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Table of Contents

Editorial 1/2023..... 5

Prefatory

What Can Double Estrangement Reveal about Speculative
Fiction?
JOY SANCHEZ-TAYLOR..... 7

Peer-Reviewed Article

The Critique of Colonial Cartography in N. K. Jemisin’s
The Hundred Thousand Kingdoms
PETER MELVILLE..... 12

Book Reviews

*Reverse Colonization: Science Fiction, Imperial Fantasy,
and Alt-Victimhood*
C. PALMER-PATEL..... 25

*Encountering The Sovereign Other: Indigenous Science
Fiction*
HOGAN D. SCHAAK..... 29

*Chinese Science Fiction during the Post-Mao Cultural
Thaw*
EERO SUORANTA..... 33

Shakespeare and Science Fiction
NOAH SLOWIK..... 37

*Fantasy and Myth in the Anthropocene: Imagining
Futures and Dreaming Hope in Literature and Media*
GEMMA FIELD..... 41

Interview

- Hail and Farewell: An Interview with *Fafnir*'s Departing
and Arriving Editors-In-Chief
ELIZABETH OAKES & ESSI VARIS..... 46

Lectio Praecursoria

- Loputtomuuden hinta: *Doctor Who*, etiikka ja ihmisyyden
rajat
LEENA VUOLTEENAHO..... 51

- Call for Papers 1/2024**..... 58



Editorial 1/2023

Elizabeth Oakes, Merve Tabur, Essi Varis & Jari Käkälä

Welcome to *Fafnir – Nordic Journal of Science Fiction and Fantasy Research*'s first edition of 2023. We would like to thank Joy Sanchez-Taylor for opening the issue with her thought-provoking prefatory, "What Can Double Estrangement Reveal about Speculative Fiction?". In this short essay, Sanchez-Taylor demonstrates how racial and/or ethnic self-consciousness adds layers of estrangement to such non-Eurocentric works of speculative fiction as R. F. Kuang's *Babel* (2022) or Ma Ling's *Severance* (2018). Post-colonial themes and marginalized perspectives are also front and center in the only research article that survived the grueling peer-review round for this issue: in "The Critique of Colonial Cartography in N. K. Jemisin's *The Hundred Thousand Kingdoms*," Peter Melville extends Stefan Ekman's theories of fantasy maps and argues that the omission of maps from *The Hundred Thousand Kingdoms* (2010) is one of the ways in which N. K. Jemisin defies the colonial gaze inherent in cartography.

In addition, our new reviews editor, Jari Käkälä, has collected five fascinating book reviews for you to enjoy, many of which also happen to revolve around various marginalized perspectives on speculative genres. C. Palmer-Patel continues the post-colonial discussion by reviewing David M. Higgins's *Reverse Colonization: Science Fiction, Imperial Fantasy, and Alt-Victimhood*; Hogan D. Schaak introduces yet another angle with his review of Miriam C. Brown Spiers's *Encountering The Sovereign Other: Indigenous Science Fiction*; and Eero Suoranta also adds his review of Hua Li's *Chinese Science Fiction during the Post-Mao Cultural Thaw* to this non-Eurocentric choir. By contrast, Noah Slowik's review of Sarah Annes Brown's *Shakespeare and Science Fiction* looks back on one of the giants of the Anglocentric canon, but from the viewpoint of SF, which could still be construed as a somewhat marginalized stance in the field of literary studies. Finally, Gemma Field's review of *Fantasy and Myth in the Anthropocene: Imagining Futures and Dreaming Hope in Literature and Media*, edited by Marek Oziewicz, Brian Attebery, and Tereza Dedinová, foregrounds one of the most global and

fundamental power struggles of all – that between humans and nonhuman nature.

Our long-serving co-editor-in-chief, Laura E. Goodin has set the coordinates of her hyperdrive for new missions in distant galaxies, and in her place, we welcome our colleague Merve Tabur from Utrecht University. In the now-traditional “Hail and Farewell” interview, they discuss their memories of and expectations for their editorial journeys, the aspects of *Fafnir* they most want to foster, and their love for speculative fiction. If you are thinking of submitting or editing for *Fafnir* one day, tune in for their tips!

The issue concludes with Leena Vuolteenaho’s Finnish language *lectio praecursoria* “Loputtomuuden hinta: *Doctor Who*, etiikka ja ihmisyiden rajat,” which views *Doctor Who*’s depictions of immortality through the lens of Buddhist and Christian ethics. Vuolteenaho notes that we cannot draw a clear line between the realistic pursuit of prolonged lifespan and the (as-of-yet) speculative pursuit of immortality. Therefore, speculative works like *Doctor Who* can function as helpful thought experiments, which allow us to consider what kind of ethical troubles the extension of human lifespan can entail now or could entail in the future as medical science keeps pushing the boundaries of what it means to be human.

While the call for papers to our next issue, 2/2023, is coming to a close at the end of June, we continue to welcome submissions for our next open issue, 1/2024. Submission guidelines can be found at <http://journal.finfar.org/for-authors/submission-guidelines/>. Please note that we are also seeking a new editor-in-chief with Finnish language proficiency. The three-year position is open from the beginning of 2024, and you can find more details on the application process here: <http://journal.finfar.org/fafnir-etsii-uutta-paatoimittajaa/>.

We hope the critical engagements, analyses, and considerations of our contributors provide you with food for thought whether you are enjoying the long days of northern summer or a cozy southern winter. As always, we at *Fafnir* hope this issue finds you well and inspires your research in the wide, wonderful field of speculative fiction!

Essi Varis, Elizabeth Oakes, and Merve Tabur, Editors-in-Chief
Jari Käkälä, Reviews Editor
Fafnir – Nordic Journal of Science Fiction and Fantasy Research



What Can Double Estrangement Reveal about Speculative Fiction?

Joy Sanchez-Taylor

In my book *Diverse Futures: Science Fiction and Authors of Color*, I use the phrase “double estrangement” to describe science fiction texts that add a layer of racial self-consciousness to the estrangement of science fictional settings. This term juxtaposes the ideas of cognitive estrangement expressed by science fiction critic Darko Suvin with W.E.B. DuBois’s writings on racial double consciousness. At the time I was writing *Diverse Futures*, I was unaware that science fiction scholar Ian Campbell had also decided on this term for his 2018 book *Arabic Science Fiction* to describe Arabic science fiction’s use of estrangement as subtle political critique under dangerous social situations and also to address the ways that Arabic science fiction authors estrange references to Western technologies. And it turns out that the term “double estrangement” has been used in fantasy studies to discuss the ways that immersive fantasy worlds often shield readers from any implication that the created fantasy world is not real (Mendlesohn 59). While these definitions of “double estrangement” are inherently different and were created for different purposes, I want to take a minute to think through what double estrangement can add to the study of speculative fiction.

What each of these definitions of double estrangement demonstrates is an awareness that speculative fictions work to place readers in a liminal position: between the “real” world and the world of the speculative text, or between a fantasy world and its “rational” alternative. I am using quotation marks around the terms “real” and “rational” here because these terms come from a Eurocentric perspective. European colonizers believed that their sciences and technologies were superior to those of the peoples they colonized, and therefore the only rational option, a fact that John Rieder documents thoroughly in *Colonialism and the Emergence of Science Fiction*. The rational vs. irrational binary is one of the cornerstones of definitions of speculative

fiction and also serves as a boundary denoting the difference between the genres of science fiction and fantasy.

And yet, in many countries and cultures, what is considered real and rational differs widely. Colson Whitehead explains in an interview about his zombie apocalypse novel *Zone One* that “My conception of what makes a zombie horrible and terrifying is realizing the truth of the world, which you’ve always suspected” (Colbert). Many other authors and scholars discuss the experience, as Greg Tate describes, of “[living] the estrangement that science fiction writers imagine” (qtd. in Dery 212). Africanfuturist and Indigenous futurist authors frequently discuss the experience of already living in dystopic or post-apocalyptic worlds. Non-Eurocentric science fiction authors may be living in regimes that do not allow for outright social critique or may have a complex relationship to Western science and technology, as evidenced in Campbell’s discussion of the multiple estrangements in Arabic science fiction. Authors writing speculative fiction from a perspective outside of the dominant or Eurocentric model, authors already living an estranged existence, are therefore frequently writing works that contain multiple layers of estrangement.

The acknowledgement of multiple levels of estrangement in speculative works pushes authors and scholars to think beyond Suvin’s scientific and political novums and reconsider the assumption that everyone can recognize “the real world.” Theories of double estrangement highlight the social and economic estrangement that constitutes the lived experiences of many marginalized groups. As African speculative author Oghenechovwe Donald Ekpeki notes in his nonfiction essay, “Too Dystopian for Whom?,” one person’s dystopia is another person’s lived experience. And while for years, science fiction argued that after the apocalypse, humans would find a way to forget their differences and work together, current events like the COVID-19 pandemic seem to indicate that disaster only serves to widen economic gaps and create more intense social and political divisions.

Ling Ma’s *Severance* is a good example of a science fiction novel that utilizes double estrangement to take on the trope of the multicultural survivor group found in popular post-apocalyptic series like *The Walking Dead*. In *Severance*, the Asian female narrator, Candace, joins a group of survivors after deciding to leave New York City, which has become ravaged by a fungal infection that turns people into zombie-like creatures. Ma shifts from the typical zombie apocalypse narrative where danger comes from the zombie and creates a narrative that allows Candace to empathize with the non-violent former-humans. She also uses Candace’s internal monologue to add a layer of racialized and gendered precarity to her narrative. Candace is consistently aware of her expendable position in the survivor group and is forced to utilize Asian female stereotypes to escape being imprisoned by a white man after it is revealed that she is pregnant. Ma’s references to the narrator as the child of immigrants, who is reluctant to leave her corporate office after a pandemic decimates the city, offers a commentary on the illusion of the model minority and the price that women of color pay in a world where failure is not an option. The fact that she is imprisoned to “protect” her child links to narratives of women of color as unfit mothers. Readers feel every level of estrangement that the narrator experiences as the novel uncovers multiple tensions: the tensions between the pre- and post-pandemic worlds, between the narrator and the

survivor group she joins, and between the narrator and her heritage, which is revealed through flashbacks and a vision the narrator has of her dead mother. Ma's near-future dystopia is almost indistinguishable from the present, and yet the levels of estrangement the narrator faces and the racial/ethnic self-consciousness revealed make *Severance* a prime example of how writing science fiction from a marginalized perspective can add additional levels of estrangement to a genre defined by cognitive estrangement.

But what does the concept of double estrangement bring to other speculative genres, like fantasy? If double estrangement in fantasy is the act of shielding the reader from any speculation that an immersive fantasy world is not real, then a work like R. F. Kuang's *Babel* offers an important example of how non-Eurocentric fantasy can use alternate perspectives and realities to play with the borders of reality in a fantasy text. Kuang's novel tells the story of a young Chinese boy, Robin, who is brought to England after the death of his mother and trained by his benefactor and unacknowledged father, Professor Lovell, to become a translator for Babel – a powerful institution that creates the magic bars that are the basis of colonial wealth and power in this fantasy setting. *Babel* employs conversations about the morality of supporting a corrupt, colonizing empire in order to create an added level of estrangement in the narrative. Within Kuang's European fantasy setting, her characters of color are never fully accepted and are constantly questioning their choice to participate in the colonial machine. The fact that non-European languages are the key to the continuing dominance of England's magic also comments on issues of translation and reception for authors like Kuang who want to write fantasy that differs from or critiques the Oxford school tradition of fantasy.

Although the double estrangement of the world of *Babel* is maintained – the existence of Babel and magic in the novel is never truly questioned – Kuang plays with the idea of fantasy and reality to critique the Eurocentrism of fantasy literature:

Of all the marvels of Oxford, Babel seemed the most impossible – a tower out of time, a vision from a dream...it all seemed to have been pulled straight from the painting in Professor Lovell's dining room and dropped whole onto this drab grey street. An illumination in a medieval manuscript; a door to fairy land. (Kuang 72)

Kuang connects her narrator's amazement to fantasy and fantastic creations; her references to "medieval manuscripts" and "fairy land" take the most expected aspects of Eurocentric fantasy worldbuilding and use them to express the alienation of her Chinese protagonist. Throughout *Babel*, Robin is forced to abandon his dead mother, change his name, and accept the fact that his white father will never acknowledge him. The professor even beats him in a graphic scene while making references to colonial stereotypes of Chinese laziness. Robin eventually kills Professor Lovell and spends the rest of the novel trying to survive in an England that wants to imprison and torture him. Like Candace and many other marginalized people of color, Robin is both invisible and hyper-visible, and his survival depends on his awareness that he will never be able to fully integrate into a white-dominated colonial culture. Double estrangement in fantasy can be an important lens for authors and scholars to begin

conversations about how non-Eurocentric fantasy can utilize fantasy structures, Eurocentric or otherwise, as colonial critique.

I hope that my brief discussion of the concept of double estrangement in non-Eurocentric speculative literature helps to acknowledge the important contributions that authors who write outside of white, male, heteronormative identities are making within this genre. Authors who choose to write non-Eurocentric speculative fiction utilize the estrangement possible in speculative worlds to draw attention to the ways that marginalized peoples already live an estranged existence. Those of us who study speculative fiction need to consider how double estrangement highlights the ways that non-Eurocentric speculative works critique the history of Eurocentric dominance in speculative genres and, ultimately, create new ways of thinking about who is actually estranged in speculative fiction.

Biography: Joy Sanchez-Taylor is a Professor of English at LaGuardia Community College (CUNY) and a Mellon/ACLU Community College Fellow whose research specialty is intersections between science fiction, fantasy, and critical race studies. Her book *Diverse Futures: Science Fiction and Authors of Color* (2021) examines the contributions of late twentieth and twenty-first century U.S. and Canadian science fiction authors of color to the genre. For more of her writing, check out her article “The Line Between Science Fiction and Fantasy is Blurring, and I’m Into It,” which has been nominated for an IGRYTE Award.

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The Critique of Colonial Cartography in N. K. Jemisin's *The Hundred Thousand Kingdoms*

Peter Melville

Abstract: Epic fantasy is well-known for supplying readers with maps of fantastic secondary-world settings. N. K. Jemisin's *The Inheritance Trilogy* is an example of an epic fantasy series that might have benefited from a map, but its author specifically chose not to include one. Jemisin has publicly acknowledged her aversion to the fantasy map as little more than a cliché that oftentimes spoils the role that places on the map will have in a fantasy text. Critical descriptions of cartographic images in *The Inheritance Trilogy*, particularly in its first novel *The Hundred Thousand Kingdoms*, suggest there is more to the story: that the omission of a reader map adds emphasis to the series' postcolonial critique of what map theorists call "the cartographic gaze."

Associating the very idea of a world map with the arrogance of empire, *The Inheritance Trilogy* characterizes the god's eye view of colonial cartography as harmfully misguided, even blasphemous, in its attempt to capture the world from a single totalizing perspective. Jemisin counters the objectifying vantage point of the god's eye view with the subjective narrative perspective of the colonized other. She is by no means the only fantasy author to use first-person narration to promote postcolonial perspectives, but doing so enables her to recapture a depth of experience that is lost when worlds (both imaginary and real) are framed by the colonial cartographic gaze.

Keywords: fantasy, maps, cartography, colonial empire, postcolonialism

1. Introduction

Despite her known aversion to fantasy maps, N. K. Jemisin provides readers of her *Broken Earth* trilogy (2015–2017) with a continental map of the secondary world known as the Stillness. She claims to have needed a map as she wrote the first novel in the series and admits that the strange vastness of the Stillness presented a unique case in which seeing a map might justifiably elevate the reader's "sense of wonder" and "add to the story" ("Stillness"). For her first *Great Cities* novel *The City We Became* (2020), Jemisin includes yet another map, albeit one that faithfully reproduces the real-world topography of New York City with additional scribbles that mark the locations of fantastic elements from within the story. While these recent exceptions have ostensibly become a new rule for Jemisin, her earlier works reflect a concerted disinclination toward the cartographic conventions of fantasy fiction that is well worth revisiting. The absence of a map in her debut fantasy series *The Inheritance Trilogy* (2010–2011) represents an intentional choice to avoid the fantasy map as "a cliché and a kind of spoiler" that not only reveals "locations that will become important" in a series, but also privileges global perspectives at the expense of local viewpoints or vice versa (Interview). In cases where a series' focus shifts between "the whole planet" and "one city-sized palace," she muses, "Which one should [get] the map?" (Interview).¹

The purpose of this essay is twofold. First, it aims to extend the work of fantasy map theorist Stefan Ekman by applying his ideas to a fantasy series that deliberately refuses to provide a visible cartographic depiction of its secondary world. If the fantasy map sometimes functions as a "central part of the creation process" (*Dragons* 21), then how might its absence implicitly contribute to the same? Alternatively, if the map acts as a "threshold" or "liminal space between the actual world of the reader and the fictional world of the fantasy story" (21), then what does it mean for a postcolonial fantasy like *The Inheritance Trilogy* to deny this conventional first point of contact between reader and story?

As scholars of colonial cartography point out, maps express "relations of power" and "have held particular significance as instruments of colonial control" (Harley 35, Nayar 23). They "serve not simply to represent space but to impose one way of relating to, seeing, and imagining the world – a worldview [the map] claims to be superior" (Bellone et al 34). Ekman echoes this idea when he emphasizes the "propositional" rather than representational nature of maps ("Entering" 73). Maps, he explains, do not *re-present* a place so much as they make "arguments" about that place, including the fact that it "embodies a certain ideology" (85). An official, state-produced diegetic map of *The Inheritance Trilogy's* so-called Hundred Thousand Kingdoms, for instance – like the one located in the royal apartment of Relad Arameri – would undoubtedly make arguments in favor of the dominant colonial power within that world, namely, the Itempan religious order or Amn people in general. Reproducing such a map would run counter to Jemisin's invitation to witness

¹ This question is largely rhetorical, as Jemisin is no doubt aware of fantasy texts that include multiple maps at different scales. Her feelings about a potential map for *The Inheritance Trilogy* are nevertheless clear: "I didn't want one" (Interview). The case appears to be the same for her second fantasy series *The Dreamblood Duology* (2012), which also forgoes the convention of a fantasy map.

and share *The Inheritance Trilogy's* varied perspectives of colonized others. This is, for me, the most significant and compelling reason why the trilogy does not feature a visible map of its secondary world. The absence of a paratextual map that might otherwise mediate the reader's initial interaction with the series literally and figuratively prioritizes the viewpoints and subjective experiences of characters like Yeine, the displaced narrator of *The Inheritance Trilogy's* first novel *The Hundred Thousand Kingdoms* (2010).²

The second aim of this essay is to provide analysis of textual examples, particularly from *The Hundred Thousand Kingdoms*, where Jemisin describes cartographic images or alludes to what map theorists call the "cartographic gaze" (Specht and Feigenbaum 39). In this respect, I look beyond Jemisin's own published explanations for her refusal to provide a map for her trilogy and highlight instead the connections the series makes between cartography and the colonial gaze. *The Hundred Thousand Kingdoms*, I argue, carries an implicit ideological critique of the very idea of a world map and associates such maps with the arrogance of empire and colonial domination. Specifically, the novel characterizes the bird's or god's eye view of colonial cartography as harmfully misguided, even blasphemous, in its attempt to capture the world from a single totalizing perspective.

As Denis Wood reminds us, "People create maps only when their social relations call for them" (19). In *The Hundred Thousand Kingdoms*, the arrogant cartographic gaze of the Arameri world order promotes an underlying political agenda shared by colonial cartography in our own world: "to define and claim outside ownership of territories" and "to root people to entities to which they ... have to be loyal, but [which they cannot] see" (Tadepalli). At the novel's conclusion, this agenda is challenged by the emergence of alternate ways of viewing the world, not the least of which is the insistent narrative perspective of the novel's protagonist Yeine, a colonized other who defies the colonial state and quite literally becomes a god. If the series offers no map of the Hundred Thousand Kingdoms, then it is partly because the central and centering arguments that such a map would make in favor of an Itempan or Arameri colonial worldview cannot hold. As the Arameri patriarch Dekarta himself predicts, "every nation on this planet will rise up to destroy us" (396). The empire that the map would portray, in other words, is doomed to fail.

2. Fantasy Maps and Colonial Cartography

Ekman observes that fantasy's use of maps is often regarded as "one of the genre's most distinctive characteristics" (*Dragons* 11). In the satirical words of Diana Wynne Jones, "No Tour of Fantasyland is complete without one" (1).³ One of Ekman's main points about fantasy maps is that they hold significance

² Yeine's story begins when she is summoned to travel from her home nation of Darr to the Arameri-controlled city of Sky, the political capital and cultural center of the Hundred Thousand Kingdoms.

³ The humor of Jones' observation plays on the prevalence of maps in iconic fantasy texts by such writers as J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, and Ursula K. Le Guin. Ekman's sample survey of 200 fantasy novels shows, nevertheless, that while maps appear frequently enough to be recognized as a well-established (even stereotypical) convention within the fantasy tradition, they are by no means "compulsory ingredients" of the genre (*Dragons* 22).

for both the author and the reader. On one hand, they can play a central role in the creative worldbuilding process. As mentioned, Jemisin admits to having needed a map when imagining the complex topography of her *Broken Earth* series. Ekman says the same was true for J.R.R. Tolkien, for whom the “map [was] primary and the story secondary, at least in fashioning the geographical setting” of Middle-earth (72). On the other hand, as thresholds between the actual world of the reader and the fictional world of the fantasy story, maps are an important part of what Ekman and Audrey Isabel Taylor call “readerly world-building,” or the process by which “readers carry out a hermeneutical construction of a world” and create the story “as a full object in their minds” (“Notes” 10).

Given the importance maps can have for both readers and authors, Ekman implores fantasy critics to analyze fantasy maps and texts together: “To ignore what the map communicates and only analyze the text means omitting a significant part of the work” (*Dragons* 67). When the work includes a map, the analysis should consist in part of a “topofocal” or “place-focused” approach that accounts for the “dynamic rather than static” system of “links” that develop between the map and the text over the course of reading the work (Ekman, *Dragons* 2, “Map and Text” 75). I agree with Ekman (and Taylor) on these points but add that the topofocal approach to fantasy might well include the deliberate omission of a map as a part of the work and as a potential source of meaning, particularly in postcolonial texts where maps are viewed with suspicion.

It is important to keep in mind, after all, that in addition to being tools for imagining pathways through worlds both fictional and actual, maps are also deployed as instruments of power and have historically been the tools of empire. Benedict Anderson, a renowned theorist of the nation-state, identifies the map as one of three primary institutions, along with the census and the museum, that “profoundly shaped the way in which the colonial state imagined its dominion” (168). For Anderson, the colonial map was not a “scientific abstraction of reality” so much as an “instrument [used] to concretize projections on the earth’s surface” (173, 174). It offered points of reference for the administrative and military operations of colonization to work within and to take shape in the minds of both the colonizer and the colonized (174). As a reproducible and widely distributed object, the map became an “intellectual weapon” geared towards the continued production and maintenance of state power (Morisson 27). It belonged to a discourse of totalization that not only differentiated the lands claimed by colonial powers externally, but also projected the semblance of stability within each territory. Anti-colonial uprisings or insurgencies were rarely indicated unless a map was specifically appointed “for the purpose of suppressing such challenges to their power” (Wanberg 6). In other words, in addition to marking the locations of strategic outposts, trade routes, borders, and towns, the colonial map represented a topography of management and control.

For many critics of colonial cartography, the totalizing and suppressive power of the colonial map is underwritten by the cartographic gaze, which objectifies the lands and people it surveys from the vantage point of the bird’s or god’s eye view. According to Doug Specht and Anna Feigenbaum, the map’s expansive aerial perspective forms a “precursor to the surveillant gaze, epitomized by Bentham’s Panopticon and the work of Foucault;” and was

“instrumental in the forming of the Other – and with that the subjugation of the Other” (40). The objectifying gaze of the divine view from above “solidifies relations [below] and immobilizes those who are mapped,” robbing them of “their self-determination” (40). It projects onto the map what Edward Said would call an “imaginative geography,” which does not represent a colonized people or territory with scientific accuracy, but conjures an image of the colonial other as a fixed object to be made governable and exploited as a resource for extending colonial influence across the world (49). If the colonial map makes an argument in favor of the “assertion of sovereignty” (Black 12), then the divine perspective afforded by the bird’s or god’s eye view is the *logos* – or structural appeal to reason – on which that argument rests.

3. The God’s Eye View of the Arameri Cartographic Gaze

Without a paratextual map, readers of *The Hundred Thousand Kingdoms* are not afforded their own bird’s or god’s eye view of Jemisin’s world but are quickly made aware of the effects such views have on the colonized other. The novel’s second chapter provides an early example of a view that looks down from above and explicitly associates its privileged perspective with the godlike purview of the colonial gaze. When Yeine arrives at the Arameri capital of Sky, she is led on a tour that ends in her new apartment in the towering heights of Sky palace. She is immediately struck by the view: “Floor-to-ceiling windows ran along one wall, which afforded me a stunning view of the city and the countryside below – far, far below” (16). The view offers sweeping vistas that evoke the all-encompassing vantage point of the cartographic gaze. “We were so high”, she marvels, “that I couldn’t even make out people on the streets below” (16). Though it leaves her momentarily speechless, Yeine soon expresses reservations about the view from Sky: “it seemed as though I could see the whole of the Hundred Thousand Kingdoms. That was a fallacy, I knew” (74). On the surface, the “fallacy” she mentions pertains to the literal impossibility of seeing an entire world from a single vantage point, especially one proven by scribes to be “round” (74). But Yeine also means to denounce the totalizing arrogance of the cartographic gaze through which colonizers imagine their charted domains from a distance and in which the people of those domains fade from view. The idea that the Hundred Thousand Kingdoms could be collectively captured and known from the elevated viewpoint of one nation strikes Yeine as “profoundly wrong” (74). “It is blasphemy,” she insists, “to separate oneself from the earth and look down on it like a god” (74).

While her condemnation of the god’s eye view is couched in religious terms, the separation to which Yeine refers reflects the political hierarchy imposed by cartographic viewpoints that elevate the surveyor over the surveyed, the mapper over the mapped. For critics of colonial cartography, this “false sense of separation” promotes a notion of “space as an object” and engenders a “geographical imagination where nature and its local inhabitants have become merely resources for settlement, domination, and exploitation” (Bellone et al 18). Ironically, the objectifying cartographic view Yeine encounters from her apartment window sharply contrasts with her own narrative perspective as a colonized subject. As Jemisin points out, *The Inheritance Trilogy* falls within the category of postcolonial texts that eschew

conventional fantasy tropes of “Us vs the Other” in favor of “stories [told] from the Other’s PoV” (“Considering”). As a member and leader of the colonized nation of Darr, Yeine embodies the underclass perspective of the other who experiences colonial domination from below. Hers is a story of manipulation and exploitation at the hands of the colonial state. Standing before the god’s eye view of her new apartment in Sky, she finds herself unexpectedly inhabiting the alien perspective of the colonial gaze, which leaves her feeling disoriented and displaced, separated from herself as a colonized subject. The contrast between the view and her own grounded experience of the people and lands below works to denaturalize the cartographic gaze. Her misgivings about the view emphasize its partiality, the fact that it represents just one perspective – albeit an elevated or privileged one – that favors a specific worldview.

Yet, even as Jemisin aims to denaturalize the colonizer’s cartographic perception of the world, she draws attention to its insidious appeal. The more Yeine grows accustomed to her apartment’s Sky view, the more she admits to being enthralled by its blasphemous perspective: “I could not help drinking in the view. It is important to appreciate beauty, even when it is evil” (75). The aesthetic allure of the god’s eye view is partly what makes it so “dangerous,” says Yeine (74). It entices the viewer with vistas that can delight as much as they distort the world they frame. Part of the pleasure afforded by such a view is derived from convention, or the reiterative process by which one formal way of framing the geographic world gains recognition and credibility over others. As Specht and Feigenbaum admit, there is “a bias towards the creation of God’s eye views of the world, which frequently exclude other interpretations and understanding of existence” (50).

But the appeal of the god’s eye view is also born of the sense of order it provides, particularly in the way its broad scale enables relations to be drawn and maintained between discrete geographical features and locations that form an organized whole. According to Michel de Certeau, “this pleasure of ‘seeing the whole,’ of looking down on” and “totalizing” what is below renders the profound complexity of something like a city (or in Yeine’s case, an entire empire) “readable” – which is to say, it “immobilizes [the city’s] opaque mobility in a transparent text” (92). De Certeau has in mind what he calls the “celestial eye” that gazes down from the top of the former World Trade Center in New York City (92), but his comments likewise befit the panoramic views afforded by Sky Palace, an edifice which, like the World Trade Center, stands as an emblem of worldwide imperial influence and power. The view from Sky, in other words, is hardly neutral, as though it merely embodied the vantage point of a bird. Rather, it projects a deliberately constructed perspective of divine authority offering the “fiction of knowledge” over a teeming multiplicity of colonized lands reduced to an immobilized image – or, as de Certeau alternatively describes it, a “visual” simulacrum “whose condition of possibility” rests on a “misunderstanding of practices” carried out below (92). Put more plainly, looking out from the heights of Sky Palace promotes the semblance of order beneath the organizing purview of empire, but in the process, this view loses sight of the lives and goings-on of ordinary people on the ground, as Yeine suggests.

In the context of the *Hundred Thousand Kingdoms*, this immobilizing desire for order is specifically associated with the divine perspective, or celestial eye, of Itempas the Skyfather, whom the Arameri worship as “the lord of order”

(21). Having ascended to monotheistic prominence by imprisoning the god of chaos (Nahadoth) and killing the goddess of balance (Enefa), Itempas epitomizes an overdetermined drive toward order that demands strict compliance and assimilation to a single interpretation of the world. Those who express views or distribute documents that contradict the Itempan worldview are routinely executed for “heresy” (111). A map, for instance, that were to deviate in some way from the world-ordering perspective of the Itempan cartographic gaze would surely be deemed seditious and thus dangerous to possess.

As tantalizing as the thought of anti-colonial cartographic resistance might be, Jemisin denies readers the pleasure of seeing the Hundred Thousand Kingdoms from any cartographic perspective whatsoever. She prefers, instead, to problematize the colonial cartographic gaze by narrativizing its unsettling effects on Yeine, the colonized other who is at once compelled and repelled by the colonist’s god’s eye view of the world. In this respect, Yeine’s narrative perspective captures a more nuanced impression of her world’s geopolitical landscape than a conventional fantasy map could ever hope to portray. More to the point, in addition to offering an understanding of existence that differs from the colonial cartographic perspective, her narrative specifically relates a journey through a world in which maps can be used against her.

4. Stepping into the Arameri World Map

The only map discussed at length in *The Hundred Thousand Kingdoms* is one that is precisely weaponized against Yeine and her people. It belongs to her Arameri cousin and political rival Relad, who invites Yeine into his apartment to explain his sister Scimina’s plan to leverage neighboring kingdoms into attacking Yeine’s home nation of Darr. The map offers an oversized view of the world comprised of “beautifully colored ceramic tiles” spread across the floor of a large open chamber in Relad’s apartment (335). In his attempt to exploit Yeine’s fears over the welfare of her homeland, Relad steps into and across the enormous map to stand like a god “in the middle of the Repentance Sea” (337). He points to variously colored stones placed on the map near the borders of Darr that represent his sister Scimina’s allied forces as well as his own group of mercenary fighters not far away. He promises Yeine the use of his mercenaries to “give the Darre a fighting chance” against Scimina’s allies if Yeine endorses him as the next heir to the Arameri throne (338).

The image of Relad taking giant strides across the world strikes Yeine “as irrationally amusing for a moment” (337), but she quickly gleans the deadly symbolism behind his cartographic performance of colonial power. For Relad, treading the geographic world as a giant is not irrational or laughable so much as it resonates with the cartographic perspective of his colonial mindset. Unlike Yeine, he is accustomed to looking down on the Hundred Thousand Kingdoms from the heights of a god, from where he sees not the people of nations below but objectified space. From his oversized vantage point within the map, the wellbeing and cross-border conflicts of nations appear as little more than a set of “pawns” that can be moved across a scaled down abstraction of the world to accumulate more power (337). Casually bartering the lives of entire populations

for his own political gain, Relad stands (quite literally in this case) as a towering figure of cold-hearted colonial egotism.

Relad's cartographic performance offers Yeine a sobering reminder of the disproportionate suffering colonized nations experience at the whims of the colonial state. She recognizes his offer of military aid not for its genuine concern for the lives of her people but for the manipulation it entails. The stone pieces he has "ranged around Darr's borders" clearly communicate the threat her nation faces as well as his own godlike power to intervene (336). He can move his own pieces into play but will only do so in exchange for a political favor. Confronted with her people's objectification beneath the colonizer's cartographic gaze, Yeine finds herself similarly objectified as just another pawn in a devastating game of colonial intrigue and sibling rivalry. With no better option than to agree to help her people on Relad's terms, Yeine accepts his proffered hand as the fate of the colonial world lies at his feet.

It is perhaps at this point in the novel where readers are most likely to notice (if they have not done so already) the absence of a paratextual map. The scene in Relad's apartment, in other words, makes the significance of that omission conspicuously available to the process of readerly world-building. In carrying out their "hermeneutical construction" of the Hundred Thousand Kingdoms (Ekman and Taylor 10), readers who empathize with Yeine's discomfort in the face of Relad's cartographic performance are invited to reflect on the politics of maps and the cartographic exploitation of colonized others in Jemisin's secondary world. Relad's map is, after all, hardly subtle: its oversized presentation makes a spectacle of the colonizer's mindset, of looking down on peoples and nations as playthings in a game of colonial domination. Not only does Jemisin's account of Relad's map draw attention to the absence of a paratextual map, but its description arguably stands as a proxy for the map the series *might* have featured if it were not for the fact that such a cartographic representation would reproduce the ways the Hundred Thousand Kingdoms are officially recognized, divided, and organized by the dominant colonial power. Denying visual access to such a map, Jemisin implicitly asks her readers to imagine her world not as it appears to characters like Relad or Scimina, for whom the map is a means to extend their power, but rather through the perspective of the colonized other, who experiences the map as an existential threat to her people.

5. Reversing the Colonial Gaze

While Relad and Scimina pursue further machinations in their competition over the Arameri throne, Yeine seeks out alliances of her own, which enable her to counteract the world-shaping power of the colonial gaze. Most notably, she gains the trust of a group of imprisoned gods called the Enefadeh, who conspire with her to disrupt the succession ceremony at which the next heir to the throne will be chosen. Not all of their plans unfold as expected, but Yeine's alliances manage to set into motion a sequence of events that culminate in the awakening of a divine soul that was implanted in Yeine's subconscious before she was born. Claiming this soul's immortal powers for her own (as well as that soul's privileged place in the pantheon), Yeine confronts the Arameri patriarch Dekarta in a scene that dramatically reverses the power dynamic of an earlier

scene, in which Dekarta, meeting Yeine for the first time, commands her to “Stand” so he can “have a look at [her]” (7). If the earlier scene captures Yeine’s sense of inferiority under the patronizing scrutiny of the colonial gaze (“I am not very interesting to look at,” she admits [7]), then the scene of her ascension to godhood illustrates Dekarta’s sudden panic at finding himself the object, rather than the beholder, of a god’s eye view. He cowers beneath Yeine’s newly acquired divine gaze and begs her for guidance over the future of his empire, only to be warned of an impending postcolonial reckoning in which the Arameri people will face “the world’s wrath” (396).

Interestingly, this reversal of power between the colonizer and the colonized is short-lived, as Yeine promises to withdraw herself from the affairs of mortal kind. Her experiences have taught her about the danger and the allure of looking down on others from the heights of a god. She is familiar with the way such views encourage a colonial mindset that distorts what it sees and captures inhabitants below not as people so much as objects susceptible to manipulation and control. For Yeine, the Hundred Thousand Kingdoms has suffered enough from the “constant interference” of divine perspectives (396). She is reluctant to engage in a process of decolonization that would merely reverse the modes of domination central to colonization, including the deployment of a god’s eye view. Unlike her cousin Relad, who steps into the world map with a colonizer’s godlike arrogance, Yeine effectively steps out of the world, taking the privileged vantage point of her goddess’s eye view with her. Her refusal to exploit her divine perspective even for anti-colonial gains not only marks the promise of more equitable future relations across the Hundred Thousand Kingdoms but also mirrors (and further reinforces) Jemisin’s own refusal to provide readers with a god’s eye rendering of those same kingdoms.

6. Fantasy’s Mutable Landscapes

If new maps are to be drawn in the wake of Yeine’s ascension, then they might de-emphasize objectifying perspectives that conflate particular worldviews with the god’s eye view. Rather, they might productively accentuate subjective local viewpoints that are subject to change. As Jemisin reminds us: “All Fantasy Things are mutable. Including maps” (“Stillness”). She makes this point in reference to the published map of her *Broken Earth* trilogy, which the reader knows to be implicitly provisional since the fictional setting of the series is subject to unpredictable geological shifting. But Jemisin’s emphasis on cartographic mutability also applies to *The Inheritance Trilogy*, particularly in terms of geopolitical changes precipitated by Yeine’s ascension to godhood. One of the few interventions Yeine allows herself at the end of *The Hundred Thousand Kingdoms* is to transform the edifice of Sky palace into an enormous “World Tree” that casts a shady green glow over the surrounding city. In the second novel of *The Inheritance Trilogy*, *The Broken Kingdoms* (2010), this topographical change leads to a division between Arameri authorities, who continue to refer to the city of Sky by its old name, and the inhabitants, who rename the city “Shadow.” Tourists are regularly encouraged by locals to use names such as “West Shadow” or “East Shadow,” rather than Sky, if they “stop to ask directions” (*Broken* 7). Confusing though it may be to outsiders,

navigating the city requires familiarity with its shifting political terrain. Older cartographic viewpoints, especially those that persist in visualizing the city from the heights of Sky palace, no longer reflect life within the shade of the city's nascent postcolonial reality.

Discrepancies between official and unofficial geographies call for new forms of cartography that would be capable of projecting multiple viewpoints of the same territory. Though it falls beyond the traditional bounds of visual cartography, Yeine's subjective narrative perspective offers a promising counterpoint to the presumptuous world-ordering view of the colonial cartographic gaze. All cartography, including narrative accounts of geographical space, will involve "distorted rendering" to some degree, as Jemison admits ("Stillness"); but her novel writes against a long-standing tradition in colonial cartography, one in which the particular distortion of the objectifying god's eye view has been deployed (to the exclusion of alternate cartographic perspectives) to chart populations and build empires (Specht and Feigenbaum 50). Yeine's narrative point of view projects not a telescopic view that objectifies at a distance, but a particular ground-level experience of the world that turns its terrestrial viewpoints back on the empire. More like a travelogue than a map of the postcolonial fantastic, Yeine's narrative leads the readers down the precarious pathways taken by colonized others, whose lives can be forever changed when a royal hand moves stones across a tiled floor.

7. Conclusion

Even as they complement *The Hundred Thousand Kingdoms* in portraying varied perspectives within *The Inheritance Trilogy's* secondary world, the two follow-up novels lack their predecessor's incisive critique of colonial cartography. Their references to cartographic images are intriguing but more incidental than representative of a purposeful continuation of the cartographic theme. In *The Broken Kingdoms*, for instance, Oree, the narrator and a Shadow city commoner, makes only a brief reference to a tourist map that marks the city's various "god spots," or places affected by the power of one of the many godlings that populate the world (8). The most interesting detail of this map is that it indicates how Yeine's summoning of the World Tree at the end of *The Hundred Thousand Kingdoms* "interrupted" the flow of Sky's "convoluted streets" (9). In this respect, the map is postcolonial, as it not only charts the presence of previously unacknowledged deities in the city but also traces the uneasy contours between an old-world order and the new.

The Kingdom of Gods (2011) offers a few more passing cartographic references, including a description of a child's bookshelf that contains "[m]aps of faraway lands" (49), a reference to a hand-written note illustrating one character's proposed journey to Sky (322), and an allusion to scribes "mapping [the] wonders" of a palace that Yeine eventually raises from the ocean to replace the old palace of Sky (472). Most intriguingly, the narrator Sieh, a trickster child god trapped in mortal form, mentions his tendency to "change directions on maps so they make no sense" (284). Although Sieh's modest acts of cartographic defiance provide food for thought, their anti-colonial potential (not unlike that of Oree's tourist map mentioned above) remains largely undeveloped. Tinkering with maps is just one of the many "small, silly things"

Sieh does to amuse himself at the expense of others (284). It means no more to him than “piss[ing] in the punch bowl at weddings” (284).

The two final books in the trilogy are arguably more concerned with postcolonial themes of forgiveness and reconciliation than with images of colonial cartography. *The Hundred Thousand Kingdoms*, on the other hand, initiates its critique of colonial cartography with its own small but meaningful act of cartographic defiance – its refusal to provide a conventional fantasy map of the trilogy’s secondary world. Why deny readers one of epic fantasy’s “most distinctive characteristics” (Ekman, *Dragons* 11)? Jemisin admits that she is “not a very visual person” (“Stillness”), but neither this limitation nor her professed aversion to fantasy maps has prevented her from employing paratextual maps in her more recent fantasy series. I have argued that the most compelling reason for the lack of a paratextual map in her debut fantasy series lies in the specific connections *The Inheritance Trilogy* makes between colonial domination and the cartographic gaze. Yeine’s unsettling encounters with the expansive view from her Sky apartment and her cousin’s audacious stroll across a map of the world throw into sharp relief the objectifying distance the colonial cartographic gaze affects between the colonizer and the colonized. These scenes dramatize the process by which the god’s eye view of the cartographic gaze looks down on the lands of colonized others and sees not people so much as resources available for manipulation and control.

The omission of a traditional fantasy map is Jemisin’s first signal that she intends to engage in a critique of cartography as a tool of empire. It alerts the reader to the fact that maps, particularly those that presume to chart entire worlds, do not always serve the interests and well-being of colonized others. On the contrary, they make “arguments,” as Ekman notes, which seek to justify and embody the worldviews of those who create them (85). It bears repeating that the only world map mentioned in *The Inheritance Trilogy* is specifically weaponized against Yeine. Relad uses it to terrorize and exploit Yeine’s fears for the wellbeing of her people. Reproducing this map in lieu of available alternatives would only re-inscribe and support the map’s underlying colonial agenda. Jemisin counters the objectifying cartographic perspective of Relad’s map with a subjective narrative that validates the point of view of the colonized other. Jemisin is by no means the only fantasy author to use first-person narration to promote postcolonial perspectives, but doing so enables her to capture a depth of experience that is lost when worlds, both imaginary and real, are dominated and framed by the colonial cartographic gaze. If the presence of colonized others fades beneath the elevated god’s eye view in colonial cartography, then *The Inheritance Trilogy*, and particularly its first novel, aim to bring those others squarely back into view.

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BOOK REVIEW:

*Reverse Colonization: Science Fiction,
Imperial Fantasy, and Alt-Victimhood*

C. Palmer-Patel

Higgins, David M. *Reverse Colonization: Science Fiction, Imperial Fantasy, and Alt-Victimhood*. U of Iowa P, 2021. ISBN: 9781609387846

Considering the continued global rise of racism and misogyny, David M. Higgins's *Reverse Colonization* delivers a timely investigation into how far-right reactionaries have misappropriated science fiction using overt themes of imperialism and, specifically, narratives of reverse colonization. By "reverse colonization," Higgins refers to works in which readers are made to confront fears of foreign or alien invasion, thereby reversing the perspective of an audience from its usual identification with the colonizer to that of the colonized. Higgins proposes two modes of reading these narratives: the intended reading, in which the reader is made to consider the perspectives of those who have been harmed by imperial violence, and an alternate reading, in which readers who have benefited from imperialism are drawn to view themselves as victims. The reverse colonization narratives are ones which "invite identification *with* victims, but they can also provoke identification *as* victims" (18, emphasis original).

Looking at the works of canonical New Wave science fiction authors, Higgins presents this alternate reading, dissecting points where this identification with victimhood can be misread or misappropriated, resulting in what he terms "imperial masochism," "the way subjects who enjoy the advantages of empire adopt the fantastical role of colonized victims to fortify and expand their agency" (2). While Higgins focuses on influential authors of the 1960s, he extends the discussion to contemporary events which have occurred over the last decade, "demonstrat[ing] how pivotal changes in imperial fantasy that occurred during the 1960s have led to dire consequences

in the contemporary era” (4). In so doing, he is also taking into account, for example, the Hugo Awards’ Puppygate fiasco, in which a select group of voters contended that – due to the nominations of several non-white, women, or LGBTQIA+ authors – the award was being granted on the basis of social justice rather than merit.

Higgins’s choice of texts and authors is revealing; throughout the five chapters, he examines the works of Robert Heinlein, Frank Herbert, Arthur C. Clarke, Philip K. Dick, Thomas M. Disch, Michael Moorcock, J. G. Ballard, and Samuel R. Delany. With the sole outlier of Delany (who, I would like to point out, is the usual outlier when one lists canonical 1960s SF writers), these authors are all white heterosexual men. Higgins does not justify his choice of authors or even draw attention to the obvious lack of women, POC, or LGBTQIA+ authors. While the choice could have been explained with practical considerations – including a wider spectrum of authors would have easily doubled the length of the book – the lack of justification is disturbing because it implies that canonical SF writers are all men, white, and heterosexual (with the exception of Delany who proves the rule). However, bearing in mind that Higgins chose canonical texts that have been misappropriated for audiences who are “incels, antifeminists, white nationalists, alt-right activities, and neoreactionaires,” his choice of texts can be considered to be reasonable. Even so, I would have liked to see some reflection on how this choice might potentially skew his reading and analysis.

For instance, in Chapter One, “Liberating Psychedelic Masculinity,” Higgins examines masculinity alongside colonization in three foundational science fiction texts: Frank Herbert’s *Dune* (1965), Robert Heinlein’s *Stranger in a Strange Land* (1961), and Arthur C. Clarke’s *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968) in comparison to the Stanley Kubrick film (1968). Each text has been examined in great detail by SF critics analyzing both masculinity and postcolonialism, but rarely paired in the intersectional manner that Higgins draws attention to. Integrating this scholarship that has come before him, Higgins’ own contribution feels like the natural next step in the conversation. Each text, Higgins argues, “invit[es] men to identify as colonized victims undertaking a heroic struggle to liberate their personal power. This reversal is made possible by the trope of reverse colonization, which imaginatively situates elite male heroes as psychically colonized victims” (33). Turning to such critics as Frantz Fanon, who argued that decolonization also includes decolonizing the self (and patterns of thinking), Higgins examines how decolonization in these texts is linked to the liberation of the masculine self. In other words, decolonization in these texts simultaneously reinforces masculine elitism. This conclusion is drawn out and expanded on in the first half of the book as Higgins focuses the first three chapters on the theme of masculinity.

Throughout, Higgins gathers evidence from real-life examples, noting in each instance how the radical right uses allusions to popular science fiction texts to justify their visions of the society. This critical methodology in Higgins’ approach is particularly strong in Chapter Two, “Threatened Masculinity in the High Castle,” which he begins with the manifesto written by Elliot Rodger, a mass shooter who killed six people and injured several others before killing himself in May 2014. Rodger’s actions inspired other “incels” (involuntary celibates), an “online community of (mostly white) men who regard themselves as victims because they believe that women refuse to have sex with them” (58).

Dissecting Rodger's own testimonials, Higgins highlights several popular works of science fiction that feature prominently within Rodger's writing. Higgins is careful to avoid making any claims that science fiction would lead to dangerous patterns of behavior, but instead considers the ways in which science fiction can be misread and misappropriated in order to normalize dangerous ideologies. Looking at Philip K. Dick's (PKD) *The Man in the High Castle* (1962), Higgins analyses moments in which the racist antique dealer Robert Childan's interactions with other characters result in a perceived threat of emasculation, a threat which audiences may identify with. However, as Higgins points out, Childan is not a character we are meant to sympathize with; while in the position of colonized subject, Childan "identif[ies] with the Nazis and their embodiment of white superiority. Childan doesn't want to overthrow the social hierarchies that oppress him; he just wants to be the one at the top of such hierarchies" (76). Childan is, in fact, a Nazi-sympathizer, an identity that audiences are not meant to align with – unless they are a Nazi-sympathizer themselves.

Here, Higgins turns to the works of PKD as an author prolific in "ontological reverse colonization narratives – in other words, stories that imagine that 'reality' as we experience it is a prison and humans have been oppressively colonized by false beliefs and attitudes" (64). To do so, Higgins examines the parallels with this ontological reverse colonization in Rodger's own writing where he "questioned the very fabric of reality" (109 quoted in Higgins 63). The case study and focus on PKD is sensible. Yet, I would have liked to see more than one case study, especially as PKD is infamous for the way in which he presents women characters. For instance, while Higgins briefly mentions the *Matrix* franchise in the chapter, he easily sidesteps any discussions of queerness, which are prominent in the films. Given that the theme of these chapters concentrates on the threat of emasculation, the exclusion of queer readings is an apparent gap.

Indeed, Higgins seems to sidestep controversial discussions quite often, perhaps in order to maintain some semblance of neutrality between alt-left and alt-right, but the overall effect is a critic that is playing it safe. In Chapter Three, "The Whiteness of Black Iron Prisons," Higgins concentrates on the prison narrative, or the carceral reverse colonization fantasy, "stories that imagine relatively free (and usually white) subjects as incarcerated prisoners" (92). Here, Higgins analyzes PKD's "Black Iron Prison" in his *Exegesis* (1970s) alongside the British television show *The Prisoner* (1967–68), Thomas M. Disch's novelization of the show (1969), and Disch's novel *Camp Concentration* (1968). As carceral reverse colonization narratives invite audiences to imagine themselves as victims, Higgins draws attention to how these narratives, rather than inspiring empathy with oppressed peoples, instead support elite audiences' own claims of victimhood. However, as he points out, "Imagining liberation struggles as universal ... fails to pay attention to the intersectional nature of specific oppressions" (92). This observation allows Higgins to make brief commentaries on political events concerning citizenship and incarceration while, once again, avoiding digressions into full political analysis. These brief mentions of political insights are both a strength and weakness of Higgins's book. While the book potentially misses depth, the range and breath of ideas is stunning, leading the reader to extend the analysis on their own. While I would have liked to see more detail, Higgins, I believe, made the right choice in

covering a number of interconnected ideas as it reveals a larger picture, one which establishes a long-running narrative of alt-victimhood.

After this thought-provoking first half of the book, Chapter Four, “Victims of Entropy,” and Chapter Five, “Cognitive Justice for a Post-Truth Era,” are both to some extent outliers. While Higgins still examines the alt-victim narrative, Chapter Four shifts the attention to the British authors Michael Moorcock and J. G. Ballard. Higgins has a clear strength in American studies, which is made obvious in his integration of American politics and events. This depth seems to be missing from his analysis of Moorcock and Ballard as he attempts to integrate brief mentions of British events (such as Brexit) in order to situate the differing experiences of colonization between American and British empires while still bringing the analysis to reflect on a US context. Thus, it is difficult to make out whether Higgins’s inclusion of British authors here is meant to pose a different national version of alt-victimhood, or whether he is considering the ways these authors are influential to American audiences.

Likewise, the examination of Samuel R. Delany’s *The Fall of the Towers* trilogy (1963–1965) in Chapter Five feels like an outlier because, as I emphasized above, Delany himself is an outlier. However, Higgins himself does not draw attention to the fact that Delany is the token minority in his list of canonical authors, thereby avoiding any discussion of racism in the discussion of alt-victimhood. Instead, he focuses purely on the post-truth ideas that emerge from Delany’s texts. The emphasis on text rather than author is a strange shift in methodology at this point, considering how Higgins included lengthy bionotes on the other authors under examination and, in some cases (like with PKD), dove into details on the author’s personal writings and thought processes.

Despite these shortcomings, *Reverse Colonization* covers a vast range of real-world examples, primary text analysis, and critical theory very quickly and efficiently. This might leave the casual reader feeling a sense of whiplash with the speed at which Higgins moves from thought to thought. At the same time, this pace allows Higgins to make thought-provoking connections and bring together a number of seemingly disparate ideas in order to challenge the reader to question their own modes of reading. It is not a text one would browse quickly, but, instead, one that is meant to be read, pondered, digested, and read again to consider new ideas, connections, or kernels of thought. It is certainly one that I look forward to reading again in the near future.

Biography: Charul (“Chuckie”) Palmer-Patel is founder and Co-Head-Editor of *Fantastika Journal*. Her first monograph, *The Shape of Fantasy* (Routledge, 2020), investigates the narrative structures of Epic Fantasy, incorporating ideas from science, philosophy, and literary theory. Her next monograph, *Negotiating Motherhood and Maternity in American Fantasy Fiction* (Edinburgh University Press), will analyze fantasy published by a range of American identities. You can follow C. Palmer-Patel at @docfantasy_ on Twitter.



BOOK REVIEW:

*Encountering The Sovereign Other:
Indigenous Science Fiction*

Hogan D. Schaak

Brown Spiers, C. Miriam. *Encountering The Sovereign Other: Indigenous Science Fiction*. Michigan State UP, 2021. ISBN: 9781611864052.

Miriam C. Brown Spiers's *Encountering the Sovereign Other* is a well-thought-out and welcome addition to the conversation around Indigenous futurism. The emergence of a large number of Indigenous North American writers in genre fiction is a recent and ongoing phenomenon that has yet to be adequately theorized. Exploring how authors who identify as Indigenous North Americans interact with Western genre fiction, Brown Spiers does an excellent job analyzing Indigenous North American engagement in the tradition of SF. The only drawback to this book is that its focus on SF ignores the transgeneric qualities of many of the novels Brown Spiers discusses, opening her argument up to criticism from other sub-fields within genre studies. At the same time, this is the first book-length scholarly assessment to join the still nascent critical conversation around Indigenous SF. In the relatively short span of 140 pages (including introduction), Brown Spiers contends that although the traditions of Western SF and Native American studies clash, Indigenous authors have recently been engaging SF in ways that expand what SF can be – specifically as they challenge the traditional separation of religious and scientific thinking in Western SF.

Brown Spiers starts her critical work with Darko Suvin's "novum" theory of SF. While she acknowledges the potential in Suvin's framework for cognitive estrangement to serve as a framework for SF that is open to other voices, she also critiques how this dominant theoretical framework limits considerations of Indigenous interventions in SF. In Suvin's theory, the cognitive and the scientific leave no room for religion or myth as legitimate influences of SF

narratives. In contrast, Brown Spiers argues that the cognitive, science, religion, and myth are combined in Indigenous SF, positing that while novums are important in Indigenous SF, they specifically do combine religion and science. In this way, she brings novum theory to the field of studies in Indigenous North American literature and introduces antiracist Indigenous North American responses to novum theory into SF studies.

In her discussion, Brown Spiers intervenes in the ongoing conversation on what to call recent Indigenous speculative fiction. She disagrees slightly with Grace Dillon's broader theory of Indigenous futurism, preferring Dean Rader's description of Indigenous speculative fiction as the "Indian invention novel" (xv). However, she gets even more specific, arguing for the potential of reading some Indigenous North American invention novels as Indigenous science fiction that both criticize Western SF from an Indigenous perspective and engage with the tropes of the genre in a way SF readers broadly would find appealing. Throughout, Brown Spiers insightfully argues that Western SF has a traditionally temporal center, while Indigenous SF tends to have a spatial center. Beyond pointing out that the "Other" encountered in Western SF is often a stand-in for Indigenous peoples and that Indigenous authors often play with this trope, she notes that Indigenous North American worldviews do not see the same binary opposition of science and religion that is common to the Western tradition. Instead, Brown Spiers argues that Indigenous SF contains a more holistic, spatially grounded approach that combines a community-based land ethic with scientific knowledge. Because of this, she is able to support her argument that Indigenous SF reveals how many Western religious values have become normalized in a genre that traditionally prides itself on its commitment to a universalizing logic.

In *Encountering the Sovereign Other*, Brown Spiers explores radiation monsters and borders in Indigenous SF, examines Indigenous resistance to Western SF through alternative and virtual histories, and provides a plethora of examples beyond the few selected for in-depth analysis within the book. Brown Spiers writes at length about William Sanders's *The Ballad of Billy Badass and the Rose of Turkestan* (1999), Stephen Graham Jones's *It Came From Del Rio* (2010), D. L. Birchfield's *Field of Honor* (2010), and Blake M. Hausman's *Riding the Trail of Tears* (2011). While Brown Spiers's overall argument about Indigenous intervention in SF is convincing and her arguments in each part of the book are well made, issues such as the absence of transgeneric theory leave considerable gaps in her argument that could potentially undermine parts of her logic throughout the book.

Discussing radiation monsters and borders in Indigenous SF, Brown Spiers insightfully explains how the Western tradition of SF relies on a notion of time inherited from Christianity – specifically Millennialism. In Millennialism, time is imagined as constantly marching forward, bringing with it a positive progression in technology and quality of life for humans. Brown Spiers posits that Millennialism in SF also relies on the idea that faith and religious thought evolve into cognitive, scientific values. In other words, while the religious aspects of Millennialism disappear in Western SF, the belief in time inevitably being tied to a positive progression for humans remains. Brown Spiers posits that this is used in SF to justify abuses of land, the Other (specifically the Indigenous Other), and power in general for the sake of the progression of Western civilization. In contrast, the spatial focus of Indigenous

worldviews, she argues, centers on what happens within a particular place. This spatial focus allows for a more fluid understanding of how science and religion interact practically and ethically in a specific environment. Within this discussion, Brown Spiers argues effectively for the intersection of religion and science. Her comparison of Western and Indigenous literatures contrasts the problematic religious figures and wisdom keepers in Western SF with the responsible wisdom keeper and religious leader figures in Indigenous SF. Then, while theorizing Indigenous resistance to Western SF through alternative and virtual histories, Brown Spiers claims that even when traditional Western SF narratives focus on multicultural casts of characters, these characters are tied to political and military institutions and represented as coming together around an Anglo protagonist in ways that erase cultural difference when a clearly hostile alien enemy is fought. Brown Spiers compellingly argues that these characters resist institutions inherited from imperialist Western civilization. She then posits that in this kind of Indigenous SF, protagonists tend to come together around a common enemy while still maintaining their cultural difference.

However, the marked absence of transgeneric and other genre theory, such as fantasy and horror, stands out in arguments such as the one summarized above. When writing about Stephen Graham Jones's SF/horror novel *It Came from Del Rio* (2010), for example, Brown Spiers overlooks the transgeneric quality of the work in order to focus on its SF aspects. Her argument is that "*It Came From Del Rio* reminds readers that racial and national borders are permeable and artificial, easily crossed no matter how humans try to reinforce them" (31). This argument is well made, and she is certainly right to posit that differently from the individual exceptionalism of Western SF, this very anti-separatist, anti-racist ethos underlies "an Indigenous perspective that portrays people as dependent upon and responsible to one another, as well as to the world around us" (31). However, by ignoring the fact that *It Came From Del Rio* is transgeneric, Brown Spiers risks overemphasizing the importance of SF within the novel. The novel contains strong horror elements and is populated with monsters. Horror and monster theory are both often studied through the lens of the transgeneric. For example, Kathryn Walkiewicz, Gary E. Anderson, Cari Carpenter, and Jodi Byrd have mapped many of the transgeneric properties of Stephen Graham Jones's fiction, and Brown Spiers makes no mention of their work. This is an important oversight, especially since Byrd claims that genre itself colonizes texts by collecting, categorizing, and arraying textual productions into shelved units for instant marketability as it produces and reproduces interpretation and meaning (345). Addressing this point, and considering how, for example, horror theory may also be mapped onto a novel like *It Came From Del Rio*, would have further strengthened Brown Spiers's theories.

Having said that, Brown Spiers's argument shines when she gets comparative. References to SF films like *Godzilla* (1954) and *Independence Day* (1996) serve as great examples that lend a clear background to Brown Spiers's analysis throughout the book. She also engages with very recent research, using David M. Higgins's 2021 work on alternative victimhood in SF as a baseline for her examination of multiculturalism in Western SF. This focus on very recent research does seem a little patchy, though, considering that the most recent horror theory that Brown Spiers's uses is Julia Kristeva's relatively old 1980s

philosophy of abjection and a brief mention of Judith Butler's 1990s theory of monstrous Others. Consideration of Indigenous horror and transgeneric theory, such as that found throughout *The Fictions of Stephen Graham Jones: A Companion* (2016), would have been welcome. As a result, while the research in SF throughout *Encountering the Sovereign Other* is otherwise accurate and up to date, considerations of broader genre theory which should be framing the SF lens Brown Spiers adopts seem to be missing.

Toward the end of the book, Brown Spiers offers a brief nod to the recent Indigenous films and websites as well as other novels of Indigenous futurism that do the same kind of worldbuilding she has been exploring. This conclusion provides the reader with a long list of material to pursue related to Indigenous SF. All in all, *Encountering the Sovereign Other* does an excellent job theorizing Indigenous SF, providing convincing and in-depth comparisons between Western SF standards and themes across works by Indigenous North American SF writers and laying the groundwork for other theorists to examine the ways in which Indigenous authors intervene in traditional Western genres to show and explore real cultural difference. This is the first book-length attempt to theorize such specific genre interaction with Indigenous North American fiction, and I would recommend it to anyone studying Indigenous North American literature. It could be quite useful in crafting a themed undergraduate or graduate course on Indigenous SF. Even as the lack of consideration for transgeneric theory and theories from other genre studies which her selected texts invite leaves Brown Spiers's treatment open to a number of criticisms, this is a much-needed book and will undoubtedly be a launching point for many other theorists interested in how Indigenous writers interact with the traditions of Western genre fiction. I suspect it will become a staple of Indigenous North American literary theory, grounding future examinations of genre within the field.

Works Biography: Hogan D. Schaak is a PhD candidate of English and the Teaching of English at Idaho State University. While his doctoral work concerns Indigenous North American gothic and horror fiction, Hogan has published on a range of topics including detective fiction, 19th century gothic poetry, and Indigenous speculative fiction with journals such as *Transmotion*, *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts*, and *Studies in the Fantastic*.

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BOOK REVIEW:
*Chinese Science Fiction during the Post-Mao
Cultural Thaw*

Eero Suoranta

Li, Hua. *Chinese Science Fiction during the Post-Mao Cultural Thaw*. U of Toronto P, 2021. ISBN: 9781487508234.

In less than a decade, contemporary Chinese science fiction has caught the attention of fans, critics, journalists, and scholars around the world. As much of the buzz has focused on contemporary SF's relationship with the current society and politics of the People's Republic of China, its antecedents in the earlier eras of PRC literature have received less attention with English-language treatments of the SF boom of the late 1970s and early 1980s in particular relegated to scattered book chapters and essays. This gap is all the more striking if we consider that the temporal distance between the present and the start of Chinese SF's on-going "New Wave" in 1989 (Song 8) is now over five times as long as the one between the start of the New Wave and the end of the previous boom in 1983 when the "Campaign to Eliminate Spiritual Pollution" put a temporary halt on the development of SF in the PRC.

In light of the above, Hua Li's *Chinese Science Fiction during the Post-Mao Cultural Thaw* is a most welcome addition to English-language critical work on Chinese SF. Focusing on the period between the death of Mao Zedong in 1978 and the anti-spiritual pollution campaign of 1983, Li presents convincing evidence that features associated with New Wave Chinese SF, such as "a somewhat sceptical or even subversive political bent, a deep familiarity and engagement with the canon of Western SF, and a wide range of themes and narrative techniques" (180), were already present in thaw-era SF works. As such, this brief period forms an important bridge between the PRC SF of the 1950s and 1960s and its on-going New Wave, and it fully deserves the in-depth treatment that Li's book offers it.

The opening chapter of the book surveys the field of Chinese SF during the thaw period and argues that at this time “Chinese SF increasingly accumulated symbolic, cultural, and economic capital” (10) as shown by the diversification of publication venues for SF stories, the increase in remuneration for authors, and the canonization of important works through awards and literary criticism. This is followed by chapters dedicated to the authors Zheng Wenguang, Ye Yonglie, Tong Enzheng, and Xiao Jianheng, putting their thaw-era works in the context of their wider careers and their views on SF as a genre. Although sometimes focusing only on a relatively small subset of works by one author, such as Zheng’s “Mars series” and Tong’s narratives of encounters with aliens, these sections manage to provide abundant, concrete examples of the complex relationship between ideological constraints and individual creativity in thaw-era SF.

Following the four chapters on individual authors, Chapter 6 adopts a more cross-sectional perspective by discussing “tech-SF,” a subgenre that “focuses on technological innovations and inventions” (115) and their importance for “the accelerated development of a modernized and powerful China” (116). According to Li, this type of SF was mostly written by novice authors of fiction and appealed to a much narrower readership than the works of the above-mentioned veterans, which helps explain why it did not flourish in the PRC after the 1980s. However, Li argues that tech-SF has nevertheless “metamorphosed into an undercurrent within the larger tide of contemporary Chinese hard SF” (133) as shown by its influence on the works of Liu Cixin in particular.

The penultimate chapter widens the scope of the book to include SF comics, radio dramas, live-action films, and animation, showing that although media convergence in thaw-era PRC did not reach levels similar to that in the United States and Japan of the time, it did bring wider popular attention to SF as a genre. A particular highlight in this section is the discussion of the PRC’s first SF film, *Death Ray on a Coral Island* (1980), whose director, Zhang Hongmei, is also one of the few female Chinese SF practitioners mentioned in the book. An even more delightful look into thaw-era SF on screen, perhaps, is Li’s analysis of the animated film *Dingding Fights the Monkey King* (1980), which she reads as affirming the government’s message that science and technology (represented by the studious Dingding) have taken the place of revolutionary fervor (represented by the Monkey King) as the key to production. That the film’s symbol for old-school Maoism would be the simian hero of *Journey to the West*, the classic 16th century tale of Buddhist pilgrimage, is perhaps less surprising if the reader is also aware that Mao Zedong tacitly encouraged comparisons between himself and the shape-shifting Monkey in the 1950s and 1960s (Chow 649). Tellingly, *Dingding Fights the Monkey King* begins with the protagonist watching the Mao-era *Journey to the West* adaptation *Uproar in Heaven* (1961/1964) on television in his well-furnished home, which Li further points to as an example of how thaw-era SF media promoted not only science, but also new modes of consumption.

In her last chapter, Li re-examines Rudolph Wagner’s hypothesis that thaw-era SF was a form of “lobby literature” aimed at presenting the scientific community’s demands and offers of compromise to officialdom. Li characterises Wagner’s hypothesis as “overblown” and comes instead to the conclusion that “thaw-era PRC SF actually functioned as a type of government-

backed literature, whose writers were working more as in-house advocates of a key component of the central government's Four Modernizations agenda than as lobbyists or a group attempting to extract concessions from the government" (173). At the same time, debates in the press over the role of science fiction show that "Thaw-era SF nonetheless had its share of contentiousness" (178). This, along with the literary experimentation and cautionary notes that became more prevalent in SF during this period, leads Li to describe thaw-era science fiction as not only "blooming," but also as "contending" and "boundary-breaking" (177). In comparison to Wagner's rather simplistic reading of SF literature as akin to a coded list of policy recommendations presented to a readership of officials, Li's more nuanced analysis explicates what made post-Mao SF appealing to wider audiences and thus also helps explain both its popularity and its lasting influence on the Chinese New Wave.

A major strength of *Chinese Science Fiction during the Post-Mao Cultural Thaw* is the way that it situates thaw-era SF in multiple and often intersecting contexts, which are not limited to the prevailing ideological winds of the post-Mao thaw and the Four Modernizations. For example, Li notes that the growing interest in genetic engineering among PRC scientists in the late 1970s was reflected in stories about "the enemy within – cancer, bio-weaponry, and genetic manipulation" (119), while the humanistic trends and romantic elements of mainstream literature also manifested in SF as the prominent inclusion of love interests (43, 88). Li's in-depth approach here is made all the more impressive by the aforementioned examination of SF works from several different media, which allows the reader to gain a thorough sense of both the SF field and the broader zeitgeist in the PRC at the time.

Nevertheless, there are also points that could have been elaborated further. While arguing that inexpensive *lianhuanhua* comics (which combined pictures with short, caption-like texts) helped spread SF to rural areas where television and films were not yet available (144–145), Li cites Marshall McLuhan's comparison of TV and cartoon images in *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*. This includes McLuhan's claims that TV "was a real rival" of the comic book in the twentieth-century West and that "since the advent of TV, the comic book has gone into decline" (qtd. in Li 145). Although this may have seemed like a reasonable supposition when *Understanding Media* was originally published in 1964, it raises the question of how this supposed rivalry fits in with the Japanese "media mix" strategy of texts circulating across multiple media forms (including both comics and television), which Li references several times. As Li does not directly discuss the fate of *lianhuanhua* after the early 1980s, it is unclear whether she would actually attribute their decline to the spread of television or not; in either case, the topic would have been worth a few extra paragraphs or a reference towards some further reading.

Two other gaps are both related to the influence of foreign SF media in China. First, although Li does examine the impact of translated SF fiction and foreign SF films on PRC SF at several points, the presumably complex (not to mention potentially politically fraught) process of translating these texts into Chinese is not touched upon. Second, there is no mention of *lianhuanhua* adaptations of foreign SF films and their role (if any) in introducing themes from Western SF or spreading SF to new audiences in China. The latter omission is especially puzzling if we consider the unusually widespread

attention that the *Star Wars lianhuanhua* of the early 1980s have received in recent years, which would seem to make the topic an obvious choice for inclusion when discussing SF comics during the thaw era.

However, such minor omissions weigh little when contrasted with Li's insightful analysis and her obviously strong grasp of her material. Weaving together multiple threads within thaw-era SF and expertly contextualizing its major developments, *Chinese Science Fiction during the Post-Mao Cultural Thaw* offers a fascinating perspective into an overlooked subject and lays a solid groundwork for the further study of this brief yet significant period in Chinese SF history as well as its connections with the New Wave of PRC SF. Although perhaps slightly too specialized to be used as a textbook on a general course on Chinese SF, the book would make for excellent background or supplemental reading for students intending to pursue the topic further in addition to its usefulness for research purposes. I can therefore heartily recommend this work to anyone looking to fully understand the past and present of Chinese science fiction.

Biography: Eero Suoranta is a doctoral researcher at the University of Helsinki where his work focuses on alienation in contemporary Chinese science fiction. He has also translated Chinese SF into Finnish, worked as a freelance journalist and literary critic, and been featured as an expert on Chinese literature and philosophy by the Finnish public broadcasting company YLE.

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BOOK REVIEW:
Shakespeare and Science Fiction

Noah Slowik

Brown, Sarah Annes. *Shakespeare and Science Fiction*. Liverpool UP, 2021.
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It can be easy not to notice the scope of a canonical author's influence on science fiction until someone points it out. The writer who has left, perhaps, the most resounding impact on SF – more than Homer, Ovid, Chaucer, or any one of the Romantic poets or Victorian novelists – is William Shakespeare. In *Shakespeare and Science Fiction*, Sarah Annes Brown offers a comprehensive analysis of Shakespeare's presence in SF to date. The greatest strength of Brown's investigation lies in its evidential data, focusing on explicit references to Shakespeare in SF. Without attempting to locate him as the origin of SF, Brown offers an overview of Shakespearean allusions as proof of Shakespeare's ability to be paradoxically both more and less than other authors. While providing the groundwork for evidence of Shakespeare's ubiquity in SF, she also leaves room for interpretation by other scholars on the importance of his lasting influence. Through a survey of the subgenres of stories revolving around time travel, alternate history, dystopia, aliens, space exploration, posthumanism, and the post-apocalypse, Brown shows how SF reveals readings of Shakespeare that would be otherwise unreachable within the confines of realist fiction.

According to Brown, the subgenre of time travel especially allows SF writers to incorporate Shakespeare as a character. For example, Brown contrasts Isaac Asimov's inclusion of Shakespeare in "The Immortal Bard" (1954) with that by Hugh Kingsmill in *The Return of William Shakespeare* (1929). While each deploy a similar novum of transporting bewildered Shakespeares from the past to the present, Brown concludes Kingsmill's time-travelling bard is superior to Asimov's because of the disorientation he undergoes when thrust into modernity. In addition to this, Brown refers to playful examples such as the Shakespeare of Frank Ramirez's "The Merchant of

Stratford” (1979) who has been visited by time travelers so many times that he becomes a fan and writes an SF novel himself. There is, too, the case of Shakespeare’s disappointment at a production of Tom Stoppard’s *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* in Harry Turtledove’s “We Haven’t Got There Yet” (2009). Altogether, these humorous anecdotes exemplify how time travel SF is the subgenre that most brings out the modern comedy of Shakespeare.

Shakespeare may also appear as a character in alternate history, which, Brown notes, is the SF subgenre that is the most pertinent to the realm of geopolitics. For example, she compares Keith Roberts’s *Pavane* (1968) with Kingsley Amis’s *The Alteration* (1976). The former is a story about an assassination of Elizabeth I that disrupts Shakespeare’s composition of *Richard III*. The latter features Martin Luther remaining a Catholic, which in turn leads to the diminishment of Shakespeare’s reputation and his transportation to what has become the country of New England in the northeast of the US. Each of these novels considers what a world would feel like in the absence of an ever-looming Shakespeare, arguably the greatest writer in the history of the English language. Similarly, in Robert Silverberg’s *The Gate of Worlds* (1967), Shakespeare is forced to write plays about Turkish sultans, rather than English monarchs, as Europe has succumbed to the power of the Ottoman Empire. As Brown discusses, these alternate histories force us to consider how the Bard’s work would hold up outside a geopolitically English context.

While Brown makes the connection between alternate history and geopolitics, she sees instances of Shakespeare in dystopian literature as inextricably tied to politics in general. Brown finds a famous example of this political edge, for example, in Aldous Huxley’s *Brave New World* (1932), one of the novels whose title comes directly from a line in Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*. In addition to synthesizing a debate over a comparison between Mustapha Mond and Prospero, Brown notes how Huxley embodies Shakespeare’s knack for exploring philosophical questions about the world, such as what happens to society when it no longer appreciates great art. Furthermore, in George Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949), Shakespeare and other canonical writers are translated into Newspeak and thus mediated by authoritarian subliminal messages. Even when Shakespeare lives on through oral tradition in Ray Bradbury’s *Fahrenheit 451* (1953), it is possible to misquote the classics over time if only recited from memory by those accustomed to the memory aids of a modern world. As a result, this discussion leads Brown to conclude that lack of appreciation for the value of Shakespeare often leads to corruption in dystopian novels.

Stories of space travel and alien encounters further function as a litmus test for Shakespeare’s universal appeal. Although it is possible to divide the two into separate subgenres, it makes sense that Brown groups them together because Shakespeare serves similar purposes in these subgenres. In various instances throughout Kim Stanley Robinson’s Mars trilogy (1992-96), for example, Shakespeare acts as a sort of cultural artefact to cling to as a remnant of Terran civilization during interplanetary colonization. Just as the impact of a play can be altered depending on the historical context and delivery, Brown explains how Robinson’s speculations about Shakespeare on a newly terraformed planet develop fresh interpretations. A similar appreciation is demonstrated in Anne McCaffrey’s *The Ship Who Sang* (1969) where the Bard’s works are so highly lauded that they are translated into an alien language. Some

years ago, in a podcast interview with Brown, Barbara Bogaev asked whether there is a more terrifying and harrowing situation for an actor than representing humanity to an alien civilization through their ability to perform Shakespeare. Bogaev's question gets at the heart of how – when faced with the task of hypothetically conveying ourselves to aliens – Shakespeare is a touchstone for human nature. In any event, these intersections with extraterrestrial life are perhaps the ultimate demonstration of Shakespeare being both everything and nothing, a recurring thread throughout Brown's book.

As an outlier section of the book, Brown dedicates a chapter to the way SF writers have been continuously inspired by one play in particular, *The Tempest*. For example, Neil Gaiman's last volume in his Sandman series, *The Wake* (1996), considers what *The Tempest* might look like if Shakespeare was decoupled from Prospero. Within the framework of a single play, Brown sees Gaiman question Shakespeare's authority in a way similar to that in stories of time travel, space exploration, and alien encounter. Another text that draws heavily upon *The Tempest* is Clifford Simak's *Shakespeare's Planet* (1976), which follows the same trajectory as the drama. Simak's novel includes a playful twist where there is a character named Shakespeare, but he is not the Elizabethan playwright. Rather, the character has chosen that name from a copy of the playwright's Complete Works. Although *The Tempest* has directly inspired SF works more than Shakespeare's other plays, in Brown's view the best adaptations are texts that remain true to the original play's magical essence while also bringing something innovative to the table, no matter the play chosen from Shakespeare's oeuvre.

With Caliban's betweenness in mind, posthuman identity is another SF subgenre that has taken up Shakespeare in a philosophically complex way. It is no surprise that *Hamlet*, too, is of particular interest to SF writers who explore what it means to be posthuman. The play involves toiling over coming to terms with oneself, an increasingly common question as today's AI technology progresses. One of the most popular examples where Brown sees this apparent connection is Jonathan Nolan and Lisa Joy's *Westworld* (2016). The fascinating contradiction in this show, however, is that the androids end up seeming more human than the humans themselves. Brown concludes that the similarities between Hamlet and machine learning intensify rather than lessen the Dane's humanity, reiterating the point that human and technology are perhaps more alike than they initially seem. Exploring this point, Brown also detects traces of Shakespeare in robot literature as early as Karel Čapek's *R.U.R.* (1920). Exaggerated as it may sound, perhaps humanity faces a fate similar to the one depicted in this play, a robot revolution, if the complexities of posthuman identity are left ignored. Especially on the topic of the posthuman, Brown acknowledges that the influence of Shakespeare leaves many unanswered questions.

Brown concludes her book with a final chapter about the depiction of an omnipresent Shakespeare in literature that deals with situations pertaining to the end times, post-apocalyptic fiction. Of course, religion was a prominent topic for Shakespeare, who lived in the wake of the Protestant Reformation, and Brown notes how the book of Revelation resonates in both *King Lear* and *Macbeth*. There is, for example, an invocation of a *Macbeth* performance in Mary Shelley's *The Last Man* (1826), and the play's horror aptly contributes to the novel's bleak ambiance. Additionally, as Emily St. John Mandel's *Station*

Eleven (2014) features a performance of *King Lear*, Brown points out that “Both Shelley and Mandel transform Shakespeare into a presage of apocalypse” (176). Since his works are deeply concerned with God, it is no surprise that SF including Shakespeare would pose theological questions as well. As Brown puts it on the final page of her book, there is a sense that Shakespeare has replaced God in SF.

Overall, *Shakespeare and Science Fiction* provides a foundation for looking into Shakespeare’s everlasting resonance within the genre, and it is exciting to think about how creators of SF may continue to engage with his works in innovative ways in the future. Thankfully, knowledge of the canons of both SF and Shakespeare in their entirety is not prerequisite to recognizing the implications of Brown’s analysis. She writes accessibly enough by digging directly into the major works and glossing over the lesser-known ones. Though Brown’s study may be too in-depth to be assigned as course material to undergraduate students, it could be useful for SF writers to discover unused aspects of Shakespeare’s corpus as inspiration for their work. Since this book is the first of its kind, Brown has started the conversation. However, there is more to be said about the instances she has unveiled, and there are likely more examples of Shakespeare in SF than what Brown covered. Nevertheless, this book is an invaluable resource for scholars looking to think through the ways in which Shakespeare has inspired SF writers.

Biography: Noah Slowik (he/him) is a second-year English MA student at the University of Vermont, a Graduate Research Assistant for the Writing in the Disciplines Program, and a Consultant for the Graduate Writing Center. His thesis is on the geopolitics of aviation in H. G. Wells, and he has worked as a Teaching Assistant for a Geology, Physics, Philosophy, and Literature interdisciplinary Extraterrestrial Life course.

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BOOK REVIEW:

*Fantasy and Myth in the Anthropocene:
Imagining Futures and Dreaming Hope in
Literature and Media*

Gemma Field

Oziewicz, Marek, Brian Attebery, and Tereza Dedinová, editors. *Fantasy and Myth in the Anthropocene: Imagining Futures and Dreaming Hope in Literature and Media*. Bloomsbury Academic, 2022.

This collection from Marek Oziewicz, Brian Attebery, and Tereza Dedinová provides a long-overdue contribution to the study of fantasy and myth. This is the first critical offering discussing the intersection of fantasy and myth with the environmental humanities and the Anthropocene, although at the same time it largely rejects the label of its title. The hubris of the term “Anthropocene,” and what is concealed under the blanket term “Anthropos,” is a recurring criticism in the collection. The typology as well as the political and cultural claims of fantasy have received the most academic attention, and they form the bulk of fantasy scholarship. This book’s stated purpose, on the other hand, is to contribute to the scholarly and creative archive by rejecting the determinism of the Anthropocene in favor of symbiotic modes of thinking and dwelling, and in this it succeeds admirably. However, this is not a conventional academic offering as the essays sit alongside poetry, visual art, and creative prose on topics ranging from the ecocentric potential of theme parks to a reading of radical impetus in children’s cartoons.

This whimsical turn is a decided effort, and Oziewicz says as much in his introduction. While the book’s focus is not only on fantasy *for* the Anthropocene, discussing these texts is necessary to elucidate forms of advocacy and problematic modes of engaging with the non-human world. It is the register of the mythic and fantastic that makes them apparent. Rather, the texts in the collection grapple with the fantasy *of* the Anthropocene, that is, the

fallacy of human supremacy, our supposed elevation above the natural world that is currently crashing down around us. To paraphrase the editor, conceptualizing alternative modes of inhabiting and engaging with the Earth is represented in the registers of the mythic and fantastic because the mythic and fantastic are precisely the registers in which it is possible to do so in the spirit of hope. Many of the essays in this collection take their cue from or draw on Donna Haraway's *Making Kin in the Cthulhucene* (2016). This heavy bias in favor of one theory ends up being both a strength and a weakness: such a concentrated study of a single text provides an in-depth exploration of Haraway's work and demonstrates its versatility, but it also does make for somewhat repetitive reading. On balance, it is an incisive and unique offering for scholars of speculative fiction and for the environmental humanities – extending beyond a purely scholarly contribution to encompass artistic, editorial, and fable elements that complement the scholarly discussion.

The academic essay collection is supplemented with two glossy sections of full-color visual art, and all of this is interspersed with poetry and prose from contemporary children's authors, creative non-fiction from the artists themselves, and snapshot fables from Attebery on the machinations of a generic hero-figure he calls "Anthropos," who bends the elements to his will in four vignettes. Overall, the book is looking to contribute to a storytelling archive that would provide hope-based alternatives to the norms and values of the Anthropocene. While it is beyond this reviewer to evaluate the technical merit of the art pieces, they provide a complimentary visualization of the themes discussed.

Oziewicz articulates the problematic of the Anthropocene in terms of "ecocidal" (4) ontologies which permeate Western story- and myth-making systems as represented by Attebery's Anthropos episodes. The critical essays are divided into four elemental-themed sections: the essays in "Trouble in the Air" ask structuralist questions about fantasy and myth, in the section "Dreaming the Earth" what Oziewicz calls the "biocentric turn" (7) in fantasy and myth is elaborated on as one of rooted yet fluid resilience, the chapters in "Visions of Water" concern humanity's relationship with the ocean, and finally the Anthropocene is interrogated in terms of extra-human and elemental forces in the articles collected under "Playing with Fire."

The book's title is somewhat misleading since its most prominent theme is precisely the inadequacy of the term "Anthropocene" to describe the most influential factor in this epoch, to apportion the responsibility, or to imagine some way of living that might lead elsewhere than to a crisis. I suppose this was a marketing choice by the publishers, but it does not convey the fact that the collection repeatedly criticizes the term "Anthropocene" for normalizing anthropocentrism and for obscuring the fact that humanity's contribution to climate change varies greatly across the globe. The collection most frequently offers the Cthulhucene in its manifold permutations as an alternative.

Oziewicz's concise and well-reasoned essay is, to my mind, the strongest of the collection. What he calls the "ecocidal unconscious" (58) is a state of mind that prevents us from fully comprehending and articulating the contradiction of modern life: that our existence depends on a fragile biosphere which we are doing our best to destabilize. Oziewicz argues that this limited, short-term thinking has infiltrated our story systems to the point that even tales told in defense of the planet perpetuate counterproductive narratives about climate

change. Much like Jameson's political unconscious or Patricia Yeager's energy unconscious, the thesis of the ecocidal unconscious discussed by Oziewicz renders the ideological underpinnings of the anthropocentric mindset visible.

Oziewicz makes those underpinnings apparent by contrasting the themes and representations of two graphic novels for children. In Marvel's *Captain Planet* series, environmental threats are represented as "anthropomorphic evil agencies" (63) and as the direct result of personal moral failings. Emergencies are confined to single locations, and they are always resolved through violence after which everything returns to business as usual. In contrast, *AstroNuts* follows the comic adventures of a group of superpowered animals on a mission to save the planet. Narrated by the earth itself, this story is set in motion not by a localized, and therefore confined, problem, but rather by the rising carbon dioxide level in the atmosphere – a global phenomenon.

Engaging readers through silliness and play in the spirit of Haraway's various riffs on "SF" (including "science fiction," "speculative fabulation," "string figures," and "so far") (7), Oziewicz posits that *AstroNuts* displaces the traditional emphasis on human characters through the representation of non-charismatic fauna engaged in collective action. The concept of the Goldilocks planet and our current ecological balancing act are the driving themes of the text, and Jon Scieszka, the author of *AstroNuts*, has also contributed art and prose to *Fantasy and Myth in the Anthropocene*. Thus, *AstroNuts* constitutes what Oziewicz calls a "planetarianist fantasy" (64) of refusing the ecocidal ideology in favor of articulating hope through storytelling.

Another article that deserves high praise is Prema Arasu and Drew Thornton's reading of hybrid ontologies in water-based fantasy films. Arasu and Thornton argue in terms of a littoral transhumanism, examining hybrid literary representations that destabilize established notions of human subjectivity, and they interpret the "ocean-chthonic" (150) human-monster hybrid figure as a rehabilitated romantic partner. Examining the representations of aquatic humanoids in *Ponyo* and *The Shape of Water*, the authors argue that the relationships between humans and ocean-chthonic hybrids in these films constitute playful and embodied efforts to re-entangle with non-human others which Donna Haraway calls "making kin" (8). The authors choose the designation "ocean-chthonic" for these characters because of their autochthonous supernatural watery origins, and "hybrid" for their melding of monstrous physicality with unmistakable human empathy. These characters defy classification and ordering by blurring the boundary between a beast that can't speak and a speaking person. In each of the fantastic worlds Arasu and Thornton examine, the ocean-chthonic hybrid represents a "debridement of human exceptionalism" (152) by exposing the falsehood of the supposedly immutable human-nature binary and the multifold possibilities for species co-existence. In both films, it is communication that makes kinship and staying with the trouble possible. Finally, Arasu and Thornton posit that the designation of ocean-chthonic hybrids as romantic shows a general move towards embracing more complicated embodied ontologies in real life.

Although not as strenuously argued and reasoned as the articles mentioned above, Kim Hendrickx's gloss on the ecocentric potential of cosmic horror as a "speculative figuration" (216) reflects on the current epoch and possible nomenclature, arguing that it is through Lovecraftian horror that we can best challenge the illusion of control that exemplifies the Anthropocene's

discourse. The author takes their cue from Jeff Vandermeer's *Southern Reach Trilogy* and Haraway's conceptions of H.P. Lovecraft's Cthulhu mythos, examining how the overlap between the discourse of ecology and the idea of truths beyond human comprehension can be used to formulate "responsibility" (Hendrickx 226) toward the environment. This starts with untangling ideas about the nature of narrative and our narrative(s) of nature. Hendrickx goes on to note that Vandermeer's trilogy represents how easily the natural world can become a source of cosmic horror: textually by defying all attempts at human measurement and therefore mastery, and thematically by highlighting the unstable foundations of our dominion over the earth. Cosmic horror, says Hendrickx, constitutes the "ultimate failure of control and rationality" (223). Much like the protagonist in *The Horror Over Innsmouth* retracing his own family's history, stories about nature, like *Southern Reach*, force us to realize with a creeping dread that we have never been modern.

While the aforementioned essays offer well-reasoned insights, the quality of the essays in the collection varies significantly. Oziewicz's contribution is particularly noteworthy for his description of the climate crisis as failure of communication and imagination – and for providing a discourse alternate to Haraway's. Unfortunately, not all the essays reach his level of insight or apply the same academic rigor. One of the essays goes so far as to argue for the conscientizing potential of a theme park, which this reviewer found to be something of a stretch given how bad they are for the environment (a concern that was not addressed). Since Baudrillard already used Disney's "Main Street, USA" to exemplify the simulacrum, a copy without an original, it would require more rigorous discussion than is provided to imagine a call to activism in such a place.

As discussed above, the second and perhaps more substantive criticism regards the choice of Haraway's *Cthulucene* as a central text. Since the collection under discussion is about imagining futures and draws heavily on the role of children's literature to do this, it seems an odd choice to center it around a theory that its own author pithily summarizes as "Make kin, not babies" (8). Simply put, Haraway's argument of rejecting reproductive futurism is flawed because if all the people who care about the future of the planet stop having babies, then only people who don't care about the planet at all will be left after a few generations. Therefore, the collection would benefit from an expanded theoretical basis. Only Lindsay Burton's essay addresses this contradiction, pointing out that it is in the liminal phase of youth that most people are conscientized into making sustainable lifestyle choices.

On balance, several articles in *Fantasy and Myth in the Anthropocene* provide strong academic discussion. While the theoretical basis of the essays is somewhat repetitive, Haraway's theory is clearly a generative thesis for the study of fantasy and our environmental future. The theories, stories, and art put forward within the pages of this book provide a solid foundation for building and imagining better futures. At the same time, it is difficult to decide where this book best belongs. The scope of its offering is so broad that parts of it would be useful in many places, but it is hard to imagine many contexts where all of it would be useful at once. Its creative elements are so rich and varied that to confine the book to the literary studies shelves of a university library would seem unnecessarily restrictive. Given the emphasis on Haraway's work, it would no doubt be very useful if assigned in a course on her works. However,

ultimately, its glossy pages of beautiful artwork deserve to be imbibed by young people themselves in addition to scholars.

Biography: Gemma Field obtained her Master of Arts in Modern English Literature from the University of Cape Town, South Africa, in 2022. She won the inaugural Stan Ridge Memorial Prize for Best Conference Paper at the University of the Western Cape, South Africa, in 2019 for “Asphalt Afrofuturism: Slow Violence in *Lagoon*.” She works in marketing.

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Hail and Farewell: An Interview with *Fafnir*'s Departing and Arriving Editors-In-Chief

Elizabeth Oakes & Essi Varis

The past 12 months have been a year of upheaval in the halls of *Fafnir*. With the departure of one of our longest-serving editors-in-chief, Laura E. Goodin, Essi Varis suddenly bobbed from the new arrival to the most senior member of the editorial team as all the other posts were vacated and then filled again with new international talents. We were aided past these rocky waters by two visiting editors in issue 2/2022. But now, with the arrival of our newest editor-in-chief, Merve Tabur, the ship of *Fafnir* is finally sailing on an even keel again. As has become our tradition, we wanted to reach across the cyber-seas and give both the departing and the arriving editors a chance to share some thoughts with the readership. Essi, who is currently in Norway, contacted Laura in Australia, and Elizabeth Oakes messaged from Finland to the Netherlands in order to interview Merve.

Essi Varis: So, Laura, in addition to being a researcher and an editor, you are also a fantasy author. If you wrote a speculative fiction story of your time with *Fafnir*, what kind of a story would it be?

Laura E. Goodin: It would be full of wonder, newly discovered treasures, and quests for secret knowledge. It would have heroes solving mysteries and returning in triumph to share what they've learned with the rest of the kingdom (and occasionally win international renown). It would have practitioners of the magic art of scholarship, both new and experienced, working together to continually push the boundaries of what we all know and understand. And it would have at least one editor-in-chief who has been profoundly changed by her own *Fafnir* quest.

EV: You also stayed on board as *Fafnir*'s editor-in-chief for a fairly long time, from 2018 to 2022. What were the highlights of those years? Were some issues or texts particularly memorable, or was there some part of the editing process you enjoyed the most?

LEG: I don't think I could single out a particular issue or text as each issue was a veritable tsunami of fabulous ideas and perspectives, and each paper, prefatory, review, and reflection was an exciting discovery. I think that, actually, was what I enjoyed the most: the thrill of seeing what new concepts and insights the scholars who submitted to us would come up with. Of course, I loved collaborating with the other editors-in-chief and the reviews editor in the heady rush to produce each issue; that was just plain fun, as well as a terrific learning experience for me. And I'm not sure you could top the excitement of finding out we'd been nominated for a 2020 World Fantasy Award and then Zooming in to the ceremony, all of us on the edge of our seats, to find that we'd become the first academic journal in history to actually win one.

EV: *Fafnir* is a Nordic journal, but you live all the way in Australia – farther away than any other editor we've ever had in the team. I remember that negotiating the timezones was a little challenging sometimes. But other than that, how did you find working with people on the other side of the planet? Did you know a lot about Nordics beforehand or did you learn anything interesting about us?

LEG: Yes, the time zones could sometimes be a bit tough to juggle. But I'm a bit of a geography geek, and the intersections of people and place, and the wild energy that those intersections can throw around, are some of my greatest fascinations and joys. I'm endlessly curious about the perspectives, opinions, and experiences of people who live Somewhere Else. As an expat myself (I'm an American who's been living in Australia for the past 27 years), I find ideas of place, home, and belonging to be crucially important to my own speculative writing and to the insights I can gain from others. Again, as an armchair geographer, I'd known a bit about the Nordic countries, and I'd traveled (albeit briefly) in Finland (in fact, the academic stream at the Helsinki Worldcon was where I'd found out about *Fafnir*). But getting to know my *Fafnir* colleagues gave me a great opportunity to learn more about the various cultures in the region. Probably the biggest cultural difference between me as an American and my Nordic colleagues was that y'all have a much, much better grasp of the idea of a healthy work-life balance. I took inspiration from that!

EV: Do you think that speculative fiction and the research of speculative fiction have changed in some way during the time you've worked on the field? Is there some change you still expect or hope to see in the future?

LEG: I don't think a few short years is long enough for trends in academia to change drastically. (Inertia is a thing!) However, what I am seeing is changes in academia itself: it's harder in many countries for researchers to get the support that makes large-scale research possible, whether that's grants or jobs at universities. This is having a dire effect on the vibrancy of the research scene in just about every discipline, including (and perhaps especially) speculative fiction. I would love to see the pendulum swing back so that research into the humanities and creative arts is seen as enormously valuable, rather than as a quaint but irrelevant holdover from the previous century. I'd love to see the creative work of the human spirit be acknowledged as essential to our lives together and to our very survival as a species. I'd love to see the world's economists, politicians, and businesspeople turn to its writers, artists, and scholars for new ways of thinking about – and perhaps even solving – the world's many problems and dilemmas.

EV: What advice would you give to the current and future editors-in-chief of *Fafnir*?

LEG: Everything is always going to take more time than you think. The rewards and satisfactions will come from both expected and unexpected places, and they will be intense. The frustrations will pop up randomly, and they'll be intense, too, but you and your fellow editors-in-chief will always find a way to prevail. And, finally, hang on and enjoy the ride!

Elizabeth Oakes: How does your background and experience shape your work with *Fafnir*? And what has been most interesting and engaging in your editorial work with *Fafnir* so far?

Merve Tabur: As a scholar of comparative literature and environmental humanities, my approach to the study of speculative fiction is very much steeped in interdisciplinary, postcolonial, and feminist methodologies. My research examines how ecological and planetary futures are envisioned in Turkish, Arabic, and Anglophone speculative fiction. The comparative, multilingual, and interdisciplinary approach underlying my research necessarily informs the kinds of contributions I make and the feedback I offer as an editor. Many of the texts that I work with in my research also foreground the entanglement of social and environmental justice in their articulation of speculative scenarios. This strong emphasis on justice, which is a central aspect of my theoretical and pedagogical engagements with speculative fiction, is something I aim to foster also in my editorial work in *Fafnir*.

Being in the backstage of production and seeing the issue come to life through the rigorous and collaborative work of the authors and the editors has been the most fulfilling and inspiring aspect of my editorial work with *Fafnir* so far. As a new member of the team, I have also enjoyed (and greatly appreciated) learning from my hardworking colleagues!

EO: How do you see *Fafnir* contributing to the field of speculative fiction research, and what kind of contributions would you like to foster?

MT: *Fafnir*'s pioneering contributions to the expansion of speculative fiction research in Nordic countries and languages are invaluable. Yet, although *Fafnir* is situated in the Nordic context, it receives and publishes submissions from all around the world. I see *Fafnir*'s biggest contribution to the field as its openness to international, interdisciplinary, and innovative perspectives in speculative fiction research. A wide range of scholars working with diverse languages, genres, methodologies, and theoretical frameworks can find a vibrant and welcoming platform for conversation here. As an editor, I would like to foster further contributions to discussions on postcolonial and decolonial approaches to the study of speculative fiction. I would also love to see more submissions that engage with futurisms from a comparative perspective. I hope that authors working on speculative fiction traditions that are underrepresented in Anglophone research environments will feel encouraged to submit their papers to *Fafnir*!

EO: What would you say to someone thinking of submitting an article to *Fafnir*?

MT: Send it along – especially if you have perfectionist tendencies and struggle departing with finished articles! You may want to take a look at the previous issues to see if *Fafnir* is a good fit for your research. We accept submissions that engage with any aspect of speculative fiction and are open to interdisciplinary and intermedial studies. If you are unsure whether your article is a good fit, feel free to contact one of the editors. Rest assured that the editorial team attends to every submission diligently and works closely with authors to ensure the timely completion of the peer review and revision process.

EO: Why do you love speculative fiction?

MT: Speculative fiction is where I can feel at home as a stranger in a strange land. What I appreciate the most about speculative fiction is its capacity to foster ways of being, thinking, and relating to the world that seem paradoxical, contradictory, or impossible. I love the complexity and empathetic depth with which speculative fiction can endow its diverse worlds. Growing up, I was particularly drawn to horror books: I not only enjoyed the company of many ghosts and monsters but also found them to be good teachers. I developed a more focused interest in science fiction later in life and was lucky enough to turn it into one of my research areas. What fascinated me the most about science fiction in my early encounters with the genre was the sense of looking at the future in the face. Although my relationship to science fiction has become more nuanced since starting to study it more critically, time and again I have turned to science fiction simply to find an anchor in this sense of futurity,

particularly in times when even dreaming about the future feels like an impossibility. I love how speculative fiction enchants anticipation and harbors this feeling of an opening by simultaneously stimulating philosophical inquiry, critical thinking, and creative problem-solving.



Lectio praecursoria:
Loputtomuuden hinta: *Doctor Who*,
etiikka ja ihmisyyden rajat

Leena Vuolteenaho

FT, sairaanhoitaja (AMK) Leena Vuolteenaho väitteli Oulun yliopiston englannin kielen oppiaineesta lokakuussa 2022. Oheinen essee on päivitetty versio hänen väitöstilaisuuden alussa pitämästään suomenkielisestä lukiosta. Englanninkielinen väitöskirja *The Price of No End: Doctor Who, Ethics, and the Limits of Humanity* (Acta Universitatis Ouluensis, sarja B, Humaniora, 199) on vapaasti luettavissa Oulun yliopiston Jultika-arkistossa: <http://jultika oulu.fi/Record/isbn978-952-62-3393-2>

Asiasanat: buddhalainen etiikka, Doctor Who, kristillinen etiikka, kuolemattomuus, populaarikulttuuri, terveydenhuollon etiikka

Ihmiselämää määrittävät monenlaiset rajat, jotka koskevat niin luvallisenä pidettyä toimintaa kuin toiminnan mahdollisuuksiakin. Väitöstutkimukseni aiheena oli ihmisyyden rajojen ylittäminen, tarkemmin sanottuna kuolemattomuuden ja elämän merkittävän pitkittämisen tavoittelu, sekä näihin tavoitteisiin liittyvät eettiset kysymykset kristillisen ja buddhalaisen etiikan näkökulmasta. Aineistona käytin valikoituja jaksoja brittiläisestä tieteisfiktio-tv-sarjasta *Doctor Who*. Minua kiehtoi erityisesti, miten kristillinen ja buddhalainen etiikka suhtautuvat ihmisyyden rajojen ylittämiseen ja miten nämä katsomukset näkyvät *Doctor Who* -sarjan kuvaamassa kuolemattomuuden tavoittelussa. Entä heijasteleeko sarjassa esitetty fiktiivinen kuolemattomuus kristillisen ja buddhalaisen etiikan suhtautumista myös tosielämän pyrkimyksiin saavuttaa kuolemattomuus tai pidentää elinikää? Lähestymistapani oli monitieteellinen, ja viitekehykseni

hyödynsi muun muassa kulttuurintutkimuksen, (systemaattisen) teologian, filosofian sekä terveydenhuollon etiikan terminologiaa ja menetelmiä.

Doctor Who on brittiläinen tieteisfiktiosarja, jota on tehty vuodesta 1963 alkaen. Sarjan päähenkilö, ihmistä muistuttava avaruusolento Doctor, matkustaa ajan ja paikan läpi sinistä poliisikoppia muistuttavassa TARDIS-avaruusaluksessaan ja joutuu monenlaisiin seikkailuihin. Kuolemattomuus ja elämän pitkittäminen ovat monin tavoin keskeinen osa sarjan tematiikkaa, lähtien siitä että sarjan tieteiselementit mahdollistavat kuolemattomuuden tavoittelun tai saavuttamisen teknologian keinoin. Lisäksi Doctor itse on avaruusolento, jonka lajin nimi on *Time Lords* (käännetty sarjan suomennoksessa Ylellä muotoon "Ajan herrat"). Lajin ominaisuuksiin kuuluu *regeneration* ("uudentuminen"), mikä tarkoittaa käytännössä sitä, että kuolemassa oleva *Time Lord* ikään kuin syntyy uudelleen uudessa kehossa ja uudella persoonallisuudella varustettuna. Kyseessä on silti sama yksilö, jolla on tallessa edeltäjiensä muistot ja kokemukset. Myös Doctor on käynyt *regeneration*-prosessin läpi useita kertoja; tätä kirjoittaessani sarjassa on juuri aloittamassa 14. Doctor.

Doctor Who sopii erityisesti kristillisen ja buddhalaisen etiikan näkemysten tarkasteluun, koska sarjan historiaan liittyvistä syistä siinä nähdään erilaisia kristillisiä ja buddhalaisia elementtejä, joista ainakin osa on lisätty käsikirjoitukseen tietoisesti. *Doctor Who* ei kuitenkaan tarkoituksella edusta mitään tiettyä uskonnollista kantaa.

Fiktiota on mahdollista käyttää eräänlaisena ajatuskokeena. Ajatuskokeet – Tittlen (x) sanoin "what-ifs' with a purpose" – tarjoavat lähtötilanteen, jonka puitteissa voidaan tarkastella teoreettisia tapahtumia ikään kuin ne olisivat mahdollisia tosielämässä. Esimerkiksi McCombin (207–222) esittämät näkemykset ajatuskokeen määritelmästä ja fiktion mahdollisuuksista toimia ajatuskokeina puhuvat sen puolesta, että tieteisfiktio voisi soveltua tähän tarkoitukseen erityisen hyvin. *Doctor Who* -sarjan käyttäminen aineistona motivoituu juuri tästä tieteisfiktion erityispiirteestä käsin: sen puitteissa esimerkiksi kuolemattomuutta voidaan tarkastella tosielämän ihmisiä muistuttavien hahmojen kokemana todellisuutena, kun taas tosielämästä ei löydy kuolemattomia tutkimuskohteita, joista tällaisia havaintoja olisi mahdollista tehdä.

Kuolemattomuutta on kuitenkin vaikeaa määritellä tarkasti tai yksiselitteisesti, koska termillä voidaan tarkoittaa hyvin monenlaisia asioita. Myös rajanveto kuolemattomuuden ja elämän pitkittämisen välillä on vaikeaa, sillä riippumatta siitä kuinka kauan elävä olento on pysynyt elossa tähän asti, on mahdoton sanoa, onko näin myös tulevaisuudessa (Swedene; Horrobin). Lisäksi jakoa voidaan tehdä esimerkiksi maanpäällisen kuolemattomuuden ja uskonnollisen iankaikkisen elämän välille, joskin näillä voidaan myös tarkoittaa hyvin monenlaisia asioita (Zaleski; Huovinen). Itse keskityin tarkastelemaan nimenomaan maanpäällisen ruumiillisen kuolemattomuuden tavoittelua, johon voidaan liittää monenlaisia eettisiä näkökohtia, kuten kuolemattomuuden mahdollisuuden aiheuttama yhteiskunnallinen

eriarvoisuus, kuolemattomuuden saavuttamisen vaikutukset yhteiskunnan ikärakenteeseen ja toimintaan, vaikutukset syntyvyyteen ja maapallon kantokykyyn, ympäristövaikutukset yleensä, sekä kuolemattomuuden vaikutukset yksilölle, erityisesti sietämättömän tylsistymisen muodossa (Williams). Huolten aiheellisuudesta ei kuitenkaan voida olla täysin varmoja, koska kuolemattomuuden vaikutuksista ei ole olemassa tosielämän havaintoja, eikä tällaisten havaintojen saamiseen liene vielä lähitulevaisuudessaakaan mahdollisuuksia.

Koska kuolemattomuuden tavoittelun ja elämän pitkittämisen välille ei voida vetää tarkkaa rajaa, tosielämän pyrkimyksillä pidentää ihmisen elinikää on paljon yhteistä kuolemattomuuden tavoittelun kanssa, vaikka kuolemattomuus ei olisikaan elämän pitkittämisen (ainakaan ääneen lausuttu tai tietoinen) tavoite. Elämän ylläpitäminen voidaan nähdä yhtenä lääketieteen ja terveydenhuollon perustehtävistä, mutta sen toteuttamiseen pyrkiminen ei aina ole eettisesti ongelmattonta. Koska on vaikea määritellä, missä kohtaa elämän pitkittäminen menee liialliseksi, sen loogiseksi päätepisteeksi voidaan tulkita myös kuolemattomuuden tavoittelu. Nämä ovat keskeisiä päämääriä myös transhumanismissa, eli aatesuuntauksessa, joka pyrkii teknologian keinoin ylittämään ihmisyyden rajat (Porter; McNamee ja Edwards).

Se, miten kristillinen ja buddhalainen etiikka suhtautuvat kuolemattomuuden tavoitteluun, liittyy muun muassa niiden taustalla oleviin ihmis- ja maailmakäsityksiin. Kristillisen etiikan näkökulmasta kuolemattomuuden keskeisimmät eettiset ongelmat koskevat ihmisen ja Jumalan suhdetta ja eroavaisuuksia. Kristillisen ihmiskäsityksen mukaan ihminen on perustavanlaatuisesti vajavainen Jumalaan verrattuna, muun muassa tietojen, taitojen ja moraalin osalta. Siksi ihminen ei osaa ennakoita tai estää kuolemattomuuden ei-toivottuja seurauksia, ja voi olla myös välinpitämätön aiheuttamansa kärsimyksen suhteen tai käyttää kuolemattomuutta oman etunsa tavoitteluun. Kristillisen etiikan voidaan siis ajatella suhtautuvan kuolemattomuuden tavoitteluun kielteisesti, koska ihminen ylittää siinä toimintavaltuuksiensa ja taitojensa rajat. Ongelma ei siis kristillisestä näkökulmasta ole niinkään se, että "Jumalaa leikkivä" ihminen uhkasi ottaa Jumalan roolin elämästä ja kuolemasta päättävänä tahona, vaan se, että kuolemattomuutta tavoitteleva ihminen todennäköisesti aiheuttaisi pyrkimyksillään vahinkoa, jota ei olisi kykenevä hallitsemaan. Lisäksi voidaan ajatella, että kiinnostus kuolemattomuutta kohtaan osoittaa kyseenalaista moraalialia, esimerkiksi vallanhimon muodossa. Ajatus muistuttaa Hopkinsin (317–343) käyttämää käsitettä "hubris criticism". Lisäksi ikuisen maanpäällisen elämän tavoittelun voidaan nähdä olevan ristiriidassa hengellisesti käsitetyn iankaikkisen elämän kanssa. Ihmisen puutteellinen kyky hallita kuolemattomuutta sekä kuolemattomuutta tavoittelevien moraalinen rappeutuneisuus ovat toistuvia teemoja myös *Doctor Who* -sarjassa.

Buddhalaisesta näkökulmasta kuolemattomuuden ongelmat liittyvät puolestaan liialliseen kiintymykseen katoavaista kohtaan sekä käsitykseen elämästä kärsimyksenä. Buddhalaisuuden mukaan elämä on perusluonteeltaan kärsimystä, joka johtuu erilaisten katoavaisten asioiden janoamisesta ja niihin takertumisesta. Ikuisen elämän voi siis nähdä ikuisena kärsimyksenä, jonka

tietoinen ylläpitäminen ei luonnollisestikaan ole toivottavaa. Elämän merkittävän pitkittämisen tai kuolemattomuuden tavoittelun voi siis nähdä itse elämään ja sen katoavaisuuteen takertumisena. Tällaiset tavoitteet eivät edistä buddhalaisen maailmankuvan tai ihmiskäsityksen mukaista hyvää, eli elämisen ja jälleensyntymisen taakasta vapautumista. Myös nämä teemat esiintyvät *Doctor Whossa* toistuvasti.

Lisäksi buddhalaisuus korostaa *samsaran* eli elämän, kuoleman ja jälleensyntymän muodostaman kehän merkitystä. Sen kiertämisen toivotaan johtavan kohti valaistumista eli *nirvanaa*. *Doctor Who* -sarjan tapa kuvata *regeneration* ja sen rooli Doctorin tai muiden *Time Lordien* elämässä ja henkisessä kasvussa muistuttaa monelta osin buddhalaista käsitystä *samsarasta* ja jälleensyntymästä.

Miten kuolemattomuus siis liittyy yhtäältä moraaliin ja toisaalta kärsimykseen? Aineistoa käsitellessäni kiinnitin huomiota muun muassa siihen, missä *Doctor Who* -tarinoissa kuolemattomuus esitetään erityisesti moraaliltaan rappeutuneita hahmoja houkuttelevana mahdollisuutena (esim. ”The Five Doctors”, 1983), missä tarinoissa kuolemattomuuden tavoittelu päättyy epäonnistumiseen ja/tai rangaistuksena esitettävään kohtaloon (esim. ”Father’s Day”, 2005), ja missä tarinoissa kuolemattomuudella on kielteinen vaikutus kuolemattoman/kuolemattomaksi muuttuvan hahmon moraalitajuun (esim. ”Enlightenment”, 1983). Nämä teemat liittyvät erityisesti kuolemattomuuden ja moraalin väliseen yhteyteen ja siis kristillisen etiikan näkemykseen kuolemattomuuden eettisistä ongelmakohdista. Toisaalta tarkastelin myös niitä tarinoita, joissa kuolemattomuus johtaa merkittävään fyysiseen, henkiseen tai emotionaaliseen kärsimykseen (esim. ”Mawdryn Undead”, 1983) ja joissa kärsimys johtuu liiallisesta kiintymyksestä elämään tai kyvyttömyydestä päästä irti elämästä (esim. ”The Woman Who Lived”, 2015). Nämä ovat tärkeitä kysymyksiä buddhalaisen etiikan näkökulmasta. Monista aineiston tarinoista (esim. ”Mawdryn Undead”) löytyi molempia aineksia.

Kristillisen etiikan tapaan *Doctor Who* esittää tapauksia, joissa kuolemattomuudesta kiinnostumisen voi nähdä kertovan ylimitoitetusta käsityksestä ihmisen kyvyistä ja viisaudesta: se voi osoittaa suuruudenhulluutta, vallanhimoa tai muita vastaavia moraalisesti ei-toivottavia ominaisuuksia. Lisäksi nähtävissä on ajatus siitä, että ihminen ei ole pätevä päättämään niin monimutkaisista asioista kuin kuolemattomuudesta ja että kuolemattomuudella on arvaamattomia kielteisiä seurauksia, joita ihminen ei pysty hallitsemaan. Kuolemattomuutta tavoittelevia hahmoja kuvataan siis oman edun tavoittelijoina, ja kuolemattomuudella on usein tuhoisat seuraukset. Lisäksi kuolemattomuudella on kielteinen vaikutus moraaliin, riippumatta siitä onko kuolemattomuus aktiivisen tavoittelun tulos vai henkilölle ulkopuolelta annettu ominaisuus. Myös päähenkilö Doctor käyttäytyy ajoittain moraalisesti arveluttavalla tavalla. Monissa tapauksissa syynä tähän on nimenomaan ajatus siitä, että yli-inhimillinen elinikä asettaa hänet tavallisten kuolevaisten ja heitä koskevien sääntöjen yläpuolelle. Toisaalta hahmojen moraalialia kuvataan eri tavalla riippuen siitä, onko kuolemattomuus tarkoituksella saavutettua vai ei. Kuolemattomuuden tietoinen tavoittelu on yleensä moraaliltaan kyseenalaisten hahmojen

toimintaa, kun taas hyvät hahmot tulevat yleensä kuolemattomiksi jonkun muun hahmon tekojen seurauksena. Kuolemattomuuteen ja moraaliin liittyvien tarinoiden voi nähdä käsittelevän myös sitä, kenellä on valta päättää ihmisyyden rajoista ja niiden ylittämistä. Yleensä tämä valta kuuluu jollekin "korkeampana voimana" toimivalle taholle, ei kuolemattomalle hahmolle itselleen. Kristillisen etiikan näkökulmasta tämä vertautuu Jumalan auktoriteettiin asettaa ihmisyyden rajat.

Buddhalaisuuden käsitys elämästä ikuisena kärsimyksenä toistuu myös *Doctor Whossa* useissa eri muodoissa. Kuolemattomat hahmot saattavat kärsiä joko fyysisesti, henkisesti – esimerkiksi pitkästymisen tai paikalleen jumiutumisen muodossa – tai emotionaalisesti, kun kuolematon hahmo väistämättä menettää kaikki läheisensä. Kärsimys näyttäytyy sarjassa kuolemattomuuden seurauksena riippumatta siitä, onko kuolemattomuus tarkoituksella saavutettua vai ei. Erityisen selkeästi ja usein kuolemattomuuden ja kärsimyksen yhteys näkyy itse Doctorin kokemuksessa elämästään *Time Lordina*, jonka synnynnäisiin ominaisuuksiin kuuluu yli-inhimillinen elinikä. Doctorin kuolemattomuudesta on toki kiistatonta hyötyä sekä hahmoille sarjan sisällä että sarjan tekijöille, jotka ovat voineet jatkaa sen tuottamista jo 60 vuoden ajan. Kuitenkin sen seurauksena Doctor kokee jatkuvasti erityisesti voimakasta emotionaalista tuskaa ja joskus äärimmäistä fyysistä kärsimystä. Toisaalta kuoleminen ja jälleensyntyminen vie kohti *nirvanaa*. Kenties siksi se näyttäytyy sarjassa eettisesti suotavampana kuolemattomuuden muotona kuin loputon elämä kokonaan ilman kuolemaa ja elämästä luopumista. Katoavaiseen takertumisen tietoinen tavoittelu ei kuitenkaan näyttäydy eettisesti kannatettavana, joten kuolemattomuutta ei kuvata *Doctor Whossa* erityisen suositeltavana myöskään buddhalaisen etiikan näkökulmasta.

Sarja luo myös yhteyksiä kuolemattomuuteen liitettävien moraalisten huolten ja kärsimyksen välille. Kuolemattomuuden aiheuttama kärsimys voi nimittäin ajaa hahmon moraalisesti tuomittaviin tekoihin siinä toivossa, että ne lievittäisivät kärsimystä. Toisaalta vallanhimo tai oman edun tavoittelu voivat myös johtaa kärsimykseen. Tällöin kristillisen ja buddhalaisen etiikan kuolemattomuuteen liittämät huolet yhdistyvät toisiinsa uusilla tavoilla. Vaikka näiden kahden uskonnon opilliset ihmis- ja maailmakäsitykset eroavat joiltain osin merkittävästi, kummankin uskonnon voidaan sanoa suhtautuvan kuolemattomuuden tavoitteluun vähintäänkin varauksellisesti.

Vaikka *Doctor Who* on uskonnollisesti sitoutumaton populaarikulttuurin tuote, se siis kuvaa ja heijastaa erilaisia eettisiä kantoja ja näkemyksiä ja tuo ne toisinaan myös mielenkiintoisen dialogiin keskenään. Sekä kristillisen että buddhalaisen etiikan näkemykset kuolemattomuudesta toistuvat sarjassa selkeästi ja säännönmukaisesti, joskus limittyneinä toisiinsa ja ilman että kumpikaan näkemys painottuisi toisen kustannuksella merkittävästi. On kuitenkin hyvä pitää mielessä, että *Doctor Who* on käsitellyt kuolemattomuutta vuosikymmenten varrella usein ja hyvin monipuolisesti, eivätkä kaikki sarjan aihetta käsittelevät tarinat välttämättä heijasta juuri kristillisen ja/tai buddhalaisen etiikan näkemyksiä, ainakaan yhtä selkeästi. Sarjalla ei siis voida osoittaa olevan varsinaista uskonnollis-eettistä kantaa kuolemattomuuteen.

Miten näitä *Doctor Whon* kuvauksia kuolemattomuudesta sitten voisi suhteuttaa tosielämän pyrkimyksiin pidentää elinikää? Kuten edellä esitin, eliniän pitkittämiseen ja elämää ylläpitäviin hoitoihin liittyy esimerkiksi terveydenhuollossa erilaisia eettisiä kysymyksiä ja huolia. Kristillisen etiikan näkökulmasta huolet liittyvät esimerkiksi niihin seurauksiin, joita kuolemattomuuden saavuttamisella olisi yhteiskunnan rakenteelle, ihmisten väliselle oikeudenmukaisuudelle, luonnolle tai itse kuolemattomien hyvinvoinnille. Samoin kristillinen näkökulma muistuttaa, että kuolemattomuuden tavoittelu voi samastua vallan tavoitteluun. Otetaanko kuolemattomuuden tavoittelussa siis riittävästi huomioon käytettyjen menetelmien eettisyys tai kuolemattomuuden kielteiset (sivu)vaikutukset? Buddhalaisen etiikan näkökulmasta taas erityisen keskeisiä ovat huolet elämän pitkittämisestä kärsimyksen pitkittämisenä. Pidempää elämää tavoitellessa tulisi aina muistaa arvioida, millaista näin saavutettu elämä on laadultaan ja onko siitä mahdollisesti aiheutuva kärsimys siedettävällä tasolla.

Kristillisen ja buddhalaisen etiikan suhtautuminen kuolemattomuuteen on sidoksissa kunkin uskonnon maailmankatsomukseen ja ihmiskäsitykseen. Siksi ne eroavat toisistaan, mutta lopputulemat ovat silti samankaltaiset. Onkin tärkeää tuntea erilaisten eettisten näkemysten taustalla vaikuttavia maailmankatsomuksia, sillä ne selittävät osaltaan eri kantojen eroja ja yhtäläisyyksiä. Lisäksi haluan kiinnittää huomion (tieteis)fiktio mahdollisuuksiin käsitellä erilaisia eettisiä kysymyksiä ja näkemyksiä, erityisesti sellaisten ilmiöiden kohdalla, joita ei ole mahdollista tarkastella nykytodellisuudessa.

Elämän pitkittämiseen liittyvät eettiset haasteet ovat jo nyt ajankohtaisia esimerkiksi terveydenhuollossa. Tällaisia ovat esimerkiksi elinsiirteiden hankkimiseen liittyvät eettiset ongelmat (esim. Corfee) sekä elämää ylläpitäviin hoitoihin liittyvän kärsimyksen huomioiminen (esim. Klein ym.; Brorson ym.). Kuolemattomuuden tavoitteluun liittyvien eettisten kysymysten käsitteleminen ei siis ole pohtimisen arvoinen asia vain avaruudesta saapuville aikamatkustajille; se on merkityksellistä paitsi teoreettisesta näkökulmasta myös käytännön elämässä tehtävien ratkaisujen ja valintojen näkökulmasta. Olisi tärkeää tuntea erilaisten maailmankatsomusten eettisiä näkemyksiä ja ottaa ne huomioon, kun esimerkiksi terveydenhuollossa tehdään elämän pitkittämiseen liittyviä päätöksiä.

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