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

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In this issue

SFRA Review Business

And We're Off!.....2

SFRA Business

Welcome to 2012.....2

A Trip to Eaton.....3

"Putting the Science in Fiction" and AlterFutures.....4

Feature 101

Immortality and Infertility in Science Fiction:
Who Wants to Live Forever?.....5

Nonfiction Reviews

Visions of Mars:
Essays on the Red Planet in Fiction and Science.....11

Becoming Ray Bradbury.....12

Walter M. Miller, Jr. A Reference Guide to his Fiction and Life.....13

The Lying Brain:
Lie Detection in Science and Science Fiction.....14

The Twisted Worlds of Philip K. Dick:
A Reading of Twenty Ontologically Uncertain Novels.....16

Race in American Science Fiction.....17

Fiction Reviews

Reamde.....19

Tesseract 15.....20

Never At Home.....22

Media Reviews

Melancholia.....23

The Skin I Live In.....25

Pioneer One.....27

The Definitive Flash Gordon and Jungle Jim Volume One.....30

Terra.....31

Announcements

Calls for Papers.....32

And We're Off!

Doug Davis and Jason Embry

WHAT A YEAR. Here at the *SFRA Review*, as we are sure you have noticed, things are changing. We lost our beloved Managing Editor, Janice Bogstad and acquired Lars Schmeink for that role. Lars is already proving to be invaluable in our transition from a primarily print-based journal to a digital publication, linked to an on-line store that will facilitate the purchase all of the books and other media reviewed in each issue. Please look for this option starting with issue 301.

We have also gained a Public Relations Director, R. Nicole Davis. She secured a room at last year's Dragon*Con in Atlanta for the Editors as well as our Vice President, Jason Ellis, and our former President, Lisa Yaszek so that they could address the scholarship of the SFRA to SF fandom. We are looking forward to many similar opportunities in the future.

Finally, as Ritch Calvin will tell you in the next column, we will be sending a final 3-in-1 print issue for those of you who did not receive your print copies for this year. Keep your eyes on your mailboxes.

"But what about 2012?", you might ask. Well, we have a treat for you this issue. The Doctors from Malta have sent us another Feature 101 for this issue...this time it is on Immortality and SF. We also have several engaging Nonfiction reviews on three great SF authors, Philip K. Dick, Walter M. Miller, Jr., and the late, great Ray Bradbury.

Not to be undone, Neal Stephenson has written another book and we are publishing another review of it along with a review of *Tesseract 15*, the Canadian Anthology of Science Fiction.

Alfredo Suppia has supplied us with two more reviews of SF film and our own President has reviewed a web series that seems to be garnering a little buzz.

Finally, while the CFP list is a little small, the final entry is a Call for Executive Committee Candidates, so those who are interested, make yourselves known.

Thanks for reading, everyone! We look forward to seeing many of you in Detroit in the coming weeks. Please enjoy.

Welcome to 2012

Ritch Calvin

UNLESS YOU'VE BEEN HIDING under a rock (or have been finishing a book project, or serving as the chair of your department), then you're aware that the end is near. That's right, on December 21, 2012, the world will cease to exist—and on the winter solstice, too! Much of the speculation on the end of the world is fueled by a belief that the Mayan Long Count calendar will complete its cycle this year. Further, a great deal of the work of New Age proponents of the 2012 cataclysm has been predicated on (interpretations of) the Mayan calendar and eschatological predictions. These groups are not alone. For example, some Hindu leaders also think that 2012 marks a significant moment in history for human enlightenment.

Science fiction, too, is filled with such predictions: angry gods, swarms of invading aliens, comets or other planets striking the Earth, rampant ecological change and destruction, nuclear or biological warfare, self-aware computers and robots. One key difference in these two kinds of apocalyptic discourses is that, in the former, we can do nothing (or very little) to alter the events, while, in the latter, the narratives (at least in part) serve to warn us that we can change the course of events. Furthermore, apocalyptic literature (including science fiction) suggests that a new and better order will emerge out of the catastrophe. The change will do ya' good....

While I offer no apocalyptic narrative, and while I offer no promises of world-altering change, things within the SFRA are in constant flux.

No doubt you have seen the regular updates from Steve Berman on status of the annual SFRA conference to be held in Detroit. Steve and Deborah Randolph have assembled a great selection of guests, including Eric Rabkin, Saladin Ahmed, Minister Faust, Robert J. Sawyer, Sarah Zettel, Melissa Littlefield, and Steven Shaviro. It looks to be a wonderful line-up. Please consider submitting a paper or panel proposal soon. The deadline is April 23, 2012. And please consider attending, whether or not you're presenting. Further information and registration can be found at: <http://sfradetroit2012.com/>.

At the *SFRA Review*, we now have Lars Schmeink on board as the managing editor, and let me say, he's hit the ground running. As you know, the economic conditions for the *Review* shifted dramatically in mid-2011. For many years, the University of Wisconsin, Eau Claire generously subsidized each and every issue. The subsidy helped us keep membership and subscription rates lower than they would have been. However, economic times are tough everywhere, and that includes at public universities. UWEC was compelled to withdraw its economic support, though we remain thankful for the support that we had over the years. As a consequence, we had to make a decision regarding the future of the *SFRA Review*. As you know (or, as I hope you know), the *SFRA Review* has been shifted to an e-publication format. Standard membership rates to the SFRA include an electronic-only version of the *Review*. The nature of the publication industry is such that a number of other publications in the world of science fiction scholarship have made similar decisions, including *Science Fiction Studies* and *The New York Review of Science Fiction*. In the past, we have made available a .pdf copy of the *Review* on the SFRA website. Beginning with this issue, we will make the *Review* available to members in a variety of electronic formats, including .pdf, .epub, and .mobi (and perhaps .lit and .prc—we'll see where the demand is). For an additional fee, though, a print copy will still be an option, through a print-on-demand service. Lars will be leading that portion of publication.

That leaves the questions of the last three issues from 2011, issues 296, 297, and 298. The Executive Committee and all the editors (Doug Davis, Jason Embry, and Lars) discussed this issue extensively. They have all put a great deal of time and thought into the issue, and I appreciate their input and dedication! After a great deal of discussion, we decided that we would print all three issues in a single volume and mail them to everyone who was a member in 2011. In the end, regardless of the shift in economic conditions, those who were members of the SFRA in 2011 had paid for a print copy and were, therefore, entitled to a print copy of the *Review*. We have set up an account with a print-on-demand company and will mail the 3-in-1 volume in the very near future. Although this 3-in-1 issue will be unusual, printing them as one volume will save both time and money for the organization.

The SFRA FaceBook page is now up to 267 "likes." Drop by if you haven't already. Add your vote of approval, and even more importantly, post links to all

things science fiction and join the discussions: publications, releases, conferences, discoveries, etc. In addition, work on the website continues apace. Changes to the front-end appearance are currently underway. Furthermore, the work on the back-end functionality soon will be.

So, the end may well be nigh. The world may be radically changed. I don't know. This may well be your last chance to attend an SFRA conference, though I rather hope not. But the changes at the SFRA keep on comin', and I hope that they continue.

VICE PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

A Trip to Eaton

Jason W. Ellis

GREETINGS, ALL! For this issue's column, I am writing from beautiful Riverside, California where I am completing a two-week research trip in UCR's Eaton Collection of Science Fiction and Fantasy as one of this year's Mullen Fellows. There are many interesting and wonderful things in its expansive collection. I have focused my reading on science fiction magazines and fanzines from the 1960s to 1990s, and I have been very happy with the many things I have found for my work—e.g., a full run of *The Philip K. Dick Society Newsletter* and early appearances by William Gibson in *Genre Plat* and *Wing Window*. The fellow sitting behind me is reading 1940s pulps and fanzines. It is a lively and dynamic space where affiliated and independent scholars are doing important work, and luckily, it is not so serious a place as to be unfavorable to telling others about the SFRA and the upcoming conference in Detroit (<http://sfradetroit2012.com/>).

As we know from our membership surveys, the SFRA's best introduction to nonmembers is the call for papers for our annual meeting. I know that the circulation of the call for papers has significantly changed since the 1985 meeting in Kent, Ohio where Donald "Mack" Hassler presented the Pilgrim Award to Samuel R. Delany (Thanks to the Eaton Collection, I saw the photographic evidence in *Locus* #296!), but even in the age of digital ubiquity, a personal invitation to join us in Detroit will likely yield significant gains for the membership—a larger conference, more conversation, more possibilities for collaboration, etc. Of course, "personal" can take many forms—texting, Facebook-

ing, emailing, telephoning, and yes, even face-to-face chitchating!

So, let's put the word out on the street about the organization and the upcoming Detroit meeting. Steve Berman has done a lot of great work organizing this year's conference on the theme of "Urban Apocalypse, Urban Renaissance: Science Fiction and Fantasy Landscapes." Steve is accepting abstracts on that theme and other SF-related papers and panels until April 23, 2012 (proposals can be sent by email to sdberman1121@gmail.com). For all SFRA members, especially those folks going to ICFA in Orlando and other conferences elsewhere, tell your conference fellows and presenters know about the Detroit SFRA meeting—have a stack of CFPs in one hand and your iPhone in the other.

EVENTS

"Putting the Science in Fiction" and AlterFutures

Chris Pak

IN APRIL I attended two UK-based events on consecutive days, both of which explored exchanges between the sciences and arts and both of which involved sf to a significant degree. I give the following account of these events in the hope of raising awareness and support for these ongoing discussions.

On Wednesday 25th April I attended the workshop "Putting the Science in Fiction", organised by David Kirby and Geoff Ryman. While Ryman needs no introduction, Kirby is less well known; he is the writer of the well-received book *Lab Coats in Hollywood: Science, Scientists and Cinema*, and is Senior Lecturer in Science Communication Studies at the University of Manchester. This workshop brought together a range of thinkers and practitioners whose interests converge on science so as to consider ways in which a counterpart to the Science and Entertainment Exchange in America could be instituted in the UK. This organisation is a government funded body that offers a free service connecting directors and screenwriters to scientists for consultation. There were 120 attendees from a range of academic institutions from across the UK, Canada and Germany, along with representatives from the University of Liverpool's Science Fiction Library, *Interzone*, the Wellcome Trust, The Royal Society, the British Science Association and the National Endowment for

Science, Technology and the Arts (NESTA), a range of science communication researchers, science outreach officers, sf, crime, and popular science writers, consultants from LitFest, Ignitel, Parthenon Entertainment, Charlie Films and scientists from Norwich BioScience Institutes and Jodrell Bank. Kirby and Ryman organised this workshop as a preliminary exploration into the issues involved in establishing a similar organisation in the UK. Unlike the Science and Entertainment Exchange, the involvement of artistic forms outside of cinema and television was considered. The benefits of collaborations between science and the arts outside of sf was also a major theme of the workshop.

The event opened with a panel that focused on the experiences of writers, scientists and editors already involved in interdisciplinary collaborations, primarily but not limited to the published collection of short stories *When It Changed*, edited by Ryman. This anthology featured stories built around an idea proposed to sf writers by a scientist that they had been paired with. Discussion focused on the problems associated with such exchanges and explored how fruitful collaborations resulted in stories that were scientifically well informed and that suggested applications for science that had been previously unconsidered.

The second panel focused more generally on science in television, film, and theatre and included panellists David Kirby, composer and screenwriter for the film *Dimensions: A Line, A Loop, A Tangle of Threads*, Anthony Neely, academic and author of *Science on Stage* Kirsten Shepherd-Barr and palaeontologist, and science consultant Phil Manning. Discussion ranged from issues involved in consultancy work in broadcasting, film and theatre in both America and the UK, raising differences between the two countries with regard to the use of such consultants and the role that the Science and Entertainment Exchange plays in US film and television.

The final panel brought together writers Geoff Ryman, Paul McAuley, Ken MacLeod, Alastair Reynolds and Justina Robson for a discussion of how these writers use science in their stories and more generally on sf as a genre, its fandom and its link with science. As a consequence sf was well-represented, signalling the important role that it could play in bringing well informed science to a wider audience, along with the gains that writers of sf could receive with access to an organisation offering a pool of science consultants.

These roundtables were capped with an hour discussion aimed at developing preliminary ideas for

developing a coherent plan of action for the budding organisation. Ideas proposed tended to fall into several groups: assessment of the broadcasting climate in the UK, including a consideration of the BBC's role in production; a consideration of the organisations that could be approached to develop a network (including The Royal Society, the Wellcome Trust and various UK award bodies, among others); and specific ways in which those involved in the arts could provide benefits to scientists for their collaborations (as it was implicit that artists could benefit from scientists' experiences in their production). At this stage ideas for a network or organisation are still being considered; if anyone would like to get involved, please contact David Kirby at david.kirby@manchester.ac.uk. For more information about the workshop, please visit <http://www.arts.manchester.ac.uk/cidra/events/cidracollaborations/putting-the-science-in-fiction/>.

The next day I travelled to Soho in London to present a paper on terraforming (my thesis subject) at the AlterFutures group, a collection of thinkers from design disciplines such as architecture, future design, etc. Two other speakers presented on works in progress: Samantha Lee (from the Architecture Association), who presented a remarkable project exploring the use of landscape as a supercomputer, and Joseph Popper (from the Royal College of Art), who is working to develop a film and possibly an installation on the ethics of one way missions into deep space. Previous speakers at his monthly meeting included Tony Noble, producer of the film *Moon*, and Damien G. Walter, sf critic at the UK newspaper *The Guardian*.

AlterFutures is organised by fashion futurist Cher Potter and co-organisers Daisy Ginsberg, James King, Jessica Charlesworth and Tom Wynne-Morgan. Ginsberg explained that the meetings were inspired by Stuart Brand's Long Now Foundation. AlterFutures aims to 'question received expectations of the future and propose compelling alternatives', ideas that closely link it with sf. Overall, the discussion sparked by these presentations and the insights offered by a mainly technical audience speculating about the future was stimulating in ways that promised fruitful collaborations between researchers of different disciplines. Cher Potter can be reached via the Meetup group <http://www.meetup.com/AlterFutures/>. The AlterFutures website is <http://www.alterfutures.org/>.

The purpose of these notes is to raise the fruitful collaborations that are being forged between sf, the sciences, and other artistic disciplines. Kirby and Ryman's

organisation promises a consolidation of this collaboration in terms of a growing network that, I hope, will become more influential in time. In discussion with Potter at AlterFutures, I realised that such collaborations were working mainly in isolation, and that the potentialities for bridging these gaps between such groups offered genuinely exciting possibilities for sf to develop a wider influence. No doubt there are other groups working in isolation: a forum such as the SFRA Review could offer much to Kirby's project and to organisations such as AlterFutures.

Feature 101

Immortality and Infertility in Science Fiction: Who Wants To Live Forever?

Victor Grech,
Clare Thake-Vassallo
and Ivan Callus

Abstract

THE DESIRE TO LIVE FOREVER may be hard-wired as part of our selfish gene makeup but we can have no true knowledge as to whether such a state would be desirable in the long term or not. This paper investigates the intersection of infertility with immortality, and attempts to do so by including all available narrative forms. Common tropes and excessive scientific errors are highlighted with an interdisciplinary leaning as the author is a medical doctor.

Introduction

Immortality is a common function in mythology, and the "theme of a conditional invulnerability or immortality appears with some regularity in Greek myth" (Hard 457), emphasising "the limitations of the mortal condition" (457), and our desire for endless deferrals of the dread for something after death.

Immortality in science-fiction (SF) has been extensively reviewed in critical works (Slusser), and specifically, the neurobiologist Joseph D. Miller has pragmatically addressed "what little is known of the biology of aging and death" as well as extant biological life pro-

longation techniques such as hibernation and extreme diets (Miller 81).

Indeed, it has even been suggested “that an urge for immortality [...] at the level of the gene is the basis of all behaviour” (Cooke), serving as “a desperate defense against death” (Rabkin xvi). Alternatively, it has also been argued that the longevity plot “is always a figure and a disguise for that rather different one which is historical change, radical mutations in society and collective life itself” (Jameson 32). The tack often taken by authors is that of “the motif of futility and punishment resulting from a search for immortality,” akin to the mythical Tithonus (Rosen), who was granted immortality without accompanying youth, destined to an existence of increasing decrepitude (Hard 47), prefiguring the Struldbrugs in Jonathon Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels* (1726).

Immortality in SF is too vast a subject to tackle in any reasonable length, and this paper will therefore focus on the intersection of immortality with infertility within the genre. In SF, the price of longevity or immortality is often depicted to be infertility. This is probably for three reasons: firstly to neatly eliminate the otherwise ensuing overpopulation problem at source and allow the author to concentrate on the consequences of immortality. Secondly, to create a sense of pathos and elicit sympathy for a protagonist who would otherwise be superhuman. Finally, and most importantly, as a price for not remaining effectively human, a Faustian type of bargain, as influentially discussed by Harry Levin in *The Overreacher: A Study of Christopher Marlowe* (1952). Levin discusses Marlowe’s *Faustus* (Latin for “auspicious”), a highly successful scholar who is dissatisfied with life and enters into a pact with the devil, pledging his soul for a fixed number of years of unlimited knowledge and worldly pleasures. Levin compares *Faustus* with Icarus, Simon Magnus and Cornelius Agrippa, other overreachers representative of the scientific community who succumb to temptations that they provide for themselves (108-35).

This paper will attempt a comprehensive reading of narratives that deal with the intersection of infertility with extreme longevity and immortality. All narrative forms will be entertained, and limitations of space will therefore preclude any more than a brief synopsis of each narrative. This review will also inevitably exhibit an interdisciplinary slant as the author is a medical doctor who will also highlight scientific implausibilities that go beyond the pale of acceptable poetic license as arguably, SF “was, or should be, integral to scientific

thought and research, [...] judged on those grounds, and not on merely literary ones: or, one might say, not on literary grounds at all” (James 23).

Narratives

Extreme longevity and infertility are depicted in Silverberg’s “To Be Continued” (1956) which portrays an exceptionally long-lived Roman who ages at a tenth of the normal rate, and who has finally reached maturity as evinced by a positive sperm test. He also manages to find another long-lived female, but despite her adult appearance, his ambitions to father a child are thwarted as she has not reached true sexual maturity. This story presents several implausibilities and contradictions from a biological point of view. Slow maturation would also encompass the neonatal and infant period, and it is likely that such a child would have been killed by the superstitious populace, and if not, venerated as a sending from the gods. Another improbability is the identically slow rate of aging in two individuals who are almost certainly *de novo* spontaneous mutations and not in any way related.

Extreme longevity and infertility have also been depicted in human-manufactured androids in Simmons’s *Hyperion* (1989), contrary, for example, to Scott’s short-lived androids in *Blade Runner* (1982).

The extreme end of the longevity spectrum is immortality, and this has also been depicted as inflicting sterility, again, perhaps, a form of chastisement for overreaching or instantiating an “unnatural” state. For example, in Kate Wilhelm’s “Welcome, Chaos” (1983), a small group of scientists develop a drug that kills half of the individuals that ingest it and confers immortality and sterility on the remainder through an immunological method that renders the individual immortal, freezing the individual’s age at the time when the drug is taken. In a rather anticlimactic ending, the group finds out that women can overcome their immunological response to sperm via yoga techniques. Doctors are hardly mentioned in this novel and one questions whether such a small group of true scientists would not have realised that they did not have a large enough sample of humanity to test this drug adequately, and in the circumstances, ethically, and for a discussion of the issues related to drug testing prior to public release, see Bodenheimer.

An analogous situation develops in Keller’s *Life Everlasting* (1934), when a maverick scientist develops a serum that confers extreme longevity and corrects physical defects but is afraid to try it on his son, who

has an incurable disease. He therefore tries it out on four fellow roomers that also live in his rooming house, and when it works, he makes the serum public. Unfortunately, this also causes sterility and the scientist shrugs this off as, after all, the serum would otherwise lead to massive overpopulation. A similar situation is portrayed in Eberle's *The Mordant* (1930) where an elixir provides immortality at the price of sterility and a stifling of the soul. Keller's other short story, "The Evening Star" (1930) features a small group of perfect humans on Venus with extreme longevity who are practically sterile.

Radiation not pharmacology is the source of immortality for a group of lost Incas in Milton's "The Dynasty of the Blue-Black Rays" (1930), a hollow Earth story wherein special natural radiation enables them to survive without sustenance, but they are sterile and if they leave their underground abode, will immediately die. Similarly, long-lost Atlantean descendants are discovered in whom immortality is admixed with sterility in Merritt's *The Face in the Abyss* (1923). Utilising a slightly different medical technique, Wertebaker's *The Coming of the Ice* (1926) conflates sterility and loss of libido with immortality acquired through a surgical procedure.

Extreme longevity is also conferred on the survivors of individuals who contract and survive a micro-organism on the planet Ballybran where singing crystals are mined, in McCaffrey's *The Crystal Singer* (1982), but such survivors are also rendered sterile. Adams's series *Horseclans* (1975) also depicts immortals who come about after a nuclear war and who are also sterile. Aliens confer immortality through a substance that is imbibed in water while slowly causing human sterility in Voris' *The Waters - Book One - The Valley* (2008). Fortunately, in the sequel *The Waters - Book Two - Contact* (2009), the aliens return to rectify this unforeseen problem.

In Shaw's *One Million Tomorrows* (1970), immortality is available in drug form, but males that take the immortality drug lose their sex drive. For this reason, most men take the drug when their innate sex drive wanes due to advancing age. Infertility as the cost of immortality is also seen in Simmon's *Hyperion* (1989), where a crashed spaceship crew are infected by a parasite that renders them immortal and not only sterile, but also without gonads and external sexual characteristics.

In Budrys's "The End of Summer" (1973), the protagonist creates a generator that blankets the globe with a

special type of radiation field that produces immortality by inducing all cells to maintain their status quo at the instant when the generator was switched on, thereafter preventing the changes that would be necessary for a pregnancy to develop, and also precluding new memories from being laid down, a permanent groundhog day. Similarly, Lem's *Return from The Stars* (1971) portrays an astronaut who returns to Earth after a mission that lasts in excess of a century, and who finds humanity "betrieved", a medical process that removes all aggressive impulses but dampens the sex drive.

Immortality may also be conferred as result of a near-death experience in Bester's *Extro* (1975), and the resulting men and women are also sterile. More recently, in Simmon's *Ilium* (2003), virtual immortality is also shown to cause greatly reduced fertility.

Pubertal manipulation may also result in sterile immortality. In Knight's "The Dying Man" (1957), humanity is genetically engineered to appear adult and sexually active while being actually prepubertal hormonally, and hence incapable of conception, and we are told that the rare sexual encounter that leads to pregnancy is inevitably spontaneously aborted.

Similarly, Niven's Stapledonian *A World Out of Time* (1976) merges several tropes, by depicting spiteful "Boys" and "Girls" who are immortal and extremely intelligent, prepubertal (and therefore sexually inactive), and who do not commingle across the gender divide. Almost identical tropes are depicted in the Star Trek episode "Miri" (1966) wherein the inhabitants of an extrasolar planet created a "life prolongation complex" virus that inadvertently killed all of the adults and slowed down surviving children's physical and sexual development, but these children eventually still reached puberty and die on contracting the virus. And in Marley's *The Child Goddess* (2004), a virus is also responsible for creating an extrasolar society of children exclusively, resulting in a state of perpetual prepubescence and immortality.

Immortality with ennui and voluntary infertility is glimpsed in Simmon's *Endymion* (1995), where the Church rules a vast interstellar empire and controls it by offering a guaranteed form of immortality resulting in an endless cycle of repetition without change. Children are therefore no longer vital to the continuation of the species, and are considered a liability.

Conversely, in Hamilton's Confederation universe, after a widespread unification of all of the various Christian faiths, priests are no longer celibate (and may also be female) and indeed, contraception is actually en-

dorsed, especially in the setting of a grossly overpopulated Earth. Infertility is also the lot of the immortal male-only soldiers in Langford's "Training" (1979) who are maimed and killed many times over and recover in regeneration tanks. They are conscious of their regeneration, and watching their bodies re-grow is so dehumanizing that they become impotent. Farmer's "Father" (1955) combines several tropes by depicting a women-only world where all animals are female, immortal and sterile, and a human group finds itself unable to have any form of sex, and one of the female humans who happens to be pregnant miscarries.

Not even micro-organisms are spared the infertility-immortality dichotomy, and in Blish's *They Shall Have Stars* (1956), experiments on microbial rotifers are shown to demonstrate that if they are bred for longevity, they tend to be less fertile, and vice-versa. Aliens have also had to submit to this dichotomy and Silverberg's *Downward to the Earth* (1969) refers frequently to Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899) with many of the themes experienced by Conrad's anti-hero (such as anti-colonialism and even a character named Kurtz). The novel portrays the alien inhabitants of a human ex-colony world who experience physical rebirth, and are alternately reborn as one or the other of the planet's two sentient races. This process somehow leads to few offspring being produced. Similarly, Sheckley's "The Sweeper of Loray" (1959) depicts an alien village where an endemic vegetable lengthens lifespans significantly but reduces the village's birth rate.

Interestingly, men are needed, albeit briefly, in the two Star Trek episodes, "The Lorelei Signal" (1973) and "Favorite Son" (1997), where beautiful females feed off the "life energies" of males, thus killing men to retain their immortality at the expense of infertility.

Discussion

This reading reveals a common denominator within the wider genre itself in that these narratives "recontextualize the subject of immortality, continuing to examine its influence as an ancient human aspiration while at the same time considering new scientific advances and their impact on life and literature" (Rabkin vii).

Another shared common thread is the reflection of our collective wish to enjoy existence without the vicissitudes of age and infirmity, "our culture's avoidance of that middle ground between fantasies of perpetual youth and dreams of endless life: the increasingly common reality of a greatly protracted old age" (Mangum 102).

This reading also demonstrates that immortality would mutate society in unimaginable ways, because inevitably, "in a world where eternal life is possible, there will be social change and adaptation. Human culture will flex and bend [...] There will be a feedback [...] adaptations, and society will end up influencing the way immortals live. Some of that influence may be negative" (Yoke and Hassler 186).

However, questions are raised by potential immortalisation because we may "lose our very selves. Immortality is a self-defeating fantasy, a desperate defense against death [...] who would choose such a neutered eternity?" (Rabkin xvi) and indeed, overall, fiction perceives "extended longevity, let alone the limiting case of immortality, as being in conflict with the essential human spirit, which acquires meaning in relation to mortality" (Domingo 733).

Some narratives in the genre seem to argue against immortality, implying that "true pleasure is not additive (i.e., not made "better" by being prolonged or experienced more often). If your life is a good one, and worth living, it is not made better, or more worthwhile, for having a greater duration" (Preston and Dixon 105). Would endless cycles of repetition unavoidably lead to ennui and hubris, with physical, psychological and emotional sterility? This naturally raises yet another question: would this create any tension and if so, would we really care?

It has also been stated that the "longevity plot is always a figure and a disguise for that rather different one which is historical change," that is, fear of change, and in relation to ageing, this is invariably for the worse (Jameson 34) since arguably "all fears and phobias are at bottom fears of death or of the abatement or arrest of vitality" (Stanley 550). On the other hand, "at some level, immortality is depicted there as an undesirable exclusion from the dynamic processes of normal life," (Canaan 323) an unnatural and undesirable process that may lead to "separation from the joys of heaven and the afterlife," (Rosen 128) resulting perhaps in a "cultural bias against immortality" (131). This, however, is viscerally combated since "an urge for immortality [...] at the level of the gene is the basis of all behaviour" (Cooke 90).

Perhaps this is why the conflation of infertility with immortality is the exception in SF where the inherent optimism of the genre only infrequently imposes infertility or sterility as the price of longevity or immortality, in a switch from the mammalian "disposable soma" theory which states that ageing is neither use-

ful individually nor racially, and summarises a species' options as one of these two: to expend what is effectively a finite amount of energy in maintaining stable individual organisms with multiply redundant systems, and such individuals would be virtually immortal. Or to expend energy in a process of accelerated development and sexual reproductive potential, engendering offspring but at the price of cumulative metabolic errors in the individual that will result in ageing and eventually death of the disposable soma (body), with a high level of accuracy maintained only in the germ line cells (Kirkwood and Holliday).

The opposed view is usually the case in SF, and longevity or immortality is associated with infertility in only a very small proportion of SF narratives. Arguably the most famous example in the genre of virtual immortality without sterility is Heinlein's Lazarus Long, a product of a deliberate breeding program designed to inculcate longevity by the selective breeding of humans who have long-living grandparents, a program sustained by financial incentives for those who participate. The inherent longevity of these humans is further enhanced by complete rejuvenation clinics which gradually replace nearly all body parts in combination, extending their already-long lifespans practically indefinitely, and humanity avoids overpopulation by endlessly populating new and virgin planets and living typically Heinleinian idiosyncratic lifestyles, proving that the "successful immortal [...] not only stays alive but does something satisfying with his life, [...] by avoiding confinement within a set of rules or preconceptions" (Yoke 138).

The possibility of extreme longevity or immortality has been discussed in the scientific literature, and state or societal imposition of measures that would limit population have been raised. An interesting possibility is to limit the right to reproduce only after eventual death or to forfeit this right to subsequent antiagathic therapies should individuals decide to reproduce (Harris).

Some have regarded immortality as a "denial of the sexual and generational" (Hendrix 189), and in this setting, SF posits cautionary tales, "the motif of futility and punishment resulting from a search for immortality" (Rosen 125), yet another repetition of SF's warning with regard to overreaching, as individual authors repeatedly warn readers.

Terrifying situations and a frequent "happy ending: it is the coexistence of fear for and projection towards the future that makes science fiction a popular genre in

today's world, a panacea that simultaneously fans and soothes our visions of where [...] hubris may lead us." (Thake Vassallo 177).

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Visions of Mars: Essays on the Red Planet in Fiction and Science

Wendy Bousfield

Howard V. Hendrix, George Slusser, and Eric S. Rabkin, eds. *Visions of Mars: Essays on the Red Planet in Fiction and Science*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2011. Paper, 216 pages, \$40.00, ISBN 978-0-7864-5914-8.

“CHRONICLING MARS” the J. Lloyd Eaton conference (Riverside, California, May 2008) generated dialogue among academics and science fiction writers. *Visions of Mars*, the volume it inspired, reflects the intellectual excitement of this occasion. Besides transcripts of panel discussions on the future of Martian science fiction, *Visions* includes an address by Kim Stanley Robinson and seventeen scholarly essays, all but one revised conference papers. Most essays are elegant, insightful, and formidably researched, though unfortunately, a handful are slight while a few are atrociously written. Nonetheless, considered together, the contents of *Visions* address the major concern of conference-goers: how have changing scientific conclusions about Mars shaped science fiction, past, present, and future?

Three themes underlie the academic essays in *Visions*. First, Mars fiction is a metaphor for earthly social problems. Howard V. Hendrix (“The Martian in the Mirror”) and Sha LaBare (“Chronicling Martians”) both discuss ecologically-based Martian fiction: cautionary tales reflecting our guilt about species loss. Second, some *Visions* essays demystify evolving scientific theories about Mars. In “Mars of Science, Mars of Dreams,” Joseph D. Miller explains the astronomical and biological beliefs shaping three periods of Martian fiction: “Romantic,” based on the “discovery” of Martian “canals”; “Sterile,” based on Mariner’s images of Mars’s cratered, moon-like surface; and “Realistic,” in which newly discovered “extremophiles” have fueled speculation about microbial life on Mars. Third, most *Visions* essays focus on writers of influential Martian fiction. George Slusser (“Rosny’s Mars”) and Robert Crossley (“Mars as a Cultural Mirror”) call on monolingual Americans to recognize the seminal nature of, respectively, French and Czech Martian novels.

Ray Bradbury and Kim Stanley Robinson, those colossi who bestride the world of Martian fiction, attended the Eaton conference and were the subject of scholarly papers. Eric Rabkin (“Is Mars Heaven?”) honors Bradbury as the first science fiction writer to be treated seriously by the literary establishment. Christopher Palmer (“Kim Stanley Robinson: From *Icehenge* to *Blue Mars*”) finds a common pattern in Robinson’s four Mars books: characters driven by a scientific compulsion to “register, describe and understand” are confronted by mysteries that transcend scientific understanding.

Bradbury’s golden-eyed, telepathic, doomed Martians are literary icons. Unfortunately, in a dialogue with Frederik Pohl, eighty-seven year-old Bradbury sounds grumpy and cantankerous, ranting about Hollywood’s corruption of young science fiction writers. Though Bradbury’s “Plenary Lecture” was not included in *Visions*, Pohl summarizes it: “modern science fiction’s all trash” (186).

In “Martian Musings,” which describes the literary, scientific, and personal factors shaping *Red*, *Green*, and *Blue Mars*, Kim Stanley Robinson acknowledges his own debt to Bradbury. Robinson extrapolates from *Martian Chronicles* “laws” that underlie his own trilogy and other Martian fictions: first, an extinct or senescent Martian civilization haunts explorers; second, terraforming Mars violates the planet’s integrity; third, humans living on Mars become Martians. Besides Bradbury, Robinson cites Russian, German, and English-language authors who influenced his exceedingly allusive Mars novels. These include Aleksandr Bogdanov’s *Red Star* (1905), the subject of Ekaterina Yudina’s “Dibs on the Red Star” (and, clearly, the inspiration for the trilogy’s “Bogdanovist” revolutionaries). Besides citing scientific studies of Mars that shaped the trilogy, Robinson claimed to have been influenced by his engagement with alternative societies. Indeed, Robinson’s Mars novels feature many small ethnic enclaves, whose members combine earthly ethnic traditions with new Martian customs. Rivaling *Martian Chronicles* in its literary influence, Robinson’s trilogy addresses, through its talkative, intellectually questing characters, all the themes debated at the Eaton conference.

In conclusion, the unique value *Visions of Mars* lies in its multiple viewpoints. Two recent, substantial university press books cover much the same ground: Robert Markley’s *Dying Planet: Mars in Science and the Imagination* (2005) and Robert Crossley’s *Imagining Mars: A Literary History* (2011). *Visions*’ strength is that scholars and writers debate influences on Martian fiction

and speculate about its future. *Visions*, unfortunately, deserves better copyediting and fact checking. Though readers will undoubtedly skip some poorly written essays, I recommend *Visions of Mars* for academic and general readers and for libraries.

Becoming Ray Bradbury

Patrick R. Casey

Jonathan R. Eller. *Becoming Ray Bradbury*. Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press. 2011. Hardcover, 324 pages, \$34.95, ISBN 978-0-252-03629-3.

THE STRIKING ASPECT of Jonathan R. Eller's new Ray Bradbury biography, *Becoming Ray Bradbury*, is not the depth of the research (more than 10 years of nearly unprecedented access to Bradbury and his work) or its clear and easy readability. What's striking is how little "plot," in terms of family history or interpersonal relationships, is necessary to create the sensation that the reader knows and understands Bradbury as a person and a writer. In this sense, *Becoming Ray Bradbury*, is a very Bradburyian biography. Eller focuses on the stories, the metaphors, shaping Bradbury's view of himself and his work, rather than on dramatic events or even sustained, interpersonal interactions.

This isn't to suggest that Eller's biography is simply a list of literary influences. All the major biographical milestones of Bradbury's first 34 years are accounted for: birth, schooling, career, and marriage. However, these actual social-historical events are never the core of the biography. This emphasis on metaphors is illustrated in the first sentence of the very first chapter, "From the Nursery to the Library," where Eller relates Bradbury's claim to remember "the trauma of birth, the sensation of breastfeeding, the pain of circumcision, and the infant nightmares of being born" (9). Eller ties these claims to another Bradbury anecdote about a chance boardwalk encounter with a museum displaying human fetuses before relating these images of birth and infancy to Bradbury's stories "The Small Assassin" and "The Jar." It is only after examining these stories that Eller supplies the simple narrative details of Bradbury's actual birth on August 22, 1920 in Waukegan, Illinois. For much of the 288 page biography (notes excluded), Bradbury's "close and loving" family appear as removed from his development as his father and brother were

when they attended a baseball game across town on the day of his birth (9). Though Bradbury lived with them until his marriage in 1947, well into his writing career, they appear as only distant influences on his image of himself and his work. Even his Midwest childhood, which influences much of his best work, is evoked only as it appears as reimagined memories in his literary work. Bradbury's real influences, Eller implies, are the works of other authors. Eller makes this influence clear in the first chapter by moving Bradbury into the Waukegan public library within one page of his birth. It is in libraries, bookstores and writer's workshops (both formal and informal) in Waukegan and, later, Los Angeles that Ray Bradbury truly becomes Ray Bradbury.

Eller does a truly commendable job tracking these literary influences, from *Argosy* magazine's Peter the Brazen serials (supplied to him as child by his father), to teenage obsessions with science fiction and other genre authors, to more mature interests in neoclassical and Romantic poets fostered by friends such as Edmond Hamilton (who led Bradbury to Shakespeare's sonnets, romantic poets, and the works of Dickinson and Gerard Manley Hopkins) as well as his wife Marguerite (whose appearances in the biography are largely limited to her role in fostering a love of Kafka and other European writers). Bradbury's flirtations with modernist writers such as Eliot and Pound whose philosophies differ so dramatically from his own romantic instincts, explain his inability to construct a full length novel until he is finally able to accept Henry Kuttner's advice to "lay off this soul-searching stuff" and instead recognize that "it's your own final judgment that's important" (113).

Genre fiction fans and academics will undoubtedly love these details. The uninitiated or even the merely mildly curious are unlikely to share the same enthusiasm, though, as Eller relies a good bit on his audience already having a fairly deep knowledge of the history of science fiction, the tension between the pulps and the literary journals as well as the creative work of players central to Bradbury's personal development. Of course, the uninitiated and mildly curious are not the most likely audience for a text like this in the first place, so even these assumptions amount to little more than a slight annoyance.

A slightly more substantial complaint is that by focusing so much on literature, influences outside of literature are sometimes given too brief (or at least unfulfilling) treatments in the biography. Personal relationships seem to revolve around the books they shared and revisions they suggested. In a sense, this is

fine; it doesn't necessarily detract from Eller's ability to convey Bradbury's struggles and goals as a writer. However, it does occasionally make it feel as if some decades long relationships exist solely within the confines of a writer's workshop. Even Bradbury's relationship with Grant Beach, a man whose friendship both directly and indirectly led Bradbury into a deeper exploration of the Hispanic community of Los Angeles and the history and culture of Mexico (both of which play significant roles in Bradbury's work), is used primarily as a metaphor for Bradbury breaking free of his own insecurities as a writer. Again, this doesn't necessarily detract from the biography's ability to confer insight into Bradbury. It does, however, suggest that many details have been omitted or refined in order to better serve the story as a whole.

Perhaps this approach to relationships is fitting given Bradbury's own eventual acceptance of his writing as a flash of intuition followed by years of obsessive rewriting (even after publication). In fact, perhaps there is no other way to truly explain Bradbury's view of himself and his work. He is a work of both unfettered inspiration and persistent revision.

By 1953, as Bradbury sets off for Europe to work with director John Huston and *Fahrenheit 451* is prepared for American release, Eller finds that "all of [Bradbury's] strengths as a creative writer were firmly established – as were his shortcomings" (284). "He had become a master of exploring his own childhood terrors, but his work also came to manifest adult ambivalence concerning life and death and identity" (286). These mature years are left a story for a future biography. Bradbury fans and scholars can only hope that Eller will exam these years with the same depth, enthusiasm, and insight that he brings to the first 34 years of Bradbury's life.

Walter M. Miller, Jr. A Reference Guide to His Fiction and His Life

Dominick Grace

William H. Robertson. *Walter M. Miller, Jr. A Reference Guide to His Fiction and His Life*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2011. Paper, x + 208 pages, \$40.00, ISBN 978-0-7864-6361-9, e-book ISBN 978-0-7864-8710-3.

THIS BOOK IS NEITHER A STUDY nor an analysis of Walter M. Miller, Jr's work, as its title indicates. Robertson states that the "entries are meant to be informational rather than critical, but critical judgments are occasionally implied or explicit"; the book, he says, "provides a resource to verify information concerning the novels and stories as well as an introduction and avenue to the works beyond *A Canticle For Leibowitz*" (2). Consequently, the audience most likely to find the book useful is the undergraduate student or perhaps a teacher using Miller for the first time in a course. More knowledgeable scholars will find an up to date (as of the time of the book's publication, anyway) bibliography of primary and secondary resources, but what is useful about those resources is rarely reflected in the entries in the book proper. In fact, these secondary sources are rarely referenced in the entries, nor are there entries for even the major critical studies, though there are entries for all the authors and works either reviewed by Miller or included in the *Beyond Armageddon* anthology he co-edited. At least a few entries on the most useful studies would have been more valuable than entries on the authors of stories included in a book Miller co-edited.

As a reference work of entries, organized alphabetically, of subjects pertaining to Miller's work (primarily) and life (secondarily), this book provides a useful array of information, from synopses of every story Miller published (listed by title), through all characters named in any story (listed by name and/or title—if Robertson missed anyone, I didn't notice), as well as important terms or concepts or phrases used in any story—especially useful on this front for anyone poorly versed in Latin or other languages, as all Miller's non-English quotations and original passages are included, sourced, and translated. Many of the entries do provide more than just factual information, though fact is the focus. The entries on names, for instance, often offer very helpful explanations of the provenances (e.g. Biblical sources) as well as symbolic associations that can be drawn from character names. These would be good examples of points at which critical content is included. Anyone not intimately familiar with Miller's work will find things he or she did not know in this book. However, the most explicit critical judgment in any entry refers to the prefatory piece "Alibi," appearing in *Beyond Armageddon*, about which Robertson concludes, "It is of questionable taste and perhaps better left unpublished" (9). Why this minor piece by Miller, of all things, is the one about which Robertson chooses to make his only explicitly critical (in the popular sense of

the word) comment is unclear, but it is perhaps paradigmatic of the limitations of this book.

This is a useful and detailed book, but it is also one editorial round short of being really satisfactory. One hopes that a final round of close reading and review might have identified such sore-thumb moments as the one just mentioned, as well as some of the errors and oversights. No such book is likely to be organized perfectly, in the eyes of every reader, but one problem with this book is the inconsistency of cross-referencing. Unless Robertson explicitly directs the reader to another entry, in which case he boldfaces that entry, there is no clear indication within entries of which elements mentioned therein are also the subject themselves of separate entries. Admittedly, entries full of boldface or bracketed (qv) references can be a distraction, and admittedly, it is often relatively easy to infer which terms are likely to have separate entries; however, it is also often not easy so to infer, especially for the relatively neophyte readers for whom this book would seem most suited. Furthermore, some terms for which there should be separate entries do not receive them. A few entries on the story “It Takes a Thief,” for instance, refer to a hüffen, apparently a rideable creature, but there is no entry for that neologism, so the reader curious to know what exactly a hüffen is must track down the story to find out, rather than simply flipping to the appropriate page here. More significant, the term “Thon,” so important in the two novels, has no entry to explain what it means. If one reading the book can find internal evidence of such omissions, one is unlikely to have faith in the comprehensiveness of the book overall.

More problematic are the far too frequent and surprisingly basic errors (“tenants” for “tenets” twice on the same page; “dominate” for “dominant”; the name of an alien species repeatedly spelled two different ways in the same entry; lie/lay confusions; and other errors of the level one expects to find in undergraduate essays are far too common here) as well as errors of fact, the most notable of which is the description of the robots in Čapek’s *R.U.R.* as “mechanical men” (147). Occasionally, bad phraseology makes an entry say something other than what it means, as in the entry on Blessed Chang, which includes the assertion that Abbot Arkos is “upset that Brother Francis will not categorically deny that the pilgrim he met in the desert is not the Blessed Leibowitz,” when what Arkos wants is for Francis to deny that the Pilgrim is Leibowitz. In a book that presents itself as explicitly informational in nature, such errors of fact are unfortunate, as when one spots such an error, one

must wonder how many other such errors may be present elsewhere. A reference book becomes problematic when one feels compelled to check its references.

As far as I can determine, errors of fact are relatively rare. However, errors of omission are more frequent, and grammatical (or typographical, or editorial) errors occur far too frequently—there are literally dozens of instances of them. The book’s reliability is therefore compromised, especially since the readers most likely to need a book like this are also the ones least likely to be alert to such errors.

The Lying Brain: Lie Detection in Science and Science Fiction

Kevin Pinkham

Melissa M. Littlefield. *The Lying Brain: Lie Detection in Science and Science Fiction*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2011. Paper, 203 pages, \$28.95, ISBN 978-0472051489.

SINCE THE MARK OF CAIN, various cultures have believed that guilt and deception could be read in the body of the guilty party. Twentieth-century Americans came to believe that a trained polygraph artist could root out deception simply by paying attention to the subtle variations in the ways a graph recorded a suspect’s physiological responses. For any scholar or layperson interested in the history and application of lie detection technologies, *The Lying Brain* offers an informative overview of how lie detection has been promoted in American culture, both through scholarly research and through genre fiction such as scientific detective stories and science fiction. While not exhaustive, the book does condense an impressive amount of information into a readily accessible 148 pages of main text and provides extensive resources for further study in the remaining pages of notes and works cited.

Running the gamut from the early stages of fingerprinting through the development of the polygraph to contemporary functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) and Brain Fingerprinting technologies, the book provides a cultural history of lie detecting. The author, Melissa Littlefield, triangulates literature and science studies with Science, Technology, and Society (STS) scholarship, and is primarily concerned with:

cultural assumptions about deception and its

mechanical detection: that lies are measurable phenomena that manifest themselves in the body's physiology, particularly in the autonomic and central nervous systems; that the body produces objective data that are easily and unambiguously interpretable; and that deception demands the knowledge and suppression of truth. (2-3)

Over the course of the book, the author reveals her concern that these cultural assumptions are grounded less in real-life experiences of deception and more in strictly controlled laboratory experiments, and that popular literatures helped to reinforce those assumptions in the reading public's imaginations.

The first chapter explores the applied psychology of Hugo Münsterberg, who believed that elements of emotions were beyond conscious control and would reveal themselves through physiology, thus providing tools that could be used in law enforcement. As Münsterberg's theories were gaining some attention, two contemporary Chicago reporters, Edwin Balmer and William MacHarg, began to write the adventures of Luther Trant, a psychologist-detective whose use of instruments from experimental psychology to interrogate suspects is clearly aligned with Münsterberg's theories and offers readers the first application of such technologies to forensic investigations. The author argues that the both Münsterberg's work and the Trant stories created a space in the cultural imagination for the possibility of applying technology to achieve a more reliable and ultimately more humane form of interrogation.

The second chapter explores William Marston's experiments in trying to measure the physiological traces of what he called the "Deceptive Consciousness," which he felt manifested in "the struggle between conscious, voluntary suppression and involuntary, unconscious expression" (53). The author examines Marston's controlled laboratory experiments that ostensibly supported his theories but questions their objectivity. One of the weaknesses the author sees in Marston's experiments was that the interrogator was often privy to the "truth" created by the structure of the experiment, an issue rarely, if ever, encountered in actual forensic investigations.

The third and fourth chapters contain the strongest concentration of information of interest to SFRA members. In chapter three, the author discusses how a group of short stories—"The Thought Translator" by Merab Ebertle, "The Thought Stealer" by Frank Bourne, "From

the Wells of the Brain" by Paul Ernst, and "The Ideal" by Stanley Weinbaum—and a novel, Alfred Bester's *The Demolished Man*, contributed to the idea that thought was an energy form that could be represented physically by various technologies or interpreted by those with sufficient training, reinforcing the pedigree of the polygraph. Chapter four focuses primarily on the history of fingerprinting as a means of assuming that our identities are inscribed upon our bodies. Exploring how popular fiction has reinforced the location of identity in the body, the author discusses Jack Finney's novel *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, in which the forming bodies of the invading pod-people have no fingerprints, a fact that is perhaps more unnerving to the protagonists than the fact that forming pod-people have no faces. This discomfort reveals the level to which fingerprinting as the most reliable form of identification had come to dominate the public's imagination and still does today, as often seen in television police procedurals.

The fifth chapter is most relevant to our post-9/11 world, revealing how Brain Fingerprinting and fMRI technology have contributed to beliefs that certain locations of the brain are associated with deception and, as a result, truth can somehow be found through technological means in the brain. In chapter five, the author explores James Halperin's *The Truth Machine*, which envisions the future of lie detecting using technologies rather similar to electroencephalography and fMRI. Through a brief discussion of the novel and an extensive discussion of emerging brain technologies, the author exposes how our culture has come to believe that the brain can be made to reveal truths that the mind tries desperately to conceal, useful when hunting terrorists. Both the author and Halperin discuss the problems inherent in looking for a single solution to uncovering deception and getting to the truth, however promising that solution might appear to be at first glance. For a world horrified by public accounts of waterboarding and other forms of torture designed to get at the truth, a belief that simply connecting a suspect to a machine to discover that truth is a comforting, if potentially suspect, belief. As the author reveals throughout her book, the attempt to find more humane means of interrogation has been a driving force behind the search for more accurate lie-detection technologies and has contributed to the public's hope that finding the truth could be as simple as connecting a brain to a machine.

The coda to the book compares *The Demolished Man* and *The Truth Machine* to explore their remarkable

similarities, primarily in the way both novels reveal the history of lie detection and the cultural assumptions that have accompanied that history: that deception can be read on the body, that the body is incapable of hiding the truth, and that lies and truth are much more intertwined than we would like them to be (148).

The book is highly recommended for a university research library and would serve the needs of a smaller college with a criminal justice or forensic science program quite well; its affordable price and clear writing could be quite appealing to a larger public library. For the science fiction scholar, the book ultimately does not have as much to offer as the title might indicate, focusing more on the history, technology, and science of lie detecting than on science fiction; however, the author's readings of Bester, Halperin, and Finney will be of great interest to scholars delving into their works or to anyone interested in the cultural construction of the mind.

The Twisted Worlds of Philip K. Dick: A Reading of Twenty Ontologically Uncertain Novels

Bruce Lindsley Rockwood

Umberto Rossi. *The Twisted Worlds of Philip K. Dick: A Reading of Twenty Ontologically Uncertain Novels*. Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland, 2011. Paper, vii + 308 pages, \$45.00, ISBN 978-0-7864-4883-8, e-book ISBN 978-0-7864-8629-8.

UMBERTO ROSSI is an Italian independent scholar who has written on science fiction, postmodernist fiction and the American novel. He has previously published on Philip K. Dick in Italian: *Trasmigrazioni: I mondi di Philip K. Dick*, co-edited with Valerio Massimo de Angelis, Le Monnier, Firenze (2006): *The Proceedings of the P2KD: P.K. Dick at the Millennium International Conference* held at the University of Macerata, Italy in 2000, with papers by Fredric Jameson, Peter Fitting, Darko Suvin, Carlo Pagetti, Carlo Formenti, and Franco La Polla. The volume under review reflects his scholarship on Dick since that time, takes advantage of the work of Italian scholars not easily available to American scholars, and indicates a thorough and comprehensive reading of the primary and secondary sources, including extensive use of the published letters

of Dick from his *Selected Letters*, volumes 1 through 6, published between 1991 and 2010.

One of the primary benefits of reading this book is the thematic arrangement of his analysis of the texts, and its systematic introduction and comparison of the existing critical literature about Dick in relation to the twenty major texts under scrutiny. Readers familiar with some but not all of the works under discussion (such as myself) can assess the accuracy and insights of his analysis with respect to the works we have read, and then reliably learn a great deal about the lesser-known novels and stories of Dick. This can provoke an interest in reading more of Dick's work, and a reassessment of the significance of his entire corpus.

As the subtitle of the book suggests, a major theme of Rossi's assessment of Dick's writings is the continual appearance of ontological uncertainty in his novels, and an appraisal of how this uncertainty is examined by critics from a variety of perspectives—Jameson, Baudrillard, Disch, Robinson, Lethem, Freedman, Suvin and many others. His thorough introduction to the volume notes:

Dick's very personal interpretation of Jameson's solid academic analyses might be easily branded as a misreading, but since Dick's unorthodox use of neurological theories gave as one of his best novels, *A Scanner Darkly*, it should be seen as creative misreading. . . . [W]hat is at stake . . . is the difficulty of directly grasping the world (as it is or as it is depicted in fiction), as something immediately meaningful, as something evident in itself. (8)

Rossi summarizes Tzvetan Todorov's idea of the "pure fantastic as a hesitation between two different explanations of a certain event" and adapts it to his reading of Dick by suggesting that Dick's novels do not merely represent an alternative between the natural and supernatural, but also between factual and counterfactual, between two counterfactual realities (*The Man in the High Castle*), or between two supernatural realities (*Ubik*). "Uncertainty is however not necessarily applied to whole worlds; we are often uncertain about the ontological status of single beings or objects in Dick's counterfactual, sfnal or realistic worlds." (14) He then discusses Thomas A. Disch's assessment of Dick's technique of playing "the Game of the Rat," that is, "[C]hanging the rules of a game while playing is quite similar to changing the ontological status of the/a world, a place, a character, an object while telling a story" (15). This lends insight to his reading of Dick's

works and Rossi suggests that:

Dick's *Game of the Rat* also asks for certain narrative techniques. Surely one of these is strictly connected to the idea of finite subjective realities, that is, that each individual lives in a different world, or *idios kosmos*; it is the multiple plot technique (possibly derived from Dos Passos), where a third person narrative is coupled with multiple narrative foci. (19-20)

The concept of "Finite Subjective Realities" (FSR) was developed by Dick drawing on a several psychiatric theories and which can be used to provide alternative realities by providing "pocket parallel universes . . . projected by the minds of single individuals thanks to drugs or VR technologies" or "delusional realities which are projected by the deranged minds . . . of one or more characters" (17). Rossi points out that Dick's student Jonathan Lethem "based his novel *Amnesia Moon* on this device" (17).

Rossi concludes his introduction with a map of the book, outlining which texts he will compare against the themes he chooses to emphasize. Chapter One assesses *The Cosmic Puppets* and *The Game-Players of Titan* to illustrate "the idea of Dick's fiction as a rigged game" while Chapter Two explores this further in *Eye in the Sky* and *Time Out of Joint*, where he shows how Dick can move among genres within a text and call into doubt the *koinos kosmos* (shared world) of his readers (21). Other chapters address the classic works (*The Man in the High Castle*, *The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch*, *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep*, etc.) in comparison with each other and with less widely read works (*Martian Time-Slip*, *Dr. Bloodmoney*, *Now Wait for Last Year*, *We Can Build You*, etc.). Techniques explored include "discussion of the relation between the worlds inside the novel, and its readers' understanding of the world they live in" and the use of multiple plots and narrative foci, time travel as a device to "achieve ontological uncertainty," Dick's frequent use of finite subjective realities (FSR) and the uncertain status of characters who may be human, android or simulacra. Chapters 8, 9 and 10 address the VALIS trilogy, where "the three novels are structured according to new applications of narrative devices Dick has already used" (21-22).

Each of the chapters is an essay in itself worth close examination, full of detailed quotations and critical assessment of the prior critical literature, and there is extensive cross-referencing among the texts as Rossi builds his argument. His frequent tables help sort out the comparative plot elements and stylistic techniques

Dick deploys (at pages 48, 60, 65, 85, 112, 121, 129, and 178). There is a certain amount of repetition as he refers to the same works in different chapters, but this does not diminish the readability and high value the book provides to any Dick scholar or any serious fan of Dick's work who wishes to come closer to understanding this key writer of 20th century science fiction. The book appears to have been originally written in Italian, and there is some inconsistency in grammar that flows from this translation. Had I read the MS I could have pointed out a few editorial corrections. That being said, this is an excellent resource that should be in any university library collection and many private collections as well. The softcover binding is well designed, but a hardcover reprinting with corrections for a second edition would enhance its longevity as a library resource for years to come.

Race in American Science Fiction

Christy Tidwell

Isiah Lavender III. *Race in American Science Fiction*.

Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2011.

Paper, 269 pages, \$24.95, ISBN 978-0-253-22259-6.

THE STUDY OF RACE in science fiction has been growing in importance in recent years and Isiah Lavender III's work on the topic comes at just the right time to take advantage of that growing critical attention. However, *Race in American Science Fiction*, although clearly addressing a scholarly gap and an important issue, has serious limitations.

Lavender's basic argument is simple: race and racism in sf have been overlooked and we must now redress that oversight. To this end, Lavender includes discussions of big name writers like Samuel Delany and Octavia Butler as well as less well-known (or less frequently discussed) writers and texts—such as Sam Greenlee's *The Spook Who Sat By the Door*, Walter Mosley's *Futureland*, Robert Moore Williams' "Robot's Return," and Philip K. Dick's "The Electric Ant." He also re-examines popular works of sf by white writers with racism and racial issues in mind, such as H. G. Wells' *The Time Machine*, Isaac Asimov's *I, Robot*, and William Gibson's *Neuromancer*. This variety is the book's greatest strength as it makes race in sf an issue that ranges outside its normal bounds and introduces the reader to new texts and interpretations.

Lavender argues that this oversight is caused by tradi-

tional elements of sf—including science itself. Certainly, history shows that science has been used to racist ends in the past, but Lavender's critique of science in sf is extremely problematic. He argues that "[t]he authority of science and its perception of superiority is a fallacy built on social and political prejudice," that "[p]ublic respect for science is affirmed on the mere appearance of scientific authority" (51), and that this fallacious authority is used to mask issues of race in sf. Therefore, he writes, "one of the functions of sf is to draw attention to and challenge racist and ethnocentric attitudes, in part by interrogating science" (52). The goal of interrogating science and thereby challenging racist and ethnocentric attitudes is laudable, but in his discussion Lavender often fails to distinguish between science as a whole and social Darwinism, thereby damaging his argument as he misrepresents and seems to reject all of science and overstates his own claims.

When he does engage with science more broadly, his outlook is overwhelmingly negative. He writes that "our technological advances seem to continually divide humanity along fault lines of various differences, including race" (97) and reveals a fear that "humanity could be victimized by its reliance on technology in the future" (196). This negativity and fear further limits his argument, as it isn't fully explored. His coverage of race in American sf might be opened up in intriguing and useful ways if his study made room for a more positive and empowering vision of science alongside these fears.

Lavender also argues that familiar analytical tools such as Suvin's cognitive estrangement mask race and racism in sf: "I believe racist attitudes are masked via cognitive estrangement (science) or changed via subjectivity (ifness), but they are revealed and examined via otherhood (race approach). Race and racism are obscured by these otherwise fascinating modes of reading" (31). This suggests that traditional modes of thinking about and approaching sf are ineffective because they do not address the topic directly. Lavender repeatedly argues for a direct approach to race, writing of Ray Bradbury's "Way in the Middle of the Air," for instance, that, "Unlike Asimov, who used robots to clandestinely talk about race, Bradbury takes on the subject of race directly" (96). He goes on to argue that "[t]his story is unique in 'mainstream' sf in its scathing critique of American racism . . . which does not displace race through alien beings or replace American culture with a pretend culture. In other words, it is a direct extrapolation of the existing relations between the

racism in 1950" (98). This dichotomy between direct and indirect approaches to the issue raises more questions than it answers, however. Why is the direct approach better? The fact that sf is able to deal with tough issues in ways that are not direct but that are still effective is usually considered one of its strengths, so why does Lavender seem to dismiss it? Sadly, this is never fully explored.

Finally, Lavender's book introduces some new terminology to the discussion of race in sf in an effort to develop a new critical framework: "I propose a new definition of a critical idea already in existence—the other—by combining a sense of it with personhood (identity) and neighborhood (environment) to produce a notion of 'otherhood'" (7). This is an intriguing concept and one that could potentially be useful for teaching in this field, but the term is defined very broadly and lacks a concrete model for its use. Furthermore, when used in context later in the book, it does not seem function differently from pre-existing sf terminology. In one example, Lavender describes it as part of developing "a new and separate society, another neighborhood to live in on a separate planet free of anxiety, depression, and self-defeating thoughts—an otherhood" (98). Its use here raises the question of why "otherhood" and not simply "separatist utopia"? The field already has language to express this idea; why do we need new terminology? Ultimately, Lavender's terminology is not convincing because he doesn't adequately show its necessity.

The central problem of this book is that although Lavender has interesting claims and ideas, they are underdeveloped. He frequently moves quickly from idea to idea, without pausing to fully explain the connections he's making or to provide evidence for some of his claims. The most striking instance of this occurs early on when he claims that Joss Whedon's *Dollhouse* suffered in the ratings primarily because viewers feared the presence of an interracial relationship. This book is on an important topic at the right time and so should be considered in the growing conversations about race in American science fiction, but I look forward to more refined and concrete arguments in the future, both from Lavender and from others.

Reamde

Christopher Hellstrom

Neal Stephenson. *Reamde*. New York: William Morrow, 2011. Hardcover, 1056 pages, \$35.00, ISBN: 978-0061977961.

WHEN THE TITLE *Reamde* was announced, it seemed that it was a dog whistle to fans of what many consider his best work, *Cryptonomicon*. *Reamde*, meant to be read as a misspelling of *Readme* (and the name of a computer virus in the novel) seemed a return to Stephenson's hacker culture roots. When I first read the title, I thought it might be pronounced "reamed" and that it would have a great deal of Stephenson's signature violence, or perhaps a misspelling of "remade" to connote a change in direction in his writing (Stephenson pronounces it Ream-DEE). It was not the title, however, but the designation of the novel's genre as a "thriller" that worried SF fans most. SF fans stand out from readers of others genres because of the types of expectations they have of their favorite authors. Just as *Star Wars* fans feel they could map out the perfect movie using the characters created by George Lucas, Stephenson fans seem to have expectations of the unrealized Platonic ideal of the Stephensonian masterwork. But what do fans expect from Stephenson? And where does the thriller *Reamde* fit in the scheme of Stephenson's career thus far?

Stephenson, while writing 1000-page books with ambitious titles (*The System of the World*) does not have such mapped out literary goals in mind. He writes what interests him and has said that he could easily write a long series and revisit popular characters in his "Snow Crash" or "Baroque Cycle" universe and they would in all likelihood continue to sell. While many SF writers will stick to a particular formula and set of tropes, Stephenson has an impressive intellectual range and ambition. With each work, Stephenson has moved from thrillers (*Interface*) to post-cyberpunk (his break-out novel *Snow Crash*) to historical fiction (*The Baroque Cycle*) to space opera (*Anathem*). Thematically, Stephenson takes on many of the controversies of our time from artificial intelligence, educational practices, to the birth of the modern monetary system and the Many Worlds Theory Interpretation of Quantum Mechanics. Though *Reamde* is a "thriller," it contains certain recur-

ring Stephensonian tropes. These include 1) A celebration of geek culture and techno cultural observations 2) The privileging of makers and doers over pure abstract thinkers 3) Physical action 4) One or two "big ideas" that fuel Stephenson's interests and creative energies.

Like most Stephenson novels, *Reamde* references traditional geek totems like the role playing games, *Dungeons and Dragons*, Tolkien, and hacker culture. The character of Richard Forthrast is the most realized and appealing. The opening scene builds the mythology of Richard and creates an appreciation for Midwestern values we see explored elsewhere in Stephenson's writing, most notably in his recent Introduction to David Foster Wallace's *Everything and More: A Compact History of Infinity*. Richard is a draft dodging marijuana smuggler who creates a wildly popular *World of Warcraft* competitor, T'Rain. *Reamde* comes alive as a narrative in its description of how T'Rain works. Stephenson has called SF "idea porn," and it is precisely the digressive info dump worked into the narrative that makes *Reamde* entertaining in parts.

Richard Forthrast hires two writers, a Tolkien-esque Donald Cameron, and Devin Skraelin, a Fantasy hack writer to help build the T'Rain world. The two quarrel over Skaraelin's overuse of apostrophe and Cameron's attempts to remove them, an event called Apostropocalypse. These are the types of gonzo digressions that remind fans of the funnier sections of *Cryptonomicon*, such as the one that describes the proper way to eat Captain Crunch cereal and eight pages about antique furniture fetishes.

The other satisfying aspect of *Reamde's* narrative is the unique observations about technology and culture. These thoughts bring to mind the work of William Gibson and one such example is the attention paid to color codes for work and family obligations in Richard's Outlook calendar. Here is another example, with Stephenson writing about the relationship Richard has with his GPS system: "The GPS unit became almost equally obstreperous, though, over Richard's unauthorized route change, until they finally passed over some invisible cybernetic watershed between two possible ways of getting to their destination, and it changed its fickle little mind and began calmly telling him which way to proceed as if this had been its idea all along."

There are points of *Reamde* that really get to the heart of what it is like to live right now in the same way *Kmart* or *Dirty Realism* did in the eighties. Stephenson, keenly observant of the culture, mentions Walmart often, as a permanent, ubiquitous fixture of

American life. “Walmart was not so much a starship as an interdimensional portal to every other Walmart in the known universe.” This type of observation, this Walmart Realism, makes way for the weaker sections of the book, the very long action and chase scenes. The very aspects that make *Reamde* a thriller are the least thrilling parts of the novel.

Reamde moves from a novel about Chinese goldfarming and the *Reamde* virus inside the T’Rain game to an overly complicated plot involving Al Qaida, survivalists, and many fetishistic descriptions of guns. This fits into Stephenson’s stress on the “doer” over the “academic” and by extension the importance of physical combat in his novels. Stephenson’s work on the online serial novel *Mongoliad* is an outlet for his interest in western martial arts. Even the philosophical first contact novel *Anathem* contained practitioners of “Vale-Lore” which seemed merely an excuse to bring Ninjas into what is essentially a fictionalized Gödel Escher Bach. However, the disappointment with *Reamde* is among those who think that a literary Gödel Escher Bach, the ultimate in idea porn, is a good idea. *The Baroque Cycle* had the philosophical Newton/ Leibnitz scenes as well as swashbuckling pirate scenes. *Reamde* is mostly pirate scenes.

Buried in the narrative are fragments of ideas that are of interest to Stephenson and will probably turn up in his future fiction. One of these is the idea of Grace. “Maybe this was all down to some supernatural effect, such as Grace, that flowed through people’s lives even if they didn’t understand why.” Stephenson’s idea of Grace recalls the idea of “mystery” in Richard Ford’s *The Sportswriter* from his Bascombe Trilogy. In another Stephenson novel this concept of Grace would be explored in greater detail and “hacked” properly so we would have a better understanding of it. We can see Stephenson’s willingness to embrace contradiction against the idea of Grace in his description of Richard’s belief that “there was an objective reality, which all people worth talking to could observe and understand, and that there was no point in arguing about anything that could be so observed and so understood.” However, with the limitations of the thriller genre this type of speculation about mysterious Grace and the cold mechanics of objective reality are not explored with any amount of depth.

Stephenson’s next novel will go in yet another direction, SF in the Heinleinian fashion that he hopes will inspire our ability to “get big things done.” Stephenson has attempted to remake the thriller, cyberpunk, and

the historical novel, and it will be interesting to see how he will defy expectations with his take on the traditional near future space opera as well.

Tesseracts 15

Amy J. Ransom

Czerneda, Julie, and Susan MacGregor, eds. *Tesseracts 15: A Case of Quite Curious Tales*. Calgary: Edge SF & F, 2011. Paperback, 280 pages, \$15.95, ISBN 978-1-894063-58-6.

IN 1985 JUDITH MERRIL inaugurated the *Tesseracts* anthologies of Canadian SF. One of the first to coin the term “speculative fiction,” the US-born expat had long been a proponent of a broad definition of the genre, as her introduction to the first of what has become a series of sixteen volumes published over a period of almost thirty years indicates. Merrill writes that:

So-called ‘science fiction’ is speculative or extrapolative literature (or sometimes visual art or music) dealing in some way with the idea of *change*—most often changing human responses to the altered, or shifting, environment of some alternative reality. Most often, simply, ‘future fiction.’ (2)

Over the years, with the franchise changing publishers and (purposefully) changing editors with each volume, the series’ look and feel has evolved significantly. That first volume appeared with an elegant cover illustration in trade paperback format; for a number of years, however, it shrunk in size (but not length—with *Tesseracts 4* reaching 427 pages) during the 1990s. Since *Tesseracts 9* (2005), the volumes have appeared almost annually under the imprint of Edge SF & F, with an increasingly liberal application of Merrill’s notion of “speculative fiction,” with volumes twelve through fourteen dedicated respectively to “Canadian Fantastic Fiction,” “Chilling Tales from the Great White North,” and “Strange Canadian Stories.” The most recent installment, *Tesseracts 15: A Case of Quite Curious Tales*, edited by Julie Czerneda and Susan MacGregor, breaks new ground by targeting a young adult audience.

The anthology includes twenty-three stories, most of which range from 10-15 pages, and four poems; of these, I would label only seven as works of science fiction. Perhaps hoping to draw upon the popularity of the Stephenie Meyer’s *Twilight* and other such dark fantasy series, the majority of the works selected fall most

closely into that category. Various stories envision vampires, werewolves, selkies, demons, and other fantastical creatures or magic of some sort existing in a more-or-less realistic version of the reader's shared consensus world. The contributors include some well-established Canadian genre writers, several of whom are *Tesseracts* regulars like Robert Runté (who co-edited *Tesseracts 5* with Yves Meynard) and Claude Lalumière (who edited *Tesseracts 12*), but it also features a number of young and début writers primarily from Montreal, Ontario, and Alberta, but with contributors *A mare usque ad mare*, hailing from as far east as Prince Edward Island and as far west as the Yukon Territory.

As a work dedicated to younger readers, the collection has various recurrent themes and settings, school halls and classrooms often appearing. Teen angst and growth appear in the werewolf story "Feral" by Nicole Luiken and, more originally, in Michele Ann Jenkins's "Take My Walking Slow," which features an AI, which has experienced life only in the virtual world, leaving it for the "Outside." A number of stories explore questions of identity, including secret identities as in "Costumes" by Shen Braun and "The Bridge Builder" by Kevin Cockle, in which a sickly genius outsider discovers that the game he has designed has actually opened a bridge to another (fantasy, not sf) dimension of reality. Aspects of split personalities and divided selves appear in Claude Lalumière's "The Weirdo Adventures of Steve Rand," the title character of which becomes a teenage superhero in his sleep, and "Every You, Every Me" by Virginia Modugno.

One of the collection's deeper stories is "The Memory Junkies" by Kate Boorman. Set in the very near future (2020), it depicts a group of teenagers who have become near orphans since their parents' addiction to a new "medical" technology called the Memory Dive. With references to these kids' gadgetry—the next versions of iPod, SmartPhone and the like—and the advent of privatized medicine in Canada, her extrapolations seem spot on. The group must decide if it is to carry out its plan for a terrorist attack on the clinic in order to get their parents back; their debate centers around the fact that if they blow up the clinic, all of the memories of their own childhood will be obliterated from their parents' memories. Perhaps the collection's best story, written by a long-time figure on the Can SF scene, Robert Runté, also deals with the issue of the split self, as its title, "Split Decision," and clever punch-line reveal. Runté's is one of very few stories in the collection which directly engage questions of Canadian-ness as its pro-

tagonist contemplates the "life-changing decision" (197) of accepting the invitation to study abroad, so to speak, with the aliens who have landed on her school's hockey rink. Her initial plan is to walk half-way up to the ship, forcing the aliens to come out, since "Meeting 'half-way' is how Canadians do it!" (193); she also observes that her friend Sarah's Pakistani parents had to make a similar decision coming to Canada (197). However, several texts feature the nation's northern climate, such as the magical sledding expedition in Kurt Kirchmeier's "Four Against Chaos" and Jennifer Greylyn's alternate history/paranormal rescue mission for the *Titanic* disaster in "Saving the Dead, or The Diary of an Undertaker's Apprentice." To argue that Canadian SF must engage Canadian topics and identity is, of course, unfairly limiting and a form of ethnocentrism assuming that "universal" topics come from the center (US/UK) and not the periphery. And yet, reading "other" SF's as national allegory has been a significant scholarly approach to them, as we continue to see in such recent essay collections as Masrood, Ellis and Raja's *Postnational Fantasy* (2011).

For that and other reasons, although the fact that it is destined for young adult readers is not one of those, I do not find a lot to appeal to the scholar in this particular collection. I am also disappointed by the fact that the only text by a French Canadian is by Claude Lalumière, a self-confessed "lapsed francophone" (who has, nonetheless recently published an intriguing collection of stories in French). This is nothing against Lalumière, a writer with a strange and quirky imagination, but rather because almost every prior *Tesseracts* anthology did its part to bring the Two Solitudes together with two to five works translated from French by significant Québécois writers. And this is particularly disappointing given the quality of young adult genre writing in Québec. So, instead of this volume, I would recommend that readers interested in the speculative fiction being produced north of the US border pick up any of the other *Tesseracts* anthologies mentioned in the introduction (see reviews of volumes nine and ten cited below). In particular, for those more interested in genre sf than more genre-bending "speculative fiction," the earlier volumes remain closer to the field.

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Never at Home

Larisa Mikhaylova

Duchamp, L. Timmel. *Never at Home*. Seattle: Aqueduct, 2011. Trade Paperback, 312 pages, \$18.00, ISBN 978-1-933500-74-4.

THE BOOK INCLUDES seven short stories and novelettes about people who—true to the title—are perpetually and irrevocably homeless. But not in the everyday meaning of losing a place to live and thus having to sleep under a bridge. Rather they are not feeling at home in their own lives, timelines, spaces. And no matter how hard they try to fit, they are just on the border, never accepted fully on either side.

That said, this doesn't mean that all of the stories are similar. Their manners of storytelling differ significantly. But the core conflict remains the same – between protagonist and structure of existence, its lattice becoming less and less accepted and accepting, more and more ephemeral, exceedingly insufficient, all leading to ineffable sadness.

The author is exploring our connections with the world we live in: love (“Explanations Are Clear”), memory and knowing our origins (“Tears of Niobe” and “The Nones of Quintilis”), communication (“A Question of Grammar”), presence (“The World and Alice”), aesthetic feelings (“Sadness Ineffable, Desire Ineluctable”), and an understanding of evolution and the limits of transformation, leading to a consideration of the next stage of our existence (“And I Must Baffle at the Hint”).

Timmel Duchamp in these novelettes and short stories (five of them previously published in collections and magazines, two new) is less a constructor and delineator and more an observer of minute gradual changes in perception which help us to understand the strength, meaning and necessity of such connections

for a person.

The attachment of partners in the first story, “Explanations Are Clear,” is emotionally strong both ways, but for one in their pair an integral feature of her character is metamorphosis: she is constantly morphing, attracted by new moments of being. Thus the impossibility of prolonging contact, of holding this attained unity is excruciating for another partner who is unable to locate her love in a new form.

“Tears of Niobe” weaves a convoluted story of seclusion and keeping to memories, of balancing the existence of worlds in the universe of memories. Flashes of contact with a different world and etching these moments which otherwise would have perished become a duty of a Dreamer. The memory of cities doomed to perish is thus kept forever.

Allusion to the pagan Roman past of Italy—a country whose culture the author knows very well – works on the level of a mystery unwrapped for the daughter of two mothers through the notes typed for her by one of them before her birth for the day when time comes for her to beget. The rituals of ‘activating fertility’ in “The Nones of Quintilis” are also quite otherworldly, having little in common with our present.

“A Question of Grammar” is written in the vein of “Reading the Bones” by Sheila Finch with its Guild of Linguists, only here the communicator becomes not temporarily but permanently bonded on the molecular level to her alien, named Pluummuluum, from a wet and hot distant world. Those are not the only physical constants which are organized differently in Corollan space. Pluummuluum travels and trades with her help, communicating with Azia telepathically. Experiencing an agonizing need for attention and unity, the young heroine gradually turns from little more than a tool to a person whose attitude enables her to adopt a different, consciously chosen ‘grammar’ of life.

We follow Alice from the fifth story until the end of her life, while Duchamp investigates a feeling, obvious only to her heroine, of not possessing enough ‘heft’ to live her life without holding to other people, as if she could lose touch with reality completely. The people she loses—her grandma, for instance—seemingly carry away part of her own hold on the world. The story reads on a minimum on three levels simultaneously: as a psychological SF story with a time-travelling heroine, meeting herself several times in different periods; as a peculiarly realistic story of Alice trying to understand the meaning of the past and present; and as a symbolic representation of connections we create in the world

which could last after we are gone.

Desire to understand other ‘grammars,’ that is connections with the people you know and cherish, to perceive and master other languages, is at the core of a novelette “Sadness Ineffable, Desire Ineluctable.” It is the longest and the most slowly developing piece in the book. Neither exact sciences (mathematics) nor humanities (history) help the women to perceive fully that parallel world where they can transfer themselves; even human art (the third character is an opera singer) appears not sufficient to help them. The exquisite beauty of the inhabitants of that world, and their singing-dancing language, remain undecipherable, another world unaccepting, yet gnawing at mind and body, making it impossible to stay in the previous life which has started to seem unbearably crude. Focus is shifted from the description of tantalizing glimpses of another world to the explanation of the decision to leave in the farewell letter of the narrator, and we let the characters go, understanding that exploration may come to the point of no return.

Taking the world for a known place is convenient for a time being if you are content with who you are and with your connections to the environment. But when a moment comes to encounter the facets you cannot so easily comprehend, there are two major ways out: either to explore the new ‘world,’ trying to fit it into one’s worldview, expanding the picture to incorporate novel aspects, or, out of fear, to deny its existence, shutting it from observation, memory and understanding. Duchamp’s characters are anything but shy and denying, though they may be quite terrified at times. They are courageous enough to explore new connections though it might cancel previous understanding. The emotional basis for penetrating deeper into the unknown is sincere involvement, at least in one relationship.

Thus even the quite normal life of Alice who lacked heft was nevertheless never full as the woman always felt her insufficiency, no matter how hard she tried to matter. And only when she ceased just clinging to others and let go, becoming one with more than just those around her but with the wider world she was always afraid to let herself merge with, only then did her attitude change, and she was able to find fulfillment at last. Walls of rejection and isolation are left behind, and though it brings new complications, experience continues. But when a new wall is set and strengthened by impassable contradiction with reality as we know it, then comes horror. Timmel Duchamp rarely directs her reader there. Overcoming utter confusion and finding

a new “grammar” is the stratagem of her stories.

Imagine that in your garden some teenager cocoons to turn into something unknown. What would be your reaction, especially after you learn of violent acts, shooting and otherwise destroying the cocoons, by non-cocooned youth? To report it to the authorities or to a committee of citizens guarding the cocoons? The heroine of the last story, “And I Must Baffle at the Hint,” prefers not to tell anyone and observes the emergence of a new, beautiful creature. Whose child was it before? Similar to Clarke’s *Childhood’s End*, this new stage is not depicted as threatening, but definitely radically different. And if in the beginning only one person morphs, the last story leaves all of us on the threshold of morphing into something subtler and less mundane. The collection *Never at Home* once again demonstrates the unique ability of the author to probe far beyond our comfort zone of existence, and can definitely provoke discussions in the classroom, which might prove life-changing for the participants.

Media Reviews

Melancholia [film]

Alfredo Suppia

Melancholia. Dir. Lars von Trier. Perf. Kirsten Dunst, Charlotte Gainsbourg, Kiefer Sutherland. Zentropa Entertainment / Memphis Film / Zentropa International Sweden. 2011.

AS AN EVERLASTING GHOST haunting men throughout the centuries, melancholia has affected heroes and characters in a variety of narratives that include Homer’s *Iliad* (circa 850 BC), as well as Sophocles’s and Euripides’s tragedies (5 BC). As a disease, melancholy has victimized humankind since at least the 5th Century BC, when Hippocrates, the discoverer of the Four Humors, classified and ascribed it to an increase of black bile (*melan chole*) in the human body. Black bile was associated with the element Earth. In his book *Mourning and Melancholia* (1917), Freud reassesses the idea of melancholy, now as a psychiatric disease. Therein, the Austrian psychoanalyst observes similar symptoms in both mourning and melancholy cases—“profoundly painful dejection, cessation of interest in the outside world, loss of the capacity to love, [and] inhibition of all activity” (244)—with the dif-

ference that, in the latter, there is seemingly no loss to trigger the condition. In Lars von Trier's 2011 film *Melancholia*, centuries of accumulation of this tellurian black bile has crystalized into a giant massive planet, ten times bigger than Earth. The once ethereal, abstract and seemingly unfounded pain is now rock solid and out there, in a collision course with this island Earth.

The director who once said "I understand Hitler, even sympathize with him" in a press conference at the Cannes Film Festival, reveals his affinities on the soundtrack of his latest film. "Isoldens Liebestod," from *Tristan und Isolde* by Richard Wagner, opens *Melancholia*. However, the music seems to be there less for Wagner and what he would have meant for nazism, but more for what "Isoldens Liebestod" represented for some surrealists at the time. *Melancholia* is an idiosyncratic composite film: a modern European narrative with classical touches, and plenty of surrealist and postmodern fissures.

Melancholia refers to a myriad of films, scattered and different. Its prologue looks like a tribute to Luis Buñuel and Salvador Dalí's *An Andalusian Dog* (*Un Chien Andalou*, 1929), but it also resembles the kind of "visual sculpture" practiced by Matthew Barney in his *Cremaster* series (1996-2003). Since *Antichrist* (2009), or even before, von Trier seems to embrace the imagery of Barney and *Cremaster*. The prologue of *Melancholia* not only condenses future ellipses, scenes from the film's ending, but also translates some of the characters' feelings and dialogues into imagetic metaphors. The first part of *Melancholia*, "Justine," bears Thomas Vinterberg's *Festen* (1998) in its "genetic code." It is a tribute to the freshness of *Dogma 95*, the movement dated and buried (yet by no means irrelevant), but now with a satin finish. Here the ordered world has a hero, Claire (Charlotte Gainsbourg), and a pariah, Justine (Kirsten Dunst). The handheld camera and the *vérité* style seem to destabilize the organized bourgeois world, which is often the centerpiece of classical narrative norms in Hollywood cinema. In the second half, "Claire," an inversion takes place. The socially misfit Justine becomes the fittest in the face of the apocalypse. Claire is now the misfit in a chaotic, unstable and finite world. Accordingly, the film's style changes in proportion. A more operatic mode comes into play, the visual spectacle of a meaningless world.

The trope of the collision of celestial bodies has a very long career in film history, especially in Hollywood film history, from Rudolph Maté's *When Worlds Collide* (1951) to Michael Bay's *Armageddon* (1998) and

Roland Emmerich's *2012* (2009). The motif of a couple or family on the brink of a catastrophe of cosmic proportions refers both to the episode "The New World" ("Il Nuovo Mondo"), directed by Jean-Luc Godard for *Rogopag: Human Relations* (*Ro.Go. Pa.G.*, 1963) and Andrei Tarkovsky's *The Sacrifice* (*Offret*, 1986). Films like *Il Giorno Prima* (1987), by Giuliano Montaldo, also "gravitate" around *Melancholia* in its treatment of the anxiety that precedes the end of the world—not to mention several other titles, some Hollywood movies and blockbusters such as Mimi Leder's *Deep Impact* (1998), or the aforementioned *2012*. Of all these, "The New World" and *The Sacrifice* seem closest to the "orbit" of *Melancholia*, in terms of "spirit" and "atmosphere." The difference is that in Godard's film, as in Tarkovsky's, the end of the world comes in the wake of nuclear warfare. After the Cold War, nuclear threat seems discredited in favor of terrorism. In the post-Bush and Bin Laden Era, cosmic cataclysms sound even more appealing.

In Godard's "The New World," the life of a couple is transformed by an imminent nuclear catastrophe. In *The Sacrifice*, a family takes refuge in a house in the countryside, waiting for World War III, a conflict with the guarantee of nuclear apocalypse. Like *Melancholia*, all these films can be claimed by the cinematic genre of science fiction—indeed, perhaps more precisely, a variant of the genre style which is less concerned with the visual spectacle and more dedicated to intellectual and psychological speculation. In films like *Melancholia*, the sense of wonder does not fade in the retinas of the public. It goes beyond the optic nerve in an attempt to cause "upper" reactions in the spectator's intellectual mind. This is not a science fiction movie deprived of special effects, however. In practice, von Trier's film benefits from painstaking visual effects—notably the work of the Polish company Plastige (<http://www.plastige.com>). But the "pyrotechnics" here are on another level, they serve other purposes. *Melancholia* is "scientifically incorrect." The whole human race would already be extinct, or at least immersed in profound collapse, a long time before the impending collision with a planet as big as *Melancholia*. Apparently, von Trier's "planet-metaphor" would be a "giant rock", not a gas giant like Jupiter. Anyway, the gravitational effects of the devastatingly close passage of such a big planet are absolutely neglected in favor of metaphor. *Melancholia* is a great exercise of poetic license, an investment in pure metaphor which is something rather rare among the late profusion of "that's that" action movies. Two women and a child holding hands, waiting for the im-

pact of a massive planet on Earth, is an image only possible in poetry. But it does not matter; in no way does it compromise the “science-fictionness” of von Trier’s film. We could just recall Ray Bradbury and many others authors of the genre. Nor is it appropriate to consider *Melancholia* a realist film—far from it. Perhaps with some flexibility, we could talk about, *mutatis mutandis*, a certain “poetic realism” revisited by von Trier’s film.

Scientifically inaccurate, Baroque, poetically licentious, *Melancholia* brings—albeit parsimoniously—magnificent special effects, produces a disturbing science fiction effect and, along with other rare films of the same stature, reposes the question: after all, what is the real stuff of science fiction—for example, the collision of planets, or our anxiety over the possibility of the collision of planets? The answer is not as simple as it sounds.

The Skin I Live In **[film]**

Alfredo Suppia

La Piel que Habito. Dir. Pedro Almodóvar. Perf. Antonio Banderas, Marisa Paredes, Elena Anaya. Canal+ España / El Deseo S.A. / ICO. 2011.

JUDGING BY Pedro Almodóvar’s filmography, from *Film Político* (short, 1974) to *Los Abrazos Rotos* (2009), including *Folle... Folle... Fólleme Tim!* (1978), *Pepi, Luci, Bom y Otras Chicas del Montón* (1980), *Entre Tinieblas* (1983) and *Carne Trémula* (1997), at first glance one would hardly bet that the prolific Spanish director would one day venture into science fiction cinema. However, in *La Piel que Habito* (2011), his most recent feature film, Almodóvar finally visits the “backyard” of science fiction, a field of uncut grass and undefined limits where the bones of the genre are buried.

Based on the novel *Mygale* by Thierry Jonquet (1995), published in the U.S. as *Tarantula* (2003), *La Piel que Habito* departs from a science fiction premise over which Almodovar weaves his auteur cinema. “Legend has it that” the primary motif of this movie was whispered into the director’s ear by Brazilian plastic surgeon Ivo Pitanguy—Almodóvar has a close relationship with Brazil; he is a personal friend of the musician Caetano Veloso and fan of Brazilian music, as we can see in some musical sequences in his films, including *La Piel que Habito*.

Jonquet’s novel offers a grabbing story to be read at once. The engaging prose captures the reader’s attention from its mysterious beginning. Although not very daring in formal terms, the narrative structure is somewhat reminiscent of Robert Louis Stevenson’s *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886). Lafargue, the doctor in Jonquet’s novel, resembles Dr. Jekyll in many ways—for instance, he also keeps an apartment as a place to release his sexual perversity.

In the film, Dr. Robert Ledgard (Antonio Banderas) is a celebrity plastic surgeon and medical genius obsessed with the death of his wife, for whom he develops an artificial “superskin,” resistant to insect bites and burns. Dr. Ledgard lives in El Cigarral, a mysterious property on the outskirts of Toledo, Spain, where he maintains an operating room and clandestine laboratory in which he performs his experiments out of the reach of medical and scientific ethics. His main “guinea pig” is a young, mysterious, beautiful woman, Vera (Elena Anaya), who is kept in seclusion in the scientist’s house, constantly monitored by cameras installed in her bedroom. At Dr. Ledgard’s right hand is the seemingly cold and mysterious Marilia (Marisa Paredes), the zealous housekeeper responsible for maintaining the order and secrets of El Cigarral. I must interrupt the synopsis here so that the twists and surprises remain safe in secrecy of the dark room.

Ledgard is a sort of Victor Frankenstein of the Genome Era. Vera is his fantastic creature and Marilia is a far more elegant and seductive version of Igor—a character absent from the celebrated novel, *Frankenstein* (1818), by Mary Shelley, but recurrent in film adaptations of it. A kind of tacit remake of Georges Franju’s *Les Yeux sans Visage* (1960)—but in more Mediterranean tones—*La Piel que Habito* seems to “reconstruct” fragments of a series of film predecessors, but with the thicker and more colorful lines of Almodóvar’s cinematic palette. Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* and seminal films like the aforementioned *Les Yeux Sans Visage* provide the “scraps” to the “lining” of Almodóvar’s patchwork, as well as a variety of films like Hiroshi Teshigahara’s *The Face of Another* (*Tanin in Kao*, 1966), John Frankenheimer’s *Seconds* (1966), Walter Grauman’s telefilm *Who Is Julia?* (1986), and John Woo’s action thriller *Face / Off* (1997). The theme of organ transplants, whether appendages or faces, has haunted the film history for a long time, since at least *The Hands of Orlac* (*Orlacs Hande*, 1920) by Robert Wiene. Expressionism, psychoanalysis, and surrealism seem to comfortably fit in the theme of transplantation, as we can

see in *The Hands of Orlac*, *The Face of Another* and *Les Yeux Sans Visage*. Although more moderate in photography and dramatic tone than the average Almodóvar film, *La Piel que Habito* is notably much “hotter” than *Les Yeux Sans Visage*, bringing an Iberian/Latin libido and sensuality, which has thus far been absent in most “transplant movies.” While milder and more moderate, a closer look into *La Piel que Habito* reveals Almodóvar’s “heavier hand,” his thicker “brush” in the style of Van Gogh, his “screaming” colors beneath the coldness of pastels—here, we refer not only to cinematography, but also the tone of the narrative, *mise-en-scène* and the actors’ performances.

Like *Frankenstein*, *La Piel que Habito* can be seen as a Gothic novel, but one which is amplified by the Baroque and melodrama typical of Almodóvar’s cinema—finally, a curious case of “Gothic melodrama.” Also based on the theme of mistaken identity, the film offers a melodramatic-gothic-baroque plot which is extraordinarily well-woven together. The explicit and imagetic references to the skin, clothes, pieces of fabric (inspired by the work of Louise Bourgeois, the sculptor of enormous spiders, Vera sculpts shapes covered with these scraps of fabric) and scars all summarize on a symbolic or emblematic level the “tissuelike” plot, which is skillfully “tailored” through advances and retreats in time—a clear example of how the Portuguese term “enredo” can be appropriately applied to the matter of a narrative. Besides the skin and fabric, the doors also yield to symbolism of rape and enclosure, the secrets and whispers from a fictional universe that may have begun in the mysterious back door of Dr. Jekyll’s house—which is described by the lawyer Utterson in the first chapter of Stevenson’s *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*—and through films as diverse as Fritz Lang’s *The Secret Beyond the Door* (1947), or Artie and Jim Mitchell’s *Behind the Green Door* (1972). The parallel between Dr. Jekyll and Dr. Ledgard is inevitable.

The baroque melodrama added to the Gothic in *La Piel que Habito* reminds us of Almodóvar’s life in the context of La Movida Madrileña (the countercultural movement that emerged in the early transitional years of post-Franco Spain) as well as the aesthetics of Esperpento—which generally refers to something grotesque, but more specifically designates the literary style created by Ramón María del Valle-Inclán and the Spanish Generation of 98 and characterized by the grotesque distortion of reality in the service of social criticism. So, we could risk the hypothesis of a “Gothic Esper-

pento” in a germinal or “captive” state underlying the latest Almodóvar film.

Although it clearly mobilizes typical SF iconography and narrative strategies, *La Piel que Habito* offers a low degree of extrapolation in terms of science and technology. Dr Ledgard’s unauthorized experiments are based on “transgenesis,” a technique which can presently be seen on the current scientific and technological landscape. The following remarks contain spoilers and should not be read by those who prize a good surprise in the movie theater. We recommend, in this case, the reader leap forward to the last paragraph. The fact is that Ledgard, as a plastic surgeon that merges “transgenic” with “transgender” and experiments with further human transformations from the skin to deeper tissues, plays the role of a “violator of souls” whose “stylus” is his expertise in gene therapy. In this sense, Ledgard is no less of a “rapist” than his rivals, the obvious rapists in *La Piel que Habito*. A film about rape that emphasizes the value of the skin as the thin shell of human identity, the last “barrier” to invaders (the psychopaths and the mosquitoes that transmit malaria), *La Piel que Habito* ends up presenting a reversed sense of Stockholm Syndrome, in which the captive finally becomes the master of his tormentor—as in the original novel. With this in mind, it is worth mentioning newsreel cases like that of Natasha Kampusch—who spent years of her childhood and youth in captivity—and new media artists like Micha Cardenas, a transgender performer (see <http://transreal.org/>, <http://bang.calit2.net/tag/micha-cardenas/> and <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pHEDym1aOZs>). Wisely, Almodóvar does not bet on easy, comforting resolutions, and the film retains its disturbing tone until its end—yes, contrary to what it may seem, the outcome of *La Piel que Habito* is not a happy ending. It is just the beginning of a new plot, a “second episode,” as unusual and uncanny as the first. Last but not least, it is worth noting that Alfred Hitchcock’s *Vertigo* (1958) also occupies a prominent place on the cinematic horizon invoked by *La Piel que Habito*.

The web of conflicts and motivations that dwell in *La Piel que Habito* is more detailed and firmly woven than in the novel *Mygale*. Ledgard (film) is a character perhaps more “vertical” than Lafargue (novel). Ledgard’s motives and history are more scrutinized—and even more fantastic than Lafargue’s. To those surprised by the short appearance of Zeca, the “tiger” (Roberto Alamo), as well as the supposed gratuity of the scene in which he rapes Vera, we recommend the reading of

Jonquet's original novel. The book can clarify something about the process of adapting literature to film as well as the narrative and aesthetic options available for a director—in this case, a director like Almodóvar. The rape scene condenses one of Ledgard's main motivations—it triggers the beginning of the doctor's more substantial feelings of sympathy towards Vera. Ledgard is perhaps less hateful than Lafargue—just as Vicente (Jan Cornet) is perhaps less of a scoundrel than Vincent, the character in the novel. Lafargue is also more ambiguous, darker, and much less heroic.

In the novel, the iconography of science fiction or the mad scientist motif is much milder than in Almodóvar's film. Actually, Jonquet's novel is not an SF narrative—there is no clear element of extrapolation or speculation; regardless of the radicalness of the situations, everything is perfectly contemporary and scientifically feasible. Also, the skin is not such a prominent and metaphorical motif. The film works on more fantastic and baroque grounds—but is also more acute in terms of conflicts and motivations. In *La Piel que Habito*, the doctor's wife is a ghost constantly haunting El Cigarral; Lafargue's wife (novel) does not exist beyond a single, brief mention, absolutely circumstantial.

Almodóvar discards what I consider an ingenuous touch in Jonquet's novel: scarce explanations and the confrontation between the characters Alex Barny and Vincent Moreau, friends from their youth. On the other hand, the corrupt Ledgard, with his clandestine laboratory and dubious practices, brings additional interest to the film. In its detailed scrutiny of characters' conflicts and motivations, the film leaves less to chance. In the novel, the climax depends on chance, a tragic coincidence that makes Lafargue the victim and Eve the victimizer for a split moment. Still, the same chance makes the novel dénouement perhaps even stronger.

In Jonquet's novel, the doctor's desire for his creature is subtler than in the film, where the sexual act is eventually consummated. However, *La Piel que Habito* seems to hold a more "moral" and conservative discourse when it invokes Ledgard's dead wife, a strong source of motivation, and when it concludes with a certain "poetic justice"—two situations entirely absent from the novel. Anyway, these are just some hasty impressions of a first comparison between the original and its adaptation. We should stop here and finish by recommending the reading of *Tarantula*.

Revisiting Almodóvar's filmography, perhaps the experience of *La Piel que Habito* is much more predictable and consistent with the director's career than

previously supposed. The theme of voyeurism and televisual mediation was already in movies such as *Kika* (1993). The desire that captivates and captures arose in films like *Matador* (1986), *La Ley del Deseo* (1987) or *Átame!* (1990). The replacement and molding of others according to one's own desire could be seen in *Carne Trémula* (1997) and *Hable con Ella* (2002). With *La Piel que Habito*, the Spanish director now makes a generous and welcomed contribution to science fiction film, cleverly employing the instruments of the genre to the delight of his authorial cinema. Now the possibility of Almodóvar returning to themes of science and fantasy in the future seems much more practical—and natural.

Pioneer One [web series]

Ritch Calvin

- "Earthfall." *Pioneer One*. Dir. Bracey Smith. Writ. Josh Bernhard. Perf. James Rich, Jack Haley, Alexandra Blatt. 16 June 2010.
- "The Man from Mars." *Pioneer One*. Dir. Bracey Smith. Writ. Josh Bernhard. Perf. James Rich, Jack, Haley, Alexandra Blatt. 15 December 2010.
- "Alone in the Night." *Pioneer One*. Dir. Bracey Smith. Writ. Josh Bernhard. Perf. James Rich, Jack Haley, Alexandra Blatt, and Laura Graham. 28 March 2011.
- "Triangular Diplomacy." *Pioneer One*. Dir. Bracey Smith, Writ. Josh Bernhard. Perf. James Rich, Jack Haley, Alexandra Blatt, and Laura Graham. April 2011.
- "Sea Change." *Pioneer One*. Dir. Bracey Smith. Writ. Josh Bernhard. Perf. James Rich, Jack Haley, Alexander Blatt, and Laura Graham. 10 October 2011.
- "War of the World." *Pioneer One*. Dir. Bracey Smith. Writ. Josh Bernhard. Perf. James Rich, Jack Haley, and Alexandra Blatt. 13 December 2011.

IN 2010, THE WEB_BASED SERIES *Pioneer One* premiered via the web. Each of the six episodes of season one can either be downloaded by .torrent file (<http://vo.do/pioneerone>) or can be streamed via YouTube. Following an initial Kickstarter campaign, the series was crowdfunded, meaning that, donations were collected via the home page, the blog, and FaceBook, and each of the episodes was completed and released as sufficient funding arrived. Bernhard claims that the pilot cost a mere \$7,000. Once it was released for download, they brought it \$30,000 in donations, which funded the

next production block in October, 2010 (Goodman). The Intro on the blog (<http://www.pioneerone.tv/intro>) claims that the series is “totally financed on viewer donations”; however, episodes five and six contain ads about midway through the episode. Following the success of *Pioneer One*, another web series has been released by VODO, called *Zenith* (<http://vo.do/zenith>), a “cataclysmic,” “cyberpunk thriller.”

The series was written by Josh Bernhard (who has only one other writing credit) and directed by Bracey Smith (who has no other directing credits). Furthermore, the actors are largely unknowns. Several of the primary actors have credits in one or two short films, but little else. And while the acting is not stellar, it is every bit as good as the acting found in many prime-time, network TV series. Similarly, the sets are clearly bare bones, though that never interferes with the willful suspension of disbelief or with the enjoyment of the show. Indeed, the series was awarded the New York Television Festival’s Best Drama Pilot award for 2010.

The plot centers around a mysterious event over the Montana skies. What appears to be a large meteorite blazes through the sky, slowly breaking up into smaller pieces. In fact, the meteorite was a space capsule, which then lands just over the Canadian border, and, fearing a terrorist act, the Canadian authorities call the US Department of Homeland Security. When a number of local individuals end up in the hospital with radiation poisoning, they are convinced. Agent Thomas J. Taylor, who has been shuffled off to Helena, Montana—where he will never have to handle anything significant—is called to the base in Calgary.

Furthermore, the Canadians have taken into custody the sole passenger of the capsule, a young man who brandishes a gun and speaks Russian. When questioned, he responds only, “Identify yourself. Which side are you?” The Deputy Secretary of Homeland Security Eric McClellan (Einar Gunn) is convinced that a terrorist organization has gotten its hands on some surplus Soviet-era equipment and used it to perpetrate an act of terror. Taylor responds, “On Montana?”

The DHS issues a press release that the crash was actually an old Soviet satellite. However, amateur sky-watchers have footage of the crash, and they publicly announce that, based on the trajectory of the event, it must have come from deep space, not from a geosynchronous orbit. Consequently, the Russian Ambassador arrives at DHS demanding the return of their cosmonauts.

When Taylor and his aide, Sofie Larson (Alexandra

Blatt), inspect the capsule, they discover an old Soviet-era insignia and a page from a flight manual. On the back of the page is a hand-written note that states that he has come from Mars. Although Taylor has been ordered to turn the terror suspect over, he does not believe the terror angle, and he wants to do due diligence and follow the Mars angle. He calls in the world’s leading Mars expert, Dr. Zachary Walzer (Jack Haley), who has written extensively on the possibility of a Mars settlement, and has advocated for the continuation of manned space travel.

In the meantime, the young man, who is now being called “Yuri” (Aleksandr Evtushenko), is gravely ill. The attending physician announces that he is dehydrated, suffers from advanced osteoporosis, and is riddled with cancer. All of these symptoms convince Walzer that Yuri is actually from Mars. He supposes that the Soviets sent a mission to Mars, and that, for some reason, Yuri has returned to Earth, probably in desperation due to dwindling resources.

Over the next five episodes, the political machinations move quickly. The DHS, the Russian Embassy, and the Canadian Embassy all have a stake in the outcome. Each of the three offices seems to be working with different motivations and goals, and, more importantly, they are operating based on differing sets of information. Taylor pulls every trick he can to keep Yuri out of the courts and prison and to “find the truth.”

Despite the innovative origins of the series, despite the shoe-string budget, despite being written and directed by relative unknowns, despite the use of largely unknown actors, the whole series is quite well done. The narrative is complex and compelling. Even as situations seem to change quite rapidly, the narrative unfolds quite slowly. Each episode features a number of slow shots, a number of mood shots, a number of close-ups that focus in on a feature of the room or a character’s face.

Tom Taylor is a cipher: stolid, stoic, and stubborn. In a wonderful moment, Taylor questions Yuri, but he gets no satisfactory answers. He quips, “It’s like talking to a fortune cookie.” That is, undoubtedly, the same response that everyone who talks to Taylor has.

Bernhard claims that his inspirations were *The West Wing*, *Babylon 5*, and *Friday Night Lights* (Lachonis). From these TV series, he drew inspiration on structure, style, and the creation of long story arcs. Certainly many SF TV series have taken on political questions, though often indirectly. *Star Trek* could be, and often was, read as a polemic on US political positions on free trade/en-

terprise, democratization, and non-intervention. More recently, *V* is a re-iteration of a previous series, both of which appeared at moments in the US history in which immigration policy was front-page news. However are we to deal with the invading hordes of “illegal aliens?” *Pioneer One* illustrates, in part, the difficulties of multi-lateral, international politics (e.g., episode four is entitled “Triangular Diplomacy”). *PO* also foregrounds the lack of open and honest communications between and among governmental bodies (Walzer, a scientist, is appalled at the lack of communication—it’s not how *science* works!), and the personal biases involved in significant decisions (McClellan seems to hate the Russians and doesn’t like Tom Taylor all that much).

However, the one aspect of *Pioneer One* that I find troubling is the way in which it fits within the dominant narrative—so prevalent these days in both film and television—that the government (in the form of police officers, detectives, forensic experts, lawyers, district attorneys) has our best interest at heart, that they are, in fact, motivated by the truth. So many current television series rest on the fact that someone is willing to go the extra mile to get the bad guy and protect the public, even if it means nudging, bending, breaking, or bludgeoning the law in the process (viz. Elliot Stabler in *Law & Order: SVU* or Horatio Caine in *CSI: Miami*). In *Pioneer One*, the governments are inept, wrong, and generally motivated more by politics than by anything else. Government officials do not trust one another; they trust officials from other governments even less. They are motivated by personal ambition. For example, McClellan begins the series as Deputy Secretary of DHS, and ends up as Secretary, with hints at running for president.

However, Thomas Taylor is different. He’s the one on the margins. He’s the one looking for the truth. Because he is a nonconformist, he has been relegated to the Helena office. Shortly after he arrives in Calgary, he makes a phone call to “Frank.” We are given very little information on Frank—no last name, no background, no connection to Taylor—though it is possible that he was a friend to Taylor’s father. In the episode six, Frank returns and tells Taylor that he is a counterbalance to Washington players such as McClellan, that Taylor is able to use his imagination and see possibilities.

For teaching, *Pioneer One* offers many possibilities. For one, it could be studied for the ways in which digital media are altering models of funding, production, and distribution. As another example, on the Pioneer One blog, the ability to read and follow discussion must

be “paid for” by means of a post on FaceBook or Twitter. The series also offers comparisons to other television series that have foregrounded (international) politics. Series such as the aforementioned *The West Wing* (1999-2006), but also *24* (2001-2010), and *Commander in Chief* (2005-2006) all offer glimpses into the complexities and tensions of international politics. *PO* also illustrates (some of) the ways in which politics and science are (all too often) at odds with one another. While Walzer believes in the free exchange of ideas and information, the politicians do not. While Walzer believes that he has definitive proof that Yuri and his capsule came from Mars, his “evidence” is largely irrelevant in the political arena. Finally, *PO* offers a look at the possibilities of life on other planets. In 1951, science fiction writer and critic Judith Merrill wrote an article for *Marvel Science Fiction* entitled “Where Will Our First Spaceship Go? Mars: New World Waiting.” In the essay, she makes her case for why we should travel to Mars: because we have evidence of life there and because we have evidence that human life is possible there.

Pioneer One is a show about pioneers. The writer and director both quit their jobs to follow a dream. Instead of following the usual path through the networks, they took to the web, both as a means of funding and of delivery. While *Pioneer One* is certainly not the first to use crowdfunding and .torrent delivery, it has been one of the most successful. They employed a cast of relative unknowns to tell a gripping story about another kind of pioneer—Martians. Here, the Soviets established a (who knows how small) colony on Mars. O Pioneers! Who knows what we will find along these paths?

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The Definitive Flash Gordon and Jungle Jim Volume One **[graphic novel]**

Dominick Grace

Raymond, Alex. *The Definitive Flash Gordon and Jungle Jim Volume One*. Santa Fe: IDW, 2011.

THIS GOLDEN AGE OF COMIC STRIP and comic book reprints continues with this latest endeavour from IDW, one of the top publisher currently offering such material. *Flash Gordon* has been reprinted before more than once (and indeed, in what seems an odd licensing decision, a competing series of reprints is forthcoming from Titan), but IDW is the first to include the original topper strip, *Jungle Jim*, and is presenting the material in an oversize (12 x 16), fairly carefully-restored handsome edition. Whether it will merit the “definitive” claim remains to be seen, perhaps, but it is certainly nice to look at—though the fact that the book had to be produced from scanned and restored newspaper pages inevitably leads to some issues with consistency of color, smudging, and blurring, unless someone else ends up finding superior source material, it’s hard to imagine another edition looking this good. Roughly the first two years of the strip appear here.

Flash Gordon is, perhaps, the definitive SF newspaper comic strip, though how seriously one can really take it as SF, especially in these early years, is open to debate. Science Fantasy itself might seem a generous term. A wandering planet threatens to hit Earth, so mad scientist Dr. Zarkov (whose madness vanishes after the first few strips, in one of many inconsistencies) designs a rocket to divert it, kidnaps polo-playing Yale grad (!) Flash Gordon and Dale Arden (apparently strangers to each other at this point; magically in love a few strips later) and crashes his rocket into the planet, thereby apparently changing its movement enough to spare Earth—or so we must assume, since the issue never comes up again. And that’s just the first huge scientific absurdity in this world of aliens who speak English, multiple humanoid species all evolving from different animals on the same planet, “gas rays,” open radium mines being worked by bare-chested slaves who simply shovel it into furnaces as fuel, and so on. *Jungle Jim* is Earthbound but barely less absurd, as within the first few strips he takes on a lion and tiger (in the same Malayan jungle) and then has the requisite encounters with white jungle gods, lost valleys and other staples of

jungle adventure. In short, taking any of this very seriously is pretty much impossible.

The plot takes Flash and company through various encounters with Ming the Merciless, ruler of the planet Mongo and pretty clearly a SFnal treatment of the dangerous Orient; he’s a sort of Fu Manchu style villain, though the more immediate antecedent is almost certainly the Mongol Reds who are the initial threat in the earlier *Buck Rogers* strip, which fairly clearly inspires certain aspects of *Flash Gordon* (the various animal races of Mongo, for instance, are obviously similar to the Tiger-men and so on of the earlier strip). Mongo is populated by various humanoid races (my favorites; the underground-dwelling “death dwarfs”) usually derived from animals—Lion Men, Shark Men, Hawk Men and so on—subjugated by the Emperor Ming. Over the first few years of the strip, Ming is the main antagonist as Flash gradually builds a power base by becoming a King himself and leading a rebellion against Ming.

There is virtually nothing in the way of serious consideration of the politics of this world—Flash simply accepts a kingdom without ever once considering the possibility of holding an election, for instance—but the strip does offer fertile ground for cultural studies, especially from a post-colonial perspective, in how it sublimates fear of the other in fantasy and privileges a Western (specifically white) perspective. This is actually overt in *Jungle Jim*, in which skin color is frequently explicitly a topic of discussion; even though we can actually see which color people are because it’s a color comic strip, the linguistic coding and privileging of whiteness is overt. The unexamined colonialist assumptions of both strips can be fruitfully compared and contrasted, given the generic differences between Science Fantasy and supposedly “realistic” adventure. Indeed, the essentially similar trajectories of both strips occasionally emerge obviously, as in the early pairing of strips in which the final panel of one shows *Jungle Jim* in deadly combat with a lion, and *Flash Gordon* in deadly combat with a Lion Man.

Both strips are also interesting (arguably fascinating) for their sexual elements, as well. Especially as Raymond’s art develops and the lushness and suppleness of form for which he is highly regarded emerges, the strips are often barely-sublimated erotic studies that might lend themselves well to queer readings and certainly raise questions about sex roles and status (and not merely, I’d argue, because of the overt stereotypes invoked). Characters, both male and female, spend inordinate amounts of time as scantily clad as the news-

paper publication would allow, often in various states of abjection. The potential for classroom discussions about race, class, and sex are extensive.

The strips are also object lessons in comics grammar, especially as one can watch Raymond learning how to tell a comics story as the strips develop, both in terms of pacing and page design. His growing experimentation with page design (especially during the few months when both strips got a full page each) offers an excellent way to study what works in comics. A course in comics history could make great use of this book as an example of a strip that established many of the ground rules of fantasy-based art for subsequent artists (one can see Raymond's influence in the work of many subsequent major comics art fantasists, from Frazetta through Wrightson and Al Williamson).

This is a high-ticket item, so it may not be suitable as a required class text. However, this volume offers up numerous insights into one of the best-known and most influential SF (or SF-ish) comic strips. Anyone seriously interested in comics should have this book.

Terra [online comic]

Chris Pak

Terra. Art. Holly Laing. Writ. Holly Laing and Drew Dailey. 2009. 15 Feb. 2012. <<http://www.terra-comic.com/>>

Terra is the story of resistance and struggle during a galactic war, in which a group of rebels oppose the corruption and warmongering at the upper echelons of the human and Azatoth military. Co-created by artist and writer Holly Laing and writer Drew Dailey and launched on March 20th, 2009, *Terra* wears its space opera influences on its sleeve: in an interview Laing calls *Terra* "a product of all the science fiction I've watched over the years" and credits *Avatar*, along with SF classics *Star Wars*, *Alien* and *Aliens*, and Joss Whedon's *Firefly/Serenity* as major influences on both co-creators (Otomo, <http://truebelieverreviews.com/wordpress/?p=190#more-190>).

"Terra" designates the United Earth Coalition's (UEC) primary spaceport, the jumping point to wider galaxy. *Terra* begins with infiltration specialist Grey O'Shea, whose troop is killed by an overwhelming Azatoth force due to a tactical error by his superiors. Discovered by the prominent Azatoth rebel Agrippa Varus,

O'Shea is inducted into the resistance as an agent, becoming Agrippa's student. Later, UEC fighter pilot Alexis Hawke and flight engineer Rick MacFarlane are stranded after a successful raid on the rebel base on the planet Lavinia. Through these three ex-UEC officers, the xenophobia underwriting the human-Azatoth war and the possibilities for reconciliation despite longstanding racism and conflict is explored. The student-mentor relationship between O'Shea and Agrippa and the interspecies love relationship between Agrippa and the Varelian Eve Arlia promise wider peaceful relations between aliens. Such connections are polarised by high level military-political conspiracies amongst UEC officials on Terra, the bloodthirsty warmongering of the Azatoth Shadow Cabal and Hawke's fraught relationship to the Azatoth, conditioned by years of childhood enslavement to the Shadow Cabal.

The narrative pace is dictated by the rate of graphical production. Each page takes five to six hours to produce, which means that updates are restricted to a weekly schedule (currently US Wednesdays) on a page-by-page basis. This serialism tends to push the narrative toward weekly cliff-hangers; despite its release by instalment, there is a sense of an overarching trajectory to the story. Laing's devotion to the graphics means that they are compelling and sometimes spectacular (for example, the reflected explosion in the visorplate of one pilot on page eighty-five). As the story progresses, Laing experiments with new color palettes and techniques. This experimentalism pays dividends and makes the evolution of *Terra's* artwork a joy to follow. Extra features such as a section documenting Laing's artistic process ("What Goes into Graphics"), the tools of her trade ("Credit"), and a section on supporting artwork makes for an engaging insight into the demanding artistic process involved with webcomic production. This insight extends to an actual engagement with the audience through a section devoted to fan art.

Terra also contains other supporting material, helping to create the sense of an expansive universe for the events of the story. A galaxy map, adapted from a NASA image of the Milky Way, assists in situating the events of the story. A "History of the Timeline" fills in some of the background to the current human-Azatoth conflict, recounting as it does the history of war and disruption involving many other races. A cast list, information on military ranking amongst the human and Azatoth military, a list of alien species and information on transport and weaponry all contribute to the efforts of the creators to document their universe in order to

give the narrative a wider contextual grounding. Because of the advantages offered by online media, these sections have the potential for continual expansion as the narrative unfolds.

Perhaps the most entertaining of the extra features are the comments on each page of the webcomic. This link between creator and reader offers a sense of involvement, opening up a type of dialogue absent from many other forms. Readers have taken the opportunity to comment on aspects of the artwork, the narrative and the SF assumptions encoded into each page. Issues of gender stereotyping is raised in relation to a female Azatoth's military dress on page thirty-one, which quickly develops into a dialogue about art and plausibility (see also page thirty-three). Plausibility is picked up earlier in relation to human racism on page fifteen; the problem of measuring time in space and its effect on language is questioned on page twenty, while questions of cultural relativity are raised in relation to one reader's perception of the similarities between Azatoth and Japanese culture (page thirty-six). Issues of militarism and terrorism are also addressed, with a discussion of the semantics of that familiar opposition between terrorist and freedom fighter on page forty-seven and the connections drawn between conflict in *Terra* and real world conflicts (such as Afghanistan). My personal favourite is a comment that questions the practicality of a handheld sidearm that emits a blue glow: a potentially compromising choice of equipment (see page twenty-eight). Other general comments include notifications of typos that have since been addressed and even suggestions for the phrasing of dialogue, all of which is explicit evidence of some mutual shaping of the narrative between creators and readers.

Problems with the narrative are also raised: some transitions between pages appear a little abrupt, while the pace at which the two UEC officers Hawke and MacFarlane side with the rebels could benefit from some development. Such issues can be seen as a problem associated with developing a convincing narrative pace within the constraints of a weekly comic under pressure to sustain reader interest, and is certainly more prevalent in the earlier chapters of the story.

Terra lends itself to teaching: SF's dialogism developed in the pulps finds an analogue in webcomics, and *Terra* can certainly be seen as an inheritor of this tradition. Readers have noted many echoes to such works as Barry Longyear's "Manifest Destiny," "Enemy Mine" (page forty-two), the game *Mass Effect* (both creators are gaming fans), and a host of others, leading Dailey to comment

"so I guess everything looks like something, lol" (page seventeen). This borrowing between SF media has applications for exploring the contours of the SF megatext in its fundamentally iconic mode, within a context that privileges the image. The involvement of fans in the creation of the webcomic offers avenues for introducing students to the arena of internet fandom while the accessibility of the comic could offer a way into exploring the mechanics of comics and graphic novels. *Terra* is a good example of a work that connects to a wide range of themes and to fan culture, making it suited to introducing SF elements to those unfamiliar with the mode. The constraints of pace to the form make it an addictive read, the more so now that there is a sizable archive of past material to hook new readers, while the voices of the creators certainly add to the enjoyment of following the series with other readers.

Announcements

Call for Papers- Conference

Title: Science Fiction & Food Politics, NeMLA

Deadline: 30 September 2012

Conference Date: 21-24 March 2013

Contact: murrays@stjohns.edu

Topic: When it comes to food production and consumption, science fiction offers us contrasting visions of hope and horror. Sometimes, works in this genre paint utopian pictures of consumer choice and convenience; other times, the future of food looks quite bleak, with today's troubling trends (ex: Genetically Modified Organisms) extrapolated to worst-case scenarios.

Submission: Please submit a 250-500 word abstract pertaining to the intersecting questions of science fiction (literature, television, and/or film) and food politics to Sean Murray, St. John's University, murrays@stjohns.edu.

Call for Papers- Conference

Title: The 2013 Joint Eaton/SFRA Conference

Deadline: 14 September 2012

Conference Date: 10-14 April 2013

Contact: Melissa.Conway@ucr.edu

Topic: Science Fiction Media. This conference—co-sponsored by the Eaton Collection of Science Fiction and Fantasy (UC Riverside) and the Science Fiction

Research Association – will examine science fiction in multiple media. The past several decades have witnessed an explosion in SF texts across the media landscape, from film and TV to comics and digital games. We are interested in papers that explore SF as a multimedia phenomenon, whether focusing on popular mass media, such as Hollywood blockbusters, or on niche and subcultural forms of expression, such as MUDs and vidding. We invite paper and panel proposals that focus on all forms of SF, including prose fiction.

Submission: Abstracts of 500 words (for papers of 20-minutes in length) should be submitted by September 14, 2012. We also welcome panel proposals gathering three papers on a cohesive topic. Send electronic submission to conference co-chair Melissa Conway at Melissa.Conway@ucr.edu with the subject heading: EATON/SFRA CONFERENCE PROPOSAL. Please include a brief bio with your abstract and indicate whether your presentation would require A/V. Participants will be informed by December 1 if their proposals have been accepted.

Call for Candidates- SFRA Executive Committee

The SFRA seeks candidates, including self-nominations, for this fall's election for the following executive committee positions, effective January 1, 2013: president, vice president, treasurer and secretary. Nominations or questions should be sent to Lisa Yaszek (lisa.yaszek@atgatech.edu), SFRA immediate past president. Job descriptions, drawn from the official duties of each officer found on page 35 of the 2009 SFRA Member Directory and from the bylaws available at <http://www.sfra.org/bylaws>, are as follows:

President (term: 2 years; may not succeed themselves in office): The president shall be chief executive of the association; he/she shall preside at all meetings of the membership and the Executive Committee, have general and active management of the business of the association, and see that all orders and resolutions of the Executive Committee are carried out; the president shall have general superintendence and direction of all other officers of the association and shall see that their duties are properly performed; the president shall submit a report of the operations of the association for the fiscal year to the Executive Committee and to the membership at the annual meeting, and from time to

time shall report to the Executive Committee on matters within the president's knowledge that may affect the association; the president shall be ex officio member of all standing committees and shall have the powers and duties in management usually vested in the office of president of a corporation; the president shall appoint all committees herein unless otherwise provided.

Vice president (term: 2 years; may not succeed themselves in office): The vice president shall be vested with all the powers and shall perform all the duties of the president during the absence of the latter and shall have such other duties as may, from time to time, be determined by the Executive Committee. At any meeting at which the president is to preside, but is unable, the vice president shall preside, and if neither is present or able to preside, then the secretary shall preside, and if the secretary is not present or able to preside, then the treasurer shall preside. The vice president shall have special responsibility for membership recruitment for SFRA.

Secretary (term: 2 years; may succeed themselves in office): The secretary shall attend all sessions of the Executive Committee and all meetings of the membership and record all the votes of the association and minutes of the meetings and shall perform like duties for the Executive Committee and other committees when required. The secretary shall give notice of all meetings of the membership and special meetings of the Executive Committee and shall perform such other duties as may be prescribed by the Executive Committee or the president. In the event the secretary is unable to attend such meetings as may be expected, the Executive Committee may designate some other member of the association to serve as secretary pro tern.

Treasurer (term: 2 years; may succeed themselves in office): The treasurer shall be the chief financial officer of the association and have charge of all receipts and disbursements of the association and shall be the custodian of the association's funds. The treasurer shall have full authority to receive and give receipts for all monies due and payable to the association and to sign and endorse checks and drafts in its name and on its behalf. The treasurer shall deposit funds of the association in its name and such depositories as may be designated by the Executive Committee. The treasurer shall furnish the Executive Committee an annual financial report within 60 days of the fiscal year; the fiscal year shall end on December 31.

Science Fiction Research Association

www.sfra.org

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

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SFRA Standard Membership Benefits

SFRA Review

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

SFRA Annual Directory

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

SFRA Listserv

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

Extrapolation

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

Science Fiction Studies

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

SFRA Optional Membership Benefits

Foundation

(Discounted subscription rates for members)

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

The New York Review of Science Fiction

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

Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts

Four issues per year. Scholarly journal, with critical and bibliographical articles and reviews. Add to dues: \$40/1 year; \$100/3 years.

Femspec

Critical and creative works. Add to dues: \$40 domestic individual; \$96 domestic institutional; \$50 international individual; \$105 international institutional.

