

GUIDELINES FOR *FAFNIR* REVIEWERS

Thank you for contributing to *Fafnir – Nordic Journal of Science Fiction and Fantasy Research*! If you've not worked with us, you'll see below a number of guidelines that lay bare our expectations.

BOOK REVIEWS

Quality book reviews for academic monographs and collections should be both:

- (1) ***Descriptive***. Description should be fair, pointing out thesis, basic argument, methodology, contents of the book, and authorial intentions.
- (2) ***Evaluative***. The reviewer should assess the book's strengths and weaknesses, noting surprising or dubious points, plus the book's contribution and/or value to contemporary scholarship. This last aspect requires some field knowledge; reviewers should attempt due diligence. Since *Fafnir* serves an [international academic audience](#), a reviewer's contextualization of a book (and/or assessment of its value) might sometimes be a review's most important feature. Referencing other relevant secondary literature is wonderful, though not required; actual *citations* for such secondary work depends entirely upon a reviewer's preferences.

Sometimes, *simply* contextualizing a book within SFF scholarship (or, conversely, the book's role in current academic conversations) can suffice for our "evaluation" criterion. This might apply, for example, if a book contains mostly nonfiction primary sources from an important author.

Reviewers have free reign to structure reviews as they see fit, although organization should be logical. Likewise, a book's overall evaluation is left entirely to the reviewer's discretion. If a book has more strengths than weaknesses, or vice versa, please let that be reflected in your structure. We consider it a standard convention of the review genre, however, that even highly laudatory reviews contain some critique, even if a minor one; likewise, even highly negative reviews should contain some elements of praise. Ultimately, we see reviews as something like guides for other scholars with the SFF field.

Some reviewers, in addition, may wish to identify a potential audience for a book: scholars, teachers, university libraries, and the like. Since we assume a scholarly SFF audience, *Fafnir* considers this feature optional, according to the reviewer's own best judgment.

Length

Reviews for monographs generally run around 1500 words, give or take; reviews on edited collections may run longer (or focus on only strongest/weakest essays). Yet we're pretty flexible on word count, since as an online journal we don't have a print journal's space limitations.

Due Date

Submit reviews no later than 3 months after receipt of the book. If more time is needed, however, please contact the *Fafnir* reviews editor at [reviews\(at\)finfar.org](mailto:reviews@finfar.org). In fact, if any issues arise at all during the review process, please don't hesitate to contact me. We're friendly folk here.

Odds & Ends

- Two sample reviews are provided at the end of these guidelines: [Review A](#) and [Review B](#).
- Please also include a short bio (~75 words) with your review.

DISSERTATION REVIEWS

Unlike book reviews, we see dissertation reviews as a way to advertise exciting new work being done within SFF research. Thus, a dissertation review should focus more on highlighting the dissertation's place within contemporary scholarship than on evaluating its strengths or weaknesses. Of course, please also provide an overview of the thesis, content, argument, and methods.

Dissertation reviews should run about 300-600 words. Please submit dissertation reviews to the reviews editor within 2 months.

Additionally, authors are especially encouraged to recommend their own dissertations for review. In return, we may ask that they review someone else's dissertation in return.

SAMPLE BOOK REVIEW FOR *FAFNIR* #1

T. S. Miller

Book Review:

Imagining the Future of Climate Change: World-Making through Science Fiction and Activism

Streeby, Shelley. *Imagining the Future of Climate Change: World-Making through Science Fiction and Activism*. U of California P, 2018. ISBN: 978-0-520-29445-5.

Shelley Streeby's *Imagining the Future of Climate Change* is a unique and necessary book that bridges the too often too distant spheres of environmental activism and SF scholarship. The scope of book, however, remains somewhat narrower than even its more specific subtitle—*World-Making through Science Fiction and Activism*—would suggest, and a reader already well versed in the long tradition of ecological SF may find it strange, for example, that this monograph on climate change and SF mentions the name of so towering a figure in the field as Kim Stanley Robinson only in passing. But Streeby makes it clear from the outset that, rather than attempting to cover the vast subject of climate change as it has been represented in science fiction as such, she is more eager to foreground the ways in which Indigenous people and people of color use forms of speculative thinking “to remember the past and imagine futures that help us think critically about the present and connect climate change to social movements” (5). It is clear that Streeby hopes to reach multiple audiences with different degrees of familiarity with the territory the book covers—for instance, she even reserves several pages of her introduction for an admirably concise “Brief History of Global Warming”—and I am confident that she has succeeded in that ambition. Accessible in the extreme and relatively short for an academic book (the main text runs to fewer than 130 pages), *Imagining the Future of Climate Change* should, I expect, work very well in an undergraduate classroom setting, and it will certainly improve my own future teaching of climate fiction whether or not I decide to assign the text itself.

Streeby writes in an almost conversational style without sacrificing depth, although readers expecting new and original readings of particular texts in the emerging canon of climate fiction will, again, not find many here. Rather than advancing a series of new interpretations, the book reads more

as a primer or guide to a set of interlocking issues as they play out across a tremendous swathe of cultural territory. Streeby repeatedly and quite accurately describes what she is doing in the book as “telling a story”: “I tell the story of imagining the future of climate change by focusing especially on movements, speculative fictions, and futurisms of Indigenous people and people of color—work that is all too often excluded from the category of cli-fi and that extends beyond cli-fi in its rich and deep connections to social movements and everyday struggles and to other cultural forms such as film, video, music, social media, and performance” (4-5). This overarching story turns out to be grim at bottom, as so much climate writing must be, though not without notes of hope in the “networked local strategies, direct actions, and collective envisionings of the future” documented by Streeby (126).

Although Streeby groups climate activism and speculative arts of all kinds under the umbrellas of futurism and world-making, insisting that we miss a great deal “when the focus is only on nation-states, transnational corporations, research scientists, and politicians as significant agents and explainers of change” (6), in practice she organizes the book around a few central figures, texts, and movements. For instance, the first chapter, titled “#NoDAPL,” uses the Dakota Access Pipeline protests of 2016—high-tech in its hashtags but with an emphasis on a politics of place—as an armature around which to build a much longer and broader history of Indigenous futurisms of various kinds, including the slipstream fictions of Gerald Vizenor and Leslie Marmon Silko, but also the much earlier activism of Hopi leader Thomas Banyacya and the 1990 Declaration of Quito. The second chapter, “Climate Refugees in the Greenhouse World,” chiefly uses the life and work of Octavia E. Butler to think about the prehistory of the current public discourse surrounding climate change. Streeby makes extensive and indeed striking use of the recently opened Butler archive at the Huntington Library, and her methodology differs intriguingly from the conventional ways in which authorial archives are so often deployed to support particular textual interpretations. Instead, Streeby invites us to consider Butler as a storyteller of another kind: an archivist and historian of climate change who scrupulously researched and documented climate change, climate-influenced disasters, and other ecological issues while working on her 1993 novel *Parable of the Sower*—which, as Streeby demonstrates, made considerably more explicit reference to climate change in discarded drafts. Streeby’s third and final chapter, “Climate Change as a World Problem,” emphasizes contemporary intersectional social movements and particularly the work of adrienne maree brown as an author and organizer, epitomized in her co-edited 2015 anthology of stories titled *Octavia’s Brood*.

If this mixture of activism and literary speculation from various groups and communities can seem eclectic, it should. Part of Streeby’s goal is to sketch possibilities for connection across, for example, black and Indigenous futurisms. Only one section in the book seems (to me) to cross the line from the productively eclectic into the possibly arbitrary, namely, the tenuously connected treatment of the Māori web series *Anamata Future News* that concludes the first chapter. It is not that I object to the inclusion of this particular piece of media for any reason, but its distance from many of the other texts and communities surveyed more broadly and deeply in the book necessarily led me to wonder why this obscure web series, rather than any number of other cultural productions, should appear here. I suppose the disappointment then lies more in all that Streeby had to exclude from this book. In general, however, I found Streeby’s chosen methodology—described by the author herself as building on “‘social movements and culture’ methodologies in American Studies” (6)—to be highly effective in how it links clear and concise historical summary and key political “flashpoints” with the development of ecologically minded SF before and after the landmark publication of Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring*. Certainly, parts of all the stories that Streeby tells will be familiar to different groups of readers within her wide audience, but everyone will also learn some new detail from the collective tapestry she weaves. I had no idea, for example, that in 1962 Monsanto produced and

circulated its own SF short story to counter the radical futurism of Rachel Carson, which it called “The Desolate Year.”

The bigger picture that emerges in the book, however, is more important than any such details, and Streeby convincingly demonstrates the success with which artists and activists have begun decolonizing the climatological imagination: for example, she shows how the #NoDAPL water protectors imagined “a future connected to the past beyond the global fossil fuel economy” (40), and she contextualizes the protests using both past incidents of resistance against resource extraction and Traci Voyles’s concept of “wastelanding,” that is, the “extraction of resources in racialized spaces that combined with environmental racism renders ‘space marginal, worthless, and pollutable’” (44). One of the central—and most hopeful—tensions that she identifies at Standing Rock is the way in which the movement contributes to “a revitalized politics of place” while simultaneously showing how activist futurisms can “connect people who are widely separated geographically but bound together in confronting common antagonists and sharing common goals” (44). The third chapter expands on this point usefully in its profile of adrienne maree brown, an activist and thinker described as both “attuned to the particularities of place” while thinking about “climate change as a world problem,” and whose work points to “direct action as a crucial method” (105).

While one may disagree with certain individual claims or exaggerations in the book—for instance, that Butler’s *Parable of the Sower* was necessarily “one of the first to imagine possibilities in the wake of climate change disaster” (70)—the larger argument invariably holds. In this specific case, the argument is that Butler’s “memory work” collecting and annotating newspaper articles as she attempted to imagine new forms of symbiosis in her fiction both challenges neoliberal failures in the face of climate change and “models an interdisciplinary engagement with the sciences” (24), making Butler—along with Silko—major “intellectuals” of climate change. In fact, I would highly recommend this book to any scholar of Butler’s work, as that second chapter itself models a promising method of making sense of all “the unpublished fragments, blueprints, and drafts of . . . prequels and sequels” that fill the Huntington archive, which Streeby understands as “a kind of dreamwork” (81).

Equally stimulating are Streeby’s treatments of the many other “world-making projects” covered in the book, which are not necessarily utopian yet still challenge the fossil fuel industry through visionary futurisms (43). Of course, writing about climate change is always “timely,” always “urgent,” but *Imagining the Future of Climate Change* boasts a very useful bibliography that is almost shockingly current. And, despite the obvious speed with which this book was, for an academic title, conceived, written, and brought to print, I detected no real signs of overhaste save the minor mistake in Streeby’s brief reference to Supreme Court Justice Gorsuch with the first name “Adam” rather than “Neil” (88). Also, the lack of an index, which one suspects to be a time- and/or money-saving move, is offset by the other paratextual materials included in the book, such as a list of key figures, a more descriptive table of contents labelled “Overview,” and a glossary of important terms. That the first two entries in this glossary should happen to be “direct action” and “speculative fiction” perhaps tells us all we finally need to know about the mission of *Imagining the Future of Climate Change*: Streeby insists persuasively that our “answers about the future of climate change must not come solely from the sphere of science and technology, or they will be too narrow, not capacious enough,” and that we vitally need these “visionary fictions created by activists and artists who struggle to conceive of worlds that diverge from dominant narratives of power and privilege” (30-31).

Biography: [insert brief bio ~75 words]

Sean Guynes-Vishniac

Book Review:

Twenty-First-Century Popular Fiction

Murphy, Bernice M., and Stephen Matterson, editors. *Twenty-First-Century Popular Fiction*. Edinburgh University Press, 2018. ISBN: 978-1474414852.

As most of us in the field intimately know (given that the usual rationalization of our worth to the academy tends to be based in the fact), popular fiction makes up the vast majority of the literary market, in terms of both annual sales and new titles published each year. Scholars, like me, just coming into our own have benefited from the pioneering work of earlier generations of literary and cultural studies scholars who have paved the way for science fiction studies, romance studies, crime and detective fiction studies, Gothic studies, and others. Murphy and Matterson's nearly encyclopedic volume of essays, *Twenty-First-Century Popular Fiction*, demonstrates, however, that a significant amount of work still remains for academics wishing to steer popular fiction into theory-infested, tenure-anxious waters—even 40 years after Darko Suvin's *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction* (1979) seemingly legitimized sf and 35 years after Janice Radway's *Reading the Romance* applied reader response theory to romance novels. This volume shows that the work of popular fiction studies lies not so much in "legitimizing" popular fiction as an object of study (though some still need convincing) as it does in diving head-first into the vastness of the popular fiction catalog. Though Murphy and Matterson limit their scope to the popular fiction of just the past two decades, the contributors to *Twenty-First-Century Popular Fiction* signal that our work has just begun—but, if Murphy and Matterson's volume is any indication of the state of that beginning, we're off to a good start.

Twenty-First-Century Popular Fiction should be best understood as a dense overview of and introduction to the scope of genres that populate the twenty-first-century popular fiction market, emphasizing those texts and genres that have had significant cultural influence in the past two decades. With twenty chapters, plus an introduction, all in 250 pages, the collection trades depth for breadth. While many will no doubt lament the exclusion of this or that genre, the overall effect is a capaciousness that comes as a relief. Murphy and Matterson ensure that an incredible range of authors and popular literary genres are covered, bringing together critical introductions to authors who have rarely appeared between the same covers on account of the usual separation between scholarship on the major genres. Thus Max Brooks, Dan Brown, Suzanne Collins, Gillian Flynn, Tana French, Neil Gaiman, Hugh Howey, E. L. James, Stephen King, George R. R. Martin, Larry McMurtry, Stephanie Meyer, China Miéville, Grant Morrison, Jo Nesbø, Jodi Picoult, Terry Pratchett, Cherie Priest, Nora Roberts, and J. K. Rowling—whew!—are all covered. The collection thus provides an author-centric approach to popular fiction and genre, which only makes sense since the craft, success, and reputation of popular genre authors are regularly measured against their genre's respective "giants"—one has only to look at book blurbs for new authors that claim they are a blend of authors X and Y to see that success in popular fiction is often measured in relation to the major names.

The book arranges chapters chronologically by birthdate of the authors they study. The effect, however, is not relentless, since the chapters are relatively short, ranging between eleven and thirteen pages, nor is it boring, since the tight work of each chapter is new, exciting, and thought-provoking.

Twenty-First-Century Popular Fiction is thus a rather energizing read through which even the best-read among us will find something new. Such is the ethos of the collection: to suggest new directions for popular fiction studies while also modeling the kind of writing—mixing a love for the fiction with a serious, critical approach—needed to enliven the field. Murphy and Matterson refer to this in their introduction as “changing the story” of the field. They establish that the purpose of the collection is not to offer more histories of popular fiction but to “provide an informed, accessible and authoritative snapshot of the current state of popular fiction” by emphasizing “key contributions to both the individual genres or sub-genres,” bringing together essays that will serve “as starting points for further reading and research” (2).

The introduction charts some key features of popular fiction in the twenty-first century, noting, for example, the increasingly blurred boundaries between “genre” and “literary” markets; the preponderance of transmedia extensions and adaptations; the “increasing elasticity of genre” as genres increasingly blur and break rules; and the subsequent creation and hybridizing of new ones. Admittedly, however, this latter feature is not particularly new; while it is certainly possible to historicize genre hybridity in this specific historical moment, the editors make no attempt to do so. It might be that we are witnessing a moment of “genre confusion” akin to that of the late-nineteenth-century that first saw the emergence of the popular fiction market. Of course, the editors could only have addressed this by including fewer chapters and permitting a higher per-chapter word count. As the introduction demonstrates, word count proves a minor problem throughout the collection; after all, when you’ve got twelve pages to summarize the significance and cultural position of an author with a catalog as vast as Nora Roberts’s, as complex as China Miéville’s, or as transmedial as Stephen King’s, let alone to generate an original scholarly argument, much will be lost. This is an understandable—and by no means detrimental—symptom of the previously noted overall spirit of *Popular Fiction*: breadth over depth. This leads to occasionally regrettable exclusions or underdeveloping certain aspects of an argument. Matterson’s own chapter, for example, on Larry McMurtry is misbalanced toward a general history of the Western, doing very little to advance critical knowledge of McMurtry’s role, aside from noting that McMurtry produces an important dialectic between representing the “actuality” of the West’s history and the significance of (inaccurate) cultural memory and its cowboy mythology to readers. On the whole, however, the chapters generally outshine their limitations.

All twenty chapters are competently written and fulfill well their duty to provide a “snapshot” of individual authors who represent the state of popular fiction. Perhaps because of the limited length and thus limited ability to break new ground, the most impressive chapters are those that focus on writers who are truly untouched by scholarship, even as they are selling millions of copies worldwide. Jarlath Killeen’s chapter is on Nora Roberts’s romance novels and Clare Hayes-Brady’s is on Jodi Picoult’s “women’s fiction”; ironically, Killeen and Hayes-Brady reference Stephen King’s approval of both women writers in establishing their significance, though their avid readerships and dozens of novels (over two hundred, in Roberts’s case) bespeak their importance. Hayes-Brady, for example, demonstrates Picoult’s masterful “movement between voices and times [that] allows Picoult to drip-feed the major moments of narrative significance to the reader, while contextualising these developments amidst moments of crisis” (150). In doing so, Picoult’s *The Pact* “consolidates Picoult’s abiding interest in narrative, memory, and testimony” as significant to the lives of American women (151), though it might have been useful to note the demographics of Picoult’s readers. Likewise, Brian Cliff’s chapter on Tana French’s Irish mystery novels, Stephen Kenneally’s chapter on science-fiction writer Hugh Howey’s use of self-publishing, and Catherine Siemann’s chapter on Cherie Priest’s race- and eco-critical steampunk novels all offer excellent critical dissection. These youngest authors surveyed in the collection represent the greatest prospects for popular fiction studies modelled by Murphy and Matterson’s collection.

Twenty-First-Century Popular Fiction is an important resource for the growing field of popular fiction studies. It marks “popular fiction” as something separate from, but imbricated with, the study of popular culture more generally (see, for example, the work of *The Journal of Popular Culture*, where popular fiction articles regularly show up but by no means as the majority of what they publish), and a field that needs greater vision of sight than the limited scope offered by science fiction studies or romance studies. Murphy and Matterson’s collection is, in essence, an argument for the formulation of a sincere field of popular fiction studies like that put forward by Ken Gelder in his 2004 book *Popular Fiction: The Logics and Practices of a Literary Field*, but never truly advanced since then; Murphy and Matterson’s book makes clear the need for something like a journal of popular fiction studies.

Of course, *Twenty-First-Century Popular Fiction* falls victim to some of the issues plaguing the study of popular fiction more generally; it is Ameri- and Eurocentric in its survey of authors, and though it covers women and men nearly equally (nine to eleven), not a *single* writer of color is surveyed, nor is there much diversity with regard to sexuality, (dis)ability, or religious background. This is partly because, like most aspects of popular culture production, popular fiction is largely written by white men and women, with significantly different disparities across genres (for example, sf and the Western have been predominantly written by men, romance by women). Still, it would not have been difficult—to take one example—to reach out to scholars of black popular fiction, whether of science fiction, horror, or romance, especially given that important new work has been forwarded in each of these areas in recent years, particularly given the rise of Afrofuturism and the growth of black romance imprints/publishers. Truthfully, any survey of twenty-first-century popular fiction that does not cover non-white, non-heterosexual authors should not be considered a very thorough survey of twenty-first-century popular fiction.

Regardless, Murphy and Matterson have created an important model for future work that accomplishes the sort of scholarship, despite sacrificing depth for breadth, desperately needed to develop the field. *Twenty-First-Century Popular Fiction* is a must-need for scholars of popular fiction across the genres and across media, and it even raises questions about the place of a comics auteur like Grant Morrison and, by extension, the place of comics themselves within the fold of popular literary studies. It is a volume that I hope marks the beginning of a new era in popular fiction scholarship.

Biography: [insert brief bio ~75 words]