's giants, Gargantua and Pantagruel, is so imbued with life that it expands beyond its limits, even succeeding in the impossible task of generating life from dead cells.

Nevertheless, not all the fantastic creatures in *Hellboy 2* are destined to prosper like the Trolls. The Elves depicted in the film live in a world which looks as if in a perpetual autumn, full of hints of a past splendour but now filled with death and decay. It is not accidental that their king is extremely old and has only one arm: these creatures are members of an ancient and dying race that, opposite to that of the Trolls, is bound to live a sterile life and, eventually, disappear. The offspring of the Elf king, Prince Nuada, and Princess Nuala, are different from the human characters of the film, but their bodies are not grotesque in the Bakhtinian sense: they look elegant, austere, and lack the playfulness of the other races and monsters. The twins are instead closer to the principles of the Romantic Grotesque: Prince Nuada is the villain of the film and is driven by fear and violence, while Princess Nuala is instead a gentle empath with psychic powers. The final defeat of the evil Nuada happens thanks to his sister: she stabs herself to death, thus fatally injuring her brother with whom she shares her life essence. Only killing herself and her twin brother, thus ending forever the blood lineage of the royal Elves, Nuala is able to bring a sort of negative renewal: thanks to her the menacing Golden Army is destroyed and peace is brought back in both the magic realm and the human world. However, the film makes clear that this is not the kind of renewal to which our society should aspire; during the film it is revealed that Liz, Hellboy's girlfriend, is pregnant and in the final scene it is further revealed she is carrying twins. Hellboy, the big red devil and Liz, a girl with the often uncontrollable gift of creating and manipulating fire, are destined to give birth to a very special offspring and start a new and peculiar lineage. This pregnancy is not as radically Grotesque as that of the pregnant hag found in the Kerch terracotta collection mentioned by Bakhtin (25), but the idea of Hellboy producing an offspring with a woman is still quite powerful. Not only is Hellboy visually grotesque, but during the two films it is plainly stated that he is the son of a member of Hell's royal family and so is destined to bring about the Apocalypse. Hellboy is then, despite his heroic attitude, still linked to death and destruction, but his grotesque body is nevertheless full of life and able to bring a new kind of renewal. This instance of grotesque renewal can be considered the natural evolution of the 'negative renewal' found at the end of "The Shadow Over Innsmouth" (1936): while in Lovecraft's novella it takes the protagonist an almost superhuman effort to accept his true nature and join his undersea and hybrid family, in *Hellboy 2* the hybrid offspring of Hellboy and Liz is the product of their love for each other. It is then possible to see how the Lovecraftian, in conjunction

with carnival laughter and the Superhero genre, has made possible a new and unexpectedly positive resurgence of long lost aspects of the 'Antique Grotesque.'

In conclusion, the *Hellboy* graphic novels and films are texts worth studying not only as they show a development of the Lovecraftian, but also because they are complex and rich texts on their own. Instead of trying to include these texts in the Lovecraftian, and thus in a way, reintroducing the concept of canon, it is more appropriate to read them as texts that cleverly use the Lovecraftian together with other genres such as the Horror, Adventure and Superhero ones. The Lovecraftian is hard to describe as from the very beginning it has been used as a mode, a collection of themes as the aforementioned cosmic fear and 'unnamable' creatures that were used to give a very distinct flavour to some genres. Even in Lovecraft's fictions the Lovecraftian is used in connection with different genres: the Horror genre ('The Dunwich Horror,' 1928), Science Fiction ('The Colour From Out of Space,' 1927), and Fantasy (*The Dream-Quest of Unknown Kadath*, 1927). This mode enriches other genres, as demonstrated by the hybrid nature of the texts analysed in this article. Considering the Lovecraftian as a mode instead of a genre is not to be regarded as 'downgrading' it; instead, this gives the Lovecraftian a flexibility and adaptability that a genre cannot have as it has to obey to stricter rules than a mode. The Lovecraftian has become a trans-medium and trans-national mode that can be used by American comics artists such as Mignola and Mexican film directors such as del Toro without any need to create a similar setting or the risk of contradicting given rules: as the Lovecraftian is a 'flavour' that can be applied to pretty much any genre in the context of any national identity, there is no need to establish a canon. Building it would instead be putting serious limitations to this mode: as demonstrated by this article, the Lovecraftian has gained multiple elements and readings from cross-contaminations.

Moreover, the use in the *Hellboy* films of the carnivalesque together with the Lovecraftian and the Superhero genre seems to have brought a gradual but substantial change into the latter: while the Lovecraftian mode and the carnivalesque have been used in other texts such as in some episodes of the TV show *South Park* ('Mysterion Rises,' 2010) and graphic novels such as *Howard Lovecraft and the Frozen Kingdom* (2010), the superhero genre, especially in films dedicated to Marvel Comics characters, has made the carnivalesque one of its recurring elements (*Guardians of the Galaxy*, 2014; *Ant-Man*, 2015). Given the adaptability of the Lovecraftian, it would not come as a surprise to see a return of this mode together with the Horror genre in the announced film reboot of *Hellboy*, to be directed by English Horror Director Neil Marshall. In that case, the new mix of Lovecraftian Horror and superheroes may even start a new trend in the superhero genre, once again demonstrating the versatility and importance of the Lovecraftian in contemporary media.

NOTES

1. I have decided to maintain Lovecraft's peculiar spelling of the word in my article, as the author uses it in the whole of his fiction.

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TICKETS PLEASE! – TRAINS, STATIONS AND TRAVEL IN THE WORKS OF CHINA MIÉVILLE

Chris Hussey

The motif of the train appears to be of great importance within the work of China Miéville, with over a third of his novels featuring them, and related elements such as rails, stations, and travel holding a central role within a number of his texts. Some references to trains in Miéville's work are overt, appearing within the titles of his novels, as in the case of *Railsea* (2012) or *Perdido Street Station* (2000), or are visually represented on their covers – such as with *Iron Council* (Pan Books, 2004) and *Railsea* (Del Ray, 2012) that represent the view down a railway track towards a train. I will examine the world that Miéville crafts, exploring the role of trains within a fantastic setting; and the role of the train as coloniser, or colonial agent, one which exercises control over the landscape and populace.

Whilst most people are loosely aware of what trains are, and most people have probably travelled on some form of train within their lives, it would in the first instance be worth defining what a train is and what it represents for the purposes of this paper. A dictionary definition states that "train," when used as a noun, consists of "a number of railway carriages, vans, or trucks coupled together, with or without a locomotive" (Oxford English Dictionary). For my purposes here, it is this definition of the word train as referring to a collective entity that is most relevant: within Miéville's texts, this operates both as a signifier of unity and also as a physical vehicle for the purposes of narrative and locomotion.

Whilst other modes of vehicular transport do feature within the works of Miéville, such as boats, airships, and buses, the prevalence of trains and aspects thereof in a number of his works is perhaps representative of the historic and significant nature of this method of transport in Britain and abroad. The relative importance of railways and trains has permeated British culture for the last two centuries since the "scattering of pioneer lines of the 1830s" that Simon Bradley (*The Railways: Nation, Network and People* 9) describes as preceding the subsequent periods of intense investment and construction in the rail industry, punctuated by periods of introspection involving "solemn reflection and abstinence" (10). Interest in this new method of transport, above and beyond the connections that were to be made between distant places and the speed at which people could travel, would be reflected in all that it signified for the populace: new technology brought toward and made available for use by the general public. Bradley suggests that within this period of expansion and into the 1860s, "to the contemporary mind, they [railways] still represented the essence of modernity" (10-11). This may continue to hold true today if one considers Miéville's texts within the wider context of our increasingly globalised world. But the train, according to Benjamin Fraser and Steven Spalding, is "not merely an indicator of industrial progress or a metaphor/symbol for the

contradictions of modernity but also a subject worthy of cultural analysis of all types" (*Trains, culture, and mobility: riding the rails* x) In this context, trains become both objects of and metaphors for notions of mobility, technology, innovation, and creation as societies developed and implemented this industrial breakthrough on a larger scale.

Mobility, Technology, Innovation and Creation

These key concepts are explored within Miéville's novels, with mobility represented in two main ways: as physical movement, and in terms of social impact. In considering a method of transport such as a train, it is impossible to separate it from considerations of motion, and Colin Divall and Hiroki Shin note that even "from its early years as a means of transporting people [...] the railway has been linked with speed" ("Cultures of Speed and Conservative Modernity: Representations of Speed in Britain's Railway Marketing" 3). The advent of such technology, and the accompanying capability of quickly transporting goods and people over vast distances, is seen as being advantageous within *Iron Council*, as both a way of being able to wage war more effectively as well as a contributor to the city's growth. Miéville portrays the emergence of the railways as a revolution in and of itself, beyond the wider ongoing industrial transformation. **It is representative of technological expansion, urbanisation and colonisation, in order to meet the perceived needs of the city and those that rule it.** Reading through a postcolonial lens, Christiane Reichart-Burikukiye echoes that railways did not only revolutionise transportation, but that it was **"their ability to transport goods, people and information in hitherto unknown temporal and geographical dimensions"** that **"became the backbone of the rapidly expanding process of industrialization"** ("The Railway in Colonial East Africa: Colonial Iconography and African Appropriation of a New Technology" 63) and were a catalyst for urban growth.

It is a growth that seems without end, perhaps reflective of a form of "accelerationism" of capital as discussed by Benjamin Noys (*Malign Velocities: Accelerationism and Capitalism* 91), mirrored by the striking description of the *Iron Council* as being a "perpetual train" (Noys 286). This stated perpetuity suggests something that can continue to expand, to move and to live, with new passengers and repairs, for time immemorial. It could be said that this constitutes a form of mutation, in the way in which the train grows and expands beyond its original purpose, in an organic manner. Miéville implies the train has an animalistic quality too by stating it "is going feral" as it "deviates" from its original course to travel "west-northwest" (*Iron Council* 286) taking them into the "wilderness where there is nothing, a new unmapped place" to continue its journey across these previously unknown lands (286). When it is also described as being a "rolling-stock town, an industrial citylet that crawled" (189), it further reinforces this idea that the train may be alive, the verb "crawled" implying that it will continue to advance relentlessly, however slowly. The implication is that such expansionism may impact upon speed: the train, with its original purpose, was said to break with the tradition of "squat, simple trains within New Crobuzon" that "were always accelerating or slowing, only ever jerking between stations," as there "was no time for them to pick up pace, to maintain it and create this new sound, this utterly new beat of a speeding train" (186). Noys asserts that "Speed is a problem. Our lives are too fast, we are subject to the accelerating demand that we innovate

more, work more, enjoy more, produce more, and consume more" (x). The inherently consumer capitalist nature of the venture in *Iron Council* initially leads to rebellion: "the renegades take the train" (271). The acceleration of this need to continually expand in turn enfranchises the Remade, the human element of the Iron Council, to overthrow the established order, making themselves their own rulers and granting them social mobility in a way that they had previously been denied. The Remade, physically transformed in myriad ways by the rulers of New Crobuzon as punishment for crimes, are viewed as second-class citizens, but their changed nature gives them the opportunity to craft a new life for themselves outside of the society that maimed them.

"Technological advances," Divall and Shin note, fundamentally impacted upon people's lives, with "changes wrought to human experience by the 'compression' of time and space" (3), notably including the capability "to travel ever longer distances in ever shorter periods of time" (3). Technology in the form of the train, as utilised and experienced by the protagonists within Miéville's novels, becomes more than just a benefit, but rather a way of life. Alessio Lerro draws on Italian Futurist perspectives which contemplated the "impact" of technology, contextualised by considering methods of transport, where "images of trains, tracks, and locomotives" were seen to be "now emblematic of a new epochal spirit" ("Futurist Trains: Aesthetics and Subjectivity in the Italian Avant-Garde" 77). He argues that trains "become the mirror of a new perspective on modernity and the symbol of a new aesthetics" (77) and that to Futurists, "trains synthesize the poetic structure of modernity, a tension between formal and informal, chaos and order, and nature and technology" (77-78). By way of this perspective, Lerro draws on the tension between nature and technology, as well as trains' relative importance and substantive impact upon society. This is interesting when read alongside Miéville's allegorical and metaphorical portrayals of trains, particularly within *Iron Council*. The train, whilst not physically alive, is personified, and it is the way in which the protagonists utilise the train for their own ends that casts it as an organic entity, one that represents their dominion over nature.

Karl Marx's *Grundrisse* (1939, translated 1973) considers this interplay between nature and technology, with specific references to trains. He states that:

Nature builds no machines, no locomotives, railways, electric telegraphs, self-acting mules etc. These are products of human industry; natural material transformed into organs of the human will over nature, or of human participation in nature. They are organs of the human brain, created by the human hand; the power of knowledge, objectified. (706)

The notion of these inherently unnatural, inorganic creations, made from the work of and endeavour of human industry and that are being put to use to colonise, expand and further the human cause is of particular interest given their occurrence in Miéville's work. It may link to Noys's allegorical comparison of the "constant stoking of the train" to "capitalist productive forces" (91): an ongoing and increasing exertion of the human will and subjugation of the natural world by replacing it with

technology. Both Marx and Miéville depict in their writing the privileging of technological over the natural as an instrument of the human will, designed by and enslaved to a purpose. It demonstrates a mastery of man over machine: dominion over one's own creation. The Remade in *Iron Council* choose to rebel against their overlords and, whilst they emancipate the train for their own purposes, still subjugate the natural world so that they can move the train. The natural landscape, however, is not afforded such liberation.

The Iron Council's desire to go renegade represents a desire to lay new tracks: both physically to transport or transplant themselves elsewhere, but also to uproot what had previously been static and fixed within their lives. It is symbolic of them reneging on their past, whilst in turn building for the future, as they reject the status quo and the governing body of New Crobuzon for a new existence, one where they can be their own masters. It comes at a cost to the landscape however, as it is said to be a "flatbed town carved out of the land, a range of buffers, a fan of rails" (187), the verb "carved" here emphasising the physical toll that has been taken. At this juncture, an ecocritically inflected reading of the impact of trains on the landscape within Miéville's work becomes productive. As Cheryl Glotfelty argues ecocriticism "negotiates between the human and non-human" (*The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology* xix) it may be particularly useful given the interplay of these two concepts in Miéville's writing. With regards to *Iron Council*, it is evident that there is a domination of the landscape perpetrated by humans, that aspects of technology and industrialisation are "transformed into organs of the human will" (Marx 706). Conversely, in *Railsea* the rails are the landscape, and whilst humans try to subjugate it to their will, it is never truly obedient, suggesting that irrespective of technological advancement, nature cannot always be tamed.

Furthermore, drawing on ecocritical perspectives puts the emphasis back onto the importance of place, as well as potentially offering scope for "ecological awareness" as Ursula Heise suggests (*Sense of Place and Sense of Planet: the Environmental Imagination of the Global* 13). This may lead one to consider notions of sustainability and the impact of human actions upon the landscape. For example, the way in which tracks are recovered and re-laid within *Iron Council* could be viewed as a form of recycling and renewal, regenerating in an organic fashion. Miéville writes: "Miles of track, reused, reused, it is the train's future and its present, and it emerges a fraction more scarred as history and is hauled up again and becomes another future" (*Iron Council* 285). The repetition of the word "reused" in this instance places emphasis on the need to utilise their current resources as well as highlighting the length of their journey, whilst the references to "future" and "present" foreshadow the Iron Council's eventual fate. Reclaiming the previously used track and recycling it repeatedly shows a concern for and awareness of resources, framed by their inability to produce more track, but equally suggests that it may not be indelibly damaging to the environment. The relaying of track means it is but "a moment of railroad" and "contingent and fleeting, recurring beneath the train, leaving only its footprint" (285), and whilst it still leaves traces of tracks that Judah notices and that they are unable to obscure even with an "army of camp followers" (287). It represents "ineffective camouflage" as he notes that "they cannot pass without indelible marks" (287), as they imprint themselves upon the landscape, but the need to re-lay and reuse the old track

is not seen as problematic for the Iron Councillors, even given the traces that they leave behind, as it carries them towards their ultimate goal, that of freedom. Their innovation of reusing materials to create this path forwards, may be mimetic of the writing process, as they seek to rewrite the socioeconomic script and create a new form of history. The manipulation of landscape is not seen as causing long-term or permanent damage, but does stress the environmental impact of industry, and the potential ecological effects such changes may precipitate.

The creation of such infrastructure comes at an inevitable cost, such as the physical impact of imprinting rails upon the land, as well as the byproducts of waste and litter from their use. In *Railsea*, Miéville outlines that previous visitors were from “everywhere & nowhere,” and that with the passage of time, the world has suffered and become home to “millennia of discarded rubbish that littered the railsea” (97). This is indicative of the manner in which many treat the environment, but also demonstrates the lack of care, where things were:

Brought to the railsea, used, & discarded by one of the visitors from other worlds, remnants brushed from cosmic laps, during the long-ago years when this planet had been a busy layby, a stopover point for the same brief visits that had accidentally stocked the upsky with its animals. This world had been a tip. Frequented by vehicles en route from one impossibly far place to another, with trash to dump. (98-99)

Miéville crafts a gritty, dystopian world in *Railsea*, where there is “darkness under the rails” (174), and where “between pressure-hardened earth & shaley rock, an archaeology of discards, centuries layered” exists, consisting of “junk, shards, glass, bits & pieces” and more besides (175). It is bleak, but it represents an extrapolative possibility, outlining the future consequences of over-industrialisation and urbanisation, with there being rails instead of oceans and a drastic change to the landscape. Miéville depicts the price for convenience and the growth of technology: the huge cost to the environment.

World-Building: Trains in Miéville’s Work

The trains and railways that feature within Miéville’s work are broadly based within worlds of his creation. Whilst made in reference to other works of Miéville’s within the Fantasy genre, Farah Mendlesohn’s description of the author as a world-builder “in the conventional sense” is of particular relevance here, as she argues that: “the way [he draws his] worlds emphasizes at each level the interdependence of elements and the sense that no element is coincidental but rather consequential” (*Rhetorics of Fantasy* 66). The trains require rails, and from there spring up stations, tickets, and other connected elements such that there is a sense of realism, whilst also outlining some of the limitations of the nature of travel by train. It provides a form of anchorage to the physical that may be eminently familiar, even within a fantastic setting. Within the context of *Railsea*, where instead of oceans and vessels the world is covered with rails and trains, such a fantastical element

may be problematic for a reader to relate to. The substitution for something familiar, even with this sort of twist, may serve to lessen any disconnect that may occur between reader and text within the construction of the world, irrespective of its fantastic nature. The train therefore offers some stability with this index of recognition for a reader, even when removed from a reality they may know, which may help with their engagement with a text. Such a surrealist element still allows for a diverse world to be crafted, but also emphasises within the text that the railsea has occurred as a consequence of the actions of those that inhabit this world. Furthermore, the symbolism of the train within Britain and beyond, as outlined earlier in this article, makes it useful as a signifier: it is something that most will have experienced, and yet is a powerful reminder of industrial advancement. Indeed, in Miéville's recent retelling of the Russian Revolution, he notes the significance of trains, as it was through "train lines along which passed people and goods, weapons and fuel and food, information and rumour and politics" (*October* 59). He argues that "Those tracks were sinews of power" (59), representing the revolutionary potential for trains in worlds both of reality and fiction.

Miéville's crafting of fictive landscape puts rail travel at the centre of Railsea, and so much so that it is a revelation to the protagonists that there is something beyond their experience of this type of travel: journeying solely on trains that run on rails everywhere is all that the protagonists know. Rather than whales, the people of Railsea hunt moles, in a railway-based subversion of Herman Melville's *Moby Dick* (1966). There is most certainly a "sweet mystery about this sea" (Melville 563). Miéville's vision of a world where the train has replaced other conventional or historic forms of travel privileges the train's purpose and utility, and its relative essentiality as a mode of transport. Miéville's description of the railsea highlights its sheer immensity, as it represents a focal point within the eponymous novel. He writes:

Atangle across the whole vista, to & past the horizon in all directions, were endless, countless rails. The railsea. Long straights, tight curves; metal runs on wooden ties; overlapping, spiralling, crossing at metalwork junctions; splitting off temporary sidings that abutted & rejoined main lines. (9)

The emphasis on the rails themselves is clear, as both a means of conveying the train physically but also representing the potential and possibilities of where the "endless, countless rails" could take someone. The fluidity implied by the use of ampersands within the novel helps to achieve this, where Miéville outlines that whilst "there was a time when the word '&' was written with several distinct & separate letters. It seems madness now. But there it is, & there is nothing we can do about it" (143). Furthermore, the ampersands are seen as being perfectly representative of motion, with Miéville adding:

The lines of the railsea go everywhere but from one place straight to another. It is always switchback, junction, coils around & over our own train-trails. What word better could there be to symbolise the railsea that connects & separates all

lands, than "&" itself? Where else does the railsea take us but to this place & that one & that one & that one, & so on? & what better embodies, in the sweep of the pen, the recurved motion of trains, than "&"? (143, original emphasis)



This act of conjoining and flow through the use of ampersands is important, and Miéville, when interviewed by Julie Crisp for Tor Books in 2013, suggests that ampersands were one of the things he enjoyed most about writing *Railsea*: "I got a massive kick out of the ampersands. I enjoy them every time I see them. I am aware not everyone agrees - some people hate them - but they made me happy." The ampersands therefore have not only a literary function, but also are a visual signifier, representative of the importance of trains within the novel and Miéville's writing, given their privileged status of replacing a common conjunction throughout an entire novel.

The conception of the station itself is significant in both *Iron Council* and *Perdido Street Station*, as an archaic, baroque monument to the excesses of industrialisation and urbanisation, built at the expense of the infrastructure needed to support the railway network, and for its narrative function within the text. Described as being a "staggered monolith [...] weighty and huge" (754) with an "enormous sprawl" (313) extending out from it, the station represents all that is wrong with the world. Miéville uses a beautiful turn of phrase to describe the architecture, noting the station's "chaotic majesty" (750), as "lights flickered on across its vast and untrustworthy topography, and it received the now-glowing trains into its bowels like offerings" (751); a "great disreputable leviathan building, wallowing in fat satisfaction in the city-sea" (751). It is of note that in both the book *Perdido Street Station* and *Iron Council*, the noun "leviathan" is used with reference to the railways and station, emphasising both its power and size, and drawing upon animalistic connotations through the personification of the station in its "wallowing" within the "city-sea."

For all the emancipatory potential that railway travel offers, as expounded by Miéville, the station does not help serve the populace in a meaningful way. "The coagulate of miles of railway line and years of architectural styles and violations [...] An industrial castle, bristling with random parapets" (*Perdido Street Station* 78), the station is described as having towers, and "turrets," as though armed for war. It also features the militia's "Spike" that is said to have "loomed over the other turrets, dwarfing them," but still only an "annex of the enormous station" (79). The verb "loomed" implies a sense of threat that the militia and the violently named "Spike" embody, yet even this is part of a far larger design in that it represents merely an "annex." The station being described in such a way reflects the somewhat industrialised society Miéville crafts: its baroque, excessive nature is not fully fit for purpose, yet it is iconic and constitutes a central figure, a representative of the things that are wrong within New Crobuzon. This offers a constant reminder through its presence that however visible it may be, what the station and rail systems represent within this novel may not be entirely positive. Miéville problematises the idolisation of the station: "The architect had been incarcerated, quite mad, seven years after *Perdido Street Station* was completed. He was a heretic, it was said, intent on building his own god" (79).

Although the focal point of the novel, it is made clear that this monument is not something

to be worshipped: for all of its supposed power and grandeur, it is clear that the station is representative of some of the worst excesses of society, as well as being unable to meet the needs of the populace. This is perhaps a veiled critique of how railways are run, whether privatised or nationalised, and perhaps serves to problematise both options. For instance, within *Iron Council*, when the train community goes renegade, they remove themselves from the pre-existing network of rails and infrastructure, and society more broadly. This allows the councillors to escape the previous constraints placed upon them, and gives them the relative freedom of upping the tracks and taking the train where they want it to go, a positive for traveller and activist alike, providing an agency and autonomy that they previously lacked. The train is taken back into public hands, the service reclaimed and regenerated. The separation that Miéville implies from this form of government and society that is not fit for purpose still highlights the need for essentials, such as transport systems like railways, but it implies that with graft and solidarity, people can do this on their own terms.

Miéville's attention to detail in his novels about aspects of trains and travel extends to the use of tickets required for journeys around. Tickets are necessary, as demonstrated in *Un Lun Dun* (2007) when Zanna receives a "mad version of a London travelcard" (13). In *Perdido Street Station*, Lin laments the lack of a ticket inspector, which appears to be a regular occurrence and an ongoing frustration with the system at hand. Whilst the worlds Miéville crafts may be subversive and fantastical, the need for these sorts of things implies that there is some order amongst their disorder, even if it appears that the infrastructure of the railways is not always able to support those who choose to use it. Viewing *Perdido Street Station* as a monument to excess is perhaps somewhat representative of the society Miéville crafts and looks to comment on within his novels: the problems with the infrastructure and inability to fully serve the populace imply a dysfunction that causes unrest and rebellion. The "absurdly hubristic schemes to extend the rails" for "hundreds of miles" to the "south or west" (*Perdido Street Station* 174) potentially represent both a political and ecological overreach, in terms of their scope, ambition and practicality. With much left unconnected, and the potential for all of those it could serve then untapped, Miéville may be proffering a comment on the implications when services fail to meet the functions of the populace, and with trains as emblematic of this, given their centrality to the plot of this and a number of his works.

Trains as Narrative Functionaries – Significance of Travel, Speed, Space

The trains within *Iron Council* and *Railsea*, more so than in the other works this article focuses on, are ways of Miéville driving forward the narrative: in each work, trains are the focus, the vehicle through which the plot is driven, as their various journeys are charted and explored from the perspective of the various protagonists. Travel, beyond other symbolic uses of the train, is an important consideration within the work of Miéville, and the trains conform to realist convention, inasmuch as they are grounded, earthed, and rooted in the physical. The need, for instance, of a particular form of track for the train helps to situate it firmly within the material world, a world that a reader may be able to relate to. Whilst there is a certain linearity to a train running along a track, it also suggests a specific set of relationships with space and perspective of the world around; what is seen from the train windows, with the author as conductor of what may be viewed and the speed

at which it occurs. Reichart-Burikukiye suggests that from a post-colonial perspective, the train: "orchestrated the landscape [...] train was able to enframe, distance and present this view" (63), just as Miéville uses the train as a narrative tool within his writing.

This notion of narrative perspective is important, with Reichart-Burikukiye adding that the "railway did not only produce the landscape but also it reproduced a variety of spaces on different levels for the colonial eye. It opened up the space, made it passable and negotiable and uncovered it for surveys and exploration" (68). It is this, she suggests, that "for colonial travellers" gives the "landscape had a temporal dimension, in which the world outside the window became the inversion of their self-dramatization," where "the railway was a symbol of a mobile, civilized, developed, organized and modern Europe, whereas the world outside the window was seen as immobile, static and wild, a world that had to be tamed, controlled, disciplined and educated" (68-69). Within the context of the novels under consideration, Miéville portrays worlds on which we are given a specific perspective that allows him to comment on societal issues that may otherwise be challenging to explore within a realist text: distancing in this way and framed through the narrative functionary of the train demonstrates its relative power, and importance, to Miéville's thinking.

The narratives of Miéville's novels do not simply reflect the traditional linearity of a train track; they also play with the convention of a train in terms of the way those who traverse them choose to travel. Trains are not simply direct in Miéville's writing; they do not stick to a preordained route or timetable. For instance, in *Iron Council*, the renegades relay the captured train's tracks to suit their own purposes, and to travel where they wish as a form of rebellion against the government. They choose a nomadic existence, away from New Crobuzon's rulers, which allows them to travel wherever they want. Although its endeavours are driven by ideals and the people who believe in what it represents, the train still requires rails on which to run, and this physical constraint requires intense efforts on their part to continually maintain their chosen course. Similarly, in *Railsea*, there is no "efficient route," but rather it involves a "veering route, up & backwards, overshooting and correcting, back down again south & west, crossing its own earlier path, changing direction, another overlap, to stop, finally, a few hairs' widths from where we began" (143). The relative complexities of travel within these novels can be seen as a mirror for the sort of journeys that the protagonists themselves may face, with innumerable options to choose between and potential uncertainties. The jumbled nature of the rails and myriad pieces of haphazard technology in *Railsea*, where the rails "cleaved, at twenty thousand angles of track-meets-track, were mechanisms, points of every kind: wye switches; interlaced turnouts; stubs; crossovers; single & double slips. & on the approaches to them all were signals, switches, receivers, or ground frames" (9), frame both the world and accentuate the adventure for the protagonists, such that there is a degree of unpredictability, unreliability, and ultimately possibility within the narrative.

It is the notion of possibility that challenges the commonly-held perspective of the characters in *Railsea*, as the thought of there being something other than rails is portrayed as being unfathomable. When Caldera voices her thought that it is the "end of the line" it is seen as a "transgression" (355). This statement is both shocking and exciting, as it represents a break from

the natural order of their world. It is an unexpected event, even though it had been hoped for when the journey began. But like the Iron Council's defection, this transgression goes against the known reality of the protagonists' prior existence. It is exhilarating and terrifying in equal measure for these reasons, and it is through the vehicular virtue of the train that it is realised. Towards the end of the book *Railsea*, when the rails are said to stop, Miéville presents this in a beautifully stylised manner:

& the railway line,
JUST,
STOPPED. (355)

The abruptness, represented visually within the text as shown above and through the use of both capital letters and punctuation, implore the reader to halt at this pivotal moment. It is said to be "unholy, uncanny. The perversion, the antithesis of what railroads had to be, a tangle without end. & there it was" (355). The protagonists cannot comprehend this as it is beyond all that they have previously known, something outside of the centrality of railways in their lives. To move past this point where the tracks stop represents a major point of change for the protagonists, as it is rightly implied that it is both symbolic of an end, and of a new beginning. The thought that there could be something other than rails is a revelation, to find that there is something antithetical to what "had to be" (355). The journey that leads them to this previously unknown area may be read as a colonisation of this new space, moving beyond their reality to something which may be considered new or exotic. Reichart-Burikukiye (64) suggests that "the railway assumed the function of bringing space under control," and that they "[...] were not seen as an occasional change in the daily culture of traveling but as a creature process that opened up wild, unknown and unimproved land," arguing "the railways produced territories and then took possession of them." Whilst this may not be the implicit intention of the protagonists, viewing their journey in this way within the context of the subjugation of the land by the rails, adds further fuel to reading trains within Miéville's work with a postcolonial lens.

Trains as Colonial Agents

Within the context of India, Marian Aguiar suggests that "colonial rhetoric had focused on the railway as a way to progress; as a means to secure the colonial state" (*Tracking Modernity: India's Railway and the Culture of Mobility* 101), and there is a parallel with *Iron Council*, where the railway offered an opportunity to wage war against the Tesh, representing as much of a political vehicle as one of war. It is crewed by people from all manners of places and from a variety of races who made a life for themselves in and around the train. The "perceived cultural role of the train" as Aguiar (101) notes, was to be "seen as an instrument in an ongoing negotiation of difference in a state that sought to amalgamate an extraordinary number of diverse ethnicities, religions, castes, classes and languages." But there is an inherent complexity with this view of the train within *Iron Council* as a coloniser, as whilst it was initially sent for this task of colonisation, it was in turn appropriated and colonised itself by those on it. This may be interpreted as its own form of colonisation, as the "perpetual train has gone wild" and "the iron council renegade" (*Iron Council* 286), to become its

own colony. Indeed, Aguiar draws on the role of the train after India's independence, where "the train, previously a symbol of colonial rule, became the sign of an independent, industrialized nation" (101) just as it seems the Iron Council did.

The very nature of a train being "perpetual" carries both significance and importance: not just as a physical method to transport people, but for what it represents. Whilst the construction of this railroad and the train itself was intended as a conveyor of war, the rebellion of the protagonists reclaims this icon, so that it instead becomes symbolic of freedom, and serves as a statement against the novel's longstanding war. The very vehicle intended to bring death instead brings the chance of a new life without end, and with limitless potential for where it may take those who travel with it. The emancipatory nature of the railway is poignant, as it grants a release for those who are able to access it, but there is the implication that it requires capital to fully embrace, which may therefore not have as transformative a function as it perhaps could have. Whilst Reichart-Burikukiye notes that the "railway redefined the dimensions of space and time" as "distances disappeared, spaces shrunk and metropolitan centres were enlarged by connected peripheries" (64) its role in the colonisation of Africa was an "instrument of economic exploitation and control and it encapsulated the ideals of European expansion and domination," rather than as something that enriched or enhanced the lives of those native to the area. In Miéville's work, it serves to emphasise the notion of unfulfilled promise once again, where irrespective of industrial advancement, there is no fundamental benefit to the masses, as though things were stuck in time.

It is therefore resonant with the end of *Iron Council*, when the protagonist Judah utilises his "thaumaturgy" to conjure a time golem to hold the train in perpetual stasis (591), a moment that is perhaps most representative of the train's power and potential as a coloniser, one which may be left unfulfilled. This act preserves the Iron Council from being destroyed by the militia, those sent by the government to put down the renegades' rebellion, capturing them as one in time, as a socialistic movement of perfect unison and as a public monument to what represents a vehicle of change, but also denies them their future and potential, and ultimately change. Mendlesohn claims that as Judah "intervenes in the world" (original emphasis), the "attitude to the physics of the world in Miéville's work becomes a metaphor for politics: there is nothing predestined, there is only what we work out" (65). Judah's intervention denies the councillors justice at the hands of the law, whilst preventing their deaths: leaving him somewhat neutral between both parties. Mendlesohn's belief that Judah represents the role of the "antagonist," along with her claim that "his stance of one of challenge" (65), is therefore apt. Miéville's role, as author, could also be interpreted as assuming this stance of challenge: of status quo, society, and politics.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Miéville's use of the railways and all that they entail within his work are multifaceted: the trains, stations, and track are not just for commute journeys, but rather offer a broader form of travel, one that is filled with possibility, and, in many cases, hope. Trains and railways in his work operate as metaphors for industrial advancement, and this article has considered the

implications of such advances in technology, both for their positive and negative effects upon the worlds that he creates. The control exerted over the landscape and the populace also indicates that the train within Miéville's work functions as a colonial agent, whilst at the same time engaging with social and cultural aspects of these societies.

The journeys that the protagonists make represent opportunities for exploration, whether that is in terms of rights and freedoms in *Iron Council*, or new beginnings in *Railsea*. Miéville presents railways as a triumph of the living over material objects, but personification brings to life these rail-based elements as extensions of human will. The rails represent a tool to be wielded and a force for control and colonisation, and even when re-laid, they serve as a physical reminder of where the protagonists in *Iron Council* have come from and where they will go. The railway is symbolic of the past, as well as of the future.

Within Miéville's work, the trains and their related paraphernalia are in themselves a carriage for ideas and for commentary, whether on the dysfunctional and bloated infrastructure of society, or a reminder of the need to always keep moving, to break from the ties of convention. Their use and their relative importance within the work of Miéville cannot be understated. Trains are very much a vehicle of the people, as demonstrated within *Iron Council*, as it is the mode of collective experience they represent, formed from the protagonists' collaborative unity, which links them as surely as any coupling of train carriages, and serves as the driving force behind their rebellion. Just as Miéville uses trains as a device for driving both plot and narrative, they also allow for a stable, consistent form of transport within the wider context of his work, an authorial trope that is both familiar and recognisable. Irrespective of what else Miéville explores within his texts, it remains a constant anchor for the reader, grounding and shaping all of his works. The practical nature of trains, stations and rails as components of narrative within Miéville's work is as important as the literary functions they provide, and their centrality to a number of his works as outlined within this paper demonstrates that it is a topic worthy of further discussion and exploration.

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DECENTRING AN ISOLATED CULTURE: EXPLORING MAGIC AND CONTACT ZONES IN JIM BUTCHER'S *THE CODEX ALERA*

Matthew J. Elder

When cultural groups are isolated they stagnate. This stagnation often causes problematic flow on effects of marginalisation, oppression, and discrimination. Engaging openly with transcultural exchange, rather than denying its on-going influence, affords the opportunity for mutual growth and a reduction in suffering caused by the marginalising, oppressive, and discriminatory practices (intentional or unintentional) of assumed, normative, dominant narratives. Fantasy literature, through creating a space to step outside of the self, helps the reader to experience difference in a way that allows for them to be self-reflexive and critical of their position in the world. In the context of Jim Butcher's series, *The Codex Alera* (2004-2009), the reader becomes deeply enmeshed in both the perils of isolated, hegemonic cultural groups as well as the ways that transcultural exchange through contact zones, once achieved and accepted, brings about positive social change. A hegemonic nation that insists upon its cultural isolation becomes dangerous when that nation forges the dominant power flows and narratives that in turn shape the lives of others.

In order to justify and interrogate this statement, this article will engage with the anthropological theories of Mary Louise Pratt and Arjun Appadurai, and then, using a contemporary Fantasy series as a case study, demonstrate these theories in action. What this analysis will show is the relevance of these theories to overcoming systemic socio-cultural issues, as well as how approaching a constructed secondary world through these theories affords the critical reader another tool with which they can pry loose insights about the text's ideas and meanings.

In *The Codex Alera* the reader is introduced to a world centred (both narratively and geographically) on the Aleran people. They are the dominant superpower, and their country is surrounded on three sides by three other cultural groups. Butcher's narrative uses the relationships between these geographically adjacent and ideologically opposed cultural groups in order to critique the hegemonic, isolationist, marginalising value system that is the dominant cultural narrative of Alera. In doing so, the text showcases that the fastest way to realise positive social change within the hegemonic state is through recognising, accepting, and engaging with the difference and possibility brought through transcultural exchange rather than denying its influence.

This article explores the relationship that Alera has with each cultural group through the critical lens provided by Arjun Appadurai's analysis of globalisation and identity construction via distinct, disjunctive, global flows of power (*Modernity at Large*, 1996); as well as Mary Louise Pratt's

contact zones, and the way that the interaction of power flows and dominant narratives within those contact zones performatively shapes cultural identity via transcultural exchange ("Arts of the Contact Zone," 1991). In applying these anthropological theories as a part of a literary analysis, the key factor will be the symbolic and thematic interpretation of the magic systems at play within each cultural group and the ways that they clash within the contact zones. This analysis highlights one of the ways that contemporary Fantasy texts, and in this example *The Codex Alera*, provide the reader with an understanding that could, in turn, become a tool to be brought to bear on the global scale issues of reality. It affords an understanding that empowers agency.

The progression of anthropological study highlights that people live not only according to their own value systems, but also in relation to the value systems of others. Phillipe Descola argues that anthropology's historical definition of culture has been as a "system of mediation with Nature" (*The Ecology of Others* 35). However, globalisation, due to its exponentially more frequent encounters with, and exchanges between, different cultural groups, has highlighted the broader realisation that the notion of the isolated culture, of the binary relationship between nature and culture, must, like all binaries, be false. Approaching a relationship in this binary manner that views each side as discrete and concrete entities is too limited in scope to accurately account for or represent the complex ways that life manifests and functions. So, instead, as Gustavo Perez-Firmat suggests in *The Cuban Condition* (1989) we speak of transcultural exchange, the idea of "a liminal zone, or 'impassioned margin' where diverse cultures converge without merging" (25). As Maurice Godelier notes in *In and Out of the West* (2009):

[we] must also bear in mind that groups or individuals always define themselves by reference to others of the same or opposite sex, or of the same or another religion and so forth. It is in this more fundamental sense that no identity [...] is closed in on itself, and closed to the outside world. (12)

The traditional definition of culture connotes individual, closed, and separate systems; however, the more accurate approach views cultural groups as open systems that are constantly changing and growing, continually altered by interaction with everyone and everything else in the world, ceaselessly created for and by each individual agent. In line with Godelier, in *Companion Encyclopedia of Anthropology* (2002), Tim Ingold highlights that the "isolated culture has been revealed as a figment of the Western anthropological imagination" and that a far more accurate statement is that "people live culturally rather than they live in cultures" (330, original emphasis). In *Modernity at Large* (1996), Appadurai also draws this distinction between culture and cultural, explaining that:

If culture as a noun seems to carry associations with some sort of substance in ways that appear to conceal more than they reveal, cultural the adjective moves one into a realm of differences, contrasts, and comparisons that are more helpful (12).

In making specific examinations of the cultural groups within *The Codex Alera*, it will become clear not only how the existing value systems have been shaped by encounters with cultural difference, but how the potential for mutual growth in those value systems can be found within those encounters. As I will explore, the text also highlights how the transcultural influence shapes the identity of even those groups who might problematically perceive, and indeed insist upon, the notion that their nation is isolated in its hegemony, shaped only from within.

The transcultural exchange – the interaction between agents wherein each agent's identity is shaped because of and through that interaction – takes place in what Homi Bhabha calls the Third Space in *The Location of Culture* (1994). Bhabha contends that cultural identity is performatively constructed by each party being “mobilized in the passage through a Third Space” (37). The Third Space is the site of the relationship, of the discussion taking place between agents. It is the ‘space’ in which the transcultural exchange exists, or, in Bhabha's terms, an “interstitial passage between fixed identifications” (5). Focusing on the Third Space draws attention to the discrete, divergent, and overlapping cultural elements that are being encountered and exchanged. It reinforces our ability to discuss the cultural rather than culture, for, in this Third Space the cultural can be examined, as Appadurai explains, as a “heuristic device we can use to talk about difference” and the flow on effects of exchanging those specific differences (13).

Mary Louise Pratt takes this concept of the Third Space, and builds from that a more tangible anthropological theory: contact zones (Pratt 37). Contact zones are physical locations which, due to the nature of the place, bring about proportionately higher rates of transcultural exchange. In a sense, they are physical Third Spaces. Historically, contact zones might be border towns, market places, or docks, but this concept has become more nuanced and complicated in our globalised world. For example, we are forced to ask key questions about ideas such as the nature of the internet as a contact zone, and diasporic pockets within dominant cultural narratives.

Each contact zone to be examined within Butcher's work is functionally a border between the Aleran people and one of the three other cultural groups on Carna. In each case the contact zone represents the relationship between two cultural groups and, in a physical and socio-cultural sense, shapes that relationship. It is in these places, these contact zones, that meaning is realised as relationships are defined. This discussion of contact zones will also explore the role that magic is playing in the interactions, and illustrate its function as an exaggerated example of a social force, what we might perhaps call a ‘magiscape’ were we to borrow a suffix and structure from Appadurai's terminology for key social forces such as “ethnoscapes” or “ideoscapes” (Appadurai 33). An understanding of the magic involved in each transcultural exchange will aid in understanding the conflicts and identities being represented due to the symbolic nature of that magic and the way that, like economic and political forces, magic too shapes identity. This engagement with magic will also highlight the ways in which the dominant narrative, flows of power (as Appadurai refers to them), or presence of magic move through a society to enforce cultural value systems via their performative repetition. The remainder of this article will focus on the details of Butcher's macro-scale world building and a breakdown of the group cultural identities. This textual case-study will showcase the

role that transcultural exchange and contact zones play in de-centring the problematic, isolated nation.

As the reader enters *The Codex Alera* they are introduced to an 'Aleran-centric' worldview, where everyone else is the outsider. Aleran society originates from a lost Roman Legion that disappeared in a storm and arrived in Carna. The society is Ancient Roman in regards to their class system, their government – with a combination of a senate and a system of high Lords and Ladies, as well as a First Lord (Caesar, here called Gauis) – and also their legion-style military. However, despite these remnants of Roman heritage, much has changed over time through the emergence of furycraft, a magic system of elemental manipulation in which every Aleran individual has some level of capability. The history of Alera tells us that with the strict regimen of a Roman legion, and “with their furies and their furycrafting, the Alerans dominated the world, and no other race or peoples could claim mastery over them.” (Butcher, *Furies of Calderon* 301). As mentioned above, ‘—scapes’ (such as financescapes, or ethnoscapes) are described by Appadurai as the disjunctive powers flows that construct the social reality of the globalised world (Appadurai 33). This theory is relevant to this analysis of Butcher’s work in two key ways. First, we can see the magic systems throughout the series performing an analogous role in constructing the social reality of each imagined cultural group. Second, the example set by these socially constructive magic systems highlights for the reader the way that these global scale social flows are disjunctive and construct reality. In the case of Alera, furycrafting, and the prowess it grants them, creates a dominant narrative of hegemonic superiority that both perpetuates the Aleran-centric perspective and marginalises those outside of that dominant power flow. The magic is the thing by which they define themselves: Alerans are the people who furycraft, everyone else is an unenlightened savage. The map of the world, present at the beginning of each novel, is titled “THE REALM OF ALERA and the barbarian lands” (*Furies of Calderon* front material, original emphasis). Note the capitalisation of Alera and the lower case of “the barbarian lands,” even the font in the novel shrinks in size as if the Aleran cartographer knows they have to mention the lands outside Alera but also know that those places do not really matter.

The Alerans, as we are introduced to them at the beginning of the series, are the perfect example of the problems of a cultural system that enforces its own isolation to preserve its superiority. In Butcher’s novels, they are the dominant power, but they have also been stagnant as a society for hundreds of years; and it is this stagnation, this inability to recognise perspectives outside of their own, that makes them vulnerable when the Vord (the series’ main antagonists) arrive. The narrative explores the way that their hard, external divisions bring about internal fracturing. The disjunctive power flow of a might-makes-right society also oppresses and marginalises those lacking in said might, and Alera is feeling that strain of discontent. Taking into account Godelier’s remarks concerning the way that identity is never constructed in isolation, we can already see that this Aleran-centric perspective is flawed. They define themselves as martial champions of the world, but they can only hold this position if there is someone to triumph over; their assumed superiority can only exist because they have a relationship with those perceived as inferior. In their might-makes-right mind-set fuelled by their magic, they are already defining themselves by opposition and therefore their perceived cultural isolation must be false. What Alera represents is a denial of

globalisation, not as a political stance, but as a 'bury their heads in the sand' deliberate ignorance or denial born from a desire to remain dominant, remain the inviolable central power regardless of cost to others and even their own citizens. However, as the exploration of this world's contact zones will show, cultural groups are always porous, always transcultural. The Alerans are defined as much by the cultures around them as by their own internal perspectives. All change requires is an awareness of the influence of external influence on identity (even in the face of huge disjunctive cultural power flows) and a willing recognition of the value of those different perspectives.

Alera is surrounded on three sides by three distinct cultural groups, with whom Alera is, or has been at various times, each independently at war. Each conflict is tied to a key contact zone. For example, the contact zone for the Aleran and Canim peoples is the leviathan-filled sea to the west. But to best understand the significance of this location we must first understand the conflicting cultural values at play within it. The Canim are a people whose society has a caste system consisting largely of 'makers,' the lowest, and most numerous, level of society; they are the craftsmen and farmers. The other two castes are the warriors and the ritualists.

There is a large sense of shared – and individual – responsibility and obligation in Canim society, with each caste performing a specific role. The Canish magic system is a type of blood magic in which the ritualists use blood to bring about various effects such as blessing blood lines, increasing fertility, improving crops and altering the weather, (to say nothing of the war magics they can also bring to bear). They can only provide these blessings through the use of blood and so when a Cane grows old they, as Varg states, "are willing to make a gift of their blood upon death" (Butcher, *Captain's Fury* 370). The Canes's "ideoscape" (Appadurai's term for the socially constructive power flow made up of "the ideologies of states" (Appadurai 36)) of obligation is represented in and reinforced by the magic; we can break down the magic system symbolically to understand how the Canes's view themselves, the world, their place in it, and their relationship to others.

The Aleran magic system favours the individual, and in their view that furycrafting might-makes-right, the magic pushes them to use others for personal gain, to step up the hierarchy. Furycrafting, when viewed this way, is a magic system of privilege which marginalises the weakest members of society, relegating them to positions almost outside of society. Aleran society places no value upon those marginalised individuals such as slaves, and non-citizen Alerans. This contrasts heavily with the Canish way of living in which everyone plays their part and all parts are valued for contributing. The Canish blood magic is deeply rooted in a sense of mutual obligation, in a system via which the ritualists improve the lives of the makers and in return the makers gift their blood to the ritualists upon death. Their magic system pushes for success through co-operation, insisting that mutual effort means mutual gain. Where the Alerans sacrifice each other in order to stay on top, the Canes sacrifice *for* each other so that all might benefit. Each society's values are represented in their magic, and the analysis suggests fundamental opposition, groups perhaps destined to hate each other; however, in the contact zone, mutual change and growth becomes possible.

The key contact zone is the leviathan-filled sea to the west of Alera. It is here that these two

societies meet and quite literally clash again and again. Their conflict here, between Canish raiding parties and Aleran legions defending their homes, gives insight into the unchanging nature of their relationship: like the tides of this western sea, throughout history the Canim raiders have washed up to the shore, only to roll away again and again. The dominant cultural narrative of each of these peoples is embodied in the ways that these peoples interact with this oceanic contact zone.

The Canes are a more capable sea-faring race, they cross the ocean divide between continents in a massive fleet so that losing some ships to the leviathans is an acceptable sacrifice; it is the price that they are willing to pay for the greater, communal success. The Alerans on the other hand, have to rely on watercrafting to hide their passage from the leviathans or all of their ships would perish, once again placing value on those powerful enough to succeed. Neither approach is safe or reliable. It is significant that the most successful crossing ever undertaken is when the Alerans and the Canim return to Alera united in common purpose (*Princes' Fury*, 2009). The Canim sea-faring skills are combined with the Aleran furycrafting as great half-mile-wide ships are constructed out of icebergs to ferry the remnants of the now near-extinct Canim back across the sea.

The violent ocean that these peoples ultimately cross together is a physical space that demonstrates the dangers of navigating transcultural conflict, both in the sense of physical danger as well as in fear of some form of cultural reduction or possible future homogeneity. However, through open communication it also becomes a space that can be best navigated together. Mary Louise Pratt acknowledges that there are perils to working within the contact zone, but that the benefits ultimately far outweigh both the risk and the unacceptable cost of hard-line isolated borders ("Arts of the Contact Zone," 37). The worldview of the Canes that puts value on mutual effort, once also recognised by the Alerans, enables them to put aside their individual drives and, by combining their furycrafting ability with the seafaring talents of the Canim, they accomplish something otherwise impossible: a journey in which no ships are lost in crossing the leviathan sea. This, in turn, begins an alliance through which the Alerans, with help, can prevent their own destruction at the hands of the Vord, while the Canes avoid extinction as their homeland is lost to that same foe. Here, the nature of the two cultural groups, and the nature of the zone itself, changes: both becoming easier to traverse; and both leading to a future of mutual growth rather than the historical descent into warfare and divided systems. Despite their diametrically opposed value systems, the contact zone affords them the opportunity to succeed together, to look past differences as impossible barriers to find instead solutions and value in those differences.

The relationship between the Aleran and Marat peoples is similarly antagonistic. The Marat murder of Gaius's much loved son Septimus (who one day should have ruled Alera) marred the landscape of the Calderon Valley and solidified the nature of the Aleran-Marat relationship. On the surface level, the lives of Aleran steadholders (not-Citizens) in the Calderon Valley seem free and uncomplicated, but the Aleran social structure and value system subtly underpins everything: while they are seemingly free, they are actually trapped on the fringes of society, their agency limited by the dominant cultural narrative of furycraft forged superiority, looked down upon by their own people. This is an image of the magiscape in action: a flow of power, and a disjunctive social norm that

originates from, benefits, and moves downwards from the privileged top of society to marginalise the relevance and agency of the bottom and outskirts of society. Here we can see Appadurai's understanding of social construction at play: these power flows forge norms and perpetuate a status quo that is fundamentally disjunctive, unequal, and problematic. Much as the mutual obligation of the Canes critiques the Aleran slavery and use of others for personal gain, in the Calderon Valley the text brings the reader's attention to the contrast between the marginalised communities of Alera and the open-acceptance of the Marat tribes in order to yet further layer this critique of the issues inherent in the enforced, isolated cultural group.

As with the Canim and the Alerans, the magic system of the Marat mirrors and shapes their core cultural values; again, highlighting for the reader the way that identity, values, and norms are shaped by macro-scale social flows of power. Marat cultural values starkly contrast the individualistic, false-meritocratic nature of Alera as the Marat are a fundamentally group-oriented, open-minded people. As a young Marat comes of age, they form a magical bond with an animal, referred to as a *chala* or totem. This animal will accompany them their entire life. The relationship that forms between bonded partners is one of mutual benefit, with increased abilities such as strength or speed for the Marat, and increased levels of sentience for the animal. However, this bonding is not done for personal gain; it is fundamentally concerned with learning another way of living life, of viewing the world. As one chieftain, Doroga, states: "Our people have lived in many lands. We go to a new place. We bond with what lives there. We learn. We grow. We sing the songs of wisdom to our children" (Butcher, *Academ's Fury* 62).

Those people who bond a particular animal come together to form a tribe with others sharing similar bonds and, as such, over time, old tribes fade away and new tribes are formed. Marat share an oral tradition, so as each generation grows old they pass on the things that they have learned from their *chala* to the next, with each shared experience given great weight and importance. The Marat are almost a direct opposite to the Alerans, in that their way of life, embodied in and shaped by this magic system, not only functions as a transculturally open-system, but, more significantly, it is an intentionally active open-system in which participants seek out the new and the different to transform what they currently know. They embrace Perez-Firmat's "impassioned margin" (25). The Marat live in and move through the world in this way, full in the knowledge that they will never be finished learning, finished growing. They do not assume superiority, or that they are always right, or that others have nothing to offer them. Rather than the top-down, marginalising, dominant narrative that is the core of Aleran cultural identity, the magiscape of the Marat *chala* can be envisioned as a circle. It flows evenly through their society in a decidedly non-hierarchical manner, advocating and supporting acceptance of others rather than a marginalisation of difference. Where the Alerans push away, forcing others and difference beyond their imagined boundaries, the Marat reach out in order to accept, welcome, and connect to others and differences: they are "the One-and-Many people" (Butcher, *Academ's Fury* 1-2).

The Calderon Valley, historically representing a massacre between peoples, becomes the site in which our protagonist Tavi brings about resolution to a schism within the Marat people, and

in turn leads to a forging of Aleran-Marat alliances. The relationship between two peoples is located in this site, this third space of mediation, the land bridge between peoples, and so, as the nature of the contact zone changes from the place of a massacre to a place of aid, that change radiates outwards to affect both the cultural relationship and the cultural groups as whole entities. The climax of *Furies of Calderon* (first book of the series, 2009) involves a large battle in the Calderon Valley. Ultimately mutual destruction is prevented as protagonist Tavi (an Aleran) becomes a part of the Marat cultural drive towards forging bonds and taking on wider perspectives; as a result, through the interaction afforded by the contact zone, the assumed divide between peoples is bridged in a way that opens a space for future mutual growth. Despite Alera's assumption of superiority and their denial of external influence, the reader is shown possible solutions to the societal stagnation and internal discrimination that threaten to tear Alera apart from the inside (essentially along partisan lines). Here, those solutions lie in a perspective shift away from cultural differences as barriers towards viewing those differences in terms of capabilities and strengths. The Fantasy text achieves this communication by grounding the discussion in the more graspable symbols of furycrafting and *chala*, using the way that the magiscapes both represent and reinforce cultural values to showcase the social principles in action.

These two civilisations' clearly opposed perspectives bring to the foreground a discussion concerning the emphasis that contemporary western society places upon individualism, as well as the flaws in a system that is spoken about as if it rewards an individual's own merit, but in fact is set up to disproportionately continue to further reward those in privileged positions rather than benefit for the good of everyone. False meritocracies can only increase marginalisation as the opportunities for success are narrowed by the top-down focus of the system which, in time, leads to stagnation and ultimately internal conflict as those discriminated against and marginalised by the dominant narrative reach a tipping point. The enforced cultural isolation born of assumed superiority designed to benefit those at the top is deeply flawed and fundamentally problematic, and only becomes more so the more encounters with difference take place and push back against those disjunctive power flows. It is true of Alera, whose flaws become more pronounced and clear with each cultural juxtaposition, and it is just as true in our globalised world.

With the leviathan ocean to the west, and the Calderon Valley land bridge to the east, the entire north of Alera is dominated by the Shieldwall that runs coast to coast keeping the Icemen out of Alera. The wall functions both as a barrier to the Icemen, but also as a pedestal from which the Alerans can look down upon the Icemen, with their perception of superiority only enforced by their continued success in holding the wall. In furycrafting, water is the element of controlling and experiencing emotion, while fire is the element that stokes emotions. On a number of occasions throughout the series, politicians use firecraft to stir the passions of the crowd they are speaking to, and High Lords summon great fear into the opposing armies. At the Shieldwall these two forces of magic come together in an unexpected way to shape and maintain the hostile relationship between the Alerans and the Icemen. The Icemen "are already watercrafting, whether they realize it or not" (Butcher, *First Lord's Fury* 686). Their magic system is one that permeates their society more than Canish sacrificial blood magic, Marat *chala*, and even Aleran furycrafting. For the Icemen, their

magic system is their way of being, so fundamentally tied to their existence that it becomes a part of their communication. The Icemen have so internalised their magic, they 'speak' to each other through conveyed emotion via watercrafting.

It is here that the magic highlights the problems implicit within this contact zone, in a relationship represented by a wall and an army. Every Aleran Legionare on the Shieldwall is taught a basic firecrafting to warm themselves from the inside upon the cold northern wall. The unintended side-effect of this firecrafting is that because the way that the Icemen communicate through watercrafting and emotion, the legionaries' simple survival firecraft is interpreted by the Icemen as hatred. At the same time, on the other side of the wall, the firecrafting that the Alerans need every day to survive the cold resonates against the watercraft communication of the Icemen, and that magic resonance further stokes the hatred and resentment that the Alerans feel for the Icemen perpetuated over years of war and death. It is a harsh, unintended cycle that has persisted for three hundred years: all of the Icemen feeling hatred and judgement from on high as the Shieldwall pens them in; all of the Alerans fuelling their hatred and judgement with every death, every battle. What this apparent impasse of magic represents for the reader is the powerful way that quotidian performative acts add up to re-creating and reinforcing the status quo in ways that enable the perpetuation of suffering and discrimination.

Much as in other cases where the Aleran furycrafting capabilities have blinded them to those less capable, the Shieldwall colours any and all interaction between these two peoples. Pratt describes "miscomprehension, [and] incomprehension" as "some of the perils of writing in the contact zone" but that by working within the contact zone these issues can become "more widely visible, more pressing and [...] more decipherable to those who once would have ignored them in defense of a stable, centered sense of knowledge and reality" (37). The firecrafting of the Alerans comes to symbolise the consequences of enforcing an isolated cultural perspective. The Shieldwall is complicated in that the nature of it as a contact zone causes conflict. However, it is also because of that conflict that these kinds of transcultural interactions take place, which in turn create more opportunities for changes in perspective and mutual growth. What this transcultural relationship demonstrates through the contact zone, is that the cost of failure in the contact zone, the 'peril,' is high (war, death, hatred all perpetuated for little reason); but also that if one is willing to step outside of one's limiting dominant narrative, to engage with a different perspective, that such issues can yet be overcome.

The Codex Alera is an Aleran-centric narrative. Each of the opposing cultural groups are juxtaposed, not against each other, but against the Alerans, with each transcultural exchange, and the subsequent growth and change it brings about, further highlighting a flaw in Alera's insistence on preserving their isolationist, hegemonic worldview. Alongside the contact zones within the text, the protagonist of the series, Tavi, plays a key role in highlighting the inherent problems with the closed Aleran system. Tavi, a young boy in the first novel, is the only person in Alera who cannot furycraft. Whilst furycrafting acts as a cultural adhesive, binding Aleran society together, such a definition leaves Tavi an outcast within. Born an Aleran, he feels those ties, but lacking that key trait

he feels not truly a part of his own people. He is more of an outcast, more of a “furyless freak” than a Marat or a Cane (Butcher, *Furies of Calderon* 144). Tavi has unique circumstances at first beneath and then above Aleran society: at first fury-less and then a powerful furycrafter. This creates in him a perpetually open world-view, affecting and being affected by everyone that he meets. Tavi’s life philosophy, and actions as a character, embodies and enacts the principles of transculture and, as a mobile character and catalyst for change within the narrative, he comes to function in a way as a key contact zone between cultural groups.

The Codex Alera is in part Tavi’s coming of age story: the tale of his transition from small frightened boy to the First Lord of Alera. But, significantly, it is also his tale of changing how the world sees itself and him. Tavi never changes who he is; he succeeds by embracing his identity, by defining himself on his own terms, essentially, by challenging the established boundaries of his society and forcing them to change. Fundamentally, he grows via his interaction with members of diverse cultural groups; he proves to Alera that strength lies not in wielding one’s own literal power over others, but in finding the solutions offered by a wider perspective. Over the course of the novels his presence brings about more interactions between the Marat and the Alerans, even going as far as to have Marat serve alongside Aleran legionaries. His actions bring about those increased levels of transcultural exchange that contact zones are marked by. Tavi’s character within the narrative is porous and liminal; he is the “impassioned margin” required for transcultural exchange (Perez-Firmat 25).

The sense given at the end of the last novel is that the great acts of heroism (individual power and success) are not what Tavi (now Gaius Octavius) will be remembered for in the history books. The writings of the various First Lords presented in each novel provide insight into how lasting change is achieved. Ultimately it is not furycrafting strength that defines the family of Gaius; it is their ability to see beyond the societally enforced norms that they are performatively constructed by.

In *Furies of Calderon*, in almost direct contrast to the normative values of Aleran society, the writings of Gaius the First tell us that it is often the smallest actions, the unseen individuals, who shape history. While Gaius Sextus’s notes speak strongly of the tough decisions and sacrifice that authority requires and the responsibility to others that power carries with it, Tavi’s own writings, in his role as Gaius at the end of the series, speak less of grand deeds and more of worries as to how to ensure the survival of not only Aleran cultural aspects, but also of the Canim, Marat, and Icemen in the days to come. He essentially asks the question, now that their barriers are lowered, how do they continue to grow without something also being lost or left behind in the process? He asks questions not of glory or of being remembered, but how they can “survive the winter” (Butcher, *First Lord’s Fury* 672). Thematically the text presents a narrative in which, alone, Alera, and indeed everyone else, would fall, consumed by the Vord: they succeed only when they learn to see the strength and value in each other’s perspectives. The Vord that threaten to consume the world, in the literature, are an external catalyst. They accelerate decisions that would have been brought to bear upon the societies eventually in that even without them the multiple wars Alera is engaged in present futures

of either mutual destruction, or internal collapse as they continue to stagnate and discriminate internally. The Vord are the Fantasy's exaggerated example, the message is not that the threat of extinction is required for us to deal with our social issues; ideally, if we are aware of our construction, we can then take steps to counter it.

When we engage with the symbolic and interpretive nature of contact zones and magic within contemporary Fantasy literature, they become tools that highlight the ways in which transcultural exchanges take place. Not only do the processes involved in such exchanges become graspable as concepts – for instance, how the relationship between the Alerans and the Marat, and their view of each other, shifts and changes over time in the contact zone of the Calderon Valley – but as a result of this engagement, the thematic discussion within the literature is also furthered. For example, examining the way in which the mutual triumph over the leviathan sea by the Canim and the Alerans highlights the issues of hegemonic orders which engage in slavery, and the differences between being used by the privileged, and contributing to the group. As contemporary anthropology has shown, transcultural exchange is constantly occurring, no identity is actually an island and as such, in a sense, change is inevitable. The more relevant question then is how long will change take, and who will suffer for the delay?

As the reader progresses through the *Codex Alera*, the narrative suggests two end states: either Alera continues to isolate itself as the central power, denying outside influence, and as such relegates itself and the rest of the world to death at the hands of the Vord. Or, Alera, and the nations with which it wars, change, come together to survive and learn from each other in ways that not only defeats the literal genocidal threat of the Vord, but in the long view allows them to start to overcome the internal issues of marginalisation and discrimination brought about by enforced, hegemonic isolation. It is in the play of the characters and the magic – the symbolic representations and voices for diverse cultural perspectives – that meet and exchange within the contact zones, that the reader is shown how macro-scale change is possible. The Fantasy genre, through the magic of each cultural group, is able to mirror the social '—scapes' of global identity construction in a way that makes these complex, often invisible, social forces more immediately visible and graspable. The contact zones that the series presents appear to present obstacles – murky waters to be navigated, divides to be bridged, walls to be torn down – however what the narrative bears out is that it is within the contact zones that such obstacles can be overcome.

The imminent doom of Alera alone, and the eventual success of the transcultural alliance, together demonstrate that while we may desire "a stable, centered sense of knowledge and reality," when that "knowledge of reality" is shaped by "deeply perspectival" dominant narratives it only limits and marginalises on both the micro individual level within a cultural group, and externally on a macro, and even a global scale (Pratt 37; Appadurai 33).

This ability to grasp the role of these interactions on macro scales is only becoming more relevant to our contemporary globalised reality. This text was produced from within a cultural context directly shaped by huge disjunctive cultural flows and dominant norms.¹ In this way it is only

more significant that what *The Codex Alera* seeks to convey is a message of unity for mutual gain with a concern for cultural loss, for growth through difference rather than isolation via hegemony. Such a message has become especially relevant in the current context of the western world as we experience a conservative swing back towards nationalism and hard dividing lines. The ability to engage with the ways that contact zones and transcultural exchange shape identity – and indeed offer potential for growth and success – is crucial for understanding the potential consequences, regardless of political perspective, of attempting to enforce closed-systems of culture instead of embracing cultural difference.

NOTES

1. For a white, male, American author, the contexts of both globalisation and the United States are of relevance here.

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BIONOTE

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NON-FICTION REVIEWS

PENTECOSTAL MODERNISM: LOVECRAFT, LOS ANGELES, AND WORLD-SYSTEMS CULTURE BY PHILIP BARNARD AND STEPHEN SHAPIRO

Review by James Machin

Barnard, Philip and Stephen Shapiro. *Pentecostal Modernism: Lovecraft, Los Angeles, and World-Systems Culture*. Bloomsbury, 2017. 192 pp.

Published as part of Bloomsbury's "New Directions in Religion and Literature" series, the stated aim of this book is an intriguing one: the authors intend to demonstrate that both Pentecostalism – with a particular focus on its practice of "speaking-in-tongues" – and H.P. Lovecraft's pulp fiction are contemporaneous cultural manifestations of the wider modernism precipitated by societal shifts in urbanisation and regionalism. Underpinning this is a desire to "rethink commonplace definitions of and approaches to modernism, and to re-envision it as a period term covering the entire spectrum of cultural productions and practices seen from a long-wave perspective" (11), provoking the question of whether any current modernist scholarship does not have a similar remit. However, and of particular relevance to *Fantastika*, the treatment of Lovecraft here raises troublesome questions about the treatment of genre writers in wider scholarship, concerns I will return to below.

The introduction sets out an ambitious schema, informed by Trotsky's notion of "combined and uneven development," based on the "world-system" concept of Immanuel Wallerstein and others who argue that "the early-modern world saw the rise of a capitalist inter-state system based on linkages and inequalities" (15). Barnard and Shapiro's discussion of the cultural manifestations of modernism is rooted in a base/superstructure dialectic in which "different cultural forms, be they religious fundamentalism, weird fiction, or the middlebrow exposition of progressive theology" (20) represent interrelated cultural strategies to jostle for position in the new, modernist, matrix of social capital. The specific political agenda of the study is to overcome the "national and urban exceptionalism surrounding modernism" (44) by shifting focus from the avant-garde salons of Paris and London to "semiperipheral" American conurbations such as "Topeka, Houston, Los Angeles, Providence, and Rochester" (44).

The fact that there are two introductory chapters on methodology certainly connotes how heavily this book is dominated by its theoretical framework: its front-loaded argument exacerbates some of the problems I identify below. The authors turn their attention to their first case study in chapter three: "Pentecostalism and the protolanguage of racial equality." The history of Pentecostalism in America was informed by unique social and historical contexts: even before landfall, chance encounters between different Christian sects were feeding into its development –

during John Wesley's passage in 1735, for example, he was impressed by the "greater shipboard calm of Moravian Pietists" (68-69). The authors do an admirable job of negotiating the frequently bewildering tangle of influence and inter-pollination between and across sects, the schisms, and allegiances that eventually lead to their main focus, what they argue to be a 'modernist' iteration of Pentecostalism: the revival at Azusa Street, 1906 to 1909.

It was in Azusa Street, at the beginning of the twentieth century, that an interracial congregation began speaking-in-tongues. The authors provide ample and convincing detail on what they set out as the circumstances that facilitated the event. Religion aside, factors included population movement into the rapidly urbanizing city and the relative "freedom from overt discrimination in housing, employment, and the political arena" in the region, Los Angeles being deemed by some to be "among the best places for African Americans to live in the entire nation" (89). Intersecting with, and perhaps dominating, these conditions is, of course, economics and class: "Azusa happens in Los Angeles precisely because conditions there for Black Americans were among the most promising then available, even if they were not truly enabling" (102). According to this reading, speaking-in-tongues was in some sense a performative, if ostensibly unintelligible, expression of social aspiration.

As for the phenomenon of speaking-in-tongues itself, obvious comparators in the context of the book – the doggerel Cthulhu-ese of Lovecraft, Dada, and Joyce's *Finnegans Wake* – are certainly acknowledged but discussion in this direction is disappointingly limited. Instead, the authors focus on "Thomas Szasz's analysis of behaviour previously categorised as (female) hysteria" (103) and discuss speaking-in-tongues as a "protolanguage" that "cannot be understood by the rules of symbolic language" (105). To gloss, perhaps too superficially, the considerable detail provided: though non-representational, this protolanguage is used as a demonstration of dissatisfaction and a request for intervention. The dissatisfaction is that of the aspirational class straining to achieve "the social ascent promised in the Californian Dream" (102). Speaking-in-tongues, essentially, is a language that "conveys the experience-system of obstructed aspiration" (103).

In the April 18th 1906 edition of the *Los Angeles Daily Times*, an article titled "Weird Babel of Tongues" breathlessly detailed the "fantastical rites" being performed at Azusa Street by "coloured people and a sprinkling of whites" (82). The piece, helpfully included in full, is not only an entertaining read but provokes very obviously segues into Lovecraft. The prose itself is Lovecraftian; passages such as "night is made hideous in the neighbourhood by the howlings of the worshippers" (82) could be lifted straight from "The Horror of Red Hook" (1927) or "The Call of Cthulhu" (1928). Unfortunately, these connections are never explicitly made and, where implied, are never properly explored. What is actually presented within the chapter "Lovecraft, Race, and Pulp Modernism" is an at times tortuous survey of racism as an underpinning of Lovecraft's fiction and worldview. The considerable existing scholarship on and around the notion of "pulp modernism" – in the work of the late Mark Fisher, for example – is neither acknowledged or discussed. For a writer whose racism operates so explicitly, it might seem perverse to wring out the texts for further damning intimations of additional strata of racism, but nevertheless, the authors insist on doing so on the basis that it

is specifically *slavery* rather than *race* that “is fundamental in Lovecraft’s fiction” (129). The textual examples adduced to demonstrate this claim are at times less than convincing: do the “abnormal, non-Euclidean” angles of R’lyeh (referred to in the book simply as “an island”) *really* represent the “white narrator’s response to the non-European nose”? (134). While these and other claims may work as a series of rhetorical flourishes, they fall short of being persuasive on a common-sense level. More troublingly, could such critical conceits not be perceived as racist in and of themselves? (It is, after all, the authors making the association here between “abnormal” angles and the “non-European nose,” not Lovecraft himself.) The resulting analysis reads as though Edward Said, in his famous essay on *Mansfield Park*, had repeatedly asserted that Austen was obsessed with slavery and that there are no other valences to her writing.

Elsewhere, the issue of gender is evoked but underdeveloped: the reader is informed that Cthulhu’s tentacles are in fact a variation on the theme of “vagina dentata” (130), and later reassured that “miscegenation in Lovecraft is rarely driven by transgender erotic desire” (138), but these observations seem stray and purposeless. Again, given the psychological transparency of much of Lovecraft’s work, overstating the case seems both unnecessary and counterproductive. Unfortunately, there are not only tenuous readings of his work, but straightforward misrepresentations in the service of the wider argument: it is simply not true, for example, that when Lovecraft’s characters engage with occult tomes it is usually from the position of “little or no academic training or affiliation” (119); those poring over the *Necronomicon* and other unmentionable treatises are often “unpleasantly erudite” (to use Lovecraft’s celebrated phrase from *At the Mountains of Madness*, 1936) faculty members at Miskatonic University.

The fundamental issue here is that Lovecraftian scholarship should be far beyond rehearsals of the self-evident racism of his writing. There is a growing body of academic work that amply demonstrates the value of more ambitious approaches to his work, good examples being the recent critical anthologies *New Critical Essays on H.P. Lovecraft* (Palgrave, 2013) and *The Age of Lovecraft* (University of Minnesota Press, 2016). In the wider and developing field of scholarship on Weird fiction (and Fantastika generally, as represented by this very journal), formulations such as the following read as desultory and procrustean: “Lovecraft’s historical tales become weird by necessity, since they are unable to speak about something seemingly otherworldly that ought not to be there: New England’s participation in, as opposed to resistance to, slavery” (134). To be fair, the focus of interest for the authors is not Lovecraft but the way these texts can slot within a much larger schema, one delineated with a good deal of care in the introductory chapters. However, the fact remains that the work here on Lovecraft will be of little use to anyone with a specific interest in the author, Weird fiction, or wider genre discourse. Moreover, there is a larger issue at stake here: are reductive readings of genre writers for the purposes of a broader argument fair practice, where a similar treatment of (for example) Joyce would not be? There is an implicit assumption in this book that Lovecraft, as a lowly pulp fiction writer, can be casually adduced to an argument without his writing being given proper consideration beyond the authors’ immediate rhetorical purposes, let alone being treated as nuanced literature (or even literature) in its own right.

Pentecostal Modernism: Lovecraft, Los Angeles, and World-Systems Culture is, then, something of a curate's egg. I cannot help thinking that had Lovecraft been omitted, a more robust – and fascinating – argument could have been made about the place of Pentecostalism and speaking-in-tongues as a manifestation of the modernist spirit and a product of specific modernist social conditions. There is also a lost opportunity to look at how contemporary religious charisms might have informed Lovecraft's fiction, as opposed to how the same conditions of world-systems capitalism resulted in both. It may be safe to assume that many readers of *Fantastika* will share my own predicament concerning this book: under-familiarity with the history of the Pentecostal movement and over-familiarity with H. P. Lovecraft.

BIONOTE

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TELLING IT SLANT: CRITICAL APPROACHES TO HELEN OYEYEMI EDITED BY CHLOÉ GERMAINE BUCKLEY AND SARAH ILOTT

Review by Rachel Fox

Chloé Germaine Buckley and Sarah Ilott, eds. *Telling it Slant: Critical Approaches to Helen Oyeyemi*. Sussex Academic Press, 2017. 256 pp.

In their closing keynote to the *Global Fantastika* conference in July 2016, Chloé Germaine Buckley and Sarah Ilott proved themselves to be a dynamic duo capable of jointly presenting their critical interventions in a masterfully coherent and engaging conversation. Their keynote, entitled "Feminist Rewritings of the Spiritual and the Physical Wilderness of the Bush," discussed Helen Oyeyemi's *The Icarus Girl* (2005) and Nnedi Okorafor's *Who Fears Death* (2010), and argued that, in both texts, the appropriation of the bush, generally considered a patriarchal, chaotic space, opened up opportunities to articulate feminist rewriting and revisioning. The keynote was an apt conclusion to the *Global Fantastika* conference in highlighting the intersectionality that must be necessarily acknowledged in both feminist and postcolonial writing and media.

The importance of intersectionality is similarly flagged throughout their excellent edited collection *Telling it Slant: Critical Approaches to Helen Oyeyemi* (2017) where the essays contained therein draw connections across gender, racial, sexual, and class identity. As Germaine Buckley and Ilott point out in their introduction, this collection of essays represents the first comprehensive work on Oyeyemi's fiction, exploring her entire oeuvre from various theoretical angles (2). Germaine Buckley and Ilott's introduction is fluently written, a continuation of their smooth delivery style during their keynote for *Global Fantastika*. Their introduction argues that Oyeyemi's work "is not an affirmation of a postmodern identity negotiated at the margins, but a troubling whisper that highlights the trauma that seeps into histories, nations and bodies that have become broken" (1). Oyeyemi's fiction is strange and unsettling, a "troubling whisper" that, as is made clear by the various contributors to *Telling it Slant*, defies closure. In their introduction, Germaine Buckley and Ilott draw on Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus* (1987) to point out the rhizomatic structure of Oyeyemi's works. They also identify the innate intertextuality of Oyeyemi's fiction, which the contributors make reference to frequently throughout. Germaine Buckley and Ilott argue that "[r]eading Oyeyemi's works as intertextual and rhizomatic assures that they remain open" (3). In acknowledging the openness of Oyeyemi's works early on, Germaine Buckley and Ilott signal, significantly and crucially, that this collection serves to open up Oyeyemi's oeuvre through varying interventions, as opposed to pinning her down.

As the introduction progresses, Germaine Buckley and Ilott introduce the various locations significant to Oyeyemi's works, referring both to the setting of the individual texts, and to Oyeyemi's Nigerian heritage, although in their conclusion they address the fact that "Oyeyemi explicitly disavows the influence of Nigeria on her work [...] possibly in response to biographical readings of her fiction" that, in labelling, might be limiting (189). In this point, again, it is signalled as to how Oyeyemi refuses to be tied down to any specific categorisation. The introduction helpfully addresses the two particular genres associated with Oyeyemi's fiction: the Gothic and Postcolonial. In particular, Germaine Buckley and Ilott point out how Oyeyemi uses and recontextualises Gothic tropes to approach the traumas associated with a colonial legacy. The introduction then proceeds to provide a plot and background to Oyeyemi's works in chronological order, and although they finish their introduction quite abruptly, Germaine Buckley and Ilott do provide an interesting, rich, and expansive discussion of Oyeyemi's styles, genres, and texts.

The first chapter of the collection is written by David Punter, who explores unstable subjectivity, the uncanny, and the sensation of foreignness in Oyeyemi's *White is for Witching* (2009) and *Mr Fox* (2011). As a first chapter, it works well as it immediately puts forward the importance of feeling unsettled in Oyeyemi's work, of "never feeling 'at home'" (25). He cites Sigmund Freud early in his chapter, referring to the uncanny in relation to the figure of the double, or twin, and ponders of the doubling of the self as a contestation between the outside and the inside of oneself. He explores the notion of foreignness alongside this turbulent subjectivity, and focuses, in particular, on "a sense of not being allowed to be at home in one's own skin" (28). The second chapter is written by co-editor Chloé Germaine Buckley, and explores the figure of the Gothic child in *Boy, Snow, Bird* (2014), *The Opposite House* (2007), and *The Icarus Girl*. Besides continuing the discussion put forward by Punter on unsettled subjectivities, the placement of these two chapters at the beginning of the collection works well insofar as the reader is introduced in depth to all of Oyeyemi's novels early on (her dramas are featured later in a chapter by Nicola Abram). Germaine Buckley explores the "uneasy coalescence" between the traditions of the Gothic and *bildungsroman* (coming-of-age) in the aforementioned novels by Oyeyemi (38). She suggests that Oyeyemi's Gothic children represent "an unsettling alternative" to the optimistic, future-facing child often touted in typical tales of "postcolonial *bildungsroman*," a term she borrows from Feroza Jussawalla (38). Germaine Buckley discusses various formations of the child in Oyeyemi's fiction: uncanny children; haunted children; and the paternal/maternal relationship, poignantly arguing that "Oyeyemi's construction of the child draws on a gothic literary tradition in which the child marks a site of anxiety about proper lines of descent, inheritance and legitimacy" (50).

In the third chapter of the collection, Natalya Din-Kariuki presents the reader with a short essay on mimesis in Oyeyemi's fiction (namely *Boy, Snow, Bird, The Icarus Girl, White is for Witching*), focusing, in particular, on the Postcolonial. She begins her chapter with an insightful reading of Boy Novak (*Boy, Snow, Bird*) reviewing her reflection in the mirror—a scene that is revisited by several contributors throughout the volume—and the "twin-pictures" Jessamy cuts out of books. Following this, she cites Frantz Fanon's *Black Skins, White Masks* (1952) alongside Jacques Lacan in a musing upon identification and subjectivity which, as in the previous chapter, focuses on the

child protagonist and the tradition of *bildungsroman*. Her chapter smoothly and effectively takes us from text to text, locating her analysis in the context of postcolonial discussion surrounding both Africa—more specifically, Nigeria and the diaspora—and American Civil Rights. In her well-argued chapter she strongly advocates for the recognition of Oyejemi's fiction beyond a singular "national or diasporic paradigm," suggesting that her fiction represents "an exemplary contribution to world literature" (70-71). In the fourth chapter, Kate Burton offers an extended version of her conference paper presented at *Global Fantastika*. Her chapter methodically takes us through *White is for Witching* and *The Opposite House* as she explores themes of national identity and xenophobia, arguing that multiculturalism is inexplicably haunted by Britain's colonial past and imperial ideologies (75, 85). Burton's analysis of Oyejemi's texts focuses on the idea of the border—geographical and bodily—citing Julia Kristeva's concept of the abject in examining transgressions across borders and "the traumatic consequences of possessing two conflicting identities" (88).

In the central chapter of the collection, Nicola Abrams turns towards Oyejemi's plays, *Juniper's Whitening* (2005) and *Victimese* (2005). It is an important and necessary essay that discusses an area of Oyejemi's work that is often ignored. She argues that both plays "signify [...] through affect" and identifies how both plays use non-verbal signs to communicate (94). Abram's chapter is written melodically as she evokes themes introduced at earlier stages in the collection, exploring trauma, the liminal figure of the child, intertextuality, the Gothicising of the domestic setting, and the tradition of Yoruba. The different sign systems offered by Oyejemi's plays offer alternate modes of communication where "[t]rauma refuses to be ordered and organised into the systematic relationship of signifier and signified" (96). Abram's explores such modes of communication, exhibited within a gothic and/or closed, unsettling setting, as a means of beginning to comprehend colonial and childhood trauma in what I consider to be one of the strongest chapters in this collection.

Chapter six, written by Anita Harris Satkunanathan examines the intersectionality between the feminine and the Gothic, alluding to *Bird*, *Snow*, *Bird*, *Opposite House*, and *White is for Witching* throughout. Satkunanathan uses Alfred Hitchcock's *Vertigo* (1958) as a key intertext through which to carry out her analysis. This may, at first, seem an unusual choice, but, as Satkunanathan points out, the film is cited more than once in Oyejemi's texts and it does, surprisingly, fit very well with her readings of doubling in her chapter. She makes reference to the same mirror scene in *Boy*, *Snow*, *Bird* used by Din-Kariuki but extends this reading of the mirror to explore the uncanny and the splitting of self in the aforementioned texts. This chapter turns to look, specifically, at Gothic tropes (and Gothic femininity), and her argument that there are "patriarchal and imperial imperatives towards silencing any dissent [...] amongst those whom are considered Other" means that the chapter marks the subtle, skilful shift in the second half of the collection to consider gender more directly (122). The seventh chapter, written by co-editor Sarah Illott, continues to focus on patriarchal and imperialist hierarchies, and argues that the eating disorders displayed in the female protagonists of *The Opposite House* and *White is for Witching* "can be read as indexes of protest dissent, [and] transgressive desire" (132). Illott makes good use of Hélène Cixous's theories throughout her chapter, pointedly stating that she does not "attempt to impose a pattern" on Oyejemi's texts, but, instead, uses Cixous's ideas to open up the content of Oyejemi's novels (133). In her analysis of the process

of consumption and lack thereof, Ilott gestures to both “[g]astronomic and sexual desires” (139). Making innovative readings from Cixous’s work, she argues that the mouth represents “a site of damage as well as one of possibility,” articulating trauma “via oral and gustatory hauntings of sound and taste” (147-148).

The penultimate chapter, by Jo Ormond, is neatly paired with the last chapter of the collection, written by Helen Cousins. Both chapters have a vested interest in the Fairy Tale genre that Oyeyemi plays with in her fiction, and both authors draw attention to the inherent intertextuality of the novelists’ works. Ormond explores the ways in which Oyeyemi uses Fairy Tale tropes to unsettle the traditional role of the villain in *Boy, Snow, Bird* and *Mr Fox*, and points to the impact of societal pressures in the formation of villainy. At the conclusion of her chapter, Ormond states that “Oyeyemi’s work continues the feminist tradition of Angela Carter and Margaret Atwood by using the Fairy Tale genre to highlight issues such as misogyny and racism” (165). The intertextuality that Ormond gestures to at the close of her chapter is extended in Cousins’ final chapter, which looks at *Boy, Snow, Bird* in comparison with Angela Carter’s and Barabara Comyn’s Fairy Tale rewritings. In particular, she explores notions of beauty, alongside discussions of racial identity and mimicry, in the shadow of the tale of Snow White. Once more, proving the collection’s own somewhat poetic structure, this chapter harks back to the mirror scene previously discussed by Din-Kariuki and Satkunananthan in an analysis of the family in *Boy, Snow, Bird* “passing” as white, arguing that race and beauty (especially in conjunction with one another) are a fantasy, a simulacra.

In their conclusion to the collection, Germaine Buckley and Ilott remind the reader that “Oyeyemi’s work eludes closure” (185). It would seem odd to then write a conclusion to a collection that has made abundantly clear the impossibility to pinning down the author that is its subject matter. However, Germaine Buckley and Ilott’s “conclusion” manages to triumph over this potential contradiction as they spend the last few pages of the collection discussing Oyeyemi’s most recent publication *what is not yours is not yours* (2016). Their forward-looking conclusion arguably further opens up the discussions and arguments made throughout by the contributors that have come before. The collection is both well organised and fluent in style, the essays subtly link to one another, and often hark back to and anticipate one another, citing recurrent symbolism and themes without going so far as to actually repeat each other directly. Overall, the collection delivers an intellectually stimulating discussion about Oyeyemi’s oeuvre and, as Germaine Buckley and Ilott stated was their intention, leaves room for further interventions.

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SCIENCE FICTION, FANTASY, AND POLITICS: TRANSMEDIA WORLD-BUILDING BEYOND CAPITALISM BY DAN HASSLER-FOREST

Review by Peter J. Maurits

Hassler-Forest, Dan. *Science Fiction, Fantasy, and Politics: Transmedia World-building Beyond Capitalism*. Rowman and Littlefield, 2016. 246 pp.

Fantasy has established its place within Marxist cultural criticism as a serious object of study. No longer is it considered a reactionary genre – opium for the masses. Instead, in an expanding body of work, spearheaded by China Miéville (2002), analysing the Fantastic is considered relevant because it can “make sense” of the success of the genre, and can “identify left cultural elitism” (40). Most importantly, according to Miéville, Fantasy is important because under capitalism, social relations between humans take on the “fantastic form of a relation between things”—between commodities. Under capitalism, then, real life “is a fantasy” (41-42).

Dan Hassler-Forest continues this tradition of Marxist analyses of the Fantasy form in his book *Science Fiction, Fantasy, and Politics (SFFP)*, arguing that Fantasy cannot be equated with the “nostalgia mode” or “escapism” (32). He also expands the tradition by including a neglected aspect of this narrative form: “the fact that our immersion in imaginary storyworlds takes place not within but *across* media” (5). A number of book length studies exist on that topic (for example, Scolari, Bertetti, and Freeman (2014); Kalogeras (2014); Harvey (2015)), but the arguably necessary dialectical materialist perspective had thus far been missing. Going a step further, Hassler-Forest argues that not only is Fantasy not reactionary, it also contains a “radical” and “anticapitalist potential” (4), even if it also contains the opposite. Dialectically, he analyses the tension of these “contradictions” and poses the question of whether “these storyworlds can facilitate and sustain real-world anticapitalism, both in theory and in practice” (132).

SFFP’s central concept is that of “transmedia world-building,” signifying the construction of storyworlds “across” media, the deferral of “narrative closure,” and “audience participation” (5). This last aspect is the most innovative aspect of the study. “[A]ctivities and interests of fan culture,” Hassler-Forest explains, “have by now become an essential part of a widely shared popular culture” (6). In the second chapter, he illustrates this with the detailed example of *The Lord of the Rings (LOTR)*. When a fan tried to enter the *LOTR* set, she was escorted off the property by security guards. Shortly after, however, she was invited for a “guided tour” by director Peter Jackson. The fan could take photographs and post them on her website, which became one of the “key recourses for publicity and breaking news surrounding the highly anticipated film trilogy” (42). Fans are thus

no longer simply consumers of cultural products, but have become “valuable contributors” to the “process” of promoting *LOTR* to a “larger audience” (43).

Historicizing this phenomenon, Hassler-Forest aligns this type of fandom with “immaterial” and “unpaid labor,” which is the “dominant logic of labor in the post-Fordist economies of cognitive capitalism” (10). And while *LOTR* fans operate in “collaboration with new forms of corporate power,” the narrative and its fans also work in opposition to it (11). Hassler-Forest emphasises that the “immersive engagement provided by transmedia storyworlds offers many potential lines of flight that mobilize an anticapitalist engagement” (9). The *LOTR* storyworld has “strong anticapitalist tendencies” because it “dramatiz[es] the notion that radical political change is possible and sometimes even desirable” (35). The “characters and icons” can “become meaningful political symbols” (134), as in the case of the 1960s anti-capitalist and anti-war campaign *Frodo Lives!*. In the chapters that follow, Hassler-Forest shows that there are similar “politically productive tensions” in the storyworlds of *Battlestar Galactica* and *Game of Thrones* (chapter three), *Spartacus* and *The Hunger Games* (chapter four), and *The Walking Dead* and the “Metropolis Saga” (chapter five).

SFFP is written in a sweeping, dense, but highly readable style. It demonstrates a deep knowledge and passion for the primary material, and an intimate familiarity with a broad range of theoretical debates, which are presented to the reader with apparent ease. At its best, *SFFP* is in its close readings and historicisations of primary works of the different storyworlds—aligning, for example, the games in *The Hunger Games* with “global capitalism’s precarious material reality” and “neoliberalism’s fundamentalist paradigm of ruthless competition” (149).

SFFP also raises a number of questions, caused mainly by the connected issues of style on the one hand, and the imbalance of analyses of works and fandom/activism on the other. Hassler-Forest abundantly employs adjectives and adverbs, demonstrated by his liberal use of “perfectly” (about twenty-six times). The adjective is hardly ever true, which affects the book’s preciseness and consequently the reading experience. A similar issue occurs with the adjective “radical.” It is used almost one hundred times (ninety-seven if I counted correctly), and appears central to *SFFP* as Hassler-Forest sees himself as radical (ix) and identifies the Marxist part of his methodology as such (21). But it is unclear what the relational term “radical” means for Hassler-Forest. In the case of his Marxist methodology, for example, his main source is Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt’s neo-Marxist attempt to explain globalisation – *Empire* (2000). However, *Empire* was critiqued for not being radical, “petit bourgeois” (Di Nardo 38), not “bear[ing] any relation to classical Marxism” (59), and for the “complete absence of the one criterion that distinguishes Marxism from competitive schools of thought, namely class” (Proyect 40).

The unanswered question of what it means to be radical works on in the parts on fan culture and, more importantly, political activism, which appear underdeveloped and insufficiently critical. It is never clarified, for example, what made the *Frodo lives!* movement radical, what were its goals, what did it (try to) accomplish, and how. Instead, it is simply stated that “youth culture [...] clearly saw” in Frodo’s battle “a direct reflection of their [...] struggle” (my emphasis, 33). *The Hunger*

Games is similarly labelled radical and subversive, because its imagery formed a vehicle for activists groups. Activism included creating “awareness and encourage[ing] collective action in response to global capitalism’s poverty epidemic,” getting celebrity support, and being the “fastest petition on website Change.org to reach its projected goal” (146). It was also a “means toward community building and class-consciousness” – which consisted of “posting a selfie” with a “hashtag” and “personal narratives” of precarity. This, Hassler-Forest maintains, “developed into a very real, very successful attempt to forge a direct link between the radical energy of the fantastic world-building and anticapitalist activism” (146-147).

Hassler-Forest does not provide arguments to convince the sceptical reader of the radicalness or success of such actions. But this is necessary, because it is questionable if “creating awareness” is radical; because the connection between capitalism and so-called celebrity activism has been well documented (recently by Williamson 2016); because the effect of democratic initiatives has been shown to be depressingly low (Gilens and Benjamin 2014), raising questions about Change.org effectiveness (incidentally a multimillion dollar company led by the previously aspiring investment banker and now multimillionaire Ben Rattray). It is also necessary because the limitations of “hashtag activism” have been debated extensively (“hashtag activism is never real activism,” Stehle and Smith-Prei 142), and because the *topos* of revolution is largely commodified (Rimbaud 2008). Most importantly, it is necessary because this “activism” constitutes one part (if not half) of the contradictions Hassler-Forest analyses. If the sceptical reader finds that these actions are not “radical” or “anticapitalist,” those contradictions collapse.

Interestingly, Hassler-Forest appears to be conscious of the limits of so-called radicalness, for example when he mentions that “ideological content doesn’t translate automatically into class consciousness or political action” (134), and in his casual critique of “seemingly progressive identity politics” (148). It is unclear why he is more lenient towards ‘activist’ movements. It might result from a critic who is struggling to find a methodology. It might also result from his optimistic default assessment that “whatever shape they take [...] and whatever way they are integrated in capitalism [...] I am firmly convinced that fantastic transmedial storyworlds’ [...] fundamental and ultimately irresistible attraction lies in this basic truth: [...] they remain grounded in the common hope and desire for a different, better world” (200). But Anderson has argued in the debate on desire and utopia that this better world only becomes meaningful once desire is given content (cf. *Arguments with English Marxism*). Either way, like the frictions Hassler-Forest himself points to, this is a productive one. It highlights the many questions there are left to answer, creates new ones, and as such affirms the importance of the topic Hassler-Forest has chosen to discuss. In fact, after *SFFP*, it is hard to imagine a discussion of the Fantasy genre disconnected from fan culture. As such, the book has the potential to modify the scope of Fantasy scholarship, and is a must-read for anyone working on the topic.

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HAUNTED LANDSCAPES EDITED BY RUTH HEHOLT AND NIAMH DOWNING

Review by James Machin

Heholt, Ruth and Downing, Niamh, eds. *Haunted Landscapes: Super-nature and the Environment*. Rowman & Littlefield, 2016. 256 pp.

With this collection of essays, the editors have sought to encompass the “wide range of ways one can talk about haunted spaces,” including “landscape studies, affect theory, psycho-geography, eco-criticism, history, memory studies, literary studies, film studies, folklore, trauma studies and postcolonial theory” (Heholt and Downing 2). This breadth of foci, set out in the introduction, already makes it clear that the *Haunted Landscapes* under discussion are not simply desolate wildernesses, but include metropolitan cobblestones, American ghost houses, and Spanish orphanages, among myriad others. In order to help us navigate this variegated terrain, the book is organised into three sections: “Landscapes of Trauma,” “Inner and (Sub)urban Landscapes,” and “Borderlands and Outlands.” In her introduction, Ruth Heholt evokes Vernon Lee’s use of the term “Genius Loci” to delineate the idea of a “ghost-of-place.” This is the notion of the haunted landscape as possessed by an immanence or agency, and one which can “invade consciousness” (Heholt and Downing 1), interestingly at odds with the late Mark Fisher’s discussion of eeriness as an absence of agency in his *The Weird and the Eerie* (2016).

In “Place as Palimpsest: Paul Celan and Martin Heidegger and the Haunting of Todtnauberg,” Mark Riley examines the 1967 encounter of the poet and the philosopher at the latter’s mountain hut, a locale “haunted by histories and in particular Heidegger’s nefarious involvement with National Socialism” (23). Riley argues convincingly that the meeting was “mediated by ghosts and [Celan’s] imaginings of what had happened there before” (23), just as Heidegger’s earlier understanding of the Black Forest landscape was informed by the tensions between the mythopoeic ‘authenticity’ of blood and soil, and modernity. The ghosts of early twentieth century fascism – in Poland and in Spain – also haunt the subjects of the next essay, “Anamorphosis and the Haunted Landscapes of Pasikowski’s *Aftermath* and Del Toro’s *The Devil’s Backbone*” by Matilda Mroz. Mroz evokes the concept of anamorphosis, after Jacques Lacan and Slavoj Žižek, to explore how cinematic hauntings involve the viewer “seeing and not seeing” the spectral (43). She notes that “the spectral spaces of both films are decidedly watery: flooded, swampy, rainy [...] a spatial fluidity is indicated which mirrors the boundary transgressions of the spectral” (53). Mroz also observes that both films are part of a wider visual culture “that is obsessed with memory and the unearthing of previously occluded pasts and narratives” (55). The book in which this essay is contained attests to this obsession not being restricted to visual culture alone.

The next two essays turn to contemporary fiction for their subject matter. Ryan Trimm, in "Witching Welcome: Haunting and Post-Imperial Landscape in Hilary Mantel and Helen Oyeyemi," explores how both novels evoke the "spectral quality of landscape, one bringing the past into the present" (60). The irruption of historical trauma into the present is, of course, a regular touchstone throughout the anthology, and if *Haunted Landscapes* is itself haunted by anything, it is Jacques Derrida's *Spectres of Marx* (1993). For Trimm, also, the "past stands not as a distinctive and separated realm but as a numinous spirit," although he demonstrates how both Mantel and Oyeyemi's fictions suggest the possibility that some spectres "might be conjured anew and recast for a more hospitable future" (72). In "'Tender Bodies': Embracing the Ecological Uncanny in Jim Crace's *Being Dead*," the volume's co-editor, Niamh Downing, provides a thorough reading of Crace's remorselessly bleak novel, looking at the uncanny effects/affects of the absorption of the dead, murdered human bodies into the teeming ecology of the shoreline. Downing's analysis is a welcome gesture towards contemplation of the posthuman, and is arguably at odds with the more anthropocentric assertion in the introduction that "a haunting needs an outside, interpretive presence" to exist (Heholt and Downing 5).

Opening Section Two is Karl Bell's essay, "Phantasmal Cities: The Construction and Function of Haunted Landscapes in Victorian English Cities." Bell takes a welcome historical/empirical approach to his discussion of urban Victorian ghosts, "drawing [...] upon ethnographic accounts of Victorian urban supernatural folklore" (96). In doing so, he reveals some counter-intuitive truths; for example, that the sense of eeriness was not necessarily dispelled by "the development of gas lighting in many urban centres from the early 1820s [...] In some cases gas lamps were themselves the stimulus for urban ghost scares" (98). Bell goes on to describe an incident in Brixton in 1872 when "two lads were charged with making a disturbance" after their shouted accusations that a faulty gas lamp was haunted "drew a mob in the street" (98). As is the case today, new technologies can become appropriated within our spectral landscapes as much as they can dispel them. Bell also provides some fascinating detail on "communal ghost hunting, a customary practice and popular entertainment that infrequently erupted in Victorian cities," sometimes involving hundreds or thousands of people (107). The discussion of this more quotidian incarnation of the haunted landscape as community theatre is a valuable counterbalance to the more recondite iterations of the terrain found elsewhere in the book.

In "The Girl Who Wouldn't Die: Masculinity, Power and Control in *The Haunting of Hill House* and *Hell House*," Kevin Corstorphine gives some deserved critical attention to both Shirley Jackson and Richard Matheson. Corstorphine is sensible enough not to waste time contorting the motif of the haunted house to fit neatly within the framework of the haunted landscape, instead contrasting the subtlety and Jamesian ambiguity of Jackson's book with Matheson's unequivocal brutality, while also investigating how both engage with similar Freudian and gendered anxieties. As with the haunted landscape, the haunted house is a "singular place where space and time are collapsed in on themselves, and slippage can occur" (126). In the subsequent essay, "Gothic Chronotopes and the Bloodied Cobblestones: The Uncanny Psycho-Geography of London's Whitechapel Ward," HollyGale Millette is similarly concerned with "a place wherein space and time collapse," which she

renders a “chronotope” after Bakhtin’s construct (129). Millette is specifically concerned with how the Whitechapel murders have resulted in the area being “haunted in form and representation” and how “this haunting was and is gendered consistently reproducing the effect that it names” (145).

As well as being haunted by Derrida, *Haunted Landscapes* is also haunted by the Victorian past, with many of the essays referring back to the period either explicitly or implicitly through various texts. In “(Sub)urban Landscapes and Perception in Neo-Victorian Fiction,” Rosario Arias looks at how Sonia Overall’s 2006 novel *The Realm of the Shells* uses landscape to demonstrate this haunting of contemporary culture by the nineteenth century. Arias invokes phenomenology and archaeology as “helpful critical interventions into the neo-Victorian text” (149), which in this case incorporates a fictionalised version of the mysterious Shell Grotto discovered in Margate in 1835. The emphasis here is on materiality, and the potential of ‘landscape phenomenology’ to reveal “presence and absence, distance and closeness, subject and object” (160), both temporal and spatial.

Daniel Weston leads us onto firmer (or, rather, further shifting) psychogeographical terrain with his chapter, “W. G. Sebald’s Afterlives: Haunting Contemporary Landscape Writing,” Weston argues that while Sebald “sought out ghostly presences in place,” he has “now also become one for other writers who follow after him” (167). This brings to mind Will Wiles’s similar – though rather more rebarbative – complaint that the spectre of Iain Sinclair is so omnipresent in certain areas of London that it precludes any original or authentic experience of them. Weston takes a more balanced, sympathetic view of Sebald’s legacy, and is nuanced in his acknowledgement of the problems it creates. Roger Luckhurst’s critique of shorthand, broad-brush applications of ‘the spectral turn,’ at the expense of historical and topological specificity, is a touchstone here, as it has been in the introduction and elsewhere in the anthology:

The questions that [Luckhurst] asked as long ago as 2002 of the spectral lens through which places is often seen — why has spectrality become such a master trope, what are the drawbacks of granting it such precedence — have never really gone away. (177)

Talking of historical and topological specificity, ‘Reivers, Raiders, and Revenants: The Haunted Landscapes of the Anglo-Scots Borders’ offers much, courtesy of Alison O’Malley-Younger and Colin Younger. This is a breathless gallop across the “shadowlands of the border landscape, replete with its blood-stained [history] of hostility, feud, and cyclical, reciprocal violence” (183) populated with Picts, Saxons, Vikings, Border Reivers, and assorted fugitive banditti. For the authors, the Anglo-Scots borders represent a “*terra contentiosa* historically described as an unredeemed and irredeemable Gothic wilderness, paradoxically unconfined by stable borders or firm moral boundaries wherein anarchic forces are writ large upon the land” (185). The borders are “*debateable lands*, described thus since the sixteenth century” (185-186, original emphasis). They are, in effect, the haunted landscape writ large, and an archetypal liminal, Gothic space of myriad category pollutions, self-narrated through its rich folklore.

Rebecca Lloyd's concern in "Haunting the Grown-Ups: The Borderlands of *ParaNorman* and *Coraline*" is with the artificially-created haunted landscape; landscapes that are "not 'found' as is the case for live action film, but purposefully made by animators" (199). Again, one of the key findings is the conflation and disruption of ordered time and space: "Layers of landscape are animated where representations of time and place are made complex and asymmetrical, reaching back and forth into the past and across space exposing the porous and unlimited dimensions of these categories" (213). William Hughes, in his closing essay, "'The Triumph of Nature': Borderlands and Sunset Horizons in Bram Stoker's *The Snake's Pass*," argues for a reading of Stoker's first published novel that, rather than "imposes an idealistic palimpsest of English attitudes upon the vivid Irish canvas of his fictionalized Clare Coast" (217), re-accommodates Stoker within Irish letters, against the grain of recent postcolonial scholarship. Hughes is successful in his explicit attempt to sidestep the considerable shadow of *Dracula* (1897) in his deft exploration of how the landscape of *The Snake's Pass* (1890) provokes complicated questions of national identity.

In her Afterword, Heholt reframes the discussion in the context of the Gothic, and also finds an affirmative answer to the question of whether all landscapes are haunted. This volume certainly offers ample evidence and, taken in each essay's own right, there is a wealth of laudable, often lively and inspiring, scholarship on offer here. There remains a nagging question of attenuation, however; one which isn't sidestepped by the editors. In the Introduction, Heholt writes that "if we follow Lee's view of landscape, whereby the spirit of place *is* the landscape, there will be an almost infinite number of haunted places" (Heholt and Downing 2). In *Haunted Landscapes*, there is a concomitant tendency to treat any and every extension in physical space as a landscape. I would be hard pushed to cite any specific instances of etiolation resulting from this editorial generosity, however – it is less a criticism than a question provoked by a vigorous and engaging critical project.

BIONOTE

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SCIENCE FICTION CRITICISM: AN ANTHOLOGY OF ESSENTIAL WRITINGS BY ROB LATHAM

Review by Amanda Dillon

Latham, Rob. *Science Fiction Criticism: An Anthology of Essential Writings*. Bloomsbury Academic, 2017. 592 pp.

The curse of the out-of-print text plagues not only creative Science Fiction texts but Science Fiction's critical texts as well. While the SF Gateway has begun to help with the former, very little has so far been done to rectify the latter, which seems rather a pity. For educators in particular, though we have useful texts like Edward James and Farah Mendlesohn's *Cambridge Companion to Science Fiction* (2003) and Adam Roberts's *The New Critical Idiom* (2005, 2nd edition 2006) and *History of Science Fiction* (2006, 2nd Edition 2016) – to note only three of many – a collection of major critical work on Science Fiction has been long overdue. Rob Latham's new volume fills precisely this void – and succeeds in its aim to provide essential Science Fiction theory and criticism in spades. Instead of attempting to provide an overview of the field, Latham provides readers with a taste of almost every major piece of work on – and critic of – Science Fiction from the inception of the genre and its associated scholarship to the present day. Indeed, one of the volume's strengths is its awareness of the fluid relationship between critic and creative writer in the genre, and its inherent self-reflexivity. Dotted throughout are contributions from what we might call the usual suspects – Darko Suvin, Fredric Jameson, and Judith Merrill, among others – are also a healthy dose of pieces by creative writers like Mary Shelley, Robert A. Heinlein, Joanna Russ, and Samuel R. Delany, and more contemporary critics like Grace Dillon, Lisa Yaszek, Dave Wittenberg, and Latham himself (all of whom are becoming the 'usual suspects' in the most positive of senses). Overall, this collection is a stunning mixture of the familiar and the new: a combination of what's absolutely essential for anyone embarking on research in the Science Fiction field, and pieces that almost certainly will become essential in years to come. In fact, I would wager that Latham's collection itself will become essential reading and the go-to textbook for most if not all undergraduate courses in Science Fiction in the very near future.

Latham's collection is divided into five sections, moving from more definitional and formal issues through to more contemporary concerns such as race, the alien, and post-colonialism. Listing essays as stand-outs is unnecessary, as they are all excellent pieces of scholarship. There are some much loved and hard-to-find pieces like those by Judith Merrill and Marc Angenot, while there are also steadfast essentials like Samuel R. Delany's "About 5,750 Words" (originally published 1978) and J. G. Ballard's "Which Way to Inner Space" (originally published 1962), as well as newer selections like an excerpt from Dave Wittenberg's book on time travel and Kodwo Eshun's piece on Afrofuturism. What is perhaps more interesting is the method by which Latham has selected

pieces, deliberately foregrounding the constant dialogue in Science Fiction studies, which he points out in relation to the first section on definition (2). Definition is one of Science Fiction studies' favourite (and potentially inexhaustible) topics, and Latham provides readers with a multitude of critical approaches to definition and, importantly, contextualises them in his introduction (7-10). A similar approach connects thematically related essays in the section on the nonhuman, which ranges from Mary Shelley's Introduction to *Frankenstein* (1818) to Sherryl Vint's essay on human-animal studies, with a stop at Allison de Fren's essay on technofetishism on the way. Latham's introduction therefore provides the section with a narrative thrust that it might otherwise lack. This approach in foregrounding critical dialogue continues throughout the collection, and this allows both for explanation of Latham's essay choices and the necessary historiographical context for pieces which might otherwise feel slightly disjointed. This is actually key to the underlying brilliance of this collection: Latham has not merely collected the most important pieces of critical work in the field, but done the hard grist of presenting them in a digestible way for students and in a fashion that remains thought-provoking for those more familiar with the field.

In addition to putting all of these essays in a single (and, obviously, recently published and therefore easily accessible) collection, Latham also provides the reader with some brief introductory essays to each section as well as an annotated bibliography featuring ten pieces of further reading for each section. Any collection will inevitably have gaps, and it is in these sections that Latham provides himself with an out to anyone wondering where, for example, Peter Stockwell's shockingly underappreciated work on neologisms is or Roger Luckhurst's amazing 2005 narrative of Science Fiction can be found. In fact, it's tremendously difficult to find a place where Latham's collection errs: nothing seems to be missing, nor is a single toe put out of line (though I admit I would have liked to have seen a section out of Stockwell's work in the section on formalism as a nod to conlangs and neologism rather than it just receiving a mention in the annotated further reading). This is an extraordinary collection, both for students and educators. It is very easy to see this being used in Science Fiction literature courses as a core critical text without any concerns of bias or missing anything important. Provided with a text like this, undergraduate students (or postgraduates who need to be brought up to standard) can be assured they've been exposed to every major piece of work on Science Fiction. For those of us on the staff side of the academic divide, the collection provides access to essays that may have been on our 'to-read' list for a long time, articles we have heard about but never unearthed, and introductions to areas beyond our specific sub-disciplines. This is an impressive feat of scholarship and critical historiography and an absolute boon to the field for teachers and students alike – and it's affordable to boot (well done, Bloomsbury). I recommend it unreservedly.

BIONOTE

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LOST SOULS OF HORROR AND THE GOTHIC

EDITED BY ELIZABETH MCCARTHY AND BERNICE M. MURPHY

Review by Rowan Bowman

McCarthy, Elizabeth and Murphy, Berenice M, eds. *Lost Souls of Horror and the Gothic: Fifty-Four Neglected Authors, Actors, Artists and Others*. McFarland, 2016. 248 pp.

Sir Christopher Frayling's foreword provides a brief history of the origins of the accepted canon of key Gothic writers and, later, filmmakers which has been passed down largely without question over the past two centuries. It is this "apostolic succession" (1) which *Lost Souls* sets out to challenge. The subjects are chosen from a broad spectrum of creative endeavour: writers, directors, actors, artists, videogame designers, songwriters, mediums and occultists. The declared intention of the editors is to shed light on these 'forgotten' Lost Souls, for both Gothic and Horror scholars and the general enquirer. The subjects of the essays are arranged alphabetically and as such, the volume provides an interesting work to dip into. Additionally, the comprehensive index is useful for academic reference, or for those whose interests lie in a specific area, facilitating a pick and mix reading of these short essays. The subjects are addressed thematically in this review for ease of discussion.

The largest group of Lost Souls in this collection are writers, the earliest examples coming from well before the Gothic movement began. Sixth century Gallic bishop, Gregory of Tours, wrote accounts of the lives of the saints which, Peter Dendle argues, play directly on the affective nature of revulsion, uncertainty and the unknowable to "invoke primordial questions of the human condition" (100). Dendle's essay provides gruesome examples of this "particular brand of Christian comfort" (102). Brendan O'Connell introduces the fourteenth century 'Erkenwald Poet.' In his poem, Bishop Erkenwald is summoned to the sarcophagus of a pre-Christian judge, whose uncorrupted body is given a Christian baptism. The corpse disintegrates in a grisly descriptive forerunner to the classic staked vampire which exploits "gothic and horror elements" (79). The poet, playwright, architect and theologian, Edward Jerneingham, uses his poetry to criticise aspects of the Catholic Church, in "what we now take to be the conventions of Gothic writing" (108). Peter Lindfield and Dale Townshend champion his largely forgotten work, both poetic and architectural.

Regina Maria Roche was so famous in her time that her novels were mentioned in Austen's work. Christina Morin suggests Roche's later rejection by the establishment was because of her disreputable publishers and her derivative plots which closely resembled those of Ann Radcliffe. Morin argues that modern academics ignore the actual texts which use the Gothic to explore the

contemporary issues afflicting the author. David Punter proposes that Francis Lathom is among several neglected "minor Gothicists whose work is overlooked because they were not primarily genre writers" (124). Punter's essay dismisses theories of Lathom's homosexuality and disputed parentage as factors in his obscurity, and commends Lathom's work for his innate sense of playful exploration of the Gothic "notions of innocence and forbidden knowledge" (126).

As with Lathom, Charlotte Riddell's Gothic stories are overshadowed by her mainstream writing. A life of hardship resulted, like Roche, in hurried work, churned out to cover necessities. Clare Clark suggests that Riddell's stories channel her experiences into a deeply personal reflection of the social and economic plight of women in late Victorian Britain. Fitz-James O'Brien was once dubbed the 'Celtic Poe.' Kevin Corstorphine's essay relates the life of a scoundrel, brawling, drinking and womanising his way across Ireland, London and New York to such a degree that his notoriety prevented a proper retrospective of his work. Corstorphine argues that O'Brien deserves recognition in the development of Horror, Science Fiction, and American literature. Jerome K. Jerome produced one volume of Gothic short stories, *Told after Supper* (1891) which has been completely overshadowed by his other novels. William Hughes argues these stories deserve better recognition for a literary perceptiveness and brevity that should place them firmly in the "Christmas-Eve Ghost Storytelling" tradition (116).

Marie Correlli was the bestselling author of her age. Caitriona Kirby argues that she has been forgotten through literary snobbery. In *Sorrows of Satan* (1854), Kirby suggests, Correlli offered "a Gothic corrective to definitively Realist woes" (57) and deserves recognition not only for herself, but for the Lost Souls she wrote about. Ailise Bulfin outlines Guy Boothby's work and demonstrates how his heroically arduous early experiences across the globe informed his writing. 'Dark themes' stained even his detective and romance novels, in particular the 'revenge motif' and fearfulness for European civilisation, and his supernatural thrillers offer insights into the origins of these key tropes. James Doig proposes that Lionel Sparrow is a Lost Soul because he was too busy with day-to-day life to give his writing enough time. His short stories were excessive, with "violent murder, mutilation, disfiguring disease, and torture" (205-206). Doig uses extracts to demonstrate Sparrow's bloodthirstiness and the sub-Poe transgressive-ness of the stories.

Anna Powell suggests that John Buchan exhibited a "dualism towards 'fallen' nature" (43) through his supernatural short stories, which reveals him as a scholar of the occult, and she includes a comprehensive reading list of his work. Aleister Crowley's name is synonymous with the Dark Arts, and his influence still touches those who dabble in the occult. His supernatural Horror novels are forgotten, being of little particular originality. Clive Bloom argues however, they represent the *zeitgeist* for Victorian children who grew up in WWI. Darryl Jones describes Oscar Cook as a writer who "specialized in a particularly nasty variety of colonial horror," a kind of "pulp Conrad" (50). Cook's wife promoted his stories after his death in 1952 but Jones blames Cook's present obscurity on the uncomfortably racist subject matter rendering these classically horrific tales unpalatable.

New Zealand novelist and playwright, Dulcie Dreamer's supernatural writing was based,

Jim Rockhill suggests, on early experiences of 'real' hauntings. Her novels have been overlooked since her death in 1970, only now being rescued by genre enthusiasts. Roger Luckhurst considers William Buehler Seabrook to have played two overlooked roles in the development of Gothic Horror: Firstly, his book, *Witchcraft: Its Power in the World Today* (1940), which criticised (among others) Aleister Crowley's practice. Secondly, his rejection of pseudo Western 'magic,' which led him to seek authenticity in primitive cultures, thereby introducing the Haitian zombie to American culture. Kristine Larson succinctly catalogues Dion Fortune's works on the psyche and its ability to heal through spiritual guidance, and links this to Fortune's belief in her own psychic powers. Larson argues that she should be respected for her pioneering feminist viewpoint emphasising the importance of sexuality in wellbeing. Collette Balmain explains that Edogawa Rampo's obscurity in the West is due to a lack of translated works. The prolific novelist and short story writer invented the Japanese detective thriller, but Balmain explains that his "erotic grotesque nonsense" (174) still influences Japanese Horror filmmakers fifty years after his death. Katherine Farrimond champions the work of Nicholas Fisk, a children's author who believed that fantasy depended upon "believable realism [...] and one thumping lie" (83). She uses examples of his Science Fantasy Horror stories to show his skill at creating menace and unease. Charles Beaumont's horrendous childhood in 1930's Chicago resulted in "an innovative storyteller capable of producing hallucinations on paper" (31). He also wrote films and episodes of *The Twilight Zone*. Edward O'Hare explains that, just as Beaumont's career was about to reach the acclaim it deserved, he succumbed to a condition similar to Alzheimer's and died at thirty-eight.

While Ira Levin scarcely lacks recognition as the "father of the modern popular thriller" (127), Bernice M. Murphy argues that the true extent of his contribution to the genre goes unacknowledged. Murphy notes that without the success of *Rosemary's Baby* (1967), mainstream publishers would not have been convinced of a "genuine public appetite for mass-market horror fiction" (128). Edward O' Hare's second essay is about Peter Van Greenaway, author of *The Medusa Touch* (1973). It describes an elusive Lost Soul with a deep distrust of modernity that was expressed in 'erudite' work of "apocalyptic imagination that has lost none of its persuasive force" (219). John Farris's career as a writer has spanned over sixty years, offering a huge variety of Horror and Supernatural thrillers. Xavier Aldana Reyes explains that the prolific writer has a tendency to be thematically derivational, but claims that his lack of fame is simply because "he has not gone out of his way to become famous" (82).

Robert R. McCammon's current obscurity is due to a ten-year writing break which possibly alienated his readership. Neil McRobert proposes that his resistance to the entrapment of genre-classification deserves better recognition, and cites *Gone South* (1992) as a work that "stands alongside William Faulkner, Cormac McCarthy or James Dickey" (145) in its visceral depiction of the South. Philip Ridley, painter, photographer, playwright, filmmaker, and author of children's books, is regarded to be a Lost Soul because of his varied repertoire which evades pigeonholing. Douglas Keesey describes the origins of his children's stories and suggests an attempt to address fear through the Horror of modern fairy tales such as *Krindlekrax* (1991). American Horror Director, Victor Halperin, is largely forgotten now, Murray Leeder argues, because of the general consensus that

American Horror movies began in the 1960s. Leeder describes how Halperin burned out quickly, a *Lost Soul* ahead of his time, unable to compete with the movies that built upon his early work.

Jim Rockhill begins his essay on Carl Mayer, with a list of films which “all owe their existence, at least in part” (139) to the German film-poet. Drawing on the hardships of his early life, he shows how Mayer “plumbed psychological depths rarely encountered before in film” (140). A truly *Lost Soul* (one film is physically lost), his skills were unsuited to the talkies and he dwindled into obscurity. Wendy Haslem’s essay on anthropologist, writer and filmmaker, Maya Deren, charts the path of an expert on Haitian Voodoo rituals who used the “potential of cinema to present uncanny visions of transfigured identities [to] explore the immaterial” (75). Jon Towlson introduces ‘radiation cinema’ director, Jeff Lieberman. A contemporary of Romero and Carpenter, Towlson argues he should be better recognised for films like *Squirm* (1976) and *Blue Sunshine* (1978). For over forty years, Lieberman has channelled contemporary fears through the lens of quirky and subversive cinematography.

Madelon Hoedt argues that Stephen Mallatratt deserves better recognition for his stage play of *The Woman in Black* (1987). Hoedt maintains that it is wrong to measure the success of supernatural Gothic Horror simply by the number of jump-scares, arguing that Mallatratt’s staging produces an affective experience that is “more personal, more direct, and [...] more frightening” than cinema (135). George Toles pictures the director and screenwriter, Joseph Minion, sitting in a diner explaining his ‘comedies of madness’ to two of his protagonists who became “casualties of sexual exploits for which they were psychically ill-equipped” (154). This essay is entertaining (especially if one is familiar with *Vampire’s Kiss* (1989) or *After Hours* (1985)), and deftly portrays the shadowy Minion lurking behind his creations. Stephen Volk wrote the first Horror ‘mockumentary,’ *Ghostwatch* (BBC, 1992), several films including *The Awakening* (2011) and the television series *Afterlife* (2005-2006). James Rose acknowledges that his contribution to the contemporary Horror scene is celebrated, but suggests that he deserves acclaim beyond his current audience for exploring the dynamic between “Believer and Skeptic [...] and the presence of the Ghost” (221).

Maria Parsons depicts the actress, Theda Bara, as a Gothic trendsetter who developed one of the earliest on-screen ‘vamp’ personas. She played “powerful, dangerously enigmatic” (25) women, so alluring they did more to fascinate than repel. Parsons’s detailed essay fleshes out the shadowy film performances, many of which were destroyed in a fire in 1937. Jarlath Killeen describes the Gothic stage and film actor, Tod Slaughter, as “the leading British exponent of Gothic Horror [...] rivalled only by Karloff” (200). Killeen’s considered analysis suggests that Slaughter does not enjoy the cultural status of Karloff, Lee, Cushing, and Depp, despite making the Gothic accessible to non-Horror fans. Bill Warren introduces Morris Ankrum, as a “stalwart presence in 1950’s science fiction movies” (16). Warren portrays an actor whose physical presence gained him roles of ‘the man in charge’ and whose career gently dwindled as he aged.

John Exshaw describes Skelton Knaggs as a spectacularly ugly British character actor who never played in a hit movie, but when given the opportunity could make “an essentially grotesque

character both likeable and sympathetic" (120), an invaluable skill in Horror movies. Exshaw asks if the pathos Knaggs brought to his characters is a glimpse into the depths of a truly lost soul. Mark Cofell peppers his account of Charles Gemora's rise from Hollywood studio sculptor to "gorilla man and effects wizard" (95) with fascinating details. Seen from a time where CGI is the norm, Cofell makes the case that Gemora's work is ground-breaking because he identified the subtle commonalities "between man and simian" (95). Mark Jancovich explains that Ingrid Bergman's films are not now considered part of the Gothic and Horror genres, but at the time of their making in the 1940s, "the terms 'psychological film' and 'Horror film' were almost interchangeable" (35). Her beauty and natural unmannered performances gave an air of wholesomeness which emphasised the monstrosity of the peril.

Elizabeth McCarthy introduces Evelyn Ankers as "Scream Queen extraordinaire" (11). She rose to fame in *The Wolf Man* (1941), acting alongside Claude Rains and Bela Lugosi. Audiences lost their appetite for such movies later in the war and by the time Horror resurfaced in the 1950s, Ankers was too old to resume her scream queen mantle. Tom Weaver's account of his meeting and friendship with actress Susan Cabot stands out as a testament to an artist living a life of Gothic Horror, born of transgression, from her chaotic house to her appalling murder at the hands of deranged son. Peter Hutchings's essay on the *Hammer Horror* actor Ralph Bates charts his career through the British Horror industry until its decline in the 1970s. Hutchings suggests that television work overshadowed his earlier career as an "amiable genre presence" (26), disguising menace with "charismatic charm" (26). Sorchia Ni Fhlainn explains that Vincent Schiavelli was born with Marfan Syndrome which left him with an appearance "perfectly suited to playing unusual characters" (190) such as the Subway Ghost in *Ghost* (1990). Ni Fhlainn claims that his ability was never fully recognised and that "the unique intensity that simultaneously evoked pity and yet warned of potential malevolence" (192) has not been celebrated as it should.

First and foremost a musician, Danielle Dax is better remembered as the Wolf Girl in *The Company of Wolves* (1984). Catherine Spooner describes Dax's post-punk performances in the emergent London Goth scene of the early 1980s, demonstrating Dax's commitment to this sub-culture. Her subsequent styling as a television interior designer detracts from her "unsung Goth feminist icon" (66) status. Jenny McDonnell includes singer-songwriter Tom Waits in the collection because his songs are about lost souls. Waits embraces the Gothic tropes of physical disability and deformity, alongside freak shows and the circus, which aligns his work firmly within the American Gothic tradition. Sidney Sime is the earliest visual artist included in *Lost Souls*. His best-known collaboration is with writer Edward Plunkett. Sime is credited as the first Western artist "to seize upon the Gothic undertones [...] in Japanese art" (199). Maria Beville suggests that, although Sime has a dedicated gallery in his hometown, his "contribution to the emergence of cosmic horror" (197) is not widespread knowledge.

Tracy Fahey proposes that the dark sexuality and highly emotional art of Austrian printmaker Alfred Kubin stemmed from his "strange and troubled life" (121), a Gothic Horror of unrelenting sadness. Declared 'Entartete Kunst' by the Nazis, Kubin is still subject to occasional

retrospectives, but Fahey argues that his “visualizations of contemporary psychological ideas” (123) deserve better recognition. Wendy Mooney suggests that Paula Modersohn-Becker’s expressionist paintings are an “anticipation of Southern Gothic” (155). She uses photographs to demonstrate the Gothic nature of Modersohn-Becker’s art, showing preoccupations with freaks, illness and disability, and the ‘backwoods’ girl-child’s connection with nature. Frederick Wertham was a child-psychiatrist who warned, on flimsy evidence, that Horror comics could psychologically harm children and cause “a moral decline of a nation’s youth” (229). He did not call for the resulting 1950s censorship, but created a false narrative and foolishly rode the publicity storm. Sarah Cleary’s well-argued case shows a Lost Soul despised by followers of the genre he maligned.

Sandy Peterson designed the *Call of Cthulhu* table-top role-playing game in 1981. Rachel Mizsei-Ward discusses Peterson’s role in promoting many obscure Horror writers and creating multiplayer computer games with the “the social aspect of traditional table-top role-playing games” (161). Shinji Mikami invented the survival Horror computer game *Resident Evil* (1996-2006). Eóin Murphy’s engaging essay is part *homage*, part biography, with interesting details about the development of the game. Mikami’s work is hugely popular, but like most game-designers he is the ghost in the machine, expertly manipulating Gothic Horror tropes to unsettle the player. For Ewan Kirkland videogames eluded academic study, lacking the materiality required for textual analysis, until he discovered *Silent Hill 2* in 2001. Developed by Team Silent Hill, Kirkland describes a game with “a particularly cinematic aesthetic [and] uniquely creepy sensation of contamination, decay and delirium” (212), qualities essential for supernatural Horror.

The final group of Lost Souls are believers and sceptics. They have not sought to express horror or the supernatural through fiction or art, instead opting for an academic approach with varying lack of success. Medium and psychometrician, Leonora Piper, was friends with Henry James’s brother, William, who co-opted her into the American Society for Psychical Research. Dara Downey explains that although she was subjected to an extraordinary number of tests, some physically dangerous, “Piper was never actually debunked” (172). When she retired, the *New York Herald* twisted her interview into a retraction, and she was never taken seriously again. Archaeologist and editor, Montague Summers, is famous for his work on witches. Frank Furedi discusses Summers’s “conviction that witchcraft was a serious, ongoing threat to European civilization” (210) rendering him a Lost Soul, battling against indifference. Furedi considers how, a century later, we paradoxically condemn sceptics “through a narrative of evil” (211) that would comfort Summers. The final Lost Soul in this review is Charles Fort. Lifelong sceptic, his emphasis on the importance of maintaining an open and enquiring mind is celebrated by the Fortean Society, several magazines and through fiction. His name is synonymous with all things unexplainable and his non-fiction books are still in print. Tania Scott’s argument is that this work completely overshadowed his fiction, most of which was never published, despite its “macabre sense of humour,” a continuing source of regret for Fort. Scott commends all aspects of his work, advising that the reader should approach it “in a spirit of scientific investigation and with a keen sense of humour” (89). Good advice that should be extended to the many Lost Souls in this volume.

BIONOTE

Based in England, **Rowan Bowman** has a PhD in Creative Writing. Her research interests include spectral landscapes, method writing and the supernatural Gothic horror genre. She has one published supernatural Gothic Horror novel, *Checkmate*, and is currently working on her second novel.

WEREWOLVES, WOLVES AND THE GOTHIC

EDITED BY ROBERT MCKAY AND JOHN MILLER

Review by Carys Crossen

McKay, Robert and Miller, John, eds. *Werewolves, Wolves and The Gothic*. University of Wales Press, 2017. 274 pp.

After years of neglect from academia, the literary and cinematic werewolf is finally having its moment in the spotlight and the latest work to focus entirely on lycanthropes reflects this. *Werewolves, Wolves and the Gothic*, edited by Robert McKay and John Miller, is an examination of the werewolf in Western culture from the Victorian era up to the present day. The werewolf texts produced during this timeframe have, until now, received comparatively little critical attention (save for a few key works such as *The Wolf-Man*, 1941) but this volume ably demonstrates that there is plenty of material available that is ripe for analysis and study. The work is divided into two principle sections: "Social Anxieties" and "Species Trouble." The former examines the multitude of ways in which lycanthropy and the werewolf have come to represent specifically human concerns and anxieties, while the latter is predominantly concerned with the distinction (or lack thereof) between human and animal. Race and gender are the central concerns of chapters under the "Social Anxieties" heading, starting with Hannah Priest's discussion of two seminal werewolf films: *The Wolf-Man* and *An American Werewolf in London*. Priest's chapter explores the changes in how the werewolf was represented during the twentieth century, shifting from the wicked female werewolf of the late nineteenth century to an impotent male figure, possessor of a broken, disfigured lycanthropic body.

Chapter Two, authored by Jazmina Cininas steps backwards in time to examine the wicked female werewolves of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. She argues that the rise of the female werewolf was intimately linked to fears of the 'New Woman' and, not coincidentally, female werewolves were portrayed as originating from countries that had granted universal suffrage. Chapter Three by Michelle Nicole Boyer expands the definition of the term 'werewolf' by focusing mainly on two films that don't feature conventional shape-shifting lycanthropes: *Dances with Wolves* (1990) and *The Last of the Dogmen* (1995). The chapter examines the link between the Native American peoples and the wolf in Western popular culture, from the films listed to contemporary television series. Boyer's chapter does not examine the Native American werewolves featured in Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight* series (2005-2008), an omission that becomes clear upon reading Chapter Four by Roman Bartosch and Celestine Caruso. The authors examine a range of topics including class, race, the abject, and cultural stereotyping in Meyer's works, arguing that Meyer's work portrays the Native American werewolves as embodiments of white middle-class fears of social disorder. Chapter Five, by Batia Boe Stolar, focuses on perhaps the best-known female werewolves in Western popular culture, those featured in the *Ginger Snaps* (2000-2001) film trilogy. Utilising the

theories of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari and their concept of 'becoming-animal,' Boyer explores the sisterly bond at the heart of the films and how they celebrate the werewolf over and above the human.

Chapter Six marks the beginning of the second section, "Species Trouble." Ecology and the human impact on the environment are at the heart of "Species Trouble," with chapters focusing on the juxtaposition between Nature and Civilisation, Human and Animal. The section opens with Kaya Franck's examination of the lycanthropic elements in Stoker's *Dracula* (1897). She asserts that the presence of the wolf and its return/escape represents a threat to the British nation in Stoker's novel, and that national stability is dependent on the wolf being either killed or contained. Chapter Seven, by John Miller, is an examination of the short fiction of H. H. Munro, in which animals and the wild's intrusion of the domestic is a recurring theme. Unlike Franck's chapter, Miller argues that a decline in wildness and the reduction of wolves to mere entertainment in Munro's fiction represents a decline in national strength. Chapter Eight by Robert McKay examines another classic werewolf text: *The Werewolf of Paris* (1933) by Guy Endore. It explores the link between lycanthropy and the political influences of the 1930s, when the novel was written – most particularly the legacy of anarchism and the Paris Commune, as well as the novel's exploration of individual greed and selfishness versus community, as depicted in the story's meat-eating scenes.

Chapter Nine by Margot Young tackles Angela Carter's wolf stories, specifically "Peter and the Wolf" (1985), "Wolf-Alice" (1979), and "The Company of Wolves" (1984). Although Carter's work has always been a popular subject for literary analysis, Young examines the stories from a new angle, suggesting that Carter's fiction presents an ecological challenge to human subjectivity and delights in the breakdown of boundaries between human and animal. Chapter Ten by Bill Hughes centres on Maggie Stiefvater's *Wolves of Mercy Falls* series (2009-2014), which is aimed at Young Adults. Hughes makes the case that Stiefvater's novels are a rare YA example of humanity proving more appealing and full of potential than lycanthropy, arguing that choosing to be a wolf is an act of 'bad faith,' in refusing to shoulder the responsibilities of being human. Chapter Eleven by Matthew Lerberg examines two examples of the Big Bad Wolf in modern popular culture, featured in the television series, *Grimm* (2011-2017), and the comic book series *Fables* (2002-2015). It examines the lycanthropic characters using the theories of Deleuze and Guattari, exploring how the werewolves in these mediums erode binaries and encourages new ways of viewing the wolf.

The essays featured here are both complex and diverse and explore numerous different themes, ranging from lycanthropy as contextualised by left-wing politics to the link between wild wolves and indigenous peoples in Western popular culture. Perhaps inevitably, several essays take many of their cues from Chantal Bourgault Du Coudray's *The Curse of the Werewolf: Fantasy, Horror and the Beast Within* (2006), particularly the repeated analysis of and references to the ecoGothic and the importance of ecology when examining the werewolf and natural wolves. The essays' willingness to engage with previous research in this area is an asset, building on earlier criticism whilst contextualising the new contributions by the authors. There is a nice balance between famous, well-researched works and lesser-known lycanthropic texts in this collection. Films such as *Ginger*

Snaps (2000) and *The Wolf-Man* (2010), the Young Adult Series *Twilight*, and even Stoker's *Dracula* are re-examined to illuminate new themes and new modes of examining these works. But the chapters on near-forgotten works such as Clemence Housman's *The Werewolf* (1896) and H. H. Munro's obscure wolf stories are equally fascinating. There are some notable omissions (Anne Rice is mentioned briefly; neither Glen Duncan nor the *Underworld* (2003-present) franchise get a look-in) but this is inevitable with an edited volume and the texts chosen for analysis need no justification.

Recurring themes include the conflation of wolves with indigenous peoples, for example, the Native Americans, by European settlers, and the disruption of boundaries by werewolves and lycanthropy. Inevitably, there are competing viewpoints. Kaja Franck interprets wolves as symbols of wildness that must be banished or contained by civilisation in *Dracula*, while John Miller suggests that reducing wolves to mere entertainment in H. H. Munro's short fiction is symptomatic of the decline of the British nation. Nonetheless, all the chapters are persuasively argued and offer new modes of examining the werewolf in a collection that promises to be an influential addition to werewolf studies.

BIONOTE

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AURELIA: ART AND LITERATURE THROUGH THE MOUTH OF THE FAIRY TALE BY CAROL MAVOR

Review by Paul McNamara

Mavor, Carol. *Art and Literature through the Mouth of the Fairy Tale*. Reaktion Books, 2017. 256 pp.

In her introduction, Carol Mavor writes that *Aurelia* “is told with a butterfly tongue that celebrates, warns, swallows, chews and rebels” (33). She achieves this as she beautifully intertwines words and images to articulate her narrative and arguments. Mavor’s aim is to first investigate fairy tales using numerous senses to explore colour, language, sound, and food. She then contrasts fairy tales against real events to challenge societal understanding. This book acts as a validation of both the relevance of fairy tale studies and for their use as a critical tool. The book itself reads almost like a fairy tale as the reader is immersed in Mavor’s world of colours, images, and sounds. But beneath this stylistic presentation, it is full of substance. Mavor compares fairy tales to butterflies, bringing them back to their chrysalis form to shine new light upon them and explore them anew, delving into language by exploring the sounds and shapes of phonemes. In the preface, Mavor writes that “an O is an eye from which the fairy tale emerges” (13), referring to the O that begins a fairy tale in the phrase ‘Once upon a time.’ Throughout the book Mavor explores a number of fairy tales, both fictional stories and real-life narratives with magical qualities. She breaks down the boundaries of what a fairy tale is, quoting the author Nabokov “great Novels are great fairy tales” (30). Mavor examines the sounds, tastes, images, and origins of the pieces, investigating the often-studied works in an unusual and exciting manner.

In the first two chapters, Mavor delves into her culinary interests stating that “in fairy tales, as in cuisine, materiality transforms” (18) and uses the term “eatingmagination” (18) to describe her analysis. The themes of appetite and eating are explored in stories such as *Midas* (2004), “Jack and the Beanstalk,” and *Alice in Wonderland* (2000). She explores what gold means as a natural and edible substance, particularly how colour adds to the stories as she herself writes sections of pages in gold ink. Mavor discusses the feeling of magic and wonder gold creates, while admitting that it is also the cause of many characters’ downfalls. Although not specifically discussed in detail, gold is used throughout as a symbol of wealth and excess. What follows is a natural progression to a discussion on appetite in *Alice in Wonderland*. She discusses “Carroll’s focus on eating as a form of non-eating” (53) and the importance of Alice’s eating habits – when she eats, it often creates a major narrative change in the story. Mavor states that food is all around in the Alice stories “but not much nurturing” (61) occurs. Throughout the stories Mavor argues food is presented as temptation as opposed to nutrition. These chapters offer an accessible and enjoyable entry to the book.

In the third chapter, the author associates the image of the raindrop to the themes of innocence and perspective as “innocence quivers on an impossible, or nearly impossible, state of being” (85). The author uses the story of *Paul and Virginia* (2005), by Jacques-Henri Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, as an example: a tale of two children born with the expectation they would be wed. Mavor traces their story as they grow up almost as siblings, arguing that – like the raindrop – their lives exist in a near impossible state of being as both sibling-like and as an intended married couple. Examining Lennie in John Steinbeck’s *Of Mice and Men* (1937), she challenges the meaning and nature of innocence. Noting Lennie’s “strange innocence” (105), she states that if he cannot remember, he ‘cannot be guilty’ for the crimes he commits. Similar to Paul and Virginia growing up as near siblings bound to be wed, Lennie’s unintentional crimes are quickly forgotten and as such he is simultaneously innocent and guilty. Here Mavor is providing a dual argument, firstly about impossible states of being but also about the importance of agency. In both stories, she argues that there cannot be blame if the character does not understand their actions. Mavor’s argument fractures here, her use of Lennie as an example of the danger of lack of agency undermines the argument. Lennie’s lack of agency is due, at least in part, to intellectual disability as opposed to societal pressure and this does not conform to the rest of Mavor’s argument, which focuses on agency being taken by others. Still this discussion on agency – while flawed – is an important lead into the chapters on real narratives that follow, as the argument becomes more prevalent in real situations. It is also interesting to compare this to the attention given to agency in modern fairy tales, such as recent Disney’s films *Frozen* (2013) and *Moana* (2016) where accountability and the ability to make one’s own decisions are pivotal aspects.

Chapter four leads into a discussion of language with the first prominent real-life narrative, that of Poto and Cabengo. Poto and Cabengo were the nicknames of two young girls who were neglected by their family and cut off from the world. Isolated, they invented their own language. While their story seems magical, the tale does not have a happy ending – similar to the other real-life examples Mavor incorporates. Once the girls’ language was discovered, it was deconstructed by scientists while the girls were forced to learn English. As they got older they ended up forgetting much of the language they invented and were forcefully injected in the real world, ending up in menial jobs. This is the first of numerous instances in the book where Mavor highlights the problems magical stories have in the real world. She argues that happy endings and magic are only allowed to exist in fiction. The contrast of reality and fairy tales here is interesting as this story begins with magic and ends with its removal. In fairy tales an injection of magic often leads to the happy ever after. Mavor finds a vibrancy in the world of fairy tales that she believes cannot survive in reality.

In the following chapters, Mavor explores the ability of transformation within both people and materials, emphasising the implications this has on storytelling. Here Mavor’s writing style is eccentric and playful throughout. Although this occasionally makes the work feel a little disjointed, overall it creates an accessible and engaging effect. She discusses the magical association of glass in *Cinderella* (2014), how it works as a metaphor for newness and possibility but also hints at timelessness. Linking mirrors to the tropes of reflections and other worlds, Mavor draws upon Jacques Lacan’s famed work on mirror theory and recognition. Furthermore, she discusses that coral,

like glass, is outside of time (159), both alive and dead. In fairy tales, the ability to change is a pivotal part of storytelling. Whether it is a pauper becoming a princess or an animal becoming a person, change is the magic factor fairy tales uses to inspire readers. Mavor connects the ability and act of change to sleep and how it works as a dimension between two worlds that holds the power to transform and create. This focuses her chapter on the act of changing as opposed to the final product. Her exploration of middleliness, potential, and the ability to change continues by using various examples before focusing on Bernard Faucon's *Land of Boys* (1978-1996). Faucon's photos depict mannequins of young boys which sometimes include male children, which themselves seem caught between living and dead. She compares Faucon's work to fairy tales such as Snow White's coma (2014) after eating the fatal apple and to the tale of Pinocchio (1996). She reiterates the problems with reality, in comparison to the story of Pinocchio stating: "only in fairy tales can a boy live 'happily ever after'" (234). In these chapters, along with the earlier writings on innocence, Mavor is fascinated by fairy tales capturing something that is on the cusp of being tangible, but not quite there. This move to more disturbing real-life art and events harks back to the origins of fairy tales which evolved from much more gruesome and violent accounts, such as examples collected by the Brothers Grimm. Mavor is not simply connecting fiction to fact but current incarnations of fairy tales to their violent origins.

In chapter nine, Mavor moves to the image of girlhood. She begins by pointing out the media's obsession with girlhood and how actresses achieved success playing 'child-women' (237) by acting childish while remaining sensual. Mavor explores the story of Minou Drouet, a child poetry prodigy and the effect her work had on mainstream media. Drouet published her first book of poetry at eight years old, after spending much of her childhood without speaking, which itself was acclaimed by critics and public alike. Drouet was dubbed the young poetry prodigy by the media, which typecast her as a magical being, ignoring her rough upbringing which influenced the experimental and often dark poetry. Once again Mavor highlights the difficulty of reality maintaining something intangible or magical, arguing that this can only exist in the land of fiction. Mavor's argument here returns to the impossible state of being. The public expected Drouet to have the skills of a dark and critical writer while remaining an innocent child. The force of society's expectation created something that cannot exist, a fairy tale unconnected to reality – Drouet was not her public image. Mavor again smartly alludes to the origin of fairy tales and how harsh reality inspires fiction and that people are happier to live with the fiction, rather than the fact. In so doing, Mavor refuses to allow fairy tales to forget their own history.

The final two chapters in the book return to discussions on the aesthetic as Mavor explores the colours red and brown. Mavor discusses the vibrancy of the colour red in the photography of Ralph Eugen Meatyard (1959), viewing red as a powerful sensual colour and states that it can show both vitality and death. She offers examples of black and white photos stating: "we can see the red" (265). Continuing, she describes brown like "flies in amber" (276), linking it to food such as honey and caramel. The book then concludes with a serious discussion on skin colour, first using Langston Hughes *The Brownies' Book* (1920-1921), a children's magazine used to "instil black pride" (271) into young African American readers who he calls "children of the sun" (275). The book examines

Hughes journey in publishing the magazine and its ultimate failure. The story of Emmett Till – a young African American child who was brutally murdered and had his body put on public display as a symbol of the effects of racism – is also discussed in detail. Throughout, the book delves into darker material each subsequent chapter and culminates here as Mavor explores the horrors experienced due to skin colour. This is a stark culmination of her argument about the power of the aesthetic and the frailty of fiction against reality.

Investigating classic tales and real life, *Aurelia* sheds new light on old events and challenges preconceived notions of the boundaries of fairy tales. Mavor explores fictional and real events with enthusiasm and grace. The book will challenge and endear as it attempts to create a world of new possibilities and perspectives for its readers.

BIONOTE

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NEW DIRECTIONS IN 21ST CENTURY GOTHIC

EDITED BY LORNA PIATTI-FARNELL AND DONNA LEE BRIAN

Review by Alison Baker

Piatti-Farnell, Lorna and Lee Brien, Donna, eds. *New Directions in 21st Century Gothic: The Gothic Compass*. Routledge, 2015. 248 pp.

From *Routledge Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Literature* comes an interesting collection of essays. The subtitle, *The Gothic Compass*, suggests exploration, adventure and searching out aspects of the Gothic in unexpected quarters, and it delivers on this promise. The research interests of the editors, as outlined below, are in a range of areas, and multi-disciplinary approach comes through in the subjects of the chapters. The acknowledgements of this volume of essays states that the genesis was a series of conversations between the editors at the Gothic Association of New Zealand and Australia (GANZA) conference in 2013 over the state of the Gothic in post-millennial times. The contributors are multidisciplinary and transnational: literature, education studies, design, fine art, history, and internet studies are all featured, leading to a rich diversity in approaches to the topic.

The editors, Lorna Piatti-Farnell, Senior Lecturer in Communication Studies at Auckland University of Technology, and Donna Lee Brien, Professor of Creative Industries at Central Queensland University, also come to the subject from different perspectives; Piatti-Farnell from Popular Culture studies encompassing the intersections of the Gothic, food studies, cultural history, film and literature, while Lee Brien is convener in food studies and has published on creative non-fiction with a focus on life writing. Their differing backgrounds richly inform the diversity of the collection.

Although the collection does not seek to constrain or limit the authors' definition of the Gothic as a genre, Gothic tropes such as the supernatural, the uncanny, terror, power imbalances, hidden things, and liminal states are frequently employed to note the Gothic in unexpected places. Examples of this include the essay on wedding cake decoration by Carmel Cedro and Gwyneth Peaty's discussion of that obscure object of desire, the gargoyle. This latter essay was, for me, a standout in a very strong collection. Peaty's consideration of paranormal romance as worthy of scholarly attention is welcome, and she makes a fascinating link between the familiar Gothic trope of the vampire as forbidden lover, the gargoyle as supernatural protector, and post 9/11 corporeal security anxieties. As Joseph Crawford's *The Twilight of the Gothic? Vampire Fiction and the Rise of the Paranormal Romance* (2014) discusses, paranormal romance has lacked serious critical attention,

so this chapter is particularly welcome.

Donna Lee Brien's chapter on Alison Bechdel's graphic memoir *Fun House* (2006) teases out the obvious Gothic aspects (Bechdel's upbringing in a funeral home, the presence of bats in the family's living room, her father's suicide). It also considers her father's hidden sexuality: he was a closeted homosexual who may have had an affair with his psychiatrist - psychiatry and mental illness also being common tropes in the Gothic genre. Brien takes these tropes and applies them to the stoic juxtapositions of 'pioneer' women's life writing, for example Mary Walker going through her daily routine of housework, baking six loaves of bread, cooking and then giving birth to a son at nine o'clock that evening. Her presence in the sublime but also *Unheimlich* landscape, Brien argues, renders housework no more significant than childbirth, thus creating an alienating effect for readers.

Maria Cohut's chapter, "The Gothic Landscape of *Tale of Tales* Games: Unresolved Quests for Meaning," seeks to apply the Gothic sensibility to the interactive multiplayer games. The games, as Cohut describes them, are as much philosophical meditations on the beautiful and sublime, with consciously Gothic settings: both those discussed are set in forests. Since the games do not seem to have a plot, the player is exploring the landscape and attempting to interact with it. Cohut argues that the state of being inside the game creates the sensations (liminal states, claustrophobia) within the Gothic tradition.

Emily Gray's chapter, "Writing 'Lesbian, Gay-Type Lovers': *Buffy*, Postmodern Gothic and Interruptions to the Lesbian Cliché," discusses Wiccaweb, an online fan forum devoted to *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003) characters Willow and Tara, and rejects the cliché of the monstrous in portrayals of lesbian relationships. While, as Gray asserts, familiar Horror tropes such as the blonde cheerleader, the nerdy boy, and the geeky girl are frequently overturned, Tara suffers the ultimate lesbian fate in genre television or films: she is killed. Gray usefully traces the trope of the tragic lesbian from the nineteenth century sexology of Havelock Ellis through Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness* (1928), 1990s thrillers such as *Basic Instinct* (1992) to Richard Eyre's adaptation of *Notes on a Scandal* (2006). Gray argues that the common tropes of dead lesbian, and Willow's subsequent descent into rage and vengeance, are unchallenged by *Buffy* showrunners. The Internet, states Gray, including fan sites, is a liminal space in itself, and Wiccaweb's discussion forum and fan fiction, offer 'a point of interruption' to the clichéd portrayal of lesbianism. While this chapter is fascinating, it was not always clear to me how the fan fiction rewriting of Tara and Willow's relationship relates to the Gothic.

While, as stated above, the collection is richly diverse in both its subject matter and approaches to the Gothic, it lacks diversity in cultural/ethnic approaches. The Gothic discussed in the collection is largely white. It would have been interesting to have seen consideration of the Gothic paradigm from other perspectives, such as that taken by Bernice M. Murphy in *Rural Gothic* (2013) or in Mike Hill's consideration of slasher movies in Annalee Newitz and Matt Wray's *White Trash* (1997). A greater interrogation of race, class and culture in twenty-first century considerations of the Gothic would be welcome.

This collection will be valuable for researchers and students of the Gothic, particularly for interdisciplinary studies. The range of subject matter covered and the approaches to Gothic studies will provide thought-provoking critical reading for those interested in the Fantastic in all its forms, and would be a welcome addition to university libraries. It should provide a useful impetus for wider consideration of issues of class, 'race' and identity within the Gothic, and the extent to which the affect and visual vocabulary can be identified in other areas of genre literature, film, television, and gaming. It is to be hoped that future collaborations will focus on more non-Western cultural products.

BIONOTE

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THE INTERTEXTUALITY OF TERRY PRATCHETT'S DISCWORD AS A MAJOR CHALLENGE FOR THE TRANSLATOR BY ALEKSANDER RZYMAN

Review by Jim Clarke

Rzyman, Aleksander. *The Intertextuality of Terry Pratchett's Discworld as a Major Challenge for the Translator*. Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2017. 197 pp.

There are a series of fiendish challenges for translators who are faced with rendering into target languages equivalences of Pratchett's often dense, witty and allusive language. In addition are the concerns of what Lawrence Venuti called "domestication" and "foreignization," which describe respectively translation strategies which either aim to minimise the alienation of foreign-looking terms in the text, or by contrast seek to retain some of the original's 'foreignness.' This alienation component would seem, on the surface, to chime nicely with Darko Suvin's understanding of Science Fiction (SF) as a literature of estrangement, but this binary choice seems less universally applicable where the source text is fantasy rather than SF.

Comedy adds an additional complicating factor. Entire library shelves have been dedicated to dissecting what makes things funny. Connotation is definitely part of this, especially where either the connotation frustrates expectation, or where it forms a witty pun or reference for the reader. However, senses of humour are individual, and frames of reference are similarly distinctive. What is funny for readers of a book written in English becomes an immense challenge for translators charged with generating the same humour in a target language whose frames of reference are completely different.

Indeed, John Clute identified Pratchett as an author of comedies containing a particularly significant proportion of allusion and intertextuality in *Terry Pratchett: Guilty of Literature* (edited by Andrew M. Butler, Edward James, and Farah Mendlesohn, 2000). Indeed, on encountering Aleksander Rzyman's monograph on the Discworld, one hoped to encounter scholarship that at last builds on that volume, rather than the sort of pseudo-scholarly 'studies' of the science or folklore of Discworld, or miscellaneous 'companions' of the sort which similarly plague Middle Earth and Hyboria. Pace the fine people at the Guardian newspaper, but Terry Pratchett's work IS literature, and warrants the same degree of scholarly attention that other litterateurs have obtained. Rzyman's monograph on Pratchett, being a rarity, is simultaneously a disappointment for failing to build upon the excellent foundations of Butler, James, and Mendelsohn.

Rzyman's monograph, somehow still seeming brief at over 170 pages, is entitled *The*

Intertextuality of Terry Pratchett's Discworld as a Major Challenge for the Translator. This alone gives the game away. Such a clunky title is clearly derived from a thesis of some sort, and ought to, along with the many simple typographical errors contained therein, have been corrected by an editor at Cambridge Scholars Publishing. Rzyman is a lecturer in English-Polish translation at the University of Zielona Góra in Poland, and his research focuses on the difficulty of translating humour, intertextuality and wordplay in "literary and quasi-literary" texts.

Rzyman's dissertation (for that is what it is, down to the lack of an index and the lengthy introduction about research objectives) focuses on the titularly described difficulties of rendering Pratchett's dense and witty allusive prose into Polish. The sections (67 in total) identified for discussion come from sixteen of the first twenty Discworld novels, and seem to have been chosen primarily for their referencing of other literary texts. What follows are lengthy, and somewhat repetitive, chapters examining firstly the range of references in these chosen excerpts in English, and then an exploration of how several of Pratchett's Polish translators have addressed the translation of these references.

Some of these are, of course, disputable. Is Pratchett's use of the term "eldritch" really a reference to H.P. Lovecraft on each and every occasion? Similarly, Rzyman's research methods are sometimes questionable, whatever the results. A reliance on web searches leads inevitably to a dead end where he discusses how the "Star Wars Fanon" web page is of little help to him as a reader. Nor, indeed, to us as his readers.

By contrast, where Rzyman is rigorous, such as in his careful parsing of what seems to be every single possible Shakespearean reference in *Wyrd Sisters* (1988), his prose becomes an attenuated example of stripping a joke of its humour by over explaining it. As one approaches the end of this by turns exhausting and exasperating analysis, it is evident that there is little attempt to look beyond the self-generated confines of the study. There is no attempt to extrapolate from these translations to general problems relating to translating intertextuality from English into Polish, for example, or to discuss intertextuality or humour as issues for translation in general. When one considers Robert Stiller's three translations of *A Clockwork Orange* (Anthony Burgess, 1962) into Polish, each entirely different from one another, there seems to be grounds to expand the remit ever so slightly beyond the doctoral framework here, which is a challenge sadly left untouched.

Rzyman concludes his monograph by acknowledging that his "method may seem to border on unnecessary meticulousness or showy exaggeration at times," and this is indeed the case. But more concerning than this, or the irritating typos, or the lack of an index, or even the frustratingly narrow remit of the study, is the failure to contribute anything significant to two debates - Pratchett's legacy as literature on the one hand, and the various challenges of translating fantasy literature on the other. As a doctoral study this is almost too neat. As an academic testimony to Pratchett's work, or reception, or even the difficulties of its translation, it is sorely lacking. Between thesis and monograph, something got lost in translation.

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BIONOTE

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POST-MILLENNIAL GOTHIC: COMEDY, ROMANCE AND THE RISE OF HAPPY GOTHIC

BY CATHERINE SPOONER

Review by Rachel Mizsei Ward

Spooner, Catherine. *Post-Millennial Gothic: Comedy, Romance and the Rise of Happy Gothic*. Bloomsbury, 2017. 232 pp.

Having heard Catherine Spooner speak at conferences a few years ago, I was delighted to finally get to read a published version of her research. This book examines examples of twenty-first century Gothic, with a particular emphasis on the popular. It charts the development of a new style of Gothic which Spooner terms as 'happy Gothic.' Happy Gothic emphasises joy and celebration rather than the gloomy and depressing. The examples used (including high-street fashion, make-over shows, situation comedies, Young Adult (YA) fiction and tourism) interrogate the fringes of the Gothic cannon. This kind of popular Gothic is frequently considered debased and "is either tactfully ignored by critics or dismissed as lacking integrity" (4). This debased form of Gothic is frequently associated with women's culture, with the key post-millennial example of this being *Twilight* (2005). Criticism frequently identifies Gothic as an expression of collective anxiety and trauma which means that examples that do not fit this narrative (such as those covered in this book) are ignored. The book makes clear that there is an important difference between Gothic and the Goth subculture, however both frequently build upon each other.

The first chapter considers lifestyle Gothic, examining examples of television programmes such as the home makeover show *Grand Designs* (1999-present) and fantasy cooking show *Heston's Feasts* (2009-2010). As Spooner notes, "for some readers of Gothic fiction, it is not enough merely to consume Gothic narrative on the page (or latterly, the screen): they wish to live Gothically, to extend their reading or viewing experience to everyday life" (29). In these programmes Gothic is associated with bad taste and the artificial. However, this artificial aspect is an important part of the Gothic, and Spooner demonstrates how the bricolage of different forms can be seen even in its earliest examples. The Gothic home in *Grand Designs*, which is criticised by the programme presenter for its artificiality and bad taste, is contrasted with Walpole's mansion Strawberry Hill, which employed many similar interior design motifs.

The director Tim Burton has become "virtually synonymous with Gothic" (50) and is the focus of the second chapter. Spooner argues that when Burton's films are looked at more closely, they are not as Gothic as they first appear. Few of his films are straight Gothic, with many hybridising with other genres. Much of what makes Burton's films appear Gothic is related to their music, costume,

special effects and production design. Part of this is due to a significant cross-over in personnel between his films, which helps to create a consistent look. This distinctive appearance has become a lucrative brand for Burton, and helps to critically elevate him to the rank of an auteur rather than a journeyman director. A secondary aspect is how Burton is aligned in the media with the Goth sub-cultural identity invited through his choice of clothes and hairstyle.

Fashion is an important part of the Goth sub-culture. Chapter Three considers how Goth and Gothic are used by retailers and magazines as a way to describe and sell clothes. Spooner notes that "clothes are often Gothicised by context: by what happens when they are worn" (68). This means that, for example, a mainstream black top can become Goth when it is assembled in a bricolage of relevant items. This chapter also discusses Sophie Lancaster, a young Goth who was murdered for her sub-cultural appearance. As an example of the Goth scene, she did not conform to the traditional miserable stereotype, instead being creative and cheerful, or as the sub-culture describes it, 'Perky Goth.' In the Goth subculture "Perky Goth began as a joke, but is fast becoming a dominant paradigm" (77).

Chapter Four looks at the post-millennial vampire, using examples such as *Twilight* series (2005-2008), and *True Blood* (2008-2014). The *Twilight* vampires are, as well as being sparkly, aspirational. They are supernaturally polite, and act "as representative of order rather than chaos" (87). However, these vampires have one difference to many other millennial examples, which is that of their preppy clothes. Spooner details how Goth style has become synonymous with vampire style, with characters costumed as Goths. An important mode of happy Gothic is 'the whimsical macabre,' as coined by Spooner and is the focus of Chapter Five. She explains that "[t]he whimsical macabre reconfigures the gruesome and grotesque as playful, quirky and even cute, and often draws upon imagery associated with childhood" (99). These Goth children are usually female, with their origins in literature by authors such as the Brontës. The Goth girl is "attractive, quirky, intelligent and sensitive but troubled" (99). Within the whimsical macabre, the Goth girl is not forced to grow up and give up her Goth style, unlike many of the examples of adult female Goths in popular culture. Even toys have incorporated the whimsical macabre, with an important example being the Monster High dolls. These dolls highlight the monstrous/cute feminine body through their combination of fashion stylings and traditional monsters. The chapter also considers the Gothic Lolita style, which originated in Japan but has become global. This subculture "is built around, and fetishizes, the notion of girls as consumers" (114). The deliberate childish appearance of this style in Japan is a way of "refusing adult sexuality" and "a kind of passive aggressive rebellion against patriarchal culture" (113). By looking like children, it gives the adherents a way of gaining power over societal norms.

Historically, "vampires and comedy were often linked but the vampires were not expected to be funny themselves" (128). The sixth chapter considers many examples of vampires and humour. Nineteenth century examples of stage vampires frequently exhibited a dandy wit and broke the fourth wall. This style of performative vampire has continued into the present, with the chapter using the example *What We Do in the Shadows* (2014). This mockumentary about house sharing vampires features many of these motifs (particularly that of breaking the fourth wall) and is "an ongoing

negotiation between extravagance and mundanity" (139).

Chapter Seven examines makeovers, masculinity, and the Goth sub-culture. For women, "Goth is constructed as a lifestyle choice. [...] For men, Goth is constructed as something riskier, that flouts social expectations" (145-146). Spooner argues that when men use Goth modes of dress in stand-up and sit-com "they are transformed from an object of fear to an object of laughter" (146). In sitcoms Goths are often male, with the chapter featuring examples from *The Big Bang Theory* (2007-present), *The IT Crowd* (2006-2010), and *The Mighty Boosh* (2004-2007). Noel Fielding is key to the British examples, presenting a kind of Goth dandyism which is concerned with "cultivating and expressing the interior through the exterior" (161). The chapter also looks at makeover shows such as *Snog, Marry, Avoid* (2008-2013), which make-over (usually female) participants into more 'acceptable' forms of beauty. *Snog, Marry, Avoid* is a contemporary freak show, with participants who are at the extremes of sub-cultural fashion. This is usually regarded as 'WAG' fashion but Goths can also take part, and they are made-under into what is described as "natural" beauties. This erasure of personal style sounds negative, but the programme can be celebratory, as it allows Goths a platform to display their sub-cultural style on television and answer back to mainstream culture. However, "self-transformation in contemporary Western culture is the special province of women" (154), which means that male Goths usually appear in comedy.

Whitby is the focus of Chapter Eight, as a longstanding site of Gothic dark tourism. Dark tourism is "the tourist consumption of sites associated with death and suffering" (166). From the Victorian period the town has contained both genteel and vulgar attractions. The two main examples considered in the chapter are Whitby Abbey and The Dracula Experience. The town is also the home of Whitby Goth weekend, a long running festival devoted to the Goth sub-culture. This festival is also central to the final example, Paul Magrs series of books about Brenda and Effie. These books celebrate Whitby as a site of Gothic-carnavalesque, while the characters "offer a template for a subcultural community united in difference in which the paramount values are playfulness, tolerance and fun" (181).

Spooner concludes that Goth has become interchangeable with Gothic, with the sub-culture informing the appearance of post-millennial Gothic texts:

Goth now affects the *production* of Gothic texts, many of which are influenced by its aesthetic or address it as an audience. The predominantly *visual* nature of Goth and its spectacular style, alongside its emphasis on Gothic as a lifestyle, have influenced a new mode of Gothic in which visual aesthetics are prioritized over narrative. (184-185, original emphasis)

This book expands our understanding of the Gothic and uses lots of interesting contemporary examples. I think this book would be of interest to not just Gothic scholars, but also those interested in post-millennial and material culture.

BIONOTE

Based in England, **Rachel Mizsei Ward** is an Eisner Award nominated scholar for her edited collection, *Superheroes on World Screens*. She has published in *Comparative American Studies*, *The Journal of Popular Television* and the *Irish Journal of Gothic and Horror Studies*. Her latest project is on the discourse surrounding adult colouring books.

APOCALYPTIC FICTION BY ANDREW TATE

Review by Laurie Ringer

Tate, Andrew. *Apocalyptic Fiction*. Bloomsbury, 2017. 21st Century Genre Fiction. 192 pp.

What is it that attracts authors and readers to the end of the world? Why do narratives of “our wrecked present” (129) sell, and what does commoditizing destruction for ethical, intellectual, religious, aesthetic, financial, or entertainment purposes say about the producers and consumers of apocalyptic fictions? Andrew Tate creatively implicates readers in the problems of *apocalypses*, modes of reading and thinking that uncover the hidden ramblings and turnings of narratives unravelling toward uncertain futures. Like the survivors in the primary novels, readers might find a sliver of hope “if we do not capitulate to the idea that the future has already been written” (137).

Like the yet unwritten future, Tate’s exploration resists closure. Key to appreciating Tate’s survey is falling into step with his creatively peripatetic writing style. His survey of dystopic and apocalyptic fiction is critical but non-telos driven; the style emulates the open-ended journeys in the texts that he analyses.

Textually, Tate’s approach moves like his characterisation of Emily St. John Mandel’s *Station Eleven* (2014): “an act of reading; a departure, on foot; and the imagined possibility of other forms of mobility” (137). As Tate’s analysis moves from author to author and from fiction to film, his style likewise finds new mobilities: walking and care-giving in Cormac McCarthy’s *The Road* (2006) and Jim Crace’s *The Pesthouse* (2007); annotation and curation in *Station Eleven*; exegesis and eschatology in Tom Perotta’s *The Leftovers* (novel, 2011, adapted to HBO series, 2014) and Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins’s *Left Behind* (1995-2007); narration and creation in Margaret Atwood’s *MaddAddam* trilogy (2003-2013); and speculation and consumption in Suzanne Collins’s *The Hunger Games* (2008-2010), James Dashner’s *The Maze Runner* (2009-2016), and Veronica Roth’s *Divergent* series (2011-2013).

Tate’s three-step approach - reading, departure, and imagined possibility - renders each chapter less a space with clear boundaries and more an episodic journey through which readers engage with the force, scale, and sense of unspeakable destruction, similar to the shifting narrative style of AMC’s *The Walking Dead* (2010-present). Tate’s chapters progress in the ways that survivors fall into company and part ways. Walking through a desolated world over which there is no transcendent or unitary point of view, their paths changing as their stories and partnerships require, each story and partnership enriching and complicating the landscape. This analogy might help to explain Tate’s primary text selection, moving the reading experience away from personal (dis)taste to the practical and creative potential of partnerships that happen along the way.

Like the landscapes in Tate's primary texts, the terrain of *Apocalyptic Fiction* is treacherous and ultimately unknowable. Floods, epidemics, spectacles, threaten to overtake the characters, texts, and readers. One of the problems of living with/reading through the end of the world is the complex problem of feeling: "Is the universe simply indifferent to the human desire for order and mercy?" (21).

Tate shifts the question away from feelings on the deference/indifference of the universe to human desires toward the rich possibilities for human (re)storying in the ruins: "The end of the world is, oddly, a rich beginning for narrative" (22). Tate's five body chapters can be read as three body problems. In Newtonian physics, two bodies will behave in predictable ways; a third body adds degrees of unpredictability, creativity, and freedom. Tate's chapters collide dominant cultural doxies with genre fiction and scholarly context. Rather than creating an artificially unified whole about the apocalypse, each chapter opens narrow windows of "imagined possibility" (137) in a present haunted by the inaccessible past and the darkening future.

The three-body collisions of each chapter update and embody the long-contested and problematic issues of transcendent revelation, human witness, and narrative authority, whether in religious, journalistic, academic, juridical, or political modes.

In Chapter two "'God rains over everything': Two floods'" (23-41), transcendent revelations derive from two related religious traditions: the *Tanakh* and the bible. Two novels entitled *The Flood*, one by David Maine (2005), the other by Maggie Gee (2005) offer competing human witnesses to the catastrophic floods whose genre fiction narrative authority is undermined and questioned by ancient texts and scholarly study (27). Alongside the cultural and intellectual flood traditions, Tate notes contemporary sceptics who discount the authority of religious texts as well as devotees who read apocalyptic fiction and current events through their sacred textual authorities. The problem of continuance from a divinely induced cataclysm is the problem of textually based notions of (in) justice.

Chapter three "'Sudden departure': Rapture writing" (43-60) may be the most surprising. LaHaye and Jenkins's *Left Behind* (1995-2007) and Perotta's *The Leftovers* (2012) depict the fall-out of the Rapture which suddenly spirits pre-selected believers into heaven: "Millions of people suddenly disappear into thin air, leaving only their clothes – and non-believers – behind" (46). Tate's reading of this primarily American interpretation of a New Testament text (45-46), highlights competing authorities of personal experience and official statements: "phenomena that exceed rational explanation are not dismissed or exposed as a hoax, but neither are they represented as signs to be followed into blind obedience." This "different kind of quiet apocalypse" (60) is about the excruciating problem of living in the always changing times after the end.

Chapter four "'In the beginning, there was chaos': Atwood, apocalypse, art" (61-81) focuses on the *MaddAddam* trilogy, though primary attention is given to Crake and Jimmy (later Snowman-Jimmy) who are most fully discussed in *Oryx and Crake* (2003). Peripheral figures in *The*

Year of the Flood (TYOTF 2010) and *MaddAddam* (MA 2013), scientist-philosopher-godlike Crake both engineers and destroys humanoid life, while his friend Jimmy becomes a sort of accidental Jesus, concocting a ramshackle cosmology/religion/aesthetics as he goes along. Jimmy's is one of the pre-flood religious groups like the Pure-Heart Brethren Sufis, Ancients of Days, Hare Krishnas, Lion Isaihists, Wolf Isaiahists, God's Gardeners (TYOTF 39), the Church of PetrOleum, and the Petrobaptists (MA 111). These human witnesses further destabilise narrative authority with a creative ambivalence that Tate links to Atwood's strict agnosticism that neither confirms nor denies "spiritual possibility," allowing for "the persistent idea of holiness" (81) after the desolation of the "Waterless Flood" (TYOTF 89).

Chapter five "Empty Roads: Walking after catastrophe" (83-101) explores McCarthy's *The Road* and Crace's *The Pesthouse*. With McCarthy and Crace, transcendent notions of philosophical walking, after Henry David Thoreau come to naught (84-87). Survivors/witnesses of the apocalypse have lost the privilege of nonconformist sauntering (85), walking instead to stay alive. To the unnamed wife in *The Road*, walking is not really living: "We're the walking dead in a horror film" (qtd. In Tate 91). The father, however, sees his journey as a type of pilgrimage through which "the fire" or "a pursuit of goodness" (94) transfers from father to son and beyond. Tate interprets walking in *The Pesthouse* as the rebellious pursuit of personal freedom, free from socially imposed identities and open to individual self-narration.

Chapter six "Keep watching: Spectacle, rebellion and apocalyptic rites of passage" (103-128) wanders between adult and young adult (YA) fiction in *The Hunger Games*, *Divergent*, and *The Maze Runner* series. To critics who might suggest that it is problematic to wander between adult apocalyptic fiction and YA dystopic narratives, it is worth considering the ways that the apocalypse is a constant coming of age for survivors whose tenuous existences are always in danger of further collapse (127-128). More crucially, Tate notes the perversions inherent in the spectacles of contest that denature the children/teens who compete for the consumption of spectating audiences (124). Problematically, the commoditisation and consumption of dystopic violence may both instil conformity and engender activism in the spectating audiences.

Although there is much to commend in Tate's writing style and chapter structure, a caveat on diversity and inclusivity is necessary. Tate briefly acknowledges the lack of diversity in *The Hunger Games* (121, 125-126), though more could be done with inclusion. For example, the Atwood analysis centres almost exclusively on two men, Jimmy (Snowman-Jimmy) and his friend/rival Crake. It is possible that Tate was drawing on the anti-/Christ-type symbolism of Snowman-Jimmy, but the second novel is co-narrated by two women, Ren and Toby. A glancing reference to Ren as a former girlfriend of Jimmy's (76), rather than a woman with a story to tell, misses out on the un/holy possibilities of women priests and warriors (TYOTF 416-420). In the third trilogy novel, Toby not only takes over Snowman-Jimmy's role, she becomes both gospeller and prelate for the Crakers's budding spirituality (MA 201-204). In the North American context, there is also the polytemporal problem of European First Contact with First Nations/Native American people who have been living a colonial apocalypse for some five hundred years.

This caveat notwithstanding, Tate's survey is a useful starting point for scholars and students. Gaps in diversity and inclusivity can be supplemented through additional readings and in-class discussions. The Annotated Secondary Bibliography (159-171) is a convenient orientation to the field since 2000, and Tate's ambulations through blasted landscapes would be a useful addition to bibliographies and reading lists seeking something more than destruction in apocalyptic fiction: "The end of the world is, oddly, a rich beginning for narrative" (22).

BIONOTE

Because life is less like fiction than would be ideal, **Laurie Ringer** (based in Canada) teaches and researches *Fantastika*-related texts whenever possible. Forthcoming publications include "Turning Two into Three: Decolonizing the Gothic" in *A Feel for the Text* (ed. Ahern) and "Accidents of Occidentalism" in *The Science Fiction Western: Representation of Female Characters* (ed. Marotta).

GENRE FICTION OF NEW INDIA: POST-MILLENNIAL RECEPTIONS OF 'WEIRD' NARRATIVES BY E. DAWSON VARUGHESE

Review by Kerry Dodd

Varughese, E. Dawson. *Genre Fiction of New India: Post-Millennial Receptions of 'Weird' Narratives*. Routledge, 2017. 168 pp.

Fantastical fiction is a rich wellspring of creative output, encompassing texts which themselves progressively challenge the restrictiveness of genre, form, and style. By crossing realistic and conceptual elements, such as the interrogation of scientific logic or historical narratives, this literature can elucidate the limits between the physical and metaphysical. E. Dawson Varughese's *Genre Fiction of New India: Post-Millennial Receptions of 'Weird' Narratives* seeks to embrace this multiplicity by analysing the genre of "bharati fantasy,"¹ a term which the author formulates to explore Indian Fantasy Fiction within both a local and global context. Part of Routledge's *Studies in Contemporary Literature* series, Varughese's book provides a rich analysis of recent Indian fantastical fiction, offering detailed readings of case-study texts alongside author interviews to explore the post-2000 publication of mythology-inspired fiction. By reading the coined genre "bharati fantasy" alongside Weird Fiction, the author draws attention to the formation and thus contemporary significance of such umbrella terms, marking them as the forefront of cultural media studies alongside interrogating how scholars, readers, and critics engage with the Fantasy genre.

Genre studies often incorporate niche subsections, requiring a specific awareness on the part of a reader towards the denominational diversity within fantastical fiction and the nuances of each permutation. Varughese in *Genre Fiction of New India* is evidently aware of this complexity, as the first two chapters engage at length with the pragmatic social and cultural factors surrounding Indian mythological fiction within a contemporary context. Offering an insightful discussion of translation and a background for readers who are unfamiliar with Hindu mythology, the author's writing style make this an accessible read throughout. The first chapter offers a clear and succinct methodology which provides a brief, but comprehensive, introduction to post-millennial publication within India and specifically the cultural reception of Fantasy texts. The discussion of economic, political and contextual factors presents a robust and informative prelude to the rest of the critical study, highlighting the differentiation between global popular examples, such as Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* (1997), alongside more locally situated authors. Demonstrating the key influence of Hindu texts such as the *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*, Varughese highlights how these crucial contextual factors shape the reading and reception of what she terms bharati fantasy due to its distinct differentiation from traditional Western modes.

The synergy between Hindu mythology and Indian Fantasy Fiction is one which Varughese deftly outlines, offering extensive discussion on concepts such as *itihasa* (which broadly refers to true, factual events) and how their comprehension differs from orthodox Western philosophical thought. Mythology is a particularly central concept engaged with throughout the study, particularly as the author emphasises how Hindu myth is often treated as fact (*ithihasa*) and, as such, to an Indian audience differs from Western perceptions of historical truth. Establishing *bharati* fantasy as a subgenre, the author offers a focused analysis of this niche, leaving room for a more self-reflexive approach towards the process of genre demarcation. Although Varughese establishes an important distinction between reception of and interaction with mythology, her argument at times feels dissociated from wider implications and examples. Particularly, re-imaginings and modernisations of myth are currently intensely popular as demonstrated by both the *American Gods* novel and its TV adaptation, the series *Once Upon a Time*, or the global commercial and critical success of the Japanese visual novel *Fate/Stay Night* and its multitude of adaptations. Although this study does acknowledge the important contrast between readers who are familiar with the source material and those who are not, any further discussion of mythological fiction or umbrella terms – such as speculative, slipstream or indeed *Fantastika* – are sadly overlooked.

Throughout the book and particularly in the second chapter, Varughese reads *bharati* fantasy alongside studies of the Weird, a strand of the fantastic which itself has received increased attention in both fictional and critical fields since the millennium. The author is particularly aware of Western influences upon genre studies, noting that: “In creating a new genre term for a body of fiction, the process is significantly (not completely) de-centralised from Western academic discourse and classification” (13). Although Varughese presents a pertinent commentary upon the influence of the Western academy upon genre studies, this reading borders on being too superficial. Indeed, the author’s later argument that Weird Fiction is part of the Western canon seems to particularly overlook its fringe status; although within recent scholarship genre fiction is more common, it is still outside the mainstream of literary thought. The Weird itself is frequently considered by both critics and readers to be nebulous and slippery, and its disposition towards being more of a mode than a genre could be a particularly insightful parallel to this investigation into Indian mythological fiction. However, the author does demonstrate the importance of mediating postcolonial literature alongside *bharati* fantasy in order to understand the complexities and variation within Indian fiction. This approach highlights the necessity of critical thought incorporating a keen awareness of wider genre politics and their prospective applicability.

Varughese engages with the Weird by first tracing its linguistic roots to the “wyrð” and its personification through *Urd*, one of the Norse mythological sisters of fate. Focusing on the emphasis upon divinity and the numinous, the author argues not for *bharati* fantasy to be read as part of the Weird but “rather its reception in a Western context may be akin to that of (New) Weird fiction” (25). To demonstrate this connection, Varughese outlines what she considers to be the principal qualities of the Weird, primarily drawing on the work of H. P. Lovecraft, China Miéville, S. T. Joshi, and Jeff VanderMeer to outline a list of the field’s attributes. Certainly, what this process does demonstrate is the applicability of the Weird to deconstruct the delineation of genre, particularly the benefits

of reading outside constricting internal and circular debates. This investigation however lacks a sufficiently nuanced approach; Varughese's definition seemingly either avoids or is intentionally divorced from the substantial body of discourse surrounding the fraught definition of Weird Fiction. As such, by neglecting to indicate an awareness of these debates, Varughese's study arguably falls into the trap of spending too long marking out genre territories without ever fully exploring the prospective application or function of this process. Where the second chapter does engage more closely with textual material, a vibrant analysis incorporating a rich selection of texts is presented. However, this section is predominantly restricted by its loose engagement with the Weird, particularly evident as this connection becomes somewhat latent throughout the second half of the book.

The third and fourth chapters are structured around case-studies of chosen bharati fantasy texts, complemented by interviews with the discussed authors. The first engages with classic approaches that celebrate ancient India whereas the later focuses on the modernisation of mythology. Discussing the novels of Amish Tripathi, Shatrujeet Nath, Samhita Arni, and Amish Tripathi, the author draws on the complexities outlined in her previous methodological framework to deftly engage with Hindu conceptualisations of history, myth, and divinity. Offering a survey of key texts, Varughese highlights how the re-imagining of these classical figures demonstrates genre's fiction functionality is speaking to, or more poignantly challenging, contemporary issues and anxieties. The interviews, meanwhile, provide a strong accompaniment to the textual analysis. Indeed, Varughese's approach is to derive each of the interview questions from the preceding topics. The ensuing parallels offer an insightful view into the cultural heart of bharati fantasy and how the authors' conscious engagement with Hindu mythology offers an engaging interpretation. Samhita Arni notes, "I am fascinated by the way that such narratives are used politically, and how conflict and politics, in turn, shape the best-known version of these narratives" (91). Demonstrating the applicability and potential for genre studies to speak to wider contemporary social issues, these interviews illustrate the cultural relevance and significance of this literature. Pertinently, none of the authors embrace genre labels and indeed are quite resistant to their limiting demarcation, a concern which Weird writers also frequently discuss. However, none of the interviewed authors are questioned about their awareness or thoughts regarding the Weird and as such refrains from proposing a more engaged interaction between the two fields.

The last chapter mirrors the previous format but engages instead with contemporary envisionings of Hindu mythology. Within modernity, technology is a dimension that potentially conflicts with the mythological or fantastical nature of the outlined theologies. Yet Varughese highlights that for Hinduism, science and faith are in fact not straightforward opposites of each other. Empirical research, as such, becomes a method not to undermine miracles, but rather demonstrate how contemporary scientific developments can equally be located within theological textual examples, as the conceptualisations between the two begins to blur. Focusing on the post-millennial settings of these novels, the author explores how aspects of mythology are negotiated and infused with contemporary culture, specifically how the modernisation emphasises accessibility to a global audience. Discussing the work of Ashwin Sanhi, Pervin Saket, C. C. Doyle, and N. P. Choudhury, the accompanying interviews accentuate and compliment the third chapter's responses.

Genre Fiction of New India sets out to identify the post-millennial reception of “New India” narratives, celebrating their cultural significance and their important place within the diversity of Fantastika. Varughese concludes with a brief overview of the discussions of the field thus far and seeks to chart the ‘weirdness’ of each of the texts. Throughout the book, Varughese’s attention to vibrant contemporary re-interpretations of Hindu myth demonstrates the strength of Indian fantastical fiction. Although this critical inquiry does offer a comprehensive study of the aforementioned authors, its engagement with Weird Fiction frequently feels superficial and indeed too restricted by Varughese’s uncritical acceptance of genre boundaries. Throughout my reading, I repeatedly felt that a much deeper, more interrogative and nuanced investigation could have been produced by omitting the Weird and focusing solely on the manifestly rich selection of Indian Fantasy. Given that other global mythological fiction and Epic Fantasy were overlooked, the validity and purpose of such a genre-bound inquiry comes into question. Varughese’s study confidently outlines the importance of appreciating the nuances of Indian Fantasy – particularly its mythologically inspired fiction – and deftly explores how its contemporary surge in popularity may speak to wider concerns. This approach is one which raises a number of insightful perspectives, which itself could be pushed even further by stepping outside the demarcation of genre boundaries and assessing the contemporary cultural application of these landmark texts.

NOTES

1. Editor’s note: in general, we would capitalise a cultural term such as “Bharati,” but for the purposes of this review we have chosen to follow Varughese’s capitalisation practice.

BIONOTE

Kerry Dodd is a PhD researcher at Lancaster University, UK. His thesis, entitled “The Archaeological Weird: Exhuming the Inhuman,” examines the intersection between archaeology and Weird fiction. Exploring the connection between history, space and objects, his thesis focuses on Weird fiction, from the pulp magazine *Weird Tales* to the contemporary ‘New’ Weird, to assess the continual incorporation of archaeology as a method to challenge perceptions of historical and empirical delineations. Kerry also works more widely in the fields of: Science Fiction (particularly Cosmic Horror and Cyberpunk), the Gothic and digital culture.

CONFERENCE REPORTS

GOTHIC FEMINISM CONFERENCE, MAY 24-26, 2017, UK

Conference Report by Rhianon Jones with additional
comments provided by Chloé Germaine Buckley

Women-in-Peril or Final Girls? Representing Women in Gothic and Horror Cinema Conference
University of Kent, UK, 24-26 May 2017

Women in Peril or Final Girls? was the second conference hosted at the University of Kent by the *Gothic Feminism* research project. The intention of the research group is to question the "representation, interpretation and feminist enquiry in relation to the Gothic heroine through film history" (*Gothic Feminism: The Representation of the Gothic Heroine in Cinema*). This, their second conference, focused on the relationship between contemporary Gothic and Horror cinema, and their portrayal of women. It asked whether, twenty-five to thirty years after their release, Mary Ann Doane's *The Desire to Desire* (1987) and Carol Clover's *Men, Women and Chain Saws* (1992), are still relevant in today's climate.

The conference was spread over three days on the beautiful campus of the University of Kent, and attracted a diverse community of scholars from across the UK, Europe, and the United States. The schedule was such that it allowed everyone to attend all the panels, and a particular strength was the intimate setting that allowed plenty of time for people to discuss the day's panels and debates outside the conference rooms. As you can imagine, Doane and Clover loomed large over the proceedings, as did debates concerning the current relationship between Gothic and Horror cinema, their similarities and differences, and their definition. The conference enabled a lively and wide-ranging debate into gender representations and feminism in genre cinema, and presented a broad picture of the concerns and issues dominating it.

The first day opened with the keynote, entitled "What Final Girls Did Next: Horror Heroines in the Age of Postfeminism" from Dr. Xavier Aldana Reyes (Manchester Metropolitan University, UK). Aldana Reyes's paper perfectly set the tone for the conference, opening up and highlighting several important areas for debate in the current political and social climates. He began by questioning what feminism looks like at this current time in a postfeminist environment. Drawing on debates raging, particularly on social media, on feminism and anti-feminism, he asked if the terms 'feminism' and 'postfeminism' were still relevant, and wondered if the term '*post-feminisms*' was more apt. He noted how formulations of gender are relevant today in an unprecedented way, with the growing awareness of trans and other identities, and we must ask what this means for our filmic heroines. The question of reception and spectatorship also enters the scene here. Aldana Reyes highlighted that

his status as a white, cisgendered male naturally colours his engagement with texts, and we too must be aware of this in our studies. Finally, he suggested that debates revolving around whether Horror and Gothic genres were misogynistic or lent power to women were too reductive. He argued that these films should be thought of as 'empowering tools' that allow the study of gender representation – a fact that these very cinemas seem aware of themselves.

Following Aldana Reyes's keynote, the first panel of the day focused on Del Toro's *Crimson Peak* (2015) with Marine Galine (University of Reims-Champagne-Ardenne, France) providing a Kristevan reading of the two Gothic heroines that asked how their agency disturbed psychoanalytic paradigms. Matt Denny (University of Warwick, UK) and Frances Kamm (University of Kent, UK) both discussed how the film disrupted the boundaries between Horror and Gothic, blurring and merging the two in a way that defies easy definition. Throughout the day there was a range of discussions on a diverse variety of texts that covered the full gamut of Gothic-Horror cinema. Carolyn King (Independent Scholar, UK) looked at the role of the romanticised figure of the gypsy in early Gainsborough and Hammer Horror films. At the other end of the scale, Rebecca Jones (De Montford University, UK) evoked the AI character Ava in the Science Fiction-Gothic *Ex Machina* (2014) to discuss how she complicated notions of female agency by being both the woman-in-peril and the final girl.

A welcome change at the end of the day was the final panel on age. In genres that are too often dominated by young, attractive women and themes of sexual agency, the panel highlighted how imperative it is to consider the role that age plays in female representation and repression. Catherine Lester's (University of Warwick, UK) paper on the use of the slasher's aesthetics in the film adaptation of *Coraline* (2009) emphasised that the formal elements of the genre, so often associated with perpetuating misogyny and violence, can be utilised to produce an empowering narrative focusing on a female child protagonist. At the other end of the age spectrum was James Kloda's (Independent Scholar, UK) analysis of the 'psycho-biddy' films in relation to Robert Altman's *That Cold Day in The Park* (1969). Kloda stressed how Altman unravelled the genre through the casting of a young woman in the role of the 'biddy,' whilst the male gaze is untangled through her objectification of the young male body. Thus, Altman's film has elements of sixties countercultural subversion.

The second day continued with the same variety of texts and interests that had dominated the first. A prominent paper was Chloé Germaine Buckley's (Manchester Metropolitan University, UK) examination of interpretations of the witch in cinema. Germaine Buckley asked if witches are feminist heroines or monsters arising from patriarchal fear. In a sentiment that echoed Aldana Reyes's urgings that theorists avoid essentialist conclusions, Germaine Buckley argued that the witch remains as an ambiguous figure and we must resist the urge to label her as only empowering or misogynistic. It was suggested that, viewed in relation to the current backlash against feminism, archetypes like the witch can still be used for purposes of vilification and suppression. Films such as Robert Egger's *The Witch* (2015) call attention to this ambiguity, thus highlighting the need to avoid simple definitions such as 'misogynistic' or 'empowered.'

Paul Mazey's (University of Bristol, UK) paper looked at the use of music in *Daughter of Darkness* (1948) to emphasise the moral conflict of a female villainess-protagonist, and highlighted the essential point that we must keep in mind all aspects of film production when analysing cinema. Music is often too overlooked in film analysis in favour of plot, costuming, set design and direction, etc. Nevertheless, Jennifer Richards (Manchester Metropolitan University, UK) delivered a compelling reading of the use of clothing and fashion in *The Neon Demon* (2016) in relation to contemporary treatments of abjection.

The afternoon widened the debate beyond British/American borders with a panel on International Gothic and Horror that took us to, variously, Italy, Romania, France, and Korea. Maria Ginakaniki (Independent Scholar) revisited Dario Argento's *Suspiria* (1977) and *Opera* (1987) in relation to femininity and the monstrous mother. Oana-Maria Mazilu (University of Kent, UK) looked at the Romanian film *Miss Christina* (2013), noting the lack of Romanian Gothic film productions and their relative under-representation in discourse, despite the country's importance to the Gothic genre. Maddison McGillvray (York University, Canada) looked at the use of 'women-in-peril' and *The Final Girls* (2015), and the merging of Gothic and Horror conventions in New French Extremity cinema. Finally, Robyn Ollet (Teeside University, UK) ended the day with a reading of Chan-Wook Park's *The Handmaiden* (2016), and its use of queer in developing and extending tropes of paranoia to ones that are ultimately reparative, rather than monstrous, to present queer subjectivity as a means of escape.

The final day opened with a look at Postgender. Katerina Flint-Nicol (University of Kent, UK) provided an alternative reading of 'the abject' with her focus on George Bataille, and the deconstruction of the female form in New French Cinema. For some, the stand out paper was Dawn Keetley's (Lehigh University, USA) 'The Final Girl of Twenty-First Century Eco Gothic Cinema,' which brought insights of eco-criticism to bear on cinematic Gothic Horror. The second half of the final day was a reminder that the Gothic and Horror can lurk anywhere beyond our cinema screens. There was a range of papers on TV and independent films, with a critical reading of TB adaptations of Daphne du Maurier by MMU's Holly Hirst, and papers on *Penny Dreadful* (2014-2016) and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003). Meanwhile, the final panel of the conference, entitled 'Gothic and Horror in Unexpected Places,' reminded us just how Gothic and/or Horror really can appear anywhere. Andra Ivanescue (Brunel and Anglia Ruskin University, UK) interrogated how their appearance and production in video games have affected Gothic tropes. Lawrence Jackson (University of Kent, UK) examined Alice Lowe's exploration of the Gothic in the seemingly mundane; rambling and caravanning, and the feminine; pregnancy. He looked at the way that, for women, she presents Gothic-Horror as a means of moving from repression to self-actualisation and freedom. With papers on unexpected texts like *Carry on Screaming* (1966), the last day of the conference really spoke to the diversity of research interests under the banner of Gothic Feminism.

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BIONOTE

Rhianon Jones is an Associate Lecturer of Literature at Lancaster University, UK. Rhianon is currently finishing her PhD thesis on the fin-de-siècle grotesque in popular music. Her research interests include the gothic and the grotesque in film and literature.

WORLD DRACULA DAY SYMPOSIUM, MAY 25-26, 2017, USA

Conference Report by Dax Stokes

World Dracula Day Symposium 2017

North Central Texas College, Flower Mound, Texas, USA, 25-26 May 2017

On the evening of Thursday 25th May 2017, Dracula scholars and enthusiasts from around the United States converged on the campus of North Central Texas College (NCTC) in Flower Mound, Texas, for the "World Dracula Day Symposium 2017." The conference continued on Friday 26th May, which is World Dracula Day, an occasion to celebrate the publishing of Bram Stoker's immortal novel *Dracula*. This year's symposium was held on the 120th anniversary of the book's release. The Whitby Dracula Society 1897 first began the celebration of World Dracula Day just a few years ago, and there are now events happening around the world. NCTC was also the location for the 2015 conference "There Are Such Things! Vampire Studies Symposium," held on Halloween and featuring vampire scholars from across Texas. Topics covered all aspects of vampirology from folklore to modern day vampires.

For the 2017 symposium, the focus was solely on Stoker's novel and related interpretations of the immortal Count Dracula. The symposium began on Thursday evening with Dacre Stoker, great-grandnephew of Bram Stoker, and manager of the Stoker Estate, presenting his signature lecture "Stoker on Stoker: Mysteries Behind the Writing of *Dracula*." Stoker has done extensive research into the writing of the original novel and is the author of the official sequel *Dracula: The Undead* (2009), as well as a co-editor of *The Lost Journal of Bram Stoker: The Dublin Years* (2012). His presentation included several interesting pieces of information about Bram Stoker and his process of writing *Dracula*, among which some new revelations recently gleaned from Stoker's manuscript, currently owned by Microsoft's co-founder Paul Allen. This evening session was followed by a book signing with Mr. Stoker.

Friday's events kicked off again with Mr. Stoker, this time presenting on "Responsible Romanian Tourism: The Inseparable Connection between Vlad Dracula and Count Dracula." One of the many jobs that Mr. Stoker has taken on over the years is that of Romanian tour guide. He has led several guided tours of Dracula sites in Romania, including those related to Vlad the Impaler and the fictional Count Dracula. Stoker was instrumental in the recent Airbnb contest to spend Halloween night in Bran Castle, which received over 80,000 submissions.

The next lecture was presented by J. Gordon Melton (Baylor University, USA), who, in addition to writing several books on vampires and religion, is a Distinguished Professor of American

Religious History. His presentation, "How Dracula Made the Protestant Reformation Possible?" discussed how Vlad the Impaler's ability to keep the Turks out of Europe made it possible for the reformers to keep the freedoms that allowed them to flourish. Professor Melton even included an interesting discussion of how the shape of crescent rolls is directly related to a similar invasion of the Turkish army in Europe and further, the crescent symbol of the Turkish flag. The first break for book signings with the speakers took place during lunch, and several donated items were given away as door prizes to many of the attendees.

After lunch, the first presenter was John Edgar Browning (Georgia Institute of Technology, USA), author and editor of several books and articles on *Dracula*, Stoker, and vampires. His lecture, entitled "From Villain to Vaudevillian: Dracula's Untold Years (1897-1920)," was full of rarely discussed appearances of Dracula on stage and in the media in the early twentieth century. Browning has done substantial research on early reviews of Stoker's novel, and a new edition of his work on the critical reviews of *Dracula* is due soon. Browning's lecture was followed by the somewhat lighter topic of "Dracula Film Spoofs: Funny and Loving It," presented by Nancy Rosenberg England (University of Texas, USA). England focused mainly on the films *Love at First Bite* (1979) starring George Hamilton, and 1995's *Dracula: Dead and Loving It*, starring Leslie Nielsen and Mel Brooks. This lecture included an overview of satire in film and literature, with detail given to the two films previously mentioned. The inclusion of a few clips helped liven up the symposium.

The afternoon included another break for book signings with the speakers/authors, as well as local paranormal fiction authors in attendance. The final two lectures continued the discussions of *Dracula*. First, Elizabeth Richmond-Garza (University of Texas, USA) and Thomas Garza (University of Texas, USA), co-presented a lecture titled "Slavic Realities and Irish Fantasies: Bram Stoker's *Dracula* @120." The presentation format was a lively debate about what influenced Stoker the most: Victorian Society and literature, or Slavic folklore. Both speakers made strong cases, and in the end, it was easy to see that Stoker was influenced by the modern-day society and folklore. The final lecture for the symposium was given by the conference organiser, NCTC librarian, and host of *The Vampire Historian Podcast* (2015-present), Dax Stokes. Stokes presented on the topic "The Comic Lives of Dracula: How Bram Stoker Helped Create the Marvel Cinematic Universe." Highlights of the presentation included a look at various incarnations of *Dracula* in comic books and graphic novels, with special attention given to the Marvel series *Tomb of Dracula* (1972-1979) and its character Blade's part in the creation of Marvel Studios.

The symposium was a great success, and the attendees were exposed to several interesting and new pieces of information in the realm of Dracula Studies from the distinguished panel of speakers. Preliminary plans are already underway for a third vampire symposium in Texas. For more information on the 2017 symposium, visit <https://thevampirehistorian.com/symposium/>. For the 2015 symposium, visit <http://vampiresymposium.com>.

BIONOTE

Dax Stokes is a librarian and adjunct instructor of music at the Flower Mound campus of North Central Texas College, USA. He holds degrees from the University of Tennessee and University of North Texas. Since 2010, he has been lecturing on the subject of vampires and the novel *Dracula* throughout the North Texas area. He is also the host of *The Vampire Historian Podcast*, and can be found at <http://thevampirehistorian.com>.

DYSTOPIA NOW CONFERENCE, MAY 26, 2017, UK

Conference Report by Francis Gene-Rowe

Dystopia Now Conference.

Birkbeck College, University of London, UK, 26 May 2017

Dystopia Now took place in Birkbeck's Keynes Library on a beautiful summer's day. Midsummer is a complicated time of the year. Alongside the glory of each warm afternoon, there's a sense of being overwhelmed by the torpor-inducing heat, and the balmy evenings often possess a quality of drowsy melancholy. There's a tension between this more sombre aspect and the both real and notional goodness of the season as the year's peak. Positive and negative attributes intermeshed in a contradictory bundle: this is the familiar character of academic work, of reading the contemporary world critically. After all, to discuss dystopia in and as the now – within a richly furnished room, at the centre of a hyper-corporate metropolis, within a context of economic and educational privilege – this itself bundles together a range of tensions, good and bad. Delegates were welcomed to the conference by Birkbeck's Joseph Brooker, whose introductory remarks emphasised both the notion of 'dystopia now' as a contribution to the ongoing interrogation of generic category, mode, and mood across media, as well as the increasingly prevalent notion of the present moment as a dystopian one. The call and response here was clear: first of all, here is the formal nexus of our work; secondly, the material circumstances of textual and discursive production – what enframes this present moment of listening and communicating.

Caroline Edwards's (Birkbeck, UK) keynote was excellent. The primary focus of her talk was the notion of techno-modernity, and in particular the double-sidedness of contemporary speculative responses to it. Techno-modernity, she argued, serves both to present concrete forms of our fear of the (apocalyptic) loss of modernity/civilisation, as well as to inspire fear of the technological future perfect of where we might be heading. These poles encapsulate both love for and hatred towards techno-modernity. The body of her talk comprised a history of nineteenth and twentieth century dystopian texts, punctuated by certain key critical references and notions: the utopian problem of labour as part of dystopia's background, the tension between individual subject and utopian collective, the matter of formal complexity in narratorial frames of dystopian texts implying post-dystopian future times. I found it interesting that the *Dystopia Now* conference was opened up with a broadly historical keynote that nonetheless felt entirely contemporary. Edwards is a Walter Benjamin scholar, and I could read traces of Benjaminian historical materialism in her keynote, particularly the notion of the past as an avenue to a transformed future. In other words, a line of thinking by which investigating dystopia's past has a direct impact on how we read the protean immediacy of the present. The current global predicament of ongoing, self-proliferating crisis poses a challenge

to academic thought: how do you break away from 'pragmatic' narratives of inevitability? It's a real problem, and I thought the keynote set the scene perfectly for the day ahead.

The first panel I attended was "From Big Brother to The Circle." The opening paper by Simon Willmetts (University of Hull, UK) began with a discussion of George Orwell's *1984* (1949), highlighting its iconic status as an emblem of resistance as well as the ways in which it seems dated, particularly with regards to surveillance studies. Willmetts suggested that a shift has occurred with regards to how control mechanisms are implemented. Rather than state surveillance constituting a primary concern, writers like Gary Shteyngart examine the predicament of the human body constituted as data and, in so being, dehumanised. Willmetts's paper also discussed the tension between individual and collective in dystopia. Willmetts's stance was that dystopia centres upon the individual, although he complicated this notion by assessing more relation formulations of autonomy. The next paper, by Patricia McManus (University of Brighton, UK), examined the shifting attitudes towards the idea of leisure from its emergence in the nineteenth century to the inter-war years and beyond, alongside the notion of dystopias as places of pleasure. McManus's paper included a detailed discussion of crowds: as spaces, collectives, as both a mode of sociability as well as one of political potentiality. The problematisation of the crowd in the late nineteenth century, McManus argued, emerged hand-in-hand with dystopia. De-individuated subjects, or 'happy' dystopians, arise from the collective's complicity in the existence of dystopia. In modern society, free time is colonised within mass digital culture, such that leisure becomes machine-like. Laura de Simoni's (University of Nottingham, UK) paper on the dystopian impulse in speculative drama rounded off the panel. Focusing in particular on Philip Ridley's *The Pitchfork Disney* (1991), de Simoni's argument was that dystopia in theatre aligns closely with heterotopia, operating as a nexus point of conjugal physical space alongside the mental space of desire.

For the next time slot, I attended the "New Perspectives" panel, which was composed of three MA students from Birkbeck. Frank Jackman began with a paper about different notions and forms of entropy in H.G. Wells's *The Time Machine* (1895) and J.G. Ballard's "The Voices of Time" (1960). Included in the frame were Thomas Pynchon's notion of an entropic society – read backwards by Jackman towards *The Time Machine's* fin-de-siècle context – as well as various theories and applications of entropy: thermodynamic, evolutionary, metaphorical. Following this was Lawrence Jones's paper on utopia, dystopia, and heterotopia in Yevgeny Zamyatin's *We* (1924). Under Jones's reading, *We* sets out to realise a Romantic project of recapturing or accessing a utopian past, epitomised as nostalgic desire embodied by the glass house in the novel. Against or alongside this, Jones laid Soviet ambitions of technological progress, encapsulated in the American energy of the chronometer. The terrain of Jones's talk was extremely Benjaminian, an intersection which arose in the discussion at the end of the panel. Rounding things off was Eden Davis's paper on Pynchon, counterculture and cybernetics. Davis's sophisticated presentation brought texts like *Mondo 2000* and the *Whole Earth Catalog* and thinkers such as Terence McKenna into dialogue with the archetypically Science Fictional territory of dystopia. Digital utopianism, the emergence of systems theory, West Coast counterculture's transformation into technocracy: these are key ingredients of the now, and Davis's intellectually fluent reading positioned Pynchon's nostalgic heterotopianism

against the futurist visions of Silicon Valley.

We then broke for lunch in the sunshine.

The first afternoon session I attended was "Apocalyptic Times." Alice Reeve-Tucker (UK) presented a tightly focused reading of Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* (2006) and in particular its spiritual-religious elements. Reeve-Tucker emphasised the aspect of religious hope in *The Road*, drawing upon both a notion of destination running like a thread between dystopia and apocalypse: dystopia as a conduit to another world, one that is *supposed* to be coming. The second paper was by Diletta De Cristofaro (Harlaxton College, UK). De Cristofaro's talk concerned intersections between dystopia, apocalypse and temporality, with particular focus laid upon *The Road* and David Mitchell's *Cloud Atlas* (2004). De Cristofaro contrasted the traditional, teleological apocalyptic paradigm with its contemporary iteration, characterised by disequilibrium and radical renewal via historical crisis. In her reading, contemporary dystopian texts like *Cloud Atlas* and *The Road* enable a critique of utopian teleology, offering instead the metanarrative of apocalypse. Apocalypse, De Cristofaro argued, is an inherently ecocritical notion, offering an immensely powerful metaphor within the contemporary environmental imagination. Chris Pak's (King's Digital Lab, King's College, UK) paper focused on Cory Doctorow's *Walkaway* (2017) as a text which depicts and models alternatives to contemporary neoliberal dystopia. Pak focused his thinking through notions of pragmatism, both with respect to challenging the narratives underpinning neoliberal hegemony – there being no alternative, humans as a naturally competitive species, the sense of a neoliberal sociocultural 'default' – as well as attempts at envisioning alternative forms of society. *Walkaway*, Pak argued, shows how a crisis between a neoliberal status quo and other forms of social and economic organisation can lead to a newly productive outcome or perspective. An interesting exchange occurred during the questions, with a member of the audience querying whether the term neoliberalism is too narrow to be critically relevant. Pak responded by suggesting that it's too early to say whether neoliberalism is an obsolete term, but that he thought that was not the case and that arguing so might be playing into the novelty of generating new critical terms for criticism that doesn't reflect reality – indeed that it might be playing into neoliberalism itself.

For the final round of papers I chaired a panel called "Metadystopia." Christos Callow Jr. (Independent, UK) gave a talk about Yorgos Lanthimos's film *The Lobster* (2015), as well as the notion of dystopia in the media. Although at times a little thematically diffuse, Callow's paper raised some extremely interesting points about how dystopia is thought of at the level of popular media. In some ways, this recast parts of Pak's argument in more pessimistic terms: what if the study of dystopia is itself spectacular in the Debordian sense? Next was Maxi Albrecht (Freie Universität Berlin, Germany) on survival politics. Albrecht situated her talk within a wider consideration of how cognitive abilities are assessed and valued within modern society, referring at one point to Howard Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences: intelligence as multivalent and cultural as well as biological. Albrecht drew attention to the prominence of survival in contemporary dystopian media, particularly AI narratives, and suggested that fictional dystopian scenarios give us a counter-perspective on what might ordinarily be considered "useful intelligences." Finally, Thomas Travers (Birkbeck, UK) presented

a paper on Don DeLillo's *Zero K* (2016). DeLillo's novel centres in large part upon cryonics, and Travers's talk presented *Zero K* as a text of acceleration, pendulating between visionary anticipation of a heavenly, post-cryonic future and billionaire dreams of immortality as a form of futurist blood money. The cryonic wager in *Zero K*, then, embodies necrocapital: a biopolitical extreme of zombie labour pushed to its limit.

Dystopia Now closed with a keynote by Mark Bould (University of the West of England, Bristol, UK). If Edwards's talk filtered its preoccupation with the now through the lens of dystopia's earlier history, Bould's largely focused on the more recent past, as well as the challenge facing scholars today: how can we process the actuality of dystopia as now? One of the principal strands of Bould's talk was an investigation of the interrelation of neoliberalism and fascism. Anti-utopianism, he suggested, is particularly prominent in contemporary dystopia, and asserts that utopia always already contains the seeds of totalitarianism. At the same time, the restrictive hegemony of twenty-first century capitalism is distinct to the centralised totalitarianism of classic dystopian texts, as in the famous 1984 themed Super Bowl advert by Apple, in which new personal computers liberate us, the consumers, from the old totalitarian mainframe, and instead conduct us to a neoliberal future. Bould's talk sketched a history of capital and fascism entwined, running through both cinema – from *Metropolis* (1927) through to the Mussolini-esque qualities of Christopher Nolan's *Batman* movies (2005-2012) – and political philosophy, including the Hayekian antidemocratic blueprinting of the Salazar and Pinochet regimes as well as Franco Berardi's *After the Future* (2011), which posits that neoliberalism is a perfect form of fascism, in which all aspects of societal and individual existence become competition. The anxiety underlying academic discussion of dystopia is the fear that it can't tell us anything that we don't already know. Although Science Fiction can be read as presenting new combinations or juxtapositions rather than extrapolation, in contemporary society dystopia tends to function as a form of spectacular entertainment. Consequently, what besets us under neoliberalism is a breakdown of visualisation, of imagination of the future. Bould conceded the reality of this pessimistic perspective, but laid against it a Jameson quotation: "hope lies in all the stuff I don't know." Much as dystopia now may constitute commodity, it also contains the seeds of uncertainty, of new possibility. Bould chose to end with an extended quotation from the late Mark Fisher's impassioned response to the cinematic release of *The Hunger Games: Catching Fire* (2013). The tribute was both apposite and extremely poignant, and marked a fitting close to proceedings.

After this, we went to the pub and had a great time.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Jim Clarke for his assistance putting this report together, and also highlight responses to the conference by Amy Butt and Joseph Brooker, both available at www.ccl.bbk.ac.uk. For further information on Caroline Edwards's keynote, I would recommend going on her website: www.drcarolineedwards.com.

BIONOTE

Francis Gene-Rowe is a doctoral student at Royal Holloway, University of London, UK. His thesis focuses on William Blake and Philip K. Dick, and ties into his wider interest in texts which posit transformed concepts of time, language, and world. He co-directs the London Science Fiction Research Community, and was the recipient of the 2017 SFRA Student Paper Award.

ACADEMIC CONFERENCE ON CANADIAN SCIENCE FICTION AND FANTASY, JUNE 2-3, 2017, CANADA

Conference Report by Allan Weiss

***2017 Academic Conference on Canadian Science Fiction and Fantasy* Toronto, Canada, 2-3 June 2017**

The 2017 *Academic Conference on Canadian Science Fiction and Fantasy* was held on June 2-3, 2017, at the Merrill Collection of Science Fiction, Speculation and Fantasy, which has been the home of this biennial conference since 1997. To celebrate our twentieth anniversary under our current name and in our current venue, ACCSFF proudly presented certificates of appreciation to three people who have helped us immensely over the years: retired Head of the Collection Lorna Toolis, librarian Annette Mocek, and student volunteer Clare Wall.

At each conference, we have one Author Keynote Address speaker and one Scholar Keynote Address speaker. This year, the author was Madeline Ashby, author of *vN* (2012) and, most recently, *Company Town* (2016), a finalist in this year's CBC (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation) Canada Reads competition. She spoke on Friday evening about her work as a futurist, relating her non-fictional writings and her novels. Her talk provided great insight into the links between her 'day job' and her fiction, revealing how each inspires the other, as well as the challenges of adjusting to technological developments that move so quickly. Our guest scholar was Dominick M. Grace, a regular participant in ACCSFF and author of *The Science Fiction of Phyllis Gotlieb* (2015); he spoke about his evolution as a scholar of Fantastic Literature and of Canadian Speculative Fiction in particular. Grace's talk was engagingly personal and humorous.

ACCSFF '17 was the biggest of the series, featuring nine sessions and a total of twenty-one papers. The conference began on Friday afternoon with a session on Canadian Science Fiction (SF). Douglas Ivison (Lakehead University, Canada) discussed the work of Golden Age of Science Fiction author A. E. van Vogt, relating his philosophy and interest in the role of technology in society to modernism. Michael Kaler (University of Toronto – Mississauga, Canada) looked at the theme of telepathy in the work of Spider Robinson, showing its links to the teachings of 1960s and 1970s spiritual leader Stephen Gaskin. Kaler's argument was that both were seeking to create new myths, and ways to achieve a higher unity, for a society that had rejected older religious systems.

Session II was the first of the conference on Canadian Fantasy. Adam Guzkowski (Trent University, Canada) spoke on the problem of free will in Dave Duncan's novel *The Gilded Chain*

(1998); Duncan, like many Fantasy writers, portrays his characters struggling with such questions as moral agency when one is subjected to magical binding. Natalie Ingram (University of British Columbia, Canada) discussed Guy Gavriel Kay's *Under Heaven* (2010), raising Kay's potentially problematic treatment of Chinese culture and asking to what extent it is coloured by Orientalism and primitivism. Finally, Michael Johnstone (University of Toronto, Canada) analysed politics in Kay's *Tigana* (1990), in particular the politicisation of language and the role of language in world-building.

After Madeline Ashby's Keynote Address on Friday evening, Session III on posthumanism and the cyborg in Canadian SF focused on two recent authors of texts about posthumans. Clare Wall (York University, Canada) discussed Ashby's *vN*, showing how themes of consumption – literally, eating and food, and consumerism – reflect posthuman challenges to boundaries between the human and non-human, self and other, and the genders. Edna Bovas (University of Toronto, Canada) concluded the day's presentations with a paper on Larissa Lai's *Salt Fish Girl* (2002), arguing that Evie's theology and status as a "mutant" offer similar challenges to conventional religious, biological, and gender boundaries; her position as an outsider gives her unique insights into many of our society's assumptions about various assumed binaries.

Dominick Grace (Brescia College University, Canada) gave his talk first thing Saturday morning. Following that was Session IV on apocalypse and magic realism in Canadian SF. Ben Eldridge (University of Sydney, Australia) looked at the work of Peter Watts, focusing on sexually sadistic imagery in the final novel of his *Rifters* series, *Behemoth* (2004) and raising questions about its function in the text and the series as a whole. Cat Ashton discussed the work of two surrealist authors, Tony Burgess and Eric McCormack; in Burgess's *Pontypool Changes Everything* (1995) and the film adaptation, *Pontypool* (2009), and McCormack's *The Mysterium* (1992), language becomes a disease or the site of symptoms of disease. Ashton analysed the postmodern implications for our understanding of reality of the instability or even pathologizing of language.

Session V was the second on Canadian Fantasy. Eleonora Rao (University of Salerno, Italy) looked at myths and fairy tales in the poetry of Margaret Atwood, while Derek Newman-Stille (Trent University, Canada) studied the fairy-tale roots of Emma Donoghue's short story "The Tale of the Shoe" (1997), a retelling of the Cinderella story that inverts much of the sexual politics and assumptions about disability of the original. Kristen Shaw (McMaster University, Canada) gave a paper on *Certain Dark Things* (2016) and *Night Wanderer* (2007), vampire novels by Mexican-Canadian author Sylvia Moreno-Garcia and Native-Canadian author Drew Hayden Taylor respectively. Shaw argued that these novels subvert the conventions of the vampire genre to explore themes of the treatment of the racialized other in our society.

After lunch, there were two concurrent sessions on Canadian SF media expressions; Session VI-A was on Fantastic television and Session VI-B was on Fantastic film. In Session VI-A, Lisa Macklem (University of Western Ontario, Canada) analysed how the series *12 Monkeys* (2015-present) portrays women as empowered and empowering figures, largely through their positions as mothers. Meghan Riley (University of Waterloo, Canada) surveyed racial and gender themes in various television series,

above all some of the *Star Trek* iterations, and demonstrated how racialized characters and women continue to be marginalised. Like Lisa Macklem, Riley was interested in how motherhood is treated in these shows, and how often women are portrayed as being incapable of having children. In Session VI-B, David Cheater (Toronto, Canada) looked at the use of the devices of Magic Realism in *Queer* film, relating the handling of Magic Realist aesthetic to other films that concern ethnic and other marginalised groups. Amber Linkenheld-Struk (Toronto, Canada) analysed existentialist thought in *Arrival* (2016), demonstrating how the film deconstructs film itself as it disrupts conventional narrative time and how its focus on the theme of communication highlights problems of epistemology and reality.

Session VII was on race and ethnicity in Canadian SF and featured two papers on quite different topics. Derwin Mak (Toronto, Canada) analysed the “perpetual foreigner” syndrome in Chinese-North American Science Fiction and Fantasy, as characters in short stories by Eric Choi, Ken Liu, and William F. Wu find they can never be fully accepted by North Americans, but are always treated as outsiders. Selena Middleton (McMaster University, Canada) spoke on apocalyptic themes in works by Native-Canadian authors Eden Robinson and Lee Maracle; in their short stories, the apocalypse has already happened, and the anthropocene seems to mean our doom, but Native characters inhabit a liminal space that may mean their survival.

The final session was on Canadian Fantastic comics and music. Andrew Deman (University of Waterloo, Canada) discussed Canadian identity in the comic-book series *We Stand on Guard* (2015), looking closely at how stereotypical images of Canada, and concepts of Canadian identity, play a role in the narrative and themes of the text. Anna Peppard (York University, Canada) talked about depictions of Pierre Elliott and Justin Trudeau’s governments in Marvel comic books, revealing how differences in the times in which the two governed, and the issues they faced, are reflected in the ways they have been portrayed. Our final paper was by Alexander Sallas (McMaster University, Canada), who did a close reading of Strapping Young Lads’s album *City* (1997) as a critical dystopia, one that highlights the dystopic nature of urban spaces.

Each of the sessions and the two Keynote Addresses inspired lively discussion during the question-and-answer periods. Those conversations testify to the thoughtfulness and diversity of the papers; never has ACCSFF hosted such a wide array of studies. Whereas scholars participating in some of the earlier conferences had found certain authors of special interest – Margaret Atwood, Peter Watts, and William Gibson, for example – at this year’s conference only one author, Guy Gavriel Kay, was the subject of more than one paper. In addition, there was a high turnout of younger scholars, evidence of a growing interest in Canadian Fantastic literature, film, television, and other forms of expression. That bodes well for the future of Canadian SF studies, and heightens our anticipation of the next ACCSFF in 2019.

For more information on ACCSFF, visit our website at www.yorku.ca/accsff
We are on Twitter @ACCSFF_Canada

BIONOTE

Allan Weiss has been Chair of the Academic Conference on Canadian Science Fiction and Fantasy since 1996. He is Associate Professor of English and Humanities at York University, Canada and has published articles on Canadian fantastic literature as well as on the short story and "mainstream" Canadian literature. He also writes fiction; his latest collection of short stories, *Making the Rounds*, was published by Edge in 2016. Visit his website at www.allanweiss.com

CURRENT RESEARCH IN SPECULATIVE FICTION, JUNE 9, 2017, UK

Conference Report by Danielle Girard

Current Research in Speculative Fiction (CRSF)
University of Liverpool, 9 June 2017

With eleven panels and two keynotes, CRSF 2017 brought forth a whirlwind of engaging conversation about Speculative Fiction that had, given its post UK election timing, an undeniably political atmosphere from the first coffee of the day to the final toast at the concluding wine reception. With the past two years creating a veritable earthquake of political divisions it is unsurprising that ongoing political upheavals would take centre stage at a conference about Speculative Fiction. Indeed, following the conference registration – the presence of free coffee, tea, and biscuits made for an accommodating experience – the first keynote of the day addressed the Trump era.

Dr Bernice Murphy's (Trinity College Dublin, Ireland) keynote, "American Apocalypse: Plague Narratives, Popular Culture and White Anxiety in the Age of Donald Trump," offered an engaging examination and discussion of the trends and tropes of dystopian fiction ranging from smallpox to the forty-fifth president of the United States. Murphy began her discussion by looking at the trope of white people 'going native,' drawing upon the 2009 film *Avatar* in which the protagonist comes to literally embody an avatar of the native species. She then emphasised the ways in which apocalyptic narratives tend to revert the natural landscape back to its original, pre-colonisation state, almost as though the white colonisers are erasing their tracks in a reverse colonisation from west to east. Moving on, Murphy's discussion raised an interesting consideration about white anxiety in the age of Donald Trump. After explicating the patronising, and indeed racist, view of non-white survivors in plague narratives, Murphy used the recent census of demographics in the United States of America that found that ethnic minorities within the USA had overtaken whites as the overall majority. Despite the fact that whites remained the single largest group, they had in effect become a minority. Murphy theorised that this demographic study may have contributed to the white anxiety that drove America down the direction that it took in the 2016 Election.

Following the keynote, everyone set off to attend one of three concurrent panels. In the "Body and Power" panel Claudine Bollinger (University of Bern, Switzerland) started things off with an engaging paper entitled "Reading Bodies, Reading Minds: Enhanced Cognition in Anne Leckie's *Ancillary Justice*." Bollinger discussed the notion of mind reading as a capacity to reason and respond to others, in essence using body signposts in order to predict or reason how another person is thinking or will act. She balanced her discussion of Leckie's text with a study of the science of clinical neurology, and argued that biological data differs from the state of mind. Danielle Girard

(Lancaster University, UK) followed with her talk, "Fanning the Queer: Slash Spock," which examined the queer coding within *Star Trek: The Original Series* (1966-1969). Girard argued that Mr Spock's character within the canon of the text is inherently queer based on factors of his parentage, said coding and even the fan culture that reimagined Spock as Captain Kirk's lover. With the third speaker on the panel a no-show, a rousing discussion of both women's papers ensued.

After a catered lunch that culminated with a delicious selection of cakes, another set of three panels occurred. At the "SF and Cultural Productions" panel Ian Farnell (University of Warwick, UK) kicked off the afternoon sessions with a spirited talk on "Theatre, Science Fiction and Nick Payne's *Elegy*." Farnell considered the ways that Science Fiction has moved into theatre as a means to include hard science, creating a space for 'science fact' on stage. Farnell discussed the way plays tend to look to the past in order to engage with issues facing contemporary society. Following Farnell, Raphael Kabo (Birkbeck College, University of London, UK) gave an engaging talk on "The Snow and the Zone: Creating communitas on the thresholds of SF cinema," during which he examined the 1979 film *Stalker* and the 2013 film *Snowpiercer*. Kabo's paper examined spatial and temporal thresholds, looking particularly at the environments of both *Stalker* and *Snowpiercer*. Kabo noted that the end of *Snowpiercer* depicts a vision of the future that is radically multi-ethnic. Closing out the panel, Jaime Oliveros Garcia (University of Huelva, Spain) spoke on "Connecting Cognitive Narratology and Ergodism: Gods will be Watching, the Last Chapter." Garcia's talk centred on the narrative structure and modes of video games. He argued that there can be no ergodicity without breaking the fourth wall. With texts from a broad range of narrative mediums, this panel offered a valuable perspective on the breadth of speculative fiction.

Next up was panel three, "Soundscapes and Landscapes." Jemima Cloud (University of Liverpool, UK) began the session with her paper, "28 Days Later, 28 Years Behind: How music reflects the surprisingly conservative ideology of family in *28 Days Later*," in which she discussed how music is used to code the underlying thematic narrative of a text. She examined the way that music acts as a prophecy within the canon of *28 Days Later* (2003). Anya Hancock (University of Oxford, UK) was next, speaking on, "'The nicely managed crescendo': Soundscapes of horror in BBC adaptations of M.R. James's ghost stories and Robin Hardy's *The Wicker Man* (1973)." Hancock's paper investigated soundscapes in horror cinema. She theorised that sound in horror is used to reflect the narrative but can also be effective in jarring with the narrative. Declan Lloyd (Lancaster University, UK) wrapped up the panel with a paper called "J. G. Ballard and the Great Lost Salvador Dali Ad-campaign." Lloyd's paper examined surrealism and the series of Ballard billboards that use text to reflect and imitate the images from Dali's paintings. His talk offered insight into the visual aspects of the speculative and examined how text can be used to recreate art. The panel as a whole presented a fascinating examination of how sound mixing not only adds the horror narrative but also becomes an interactive presence.

Following a short comfort break, three final concurrent panels were held before the final keynote address. In *Unsustainable Futures*, Sarah Lohmann (Durham University, UK) began the final session of CRSF with her paper "The Coming Races: Self-Defeating Eugenics in Late-19th-

Century Utopian Literature.” Lohmann talked about eugenics in utopian literature, examining the elimination of gender roles among the Vril in Edward Bulwer-Lytton’s *The Coming Race* (1871). Next, Asami Nakamura (University of Liverpool, UK) gave an engaging paper entitled “The Sexual Politics of Memory in Katherine Burdekin’s *Swastika Night*,” focusing on nostalgia and its existence as oppression and resistance in dystopian cautionary tales. Nakamura looked at the ways that nostalgia can be used, such as a marketing strategy or as a political instrument. She discussed the ways in which nostalgia is often used as a trap for oppression within dystopian fiction. Closing out the panel, Mike Ryder (Lancaster University, UK) gave a passionate talk on the subject of “‘Future Soldiers’: the Soldier, the Citizen and the State.” Ryder looked at Robert A. Heinlein’s *Starship Troopers* (1959) and Joe Haldeman’s *The Forever War* (1974). His talk centred on the body of the soldier and the way it is used within each novel as a weapon puppeteer by the sovereign state. Drawing heavily on Giorgio Agamben, Ryder theorised that the body of the soldier becomes synonymous with the body of a slave.

After another short break, Dr. Robert Maslan (University of Glasgow, UK) closed out the conference with a captivating keynote address entitled “The Politics of Celtic Fantasy.” Maslan spoke about fantasy and its relationship to history. His engaging discussion examined the deep political roots of, in particular, children’s Celtic fantasy. His talk touched upon the Irish Civil War (1922-1923) as well as the Easter Rising and the ways in which fantasy is used to bring the past to the present. He briefly examined the women of the rising, as well as the attempt to suppress the revolt through appeals to the imagination. He drew attention to the social hierarchy and gender roles at play within his texts – *The Crock of Gold* (1912) and *The Turf-Cutters Donkey* (1934) – and the history surrounding them. Finally, he discussed the portal quest fantasy model, in which a guide or mentor is needed to explain the new world, and looked at how fantastical landscapes, such as the ringed hill, can be used to tie this reality to unexplained phenomenon that is exclusive to the Celtic landscape. Maslan’s keynote talk was an uplifting end to the day’s panels.

The conference itself ended with a wine reception, a group photo, and a promise to return next year. Also worth mentioning is the masterclass that was held in conjunction to the conference on the 8th of June. “Rethinking the Contemporary: The Role of the Fantastic,” was a free masterclass that gave attendees a chance to discuss their research openly with the two conference keynotes, Dr. Bernice Murphy and Dr. Robert Maslan, as well as Lancaster University’s Dr. Brian Baker. Both masterclass and conference provided an engaging and welcoming atmosphere for critical discussion in the fields of Fantasy, the Gothic, and Science Fiction.

BIONOTE

Danielle Girard is an international PhD student at Lancaster University, UK, researching *Star Trek* and its place in fan and queer history. She is particularly interested in the gender politics at play when fans slash the textual canon to create homosexual couplings, such as Kirk/Spock as well as the troubling trend of “queerbaiting.”

J. G. BALLARD DAY SYMPOSIUM, JUNE 24, 2017, UK

Conference Report by Laura De Simoni

J.G. Ballard Day 2017: "J.G. Ballard and Making"
Birmingham City University, UK, 24th June 2017

On Saturday 24th June, Birmingham City University hosted the 2017 edition of the J.G. Ballard Day. The event, coordinated by Dr. Thomas Knowles (Birmingham City University), was the second such conference dedicated to the works of that prophet of the twentieth century, J.G. Ballard. This year the symposium aimed to explore the connection between Ballard's work and the making, repurposing, and manipulation of objects. Alongside this primary topic, the event organisers also chose to emphasise the diverse artistic responses to the ideas expressed in the author's oeuvre. This multidisciplinary approach was particularly relevant in light of Ben Wheatley's 2015 screen adaptation of *High Rise* (1975), which has contributed to a revival of interest in Ballard's work beyond the written form. This topical theme attracted delegates from a broad range of backgrounds, including filmmakers, photographers, visual and sound artists as well as academics, to respond to different aspects of Ballard's writings and discuss their implications. The result was a cross-disciplinary event in which Ballard's work was read through a variety of lenses and perspectives, a testament to the enduring fascination inspired by the father of "inner space."

The day started with a presentation by students from Birmingham City University's Collaborative Practice module, a course which brought together the schools of English and Fashion to design and make objects which could recreate the spirit of Ballard's 1973 *Vermillion Sands* short story collection. The students involved, Khadjia Abdulkhadir, Marriyah Hussain, Natasha Bedward, and Sadeka Chowdhury, presented the results of the creative experiment using the surrealist exquisite corpse technique. A number of sculptures and collages were exhibited on the day, and the rest of their work was documented in the beautifully designed programme, which turned out to be a work of art in itself.

The first panel, aptly titled "Movement," began with a Skype talk given by Aristotelis Maragos (University of Kent, UK) exploring the cinematic qualities of Ballard's writings while questioning its adaptability for the screen. Maragos showed the audience two extracts from his film projects: one was a documentary exploring Canary Wharf through the Science Fiction texts of J.G. Ballard; the other, an extract from the film *The Langoliers* (1995) edited and reinterpreted via collage technique. The second group of presenters was composed of four BA Graphic Design students at Falmouth University (UK): Paul Merrit, Dylan Young, Reuben Morley, and Alex Basset. After they presented their short film *AVTUR*, which encapsulated many iconic Ballardian images in only ninety

seconds, there was a discussion about the process of shooting and piecing together the work. The third speaker of the day, Matthew Richardson (Norwich University of Arts, UK), advanced the idea of a visual uncanny. Working as an illustrator, Richardson showed different visual responses to texts such as *The Drowned World* and *The Crystal World*. In his other project, *Am I The Island* (2016), he used Google Streetview to recreate the uncanny experience of displacement of Ballard's *Concrete Island* (1974).

The afternoon panel named "Rest" started off with the sound artist Verónica Mota (Berlin, Germany) showing her audiovisual sound collage based on Ballard's prose poem "What I Believe" (1984). Through the repetition of haunting images and sounds, and a voiceover of Ballard himself reading his composition, Mota's video transported the audience into the deep unconscious sites of the author's words. Giorgios Crouch, an independent photographer, presented his ongoing project titled *Images of the Airport Landscape*. He led us through his psychogeographical journey across the airports of the world, specifically exploring the transience, alienation and discontinuities of these landscapes, together with their relationship to the surrounding areas of wilderness. Laura De Simoni (University of Nottingham, UK) returned to the theme of the Ballardian uncanny, exploring how it was conveyed in performance in a dramatic adaptation of *Crash* (1973/2001). Focussing on the final staging of the production, this talk described how elements of the setting, lighting, acting and sound worked together in transporting the Ballardian dystopia to the stage.

As the day came to a close, Rachele Dini (University of Roehampton) delivered the conference keynote. Her talk considered the role of waste objects in Ballard's critique of neoliberalism in his millennial novels, *Super-Cannes* (2000), *Millennium People* (2003), and *Kingdom Come* (2006). She focused on the power of such neglected objects to hinder the flow of capital, and the impact this had on the workings of the social systems portrayed in Ballard's fiction. Dini delineated three approaches towards waste: in historical materialist, structural anthropological, and new materialist terms. Rather than privileging one perspective over another, Dini suggested that a more productive strategy was to use a "multi-dimensional framework." The waste materials that litter Ballard's landscapes in the millennial trilogy have a life of their own, even after they have been disposed of. Recognising the significance of the never-ending lifecycle of such objects, Dini's provocative conclusion suggested that objects have more agency than people in Ballard's novels.

The vast array of responses to Ballard's works gave evidence of the enduring creative and critical legacy of the writings of J.G. Ballard. The variety of such manifestations made this one-day symposium an exceptional showcase of the potential to expand Ballardian 'obsessions' to different media. Throughout the day, the various speakers explored Ballard's words not only through their textual qualities, but also through their intrinsic visual, cinematic and aesthetic value. The conference raised awareness of the wide-ranging work being inspired by Ballard's writings, and joined the loose ends of theory and practice on the topic. It stimulated an exciting discussion about the timeliness of Ballard's works, and their specific relevance to today's socio-political climate. A special issue of *Open Cultural Studies* based on the proceedings of the symposium is due to be published by in 2018. After the success of the past two editions, the organisers plan to continue the newly established

tradition of annual J.G. Ballard Days at Birmingham City University.

BIONOTE

Laura De Simoni is a PhD researcher and teaching affiliate at the University of Nottingham, UK. Her work focuses on dystopia in contemporary drama. She is primarily interested in understanding how dystopia as a literary genre manifests in recent theatre and performance.

SCIENCE FICTION RESEARCH ASSOCIATION CONFERENCE, JUNE 28-JULY 1, 2017, USA

Conference Report by Thomas Connolly

Science Fiction Research Association Annual Conference

Marriott Riverside Convention Centre, Riverside, California, USA, 28 June 2017 to 1 July 2017

It is hard to describe, to those not in the field, what sets conferences in Science Fiction (SF) Studies apart from those in other fields. Whereas attendees at academic events often share theoretical or professional interests, those at SF events are also joined by a shared love, often reaching back to childhood, for SF itself. As a result, the atmosphere of such events often has the feel of a Comic-Con as much as a scholarly meeting of minds. Where else in academia, for instance, could you find a bar serving 'Klingon Blood Wine,' or a professional cosplayer, complete with sword and drinking gourd, participating in a panel?

Both of these were to be found at the 2017 conference of the Science Fiction Research Association (SFRA), one of the biggest annual conferences in SF Studies. Held in Marriott Riverside at the Convention Centre in Riverside, California, from June 28th to July 1st, the SFRA conference brought together an international cohort of SF scholars, writers, and performance artists to discuss and dissect the field of SF.

The scholarship at this year's conference demonstrated the politically and socially engaged nature of SF Studies. The conference topic – "Unknown Past, Unseen Futures" – indicates the juncture at which the field currently finds itself: faced with looming environmental disaster, ever-increasing technological and corporate hegemonies, and global political uncertainty (to put it mildly), SF has found itself called upon to offer visions for an increasingly uncertain future. A quick glance at some of the key words in this year's panel and paper titles reveal the extent to which SF scholars have responded to these global trends: discussions roved over topics such as "the Anthropocene," "Posthuman Futures," "Toxic Bodies," "Climate Change," "Techno-Optimism," "Solarpunk," "Post-Life," "Worlds in Peril," "After Humanism," and many similar topics.

My own experience of the conference reflected these preoccupations. One dominant trend that I noted across the three days of scholarship was what might be called the recent 'posthumanist turn' in SF Studies. Katherine Bishop (Miyazaki International College, Japan) opened up the "New Landscapes" panel on Thursday morning, for example, with a close reading of Jeff VanderMeer's *Southern Reach* trilogy (2014), examining his deployment of 'ekphrasis' – the rhetorical description of a visual work of art – as a means of undermining ontological divisions between human and non-human landscapes and beings. The frequency with which New Weird works such as VanderMeer's trilogy

were mentioned in papers and Q&A discussions over the three days can perhaps be accounted for by the unstable and shifting character of New Weird's thematic explorations of human experience. Such fiction aligns with the current theoretical preoccupation with exploring the ontological and epistemological boundaries of the human in SF Studies: the 'speculative realism' of Graham Harman, Iain Hamilton Grant, and others, for example, was a regular subject of – often heated – debate during Q&A sessions, reflecting the urgently felt need within the field to critique the legacy of destructive humanism. Elsewhere, two Friday panels – "Posthumanism and the Subaltern" and "Evolution and Posthumanism" – were dedicated specifically to posthumanist topics, with presenters examining works across a diverse spectrum from George Lucas's *Star Wars* (1976-present) to the 'necro-realism' of Cold War Russia. Further papers on 'crip futurism' by Cole Jack Pittman (University of California, LA, US), 'indigenous futurism' by Fatimah White (African American Museum of Nassau County, US), and 'queer spaces and temporalities' by Jędrzej Burszta (SWPS University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Poland) continued to expand the field beyond the traditional boundaries of the western humanist narrative.

Alongside this posthumanist turn, another dominant topic was, of course, ecocriticism and the human relationship to nature, with a full five panels addressing explicitly ecocritical themes. 'Energy Futures of the Anthropocene' on Friday evening, for example, brought together a host of papers examining the intersection of human technological concerns with a variety of environmental themes. Rhys Williams (Glasgow University, Scotland) undertook an analysis of 'solarpunk,' critically examining the potential for this emerging form of fiction, still largely limited to amateur online writings, to offer new utopian models for human society, while Ali Sperling (University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, US) discussed the emergence and impact of new ecologies and ecosystems in nuclear disaster zones on our perceptions of nuclear technologies. The always-stimulating Gerry Canavan (Marquette University, US) rounded out the panel, offering a critique of the trope of 'hyperspace' in space-operatic works, and its culpability in enabling escapist fantasies of post-materialist futures that avoid, rather than confront, the material realities of climate change.

Elsewhere, the emergence of new traditions in SF distinct from the Anglophone tradition was also in full evidence. Saturday morning's "Racing Towards the Future: Speculative Cultures, Science Fiction and Race" offered (in my view) the most stimulating experience of the conference, demonstrating the diverse and vibrant range of scholarship being undertaken in Indian, Afrofuturist, and Native American SF. The theme of the panel could perhaps be summarised in the concept of 'survance' as outlined by the first speaker Valorie Thomas (Pomona College, US): whereas "survival" implies negative images of victimisation and oppression, "survance" is instead intended to repudiate victimry and celebrate the self-representation of native peoples. While Thomas was interested in the "psychogeographies" of Native American artworks, the next speaker, tobias c. van veen (California State University, US), took up the trope of Armageddon in Afrofuturist SF, and in particular the idea that, according to many black writers and artists, Armageddon has already arrived for black subjects of neoliberalism. Next up was Pavithra Prasad (California State University, US), who performed segments of her one-person play, *The Occidental Moon*, which explores Indian identity through the lens of that nation's efforts towards space exploration. Finally, ZiggZaggerZ,

a “multidimensional black alien entity” and professional cosplay performer, offered a mixture of performance art and informal discussion to describe her experiences of disability and the importance of cosplay as a means of exploring and enabling alternative identities.

Aside from the academic panels, there was also a variety of other conference events taking place in the nearby Culver Center. On Thursday evening, critically acclaimed author Nnedi Okorafor gave a personal talk in which she recounted her experiences writing SF and YA works, and her attempts to adapt the tropes of SF – a genre traditionally dominated by white western authors – to reflect the experiences of the Nigerian protagonists of her works, particularly in her acclaimed *Binti* sequence (2015-present). Friday evening, meanwhile, saw a screening of Denis Villeneuve’s *Arrival* (2016), followed by a Q&A session with Ted Chiang, author of “Story of Your Life” (1998), the short story that inspired Villeneuve’s adaptation.

Unlike a good many international conferences, the SFRA conference is also a welcoming place for graduate students. Wednesday’s programme was devoted to graduate workshops, as a host of students, early career scholars, and seasoned academics shared stories, information, and advice aimed at helping graduate students to cope with the difficulties of beginning an academic career: doctoral research, funding and grants, publications, job interviews, and so on.

The four-day event was closed out with a banquet in the Marriott Ballroom, followed by the SFRA award ceremony. The Pioneer Award, which recognises the best critical essay on an SF topic from the previous year, went to Lindsay Thomas (University of Miami, US) for her essay on climate change policy in relation to Kim Stanley Robinson’s *Mars* trilogy (1993-1996), while the Mary Kay Bray Award, given to the best essay, review or interview to be published in the *SFRA Review*, went to Aidan-Paul Canavan (Edge Hill University, UK) for his review of the Netflix series *Daredevil* (2015-present) and *Jessica Jones* (2015-present). Francis Gene-Rowe (University of London, UK) picked up the Student Paper Award for his examination of Stephen Mooney’s *The Cursory Epic* (2014). Paweł Frelík (Maria Curie-Skłodowska University, Poland), recipient of this year’s Clareson Award for Distinguished Service, delivered a distinctly science-fictional acceptance speech, outlining three separate responses to his receiving the award before ending with a moving word of thanks to the SFRA. Finally, the Pilgrim Award went to Tom Moylan (University of Limerick, Ireland) for his distinguished service to SF Studies, particularly his two critical works on utopia. In his emotional acceptance speech, Moylan recounted his introduction to SF as a young boy in Chicago, and his journey through academia at a time when SF was just beginning to make its way into the academy.

Overall, then, the SFRA annual conference offered a stimulating and enjoyable four days, and an effective demonstration of the scope and depth of current research in SF Studies. Perhaps it’s the Klingon Blood Wine talking, but the SFRA conference will certainly be high on my list of conferences to attend in 2018.

BIONOTE

Thomas Connolly is a final-year doctoral candidate in the Department of English at Maynooth University, Ireland. His research explores posthumanist depictions of the human subject in Anglo-American science fiction in works from throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. He was the recipient in 2012 of the John and Pat Hume Scholarship. Thomas has research and reviews published in *Science Fiction Studies*, *Foundation*, and the *SFRA Review*. Thomas is also Book Reviews editor for the online, open-access *Journal of Science Fiction*. His short story, "Bleep," was shortlisted for the RTÉ Francis MacManus Short Story Prize in 2015.

CONFERENCE OF THE INTERNATIONAL GOTHIC ASSOCIATION, JULY 18-21, 2017, MEXICO

Conference Report by Rebecca Gibson

Gothic Traditions & Departures: 13th Biennial Conference of the International Gothic Association
Universidad de las Américas Puebla (UDLAP), Cholula, Mexico, 18 – 21 July 2017

The thirteenth Biennial Conference of the International Gothic Association began with an opening ceremony that acknowledged the tumultuous times we live in: addressing delegates from across the globe, conference organiser Dr. Enrique Ajuria Ibarra embraced the diversity of academic backgrounds and disciplines that feed into the Gothic and welcomed the potential for creative exploration that such a large conference can inspire. The conference theme of “Gothic Traditions and Departures” highlighted this unique adaptability, and the sunny location (as well as several of the conference speakers) foregrounded the international nature of both the academic field and the association.

The expansive possibility of Gothic to travel across genre and subject was foregrounded by the opening plenary address “Dark Sound: Being and Timbre in Gothic.” Professor Isabella van Elferen (Kingston University, UK) filled the auditorium with Gothic music by Darker and Wardruna as she explored the concept of affective sensation and reminded us that through deliberate cultivation of a Gothic atmosphere, the monstrous can become sublime. This was a fitting beginning for a conference which returned repeatedly to the changing shape of Gothic in popular culture: what was once a beauty only appreciated by some is now expanding into the cultural imaginary of the many, allowing for a much richer, more diverse field of study.

While others discussed the Victorian Gothic tradition in chapbooks and penny dreadfuls, Scottish Gothic, American Gothic, and female Gothic departures, session A of Tuesday’s parallel panels focused on “Gothic TV: Vampires, Neoliberalism, and the Queer Uncanny.” This panel began with Harriet Fletcher (Lancaster University, UK) reimagining the celebrity vampire narrative from its beginning with Lord Byron to Countess Elizabeth in *American Horror Story: Hotel* (2015-2016). Karen Macfarlane (Mount Saint Vincent University, Canada) continued the theme with her insightful paper on the entropic hopelessness of neoliberal Gothic in *American Horror Story*’s obsession with real estate (2011-present). Jamil Mustafa (Lewis University, USA) rounded off the panel with an engaging discussion of Gothic intertextuality and the queer uncanny in *Supernatural* (2005-present), with a particular focus on the inclusion of fan works into the canon. The first day of the conference ended with a welcome toast commemorating Professor Diane Long Hoeveler, who sadly passed away in

2016, and the awarding of three Postgraduate Student Bursaries in her memory. The Allan Lloyd Smith Memorial Prize for Gothic Criticism 2017 was also awarded jointly to Marie Mulvey-Roberts for *Dangerous Bodies: Historicising the Gothic Corporeal* (2015), and to Tim Jones for *The Gothic and the Carnavalesque in American Culture* (2015).

The second day began with panels on Latin American Gothic, necrophilia in nineteenth-century British Gothic, haunted garments and reimagining the Gothic. The "Gothic Gender and Sexualities" panel opened with Luke Chwala (Indiana University of Pennsylvania, USA) detailing how Octavia Butler's *Fledgling* (2005) portrays the vampire as a polymorphously sexual being whose relationship with humanity resembles an ecosystem. Wendy Fall (Marquette University, USA) continued this discussion on the overtly sexualised portrayal of vampires by reading Varney the Vampire as a textual representation of rape culture whose lack of accountability is replicated in the contemporary media's discussion of sexual assault. Finally, Daniel T. Kasper (University of Arizona, USA) shifted the focus onto Darwinian sexual selection in Edward Bulwer-Lytton's *The Coming Race* (1871), culminating in a series of questions from delegates which linked all panellists together in discussion of how Gothic can be used to problematise conventional concepts of sexuality.

Next, a session on alternative realities explored Gothic intertextualities and digital Gothic while the panel on "Images and Sounds of the Gothic" began with Megan de Bruin-Mole (Cardiff University, UK) delivering a lively paper on how visual mashup artists reuse real life images of past trauma to explore the repetitive monstrosity of war. Sam Wiseman (University of Erfurt, Germany) also explored how depictions of monsters reflect on contemporary preoccupations, this time in German Expressionist cinema, before Thomas Stuart (University of Western Ontario, Canada) rounded off the panel with an in-depth analysis of Gothic echoes of the trapped past in *The Stone Tape* (1972). This panel forged an important link between new media iterations of the Gothic and some of the oldest onscreen examples, such as *Nosferatu* (1922), illustrating how Gothic has the ability to cross generic categories in its exploration of monstrosity.

Professor Maisha Wester (Indiana University Bloomington, USA) delivered a fascinating afternoon keynote on "Duppy vs Ghost, Obeah vs Witchcraft: Dueling Folklore in Black Diasporic Gothic Fiction," in which European perceptions of folkloric creatures were thoroughly interrogated and reconfigured as sources of ambiguous transformation in black Gothic fiction such as *Myal* by Erna Brodber (1988) and *Skin Folk* by Nalo Hopkinson (2001). The following inauguration of the open-air exhibition of conference murals by UDLAP students encouraged delegates to take in the beautiful geography of the campus and provided many opportunities for commemorative photos to be taken, as the artwork included vampires, masked figures, and quotations from Catherine Spooner and Nina Auerbach.

The final session of the day included panels on Gothic deviances, cosmogonies and rural traditions, contemporary adaptations of *Frankenstein*, the politics of melancholia and property, and children's Gothic fiction, as well Gothic violence and imprisonments. The latter panel began with an intriguing paper from Marie Mulvey-Roberts (University of the West of England, UK) entitled

"From the Holy Family to the Manson Family: Religion, Gender and the Cult in the work of Angela Carter," in which facts from the real-life Manson case were contrasted to great effect with the cult of Zero from Carter's *The Passion of New Eve* (1977). Tim Haner (University of the Fraser Valley, Canada) continued the theme of oppressive familial politics with his analysis of Robert Aickman's "The Inner Room," and Kyle Brett (Lehigh University, USA) rounded off the panel with an extended comparison of the inhabitation of the ancestral family home in Lord Byron and H. P. Lovecraft. All three papers explored the violence at the heart of these Gothic families, and how the inevitable plateau of that tension often results in psychological fracture for the protagonist – and how, in the case of the Manson family, when it comes to such imprisonments there can be uncomfortable crossover between fiction and reality.

The second day ended with a short film screening of *Los misterios de las monjas vampiras* (2016) directed by Antonio Álvarez Morán, a colourful and darkly funny Mexican Gothic delight which featured everything from Aztec sacrifice to vampire nuns. The director and lead actress held a Q&A afterwards dressed respectively as a vampire and a nun, and the response from delegates was overwhelmingly enthusiastic, with many considering it a conference highlight.

The third day turned its attention to, among other topics, eighteenth Century Gothic, the place of Gothic in contemporary international crime fiction, rethinking Gothic in the literary tradition and a second panel on Latin American Gothic. "Clinical Gothic" was elsewhere discussed, with Sara Wasson (Lancaster University, UK) delivering her fascinating paper on the ethics of organ procurement and tissue transfer in Gothic fiction live via Skype feed from Lancaster, in an IGA first. Laura Kremmel (Lehigh University, USA) continued the theme in her discussion of "Gothic Exhibition: Anatomy's Literary Crossover," providing a detailed account of how dissection and display of the body in anatomical museums capitalises on the Gothic literary imagination of its visitors. Finally, Benjamin Noad (University of Stirling, UK) gave an enthusiastic paper on how to reconcile the role of the madhouse in Gothic fiction, ruminating on how Gothic writing is capable of both informing the cultural imaginary of mental illness and reflecting it. All three speakers engaged deeply with questions of medical ethics and how the Gothic mode provides an opportunity to explore these issues of bodily ownership, with an awareness that harmful tropes are still present and must be carefully negotiated in order to produce meaningful work.

The final session of the day spanned themes from nautical Gothic to Latinx Gothic in music, drama, and dance, as well as Gothic in Asia and the Middle East and Gothic in Horror Films. The panel on "Gothic Monsters and the Stage" began with Dorota Babilas (University of Warsaw, Poland) delivering an enlightening paper on the myriad operatic traditions running under the surface in Gaston Leroux's *The Phantom of the Opera* (1909-1910). I (Rebecca Gibson, Lancaster University, UK) followed with a paper which expanded on Babilas's reading of Leroux's text, exploring the concept of horror as language gap in *Phantom*. Yasser Khan (Wolfson College, University of Oxford, UK) rounded off the panel with an analysis of the interplay between race and monstrosity in Gothic melodramas. Lively discussion and questioning followed, with each speaker offering their own interpretations of the discussed texts.

Professor Aurora Piñeiro (National Autonomous University of Mexico, Mexico) delivered the last keynote of the conference on Gothic rewritings of Hansel and Gretel from Angela Carter to Mariana Enriquez, moving through a seamless analysis of adaptations in order to demonstrate that this particular folktale is particularly well-suited to condemning intolerance and oppression of the vulnerable: both Jorge Volpi's *Oscuro Bosque Oscuro* (2010) and Louise Murphy's *The True Story of Hansel and Gretel* (2003) relocate the story to World War Two, and the tale persists to the present day in the form of *The VVitch* (2015). The day rounded off with a general meeting of the association, in which the next co-presidents were announced as Professor Justin D. Edwards (University of Stirling, UK) and Professor Jason Haslam (Dalhousie University, Canada).

Delegates were greeted by Gothic performers at the opening of the conference banquet dinner and disco at the beautiful Restaurante Hacienda Las Bodegas del Molino, where we were led through a labyrinthine series of corridors in the restored – and possibly haunted – mansion to the dining room, which was complete with DJ and strobe lights. The lively and welcoming atmosphere of the conference extended to the dance floor and it was widely agreed to be the best banquet the IGA have ever organised.

The final panels of the conference covered topics from Gothic theology and morality, urban Gothic and folklore and the Gothic. The fascinating "Gothic Travels and Tourism" began with Justin Edwards (University of Stirling, UK) taking us on a journey through the works of Edward Said, reinterpreting them as haunted travel memoirs. Gina Wisker (University of Brighton, UK) followed with an intriguing analysis of H. P. Lovecraft, Ian McEwan, and Hilary Mantel, bringing all three authors together in contemplation of the intersections between travel and terror. Nicola Bowring (Nottingham Trent University, UK) brought the panel to a close with an overview of travel, exoticism and alterity in the Gothic tradition. A panel on the significance of travel in the Gothic mode was a fitting end for the IGA's first foray into Mexico, and demonstrates that there is ample opportunity for the conference to go even further afield in future.

The ceremonious breaking of several beautifully made piñatas marked the closing of the conference: as well as costumed Day of the Dead skeletons and a dauntingly large spider, Black Philip from aforementioned *The VVitch* made an appearance, with most delegates reluctant to part with him even after photos had been taken. Such a playful end to the conference typified this aspect to the Gothic that can sometimes go unremarked upon, and which makes the Gothic academic community a pleasure to be part of.

BIONOTE

Rebecca Gibson is a PhD student at Lancaster University, UK. Her thesis focuses on the Gothicisation of plastic surgery in contemporary text and media, and her secondary research interests include feminism and the medical humanities.

EVENT REVIEWS

IN THE FUTURE, THEY ATE FROM THE FINEST PORCELAIN MAY 6-JUNE 24, 2017, UK

Exhibit Review by Molly Cobb

Sansour, Larissa. *In the Future, They Ate from the Finest Porcelain*. Various Media. Exhibited at the Bluecoat, Liverpool, 6 May - 24 June 2017.

Centred on her film of the same name, Larissa Sansour's exhibition *In the Future, They Ate from the Finest Porcelain* (2017) aims to examine the links between history, self, and nation. The titular film explores the actions of a resistance group which deposits porcelain tableware underground, with the aim of influencing future archaeologists into positing the existence of a past civilisation which in fact never existed. By influencing history in such a way, the group hopes to support their future claims to the territory and resist losing their land to invading forces. By challenging claims of ownership and "historical entitlement," Sansour's film reflects on the nature of myth, history, and the self-creation of a national heritage. By de facto creating a nation, the resistance group has essentially participated in "historical intervention" and created a mythic nation which will eventually become historic fact.

By portraying the creation of an alternate history in the present to enact an alternate future, Sansour's film combines a technological future with a mythic past, most notably through the juxtaposition of high-tech spaceships and low-tech porcelain tableware. Throughout the film, Sansour excels at portraying this through the use of powerful, thought-provoking imagery. Depicting the porcelain as raining down upon the artist, Sansour couples this with the imagery of spaceships swarming overhead like a plague of locusts. Sansour's exhibition replicates the swarm of spaceships which feature in her film in the installation titled *And They Covered the Sky until it Was Black*. Referring to both porcelain and spaceships as similar to biblical plagues, Sansour explores connections between the overwhelming nature of connections to the past (that is, the porcelain) and the crushing force of an oncoming future (via the spaceships). The dropping of bombs from the spaceships reflects the destructive nature of the invading forces as perceived by the resistance group. Interlacing these bombs with symbols of the past and future indicates how these two temporalities destroy one another, inform one another, and ultimately survive one another. The porcelain placed by the resistance group thus aims to reclaim what this invading future has destroyed.

Linking art and reality together, Sansour has also enacted burial performances of actual porcelain tableware in Israel and Palestine, with the coordinates of these burial sites recorded in a series of bronze sculptures styled like Soviet missiles and included in the exhibition. As the porcelain

is buried rather than exhibited with the other artwork, they are essentially artefacts in absentia, with the bronze sculptures as their proxy. Indicating their presence despite their absence, Sansour examines notions of culture and nationality as concrete concepts which exist as a result of their effect or influence rather than through their actual presence. The use of bombs to indicate the burial sites reflects the destructive imagery in Sansour's film as these buried objects are designed to reflect a nation destroyed. In combining bomb imagery with the burial of these false artefacts, however, Sansour toys with the idea that these remnants are actually a destructive force due to their alteration of history.

Examining the connections between myth and history allows Sansour to explore ideas of fiction, narrative, and the ability of individuals to twist such things into fact despite their fictive nature. In fact, Sansour's film ends with the same dialogue with which it begins – "tell me about your dream" – which not only calls into question whether the events in the film have occurred as fiction or reality, but reflects the cyclical nature of history and myth. In creating this fictional history, however, Sansour implies that the resistance group is not altering anything which has not already been previously modified. Rather, the resistance group accuses the ruling nation of 'unseeing' anything that does not fit, or is inconsistent with, their narrative fiction in which they alone are entitled to the land. Claiming that the burial of the porcelain is "depositing facts," Sansour refers to herself in the film as a "narrative terrorist." She goes on to comment that "fiction has a constitutive effect on history and political reality." As such, the nation which the resistance group hopes to create will exist as a polemic utopia, designed to alter political history in such a way as to grant them entitlement which does not exist. Discussing the creation of history as an act of storytelling which alters the political landscape, Sansour implies that myth not only creates fact, it indeed creates identification via heritage, culture, and nationality as well. Referring to the present reality in which the resistance group exists, Sansour calls it a "barely functioning dystopia" and overlays the film with apocalyptic imagery designed to reflect not only the destructive nature of the bombs but the idea of change. Indicating that apocalypse has a way of sneaking up on the individual, Sansour acknowledges that the historical change which the resistance group is hoping to enact will not come to pass until those enacting it are long gone.

By examining history and the future as a by-product of fiction, Sansour explores links between the creation and destruction of nations and people through story, rather than physical action alone. Sansour's burial performances emphasise this link between reality and fiction by acting out the fictive narrative of her film. Whether such actions would actually be able to de facto create a nation is uncertain, though Sansour acknowledges the challenges presented by carbon dating. This scientific advancement serves to once again demonstrate how technological progress has a way of affecting how a narrative is told. Sansour also acknowledges that porcelain tableware without the skeletons of those who would have used them betrays the fiction. However, the film indicates that members of the resistance group aim to be "buried as part of [their] own fiction," thereby inserting themselves into the fiction created by the porcelain.

Alongside the film, Sansour's exhibit also includes reproductions of the porcelain plates

featured in the film. Titled *Revisionist Production Line*, the plates are laid out on a conveyor belt leading to a large stack onto which the plates continue to pile up. Reflecting the cyclical nature of history as indicated above, the conveyor belt also serves to reflect the mass-produced nature of the future. The plates created via this production line represent the resistance group's endeavour to create historical fact which will alter the narrative of the future and parallels the mass-produced spaceships utilised by the invading nation to alter the cultural narrative.

What Larissa Sansour achieves so well throughout her exhibition is the combination of past and future in such a way as to comment on the political nature of the present and its impact on individual self and identity. By coupling futuristic technology with handmade crockery, the ability of individual culture and heritage to survive future progress is called into question. Sansour's combination of various media in order to depict her version of an altered future through a transformed past allows audiences to examine the various ways in which narratives can be conveyed and the differing approaches to how myth can present fiction as fact. As Sansour herself is Palestinian, her choice of burial location for the artefacts in absentia reflects a personal attachment to ideas of historical entitlement, themes she illustrates so well as to give them global significance. The use of a near-future dystopia in order to achieve this indicates that Sansour's vision of a slow-building apocalypse which occurs when least expected and alters concepts of history, self, and nation may be closer to our present than our future.

BIONOTE

Dr Molly Cobb (UK) is a PhD graduate whose research focuses on mid-20th century American science fiction and representations of identity. She contributed a chapter to the forthcoming title *Sideways in Time: Critical Essays on Alternate History Fictions and Counterfactual Narratives* and was an organiser of the Current Research in Speculative Fiction conference.

MARS: AFTER THE CRISIS

MAY 14, 2017, UK

Performance Review by Ian Farnell

Tejal-Hamilton, Sarah, writer. *Mars: After the Crisis*. Dir. Ita O'Brien. Perf. Miriam Lucia, Dominic Rye, Fed Zanni. The Spill, Old Red Lion Theatre, London. 14th May 2017. Performance (rehearsed reading).

A growing number of productions by emergent playwrights and theatre companies have taken as their starting point the notion of colonising other planets. Alistair McDowall's *X* (2016), Idle Motion's *Voyager* (2016), curious directive's *Pioneer* (2015), The Outbound Project's *The Mission* (2016) and several others have all moved beyond our home planet, broadening theatrical horizons to further understand the human condition. The destinations have been different – Mars, Pluto, Europa, even a staged landing inside a Russian biodome – but the journeys have been surprisingly similar. All of them have placed everyman or everywoman characters at the heart of the show – young, talented individuals who become the first person to occupy the play's interstellar globe of choice. These ventures are all privately funded, by corporations or billionaires acting either philanthropically or with a drive to make history. Perhaps the most obvious theme is that each undertaking ends in failure. In *Pioneer*, long-term Martian habitation is revealed to have been a hoax. The sole crewmember of *The Mission*'s privately funded voyage to Europa broadcasts her suicide to the world in a bid to stop further neoliberal advances into space (her transmission is in fact cut short by the project's billionaire financier, who with his permanent grin and trimmed goatee was eerily if unintentionally reminiscent of Richard Branson, CEO of Sending Millionaires into Space). In *Voyager*, the flight did not even leave Earth, after its solo astronaut elected to stay behind with her family. Alistair McDowall disturbs the state of his characters in *X* so much that it eventually became uncertain as to whether the play had really been set on Pluto at all. Unlike, say, Andy Weir's *The Martian* (2011) and the subsequent film adaptation (2015), there are no optimistic outcomes or utopian dreams here – humanity either cannot escape its problems, or carries them into the unknown.

Sarah Tejal Hamilton's *Mars: After the Crisis* (2017) gives this failure a significant position in its title. Similarly, while other recent works toned down their more overtly science fictional elements – to focus on the human endeavour at the heart of space travel – Hamilton's play features genetically modified humans and artificially intelligent humanoids, functioning as everything from manual labourers to trainee lawyers. And of course, its crisis is similarly grander in scale – a gradual war of attrition between Earth and its new colony, resulting in Martian civil unrest and the use of nuclear weapons. The play flits between two different times and locations, both in the mid-2050s: the Martian colony prior to its destruction, and a tribunal on Earth examining the incident several years later. Scenes interchange frequently, and a picture of events emerges over the course of the

narrative, which ends (in the past) with the climactic nuclear annihilation of the base, and (in the 'present') a confrontation between Ruth, the tribunal's chief examiner, and Ben, the architect of the initial colonisation, who is complicit in the disaster. As well as an interplanetary epic, the play is also a family drama – Ruth and Ben are ex-husband and -wife, and their son served as a soldier on Mars, where widespread, terrified reaction to his genetically altered biology – putting the xeno into xenophobe – contributed to the subsequent disaster.

This conceit is typical of both Science Fiction and the theatre – grounding social commentary in personal conflict. *Mars*, sadly, does not quite pull it off, and it is difficult to ignore some of the larger gaps of logic in the plot. The idea that a tribunal examining nuclear war on the Martian colony would be led by the wife of the founder of that colony screams 'conflict of interest,' and while this could result in an interesting examination of corruption, nepotism, and the whole post-truth debate, the implications of the intimate relationship between these central characters is never questioned. Moreover, the constant jumps between Earth and Mars, and between events in separate years, is a stylistic shift perhaps more akin to the novel or cinema, as opposed to the stage, where temporal shifts of this magnitude are difficult to signal.

The play sadly also squanders its most interesting aspects, in favour of rooting the larger focus amongst its familial narrative. Ruth's personal AI (Artificial Intelligence), Hogarth, is a sentient humanoid robot who is training to become a lawyer, and spends the majority of the drama in a quiet struggle between his self-awareness as a machine and his desire to be seen as an equal member of society. The ideological pull of his separate, conflicting identities leads to the play's most memorable scenes: when interviewing AIs who had been present on Mars, he struggles to reason with them on a level beyond basic android protocol, and tries out of politeness to resist simply subordinating their data through his abilities as a newer, more advanced model. Perhaps the play's strongest moment is Hogarth's discussion of the social evolution of artificial intelligence, as he questions Ruth about who will ultimately document their development, curate their history and remember their stories. His desire for a unique cultural voice is a moment of brilliant empathy, so it is a pity that *Mars* prioritises drip-feeding the causes of the crisis (which, with the outcome ascribed with some certainty in the title, are perhaps not as interesting as Hamilton believes), when dramatically speaking, Hogarth's existential crisis is much more engaging than the loss of the colony. According to the theatre's website, the play "questions the human proclivity for self-destruction when our instinct is survival" – its focus is clearly on the human aspect, writ large via interstellar nuclear politics. So far, so Sci-Fi. But its most *theatrically* rewarding moments are found in Hogarth's subtle yet persistent search for meaning.

That being said, Hamilton's play has only been given one airing – a rehearsed reading at the Old Red Lion Theatre, as part of their ongoing engagement with and nurturing of future theatrical talent. The cast and director had only rehearsed during the day, and presented their performance – which by its nature made little use of the space, and was presented with scripts in hand – that same evening. Therefore, it is perhaps unfair to judge *Mars* on the basis of this single outing, when it is so evidently presented to encourage development, as opposed to constituting a finished piece.

It remains to be seen, should it be formally produced, what the finished piece may look like. Given time, there is a good play amongst that reading – the seeds are there. Hamilton has already managed to situate her grand questions in a personal narrative, but perhaps not the one she was aiming for. The litmus test for Science Fiction theatre is the same as any piece of theatre – its characters must be believable, intriguing, and affecting. There have been many attempts, some successful and some less so. I live in hope that Science Fiction will find its place within the muscular language of theatre, where intimacy is the measure of infinity and words can construct worlds. Hamilton is on the right path.

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BIONOTE

Ian Farnell is planning a PhD on twenty-first century Science Fiction plays, having recently completed an MRes at Warwick University, UK which focused on several recent examples of SF in British theatre.

THE INTERNATIONAL VAMPIRE FILM & ARTS FESTIVAL MAY 26-27, 2017, TRANSYLVANIA

Festival Report by Laura Davidel

The International Vampire Film & Arts Festival Sighișoara, Transylvania, 26-27 May 2017

One cannot resist the temptation of participating in the International Vampire Film and Arts Festival (IVFAF), especially since it takes place in Sighișoara, the birthplace of Vlad the Impaler and one of the best-preserved citadels in Europe. With the proliferation of the vampire trope in literature, film, and digital art, going to Sighișoara for this festival was like going back in time to the origins of the Dracula myth. The IVFAF consisted of three parts: the screenings of films and short films that explored the metamorphoses of the vampire; an academic conference; and a literary programme which included an audience with writers of contemporary vampire fiction. In addition to this, participants could book private tours to the Bran Castle – thought to be the inspiration for the Count's castle in Bram Stoker's novel, *Dracula* (1897), or the Poienari Citadel – one of the fortresses actually inhabited by Vlad the Impaler.

Reunited under the theme *Theatre des Vampyres*, the majority of films were screened in the crypt of the Hotel Sighisoara, which made me think of the underground passages from Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764). This venue was a very inspired choice, as it provided the audience with the appropriate dark and gloomy atmosphere for the screenings. Ranging from Horror to Comical, the films explored how the trope of the vampire was represented in the cinema, from the deviant sex-worker depicted in *Venerada* to the identity crisis of the female vampire hunter who finds out that she is a hybrid in Matthew Abaya's *Vampariah* (2016). This was my favourite film, not only due to its abundance in cultural references about Aswang (the Filipino vampire), but also for the antithesis between the undead's self-fragmenting body and use of high-tech drones that try to catch it. In addition, *Vampariah* won the Golden Stake award at the IVFAF. Another film that caught my attention was Ryan Blazic's *Monsters among Men* (2017), which explored the idea of a vampire's need for pure blood rather than diabetic blood that proves to be lethal for the undead.

The conference began with Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock's (Central Michigan University, USA) keynote speech, "Vampire Suicide," in which he addressed the reasons why vampires attempt to commit suicide: regret, remorse, and ennui. Pointing out that immortality can be regarded as both a gift and a curse (to the extent of becoming a veritable death wish), his talk concentrated on the depiction of Varney's self-disgust in James Malcolm Rymer's *Varney the Vampire* (1847), the

ethical question of why God would allow vampires to exist in Anne Rice's *Interview with the Vampire* (1976) or the curse of being a witness to human self-destruction in Jim Jarmusch's well-known film *Only Lovers Left Alive* (2013). These narratives, as Dr. Weinstock argued, re-position the human at the centre of the universe while confirming the abnormality of the vampire, who resorts to self-punishment.

Stephanie Weber's (University of Vienna, Austria) talk, entitled "The Dark Gift of Immortality: Reflections on the Melancholic Vampire," concentrated on films such as *Therapie für einen Vampir* (2014) and *Interview with the Vampire* (1994), using Jacques Lacan's theories on the mirror phase and Sigmund Freud's concepts of the uncanny and melancholia in order to address the melancholic vampire that is tormented by the absence of a reflected mirror image. In "The Unwritten Vampires: Infectious Interrelations of Character, Trope and Genre," Essi Varis (University of Jyväskylä, Finland) focused on narrative theory and character construction, pointing to the interrelation of motifs tropes and imagery that, together with stock characters and plots, define a genre. She then discussed the characters in the comic book series, *The Unwritten* (2009-2015), by Mike Carey and Peter Gross. Another interesting perspective on genre was raised by Shelby Nicole Russell (University of Louisiana at Monroe, USA) who pointed out that the vampire genre is abundant with medieval tropes, especially regarding death and immortality.

A very engaging talk was given by Rhonda Jackson Joseph (MFA Alum, Seton Hill University, USA), who drew attention to the fact that black femininity is underrepresented in vampire culture to the advantage of the stereotypical white vampire. According to Fireside Fiction, 2015 figures show that less than 2% of the stories published in sixty-three magazines were written by black authors ("Fiction, We Have A Problem: It's Racism"). This fuelled a discussion with the audience who tried to come up with other examples of black female figures in literature (the first I could think of, besides Anne Rice's vampire queen, Akasha, were the black servants of Louis's plantation in *The Vampire Chronicles* (1976-Present) and in television and film (Bonnie in *The Vampire Diaries* (2009-2017) and, of course, *Blacula* (1972)).

A panel that I really enjoyed was the "Vampiric Evolution & Conspicuous Consumption," formed by Claudia Marie Kovach (Neumann University, USA), William Hamilton (Neumann University, USA), and Keith Fallows (Rosemont College -- USA). While Keith discussed the morality in Dan Simmon's *Carrion Comfort* (1989), William Hamilton provided a thought-provoking analysis about vampiric dialogue, drawing attention to the presence of queering effects in Stoker's *Dracula* and Tobe Hooper's film *Lifeforce* (1985). Claudia Marie Kovach's talk focused on three major vampire narratives belonging to Polidori, Stoker, and Rice, examining desire and the way that the vampire, as a scapegoat, finally restores order. Other thought-provoking readings of the vampire metaphor were provided by Tracy Reilly's (University of Dayton, School of Law, USA) analysis of copyright with regards to Stoker's *Dracula* and Elsa Carruthers's (MFA Alum, Seton Hill University, USA) interpretation of vampires as symbols of decadence in the context of an increasingly globalised marketplace. Leadie Jo Flowers's (MFA Alum, Seton Hill University, USA) paper examined the mixture of capitalism and vampirism as a means of explaining the popularity of the vampire.

From Medieval origins to Brazilian metamorphoses; from scapegoating and desire to capitalism; or from vampiric transformation to suicide, this academic conference provided an inspiring space for exploring and examining the multi-faceted metaphors of the vampire in both literature and cinematography. While the essential traits of a vampire established by Stoker in his seminal novel *Dracula* were recurrent throughout this conference; the presentations provided fascinating accounts on the psyche, desire, queerness, and capitalism as some of the manifold aspects that constitute the figure of the undead.

The Literary Programme offered interviews, readings, and Q&As with the nominees for the Golden Stake Award: Aaron Speer, Tima Maria Lacoba, Sloane Murphy, Rhiannon Frater, Jaye Wells, and April White. This was followed by an audience with Katie Ruth Davies, the writer behind the *Blood Omen* saga (1996-2012), and award-winning authors Michael Arnzen and Karpov-Kinrade. The panel, "The Rules of Vampirology," formed by Manuela and Valentin, two Romanian representatives from [The Land of Dracula](#) and Shane DeFreest from White Wolf, discussed legends about vampires in Transylvania and the historical sites connected to Vlad the Impaler, as well as the elements from folklore and literature that were incorporated in the creating the clans from the well-known *Vampire the Masquerade* (1991-present).

While the discussions with the participants have provided me with inspiration and ideas for my dissertation, I must admit that I also enjoyed the Midnight Cemetery Walk in the Sighișoara graveyard, the rain which really added up to the gloomy atmosphere (there was even lightning during my talk), and especially the Vampire Ball in which vampiric costume was *de rigueur*. DJ Cypher (Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock's alter ego) provided a special set list and ultimately put [The Days of Swine and Roses](#) in my mind for the following few weeks. To conclude, I can only hope that Seton Hill University, Kutztown University, and the University of South Wales will turn this festival into a tradition and associate themselves with Romanian universities in order to gain in greater visibility. I would like to finish by mentioning both Nina Auerbach's assertion that "every age embraces the vampire it needs" (145) and Angela Carter's claim that "we live in Gothic times," (122) as two essential ideas that describe the exchanges, films, and atmosphere of the 2017 International Vampire Film and Arts Festival in Sighișoara.

Follow the IVFAF's Facebook page for more details and visit www.ivfaf.com for the 2018 edition of the festival. Follow this link for an interview with the organisers: <http://triblive.com/lifestyles/morelifestyles/12451375-74/seton-hill-faculty-co-curate-academic-conference-for-international-vampire-film-and-arts>

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BIONOTE

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TIME MACHINES: THE PAST, THE FUTURE, AND HOW STORIES TAKE US THERE MAY 27-SEPTEMBER 3, 2017, UK

Exhibit Review by Alexander J. Wilson

Time Machines: The Past, the Future, and how Stories take us there

Palace Green Library, Durham University, UK, 27th May – 3rd September 2017

“How big is time? And what will the future be like?”

This summer Durham University's Palace Green Library hosted a major exhibition on depictions of time travel in Science Fiction, with a focus on literary works, film and popular music. The exhibition particularly emphasised the importance of H. G. Wells's *The Time Machine* (1895) in establishing time travel as a significant theme within the genre – the original manuscript of which was prominently displayed at the midpoint of the showcase. The dramatic shifts in scientific knowledge during the nineteenth century impacted many literary works of the time – including Wells's early Science Fiction novels – which provided a general focal point. The radical change in attitudes towards time was conveyed through the juxtaposition of extracts from major texts, including Alfred Tennyson's "In Memoriam A. H. H." (1849) and Thomas Hardy's *A Pair of Blue Eyes* (1873), alongside material evidence, such as trilobite fossils and geological samples, that contributed to a significant reshaping of the conceptual parameters of history. Wells's association with time travel narratives and the impact of these scientific advances on the development of Science Fiction as a genre are well established; the decision to present these ideas in an interdisciplinary context, however, allowed them to be viewed from a fresh perspective. This context was especially useful for a non-academic audience who may be unfamiliar with the history of scientific advancement during this period.

The exhibitors were careful to highlight how the complexities of time has long been a subject of interest for writers of literature and philosophy, and did not suddenly emerge with more definite categorisations of 'science' as a distinct field of knowledge. The early sections of the showcase, which preceded the focus on nineteenth-century Science Fiction, displayed such texts as Aristotle's *Poetics* (c. 384–322 BCE), John Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1667), and *The Book of Hours* (c. 1490–1500) as works with a significant interest in concepts of time and chronology. A large display at the beginning of the exhibition of various clocks and other timekeeping devices, from a three-thousand-year-old Egyptian water clock to a selection of modern Japanese alarm clocks, from the outset highlighted the diverse methods by which different cultures measure and interpret time; this effect was replicated in the soundtrack to the exhibition, which consisted of the sounds produced by these devices alternately harmonising and causing dissonance amongst each other. From the

start, the exhibition asked its audience to consider non-standard ways of making sense of time, but also highlighted the limitations that we face in attempting to understand our temporal situation in the first place. These limitations were further emphasised by the explanations, positioned directly after the nineteenth-century material, of more recent scientific developments that problematise linear approaches to time – most notably Albert Einstein’s General Theory of Relativity and Erwin Schrödinger’s Time-dependent equation. These were welcome additions that expanded upon understandings of time travel beyond the classic example provided by Wells, and were presented in a satisfactorily relevant and accessible manner despite their intrinsic conceptual complexities.

Along these lines, the exhibition emphasised that while the model of time travel used by Wells in *The Time Machine* – namely time as a linear construct and a relatively ‘deterministic worldview’ – has undoubtedly been influential in cultural representations of the concept, many other types of time travel have been imagined in fiction. This multiplicity was represented in the variety of texts displayed alongside Wells’s model, which include Robert Heinlein’s *By His Bootstraps* (1941), in which the protagonist creates a paradoxical time-loop wherein he meets himself on multiple occasions, and Ray Bradbury’s “A Sound of Thunder” (1952), which revolves around the concept of the ‘butterfly effect’ – the idea that small changes made by travellers to the past can fundamentally alter the form that the future takes. Significantly, the exhibition as a whole did not adhere to a rigid chronology in its own organisation, with the initial displays of Aristotle’s and Milton’s earlier works also featuring later texts, including James Joyce’s *Ulysses* (1922) and Katherine Mansfield’s “The Prelude” (1918), that post-date the following section on the nineteenth century – a technique replicated throughout the exhibition, as such diverse literary works as Kurt Vonnegut’s *Slaughterhouse-Five* (1969) and Virgil’s *Aeneid* (c. 29–19 BCE) were presented alongside each other in the same display-case. While the section on Wells and his nineteenth-century context was given prime focus at the midpoint of the exhibition, its placement also worked to locate alternative conceptions of time and history around a comparatively ‘fixed’ centre. This allowed the curators to explore more unfamiliar territory at the outset and conclusion of their project without straying into largely inaccessible fields.

The diverse narrative possibilities and functions of time travel are best exemplified by the superb final section of the exhibition, which challenged attendees to engage with non-linear conceptions of both past and future. This section presented the concept of time travel from the perspectives of mental time travel – a broad category that the exhibitors took to include alternative histories, such as Phillip K. Dick’s *The Man in the High Castle* (1962), and narratives in which historically marginalised perspectives are given a voice through time travel, such as Octavia Butler’s *Kindred* (1979) – alongside utopian and dystopian literature. Of particular note is the research into ‘critical utopias,’ a term coined by Tom Moylan in *Demand the Impossible* (1986), which stress the importance of the relationship between such imagined societies and the real world; the exhibition suggests that the category includes such texts as Margaret Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale* (1985), J. G. Ballard’s *High-Rise* (1975), and Marge Piercy’s *Woman on the Edge of Time* (1976). These utopias present idealised alternative communities as a means of commenting on our own societal experiences; they draw contrasts and similarities between the societies of their intradiegetic narratives and the reader’s own, often to stress the need and possibilities for real-world social change. As the exhibition puts it,

“they emphasise the dynamism of time and the scope for humans to choose and shape, rather than submit to the inevitability of, the future.” The possibilities emerging from such approaches were summarised in the concluding stages of the exhibition in the outstanding short film “Who Owns the Future?”, which detailed how time travel narratives and alternative history concepts have been used in film, music, and literature to empower various communities marginalised by gender and race – a fitting end to an impressive showcase that emphasised the multiple ways in which time and our journeys through it can be represented in fiction and culture.

The exhibition was accompanied by a series of lectures, since made available as podcasts, delivered by the academic team whose research informed the exhibition. These include a general introduction to the exhibition by Professor Simon James and Dr Jenny Terry of Durham’s Department of English Studies, as well as specific lectures on H. G. Wells (Simon James) and Feminist Utopias and Afrofuturism (Sarah Lohmann and Jenny Terry). At the time of writing, these podcasts can be accessed online on the Palace Green Library website: www.dur.ac.uk/palace.green/timemachines/.

BIONOTE

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**FILM,
TELEVISION,
AND VIDEO
GAME REVIEWS**

SPACE ADVENTURES IN MULTI-DIMENSIONS: VALERIAN AND THE CITY OF A THOUSAND PLANETS (2017)

Review by Alison Tedman

Besson, Luc, director. *Valerian and the City of a Thousand Planets*. Perf. Dane DeHaan, Cara Delevingne, Clive Owen, Rhianna, Ethan Hawke. EuropaCorp Films; Fundamental Films; Grive Productions, 2017. Film.

Adapted from the French comic-book series *Valérian and Laureline* (Mézières and Christin 1967-2010), Luc Besson's Science Fiction Space Opera *Valerian and the City of a Thousand Planets* (2017) offers a visually rich, immersive world that contrasts with those of its Hollywood Action contemporaries. Its \$177.2 million budget (*Box Office Mojo* 2017) is frequently cited as unprecedented for a European film, while 2,734 effects shots were provided mainly by industry colossi ILM and Weta Digital. Besson planned the adaptation in the late 1990s, discarding an early screenplay after viewing *Avatar* (2009), yet gaining new technical motivation from the latter film (Fleming).

Valerian and the City of a Thousand Planets (henceforth *Valerian*) opens with an exposition showing the creation of the space city of Alpha, followed by a calmly surreal sequence on Planet Mül that establishes the hallucinatory, immersive nature of Besson's universe. The comic's illustrations of this planet are transposed in dream-like imagery that is close to the original. We are introduced to the gentle Pearl race by a young female waking up, cleaning her face with a giant pearl to give it an iridescence that is apparently sensitised to emotions, and joining others on an idyllic beach. Pearls are fished, and reproduced by converters, creatures that multiply any object fed to them.

When this paradise is compromised, the narrative segues, for reasons that we learn later, to the off-duty flirting between the space crew of *Valerian* (Dane DeHaan), and his military (and, he hopes, personal) partner, Laureline (Cara Delevingne). Shortly after, we are caught up in an innovative sequence in which interplanetary tourists (some comedy clichés here) visit a large inter-dimensional Big Market with a guide (James Flynn). This twenty-eighth century sequence suggests a potential direction for virtual reality, and a visual synonym for it, as we intercut between two co-existent versions of the landscape, seen through an objective, and at times subjective narrational viewpoint. The Big Market's actual space is a policed, sandy arena, reminiscent of a *Mad Max* (1979-present) future landscape, while a bustling, crowded market appears, as in virtual reality, when characters don the appropriate headset. Tourists can pluck items out of the alternate realm by coding their DNA into a transmatter box; a similar transporter encases Valerian's arm. Combined with invisibility,

it functions as Suvin's Novum: a new element, specific to Science Fiction.

During a chase through Big Market, the interstice between co-existing worlds is apparent. After taking key items from an alien who is selling to diasporic Pearl people, Valerian is pursued, but his arm is partly caught in the box and still visible to antagonists in the Market. He is located between two spaces. The multi-dimensionality of virtual space is also connoted, without cyberspace tropes, as he falls, Alice-like through several floors. Here, and in ensuing action scenes, characters pass through impossible barriers and spaces, remediating transitions between levels in games. Inside Big Market, items located in a game-like space become tangible, in an extension of the virtual consumables of real games' e-commerce.

The film's narrative action transfers to the city of Alpha which, as the exposition has shown, comprises centuries of the occupants of alien ships taking up residence, and retaining their cultures. Besson's SF Fantasy *The Fifth Element* (1997) combined digital effects with miniatures, but *Valerian* was mainly created against blue screen. The fast action means that multitudes of computer-generated spaces and motion-capture beings are experienced at breakneck speed. Yet this can be more appealing than rather flatly delivered military scenes, although there are uncanny moments, as when a room is invaded and everyone cocooned in a glutinous substance. A subterranean scene in which Laureline takes an underwater ride with the weird Bob the Pirate (Alain Chabat) to catch a vision-inducing jellyfish, echoes French Fantasy film *City of Lost Children* (1995), although based on a sequence in the comic.

Other images from the film are recognisable from the *Valérien and Laureline* adventure that Besson mainly used for the adaptation, *Ambassador of the Shadows* (Mézières and Christin, 1975, translated by Jerome Saincantin, 2013). The comic's artist, Jean-Claude Mézières, worked with Besson on *The Fifth Element*. Unlike some independent American comic adaptations, *Valerian* eschews the foregrounding of comics' formal properties, through stills or panels within the frame for example, and it contrasts with the recognisable branded aesthetics of the Marvel and DC franchises (see, for example, studies of comic-book films by Burke in *The Comic Book Film Adaptation: Exploring Modern Hollywood's Leading Genre* (2015); Hassler-Forest in Leitch ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Adaptation Studies* (2017)). Stylistically, it remediates Mézières's painterly and quirky imagery.

The influence of the *Valerian and Laureline* comic-book series on many Fantasy texts including *Star Wars* (1977-present) is often cited: here, the seller from whom Valerian steals is Jabba-like. Humour is also used in depicting some scenes with aliens, and together with the young cast and 12A UK certificate, will have contributed to at least one UK cinema chain marketing *Valerian* in a trailer with the summer's family releases, where it appears oddly but vividly amid the animations. Another form of intertextuality is found, from an auteur perspective, in Besson's use of guest cameos and casting against type, as in *The Fifth Element*. Herbie Hancock, Ethan Hawke, Rutger Hauer, and Mathieu Kassovitz appear in a cast that includes Clive Owen as Commander Arün Filitt. Continuity is also established through Besson's cinematographer, Thierry Arbogast.

Despite press plaudits for the film's aesthetic and its visual effects, some reviews critique its structure and characterisation. Interestingly, such issues are traceable to Besson's earlier work, its reception and his critically assessed auteur status. These are explored in Hayward's seminal *Luc Besson* (1998) which, like later texts, notes the duality of Besson's work, between France and Hollywood, independently financed Art House and Action blockbuster. In *The Films of Luc Besson* (2006), editors Hayward and Powrie define Besson's auteur traits as "excess and stylization," with characters who "seem to lack psychological or historical depth" (1). While some reviews of *Valerian* might appear to consider these same traits, excessive spectacle is positively nuanced for critics when associated with successful digital Fantasy world-building. Spectacle is recontextualised at a historical distance from Besson's perceived 1980s identity, as one of the directors associated with the "cinema du look," a "neo-baroque," self-aware visual style.

The specific adaptation of a comic also impacts, of course, on Besson's approach. *Valerian* and Laureline's embodiment by actors who appear to be younger than the illustrations, suggests a disparity between their limited experience and given narrative prowess as military "special operatives." However, their action performances and dialogue are usefully read as intended to construct a quirky, Fantasy comic-book aesthetic, appropriate to the ambiance and production context of the comic.

In considering gendered performance, Laureline is unarguably the hero of *Ambassador of the Shadows*, published over forty years ago. Through thirty of the comic's forty-eight pages, she forwards the narrative to find an absent Valerian, gaining helpers, and using the converter (here translated as "transmuter") to buy information or visions that assist in her search. In the film her quest is briefer, and by contrast, Valerian is involved in most of the action, rescuing a white-gowned Laureline from cannibalism, in a sequence in which his body is disguised as one of the lumbering aliens by the female shape-shifter, Bubble (played by Rihanna). Yet in the comic's narrative it is Laureline who dons the shape shifter as masquerade to infiltrate the aliens. Even when Valerian is found, five pages from the comic's end, Laureline oversees the interstellar politics of the comic's conclusion, and accuses a male Ambassador of paternalism. Onscreen, she gains Valerian's authorisation, by extolling the need for love. This is not to criticise the performances of Delevingne or Rihanna in their roles, yet the original plot might have led to an interesting, female-driven Action film, as in Besson's *Nikita* (1990), or *Lucy* (2014).

Having noted this, as debates in current adaptation theories indicate, there is no requirement for fidelity in adapting one medium to another, particularly in a convergent culture (see Leitch's overview in Leitch ed., 2017). Indeed, the chivalrous elements and world-view foregrounding love align the film as an auteur text with Besson's *The Fifth Element*. The earlier film utilises, for Hayward (1998; 2006), tropes including romantic love and the masculinised gaze with gender fluidity, in a male hero journey. We find similarities in a preliminary reading of *Valerian*, since a dazed-looking Valerian watches actress Bubble perform an erotic dance in which she quick-changes costume and identity throughout, like a Science Fiction reworking of *Moulin Rouge* (2002), while gender fluidity is seen in the androgynous Pearl people, and in aspects of shape shifting.

For its beautiful, innovative worlds and ground-breaking effects, *Valerian and the City of a Thousand Planets* is worth watching, and significant. Audiences may focus on its visual attractions, or accept it in its entirety, as the latest instalment in a perceived auteurist oeuvre.

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BIONOTE

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DIVINE CONTRAVENTION

Review by Jack Fennell

Fuller, Bryan and Michael Green, creators. *American Gods*. Perf. Ricky Whittle, Emily Browning, Crispin Glover, Bruce Langley, Yetide Badaki, Pablo Schreiber, Ian McShane. Fremantle Media North America, 2017. Television.

The temptation inherent in reviewing an adaptation like this is to compare the *American Gods* (2017) show to the source material. For brevity's sake I will avoid doing so here as far as possible. Suffice it to say that the most important aspects of the landmark Neil Gaiman novel have been retained, though a lot has also been remixed, meaning that fans of the novel will recognise the story without necessarily being able to predict it.

The central conceit of the story is that human beings imagine gods into existence, often unwittingly, along with other supernatural beings (such as leprechauns) who depend on human acknowledgement for their survival. These beings are shaped by human attitudes even as they are sustained by them: for example, there are multiple versions of Jesus Christ, tailored to the specific beliefs of each Christian denomination.

The gods of the old world were added to the American melting-pot by immigrant populations, but their power and influence has declined. Most of them live anonymously among the human population, using suggestive aliases and taking jobs in fields reminiscent of their original divine vocation. Once a god comes into existence, it can survive as long as people remember its name or make use of its iconography. For example, the Ancient Egyptian god of death, Anubis (played by Chris Obi), living in America under the name "Mr. Jacquel," carries two departed souls to his pantheon's afterlife during the show's run – one an Egyptian expat with a lifelong fondness for the stories of that pantheon (despite being a Muslim by faith), the other an atheist who happens to work at a casino decorated with an 'Ancient Egyptian' theme. Sincerity of belief does not matter; a starving god will take whatever it can get.

The main character Shadow Moon (Ricky Whittle) is drawn into this hidden world after being released from prison early to attend the funeral of his wife Laura (Emily Brown). Left rudderless after discovering that Laura was cheating on him, Shadow accepts a job offer from the enigmatic Mr. Wednesday (Ian McShane), another primary character, who is recruiting old friends from various ancient pantheons for an impending war. Humanity's god-making tendencies have spawned new deities to govern newer phenomena, such as Media (Gillian Anderson), the Technical Boy (Bruce Langley), and Mr. World (Crispin Glover); these younger deities' power is growing, and Wednesday (a.k.a. Odin) wants the Old Gods to fight back. What follows is a road trip through the gods' America, punctuated with flashbacks to the Ice Age, the Viking settlements, the Atlantic slave trade, convict

transportation, and the Iranian Revolution.

Ricky Whittle does well as Shadow Moon, striking a balance between an uninitiated everyman and a capable tough guy. The TV character is very different from the Shadow of the novel, a remarkably unflappable protagonist who takes the weirdest occurrences in his stride. Here, he is a more reactive, sceptical character: indeed, he spends the entire season doubting his own sanity before accepting the reality of gods in the finale. Opposite Whittle, Ian McShane is definitely the right actor to play Wednesday. As attested to by his roles in *Deadwood* (2004-2006), *Kings* (2009), and *Pillars of the Earth* (2010), to name but a few, he excels at portraying morally-ambiguous authority figures, but the part of Wednesday also harks back to his roguish performance in *Lovejoy* (1986-1994).

Shadow and Wednesday are not the only ones on the road. Emily Brown stars as Laura Moon, whose archetypal significance was underlined in promotional material that described her as “the Dead Wife.” She is not, however, a clichéd love interest who dies merely to provide Shadow with motivation. Indeed, her affair with Shadow’s friend Robbie (Dane Cook), exposed by the embarrassing circumstances of the car crash that killed them both, has damaged her relationship with Shadow irreparably. She provides the counterbalance to Shadow’s self-doubt, as she readily accepts the reality of gods and her new undead existence (which is not to say she’s happy about it). Brown also puts in a good performance as Essie McGowan, the eighteenth-century Irish transportee whose belief in leprechauns gave the fairies a foothold in the New World.

Pablo Schreiber plays Laura’s unwilling travel companion, the leprechaun Mad Sweeney, who has reluctantly agreed to help her in order to reclaim the lucky coin that is now reanimating her. Sweeney plays up to the hard-drinking, belligerent Irish stereotype (in the novel, his behaviour is explained as a consequence of the influence of American popular culture), but the incorporation of elements from the original tale of Mad Sweeney (*Buile Suibhne*) add texture and depth to the character. As the series goes on, more is revealed about Sweeney’s involvement in the events leading up to Shadow’s imprisonment and Laura’s death, underlining the morally ambiguous tone of the show.

The stakes for all the gods concerned are illustrated in the story of Nunyunnini, a late-Palaeolithic deity who faded out of existence when he was forgotten by humanity. To ensure their own survival, deities must cultivate human memory and awareness: the Old Gods favour methods that are sometimes cruel and violent, while the New Gods absorb their worship passively, though this does not make them any more empathetic or humane. Both cohorts are, at the end of the day, equally amoral, which makes it difficult to root for one side or the other, even though Shadow and Laura seem to be in the Old Gods’ camp by default.

Bryan Fuller and Michael Green are fitting co-showrunners for this complex story-world. Moments of whimsy and visual comedy (particularly the season finale’s garden party at the goddess Easter’s country estate, complete with bunnies that defecate candy) are balanced with multiple

nightmare sequences, disturbing visualised metaphors and copious amounts of gore. In fact, *American Gods* manages to combine these contrasting images into an unusual synthesis: see, for example, the severed Viking arm straying outside the widescreen 'letterbox' as it arcs through the air, or Laura kicking an enemy in the crotch hard enough to launch his skull and spinal cord skyward. The intro sequence, in which we ascend a totem pole comprised of old deities in sinister new contexts, foreshadows the series' visual design. The heightened reality of the story is conveyed through vibrant colour and pitch-black shadows, and the mystical imagery – including a buffalo with burning eyes, a bleeding hammer, and a mountain of skulls – is presented in all its glory, without any hesitancy. Visual effects are also used to transgressive ends: we see the sex-goddess Bilquis (Yetide Badaki) literally consume people through her genitals (sending them to a strange "vagina galaxy," as another character puts it); a gay sexual encounter between an Omani immigrant (Omid Abtahi) and a Jinn (Mousa Kraish); and a smoke-belching munitions factory that almost looks like a hulking monster in itself. Aside from CGI, a number of different animation styles are utilised to broaden the show's visual palette: the tale of Nunyunnini is told in stop-motion, while a proposal to drop a nuclear weapon on North Korea is illustrated with a cheery, technicolour cartoon full of unicorns and rainbows.

The supporting gods, old and new, are well-cast. Gillian Anderson as Media is clearly enjoying herself as she impersonates Lucille Ball, David Bowie, Marilyn Monroe and Judy Garland. Orlando Jones gives an engaging, subtly menacing performance as "Mr. Nancy" (a.k.a. Anansi). Peter Stormare plays the part of the (supposedly) evil Slavic god Czernobog with a very unnerving mixture of frustration and sadistic humour, and the soft-spoken Jeremy Davies has some nice moments of visual comedy as "Jesus Prime." Bruce Langley is suitably contemptible as the Technical Boy, the god of technology (imagine the most aggravating teenage internet troll you've ever encountered, combined with the most self-satisfied Silicon Valley entrepreneur you can imagine), and Yetide Badaki gives an arresting performance as Bilquis, also known as the Queen of Sheba (complemented with equally arresting special effects).

The series is a success in terms of casting, production, and visuals, and being based on one of the most celebrated Fantasy novels of the late twentieth century, it has a compelling story to tell. However, the richness and complexity of the material come with one drawback, in that there's a lot of lore and background information to be introduced. For the most part, the various gods are not on screen for very long before Shadow and Wednesday hit the road again, meaning that in spite of their charismatic performances, we do not get to see them take much of an active role in the story. This season is all about setting the scene, of course, though that in itself is a cause for concern: for one thing, it sets the bar quite high for future seasons, and for another, Fuller's TV series have in the past had an unfortunate tendency towards untimely cancellation – a trend one hopes *American Gods* can buck, lest we never get to see characters such as Whisky Jack or Mama-ji.

BIONOTE

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A BEAST AND HIS BOY: CONNECTING WITH THE OTHER IN *THE LAST GUARDIAN*

Review by Samantha Blanch

Fumito, Ueda. *The Last Guardian*. GenDesign, 2016. Video Game.

The Last Guardian, a 2016 title developed by GenDesign and directed by Ueda Fumito, is an ambitious project that engages with ideas of empathy and experience that one might think typically outside the scope of a video game narrative. Ueda's previous works – *Ico* (2001) and *Shadow of the Colossus* (2005) – have been praised by critics and players alike for their distinctive atmosphere and intertwining of gameplay and storytelling elements. This pedigree, combined with an unusually long and frequently extended development time, meant that *The Last Guardian* entered the video game market with enormous expectation placed upon it. Commercially, at least, these were not entirely met; pre- and early sales were good but failed to make up for the length of its development and – while critical reception was overall quite positive – several critics took issue with the somewhat unintuitive controls and dated graphical quality. Despite these issues, however, *The Last Guardian* continues the legacy of its predecessors: delivering a powerful tale about co-operation, connection, and understanding that can only really be experienced through the act of playing. This is achieved in several ways all well deserving of attention, however where the game's central thematic concerns really come through is the relationship crafted between the player and the deuteragonist – the titular Guardian, Trico. *The Last Guardian* is at its heart a story about connection and empathy with the other, and its portrayal of this exemplifies some of the unique qualities games bring to storytelling.

The game begins with the protagonist – a nameless young boy covered in strange tattoos – awakening in a strange, crumbling ruin with no memory of how he got there. Across from him, an enormous feathered beast lies chained to the ground, pierced with broken spears. After a brief tutorial sequence spent feeding and unchaining the beast – a bizarre, griffin-like creature that we are told is a legendary 'man-eater' called a Trico – the boy embarks on what he calls his "strange journey" to find his way home. Trico insists on following the new player and the two head out together into the labyrinth of crumbling ruins, caves, and ancient bridges that make up the mysterious 'Nest.' Mechanically, the game falls within the genre of 'puzzle platformers,' a relatively common style of game. As the boy, the player must navigate this strange world and complete various tasks – such as climbing along tightropes to reach a lever or sneaking through small tunnels to evade detection by enemies – to progress. *The Last Guardian* separates itself from the rest of the genre by focusing on the player character's relationship with the beast itself. Trico is one of the driving forces of the game both narratively and mechanically; it is the boy's and by extension the player's interactions and growing connection to this great beast that propels the story, as many of the puzzles can only be solved through encouraging Trico's co-operation. The game is built around the shared experience of

these two wildly different beings and the trust that forms between them.

Primarily, this is due to the video game medium's immediacy. In a game, even one where there are not many choices to be made, the barrier between character and audience is much thinner than in other media, which *The Last Guardian* uses to great effect. When Trico sulkily refuses to jump into an underground lake early in the game, it isn't the boy that has to find a way to coax him down but the player; the player that pulls the broken shafts of spears from his flank and reacts to the accompanying shrieks of pain; and the player who soothes him when he rages after a fight. From early on it is made clear that Trico is not simply a vehicle through which the goal of the game can be reached – as with many other non-player companions in video games – but an important character with an individual will. The game's much-lauded A.I. highlights this fact by showing Trico as behaving like a 'real' animal with his own specific quirks, needs, and foibles that are at the beginning difficult to understand. He is not always convenient or easy to command; he becomes distracted or distressed at times which impedes the player's progress. This choice by the developers is a movement away from the protagonist-centred universe commonly seen in games – where houses are made to be broken into and other people exist only to provide something – and towards a universe where the player is encouraged to consider the experience of another. Like ThatGameCompany's 2012 game *Journey* or Ueda's own previous work *Ico*, *The Last Guardian* reimagines the role of the 'companion' character in games, confronting the player's assumptions regarding this role. Ueda's focus on non-human experience reinforces his challenge to the perhaps egocentric view of the player. Trico is a fantastical, bizarre creature with a completely fictional existence that nonetheless feels both real and valid.

An important part of *The Last Guardian*, both mechanically and thematically, is the player learning to understand Trico's reactions and how to respond to them. This further underlines how Ueda emphasises the validity of Trico's experience as a character and encourages the player to consider it. For example, at various points throughout the game, the boy and Trico encounter stained glass symbols that prevent them from progressing. Trico's eyes go wide, his feathers fluff out, and he immediately hunkers down and backs away in an obvious show of fear. From a gameplay perspective, this is simply a way to prompt the player to solve the problem and access the next sequence, but it is contextualised in-game as relieving the distress of a terrified Trico. As the player spends more time with Trico and becomes more aware of him as an animal with thoughts and feelings, these obstacles become actively distasteful to the player as a cause of suffering for him; their removal and by extension Trico's relief and comfort becomes the 'reward' that the player receives. The game encourages the player to understand and care about Trico's experiences as much as their own by incorporating them into the puzzle aspect of the game, placing empathy at both its mechanical and narrative core.

The connection created by the mechanics is further emphasised by the symbiotic nature the relationship between the player and Trico takes over the course of the game. As the player progresses and learns to better understand Trico they are rewarded by the beast's trust, furthering both his arc as a character as well as the connection with the player. By caring for Trico and helping

him navigate their vast prison, in turn Trico protects the player from foes and – in a few particularly desperate cases – rescues them from plummeting into an abyss. Trico becomes a much-needed ally in an alien, hostile environment and a place of safety in dire circumstance – indeed, the only times in which the player can ‘fail’ are all times where Trico is not there to protect the player. In one particularly memorable sequence, the player is separated from Trico and forced to progress alone for the first time since the beginning of the game. The sudden change in mechanic underscores the discomfort and anxiety of having Trico taken away as well as illustrating how vulnerable the player is alone. Trico’s reappearance is a reprieve both in terms of game difficulty and emotional tension. This mechanical interdependence between boy and beast encourages a real connection between the player and their fictive companion, effectively illustrating the game’s story of an unlikely but powerful friendship that continues throughout and is ultimately instrumental to its conclusion. The immediacy, interactivity, and personal nature of the player’s experience is what makes this narrative work, showing the efficacy of the video game medium in encouraging empathy and emotional understanding. This is not an attempt to simulate an emotional experience as in ‘empathy game’ titles like *Depression Quest* (2013) or *That Dragon, Cancer* (2016), but rather to create a space and a story where the human player forges their own understanding with the fictional world.

The Last Guardian is a strange and occasionally frustrating experience. The controls are unforgiving, the third-person camera capricious and difficult to control, and Trico himself can at times display a decidedly catlike attitude towards co-operation. However, the way it uses the specific qualities of the medium to forge a bond between the player and the story makes it a truly worthwhile one. The boy’s strange journey with the man-eater that he befriends along the way is a powerful narrative experience that accomplishes its goals in ways that simply cannot be achieved by other media. In a culture where video games are still widely considered to be little more than violent, meaningless vehicles for fast-paced gratification, *The Last Guardian* is a beautiful, melancholic example of how versatile and effective a narrative medium they can be.

BIONOTE

Samantha Blanch holds a degree in Arts, English from the Australian National University, where she did her Honours thesis on video games as a unique narrative medium. She is interested in how new media, especially video games, role-playing games and fanfiction, work as forms of storytelling.

"I HOPE DADDY ISN'T AS BIG OF A DICK AS YOU": *GUARDIANS OF THE GALAXY VOL. 2*, FATHERHOOD AND ITS LEGACY

Review by Daniel Huw Bowen

Gunn, James, dir. *Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 2*. Perf. Chris Pratt, Zoe Saldana, Dave Bautista, Bradley Cooper, Vin Diesel, Karen Gillen, Pom Klementieff, Michael Rooker, Elizabeth Debicki and Kurt Russell. Marvel Entertainment, 2017. Film.

James Gunn's effervescent *Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 2* (2017) is a Family Drama in the guise of a Superhero Film, a Space Opera that crams in enough daddy issues to put even the *Star Wars* universe to shame. Its predecessor, *Guardians of the Galaxy* (2014) saw the team combat the minions of the villainous Thanos (Josh Brolin), adoptive father of team member Gamora (Zoe Saldana). The sequel explores Gamora's cruel upbringing and its effects on her relationship to her sister, Nebula (Karen Gillen). Substituting this parental antagonist with another, the sequel introduces Ego (Kurt Russell), an omnipotent Celestial being and biological father of leading man Peter Quill – the self-described Star-Lord (Chris Pratt). Moments prior to Ego's debut, Rocket (voiced by Bradley Cooper, motion by Sean Gunn) and Quill compete for control of The Milano – the team's ship – subsequently crashing it and endangering the lives of those on board. Quill leaves with Ego, prompting Rocket to jibe, "I hope daddy isn't as big of a dick as you." To begin, Ego in fact proves to be Quill's ideal father figure, a pinnacle of conventional masculinity for him to emulate. This charade is destroyed however by the revelation of Ego's nefarious and, yes, egotistical plan for universal domination.

Ego fundamentally embodies Mark Bould's idea of "masculine identity, and thus patriarchy, [...] conceptual[ing] himself as rational, proportionate and complete" (Bould 91), which the film takes rather literally. As a Celestial, Ego exists beyond the restrictions of the body but chooses to present himself as a white man, Kurt Russell, an archetypal 'tough guy,' representing conventional masculinity in American film (Hartzer). Ego's authentic form is a giant, floating brain capable of manipulating matter. This sentient being's corporeal form (and source of his matter manipulating powers) resides as the nucleus to a paradisiacal planet, a beautifully rendered world of lush vegetation, vividly coloured skies and statuesque geological formations. His entry into Quill's life is a strategic ploy as his son is necessary to complete his villainous plot, the Expansion – the realisation of traditional male ambition and the science fictional equivalent to ejaculating across reality. Throughout his extensive life, Ego had visited various planets, planting seeds of himself on each one, to "roam and spread, covering all that exists, until everything is me." To succeed however, he needs the power of a fellow Celestial and attempts to coerce Quill (a human-Celestial hybrid) to aid him. When Quill refuses, Ego

creates a phallic tentacle to penetrate and syphon the Celestial energy from his son, turning him into a 'battery' to complete his plan. Russell's performance makes this betrayal particularly painful: for the first half of the film, he not only charms Quill but also the audience by flashing beaming grins and delivering lame dad jokes. This makes his blasé confession to the murder and therefore fridging of Meredith Quill (Laura Haddock) later in the film far more chilling. Though a predictable plot point, it infuses the story with the emotional depth many films from Marvel Studios lack. It also serves as Ego's undoing, as Quill's affection for his mother causes him to retaliate against his father, rejecting the legacy of conventional masculinity that the former hoped his son would perpetuate. It is only with the destruction of Ego, the emblem of masculinity, that Quill is permitted to act less rationally and more emotionally.

Prior to this, Ego's presence only reaffirms Quill's masculinity. Supposedly designed as a satirical take on their typical hero, Marvel's idea of satire involves casting another handsome white with an amalgamation of the traits of those that came before (Chris Evans's chest, Robert Downey Jr.'s charisma and Chris Hemsworth's cheekiness) (Kilkenny). Following the crash of the Milano due to Quill acting on behalf of "what's between [his] legs," he accepts Gamora's chide light-heartedly, telling Drax and Nebula that he could have deftly landed the Milano if his penis had the dexterity to pilot it, attempting to reassure them of his masculinity. He then spends time in Ego's company engaging, for example, in a game of catch – evoking images of traditional American male bonding and retroactively fulfilling Quill's lack of conventional relationship with his father. After this, his flirting with Gamora is overbearing, his actions imposing. He touches her whilst she is preoccupied and without her consent, insists that she dances with him, even though she refuses. Gunn's camerawork, quick cuts of rotating close-ups, are disorientating, reflecting the uneasiness of the situation. Though Gamora concedes to dancing, soon after she pulls away, professing uncertainty regarding Ego's character. Now, Quill is quick to aggression: affronted, he dismisses her opinion, believing Gamora "likes [it] when [he's] the weak one." This display of toxic masculinity is a result of Ego's presence; Quill is far more sensitive now that his competency and strength are questioned, especially by someone who supposedly embodies the antithesis of his father's traditional masculinity – a woman.

Even though Gamora does not embody features of traditional femininity, the film insists on imposing them upon her. Raised as a warrior, Gamora is far more stoic than any of her team members: she's often silent and reluctant to discuss feelings, threatening Mantis when she attempts to use her empathic abilities on her. She is self-assured in her physical prowess, Gamora needs no validation of her skills when she slays the inter-dimensional beast that the team face, allowing Drax to believe he had defeated it. Her almost mute demeanour means that unlike the male Guardians, Gamora rarely engages in the juvenile comedic discourse and on the one notable occasion she does, it is with Nebula (a scene that was cut from the final theatrical edition). She becomes defined in contrast to the qualities that they possess, far more obvious because she is (until the end of this film) the team's only female member. One of the first conversations between Drax and Quill portrays her as a romantic conquest for the latter, supposedly an unattainable one. Later, Ego suggests that it was Quill who gifted Gamora her 'freedom' from Thanos. Ego compares this to the 'gift' he bestowed upon Meredith Quill, that is Peter Quill himself by impregnating her. By equating the two instances,

Ego maternalises Gamora without making her a mother. These prescriptive ideals infringe upon the subjectivity Gamora had in fact earned herself, escaping with expectation of femininity, marring the freedom from patriarchal control she fought for herself.

The effects of Gamora's upbringing under Thanos' patriarchal rule were definitive and shaped the relationship with her sister Nebula. As children, the two were forced by their father to fight one another; Nebula would typically lose and, as a punishment, Thanos would mark her failings on her body – "he removed the brain from my skull, my arm from my body." The hostile environment of their upbringing segregated the two, as Gamora claimed she "was concerned with staying alive, every day, until the next day. And [she] never considered what Thanos was doing to [Nebula]." Following Gamora's desertion of Thanos and defeat of Ronan in the first film, Nebula vows to hunt her sister down, to the point of self-destruction. This culminates with her taking a spaceship and targeting Gamora whilst she is alone on Ego's planet, recklessly piloting it into a cave where Gamora is taking shelter, endangering her life and destroying the craft. The fight that ensues between the two is primal. Gamora fires a gigantic gun repeatedly at Nebula, mindlessly yelling as Nebula struggles to free herself from the cockpit of her ship. It collapses under Gamora's fire, though she decides to save her sister from the wreckage. The two then engage in a brief physical fight, grunting and shoving each other, contrasting to Gamora's usual refined fighting style, with Nebula successfully gaining the upper hand before releasing Gamora from her grasp. Instantly, they debate over who won, who bested the other in combat. The competitiveness of their sisterhood reflects the struggles of feminism under neoliberalism, replacing "care and interdependence" with prospects of "individual advancement and meritocracy" (Fraser). With the revelation of Nebula's sufferings because of her losses to Gamora, the two somewhat reconcile in front of the burning effigy that was Nebula's vehicle, invading the depths of Ego's masculine utopia with the female solidarity in the most pleasing story arc of the film.

By the film's end, Gamora offers Nebula a place on the team, in her 'family,' and though she refuses, it offers a glimpse at a possible evolution of the portrayal of this female relationship, beyond the pressing influence of familial patriarchy. By contrast, the film's treatment of masculinity is far less satisfactory. Though *Guardians* tries to signal a shift away from traditional masculinity and its legacy, it only succeeds by permitting its leading character to ever so slightly emote more clearly. Undeniably an intimate character development, the primary success of the film is to prove however that daddy was actually a far greater dick than his son.

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THE IMPORTANCE OF INTERSECTIONALITY IN THE MODERN SUPERHERO GENRE: HOW *POWER RANGERS* (2017) EXPLORES DIVERSITY IN HOLLYWOOD

Review by Hollie Fitzmaurice

Israelite, Dean, dir. *Power Rangers*. Perf. Dacre Montgomery, Naomi Scott, R. J. Cyler, Becky G., Ludi Lin, Elizabeth Banks, Brian Cranston. Lionsgate, 2017. Film.

Dean Israelite introduced the world to a darker, more sinister interpretation of Haim Saban's *Mighty Morphin Power Rangers* (1993). The film boasts a diverse cast, a two-hour runtime, and plenty of nostalgia. Israelite's *Power Rangers* (2017) promised much-needed racial diversity, representations of the LGBTQ+ community, and those on the autism spectrum. *Mighty Morphin Power Rangers* has always set a high standard for representing people of colour – although their accomplishments were often debatable – so it is unsurprising that the franchise is now endeavouring to bring underrepresented groups to the silver screen.

In the months leading up to the cinematic release, it was confirmed that *Power Rangers* would have an LGBTQ+ character. Trini Kwan, the yellow ranger, would become the first LGBTQ+ superhero in a cinematic release (Couch). While characters such as Deadpool or Iceman are canonically Pansexual or gay in the comic books, it is never mentioned on screen. Hence, expectations for Trini were high. Although it was not as controversial or as hyped as *Beauty and the Beast* (2017), it was still something that had the potential to divide fans. While LGBTQ+ representation in film has taken far too long to happen, the representation in *Power Rangers* was somewhat disappointing. The scene was brief – blink and you will miss it. Showing the group bonding, Trini is lamenting her parents' disapproval of her relationships. Zack, the Black Ranger, jokingly asks if she has boyfriend trouble. After a characteristically sarcastic response from Trini, he drops all pretence of humour, asking if she has girlfriend trouble. Trini and Zack are the two characters that are developed the least, but this brief interaction tells the audience something important about them. While Trini's sexuality is neither discussed nor developed for the remainder of the film, this scene would certainly have benefited from further development. But one other important thing did come from that their interaction. Zack initially takes for granted that she is having boyfriend trouble, but quickly addresses this. There are no further discussions about Trini's sexuality, nor did anyone judge or question it – namely this did not change their opinions about her. Society has become more aware of the fluidity and intricacies of sexuality, which is why representation matters. Trini was not defined solely by her sexuality, but having the story explore this would add gravitas to the choice of depicting a more varied cast of

characters, rather than making it look like a press stunt.

While the LGBTQ+ representation was disappointing, one type of major representation went under the media radar. One of the heroes, Billy, the Blue Ranger, is autistic. Early in the film, the audience sees Billy as he struggles in his interactions with other people, as well as his peers' difficulty understanding him. His introduction shows him meticulously organising his pencils, while being bullied for doing so. Then Jason, the Red Ranger, steps in. Jason reminds the class that there is nothing wrong with Billy; that the problem lies with the bullies. As the film progresses Billy gains more confidence. But as his confidence grows, his personality does not change, nor does anybody try to force it. His fellow Rangers respect him as a person, treating him as a friend, not someone who is different. This becomes more poignant when Billy becomes the first to Morph, because he is the most open and honest about himself and his identity, and because he feels connected to the group, a metaphor that reminds the audience that Autism is not something that needs to be fixed. By having such a prominent character on the spectrum and by adding another layer of intersectionality by casting a person of colour in the role, it adds a sense of realism to the portrayal of teenagers that many films lack. Although there are moments where the representation is imperfect, it is overall a positive and important step, not just for superhero narratives, but for Hollywood as a whole.

As well as impressive efforts made to represent minorities, *Power Rangers* was a visually stunning film. While the original series is known for its poorly choreographed action scenes and excessively vibrant colour scheme, Israelite's version uses the same principles, updated for a modern, adult audience. A dark, often tense ambience combined with spectacular CGI moves the *Power Rangers* franchise from the realms of kitschy children's show and into the world of the superhero blockbuster. Aspects of the franchise such as Goldar, the Zords, and the Megazords are no longer the unimposing inanimate pieces clumsily moving across the screen. Goldar, while unrecognisable when compared to his predecessor, becomes a more threatening villain. In a similar fashion, the Zords move in a more fluid and believable way. While there are moments when the bright colour schemes of the original series seeps in, it moves seamlessly back into the gritty portrayal of a modern Angel Grove. The visual elements of the film highlight the importance of intersectionality. The original series, while having a racially diverse cast, came under scrutiny for racial profiling, being accused of colour coding costumes based on ethnicity or gender. Israelite's version makes a commentary on this, as the heroes discover their Ranger colour. When each member of the team announces what colour they are glowing, Zack informs the team that he is Black. Billy questions this leading to a humorous and light-hearted moment that prompts the audience to question the stereotyping of the original series. The use of humour, as well as the very deliberate connection between the spoken word and visual symbolism brings to the foreground the stereotypes seen throughout Hollywood, and the need to break away from them.

While the plot is, at times, weak and underdeveloped, the film is a nostalgia-filled introduction to a modern interpretation of the franchise. It is certainly a film that provides ample opportunity for further development, regarding both plot lines and social issues. And although the movie is far from being a perfect box office success, it is one of the most inclusive releases

in modern Hollywood, avoiding many of the injustices the film industry has been guilty of, most notably whitewashing. Granted the LGBTQ+ representation was minimal, at best, it does allow for further discussion in any sequels that may be released. Overall, *Power Rangers* is a fun film, with enough nostalgia for anyone who grew up with the original series, with a talented cast and excellent direction.

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THE WONDER OF WOMAN IN THE SUPERHERO FILM INDUSTRY

Review by Danielle Girard

Jenkins, Patty, director. *Wonder Woman*. Perf. Gal Gadot and Chris Pine. DC Films, 2017. Film.

In 2008 the contemporary superhero craze began when the first instalment of the Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU) – *Iron Man* – hit cinemas, raking in both money and outstanding reviews. In the nine years following *Iron Man*'s release, Marvel has dominated the superhero industry, easily overshadowing the DC Extended Universe's (DCEU) attempts at mimicking their success. As Sam Adams notes in *The Rolling Stone*, both *Man of Steel* (2013) and *Suicide Squad* (2016) performed poorly at the box office and received worse reviews. *Batman vs. Superman: Dawn of Justice* split fans and critics, but still fell well shy of its MCU competition, *Captain America: Civil War* (2016).

However, with its fourth film, *Wonder Woman* (2017), the DCEU had the courage to transgress boundaries that the MCU has staunchly ignored during its rise to success: namely the creation of a female-led superhero film. The problem of gender – not just within the superhero genre, but the entirety of Fantastika and all the genres that word incorporates – is endemic, as evident in Josh Spiegel's article, "'Wonder Woman' Is a Milestone, But It Shouldn't Be." Spiegel notes of the film that it is:

the first female-led superhero film in more than a decade, and with Patty Jenkins at the helm, it's the first to be directed by a woman. *Wonder Woman* is also the first female superhero to get her own movie in either of the two shared universes from rivals DC and Marvel. (par. 1).

Despite the fact that this milestone is overdue, it nevertheless imbibes an importance that cannot be overstated.

Therefore, it is essential to begin this review with a short comparison of the two superhero universes, as the DCEU is in many ways attempting to emulate the success that Marvel has achieved with its cinematic universe. Franchising, it would appear, has become the driving force for a dying film industry. It gives the characters a chance to grow and learn more fully over time than an ordinary two-hour action film would allow. Audiences of this type of cinema are groomed on character-lead films where the payoff is received when these super personalities come together in an ensemble blockbuster. But in the nine years that have passed since the superhero film was established as a prominent genre within Hollywood, Marvel has failed spectacularly on delivering a female-lead

film or even a female-directed film – famously losing Patty Jenkins (who would go on to direct *Wonder Woman*) from *Thor: The Dark World* (2013, as reported by Masters) and more recently, failing to secure Ava DuVernay for *Black Panther* (anticipated 2018, reported by Benesh). It is of further importance to mention Black Widow's absence from Marvel's merchandising line, as well as the uncomfortable fact that the first film to so much as include a female character in the title will be *Ant-Man and the Wasp*, to be released in 2018.

Wonder Woman tells the story of Diana of Themyscira (played by Gal Gadot) who is the daughter of Hippolyta – Queen of the Amazons – and eager in her ambition to combat the threat of the god of war, Ares. It follows the normal arc that should be expected of a Superhero Film: hero is called to action, hero leaves home, hero must face their naiveté when confronted with the greater world, hero overcomes and defeats, thus ultimately earning their title. In that sense, the film becomes formulaic, but *Wonder Woman*'s greatest achievement is not the rise of a woman to power instead of a man, but the smaller moments of cinematic brilliance in which director Jenkins portrays with deft beauty the struggles of existing as a woman in a male-dominated genre (or world). This is first evident when Diana and Steve (played by Chris Pine) travel by boat to London and Diana asserts, in no uncertain terms, that men are “unnecessary” for female pleasure. This moment, coupled with Pine's nude scene wherein for all intents and purposes the male rather than the female is the object of desire, posits *Wonder Woman*, and indeed Diana, as outlier of the genre. Further, Jenkins's film gives an honest depiction about the struggles women tend to face in the work place as Diana is rarely given an opportunity to express her voice without having a man speak over her. She is constantly undercut and told that she cannot achieve what men cannot achieve. This early frustration with her place in the world beyond Themyscira builds to a moment of climatic poignancy that stands out as the film's brightest moment. This, of course, is when Diana crosses No Man's Land because it is the right thing to do, and because she, as a woman, *can*.

Here lies another fascinating facet of Jenkins's film. Not only is its stance on gender antithetical to the wider genre, it is also a deviation from the prior instalments to the franchise to which it belongs. As Eric Weiss points out in his article, “The DCEU has a problem – everybody likes *Wonder Woman*,” the makeup of a hero has been radically warped in the DCEU in order to reflect something innately selfish. He writes, “*Man of Steel*, *Batman vs. Superman*, and *Suicide Squad* all espouse a fundamentally selfish worldview – where heroism is a test of self, not a service performed for other people” (par. 7). And indeed, Zack Snyder's extended universe has often been dark, patronizing, and featured glorified depictions of the masculine self and the masculine body. His heroes – namely *Superman* and *Batman* – occupy a space that exists above the average citizen, they are better, they know that they are better, and the very visage of these men dominates the screen with bloated muscle that exists on a plane so much higher than human achievement that it becomes unpleasant to watch. *Wonder Woman*, however, is a woman of the people. I would theorise that this excessive use of heroism as a means of testing oneself fails to encompass Diana because she is something new that exists in a realm outside of the trite, tired imaginings of the cinematic masculine superhero.

That is not to say that *Wonder Woman* has no resemblance to the other films in the DCEU. On an aesthetic level, there is no doubt to which cinematic universe the film belongs to as the colour scape of the film is a perfect match with the washed out and often bleak landscapes of both *Man of Steel* and *Batman vs. Superman* (2016). But while the visuals of the film reflect its place in the extended universe, *Wonder Woman*'s fight scenes – and the way in which they are scored with her theme and shot in slow motion – are upbeat and refreshing. However, *Wonder Woman* does ultimately collapse under the weight of the final fight between Diana and Ares. The dialogue falls flat and Diana's victory is clichéd, perhaps due to the film's earlier No Man's Land scene, the true climax faces a losing struggle.

Overall, *Wonder Woman* has effectively blown fans and critics out of the water with its overwhelming success. The film not only out-performed its cinematic universe predecessors, but also effectively proved that there is an avid audience for female superheroes. The flops and faults of the DCEU, then, pale in comparison to the light that *Wonder Woman* shines on the superhero genre as a whole. It is no undeserved feat that this film has become the highest grossing live action film directed by a woman. This praise is important to bestow upon the film for the boundaries it transgressed, but it also must not go unsaid that – however monumental *Wonder Woman* is – it is primarily a victory for white women. While it is true that Gadot's Israeli background posits this film at a crucial intersection of feminism, in essence celebrating global women of different faiths in a time of divisive political turmoil, it is equally true that *Wonder Woman* offers an expected face of feminism. She may be mistaken for white by the audience, and further, she is presented in a heterosexual relationship, and although her comic counterpart has been depicted as bisexual in recent years, the cinematic Diana cannot be celebrated for this diversity until it is actualised on screen. Likewise, it is important to note that there still has not been a superhero film with a person of colour at the helm (which will be rectified by the release of *Black Panther* in February of 2018)¹. While *Wonder Woman*'s box office success, refreshing story, and near universal popularity is all notable progress, her film must be viewed as a single, progressive paving stone rather than a completed road. One can only hope that the industry will view *Wonder Woman*'s success as definitive proof that there is an eager and active audience for diverse heroes.

NOTES

1. Excepting, of course, Halle Berry's *Catwoman*, which was a catastrophic failure. Much like the casting of black actor Michael B. Jordan in 2015's *FANT4STIC*, this film also received a push back against the casting of a black actor in a "white" role – meaning that *Black Panther* will be the first black-lead film originally written with black characters.

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"I COULD SWEAR SCISSORS WERE INVOLVED": KUBO AND THE TWO STRINGS (2016) AND THE FATE OF THE STOP-MOTION MOVIE

Review by Thomas Tyrrell

Knight, Travis, dir. *Kubo and the Two Strings*. Perf. Charlize Theron, Art Parkinson, Ralph Fiennes, Rooney Mara, George Takei, Matthew McConaughey. Universal Pictures International, 2016. Film.

The survival of the mainstream stop-motion movie into the second decade of the twenty-first century is cause for celebration, and more so for being entirely unexpected. Even Walt Disney Studios, once synonymous with cel animation features, has largely handed the baton on to Studio Ghibli, executing a turn towards computer-generated animation and CGI-enhanced live-action remakes of its animated back catalogue. By now, the messy, painstakingly laborious analogue process of stop-motion should be cinematic history, relegated to clay-mation enthusiasts and the occasional arthouse flick. When Dreamworks Studios forced Aardman to turn to CGI for *Flushed Away* (2006), it should have been the first nail in the coffin. The hyperkinetic hybrid success of *The Lego Movie* (2014) – a CGI film designed to imitate and supersede a well-established amateur animation scene – should have been the last. Instead, if *Kubo and the Two Strings* (2016) is anything to go by, we're seeing a renaissance in stop-motion animation and a new sophistication in both animation and story-telling.

Kubo is the fourth feature film from Laika, the American animation studio previously responsible for *Coraline* (2009), *ParaNorman* (2012), and *The Boxtrolls* (2014). The stylistic break between this film and its predecessors is its aesthetic beauty. *Kubo and the Two Strings* is a beautiful movie: classically, artistically beautiful. Whereas stop-motion has traditionally celebrated the ramshackle, oddball and gothic – think of the plethora of madcap inventions in *Wallace and Gromit* (1989-2008), or the zombies in *Corpse Bride* (2005) and *ParaNorman* (2012) – *Kubo* takes its aesthetic cues from its Ancient Japanese setting. The results are frequently breathtaking. There are traditional Japanese festivals, golden-hour vistas among ancient woods and surreal, dreamlike inventions like a boat made from fallen leaves. Stop-motion frequently has trouble rendering water convincingly, but this limitation is met head-on from the gripping opening sequence, where Kubo's mother sails through a storm, threatened by a Hokusai-esque great wave. As one of the characters wryly remarks "I'm not even sure this counts as origami. I could swear scissors were involved." There is a certain amount of CGI compositing for backgrounds and weather effects, but a surprising number of practical effects are stop-motion, and the behind-the-scenes featurettes are fascinating. If you've ever wished the *Kung-Fu Panda* movies (2008-2016) could have been half as beautiful as their traditionally-animated

credit sequences, this is the film for you. *Kubo's* own credit roll, with its shamisen-infused cover of *While My Guitar Gently Weeps* (Regina Spektor, 2016), is sublime.

Thematically, *Kubo and the Two Strings* dives into the same deep waters as Disney's *Big Hero 6* (2014), dealing across its running time with the experience of loss and grief, and the comfort offered by the belief that death is not the end. Kubo spends his childhood caring for his mother, who suffers from amnesia and partial catatonia after receiving a blow to the head during the storm that brought them to shore. He provides for her by going down to the village and telling stories through the medium of origami. Kubo's shamisen, a three-stringed Japanese instrument not unlike a banjo, causes sheets of paper to fold themselves into elaborate models, which move and interact with each other. This sequence is enormous fun as an excuse for some dynamic action and humour – the fire-breathing chicken is a particular highlight. Yet the scene also conveys a great deal of plot information in a way that's eye-catching but not as stylistically jarring as, for example, Hermione's sudden detour into shadow puppetry in *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows Part One* (2010). It also allows the film-makers to double down on their themes by adding a meta-narrative twist. This is a story about the power of stories, and the hero of the animated film is himself an animator.

Things go to pot, predictably enough, after Kubo forgets his mother's injunction against staying out after dark. He finds himself hunted by his terrifying Aunties – witches in Noh masks who rank high among the film's memorable antagonists. Like Kubo's mother, they are daughters of the Moon King, who took one of Kubo's eyes when he was a baby and is bent on taking the other. By blinding him, they hope to draw him with them into the Heavens, where everything is icily perfect and undying. Kubo and his mother are determined to remain on Earth, amid death, pain and suffering – but also love, hope and friendship.

The resulting conflict smashes Kubo's village to wreckage, leads to the apparent death of his mother and catapults Kubo onto a hero's journey to recover three pieces of magic armour and challenge his grandfather, the Moon King. Joining with Monkey, a magical talisman turned mentor/guide, and Beetle, an amnesiac cursed samurai, Kubo faces numerous challenges, such as a Ray Harryhausen-inspired giant skeleton – eighteen-foot high even as a model – which confidently walks the narrow line between hokey and horrific.

The familiar geometry of the 'collect three magic items' structure does not negate the fact that the film does a great deal of work for Western audiences, explaining key aspects of Shinto and Buddhist beliefs alongside its own original story. Where it skimps on explanation, it is sometimes to the film's profit. If it is hard to explain exactly why Kubo is sheltering in the body of a dead whale amongst a frozen wilderness, or sailing on a ship made from fallen leaves crewed by a monkey and a beetle, or why there appear to be no humans living anywhere in the land except in one single village, the strange and striking imagery gives the film the otherworldly logic of an Eastern fairy tale. Less successful is the decision not to explain the magic system, which everyone in the film takes for granted. It appears to have no ordained costs or rules, apart from the informal one of "don't mess with the monkey." It is associated with music and origami, but it can work independently of

them. It wouldn't be an issue if the film wasn't reliant upon it for the conclusion, which makes sense emotionally and thematically rather than practically. It's a narrative move I've always hated in *Doctor Who* ("The one thing that can stop the Snowmen – a whole family crying at Christmas!", (2012)) but I'm more inclined to give it a pass in a Fantasy film. If nothing else, it offers an interesting twist on the dilemma of whether to deal out Justice or Mercy to the Big Bad.

Where *Kubo and the Two Strings* stumbles is through assigning too many roles to its protagonist, who juggles his duties as young carer, animator, storyteller, musician, magician, and warrior throughout. Even an excellent vocal performance by Art Parkinson doesn't quite reconcile all the roles the film wants him to play. Charlize Theron and Matthew McConaughey do solid work as Monkey and Beetle, but the best vocal work is done by the villains. Rooney Mara's icy, trilling Aunties are the stuff of nightmares, and Ralph Fiennes as the Moon King effortlessly handles the transition from avuncular counsellor to vengeful monster. It would have been welcome to see more Japanese actors in major roles, especially since George Takei and Cary-Hiroyuki Tagawa are relegated to minor villager parts. Otherwise, the film handles its Japanese setting with fidelity and respect.

If the fashion in Hollywood animation is for anarchic, breakneck capers with plotlines that embrace the surreal, *Kubo and the Two Strings* has a more harmonious vision, and gives us a film of great beauty and considerable ambition, both in its animation and its storytelling. Since *A Nightmare before Christmas* (1993), the Gothic has been a mainstay of stop-motion animation. *Kubo and the Two Strings* proves that the medium can handle epic Fantasy just as well. Now that the range and power of this art-form has been so well demonstrated, I find myself wondering what a stop-motion *Wizard of Earthsea* (Le Guin, 1968) would look like – or even a stop-motion *Dune* (Herbert, 1965) whose sandworms and ornithopters would look incredible as Laika creations. One thing is for certain – whatever Laika comes up with next is going to push the medium in a whole new direction.

BIONOTE

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"BLESSED ARE THE MEEK": ATWOOD'S DESIRE FOR FEMALE AUTONOMY IN *THE HANDMAID'S TALE* (2017)

Review by Jade Dillon

Miller, Bruce, producer. *The Handmaid's Tale*. Perf. Elisabeth Moss, Yvonne Strahovski, Alexis Bledel, O-T Fagbenle, Max Minghella, Amanda Brugel, Joseph Fiennes, and Samira Wiley. Hulu, 2017. Television Series.

Margaret Atwood's 1985 novel *The Handmaid's Tale* depicts an oppressive world where women are condemned to a life defined purely by their reproductive status. Following a civil war, the United States is rebranded as Gilead: a hierarchal society which uses biblical verse as a new form of Constitution. Due to a decrease in female fertility, those who can bear children have become a social commodity known as "Handmaids."

In 2017, Hulu (an America streaming service) released a ten episode series based on Atwood's original text. Following the life of Offred (Elisabeth Moss), the dark reality of a handmaid's duty is forced upon the viewer. She lives under the rule of Commander Fred Waterford (Joseph Fiennes), and his wife Serena Joy (Yvonne Strahovski). Without personal identity or freedom, Offred becomes, on one level, an emblem of female submission. Interestingly, it is Serena Joy who instigates a more immediate dominant/submissive binary towards Offred, illustrating the varying fractions of womanhood in Gilead. Such binaries remind the viewers that toxic femininity pervades the Gilead hierarchy, as much as the control of its male architects. Hulu grants more depth to Serena Joy's character in comparison to Atwood's original narrative. Viewers learn of her academic background and intellect, and the autonomy she sacrificed to help create the gendered structures of Gilead, structures by which she is now rigidly confined.

As the series' narrator, Offred allows the viewer to encounter the life of a handmaid alongside her character, while flashbacks are used effectively to depict her life prior to the theocracy of Gilead. Moss, who is also a producer with the series, uses the contradictions of public versus private language to express her handmaid duty, and her competing desire for personal autonomy. Audibly, Offred conservatively adheres to the religious strictures of Gilead, while her internal narrative heavily contrasts with her dialogue. Overall, the series effectively captures the novel's dramatisation of this division between Offred's public and private selves. The public self is consumed with the hierarchal norm of submission, whereas the private yearns to escape the limitations of Gilead. The underground sex workers are also indicative of gendered submission within Gilead. The male elite insist on female purity, and that women submit to their biological destiny as mothers, yet the

sexual exploitation of the jezebel reveals that the reproductive and sexual objectification of women illustrates the gendered double standards of Gilead.

The series uses Atwood's original text as a foundation for its cinematic exploration of institutionalised gender oppression. The medium of the series embellishes Atwood's world, developing its existing plotlines and adding new narrative elements, highlighting issues more relevant to its twenty-first century audience, such as LGBTQ+ rights and female genital mutilation.

The female body is a fundamental signifier within Atwood's novel as the active violation of the handmaids' physical selves works to dissolve their identity. Each month, when the handmaid is in peak ovulation, the Ceremony between the governing house and the handmaid commences. Lying there, ceremonially raped, the handmaid becomes a doll-like figure used as a vessel of possible reproduction. The Ceremony scene is one of the most iconic within the series; it is formulated on the basis of submission and dominance. Similarly, the Ceremony highlights more complex intersections; Serena Joy despises her role in the ceremony, while Fred Waterford sometimes struggles to perform sexually. Therefore, the binaries that exist are non-linear, continuously challenged by social and religious expectations. This scene provoked mixed reactions among audiences in the U.K and U.S, resulting in complaints about its graphic content. Without dialogue or resistance, the audience watches in horror as Offred is silently raped by the Commander. Upon reflection, the audience must engage with their individual thoughts on Gilead, and what this dystopian narrative metaphorically illustrates in terms of the position of women in many contemporary societies.

Hulu cleverly adapts Atwood's religious symbolism for the Ceremony and the structure of Gilead as an underlying justification for the horror displayed to the audience. Hymn-like music plays as the Commander quickens his pace, finally reaching an ultimate crescendo. The religious façade is abruptly ended once the Commander has ejaculated; silence consumes the room as he stiffly wipes himself and exits the Ceremony, leaving his wife and handmaid to cope with the emotional aftermath.

Diverse representations of sexual orientation are central in Hulu's adaptation, and the series illustrates how these identities threaten the gendered structure of society in Gilead. Known as "gender traitors," lesbian women are considered sinful. Moira (Samira Wiley), Offred's long-term friend, hides her sexual orientation from the Aunts as she is aware that she could face corporal punishment. However, Ofglen (Alexis Bledel) is arrested under the law of the Eye for having an illicit relationship with a Martha (a class of woman who acts as a domestic servant to wealthy families in Gilead). While the Martha is sentenced to death by hanging, Ofglen is returned to her role as handmaid following female circumcision. Such actions against the female body are highly significant in relation to the oppressive discourse depicted in *The Handmaid's Tale*. By circumcising Ofglen, female identity and sexual autonomy become further undone. Interestingly, Ofglen's character in the series is a clear departure from the novel, and her new narrative arc is pivotal in relation to LGBTQ+ representation. Similarly, the decision to include female genital mutilation (FGM) not present in Atwood's original text is telling. These contemporary revisions are significant to the project of Hulu's

The Handmaid's Tale, as they visually illustrate the shocking reality of the violence and discrimination felt by those who exist outside the boundaries of Gilead's gender binaries. Using lesbianism as an example of a sinful act punishable by death evokes strong emotions which are not far from those felt by people fighting for gay rights and equality across the world. The circumcision of Ofglen is harrowing and cruel, a violation of the body disguised as a cure to cleanse her of her sinful desires. Hulu's decision to introduce this into the narrative is critical, as it highlights the experience of numerous women who endure forced genital mutilation. The harrowing violation of human rights found in Hulu's *The Handmaid's Tale* is perhaps linked to the changing legal status of FGM laws in the United States. As of 2015, more than twenty-four states have laws against FGM, while in 2013, Equality Now backed The Transport for Female Genital Mutilation Act, which prohibits the transport of girls out of the United States for the purpose of FGM. While FGM is more common in areas outside of the US, it affects girls and women worldwide. Through Hulu's adaptation of *The Handmaid's Tale*, viewers are granted a glimpse of the shocking reality of FGM as a form of gender violence, which might otherwise seem too remote an issue to gain much exposure.

Though the series offers disturbing moments of cruelty and self-policing in its version of Gilead, there remain certain elements of rebellion against the dominant female archetype of fertility and maternal inclination. While Offred initially engages in a sexual relationship with Nick (Max Minghella) at the command of Serena Joy, she begins to enjoy their affair as she can express her own sexuality:

so I've come back to Nick, time after time, on my own [...] I want to know him, memorise him, so I can live on the image later [...] I could say these are acts of rebellion, a fuck you to the patriarchy, but those are excuses [...] I'm here because it feels good, and I don't want to be alone.

This scene signals a political shift within Offred, as this rebellious act feeds into her desire to join the resistance group Mayday. Both acts signify the desire for independence separate from the confining roles of Gilead. The female resistance seen in the series finale is presented in terms of female solidarity within the handmaid community. While they show solidarity with each other, this is heavily contrasted with the divide between the handmaids and the Commanders' wives. The wives do not replicate the female unification felt between the handmaids, but rather adhere to the dominant structure of patriarchy and insist on its control.

Elisabeth Moss has been widely praised for her performance as Offred, and has garnered an Emmy nomination for the role. She powerfully portrays the silent resilience of Atwood's character, and the series draws on frightening aspects of contemporary society to portray the dystopian world of Offred. Hulu's *The Handmaid's Tale* creates a feminist screen adaptation fused with the dark momentum of its dystopian source material. Atwood's desire to illustrate the gender division in society through a dystopian lens is effectively mirrored in Hulu's adaptation. *The Handmaid's Tale*, as both an original novel and television adaptation, powerfully depicts the enduring relevance of

gender and politicised bodies as part of the rationale of many oppressive regimes.

BIONOTE

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ALIEN: COVENANT: OVERZEALOUSNESS KILLED THE CAT

Review by Veronika Briatková

Scott, Ridley, dir. *Alien: Covenant*. Perf. Michael Fassbender, Katherine Waterston, Billy Crudup. 20th Century Fox, 2017. Film.

A prologue clip, released prior to the film's premiere, included a quotation from Percy Bysshe Shelley's poem "Ozymandias" (1818): "Look on my works, ye mighty, and despair!" These lines foreshadow *Alien: Covenant's* (2017) main theme of god complex, the power of creation, and its consequences. *Covenant*, a prequel to *Prometheus* (2012), is the third movie in the *Alien* franchise (1979-present) to be directed by its creator Ridley Scott. The films so far have been a mixture of Science Fiction, Horror, and Action. Scott and script writer John Logan claimed philosophical questions towards God's existence were to be a large part of *Covenant*, which intended to mark the franchise's return to topics originally presented in *Alien* (1979). These intentions were not realised despite the film's confident philosophical and aesthetic foundation as it merely recycles old theories – without diving deep enough beneath the surface – and unsuccessfully materialises the existential horror in the design of its alien creatures.

Prometheus focused on the archaeologist Dr. Elizabeth Shaw (Noomi Rapace) and the rest of the crew, consisting mostly of sceptics denying the existence of extraterrestrial beings, meeting their creators, who are nicknamed the Engineers. The existential quest begins when Shaw and her partner Charlie Holloway (Logan Marshall-Green) find evidence which reveals a star-map pointing to the Engineer's location. The Weyland Corporation finances the expedition but hide its alternate motive – prolonging the life of its creator Peter Weyland (Guy Pearce). At the end of the film, android David (Michael Fassbender) and Shaw, the only survivors, navigate the Engineers' ship to their home planet to learn why they decided to annihilate the human race.

The idea that humans were created by aliens is not new; such theories first gained popularity in the late sixties through the work of Erich von Däniken in *Chariots of the Gods?* (1968). This ancient astronaut theory offered an alternative explanation to creationism and the origin of gods. *Covenant* ultimately becomes David's story and exposes how deep down the rabbit hole he has fallen and, deviated from its creator's intended purpose, making the question of faith less prominent in *Covenant* than in *Prometheus*.

The film's first shot is a close-up of David's blue eye looking directly at Weyland and the audience, mimicking the moment a parent's gaze meets that of a newborn child. Within the prologue, Weyland and David overtly discuss their respective roles as creator and creation. The film then

shifts to show the eponymous colonist ship *Covenant*. After a solar flare damages the ship the crew receives a rogue transmission from a near-by planet, one which appears more suitable for human life than their target destination. This distress call is not too dissimilar to the Greek mythological trope of the siren's song, a temptation the *Covenant* crew cannot refuse. Unfortunately, the planet is not the Promised Land and they end up trying to escape its deadly and hostile occupants; as the trailer had anticipated: "the path to paradise begins in hell."

The crew, consisting of pre-existing romantic couples, bond together well despite occasional differences in opinion. The dialogue quickly establishes the status of individuals within the group, reminiscent of the original *Alien*'s crew. Unfortunately, some highly criticised writing choices in *Prometheus* repeat themselves in *Covenant*. The characters are reckless when landing on the unknown planet and underestimate the potential danger concealed by the beautiful surrounding landscape. Furthermore, the crew's diversity appears to be self-serving rather than being truly inclusive as the characters remain underdeveloped accessories.

Although Daniels seems ripe to be a direct copy of Sigourney Weaver's Ripley from *Alien*, Katherine Waterston's portrayal refuses to become a mere copycat and she vitally brings an original interpretation to the role. Daniels is the chief of terraforming, respected by her crew. Her story is not that of a weak female character finding her independence as the film progresses; her strength allows Daniels to survive and overcome a personal trauma without giving up hope. Some of her scenes were inspired by Ripley's iconic moments in *Alien*, but Waterston's performance feels fresh as she injects Daniels with playful attitude that does not disappear in the face of danger, nor does it intervene with her survival skills.

Some crew members are a mix of stereotypes but their individualities partially come through. One of these is Tennessee (Danny McBride), a drinking former felon in a cowboy hat, whose role in the movie becomes more overt towards the end. Captain Chris Oram (Billy Crudup) claims the crew does not trust him because he believes in God – a set-up which does not lead anywhere and his character development stales, which rings true for most characters whose role is to simply die or be injured violently. Walter (Michael Fassbender), the android travelling aboard the *Covenant*, meanwhile becomes an instrument; it is through him that David's story and ideas are communicated.

New Zealand's forests, lakes, and tall mountains play into the idea that the Engineers' planet would be perfect for the colonists. The movie does not portray horror as being inherent to the space or the planet. Similarly, solar flares damaging the ship do not possess consciousness, thus horror is not located in space either. This dislocation is achieved by using wide shots showing the beauty from an objective distance, as opposed to subjective proximity during the scenes on the ground or inside the ship. The audience is expected to share a sense of overbearing fear with the crew whilst they are undergoing the ultimate survival test, but the implementation of the fear misses crucial points. *Covenant* struggles to keep up with the demand of the genre and locates fear in David, the aliens, the Engineers, the surrounding architecture, and art. The movie would have benefited from using the sources sparingly.

CGI and practical effects were fundamental to creating the alien creatures that inhabit the Engineer's planet. The aliens' speed is intimidating, but the effect is only temporary as CGI lacks beauty at higher speeds; the aliens are deprived of the characteristics that make them believably threatening as they feel more like plastic, preventing the suspension of disbelief. The design of the aliens is inspired by H.R. Giger's work but the new creatures are only the Xenomorph's distant cousins. Conor O'Sullivan (creature design supervisor) leaned towards biological designs inspired by animals found on earth (Sullivan). On the other hand, the shower scene that was teased in the trailer featuring the Xenomorph is a return to the classic connection that ties horror and sexual tension. A few excitement-inducing alien scenes, however, do not make a great movie. *Covenant* is also guilty of inserting a major action sequence into the movie for the sake of having one, and as it is often the case, CGI-heavy fast cut-scenes result in underwhelming theatrics which unnecessarily increase the pacing of the movie at a point where the *Covenant*'s mission can still be completed and the stakes are not dangerously high.

David, *Covenant*'s central figure, is a blend of Frankenstein and his monster. Fassbender, playing both Walter and David, brings dynamism to the dialogues, and is responsible for David's allure despite his incoherent philosophical ideologies. It can be argued that such confusion reflects David's aberrancy and madness but the grandiose statements fall flat as the dialogues begin to feel staged. The question of an android's ability to feel love is awkwardly out of place, fitting with neither the tone of *Prometheus* nor *Covenant*. Fortunately, David's awkward scenes are in the minority and he mostly acts like the villain the movie deserves and desperately needs. The ending is partially predictable, but becomes an appropriate dénouement that fits well within the storyline and makes room for the next sequel.

Jed Kurzel captures the essence of Ridley Scott's vision and establishes a musical connection between *Alien*, *Prometheus*, and *Covenant* by reimagining and reincorporating famous motifs from their respective soundtracks. Scenes depicting the calm or feral nature of the alien creatures are accompanied by music that interprets the mood of the scenes. The melody of the opening song, "The Covenant," emphasises the combination of anticipation and fear of the unknown, as a shot of the ship in space appears on the screen.

The name 'Covenant' symbolises the promise of a new beginning for the colonists and humanity. Scott and the ensuing marketing campaign also made a commitment; they promised a movie that would be as horror-centric as *Alien*. Perhaps it was this overzealousness to imitate the success, an exhausting but superficial use of Horror devices, and philosophical material that make the movie feel staged and calculated. The first *Alien* movie was a terrifying combination of Science Fiction and Horror that engaged the audiences and made them feel as if they were (with) Ripley. *Alien: Covenant* is redeemed by acting performances, music, and visually alluring art and architecture. Despite the script's shortcomings, making the prequel series about David was a good choice and even elevated *Prometheus*. Nevertheless, this potential is marred and continues to hinder Scott's attempts at creating a movie that would successfully follow in the footsteps of *Alien*.

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BIONOTE

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2B AND NOT TO [B]E: LIFE, NONLIFE AND THE QUESTION OF INHERITANCE

Review by Thomas Kewin

Taro, Yoko, creator. *NieR Automata*. Square Enix CO., Ltd, 2017. Video Game.

The latest addition to the NieR (and loosely, yet irrevocably, connected to the Drakengard) franchise, *NieR: Automata* (2017) might appear as being rife with many of the internal contradictions which make up the present gaming landscape for Western audiences. With all the trappings of a Science Fiction narrative: an interplanetary proxy machine war, humanity prospering amongst the stars, android soldiers indistinguishable from their human masters, and a post-human world. More predictable still, the android proxies that the player inhabits – YoRHa android models 2B, 9S, and A2 – seem like the definition of the ‘silent protagonist’ archetype that dominate the majority of AAA games. With the present scene saturated with action and role-playing-games (RPG) titles, for a game like *Automata* to emerge, seeming to resemble the conventional Japanese role-playing games (JRPG) and yet maintaining a peculiar life-sign of its own, serves as a testament to an encompassing sense of genre experimentation.

In the words of Yoko Taro, the series creator, in discussing the emerging gulf between Japanese and Western game development, he argues that: “You have the AAA titles, which aren’t taking any risks – [...] following a safe, set format with systems that people are familiar with” (Taro “NieR: Automata’s Creator on Pushing the Boundaries of Gaming”). This familiarity is where Taro relishes in wilfully subverting his audience’s expectation, for the true excellence of *Automata* is in the playfulness of its artistic vision – each element of the game is articulated with such creativity that the player’s sensibilities are rarely left unchallenged and prejudices about the medium are shaken from the onset. Consider PlatinumGames’s involvement in developing *Automata* and its previous action pedigree, particularly the developer’s hallmark game *Bayonetta* (2009) and the equally energetic *Vanquish* (2010) which are clearly influential in the pace of the altercations that propel the player through an endless barrage of robotic enemies. For all the talk of *Automata*’s influences, it is apparent from the execution that this is not a title that suffers from a lack of character or imagination, creating an inimitable experience which is frankly unparalleled in most action and RPG games available. It is, of course, worth making the distinction that *Automata* is not a purely action-oriented title, as there is a strong narrative dimension and a variety of game mechanics through which Taro reveals his greatest gambit – a Science Fiction-infused imperial narrative, using the familiar stable of posthuman entities, alongside the ‘Weird’ tone identifiable with the director’s work and the NieR franchise at large, to ponder the future of life in the 120th century.¹

Controlled and streamlined as an experience, versatility is the operative word for a game of this calibre. The combat system itself seems perversely gratifying in that, whether considering the

permutations between different play styles, or the seamless manner in which the game mechanics inform a player's sense of character and story, *Automata* is never without refreshing insights on the gaming medium. The camera itself creates a heightened sense of immersion, almost guiding the player through a kaleidoscope of interactive game modes – from the conventional 3D Bayonetta-inspired hack and slash to the 2D side-scrolling segments of platformer fame, as well as retro twin-sticker shooter segments, with numerous top-down perspectives emulating classic arcade shooters. Further, there are sophisticated levels of narrative immersion in the New Game+ feature – following in the tradition of *NieR* – which allows for entirely new dimensions through subsequent campaigns in the guise of the three different androids. Through this transformative experience, the emerging shape of the narrative is exposed as the fallacy it is – the player's realisation of their own complicity in the shape of the game as it stands.

Peculiar in its stylistic approach, often blending melancholic subject matter with absurd character pieces, the overwhelming futility of the experience perpetually reminds the player of the gravity of its central conflict, whilst outlining the indelible fact that enduring conflict is intrinsic and even *necessary* to human and machine life. Set in the year 11945 AD, in the midst of the fourteenth Machine War, *Automata* squares the core tension of the game's narrative in the midst of a conflict which is fought on Earth between extra-terrestrially engineered, robot life-forms and remote, deployed, humanoid-android soldiers. One might consider this a post-apocalyptic future, given the grave state of affairs in the aftermath of Project Gestalt, an attempt to save humanity from an incurable illness which invariably began its extinction. In the face of such tragedy, upon the titular androids 2B and 9S reaching the surface of Earth in a blistering opening sequence, there is a sense of immediate dislocation when confronted with the desolation of a post-human Earth: all that remains are robots in a state of obsolescence, others falling victim to a crisis for meaning, succumbing to a maligned form of madness or nihilism, whilst others abandon allegiances and are becoming nomadic.

Exploration is a feature this game capitalises on, similar to AAA gaming titles like the *Mass Effect* (2007-2017) and *Fallout* (1997-2015) series, and yet – particular to *Automata* – there is little onus on reward in actual discovery. Franchises like *Mass Effect* and *Fallout* are interesting in that the thrill and sense of achievement that might be gleaned from discovery, which seems fairly emblematic of the Science Fiction and Dystopian genres, is subverted in *Automata*. Given the shared preoccupations with the Science Fiction and Dystopian genres, *Automata* belies this conception of exploration in the sense that the player is not being directed towards these environments through any lens of wonderment, nor is there anything to achieve in acquiring or discovering materials beyond maintenance of the androids – which, by design, is a repetitive act of survival. Encountering any forms of life, whether alien or android in nature, only reinforces the sense that survival in such a post-human world is increasingly bleak and meaningless – there is little sense of stability, and barely any assurances.

While the relationship between Science Fiction and imperialistic narratives might seem self-evident, there is nonetheless a rather interesting use of such a familiar genre staple in *Automata*.

That is not to say there are not familiar archetypes or story beats being reworked throughout the narrative – Science Fiction, after all, is a genre with a rather rich tapestry of tropes that are often lifted and appropriated within the action gaming world. To return to an earlier point, what makes *Automata* a stellar experience (and perversely gratifying) is the fact that it ponders the possibility of a *humane* world long after humanity has disappeared. *Automata* is clearly situated as a colonial simulator, given that the medium allows the player to embody a series of humanoid androids, implicitly dehumanising and committing murderous, genocidal acts against various forms of its own kind (those subjugated Others), in spite of all evidence suggesting the nascent fact that such entities are themselves free-thinking, self-aware, emotive beings, there is an interesting re-inscription of colonial values.

Automata is a game which explores the troubling side of conflict in a way that is all the more personable, having the player perform these murderous and immoral acts, and as such must evaluate the extent to which they regard these robotic entities as being worthy of occupying the category of 'life.' Life worthy of preserving; life granted an ethical standard. Pairing the familiar hack and slash game mechanics with the outlying robotic factions, there is a conscious ethical choice being implied on behalf of the developers; the existentialist subject matter parsing through the science-fictional nature of its setting and characters with the colonial imperatives they so frequently assume and the internal contradictions the player may so readily ignore. As such, the capacity to identify and empathise with the android-protagonists raises problematic questions regarding how far we assume a sense of ethical and metaphysical supremacy. The simulated experience of 'going native' in and of itself not only communicates a transformative moment for the characters that the player inhabits, in occupying the various liminal spaces and experiencing the plight of the various robotic factions, but the realisation on the part of the player of their complicity affirming hierarchical value systems. It's a sobering realisation that is communicated beautifully through the gaming medium.

And yet, it would be difficult to ignore many of the criticisms that have been levelled against *Automata*, such as the difficulty of the game and the tedium of its world. Nonetheless, *Automata* provides a nuanced gaming experience which showcases the elegance of the gaming medium, as we have it, in a way that few games in the action RPG world ever deign to realise. By dabbling in creative, and readily immersive, game mechanics, it provides a powerful and engaging narrative that possesses character in a manner that few games do – not by rite of a game engine, or by quirk of familiar tropes – but in daring to change the conversation; not in a genre-defining sense, instead impressing the importance of the medium and its potentiality for communicating a story that explores themes, both existentially melancholic and colonially absurd. It is a game that impresses the merits of the action RPG title with such grace and veritable imagination, that it might leave an indelible mark, not just on our impression of what gaming means in a cultural context, but what it can allow us to realise about ourselves.

NOTES

1. Yoko Taro styled his own work as "Making Weird Games for Weird People" in an interview at GDC14.

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REHABILITATING ONE'S MORALITY, MENTALITY AND MOVIE

Review by Adele Hannon

Verbinski, Gore, dir. *A Cure for Wellness*. Perf. Dane DeHaan, Jason Isaacs, Mia Goth. Writer Justin Haythe. 2016. Film.

A Cure for Wellness (2016), directed by Gore Verbinski, is a suspenseful thriller that has left audiences bewildered by its blending of cinematic style. It can be analysed from multiple perspectives due to its multifaceted themes and its ability to transgress genre. Since its release, this misunderstood film has been poorly received due to an abundance of styles that prevent any clear understanding of the narrative purpose. Ira Jaffe comments on the aversion to mixing genres, stating that there was an attempt to: "limit the diversity of style, as it might disrupt the narrative flow and illusion of reality," presumably preferred by the audience (Jaffe 8). However, it is by creating an uncanny atmosphere through this disconnected framework that Verbinski has more freedom to deconstruct familiar modes of representation. The director's choice of a hybrid genre distorts familiar forms to force his audience to recognise the warped face of the modern world. Where genres are usually more distinct, *A Cure for Wellness* instead shows how they each can slip into one another, making the unfamiliar familiar, or the familiar strange.

In this 2016 American-German psychological horror, Verbinski applies the Freudian elements of the "*Unheimlich*" (uncanny) effect and repression to deal with psychological concerns of the twenty-first century interpreting a range of modern anxieties. William Patrick Daly writes that "no discussion of the Gothic can avoid discussing Freud; one of the most obvious ways of thinking about the genre is to read it in terms of Freud's system" (177). The film draws on metaphorical devices from Gothic fiction and psychological concepts to portray an unsettling narrative involving a decline in human health and morality. The treatment of social issues both embodies and surpasses complex themes and cinematic intensity, becoming a platform that facilitates a dialogue of darker motifs. What is most entrancing about this film is how it challenges traditional genres, utilising ambiguous conclusions and intricate themes to parallel the complexity of contemporary life.

Freud claims one can engage with the uncanny in how he/she "tricks us by promising us everyday reality and then going beyond it" (Freud 156-157). Verbinski 'tricks us' by offering a realistic setting and then shifting it to a place of Horror, imbued with impossible conclusions and monstrous creatures. Due to there being no clear thematic concept within this film, the narrative offers no more than a plethora of ambiguous conversations and insignificant scenes. Rather than resting on simple interpretations and naturalised meanings, Verbinski instead "strays haphazardly out of blockbuster comfort zones" (Dowd n.p.). Where the synchronicity and rigid behaviour of the

spa resort's patients stress this idea that consistency and sameness are considered 'being well,' Verbinski, with his alternative approach, veers away from the homogenous space of cinema.

The film begins with Lockhart (Dane DeHaan), an ambitious young executive, being sent to retrieve the company's CEO, Roland Pembroke (Harry Groener), from a mystifying "wellness centre" at an isolated setting in the Swiss Alps. The movie plays on the idea of moral good, highlighting a decline in decency rooted in a person's inability to resist the libertine temptations of sex and money. As Pembroke highlights "there is a sickness inside us." Illustrating the corporate sphere as a dismal and ominous place, *A Cure for Wellness* probes how the modern world is blinded by the cloud of capitalisation. Verbinski sets up a palpable distinction between the metropolitan backdrops of the Manhattan grey buildings with the serene beauty of the "wellness-centre." Demonstrating a binary of immoral and moral, the city is presented as the epiphany of malevolence where Lockhart hustles inside New York City's dark monolithic towers. Through the cinematography, the audience gains an insight into how certain societal frameworks are debasing human nature. The words of William Wordsworth in "Tintern Abbey" become relevant as the poet highlighted how the "fever of the world" (Wordsworth), the industrialised greed, shattered the essence of humanity. Probing consequences of capital ambition, the infertile narrative, and character development could be the director's way of attacking consumerist life, and its sterile effect on humankind. Infertility being a major theme in this movie stresses the fruitless lifestyle of the corporate executives and the ineffective conclusion that produces no real answers. It is within the Gothic building of the Swiss Alps that time stagnates and everyone is supplanted in the moment, without any means of progression or essentially getting better. As the character Hannah (Mia Goth) outlines "no one ever leaves."

This theme of infertility also connects to the controversial idea that a woman is insignificant if unable to fulfil biological expectations. *A Cure for Wellness* further exemplifies this through a limited representation of the female protagonist, where she is presented as a simple-minded, feeble entity that serves only as an object of the male gaze. Hannah, a damaged individual who strives for normality, is introduced as a source of otherness in the film. She does not fit into the homogeneous space of the spa facility, instantly setting up her position as Other. As her father, Dr. Volmer (Jason Isaacs), states "she is not like the others." The porcelain ballerina, seen earlier in the film during a scene between Lockhart and his mother, mirrors the position of Hannah as fragile and doll-like. Volmer stresses that "she may look like a woman but she is only a child." However, even though Hannah is presented as the conventional Gothic damsel-in-distress, her strength to kill her father shows her ability to transgress the patriarchal world.

It is not only the female gender that is repressed in this Gothic tale, but Verbinski highlights mankind's attempt to repress one's true nature. The film emphasises the idea that within an urbanised environment, individuals are working themselves to death, and are prepared to distort reality to circumvent confronting their true self. As such, the film engages with the consequence of denying one's authentic self through repression. As Pembroke says in the opening section of the film: "A man cannot unsee the truth [...] He cannot willingly return to darkness or go blind once he has the gift of sight." It is through the character of Lockhart that we witness the struggle with his repressed

character, as he suppresses an essential part of him that involves the suicide of his father. The name "Lockhart" even hints at the protagonist's chosen mode of being, locking away his haunted self and presenting a commercial superficial image.

A Cure for Wellness conjures many questions concerning the modern industrialised world and what it means to live well. Due to how "we are the only species capable of self-reflection [...] the only species with the toxin of self-doubt written into our genetic code" (*A Cure for Wellness*), the film asks the audience to reflect on their lifestyles and explore whether their identities can be labelled as "well." Its primary function is to narrate a tale of corporeal, psychological and spiritual decay. The film thus acts as an exploration into the decline of the human psyche where Verbinski plays on the desire for a magic tonic, a "cure," to remedy the despondent afflictions of modern life. Water is a recurring symbol, an emblem of supposed restoration, which can wash away the abnormal tendencies. Touching on ideas of the Romantic scholars such as William Wordsworth and Percy Bysshe Shelley, the film seeks to undermine the despotic character of capitalism, as well as revealing the declining moral purpose of the existing social class. It is a response to the loss of beauty in the world, with its revived Gothic medievalism allowing for an escape from progress and industrialism. The film's evasion from reality extends as far as the supernatural and the use of the Gothic enables cultural anxieties to be projected onto an unrealistic entity – in the shape of Dr. Volmer – as the immortal incestuous monster – and diverts the audience's fear of societal development. In explaining the purpose of supernatural in fiction, Alexa Wright states that at: "Times of social and moral unrest, in particular, the visible presence of a human monster offers an important form of reassurance that society has a means of dealing with disruptive forces in play" (Wright 166). Gore Verbinski's 'cure' is never defined, and it is up to the viewer to decide what constitutes the film's defining categories of 'well' and 'unwell.' Rather than accomplishing a cohesive thematic purpose, *A Cure for Wellness* is more influential in its cinematic hybridity and transgressive use of genres, and this could be the cure that Verbinski was aiming for: an antidote to previously restricted narratives. Through a contradiction of convention and narrative style, this film succeeds in mirroring anxieties concerning the decline in human morality, addressing 'the plague' that has infected the modern world.

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BIONOTE

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FROM THE CRADLE TO THE GRAVE: HOW *BUFFY THE VAMPIRE SLAYER* BECAME A CULT CLASSIC

Review by Sophie Raine

20-Year Anniversary Review

Whedon, Joss, creator. *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. Perf. Sarah Michelle Gellar, Nicholas Brendan, Alyson Hannigan, Anthony Stewart Head, Charisma Carpenter and David Boreanaz. Mutant Enemy Productions, 1997-2003. Television.

Twenty years from its first airing, the Emmy Award-winning series *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (BTVS) lives on as a cult classic. Considering the attention BTVS has received from both fans and academics, it is difficult to understand the scepticism that the show faced when it was first broadcast in 1997. The revival from the critically-panned eponymous movie, starring Kristen Stanson in 1992, highlights that its current status has shifted from the understandable initial scepticism. With the benefit of hindsight, it is easy to pinpoint the elements of BTVS that are still relevant today. Through Buffy, Whedon demonstrates the complex tableau that is the life of a teenage girl, something which is usually dismissed in TV and film.

Creator Joss Whedon, however, never lost faith in the project. In an interview with *A.V. Club* in 2001, Whedon suggested that far from being an accidental hit, he “designed *Buffy* to be an icon, to be an emotional experience, to be loved in a way that other shows can’t be loved. Because it’s about adolescence, which is the most important thing people go through in their development, becoming an adult” (“Joss Whedon Interview with Tasha Robinson”). BTVS is a show which gradually matured with its young audience, depicting the angst of adolescence and the often-grim reality of adulthood. Watching the host of monsters that Buffy faces and defeats, the viewers learn to exorcise their own metaphorical demons. The show has particularly resonated with a generation of young women, represented by BTVS’s ongoing influence in gender studies and popular culture. This is not simply due to featuring a female protagonist but equally the multivalent portrayals of complex female characters. Buffy deals with family issues, relationship problems, academic anxiety, peer pressure and, in the later and darker seasons, emotionally abusive relationships, depression, and rape. All of this, whilst she fights the forces of evil. BTVS succeeded at blending the gritty elements of Supernatural Horror with the equally dark human world.

The difficulties facing Buffy in season one, vampires aside, were familiar to many young viewers and explored the liminal status of the average teenager: too old to be a dependent, too young to be completely independent. The main ‘Big Bad’ of this season is the ancient vampire known only as the Master, who is gathering strength to return to the surface and kill Buffy as is foretold in

the prophecy. Though the Master is defeated, Buffy is killed, briefly, and brought back to life by her friend Xander. Having a primarily campy tone to the first season, we end with lingering questions regarding mortality and trauma. Particularly, this theme carries into the beginning of season two and runs throughout the entire series, becoming more overt and macabre as Buffy enters adulthood.

Season two marks the beginning of both the evolution of Buffy as a character and the show itself, particularly in regard to relationships. Season one presents the romantic relationship with Buffy and cursed vampire Angel whereas season two develops this into something more sexual and complex. The loss of her virginity to Angel results in his transformation to the soulless and sadistic Angelus. Buffy begins to struggle to discern between good and evil, past and present, as she is unable to separate her responsibility as a slayer from her emotional attachment to Angel. Progressing to season three, the audience are introduced to the slayer, Faith, initially shown to be a 'bad girl' counterpart to Buffy's moral righteousness. The accidental murder of an innocent man leads Faith to engage in self-destructive behaviours and eventually giving in to the darker side of her power. Faith's liminal status as neither part of the human world nor part of the supernatural means that bringing her to justice is a complicated task. This has wider implications for the show as a whole which was starting to address the concept of the human 'monster' that cannot simply be eradicated through force.

The troubles that Buffy faces in later seasons range from academic pressure to the revelation that her mother, Joyce, has a brain tumour. The highly emotional death of her mother, in season five, signifies the end of adolescence for Buffy as she is now the primary caregiver of her sister, Dawn. Considering the supernatural elements of the show, Joyce has represented stability and normality for Buffy; the death of Joyce is symbolic of the end of her adolescent years and the beginning of the darker chapters of the show. Buffy's inability to cope with the death of her mother combined with the seemingly undefeatable god, Glory, sends Buffy into a catatonic state. Though she eventually is able to come out of this, the pressure of her personal life combined with the responsibilities of being the 'chosen one' lead to an apathy that Buffy never quite recovers from.

Although *BTVS* by this point had been progressively becoming more mature, many were not prepared for the upcoming emotional rollercoaster in store for its audience. After having been resurrected by Willow at the beginning of the penultimate season, Buffy is torn from heaven and thrown back into the reality of slaying. Awaiting her in the mortal world is debt, responsibility, and the lack of stability. This, in contrast to her euphoric afterlife, triggers Buffy's depression as she resents her friends for her resurrection, feeling it to be a violation rather than a blessing. Taking a radically different approach, season six focused on real-life difficulties such as money woes, mental illness, and problematic relationships; indeed for the first time in the series, monstrosity is located in human beings – rather than in supernatural creatures – as depicted by Warren Mears, the intelligent antagonist with a personal vendetta. While all the seasons tackle hard-hitting issues, season six marks the metamorphosis of *BTVS* into a gritty and socially-conscience series. Having lost the financial security of her mother, Buffy is forced to undertake employment in a fast-food restaurant, initially seen as humiliating for a person with her skill set and sacred calling. However, she acknowledges her

job as being a necessary evil and perseveres. Though this may seem insignificant, it is important for young viewers to be exposed to their heroes working in low-paid and unpleasant jobs.

Buffy's depression during this arch, is skilfully articulated by Whedon and emotively performed by Sarah Michelle Gellar; we see her not attempting suicide or consistently in the throes of despair but, rather, we are shown her numbness, her lack of interest and care regarding the rest of the world and herself. She is acting, and as she claims in her solo in the musical episode "Once More with Feelings," she is just "going through the motions." This leads to her sexual relationship with the vampire Spike. The dynamic is toxic and asymmetrical as Spike's love for Buffy is never reciprocated. When Buffy recognises how unhealthy their relationship is, she terminates it. Spike's attempts to pressure her into resuming their relationship takes a drastic turn when he attempts to rape Buffy in her bathroom in the episode "Seeing Red." This scene is particularly emotive as Buffy has returned from being badly hurt in a fight with a vampire and is preparing to go in the bath; Whedon here presents her as particularly vulnerable woman rather than a superhero. This is one of the defining moments of the series as this is not ostensibly for shock value. Whedon shows the grim reality of an emotionally abusive and controlling relationship to combat the on-going romanticising of the Buffy-Spike affair by fans. The show's take on rape and consent explains *BTVS*'s legacy as it vitally portrays universal experiences. The episode "Seeing Red" aired in 2002 but its themes are still relevant today, particularly towards victim-blaming and holding rapists accountable for their actions.

It is not only the Buffy-Spike dynamic that makes this season so memorable. In the season finale Willow, devastated by the death of her girlfriend Tara, gives in to dark magic to exact her revenge on Tara's killer, Warren. Constructing Warren as an antagonist was a bold choice by Whedon as it muddies the waters regarding retribution. Up to this point, Warren has enslaved his ex-girlfriend and tried to rape her; killed her; attempted to kill Buffy; and in the process, accidentally shot Tara. Looking back to season one, it is hard to imagine Willow Rosenberg flaying a man alive; yet this is something which season six almost delights in showing the viewers, thus leaving us to question the moral ambiguity of Warren's murder. As Faith shows us that bad people can commit acts of kindness and make moral judgements, Willow illustrates that morally upstanding people are capable of evil deeds. *BTVS* moves from adolescent issues to addressing societal problems and from clear 'Big Bads' to a more nuanced and complex portrayal of good and evil.

Recovering from the fallout of season six, Willow returns after spending time with the Watcher's council, in an attempt to harness her powers and slowly deal with her grief and guilt. The acceptance of Willow back into the "Scooby Gang" allows Whedon to demonstrate the importance of communication and forgiveness. This season also sees the return of the newly ensouled Spike, tortured by the atrocities he has committed as a vampire. *BTVS* does not reignite the relationship between Buffy and Spike. Instead it portrays the complex nature of the relationship as one based on passion, dependence, and resulting ultimately in violence and trauma. In season seven, viewers see Buffy dealing with arguable the most difficult villain she has faced so far: the battle with The First, a non-corporeal entity emblematic of the primordial evil and subsequently, all evil. In an attempt to save the world, Buffy must train an army of 'potentials' or would-be slayers. Willow, in the season

finale 'Chosen,' endows all potentials with the abilities of a slayer as they go to attack The First's army of ubervamps in the Hellmouth'. This is particularly of note as the first episode of *Buffy* was entitled "Welcome to the Hellmouth" – the show has seemingly come full circle. In order to completely destroy the Hellmouth, Spike sacrifices himself, taking most of Sunnydale with him. Spike finally redeems himself in Buffy's eyes through both his heroic actions and by finally accepting that his feelings for Buffy are unrequited.

It is not only Spike who matures in the final episode but also Buffy herself. Throughout the seven seasons of *BTVS*, despite regularly having help from her friends, Buffy has constantly maintained that she is alone in her destiny. Arguably she feels isolated as they cannot comprehend the enormity of her sacred duty. It is not simply that Buffy has help, but rather that she is capable of accepting when it is offered to her. As the gang look out over the void that once was Sunnydale, Buffy smiles, in the realisation that she is not alone and no longer needs to bear the weight of the world on her shoulders.

Looking back on the legacy of *BTVS*, the mirroring of Buffy's maturity to that of the show is evidence of Whedon and the writers' skill. Despite an initially apprehensive response from critics, combined with its cancellation in season five, *BTVS* resurrected. The thoughtful and complex structural framework spanned seven seasons, allowing for the gradual development of both the show and its protagonist. Its contribution to popular culture cannot be understated as scholars continue to study the long-lasting significance of the show and its impact on the genre.

NOTES

1. Ubervamps was coined by the Scooby Gang to describe the First's army of vampires. These were re-creations of the original vampires and were stronger than an average vampire.

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BOOK AND OTHER TEXTUAL REVIEWS

HERE COMES THE FROST KING: A MODERN FAIRY TALE TO READ ON PRIMEVAL NIGHTS

Review by Rhianon Jones

Arden, Katherine. *The Bear and the Nightingale*. Del Rey, 2017. Novel.

Picking up Katherine Arden's debut novel, *The Bear and the Nightingale* (2017), and stepping between its pages, one fully expects to enter an allegorical fairy tale. Its very title is suggestive of a heritage of fables and legends – the disparate animals suggesting archetypal qualities of strength and lightness, danger and beauty, freedom and romance. In many ways, one is not disappointed. The novel successfully draws upon the rich culture of Russian folktales to relate the story of a young adolescent girl, Vasya, who has the rare talent of being able to see supernatural beings. This ability she has inherited from her maternal grandmother, who, it is implied, is a descendent of the Winter King himself. Vasya's mother, determined to bear a daughter who will share her own mother's gifts, dies in childbirth, and the baby is left to be raised by her father and an aging nurse.

The novel itself contains all the plot staples we've come to expect from Fairy Tales; the dead, much loved mother, the evil stepmother, the simple well-meaning father, the misguided, proud priest, and of course, brotherly rivalry. Moreover, the story at the centre of the novel is not the most original: a young, misfit tomboy must protect the ones she loves from outside forces that only she can battle, and she is thwarted in this task not only by those who would do her harm, but also those she seeks to protect. Yet anything commonplace about the plot is rendered immaterial as the story is expertly told. Arden's skilful prose transports us to a forest in the depths of Russian winter, where "the air is sullen with wet that was neither rain or snow," and the people are "thin from six weeks' fasting on black bread and fermented cabbage" (1). Vasya herself is "skinny as a reed-stem with long-fingered hands and enormous feet," eyes and mouth that are "too big for the rest of her" (19). Arden's characters and settings are richly woven and this in itself is enough to keep one reading.

Whilst they may be stock Fairy Tale fare, the characters contain enough ambivalence to prevent them from appearing one-dimensional. Kasya's stepmother, Anna, treats her unfairly, but we know that this stems, at least partially, from fear. For Anna can also see spirits, but with a Christian upbringing and no knowledge of the old pagan faiths, Anna does not understand what she sees, and believes them to be demons and herself cursed. Anna's fear and jealousy find an outlet in her hatred of her stepdaughter, who she dislikes simply for being braver and stronger than herself. The priest Konstantin is blessed with beauty, piety, and a voice so lovely people weep to hear him sing. Yet, he is also greedy, ambitious and arrogant, and, as the Rusalka observes, "Full of desire [...] and fear" (97). It is this fear and desire, most notably for the strange and striking Vasya, that drives his narrow-mindedness and his arrogant belief that the voice guiding his actions is the voice of God.

Together, united in their lust, jealousy and anxiety, Konstantin and Anna are determined to break our young heroine, and while the reader cannot condone their actions, they can understand them.

The most colourless characters are the spirits themselves, who exist in the forms they do simply because people have believed them into existence. Created via a type of thoughtform, the spirits have no history, motivation or desires of their own. Their actions are guided by the people's belief in them rather than personal agency, and they are neither good nor evil. Even the Rusalka, arguably the most evil character, at least until the introduction of the Frost King's brother, does not kill out of anything other than pure compulsion, for that is what belief has conjured her to do. The exception to this is the character of the Frost King himself, who, for the first half of the novel at least, cannot be easily labelled as 'good' or 'evil,' and his intentions remain unclear. This, I would suggest is down to Arden's own interest in the evolution of the Frost King character, which she has said in the past helped inspire the novel. The character, sometimes known as Chernobog, has evolved in folklore from a wicked pagan God to a Russian Father Christmas. In Arden's novel the Frost King appears to be firmly in the middle of this journey of transformation – exhibiting both good and bad tendencies.

One aspect that may surprise readers is that the titular characters, the Bear and the Nightingale, do not enter the narrative until midway through the novel, and even then it is in the form of a warning: "The Bear is awake" (150), and a prophecy: "You will pluck snowdrops at midwinter, die by your own choosing, and weep for a nightingale" (156). The reader must wait until later in the text to see these ominous words realised and encounter the characters themselves. However, the implication from the title is somewhat different, which is rather misleading. One suspects that the title was chosen for its evocativeness, rather than descriptive accuracy. Still, the book is the first in a trilogy, so maybe this criticism is somewhat unfair – as the second and third part may well enlarge upon these two characters. Although one suspects from Kasya's open-ended and somewhat unsatisfying ending that this is not the case, and the sequels will belong to her as much as the debut has done.

Despite the slightly clichéd plot, there is at least one point that is refreshing; notwithstanding the imagery associated with the nightingale throughout literature, love, and romance are pleasantly missing from the story. Where love exists in Arden's text it is familial love, and there is great warmth of feeling between Vasya and her siblings, and between their father and his children. Elsewhere love is given an unfavourable treatment. The marriages that occur throughout the narrative are arranged on suitability and social value, rather than romance. The romantic love that exists is the destructive, envy driven yearning felt by Anna for the priest, and the priest for Vasya. Yet, for the central heroine herself there is no romantic interest, nor does Vasya show any inclination in this direction. She is only concerned with following her own path, and deliberately chooses a course that leads her away from conventional romance.

There are some slight inconsistencies in the novel, which upset the flow of action and threaten to jolt the reader out of Arden's proficiently crafted world. The sudden arrival of vampires

within the village, though not unfamiliar beings in Russian tales, appear somewhat unexpectedly in the book when, until that point, the most evil characters have been the humans themselves. The point where Vasya and her brother find themselves momentarily becoming vampire hunters does not entirely work, and it feels almost as if one has stepped briefly into another novel. An additional point for anyone who speaks Russian, and has in depth knowledge of Russian folklore, is obviously issues of translation. I am unable to judge what liberties may have been taken with the language; however, the apologetic note at the end of the text suggests that the more pedantic reader might take issue with some sections.

Nonetheless, this is a classic tale, and though we may have heard it all before, like the nurse's stories around the fireside, it's worth hearing again. It is a story of good and evil, fear and greed, pride and lust, and these themes are explored with enthusiasm, even if the conclusions drawn from them are not the most unexpected. I, for one, will look forward to reading the sequel. Though you may know how the novel will end, it is the journey that counts and Arden makes hers thoroughly pleasurable.

BIONOTE

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THE APOCALYPSE WE DESERVE

Review by Aleksander Kordiš

Bakker, R. Scott. *The Unholy Consult*. Overlook Press, 2017. Aspect-Emperor Series 4.

The Unholy Consult (2017) is the fourth and final entry in the *Aspect-Emperor Series* (2009-2017), which is a follow-up to the *Prince of Nothing Trilogy* (2004-2006). R. Scott Bakker has enjoyed popularity in a more niche circle of Fantasy readers, but with the completion of both his series he deserves to stand as a modern classic. During the first series the scale and scope of the books seemed to outclass the narrative possibilities. Upon reading through both series, we are treated to a riveting tale that raises as many questions as it answers. So, after seven books and many years of reading, deliberating, and waiting, the tales of Anasûrimbor Kellhus has come to an end. *The Unholy Consult* revels in everything the author has built up to this point. It is uncompromisingly philosophical, violent, sexual, and above all – dark.

The *Prince of Nothing Series* focused on a couple of main characters that all follow the march of The Holy War to the city of Shimeh. The *Aspect-Emperor Series*, on the other hand, focuses on a multitude of geographically separate narratives that in the end all conclude at the destination of The Great Ordeal – Golgotterath. The similarities between the two series make the proceedings familiar for the readers, and enable the author to gradually raise the stakes. In the culmination, *The Unholy Consult*, the building threads clash as men, beasts, and gods come to blows at the legendary pillars of Golgotterath. In the beginning we followed the rise of Kellhus to power, and as the Aspect-Emperor and strongest wielder of the magic known as the Gnosis, that power becomes unquestionable. It becomes easy to see why he is the Aspect-Emperor and how the constant strength of a single man can hold the entire world together. Each of the supporting characters pale in comparison to the proposed perfection of the Aspect-Emperor, but through their weaknesses and battles the narrative portrays the struggle of mere humans fighting for their own salvation against an army of monsters. Through the eyes of Kellhus we get to learn about the broader philosophical implications of religion, existence, good and evil, and through the perspective of the other characters we see the physical nature of battle, and the dregs through which they crawl in order to survive. This battle began in *The Darkness That Comes Before* (2004) when Kellhus discovered the existence of the monsters known as the Consult, and through his ascension to the throne of Aspect-Emperor he seeks to preserve humanity from the Second Apocalypse. From the moment he was crowned after conquering the city of Shimeh, Kellhus has dedicated his life to defeating the Consult, and his efforts conclude in *The Unholy Consult* and the battle at Golgotterath.

However, before I even continue with *The Unholy Consult* or any of the series in general, a small digression is necessary. Firstly, R. Scott Bakker is a PhD level student of philosophy, and his writing showcases that. The narratives are deeply rooted in a mentality that asks broad and disturbing

questions. The fate of the entire world does not so much hinge on swords and sorcery, as it does on understanding. One of the reasons why Bakker has not reached the mass appeal of other Fantasy authors is due to the sometimes overwhelming philosophical pondering in his narratives. As such whole instances can be obscured by the author's almost pompous wordplay and lofty aspirations. A second note deserves to be made about the actual language of both series. Many Fantasy tales have laid the groundwork for authentication of otherness, or otherworldliness, through complex names, polysyllabic phrases, and use of umlauts. Bakker is very much a follower of that school of thought, but his use of diacritic symbols, umlauts, and archaic syllable patterns can be considered extreme. At some point important names can become jumbles of letters and this leads readers to frequently turn to the glossary. At first glance the combination of dense wordplay, even denser philosophical background and foreground, and names that border on being unpronounceable can easily draw a reader away from the series completely. However, those who decide to continue reading Kellhus's tale will be rewarded immensely.

Bakker's knowledge of philosophy shines in his use of religion, which is one of the central themes of both series. Asking the most disturbing questions, he sheds light on the darkest of what fanaticism, religion, hatred, multiculturalism, and even the simple human soul has to offer. For Bakker, religion is a tool for war and is the main driving force of both *The Holy War* and *The Great Ordeal*. Both of these armies march for the love of their God and his earthly vessel Kellhus, just as much as for their hatred of the No-God. It is a bold narrative that focuses on the devious change from belief to fanaticism. However, religion is not the only tool at the Aspect-Emperor's disposal. The land of *The Three Seas* is also one of magic, which is linked to the reshaping of reality through astute understanding, and each school of magic does this in a different way. However, magic brings with itself a dark religious connotation because users of magic are considered sacrilegious and are therefore damned. Nevertheless, in order to save humanity even magic is a valid tool in combat. The final battle in *The Unholy Consult* is spun as one of good versus evil, but is built on the notions of mass-murderers, zealots, rapists, and etcetera. The means of achieving absolution, however, are justified solely by the end. These aspects of religion, coupled together with the philosophical search for understanding and true being can occupy the minds of readers with their own moral dilemmas, far-reaching questions, and can even bring the most determined of opinions to a point of deliberation.

Beyond the uncompromising philosophy these tales are ones of everlasting battle. The Holy War in *The Darkness That Comes Before* transitions into The Great Ordeal in *The Unholy Consult*. It is impossible to separate the characters in the stories from combat, as their very beings exist to be *against* something just as much as *for* something. No entity is static, and no one is free from the darkest of what humanity has to offer. The focus is on a broad battle through the perspectives of various characters who have their own agendas, own paths, ideals, perils, and world-views. The combat around these characters is as palpable and personal as their inner ones. Readers are drawn to characters who contrast the darkness of the world around them (or who amplify it), and who persevere through their uncounted tortures. Through personal tales the narrative manages to seamlessly branch into a dense lore and mythos that spans thousands of years. Each constituent

of the dense lore is given enough space to be an integral part of the stories, but never overstays its welcome. Quite to the contrary, longer instances of characters elaborating on the lore of the world can grant needed respite from the seemingly endless slaughter carried out in the name of what is Holy to some, Unholy to others. The glossaries and encyclopaedic entries provide much needed information in each of the books, and active online forums offer opportunities for even more deliberation and conversations. This is a prominent feature of *The Unholy Consult* as Bakker concludes his series with an expanded and all-encompassing encyclopaedia spanning over 200 pages. For those who have followed Kellhus since the beginning this is a great addition to their gathered knowledge, and an engrossing read in of itself.

The final question of every good review is – would I recommend it? My answer – of course I would. Whilst I have remained somewhat vague in terms of detailed descriptions, this is because, upon finishing the seven books, I have even more to think about than while waiting for each new entry. Every story is as unrelenting as the prior, and Bakker never falters in realizing his vision. The author never shies away from the darkest depths humans can reach, the damage conflict can bring, or the actions humans are willing to take for what they believe in (or in what they believe will grant them absolution). The series give little in the way of hope, but still just enough light for those who are of strong character and conviction not to falter. In the end what we feel, the readers' moral fibre and compass mean little because the *Prince of Nothing Series* and the *Aspect-Emperor Series* show us the very depths of what human depravity can offer. Savage almost, unrelenting, oppressive, and uncompromising towards the body and the mind. Long after finishing each book, and not to mention after ploughing through all seven, readers will find it hard to stop thinking about the series, to the extent where it feels more like *witnessing* the narratives than simply reading.

BIONOTE

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INTO THE FOREST AND INTO TROUBLE: A REVIEW OF BRIAN CATLING'S *THE VORRH*

Review by Stuart Spear

Catling, Brian. *The Vorrh*. Coronet, 2016. Novel.

Even before reading a single word of *The Vorrh* (2016) you can't help but enter it with raised expectations. The cover includes glowing reviews from writers and filmmakers such as Terry Gilliam, Jeff VanderMeer, and Philip Pullman, and in his introduction Alan Moore labels Catling's novel as this century's "first landmark work of fantasy" (xii). Such promise awaits inside.

The titular Vorrh is a physically bewildering forest found within Africa, but also one that sits outside our language and conceptual understanding. Those who enter it begin to lose their minds, and no human has ever crossed it more than once. It is older than mankind and somewhere inside it – it is believed – lies Eden. Adam still roams the forest, a withered, grey husk of the First Man. Bordering the forest lies the colonial city of Essenwald plundering the forest's resources, which itself was transported brick-by-brick from Europe and rebuilt as a copy.

The Vorrh is a novel of multiple, often converging, narratives: one of which concerns a young English colonial soldier – Peter Williams – and a local shaman called Irrinepeste. Peter befriends Irrinepeste who soon transforms him into the mythical Oneofthewilliams; in so doing she begins the Possession Wars that will foster a revolution from the "True People" against the colonists. Years later, Peter converts Irrinepeste's corpse into a magical bow and two arrows which will prove vital to Peter's mission: he has crossed the Vorrh once, he must cross it again. Complicating his journey is Tsungali, a member of the True People, who is tracking him in order to prevent this happening – though Tsungali himself is being tracked by another African hunter.

A different narrative follows Ishmael, a cyclops child who has been raised in the basement of a sealed house in Essenwald by similarly one-eyed guardians who are filled with some unidentified white fluid. One day the human occupant of the house, Ghertrude, breaks through the locked doors into the basement, discovers Ishmael and begins their journey towards the mysteries of the Vorrh – soon to be accompanied by the blind and wealthy Cyrena.

Another story centres on a character known as The Frenchman (based on real-life proto-Surrealist Raymond Roussel) who, along with his assistant Charlotte, enters Essenwald with the intention of exploring the heart of the Vorrh accompanied by a local guide, Seil Kor. The Frenchman is a wealthy writer with dark impulses; his quest inevitably becomes complicated and dangerous. Elsewhere we find: real-life photographer Edweard Muybridge; a Colonial-Scot and a surgeon

use a group of slaves with supernatural abilities in order to perform dark magic within the forest; Anthropophagi creatures who haunt the Vorrh; and existences who may be former angels known as the Erstwhile.

All of these narratives overlap and intertwine, and for the first hundred pages this can be a dizzying experience, but one that propels you forward into this dark and convoluted world. As literary genres collide, the novel's mysteries quickly begin to emerge and multiply, as a myriad of avenues open up to be explored. Yet the novel cannot sustain this degree of intrigue and possibility, it soon struggles to juggle these narratives and the momentum ekes away. The writing, which had initially been exhilarating and demanding, becomes baggy and overblown; the myriad of characters and their actions become both comically absurd and deeply problematic – one character's reaction to an experiment leads them to rape their captor before dying in a frenzied, delirious fit.

For *The Vorrh*, to some extent, is a post-colonial novel that falls into the traps of colonialist narratives. What is Africa and its natives in this novel other than a collectively mysterious, shamanistic Other? Any agency provided them is of a supernatural bent, and their motives and choices are hinged upon these otherworldly powers. Simultaneously, the novel's temporal setting places it within the realm of Neo-Victorian narratives, a genre which allow authors to probe and complicate the gender, racial, and social norms of both that narrative's setting as well as our current cultural climate, yet this is something Catling fails to accomplish. Missing from *The Vorrh* is the subversion, the acknowledgement and potential deconstruction, of colonial tropes and Neo-Victorian archetypes one would expect from a contemporary, postmodern author. And then there are the female characters - though 'characters' may be too generous a term for some. Nearly all the women's narrative arcs either stem from or culminate in having sex with a male character – with perhaps the notable exception of Charlotte, who instead cleans up after the sexual desires of The Frenchman. Sex, and its accompanying power relations, is peppered throughout the novel but never in a way which illuminates or emboldens the story; rather, these moments come off as outdated attempts at provocative frisson and bizarre narrative contrivances.

It is worth noting, however, that *The Vorrh* is the first instalment of a trilogy, which poses interesting questions in of itself. Will the subsequent novels satisfy the mysteries and questions posed by this first instalment? Will this collection of shaggy and disappointing tales coalesce into a more unified, thematically stronger whole over the course of a trilogy? It is possible, yet come this first instalment's end, some key narratives seem to have reached their natural conclusion, while others have lost any momentum they had initially generated. But in a novel so heavily invested in supernatural happenings, do these dead-ends really matter? Ghosts and spirits permeate throughout *The Vorrh*, thus the reanimating of supposedly dead narratives wouldn't be out of place, which leads to the ultimate question that hovers over the novel's end: Why should I care?

Catling's novel is in many regards a textual mirror to the city of Essenwald. Similar to the city's creation, Catling has transplanted Surrealist, fantastical and magical realist tropes brick-by-brick into his novel and then mined these generic resources only to subsequently squander its rich

potential. By stylistically indulging in the rendering and presentation of each individual brick, Catling cuts himself off from seeing the whole piece. At no point does it feel as though he occasionally stood back to appreciate the wider picture. If he had, he would have seen the novel as we do – a sometimes beautiful, but ultimately frustrating mess.

BIONOTE

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SUBSERVIENT TO SOLITARY: BALANCING AUTONOMY WITH ATTACHMENT IN A CLOSED AND COMMON ORBIT

Review by Rebecca Horton

Chambers, Becky. *A Closed and Common Orbit*. London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2016. Novel.

Following swiftly in publication, and immediately subsequent to the events that unfolded in her successful first novel, Becky Chambers invites us back into the world of the Wayfarers. In *The Long Way to a Small, Angry Planet* (2014), readers were drawn into a story filled with diverse species cooperating on a perilous mission in a narrative which shone most when Chambers focused on the crew's interpersonal relationships. *A Closed and Common Orbit* (2016) maintains this same pattern, but follows characters that occupied the periphery of the first book. The novel's complexity is reflected in the dual circular journeys, as suggested by the title, experienced as the storyline progresses.

A Closed and Common Orbit is an immediate departure from what you might expect from a literary sequel, as Chambers chooses to abandon all but two characters that were developed in the first novel. The AI system Lovelace – or Lovey as readers came to know her – is no more. Her sacrifice at the end of the first book ironically allowed her to reach her goal of living independently, albeit in an illegal body kit. The utter 'wipe' of Lovelace's personality and memories is critical to the success of the second novel, acting as the catalyst of the relationship between Lovelace – later known as Sidra – and Pepper. Moving all of the other dynamic characters away from the plot allows Chambers to explore new relationships between previously introduced alien species, while being able to move in a new direction with these aforementioned secondary characters. This movement is a necessary step in order to understand the struggle that Pepper and Lovelace/Sidra face when adapting to life on Port Corial; by witnessing how they create their identity, readers experience the invention of their lives.

The division of the book into three sections, each with diminishing page value, mirrors the journey of discovery in space as much as self. "Drift," the first piece of the novel, comprises half the page value of the story. The middle component, "Pull," represents a third, while "Circle," the conclusion, spans only seventy-one pages but stays true to its name. Sidra and Pepper are developed slowly by Chambers, given ample time to explore themselves as entities created by others to perform specific duties, but struggling to survive when their original confinements are removed. "Drift" is the ruling inclination; it is in this section that our protagonists find something that wrenches them out of their previous activities and into new territory. "Pull" sees our protagonists

exploring temporary roles, discovering their abilities and limitations to experience the range of emotions that result from being forced into a new life. By the conclusion in "Circle," we can see Sidra and Pepper as beautifully flawed and real beings who are happy living by their own design and created a family of their own.

Tattoos, referred to as tweaks, hold particular importance in both of Chambers's works. It is not too surprising then that Tak, a tattoo artist, becomes a significant figure in Sidra's journey of self-discovery. As an Aeluon (an alien who reflects feeling through skin colouring), Tak moves between male and female genders throughout their life and personifies balance in a number of different situations: between sexes, emotions, and even in understanding/perception. Sidra is enamoured with tattooing as an act of taking an idea from someone's mind and making it tangible – a process she wishes to learn so she too may have that ability. Tattooing also ties back to a circle, like the book, by not only representing current identity but the underlying reasons for change as well. Aptly, Tak discovers Sidra's true identity whilst he is trying to tattoo her, and has to overcome their own stereotypes and moral issues surrounding what constitutes a sentient being.

Choice is a major focus within Chambers's work: Sidra cannot lie or be dishonest due to Lovelace's original programming, something which she works hard to overcome throughout the book. Sidra does not endeavour to be deceptive, but feels as though conquering her limitations is proof of her sentience and will allow her to freely develop an identity of her own choosing. Lovelace elects to be known as Sidra as she travels to Port Corial, her first autonomous decision. She is urged to do so by Pepper, who argues that identity is found through personal decisions, not others' expectations or programming. Even her preference in books is important and helps others understand her; she is fascinated by mystery, non-fiction, mythology, and folktales due to their preoccupation with the fear of death and the idea of someone caring enough to avenge your life.

The differences within personalities are also integral to this narrative. Sidra is someone who has difficulty being in busy places; she is overwhelmed by needing to understand everything, a desire that she struggles to overcome. Her system's programming incorporates feeling at the beginning of her humanoid life as her body-kit is implanted with sensory memories that respond to outside stimuli when she experiences something new – like drinking mek. Sidra is overwhelmed by these force-fed impulses, as they do not reference anything that she is familiar with – they are outside of her knowledge database. Since she is already a being with social anxiety, it is understandable that she wants to be able to override her base coding – to experience the world at a rate that she is comfortable with.

Pepper as foster and mentor has a story that mirrors Sidra's, yet is presented in a much more immediately relatable way. Her journey has the typical stages of childhood, adolescence, and adulthood which Sidra's cannot. Pepper began life as Jane 23, a manufactured being who was trained to sort scrap. She never ingested solid food, never saw the constellations that she would later live among, and never knew life other than her tasks, until a disastrous factory accident led to her escape. Finding shelter after running aimlessly, she is raised by Owl, an AI system who teaches

her more about humanity than any tangible being has before – this allows her later to see Sidra as sentient rather than a program inside humanoid housing. Pepper treats Sidra almost like a child, as Owl did with her; there is no judgement that she takes time to develop her personality, as Pepper understands that it will take her time to navigate a new planet with a new body and different abilities. Throughout her story, we see how Pepper is both strong and mentally adaptable. She was taught to read (and speak another language) by Owl, and had to find a way to control her mental state without human interaction for a number of years. Her journey in being able to quantify the world with language is something that is quite inspiring; we are able to see how incorporating new linguistic or cultural elements into our lives helps to differentiate and define ourselves amongst our peers. She is also able to help Sidra realise that her skill at monitoring and pleasing people can be fulfilling and a base to create a new life around.

Pepper is also a collector: of tangible payments, of experiences, and of people. Blue, her partner, was rescued by her in a comparable way to Sidra. On her mission to escape the scrap planet, Pepper rescues Blue from being forced to work in a factory guard tower. After the Enhanced realised that their 'genetweaking' went awry, they sent Blue to a trash planet to watch monitors, to live out his life without any regard from those that created him. Pepper saw him as a being, not simply a role, and rescued him from the life he was condemned to live. He was allowed to choose his own name – deciding on Blue over Laurian – and reinvent himself as an artist. Although originally created to be a politician, his imposed genetic tweaks didn't cooperate and he was considered a failure. Once in Port Corial he is able to thrive using the 'mistake' of artistic ability; what was explained to him as a fault brings him fulfilment in a place that allows people the freedom to live freely.

This second voyage with the Wayfarers encourages the reader to collect facts, to recognise people as equals, and to value the connections we choose to make for ourselves above all else. Finding a way to reconcile identity with a fulfilling task is an adventure that we all experience; who we shoulder this journey with changes both participants in a way that is at once wholly personal and intrinsically connected.

BIONOTE

Rebecca Horton has a degree in Comparative Literature from the University of Alberta, Canada. Her academic interests include voraciously consuming books that deal with subversion, horror and humour, learning new languages, practicing photography, and finding brilliant juvenile texts for her children.

BETWIXT THE EDDAS: SITUATING NEIL GAIMAN'S NORSE MYTHOLOGY

Review by Kimberlee Bartle

Gaiman, Neil. *Norse Mythology*. Bloomsbury, 2017.

In the introduction to his new book *Norse Mythology* (2017), Neil Gaiman confesses to pouring over various translations of the original *Prose Edda* (thirteenth century Icelandic text written by Snorri Sturluson) and *Elder Edda* (a collection of Old Norse poems, date unknown) both before and during the writing process. Gaiman states: "I've tried my best to retell these myths and stories as accurately as I can, and as interestingly as I can" (xvi). As opposed to many of his other works of fiction, this project was fuelled not only by deep passion but also by intense research and an almost desperate need for authenticity. Because of Gaiman's desires to stay true to the original Viking lore, I decided to evaluate his novel alongside these original sources as a means of assessing that authenticity. Overall, despite initial preconceptions that Gaiman would take great liberties with the eddic tales, his book indeed shows considerable respect for the original stories, with each chapter carefully paralleling a section of the *Prose Edda* and/or the *Elder Edda*.¹ By assessing Gaiman's focus on third and second person narration in his novel respectively with his slightly hyperbolic treatment of character development and mirroring of Nordic oral traditions, Gaiman's work assumes its place as a natural, more modern extension of the original Viking myths.

Having drawn from both the *Prose* and *Elder Edda*, one major element Gaiman had to accommodate was the inconsistency in narration not only between these books, but also the various sections within each book. For example, in Sturluson's *Prose Edda*, stories included in the section *Gylfaginning* are written "entirely in dialogue," while those in "*Skaldskaparmal* [are] written in a combination of dialogue and third-person storytelling" (Byock xv). The *Elder Edda*, or aptly referred to "Poetic Edda," is conversely comprised of several varieties of poetic verse. Gaiman mediates these disparate forms by focusing primarily on third person narration in each story, which, on a practical level, allows Gaiman the space to extrapolate details from the original lore and expand both the story and the character development with dialogue and direct action (which Gaiman referred to as finding "joy and creation in the telling" of each character and story [xviii]). Thor, we know, is tremendously strong – he is not as bright or cunning as Odin or Loki, but he gladly fulfils the role of protector. In the original *Eddas*, there are many instances in which Thor, strong though he may be, is challenged in his intellectual capacity, filling many of the original Icelandic tales with humour at Thor's expense,² and yet, these funny moments could be potentially lackluster to contemporary readers who are less familiar with the hilarity implicit in the ancient Icelandic stories. Gaiman, then, was able to fill these sections of third-person immediate action with hilarious conversation and action to capture a contemporary audience, as when Kvasir the wise discovers the ashy remnants of a fishing net Loki

had created and then destroyed when he fled to the lake in the form of a salmon. Kvasir, logically deducing Loki's whereabouts based on the clues in front of him, is met by an impatient and rude Thor who shouts out, "Why are you still jabbering? [...] Why are you staring at ash and at sticks and scraps of wood when you could be chasing Loki?" and "I am done with you and your foolishness" (240). When Kvasir tries to help Thor logic the situation out himself, he responds with "Er..." and "So Loki..." until the triumphant Kvasir states that the gods must catch fish-Loki with a net and kindly congratulates the unhelpful Thor on figuring it out, to which he "nodded with enthusiasm, not entirely certain how he had come to this conclusion from ashes on the floor but happy to know where Loki was hiding" (241). Thor's focus is always physical – he places priority on "chasing Loki" because his physical skillset is stronger than his intellectual one. By drawing out this and other such scenes, Gaiman stays incredibly loyal to the original and humorous dynamics of the story, but makes the humour more direct and accessible by placing it in an extended third person setting. Another practical example of using third person narration to flesh out a story includes the approximately two and a half pages of the original *Skaldskaparmál* 5 in the *Prose Edda* versus Gaiman's sixteen-or-so page parallel chapter, "The Treasures of the Gods," – while completely faithful in terms of plot trajectories and individual character efforts, Gaiman has filled the story with a great deal of extra dialogue and direct action to extend the humour and emotional capacity of the story for modern audiences.

While Gaiman utilises third person narration to expand the original stories, Gaiman also frequently slips into short sections of second person narration, particularly in chapter openings. (Chapter 1, or "The Players," for example, begins with: "Many gods and goddesses are named in Norse mythology. You will meet quite a few of them in these pages" [5].) Using a second person narration style creates a sense of shared experience between narrator and audience, but it also stylistically emphasises the Nordic tales' origins as ancient oral legends; consider, for instance, Gaiman's chapter on "The Mead of Poems," in which he opens, "Do you wonder where poetry comes from? [...] It is a long story, and it does no credit to anyone: there is murder in it, and trickery, lies and foolishness, seduction and pursuit. *Listen*" (111, emphasis added). In discussing Ragnarok, the end of all things, he simply states, "*Listen*, and you will learn" (253, emphasis added). Clearly, Gaiman's medium here is written text, yet he deliberately employs the verb "listen," which literally connects the story to an audial/oral narrative experience. However, and perhaps more interestingly, this also alludes to a feature in Nordic lore, in which the narrator often checks in with the reader/listener to keep them engaged with the story. In "Völuspá: The prophecy of the seeress" in the *Elder Edda*, for example, stanzas 27, 28, 33, 35, 39, 41, 48, and 62-63 end with the phrase, "do you know yet, or what?" By incorporating these moments of second person narration or oral tradition in the otherwise story-centric third person format, Gaiman structurally substantiates his aims of authenticity. Additionally, given that originally "the Eddas [...] were written in the native language and they were meant to be read aloud, enabling a single manuscript to speak to many, literate and non-literate alike" (Byock x), this also potentially illuminates the idea that Gaiman's respectful appropriation of content and style in a contemporary genre fiction or Fantasy format allows these myths to be shared amongst as many people as possible.

Ultimately, Gaiman's reverence for these stories is apparent. His retelling of these myths – which is truly what they are, for he never adds a story that is not inherently within the Viking lore – operates on naturally developed and extended characters within the realm of Nordic structures and oral traditions. While his story is not going to be a primary resource for Nordic scholarship, it absolutely encapsulates the thematic and structural feelings of the original stories in a way that keeps Norse mythology exciting for people of all backgrounds.

NOTES

1. While this list is imperfect, I found Gaiman's chapters to generally connect with the following eddic stories, numbering Gaiman's "The Players" as chapter 1 and so forth (though chapter 1 allusions omitted here for lack of direct connections [or my shoddy note taking]: Chapter 2 – *Prose Edda* / *Gylfaginning* 5-6, 8-9; Chapter 3 – *P.E.* / *Gylf.* 15-16; Chapter 4 – *P.E.* / *Gylf.* 15; Chapter 5 – *P.E.* / *Skaldskaparmal* 5; Chapter 6 – *P.E.* / *Gylf.* 42; Chapter 7 – *P.E.* / *Gylf.* 34; Chapter 8 – *Elder Edda* / *Thrymskvida: The Song of Thrym*; Chapter 9 – *P.E.* / *Skalds.* 2; Chapter 10 – *P.E.* / *Gylf.* 44-47; Chapter 11 – *P.E.* / *Skalds.* 1; Chapter 12 – *P.E.* / *Gylf.* 37-38; Chapter 13 – *P.E.* / *Gylf.* 48 and *E.E.* / *Hymiskvida: The Song of Hymir*; Chapter 14 – *P.E.* / *Gylf.* 49 and *E.E.* / *Baldrs draumar: Baldr's dreams*; Chapter 15 – *P.E.* / *Gylf.* 50 and *E.E.* / *Lokasenna: Loki's home-truths*; Chapter 16 – *P.E.* / *Gylf.* 51.

2. See Byock 51n1, 55n1, and 55n3 for examples.

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BIONOTE

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GORY STORY IN A HIGHLANDS HOUSE: MCTAVISH MANOR DRAWS AND SPILLS GOTHIC BLOOD

Review by Stephen Curtis

Labarta, Inés G. *McTavish Manor*. Holland House, 2016.

Perhaps above all other genres of fiction, Gothic writing wears its influences bloodily on its sleeve. Repetition, quotation, parody, and the balancing of the expected with the unknown are all key features of this most uncanny of forms. The use of repeated settings, monsters, and character types form the bedrock upon which Gothic fiction can take hold before unsettling the reader and revealing the unstable foundations that really underpin our world. Inés G Labarta's *McTavish Manor* (2016) is a prime example of this blurring of the familiar and the unexpected, blending together a number of Gothic tropes and conventions to produce an original take in this claustrophobic and deliciously bloody novella.

The novella itself is a form that is perfectly suited to Gothic writers, with its hybridised nature allowing for more scene-setting than a short story but necessitating the gaps and ambiguities that are not always present in a full-length novel. Labarta clearly relishes the opportunities of the form, producing a breathless and visceral narrative that reeks of the bloody matters haunting classical Gothic fiction whilst embracing the explicit descriptions of the contemporary. The titular manor's cast of residents are trapped between the established truths of superstition and the revelations of scientific discovery, with their liminal position destabilising the relative merits of each competing worldview. Any preconceptions about the civilising nature of scientific endeavour are quickly eroded as Labarta exposes the barbarism that can lie so close to the surface.

McTavish Manor is a typically bleak and isolated location for a Gothic tale. Its ramshackle halls are set within the windswept Highlands of Scotland and its isolation from civilised society is keenly felt throughout, not least through the novella's nod to the genre's epistolary forebears, *Dracula* (1897) and *Frankenstein* (1818). These two giants of Gothic fiction, alongside Robert Louis Stephenson's *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886), are mixed with the countryside of *Wuthering Heights* (1847) to produce a rich melange of classic influences, all seasoned with Labarta's own continental approach. The result is a novella that lingers long in the imagination, overcoming the minor limitations of editing that were present in the e-book version I read. It seems churlish to point out the occasional slip in wording and tense given Labarta's impressive polyglot qualities here but there were moments where I was taken out of the experience in order to make sense of these slips of the pen. I am a huge supporter of smaller presses and the extra risks they often take with the material they choose, but it is important that they aspire to a high level of editorial accuracy too.

Immediately as the novella begins, Labarta skilfully sets the scene of McTavish Manor and its surrounding environs: "The healthy Highlands' wind often swirls inside – but this is not in any way irksome, for it lessens the heaviness of the air that sometimes gives to the house a somewhat oppressive atmosphere" (*McTavish Manor* n.p.). This description wonderfully conveys the complete absorption of the Manor into its surroundings, reminding me of the Gothically sumptuous *Crimson Peak* (2015). We meet the residents of the Manor through the letters of a doctor visiting the McTavishes, another key Gothic motif. His account richly echoes the naivety of classic figures such as Jonathan Harker and skilfully conceals the depths of his own character failings. Charles Bisland MD describes the family as "the kindest people" although the details of Mr. McTavish's "almost canine sounds" and Mrs McTavish's brutal slaughtering of a cat that bites one of her children swiftly unravel this bland platitude. In true Gothic fashion, the McTavishes have twin children, one of whom is a girl with features and behaviours that cause Bisland to confuse her for a boy. Whilst this uncertainty is not out of place in the Gothic, I do feel that it is an area that perhaps warrants more circumspection given the difficult position of transgender individuals in contemporary society. As things stand, the detail does not really add enough to justify its somewhat gratuitous inclusion in the story.

The McTavishes soon become relegated to the background, however, as Labarta expands her influences even further to include the Post-Colonial Gothic aspects of *Jane Eyre* (1847), most notably developed through Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966). Joining the family is a "Negress servant – the one you describe as a fascinating witch from a land of Godless myths & superstition." Luna is introduced following an attack by wolves, an attack that has led to the loss of her left eye. This abject introduction belies her ascension to become the heroine of the novella, her mysterious origins providing her with the necessary distance to overcome the labyrinthine terrors of McTavish Manor. I found Luna to be the most interesting and well-rounded character in Labarta's novella and would be interested to read more featuring her.

One major connecting theme throughout the novella is that of blood. Whether shed or contained, pure or contaminated, wasting or nutritive, the world of McTavish Manor is drenched in the juice of life. Mrs. McTavish carries out arcane scientific investigations into the nature of blood, Dr. Bisland is both consumed by and the consumer of blood (I particularly liked his professed vegetarianism at the beginning of the novella) and there is a nice cameo appearance by the father of vaccination, Edward Jenner. Labarta takes the various strands of her influences and draws out their bloody associations in order to paradoxically confuse and illuminate the ways in which blood dominates Gothic literature and the world of McTavish Manor in particular. The regression of Bisland from man of science to "The BloodThirsty Bhampire" parallels the degeneration of the novella from ordered Gothic pastiche to almost psychedelic surrealism. This syntactic breakdown is further emphasised by the proliferation of different languages throughout the text. At first limited to individual words of Gaelic such as "dubh" meaning darkness and the aforementioned "bhampire" or Yoruba with "abiku" for spirit, as the novella accelerates towards its conclusion these forays into other tongues become more substantial. Accompanied by the typographical effects of italics, ellipses, and strikethroughs, the increasingly fevered and disordered world of McTavish Manor is well illustrated.

I feel that I should mention the occasional illustrations contained within the novella, but in truth I was somewhat unconvinced by them. They are interesting enough but are too infrequent to add much to the text. Perhaps a more explicit link between the illustrations and the narrative might have helped to situate them more clearly. That being said, taken as a whole they do contribute to the otherworldly and somewhat ethereal nature of *McTavish Manor*.

Overall, therefore, Labarta's novella is a wonderfully bloody piece of contemporary Gothic pastiche, capturing much of the mood and atmosphere of classic eighteenth century Gothic whilst also skilfully updating it with convincing elements of Post-Colonial texts and garnishing with lashings of gore. It fits exceptionally well within the novella form, and feels neither like an embellished short story nor a truncated novel. I was generally absorbed in its delirious depiction of the rapid descent from civility to savagery and found its original use of various languages and typography added a great deal to its success. It would certainly appeal to readers familiar with the classic Gothic texts by which it is so clearly influenced, as well as readers looking to explore the fruitful hybridity of the Gothic and the post-colonial. For readers who desire more after reading *McTavish Manor*, I would also recommend Jack Wolf's novel *The Tale of Raw Head and Bloody Bones* (2013) which tackles similar themes to *McTavish Manor* within a more historically focused approach.

BIONOTE

Stephen Curtis's research specialises in the representation of blood in culture, with a particular emphasis on Early Modern theatre and Contemporary Gothic. He has presented and written on a wide variety of texts from the Medieval Mystery Cycles to videogames. Based in UK, he is currently working on monographs on blood in Early Modern theatre and culture, and Early Modern Horror. He can be found @EarlyModBlood on Twitter.

THE IMAGINARY IS WHAT TENDS TO BECOME REAL

Review by Richard Mooney

Miéville, China. *The Last Days of New Paris*. Picador, 2016. Novel.

The aspects of a surrealist painting are not dissimilar to the two opposing sides of a war, a coming together in a cacophony of stimuli at odds with each other to form a disharmonised image. Surrealist beauty is subjective but its purpose is uniform, as a manifestation of the liberation of thinking of both artist and the viewer. In China Miéville's 2016 novella, *The Last Days of New Paris*, those manifestations are being used as physical weapons to combat the radical right ideology that is Fascism.

As a massive fan of his work *Perdido Street Station* (2000) and *The City & the City* (2009), I felt that although there is a lot of love put into this book, there is also a creative distance between Miéville the writer and Miéville the storyteller. He claims the story was actually told to him during a mysterious meeting in which he listens to an elderly French gentleman (whom he suspects is the main character of the novel itself) over 36 hours. Though the concept of how he came into possession of this story is intriguing, I cannot help but feel that Miéville was so intent on creating landscapes of the 'New Weird' that he creates this fictional meeting to try and shift responsibility for the story being a little thin on the ground.

Although beautifully written and filled with such vivid imagery that rivals, and in many cases surpasses his contemporaries, it is his socio-political undertones which come to the surface – more so than any of his previous works. Previously his Marxist ideals were present, though only through sub-plots and between-the-lines readings of his work. Here it is blatant, suffocating the story with images and scenes designed to undermine the Fascist lines of thinking he and his fellow socialists rage against. A particularly striking example of this can be found within the final conflict between the surreal "manif," known as the "exquisite corpse," and the grotesque Nazi creation, "fall rot." Although the entire scene is incredibly visceral, it seems the creation is more a representation of the Nazi ideology and an attempt to show how ridiculous the Nazis are in general rather than considering Fascism as a viable creed.

Following two timelines set in an alternate dimension where World War II played out differently than in our history books, we follow Thibaut in 1945 and Jack Parsons in 1940. The latter timeline is more a love letter to the surrealists of the time, but lacks enough narrative to be relevant to the main plot. Its entire purpose is to show how the initial incident that brings the surreal vision of Paris to life occurred, yet could – in all honesty – be reduced to a single chapter, or even a letter

read by Thibault in the story's main timeline. Thibault lives in a war-torn Paris, a city where living art walks the broken streets causing havoc across whoever ventures across them, spending his days fighting the Nazis in whatever way he can. His story is filled with pyjamas that can act as shields, a spy from hell, and the pleasant nightmare of Hitler's paintings. Although this is a clever book, with some interesting points regarding the depiction of war alongside surrealist art and Fascism in an ever-growing right-wing world, the story remains very bare – like a skeleton dressed in exquisite robes.

Miéville has always been a champion of the 'New Weird' – a modern echo of H. P. Lovecraft's Cosmic Horror – even if at times unable to embrace the way it is marketed as the genre creeps closer to the mainstream. Miéville feeds on bizarre imagery and given the abundance of crossover surrealist art can provide, it is no wonder you feel this is a work born from personal joy rather than artistic necessity. Given Miéville's stature, whether he likes it or not, he is looked upon more than others to increase the value and validity of fringe genres; this novella does neither. Despite being one of his shortest works, it is not for the uninitiated. First time readers would be best looking to one of his more substantial novels, where he takes the time to set up the world and its rules – which he always does expertly. Whereas in *New Paris* the rules of the world are thrust so completely and fully upon the reader that it is almost overwhelming. Miéville prides himself as a well-researched writer and – to the casual reader – his novels can be quite intimidating, whether the vast and complex world of *Perdido Street Station*, or the Borges concept that governs the world of *The City & the City*. This is why a map of Paris itself might be helpful when reading, though an English born, raised, and residing writer, Miéville wields his knowledge of Paris in the same way James Joyce does with Dublin. While it is impressive to a point, it also feels as if it alienates non-Parisians.

In *New Paris* the surrealist aspects are not limited to the art but the writing itself. The only way to understand the surreal is to embrace it – or read Miéville extensive notes on the subject that only mildly border on being egotistical. Though there is nothing wrong with publishing work built around a topic which you are passionate about, it is worth considering that given the extensive notes available at the end of the book that the casual reader may think someone moved it from the 'Art History' section of the bookstore to 'Fiction.' Each time the reader must reference the notes the power of the narrative fades slightly; this novella has 162 notes. So, whether you read the notes and destroy any chance the limited narrative has of building momentum, or try to read it uninterrupted with little knowledge of the great Surrealists and their work, you will find yourself at a disadvantage, losing sight of the power of the imagery presented in visceral detail.

Unlike most films and novels which cater to the recipient's lack of knowledge at the beginning, Miéville treats the audience like an unseen and almost unwanted guest, given the way he forces them to become accustomed to the rules of his worlds via the scraps of information he allows to naturally occur. The protagonists of Miéville's stories have better things to do than ensure their intrusive audience are well informed of a situation the former are already accustomed to. Perhaps this is one of the reasons I respect Miéville so highly – his art is of a higher quality than many of his contemporaries. The scenarios he creates provide the audience with the necessary scraps to piece together a natural feeling world against all odds. But even if one hates Miéville's personal beliefs, his

stories and his settings, one cannot deny that he is simply one of the best writers of this generation in terms of his wordsmithing and technical abilities.

This is a novel with an odd place in the catalogue of impressive work. For Miéville, it seems to be more of an exercise in the Weird, pushing the boundaries of what he feels can be achieved visually through words. This sadly is apparent to the reader. This novella should only be sought out by those who have read his much more accomplished works and are still hungry for more. To read this as your first foray into Miéville's work is potentially to dissuade yourself from reaching out and experiencing his novels, which are in an entirely higher league altogether.

BIONOTE

Richard Mooney is a comic writer from Glasgow best known for his work on Percy Nobleman, Uptown Chronicles and Daughter of Titan. Since no one from any of those publications has met him in person, his existence cannot be confirmed.

COUNTLESS LIVES INHABIT US: PESSOA MEETS ZOMBIES

Review by Ana Rita Martins and José Duarte

André Morgado and Alexandre Leoni. *A Vida Oculta de Fernando Pessoa (The Hidden Life of Fernando Pessoa)*. Bicho Carpinteiro, 2016. Comic Book.

Fernando Pessoa (1888-1935) was one of the most prolific and influential Portuguese authors of the twentieth century. He was responsible for several important works, not only signed with his own name, but also via heteronyms – imaginary literary pen names. Besides poetry, Pessoa wrote fiction, including novels, stories, and essays, and he also translated the works of other authors such as Edgar Allan Poe, who would be a major influence on some of Pessoa's writings, namely his Detective novels. Much like the American author, Pessoa was fascinated by the occult and the supernatural. As Steffen Dix explains, from very early in his life Pessoa "show[ed] a marked inclination for the occult" (1), a theme that would be prevalent in a number of his writings and one he would continue to develop during his career. It was this interest that sparked Morgado's and Leoni's idea for the comic book where they delve into an alternate world in which zombies have infiltrated the conventions of the Detective genre.

In the 2016 comics entitled *A Vida Oculta de Fernando Pessoa [The Hidden Life of Fernando Pessoa]*, André F. Morgado (a Portuguese author) and Alexandre Leoni (a Brazilian illustrator) create a fiction with the figure of Pessoa at its centre. The authors attempt to explain how and why Pessoa created his alter egos, focusing particularly on Alberto Caeiro, Álvaro de Campos, and Ricardo Reis (his chief heteronyms). *The Hidden Life of Fernando Pessoa* can be read as a contemporary pop culture work influenced by other creations that try to rewrite or reinterpret well-known stories or figures, as is the case of *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* (Seth Grahame-Smith, 2009) and, more recently, *Abraham Lincoln: Vampire Hunter* (Timur Bekmambetov, 2012). Yet, how compelling is Morgado's and Leoni's text in its attempts to re-imagine the life and work of Pessoa?

The narrative begins by trying to justify Pessoa's attraction to the occult and the written word, which he is driven to master from a young age. This was due to a letter left by his father whose early (unnatural) death triggers the boy's imagination. While the deaths of both his father and younger brother initially seem to be a result of tuberculosis, it is implied they suffer from an Evil greater than a mere illness. In fact, the father's letter and last will directs his son Fernando to take his place in the Secret Society for the Annihilation of Evil ("Sociedade Secreta do Extermínio do Mal"). Training under Commander João Miguel Rosa, Fernando Pessoa accepts his fate as a zombie hunter working for the Secret Society, who provide him with the names of those infected by the "Devil's plight" ("maleita do Diabo").

It is interesting to note that the strange disease that turns men and women into blue-coloured, blood-thirsty monsters seems to be spread through bites, as if it were a form of biological virus, much like in the graphic novel series *The Walking Dead* (2003-present). However, there are also a number of religious allusions, namely in the references made to the virus itself, which is identified as an "Evil" that is quickly infecting Lisbon's population, and to the fact that God the Father is with Pessoa, implying that he is doing God's work.

Yet, Morgado and Leoni do not offer any explanation as to what the mysterious disease is, what its origins are, or how it arrived in Lisbon. The Secret Society for the Annihilation of Evil also remains in the shadows: who are its members? How was it created? How do they know who has been infected? All these questions are unanswered, which is one of the comic book's shortcomings, as a clearer explanation of what causes this infection and who are the men fighting it would help clarify the authors' intentions, and contribute to a greater narrative cohesion.

After years fighting to end the zombie threat, Pessoa is given a final list with the names of three men: Alberto Caeiro, Álvaro de Campos, and Ricardo Reis – his most famous literary personas. In *The Hidden Life of Fernando Pessoa* the writer's heteronyms are real men whose lives are cut short by the zombie virus, except for Álvaro de Campos, who is aware there is no escaping the disease and chooses to commit suicide. Pessoa shoots Alberto Caeiro and Ricardo Reis before their transformation is complete. Nonetheless, their lives inspire Fernando Pessoa to write on their behalf and, thus, somehow atone for their deaths. As their voices become his voice, Pessoa feels he is living the lives of others ("Sinto-me a viver vidas alheias"), which is certainly a creative way of justifying the writer's numerous heteronyms.

Visually, Alexandre Leoni's drawings complement the details of Morgado's writing nicely, providing the reader with an intriguing use of image and colour. One of the aspects criticised elsewhere (Moura, "A Vida Oculta de Fernando Pessoa. André F. Morgado e Alexandre Leoni (Bicho Carpinteiro)") is that the colouring of the book is too dark and relies on a rather simplistic colour pallet. However, the darkness of the hues (mostly black, dark brown, blue) establishes the relationship between image and text by complementing the Zombie/Detective/Horror story atmosphere intended by the authors and expected by the readers.

In sum, despite *The Hidden Life of Fernando Pessoa* not being the first comic book or work of fiction to explore the life and image of Fernando Pessoa, it is a good addition to the many creations involving the author and, potentially, an alternative way to lure young readers to Pessoa. It should also be noted that most of the text is taken from Pessoa's own work, so although the idea is original, there is little novelty in the writing itself. Furthermore, because the authors decided to use Fernando Pessoa's words, the narrative is at times dense and puzzling, and the dialogues do not always make sense within the storyline.

The ending itself seems somewhat baffling, as there is no explanation as to the identity of the female zombie Pessoa visits. The readers are only given a name, Ophelia, and nothing

more, which might be incomprehensible for those who are not familiar with Pessoa's personal life'. Simultaneously, this comic book is also proof that, despite being dead for eighty-two years, Fernando Pessoa is still very much alive and is continuously being reread, reinterpreted and used for new creations. In this sense, Morgado's and Leoni's work proves that Pessoa lived many lives in the twentieth century and is living new ones in the twenty-first.

NOTES

1. Ofélia Maria Queirós Soares (1900-1991) was the name of Fernando Pessoa's only known girlfriend.

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BIONOTES

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TRADITION AND FUTURE IN NNEDI OKORAFOR'S *BINTI*

Review by Myriam M. Rojo

Okorafor, Nnedi. *Binti*. Tor Books, 2016. Novella.

Winner of the Nebula Award in 2015 and Hugo Award in 2016 for Best Novella, *Binti* (2016) deals with the Afrofuturist concerns of reimagining the future and the use of technology from a black cultural perspective. In the story, the concept of a future where Africans and African descendants are not only users, but also important figures in the fields of technology and science, is fused with their tradition and ancient culture. Within this first novella of the *Binti*'s series, Nnedi Okorafor carries the reader across two different, interconnected worlds: Himba's time-honoured culture and Oomza Uni's modernity.

The protagonist is Binti, a sixteen-year-old Himba girl. The Himba are described as a Namibian tribe whose most visible characteristic is their habit of covering their bodies and hair with "ojitze," a mixture of red clay and oil, to protect themselves from the sun. Without her family's knowledge or sanction, Binti accepts a place at the prestigious Oomza Uni, an intergalactic University. At the very beginning of the story, we are made to realise the painful decision Binti has made, since as she herself expresses it: "I was defying the most traditional part of myself for the first time in my entire life" (9). The fact that she is leaving the Earth to study at a university where only five percent of the students are human – and she being the only Himba – is both a tremendous personal distinction and a family dishonour. She acknowledges that "I'd scandalized our entire bloodline" becoming a "pariah" in her home town (10). However, her extraordinary talent for mathematics and fascination with remote places means she "was never to have a normal life" even if she fulfilled the expectations of Himba society (13).

Despite its deep-rooted culture and tradition, the Himba tribe has an immense connection to science and mathematics. The importance of this connection in the novella is no surprise since, as Ytaha L. Womack describes, Afrofuturism as a genre strives to "unearth the missing history of people of African descent and their roles in science, technology, and science fiction" (Womack 17). Binti's family has been working with mathematics, currents and circuits for three hundred years. They excel at creating astrolabes – mechanical devices used to communicate as well as to gather personal information. It is unlikely to be a coincidence that the author uses this device – a real ancient astronomical computer for measuring time and celestial positions – since it represents both ancient culture and the future possibilities of space. Through the transfer of oral knowledge, her father has taught Binti how to become a "master harmonizer" and talk to the "spirit flow" to persuade him of turning into one current. For Binti, science and mathematics are not only what her family does

for a living, but also the way she experiences the world: she has her “mother’s gift of mathematical sight” and, when in trouble, she thinks mathematically (Okorafor 31). Okorafor’s introduction of real equations – such as the Pythagorean Theorem – to depict Binti’s stream of consciousness illustrates the huge weight this discipline has in the text. However, this passion for science and technology does not develop into a higher curiosity in Himba culture. As Binti’s friend remarks: “We’re Himba. God has already chosen our paths” and that path is nowhere outside her town. (29)

In spite of this huge conflict of choosing between family tradition and personal desire, Binti enrolls in Oomza Uni and boards a “magnificent piece of living technology [...] a type of ship closely related to a shrimp” (19). The mixing of nature and technology is also a recurrent theme in the novella. The author thus follows the general idea that “Afrofuturism is a home for the divine feminine principle, a mother Earth ideal that values nature, creativity, receptivity, mysticism, intuition, and healing as partners to technology, science, and achievement” (Womack 103). Binti’s description of the growing leaves at the touch of her “edan” is one clear example. Initially, she feels an outsider being the only Himbayet, being among others “who loved mathematics, experimenting, learning, reading, inventing, studying, obsessing, revealing.” she quickly forges new friendships (Okorafor 21). It is at this point when Okorafor, brilliantly, interrupts Binti’s journey with a striking narrative twist: the ship is attacked by the Meduse – an alien race resembling jellyfish, who slaughter almost all its passengers. The Meduse “move like water [...] they worship water as a god. Their ancestors came from water long ago” and Okorafor recalls being inspired by “the little blue jellyfish I saw swimming the Khalid Lagoon that sunny day in Sharjah, United Arab Emirates” (26). The Meduse have waged a protracted war with humanity, but had recently established a truce with their enemies. Binti survives the attack holding her “edan,” “a device too old for anyone to know it functions” (17), which she had found in the desert and was told it was made “from something called a ‘god stone’” (49). She uses it as an amulet to give her strength and protection but, unexpectedly, it turns out to be a sort of defensive object against the Meduse. In addition, being hidden in her room, Binti realises that her “edan” is also a communication transmitter between her and the Meduse. This event is crucial to the unfolding narrative in terms of establishing mediation between the two species. Humanity has always perceived “the Meduse as inferior” (26), who in turn regard humanity as an “evil thing” (42). However, through communication, understanding grows. Binti finally recognises that “the Meduse are not what we humans think. They are truth. They are clarity” (66); and the Meduse are capable of seeing “that a place harboring human beings could carry such honor and foresight” (79). Because of her device and her position as a “master harmonizer,” Binti is able to establish a dialogue with the enemy and, in doing so, perhaps save the people of Oomza Uni.

The fact that Okorafor chose Binti as the name of the protagonist is no surprise. Binti means “daughter of” in Arabic and, as the reader can see throughout the plot, the protagonist represents both the continuation of her family’s technological tradition and her human species more generally. Despite leaving her home and living in exile, perhaps forever, Binti does not relinquish her tribal heritage. Binti’s intelligence and strength enable her to become both an ally for the Meduse and the saviour of people in Oomza Uni. Her position as protector can be related to what Afrofuturist artist D. Denenge Akpem sought to express with her performance installation *Alter-Destiny 888*, in which

she “focused primarily on the question of whether one does have the power to alter one’s destiny and whether one might act as conduit to affect global destiny or to heal trauma in collective cellular and psychic memory” (Womack 114).

In *Binti*, Nnedi Okorafor carries us to a place where the old and the new combine. Not only does she mix the traditional with technological, but also dissolves the perceived antagonism between them. As in most of her works, Okorafor gives real African customs, ideas and mythology an important position within a world where they might be considered outdated and unsophisticated. Although the description of the technological machinery and scientific elements could be considered vague and confusing in certain parts of the narrative, the author holds the reader’s attention by creating real interest in Binti’s past, present and future. This dichotomy of tradition/modernity is treated by many Afrofuturist authors, for example, in Octavia E. Butler’s *Fledgling* (2005), where the protagonist must use ancient manuscripts as well as modern technology to discover her true origin. In *Binti*, as well as in her other works, Okorafor evokes the past and the future, and proves that they are interconnected, rather than opposed. Due to her emphasizing this theme, Nnedi Okorafor is considered to be working at the centre of the Afrofuturist project, and her mediating characters such as Binti “are outsiders who straddle two worlds” (Womack 113).

Once you have immersed yourself in the first novella of Binti’s world, you will be hard-pressed not to immediately continue with the series. Undoubtedly, *Binti: Home* (2017) and *Binti: The Night Masquerade* (expected 2018) provides further opportunities to delve into Okorafor’s complex universe.

NOTES

1. The explanation that Okorafor gives about this concept is not fully clear and explored throughout the story. It can be inferred that it is another way to connect past and future: the “spirit” representing the ancient heritage and the “current” being the scientific use of that knowledge.

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BIONOTE

Myriam M. Rojo is a PhD student at Universidad Complutense de Madrid, Spain. Her dissertation links Black Feminism and Afrofuturism by the concept of “the Other” in Octavia E. Butler’s works. She has participated in several international congresses in and outside Spain.

HUNTED: 'A TALE AS OLD AS TIME'

Review by Meriem Rayen Lamara

Spooner, Meagan. *Hunted*. HarperCollins, 2017. Book.

An emerging trend in contemporary Young Adult Fiction is the reimagining of traditional fairytales, folktales, legends, and myths from across centuries and around the world, with a number of authors engaging in the de-constructing and re-constructing of traditional tales all while merging elements of various genres including Fantasy, Horror, and the Gothic. It is in the wake of Disney's live action movie *Beauty and the Beast* (2017) that Meagan Spooner's *Hunted* (2017) hit the shelves. *Hunted* is marketed as a *Beauty and the Beast* retelling set in Russia. As readers, we immediately expect to see yet another retelling of a tale that has been retold countless times. And yet, *Hunted* was to me an unexpected, but welcomed surprise. For while there are a number of similarities to the Fairy Tale as we know it and its various retellings such as Rosamund Hodge's *Cruel Beauty* (2014) and Sarah J. Maas's *A Court of Thorns and Roses* (2015), Spooner's retelling introduces new and imaginative elements to the tale.

The novel is set in a wintery Russian-esque setting and follows the story of Yeva, whose childhood nickname is Beauty, the daughter of a respectable and wealthy merchant. In the beginning of the story, Yeva, her father, and her two older sisters live a lavish life when an unfortunate event occurs, causing them to lose their entire fortune. They are forced to return to their father's remote hunting cabin in the forest where he lived as a hunter before marrying their mother. The sisters, with the help of a boy servant who chooses to remain with them, try to make the best out of the situation. Their father, on the other hand, finds it hard to adapt. He becomes restless; haunted by the Beast of the forest whom he believes is hunting him. Although Yeva grew up listening to her father's tales of the Firebird and the creatures who roam the forest, she never thought of them as more than the fairytales she loved. When her father goes missing in one of his hunting trips, Yeva decides to follow him and is captured by the Beast. There, she realises that some stories are indeed true, and she is thrust into a world beyond anything she could have imagined.

Before her family's misfortune, Yeva was a Lady-in-waiting for the Baronessa, a position she did not truly enjoy. She sets herself apart from the girls in her entourage, and is indifferent to their concerns regarding marriages and fashion. The hours spent knitting and engaging in idle chatter and gossiping in the company of the other ladies in the Baronessa's house annoyed her, and she would repeatedly find herself gazing out at the forest from the window, longing for her bow and arrow, for Yeva was a huntress, like her father, and it was in the woods that she belonged.

Yeva was to me a refreshing version of Beauty, and I have truly enjoyed her as a character; she is kind, determined, complex, and flawed. The only resemblance she holds to the traditional

character, besides her beauty, is her unconditional love for her family. She is torn between her duty as a daughter and a lady, caring for her family, and her desire for the life she has always wanted; a life of hours spent hunting in the darkest, unexplored parts of the woods, free from all the constraints and obligations her status and the society she lives in dictate. Soon after they have moved to the cabin, Yeva takes it upon herself to provide food for her family. She is determined to keep them alive and safe. It is this very determination that characterises her that keeps her alive when she is a captive in the Beast's prison.

In her prison, and just like Scheherazade and her tales in *The One Thousand and One Nights*, Yeva proceeds to tell her captor stories of past heroines and heroes, of quests and curses. She tells him of Vasilisa the Beautiful and Father Winter, of Prince Eoven and the Firebird, and her stories seem to entertain the Beast but more importantly they keep her alive. As time passes, she begins to feel attached to her listener, but when she realises that the Beast is her captor, she attempts to kill him several times for she believes him to be her father's killer. The story exemplifies a common, and very important, theme in contemporary Young Adult (YA) narratives that is concerned with the concept of the Other. Broadly defined, the Other is the outsider who often acts as an indicator of borders and limits, whether they are political, societal, cultural, or supernatural. In Supernatural Fiction, monstrous beings such as vampires or werewolves function as figures of Otherness, as they are "located at the margin of culture, [they] police the boundaries of the human, pointing to those lines that must not be crossed" (Punter and Byron 263); twenty-first century YA Fiction is replete with examples of such figures, offering a revised vision of the outsider.

In *Hunted*, Yeva, just like the Beast, is the Other. She has always felt an outsider amongst the people around her. Likewise, the Beast in being neither man nor wolf is Othered. The Beast is depicted as both a monster and a tormented soul which incites Yeva, as well as the reader, to sympathise with him. The passages told in his point of view provide glimpses into his evolving thoughts and tormented nature as both the human in him and the wolf fight to take control. The Beast's dual nature is what kept Yeva from killing him. As she begins to see glimpses of his human form, she is confronted with her own thoughts: would killing him be a murder? Or would it be revenge? It is only towards the end of the book that Yeva uncovers the truth behind the Beast's curse and eventually saves him. She understands that everything has two sides to it, two natures, as she notes "A wolf and a man. A woman and a dragon. Hunter and hunted. Nothing in this world has only one nature" (Spooner 375).

What I found striking as I was reading the book was the almost inexistent romance between Yeva and the Beast, which I was quite pleased with for as much as I love the tale and its numerous variations, I have always found Beauty's love for the Beast unsettling. Luckily, Spooner managed to handle the controversial aspects of the tale very well. Yeva's relationship with the Beast is that of understanding. They are two souls who see something they recognise in one another. Their love for the forest, their loneliness, a need they both understand, and their desire for more is what brings them together at the end.

The events of the story progress slowly, but Spooner's elegant yet dark writing makes it very enjoyable. At first glance, it is clear that *Hunted* bears a number of similarities with several versions of the tale that have through the years become the basis for most contemporary retellings, notably the tale of Cupid and Psyche in Apuleius's *The Golden Ass* (second century CE), Jeanne-Marie Leprince de Beaumont's *La Belle et la Bête* (1780), and Disney's animation *Beauty and the Beast* (1991). Some of the archetypal elements of the tale, such as, the merchant who loses his fortune, the beautiful daughter, the Beast and the cursed prince are all there. However, setting her 'retelling' in a Russian-like environment, Spooner was able to weave in Slavic mythology and folklore. In the Beast's forest, for example, Yeva encounters a number of creatures belonging to Slavic mythology; notably the Lamy, the Borovoi, and the Firebird. Such additions to the tale create a unique retelling. *Beauty and the Beast* exists in different versions from all around the world, and through her own retelling, Spooner emphasises the universality of the tale and its undying appeal. *Hunted* is "a tale as old as time" (Disney, 1991).

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BIONOTE

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DEATH IN A BOOKSTORE: ŽIVKOVIĆ'S *PAPYRUS*

Review by Bethany Dahlstrom

Živković, Zoran. *The Papyrus Trilogy*. Trans. Alice Copple-Tošić and Vuk Tošić. Cadmus Press, 2016. Novel.

Imagine being presented with a book that, if opened, would be the last thing you ever read. Would your curiosity compel you to open it, even knowing you would not live to tell the tale? How much money would you pay in order to get your hands on a manuscript that grants its first reader immortality? And if you found out that with a single series of books you could bring people back from the dead, would you share the knowledge?

These are the questions posed by Serbian author Zoran Živković, a creative writing professor at the University of Belgrade and receiver of many global literary awards for his novels *The Last Book* (2007), *The Grand Manuscript* (2012), and *The Compendium of the Dead* (2015). Recently bound together as *The Papyrus Trilogy* (2016), the books have been translated into English by Alice Copple-Tošić and Vuk Tošić, through Cadmus Press, which has begun to publish the Zoran Živković Collection.

As with Živković's prior works, such as *Impossible Stories I* (2010), *The Papyrus Trilogy* is riddled with the impossible, the supernatural, and the unexplainable. In the first novel, ironically named *The Last Book*, the reader is introduced to the literary-minded police detective Dejan Lukić – a man criticised both by his fellow detectives for enjoying books and by Vera, the beautiful bookstore owner who does not believe that a detective could be interested in 'serious literature.' His unique position, with a foot in each world, allows Dejan great insights when weird, seemingly supernatural, deaths begin to plague the Papyrus Bookstore in Dejan's town. Akin to Umberto Eco's *The Name of the Rose* (1980), the trilogy is disseminated with plenty of literary allusions, which places Živković alongside great writers like Eco and José Saramago – another author he mentions multiple times in *Compendium of Death*, in line with the leitmotif of death itself. Živković even alludes to Roland Barthes's term of 'déjà lu,' a phrase unique to the literary community, as it describes the unshakable and almost uneasy feeling (like déjà vu) that you have read an exact passage before. Uneasy and trailed by the ever-watchful and invasive National Agency, and taunted by a secret cult headed by a mysterious Grand Master, Dejan tries to solve the case as soon as possible to avoid any more deaths – but he realises he might be the next one on the killer's list.

Even more interesting than Živković's intricately woven plots is the role that the author plays in the novels. Over the course of the three books, Živković is alluded to as an omniscient being able to commit a murder for no reason or justification; who can assist the characters on a whim but also taunt them with riddles, puzzles, and unexplainable events. Creatively, Živković allows

the author to communicate with Dejan via text messages in the second book, warning him about events before they occur, testing his insightfulness as a detective. This special relationship between author and character allows unique insight into the former's intentions for the novel, as the reader is told that the author wishes to write a Detective novel to prove that such novels can be considered *serious literature*. More than that, by helping his characters, Živković tries to make amends for any wrongdoings that his characters perceive he has done to them. This includes healing a colour-blind woman so that she can see the world through a new lens, a gift that the author hopes will compensate for the deaths of many characters in the first book.

Stylistically, the decision to write himself into the book seems a dangerous one. Bordering on the absurd, the author is portrayed as "an older man with round wire-framed glasses" (595), and the characters in the novel only physically see him once, at the very end of the third book. Until that point, he is this mysterious, at times merciful but mostly deceptive 'Other,' who controls the world within which the characters live. Although he promises after the first book not to write another detective story, Dejan deduces that the author has indeed broken his agreement and begun another novel. The irony in Dejan's rejection of the author's influence on his reality is that the simplest explanation would be the most supernatural one; through this exclusion, Dejan is resigning himself to believe in the impossible. The idea of the supernatural as the most plausible explanation inverts the very definition, redefining 'normal' as 'abnormal' – which Dejan cannot accept. Time and time again, through the subsequent books, the detective tries to reject the idea that the author would be writing another novel after promising to leave their world alone – but the underlying point remains: "It is [...] naïve to believe the promises of an author" (587).

This complex role of the author received criticism, raising the question, how can one write highbrow literature or even further which stylistic choices should be made for the most effective and well-written novel. This ranges from Dejan's exasperation that the author has forsaken "good writing" by repeating a scenario (536), to the fact that narrative coherence is questioned multiple times, both in *The Grand Manuscript* and *Compendium of the Dead*, alluding to one particular scene as "an episode that made no sense [...] like something an inexperienced and up-and-coming author would write, only to flaunt his imaginativeness, without any concern for its purpose in the novel as a whole" (500). Again, narrative coherence is called into question when Dejan is given an inexplicable 'out' in an otherwise unavoidable situation, written off by the author as necessary for a melodrama, as "they are the best when they have happy endings" (399). Absurdity does not matter when the ending of the novel is at stake. In fact, absurdity often clouds the minds of the characters, showing Dejan illusions that plague him throughout *The Grand Manuscript*. Dejan's awareness of the author's presence is rather significant; offering insights into the author's writing process and motivations, his desire to mildly torture his characters as they try to solve the mysteries. Dejan is weary of the head-games, even going so far as to admonish the author for toying with him.

Although it seems that the author's main intention is to confuse Dejan, the reader is not any more privy to the author's intentions than the characters are. The reader is given no special consideration, no hints as to the future or plot twists, depending upon only the information the

author shares with Dejan. Although seemingly all-powerful and omniscient, the author chooses only to divulge partial knowledge, obscuring some of Dejan's own observations until all of the pieces of the puzzle are together. Only then can the reader, along with the other characters, see the whole picture. The audience and readers alike are drawn in as active participants in the mystery. They struggle not to read *The Last Book* as it is opened before them, desperately wondering just who has authored *The Grand Manuscript* and if it actually grants eternal life, finally breathing a sigh of relief when Vera's self-awareness leads her to understand that neither she nor Dejan will come to harm because they are protagonists.

The grand finale of *The Papyrus Trilogy*, a fireworks-size display of revelations and reunions, sees the author stepping out from the unknown *other* reality, greeting his characters, explaining that he had learned a valuable lesson – that Detective novels don't need a murder to be intriguing. He promises his creations that he will leave them be, that he will never disrupt them again. Which leaves the reader to wonder: how can we trust the author? As order is restored to Dejan Lukvić's life, we can only hope that it was not the voice of Zoran Živković speaking.

BIONOTE

Bethany Dahlstrom is a second-year PhD student at Lancaster University, UK. Whilst her academic interests lie in Victorian literary studies, she finds comfort in reading about worlds outside of our own and circumstances that cannot easily be explained.

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