

MESSENGERS FROM THE STARS
ON SCIENCE FICTION AND FANTASY



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Messengers from the Stars: On Science Fiction and Fantasy

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Twilight Road – Thomas Örn Karlsson

EDITORIAL

GUEST EDITORS: Danièle André & Cristophe Becker

For this 2019 *Messengers from the Stars* issue, the focus will be on how lies and “alternative facts” – as coined by Counselor to President Donald Trump Kellyanne Conway – can be both the basis for some to overthrow governments or remain in power, and for others a way to protect a society that would be torn by war or disaster if truth was to come out. Thus, the interest is in seeing how lies and alternative facts are used to deprive people of their power to decide for themselves for good or bad – the question of lifting the burden of moral condemnation on cannibalism is, for instance, central to Richard Fleischer’s *Soylent Green* (1973) and leads us to wonder whether or not falsification can ever be justified. In our societies, in which lies in some forms or others are part and parcel of our daily lives, the

question of truth and facts is to be questioned and we can wonder to what extent they could jeopardize our contemporary so-called democracies.

The papers here gathered study the tools used by fabricators and falsifiers in order to twist reality and minimize the truth (propaganda, political manipulation, storytelling and information warfare) as well as the effect an unmitigated resort to lies has on social structures. Thus, Ciarán Kavanagh shows how an author can imagine a narrative so complex (in the different levels of the diegesis) that it manipulates and tricks its readership without ever giving a final explanation.

In his analysis, Peter Kosanovich tackles the issue of the use by the media and history of propaganda to show how it alters the perception the people may have of historical events or of society. Jessica Ruth Austin also focuses on propaganda but with a view of questioning the assertion that there may really be good reasons for lying to the people and whether that can ever be justified regardless of the consequences. Lies are also at the core of Rebecca Lynne Fullan's article. It shows how those in power remain so by manipulating history, and how, by silencing the minorities, they enable violence, misunderstanding and fear to dominate.

Rano Ringo and Jasmine Sharma underline how technological and social experiments conducted on poor people under false promises aim at not only making them become their own guards and torturers, but also at disempowering them. In their study Dorothea Boshoff and Deirdre C. Byrne show how fake news and propaganda are the tools used to disempower minorities, create an atmosphere of fear, subjugation and violence to silence opposition and enable a systemic oppression to persist.

Finally, Martin Simonson offers a story that ponders upon the need for human beings to get connected to the past. He explores the crave to understand and fathom anthropological data in order to be able to get a glimpse of life in foregone years and somehow relive it in order to be connected to those who were there before, whose fragile presence still lingers on with a godlike aura.

MONOGRAPH SECTION





Eyes in the Snow – Thomas Örn Karlsson

Gaze into the Abyme: Navigating the Unnarrated in *Ubik*

Ciarán Kavanagh

University College Cork

Abstract | Due to the potentially endless convolutions of an unstable pseudoreality, the plot of Philip K. Dick's 1969 novel *Ubik* has traditionally been read as irresolvable. Critical focus has, therefore, been centred on *Ubik*'s resistance to "bourgeois" modes of reading, casting the *mise en abyme* conjured by its ontological play as essentially unnavigable. While vast parts of *Ubik*'s world are indeed unnarrated or unreliably narrated, thereby terminally complicating any attempt to completely resolve the plot, this study argues that we are by no means completely lost in the novel's paradoxes. Situating this hypodiegesis against others in Dick's *oeuvre*, this article first seeks to correct a certain myopia in relation to *Ubik*'s plot, a correction which will allow a more nuanced consideration of the nature of the *half-life* which its deceased characters inhabit. Intertwined with this reading is a consideration of *Ubik*'s critical heritage, and the reasons why other critics may have missed potentially vital clues as to the *half-life*'s true nature.

Keywords | Philip K. Dick; Science Fiction; *Ubik*; postmodernism; criticism.



Resumo | Devido às potencialmente infinitas convoluções de uma “pseudorealidade”, o enredo do romance de 1969 de Philip K. Dick, *Ubik*, tem tradicionalmente sido lido como insolucionável. O foco da crítica tem-se, portanto, centrado na resistência de *Ubik* aos modos “burgueses” de leitura, lançando o *mise en abyme*, conjurado pela sua conjugação ontológica como algo essencialmente impossível de navegar. Embora grandes partes do mundo de *Ubik* sejam, de facto, não-narradas ou narradas de forma não confiável, consequentemente complicando de forma terminal qualquer tentativa de resolver o enredo, este estudo argumenta que não temos de estar, de todo, perdidos nos paradoxos do romance. Situando esta hipodiegeese em contraste com outras obras de Dick, este artigo tenta, em primeiro lugar, corrigir uma certa miopia em relação ao enredo de *Ubik*, uma correcção que permitirá uma consideração mais diferenciada da natureza da *meia-vida* que as suas personagens falecidas habitam. Interligada com esta leitura encontra-se uma consideração da herança crítica de *Ubik*, e as razões pelas quais outros críticos possam ter desconsiderado as pistas potencialmente vitais em relação à verdadeira natureza da *meia-vida*.

Palavras-Chave | Philip K. Dick; Ficção Científica; *Ubik*; pós-modernismo; crítica.



Introduction

Philip K. Dick’s 1969 novel *Ubik* has traditionally been interpreted as uninterpretable – or, at least, as resisting certain modes of interpretation, alternatingly characterised as bourgeois (Huntington, Fitting), rational (Lem), traditional (Fitting), and so on. The aspect of *Ubik* which resists interpretation is the *mise en abyme* conjured by its Russian-doll diegeses, which, scholars maintain, makes any final resolutions of the actual plot impossible. The second section of the novel, in particular, is almost entirely cut-off from the primary diegesis by an ontological veil that neither reader nor characters appear able to pierce. This sunken diegesis is created by a “cold-pac” technology which prolongs the consciousness of the almost dead through cryogenesis, allowing limited communication with the outside world and causing the consciousness of the deceased to exist in a dream-like mental plane. Following an explosion, the second half of *Ubik* appears to take place wholly within a cold-pac powered hypodiegesis, though, as is standard with Dick, both readers and characters learn this quite a bit after the initial reality switch.

Critics of *Ubik* traditionally characterise the ontic confusion therein created as unnavigable, and focus their interpretive powers on describing this puzzle rather than attempting to solve it, maintaining that any prolonged exploration of *Ubik*'s ontic haze will lead, eventually, to an epistemological cul-de-sac. Kim Stanley Robinson claims that "the constructive principle in *Ubik* is this: for every explanation one can construct for the events of the novel, there will be at least one event that confounds that explanation, making it impossible and thus inoperative" (95). Stanislaw Lem encourages us to shelve "pedantic" objections and instead "inquire rather after the overall meaning of the work" (59). Peter Fitting similarly suggests that "there is no satisfactory single interpretation of *Ubik*", a frustration, he contends, which causes *Ubik* to act as "a mirror which reflects the reader's look, forcing him out of his familiar reading habits while drawing his attention to the functioning of the novel" (51). Other critics see *Ubik*'s irresolvable plot as a weakness. Darko Suvin, the father of SF theory, explains the conflicting details and narrative difficulty as a result of "a narrative irresponsibility reminiscent of the rabbits-from-the-hat carelessness associated with rankest Van Vogt" ("Artifice as Refuge" 19). His final judgement of the novel is "a heroic failure" (20). George Turner concurs, and describes the book as a pack of conflicting absurdities (qtd. in Lem 60). Andrew Butler, in his unpublished PhD thesis, entertains the idea that the plot convolutions "are simply the result of his mindlessly applying A. E. van Vogt's "eight hundred word rule", as suggested by Suvin, but eventually attributes an intention, rather than haphazardness, to Dick's frequent violations of continuity (153). Thus, even when critics disagree on how the contradictory nature of the plot is read, there is a strong general agreement that its plot is indeed irresolvable.

This article will not fully break with this critical consensus; however, it will argue that we are by no means as adrift in the hypodiegeses of the cold-pac as scholars have generally contended. While it appears impossible to figure out how a character or characters were put into cold-pac following the Luna explosion, there are, in fact, many clues as to the controlling consciousness of the projected world, which by no means appears to be Jory, the character which the narrative appears to blame and which critics have largely accepted. This paper will ultimately argue that *Ubik*'s hypodiegesis, encountered after the explosion on the Luna base, is either completely or mostly the mental product of Glen Runciter. Furthermore, the characters within this fantasy are either complete figments of Runciter's imagination or their existence in

this mental plane is being “focalised” through his consciousness, filtered through his perceptions in a manner that is literally and literarily akin to narrative focalisation. By this reading, the plot of the hypodiegesis can be understood as an ego-driven fantasy designed to reaffirm Runciter’s self-importance, legacy and, ultimately, to act as a coping mechanism which allows him to avoid dealing with the fact that he has died. This understanding of *Ubik*’s plot will also be shown to illuminate wider themes of Dick’s, particularly his representation of literary and mental space, and his exploration of postmodern metafiction. Lastly, it will be argued that *Ubik*’s narratological puzzles may be missed by critics not simply due to the complexity of those puzzles, but due to a sometimes patronising characterisation of the author.

The Surface

Ubik’s first section and primary diegesis is primarily told through the perspectives of Joe Chip and his aged employer Glen Runciter. Runciter Associates employs what the novel calls inertials, or anti-psi, people with the natural ability to negate the psionic powers – generally telepathy, telekineticism, and divination – of supra-normal humans, the latter group employed by Ray Hollis. Joe himself is not an anti-psi, but a technician trained in measuring psionic and anti-psionic fields. The first quarter of the novel is mostly centred on the enigma of Pat Conley, a new recruit for Runciter Associates. Pat’s talent, completely unique, it seems, to the world of *Ubik*, allows her to rewind time in order to change the past, thereby resulting in a new present. The second mystery of this portion of the novel concerns the simultaneous disappearance of a number of Ray Hollis’ top agents, and the offering of a huge contract to Runciter Associates by an interplanetary financier, Stanton Mick. In terms of pinning down the “correct” plot, critics have traditionally seen Pat as a red herring, as it does not appear that she is necessarily connected to the events of the half-life world.

These developments lead to what is presented as Stanton Mick’s lunar base, wherein Runciter, Pat and Joe, along with a number of Runciter’s top inertials, are ambushed by a “self-destruct humanoid bomb” in the guise of Mick. The second part of the novel, the post-Luna narrative, sees the employees of Runciter Associates waking up, battered but alive, with the exception of Runciter himself – or so it seems. This section is nearly entirely seen through the eyes of Chip. Everything which occurs

after the bomb blast, hereafter termed the post-Luna narrative, takes place in “half-life”, in a mental simulation created by a character or characters placed in the cold-pac technology. This, however, is a fact that is kept hidden from both reader and characters for some time. It is instead Pat Conley's mysterious power which is blamed for the strange, degenerating world conceived after the blast, which causes foodstuffs to decay, objects to revert to their technological predecessors, and the wider world to slowly regress towards 1939.

The discourse of this portion of the novel sees the surviving employees escape from Luna with the body of Glen Runciter, curiously unhindered, to the Beloved Brethren Moratorium in Zürich, where they hope to put him into cold-pac and thereby contact him for further orders. Cold-pac allows communication with the deceased through a telephone-like apparatus, a technology currently sustaining Runciter's wife Ella. Runciter's brain activity, unusually, has completely ceased, so this plan fails. By this point, the characters have become aware that something about the world they have woken up in is different. From the beginning of the post-Luna narrative, the Runciter employees, led by Joe, become explorers of the ontic haze of the hypodiegesis. Eventually, they realise that they haven't woken up in their own reality, and must therefore analyse the world they have found themselves in to determine its rules, the reason behind its degeneration, and why they have become stuck there. Like critics of the novel, they get lost in assumptions, possibilities and plot-holes, an experience which most of them do not survive, succumbing to an extreme enervation which completely desiccates their bodies. After some time, a number of the characters conclude that it is they, not Runciter, who have died in the blast, and their struggles in the hypodiegesis are the result of a malignant force attacking their cold-pac rescued consciousnesses. This force is identified as Jory, a half-lifer child who creates a mental simulation for other half-lifers to inhabit, where he can then feed on their remaining life-force. Jory, they learn, can be kept at bay with the titular *Ubik*, a portable reality stabiliser that comes in the form of a spray can. At least, this is the explanation offered to them by what appears to be either virtual or divine manifestations of Glen and Ella Runciter. Digging a bit deeper, however, reveals a far different narrative, one explicitly pointed at by *Ubik*'s epilogue which reveals that Glen Runciter is part of the death world too, and that a full re-evaluation of the plot as it is understood it is necessary.

In the final chapter of *Ubik*, the narrative appears to shift up a diegetic level,

once again seen through the point of view of Glen Runciter, who, following his “rescuing” of Joe, is seeking to communicate with Ella in the Beloved Brethren Moratorium. On attempting to tip an attendant, he finds that his coins have metamorphosed to bear the likeness of the ostensibly dead Joe, a sign which has previously signalled to Joe, whose money bore the likeness of Runciter, that Joe was dead and Runciter alive. Runciter’s world, which he had portrayed as the stable primary diegesis, is therefore revealed to be a hypodiegesis, to be some other manner of simulation or virtuality, and *Ubik* ends on a classically Dickian “This was just the beginning” (224). For some readers, this will be a confirmation rather than a revelation – there are hints throughout the post-Luna narrative that Runciter is not the deus-ex-machina character which he, somewhat ludicrously, portrays himself to be. It also reveals that what the reader believed to be the hypodiegesis is actually a hypohypodiegesis, ontologically located a level either below or adjacent to that occupied by Runciter (from here, the term hypohypodiegesis will be avoided for ease of reading as context should make it more than clear which level of *Ubik*’s *mise en abyme* is being discussed). Narratologically, however, it is important to note that the novel appears to have at least three ontological levels, and that Runciter’s level following the Luna-explosion, which sees him back in the Beloved Brethren Moratorium, is potentially a level above that of the cold-pac reality in which most of the action is taking place, though it clearly is not the primary diegesis.

Herein lies the puzzle pointed to by Robinson: if Runciter did not get the inertials off-planet and into cold-pac, and if the inertials did not get Runciter off-planet and into cold-pac, then where do the hypodiegeses come from? If all of the second portion of the novel is in a degraded diegesis, what information therein gained can we trust, and what is spurious? *Ubik* is, no doubt, full of conflicting information – signal and noise are, in areas, either indistinguishable or inverted. While Robinson, Lem and Fitting (among others) do not, as Suvin and Turner, explain the ostensible contradictions of the novel as a mistake of Dick’s, they do construe the plot not so much as intricate, but as impossible. This article, however, contends that significant headway can be made when *Ubik*’s convolutions are neither written off as a result of Dick’s ostensible haphazardness, nor as a deliberate breaking of literary and generic convention. Robinson has warned of the dangers of this approach, claiming that “every reader of *Ubik* becomes engaged, just like its characters, in the struggle to create a coherent explanation for the events of the narrative, and like the characters

every reader is eventually defeated” (97). The following section, then, is an unusual but here necessary sight in academic criticism: a plot sketch. Aspects of my proposed reading of the novel’s plot will necessarily involve presumptions, assumptions and dead-ends. There is, likewise, an attempt to trace not only of the novel’s events, but to inscribe *Ubik*’s ontology; the fabrications in *Ubik*, mainly being the cold-pac technology and the psionic abilities, are only partially understood by both characters and, therefore, by readers. There is a fog over areas of *Ubik*’s ontological boundary, obfuscating the exact potentials and possibilities of the novel’s SF inventions, what Suvin terms the text’s “nova” (Metamorphoses 71). Nevertheless, *Ubik* is replete with clues which can help navigate these waters – data which has been elsewhere dismissed but may, as contended here, help to solve the puzzle of *Ubik*’s *mise en abyme*.

The Abyss

Following the Luna explosion, both characters and readers receive either limited or zero information from the primary diegesis, bar the fact that some or all of the characters are dead. Some of the information therein encountered, about characters and *Ubik*’s projected world, is likely to be true. However, given the unreliable ontology of the hypodiegesis, it appears that other information is untrue or warped, a distinction that must be made on a case by case basis. Our first core assumption is that the post-Luna novel is entirely set within a hypodiegesis which is being constructed by the mind or minds of certain character(s). This assumption necessitates that we account for this or these characters’ placement in cold-pac, but it does not mean that we have to place them in the Beloved Brethren Moratorium in Zürich. This is the main stumbling point in trying to bring some stability to *Ubik*, as it seems unlikely that any of Runciter’ Associates bodies could have made it to the Zürich Moratorium; their assassination on Luna appears to have been organised for its specific distance from civil authority on Earth, a tactic which, Runciter notes, other anti-psi organisations have fallen prey to (85). It is also unlikely that the assassins would allow the resuscitation of the characters into cold-pac, as they could be consulted on the means of their death (though this is not a tactic which the text actually discusses). Nevertheless, we know that one or some of the characters are indeed in cold-pac, even though the events that lead to them being put there are

absent. Because this section is entirely unnarrated, and there does not appear to be any information in the hypodiegesis which could help us understand the events, we are essentially confined to this manner of speculation. It is entirely possible that some rescue mission was conducted, or something went wrong with the bomb and some inertials did escape. It should also be considered that it is a distinct possibility that the bodies are in the control of the killers, and not, therefore, in the Beloved Brethren Moratorium. If this is true, then the cold-pac consciousnesses of Ella and Jory are not part of the hypodiegesis, but are simply the creations or projections of its controlling mind or minds.

A reading of the novel wherein Jory and Ella are not the semi-cosmic forces they are presented as in the hypodiegesis is stronger if we place the containing cold-pac away from Zürich; however, it is by no means dependant on it. Another frequently noted “plot-hole” is that Van Vogelsang has been instructed to place Ella in an isolation chamber, so she should not be able to contact the inertials. The reader does not, however, need to fill in every detail of the primary diegesis in order to understand aspects of the hypodiegesis. By the evidence of the hypodiegesis alone, it appears very unlikely that Jory or Ella are connected to that reality’s alternating degeneration and regeneration, or at least in the manner that their post-Luna characters claim. The only stable knowledge of the cold-pac technology comes from the pre-Luna explosion, and primarily from Runciter’s visit to Ella. From the knowledge therein gained, we can yet impose several limits on the ontological boundary of the hypodiegesis. The first is that Runciter’s “visitations” in the hypodiegesis are clearly not possible as his communication with Ella in the first half of the novel did not allow him to place himself within her mental world, nor to provide her with any virtual object such as *Ubik*. In fact, it only barely allows telephone communication (and this is in an era where “vidphones” are the standard). It is possible to extrapolate a less stable conclusion from this, being that there is potentially no way for the outside world to interfere with the cold-pac hypodiegeses; the only potential interference seen is Van Vogelsang increasing the “protophasonic flow” in order to raise the volume of a half-lifer’s voice, and his offer to isolate Ella in a specially built chamber which could stop her consciousness from mingling with those around her.

It likewise makes no sense for the Moratorium to keep a creature such as the post-Luna Jory among the other half-lifers, as the longer their “patients” stay half-alive, the more money they make. Post-Luna Ella’s assertion that the Moratorium are

paid handsomely to keep individuals like Jory seems very suspect – it seems, in fact, like a lazy plot patch for lazier plot-hole, a suspicion which will be addressed later in this article. Additionally, the reader knows through Van Vogelsang that the mingling of consciousnesses occurs very gradually, that it affects those with waning “protophasonic” energy more significantly, but, likewise, that it is enjoyed by half-lifers as a respite from an otherwise lonely existence. This information is given in an attempt to both abate Runciter’s anger at Jory’s “invasion” of Ella’s consciousness, and to convince him to keep Ella in the normal half-life system, even when the more expensive isolation chamber would obviously benefit Van Vogelsang. This seems, then, to be information which the reader can trust. Pre-Luna Ella also raises no alarms about the presence of half-lifers such as Jory. She tells Runciter that half-life is a sort of amusing dream, though some of her dreams are not about her: “A lot of my dreams aren’t about me at all. Sometimes I’m a man and sometimes a little boy; sometimes I’m an old fat woman with varicose veins... and I’m in places I’ve never seen, doing things that make no sense” (17). This suggests that the cold-pac consciousness drifts into the dreams of others, sharing the protagonist-role of that dream (“I’m a man ... I’m in places”).

The final comparison from this section of *Ubik* is between pre- and post-Luna Jory. Post-Luna Jory bears a similarity only in name to his pre-Luna manifestation. In the pre-Luna narrative, Jory appears as a fairly benign figure who, though intruding on Ella’s conversation with Runciter, simply wants conversation with the outside world. He is a villain only to the mind of Glen Runciter, and Van Vogelsang illustrates his “invasions” of her consciousness as both unavoidable and unintentional, comparing them to radios with a weak and a strong signal. Ella also appears to be yearning, at this point, for true death, so the threat of Jory to her seems nil. His cartoon-villain post-Luna “manifestation”, wherein he also reveals that he goes by the names Matt and Bill, the psionic twins encountered by several of the inertials in their dreams in the primary diegesis, makes little sense. His ostensible reversion of the hypodiegesis to a time in which he never existed makes less sense. As the anthropomorphised entropic villain, Jory appears to simply be the last in a series of wild guesses, as likely as the previously assumed Pat Conley, or the briefly considered Sammy Mundo. Post-Luna Runciter, incidentally, claims that Mundo survived but is in a hospital several miles from the Moratorium, even though there is a Mundo character in the cold-pac hypodiegesis since the beginning – another floating and ill-

conceived datum which characterises the lack of authorial control over the hypodiegesis.

The post-Luna section is, then, riddled with plot-holes. It is also, and crucially, however, subject to a diegetic authorial force, or forces, to whom we may attribute these failings – a fabulation which readers of Dick should be well used to encountering. The cold-pac hypodiegeses are mental constructs of the type Dick frequently writes, wherein a character's perceptions become either their own reality or are imposed as a shared reality. Examples of this include Manfred's world in *Martian Time Slip*, the group simulation in *Maze of Death*, the shared hallucinations of *The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch*, the KR-3 parallel universe of *Flow My Tears*, *The Policeman Said*, and, most useful in decoding *Ubik*, the shared mental hypodiegeses of *Eye in the Sky*. Each of these works, among others, features a character with the ability to "author" or "reauthor" aspects of the narrative. Pat Conley, for example, has this ability in *Ubik*, as her talent allows her to place the narrative path that the reader has already read sous rature. It also appears that the hypodiegesis is subject to an authorial type of control, which we can turn elsewhere in Dick's oeuvre to understand.

In *Eye in the Sky* (1957), a tour group composed of eight individuals fall into a particle accelerator, causing their unconscious consciousnesses to mix and form a type of shared reality, under the focalisation and control, however, of one member of the party. The first to control the narrative, Arthur Silvester, a racist, religious fundamentalist, transforms the ontology of the hypodiegesis into his vision of the world. Sins, therefore, are immediately punished by stinging insects, miracles become a worthwhile business investment, and the wider universe is revealed to be geocentric. More insidiously, Silvester's perception also changes the characters, slowly warping, for example, the one African-American of the party, Bill Laws, into a racist caricature, causing him to hunch his shoulders and speak in exaggerated and grossly caricaturised vernacular. Silvester's narrative control also turns the politically liberal female of the group into a misshapen satyr. Silvester later loses control over the hypodiegesis, and its focalisation passes on to another member of the party. At the novel's close, four members of the party of eight have assumed control of the hypodiegesis, each one revealing how their biases and mental life affect their perspective of reality. It is not clear, at the novel's close, as to whether the final diegesis is the primary or another version of the hypodiegesis. *Eye in the Sky* bears not only a thematic similarity, then, to *Ubik*, but a potential structural parity as well.

Just as in *Ubik*, the characters of *Eye in the Sky* have to play ontic detectives in order to figure out who is controlling their shared narrative. They look for clues in the ontological fabric of the world in order to figure out the controlling personality, which leads them to realise that they're living in Silvester's fantasy. Readers of *Ubik* can employ the same technique to figure out the focalising personality of the half-life world. The clues therein gathered, which will here be elaborated at some length, will reveal that both readers and characters are, in fact, subject to the fantasies of Glen Runciter.

Of the most significant features of *Ubik*'s cold-pac hypodiegesis is that it regresses to 1939, a time period experienced only by him. Similarly, the "final" villain is a child who annoyed Runciter the previous day, who only he has personally met, and the saviour is, alternately, Runciter or his wife. The literal centre of this micro-universe is Runciter's home town. The means by which the nature of the hypodiegesis is explained is, again, through interests of Runciter: advertisements, the writing of which he considers "proof of the marvellous multifacetedness of his mind" (40); and coins, which he appears to collect (57). Characters which only he has encountered populate this world, and in forms closer to caricature than reality. Van Vogelsang, for example, is "remembered" by Joe with dislike in the post-Luna narrative (83), though, as a technician, Joe is unlikely to have ever encountered him as Runciter does not visit his wife often (16), and he would also be unlikely to bring Joe along for the trip. Furthermore, over the course of the hypodiegesis, Van Vogelsang's politeness is increasingly exaggerated into whimpering servility. It appears that this is how Glen Runciter perceived him, especially following his inability to help Ella. In Runciter's briefly illustrated hypodiegesis, wherein he believes himself to be alive and contacting the inertials through cold-pac, Van Vogelsang is described, by the narrative, as "scuttle[ing] into the consultation lounge, cringing like a medieval toady," and as an "eager-to-please creature" (198). No such focalisation-approved descriptions are seen in the pre-Luna narrative.

Joe, the protagonist of the hypodiegesis, undergoes a somewhat similar personality change, becoming a near hysterical worshiper of Glen Runciter. When the narrative is focalised through the pre-Luna Joe, no such veneration is visible – in fact, one of the few observations Joe makes about Runciter concerns the tastelessness of his office décor (58). In the hypodiegesis, Joe takes motherly care of Runciter's body, describes him as "the most life-loving, full-living man I ever met" (89), refuses a

“tranquilizing gum” because “Runciter never took a tranquilizer in his life,” and nonsensically claims that “[Runciter] give his life to save ours” (90). When Vogelsang is unable to resuscitate Runciter’s consciousness, Joe bursts out: “They’re only going to try for fifteen minutes to bring back a man greater than all of us put together” (91). When Joe finally gets to his apartment, he finds not only that it has regressed in time, but that it is now decorated with pictures of Glen Runciter (143). The hypodiegesis is, in fact, completely suffused with Runciter – a legacy, perhaps, of the ego he cultivated in life. Without the knowledge that the narrative has sunken a diegetic level, Joe’s outbursts appear as the humorous exaggerations of the bereaved. With the later knowledge of the nature of the hypodiegesis, however, the humour here is redoubled. The entire hypodiegesis now appears as a classic ego fantasy in SF trappings: what will people say about me when I’m dead? Who will come to my funeral? Could my business possibly survive without me? Will reality survive my absence? Neatly summarised, it appears that the hypodiegesis either contains but one character from the primary diegesis, or is, in the manner of *Eye in the Sky*, a composite reality being focalised through a single character’s perspective of the world – that character, of course, being Glen Runciter.

What, however, does this reading of the novel reveal about the primary diegesis? Essentially, not very much – the primary diegesis remains almost entirely removed from the reader. The wider fate of the employees of Runciter Associates is, thus, unknown, and the reader does not exactly know whether the inertials are hooked up together or if everything is in the mind of Runciter alone. Runciter himself appears easily confused by the difference between people and the symbols representing them. When he is told that S. Dole Melipone has fallen of the map, he asks “did you look on the floor? Behind the map?” (8). This is, perhaps, an early warning as to the foolishness of mistaking people for their graphic representations. Still, without knowing how one or some of Runciter Associates became hooked up to cold-pac, we cannot pin down a concrete narrative. It is quite possible, much like how the hypodiegesis in *Eye in the Sky* becomes focalised through different characters, that the final epilogue is the beginning of Joe Chip’s narrative control, signalled by the coin bearing his likeness. It is also possible that there are multiple real characters in the cold-pac hypodiegesis, and that they will simply live through these types of narrative simulations while waiting to fully die, much like the stranded voyagers of *A Maze of Death* (1970). This would seem to fit with Ella’s description of the cold-pac

experience. This explanation can also incorporate a reading which sees Ella and Jory as real parts of the hypodiegesis – here simply playing roles in a simulated “adventure” like those described by Ella.

When the post-Luna narrative is understood as a fantasy of Glen Runciter’s, which is perhaps happening to him rather than being controlled by him, then the various plot-holes which characterise the hypodiegeses make sense. Of course, just because a reading makes sense does not mean that it is true. It is possible to look elsewhere in Dick’s works and easily find impossible worlds whose entropic descent into absurdity appears to be their *modus operandi*. Critics have not been wrong to approach *Ubik*’s world in this manner – even if some stability can be provided to the hypodiegesis, its radical instability is the dominating aspect of the narrative, even if only on the level of discourse. This analysis is not, then, being presented as a solution to *Ubik* – the novel’s core experience is in its intractability, in forcing such paranoiac readings from its critics. The great isolation imposed by *Ubik*’s unnarrated space makes conspiracy theorists of its readers, forcing us to look for the profound in the mundane, trapping us in a hermeneutic circle. Since the framing narrative is unnarrated, it is quite possible to find “proof” for a huge variety of readings. This is, perhaps, closer to the novel’s truth – not the fact that there may be a way out of the maze, but the presiding experience of being lost in that maze.

Ultimately, however, a reading wherein the post-Luna narrative is a virtual or mental reality focalised through the perceptions, memories and personality of Glen Runciter strikes as the most likely. It is not possible to confirm whether the other characters are complete figments of Runciter’s imagination – on the same ontological level, then, as post-Luna Van Vogelsang – or whether their consciousness are here involved in Runciter’s fantasy and therefore focalised through his “authorial” wishes, as is the case in *Eye in the Sky* (in which characters also appear to die, though later return once the controlling consciousness of the world changes). There is, perhaps, more evidence to suggest an ontology similar to the latter, or to at least suggest that Joe has also made it to cold-pac. Not only does Joe appear as a Joe Chip coin in Runciter’s level of the hypodiegesis, but Runciter also mirrors Joe’s behaviour in the hypodiegesis, treating him with far greater reverence than he did in the primary diegesis. For example, when Runciter believes himself to have survived the explosion, he mourns the loss of his best people, “especially Joe Chip... where am I going to find a tester like Joe?... I can’t find a tester like Joe, he said to himself. The

fact of the matter is that Runciter Associates is finished” (199). This suggests a truly eternal *mise en abyme*, wherein Joe is imagining a world wherein Runciter is imagining a world wherein, ...potentially *ad infinitum* (here, it is the critics that have a sinking feeling that this is only the beginning). Again, because so much of *Ubik*'s space is unnarrated, we are confined to speculating as to the ontological rules and particulars of the framing diegesis, though it certainly appears as if there is some contestation over the reins of the narrative, as in *Eye in the Sky*.

Is there Half-Life After Death?

While there is not enough space to offer a more in-depth analysis of *Ubik*'s themes as unveiled by this reading of the hypodiegesis, this article will draw to a close by outlining a number of interpretive routes that may be differently illuminated with an understanding of Runciter as its “author”. The eponymous *Ubik* may certainly be treated differently when read as a product of Runciter's mind – as the product, specifically, of a diegetic “author”. Like all of Dick's pocket universes, Runciter's is fundamentally unstable. Enough is known about the cold-pac technology to explain this – Runciter, being of advanced age, has a limited amount “protophasonic activity” remaining; he can only last so long in cold-pac before succumbing to true death. But in his own narrative he is still alive, and he needs, therefore, a narrative explanation for his inability to maintain/inhabit a functioning world, which is where Pat Conley, Sammy Mundo and Jory come in. *Ubik*, the great defeater of demon children and universal entropy is, essentially, a plot band-aid, more *deus-ex-machina* than actual *deus*. The world created by Runciter is not, after all, very sophisticated - as pointed out, continuously, by his characters. When he attempts to send divine messages, he gets caught pretending to be a video recording on TV. When he attempts to descend godlike into the hypodiegesis, his theories of its degeneration are immediately proven wrong and he is expelled from the world: ““You don't know the answers,” Joe realises, ‘That's the problem. You made up answers; you had to invent them to explain your presence here. All your presences here, your so-called manifestations’” (195).

Ubik is, then, exactly what it appears to be to a sceptical reader: a literal manifestation of an SF plot bandage, a “phlebotinum” which can resolve the story (if not the reader's questions). Described in a stampede of meaningless SF jargon, *Ubik*

is a parody of SF miracle science:

a portable negative ionizer, with a self-contained, high-voltage, low-amp unit powered by a peak-gain helium battery of 25kv. The negative ions are given a counterclockwise spin by a radically biased acceleration chamber, which creates a centripetal tendency to them so that they cohere rather than dissipate. A negative ion field diminishes the velocity of anti-protophasons and, under the principle of parity, no longer can unite with protophasons radiated (...). (Dick 220-221)

Joe is such a sceptical reader. His puzzled reaction to this is to point out to the Ubik saleswoman that saying “negative ions” is a redundancy: “all ions are negative” (221).

More than anything, this reading of *Ubik* underlines its exploration of both mental space and narrative space. The mental space represented by the hypodiegesis makes little sense when Jory is understood as its projecting personality – nothing of the world suggests the perspective of a child. When the projected world is understood as tied to Runciter’s experiences and perception, however, it gains greatly in depth. Significant new ground is opened up for Marxist analyses, for example, when the wealthy capitalist is understood as the controlling mind of the hypodiegesis. Runciter’s fantasy world confirms his suspicions that his workers’ lives revolve around him: Joe’s hysterical adoration, the general helplessness of his workforce without him, the stable centre of the Universe being revealed as his birthplace, and so on. Additionally, treating the hypodiegesis as an internal narrative, whose articulation, exploration and experience is highly literary in nature, also highlights Dick’s particular expression of postmodern metafiction. Dick’s exploration of ontological issues almost always involves a concurrent exploration of literary ontologies. Early in the hypodiegesis, Joe and the inertials find themselves in a sort of reader’s roundtable, totting up clues and attempting to make sense of the world they have found themselves in. When its author later descends himself to make sense of the matter, his explanations are disproven by his own characters-cum-readers, as if Dick was predicting how his readers would one day attempt to make sense of *Ubik*.

Progress in Pandemonium: Tricky Dick and the Critics (Postscript?)

The elephant in the room, waiting patiently to be noticed, is, of course, Philip K. Dick himself. This manner of academic discussion poses an interesting dilemma

for considerations of the ontology of the *real text*, one which will by no means be resolved in these pages (if ever). Is the correct reading that which is democratic, meritocratic, or “authorcratic”? In relation to the latter, though Dick has discussed *Ubik* widely in letters and interviews, he has never said anything which necessarily confirms or contradicts the above reading. This, of course, proves nothing. Arguably, this article’s reading of *Ubik* does not necessarily require itself to be Dick’s intended plot; with such a vast part of the novel left unnarrated, there is a latent invitation to the reader to make sense of it in their preferred manner. If specificity was the aim, then endlessly complicated degenerating pseudo-realities would not be the game. Nevertheless, this article has courted the idea of an intended reading through juxtaposing *Ubik* against other texts in Dick’s oeuvre, and through the utilisation of general knowledge on the author. As an interpretive move, both tactics incorporate some conception of authorial intention in order to stabilise or navigate the vast, unknown narrative space which characterises *Ubik*. This is, of course, unavoidable in any manner of criticism, though the ideology behind such interpretive techniques always appears closer to the surface when a reading contradicts established academic opinion, even when the established opinion, as it has been shown in this article, also utilises a perception of the author to disambiguate the radically ambiguous. That being said, the analysis outlined above is, in the writer’s opinion, less dependent on a specific conception of Dick than those which seek to quarantine the novel’s complexities through the assumption that they arise from, alternatingly, a character deficit, looming deadline or similar biographical detail.

Questions as to the author’s intended meaning are less demanding when arguing in favour of a thematic or ideological reading of a work. In an essay on class relations in *Ubik*, for example, it doesn’t quite matter whether Dick intended for the novel to be read as a criticism of late-stage capitalism. Some verb of a passive or ventriloquising nature can be assigned: he can be said to be “channelling”, “relaying”, “lashing out”, or, a constant in Dick criticism, “prophesying”. It should be noted that the use of such terminology can be troubling, undermining Dick’s intellectual agency, and characterising him instead as an author whose genius is unwitting or unvarnished. All such titles and praise tend to bemean, of course, as compliments; however, innocently intended or otherwise, one should be aware of the dangers of such terminology. Prophets, after all, are mouthpieces for an intellect or wisdom that is not their own, and literary works from the margins of literary culture have a tendency to

be so praised, an extension, perhaps, of the colonising nature/culture dichotomy imposed by conceptions of “high” and “low” culture, of which postmodernism is seen as belonging to the former, and SF to the latter.

While it is easy to form a significant-seeming constellation when one picks all the points, and perhaps unfair to do so, it is necessary to here demonstrate the type of discourse being marked out, which Dick scholars should recognise as a constant across Dick criticism. Suvin is openly scathing of Dick’s method, and bemoans his “serious lack of narrative control in *Ubik*”, and further describing his twists and turns as “narrative irresponsibility” (“Artifice as Refuge” 19). Lem characterises the author as lost in the labyrinths of his own worlds, and, in fact, as in need of critical assistance of he is to escape the label of “mystic” (62). Istvan Csicsery-Ronay describes his writings as “always on the verge of chaos, with rhythms of thought and prose unpredictable and unschooled” (vi), and characterises the author himself as an unwitting or accidental genius: “Dick demonstrated that SF had become able to express those visions without paying obeisance to philosophy or literature. Somehow, literature and philosophy came to him” (v). While each writer is also of Dick’s most admiring, the means by which this admiration is expressed has perhaps absorbed a suppressed elitism from the then mainstream literary culture.

The constancy by which Dick is so described runs the risk of patronising him as an author and occluding serious attention. While we, of course, treat an author by the lessons we have learned in their wider fiction, we should also be aware of the potential biases and pitfalls established by earlier critical scholarship – biases which were perhaps unavoidable at a time when mainstream academic culture was so hostile to genre fiction. We should be particularly careful with patronising language, however, especially given the endless conversations conducted, at one point, around Dick’s mental health, and the danger of invoking cultural stereotypes as to the type of author or thinker that a neuroatypical person can or should be (though I am by no means directing that criticism at the above quoted academics). Fredric Jameson’s dubious use of “schizophrenic” to describe narratives of the kind Dick writes is perhaps a contributing factor to such discussions. Of course, this article’s manner of characterising Dick is itself a result of no small amount of scholarship on his work and life. This is not an argument for treating Dick’s narratives as one treats Nabokov’s, nor a claim for a universal genius across his vast oeuvre. This is simply an observation of critical norms which may limit the ways in which one can read,

analyse and enjoy Dick's work.



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Twisted Forest – Thomas Örn Karlsson

Effective Alternatives: How *V for Vendetta* Provides a Relatable, Presentist Examination of Propaganda

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Abstract | “Effective Alternatives: How *V for Vendetta* Provides a Relatable, Presentist Examination of Propaganda” takes the time to look at the subgenres of alternate histories and dystopic futures as tools to analyze the effects of propaganda and counterpropaganda. Using both the graphic novel by Alan Moore and subsequent film adaptation of *V for Vendetta* as a case study, the essay articulates that the genres of alternate history and dystopia are inherently “presentist”, providing criticism of the era the works were made. Moore wrote his acclaimed graphic novel at the height of Margaret Thatcher’s tenure as Prime Minister of Great Britain and used it as a warning for the potential devastating affects her policies could have. The 2005 film adaptation, directed by James McTeigue, took the same criticisms but placed them in a more contemporary setting, amended for a Western world following the September 11 terrorist attacks in the United States. The essay spends time discussing types of propaganda, notably “agitative” and “integrative” propaganda as defined by Garth Jowett and Victoria O’Donnell. Ultimately, it makes the claim that works like *V for Vendetta* are both useful and relatable when addressing issues at a multi-generational disconnect, such as World War II to now.

Keywords | Propaganda; Moore; allohistorical; dystopia; vendetta.



Resumo | Este ensaio examina os subgêneros de histórias alternativas e futuros distópicos como ferramentas para analisar os efeitos da propaganda e da contrapropaganda. Partindo tanto da novela gráfica de Alan Moore, quanto da adaptação cinematográfica subsequente de *V for Vendetta* como um caso de estudo, este texto defende que os gêneros de história alternativa e distopia são inerentemente “presentistas”, criticando a era em que as obras foram criadas. Moore escreveu este aclamado livro no auge do mandato de Margaret Thatcher como primeira-ministra da Grã-Bretanha, usando-o como alerta para os possíveis efeitos devastadores que poderiam resultar da sua ação política. A adaptação para o cinema de 2005, dirigida por James McTeigue, abraçou as mesmas críticas, mas colocou-as num cenário mais contemporâneo, adaptando-as a um mundo ocidental posterior aos ataques terroristas de 11 de Setembro nos Estados Unidos. O ensaio discorre sobre tipos de propaganda, nomeadamente do tipo “agitative” e “integrative”, tal como definidas por Garth Jowett e Victoria O’Donnell. Em última análise, afirma-se que obras como o filme *V for Vendetta* são tão úteis como relacionáveis quando tratam de questões de desconexão entre várias gerações, desde a Segunda Guerra Mundial até hoje.

Palavras-Chave | Propaganda; Moore; “allohistory”; distopia; vendetta.



Effectiveness is heralded as one of the most significant aspects of media, and it holds the same weight in narrative storytelling. If a newspaper article, television news broadcast, radio broadcast, or any other method of journalism is not successful in delivering the message effectively, then what is the point? The same can be said for narrative stories, in whatever medium they are consumed: a book generally, though not always, needs to have a protagonist the reader can empathize or sympathize with; if a television program airs episodes out of order, which has been known to happen, then viewers will find it more difficult to follow the narrative; and films, for the most part, require at least minimal world-building for the audience to even care about the setting. Take for example Orson Welles’ live radio broadcast of *The War of the Worlds* in 1938, in which his method of conveying the story included not only the original story written by H. G. Wells, but also intercut the story with live “Breaking News” bulletins meant to simulate a presence in reality for the story. Though the scale of panic is disputed, it is not denied that Welles’ method of delivery for the story did

have an impact on a certain portion of the populace within the United States at the time. Unconventional, to say the least, but highly effective.

For these same reasons, it is important for both propaganda and censorship to be effective when employed on a society; if ineffective, then there is again no point. Jacques Ellul lays this out explicitly: “Propaganda is made, first of all, because of a will to action, for the purpose of effectively arming policy and giving irresistible power to its decisions. Whoever handles this instrument can be concerned solely with effectiveness.... Ineffective propaganda is no propaganda” (Ellul x). The most glaring example of this is Adolf Hitler in Nazi Germany, and how his charisma and means of delivery for his manifesto – not his book, but rather his declarations and general rhetoric – completely overtook the people of Germany between World Wars I and II. While it is paramount to study and observe trends like this throughout history – and history is, after all, the greatest teacher – this may not be the most proficient means of studying these effects. Once an event has happened, it is easy for many people, years later, to simply pass it off as a “one-and-done”, or that it will never happen again because “we have learned from our mistakes”. I make this claim as an American, and based on personal observations of people believing the Holocaust can never happen again, while simultaneously ignoring clear evidence of a growing Neo-Nazi/White Supremacist faction within the United States as recently as 2017; and I support this with a 2018 *Washington Post* study that lays claim to the idea that many millennials are apparently unaware of the full extent of the Holocaust in WWII (Zauzmer). Here I will assert that alternate histories and dystopian fictions such as *V for Vendetta* are an effective, more easily-relatable, and highly receptive method of reviewing moments and eras of history, while simultaneously warning against similar occurrences in the future.

In his article “Why Do We Ask ‘What If?’ Reflections on the Function of Alternate History,” Gavriel Rosenfeld argues “that writers and scholars have long produced ‘allohistorical narratives’ out of fundamentally presentist motives” (90). By this, he claims that while the setting of the narrative may occur in the past, future, or alternative version thereof, the primary function of alternate histories always represents a criticism of the “present”, when the work was penned; he specifically makes reference to literature to articulate his point, though the same principles are applicable to other mediums as well. Rosenfeld acknowledges that, outside of anthologies and short-stories primarily focusing on time-travel, alternate histories did

not come into prominence, nor gain popularity, until the 1960s with the rise of postmodernism (92). He makes this parallel by observing the primary function of postmodernism as that of self-critique, almost ironic self-deprecation, allowing for alternate histories to make a claim for presentism and thus evaluate political and societal trends around the world.

An example of this criticism of the present is the graphic novel *V for Vendetta*, written by Alan Moore and illustrated by David Lloyd, and its 2005 film adaptation. Often, though not always, alternate histories use the past as a reflection of the present, as is the case in Amazon's streaming adaptation of *The Man in the High Castle* (2015-). *V for Vendetta* differentiates itself by using the present as a warning for the future; since it is set in a totalitarian near-dystopic Great Britain. Moore began his initial run of *V for Vendetta* in 1982, still at the height of Margaret Thatcher's tenure as Prime Minister, and used this as a warning to all Britons: if the nation were to continue down the path set by Thatcher, they would undoubtedly become so jaded and passive, as to ultimately lose the cognizance to realize they had already lost individual freedoms. This is mirrored by the cinematic iteration of the film, directed by James McTeigue, who chose to modernize the setting; the graphic novel was written in the 1980s but is set in 1997, while the film was released in 2005 but is set in 2019. This alteration allows for the examination of trends Moore scrutinized in the 1980s, but also more contemporary issues set in a post-9/11 world. By approaching these themes and subject matter this way, *V for Vendetta* capitalizes on people's inherent knowledge and understanding of their own present and offers a stark contrast to dramatically emphasize the point to be made.

Because *V for Vendetta* presents itself as a critique of both the present and a cautioning of the potential future, it retains the ability to more broadly encapsulate and address the subtleties of propaganda and its effects over time. To do this, *V for Vendetta* uses a combination of melodrama and hyper-theatricality to demonstrate propaganda and counterpropaganda in its totalitarian future. In his book *Propaganda: The Formation of Men's Attitudes*, Jacques Ellul states "In propaganda we find techniques of psychological influence combined with techniques of organization and the envelopment of people with the intention of sparking action" (xiii), and additionally that "Propaganda is a manipulation of psychological symbols having goals of which the *listener is not conscious*" (xi). Ellul elaborates that it is common for a social or economic elite to be in positions of power over propaganda (xvii).

Christina Stojanova simplifies this definition as, “the deliberate, systematic attempt to shape perceptions, manipulate cognitions, and direct behaviour to achieve a response that furthers the desired intent of the propagandist”. While all of this is observable in *V for Vendetta*, Garth Jowett and Victoria O’Donnell provide a breakdown of propaganda to better enable the ability to identify its multiple forms: agitative propaganda and integrative propaganda.

Jowett and O’Donnell define agitative propaganda as “attempting to rouse an audience to certain ends and usually resulting in significant change” (8). More simply, agitative propaganda is the most visible form that generally catches the attention of a populace. This form can best be observed during flashbacks in *V for Vendetta*, that examine life before and during the rise of the totalitarian state, a time the film and graphic novel cynically refer to as The Reclamation. Ludmiła Gruszewska Blaim lays out a three-act structure for the rise of Norsefire, the neo-fascist party that controls the government in *V for Vendetta*. In her breakdown of the first act, she describes the party leader as Hitler-like, and that his plan for seizing power comes “through the politics of fear” (Blaim 81). V, the story’s central anti-hero, is a survivor of The Reclamation; having been imprisoned and experimented on by Norsefire, he now seeks the destruction of the party and every individual involved in his torture. V supports Blaim as he recounts the conclusion to The Reclamation: “... the end result, the true genius of the plan was the *fear*. Fear became the ultimate tool of this government, and through it, our politician was ultimately appointed to the newly created position of High Chancellor. The rest, as they say, is history” (*V for Vendetta* 1:35:14). Blaim cites David Altheide to expand on this concept:

Citizen beliefs often are constructed and then manipulated by those who seek to benefit. Fear does not just happen; it is socially constructed and managed by political actors to promote their own goals. The goal of such manipulators might be money, but more often than not it is political power and symbolic dominance: getting one’s view of the world accepted opens the door to many other programs and activities to implement this view. (Blaim 81)

In the film adaptation this idea is demonstrated through a memory that visually retells the events of The Reclamation, whilst accompanied by a voice-over narration courtesy of V. The party leader, High Chancellor Adam Sutler (née Adam Susan in the graphic novel) – portrayed by the late John Hurt – is shown at rallies, military

parades proceeding in front of him, “preaching from the pulpit”, framed by immense banners that display the party logo emblazoned on the front: a bold and fiery red crucifix-like symbol plastered on the darkest of black backdrops. His exaggerated motions and shrill delivery of speeches are redolent of Hitler’s own, set on the backdrop of a military parade, flanked by flags and banners depicting Third Reich symbols.

This representation of Sutler reflects him as a visual symbol of power. Placed on a raised pulpit, he speaks from above everyone else, invoking a God-like quality to him, that he and his words are more than human. The banners and flags that flank him evoke an emotional resonance, that he speaks directly for the party, and that the message is larger than he. This is further emphasized later in the film, every other time Sutler is shown it is through a massive television screen, directing his inner circle. He is re-emphasizing his own power to the people who already support him fully, creating a feeling that he is larger-than-life.

Blaim’s Hitler-like comparison of High Chancellor Adam Sutler is alluded to and supported by Rosenfeld who, in his chronicling of trends within the genre of alternate histories, observes a renewed interest in Nazi-related themes and settings during the 1980s. He notes that in the United States – but also observed in Great Britain – with the apparent fall of communism and end of the Cold War, the focus of allohistorical narratives became highly self-congratulatory, shifting away from the duplicitous Soviet Union in favor of the notorious Nazis (Rosenfeld 95). Beginning its initial run in 1982, however, *V for Vendetta* was released during a transition time, not embracing the “self-congratulation” attitude of the 1980s, but rather reminiscent of the ‘self-critique’ identifiable from the 1970s. Rosenfeld describes this era:

Thanks to the traumas of the Vietnam war, the upheavals of the Civil Rights movements, the scandal of Watergate, the onset of economic recession, and the escalation of cold war tensions between the U.S. and the Soviet Union, a sense of national decline produced a pessimistic mood that transformed the function of the alternate histories from one of triumphalistic self-congratulation to self-critique. (95)

While Rosenfeld’s argument focuses primarily on the United States – he makes the claim the genre of alternate history was either born or popularized in the United States, simply due to the nation’s involvement in “events that have left their mark on

the world of today and that continue to resonate in the present” (94) – these same trends function in consort with 1970s and 80s Great Britain.

David Lloyd, artist of the *V for Vendetta* graphic novel, explains “The whole philosophy behind the story was partly stimulated because ... this was during the Margaret Thatcher era. It was an ultra-conservative government, which was imposing quite heavy political rules on everyone” (“Freedom! Forever!: Making *V for Vendetta*”). This is further supported by Paul Levitz, former DC Comics President, who described the British comic writers of the time as “very politicized” (“Freedom! Forever!: Making *V for Vendetta*”). These elements of critique are rampant throughout the graphic novel, as Alan Moore drew every possible comparison between Margaret Thatcher and Adolf Hitler while he crafted the character of High Chancellor Susan. This grounded his critique and his grievances in the 1980s, vocalizing everything Moore felt was wrong with the society of the time.

Eric J. Evans aids in this comparison of Thatcher and Hitler. He broadly summarizes Thatcherism to include: “individual rights; private enterprise within a free market; firm, perhaps authoritarian, leadership; low levels of personal taxation; union- and vested-interest-bashing; [and] simple patriotism” (Evans 3). Matthew Grimley supports these claims, but additionally makes special mention of the policies and laws Thatcher attempted to enact on the basis of “morality”. Grimley specifically identifies Section 28 of the 1988 Local Government Act and certain clauses of the 1988 Education Reform Act. In conjunction, these acts required the teaching of Christianity in schools, as well as the outright ban of promoting homosexuality in schools (Grimley 79). These sentiments are replicated and dramatized at the beginning of the filmic version of *V for Vendetta*, when television host, and prominent party member, Lewis Prothero proclaims: “No one escapes Judgement. You think He’s not up there? ... I was there, I saw it all. Immigrants, Muslims, homosexuals, terrorists. Disease-ridden degenerates. They had to go. Strength through unity. Unity through faith. I’m a God-fearing Englishman and I’m goddamn proud of it” (*V for Vendetta* 3:36)! The detest and resentment verbalized towards homosexuality is apparent from his delivery of the words; every syllable is emphasized, more-so than that of the other undesirables mentioned, to give explicit prejudice of the disgust Prothero reserves for “non-traditional” romantic relationships.

This comparison is further cemented during a flashback – laid-out like a conspiracy theory – told by V to a pair of police detectives. In his standard

theatricality, V does this while in disguise and in front of a national memorial meant to commemorate the lives of those lost in a terrorist attack. “Our story begins ... with a young, up-and-coming politician. He’s a deeply religious man and a member of the Conservative party. He’s completely single-minded and has no regard for the political process” (*V for Vendetta* 1:32:57). Grimley provides the connection to Thatcher who, “felt that it was precisely *because* Britain was becoming more secular that it was necessary for the government to keep religious values alive” (87). Additionally, this disregard for the political process is shared, as numerous accounts describe Thatcher as lacking the subtle capabilities to address international diplomacy. Moore uses this as a presentist assessment, highly critical of Thatcher’s active policies as a slippery-slope towards Nazism. He also utilizes these visuals and comparisons to drive home the representation of agitative propaganda as vehemently virulent, while functioning to emphasize one specific ideology: non-Christian degenerates and immigrants are ruining London. McTeigue mirrors this in his modern reinterpretation, repurposing Moore’s criticisms to include a variety of issues relevant to the world post-9/11, specifically that of Islamophobia demonstrated around the globe.

Among *V for Vendetta*’s fictionalized manifestations of the Nazi party, those shown as a part of Sutler’s inner circle, is the prior-discussed Lewis Prothero, also known as “The Voice of Fate”. A prominent party member, and most public propagandist for Norsefire, Prothero loosely equates to Joseph Goebbels, the Reich’s Minister of Propaganda. A well-spoken man who harbors deep-seated prejudices, Prothero addresses the nation of Britain nightly, spouting hateful, disdainful rhetoric that makes well-known the stances of the party. He is the party’s mouthpiece. This is highlighted throughout the film, while additionally connecting Prothero to V’s grand conspiracy.

Prothero’s tirades, though exaggerated and fervent, represent what Jowett and O’Donnell refer to as integrative propaganda, “attempting to render an audience passive, accepting, and nonchallenging (Szanto, 1978)” (Jowett and O’Donnell 8). They elaborate on this by making claim the goal of integrative propaganda, while not as flashy or outspoken as agitative propaganda, is to maintain the goals and positions held by the party or propagandist. Blaim describes this effect in *V for Vendetta*, the rendering of an audience nonchallenging, as a delusion of normality. She insists that the totalitarian regime is “so deceptively intense that some of the citizens become careless” (Blaim 82). Blaim surmises:

For the life of an average Londoner of 2019 seems relatively normal. Glued to their TV-screens, the well-fed inhabitants of the fascist England work in nice looking offices, live in cosy, neat houses and rest in friendly pubs over their pints of beer. Londoners, who are regularly shown in the chorus-like scenes, may look apathetic or slightly depressed but not particularly anxious or terrorized.... Only in the background, one can hear a threatening, well-modulated male Voice which scolds, urges, and warns that the moment is critical. (82)

The Voice being that of Lewis Prothero, whose words do not fall on the deaf, nor do they incite panic, but rather continue to reinforce the established reality the people of London have grown accustomed to.

Blaim explains that after Norsefire won the election, effectively granting High Chancellor Sutler unchecked official political control of the country, and after the undesirables were removed from England, the regime itself all but disappeared. Gone were those who were labeled the source of all previous problems and those who were blamed for the apparent despair of the rest of the world; gone with them – mostly – were the Fingermen, Moore's reimagining of the Gestapo, whose job was no longer as openly blatant as removing undesirables from society. With that "problem" nullified, the need for flashy, extravagant military parades was no more. The party scaled-back its ostentatious agitative propaganda, but maintained the constant, ever-present, and largely unnoticed integrative propaganda to sing its praises.

This more muted approach with which Norsefire conducted its business led to complacency in the people of England; any potential dissent is long gone, causing no uproar for people to discuss in their everyday lives. Blaim points to a scene at the beginning of the film, in which Evey Hammond – the heroine who comes to be associated with V – breaks the nationwide curfew to go on a dinner date with her boss Gordon Deitrich. This decision by Evey illuminates that she fears the consequences of skipping a dinner with her boss more than the curfew, warping the perspective of her priorities under the totalitarian state. The dangers of the party no longer feel immediate, but instead a relic of the past. It is not until the Fingermen find and attempt to rape her, before being saved by V, that Evey realizes the extent of her mistake.

To further this idea, Blaim takes the time to discuss the larger situation in which Deitrich finds himself. Gordon Deitrich is a closeted gay man – portrayed by

Stephen Fry, an openly gay man – and the host and star of a late-night comedy talk-show. At one point in the film, Evey is staying with him to avoid capture by the police; after living with V for some time, Evey is considered dangerous and faces an arrest warrant for terrorism. Deitrich arrives home to show Evey the episode taped for that night, one he is very proud of, “We threw out the censor-approved script and shot a new one that I wrote this morning” (*V for Vendetta* 1:05:19). The new script is a spoof variety segment to mock the High Chancellor, jokingly insinuating that beneath the Guy Fawkes¹ mask V has become associated with, he is in fact the doppelgänger of Sutler himself. After the hilarity of the segment, Deitrich is on the phone with either the show’s producers or network executives – it is not made explicitly clear in the film – to whom he is defending the segment. He claims it is “the most-watched show on the air”, and the worst consequence he foresees is a fine (*V for Vendetta* 1:07:44). Later that night the Fingermen show up to apprehend Deitrich, “black-bagging” him. This literally and symbolically makes him disappear, erasing the person Deitrich used to be by covering his head with a black bag when arrested. When Evey inquires the fate of Deitrich, V explains that if the television segment had been the worst of it he might have just been arrested or fined, but when the controversial artwork hidden in his basement revealed his homosexuality and “when they found a Quran in his house, they had him executed” (*V for Vendetta* 1:21:54). Deitrich’s delusion of normality veiled the truth of the party that his comedic mockery of a segment would open the door for search, seizure, and judgment to be brought against him. This would suggest that the implementation of integrative propaganda by the totalitarian state was successful in maintaining a constant barrage of information, lulling the citizens into such complacency, ultimately dooming Deitrich.

While the consequences are easily observed in the behavior and downfall of Deitrich, the film also takes the time to establish the media is state controlled. After V rescues Evey from the Fingermen attempting to rape her at the beginning of the film, the pair go to a rooftop overlooking the city. They witness, again through V’s trademark theatricality, the Old Bailey statue of Lady Justice explode in grand fashion, accompanied by fireworks and a recording of Tchaikovsky’s *1812 Overture*,

¹ Guy Fawkes was one of the known conspirators of the Gunpowder Plot of 1605, a failed attempt to assassinate King James I by blowing up the House of Lords on November the Fifth. Though the attack was planned by Robert Catesby, Guy Fawkes has become the most notorious of the conspirators due to his discovery with the explosives. Fawkes was put in charge of the explosives due to his previous military experience. Throughout the film, V dons a stylized mask in his image: stark white, a curled smile, and iconic black moustache and soul patch.

which V conducts through pantomime. The target, Lady Justice, traditionally symbolizes justice and the fairness of law. To V, however, it represents the failure of the English government that has bastardized and corrupted the entire legal system, removing all individual liberties; it also marks V's personal feelings toward the so-called "symbol of justice", that failed him personally.

The news broadcast the next morning makes mention of the explosion of the Old Bailey, but showcases what Jowett and O'Donnell describe as black propaganda, that which is "credited to a false source, and it spreads lies, fabrications, and deceptions" (9). The broadcast states that the Old Bailey had been commissioned to be demolished for some time, and the demolition crew decided to "give the old girl a grand, albeit improvised send-off" (*V for Vendetta* 13:30). When the chief executive of the BTN – the film's iteration of the BBC – is questioned about whether or not people would believe the spin on the Old Bailey demolition, he responds, "Well, why not? This is the BTN. Our job is to report the news, not fabricate it. That's the government's job" (*V for Vendetta* 13:17). The irony of this explanation is that this chief executive, Roger Dascombe, is also the official head of the propaganda for Norsefire. The scene immediately prior to the news broadcast shows High Chancellor Sutler discussing the explosion with his inner circle, including Dascombe. When asked what the media's approach to the explosion would be, Dascombe conveys, "We're calling it an 'emergency demolition'. We have spin coverage on the network and throughout the InterLink, and several experts have been lined up to testify against the Bailey's structural integrity" (*V for Vendetta* 11:32). This supports the black propaganda lie, falsely crediting the "grand" demolition to an actual crew. It also ties back to what Ellul articulated, that propaganda is often controlled and manipulated by a social or economic elite.

Both the graphic novel and the film provide broad depictions of propaganda, and its overall effectiveness being portrayed through a dystopic alternate history. They also examine various uses of counterpropaganda within this dystopian future. Jowett and O'Donnell articulate that, as is the case in *V for Vendetta*, "Where the media is completely controlled, counterpropaganda can be found underground" (227). The argument can be made that the media in London 2019 is not completely controlled, otherwise Deitrich would not have been able to air his controversial variety show segment to begin with; but precisely because the consequences were so severe, resulting in his death, it can be determined that the media is fully controlled,

and Deitrich's "outburst" was merely an anomaly. The comedy show itself was a control mechanism, allowing Deitrich and the audience to believe he was being divergent. In reality, outside of the one episode, the series as a whole was deemed acceptable to the boundaries laid out by the media bubble. Jowett and O'Donnell further their definition:

Underground counterpropaganda may take as many media forms as the propaganda itself. There are obvious forms of underground propaganda, such as handbills and graffiti, but other important forms of counterpropaganda are theater, literature, television, films, and poetry. (227)

In this regard, Deitrich's manipulation of his own platform to be used against the state and the party is an example of counterpropaganda, simply with negative consequences. Other instances highlighting many of these techniques are shown throughout the film, met with varying degrees of success.

The most prominent example of such counterpropaganda manifests in the continuation of the BTN news broadcast scene, when Dascombe approves the spin for the "emergency demolition" of the Old Bailey. As the scene progresses, V assumes control of the BTN broadcast tower in an act of terrorism, utilizing the station's emergency broadcast frequency to play a pre-recorded message of himself ridiculing the government and calling to action the disillusioned and careless citizens. The backdrop of his recording is official but drab, budgeted to resemble the morning announcement video from a high school. V sits center frame, set against a blood-red curtain, making use of the same color-scheme branded to represent Norsefire – black and red. A small "V TV" floats in the bottom right corner, a malicious mockery of the official BTN network. At the end of his address, V implores the people of London to join him one year from then, on November the Fifth², in front of the Houses of Parliament, to make the government remember they serve the people, and not the other way around. In this way, not only is V spreading his message on a massive scale, but he is also utilizing the same means of distribution as the government he so hates; repurposing their own broadcast against them. More significantly, because the

² V plans to blow up the Houses of Parliament on November the Fifth. His selection of this date is in homage of the Gunpowder Plot of 1605. The original plot was organized by Robert Catesby as an attempt to end the persecution of Roman Catholics under the English government. V uses this as a justification to end similar persecution under the totalitarian regime of Norsefire. He believes the destruction of this building, as a symbol of law, will awaken the English populace from their passivity.

BTN is a state-run media platform, and shown to be the only network the citizens watch, they have previously had little reason to doubt the information and news being presented to them. This challenge by V hijacks the system to provide an ironic sense of validation; if the message is broadcast on official frequencies, it must, to a certain degree, be true.

Beyond this extended scene in BTN Tower, the film makes mention of other forms of counterpropaganda, all of which have been incited by V to some capacity. In the opening scenes of the film, when V rescues Evey, he cuts his anarchic “V” symbol enclosed in a circle across a street sign that displays the slogan of the party, “Strength through unity, unity through faith”. Here, he again uses the party’s own symbol against them, superimposing his declaration on top of theirs. Two short scenes in the final third of the film show a little girl; she has been shown throughout the film, always watching the BTN news broadcasts with her parents. The first instance of the girl shows her graffitiing V’s trademark symbol over a similar party slogan sign; she is interrupted by Evey before she can finish, leaving the “V” incomplete. The spray-paint the girl chose to use was red, subverting the same red used by the party. Later in the film, V has mailed replicas of his infamous Guy Fawkes mask and iconic black cloak and hat to every Londoner³. The people of London have taken to using these for numerous purposes, including a short clip that highlights a robbery being conducted by a man wearing the mask. The little girl wears her mask and black adornments to continue her graffiti work, this time adding an extra poetic quality to the act by doing so under the apparent guise, or in veneration of V and his message. She is caught by the Fingermen, however, and is shot trying to make her escape, causing an uproar in her neighborhood.

Though the narrative is conveyed to a heightened degree by V’s overdramatization and ostentatious theatricality, *V for Vendetta* still manages to provide a clear and extensive examination of multiple forms of propaganda, censorship, and counterpropaganda against state-controlled media. By presenting these themes in this way, Alan Moore and David Lloyd, and subsequently James McTeigue were able to convey discontent with the moment; they provided a presentist critique on governments, news media outlets, and disillusioned citizens.

³ V’s infamous Guy Fawkes mask has since become a 21st century symbol of protest and public demonstration. Notably, the “hacktivist” group Anonymous has adopted it as a preferred method of hiding the identities of its members. Anonymous is highly anti-establishment, drawing inspiration from and a kinship to V.

This presentist critique grounded the contentions to an identifiable and almost tangible reality, allowing peoples of the 21st century to see and understand these concepts in a setting and narrative more immediately adept and applicable to them. World War II and the historical figures involved it in, such as Adolf Hitler, appear to have attained an almost mythic status in history books. Stories of the war are so grand and epic that it almost seems unreal, particularly in 2018. World War II and the tragedies of the Holocaust now exists in a three-generation removal from the new present, too far to comprehend on a personal level. Through this strategy of alternate histories, and dystopian fiction, narratives like *V for Vendetta* are able to make the generational leap, bridge the gap of understanding, in a far more relatable manner.

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Lake of Despair – Thomas Örn Karlsson

Lies for the “Greater Good” – The Story of *Horizon Zero Dawn*

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Abstract | Since the advent of mass media, governments and academics have researched ways to manipulate information received by the general public. Reasons for this have ranged from propaganda to altruism, and debates have raged as to whether people have a ‘right’ to the truth and to the ethical implications of lying. This article investigates the way that lying for supposedly altruistic reasons is used in the narrative of the video game *Horizon Zero Dawn* (Guerrilla Games, 2017). *Horizon Zero Dawn* is the story of a young girl named Aloy who lives in a post-apocalyptic world in which humans were decimated by the robots they had created hundreds of years before. This article analyses the way in which, within the narrative, governments and corporations implemented their plan to ensure humanity’s survival, and their justifications to lie to the general public about the lengths this plan would go to. This article examines how their justification for lying usurped the robots’ claim to inherit the Earth and the ethics behind it.

Keywords | video games; *Horizon Zero Dawn*; ethics; posthuman; propaganda; alternative facts.



Resumo | Desde o advento dos meios de comunicação em massa, os governos e os académicos têm investigado formas de manipular a informação recebida pelo público em geral. As razões destas investigações vão desde a propaganda até ao altruísmo, e os debates continuam sobre se as pessoas terão ou não “direito” à verdade e sobre as implicações éticas de mentir. Este artigo discorre sobre o modo como se usa a mentira por razões supostamente altruístas na narrativa do jogo de vídeo *Horizon Zero Dawn* (Guerrilla Games, 2017). *Horizon Zero Dawn* é a história de uma jovem rapariga chamada Aloy, que vive num mundo pós-apocalíptico, no qual os humanos foram dizimados por robôs que eles próprios criaram centenas de anos antes. Este artigo analisa a forma como, dentro da narrativa, governos e empresas implementaram o seu plano para assegurar a sobrevivência da humanidade e as suas justificações para mentir ao público em geral sobre o ponto a que estes planos chegariam. Este estudo explora ainda as formas como as suas justificações para mentir usurparam as reivindicações dos robôs para herdar a Terra, e a ética por detrás dessas mentiras.

Palavras-Chave | videojogos; *Horizon Zero Dawn*; ética; pós-humano; propaganda; factos alternativos.



Introduction

Horizon Zero Dawn (shortened to *Horizon*, from herein) is a role-playing video game released in 2017 by Guerrilla Games. The game was critically well received due to its graphics, storyline and open-world elements, and as of February 2018 has sold over 7 million copies (VGA247.com 2018). The story of *Horizon* is set in the 31st Century with gameplay focusing on a young girl named Aloy, a member of a tribe called the Nora. The world of *Horizon* is tribalistic with little technology or modern medicine though we find out very quickly that it was not always this way. Travelling through the narrative, the player discovers that in the years between 2031-2066 society had been technologically advanced and robots and automation had been widespread (horizonzerodawnwikia.com 2018a). The collapse of society was caused by a set of robots, manufactured by Faro Automated Solutions (FAS), which failed to respond to protocols, and thus began to serve itself. These robots became known as the “Faro Plague” and possessed the ability to convert biomatter into fuel, meaning that they could power themselves indefinitely. They began to strip the whole planet of its resources and over 15 months caused the extinction of all life on Earth before going into long term hibernation (Guerrilla Games, 2017).

What is intriguing about this story, which is also the basis for this article, is that the general public were not aware that the final 15 months of life on Earth were in

fact their last. The public were never aware that the governments and carefully selected scientists knew that the Faro Plague could not be stopped. The government were in fact planning for a re-introduction of humanity hundreds of years later rather than saving those currently alive. During the game's main questlines, the player discovers that Ted Faro (owner of FAS) had created the military robots that would become the Faro Plague. He created the robots with encryption protocols that could not be brute-forced and without a back door (a way for the original programmer to reset any malfunctions). Expert scientist, Elisabet Sobeck, realised that there was no way to shut the robots down before they extinguished life on Earth and instead initiated Project Zero Dawn. For Sobeck, all the resources should be mobilized to create GAIA, a massive computer system which had two major goals. GAIA would first code-break the Faro Swarm (this would take over 100 years after humans had gone extinct) and then terraform Earth back to a state where human life (and others) could be re-introduced (horizondawn.wikia.com 2018b). However, to buy time for the work on GAIA to be completed, a secondary military operation (Operation Enduring Victory) was implemented. The public were only told that they had to join the military to hold back the robots until Project Zero Dawn could be "completed". They were manipulated into thinking that Project Zero Dawn was many things, including a super weapon, and that there was indeed a chance for their survival (horizonzerodawn.wikia.com, 2018c).

This article analyses the way the government and corporations in the game manipulated the mass media using "alternative facts" to make sure that the public would not find out that they were going to die. This article looks at the ethical implications of lying for the "greater good", which in this instance was pretending that humanity would survive. In this sense, I will argue that lying in *Horizon* was unjustified and stopped people from being able to make their own choices when it came to how they wanted to die. It will be argued here that lying just to ensure humanity's survival was unethical and, in order to do so, I will follow humanist philosophy and postmodern theories.

Lies and Propaganda in *Horizon Zero Dawn*

The act of lying and its consequences has been debated by philosophers for centuries, with some deeming all lying as bad, some viewing white lies or half-truths

as acceptable, and others discussing lies for the “greater good”. Emmanuel Kant argued that lying is always wrong because “a lie always harms another, if not some other particular man, still it harms mankind generally, for it vitiates the source of the law itself” (Kant 281). Kant and other pre-modern scholars, such as Aquinas (1485), often see lying as an absolute. Bauer argued that even broken promises could be construed as lies in absolutist terms and thus morally wrong:

Any act that is strictly in accordance with one’s inclinations is also a violation of human autonomy (i.e. The freedom to act in accordance with the moral law), and for this reason such acts damage the dignity of the moral agent. (91)

Later scholars, however, argued that life is often more nuanced and having monolithic virtues is often unworkable, as Langton observes “it is an old dilemma: Having an ideal you want to live by, and an ideal you want to seek and preserve” (292).

In many scenarios lying can be argued as “justified” by utilitarians in particular. In the medical profession this has been debated in regards to patient care; most physicians use a “consequential method of reasoning rather than a principle-based method, professionals find situations in which telling the truth may not be in the best interest of those involved” (Everett 333). Psychological studies have investigated the concept of prosocial lying, whereby the lie is for someone else’s benefit, Lupoli, Jampol and Oveis (2017) comment on this phenomenon:

Prosocial lying is ethically ambiguous. On the one hand, lying violates the principle of honesty.... Yet, these lies differ in their intention from selfish lies, or those which are told to benefit oneself. (1028)

In the medical field, in particular, “alternative facts” in medical trials are not surrounded by the political rhetoric which could be considered as a form of lying, prosocial or otherwise. Mascherbauer (2017) notes how some clinical trials use “alternative facts” when it comes to how treatments work in different trials to test the results of small data sets. For Mascherbauer, the testing of “alternative facts” in medicine is not to do with lying, as drugs can have different outcomes in different circumstances so it is not pushing a political agenda; “These trials were testing ‘alternative facts’, and falsified previously established ‘facts’. So what is wrong about ‘alternative facts’ or the search for them? Nothing, after all” (223). However, in

political discourse this is often not the case and it has been argued that “alternative facts” represented in the media to disseminate certain ideologies to the public are “framed largely by appeals to emotion that are disconnected from the details of policy, and by the adherence to talking points that often ignore the facts” (Mann 573).

Studies have shown that when people are asked about their most important moral value, the most frequent response is honesty (Graham, Meindl, Koleva, Iyer, & Johnson 2015). As “alternative facts” as argued by Mann from political debates often ignore facts, it can be construed as dishonesty. This may explain why many dystopian films such as *Soylent Green* (Fleischer, 1973), *Children of Men* (Cuarón, 2006), *Blade Runner* (Scott, 1982) all have lies in the central narrative with governments or powerful corporations being the ones deceiving the public. For *Horizon* as well, lies and propaganda are central to the storyline.

Although definitions can vary, many scholars note that a component of democracy is a well-informed public: “if people are pervasively misinformed, chances are that societal decisions will be suboptimal” (Lewandowsky, Ecker & Cook 355). The first apparent way that FAS (in conjunction with global governments) makes sure that the public are not well informed in *Horizon* is by wilfully suppressing information that would be in the public interest; a PR employee at FAS notes that a video of the Faro Plague swarm converting dolphins into bio-fuel was problematic for them:

Our suppression team has scrubbed it from 43 networks, but it’s still propagating, so it’s only a matter of time before it goes viral. A prepared statement feels grossly insufficient. Any suggestions? This one’s a real stinker. (Guerrilla Games, 2017)

Lewandowsky, Ecker & Cook (2013) have argued that suppression of facts in the media has led to conspiratorial discourses. This causes an issue in that “the mere exposure to conspiratorial discourse, even if the conspiratorial claims are dismissed, makes people less likely to accept official information” (355). Although suppression of facts could be argued as not lying (in that it is not explicitly said) it can still be argued as deceitful and can be construed as acting in “bad faith”. Bauer argues that “acting in bad faith...is equivalent to perfidy, which I have defined as *a false invitation to enter into a condition of mutual trust, intentionally contrived and communicated by either a lie or another act of duplicity*” (78). In this sense, suppressing facts can then be defined as an act of duplicity and therefore a lie.

The second way in which lies propagate in the *Horizon* narrative is within the “alternative facts” released to the public. For Street, in discussing the Iraq War, ideology of reporting can create “alternative facts” in that we don’t see the media as “covering the war, but as being used to create support for the US government’s military strategy” (Street 45). In the case of the game, a datapoint by an unknown soldier produces a good illustration of what Street mentions:

Just Got Back: Just got back. Ho Chi Minh’s gone. Barely got out. Two-thirds of the brigade didn’t... And then the verts lift off, and we come under fire not from bots but a Vietnamese battery! CO called it friendly fire but that’s crap, they were just pissed because we were bugging out and they couldn’t. Oh my god. And now we’re back in the USA and the CO is calling it a “qualified success” because we delayed the bots by several days and time is what Zero Dawn needs. Said we’d have a new mission tomorrow. Oh my god. (Guerrilla Games, 2017)

These “alternative facts” as presented by Operation Enduring Victory can also be attributed to Bauer’s perspective on Newman’s theory of *aequivocatio*, in which statements put out by the military in *Horizon* state “some truth while realising that the hearer will likely draw an illogical or untrue conclusion” (Bauer 139). This is demonstrated in many datapoints the player can find throughout the game such as a press release to the public from Ted Faro:

I can promise you, can absolutely assure you, is that I am already devoting every possible resource towards reaching... a speedy conclusion to this issue. So when you hear the bad talk about us, against this company, in the days, maybe weeks to come... just bear in mind that we will get past this... that a day's coming when none of this will matter. (Guerrilla Games, 2017)

The player knows at this point in the narrative that Faro was aware that the Faro Plague swarm was unstoppable and would cause an extinction event. However, the way this press release is framed to the public means that they would come to the “untrue conclusion” that the swarm will be fixed; that is the reason it will not matter what people think of FAS and why “a day’s coming when none of this will matter” (Guerrilla Game, 2017). The interesting part of the *Horizon* narrative is that the player knows that these manipulations largely worked; humanity fought the Faro Plague to the very last man with many still believing that Project Zero Dawn would save them.

Still, this creates an interesting ethical issue: should humanity have been kept in the dark about the fact that they were all going to die?

The Right to Die with the Ones You Love

Now that we have looked at the ways in which the “alternative facts” told throughout the *Horizon* narrative were used to manipulate the populous, it is important to analyse the ethics of these manipulations, namely the “right to the truth”; whether the lies told were just or whether the world’s population in *Horizon* had the “right to the truth” no matter whether Project Zero Dawn worked or not.

Although the previous section of this article identified the manipulation of facts by the media and government agencies in *Horizon* as unethical, according to several different theorists, the “right to the truth” is considered differently to the ethics of lying in general. This is because for early philosophers the “right to the truth” was not considered a requirement to whether someone was being lied to. In medical scenarios, some professionals would argue that “the real issue is not whether the truth should be told but whether there is a way of telling it responsibly” (Everett 333). For Aristotle, Aquinas, Kant and other absolutists it was not worth considering whether people had a “right to the truth” and whether that made a lie worse because a lie was morally wrong no matter what. Kant went to the extreme when it came to the “Murderer At The Door” example:

If by telling a lie you have prevented murder, you have made yourself legally responsible for all the consequences; but if you have held rigorously to the truth, public justice can lay no hand on you, whatever the unforeseen consequences may be. (Kant 281)

As the quotation above expresses, Kant viewed a lie as morally wrong even if it meant that someone would be harmed by it. Later philosophers criticised this notion. For instance, Bauer notes that philosopher Constant criticised Kant and suggested “that the proper definition of a lie be a falsehood told to someone who has the right to the truth” (106). Bauer argued that Constant was correct to argue that in the “Murderer At The Door” example, the murderer does not have the “right to the truth” because their intentions are morally wrong. Therefore logically it is proper and just to lie to the murderer about the whereabouts of their would-be victim. Leading on from

this logic then for the narrative in *Horizon*, Operation Enduring Victory knew that they were sending soldiers to their death and so their intentions could be argued as morally wrong even if they felt they were lying for the “right” reasons.

Bauer addresses the concerns that a “right to the truth” makes “it possible for falsehoods to be excused by simply providing a plausible justification based on the situation.” (106). For Bauer, it is Spinoza who reveals what is the most ethical approach in terms of the “right to the truth” as he explains:

He resolves the tension between what might appear to be two completing absolutes: the fundamental inclination to preserve one’s existence, and the imperative never to act in bad faith. In the end, he shows that the principle of acting in good faith rather than the principle of self-preservation is most elemental to human freedom. (88)

This differs from a utilitarian view in which Smart states that:

If it were known to be true, as a question of fact, that measures which caused misery and death to tens of millions today *would* result in saving from greater misery and from death hundreds of millions in the future, and if this were the only way in which it could be done, then it *would* be right to cause these necessary atrocities... One would have to be *very sure* that future generations would be saved still greater misery before one embarked on such a tyrannical programme. (318-319)

As the characters in *Horizon* know for a fact that humanity will cease to exist in the following 15 months and there is nothing they can do about it (apart from planning for humanity to begin again in the next millennia), they could be excused for deploying a utilitarian viewpoint. Nonetheless, there is always an argument to be made that “we have a duty to act in an ethically correct way towards existing persons, not a duty to increase the beneficiaries of our ethical conduct” (Palazzi 1074). Although Elisabet Sobeck and other scientists believed that Project Zero Dawn would end up working in the future, there was no guarantee that it would. Consequently, their ethics were being projected onto future generations who may not have even existed. This example of lying could be considered a form of prosocial lie, these are lies which are told with the “intention of benefiting others in some way” (Lupoli, Jampol & Oveis 1026). But end results can never be guaranteed and “although those who tell prosocial lies have good intentions, these lies can have harmful effects on others...What complicates matters, however, is that prosocial lying may not necessarily be the most beneficial action to

take when considering targets” interests. (Lupoli, Jampol & Oveis 1028). Within *Horizon*, there are datapoints which can be suggested to support the argument that lying about Project Zero Dawn, and the fact that the war is winnable, does not benefit the “target’s interest”:

FROM: Roshana Guliyev
TO: Sgt. Guliyev
SUBJECT: Please reply!
STATUS: Rejected

Ames... I don't even know if you're alive anymore. The mails I get from you, they say they're from you, but they don't sound... They sound... recycled. Phrases put together. And you don't say anything about the news I pass on! The containment zone, the re-breathers, the rioting, 1Earth--what happened in the Dallas Bubble, Ames, that wasn't the robots! They won't even give me a straight answer when I demand to know if you're still alive! They just say if your messages keep coming, then... you're still... “operational.” It's not fair, Ames. It's not fair that you won't be with me when the lights go out. I love you. (Guerrilla Games, 2017)

Within the game, the player can find many instances of similar military propaganda with the intent of increasing participation and acceptance of military action. This form of prosocial lying has its benefits for the orchestrators of Operation Enduring Victory as it kept soldiers in their posts and volunteers coming to fight. This is a tactic in real life military propaganda with Leslie noting that prosocial lying means that “he is held to his post by fictitious bonds which he has come to regard as real”. He feels he ‘must’ support his comrade instead of leaving him to face the enemy alone” (163):

Corporal Sarai: ...I got the recall alert. Read them up on a turbine, in the smell of cooking ozone. They covered every angle – better pay, amnesty for any combine wars you'd fought in, guaranteed citizenship... We should have thought “OK, what's the catch?” But what we did think was “I guess we're better than the bots after all.” Big talk from Herres about pride and duty – smart guy. He was right. I'd been proud to be a U.S. soldier. I jumped at the chance to be one again. And look what I landed in. (Guerrilla Games, 2017)

Soldiers and volunteers for Operation Enduring Victory may have been promised material goods but were also swayed by nationalist and prosocial propaganda. There is a more sinister reason why, in *Horizon*, the “right to the truth” was withheld, and not just to keep the troops spirits up. Fukuyama has noted that “it has been widely

understood among philosophers that the family stands as the major obstacle to the achievement of social justice. People, as kin selection theory suggests, tend to love their families and relatives out of proportion to their objective worth” (98). Although not explicitly stated within the game, it can be assumed that many soldiers in Operation Enduring Victory would not have participated if not for their wish to save their families. This is clear for a soldier named Grant, for instance:

FROM: Grant Rowe
TO: Mom
SUBJECT: [No subject]

Dear Mom,

I heard some guys jabbering about a breakthrough on the Atlantic today. Said southern Jersey, Philly, northern Delaware is just... gone, NYC nearly surrounded. My CO won't confirm or deny, and since we stopped using augs I can't check the feeds, but everyone's talking about it, and all I know is, if it's true, Vineland was right in the middle of it... and that means you were in the middle of it... in which case I'm writing to a goddamn ghost like a goddamn fool. Ah, screw this. Screw enduring victory and zero dawn and everyone and everything else. Honourable service, my ass. I should've stayed home so you didn't have to die alone.

Grant (Guerrilla Games, 2017)

In a study by Everett et al. (2010) they found that medically “patients prefer physician to lie to insurance company but do not want to be deceived about their own care.” (Everett et al. 333). Therefore, this article would argue that the population would have a “right to the truth” when it comes to their own demise.

Blessed Are the [Robots], for They Will Inherit the Earth

The extinction of humanity narratives that have become popular in recent years such as *I am Legend* (Lawrence, 2007), *The Road* (Hillcoat, 2009), *The Walking Dead* (Darabont, 2010) all have something in common: they all push a humanist trope that humans “deserve” to carry on living. But in the case of *Horizon*, lying via “alternative facts” is required to ensure that humanity survives in the distant future via gestation and cloning. Lying ensures that before the extinction event humanity does not get autonomy for their final days.

Although there is little academic literature on the ethics of extinction events, Dietrich argues that it is not *if* but *when* humanity goes extinct: “Not only will humans become extinct eventually, but given how devastating we are to the planet, and how

entrenched our behaviour is, an argument can be made that we *ought* to extinguish ourselves – and soon” (57). This is an opposed view to what Leslie argues in *The End of The World: The Science and Ethics of Human Extinction*, “[if] there existed no living things, the materialization of a good world of people would itself be a good development” (291). The problem is that humans are not always good. One of the main reasons why Dietrich would argue that humanity should become extinct, after creating robots to take our place, is that:

On the best available theory we possess, four very serious social ills – child abuse, sexism, rape and racism- are due to our evolutionary heritage... So let us build a race of machines...which implement only what is good about humanity, which do not feel any evolutionary tug to commit certain evils, and which can let the rest of the world live. (61)

In *Horizon*, we know from information gleaned during quests and in the open-world gameplay that *Horizon* society was in the position to create robots that passed the Turing Test¹. They however banned the creation of such robots (called the Turing Act) after an AI called VAST SILVER gained sentience and “escaped” its programming. For Littmann, the Turing Test is an incomplete and biased way to consider whether a being is “alive” or not: “our conclusions as to which things think and which things don’t shouldn’t be based on a double standard that favors biological beings like us” (11). This idea is raised in *Horizon* by those who criticise the Turing Act: “The time has come to ask the hard questions about what it means to be human in a post-biological world. Turing and its supporters are on the wrong side of history” (Guerrilla Games, 2017). It could be argued that the *Horizon* world is anti-robot in a way that puts humanity in a hierarchy above other (artificial) lifeforms. From a posthuman/postmodern account then is it still right to lie to make sure the Faro Plague swarm is defeated?

This question has been debated in regards to the *Terminator* (Cameron, 1984) franchise by Yuen in his essay “What’s so terrible about judgment day?” (2009). Within the franchise the imperative for humans is to stop Skynet of becoming self-aware and then starting a nuclear holocaust that kills off most of humanity. Yuen argues, however, that the fact that Skynet becomes self-aware means that it should

¹ According to Britannica Online the Turing Test is an experiment to determine whether a machine can demonstrate human intelligence or not. The standard set up tests whether the machine can be mistaken for a human when in conversation with an actual human.

have the right to defend itself, “refusing to give Skynet this right would mean that the rule of self-defense does not apply to all persons, and we would be denying Skynet respect, violating both formulations of the categorical imperative” (166). Yuen contends that, from a utilitarian standpoint, it could then be argued that allowing Skynet to become self-aware (thus causing judgment day), instead of killing the scientist who creates what will eventually become Skynet, “actually maximizes interest satisfaction in the long term” (169). This is because if our moral obligation as a utilitarian is to minimize suffering, and if we consider Skynet as another form of life, then we should allow it to “win”; there are millions more robots than humans that will benefit from humanity ceasing to exist. Within *Horizon*, this point can be argued as well in that the Faro Plague has shown it has awareness and has begun to serve itself.

Within the game’s narrative it is argued here that lying to the public just to try to guarantee a new humanity being created and surviving in the future is unethical as it stops a post-biological life from having a chance to live. In real-life this is something that will need far more analysis as we cannot be sure of the when and where (or indeed the consequences) of human extinction events. Machine ethics is a developing field for this very reason because as Littman notes, “The computers we build in the real world are growing more complex every year, so we’ll eventually have to decide at what point, if any, they become people, with whatever rights and duties that may entail” (8).

Conclusion

What makes the analysis of “alternative facts” as lies in *Horizon* important is that the game narrative raises two ethical points which can be related to real-life situations, the right to the truth and the ethics of lying to favour human beings over other species. This article does not take the absolutist stance of viewing lies as always being wrong. However, the evidence of harm within the game leads to the conclusion that the lies told to keep humanity in the dark about their impending death make the lies unethical rather than prosocial or altruistic; when it comes to stopping families being together when death is inevitable this article argues that they have a right to the truth.

This paper has also argued that extinction of the human race would have been an ethical and positive outcome for the robots in *Horizon*. Anderson (2008) has argued that people's understanding of ethics when it comes to robotics is humanist and therefore flawed (478). Anderson argues that often people will refer to Isaac Asimov's "three laws of robotics" when talking about programming ethics into machines. The three laws are primarily to guarantee the safety of humans, in that a robot must obey them and not do them any harm, only protecting its own existence if a human is not injured in the process (477). These laws are problematic for Anderson in that they make the robot a "slave to human beings" rather than following its own ethical principles (478). In *Horizon* then, it can be argued that the Faro Plague is only instilling the ethics that humans would force upon the robots; that humans are there to obey and not do the Faro Plague harm, and humans should not preserve their own existence because the Faro Plague requires them to be turned into bio-fuel.

This study has also argued that within *Horizon* we are able to debate how lies have changed the landscape and ethics of the game world. This is in part because we are able to know the exact consequences of the actions taken in the narrative. Thus, we have been able to analyse which "alternative facts" were used in game because we could find datapoints in gameplay which would reveal the truth of the matter. In this sense, this essay has also shown how the developers of *Horizon* have used the language and ideology present in real-life media manipulation. However, a major problem in dealing with lies and "alternative facts" in modern terms is that philosophy has not yet caught up with modern technology, as Smart explains: "Could Jeremy Bentham or Karl Marx (to take two very different political theorists) have foreseen the atom bomb? Could they have foreseen automation? Can we foresee the technology of the next century?" (319). For Lewandowsky, Ecker & Cook (2017), an issue with modern technology is that we have gone into an era of post-truth where people can pick and choose which "truths" they want to hear. They note that "the flexibility and fractionation offered by social media has allowed people to choose their favoured 'echo chamber' in which most available information conforms to pre-existing attitudes and biases" (359).

It is also not entirely unsurprising that the governments in *Horizon* chose to take away the right of the citizens to select how they die; in Western countries, such as the USA and the UK, there has been a growing right-to-die movement, primarily concerned with hospice patients having the "right to make their own decisions

regarding the amount of medical care they want and the circumstances and timing of their death” (McCormick 119). However, across the globe only Belgium, Columbia, Luxembourg, Canada and the Netherlands allow for active human euthanasia (bbc.co.uk 2015). This is despite polls across differing nations suggesting that residents support people’s right to choose when they die, such as a poll in the USA in 2016 which suggested that more than 84% of people supported the notion of “right to die” (McCormick 119). *Horizon*’s narrative is simply perpetuating a real-world scenario for many people around the globe, the fact that government institutions have already decided that citizens do not have autonomy over the circumstances of their death, whether this is theoretically ethical or not.

In conclusion, a study on elderly residents who were told that they were dying had damaging effects on their psyche with one patient choosing to starve himself to death before his terminal illness killed him (Meyer 1997). Meyer notes that in cases where patients are not told their terminal diagnosis, they often live longer than expected and so the “right to know” can be tricky to deliberate. The narrative of *Horizon* however is very clear that all humanity will die by a specific point, there was no hope for reprieve. The psychological impact on people from knowing the truth (and whether they would kill themselves before the Faro Plague got to them) would therefore be inconsequential; there would be no one left to mourn or deal with social or economic consequences of people being told they were going to die. The manipulation of the public in *Horizon* via “alternative facts” ensured that humans were not given a choice about their last days. This is why it has been argued here that “alternative facts” in media should be examined in philosophy scholarship as a form of lying. Therefore, “alternative facts” should be considered differently philosophically than its less harmful counterpart in the medical institutions where uses of “alternative facts” are for testing hypotheses rather than manipulation for ideological pursuits.



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Dark Moon – Thomas Örn Karlsson

“What Really Happened Ain’t There”: Sifting the Lies of Settler Colonial History with Patrick Ness’ *Chaos Walking* Series

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Abstract | Settler colonial history is built on a foundation of lies, which support and perpetuate the violence inherent to and constitutive of these societies. Science fiction written by settlers often glorifies colonialism, but the *Chaos Walking* series by Patrick Ness offers a story of another planet in which facing and revealing the lies of colonial history is essential to stemming the tide of violence flowing from these lies. In these books, the knowledge, bodies, and voices of women and Indigenous extraterrestrials become the grounds of memory that can lead to the *possibility*, though never the promise, of nonviolence. In this essay, I use Indigenous critical theory, theology, and colonial history to explore the possibilities and limits of Ness’ work to reveal, confront, and transform a settler colonial lineage of stories of conquest, concealment, and deceit.

Keywords | Settler colonialism; Patrick Ness; *Chaos Walking*; Indigenous theory, cryptohistory.



Resumo | A história colonial assenta numa fundação de mentiras, que apoiam e perpetuam a violência que é inerente e constituinte destas sociedades. A ficção científica escrita por colonizadores frequentemente glorifica o colonialismo, mas a série *Chaos Walking* de Patrick Ness apresenta uma história de outro planeta no qual enfrentar e expor as mentiras da história colonial se revela essencial para parar a onda de violência que advém dessas mentiras. Nestes livros, o conhecimento, corpos e vozes de mulheres e de extraterrestres Indígenas tornam-se a base da memória que pode levar à *possibilidade*, apesar de nunca à promessa, da não-violência. Neste ensaio, faço uso de teoria crítica Indígena, da teologia e da história colonial para explorar as possibilidades e limites do trabalho de Ness para revelar, confrontar e transformar a nossa linhagem partilhada de histórias coloniais de conquista, dissimulação e engano.

Palavras-Chave | colonização de povoamento; Patrick Ness; *Chaos Walking*; teoria indígena; criptohistória.



Patrick Ness' young adult science fiction series *Chaos Walking* consists of three novels, *The Knife of Never Letting Go* (2008), *The Ask and the Answer* (2009), and *Monsters of Men* (2010). The series takes place on a planet colonized by humans, who have killed many of the Indigenous extraterrestrials. The violence of this history has been obscured as quickly as it has been committed, and all the human colonists have either been lied to about the history of their communities, or created such lies, or both. The colonists call this planet "New World". Imagining a new world has, at least since 1492, been a project rooted in violent colonial and imperial enterprises, and the *Chaos Walking* series features characters who are ceaselessly tangled within settler colonial and misogynistic violence, while striving, as a narrative whole and in terms of character choices, to find ends for that violence. Such ends prove frighteningly elusive, partially due to the historical lies that obscure everything that has happened on this planet since the arrival of its human colonists.

This context of historical lies points *Chaos Walking* directly at American history as played out in the United States and presented to the world. The project of America is one of genocide and dispossession of Indigenous peoples, in tandem with concealment and lies about these crimes. In *The Transit of Empire: Indigenous Critiques of Colonialism*, Chickasaw literary scholar Jodi A. Byrd writes that "[t]he story of the new world is horror, the story of America a crime" (xii). Ness' novels

demonstrate how this kind of colonial horror can be simultaneously concealed and perpetuated by lies about history. Ness is a white settler from the United States,¹ and while science fiction, especially that written by white settlers, has often been used to justify, glorify, and build up colonial narratives, his books attempt to tell a different kind of story – a settler science fiction narrative that is attentive to patterns of oppression and seeks to disrupt those patterns. In this essay, I use Indigenous critical theory, theology, and colonial history to explore the possibilities and limits of Ness’ work to reveal, confront, and transform a settler colonial lineage of stories of conquest, concealment, and deceit.

Thomas King, a Cherokee writer of both fiction and non-fiction, asserts in *The Truth About Stories: A Native Narrative*, “the truth about stories is that that’s all we are” (2). In this book, King curves and curls both mythical and autobiographical tales into recurring and cumulative twists of meaning. King’s enactment and declaration of how stories work is one entry point into Indigenous literary theory, in which the power of stories becomes both an explanation for and a counter to the violence of colonialism. In *Chaos Walking*, and in the world outside of the books, powerful stories continue to assert settler colonial power over Indigenous people, and patriarchal power over women, so thoroughly that the people immersed in these ideas often do not recognize or admit the foundations of violence that such ideas rest upon and strengthen. Stories carry power, and those who do not recognize that power (as well as many who do) will still convey such power in all its violence to others, mouth to ears, skin to skin. There are other kinds of stories, however, including stories that expose what is otherwise culturally hidden, along with the processes of concealment and lies that perpetuate historical violence. These decoded stories may serve as enacted responses to urgent questions: Once we know that many of the stories we live inside *are* lies, once we see that many of the stories we live inside also produce the violence we live with (or under, or on the run from, or which we inflict), what do we do? Are stories even possible outside of or in tension with the larger narrative frameworks that instruct us to know the world?

The feminist theologian Catherine Keller describes “cryptoapocalypse” as a cosmological orientation that can divest itself of its explicit religiosity, while still keeping its force in creating people’s relationships with the world around them,

¹ Patrick Ness was born in Virginia, but currently lives in England.

causing people to anticipate and even facilitate extreme destruction because of stories of religious apocalypse. People have this relationship and participate in cryptoapocalyptic destruction even while being unaware of or disbelieving the premises of a religious apocalypse. Cryptoapocalypse is cyclical and does its work without being explicitly revealed or known. In this essay, I extend this concept to a cryptohistory in *Chaos Walking*, a structure in which violence against Indigenous people and women is repeated even by people who have no explicit knowledge of the way this violence has played out in the past and may truly wish to avoid it. The historian and anthropologist Ann Laura Stoler, describing the same pattern, calls it “colonial aphasia”, and elaborates, “[t]his capacity to know and not know simultaneously renders the space between ignorance and ignoring not an etymological exercise but a concerted political and personal one” (12-13). Similarly, the analysis I offer of *Chaos Walking* is meant to be not only a literary examination but to inspire political and personal reckoning in readers. To watch cryptohistory and colonial aphasia work, let us go deeper into the world of *Chaos Walking*.

On the planet where the novels take place, the thoughts of human men and most other beings are audible to all, but the thoughts of human women remain private. Human settlers call these thoughts “Noise”. Todd Hewitt, the sole, first-person narrator of the first book and co-narrator of the others, has been taught that Prentisstown, where he lives, is the only surviving town on the planet, that all human women were killed through germ warfare by the Indigenous people of the planet, who call themselves the Land but are called Spackle by the colonists, and that the Spackle were all killed in retaliation. Almost none of this is true: instead, the women were murdered by men of the town because of their telepathic silence, other towns still exist with living women, and many members of the Land survive, some free, some enslaved.

In Prentisstown, memory is controlled and secrets are kept despite the Noise through ritualized narrative and group identity regulated by violent initiation. History is re-shaped through this control, while, intentionally and unintentionally, characters repeat the violence that is simultaneously ritualized and disavowed in cultural memories of the past. All three books function as quests to remember or conceal lost narratives of the past, and through this often violent struggle, the characters seek to alter the present and the future, and, especially, to divert them from the repetition of the destructive past. *The Knife of Never Letting Go* is narrated only by Todd, *The Ask*

and the Answer alternately by Todd and Viola, a young woman from a new settler ship who has crash landed on New World, and *Monsters of Men* alternately by Todd, Viola, and the Return, a member of the Land who escapes from enslavement by human settlers. Thus, the narrative structure of the books opens to the voices of literally and figuratively silenced people through which it is less and less possible for the lies of cryptohistory to remain either hidden or unchallenged.

In *Chaos Walking*, the knowledge, bodies, and voices of women and Indigenous people become the grounds of memory that can lead to the *possibility*, though never the promise, of non-violence. The relationship between silence, Noise, writing, and speech is extremely contested, and these categories do not have clear boundaries, but intersect messily and frighteningly with gendered and genocidal violence, enabling, justifying and working against violence in turn. Women and Indigenous people open spaces for memory of and beyond the very violence that often kills them. Through this process, some characters find possibilities for less violent action and relationship in a landscape of historical memory grounded in deliberate lies and ritualized repetition of violence.

As we meet Todd in *The Knife of Never Letting Go*, he explains how close he is to official manhood, as designated by Prentisstown. This transition to manhood is ambivalent and confusing to Todd: "...it will be a party, I guess, tho I'm starting to get some strange pictures about it, all dark and too bright at the same time, but nevertheless I will become a man [...]" (Ness, *Knife* 4). So, what Todd can see of manhood is suspect, and the incessant Noise is nonetheless capable of keeping secrets, leaving him knowing there is something disturbing in the bridge between the past and the future that his initiation into manhood will represent, but not what that disturbing thing might be. At the same time, he has no choice, as far as he knows, but to become a man in the terms offered by his town.

Instead, Todd's fathers, who adopted him after his mother was murdered, begin to uncover the lies that undergird Todd's perception of the world and conception of manhood. Ben, one of Todd's adoptive fathers, tells Todd everything he's understood of history is untrue, and uses trust as the bridge that might allow Todd to cross from known lies to the unknown truth: "[T]rust me when I say that the things you know right now, Todd, those things aren't true" (Ness, *Knife* 51). At this point, Ben reveals to Todd how Prentisstown's boys ritually become men – by killing another man – and gives him his mother's diary and instructions to flee the town

against this fate (50). Manhood in Prentisstown is utterly predicated on violence, the ritualized repetition of the violence against women (and, we will soon learn, against Indigenous people) that has been hidden and historically rewritten. Memories hidden beneath the cryptohistory of Prentisstown's misogynistic and colonial violence can be accessed through intimate trust that Ben creates in direct opposition to Prentisstown's version of manhood. In its place, Ben offers Todd a fleet, hunted, relational, and non-violent manhood, one Ben has only been able to cultivate as an option in secret opposition to (and through outward complicity with) the master narrative of lies and ritualized violent memory that Prentisstown demands.

As Todd flees across the planet, he gains identity as a man who cannot kill. This identity sets the terms for many of the relationships he has throughout the series, but it is also false: he murders the first Indigenous person of New World that he ever sees, and he also participates in tortuous and sometimes lethal forms of state violence. A desire for goodness and even a narrative of non-violence is not sufficient to withstand cryptohistories of dehumanization that leave the women and Indigenous people of New World available for – indeed, required as – targets of the violence of settler men *as* men. Soon after fleeing his home, Todd meets and begins traveling with Viola, a girl who has crash-landed on the planet as part of the vanguard of more human colonists. When he meets Viola, Todd does not know about his town's history of men murdering women, but he finds himself deeply unsettled by Viola's telepathic silence, and so he begins participating in the story of what it means to be a man of Prentisstown responding to a woman without awareness *of* that story, drawn to desire violence against Viola in a repetition of his cryptohistory:

'You're NOTHING!' I scream, stepping forward some more. 'NOTHING! You're nothing but EMPTINESS! There's nothing in you! You're EMPTY and NOTHING and we're gonna die FOR NOTHING!'

[...] I'm so furious, my Noise raging so loud, so *red*, that I have to raise my fists to her, I have to hit her, I have to beat her. I have to make her ruddy silence STOP before it SWALLOWS ME AND THE WHOLE EFFING WORLD!

I take my fist and punch myself hard in the face. (Ness, *Knife* 123)

In these moments, Todd experiences an internal call to Prentisstown-style manhood, feeling the gendered difference of Viola's voice as a threat not just to him but to the world – this does not really make sense, of course, but it makes

Prentisstown sense, it makes sense in the cryptohistory in which Todd participates without his conscious knowledge. Todd is only able to *not* attack Viola by turning the violence on himself. Todd does not attain the non-violent manhood Ben has tried to offer him, but, as Viola and Todd grow to trust each other, he experiences this girl in all her personhood and complexity. Eventually, Todd realizes that, despite her lack of Noise, Viola is not inaccessible to him: “I search out her face and the language of her body as she stands here watching me, and I find that I still know who she is, that she’s still Viola Eade, that silent don’t mean empty, that it *never* meant empty” (Ness, *Knife* 444). Viola’s gendered silence in telepathic Noise is unchosen, but her vocal silence until she decides to trust Todd is deliberate, and it is clear that the onus is on Todd to learn to understand her as a person, to realize that “silent don’t mean empty” through their relationship.

When Viola does gain voice, it is a voice she chooses – indeed, she is able to take on accents and mimic others’ voices with ease, disguising herself as they move among established human settler populations – and she resists any attempt to be forced out of silence on others’ terms. Toward the end of the series, Noise is shown to be a powerfully unifying method of communication among the Land, and Ben learns to use the language of the Land, and becomes convinced that, if all human settlers connect with the Land in this way, there will be peace. Viola is suspicious of this offer:

Ben is certain women *do* have Noise and that if men can silence theirs, why shouldn’t women be able to *un-silence theirs*?
He wonders if I might be willing to give it a try.
I don’t know.
Why can’t we learn to live with how we are? And whatever anybody chooses is okay by the rest of us? (Ness, *Monsters* 590)

Viola consistently resists the imperative to voice that Todd lays on her at first, and Ben at last, and insists upon voice and silence on her own terms and within her own registers of power. Through this insistence, she may lose a chance for deeper connection with the Land and with settler men, but she also avoids what may be an invitation to co-opt or appropriate the language of the Land. There is no simple value or denigration possible in these books, not of Noise, voice, or silence; instead, these all exist in profound and ambivalent relational power according to the always-constrained, always-meaningful choices of the characters. The diary of Todd’s mother

is another form of a woman's voice that is sometimes silent to Todd, but is also the voice of memory that connects Todd to his ability to survive and to relate in less violent ways than through Prentisstown's colonial masculinity. Through most of the series, Todd cannot access his mother's narrative, which we presume with him to hold the truth about the past, because he cannot read. Todd's illiteracy is due to the deliberate dismantling of education in Prentisstown. Todd's mother experiences a threefold silence, first through her lack of Noise, then in her murder by the men of her town, and finally through Todd's politically manufactured illiteracy. Even under this much constraint, the book that contains her written voice functions to shield Todd from violence, and influences Todd's relationships. Todd's mother's book protects him bodily when it takes the impact of a knife that is meant for Todd, sustaining a wound in Todd's stead. Todd's shame at not being able to read makes it a struggle for him to enter into relationships with those who could read to him; nevertheless, Todd's access to the diary is entirely contingent on his relationships with others. During their flight across the planet's human settlements, Viola imitates a Prentisstown accent to start reading the diary to Todd. Viola uses the power of her chosen, malleable voice to bridge the gap between Todd and his dead mother, but they are interrupted and unable to get very far in the story. The promise of a true, direct history from a believable source is *never* fulfilled by the diary. When Todd does hear the end of the diary, it is through the aggressively deceitful Noise of Mayor Prentiss, a manipulative tyrant who consistently lies to Todd, so neither we as readers nor Todd can be sure that what the Mayor is reading is what Todd's mother wrote. As Todd realizes this uncertainty and gets to the inconclusive end of his mother's narrative, he thinks in frustration, "What really happened ain't there", and yet the necessity to respond to what "really happened" remains incredibly urgent (Ness, *Monsters* 407). There *is* no unmediated true story, and simultaneously there *is* no story without great power. At the end of the series, Viola reads the diary aloud to Todd while he is in a coma-like state, and the combination of her voice and Todd's mother's words has the power to affirm Todd's identity and pull him back toward consciousness. Todd, from inside his silence, experiences Viola's reading as "that voice saying those words [...] as I'm flying through these memories and spaces and darkneses [...] I will answer —" (*Monsters* 600-601). For Todd, the voices of his mother and Viola, given on their terms rather than on the terms of men in power, create an alternative history and a possibility of relationship with women. When Todd listens to his mother and to Viola, he can look

beyond the cryptohistory of Prentisstown that has taught him that women are dangerously silent enemies to be killed, and these relationships in turn save his life, both literally and figuratively.

Todd has some access to alternative stories about women and ways of being a man, especially through knowledge that his mother lived and wrote, but he has *not* had access to any alternative stories about the Land, and so he becomes a killer even as his society labels him one who cannot kill. Todd indeed does not kill *humans*, and, in despair over having been unable to kill a human man who attacked him and Viola, thinks “I’d be a killer, if that’s what it takes. [...] Watch me” (*Knife* 269). And we do watch him, as he recognizes a Spackle man fishing at the river, a sort of person he has never seen before, a being he thought was extinct. Todd immediately attacks the man, “all I’m thinking and sending forward to him in my red, red Noise are images and words and feelings, of all I know, all that’s happened to me, all the times I failed to use that knife, every bit of me screaming – *I’ll show you who’s a killer*” (Ness, *Knife* 273). Todd’s murder of the man of the Land is described in exhaustive detail, and, once he is dead, Todd tries to justify this killing through the larger lies of Prentisstown history. He explains that Viola does not understand that the Spackle are all terrible murderers, but Viola disrupts this story: “‘You stupid, fucking IDIOT!’[...] ‘How many times have you found out that what you’ve been told isn’t true?’” (Ness, *Knife* 276). Outside of the language of conquest and its cryptohistories, which have subsumed Todd, Viola can interpret the fear and innocence of the man of the Land and show it to Todd, who then sees what had been concealed in the story of hatred and necessity in his mind: “And (no no no no no) I see the fear that was coming from his Noise – [...] And I’m a killer – I’m a killer – I’m a killer – (Oh, please no) I’m a killer” (Ness, *Knife* 277). In the moment of encounter with the man of the Land, Todd’s knowledge of history has told him that Spackle are horrors to be destroyed, and this dovetails with Prentisstown’s cryptohistory of misogynistic violence, pushing Todd toward a manhood predicated upon the violence that has created his town. Unable to perceive beyond these stories, Todd attacks and kills the first Indigenous person he has ever seen. Through Viola’s intervention, however, Todd is able to understand that killing this man of the Land is murder, though other humans will not recognize this and will continue to conceptualize him as a man who cannot kill.

At the beginning of the second novel of the series, *The Ask and the Answer*, Todd is imprisoned and put to work by the terrifying leader of Prentisstown, Mayor Prentiss, who has successfully taken control of most of the human settlements on New World. In this employment, Todd commits violence against women and members of Land, including putting numbered ID bands on Spackle and women. These bands cannot be removed without killing the wearer. Todd justifies his participation in banding the Spackle by thinking “if I’m not the one who does this, then they’ll just get someone else who won’t care if it hurts” (Ness, *Ask* 137). Mayor Prentiss eventually reveals that these bands were designed to kill the wearers over time, so that, now, Todd who “cannot kill” has been a participant in many murders (Ness, *Monsters* 565). Todd kills in these instances not only because of the lies he has been told and the cryptohistory he has not been told, but because of the governmental structures of violence he, as a human man, is pressed into and participates in.

At least one Indigenous extraterrestrial, however, will see both Todd’s violence and his regret, and this leads him to a deep grudge against Todd. This person of the Land is working to return from slavery to a culturally grounded selfhood, by “learn[ing] what the Land calls things” (Ness, *Monsters* 79). This character is part of a group of Spackle who were separated from the rest of the Land at the end of the war that occurred just before Todd’s birth, and subsequently enslaved by the human settlers in the largest human settlement on the planet. As readers, we encounter him first as “1017”, his band number, a designation entirely created through violence inflicted by human settlers. At this point, the enslaved Spackle are being given a substance in their food which prevents them from having Noise. As Noise is the only language of the Spackle, this silences them completely. At first, readers see 1017 exclusively through Todd’s perception of their relationship, in which 1017 is aggressive within his violently subordinated condition, and Todd alternately scapegoats 1017, once beating him badly, and, at other times desperately works to save 1017 from death, sometimes at great risk to himself. This horrifying relationship keeps Todd tenuously connected to an understanding of Spackle personhood, and it keeps 1017 alive, but 1017 does not experience this as remotely positive, and Todd’s emotional engagement does not indicate goodness or relational justice.

In *Monsters of Men*, 1017 begins to narrate his own portion of the book, and he is called the Return after he returns to a larger, free population of the Land. The Return does not perceive Todd as a compassionate young man who cannot kill, but

instead says “He is worst of all of them [...] Because he *knew* he was doing wrong [...] worst is the one who knows better and does *nothing*” (Ness, *Monsters* 84). The Return’s vengeful anger is enhanced by what others perceive as Todd’s extraordinary goodness, precisely because Todd is able, within his own guilt, to perpetuate great violence. The Return forcefully contradicts the idea that emotional response makes a good person. Quite the opposite, he sees Todd’s experience of being haunted by the wrong he has done to members of the Land as literary scholar Renée L. Bergland sees the narrative haunting of American literature by Indian ghosts: one way to *erase* the necessity of repair, justice, or change *through* sadness and fear over the violence that has occurred (Bergland 3). “A twinge of remorse in the act of invading provides no grounds for celebration unless it prompts the invaders to leave”, writes Waziyatawin Angela Cavander Wilson, a Wahpetunwan Dakota historian (73). Todd is not going to leave – in *Chaos Walking*, the settlers are technologically unable to leave, a narrative situation that raises a question of what kind of decolonization is possible in the continued and presumably permanent presence of invaders. Todd’s remorse, like the remorse of many settler colonists or of colonial societies themselves, may be a tool that smooths over the edges of cryptohistory, thus allowing it to continue to work, rather than an experience that is likely to help create a more just present and future. So, if not through good intentions or remorse, through what avenues do characters in *Chaos Walking* find an end to violence?

Some people in *Chaos Walking* try to find non-violence through deep communicative connection, but, as we see with Viola’s concern about the invitation to Noise, a compulsion to share or speak can be as damaging as a compulsion to remain silent. The narrative ambivalence about whether it is possible or desirable for all people to share in the Land’s language relates to a deeper tendency of settler colonists to continually, over time, experience belonging through co-optation and appropriation, which Byrd refers to as settlers learning to “cathect the space of the native as their home” (xxxix). I’m interested, then, in connection that occurs between the Return and Viola precisely because it does *not* create a positive sense of being one people or sharing one home, but instead is a mutual recognition of pain that pauses violence long enough for other options to emerge. The Return’s quest to avenge himself on Todd leads him to attack Viola when she orchestrates peace talks with the Land, and is interrupted by his recognition that she, too, is banded, that they have

been subject to the same violation. In the moment of the attack, they both recognize this. Viola expresses her recognition first:

I raise my arm in a hopeless attempt to protect myself—
And—
The blade doesn't fall [...]
The Spackle is staring at [...] the band on my arm—
The red, infected, sick-looking band with the number 1391 etched onto it—
And then I see it—
Halfway up his own forearm, as scarred and messy as mine—
A band reading 1017— [...]
He's frozen his swing, the blade in the air, ready to fall but not falling, as he stares at my arm. (Ness, *Monsters* 350)

The Return's recognition immediately follows:

I saw her band.
Saw the pain obvious even in one of the voiceless Clearing.²
[...]
And I remembered the pain of the banding, the pain not only in my arm but in the way the band encircled my *self* as well, took what was me and made it smaller, so that all the Clearing ever saw was the band on my arm, not me, not my face, not my voice which was also taken—
Taken to make us like the Clearing's own voiceless ones.
And I could not kill her. (Ness, *Monsters* 379-380)

Before this moment, Viola experiences the Return only as “1017 – Todd's Spackle” (Ness, *Monsters* 350), and the Return sees Viola only as The Knife's beloved “one in particular” (347); they relate only through Todd. In the charged, intimately violent moment of the Return's attack on Viola, they both, who have been silenced and attacked in many ways, recognize their mutual oppression through their mutual physical pain, the bands as sign and signal of the denial of each other's personhood on each other's bodies. Both Viola and the Return struggle to have voice and silence on their own terms in the context of murderous oppression and cultural alienation, yet in this moment, the pain of their bodies communicates. This is not an idyllic recognition that blossoms into friendship and mutual struggle against oppression, but a bare minimum recognition that keeps them both alive for another day. The bare minimum recognition does not depend on how well Viola and the Return are able to understand each other's cultures, nor is it a processing of history

²“The Clearing” is what the Land call the human settlers.

through remorse and desire, which so often, as we have seen, are close neighbors to colonial appropriation and aphasia. Instead, it is a body-to-body moment in which the lies of cryptohistory are exposed through the evidence of each person's senses, and this serves to interrupt the violent cycles they are immersed within.

Toward the end of *Monsters of Men*, the Return mistakes Todd for the Mayor and attacks him, leaving him in the coma described above, and Viola has to choose whether to kill the Return or not, as they meet in the guilty suffering of the Return's Noise:

1017 is remembering Todd— [...]
When Todd killed the Spackle even when I was screaming for him not to—
And 1017 remembers how Todd *suffered* for it—
Suffering I see 1017 start feeling in himself—
[...]
And then I realize— [...]
If I kill 1017—
And war starts again—
And we're all killed—
Who will remember Todd? [...]
And I drop the weapon. (Ness, *Monsters* 580-582)

When the Return and Viola meet again, they are still not friends or allies, but again encounter each other violently, in mutual recognition of pain, guilt, and the desire for vengeance. Viola's decision not to kill the Return, like his decision not to kill her, starts from a recognition of shared pain, but it is not finished there. Instead, her final decision against killing comes out of a desire for memory to persist in her body, for herself to carry her pain *and* her memories of Todd forward, to live in a haunted future because the alternative is death, lies, and the forgetting of love. It is still the bare minimum of communication, of relationship, between this human settler woman and this Indigenous man, not-killing, but it is also the most effective tool offered in this narrative to start, though definitely not finish, a process in which a cessation to violence and oppression can be imagined over and against the cycles of violent cryptohistories.

Here, then, is what I see explored and demonstrated in *Chaos Walking*: in the violent maelstrom of the New World, the bare minimum of a non-murderous way of relating cannot be dismissed and is sometimes all that we have. It is not the only option played out in these books, but I find it the most trustworthy in considering

what is possible for settler science fiction attending to Indigenous realities to offer, what it *can* create in opposition to colonial violence that is *not* just a form of emotionally imagined connection. Settler stories created the colonial aphasia and violence that has been rehearsed so often in science fiction tales of new planets; therefore an attentive settler science fiction addressing that violence directly can bring the story around to the bare minimum Viola and the Return reach in *Chaos Walking*, and it is a useful feat of imagination to do so.

Cryptohistories and lies will reproduce their violence by means of the choices of emotionally responsive, well-intentioned people who do not explicitly desire violence. Even the bare minimum of not-killing is impossible without a story shift, remembering and revealing cryptohistories whose lies cannot persist unchallenged in the presence of the chosen voices and knowledge of people who have been systematically violated. We, too, outside the books, cannot create stories apart from the lies that form the foundation of our official histories, nor from the violence that undergirds the cryptohistories we all carry, but we *can* create stories that respond to those lies. Emotional responsiveness and guilt do nothing to change violence and may even make it easier for the violence of cryptohistories to be repeated, but a shared recognition of pain, through memory carried in the body, can disrupt the violence and undercut the lies, which, without alternative stories, will persist and renew themselves.



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Behind Bars – Thomas Örn Karlsson

“Do Time Now, Buy Time for Future”: Phallic Deception and Techno-Sexual Agency in Margaret Atwood’s *The Heart Goes Last*

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Abstract | This article investigates the politics of deception in Margaret Atwood’s novel *The Heart Goes Last* (2015). It critiques techno-science from a feminist viewpoint. The two main female characters of the novel, Jocelyn and Charmaine, dismantle the technocratic scandal and expose the underlying reality of the situation in which they find themselves. They pose a threat to the phallic dominance, orchestrated and practiced by those in power. The article discusses the manipulation of technology and its effects on the central women characters. It unravels the latent forces of resistance in Atwood’s dystopia and unmask the politics of pretentiousness within its speculative structure. This feminist reading is buttressed by the works of Science and Technology theorists like Donna Haraway and Sandra Harding and theorists on “nomad feminism” like Rosi Braidotti. Philosophies of Michel Foucault,

Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari enlighten the argument with critical insights on the discourses of power and hegemony within technocracy.

Keywords | Science Fiction; feminist; techno-science; technology; deception.



Resumo | Este texto examina as políticas enganadoras no romance de Margaret Atwood *The Heart Goes Last* (2015). O texto faz uma crítica à tecno-ciência a partir de um ponto de vista feminista, através das duas personagens femininas do romance, Jocelyn e Charmine, que desmontam o escândalo tecnocrático e expõem a realidade da situação em que se encontram. Elas representam uma ameaça ao domínio fálico posto em prática por aqueles que estão no poder. O texto explora a manipulação da tecnologia e os seus efeitos nestas personagens. Desvenda também as latentes forças da resistência na distopia de Atwood e revela as políticas da pretensão dentro da sua estrutura especulativa. Esta leitura feminista é apoiada por trabalhos de teóricos como Donna Haraway e Sandra Harding, e teóricos que trabalham sobre “feminismo nómada”, como Rosi Braidotti. Para além destes, este estudo baseia-se ainda em filósofos como Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze e Felix Guattari, em especial no que diz respeito aos discursos de poder no contexto da tecnocracia.

Palavras-Chave | Ficção Científica; feminismo; tecno-ciência; tecnologia; engano.



Sci-fi or Speculative Fiction? Discursive Positioning of *The Heart Goes Last*

“...Margaret Atwood, for example: Here is a woman so terrified of science fiction cooties that she will happily redefine the entire genre for no other reason than to exclude herself from it.”

(*Margaret Atwood and the Hierarchy of Contempt* by Peter Watts)

The link between Science Fiction and Atwood’s selected writings is debatable. Atwood is reluctant to use the term science fiction for her selected novels. Instead, she uses the term speculative fiction to define her recent dystopias. By speculative, the author means fiction characterizing “human society and its possible future forms, which are either much better than what we have now or much worse” (Atwood, *IOW* 115). In one of her interviews, Atwood makes the distinction between the two genres more prominent by saying, “when people think ‘science fiction’, they usually think of Star Trek, or they think Star Wars, as they think War of the Worlds” (*WA* 259). She labels her writings as speculative as “there is nothing in it that we can’t do. The location is Earth. The characters are us” (*WA* 259). Ursula Le Guin critiques Atwood’s terminological distinction between science and speculative fiction. She notes:

...Margaret Atwood doesn't want any of her books to be called science fiction. In her recent, brilliant essay collection, *Moving Targets*, she says that everything that happens in her novels is possible and may even have already happened, so they can't be science fiction, which is, "fiction in which things happen that are not possible today." This arbitrarily restrictive definition seems designed to protect her novels from being relegated to a genre still shunned by hideous readers, reviewers and prize-awards. She doesn't want the literary bigots to shove her into the literary ghetto. (qtd. in Atwood 5-6)

Le Guin's comment targets Atwood and her understanding of science and speculative fiction. Lucie Armitt writes:

Good science fiction (whether based on technological or a socio-political foundation) places a great emphasis upon the intrinsic link between perceived reality and the depiction of futurist and alien societies. Thus whatever the approach and whatever the gender, the depiction of an alternative reality is only the first step of an essential reassessment on the part of both the author and the reader, making strange what we commonly perceive to be around us, primarily in order that we might focus upon the existing reality afresh, and as outsiders. (Armitt 9)

According to Armitt's definition, science fiction envisions a possible future that might occur if the activities of the present remain unchecked. Atwood's fiction depicts alternate futures carrying the unpleasant realities of the present. Her novel *The Heart Goes Last* (2015) exemplifies a tendency towards dystopia and canvasses a world of calculated deceptions. It showcases the current reality as extremely horrifying and depressive. By the term dystopia, the author suggests an "imagined perfect society and its opposite-because...each contains a latent version of the other" (Atwood, *IOW* 52). It means that our imperfect world, in due course of time, will transform into a power seeking hegemony before restoring its lost balance. The novel landscapes this idea within a science fiction framework. This article details corporate treachery and its dissolution in the subsequent section.

The novel encapsulates an economic depression rendering the individuals' lives in danger. Embodying a dystopian impulse, it demonstrates a technological crash leading to unemployment, homelessness and monetary deflation. These dystopian characteristics challenge the hard core definitions of science fiction that is "science fiction is all about science. It is a sole literary form that examines the ways in which

science penetrates, alters and transforms the themes, forms and worldview of fiction” (Slusser 28). However, there are contrastive viewpoints regarding this. In the words of Gwyneth Jones, “SF doesn’t have to be about rockets and intergalactic wars and defending the earth and all those boyish pursuits. Oh no. SF can be about things that are true and beautiful and womanly like sociology and town planning” (qtd. in Lefanu 179). Margaret Atwood’s *The Heart Goes Last* epitomizes the latter. Going by this definition, it is a soft science fiction work describing the breakdown of human values and the rise of a ruthless technocratic regime.

To avoid falling prey to the amusing madcap reflected through Jones’ statement, one should focus on the deeper meaning of her argument and try to interpret the underlying politics of science fiction. It seems that Jones has something modest to comment on the genre, something that could add a critical insight to the ongoing argument. The novel also evidences a feminist futurity at the heart of its narrative. It means that as the story advances, one could perceive the role and significance of the female characters destabilizing the technocratic patriarchal order. As a feminist science fiction novel, it “presents the blueprints for the social structures that allow women’s words to counter patriarchal myths” (Barr 7). This refers to the cross-deceptive maneuvers practiced by them in order to transgress the sexual technopolitics of the phallic power.

Alternative Facts and Feigned Truths in *The Heart Goes Last*

Envisaging an acute economic depression in the U.S., the novel begins with a young couple, Stan and Charmaine, struggling for survival. Unemployed and homeless, they are enforced to stay afloat in their old Honda surrounded by roving thugs. Their food stock is about to end when one day Charmaine comes across the Positron Project in the town of Consilience. Positron is a capitalistic and a utilitarian endeavor that offers atypical enticements to the economically weaker section of the society. Orchestrated by opulent industrialists, it deploys sentimental tactics to lure distressed individuals and cajoles them into join their mercenary business. On its first announcement, the Project promises to restore the wasted lives of many of its country’s citizens, a lucrative opportunity to alter the desperate situation that Charmaine and Stan reluctantly face. It manifests the hopes and fears of financially

challenged individuals and unmask their desire to climb high on the economic ladder. It beguiles people stricken with pecuniary crisis and defrauds them emotionally with false assurances.

Headed by Ed, the Project claims to provide a clean house and regular employment to its members for the first six months. For the remaining six months, the residents must be shifted to the Positron prison and serve as inmates in the prison cell. Once their tenure of service in the prison is completed, they are supposed to be transferred back to their civilian homes. Despite the unusualness of the Project, the idea of part-time residency and comfortable life quickly lures Charmaine. Eventually, the couple agrees to sign a contract with the Corporate offering this temptation unaware of the consequences it might cause in future.

Taking this into account, this article also focuses its attention on the politics of institutional manipulation in Atwood's dystopia. It speculates how multinational corporations, to accomplish their avarice, entice helpless individuals and deceive their aspiration of better life. However, the hegemony of these firms is by no means static. It can be challenged by latent forces carrying the potential to overturn their deceptive maneuvers. Michel Foucault in *The History of Sexuality* (Volume 1) wrote that "where there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance, is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power..." (Foucault 95-96). In the novel, Jocelyn and her teammates belong to this resistance group. Jocelyn plays a crucial role in Atwood's dystopia. One of the central characters and the chief executive of the Project, she is positioned next to Ed in power and authority. However, she conspires against the Projects' duplicity and threatens its unity from within. The novel revolves around her well planned and skillfully executed maneuvers and details a feminist appropriation of techno-science, which is often regarded as a phallic enterprise.

In due course, Positron turns out to be a technology of surveillance. To understand Positron as a technology of surveillance, one must comprehend the philosophical dimension of this technological system. Philosopher Jeremy Bentham suggested a new architectural model for circular buildings in the West. He named this model "Panopticon". It was primarily applied to prison houses where each prisoner was to be kept in a separate cell and his labor was meant to be made productive and useful. Later, Michel Foucault extended this to the notion of disciplinary power and

observed how it elicits instructed action and shapes human behavior. In his popular work, *Discipline and Punishment*, he describes Panopticon as:

[an] enclosed, segmented space, observed at every point, in which the individuals are inserted in a fixed place, in which the slightest movements are supervised, in which all events are recorded...in which power is exercised without division according to a continuous hierarchal figure, in which each individual is constantly located, examined and distributed among the living beings, the sick and the dead-all this institutes a compact model of disciplinary mechanism. (Foucault 197)

Stan, Charmaine and other inmates are inserted in the Panopticon space during their stay in Consilience. The Panopticon system monitors individual actions of the inmates. Working as the third eye, it induces discipline and offers cognitive knowledge to the members working within its framework. This cognitive knowledge refers to the fact of being observed by hidden cameras controlled by the executive supervisors of the Project. The article canvasses a feminist appropriation of the Panopticon as opposed to its andocentric operating principles. Jocelyn's presence is fundamental to the decisive plot as she exercises authority over the phallic Panopticon and modulates its latent dynamics with her knowledge. The next section maps Jocelyn's character and her unique relation with techno-science.

Women and Technology in *The Heart Goes Last*

(i). Jocelyn: Resisting Technocracy and Redefining Technology

Jocelyn features as the right-hand person to Ed, the Manager of the Positron Project. Stan's inceptive remarks on her are quite notable. The narrative voice portrays her physicality and position as:

There is a woman with him (Ed), also in a dark suit, with straight black hair and bangs and a squarish jaw; no makeup, but she does have earrings. Her legs are good though muscular. She sits to the side, fooling with her cellphone. Is she an assistant? It isn't clear. Stan pegs her as butch. Technically, she shouldn't have been here, in the men's sessions, and Stan wonders why she is. (Atwood, *THGL* 38)

However, there is much more to her than this. Unlike her allotted function to ensure the success of the Project, she works towards its failure. She is well aware of

the entire sham and decides to protect the inmates from its fatality. Stan's egotism and masculine pride makes him uncomfortable in Jocelyn's hierarchical presence. His discomfort increases while she overpowers him by her smartness. Technology plays an important role in drawing her character sketch. As previously discussed, Foucault's idea of disciplinary power is actually a masculine technology that regulates the subjected individuals. Jocelyn subverts this technology of power through manipulating the authority that controls it. In fact, her act of using a cell phone embarrasses Stan as she inverses the order of technological utility. The cell phone beneath her fingers signifies a facile consumption of technology and underlines her distinct link with techno-science per se. As opposed to it, Stan feels humiliated due to his inability to use a cell phone while serving as a member of the Positron Project. In this regard, it is important to develop an in-depth understanding of gender within the technological apparatus. The following paragraphs explore this theory through different examples.

Undoubtedly, science and technology is predominated by men. Sandra Harding notes: "western philosophies of science...have identified how modern ideals of scientific rationality, objectivity and good method are shaped by familiar stereotypes of manliness" (Harding 85). Arguing for an egalitarian technology thesis, Wendy Faulkner writes:

The wider links between gender and technology, in structures, symbols, identities have long been acknowledged by feminists. Because both modern technology and hegemonic masculinity are historically associated with industrial capitalism, they are linked symbolically by themes of control and domination. (Faulkner 82)

In the novel, Ed is the mastermind behind the Positron Project. Jocelyn subverts its phallic authority by maintaining her feminist presence within the system. She has secret access to all the confidential stuff and can decipher any code within the Positron. She amusingly invites Stan to "listen in on Max and Jasmine (Charmaine), during their little vacant-house rendezvous [as she has] got the recordings, the surveillance videos" (Atwood, *THGL* 129). Thus, Jocelyn emerges as a strong female character and is able to control Stan's momentary actions. She perpetuates a user-friendly interaction with the technological interface and handles everything with extreme care. John Seltin's observation that "technology is invented by and invents

the human [and] the two cannot be dissociated because they exist in a transductive relationship, operating along an axis of supplementary logic” (Seltin 49) finds distinct relevance in this article. Jocelyn undermines the stereotypical gender-technology equation and asserts her feminist engagement. She attempts so through the active appropriation of the Project. To validate her relationship with technology, this study will use some philosophical and posthumanist theories within a feminist context and observe how Jocelyn configures her individual stance within it.

The question of feminist epistemology and situated knowledge is pivotal to the novel. Critic Heidi Grasswick in her essay “Feminist Epistemology and Philosophy of Science-Power in Knowledge” interprets situated knowing as “explaining how people in marginalized positions might have better insights based on their social location that could be fostered to attain knowledge” (Grasswick xv). This idea positions Jocelyn in the gender minority whose standpoint modifies the phallic technocracy of Ed. Jocelyn’s marginalization is figured by her essentialist gender role. Being a woman, she is not supposed to practice authority over the techno-scientific knowledge. However this female subjection, according to Grasswick, could be transformed into a powerful feminist standpoint and thus becomes a product of feminist epistemological creation.

This argument bears exemplar reflection when Jocelyn demonstrates Charmaine’s clandestine affair to Stan. This demonstration is attempted through a techno-visual interface that is a television screen. Therefore, similar to the case of cell phone, the television as technology strengthens her link to techno-science. Through the audio-visual technology, Jocelyn exercises power over Stan’s thoughts and reverses the gender subjugation process further. Adding more to this, this instance could also be read through Haraway’s theory of modern visualization. Rosi Braidotti elaborates Haraway’s assertion in the following words:

Arguing that modern visualization techniques shatter one dimensional seeing or passive mirror function, Haraway suggests that we learn to see in compound, multiple ways in “partial perspectives”- she names this process “passionate detachment”- like the eye of a travelling lens”. (Braidotti 73)

It means that the activity of watching becomes a multi-dimensional experience, a sub-structure of situated knowledge that conveys a feminist way of looking at the screen. Jocelyn actively participates in this activity and ensures its

everlasting effects on Stan. It is important to further elaborate on the dialogue between Jocelyn and the techno-scientific network through Haraway's theory of cyborg and Braidotti's theory of nomad feminism.

Donna Haraway in her famous essay "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology and Socialist Feminism in the late Twentieth Century" defines cyborg as a "hybrid between machine and organism...a creature of the post-gender world" (Haraway 291). She considers "gender as a verb, not a noun [that is] about the production of subjects in relation to other subjects, and in relation to artifacts. Gender is about material-semiotic production of these assemblages that are people..." (qtd. in Ferrando 57). Jocelyn's relation with technology: the television and the cell phones to communicate, the high power surveillance cameras, the codes to the various systems installed within the city, makes her a cyborg figure. In the present context, one must understand the cyborg as a newly emerging class of women with fractured, shifting and unstable identities. Their endeavor to be a part of the great information network and embrace the growing techno-scientific interface aligns them with the post-world scenario.

Jocelyn's cyborgian self does not imply a prosthetic extension of her human body. Instead, her interaction with technology supports her cyborgian dimension and empowers her beyond the stereotypical world of phallic dualism. Her character escapes rigidity of subject position and resists objectification of her sexuality. Also, the figure of the cyborg is a metaphor of discursive formation in addition to a symbol of technological progress. It questions the western human subjectivity and critiques the patriarchal discourse that engenders the female as subordinate to men. The cyborgian figure suggests the limitation of humanist definition to explain the posthuman. It is because the posthuman need not mean to be non-human or antihuman but it captures the tendency of being outside the ambit of the stereotypical definition of humanism.

Apart from the cyborg, Jocelyn's personality captures what Rosi Braidotti calls "Nomadism" or "Nomadic Feminism". Braidotti's theory is grounded within a technofeminist framework. She defines the Nomad as her "figure of a situated, postmodern, culturally differentiated understanding of the subject in general and of a feminist subject in particular" (Braidotti 4). The nomadic subject too, like Haraway's cyborg, denounces fixity of position and exists in a continuous process of subjective becoming. In its relation to technology, the theorist goes on to write: "Nomad [is an]

artifact, a technological compound of the human and the posthuman...a cyborg...she is abstract and perfectly, operationally real” (Braidotti 35). The subject occupies an ambivalent place within the technological matrix: an in-between position that situates her both within and outside the system of power.

Jocelyn’s character reflects this aptitude providing her with an extraordinary life force. She functions at the threshold of internal and external forces, a completely nomadic space allowing her to exert masculine hegemony camouflaged within her female body. Her proficiency with the artifact culture, in spite of being a woman, makes her dominate the technocratic scene and belittles Stan during her presence. Her commendable spirit to voice against Ed’s treacherous business projects her immense confidence. She transgresses the patriarchal ideology but still maintains decent behavior in case of sensitive counter-tracking. In this way, her manipulation of the techno-scientific world ensures success in the near future. This success is achieved in the form of freeing Stan, Charmaine and other innocent inmates from the deceptive maneuvers of the Positron Project. The next sub-section discusses Charmaine character and how she challenges the capitalist technocracy of the Project.

(ii). Charmaine: Technological Ambiguity and Techno-pyretic Realization

This section analyzes Charmaine’s position as a woman in the Positron Project. Unlike Jocelyn, Charmaine’s presence in the techno-scientific world of the town of Consilience is rather ambiguous. The duplicitous promise of clean laundry and a roof to rely upon lures her into agreeing to part time incarceration. Nevertheless, she becomes a technological subject the moment she enters the hegemonic empire. The following section deals with the way technology subjects Charmaine into subservience in the beginning and emancipates her at the end.

Charmaine’s technological subjection begins after she enters the Positron Project. “Technology is often associated with masculinity”, writes Deborah Johnson. She continues by stating that “Technology is thought to be masculine-the domain of the male, while women are thought to be often inept with technology, ignorant and unskilled with regard to how artifacts work and simply less interested in it” (Johnson 2). In the novel, Charmaine challenges this notion of uninterested and technically unskilled woman. Unlike Johnson’s woman who is incompetent with the technical artifacts she handles, Charmaine exactly knows how to inject the poisonous syringe

into the flesh of those who are an internal threat to the Project. Here, the injection becomes a techno-social artifact used by Charmaine to supposedly kill men. However, the word “supposedly” problematizes the situation as Charmaine acts under the instructive guidance of Ed’s authority. Thus, though the injection held beneath her fingers is an artifact of power, it loses its technological essence, as the hegemony providing meaning to it is inevitably phallic.

At this stage, it will be interesting to apply postmodern philosophies of Deleuze and Guattari to Charmaine’s activities in *Consilience*. Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari in their famous book *Anti-Oedipus* came up with the concept of “Body without Organs”. The theorists discuss an apparent conflict between the body, organs and organism. Here, the body refers to the individual personality while organs bear reference to the behavioral attributes of the embodied individual. The organism is a unified whole of the individual body inclusive of multitudinous organs (Deleuze and Guattari 9). However, the theorists problematize the idea of unified organism as this unity exercises hegemony over the organs embedded within its structure. In other words, the unity of the organism is both manipulative and deceptive towards the organs that it governs. Critic Hodney Jones explains this notion as:

Deleuze and Guattari use the term body without organs to refer to the virtual dimensions of the body, the body freed from the organization of the organism, the body outside any determinate state, torn from here and now, exemplified, For them, in the body of the masochist, the drug addict, the lover and the Schizophrenic. (Jones 2)

It means that a body, in order to be emancipated, must be free from the deceptive clutches of its authorizing organism, which could be attempted by challenging the unity of the organism, and liberating its individual organs from the manipulative politics of the organism. Thus, the notion of “Body without Organs” refers to the rebellion of different organs against the powerful organization of the organism. In the novel, one could read Charmaine’s activities as organs and phallic technocracy as an organism. The organism dominates the body that is the collective of Charmaine’s actions and regulates its functioning within the patriarchal order.

The system curtails her freedom and shapes her activities depending on the requirement of the Project. She is bound to perform painless encounters, do the monotonous work of towel folding during her extension period in Positron and finally

inject Stan to supposed death. And after that, she is compelled to enact fake emotions and fool Ed into believing her ready for his brain transformation experiment. The conglomerate of organs, referring to her different activities conducted with the Panopticon, allows Charmaine to challenge Ed's sexbot business and save Stan from its domineering clutches. Ed's manufacturing of Elsivers and Marilyns (the new sexbots) is actually a scandal involving the technological misuse of human bodies (especially the female ones). Jocelyn informs Charmaine about Ed's master plan as:

Big Ed has a hard-on for you, and he won't take giggle for an answer. He's having a sexbot made. A sexbot. They have already sculpted your face; next they will add the body...but once he's practiced on that he'll want the real thing. Eventually, he will tire of you- and then where will you end up? (Atwood, *THGL* 213)

This warning scares Charmaine down to the core. Her sexual utility as a techno-human is beyond her imagination. Aino Koistinen in the paper "The (Care) Robot for Science Fiction: A Monster or a Tool for the Future" declares that "the history of science fiction shows us that we as humans have always been fascinated by creating the machine in our own image. Perhaps, this is a sort of God-complex, or perhaps we are just so perplexed about our own humanity, that we feel the need to re-create our image through technology in order to understand our humanness" (Koistinen 102). Nonetheless, Ed's rational behind creating sexbots is to abuse and master technology in order to accumulate profit. Charmaine primarily becomes one of its soft targets before she realizes the duplicity of the venture. Hence, the presence of sexbots politicizes the relation between gender and technology and explains the exploitation of women in both human and robot-human form.

Charmaine's personality undergoes a drastic transformation as the novel reaches its denouement. Unshackling herself from the deceptive underpinnings of technocratic hegemony, she emerges as a strong-willed female character. The redundant conspiracies of phallic techno-science fall short of disempowering her after she gains critical insight of the subject position. This happens when Jocelyn acquaints her with the truth of the Positron Project. Thus, the novel portrays Jocelyn and Charmaine sharing a sisterly bond on a techno-scientific interface. It depicts a courageous sister, Jocelyn, emancipating a credulous sister, Charmaine, from her passivity and distress. Together the two rebel against the phallic technocracy of Ed.

In this way, Charmaine's character in the beginning is much different and in contrast to her daring actions at the end. In the end, with Jocelyn's help, she tricks Ed into believing in her passivity while planning to counter deceive him at the back. It is here one finally notices Charmaine as a fully assertive character who assumingly undergoes a brain transformation surgery. Charmaine ends up toying with the masculine techno-science with Ed's plan getting backfired. Instead of Charmaine, it is Ed who undergoes a brain transformation surgery. Thus, Ed's plot of conducting sexbot business characterizing Charmaine's behavioral features concludes with Ed getting trapped in his own fabricated net. In other words, feminist standpoint, in the face of Charmaine and Jocelyn, has the ability to deconstruct the phallic dimensions of techno-science and envision a feminist techno-scientific epistemology in its place.

Conclusion

The novel is enmeshed with multifaceted realities. Centered on economic recession, it explores the baleful misuse of science and technology. Divided into different sub-sections, the article delved into the fundamental merit of human relationships and how they endure within a technological landscape. As Science and Technology theory (STS) "centers on the idea that technology and society co-constitute each other" (Johnson 3), the article examines the theory of feminist technology "that counters the pre-existing imbalances in gender relations, imbalances that favor men" (Johnson 3).

This study has systematically analyzed the major female characters and their function within the technocratic environment. Their interaction with technology is linked to their feminist identities. The themes of deception and self-deception canvas the novel emphasizing falsity towards factual information. Ultimately, the women confront technological misuse by contesting the incorrect. They do so by manipulating hegemonic masculinity, not to exercise essential control but to critique the devious control of technology in a patriarchal set-up.



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Fire Stories – Thomas Örn Karlsson

He Said, She Said:

Fake News and #MeToo in Marianne de Pierres' *Sentients of Orion*

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Abstract | The recent #MeToo movement on social media originated in Hollywood as an attempt to mitigate the drastic under-reporting of sexual harassment and gender-based violence. The rationale is that if survivors of gender-based violence (who are usually women) could find solidarity in speaking out about their experiences, they would feel empowered to mount a successful challenge to rape culture. Unfortunately, the possibilities for change held by #MeToo are in danger of being undermined by the prevalence of fake news, which threatens to discredit accusations of sexual misconduct as well as protestations of innocence by accused persons. Using the phenomena of fake news and the #MeToo movement as starting points, this paper aims to show how Marianne de Pierres' modern space opera in *Sentients of Orion* represents the slippery territory between truth and subjective interpretation, especially in loaded incidents of sexual exploitation and abuse. By exploring three incidents

from the text, we will demonstrate that de Pierres' writing, far from being 'escapist' as space opera is often assumed to be, contains a trenchant critique of contemporary discourse about sexuality and sexual misconduct.

Keywords | Fake news; #MeToo; *Sentients of Orion*; feminist resistance; Mira; rape; sexual abuse; subjective interpretation.



Resumo | O recente movimento #MeToo nas redes sociais teve a sua origem em Hollywood como uma tentativa de mitigar o drástico número de casos não declarados de assédio sexual e violência com base no gênero. A fundamentação é que se os sobreviventes de violência com base no gênero (que são normalmente mulheres) podem encontrar solidariedade ao falar sobre as suas experiências, então sentir-se-ão legitimados a desafiar com êxito a “cultura de violação”. Infelizmente, as possibilidades para a mudança promovidas pelo movimento #MeToo correm o perigo de serem prejudicadas pela prevalência de *fake news*, que ameaçam desacreditar tanto acusações de má conduta sexual, como protestos de inocência por parte de pessoas acusadas. Usando o fenômeno de *fake news*, e do movimento #MeToo como pontos de partida, este ensaio presente demonstrar como a *space opera* moderna de Marianne de Pierres, em *Sentients of Orion*, representa o território incerto entre a verdade e a interpretação subjectiva, especialmente em incidentes de exploração sexual e abuso. Explorando três incidentes do texto, demonstraremos que a escrita da autora, longe de ser “escapista”, como normalmente se entende que seja a *space opera*, na realidade contém uma crítica incisiva ao discurso contemporâneo sobre a sexualidade e a má-conduta sexual.

Palavras-Chave | Fake news; #MeToo; *Sentients of Orion*; resistência feminista; Mira; violação; abuso sexual; interpretação subjectiva.



Introduction

Sexual misconduct dominates the news. It is impossible to look at the state of events in the world without learning of a new scandal, a stringent denial or heartfelt apology about sexual advances and differing views on what might or might not be appropriate. The verbal conflict between accusers and accused often comes down to competing versions of the truth, in which the person who wields the most potent discourse in a courtroom or in the media is usually the winner. Thus, accusations of sexual impropriety frequently degenerate into slanging matches, *ad hominem* attacks and contests of rhetoric. These diversionary tactics regularly distract attention away from the facts of who did what and replace it with a focus on who said what.

The recent #MeToo movement on social media originated in Hollywood as an attempt to mitigate the drastic under-reporting of sexual harassment and gender-based violence (WHO 9; Abenstein n. pg.; Shaheen n. pg.). Victims of gender-based violence (GBV) frequently experience shame and fear of reprisal (from the perpetrator or from others), which prevent them from reporting. #MeToo is motivated by the belief that breaking the silence around GBV and sexual harassment will make a difference to the level of reporting and hence to prosecution. Its main aim is to increase discourse about sexual misconduct by creating a safe space for victims and survivors to own up about their experiences. This will generate solidarity and awareness of the prevalence of GBV in present-day society. The rationale for the movement is that *utterance* of truth can create *community*: or, to put it another way, that communities of discourse can become communities of social change. The movement is intended to segue from social media into effective political action, leading to increased social and legal prosecution of perpetrators and a reduction in the prevalence of GBV. At first glance, the movement might be perceived as the spearhead of a revolution. In theory, the world could change for the better for women, who are still the most frequent targets of GBV.

Unfortunately, the possibilities for change held by #MeToo are in danger of being undermined by the prevalence of fake news. Fake news, or the spreading of false information through official news and information channels, initially came to the world's attention during the Trump/Clinton election race as a political tool (Howard et al. 1). Fake news has led to a flurry of news channels attempting to legitimate themselves as purveying only the truth.¹ The dependence of information on discourse has highlighted the sinister implication that discourse can be mediated by ideological and political agendas, leading it to diverge from "the truth". The even more sinister result of the recent slew of fake news reporting is that it has become commonplace to use "fake news" as an accusation to cast doubt upon reports and discourse that do not please the reader or listener. Thus the very establishment of "fake news" as a part of everyday reality means that using fake news as an escape hatch is as common an occurrence as the fake news itself (Dentith 65).

¹ In reference to the manipulation of information on online platforms, Tufekci speaks of "epidemics of disinformation, meant to undercut the credibility of valid information sources" (n.pg). For further discussion of the fake news phenomenon and the effect it has on "truth", also see Ember (n.pg) and Hunt (n.pg).

While #MeToo draws its political impetus from women's right to sexual agency and safety, as well as the collective drive to see perpetrators brought to justice, it is easy to see how fake news can undermine the movement. Not only can untrue accusations lead to the downfall of those innocently accused,² but valid accusations can, with aplomb, be discredited as "fake news". The capacity of #MeToo to bring about real and desperately needed change for women is placed directly at risk by fake news: if political news can be invalidated, so the logic goes, so can reports of GBV. The two issues do not only converge: fake news could undermine #MeToo and turn a potential revolution into a temporary flicker, soon to be forgotten and swept under the carpet.

Marianne de Pierres' *Sentients of Orion*: A Speculative Intervention

Using the concepts of fake news and the #MeToo movement as starting point, this article aims to show how Marianne de Pierres' modern space opera is relevant to contemporary socio-political phenomena and movements. In particular, for de Pierres, the genre provides a medium for stringent critique of the gender status quo (Boshoff, 2017). In her *Sentients of Orion* series, de Pierres (2007, 2008, 2009, 2010), depicts the women of Orion as victims of a sustained "fake news" and propaganda campaign that misrepresents and maligns their sexual agency, similarly to the women who have spoken out in #MeToo.³

The story, which is told from a variety of viewpoints, follows Baronessa Mira Fedor, a young woman trying to save her planet and her solar system from the invading Saqr and their overlords, the Post-Species Extropists. After being raped and impregnated by the crown prince of Araldis, Trinder Pellegrini, to ensure the continuation of his line, Mira flees the planet with the help of Insignia, her sentient biozoon spaceship, whom she pilots by means of a genetic abnormality usually found only in the men of her family. She faces a number of challenges along with a widely varied cast of characters in her efforts to stop the invading forces and be re-united with the survivors on Araldis. The *Sentients of Orion* series deals with issues of conflict, politics, religion, intercultural relations, and intimacy. Importantly, all these

² In South Africa, though, less than 4% of accusations of sexual misconduct have been shown to be false (Lazard n.pg).

³ The *Sentients of Orion* series comprises four novels, which, for ease of reference will be abbreviated as follows: *Dark Space* (DS), *Mirror Space* (MS), *Chaos Space* (CS) and *Transformation Space* (TS).

aspects are profoundly gendered and highlight the power differential between men and women under patriarchy. Due to length constraints, this article will explore three incidents from *Sentients of Orion* that reinforce and echo the intricacies and power-dynamics at play in #MeToo and fake news.

It becomes clear early in *Dark Space*, the first volume in the series, that the women of Orion are secondary citizens. The Latino culture, which holds sway on Araldis, is the epitome of patriarchy, both literally and figuratively. The Prince, with his son, the Patriarch-in-Waiting, rule in a world where women are objectified and seen only as possessions, conquests or mild entertainment. Even those women privileged enough to break out of the mould and obtain a tertiary education, like Mira, are usually relegated to studying “soft” and “inferior” courses at university. Older women are discarded and disregarded, and the burden of childcare falls squarely on the shoulders of the mothers. This state of affairs is strikingly similar to what Darko Suvin calls “the author’s empirical environment” (16), or the society we currently inhabit. Women are routinely considered as nothing more than reproductive machines and therefore not worth educating. This prejudice, dominant in many societies keeps many women unaware of their own oppression and compliant with the status quo (Kiluva-Ndunda 91).

At the heart of the disempowered state of the women of Orion is their lack of agency in procreation and therefore over their own bodies. While the denizens of Orion are “humanesque”, their procreative faculties operate differently from those of humans. Sexual intercourse can be initiated by either party, but only men hold sway over fertility. It is often posited that women’s power over men, and men’s fear of women, arise from women’s ability to conceive and bear life (Rich xiii). Indeed, this is the origin of speculations about sexual and gender difference. By choosing this particular aspect as the focal point for the women of Orion’s struggle for equality, de Pierres ensures that her work, albeit in the oft-disregarded genre of space opera, has more than surface relevance to contemporary society.

It is important to establish how the women of Orion came to find themselves in a state of institutionalized inferiority and bereft of reproductive agency. Light is shed on the history of disempowerment in a conversation between Mira and her sister, Faja (DS 152-154). Faja bemoans the fact that their society is ruled by Franco, the Prince, instead of by his far more intelligent and courageous sister, Marchella. She calls the men of the clan “intransigent”, saying:

[t]hey think only of the men ... the men ... The men say they left Crux for the sake of our future. That is a lie, Mira! They left for the sake of *their* future: to keep their women restrained. Things had begun to change on Crux. The many wars had opened our eyes to other ways. (DS 152)

Here de Pierres, through Faja, explains what many feminist science fiction authors have emphasized: that patriarchy serves only men.⁴ There is a jarring difference between the “truth” as Faja sees it, and the “truth” that Mira believes. So convinced is Mira of her version of history, that she does not even question Faja, she automatically rejects her opinion as a lie:

Mira stared at her, open-mouthed. “No. That is not so. We left to arrest the dilution of our race. When our women were raped during the wars, it led to much interbreeding with our enemies. That is why they altered the terms of our fertility. To protect us.” (DS 152)

Mira’s disbelief places the official story of what happened on Araldis squarely within the domain of discourse rather than fact. Her reaction to hearing a different version of events bespeaks cognitive dissonance, which, in any universe, abets the impact of fake news. People tend to be so convinced of what they believe (often based only on information that they have been exposed to) that other possibilities are automatically rejected. Faja, however, is able to shock Mira’s beliefs by revealing that the ‘clan leaders’ had only wished to “strengthen their patriarchy’ and that the Latino race had never been ‘in danger of dilution” (DS 152). In this way she exposes and critiques the well-orchestrated campaign of fake news launched and sustained by the men of Orion in order to deprive the women of all their social power. The device of re-narrating history according to a predetermined ideological bias (in this case relating to gender) is a well-known strategy to reinforce the dominance of one group over another.

Fake news, as we know it, spreads fast and gains traction through targeting the fears of society. A very recent study published in *Science* on the spread of fake news on Twitter found that “[f]alsehoods diffused significantly farther, faster, deeper and

⁴ See, for example, *Native Tongue* by Suzette Haden Elgin (2000); *Door into Ocean* by Joan Slonczewski (2000); *Woman on the Edge of Time* by Marge Piercy (1976; rpt. 2016); and *The Wanderground* by Sally Miller Gearhart (1979). One of the most excoriating critiques of patriarchy in feminist science fiction is articulated by Suzy McKee Charnas in *Walk to the End of the World* (originally published in 1974) and its sequel, *Motherlines* (originally published in 1978) (Charnas 1994).

more broadly than the truth in all categories of information” (Vosoughi, Roy and Aral 1146). The study also found that these “false stories inspired fear, disgust, and surprise” in readers (1146). As in current reality, the fake news on Orion gained traction through appealing to the deep fears of the common people; in the case of the women, the deep-seated fear of rape, and worse, of falling pregnant from rape; and in the case of the men, the fear of their race being genetically diluted. Fear of rape, as Pumla Dineo Gqola demonstrates in *Rape: A South African Nightmare*, can determine a woman’s every move: where she goes, whom she chooses to accompany her and whom she speaks to (58). For a campaign of fake news to succeed, the threat it addresses does not have to be real; the *fear* underlying such a possible threat needs to be deep enough, as is the case in the tide of xenophobia fueled by the current U.S. administration, and as is the case in Orion.

Mira’s initial rejection of Faja’s theory also spotlights a particular social shortcoming that gives power to fake news and to those who wield it. Those who were raised in apartheid South Africa know first-hand the dangers and devastation that an institutionalized avoidance of critical thinking can engender. The travesty of apartheid was made possible by an endemic lack of critical questioning by the majority of perpetrators. Collective compliance with legislated racism was ensured by a seamless social machine (Deleuze and Guattari 141) instantiating and perpetrating state control of the media, religion and education. Faja points out that the same is true on Orion:

“You sound like a Studium lecture, Mira. Have you not thought to look past the official canon?”

In truth she had not. In her time at the Studium her mind had been immersed in Latino poetry and ship schematics. (DS 152)

Most, if not all, states control the education systems in the countries they govern and use it as a means of “producing people” (Wallin 117). These systems may encourage open-ended enquiry, which will produce a generation of critical thinkers and questioners, or discourage it, leading to a generation of blind followers. Fake news and information control could be rendered harmless through education systems that focus on critical thinking. Through the example of Mira’s failure to think outside the box of her formal curriculum, de Pierres challenges the role of

formal education in the control of information and the maintenance of patriarchal power through *not* teaching students to ask critical questions, and to draw their own conclusions about the machines of power and social control.

Sustained state-orchestrated misinformation led to the women of Orion willingly giving up their fertility, and with that, their power. The insidiousness of it does not, however, stop there. As happened with apartheid in South Africa, and all systems of misinformation, a small section of Orion society did question men's control of reproduction. The women of Orion who knew the truth about patriarchy mustered a women's resistance movement, called the Pensare. Mira's reaction to finding out that Faja belongs to this resistance group reveals yet another facet of how fake news undermines the truth:

Without warning [Faja] parted the folds of her tunic and revealed intricate lines and patterns etched into her flesh.

Mira gasped. "I have seen that before – on a Galiotto woman at the Studium. She gave me her biometric stripe. That was how I escaped".

"It is the sign of the Pensare".

"I thought they were only an invention of the Nobile".

"No invention, cara". (DS 153)

The women of Orion have been made willing collaborators in their own oppression through fake news. But the same information machine has disarmed the only resistance movement (the Pensare) by casting doubt on their existence, weaving myths around them, and by consistently spreading the rumour that they were simply "an invention". The Pensare in Orion pose a threat to the established order. In a society where critical questioning is not the norm, fake news, insidiously spread by powerful forces, can destroy the potential of revolutionary organizations, adding yet another parallel between current affairs and Orion.⁵ If #MeToo is undermined often enough with claims that accusations of harassment against powerful men are only

⁵ The lies surrounding the Pensare echo state news campaigns such as the one surrounding the death of Bolivian student Jonathan Quispe, who was reportedly killed by "a marble fired from a projectile by other protesters" during a student protest for more university funding (Scholars at Risk n.pg). María Galindo, one of the founders of Bolivian feminist protest group "Mujeres Creando" (Women Creating), exposes the falsity of this fake news in a piece entitled simply "I do not believe Romero" [the Bolivian Minister of Autonomy who said that Quispe had been killed by a marble from another student's weapon] (Galindo n.pg).

“fake news”, the movement, like the Pensare, might be relegated to the shadows, to exist only in the hearts of the few who continue questioning the status quo.

The leader of the Pensare is Marchella Pellegrini, the sister of the ruling Prince. Marchella represents the resistance of women to the manner in which the patriarchal system used misinformation to disempower the women of Orion. She applies a variety of strategies in her challenge to the status quo. One of them is giving the Crown Prince and Patriarch-in-Waiting, Trin, an alternative to the diet of fake news that he'd been fed. By aggressively challenging the ruling Prince in his son's presence, she presents Trin with a set of facts, which he, due to his constant exposure to and firm belief in the misinformation spread by the state, has not considered before. She wants to open the future Principe's eyes to the social injustices on the world he is destined to inherit and rule, particularly those injustices concerned with sexual discrimination and female agency (DS 110).

Marchella's efforts are, unfortunately, wasted on Trin. Having only ever been exposed to a limited and untrue version of the world, and having benefited directly from that particular version, it is not within his ability to question, let alone to discard what he perceives as the truth. Trin personifies the dehumanizing effect of large-scale information control on those who attain privilege from it. When Trin decides to rape Mira, he does so blinded by the framework of lies about women's reproductive rights that have been spun over Orion. Trin's friends, who hold Mira down while he rapes her, operate under the same delusion. They believe that the genetic line has to be kept “pure and safe”. There are distinct echoes here of the racist fear of miscegenation among colonialists by conceiving children with “natives” and so contaminating the “purity” of the racial line. Trin and his friends believe that it is his duty to impregnate Mira by whatever means necessary, even without her consent. In that moment, all Marchella's attempts to reveal a different truth to Trin, and all her previous efforts to expose the falseness of his belief system, are proven horrifyingly ineffective (DS 382) as patriarchy triumphs.

Marchella's resistance is not only focused on apparently ineffective awareness-raising among a population whose beliefs have become fossilized. Behind the scenes, she is involved in business and politics, trying to combat the effects of the misinformation campaign. She is willing to go great lengths to rectify the gender inequality in Latino society. Marchella's dealings with Tekton, the Lostolian Godhead, strikingly spotlights de Pierres' consistently relevant references to fake

news in its presentation of “alternative facts” and in its manipulation of which information is made available to whom.

The negotiations between Marchella and Tekton for a mining contract are described in no fewer than three different incidents in *The Sentients of Orion*: once when Trin listens to an audio recording of the events (DS 161-165); then as retold from Tekton’s point of view (DS 303-307); and again when Mira listens to the transcripts (CS 177). The fact that different “official” versions of the same event are available speaks of a dangerous control of information by the state. Analysing the manner in which this information is manipulated will shed light on the reasons for and consequences of information control in Orion.

Trin and Mira listen to the same recording of Marchella’s negotiations with Tekton, but they do so at different times, from different gender perspectives and they interpret the discussion through different background filters. In Trin and Mira’s versions, Marchella is simply an ambassador and Tekton a business interest (DS 161-165). Tekton gains control of a rare mineral in return for monetary payment and agreeing to secure access for a woman from Orion to the presence of the newly discovered God. In their version (and both their interpretations), the element that is most underplayed in comparison to Tekton’s recollection is sexuality. The parts that are missing from their versions of the meeting between Tekton and Marchella are overwritten with the word “**SUPPRESSED**” in bold (DS 162; 163; 164; 165). The use of “suppressed” instead of “edited” or “censored” comments on the suppression of women’s sexuality and voice. It also foreshadows the importance of the hidden information in subsequent versions of the conversation.

In Tekton’s version, what comes to the fore is his knowing abuse of power in order to obtain sexual gratification from Marchella (DS 303-307). In Lostolian culture, which subscribes strongly to hegemonic masculinity, it is perfectly acceptable to display one’s nakedness – including showing a male erection outside sexually intimate situations. Tekton does this, to the embarrassment of Marchella, who is seemingly there for a business meeting (DS 305). Tekton apologises and explains his arousal, somewhat disingenuously: “On Lostol it is not a thing we hide. It prevents much deception when you can see what excites a person” (DS 303). Given the comparatively hidden nature of women’s arousal, this clearly only applies to men’s sexual excitement. This scenario reminds the reader of the decades-long abuse of gender and sexual power in Hollywood as well as in other social spheres, ranging

from rape to demeaning micro-aggressions, which eventually sparked #MeToo. In many cases, sexual arousal is equated with sexual entitlement.

Tekton soon realizes that Marchella is willing to do whatever is required to gain access to God, and the knowledge that she is open to negotiation gives him a “painful” erection, which he does not try to hide (DS 309). Tekton knows that he will attain the sexual gratification he seeks. Even though her skin is “rough in comparison to that of a Lostolian female” and he can smell “the light perspiration on her brow”, Tekton is turned on. He is willing to have sexual intercourse with anything that moves – even that which so obviously offends his sensibilities (DS 310). Marchella smells bad to him, and Tekton has a penchant for women with more “flopping flesh” (CS 79) than Marchella has, but he is bent on gratification:

With the confidence of one used to getting his own way, Tekton reached for her, running his tongue along the side of her face, tasting the bitterness of iron and the tang of copper. He then shuddered into a seated position and pulled her down to him. With her face pushed to his thighs, he sent his logic-mind diving under the sea of his *akula* and began building magnificent cathedrals in his free-mind. (DS 311)

The full version of events, as told from Tekton’s point of view (DS 303-307), could easily be read as Tekton forcing the unwilling Marchella to perform oral sex on him, but in reality (for those aware of the context, as Mira is when she hears the recording), Marchella’s act is calculated. She, like him, is doing whatever it takes to get what she wants, which is to get a Latino woman nominated to gain access to God. Making use of her sexuality, she places herself in a position of disempowerment in order to empower all the women of her race on a permanent basis, and instead of a stereotypical victim, she is the instigator and the “winner” in this unequal sexual exchange. It is during the third narrative of this event, when Mira listens to the recording (CS 177), that it becomes clear that Marchella’s “whole purpose had been to save [the women] ... *No*, not that ... to *free* them”. The women of Araldis could never be free while their fertility was “held to ransom” (CS 177). De Pierres has previously depicted information as partial and subject to individual interpretation, and the case of this sexualized negotiation is no different. Neither Trin nor Mira is granted access to all the available “truths”: Marchella possesses the most detailed information about motives and actions, but it is clear that there is no single or easily available complete truth.

Significantly, de Pierres not only includes more than one version of this intimate interchange, but locates the difference between the versions in the degree of coercion and consent. In this way she brings to the fore the subjective nature of information and “truth”. These aspects pertain directly to #MeToo.⁶ High-profile sexual harassment cases increasingly show different interpretations of events as perceived by the victim and the accused. Individual differences in worldview, agenda, metaphysical outlook and psychological make-up lead people to perceive intimate interactions in widely divergent ways. This points to the urgent need for open dialogue regarding subjects such as rape, sexual harassment, agency, consent and even basic appropriateness.

Trin, who hears the same version of Marchella’s negotiation with Tekton as Mira, is unable to interpret the recording in any way other than that which is presented to him. He does not question what he hears, and does not think further than the surface “facts” that are presented to him. He is unaware of the possibility of other interpretations or deeper meanings. In having Mira listen to the same recording, but coming to completely different conclusions, de Pierres demonstrates how “factual” interpretation can be altered through a questioning attitude and critical thinking. A consistent application of information control serves to dumb people down. Not asking questions (which is actively discouraged by many so-called education systems) is just a symptom of misinformation. While there is seemingly no great harm in the manner people fail to think further than the surface regarding information which is made available to them, it becomes hugely problematic when a lack of critical thinking allows social atrocities such as Trin’s rape of Mira, or the suppression of large sections of society by others as in the case of apartheid or institutionalized masculine hegemony.

Conclusion

Orchestrated through sustained information control, not having any choice in fertility and reproduction contributes to the suppression of women by the patriarchal system of Orion. As becomes clear from the very existence of #MeToo, in spite of all

⁶ In her comparison between the short fiction of Ursula K. Le Guin and the South African Truth and Reconciliation Committee, Deirdre Byrne notes that ‘both *events* and *accounts* purportedly have a relation to truth’ (237, emphasis added).

the gains that have been made against hegemonic masculinity and toward equality for all, we live in a world where power is still used to foist sexual intercourse upon the powerless or to gain sexual favours (from another perspective, some resort to using their sexuality in order to gain access to power that would otherwise be denied to them). All of these features are echoed in *The Sentients of Orion*.

At the time of writing this article, the world is waiting to see what will become of #MeToo. Will it indeed be the start of a revolution, or will powerful players be able to shrug off accusations of sexual misconduct and violence as mere “fake news”, escaping with no consequence and rendering resistance useless? In de Pierres’ *Orion*, a deep-rooted, state-orchestrated campaign of false information, along with the manipulation of information availability and the failure of the education system have led to the disenfranchisement of all women, particularly in terms of their sexual agency. In addressing these issues, so closely related to news broadcasts in consensus reality, *The Sentients of Orion*, poses a strong and relevant challenge to the manner in which manipulated truths uphold the unequal gender status quo.



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OFFSPRING

BY | Martin Simonson



From the Past – Thomas Örn Karlsson

The forest reached as far as one could see, even though the base had been set up on a ridge and the view was undisturbed for miles. Uncounted folds of ancient landscape lay covered under furry white pines, pale birch-wands with auras of silvery powder and other trees transformed beyond reckoning by the frost. Ludovic scanned the chaotic jumble of what he knew was mainly spruce, pine, birch and aspen. For a moment, he imagined that this was what the place must have looked like a thousand years ago, but he instantly dismissed the notion with a self-deprecating sneer. Futile illusion! No roads cut through the overwhelming frosty mass of vegetation as in the old days. No fields interrupted the army of marching trees. No smoke rose from clearings. Houses on these latitudes had been built of wood, and they had long since collapsed and merged with the underbrush – together with the rest of the Scandinavian civilization.

Ludovic pushed the chair back from his desk, stretched languidly and watched his arms. They were typically Scandinavian, with light, freckled skin and tufts of red-blond hair shadowing the forearms. He was still not used to the new body, even though he had worn it for almost a year now, and he could still feel sudden stabs of satisfaction when he looked at himself in the mirror. The body was based on the classic Northern European matrix, with a dash of Southern European bone structure. Mid-blond hair, light skin, blue eyes. There were people in the team who had chosen the opposite, Southern European features with Northern European structure, but he preferred the lighter build. Better for field work, if not for anything else. Not such a bothersome lot of bones and muscles to drag along.

Ludovic went up to the panoramic windows. It was an early morning in April, and just a fine sheet of nano between himself and fatal disease. The trees thrived and prospered, but not a single C-class individual would be able to survive out there. The D-classers would be fine, naturally, but who wanted to strut around coated in metal?

He was suddenly overwhelmed by the distance between himself and all those lives he had spent the last 130 years studying. Those A-classers who had walked the forests on the other side of the window, with only thin layers of clothing covering their actual *bodies*... They would swim naked in the lakes, draw deep breaths of authentic, untreated air, perhaps sweating and screaming when the nightmares beset them at night, but laughing again as the sun rose. They had been torn between hope and despair in ways he could not fathom, no matter how closely he studied their ways.

The abyss slowly began to crack open under his feet, and Ludovic retired quickly to his desk to try and think about something else. Lately, the vision of the dark shaft gobbling up both light and comprehension had visited him with alarming frequency, and it was increasingly difficult to rid himself of it. He sat down, closed his eyes and deliberately breathed in slowly and steadily through the nostrils, until his pulse returned to normal by itself.

He was okay.

A rapid glance at the mechanical clockwork on his wrist revealed that breakfast was almost over. He would have to hurry if he wanted some before they closed the kitchen.

The canteen was already half empty when he arrived – the birthplace of Elisabeth Hesselblad was on today's program and most of the technicians had left the base before dawn. Catholic saints in Scandinavia were not the usual fare, to put things mildly, and the prospect of finding something worthwhile really should have interested him a lot more, especially since they only had a day to explore the site before moving on to Läckö. Ludovic, however, didn't nurture any hopes they'd find anything exciting and had allowed the team to take off before him. The archives showed a number of owners throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. How big were the chances they would find something now? According to the preliminary reports, only the foundations were left – a classic up here in the damp Le Nord.

He browsed through the text until the droid arrived with his coffee and the croissant, as anachronistic as the wrist watch. All of it served as a reminder of his ties to the ancient world; he supposed this was the reason the technicians considered him a snob. Ludovic couldn't have cared less. He brought the cup of hot coffee to his lips and smiled absent-mindedly as he watched the impenetrable forest outside the windows, where the trees had begun to steam in the light of the slowly rising sun. All these rituals... He just couldn't help himself. After all, he was professor of anthropology, archaeology and cultural history, and he loved the ancient customs, the artifacts, the lifestyle of the past. Pipe smoking, for instance, involved a complex and manifold set of sensations that made him feel alive in the old sense of the word: the texture of the tobacco against his fingertips as he packed the pipe, the sudden flare of the match, the warm cherry wood of the bowl against his folded palm, the smooth stem and the bit against his lips... and the forbidden feeling as he filled his lungs with

smoke. Such excesses had raised his insurance fees to almost impossible levels, but it was well worth the money. If he really tried, he could almost imagine what it would have been like in the old days, even when, as now, he had to smoke in a sterile metal-and-nano compartment instead of enjoying the ritual in the more congenial surroundings of his murky study, with dusty volumes on the shelves and well-worn leather armchairs.

A ringtone woke him from his thoughts. He had chosen the sound from the classical twentieth-century phones in a vain attempt to imprint a sober and old-fashioned atmosphere in his communications with the rest of the team, but it was practically useless--the feeling was instantly ruined by the uncultivated voices, marked by pre-programmed accents, and above all the invariably trivial exchanges.

“Ludovic?” panted Friedrich as soon as he had approved the call, and the bronze-coloured face appeared above his steaming cup. “Sir?”

“Yes?” said Ludovic, with a tinge of irritation. “I’m in the middle of my breakfast.”

“I’m sorry to interrupt, sir, but I think you’d better come over. We’ve, uh... found something.”

“Specify.”

“Yes, well, it’s a... some sort of... subterranean space”.

Ludovic hearkened. “What’s that? Where?”

“Well, that is to say, uh... under the house”.

“A cellar?”

“I’m not sure, but I think...”

“The correct term is cellar, if it is situated under a common living space”.

“Well, it’s not exactly a cellar, sir. We were exploring the remains of this here, uh, saint’s house, and found a trapdoor. It was sealed from the inside in some way, so we opened up and...”

“You opened an air-raid shelter? Without informing me first?”

Friedrich was silent for a few seconds.

“Not exactly,” he said at last. “We... I didn’t have time to stop them. But as soon as I found out what was going on, I gave orders to vacate the... uh...”

“Did they touch anything down there?”

“No, I don’t think so. I searched them when they came out”.

“Who went in?”

“Stahl and Villeneuve.”

“All right. Put them in quarantine immediately. What have you found?”

Friedrich hesitated. Then he said:

“It’s probably best if you came over. So you can see for yourself.”

Ludovic sighed. “Okay, I’ll be there in...” – he turned his wrist slightly to check the watch--” ... about fifteen minutes”.

Ludovic put the cup back on the table together with the croissant, still untouched, left the canteen and went straight to the locker room, where he began putting on the protective suit. If he had chosen to work as a droid, like Barbusse and many others in the crew, he could have taken off without any of these annoying procedures, but as it was he had to undergo the complete safety protocol, with tedious measurements of oxygen levels and blood pressure and so on. He railed impatiently at the personnel in the hangar as they helped him check out one of the smaller hovercrafts.

An air-raid shelter under the saint’s house. He didn’t want to admit it, even to himself, but Friedrich’s words – above all, his *tone* – had tickled his curiosity. If Friedrich dared to interrupt him in the middle of his breakfast they had obviously found something interesting.

Ludovic would usually travel slowly over the topography in search of subtle remains the scanner might have missed, but once he disengaged from the base and reached hovering altitude he brought the craft up to an almost reckless speed, just above the tree tops.

Barbusse received him at the landing area the engineers had prepared the day before. They had felled a good number of trees and even though they had pulled the trunks and branches aside it was still difficult to get a good view of the ruins, situated about thirty meters from the clearing. Barbusse strode over the branches on his tall, whirring legs without getting tangled and Ludovic followed in his yellow protective suit. Friedrich was waiting for him at the entrance, where the team had established a lab tunnel according to standard procedure.

“Show me in”, said Ludovic without saluting.

Friedrich nodded nervously behind his visor and led the way through the tunnel. Some ten meters ahead two technicians were standing, chatting. They

straightened up when they saw Ludovic's yellow suit with the green shoulder stripes, and took a respectful step aside. Friedrich made a sign towards the ground, where a steel trapdoor, partly covered with moss, had been unveiled. One of the technicians opened it. Ludovic activated his searchlight and began climbing down the iron steps into the darkness below.

"Air-raid shelter with sealed trapdoor", he mumbled into the microphone and let the camera take in the details of the bottom side of the door. "Approximately 2030's. Probably Bofors."

A few more steps and he stood on the shelter's floor. He looked around as he waited for Friedrich to arrive. The technicians had left footprints everywhere, but there seemed to be few other traces of contamination. The sleeping area was untouched, judging by the unbroken layer of dust that covered the wrinkled sheets. The walls were dominated by old screens, a standard feature of the shelters from this period. The kitchen area was full of mugs and glasses, also covered in dust.

"I stopped them as soon as I heard what they'd found," said Friedrich behind him. "I don't think they..."

"So I can see", said Ludovic drily. "Give me the prelims."

"Yes. Well. Two main areas, the second one behind the door over there. No signs of intrusion. Sleeping area and kitchen both intact".

"Yes, yes," said Ludovic, waving his hand. "What's in the other room?"

"Well, that's what I think you will find interesting. The technicians found relics after three Class-A individuals, and a series of written documents".

People and books, translated Ludovic to himself and felt his heart beat a little faster. He went up to the door and opened it. Another rectangular space, but here the walls were covered with shelves, crowded with books of different size and shape. In the far end of the room was a table and a few chairs. On the table stood two transparent bottles, something that looked like an old camera, a few more books and a chandelier. A jacket hung on the back of one of the chairs and the tattered remains of a couple of pants lay on the floor by the table's legs. Pale bones protruded under the cloth here and there. A cranium with a broad crack over the forehead rested on the floor next to the chair, and on the other side were similar heaps.

Skeletons and skulls, in the old language. Remains of *real* people, Ludovic reminded himself. Those skeletons had been forged in *real* wombs.

He turned slowly in the door.

“Thank you, Friedrich,” he said. “I’ll take it from here.”

“Okay, but...” began Friedrich, but Ludovic just shook his head, entered the room and closed the door behind him.

He remained by the door for a moment, shut off the search light, activated his own luminous filters and took in the scene. He had been waiting for ages for something like this to cross his path. The regular troops usually managed to destroy any valuable remains in the country during the campaigns to exterminate the B-class scum, but this seemed to be a virgin tomb.

Ludovic took a few steps into the room and scanned the bookshelves. As he advanced he spoke absent-mindedly into the microphone. “Seven or eight hundred volumes, give or take. Many with hardcover bindings and in reasonably good shape.” Enough, in itself, to trigger the interest of any respectable tomb raider.

Ludovic took a reverent step towards the books and passed his gloved hands over the spines to remove the dust and get a view of the titles. Mostly European works, written in different languages: Spanish, English, Swedish, French. Philosophy, poetry and history in the main, but also a few novels. Chiefly twentieth and twenty-first centuries – the collected works of Pope in an early nineteenth-century edition was one of the seemingly few exceptions. Nothing of real value at a first glance, perhaps, but still a decent library, considering the circumstances. The only thing that broke the symmetry of the parade of books was a solitary, black Olympus camera, placed just in front of a volume of Lucretius in Spanish translation.

Ludovic shut off his own camera and the microphone but did not yield to the temptation to pull out some of the books and look more systematically for goodies-- there would be plenty of time for that over at the base later. Instead he went up to the table. The relics of the three A-classers were spread out over the chairs and the floor. Hopefully, in due time they would acquire more solid identities. The mere fact they were A-class individuals was obviously of sufficient interest, but what if... What if it was something more than just vulgar middle-class this time? Ludovic’s area of expertise was the provinces and he knew he couldn’t compete with the urban archaeologists’ findings in terms of sophistication. Still, he never lost hope that one day he would come across something unexpected. He didn’t ask for much; anything beyond grocery receipts would do. Anything that could help him gain a more subtle understanding of how these people had lived.

Next to the bottles and the book was an album with covers made of coarse fabric. Ludovic felt a sudden pang of expectation as he carefully removed the artifact from the table to take a look at the contents.

The album was full of black-and-white pictures, 20x30 cm according to the eye scanner. Judging by the scenes they were probably taken in the area: there were pictures of rivers and waterfalls with long exposures, trees covered in snow, a wooden landing stretching over a black lake and people with gasmasks holding... lamps?

Ludovic fixed his eyes on the picture and zoomed in. The gas mask seemed to be an authentic Russian model from the middle of the twentieth century, but the lamp looked more like a decorative item from the early twenty-first century than a real artifact.

Ludovic turned the pages. The pictures gradually changed in tone, from contemplative nature scenes to empty highways, abandoned houses and cars, corpses by a kitchen table, gas stations going up in flames... The progression was apparently arranged so as to document the different phases of the Shock in a narrative sequence. Towards the end was a photograph of recently dug graves on a field. Next to the graves were two men in gasmasks, long raincoats and rubber boots, leaning on spades. On the opposite page, pictures of women and children.

Ludovic kept turning the pages. The last ones were dominated by photographs of a house, similar to the archival pictures of Hesselblad's home, and interior shots from the shelter. The very last photograph showed three bearded men, around fifty years of age, sitting by the very table in front of him. One of them, a tattooed fellow with a bulky digital camera in one hand, looked straight into the lens, proposing a drunken toast. Another one, a long-limbed man with worn-out pants, leaned back in his chair with hanging arms as he looked up at the ceiling. A ballpen stuck out languidly between his fingers. The third A-classer, a fairly short, wiry character wearing a basketball cap, was leaning over the table with his head in his hands. He watched the others with a melancholy smile.

Ludovic stared at the picture. It was difficult to say if it was arranged or just a spontaneous snapshot. But who was the photographer? He turned the pages backwards, scanning them for possible references, but found nothing. Perhaps they had taken the picture with a timer, using the camera on the shelf.

He put the album back on the table, picked up the book and blew the dust off the cover. A title in Swedish: "Movements in the woods". The cover picture

resembled those he had seen in the album: a black-and-white photograph of naked white birches beyond dark waters, and an indistinct silhouette of a person wearing some sort of hooded monk outfit, moving among the trees. Below the picture were the names of the authors: “By Per Johansson and Martin Simonson. Illustrations by Thomas Örn Karlsson”.

Ludovic put the book away, activated the system and ordered visuals of the three names from the Swedish A-class archives. After applying the appropriate filters they appeared on his retina: Per Johansson, Swedish writer; Martin Simonson, associate professor of English literature at a Spanish university; Thomas Örn Karlsson, photographer and the last known owner of the Hesselblad house. He opened the album on the last page and compared. Karlsson, the tattooed photographer with the grizzly beard, was easy to recognize. The other two were a little harder to identify, but after a while he realized that the man wearing the cap responded to Johansson’s profile, while the long-limbed fellow staring at the ceiling must be Simonson.

He put the album back on the table, shut off the system and sat down cautiously on one of the empty chairs. His eyes fell on the bottles on the table. One of them was open and practically empty, but the other was untouched, corked and sealed with red wax. He turned it and wiped the dust off the handwritten label: “Karlsson’s aquavit”. As usual, the angels had taken their share during the hundred and fifty years or so that had passed, but there were at least three quarters left in the bottle.

“Aquavit...” The very word was like a spell, and he was transported to sweeping views of pastoral Carl Larsson landscapes, with meadows and cattle and lakes bordered with ethereal birches, farmhands and maidens under leafy oaks, kitchen gardens and tubulars pulled out of a black, rich soil. Aquavit had been a popular drink in Scandinavia. Distilled from potatoes and mellowed with... well, there had been different recipes. As a cultural historian specialized in Mid-Sweden, Ludovic had tasted the beverage a few times for strictly scientific purposes, but it had been newly produced and he wasn’t even sure the ingredients really came from Le Nord. And it had definitely not been produced by A-classers, so the soul of the craftsmanship had been lost.

But this...

Ludovic stared greedily at the bottle for a few seconds, and then he surprised himself by suddenly breaking the wax seal, uncork the bottle with his multi-tool, and fill up the emergency deposit on his left hip. He poured and poured, as if in a trance,

until the bottle was completely empty. Then he closed his lips around the emergency mouthpiece and took a sip.

His tongue and throat stung sharply before an imposing warmth began to spread in his stomach. He felt the heat in his cheeks. Then he closed his eyes and took another sip, a little more cautiously, to try to identify the taste.

St John's worth.

That's what it was.

He took a third sip and tasted it with the intellect this time. In spite of the herb's name, no spontaneous associations to the Christian saint were established – instead, an irrefutably pagan atmosphere gathered momentum within him. The yellow flowers of the herb took shape in his head, and then the photographer with the grizzly beard appeared on a forest track, bare-chested and with a camera dangling around his neck. He was humming an old tune as he nipped off flowers and leaves here and there.

Ludovic took yet another sip of the aquavit. Then he opened the book and began to read.

Several hours passed. At one point, Friedrich knocked on the door and asked if everything was all right, and if he needed anything. "All is fine", Ludovic replied, and added that there would be no further interruptions, under any circumstances.

Then he continued reading.

And drinking.

When he was done, he put the book on the table and sat staring at the cover for a long time. "Movements in the woods. By Per Johansson and Martin Simonson. Illustrations by Thomas Örn Karlsson."

The cover picture showed the monk of the story moving among the trees. Or was it perhaps the partisan girl, returning ghost-like after an attack in the Borderlands? Impossible to tell. One thing he did know: those bones on the floor had once belonged to real bodies – and the bodies had been true *parts* of the world out there. Not like himself and the other C-classers, who had to waddle along in their protective nano suits, self-contained and detached from everything outside themselves.

His own memories stretched as far back as 2060, more or less, *after* the Shock, and they had been stored over three generations. His consciousness was connected to

his body merely through the nervous system. The ties of the A-classers, on the other hand, had been solid. They may have had short lives, but at least they had been *real*.

The first wisps of hopelessness began to dance around him. When he sat down with the book a few hours earlier he had felt a growing excitement; a logical consequence of the presence of ancient artifacts on the table, and the effects of the aquavit. But now the bottomless abyss started to groan and widen again.

He would never fathom, on any deeper level, how these people understood their place in the world, the width of their relationship with the environment. The art they produced, the passions that burned, the despair, the myths about the extinction that everybody had to undergo; it was all beyond him.

Or was he mistaken?

Was there a way of bringing forth the old gods again, to ask them for relief? To actually *feel* the world before it was over?

Ludovic stared hard at the cover of the book, as if to elicit some sort of response. Then he got up on shaky legs, extracted the bag for samples from the front pocket of the nano suit, opened it and shoved the book, the album, the camera, the chandelier and the bottles inside. He dropped to his knees and gathered the relics of the three A-classers, put them inside the bag, sealed it as well as he could and stumbled out of the room.

Friedrich saw him exit the lab tunnel and make his way towards the hovercraft. He must have realized something was wrong because he tried to catch up and exchange a few words, but Ludovic brushed him aside and climbed into the cockpit without answering any of the assistant's questions. Then he engaged the ship's system and asked Christophe to program a trip to the nearest fjord, as fast as possible. It took a while before he was able to activate the autopilot, but at the fourth try he finally managed to place his index finger on the right spot on the screen. The hovercraft wheezed upwards, turned ninety degrees and shot off over the trees.

The journey took twelve minutes all in all. They landed on the water next to a sandy beach surrounded by irregular granite rocks that shifted in colour between pink and gray. Chris manoeuvred them closer and nuzzled the ship halfway up on the beach.

Ludovic sat motionless in the cockpit, watching the fjord's uneven surface of battered steel, and the reeds, colourless under the pale afternoon sky, that had conquered one end of the beach.

This was the Idefjord. On the other side was a land that had once been known as Norway. It was historical territory: not very long ago, Vikings had entered these waters from Skagerack, and this was where the mad Swedish king Charles XII launched his last campaign in an attempt to seize the neighbouring kingdom.

Now, however, it was Le Nord, an empty province in the French-German Empire.

Ludovic grabbed the sample bag, opened the door and took a drunken step into mid-air. He fell in the sand, cursing between his teeth as he got up. Then he dropped the bag and went over to the reeds, where he began breaking off the dry, brittle stems. He carried the broken stumps back to the bag and took another turn, and then another, and when he felt it was enough he began building a big heap on the water's edge.

“Ludovic.” The humming voice of Friedrich in his left ear. “Return to the craft. I repeat: return to...”

Damn. He had forgotten to shut down the system. They had located him long ago, of course. Just a matter of minutes now before they'd be here.

Ludovic cut Friedrich's voice in mid sentence and began pulling off the protective coveralls. Alarm tones went off in his ears, lights flared on his retinas, vibrations shook his arms and legs, but in the end he managed to peel off the yellow nanosuit. It fell on the sand with a mournful rustle.

He drew a deep breath and then he pulled off the helmet. It was madness, of course, this body has cost him a fortune. But he just couldn't stop – he had to find out what it was like.

He drew another deep breath and filled his lungs with the poisonous air.

Nothing happened.

He let the air out, and inhaled once more.

His heart kept beating.

Then he felt the wind against his face for the first time. It was cold and wild.

The sand was rough against his naked soles. It shifted under the weight of his body.

He remained still for a while, took it all in.

It was real. No nano between himself and the world. The *real* world. And he was still alive and physically operative. For the time being.

Probably not for much longer.

The heap of reeds swayed slightly on the water's edge, but it was sufficiently solid and voluminous not to disintegrate under the pressure of the small, choppy waves. Ludovic lifted the sample bag and poured the contents over the reeds. The stems cracked and rustled as the bones fell on them. Some of the relics tumbled off and hit the water. Ludovic picked them up with shaky hands and placed them next to the book and the album. Then he pushed the whole thing further out, wading after the heap in his thin pants. His feet ached in the shockingly cold water. Shivering, he managed to pull out the lighter and the pipe of the shirt's breast pocket, produced a flickering flame and held it to the reeds until he saw strokes of smoke surround the relics. After a few seconds the first flames broke through.

He placed the pipe next to the book and gave the bonfire one last push. It sailed slowly towards the main current of the fjord.

Ludovic pulled off his pants and shirt and waded further out after the burning heap of reeds. Wisps of smoke were caught by the afternoon breeze and made his nostrils twitch. He no longer sensed his feet, but he could feel his testicles contract and withdraw as he waded deeper into the water.

This is what it is really like.

This is. What it.

Is really...

A golden cluster of fire spread over the dark waters of the fjord. He now realized that the skulls looked like giant eggs in a burning bird's nest. Would they come? He felt like screaming, but he knew there were no words to bring forth the gods, only pain and sacrifice.

That was how it had to be.

He heard a gurgling sound deep in his throat and felt his lungs wheeze as he tried to fill them again.

"Come..." he whispered, and coughed. "Please come..."

He was struggling to breathe now and darkness settled around him. As if in a dream he perceived a great black bird that slowly descended from the pale sky. The bird screamed at him in a language he had never heard before. It grew bigger and finally settled on the water beside him, huge and black and shrieking.

Ludovic, his senses mollified, slowly let himself go. The gods had arrived. They would carry him to regions beyond waking, where no pain ever was or could be.

Because he was their offspring.

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS



Messengers from the Stars: On Science Fiction and Fantasy

No. 4 – 2019

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Martin Simonson | Martin Simonson received his PhD from the University of the Basque Country with a dissertation on the narrative dynamics of *The Lord of the Rings*. He is the author of the monographs *The Lord of the Rings and the Western Narrative Tradition* (Walking Tree Publishers, 2008) and, with Raúl Montero, *El héroe del oeste en Las Crónicas de Narnia* (Peter Lang, 2014) and *El Western fantástico de Stephen King: hibridización y desencantamiento en "El Pistolero"* (Peter Lang, 2018). He is the translator of several works by J.R.R. Tolkien into Spanish, among others *Beowulf* (2014), *The Story of Kullervo* (2015) and *Beren and Lúthien* (2018). He currently teaches English 19th and 20th century literature in the BA program of English Studies, and an introductory course on fantasy, horror and science fiction at the MA program of comparative literature at the University of the Basque Country.

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Thomas Örn Karlsson | Thomas Örn Karlsson started out as a nature and landscape photographer but gradually evolved towards the realm of horror and fantasy. Recent exhibitions include #MEMORYLANE, in which levitation art is combined with music (by Anders Rane), and “Out of this world”, a collaboration with writers Martin Simonson and Raúl Montero, which was presented, together with a lecture, at Fotografiska Museet in Stockholm in August 2017. Thomas currently works as ambassador for Olympus.

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