BOOK REVIEW:

Science Fiction and Psychology

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Miller, Gavin. *Science Fiction and Psychology.* Liverpool UP, 2020. ISBN 978-1789620603.

In his book, Miller juxtaposes the literary history of science fiction with the history of psychology to discuss their influence on each other. To this end, he presents analyses of texts that explore the impact of psychology on science fiction and the role of science fiction in portraying psychological theories. Miller examines the overlap of psychology and science fiction by turning to texts written by authors not trained academically in the field of psychology, arguing that these kinds of works yield interpretively more engaging analyses than works whose authors do have psychological training and expressly seek to use it in their fiction. Since research on fiction can always benefit from an interdisciplinary approach and psychological research addresses similar issues (such as perception, cognition or behavior), Miller's book seems a useful addition to the existing scholarship on science fiction.

As an introduction, Miller defines psychology as a group of research areas that arose during the industrialization of the West and focused on methods of understanding the soul, the self, and the psyche by going beyond already known scientific practices. According to him, psychology plays five roles in science fiction texts: (1) *didactic-futurological*, (2) *utopian*, (3) *cognitive-estranging*, (4) *metafictional*, and (5) *reflexive*. By the *didactic-futurological* role of psychology in science fiction, Miller means that its narratives can be used to convey scientific knowledge, including human sciences. In this function, science fiction stories are a source of futuristic speculation on how our lives may someday be. Miller agrees with Joanna Russ's view that the didactic and futurological functions of psychology in science fiction are marginal and argues that the reliability of such forecasts is irrelevant. Considering the *utopian* role, Miller sees more use for predictions in cases where they confront the present

with ideas of a better or a worse imaginary world, noting that the overall aim of utopian science fiction is to express a dissatisfaction with the world we are living in now. Then, the *cognitive-estranging* function of psychology in science fiction relies on Darko Suvin's concept of defamiliarizing the world we know by showing it in a different light while its *metafictional* role is to facilitate the aesthetic self-consciousness of the genre. Finally, the *reflexive* function of psychology is to make the reader reflect on claims of psychological knowledge in science fiction, for example, to criticize psychoanalytic therapy.

With these categories, Miller shows that science fictional narratives lay the ground for psychological theories and practices; an observation which has already been made by psychologists such as Sandra and Daryl Bem, Randy Thornhill and Craig Palmer, and Steven Pinker who "invoke different speculative narratives of the future as a way to legitimate their particular psychology claims" (44). Miller further explores this notion through the analysis of science fiction texts which demonstrate a variety of psychological theories.

The book is divided into five chapters, each discussing a different psychological school – evolutionary psychology, psychoanalytic psychology, behaviorism and social constructivism, existential-humanistic psychology, and cognitive psychology. The amount of space devoted to individual schools is more or less the same, and overall, the composition of Miller's monograph follows the structure of psychology textbooks, determined by the history of successive schools of psychology. Each chapter consists of theoretical background and analysis of chosen science fiction texts.

In Chapter 1, Miller focuses on evolutionary psychology. He introduces the basic claims of this school, starting with Social Darwinism and its main figures such as Herbert Spencer and William Graham Summer. The chapter then covers the rise of sociobiology and the late 1980s advent of evolutionary psychology and its key propagators – Leda Cosmides and John Tooby as well as Steven Pinker. Miller highlights the criticism of idealistic programs that involved creating a perfect society based on ideals of compassion and fellowship, discusses how they were interpreted as utopias, and concludes that the presence of evolutionary psychology in science fiction has an anti-utopian background. For his analysis, Miller chooses H. G. Wells's anti-utopian texts *The Time Machine* (1895) and *A Modern Utopia* (1905), which employ the concepts of evolutionary psychology. Juxtaposing this discussion with utopian novels such as Octavia Butler's *Parable of the Sower* (1993) and *Parable of the Talents* (1997) that stand against its ideas, he provides an insight into two different approaches to evolutionary psychology in science fiction.

Proceeding to another psychology school, Miller begins Chapter 2 with the origins of psychoanalytic psychology in the 1880s and presents its main concepts and figures – the unconscious theorized by Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung and the influence of Nietzschean discourse on both of them. The first part in the analytical section is devoted to a discussion of H. G. Wells's *The Island of Doctor Moreau* (1896) and *The Croquet Player* (1936), which present the journey into the unconscious and the return of the repressed. Adding to his discussion of Freudian psychoanalysis, Miller focuses on George Orwell's *1984* (1949) and Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932), which "present a cruel dialectic in which the creation of self-conscious subjectivity is also the destruction and self-alienation of that same subjectivity" (95). Moving from

Freud's theories to Jung's, Miller provides an analysis of Ursula K. Le Guin's interest in Jungian psychoanalysis, mainly the notion of the shadow self and the collective unconscious that is made up of archetypes. However, as Miller notices, Le Guin does not follow Jungian concepts blindly, but rather transforms them for her own use. With his analysis of Josephine Saxton's *Jane Saint and the Backlash* (1989), Daniel Keyes's *Flowers for Algernon* (1966) and Frederik Pohl's *Gateway* (1977), Miller further discusses transformed ideas of the collective unconscious. At the same time, what seems to be missing from this chapter on psychoanalytic criticism in science fiction is the figure of Jacques Lacan. Having adapted Freud's ideas and incorporated them into poststructuralist theories, Lacan is one of the most discussed theoreticians of psychoanalysis in literary studies. Because of this, applying his ideas to the reading of science fiction would definitely be a valuable addition to the book.

Focusing on behaviorism and social constructionism, Chapter 3 also starts with a theoretical introduction and Miller's explanation, in this case, of the fact that he put these two schools together because they both share "a progressivist ambition to intervene in the social and cultural plasticity of human life" (127). Within this discussion, he takes up John B. Watson as a pioneering behaviorist alongside Ivan Pavlov and Edward Thorndike, all of whom believed that psychology should focus not only on introspection, but also on the outside world. According to Miller, behaviorist tendencies in science fiction come across mostly in utopian/dystopian works, and he considers B. F. Skinner's *Walden Two* (1948) as the starting point of this tendency. Miller argues that Skinner points out the ethical problem of the conflict between "the desires of the individual and the supply of societal roles" (137). Linked to this analysis of *Walden Two*, he brings in works critical of behaviorist concepts, such as *A Clockwork Orange* (1962) by Anthony Burgess and *The Lathe of Heaven* (1971) by Ursula K. Le Guin. Alongside his discussion of behavioral psychology in science fiction, Miller also invokes the concept of social constructionism exemplified by the role of constructing variants of sexuality in the creation of fantastic worlds. Both paradigms seem to correspond with science fiction's role as a method of organizing knowledge due to their emphasis on the social dimension over the personal.

In the final two chapters, Miller introduces existential-humanistic psychology as shaped by the influence of European existential philosophy and discusses psychologists who were dissatisfied with already existing psychological approaches. He mentions Rollo May, Erich Fromm, and Abraham Maslow as the most prominent figures in this discourse, among others. Analyzing novels such as Vincent McHugh's *I Am Thinking of My Darling* (1943), Miller provides science fictional examples of conforming to the existentialist idea of authenticity, corresponding with existentialist concepts, and reflecting the critique of the biomedical psychiatry of the 1960s. In his interpretation, the existential-humanistic perspective is reflected in science fiction's didactic and prophetic aspects.

Miller ends his overview of psychological concepts imported into science fiction with cognitive psychology, which, to him, is a discourse closest in its assumptions to the genre of science fiction since it explores mental, schematic, and socially motivated processes and representations. Miller examines these ideas through works such as Jack Finney's *The Body Snatchers* (1955), which discusses "the effects of stereotypical schemas upon perception, knowledge,

and memory" (206). In addition to this, he turns to Walter Lippmann's idea of a blind spot – a gap between the external fact and the internal mental representation – and discusses the role of language in creating illusions and establishing reality as well as the way it problematizes psychological processes in works such as Samuel Delany's *Babel-17* (1966).

Overall, I found Miller's arguments compelling. He not only presented ways in which particular psychological orientations can be applied to the literary analysis of science fiction, but he also introduced works which distort popular psychological concepts and suggest new ways of understanding them. Because of its structure, *Science Fiction and Psychology* serves as a good introduction to the most important psychological schools and their applications in science fiction, which could prove useful to both literature and psychology students and scholars. What makes Miller's book stand out is the focus on a variety of psychological schools, which enables him to go beyond the psychoanalytical readings that have often been seen as the most significant approach to applying psychological theories to literary studies. Importantly, the author not only provides analyses of science fiction texts that adapt crucial psychological concepts, but he also discusses works that use psychology to examine and challenge the field's most popular ideas. While the chapter on cognitive psychology could have been developed further since as Miller himself stated, it is currently a dominant psychological school, he is successful in presenting the significance of science fiction for psychology and vice-versa. In addition to this, Miller's research could have been extended to include the areas of neuropsychology and parapsychology, which require further research. Nonetheless, the book is definitely a useful foundation for those interested in intersections of psychology and science fiction.

> *Biography:* Alicja Jakha is a PhD Candidate at the John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin, Poland. Currently she is writing her dissertation on the representation of postcolonial trauma in Afrofuturist and Indigenous Futurist texts of N. K. Jemisin and Rebecca Roanhorse. She is the author of the article "The Spectral Presence of (Un)dead Mother in Shirley Jackson's Short Stories" published in *Annales Universitatis Marie Curie-Skłodowska* (2020). Her scholarly interests are Native American studies, African American studies, trauma studies, and speculative fiction.