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SFRA would like to thank the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire for its assistance in producing the SFRA Review.

SUBMISSIONS
The SFRA Review encourages all submissions, including essays, review essays that cover several related texts, and interviews. If you would like to review nonfiction or fiction, please contact the respective editor.

Christine Mains, Editor
Box 66024
Calgary AB T2N 1N4
<cemains@shaw.ca>

Janice M. Bogstad, Managing Editor
239 Broadway St.
Eau Claire WI 54703-5553
<bogstajm@uwec.edu>

Ed McKnight, Nonfiction Editor
113 Cannon Lane
Taylors SC 29687
<emcknight@ac.edu>

Philip Snyder, Fiction Editor
109 Northumberland Road
Rochester NY 14618
<psnyder@monroecc.edu>

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News Items:

The World Fantasy Con has announced site selection for the next three years: 2006 in Austin, Texas, November 2-5; 2007, in Saratoga, New York, November 1-4; 2008, in Calgary, Canada, TBA.


The 2005 Philip K. Dick Award was given to War Surf by M.M. Buckner.

The Crawford Award for the best fantasy novel by a new author was presented at the International Conference on the Fantastic in the Arts in Fort Lauderdale on March 18 to Joe Hill for 20th Century Ghosts.

The Lord Ruthven Award recognizing excellence in vampire fiction went to Elizabeth Kostova for The Historian, with Octavia Butler’s The Fledgling as runner-up.

The Dell Magazine Award for unpublished fiction by an undergraduate was presented at the International Conference on the Fantastic in Fort Lauderdale on March 18. The winner was Meghan Sinoff.

Four inductees to the Science Fiction Hall of Fame in Seattle have been announced: George Lucas, Anne McCaffrey, Frank Herbert and Frank Kelly Freas (the last two posthumous). The event will be held at the Science Fiction Museum on June 17.

SFRA BUSINESS

Editor’s Message

Christine Mains

Hmmm. Still running a little behind, so I’ll repeat much of my message from last issue. It goes something like this: Apologies, nagging of late reviewers, pleas for more content, wishes for good reading.

President’s Message

David G. Mead

I am looking forward to our annual meeting in White Plains, NY, June 22-25. I hope you are too. Please book your room, send in your conference registration, and – if there’s still time for last minute submissions – send in your paper and get on the program. Oscar and Tom have great plans and a terrific slate of guest authors, including – among others - Norman Spinrad, Nancy Kress, and Nalo Hopkinson. I really can’t wait to get there, and I hope to see you there too.

We are planning to hold our 2007 SFRA annual meeting in conjunction with the Heinlein Centennial celebration in Kansas City, July 6-8, 2007. For our SFRA meeting, we need a Conference Chair and a Program Chair, or a team of SFRA folk who will take charge of the meeting. I am making some preliminary arrangements, with the help of Jim Gunn and Chris McKitterick of the University of Kansas, but more help is needed. Please consider volunteering.

Also, recruiting new members of SFRA is something we all can do. If you know someone who works in the field but isn’t a member, please invite him or her to join. Membership forms are on-line as www.sfra.org. We’ll do all we can to make their association fruitful and pleasant.

I hope spring finds you all well and happy, and busy writing wonderful history and criticism of science fiction.

PS. If you were in Las Vegas last year, you might have met my grandson Leo and his mother Jennifer, who came to help with the conference. Leo is expecting a sibling in September. His doting grandparents are beside themselves with joy, as are his parents Chris and Jen Shields.

Candidates’ Statements

For President

Adam Frisch

I am honored to be nominated for the position of SFRA President. I have been a member of SFRA since 1978, and served as the organization’s vice-president in 1999-2000. I have also served on several SFRA committees, most recently the Pilgrim Award Committee from 2002-2004. I am currently Professor and Chairperson of English at Briar Cliff University in Sioux City, IA., from which position I have managed to do some scholarly work on the authors James Tiptree, Jr., Ken MacLeod and Kim Stanley Robinson, as well as on the genre of SF film. If elected, I will do my best:

1) to keep the organization, its print and electronic publications, and its annual meetings running smoothly,

2) to work with the other SFRA officers to find new ways to increase our
I enjoy working with, and whom, if elected, I would like to serve. I have come to realize that the SFRA is an interesting and diverse group of people pedagogy at the meeting in Las Vegas last summer, where I also presented a paper, I have come to realize that the SFRA is an interesting and diverse group of people I enjoy working with, and whom, if elected, I would like to serve.

My interests include the intersections of SF and Fantasy with law, politics, and ethics. I am concerned about the political distortion of science by some who see it as a threat to their religious views, economic or political power, or all of the above, and see SF as a good place for critical and satirical commentary on the alternative presents and futures we endure, or hope to create or avoid. I would like to see the SFRA continue to encourage critical and creative thinking and writing about what those futures are likely to be. We are already living in a period once regularly written about as “the future” by SF’s leading figures—do we need to rewrite the past-future, or consider whether the present is an alternative time line? And what new futures are now possible that we wish to write about and, as Fredenk Pohl has said, perhaps try to prevent?

My professional experience includes my current role as department chair (Finance & Legal Studies) at Bloomsburg University, where I have taught since 1985. Law & Literature, and International Law are my favorite subjects, and I have used SF texts in various classes, including my required “business law” course (I used Jane Yolen’s “Briar Rose” one term in trying to get my students to think about the implications of the Solomon Amendment litigation). I attend various professional meetings, most recently the centennial of the American Society of International Law, and would work as SFRA President to get regular recognition of our work in academic circles to the extent that it would help us expand membership, and help our members improve their professional opportunities. We ran an ad for the 2006 Annual Meeting in the summer issue of the CHE’s “Events in Academe” at my suggestion, and got it listed in the January issue calender, which I hope will encourage participation. I also reach out to my peers on our campus to join and participate, and hope all who read this will do likewise. If everyone who reads this notice gets one more person to join the SFRA, it would be a great step forward.

I endeavor to get my students to write well, and still find grading essays takes forever. This afternoon I tried to explain how Thomas Kuhn and John Rawls influenced my thinking about human rights to students who had heard of neither. It struck me then that SF, and the SFRA as an organization dedicated to the study and encouragement of SF, may both need a Kuhnian paradigm shift now, to rethink their mission and method, and learn from and attract into the SFRA the next several generations of writers and scholars who will carry on the work.

The world is not flat, but it is multi-dimensional and interconnected. My daughter and her partner Nick just visited from Edinburgh for their first visit since 9/11, which happened just after my son Nathan and I attended the 2001 Philadelphia WorldCon. I exchange e-mail regularly with a former student now in Iraq over the Internet, discussing Chris Hedges’ “War is a Force that Gives Us Mean-

The Octavia E. Butler Memorial Scholarship Fund has been established to provide a scholarship for writers of color to attend the Clarion Writers Workshop, where Butler got her start. The scholarship will be administered by the Carl Brandon Society, which earlier this year established the Parallax Award and the Kindred Award.

The winner of the James Tiptree Award for gender-bending speculative fiction is Air by Geoff Ryman. The award will be presented at Wiscon 30, from May 26-29 in Madison, WI.

Forthcoming Nonfiction: (Spring, 2006)

Battaglia, Debbora. E.T. Culture: Anthropology in Outerspaces. Duke UP
Brin, David and Matthew Woodring Stover, eds. Star Wars on Trial: Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers Debate the Most Popular Science Fiction Films of all Time. Benbella.
CfPs:

WHAT: When Genres Collide
WHO: SFRA 37th Annual Conference
WHEN: June 22-25, 2006
WHERE: Crowne Plaza Hotel, White Plains, NY

TOPICS: Guest of Honor: Norman Spinrad. Featured Guests: Nancy Kress, Nalo Hopkinson, R. Garcia y Robertson, William Sleator, Joan Slonczewski, Michael Whelan. Readers of science fiction are well aware of the intense cross-pollination of SF and other genres. Science fiction has frequently dovetailed with fantasy and dark fantasy. Even in hard SF, readers often encounter variations of “ghosts” and “gods” in the stories. With the ever-evolving cyberpunk movement, the rise of slipstream fiction and mysteries that hover on the cusp of mainstream even as they move into

For Vice President

Ed Carmien

Every so often one is called upon to take a moment and define him or her self. Whether a bio blurb to accompany a short story, a short statement to help with introductions at a new job, or a platform statement, the goal is the same: to convey information. So who is Ed Carmien? I am it seems a hybrid creature. Not one major but two in college, not one master’s degree but two, not one Ph.D. but—well, ok, there the trend skipped a step. Write two dissertations? My working life has been equally diverse: SF writer (and member SFWA) and academic? Yes. Couldn’t imagine living any other way.

Previous service to the Association includes working as a member (last year) and chair (this year) of the Graduate Student Award Committee, and it has been an honor to be allowed to organize and chair a panel for the upcoming conference about the role of fantastic literature in English composition and other courses. It is as a writer and Associate Professor of English at a New Jersey community college that I offer to serve the SFRA as vice-president. In addition to sundry supportive duties our vice-presidents are charged with “special responsibility for membership recruitment.”

I envision a membership drive that makes a direct appeal to all institutions that offer a science fiction (&/or fantasy) related course. Those who teach such courses would be enriched by membership in SFRA—seeing to it all appropriate institutions have a representative in our membership is a clear goal that can be pursued through a letter (or email) campaign. To support this endeavor I have received confirmation that my institution will support extensive mailing costs in the event I am elected.

In addition, secondary or indirect activities that enhance the value of membership in “our thing” can help boost retention. James Gunn mentioned the academic program repository, for example: between that and ongoing efforts in the SFWA (note the “W”) to promote SF through better coordination of press resources, we can leverage our knowledge and talent into the public arena more effectively. By advertising our sundry programs (the repository) and making it possible for members of the press to contact those of us who know what they want to learn about aspects of popular culture that are constantly proving relevant to our broader intellectual culture, we can help make SFRA more relevant and useful than it already is, and hence an organization in which it is worth retaining membership.

And there’s the hybrid thing again—the joining together of otherwise disparate parts in order to create a better whole. My interest in this concept extends to enthusiastic support for the idea of combining our upcoming 2007
meeting with the Heinlein centennial. No more useful hybrid concerning our organization comes to mind, and I sincerely hope our current leadership makes it possible for us to hold a combined event. As I mentioned earlier, making the SFRA more relevant to ongoing activities in our area is the handiest recruitment tool there is.

I promised myself I would quit at the end of one single-spaced page, and as I write this I can see the bottom margin. I will cheerfully answer any questions posed by the electorate: contact me by email at carmien@mac.com. Learn more about me and my work as a writer of SF by visiting: http://www.sfwa.org/members/carmien/index.html

Lisa Yaszek

I am Assistant Professor in the School of Literature, Communication, and Culture at Georgia Tech, where I also serve as curator for the Bud Foote Science Fiction Collection. My first book, The Self Wired, explores cyborg writing as a new way to represent the impact of postwar technologies on American subjectivity. My forthcoming book, Galactic Suburbia, shows how women writing science fiction in the 1940s, 50s, and 60s developed a unique body of literature that critically engaged emergent technocultural institutions and prefigured the literature we now recognize as feminist science fiction. My essays on gender, science, and science fiction appear in journals including Extrapolation, Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society, and electronic book review.

I have been involved in SFRA since 2003 as a conference presenter, panel organizer, Pioneer Award recipient, and Pioneer Award judge. If elected Vice President I would work to raise the profile and increase the membership of SFRA by forging new connections with interdisciplinary academic and artistic organizations. At first we might simply announce our presence by advertising our conferences, publications, and awards with such groups; later we could use the SFRA webpage, email list, and newsletter to circulate information about organizations amenable to science fiction studies and to organize panel submissions for their conferences. The Society for Literature, Science, and the Arts, SIGGRAPH, and the National Women’s Studies Association would all welcome our presence, and I’m sure that my colleagues in SFRA can identify a number of other groups that would do so as well.

I would also like to explore the possibility of advertising SFRA to students in appropriate graduate and undergraduate programs and creating profiles of our organization in popular online communities such as myspace.com and facebook.com. Extending our recruitment efforts in these directions will enable us to reach a wide range of up-and-coming scholars and artists both within and outside the science fiction community.

For Secretary

Stacie Hanes

My name is Stacie Hanes, and I’m a Teaching Fellow at Kent State University. Academically, I specialize in 19th century British literature, contemporary British fantasy, and queer theory; my most acute interests are in ethics and literature, particularly in Terry Pratchett’s Discworld and Joss Whedon’s Buffyverse.

I’ve been involved in the SFRA since sometime in 1999, when Joe Sanders asked me to be on the committee planning the 2000 conference, which was held in Cleveland that year. At the time I was an undergraduate, so you might say that I have grown up with the organization, presenting papers and chairing sessions in Cleveland, Chicago, and Las Vegas. Beginning my involvement by helping to
WHAT: Kubrick collection  
TOPICS: We are soliciting contributions for a collection of essays (to be published by McFarland and Company) which will address the work of Stanley Kubrick from a variety of new and fresh perspectives. In general, we are particularly interested in essays that synthesize analyses of several Kubrick films as they relate to a particular topic, rather than single film studies. As an example, an essay is already underway on architecture and Kubrick’s films. We particularly encourage original, groundbreaking analysis and discussions of overlooked aspects of Kubrick’s work. Preference will be given to essays that are already completed or nearing completion. Chapters will include, but are not limited to the following subjects: Kubrick as photographer; Kubrick as newsreel filmmaker; Kubrick and genre; Kubrick and gender; Kubrick and politics; Kubrick and technology; Kubrick and war; Kubrick and adaptation; Kubrick’s unfinished projects; Kubrick’s reputation as a filmmaker; Kubrick and Spielberg’s A.I.; Kubrick’s relationship to the other arts (painting, music, etc.). We are also seeking several essays on various aspects of 2001: A Space Odyssey.

SUBMISSIONS: John Springer, Dept. of English, 100 North University Drive, University of Central Oklahoma, Edmond, OK 73034-5209. <jpspringer@ucok.edu>

WHAT: Exploring the Multiverse: A Study of the Works of Michael Moorcock  
WHO: Editor: Thomas Fortenberry  
TOPICS: Submissions are invited for a new collection of essays studying the writings of British author Michael Moorcock.

organize the very first professional conference I attended was, I have to say, plunging into the deep end. I’ve tried to keep up that involvement, most notably by spending 2004 and early 2005 helping to design and edit the SFRA website, a task for which I, Samuel McDonald, and Elizabeth Monier-Williams volunteered at the Chicago meeting in 2004.

Though the SFRA was the first professional organization I joined, I’ve been steadily involved with major student organizations for a long time, always as a member of the directing board. At Lakeland Community College, I was president of the Campus Activities Board for two years, while also serving as one of the nine Student Government officers. As CAB president, I directed teams of student volunteers who organized large-scale events at least monthly; we were responsible for a budget of over $30,000 per year, which we used to purchase promotional items and materials, pay performers, book the performers’ accommodations, and assist other student organizations in funding their niche events. During that time, I worked with student volunteers, college administrators, agents, artists, and the governing boards of other organizations on a regular basis. I received several service awards from the college for my work with CAB, which included writing its Constitution and bylaws. I’ve always taken the awards as signs of approval, but since two were clocks, perhaps they just valued punctuality.

After I moved on to Youngstown State University, where I completed my Bachelor’s degree, I had to look for some other organization that might need me. I found YSUnity, the campus gay/straight alliance. I performed similar duties for YSUnity, but without the budget. I designed promotional materials and a website that I still maintain. After about a year with YSUnity, I was elected president of the group; I held the office for two years, while I worked for the English Department as a graduate teacher. As YSUnity president, I ran meetings, produced documents, organized events, and built the organization up from a handful of core members to a thriving activist group of several dozen regular attendees. My two-year term (not reign of terror, whatever you might have been told) coincided with my graduation from YSU’s Master’s in English program. When I left YSU and YSUnity, I was given the Edna K. McDonald Cultural Awareness Award; it was a purely ornamental object, so I like to think that it wasn’t for just showing up on time.

Since then, I’ve been a part of other organizations, such as Omicron Delta Kappa (a leadership honor society), Phi Kappa Phi, and the International Association for the Fantastic in the Arts; for the last, I am now the Division Head of the brand new Visual & Performing Arts section of the organization, with responsibility for building it into a successful division.

The ability to take small or new groups, or projects, and help build them into thriving entities strong enough to stand without me may be my greatest strength; it’s what I’d like to offer to the organization: a continued, perhaps intensified effort increase our membership. I would like to see growth for the benefit of younger scholars like me, who find mentors among the senior scholars in the field, for the secure perpetuation of the SFRA itself, and for a still broader exchange of ideas within sf scholarship; I see the continued improvement of our web presence as an important means to this end, as might be increased development of mentoring efforts toward graduate students and other young scholars.

Shelley Rodrigo  
I am currently a faculty member at Mesa Community College in Mesa,
Michael Moorcock. Moorcock has had a long and amazingly successful career as both editor and author. Winner of numerous awards (including the British Fantasy Award, World Fantasy Award, and being shortlisted for the Whitbread [Mother London]), he is most famous for having created a vast and fantastic multiverse of interconnected realities centered around the concept of a recurrent Eternal Champion. This collection endeavors to explore that multiverse on many levels and examine the many incarnations of the Eternal Champion. Moorcock, much like Edgar Rice Burroughs, Robert E. Howard, H. P. Lovecraft, and J. R. R. Tolkien, has created unique worlds and memorable characters that have become archetypal and influenced a generation of readers and writers. However, Moorcock’s fiction and its widespread impact have yet to be the subject of a major critical study, which this collection hopes to rectify.

For Treasurer

Donald ‘Mack’ Hassler
I have worked with this organization a long time because I enjoy the people and the projects so much. It is important to keep our records and our money straight. When I served as treasurer back in the eighties, we did not have the cool database software that we have now, and so in this past term I have had to adapt my ‘file card’ approach to the changes—not a bad idea for someone interested in science fiction. I think I know the new system now and would love to continue with it for two more years. Because of my age, if elected I shall be the Alan Greenspan of our community. Also, as you know he began as a disciple of Ayn Rand—and I of Heinlein. But perhaps I should stop now lest I lose more votes.

Warren Rochelle
I am honored to be nominated. This is a wonderful group of scholars and teachers, and I will continue to do what I can to help it flourish. I feel that active participation of the membership is essential for this to happen. I am passionate about the teaching and scholarly study of science fiction and want to be involved in the betterment of each. Service on the Executive Committee is a way to do this.

NONFICTION REVIEW

Speculations on Speculation

Neil Barron


Science fiction writers, academics (many of them former SF fans) and outside critics have repeatedly examined and re-examined SF as it has evolved from literarily suspect pulp-derived stories in the 1920s to one of today’s more popular genres, in which distinguished work is increasingly and more widely recognized. The latest example of these critical surveys is Speculations on Speculation: Theories of Science Fiction. Gunn, professor emeritus of English at the University of Kansas, has written SF like The Listeners and Some Dreams Are Arizona. I primarily teach writing and film studies classes. My scholarly interests all intersect under the umbrella of how technology interfaces with humanity. As a rhetoric and composition scholar this includes studies of usability, distance learning and professional development. As a film studies, and humanities scholar in general, this includes science fiction studies and what I call “cyborg theory.” I have attended and presented at the annual SFRA conference, on and off, for the past seven years. I was also the co-editor for The SFRA Review from 2001 to 2003.

I appreciate the open and welcoming atmosphere of SFRA as a conference and organization. As a young graduate student the scholars at SFRA made me feel a part of a scholarly community. I believe it is important to continue SFRA’s legacy of being open to young scholars, as well as scholars making connection from and through other disciplines. As an elected officer I want to give back to the organization as well as continue to promote the organization with other scholars. I would especially like to see the organization target the various upcoming media scholars; much of their work can, and does, benefit from science fiction studies.

TOPICS: The peer-reviewed, quarterly journal Storytelling is dedicated to analyses of popular narratives in the widest sense of the phrase and in the media and all aspects of culture. Although past essays have focused on children’s literature, comics, detective/crime fiction, film, horror/gothic, popular music, romance, science fiction, and television, submissions are by no means confined to these areas.

SUBMISSIONS: 50-word abstract, 3,300 to 6,000 words, MLA: Elizabeth Foxwell, storytelling@heldref.org

DEADLINE: none
INFO: www.heldref.org/stor.php

WHAT: Special Le Guin issue

WHO: Extrapolation

TOPICS: Ursula K. Le Guin is the author of a number of acknowledged classics of science fiction and fantasy, among them The Left Hand of Darkness, The Dispossessed, and the A Wizard of Earthsea trilogy, but these early masterpieces were all written and published a quarter of a century ago. Even Le Guin’s award-winning novel Tehanu is some fifteen years old. For this special issue on the work of Ursula K. Le Guin we welcome essays on any of the author’s published fiction, but would particularly like to see explorations of her children’s fantasy, short fiction, poetry, or such recent novels as The Other Wind and The Telling.

CONTACT: Michael Levy & Sandra J. Lindow <levym@uwstout.edu> and Extrapolation editor Javier A. Martinez at <martinez@utb.edu>.

DEADLINE: June 1, 2006

Nightmares and has written extensively and perceptively about SF (his The Science of Science Fiction Writing, 2000, may be his best critical work).

Candelaria, who’s pursuing a PhD at Kansas, has written some SF as well as SF criticism.

Many of the 24 essays here, grouped in six parts, are by those who know the field best, writers skilled not only as writers of SF but as skilled analysts of their chosen genre. Among these are Gunn, Barry Malzberg, Samuel Delany, Ursula Le Guin, Brian Aldiss, Alexei Panshin and Michael Swanwick, several of whom have won the field’s most prestigious awards, often repeatedly. Academic critics who don’t write SF include Darko Suvin, Robert Scholes and Gary Wolfe. The publishing/editorial perspective is capably presented by David Hartwell and Kathryn Cramer.

It was good to reread some of the best earlier criticism, which stands up quite well against the more modern pieces (a reflection of the careful choices by the editors), some of them original to this volume. Some essays are especially valuable to the neophyte reader of SF criticism, such as Hartwell’s “The Golden Age of Science Fiction is Twelve” (from his 1984 work, Age of Wonders), whereas essays by someone like Darko Suvin require both endurance and at least some familiarity with literary theory.

This varied and balanced survey will be of greatest value to veteran readers of SF and especially to teachers and would-be critics of SF. For larger public and academic libraries.

NONFICTION REVIEW

On SF

Neil Barron


Thomas M. Disch is a respected writer of SF and other fantastic fiction, as well as a few books for children and a considerable body of poetry. He isn’t a popular SF writer, perhaps because of his sharp and shrewd criticism of the inadequacies of much SF. Most of his earlier criticism is found in The Dreams Our Stuff is Made Of: How Science Fiction Conquered the World (1998). His most recent work is assembled in On SF, 41 pieces, many of them book reviews originally published in magazines or newspapers whose titles are shown in the acknowledgements but usually and irritatingly without date or pagination (it would have required little effort to include this helpful information).

Among the longer essays (10-15 pages) are two similar polemical pieces, “The Embarrassments of Science Fiction” (1975) and “Big Ideas and Dead-End Thrills: The Further Embarrassments of Science Fiction” (1992). Both skewer the multiple and persistent imbecilities of SF, derived in part, Disch argues, from a provincialism of SF writers and readers trapped in a self-imposed ghetto of the larger literary world. Disch doesn’t limit his targets to second-rate talents and has harsh things to say about revered figures like Bradbury (a withering review of a collection of his short fiction). He praises Vonnegut’s Galapagos (1986) and most of Gibson’s cyberpunk works. He savages The Engines of the Night (1982), 36 essays by Barry Malzberg, but gleefully omits the name of its author. One of the five sections of the book, “Crazy Neighbors,” shrewdly examines some of the pseudoscientific barnacles that often cling to SF—UFO’s, alien abductions, SF
nonfiction review

the haunted screen
mark decker

kovacs, lee. the haunted screen: ghosts in literature and film. mcfarland, 2006. $29.95. www.mcfarlandpub.com 1-800-253-2187

sometimes a book reviewer must constantly remind himself that a book under consideration would not have been published if an editor wasn’t confident that there would be people interested in buying it. reviewers, after all, are not the all-knowing arbiters of taste and refinement that their position would suggest. instead, they are members of an identifiable audience and therefore they share the proclivities and prejudices of their peer group and may react negatively to a text because they are not members of its intended audience. this advice is something that this reviewer constantly repeated to himself when reading lee kovacs’ the haunted screen: ghosts in literature and film. though kovacs’ book is crisply written and is beautifully illustrated with many stills from the movies under consideration, it is not a text that asks the kinds of questions that academics would be interested in.

instead, kovacs seems to be writing for intelligent fans who are not grounded in the commonplaces of literary or filmic criticism. and indeed, the close readings and careful explanations of critical terminology will serve this audience well. in this way, kovacs is bringing academic and popular criticism closer together. for example, kovacs informs this audience that “ghosts of the literary gothic are fearsome creatures. they weep and wail, they hover about castles and moors, they are unrelenting in their passion, and they are deprived of their once-human form” (3). there is much readerly pleasure in this evocative line, but most academic critics know what “gothic” means. another example of this pervasive popularization occurs when kovacs explains that a “characteristic of the gothic novel is its highly charged, highly stylized narrative” (25). kovacs’ tone is also somewhat unsettling to those used to critique, and it sometimes descends to a cheerleading that is more in line with an enthusiastic movie review. according to kovacs, the “film adaptation of the ghost and mrs. muir is a remarkable and beautiful achievement. it is a film in which word, image, and music coalesce to project a fairy tale atmosphere” (42). he also notes that “portrait of jenny is a work that has translated beautifully from novel to film” (56). these are cogent pitches that would conceivably convince a hobbyist to view an obscure film, but not genuine critical discourse.

this is not to say that kovacs does not try to attract a more scholarly audience. his criticism is sometimes theoretically informed, with lucaks, bakhtin, and foucault making brief appearances—though the theoretical concepts are as patiently explained as more traditional terms like “gothic.” yet despite his appropriate use of these established critics, he often ignores opportunities to employ more recent critical methodologies. when discussing portrait of jenny, for ex-

what: graduate student essay prize
who: sf foundation
topics: judges: gwyneth jones (world fantasy award winner); uppinder mehan (emerson college, boston); lisa yaszk (georgia institute of technology). authors must be graduate students at the time of submission. the winning essay will receive £250 and be published in foundation; all submissions will be considered for the journal.
submissions: the essay must be in english, between 5000-8000 words, on any aspect of science fiction. send in msword format.
contact: michelle reid <michelle@surguy.net>
deadline: may 31 2006

what: 31st annual meeting
who: society for utopian studies
when: oct. 12-15, 2006
where: antlers hilton hotel, colorado springs
topics: scholars and artists from all disciplines are encouraged to present on any aspect of the utopian tradition—from the earliest utopian visions to the utopian speculations and yearnings of the 21st century, including art, architecture, urban and rural planning, literary utopias, dystopian writings, utopian political activism, theorizing utopian spaces and ontologies, music, new media, or intentional communities.
submissions: 100-250 word abstract
contact: carrie hintz, <carriehintz@hotmail.com>
deadline: may 1, 2006
WHAT: Special Issue: SF and Life Writing
WHO: Biography
WHEN: Winter 2007
TOPICS: Guest editor John Rieder invites essays on the ways science fiction explores the recording of lives, including its estrangement and problematization of the construction of identities, issues of memory and identity, the social construction of personhood, and related topics; or papers that explore the auto/biographical elements of science fiction, such as the relation of science fiction to travel writing, captivity narratives, autobiographical ethnographic accounts, or case histories. These lists of topics are meant to be suggestive, not exclusive. In general the special issue will seek to ask how comparison between biography and science fiction can provoke useful theoretical and critical questions about both genres, and any work that undertakes this task is welcome for consideration.

CONTACT: <biograph@hawaii.edu>

Example, Kovacs repeatedly references "Eban's conflicted sexuality" (55) and notes that using a child actress to portray Jenny "would have been morally unacceptable to the board of censors and would have thrust the film into the murky, sexual atmosphere of the novel" (60) because the viewing public could not accept the filmic depiction of a grown man attracted to a prepubescent girl. Despite detecting this non-normative sexual energy, however, Kovacs does not make any appeal to queer theory. This is an interesting omission in a reading of a narrative about a sexually ambiguous man who is erotically attracted to a child. There have been queer theory texts that investigate the literary eroticization of children, and Kovacs could have used them to craft a more theoretically informed discussion. One text that comes quickly to mind is *Curiouser: On the Queerness of Children* published in 2004 by Minnesota in time for Kovacs to consult while preparing *The Haunted Screen* for its paperback edition. Furthermore, many articles in that collection predate Kovacs' initial 1999 hardback edition.

There is also a ham-handed postcolonialism in Kovacs' discussion of *The Uninvited* that is sure to irritate those familiar with contemporary critical debate. Kovacs suggests that the "death of the English Mary Meredith and the triumph of the foreign invader suggests a political allegory, a fable in which the oppressed, real or perceived, manage to defeat their enemies" (98). The "foreign invader" here is from Spain, and it is a bit of a stretch to see the Spanish as essentially subaltern to the English. Kovacs also sometimes ignores more traditional historical scholarship. For example, his discussion of Thornton Wilder's *Our Town* repeatedly points out that Grover's Corners is a dull and stifling place (e.g. 133), yet he makes no attempt to place this rural monotony within the critique of small town life that was a common theme in early 20th-century American literature. Beginning in the 1920s, writers like Zona Gale and Sinclair Lewis demonstrated ad nauseum and to great acclaim that small-town America wasn't what its proponents claimed it to be. If Kovacs wants to make Wilder's portrayal of small-town life so central to his argument, the play needs to be read as a response to this literary movement.

Kovacs also makes a crucial interpretive gaffe in his final chapter, suggesting that the 1990s saw the end of filmic adaptations of literary ghost stories. He posits "an evolution of filmmaking that moves away from the classics, from the literary canon, to define itself as a separate genre. The ghost of the 1990s is no longer a 'ghost' of his textual image" (147). This assertion is clearly problematic because not every ghost story made before 1990 was an adaptation of a literary work. More importantly, however, literary ghost stories continue to be adapted for the silver screen. Henry James' *The Turn of the Screw*, for example, was remade as a theatrical film once and as a television movie twice during the 1990s. The ultimate untenability of this statement is doubly unfortunate because it serves to justify the inclusion of a chapter on the movie *Ghost* in a book that otherwise consists of essays about literary works that have been made into films.

This review is perhaps a little too hard on *The Haunted Screen*, however. Despite the frustrations outlined above, I enjoyed reading it. So while academic critics will find this book ultimately disappointing, thoughtful people who are interested in film and literature will enjoy reading a text that presents complex ideas in a non-condescending way. Additionally, this text may also be appropriate for a college-level classroom if the instructor were teaching general education courses and wanted to use the films Kovacs discusses. Given the right audience, then, Kovacs has created an engaging narrative that will entertain and challenge fans of ghosts who haunt the page and screen.

Whoever concocted the dust jacket blurb and press release for this book was writing fantasy, and not the good kind. Far from being “the ultimate reference guide to inventions and discoveries that first appeared in science fiction,” *The Science in Science Fiction* is an often engaging, quirky *Cook’s* tour of science and SF, but it is not a scholarly book in concept or execution. Using this book as a research tool without knowing its limitations would be a colossal mistake, and any reader aware of its imitations would probably go elsewhere anyway. Bly’s prose style conveys enthusiasm and, in some instances, commitment, but it is eminently clear that he has written a pop account of the science of SF and that to judge the book by scholarly standards would constitute cruel and unusual punishment.

The book is divided into an Introduction, 83 alphabetical entries from “Alternate Energy” to “X-Ray Vision,” nine entries devoted to “runners-up” (ideas that did not make the final cut), a bibliography, and an index. Most items are short—two to three pages—but several, among them “First Contact” and “Interplanetary and Interstellar Travel,” are two to three times longer. Traditional SF staples are well represented, among them androids, robots, black holes, faster-than-light travel, force fields, and terraforming. Each entry features a discussion of SF works in which the scientific idea originated or figures prominently as well as a brief layperson’s explanation of the science. There are quotations from primary and secondary sources. The bibliography is arranged in sections that match the book’s item headings. Although many bibliographical entries include page numbers, many do not, and there is no attempt to indicate the page numbers of the quotations in the main text.

The book’s greatest strength is its tone. The pleasure that Bly derives from SF and his interest in important and sometimes weird science is evident throughout. Furthermore, his respect for SF, both print and film, might well entice some readers to give SF a try or to look at it from a new angle. He appreciates the playfulness of SF and obviously enjoyed writing about out-there ideas like psionics and hyperspace. Finally, the inclusion of immediately relevant scientific challenges, such as global warming or drug-resistant pathogens, serves to remind readers that SF can be a futurist’s literary laboratory, a place where the impact of science and technology are often pre-tested.

Even judged by pop standards, however, the book is flawed. The title promises more than it delivers. The phrase “The Science in Science Fiction” stakes out a vast territory, one more suited, perhaps, to an SF writer-scientist like Gregory Benford or Joan Slonczewski. The subtitle is pretty standard for pop expositions of almost anything. Imagine that: SF has accurately predicted 83 scientific ideas or discoveries. Actually, though, that is not what Bly does. He tells us in his introduction that he used four criteria for selecting entries, only one of which is that SF has made predictions that have come true. He tells us that he has included ideas originating in science that were made famous by SF, SF predictions that have not yet come true but might, and SF predictions that have not yet come true and might never do so, though they are theoretically possible. Even if one accepts the premise that what one reads in SF constitutes predictions (which is pretty dubious), casting such a broad net dilutes the argument for SF’s far-sightedness. In
any case, the subtitle misrepresents the book’s content.

If I were applying scholarly standards to this book, I would take issue with Bly’s not-so-comprehensive lists of SF works that exemplify his claims and the omission of the science surrounding race and gender issues. Women writers do not figure prominently in this book. However, accuracy is a problem too, and even popular non-fiction of this sort should be accurate. For example, he writes that in Huxley’s *Brave New World*, “genetic engineering was used to create standardized humans.” Not so. The chemical poisoning of fetuses is a biological act, but it is not genetic engineering, even if the visible results are similar. In the chapter “Immortality and Longevity,” he repeatedly calls the global ruler in Robert Silverberg’s *Shadrach in the Furnace* “Khan.” “Khan” is his title, not his name (which is Genghis II Mao V). This is not a major point except that it might lead readers to confuse the character with the wrathful Khan of *Star Trek* fame. Furthermore, it is one of a number of instances in which I questioned what Bly knows about some of the books he mentions. If you were asked to write one sentence about Plato’s *Republic*, would it be this one: “His satiric utopia, known as ‘Plato’s Republic,’ was a city-state with communal living among the ruling class”? In the entry entitled, “Humankind Wiped Out By Plague,” he inexplicably omits the greatest pandemic of all time—the death of tens of millions of Native Americans from urban diseases against which they had no immunities. Finally, when I read that there are scientists who believe that SARS came from outer space (mediated by neither irony nor citation), I began to wonder how many of the book’s claims are equally sensational; after all, there are “some scientists” who believe almost anything.

Having said all the foregoing, I will add, perhaps surprisingly, that I did not dislike this book, however frustrating it is at times. I am all for books that seek to popularize SF by demonstrating its potential relevance to real life, especially if they effectively celebrate the genius of SF’s outstanding scientific prognosticators or if they promote an awareness of the great scientific challenges and perils of our time. This book does both of these, though only up to a point.

Ultimately, I agree with Ursula Le Guin’s assertion that SF is not primarily a predictive form. To use prescience as a criterion for judging SF writers can be an eye-opening pursuit, but it is not the be-all and end-all of a genre which at its best spins what H. G. Wells called “scientific romances,” what we might call new or modified myths of the scientific age. Of course, some of the best mythic stories—beginning with *Frankenstein*—are cautionary tales, but they, too, are often thought experiments rather than predictions. And, of course, someone could write a pretty funny book about all the science that SF has gotten wrong. Furthermore, getting things technically wrong has been no impediment to the popularity or importance of writers such as Ray Bradbury (whom Bly praises lavishly).

I think that Bly would have done better either to make a narrower claim or to have chosen a really good reason—such as examining possible futures before they occur—for talking about SF’s predictive possibilities. The fuzzy focus does not appear to have provided him with adequate reasons for authorial choices. Although occasionally engaging, this is not a book that SF scholars and discerning fans must run out and buy.

NONFICTION REVIEW

**Social and Virtual Space**

*Thomas J. Morrissey*


Laura Chernaik has written an intricate, far-reaching, intellectually challenging, sometime arcane, lucid, well-documented, and ultimately passionate treatise on the dreadful (and malevolently engendered) state of world affairs and SF writers’ responses to it. Reading it sometimes felt like negotiating a three-dimensional latticework in which footholds are alternatively sticky, greasy, or bouncily resilient. If the text feels like a maze, that is an illusion: it is remarkably cohesive given its grand scope. In spite of and thanks to its highly theoretical basis, *Social and Virtual Space* is both a radical feminist and Neo-Marxist critique of Neo-Conservative imperialism and a celebration of personal and collective agency in the struggle against it. Her discussion of SF in general and specific works and writers in particular is important to her overall argument, but the book’s focus goes well beyond literary analysis.

Divided into a Preface, six chapters, and an Afterword—all of which comprise a mere 191 pages of text—*Social and Virtual Space* is an astonishingly pithy book. To say it is short would be like calling a climb straight up a 30,000 foot mountain
Chernaik is a philosopher well versed in and enamored of theory. She can split hairs with the best of them. Not having cut my academic eye-teeth in the age of theory, I admit to having to struggle at times to grasp fully Chernaik's logical moves. Also, I cannot readily judge the accuracy of her assertions about the work of theorists with whose writing she, as a philosopher and cultural critic, is far more familiar than am I. However, insofar as her project transcends the theoretical, it is sound and graspable.

Although her conclusions about the Bush-Blair war policy in Iraq and elsewhere are dependent on a complex argument based in theory, she makes it eminently clear that she is not playing word games. In the very first sentence of chapter one she tells us that her book, "like the work of philosophers Jacques Derrida and Emmanuel Levinas, links language with action." No matter how rancid the argument becomes, her goal is to say something meaningful and useful about living a conscientious life in the era of Neo-con ascendency and consequent moral decline. From Derrida she adopts the concept of undecidability as the intellectual tool by means of which a space is created for multivalent discourse, even as political leaders strive to frame issues in binary terms. From Levinas she borrows the idea of universal responsibility so important in Jewish ethical thought. If there is room for dissent, and if dissent is called for, then one must act.

Of course, making room for dissent is not easy. In chapter two she considers how consensus politics, the post-war phenomenon marked by the marginalization of ideas or social movements that were deemed beyond the political pale, impoverished the political process. Chernaik argues that the success with which the disenfranchised—the poor, women, racial minorities, and gays and lesbians—employed moral arguments to bring their ideas into the political forum paved the way for the right to do the same. The result: "The New Right constructs a theocratic space, rather than the plural spaces of liberalism, the new social movements, and radical democracy."

The second part of this chapter, one of the denser regions of the text, treats transnationalism and technoscience. From David Harvey she gleans the term "spatial fix" to describe how transnationalism serves the interests of the Neo-cons. Opening world markets, creating demand for goods, exporting manufacturing jobs to Third World countries where wages are low, unions are suppressed, and environmental regulations are weak or non-existent all provide outlets for an economy based on over-consumption and accumulation. If and when war is necessary to force the fix, no problem. Then, citing the work of Donna Haraway, Bruno Latour, Gilles Deleuze and many others, she introduces New Science Studies. The short version is that science must not be seen as apolitical, that postmodernity is marked by hybridization, and that one form of hybridization is the stifting and simultaneous augmentation of human agency via technoscience. Instantaneous communication (the Internet being the prime example) and new production techniques promote transnationalism, but they also allow for local and global information sharing and social action. Our interdependence with technoscience has made us cyborgs of a sort, and herein lies the move to SF in the next two chapters.

In chapters three and four, Chernaik gives close readings of Samuel Delany and Pat Cadigan. Binaries be damned; here comes science fiction. Delany, both as a theoretician and SF writer, theorizes and utilizes SF so as to create new spaces for the radical deconstruction of "sexual identity, gender identity, and species identity." Most of Chernaik's emphasis here is on Delany's Nevéryon fictions. Cadigan, the so-called "Queen of Cyberpunk," employs technoscience to leave behind conventional thinking about alternatives and agency. Chernaik's in-depth analysis of Synners demonstrates how the novel reconfigures and de-fangs traditional Judeo-Christian religious tropes. She argues that Synners is not an example of marginalized sniping but a frontal assault on and displacement of limiting concepts, among them compulsory reproductive heterosexuality. Both of these chapters establish SF as a literary form that by its very nature questions given notions of reality. She never uses the word "estrangement" to describe the turn from mundane fiction to SF, but it occurred to me that insofar as SF worlds are foreign and strange as compared with normative reality, the journey through the SF texts Chernaik chooses immerses readers in foreign realities in which many will feel far more comfortable and far less alien. Creating such realities is one way that SF can be a counterweight to oppressive cultural hegemony.

In chapter five, "Spatial Displacements," Chernaik rejects the notion that divisions among left-wing opponents of Neo-con domination necessarily constitute "fragmentation." In fact, it is embracing the diversity of the opposition by its various constituencies that empowers it. Complexity favors the disenfranchised, which is why she argues for the combination of "historical, fictional, and theoretical works as objects of analysis, rather than limiting oneself to either material or semiotic objects."

In her final chapter Chernaik brings her brand of diversified argumentation to bear on the Iraq war in particular. Applying just war theories to both the justification for and conduct of the war, she concludes, as have many others, that the war is unjust on both counts. Citing what she regards as the lies and distortions that led to war and the examples of brutality
and torture that have horrified much of the world, she sees preemptive invasion and cruelty in the name of safeguarding civilization as the Neo-con equivalent of the moral corruption that lies at the heart of the society depicted in Ursula K. Le Guin’s “The Ones Who Walk Away From Omelas.” This move was especially meaningful to me since I typically begin my course in utopian literature with “Omelas” as a way of introducing questions of social morality and of scapegoating in the name of the general good. Perhaps the most shocking observation in the chapter is her contention that displaying footage of the beating and sexual humiliation of Iraqi prisoners might have been designed by some as a means of titillation, a stimulus that might evoke from some viewers feelings of righteous vengeance: when you’re up against sub-humans, use subhuman tactics. Such is the slippery slope to perdition.

This book was not my cup of tea, but it was my cup of unsweetened chocolate. Are there other possible routes to a critique of the Neo-conmen? Sure, but this book is the ethical anthem of an honest and engaging anti-establishment mind, and it is worth the effort to engage it.

NONFICTION REVIEW

Unsung Heroes of The Lord of the Rings

Bruce A. Beatie


The conception of this book is much more promising than its realization, for reasons that, as we shall see, are perhaps excusable. Porter sets out to show, through analysis of seven of the secondary figures in the book and the film, how an “everyperson hero acts during a crisis, whether that be on a battlefield or in the corner convenience store.” (vii-viii) “To me,” she says, “Tolkien’s epic is timeless, and Jackson’s adaptation likely to become a classic. With respect to both,” this book highlights “the heroic deeds of seven important characters” and indicates “the continuing relevance of *The Lord of the Rings* in modern popular culture.” (xiv)

Porter’s first chapter, “Literary and Cinematic Heroes” (1-22), retains some of the promise of the title, though her use of multiple subtitles gives her argument the feel of a textbook. She summarizes the hero-definitions of Lord Raglan, Northrop Frye, and Joseph Campbell, following in large part Anne Petty’s 2003 *Tolkien in the Land of Heroes*; Campbell, however, is the only one to whom she makes repeated reference throughout her book. In an interesting section, she analyzes how Peter Jackson uses the camera, lighting and especially music to define the heroes of his film, and comments on the way Jackson gives greater emphasis to female heroes than does Tolkien. She concludes with “a modern definition of hero” (20) based more on cinematic analysis than on the literary scholars mentioned above (I quote only the topic sentences of the 2nd, 4th and 5th definitions): “1. They have the ability to act on their convictions. 2. They can plan a strategy and successfully carry it out. 3. They sacrifice themselves if necessary, but they do not seek to become martyrs. 4. They grow as characters. 5. They value love of family and home.”

The next five chapters discuss “Merry as a Knowledgeable Hero” (23-55), “Pippin as Impulsive, Youthful Hero” (56-89)—there is an interesting chart comparing the narrative trajectories of Merry and Pippin on page 84, “Éowyn as Action Hero” (90-114), “Galadriel and Arwen as Inspirational Heroes” (115-143), and “Legolas and Gimli as Intercultural Heroes” (144-166)—the term “intercultural” is more PC than accurate; Legolas and Gimli belong to fundamentally different races. It is in these chapters that the promise falls short. Though Porter has done her homework well, and makes extensive use of prior critical writing (especially thorough in discussing the Jackson film), and makes useful comparisons between the literary and cinematic qualities of the respective “unsung heroes,” her actual analysis is highly repetitive, not only from chapter to chapter, but within each chapter. It is also remarkably simplistic, both in the over-frequent subtitles and, especially, in the fact that each chapter concludes with an evaluation of each figure against the five qualities defined in her first chapter. In spite of her occasional reservations as to the appropriateness of a particular quality for a particular figure, these repetitive analyses have a Procrustean feel. In particular they seem out of place in the otherwise less repetitive and simplistic chapters on the elves (and the dwarf).

The final chapter on “The Changing Social Definitions of Heroes” (167-184), however, is well worth reading. Here Porter pulls together the points made too diffusely in the preceding chapters, focusing on, as her “Introduction” promised,
the continuing relevance of *The Lord of the Rings*. "The themes in book and film illustrate the best that men and women can offer, and the characters illustrate both the heroism of past generations and the relevance of trying to do one's best, often against incredible odds, in modern life. Groups as divergent as veterans of World Wars I and II, U. S. hippies during the 1960s, videogame players in the early 2000s, and female fanfiction writers on the Internet have read their own culture- and time-specific meanings into this tale of good and evil." (184)

The book concludes with "Notes" (185-202), briefly annotated “Online Resources for Tolkien Studies” (203-207), a "Selected Bibliography" (209-215), and an index. The editing is generally thorough, if uncritical; an editor might well have worked with Porter on the problems of repetition and style. The only editorial faux pas I caught was the sentence discussing "Frodo's gift …, a phial of light, which provides helpful in *The Return of the King* …” (131)—it should read either "provides help" or "proves helpful," but it's the sort of error spell checkers don’t catch. The reference, by the way, is to Jackson's film, though Galadriel's phial plays a greater role in the book.

Though there are few formal proofreading problems, there are some curious misinterpretations and outright errors that Porter or her editor should have caught. Her statement that "the events [of *The Lord of the Rings*] are set millennia ago" (17) may be simply a careless exaggeration; though Tolkien says that the days of the Third Age of Middle-earth “are now long past” and that “the regions in which Hobbits then lived were doubtless the same as those in which they still linger: the North-West of the Old World east of the Sea” (*Fellowship*, Prologue), neither Tolkien nor Jackson makes any clear chronological connection with our own time. Again, Porter's remark that "Elves … can survive so long as to seem immortal." (145: a note refers, obscurely, to page 44 in *The Silmarillion*) may be a possible interpretation deriving from Jackson's film; but Tolkien states repeatedly in *The Silmarillion* that the Firstborn of Ilúvatar are in fact immortal in the Undying Lands, though not in Middle-earth. But her statement that, in the book, “The Hobbits are detained by Maggot” (29) is simply not true; the hobbit farmer offers them hospitality and (as Porter does note) help. And it is hard to accept her repeated reference to “the battlefield at Cormallen”(58), “Jackson's Battle of Cormallen” (59), “the Battle of Cormallen” in Tolkien's book (65) (106): the battle she refers to is at the Morannon, before the Black Gates, while the Field of Cormallen is an Eden-like garden within Ithilien, more than 60 miles from the Black Gate according to Tolkien's map, and Tolkien would be horrified at the misidentification. It is due probably to the fact that the chapter in *The Return of the King* in which the battle reaches its climax is indeed entitled “The Field of Cormallen.” This error fits with a general impression that Porter has read Tolkien less carefully than she has viewed and studied the film.

The book, however, seems likely a labor of love; Porter is not by training or experience a literary scholar. The book's jacket flap lists her as "Professor at Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University, where she teaches Honors Literature and Humanities," and as author of three other books. The Ohiolink catalog shows her in fact as author or co-author of four books published between 1993 and 2004, but they are all on pedagogy in the technically-oriented classroom; her only entry in the *MLA International Bibliography* (the standard bibliographical source for literary studies) is a long 1984 article on “Teaching Linguistics to Technical Communication Students”—hence, I suspect, the "textbook" feel of her study.

The negative points I have raised do not mean that Porter's book is without value. Her discussion of the "unsung heroes" is often insightful, and her book is as far as I know the first to discuss in any detail the relationships between Tolkien's book and Jackson's films. Her notes and bibliography provide useful references to much very recent critical writing (from as late as May 2004). Indeed, if reissued in a less expensive paperback format, the book might serve very well as a textbook for a course on literature and film.

**FICTION REVIEW**

**Chronicles of the Wandering Star**

Michael M. Levy


This is a rather unusual volume. Its publisher, It's About Time, produces science books for classroom use. *Chronicles of the Wandering Star* is one small part of a multi-volume set of books and other materials called InterActions in Physical Science, a year-long curriculum for seventh or eighth grade students. The entire shebang includes a $59.00 student textbook, a two volume student work book (available in two different configurations) at $18.90 or $14.95, and a three volume teacher's
McCallough is a young writer of considerable promise. He's been publishing short fiction in places like *Weird Tales* and *Writers of the Future* for the past few years and his first novel, *WebMage*, is due out from Ace this summer. *Chronicles of the Wandering Star* tells the story of an interstellar exploratory ship which is damaged while traversing Fold Space and ends up barely operational in our solar system. The tale centers on four aliens, each of a different species, all the physical and emotional equivalent of young adults, who form the crew of the splintership Solar Wind. Their somewhat picaresque adventures include a mistaken attempt to understand Earth politics via an uncritical sampling of the Internet, various not entirely successful attempts to fix their spacecraft and other technology, a mission to capture an asteroid and return it to the Wandering Star which nearly ends in disaster, and a vacation trip to Earth that goes awry when their expandable boat sinks in cold water. I'm sure you get the idea. Each chapter is a legitimate adventure, but they all follow a pattern. The young aliens get in trouble, but manage to save themselves (or figure out what went wrong after the fact) by means of either a careful application of critical thinking skills or basic experimental physics. This is the purpose of *Chronicles of the Wandering Star*, to provide a series of enjoyable tales that support the lessons of the InterActions in Physical Science textbook, and McCallough succeeds quite well at his task. Students get a practical demonstration of one or more principles of physics and see young people not all that dissimilar from themselves struggling to develop the critical thinking skills needed to master the problems presented.

Obviously *Chronicles of the Wandering Star* is not a book that you're likely to pick up and read for its own sake, but it should prove very useful to any middle school teacher who chooses to adopt the InterActions in Physical Science program.

**FICTION REVIEW**

*James Tiptree Award Anthology 2*

Linda Wight

Since 1991, the James Tiptree, Jr. Award has been recognising science fiction and fantasy that “expands or explores our understanding of gender.” In their second annual anthology, the editors encourage readers to examine what gender means to the Tiptree Award by revealing some of the widely varied approaches taken to exploring and expanding the concept.

Following from the highly regarded *James Tiptree Award Anthology 1* (San Francisco: Tachyon, 2005), [reviewed in *SFRA Review* 274] the *James Tiptree Award Anthology 2* brings together seven short stories, two novel excerpts and five essays to showcase the latest in “gender-bending” science fiction and fantasy. As expected in an annual anthology, the majority of fictional works are drawn from the 2004 Tiptree Award (presented in 2005). This provides an awareness of the breadth of approach and style recognised by the 2004 jurors, supporting Debbie Notkin’s claim in the introduction, that “fluidity, flexibility and unpredictability are the hallmarks of the Tiptree Award.” (xiii)

The editors also include three short stories from previous award years to further emphasise the authors’ variant approaches to gender. Raphael Carter’s “Congenital Agenesis of Gender Ideation,” winner of the 1998 Tiptree Award, is introduced as “the most direct exploration and examination of gender in the entire Tiptree ‘canon’” (15). Carter presents a fictional scientific report to emphasise the constructed nature of the gender binary, suggesting that we filter out contradictory aspects of the world that fail to accord with our simplistic binary views. Proposing an alternative of twenty-two distinct gender categories, Carter encourages us to acknowledge differences and details that we are accustomed to ignore.

Ursula K. Le Guin’s, “Another Story, or A Fisherman of the Inland Sea,” (1994) is another standout, a lesson on writing about gender without writing about gender. In a beautifully crafted story set on the world of “O,” Le Guin exposes the socially constructed nature of family, love and sexual relations, presenting a complex society where marriage consists of two men and two women, divided into gender and into the Morning or Evening moiety. Le Guin suggests that the need to belong and be loved is universal, irrespective of the social construction of the family.

Several stories explore gender through humour. Jaye Lawrence’s “Kissing Frogs” (2004) is a delightful retelling of “The Frog Prince” depicting gender as inconsequential in a world where the experience of having one’s identity shaped by others’ perceptions is dramatically literalised. Carol Emshwiller’s “All of Us Can Almost …” (2004) is a quirky exploration of
power relations between the sexes and the empty spectacle of masculine power. Her female protagonist – a waddling, flightless, predatory bird – must choose between emulating a showy, precarious masculinity, or pursuing an alternative path to genuine strength. Eileen Gunn and Leslie What’s “Nirvana High” (2004) overflows with grunge references, set in a pop culture world where kids attend Cobain (as in Kurt) High. Although not directly concerned with gender, its stable status is problematic in a world where a substitute teacher channels a dead scientist for a very practical chemistry lesson, and the principal, Mr Madonna, is “an XXY.” (122)

L. Timmel Duchamp’s “The Gift” (2004) and Jonathan Lethem’s “Five Fucks” (1996) complete the short story contributions. A heart-breaking tale, Duchamp’s story questions the link between achieved manhood and functioning sexuality, revealing the tragedy of how deeply our assumptions about gender and sexuality are ingrained. “Five Fucks” presents a similarly tragic end, men and women existing as alien entities inexorably drawn to one another, but destined to destroy the world.

The two novels included in the anthology are excerpts from Joe Haldeman’s Camouflage (2004) and Johanna Sinisalo’s, Troll: A Love Story (2004). Both excerpts include the first few chapters, introducing readers to the novels; however neither allows much insight into how the texts deal with gender, or why they were chosen as joint winners of the 2004 award. Sinisalo’s depiction of the troll is captivating however, encouraging readers to seek out the full text.

Perhaps the greatest strength of The James Tiptree Award Anthology 2 is the critical essays, which provide intimate insight into the Tiptree Award, the Wiscon community, James Tiptree, Jr. (aka Alice Sheldon) and the crucial dialectic between writers, critics and fans of gender-bending science fiction and fantasy. Julie Phillips’ “Talking Too Much About James Tiptree, Jr.” and Tiptree’s letter to Rudolf Arnheim reveal the characteristics which made Tiptree an ideal candidate for whom to name a gender-bending award. In a 1945 journal entry, Tiptree wrote, “I am trying, from the living urge of my own life, to force open channels of communication so far mostly closed. […] To press out naked into the dark spaces of life is perhaps to build a small part of the path along which others like myself wish to travel.” (9) It is along this path that the James Tiptree Award has travelled, acknowledging works that have continued to force open the closed channels of communication.

Nalo Hopkinson and Gwyneth Jones also contribute essays. Hopkinson emphasises the importance of communities such as Wiscon (the annual feminist SF convention) and the Tiptree Award for providing a place where people of the “wrong” colour, gender, race and class can feel visible and imagine beyond ingrained assumptions. Jones suggests that while technology has made biological sex malleable, ideas of gender have become more resistant to change.

It is fitting to conclude by returning to Debbie Notkin’s “Introduction,” as it is her insight as chair of the James Tiptree, Jr. Award Motherboard that frames the entire anthology. Notkin emphasises that “the main point of the Tiptree Award is not to provide answers – but rather to raise questions” (xvi) and it is on this point that The James Tiptree Award Anthology 2 succeeds. The anthology does not provide consensus on what we mean when we talk about sex and gender, or whether a gender-bending text is, or should be, feminist, but it does raise questions and provoke arguments, and continues the work of building a science fiction and fantasy community concerned with grappling with these ideas. As Notkin explains, “That's the point, after all” (xvi).

FICTION REVIEW

Pretender
Edward Carmien


In this eighth book of Cherryh’s remarkably long-lived series that began with Foreigner more than a decade ago, human translator to the atevi Bren Cameron is swept up in events sparked by a coup that removed the atevi aiji Tabini from power. Will Tabini be restored to his rightful position as head of the Western Association, the alien government that works most closely with the human enclave sequestered on a nearby island continent? All the usual suspects return to the stage for this “second book of the third Foreigner series.”

Can any author sustain interest in a series that runs to its eighth book? The main challenge is to balance on a slender reed in between “jumping the shark” on the one side and spiraling into repetitious sameness on the other. It is possible, but it is certainly not common. Despite being a hearty Cherryh partisan for decades (see The Cherryh Odyssey if one has doubts) it is with a heavy heart I report Pretender slips off the slender reed.
There are no spectacular rearrangements of characters or settings in *Pretender*. The pot is not stirred for the sake of stirring it. Instead, *Pretender* simply lacks the components of a compelling story for readers not already in love with the characters and the setting. In *Foreigner* Bren Cameron is pitched into political controversy when the stable arrangement between atevi, who are native to the world in which the story takes place, and humans is jeopardized by the return of the interstellar spacecraft that delivered humans into orbit hundreds of years in the past. Cameron is faced with a political, linguistic, and psychological challenge, that of doing the right thing in order to keep the peace. There is some external action, but the primary stresses are internal.

In the second book the challenge to established order continues. *Invader* introduces conflict between Cameron and his human government. The spacecraft in orbit is generally isolated from the surface, but two of the crew are landed in order to act as liaisons between the atevi and human governments and the ship, which desperately wishes for the ground-pounders to gain heavy-lift earth to orbit transport ability. Again, Cameron must act correctly to maintain the peace, facing down conservatives both atevi and human who have powerfully negative agendas.

And so the series continues. As part of this review your trusty reviewer re-read *Foreigner* and *Invader* (and made a good start on *Inheritor*, but deadlines are deadlines) and found them compelling and interesting reads. Those new to Cherryh and interested in some of the best the field has to offer in alien/human relations should start with *Foreigner* and move on from there.

<Readers wishing to avoid “spoilers” should stop reading now. Details about *Pretender’s* plot follow.>

*Pretender*, unfortunately, lacks the juice to entice new readers on its own. Cameron is with his trusty bodyguards, including his lover, Jago, as well as the aiji Tabini’s son and the aiji Tabini’s grandmother, Ilsidi. In *Destroyer* this cadre returned from space to discover that a pretender to the “throne” has chased Tabini into the hills. With Cameron’s return, events are sparked that return Tabini to power.

There is some politicking, as the assassin’s guild puts in an appearance, but as the lackeys of the usurping power they are soon disposed of. A local groundswell of support follows Tabini’s tempestuous return to the capital. Cameron rides most of the way there in a bus along with Tabini’s son. Changing to rail, they arrive at the seat of the government and Tabini takes over, declaring that none of the pretender’s actions were lawful and that any decisions taken by the pretender must be resubmitted to become legitimate.

But where in earlier books Cameron has always played a central role in the success of Tabini’s government, in *Pretender* he does nearly nothing but struggle with physical discomfort during the long bus ride to the capital. He is never in any particular danger, faces down no challenges, solves no problems. The charm of *Pretender* is entirely in the soap-opera elements of his personal relations. Caught sharing a hot bath with his lover, he worries that this impropriety (for he is the alien in this context) in the house of a staunch traditionalist might de-rail Tabini’s bid to retake power. Even that worry is short-lived, however.

Notably lacking from *Pretender* is any mention of what the human government on the nearby island continent is doing during the year the usurper is in charge. In previous books Cameron’s absence for a day or two is enough for human conservatives to launch dangerous plots that threaten to rock the boat of cooperation that has served the two cultures well over more than two centuries. One of the dramatic mainstays of the series is therefore missing, and *Pretender* is thereby less compelling.

Series fiction presents a number of challenges to any author. There is a certain contract readers expect to be followed: the main characters, who become familiar over many books, enjoy a certain level of script immunity. Killing them off risks invoking the “jumping the shark” effect, and often it means such characters can’t grow or change over time. Bren Cameron has certainly grown over time, and the series is better for that fact. Yet Cherryh, apparently unwilling to allow even secondary characters to experience much change, leaves readers of *Pretender* with the too-comfortable feeling that all will be well.

Il ISI goes on a dangerous car journey and escapes unscathed. Tabini’s son and his new bodyguards suffer no harm. Cameron’s coterie of bodyguards are unhurt. Booby-trapped fueling stations don’t blow up. Politically valuable space shuttles aren’t sabotaged or destroyed. The human island-continent isn’t invaded. Tabini is denied the chance to face down the usurper, who escapes unharmed into the wilderness. In a culture that possesses some fourteen words for betrayal, none of Cameron or Tabini’s staff prove unreliable at a key, dramatic moment.

There are cute moments aplenty. The atevi leader’s son has become Cameron’s constant companion, and his youth provides opportunity for smiles for those familiar with the series. Jago and Cameron have settled into a comfortable if socially unacceptable (to atevi and humans at large) relationship. Ilsidi is her usual cane-thumping self.
As with *Destroyer*, those who are reading the series because (as is often true with Cherryh’s readers) they MUST, will not need this review to continue enjoying the series. New readers beware: this is not the right book to begin the exciting journey into the world of the atevi. *Foreigner* is that book.

**FICTION REVIEW**

**The Cuckoo’s Boys**

David G. Mead


Although this book is Robert Reed’s third short story collection, until now I had read only a few of his novels. My first acquaintance with his work was *Down the Bright Way* (1991), which, if memory serves, was a candidate for the Campbell Award. Since then I have read and reviewed (favorably) two more of his novels, *Marrow* (2000) and *The Well of Stars* (2004), both of which describe events aboard a planet-sized spacecraft which is traveling the Milky Way galaxy. He has published eleven novels to date, as well as numerous stories and novellas.

*The Cuckoo’s Boys* collects twelve stories dating from 1993 to 2005, most published originally in *Asimov’s* and *The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction*. The volume also contains a useful *Afterword*. The stories are proof, if any is really needed, that Reed is a really fine writer of science fiction. He fully deserves the numerous honors his stones and novels have won. The stories here are technologically rich, emotionally intense and very interesting. Reed explores the interaction of humanity and technology ‘from the inside,’ using first-person narrative to convey his characters’ often painful, sometimes terrible struggles with a world made strange by scientific change.

Scientific and technological changes make Reed’s stories possible, but hymning or damning these changes is almost never the theme. They just situate the human drama. The first story of the collection is fairly typical in this regard. “On the Brink of that Bright World” imagines what someone might do when the first messages from extraterrestrials arrive and all eyes are on the stars. It really isn’t what we usually expect from SF (explorations of decoding/translation, concerns about alien intentions, the impact on culture, etc.), yet Reed’s take on this traditional scenario seems plausible and bitterly insightful, and reminds us that life and death are *scaled* processes, ongoing even in the midst of grand events.

There’s a nice variety to the stories in this collection. One or two resonate with contemporary issues, but Reed does not come across as a writer of simple parables about current events. “Savior,” for example, calls to mind recent debates about the value of torture in the ‘war on terror,’ and suggests that the terrible deeds men do in wartime – for the best of reasons, in the fog of battle - may come back to haunt them later, when the smoke clears and hindsight can see the plain truth, but the story is not as much about the policies of the Bush administration or any other current event as it is about how we treat our heroes, their heroism, and our history. “The Children’s Crusade” may remind us of NASA’s recent problems with the space shuttle and other projects, and the public’s lack of enthusiasm for the space shuttle program after the Challenger disaster. Given these and the pressing needs here on Earth, how will we get to Mars and Beyond, and who will go?

Several of the stories – “Night of Time” and “River of the Queen” – are set on the Great Ship, although we do not really need to have read *Marrow*, *The Well of Stars*, or other stories set in the Great Ship cosmos, such as the recent novella *Mere*, to appreciate what is going on, since what is going on is humanity’s ongoing struggle with time, memory, life and love.

The speculations about advances in science and technology in Reed’s stories seem very consistent, and functional. He imagines the conquest of aging (death by violence is still possible) and the evolution of humanity by means of technology into a wide variety of forms (clades). He imagines the development of autonomous Artificial Intelligences, and the existence of a wide variety of starfaring, long-lived alien beings. Hence he can tell tales of seemingly endless life aboard the Great Ship as it travels at relativistic speeds through the galaxy (“River of the Queen”), of humanity evolving into god-like beings of many sizes and shapes (“Coelacanth”), of humans kept as souvenirs by their own proud creations (“The Children’s Crusade”), of humans using viruses to clone themselves by the thousands and how those cloned thousands cope (“The Cuckoo’s Boys”).

Reed’s writing is in the tradition of Heinlein at his best, and he deserves to be read widely. Strongly recommended.

It must be a great deal of fun to write fiction with Jack Dann. That, certainly, is the impression given in many of the entertaining headnotes accompanying this eclectic group of short stories. Each of these stories is the result of a collaboration between Dann and one or more others. Gardner Dozois is the most frequent partner, involved in ten of the eighteen stories; Michael Swanwick, Barry Malzberg, and George Zebrowski are also represented. Each author has included a brief note describing the story's birth and development, and while creative writing instructors may be intrigued by the methodologies described here, what comes across most vividly to the casual reader is the sheer excitement of working with close friends in a process everyone loves. Even when the collaborations aren't entirely deliberate – Dann's description of stealing Dozois' initial idea for "The Clowns" is particularly entertaining, for example – what is apparent is the manner in which these collaborators delighted in the process of working together, challenging and supporting one another, and in most cases that energy and excitement translates effectively into the stories themselves.

Originally published in sources as diverse as *Penthouse, Amazing Stories, The Twilight Zone Magazine,* and *Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction,* Dann's stories range in setting from Mars and Earth orbit to Faërie and the cliffs of Heaven, with side trips to Niagara Falls and the C. Fred Johnson Municipal Pool. This diversity of place is matched by the diversity of tone and style. Some stories are wickedly funny, others just wicked, while “Down among the Dead Men,” which features a Jewish vampire in a World War 2 concentration camp, or “The Clowns,” in which a young boy is haunted by a clown who may or may not be a ghost, show that Dann and his friends can handle horror expertly. Only a few stories embrace mainstream science fiction; most notable is “High Steel,” written with Jack C. Haldeman II, a Nebula award finalist in 1982. In this story the protagonist, John Stranger, is a Native American training to become a medicine man. When he is drafted by a white-owned corporation to do construction work in Earth orbit, he struggles to hold on to his sense of purpose and self, even though that depends upon a harmony with a world that is now only a bright bubble off in the distance. When an industrial accident threatens the station he is helping to build, Stranger's emotional and spiritual integrity are put to their most severe challenge.

Although “High Steel” is the only story in the collection written with Haldeman, its central themes of identity and place are important throughout the volume. It is interesting to read in the headnotes Dann's reminiscences of his own east coast childhood and his “pilgrimages” to meet, eat, talk, and write with his friends and collaborators, especially now that Dann is living in Australia. Many of the protagonists whom we meet in this volume are men or boys who have become disconnected from the places they consider home, and the consequences of that disconnection are a vital dynamic of the stories. One of the best examples of this motif is the brief “Playing the Game,” which Dann wrote with Dozois. This story also suggests how successfully “hard” SF ideas can function in a fantasy narrative; originally published in *The Twilight Zone Magazine,* the impetus for the story was Dann's idea of a boy who could manipulate “quantum uncertainty,” according to Dozois' note, to move among alternate realities. The result is Jimmy Daniels, who daily slips away from the house that isn't quite home and sneaks off to the cemetery, where he struggles to reconnect with the one reality that is truly his. What makes the story so effective is its decision to concentrate on Jimmy's familiar sense of dislocation, his awareness that his parents aren't quite the people he knows they should be. That anxiety, so familiar to adolescence, gains poignancy when Jimmy begins playing his “game,” reaching out with his mind, trying to reconstruct the reality he'd lost.

As effective as “High Steel” and “Playing the Game” are, they may not be the best choices on which a reviewer should concentrate, because the seriousness of mood that characterize them is something of an anomaly within the collection as a whole. A few other stories, such as “Down among the Dead Men” and “The Clowns,” already mentioned, share that tone, but for the most part, the stories here are witty and exuberant, reveling in an energy that must have carried over from those brainstorming sessions described in the headnotes. Another story of displacement and confusion, for instance, resurrects the identity of Jack the Ripper in the body of a New Jersey nebbish named Leon Schwartz, and the struggle for control between the two men suggests that the local prostitutes are quite safe. “Touring” also explores the possibilities of life after death, and watching Elvis Presley, Buddy Holly, and Janis Joplin jam together is well worth the price of admission.

*The Fiction Factory* is an appealing collection of high-spirited and thought-provoking stories. Not all of the stories here
are equally successful, but there is a delightful sense of being invited in to share the fun with a creative and committed group of writers.

FICTION REVIEW

Alanya to Alanya

Ritch Calvin


My “discovery” of the work of L. Timmel Duchamp was, as usual, pure serendipity. Granted, she has been writing for some time, and her work has appeared in a variety of places, including some well-known sources (including _Asimov’s_, _Extrapolation_, and _The New York Review of Science Fiction_). However, her body of work is not extensive. For example, ISFDB lists only one novel and, oddly enough, no collection of stories even though she does have a collection out, as well as a number of other pieces, many of them in small market outlets (including _Lady Churchill’s Rosebud Wristlet_). Duchamp takes ideological issue with the mainstream publishing industry; in part, she rejects the way in which nearly all mainstream presses evaluate manuscripts based on synopsis or plot summary. She believes that such a practice is unfair and that it favors plot-driven works. This aspect of the publishing industry is just one of the reasons why she decided to start her own press (Lukin).

So, one day, as I sorted through the day’s junk mail (sorry, 4th class mail), I found a brochure from Aqueduct Press, a publishing house specializing in feminist science fiction. In today’s information age, I should never be surprised that someone (or some entity) gets a hold of my mailing address and reading tendencies, but I was surprised that this unsolicited mailing should be so well-suited. Apart from the work of Duchamp, Aqueduct Press also features other writers such as Kim Antieu, Eleanor Arnason, Rebecca Ore, Gwyneth Jones, and Nicola Griffith, among others, so I was quite interested in the press and its catalog.

I purchased a copy of Duchamp’s novel (she has also released a collection of stories, entitled _Love’s Body, Dancing in Time_) and was quickly engrossed in the (massive) novel, which is the first installment in a five-novel series. The remaining volumes, _Renegade, Tsunami, Blood in the Fruit_, and _Stretto_, will be published from June 2006 through June 2008). The novel is set in the near-future United States, picking up action in 2076. While much of the social structure is quite familiar, one very significant change has taken place. The governing structures of the world have become much more global, though nations retain their autonomy, and societies have become more clearly hierarchized. The society’s leaders, both in government and in industry, belong to the Executive class, one which not only enjoys a luxurious lifestyle that is unimaginable to the masses—the “sub-execs”—but have also developed a distinct social structure. The sub-execs are mollified, in part, through the entertainment/internet systems that are implanted in their brains. On the one hand, the novel’s Executive class is an extrapolation of current trends. Statistics suggest that, particularly here in the US, the middle class is disappearing while the gap between the wealthy and the working poor grows larger and larger. Indeed, today’s privileged enjoy a standard of living that is unimaginable to the masses.

The Executive class has also, in some ways, reified traditional gender roles. While females are members of the Executive class, they hold no positions of power. All significant functions are fulfilled by males, and they seem to hold very strong, very rigid sexist beliefs about women and their abilities. While some Executive females work, they are always in supporting roles, and often undergo horrible abuse at the hands of their bosses. But in order to succeed, the male Executives must undergo an operation. The novel is never very clear about the nature of the operation, although more and more hints about it appear as the novel progresses. But one thing that it does do is render the Executive males sexual eunuchs. They can no longer feel any sort of physical pleasure (or pain) in the genitals, which frees up their time, energy, and thoughts for work. The Executive females, it would seem, do not undergo an analogous procedure. Instead, Executive females are used primarily for reproduction, and many of them remain in the home to provide childcare. However, the women still have sexual desires, and they fulfill those desires with other Executive women.

In an interview, Duchamp cites Adrienne Rich as a formative and foundational thinker for her, and I would suggest that this aspect of the novel reflects that influence. In “Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence,” Rich points out the ways in which the patriarchal household has controlled women, and this is quite clear in the novel. But Rich also asks “why species survival, the means of impregnation, and emotional/erotic relationships should ever have become so rigidly identi-
fied with each other” (162). In this novel, the two are quite separate: the women have sex with the males for the purposes of species survival, but their emotional and erotic needs and desires are fulfilled with one another. This arrangement, however, has not extended to the sub-execs, and it is kept secret from them. This aspect is one of the ironies, or paradoxes, of the novel. While Rich suggests that these other reproductive/erotic relationships offer less oppressive and less exploitative alternatives to compulsory heterosexuality, and while Duchamp would likely agree, in this novel the alternative arrangement is a product of a degenerate and oppressive ruling class. I look forward to seeing how Duchamp develops this arrangement in the remaining volumes.

Against this backdrop, the aliens, the Marq’ssan, appear. Once again, direct information about the Marq’ssan is slow in coming, with tidbits leaked out over the course of the novel. They possess advanced technology as well as the ability to alter the shape of things through organic processes. For one, they alter their own appearance while in the presence of humans in order to appear more palatable. Whether or not the Marq’ssan are sexed beings remains, to this point, unclear, though they arrive on Earth wanting to deal only with females. After announcing their presence and demanding to meet with three female representatives from each nation, they disable all electrical and electronic capabilities on the planet (though some few are spared by being hidden deep in the Earth). U.S. officials, however, are never convinced that it is an alien attack; instead, they believe it is the work of terrorists. Nevertheless, their hand has been forced, and they put together their team of three women ambassadors, one of whom is the protagonist, the history professor Kay Zeldin.

Once all the women are assembled on the ship, the Marq’ssan inform them that humans are on a destructive path. They are appalled by the crisis that lead to the emergence of the new Executive class, and the ways in which the Executives were able to use the crisis to exert even stronger controls over the general population. They “demand” that the women on board negotiate a new government, a new social structure that will “end the seemingly infinite cycles of conquest and domination and violence that characterize human history” (70). They argue that only the process of negotiation, organized from the bottom members of society, will be effective. While the Marq’ssan have only now made their presence known, they have actually been on Earth for many years, working among grassroots and feminist organizations all over the globe. Apart from the formal representatives, the activists and feminists are integral to the negotiating process. As these negotiations take place, the events of the narrative taken place, largely, in these three loci: the US government’s security department, the Marq’ssan ship, and the feminist and activist community in Seattle.

The novel was published in 2005, and so many of the topics and events seem custom-made to address living in the post-9/11 US—even more so after the revelations about the NSA wiretaps. But the interesting fact is that these five novels were originally written in 1984. Duchamp asserts that they were written in response to Reagan-era government policies, particularly those regarding Central America. But they were also written in response to the ways in which the press was censoring political commentary (Lukin). So, while the Marq’ssan Cycle has an historical context, it seems more relevant than ever. As Duchamp writes in the “Afterword,” they have also been revised for publication twenty years later, so some of the references were doubtlessly added (the omnipresence of the internet, for example); nevertheless, they are remarkably pertinent at the moment. Even given all the political and historical background, she contends that the primary aim of the novels is to develop the process of constructing a new, even utopian, society. A great many science fiction novels depict utopian societies, but the process of getting there is missing, and, according to Duchamp, that’s the tough part. What does that road look like and how does one get on it?

Duchamp has been described as a “scholarly” writer. And indeed, Duchamp (like her protagonist Kay Zeldin) is trained as an historian, though she describes herself as “not an academic” and “not an intellectual, either” (Lukin). Even so, a writer who cites Nietzsche, de Beauvoir, Wittgenstein, Kuhn, Rich, de Lauretis, and Adorno and Horkheimer as writers who have contributed to her analytical framework, a writer who has read (approximately) one academic essay per day for the last thirty years (which totals roughly 11,000 essays), is bound to come off as a bit “scholarly.” Nevertheless, her intellectual grounding and her political activism both contribute to create a novel that is highly readable and as politically relevant as any novel I can recall.

Works Cited
In the United Kingdom, Temeraire is the title of the first volume of a fantasy series by new author Naomi Novik; in North America, Temeraire is the name of the series of which the first volume is titled His Majesty’s Dragon, with the second volume Throne of Jade and the third Black Powder War to follow shortly after (in March, April, and May, respectively, meaning that North American readers won’t have to wait nearly as long as readers in the UK to read the rest of the story). Temeraire is also the name of one of the leading characters in the series, an intelligent, compassionate, and fiercely loyal dragon in His Majesty’s Aerial Corps.

Novik’s book has been getting rave reviews from an impressive array of authors in SF and Fantasy, said reviews being more than well deserved. It’s been a very long time since I last forced myself to stay awake long enough to finish any book on first reading, let alone a second reading, but even knowing how the story ended didn’t get me to bed earlier than the wee small hours. Many of the reviews have mentioned the names of Anne McCaffrey, author of the Pern series about dragons and their riders, and Patrick O’Brien, author of the series upon which the film Master and Commander was based, a series set against the backdrop of the Royal Navy during the Napoleonic wars. And it’s certainly fair to describe the book in terms of a Hollywood-style pitch, as “Aubrey and Maturin in Pern,” perhaps, although such a description wouldn’t really do it justice. But the bond between dragon and rider is central to the characterization and the development of the plot, and the setting evokes an alternate history of sorts, what the Age of Sail might have been like if dragons existed and served as a kind of Royal Air Force.

Captain William Laurence commands HMS Reliant, proud of his career in naval service and looking forward to his engagement to a young woman in society; when his crew captures a French ship and takes as a prize a dragong’s egg intended, although he doesn’t know it at the time, as a gift from the Chinese Emperor to Napoleon Bonaparte. But the French ship has been becalmed and delayed by the war, and the egg is about to hatch; if someone does not bond with the dragonet, it will become feral, useless to the Aerial Corps which needs every dragon and rider it can get. The Reliant is weeks away from landfall, and Will finds himself the dragonet’s choice as partner, which means the end of his naval career and all his hopes for a normal life in his society; aviators are a breed apart and much looked down upon by men of social standing like Will’s father. At first somewhat bitter and resentful (in a very gentlemanly way) about his change in fortune, Will comes to regard his growing partnership with Temeraire as a blessing, and in time begins to adjust to, and in many ways change for the better, the closed society that is the Aerial Corps.

Those readers interested in historical fantasy, in the intersections between the real past and the imagined past, will find much of fascination in the way that Novik blends what might be two very different narrative worlds. The battles at sea and in the air are concretely detailed, the result of much research and attention paid to the historical period; if any kind of air support had been possible then, battles might very well have been waged in just the way she describes. The only fantastic element is the dragons, the only ‘magic’ that provided by their different talents and abilities, yet the world in which they exist is subtly changed by their existence. This is not simply a historically accurate world into which the fantastic element has been forced. For instance, the fact that dragons are as likely to bond with women as with men means that it is not unusual to find women riding dragons into battle, clad in trousers rather than skirts and as likely to bear battle scars as their male counterparts. Will’s comradely and openly sexual relationship with Jane Roland is contrasted with the socially-bounded and now-impossible engagement to Edith. While the focus is not on such issues as the treatment of women in society or the inequities of the class structure – Novik’s primary concern is to tell a cracking good story – such themes can be traced throughout.

But what makes this such a compelling read, ultimately, is the attention paid to those old stand-bys, plot and characterization. The events of the plot move along at a perfect pace, with fast-paced action scenes giving way to tense moments of plotting (in the other sense of the word) and conspiracy, and moments of quiet reflection and humor for balance. And, thankfully, while this is the first book in a series, it doesn’t fall victim to the cliffhanger ending; enough threads are tied to provide a satisfying sense of conclusion, enough left dangling to want more of the story in the next book. It’s the characters that pull you in, though, both human and dragon, and the interaction between those characters. Will Laurence is a complex young man, the product of his society but intelligent enough and open-minded enough to see the flaws in his world and in himself; Temeraire is not a carbon copy of McCaffrey’s dragons, or indeed of any other literary dragon. He’s well read but can’t resist the shiny, thoughtful and mature but with occasional moments of childish insecurity. In short, these are fascinating characters in a world that I can’t wait to revisit. Naomi Novik is an amazing new talent, and I look forward to reading more from her pen in years to come.
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Texas A&M Univ-Corpus Christi  
Corpus Christi, TX 78412  
<Dave.Mead@iris.tamucc.edu>

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400 East Second Street  
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