SFRA Review (eISSN 2641-2837; formerly published in print as ISSN 1068-395X) is an open access journal published four times a year by the Science Fiction Research Association (SFRA). SFRA Review is devoted to surveying the contemporary field of SF fiction, media, and scholarship as it develops, bringing in-depth reviews with each issue, as well as longer critical articles highlighting key conversations in SF studies, regular retrospectives on recently passed authors and scholars, reports from members of the SFRA Executive Committee, and much more.

SFRA Review History

SFRA Review was initially titled SFRA Newsletter and has been published since 1971, just after the founding of SFRA in 1970. The Newsletter changed its named to SFRA Review in 1992 with issue #194 to reflect the centrality of an organ for critical reviews of both fiction and scholarship to the SF studies community. The Newsletter and Review were published 10 times a year until the early 2000s, when the Review switched to a quarterly schedule. Originally available only to SFRA members or sold per issue for a small fee, SFRA Review was made publicly available on the SFRA’s website starting with issue #256 (Jan/Feb 2002). Starting with issue #326, the Review became a stated Open Access publication. Select issues from 1974 to 2011 (issues #31-295) are available as PDFs through the Digital Collections of the University of Southern Florida Libraries (see the link a at the bottom of this page).

Submissions

The SFRA Review encourages all submissions, including original essays (4,000-6,000 words); review essays; individual reviews of fiction, media, and scholarship; and interviews. If you would like to write a review essay or review, please contact the respective review editor. For all other publication types, please contact the editor, managing, and/or associate editors.
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SEE ANYTHING different? Huh, do ya? How about now? Well, fine, I’ll put it plainly: the SFRA Review has a brand new look—and it only took a six hours to fully redesign our template! This visual change also comes with an expanded editorial board. With #329 we welcome:

- Ian Campbell as the new Managing Editor. Ian will help me do a number of pressing things as we grow the journal, among these we will collaborate to expand the articles section of the journal, explore options for an online edition, build a contributor database, and institute contributor agreements promising a Creative Commons license that will ensure our contributors have the rights to reuse their contributions as they see fit.

- Virginia Conn and Amandine Faucheux as the new Associate Editors. Together, Virginia and Amandine will be key to expanding the journal’s reach and scope, primarily by seeking out and editing groups of symposia articles.

- Thomas Connolly as the new Assistant Media Reviews Editor. Under the direction of Media Reviews Editor Leimar Garcia-Siino, Thomas will help internationalize and expand the reviewers and media reviewed, ensuring in our age of an overwhelming amount of media that we are able to cover both what matters and what needs to be considered.

Please join me in welcoming our new editors!

In addition to design and editorial changes, this issue of the Review includes an essay by Benjamin Robertson on abstraction as a franchising strategy in the MCU, a new SF in Translation column, an interview with Beata Gubasci, and a whole slew of reviews—with more promised in the future!

Big changes are coming, and we hope you’ll be a part of this growing SFRA Review by contributing a review, an essay, or an idea for where we can go next!

That's all until next time. Be seeing you!
WELL, Hawai‘i was a conference to remember! We had performances, papers, and pineapple, each more delicious and inspiring than the other. Huge mahalo to the organizers, the guests, the speakers, and the attendees. The conference was also a chance for us to start a number of conversations that have been waiting to happen. The first, and arguably most dramatic, of these is the long overdue reconsideration of the award names. Specifically, the names of the Pioneer and the Pilgrim awards seem to warrant some revamping. A few good suggestions have already been made but we’ll be opening up a forum for discussion in the next few weeks where members will be invited to suggest alternative award names and respond to those made by others. Stay tuned.

Speaking of awards, we’re getting ready to offer a new one! We will be presenting the brand new annual SFRA book award for best first scholarly monograph in SF, in English, at the next conference. In addition to recognition and fame, the recipient will be awarded a $500 cash prize. If you published such a book or would like to recommend one, please do let us know and we will contact the publisher to obtain copies for evaluation. Big shout out to Sean Guynes who came up with this idea in the first place!

The next order of business relates to the upcoming elections. You may well remember that we recently reconfigured the structure of the SFRA Executive Committee’s time in office, extending the terms to three years and staggering the Officers’ elections. Statements from candidates for both the position of Secretary and President appear in these pages. I urge you to read them carefully and cast your vote in due course. No matter the results of the elections, each of the nominees has effectively committed themselves to sustaining, supporting, and improving the SFRA for a number of years, and for this I offer huge, enormous thanks to everyone who agreed to put themselves forward.

Finally, as I write this, I know everyone is eager to find out where next year’s
conference will be held. I hope that by the time this is published, you’ll have already received a separate notice about our location but in the meantime I must wait for a few more puzzle pieces to fall into place before I can formally announce. So that we may be spared such suspense in future years, I invite all those thinking they may be interested in hosting, any time in the years to come, to get in touch as soon as possible. In addition, we will be publishing a short precis with information that may help you all suss out the feasibility of committing to hosting. As ever, I am at your service should you have any questions.
SFRA VICE-PRESIDENT’S MESSAGE

Next Stop: Bloomington, IN

Sonja Fritzsche

WHAT a wonderful conference we had in Honolulu, Hawai‘i at Chaminade University in June! Many thanks again to the conference hosts John Rieder, Ida Yoshinaga, Justin Wyble and the rest of the committee for their warm Hawai‘ian hospitality, expert organizational skills, and overall thoughtfulness. The many special guests, high-quality presentations and discussions prompted by the conference theme—“Facing the Future, Facing the Past: Colonialism, Indigeneity, and Science Fiction”—made it especially memorable. I already have the 2019 conference on my calendar, which will take place at Indiana University in Bloomington, Indiana from July 8-11, 2020. More information will be forthcoming soon. Many thanks to Rebekah Sheldon and her generous Hoosier colleagues who have stepped forward in the society’s hour of conference host need! This past year, it was also a pleasure to work with my colleagues on the Clareson Award committee. I was honored to be able to present the award to Sherryl Vint from the University of California, Riverside for her distinguished service to the field of science fiction studies. Congratulations to all of the winners of the 2018 Awards! Be on the lookout for a new award category as well!

Please keep your eyes peeled for an official announcement about a new SFRA Country Representative Initiative. The SFRA has long been very fortunate to have a number of international members and to host an occasional conference in a country outside of the United States. In an effort to encourage support for the study of science fiction in other countries and also to help these scholars network with each other, the SFRA is soliciting volunteer country representatives to help facilitate such communication. Responsibilities would include acting as an informational liaison between the SFRA and the country’s science fiction scholarly community through the promotion of events, new membership outreach, and otherwise helping to connect in the spirit of international communication and collaboration. If you are interested, please contact me at fritzsc9@msu.edu. We hope to integrate some of this information on the SFRA website as well to help with the visibility of scholarly science fiction work in other countries. Please also continue to pass on your announcements and any CFPs that you would like to have posted on the SFRA Facebook or Twitter pages.
REPORTS FROM THE SECRETARY

Jenni G. Halpin

Secretary Report: Executive Committee Meeting Minutes
Chaminade University, 22 June 2019
12:10 PM - 2:00 PM

PRESENT: Keren Omry (President), Sonja Fritzsche (Vice President), Hugh O’Connell (Treasurer), Jenni Halpin (Secretary), Pawel Frelik (Past President), Katherine Bishop (Webmaster)

1. **Slack.** There is general agreement that slack is working for us well enough for our communications.

2. **Honolulu Conference.** Final costs are forthcoming. John Rieder recommends reducing the currently large discount for graduate students so as to better balance the overall costs.

3. **Upcoming Elections.** Because Wild Apricot (WA) supports casting votes anonymously while limiting voting eligibility to current members, we will use it to run elections. Candidate statements should go into the next Review 60 days before voting opens. Voting should be open for a month, and results should be announced no later than mid-December.

4. **Wild Apricot.** WA is making changes connected to their introduction of their own payments scheme. Hugh is seeking further details. Pawel will seek estimates on getting a new website built on WordPress as an alternative. We will go dark on new membership for November and December to help Hugh and Katherine get the new system up and running.

5. **2020 Conference.** Keren, as Immediate Past President (IPP), will serve on the conference committee as a new duty of the IPP. We will call for sites and organizers, for the short and long term.

6. **Award Names.** At the business meeting we will begin a conversation about changing the names of the Pilgrim and Pioneer awards.
7. **Country Representatives.** These new roles would be overseen by the VP, providing geographically specific information. Katherine will make sub-pages by geographic region. We need a brochure for them to disseminate (ideally this will be a full color PDF that prints nicely in black and white on either A4 or 8.5×11). We might even have SFRA branded mini events. This could also funnel toward the Review.

8. **Book Prize.** Sean Guynes has proposed a SFRA book prize for scholarly books. Discussion will continue.

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**Secretary Report: Business Meeting Minutes**  
Chaminade University, 23 June 2019  
12:20 PM - 1:00 PM

PRESENT: Keren Omry (President), Sonja Fritzsche (Vice President), Hugh O’Connell (Treasurer), Jenni Halpin (Secretary), Pawel Frelik (Past President), and approximately 40 others.

1. **Appreciations** (Keren Omry). Thanks to John, Ida, Justin and all who helped organize the conference. Thanks to the rest of the Executive Committee. Thanks to Sean Guynes, editor of *The SFRA Review*. Thanks to Katherine Bishop, our web director.

2. **Membership Report** (Jenni Halpin). As of last week we had 302 members, similar numbers to the lead up to last year’s conference. We are seeing a slight increase in the overall ratio of members based outside the US but a slight decrease in student members based outside the US. None of these changes appear large enough to mark significant trends.

3. **Country Representatives** (Sonja Fritzsche). The Vice President posts on Twitter and Facebook and solicits CFPs to include here. We want to support our international member and recognize how SF is a global genre. We are looking for connectors who are excited to share about their work. Potentially there will be some web space for posting and maybe also space in the *Review*. An official call for people to serve as country representatives will be forthcoming.

4. **Award Committees** (Keren Omry). Members are needed for all five award committees. We are considering adding a sixth award, for a book; details will be
forthcoming. The Executive Committee will make a proposal for this and send it out. The ‘Support a New Scholar’ prize is two years of membership in the SFRA; applications for this prize are usually due in December.

5. **Finances** (Hugh O’Connell). Our 2018 income was approximately $2000 more than expenditures.

6. **Upcoming Elections** (Keren Omry and Pawel Frelik). The President and Secretary will be ending their terms in December. (As of last year we stagger terms on the Executive Committee to increase our preservation of institutional knowledge.) Persons interested in standing for either post should contact Pawel; candidate statements will be due in July for inclusion in the August issue of the *Review*. Voting will be open for a month, 60 days after the statements are published, with results to be announced as soon as possible after voting closes.

7. **Future Conferences** (Keren Omry). Two options for next year’s conference have arisen in the wake of the previous plan falling through: Warsaw or Indiana, and efforts are currently focused on Indiana. We are always looking for proposals to host future conferences, as much as five years down the line. A template for conference bids is on the website. We will develop a document with details from the history, such as typical attendances, ratios of graduate student to full-price registrants, and the other details that a bid should take into account. We prefer to announce the location not later than the previous year’s conference banquet with CFPs posted by November or December. And we would love to announce as much as possible as early as possible.

8. **Graphic Design** (Keren Omry). We are eager to revamp our look and need a 3D printing expert to help us update. Contact Keren.

9. **SFRA Review** (Sean Guynes). The *Review* is seeking an Associate Editor to add symposia, such as papers from the conference or themed sets. It is also seeking an Assistant Media Editor, with applications due 1 August. These are positions that would ideally be filled by graduate students or early career scholars. Ida will be circulating a call for the symposium of conference papers, which literally is a call for papers as presented at the conference.

10. **Award Names** (Keren Omry). Changing the names of the Pilgrim and Pioneer
awards has been suggested. Discussion among the business meeting included the following ideas: these names are both colonialist and overly Americanist; renaming them for previous or early recipients could reinforce representational biases we hope to move beyond; the two names should sound different so that we do not confuse the one with the other; naming them for concepts might be more fruitful than naming them for people; naming them for authors would shift focus away from our scholarly endeavors; naming them for living people would call for obtaining the permission of those people. Some suggestions include: Bailey, Octavia Butler, Ursula K Le Guin, Ansible, Voyager. Discussion will continue.
REPORT FROM THE TREASURER

Treasurer Report: SFRA Finances for 2018-2019

Hugh O'Connell

2018 Final Account Balances
- Checking: $62,348.18
- Savings: $20,446.45

2018 Income (Journals, Memberships, Conference Registrations, Savings Account Interest, Etc.)
- $55,605.62

2018 Expenditures
- Journal Subscriptions: $17,286.37
- Wild Apricot: $778.68
- Adobe Creative Cloud: $254.27
- Marquette Conference Costs: $30,456.72
- Conference Guest Hotel: $2,279.88
- Conference Guest Travel: $67.15
- Conference Travel Grants: $1,350.00
- Postage: $50.10
- Accountants: $975
- Total: $53,498.17

2018 Net
- $2,107.45
BELOW, please find the statements from the candidates for two Executive Committee positions that are open this year: President and Secretary. You may remember that during the last tranche of changes to the SFRA Bylaws we decided not only to extend all terms of office to three years but also to introduce staggered terms in order to provide better continuity to the organization. Consequently, after electing Vice-President and Treasurer in 2018, this year we are voting for President and Secretary, who will, naturally, serve for three years. So, please read and consider the candidates’ statements and, when we open our online voting page in early October, cast your vote.

I would also like to take a moment and offer my appreciation to the candidates for their willingness to run for office. Like all volunteer organizations, we depend entirely on our members’ efforts. While being an SFRA officer may look glamorous on paper, it is also a commitment of time and attention in the service of others. We should always remember this and acknowledge their participation—thank you De Witt, Gerry, Grant, and Sean!

Candidates for SFRA President, 2020-2023

De Witt Douglas Kilgore

Being asked to serve as President of the SFRA is a signal honor for me. I’ve been a member of the Association for almost two decades. That longevity is testament to the role it has played in shaping my intellectual life. My service to its committees (the Pioneer and the Clareson Awards) consistently produced the most pleasurable exchanges of my career. I am particularly proud of the fact that some of my former students are now distinguished members of the organization. These contributions inspire a small measure of pride in me.

Thus, I imagine that the President of this body is more the executor of our collective vision than a leader whose unique perspective manifests our future. My particular agenda is that the SFRA should seek ways to remain responsive to the ways science fiction narratives have come to dominate our increasingly fractiously
planetary culture. This raises at least three challenges for the scholar-writers of this Association: 1) To exchange defensive critical postures for confident assessments of how genre productions actively directs the flow of current cultural and political conversation, 2) to conserve the genre's literary, critical and cinematic histories while registering the radical changes that hitherto minority discourses have made on what is written and filmed, and 3) to continually renew our attention to the genre's role as a catalyst for cultural change through rational engagement with the physical world. (We can continue to argue about whether that potential is generously progressive or robustly reactionary.) This list of agenda items, however, amounts only to an abstract statement of purpose. They can only be implemented by maintaining the things we do as we create new initiatives. If elected I hope to preside over exchanges that would build on previous initiatives undertaken by the Association's Executive Committees (reading through past issues of the SFRA Review is a necessary prompt here) as we work to generate programs that will continue to energize our membership's research agendas and creative work.

Gerry Canavan

I was honored to serve as SFRA's Vice-President in the previous leadership cycle, and equally honored when nominated for run to president this time around. Along with IAFA, SFRA is truly my scholarly home, and if selected as president I hope to build on the successes of the last few years, to continue to grow the membership and influence of this organization. My experience organizing the 2018 conference at Marquette has shown me that SFRA would benefit from clarifying and regularizing the way it structures its annual conferences, allowing us to better plan our locations and our finances several years out (including of course the organization's promised return to Europe). There are also ample opportunities for conference collaborations with other scholarly organizations like ASLE and SLSA, as well as attractive research sites like the Eaton, a practice which has fallen away somewhat in recent years. The recent improvements to the website and the expansion of The SFRA Review also offer an opportunity for new digital collaborations that I am eager to explore. Finally, I am committed to re-interpreting the various functions of SFRA in the face of the ongoing tumult in academia and in the world at large. In particular, in the face of neoliberal
austerity, right-wing backlash politics, and major demographic shifts that threaten the global university system, it seems to me crucial that SFRA devote more energy to finding space for the many independent and alt-ac scholars who contribute to the field, as well as support emerging scholars find suitable and stable employment befitting their expertise, whether inside or outside the academy. Our conference is a site where we might greatly expand our collective understanding of the challenges and opportunities of the present moment, with specific attention to the sorts of doors our science fiction scholarship can open.

Candidates for SFRA Secretary, 2020-2023

Grant Dempsey

I am honored to run for election to serve the SFRA in the position of Secretary. I am currently a doctoral candidate at the University of Western Ontario’s Centre for the Study of Theory and Criticism, where I also completed my MA. The SFRA has been important to me ever since I joined it within the first year of my graduate studies. I attended the SFRA’s annual conference in Riverside, California in 2013, and since then, I have attended as frequently as I could, cherishing on each occasion the warm welcome and the sharp and productive feedback that I always find among this organization’s members. This year, I was honored to receive the Student Paper Award for the piece that I presented at the annual conference in Milwaukee in 2018.

I am appreciative of the support and recognition that I have gained from the SFRA, and equally appreciative of this opportunity to serve the SFRA in return. I have significant experience in administrative and organizational duties. Since early in my graduate studies, I served multiple years as a student representative both within my program, on a committee responsible most importantly for evaluating course proposals, and without, on the council of the university’s Society of Graduate Students. Both of these specific positions required intensive communication management, ensuring that my fellow graduate students were informed of and enabled to respond to developments. I was also co-organizer of my program’s internal lecture series, the Theory Sessions, for three years, for which I communicated with and mediated among graduate students and faculty in several departments across my university. In my work on the editorial committee for the journal *Chiasma:*
A Site for Thought, one of my responsibilities was the creation from scratch of an email contacts list including department heads, graduate chairs, and program administrators at universities in, and many outside of, North America, for the sake of direct communication of the journal’s CFPs and issue releases.

I am well suited to the duties of the SFRA Secretary, and I am eager to do what I can to support the SFRA Executive Committee as a whole.

I hope to have this chance to serve you.

Sean Guynes

Dear SFRAers, I hope you will consider me an appropriate candidate for the position of Secretary on the Executive Committee of our incredible organization. Though I may be young, I am dedicated to making the experience of science fiction scholarship one of camaraderie, professional support, and intellectual encouragement. As editor of SFRA Review I work hard to ensure the growth of the publication alongside our field's and organization's developing and necessary interest in work on race, gender, sexuality, the decolonial, and the Anthropocene, and have worked to make the Review an inclusive space for writing about speculative fiction. As I continue to grow SFRA Review, I also want to bring my experience as an editor (of the Review, previously of Foundation, and of several book projects), as a laborer in alt-ac, and as a critic who has written for non-scholarly audiences to the position of Secretary. As managing SFRA members' journal subscriptions is part and parcel to the position, I would bring my expertise in journals work as the journals coordinator at Michigan Publishing (University of Michigan). By bringing outside experience of alt-ac and public writing, I will be able to offer a perspective on SFRA issues that emphasizes the challenges of the academic market, of graduate and adjunct labor, and of scholars who wish to remain active in SF studies and who opt to take alt-ac careers. Through the Secretary position on the Executive Committee, I will work with other members to continue to enact a more just future in the present, helping in what little way we can as scholars of speculative fiction, and fighting so that membership in SFRA is a welcoming experience for all.
2018-2019 SFRA AWARDS

PILGRIM AWARD

The Pilgrim Award was created in 1970 by the SFRA to honor lifetime contributions to SF and fantasy scholarship. The award was later named for J. O. Bailey’s pioneering book, Pilgrims through Space and Time (Praeger, 1972).

Remarks for the Pilgrim Award

Amy Ransom

I’m pleased to be here to give this award, as the newest member of the Pilgrim committee, I also speak for our chair Mark Bould and next year’s chair Joan Gordon. About fifteen years ago, when I was beginning research for my own book on Québec sf as a postcolonial literature, there was really very little out there making what seemed to me an obvious connection. And then I discovered a book called Colonialism and the Emergence of Science Fiction by this guy named John Rieder teaching at the University of Hawai‘i Mānoa. Published in 2008, it was one of the very first books that not only read sf through the lens of postcolonial theory but linked the genre’s very development to imperial colonialism. Given his critical theoretical bent, I hesitate to use the term “pioneer” with all of its historical baggage, but John’s book was certainly pathbreaking. Well, his more recent book, Science Fiction and the Mass Cultural Genre System (2017), is no less pioneering, and, in fact, our very organization recognized his work as such with the 2011 Pioneer Award for his essay “On Defining Science Fiction, Or Not: Genre Theory, Science Fiction, and History,” which would become the first chapter of SF and the Mass Cultural Genre System.

It’s particularly appropriate that we recognize John here and now, when he has invited us—a community of sf scholars—into his home turf, because more so than most studies, his examination of sf as a mass cultural genre system, a system that develops organically out of a dialogue between writers, readers, publishers, and critics is ultimately, really, a book about us and about what we do. I could sort of fan-girl gush here for a few more minutes, but instead, I want to quote some remarks made by our eminent committee chair, Mark Bould, about this book:

“It is unique in sf studies. In a field so full of attempts to define the genre, it is
the only work at this length to pay sufficient attention to genre theory. It is a book that has long been necessary... it should also finally put much needed nails in the coffin of Suvin-ian orthodoxy. [...] I especially liked that bit...]

Chapter Two is... a reminder of how lucid and engaging a writer the author is. [...] Chapter Three is magisterial. The task it undertakes seems so obvious in retrospect that I found myself wondering why no one had ever done it before.”

John is such a master at eloquently and elegantly offering cutting-edge scholarship, he is so smooth that he convinces us that his possibly revolutionary conclusions are obvious and necessary. Not only is he a top-notch thinker, scholar, and rhetorician, though, he is a great teacher, and just a down-to-earth really nice guy. He received a Chancellor’s Citation for Excellence in Teaching in 2005, and he is training the next generation of sf scholars in the same type of rigor, but also sense of service that he displays himself. I know this first hand from working closely with one of his doctoral students, Ida Yoshinaga, at ICFA and our co-host here in Honolulu.

Colleagues, friends, please join me in congratulating John Rieder as the winner of the 2019 SFRA Pilgrim Award for lifetime contributions to SF and fantasy scholarship.
Pilgrim Award Acceptance Speech

John Rieder

“I am a pilgrim and a stranger
Wandering through this fearsome land”

I AM so very happy and grateful to be named the recipient of the 2019 Pilgrim Award (and pleased that a conversation about renaming the award has begun at this conference’s business meeting).

As far as the song goes (and I stopped where I did because it descends into religious banality immediately after those opening lines), science fiction studies has been anything but a fearsome land for me. Although I’ve had a scholarly interest in science fiction from my graduate school days onward—my second ever publication was in Science Fiction Studies in 1982—my decision to make SF the main focus of my research was made in mid-career, and it was easily the best professional decision I ever made. I have found SF studies a very welcoming and abundantly fertile territory.

But we do live in fearsome times, and many of us—including residents of the US—in increasingly fearsome lands. I continue to find SF a powerful resource for speculative and imaginative “facing up” to the many sources of rational fear that the contemporary world order confronts us with. When I composed this conference’s call for papers on “Facing the Future, Facing the Past,” I always had in mind the sub-text that for white settlers like myself, facing up to our past is the prerequisite to moving toward a better, more just, more peaceful future.

The past of SF has been the subject of my research. I consider myself first and foremost a literary historian. I am so gratified and honored to receive this award because I take it as evidence that my attempts at writing the history of SF have had a positive impact on the field.

I have been guided by two main goals in writing the history of SF:

First, I’ve wanted to encourage scholarship to embrace the diversity of SF. I’ve wanted to emphasize its openness, its malleability and its historical mutability. I’ve wanted to encourage thinking of its genre conventions as flexible, resilient resources rather than either mere limitations on artistry or keys to some version of political correctness. I’ve tried to see the genre whole, as a complex history of opportunities,
achievements, repetitions and innovations, traditions and rebellions.

Second, I have wanted to detach SF scholarship from the all-too-pervasive ideology and temporality of progress in so much of SF in all its versions. I’ve wanted to push against SF’s old, well-established habits of imagining the future as more Western, more immersed in industrial technology, more territorially expansive, and less connected to the earth—literally the earth as a planet, in space opera, but more profoundly the earth as the land that gives us our life. I have wanted not just to question capitalism’s bullshit about itself (as China Miéville so memorably put it) but to challenge the anthropological problematic that understands contemporary non-Western societies as remnants of a past that will inevitably fade into nothingness as we forge our way into the future. That is why in the call for papers I wanted to emphasize the Native Hawaiian understanding that we live facing the past, that it is the past that informs our decisions and shapes our futures, and it is not something we turn our back on and try to forget because “it’s history.” So I’ve wanted my work to say that there are alternatives to capitalism and colonialism, and they are not only imaginary and in the future, they are right here, in our world, and subject to our choices.

So thank you, thank you, thank you once again. Special thanks to Carl Freedman and Joan Gordon, who helped usher me into the SF scholarly community in the early 2000s, to those in the audience I see before me who have been instrumental in my SF career—Veronica Hollinger, Art Evans, Pawel Frelik, Grace Dillon—to some who are not here but have to be named—Mark Bould, Sherryl Vint, and Rob Latham—and most of all to the person who has taught me more about how to read and think and see the world than anyone else, my partner and the love of my life, Cristina Bacchilega.
THOMAS D. CLARESON AWARD

The Thomas D. Clareson Award for Distinguished Service is presented for outstanding service activities—promotion of SF teaching and study, editing, reviewing, editorial writing, publishing, organizing meetings, mentoring, and leadership in SF/fantasy organizations.

Clareson Award Acceptance Speech

Sherryl Vint

IT IS a very great honour to receive this award, and I’m sorry that I can’t be there to receive it in person. Ironically, or perhaps fittingly, I’ve been kept away by service on an institutional committee. I regret missing what I’m sure was a wonderful conference, organized around such an important theme.

I first want to thank the award committee for their work and indeed all the award committees for the various awards being presented here tonight. Doing such jury work is a hugely important part of shaping the profession, like so much of the often-invisible labour that is part of academic work. Thus, while I’m grateful to be recognized for the service work I have done, I would like also to acknowledge that so much of this work done by so many people goes unrecognized.

I’m also thrilled to be receiving my award during the year that John Rieder receives his well-deserved Pilgrim Award. I wish I were there to celebrate with you, but at least I can say Congratulations John!

The various things I’ve done for field service—editing, organizing conferences and panels, working with grad students—have all been my pleasure. It is rewarding as an editor to see great work come into print, at-times to have a shaping role in curating conversations and interventions. I’m inspired by working with my graduate students and seeing the ways their work, alongside that of other young scholars, is growing the field in exciting new directions.

I’ve also been fortunate to work alongside and learn from some of the best people in the field. I’m indebted to my Speculative Fictions and Cultures of Science program co-founder Nalo Hopkinson, who is also being honoured here tonight. My co-editors at *Science Fiction Studies* have shown me what it means to cultivate excellent in the field, and I thank Art Evans, Veronica Hollinger, Istvan Csicsery-
Ronay, Joan Gordan, Carol McGuirk, and Lisa Swamstrom for their mentorship and fellowship. Although I no longer edit *Science Fiction Film and Television*, my co-editors there—Mark Bould, Gerry Canavan, and Dan Hassler-Forest—were the field’s best fellow travelers as we figured out how to run a journal.

Above all I’m grateful for this field, for our ability to combine intellectual commitment with welcoming community and a shared project of trying to make a better world. Thank you for this recognition of my small part in this work.
The Pioneer Award is given to the writer or writers of the best critical essay-length work of the year.

Pioneer Award Acceptance Speech

Jed Mayer


I WOULD like to thank the Science Fiction Research Association for the honor of their Pioneer Award. The honor of the Association’s recognition is made even greater by having my name linked, however briefly, with that great pioneer of speculative fiction, Mary Shelley, whose work continues to inspire me, and all of us devoted to this field. I believe that the Association’s interest in my essay reflects our shared concern with the problem of climate change. Amidst all of the shortages we will experience in the coming decades—food, water, biodiversity and compassion to name a few—will be the shortage of narratives for telling the story of our changing planet, in ways that might help us ease the slow violence of climate change. I hope that the trope of weird ecology that I developed in this essay can provide one such narrative thread, and I am grateful that the essay resonated with the SFRA’s readers: thank you.
MARY KAY BRAY AWARD

The Mary Kay Bray Award is given for the best essay, interview, or extended review to appear in the SFRA Review in a given year.

Remarks for the Mary Kay Bray Award

Katherine Bishop

THE committee for the 2018 Mary Kay Bray Award considered works published in the SFRA Review over the past year. This year's decision was made even more difficult by the addition of the Features 101 articles. Choosing a single recipient from the many fine submissions proved impossible, so, after much back and forth, we settled on dual winners. Our congratulations and thanks to T. S. Miller and to Amandine Faucheux for their outstanding reviews.

Just as Miller finds that Latham's volume "manages to carve out a new and necessary space for itself largely by redefining the space of science fiction and science fiction studies in innovative and inviting ways," so too does Miller redefine the review here--and with elegant, engaged, and engaging prose. Rather than sticking to the typical review format, Miller puts his recommendation up front and continues to elaborate on it as he goes. Moreover, the work of reviewing a 620 page volume of criticism is immense--yet Miller illuminates a range of entries succinctly, making graceful work of the 44 entries plus editorial contributions. He deftly limns both the field and the handbook's navigation of its changing waters.

In our co-winning selection, Faucheux balances unobtrusive plot summary with an in-depth analysis of wide-ranging themes (ecology, gender, sexuality, race, oppressive social structures, family relationships), which are then elegantly connected with the previous two entries in Jemisin's trilogy. Moreover, Faucheux smoothly sets the stakes for both The Stone Sky and for the trilogy, showing just how relevant this text, and by extension, SFF is and can be.

Both contributors inspired us with their attention to excellence across the board. Our thanks to these Mary Kay Bray Award-winning authors, and to the many other contributors, for their excellent work for the SFRA Review. We look forward to the challenge we will surely face again next year!
Bray Award Acceptance Speech: Miller

T.S. Miller


TO receive the Mary Kay Bray Award for this particular piece of writing was a highly unexpected honor, and also a very encouraging one at a time in my scholarly career when I find myself suddenly without any academic affiliation. In fact, I'll confess that, due to a combination of difficulties in my personal and professional lives related to my status as a precariously employed academic, I submitted this review perhaps as long as a year or so after the original deadline set for it. Apologies and thanks, then, are due to Nonfiction Review Editor Dominick Grace, whose patience I surely stretched to the limits. My employment status has also made it difficult for me to travel for conferences, and I deeply regret that I haven't been able to attend a meeting of the SFRA for many years now. But I hope to continue doing work in the field and finding my way back one way or another. I know that this organization has always been especially welcoming to independent scholars, and I'll be glad to continue to be involved with it whatever the future may hold for my academic career.

Bray Award Acceptance Speech: Faucheux

Amandine Faucheux


I AM very grateful to the award committee and to the *SFRA Review* for publishing my review. I would like to take this opportunity to also thank my advisors Carl Freedman and Isiah Lavender III at LSU for supporting my work. Thank you all.
STUDENT PAPER AWARD

The Student Paper Award is presented to the outstanding scholarly essay read at the annual conference of the SFRA by a student.

Student Paper Award Acceptance Speech

Grant Dempsey

For — “‘Did they tell you I can Floak?’: Living Between Always and Sometimes, in China Miéville’s Embassytown”

I AM honored to receive this award and more thrilled than I can express in words, or even in my own voice, which is why it is good that Stina is doing the talking. No, I wish very badly that I could be with all of you right now and that I could have enjoyed this year’s conference with you. I am very sorry that I could not, but I am eager to hear from many of you how this year’s conference has been and to read some of the great work that will surely come out of it, and I am looking forward to the next time! Thank you very, very much both to the award’s selection committee and to the SFRA executive committee, and thank you to everyone who has been a part of my experience with SFRA through the years so far. Thank you, Stina, for reading me and making me present here. I hope that you all have an excellent evening!
I AM going to start with two quotes from within the MCU that speak to my interest in franchise. The first is from Hawkeye, in *Age of Ultron* (2015): “The city is flying, we’re fighting an army of robots and I have a bow and arrow. None of this makes sense.” The second is from Baron Wolfgang von Strucker, in an end-credits scene to *The Winter Soldier* (2014): “This isn't the age of spies. This is not even the age of heroes. This is the age of miracles ... and there's nothing more horrifying than a miracle.” I will come back to these quotes below, but for now suffice it to say that what holds the MCU together is not its genre—the superhero film—or its historicity—the Bush and post-Bush era of foreign policy, the transmedia era of media industries—but its miraculous coherence, a coherence that derives from an absolute commitment to its own internal logic and narrative rather than to any historical moment or fact.

I am interested in how we interpret a franchise, what methods we use, and how those methods must necessarily challenge older methods that privilege objects whose relative stability and textual independence derives from their clear date of publication or release. I am not primarily interested in franchise as a production model or as a means to leverage fan engagement. But when we speak of interpreting franchise we must ask what we are interpreting exactly. Can we can call a franchise, such as the MCU, Star Wars, Harry Potter, or The Hunger Games, a text? It would be difficult, I think, to call a franchise of any size a text, although we can say that franchises are made up of texts (all of which can be interpreted as such). We have other concepts available, including that of form. However, I am also not certain that franchises share clear formal characteristics such that we can easily compare them or establish a methodology that can account for all of them. Star Wars and Star Trek operate according to very different logics when we think about them at the level of franchise. Although they have both changed considerably over the courses of their respective histories, Star Trek begins with an episodic structure that still informs its...
overall development. By contrast, Star Wars begins with aspirations to a continuity and coherence of narrative that presents problems for its filmic iterations today. I realize that these are gross generalizations given how Star Trek has gradually become a universe with an internal history that holds the episodes together and how the Star Wars universe continues to sprawl beyond the gravitational pull of the Skywalker saga.

In any case, form seems a bit wrong here for other reasons as well. Consider an interpretive scheme close to the heart of many who study genre fiction, if only for its politics. In *The Political Unconscious*, Fredric Jameson describes three concentric circles or horizons of interpretation. At the smallest level, we have the individual text as the symbolic solution to a social contradiction. At the second level, that of the ideologeme, individual texts are understood to engage in an ongoing dialogism with one another about an ongoing social contradiction, each offering its own solutions to this contradiction. The widest horizon involves what Jameson calls the ideology of form, where form itself is the content we interpret. By way of her analysis of the ideology of form, the interpreter of the literary text discovers the contradictions that relate and distinguish one mode of production and another as latent in the sign systems those modes of production condition. The literary text comprises traces of such sign systems. But what do we do when the “text” and the form are the same thing? It does not seem to me that Jameson is saying that we should study “the novel” so much as novels as expressions of the form called the novel. How can we do anything but that? How can we study all of the novels or even a significant number of them? Likewise, how do we study a franchise? Do we claim that an individual text from within a franchise, such as *Infinity War* (2018), expresses the whole? *Infinity War* in particular is problematic in light of these questions. All roads lead to it, and it seems clear that it has set the stage to reset the MCU for a new run of films. At the same time, I am not sure all roads always led to it. It may express what the MCU has become, but I am not sure that it expresses some formal essence of the MCU such that we can understand it as an instance of form in the way we can understand *Middlemarch* as an instance of the novel.

The problem of interpreting a franchise as a franchise and not as a series of related texts has to do with the fact that franchises are series of texts, but are neither texts nor forms in any conventional sense. So if there is a form of franchise, it's difficult to describe. Again, we might identify some characteristics of franchises such as their
seriality or their use of multiple media platforms to tell a single story, but I am skeptical that such characteristics bind them together into anything like a coherent category except perhaps at the highest level of abstraction. And even if we could discover and name the formal dimensions of franchise we would still be left with another problem. While it may be difficult to see how all novels relate to one another, and though we may argue about where the romance (in the sense of *Don Quixote*) ends and the bourgeois novel begins (for example), we can nonetheless take these forms as critical fictions and understand an individual instance as an expression of one or the other at a punctual moment in time, the date of its writing/publication. Franchise allows us no such punctuality. If, for Jameson, the interpretation of form involves finding in a given formal expression contradictions between modes of production and therefore history itself, what do we do with ten years of the MCU, twenty years of Harry Potter, thirty years of Dragonlance, forty years of Star Wars, fifty years of Star Trek, or sixty years of James Bond? Again, the issue here is not reading *Casino Royale* (the novel published in 1953) or *Casino Royale* (the film released in 1967) or *Casino Royale* (the film released in 2006). The issue is not even comparing them with one another as examples of James Bond, as examples of spy fiction, or as expressions of their respective historical conditions. The issue is interpreting them all as, or as part of, a franchise: as the “stanzas,” “paragraphs,” “pages,” or “chapters” in a larger work, the form of which only emerges in time and is never “set”—even to the minimal standards we expect from novels or films.

That said, I want to offer a very tentative definition of the franchise as form, which I hope is not too obvious: franchise, as form, incorporates and thematizes historical conditions and methods of production into a storyworld and narrative. It does so on a more obvious, literal, or material level than that of signification, figuration, or symbolization. For example, in *The Force Awakens* (2015), Leia Organa and Han Solo are each considerably older than they were in their previous appearances in the Star Wars franchise (on film anyway). Of course, their age reflects a history internal to the universe, but it also reflects the fact that the actors who play these characters, Carrie Fisher and Harrison Ford, have aged outside of the franchise. When Lor san Tekka, in the first line of dialogue spoken in the Star Wars universe after Lucasfilm was acquired by Disney in 2012, states that “This will begin to make things right,” he not only addresses the problem of the First Order and the Resistance’s need for Luke Skywalker’s help. He also speaks to the need for the franchise to service those
fans alienated by the prequel trilogy, those fans who grew up with the prequel trilogy and actually enjoy it, and those fans who are entirely new to the franchise. Insofar as both *The Force Awakens* and *The Last Jedi* (2017) thematize the conflict between generations—with Kylo Ren telling fellow newcomer Rey to “Let the past die. Kill it if you have to”—Fisher’s and Ford’s ages operate symbolically with the franchise. However, this symbolic dimension does not derive simply from a desire to make a symbolic point. It also arises in response to a change in the historical world that the franchise has very little choice about acknowledging.

The difficulty of franchise, then, as Jameson’s theory of interpretation reveals and as my tentative definition hopefully makes clear, is its lack of punctuality. To return to the MCU, for example, we can ask: what is the historical moment of *Infinity War*? Clearly, the answer is 2018. But is the 2018 version of Thanos the same as the 2012 version of Thanos, the one played by Damion Poitier rather than Josh Brolin? How is Thanos, in the context of the Obama administration, different as an unknown future threat different than Thanos, in the context of Trump, as a current threat? Another example, more in line with the definition I offered, is that of Iron Man’s likely death or disappearance in *Avengers: Endgame* because Robert Downey, Jr. no longer wants to play the part or Marvel no longer wants to pay his fee. We have to take all of this and more into account when we interpret a franchise. It’s not enough or even possible to say that this film was produced under these or those conditions, or that it encodes sign systems at odds with one another in a properly dialectical manner. Just as Jameson argues that, at the level of history proper, we must study form as content, we must account for the formal characteristics of franchise (its ongoing production and the manner in which this ongoingness determines the storyworld and the narrative thereof) as content. Addressing franchise in this manner not only forces us to give up any residual sense that texts are stable and coherent. Doing so grants us access to historical transformations (in politics, culture, technology, aesthetics, and so on) difficult to discern in standalone texts.

Turning to the MCU, let’s think about the first two complete MCU trilogies, *Iron Man* (2008-2013) and *Captain America* (2011-2016). The *Iron Man* and *Captain America* trilogies are clearly the most invested of all the MCU series in some representation of real-world politics, especially America in an international context. The *Iron Man* trilogy deals with the American military industrial complex and its impact on a global stage under the conditions of late capitalism and globalization.
rather than those under which Eisenhower named that complex. Or, better, the trilogy is interested in the military industrial complex under the conditions partly determined by the establishment of the military industrial complex after the second world war. Captain America deals with the emergence of the US as a superpower by way of that second world war (in The First Avenger), the use of American power and the occulted nature of conflict during and after the Cold War (in The Winter Soldier), and debates about American unilateralism under globalization (in Civil War). These history lessons are themselves refracted through a certain presentism, as is all textual production. American imperialism and adventurism in the Middle East, and the terrorist blowback this caused, not only appear in Iron Man, but also help determine the film’s and the trilogy’s understanding of the emergence of the military industrial complex as a sort of teleology. Globalization and American authority on the international stage are both thematized in The Winter Soldier and Civil War. These issues also shape the overall arc of the trilogy insofar as The First Avenger gives us the second world war as the precondition not for an open-ended future, but for specific events of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.

All of this is to say that the franchise as form certainly involves contradictions between various sign systems characteristic of different moments in history and the modes of production at work in those moments. However, the contradictions do not manifest in a single text but across a series of texts that: 1) are produced at different historical moments; 2) thematize historical progress; 3) thematize historical progress by assuming a specific trajectory for this progress; and 4) remain open to new historical events even as they happen. This last point is, of course, especially important as the MCU moves through the present of our world and into its future, as the figure of Thanos suggests.

And this brings me to my second major discussion point: abstraction and the general intellect. Here, I will start with the MCU and then turn to Marx for a bit. The MCU is abstract, in the sense of being drawn away, all the way down. Nothing in the MCU connects with anything else in a concrete, historical manner such that we would expect to see in science fiction or certain other mimetic or realist forms. Tony Stark invents world-changing tech so often that the films cannot represent this invention as it happens. He spends considerable screen time in Iron Man creating the flight capacities of his suit (although only a week or two of diegetic time, it would seem). Then, once that’s perfected and he starts using the suit, he reveals other tech already
included in the suit the development of which is never represented to us despite its world-changing quality. The various gizmos that get him into and out of his suit are groundbreaking—not to mention the artificial intelligences he has just lying about in case he needs them or the impossible smart phone only he possesses. How are these things made? Why don't they affect the world in any transformative sense?

More broadly, there are many references to the Chitauri invasion in films following *The Avengers*, but the world seems to remain largely the same (*Spiderman: Homecoming* being the exception to this rule, I think). Some of my favorite examples of abstraction have to do with the MCU's various villains, many of whom (especially in later films) seem to just hang around in utterly unlivable spaces divorced from all society by apocalypse or maybe just by design. Think about the Frost Giants, the Chitauri, the Dark Elves, Dormammu, Thanos, Surtur, the Mandarin, etc.: each of them sitting in some other place, often an as yet unheard of dimension, where nothing else exists, waiting to do bad guy things. Then think about some of the abstract spaces themselves, including the Bifrost, the brain map in *Iron Man 3*, Jotunheim, the nanoverse in *Ant-Man*, the dark dimension, the mirror dimension, Sanctuary, and more—none of which seem to have any relation to anywhere else and all of which are empty of everything but reference to themselves as the place that they are. Hawkeye somehow owns a farm, as if such pastoral bliss and cliché American values could co-exist with superheroes. And, as he would remind us as he stands in a city abstracted from the very earth itself, “None of this makes sense.”

Hawkeye is right. None of this makes sense. Nonetheless, I would claim that all of this abstraction, all of its “not making sense,” is what allows the MCU to make sense—and that is its primary characteristic as a franchise and the quality we must always account for when interpreting it. For Kevin Feige, the various screenwriters, directors, editors, producers, actors, and the rest who create the MCU cannot attempt to turn the *Iron Man* films into sf, in which each of Tony’s nova has a totalizing effect on the culture in which it was produced. Doing so would render the MCU untenable going forward. People have personal reactions to aliens, but if the response to aliens happened on a national or global level in an historically appropriate manner, we would lose the sense that this world might relate back to our own as our own currently exists. Giving the bad guys backstories beyond “ancient grudge” or “wanton destruction” would risk derailing the forward motion of this or that film (Thanos and the Vulture being significant exceptions here).
So let me work back to this point by way of a short quote from Marx. In the *Grundrisse*, at the beginning of the fragment on machines, Marx writes, “Capital which consumes itself in the production process, or fixed capital, is the means of production in the strict sense.” By “fixed capital” Marx means machinery, specifically industrial machinery. Machines “store” human skill and knowledge and thus represent an abstraction of the general intellect. Under late capitalism, however, we should no longer consider machinery to be limited to the technologies of industrial capitalism. Franchise is a type of machine characteristic of the present mode of production, one that alludes back to Marx’s machine but is more characteristic of the machines we find in Deleuze and Guattari’s *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*.

Franchises store human knowledge and skill for the purpose of extracting value from that knowledge and skill. Star Trek is its own thing, but also an expression of a more generic form, the space opera or frontier sf. The MCU, and the DCEU, are capital in much the same way. They store and deploy superhero comics, the types of stories and characters they involve, the way such stories and characters interact, and so on. They thus privatize an aspect of the commons and develop it for their own ends and according to new conditions that manifest on the fly, as the films are produced.

It seems non-controversial to claim that franchises seek to leverage themselves in order to produce more franchise. Each franchise does this in its own way, some more successfully than others. Nearly every franchise eventually runs into some aspect of its past production it can no longer tolerate, for example, because of problems associated with world-building or the simple passage of time in the real world. Star Wars and Star Trek, among other longstanding franchises, deal with the latter. The MCU, because of the speed at which the films have appeared, has not yet dealt with this problem. It has, however, dealt with the former problem, which is especially a problem for a franchise that has averaged nearly two films per year for ten years (not to mention all of the related television programming). At the start, the films mainly isolated characters from one another. Obviously, there were crossovers but they did not become significant until *The Avengers*. Nonetheless, there were hints of the future in early films: the shield in *Iron Man*, for example, or the appearance of the Tesseract in *The First Avenger*. Each of these easter eggs could have fallen by the wayside if necessary, but they nonetheless begin to shape the franchise as they accumulated. The appearance of the Infinity Gauntlet in *Thor* does not guarantee *Infinity War*, but
the appearance of Thanos at the end of *The Avengers* does guarantee his subsequent appearance as a major villain. This both produces a future for the franchise even as it limits that future. The franchise has committed itself to *something*. And by committing itself to that something, it begins to exhaust itself. It reifies one possibility amongst many and thus eliminates other possibilities. Until it reaches a crisis point.

And that’s how the MCU machine works. It’s not a means of simple reproduction but rather one that takes on an accumulative shape as it develops and as more and more parts are added to it. These parts remain abstract, or drawn away, from one another but they grant the overall machine a shape that in turn determines future production. Ryan Vu tells us that every MCU film is the trailer for the next MCU film, which is true. It is also true that every MCU film is the most recent expression of a fixed-ness of capital, a machinic collection of abstract parts whose overall shape produces a limited set of possibilities for what can follow.

Thus we can return to Baron Wolfgang von Strucker and miracles. As it has progressed, the MCU has taken on an increasingly cosmic, or even mythological scope. This scope, I would argue, is necessary to contain the abstract parts of which the franchise is made, as if only contact with the truly impossible, the radical outside that capital can only dream of expanding into, can salvage all of this. Thus, Strucker’s line from *The Winter Soldier*, which bespeaks the death of genre fiction that deals with history, and even that which deals with impossible humans: “This isn’t the age of spies. This is not even the age of heroes. This is the age of miracles...and there’s nothing more horrifying than a miracle.”
Editor's Note: “The SF in Translation Universe” is a regular column appearing in the Features section of SFRA Review (beginning with issue #325).

The SF in Translation Universe #5

Rachel Cordasco

I’m back, dear reader, to tell you all about the SFT coming out in the next few months. With Icelandic fantasy, Japanese space opera, and more, there’s something for everyone!

July is one of the most exciting months for SFT in 2019 because it offers us such a diverse lineup of authors, languages, and subgenres. If, like me, you’re a fan of everything by Liu Cixin in English, you’ll love Baoshu’s The Redemption of Time (translated by the great Ken Liu). This is fanfiction of the highest order: as Baoshu explains in his preface to Redemption, he was enthralled by the universe that Liu Cixin created and wanted to explore one facet of it himself. Thus Baoshu imagined what become of Yun Tianming—his brain getting sent out to intercept the Trisolaran fleet, the Trisolarans implanting his brain in a cloned body and experimenting on him in order to understand humans better, and the ultimate end (and beginning) of the/a universe. Both Baoshu and Liu Cixin had stories in Ken Liu’s anthology Broken Stars, which came out this past February.

What else makes July so great? The ninth volume (out of ten!) in the Legend of the Galactic Heroes series by Yoshiki Tanaka (translated from the Japanese by Matt Treyvaud) is out, and it takes us on a wild ride toward the end of a sweeping saga involving clashing empires, larger-than-life rulers, political intrigue, and the fate of humanity. From Iceland, we have Alexander Dan Vilhjalmsson’s Shadows of the Short Days (translated by the author), a work of fantasy in which people can pass through multiple dimensions and "psychoactive graffiti" is a thing that exists. And if you’re already a fan of Blaft Publications’ Tamil pulp fiction anthologies, you’ll be quite happy to hear about The Aayakudi Murders by Indra Soundar Rajan (translated by Nirmal Rajagopalan), a fast-paced thriller about ghosts, spirit possession, and the journalist who becomes entangled in it all.

And as if this month couldn’t get any better, July offers us Ann and Jeff
VanderMeer's Big Book of Classic Fantasy, a feast of international fantasy that includes several stories never before translated into English. Featuring Verne, Gustav Meyrink, Christina Rossetti, Tolkein, Hesse, Du Bois, and many others, Classic Fantasy will enormously expand your speculative fiction horizons.

If you love fantasy in all of its many forms, August is all about fantasy. Yoko Ogawa's latest novel in English, The Memory Police (translated by Stephen Snyder) imagines a world in which "out of sight, out of mind" is taken to its literal, and terrifying, extreme. With objects and living things disappearing, and people then forgetting they even existed, it's up to those few who can remember to try and stop the Memory Police from eliminating everything they care about. Germany's bestselling high fantasy writer, Markus Heitz, is out with Raging Storm (translated by Sorcha McDonagh), the fourth and last book in the Legends of the Älfar Series. In the aftermath of a devastating conflict, the son of the Emperor of the Älfar seeks peace, but the country is threatened by a powerful and mysterious mage, which only the alfàr have a chance of destroying.

Thanks to Angry Robot Books, we also get an Israeli fantasy by acclaimed author Keren Landsman (whose story "Burn Alexandria" was included in Zion's Fiction: A Treasury of Israeli Speculative Literature, out in 2018). The Heart of the Circle (translated by Daniela Zamir) is a story about religious extremists persecuting sorcerers, and the people who fight for the latter's right to exist.

So far, I haven't heard about any novels/collections/anthologies coming out in September, but that certainly may change between now and then! Meanwhile, let's focus on more good news: a wealth of short SFT that was published in July in Clarkesworld, The Dark, and World Literature Today from China and Korea, Argentina, and Mexico, respectively.

Thanks for reading, and I'd love to hear what you're reading now and/or looking forward to: rachel@sfintranslation.com.

 Until next time in the SFT Universe!
Editor’s Note: “Meet the Future” is a regular column appearing in the Features section of SFRA Review (beginning with issue #326). It is an interview series conducted by the SFRA Review editor that highlights the work of up-and-coming SF scholars, typically graduate students, postdocs, and recent hires.

Meet the Future: Beata Gubasci

Beata Gubasci
PhD Candidate, English
University of Liverpool

Hi, Beata, could you tell us a bit about yourself?
Most people call me Bea as in “Bee.” I’m a PhD candidate at the University of Liverpool. Throughout my studies, I have acquired an increasingly disturbing collection of indoor plants and Cthulhu statuettes.

How do you describe yourself professionally?
I think I’m very much at cross-roads at the moment since I’m getting close to finishing my studies. It will be exciting to figure out my professional identity and come up with another research project. I’m interested in gaming and medical humanities at the moment.

Why does sf matter to you?
Shockingly, I’m a fan. SF just runs in the family, I guess. I remember finding Asimov, Lem, LeGuin and many others on our bookshelves, and watching Star Trek relentlessly with my mum on weekends. It’s always been a site and source of bonding with people and in this function, it’s some sort of a bridge between my upbringing and my current situation as an international research student. SF, I find, is always like a binding agent.

On the other hand, in my current research I argue that fantastic storytelling inherently embodies or contains or permeates the ontology of crisis and a truly critical epistemology. It is something that is capable of expressing anxieties and traumas originating even from before language. The fantastic can bring the unspeakable
closer to our ken, and make norms more sustainable. It has been pointed out by many scholars how the crisis of modernity and postmodernity feels fictional, science fictional, and as a result SF becomes more and more mimetic. The fantastic is the most accurate expression of our dislocated inertia. In this sense, I think SF is one of the most important forums today—it can reach beyond “fake news” and stuff like that. Its truthfulness or its “truth quality” lies in the fact that it’s not considered to be as such. If this makes sense at all.

**What brought you to sf studies?**

My studies in English Literature at the Eotvos Lorand University, Budapest, were very formative—I’m very much indebted for a lot of great tutors and mentors. I have always been interested in Gothic and Weird fiction but I didn’t really know until my masters that SF can be a viable option too. I signed up for a class, “Post-apocalyptic Science Fiction” led by Vera Benczik. It was absolutely mind-blowing that the stuff I consumed regularly as a reader, movie-goer and gamer can be subject to academic discussion. Vera’s class was the gateway into SF studies which then began with a project on Octavia Butler led by Eva Federmayer. I’m also really grateful for Veronika Ruttkay, whose Gothic classes I thoroughly enjoyed, since she was really supportive of my PhD proposal on monstrosity. Judit Friedrich, my BA and MA supervisor, gave me a lot of guidance and confidence—without her I don’t think I would have dared to apply for a PhD position at all. Arriving to Liverpool, being totally new to SF studies, my supervisors Will Slocombe and David Seed, and the PhD cohort, have been incredibly helpful finding my place and navigating my journey in a totally new research environment.

**What project(s) are you working on now, and how did you get there? What question(s) really drive your work?**

My current project is provisionally entitled, *Literature of Monstrosity: Posthumanism and the New Weird*. In my thesis, I attempt to establish conceptual and aesthetic links between Critical Posthumanism and the New Weird. One of the most important of these links is how both of them emerge from crisis, carry trauma and not only express it through the registers of the monstrous but also try to resolve the crisis and trauma through the experience and engagement with strangeness. My research on trauma studies and posthumanism has also led me to medical humanities.
I’m really excited about the entanglements between the medical and the fantastic.

**What do you envision for the future of sf studies and sf scholars? What do you want to see us accomplish?**

The sf research community is probably one of the kindest and most supportive I’ve ever been a part of. I think what I’d like to see this community to collectively achieve is facilitating HE becoming more accessible and sustainable. Also, I think it would be really important to unearth, conserve and promote more non-Western SF. A lot of archival and curatorial work would be needed to graft these traditions into the canon and curriculum. I also hope to be a part of more interdisciplinary research projects in the future.

**If you could write a dream book, or teach a dream course, what would it/they be?**

This is a tough one. I’ve got a notebook dedicated for dream book and course ideas. I really enjoy my PhD research, so it would be quite dreamy to turn that into a book or maybe teach the weird tradition in some form. I’m also motivated to do something with gaming and gamification in the near future. Ultimately, I think my dream book would be something fiction. Something weird!

**Thank you! Your labor and thoughts are valued and appreciated.**
Review Essay: Recent Work on 2001: A Space Odyssey

Simon Spiegel


For anyone interested in Stanley Kubrick's 2001: A Space Odyssey (US/UK 1968), there has never been a lack of literature. In fact, the seminal science fiction epic has already been called the movie about which most has been written. Whether or not this is true, there is hardly any aspect of 2001 which has not been treated so far. Still, the 50th anniversary of its original release has seen a new wave of publications. Two of them are the subject of this review.

The books by Frinzi and Benson differ in goal, approach, and range. Frinzi's book can best be called an extensive appraisal by a lifelong fan. The author makes no effort to disguise the fact that he approaches 2001 as a devotee who wants to share his passion with his readers. His book tackles the film from different sides: there are chapters on the production and the people involved, on the special effects, on 2001's influence on later movies, and one specifically on the enigmatic Star-Gate sequence towards the end.

Space Odyssey, on the other hand, is a making-of which makes extensive use of archival and other previously unpublished material. Benson's book is by no means the first account of the film's production. Already in 1970, Jerome Agel published a making-of, and two years later, Kubrick's co-author Arthur C. Clarke put out The Lost Worlds of 2001, which covered his collaboration with the director. There have been more books since, mostly restricted by the fact that a lot of material was simply not accessible. This has changed dramatically since Kubrick's death in 1999. A plethora of material is now available at the Stanley Kubrick Archive at the University of the Arts in London. The first book on 2001 to make extensive use of this treasure trove was Piers Bizony's The Making of Stanley Kubrick's 2001: A Space Odyssey, published
in 2015.

Bizony’s book, which originally appeared as a ludicrous limited edition weighing almost 20 pounds and was later re-released in a more compact version, covered the film’s production in great detail. It is a testament to Benson’s skill as a researcher that he is, despite the thoroughness of Bizony’s book, able to come up with a lot of previously unknown details and actually shed some new light on the film’s gestation.

Kubrick is often portrayed as a singular genius who simply had to put into reality the film that he envisioned in his head. As Benson shows, nothing could be further from the truth. Kubrick often had no clear idea what he wanted to achieve, but rather made his team come up with convincing ideas—ideas which he would reject most of the time. The director relied heavily on the creative input of his contributors, and one of his unsung qualities was his ability to discover new talents and push them to their limits—and beyond. While he also worked with experienced old hands, many young men, some of them with almost no previous experience in filmmaking, adopted central roles in the production of 2001.

One effect of Kubrick’s approach was that nothing about the final film was set in stone. Today’s blockbusters are highly hierarchical enterprises, where each department has to follow clearly set requirements. 2001, with a final budget of 10.5 million dollars, was also a large-scale production but was run more in the fashion of a theater workshop, where everything was up for change. The soundtrack, the final design of the monolith, many of the special effects, the crucial scene where HAL lipreads the astronauts’ conversation, the enigmatic ending—none of these elements, and many more, were part of the original screenplay. They were rather the result of Kubrick’s unorthodox iterative process.

While this approach ultimately led to great results, it was, for many of Kubrick’s collaborators, also extremely exhausting, and as much as Kubrick relied on his team, when it came to cashing in, he became very close-fisted. This proved to be especially true for Clarke. The SF writer was, without any doubt, one of the most important influences on the film. Still, Kubrick basically shortchanged his co-author. Not only was Clarke (at the time, battling financial problems) obliged to hold back the publication of the novel based on the screenplay until the release of the film—a date which was continuously delayed—but he had also no share in the film’s profits. Kubrick, on the other hand, got 40 percent of the novel’s gains. Likewise, he took the
credit (and subsequently the Academy Award) for the film’s special effects which, in all fairness, should have gone to Douglas Trumbull.

Even for 2001 aficionados, Space Odyssey offers many new insights. It features considerably fewer illustrations than Bizony’s tome, but as a look behind the scenes, it is the superior book. From an academic point of view, it has only one real weakness: Benson hardly ever names his sources. Although there is no reason to doubt the veracity of his account, this makes life unnecessarily difficult for potential subsequent researchers.

Frinzi also writes about the film’s production, but comparing these parts to Benson’s book is quite unfair. Frinzi undertook no primary research but had to rely on existing literature. Accordingly, he comes up with hardly any new insights in this regard. For anyone mainly interested in the genesis of 2001, Benson offers much more.

Kubrick’s Monolith seems to be intended as a general introduction for a non-specialized audience. For these readers, chapters like the one on the film’s symbolism, in which Frinzi discusses the monolith and, more generally, its dominant shapes and its images of birth and death, are probably beneficial; but for anyone more familiar with the film, there is little new or exciting. This is especially true for two chapters called “The Star-Gate Explained” and “Watching Kubrick’s Odyssey. The Cinematic Experience.” Neither chapter really delivers what its title promises: we get neither an explanation of the film’s most baffling sequence nor a true account of how 2001 was or is experienced by its viewers. What these chapters offer is rather detailed step-by-step descriptions of the film, embellished with some additional thoughts.

Considering the vast existing literature on Kubrick’s film, it is, of course, difficult to come up with a new angle. Funnily enough, the most original chapter in Frinzi’s book is the one in which he, in the fashion of a true fan, compares the various soundtracks which have been published since the film’s original release. Here he actually discusses something which has not yet been talked about ad nauseam.

The two books will certainly not be the last published on 2001, but while Kubrick’s Monolith probably won’t have a lasting effect on coming publications, Benson’s book will in all likelihood become the new standard reference when it comes to the film’s production.
THE most valuable parts of this volume of essays are the work of the editor. Bray’s introduction, “New Dimensions in L’Engle Studies?” (3-39) is not only the longest contribution, but also offers an excellent and insightful overview of L’Engle’s life and work. The “Selected Works” (189-196) is more than its modest title suggests. The section “Works by Madeleine L’Engle” lists and organizes L’Engle’s books: “Books for Children,” “Novels for Young Adults,” “Novels for Adults,” “Short Stories,” “Plays,” “Journals/Memoirs,” “Poetry,” “Biblical Midrash,” “Reflections on Life,” Prayers, Readings and Meditations”—each section is alphabetized, and a check of other bibliographical sources suggests it is comprehensive. Included also are “Selections” of L’Engle’s articles and book chapters, her published speeches and lectures, and her forewords, afterwords, prefaces and introductions. The section “Works About Madeleine L’Engle” includes books, book chapters, and critical articles.

As might be expected, most of the nine essays deal with L’Engle’s two series of books that Bray lists as children’s or young adult books. The longest and best of the essays is Carol S. Franko’s “Narration of the Poet as a Young Woman: Intertextuality, Genre and World-Building in L’Engle’s Austin Family Novels,” and is the only one dealing with L’Engle’s Austins series. Franco “explores L’Engle’s use of intertextuality and genre to portray Vicky Austin’s development from active receiver of family and literary traditions in Meet the Austins, to apprentice poet and powerful but vulnerable ‘poe[t]mind’ (Ring 179) in Ring of Endless Light, and finally to committed practicing poet in Troubling a Star” (65). “A quick way to contrast the Austin novels with Wrinkle,” she concludes, “is to say that they have libraries instead of fantastic beings—Grandfather Eaton’s library on a cliff over the bay rather than tesseracts enabling galactic travel” (85).

Five of the essays focus on the Murry-O’Keefe series. In the opening essay, “A Scientific Girl and Two Intuitive Boys: The Unconventional Protagonists of A Wrinkle in Time,” Anne-Frédérique Mochel-Caballero considers only the characters in the
books published before 1980. She compares the male-female trio of Meg, Charles Wallace Murry, and Meg’s friend Calvin with the similar trio at the center of the Harry Potter books, Harry, Ron and Hermione. Rowling’s characters are, Mochel-Caballero feels, “more stereotyped than L’Engle’s (48), though in both series the protagonists use love as their primary weapon. The same trilogy is discussed in Naomi Wood’s “Discarded Image and Expanding Universe: The Metaphysics of C. S. Lewis and Madeleine L’Engle.” After discussing the influences of Lewis’s Narnia books and his space trilogy on L’Engle, Wood concludes that the two authors’ works “ultimately affirm participation in larger cosmic structures, but they characterize that action differently. […] L’Engle, in her openness to new ideas, her creative engagement with scientific frontiers of knowledge, offers ways of spiritual knowing that don’t require adherence to outmoded models and static dogma” (146).

Sophie Diller’s “What Madeleine Inherited from Her ‘Grandfather George’: The Influence of George MacDonald on Madeleine L’Engle in Her Children’s Fantasy Books” goes through the Time Quintet, showing direct influences of MacDonald, but the comparisons she makes are mostly on the surface. The fourth (and most difficult) book of the Time Quintet is examined by Chantel Lavoie in “Thinking, Doing and Delaying Insemination in L’Engle’s Many Waters.” Her argument shows that this novel “is neither a simple nor a condemnatory story that L’Engle weaves throughout her testament to the Old Testament tale. In her work, the Bible becomes among other things a tale of mystery and intrigue” (55).

The only essay to consider most of the eight Murry-O’Keefe series is also the least convincing in this collection. In Gregory G. Pepetone’s “Madeleine L’Engle: An Anti-Romantic Romantic?” the first subtitle is “The Murky Inanities of the [nineteenth century] Art Religion,” a quotation of a quotation from Igor Stravinsky (112) which he treats as if “Art Religion” were a widely accepted critical term; he uses it to comment, often confusingly, on the whole of L’Engle’s Time Octet.

The most unexpected of the essays is Emily Louise Zimbrick-Rogers’s “Of God and Women: The Evolution of Theology in L’Engle’s Biblical Reimaginings.” Her subject is the eight titles which Bray’s “Selected Works” section classifies as “Biblical Midrash.” In an essay with many subtitles, the author summarizes all eight of those Midrash pieces (which she calls L’Engle’s “Biblical reimaginings:), and then does a “close analysis” of Many Waters (see above) and Sold into Egypt, which she calls the third volume of the Genesis Trilogy (published with that name in a single volume
in 2001). She argues in conclusion that L’Engle here “is actively doing theology by telling stories, listening to Scripture and speaking back into its cracks and gaps, both filling in gaps and creating new fissures that she does not fill but allows her readers to experience” (174).

In “A Problematic Sense of Place: Madeleine L’Engle’s ‘White in the Moon the Long Road Lies,’” Gérard Préher comments on one of L’Engle’s very early short stories (published in June 1939 in the Smith College Weekly). After comparing L’Engle briefly with Faulkner, Rawlings, and Welty (all 20th century) and Constance Fenimore Woolson (19th century) as southern authors, Préher comments on the tale of Selina, a southern woman who takes a teaching job in the north. He concludes that “Finding her Southern self coincides with Selina’s parting with it” (156).

The last essay, the shortest and one of the best, is by Bray: “‘And what should I do in Illyria?’ Discovering the American South and Its Gods in Madeleine L’Engle’s The Other Side of the Sun.” The quotation in her title consists of the first words of Viola in Twelfth Night, when she comes to land in Illyria after a shipwreck. In L’Engle’s novel “Illyria” is the name of “the huge rural family mansion” (180) of the southern Reniers into which the 19-year-old Stella, born in the north, marries. Bray lists this 1971 novel among the eight “Novels for Adults.” “[W]hat I tried to do,” L’Engle says, “was to take the traditional Gothic form and give it theological depth” (179), and she concludes that “The final message of the novel is neither exotic no[r] supernatural […] Love is therefore Stella’s vocation in Illyria and what she should do there” (186).

In her “Preface,” Bray notes that “very little real literary criticism has been done on any of L’Engle’s work except on the three first books of the time quintet” (though these essays also stress the Time series), “and practically no serious articles have been published on any of her adult fiction” (1). Indeed, Bray’s list of “Critical Articles” includes only one article in a refereed scholarly journal, and of the eight books I have looked at courtesy of interlibrary loan, only Donald R. Hettinga’s Presenting Madeleine L’Engle (1983) has end-notes, a “Selected Bibliography” (in a format possibly the source of Bray’s), and an index. This brief volume, therefore, is indeed a significant contribution to L’Engle criticism; one could wish it were longer and less mixed in quality.
**Speculative Realism and Science Fiction**

**Bodhisattva Chattopadhyay**


SPECULATIVE realism and its many philosophical kin borrow heavily from SF and SFnal modes of thinking. Several books published prior to this one have already highlighted the connection, for instance Graham Herman’s *Weird Realism: Lovecraft and Philosophy* (Zero Books, 2012), Anthony Dunne and Fiona Raby’s *Speculative Everything: Design, Fiction, and Social Dreaming* (The MIT Press, 2013), and some related studies such as Steven Shaviro’s *The Universe of Things* (UMinnesota Press, 2014). Brian Willems’ treatment, though, is the first book length and direct treatment of the connections between these two disciplines. Furthermore, the focus of some of these others, such as Dunne and Raby, has been on the philosophical and aesthetic aspects of speculation rather than on how SF itself informs many of these speculative practices. As part of Graham Harman’s edited series on Speculative Realism, Willems’s work thus foregrounds implicit connections, and it does so by basing the study of speculative realism firmly on an SF perspective, offering close readings of several key contemporary authors: Cormac McCarthy, Neil Gaiman, China Miéville, Doris Lessing, Paolo Bacigalupi, and Kim Stanley Robinson.

Willems’ main theoretical quibble within the field of speculative realism is against Quentin Meillassoux’s understanding of science as well as the distinction between SF and extro-science fiction (XSF) that Meillassoux draws in his tiny pamphlet *Métaphysique et fiction des mondes hors-science* (Aux forges de Vulcain, 2013; translated into English by Alyosha Edlebi as *Science Fiction and Extro-Science Fiction*, Univocal, 2015). Meillassoux argues that SF needs to remain grounded in some variety of science, extrapolation, and the scientific method, while XSF truly challenges the worlds of science itself, a world where, in principle, experimental science is impossible. My own problem and one noted by others within the SF community (for instance Amy Ransom and David Ketterer) with Meillassoux’s well-known argument has been that Meillassoux analyses all of SF while using antiquated examples of SF in order to advance a theory of XSF. He ignores many of the contemporary developments in both
SF and SF genre theory, and perhaps even more importantly for the philosophical arguments of XSF, ignores much contemporary philosophy of science. The problems and potentials in Meillassoux’s argument thus make it easy for Willems to mount a study that takes issue with precisely those points, as well as to build upon them. As Willems makes clear at the outset, both science fiction and science deal with forms of ambiguities that are not amenable to the simplistic Gernsbackian extrapolation argument: “rather than foregrounding the way sf extrapolates current scientific facts into future plots, this book searches out objects which resist incorporation into any past, present, or future scientific understanding” (7). Yet Willems offers much more than a rebuttal of the XSF model in his richly detailed reading of unknowability and ambiguity within SF, which he labels “the Zug effect,” borrowing from a story by Damon Knight. The Zug effect describes organizations of knowledge that are not bound to an explanatory framework – moments of “ambiguity” within sf, and thus offers the possibility of a non-anthropocentric mode of thinking. Following Levi Bryant, Willems calls the objects that evince these possibilities “dark objects” (6, 16).

Developing this form of thinking get us to the heart of both the concerns of much of speculative realism and object-oriented ontology, which is the Anthropocene and different ways of dealing with anthropogenic climate change and climate disaster.

In the principal chapters of the book, Willems reads several authors and their texts in order to identify instances of the Zug effect. In Cormac McCarthy’s *The Road*, Willems identifies the post-apocalyptic worldlessness as a space that allows the Zug effect – or more specifically, dark objects – to appear. In the works of Neil Gaiman, Willems explores what Gaiman calls “double vision,” or moments where an object and its contradictory qualities are simultaneously manifested – such as change and non-change, or the knowable and the unknowable – so as to disturb the certainty of knowledge. In reading Miéville’s *Perdido Street Station* (2000), a novel which readily lends itself to this kind of analysis, Willems further builds on the nature of vision by examining the crisis engine. Doris Lessing’s *The Cleft* (2007) provides Willems with another opportunity to look at the life of objects and the emergence of weird objects and the conditions around their appearance. Willems then moves on to a different territory, exploring the “animal” question in non-anthropocentric speculative realism through a study of Bacigalupi’s *The Windup Girl* (2009) and the figures of the megadont and the robot Emiko. In the final chapter, he turns to Kim Stanley Robinson’s *Years of Rice and Salt* (2002) and explores the form of creating an alternate
history of the past as a way to imagine an alternate view of the future, uncertain and unmoored from the anthropocentric one, but also inextricably tied to it, given that the whole purpose of the exercise is to reinsert the human in a larger web of objects and their histories.

These extremely brief summaries of Willems's chapters do not do justice to the overall argument, especially as Willems is drawing upon a larger set of philosophical discourses that are central to speculative realist thought. The notable weakness of the book is that the author does not spend much time to argue specifically from the perspective of the philosophy of science, nor does he quite distinguish SF and fantasy. Many of the arguments that Willems makes could have been much more easily explored through a study of contemporary fantasy (or even horror) rather than science fiction, several of which are closer to weird fiction than the novels that Willems explores. Both Gaiman's and Miéville's works operate much more easily within the generic disturbance of fantasy rather than the kind of analysis that Willems uses as a framework for SF studies. Furthermore, Willems could also have productively used alternative frameworks of SF-cognate genres, which neither work with nor pretend to work with definitions such as that of XSF, even in their understandings of the future (such as Afrofuturism or Indigenous futurism). The XSF argument is relevant for speculative realism but quite irrelevant for SF studies, and part of the reason why it is irrelevant is the presence of these alternate genres. The book should have paid more attention to these phenomena for a more rounded approach.

Nonetheless, for the critical SF reader the main areas in which such a study is likely to be useful would be contemporary studies of climate fiction, postapocalyptic fiction, and the new weird. It will certainly add to a better understanding of speculative realism and its borrowings from, and connection to, SF, even if it does not add much that is new to our understanding of SF.
Science Fiction, New Space Opera, and Neoliberal Globalism

Hugh C. O’Connell


SPACE opera’s expansive scale arguably provides the most suitable sf canvas for capitalism’s free-market evangelists to ply their economic fantasies of unfettered markets and infinite growth. This is to say nothing of its reliance on individualist hustlers serving as an ideal fantasy self-image. This situation led Ursula Le Guin to complain that, in sf’s dominant imaginary, “Competitive free-enterprise capitalism is the economic destiny of the entire Galaxy” (qtd. Winter 133). Furthermore, space opera was so disdained by critics that by the time that Wilson Tucker coined the term in 1941, he already sought to dismiss it as outworn. For these reasons, it seemed a highly improbable candidate for an ideological makeover and reboot, let alone, in Farah Mendlesohn’s words, that sf’s “most juvenile, immature canvas” would become its “cutting edge” (556).

This remarkable transformation in space opera’s formal and critical destiny serves as both the occasion for and subject of Jerome Winter’s timely monograph, *Science Fiction, New Space Opera, and Neoliberal Globalism*. Foremost, Winter provides a new literary history tracing space opera’s evolution into New Space Opera, a history situated within and in dialog with the longue durée of neoliberalism. Fleshing out this history, Winter delivers detailed close readings of several key New Space Opera texts that target its multiple sites of germination from within Afrofuturism, the New Wave, The Scottish periphery of the British Boom, feminist sf, and Caribbean postcolonial sf. This approach reveals the circuitous routes New Space Opera has travelled in its project of revitalization from the 1980s to the present.

At stake for Winter is the way that New Space Opera “allegorise[s] a specific vanguard cultural politics evolving in tandem with a specific new system of global capitalism” (3). To trace this relationship, Winter draws from marxist cultural theory generally and from the cosmopolitical theory popularized by Pheng Cheah and Bruce Robbins particularly. For Winter, the latter is essential for championing a “call for a
revolutionary international cultural politics that refuses to ignore the inequalities of the world-system, [by] capitalising on advances in electronic and digital systems as a means to gradually overcome the imperial divide” (91-92). In Winter's hands, then, New Space Opera gives form to a cosmopolitical desire from within our fully neoliberal, global present. This overarching approach is then tempered by feminist and postcolonial theory and sf texts to provide a rich analysis and multipronged critique of neoliberalism. Winter thereby reveals that New Space Opera is a decidedly global genre in all senses of the word. Indeed, for readers already familiar with the mainstays of New Space Opera, the chapter on postcolonial Caribbean writers may be the most interesting and where the most new critical ground is broken.

The book’s theoretical argument is furthered by its historical narrative. Rather than focusing on the overlapping of neoliberalism’s political ascendancy with New Space Opera’s reboot in the 1980s to the present, Winter takes a longer historical view. In this, he follows Daniel Steadman Jones in theorizing a long neoliberalism characterized by three distinct phases. The first, largely European intellectual phase begins “in the 1920s with theorising by the likes of Walter Lippman, Ludwig Von Mises and Michael Polanyi” (32) and corresponds with the traditional space operas of Doc Smith and the subsequent writers that refined space opera through the Golden Age of sf. Neoliberalism’s second phase from the 1960s to the 1980s takes on “a distinctly Americanised character” as evinced by the “fiscal conservative and moderate leftist opposition to the Keynesian compromise and Great Society programmes” that were then purposefully conflated with Soviet Communism (43). Alongside this shift, Winter considers how some of the early progenitors of the New Space Opera in Afrofuturism (Samuel Delany) and the New Wave (M. John Harrison) transform aspects of traditional space opera in opposition to this growing neoliberal ideology. Taken together, they offer something of a template for later New Space Opera proper.

The third phase, from the 1980s to the present, in which neoliberalism has become the hegemonic order of the day, coincides with the rise of New Space Opera proper. Here, Winter examines how New Space Opera reboots and remixes space opera’s defining tropes, lending them new “fierce political stances” and added “literary-aesthetic virtuosity” (2-3). However, in riposte to the often jubilantly imperial ambitions of much traditional Space Opera, Winter situates the New Space Opera within a state of postimperial melancholy, whereby the former’s “buoyant optimism and vast immensity […] have been deflated and downsized” (6). This creates an
interesting tension between New Space Opera’s ambivalence with its intergalactic dramas and the triumphalist end of history rhetoric of neoliberal neoimperialism. This ambivalence manifests itself in what Winter characterizes as a “nostalgia for infinity.” As Winter explains, “New Space Opera, in its knowing recuperation of heightened futuristic genre conventions and exaggerated pitches of campy speculative excitement […] underscores its nostalgia for future infinity even as it negotiates the foreclosure of such a futurity by the catastrophe of contemporary history” (6). This focus leads Winter to rewardingly nuanced readings of the primary texts, for example, revealing how two avowed Scottish far-leftists (MacLeod and Banks) have to think along with and through neoliberal capitalism in order to posit their future anarcho-socialist utopias.

While the book displays an impressive critical and literary insightfulness, it does, however, sometimes feel rushed. It would have benefited from a stronger editorial hand; there are too many typos, missing works cited entries and other general editing errors to not mention. Moreover, given the book’s complex intermixing of literary history with excurses on political economy, critical theory, and specific literary case studies, the argument’s structure is sometimes a little disjointed; this is especially the case for the introduction. Likewise, given the wide conceptual and historical terrain covered, I would have preferred a concluding chapter that brought these disparate strands and arguments together more sharply.

Ultimately, this an important entry for sf studies. Like many of the authors that figure in his study, Winter dares to take that least respectable offshoot of an already often ill-reputed “paraliterature” seriously. In doing so, he not only demands other critics follow suit, but lays out the critical terrain for future studies to come. Moreover, given its multiple lines of inquiry, his study transcends the limited scope of space opera and should be read by scholars interested in postcolonial and feminist sf, globalization studies and political economy, and the literary history of sf more generally.

Works Cited

PHILIP L. Simpson and Patrick McAleer’s *Stephen King’s Contemporary Classics: Reflections on the Modern Master of Horror* (2015) is one of the many recent edited collections on horror topics coming out of Rowman & Littlefield. The volume is a welcome addition. As the editors note in the introduction, academic criticism of Stephen King’s work tends to focus on his early works. The editors here capture scholarship on King’s newer works that tends to show up at conferences (particularly the Popular Cultural Association’s annual conference, which boasts a Stephen King area cochaired by the editors) but often wouldn’t find purchase in the more durable academic record. In that light, much of the material in this collection is best thought of as a first foray into new territory.

The book consists of fourteen chapters plus a bibliography and index. Notes are provided at the end of each chapter rather than global endnotes, and the bibliography at the end collects most (but not all) of the references cited by the various authors. The scholarly apparatus of the volume is above average for usefulness, and I appreciate the care the editors took.

The book is broken up into three parts: “Contemporary Classics,” “Modern Horrors,” and “Stephen King and Writing.” Of these, the highly innovative third part is the highlight of the volume. “Part I: Contemporary Classics” features four essays: one on *Duma Key* (Hayley Mitchell Haugen), two on *Under the Dome* (Jennifer L. Miller and Tamara Watkins), and one on *Joyland* and *Doctor Sleep* (Clotilde Landais). Haugen’s essay (“‘Ordinary Miracles’: Stephen King’s Writing (and Painting) a ‘Way Back to Life’ in *Duma Key*”) explores the theme of art as healing, moving between biography of King and the characters of *Duma Key*. (As readers may well know, King was struck by a vehicle and nearly killed in June 1999.) Haugen convincingly traces a formula familiar to King fans, as an “ordinary” sentiment becomes extended imaginatively by King to become miraculous (and terrifying). Miller’s thesis in “A
Tale of Ambiguous Morality: Narrative Technique in *Under the Dome*” is that “King’s use of various narrative strategies […] disrupts binary distinctions between good and evil and […] challenges the reader’s own complicity in making such distinctions” (14). This reader finds Miller’s thesis unpersuasive. While analysis of narrative technique is most welcome in an age of ideological critique, Miller’s insistence on literalizing the analogies of author to God and narrator to reader feels simplistic, such that the claim to reader-complicity she makes is a weak indictment at best. (Simpson makes similarly weak overtures to reader-complicity in his chapter on “Morality.”) Tamara Watkins’s essay (subtitled “An Assessment of the Adaptation of Stephen King’s *Under the Dome* into a Prime-Time Drama”) is the strongest essay in Part I. Watkins not only traces the similarities and differences between the book and the adaptation, but the essay makes substantive comment on the theory of adaptation beyond mere re-mediation of the same work. Those interested in adaptation studies should take notice. Landais’s essay (“Reading *Joyland* and *Doctor Sleep* as Complementary Stories”) is exciting given the newness of the material she covers, and the essay is an enjoyable read as general criticism of *Joyland* and *Doctor Sleep*, but the standards of evidence she adopts for her comparative approach are dubious. For instance, Landais argues that the stories are linked by themes and figures such as the fact that both main characters live in New Hampshire and “both novels deal with people who call outsiders ‘rubes’” (42). To be fair, she presents subtler evidence as well, but the reader is left wondering if the similarities she points out might simply be the product of King having written both novels at the same time.

“Part II: Modern Horrors” contains five essays. This section, while not universally so, is disappointing. Patrick McAleer’s essay about Roland Deschain’s Perpetual Quest for the Dark Tower is one of the weakest essays in the volume, which is surprising given its author. The issues begin at an insufficiently articulated argument about “purposeful failure” (68) and are amplified by failure to achieve basic clarity of prose. Matthew M. Holman’s essay on *The Girl Who Loved Tom Gordon* is an enjoyable introduction to the themes of the novel. I have already commented on the weakly-theorized reader-complicity argument in Philip L. Simpson’s essay (“Morality’: Stephen King’s Most Disturbing Story?”) and about that essay I shall say no more. In 2015, Alexandra Reuber felt the need to write a pure psychoanalytic reading of King’s Gothic texts, complete with an assertion about a well as “a sexual representation of the woman’s vagina” (111). Reuber is accurate when she says that
King has “contributed to the survival of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century gothic fiction” (101) and it makes sense to analyze King accordingly, but her approach is utterly perplexing given that Gothic criticism has long since moved away from psychoanalytic approaches. Rebecca Frost offers the most original essay in the section with an analysis of King’s serial killers in relation to serial killers in the greater cultural consciousness. She demonstrates that while serial killers became a conventional type with familiar, fixed properties in the 1980s and 1990s, King’s serial killers remain individuated rather than tropified.

The final section, “Stephen King and Writing,” saves what is up to this point an uneven collection. Michael Perry draws connections between Duma Key, Blues music, and literary Modernism in an essay that would benefit any scholar trying to find a way to connect King to more traditional fields of research. Carl H. Sederholm returns the volume to adaptation studies, this time with an analysis of a pop-up-book adaptation of The Girl Who Loved Tom Gordon. Sederholm’s essay, and Watkins’s, are must-reads for scholars or fans of adaptation. Sederholm’s essay is noteworthy in that he is able to make an experience that is inherently tactile highly lucid to a reader who has never held the object in question. Kimberly Beal’s essay on Richard Bachman does a splendid job of analyzing King’s relationship to his alter-ego, charting the murky boundaries between authors and identities in King’s pseudonym fiction. The final and most innovative contributions to the volume are a pedagogical report by Mika Elovaara, who runs a periodic graduate course at University of North Carolina, Wilmington called “Author Focus: Stephen King.” The course is a hybrid composition, literature, and creative writing course which essentially uses King’s On Writing as its textbook. Elovaara describes the syllabus, moves through the course expectations, examples of activities, discussions of essays his students wrote, and reflections in light of student feedback. Paired with this final essay (and closing out the volume) is “The Blue Diamond,” a horror story written by Steph Post as part of a final project for Elovaara’s course.

I approached Stephen King’s Contemporary Classics hoping for some sort of “new approaches to King and King studies” volume, and in some places found it, particularly in the essays about adaptations and pedagogy. But from a critical standpoint too many of the essays do little to enliven a tired discourse. If the exigence of the volume was to carve out some rhetorical space for a modern scholarly appreciation of King, it is confusing to find the volume filled with the same old methodologies applied to
new texts. I think an opportunity was lost here, though on balance this is a worthy collection and one that belongs on the shelf of any fan of Stephen King (not just scholars). I myself had fallen away from King, and this volume has sparked a renewed interest in the books I’ve seen appear in stores over the last two decades but never had any inclination to read. Though imperfect, *Stephen King’s Contemporary Classics* performs a valuable service for King scholarship. I recommended it for purchase by my institution's library, and will keep my review copy within easy reach for the foreseeable future.
Decolonizing Speculation in Financial Times

Michael Yarsky


FOR individuals compelled by the literature of marginalized communities as well as those curious about extending queer concepts of futurity beyond and above the cisgendered and white political imagination, Migrant Futures is a triumph of intersectional scholarship and well-integrated research.

The book’s primary objective is looking at financial speculation as a form of crafting a future intended to bring neoliberal prosperity to a privileged few at the expense of global marginalized communities. Bahng’s evidence of this is vast, historical, and contemporary. Historically, she analyzes the fictions manufactured by Henry Ford in order to court investors toward building his Fordlândia in Brazil: “Because the plantation met with consistent financial difficulties, Fordlândia’s justification for renewed funding and support relied heavily on its self-promotion as a civilizing mission…Henry Ford recognized an opportunity to string investors along by promising to bring assembly-line, plantation-style order to [the Amazon rainforest]” (28-29). These correspondences spun an illusory, benevolent fiction rife with white supremacy in order to secure a financial future based upon exploiting foreign land. Bahng illustrates how the power-holder’s colonization of the future via financial security is a continuation of historical racism. For example, simulation of a small-pox epidemic in a military project called “Dark Winter” peddled a hypothetical, disastrous future meant to convince people to expand a racist and brutal homeland security apparatus: “The fiction of disaster became pivotal in catalyzing a system of emergency management…Crisis simulation is self-fulfilling because it inevitably calls for increased securitization, anticipating and fomenting uncertainty all at once” (52-53). Speculations that take such emergencies as an inevitable given are a means of populating the future with unproven certainties. These tools are meant to plan for an occurrence that is always already imaginary, and ultimately lead to an implementation of fear-based policy that subjugates minority populations who are also always presumed to be a threat, thereby resulting in “armed checkpoints fortified
by surveillance technologies” across the US-Mexico borderlands (53). Bahng also masterfully analyzes the transnational market for surrogate motherhood and how it, too, maintains echoes in it of black bodies being reproduced for the sake of privileged white families (80) and even includes a virtuosic reading of the film *Children of Men* and its inability to transcend the usage of black bodies in the name of White Saviorhood.

What Bahng is referring to with regard to migrant futures is the ability of some science fiction to create an alternative form of speculation that is more beholden to human needs and less beholden to the needs of capital. *Migrant Futures* takes queer theoretical concepts of futurity and extends it to a cross-disciplinary discussion. Bahng is correct in echoing Jose Muñoz’s rebuttal to Lee Edelman’s *No Future* by pointing out that Edelman’s disavowal of the Child ignores what life might mean to a non-hypothetical, always-already white child: “Is it not possible that the politics of life might mean something very different for populations whose histories include the rendering of life into non-being?” (90). While Muñoz’s own text, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* keeps its examples to cisgendered, white gay men, *Migrant Futures* broadens the textual repertoire that bolsters Muñoz’s point by including international, globally oppressed citizens. The examples that she provides are all effective: Bahng suggests *Midnight Robber* as a work about reproductive futurity superior to *Children of Men* (104-118) because it not only eschews basing all futuristic technologies on Enlightenment-era European innovation, but also questions the assumptions that belie this Eurocentric preference. *Midnight Robber* champions the marginalized because it fashions a futurity around technologies pioneered in Africa (107) and opens space to the notion of queer families being a healing influence in the future (116-117). Bahng writes that *Midnight Robber* “offers an important alternative to the racialized surrogations of reproductive futurity” (118).

*Migrant Futures* continues its journey in its fourth and fifth chapters by addressing the portrayal and treatment of the Asian sci-fi character as an idealized, futuristic, quasi-android figure. She writes of *Blade Runner* (1982) and *Neuromancer* (1984) that “techno-Orientalism figures the Japanese as ‘unfeeling aliens; they are cyborgs and replicants. But there is also the sense that these mutants are now better adapted to survive in the future.” She then analyzes a Phillips Norelco ad to emphasize that the techno-Orientalist phenomenon comprises “the dehumanization of an Asian subject, a romance narrative between a feminized East and a masculinized West, and a
broader preoccupation with Asia’s rise to technocultural prowess in the global theater” (125). Her primary example is how Singapore has become a neoliberal laboratory nation-state, a transnational experiment that studies the impact of neoliberal market forces on a citizenry as if they were guinea pigs meant to prove Wall Street and the International Monetary Fund correct (128). The well-touted prosperity Singapore is experiencing is, of course, predicated on the erasure of migrant workers like those from the Philippines from said economic security.

Bahng’s text is a well-organized, masterful chronicle of how the financial narratives of the colonizers create global mayhem, but that certain science fiction envisions futures that aren’t colonized by pro-capitalist pre-determination. In this way, Bahng envisions futures where queer families can prosper, where pasts are excavated and legacies of the downtrodden are no longer erased, and hope for a more utopian horizon is possible for everyone. While I wish Bahng had gone into more detail about CRISPR/Cas9 technology in the last chapter, as well as delved deeper into how econometric regression analysis’s erasure of outlier data points is also arguably an erasure of the marginalized, it is still categorically a bravura work of intersectional scholarship.
The Kaya Anthology of South Korean Science Fiction

Samuel Gerald Collins


Readymade Bodhisattva is the long-awaited anthology of South Korean science fiction—the first of its kind in English. It comes on a wave of similarly groundbreaking translations of global science fiction into English (e.g., The Gollancz Book of South Asian Science Fiction (2019)). But given the prominence of East Asia in sf—textual, cinematic and graphic—it seems odd that the Korean collection has been so long in the making, particularly since the “Korean wave” has brought such a variety of sf-themed film, television, graphic novels, animation and games to English-speaking audiences. Perhaps this is an artifact of a literary canon that has been so closely defined with political criticism and the tragedy of Korean history. Even so, as Sunyoung Park points out in an insightful introduction to this collection, writers like Choi In-hun (author of “The Plaza”) have crossed over into science fiction in order to facilitate their political critique in the present, while a newer generation like Kim Youn-ha regularly shift from realistic to fantastic registers.

Still, it is intrusive to note what makes South Korean sf different, qualities that are, moreover well-represented in this collection. First, the youth of the writers. As Sunyoung Park notes, sf was introduced into Korea at the beginning of the 20th century, but the development of Korean sf has exploded in the digital age, with strong growth not only in mainstream sf, but also in urban fantasy, slipstream and other subgenres. While there are apical ancestors here (Mun Yunseong, Bok Geo-il), the majority of these writers were born after 1970—after the “386 generation” that was the flashpoint for South Korea’s democratic movement. Coming of age during Korea’s era of boom-and-bust economic growth and rapid globalization gave them, perhaps, different perspectives on the future, ones influenced by critiques of both authoritarian control and corporate power, and ones where the future of Korea is hardly a fait accompli.

More importantly, perhaps, and regardless of the age of the authors themselves,
this is a very contemporary collection. With the exception of two stories (both originally published in 1967), this is a 21st century anthology, and many of these writers consumed and produced sf in the context of Korea’s internet revolution, one that has made South Korea by some measures the most wired nation on the planet. A concluding essay on South Korean sf fandom from Sang Joon Park contextualizes the collection in these digital platforms: “Naeil BBS” was an early-1990s sf fanboard managed by Choi Hyunjun, one that popularized both foreign and domestic sf. Webzines like “Geoul” (Mirror) and “Crossroads” were pivotal to the development of several writers here.

The first, eponymous offering (“Readymade Bodhisattva”) is, perhaps, the best known in the English-speaking world, since it was adapted to film and released with two other short pieces as “Doomsday Book” in 2012. Taking inspiration from Masahiro Mori’s *The Buddha in the Robot* (1981), Park Seonghwan’s short story centers on “Inmyeong” (or “Life”), a “general purpose” robot working in a Buddhist temple that achieves enlightenment and proceeds to instruct a growing following of monks. Finally, the U.R. Corporations is called to inspect the robot and, under orders by the President, turn it off before it can “infect” other robots and humans. As Inmyeong explains before turning itself off (an entirely enlightened thing to do), “the eyes of this robot see the nothingness of passion, of impure desire, of good and evil, of enlightenment and darkness” (40). It is the nonhuman here that is the ultimate measure of humanity’s precarity. The story sets the stage for the collection—contributions that interrogate the human, non-human and post-human from the perspective of technological development, modernization and Korean history and culture.

Another answer to the same questions raised by “Readymade Bodhisattva” is Bok Geo-il’s “Along the Fragments of My Body,” where robots contemplate the continuity of their mechanical selves through the medium of robot art. Where is the “I” when the CPU and the servos have been all replaced? On the other hand, in Pak Min-gyu’s devastating “Road Kill,” robots clean the detritus of humans and animals killed along a super highway that forms the impenetrable barrier encircling a refugee zone. Here, robots bear witness to the inestimable cruelty of humans towards others they find expendable.

There are also several stories that examine the transhuman and the posthuman, the ways that the human becomes more and more the product of its non-human
supplements or, alternately, the ways in which the human is transcended altogether. In Yun I-hyeong’s “The Sky Walker,” a young athlete contemplates her own, earthbound limits while exploring the world of human hybrids who can bend gravity to their will. And in an excerpt from Kim Young-ha’s “Quiz Show,” two characters discuss the possibility that they are disembodied brains stored on a spaceship travelling to a distant star. Finally, in Djuna’s “The Blood Battle of Broccoli Plain,” humans are infected with a “Linker” virus that enables them to adapt to alien environments they reach by hitchhiking rides on parasitic alien spaceships. On a remote planet, North and South Koreans continue their fratricidal battles, until they finally succumb to an alien ecology that absorbs whatever remains of their humanity. Djuna seems to be saying that Our posthuman futures will ultimately make a mockery of our current political battles, noting that, when “new space travelers came to the plains, they found nothing that resembled human beings” (294).

The tone to most of these contributions is quietly dystopian, and it’s the everyday tragedy of human lives pushed to their limits that gives the collection its most Korean character. These are stories where characters faced by the abyss quietly show each other their photos as the batteries on their phones slowly die (“Where Boats Go”), or where a man screams alone against authoritarianism (“Empire Radio, Live Transmission”). And here the collection proves similar to tragedies of life amidst war, oppression and inequality that have been major themes in South Korean literature. The collection ends with Kim Changgyu’s “Our Banished World,” where children are allowed to board a boat to escape a simulated world that is being terminated by the alien scientists studying it. The story comes on the tails of one of the worst tragedies in recent South Korean history—the capsizing of a boat (the Sewol ferry) filled with high school students, most of whom die after they are instructed by the captain to remain below decks. The story ends, as does the Sewol tragedy, with the young students texting their parents to tell them they love them. Only here, Kim has reversed it, for it is the parents who are about to die, and the children who have been granted the chance at a new life. But rather than a redemptive fable, the end is a ferocious indictment of a society that sacrificed its children to capitalism and petty corruption.

Each of these stories offers thought-provoking windows onto modern lives, and it is high time that these writers are exposed to global audiences. South Korea is one place where the future fairly pushes its way into the present—sometimes in a
suffocating way, at other times with the breath of possibility and emancipation. It is my hope that this is the first of several sf anthologies.
**MEDIA REVIEWS**

**The Wandering Earth**

**Virginia L. Conn**


SOME of the earliest scenes in Frant Gwo’s 2019 smash hit, *The Wandering Earth*, are hard to bear. They hit too close to home: another city abandoned, another species gone extinct, another drought, another flood, another climate disaster. Alongside the increasingly frantic reports being steadily released by every reputable climate-based scientific organization in the real world, our own imminent demise seems to have been inserted without alteration directly into the film’s introduction.

The film’s central catastrophe is simple: the sun is going supernova and will engulf the Earth within a hundred years if nothing is done. The solution, however, is not so straightforward: humanity unites behind the Wandering Earth Project, a plan to launch the Earth out of its heliocentric orbit and into a different one 4.2 light years and 100 generations away. This plan is ambitious, hopeful, and cold: half the population is wiped out immediately, and those lucky enough to survive are only able to do so by selection through a non-transferrable lottery. The sun’s expansion, however, is only the first of a series of cascading disasters that make up the plot of this visually-astounding film, with each disaster leading to ever-greater and more overwhelming problems.

Yet scenes of the decline and destruction of Earth do not actually open the film, nor do they close it. Instead, scenes of love and duty—both familial and universal—bracket the film and are foundational to *The Wandering Earth’s* philosophy. When saving the world, the idea of love being a choice demonstrated through the willingness to sacrifice is a hard one, one that denies selfishness or individual self-preservation. The astronaut Liu Peiqiang’s willingness to allow his gravely ill wife to die in order to make the best choice for custodianship of his son, for example, then to leave that same beloved son in order to best serve humanity, and eventually to sacrifice himself, never seeing his son again, in order to save everyone, is held up as the ultimate in both fatherly love and national patriotism. His subsumption of individual desire to the greater good is echoed too many times to count over the course of the film, in
both great and small ways, by both named and unnamed characters. Survival, here, necessitates sacrifice.

Multiple commentators have already noted that one thing that non-Chinese audiences have missed about the film is the emphasis on solidarity and a communal sense of purpose; the heroes are not exceptional, but rather representative of numerous individuals all doing the same thing at the same time. They’re heroic because, when confronted with opportunities to give up or turn away or concede defeat, they choose the difficult path, and the effect of each person choosing what’s right over what’s easy snowballs into global salvation. All of this is true, certainly, and is also certainly heartwarming, but it results in a fundamentally neoliberal version of environmental disaster in which catastrophe can be avoided by individual choice and individual action. Even climate change writ large, for example, is revealed to not be the fault of humans—rather, it is the expanding sun, an external antagonist, that has caused global chaos, not corporate pollution, not centuries of resource exploitation, and not multinational organizations profiting at the cost of individual lives. No one is at fault in this disaster, which absolves both characters and viewers of guilt and allows them to focus on the unsullied good of acting against an outside force in which their individual actions are all that matter.

The central message of *The Wandering Earth* is that the powers that be (dehumanized to the point of being represented as/by an AI) cannot and should not be relied upon, while individuals will do what is best for everyone. This is a community-building that relies on individual parts to make the right decision, not on institutions to change in order to do right by individuals. This shouldn’t be surprising—the author of the book the film was based on, Liu Cixin, is noted for his pessimism regarding humanity’s ability to adapt at a large scale—and while the film’s ending represents a triumph for the human species (an unusually optimistic one, given the rest of his oeuvre), its themes remain entrenched in existing power structures.

While some viewers may balk at the film’s conservative bent, even the most ardent naysayers must admit that *The Wandering Earth* has plenty to recommend it, especially visually. There are some very nice establishing shots—in particular the opening pan out from protagonists Liu Qi and Han Duoduo in their truck through the expanse of an abandoned Beijing, up to the planetary thruster, the entire planet, and finally to the space station—and moments of comical exaggeration and slapstick humor juxtaposed almost immediately with extreme and sudden violence. It’s a film
about the need to hold onto hope (“the most precious diamond in our lives”), a theme that is so powerful that when the Earth’s final hope—embodied in the thrusters pushing it towards its new home—fails, it feels like a punch to the gut. It hurts to watch the thrusters fail and to hear the AI onboard the space station continually self-correct as to the magnitude of the disaster. *The Wandering Earth* is very successful at getting us to believe in hope again, and to invest ourselves in the idea that humanity can be saved. But such a hope—and such a film—is situated in a mindset fundamentally committed to the Meghalayan age, not the Anthropocene. To believe that global destruction is externally-imposed while the solution is due to individual choices, not systemic change, feels good and relieves us of guilt, and maybe that’s not such a bad thing for a blockbuster film looking to make it big on the international market. Given its box-office success, it’s not so far-fetched to imagine that viewers want to believe in climate hope and global salvation.

A film like *The Wandering Earth* has done so well internationally for several reasons, I suspect: capitalizing on the meteoric rise in popularity of Chinese science fiction in general and Liu Cixin in particular, a concentrated and enormous financial investment on the part of the Chinese film industry, and a savvy business move on Netflix’s part to court the Chinese market, but also, at a more personal level, the aforementioned possibility it offers of both individual and collective response to climate change. The science and central conceits are, frankly, ridiculous, but that isn’t really what this film is about. Rather, *The Wandering Earth* offers a moment of respite from the overwhelming fear and uncertainty that viewers are increasingly being forced to confront in the face of real-world catastrophe. To show that one individual can make a difference is comforting in a world still stuck in the opening scenes of a global disaster that it promises can be averted if enough people want it badly enough and which isn’t our fault in the first place, anyway: the ultimate in science fictional escapism. With its big budget, lush visuals, and emphasis on individual action, *The Wandering Earth* emphatically asserts itself as part of the growing canon of naively optimistic cli-fi films that offer hope without demanding change in return.
**See You Yesterday**

T. S. Miller


SEE You Yesterday is debut director Stefon Bristol’s mostly successful attempt at a *Do the Right Thing* (1989) by way of *Back to the Future* (1985). An innocent black man is killed during a chance police encounter: what if we could literally turn back the clock and avoid that moment in time entirely? The film may well have been pitched as *The Hate U Give* (2018) with time travel, so simple yet so striking is the basic conceit that grounds the film’s narrative structure as well as its loftier thematic ambitions. And perhaps the comparison to *The Hate U Give* is the more apt one despite Spike Lee’s producer credit, if only because *See You Yesterday* seems very much a “YA film,” if such a category can be said to exist independently of direct adaptations of particular YA novels. As a whole, the film is a depressingly timely and powerful examination of police violence and its effects, yet it can also become tonally discordant at times, alternating as it does between lighthearted scenes of young adults solving engineering problems with wacky, *Ghostbusters*-esque science, and then highly realist depictions and dissections of tragedy and trauma. The scene that best encapsulates this tension is surely Michael J. Fox’s somewhat waggish cameo near the film’s beginning: this evocation of the youthful, nostalgic romp that is the *Back to the Future* trilogy is juxtaposed uneasily with the far less playful time travel book that his character is shown reading, Octavia Butler’s *Kindred*. The challenge that Bristol has set for himself as a filmmaker is therefore to raise a familiar YA sci-fi adventure plot to the level of seriousness necessary to address the tremendous and tremendously weighty problems he has chosen. *See You Yesterday* largely succeeds in these efforts, but will also leave viewers wondering about what exactly it all might mean for a world without time travel backpacks.

C.J. (Eden Duncan-Smith) and Sebastian (Dante Crichlow) are gifted high school students living in the Brooklyn neighborhood of Flatbush. The film is set little more than a month after its own release date: very appropriately, its futuristic dystopian setting is simply being black in America in 2019. Bristol has expanded *See You Yesterday* from his earlier 15-minute short film of the same name (2017), and the
longer runtime of the feature, while still brief, has allowed him to provide viewers with a vivid sense of a lively black, Hispanic, Afro-Caribbean Flatbush community. The perceptive and realistic slice-of-life filmmaking that characterizes the varied interactions among members of the community, however, contrasts sharply with the film’s markedly clumsier handling of its science fictional content. It is not simply those viewers with a preference for harder SF who will find its initial premise beyond improbable: C.J. and Sebastian have apparently invented personal time travel machines that they are in the process of testing first on themselves. The devices take the form of modified backpacks, more or less proton packs out of Ghostbusters (the film is peppered with such references), and the two students only seem to understand their paradigm-shattering achievement as significant to the extent that it might earn them college scholarships after demonstration at an upcoming expo. A wealth of technobabble explains how the devices function, and ensuring that the backpacks operate properly drives a significant portion of the plot; for example, at one point they must obtain a “quantum circuit board” from another student’s project.

Here we can observe an additional unresolved tension in the film: although the time travel machine effectively works like magic on some level—complete with certain arbitrary, almost fairytale-like rules that must be obeyed for the sake of the plotting—See You Yesterday also appears to want to celebrate science and engineering and inspire young people of color to pursue success in STEM fields. (Like Jordan Peele’s 2019 film Us, Bristol also indirectly celebrates the role of HBCUs specifically.) Hidden Figures (2016) thus strikes me as an obvious influence or at least a point of reference: in some of the film’s promotional materials, C.J. is prominently shown wearing a NASA t-shirt befitting her outspoken character—”I Need My Space”—and we see another humorous physics shirt elsewhere in the film. Should, then, the fantastical character of the science invoked in the film lead us to understand See You Yesterday fundamentally as a fantasy, driven by an eternal desire to turn back time? Or does it offer up STEM and science fiction as the source of a potential means to address police violence, to save black lives, to build a better and more just future? Can we “science” our way out of this mess? Interestingly, the film keeps the more militant activism, all the protests and the marches, entirely in the background and on screens, while C.J.’s quest for justice remains personal: two high school kids building time machines in a garage. C.J. seems to think she can do it alone, but the film as a whole is perhaps leading us to draw other conclusions.
A film that begins as a fun romp—with C.J. and Sebastian testing the time machines simply to see if they work and so secure a college education—is of course interrupted by tragedy, the killing of C.J.’s older brother. Bringing him back gives C.J. and her time machine new purpose, and her failure to succeed on the first attempt transforms See You Yesterday into a classic time loop film, in its basic structure following Groundhog Day (1993), Source Code (2011), Edge of Tomorrow (2014), and any number of others. If, as I noted above, that playful tone does return incongruously at times, Bristol nevertheless teases out the implications of this union of police violence plot and science fictional premise in serious and provocative ways: what, after all, is the unending series of wrongful deaths by police violence than a kind of time loop from which we cannot escape? Another year, another month, another death in the headlines: this is the repetitive time loop that is the reality of being black in America. Bristol handles his science fictional literalization of this idea very well: for example, he does not show the murder on screen initially (we already know this story, after all), and C.J.’s emotional state after her first failure is particularly powerfully evoked. Her brother died. Again. “I don’t know if I can deal with seeing that again,” Sebastian says in the original short. As a time loop film, See You Yesterday forces its characters and its viewers to relive a trauma from which there appears to be no escape, no matter what any of us do.

The film’s ultimate lack of certainty, while likely to disappoint some in its audiences, is therefore probably inevitable. Time travel is obviously not a practical solution to the problem of police violence, but thinking more deeply about time and repetition in connection with the issue, as the film encourages viewers to do, may turn out to lead us somewhere new after all. Significantly, C.J. and Sebastian’s devices only allow for extremely short range time travel into the past, a kind of time travel that doesn’t really permit them to escape from the present at all—to say nothing of escaping from the past history of trauma over the last few decades and centuries that has accompanied the black experience in America. All in all, I think the film is deeper and more provocative than its lighter tone and slighter running time might suggest, and I would recommend it for use on a syllabus for any course in which young adult SF/F, race, and/or Afrofuturism figure prominently. I will conclude by noting that, on his personal website, Bristol includes both Back to the Future and Jurassic Park among his favorite films: we can only wonder what he might come up with when he next decides to visit SF territory, but I certainly will be looking forward to it.
ALMOST every television program’s second season embodies a course correction: a discarding or alteration of what did not work the first time, a greater emphasis on what did. *Star Trek: Discovery*’s second season, broadcast in fourteen episodes from January to April 2019, is perhaps a sharper course correction than many. *Discovery* has had a tumultuous behind-the-scenes journey: the original showrunner quit partway through season 1, and his replacements were, in turn, fired partway through season 2, replaced by series co-creator Alex Kurtzman. Even without this behind-the-scenes knowledge, the transformation is visible on screen. A greater emphasis on traditional *Star Trek* optimism has replaced the first season’s grimness, even if a strong focus on action remains, in favor of. Constant affirmations of camaraderie have replaced the antagonism within the main cast. Fans often criticized the first season for its lack of adherence to earlier continuity, especially visually; the second season is replete with references, especially to the original *Star Trek* (1966–69) and *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine* (1993–99), and it massages or eliminates many of season 1’s discontinuities.

Like season 1, season 2 is noteworthy for its attempts to balance the “new” and the “old” of a long-running franchise. Significantly, season 2 makes heavy use of continuity elements from the original *Star Trek* series. Christopher Pike (Anson Mount), the USS *Enterprise*’s captain from the original unaired pilot (“The Cage”), assumes command of the *Discovery*. Spock (Ethan Peck) also joins the main cast; other characters from the original pilot also appear. The *Enterprise* characters wear the bright, primary-color uniforms associated with the original *Star Trek*, rather than the drab blue ones introduced in *Discovery*.

At its best, this is not mere “fan service.” Season 1 established that *Discovery*’s protagonist, Michael Burnham (Sonequa Martin-Green), was the foster daughter of Spock’s parents, but did not explore Spock and Michael’s own relationship. Season 2’s sibling rivalry allows the viewer to see new sides to both characters, and Ethan Peck successfully walks a narrow tightrope as Spock, plausibly playing a younger
version of Leonard Nimoy’s iconic character while still making the part his own.

*Discovery*’s callbacks reach their apotheosis in a pair of episodes: “If Memory Serves” and “Through the Valley of Shadows.” The former opens with a montage of clips from “The Cage” and recreates many elements from the original pilot, as Michael enlists the help of that episode’s psychic aliens in repairing Spock’s damaged psyche. Several characters from “The Cage” return, and the episode gains its emotional power from the juxtaposition of old continuity with new characters. “Through the Valley of Shadows” is heavily dependent on the viewer knowing Captain Pike’s ultimate fate from his final on-screen appearance in “The Menagerie” (1966). Here, Pike himself becomes aware of that fate, but elects to go forward regardless. Both episodes successfully mine old continuity to dramatic effect.

However, there is a peril to using old continuity in a new production. Spock goes through a large range of emotional experiences here given his emotional naïveté prior to *Star Trek: The Motion Picture* (1979), and the show occasionally contorts to maintain consistency with a line from “Journey to Babel” (1967) that establishes Spock and his father did not speak for eighteen years prior. The season also makes heavy use of the Federation covert agency Section 31, originally established in *Deep Space Nine*, but in doing so, contradicts a number of key facts about the organization. Additionally, season 2 occasionally “explains” discrepancies from season 1, such as why all the Klingons in season 1 were bald, in ways that don’t hold up to scrutiny, and probably create more problems than they solve. Use of continuity may please fans, but it is not always good storytelling.

*Discovery*’s combination of retro and modern appeal goes beyond continuity. Like season 1, season 2 merges the episodic space adventure of pre-streaming 1966–2005 *Star Trek* with the practices of contemporary streaming tv. There is a season-spanning storyline, but its design allows for the incorporation of traditional planet-of-the-week storylines (“New Eden,” “The Sound of Thunder”), where the crew must reckon with a new civilization and its challenges to their values, or a space-entity storyline (“An Obol for Charon”). These episodes all stand alone as action-adventure sf with a dash of *Star Trek*-style moral dilemmas, but they all also have lasting effects on the characters. Unfortunately, as the season goes on, it falls victim to the perils of serialization, as the storyline becomes increasingly convoluted and improbable, a series of often-arbitrary twists replacing good storytelling. One also gets glimpses of the changing creative minds, as seeds sown in the first few episodes
do not entirely line up with the explanations given in the last few.

The new/old captain, Christopher Pike, best displays the ethos of pre-streaming *Star Trek*. Previous captains were often moral paragons, not always right in their ethical decisions, but well-meaning and idealistic, especially Captain Kirk from the original and Captain Picard from *The Next Generation* (1987–94). Modern prestige television shies away from this type of lead in favor of dark, morally compromised, angsty characters, such as Don Draper in *Mad Men* (2007–15), Walter White in *Breaking Bad* (2008–13), and Jessica Jones in *Jessica Jones* (2015–19), and *Discovery*’s lead Michael Burnham arguably fits this mold as well. Little place for the forthright hero of old exists in the contemporary landscape of tv that seeks after critical regard.

*Discovery*’s captain in season 1 (Jason Isaac’s Lorca) was also morally compromised, but Captain Pike is a conscious repudiation of this ethos. Mount’s Pike is honest, principled, and forthright; he’s a team player who works *with* his officers rather than barking at them, inspiring them to do their best. This could come across as caricature, but Mount gives Pike an easy humanity. I suspect, though, that a character like him can only be captain if the captain is *not* the lead; the lead needs angst. Even if so, Pike helps lifting the tone of season 2, above the gloom and doom of season 1. Pike shows that there is still a space for principled optimism, and that one does *not* have to descend into the darkness first to find it (as season 1 seemingly argued), reconciling the characteristics of pre-streaming *Star Trek* with the demands of the modern prestige television *Discovery* aspires to be. This course correction provides an instructive case study in how franchise sf balances the nostalgia of the old with the appeal of the new.
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