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In This Issue

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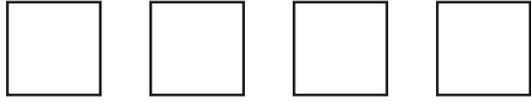
SFRA Review Business

Lies of Omission

Karen Hellekson and Craig Jacobsen

Confession is said to be good for the soul. Though few of you might notice if we didn't call it to your attention, we lied to you in the Editors' Message of issue 285. We assured you that this issue would contain a 101 feature on fan Studies, and a One Course feature on teaching the Zombie Renaissance. Alert readers will notice that it contains neither. Alert readers will also notice that, even without these promised features, this Big Issue is just as big as the last Big Issue, and sometimes something's got to go to make room. Since the Editors of the *Review* are also the writers of the promised but absent articles, we knew that they could handle the disappointment of having to wait another issue.

What we do have is a much-needed Postmodernism 101 feature article written by 2008 Pioneer Award winner Sherryl Vint, and a piece by former SFRA President Alan Elms about Karen Joy Fowler, our guest at the 2008 conference, as well as the usual reviews of fiction, nonfiction, and media. We're confident that these offerings will sufficiently express our contrition for our omissions.

SFRA Business

Behind Us and Before Us

Adam Frisch

Final columns often gaze through rearview mirrors. As I look back over my two years of SFRA presidency, most of what strikes my first glance contains a whole lot of turbulence. Near the beginning of my term came the one event no SFRA president ever wants to face: the resignation of then *SFRA Review's* fine editor, Chrissie Mains. Shortly after that turnover, an early morning e-mail arrived from Farah Mendlesohn informing me of the economic collapse of the Dublin venue for SFRA's 2008 summer meeting. Woof. Fortunately, the Campbell folks came through quickly with an alternative site, and Ritch Calvin

stepped up to help with the myriad of subsequent details needing change. So lots of folks finally got to Kansas, where the SFRA Executive Committee decided, among other things, to open the SFRA mailing list to nonmembers so that interested scholars who could afford only one or two organizational memberships might enliven our discussions. But behold, along with many a legitimate scholar came a bubblegum chewer (or two? or three?) whose goal was apparently to gum up the works. Then either the U.S. or the British post office (you guess which one) lost in transit Gwyneth Jones's Pilgrim award plaque—although not the statue, which, thank goodness, stays with the SFRA president. (A replacement has been engraved and sent.) Now, as twilight falls upon my presidency, more upheaval: the SFRA Web site has decided to move in search of a server and set of programs capable of handling truly interactive fare, from blogs to online membership renewals. Apparently I should have sprung for the higher-priced rearview mirror!

Yet turbulence can lead to new pathways and insights. Partly because of all the shifts and shake-ups in SFRA's various gears and mechanisms during the past two years, SFRA's membership (and especially its younger and more energetic membership) has increased dramatically. The *SFRA Review* under new leadership has become even more far-ranging, media-inclusive, and good-looking. New directors for publicity and Web directorship have come forth to make both areas much more dynamic in the future—soon, all of us will be able to consult our Directory and renew our memberships and subscriptions online—while from the past, SFRA organizational and *Review* archives are being firmed up both as hard copies in Kansas and as electronic documents in Florida. SFRA award committees have become stable and efficient, and new liaisons with other SF organizations (such as SFWA and About SF) have been established and are beginning to flourish. New monies for SF scholarship projects and travel grants for members are coming online. The future SFRA conferences in Atlanta, Phoenix, and Lublin, Poland, have already attracted an abundance of interesting (and famous) SF authors who promise to make these events among the best in our organization's history. And finally, initial queries have started about another, updated, more exciting SFRA fiction anthology. And all of this with "no new taxes" or dues raises!

So as I return my sight to the way ahead, I see a landscape both inviting and vibrant in front of us, and I feel confident that SFRA remains firmly on the road to a most successful future. I'm glad I've stayed along for the ride.

Executive Committee Officers

The Science Fiction Research Association announces the results of the elections for Executive Committee officers for 2009-2010:

President:	Lisa Yaszek
Vice President:	Ritch Calvin
Treasurer:	Mack Hassler
Secretary:	Shelley Rodrigo

In accordance with SFRA bylaws, Adam Frisch becomes the Commitee's fifth voting member, the **Immediate Past President**. Congratulations to all.

The Association would also thanks the members who stood for office, and David Mead, outgoing Immediate Past President. The SFRA depends upon and values the service of its members.

Features
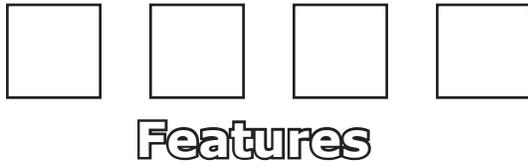
Postmodernism 101

Sherryl Vint

Postmodernism is a term as difficult and frustrating to define as is the term *science fiction,* and anyone trying quickly to grasp the term is soon beset by seemingly countless and often contradictory descriptions. Even the "post" of postmodernism complicates rather than clarifies, as the precise date and nature (or even fact) of its break with the modernism that precedes it have all been occasions for critical debate. It is a cultural and aesthetic phenomenon that emerged in Western culture sometime in the post–World War II period, often linked to the disciplinary changes that shook up the humanities with the "linguistic turn" of the late 1960s and early 1970s. It was at its height in the late 1980s and throughout the 1990s and began to fade in the twenty-first century, although as yet no term has emerged to describe the period, our current cultural moment, which followed postmodernism. (This in itself is not unusual: postmodern author John Barths wrote an essay called "The Literature of Exhaustion" in 1967 describing the "the used-upness of certain forms or the felt exhaustion of certain possibilities" [64] in the project of modernist literature, which required radical new forms; by 1980 he was able to identify this new feeling and form as postmodernism in his follow-up essay "The Literature of Replenishment.")

Yet although the term *postmodernism* is no longer ubiquitous on conference programs and graduate course syllabi as it was in the 1990s, we shouldn't be too quick to conclude that postmodernism is therefore over. Like cyberpunk, which Jameson famously described as "the supreme *literary* expression if not of postmodernism, then of late capitalism itself" (419), postmodernism has not so much disappeared as become the taken-for-granted experience of twenty-first-century life, thereby no longer requiring label as a cultural expression because it has become a mode of being. Common to the many and overlapping lists of characteristics of postmodernism are disunity, fragmentation, contingency, chaos, division, difference, discontinuity, meaninglessness, waning of affect, and loss of history—all equally applicable to the experience of our current age. Zygmunt Bauman has called this the era of *Liquid Modernity* (2000). Liquid society is characterized by instability and ambiguity, the erosion of what had seemed to be stable categories of identity, and the fragmentation of experience under conditions of such rapid change that social forms and institutions no longer have time to solidify into meaningful sites of human identity and collective action. The emergence of postmodernism is equally tied to the rise of information culture and the increased penetration of information technology into our daily lives and experiences (hence Jameson's connection of postmodernism and cyberpunk). This, too, has become such a common feature of daily experience that it is difficult to perceive how radically our experiences have been shaped by portable and ever-present entertainment technologies over the period termed postmodern—although watching *Life on Mars* (UK or US) gives some sense of the import of these cultural changes in precisely how truly alien is the world displaced thirty-some years in the past.

In sorting through the various things the term *postmodern* might mean to those who use it, it is helpful to keep in mind two continuums along which to plot various definitions and reactions: aesthetic or historical explanations of the phenomenon; and perceptions of it as reactionary or progressive. Discussions of postmodernism that see it predominantly as an *aesthetic* mode, a list of features or techniques that postmodern texts (broadly construed) possess while others do not, inevitably run into difficulty when a supposedly postmodern characteristic (such as metatextuality) is located in a text dated before the putative appearance of postmodernism, such as the often-invoked metanarrative *The Life and Opinions of Tristam Shandy, Gentleman* (1759). On the other end of this continuum are approaches that define postmodernism primarily in terms of *history,* a distinction sometimes marked by the use of the term *postmodernity* rather than *postmodernism.* Postmodernity is associated with the shifts from a predominantly industrial and manufacturing economy to one based largely on service industries and information technology, the reorganization of labor on the basis of flexible accumulation and post-Fordist production, and the various aspects of globalization of culture and the economy driven by new information technologies.

The term *postmodernism* seems to have originated with architecture and the call on the part of people such as Robert Venturi and Charles Jencks for design that reacts against the aesthetics of modernism. The ideal was to achieve a difficult unity that allows for plurality rather the erasure of difference in favor of the tantalizing unity that had come to characterize modernist design. It quickly became an important term in philosophy, and it is this heritage that shapes most of the postmodern scholarship within the humanities. Jean-François Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (1984) defined postmodernism as an incredulity toward "grand narratives": those tantalizing explanations or theories that explain the world in terms of the progress toward rationality, or the increase of human freedom, or ability of science entirely to know the world. These narratives are no longer convincing now that we have come to understand the role of subjective perspective in shaping knowledge; further, analysis of the imperialist and patriarchal underpinnings of many of these formerly hegemonic ways of perceiving the world have made many question the utility (and ethics) of such grand narratives. Lyotard argues that postmodernism is characterized by partiality and contingency, competing multiplicities of knowledge, and abundance of micronarratives. This perspective provoked significant reaction, particularly from Jürgen Habermas, who argued that modernity and its Enlightenment-based goal of emancipating humans through communicative rationality was an "incom-

plete project." Many critiques of postmodernism since have built on this foundation, arguing that it is either a continuation of the project of modernism (if one stresses its ability to include voices previously marginalized by dominant cultural paradigms) or else that postmodernism is an amoral and dangerous discourse because its focus on language games (in the Wittgensteinian sense) and discourses of power eradicate the ground from which to launch an effective critique of unjust social relations.

Ihab Hassan is credited as the first to introduce the term to literary studies, although his *The Postmodern Turn* (1987) has largely been ignored in subsequent criticism, overshadowed by the more flamboyant theorists such as Baudrillard and Jameson. Hassan argued that postmodernism was characterized by urbanism, technologism, dehumanization, primitivism (psychedelia, beat, hip), eroticism (homosexuality, camp, polymorphous perversity), antinomianism (SDS, Weathermen, Chicano Power, apocalyptism), and experimentalism (antiformalism, fantasy, play, fusion of media). He saw the emergence of postmodernism as deeply connected to the radical social movements of the 1960s, embracing both aesthetic and historical features in his explanation. The affinity of postmodernism with many of the common themes of SF should be apparent from Hassan's list, and its dissolution of boundaries between high and low culture as part of its emphasis on texts and textuality had a large role to play in further legitimating SF as an academic discipline. Literary postmodernism is inconceivable without a concurrent understanding of poststructuralist linguistics and its insight that language refers to the world in a neutral and straightforward manner; instead, the world becomes accessible to us through the system of language that we use to describe it, a system that derives its meaning internally from differentiation. In two important books, *Postmodernist Fiction* (1987) and *Constructing Postmodernism* (1992), Brian McHale builds on the similarity between SF modes of world-building and this poststructuralist understanding of the ways in which language creates rather than reflects reality. He argues that SF, which so often focuses on the encounter with the other, is an ontological genre that is well suited to express the multiplicity of perspective embodied in postmodernism. *Science Fiction Studies'* special issue on postmodernism (1991) and Larry McCaffery's *Storming the Reality Studio* (1991) are also key explorations of this affinity.

One of the central features of postmodernism is the fragmentation or decentering of the subject, who is now understood as subject to language and other discourses of identity that precede the individual rather than autonomous author of his or her own stable and coherent identity. Much of this aspect of postmodernism continues in scholarship on the posthuman and has remained central to SF through the work of scholars such as N. Katherine Hayles and Donna Haraway. Such work focuses on the constitution of the subject as well as the world through the workings of language, power, and technologies of representation. Posthumanism inherits many of its questions and concerns from postmodernism.

Postmodernism is also strongly associated with discussions of virtuality and hyperreality, and thus with the work of Jean Baudrillard. His work interrogates consumer culture and the sign system of advertising. Advertising has broken the link between the product and the consumer's actual needs, he suggest, such that what we buy is not so much the product itself as the signs that differentiate it from other, similar products. Baudrillard thus extends the analysis of language as a system for producing the world—rather than reflecting it—to the analysis of material behavior within consumer, advertising-dominated culture. Like language, consumption is a code, and our immersion within consumption-driven late capitalism becomes part of the erasure of nature and its replacement by culture, a paradigmatic postmodern experience. In perhaps his most famous work, *Simulacra and Simulation* (1981), Baudrillard traces the history of representation through four "orders" of simulation, a genealogy of our evolving understanding of how language and other sign systems refer to and represent—or shape and create—our experience of reality. In the first order, we see the idea of "naïve" representation, the assumption that everyone lives in a common, shared world and that it is not problematic for language to refer to this world. In our postmodern era, Baudrillard claims, we have entered the fourth order of simulation, where the signifier or image doesn't relate to an external reality at all. In other words, the model now precedes the simulation: instead of the simulation referring to the real life referent, we increasing begin to experience real life in reference to other images or representations, which are more "real" to us.

Baudrillard is a provocative and often misunderstood—as often polemical and unclear—cultural critic. His argument that there is no longer a fundamental difference between the referent and the signified has become associated with the "excesses" of postmodernism in the popular cultural imagination, and in fact one of the reasons sometimes given for the "end" of postmodernism is the harsh return of "real" materiality with the attacks on the Twin Towers in 2001. This suggestion, however, misses the point that it was precisely the deep interpenetration of material and semiotic "realities" that identified the Towers as a target in the first place. Further, the very workings of the economy in late capitalism are themselves situated in the realm of simulation, yet they have real material consequences, as the recent financial crisis has made clear. Entities such as derivatives and futures markets, the valuing of corporations such as biotech companies on the basis of the promise of assets they might produce in the future rather than their existing capital, and the speculative aspect of post-Fordist flexible accumulation all point to the ultimate triumph of the sign, of the abstract over the tangible.

The other theorist whose name is most widely invoked in discussions of postmodern is Fredric Jameson, whose *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1991) was one of the most widely cited texts of the 1990s. Like Hassan, Jameson understands postmodernism through a list of features; key to this list are waning of affect, abandonment of a surface/depth model of meaning, loss of historicity, and fragmentation rather than alienation of the subject. Like Baudrillard, he associates many of these changes with the rise of consumer culture and the replacement of nature with culture. Jameson, however, is also specifically interested in understanding the consequences of postmodernity for the experience of individual subjects. He argues that the transformation of reality into images is politically disabling. Drawing on Louis Althusser's description of ideology as that which enacts imaginary relations to real conditions, Jameson describes postmodernism as a crisis in representation that has rendered us unable to make "cognitive maps" of our social conditions and hence to transform them to less exploitative ones. He

argues that the distinguishing feature of postmodernism is that the semiautonomy of the cultural sphere has been destroyed by the logic of late capitalism. Thus, there is no longer any difference between art and advertising, between entertainment and social critique. This change has crippled our critical faculties as the distance between art and the world in which it circulates has been eliminated; art has become just one commodity among many, and thus unable to offer a place from which to critically reflect on one's society.

David Harvey's *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (1989) also focuses on socioeconomic factors responsible for the transition to postmodernism. The major difference between modernism and postmodernism, he suggests, is that for modernists, space was always connected to social purposes and thus shaped by social projects, whereas postmodernists see space as autonomous and shaped by aesthetic aims unrelated to social objectives. Manuel Castells's in-depth sociological study, collected in the Information Age (1996–98) trilogy, can similarly be understood as a tour through postmodernism's worldview. Like the cyberpunk literature that Jameson argues captures the ethos of postmodernism, Castells's work posits *"our societies are increasingly structured around a bipolar opposition between Net and the self"* (3; italics in original). The collaborations of Douglas Kellner and Steven Best, *The Postmodern Turn* (1997) and *The Postmodern Adventure* (2001), similarly do important work in charting the ways in which postmodern culture has changed art, economics, and politics. Their focus on technology has made their work particularly amenable for SF scholars. Kellner and Best mediate nicely between critiques of postmodern culture's political and economic limitations, and the more positive assessments of the ways in which postmodernism has enabled multiple voices to be heard in the SF canon and elsewhere. SF critics such as Marleen Barr in *Feminist Fabulations* (1992), Jenny Wolmark in *Aliens and Others* (1994), and Timothy Spaulding in *Reforming the Past* (2005) have found in postmodernism's emphasis on fragmentation and partial perspective a powerful tool for bringing previously marginalized perspectives into SF criticism. Similarly, SF novels such as Joanna Russ's *The Female Man* (1970), Stanislaw Lem's *Solaris* (1961), and Jack Womack's Dryco series (1987–93), suggest that SF writers as well aware of the kinship between SF and postmodern discourse. In fact, Istvan Csicsery-Ronay Jr. argues that "the transformation of the world into a technological project makes SF the only form of literature capable of mirroring reality" (306) in the postmodern era.

The legacy of postmodernism is thus a mixed one. It is both a critical phenomenon, predominantly of the 1990s, and the continuing cultural milieu in which we live. Its emphasis on multiplicity, fragmentation, partial perspective, and the intersection of language and power has enabled serious critical reflection on popular genres including SF. Within humanities academia as a whole, insights generated by postmodern discourse have prevented the continued dominance of white, patriarchal, heteronormative, and Western systems of knowledge. Yet the social and economic changes concomitant with postmodernity have been significantly less salutary. Jorge Larrain, interrogating the contradictory celebration of enabling multiple voices to speak at the same time as all speaking positions become decentered and partial, argues, "The postmodern discourse does not act like the

old liberalism telling people that there is freedom, equality and property for all. It rather tells people that there is chaos in reality (carefully concealing the fact that this is brought about by the same market forces) and dislocation in themselves and that there is nothing they could do about it" (288). He thus sees postmodernism as an ally of neoliberalism, a position very similar to that taken by Jameson in his recent *Archaeologies of the Future* in which he argues that we live in an era of "cynical reason" (229), an "empty ideology that accompanies the practices of profit and money making…that has (and needs) no content to disguise itself" (229). This is not because people are necessarily convinced of the values of the hegemony of big business and late capitalism, Jameson insists, but simply because they are "convinced of its permanence" (229). The challenge for SF, then, as a literature capable of interrogating this reality is to embrace postmodernism's framework for articulating difference without succumbing to its cynical reason.

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Twenty-Two Years in the Karen Fowler Writing Group: An Appreciation of Its Not-Quite-Founder and Sort-of-Leader

Alan C. Elms

Pretty much every term in that title requires further explanation, and I'll gradually work through them. First, as Karen herself may be quick to tell you, the writing group in question has never actually been called "The Karen Fowler Writing Group," at least not formally and not within Karen's hearing. It has never really had a formal name—mostly its members call it "*the* writing group," or "*our* writing group," or sometimes "the *Davis* writing group," although there are actually several writing groups in Davis, California, where we have both lived for many

years. Karen was indeed not quite the founder of the group—it began as a writing workshop at the Davis Art Center, and it was briefly led by two aspiring male novelists before Karen agreed to take on the job. Karen had already taken a writing course at UC Davis from Kim Stanley Robinson, and several other students from Stan's course decided to set up their own separate writing workshop, but it didn't last long. Karen's workshop, however, gradually became a self-identified writing group rather than a workshop, and it has now lasted for more than a quarter of a century.

I've given you this early history of the group mainly to suggest that its long-term survival owes something to Karen's distinctive role in it. I was not part of the group during its earliest years, but from what I've heard, its first two workshop leaders didn't work out well, in part because they regarded themselves as better writers than the rest of the group, and they took offense when group members criticized their work. I know nothing at all about the competing workshop, the one composed of former students of Stan Robinson, except that Stan did not participate in it. He has his own ways of writing, and submitting his work frequently to workshop critiques is not part of them. Karen had learned a lot from Stan and they became good friends, but she worked differently—she was happy to participate as an active member of the workshop she continued to lead, bringing in her writing every week for group critiques and joining in the critiques of other members' work as an equal rather than as The Leader.

That was how the group was working when I joined it in the latter part of 1986. By then I had achieved tenure in the psychology department at UC Davis, had published a couple of books about social and political psychology, and was thinking again about trying to write science fiction—an ambition I had given up in my late teens. I read an article in the local newspaper about Karen Joy Fowler, described as a housewife who was beginning to have some success in publishing science fiction short stories—and who was leading a fiction workshop at the Davis Art Center. I hadn't read any of Karen's work at that point, but I pulled out an issue of the *Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction* that included one of her stories, and I thought it was pretty good. So I called her, we talked briefly on the phone, and she encouraged me to give the group a try. I went to the next meeting, and I've been in the group ever since.

By that time Karen had already won a prize in the annual Writers of the Future Contest and had published half a dozen stories. Shortly after I joined the group, she published her first collection of short stories, *The Lake Was Full of Artificial Things,* which led to her winning the Campbell Award as best new science fiction writer of the year. She was also beginning to speak to groups. One day in 1986, my daughter, Laurel, who had already been a science fiction fan for several years, came home from her high school course in science fiction to report that Karen had spoken to her class. When I asked whether Karen had shared any secrets about writing, Laurel said she had told the class she always had problems with her stories' endings. In later years, I've heard Karen say she always has problems with the middle of her stories, and on other occasions, I've heard her say she always has problems with the beginnings of her stories. I don't see that her stories consistently suffer from any of these problems; whenever she brings a short story to the writing group

in supposedly rough draft, it always appears close to perfection. So maybe she's just talking about how things feel as she's writing the stories, rather than about how they look when they're done. (You might also note that Karen's use of the word *always* is not always reliable. Her most recent Nebula-winning story is titled "Always," but we as readers are entitled to have serious doubts about that word in the story's context, though the narrator is certain it's true.)

I hope it's no great indiscretion to say that Karen has almost *always* encountered more problems in writing her novels than in writing short stories. I can attest to those problems firsthand, since she has brought nearly every chapter of nearly every novel she has written to the writing group for our reactions and suggestions. She began bringing in the *Sarah Canary* manuscript, chapter by chapter, soon after I joined the group. We saw it develop almost like a Saturday morning movie serial, with a new chapter every two or three weeks when things were going well and more widely separated when they were not. We saw one full draft of the novel and most of a second draft with at least two alternate endings, neither of which was the ending that appeared in the published novel. We all thought it was a delightful novel, though we were never sure exactly who or what Sarah Canary was supposed to be, and Karen did not explain Sarah to us. Some of us did speculate that Sarah might be an extraterrestrial creature, so we were gratified when John Clute proclaimed that the book was "the finest first-contact novel yet written." Karen seemed to agree with that interpretation. But she places a high premium on ambiguity in most of her fiction, and as the writing group's procedures developed, we did not insist on any member explaining any aspect of his or her fiction or poetry. So with regard to Sarah Canary, we did not ask and Karen did not tell.

Unfortunately, the publishers of her short story collection did not value ambiguity as much as she or we did. They had been expecting her to follow with a more obviously science fictional novel than *Sarah Canary*, and they refused to publish it. Over the next year or so, Karen occasionally showed our group rejection letters from other publishers—the most wonderful assortment of rejection letters I've ever seen, typically phrased in terms of "We loved this novel but it doesn't fit our needs," or "It's terrific but we don't know how to market it." When Henry Holt finally published it in 1991, two or three years after it was essentially finished, the dust jacket made no mention of science fiction or extraterrestrial creatures, and none of the blurbs were from science fiction writers. The same was true of Karen's second collection of short stories, *Black Glass,* several years later. The writing group, or at least those of us who had a particular interest in science fiction, were learning through Karen's example some of the difficulties of being a genre writer. But we also learned some of the advantages of being able to write science fiction so sophisticated that people who said they never read science fiction could happily read Karen's science fiction and still feel they had retained their literary purity.

For a while during my early years in the group, we continued officially as a writing workshop at the Davis Art Center. Karen was designated each term as the instructor, and she was supposed to collect fees from us to share with the center. But she felt uncomfortable with asking us to pay her for being part of what she saw as a leaderless group. She tried to placate the Davis Art Center by rotating the fee payments among us—collecting only

from the allowable minimum of four paying students per session, as I recall, though the group was always a good deal larger. That was another reflection of her basic modesty, her feeling that we were all just friends who helped each other with our writing—though she was rapidly becoming the one expert among us at writing fiction, freely sharing her insights into the process and her suggestions for improvement of our work. The art center's manager began to complain about the workshop, without asking any of us whether we were happy with it. I suspect that jealousy of Karen's success was involved, as well as the manager's desire to fully repossess the lovely Board of Directors meeting room that Karen had somehow obtained for our once-a-week, three-hour-long meetings. At any rate, we soon left the Davis Art Center and became a peripatetic writing group, meeting briefly at a Quaker friends' meeting house, in a bookstore's storage basement, at a gathering place for foreign students and friends called International House, and for a somewhat longer period at the headquarters of the Cal Aggie Christian Association, a drafty and thin-walled structure that we began to call the CACA House. The Christian Association eventually kicked us out because we were too noisy—and perhaps too vulgar for some of the more prudish CACA members, since we often read aloud some pretty racy poetry and fiction.

As Karen became more visible as a writer, she also became more peripatetic—leaving Davis for several months to learn screenwriting in Hollywood, supported by a competitive fellowship, and on another occasion spending a full semester at Cleveland State University where she taught creative writing. She began to teach writing workshops here and there, sometimes in the Clarion system and sometimes in writing programs that had little or nothing to do with science fiction. I assume she was doing those teaching stints partly to supplement the usual meager financial rewards of a published science fiction writer. She was certainly getting no financial rewards from our group, and after the Davis Art Center contretemps, she never again asked us to pay her anything for her leadership of the group. Nor did we make an offer—though I think we would have if we had thought it essential to get her to return to Davis, especially from those longer stints in Hollywood and Cleveland. Before she left for Hollywood, the core members of the group did get together to write her a going-away present—a combination bodice-ripper and baseball novel titled *Heir to the Sweet Abyss,* which delivered an insistent message at the end: "There's no place like home. There's no place like home."

And home she eventually came after each time she went away. Most important for the group, Karen and her husband moved out of their tract house in South Davis and bought a lovely older home in the very center of town. It was tucked away down a semiprivate lane, just behind a sorority house and a block from the UC Davis campus. One of the deciding factors in choosing this particular house, Karen told us, was that the dining room was the ideal size for our group to meet. And there we met, most Thursday nights when Karen was in town, for well over a decade. Karen installed a dining table that sat eight writers comfortably; the group on any given Thursday evening seldom exceeded that number, and rarely dropped below six. The group was small enough not to need formal bylaws, but we did gradually develop a set of simple rules and common understandings. Among the more important rules is that anyone

ready to present to the group will bring enough copies of the story or chapter or poem to distribute to everyone at the meeting, and will read his or her work aloud while everyone else reads along silently before starting to discuss it. One important common understanding is that discussions of our work will not involve personal questions directed toward the author, or indeed any questions about the "meaning" or "intent" of the work. The author may volunteer such information, but is not expected to do so. (I learned pretty quickly after I joined the group that even the most obvious Freudian or Jungian interpretations of a piece were unwelcome—especially from Alan the Analyst.)

One unwritten rule is that when a group member brings exactly the right number of copies of his or her work for the number of members in attendance, everyone applauds enthusiastically before the reading begins—most likely the only time any work gets applauded at all. As a group we are appreciative of good writing, and we let the authors know our appreciation by our comments, but we are not wildly demonstrative. That goes for Karen too—in terms both of her thoughtful and usually supportive comments about the work of others, and of the group's usually enthusiastic but sometimes picky comments about her work.

I associate Karen's dining room with her writing and our reading of her next four novels, chapter by chapter—*The Sweetheart Season, Sister Noon, The Jane Austen Book Club,* and *Wit's End.* None of these was marketed as science fiction or fantasy, though most of them can be read to some degree as alternate histories, and a couple of them imply elements of the fantastic. But they all share the same distinctive voice as Karen's shorter science fiction, just as *Sarah Canary* does. I was once asked to introduce Karen at a book reading in a local bookstore, and as part of my introduction, I was supposed to identify her genre or characterize her work. The best I could come up with was to say that her writing was Karenjoyfowleresque—and I'm still satisfied with that term. If you've read much of Karen, you know what I mean. In recent years I've noticed that several younger authors in the Slipstream or New Weird school of writing sound awfully Karenjoyfowleresque—and that's not a bad way to sound. But Karen still does it better.

Karen's dining room was also the site for the development and completion of five or six other novels, none particularly Karenjoyfowleresque but all benefiting from Karen's wise counsel. Two of them were written by members who came to the group specifically to write a novel, wrote it, self-published and self-marketed it with some success, and went away again. The others were written by long-standing group members, who wrote their novels slowly and who are still holding onto their finished manuscripts until they find the right agent or editor or publisher, or perhaps until they find time to tweak the novel just a little more. Karen is a good role model for writing novels at a leisurely pace. But when she's pretty much done with a novel, she usually moves into a mode of furious rewriting, with the help of her editor or several highly skilled friends and peers, until she meets most of her expectations and her publisher's absolute deadline. The members of our group are all very good writers or they wouldn't be there, and Karen has helped them to get better. But they are, shall we say, not as motivated as Karen at getting their work into print.

That brings up the topic of Karen's husband, Hugh Fowler. They met as Berkeley undergraduates and got married soon after graduation. After graduate school, Hugh eventually became a residential energy expert for the Sacramento Municipal Utility District, while Karen found herself to be the residential mother of two small children. When she decided at age thirty that she wanted to become a professional writer rather than pursue more reliable employment, Hugh agreed to let her give it a try for a year, then renewed that option for another year. Some science fiction organization should give Hugh a plaque or a medal, not only for being supportive of her writing career in that way, but for introducing Karen to science fiction in the first place. As she has often told the story, he revealed on their first date that he was a science fiction fan, and before their next date, she rapidly read as many science fiction books as she could get her hands on. Her novel *The Jane Austen Book Club* does not include any members of our writing group that I could identify—we are, after all, primarily a writing group and not a reading group. But the character named Grigg, the only man in the Jane Austen Book Club, is a science fiction fan who introduces the group's women to the genre. I have assumed (without confirming or disconfirming my assumption by asking Karen) that Grigg is at least loosely a tribute to Hugh Fowler.

When the writing group moved into Karen's dining room, I began getting to know Hugh a little better—he was often nearby for a few minutes before he retreated to another room to read or watch TV. He never indicated any interest in joining the group, and I never discussed science fiction with him. But I did learn to bake a cake known as Hugh's Cake, a Bundt cake with a lot of nutmeg, from a recipe for which he won a prize in a cooking competition at his place of employment. I then combined Hugh's recipe with a recipe from a popular cake cookbook plus taste tests of a variety of whiskeys at the annual Bourbon Festival in Bardstown, Kentucky, and came up with my own recipe for Kentucky Bourbon Cake. I've baked that cake several times for the writing group and Karen likes it a lot. If you look on page 25 of the hardcover edition of *The Jane Austen Book Club,* you'll find my Kentucky Bourbon Cake being served at the book club's first meeting.

Karen's dining room has also been an important site for the expansion of my knowledge of the science fiction world, either by meeting "visiting firemen" and "visiting firewomen" who stopped by to see Karen's writing group in action, or by hearing from Karen about her rapidly expanding network of contacts with other writers and editors and so forth. I had already known that the science fiction world is much more of a community than the mainstream literary world, or even the world of mystery writers and fans. But I hadn't realized how much a writer of Karen's stature feels obligated to develop and maintain interactions with many other professionals in the field, who call and e-mail and ask for contributions to edited volumes and send their latest manuscripts for her to read and criticize and blurb. That's not even counting the many former students from her frequent teaching of formal workshops and college courses. A few of those former students have been geographically close enough to Davis to then join our writing group, either occasionally or for an extended period of frequent participation.

Karen's wide circle of science fiction friends and colleagues has also been quite helpful to me in my scholarly work outside the group, especially with regard to James Tiptree Jr. Karen has put me in touch with Tiptree's literary heir, Jeffrey Smith, as well as with Tiptree biographers Julie Phillips and Justine Larbalestier, when I needed their help most. Also, when Ralph Benko and I were first putting together ideas for what would become the annual Cordwainer Smith Rediscovery Awards, I met with Karen to get some idea of how she and Pat Murphy had initiated the James Tiptree Jr. Award. Ralph and I never staged any bake sales to finance the Cordwainer Award, and it has not become nearly as influential as the Tiptree Award. But by following Karen's advice, and with the help of Bob Silverberg and others, it has attained a degree of prestige in the field, and we were happy to find it a long-term home at Readercon.

Karen's recent mainstream success, especially with *The Jane Austen Book Club,* has drawn more interest in our writing group as well—to the extent that we have had to get a little more fussy about whom to admit. Her success has also made it easier for us to impress outsiders by identifying ourselves as members of "Karen Fowler's writing group," though she has never tried to pull rank within the group and would probably prefer that I not use that name for it. At the same time, her financial success with *The Jane Austen Book Club,* from sales both of the book and of the film rights, has surely made Hugh Fowler happy with his long-ago investment in Karen's writing future. Upon Hugh's retirement from his public utility job, the Fowlers were able to buy a house in Santa Cruz, an even more upscale real estate market than Davis. Hugh grew up near the ocean and wanted to retire to a place closer to open water than our dry Central Valley, and both Karen and Hugh wanted to live closer to their grandchildren, who are growing rapidly somewhere down in Southern California. The Fowlers are holding onto their Davis house, just in case—but by now they have almost entirely moved into their Santa Cruz home. Karen has promised to visit our writing group again whenever she has a good chunk of new writing for us to read, and we plan to hold her to that promise—especially regarding what we have for several years referred to as her "monkey novel," or more properly her "ape novel," two or three chapters of which we read before she put it aside to write a novel that her publishers hoped would appeal more to *Jane Austen Book Club* fans.

The writing group plans to go on meeting, in one or another of our dining rooms, but of course things won't be the same without Karen's regular participation. Sigmund Freud, in his classic paper "Mourning and Melancholia," first discussed the psychological phenomenon of intensified identification with an absent loved one. So our group, after Karen's departure from Davis, has even more reason to call ourselves the Karen Fowler Writing Group—much as various patches of Davis real estate are called Oak Tree Plaza, Mace Ranch, the Wildhorse Golf Course, and Cannery Park, though their eponyms are no longer with us. But that oak tree and that ranch and the tomato cannery and the wild horses are never coming back to Davis, and local memories of them are fading fast. In contrast, I'm sure our writing group will experience renewed focus and productivity every time the word goes out that Karen Joy Fowler's back in town.
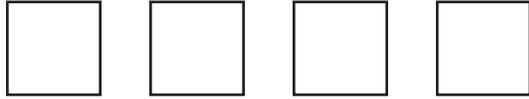
Nonfiction Reviews

Navigating the Golden Compass

Janice M. Bogstad

Glenn Yeffeth, ed. *Navigating the Golden Compass: Religion, Science and Daemonology in Philip Pullman's His Dark Materials.* Dallas, TX: BenBella Books, 2005. Paperback, 240 pages, $17.95, ISBN: 978-1-932100-52-5

Thought-provoking, entertaining, at times annoying—are all adjectives that apply to this group of eighteen perspectives on Pullman's His Dark Materials trilogy. Published after the third book was released but before the movie came out, this collection of essays pertains specifically to the written works, but a few of their predictions, especially that there will be objections to their content by some religious groups, have come true. One could not agree with all perspectives because some contradict others, especially in the areas of religious content and writing competence. Most essayists are writers of science fiction and fantasy, and when not, are scholars in fields of literature, psychology, or the sciences. And almost all have extensively published either fiction or nonfiction.

Published fictional authors hail from the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia and include Michael Chabon, Don DeBrant, Sarah Zettel, Karen Travis, Jean Rabe, Kay Kenyon, Richard Harland, Gregory Maguire, Harry Turtledove, Sean McMullen, and Justin Leiber. Added to these are academics specializing in children's literature: Naomi Wood, Gregory Maguire, and Natasha Giardina. Psychology professors include Arthur B. Markman and Kim Dolgin. Dave Hodgson specializes in social theory, Robert A. Metzger is a scientist, and Daniel P. Maloney's credentials are in philosophy. Each provides a short of snapshot reaction to the trilogy, and some focus as much on the work of other writers as they do on Pullman, providing a comparison with high fantasy. Justin Leiber, for example, discusses Tolkien, and Pullman's stated foil, C. S. Lewis, comparing what he sees as their nineteenth-century values with Pullman's twentieth-century ones. Others, like Kay Kenyon, make their comparisons within more contemporary works such as Susan Cooper and Neil Gaiman, illustrating especially the structural strengths of these works in relation to Pullman.

Chabon's piece, "Dust and Deamons" (originally published in 2004 in the *New Times Review*), provides a plot overview and comments on all three novels, highlighting it as a story "about the way that adults betray children." A few of the authors have created entertaining satirical pieces, examples of literary expertise on their own. Jean Rabe's "Letter to the Editor," (*London Times,* editorial section) gives us a version of "A Modest Proposal" by praising the many actions of Mrs. Coulter, who "endeavors to take children from the poorest of parents, crude ragamuffins who playfully skitter through alleys like grubby rats and

whose presence spoils the city's otherwise picturesque image." Sean McMullen's "The Field Naturalist's Guide to Daemons" addresses fledgling researchers about to embark on Lyra's world to study how daemons affect the overall social structure. The many questions he outlines for their studies highlight the more and less believable implications of having a daemon couched in amusing terms. However, Karen Travis's "I Gotta Get Me One of Those," while not actually a satire, is written in a very light style, with observations interspersed by dialog. She speculates about economic features, how they will affect the job interview, how we might see "a whole line of merchandising from coats that complement your daemon ermine or fox to studded collars and matching human–daemon accessories." Markham is perhaps less amusing, but no less tantalizing, in his analysis of how daemons fit with what we know of the structure of the human mind and identity formation. Maguire, on the other hand, criticizes the changes that Pullman has made in his definition of "Dust" between the first two books and the third. He notes: "In the third book, Dust seems to be related to every physical aspect of every world, including natural forces like wind and rain" (117). And DeBrandt's "His Dark Pharmaceuticals" entertains as he foregrounds the many references to drugs in Lyra's alternative world, from the poppy heads in the Jordan College scholar's parlor to the Bloodmoss of the Svalvard Bears, the poisons used by Mrs. Coulter and the Master of Jordan, not to mention all of the substances that are smoked. Of course, these many substances which are illegal in our world appear regularly, as part of normal society, in Lyra's—so often, in fact, that it is surprising that religious conservatives have focused their criticisms almost exclusively on the many attacks on organized religion and specifically Christian beliefs. One would think they'd also have noticed the drug culture. The problem of Pullman's attacks on Christianity, on C.S. Lewis, and on institutionalized religion is addressed by several authors. In the final essay, "Show Me Don't Tell Me," Daniel P. Moloney argues, unconvincingly, that Pullman's best writing espouses Christian beliefs and his anti-Christian insights often appear as intrusive, extended explanations. I happen to find many of Seraphina Pekkala's comments and Lord Asriel's expositions to be thought-provoking, but he claims they are just bad writing.

Pullman's writing style is also addressed by Giardina, Turtledove, Wood, and Zettel. Zettel, in "Dust to Dust," examines a series of children's fantasy tropes and archetypes that Pullman skillfully subverts, with, and in her estimation, greater or lesser success. These include "girl-animal telepathic bonds," "talking animals," "Love saves the world," "Boy warriors," and "the power of destiny." Turtledove, in "Occam's Razor and *The Subtle Knife,*" takes on characterization and world building, finding both flaws and strengths in the trilogy. He compares Lyra to Heinlein's feisty Podkayne, but he finds that the world building in the first book is stronger and more consistent than in the other two. His dissatisfaction with the Mulefa in *The Amber Spyglass* is more fully articulated in Hodgson's "New Eve: Evolution, Sustainability Across Many Worlds." Hodgson brings theory of individual and social evolution to bear on questions of whether the Mulefa ecology is sustainable, but more centrally whether and under what conditions humans could sustain a culture of cooperation, or "The Republic of Heaven." Metzger relates the awe that Pullman reflects for the methods of science as well as

its misuses. Developmental and cognitive psychology provide material for the reflections on Lyra and Will's ability to evolve psychologically and socially in ways that would be necessary to the story in Dolgin's "Coming of Age in Svalbard and Beyond" and Harland's "To Be In Oxford." Harland also joins Wood and Giardina in praising Pullman's validation of children's culture. Harland especially notes the self-consistent and self-contained nature created by the children of Oxford, and Giardina comments in "Kids in the Kitchen" that "children's culture resists adult hegemony and creates its own rules and hierarchies to subvert the power of adults over them" (141). Wood chooses to features Pullman's exploration of innocence in the face of the conflation of knowledge and sexuality that characterizes much religious thinking manifested in their attempts to suppress both.

Most of the essays are more on the order of long reviews or reaction pieces rather than scholarly essays. They are eminently readable for a general audience, especially for readers who are familiar with the books. But they are also at times unsatisfying, incomplete, or sketchily argued. Each author demonstrates an obvious knowledge of the Pullman books as well as of fantasy literature, the craft of writing, or sometimes both.

Popcorn Science

Neil Easterbrook

This spring's first Hollywood big-budget sci-fi action fiesta was supposed to have been *Jumper,* Doug Liman's film of a fellow who can *jaunt* just by wishing so. It starred the wooden Hayden Christensen, who as an actor was a much better Stephen Glass than Anakin Skywalker; apparently some actors are better at pretending to be real than authentically being real. In the science section of the *New York Times,* Dennis Overbye reported that the month before the film opened Liman screened sections for a standing-room-only lecture hall of MIT students, who then heard commentary by MIT physicists Edward Farhi and Max Tegmark, experts in quantum computing and cosmology. "One student asked the physicists if they rolled their eyes at the scientific miscues in movies. That was too much like work, protested Dr. Farhi, who said he was more interested in the acting and the characters." Unfortunately, no one else seemed much interested in the acting (viz. Hayden Christensen) or the characters, and *Jumper* did not jump at the box office.

But the meeting at MIT was revealing in another way because it marks the perennial interest of scholars, fans, and scientists alike in how Hollywood depicts science. Perkowitz's *Hollywood Science* is the most recent in a long line of similar books, such as Lawrence Krauss's *The Physics of "Star Trek"* and *Beyond "Star Trek": Physics from Alien Invasions to the End of Time* (which isn't only about *Star Trek*). I enjoyed Krauss's books far more than Perkowitz's, both because I read them first (which sometimes gives a stronger impression or establishes a paradigm

for judgment) and because they are richer, livelier, more incisive accounts. However, the specific advantages of *Hollywood Science* are three: the wide range of films he addresses, the particular sciences given focus, and most significantly the accessible presentation; indeed, an undergrad or a lay reader need have no prior knowledge either of film or science to find the book an accessible survey of some of the ways Hollywood presents science. SF scholars may want to thumb through it, especially to cull it for tidbits to be deployed as illustrations in classrooms; teachers could recommend it to students who think the science or the diction of science irrelevant to discussions of SF, and general audiences may find it provides a diverting entertainment for an afternoon tea (which need not, by the way, be *Earl Grey, hot!*).

Rather than obsess over FTL or time machines, *Star Trek* transporters or replicators, Perkowitz wanders through geology and climatology, genetic engineering and mathematics, asteroids and volcanoes. This variety is welcome, as is the variety of the 119 films engaged, including both sci-fi schlock and sober mainstream drama. Even biopics appear, such as the Oscar-winning *A Beautiful Mind,* about the brilliant but schizophrenic mathematician John Nash, or the lesser-known *Infinity,* the story of Richard Feynman, the Nobel laureate in physics. This wide range is an excellent idea for his development. It's especially refreshing to read a book that addresses more than just the usual suspects— *Frankenstein, Blade Runner, The Matrix, 2001: A Space Odyssey, Invasion of the Body Snatchers, Total Recall,* and *The Terminator*—though these receive suitable mention as well. The book also provides a generous complement of black-and-white stills.

The central weakness of the book is precisely the thing that will appeal to popular audiences: its simplicity. The structure is simple, the commentary simple, the style simple, and the thought simple. Feel free to substitute the words *straightforward, accessible,* or *clear,* because I mean *simple* to be descriptive rather than pejorative. But this simplicity will sharply limit the book's usefulness to scholars of SF or of film. For example, structurally, the book alternates huge amounts of plot summary with huge scientific infodumps—and those infodumps are expository summaries of the scientific data and current conclusions about that data. The strategy for development is a "this, but" or "one hand, other hand" technique, of the sort that most literary academics find themselves teaching to the novices in their first-year composition courses. Not that there's anything wrong with that.

Most of this works in the following way: here's how several films depict, say, alien life, or geology, or global warming. That is followed by: on the other hand, here's what science tells us is possible, is factual, or is probable (respectively). As an example, take the second chapter. In the approximately 30 pages of "Alien Encounters," the first 16 are given to generally quick but sometimes developed plot summaries of movies that contain aliens; the next 10 pages provide expository summaries of the sorts of scientific knowledge we have about what alien life might, or might not, be like; the chapter's final 4 pages perform some matching of the scientific data against the plot summaries. End of chapter. Other chapters provide more mixing earlier on, but plain expository comparison and contrast is the organizing strategy throughout the book. Similarly, the sentences themselves are so simple that most scholars and other informed readers will probably skim, rather than actually read, the book. Yet the lack

of wit and the unvariegated simplicity will probably appeal to nonacademic audiences.

Some chapters, such as "Scientists as Heroes, Nerds, and Villains," are much more interpretative, trying for greater nuance and at least offering some taxonomic distinctions (though in this case, note again how simple the categories remain). The general simplicity of the categories identifies simple thinking. Perkowitz makes no generic or narratological distinctions between SF, technothriller, monster movie, screwball comedy, or biopic—generally because Perkowitz is only concerned with broad strokes to critique what he sees as the even broader brush preferred by Hollywood. SF film is simply a privileged and familiar vehicle for Hollywood's representation of science. Perkowitz is similarly either completely silent on, or generally uninterested in, SF film's literary sources (both particular authors such as Wells, Dick, or Aldiss, and particular movements, such as cyberpunk) that prove the films' ur-texts. Perkowitz has nothing to say about the "filmic" qualities of cinema, and other than for the briefest moments he does not engage SF or SF film criticism. These omissions are tolerable because the book is about Hollywood movies, but a far richer book would indeed consider literature, political or historical context, the insights of other critics, and subtleties of different generic protocols.

In the final chapters, Perkowitz takes on two tasks: to award laurels and to promote science pedagogy. Adopting the terms of Harry and Michael Medved, the penultimate chapter provides an annotated list of his Golden Eagles (films he really thinks offer solid accounts of science) and Golden Turkeys (films that commit especially egregious scientific errors). His Golden Eagles: *Metropolis, The Thing from Another World, The Day the Earth Stood Still, On the Beach, Blade Runner* (1982 version), *Jurassic Park, Gattaca, Contact,* and *A Beautiful Mind.* (Note that only one of these is not conventionally thought to be SF.) His Golden Turkeys: *The Core* (for failing to get even a single thing correct) and *What the #$*! Do We (K)Now!?* (for "quantum loopiness"). I am perplexed that he offers only two turkeys, since one might have imagined that examples are legion, and opportunities to lampoon nonsense might have made for a more lively text. What of *Battlefield Earth,* as one example? Perkowitz gives a "Special Award" to *The Day after Tomorrow,* on the grounds that despite enormous scientific exaggerations and inaccuracies, it nicely dramatizes the conflict between proactive scientists and reactive politicians—though most of us might have called it a golden turkey, a rotten tomato, and tediously clichéd to boot.

These choices seem generally reasonable, but one is always inclined to quibble with lists, especially on scientific grounds. Take the *for instance* of *Jurassic Park,* a film that may well introduce its audiences to the significance of DNA and provide some interesting extrapolation about what biologists may one day be able to do with it, but it also commits the most egregious errors against another sort of science, that of the "complexity" sciences, or what the physicist Murray Gell-Mann wished to call "plectics." The most familiar form of these sciences is popularly, and in the film, called "chaos theory." In an essay in the *New York Review of Books,* the paleontologist and historian of science Stephen Jay Gould vivisected Michael Crichton's understanding both of DNA and especially of chaos theory, because Crichton says it means *precisely the reverse* of what it actually suggests. In perverting the science, Crichton's "chaos mathematician" Ian

Malcolm turns the mathematics of chaos into the sort of romantic nostalgia that animates a "Nature" responding to scientific hubris with the vengence of the Greek or Hebrew gods (see "Dinomania"). Crichton wasn't being ironic, and he wasn't trying to provide an analog of "Hubris clobbered by Nemesis," Brian Aldiss' famous definition of SF. How such attitudes might actually constitute a "Golden Eagle" is hard to understand—though for its chase scenes and innovative special effects, *Jurassic Park* certainly merits a Golden Eagle when measured either by the Mindless Popcorn Consumption Meter or the First-Thing-Let's-Kill-All-the-Lawyers Meter.

The central reason Perkowitz admires *Jurassic Park* (or *The Day after Tomorrow*) is the opportunity it provides for science education and science educators. Consequently, Perkowitz understands film using limited aesthetic models: film can be either (a) mindless escapist entertainment, or (b) an instrument of pedagogy. This is an extraordinarily constrained view of an art form, but, truth be told, if we started pointing fingers at people who conceptualized art in this way then we'd need a very long list indeed. For instance, he recommends doing things such as pairing *The Day after Tomorrow* with a film such as *An Inconvenient Truth* (which has scientific and rhetorical problems of its own); one is "fictional," the other "truthful," and complemented by rigorous analytical discussion together provide the opportunity to sort fact from fiction and rhetoric from reality. Working scientists consistently link their own nascent interests in science with their youthful (and continuing) experience of SF, increasingly of SF film rather than literature, and Perkowitz wishes simply that Hollywood get closer to scientific truth—not that the films be utterly consistent with and accurate about all aspects of current scientific knowledge. The pace of real science is deadening, and films such as *Destination Moon* (adapted from Heinlein's *Rocket Ship Galileo*) are unwatchable, even for aerospace engineers. The restraint of Perkowitz's sensible, cogent recommendation is admirable, though it probably results less from intellectual pragmatism than from his authentic fanboy joy at Hollywood's unrestrained excess.

An exceptionally accessible book, *Hollywood Science* provides a very good catalog of the ways Hollywood has used and abused science. I highly recommended it for high school and public libraries, and perhaps also for undergraduate libraries that contain collections of less academic books with popular appeal. At the introductory level, *Hollywood Science* may provoke analytical responses, just as SF films may precipitate awe. As Max Tegmark remarked in that MIT meeting about *Jumper,* "even inaccurate science fiction movies could inspire scientists to think. You could see something that you think is impossible,…but that might start you thinking."

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The Philosophy of "The X-Files"

Justin Everett

Chris Carter is reported to have once said that the *X-Files* was about the search for God. Indeed, the show is highly philosophical and metaphysical, if not theological in the questions debated by its central characters, Mulder and Scully, who represent the divergent worldviews that undergird the "two cultures" debate. Mulder's investigations are driven by metaphysical questions based in a religious-like belief that "the truth is out there." Questions, not answers, drive Mulder. His is a quest in the pre-Enlightenment mode, a search for something he believes in. In *The X-Files,* Scully is tasked to debunk Mulder's belief system and put an end to his investigations. Her approach is the post-Enlightenment scientific method: she examines evidence and draws conclusions only on the basis of the available evidence; in her mind, following a Popperian logic, science can disprove a hypothesis but can never confirm one. The "truth," in Scully's view, is always negative, whereas in Mulder's view, it is positive. However, as the show progresses (and in particular beginning with the episode "The Erlenmeyer Flask") Scully begins to surrender her view to Mulder's and ends the show in a position of belief: The truth is out there, and it cannot always be seen. This is fundamentally a religious view.

Dean A. Kowalski has accumulated a thoughtful collection of essays that contemplate a variety of philosophical views against this background. The book is divided into three parts. The first, "The Credos," addresses the implication of the credos often mentioned in the show: "The truth is out there," "I want to believe," and "trust no one." The second essay in this section, "Freedom and Worldviews in *The X-Files,*" probably should have been the first, because it treats in broad terms the philosophical (and quasi-religious) views personified by Mulder and Scully. Some essays in this section I found less valuable. For example, one essay in this section discusses film noir in a way that reveals its author's unfamiliarity with the subject. However, this is a collection written by philosophers and not literary critics, so perhaps this error can be forgiven. The last two essays in this section discuss Kuhn's concept of "paradigm shift" and its relevance to worldview and a discussion of Mulder's beliefs in relation to William James's essay "The Will to Believe" and his book *The Varieties of Religious Experience.* The essays in this section introduce topics that I had hoped would be discussed in the following sections in more intimate detail.

The second section, "The Characters," I found less satisfying. In this portion of the book, the essays use particular characters as launching points to discuss broad philosophical issues and do little to provide insight into the characters. (Of course, this reflects my bias as a rhetorician and a teacher of English rather than as a philosopher. I have colleagues who use popular culture to teach philosophical principles. Their purpose is not to teach the subject matter itself, but to engage discussion on philosophical principles.) Two essays in this section are an exception. "Moral Musings on a Cigarette Smoking Man" and "Walter Skinner: *The X-Files'* Unsung Hero" capably balance philosophy and literary criticism. In these essays, philosophy is used as a lens for understanding the characters rather than merely using the characters as an excuse to talk about philosophical principles that, for the most part, were only thinly related to the proposed matter at hand.

The final section, "The Episodes," continues the trends from the preceding section. For the most part, the essays here use particular episodes as a means of discussing philosophical principles rather than using those principles as a lens for interpreting or commenting on particular episodes. This is the aspect of the book that I found most disappointing, though perhaps those interested in using *The X-Files* to teach philosophy will disagree with me.

Overall, this book contains a number of essays that I found valuable, along with an equal number that could have accomplished the same ends by using many other popular culture artifacts as a launching point. The title of this collection suggests that the essays it contains will be about *The X-Files.* Although this was the case in a number of essays, in an equal number it was not. I believe that those who teach philosophy will find much in these pages to help them use *The X-Files.* Those who wish to approach *The X-Files* as an object in its own right will find less here of value to them.

The area that deserves more discussion than it receives is the underlying quasi-religious belief system that undergirds *The X-Files* and drives its credos. I am convinced that the popularity of the series, when compared to other series that engaged supernatural topics, is due to the continuity of this theme. Indeed, the search for God, or at least something to replace God, is a driving force of much of what we call science fiction, fantasy, and horror. These concepts were touched on within this collection, but not with the coherence and consistency of treatment that would have made this a much stronger collection. However, because collections of essays cannot possibly have the same consistency as monographs, this is perhaps an unwarranted criticism.

This text accomplishes its purpose. Although it is not an outstanding collection from the viewpoint of a rhetorician and literary critic, those who teach philosophy through popular culture may find it useful. I would not consider this a must-have for my own collection, though for a university desiring to build a library of books related to media science fiction, this would be a suitable choice.

Utopia Method Vision

Janice M. Bogstad

Tom Moylan and Raffaella Baccolini, eds. *Utopia Method Vision: The Use Value of Social Dreaming.* Oxford: Peter Lang, 2007. Paperback, 345 pages, $49.95, ISBN 978-3039109128.

This first volume in a planned ongoing series, Ralahine Utopian Studies, includes essays as the result of two years of meetings (spring 2003 through autumn 2004) at the Ralahine Center for Utopian Studies, Limerick University. Participants were twelve scholars from Canada, England, Ireland, Italy, Northern Ireland, and the United States. The second volume, *Exploring the Utopian Impulse: Essays on Utopian Thought and Practice* (ed. Griffin and Moylan) is already in print. The articles range from overviews of the history of utopia, the intersection of utopian thought, and writing with a range of disciplines such as sociology, politics, history, and literature to discussions of contemporary intentional communities or utopian moments such as the two-week UN-sponsored World Conference Against Racism in August 2001 (Durban, South Africa). The twelve scholars include, in order of appearance (after an introduction by Moylan and Baccolini), Lucy Sargisson, Ruth Levitas, Vincent Geoghegan, Gregory Claeys, Phillip E. Wegner, Kenneth M. Roemer, Raffaella Bacfolini, Tom Moylan, Naomi Jacobs, Peter Fitting, Hoda M. Zaki, and Lyman Tower Sargent.

Readers with an interest in utopian or membership in a utopian studies society (SUS, US, for example), will recognize most of these names either from conferences or as authors of many books or articles in this area of study, as well as feminism and science fiction venues. Their credentials have been long established, as have their particular areas of research.

In this first volume, authors were encouraged to contextualize their positionality as individuals, demonstrating the importance of specific individual experience in the development of utopian consciousness. Each situates his or her comments in an historical overview of their interest in utopias, thus both identifying the personal in the political and demonstrating the analytical framework for lived experience that has grown out of their related studies. In many cases, they trace a path to their present studies and link their theoretical stance to their choice of objects of study. These objects range from literature to film to popular culture artifacts, some of which are classical utopian texts and others, like Anna Laura Braghetti's *Il prigioniero* and related film *Buongiorno, notte* may be a first introduction for English-language readers to both cultural works and historical events.

Overall, the selections also present a snapshot of multidisciplinarity as a vital element in developing a utopian consciousness. One cannot thus characterize a single type of methodology or the content of the pieces written by scholars of different generations, coming from different academic disciplines, from different countries, with a range of intellectual and experiential knowledge.

The range of articles offers, among other perspectives, a review of historical utopian thought and texts, especially evident in the opening article by Lucy Sargisson, "The Curious Relationship Between Politics and Utopia." She details major nineteenth- and especially twentieth-century theorists. Clearly there are shared theoretical, or at least textual, sources, such as Louis Althusser, Ernst Bloch, Karl Habermas, Frederic Jameson, Mannheim, Karl Popper (as a foil), and Philip Wegner. These icons, to name a few, appear in three or more articles, as do both classic utopian works such as Morris and More as well as contemporary fictional (critical) utopian writings of Octavia Butler, Ursula K. Le Guin, Joanna Russ, and Kim Stanley Robinson. Other utopian and dystopian writings also appear in individual essays, as discussed below. Sargisson examines politics and utopias in her historical overview. Levitas, in "The Imaginary Reconstitution of Society: Utopia as Method," reviews the discipline of sociology, which forms the basis of her contemporary interest in utopia. She both articulates and deconstructs the ambivalence with which traditional sociologists view the utopian enterprise, a useful overview for those not familiar with the field.

Of great interest also are the many intersections with relatively contemporary historical moments such as Baccolini's interpretation of the memoir of the Italian terrorist, Anna Laura Braghetti (*Il prigioniero,* 1998) on the 1978 kidnapping of Aldo Moro and the film based on the book, *Buongiorno, notte* (2003), created by the Italian director Marco Bellocchio. Within a larger essay on the function of both memory and nostalgia in utopian imaginings, she both revisits the terrors of her youth during the excesses of the left-wing Italian Red Brigade and her contemporary, theoretically informed understanding of how that moment relates to the present one. This book, by one of the terrorists who spent the intervening years in prison, and the subsequent film provide a seemingly perfect source for the place of both memory and nostalgia in the ongoing pursuit of utopia. While it is clear that Baccolini has never supported the destructive actions of the Italian radical group, she nevertheless recognizes the function of remembering activism gone wrong and the desire to see it revised. This essay also reminds us of the oft-stated concern that utopianism is not achieved in the attainment of perfection, a static state of accomplishment, but in the process of remembering, revising, and desiring—what Levitas calls elsewhere "the imaginary reconstitution of society" (55) that is the utopian project: a better society. In fact, Baccolini's early scholarly history lies in the examination of dystopias that contain within them utopian elements. Baccollini also discusses the utopian dissolution that ends Joanna Russ's famous "When it Changed" as a technique to demonstrate the necessity of criticizing each successive utopia.

I was also particularly interested in Hoda M. Zaki's article on the UN Conference on Racism (2001, Durban, Africa). Zaki aptly describes both the chaos and the potential of these massive, international, political, and cultural events. They encompass a sort of hopelessness in that the process of change is slow and the realization of goals set out in the resultant documents are agonizing. But they also represent the power of hope, that such an event can occur, that goals can be determined, and that organizations such as the UN do monitor the progress of those goals. Having attended and participated in several NGO forums of the Fourth UN Conference on the Status of Women (Beijing, 1995) I found her articulation of these two faces of attempts at international cooperation to be accurate.

Although I have only provided details on two of the twelve articles, the rest are also of interest, but the quality of theory and object of study in each case cannot be easily summarized. For

much different reasons, each can be read and reread. I highly recommend the work to those interested in utopian theory and utopian literary theory. The series offers cutting-edge examples of contemporary utopianism.

Der Autor mit dem dritten Auge

Bruce A. Beatie

Uwe Anton. *A. E. van Vogt: Der Autor mit dem dritten Auge. Ein Werkführer* [The author with the third eye. A guide to his work]. Ed. Hardy Kettlitz. Berlin: Shayol, 2004 (SF Personality, 15). Paper, 156 pages, €11.90 (US$17.50), ISBN 3-926126-34-5.

Anton's book is the sort of reference work that SF scholars, critics, and even fans should (and rarely do) have available in English for every major author. Anton's book should be the starting point for anyone who is interested in van Vogt and who can read German. Here, the translations of all the chapter titles and subtitles are mine.

In his foreword, Anton notes the polarity of evaluations of van Vogt's work both in the United States and Germany, but he points to a "rediscovery" in Germany in the 1980s and 1990s; earlier translations, he says, often showed only "rudimentary similarity" to the original texts. The second chapter gives a brief "Sketch of his Life" that nonetheless goes well beyond what is said in van Vogt's autobiographical *Reflections* (see my review elsewhere in this issue of the new edition of *Voyage of the Space Beagle*).

The "guide" chapters (chapters 3 to 8) follow a standard format: each entry begins with a fairly detailed summary of the narrative, followed by a generally much shorter commentary on the story; within each chapter, the entries are ordered chronologically by date of publication; titles are given in English, followed by publication history and title of the German translation. There are many illustrations of magazine and book covers.

The third chapter lists "The Early Short Stories (1939–1952)," though the term includes what *Astounding* called "novellas" as well as short stories proper. When a story was later incorporated into a novel, the entry is simply a cross-reference to the novel (except for the long first entry on "Black Destroyer," which discusses the rationale for this procedure, among other comments); most full entries are half a page or less. According to the bibliography (which I will discuss below), van Vogt published seventy-four stories in this period. The fourth chapter, "The Early Novels (1946–1956)," has longer entries, usually about 2 pages. When a novel incorporates a previously published short story, the separate stories are summarized individually, with commentary on revisions in the novel version. According to the bibliography, it includes twelve novels; there are single entries for the Null-A series (including the 1984 *Null-A Three*) and the Isher series, though the bibliography lists them separately.

Chapter 4, "The Years of Change (1957–1966)," discusses novels published during van Vogt's years of involvement with L. Ron Hubbard, Dianetics, and hypnotism. As chapter 2 notes, most of the eight novels published in these years are "so-called

'Fix-up Novels'—revisions of earlier short stories which he more or less skillfully pulled together into novels" (8). The first of the fixup novels, *The Voyage of the Space Beagle* (1950), is included in the third chapter.

"The Late Short Stories (1963–1986)" and "The Late Novels (1969–1987)" are the subject of chapters 6 and 7; my comments on chapters 3 and 4 above also apply here. According to the bibliography, there are thirty-eight late stories and sixteen late novels, including *Null-A Three,* discussed in chapter 3, *A la conquéte de Kiber* ("To Conquer Khyber" 1975, published only in France), and *Il villagio incantato* (1987, Renato Pestrieniero's novelization of "The Enchanted Village" [1950], published only in Italy and Germany).

The final "guide" chapter, "Further Writings," should include, according to the bibliography, thirty-four articles and books, but it only discusses three books: *The Hypnotism Handbook* (1956), *The Money Personality* (1972), and *Reflections of A. E. van Vogt* (1975). There is an entry for *John W. Campbell's Letters with Isaac Asimov and A. E. van Vogt* (1993), four articles included in the short-story collection *The Best of A. E. van Vogt* (here 1976, but 1974 in the bibliography), and four other articles.

The "Bibliography of the Works of A. E. van Vogt" (chapter 9) is as valuable as the "Guide" (chapters 3–8). It is divided into two parts: original and German editions. Part 1 is considerably more extensive than the bibliography in van Vogt's *Reflections,* though that one does include word counts and the publications of van Vogt's wife, E. Mayne Hull. Its first section lists "Short Stories as Individual Publications: Chronological Survey" and gives titles (including later alternate titles) for 112 numbered stories, with places and dates of original publication; his collaborative stories with his wife are included, as well as a 1981 story ("Ein idealer Tag") published only in Germany, and an unpublished story, "Skin." The second section lists his thirty-seven "Novels" both chronologically and alphabetically by title; the chronological list gives both magazine and book publication data, and includes alternate titles; the alphabetical list includes cross-references to the German translations provided in part 2. The third section lists "Short Story Collections" alphabetically and includes a content list for each. The final section gives van Vogt's "Further Writings" in chronological order.

Part 2 has, as far as I could find, no parallel in any previous publication. The list of "German Editions" follows the same format as part 1. First come ninety-four numbered short-story entries (eighty-seven actual stories, plus seven cross-references under alternate titles), alphabetical by English title (hence also a cross-reference to the chronological list in part 1), followed by German title, translator/editor, and place and date of publication; many show multiple versions—there are eight each of "Black Destroyer" and "Discord in Scarlet." The forty-two numbered "Novels" (thirty-seven actual novels and five references under alternate titles) are listed alphabetically by German title (the alphabetical list in part 1 provides cross-references); otherwise, the data given are as for the stories, and again, there are often multiple versions—six for *Voyage of the Space Beagle,* including the most recent, which the "Guide" entry says "is absolutely perfect. The editor [Rainer] Eisfeld has translated the novel following the originals of the four stories, but included all revisions and changes of the book edition, indented and set in cursive, and partly annotated in footnotes" (49). WorldCat lists only one

copy, held in the Bavarian State Library, unavailable for loan. The German Amazon Web site lists only expensive used copies. When I tried to buy one anyhow, the response was that it "could not be shipped" to my address. Eisfeld has also published similar variorum translations of the Isher series (*Ischer: Ein Zyklus in zwei Romanen und zwei Erzählkungen,* 1989) and the Null-A series (*Null-A. Ein Zyklus in drei Romanen,* 1987) in the paperback series Bibliothek der Science Fiction Literatur published in Munich by Wilhelm Heyne.

The section on "Short Story Collections" lists ten, six of which are German translations of English-language collections, all of them somewhat abbreviated (one or two stories missing). Of the four original collections, one (*Das Absolutum. Science-Fiction-Roman. Eine Trilogie,* 1962; two revised later editions) is actually a fixup by Jesco von Puttkamer, including "Vault of the Beast" (1940), "Asylum" (1942), and "Fulfillment" (1951). Only three "Further Writings" (154) in German are listed, none of which seems to correspond to any entry in the English-language list. The book's final section is an index of both English and German titles.

As I noted at the outset, this book is a reference work, not a critical study—though its organization is by itself a critical judgment; probably at least three-fourths of the text of the "Guide" chapters consists of narrative summaries, and some of the commentary that concludes entries focuses on problems and/or virtues of German translations of van Vogt's works. That is perhaps unfortunate, considering the lack of published critical studies of van Vogt's work. Nonetheless, some of Anton's critical comments are insightful. He notes, for example, that *Slan* "is certainly the most important mutant novel of the forties, [one that] has decisively influenced the whole genre and called forth many imitators—for example, the success of the…comics-series *The X-Men* in all its incarnations can be traced back to the basic concept of *Slan*" (33).

It is a shame that the book, in spite of its recent publication, is no longer in print; nor could I find used copies available on Amazon.de. However, copies are available through interlibrary loan.
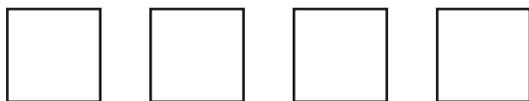
Fiction Reviews

Minireview: *Caine Black Knife*

Edward Carmien

Matthew Stover. *Caine Black Knife.* New York: Del Rey, 2008. Paperback, 368 pages, $14, ISBN 978-0345455871.

In this third "act of Caine," Stover revisits his callous, terrifically vulgar antihero, Caine. Born Hari Michaelson on a future Earth locked into a strict caste system, he becomes an actor for a worldwide audience for full-immersion fantasy adventures. His

stage is Overworld, an alternate Earth where magic works and creatures of legend are real, and he plays the role of Caine, an assassin-adventurer curiously present at most of the significant events in recent Overworld history. By this third novel in the series, Caine has made himself unpopular on his home world and no longer acts for an Earth audience but instead plays to an emperor (who has the technology to "read" Caine's perception broadcast) and to a god of Overworld who, in Overworld's alternate reality, can and sometimes does talk back.

The primary plot of the novel twines a current tale of social repression practiced against Ogrilloi (font of Earthly tales of Ogres) with a flashback to Caine's breakout adventure in which the same Ogrilloi had practiced on them the brutal art of ethnic cleansing—by Caine and at Caine's urging and direction. This adventure, which made Caine famous on Earth (and infamous on Overworld) leads Caine back into contact with elements of the Earth corporation busy exploiting Overworld—contact that had been thought impossible as of the end of the previous novel in the series. Naturally, because Caine is a wanted criminal on Earth, the climax of the novel is a direct segue to the next novel in the series.

Touted as fantasy, these books have a solid foundation as science fiction. The science may be space opera, but the social commentary is wickedly accurate, and the literary realism, although often used to accurately depict the fine art of dealing injury and death, is of a high caliber. Not for the squeamish, the Acts of Caine, as Stover has come to label the series, is both pulp and antipulp, and it's worth a look to those interested in society's love affair with violence as entertainment.

Go-Go Girls of the Apocalypse

Joseph F. Brown

Victor Gischler. *Go-Go Girls of the Apocalypse.* New York: Touchstone, 2008. Trade paperback, 324 pages, $14.00, ISBN 1-4165-5225-1.

In an early scene, Mortimer Tate, the novel's protagonist, and his companions are set upon by bloodthirsty cannibals right out of a Cormac McCarthy novel. As the only person not immediately captured, Tate feels compelled to find and free Buffalo Bill, his six-shooter-toting, cowboy-wannabe sidekick, and the other members of their party. When he sneaks up to the cannibal camp, what he sees is rightly horrifying: a man having his legs sawed off and then eaten in front of him. The cannibals howl, the victims wail, and Mortimer, safely hidden, passes out. When he awakens hours later, two cannibals, unaware of Tate, stand talking nearby. "I get a little tired of the fermented blood sometimes," one explains, "It seems so long since I had a nice glass of wine or a Dr. Pepper."

Such is the humorous and strangely humanizing retake on the postapocalyptic subgenre's recent sanctimony (see Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*) that is the defining characteristic of Victor Gischler's fifth novel and first foray into science fiction from the dark, rain-soaked streets of hard-boiled crime narratives. That is not to say that Gischler has abandoned the characteristic violence

and sleaze of the pulp tradition. No, the society of his postapoca-lyptic landscape is defined by a struggle, after all, between the franchised decadence of Joey Armageddon's Sassy-a-Go Go clubs and a terrorist gang known as the Red Stripes. Although comparisons to Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* are inevitable, Gischler's book perhaps functions best as a satirical response to McCarthy's stifling seriousness. Indeed, *Go-Go Girls* probably has more in common with the work of Kurt Vonnegut (Gischler notes *Breakfast of Champions* as a major influence) and Walker Percy: at times the novel feels like a pulpy version of *Love in the Ruins.*

The novel follows Mortimer Tate as he leaves the security of his Tennessee cave (where he has been for the last nine years) to explore what is left of the world after the Fall and to find the wife, Anne, that he abandoned. In the course of his journey, he falls in with Buffalo Bill and Sheila, an ex-go-go girl. Society having crumbled, the closest thing to order can only be found at Joey Armageddon's Sassy-a-Go-Go clubs. Here, Tate trades his store of whiskey for the new currency, Armageddon dollars, receives a platinum membership card (granting him access to all manner of refreshment and entertainment), and learns that his wife, now a go-go girl, has been transferred to a new club open-ing in Arkansas. Resolving to find her, Tate and Bill set out on a journey that takes them through the postapocalyptic Southern landscape and leads them to run-ins with cannibals, patients in a secluded mental hospital reminiscent of the Castle Anthrax from *Monty Python and the Holy Grail,* and, finally, with Joey Armageddon himself. Armageddon tells Tate that Anne has been taken by the Red Stripes and tasks Tate with assassinating their leader, the Czar. Their quest leads them to the Lost City of Atlanta, where a crazy mountain man named Ted (a thinly veiled Ted Turner) helps them negotiate the roving gangs (culminat-ing, at one point, in an exciting blimp rescue at the base of Stone Mountain) and leads them to the Czar's stronghold: the CNN Center.

This is where things get really interesting. Tate learns that the conflict between Joey Armageddon and the Czar is not so much a struggle between drastically different visions of organizing this postapocalyptic society (Armageddon's sleazy, yet mostly benign, notion of a community organized around go-go clubs versus the terrorism and mayhem of the Czar's Red Stripes) than it is a rivalry between competing commercial brands. The open warfare between the two groups, Tate discovers, erupted as the result of a disagreement over distribution of the Czar's various brands of alcohol. For Tate, choosing sides in this war is only as meaningful and moral as, say, choosing sides between McDon-ald's and Burger King.

Scholars will no doubt find this last section of most inter-est for its examination of a post-Southern landscape. Gischler's book, as it straddles the line between science fiction and Southern studies, presents a vision of the American South that estranges and interrogates contemporary notions of the modern South, and especially, the notion of Atlanta as an "international city of the future" (as SFRA's 2009 conference announcement succinctly puts it). That is to say, the novel seems to question the notion that the South no longer exists as a distinctive cultural region and that it has somehow moved into a post-Southern phase in which cities like Atlanta have been homogenized along patterns of other major American cities. Gischler is onto some-

thing here. Ask any resident of Atlanta these days, and you are sure to hear how much the city has changed in the last ten years (as if rapid change and progress have not been the city's defining characteristics since General Sherman burned it to the ground). Although such statements typically convey an optimism over the city's recent economic prosperity, they are also packaged with an anxiety that such progress has led to a distinctly postmodern transformation of the city's cultural identity and its landscape as Ikea and others fight for retail space in the historic down-town area only a stone's throw away from the Margaret Mitch-ell house. Understanding how Gischler's novel critiques this contemporary view of the South depends on understanding that the wasteland Atlanta of his novel (the "Lost City of Atlanta") and the ever-changing "city of the future" are one in the same. In both, the city's cultural identity and its landscape have been transformed and fragmented by economic processes that, for both the novel's characters and Atlanta's residents, are difficult to completely comprehend.

Gischler's entertaining narrative and rugged, fun prose give us something to consider as we make plans for the upcoming SFRA conference, and the novel certainly deserves consider-ation by scholars anticipating our discussions on the intersection of Southern culture and science fiction.

City at the End of Time

Peter Brigg

This is a novel that bites off more than it can chew. It purports to deal with the end of time and how that ending plays back against the present (a now set in a collapsing Seattle). It is a novel about confusion and collapse, within which are set quests involv-ing a group of characters who, it eventually turns out, possess the components necessary to in some vague way restart the uni-verse. It is filled with some of Greg Bear's wonderfully original creations and situations, but there ends up being just too much of it. Readers are left with a lot of fervent prose near the end attempting to describe the indescribable in ever more abstract—and finally irritating—ways.

Perhaps the chief weakness of this book is the way it hovers among the vaguely scientific, slightly theological, and purely fantastical. It pays occasional homage to particle physics and ideas about the big bang (it is, finally, a novel about the next big bang and how a bunch of people and gods get it underway), but it is also about a force called the Typhon, or perhaps it is a god called the Typhon (in honor of its Greek forebear), which is systematically destroying everything, leaving behind a chaos of bent shapes probably inspired by Max Ernst's *Europe after the Rain.* This description could not be further from our known con-jectures about entropy, and yet this novel casually throws ideas of trillions of years around, so it should be about entropy.

When I look at the novel simply as fantasy, then its chief problem is one of pace. There are too many stories going on, and

far too many things are described. It leaps about the cosmos, time, and a vast cast of characters. It dilutes itself by lengthily attempting to describe the indescribable. Some wonderful ideas—such as the way texts are responsible for the actual existence of history and time—get lost in the presence of characters like the Moth, Eidolons, talking suits of armor, and a bunch of housecats that turn up at the end of the universe to tear apart the bad guy (god?).

The secret of long quest novels set in strange places involving strange creatures is, as *The Lord of the Rings* taught us, that there must be some kind of moral force and a unified focus in the end. There must also be characters who are not attitudes but are psychologically realized beings who, in the end and despite their varied shapes, have human psychologies. Bear's present-day characters could be named Fear and Confusion, and the central characters in the end of time portions (who owe a good deal to H. G. Wells) are conventional lower-ranked figures who are being prepared by their masters to undertake a big adventure.

There is a lot in this book that I want to like, but it is not enough to make me like the whole thing. When the idea of Brahma, the creator, awakening to make the new universe sneaks into the later pages when there has been no preparation for a Hindu perspective, it reinforces the feeling that Bear did not know how to handle his end of time concept when it really came to the end of time. If this book is to be stood up against similar vast conceptual sweeps, such as Olaf Stapledon's *Last and First Men* or even Arthur C. Clarke's *Childhood's End,* it simply looks overlong and limp.

Harmony

Michael J. Klein

C. F. Bentley. *Harmony.* New York: DAW, 2008. Cloth, 400 pages, $24.95, ISBN 978-0-7564-0485-7.

After reading this book, I was reminded of the famous line from *Macbeth:* "A tale…full of sound and fury, signifying nothing." Ostensibly, the universe *Harmony* is set in is full of important events. The Earth and its allies, collectively known as the Confederated Star Systems (CSS), are at war with the Marillon Empire, aliens bent on galactic conquest. In order to secure victory, the CSS must steal the nearly indestructible substance called Badger Metal from the Harmonic Empire, a separatist collective of genetically "pure" humans who have sought to forget their origins and their link to the CSS.

But this political backdrop serves as nothing more than a way to get the protagonists from Harmony and the CSS together for the latter half of the novel. In doing so, Bentley squanders the political intrigue she has hinted at, letting the book devolve into a story of unrequited love between a CSS spy and a Harmonic priestess. Rather than space opera, *Harmony* reminds me more of soap opera.

The government of Harmony, a theocratic oligarchy, is overseen by an elite caste of men and women more concerned with the order of society than the well-being of its inhabitants. This rigid structure is enforced by a strict caste system ingrained in the genetic makeup of its citizens, and it's revealed by a birth-mark emblazoned on their cheeks. Although not as limiting in terms of mental development as Huxley's castes in *Brave New World,* the system goes far in relegating individuals to specific functions within society.

Early on, Bentley introduces her audience to Sissy, a member of the worker caste who builds space navigation technology. Sissy is unique in that she has seven caste markings on her face. She hides this with makeup because those who have this or any other sign of deficiency are quickly whisked off to insane asylums.

During one of the planet's frequent earthquakes, Sissy manages to contain much of the damage by harmonizing with the planet, an action never fully explained during the course of the book. Her heroism and unique markings bring her to the notice of Gregor, the high priest of Harmony. Gregor decides to elevate Sissy to the role of high priestess when the previous holder of the office dies of injuries experienced in the earthquake. Gregor believes that Sissy might be the savior of Harmony, as foretold in prophecy. At the very least, he believes she will be easily manipulated as a result of her youth and inexperience, giving Gregor even more influence over the ruling High Council.

Although Sissy's rise from generic worker to head of the ruling class might seem far-fetched, Bentley relates it without any sense of awe or wonder. While events proceed along with characters voicing opposition, one never believes they are there except to serve as some sort of requisite foil. Sissy's rise never seems in doubt because the political landscape Bentley creates is nothing more than backdrop.

Thrown into this mix of characters is Jake Hannigan, a member of CSS's military. Hannigan is charged with infiltrating Harmony's society to steal the secret of Badger Metal. Genetically altered to fit in with the natural-born Harmonics, Hannigan makes his was to Harmony, soon establishes himself as an elite member of their military caste, and eventually finds himself the personal bodyguard of Sissy after an attempt is made on her life. Again, this unlikely chain of events is just delivered to the audience as a series of necessary steps to keep the narrative moving along.

Impressed with her drive to help her people, Hannigan feels torn between his duty to Earth and his deep feelings for Sissy, who has thrown Gregor's plans into disarray by becoming her own person. Remembering her humble beginning, Sissy wants true reform and enacts changes for all those living on Harmony. Surprisingly, Hannigan's thoughts rarely linger on the possibility that the aliens may have already invaded the CSS (he has no contact with Earth for months). He just focuses on keeping Sissy safe while trying not to develop feelings for her.

Harmony is told in a series of short (usually only five or six pages each) chapters, moving the action along at a nice clip. However, in increasing the pace of the novel, Bentley has sacrificed any real depth. The audience only sees the society of Harmony in brief glimpses, none of which really contain intrigue. Rather than giving us a new world to explore, Bentley just moves through territory familiar to readers of the genre, never surprising the audience or revealing any unique perspectives.

Reading a novel in the space opera genre of science fiction may bring another important work to mind. The publication of Frank Herbert's novel *Dune* was a watershed event for the field of science fiction. Herbert's work was more than just a collection

of characters acting against a background of politics and culture. Rather, they were fully fleshed individuals, motivated by hate and greed, complex in their characterization.

Although *Harmony* belongs to this same subgenre of science fiction, it really does nothing to set itself apart. *Harmony* could have been a better work had the author given it depth, rather than just skimming over the surface of this unfamiliar culture while rehashing familiar themes. While a teacher could include both *Dune* and *Harmony* in a course on political science fiction, *Harmony*'s inclusion could only be justified as a means to point out to students what not to do in writing for this genre.

Matter

Paul Kincaid

Iain M. Banks. *Matter.* UK edition: London: Orbit, 2008. Cloth, 593 pages, £18.99, ISBN 978-1-84149-417-3. US edition: New York: Orbit, 2008. Cloth, 608 pages, $25.00, ISBN 978-0316005364.

Matter is Iain M. Banks's first science fiction novel in four years, and his first new Culture novel since *Look to Windward* in 2000. It contains all of the virtues of his earlier space operas, but also all of the vices. Its virtues are speed, wit, elegance, invention, and a handling of scale that few of his contemporaries can come close to matching. We start with what appears like a semimedieval battle: a playboy prince flees the fight in some disarray, and by chance witnesses the murder of his father, the king, by the king's most trusted lieutenant. At the core of the novel, therefore, is a traditional story of a prince's struggle to survive and then reclaim the throne.

But at this point the perspective shifts, suddenly and dizzyingly. The battle takes place on one level in the middle of a Shellworld, a kind of multilayered *Orbitsville,* each level of which has at least as much land area as a generously sized planet. To find help, Prince Ferbin must leave his level of the Shellworld (which is controlled by one alien race), cross eight other levels (inhabited by other beings and controlled by a different race), reach the surface (in the sphere of influence of yet a third space-faring civilization), and eventually cross space to find his sister, Anaplian, who happens to be an agent of the Culture's Special Circumstances section.

The Shellworld alone is the sort of dazzling invention for which Banks has become famous, and it sits here among many of the more familiar devices of his Culture series: the vast ships, the drones, the weirdly remade humanity. There is so much going on that it can be difficult to keep the scale of things in mind, yet Banks never loses track of the human story he is telling. And as always, he tells the story with a sure control of pace and an eye for the comic, the revealing detail, the absurd, the humane. This is a fast, bloody story; at times it can be gruesome, yet, although this is a universe of almost magical plenty in which characters can remake themselves, repair themselves, and call on unimaginable resources, there is never a suggestion that these are comic book heroes who can stroll through the mayhem un-

touched. Pain and injury, inflicted or experienced, have an effect both physically and emotionally.

Yet battle and violence are central. It is not just the continuing slaughter in the Shellworld. Our first glimpse of Anaplian shows her single-handedly destroying a military column in yet another war on yet another planet. The various civilizations that Ferbin encounters are all gearing up for war against one another. Every piece of action in the book—and it is an action-packed novel—seems to involve a fight in one form or another. The death toll is horrendous.

Two previous Culture novels, *Excession* (1996) and *Look to Windward,* had suggested a deeper theme developing in the series; issues of guilt and responsibility emerged, and more significantly, Banks suggested the idea that civilizations might grow old and tired and move on to another sphere. This notion is hinted at in the new novel but taken no further. Rather, we get the sense that, no matter how advanced the civilization, there is something atavistic about the people that means that they can see no way to settle disputes or achieve ambitions other than through conflict, which of course raises the question of whether warfare really is endemic in all societies. Thus, although Banks never makes warfare painless or glorious, there is still something of the boy's own adventure about this novel. And it is a very masculine novel; other than Anaplian, a battle-hardened veteran, every major character in the novel, every major player in its war games, is male.

That said, if the novel makes a return in subject matter to the more brutal pattern of Banks's earlier science fictions, it is as well written and as powerfully constructed as any of his novels. No one in contemporary science fiction has done more to rescue the space opera, presenting a boundless future as an essentially liberal vision of open opportunity for all. And this new book, one of the longest and most complex of the Culture novels, continues to hide a sharp and intriguing argument about the possibility of individual utopia and the moral complexity of living in such a society behind a playful and entertaining adventure.

Daughters of the North

Ritch Calvin

Sarah Hall. *Daughters of the North.* New York: Harper Perennial, 2007. Paperback, 207 pages, $13.95, ISBN 978-0-06-143036-7.

I am always quite pleased when I discover a new writer, especially when that writer is someone who is not generally associated with the SF genre. Although the SF field is quite dynamic at the moment, an infusion from someone outside the field can often provide a refreshing perspective or insight. In this sense, Sarah Hall and her new novel have a great deal in common with Margaret Atwood (*Handmaid's Tale*) and Marge Piercy (*Woman on the Edge of Time*).

Sarah Hall has already had quite a career. Her first novel, *Haweswater* (2002), was awarded the Commonwealth Writers Prize in 2003. Her second novel, *The Electric Michelangelo* (2004), was a finalist for the Man Booker Award and also for the

Commonwealth Writers Prize. Her most recent novel, *Daughters of the North* (2007), has been already won the John Llewellyn-Rhys Memorial Prize and has been short-listed for the Arthur C. Clarke Award (2008).

Daughters of the North (originally published in Great Britain as *The Carhullan Army*) fits roughly into the dystopic, postapocalyptic genre. Indeed, although she does not write SF per se, she is well aware of the genre. In the "Conversation" with the author that follows the novel, Hall acknowledges that *Daughters* fits into the genre of "speculative fiction" with dystopic elements, and she cites *The Handmaid's Tale, 1984, The Children of Men,* and others as forerunners. As with *The Handmaid's Tale, Daughters* begins in medias res. *Daughters* depicts a near future in which Britain has undergone dramatic climactic change and lived through an intense energy shortage. The shortage has enabled the government to enact draconian social controls, called Civil Reorganisation. Energy in all forms is strictly rationed. Given the severity of the crisis, the new government, the English Authority, has also instituted strict population controls; only those with government approval can have children. In order to control population, each woman is fitted with a contraceptive ring, and the government—and by extension employers—can inspect any woman at any time to verify that the ring is in place. Nevertheless, this is not a novel about ecology or disaster or technology or battles. Rather, it examines the ways in which certain individuals respond and cope in the wake of hardships and horrors.

The novel relates the story of one individual, Sister, the only name we are given. Her tale begins approximately fifteen years into the crisis. She is married, though not happily, and works at factory labor. Her fitting with the contraceptive ring, and subsequent inspections, have driven her to the point of despair. She knows, however, of a place outside of her hometown, Rith, called Carhullan, a place outside government controls, a place where only women live. Though Carhullan was established immediately after the time of the government takeover, defectors to Carhullan have diminished over time, and Sister is the last woman from Rith to ever leave for Carhullan.

Sister reaches Carhullan, though she does not get the reception she had imagined. Furthermore, life in Carhullan is difficult. In some ways, life there is every bit as difficult as it had been in Rith; their energy is extremely limited, and they have to ration energy and food closely. Her job at Carhullan is to work in the peat and cut away blocks of it to dry for fuel. Her labor is every bit as backbreaking and mind-numbing as the labor in the factory. Nevertheless, Sister comes to enjoy her life there, and she finds value in the work, in the community, and in her new lover, Shruti.

Of course, change comes. When the king dies, the Authority decides that no one will succeed him. Instead, the Authority broadens its powers and begins to sweep through all the "unofficial" zones, including Carhullan, and to bring them all under Authority control. The question then becomes, how do they respond to the threat? Do they enjoy the time they have left and wait for the end? Do they try to find some other place? Or do they go on the offensive and take on the whole of the Authority military? Jackie, one of the founders of Carhullan and the one with a military background, decides that the best course of action is to go on the offensive. The aim is to infiltrate Rith and convince the

entire town to resist the Authority. Many of the women in Carhullan, however, are committed to nonviolence, including Shruti. Each woman is given a choice: train for the coming battle or opt out. Sister decides that she has to fight. She opts for military training, even though it means the end of Carhullan, even though it means the end of her relationship with Shruti.

In the face of crises, what authority does the government have? In what ways can it intervene? How much loss of liberty is appropriate or acceptable? How much will an individual endure before rebelling? As Hall acknowledges in the "Conversation," the novel examines the conditions under which an individual is lead toward militancy and extremism. Initially, Sister rebels and leaves Rith. But when her new freedoms are threatened, her rebellion takes a new, militant form. Even though Sister is now sacrificing everything she has found in Carhullan, in the end, she believes that the fight is larger than she is.

Interestingly, much as in the Atwood and Piercy novels, Sister's tale is not her own. In *Handmaid's Tale,* Offred's tale has been reconstructed and edited by academics. They are working in some future moment, and it is quite clear that they get some of their assumptions wrong. Similarly, in *Woman on the Edge of Time,* Connie's tale has also been constructed by the doctors in the asylum, and the doctors' notes undermine Connie's entire narrative. In *Daughters,* Sister's tale is also presented in the form of a transcript from a prisoner held by the English Authority Penal System. Although some of the "Files" are presented as "complete," some are listed as "partial" or "corrupted." Each of these narrative conceits raises questions about voice, narrative authority, and reliability. These are questions that I often raise with students: who is telling the story? How does he or she have access to the information? What stakes or biases does the narrator have in this narrative? Can the narrator be taken as face value? Is this Sister's unmediated tale or propaganda from a government agency?

Daughters of the North is a beautifully written novel, at times lyrical and at other moments harsh in tone and vocabulary. Hall uses the language to reflect the moment, whether it is the horror of the "inspections," the harshness of the landscape, or the beauty of the relationships. Beyond the language, though, it is adept at representing important social concerns of the day: environmental degradation, the energy crisis, the loss of individual liberties, and the rise of political extremism. As *The Handmaid's Tale* emerged at the historical moment of the New Right's efforts at reimposing controls on the female body, *Daughters of the North* emerges in the midst of a crisis in individual liberties, and it speaks just as powerfully and clearly as its predecessor.

Weaver: Time's Tapestry Series, Book 4

Janice M. Bogstad

This final book in Baxter's Time's Tapestry series locates the source of the prophecies that manifested themselves through unwitting individuals starting in the fourth century BCE. The prophecies themselves each underlie the first three novels of the series, *Emperor* (2006), *Conqueror* (2007), and *Navigator* (2008). The four prophecies are included as preface to this final volume, but their agency requires the unwilling participation of a young Jewish scholar, Ben Kamen, whose dreams are manipulated by the Nazis in order to change history and thus ensure their success. So we discover that the story of prophesies that supposedly allowed Rome to be preserved longer, that may have caused the success of William the Conqueror, that foresaw the ultimate defeat of Islam in the West, and that foresaw the discovery and colonization of the Americas by Christopher Columbus have been planted in the minds of individuals throughout history through Nazi intervention.

I had not read the three earlier books when I picked up *Weaver,* but had read enough of Baxter's other work to know that they were probably worth reading. And indeed, Baxter, in this fourth book in his alterative history series, has given us a page turner. It is set in World War II, specifically during the battles between England and Germany between 1940 and 1943. The story engages attention as a reader tries to determine first whether this is the alternative history promised, or whether the alternative history will develop later. The point in history where we can see a variation, regardless of how familiar we are with the actually history of World War II, begins as Hitler is poised to send his armies to invade England. This event, long planned and for which the German army prepared in 1939, never came to fruition in the world as we know it. But so many of the other phenomena that characterize that period of modern history are accurate that one cannot determine whether the novel starts with authentic history until Germany does, successfully, invade southern England, only to be stopped by American intervention before they reach London. They stop at the Winston Line because America has landed in Britain at the invitation of Winston Churchill and Hitler isn't ready to declare war on America. The novel follows the premise that Germany has been on English soil for four years after first conquering France, and that this change is predicated by the aforementioned series of prophecies. It's only with the last line of the novel that we can speculate about how our own version of history came about and British soil remained free of the Third Reich (except for its many bombs).

Still, this is also a novel in which methods for changing the march of historical events is explored, so one reads on to see how the historical trajectory is changed by prophecy. And the prophecies themselves are being researched by a contemporary medievalist, Mary Wooler, an American who just happens to be in England researching several unusual texts that were preserved through several centuries. As an American, she has some protection from the Nazis, who want her to report back to her country on their benevolent and righteous rule of England. Not so her son, married to a British woman, nor her friends, nor the families in the south of England, who suffer the privations of occupation and even have German soldiers billeted in their homes.

The novel engages our attention as it tells its story from the perspectives of an American woman, her American son, whose wife is executed by the Nazis early in the novel, and a German soldier, Ernst, who is a sympathetic character, not quite willing to be as ruthless as his Waffen SS brother, Joseph. Joseph is working with an English woman, Julia, also a Nazi, on a series of experiments with sending prophecies back through history that will preserve the Aryan race and, they hope, ensure the success of Germany in the twentieth century. Early in the novel, as Ernst and his French girlfriend, Claudine, still in occupied France, are entertained by his more successful brother, Joseph, and collaborator Julia, we find out that she is the mastermind of the alternative history project, and she describes her theories: "There are plenty of ways things could have occurred differently. If the British had been persuaded to stay out of what was essentially a continental war, for instance. If that had been so, the Kaiser could have won, in the sense of achieving his central goal of economic union of the European peoples centered in Germany. Wouldn't that ha e a better history than the one we endured?" (41). But it turns out that her meddling with history goes much further back—as far back as the fourth century BCE. When that prophecy doesn't ensure Germany's speedy conquest, she tries to interfere in the fifth century, then the eleventh and fifteenth centuries. And, as Mary discovers in unlocking the meaning of the prophecies in the Latin, Old Anglo-Saxon and Old English forms in which she finds them, she becomes the person who knows why Julia's experiments must be stopped.

We are thus offered snapshots of the intimate details of war and occupation through these perspectives as we try to sort out the exact contours of the time travel project at its core. And the story of the prophecies themselves tantalizes us with speculations about history as we know it, and how and when it was changed. If this novel is any indication of the other three, they are also worth reading. Baxter's tendency to inflate his explanations, extend the range of his theories, and speculate expansively on the nature of human history and the human condition are much more carefully controlled in this novel. Of course the surprise ending, as Ben Kamen attempts to undo the damage, is not much of a surprise, even if it's not fully spelled out for us, but the almost-mystery story that characterizes the rest of the novel makes it very successful.

A World Too Near

Janice M. Bogstad

The second book in Kenyon's new series demonstrates some of the usual strengths and weaknesses of the middle novel in a trilogy or second novel in a series, picking up threads of the first, *Bright of the Sky,* and introducing a few new characters but never resolving the central conflicts of the plot. It also introduces a few new social movements and races of people inhabiting the alternate, created environment called the Entire. The "Rose" of the series title is another name for our Earth and the universe it inhabits, creating a contrast between naturally occurring universes and the artificial environment of the Entire. The central dilemma that closed the first novel was Titus Quinn's revelation that the

Entire was going to destroy the Rose, and this topic dominates this second novel. Quinn has two quests: to find his now-grown daughter, Sydney, who was enslaved and blinded soon after his family appeared in the Entire, and to blow up the engine that is feeding on our universe.

Titus is in the midst of several conflicts, including conflict with his employers on Earth and their representative, the ambitious Helice Maki, who accompanies him on his visit to the Entire. He's also in conflict with Sydney. Both his wife, Johanna Quinn, prisoner/lover of a Tarig (an Entire overlord), and Sydney participate in a battle that may mean the destruction of either Earth and its universe or of the Entire, and Quinn is constantly conflicted about which goal to pursue first: freeing his wife and daughter, or saving Earth. In the end, he's even conflicted about whether he has the right to destroy the Entire at all. Thus the tension about a destructive relationship between these two space-time continuums—the "natural" one of the human universe and the fabricated Entire—is also reflected in the tensions among the Quinns.

A further tension emerges as it becomes clear that Maki, who should be his colleague, is ambitious. Maki has her own agendas for a rise to personal power. Titus's intentions are yet a third plot element—the hope that he can rescue his family. A fourth plot element—Maki's hope that she can use her mastery of the Entire to take over the Earth-based empire of which she is a major officer—provides color but does not ultimately affect Titus's missions. In fact, Johanna, who meets him briefly, is also trying to help him in one of the missions while Sydney is trying to hinder him. Neither plot really works; the (anti)climax of this novel leaves much room for renegotiating the meaning of the Rose and the Entire.

The story is disjointed as it jumps from Titus to Johanna to Sydney, all of whom are widely separated from one another during their adventures in the Entire. Titus has spent many years back on Earth trying to find a way to save his family, but Johanna and Sydney have lived this whole time in the Entire, where time passes differently—more quickly compared with Earth. They have each had time to build fraught relationships and acclimatize to difficult situations while Titus has been at home, worrying about them. His life has also been difficult. He was first considered to be crazy; then he was forced to go back to the Entire to chart the all-important passageways that might provide travel options between points in the human universe.

When he returns to the universe, he must renew his friendships with indigenous peoples and play on their hate for the Tarig to pursue his aims. He finds this hatred among several of the creatures, human and otherwise. Meanwhile, Sydney, who grew up as a slave rider for nonverbal, telepathic creatures, seeks to chart a path that will permit her to harness their power, regain her eyesight, and launch an attack on the Tarig lords. It would seem that she and her father would have complementary intentions, but both struggle with their loyalties to either the Rose or the Entire, coming up with opposing answers—or at least this is how they come to understand each other.

Both novels are enriched by the several cultures and philosophies created for the Entire. Most of the individuals who befriend and assist Titus are humanoid and are based on what seems to be Qing Dynasty China, and they make use of some of the more unpleasant forms of social discipline found in that time and place. Nods to neo-Confucian cultural forms set the nature of this group. Titus's closest ally, a young, rebellious woman named Anzi, befriends, protects, and guides Titus. But then there are the Tarig, who themselves are in conflict. Lady Charon first loves and then hates Titus; Lord Inweer cherishes Johanna but never trusts her; and Lord Oventroe attempts to aid his destructive quest from the start. Then there are the horselike Inyx, who live apart from the Tarig, intersecting only when they need protection from a sketchily portrayed invading force, the Pognard. And then there's the Gond, who cannot move a distance on their own power but must use power sleds to do so; creatures of the air that transport others through the skies of the Entire for payment in bags of seeds; and the Godmen (and women) who can be of any Entire race but who take on the position of scapegoat and intermediary to an unsympathetic god. In the Entire, one does not want to attract the god's attention because this usually leads to personal disaster, so the Godmen, dressed in dirty white robes, court that attention, theoretically protecting others.

Although at the end of the first novel Titus had proved himself capable of opposing the all-powerful Tarig, whose original home planet and culture are responsible for creating the fabricated universe of the Entire, he is by no means assured of success. These few individuals have a great deal of power, and they totally control the populations of the Entire that they created with a mix of cruelty and imposed order. We discover more about their nature, their intentions, and their threat to human space in the second novel, but Titus's contribution at the end of *Bright of the Sky* was to prove that the Tarig, although the creators of this self-contained environment and the creatures that people it, were neither omniscient nor invincible: he was able to kill one of them, evade others, and render all of them less effective.

As should now be clear, Kenyon's novels follow intricate intersecting plots and detailed creations of both space-time and character as she charts a quest narrative through lands of the Entire fraught with mysteries and physical dangers. For example, the Tarig overlords disapprove of violence, so killing another creature of the Entire results in a sentence to an unpleasant death that only they are allowed to administer. They garrote their victims so they die slowly. Yet one of the Chinese lords, Anzi's uncle, Yulin, who secretly befriends Titus, kills several of his retainers so that they cannot pass along knowledge of Titus to the overlords, and gets away with it—sort of. He sacrifices his lands and monies to his brother and becomes a vagabond, but he survives as a rebel.

So while the Tarig creators are viewed by most inhabitants of the Entire as omniscient, inescapable, and all powerful, their limitations become manifest. Quinn actually kills at least two of them. Hope for Titus, his wife and daughter, and Earth are maintained but not resolved.

Even if the overall plot of the series does not resolve in this second novel, the work still appeals for its vast creative scope and its many adventures, adversities, and conflict. It is not a simple tale of good and evil. In fact, it is unclear to both Titus and to Kenyon's readers whether destruction of the Entire is necessary for survival of the Rose. We will have to wait for the third novel to discover its fate.

The Host

Thomas J. Morrissey

Stephenie Meyer. *The Host.* New York: Little Brown, 2008. Hardcover, 619 pages, $25.99, ISBN 978-0-316-06804-8.

They came to Earth in a huge fleet of ships. Their healers inserted them into human brains. Controlling their human subjects after driving their victims' consciousness into some corners of their respective minds from whence they will not return, they created a conflict-free paradise on Earth. Bands of as yet unchanged humans hide and prepare for a guerilla war against unimaginable odds. One human psyche is so strong that it never disappears. In fact, it challenges and interacts with a parasite, thereby setting the plot in motion. Sound familiar? The alien invasion and mind control megatexts are huge. Zombies and other human slaves have long been a staple of pulps and B movies. Few SF writers get a chance to create new megatexts, but all of the good writers enliven familiar patterns with invention. This is what Meyer has achieved here. She has remastered old stories and made something entirely fresh and engaging.

In the three years since the publication of *Twilight,* the first book of the four-book saga featuring Isabella "Bella" Swan and her vampire friends, the Cullens, Meyer has become a young adult fiction superstar. Her fan following is immense and devoted—so much so that Hollywood is betting that they will go to see the film version of *Twilight* opening in December 2008. Her new SF novel, *The Host,* debuted between the publication of the third and fourth vampire volumes, and like all of her other books, it found a place on the *New York Times* bestseller list.

This book is not about vampires. Its narrator is an alien parasite implanted in a human. It is not a YA novel either, though it seems to have appealed to her young audience as much as her other books. Like the vampire books, *The Host* relies on character development and interaction. Readers follow the struggle between the alien Wanderer and her unwilling human host, Melanie Stryder, from the extraterrestrial's insertion into Melanie's brain to Wanderer's recognition that her host is a complete and complex being, deserving of an autonomous life. The story of Wanderer's ethical and emotional journey is punctuated by timely and convincing action. Balancing the revelation of internal struggle with the demands of plot is Meyer's specialty.

What Meyer does with familiar megatexts is part of what makes *The Host* so satisfying. Her invading aliens are not monsters who seek our ruin. Getting planted in some sentient being's brain is a biological imperative for them. They mean us no harm. Like Octavia Butler's Oankali, Pamela Sargent's Adae, or Nancy Kress's pribr, they believe that they are saving us from ourselves. They control us, but they are not malevolent like the conquerors in *Invaders from Mars,* nor do the occupied bodies resemble the awkward risen corpses of *Night of the Living Dead.* Instead, like Clarke's Overlords, these beings create a global utopia, even if we do not get to enjoy it.

At the same time, their connection with us is far more intimate than is usual for this prominent SF trope. They actually occupy our minds and adapt to bodies that we have programmed to perform life's tasks. The muscles remember, even if the mind does not. They live the lives of their hosts. They go to work,

watch television, and even raise families. Their presence is so benign that misanthropes might well argue that the planet is better off for their victory. In fact, what drives the aliens is a hard-wired altruism that makes them good citizens no matter whose planet they are stealing. Hence the invasion is relatively peaceful, the mind control leads to better "people," and utopia is finally realized on Earth.

One of the great challenges for SF writers is how to create the illusion that the reader is actually encountering an alien consciousness. In "Tradition and the Individual Talent," T. S. Elliot argues, "The business of the poet is not to find new emotions, but to use the ordinary ones" (10). How can we imagine emotions no human has ever had? There are SF writers who are extremely adept at conjuring believable aliens. Octavia Butler is a prime example. The Xenogenesis trilogy and the classic short story "Bloodchild" give us aliens whose foreignness is palpable. Amy Thomson's quasi-amphibians in *Through Alien Eyes* and *The Color of Distance* really do seem to have their own frame of reference and ways of being. Meyer's Wanderer may be small enough to fit on your hand, but she is a fully developed character torn between her species' altruism and a growing sense of the uniqueness of earthlings. Because Melanie's consciousness does not surrender and go away, we get to watch Wanderer get used to not only her host's body but also to her mind. Melanie's and Wanderer's gut responses are not the same at the start of the novel. Wanderer must learn to live in partnership with a psyche that is far more emotionally volatile than that of any she has encountered in her multiple insertions around the cosmos. The novel's title reinforces the sense that Melanie is, in may ways, the focus of the story even if it is narrated by her particular parasite. The result is an uneasy symbiosis between beings that have originated from two different and unrelated evolutionary lines.

SF by real SF writers tends not to dominate the *New York Times* bestseller List. Unfortunately, there are readers who think that they will not like science fiction are loath to try it out. In the video clip that is part of Amazon's page on *The Host,* Meyer says that this novel is "an SF story for people who don't like science fiction." She explains that the novel is not preoccupied with gadgetry, but that character is the key. I take her statements to mean that *The Host* is sufficiently focused on interpersonal relations that readers who eschew SF will not feel too estranged. Meyer is a fabulist, whether her characters are vampires or aliens. Way back in 1975, Ursula Le Guin asserted the legitimacy as SF as a literary form in "Science Fiction and Mrs. Brown." Writers choose the SF form "because what they have to say is best said by using the tools of science fiction." Referring to the various revolutions that transformed SF in the 1960s and 1970s, Le Guin tells us that SF writers are now less concerned with technical matters: "They are not interested in what things do, but in how things are. Their subject is the subject, that which cannot be other than subject: ourselves. Human beings" (105). If you watch Meyer's Amazon videos, you will see that she would agree wholeheartedly with these sentiments.

Although *The Host* is Meyer's first SF novel, it does not read like a book by a mainstream writer dabbling in SF, as does Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake.* Atwood's book frequently prods readers into thinking, "Hasn't she read such and such?" I did not have this feeling when reading *The Host.* The novel alludes to multiple SF megatexts and features icons like the

alien and the spaceship, but it is a fully realized story, one that is neither dependent on other SF titles nor derivative of them. In fact, even in the vampire books, there are hints that Meyer might harbor latent SF tendencies. Here is a passage from *New Moon,* the second book in the Twilight series. The speaker is narrator and vampire wannabe Bella Shaw: "He took my face between his stone hands, holding it tightly while his midnight eyes glared into mine with the gravitational force of a black hole" (518). That Bella chooses a space-age metaphor suggests just how ubiquitous are the cultural artifacts of contemporary science. Furthermore, that Meyer would invoke the black hole as metaphor says to me that she has been bitten by the SF bug. Le Guin defines SF as "an infinitely expandable metaphor exactly suited to our expanding universe" (113). Such can also be said about the individual metaphors drawn from a consciousness of contemporary science. *The Host* is, in part, a metaphor for the difficulty individuals can have digesting radical otherness, especially in an age when the other does not necessarily hail from Earth.

Because Meyer is an established YA writer venturing into adult territory, it is appropriate to consider how well she has made the transition. Like the vampire books, *The Host* does not even begin to flirt with an "R" rating. There is no bad language, no explicit sex, and no unnecessary violence. The narrator is an alien rather than a human teen, but is she an adult alien? Absolutely. The difference in tone and perspective between Bella and Wanderer is dramatic. Bella is an appealing character with good instincts, but she is not literally wise beyond her years. In fact, she can be impulsive and intransigent. Wanderer is a veteran of multiple insertions into the brains of diverse intelligent life forms, including flowers and aquatic plants, or "see weeds." She transcends Bella's youthful penchant for the romantic. Wanderer cannot afford to be anything but realistic because she must adapt to life in a body and on a world where she has no genetic roots. Her growing understanding of the complexities of the human psyche requires an adult mind.

Reconciling human tendencies toward both violence and love is a profound undertaking. Perhaps one way that *The Host* most resembles a YA novel is that it is a kind of comedy. The story's resolution is positive, given the human identity crisis we have brought on by a century of genocide and WMDs. Meyer says that she loves her characters. I would maintain that she loves our species as well, a stance that some will find nonadult. I would like to think that her mixed but overall positive view of us is refreshing rather than immature. In her video clip at Amazon, Meyer speaks against the arbitrary lines drawn between YA and adult literature. This a different position than that of a YA writer like M. T. Anderson, who said in an NPR interview on January 27, 2007, that he would prefer that younger teens not read his Octavian Nothing novels because of the unavoidable brutality. He finds some truths about human existence too negative for younger readers. Whether Meyer sees these same truths I do not know, but if she does, they do not play a prominent role in *The Host.*

The Host might be a novel for those who think that they do not like SF, but is also one that SF readers should find worth reading. Let's not hold the book's popularity against it. In fact, so potent and engrossing is the characterization that the book is an entertaining and accessible tour de force that deserves to be a bestseller.

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The Last Theorem

Donald M. Hassler

It seems fundamental that SF is a youthful genre. Frederik Pohl began major SF work while still in high school. Arthur C. Clarke was nearly as young when he began to contribute to the British Interplanetary Society. This book, however, is a major project of old age for both; indeed, Clarke died five months before the book's publication. Further, the various resonances of a seasoned maturity in SF are perfect for what is accomplished here and also perfect, I think, for their implications about genre, about book making, and about methods of thinking and discovery in general. *The Last Theorem* is hard SF at the top of its form because it speculates about epistemology and because it offers more ideas about the relation of SF to the history of literature in general. But these very strengths in the performance here by these two grand masters, working in tandem for the first time, render the overall effect of the book as a successful novel shaky at best. If it were not for the authors and for their probing ideas about science, method, even cosmology, readers would want to ignore the book.

The narrative of the life of Ranjit Subramanian, a Sri Lankan mathematician whose father heads an ancient Hindu temple on the island, stretches from his youthful obsession with number theory and with writing a proof for the puzzling three-century-old Theorem left by Pierre de Fermat through his marriage and political work with a successfully engineered space elevator rising from Sri Lanka and ends in a final climax with death and with sublime and sinister aliens as large as the limitless ranges of prime numbers. It all reads like a patchwork quilt made from the best of Clarke and best of Pohl. Strangely, the fictional Fermat proof as well as Ranj's nice resolution of both his sexual and Oedipal tensions take place exactly midway in the story; and the Heecheelike aliens, though haunting the story continually, back off at the end with hardly a struggle. So I conclude that there must be something going on in the book other than the tight grip of plot. Set in the near future, the story serves also to catalog world problems, from Sri Lankan independence to the latest efforts to defuse the North Korean military with a good bit of

environmental and medical advances thrown in—there is a very "green" car that runs on water and enough nanotech advances by the end for "machine storage" so that when the wife of Ranj dies in a diving accident, he has hopes to stay with her long after his death in some virtual storage state.

So even though important changes do confront the characters and their world, I suspect that the reader is more fascinated by the epistemological oppositions implicit between the empirical data that crops up and is tabulated in the story, along with myriad "current events" from our time, and the more abstract and amazing range, actually infinities, of scale foreshadowed in the number theory that Ranj is obsessed with all his life. Whereas astronomy and biology seem most observational and rigorously empirical of our sciences, a prime number is almost godlike in its abstract expansiveness. Some forty-five variations of alien species appear on earth near the end of the story, and a modern Linnaeus is needed to classify the stuff: "Taxonomists [who] had been intoxicated by a sudden breathtaking vision of becoming the Carolus Linnaeus (subclass Alien Biota) of the twenty-first century" (267). By contrast, math and theories on prime numbers and on the Fermat issues, especially, are the most airy and cerebral of human skills—like theology. Infinitely large numbers provide the cosmic possibilities for pure energy creatures ranging across the dark matter of space, but also for the nanotech capabilities of virtual reality storage and that sort of immortality. It is pure epistemology to ponder whether science yields more from the cataloging of data, like story making itself, or from the pure speculation on the sublimity of scale.

A lot of that epistemological wrestling takes place between the covers of this book.

The more literary resonance and wrestling in the book derives from the Frankenstein mix of parts that we associate with Clarke's past work and with Pohl's. The stitched-together parts come from much that the reader can recognize because both long writing careers have been so successful. The engineering of a space elevator with its terminal base sitting firmly on Clarke's beloved Sri Lanka is read side by side with mysterious Heecheelike pure-energy aliens swarming out of the dark matter of the Galactic centers that somehow is Pohl's comic book take on human paranoia. I have always read Clarke as a rather sweet-minded engineer who builds wonderfully. He builds here engineering feats of Olympic races in space near the end of this story. Clarke is a modern Jules Verne in his fascination with structures and activities in our future. The fatal scuba diving accident that forces Ranj and his family to explore ways toward immortality is another Clarkian image. On the other hand, Pohl has seemed, from the glorious time of his work with Cyril Kornbluth, satirically angry, bitter, even paranoid in his rage to teach us to always look over our shoulders. I have always marveled at Pohl's satiric anger and at his massive energy in implementing this more Wellsian vision of human depravity.

This brings me, finally, to what I see as most exciting about this collaboration, even with all its patchwork flaws. In image and setting, there is much more Clarke here. But in tone and in an echo from Enlightenment satire, Pohl prevails. The *conte philosophique,* and especially Voltaire's *Candide,* seems to resonate through most of Ranj's life story. Those Enlightenment *contes* were usually set in the East, and there were often wonders, pirate captures, current events, and philosophic speculation

woven into the story. All those trappings are in this book, even the pirates. But the dominant trait, in *Candide* in particular, is the offhand style of telling and the satiric cynicism of tone. This is what I label above as Pohl's (and Wells's) version of paranoia. It is a tone that fears a hostile universe, and the fear of hostility is based on the satiric awareness of how bad our own behavior may be. The story here does contain just a hint of well-engineered plot movement as well as just good engineering to make things better, but overall, the resonance of a sort of rambling *conte* is what impresses me here. I think this represents an acknowledgment by both Clarke and Pohl that even though they each can weave a good story, the best story is finally one of cosmology, big numbers, and fear and trembling at the universe.

The Voyage of the Space Beagle

Bruce A. Beatie

A. E. van Vogt. *The Voyage of the Space Beagle.* New York: Tom Doherty Associates/Orb Books, 2008. Trade paperback, viii, 215 pages, $14.95, ISBN 0-7653-2077-0.

First published in 1950, this is the first of what van Vogt, in his so-called autobiography (*Reflections of A. E. van Vogt,* 1975, edited from oral history tapes made at UCLA in 1954), calls a "fix-up novel" (122)—a series of shorter stories pulled together to novel length by added material; the bibliography in *Reflections* identifies ten additional fixups. The four stories that form the core of *Voyage* are "Black Destroyer" (chapters 1–6, originally in *Astounding,* July 1939), "Discord in Scarlet" (chapters 13–23, *Astounding,* December 1939), "M33 in Andromeda" (chapters 24–28, *Astounding,* August 1943), and "War of Nerves" (chapters 7–12, *Other Worlds,* May 1950). The *Reflections* bibliography gives approximate word counts of stories and novels. The four together are some 45,000 words, but *Voyage* is listed as 70,000, so the additional material is about 25,000 words, almost as much as the two longest stories together. This material ties the four stories together through a framing tale: the conflict of Elliott Grosvenor, the ship's single "Nexialist," with the ship's chief chemist, Gregory Kent ("little Gregory Kent" in "Destroyer," but revised as "a small man physically" but with "a big personality" [3]), and his effort during the four episodes to establish the validity of Nexialism ("the science of joining in an orderly fashion the knowledge of one field of learning with that of other fields" [53]) as the best means of resolving crises.

The opening section, revised from "Black Destroyer," is the main reason I wanted to review this new edition. Sometime in the late 1940s, as a teenage science fiction fan, I began collecting back issues of *Astounding,* and I have never forgotten the issue with Coeurl, the ravening black catlike destroyer on the cover. The story itself may well have been my first experience of van Vogt's fiction, though I also have an early memory of reading *Slan* and identifying with Jommy Cross. The Wikipedia entry for van Vogt notes that "Black Destroyer" "was inspired by *On the Origin of Species* by Charles Darwin," but there is no trace of such a source in the 1939 story; indeed, the only hint that the unnamed spaceship which encounters Coeurl is on a voyage of

exploration is the range of scientific specialties among its crew, which includes Kent but not Grosvenor.

The name of the ship first appears in the December 1939 story "Discord in Scarlet" (chapters 13–23), if the version published in van Vogt's 1971 collection *M33 in Andromeda* reflects the original magazine text. Here, the *Beagle* is making its first "trip outside of our own galaxy" (*M33,* 90), "the longest journey the spaceship *Beagle* has ever undertaken" (*M33,* 91), and it has "returned to the base planet" (*M33,* 92) after its encounter with Coeurl, whom the crew call "pussy." We learn at the end that the *Beagle* has been underway for "two long years" (*M33,* 126)—a point missing in the *Voyage* version. Most of the characters are the same as in "Black Destroyer," but neither Kent nor Grosvenor is mentioned. This story is surely the most influential of the four.

"Discord in Scarlet" has been claimed as the inspiration for the 1958 film *It! The Terror from beyond Space* (script by Jerome Bixby), in which an expedition to rescue a survivor of the first Mars expedition finds, on the return journey, a stowaway monster that must kill the crew for food, hides in the ventilation ducts, and is finally destroyed when the surviving crew members, wearing space suits, open all the airlocks and expose the monster to the vacuum of space. The connection of the film to "Discord" seems, however, a bit sketchy; Ixtl, its devil-faced monster (Xtl in the original), sole survivor of a planet destroyed by "a cosmic explosion" (103), consciously brings the *Beagle* to a stop in intergalactic space, but then is taken aboard as a specimen. But Ixtl's need to reproduce his species by laying eggs in human bodies makes it an explicit source for *Alien* (1979) and its sequels, to the point that van Vogt sued 20th Century Fox for plagiarism and received compensation. The *Alien* monster's use of air ducts, and its final destruction by exposure to the vacuum of space, however, seem directly based on 1958's *It!,* and that connection may be the reason why *It!* has been connected to "Discord."

The Nexialist Grosvenor was introduced in the story "M33 in Andromeda" (at 8,000 words the shortest of the four stories) as "a problem.…The first of the new young supermen—so the radiopress called the graduates of Nexial training" (*M33,* 132), and virtually the whole of Grosvenor's eventual trajectory in *Voyage* is anticipated here. At the end it is Zeller, the metallurgist, who comes to Grosvenor asking for Nexialist help. The ship, here called the *Space Beagle,* has spent "seven months in the space between our galaxy and this one repairing the damage caused by that scarlet beast" (*M33,* 129). The Darwinian parallel of its exploratory mission becomes finally explicit only in the *Voyage* version of the story, in which Grosvenor argues that, to defeat an ultimately threatening "nebular-dust intelligence" (194); its mission will have to be extended "five years longer than was anticipated" (189)—surely the source of *Star Trek*'s "five-year mission, to explore strange new worlds." How long the original mission was intended for is nowhere explicit, though the first line of chapter 24 notes that M33 was "the thirty-first star they visited" (181), but it cannot have been long: when Grosvenor proposes his five-year extension, Kent responds that "the men won't stand for even a one-year extension of the voyage" (189). But there is at least one indication that the *Beagle*'s mission is planned: at the end of chapter 12, the captain notes, "We've got distance to cover."

The second section of *Voyage,* "War of Nerves," was probably written with the frame story of *Voyage* already in van Vogt's mind, or even on paper; it seems likely that the story was sold to *Other Worlds* at the same time that van Vogt was finishing the manuscript of *Voyage,* though the 9,000 words of the magazine version are expanded to some 20,000 in the fixup. Most of the narrative is concerned with the second phase of Grosvenor's conflict with Kent. The alien threat, hallucinations caused telepathically in the crew by a birdlike race called the Riim, is framed within the Nexialism narrative, and Grosvenor alone is able to use reverse telepathy to discover that the Riim intended only friendly contact, and to persuade them to stop.

The Voyage of the Space Beagle is scarcely a novel in the way that *Slan* (reprinted in this edition in 1998), *The Weapon Makers* (reprinted in 2000 with *The Weapon Shops of Isher* as *The Empire of Isher*), and *The World of Null-A* (reprinted in 2002) are. The Nexialism narrative, absent in the original 1939 stories that van Vogt did consider to be connected, is imposed on them. The two 1939 stories remain classics in their original forms, and they do not gain from their enclosure in a frame. Both derive from the 1930s tradition of alien encounters (the "bug-eyed monsters"), yet they are remarkably innovative not only in creating credible monsters, but also in presenting much of the narrative from the alien's perspective—a technique lacking in "M33 in Andromeda" and "War of Nerves." Van Vogt reports that John W. Campbell's response to his submission of an outline for "Black Destroyer" was: "be sure to concentrate on the mood and atmosphere. Don't just make it an action story" (*Reflections,* 47). It is surprising that no film has been made from "Black Destroyer." Modern CGI could make as wonderful a version of Coeurl as *Alien* made of Ixtl; however, the Wikipedia entry for *Voyage* does note that Coeurl "was adapted as the character Mughi…in the anime *Dirty Pai.*"

I was surprised to find so little critical writing about van Vogt's work as a whole, much less about *Voyage.* A subject search in the MLA International Bibliography turns up only twelve entries, and three of those are short articles in encyclopedic reference books; three are by one author (H. L. Drake), and two are European. The same search in WorldCat showed thirteen entries, three of which are his *Reflections,* the taped interview it is based on, and a probably related shorter audiotape; two are references in the collected papers of Forrest Ackerman and Frederik Pohl. The only substantive book-length study was published in Germany: Uwe Anton's *A. E. van Vogt: Der Autor mit dem dritten Auge. Ein Werkführer* (Berlin: Shayol, 2004), which points out that "while van Vogt's influence and significance in the USA disappeared, he became increasingly more well-known in Europe and gathered, above all in France and Italy, but also in Germany, a constantly growing fan base" (8–9, my translation). The book's subtitle, "A Guide through the Works," is its best description. It consists of short, chronologically ordered articles on every published work summarizing the narratives and with brief critical comments. There is an excellent bibliography, especially of German translations—forty-three van Vogt novels in German are listed, some with in as many as six different versions, including a 1992 variorum translation of *Voyage* by Rainer Eisfeld that goes back to the magazine versions and includes all changes and editions in the fixup using different typefaces.

Perhaps it's time for a new study of van Vogt as an innovator in the context of late 1930s science fiction and comics: *Superman* first appeared in 1932, the core of E. E. Smith's Lensman series was published between 1937 and 1948, and the heroes of van Vogt's early novels are all variants on the superman theme: Jommy Cross in *Slan,* Gilbert Gosseyn in the Null-A novels, Hedrock in *The Weapon Makers.* And as noted above, many of van Vogt's stories and novels involve new takes on the stereotypical alien monsters of the pulp magazines of the 1930s. Also interesting would be a consideration of why his work remains so much more popular in Europe than in the United States.
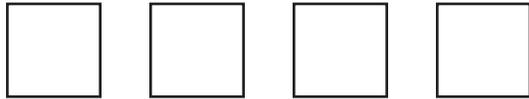
Media Reviews

Doktor Sleepless Volume 1: Engines of Desire [comic book]

Andrew M. Kelly

Doktor Sleepless Volume 1: Engines of Desire #1–8 (July 2007–August 2008). Written by Warren Ellis. Illustrated by Ivan Rodriguez. Rantoul, IL: Avatar Press, 2008. Hardcover, 216 pages, $34.99, ISBN 978-1592910557.

This collection brings together the first eight comic book issues with a wealth of reader-generated secondary material online. The story follows the emergence of Doktor Sleepless in the city of Heavenside, a typical American city in the near future, and his attempts to disturb the populace from their complacency. Doktor Sleepless is the persona adopted in the opening panels of the book by John Reinhardt, giving him a platform to speak to the city's people. He seems, at least initially, to create the character to get people to listen to him, and ultimately to follow his example and aid him. This vividly imagined and outrageous character is typical of Ellis's past work, most notably Transmetropolitan's Spider Jerusalem (DC Comics, Vertigo, 1997–2002). Both Doktor Sleepless and Jerusalem seek to shake an apathetic populace into action. Reform is sought in the realms of the political and social in the case of Jerusalem by way of revealing the truth to the public. Doktor Sleepless, in contrast, seeks to stop people from "looking for [a future] that isn't there" (issue 1, page 20, panel 5). He seeks a permanent change in the way people allow themselves to be shepherded into a present that is so grossly deficient, given their imaginative powers.

In the broadest terms, *Doktor Sleepless* explores the disparity between the future science fiction has given us glimpses of and the future that the world presented to us. Graffiti in Heavenside reads, "Where's my F***ing Jetpack," "You owe me a flying car," and "Not my future" (1, 11, 1–3). These slogans summarize the complaints of the populace. Seemingly in response to the graffiti in the preceding panels, the character known as Nurse laments, "The Future hasn't changed in ten years" (1, 11, 5). In

his first pirate radio broadcast to Heavenside, Doktor Sleepless counters with, "You know where your friends are by looking inside your own eyeball, for god's sake" (1, 20, 6). Heavenside is so deeply immersed in technology that it is mundane. The comic takes place in a domain of ubiquitous RFID tags where people "interrogate buildings and can ping their own bodies," a clear nod to Bruce Sterling's *Shaping Things* (2005). Tags work for everything, from one's identity and franchise to health and well-being. If your doctor doesn't have equipment to read your medical tag, an ad proclaims, he "[doesn't] care enough about your life" (2, 1, 6). Doktor Sleepless implores us all to wake up to the present and to change a terrible world. The Doktor closes a nightly radio broadcast with, "We now return you to the hideous soul-crushing life they built around you while you were sleeping" (7, 2, 6)—a fitting coda to the preceding avalanche of statistics on suicide, poverty, and tainted water.

Thematically, the book melds near-future SF with some of mysticism and references to H. P. Lovecraft's Chthulu mythos. Doktor Sleepless attempts to convince Sing, his ex-girlfriend and an unwilling pawn, that there's a gateway to a higher plane encoded in a book entitled *Darkening Sky.* On this plane is a being that killed his parents; he seems bent on disappointing this being by destroying the world before it can. The main character could be a sane man pretending to be insane, or his behavior could be read as an extension of a traumatized man's psychosis. Credence is given to either explanation, which lends subtlety to the work because it constantly calls into question the reader's ability to take the characters' actions at face value. The Doktor/Reinhardt line has become so blurred that even the Doktor himself is unsure which is more real or vital: the cartoon actor, or the scarred child whose drive created the cartoon.

The book delicately balances the metaphysical and the science fictional in how it provides explanations for the motivations and appearance of Doktor Sleepless. Two copies of John Reinhardt seem to exist: one who may have lost his mind and taken up the mantle of Doktor Sleepless, and one who is secretly incarcerated within Heavenside by Preston Stoker, the city's police commissioner. The incarcerated version suggests that one version is an exertion of psychic will, while the Doktor's mastery of technology throughout suggests a purely technological explanation.

The book has several components beyond the print version that permit further reader engagement with the text via a number of Web-based communities. The main site (http://www.doktorsleepless.com) is a wiki for collecting and collating information and analysis of the story's content and theories on the book's less explicable elements. Warren Ellis has also created a group blog (http://grinding.be/) to pick up where the fictional blog, Immanent.sea, left off in "looking for outbreaks of the future" (4, 3, 6). These projects attempt to enrich the medium of comics by attaching extra content, and it encourages readers to think about the technologies, ideas, and theory at work. Engaging the traditionally active and devoted following of a comic creator, especially one of Ellis's caliber and cult appeal, online and via traditional print seems an ideal way to move the medium forward.

At the end of its first eight issues, *Doktor Sleepless* is positioned to be the inheritor of Transmetropolitan's crown as Ellis's greatest achievement. Ellis is at the height of his powers to shock, to entertain, and to provoke thought, while giving the

reader a vivid glimpse of a richly and fully imagined world of mendous urgency.

The Golden Compass [film]

Janice M. Bogstad

The Golden Compass. Producer-Director, Chris Weitz. New Line Cinema, December 2007. $28.98.

Amid much controversy, a movie of the first book of Philip Pullman's His Dark Materials trilogy was released in December 2007. It was far more successful at the box office in Europe than in the United States, with a total income through July 2008 of $372 million, of which $300 million came from European screenings. The film won an Oscar and a BAFTA for its special effects in creating an alternative present-time world and lifelike speaking animals. The film engages viewers, both in its embodiment of Pullman's invented daemons and in its rendering of a culture where scientific discoveries have taken a different path. This film is available in DVD and Blu-ray in both a theater and an extended version.

The adventures of Lyra Belacqua, a preteen girl who living in a college called Jordan in an alternative universe city called Oxford, make a delightful and enthralling story. She is swept from a quiet, somewhat disordered life as an orphan and raised by Oxford scholars and housekeepers. She experiences many adventures where her mental brilliance and moral steadfastness (despite her ability to get herself out of trouble with elaborate, fantastic stories) are sorely tried. Pullman's take on innocence as a kind of unconscious knowledge is underpinned but not explained by Lyra's use of a "truth machine" and a golden compass, the latter the title of the American edition of this first book in a trilogy (entitled *Northern Lights* in the UK).

Lyra finds herself fighting a powerful organization called the Magisterium, which has sanctioned the kidnapping of children for some sort of experiment. They wish to alter the children's ability to exercise free will before they become adults, and this process is represented metaphorically by Pullman through the daemons. In Lyra's world, people's souls exist outside their bodies in the form of an animal, a daemon, and daemons stand in for a person's soul. Lyra's world is also only one of many in parallel universes, and those who have read the books know that our Earth is one of them, and one that Lyra will later be able to visit. Lyra is spurred to take matters into her own hands when her young friend, Roger, becomes one of the stolen children, and she joins with social outcasts, the Gyptian tribes who usually travel England's waterways, to try and rescue Roger and other children. This is the beginning of her adventures to Northern lands. They travel by sailboat, equipped with a waterwheel, in search of the children, and Lyra recruits the help of a sentient bear, Iorek Byrnison, witches, and other friends who help her to rescue the children. She is also seeking her father, Lord Asriel, who has been captured by other bears and imprisoned at the request of the Magisterium. They disapprove of his research, and he disapproves of them. His research, on a mysterious substance called

Dus—which both flows between alternate universes and into individual humans, enhancing their free will—is also a reason that children are being stolen.

This basic story is ultimately not what readers mention when they discuss their interest in the books. Lyra's relationships with her friend, Roger; her daemon, Pantalaimon; the Gyptians and witches who help her; and the sentient bear all make major contributions to the novel's charm. Many have found the first book to be the strongest of the three, and I suspect it is because of these relationships. The film's failure to develop these interpersonal relationships is a serious flaw. Lyra's daemon, one of the most charming and oft-mentioned devices of the novel, is largely trivialized. The reasons for daemons disappearing at death, and for "intercision" to cut away children's daemons, is also not clearly linked to free will until the very end of the film—children are told, "This is how you grow up." In the novel, the relationship between humans, daemons, and dust is discussed briefly and demonstrated in one of Lyra's Oxford adventures. The film devotes so little attention to developing her as a character through her life in Oxford that one cannot understand much about her relationship with her young friend, Roger, and all the adventures that bind them together. And so little is shown of her life with Mrs. Coulter in the analog of London that mostly what we know of them is their conflicts. Even more absent is a decent explanation of the witches, and especially Lyra's developing admiration for Seraphina Pekkala, who comes to her rescue many times. If one has read the book, remarks about "that child" made by the master of Jordan College, the archvillain of the Magisterium, Fra Pavel, and the Seraphina herself, can be understood, but otherwise, they are merely cryptic. In fact, the only relationship that is developed at all is that with the bear, Iorek Byrnison, and there is little of that. Weitz does preserve many lines of dialog from Pullman's novel, which is helpful for the story line, but he moves them to the mouths of different characters and to different parts of the story, including an imitation of the film *Fellowship of the Ring* with the initial voice-over dissertation of Dust and alternative universes.

The visual effects in the film, especially in its creation of alterative technologies—one of Pullman's high points—are impressive and are the most outstanding feature of the film. Scenery is particularly notable. For example, airplanes have apparently not been invented, and people travel long distances in balloons. So when Lyra is rescued from her life as the sole female orphan living in an Oxford College, she and the mysterious Mrs. Coulter travel to London in a luxurious cabin on a wooden airship. The views of a rather Victorian-looking London from the air are magnificent. There is also a lot of snow scenery—vast expanses of snow, frozen tundra and lakes, ice caves, and mountains. The lifelike animated daemons are often delightful, especially Lord Asriel's Stellmaria, Mrs. Coulter's golden monkey, and Lyra's Pantalaimon. Equally visually impressive is a battle between two sentient bears, Lyra's friend Iorek and the usurping king of bears, Ragnar (named Iofur in the book). But the battle at the end of the film, where the children face the Northern barbarians, eventually aided by their friend, Iorek, is far too long for its significance to the story and also not very credible. Weitz took a philosophically complicated adventure story based on the nature of knowledge, morality, and free will and turned it into an entertaining, pretty film.

Its box-office difficulties in the United States have been attributed to criticism, particularly from religious conservatives, including the Catholic church, about its production, which predated the release by more than a year. Others who were moved by Pullman's fiction way back with the release of the first volume in 1995 were holding their breath to see how a novel ultimately based on the concept that God as we know it is really an antichrist could be rewritten to remove religion altogether from the narrative. Removing most of the religious overtones to a story that Pullman claims to have been predicated on *Paradise Lost* would ultimately remove the motivation for a story. And no strategy could ever appease the religious community, so it seems in hindsight to be misguided. Why would Wietz want to alienate both audiences? Perhaps he had some notion he could overcome deep-seated objections with a sort of visually engaging adventure—and indeed, the visuals are often enchanting. But the philosophical underpinnings, especially the concept of different kinds of knowledge for the innocent and the experienced, a more engaging concept than any of the religious ones, were much too simplified. The story itself was so fundamentally eviscerated that characters and cultures were also simplified by this decision. It would seem logical that one would make a film with the possibility of appealing to the less conservative of the audiences instead of one that appealed to neither. One result is that there is still serious doubt that the other two books will be produced as films. As of July 2008, Pullman had stated he has not been contacted about or discussed a second film since before the first was released. It still may happen, but New Line is not currently willing to say, one way or the other.

Nevertheless, the film's success in Europe and its status as award awards do need to be examined. I am glad that the film was made, and I am ready to agree that many changes must occur when a novel is turned into a film. Aside from the more obvious attempts to remove any references to organized religious hierarchies, whether Anglican or Catholic, from the theocracy called the Magisterium, there were many other more subtle changes. The most startling was the removal of almost all material from the last three chapters of the novel, in which Lyra is forced to accept the willingness of her father, whom she has admired to this point, to sacrifice Roger's life for his scientific curiosity. Unlike the novel, the film has a very storybook ending, with Lyra and her friend falling asleep in a balloon basket leaning against the side of Iorek—a peaceful and hopeful ending that not only does not match the end of the book but circumvents the transition between books and leaves the viewer with a far too positive perspective on Lyra's father. With this ending, Lord Asriel assumes the stature of a hero of the piece, when he is actually as willing to misuse children and their daemons for his own ends as was Lyra's mother, Mrs. Coulter. The physical passion that caused these two adults to defy church and morality and gave birth to Lyra is discussed but never demonstrated, as it is at the end of the novel.

This film is flawed because it makes little sense to viewers unless they had read the book and were just looking to see some episodes illustrated. I confirmed this opinion with an adult nephew who had not read the books. The story line is almost totally subverted by the removal of logical explanations of the controversy between Lyra's father and the Magisterium, and of

Mrs. Coulter's reasons for running the General Oblation experiments on children.

The cast is stellar. A newly discovered young actress, Dakota Blue Richards, is excellent in the lead role, preserving the novelistic character's admirable qualities almost intact, although she is accorded much more freedom from adult supervision than in the novel. She also preserves the essence of a child's ability to sense moral turpitude in adults while making most (if not all) of her insights on the power struggles going on around her seem almost believable. Nicole Kidman as Mrs. Coulter and David Craig as Lord Asriel were able to sustain their intensity despite the limitations of the cinematic characterization. In fact, the many excellent performances partially redeemed the film. Ben Walker's Roger, in his worshipful devotion to Lyra, maintains a steadfast demeanor, and Derek Jacobi makes a wonderfully evil Magisterial Emissary.

The film's successes are not derived from what makes the novels great; instead, they derive from the conventions of filmic fantasy. That's a shame, because Pullman's material is excellent. After seeing seen the two 3.5-hour plays made from the trilogy for the London stage, and two of his early novels (*Ruby and the Smoke* and *The Shadow in the North*) in a BBC production, I have come to seriously doubt Hollywood's ability to bring any sort of subtle fantasy story to the large screen. But there is a certain audience for fantasy right now, because the Lord of the Rings, the Harry Potter, and now the Narnia films have whetted the public appetite. Maybe that is ultimately what will support the production of the other two novels in the His Dark Materials trilogy. With Pullman being who he is and the books being what they are, I hope that the other two are made—perhaps with a little more attention to the story and less to the special effects.

Battlestar Galactica: Season 3 [TV show]

Michael J. Klein

One of my favorite books is Philip K. Dick's 1968 novel, *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?,* which served as the basis for Ridley Scott's 1982 movie, *Blade Runner.* Writing in response to the Vietnam war, Dick used his novel to ask the question, "What makes us human?" For Dick, the notion of belonging to humanity had less to do with our origins and more to do with our actions. His tale of a futuristic world devoid of most life, but populated with artificial humans called replicants, called into question basic assumptions about what it means to be human.

The newly imagined *Battlestar Galactica* (BSG), which premiered as a miniseries in 2003 and as a TV series in 2004, draws more from Dick (and by extension Scott) than it does from its previous 1970s incarnation. The original series borrowed many of its elements from *Star Wars,* but the new series draws on and extends many of the questions raised by Dick about the notion of being human. While Dick and Scott could only grapple

with these issues within the confines of a single novel and film, respectively, the producers of the new BSG have had more than three seasons of television to investigate this and other issues in a more nuanced fashion.

The basic story, revealed in the two-hour miniseries, seems fairly straightforward. The Cylons, a mechanical race created by humans to serve them, revolt against their human masters. A war ensues, followed by an uneasy cease-fire. Hostilities end for forty years. During that time, the Cylons evolved; they even remake themselves to look and act like humans. After infiltrating the human colonies, the Cylons managed to wipe out most of humanity in a surprise nuclear attack. The survivors, now pursued by the Cylons, desperately search for a mythical world called Earth—home, they believe, to one of their lost colonies.

It's at this point that the new BSG and the 1970s version part company in terms of style, substance, and story. The new BSG does not depict humanity as a monolithic group. Rather, the day-to-day troubles of both the military and civilian fleets are shown. People go on strike because of poor working conditions; prisoners revolt because they want free and open elections. Not all humans feel the Cylons are the enemy, and the government is not universally trusted in this time of crisis to do the right thing. BSG does a magnificent job of revealing the blemishes and ugliness that unfolds in a time of crisis. While some have criticized the show for this—calling it a soap opera in space—the political and social aspects of the show make it accessible. This is not a show solely about advanced technology and space battles (though the battle scenes in season 3 are especially well done). It is a show about a culture facing a crisis, and about the different ways people respond to the uncertainty that brings.

The primary question of the series, similar to Dick's, is what sets us apart as humans. The humans demean their Cylon creations by using the epithet "toaster" to describe them, by torturing them, and by killing them without remorse. These actions by humans often seem incongruous with what we would deem humane. While this in itself would be a great topic to serve as a classroom discussion, BSG brings up other issues in season 3 that are worth considering.

At the beginning of the season, the humans find themselves prisoners of the Cylons on a barely habitable world. The Cylons insist they are trying to find a way for humans and Cylons to coexist. However, human resistance fighters have escalated their attacks on Cylon facilities. The fighters must decide how far they are willing to go in fighting their Cylon captors, as the Cylons have now enlisted the aid of humans in keeping the peace. These human sympathizers serve the Cylons because they want to see the two races live in harmony, but the resistance fighters vilify them. The show leaves it up to the viewer to decide what demarcates the line between resistance fighter and terrorist, and if it is justified to kill civilians in the name of war.

Other issues raised by the show in these episodes include how a culture should bring to justice a leader who surrendered to the enemy. Is the leader accountable for what the enemy subsequently does to the population? How does a populace guarantee a fair trial for that leader, and does he deserve a proper defense? When human members of the *Galactica* crew find out that they too are Cylons, the audience must consider whether individuals should be defined more by their mechanism of creation or by their actions—another example of the nature versus nurture debate.

As the series has progressed over the years, the line between Cylon and human has dissolved to the point where some Cylons openly support the human cause, and humans have fallen in love with and created children with Cylons. Equally important, members of both groups have both come to realize that survival is not enough; earning the right to survive through consistent moral action is what really matters. This is BSG's most important lesson.

The Venture Bros. [TV show]

Nathaniel Williams

The Venture Bros.: Season One. Dir. Jackson Publick. Perf. James Urbaniak, Patrick Warburton. DVD. Cartoon Network, 2006. $29.98.

The Venture Bros. comes from Adult Swim, Cartoon Network's raunchy, late-night programming block dominated by *Family Guy* reruns and fifteen-minute send-ups like *Robot Chicken.* Unlike those non sequitur–filled shows, *The Venture Bros.* involves complicated back story and a seasonal story arc that lends itself to DVD viewing. It also gains most of its comedic moments by dissecting previous science fiction television shows and offering an occasionally sublime portrayal of our modern world's love/hate relationship with science.

The show centers on Hank and Dean Venture, two adolescent brothers who follow their father, Dr. Thaddeus "Rusty" Venture, and his government-provided protector, Brock Samson, on scientific expeditions, where they frequently run afoul of monsters, assassins, and supervillains. This obvious riff on the old *Jonny Quest* series (scientist dad, his two wards, and their bodyguard) starts a string of "spot the reference" jokes that tie the show to other SF-related media of that earlier era, including the *Six Million Dollar Man,* Marvel Comics (particularly *Fantastic Four*), *The Man from U.N.C.L.E.,* and more. Along the way, the show reveals that Dr. Venture was himself once a boy adventurer much like Hank and Dean, following his über-heroic scientist dad, Dr. Jonas Venture, across the globe. Jonas appears frequently in flashbacks, alternately wearing a lab coat/goggles combination or Doc Savage's trademark ripped shirt and jodhpurs. The very familiarity of these central characters lends itself to the show's nuanced comedy, enabling the series to simultaneously satirize and celebrate this material.

If this sounds like a pure venture into nostalgia, however, think again. Instead, *The Venture Bros.* ultimately conjures the same sense of "desiderium" that John Clute finds in Howard Waldrop's short stories, providing science fiction guided by an "intense longing for something that…*should* have existed" when the reality of the present is gauged by the wonderful technological promises of the past (863). The creators of the series, Jackson Publick and Doc Hammer, extend this idea by both giving us a glimpse of that promised future and insinuating that it wouldn't have been long-lived. *The Venture Bros.*'s back story posits a recent past where superscientists really existed. The second episode, "Careers in Science," for example, begins with an industrial film from Venture Industries, dated 1971, detailing life on Gargantua One, a space station hosting 2,000 employees.

The action then shifts to the present day, where budget cuts and lack of interest have reduced the station to a mere crew of two. Later episodes present similar chronological juxtapositions, and the show's central conceit becomes clear: in *The Venture Bros,* the wonderful, streamlined future promised by SF media of the 1950s and 1960s really happened…then went drastically downhill to become something more closely mirroring our own world.

The brothers may have antigravity boots, hover bikes, and a robot assistant, but they live in a world where scientific discoveries are often sold to the highest bidder and where research without immediate, lucrative results means losing one's contracts. Dr. Venture's scientific expeditions are frequently just salvage jobs, attempts to repair or resell the technogadgets his father created in that earlier golden age. Each episode finds a way to somehow highlight Venture's lack of financial solvency: he takes an under-the-table job with a Disneylike entrepreneur who wants a cloned body despite a "congressional ban on cloning," or he hosts a "Tag Sale" where a "Laser Death Ray Bargain Bin" sits alongside old records and other knickknacks. In another attempt to raise funds, Venture rents lab space to Dr. Orpheus, who turns out to be a Dr. Strange–like necromancer rather than a research scientist; their ongoing debate about the relative merits of their chosen careers provides one of the series's highlights, an amusing take on Arthur C. Clarke's adage that sufficiently advanced science is indistinguishable from magic.

The series' supervillians are equally hamstrung by bureaucracy to the point of irrelevance. Venture's archnemesis, the butterfly-themed Monarch, must halt one attack because it violates guidelines laid out by the Guild of Calamitous Intent. The guild makes it impossible for Venture to prosecute his archrivals by standard legal means (the organization gives generously to law enforcement benefit drives), but they also provide enough red tape to make it equally unlikely that any real harm can be done to Venture's family. For all parties involved, money and regulations trump any other factors.

While it contains an indictment of our world's marginalization of scientists, *The Venture Bros.* also provides a more typical mocking of the "mad scientist" archetype, particularly as it relates to single fathers. Dr. Venture embodies the scatterbrained technocrat, forgetting his sons' names while blithely taking them into dangerous situations. Much of his social awkwardness is attributed to his scientist father's parenting, and his two boys are even less well adjusted. Many of the series' sex jokes—and they are numerous—stem from Hank and Dean's naïveté about any life outside the Venture Industries compound. Science, the show indicates, breeds isolation and ignorance. When Dean's would-be girlfriend asks why she doesn't see him in school, he replies cheerfully, "I learn in a box built by my pop!" The boys eventually rebel, albeit incompetently, in the final episode of season 1 by running away from home, only to wind up in a "scared straight"–style program for juvenile delinquents caught "dabbling in super-science."

The Venture Bros. presumes some preexisting knowledge of the genre, and of mid-twentieth-century expectations about science in general. That element, combined with PG-13 humor, might make it difficult to include in a classroom setting. Half-hour episodes, however, cover the wide divide between past anticipations and present reality in a short span, which provides plenty of time for discussion or connection to outside reading. It

might be useful, for example, in classes dealing with SF's role in postmodern culture, illustrating Fredric Jameson's notion of nostalgia as one of postmodernism's defining characteristics. By presenting the remnants of a once dreamed-of world, *The Venture Bros.* moves beyond nostalgia and desiderium into newer territory. Its best episodes illustrate how far we've strayed from an idealized future, even as it mocks the type of people who could have brought us there.

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Sherlock Holmes: The Awakened [game]

Nathan Rockwood

Playing through this game is an intriguing experience, one which is both accessible and of interest to an audience beyond traditional gamers. Although some might be irked by the notion of a computer game as an academic text, I urge anyone with an interest in the worlds of Doyle or Lovecraft to experience this one before passing judgment; you might be startled by what lurks herein.

The Awakened is one of a growing number of independently created works in several media sharing a common theme: the exploration of H. P. Lovecraft's cosmological mythos by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's keen investigator, Sherlock Holmes. Although this theme is recurrent, surfacing in text after text like a loathsome *thing* shambling between inhuman stars, there remains little overt discussion on the topic. *The Awakened,* however, being a different sort of text than most such cross-author fiction, brings to the table a freshly non-Euclidean angle while also expanding the dialogue to include a new audience.

The physical experience of game play bears mentioning. In the tradition of adventure games from the original text adventures to its own sequels, *The Awakened* is a game of exploration and puzzle solving. The adventure genre is well suited as a vehicle for a text because success and progress through the story rely on the player's observational and logical power rather than on reaction time or accuracy with digital weaponry. Scenes of action or danger, while instilling a sense of urgency, do not require Holmes to dodge bullets or move quickly. When the great detective and his assistant engage in a foot chase, for example, the player is required to locate the correct path, but moving slowly or making an incorrect guess doesn't end the story or cause him to lose. Of course, as a text so reliant on visual clues and interactive puzzle solving, the game must be both attractive and intuitive enough to hold a player's interest.

Fortunately, *The Awakened* succeeds at being both to a high degree. The game's aesthetics, both graphical and auditory, are compelling without being distracting. The interface and the puzzles are easy to work with, though less so to solve, when it comes to some of the challenges Holmes and Watson face. Some of the puzzles may even require judicious research, but few are likely to be frustrating for any length of time. Not that *The Awakened* is perfect; the facial expressions of the characters and the voice acting vary from the superb to the unrealistically wooden. A few technical glitches exist, such as a door that opens into nothingness (unless this is a designer's commentary on the nature of the universe). All in all, the faults are minor and are easily overlooked in light of the story.

Our tale opens with the morbid vision of a nightmare being experienced by Sherlock's companion and biographer, Dr. Watson, apparently some time after the events of the game. The game then takes place as Dr. Watson attempts to "remember how it all happened." This provides a frame for the tale; it also provides a mechanism that serves to maintain a feeling of immersion during the few instances where a player could die or lose; Watson simply wakes up again, muttering that he must be remembering it wrong, and the player reloads the game. While this mechanism is certainly not unique to *The Awakened,* it fits well here, making the experience of game play more natural than it might have been, and linking the story to Lovecraft's writing style.

For Lovecraft, framing a tale as a nightmare is a canonical set piece. It serves to heighten the reader's (or player's) awareness that the protagonist is unsure of the distinction between reality and delusion, a line further blurred by bizarre and terrible events. But wait, you might think, this runs right up against the traditional Holmsian reliance on strictly rational thinking. How can you eliminate the impossible when the impossible seems to be occurring before your very eyes?

The reconciliation of that paradox reveals the brilliance of *The Awakened.* As Holmes and Watson explore increasingly disturbing scenes of crime and violence, we help the great detective piece together the clues in ways that seem believable to him. A man whom a tale by Lovecraft would term a fanatical devil worshiper is, to Holmes, a delusional psychotic. A terrible and ancient cult becomes a vile ring of opium smugglers. When another computer game, like *Call of Cthulhu: Dark Corners of the Earth,* might drop names like Dagon or Cthulhu, or send the monstrous folk of Innsmouth after the protagonist, *The Awakened* presents the player with literally unnamed malevolence, and in the best form of proverbial showing-instead-of-telling, it lets Holmes formulate his own eminently rational explanation for the strange things he witnesses.

Which is what *The Awakened* brings to the increasingly voluminous dialogue between Lovecraft and Doyle. Detective fiction is satisfying to read because it represents the triumph of law over crime, order over chaos. This stands in opposition to the hypothesis of Lovecraft's mythos: everything we think we know is a lie, and we will be drowned in a chaos too massive to comprehend. But is it not natural that when confronted with an unsolvable mystery, we should bring forth an unbeatable detective? Considering that they were contemporary developments, may they not represent different responses to the same historical and social stimuli? Clearly, a fascination for such an epic struggle has been

fostering, resulting in stories like Roger Zelazny's *Night in the Lonesome October,* or more recently Neil Gaiman's *A Study in Emerald* and the others in the collection *Shadows over Baker Street. The Awakened,* however, allows readers to experience the resolution of that conflict themselves in a manner that unfolds dynamically under their control, encouraging a more personal, more visceral understanding of the literary dialogue.

I Am Legend [film]

Rikk Mulligan

I Am Legend. Dir. Lawrence. Perf. Will Smith, Maria Braga. Warner Bros., 2007. $34.99.

Rather than consider just the theatrical release of *I Am Legend* (2007), I'd rather look at the contents of the 2008 special edition DVD. The two discs contain the theatrical release, a second complete version of the film with an alternate ending, a series of animated comics, and (in theory) a "PC Weblink" to enable the download of a digital copy of the film and a bonus material databank that includes "making of" content as well as information about the history of virology and the current status of viral infections around the globe.

In the theatrical release of *I Am Legend,* a cure for cancer goes horribly wrong, killing 90 percent of the human species and mutating 90 percent of the survivors into nocturnal, light-sensitive, carnivorous (or vampiric) "darkseekers" who hunt the remaining 1 percent to near extinction. Will Smith plays Robert Neville, a U.S. army virologist who had led efforts to reverse the effects of the mutating virus until it became airborne, and is now the apparent sole survivor in Manhattan, if not the world, where he attempts to find a cure and survive in a posturban apocalyptic setting.

The first act or day of the film begins on day 1,000 and offers a glimpse of Neville's daily routine, including exercise, hunting, shopping, foraging, and broadcasting radio messages in the hopes of attracting any other survivors to his "ground zero." This routine also includes work in his home laboratory, part of which requires the capture of mutants to use in human trials; pictures cover a wall of his laboratory, documenting each casualty of the previous, failed serums, now advanced to series GA-391. In the second act, the tables turn, and Neville is nearly trapped, and his sole companion, Samantha, a German shepherd, is infected; he snaps after her death and is only saved by the intervention of the newly arrived Anna, like him immune to the virus, who responded to his radio message. Anna arrives with a boy, Ethan, and the news that there is a colony of survivors in Vermont, but Neville remains skeptical given that her source is "listening" to "God's plan." Their debate is cut short by an attack of the darkseekers, during which Neville discovers that this final attempt has created a possible cure. During the attack, Neville sacrifices himself to protect Anna, Ethan, and a sample of blood containing his cure. The final scene is of Anna's and Ethan's arrival at the walled colony and her handing the vial of blood over to someone in a uniform.

For the scholar of science fiction, this release brings to the fore a number of familiar tropes, including scientific hubris, medical ethics, the mentality of the sole survivor, and a detailed vision of the world after man (a frequent docu-fiction on both the National Geographic and History channels). In the theatrical release, Neville chooses to see the infected as completely devolved socially and little more than animals; although there is evidence to the contrary, he needs to ignore their humanity when his attempts to cure do little more than kill. The sixteen names listed as scientific consultants attest to the efforts director Francis Lawrence used to emphasize the role of science and its protocols in his vision of this latest interpretation of Richard Matheson's 1954 novel. Several details and scenes can also be read as critical reflections of U.S. military and governmental errors dealing with 9/11, and in Iraq and after Hurricane Katrina, especially given the shift of location from Los Angeles to Manhattan and the references to Ground Zero.

The alternate ending, a difference of two scenes, has more academic potential because it returns to an underlying premise of Matheson: the infected are a new species who will form a new society and a new world. It is difficult to consider the film alone, given the fifty-year history of the story and the many attempts to create films, the first being *The Last Man on Earth* (1964) and the second *The Omega Man* (1971)—neither of which met with Matheson's approval, according to several interviews he has given. The alternate ending makes it very clear that civilization as we define it has ended, but that there are affective bonds and social hierarchy within the darkseekers; combining that with the wall of deaths seems to offer the suggestion that chance may be inevitable, and one who obsessively holds onto the past will become the monster to future generations, returning to the Matheson's theme and the title. This ending also makes it clear that the darkseekers may have devolved, yet they can still cooperate and sacrifice, beyond the use of tools, traps, and plans, all indicative of higher-than-animal levels of intelligence. The alternate ending deviates in a number of other details, but test audiences found it to have too happy an ending—they weren't listening to its messages.

The four animated comics seem to be an attempt to tie in with the comics released by DC/Wildstorm than to extend the world, as the Animatrix animated stories did for the Matrix movies. The PC datalink evaded my best efforts to test it as a result of PC (Windows) errors.

My final assessment would be that the alternate ending offers more to a course involving science fiction, and that one with a strong historiographical approach could make use of it, the novel, and the first two films, to present issues of scientific responsibility and ethics. Although many of the conventional reviews panned the final third of the movie for its deus ex machina approach, all of the film versions incorporate some elements of religiosity, though this latest version was strongly based on the screenplay of *The Omega Man,* which went for mutants rather than Matheson's scientifically defined vampire plague. From an aesthetic standpoint, the film is rich with small details that explain the world's collapse better than the earlier films, and Smith's portrayal is one of his strongest dramatic roles, and far superior to the efforts of Vincent Price and Charleton Heston.

The Dark Knight [film]

Ronald C. Thomas Jr.

The Dark Knight. Dir. Christopher Nolan. Perf. Christian Bale, Michael Caine, Heath Ledger, Gary Oldman, Aaron Eckhart, Maggie Gyllenhaal, and Morgan Freeman. Warner Bros., 2008. $28.98.

Batman came to see me in the hospital.

No, wait. I got to see *Batman* in the hospital. The medication can be confusing sometimes. It was January 12, 1966, and I was in the hospital with chronic bronchitis. Fortunately, my father was an air force medic, and it was a USAF hospital, so I got to watch "Hi Diddle Riddle" in the nurse's lounge and sneak back to bed. Of course, the next night, I had to sneak out to see part two, also in my Batman slippers.

Back then, not yet eight years old, I had already learned economic decision making thanks to Batman. Walking home from school, as you could do in those days, you could stop at the drug store to buy two new comics for 12 cents each or an 80-page giant for a quarter. The bigger book was all reprints from the 1940s, but they were all new Batman stories to me and just as "official" as any others.

All of which is a roundabout way of saying that any literary figure of long standing can be retold and reinterpreted for every generation, and every retelling and rereading has validity for the storyteller and the audience. In fiction, the Three Musketeers and Sherlock Holmes have been redone repeatedly, as has Wyatt Earp from history. On the large and small screens, James Bond has been shaken up several times, and we just number all the Doctors Whos.

With two serials, a camp television show, several animated shows and direct-to-video features, and six films, there are plenty of multimedia reinterpretations of the canonical comics. Even in the two-dimensional media, there are multiple continuities between the Golden, Silver, and Modern Ages of comics. Adam West is just as legitimate a Batman as Michael Keaton or even Olan Soule (the voice of Batman on *Super Friends*). I still have reservations about George Clooney.…

Christian Bale's second donning of the cape and cowl was an unqualified success on several levels, far beyond the obviously commercial. (The film came in behind only *Titanic* in non-inflation-adjusted box office totals.) In this sequel to *Batman Begins,* Bruce Wayne goes even further into the mode of a little boy lost, somehow seeking return to normalcy. In terms of Joseph Campbell's monomyth, Batman is a reluctant hero who is trying to resist the call to adventure. At several junctures in the film, as in the previous, he sees Assistant District Attorney Rachel Dawes as the representation of the normal life he can never lead. If he can only restore order to Gotham City, it will not need a Batman anymore. With the new crusading district attorney, Harvey Dent, in Gotham, maybe the city has the hero it needs, and Batman can retire.

However, the Joker, as the agent of Chaos, forces Batman to continue in his role as Gotham's guardian. No one else can match the level of ferocity in the Joker's rampage through the city, and no one can divine the Joker's motivations or even determine his true origins from his several false stories. Drama often centers

on a protagonist's choice, and the Joker forces Batman into Hobson's Choice—to save either Dent or Dawes, but not both, and to be damned by the loss of the other. When Dawes dies and Dent is disfigured, becoming the maniacal Two-Face, Batman is ready to retreat into despair, but his character's strength has always been in the comeback. Ultimately, he triumphs, but at the cost of becoming an outlaw, hunted by the police who were his allies, the Batsignal now a smashed symbol.

As the superhero film has become a genre unto itself, it has become fodder for numerous thematic reviews. Some are superficial, only reaching for the popcorn-pushing aspect of the phenomenon. However, superheroes represent a mythology for a modern age, replacing the folk tales of Paul Bunyan and Pecos Bill. Greek and Roman pantheons now become DC and Marvel, and archetypes appear of archers and speedsters, tricksters and wizards, kings of the sea and elastic heroes.

However, to understand Batman, especially as portrayed at the end of *The Dark Knight,* it might be apt to look further to the east than Rome or Athens. By understanding that to protect the Gotham City he loves that he must deny himself a normal life, has Batman reached a deeper understanding of a hero's mission? Is he a kind of bodhisattva who has achieved enlightenment but denies himself nirvana in order to prepare the way for others? Is Gotham City his "burning house"?

Another notion to explore in this film is the importance of the villain to the hero—Holmes and Moriarty, Ali and Frazier, Tom and Jerry. As Batman strives for order, the Joker strives for chaos. In the interrogation room scene, when the Joker says, "You. Complete. Me," it underlines the obsession that defines them both. In fact, there is a whole line of analysis in Batman commentary about the Joker actually having a thing for Batman, which is why he never kills Batman but only ensnares him in elaborate traps. Given that this is Heath Ledger's defining and probable posthumous Oscar-winning role, you can insert your own "Brokeback Gotham" slash fiction here.

To reintroduce the notion of science to science fiction, a theme that could have played out to greater effect was the conflict between Bruce Wayne and Lucius Fox over WayneTech having turned every cell phone into a surveillance device. Not only does this parallel the "Brother Eye" storyline featuring Batman in the DC Comics universe, but it tracks the ongoing debate between homeland security and personal liberty. And you only thought your new iPhone just held more songs.…

Meanwhile, back at the hospital, one of the shift nurses tried to take the comics out of my night stand, saying they were no good for me. Dad put a stop to that. Later, I saw too much of myself in another kid named Ender, and I still get choked up watching *Little Man Tate.*

And I write movie reviews.

Cloverfield [film]

Steven D. Berman

Cloverfield. Dir. Reeves. Perf. Michael Stahl-David, Odette Yustman, T. J. Miller, and Lizzy Caplan. Bad Robot, 2008. $29.99.

Released on January 18, 2008, *Cloverfield,* an engaging science fiction film, has been surrounded with some accusations that the filmmaker used gimmicks and exploited the terrorist attack of September 11, 2001, to create a hit. Indeed, Manohla Dargis, a reviewer from the *New York Times,* asserts that the references to 9/11 are hollow and the movie is devoid of intelligence. Similarly, writing for the *Magazine of Science Fiction and Fantasy,* Lucius Shepard presents a scathing review and has this to say about the filmmaker's references to the 9/11 attacks: "I wondered if Abrams actually believes the American public has a need to find entertainment value in the agony of the thousands who suffered in 9/11, or if he understands that this is merely another means of desensitizing us. Was it his notion that the next time we confront a terrorist attack, we'll think of his movie and feel safe?"

These two statements don't attack the film's entertainment value so much as they attack its artistic value. Certainly, the filmmakers did not want to diminish in any way the suffering of those who experienced 9/11. Indeed, Abrams was in Japan when the idea for the film first occurred to him: "Abrams hatched [the idea] with his son upon visiting a Tokyo toy store and seeing a shelf full of Godzilla dolls" (Chaw). Intentional or not, the Godzilla films from Japan during the 1950s certainly helped the viewers release anxiety about the atomic bomb, and those films, as silly as some of them are, reminded the world of the destructive power and emotional devastation of atomic warfare. Similarly, the references to 9/11 in *Cloverfield* seem to provide a poignant reminder of those who suffered that day while fulfilling a need—catharsis if you will—of allowing the viewer to release whatever pent-up anxiety about terrorism that he or she may have developed over the past eight years. Certainly, the politics of fear waged by the Bush administration after the attack may have increased our anxiety tenfold. We need films to do this—to help us release or purge emotions (not just fear and pity, as Aristotle asserts for tragedy in his *Poetics*), but for the visceral emotion that each individual carries right now while trying to live an everyday life within the context of the present sociopolitical situation.

Shepard's accusation that the film is "merely another means of desensitizing us" is trumped up. Just watching the news from Iraq over the past few years (or just watching the television news since the Vietnam war) has already desensitized us, and one more film is certainly not going to make a difference. Not only does the film provide a basic cathartic need for the film-going audience, it also places itself within the contextual framework of science fiction. For example, the film makes reference to the scene in H. G. Wells's *War of the Worlds* where refugees from the Martian invaders come to a ferry. This ferry is eventually attacked on the water by the Martians. In *Cloverfield,* a similar scene takes place at the Brooklyn Bridge. Realizing that the monster is in Manhattan, Rob Hawkins (Michael Stahl-David) decides to escape Ground Zero by taking his friends over the Brooklyn Bridge. While on the Bridge, Rob and his friends witness the monster's tail strike it, and they retreat. However, Rob's brother and many others are killed. Also, while on the bridge, Rob talks to his girlfriend Beth (Odette Yustman) on his cell phone, and he finds out that she is trapped. Compelled perhaps by the death of his brother, Rob decides to do the noble thing

rather than wallow in self-pity. He decides to go uptown in order to save his girlfriend.

When teaching *Cloverfield,* an instructor may compare it to other scenes from science fiction literature and film. As noted earlier, it can certainly be compared to the Japanese Godzilla films. In both instances, the films are serving a cultural need by allowing the audience to release pent-up anxiety and fear after a cataclysmic event. Simply watching either monster destroy its respective city helps the viewers to channel this anxious energy. In the long run, this cathartic exercise heals the culture as a whole, and it reveals the importance of art. Through catharsis, art assures cultural survival by helping individuals to release pent-up emotion—whether the viewer is crying for the characters in a tragedy like *Million Dollar Baby,* laughing during a Woody Allen comedy, or releasing anxiety during a horror film.

Another interesting teaching device would be to compare clips from the film that allude to the 9/11 attacks to news clips of the attacks. It may be difficult to come up with the news clips, but the similarities of actual 9/11 footage to at least two clips from the film evoke the images that most Americans saw on TV on 9/11. The first clip shows a deserted cityscape with numerous individual sheets of paper floating in the air. This is a poignant image that most viewers of the film would remember. These floating sheets of paper will evoke genuine emotions from 9/11 and deepen the connection between the viewer and the film. Another clip that alludes to 9/11 is presented when Rob has journeyed to uptown Manhattan to find his girlfriend. Beth is trapped in her father's apartment, and upon first seeing the building, the viewer finds that one building has been knocked over and is leaning on another building. This fallen building will remind viewers of the fallen buildings of the World Trade Center and evokes the emotions that viewers would have felt on 9/11.

Much of what happens in *Cloverfield* reiterates how people would respond to a terrorist attack, especially the twenty-somethings who happen to be the central characters of the film. The intent of the film, however, is not to ridicule the young people for their actions but to ennoble them. The opening scene presents a going-away party for Rob. If the monster is a metaphor for terrorism, then this party is a metaphor for the everyday occurrences of young people. After the catastrophic event occurs, the young people respond; people of today's young generation would use their cell phones to take pictures of the Statue of Liberty's head if it were thrown several miles from its location. Similarly, when Michael tells his mother on the cell phone that his brother was killed on the Brooklyn Bridge, we don't see her response. This omission may be more terrifying to watch than the monster. The monster is eventually revealed, but Michael's mother is not, perhaps an effort by the filmmaker to respect the privacy of those whose family members were killed during 9/11. Moreover, the impetus to document what is happening with a camera, as Hud (T. J. Miller) does in the film, would also be natural for the young generation in spite of the danger.

The camera also reveals both Rob's relationship with Beth and the alien's landing. Hud unknowingly taped these events over a preexisting recording that Rob had made of himself going to Coney Island with Beth. It captures their growing relationship, but because Rob was about to get a job in Japan, he hadn't contacted her again. Bits and pieces of this recording are embedded within the recording of the monster's attack, which occurred about a month later. Sergeant Pryce (Billy Brown) understands the young people. He sees the value of this quest, and he allows the young people to search for Beth while providing information about how they can find safety after they find her. In the last scene on the beach at Coney Island, the viewer can see, behind Beth, a downward streak and splash that is the alien's landing. Now in the hands of the government, this tape made by both Hud and Rob has valuable information about the alien and its landing. And questions arise: Why did the alien wait a month to attack? Did it incubate for that time before it hatched? Will there be more attacks (a sequel?).

Cloverfield has something unique to say not only about terrorism and its impact but also about how our young people will handle it in the future. The film has its weak points: the dialogue is often vapid, and some of the scenes in the film are unnecessary (did they really need to include the parasites chasing the young people through a dark subway tunnel?). Overall, *Cloverfield* is a film about young people dealing with the world they will be inheriting. The film insists that young people will struggle to survive, will seek love in the midst of disaster, and will document the truth technologically to maintain awareness of those who live in the future.

Works Cited

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Shepard, Lucius. "A Tale of Two Turkeys (Maybe Three)." *Magazine of Science Fiction and Fantasy* 114.6 (June 2008): 118–24.
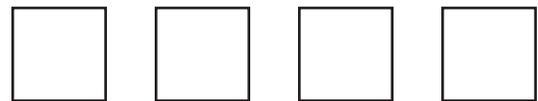
News

Calls for Papers

Compiled by Jennifer Gunnels

Call for Papers—book

Title: Open Court Pop Culture and Philosophy series

Topic: Dune and Philosophy—Volume on Frank Herbert's Dune series (*Dune, Dune Messiah, Children of Dune, God-Emperor of Dune, Heretics of Dune,* and *Chapterhouse Dune*) or the movies based on the books. Any philosophical perspective is welcomed. Particular areas of interest include environmental philosophy and ethics, philosophy of technology, political philosophy, philosophy of religion, and philosophical anthropology, but we strongly encourage you to be creative, and welcome submissions from less obvious areas. Accepted proposals will bring philosophical concepts, arguments, and/or sensibilities to

bear on issues or ideas latent in, or raised by, the Dune series.
Due date: December 15, 2008. Abstracts of 400–800 words.
Contact: Jeffery Nicholas (jefferynicholas AT gmail.com)
URL: http://jefferynicholas.googlepages.com/welcome; http://nicholasphilosophy.blogspot.com/

Call for Papers—journal

Title: *Science Fiction Film and Television*
Topic: *Science Fiction Film and Television* is a biannual, peer-reviewed journal. It encourages dialogue among the scholarly and intellectual communities of film studies, sf studies and television studies. We invite submissions on all areas of sf film and television, from. We encourage papers which consider neglected texts, propose innovative ways of looking at canonical texts, or explore the tensions and synergies that emerge from the interaction of genre and medium.
   Submission guidelines: Articles should be 6,000–8,000 words (MLA format) and include a 100-word abstract. Electronic submission in MS Word is preferred.
Contact: Mark Bould (mark.bould AT uwe.ac.uk) or Sherryl Vint (sherryl.vint AT gmail.com)

Call for Papers—journal

Title: *Transformative Works and Cultures*, Vol. 4 (Spring 2010)
Topic: Special Issue: *Supernatural—Transformative Works and Cultures* (TWC) invites submissions for a special issue on the CW television series Supernatural. We are interested in essays concerning every aspect of the show, but especially in studies of *Supernatural* fandom and fan culture. Potential topics include, but are not limited to, textual and cultural analyses of the series and of the fandom (including real person fan fiction), studies of the series' transmedia properties such as the Rising Son comics and the official Web site's Hunter's Blog, and studies of the relationship between the show's producers and actors and the online fandom.
Due date: May 1, 2009. TWC accepts rolling electronic submissions of full essays through its Web site.
Contact: Catherine Tosenberger (ctosen AT gmail.com)
URL: http://journal.transformativeworks.org/

Call for Papers—journal

Title: *Electronic Literature Collection*, Vol. 2
   Topic: *The Electronic Literature Collection* is a biannual publication of current and older electronic literature in a form suitable for individual, public library, and classroom use. We invite the submission of literary works that take advantage of the capabilities and contexts provided by the computer.
Due date: June 1–September 30, 2008. Up to three works per author will be considered;
   previously published works will be considered. Works submitted should function on both Macintosh OS X (10.5) and Windows Vista.
Contact: Helen DeVinney (hdevinney AT gmail.com)
   URL: http://collection.eliterature.org

Call for Papers—journal

Title: *Utopian Studies*
   Topic: Special Issue: Law and Utopias—papers on any aspect

of law and utopia. Law is a utopian expression, an attempt to shape a particular vision of society. Such visions enact conflicts between and among competing views of rights, duties, punishment, redemption, distribution, and nearly every other aspect of human life. Zoning laws describe someone's desired organization of space and industry. Constitutions write into being a normative alternative to the society that exists before the constitution takes effect. Positive law presents a normatively different belief system from natural law, carrying implications for societal organization.
Due date: complete drafts by May 31, 2009
Contact: Peter Sands (sands AT uwm.edu)
   URL: http://www.utoronto.ca/utopia/journal/guidelines.html

Call for Papers—conference

Title: 2008 Southwest/Texas Popular Culture/American Culture Association
Conference date: February 24–28, 2009
Site: Hyatt Regency Albuquerque, Albuquerque, NM
Topic: Breaking Borders: Indigenous Peoples Across the Divide—Paper proposals are now being accepted for a panel dedicated to issues of physical borders, from a Hemispheric and Indigenous perspective. Proposals should engage border policies and cultures of the Americas and Canada and lend critical analyses to the concept of Nationalism concerning both Indigenous and non-Native perspectives.
Due date: December 15, 2008. Abstracts of 250 words. Inquiries welcome.
Contact: L. Rain Cranford-Gomez (lcranford-gomez AT connellyhs.org, or ohoyocreole AT gmail.com)
URL: http://www.h-net.org/~swpca/, http://www.swtexaspca.org/

Call for Papers—conference

Title: 2008 Southwest/Texas Popular Culture/American Culture Association
Conference date: February 24–28, 2009
Site: Hyatt Regency Albuquerque, Albuquerque, NM
Topic: Video Game Studies Computer Culture Area—The Computer Culture Area of the SW/TX PCA/ACA welcomes paper, panel, and other proposals in video game studies. Possible topics include (but are not limited to): alternative reality games, Haptics and interface studies, Localization, Luddology and other theories of play, Machinima, MOGs, MMOGs, and other forms of online/networked gaming, narratology, representations of space and place, the rhetoric of games and game systems, technological, aesthetic, economic, and ideological convergence.
Due date: December 1, 2008. For paper proposals: 250-word abstract embedded in the body of an e-mail. Include contact information and a biographical note about your connection to the topic. For panel and other proposals, feel free to query first.
Contact: Judd Ruggill (jruggill AT asu.edu)
URL: http://swtxpca.org

Call for Papers—roundtable

Title: 2008 Southwest/Texas Popular Culture/American Culture Association
Conference date: February 24–28, 2009

Site: Hyatt Regency Albuquerque, Albuquerque, NM

Topic: Comics, Graphic Novels, Popular Culture—Any aspect of comics, and graphic novels in popular culture will be considered. In addition to our regular comics- and popular culture–related panels, we will have a roundtable discussion looking at the term *graphic novel*. We will address the question, what exactly is a graphic novel? Some scholars dislike the term. Is there another term that would work better than graphic novel, or are we stuck with it as a blanket term for all comic/sequential art related stories in book form? The area chair seeks scholars who are willing to debate this point openly and honestly.

Due date: November 15, 2008. Send title and abstract.

Contact: Rob Weiner (Rweiner5 AT sbcglobal.net)
    URL: http://www.h-net.org/~swpca/index.html

Call for Papers—conference

Title: Media in Transition 6: Stone and Papyrus, Storage and Transmission
    Conference date: April 24–26, 2009
    Site: Massachusetts Institute of Technology
    Topic: In his seminal essay "The Bias of Communication," Harold Innis distinguishes between time-based and space-based media. Time-based media such as stone or clay, Innis agues, can be seen as durable, while space-based media such as paper or papyrus can be understood as portable, more fragile than stone but more powerful because capable of transmission, diffusion, connections across space. Our current era of prolonged and profound transition is surely as media-driven as the historical cultures Innis describes. Potential topics include: the digital archive, the future of libraries and museums, the past and future of the book, social networks, mapping media flows, new forms of storytelling and expression, virtual worlds and digital tourism
    Due date: January 9, 2009. Abstracts of no more than 500 words. Send as attachments in Word format. Please include a biographical statement of no more than 100 words.
    Contact: Brad Seawell (seawell AT mit.edu)
    URL: http://web.mit.edu/comm-forum/mit6

Call for Papers—conference

Title: 2009 Eaton Science Fiction Conference
    Conference date: April 30–May 3, 2009
Topic: Extraordinary Voyages: Jules Verne and Beyond—Extraordinary voyages have shaped world literature since the Biblical Flood and The Odyssey, but no single writer has done more than Jules Verne. The conference will examine the traditions Verne exploited, his own extraordinary work and far-ranging influence in modern fiction and culture. Possible topic include but are not limited to: What is the place of the extraordinary voyage within the complex of genres that makes up early or proto–science fiction: the utopia, the scientific romance, the hollow-earth tale, the Robinsonade, etc.? How has the extraordinary voyage been linked to discourses of travel and tourism, to scientific and technological revolutions, to the history of European colonialism and the rise of industrial militarism? How do twentieth-century writers (such as the so-called steampunks) rework legacies of Verne and other

nineteenth-century SF, whether earnestly or satirically, as paradigm or as pastiche?

Due date: December 15, 2008. Abstracts of 300–500 words.

Contact: Melissa Conway (mconway AT ucr.edu)

Call for Papers—conference

Title: Place and Space in Children's Literature

Conference date: March 27–28, 2009

Site: University of Oxford, Keble College, Oxford

Topic: The University of Oxford Children's Literature Reading Group invites papers on the themes of place and space in children's literature. The locales of children's and young adult literature often aid in defining the child's relationship to his or her world and delineating the terms and possibilities of youth. More abstract concepts of proximity, size, positioning, and enclosure likewise contribute to the construction of the child and the world in which s/he exists. We solicits a wide range of submissions that explore how metaphorical and physical space create landscapes of power, knowledge, and identity in texts aimed at youth audiences.

Due date: December 1, 2008. 250-word abstracts.
    Contact: University of Oxford Children's Literature Reading Group (oxchildrenslit AT gmail.com)

Call for Papers—conference

Title: PCA/ACA 2009 National Conference

Conference date: April 8–11

Site: New Orleans Marriott, New Orleans, Louisiana

Topic: Fan Culture and Theory—Proposals for panels and individual papers are now being accepted for all aspects of fan culture and theory including, but not limited to, the following areas: fan fiction, fan/creator interaction, fan communities, fan media production—icons, fanvids, fan art and filk, fans as critics.

Due date: November 30, 2008. Abstracts of 100–250 words with relevant a/v requests.
    Contact: Katherine Larsen (klarsen AT gwu.edu)

Call for Papers—convention

Title: World Science Fiction Convention

Conference dates: August 6–10, 2009

Site: Palais des congrès de Montréal, Montréal, Québec, Canada

Topic: Anticipations in Science Fiction—The World Science Fiction Society invites papers for the academic track of the 2009 World Science Fiction Convention (Worldcon). *Anticipation* is also a commonly used French term for science fiction literature and has bilingual echoes. The academic track welcomes papers on this theme and any other topic related to science fiction. We are especially interested in works on our guests of honor: Neil Gaiman, Elisabeth Vonarburg, and David Hartwell

Due date: January 15, 2009. Abstracts of 300 words (including a/v needs) as a Rich Text Format file attachment.

Contact: Christine Mains (cemains AT shaw.ca) or Graham J. Murphy (grahammurphy AT trentu.ca)

URL: http://www.anticipationsf.ca/

Call for Papers—conference

Title: Diana Wynne Jones: A conference

Conference date: July 3–5, 2009

Site: University of the West of England, Bristol

Topic: On any and all aspects of the writing of Diana Wynne Jones, on her influence and influences. Papers on fan activity and scholarship, TV and film adaptations also welcome.

Due date: January 31, 2009

Contact: Charles Hannibal (charles.hannibal AT gmail.com)

Call for Papers—conference

Conference date: April 3–4, 2009

Site: Department of English University of Alabama in Huntsville

Topic: In Other Worlds: Estrangement, Cognition, and the SF Imagination—This conference will be devoted to exploring Darko Suvin's claim that the estranging function of science fiction allows us to "redescribe the known world and open up new possibilities of intervening into it." We welcome paper and panel proposals from a variety of disciplinary perspectives on topics.

Due date: January 1, 2009. 250-word abstract, along with institutional affiliation.

Contact: Eric D. Smith (Eric.Smith AT uah.edu)

Call for Papers—conference

Title: 4th Annual Conference of the British Society for Literature and Science

Conference date: March 27–29, 2009

Site: University of Reading

Topic: The society invites proposals addressing any aspect of the interaction between literature and science; collaborative panels of two or three papers; and papers or panels on the teaching of literature and science. We welcome work on literature from all periods and countries, and on all aspects of science, including medicine and technology.

Due date: December 1, 2008. E-mail proposals of up to 400 words with a 100-word biographical note with abstracts in the body of messages; do not use attachments.

Contact: John Holmes (j.r.holmes AT reading.ac.uk)

Call for Papers—conference

Title: Music and the Moving Image IV Conference

Conference date: May 29–31, 2009

Site: New York University Steinhardt, New York City, New York

Topic: The fourth annual conference, Music and the Moving Image, encourages that explore the relationship between music and the entire universe of moving images (film, television, iPod, computer, video games, and interactive performances).

Due date: December 12, 2008. Abstracts or synopses of papers (250 words).

Contact: Ron Sadoff (ron.sadoff AT nyu.edu)

URL: http://steinhardt.nyu.edu/music/scoring/conference/

Call for Papers—conference

Title: 2009 Southwest/Texas Popular Culture/American Culture Association

Conference date: February 24–28, 2009

Site: Hyatt Regency Albuquerque, Albuquerque, NM

Topic: "Indigenous 'Deep' Space: Indigenous Absence and Presence in Sci-Fi and Comics"—Paper proposals are now being accepted for a panel dedicated to the absence and presence of Indigenous characters and cultures in popular sci-fi genres. From *Star Trek Voyager*'s Chakotay to the *X-Men*'s Danielle Moonstar, the sci-fi and comic genres have both capitalized and mined the Indigenous landscape for characters and culture. This panel asks presenters to examine and dialogue the presentation of Indigenous characters and culture in both their presence and absence of their actuality in the popular genres of sci-fi and comics.

Due date: December 15, 2008. 250-word abstracts.

Contact: L. Rain Cranford-Gomez (lcranford-gomez AT connellyhs.org) or

(ohoyocreole AT gmail.com)

URL: http://www.h-net.org/~swpca/, http://www.swtexaspca.org/

Call for Papers—conference

Title: Fourth Australian Conference on Utopia, Dystopia and Science Fiction

Conference date: August 30–September 1, 2010

Site: Monash Conference Center, Melbourne, Australia

Topic: Changing the Climate: Utopia, Dystopia, and Catastrophe—This conference will directly address the questions of dystopia and catastrophe with special reference to a problem that increasingly haunts our imaginings of the future, that of actual or possible environmental catastrophe. The conference invites papers from scholars, writers and others interested in the interplay between ecology and ecocriticism, utopia, dystopia and science fiction.

Contact: (Utopias AT arts.monash.edu.au)

URL: http://www.arts.monash.edu.au/lcl/conferences/utopias4/index.php

Call for Papers—conference

Title: A World of Popular Entertainments

Conference date: June 10–11, 2009

Site: University of Newcastle, New South Wales, Australia

Topic: The title of the conference embraces the "globality" of popular entertainments. Yet the meaning and definition of both "popular" and "entertainment" remain widely contested as well as retaining pejorative connotations that are at odds with their transnational significance. We would welcome participants from a range of complementary disciplines: theatre and performance studies, health, history, psychology, fine art and music as well as performing arts curators and archivists to engage in the analysis as well as the celebration of popular entertainments. All abstracts of papers accepted for the conference will be published in hard copy. Participants will be invited to submit their papers for publication in a peer-reviewed e-journal devoted to popular entertainments that will be launched in 2009.

Contact: Gillian Arrighi (Gillian.Arrighi AT newcastle.edu.au), Victor Emeljanow (Victor.Emeljanow AT newcastle.edu.au), Rosalind Halton (R.Halton AT newcastle.edu.au)

Due date: January 30, 2009. Abstracts.

Call for Papers—conference

Title: Ninth Annual EGSA Conference

Conference date: January 30, 2009

Site: University of North Carolina at Charlotte

Topic: The Machine in the Garden 2.0—The 9th Annual EGSA Conference aims to investigate society's new digital face and its ever-expanding presence within the field of English. The conference's plenary speaker will be Dr. N. Katherine Hayles, a professor of literature at Duke University and noted scholar in the postmodern field, whose work concerns the relationship between science, literature, and technology. This conference welcomes submissions from all areas of English studies, including literature, linguistics, rhetoric and composition, technical writing, and creative writing. Though we encourage a broad interpretation of our chosen theme, we ask the following questions to begin—but not to exhaust—the investigation of the machine in the garden, version 2.0. How is literary criticism changing as a result of our society's dependence upon technology? Has the "Dystopia" foreshadowed in some literary texts arrived today as a result of the technology age? How has critical analysis investigated these shifts in society across any historical period?

Contact: egsa AT uncc.edu

Due date: December 15, 2008. Abstract or synopsis of approximately 300 words in body of e-mail or as Word attachment. with "EGSA Conference" as the subject line of the e-mail URL: http://cfp.english.upenn.edu/archive/General/0580.html

Call for Papers—conference

Title: Shifting Terrains: Inequalities in the 21st Century

Conference date: April 30–May 2, 2009

Site: Texas A&M University, College Station

Topic: Race, Ethnicity, and (New) Media—The explosion of work on New Media (including the Internet, mobile devices, Web 2.0) and the juxtaposition and overlap between "old" media (radio, television, film, and mass-print media) and New Media is a rich field of cultural production and scholarly research in which scholars of race and ethnicity have not been particularly well represented. However, there are cutting edge scholars who do indeed explore various aspects of race/ethnicity and (New) Media (including audience/fan studies, representations of racial and ethnic identities in a variety of media, identity-focused online communities, etc.).

Contact: Sarah Gaston (gatson AT tamu.edu) or RESI (Race and Ethnic Studies Institute) (resi AT tamu.edu)

Due date: December 31, 2008, decision by March 15, 2009. 500-word abstracts or full papers of no more than 8,000 words (including notes and references).

URL: http://resi.tamu.edu/symposium.php

Call for Applications: R. D. Mullen Fellowship

Science Fiction Studies announces the R.D. Mullen Fellowship supporting research in the J. Lloyd Eaton Collection of Science Fiction, Fantasy, Horror, and Utopian Literature at the University of California at Riverside. Awards of up to $1,500 are available to fund research in the archive during the 2009–10 academic year. Students in good standing in graduate degree-granting programs are eligible to apply. We welcome applications from international students.

The Mullen Fellowship, named in honor of *SFS*'s founding editor, promotes archival work in the Eaton's extensive holdings, which include over 100,000 hardcover and paperback books, over 250,000 fanzines, full runs of all major pulp and digest magazines, and the manuscripts of prominent sf writers such as Gregory Benford, David Brin, and Anne McCaffrey. Other noteworthy parts of the collection are: 500 shooting scripts of science fiction films; 3,500 volumes of proto-SF "boy's books" of the Tom Swift variety; works of SF in numerous foreign languages, including Chinese, Czech, French, German, Hebrew, Japanese, Polish, Portuguese, Romanian, Russian, and Spanish; a large collection of taped fan conventions and taped interviews with American, British, and French writers; reference materials on topics such as applied science, magic, witchcraft, UFOs, and *Star Trek*; an extensive collection of anime and manga; and the largest holdings of critical materials on science fiction and fantasy in the United States. Further information about the Eaton Collection can be found online (http://eaton-collection.ucr.edu/).

Applications should include a cover letter explaining the candidate's academic experience and preparation, a CV, a 2–3-page proposal outlining an agenda for research in the Eaton archive, a prospective budget detailing expenses, and two letters of recommendation from individuals familiar with the candidate's academic work. Applications should be mailed to: Professor Rob Latham, Department of English, UC-Riverside, Riverside, CA 92521-0323.

The deadline for submission is January 31, 2009. Applications will be reviewed by a committee of sf scholars, and successful applicants will be notified by March 1, 2009. Any questions should be addressed to Rob Latham (rob.latham AT ucr.edu).

SFRA Member Directory Updates

Changes in current directory

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SFRA 2009: June 11-14   Atlanta, Georgia

Engineering the Future &
Southern-Fried Science Fiction

Guest of Honor: Michael Bishop

Guest Authors: F. Brett Cox, Andy Duncan, Paul Di Filippo, Kathleen Ann Goonan, and Jack McDevitt

The 2009 conference's two themes and its selection of guest authors are inspired by the conference's location and its co-sponsorship by Georgia Tech's School of Literature, Communication, and Culture. Atlanta, a storied locale in American history, is also in many ways an international city of the future, home to 21st century information, entertainment, technological and military industried, peopled with 21st century demographics, and prone to 21st century situations.

How is the future engineered in science fiction and how has science fiction already engineered our present? The American south has long been well known for its gothic fiction, but it has increasingly figured in works of science fiction and fantasy. so it is equally fitting to ask, how has the South been an inspiration of science fiction and fantasy and what will its global future in speculative arts and letters be?

The deadline for proposals is April 1, 2009 at midnight EST. Please submit paper and panel proposals by e-mail to sfra2009 AT gmail.com. Include all text of the proposal in the body of the e-mail (not as an attachment. Please be sure to include full contact information for all panel members and to make all AV requests within each proposal.

www.sfra2009.com

Science Fiction Research Association

www.sfra.org

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

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

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SFRA Standard Membership Benefits

SFRA Review

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

SFRA Annual Directory

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

SFRA Listserv

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

Extrapolation

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

Science Fiction Studies

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

SFRA Optional Membership Benefits

(Discounted subscription rates for members)

Foundation

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

The New York Review of Science Fiction

Twelve issues per year. Reviews and features. Add to dues: $28 domestic; $30 domestic institutional; $34 Canada; $40 UK and Europe; $42 Pacific and Australia.

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