

# 322

## Fall 2017

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# SFRA Review

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## EDITORS' MESSAGE

**What is to be Done**

Chris Pak

WELCOME, all, to another issue of the *SFRA Review*. It has been a busy summer with several changes to the organisation's bylaws having been voted upon and plans already underway for SFRA 2018. Keren Omry outlines our progress with these proposed changes in her column, while an announcement for our upcoming conference next year has already been circulated via our usual channels. Gerry Canavan offers some thoughts about the theme and its fit with the conference locale in his column. Keep an eye on forthcoming issues of the *Review* for more details about both developments.

This issue of the *Review* features Tom Moylan's acceptance speech for this year's Pilgrim Award, which had been delayed till this issue. In it he describes the journey that led him to engage with utopia and science fiction, providing an account of the political and intellectual developments that have shaped his scholarship. It is a fascinating and inspiring read that reminds us of the importance of the work that we all do.

We also have a conference report by Amy Butt for the event "Organic Systems: Environments, Bodies and Cultures in Science Fiction." This symposium was organised by the London Science Fiction Research Community, one of the organisers of whom was our Student Paper award winner for this year, Francis Gene-Rowe. I was honoured to have been invited to present the keynote address for this event, which proved to be a stimulating and encouraging insight into the diversity of science-fictional engagements with the organic and environmental.

Alongside these two pieces we have, as always, our non-fiction, fiction and media reviews. I highly encourage you all to consider writing for us, whether for our reviews or announcements sections, or for our Feature 101. If you would like to discuss any ideas you may have for pieces related to your ongoing research, please do feel free to send me an email and I would be happy to open up a dialogue about your ideas.

**Restoration**

Keren Omry

HERE WE ARE, another quarter, another column. Since the last one, we've had Hugos on the mind, Halloween in the air, Harrison in the cinema, and harassment in the news. With her *The Obelisk Gate* win for Best Novel, N.K. Jemisin broke a few records while marking a shift in how the Hugo nominations and selections are conducted. Trying to stave off some of the drama of recent years that accompanied the Hugos, the so-called *E Pluribus Hugo* present a set of rules that hopefully restore the awards to their original role.

In the spirit of restoration and renovation we bring our own current exercise in democracy to an end as the polls for supporting or rejection the proposed changes to the SFRA bylaws close in the beginning of November. By the time this issue is out the results will have been tallied and a separate announcement will be made. I hope and trust our members have given the proposal some thought and cast your votes. If the proposed changes are approved, we will be looking for a new Vice President and Treasurer to be voted in by early 2018. If you think you may be interested in being a more active member of the Association by taking on either of these two critical roles in the Executive Committee please do not hesitate to contact me or any of the current officers for further information!

As you'll have heard by now, we are delighted that our next SFRA conference will take place on the campus of Marquette University, in Milwaukee, jointly organized by Gerry Canavan (Marquette University) and Peter Sands (University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee). Guided by the theme of the **Future of Labor**, we've got a great keynote lined up, some activities planned, and without question, a fantastic conference coming up. You are encouraged to look at the CFP for further details and consider sending in an abstract.

Finally, as the year comes to an end, membership renewal is around the corner. We warmly look forward to welcoming our new and renewing members!

Wishing us all a year of mutual respect and generosity, responsibility and creativity, festivity

and freedom.

VICE-PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

## **Looking Forward**

Gerry Canavan

A VERY SHORT note from me this time around, in a very busy semester: I couldn't be more pleased that the unexpected falling-through of the original venue for SFRA 2018 has resulted in the conference now being planned for my home campus, Marquette University in Milwaukee, WI, in July 2018. While the dates may be a little bit unusual—Sunday, July 1, through Wednesday, July 3—the conference itself will be terrific, centered around “The Future of Labor,” perfect for a city that gave us the famous Bay View Massacre of protestors striking for the eight-hour-workday and the longest Socialist mayoral tenure in

US history and which (like so many other places) is now facing economic disruption accelerated by the decline of manufacturing, the death of unions, and the rise of machine learning, artificial intelligence, and autonomous robots. We'll have a CFP, guest speaker announcements, and logistical details like travel and lodging soon but in the meantime if you have any questions which answered could help bring you to Marquette, please don't hesitate to contact me or the other local co-organizer Pete Sands (UWM). We're also working on excursions and perks like a visit to the amazing Tolkien manuscript collection on Marquette's campus and a guest lecture from the curator and archivist, Marquette's William Fliss.

Milwaukee is beautiful in the summer and I'm looking forward to seeing you all here.

As always, keep sending me your CFPs and announcements (including book announcements) so I can get them on Facebook and Twitter. I'm also always open to other ideas that can help our organization grow more prominent; send me an email and let's talk about it.

## **Dissolving the Boundaries in SF: A Report on the “Organic Systems: Environments, Bodies and Cultures in Science Fiction” LSFRC symposium**

Amy Butt

IN HER INTRODUCTION to the concluding round table of the ‘Organic Systems: Environments, Bodies and Cultures in Science Fiction’ symposium organized by The London Science Fiction Research Community (LSFRC), Caroline Edwards drew together the day of discussions with a reflection on the nature of boundaries. As described by Edwards, the panels and papers had confronted the complex problem of defining a ‘system’ and had challenged the implicit establishment of limits or edges which this term conveys. Rather than reinforce a systemic perspective, the papers expanded on interdependencies and ambiguities to challenge historically or culturally delineated boundaries of the human. In this way, they exposed and explored the social construct of distinctions between the human and the environment, the human and the animal, and the human and the machine.

The one-day symposium was organized by members of LSFRC: Aren Roukema, Francis Gene-Rowe and Rhodri Davies; and was held at Birkbeck University of London with support from Royal Holloway on the 16th of September 2017. It brought together a diverse and cross-disciplinary group of writers, scholars and practitioners with a shared interest in the concept of the system as depicted in or understood through Science Fiction (SF).

The keynote which opened the symposium, “Old Genotypes in New Bodies: Intimations of Posthumanity in Science Fiction” by Chris Pak, provided a sweeping trans-historical approach to depictions of intersections between bodies, culture and the digital in SF. Ranging from foundational SF texts like *Frankenstein* through to contemporary narratives, Pak provided a broad overview of shifting positions towards human/environmental

interactions. He established two primary attitudes towards the human inhabitation of environmental others: the opposing desires of pantropy and terraforming. By tracing depictions of the pantropic, Pak identified texts which challenge fixed notions of human identity and exceptionalism. This generous laying out of a common ground provided the rest of the symposium with a shared point of reference and an orientation towards the future, both the future these fictions depicted, and the lived future that they could insightfully inform.

In the panel on “Posthuman Environments”, Hallvard Haug extended this consideration of the pantropic in “Environment Zero: Cyborgs and the Space Travel Imaginary.” Haug provided a distinction between definitions of the posthuman, the cyborg, and the transhuman, to explore the repercussions of the blurring of human and machine on the boundary between human and environment. Haug argued that the cyborg as space traveler would prioritise the need to sustain the fragile body, effectively internalizing a replacement for an entire planetary environment, resulting in a closed support system which creates an impenetrable boundary between the individual and the hostile void. Jim Clarke’s paper, “Bodies, Bardos and Buddhist Transhumanism in SF,” examined an alternative trajectory for the transhuman, one based on incremental improvement of the human condition, an opening of awareness rather than a spatial closure. Clarke examined the portrayal and influence of Buddhist precepts on SF texts to consider the overlap between the scientific and spiritual depictions of revelatory knowledge and transcendence. Susan Gray’s paper on “Augmented Reality as Disrupt: Social and Emotional Networks” looked at the implication of this blurring of physical and digital space in the current built environment. Gray argued that SF offers a site for critique of the ethics of technology already present in our lives, asking how these disruptions of our lived-space in real-time might impact privacy, or more fundamentally change the perception of the self.

These boundaries of the self, and the resultant nature of self-identity in a group, was the subject of the panel “Et in Arcadia I Go: Critical Utopias” where Sarah Lohmann’s paper “Thin in Meaningful We’s: Individual and Collective Identity in Utopian Literature of the 20th Century” provided an overview of the role of the self within imagined utopian communities. Lohmann charted two

divergent approaches to collective and self-identity: one which sees the creation of utopian society from the eugenic improvement of the self, while the other sees the creation of a utopian community through the sacrifice of self to the collective in a dissolution of individuality. Eden Davis' paper, "The Ghost of Cybernetics in Thomas Pynchon's *Mason and Dixon* and John Barth's *The Sot-Weed Factor*", developed this discussion of collective cultural identity by considering the colonial and biological frontiers presented in these novels.

This notion of frontier and the conceptual boundary established between the human and the environment in terms of the landscapes of human inhabitation and occupation was discussed across several subsequent panels. In the panel "Nature in the Anthropocene" Andrew M. Butler's paper, "Taming Death: The Construction of Human/ Alien Nature in *Avatar*", challenged the notion of landscape as terra-nullius and the implicit sovereignty of the human over both animal and landscape. While Amy Cutler's paper, "In Space, No One Can Hear the Forest Scream: Reinventing Sylvan Survival", explored the conflicts and contradictions within one apparently defined landscape typology, that of the Forest. Cutler established the site of the Forest as one of entangled ideas and transformative qualities, positing that as synecdoche for the world without us, it is both an archive of a lost sylvan past and an instrument of future thinking.

Moving from the absence of humanity to its resolute presence, the architectural and spatial boundaries of these environmental distinctions were the subject of the panel "The Architecture of Tomorrow". In "The *Chthonopolis*: Architecture 'As' Science Fiction" Nic Clear argued for the consideration of utopian architectural designs as sites of cognitive estrangement through a presentation of his design work *Chthonopolis*. David Ashford explored the public perception of such architectural visions in "Vote Dalek! The Insidious Appeal of the Brutalist Dystopia". Ashford read across from *Dr Who* to provide a critical perspective on common interpretations of Brutalist architecture, using the Daleks as a way to discuss and confront fears of collectivization and technological mastery. In my own paper, "The Built Environment: SF and the Construction of Enclosure", I looked at a similarly dominant conception of architectural space in the trope of the domed city. I used this site to critique the construction of isolated

gated communities in current urban design, where the tangible enclosure of the dome wall provides the reader with an opportunity to confront the conceptual failures of such fragmented urban realms and resist their insidious proliferation.

While I was sadly unable to attend the panels on "Liminal Spaces", "Eco-Critical Speculations" or "Palimpsestic Landscapes", across these panels the instrumentality of human definitions of systems were continually brought into focus, and the cultural, legislative, linguistic or physical boundaries these established were exposed as slippery and subjective.

Paul Fisher Davies' paper "Like a Kite Bigger than the Suburb: On the Work of Simon Stålenhag" looked at the experiential impact of works which present an absence of clear boundary conditions in a bricolage representation of the world. Davies examined the demands made on the reader and RPG player attempting to reconcile and respond to a place assembled from fragments of nature and human construction. Moving from the scale of the individual to the scale of the city, Chris Hussey in "More Than A City and A City: Exploring the Intersections and Interactions of Place in China Miéville's *Un Lun Dun* and *The City & The City*" unpacked the potential of liminal space for considering the nature of boundaries within the urban, and the subsequent definitions and delineations of place. While Kerry Dodd's "In the Zone: Demarcated Places and the Archaeology of Alien Detritus" argued that, as well as being sites of archaeological adventure, zone narratives facilitate a reappraisal of the way in which humanity interprets and experiences space.

The ideological aspect of such distinctions of place was discussed by Richard Johnston in "Plough the Topsoil Until It Blows to the Ocean: Philip K. Dick and The American West." Johnston looked at Dick's construction of a composite landscape to uncover how this paradoxical topography provides a site to consider the ideological construction of Western identity and, by extension, that of global capitalism. Moving beyond these conceptual frameworks, Michelle Clarke's "Ecology, Resistance, Scale: Ecocritical Reading in African Speculative Fiction" drew on African philosophy and speculative fictions to decentralize Western understandings of nature and explore liminal spaces which make the eco-spatial realities visible.

A focus on the visibility and utility of speculative fiction was developed by Rhys Williams' "Solarpunks

or *Sunken Poles: Visions of Alternative Energy Futures*” which explored the role of SF as part of a wider body of imaginative works which allow for new ways to consider, and therefore respond to, the need for alternative energy futures. This was expanded in Gayathri Goel’s paper “What Do We Do With It? Science Fiction’s Role in Taking Responsibility for Things” which argued that the imaginative potential SF could also function as a site for the development of moral responsibility, a space to reinvent our relationship with the junk byproducts of human consumption. In this way, these papers addressed the immediate ecological value of SF, in its ability to challenge conceptual boundaries between the human and the non-human which stand as barriers to wider ecological awareness.

The roundtable discussion which concluded the day, which featured Paul McAuley, Gwyneth Jones and Adam Roberts, and which was chaired by Caroline Edwards, developed this reflection on the value of SF. Edwards questioned the potential of SF as a site to consider ecological or climate futures, and this expanded into a broader debate regarding the role of genre fiction in addressing systemic thinking and the associated boundaries and divisions in contemporary thought. McAuley noted that the fundamental division impeding ecological thought, the human – nature dichotomy, is intellectually redundant as nothing in nature can be considered untouched by human influence. In response Jones and McAuley reflected on the reciprocity of this relationship, how human development has been directed and defined

by the cultivation of agriculture. If the conceptual separation of human from environment limits our ability to imagine responses to climate change, and our entrenched position of human superiority goes unchallenged, Roberts posited that the role of genre fiction might be to write from outside our individual subjectivity. The panel went on to debate the possible role that utopian fiction might provide as a site to step outside these existing structures of thought. They questioned whether SF, as a genre defined by situated concerns as posited by Jones, is too entrenched to develop such radical narratives, or whether it could escape from the constrained perspective of the underdog to achieve what McAuley termed a ‘literary panopticism’.

This discussion reiterated the central themes of many of the panels in its consideration of ecological concerns in genre fiction; that the boundaries which we construct around human identity that appear to separate us from our environments are already more malleable than our egos might be willing to admit, and are certainly more permeable than capitalist modes of consumption would like us to acknowledge. In addressing the complex and sprawling conceptual space of organic systems, this symposium demonstrated the vital critical role of genre fiction within these debates. It demonstrated SF’s ability to dissolve the boundaries which we use to identify ourselves, providing a unique site to explore what remains of our conceptions of environments, bodies, and culture when these neatly drawn edges are smudged and blurred.

PILGRIM AWARD

## Remarks for the Pilgrim Award

Mark Bould, Keren Omry and John Rieder

THIS YEAR'S Pilgrim Award Committee has decided to recognize the achievements of Tom Moylan. Our decision is based primarily on the contribution Tom Moylan has made to the fields of science fiction studies and utopian studies in his two influential monographs, *Demand the Impossible: Science Fiction and the Utopian Imagination*, published in 1986, and *Scraps of the Untainted Sky: Science Fiction, Utopia, Dystopia*, published in 2000. Indeed, Moylan's elaboration of the concept of the critical utopia in *Demand the Impossible* was a breakthrough not only in understanding the form and possibilities of utopian thinking in fictional form, but also in linking science fiction studies and utopian studies to one another in historical and political as well as literary terms. His later elaboration of the critical dystopia in *Scraps of the Untainted Sky* solidified the insights and expanded the scope of his earlier work, and his editorial efforts at the Ralahine Center for Utopian Studies at Limerick University have continued to encourage thinking at the intersection of literary and political practices.

## Pilgrim Award Acceptance Speech

Tom Moylan

In the shadow of bluffs  
I came back to myself,  
To the real work, to  
"What is to be done."

—Gary Snyder,  
"I Went into the Maverick Bar"<sup>1</sup>

THANK YOU SO MUCH for this profound honor. Reading the list of recipients, I'm humbled to be included in the company of my science fictional inspirations, mentors, and colleagues. As I share my comments with you today, I'll name several people who have shaped my work. Therein, I hope you will hear the deep appreciation and gratitude I have for each of them (and for many others). None of us works alone. We are all in this together.<sup>2</sup>

### The Journey

I'll begin by speaking in some detail about the journey of my early work. I'm doing this not to indulge in the nostalgia of old war stories (though the memories *are* generally positive and many of us *were* opposing the US war in Vietnam), but rather to lead in to my reflections on what lies ahead.

For me, life and work has always turned in a gyre of reading and activism, with each nimbly circling around the insistent question of what is to be done to make the world better than it is, for all of humanity and all of nature. Central to this undertaking, from my days as a kid with a book to this stubborn yet hopeful teacher, writer, and activist who stands here today, science fiction has helped to disturb *my* universe, and helped me to disturb the social universe.

Growing up in an Irish, Catholic, working class, immigrant family on the North Side of Chicago, I was surrounded by love and nurturing; however, the only books in our apartment were a fine edition of the Bible and a medical dictionary which was likely out of date. But I was eager to read. And read I did. Obediently under the eyes of the nuns, eagerly on my own. Beyond the ubiquitous comic books (where I particularly enjoyed the tales of that uber-capitalist Uncle Scrooge, the pre-World War II pilots calling themselves the Blackhawks, and *Weird Tales* and the superheroes), I made my first book purchases in the religious goods shop next to our parish church: these were lives of the saints, available in pocket-sized editions. The common narrative was that of a young person who, through their own suffering or their embrace of the suffering of others, discovers a path toward salvation, with the story ending at the moment that the protagonist steps into the realm of

<sup>2</sup> I am grateful to Kathleen Eull and Katie Moylan for their helpful comments on earlier drafts of this piece: not the least for their insights on nimbleness and intersectionality.

<sup>1</sup> Snyder, Gary. "I Went into the Maverick Bar." *Turtle Island*. New York: New Directions, 1969. p. 9.

saintly behavior. Sebastian, Francis of Assisi, Thomas More, Maria Goretti, and many others opened me to a narrative of personal change, commitment, and sacrifice. Happily and healthfully for my sake, my religious formation was counter-pointed by my discovery of the treasures of the Logan Square Public Library. There, I developed two interests: atlases and geographies; and historical fiction (especially a series which, like the saintly tales, featured the childhood of a man or woman who grew up to contribute to the achievement of the American Dream – such as Thomas Jefferson and Abraham Lincoln, but also Davy Crockett, George Washington Carver, Marie Curie, and others).

So right from the beginning, my reading fed a spatial imagination that pulled me outward to other worlds and pointed me toward a vocational aspiration to make a difference in my own. Then, at the age of ten, there was that summer afternoon in the library when I was accumulating the pile of twenty or so books which we were allowed to borrow during vacation time. I'd exhausted the atlases and historical tales, and I was happily browsing. On a shelf just above eye level, I saw the title *Red Planet* and took it down with curiosity. And so began my life in science fiction. So began that dangerous reading which the hovering nuns were cautioning against (soon they would add rock 'n roll, and sex). And so my fascination with the matrix of other worlds and other possibilities took a quantum leap through the liberating pages of sf: wherein the process of *cognitive estrangement* (and yes, Darko Suvin's formulation still matters) enabled me to cut through my mundane world with a version of Philip Pullman's "subtle knife" and to take my first steps in trying to be a disruptive but useful stranger in this familiar land.<sup>3</sup>

But, as I said, I wasn't just a reader. I devoured the city, freely exploring other neighborhoods, absorbing the wonderful museums, and, by age twelve, hanging with a fairly benign street gang, while maintaining the double consciousness of being a street kid and a good student, altar, and choir boy. In high school, shifting from nuns to Christian Brothers, my sense of Chicago and my place in the world changed utterly when those few Brothers who had a commitment to social justice introduced me to the civil rights movement of the late 1950s. Working with the Young

Christian Students and the Catholic Interracial Council and exploring civil rights issues as editor of my high school newspaper, my sense of vocation with an otherworldly telos was brought down to earth in the anger and energy of activism. From university days onward, my political work was embraided with my studies (as I dropped premed in favor of English, philosophy, and history). My civil rights activity, now affiliated with northern organizers of SNCC and with SDS, segued into opposition to the war in Vietnam. And that led to my decision as a young male to choose not to serve in the military, and to redirect that privilege of not being on the battlefield into the relatively equivalent risk of militant activism. Through college and into graduate school, my involvement in demonstrations and campaigns escalated to legal and extralegal forms of nonviolent civil disobedience and resistance. And in the later 1960s, the challenge of feminism to male privilege qualitatively redirected the radical transformation of my life.

In the conjunctural year of 1968, I experienced several *breaks*. In Alain Badiou's terms, I severed my fidelity with established US culture and politics and affiliated more fully with the movements for a just and equal society.<sup>4</sup> At Marquette University that spring (while pursuing an MA in theology after finishing an MA in English), my intellectual and political work intertwined and expanded through a series of gestalt shifts, wherein each change kaleidoscopically altered the overall pattern of my life and work.<sup>5</sup>

On one hand, this again was due to reading. Two writers especially stood out. The first was Ernst Bloch, who I discovered through his reception by political theologians such as Jürgen Moltmann and

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4 See Badiou, Alain. *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism*. trans. Ray Brassier. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003; *The Communist Hypothesis*. trans. David Macey and Steve Corcoran. London and New York: Verso, 2010.

5 While these major changes in perception and standpoint had been going on in my life for several years, they crystallized in 1968 in the great titration of movements occurring in that year. True to the feminist slogan, the personal had indeed become political and the political personal. This was not just a political change but a deeply existential one, as I say a "gestalt shift" in my entire being. It was a time when for many of us, to quote Rebecca Solnit, deep changes occurred in the "inner life of the politics of the moment, to the emotions and perceptions that underlie our political positions and engagements" (xi). See Solnit, Rebecca. *Hope in the Dark: Untold Histories, Wild Possibilities*. Edinburgh and London: Canongate, 2016.

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3 See Suvin, Darko. "On the Poetics of the Science Fiction Genre." *College English* 34.3 (December 1972): 372–383; Pullman, Philip. *The Subtle Knife*. New York: Scholastic Point, 1998.



Johannes Metz, and whose hermeneutic retrieval of the principle of hope enabled me to grasp the power of the utopian impulse.<sup>6</sup> The second was Pope Paul VI, whose encyclical, *Humanae Vitae*, bespoke an authoritarian denial of women's reproductive freedom and dignity that led me finally to sever my ties with the institutional church and its deity.<sup>7</sup>

On the other hand, it was political activity that further radicalized me. In May 1968, motivated by city-wide campaigns for desegregated open housing, Marquette students called their university administration to task for its institutional racist exclusion of students of color and its expansion into the city which displaced affordable housing in favor of student accommodation. In the closing days of the campaign, three hundred of us occupied the student union for several days, only ending when we forced a negotiated settlement with our demands (one which later was finessed and diminished by the Jesuit administration). Nevertheless, at that point, I decided it was time to leave graduate school and to settle in Milwaukee as a teacher and activist. And so, I gave up the last three years of my National Defense Education Act PhD Fellowship (relieved to be done with any complicity with the military-industrial-intellectual complex of the time) and took a job at the two-year campus of the University of Wisconsin-Waukesha, where I went on to teach for over two decades.<sup>8</sup>

Moving into the 1970s, I balanced a life of co-parenting my daughters, teaching composition and

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6 See Moltmann, Jürgen. *The Theology of Hope: On the Ground and the Implications of a Christian Eschatology*. London: SCM, 1967; Moltmann, Jürgen. "Hope and Confidence: A Conversation with Ernst Bloch." *Dialog* 7 (1968); Heinitz, Kenneth. "The Theology of Hope according to Ernst Bloch." *Dialog* 7 (1968); Cox, Harvey. "Ernst Bloch and 'The Pull of the Future.'" *New Theology* 5. eds. Martin Marty and Dean Peerman. New York: Macmillan, 1968. English translations of Bloch's own work began to be published at the end of the 1960s in the US by journals such as *Cross Currents* and *New German Critique*, and by the religious publisher, Herder and Herder. For a thoughtful overview of Bloch's contribution, see Geoghegan, Vincent. *Ernst Bloch*. London and New York: Routledge, 1996.

7 Pope Paul VI. *Humanae Vitae*. The Vatican: The Holy See, 1968.

8 Expressing and informing this break for me was the iconic image of the Black Power salute made by Tommie Smith and John Carlos at the 1968 Olympics in Mexico City. At the time and all through the years, that image has echoed the depths of my own rupture from the existing system and my commitment to changing it. It was no surprise, therefore, that I chose to use it on the cover of the Ralahine Classic Edition of *Demand the Impossible*; as it semiotically links those formative strands of my reading and activism.

literature at Waukesha, and being as politically active as possible. Along the way, I continued my sf reading, relishing works such as Pohl and Kornbluth's *The Space Merchants* and Heinlein's *The Moon is a Harsh Mistress*. A few years into my teaching, one of my students, Jean Gomoll, encouraged me to propose a science fiction course—which I did, thus offering one of the first in the state. Jean, as you know, was one of the co-founders of Wiscon; and her invitation to the conference brought me into the world of fandom, and especially feminist fandom, and to my friendship with Jan Bogstad, Phil Caveny, and Mike Levy among so many others.

My embraiding of science fiction and politics was significantly moved along in 1972 by way of another breakthrough text: Suvin's "On the Poetics of the Science Fiction Genre" in *College English* (the heavily-annotated original still sits on my bookshelf). Suvin's argument gave historical and theoretical substance to my own experience of sf as a subversive genre; and it reinforced my decision to resume graduate study at UW-Milwaukee. There I was fortunate to work with Jack Zipes, who not only was breaking new ground in his studies of fairytales but who also was bringing the work of the Frankfurt School to Anglophone readers in *New German Critique*. With Jack (since then a lifetime friend), I was able to begin the long journey of my dissertation (over nine years, while I carried on those other strands of my life). Learning from his work, I pursued my own on sf.<sup>9</sup>

At this point, the *utopian* shift arising from my reading and activism fully took hold. In my research, my move from sf to the utopian mode made perfectly good sense. Agreeing with Suvin's controversial argument that we can usefully regard the utopia as a subgenre of the science fictional imaginary, I found in these provocative narratives of better and worse worlds a compelling object of study that conjoined my scholarly and political interests.<sup>10</sup>

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9 Early works include Zipes, Jack. *Breaking the Magic Spell: Radical Theories of Folk and Fairy Tales*. London: Heinemann, 1979; *Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion*. London: Heinemann, 1983; *The Trials and Tribulations of Little Red Writing Hood: Versions of the Tale in Sociocultural Context*. London: Heinemann, 1983.

10 See Darko Suvin's 1973 essay, "Defining the Literary Genre of Utopia: Some Historical Semantics, Some Genology, a Proposal, and a Plea." *Defined by a Hollow: Essays On Utopia, Science Fiction And Political Epistemology*. Oxford and Bern: Peter Lang, 2010:17 to 49. At the end of the essay, Suvin puts it this way: "Strictly speaking and precisely speaking, utopia is not a genre but the sociopolitical subgenre of science fiction. Paradoxically, it can be seen as such only now that SF has expanded into its modern

This focus was fully locked in with the timely publication of Ursula K. Le Guin's *The Dispossessed* in 1974. As I'm sure it was for many, Le Guin's powerful work brought the full capacity of sf's thought experiments into an exploration of the sociopolitical and existential struggles of the time—doing so with the insight of critique and the inspiration of vision. *The Dispossessed* crystallized my sense that sf's radical utopian potential was being articulated in a powerful new way, influenced by and subsequently influencing the rich oppositional political culture of the time. Then came the other three books that touched me deeply: Joanna Russ's *The Female Man* (written in 1968 but published in 1974) and Marge Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time* and Samuel R. Delany's *Triton*, published in the bicentennial year of 1976.

In these years, my sense of a *critical utopia* (a formulation first used by Peter Fitting) began to develop. But as I said at the outset, this work only moved forward through the influence and input of many others. And so in the summer of 1977, my theoretical base in the Frankfurt School was expanded when I took part in the first annual Marxist Literary Group Summer Institute on Culture and Society—launched by Fredric Jameson and Stanley Aronowitz. Initially in three-week sessions, party intellectuals and activists, faculty and students joined in a conversation on radical culture and politics. Over several summers at the Institute, I learned not only from Fred and Stanley, but also Terry Eagleton, Gayatri Spivak, Stuart Hall—and others who became my friends and sf colleagues such as Peter Fitting, Judy Newton, June Howard, Richard Astle, Steve Badrich, and Phil Wegner. Indeed, it was at the initial gathering that that I offered my first take on the critical utopia, as I connected the work of Zipes and the Frankfurt School with Jameson's in a discussion of Le Guin and Delany.

Then, in the autumn, in Teresa de Lauretis's seminar at UW-M's Center for 20th Century Studies, several of us convinced her to engage with sf (leading to her wonderful essay on reading sf, "A Sense of W(a/o)nder").<sup>11</sup> In this group was Mary Kenny Badami

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phase, "looking backward" from its subsumption of utopia... For all its adventure, romance, popularization, and wondrousness, SF can finally be written only between the utopian and the dystopian horizons" (42–43).

11 de Lauretis, Teresa. "A Sense of W(a/o)nder." *The Technological Imagination: Theories and Fictions*. eds. Teresa de Lauretis, Andreas Huyssen and Kathleen Woodward. Madison: Coda, 1980:

(starting her faculty position at UW-M, and having just published her important essay, "A Feminist Critique of Science Fiction"), Cate McLenehan (who was involved in fandom and sf criticism), and Michael Dean (who went on to write about and work in comics and to edit the *Comics Journal*).<sup>12</sup> We then persuaded Teresa to secure a fellowship at the Center for Chip Delany, who graciously came and generously joined our seminar for a semester. Chip's presentations on the draft of his *The American Shore* and the ongoing discussions in the seminar and afterward deepened all of our understandings of sf. These interactions had a direct impact on my critical utopian study. Already aware of the roots of the critical utopia in New Left political culture and Second Wave feminism, I was challenged to push my analysis further by Badami's feminist criticism. And then, Chip's challenging interventions sharpened my analyses by way of his discussions of sf reading protocols, while also deepening my sense of what was at stake in the critical utopias (especially those by Russ and Le Guin).<sup>13</sup>

You may know the story from there. "Figures of Hope: The Critical Utopia of the 1970s" was completed as a dissertation in 1981, and *Demand the Impossible* (edited in Youghal on the south coast of Ireland) was published in 1986.<sup>14</sup> Many, including many here today, have taken up my argument that the formal and political turn of the critical utopia marked a shift from the declaration of blueprints to the articulation of process; but, as I've always said (and reiterate in my introduction to the Ralahine Classic edition of *Demand*), I was also explicitly exploring how this new utopian writing figured a new degree

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159–174.

12 Badami, Mary Kenny. "A Feminist Critique of Science Fiction." *Extrapolation* 18.1 (Winter 1976): 6–19.

13 In the course of our discussions, I shared with Delany an early draft of what became my 1980 essay on the critical utopias of Le Guin and Delany, a version of which I had already given that summer. Looking back over my journal notes after that conversation, I appreciate all the more how deeply his comments sharpened and shaped my analysis (though I have taken his point that I was too hard on Le Guin more closely to heart, something which I finally did in my apology to Le Guin in the Ralahine *Demand*). See "Beyond Negation: The Critical Utopias of Ursula K. Le Guin and Samuel R. Delany." *Extrapolation* 21.3 (Fall 1980): 236–254.

14 Moylan, Tom. *Demand the Impossible: Science Fiction and the Utopian Imagination*. New York and London: Methuen, 1986; *Demand the Impossible: Science Fiction and the Utopian Imagination*. Ralahine Classic Edition. Oxford and Bern: Peter Lang, 2014. See "Introduction to the Classics Edition," ix–xxix.

of engaged but self-critical activism in the service of a totalizing systemic revolution. I therefore looked at how each critical utopia articulated that activism at the political level of radical change and the personal level of consciousness-raising and commitment. So it was that the threads of the personal and political in my own reality tied in to these works that were at the core of my long gestating research. From this time on, while maintaining my affiliation with sf, I focused on utopia and utopianism. At the core of my subsequent projects (on texts, theory, or practices), I have been concerned with giving voice to the capacity of the utopian impulse to critique the existing order and to offer provisional alternatives that inform the hard moves from the bad old world to the better new one.

As I pursued this work, I became more involved in the utopian rather than the science fictional societies: first the Society for Utopian Studies in North America and then the European Utopian Studies Society (and here I am grateful to Lyman Tower Sargent and Ruth Levitas for welcoming me). As I'm sure is true for many here, in these gatherings I found the personal and intellectual "safe space" that enabled me to share and develop my work, and to feel more confident about what I was doing. For it is in this comradely context that many of us begin to savor the crucial difference between the instrumental scholasticism dominating most academic circles and the "real work" (as Gary Snyder put it in "I Went into the Maverick Bar," still one of my touchstones) that we pursue in sf and utopian studies—because in our exchanges in these temporary utopian zones, we enact a better way of working and of being in the world.<sup>15</sup>

Within this support network, after *Demand*, I reread and published more extensively on Bloch, giving close attention to the way in which he

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15 This quality has been eloquently expressed by Naomi Jacobs as she writes of her personal recognition of the social efficacy she discovered in the society that came to constitute her "scholarly home" (227). Borrowing her title of "Beloved Community" from the American civil rights movement, which described that gathering "of those dedicated to justice and peace," she admits that this nomination may be too much to claim for an academic undertaking, and yet she argues that more than many such projects "utopian studies seems shaped by the conviction that "one's work, indeed one's life, [in the words of philosopher Josiah Royce] 'means nothing, either theoretically or practically unless I am a member of a community'" (227). See "Utopia and the Beloved Community," *Utopia Method Vision: The Use Value of Social Dreaming*. Oxford and Bern: Peter Lang, 2007: 2 to 3–245.

deployed his critical hermeneutic, even against his own orthodoxies.<sup>16</sup> I carried these studies forward through a series of essays on the formative function of the utopian impulse in liberation theology, placing that theological and political formation in its context as a driving force in the Latin American religious and secular Left.<sup>17</sup> As you know, I continued with sf criticism in my brief encounter with cyberpunk, but more especially with the critical dystopia project in the 1990s.<sup>18</sup> I won't belabor this part of my story as it unfolded at George Mason University (where I was fortunate to work with Denise Albanese and Paul Smith); but, in the spirit of my affirmation of collective work, I do want to recognize these collaborations.

The dystopia work itself began with an observation by Lyman Sargent on how little research had been done on dystopia, and it was followed by discussions with Raffaella Baccolini at utopian conferences in St. Louis in 1993 and East Anglia in 1999 about the nature of the new dystopias by Octavia Butler and Marge Piercy. The early encounters with Raffaella grew into collaborations that continue to this day, leading, so far, to the two volumes we have co-published and to my own *Scraps of the Untainted Sky*.<sup>19</sup> Additionally, this work was shaped by the contributions of undergraduate and graduate

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16 See Moylan, Tom. "Bloch Against Bloch: The Theological Reception of Das Prinzip Hoffnung and the Liberation of the Utopian Function." *Utopian Studies* ("Special Issue on Ernst Bloch and Utopian Social Theory") 1.2 (Fall 1990): 27–52; and *Not Yet: Reconsidering Ernst Bloch*. eds. Jamie Owen Daniel and Tom Moylan. London and New York: Verso, 1997.

17 Moylan, Tom. "Denunciation/Annunciation: The Radical Methodology of Liberation Theology." *Cultural Critique* 19 (1992): 33–65; "Mission Impossible: Liberation Theology and Utopian Praxis." *Utopian Studies III*. eds. Michael Cummings and Nicholas D. Smith. Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 1991: 20–30; "Anticipatory Fiction: Bread and Wine and Liberation Theology." *Modern Fiction Studies* (Special Issue on "Narratives of Colonial Resistance") 35.1 (Spring 1989): 103–121; "Rereading Religion: Ernst Bloch, Gustavo Gutiérrez, and the Post-Modern Strategy of Liberation Theology." *Center for Twentieth Century Studies Working Papers 2* (Fall 1988).

18 See Moylan, Tom. "Global Economy, Local Texts: Utopian/Dystopian Tensions in William Gibson's Cyberpunk 'Trilogy.'" *Minnesota Review* 43/44 (Fall 1994/Spring 1995): 182–198; *Scraps of the Untainted Sky: Science Fiction, Utopia, Dystopia*. Boulder: Westview, 2000.

19 See *Dark Horizons: Science Fiction and the Dystopian Imagination*. eds. Raffaella Baccolini and Tom Moylan. New York and London: Routledge, 2003; *Utopia Method Vision: The Use Value of Social Dreaming*. eds. Tom Moylan and Raffaella Baccolini. Oxford and Bern: Peter Lang, 2007.

students in my courses on dystopia at George Mason through the 1990s. *Scraps*, therefore, grew out of this wonderful constellation (and here I want to note that it was the impact of that decade of teaching that produced the book's pedagogical approach, one which some have found lacking but one I still stand by).

Coming up to the present, my utopian focus took another institutional turn when I founded the Ralahine Centre for Utopian Studies at the University of Limerick. Refusing insistent requests from my Dean that I take up the post of Assistant Dean of Research, in a *Bartleby*-like fashion, I chose instead to remain on the fringe of academic administration by developing the Centre. I won't recount all that our dedicated group of faculty and students have done since 2003; but in the spirit of these comments I want especially to acknowledge our initial series of seminars which invited leading scholars to discuss the nature and impact of utopia as a *method* of social knowledge and transformation. Indeed, it was out of her contribution to this series that Ruth Levitas began to develop her important work of 2013, *Utopia as Method*.<sup>20</sup> As well, after joining us for several guest lectures before his election, the President of Ireland, Michael D. Higgins, now invokes the utopian impulse in his inspirational lectures that call for a new relationship between ethics, economics, and the environment.<sup>21</sup>

Throughout this time, I have continued to write on sf, but my later work has been a series of studies on utopian practice, especially looking at the relationship of the utopian impulse to radical subject formation and political agency.<sup>22</sup> Again, I acknowledge the impact on this body of work of

my ongoing conversations with Raffaella, Phil, and Darko. Several of these essays offer case studies of the processes involved in the triadic utopian intervention of transgression, totalization, and transformation: looking at community organizing, ecological activism, nonviolent resistance, and radical pedagogy. Here I'm indebted to Hoda Zaki's work on human rights and Darren Webb's on radical pedagogy, and several of these pieces are enriched by the sf and especially by Kim Stanley Robinson. I also want to register the formative impact of the comradely tension between Fred Jameson's work on the utopian *problematic* and the primary importance of negation and Ruth Levitas's articulation of the critical and constructive potential of utopia as *method*. Like Shevek, I prefer to make things difficult and choose both approaches, reaching for a dialectical utopianism that not only breaks with the world as it is but inspires and informs our steps beyond it.<sup>23</sup>

This, then, is a brief review (perhaps not brief enough for some) of the relatively unconventional formation that has made me the bad subject that I hope I continue to be today. At the heart of it all has been the sf imaginary, the sf reading experience, the sf structure of feeling. But also at the heart of it has been a personal, political, and intellectual journey that did not follow a traditional career path; rather, it was my version of what could be understood as a secular vocation, or what radical activists of the 1960s called the "long march through the institutions."<sup>24</sup> Working as I did in a vibrant community college rather than a high-level research university, embedding my studies in teaching and political work, and (with a few notable exceptions) learning more in para-intellectual formations than in the official mechanisms of coursework and exams (that is, in libraries, coffeehouses/bars, research centers, and summer institutes; fandom and party study groups, and correspondence and conversation).<sup>25</sup> I realize that I have been privileged

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20 Levitas, Ruth. *Utopia as Method*. New York and London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013.

21 See Higgins, Michael D. *When Ideas Matter: Speeches for an Ethical Republic*. London: Head of Zeus, 2016. The utopian problematic and impulse run through many of these speeches, especially those on ethics and human rights; but the work of the Ralahine Centre and the utopian project is directly mentioned in "Public Intellectuals and the Universities" and "The President of Ireland's Ethics Initiative National Seminar," 255–269, 323–336.

22 See, for example, Moylan, Tom. "'And We Are Here as on a Darkling Plain': Reconsidering Utopia in Huxley's *Island*." *Demand the Impossible: Science Fiction and the Utopian Imagination*. ed. Raffaella Baccolini. Oxford and Bern: Peter Lang, 2014: 207–227; "Make Me Happy and I Shall Again Be Virtuous": Science Fiction and the Utopian Surplus of Science." *Imagined Features in Science, Technology and Society*. ed. Barbara Segaert. New York and London: Routledge, 2016: xx–xx.

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23 The collection, *Hunger and Hope: Utopia and Political Agency*, is forthcoming; but see the previously published versions of "'To Live Consciously is to Sow the Whirlwind': Reflections on The Utopian Standpoint of Nonviolence." *Utopian Studies* 26.1 (2015): 184–202; and "Steps of Renewed Praxis: Tracking the Utopian Method." *Minnesota Review* 86 (2016): 101–122.

24 See, for example, Ehrenreich, Barbara and John Ehrenreich. *Long March, Short Spring: The Student Uprising at Home and Abroad*. New York and London: Modern Reader, 1969.

25 The para-institutional formations that I was involved in co-de-

throughout these years with secure work that has enabled this creatively bad subjectivity, and I'm not presenting my biography as a prescriptive model for anyone in this age of dispossession and precarity. However, I do offer it as a possible way of thinking about what we might collectively do in spite of, outside of, or in the hollows and edges of today's neoliberal universities (with their disciplinary and exclusionary research and hiring practices).

### **The Project**

Moving from this personal sphere, I'll close with some reflections on work that lies ahead. First of all, within sf and utopian studies, in the face of our current inter-related crises and the consequent search for effective ways to confront them, I believe there is a pressing need again to look closely at sf thought experiments that explore the process *and* achievement of utopian transformation, examining how they elucidate the systemic and existential relationships between the initial utopian turn and social revolution. But "we," in all our diversity and solidarity, need to do this work in a capacious and compassionate spirit, taking all the contradictions into a radical new way of thinking and acting. Habitually for me, this study would begin with Morris's *News from Nowhere* and move through a series of writers up to work by the likes of Robinson (and even Jameson's non-narrative fiction, *An American Utopia*).<sup>26</sup> But this order of reading is no longer enough. In retrieving this thematic, "we" (and I target myself here) need to supersede our own standpoints and dig deeper and look wider, to break beyond white, male, Anglo-American frameworks

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veloping include Wilderness University at the University of Wisconsin-Waukesha at Waukesha (one of the first ecological studies programs in the US in the 1970s), which I co-organized with Jim Cheney, Marlin Johnson, and Mary Ellen Young; the Center for the Study of the Americas at George Mason University (and where we collaborated with the likes of the MLG and facilitated the organisation of what became the Latin American Subaltern Studies Group, led by Ileana Rodriguez and John Beverley), wherein I was privileged to be asked to continue the work of David Kuebrich and after five years handed over to Paul Smith; and finally the Ralahine Center for Utopian Studies at the University of Limerick, where I have been honored to work with Aileen Dillane, Joachim Fischer, Michael G. Kelly, Carmen Kuhling, Michael J. Griffin, Mariano Paz, Deirdre ni Chuanachain, and Jack Fennell.

<sup>26</sup> My own list would include C. M. Kornbluth and Frederick Pohl, Mack Reynolds, Robert Heinlein, Gwennyth Jones, the authors of the critical utopias and dystopias, and recent writers such as Iain M. Banks, China Miéville, and Kim Stanley Robinson.

with an *intersectional* approach that incorporates subject positions, movements, and cultures around the world (with all their specificities) and articulates not only the emerging project of large-scale social revolution but also what Ann Cvetkovich calls the "utopianism of ordinary life."<sup>27</sup>

Moving outward to our general intellectual practice, there are two areas of concern that I believe are of importance in our current situation.

On one hand, I'm referring to our deployment of a critical utopian hermeneutic: which is not, as some aver, a promiscuous matter of "seeing utopia everywhere" but rather a robust mode of analysis and intervention that unleashes the utopian potential of what Bloch calls the available tendencies and latencies of the present conjuncture. In saying this, I recognize the place of research that investigates empirical details of authorial intention and historical context; but it's important to register the equal value of a diagnostic and anticipatory hermeneutic as an engaged intervention that not only generates descriptive analyses but also creates prescriptive anticipations. On the other, I'm speaking about tapping into the capacity of the "use value" of the utopian method in the sphere of actually existing politics. The dialectic of critique and anticipation (of denunciation and annunciation) is core to the utopian proclivity; and in this time of global crises my hope is that more of us find ways to nurture the use of that method in political and cultural work—in political organizing, radical pedagogy, design and planning, artistic practice, and the implementation of local and global policies from the economic to the ecological. If those of us who aspire to be radical utopians believe that another world is possible (that, in solidarity, we can exorcize the specter of global apocalypse and actually achieve the end of capitalism), then our engagement with utopia as method (as hermeneutics and praxis) is crucial.

I'll close with an assertion and a suggestion. First, I want to speak against those reactionary tendencies in the wider social discourse and in academia that aim to repress critical inquiry and intellectual intervention that goes against the disciplinary drive of our hyper-capitalist society. I therefore want to negate the neoliberal logic that monetizes everything (including our very selves) by reaffirming the utopian process as a legitimate

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<sup>27</sup> Cvetkovich, Ann. *Depression: A Public Feeling*. Durham: Duke UP, 2012.

mode of *radicalization* and the utopian subject as a *radical* (in the long-standing progressive meaning of these terms, in so far as “radical” is understood as one who gets to the roots, the deep structures and causes of social conditions and processes). My aim here is to reclaim the rich history of these personal and political categories in the face of the moral panic generated by those who conflate, and therefore condemn, radicalization with the work of extremists. For this moral panic is essentially a repressive maneuver that attacks authentic radical development, especially among younger people. And it is one that is furthered by an academic normativity complicit with the aims and practices of the managerial university. In valorizing the radical quality of utopianism, I am (in a critical utopian spirit) privileging a method that is, in Paulo Freire’s sense, *dialogical*—open and self-critical but also affiliated and committed.<sup>28</sup> This combination of self and social transformation refuses the one-dimensionality expressed by the words “manipulation” or “demonic,” as well as the neoliberal valorization of “open” or “critical” processes. A *radical* utopian process must therefore be imbricated with the work of building a transformed future, not simply a reformed present.

Following from this, I think we all, whoever we are, need to re-consider our responsibilities as intellectuals (to recall Noam Chomsky’s phrase).<sup>29</sup>

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28 Freire, Paulo. *A Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. New York: Herder and Herder, 1971.

29 Chomsky, Noam. “The Responsibility of Intellectuals.” *The Dissenting Academy*. ed. Theodore Roszak. New York: Vintage Books, 1968: 254–299.

We therefore need to find stronger ways to preserve and extend the conditions for transformative inquiry within a viable public sphere; and we also need to join together to protect and support the growing numbers of our colleagues who have been locked into the cage of precarious work. This is especially true as corporatized universities privilege applied scholarship that serves immediate economic requirements and silencing (by merit and funding mechanisms) research that challenges the status quo and proffers alternatives that reject approved policies and practices. This holds for all areas of intellectual work, from the hard sciences to the arts; but it is especially significant for the utopian project.

These are indeed terrible times for humanity and nature. It is therefore all the more important that we respond, generally as citizens and specifically as intellectuals, with all our capacities by calling up the strength and solidarity implicit in the utopian persuasion in order radically to critique and transform this world into one that nurtures and enhances both nature and humanity.

I want to thank you again for this great honor and for the privilege of being able to share my thoughts with you tonight. And in the spirit of my talk, thank you all for all the work you do. May we all carry it on.

Annacotty, Ireland  
May 2017

## **Terraforming: Ecopolitical Transformations and Environmentalism in Science Fiction**

Thomas Connolly

Chris Pak, *Terraforming: Ecopolitical Transformations and Environmentalism in Science Fiction*, Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2016. Hardback, 243 + x pp, £80, ISBN 978-1-78138-284-4.

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CHRIS PAK'S pioneering study of terraforming narratives is the first attempt to trace the history of environmentalist themes in sf. This is indeed surprising: environmentalism has been an active political and social movement since at least the 1960s, while concerns about the human impact upon nature can be traced throughout literary history as far back as Theocritus's *Bucolics*. Such concerns have consistently been to the fore in sf: long before the adoption of overt environmentalist orientations by sf authors in the 1960s, Mary Shelley had described England as "a ragged canvas ... painted by man with alien colours" (310). Despite this long history of environmentalist concerns within the genre, however, sf scholarship has been slow to respond. Eric C. Otto's *Green Speculations: Science Fiction and Transformative Environmentalism*, the first major examination of the relationship between sf and environmentalism, only appeared in 2012, with two major essay collections following in 2014: *Green Planets: Ecology and Science Fiction*, edited by Gerry Canavan and Kim Stanley Robinson, and *Environments in Science Fiction: Essays on Alternative Spaces*, edited by Susan M. Bernardo. Outside these major texts, environmentalist and ecological readings of sf as yet remain relatively thin on the ground.

*Terraforming* thus constitutes a much-needed intervention into an area of scholarship that demands greater critical attention, and Pak proves himself to be more than up to the task. "Terraforming", as

Pak explains, "exemplifies the feedback between sf, science, and wider popular discourse" (2). Through an examination of narratives of planetary adaptation, Pak deftly unearths the "economic, social, political and cultural relationships and strategies" adopted towards nature within technologically saturated societies (12). Such relationships and strategies are, it turns out, highly diverse. From cosmic anti-humanism in Stapledon's *Star Maker* (1937), through anti-colonial mysticism in Le Guin's *The Word for World Is Forest* (1972), to unassimilable otherness in Lem's *Solaris* (1961), Pak deconstructs the often implicit environmentalist positions of an extensive range of sf authors, and convincingly argues for sf as a melting pot of conflicting attitudes towards the human relationship with nature.

The study adopts a broadly chronological framework. Chapter one examines the concept of "nature's otherness" in some key works of pre-World War Two sf. In many ways the most stimulating chapter in the book, this initial examination addresses some often neglected proto-sf works by authors such as Wells, Stapledon, M. P. Shiel, and Arthur Conan Doyle. Chapter two then moves on to explore the incorporation of pastoral themes within terraforming narratives from the 1950s, ranging from the progressive humanism of Clarke's *The Sands of Mars* (1951) to the more pessimistic corporate vision of Pohl and Kornbluth's *The Space Merchants* (1952). Chapter three examines sf from the 1960s and 1970s, a period in which emerging social concerns over the state of the environment, crystallised in 1962 with the publication of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*, led to a concurrent "greening" of sf. As a result, environmentalist themes moved to the fore of the genre, taking both mystical and political forms in the works of authors such as Ursula Le Guin, Frank Herbert and Robert Heinlein. This theme is continued in chapter four, which examines a number of sophisticated terraforming texts by James Lovelock, Pamela Sargent, and Frederick Turner. These texts act as a bridge to connect the political environmentalist movement of the 1960s and '70s to Kim Stanley Robinson's acclaimed *Mars* trilogy, which forms the focal point of the fifth chapter. Robinson, as Pak argues, incorporates into his trilogy an abundance of dialogic positions centred on the human relationship towards the natural world, bringing these "multiple voices" into contact with one another in order to generate "new



avenues for socio-cultural experimentation” (171). A final conclusion then brings the study up to the present day with a sweeping review of terraforming narratives since the mid-1990s.

To aid him in this chronological journey through twentieth-century sf, Pak incorporates a breathtaking array of theoretical concepts and ideas. Of these, perhaps the most important in informing the shape of his study are Mikhail Bakhtin’s concept of the dialogic and Damian Broderick’s concept of the sf “megatext,” outlined in his 1995 study *Reading by Starlight*. Terraforming narratives, Pak argues, “put ... into play multiple interacting voices and their relationships to the environment,” which in turn become situated within the “multiple sf discourses that have been constructed between texts and reader engagement” (10-11). Pak’s analysis itself then becomes similarly Bakhtinian in its approach: by bringing together a wide variety of disparate texts and theories, Pak initiates an intertextual dialogue centred on the motifs of terraforming and environmentalism. The resulting terraforming megatext incorporates a range of possible answers to the fundamental question at the heart of Pak’s study: “Who speaks for the land and for our relation to it?” (12). Pak later links the terraforming motif in sf to Jed Rasula’s argument for literary creation as a form of “continual recycling of language” derived from the “compost library” of the intertextual literary field (169). He thus convincingly argues for terraforming – with its literal “creation of soil” – as a fertile “compost” motif by means of which to generate “new myths” for interpreting and understanding our orientation towards the natural world (170-171).

Such a wide-ranging examination inevitably runs the risk of becoming unwieldy, or of collapsing under the weight of its own ambitious scope. Pak’s grasp of his material, however, is hugely impressive, and he moves with confidence through the whole of twentieth-century sf, incorporating a balanced mix of well-known and more obscure works. Paradoxically, Pak’s wide-ranging knowledge of the field of sf, and of an impressive array of theoretical concepts and positions, from Edmund Burke’s “sublime” to Ursula Heise’s “eco-cosmopolitanism”, also generate what is perhaps the only weakness of the study. Pak’s sure grasp of his material leads at times to passages positively overflowing with thoughts, concepts and analytical assertions, written in an energetic but occasionally dense style that may

at times have benefitted from additional unpacking of key concepts and ideas.

This is, however, a minor criticism of an otherwise important and timely study that will be of interest to anyone with a stake in the future of the planet. Through its skilful examination of this key motif in sf, *Terraforming* confronts its readers with what Pak is surely correct in calling the “fundamental question” of our time: in an age of environmental crisis, “how [do] we want to live?” (17)

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## Ray Bradbury

Donald M. Hassler

David Seed. *Ray Bradbury: Modern Masters of Science Fiction*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2016. Paperback, 224 pages, \$24, ISBN 978-0-252-08058-6.

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IT IS OUR OWN LITTLE family history and worth repeating. Young and eager writers in the thirties—the Futurians in particular—prompted by Gernsback and his use of Verne, by John W. Campbell, Fred Pohl and others, thought they might forge a wholly new genre by clustering together in the pulps and in their ghetto away from the mainstream. Some like Blish talked of incorporating modernist giants like Joyce and the poets into their work. But most felt special in their ghetto, and they did forge well what we now call hard SF. But some saw the work of SF, also, as a truly American continuation of the embrace of the “new frontier” that was American history and literature. Those wide thinkers who built their work after 19th-century giants of American manifest destiny, and manifest “darkness,” such as Melville, who embraced the movie industry that was learning to visualize the frontier as well as the darkness were grumbled at as not real SF writers. Ray Bradbury



was the best writer in this group who took the wider vision of America for their platform. Bradbury overall is now acclaimed as our most representative American SF writer even though the ghetto theorists grumble. David Seed in this new book pinpoints and quotes the Asimov grumble, “[Bradbury’s] Martian stories reek with scientific incongruity” (39).

Seed is ideally equipped to view Bradbury’s work this widely, and the structure of his book reflects his interpretation of the work as firmly in the tradition of American history and literature. Seed is primarily an Americanist, not a genre theorist and defender. Also, as a British scholar, he has a clear vision of the “monster birth” that took place over recent history on the new continent that stretched westward to Hollywood and beyond. Seed is eminently capable of seeing the large vision in Bradbury from this American Studies point of view, and even in his final of four well-developed chapters, from the point of view of NASA and the importance of our movement into Space. That movement is seen clearly as an extension, with modern technological capabilities, of the Jeffersonian project of moving “westward” as far as possible with his Lewis and Clark expedition. As we always push outward and beyond, westward into the setting sun, we push toward extinction and death. At the same time, Seed provides a careful reading of the details of Bradbury’s childlike sentimentality as it relates to an analysis of genre to the point where clear genre distinctions “blur.” A key move in Seed that we must notice is his highlighting of Bradbury’s work as a screenwriter and, especially, his contribution to the John Huston movie version of *Moby Dick* (1956). Other writers in the mainstream of modernity that become reflected in the Seed reading of Bradbury range from Steinbeck to George Bernard Shaw, and none of these, including Bradbury, is content with what Shaw had labeled the “hideous fatalism” embedded in the scientism of Charles Darwin.

The other large conceptual move that Seed contributes to our serious reading of Bradbury points back to the movie industry and to the stated method of what Bradbury calls “the scenic approach” in story development that he saw as central to his work. Visualism in writing, in fact, has the possibility to express the major epistemological dilemma posed by Shaw and others in the face of Darwinism. Just such mainstream wrestling can be found in Bradbury, according to Seed. Asimov wrestles with the same

dilemma but does so from within the confines of the ghetto, as I lay out in an essay just completed for use in the new Salem Press book *Asimov*. The dilemma has to do with Darwin’s wonderfully sublime image in the final paragraph of his *On the Origin of Species* (1859) of “the tangled bank.” The big division has to do with whether there is any teleology in this entanglement or whether it is just the “hideous fatalism” that Shaw labels as random development. The biologist Ernst Mayr in his 2002 collection of essays *What Evolution Is* points out that “sight” is selected for its survival value much more often in Nature than “intelligence.” Nature seems to want to see, in all the variety of “Illustrated Man” images, more than it wants to work conceptually with issues of purpose and human destiny. Scenic visualism in Bradbury represents this well, and he is troubled by it at the same time. Hence he is always working at the cutting edge of modern and epistemological issues. This is the big topic of the final of four excellent chapters in Seed. He presents Bradbury well as the key writer growing out of the mainstream of American and western thought; and, even though he works in different genres such as screenwriting, mystery, and even romance, the SF conventions are his main mode in establishing his very serious set of ideas. Seed’s study is very serious and comprehensive and ought to do much to boost Bradbury’s reputation in American Studies.

## ***The Ages of Iron Man: Essays on the Armored Avenger in Changing Times***

Kristen Koopman

Joseph J. Darowski, ed. *The Ages of Iron Man: Essays on the Armored Avenger in Changing Times*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2015. Paperback, 236 pages, \$40.00, ISBN 978-0-7864-7842-2. Kindle ISBN 078647842X.

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AS HISTORY has swept on, so has Tony Stark.

Joseph Darowski notes in his introduction to *The Ages of Iron Man: Essays on the Armored Avenger in Changing Times* that the character and the world he inhabits have had to respond to changes in social norms, political structures, and the technological bleeding-edge. True to its title, the collection traces the evolution of Iron Man by contextualizing the comic in the different eras it has seen. The essays vary in whether they aim for depth or breadth, but overall the collection holds together admirably as an introduction to Iron Man comics through the ages.

The essays proceed mostly chronologically, beginning with Tony Stark's debut as Iron Man and continuing up to the relatively recent fallout of the *Civil War* comics event. With over fifty years of publication history, multiple universes, and portrayals in different media to Iron Man's name, the collection narrows its focus onto the main Marvel Comics universe and allows each essay to choose its thread. Some, such as John Darowski's examination of Tony Stark in the *Civil War* comics arc, focus on only a handful of issues; others, such as Richard A. Iadonisi's coverage of recurring supervillain The Mandarin or Julian C. Chambliss's history of James Rhodes (A.K.A. War Machine), follow a single element through decades of comics. Although editor Joseph J. Darowski notes in his introduction that the contributors were meant to focus on specific eras, the mix of analytical deep-dives and broader contextualization ends up providing a stronger collection than focusing solely on chronology would have yielded.

The contributors to the collection are scholars of literature or history, and the essays reflect that. They largely fall into two categories: those that focus on an individual character to illustrate a broader connection between the comics and some category of difference (such as race, gender, or disability), and those that focus on Tony Stark's relationships to warfare, technology, and/or business. Stark's relationship to the military-industrial complex, for example, is thoroughly interrogated through different eras and different analytical lenses. As the Cold War represented not only a major turning point in the character (shifting him from a weapons manufacturer to a more technologically fluid industrialist) but also a uniquely rich period for analysis in itself, the attention given to this particular era is welcome. Charles Henebry's standout "Socking It to Shell-Head: How Fan Mail Saved a Hero from

the Military-Industrial Complex" analyzes the letters pages of the comic during the Vietnam War to locate shifting attitudes towards what Iron Man represented not only in the text itself, but also in the text's reception, providing a fascinating case study in the relationship between authors, editors, and readers of comics. Similarly, John Darowski's analysis of *Civil War* provides multiple lenses through which to view the superheroic conflict, including an ethical and political analysis of Stark's actions and how they came to be interpreted as villainous. The recent release of the *Captain America: Civil War* film, of course, makes this essay of even more interest.

While the considerable ground covered by this collection of essays necessarily means there are gaps (particularly in the coverage of more recent comics), these provide breathing room for future research. For one thing, the singular focus on the main Marvel comics continuity leaves space for future investigations of other Marvel universes (such as *Ultimates*), other media (such as the increasingly ubiquitous films), and even Tony Stark as portrayed in other titles (such as in any *Avengers* titles; with the exception of the essay on *Civil War* and Stark's appearances in *Tales of Suspense* before he had his own title, almost all of the essays focus on his eponymous book, even though the Iron Man character appears regularly in other titles). The relative absence of essays on female characters, however, seems less like a strategic choice and more like an oversight. As refreshing and insightful as Natalie R. Sheppard's essay on the Black Widow is, Natasha Romanov is not the only woman to appear in Iron Man stories.

With that said, there are also areas of overlap that may have benefited from a more forceful editorial hand; although, for example, repeated explanations of the Mandarin's powers allow the essays to stand alone, anyone reading the book cover-to-cover may find them unnecessary. Additionally, while the essays provide an excellent scholarly base for research on Iron Man, the ignoring here of the existence of a large base of nonscholarly works, such as fan essays and thinkpieces, may have led some essays to reinvent the wheel.

For example, John Darowski's "I would be the bad guy": Tony Stark as Villain of Marvel's *Civil War*" misses a main fan criticism of the comics event that provides an alternate argument for why *Iron Man* was seen as a villain: that Stark in particular suffered

from uneven characterization across the many titles involved in the event. With the rise of megatexts, the increasing prominence of fan culture and fan studies, and the proliferation of non-academic criticism on blogs and websites, it is increasingly difficult to avoid the question of how to account for nonacademic criticism. Although Darowski's essay is otherwise engaging and thoughtful, in this case, I am left wishing the answer was at least "more than this."

Because of that and because of the largely descriptive function of the book, this collection works best as a starting point for interested scholars looking for a place to begin interrogating and historically contextualizing the Iron Man comics. It also serves well as a reference for contextualizing specific eras or characters from the comics, although the brevity of the index makes it less useful for referencing details. The standalone nature and the length of the essays (between 10-20 pages each) are ideal for professors looking to assign pieces to undergraduates that are accessible and interesting without being analytically empty, or simply as a starting place for scholars looking to think more deeply about good old Shell-Head. Overall, this collection provides engaging and thought-provoking perspectives on Marvel's most unexpectedly popular superhero.

## ***The Child to Come: Life After the Human Catastrophe***

Thomas J. Morrissey

Rebekah Sheldon. *The Child to Come: Life after the Human Catastrophe*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2016. Paperback, 235 pages, \$25.00, ISBN 978-0-8166-8988-0. Cloth, ISBN 078-0-8166-8987-3.

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

IN *The Child to Come: Life After the Human Catastrophe*, Rebekah Sheldon contributes to the ongoing discussion of biopolitics, in particular how the figuration of the child in text and film often reflects readings and misreading of what living

in the Anthropocene Epoch means. In a Preface, Introduction, five chapters and Conclusion, she carves out a pathway through the intricacies of reproductive futurism, new materialisms, and queer theory as they impinge on readings of selected texts in which the image of the child figures prominently. Sheldon's Preface links the increasing evidence of ecological degradation with the responses of scholars in the humanities, asserting that both physical reality and intellectual critique are in flux but that the child is "persistent" (ix). The tightly packed Introduction further exposes the book's premise and outlines its intended structure. Here Sheldon surveys a wide range of child representations from Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* to the Star Child of *2001: A Space Odyssey* as well as taking on the knotty problem posed by the collapse of the anthropocentric view that we are life's masters: "Life-itself, then, subtends and transcends any particular form-of-life no matter how propriety its technical-legal modes of capture" (19). She tells us that Chapters One and Two explore the rhetorical treatment of the child as the reason for environmental action while the latter half of the book looks at the child as a tool in imagined scenarios of human apocalypse.

In Chapter One, "Future," Sheldon critiques a principal trope of the environmental movement, that we must protect the child against a predictably nasty future. Here she introduces Lee Edelman's concept of reproductive futurism as set forth in *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*, explaining that it "is a two-sided salvation narrative: someday the future will be redeemed of the mess our present actions foretell; until then, we must keep the messy future from coming by replicating the present through our children." This closed system of thought relies on reproductive patrimony, "the fantasized and actual extension of the humanist human into the future" (35). Thus nuclear arms are necessary to protect the future even as they increase the potential for apocalypse.

Chapter Two focuses on Joanna Russ' work, including the novel *We Who are About to...* in which a marooned space crew opts for reducing women to brood mares in the interest of continuing the human species on an alien planet even though the human race is alive and well on many other worlds. The main character's murder of the crew and subsequent suicide signals her rejection of reproductive futurism, specifically "the erasure of consent in the

commitment to generational survival” (83).

Cormac McCarthy’s *The Road* is the text Sheldon chooses to illustrate her argument that the bulwarks we construct against indeterminacy are illusory. In the context of the novel, “the telephone book and the calendar, the sacred child and the apocalyptic story, are all technologies of predication designed to obscure the irreparably contingent whatever being of Earth” (112). This chapter, entitled “Planet,” also derives from *The Road* a critique of capitalist excess. Citing the scene in which the Man and the Boy find a trove of canned goods, Sheldon writes that “the juxtaposition of material abundance with starvation uncomfortably mimics the inequalities of contemporary capital and the tendency of mass-production processes to create both deprivation and overproduction” (104).

In Chapter Four, “Birth,” Sheldon selects four of Margaret Atwood’s novels for elucidation of her term “somatic capitalism,” which she defines as “the intervention into and monetization of life-itself” (117). The child figure is at the center of a complex network of political and economic phenomena that presage posthumanity. She argues that the valorization of the fetus over the mother who carries it is in part a reaction to rapidly developing reproductive technologies: “reproduction is shown to be one of many biological functions” (122). In *The Handmaid’s Tale*, profit-driven environmental recklessness and mass overproduction free non-living vitality in the form of hazardous waste to inhibit fertility. Her reading of *Oryx and Crake* and its sequels raises profound questions about the relationship between social codes and genetics, predation as the *sine qua non* of existence, and

ultimately the relationship between “killing and birthing” (146).

*Children of Men* (novel and film) imagines a world-wide sterility plague, but offers fertile ground for the fifth chapter, “Labor.” Paradoxically, the absence of children unleashes a global killing spree that leaves Britain as literally an island of relative security which must protect itself from refugees, most of whom appear to be people of color. That a pregnant Afro-Caribbean woman will be the new mitochondrial Eve would seem to signal a victory of the oppressed over the privileged, but Sheldon asserts that the mother’s sacrifice recalls how fertile slaves enriched their masters and how fertility requires labor and produces laborers. In this chapter Sheldon surveys reproductive politics, the biopolitical state’s determination to define personhood, and the extent to which humans can be reduced to the status of agricultural capital or replaceable cogs. This theme is expanded when she concludes that the fertility-seeking Cylons of *Battlestar Galactica* are “not toasters, not robots, not metal machines, but capitalist nature, the enclosure of reproduction” (175).

The Conclusion focuses on the death of the child as the promise of a future in the Anthropocene. Her discussions of the relationship between the terms “Anthropocene” and “biopolitics”; the popularity and value of YA literature; and two films, Malick’s *The Tree of Life* and Lars Von Trier’s *Melancholia*, center on artists’ treatment of the death of narrative itself.

This is a powerful text with a sobering message. Its intended audience is clearly initiates familiar with the book’s theoretical underpinnings, and that certainly includes scholars of science fiction.

## **The Hainish Novels & Stories**

Cait Coker

Ursula K. Le Guin. *The Hainish Novels & Stories*, volumes I & II. New York: The Library of America, 2017. Vol. I: 1095 pages, cloth, \$40.00. Vol. II: 789 pages, cloth, \$40.00. ISBN 978-1-59853-537-2.

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

THIS TWO-VOLUME COLLECTION of Ursula K. Le Guin's "Hainish Cycle" (a term Le Guin herself dislikes, but which is nonetheless useful for describing the corpus as a whole) is undoubtedly what Library of America planned on getting—and publishing—when they signed on to reprint her work as part of their highly respected series of American literature. *The Hainish Novels & Stories* is a follow-up to 2016's *The Complete Orsinia*, a noble effort that, seemingly, no one wanted but Le Guin herself. Library of America is a nonprofit publisher that releases new authoritative editions of American writing each year. Thus far they only have a handful of genre entries aside from Le Guin: the two volume set *American Science Fiction: Nine Classic Novels of the 1950s* (2012) that includes classics by Bester, Heinlein, and Sturgeon, among others; three volumes of Philip K. Dick; one each for Lovecraft and Poe; and a series by Vonnegut. Le Guin is therefore the representative woman in the bunch (as she has often been in the scholarship of SF). The estimable Brian Attebery again provides editorial and scholarly acumen for Le Guin's texts. The two volumes are sold both separately and together in a boxed set designed, like the rest of the series, to be physically compact and hardy; the nearly two thousand collective pages span the space of an average new trade hardback. Scholars and fans will gain fine editions that encompass seven novels and several short stories as well as new authorial introductions, appendices, and notes.

Volume One contains the first five Hainish novels: *Rocannon's World* (1966); *Planet of Exile* (1966); *City of Illusions* (1967); *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969); and *The Dispossessed* (1974); and the four short stories "Winter's King" (1975 text); "Vaster Than Empires and More Slow" (1971); "The Day

Before the Revolution" (1974); and "Coming of Age in Karhide" (1995). The appendices include Le Guin's introductions to the first four novels, the original 1969 text to "Winter's King," and the essays "A Response, by Ansible, from Tau Ceti" (2016) and "Is Gender Necessary? Redux" (1976/1987). Volume Two contains the novels *The Word for World is Forest* (1972) and *The Telling* (2000); a gathering of short stories, including a suite called "Five Ways to Forgiveness" (previously published as a collection under a different title in 1995) and seven stand-alones; and two more essays, the original 1977 introduction to *Word for World* and the 1994 essay "On Not Reading Science Fiction." Both volumes include colorized drawings by Le Guin as endpapers: a map of Gethen for Volume I and a planetary chart for Volume II.

For those who might be unfamiliar with the Hainish Cycle, the stories themselves detail a number of planets, including Earth, that set up interstellar diplomatic relations amid localized planetary politics. Functionally, they are space opera without the "opera," as the planetary societies recur more than once but individual characters do not. Above all, the emphasis is on sociological and anthropological examination of different cultures and their localized environments. The books also contain recurring themes of environmental collapse as it relates to industrialization and wars, themes that may be of more interest to scholars now than they were decades ago. Through these works, Le Guin also popularized a number of tropes that are by now familiar to readers, such as distant ancestors who "seed" worlds with DNA to evolve humans and other species in their image (or similar to it), and the ansible, a device that allows instantaneous communications between worlds. What are perhaps the author's two most famous and influential SF novels, *The Left Hand of Darkness* and *The Dispossessed*, appear together in a single volume: both works won the Hugo and Nebula Awards and have remained classics of the genre ever since.

Le Guin's new introductions to both volumes make up the new material for the collections. Penned in December 2016, they show that she remains as politically outspoken as ever. In addition to ruminating on her past work, she states that only recently has she seen "divisive, exclusive, aggressive fundamentalisms absorb and pervert the energy of every major creed, and Americans abandoning the



secular vision of freedom on which our republic stands” (xix). Le Guin also stated elsewhere in late 2016 that she had retired from writing novels, but would continue to write essays. Let us hope so, for we need her voice now, it seems, more than ever, both in genre and out of it.

This collection is ideal for both fan and scholar, being both physically well-made and (comparatively, especially given the number of works involved) inexpensive, and intellectually expansive in the material that Attebery brings together. This also marks the first time that all the relevant stories have been collected alongside the longer works: earlier collections in the 1990s parceled them out. This is therefore a great introduction to Le Guin’s science fiction for new readers, and an equally great *festschrift* honoring one of the great minds of the field.

## ***Akata Warrior***

Jonathan P. Lewis

Nnedi Okorafor. *Akata Warrior*. New York: Viking, 2017. 496 pp. \$18.99, ISBN 978-0670785612.

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

WRITING—language—gives us the ability to memorialize. We can describe the feelings of being human, of being alive, and yet for me, perhaps because I am well into middle age now, narrative fictions and strong writers are compelling for their abilities to both give space to mourning and loss as much as for the appreciation for being alive and conscious. As I have been reading through Nnedi Okorafor’s science fiction and fantasy works over the last 12 months, I have been struck, again and again, by how this powerful writer deftly captures the thrills and joys of existence as well as the horrors of loss—particularly the loss of a person’s familial identity through the deaths of loved ones and broader losses of culture through colonialism, war, and prejudice. Okorafor’s storytelling spans ages and spaces, but among her many gifts is her ability to focus on her characters’ inner and outer conflicts and show what makes us human: contextualizing loss and memory.

Continuing the story begun in *Akata Witch*

(2011) (or as it is titled in the UK and other parts of the world, *What Sunny Saw in the Flames*), *Akata Warrior* is Nnedi Okorafor’s tenth published novel and among her finest. Reading it after reading *Binti: Home* (2017) and *Lagoon* (2014) recently, I was struck once again by Okorafor’s ability to draw from the tension between the near-universal quest for self-knowledge through one’s families, ancestries, and home places, and the sense of loss that comes from an equally common desire so many of us have to leave home, to strike out for the unknown, and make a new life for ourselves. *Akata Warrior* taps into this tension as Okorafor deftly continues her exploration of these themes of loss and what can be gained from leaving the comfortable identities and places in which we often grow up.

A worthy successor to *Akata Witch*, *Akata Warrior* is a fine stand-alone novel that extends and broadens Sunny’s journey into magical learning among the Leopard People of Nigeria and plucks at narrative threads weaving many of Okorafor’s works together. Read and/or taught together or separately, these works also offer accessible stories for readers interested in exploring African speculative fiction and Afrofuturism. While the *Akata* series is sometimes put forward as “*Harry Potter* in Africa,” such a reductive label denigrates Okorafor’s vast creative powers and the vibrancy of science fiction being created in Africa and the African Diaspora.

In my review of Okorafor’s *Binti: Home* for [SFRA Review 319](#), I connected Binti’s journey to Eliot’s concept of returning to where we began and knowing it for the first time in “Little Gidding”. But in retrospect, perhaps this comparison was too glib and sold Okorafor short—it certainly does so here in *Akata Warrior*—unlike Binti, Sunny Anyanwu Nwazue is not returning to a literal homeplace she left behind but finding her true place in the world through loss. This is the power of Okorafor’s narrative projects: she finds a way to make the familiar new while exploring what it means to be a conscious being.

In this second installment of Sunny Nwazue’s story (and one hopes that there will be more in this series), Sunny and her friends Orлу, Sasha, and Chichi continue their studies at “Leopard Knocks,” the series’ magical community, but they also venture deeper into Nigeria, confronting toxic corruption among non-magical “Lambs,” including vicious male hazing rituals among Nigerian college students.

Throughout her fiction, Okorafor is both a powerful critic and jubilant celebrant of Nigeria and Nigerian cultures, and *Akata Warrior* is no exception as she makes great use of Nigerian cultures including music, mythologies, foodways, and religions. Sunny's background as a Nigerian-American visiting her parents' homeland mirrors Okorafor's life-story, but Sunny's albinism as well as Sasha's identification as much more American than African allow for complex interactions among the lead characters and the peoples and places in Nigeria.

Above all else, *Akata Warrior* is a story of personal exploration as Sunny again pushes herself to take on more than she should be able to handle as she concurrently rejects the low expectations placed upon young women in her many worlds: Nigeria, America, Leopard People, and Lambs.

Among the joys of reading any of Okorafor's texts is her consistent ability to engage familiar tropes (here the hero's journey) without depending on cliché. Sunny is, like so many strong-willed apprentices before her, forced to learn respect and humility by

her teachers, but forced into isolation as punishment, Sunny finds help from the great spider goddess Udide, first seen in Okorafor's *Lagoon*. Udide asks a steep price, but she rewards Sunny and her friends with a living conveyance across the country—a sentient creature with agency and an appetite, and both must be appeased. There are many such moments in *Akata Warrior* where Okorafor's narrative filigrees increase the reader's enjoyment.

On their journeys across Nigeria, Sunny loses much that is dear to her, including a direct connection with her "spirit face": a sentient being bonded to Sunny known as "Anyanwu" who first appeared when Sunny began to manifest her magical powers in *Akata Witch*. But as heroes so often are stripped of crucial weapons or magical protective objects, Sunny and Anyanwu are pulled apart from each other in *Warrior*, a rare event for Leopards, and usually fatal. However, this injury is a part of the novel's greater exploration of loss and recovery and another aspect of Okorafor's growing body of excellent work.

## Luke Cage and The Defenders

Thomas Connolly

Hodari Coker, Cheo, creator. *Luke Cage*. Netflix, 2016.

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

Petrie, Douglas and Marco Ramirez, creators. *The Defenders*. Netflix, 2017.

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

IN THE FIRST EPISODE of Netflix's *Iron Fist* (2017), Danny Rand (Finn Jones) encounters a character named 'Big Al' (Craig Walker), who is homeless and sleeping rough in Central Park. Big Al is a friendly individual, offering Danny food and the use of a stolen iPhone to search for information on his relatives. Yet his appearance in the series is short-lived: before the end of that first episode, Danny discovers Big Al lying dead against a tree, a needle resting in his arm. Danny says a brief Buddhist prayer over the dead man before departing, never to mention the man again.

Big Al is a minor character in the sprawling narrative web that has so far taken shape in the six Marvel television shows aired by Netflix, consisting of one season each of *Iron Fist*, *Jessica Jones* (2016) and *Luke Cage* (2017), two seasons of *Daredevil* (2015-2016), and the crossover series, *The Defenders* (2017). The shows have for the most part been highly acclaimed, and rightly so: with the exception of *Iron Fist*, slammed for its cultural insensitivity and whitewashing of Asian characters, the shows have been praised for their sophisticated take on the conventional superhero narrative, tackling complex issues of race and gender absent from Marvel's big-screen outings and introducing a level of gritty realism and political complexity to what is often perceived as a family-friendly genre.

The strong points of the various shows have been well-noted, yet the incidental death of the homeless Big Al also serves to demonstrate one of the biggest shortcomings of these otherwise impressive and sophisticated superhero narratives: their failure to deliver a coherent critique of economic inequality.

For all of their radical politics in other regards, none of Netflix's Marvel outings offers any critique, beyond the merest lip service, of class as a substantial determining factor in the lives of their characters, good or evil. The heroes are either themselves unproblematically wealthy (in the case of Danny Rand), or else their ostensible financial hardships are sketched in generic terms—quickly forgotten anxieties over rent or bills, for example—that flatly clash with each character's ability to secure their own single-occupant property in one of the most expensive cities in the world. The villains who are fleshed out in the greatest detail, meanwhile, are the economically privileged: Wilson Fisk (Vincent D'Onofrio) in *Daredevil*, Kilgrave (David Tennant) in *Jessica Jones*, Cornell Stokes (Mahershala Ali) in *Luke Cage*, Harold Meachum (David Wenham) in *Iron Fist*, and Alexandra (Sigourney Weaver) in *The Defenders*.

When truly economically deprived characters are depicted, they are consistently portrayed either as criminals or as passive and atomised victims of faceless economic forces: Big Al in *Iron Fist*, dead of an overdose, or Elena Cardenas (Judith Delgado) in *Daredevil*, murdered for resisting the hostile acquisition of her home by vulture real estate corporations, or the male youth of Harlem in *Luke Cage*, helplessly trapped in a violent cycle of economic hardship and gangland activities. Such depictions do not add up to a structured critique of the human realities of economic impoverishment.

In this failure to engage meaningfully with economic issues, these shows reproduce a basic quality of many superhero narratives. Like crime fiction, superhero stories are often mounted on the basis of a reactionary politics that would insist on the need to maintain, rather than critique or overturn, established politico-economic power structures, however inadequate. (Alan Moore's *Watchmen*, published in 1986–1987, is a notable exception in this regard.) Foggy Nelson's (Elden Henson) criticisms of the vigilante activities of his legal partner, Matthew Murdoch, a.k.a. Daredevil (Charlie Cox), are founded on just this basis. When Matthew angrily demands to know how he is supposed to defeat 'Kingpin' Wilson Fisk without deploying his superhuman powers, Foggy retorts: 'By using the law, Matt! ... That's how we take him down' (1.13). Foggy's uncritical faith in the justice system here is surprising: he himself is a *pro bono* lawyer, a profession made necessary only because availability to legal counsel in the American



courts is directly linked to an individual's economic means, rendering the underprivileged significantly less capable of obtaining adequate legal protection. The leap towards a critique of the predatory capitalist framework permeating American society here appears small—yet Foggy continues to espouse an idealistic faith in a justice system actively skewed against the interests of his own clients.

Matthew's own response to this situation is hardly much better: striking out against isolated criminal elements within his home neighbourhood of Hell's Kitchen in a Sisyphean attempt to stem the flow of social injustice, Matthew is concerned with nothing so much as hammering his own deeply personal and ultimately conservative vision of morality upon the socio-economic milieu by which he is surrounded. Such individualism is, of course, emblematic of the superhero archetype: driven by a personal experience of criminality or evil, the superhero sets forth, usually alone, to right the wrongs committed against society, sacrificing personal happiness or meaningful relationships in the fight against degradation and chaos, and, by extension, maintaining the political and legislative *status quo*.

In this manner, the superhero resembles the quintessential labourer of late capitalism: self-made and driven, without clear personal identity, individualist to the point of pathology, and willing to sacrifice their time and labour for the sake of preserving a social system the fundamental nature of which remains, at the close of each new adventure, ultimately unexamined and unchanged. Such radical individualism precludes the possibility for broader economic critiques: despite his working-class background, Matthew does not view himself as a representative of a specific class identity combatting an inegalitarian socio-economic system, but rather as a stopgap attempting to maintain a basic level of social order so that the poor may be permitted to continue surviving as best as they can.

It is in *Luke Cage* that the shows come closest to subverting this fatalistic position. During a confrontation with Detective Misty Knight (Simone Missick) regarding the social legitimacy of vigilantism, in which Knight insists that 'The system will win' in the fight against organised crime, Luke (Mike Colter) counters that the system is skewed in favour of those with financial clout: 'Forget the system. Arrests lead to indictments. And indictments lead to pleas. There's always a bigger fish, a bigger

angle' (1.05). Luke's insistence throughout the series on the need to safeguard Harlem's black heritage, and in particular the lives of the young uneducated black men of the borough, from the corrupting influence of organised crime is a significant expression of cultural unity, and gestures towards the possibility for a broader critique of the hegemonic ideologies that generate the social instability upon which such criminal enterprises feed.

Yet Luke's failure to supplement this group cultural identity with any vision of economic reform registers the inability of the Netflix shows to fully grapple with the complexities of impoverishment. At one point, Luke repeats a line spoken to him by another character recently killed in a gang-related attack: 'These kids need to see a man go to work every day, and to be in the presence of men in uniform putting in work' (1.05). The sentiment expressed here is, on the face of it, a sensible one—yet it also replicates the capitalist sleight-of-hand that translates endemic socio-economic issues into terms of personal responsibility. The underprivileged kids of Harlem need only work hard enough, Luke suggests, and they will escape the hardships and brutalities of life on the street. Such economic privilege, however, is much like Luke's own superpowers: in order to remain an effective source of social leverage, it must by necessity be restricted to the few. Later, in *The Defenders*, when Luke finds himself mixed up in a conspiracy involving a multinational corporation and terrorist organisation—the 'Hand'—he retreats from this position altogether and insists that 'I wanted to help one kid. One family ... this is way past my threshold' (1.04).

Luke's inconsistency in this regard—his initial insistence on the need to combat systemic corruption, and his later withdrawal from this position to a singular focus on isolated individuals and families—registers the broader ambiguity of the Netflix Marvel shows regarding the appropriate stance to adopt towards economic problematics. This is made all the more difficult given that one of the four 'Defenders', Danny Rand, is himself the CEO of a large multinational. The version of 'soft' capitalist reform depicted in *Iron Fist*—Danny's demands that certain medical products be made not-for-profit, or his commitment to aiding the victims of environmental pollution caused by his own company—indicates an uncomfortable compromise on the part of the show's writers, who appear caught between a desire

to register dissatisfaction with the undemocratic power wielded by multinationals and a reluctance to commit to any vision of socio-economic change more radical than the relatively weak position that powerful companies should try and 'do good'.

Luke's later confrontation with Danny in *The Defenders* on the issue of his social privilege—which could have served as a powerful corrective to the earlier wavering of the series on such matters—instead reiterates this vague call for corporate morality. Luke urges Danny to use his impressive financial clout to 'change the world without getting anybody hurt', and also to withhold from attacking street-level criminals, the 'people who are trying to feed their families'—an exhortation that rings hollow given Luke's own previous actions in this regard, and which ultimately fails to provoke any serious change in Danny's corporate identity (1.03).

Poverty, then, these Netflix shows would lead us to believe, is simply an unfortunate side-effect of an otherwise legitimate socio-economic system, one that may be adequately addressed by the good-hearted actions of munificent multinationals. Even in those shows in which issues of poverty are more rigorously confronted—*Daredevil* and *Luke Cage* in particular—the shows insist that the best approach to dealing with economic injustice is simply to roll up one's sleeves and get on with things, fighting inequality one criminal element at a time in the hope that the system eventually works out in everyone's favour. Such a position is deeply evasive—certainly it is impossible to imagine any similar fatalist stance being taken on the issues of either racial prejudice or sexual abuse, both of which are handled with significantly more sensitivity and subtlety.

The death of Big Al registers the extent of this evasion. The character offers one of a number of portrayals of addiction in the various Netflix shows: Jessica Jones (Krysten Ritter), for example, is repeatedly depicted drawing from a bottle of spirits—a coping mechanism, it is suggested, for dealing with her traumatic experience of sexual abuse at the hands of the mind-controlling Kilgrave. Yet Jessica's alcoholism, like her ostensible financial hardships, never feels more than tokenistic, a generic attempt to index her emotional imbalance rather than a serious exploration of the nature of addiction. Jessica, in other words, is not circumscribed by her addiction in the manner that Big Al is ultimately circumscribed by his.

The distinction derives from the significance of each character within their respective narratives. As protagonist, Jessica's poverty is intended to be tragic, a self-inflicted condition brought about by her inability to fully confront her traumatic past. The gravity of Jessica's economic hardships, furthermore, is significantly diminished by her close relationship with the extremely wealthy radio host, Trish Walker (Rachael Taylor). As a minor character, conversely, Big Al's poverty is non-specific—he is simply a passive by-product of a particularly brutal form of capitalist economics of which Danny Rand will soon come to represent the more benevolent, but not radically subversive, side.

Big Al's socio-economic status is, indeed, partially recast as an active lifestyle choice: he describes himself as a 'hunter-gatherer', almost a 'noble savage', content to rummage for food among the back alleys of New York, and therefore not in need of any serious intervention (1.01). His acquisition of an iPhone in turn reflects the realities of corporate relations (resulting from an unofficial product placement deal signed between Netflix and Apple), while his death comprises little more than a moment of narrative convenience: if left alive, Danny may have been forced to eventually confront the realities—material and human—of the economic system from which he has so richly benefitted.

The shows, then, for all their noted strengths, remain weak on this issue of class and economic inequality. 'We're special creatures', Big Al tells Danny at one point. Indeed they are—but the example of Big Al demonstrates the extent to which some within the Netflix Marvel universe remain more economically 'special' than others.

# ***They Call Me Jeeg***

Fernando Porta

*They Call Me Jeeg*, Dir. Gabriele Mainetti, screenplay Nicola Guaglianone and Menotti. Perf. Claudio Santamaria, Luca Marinelli, Ilenia Pastorelli, Stefano Ambrogi, Maurizio Tesei, Francesco Formichetti, Daniele Trombetti, Antonia Truppo. Goon Films/Rai Cinema. 2015 (2016 U.S.).

**Order option(s):** [HD](#)

WHEN ITALIAN CINEMA has to deal with the SF genre the results are often questionable not to say modest. A good recent case could be Salvatores' *The Invisible Boy* (2014), which failed to satisfy the public and the critics in terms of its supposed originality compared to the well known Wellsian model, even if the story was set in a city like Trieste, perhaps the most unreal and fantastic urban setting of all the Italian cities. The case of *They Call Me Jeeg* (orig. title "Lo chiamavano Jeeg robot", 2016), is indeed a different one and deserves our attention in so far as the theme of the superhero, clearly linked to the comic book production of our time, also demonstrates its science fictional lineage.

The author of this project is Gabriele Mainetti, a director who has already done well in some of his previous achievements (i.e. in the short films *Sideburns*, 2008, and *Tiger Boy*, 2015). Mainetti is fascinated by the way pop culture, comics and cartoons especially are capable of producing meanings and shaping morals for the young people in our contemporary settings. He tells his stories with a heartfelt personal touch, is very careful to generational icons and fashions but at the same time is aware of the impossible barrier that exists between everyday reality and personal, intimate fantasies. The Roman landscape he has chosen is perhaps too well known to cinema-goers in Italy but could well appeal to American viewers too. In this movie Rome becomes another appropriate backdrop for a powerful story of initiation to superhuman powers.

The city of Rome has been used appropriately in some previous Italian science SF movies: for example in the futuristic and satirical setting of Elio Petri's *The Tenth Victim* (1965), or in the post-apocalyptic and horror-like example of Umberto Ragona's *The*

*Last Man on Earth* (1964). But in those two movies the Roman landscape that was adopted was a kind of visual citation that aimed to intensify the science fictional stories that were told. Rome in the future had to be recognized and then defamiliarised thanks to some of its well-known architectural icons (the Colosseum, the EUR's "Palace of Civilization"). Instead Mainetti's Rome produces a kind of non-monumental journey in the city of today, showing for example the dusty slums of its outskirts (the area known as Tor Bella Monaca) or accompanying us into the dark and gritty alleys that tourists never see in the historical center.

These are therefore the places for narrating a story of a superhero who has nothing of the superhero in himself, of an anti-hero in today's "less-than-heroic" society. The terrible spectre of terrorism indeed appears at a certain point of the story, with all its menacing presence, as if to make clear that we are watching a city like many others in today's Europe. Clearly this Italian interpretation of the superhero theme in cinema is very far from the typical blockbuster of its American tradition. There are no skyscrapers on the screen and our all-Italian superhero only dresses with an anonymous hooded sweatshirt during the whole movie, while talking *romanesco*, the jargon of the locals (a feature that viewers will fail to notice if they do not follow the original soundtrack while reading the subbed version of the movie).

The actor Claudio Santamaria does his best to impersonate Enzo Ceccotti, a petty criminal who acquires his superpowers after falling in the chemical waste of the Tiber during the opening dramatic sequence, when he runs away from the police. Enzo is characterized as a loner, living on yoghurt and watching porn all day. After getting his newly acquired superstrength he is not sure what to do with his life, so he just follows his anti-social instincts when tempted to steal again, this time grabbing a whole ATM machine straight from the wall. It is precisely at this point that the director Mainetti and the script writers Nicola Guaglianone and Menotti start their rewriting of the typical superhero story, this time dealing with the age of the Internet and its power to create short-lived icons for thousands of users.

Thus, our little criminal will find his immediate popularity because the video of his robbery will become viral on social networks. Thereafter he meets

his female *confidante*, like any traditional superhero. The actress Ilenia Pastorelli in fact plays Alessia, the sexy but childlike companion of Enzo and another original elaboration of the “Lois Lane stereotype” we have seen so often. It is Alessia that will give the name of “Jeeg” to his protective and solitary companion and it is in her words that Enzo has to choose his superpowers to help “the poor and the weak ones”. For American viewers it must be explained that Jeeg is a powerful robot created by Japanese cartoonists in the Seventies, and is the name of a widely popular series for a whole generation of Italian TV viewers (*Jeeg, the Steel Robot*, 1975–1976).

Alessia is after all the unwitting witness of a specifically fictional status and the name she has chosen for Enzo serves the purpose of interrogating indirectly the same filmic/comic genre that the movie is about. But the fact that this kind of reality—the *superhuman* one—only exists in the dreams and the fantasies of an eternal adolescent like Alessia is a point that many viewers will perceive as a sort of bittersweet taste. Again, Mainetti’s movie is able to transform the symbols and the conventions of the superhero genre and then produce a new meaningful reinterpretation. This is done through effective visual shots, a certain degree of chromatic manipulation and sometimes by showing harsh and gory effects typical of crime movies (as when another criminal, for example, is put to death by some ravaging dogs). The figure of super-Enzo/Jeeg interestingly acquires a truly romantic status that would be impossible for the usual Marvel or DC protagonist: for example, as when he uses his strength to spin the big wheel at a Luna Park to make Alessia happy, again actualising her personal love fantasy.

Now, every superhero character defines himself insofar as he contrasts or negates the attributes of the eventual villain he is going to fight in his adventure. In our story the baddie is Fabio “*the Gipsy*” (impersonated by Luca Marinelli), a small time gangster who first tries to rape Alessia and then succeeds in getting the same super-force of Enzo once he discovers the spot in the river where the

initial contamination took place. This character is important, not just for being a sadistic and Joker-like villain, but because he really embodies everything that the lonely, introverted, openly masculine super-Enzo has demonstrated himself to be. Again the social satire of the director seems directed at the neurotic results of contemporary media culture: Fabio likes to sing cheap pop songs and appears in colourful outfits; he talks a lot and he also shows a certain eccentric attitude that borders on the feminine. Moreover Fabio is obsessed by a search for notoriety because he appeared in a talent show on TV and now, thanks to his newly acquired super-force, he wants to get into world news by planning a bombing at the Olympic Stadium. The final confrontation between the two superhumans can only end with the victory of Enzo/Jeeg who has finally accepted the ethics of being a superhero.

And yet one cannot help feeling a little bit disappointed by the conventional turn that the movie finally reverts to after the interesting reformulation of almost all the tropes that constitute the genre of the superhero film. The first part of the movie, in particular, has introduced the viewer to a new notion of the superhero; a hero that does not want to be a hero, and many reviewers have in fact compared *Jeeg* more to the intimate script of M. Night Shyamalan’s *Unbreakable* (2000) than to any DC or Marvel blockbuster. In the end, the best way to appreciate this movie is perhaps to consider its typical Italian flavour, which follows in its own way the classical teachings of old neo-realism, and then proceeds to a complete ironic and post-romantic rewriting of all the canons of the superhero cinematic genre. The movie has rightly received several category-prizes in Italy (“Nastri d’argento” “David di Donatello”, 2016), and this review can only commend the directorial effort and the originality of the screenplay. It is a movie that does its best to distance itself from the festival of special effects of the American tradition, while also indirectly offering a critique of the notion of the superhero in our difficult “unheroic” times.

### Call for Papers—Conference

**Title:** *A Clockwork Green: Ecomedia in the Anthropocene*

**Deadline:** 1st December 2017

**Contact:** Christy Tidwell ([christy.tidwell@gmail.com](mailto:christy.tidwell@gmail.com))

**Dates:** 14–30 June 2018

A troubling paradox lies at the heart of ecomedia studies: those of us who study and teach about the intersection of ecological issues and non-print media also recognize that the production, consumption, and circulation of media texts take a massive toll on the Earth's environment, an issue well documented by media scholars. In other words, as ecomedia scholars and environmental filmmakers, we must admit that our own media production, consumption, and research practices—which are felt disproportionately across communities and cultures—make us complicit in the ever-escalating global environmental crisis. Yet if we are to better understand the vital role that film and media play in reflecting, responding to, and shaping public attitudes about the relationships between the human and non-human worlds, as well as different human communities, we must embrace this paradox. In this first-ever ASLE online symposium, we will collectively situate and define ecomedia studies and its relationship to environmental humanities, film and media studies, and cultural studies through a series of virtual presentations and conversations. While ecomedia will be our buzzword for the event, proposals on all aspects of environmental criticism are welcome.

In a May 2014 interview, deep-green activist Dan Bloom—arguably the first to use the term cli-fi for climate fiction and film—asserts, “I believe that cli fi novels and movies can serve to wake up readers and viewers to the reality of the Climapocalypse that awaits humankind if we do nothing to stop it” (Vemuri). Bloom’s claims echo those of Rahman Badalov, who declares of the Lumiere Brothers’ Oil Wells of Baku, “Blazing oil gushers make marvelous cinematographic material.... Only cinema can capture the thick oil bursting forth like a fiery monster.” But Badalov not only views these

oil gushers as monstrous nature; he also notes the dual message of the view: to both condemn environmental degradation and entertain with spectacle. Perhaps acknowledging this dual message is a way of “dwelling in the dissolve” or “performing exposure,” as Stacy Alaimo puts it. Alaimo asserts “performing exposure as an ethical and political act means to reckon with—rather than disavow—such horrific events and to grapple with the particular entanglements of vulnerability and complicity that radiate from disasters and their terribly disjunctive connection to everyday life in the industrialized world.” Environmental justice issues of gender, race, ability, class, and ethnicity are invariably exposed as part and parcel of the material networks of media. In the provocative essay “Ecocriticism and Ideology: Do Ecocritics Dream of a Clockwork Green?”, Andrew Hageman calls for “a practice of dialectical critique to read films for what they reveal to us about the contradictions within the culture, society, and ourselves that we readily recognize in such films.” We invite you to answer that call by examining any text or context broadly related to our symposium and join us for what we hope to be a unique, timely, and thoroughly enjoyable digital event.

Hageman asks, “What can film, given its ideological constraints, do to advance ecological knowledge, attitudes, and behavior?” In your presentations, we invite you to consider this and other questions, such as the following:

- How is ecomedia deployed by communities at the margins of traditional media practice and at the frontlines of environmental disaster?
- How are mainstream econarratives of gender, sexuality, race, etc. resisted and re-inscribed?
- How does the material impact of ecomedia (film, television, gaming, etc.) undermine or emphasize its message?
- How can ecomedia be useful in persuading resistant audiences?
- What strategies have worked (or not worked) in teaching ecomedia?
- What impact have comics, gaming, habitat dioramas, and other forms of ecomedia had on the field?
- What broad definitions of ecomedia can account for the wide range of forms it entails



- (more than just cinematic)?
- What broad definitions of ecomedia can account for a wide range of ecological alternatives, ideologies, or perspectives?
  - How does ecohorror inform our understanding of ecomedia in this era of climapocalypse?
  - How can re-reading historical ecomedia inform our understanding of past and/or current cultural climate?
  - What cinematic strategies and practices best reflect various ecological ideologies?
  - Can or should the focus be shifted away from the human in ecomedia?

Though the focus of the conference is ecomedia, ASLE and ASLE affiliate members will be welcome to present on a range of topics. We also encourage U.S. and international filmmakers and scholars to participate and encourage participants to meet together through local viewing/discussion groups on their home campuses.

Beyond a drastically lower carbon footprint, the nearly carbon neutral conference approach also is more inclusive of international scholars who may have funding or travel issues for a U.S.-based conference, is more inclusive of differently abled scholars who may have difficulty with physical accessibility and who may need closed captioning and/or audio screen readers, is open access after the conference window, can be used in classrooms, and has been proven to elicit more discussion than a traditional conference format. The conference is formatted as follows:

- Speakers record their own talks. This is typically A) a video of them speaking, generally filmed with a webcam or smartpone, B) a screen recording of a presentation, such as a PowerPoint, or C) a hybrid of the two, with speaker and presentation alternately or simultaneously onscreen
- Talks are uploaded to the conference website where they can be viewed at any time during the conference timeframe. Talks are organized into panels (i.e. individual web pages) that generally have three speakers each and a shared Q&A session
- Participants and panelists contribute to

online Q&A sessions, which are similar to online forums, by posing and responding to written questions and comments

We eagerly welcome international submissions, but please keep in mind the presentations should be in English or subtitled in English, and the Q&A will be in English. Also, please note that all talks will become part of a permanent conference archive open to the public.

**Submission:** Please submit abstracts of 300 words by December 1 to Christy Tidwell ([christy.tidwell@gmail.com](mailto:christy.tidwell@gmail.com)). Contact Christy Tidwell with questions about submissions and Bridgitte Barclay ([bbarclay@aurora.edu](mailto:bbarclay@aurora.edu)) and/or Shannon Davies Mancus ([shannonmancus@gmail.com](mailto:shannonmancus@gmail.com)) with questions about the conference more broadly.

**Title:** *The George Slusser Conference on Science Fiction and Fantasy*

**Deadline:** 31st December 2017

**Contact:** Jon Alexander ([jfalexan@uci.edu](mailto:jfalexan@uci.edu)), Gregory Benford ([xbenford@gmail.com](mailto:xbenford@gmail.com)), Howard V. Hendrix ([howardh@csufresno.edu](mailto:howardh@csufresno.edu)), or Gary Westfahl ([Gw-westfahl@yahoo.com](mailto:Gw-westfahl@yahoo.com))

**Dates:** 26–29 April 2018

Although the late George Slusser (1939–2014) was best known for coordinating academic conferences on science fiction and editing volumes of essays on science fiction, he was also a prolific scholar in his own right, publishing several books about major science fiction writers and numerous articles in scholarly journals and anthologies. His vast body of work touched upon virtually all aspects of science fiction and fantasy. In articles like “The Origins of Science Fiction” (2005), he explored how the conditions necessary for the emergence of science fiction first materialized in France and later in England and elsewhere. Seeking early texts that influenced and illuminate science fiction, he focused not only on major writers like Mary Shelley, Jules Verne, and H. G. Wells but also on usually overlooked figures like E.T.A. Hoffmann, Benjamin Constant, Thomas De Quincey, Honoré de Balzac, Guy de Maupassant, J.-H. Rosny aîné, and J.D. Bernal. His examinations of twentieth-century science fiction regularly established connections between a wide

range of international authors, as suggested by the title of his 1989 essay “Structures of Apprehension: Lem, Heinlein, and the Strugatskys,” and he fruitfully scrutinized both classic novels by writers like Arthur C. Clarke and Ursula K. Le Guin and the formulaic ephemera of the contemporary science fiction marketplace. A few specific topics repeatedly drew his interest, such as the mechanisms of time travel in science fiction and the “Frankenstein barrier” that writers encounter when they face the seemingly impossible task of describing beings that are more advanced than humanity. And he aroused controversies by criticizing other scholars in provocative essays like “Who’s Afraid of Science Fiction?” (1988) and “The Politically Correct Book of Science Fiction” (1994). No single paragraph can possibly summarize the full extent of his remarkably adventurous scholarship.

The George Slusser Conference on Science Fiction and Fantasy seeks to pay tribute to his remarkable career by inviting science fiction scholars, commentators, and writers to contribute papers that employ, and build upon, some of his many groundbreaking ideas; we also welcome suggestions for panels that would address Slusser and his legacy. To assist potential participants in locating and studying Slusser’s works, a conference website will include a comprehensive bibliography of his books, essays, reviews, and introductions. This selective conference will follow the format that Slusser preferred, a single track that allows all attendees to listen to every paper and participate in lively discussions about them. It is hoped that the best conference papers can be assembled in one volume and published as a formal or informal festschrift to George Slusser.

**Submission:** Potential contributors are asked to submit by email a 250-word paper abstract and a brief curriculum vitae to any of the four conference coordinators: Jon Alexander ([jfalexan@uci.edu](mailto:jfalexan@uci.edu)), Gregory Benford ([xbenford@gmail.com](mailto:xbenford@gmail.com)), Howard V. Hendrix ([howardh@csufresno.edu](mailto:howardh@csufresno.edu)), or Gary Westfahl ([Gwestfahl@yahoo.com](mailto:Gwestfahl@yahoo.com)). The deadline for submissions is December 31, 2017, and decisions will be provided by mid-January, 2018. Further information about the conference schedule, fee, location, accommodations, and distinguished guests will be provided at the conference website. The conference will be held at the University of

California, Irvine.

## Call for Papers—Articles

**Title:** *Systems and Knowledge: Scholarship, Ecology and Mind in Science Fiction*

**Completed Chapter Deadline:** 16th December 2018

**Contact:** Chris Pak ([chrispak@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:chrispak@hotmail.co.uk))

Science fiction is a genre inherently replete with a multitude of systems. From computers, robots, cyborgs and androids to human-animal studies, ecological systems, management practices and (agro-)industrial systems, science fiction has portrayed a variety of different and sometimes interlocking sets of physical systems. Ideas of knowledge generation and systematisation are also central to the genre, from the social and hard sciences, art, language and communication, right through to the systematisation and dissemination of knowledge.

World Systems Theory understands literature, film and other media as emerging from an interaction between categories of a global economic system. Immanuel Wallerstein in *The Modern World System: Capitalist Agriculture and the Origins of the European World Economy in the Sixteenth Century* (1974) proposes four categories to organise this world economic system: core, semi-periphery, periphery and external. More recently, Franco Moretti has applied this schema to analyse the novel in world literature, while Andrew Milner has adapted this model to apply it to the production of science fiction. We are currently seeking the final few essays to round off the collection, and so this is a second call for papers inviting scholars to submit proposals for articles that use or critique World Systems Theory for the analysis of science fiction. Proposals exploring any period of speculative fiction are welcome, but we are especially interested in abstracts that apply World Systems Theory to global science fiction.

**Submission:** Proposals should be 300-400 words, and include a short, 100-word biography: the deadline for submission is December 16th, 2017.

**Title:** *CFP: Ecohorror Edited Collection*

**Completed Chapter Deadline:** 14th May 2018

**Contact:** Christy Tidwell ([christy.tidwell@gmail.com](mailto:christy.tidwell@gmail.com)) and Carter Soles ([csoles@brockport.edu](mailto:csoles@brockport.edu))

In recent years, there has been increasing attention within both ecocriticism and horror studies to the intersections between the two fields. The country/city split and the civilized person's fear of the wilderness and rural spaces, key issues for ecocritics, also loom large over the horror genre. Furthermore, there are entire horror subgenres dedicated to the revenge of wild nature and its denizens upon humanity. As Rust and Soles write, ecohorror studies "assumes that environmental disruption is haunting humanity's relationship to the non-human world" as well as that ecohorror in some form can be found in all texts grappling with ecocritical matters (509-10).

There have been some critical examinations of this intersection – e.g., *Ecogothic*, edited by Andrew Smith and William Hughes (2013); an ecohorror special cluster in *ISLE*, edited by Stephen A. Rust and Carter Soles (2014); *Monstrous Nature: Environment and Horror on the Big Screen* by Robin L. Murray and Joseph K. Heumann (2016); and *Plant Horror: Approaches to the Monstrous Vegetal in Fiction and Film*, edited by Dawn Keetley and Angela Tenga (2017) – but we feel that it is time for a fuller examination of ecohorror as a genre. To that end, we invite submissions of approximately 6000-7000 words to be included in the first edited collection devoted exclusively to ecohorror. Because our

interest is in the genre as a whole, there is no limit on time period or medium; we want this collection to explore the range of ecohorror texts and ideas.

Chapters may consider the following:

- How is human violence against the natural world represented in such texts? Or, vice-versa, how is violence against humanity by the natural world represented? What effect does this violence have on the relationship between human and nonhuman?
- How do ecohorror texts blur human/nonhuman distinctions in order to generate fear, horror, or dread?
- What fears of, about, or for nature are expressed in ecohorror? How do these expressions of fear influence environmental rhetoric and/or action more broadly?
- How are ecohorror texts and tropes used to promote ecological awareness or represent ecological crises?

**Submission:** Submit completed chapters to Christy Tidwell ([christy.tidwell@gmail.com](mailto:christy.tidwell@gmail.com)) and Carter Soles ([csoles@brockport.edu](mailto:csoles@brockport.edu)) by May 14, 2018. We are requesting submissions of completed chapter drafts to be considered for this project rather than abstracts. Please feel free to reach out with questions and/or ideas before submitting a completed chapter, however; we would be happy to provide feedback or guidance.



# Science Fiction Research Association

[www.sfra.org](http://www.sfra.org)

The Science Fiction Research Association is the oldest professional organization for the study of science fiction and fantasy literature and film. Founded in 1970, the SFRA was organized to improve classroom teaching; to encourage and assist scholarship; and to evaluate and publicize new books and magazines dealing with fantastic literature and film, teaching methods and materials, and allied media performances. Among the membership are people from many countries—students, teachers, professors, librarians, futurologists, readers, authors, booksellers, editors, publishers, archivists, and scholars in many disciplines. Academic affiliation is not a requirement for membership. Visit the SFRA Website at [www.sfra.org](http://www.sfra.org). For a membership application, contact the SFRA Treasurer or see the Website.

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

### *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts*

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