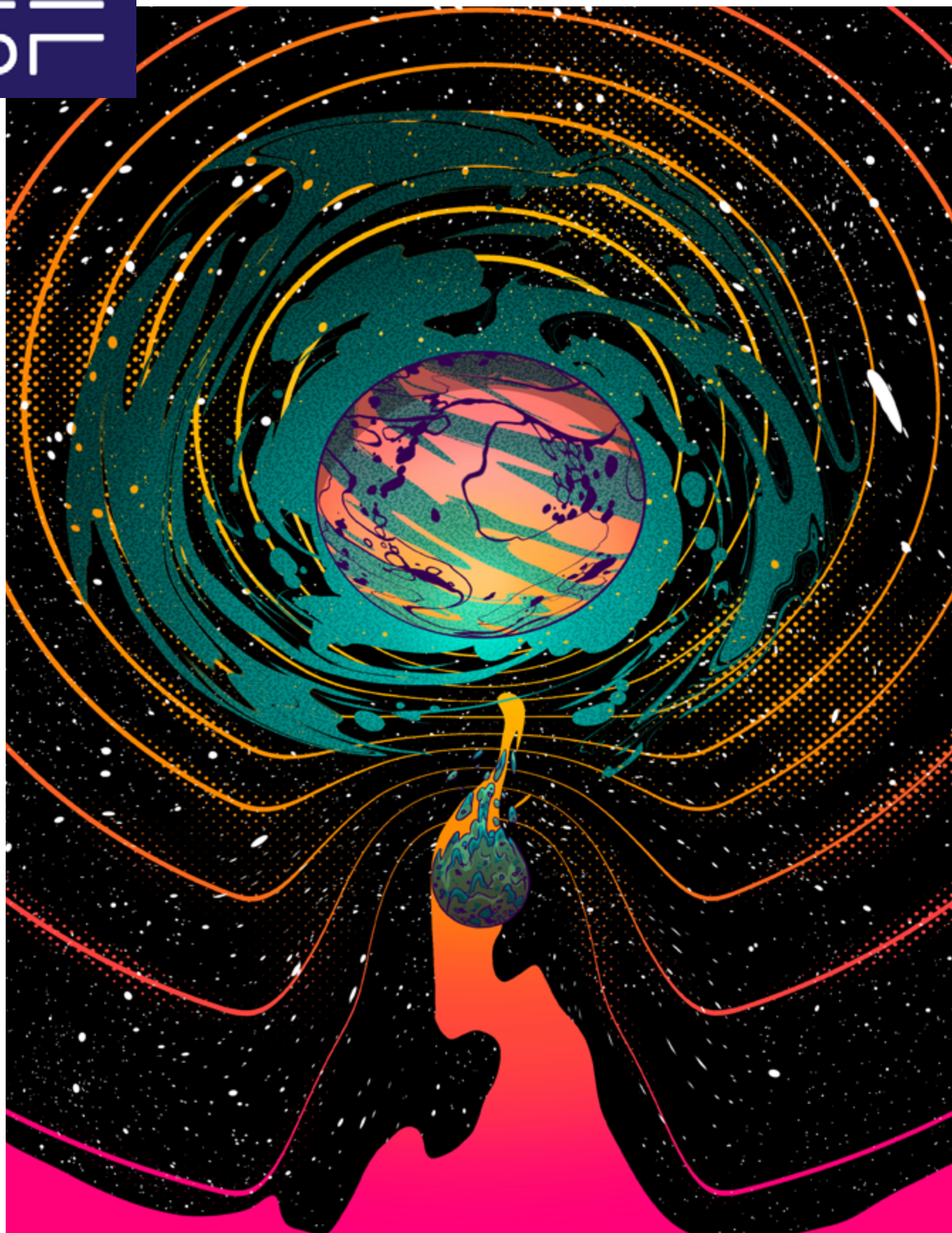






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Letter from the Editor

Since our last issue the JOSF editorial team has seen tremendous growth and challenges. This past summer we updated our website to optimize our submission and communication protocols as well as our peer review and production processes. Earlier this year, we added four new editors to the editorial team and are pleased to welcome John J. Doherty, Kristine Larsen, Carla Morttitz and Gabriel Burrow. Their interests and accomplishments can be found on page 81. We also welcome a new layout and copyeditor, Tisha Carper Long, to the team. This is the largest team the *Journal of Science Fiction* has had in its nine-year history with some of the widest reach geographically we've ever had—we're excited to work together across these borders, and across disciplines, to produce high-quality scholarship in science fiction and media studies.

In this issue, we have an editorial essay in our "Perspectives" section by Emerson Zora Hamsa which looks at Octavia E. Butler's work as an opportunity for readers, students, and teachers to expand notions of survival and community. This renewed section of our journal will give P-12 and college-level instructors, fiction writers and poets, game designers, museum curators, program administrators, playwrights and other writers opportunities to write compelling stories detailing science fiction and the speculative in practice. We invite you to pitch and submit essay ideas from your experiences in the classroom, fieldwork,

at exhibitions and museums, and performance or creative practice that deal with science fiction studies, writers of the genre, and the speculative or futurity more broadly.

There are four scholarly articles in this issue whose interrogations of science fiction and its writers draw together concepts of literary and cultural criticism as well as intertextual and cross-disciplinary analyses. Dorisa Costello's analysis in "(Re)calling Friday: Clarke's Piranesi and the Noble Savage" demonstrates how Susanna Clarke's *Piranesi* parallels and critiques Defoe's 1719 *The Life and Strange Surprising Adventure of Robinson Crusoe*. John Doherty's article takes a look at an overlooked hero in science fiction and society, the librarian; contradistinctively, Quentin Skrabec's article examines a well-studied figure in sf discourse, Jules Verne, and his use of technological innovation in his oeuvre. Katherine Schaab uses Meg Elison's *The Book of the Unnamed Midwife* in her work to explore the importance of healthily navigating trauma in community contexts to find resolve and healing. This issue also holds two book reviews of *Queering SF* by Ritch Calvin and *The Routledge Handbook of CoFuturisms* co-edited by Taryne Jade Taylor, Isiah Lavender III, Grace L. Dillon, Bodhisattva Chattopadhyay, written by Carrie-Anna Wade and Jonathan Lewis respectively, both books demonstrate the growing and expansive directions in the field.

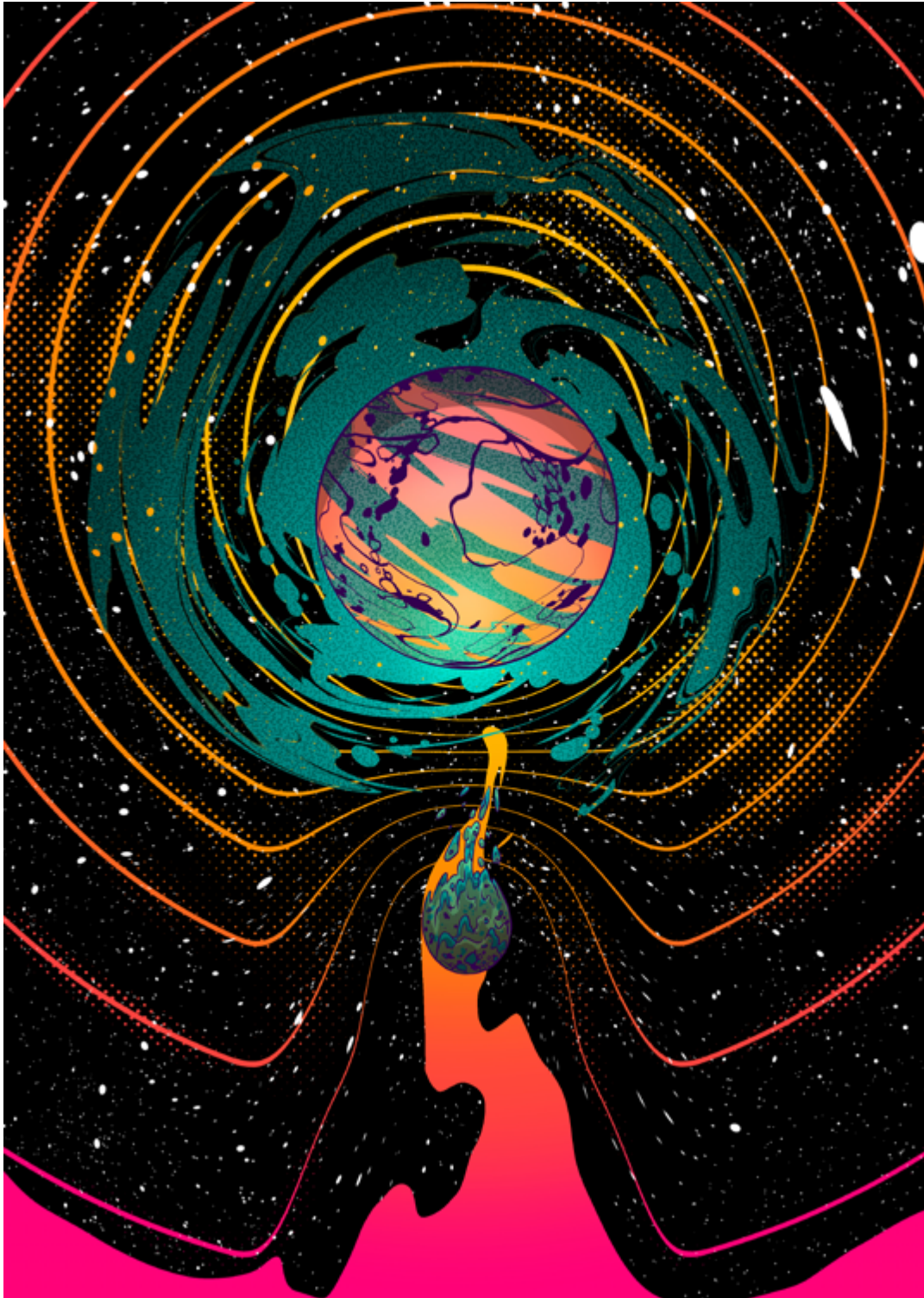


Letter from the Editor, continued

Across the summer, we have plans to complete our special issue on virtual reality and cyberspace which we hope will attend to some of the present concerns regarding artificial intelligence and virtual space, while pushing the envelope. We thank all of the contributors, peer reviewers, copyeditors, layout editors, and readers for their commitment to this open-access work. ■

– A.D. Boynton II
Managing Editor
MOSF Journal of Science Fiction

Cover Art



Forces of Attraction

Matthew Willie Garcia, M.F.A.

Marvelous Pedagogy: Octavia E. Butler's Black Speculative Fiction in the University Classroom

Emerson Zora Hamsa

"...Science fiction puts into play something that we know, that is rather familiar, while it so rearranges the signposts that the outcome is strange and defamiliarized. The melding of the familiar and the strange is not only the essence of the marvelous, but the very ground of the uncanny, which returns us to what we know in a way that we have not known and experienced before."

—Hortense J. Spillers, *"Imaginative Encounters"*

"Speculation: the faculty or power of seeing; sight, vision, esp. intelligent or comprehending vision. Now archaic."

—Oxford English Dictionary

"In my novels, generally, everybody wins and loses something—Wild Seed is probably the best illustration of that—because as I see it, that's pretty much the way the world is."

—Octavia E. Butler, *Interview with Larry McCaffery and Jim McMenamin/1988*

The theologian Catherine Keller reminds us that *apocalypse*, from the Greek ἀποκάλυψις, means to unveil—to reveal and to disclose.¹ Such disclosures often happen in (perhaps) brief, but revelatory, moments of rupture that turn our collective attention not only to our mishaps—social, ecological, political, etc.—but to our potential for repair. They remind us of our ability to imagine a world

after the end of this world. To recognize apocalypse and its attendant potential, we must be willing to recognize, and embrace, the disclosures that are often brought about by (the violence of) the dystopic. It seems that we are currently experiencing an apocalypse, which is to say a period of revelation that reveals the consequences of our refusal to seek, and practice, living and being in harmonious relation with each other and our shared planet. The symptoms of apocalypse—e.g., global pandemics, active government destabilization, state-sanctioned murders and abductions, environmental devastations—often unnerve us and send us in search of answers to these difficult moments of annunciation.

Recently, many teachers, scholars, and laypeople alike have returned to Octavia E. Butler's cautionary *Parable of the Sower*, hopeful that the ostensibly prescient novelist left clues for our collective survival. I am hesitant to claim that Butler's *Parable of the Sower* and/or *Parable of the Talents* can save us from ourselves, but I am confident that Butler's oeuvre proffers an invitation to think beyond our staid conceptions of the human and consider the potential inherent in new ways of being. If we consider Octavia E. Butler's science fiction as black speculative fiction par

Marvelous Pedagogy, continued

excellence because of her incisive critique of the human and because of the ways in which she fantasizes—and invites us to fantasize—(through) worlds that foreground and nurture black ways of being, then our turn to Butler during these dire times is not only warranted but expected. Butler’s work compels its readers to inhabit the complex tension inherent in relation while, at once, searching for possible correctives to what Butler often called “the human contradiction,” that is, high(est) intelligence coupled with an insatiable tendency toward hierarchy.² Her novels offer us a grammar and framework for imagining and constructing new futures.

Sometimes Butler gives us a warning by reflecting to us the inevitable consequences of our environmental neglect, political apathy, and destructive individualism. At other times, her stories imaginatively reassemble human genetic profiles in order to give us a (slim) chance at survival after our carelessness has destroyed (almost) everything. These are the kinds of observations I foreground when introducing students to Butler’s work. It is important to note that teaching and dwelling upon Butler’s work—*Parable of the Sower*, in particular—as a trove of prophetic and salvific prescriptions for surviving apocalypse not only ignores Butler’s own admonition that her (unfinished) *Parables* are cautionary tales, but it often obscures the ways that the black speculative can function as a praxis of critical consciousness that is essential to world building. In

other words, the *other* worlds into which Butler’s oeuvre invites us are also worlds that complicate our experiences of being and knowing. Through wide-reaching and textually-diverse, speculative thinking with all Butler’s work, we—professors and students—are empowered to collectively contemplate and fashion new modes of living.

If I may riff, for the remainder of this essay, on a question that was posed to Butler many times during her career—“what good is science fiction to black people?”—to which she, in part, replied in *Essence* magazine in 1989:

What good is any form of literature to Black [sic] people? What good is science fiction’s thinking about the present, the future, and the past? What good is its tendency to warn or to consider alternative ways of thinking and doing?³

Let us, then, consider the question “what good is black speculative fiction in the university classroom?” The black speculative, as I am invested in it and as I present it to students, is an imaginative aspect of black study that, through the embrace and practice of the fantastic, challenges, and undermines, normative ways of thinking and being.⁴ If we understand the human, and the genres that flow from it, to be an antiblack fabulation, then we can engage the black speculative as that which is characterized by its capacity to (en)vision, and enact, the simultaneity of the possibility and impossibility of black existence. In other

Marvelous Pedagogy, continued

words, the black speculative is way of seeing, and being in, the world that is antithetical to antiblackness. I use adjectival *black* in this essay to mark an unmissable gesture toward black(ness) as unbridled and unlimited potential. I mean *black* to connote a limitless disavowal of every concept and structure that is contingent upon antiblackness for its existence and survival. As such, the black speculative is not only marked by racialization (i.e. the blackened body), but by [a] black(ness) metaphysics that already and always threatens to upend antiblack reality through its alternative worldbuilding endeavors.

I have assigned Butler's *Wild Seed*, *Parable of the Sower*, and *Parable of the Talents*, in various undergraduate courses that range from *Reading the Black 80s* to *Blackness at the End of the World*. In these courses, I emphasize the importance of fantasy as a feature of the black speculative and as an intellectual, emotional, and material praxis that compels us away from the familiar, discriminatory, and destructive toward new forms of being [in relation] that encourage shared emotional and environmental responsibility as well as myriad forms of symbiotic living.

At the time of this writing, I am teaching *Cartographies of the Fantastic: Selected Works of Octavia E. Butler*, a single-author course on Butler's work, in which we return to the "Patternist" novels that Butler wrote at the beginning of her career and to *Fledgling* (2006), her final

novel. While it may seem, to some, like a missed opportunity to not assign Butler's *Parable of the Sower* and *Parable of the Talents* in this course given the ostensible apocalyptic conditions under which we currently live, it is likely that many other teachers, researchers, and readers are doing just that. There will be myriad opportunities in the coming months/years for many of us to participate in community readings, and discussions, of Butler's *Parables*—in person and online.

In my experience, students have been enthralled by Butler's lesser-known and lesser-taught fiction. During seminar sessions, students have thoughtfully considered the black imagining that undergirds Butler's stories, and they have astutely identified how such thinking is relevant to [our] collective survival. These young adults have been excited by, and invested in, discussions that take seriously the social and civic risks inherent in the making of a ruling class. More than one student has insightfully remarked upon the ways in which Butler solders symbiosis to consciousness sharing through her articulation of the Pattern, a psychic network of telepaths who wield power over people who do not possess psionic abilities.

Many students have also been eager to discuss pitfalls and benefits of the emergence of technologies that mimic telepathy. Notably, during plenary discussions, and in writing, students have been particularly attuned to the ways that Butler's work insists that we contend

Marvelous Pedagogy, continued

with troubling expressions of hierarchy that engender structures of enslavement.

Students have openly shared their struggles with Butler's depictions of slavery—psychic and otherwise—and they have also noted the ways that Butler's "Patternist" novels bring into relief the ways in which our current technologies—and the oligarchs that control them—enact their own forms of invasion upon our psyches and thus our individual and collective will(s).

Relatedly, students have also expressed their fascination with the concept of symbiotic relationality and their struggle with the seemingly thin distinction between the symbiotic and the parasitic. Such astute and complex observations are testaments to the value students have found in the ways that the black speculative compels us to dream differently and indulge our desires to live, and love, in a different world. Students have been hospitable to the rigorous thought work that black speculative fiction requires. Their willingness to think the (im)possible and experience the anticipation of its potential is nothing short of admirable.

Before they become permanent, and integral members of their telepathic communities, the characters in Butler's "Patternist" novels undergo transitions—excruciating mental and physically demanding periods during which their latent powers become active and controllable. Latents, as they are called before transition, often need a powerful

active (a telepath, shapeshifter, healer, etc.) who can support—and usher—them through transition. I like to imagine my students as latent healers—and potential world changers—who have consented to being transformed by black speculative imagining. My role, then, as an *active*, so to speak, which is to say someone who has already been transformed (and is always being transformed) by black speculative imagining is to carefully support students through their transition from realists, who are bound by the oft-destructive codes and deception of liberal humanism, into powerful fantasists who believe in the possibility of other worlds.

My pedagogical goal is for students to develop facility with the ways that black speculative imagining can function as a civic tool and a life skill. At its core, the marvelous pedagogy that is expressed in title of this essay, invites, and encourages, students to engage fully with the black speculative and resist the pressure to devote themselves to trappings of realism. This is a (black) practice of refusal, in the classroom and elsewhere, and it is, as Darieck Scott suggests, an activity that is "partly the recovery of the possible, the action—even if not remotely on par with the range of violence available to reality's actions—of forging some kind of *realization of the possible*; it is a push back against the tyranny of history."⁵ This critical refusal activity—(a) praxis—reflects a commitment to learning, teaching, and pursuing collective freedom through the relentless engagement with the fantastic power of the black speculative. ■

Marvelous Pedagogy, continued

Notes

1. See Catherine Keller, *Apocalypse now and then: A feminist guide to the end of the world* (Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 1996).
2. Conseula Francis, ed. *Conversations with Octavia Butler* (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2010).
3. Octavia E. Butler, "Positive obsession" in *Bloodchild and other stories* (New York: Seven Stories Press), 134-135.
4. For additional information about the form and function of black study and its relationship to black studies, see Stefano Harney and Fred Moten, *The undercommons: Fugitive planning and black study* (New York: Minor Compositions, 2013).
5. Darieck Scott, *Keeping it unreal: Black fantasy and superhero comics* (New York: New York University Press, 2022), 33.

(Re)calling Friday: Clarke's Piranesi and the Noble Savage

Dorisa Costello

Abstract: Susanna Clarke's 2020 slipstream novel *Piranesi* subtly resists and overturns racial objectification and oppression of an Othered subject through parallels with Daniel Defoe's eighteenth-century adventure tale, *The Life and Strange Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe* (1719). Clarke dialogs with Robinson Crusoe in unexpected ways, particularly through the presence and ultimate overturning of the noble savage trope. *Piranesi* ultimately works to destabilize Robinson Crusoe's British imperialist agenda by reversing the privileges of naming and narrative perspective through the eponymous character of Piranesi, a Black man trapped in a fantastical, labyrinthine world. My analysis will look at the ways Clarke powerfully recalls Defoe's noble savage character, Friday, and lets him speak for himself.

Keywords: noble savage, *Robinson Crusoe*, *Piranesi*

In the long scheme of literature, the novel is a youngster at the table, and the science fiction novel her younger sister still. Although predated by other prose narratives, Daniel Defoe's novel, *The Life and Strange Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe* (1719), is most often cited as the first novel in the English language. By today's standards, its episodic narrative structure, externalized psychologization of its narrator-protagonist Robinson Crusoe, and mimetic attention seem well-worn, but in its time, Defoe's classic was the first to codify such conventions of realistic fiction.¹ However, this novel is hardly "realistic" by any stretch of the imagination. It includes hyperbolic adventures—strange and surprising adventures, according to its title, that include no less than two shipwrecks, capture by pirates, a daring escape from

enslavement, and desperate survival on a deserted island that is capped by a fight against cannibals! It also critiques aspects of its own contemporary society and explores human ingenuity and technology, such that it can fit comfortably in today's speculative fiction, an umbrella category that includes science fiction, fantasy, and a host of sub-genres.

The term "science fiction," a phrase first coined by William Wilson in his *A Little Earnest Book Upon a Great Old Subject* (1851) is defined as "a story in which the revealed truths of Science may be given interwoven with a pleasing story which may itself be poetical and true" (Franklin, 2018). More recently, Hugo Gernsback used the term "scientifiction" to describe the genre as we understand it today (*Encyclopedia of Science Fiction*, 2024). Taken together, science

(Re)calling Friday: Clarke's Piranesi and the Noble Savage, continued

fiction and speculative fiction imagine the future of human civilization, and do so very often through the comparison between technologically advanced and less-advanced cultures, human or otherwise. From this long trajectory, beginning with Robinson Crusoe itself, emerges the noble savage trope, a literary depiction of less technologically developed cultures characterized as purer, closer to nature, and less corrupted by modernity, yet also very often infantile, backward, and naïve. Though the trope is not necessarily derogatory, its presence within speculative fiction has been decidedly mixed, often used as a stand-in for racial prejudices and capitalizing on racist stereotypes. Early works such as Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726), Mary Shelley's *The Last Man* (1826), and H. Ridder Haggard's *She: A History of Adventure* (1887) can be seen as the progenitors of works such as *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969) by Ursula K. LeGuin and her depiction of Gethenian society, or the Soft Ones in Isaac Asimov's *The Gods Themselves* (1972), or, even more recently, the Navi'i from the *Avatar* franchise films and graphic novels (Cameron, 2009 and 2022). As the start of it all, Robinson Crusoe's adventures through eighteenth-century colonial England and its holdings employ some of the more troubling aspects of the noble savage trope, which this essay will explore.

One such recent speculative novel that dialogs with *Robinson Crusoe* and deconstructs some of the most harmful

aspects of the noble savage trope is Susanna Clarke's *Piranesi* (2020), particularly through the presence of the novel's Black narrator-protagonist, the eponymous Piranesi. Briefly, the novel follows Piranesi, the lone human inhabitant of a labyrinthine otherworld known as the House, whose numerous halls and alcoves are decorated by various marble statues and which supports an ocean-like body of water that ebbs and flows and which offers Piranesi an abundance of sea life and kelp on which to survive. Piranesi's only human contact is with Dr. Valentine Ketterley, whom Piranesi refers to as the Other, a man who comes from seemingly elsewhere but whom readers will recognize as coming from contemporary Britain, who is searching for what he describes as a "Great and Secret Knowledge" which he believes resides somewhere within the House (Clarke, 2020, p. 8). Though Piranesi thinks of him as a friend and colleague in this endeavor, the reader soon realizes that the Other is not who he seems, and in fact, Piranesi's presence in the House is due to the deceit and machinations of the Other. Careful reading of Piranesi's characterization and his interaction with other characters, particularly the Other, reveal that *Piranesi* reimagines past representations of characters of color, particularly those considered "primitive." Clarke's novel ultimately works to destabilize *Robinson Crusoe*'s British imperialistic view by reversing the privileges of the naming and narrative perspective.

(Re)calling Friday: Clarke's Piranesi and the Noble Savage, continued

In this way, Clarke powerfully recalls Defoe's noble savage character, Friday, and lets him finally speak for himself.

The Noble Savage and Defoe

Ter Ellingson's aptly titled *The Myth of the Noble Savage* (2001) adroitly traces the origins of the noble savage archetype from its rather innocuous beginnings in seventeenth-century French anthropology to its current manifestation of non-White Otherization. He debunks its commonly held connection to Jean Jacques Rousseau and instead locates its metamorphosis in the opposition "between 'civilized white' society and all others where it embodies a denial of the possibility of attribution of good qualities to any people who were not white" as outlined in Sir John Crawfurd's paper to the Ethnological Society of London in 1859 (p. 296). While the phrase itself may have coalesced well after Defoe's novel, the ideology of non-White primitivism and inferiority had been well established in the eighteenth century. Stelio Cro and Aubrey Rosenberg, in their book, *The Noble Savage: Allegory of Freedom* (2006), note Defoe's own awareness of the trope through his use of source materials, such as fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Spanish chronicles of the New World and its indigenous inhabitants, and Peter Martyr's *De Orbe Novo* (p. 96). In the long-standing critical discourse of race, Henry Louis Gates, Jr., (1986) reminds us that the usage of race as an essential category, "within the biological sciences, has long been recognized to be fiction" and thus we

"speak in biological misnomers and, more generally, in metaphors" when we speak of race (p. 4). Its purpose is to point to, and Gates suggests, even create, difference (p. 5). It is, like the image of the noble savage itself, a trope, though, as Gates asserts "a dangerous trope" (p. 5). The dangers, as may be obvious, are the reductive, dehumanizing work that has been employed as justification for any number of atrocities, not the least of which is chattel slavery.

In Defoe, the noble savage comes most starkly into view in the latter chapters of *Robinson Crusoe*, when Crusoe rescues a cannibal, whom he later names Friday, about to be executed on the far shores of the island where he has been living. Through Crusoe's journal entries, we read that after having been saved, Friday "laid his head upon the ground, and taking me by the foot, set my foot upon his head: this, it seems, was in token of swearing to be my slave for ever [sic]" (p. 170). This obeisance could be attributed as indebtedness to one's savior rather than solely a symptom of Anglo-European ethnocentrism; however, given the details that follow and the conspicuous use of the term "slave," it is most certainly mixed with aspects of the noble savage trope and the British colonial project. Crusoe describes Friday as having

all the sweetness and softness of an European in his countenance too...His hair was long and black, not curled like wool...The colour of his skin was not quite black, but very tawny; and yet not of an ugly yellow nauseous tawny,

(Re)calling Friday: Clarke's Piranesi and the Noble Savage, continued

as the Brazilians and Virginians, and other natives of America are...His face was round and plump; his nose small, not flat like the negroes; a very good mouth, thin lips, and his fine teeth well set, and white as ivory. (p. 172)

Quite pointedly, Crusoe notes Friday's exceptionally European characteristics, which set him apart from every other savage that Crusoe has encountered in his adventures: the Native Americans in Virginia, the indigenous Brazilians on his own plantation, or the coastal Africans he observed after escaping from Turkish slavery. Ellingson notes that the "nobility" of the noble savage trope is tied to his close resemblance to the European. The savage's nobility "is associated with moral qualities such as generosity and proper and fitting behavior; and their primordial lifestyle is set off against later civilizations" (Ellingson 2001, p. 22). The fitting behavior, in this case, is hunting, as "hunting was, after all, one of the *marques de noblesse*, the emblematic privileges that distinguished nobles from commoners" (p. 24). So, Friday's lighter skin, small nose, straight hair, and thin lips, code him as Euro-adjacent, just acceptable enough to occupy the strata above the purely savage, but still Other enough to justify enslavement and even frame it as the moral obligation of the superior civilization to educate and enlighten the poor, pitiful cannibal.

In this same vein, Crusoe notes Friday's simplicity and childishness, such as when he describes his devotion to Crusoe as akin to "those of a child to

a father" (Defoe, 2003, p. 174), his silly taunting of a bear (pp. 244-245), and in his learning of English (p. 176), which Cro and Rosenberg (2006) read as a sign of his civilizing: "given a proper education, even a Cannibal will reject his barbaric behavior" (p. 101). The infantilization of Friday works to justify Crusoe's dominance and paternalistic attitude. It is, after all, for Friday's own good that Crusoe should take the lead and usher him into the civilized world. Nowhere is there resistance on Friday's part to Crusoe's demand to relinquish his own cultural and religious practices, or to leave his native land and reside with Crusoe. In fact, the narrative seems to suggest that Friday rightly recognizes his own inferiority and the superiority of Crusoe's civilized culture, exemplified not only by his submissive posturing but also by his promise to forego cannibalism, his enthusiasm at eating roasted goat and bread for the first time, and Crusoe's teaching him to bake bread himself (Defoe, 2003, p. 178). Friday's enslavement, the narrative seems to say, is actually to his benefit, as he eventually converts to Christianity, learns English, adopts the practice of wearing clothes, and is industrious in his goat-herding and bread-making—all the hallmarks of advanced civilization, which his white "master" models.

This schooling culminates in the most blatant demonstration of Crusoe's assumption of superiority, which is his assignation of names. Crusoe writes in his journal, "And first, I made him know

(Re)calling Friday: Clarke's Piranesi and the Noble Savage, continued

his name should be Friday, which was the day I saved his life...I likewise taught him to say Master, and then let him know that was to be my name" (Defoe, 2003, p. 172). To bestow a name is to claim a position of power or authority. Parents or other family members name infants; the owners of enslaved people named their chattel. Judith Butler, in *Precarious Life* (2004) parses the act of addressing the Other, of naming him against his will, and concludes it is an act of violence as it constitutes him as something different than he is. They hold that "in some way we come to exist, as it were, in the moment of being addressed, and something about our existence proves precarious when that address fails," especially when this naming is against our will and unavoidable (p. 130). They continue that "this impingement by the other's address constitutes us first and foremost against our will or, perhaps put more appropriately, prior to the formation of our will" (p. 130). Friday most assuredly had a name before he was rescued by Crusoe, but rather than inquire what that name might have been, Crusoe assumes the ability to replace that name with one in reference to himself: Friday is the day on which Crusoe saved his life; it is *his* point of reference that imparts meaning to both Friday's name and Crusoe's own title of Master. Through this address, this naming, Crusoe constitutes Friday as the one whom he saved, and by naming himself Master, he constitutes Friday as the one who serves. Friday's previous name is inconsequential,

and, because the narrative is told from Crusoe's point of view, Friday's interiority is erased and Crusoe's is privileged. So, *Robinson Crusoe* is that novel which reaffirms British imperialism and justifies the enslavement of people of color as a personal convenience, but also a moral duty.

Names, Race, and Perspective in *Piranesi*

Naming and privilege are the segues into *Piranesi*, but here, Clarke reverses the narrative perspective by telling the novel through Piranesi's point of view: the one enslaved tells the story. Though it is not clear until the end of the novel, Piranesi, formerly a young reporter named Matthew Rose Sorenson, has been imprisoned in the otherworld environs of the House by Dr. Valentine Ketterley, an anthropologist and occultist who believes that this other dimension is the spatial depository of a lost and ancient power. Through cognitive regression, returning to a place before "the iron hand of modern rationality gripped one's mind" (p. 152), he has accessed a portal to this otherworld, but as prolonged exposure there causes amnesia, and seemingly a more primitive mentality, he traps Sorenson there until Sorenson no longer remembers who he is. When the reader enters the narrative, he has already become Piranesi, the new name Ketterley has given him.

From the start, Piranesi tells the reader that he suspects his name is not actually Piranesi, though he does not remember what his original name might have been

(Re)calling Friday: Clarke's Piranesi and the Noble Savage, continued

(Clarke, 2020, p. 9). Later, as the story unravels, the reader learns that the name Piranesi is actually cruelly ironic (p. 163). Giovanni Battista Piranesi was an eighteenth century Italian architect whose etchings depict fantastical prisons and labyrinths, and here, unbeknownst to him, Clarke's Piranesi is a man trapped in a labyrinth. The naming of Piranesi, like the naming of Friday, harkens back to slave masters naming their property. While this in itself is a display of power and authority, like when Alex Haley's Kunta Kinte is renamed Toby in his *Roots* saga (1976), other fictional namings echo the indignity of Piranesi's. For example, another of Haley's characters, Queen, or Caesar from Colson Whitehead's *The Underground Railroad* (2016), or Uncle Remus from the collection of folktales that bears his name, all recall illustrious historical figures of mighty dynasties or titles of royalty. The reality of the enslaved people's powerlessness is underscored by such ostentatious monikers, just as Ketterley's naming, which he admits is "a sort of joke" (Clarke 2020, p. 163), belittles Piranesi, no less so because Piranesi himself is excluded from the joke, but certainly because of Ketterley's assumption of the right to name in the first place. Butler (2004) claims that naming such as this, "an address we do not will, and by which we are, in an original sense, captured" is comparable to being "held hostage" (p. 139). And Piranesi certainly is a hostage, a prisoner, in the literal and figurative senses. "So there is a certain violence already in

being addressed, given a name, subject to a set of impositions, compelled to respond to an exacting alterity" (p. 139). Ketterley's physical abuse of Piranesi is no less severe than the psychic abuse of usurping Piranesi's agency and right to be known by his own name.

Lest the racial implications of naming Piranesi and his imprisonment be downplayed, Piranesi / Matthew Rose Sorenson is a Black man. Scattered throughout the novel are clues to his appearance and identity. In a journal entry he had written before his amnesia, as a part of an index of people involved in his report on Ketterley's experiments, Piranesi finds a description of Matthew Rose Sorenson, who is "the English son of a half-Danish, half-Scottish father and a Ghanaian mother" (Clarke, 2020, p. 164). Elsewhere, Piranesi describes his "naked brown feet" (p. 50) as well as his hair, which is long and braided with "seashells, coral beads, pearls, tiny pebbles and interesting fishbones" (p. 101). Though the color and texture of his hair is not described, the braiding and ornamentation recalls African, Native American, and Islander styles and practices. Though subtle, it is clear that Matthew Rose Sorenson is a man of color, which problematizes his relationship to Ketterley, a white man, who is also his enslaver.

Clarke herself unambiguously links Piranesi's captivity in the House and usage by Ketterley with slavery. As Piranesi learns more about his previous

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identity as Sorenson, he discovers that some of his journal entries have been torn out. Finding their fragments embedded in birds' nests throughout the House, he pieces them together to reconstruct the entry: "There is nothing to eat. I rely on him to bring me food and water—which only underlines my status as prisoner, a slave. He leaves the food in the room with the minotaur statues. I indulge myself in long fantasies of killing him" (Clarke, 2020, p. 126). Finally, Piranesi realizes what has happened to him, that Ketterley "brought Matthew Rose Sorenson here. The Other [Ketterley] had needed someone—a slave!—to live in these Halls and collect information about them; he dares not do it himself in case the House makes him forget" (p. 188). And Sorenson does forget. He loses his identity and his place in his own world, becomes the involuntary servant of another, and is renamed. Piranesi's experience is a horrible miniature of the trans-Atlantic slave trade, where African women and men were ripped from their lands and cultures, imprisoned in foreign locales, forced into the labor of their captors, and over generations, lost the memories of their origins.

The fact of Ketterley's occupation as scientist and his use of Piranesi for his own research connects Ketterley to the long history of scientific abuse on Black bodies. We have only to think of the Tuskegee Study of Untreated Syphilis in the Negro Male, which stretched from 1932 to 1972 (CDC Syphilis Study, 2020), the 1951 case of Johns Hopkins University

Hospital's harvesting of Henrietta Lacks' cancer cells without her or her family's knowledge (Johns Hopkins, n.d.), or J. Marion Sims' gynecologic experimentation on enslaved Black women (Vernon, 2019, p. 440) to see how White medical practices have disregarded Black people's consent. Sorenson's early journal entries make clear his unwillingness to participate in Ketterley's work; the House's labyrinthine structure brings to mind rats in laboratory mazes, equally powerless subjects under the cold gaze of the researcher. It matters very little that the subjects are unaware of their captivity.

Additionally, the transformation from Sorenson to Piranesi evokes uncomfortably the term "going native." While Friday changed from cannibal to manservant to illustrate eighteenth-century British progressivism, Sorenson loses his connection to the outside world of modern-day England and technology and adopts what appears from Ketterley's perspective, and the reader's, as primitive hunter-gatherer behavior. He fishes and gathers mussels for food, collects freshwater from the rain, dries seaweed as fuel for fires, and makes fish leather and other tools. Over time his clothes and shoes fade and wear away. He ornaments his hair with colorful, collected items. Also, and especially like the noble savage myth, he is deeply attuned to his environment. Whatever Sorenson may have known or understood in his early years of imprisonment, Piranesi has the hallmarks of what Raymond Hames (2007) calls "the ecologically

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noble savage," the idea that indigenous peoples are somehow more at one with nature and more conservation-minded than industrialized cultures (p. 178). Though Hames admits that native peoples "possess an extensive and deep understanding of their local ecosystem," he problematizes this by showing that it does not correlate to conservation or resource depletion, nor does it suggest the benign natural harmony espoused by modern conservationists (p. 184), exposing this assumption as yet another empty and potentially harmful aspect of the noble savage trope. From this we see Piranesi slide deeper into the stereotype. His resonance with the House is such that he comments how "The World still speaks to me every day" (Clarke, 2020, p. 154). In context, he means this almost literally. Piranesi deifies the House, which he sometimes also calls the World. He prays to it for protection (p. 4), notes how "the House loves and blesses equally everything that it has created" (p. 17), and believes the House provides for all of his material needs (p. 54). In our world, we might call Piranesi's veneration nature worship or paganism. Ketterley's incredulosity at the idea of Piranesi's connection to the House seems to solidify Piranesi's Otherness, as it removes him even further from the reader's modern, secular understanding of the world.

In line with Clarke's painting of Piranesi as primitive, and related to Hames' analysis of the ecologically noble savage, is the eschewing of capitalist principles such as honoring private property and hoarding

material possessions. After Piranesi is freed from the House and returns to the outside world, he begins to evolve into an unnamed third identity, neither Matthew Rose Sorenson nor Piranesi. In navigating British society and its use of money, remnants of Piranesi's personality emerge, so that this new, third character notes, "Piranesi wants to say: *But I need the thing you have, so why don't you just give it to me? And then when I have something you need, I will just give it to you. This would be a simpler system and much better!*" (italics original, Clarke 2020, p. 238). While the narrator has adapted to life back in the outside world—"I remember what Manchester is and what the police are and how to use a smartphone. I can pay for things with money" (p. 238), Piranesi, by contrast, remains either unaware of those modern conventions or, once exposed to them, rejects them.

Part of the difficulty in claiming Clarke's unambiguous rejection of the noble savage and its attributed racism is the problem of perspective. As the narrative is told through Piranesi's journal entries and his own perspective, moments of dramatic irony, especially where he fails to recognize real world references or Ketterley's deception, force the reader to participate in Ketterley's condescension and Piranesi's ridicule. Two examples in particular stand out as revelatory and discomfiting.

First, though he is the only long-term resident of the House, Piranesi has several

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encounters with people from the outside world, most regularly Ketterley but also the police detective, DS Sarah Raphael, who has been searching for Sorenson since his disappearance. When Ketterley comes to visit, Piranesi often observes him using what he describes as his “shining devices” (Clarke, 2020, p. 21), with which Ketterley types notes, does calculations, and enters data about the House. Raphael also has such a device. On it she has a recording of an interview she conducted with another character, Laurence Arne-Sayles, whom the reader discovers was Ketterley’s mentor, which she shares with Piranesi (p. 220). At another time, “she tapped it and it brought forth a shaft of white-yellow Light to illuminate the Statues and our faces” (p. 217). She also takes photographs with it (p. 225). Though Piranesi does not recognize the shining device, and is clearly taken with its clever capabilities, the reader recognizes it as a mobile phone. It is curious why this particular device stands out as incomprehensible and forgotten to Piranesi, as he has other objects from the outside world: plastic bowls, shoes, a sleeping bag, a flashlight, matches, multivitamins, all of which Ketterley has given him during the six years of his captivity (p. 52). He also periodically takes photographs for Ketterley (p. 225), so he is presumably well-acquainted with a camera as well. Why, then, does he not recognize the mobile phone?

I do not have a satisfactory answer for this, except that, unlike the other mechanical items that Ketterley supplies,

the mobile phone has Internet capability, which is its own repository of “Great and Secret Knowledge.” Would the House have erased such a memory so that Piranesi would find contentment there, without wondering about the outside world? As Sorenson’s journals are dated 2012, well after the smartphone became ubiquitous in our world, I can only see this purposeful lapse of knowledge as a handy plot device that distances Piranesi from our world and contributes to his characterization as primitive.

The other episode is more direct in its condescending attitude toward Piranesi, and this is his naive, gullible nature, as exemplified by Ketterley’s questioning about Battersea. Ostensibly for his research, Ketterley asks Piranesi to answer a series of questions. His first question is what Piranesi remembers. After noting the lack of specificity to the question, Piranesi replies that he remembers everything, and then describes his ability to recall the exact locations and routes of every corridor he has ever visited and the statues contained therein (Clarke, 2020, p. 22). Ketterley then asks Piranesi if he remembers Battersea.

Because the episode is documented in Piranesi’s journal, he spells the name “Batter-sea”, thinking it is a “place that is battered by the Sea” (Clarke, 2020, p. 22), which already clues the reader in that Piranesi is confused by the word. After some thought, he replies that ““Batter-sea is not a word...It has no referent. There is nothing in the World

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corresponding to that combination of sounds” (p. 22). This troubles Piranesi, but then, we are told that Piranesi tells Ketterley, “light suddenly dawning,” that

You need to find out if I am telling the truth. I just said that I can describe the way to any Hall that I have previously visited. But you have no way of judging the truth of my claim...So you have asked me a question with a nonsense word in it—Batter-sea...You have put this in as a control question. (pp. 22–23)

After a slight pause, Ketterley agrees that is exactly what he is doing, and both of them laugh at the cleverness of it all (p. 23). However, Piranesi is clearly still in the dark and the dramatic irony of the exchange is heightened by Piranesi's belief in his own astute deduction. Here, the limitation of the first-person perspective forces the reader to play along with Ketterley's deception in a way that a third-person limited or omniscient perspective would not. Like a child earnestly explaining the legitimacy of Santa Claus' Christmas arrival to a room of indulgent adults, Piranesi's explanation of Battersea patronizes and demeans.

Yet, Clarke does reverse other aspects of the noble savage trope by empowering Piranesi, some ways which seem to directly correspond to *Robinson Crusoe's* Otherization of Friday. Like Friday's belief that Crusoe's gun is an instrument of magic (Defoe, 2003, p. 177), the reader may interpret Piranesi's ignorance of elements of our world as comical or endearingly naïve, but the term “naïve”

is troublingly privileged and not accurate with regard to Piranesi. While he doesn't recognize a mobile phone or remember the district of Battersea, he is most keenly aware of technologies and practices that support his life in the House. He has developed a system to collect rainwater for drinking, he knows where to fish and gather mussels and seaweed, creates fish leather for various uses, can recall and navigate the various corridors of the House with detailed accuracy, and, critical to his survival later in the novel, he calculates the tidal ebb and flow of the House's ocean and rightly predicts when four of the tides will converge into a massive flood (Clarke, 2020, p. 155). With his knowledge, he saves both himself and DS Raphael, who has discovered his location in the House and comes to rescue him; meanwhile, because of his disregard for Piranesi's knowledge, Ketterley is caught in the flood and dies (p. 207).

The other point of empowerment returns us to the issue of naming. This time, however, it is Piranesi who names. Before his memory returns and he realizes who Ketterley is, Piranesi calls him the Other (Clarke, 2020, p. 6). When asked by another character why Piranesi calls him this, he replies that Ketterley is “the Other. The Not-Me” (p. 87). Anyone familiar with Edward Said's Other will recognize the delicious irony of the name. In his classic *Orientalism*, Said (1979) articulates the hierarchical dichotomy of the West versus the East. He claims that “Orientalism is a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and

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having authority over the Orient" (p. 2). Within this construct, then, is the Other: the idealized, inferior occupant of the Orient, and counterpoint to the West's (namely Europe and the United States) authority (p.1). Clarke's reversal of the term, whereby the "Oriental" non-White Piranesi names the European Ketterley, neatly counters Ketterley's naming of Piranesi, and also echoes Crusoe and Friday. In labeling Ketterley the Other, Piranesi assumes the hegemonic center, the Me, from whose boundaries Ketterley is excluded. In this small gesture, Piranesi indicates a sense of his own being as separate from Ketterley's, and assumes the right to name, with himself as the referent. Whereas Friday's referent is slave to Crusoe's Master, Piranesi's is Self, for if there is a Not-Me, there must be a sense of Me, as well.

Conclusion: Friday Finally Speaks

Though still decidedly a prison, even though Piranesi's amnesia has not yet made him aware of the fact, Piranesi's acclimation to the House, his mastery of its environment that allows him to live with comfort and ease, and this naming of Ketterley disrupts Ketterley's authority of knowing, and shifts the power and prestige from our world to Piranesi's world. In a conversation with DS Raphael, after the truth of his situation has been revealed, Piranesi calls out DS Raphael's assumption that her world, our world, is the superior one. She comments that the statues that populate the House are "only" a representation of the "actual" that is found in her world, but Piranesi

fires back that "The word 'only' suggests a relationship of inferiority. You make it sound as if the Statue is somehow inferior to the thing itself...I would argue that the Statue is superior to the thing itself, the Statue being perfect, eternal and not subject to decay" (Clarke, 2020, p. 221-2). We may or may not agree with this assessment, but that is hardly the point, as both worlds have their flaws. But what Piranesi proves in this moment is that he is neither primitive nor naive. He has a profound sense of self and place, here drawing on almost Platonic concepts of reality, which reveal DS Raphael's, Ketterley's, and ours, as a false assumption of privilege.

Told from the first-person point of view of the protagonist, Piranesi, Clarke's novel overturns many of the harmful results of the noble savage trope so embedded in, and blithely unchallenged in, *Robinson Crusoe*. While the first-person perspective of *Robinson Crusoe* excludes Friday's interiority in favor of Crusoe's, enabling the novel to justify Crusoe's colonization of native lands and enslavement of native peoples as par for the course for imperialism, *Piranesi* shifts the perspective, and thus the privilege. The authority to name, the presumption to possess and enslave, the echoes of scientific abuse of people of color: *Piranesi*, imperfectly, subtly, powerfully reimagines and deconstructs the noble savage trope and gives a face, a voice, to the often-silenced Other. ■

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Notes

1. For a more detailed tracking of Robinson Crusoe's place in literary history as the first realist novel in English, see Ian Watt's *The Rise of the Novel* (2001), particularly Chapter 4: Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*. For an examination of Robinson Crusoe's groundbreaking positioning of mimesis, see Erich Auerbach's classic *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (2003), particularly Chapter 10: The Modern Novel.

Librarians of Time and Space: Libraries and Librarian-Heroes in Contemporary Science Fiction and Fantasy¹

John J. Doherty

Abstract: This paper delves into the portrayal of librarians as heroes, anti-heroes, and villains in contemporary science fiction and fantasy literature. Novels such as *The Midnight Library*, *The Library at Mount Char*, and “The Invisible Library” series present a contrasting narrative to prevailing perceptions of librarians and librarian-heroes. Through an analysis of these works and their influences, this paper examines the evolution of libraries and librarians in speculative fiction, highlighting their pivotal roles as guardians of knowledge and gatekeepers to otherworldly realms. By juxtaposing societal perceptions with fictional depictions, this paper shows the transformative power of storytelling in reshaping cultural attitudes towards libraries and those who tend to their sacred collections.

Keywords: library, libraries, librarian, librarians, science fiction, fantasy, hero, anti-hero

The three rules of the Librarians of Time and Space are: 1) Silence; 2) Books must be returned no later than the last date shown; and 3) Do not interfere with the nature of causality. (Pratchett, 1989, 344)

Giuseppe Arcimboldo’s portrait *The Librarian* (c. 1566) presents a gentlemanly librarian figure assembled from books. It has been variously interpreted as a parody of librarianship, intellectualism, or even rich book collectors looking for a sheen of legitimacy through their private, unread libraries (see, especially, K.C. Elhard’s two examinations, 2005, 2006). Kells (2017) describes this composite librarian as “clutch[ing] greedily a stack of books” (p. 131). The portrait and the subsequent analyses play into negative portrayals of librarians from the early Renaissance through to present times.

Such librarians are thieves, overly acquisitive, rudely protective of their book charges, and just generally difficult. However, Kells and others miss an even more important part of Arcimboldo’s portrait: the anthropomorphic librarian of books is emerging from and partly wrapped up in a curtain, implying either that he is stealing from one of those private libraries, or is, himself, a guardian of secrets.

As will be seen below, this portrait is a prime example of the confusing juxtaposition of librarians in popular culture as opposed to society. It demonstrates that librarians have both been demonized and lauded throughout history, mostly because of the best and the worst aspects of librarians through history that are concisely presented by

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Kells (pp. 131-140). These librarians tend to be lauded heroes in social terms, but mainly anti-heroes or, worse, villains in popular culture and media. Indeed, in the Western 21st century, librarians have been consistently demonized, from portrayals as traitors when they challenged certain aspects of the USA PATRIOT Act, to more recent attacks over their defending intellectual freedom as book banning becomes more prevalent, especially in the United States.²

What has and is being seen as a “gatekeeping” function of librarians through history has been critically analyzed by philosophers such as Antonio Gramsci and authors such as Umberto Eco, as well as library theorists such as Michael H. Harris and Stan Hannah. For Gramsci, it is possible to conclude that he sees librarians as villains, as perpetrators of a cultural hegemony that is focused on retaining power in the hands of an elite. This librarian is the wizard behind the curtain, keeping knowledge hidden and only allowing it to be expressed in specific forms. Eco’s librarian, whom I will examine more extensively later, is the anti-hero, or a character, usually an important character, who is lacking in the typical noble attributes expected of the hero. In other words, the anti-hero achieves their goals through what their society sees as less than honorable methods. Harris and Hannah, finally, point to the librarian’s quest for professional status, leading in the 19th century to consider themselves “responsible censors of the reading materials made

available through the Nation’s libraries” (Harris and Hannah, 1993, p. 34). This changed in the 20th century into a more passive role of neutral transmitter of information. Both characteristics would inform popular and societal impressions of librarians. Stoddart and Lee (2005) further argue that it has created a gap between librarians’ self-impressions and those of the publics they serve.

Sarah Gailey’s 2020 dystopian novel *Upright Women Wanted* demonstrates this. Her main character, Esther, runs away from her post-apocalyptic Arizona community to join a trio of roving Librarians that are spreading both the Approved word (the social stereotype) of their war-broken society, while disrupting social mores through their secret, Unapproved lives and spreading their Unapproved documents in support of an emerging resistance (a reverse version of the government-approved book deliveries of the Works Progress Administration [WPA] Pack Horse Library initiative of the 1930s). Gailey concludes:

[W]hatever came next, whatever fight was getting ready for [Esther] on the other side of that horizon, she was going to be ready for it. They all would—everyone in every cell across the sector, in every city and every town, in every lonesome shotgun shack, in every jailhouse and every church.

They’d all be ready to fight. The Librarians would make sure of it. (p. 173)

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In other words, Esther and her ilk are powerful, state-sponsored gatekeepers of information (anti-heroes) with the secret ability to undermine the state by providing access to less approved resources (heroes).

The American Library Association recognizes this power in the preamble to its Code of Ethics:

We significantly influence or control the selection, organization, preservation, and dissemination of information. In a political system grounded in an informed citizenry, we are members of a profession explicitly committed to intellectual freedom and the freedom of access to information. We have a special obligation to ensure the free flow of information and ideas to present and future generations (<https://www.ala.org/tools/ethics>).

While this special obligation can be and is in some places seen as a betrayal of the state's norms, and, indeed, a social evil³, many librarians might argue that it is a superpower. Indeed, Gailey's Librarians demonstrate this by challenging the Approved State as gun-toting, lesbian, rebel librarian heroes. The librarian-hero, therefore, can be the honor-bound hero, the "get it done whatever it takes" anti-hero, or even the villain.

The Librarian Hero

The librarian-hero can be found in contemporary nonfiction. For example, *The Bad Ass Librarians of Timbuktu* (2017) steal, hoard, and save sacred Islamic texts and secular manuscripts from destruction

by Al Qaeda extremists. Or, the heroes of *The Library Book* (2018), saving the Los Angeles Public Library after a devastating fire, probably the largest library fire in the United States. Perhaps they are even the ancient librarians of Alexandria, whose library was destroyed by another fire, but who served the Ptolemaic kings of Egypt in capturing (at times literally) every book they could get their hands on⁴.

These works spotlight nonfiction avatars of the librarian-heroes and their sacred, church-like temples of knowledge that we find echoed in speculative fiction and media. In the last few decades, we have seen Dean Devlin appropriate the Indiana Jones archetype in his *Librarians* TV show and prequel miniseries, where the heroes are saving the world and its actual history one book or magical item at a time. Or, still in the adventure film genre, there is Evelyn, the heroine of 1999 film *The Mummy*, whose immortal line "I may not be an explorer, or an adventurer, or a treasure-seeker, or a gunfighter, ... but I am proud of what I am ... I ... am a librarian" has entered the pantheon of librarian memes. And, in 2015's *Interstellar*, time is represented as bookshelves and wormholes as an infinite number of them.

Fantastic libraries like this also abound in fiction. Kirk and Gaydosik (2022) state "that libraries figure significantly in a surprising number of fictional works in general and in works of fantasy in particular" (p. 25). A little earlier, Stuart Kells (2017) notes that some of the greats of science fiction and fantasy create

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marvelous libraries: Ian Banks, Philip K. Dick, Terry Pratchett, Douglas Adams and even J.R.R Tolkien: “For more than a century, science fiction and fantasy has supplied marvelous visions of future libraries. But the two most marvelous fantasy libraries are pictures of the past” (p. 235). One of these authors is Umberto Eco, who will be discussed further below. The other is J.R.R. Tolkien. While David O. Oberhelman (2022) notes that the word library only appears once in *The Lord of the Rings*, and this in the Prologue rather than the actual narrative, he goes on to note that “it is clear that there are many scattered references to libraries, archives, manuscript repositories, and other collections for the preservation of literature, lore, and history ... throughout Tolkien’s legendarium” (p. 155).

In his 1997 survey of librarians in fiction, Grant Burns notes that fictional stereotypes lead to societal expectations:

Positive descriptors applied to librarians in fiction are concerned more often than not with issues of intelligence or nurturing ability. Evidently these are the qualities the public looks for in a librarian. Librarians should be smart, and scholarly, as well as tactful and friendly. (p. 2)

These librarians do have a dark, anti-heroic and villainous side, but Burns notes that this is more of the “professional-virgin sharp-tongued desiccated sex-starved shapeless spinster” (Burns, 1997, p. 3) caricature. Burns shows through this survey that librarians in fiction tend

to be victims who are shot, stabbed, or beaten to death by their books; or, if they do tend towards crime, it is of a more genteel variety, such as stealing rare books. This was supported more recently by Brown-Syed and Sands: “Librarians frequently appear ... as protagonists or as major supporting characters – detectives or villains, suspects or nuisances, or as partners or foils for the protagonists” (2017, p. 17).

Librarians in more recent fiction have deviated some from Burns’ attempts at classification. Terry Pratchett’s introduction of the Librarian of Ankh-Morpork’s Unseen University heralded a different emphasis in the opening decades of the 21st century, one in direct contrast to the caricatures, stereotypes, and increasingly vituperative impressions in popular or alt-media but more in keeping with nonfiction explorations as mentioned above. The Unseen University’s Librarian, or just “The Librarian” as he is referred to throughout Pratchett’s Discworld series, is barely even a supporting character (indeed, Pratchett’s early works in which the Librarian appears do not even merit a mention by Burns). And yet, the Librarian’s description captures both the pragmatic reputation and magical, secret knowledge of the 21st century fictional librarian—much like Arcimboldo’s anthropomorphic librarian. Yet Pratchett’s Librarian is more than this. Simply put, he was once a scholarly old wizard, magically transformed into an orangutan who refuses all help to be transformed back. His new opposable

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toes are helpful for climbing bookshelves and sorting books. And (perhaps a sly acknowledgement to his gatekeeping function) being an orangutan gives him a certain heavy weight when enforcing due dates. That said, Pratchett is at pains to note the Librarian is also a full-fledged member of the Librarians of Time and Space, with a complete understanding of the power of L-Space, and he tends to turn up in Discworld books to use these powers to save books and bring them home to the Unseen University (especially if these books need better guardianship). And, while he says “Oook” a lot, his faculty colleagues understand what he means, almost as well as the Guardians of the Galaxy understand the meanings of “I am Groot.”

Another early herald of the powerful librarian-hero archetype can be found in the monastery library of Umberto Eco’s *The Name of the Rose* (1983). When the detective hero monk Brother William first examines the library catalog, a codex listing the library’s books by order of acquisition, he notes this unusual arrangement and mentions that books must be difficult to find (Eco, 1983, p. 70). In this novel, the library is closed to all but the librarian, the villain of the story named Jorge in honor of Jorge Luis Borges and his eponymous library that Eco bases his abbey library’s design upon. Not only is the library catalog an instrument of hoarding, but it is also Jorge’s base of power. Through the librarians, the catalog allows the abbey to control who reads what. It is this

“hoarding”⁵ function of libraries that the mystery of the novel hinges upon. The Abbott informs William early in the novel that the library is “not like others” (p. 35):

[A] list of titles often tells very little; only the librarian knows ... what secrets, what truths or falsehoods, the volume contains. Only he decides how, when, and whether to give it to the monk who requests it Because not all truths are for all ears, not all falsehoods can be recognized as such by a pious soul (p. 37)

Eco, it should be noted, was never one to shy away from criticizing libraries and librarians. For example, his novel *Foucault’s Pendulum* (1989) breaks off briefly from its intense, perplexing, and autobiographical narrative to have a library clerk inform the protagonist Casaubon that the book he needs is checked out, “and, as usual in libraries, he seemed to enjoy giving me this news” (p. 312). Eco himself had earlier stood before the librarians of the Biblioteca Comunale di Milano and offered his reflections on the role of the library from the point of view of the scholar using the library. He listed some of the functions of libraries from ancient times to the present. In his translation of this lecture, Winter (1994) notes the sixth of these functions to be “concealing or not providing access to materials” (p. 120). Eco believes that “eventually there arose in libraries the function of making materials unavailable, and thus of not encouraging reading” (p. 122). This is a continuation of the older arguments about disagreeable

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librarians mentioned above, and is in direct contradiction to the ALA's stated code of equal access to all information for all information consumers. Eco recognizes this in his reflections by noting other "typical" functions of libraries: to provide public access to materials and the opportunity for discovery or retrieval of materials (Winter, 1994, pp. 119-120).

This inevitably leads to a conclusion that some speculative fictions have glommed onto: fictional Libraries have power, perhaps even a mystical power. They are places where knowledge is gathered in one space, where the books can come together to share everything that is, was, or shall be. These Libraries first manifested in the Great Library of Alexandria, the one and only time it might have been possible to gather knowledge in one place (not forgetting, of course, that there was an entire hemisphere of human civilizations unknown to the Ptolemaic elite). The Alexandrian library was power in action: capturing books for the dynasty's own use. This vision perpetuated through the centuries to inform Borges's universal library, which in turn influenced the likes of Eco and even J.R.R. Tolkien, whose libraries in Numenor and Gondor are deliberate echoes of the Alexandrian library.

The Librarians of Time and Space

From here, it is a relatively quick leap to Pratchett's Unseen University library, and its surroundings in L-Space, a more positive fantastical realization of Eco's inspiration, Jorge Luis Borges' divine,

infinite eponymous Library of Babel (Borges, 1998, pp 112-118). For Eco the critic and the novelist, the infinite nature of the library is equivalent to that of the universe—a deliberate reference to "The Library of Babel." Indeed, Borges's story begins: "The universe (which others call the Library) ..." (Borges, p. 112). Borges was "bewitched" by this idea of a library "containing all the books in existence" (Vallejo, 2022, p. 21). His historical model, in other words, was the Library of Alexandria, and his librarian a representation of the librarian-scholars of that ancient Library. And so too, therefore, is Eco's librarian-villain, and Pratchett's librarian-hero (as are their libraries, all-encompassing universes of books, or L-Space).

Pratchett's L-Space is infinite, connecting all that was written and unwritten, whose bookshelves, to quote from Borges, contain "all that is able to be expressed, in every language" (Borges, p. 115). Pratchett himself explores the nature of Libraries in *The Discworld Companion*:

Even big collections of ordinary books distort space and time ... The relevant equation is Knowledge = Power = Energy = Matter = Mass; a good bookshop is just a genteel blackhole (sic) that knows how to read. Mass distorts space into polyfractal L-space, in which Everywhere is also Everywhere Else ... Only a few librarians learn the secret. (Pratchett and Briggs, 2022, p. 228)

Anjirbag (2022) refers to these as "bigger on the inside" spaces, where "it is always

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possible to go ‘further up and further in to discover more’ (p. 88). These liminal spaces (Caemasache McKenna, 2022) are represented in popular culture by the wardrobe passageway to Narnia or the TARDIS of *Doctor Who* fame. Now we can add to these the libraries of contemporary speculative fiction, such as those in Matt Haig’s *The Midnight Library* (2019), Scott Hawkins’ *The Library at Mount Char* (2016), and, most inventively, in Genevieve Cogman’s eight-book serial (as of this writing) “The Invisible Library” (2015–2021). In each of these stories, the libraries echo Borges’s universal library: the book or the word impacts reality with the power of Pratchett’s L-Space; the librarian-heroes, if not actually orangutans or Doctors and in direct contradiction of negative media representations, epitomize the librarian-hero in the facets discussed: hero, anti-hero, and villain. In a nod to the role of librarians to protect the freedom to read, they seek out books to protect them for all time due to their (the books’) ability to impact the nature of causality. And they seem to not care how they accomplish this task.

The Midnight Library

Haig’s *The Midnight Library* (2019) is the best-seller and award-winner of these aforementioned novels. The author has written mostly young adult novels with darker themes—two of them feature the deaths of parents early on, which is not actually that unusual in speculative young adult fiction. Haig, however, takes such tropes and uses them to examine family life, such as his retelling of Hamlet

in *Dead Father’s Club* (2006), or his examination of a jaded alien’s evolving connection with his human family in *The Humans* (2013). The library and librarian-hero in *The Midnight Library* initially seem to follow the tropes established by Borges, Eco, and Pratchett—the all-encompassing universal library with the all-knowing but secretive librarian. Yet as the novel unfolds, and we begin to learn more about the protagonist and her life stories, we discover that Haig is using these tropes in a more imaginative, character-centric manner.

The novel follows Nora Steed, whose current life (or, in the book’s parlance, root life) is unfulfilling and terribly sad from her perspective. Early on, Nora concludes that she is unloved, unwanted, and unnecessary. So, she attempts to take her own life. In doing so, she finds herself in a waystation of the afterlife, in a library made up of books of lives she lived throughout a multiverse of decisions. For example, in her root life, Nora jilts her fiancé Dan two days before their wedding and ends up carrying the guilt of the pain she caused him. In another life, she marries him and follows his dreams while ignoring her own. In the library, she can open a book on a new life and live in it. As she does so, Nora begins to learn about the choices she makes and how they impact the lives she lives: “Midnight Library is not one of ghosts. It is not a library of corpses. It is a library of possibility” (Haig, 2019, p. 69).

Nora’s guide through her multiple lives is Mrs. Elm, the librarian. At first, we see

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Mrs. Elm in terms of the stereotypical librarians of fiction and film—the gatekeeper of secret knowledge helping Nora through her choices and explaining her options. Indeed, Mrs. Elm defines her role as such: “Librarians have knowledge. They guide you to the right books. The right worlds. They find the best places. Like soul-enhanced search engines” (p. 84). It is almost as if Mrs. Elm is a Librarian of Time and Space, as much at home in the stacks of the libraries of Unseen University as in the Midnight Library. Soon, however, Nora meets Hugo, another lost soul in search of a better life. His “library” is a video store, complete with VHS tapes of his other lives. Mrs. Elm, we learn, and by extension the Midnight Library itself, is a construction, building on Nora’s experiences with the real Mrs. Elm in her root life. And this person was a real-life school librarian, who was there for the child Nora in one of her more traumatic childhood experiences, the moment she learned of her father’s death.

As such, Mrs. Elm herself becomes a real-life librarian stereotype as opposed to the L-Space version: the school or public librarian who changed a life. Celebrities, authors, and even celebrity authors, are quoted ad infinitum about the value of libraries and librarians. Barbara Kingsolver, for example, sees the library as her temple, where librarians help her to “find her doorway through a library shelf into citizenship of the world”. She adds that every book she has written “has some magic in it I found in physical stacks or archives.” (Dorfman, 2018).

Such comments significantly contrast to recent statements made about librarians, especially when considered in the context of book bans and challenges.³ Mrs. Elm, like *The Librarian*, is a power for good, guiding Nora, like a guardian angel, to an epiphany about her root life.

The Library at Mount Char

Scott Hawkin’s 2016 debut novel is a significant contrast to this image of the good librarian-hero. Hawkin’s *Library* itself firmly belongs in L-Space, though (spoiler alert) it is more appropriate to say it resides outside of all space and time. This *Library* is also the work of one person, Father, who documented his infinite power and knowledge into a series of twelve catalogs. The entrance to it is a relatively simple home on a strangely populated, typically suburban street. But this home is a portal, and when one of the characters is brought into the library for the first time, his reaction is one of shock and awe:

The Library was vast ... It was easily the largest structure he had ever been inside, ever heard of, ever imagined. Bookshelves stretched across the floor as far as the eye could see. He saw a globe of light high overhead—like, skyscraper high—and a ceiling somewhere beyond that. It was impossible to estimate how far away the ceiling was—thousands of feet? Miles? The space he stood in was higher than the Superdome, wider than the airport terminal in Atlanta. “You could fly a plane in here,” he said. “Maybe not

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a 737, but a Cessna—easy. Probably even a Lear.” (2016, pp. 295-296)

The ceiling is eventually revealed to contain a view of the actual universe, where the Librarian, Carolyn, can manipulate time and space – placing, for example, a new sun in the Solar System.

Carolyn is an anti-hero in this novel. She is one of twelve children adopted by Father, the omniscient villain of the story, who assigns a catalog to each child and names them librarians. Father is always referred to, rarely seen except in flashbacks, and of a morality far beyond the comprehension of most of the other characters. He might be considered the Head Librarian or maybe even God, and Carolyn comes to an understanding of who Father is only when she replaces him. For certain, Father is the master of reality through the application of his catalogs, and the children learn to master their individual assignments while suffering horrific abuses at his hands and from each other. Father is not a benign being at all—not only does he turn the children into monsters, but he also teaches and encourages them to abuse one another. David, for example, was a gentle child who becomes a master killer. Carolyn herself is a constant victim of David’s physical, emotional, and sexual abuse. It serves to help her detach from her humanity, thus becoming, in Father’s eyes, a worthy successor.

The librarians are forbidden from reading outside of their catalogs of war, medicine, animal husbandry, languages,

etc. David’s punishment for doing so is to be roasted alive in a bronze bull. Jennifer, another of the children, has the power of resurrection, and she and Father ensure that David and the others are brought back to continue to learn and be further abused. Carolyn is the only one who ultimately dares punishment and begins to read and learn outside of her catalog. Eventually, this ensures she has the knowledge and power to overthrow Father. In doing so, however, she sacrifices all. As another character, who was originally a childhood friend of Carolyn, says to her after she has defeated Father and had her revenge on David: “It’s like you’re living at a different scale than the rest of us. Normal things—fear, hope, compassion—just don’t register with you” (p. 332).

This said, however, Hawkins does note that there is a danger to the reality that Father is fighting. Enemies are mentioned who wish to end all life. At the outset of the novel, the librarians are more worried about the absence of Father than they are happy not to suffer through his abuses anymore. Indeed, each of them are like Carolyn, “living at a different scale” and using their catalogs to figure out where he went. Eventually, it is revealed that Father was tired of protecting a universe that he had inherited rather than created and wished to retire. It is implied that the Library exists to document all his knowledge, and that there is one catalog (the Black Catalog, in this instance a singular folder) not written by him. This catalog was also not written by his

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predecessor. It was likely written by the original creator, and by possessing it, he, followed by Carolyn, can change history. Father hides the catalog from Carolyn just like Jorge has hidden works from the monk-scholars of *The Name of the Rose*. The Library at Mount Char hoards its knowledge for a special few, and even from them it hides the ultimate catalog. It takes Carolyn's sneaking around and learning from the other catalogs to gain the power to ultimately find it and own it.

The "Invisible Library" Series

The Library of Mount Char, while not front and center to the novel, is an example of the zeitgeist of the contemporary library in speculative fiction. With the other examples presented above, *The Name of the Rose*, Pratchett's "Discworld" series, and *The Midnight Library*, the contemporary fictional library is all encompassing, and the librarian-hero is its gatekeeper. Genevieve Cogman takes the spirit and mood of this library and its librarians to the ultimate representation in her "Invisible Library" steam-punk series of a multiverse as complicated as any presented in comics or films and television. It is in this multiverse that the Library, as it is simply known, comes into its own as a fictional portrayal of the ALA Code of Ethics, with echoes of the Alexandrian library and the universal L-Space of Pratchett and his "kin." Indeed, Cogman's Library sits at the very center of her multiverse, a beacon of neutrality linking worlds of chaos and order. It is a

living thing, the center of a web that connected the worlds and prevented them from falling to either the calcification of order or the seas of chaos. All things would be preserved there and would not pass away or be lost. The construct worked as they had designed, indicating stories which must be collected and preserving its contents—and them (2021, p. 311)

The central mystery of this series, which only emerges over the eight books, involves this balance between chaos and order. The books collected by the Librarians and stored in the Invisible Library connect it to the worlds of the multiverse. Each book collected is unique to the world it comes from and thus strengthens the tie with the Library and mitigates the worst effects of order or chaos. Cogman, in an email interview with this author, sees the Library "as a (sic) influence, linking multiple worlds together and slowing down the rate of change in those worlds to either Chaos or Order. ... It's at the centre of a web with links attached to many different worlds—not in a very Euclidean way" (Cogman, 2022).

The librarian-hero of these novels is Irene Winters, one of a cohort of Librarians serving the mission of the Library by not collecting but actually stealing the unique books from each world. In later novels, her apprentice Catherine accuses Irene of not being a real librarian, who should collect books and make them available to all and sundry for free. Rather, for Catherine, Irene is a Librarian Spy, with all the skills that go with that:

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The perfect Librarian is calm, cool, collected, intelligent, multilingual, a crack shot, a martial artist, an Olympic-level runner (at both the sprint and marathon), a good swimmer, an expert thief, and a genius con artist. They can steal a dozen books from a top-security strongbox in the morning, discuss literature all afternoon, have dinner with the cream of society in the evening, and then stay up until midnight dancing, before stealing some more interesting tomes at three a.m. That's what a perfect Librarian would do. In practice, most Librarians would rather spend their time reading a good book. (Cogman, 2016, pp. 359-360)

Irene would much rather be focused on protecting books and reading them. Irene sees herself as “an agent of the Library, an interdimensional organization that collected books to preserve the balance of worlds.” (Cogman, 2020, p. 16). This protecting of the balance is the ALA Code of Ethics made real (or as real as it can be in a fictional series). For Irene, Librarians do not and cannot take sides, for when they do it can impact the nature of causality. When, in the fourth book of the series, Irene is informed a Librarian had, indeed, taken sides, she was worried:

[I]f this was true . . . [it] would undermine the Library's hard-fought neutrality, the work of centuries. The average Fae would not overly object to Irene having tea and sandwiches with a dragon, any more than the average dragon would object to her having tea with a Fae—though both of them might sneer at it. But trying to affect

dragon court politics? Getting involved in a life-and-death competition for high office, with the possibility of influencing the winner? Taking sides on that level? That would turn the Fae as a whole against every single Librarian they came across. And that could destroy the Library. (2017, p. 26)

It is tempting to read the name of this fourth novel, *The Lost Plot*, as an ironic commentary on the changing image of the contemporary American librarian due to political and cultural wars—that society's leaders are losing the plot itself over the perceived gateway role libraries and librarians play.³ It is in this novel that we begin to see a more distinct outline of the central mystery of the series and the ultimate role both the Library and Irene will play in its resolution. The Library is drawn into politics and loses sight of its collecting mission, resulting in Irene beginning to question her blind obedience to the Library. For example, in one exchange, Irene realizes her superior was “trying to sell me the idea that the Library's future depends on us being essential to both sides, ostensibly as peace brokers—but actually as manipulators behind the scenes. As a faction who'd hold the balance of power” (Cogman, 2018, p. 412). The Library itself emerges as a living entity, telling its Librarians what has to be collected and getting frustrated when they are not doing so in order to affect a peace treaty between the Fae of chaos and the dragons of order.

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Initially, the renegade Librarian Alberich⁶ is the villain of the novels. He comes in and out of the series, though he was also seemingly destroyed by Irene midway through. Yet as with all good villains, rumors of his demise were premature, and he returns in the last two novels to reveal Irene's paternity (he is Irene's father and sired her in order to ensure the demise of the Library.) Alberich ultimately sacrifices himself to rescue Irene and puts her on the path to actually rescuing the Library and its Librarians (and the universe itself) from the three founders of the Library. Our librarian-hero in this series faces an ever-increasing set of challenges that bring her face-to-face with the founders. As we follow her, we begin to sense another force behind her, which is ultimately revealed to be the Library itself. All the knowledge it contains in some way as yet unexplained (Cogman promises more adventures for Irene) has seemingly given it sentience such that the Library uses Irene to combat the skewed intent of its founders.

With the death of the founders, the Library asserts itself. Irene has a new mission, one that is less a Librarian-Spy and more a regular librarian as Catherine first envisioned. She notes to her companions that, while she will still help acquire books, she has some reprioritizing to do: "A Librarian who doesn't read her books isn't getting to grips with her job" (Cogman, 2021, p. 380). In other words, even the powerful librarians have guiding principles to live up to.

Conclusion

These novels are just a small sample of those that feature libraries in the mold of Borges' Library, or librarian-heroes in the shape of Pratchett's orangutan. Caemasache McKenna suggests that libraries form a "third place" (after home, the first place, and work, the second place). This third place, she writes, is "much like a church, where people come to worship and commune with the sacredness of books and microfiche" (2022, p. 186). Based on the examples above, and on other stories featuring libraries, I would suggest instead that these libraries are

áiteanna tanaí—thin places. Heaven and earth, the Celtic saying goes, are only three feet apart, but in thin places that distance is even shorter. They are places that make us feel something larger than ourselves, as though we are held in a place between worlds, beyond experience. (ní Dochartaigh, 2022, p. 23)

Such places, as ní Dochartaigh so eloquently describes, are places of subtle power, renewing and reviving. They are places to be marked as mystically important. These are the libraries of L-Space, and like *áiteanna tanaí*, their power has to be uncovered intentionally.

The librarian-heroes of these novels hold an aura of power delegated to them by their library. Mrs. Elm only exists in the library to direct Nora to her other lives; Father and Carolyn are imbued by the power of the words in all

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the catalogs, but especially the Black Catalog; and Irene is literally marked by her Library tattoo, without which she cannot control The Language, and thus reality itself. Such power can also be seen in Eco's Jorge, Gailey's upright women, and even Pratchett's Librarian. In the real world, however, this power is clearly annunciated in the ALA Code of Ethics: "we are members of a profession explicitly committed to intellectual freedom and the freedom of access to information" (<https://www.ala.org/tools/ethics>). This wording even has echoes of our fictional librarians. Perhaps this is the reason for the attacks on today's public, school, and academic librarians. Their commitment is as strong as Irene's, as knowledgeable as Father's, and as empathetic as Mrs. Elm's. ■

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Librarians of Time and Space, continued

Notes

1. A shorter version of this paper was presented at the Southwest Popular/American Culture Association Conference, Feb. 21-24, 2024, in Albuquerque, New Mexico.
2. For example, US librarians have been facing increasing calls for the banning of books from their shelves, with the American Library Association (ALA) recording a 65% increase in public and school library book challenges from 2022 to 2023. Librarians face harassment when they speak out about these challenges. Jones (2024), for example, discusses all of this in the context of the harassment she received when she spoke out. ALA's Banned Books Week has been a yearly event since 1982. The 2024 Honorary Chair of Banned Books Week, filmmaker Ava DuVernay writes: "By banning books, we deny ourselves the opportunity to learn from the past and to envision a braver future. Books have the power to open minds and build bridges" (<https://www.ala.org/bbooks/banned>).
3. Nicholson Baker (2001), for example, invests librarians with the power to destroy the heritage and culture of the United States.
4. Irene Vallejo's opening to her 2022 nonfiction study of books, information, and the ancient Mediterranean world, evokes these heroic librarians as "[m]ysterious bands of men on horseback [who] travel the roads of Greece" (Vallejo, 2022, p. xiv) in search of their prey—i.e. books.
5. Winter quotes Eco's "De Bibliotheca": "In seguito credo abbia avuto la funzione di tesaurizzare," which he translates as "eventually they [libraries] acquired the function of accumulating treasure" (Winter, 1994, p. 121). He notes that he chose "accumulating treasure" as English for "tesaurizzare" but it could just as easily have been "hoarding," which is commonly given in the dictionaries (121, n.9).
6. Alberich is, perhaps, a reference to the king of the dwarves in The Nibelungenlied, at first seemingly evil as the guardian of the treasure of the Nibelung, with overwhelming power that is overcome by the hero Siegfried. He later becomes a guide for Siegfried, and eventually plays a trickster role, revealing to King Ortnit that he is his father and warning him off the quest that ultimately kills him. Dragons, elves, and treacherous humans are all involved.

Applying Jules Verne's Intuitive View of Technological Growth

Quentin R. Skrabec

Abstract: Many stand in awe of Jules Verne's imagination, but he does not imagine the future as much as he extrapolates into it. Verne's narratives analyze, compare, contrast, predict, and sometimes warn of scientific developments' possible consequences and potential roadblocks. Verne never mentions "exponential" growth in his novels but takes the reader on a literary ride on the exponential curve. New accurate and unabridged translations demonstrate the fusion of the historical past and the present to predict future trends.

Keywords: exponential growth, technology, futurism

Verne's Exponential Visions of Technology

Jules Verne was not a prophet but an exceptional researcher. Jules Verne's astonishing ability to foresee the future was rooted in his sense that technology advances exponentially. The Vernian growth model uses historical growth to define an exponential path into the future. But unlike the mathematical forecasting models of today, Verne fused science, fantasy, and intuition with emerging trends. Verne's approach has applications in marketing, investment, math education, and engineering. While Verne never mentions the term "exponential" growth in his novels, he demonstrates its nature using history and statistics. Of course, Verne adds creativity and imagination, but he anchors it to evolving technology of his day.

You can see Verne's intuitive thinking in his 1863 prediction of the technology of the 1960s in his novel *Paris in the*

Twentieth Century. Verne's predictions are grounded in the emerging technologies of his times. His genius was his ability to perceive the exponential nature of technological progress and foresee a future breakthrough known as visual singularity. Verne sees exponential growth as an evolutionary process that can be identified from the historical steps of science's progress. Verne also realized that a specific technology's exponential growth depended on its component technology advances. He details his historical approach of stepwise advancement and connective technology growth in such novels as *From Earth to the Moon* (1865), where he postulates that the progress of space technology to land a man on the moon will depend on individual advances in artillery, cannonballs, metal casting, metallurgy, and gunpowder. Reading and studying Verne's methodology gives us a tool for seeing into the future and projecting future project engineering needs.

Jules Verne's Technological Growth, continued

While Verne's predictions have been reviewed extensively for over a hundred years, only recently (in the 1990s) have researchers started in-depth studies of Verne's methodology as a resource for long-term forecasting in various fields (DeCanio, 1994). Vernian methodology has many applications beyond engineering and science, and we will see that it can even give insights into patent law theory (Hrdy and Brean, 2021). More recently, business consultants see Jules Verne's methodology as part of techniques such as "Innovative Thinking" (Fontaine, 2023).

Verne's Vision of the Exponential Growth of Technology

The famous scientist and science writer Isaac Asimov called Verne a "futurist." Asimov described Verne as "the first futurist in the modern sense—the first person to consider what might be done with continued technological advance, what discoveries might be made" (Asimov, 1986, p. 13). Asimov (1964) followed Verne's techniques of looking into the future of technology with similar success to Jules Verne. After visiting the New York World's Fair, Asimov looked forward 50 years with success, at least on the technical basis, if not the social and cultural (Kleinman, 2014). Verne's technological predictions, like most futurists' predictions, were better than those regarding socioeconomic and cultural evolution.

Victorians did not use the word "exponential" but had some sense

of exponential growth. This intuitive Victorian understanding was based on the theories of Thomas Malthus (1766-1835), showing that the size of the population was doubling at predictable intervals. At the time, Malthus's theory was controversial; it was challenging for Victorians to envision such doubling since the Victorian world of hard sciences was built on linear relationships. The exponential view thrusts things into the future versus the slow, more predictable, and comforting linear view of the world. Malthusian exponential population growth theory often led to dark, futuristic Victorian predictions of food shortages.

Verne's intuitive sense of exponential technological growth was 100 years ahead of its widespread use in forecasting. By the 1900s, people realized technology had advanced rapidly, but few linked it to the exponential curve. Exponential forecasting did not become popular until the 1980s. In 1965, Gordon Moore, the co-founder of Fairchild Semiconductor and Intel, posited that there would be a doubling yearly in the number of components per integrated circuit (Figure 1). Like Verne, Gordon did not base this on empirical data but on his electronic industry experience and intuition. In 1975, he revised the forecast to a doubling every 18 months. In the 1980s, graphical proof of the exponential nature of this growth became visually compelling.

The rapid technological growth of the Industrial Revolution depended on

Jules Verne's Technological Growth, continued

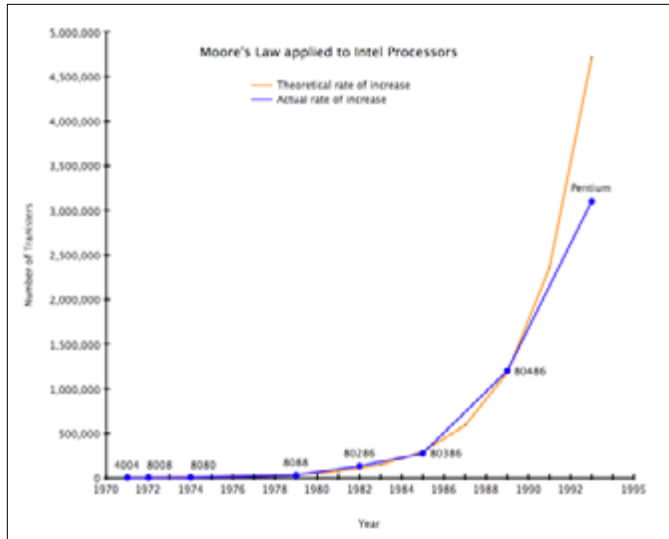


Figure 1: Moore's Law applied to Intel processors.

the development and assimilation of new scientific principles and theories. Maybe even more critical to Verne's predictive capability was his utilization of the unprecedented growth in hard information and scientific data. Historian H. Brock described this Victorian information explosion, "From around 100 titles worldwide at the beginning of the nineteenth century, the number of science periodicals grew to an estimated 10,000 by the end, facilitating in the process an exponential growth in popular and professional forms of science" (Brock, 1994, p. 86). Science periodicals, news, books, catalogs, guidebooks, and journal reports of the Victorian world fairs were available in the Bibliothèque Nationale de France (Paris). Verne's authorial secret was integrating many scientific studies, ideas, and concepts into his work.

Sensing Exponential Growth

Today, we see the real power of artificial intelligence in its ability to process large amounts of data and find correlations and connections. The huge growth of available information in the late 1800's era created a new problem of extracting, managing, and utilizing the rapid development of knowledge. Verne had to develop manual methods to catalog data in his day. He used a Fortean approach by researching and documenting literature, patents, news clips, etc. To verify their credibility, he discussed them with colleagues and scientists (Butcher, 2006, pp. 145).

Verne spent countless hours in the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, taking notes from scientific journals and keeping up with the latest advances (Seidl, 2021). He systematically collected these technical notes. One writer noted he had a "habit of taking notes on cards that he organized and kept for reference when writing is well known, and he also avidly read scientific bulletins, even dictionaries, and encyclopedias to understand the science concepts he was interested in dealing with" (Evans, 1995, pp. 35-46 ; also Yanes, 2022; Ventana et al., 2022). Verne amassed a huge archival database of 20,000 index cards (Verne, 1863b, p. XIII) on science and nature. In his book *Physics of the Future* (2011), theoretical physicist Michio Kaku notes that Verne's research, study, and collaborations allowed him to be in a future that was already present. Science fiction writer Isaac Asimov also argued that science fiction predictability

Jules Verne's Technological Growth, continued

depended on its “closeness to science” (DeCooman and Peti, 2022, pp. 9-13).

Verne also kept his hand on the “pulse” of technical growth by reviewing patents issued. This allowed Verne to see inventions not as singular events but as the steady progress of science and technology. Russian engineer and author Genrich Altschuller attributed Verne's success to this monitoring of the “pulse” (Altschuller, 1996, ch. 36). Another way he kept up-to-date was constant interactions, discussions, and lectures of prominent scientists and engineers. In 1861, Verne joined the Circle of the Scientific Press, a weekly discussion group (Butcher, 2006).

Verne reviewed his analyses, calculations, and predictions with many scientists at the University of Paris (Jenson, 2015). His cousin, Henri Garcet, was a professor of mathematics who often checked Verne's work. In the 1880s, Verne hired a professional engineer, Albert Badoureau, to check his science and math. Verne also consulted with the mathematicians at the Société Industrielle in Amiens. The Société Industrielle was a very active organization promoting industry and industrial discoveries. Verne often attended and helped arrange for speakers to present at their meetings and lectures. More importantly, Verne took the opportunity to use the Société Industrielle members as a type of “Delphi” group approach (a method of group decision-making and forecasting that involves successively collating the judgments of experts) to confirm his visions. Early in his

career, Verne joined informal discussions with French scientists at the home of friend and Renaissance man Jacques Arago. Rosalind Williams, a historian of technology at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, gave the following assessment of Verne's prediction success: “He predicted a lot of things that have happened, but that's because he was reading a lot and talking with people who knew what was going on in the world around him, so why should we be surprised?” (Breema, 2020).

Verne's back-to-future style has been an enigma. Some early researchers of Verne's approach to long-term forecasting considered it “the future through yesterday” (DeCanio, 2021, pp. 75-93). Many have struggled to define Verne's works as futuristic, prophetic, historical, fantastical, imaginative, or a combination. Like Michio Kuku, Marie-Helene Huet sees Verne's style as not imagining the world of the twentieth century “but to have portrayed the realities and the aspirations of the nineteenth” (Unwin, 2019). Verne saw the past, present, and future as a continuum.

Verne describes his approach: “I have always made a point in my romances of basing my so-called inventions upon a groundwork of fact, and of using in their construction methods and materials which are not entirely beyond the pale of contemporary engineering skill and knowledge” (Evans, 2013; Jones, 1904, pp 69-70). Verne uses what today's engineers call exponential thinking

Jules Verne's Technological Growth, continued

to fuse the past, present, and future into an evolving timeline. Exponential thinking today is a powerful tool to look into the future (Bonchek, 2016).

Sensing Exponential Timing for Breakthroughs

Exponential technological growth in any one field is not distinguishable in its early phases. In the early stages it looks linear, making it natural to extrapolate linearly into the future. Victorian science was very linear. Victorian scientists advanced science by discovering linear relationships of physical observations. Scientists like German physicist Georg Ohm developed the science of electricity as a linear relationship of voltage, current, and resistance. Humphrey Davy used linear relationships to define electrochemical phenomena.

Even today, business analysts use linear regression tools to look at the immediate future. The point on the exponential curve where the rapid growth rate becomes visual is called a breakthrough or singularity. Verne used perception to identify exponential nature, and intuition to sense the future singularity. Insight and confirmation that a technology's exponential growth was occurring allowed Verne to "feel" the future before other writers.

Verne's ability to foresee the exponential growth of technology overcame the natural human bias to think linearly (Schooner and Sele, 2021). The oldest and most famous illustration of explosive

exponential growth, and the human tendency to underestimate it, is the ancient legend about rice grains on a chessboard (Figure 2). Starting with a single grain and doubling the amount increases the quantity so that by the time you reach square 64, there are over 18 quintillion grains of rice on the board. In this story, a peasant uses his understanding of exponential growth to trick a king by asking for a reward in rice doubled every square versus a large sum of money. As the rice grains are added, the king's confidence slowly starts to sink. At square 17, the King realizes something is wrong. With each further square, his panic increases. Somewhere between square 18 and square 20, the king realized the darkness of his future. By the 21st square, the king owes over a million grains (more than he has); by the 41st, it is over a trillion grains of rice, more than he, his subjects, or any king anywhere could supply.

In his writings, Verne demonstrates exponential thinking using history and statistics, such as his *From the Earth to the Moon* (1865). He goes through the history of the evolving weight of the cannonball to predict: "If we put our minds to it, and take advantage of the scientific progress, we should be able to make cannonballs ten times heavier than those of Mohammed II and the Knights of Malta" (Verne, 1865, p. 40). Verne takes the reader through the rapid historical development of technology to project into the future and enhance the reader's acceptance of the predictions.

Jules Verne's Technological Growth, continued

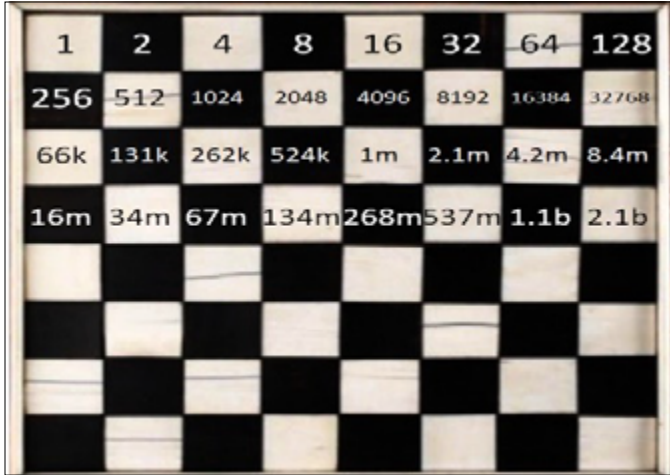


Figure 2: Exponential growth

Using historical timelines to illustrate the continuous advance of technology, he leads his readers to believe in his fictional future. Verne in *Five Weeks in a Balloon* (1863) has his main character define envisioning the future as “merely the present moving further along.”

Verne proved right that detailed historical analysis is crucial in predicting the future. Silicon Valley futurist Paul Saffo argued, “Our historical rearview mirror is an extraordinarily powerful forecasting tool. The texture of past events can be used to connect the dots of present indicators and thus reliably map the future’s trajectory—provided one looks back far enough” (Saffo, 2007).

Using Exponential Growth for Prediction

The history of science depends heavily on linear relationships, and Victorians cherished this linear view. Even today, we feel comfortable with sequential and logical linear advances, and

researchers often plot exponential data on a logarithmic scale, which visually transforms the data into a straight line. Linear thinking often operates within existing frameworks and assumptions, which led to the definition of some scientific laws in the 18th and 19th centuries. However, future groundbreaking discoveries and futuristic innovation frequently require a paradigm shift in our linear thinking.

Exponential growth in the early phases appears slow and linear until it makes a visual inflection. This visual nova is called a singularity (Figure 3), breakthrough, inflection point, or the “second half of the chessboard,” a phrase coined by Ray Kurzweil (2005). Using the chessboard example, the visual singularity occurs between squares 11 to 16. Verne often sets action in a decade before the visual singularity, when people have not fully noticed the increasing rate of specific technology. Mathematicians call this pre-event region the “deceptive zone” on the overall exponential curve near the singularity. Here, a singularity can be considered the point where something becomes visual, distinctive, understood or commonly accepted, which renders it subjective to the viewer. Verne had a genius in sensing the potential timing of the singularity.

The Idea of the Singularity Breakthrough and the Sole Inventor

Victorians loved the idea of the sole inventor with a breakthrough, and Verne

Jules Verne's Technological Growth, continued

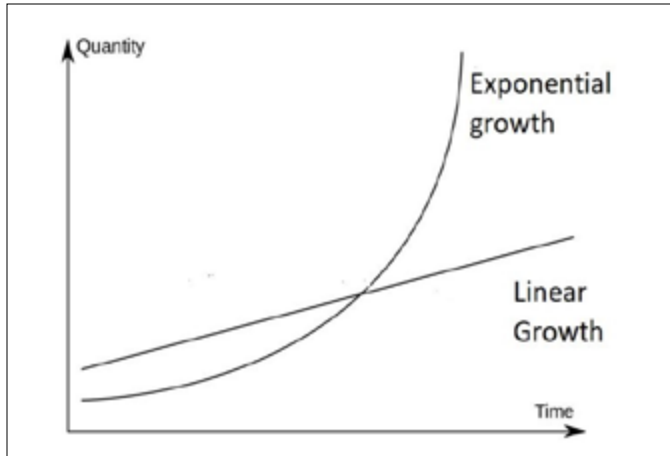


Figure 3: Timing of a singularity

adopted this mythology as a literary technique. However, Verne realized and demonstrated that breakthroughs are a collective effort, best described by Ralph Waldo Emerson: “Certain ideas are in the air. We are all impressionable, for we are made of them; all impressionable, but some more than others, and these first express them. This explains the curious contemporaneity of inventions and discoveries” (Emerson, 1860). Mark A. Lemley (2012), in his classic development of legal patent theory, noted: “The history of significant innovation in this country is, contrary to popular myth, a history of incremental improvements generally made by a number of different inventors at roughly the same time.”

Verne described the achievement of singularity/breakthrough as the streams of research and testing coming to the point as “scholars step in; they talk, write, calculate, and one fine day true success bursts into view for all to see” (Verne, 1861, p. 61). His characters facilitate this scientific confluence to

create incredible engineering feats. Verne’s heroic engineering and scientific characters, such as Robur in *Master of the World* and Nemo in *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea*, are more Steve Jobs than Thomas Edison in bringing together the overall advance of science.

The Deceptive Zone

Verne was writing in a period of rapid evolution of science, which left the contemporary reader unable to grasp it fully. Verne’s literary approach takes the reader carefully through the deceptive zone before projecting the exponential future. He educates the reader to help them better see his predictions as credible. Identifying a singularity is where inventors, investors, engineers, and designers (and science fiction writers) make their money. Looking at Figure 1, you can see that Gordon Moore, with limited data in the 1960s, was projecting from the deceptive zone into the future. The computing singularity (in retrospect) was not apparent until 1986.

Celebrated author Ursula Le Guin noted,

Science Fiction is not a prediction, but an observation. It takes a current society and extrapolates its characteristics into an environment shaped by different environmental factors, dictated by predicted developments (Rattay, 2019).

Science fiction analyst Gary Westfahl sees Verne’s success as staying focused “on predicting new developments in the near future based on the state of current scientific progress, which he diligently

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researched" (Westfahl, ed., 2022, p. 254). Verne builds his extraordinary voyages through the deception zone to the singularity by not violating "the readers' knowledge of their own present" (Westfahl, Ed., 2022, p. 254).

The critical area of the growth curve before singularity deceives most people (Kotler, 2015). Verne provided clarity for the reader in this crucial time frame; he was quite adept at predicting the not-to-distant future as well as the long-range future. Where H. G. Wells jumped to the distant future, Verne often took his readers first to the near future. Today, engineers call this "just over-the-horizon forecasting." Verne's new, not-to-distant applications of evolving technology can be lost to the modern reader, but to readers of his times, it gave his future predictions believability. Verne sometimes took his reader on a verbal ride on the exponential curve from early roots and the approach toward and through the singularity. The author often used this technological tour to strengthen his futuristic proposals. Verne incorporated, intertwined, and fused his exponential thinking as part of his stories.

James Miller notes in Verne's 1867 application of aluminum for his moon capsule:

Here Verne is using a technique that he has proved eminently successful in his earlier novels. He is extrapolating from the daily news into the not-so-distant future. Thus, he predicts developments that his readers will live

to see in a matter of years. And so, he more easily gains their credence when he extrapolates into the more distant future" (Miller, 1978, p. 41).

British author J. G. Ballard, historian and writer of science fiction, gave this shorter prediction-to-reality gap as about ten years, "What the writers of modern science fiction invent today, you and I will do tomorrow—or, more exactly, in about 10 years, though the gap is narrowing" (Ballard, 1971).

It's been written that 'history doesn't repeat itself, but sometimes it rhymes.' The effective forecaster looks to history to find the rhymes, not the identical events (Saffo, 2007).

Verne painstakingly documented these historical increments in many of his novels to make his future projections. Unfortunately, many translators often omitted these scientific details. At the singularity, history frequently assigns a single inventor. But Verne, like Tolstoy (Ahearn, 2005; Orl, 2019), knew invention was a combination of advances by many inventors and different streams of technology.

Verne combined the exponential projections of various component technologies into futuristic inventions. Verne realized that the dynamic of "combinational innovation drives the rapid advance of technology and the achievement of a singularity." This combinational innovation is "any idea or technology can also be understood as a novel configuration of pre-existing parts"

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(Clancy, 2021). Like Burke (2007), Verne viewed technology as connections from various streams of ideas and inventions. Of course, Burke had the luxury of looking back on a known successful invention to develop his thesis. Verne had to project forward to a successful innovation.

Verne used his connective thinking to combine streams of component technologies into a specific technology, such as a moon cannon. He demonstrated the connective nature of component growth in *From the Earth to the Moon* (1865) by devoting chapters to each historical component development, such as the moonshot project's cannon type, cannonball, metal casting, and guncotton (nitrocellulose). He needed considerable technological advances in all components for a moon cannon and projectile. These chapters read like the historical connections of various technologies in James Burke's *Connections* (2007). Verne extrapolated from each stream of technology to achieve the overall project goal of going to the moon. Realizing that gunpowder lacked the necessary power for a moonshot, he turned to the emerging explosive powder of guncotton. Again, translator Miller notes, "With guncotton as with aluminum, Verne is extrapolating from current events, and once again, he is gambling against prevailing opinion" (Miller, 1978, p. 52). Guncotton had been a highly kept secret by the military until 1862 and would not be adopted until safety issues were resolved in the 1870s.

Pauses of Exponential Growth

Great futurists don't always hit a home run. The future is not predictable; you can only explore future probabilities based on the trend of science. Futurists also face the common S-curve of technological growth. S-curve growth shows innovation from its slow early beginnings as the technology or process is developed to an acceleration phase (exponential) as it matures and, finally, its stabilization over time (the flattening curve). This flattened curve is a result of outside factors and events that are not fully predictable. The S-curves of technology flattening often precede a breakthrough to create a new exponential growth rate.

Some suggest that even Moore's Law of the growth rate of semiconductor power is slowing according to an S curve. Breaking from this plateau depends on the development of new technology and alternative ways of computing such as quantum computing. Some view technological growth as a series of S-curves, where S-curve plateaus are overcome by technology branching or developing alternative component technologies.

Shortly after World War II, futurists saw a nuclear future of cheap energy replacing coal and hydrocarbons. Many shared their visions based on the growth of technology. Exponential growth was evident by the 1960s. But practically no one saw the problems of waste disposal, safety, and the public's overwhelming fear of nuclear power generation. Finally,

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the disruption in growth created by the 1979 nuclear accident at Three-Mile Island helped to stabilize a flat curve period of the last 40 years, which is finally showing renewed growth, a familiar pattern. Some of Verne's once-thought-dead predictions are finding renewed research and alternative engineering, such as a trans-Atlantic tunnel, flying cars, rays that could manipulate objects in space, and even a space cannon.

Electrical power generation and its uses often had S-curve plateaus during the 19th century that Verne had to see through. Electrical technology showed exponential growth from the early experiments of scientists such as Faraday. Still, it stalled out with the power limitations of battery direct current and resumed in the 1860s with the advance of dynamos and alternating current. Lighting also advanced rapidly with arc lighting in the early 1800s, only to await the advances of incandescent lighting for mass acceptance. Verne's genius was his ability to deal with the present while seeing that small discoveries would overcome these plateaus.

The Demon of Electricity

Verne also saw that one significant technological advance might branch into new technologies and applications. The advance of electricity would be the connective driving force in many of Verne's exponential futuristic inventions; he saw electricity as the father of an array of future technologies. Throughout his career, Verne carefully followed scientific

advances in electricity. Verne's most extraordinary insight and study area would be his "Demon of Electricity" in his first 1863 novel, *Paris in the Twentieth Century*, which would be a blueprint for Verne's vision for an electrical world.

Electricity would allow an endless array of communication inventions in *Paris in the Twentieth Century* (1863), control Verne's balloon *Victoria* in *Five Weeks in a Balloon* (1863), light his *Journey to the Center of the Earth* (1867), drive his submarine *Nautilus* in *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea* (1871), run his experimental town in *Dr. Ox's Experiment* (1872), light his Underground City in *The Child of the Cavern* (1877), fly his airship *Albatross* in *Robur the Conqueror* (1886), steer his floating island in *Propellor Island* (1895), and power his multi-purpose vehicle *Terror in Master of the World* (1904).

Verne took a 40-year technological discovery and evolutionary journey applying futuristic electrical lighting systems for his novel series *Voyages Extraordinaires* (1859 to 1904), an excellent example of exponential advance (Leahy, 2016). From the 1850s to his death in 1905, Verne studied electrical science, adapting new developments for a distant future and new science fiction voyages. Verne was a passionate follower of Humphrey Davy in the 1840s and his early arc lighting design. Verne's arc light of the early 1860s novels was far ahead of the curve with its widespread commercial application not occurring until the 1870s. Verne started by combining gas and arc

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street lighting in *Paris in the Twentieth Century* (written in 1863). Verne applied arc lighting in *Five Weeks in a Balloon* (1863), and in *The Adventures of Captain Hatteras* (1866), he uses a powerful arc lighthouse in his arctic adventure.

Verne realized that the harshness of arc lighting restricted its use in work, reading, and homes. To address the harshness on human eyes, Verne suggested a modified arc lighting system in *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea* (1869) and *Journey to the Center of the Earth* (1864). Verne imagined a new electric/gas combination lighting system in *Doctor Ox's Experiment* (1874). He would be an early adopter of the "Edison" filament-type incandescent lighting in *Underground City/Child of the Cavern* (1877). Of course, Edison's system is remembered as a breakthrough event in the 1880s for softer indoor lighting. Verne never highlights Edison as the sole inventor of incandescent lighting, realizing it was an incremental advance by several inventors, particularly Joseph Swan in England. However, in 1892, in *Carpathian Castle*, Verne credits Edison for many electrical devices and calls electricity "the soul of the universe" (Verne, 1892, p. 166), anticipating even television. Electricity to achieve Verne's electrical world of Paris in the 20th century would require a confluence of technological progress in dynamos, alternating current, and a step-wise advance of pioneer inventions before the electrical singularity in the 1890s (Figure 4).

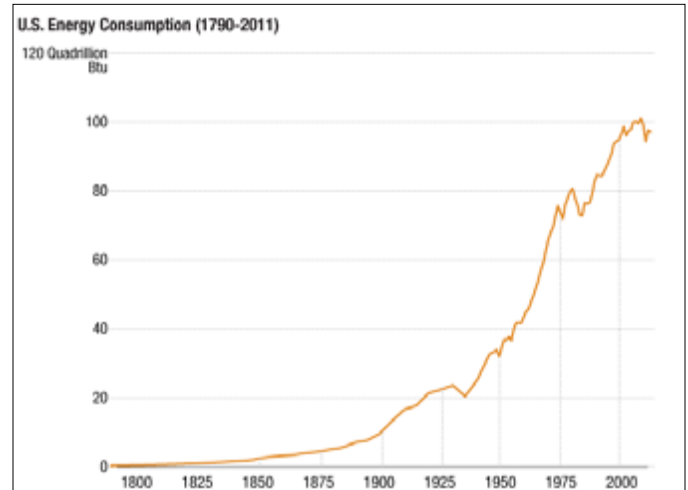


Figure 4: U.S. energy consumption

Aluminum: Verne's Vision of Exponential Growth

Verne saw electricity as the science that would lead to the aluminum age, but it would first require a singularity in the electrical generation of the 1890s. Verne's novels feature aluminum in space capsules, airplanes, skyscrapers, ships, eyeglass frames, helicopters, aluminum engines, and submarines. The Frenchman Henri Sainte-Claire Deville (1818-1881) invented a chemical process in 1854 to produce aluminum in small amounts for jewelry, tableware, and military buttons. Verne refers to Deville's early prediction of aluminum's potential structural uses in *The Self-Propelled Island* (1895).

In the 1860s, aluminum was considered a precious metal at \$300 plus per pound, with only a few pounds available. Still, Verne, writing during the deceptive zone of aluminum growth, foresaw an aluminum-dependent world in the

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future. Aluminum's properties were amazing in the Victorian world of iron.

In Verne's *From the Earth to the Moon*, he characterized aluminum in 1865: "three times lighter than iron, and seems to have been created for the express purpose of furnishing us with the material for our projectile" (Miller, 1978, p. 46). A hundred years later, there would be an aluminum spacecraft on the moon. Miller notes regarding Verne's 1867 application of aluminum for his moon capsule:

Here Verne is using a technique that he has proved eminently successful in his earlier novels. He is extrapolating from the daily news into the not-so-distant future. Thus, he predicts developments that his readers will live to see in a matter of years. And so, he more easily gains their credence when he extrapolates into the more distant future (Miller, 1978, pp. 41).

However, in 1865, there was not enough aluminum in the world for such a project. Verne realized that price and quantity would be a problem, but he also recognized the price in 1865 was rapidly decreasing, moving from "\$260 a pound in 1855 to nine dollars a pound in 1865" (Verne, 1868, p.42). Verne was also aware of the interconnection of commercial aluminum technology and the advance of electrical technology. In *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea* (1869), Verne demonstrated an extensive understanding of electrochemistry using sodium batteries to power the *Nautilus*. It should be noted that the development of batteries and electrolysis

to produce metals like aluminum, sodium, potassium, and lithium were interlinked through the advancing knowledge of electrochemistry. Verne was aware of Michael Faraday's and others' early experiments using electrolysis to extract aluminum, and electricity was the key to commercialization in the 1850s. Verne identified the future of aluminum in the 1860s, while aluminum's commercial availability was uncertain to most.

As early as 1863, Verne's *Paris in the Twentieth Century* noted characters with aluminum spectacles (Verne, 1863b). In 1882, in Verne's novel *The Green Ray*, one of Verne's characters had aluminum-framed eyeglasses. In 1886, Verne's *Robur the Conqueror* captured members of the Weldon Institute on the airship Albatross using an aluminum snuff box to send an air "message in a bottle." However, aluminum in commercial amounts would not be available until the 1890s. As the price and availability of aluminum improved, Verne suggested more aggressive applications of aluminum, such as buildings on *Propeller Island* (1895). The advance of aluminum was interrelated with the evolution of Verne's *Demon of Electricity*.

The chemical generation of electricity by batteries (DC) lacked the availability and power required to make commercial amounts of aluminum. For Verne's moon aluminum capsule, cheap electricity would be needed to fulfill his 20,000-pound aluminum order, which was unavailable in the 1860s. That singularity

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would require a mechanical means of electrical generation and the application of AC versus DC. That started with Faraday's basic principles in the 1850s. The invention of the modern mechanical generation dynamo of electricity offered the key to the future of aluminum. An advanced dynamo was needed for commercial aluminum production. It was invented independently by Sir Charles Wheatstone, Werner von Siemens, and Samuel Alfred Varley in 1867. Verne would have followed the work of all three closely.

1886 would be a singular year of commercialization as improvements in the dynamo, electrical generation, and electrochemistry converged. Verne published *From the Earth to Moon* in 1865, twenty years before the breakthrough electrical Hall-Hérout process in 1886. Note here again we see a process invented independently and almost simultaneously in 1886 by the American chemist Charles Martin Hall and Frenchman Paul Hérout. This supports Verne's view that ideas emerge and are studied until, one day, the breakthrough comes. The Hall-Hérout process drove the price down to below \$1 per pound by 1891, and in 1903, when a lightweight aluminum crankcase for their engine enabled the Wright Brothers to take their famous first flight, the metal was about \$0.30 per pound (Figure 5).

As the price dropped, applications such as sheet and structural aluminum increased, and Verne extrapolated even more uses into the future. In 1895,

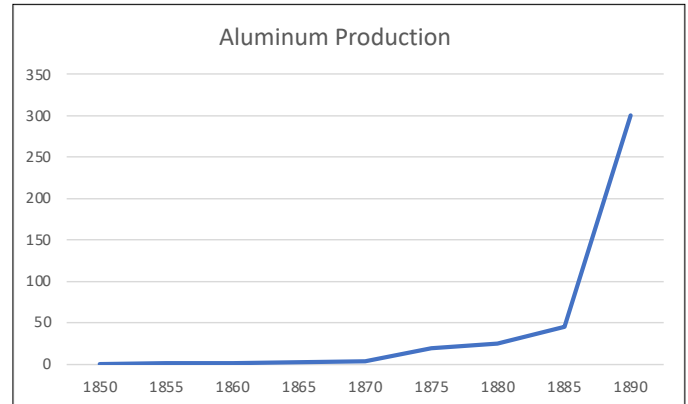


Figure 5: Aluminum production over time

Verne used aluminum skyscrapers in his novel *Propeller Island* (1895). Aluminum skyscrapers were not realized until 1956 when the ALCOA Building in Pittsburgh was built. The ALCOA building mix of aluminum and glass is strikingly similar to Verne's. In 1905, Verne wrote about his second airship, the *Terror*, made of aluminum. At about the same time, the Carl Berg Company developed and supplied aluminum frames for the Zeppelin airships.

Steel: A Singularity that Defined a New Age

Verne's vision of the Steel Age was just as extraordinary as aluminum. Verne was convinced of the future of steel even before Andrew Carnegie, who in 1870 hesitated to invest in it. In 1859, Verne made a grand tour of the shipyards of Liverpool, England, and Glasgow, Scotland, which was recorded in his book *Backwards to Britain* (1989).

Verne's use of steel would be integral to his stories in *The Blockade Runners* (1865), *The Adventures of Three Russians*

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and *Three Englishmen in South Africa* (1872), *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea* (1870), *Steam House* (1880), *The Begum's Millions* (1879), and *Propeller Island* (1895). Verne's series of Voyages Extraordinaire rides the exponential growth of technology over time, with Verne continuously adapting to the potential of steel in newer novels.

Verne realized early the future marine applications for steel. Verne designed four famous fictional steel ships: the *Dolphin* (1865), the *Forward* (1866), the *Nautilus* (1870), and the *Queen and Czar* (1872). Verne designed these ships before the manufacturing capabilities were fully available for the necessary quantity and quality of steel. Mass production of steel was limited to the full application of the Bessemer steel process until the late 1870s. In 1870, Verne's double steel hulled *Nautilus* captivated the world. The *Dolphin* was a steel-hulled Civil War blockade runner. The *Forward* was Verne's steel-hulled ice breaker for arctic exploration. The *Queen and Czar* was a modular steel vessel for cross-country African exploration. In 1877, Verne used steel in the hull construction of his real-life steam-powered personal yacht, the *Michel III*. Verne designed his steel elephant in *The Steam House* (1880). In addition, he built an 11-mile floating island of steel in *Propeller Island* (1895).

Verne demonstrated his detailed knowledge of evolving steel technology and methods throughout his career. However, when Verne began writing in the

1850s, steel existed in minimal quantities from the blister and crucible steel processes. In *Mysterious Island* (1874), he details the chemistry of iron and blister steel making. In 1870, the first singularity for commercial mass steel came in 1875 with the Bessemer process at Carnegie's Bessemer steel plant in Braddock, Pennsylvania, and Krupp's Bessemer plant in Germany. When he wrote *Around the Moon* (1865), it was a world of cast iron (which has a carbon content of more than 2 percent), and quantity steel production was just an emerging technology through the puddling process. Still, no readily available quantity of rolled steel or quality plate was accessible to build the *Nautilus* in 1872. In *The Begum's Millions* (1879), he describes the puddling and crucible processes he used for a fictional steel cannon.

By 1880, the rate of steel production had entered an S-curve plateau because Bessemer steel lacked the quality of ship steel plates. For exponential growth to be achieved again, increased iron production and quality improvements for naval armor would be required (Figure 6). Steelmakers like Andrew Carnegie and Alfred Krupp solved the quality problem by converting to the open-hearth process in 1885.

Verne followed and applied the advances of steel technology in his novels, applying steel to ever more challenging projects. Verne extrapolated the technology to produce the massive 11-mile steel island in *The Self-Propelled Island* (1896). At

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Figure 6: Steel production 1865-1900

Verne's death, steel had overtaken the production of all other iron alloys.

Process technology was only one component in the exponential growth of steel; it would depend on developing many root technologies such as pig iron and coal. Verne's novels *Mysterious Island* (1874) and *The Begum's Millions* (1879) analyzed the role of coal and chemistry in steelmaking. Verne's *Underground City* (1877) deals with the emerging coal mining industry crucial to steel production. Verne's description of the chemistry in a blast furnace in 1874 was cutting edge, and his application of coal for charcoal was visionary and would lead to a steel technology singularity. The real breakthrough of the 1885 singularity came with coal technology and increased iron furnace production.

Verne followed the progression from wood charcoal to anthracite (hard) to bituminous (soft) coal. Anthracite is harder than other coal types; it exists in limited amounts worldwide and could not have supported the exponential growth of the steel industry. In *Mysterious Island* (1873), Verne's understanding of

blast furnace chemistry is demonstrated remarkably: "Thus arranged, under the influence of the air from the bellows, the coal would change into carbonic acid [carbon dioxide], then into oxide of carbon [carbon monoxide], which would release the oxygen from the oxide of iron" (Verne, 1873; pp. 127-129). The understanding of the role of carbon monoxide in blast furnace chemistry was being researched at the University of Paris and other universities in the 1850s, which Verne had tapped into. The complete theory of carbon monoxide reduction was not commonly known until Octave Leopold Boudouard of the University of Paris published his "Boudouard Reaction" in 1901.

Rubber: Another Exponential Vision

Verne also foresaw the rubber singularity of 1890 by decades. In *From the Earth to the Moon* (1865) and *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea* (1870), Verne used rubber as a patch material. In *Clipper of the Clouds* (1880), he used rubber hoses to suck up water from rivers to his airship. In *The Tribulations of a Chinaman in China* (1879), Verne used rubber hoses to communicate between rooms, and created a rubber raft/suit for water travel.

Conclusion

Jules Verne did not imagine the future like H. G. Wells. He extrapolated into it. A recent innovation blog said,

Exponential thinking is bread and butter for engineers and scientists,

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but it's still not a popular mindset among other professionals. If we want to use technology to solve all kinds of problems, then 'exponential literacy' should be a mandatory course in every school (Caraballo, 2016).

Reading Verne offers a true insight into the application of exponential thinking. A Vernian approach to the interdependence and connectivity of different technological streams also helps predict the future. Forecasting, even with the best mathematical tools, remains partly intuitive. Verne's ability cannot be reduced to steps without infusing all the steps with imagination and creativity. In this sense, he mixes the diverse skill sets of engineers, artists, writers, playwrights, inventors, and creators. Verne's methodology is universal and can be used by scientists, engineers, investors, and science fiction writers. ■

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Navigating Trauma and Grief: The Power of Learned Resilience and Nostalgia in Meg Elison's *The Book of the Unnamed Midwife*

Katharine Schaab

Abstract: A post-apocalyptic dystopia, Meg Elison's *The Book of the Unnamed Midwife* (2014) imagines how contemporary health and social stressors could lead to social collapse. Comprised of diary entries, the novel shows how one survivor—the midwife—processes trauma as she documents death and violence while also ruminating on the past. For the midwife, turning to the past produces feelings of nostalgia, particularly a longing for foreclosed futures, which serves as an unexpected path for imagining and building a new future. Because the midwife revisits the past with a critical eye, she identifies both the bitter and sweet aspects of pre-apocalyptic society. In contrast, other survivors' idealization of the past, combined with their privileged identities (past and present), prevents them from processing trauma and imagining something new. SF scholars have addressed how nostalgia is employed to shape the meaning of home, creation of safe space, and acts of resistance that can produce joy and hope. This article extends the discourse by placing nostalgia, grief, and privilege in conversation to demonstrate the power of learned resilience, and how, in the wake of trauma, it can help individuals and communities envision and enact a more equitable and just future.

Keywords: *The Book of the Unnamed Midwife*, nostalgia, privilege, resilience, dystopia, trauma

Loss permeates our lives—from ecological devastation and gun violence to the loss of homes, jobs, relationships, health, and rights. In response to a myriad of personal and political traumas, people consult therapists, clergy, support groups, and even social media accounts. Sometimes we cope, sometimes we flounder, and sometimes we bury our heads in the sand and just try to move forward. Dystopic literature may not be a typical resource for those overwhelmed by grief and trauma, but post-apocalyptic novels often present a range of emotional responses humans exhibit in the wake

of unimaginable loss. When post-apocalyptic fiction takes a diary form, the entries reveal that the holes and gaps created by loss not only cause heartbreak and havoc but can make space for learned resilience and “a future open to something new” (Vint, 2021, p. 89). Returning to our contemporary world, individual and communal losses may not be apocalyptic, but they can be traumatic, and it is unsurprising when people become consumed by grief and nostalgia. Because “post-apocalypse as a narrative, imaginative, and philosophical space lends itself to

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other kinds of expressions and readings,” such novels can inform “how we make meaning and respond to our present contexts” (Doyle, 2015, p. 108). Drawing upon aspects of a not-yet-apocalyptic present plagued by unstable political systems, ecological disasters, and social and economic inequities, post-apocalyptic diary novels show readers the possibilities of nostalgia and “learned resilience that comes along with grief” and how such resilience can help us enact a different future (Grow, 2023, para 27).

Diary, Post-Apocalyptic Fiction, and Nostalgia

The convergence of two genres—epistolary novel and speculative fiction—offers a useful vehicle for depicting and assessing the relationship between trauma and learned resilience. Post-apocalyptic diary novels such as Octavia E. Butler’s *Parable of the Sower* (1993), Jack Womack’s *Random Acts of Senseless Violence* (1993), Meg Elison’s *The Book of the Unnamed Midwife* (2014), and Manon Steffan Ros’ *The Blue Book of Nebo* (2021) show survivors’ efforts to document societal collapse, process their new reality in a changed world, and chart a new future amid crises. Post-apocalypse demands a reckoning with loss and a world in upheaval, and survivors committed to keeping a diary exhibit an intentional desire to process grief and contemplate a new path forward.

Traditionally hand-written in a private book, diaries allow for personal reflection, reporting “of one’s life...entered at

regular intervals” (Turco, 2020, p. 177), and “normally represent the uncensored thoughts of the writer” (Löschnigg & Schuh, 2018, p. 19). The term “epistolic-diary narration” complicates the private and uncensored notion of diary writing, as this form of narration describes writers who are “to some extent aware of an addressee, either implicit or explicit” (McCallum, 1999, p. 225). Epistolic-diary narration reflects most post-apocalyptic diarists’ understanding of their writing. They are aware of possible future readers and some even document companions’ stories for posterity. In such cases, the diary may serve as part of the historical record of a period and/or place. The awareness of a future reader may limit the entries, but diary writing provides the writer space to process loss, fear, isolation, hope, and imaginative futures. The value of processing and personal reflection is supported by research on diary keeping, e.g., “the use of diaries can be beneficial in documenting lived accounts and emotional experiences of an ‘everchanging present’” (Halliday et al., 2022, p. 539); further, diarists “perceive diary-keeping to be [a] useful coping strategy” (Burt). In the wake of inconceivable trauma, diary writing helps the writer cope with an unfamiliar post-apocalyptic present and build the resilience necessary for navigating this dangerous new world.

Post-apocalyptic, dystopic narratives are squarely rooted in speculative fiction. “Closely linked to the times—and especially the politics—of its creation”

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(Shames & Atchison, 2019, p. 39), speculative fiction (especially dystopic texts) can serve as a site for critical reflection and “political, ethical, and philosophical discussion around the cultural constructs and dominant social roles and hierarchies that pervade life on Earth” (Lovell, 2021, p. 68). For instance, in Ros’ *The Blue Book of Nebo*, Rowenna uses her diary to condemn class and linguistic hierarchies that structured her pre-apocalyptic communities, thus providing readers with the space and language to interrogate contemporary hierarchies and inequitable systems. While speculative fiction can help readers critically analyze the present, these narratives can also showcase “resistance... and the building of alliances and new communities,” and thus “provide readers with hope, with the small utopian seed that we can imagine cultivating in our own reality” (Edgar, 2022, p. 215). Thus, just as diary keeping can help the writer process trauma and develop resilience, speculative fiction can inspire readers to critically reflect and act against various forms of communal trauma in the contemporary world. Taken together, post-apocalyptic diary novels can offer versions of a new, meaningful and fulfilling future—including the possibility of more fair and equitable relationships and communities.¹

By employing diaries in dystopic literature, authors create characters who not only process the present and contemplate the future but also compare the post-apocalyptic present to the pre-apocalyptic lost world. The use of

diaries in post-apocalyptic texts reveals and complicates the role of nostalgia in processing the present and imagining and leaning into a new future. Nostalgia is a “sentimental longing and wistful affection for the past...that entails a happy memory with a tinge of sadness” (Newman & Sachs, 2022, p. 1), which can trigger a sense of rootedness and uprootedness (Cassin, 2016). Diarists writing in a post-apocalyptic world have been uprooted from the past and all its familiar workings; they have been exiled to a radically different present and accept there is no hope of return. Yet, they experience nostalgia for what was lost, which leaves the diarist to either long hopelessly for an unrecoverable world or process their grief and find a way to be comfortably rooted in the present. Barbara Cassin (2016) asserts, “from nostalgia to exile, the goal...is no longer return and the home...but a founding” (p. 29). The concept of “founding” aligns with Vint’s (2021) assertion that “we need a future open to something new,” and, more specifically, a future “articulated by those less privileged and hence not nostalgic for what was” (p. 89) as well as those not seeking to consolidate and abuse power. While both privilege and idealization of the past certainly hamper the ability to envision something new, the absence of nostalgia is unrealistic.

In post-apocalyptic diaries, the founding, or a future open to something new, is propelled by nostalgia and its “two sides: rootedness and wandering” (Cassin, 2016, p. 24). While diarists’ memories

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and attachments are rooted in the past, diary entries provide a medium for processing the past and present and facilitate the mental and emotional wandering that leads the writer (e.g., Butler's Lauren Olamina in *Parable of the Sower*) to rootedness in something and somewhere new in the future. Wanderings through the past reveal a nostalgia for what was lost, particularly "a longing for futures that never came or horizons of possibilities that have been foreclosed by the unfolding of events" (Bradbury, 2012, p. 341). Survivors might long for relationships, a lost profession, and the life one would have lived. While nostalgia can root someone in the past, it has also been characterized as "one of the primary coping mechanisms...of enduring isolation, fear—and a general loss of freedom" (Gammon & Ramshaw, 2021, p. 131). For survivors, nostalgia as a coping mechanism is tempered by one's privilege (both past and present). Those with less privilege live under the threat or reality of losing their freedom, thus making nostalgia as a means of enduring (or desire to endure) less effective. Yet, because privilege shapes perceptions of self and loss, for those under threat, nostalgia becomes a vehicle for revisiting the past and assessing the present with a critical eye. Such wandering helps diarists (such as Womack's Lola in *Random Acts of Senseless Violence*) consider "the past need not have been what it was" and "to generate options for how to live now and the kinds of futures that may be possible" (Bradbury, 2012, p. 346).

Nostalgia becomes a vehicle for revisiting the past and laying the groundwork for a new future, as demonstrated in the following close reading of Meg Alison's *The Book of the Unnamed Midwife* (2014).

The Book of the Unnamed Midwife: A Case Study

Elison's *Midwife* begins with a woman—the unnamed midwife—treating patients in a San Francisco maternity ward, many of whom die from a fever that rapidly kills most of the world's population. The novel features the midwife's efforts to survive and cope with isolation, uncertainty, and violence in the wake of societal collapse. As a portrayal of a feminist dystopia, *Midwife* is "openly reactive to the current socio-political climate" with Elison highlighting issues prevalent in both contemporary and fictional dystopian societies including "the silencing of women's voices, reproductive rights, domestic violence and masculine toxicity" (Norledge, 2022, p. 133). The novel unfolds through a series of diary entries in which the midwife initially details scenes from the post-apocalyptic world, including the pedestrian acts of scavenging for food and water while also observing the violence and terror (e.g., rape, maternal death) most surviving women face at the hands of men.² As she treks from California to Utah and later Missouri, the midwife occasionally finds companions, but most of her physical wandering is spent alone. Through her diary, she documents both the physical and mental wandering innate to her new post-apocalyptic context. Early

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entries show the midwife reporting on trauma and loss; such reflections help build resilience but leave little emotional space for reflection and nostalgia. As the midwife adjusts to the post-apocalyptic world, diary entries start to reveal a longing for the foreclosed futures of pre-apocalyptic life (Bradbury, 2012). Her nostalgia for what was lost plus her critique of the world past and present helps her wander into new visions for the future. The shift between past/present violence and future hopes underlines how “feminist dystopias are an ideal space for...articulating not only the tensions and troubles but also illustrating possibilities for resolution” (Edgar, 2022, p. 202). For the midwife, critique focuses on gender hierarchies that structured pre-apocalyptic communities and apocalyptic violence. The founding or new future that she wanders toward—both physically/geographically and mentally—includes more equitable relationships and community formations, bodily autonomy, and safety.

Violence, Trauma, and Loss

Waking to a world upended by mass death and the ensuing violence, trauma and loss inform the midwife’s thoughts and actions. Her early diary entries report on people and threats she encounters, which range from a gas explosion to an attempted rape and abduction. In response to such threats, she plans to leave the city, search for food and clean water, and change her appearance. The city is no longer safe, and, as the narrator underscores, other people are often the

biggest threat: “When the sirens quit, the rules gave out. Some people had been waiting their whole lives to live lawlessly, and they were the first to take to the streets. Some people knew what would happen; they knew better than to open their doors when they heard cries of help. Others didn’t. What disease cannot do, people accomplish with astonishing ease” (Elison, 2014a, pp. 6-7).³ The midwife experiences lawlessness as a man breaks into her apartment and attempts to rape her. She slits his throat, and he dies on her bedroom floor, thus forcing her to leave her home. Her reports from the road show additional forms of violence. The midwife writes, “*Five men crouching in the street. Two women on leashes stood, staring. Never forget it as long as I live. As dirty as rescue dogs. Same look in the eye*” (Elison, 2014b, p. 61). Mayhem rules the day, and, as the violent encounters in the apartment and on the road demonstrate, women are the targets of gender- and sex-based violence.

Recognizing the risks of being read as a woman in the post-apocalyptic world, the midwife adopts a masculine gender expression. She quickly learns her body and femininity attract too much attention. After a group of men attempts to abduct her, she reflects on her appearance and notes, “She looked pale, sick, hurt, and afraid....She looked like prey, like a mark....She wanted that look off her now. She’d have to work on it” (Elison, 2014c, p. 24). The midwife acts quickly in procuring men’s clothing—along with a compression vest—and cutting her hair.

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Passing as a man heightens her safety and resilience, but it also makes survival dependent upon successfully passing or becoming someone different. The midwife instructs herself on how to be read and be accepted as a man, *"Bitch, call everyone bitch. Ride bitch, feed me bitch. Pussy=pussy. Choose the rougher word"* (Elison, 2014d, p. 30). She further coaches, *"Rub jawline. Don't look down. Stand in front of the mirror. Have a dick. Great big dick. Fear me. Always right. Kick your ass. No right to stand in my way. Who's gonna stop me? Like that, bitch? Yeah."* (Elison, 2014e, p. 42). These hypermasculine, aggressive, and even violent takes on manhood allow her to pass and interact with men safely during her post-apocalyptic wandering. Yet, the conditions the midwife faces in the early days of the post-apocalypse require expending mental and physical energy on remaining safe, which includes adopting a new persona and gender expression, thus leaving her little time for nostalgia or hopeful thinking about the future.

Loss shapes the midwife's new life and informs initial diary entries. She documents the significant loss of life and structural collapse resulting from a global outbreak of the deadly fever. *"News said women and children were much more susceptible to the disease...Saw no children recover...No live children born to women with the disease + children of uninfected women died within hours of birth...Have to face the possibility that almost everyone in this country died...Went to sleep and the world was dying*

>>> woke up and it was dead and gone" (Elison, 2014f, pp. 55-56). Contending with the world "dead and gone" is destabilizing for most survivors, but the midwife must also cope with losing her identity and sense of self. She reflects on her physical and emotional transformation upon assuming a male persona: *"Had to strip off my compression vest and wash it. Standing there, topless...felt so strange. Me = not me. My breasts for the first time in ages...Can't feel like myself. Finally put it back on when it dried. Felt better dressed. Not me = me. Me not now. Me then. Me new"* (Elison, 2014g, p. 53). Personal and communal losses engulf the midwife and her diary entries during the first year.

Despite tremendous loss, or perhaps because of it, the midwife seeks to preserve her professional identity. Continuing to work as a midwife, even if sporadically, is a survival tactic and an early effort to find connections between the "dead and gone" world and the new, deadly world. The midwife scavenges for birth control and antibiotics and administers them to women she encounters on the road to protect her patients from disease and pregnancy (which results in stillbirth and often maternal death). She barter alcohol and food for private time with a woman being held captive; the midwife uses the agreed upon half hour to treat her patient. The midwife instructs, *"I'm gonna give you a shot. It'll keep you from getting pregnant again for the next couple of months. Then I'm gonna give you some little plastic rings. You put them up inside you...if you*

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get caught with them, say they're for dryness" (Elison, 2014, p. 39). After the encounter, she writes, "*Actually pulled it off. Wasn't sure it would ever work, but I did it today*" (Elison, 2014h, p. 35). Not only did she pass as a man among other men, but she draws upon her medical training to aid women in crisis by doling out birth control and antibiotics. Treating patients allows for some recovery of the pre-apocalyptic world and her former self.

The continuity of her work pre- and post-apocalypse allows the midwife to start defining her role and place in the present. The midwife's responses to these big picture concerns are not universal; the world does not change for everyone in the same ways. For instance, in her first safe interaction with other survivors, a man named Chicken insists, "We don't need other people. We were never gonna have kids. Living is work enough. And all we've ever done is survive. It might look different if you go to college and buy a house and do all that shit, but all we do is survive. Ain't nothing changed. Just now there's less competition" (Elison, 2014i, p. 21). For Chicken, life remains focused on survival with pre- and post-apocalyptic life merging near seamlessly. However, the midwife loses her entire personal and professional life and recognizes that her identity and body (read by other survivors as female) puts her at risk following societal collapse. Thus, rebuilding takes time. Even after a year's time, "she gave herself the luxury of a few days of madness," but eventually accepts it is "*time to go*" or

time to move forward physically and emotionally (Elison, 2014j, pp. 57-58). The diary shows the midwife shifting from reporting on loss and reacting to trauma to expressing nostalgia and grappling with the positives and negatives of the past. The trauma of the present continues to inform her thinking and actions. Yet, through learned resilience, she has a better grasp on the new reality and what threats she might encounter, which allows her to drop her guard just enough to begin wandering through the past.

Wandering into Nostalgia

The midwife wanders into the past through her diary. Early reports on violence, trauma, and loss give way to entries that show the midwife wading through memories and longing for familiar experiences. These reflections trigger nostalgia, which Newman and Sachs (2022) describe as a "a mixed emotion that varies not only in intensity but also in valence, that is, how bitter or sweet the feeling is" (p. 10). Valence is crucial to understanding the midwife's relationship with the past. Her reflections trend toward sweetness when missing people and experiences, but toward bitterness in terms of the problems and inequities that plagued the past and inform the present. The presence and interaction of both bitter and sweet feelings, with the former shaped in part by loss of privilege in forsaking her identity and living under the threat of discovery and violence, allows the midwife to both appreciate and critique the past.

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Memories of loved ones and comforts lost to the apocalypse trigger strong positive feelings about the past which also intensifies the sting of loss. The midwife longs for human connection and mourns the passing of relationships and people. A question about how she learned to handle a gun leads her to think “about all the time she had spent with her dad, and the momentary lapse into nostalgia triggered an empty howling in her heart. His face was sharp in her mind, and she ached with grief” (Elison, 2014k, p. 87). The missing personal relationships and connections even trump the desire for comfort. “More than food or drink, more than hot showers...more than television and Internet...almost more than the feeling of safety and not having to constantly be on guard, she missed conversation. That moment of connection, of being understood that passed easily between equals. She felt her eyes pricking at the thought” (Elison, 2014l, p. 195). A yearning for connection triggers nostalgia, but the midwife also longs for items and experiences connected to specific memories and events. As the weather turns cold and snow falls, she writes, “*Miss Christmas movies and the baked goods...Food holding just fine, but it sure isn’t Christmas. Kill for two hours with a DVD player and a slice of cake*” (Elison, 2014m, p. 54). Continuing to grapple with nostalgia months later as she considers how to pass the time, the midwife writes, “*Wish I had an almanac. Wish I had the SF public library. Wish I had the right batteries for this CD player,*

even if the only thing I have to listen to is this Destiny’s Child CD in it. Wish I had prime rib and a chocolate cake. Wish I had Netflix. Wish I had a friend. Wish I had Jack” (Elison, 2014n, p. 141). The midwife reflects upon the commonplace and taken-for-granted aspects of her previous life. She would certainly take pleasure in eating a slice of cake or watching a television show and feels “an aching nostalgia for a world that seemed very long ago” (Elison, 2014o, p. 196). As exemplified by the midwife, those with less privilege may still feel nostalgia for elements of the past. Yet, the valence trends toward bitterness.

While the midwife feels nostalgia for the lost world, she describes that world as “utterly absurd in its existence” (Elison, 2014p, p. 196). The midwife reflects upon how violence from the past spills into the present, especially men abusing women. While searching her memories about pre-apocalyptic times, she leans into bitterness and concludes, “There was no before. The world had always been ending” (Elison, 2014q, p. 142). Grounded in weariness and anger over post-apocalyptic violence targeting girls and women, the midwife’s bleak assessment is fleshed out by Almudena Machado-Jiménez (2021) who argues that Elison uses the midwife to critique “the complex and multiform character of systemic violence validated in contemporary society” (p. 372). Ultimately, the midwife’s nostalgia at times roots her in the past and what was lost, but she does not idealize the past or get stuck

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in nostalgia, both of which would make it difficult to imagine a new future.

The midwife meets people whose nostalgia produces a more rose-colored view of the past that leads to an “inertia in the population” (Cade & Stenhouse, 2020, p. 58). Some survivors try to recreate the past and refuse to accept the present, which makes imagining a new future undesirable or impossible. For example, her encounter with a Latter Day Saints (LDS) community in Utah reveals how firmly they hold to their pre-apocalyptic societal norms.⁴ The midwife reflects, “They were too polite, too clean. *Don’t they know the world ended?*” (Elison, 2014r, p. 110). The elders continue to send young men on missions, though the updated charge is to find women and return them to the community. Additionally, because the elders place a high value on monogamy and marriage, they force women into new marriages when their husbands die or fail to return from a mission. Jodi, one of the three living LDS women, confides in the midwife, “I left when the bishop said I would be married in a week to the man of his choosing and that I was being stiff-necked and disobedient and I’d have to learn to submit. He issued, like, a proclamation that women would be given in marriage by their fathers or by the bishop from now on” (Elison, 2014s, p. 146). Jodi’s experience demonstrates how LDS elders continue to expect marriage, obedience, and traditional roles for men and women that governed their pre-apocalyptic communities.

The elders’ failure to understand how patriarchal rule continues to harm the community prevents them from advancing the “vocabularies, concepts, histories, narratives, and experiences which can illuminate the predicament or powerlessness and help to find ways of overcoming such circumstances” (McRobbie, 2009, p. 49). Ultimately, those with greater privilege tend to feel more sweetness about the past, sadness about what has been lost, and, thus, work to replicate the past. Even Jodi, who fears the elders and flees the community, idealizes the past and has not developed resilience or coping mechanisms. She longs for television shows (offering a play-by-play of entire seasons of *The Bachelor*) and holiday traditions, and she refuses to relinquish her vision of a nuclear family (even after she nearly dies giving birth to a stillborn child—and ultimately dies trying to birth her second child). The elders’ nostalgia for a patriarchal community and total power, along with Jodi clinging to past norms and refusing to adjust to a new world, marks their nostalgia as different (more consuming and favorable to the past) than the nostalgia the midwife experiences.

As noted, in her call for “a future open to something new,” Vint cautions it should be “articulated by those less privileged and hence not nostalgic for what was” (p. 89). As documented, the midwife clearly experiences moments of nostalgia. Further, before the spread of the fever, her educational training and work granted her a privileged professional and class

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status. In the post-apocalyptic world, the midwife assumes an even more privileged male identity. Between her nostalgia for “what was” and the various advantageous identities she has inhabited, the midwife seemingly fails to meet the criteria for articulating a new future. Yet, her nostalgic wanderings showcase the “bitter” and “sweet” aspects of nostalgia as she both longs for and critiques the past (Newman & Sachs, 2022, p. 10). In addition to critiquing the past, the male privilege the midwife assumes comes at a cost to her own sense of self: “It felt so alien to be naked, she could not quite own or inhabit her body. It was becoming a stranger to her” (Elison, 2014t, p. 119). By abandoning her name, personality, and identity in favor of safety and self-preservation, the midwife relinquishes the privilege of authentic expression. As the midwife oscillates between sweet and bitter nostalgia, “Fantasies of the past determined by needs of the present have a direct impact on realities of the future” (Boym, 2020, p. xvi). Recognizing how threats of the past invade the present, the midwife yearns for a new future and continues to wander toward it both in her diary and her trek across the U.S.⁵ Ultimately, the focus and valence of the midwife’s nostalgia (which differs from the LDS elders, for example) is crucial to her ability and desire to imagine a new future.

While on the road, the midwife and Jodi’s husband, Honus, each encounter other survivors’ take on something new in the form of “hives,” or polyamorous

groups comprised of one woman and multiple men. On his mission to find living women, Honus encounters Amanda’s hive. He comments on the group dynamic, “*She speaks to all the men as though they were one person. There are about twenty men here. They are all on drugs... They barely eat food, preferring to drink and smoke*” (Elison, 2014u, pp. 206-207). He also notes Amanda refers to herself as “*the queen of the hive*” and encourages Honus to stay as she needs “*more drones to bring her honey*” (Elison, 2014v, p. 207). The group dynamic of one woman and multiple men defies a commitment to monogamy as well as traditional polygamous relationships in the U.S. which typically center on one man and multiple women. Akin to Honus’ encounter, the midwife meets a woman named Vivian and the 14 men who form her hive. Reporting on the group dynamic, the midwife writes, “*She got off more times than I could count, gave them almost nothing. Threw them out if they came too fast or couldn’t take direction. Arrogant. Plain looking, but so confident = sexy. Before I left asked if she needed BC. Laughed and told me she was covered if she lived to be a thousand. She might*” (Elison, 2014w, p. 257). Both hives center a woman and her desires; this construction defies most relationships in patriarchal, pre-apocalyptic society. Although the hives’ queens have embraced a new community framework, a significant power imbalance ultimately structures the hives as men are expendable. Yet, the hives expose

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how “patriarchal structures” such as monogamous marriages in the LDS community and ubiquitous sex trading post-apocalypse “are damaging and harmful to women and girls, and when women have agency, they are safer” (Edgar, 2022, p. 209). The hives offer the midwife an example of something new, but she continues to wander in search of a founding that reflects her vision of community and a more equitable future.

A Founding, a New Future

Wandering critically through the past plus encountering various examples of post-apocalyptic life helps the midwife imagine and ultimately deliver a new future for herself. This process aligns with Baccolini’s (2004) assertion, “It is... through memory and the recovery of the past, that we bring the past into a living relation with the present and may thus begin to lay the foundations for Utopian change” (p. 521). Fort Nowhere, the site the midwife ultimately calls home, offers a community where she can establish roots, lay claim to a new future, and build upon the existing community. Inviting the midwife to join Fort Nowhere, raiders inform her, “we have a place...It’s very safe. Enclosed. Defensible. We’re not really looking to take in new people, but we never turn down women or girls. Combine that with your training, and of course we want you” (Elison, 2014, p. 263). The midwife is intrigued by Fort Nowhere, particularly the possibility of community and safety. Upon settling, she describes her new home, “*Fort Nowhere= 124 men, 17 women, 6 boys,*

2 girls. Cohesive. Peaceful....Place has a real infirmary...Slip right back in. Even wearing scrubs...Council of five in charge, but everyone votes...Three single women not including me. Dating, fucking for sure. But no coercion” (Elison, 2014x, pp. 264-265). The community signals its values through the democratic political structure and communal culture (on peace and sex) which appeals to the midwife. She reflects on reasons to stay, “*...decent people. Met a few I can talk to, even some funny guys...Couple of women I really like...Place is clean, organized. Well stocked, but they’re setting up gardens for next spring. Nobody has gotten into my space*” (Elison, 2014y, p. 265). As a forward thinking community, Fort Nowhere also allocated space for and stocked an infirmary with the hope someone with medical training might join their community. While the midwife seems content to “slip right back in” to her work, she worries about the community’s dependence upon her expertise and considers the drawback to staying. She writes, “*no other medicos, going to get worked to death if people get sick. Can’t let them become dependent. Train my replacement. Won’t keep me, can walk right out the door anytime*” (Elison, 2014z, p. 265). The pros ultimately outweigh the cons, and the midwife remains at Fort Nowhere where she plays a role in advancing the community’s vision of a new future. In this vein, Mitchell (2021) argues, “As an untethered, unnamed, and un-gendered character, the Midwife is positioned

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to assist in delivering a new maternal world, one that leads to generations of daughters, mothers and matriarchs who overturn assumptions about them that had once seemed inescapable” (p. 76). Thus, the founding at Fort Nowhere meets the midwife’s personal needs (safety, connection, understanding, service to others) while also allowing her to help enact a collaborative vision of the new world and revision of humanity for generations to come.

The midwife’s entry into the Fort Nowhere community allows for a shift from individual to communal perspective on post-apocalyptic life and what the future holds for the residents. The inclusion of additional voices and perspectives helps position Ellison’s novel as a critical dystopia grounded in hope. Contrasting classical and critical dystopias, Baccolini (2004) writes, “In classical dystopia, memory remains too often trapped in an individual and regressive nostalgia, but critical dystopias show that a culture of memory—one that moves from the individual to the collective—is part of a social project of hope” (pp. 521). The social project of hope is documented in the final stages of the midwife’s diary which features contributions from other members of the Fort Nowhere community. The midwife asks others to “add to the story of where they came from and what they had seen” (Elison, 2014aa, p. 271). The entries vary in focus and tone (from hopeful to defeated), but the diarists generally convey their changed perspectives and attitudes on subjects

such as community structure and the nature of intimate relationships. The shift in thinking, as documented in the shared diary, demonstrates the community’s commitment to “a future open to something new” (Vint, 2021, p. 89).

Several diarists work to embrace desires that run counter to the dominant norms and ideologies governing the past. For Mariah, this process involves claiming and affirming her sexual desires. She writes, *“I never thought I would be the kind of woman who has a hive. I was too old, to begin with. Forty when the shit hit the fan, and not very good-looking. It just kind of happened...We all got a barracks together, but Davy left us last year. He wanted to be monogamous with someone, but I can’t go back to that”* (Elison, 2014bb, p. 276). Mariah initially equates youth and beauty with sexual worthiness, but eventually accepts that her desires are valid and monogamy is not personally satisfying. The hives in Fort Nowhere provide both “family structure” and “communal intimacy” (Mitchell, 2021, p. 72) albeit differently from pre-apocalyptic norms. Like Mariah, Archie also grapples with the sharp contrast between how he understands and practices intimacy now versus in the past. Archie’s diary entry reveals considerable homophobia and possessiveness toward his partner while also conveying his desire for companionship and intimacy: He writes, *“I’ve been with Brian for more than a year now. We were friends at first, and I started to notice how kinda feminine he is. He was gay and I knew*

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that, but we were still good friends. He could cook real good, and he wasn't all faggoty in front of me" (Elison, 2014cc, p. 278). Judging others' relationships and his own, he notes, *"I can't live like those guys who are in the hives...It's not natural. What I have with Brian isn't natural, either, but at least I know he's all mine"* (Elison, 2014dd, pp. 278-279). Later in the entry, Archie reveals the tension he experiences between not wanting others to see him as gay while also wanting to marry Brian/Breezy. He writes, *"Doc Jane [the midwife's adopted pseudonym] says I don't have to call myself gay. I don't know what we should call it but I want us to get married. I told the raiders to keep an eye out for a nice diamond ring. I want to make an honest wife out of my Breezy"* (Elison, 2014ee, p. 279). Archie's diary demonstrates the hold reductive ideas about identity and relationships retain post-apocalypse. Further, the entry points to the potentially arduous work of "overcoming patriarchal gender assumptions" and embracing a "queering of burgeoning social communities" (Mitchell, 2021, p. 44) to support more equitable relationships and community formations, bodily autonomy, and safety.

The development of something new at Fort Nowhere is a slow process, but the diary entries showcase the satisfaction, fulfillment, and hope residents feel as they build for the future. Writing an entry on the community's formation, Daniel reflects, *"I helped to form the first council here because there was work that needed doing and people need structure...It was*

the right thing to do. We have order, and outside they have nothing" (Elison, 2014ff, p. 272). In a similar vein, Barry indicates, *"I am so glad I found this place. I thought I would never see anything like civilization again. A community, a society, a group of people getting along together just means so much....That's what I came for"* (Elison, 2014gg, pp. 274-275). Fort Nowhere provides community members with a refuge from threats beyond the walls as well as a space to understand themselves, their desires, and their place within a changed world.

Conclusion

A founding occurs within Fort Nowhere. The founding is a manifestation of the inhabitants' shared commitment to new community formations, bodily autonomy, more equitable relationships, and safety. The realization of these commitments differentiates the Fort Nowhere community and its inhabitants from the abusive and lawless cultures beyond the community walls. The pledge for fairness, autonomy, and safety applies evenly to all people in the community, which also differentiates Fort Nowhere from non-fictional contemporary societies. The contrast between fiction and real world landscapes can help readers contemplate personal and communal founding "beyond the present political and social structure that we allegedly find ourselves so unable to imagine the end of" (Doyle, 2015, p. 111). As argued, the trappings of nostalgia often prevent us from imaging or enacting something new. While *The Book of the Unnamed Midwife* is not a

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playbook for resisting injustice or building a new society, the novel, like other feminist dystopias and post-apocalyptic diary novels, may act as “a star to guide us beyond the dangers of static nostalgia and into an ecology of emotion, memory, and refuge that requires critical reflection” (Barba Guerrero, 2021, p. 41). As the midwife shows, nostalgia combined with critical reflection on the past and present can help those overcome by grief to develop resilience and wander into a more equitable future. ■

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Notes

1. New does not mean better, fairer, or more equitable for all. For example, in Meg Elison's *The Book of the Unnamed Midwife* (2014), many of the surviving men capture, subjugate, and rape the few living women and girls in the new, post-apocalyptic world.
2. Gender- and sex-based hierarchies continue to exist following the collapse of society, as "the post-apocalyptic world is not a blank slate...ideological assumptions about women and reproduction persist even without the existence of institutions and formal power structures" (Schaab 4).
3. In addition to the diary entries, readers gather information and insight about the world from an omniscient narrator. Throughout the novel, and reflected within this article, the diary entries are italicized.
4. Passing as a man gives the midwife access to male-dominated spaces where she gains perspective on how privilege (particularly derived from sex) shapes people's attitudes and actions post-apocalypse. While assuming a more privileged status among men helps sharpen her critique of society past and present, passing is ultimately tenuous and risky.
5. The midwife feeling disconnected from her body and identity, and using the diary to process her feelings, aligns with Gordon's (1998) argument that diaries are "the ideal format for those who live in the Borderlands, for those outsiders to hegemony who neither have access to a more public forum nor live lives in conformity with public expectations" (p. 44).

Books in Review

Queering SF

Ritch Calvin
Aqueduct Press, 2022, pb, 218 pp, \$18
ISBN 978-1-61976-220-6

Reviewed by **Carrie-Anna Wade**

Since the turn of the century, science fiction and speculative fiction (SF) have seen a significant shift towards inclusivity and, in more recent years, with an increasing focus on diverse and intersecting identities of gender and sexuality. This evolution reflects broader societal changes, including the growing awareness and acceptance of LGBTQ+ communities and the push for greater representation in all forms of media. As Ritch Calvin (he/him) mentions in his introduction, several political and social turning points in the 2010s, including the legalization of same-sex marriage in many countries and global movements for gender equality and LGBTQ+ rights, have contributed to the increasing appearance of queer SF. This call for representation is not only seen in literature, but also across television, film, and other forms of media, reflecting a societal push towards more inclusive narratives. Works by authors such as Samuel R. Delany (he/him), Rivers Solomon (they/them, fae/faer), and Carmen Maria Machado (she/her) have challenged the traditional, often heteronormative, and patriarchal tendencies of SF. This has crossed into

other forms of media, and Calvin makes a point to engage with multimedia artists like musician Janelle Monáe (she/they), comic book writer Kelly Sue DeConnick (she/her), and filmmakers Lana and Lilly Wachowski (she/her). Ritch Calvin's *Queering SF* is a timely and extraordinarily essential addition to this expanding field. Through his collection of essays, Calvin dissects and discusses how queer identities are currently transforming SF narratives while exploring the necessary future changes in the continuously evolving subject.

Queering SF by Ritch Calvin is an anthology of thirty-six essays (or "36 Shades of Queer," as it is wonderfully put by Calvin) that explore the multiple faces of queer science fiction. As Calvin states in his introduction, "SF is not a monolith, [and] queer SF is not, either," which is aptly represented through Calvin's exploration of the many representations of queer SF in a variety of media. His exploration of the topic reflects the nature of the genre itself, as Calvin uses historical context and contemporary analysis to inspect how writers of queer SF approach their

Queering SF, review, continued

craft with varied methods, goals, and perspectives. Each chapter meticulously dissects a new example of queer representation with the goal of not only understanding societal attitudes toward gender and sexuality, but also introducing the reader to a wide range of writers in the genre to broaden the understanding of what it means to write in queer SF. The anthology addresses a diverse array of formats that display examples of queer SF, showing how queer themes permeate various aspects of popular culture, not just literature. The essays are structured to be both informative and engaging, creating a space for both academic audiences and general readers to engage critically with queer representations in SF.

The essays contained in *Queering SF* demonstrate how queer SF interrogates and pushes the boundaries of what some might consider its “parent genre.” The idea of what constitutes SF—its characteristics and content—has been historically shaped by ever-changing cultural contexts. Many of the writers Calvin features in his essay collection seek to challenge traditional notions of SF by exploring possible futures that may arise from questioning Western perspectives of gender and sexuality. This collection displays the transformative potential of queer SF and asks readers to reflect on how these imagined futures might influence our reality.

One of the standout features of *Queering SF* is its comprehensive coverage of queer representation in SF through a wide range

of media, including books, short stories, essays, television shows, films, single songs, music albums, and even social media memes. In this broad approach, Calvin shows readers how to engage with queer representation as it varies across media and, rather than treating them as separate entities, showcases how they influence one another and even blur the lines of their categories at points. The language Calvin uses in his essays is highly accessible, making complex ideas and theories approachable for readers from various backgrounds. In addition to this, the essays are concise while remaining engaging to their audience, preventing reader fatigue and allowing for the consumption of multiple essays in one sitting. Calvin’s ability to integrate historical context into his analysis without requiring his reader to have additional outside knowledge is particularly commendable. By positioning the works being discussed within the broader history of SF’s predominantly cis-gendered, straight, white-centered narrative, Calvin successfully demonstrates how queer perspectives have allowed the genre to evolve to incorporate a more inclusive future, one that is not sterilized of gender and sexuality along with the identities that intersect with them.

While Calvin’s insights on each piece he explores are extremely interesting, the analysis often feels too brief and leaves the reader wanting more. The essays tend to wrap up quickly just as the discussion becomes particularly engaging. This may

Queering SF, review, continued

have been amended by a more in-depth critical literary engagement (as he does in “Listening to the Female Man”) which would allow for a deeper exploration of the themes, representations, and contexts being discussed. However, it is acknowledged that the inclusion of more critical theory texts would likely lower the accessibility of Calvin’s essays, which is much more valuable than exhaustive scholarly critique, as it ensures that a wider audience can engage with and appreciate Calvin’s brilliant discussions of queer SF.

Overall, *Queering SF* is an invaluable contribution to both queer studies and SF studies. Calvin’s attentiveness to the diversity in queer SF representations, along with his insightful analysis, make it an essential read for anyone who is interested in the intersections of gender, sexuality, and speculative futurisms. This book is particularly suited for students, educators, and, in general, all enthusiasts of SF who seek to understand and appreciate the value of diverse voices within the genre. Calvin manages not only to showcase the importance of representation in SF but he also inspires his readers to envision and perhaps even create inclusive futures of their own. The anthology’s use of accessible language and provision of historical context to explore contemporary relevance establishes it as a foundational text for understanding the ever-evolving genre that is queer SF. ■

Books in Review

The Routledge Handbook of CoFuturisms

Taryne Jade Taylor, Isiah Lavender III, Grace L. Dillon, and Bodhisattva Chattopadhyay
New York and Oxon: Routledge, 2024, e-book, 686 pages, \$58.99
ISBN: 978-0-429-31782-8

Reviewed by **Jonathan P. Lewis**

Among the readers I have used for my Science Fiction course, two have stood out: Grace L. Dillon's *Walking the Clouds: An Anthology of Indigenous Science Fiction* (Arizona UP, 2012) and Ivor W. Hartmann's *AfroSF: Science Fiction by African Writers* (StoryTime, 2012). My students read and respond to short selections from writers in the Americas, Africa, Asia, Australia, New Zealand, and the Pacific Islands to get an introduction to Indigenous peoples' speculative fictions among a series of other novels including works by Nnedi Okorafor, Octavia E. Butler, Nalo Hopkinson, and Margaret Atwood. But even with these standout readers, I felt that I was not able to provide students with enough background information, especially for Latinx, Asian, and Middle Eastern SF and speculative fictions and their creators.

Thankfully, I can now augment my reading list with *The Routledge Handbook of CoFuturisms* as it offers greater contexts and a wider range of critical responses than are available even in the very fine anthologies already mentioned. *The Routledge Handbook of CoFuturisms* is simply magnificent, especially with

regards to Latinx and Middle Eastern works and writers not covered by either of the other collections. Quite simply, this is an essential new text for students and scholars working on global SF, and I recommend it strongly.

Among the strengths of the *Handbook* is the overall structure of the selections by geographies. There are four major sections: Indigenous, which includes works from the Americas and the greater Pacific; Latinx; Asian, Middle Eastern, and other; and African and African-American futurisms. Each section is introduced by scholars specializing in these areas, and then there are close readings of specific texts and creations within these geographic traditions in the following chapters.

The African and African-American section is perhaps most familiar to me personally, but the deftness with which the introductory materials lay out the key differences between Afro-Futurism and Africanfuturism is remarkable and very useful; for example, Mykaela Saunders' "Blackfella Futurism: Speculative Fiction Grounded in Grassroots Sovereignty" is an

Routledge Handbook of CoFuturism, reviewed, continued

exceptional chapter that examines global contexts in SF in the African Diaspora. The works highlighted in the Asian, Latinx, and Middle Eastern sections added to my TBR pile as well, which is an effect I treasure when coming across critical anthologies such as the Handbook of CoFuturisms. Here, one can look to Euan Auld and Casper Bruun Jensen's "Speculative Hong Kong: Silky Potentials of a Living Science Fiction" and Joy Sanchez-Taylor's "Indigenous and Western Sciences in Carlos Hernandez's *The Assimilated Cuban's Guide to Quantum Santeria*" for examples of the engagement with expressions of futurism across the globe.

Furthermore, the specific readings of works by filmmakers such as Boots Riley, novelists, poets, and other artists in the African and Africa-American section do a fantastic job of bringing attention to these creators and their works and putting them in context with the broader movements of the African Diaspora. Additionally, the key artistic differences and even tensions between people of African descent in the Americas and native Africans, and the ways that the critics highlight questions of definitions and enforced regulations on humanity itself in works by Nnedi Okorafor, for example, push the discourse on Africanfuturism to new heights.

Importantly, the *Handbook* centers each set of artists and creators within the geographic locations and the colonial and anti-colonial forces that have shaped these places and the movements within them. Centering the work on place and

history makes *Co-Futurisms* a worthy addition to the critical discussion of world movements in speculative and science fictions. Furthermore, in building on such collections as *Walking the Clouds* and *AfroSF*, Taylor, Lavender, Dillon, and Chattopadhyay have done a masterful job in assembling this collection of scholars and their works, demonstrating the vibrancy and wide ranges of expressions going on today throughout science fiction. ■

About the Contributors

Artist

Matthew Willie Garcia, a California native now based in Kansas City, MO. Garcia's work transcends traditional print media working in screen printing, mokuhanga, projection-mapping, animation, and large-scale installations. Inspired by a blend of science, science fiction, and their queer identity, Garcia explores these themes through color abstraction and nonrepresentational forms. Holding a B.F.A. from the Kansas City Art Institute and an M.F.A. from the University of Kansas, Garcia has earned acclaim regionally, notably exhibiting at the Nerman Contemporary Museum of Art, Des Moines Art Center and internationally in Japan and Spain. Garcia is currently serving as the 2024/2025 Grant Wood Fellow at the University of Iowa.

Authors

Dorisa Costello is Associate Professor at Jessup University where she teaches courses in British literature, world literature, and creative writing. She is a poet and storyteller, and her scholarly work centers on speculative fiction, women writers, and the intersections of race, gender, sexuality, and ability.

John J. Doherty holds a Masters in Arthurian Literature from the University of Wales, as well as a Masters in Library Science and a doctorate in Curriculum and Instruction. He is currently Head of Research and Instruction for the Cline

Library, Northern Arizona University.

His work has been published in *Extrapolation*, *Arthuriana*, and the *St. James Encyclopedia of Popular Culture*, as well as in professional library and curriculum journals. His current research is focused on libraries and librarians in popular culture, as well as the intersection of American horror with Irish noir.

Quentin R. Skrabec Jr. has spent half his career in engineering manufacturing and the other half in engineering and science education. His education includes a BS in Engineering from the University of Michigan, an MS in Engineering from Ohio State, and a Ph.D. in Manufacturing Management from the University of Toledo. As a practicing engineer and later as an educator, he has appeared on both PBS and the History Channel. His work has been used to provide expert opinions in the *Wall Street Journal*, *USA TODAY*, and *Business Investor Daily*. He has published over 100 articles and 25 books in science, engineering, and business history. In addition, he has published two business history encyclopedias: *The 100 Most Significant Events in American Business* (Won National Library Association Best Business Reference in 2015) and *The 100 Most Important American Financial Crises*. Doctor Skrabec is a full-time researcher in engineering futurism, Jules Verne, Victorian science, and metallurgical studies.



About the Contributors, continued

Katharine Schaab is an Associate Professor of Interdisciplinary Studies and Director of Undergraduate Studies at Kennesaw State University (GA). Dr. Schaab's work traverses the fields of American Studies, Cultural Studies, and Gender and Women's Studies. Her recent work has appeared in *The Journal of Popular Culture*, *Women's Studies*, *Critical Studies in Television*, and *Issues in Interdisciplinary Studies*. She can be contacted at kschaab@kennesaw.edu.

Book Reviewers

Carrie-Anna "Care" Wade is working towards their MFA at Florida Atlantic University and currently serves as the Head Fiction Editor at its literary magazine, *Swamp Ape Review*. Their writing and research focus on the queering of private spaces and the unique stories of everyday objects.

Jonathan Lewis is Associate Professor of English at Troy University where he teaches composition, American Literature, and Science Fiction and Fantasy. His work has been published in *Extrapolation*, *Foundation*, *Response*, and other outlets. His work in progress is entitled *Contemporary Science Fiction and The Many-Worlds Interpretation of Quantum Mechanics: Sacrifice and Narrative Coherence* and is forthcoming from Lexington Books.

Editors

A.D. Boynton II (or, Anthony Boynton) is a writer, educator, and artist from the Deep

South based in the Midwest. Boynton received his Ph.D. in English from the University of Kansas where he is currently a lecturer; his scholarly and creative work often attends to the areas of Afrofuturism, the sociology of American literature and media, and politics of representation in U.S. popular culture. They have curated the *4:44 Syllabus* and have work published in the *College Language Association Journal*, *South Atlantic Journal*, and a chapbook entitled *Witness*.

Barbara Jasny has a Ph.D. in molecular biology from Rockefeller University. After a period of conducting wet-lab research, she joined *Science* magazine, the weekly journal of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, in 1985. Until she retired in 2018, she solicited papers and evaluated research reports for publication in genetics, medicine, and computational social science. Barbara is author of more than 60 research papers, editorials, and overviews, and has been involved in communicating science in books, articles, posters, virtual presentations, CDs, and podcasts. She enjoys a variety of science fiction genres, including (but not limited to) fantasy, and loves gem and mineral collecting, folk music, and (her newest passion) her grandchildren.

Débora Madrid has a Ph.D. in Art, Literature and Cultural Studies from Universidad Autónoma de Madrid (Spain). Her research interests include science fiction cinema, particularly Spanish science-fiction films, posthuman

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and transhuman science fiction and Afrofuturism. In 2022, she published the book *Creaciones (In)humanas. Alteraciones y suplantaciones del ser humano en el cine español* [or, *(In)human Creations. Alterations and Impersonations of the Human Being in Spanish Cinema*]. She is currently teaching as Fine Arts Faculty at the Universidad de La Laguna (Spain).

Jerry (Rafiki) Jenkins is Professor of English at Palomar College and a lecturer in the English and Comparative Literature Department at San Diego State University. His research focuses on Black speculative fiction and film, with an emphasis on horror and science fiction, and he is the author of *The Paradox of Blackness in African American Vampire Fiction* (Ohio State UP, 2019) and the forthcoming *Anti-Blackness and Human Monstrosity in Black American Horror Fiction* (Ohio State UP, 2024). Rafiki also co-edited, with Martin Japtok, *Authentic Blackness/Real Blackness: Essays on the Meaning of Blackness in Literature and Culture* (Peter Lang, 2011) and *Human Contradictions in Octavia E. Butler's Work* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2020). When he is not writing, Rafiki enjoys being with family, breaking people off in "bones" (i.e., the game of dominoes), and listening to old school R&B, funk, reggae, hip hop, and rock.

Sayan Chattopadhyay is a Doctoral Researcher and Faculty of English at Adamas University, India. He researches upon the changing perspectives of

Postmodern concepts, focusing upon the "assumed" politicized Science Fiction of the 20th and the 21st Centuries, globally. His interest within the field spans from Retro-Futurism to Postanimalism and beyond. His books, research articles on the sub-genres of Sci-Fi, his Sci-Fi short stories, media interviews, and other publications are widely and openly available on the internet for anyone to explore.

*Along with **John Doherty**, who authored his piece before joining the team, we welcome three new editors.*

Kristine Larsen (Ph.D. in Physics, University of Connecticut) is CSU Distinguished Professor in Earth and Space Sciences at Central Connecticut State University. Her teaching and research focus on the intersections between science and society, including Gender and Science; pseudoscience, misconceptions, and science illiteracy; science and popular culture (especially in the works of J.R.R. Tolkien); and the history of science. She is the author of *Stephen Hawking: A Biography* (Greenwood, 2005), *Cosmology 101* (Greenwood, 2007), *The Women Who Popularized Geology in the 19th Century* (Springer, 2017), *Particle Panic!* (Springer, 2019), *Science, Technology and Magic in The Witcher: A Medievalist Spin on Modern Monsters* (McFarland, 2023), and *The Sun We Share: Our Star in Popular Media and Science* (McFarland, 2024).

About the Contributors, continued

Gabriel Burrow is a Doctoral Researcher at Birkbeck, University of London, focusing on literary modelling in 21st-century science fiction. His research interests include critical utopias, alternate histories, game design, and the relationship between Sci-Fi and the tech sector. His work has been published in *SF Foundation* and *SFRA Review*. Alongside academia, he is Research Lead for creative agency TEAM LEWIS, working on everything from renewables and microgrids to space law and AI.

Carla Morttiz holds a Ph.D. in English from UNAM, with a research focus on posthumanism, transhumanism and cyberpunk. She has pursued additional postgraduate studies at Utrecht University in the Netherlands and has taught at various universities. Her work has been featured in international conferences, including *New Perspectives on Humanity from the Preponderant Relationship with Technology* (University of Oxford), *Reflections on Power and Popular Culture* (University of Wrocław, Poland), and *Russian Literature in the World Context* (Dostoyevsky Fund). In addition to her academic work, she has carried out specialised translations in diverse fields such as psychoanalysis and medicine. She also works as an editor for several academic publishing houses—bringing intellectual curiosity and linguistic precision to everything she does. ■