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

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The Canadian Sunburst Award, for excellence in speculative fiction novel or collection, has been awarded to Holly Phillips for her collection In the Palace of Repose.


The Sidewise Awards for Alternate History were also presented at LACon IV. Long Form: The Summer Isles, by Ian MacLeod; Short Form: Pericles the Tyrant, by Lois Tilton.

The Mythopoeic Society Awards were presented at the 37th Annual Mythopoeic Conference (Mythcon 37), held from August 4–7, 2006, in Norman, Oklahoma. Adult Literature: Anansi Boys, by Neil Gaiman; Children’s Literature: The Bartimaeus Trilogy, by Jonathan Stroud; Scholar-

SFRA BUSINESS
Editor’s Message
Christine Mains

The big news in this issue is a change in personnel. Sadly, Phil Snyder decided it was time to hang up his hat as Fiction Reviews Editor, the Executive Board and the editorial staff of the SFRA Review are very grateful for all the work that Phil has done over the years, and very sorry to see him go.

But we’re very happy to welcome his replacement, Ed Carmien, who’s already got lots of ideas about how to use his newfound power. One project that Ed has in mind is to devote a portion of an upcoming issue to Heinlein, given that the 2007 SFRA conference will be held in conjunction with the Heinlein Centennial. Ed Carmien is lining up reprints of Heinlein’s work, and if anyone knows of recently or soon-to-be published nonfiction studies of Heinlein or anything related, do contact Ed McKnight on that score. (I can see some potential confusion in having two Eds around... not to mention two ed(itor)s). When Ed C pitched his idea, I immediately thought of the ever-languishing Approaches to Teaching series; I’m sure some of you teach Heinlein in your classes, and we’d love to make some space for you to share your teaching tips and theories.

(Soooper secret message to those of you who discussed the Approaches to Teaching series with me at the last conference in White Plains: Where’s the content you promised me, huh?)

SFRA BUSINESS
President’s Message
David G. Mead

Well, I was wrong. My last Presidential Message wasn’t my last message as President of SFRA. I am pretty sure this one is.

The hot news of this day (Friday, October 13) is the announcement of our new officers for 2007-2008: Adam Frisch, President; Lisa Yaszek, Vice President; Mack Hassler, Treasurer, and Shelley Rodrigo, Secretary. What a wonderful Executive Committee! I have no doubt they will serve the Association well, and I look forward to working with them in my role as eminence gris (i.e. Immediate Past President).

My deep thanks to those who ran but were not victorious. It is a requirement of our SFRA elections that we have two nominees for each office. Of course, what that means is that half of those who run will not win. SFRA could not have had this election without Bruce, Ed, Warren, and Stacie. I have no doubt that their time to serve as officers will come, and we will be grateful to them again.

My thanks also to my Executive Committee for the past two years – Peter Brigg, Bruce Rockwood, Mack Hassler, and Warren Rochelle. We’d have gotten nowhere these last two years without their work.

The 2007 Annual Meeting of the SFRA will be held in Kansas City, Missouri, July 5-8, at the Crown Center. The conference theme is Celebrating the Golden Age of Science Fiction, and our guest authors will be Fred Polih, Jim Gunn, and Allen Steele. The Conference Registration fee will be $150. We are meeting in conjunction with the Robert A. Heinlein Centennial, and our participants get full membership in the Heinlein Centennial (not including the Gala Dinner, for which there will be an additional fee) as a part of their SFRA Registrations. With the events of the Heinlein Centennial, our SFRA 2007 should be an extraordinary meeting. I hope you will attend and present your scholarship. Paper proposals should be sent to Carolyn Wendell or Phil Snyder, who with Leslie Kay...
Brooker's *Alice's Adventures* is a mammoth work of detailed, in-depth research and critical, well-balanced analysis. The third in Brooker's self-proclaimed "cultural icons" trilogy (the other two being *Batman Unmasked* (2001) and *Using the Force* (2002), both Continuum) this book combines the author's passion for Lewis Carroll's original children's tale with his own now-familiar talent for producing essential scholarship in the field of popular culture. At over 380 pages long Brooker has clearly gone to great lengths to delve deep into the world of Carroll and Alice, offering the reader an insight into the mind and imagination of one of Britain's most popular children's authors. As well as being a historical narrative, investigating the truths and half-truths surrounding the inspiration for *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, Brooker's work looks at the influence Carroll and his fictional Wonderland has had on popular culture. Chapter topics include: illustrations of Alice; inspired further adventures; Disney's *Alice* and other adaptations; computer games and the darker imagination; life long fans of the story; and finally, historic pilgrimages to real life sites connected to Carroll, Alice and Victorian Britain.

Brooker makes it clear in the introduction that he does not want to trawl through well-known lies and forgotten facts about Carroll; rather, he wants to trace the "discourses around Carroll and 'Alice' – the books and the Liddell girl – one that evolved during Carroll's lifetime, and the other with its origins in the 1930s." As Brooker maintains, these discourses are key to our understanding of who Carroll was and what Alice meant to him. Either "Carroll is a sainted innocent, his books are joyous nonsense and Alice is his muse... [or] Carroll is a paedophile, his books are dark allegories, and Alice is his obsession" (xiv). Splitting the myth from reality is Brooker's ultimate intent; he does not want to provide the most accurate biographies of Charles L. Dodgson (Carroll) and Mrs Reginald Hargreaves (the real Alice). As a work of cultural criticism, *Alice's Adventures* is "not really about Dodgson and Alice and what they meant to each other. It is about 'Carroll' and 'Alice' and what they mean to us" (xvii).

To someone who studies fandom and its various levels of devotion, Brooker’s aim to find out what *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* means to those who read and adore it is a noble one. The impact that such popular fiction has on the daily lives of its fans is clearly something to which we as scholars of science fiction and fantasy must pay attention; not simply because we explore and understand what draws people into the fictional worlds created by Carroll and others but, more importantly, because we too are fascinated and drawn in by the “wonderlands” we inhabit every time we sit and read or watch science fiction. I think it is partly because Brooker is such a fan of *Alice* and the surrounding myths and fantasies that he is able to construct an interesting and compelling analysis. His knowledge of the subject area is akin to that of a *Star Trek* fan who knows every
The 2008 Worldcon will be held in Denver, Colorado, Aug 6-10, 2008. The guests of honor will be Author: Lois McMaster Bujold, Fan: Tom Whitmore, Wil McCarthy will be the Toastmaster.

Forthcoming Books:
Fall 2006
Hardy, Elizabeth Baird. Milton, Spenser and the Chronicles of Narnia: Literary Sources for the C.S. Lewis Novels. McFarland.
Mork, Patricia. Alien Theory: The Alien as Archetype in the Science Fiction Short Story. Scarecrow Press.

When I was raised as a child, I had always been enthralled by the tale of Alice in Wonderland. I was fascinated by the marvels of her world and how she was able to navigate through it. The story has always held a special place in my heart, and I have always been drawn to its fantastical elements.

However, as I grew older, I realized that the story of Alice was not just a tale of adventure and imagination. It was a story that had the power to change the way I perceived the world and the people in it. The characters of Alice and her friends were not just fantastical beings, but they were a reflection of the human condition and the struggles that we all face.


A few works of science fiction criticism are so significant as tools for the researcher, student, and casual reader that they are on the short list of must-haves for any science fiction library. Barron's Anatomy of Wonder is one such book. From its opening poem, "The End of Science Fiction," to its indices, this book is essential for its valuable and insightful essays, its very thorough annotated bibliographies, and its extensive listings of books (fiction and nonfiction), awards, foreign language works, and organizations.

It so happened that upon receiving this book for review I was teaching an introductory course in science fiction literature. In addition to reading the book and considering its value as a general resource, I spent the semester using the book as a teaching tool. Additionally, I put it on reserve in the university library during the last half of the semester to test out its usefulness to students in aiding their research. The results were impressive. Seven of my students reported using this book as a resource to help them plan their research, and they indicated to me that it helped them gain a perspective of the breadth of science fiction literature, as well as the depth of its history, which was the effect I was hoping to achieve. Students found the annotated bibliography particularly useful, because it helped them not only discover collections of essays and other information useful to them, but it reduced the time they had to spend looking at redundant information in order to find what they needed to assist with their research projects. I was pleased by the results in their papers. The students who used the book as an initial resource did not include the sorts of sources that indicated the writers were trying to pad their bibliographies. One word of caution: I found that students frequently attempted to use Anatomy as a primary source (which is not the way it should be used, except for citing some of the material in the introduc-
The first section of the book consists of a series of essays covering the history of science fiction. I utilized each of these essays as I taught that portion of the course, and found that they helped me identify areas where the material in my course was particularly weak. The first essay, “The Emergence of Science Fiction, 1516-1914,” found particularly useful, since it is in science fiction’s prehistory that I find my own background weakest. However, I would say that this essay, though excellent in its own right, does not go quite far enough. It moves fairly quickly toward the sub-genre of the “mysterious voyage,” and does not discuss in enough depth the mythic origins of SF which James Gunn and others have covered elsewhere. I think this prehistory is particularly important in order for students to understand the relationship between SF and its mythic predecessors, and would be especially valuable to assist students with understanding the backgrounds that have made science fiction possible. While some of the book’s essays do a fine job of discussing various historical contexts, there are a few places where these backgrounds could have been fleshed out a bit more, and the prehistory is one of those areas. However, this should not be viewed so much as a weakness of the book as a limitation imposed by the vastness of its scope.

One of the greatest strengths of Anatomy is its coverage of the pulps. This material is discussed not in one place, but in several essays throughout the book. The second and third essays in the first section, “Science Fiction Between the Wars: 1915-1939,” and “From the Golden Age to the Atomic Age: 1940-1963” are particularly good for their discussions, respectively, of the Gernsback and Campbell eras. I would consider these “must reads” for my students, or anyone interested in gaining a good overview of the influence that the pulps had on situating science fiction within American, British, and Continental SF. In addition to helping me steer my course, these essays helped my students understand SF’s struggle to find a cultural place as it became manifest as high art at one moment and mass market popular culture in the next, eventually to emerge with the two—literary SF and much-maligned “sci-fi”—existing side-by-side.

The last two introductory essays, “The New Wave and After, 1964-1983” and “Cyberpunk and Beyond: 1984 – 2004,” serve to introduce SF’s stylistic experiments as it branched out into new areas, moving away from the more conservative orientation of the writers of the Campbell era and earlier. One lacuna in this part of the book, I believe, is its omission of a discussion of the effect that the consolidation of the paperback industry under a few publishing giants had in the 80s and 90s and continues to have today. In particular, the reduced space in the market for new writers in the face of a plethora of media tie-ins (Star Trek, X-Files, etc.) should be treated in some degree of depth.

The second and third sections of the book are dedicated to annotated bibliographies of the primary and secondary literature. I have found these lists particularly useful. The first section helped one of my students, who had never been exposed to SF before, identify a book she might be interested in reading for her research assignment. It also helped me investigate what books I should consider for future courses, as well as identify those works (I am embarrassed to say) that I have yet to read. The annotations are objective, identify dominant themes (very useful when planning courses), and provide references to other works with similar treatments. The section treating the secondary literature is excellently organized for the researcher, whether a beginning student or more seasoned critic. Valuable introductory essays discuss the resources, followed by selective annotated bibliographies of relevant sources. Various chapters in this section are devoted to
WHAT: From the Brain to Human Culture: Intersections between the Humanities and Neuroscience
WHO: Comparative Humanities, Bucknell University
WHEN: April 20-21, 2007
WHERE: Bucknell University, Lewisburg, PA
TOPICS: Papers and/or panels are solicited for an interdisciplinary conference examining the intersections between recent work in the humanities and neurosciences. Papers from across the whole range of both the humanities (art, religion, literature, philosophy, film studies, history, languages, etc.) and neuroscience and its related fields (psychology, cognitive science, physiology, animal behavior, organismal and evolutionary biology, etc.) are welcome.
SUBMISSIONS: 500-word abstract and CV as an email attachment
CONTACT: Prof. John Hunter <jchunter@bucknell.edu>

WHAT: Literature, Ecocriticism, and the Environment
WHO: Southwest/Texas Popular and American Culture Associations
WHEN: February 14-17, 2007
WHERE: Albuquerque, New Mexico
TOPICS: Panels now forming regarding Literature, Ecocriticism, and the Environment in such areas as: ecocritical approaches to literature; environmentally-focused artists and their art; representations of nature and the environment in popular and American culture; environmental discourse in the media; the environment in film; urban environmentalism; nature writing and its authors.
SUBMISSIONS: by email
CONTACT: Ken Hada, <khada@ecok.edu>
DEADLINE: December 1, 2006
INFO: <http://www.h-net.org/~swpca/>

I have only one significant criticism of this book. Various essays in this volume, something also emphasized by the book’s organization, demonstrate a bias in favor of “literary” SF as opposed to popular culture-driven media “sci-fi.” The implication is that one belongs to high culture and is worthy of study, and the other is of a lower, and less respectable order. While the difference in the quality of writing is evident to almost anyone when examples of writing from both of these groups are considered, it is also important to remember that SF has not always been defined as much by the artistry of its style as the quality of its ideas. Within fan communities, individuals are capable of reading Octavia Butler on one hand while enjoying Star Wars on a completely different level. Both SF and “sci-fi” are important cultural products of the technological world, and both are worthy of study, though for different reasons. I would urge the editors of future editions to consider the merits of “sci-fi” on its own terms, for it is an indelible part of the equation, and will be as much a part of the history of SF in the future as Gernsback’s BEMs are today.

Overall, this is a powerful work that belongs on the bookshelf of anyone who engages in the world of science fiction, whether as a teacher, researcher, student, or casual reader. Bravo.
Joseph Carroll invented literary Darwinism a little over a decade ago. His premise, strongly influenced by the work of evolutionary biologists and psychologists, is that the human mind is the product of adaptive evolution and that by understanding the evolutionary process we can “more adequately understand what literature is” (Literary Darwinism, v). Literary scholar Gottschall and evolutionary biologist Wilson have put together and contributed to a collection of essays by writers who accept the concept of the “adaptive mind.” The collection is not intended to be definitive but, rather, suggestive of the future implications and applications of this new, interdisciplinary critical theory. The book is one volume in the “Rethinking Theory” series edited by Gary Saul Morson.

The Literary Animal, which boasts forewords by superstars E. O. Wilson and Frederick Crews, features an introduction, twelve articles spread over three major section divisions, and an afterword. There is a lengthy bibliography but no index. The book’s scope is best illustrated by the section headings: “Evolution and Literary Theory,” “The Evolutionary Riddle of Art,” and “Darwinian Theory and Scientific Methods.” In their engaging and disarming Introduction, the editors briefly recount their conversion experiences on the road to Darwinian Damascus. For those of us who have worked in marginalized literary fields or who have been frustrated by the persistence in literary criticism of theories borrowed from disciplines that have long since abandoned those theories, Gottschall’s story is especially evocative.

The seven articles in Part 1 seek to establish literary Darwinism as an antidote to scientifically ignorant social constructivist theories. Novelist Ian McEwan opens with a gracefully written juxtaposition of the Human Genome Project with the creation of fictional characters, finding both to be expressions of “our common nature.” Coeditor Wilson follows with an attempted synthesis of social constructivist and evolutionary thinking. His metaphorical assertion of the “gene-like” nature of stories will excite those of us who have worked in marginalized literary fields or who have been frustrated by the persistence in literary criticism of theories borrowed from disciplines that have long since abandoned those theories, Gottschall’s story is especially evocative.

Readers who have come this far without rejecting out of hand as heresy against the humanities the ideas set forth in the first section of The Literary Animal will come face to face with the experimental nature of this collection in Part 2. Here the editors present two articles with different interpretations of the relationship between evolution and art. Is art a by-product of the evolution of the human
teemed Tolkien scholar Douglas Anderson, editor of The Annotated Hobbit and of Tales Before Tolkien: The Roots of Modern Fantasy.

SUBMISSIONS: one-page abstracts
CONTACT: Dr. Chris Vaccaro <cvaccaro@uvm.edu>
DEADLINE: January 15, 2007

WHAT: Octavia Butler panel
WHO: SW/TX PCA/ACA
WHEN: February 14-17, 2007
WHERE: Albuquerque, NM
TOPICS: paper and panel proposals on the works of Octavia E. Butler.

SUBMISSIONS: 250 word paper and 500 word panel proposals
CONTACT: Ximena Gallardo C. <xgallardo@lagcc.cuny.edu>
DEADLINE: November 15, 2006
INFO: http://www.h-net.org/~swpca/

WHAT: 1st Annual Award for Non-English Language Scholarly Essay on the Fantastic
WHAT: The International Association for the Fantastic in the Arts
TOPICS: Prize: $250 U.S. and one year free membership in the IAFA to be awarded at the International Conference on the Fantastic in the Arts in March 2007; Winning essay to be published online at the IAFA website. Essays may be unpublished scholarship submitted by the author, or already published work nominated either by the author or another scholar (in which case the author’s permission should be obtained before submission). An abstract in English must accompany all submissions.
CONTACT: Dale Knickerbocker, knickerbocker@ecu.edu
DEADLINE: Nov 30, 2006

It is not hard for me to imagine some English faculty members writhing in agony should they be forced to read Part 3 of this book. This is where the lobsters hit the boiling water. Here in three separate essays, Gottschall, Daniel J. Kruger, and Catherine Salmon employ quantitative methodology to help explain texts. Gottschall’s quiet insistence on the need for humanists to learn from their colleagues in the natural and social sciences will strike terror in the hearts of those allergic to data analysis. His project is to test the dominant claims of feminist critics of traditional fairy tales via a study that uses experimental designs common in the social sciences. Kruger and his collaborators do much the same in their enlightening study of “Dad and Cad” male protagonists in Romantic literature. Finally, Salmon employs social scientific investigatory protocols to examine pornography and romance as manifestations of the differing mating strategies of males and females. If I did not make this essay sound like fun, believe me, it is.

This is a remarkable book, especially for someone like me who had begun thinking about evolution and literature before accidentally discovering Darwinian criticism. As a science fan and science fiction critic, I welcome with open arms the attempt to bring to the study of literature a body of learning and a point of view for which many SF readers should have sympathy. Think about Octavia Butler's Oankali, the gene-trading species that saves humans from extinction but modifies our genes in order to eliminate the lethal combination of intelligence and a tendency towards hierarchy. Surely Butler was imaginatively and consciously invoking Darwin. How many SF writers question whether we are too smart for our own good? What is this if not the fictional treatment of the limits of an adaptive capacity? Gottschall and Wilson have put together a fascinating collection. They write with conviction and humility. They are advocating an intellectual habit of mind that transcends the interdisciplinary—perhaps “pandisciplinary” would best describe the ethos of this text. The editors describe the articles in the book as “early words on their subjects, not last words” but nonetheless assert their credo: “Evolution will eventually become part of the normal discourse in studies.” I tend to agree. The collection is inclusive and provocative, a superb introduction to a promising path of enquiry that leads in a direction that should beckon to serious readers of SF.

NONFICTION REVIEW
Space Opera Renaissance
Ed Carmien


It turns out I like space opera. Not very long ago I was startled to read the words “space opera” in the blurb for a book by one of my favorite authors. I shrugged it off as an anomaly, one of those things that happens when fuzzy-minded publishers pretend they know what’s up with Our Thing—science fiction. Hartwell and Cramer’s anthology demonstrates the term’s recent use is anything but an anomaly.

Their introduction and lead-ins for the pieces that appear here tell an interesting tale that highlights both their encyclopedic knowledge of science fiction and the degree to which trends in science fiction can be deliberately influenced
Starship led by a woman, Greenland’s “The Well Wishers” focuses on the experiences of a woman who is an independent cargo hauler, Weber’s Mi. Midshipwoman Harrington offers up the first interstellar cruise of that well-known captain of space warfare, and while Asaro’s “Aurora in Four Voices” is told from the perspective of a male artist, the female lead is conspicuously more capable, being a pilot and an agent of the government’s intelligence service. “Ring Rats” by Robertson has two point of view characters, both female, who collude to save themselves and others.
Now past the anthology’s midpoint, Section V Mixed Signals/Mixed Categories (To the Late 1990s) slices the pie yet more finely, with nine more pieces by authors Gregory Benford, Donald Kingsbury, Sarah Zettel, Ursula K. Le Guin, Robert Reed, Paul J. McAuley, Stephen Baxter, Michael Moorcock, and Michael Kandel. As familiar as the previous ten authors have been to this reviewer, with a few exceptions here and in section VI the terrain becomes newer to the eye. Benford and Moorcock might not immediately make sense in this category, as both authors are more known for works of previous decades. Our editors bring Benford into the mix not from his panoramic In the Ocean of Night, however, but with “A Worm in the Well,” a story they acknowledge is not typical. Reed’s inclusion was a must, as his recent work at novel length helps define the term “space opera,” and Kandel’s “Space Opera” is a parody of, you guessed it, space opera.

The final five authors are presented in VI Next Wave (Twenty-First Century). Tony Daniel, Scott Westerfeld, Alastair Reynolds, Charles Stross, and John C. Wright reveal something about my reading habits if nothing else. Only Wright is familiar to my eye, from his galumphing Orphans of Chaos of 2005. His “Guest Law” suggests he is a name to look for in future years. Of all the sections of The Space Opera Renaissance this is the thinnest—it is perhaps too soon after the millennium to collect enough meaningful samples to distill a forecast.

Even so, the strengths of this anthology are many. Hartwell and Cramer represent a tremendously useful erudition mistakenly thought by some to belong only in the academy. Without suggesting there is no useful erudition in the academy, it is folly to think wisdom of the sort displayed in these pages is restricted to the ivory tower. Many have said before me that some literary criticism is an inbred art, produced by those who seek to get and retain academic rank for the consumption of those who have the power to grant academic rank. In science fiction (and associated literatures, such as fantasy and horror, what I have in the past argued is a romantic literature) the contributions of editors such as David G. Hartwell and Kathryn Cramer are invaluable. Add them to the contributions of well-read fan/editors such as Cheryl Morgan (who recently announced she is ending publication of Hugo award-winning Emerald City) and Janine Statson (Peregrine Nations) and the tip of a fresh iceberg appears, an iceberg savvy scholars will tap to help irrigate the desert of the real that is our modernist legacy in literature.

The most useful bit of wisdom here is a savvy analysis of how the term space opera has been used by authors, critics, publishers, and reviewers over the years. Space opera, once a term of derision, is now a neutral or even a positive genre descriptor. The editors trace this evolution through decades of advertisements, blurbs, interviews, reviews, and other sources. An artful dance, the editors add their choreography to the show, authoritatively and effectively. The New York Review of Science Fiction is presenting “a collage of nine short essays focused on individual writers” drawn from the introductory pieces in the anthology. Presented in three parts, the first appeared in the August 2006 issue (Number 216, Vol. 18 No. 12). This collage an excellent opportunity or readers interested in previewing (in part) what the editors have to say about authors such as Hamilton, Brackett, and Jackson, the authors presented in the first installment.

At 35 bucks, The Space Opera Renaissance is both expensive and cheap. Viewed as a single volume, it seems like an expensive hardback. But its nearly 1000 pages hold a wide range of authors, and one would be hard pressed to purchase even half of these pieces individually (even if in print) for less than
twice the price. Hartwell and Cramer have done the world of teaching science fiction a great favor. Even the first half of this book would serve well as a course anthology. That the whole of it is under one cover is a marvel in today's publishing world, and one can imagine an arm was twisted along the way to make this text a reality.

No one text can contain everything. Though mentioned throughout in the introduction and lead-ins, C. J. Cherryh is absent, as is Vernor Vinge. The overall length of the text was clearly an issue, though of course the absence of a suitable piece to include may also have been a problem. The editors' overall aim, to redefine space opera, is effectively carried out by the items that did make it into print. Indeed, there are stories here that could have been left aside—but not many, and in any case no two readers will agree which stories they might be. One minor quibble: the text shows all the hallmarks of what must have been a heroic and time-consuming process of scanning text or translating computer files from one format to another. There are regrettable typos here, spread inconsistently throughout the text…but not enough to cause more than an occasional raised eyebrow.

For libraries, this text is a must. In one title is gained an introduction to writers who can be hard to find, such as Hamilton and Brackett. In one title one can meet both Honor Harrington and Miles Vorkosigan, mainstay of dozens of novels. In one title one finds a wealth of plain-spoken wisdom about the history and future of this significant element of science fiction, space opera. In one title one learns that today's space opera isn't our grandparent's space opera. *The Space Opera Renaissance* is bodaciously big and scarily smart, the work of a pair of unique minds who have a strong and deep grasp of the subject matter (not to mention a house so densely packed with books it registers from space as a miniature black hole).

Turns out I like space opera. Who knew?

**NONFICTION REVIEW**

**Folktales Retold**

Amelia A. Rutledge


The list of tales discussed in *Folktales Retold*, immediately signals a clash of definitions. For Doughty, “Ali Baba,” “Beauty and the Beast,” “Chicken Little,” Cinderella/Aschenputtel,” “The Frog Prince,” “Henny Penny,” “Goldilocks,” “The Princess and the Pea,” and “Rumpelstiltskin,” among others, are to be designated as “folktales.”

Though the majority of the folktales discussed in this work fit the subcategory of fairy tale, not all of them do, thus necessitating the use of the term *folktales*. Often reference will be made to ‘traditional folktales’ or ‘traditional folk tale versions.’ These labels do not generally mean oral versions but the written version(s) that are established, usually the versions written by the Grimms or Perrault. This work examines revisions of folktales. (9)

Doughty’s implied audience of teachers and scholars is not well served by arbitrary designations based on a weak analogy to Steven Swann Jones’s fairy-tale taxonomy and defended by a reference to the practices of the brothers Grimm in recording tales that had been influenced by written texts. Her discussion of the distinctions between folktales, fairy tales, and *Kunstmärchen* indicates that she is aware that such distinctions are important, but her neglect of the distinction...
Doughty’s chapters survey “revisions” in several categories, including “Humor,” “Breaking the Picture Book Rules,” “Feminist Folktale Revisions,” “Postmodern Folktale Revisions,” “Folktale Revisions on Film,” and “Revising the Folktale Tradition.” Some chapters, such as “Postmodern Folktale Revisions” rely heavily on synopsis after cursory theoretical introductions. Doughty cites Christine Bacchilega’s *Postmodern Fairy Tales: Gender and Narrative Strategies*, but ignores the firmly literary context in which postmodern fairy tales operate. Her discussion of the narrative potential of fairy tale’s implied “anti-text” (Bacchilega’s term) as lesser characters assume prominence in the modern tales is of some interest, but the assertion that folklore as inherently postmodern is not warranted by Doughty’s limited evidence.

Doughty’s chapter on picture books introduces an array of texts worthy of examination, but too often discussion is limited to the assertion that a picture-book “rule,” treated as transparent and generally known, has been reversed. Although she cites *How Picturebooks Work* by Maria Nikolajeva and Carole Scott, she does not mention or list the work of William Moebius or Perry Nodelman. Theory is not well integrated into the analysis, thus limiting the effectiveness of her discussions of Bruce Whatley’s *Wait! No Paint!* or David Wiesner’s *The Three Pigs*.

In the chapter “Narrative in Folktale Revolutions,” Doughty attempts to bridge the gap between traditional folktales and literary tales that her terminology denies. She argues that contemporary use of the historical present in Donna Jo Napoli’s novels reclamements of the “vibrancy” stories lose when they are printed, claiming in each case that authors’ use of present tense enhances their texts’ “emotionalism” (113), but the latter term is neither rigorous nor well-defined. The chapter refers to some useful studies of narrative theory but does not use them to fullest advantage.

The chapter on “Folktale Revisions on Film” moves quickly to cinematic versions of “Cinderella” after a very brief historical discussion, in which Doughty mentions a few very early films, “fractured fairy tales,” and cartoon versions. The significant contribution to fairy-tale films by Tom Davenport is neither mentioned nor cited. She provides only passing references to the cultural contexts of cinematic production.

The body of texts surveyed in *Folktales Retold* is impressive, but the discussion is not framed in ways that support the endeavor. A more demanding review in the early stages of the project would have resulted in more theoretical and terminological rigor and more nuanced discussion.

**NONFICTION REVIEW**

*Science Fact and Science Fiction*

Neil Barron


If you know much about this 1999 Pilgrim winner, you may know that he wrote the proto-science fiction entry for the second edition of the Clute/Nicholls *Encyclopedia of Science Fiction*, to which he was also a major contributor. He also contributed to a predecessor to this new study, *The Science in Science Fiction* (1982), a useful if somewhat dated account by Peter Nicholls, David Langford and Stableford. This account is briefly discussed in his introduction, where he notes that the 1982 study contrasted the “good” (rationally plausible) and bad examples of SF. In this new study “the principal flow of concern runs in the opposite direction . . . [this study] attempts to start with science and works forward to its fictional representations, reflections and responses.”

The 300 entries are first listed and later arranged alphabetically and range from acoustics to zoology, and from 400 to 4,000 words. The two columns, 8.5x11 inch pages each contain about 1,000 words. (The full list is at www.routledge-ny.com/ref/sciencefact). The alphabetical list is followed by a thematic list under 15 main headings, such as: concepts; leading figures; authors (34 names, tending toward hard SF writers); sciences; scientific models and theories; and technology. The entry on aeronautics clearly illustrates Stableford’s extensive knowledge of proto-historical examples, works in non-English languages, and more recent novels and magazine stories, whose links to the theme are noted, though necessarily very briefly. The entries on authors, by contrast, usually discuss individual works in more detail. Like every encyclopedia, the entries are extensively linked to one another. Stableford uses asterisks before entries mentioned in parent entries to alert the reader to the links, e.g., “Atom, a fundamental particle of *matter, one of the key hypotheses of theoretical *physics.”
The exceptionally broad scope of Stableford’s knowledge is evident not only in the 300 entries but in the 12 page bibliography, which is divided into eight categories of books and articles and a final list of 14 websites. The book concludes with a very detailed analytical index comprising 140 pages. All of the thousands of stories and novels mentioned in the entries are indexed here by author and title.

There is no book I know of which is a direct competitor to this encyclopedic study. The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction, 2nd ed, 1993, has far more entries (4360) devoted to subjects and authors, but they usually lack the analytical rigor and detail that Stableford provides. Many of his valuable entries have no counterpart in the SF encyclopedia, and of course, vice versa. The Nicholls/Langford/Stableford 1982 study mentioned above is largely a popular science book, with some of the same subjects discussed in more detail in this new study—space travel, aliens, time travel, computers, robots, etc. I’d estimate this book’s length at about 575,000 words for the entries alone. That makes for a very lengthy book, and the length apparently accounts for its high price well above any other single volume work I know of (some multi-volume sets are pricier still). Many serious scholars should acquire this as a tax-deductible professional expense. Larger academic libraries, if there is academic interest in SF, should carefully consider.

NONFICTION REVIEW

Our Space, Our Place

Ed Higgins


As her subtitle announces, Ginn’s text explores the various portrayals of female characters in several popular sf television programs, specifically The X-Files, Babylon 5, Farscape, Star Trek, and Andromeda. Her topic drew my immediate attention as a long-time fan of most of the programs she covers and her gender focus struck me as interesting and likely useful in my own teaching and study of sf. But I am of two contrasting opinions about this book. On the one hand, I read with interest (and I think, profit) Ginn’s detailed summaries, interestingly culled bits and pieces from print interviews with the various female actors, her thought-provoking quotes, observations, and insights gleaned from print interviews with program writers and producers, and, additionally, quoted fan comments about female characters from various print and online sources. All these gathered-up resources offer useful perspectives regarding specific lead or supporting female characters in their various series. I particularly welcomed Ginn’s overview synopses of series seasons for both their recall of programs I’ve enjoyed but also for her often insightful focus on the primary female characters making up her study—perspectives I generally missed.

Nonetheless, I wasn’t always convinced of Ginn’s repeated assertion that for many of these strong women characters “the underlying psychological theme of the program revolves around identity issues.” Too often Ginn’s analysis of a female character seems tied to her personal wish for that character’s role to exhibit a necessary psychological change (in terms of Erikson’s theory of development) as if these fictional characters were fully developing human (or humanoid) personalities. For example, in speaking of Babylon 5’s Delenn, Ginn avers, “I like to think that JMS [J. Michael Straczynski, who wrote most B5 episodes] was not trying to write her as a traditional feminine-type character, nor relegate her to a minor role, but rather was writing her as a person trying to learn who she is.” While such a “search for self” in the fictional female characters she discusses is indeed Ginn’s oft stated thesis, the supporting analysis can sometimes be very loose indeed.

In two initial chapters Ginn traces a brief history of “Psychology and Women” and “Women in the Worlds of Science Fiction.” While perhaps useful in a classroom context both chapters offer only intro-level surveys of general psychology and, except for a brief personal narrative of her early love of science fiction film and TV and later her academic discovery of feminist science fiction, only the slimmest overview of sf’s portrayal of women.

After these introductory chapters Ginn turns to her main task of analyzing, in a chapter each, the particular series she has chosen and the specific major and minor characters she finds exhibit personal identity and choice in building relationships and fully navigating their particular worlds. Her chapters on B5 and Farscape gave the fullest scope to her “meaning and identity in women’s lives” thesis. Of these two chapters the Farscape chapter interested me most, both as a fan of the series and because so little academic attention seems to be paid to this interesting program. Ginn is able to make a sound case for Farscape’s several female characters as both “strong and fascinating” and richly developed in their characterizations. As one might expect she focuses her attention on Chiana, Zhaan, and Aeryn Sun as “Women who were good and bad, positive and negative, and living
on their own terms.”

For whatever I found disappointing, I still found much of interest in Ginn’s chapters on each of her chosen TV series, and, in part, I suppose my disappointments have more to do with her seemingly intended audience. While she often falls back on her academic credentials as “a scientist and a psychologist,” Ginn is more clearly reacting here as a fan of the programs she is reviewing and analyzing (“...as much as I love the programs I am discussing here, I will be critical. I will not be a cheerleader, and I will state my opinion. After all, it’s my book.”) There is something of a special pleading here, as Ginn, clearly, is very much the cheerleader in the characters she favors and in her perceived quest for personality identity within these fictional characters. Still, what she does is interesting and frequently insightful, even while leaving the reader (at least this reader) dissatisfied that she doesn’t spend more time making her case with a fuller literary analysis of what and where she has chosen to posit her perspective on crucial issues related to gender and identity.

Still, I think Ginn’s book should be of interest to even a scholarly audience, especially if one is teaching sf and using any of the series she examines. Ginn’s bibliography is quite good and she has conveniently compiled many feminist sf studies for anyone wishing to trace out a more scholarly approach. Her intended audience is, as stated in her Preface, more fans than scholars, so her sometime “folksy” tone (as she calls it) can perhaps sometimes be overlooked by a more academic reader, although I found this difficult.

Christine Mains in SFRA Review # 274 reviews two other recent studies of sf on TV. While Ginn’s study adds to this growing academic interest hers is a personally eccentric view filtered through a psychologist’s theoretical training. But Ginn is an enthusiastic sf tv fan as well as a trained psychologist and her analysis is thoughtful and (mostly) interesting.

NONFICTION REVIEW

Full Metal Apache

David N. Samuelson


Most Americans familiar with science fiction have little acquaintance with its Japanese counterparts, except maybe Godzilla, anime, and Kobo Abe. As a leading Japanese expert on the subject, Takayuki Tatsumi would like to change that situation, in the process widening the lens through which readers see both cultures as well as science fiction. A professor of English at Keio University in Tokyo, Tatsumi has promulgated his versions of literary history and theory in many conferences and publications.

Since his postgraduate studies at Cornell in the 1980s, a significant part of his career has been publishing in English and Japanese articles and interviews about intersections of American and Japanese culture filtered through changing conceptions of science fiction in both countries. More precisely stated, he perceives a way of thinking common to science fiction as increasingly part of both nations’ cultural furniture. That is the loose thread more or less connecting most of the previously published articles collected in his first solo book published in English, pursuing his long-running argument that science fiction is one of the best indices to show that the flow of influence from the United States to Japan has reversed, and now works in both directions.

This postmodern (he prefers “avant-pop,” i.e., post-postmodern) exercise in cultural criticism discusses art and culture, Japan and America, writing and film, reportage and his own autobiography. Erasing many traditional lines between fiction, drama, opera, film, advertising, and journalism, it explores primarily cross-cultural “transactions” since the American “opening” of Japan to the outside world in the late 19th century. In these transactions, misperceptions and misunderstandings abound, as illustrated in his explanation of the book’s title. “Apache” was appropriated from John Ford westerns by Japanese journalists to stand for a different kind of “rebel,” postwar smugglers of used metal, after which the metaphor of “eating” metal was literalized in Japanese science fiction stories and films.

Tatsumi maintains that the defeated Japanese turned the affliction of cultural masochism into a virtue, in accepting a subordinate feminized position to the macho military might and cultural hegemony of America (apparently accepting to some extent caricatures in the Italian Madame Butterfly and English Mikado). The rise of Japan to a more equal footing in the world
economy yielded technological and cultural elements adapted by cyberpunk writers, however, especially William Gibson, whose writings Tatsumi examines in several essays. Cyberpunk is certainly his best illustration of synchronous influence between the two nations as well as the collapse of distinctions between high and popular culture. Rooted in cultural diagnoses of postmodernism’s “hyperconsumerism” by Frederic Jameson and Jean Baudrillard (filtered perhaps through Larry McInerney, who wrote the foreword), this argument bears little or no relevance for writings (mostly Japanese) he treats from outside that time frame.

Although he pays lip service to Arthur C. Clarke and Robert Heinlein, Tatsumi’s heart doesn’t seem to be in it. Identifying the largely pacifist (and English, or Sri Lankan) Clarke as the “king of modern science fiction” (69) with “a straightforwardly imperialist ideology” is a stretch. Only at the most global and impersonal level of postcolonial hegemony can the “superevolution of humanity” in *Childhood’s End* come close to representing “an ideology of productionist imperialism” (57). Also included are debts owed by 20th century films to 19th century future war stories, about which he has written elsewhere, and symbolic readings of American Presidents Kennedy and Clinton. Relatively convincing in short space are his considerations of such “avant-pop” figures as Paul Auster, J.G. Ballard, Don Delillo, and Thomas Pynchon, along with “Lafcadio Hearn” and Japanese authors less known in the U.S.

The book offers fascinating glimpses into Japanese culture and (para)literature, but Tatsumi arouses my suspicions with sweeping declarations inadequately supported by data, and long strings of polysyllabic adjectives full of trendy-sounding neologisms and portmanteau words. He contends (rather than argues) that “metaphors of sadomasochism offer a penetrating angle in the avant-pop phenomena” (30) and that “metafiction and science fiction [are] the fate of postmodern literature that has characteristics of Japanese literary history” (54). More egregiously, he declares that “in the age of hypercapitalism, every binary opposition—including magic realism as ethnic fantasy/magic realism as WASP nightmare, mainstream fiction/science fiction, and avant-garde experimentation/popular culture, among others—must be deconstructed and exposed as a product of human subjectivity positioned to narrative metaliterary texts, that is, as a metadiscursive effect of a grand narrative” (39). How much he believes these ringing declamations is open to question since they don’t always make logical or grammatical sense and he fails to build on them in writing about texts and authors. Like many practitioners of cultural criticism, in fact, he seems much less concerned with textual detail than with generalizations suggesting more than he substantiates.

A separation into groupings of “theory,” “history,” “aesthetics,” “performance,” and “representation” implies more continuity and cohesion than is actually present, especially given the appended dialogues with McCaffery and Richard Calder, an American sf writer resident in Thailand who is the subject of one of his essays. It may be unfair, however, to expect in a collection of articles a fully coherent scholarly argument dedicated to proving his points. Possibly Tatsumi has done that in books not translated into English, but this one is more a set of suggestions for how he “reads” literature and culture. I am generally skeptical, moreover, about deterministic arguments singling out historical event A as “the” obvious cause of literary event B or vice versa. Godzilla may have helped “the postwar Japanese reconstruct a national identity by making themselves into victims of and resisters against an outside threat” (13), but it’s less clear to me that “ *Blade Runner* was welcomed in Japan because it re-enacted for viewers both their own false memories of [prewar] democracy and the hybrid construction of their postwar selves” (20).

Not being steeped in Japanese culture myself, I can not take for granted observations (which may be commonplace) about the centrality of cultural masochism and cyborgs to Japan, or even the market penetration of science fiction. Even as he conflates cyberpunk with mainstream (whatever we take those terms to mean) in Japan, it is not clear how popular or respected any kind of sf actually is there. From the evidence provided, moreover, and a special issue of *Science Fiction Studies* he co-edited (29:3, November 2002), what passes there for sf seems to have a large amount of fantasy and folklore without benefit of science. Given Tatsumi’s upbringing with one foot in Anglo-American culture, I would like to trust him to be relatively sensitive to both languages, but I wonder if he is not perpetuating still more of the repeated and modulating misunderstandings and misinterpretations he attributes to both cultures in the past.
I began Mary Rosenblum’s *Horizons* with high hopes for her first science fiction novel since *The Stone Garden* (1994). Over the years I had sorely missed her ability to craft lived-in futures filled with gleaming cybertech and virtual realities, yet peopled with sensitive characters in gritty, world-in-disarray settings, who often wore their hearts (if not their computers) on their sleeves. Three stand-alone books in two years (*Drylands* and *Chimera* both 1993) culminated in the consistently sharp short story collection *Synthesis and Other Virtual Realities* (1996). Rosenblum granted the near future a remarkable immediacy, captivating readers with characters who stole hours online to try to further their education while working menial jobs, or, in desperation, applied for indentured subsistence labor at electronic kiosks, because running was better than staying. Her protagonists had the depth that critics argued was lacking in most near future cyber fiction, and even her privileged characters had, or gained, a conscience in her deft hands. Despite a premise that made perfect sense given the environmental concerns that openly informed her work, the gardening-mystery series she launched as Mary Freeman with *The Devil’s Trumpet* (1999) came across as too cozy and comfortable compared to her prior oeuvre. 

Therefore, I was pleasantly surprised to see her name on the cover of the March 2005 *Asimov’s*. While the story “Green Shift,” featuring a secluded orbital garden on the New York Up Platform, seemed more like a prelude than a fully worked out tale, so be it, for that meant the then-titled novel *Eternity Shift* would arrive soon. But the potential I sensed in that story, which comprises the first two chapters of the now-titled *Horizons*, is never fully realized.

In theory, this book should be much more exciting than it turns out to be. Ahni Huang is a young corporate heiress who can sense minds through her Class Nine empathic abilities. She helps thwart a radical environmentalist plot by the Earth-based Gaists to destroy the orbital Platforms that hang above the Earth. In addition to her natural enhanced senses, she is also able to Pause herself with an inner AI (no further explanation is provided). Along the way she uncovers her brother’s betrayal of the family business dynasty, falls in love with a fellow empath, and learns about a new version of humanity evolving in the microG environment of the Platforms.

The lack of any explanation for Huang’s telepathic abilities, and the plot’s reliance on cringe-inducing coincidental meetings, particularly between her and a minor character, take an early toll. While there is a sincere attempt to depict the ability of foes to manipulate the media, or to sway the public mood through biased electronic postings in The Con, a Platform community chatroom, these points seem dated and lack the punch of her earlier work. The backdrop of an Earth governed by a World Council that keeps the American-dominated North American Alliance in its place also fails to ignite the plot beyond realpolitik clichés used to predictable effect in one “debate” scene. A world order based on ethnic enclaves whose oligarchs prefer to do business only within their groups adds little more than background noise, nor is it suggested any subversion is in order; indeed, the details of the lavish privileges of inherited wealth enjoyed by Huang are presented as if to inspire awe. In the arena of near future worldbuilding, *Horizons* simply falls flat compared to the works of newer authors such as M. M. Buckner and Elizabeth Bear. 

For these reasons, I would not recommend *Horizons* for a course syllabus. But not all is lost here. For an entertaining, solid science fiction outing, Rosenblum still possesses her eye for detail in setting, with lush descriptions of the orbital garden and effective depiction of the joys of moving, playing, and lovemaking in a microG environment. She also captures the tension that erupts between the Platform people and the derisively referred to Downsiders, placing the reader in crowded corridors and at tension-filled security checks of implanted IDs. The advantage the Up dwellers have in being above their potential enemies, and near rocks from asteroids, also provides a decent subplot. Her penchant for strong characterization is realized in the slight backstory of Huang and an ex-lover, and brought into the forefront briefly through Huang’s relationship with her mother, although what is meant to be a shocking denouement lacks the proper buildup to provide the intended effect. While *Horizons* does not match the power and impact of her earlier books, I will remain on the watch for more science fiction from Mary Rosenblum. For despite my disappointment with *Horizons*, I know that a familiar tingle of excitement will occur again the next time I see her name on a new work.
FICTION REVIEW

New Wyrd

Michael M. Levy


The Wyrdsmiths are a Twin Cities-based writing group of considerable talent. The name you’re most likely to know is that of Eleanor Arnason, a guest at at least two SFRA conferences, who’s been publishing short fiction since the early 1970s, maybe the late 1960s. Her novel, A Woman of the Iron People, won the first Tiptree Award and she’s won or been nominated for a variety of other awards as well. Less well known but coming on strong are novelists Lyda Morehouse, who was a P.K.Dick Award runner up a couple of years ago for the theological cyberpunk novel Apocalypse Array, and Naomi Kritzer, author of the best-selling fantasies Fire of the Faithful and Turning the Storm. Kelly McCullough’s first novel, WebMage, has recently appeared to rave reviews. H. Courreges LeBlanc has also published a number of well-received short stories. The other writers in the group have just barely or not yet broken through to professional status, but all seem destined to make the leap.

This small anthology features a number of fine stories, most of them original. Arnason’s “Big Black Mama and Tentacle Man” is part of a series of jazzy, quasi-folktales in which the author deals with male chauvinism, body image stereotypes and similar idiocies. Naomi Kritzer’s beautifully written “Masks,” possibly the strongest story in the book, is set in a High Renaissance-like culture where heterosexuality and marriage are rigorously enforced by a corrupt priesthood containing members of both sexes. The protagonist, a gay musician, is secretly having an affair with a member of the priesthood. Lyda Morehouse’s “Jawbone of an Ass” takes the Bible story of Samson, but relocates it to contemporary Northern Ireland and features a protagonist who, through no fault of her own, finds herself on the wrong side of the angels. Kelly McCullough’s hilarious fantasy “The Basilisk Hunter” is a send up of Mutual of Omaha’s Wild Kingdom and the Australian series Crocodile Hunter. Sean M. Murphy’s “Cloverleaf One” quite literally puts together research on the first cloverleaf interchange ever built and Heisenberg’s uncertainty principle with considerable success. H. Courreges LeBlanc’s “How Many Horses?” is a nicely done fairytale with a message about the importance of losing the things we love. Also included are short novel excerpts from works in progress by Wyrdsmith members Douglas Hulick, Rosalind Nelson, and William G. Henry. Hulick’s “An Inconvenient Corpse” from his not yet published Dust and Steel, concerns a rather nasty professional enforcer in what appears to be a fairly traditional medieval urban milieu. It has something of the feel of Steven Erikson’s work about it and, based on the excerpt, seems likely to see publication sooner rather than later. The excerpts from novels in progress by Nelson, “A Game of Beasts” from Kyria Zulie, and Henry, “A Bird of Fire” from The Commission, are both nicely written, but too brief to pass judgment on.

In short, this is an excellent anthology. The Kritzer story is worthy of at least a mention in Datlow, Link, and Grant’s Year’s Best Fantasy and Horror, and all of the stories are well worth reading. The book can be ordered at wyrdsmiths@gmail.com.

FICTION REVIEW

Blindsight

Dominick Grace


In an interview posted on the memetherapy site (www.memetherapy.net), Peter Watts self-deprecatingly and one hopes disingenuously describes himself as a hack writer. I doubt most serious SF writers would agree. His first novels, the Rifters trilogy (Starfish, 1999, Maelstrom, 2002 and Behemoth, 2004), established him as a major, albeit controversial (as evidenced by Kirkus Reviews’ description of Behemoth as “horrific porn”) new voice in hard SF. His new novel, Blindsight, shares the strengths of his earlier work while also carrying him in some new directions.

The Rifters trilogy banked on Watts’s background with marine biology by using the deep ocean as a major plot element, as well as a major thematic one in the novels’ explorations of inner space and the submerged depths of human consciousness. Blindsight turns to deep space but employs that environment with similar thematic effect, using it to underscore the novel’s interest in alienation and the distance between even the most intimately related and involved people. This novel deals with big subjects, both literally (in the form of the alien artefact the space travellers discover, a particularly disturbing manifestation of the Big Dumb Object) and thematically, and it deals with a lot of them. The novel is part
dystopian nightmare, part first contact story, part military SF, part cyberpunk, and part horror story (it features vampires and ‘zombies’), among other things. Indeed, the novel is highly self-conscious about its status as narrative and specifically genre narrative, drawing attention to its status through echoes of various other SF and horror texts (e.g. the narrator is frequently described as a “pod person,” an obvious nod to Invasion of the Body Snatchers, and attentive readers will notice echoes of everything from Alien to Solaris) as well as through the gradual emergence of the telling of the story itself as part of what the story is about. That is, the novel is also part recursive post-modern meta-narrative.

All this sounds like the novel could be a mishmash of styles and subjects, but Watts expertly weaves his various elements together to create a challenging but coherent whole. The novel is set in the late 21st century, when a jaded and exhausted humanity, attempting to flee its own consciousness by allowing its wealthy to migrate to a virtual environment ironically called Heaven, discovers that aliens do exist. The bulk of the novel follows the expedition to investigate these aliens, as a motley crew (is there any other kind?) of misfits and oddities travel to the Oort Cloud and find an enormous, and mysterious, artefact under construction by enigmatic and ultimately unknowable (literally) aliens. Those familiar with Watts’s work won’t be surprised to discover that his characters are all profoundly damaged psychologically and/or physically. The Captain is an AI that remains behind the scenes for most of the novel, but the visible commander is a genetically grown vampire (vampires, we learn, were a real species that went extinct shortly after the beginning of recorded history and that have been resurrected in this nightmarish future, though neither how nor why—beyond the propensity of science to accomplish the horrific and massively foolish merely because it can in, Watts’s pessimistic view—is made clear). Other crew members are all radically modified in one way or another, from the narrator, who had half his brain removed as a child to “cure” his epilepsy and who now is a synthesist, capable of reading the surface patterns of most people and determining what’s going on inside, while lacking any real understanding of the emotional substrate, to the linguist, who has had multiple personalities surgically induced, or the biologist, who is so wired that he gets the majority of his sensory input from implants rather than human senses. While such modifications may in some respects be seen to enhance the human, creating superior post-humans, the novel, especially in its persistent imagery of violation, disease, and the grotesque, questions whether such advances enhance or eradicate the human.

Indeed, despite its invocation of first contact, the puzzle of attempting to communicate with aliens, and the inevitable conflict with the aliens, this novel is less about the literal alien other than it is about the alien self and, more importantly, the limits of human perception even to understand, let alone define, the self. The novel’s title references a psychological condition in which the subject’s eyes function normally but the brain is unable consciously to perceive visual stimuli. The novel enumerates a veritable shopping list of psychological ailments as well as physiological limitations that profoundly challenge the reliability of perception and of the ability of consciousness to exercise free will. The novel’s ultimate thesis is that consciousness is not only not a requirement of intelligence but in fact antithetical to species survival. Watts calls the novel a “thought experiment” exploring this possibility (381) in the 20-odd pages of notes following the text proper.

These notes are necessitated by the dense scientific content of the novel. Despite its strong focus on character, and its success in making such profoundly alien humans understandable and even sympathetic, this is a hard SF novel in which even passing elements are grounded in research (Watts indicates that even more extensive notes, cut from the published version for space considerations, can be found at his website). Even the most fantastic elements, such as the inclusion of vampires, are given a plausible-sounding scientific rationale (part of the fun of such SF, of course, is the creation of rationales that sound good). In short, this novel combines the extensive scientific grounding we expect of the best hard SF writers while also presenting complex and believable characters, still not generally a strength of hard SF, though many SF writers are increasingly bridging that gap. This is an impressive book, with elements that should appeal to any serious SF reader as well as to fans of the myriad subgenres the book invokes and subverts.

I’ve always taken great pleasure in just browsing bookshelves, including the new release shelf at the local library. I generally think I keep up with new science fiction releases, but sometimes, a publication slips through. Imagine my surprise, the Ohio native that I am, to find a book on the new releases shelf entitled *Zanesville*. That I’d never heard of the author comes as no surprise, since it is his (I checked his website to determine his gender) first novel. That I might not have heard of the title before wouldn’t be surprising, either, since it’s published by Villard, which is not exactly a well-known science fiction press (they have recently published *How to Stay Bitter through the Happiest Times in Your Life* and *How to Heal the Hurt by Hating*). Perhaps as much as anything else, it demonstrates the ways in which, as was considered at the 2006 SFRA conference, the genre of science fiction and its tropes have mutated and infected other genres of fiction. So, while the press materials supplied by Villard market the novel as “fiction,” the press copy describes the setting as “post-apocalyptic.” Perhaps that was enough to get the novel on the Science Fiction shelf at the library? Nevertheless, the novel is set in a future, dystopic United States, contains biomechanical beings, and is filled with complex communication and marketing technologies.

The novel centers around two primary characters, Lloyd Meadhorn Sitturd and his son Elroy (the reference is deliberate). Sitturd was born in Zanesville, Ohio (the novel’s only reference to the title), but ended up establishing a religious cult in Texas. After the prologue, Sitturd disappears for several hundred pages, until Elroy finds his way back to his father. Elroy awakens in New York City with a severe case of amnesia. After several close calls with the nasty, mechanized police force, he is taken into Fort Thoreau, the stronghold of a resistance group called the Satyagrahi. The U.S. government has effectively been taken over by a large “cultporation,” called Vitessa, which is business, government, and religion all in one. While the government has become authoritarian and fundamentalist, the business world has taken some very strange turns. For example, McDonald’s has been overtaken by McTavish, which serves haggis (billions and billions) rather than hamburgers. Kentucky Fried Chicken has become Captain Chicken, which actually serves frogs. In the midst of this, the Satyagrahi fight Vitessa with their vast technological resources. They are “controlled” by a mysterious, absent figure, Parousia Head. Once they take in the amnesiac, they dub him Elijah Clearfather. But he is surrounded by anomalies, and they begin to fear that he is a spy, or “a weapon of mass information.” In their paranoia, they begin to use various drugs and stealth methods (the drugs from the very cultporation they are fighting). Aretha Nightingale, a drag queen and the leader at Fort Thoreau, argues that they are no longer any better than their enemies. After consulting the III Chings, they decide to send him to Pittsburgh, the home of Vitessa.

What follows is a classic quest tale. A young man sets off in search of himself and, perhaps, the meaning of life. Along the way, he undergoes a series of surreal events, from Pittsburgh to Oklahoma to Texas to Las Vegas (most of California has disappeared into the ocean, leaving the western-most urban sprawl as a combination of Los Angeles and Las Vegas) to South Dakota. While each location, each adventure brings him closer (geographically) to a resolution and closer (psychologically) to understanding who he really is, each encounter also raises as many questions as it answers.

One of the remarkable elements of the novel is its obsession with Dick and dick. As for the former, Saknussemm clearly mines much of the same territory as Dick, Philip Kindred. He explores the effects of rampant consumerism, the collusion of business and government, the paranoia of everyday life, the effects of extensive drug use, the shifting layers of reality. In addition, he makes numerous direct references, including the consultation of the III Chings. On the one hand, it refers to Dick’s use of the I Ching as a divination tool in *The Man in the High Castle*. On the other hand, the three Chings (they are, in fact, three Chinese men) refer to the three figures in “Minority Report.” In another instance, Sitturd describes a mystic/cult figure, Lodema Honeyflute. He says, “Her prophecy is based on the notion that the apparent reality of Green Pastures is an illusion and that behind the scenes lies a hidden reality” (303). Sitturd was taken up into a tornado when he was young. While there, he got a glimpse into a higher reality. There, he discovered APPARATUS, a vast, active, living intelligence that controls our level of existence. Sitturd has dedicated his 200 years of life to fighting APPARATUS. The question of shifting realities also appears in the final confrontation between the Sitturds, though I’ll not spoil the resolution. Finally, and perhaps most interestingly, is the obsession with finding a lost/dead twin. PKD wrote over and over again about his dead twin sister.
Along the way, Elroy/Elijah meets a young autistic girl, Kokomo. When he has sex with her, she transforms into him (“They were indeed One” [305]). At that very moment, the evil dwarf Finderz Keeperz fires the electronic probe they’d implanted in Elroy/Elijah’s head when he was in Fort Thoreau, but it fires in Kokomo’s brain, not his. As soon as he’d found his twin, she gives her life for him.

Perhaps more remarkable is the novel’s phallocentrism—in all of its manifestations. For one, the novel is almost entirely male-centered. The two main characters, obviously. Females do occur, occasionally. There’s the Supreme Court Justice who casts the deciding vote to allow Vitessa to take over the country; she’s now doing penance by haulng shit down in the sewer system. There’s the lesbian motorcycle gang that helps Elroy/Elijah get out of Oklahoma, who are another resistance group. There’s Kokomo, who gives her life for Elroy/Elijah. And, finally, there’s Maggie Kane, the good-hearted hooker with whom Elroy/Elijah plans to settle down, once he discovers that she’s with child. But all of the female characters are quite tangential, quite stereotypical, and function in the service of Elroy/Elijah. More literally, however, is the obsession with penises, and very large ones, at that. Elroy/Elijah is endowed with an enormous schlong, and every person who views it (and they are many) is astounded. Elroy/Elijah has actually “inherited” his penis from (another) religious cult leader from Texas, Hosanna Freed. His penis had been removed and was being kept as a holy artifact, but it was stolen by Sitturd and, from that holy penis, Elroy/Elijah/Elohim (Sitturd’s own name for his son) was created. He tends to wave his holy, magic scepter around, until he loses it, that is (I’ll not spoil that, either). The converse is also true. The evil Finderz Keeperz is under-endowed, and his sexual partner insults him and his sexual abilities.

Despite its carnal obsessions, Zanesville is a great deal of fun. It reads like a letter-day PKD, or, as the promotional copy states, “like Gulliver’s Travels seen through the eyes of Terry Gilliam.” It is provocative in, mostly, the good sense of the word. It certainly seems timely when Ralph Nader speaks of this nation’s “corptocracy,” and the battles over religion and politics heat up. It raises so many questions about the inter-relations among government, business, and religion. It also raises key questions about the moral or ethical practices and, ultimately, the danger of fanaticism when engaging in battle with an “evil” entity.

**Fiction Review**

*Living Next Door to the God of Love*

Ritch Calvin


*Living Next Door to the God of Love* is Justina Robson’s fourth, and by far her most ambitious, novel. And that’s saying something. Her first two novels, *Silver Screen* (1999) and *Mappa Mundi* (2001 garnered a great deal of critical attention for Robson. And despite their differences, the two novels were similar in that they were fast-paced page-turners, centered around technological secrets and subterfuge. Her third novel, *Natural History* (2005), was also expansive and fast-paced, but to my mind, signaled something of a shift inward (even as the action expanded out into the universe). Her fourth novel continues that trend inward, to the point that it is as much a novel of character(s) as anything else.

The novel picks up after the events of *Natural History*, though after some indeterminate length of time. *Natural History* offers the beginnings of the universe in which humans are separated into Forged and Unevolved, posthuman and human, and only provides glimpses into the alien presence, Unity, and Stuff, the alien technology that can be controlled, altered, and shaped by humans through Unity. In the narrative universe of *Living Next Door*, Earth has been vastly transformed by this Stuff. Through Unity technology, the “Unity Engine,” “sidebars” are “4-D bubbles” that exist alongside “reality,” in which the inhabitants can live out fantasies or create alternate realities. For example, in the opening chapter, the sidebar Gotham is filled with Nordic gods, Spidermen, Batmobile Cruisers, etc. Unlike the virtual realities of so many cyberpunk texts, wherein characters exist in a virtual or digital space while their “meat” selves remain in 4-D reality, here, the sidebars are 4-D realities, are physical spaces.

The novel is populated by Light Angel Valkyrie Skuld, a Forged warrior; Hyperion, an Unofficial Forged; Damien, an elf; Theodore, the human incarnation of Unity; Rita, a human who is Theodore’s “partial” (which means that he takes over her body only occasionally). The three primary characters, however, are Dr. Greg Saxton, a human, an academic, studying the Sankhara sidebar; Francine, fourteen-year-old “Genie” (genetically-engineered human), on the run, away from her mother and
step-father and in search of herself; and Jalaka, a “splinter of Unity.” The novel is fragmented into sixty-two sections, and each of the sections is told from the vantage point of one of these characters, thereby reinforcing the fragmentary nature of the character’s lives and of “reality.” While Nancy Kress, in her Probability series, develops ideas drawn from super string theory in a very pragmatic, scientific way, here Robson uses some of those same ideas in much more poetic ways. Some of the characters live in 4D, some in 7D, and others in 11D. But it is not the nuts and bolts of the mechanics of the universe that interest Robson. Rather, it is the lives and loves of the inhabitants that are her focus.

The Light Angel Valkyrie has lost her partner, Elinor, and the digital version that she keeps stored in Uluru is quickly deteriorating. She is devastated and searches desperately for ways to hold onto whatever scraps might remain. Katy, Greg’s ex-girlfriend, has left him for the Love Foundation, a quasi-spiritual organization that helps the lovelorn in Sankhara. Jalaka is on the run from Unity, but is also running from his rather sordid past, from the loves of his life. He’s hoping to find, or re-find, the perfect love. Francine, a miserable teenager, runs away from her privileged, though ultimately desolate life, into the sidebar Sankhara. She feels alone, isolated, and alienated. Here Robson employs a metaphor similar to Le Guin’s in The Left Hand of Darkness. In a sidebar to the Sankhara sidebar, Jalaka has created a replica of the Winter Palace, which serves as a retreat for Jalaka, Francine, and Greg. But as the events unfold, the landscape around the Palace becomes a vast, frigid tundra, approaching absolute zero. The primary characters must pass through this landscape, in literal and figurative ways, before the resolution: “perhaps the cold started with Francine’s isolation, Greg’s disillusion, with Sankhara’s entire freight of loneliness” (438).

The descriptions of Unity, at times, remind the reader of the Borg from Star Trek. As individuals are “translated,” they join Unity, become part of that vast, collective entity. Theodore espouses his distaste for individuality, for separateness. And, indeed, when Unity “eats” or translates the whole of the Gotham sidebar (millions of individuals), Theodore bluntly states that they aren’t really dead but live on in Unity. So the fact that Jalaka has broken off from Unity is distressing, and Unity is quite keen on re-assimilating him. But whereas the Star Trek formulation seems to be individual=good, collective=bad, the equation here is a good bit messier. On the one hand, assimilation into Unity would seem to be quite bad (and the fact that Unity callously assimilates all of the Gotham sidebar reinforces that argument. Jalaka himself would be an example of the positive aspects of breaking free of the collective Unity. And, indeed, near the end of the novel, Jalaka “eats” Rita, but then re-makes her, separate from Theo and from Unity. On the other hand, Jalaka, Francine, Greg, and Valkyrie all suffer from their isolation, and all of them seek the love and connection with another. For Jalaka, it comes down to will: “leave Unity. All rise, all separate, be slaved to nothing, no one. And if there is cause, then be joined. And if not, then not” (327).

Unlike her earlier novels, Living Next Door, I would suggest, an example of a writerly text. It requires a great deal of work from the reader to make sense of it. As Philip Snyder suggested in his review of Robson’s third novel, Natural History (SFRA Review 271), one of the difficulties here is that the reader struggles to make sense of a universe that Robson herself seems to know too well. The first 100 pages leave the reader trying to understand who the players are, what all these kinds of beings are, what a sidebar is (which is explained in Chapter 24), and so on. But, with patience, and with work, these things do all become clear. Rather than being a page-turner that one reads quickly and forgets, Living Next Door requires thought and effort, which makes it all the more memorable, in the end.

FICTION REVIEW

Mélusine and The Virtu

Christine Mains


Together, Mélusine and The Virtu make up the first story in a projected series; The Mirador is expected in 2007, with Summerdown to follow in 2008. While the later volumes sound like traditional sequels, which will gather up some of the threads left loose and hanging at the conclusion of The Virtu, the first two volumes are actually a duology, a single story split into two books. Originally, I had intended to review Mélusine in an earlier issue of the SFRA Review. As sometimes happens, I held back that review due to layout limitations, and by the time the next issue rolled around, I had received the second volume, The Virtu, and read enough to realize that many of the questions and concerns I’d expressed about the first were answered in the
second. A little research on the author's blog informed me that the two books were always intended to be one, that the story had been split into two to accommodate the marketing concerns of the publisher. Reading both books together, it's clear that the second volume is not a sequel but rather the second half of the story; in *Mélusine*, the characters journey away from the eponymous city, and in *The Virtu* they return. Storylines introduced and seemingly dropped in the first are picked up and resolved in the second. It seemed awkward, and a little unfair, to criticize the first volume for perceived weaknesses that actually resulted from a publishing decision rather than the author's creative choices, so I exercised my editorial power to abandon the first review and instead publish a single review of both volumes as one story.

*Mélusine* is the first novel from author Sarah Monette, who possesses a Ph.D. in English literature and a passion for horror and darker fantasy. Her previous publications include a number of short stories, some published in *Strange Horizons* and *Lady Churchill's Rasehnd Wristlet;* several have received honorable mentions in *The Year's Best in Fantasy and Horror* anthologies. Some of her work, including this duology, is a little rough around the edges, but that's an indication of journeyman-level work rather than lack of talent or skill. Although what follows in this review may sound like a series of complaints, I do think that this is an author at the very beginning of what promises to be a successful career.

The setting of the story is the city of Mélusine and its environs; Mélusine is in some ways the typical decadent Renaissance-flavored cityscape of much recent fantasy, an urban environment reeking of a long history and with the ruins to prove it, populated by wizards and dukes at court and by thieves and prostitutes in the winding alleyways and slums. The dichotomy is familiar to readers of fantasy, the city as a site of both wealth and poverty, or, as the back cover blurb announces, “a city of secrets and lies, pleasure and pain, magic and corruption.” Often, in this kind of fantasy world, much of the narrative takes place in the luxurious courts and temples and bedrooms of the upper class; often, as the story progresses, the veneer of wealth and privilege is worn away to reveal the nastiness lurking at the heart of both city and its inhabitants, thematically suggesting the ultimate lack of difference between aristocrats at the top of the social ladder and the brutes at the bottom. *Mélusine* breaks with this norm in a small but significant way; the veneer is brutally stripped off in the first few pages. We're barely introduced to Felix Harrowgate, wizard, friend to the wealthy and lover of the Lord Protector's brother, before Malkar, his former master and a villain (unfortunately of the two-dimensional category), rapes him in a magic ritual that leaves him insane and that destroys the orb from which the city's wizards draw their power. Felix is blamed for this incident, imprisoned, and eventually exiled, leaving the city for the remainder of the first volume and much of the second. Because the life-altering disaster happens so suddenly, there's little opportunity for the reader to develop any real sense of the city and its people, to care about the way of life that's been destroyed. The reader doesn't really have a chance to invest anything in this world.

Nor does the reader have a chance to develop much sympathy for Felix before he loses his mind. And this matters even more than it usually might because Felix is one of only two viewpoint characters through which the reader experiences this world and its people. The narrative is structured as a series of alternating first-person accounts, told partly by Felix and partly by Mildmay the Fox, a thief and sometimes assassin making his way through the city's underworld (both figuratively and literally; much of the action takes place in crypts and underground labyrinths). Both characters share a mysterious past, both share an undeniable physical resemblance, both ponder the possibility of being half-brothers (which adds another level of either discomfort or interest to Felix's physical attraction to Mildmay). Monette does a masterful job of keeping their voices distinct and appropriate for their level of knowledge about their world; through Mildmay, we get a good sense of what the city's underbelly is like, but because of Felix's madness, it's difficult to get that same feel for the upper classes. However, Felix's insanity is effectively conveyed; at one point, for instance, a number of other characters, some of whom Felix knows well, are conversing with him and with each other while they try to bathe him, but what Felix sees and hears is filtered through his inability to perceive them as they are. Such scenes could easily become frustrating or irritating, but seldom do in this work. It's still a relief, though, when Felix regains his sanity at the end of the first volume.

But even then, he's not much of a sympathetic character. It's natural for the reader journeying through a secondary world to rely on the viewpoint character as a guide, to feel sympathetic towards that character; generally speaking, a first-person narrator should engage the reader's sympathies even more, given the level of access to that character's most private thoughts and feelings. Even after he regains his sanity, Felix is selfish, cold, and at times cruel, to the point of casting a magical obligation on his half-brother that allows him to use Mildmay like a slave, an extension of his own will. And while Mildmay is easier to get to know and care about, it's impossible to ignore the fact that he's a murderer. Unusually for much genre fantasy, this is a story built around character rather than around the pattern of the plot or the detailed construction of the secondary world. The story progresses more through moments of interpersonal conflict than by the usual incidents of adventure, of physical risk and
battle, which drive the plot of a typical fantasy.

True, there is a journey, first to find a place where Felix might be healed, and then a return journey to Mélusine where Felix might repair the damage for which he feels responsible. However, the journey can hardly be considered a typical quest, and for the most part the land through which the characters travel remains unexplored and undescribed. As for worldbuilding, the systems of magic that govern the wizards’ actions seem as complex and intriguing as the little details that make up the daily lives of the city’s inhabitants. Yet in neither case is the reader provided with the kind of information that most fantasists can’t wait to share. I appreciate the lack of expository dumps, to be sure, and I actually enjoyed the experience of being immersed in a world without the aid of maps, glossaries, and “As you know, Bob” dialogues (and much is available on the author’s website, for those who really miss such information). However, given my interest in the workings of magic in fantasy worlds, I really would have liked a little more explanation, at least as far as the theories and principles and worldviews underlying the rival schools of magic operating in this world.

Because of the ways in which Monette departs from the generic conventions, this might be an interesting selection in a class on writing fantasy (and Monette’s website provides a link to an e-article in which she argues against the conventions of Tolkien-esque fantasy). Thematically, though, there’s not much here for either class discussion or in-depth scholarship; much has been made of the fact that the protagonist is gay, but in the world of the story, that fact makes little difference in the characters’ lives. On the whole, though, I was very impressed with this debut, and look forward to reading more of Monette’s work in the future.
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