

## Books in Review

**Meghan Gilbert-Hickey & Miranda A. Green-Barteet (Editors)**

*Race in Young Adult Speculative Fiction*,  
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Meghan Gilbert-Hickey and Miranda A. Green-Barteet's *Race in Young Adult Speculative Fiction* (2021) began as a response to critic Ebony Elizabeth Thomas' call for more critical attention to the Dark Fantastic. (Her book, published in 2019, is titled *The Dark Fantastic: Race and the Imagination from Harry Potter to The Hunger Games*). Exploring how race is presented and overlooked in recent speculative young adult (YA) literature comprises the foundation of this collection. The thirteen essays are concerned with how the portrayal of races and other forms of difference both reflect and perpetuate contemporary discourses of otherness. Each of the four sections has been organized with a unifying theme in mind, although the contributors' essays speak in concert with one another.

The first section, *Defining Diversity*, considers novels that feature characters of color but that do not directly confront the ways in which race affects characters' experiences. In "Blood Rules: Racial Passing and the Commodification of Difference in Victoria Aveyard's *The Red Queen*", Sarah Olutola considers how the fantastic-dystopian novel invokes familiar discourses of racial otherness by reflecting the lack of inclusion of racial minorities into American political and social structures. Similarly taking up the concept of otherness, Kathryn Strong Hansen's essay, "The Fairy Race: *Artemis Fowl*, Gender, and Racial Hierarchies", asserts that the series fail to consider race and gender directly since it has the potential for creating characters with intersectional identities, yet it reinforces current hegemonic structures. Finally, Jill Coste's "Enchanting the Masses: Allegorical Diversity in Fairy-Tale Dystopias" analyzes Stacey Jay's *Of Beast and Beauty* and

Marissa Meyer's *Lunar Chronicles* series, arguing that these works use allegory to present diversity but in fact deracialize diversity while still representing marginalization.

The essays in the second section, *Erasing Race*, consider how the lived experiences of racialized characters are elided under the guise of colorblind ideology and through the creation of postracial worlds. In "Neoliberalism's Erasure of Race in Young Adult Fiction: Sherri L. Smith's *Orleans* as Counterexample", Sean P. Connors and Roberta Seelinger Trites argue that neoliberalism has influenced the erasure of race in contemporary YA dystopian fiction. To demonstrate how YA dystopian novels reproduce the individual privilege, the authors consider Sherri L. Smith's *Orleans* as example. Malin Alkestrand's essay, "(De)Stabilizing the Boundaries between 'Us' and 'Them': Racial Oppression and Racism in Two YA Dystopias Available in Swedish", analyzes Mats Wahl's *Blodregnsserie* and Ursula Poznanski's *Die Eleria Trilogie*. These texts speak to racism and ethnocentrism in a contemporary Swedish context, using recent immigration history and tribalism in Europe. The final essay in this section, Sierra Hale's "Postracial Futures and Colorblind Ideology: The Cyborg as Racialized Metaphor in Marissa Meyer's *Lunar Chronicles Series*", consider the series' use of colorblind ideology and technology as a metaphor to perpetuate racist discourses.

The third section, *Lineages of Whiteness*, considers the ways in which whiteness is privileged and normalized. Meghan Gilbert-Hickey interrogates Patrick Ness' work in "I've Connected with Them": Racial Stereotyping and White Appropriation in the *Chaos Walking Trilogy*". Gilbert-Hickey analyzes how the trilogy replicates both settler colonialism and Western racism, thereby reifying whiteness and erasing the experiences of Indigenous

## Books in Review, Continued

characters. Elizabeth Ho's "Asian Masculinity, Eurasian Identity, and Whiteness in Cassandra Clare's *Infernal Devices Trilogy*" argues that the series reinscribes Victorian racist structures because it does not prove an ethical appropriation of past and present systems of oppression. Finally, Alex Polish examines how disability is constructed as a form of racialized otherness in "Eugenics and the 'Purity' of Memory Erasure: The Racial Coding of Dis/ability in the *Divergent Series*". He contends that the series creates a colorblind world, which is defined as a privileged world, enabling characters to believe that race no longer exists.

The book's final section, (iv) Racialized Identities, examines texts that feature racially othered characters, simultaneously unpacking an insistence on racialized discourse and looking toward works that include characters with intersectional identities. Joshua Yu Burnett's "'Vine Head', 'Snake Lady', and 'Swamp Witch': Racialized Othering in Nnedi Okorafor's *Zahrah the Windseeker*" simultaneously critiques speculative fiction for its one-dimensional depictions of race and works within the confines of the genre to advocate for fluid, multifaceted intersectionality. "Between 'Castoff' and 'Half-man': Pressuring Mixed-Race Identity in *The Drowned Cities*" by Susan Tan examines the complexities of race and racialized otherness in Paolo Bacigalupi's

novel. Tan argues that the novel offers exciting possibilities for including racial identity in YA speculative fiction. Esther L. Jones' "Black Girl Magic: Bioethics and the Reinvention of the Trope of the Mad Scientist in Black YA Speculative Fiction", understands the texts she analyzes as challenging and rewriting social scripts of mental health and disability. Her work forces us to interrogate our own complicity within these cultural narratives. In the final essay, "Forefronting Race and Law: Ambelin Kwaymullina's *The Interrogation of Ashala Wolf* and Challenging the Expectations for Idealized Young Adult Heroines", Zara Rix argues that Kwaymullina imagines a dystopian Australia as a way to teach readers about Australian history with its indigenous people. The Indigenous Futurism envisions a path that respects and honors tradition while leaning on notions of law to move toward an ethical social order.

This anthology offers a compilation that speaks to this moment in speculative fiction since each section peels back layers of institutionalized racism and discrimination that have been endemic in this genre. All the essays point toward the potential of YA science fiction to both address and interrogate racial inequities in the West and beyond. It should become an ideal reference book that can be used both at university courses and personal libraries, since it celebrates the current progress towards inclusivity, and sees an enduring future for intersectional identity. As a matter of fact, this volume also constitutes a call to action for writers of YA speculative fiction and will surely seed intersectional conversations about a genre that is only beginning to realize its potential.