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"Not in the Spaces We Know": An Exploration of Science Fiction and the Bible

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"NOT IN THE SPACES WE KNOW": AN EXPLORATION OF SCIENCE FICTION AND THE BIBLE

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INTRODUCTION

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"Not in the spaces we know, but between them," is a quotation known to H. P. Lovecraft fans from the mysterious *Necronomicon*, as described in Lovecraft's *The Dunwich Horror*. It is (ab)used as the title of this collection of essays, taken out of context. In its original context it refers to the continued presence of a race of ancient non-humans, who dwell, "not in the spaces we know, but between them." The setting of the quote has been abstracted to refer to this project and its content: reading Science Fiction and the Bible "in between" the usual scholarly spaces. Different disciplines and methodologies are invoked, terminologies are united, the transcendent and the mundane stand side by side: we attempt to look into new spaces, "in-between" spaces, not yet explored.

Religion, myth, history, and Science Fiction go well together—very well so, maybe inextricably or definitively so. Science Fiction is a lively genre with contributions made in a variety of media: literature, television, film, visual arts, design. Since its corpus and its canons are still being created, its definition is in flux. Often, Science Fiction (SF) scholar Darko Suvin's definitions are cited. Suvin writes, for example:

> SF concentrates on possible futures and their spatial equivalents, but it can deal with the present and the past as special cases of a possible historical sequence seen from an estranged point of view (by a figure from another time and/or space). SF can thus use the creative potentialities of an approach not limited by a consuming concern with empirical surfaces and relationships.[1]

Several keywords and observations from this summary of what constitutes Science Fiction are important to the present collection of articles. Science Fiction often focuses on depicting possible futures, but it is equally at home in portraying estranged visions of past and present. Science Fiction can feature "figure[s] from another time and/or space," such as aliens, angels, artificial intelligences, or future humans but it need not do so. Importantly, Science Fiction tends to extrapolate its worlds from an author's reality, often to offer an estranged view of that reality. Since the beginnings of Science Fiction as a literary genre are most frequently located around the mid to late 19th century (with Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* of 1818 as an earlier outlier) and thus around the time

[1] D. Suvin, "The Poetics of the Science Fiction Genre," *College English* 34.3 (1972), 372–82 (377). But see, e.g., I. D. Wilson's essay in this collection for alternative definitions and critical engagement with Suvin.

of scientific and industrial revolutions, Science Fiction as extrapolation from given realities often engages with the impact of technology and scientific progress on the world. As such it also speculates about the limits of science and that which science cannot (yet) explain.

The interlinking of topics such as religion, belief, theology, history, mythology, social memory, and social change can be seen in much exciting Science Fiction that pushes the boundaries of the genre and of the imagination. In the world of Neal Stephenson's novel *Snow Crash* we find institutional religion in a capitalist dystopia brought to an absurd extreme; Cixin Liu's *Three-Body* trilogy imagines a scenario in which scientists lose their "belief" in science.

Science Fiction often takes the time for sustained metaphysical speculation and assumes for itself the authority to play through thought-scenarios that in the past may have sooner found a place in theological treatises. Names and roles have changed: the author is not a religious authority or theologian, the *mysterium tremendum* is not called "god" or "the holy," but the underlying thoughts are related. The VALIS novels by Philip K. Dick are examples of works often shelved under Science Fiction that engage in profound mystical speculation. It is possible to read encounters with the unknown or unknowable in Science Fiction as formerly equivalent to speculating about a deity or other unseen higher power—mysterious, not-revealed, half-revealed, or only revealed to some. The alien in Science Fiction may have become a cipher for the unknown that fulfills an audience's wish to peek into the realm of the mysterious unrevealed. The mainstream Science Fiction alien can add an element of mystery to disenchanted, sober reality; the retention of control over the sublime or the alien when reading a Science Fiction novel or watching Science Fiction television or film is a way to add mystery and transcendence to one's reality and at the same time does not allow the preternatural or supernatural to approach too closely: as the audience of Science Fiction, we do not encounter the alien directly, we merely watch others encountering, which means that we can withdraw ourselves from it if the mystery becomes too intense, by closing the book or switching off the television.

If we regard passages of the Bible as mythological and/or theological discourse, this is one of the thematic links the Bible has with Science Fiction. In the Bible we see theological speculation, strong theological and mythological claims, differing ideologies, and of course a retention of control even in engaging with ideas of the supernatural or sublime—somebody with significant authority somehow kept the records after all. The topic "religion and Science Fiction"[2] has received slightly more scholarly attention than the

[2] E.g., D. E. Cowan, *Sacred Space: The Quest for Transcendence in Science Fiction Film and Television* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2010); P. J. Nahin, *Holy Sci-Fi! Where Science Fiction and Religion Intersect* (New York:

topic "the Bible and Science Fiction," specifically. Of course works on religion and Science Fiction often draw upon the Bible and of course Bible and Science Fiction is an important underlying topic in these works. Much interesting work can and has been done in areas of reception history, motif comparison, etc. In addition to this, discussing specifically the Bible and related literatures in conjunction with Science Fiction creates hermeneutical, heuristic, and methodological sightlines that can be of use in Biblical Studies and also in theology.[3]

Much Science Fiction is concerned with epistemology. Epistemology is a topic that is quite worthwhile revisiting every once in a while in Biblical Studies (or other disciplines) to check where we currently stand. How do we think we know? What impact would a complete or partial reversal of what we thought we know have? Do we want to provoke this kind of disruptive, destructive reading or will it endanger our jobs? Reading *Solaris* or *His Master's Voice* by Stanislaw Lem, in which the global academy dedicates all its resources to explaining essentially inexplicable phenomena, might make one feel pessimistic about ever explaining the distant past, but the novels grant interesting insights into accepted patterns, bureaucracies, and memes of the academy by way of satire.

Some aspects that come into view in a comparison of the Bible and Science Fiction have to do with social memory, the socio-cultural setting of artifacts, and interpretive work done by those who care deeply about a canon. Lem's *Memoirs Found in a Bathtub* is set in the wake of a catastrophic data loss event (all paper is destroyed) and stresses the fragility and the importance of record-keeping as well as the dangers of constructing facts from insufficient data. Here, we can draw a topic from Science Fiction and bring it to the table during a discussion of ancient history: how much can we reliably understand of an ancient community's record-keeping? How careful should we be when reconstructing?

Hugh Howey's *Wool* asks about memory and authoritative control over official memory. This might inspire reconsidering the question of who is and was the keeper of memory and who got to enter the "official" record into history. This question might be posed to the Bible and it might be posed to contemporary scholarship. What some works of Science Fiction have in common is that the mechanisms of history and authority are first revealed and then dismantled. Such works ultimately seem to imply the utopian message (utopian to some) that the patriarchy or its cipher in a given work can indeed be smashed.

Springer, 2014); J. F. McGrath (ed.), *Religion and Science Fiction* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2011); G. McKee, *The Gospel According to Science Fiction: From the Twilight Zone to the Final Frontier* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2007).

[3] See, e.g., F. Uhlenbruch, *The Nowhere Bible* (Berlin/Boston: de Gruyter, 2015).

On a more sociological or socio-cultural level, comparing Science Fiction and the Bible allows insights into canon, canonization, and power structures. Here, one can look to Science Fiction examples to learn about "ownership" of a canon (both the biblical canon and the scholarly canon), and the possibilities of claiming the power to set, critique, and re-write canon. This is a fundamentally disruptive approach. It is not necessarily intended, however, to attack or destroy a beloved canon, scholarly or scriptural. Rather, the purpose of such readings is to make the canon portable, make it future proof, to be able to carry it into the unknown future. This may need to include a certain amount of shedding and also strong critique and distancing oneself from former practices, but it is not automatically a destructive or disrespectful endeavor.

In order to bring together those who are interested in exploring reception historical, methodological, theological, or theoretical intersections the program unit called "Science Fiction and the Bible" was launched in 2012 as an exploratory project at the European Association of Biblical Studies. The unit has met three times so far, at the EABS' Annual Meeting in Leipzig 2013, EABS/ISBL in Vienna 2014, and EABS in Cordoba 2015.

In the following, work based on papers presented in Leipzig and in Vienna is collected. The essays collected here have the honorable task of engaging with methodology and theory in this new area of using critical approaches from Science Fiction studies in Biblical Studies. The papers have many things in common, among others that their exploration of methods and theories is anchored in case studies drawn from the Hebrew Scriptures. The research group "Science Fiction and the Bible," however, is interdisciplinary and continues to welcome proposals from all cognate areas of Biblical Studies and all cognate areas of Science Fiction studies—which may include science, fantasy, horror, utopia/dystopia, parapsychology, etc.

A primary disciplinary dialogue partner—though by far not the only one—is Science Fiction studies, which began conceptualizing critically the strange and uncanny in the 1970's. The "beginning" of Science Fiction literature itself is placed variably. Early Science Fiction authors usually mentioned in histories of the genre are Edgar Allan Poe, Mary Shelley, Jules Verne, and H. G. Wells (though of course the definition of the genre and its beginning is contested). Ground-breaking work that shows that Science Fiction is a rich cultural area well worth critical study has been done by scholars such as Suvin, Fredric Jameson, and Lyman Tower Sargent.[4] A landmark development in the field was the foundation of

[4] Starting points for further reading are, e.g., D. Suvin, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction: On the Poetics and History of a Literary Genre* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1979); F. Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions* (London: Verso, 2007). L. T. Sargent, "The Three Faces of Utopianism Revisited," *Utopian Studies*

the journal *Science Fiction Studies* in 1973.[5] Even more important work—more important because if no primary works were produced, scholarship would not have a subject—has been done by writers of Science Fiction who added to and diversified the Science Fiction canon since and after the 1970's, thereby keeping the young field of Science Fiction studies on its toes. Writers of note include Margaret Atwood, Octavia Butler, Ursula K. Le Guin, and Nancy Kress. Of course the genre continues to thrive. The Internet enables even livelier and faster dissemination and discussion (also beyond peer-reviewed academia), re-working, and voice-raising.

When Luke Skywalker is taking his sabbatical in Yoda's swamp, Yoda tells him to unlearn everything he has learned. Not taking things to such extremes, some of the authors of the essays presented here have ventured outside the safety of their "home" methods to enter into an encounter situation with the methodologies of science, Science Fiction, and critical Science Fiction studies. Maybe, in a sense, in order to do this the authors have "unlearned" some prejudices, such as that disciplines are in some sort of "fight" and cannot be harmonized or inform each other constructively; or that "low culture" or "popular culture" is somehow not worthy or not capable of making a profound contribution.

Francis Landy's essay is, among many things, a meditation on flux. It opens the collection because it manages to set a tone that represents beautifully the living, fluctuating quality of scripture, Science Fiction, scholarship, belief, and interpretation: wrestling dualities, constantly shifting, destroying and creating themselves and each other. Its multi-layered exploration of sacred and profane, popular and sacrosanct, fictions and realities, provides an introductory demonstration of the richness of the approach. The essay demonstrates not only how theory and practice can be brought together, but also how an instinctive reaction ("Surely, apocalyptic texts are not Science Fiction!") can inspire sustained discussion, and that the occasional reconsideration of one text or thought in the light of another can yield constructive results. Landy unpacks the apparent oxymoron "Science Fiction" informed by such concepts as religion, religious texts, and sacredness, and shows that continuities and parallels are not necessarily blasphemous. Importantly, Landy's essay demonstrates how a Science Fiction approach can be placed critically in one possible interdisciplinary nexus of theology, religious studies, Biblical Studies, critical theory, sociology, anthropology, and science. While doing so, the essay also

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5.1 (1994), 1–37, contains an interesting overview of SF genres and subgenres. A worthwhile introduction to Science Fiction, which also takes into account myth and the Bible is M. Atwood, *In Other Worlds: SF and the Human Imagination* (London: Virago, 2011). Also see the literature suggested by the contributors to this essay collection for further introductory reading.

[5] Much of the journal's content can be accessed online at the following address: http://www.depauw.edu/sfs/.

contributes significantly to approaching the question of whether or not it is even legitimate to compare religious experience and sacred texts to Science Fiction. This could be one of the basic questions a newcomer to the Science Fiction approach from theology or Biblical Studies might ask.

Ian D. Wilson's essay takes critical Science Fiction theory into the space of critical-historicism (or historical-criticism). History is a topic that comes naturally to Science Fiction. Though intuitively associated with visions of the future, of course Science Fiction's visions are extrapolated from and anchored in a historical situation. Wells' "The Time Machine," can be discussed against its late Victorian background, much Science Fiction contains allusions to the Cold War. Environmental catastrophes or totalitarian dystopias are common themes, too, extrapolated from current developments, backlashes, and fears. In literature, Science Fiction's approach to "reality" has been discussed as a successor of the historical novel.[6]

Science Fiction also engages history when asking the question "What if. . .?" not directed towards the unknown future, but towards the supposedly known past. The sub-genre "alternate history" includes works such as Dick's *The Man in the High Castle* (asking, "What if Hitler had won the war?"). As mentioned above, Science Fiction also often poses questions about record-keeping and forgetting. Science Fiction and its creators, thus, have a unique expertise in the field of history, it would seem.

Wilson appeals to this expertise and makes it applicable to ancient historical and Biblical Studies. Using Science Fiction and Science Fiction theory heuristically, the essay explores with all due caution how an ancient community engaged with history, story, empire, and power. Distinguishing carefully between modern and ancient, historiography as opposed to myth, or historiography as opposed to speculation, Wilson offers a case study that would seem like a logical endeavor when discussing, e.g., *Star Trek*: using a text and insights about textual conventions to explore the socio-cultural setting that gave rise to the text. Science Fiction comes into play on several levels in this case study: the fictional convention of superhuman power is used as a foil to explore superhuman kingship in the prophetic books, and the concept of cognitive estrangement (one of Suvin's contributions to the field of Science Fiction studies) becomes a working hypothesis when discussing how the portrayal of superhumans within a specific textual convention (here, prophetic visions) may be able to subvert a given reality and invite a rethinking of said reality.

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[6] Jameson engages with G. Lukacs' study of the historical novel in F. Jameson, "Progress Versus Utopia, or: Can We Imagine the Future?," *Science Fiction Studies* 9.2 (1982), 147–58; article available online at: http://www.depauw.edu/sfs/backissues/27/jameson.html; accessed September 7, 2015.

"Canon" is a term very familiar to anybody interested in Science Fiction, and of course it is a much discussed term, too.[7] Canon-making is a display of power. Canons are made. By whom they are made is an interesting question. A group of conservative Science Fiction writers attempted to derail the voting for the 2015 Hugo Awards (a prestigious award for Science Fiction works, thus, in a way a canon-maker), claiming that the award had been granted for reasons of political correctness rather than content, since more writers of color and women have received the award in recent years. Their protest was an interesting if pathetic (nobody affiliated with the group won an award) demonstration of formerly powerful canon-makers resisting the loss of their power over the canon.

Speaking from a fan-perspective, canon can be what is approved by an original writer—e.g., everything J. K. Rowling writes and/or says with regard to Harry Potter is canonical. However, a fan or a community of fans may choose to exclude certain works from the canon. In the mind of a fan, a canon may not be closed, even if the original work is concluded. Lively fan communities continue working around the canon by writing fan fiction, set in the same world as the canonical material or featuring characters from the canonical material. Thus, a beloved canon is kept perpetually open.

Harold Vedeler's essay discusses the Bible, Science Fiction, and their readers as manipulators of seemingly closed canons in open systems. Informed among others by cognitive theory and complexity theory, this essay investigates processes of creating and engaging with meaning. Readers who interact with the biblical text are agents in an open system and they can choose to ignore certain aspects of seemingly closed canons and highlight others as societal changes warrant. The essay stresses the human factor in creation and interpretation. Humans operate in a world of overwhelming complexity; Vedeler explores how the world's complexity can be limited by imposing upon it a seemingly closed canon in which a creator can be powerful, but from there, the question arises: how can supposedly closed canons survive and adapt? Vedeler observes processes of re-opening canons both in Science Fiction and in biblical interpretation. The essay makes a significant contribution towards abstracting Science Fiction practice and employing new and different methodologies to enable comparisons of "canon"—biblical canons and Science Fiction canons.

My essay follows upon Vedeler's. It, too, is about the manipulations necessary to open up the Bible in contemporary culture by employing narrative strategies and disruptive/creative mind-sets, and by (re-) claiming agency. This essay discusses the Bible and the re-interpretation of scripture in Science Fiction informed by emergence theory and open source, as well as contemporary Maker

[7] C. Freedman, *Critical Theory and Science Fiction* (Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press, 2000), 86.

culture, in which available technology is paired with more traditional crafts. In Maker culture individuals teach themselves the necessary skills to create technologies and artifacts they find useful or entertaining, rather than hoping for an expert company to do it for them (a successor of DIY culture). Open source refers to computer programs whose source code is made publicly available and anyone can propose improvements.

Science Fiction observes trends in the development of networks and of agency and plays through scenarios in which individuals have to rely on their resourcefulness when faced with unreliable or corrupt "experts." Aforementioned novel *Snow Crash* by Stephenson is an example in which protagonists negotiate a highly fragmented world by relying on their unique skills and personal value systems. Cory Doctorow's novel *Little Brother* depicts the life of young characters who have to rely on their self-taught skills against a government suddenly turned against them.

Science Fiction stories that play through advantages and disadvantages of network dynamics are relevant to Biblical Studies and related fields when we consider the impact of the Internet and related technologies on hermeneutics, accessibility, and "expertise." Networks no longer consist only of European and American theology departments; sometimes whoever shouts loudest or has the most time to spend online gets the most attention, whether others like it or not. Network technology also gives unprecedented access to work by those who may previously not have been able to contribute, so members of the "old" network must re-negotiate inclusivity and re-learn how to speak and listen. All these are factors that one must get used to considering when re-opening the question of how meaning is generated. It may help to look to Science Fiction for case studies extrapolated from current developments.

Science Fiction is often the locus of explorations of self and other, and of the consequences of encounters. Sometimes Science Fiction is blatant, even offensive or racist ("We, good, cultured, enlightened; they, un-cultured, crude, bad"); sometimes Science Fiction creates very sophisticated and artistically valuable additions to culture by imagining the alien (H. R. Giger's design for the *Alien* series of films is a stand-out example; it has generated volumes and volumes worth of commentary in cultural studies); sometimes, Science Fiction moves its portrayal of self and other into such abstract realms that the discussion almost folds in on itself: it is not possible, after all, to imagine the unimaginably different.

Ryan Higgins' contribution to this collection moves into a region known to many Science Fiction fans and those interested in artificial intelligence as the uncanny valley. The uncanny valley refers to a dip in a hypothetical graph of a human's emotional response to a being that is similar to them but not-quite themselves, for example, an anthropomorphic robot. A robot that is clearly not human does not cause comfort-levels to drop; neither does a being that is clearly human. But very human-like yet some-

how not-human beings can inspire a level of emotional discomfort, a sense of "creepiness." Thinking along these lines in a speculative, ethical, or theological perspective of course brings us close to the ethics of creation, which are very worthwhile discussing at the intersection of the Bible, theology, and Science Fiction: who creates whom in whose image; why should "our image" seem so creepy to ourselves? And: does creation imply responsibility for the actions of the creature? These are by far not the only questions that can be addressed at this intersection.

Higgins' essay ends on a riveting plot-twist. Not only creation and creatures—imagined and real—are the topic of his essay. He explores sliding categories of self and other in encounter situations with that which cannot quite be grasped or explained. A horror monster evokes fear, but the anthropomorphism of a near-human yet non-human being also does not inspire emotional ease and trust. The essay uses monster theory to speak of the totally alien known from horror or Science Fiction, of hybrid creatures, and of those figures that appear human, yet are—somehow—not. Higgins discusses competing and/or complementary portrayals of divinity as wholly other; yet in order to speak of the wholly other, it has to be rendered in describable terms. Rudolf Otto is a logical reference point here. How can we speak of the unspeakable? How do we describe the undescribable creature-feeling? Biblical texts attempt such portrayals again and again by describing encounter situations between humans and the deity. Science Fiction texts attempt such portrayals in encounters with the alien or the unknowable (which is, paradoxically, represented of course). A theological twist at the end of Higgins' essay encourages compassion with the not-quite-us of divinity or biblicity (what if God finds humans creepy?), giving a good example, I believe, of the "Science Fiction method" in Biblical Studies as a nuanced, multi-layered, and respectful one.

James McGrath's response to the collection surveys the methodological, epistemological, and terminological approaches from all contributions and formulates overarching observations. He contemplates coincidences and discrepancies that appear when one studies story-telling, be it in religion, theology, science, or Science Fiction. The collection thus ends with an observation on human tendencies to negotiate the unknown, the numinous, or the transcendental: disenchant but re-enchant; seek factual knowledge (in science) yet return to admitting how much is still unknown (in Science Fiction).

SEERS, FICTIONS AND OTHER WORLDS

FRANCIS LANDY
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The Bible is a preeminent sacred symbol in our culture, and like any sacred object, it is open to desecration as soon as one speaks of it.[1] In particular, this happens when one compares it to things in our world, treats it as a text like any other text, engages with it as a human discourse, driven by human interests and preoccupations. It happens in sermons, classrooms and the academy. I had my moment of truth when, in an adult education course on Kabbalah, I compared apocalyptic to Science Fiction. A lady in the audience challenged me because, after all, the writers of apocalyptic thought that what they were composing was true, and authors of fiction know that their works are fictitious. I did not know what to answer, because none of the obvious answers seemed satisfactory. This essay is an attempt to explore the space of the question.

I did have a more specific reference. I was thinking of Enoch, the great time—and space—traveller, boldly going where no man went before. Enoch, in all the different manifestations of the tradition, is the great teacher of cosmic and calendrical secrets. He attains immortality, crossing the divide between humanity and God, becoming the angel Metatron, the lesser YHWH, only slightly differentiated from YHWH himself.[2] He is the patron and prototype

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[1] Y. Sherwood, "The Persistence of Blasphemy: The Bible as a Public Edifice in the Secular State," in id., *Biblical Blaspheming: Trials of the Sacred for a Secular Age* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 9–99, describes an exhibition in the Glasgow Museum of Modern Art in which a Bible was opened up to visitors' comments, which were largely scurrilous (10–52). As she remarks, "The two major Enlightenment moves: (a) the displacement of the Bible by fact/science and (b) the demystification of the Bible as fiction were widely represented" (10) by these comments. Elsewhere in the volume she traces the origins of what she calls the "liberal Bible" to John Locke ("On the genesis of the alliance between the Bible and rights," *Biblical Blaspheming*, 303–32). In a stimulating essay, H. Pyper argues that a biblical voice can be found in its most trenchant critics, for example Richard Dawkins and Dennis Dennett, whose criticisms replicate those of the Bible itself ("Dispelling Delusions: Dawkins, Dennett, and Biblical Studies," in id. *The Unchained Bible: Cultural Appropriations of Biblical Texts* [LHBOTS, 567; London: Bloomsbury, 2012], 167–79). More generally, see J. Sheehan, *The Enlightenment Bible: Translation, Scholarship, Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004) for cultural shifts during the Enlightenment.

[2] 3 En. 4. Enoch describes his transfiguration into Metatron over many chapters. He is given the title of the "lesser YHWH" in 12:5, and is placed above all the angels. The dangers of dualism are evident from the

of mystics, in their quest of divinization and esoteric knowledge. In 3 Enoch he guides Rabbi Ishmael through the heavenly realms; Rabbi Ishmael is one of the two culture heroes of Merkabah mysticism, along with Rabbi Akiva.[3] Rabbi Ishmael in turn instructs the adept, just as Enoch is taught by the angels. Both Rabbi Ishmael and Enoch, moreover, are associated with parallel but opposed myths. Enoch is sent by the fallen angels to intercede on their behalf; the failure of his mission brings about the Flood. Rabbi Ishmael goes on behalf of the sages of Israel, who have been condemned to death by the Emperor Hadrian for the sale of Joseph into slavery; behind the divine veil he hears that his mission is in vain.[4] Both, however, are rewarded by esoteric revelation.

Opposite Enoch there are the angels, who also teach secrets, the black arts which will ruin humanity and bring about the Flood.[5] The angels also cross the divide; they are the original space aliens. Their promise of wisdom, like the sexual desire that draws them, corrupts the earth. The demonization of science is familiar from the story of the garden of Eden, as well as the association of the

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story of the arch-heretic Elisha ben Abuya, otherwise known as Aher, the "Other," whose lapse into heresy was occasioned by seeing Metatron sitting, upon which he exclaimed "God forbid! There are two powers in heaven," since angels are not permitted to sit (b. Ḥag. 15a; cf. 3 En. 16). For more on Metatron, see G. Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (New York: Schocken, 1995 [1st ed. 1946]), 67–70; and P. Schäfer, *The Hidden and Manifest God: Some Major Themes in Early Jewish Mysticism* (trans. A. Pomerance; Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1992), 132–34. However, Metatron was more or less prominent in different Hekhalot traditions.

[3] R. Ishmael is already associated with mystical traditions in the report in b. Ber. 7a that once he entered the holy of holies to offer incense and saw Akatriel Yah, the Lord of Hosts, who asked him to bless him. R. Ishmael is paired with R. Akiva as the founder of a school of Midrash. The attribution of the High Priesthood to R. Ishmael is false, but is also found in the legend of the Ten Martyrs.

[4] The legend of the Ten Martyrs provides the frame of Hekhalot Rabbati, one of the major Hekhalot texts, and is recalled liturgically in the *'eleh 'ezkera* prayer recited on the Day of Atonement. In the legend the Emperor inquires of the Sages about the punishment for a kidnapper who sells the victim into slavery. When they respond that it is a capital offence, he says that Israel is guilty of the sale of Joseph, and since they are the greatest in their generation, they will suffer on Israel's behalf. The rabbis ask R. Ishmael to undertake the mystical ascent and apprehend whether the decree is irrevocable. R. Ishmael hears from behind the divine veil that indeed it is God's will.

[5] 1 En. 7–8; 65:5–11; 68. R. Lesses, " 'They Revealed Secrets to their Wives': The Transmission of Magical Knowledge in I Enoch," in D. V. Arbel and A. A. Orlov (eds.), *With Letters of Light: Studies in the Dead Sea Scrolls, Early Jewish Apocalypticism, Magic, and Mysticism in Honor of Rachel Elior* (Ekstasis, 2; Berlin/Boston: de Gruyter, 2011), 197–223, argues that it is the association of the angels' wisdom with women that renders it illicit and contrasts it with that of Enoch.

Cainites with the arts of metallurgy and music (Gen 4:17–22). In the legal texts, it is manifest in the prohibition of magic and divination as traffic with other deities. In the contemporary world, it is evident in the archetype of the mad scientist (Dr. Strangelove, The Master in Dr. Who), in fantasies of machines that rule humans (the *Terminator* series), and the fear of technology as alienating us from a simpler, more authentic humanity.

Enoch is a central mythic figure of a tradition which Rachel Elior has identified with that of the Zadokite priests, the Qumran sect, and the Hekhalot mystics.[6] In this tradition the divinely ordained solar calendar, with its fixed system of weeks, festivals, and sabbatical and jubilee cycles, represented the ideal order of the universe, which had been betrayed by the fallen angels, who taught the secrets of the moon, and their historical counterparts in the Jerusalem temple, with their heretical, entirely contingent lunar calendar and their innovative, anthropocentric halakhah. The Temple constituted by the Qumran community corresponded to the celestial Temple, and the prayers of the community, such as the Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice, identified them explicitly with the angels. They could all become time-travellers, live in a world of the imagination that transcended that of the everyday.

The Enoch story enacted in time the displacement the Qumran community experienced in space. The primary trauma of the Flood and the reprobate angels corresponded to the destruction of the Temple, its continued pollution, and the apostacy of those who administered it, such as the Wicked Priest. In the desert the community could reconstitute an ideal and original humanity, which also offered the opportunity of transcending the human condition. They inhabited a different order of time,[7] and could achieve a form of immortality. It is the contention of this essay that utopian Sci-

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[6] R. Elior, *The Three Temples: On the Emergence of Jewish Mysticism* (trans. D. Louvish; Littman Library of Jewish Civilization; Littman: Oxford, 2005), esp. 111–22. For a skeptical view, see A. Y. Reed, *Fallen Angels and the History of Judaism and Christianity: The Reception of the Enochic Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), who thinks that 3 Enoch represents a reintroduction of Enochic tradition into Judaism from Christian sources.

[7] An invaluable study of the construction of the self in Qumran and its modelling itself on the past is C. A. Newsom, *The Self as Symbolic Space: Constructing Identity and Community in Qumran* (Atlanta, GA: SBL Press, 2004). Newsom notes that the Qumran community saw itself as inhabiting a different order of time—one that she calls "epochal"—from the more contingent time of the rest of humanity (172). See also T. Langille, "Old Memories, New Identities: Traumatic Memory, Exile, and Identity Formation in the Damascus Document and Pesher Habakkuk," in T. Thatcher (ed.), *Memory and Identity in Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity: A Conversation with Barry Schwartz* (Atlanta, GA: SBL Press, 2014), 57–88. Langille cautions against regarding the Qumran community as homogenous (67).

ence Fiction, in particular, evokes the themes and desires of Qumran and many other sectarian communities. A primary catastrophe, for example, becomes the occasion for imagining a new world. This brings me back to my initial question: the relation between truth and fiction, between an alternative reality lived by a group and the many fantasy worlds we adopt, which sometimes feel more real than our own. It is also a question of the place of the Bible in our contemporary world, the different ways it is fictionalized, for example through film. At this point I would like to introduce a theorist of Science Fiction and religion, Jeffrey Kripal, whose work focuses on the relation between the sacred and the secular, how the sacred is found in the margins of our imagination and of official culture.

In two immense books, *Authors of the Impossible: The Paranormal and the Sacred* and *Mutants and Mystics: Science Fiction, Superhero Comics, and the Paranormal,*[8] Kripal argues that Science Fiction and superhero comics are indissociable from the discourse of the paranormal in modern pop culture, and thus from religion and the sacred,[9] insofar as they pre-eminently concern the paranormal. Pop culture has appropriated the paranormal themes and experiences of "religion"; from the centre of society they have migrated to an ever more exotic periphery, an endless series of fantasy worlds, in Baudrillard's term, the "hyper-real."[10] The displacement of religion from the centre of most western cultures has thus been accompanied by its re-emergence in children's comic fiction, horror movies, and alternative systems of knowledge, such as ESP and UFOology. The oxymoron "Science Fiction" is indicative. The more "science" lays claim to the real, the more it is fictionalized, becomes the subject of the human imagination. This is in part because science and technology are experienced as alienating and dehumanizing, and in part because they have vastly increased the available information

[8] J. Kripal, *Authors of the Impossible: The Paranormal and the Sacred* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2010)*;* id., *Mutants and Mystics: Science Fiction, Superhero Comics, and the Paranormal* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2011). The first of these books is a history of the science of the paranormal in the 19th and 20th centuries, focussing on four authors (Frederic Myers, Charles Fort, Jacques Vallée and Bertrand Méheust), the second concerns the paranormal in Science Fiction. The first was originally meant to be part of the second, but became a separate work.

[9] Both "religion" and "the sacred" are highly contested terms, as we will see below. By "religion" I refer to particular systems of knowledge and organization, and by "the sacred" to that which these systems are designed to protect, preserve or communicate.

[10] J. Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation* (trans. S. F. Glaser; Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1994). The "hyper-real" is defined as "the generation by models of a real without origin or reality" (1). Science Fiction is characterized by the proliferation of virtual realities without a single point of reference.

and the potentialities of communication at the disposal of artists, writers and the public. Transmedial storytelling is an example.[11]

Kripal, in *Mutants and Mystics,* traces "mythic themes" and "paranormal currents" in modern American popular culture (pp. 1–2). By mythic themes he means stories or tropes that are embedded in the religious imagination, but which take on scientific or para-scientific form (p. 1). These participate in a seven-part metanarrative or "superstory," which is both American, imbued with American history and the anxieties and promise of being a superpower, and universal and archetypal, participating in the "human religious imagination" (p. 5). The story is about the revelation of secret knowledge, the realization that we have the capacity to be superhuman, to become gods,[12] that humanity is evolving and but a stage in the development of consciousness, and that humans are both controlled by, and write under the influence of, alien powers, and affect those powers.[13]

Kripal's work is framed in the general context of the history of religions and mysticism in particular.[14] Kripal says that the paranormal "should be at the centre of any adequate theory of religion," because it is "at the origin point of so much religious experience and expression."[15] Religions involve encounters with supernatural beings, extraordinary states of mind and powers, beliefs in non-empirical verities, like transmigration and immortality. Paranormal events happen, whether or not they are objectively verifiable, and they have effects which cannot be rationally explained. The paranormal is related to the sacred, in that the sacred, however defined, is associated with paranormal phenomena. Kripal differs from many contemporary theorists of religion in seeing the sacred as irreducible; "it is almost entirely outside our rational grasp."[16] For that reason we have "no theory of religion, but only theories about religion."[17] The multiplicity of theories can be explained by the complexity of the human mind, as well as of the phenomena of religion. In particular, Kripal distinguishes between left brain and right brain approaches: "we have [. . .] some very fine left-brain methods, but no accepted or significantly developed right-brain

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[11] Cf. M.-L. Ryan, "Transmedial Storytelling and Transfictionality," *Poetics Today* 34 (2013), 361–88.

[12] The epigraph of the book is Bergson's famous dictum that "the universe [. . .] is a machine for the making of gods."

[13] The seven parts of the super-story are: i) divinization/demonization; ii) orientation; iii) alienation; iv) radiation; v) mutation; vi) realization; vii) authorization. It is both a history of the occult as it responded to changes in human knowledge (e.g., the expanding universe) and a substrate of contemporary narratives.

[14] Kripal, *Mutants and Mystics*, 1.

[15] Kripal, *Authors of the Impossible*, 252.

[16] Ibid., 253.

[17] Ibid., 255, 256. Clearly Kripal makes a strong distinction between "of" and "about," but does not clarify what that distinction is.

methods."[18] Kripal objects to what he calls the "eclipse" of the sacred in the study of religion, that it has become a taboo word.[19] In other words, we are very good at explaining religion in terms of something else, such as social or cognitive science, using our rationalist, linguistic tools, but have little capacity to address what he calls its "experiential core."[20] Kripal thus identifies himself with the Eliadean paradigm of Religious Studies and the sui generis concept of religion and the sacred, "the sacred *as sacred*."[21] On the other hand, he refuses to dissociate the sacred from the subjective experience of it. "The sacred . . . is intimately tied to the deepest structures of the human brain."[22] The strangeness of the paranormal phenomena is thus linked to the strangeness of the mind. The sui generis approach, the recognition that we are dealing with paradoxical and inexplicable phenomena, is accordingly in tension with the necessity to translate it in terms of our culture.

Kripal has affinities with the anthropologist Roy Rappaport, for whom religion is coterminous with humanity, in that language vastly expanded the possibilities of communicating about non-present realities: the past, the future, abstract ideas, the unseen.[23] It also made it possible to lie and to doubt, since statements are not immediately verifiable; the world is full of equally valid alternatives.[24] Religions are systems for creating certainty, communicated through ritual; societies are organized around what Rappaport calls unquestionable Ultimate Sacred Postulates. Rappaport distinguishes between "the sacred" and "the numinous." The "sacred" refers to the discursive aspect of religion; the "numinous" to its non-discursive, affective, ineffable component.[25] Sacred texts and rituals are

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[18] Ibid., 267. Roughly speaking, the left hemisphere is responsible for language, a sense of time, episodic memory, and identity, while the right is imaginative, synthetic and intuitive. The two work together in any functioning human, but the right brain is linked to the experience of the sacred, aesthetics and music, while the left is rational and intellectual. Kripal recounts the experience of a neuroscientist, Jill Bolte Taylor, who suffered a stroke which disabled her left hemisphere, and, when she recovered, was able to alternate between the two (*Authors of the Impossible*, 259).

[19] Ibid., 9, 254.

[20] Ibid., 254.

[21] Ibid.

[22] Ibid., 255.

[23] R. Rappaport, *Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999). Rappaport distinguishes between hominid evolution and the evolution of humanity, which is coterminous with the emergence of language (4). Rappaport's distinction might be compared with Dawkins' differentiation of genes and memes.

[24] Ibid., 11–22.

[25] Ibid., 23, 371. Rappaport makes these distinctions more or less *ad hoc*. Kripal's "sacred" is more or less equivalent to Rappaport's "numinous." Rappaport's "sacred" and "numinous" combine to comprise the "holy."

ways in which the numinous is ordered and rendered accessible to human thought and language. Rappaport describes various ways through which language evokes and is infused with the numinous, for example through metaphor, culminating in the ultimate mystical union of meaning and meaninglessness, or performer and performance.[26] Kripal, similarly, sees a constant interfusion of consciousness and culture, of paranormal experience and how it is interpreted.[27] For example, he takes UFO phenomena very seriously, but does not think that descriptions of UFOs correspond to objective reality; he does not dismiss them as hallucinations, either.[28] Rappaport has no interest in the paranormal; nonetheless, his emphasis on the interaction of the numinous and its interpretation in language suggests a parallel. This is in part, too, because of what Rappaport calls "the great inversion."[29] Language was an evolutionarily adaptive tool, which enabled humans to master the environment; at the same time they adapted to language. Humans become linguistic animals. Similarly, they find themselves at the service of concepts that they themselves have created, for perfectly good adaptive reasons, such as God and Fatherland. We imagine and create omnipotent forces that control us.[30] Kripal, too, is concerned with correlations between Science Fiction and the literature of the occult, and how the imagination of an alien intelligence is transformed into the belief that humans themselves are the creation of, or controlled by, aliens.[31]

Kripal may also be compared with cognitive scientific approaches to religion. For him these are something of a *bête noire,* representing the materialist approach to religion that he critiques throughout the book. He proposes a dual approach through "contemporary neuroscience and psychical research."[32] The critique is

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[26] Ibid., 392–94.

[27] This is the fundamental thesis of the books; however, as he warns in the conclusion of *Mutants and Mystics*, the dualism of consciousness and culture is too simple (332–34).

[28] In an appendix to *Authors of the Impossible*, he recounts his own childhood experience of a UFO, which he had forgotten until reminded of it by his mother, and juxtaposes it with a fascinating discussion of the revelation at Fatima in 1915, which conforms to typical UFO phenomenology, and only subsequently was interpreted as a vision of the Virgin Mary (*Authors of the Impossible*, 273–82).

[29] Rappaport, *Ritual and Religion,* 9.

[30] P. Cassell, "Rappaport Revisited," *MTSR* 26 (2014), 417–38, argues that rituals accomplish a "decentering" of the self, whereby through intense experiences generated by participation in ritual alternative forms of selfhood can be realized, involving, for example, identification with divine beings and with the group.

[31] An extreme example is P. K. Dick, who believed he wrote his books at the dictation of an alien intelligence (see below). *Mutants and Mystics* in fact consists of a large number of fascinating case studies of Science Fiction writers who were also occultists.

[32] Kripal, *Authors of the Impossible*, 255.

well-taken. Some cognitive approaches, such as that of Pascal Boyer, do think that religious phenomena and beliefs can be explained in terms of cognitive psychology, anthropology, and other disciplines, and that religion is the by-product of evolution.[33] Religious concepts are inferences produced by the normal processes of the mind; Boyer implicitly assumes that religious beliefs are illusions. In particular, he does not engage with the dialectic of the left and right brains which is so important to Kripal, and hence with the whole imaginative, synthetic and non-verbal aspect of religion. Like Rappaport, however, he sees religion as a consequence of the enormous expansion of human horizons resulting from evolution. Religious ideas are supernatural, and thus counter-intuitive, in the sense that they contradict natural, intuitive ontology.[34] This I think is a valuable concept both for Kripal and Science Fiction: psychic phenomena and science vastly increase the possible and the imaginable. Kripal notes that with the expansion of the cosmos the universe became fundamentally alien.[35] Another important contribution is that of Harvey Whitehouse, who proposes that there are two modes of religiosity: one is "doctrinal," the other "imagistic." The imagistic mode impresses itself through deeply felt, often shocking, experiences, which are embedded in episodic (i.e., narrative) memory, and become the subject of exegetical reflection.[36]

The sacred is a contested term, indeed. Kripal uses it in Otto's sense, as that which is mysterious, fascinating, and terrifying.[37] He describes it as a structure in consciousness which corresponds to "a palpable presence, energy or power encountered in the environment."[38] It is thus both something subjective and external to us. The sacred is alien, and associated with all the scary phenomena and powers that fill his pages: psychic phenomena, UFOs, superheroes, channeling, and so on. At the same time, it is an intrinsic part of the psyche: "we *are* that sense of the sacred" (italics in the original); "The sacred and the human are two sides of the same

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[33] P. Boyer, *Religion Explained: The Evolutionary Origins of Religious Thought* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), 2.

[34] Ibid., 65.

[35] Kripal, *Mutants and Mystics*, 70–71.

[36] H. Whitehouse, *Modes of Religiosity: A Cognitive Theory of Religious Transmission* (Walnut Creek, CA: Altamira Press, 2004); cf. H. Whitehouse and J. Laidlaw (eds.), *Ritual and Memory: Toward a Comparative Anthropology of Religion* (Walnut Creek, CA: Altamira Press, 2004).

[37] R. Otto, *The Idea of the Holy: An Inquiry into the Non-rational Factor in the Idea of the Divine and Its Relation to the Rational* (trans. J. W. Harvey; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1923), 12–42. Kripal memorably translates *mysterium tremendum et fascinans* as "fucking scary and utterly fascinating" (*Authors of the Impossible*, 9). It should be noted that Otto does not actually use the phrase, though he does discuss its individual elements, and that his context is specifically Christian, or more precisely Protestant.

[38] Kripal, *Authors of the Impossible*, 9.

coin."[39] In other words, that which for Otto is the "wholly Other" is ourselves, and reflected in the most primitive parts of the self. Correlations with the Freudian unconscious are made throughout Kripal's texts. Thus Science Fiction and the paranormal may indeed be projections of our "hidden desires" and "unspeakable aggressions" as well as fears.[40]

Kripal's view may be contrasted with that of Durkheim, for whom the sacred is that which is most intrinsic to society, which gives it its image of itself.[41] While Kripal regards the sacred as something that comes from outside the human realm and threatens to overwhelm it, Durkheim regards it as a human construct, through which society is constituted as something that transcends its individual members. Kripal sees himself, in fact, as part of a lineage which includes Durkheim,[42] and we will see how; nonetheless, the conjunction of these two thinkers with apparently opposite views suggests something important about religion as well as Science Fiction.

I would like to introduce a third thinker: Jacques Derrida. For Derrida the sacred is the immune, the safe and sound, an area or zone beyond violence and contingency.[43] By the same token, it is very vulnerable; religions organize themselves violently to protect it. The sacred, then, in Derrida's term, is auto-immune. It incorporates the very forces that destroy it. Its immunity extends to itself. Equally importantly, the sacred founds itself on that which has no foundation, the *chora* in which, according to Plato, everything comes into being and is contained.[44] The sacred, which for Derrida, at least in its Latin-Christian formulation, is profoundly patriarchal,[45] then dissimulates an anarchic void, that which it represents

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[39] Ibid., 252.

[40] Ibid., 265. In *Mutants and Mystics*, for instance, he notes how alien abduction stories in the 1960s drew upon stereotypes taken from Superman and Spiderman comics (77).

[41] É. Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1915), 206–14.

[42] Kripal, *Authors of the Impossible*, 9.

[43] J. Derrida, "Faith and Knowledge," in G. Anidjar (ed.), *Acts of Religion* (London: Routledge, 2002), 40–100. Derrida does not actually define the sacred in the book, but inserts it into a string of virtual synonyms: the immune, the safe and sound, etc.

[44] *Chora* is the subject of three whole sections of "Faith and Knowledge" (23–25), as one of two sources or founts of religion, the other being "messianicity." It is the subject of several other essays of J. Derrida too, e.g., *Sauf le nom*, *Khora*. It refers to an "abstract spacing." The reference in Plato is to the Timaeus. For a convenient brief discussion of *chora* in Derrida, see D. McCance, *Derrida on Religion* (London: Equinox, 2009), 29–31.

[45] The association of the sacred with the phallic effect in monotheistic religions and consequently with violence against women is the subject of several sections of Derrida's "Faith and Knowledge" (e.g., sections 39 and 40).

as alien to itself, what Derrida calls "the desert within the desert," the desert which is not even the place of revelation or of monastic ascesis.[46]

Derrida thinks that faith and knowledge, religion and science, are inseparable as well as antithetical in our world. The resurgence of religion is both a reaction to modernity and appropriates its techniques. Religions are conservative, preserving society's sense of itself and its ultimate values, as Durkheim says, and they are responsive to others. Like Kripal, Derrida quotes Bergson that the universe is a machine for the making of gods,[47] that religions are systems for questioning received values, for transcending the human condition. For Kripal, the discovery of the alien, and the alien aspects of the mind, arises from the realization of the emptiness and vastness of the universe, the *chora* in which we find ourselves; at the same time, the psychic and the paranormal are constituents of, and metaphors for, our alienated culture.

Kripal's immanentist view of the sacred, correlated with that of the sacred as the paranormal and alien, results from his conviction of the double nature of the human being and of the world. Kripal's anti-reductionism is also an anti-materialism. For him, the body and psyche are separate, though conjoined. This is of course a very ancient view, going back to Plato at least in the western tradition, and standard in the Indian and Tantric traditions in which Kripal specializes. The dualism of Mind and Body is reflected in the bicameral brain, and overlays "a deeper nondual reality that possesses both mental and material qualities,"[48] of which the paranormal is a sign or symptom. The recognition of this unity, of a cosmic consciousness which finds expression in the human person, is common to mystical traditions, including Kripal's own mystical experience, which he describes at the beginning of *Mutants and Mystics*, when he found himself possessed by an overwhelming experience of Kali as Shakti, cosmic female energy.[49] The interdependence of consciousness and culture corresponds to the "externalist" position in contemporary cognitive science, according to which mind is as much a function of and constituted by the environment as by the brain.[50] The brain is that which filters or

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[46] The "desert within the desert" is an image that recurs repeatedly in "Faith and Knowledge." If the desert in monotheistic religions is the place of the revelatory encounter with God, the "desert within the desert" is the place without such an encounter (cf. e.g., "Faith and Knowledge," section 22).

[47] H. Bergson, *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion* (London: Macmillan, 1935), 275. Cf. Derrida, "Faith and Knowledge," section 40.

[48] Kripal, *Authors of the Impossible*, 257. Kripal's attack on what he thinks of as a one-sided materialist approach to religion is pervasive throughout the book. See also Kripal, *Mutants and Mystics*, 332–33.

[49] Id., *Mutants and Mystics*, 6–8.

[50] See H. L. Williams and M. A. Conway, "Networks of Autobiographical Memory," in P. Boyer and J. V. Wertsch (eds.), *Memory in Mind*

translates the cosmic consciousness in human terms, in which, Kripal says, quoting the physicist James Jeans, "the universe begins to look more like a great thought than a great machine."[51] That is why the sacred corresponds both to something mysterious and terrifying out there and to what Kripal calls "a deep structure in consciousness," since they are both part of a single reality.

Kripal relates the double but nondual structure of the mind-brain to the literary theory of the fantastic, as articulated by Tzvetan Todorov.[52] The fantastic is characterized by hesitation about the veridicality of paranormal experiences, which Kripal elsewhere calls the " 'both-and' level of the real."[53] For instance, the "superstory" expresses innumerable personal experiences of the paranormal, including Science Fiction writers, as well as being a public myth, corresponding to American history and the occult narrative of the west.

Laura Feldt, in her wonderful book *The Fantastic in Religious Narrative from Exodus to Elisha*,[54] emphasizes the ambiguity and disruptive force of fantastic narrative, which results in disbelief and doubt, for example in the participants in the Exodus story, and founds cultural memory on an experience of bewilderment. It introduces the dark as well as light side of God, and a sense that no one really knows what is happening. This is clearly true of Elijah and Elisha, those troubled superheroes. But it is also true of the Bible as a whole, as a long journey into death and exile. The paranormal exhausts itself in normality. The Bible also enacts a displacement of the sacred, from temple and history to the text, which Edmond Jabès calls the homeland of the Jews,[55] the scene of interpretation, projection and deferment, of an ever-receding future.

Feldt relates the fantastic to Durkheim's concept of the impure or left sacred, the sacred not as that which is central to society, but as that which threatens to destroy it. Durkheim's examples are rituals related to death; he stresses the importance of games, the imagination, and hilarity as ways of exploring the limits of society and its susceptibility to chaos.[56] A direct line goes from

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and Culture (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 33–61 (53). The issue is the relationship of self-memory networks to cultural memory networks. Williams and Conway explain that western societies are culturally conditioned to regard the mind as independent, while Asian societies tend to see it as interdependent. Throughout Kripal distinguishes between "Mind" and "Brain."

[51] Kripal, *Authors of the Impossible*, 265.

[52] Ibid., 34–35, 255; id., *Mutants and Mystics*, 2. T. Todorov, *The Fantastic: a Structural Approach to a Literary Genre* (Cleveland, OH: Case Western Reserve University Press, 1973).

[53] Kripal, *Authors of the Impossible*, 257; id., *Mutants and Mystics*, 6.

[54] L. Feldt, *The Fantastic in Religious Narrative from Exodus to Elisha* (Sheffield: Equinox, 2012).

[55] E. Jabès, *Le Livre des Questions* (Paris: Gallimard, 1963), 109.

[56] Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life,* 408–13.

Durkheim through Bataille and Baudrillard to Foucault and Derrida, with their sense of that which disrupts any stable foundation.[57] For Derrida, there is something archiviolithic[58] in religion, as in writing, something which destroys the sacred as the guarantor of tranquillity and as the portal to mystical consciousness, in the Temple.[59] Beneath, at the bottomless bottom, of all these processes where religion writes and destroys itself, there is the maternal *chora*, the source of life and death, the container of all things.[60] The harbinger of the question of every space odyssey: whether the universe is a human space, whether there is something or nothing.

Fiction is one of our ways of creating and inhabiting alternative worlds, and thus closely related to the discourses of religion and the paranormal. The alternative worlds may become part of our reality, as when we identify with a character, and at the least create a mental space one can revisit, and which becomes a sacred space, what Maurice Blanchot calls the space of literature.[61] It may also help us to understand our reality, more profoundly, and as a kind of other world. This is of course true of the Bible; as Gabriel Josipovici says, it gives the sense, like all great literature, of teaching us what it means to be human.[62] And it is also true of the best of Science Fiction, which is a metaphor for the possibilities of the imagination, especially in an age of human transformation. I'm thinking particularly of the novels of Greg Egan, in which humans can be translated into computer programs and thus achieve immortality, and alternative universes, or gardens of Eden, can survive the death of ours.[63] Similarly, Alistair Reynolds' novels play on biblical themes and anxieties, as titles such as *Revelation Space* (2000) and *Redemption Ark* (2002) suggest.

Kripal defines the *psychical* as "the sacred in transit from a traditional religious register into a modern scientific one" and the *paranormal* as "the sacred in transit from the religious and scientific

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[57] See A. Riley, " 'Renegade Durkheimianism' and the Transgressive Left Sacred," in J. T. Alexander and P. Smith (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Durkheim* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 274–302.

[58] J. Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1995), 10.

[59] According to the Talmud (b. Sukkah 49a), underneath the altar of the Temple there is a void that goes down to the primiordial deep. David set a stone upon this void so as to prevent the waters of chaos flooding the earth.

[60] Derrida, "Faith and Knowledge," section 52.

[61] M. Blanchot, *The Space of Literature* (trans. A. Smock; Lincoln, NE: Nebraska University Press, 1989).

[62] G. Josipovici, *The Book of God: A Response to the Bible* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989), 28–29.

[63] I am thinking in particular of his novel *Permutation City* (London: Millenium Orion Publishing, 1994).

registers into a parascientific or 'science mysticism' one."[64] The *psychical*, by which he refers to extra-sensory phenomena like telepathy, is the subject of scientific investigation, as in the work of Frederic Myers and William James,[65] and socially located outside traditional religious frameworks; it is associated, for instance, with the modern usages of "spiritual" and "mystical" as distinct from conventional religion. The paranormal is the result of the loss of religious faith and a realization of the limits of scientific reason; this may refer to inexplicable phenomena, as in the work of Charles Fort,[66] or to the theories of relativity and quantum physics, which may give rise to a certain mysticism.[67] The sacred is displaced from the "religious register," those things associated with a sense of mystery and awe in traditional cultures, to the fringes of science and to what Kripal calls "a kind of super-imagination" which "appears on the horizon of thought."[68] This leads to the "super-story," the world as narrated and understood in our imagination. Thus the world is a fiction, or many fictions.[69]

The Bible is likewise in transit from the "religious register" to various kinds of secular ones; one could argue that creationism and its congeres are a form of "parascience." The Bible is recycled in many forms: films, children's books, toys, creating different hybrids of the sacred, the commercial, the sacrilegious, the critical. The sacred as entertainment, as spectacle. Moreover, the text has given

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[64] Kripal, *Authors of the Impossible*, 9.

[65] These are the subjects of Kripal's first chapter, "The Book as Séance: Frederic Myers and the London Society for Psychical Research," (38–91).

[66] Fort is the subject of Kripal's second chapter (92–140).

[67] By "science mysticism," Kripal is thinking of the ways in which contemporary physics undermines the assumptions of materialism and rationalism, as well as the monism of some of his subjects. For example, he states, using the example of the CERN Hadron Collider, that quantum theory shows "that matter is not material at all, that there is no such thing as materialism" (*Authors of the Impossible*, 60). He is also referring to a genre of scientific writing which combines scientific ideas and metaphors with ones drawn from mysticism. A well-known example is F. Capra's *The Tao of Physics* (1975) (*Authors of the Impossible*, 123).

[68] Kripal, *Authors of the Impossible*, 9.

[69] Kripal cites Fort as suggesting that "we are all living in someone else's novel, which was not a particularly good one" (*Authors of the Impossible*, 98). At one time, at least, Fort endorsed the popular contemporary motif that the authors of the fiction were Martian (*Authors of the Impossible*, 99). For the pervasive idea in western culture that the world is a book, see U. Eco, "Two Models of Interpretation," in *The Limits of Interpretation* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1990), 8–24; G. Josipovici, *The World and the Book* (London: Macmillan, 1994); J. Derrida, *Of Grammatology* (trans. G. C. Spivak; Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976); and id.,"Edmond Jabès and the Question of the Book," in *Writing and Difference* (trans. A. Bass; London: Routledge, 1978), 64–78. The trope is central to all Borges' fictions.

way to texts. Derrida, in his essay "Literature in Secret," suggests that modern literature, by which he means fiction, is "essentially descended from Abrahamic rather than Greek culture."[70] He prefaces this by commenting that the literary "tradition cannot not be inherited from the Bible."[71] In particular, it has inherited "its sense of forgiveness" from it. God in the Hebrew Bible, and especially in the story of the Akedah (the Binding of Isaac), is characterized by retraction, withdrawal, change of mind, in contrast to the unchangeable God of Greek ontotheology. Thereby God lets us—and his fictional avatars—free; he unbinds Isaac; he allows us to betray the covenant and deny our filiation.[72] Modern literature "secularizes" or "desacralizes" the Bible.[73] It does so by repeating "the sacrifice of Isaac," "exposing it to the world." Literature goes back to the founding trauma. Derrida's essay is about fathers and sons: Abraham and Isaac, God and Abraham, Kafka and his father, Noah, Ham, and God, about the gestures of forgiveness and withdrawal through which we live. Literature asks for forgiveness for desacralization, "what others would religiously call the secularization of a holy revelation."[74] In a world without God literature is a religious remainder, "a link to and relay for what is sacrosanct."[75] It allows us freedom to create worlds without any reference to the real—since these are works of fiction—and grants their authors absolute autonomy, to write what they like, and absolute irresponsibility, since they are answerable to no one for what they write; at the same time, it is absolute responsibility, since they are the sole authors of their worlds, and heteronomy, since it is society, or perhaps an other in themselves, which determines what is literature. The text of the world is displaced into many texts and many

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[70] J. Derrida, "Literature in Secret," in id., *The Gift of Death and Literature in Secret* (trans. D. Wills; Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 119–58 (131). He qualifies the statement in various ways, recognizing that it is "seemingly improbable," making it conditional ("as though"), and in the next sentence suggesting that there is some kind of transaction between the Abrahamic and Greek inheritances, that there is a frontier between them. This echoes the famous conclusion of his essay on Levinas, taken from Joyce: "Jewgreek is Greekjew. Extremes meet" ("Violence and Metaphysics," in *Writing and Difference*, 192). The most famous discussion of the Greek and Abrahamic inheritances of western literature is E. Auerbach, *Mimesis* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003), which is the subject of another essay in this issue.

[71] Derrida, "Literature in Secret," 131.

[72] Ibid., 157.

[73] Ibid., 154.

[74] Ibid., 156. Derrida frames this as a question, to which the answer would be affirmative, judging by the following pages. The question may indicate doubt, or, more probably, speculation, on the lines of Derrida's pervasive use of "perhaps." Likewise, the use of "others" would suggest that he himself does not quite accept that the secularization has taken place, though he does see it as a "desacralization."

[75] Ibid., 157.

worlds. At the end of the essay Derrida quotes, without comment, God's blessing at the end of the Akedah, in which he promises Abraham infinite progeny: from the retracted or forgiven death of the only son come many children. The one world is multiple (cf. Gen 22:15–17).[76]

Derrida's essay circles around a prayer: "*Pardon de ne pas vouloir dire*" which may mean "Pardon for not meaning" or "Pardon for not wishing to say." This is the forgiveness literature seeks.[77] It is of course very strange, for literature pre-eminently means and speaks. The phrase is immediately applied to Abraham and God in the Akedah: "Abraham might have said, as might God also, 'Pardon for not meaning (to say)',"[78] to the secrecy, silence, suspension of ethics and will, meaninglessness and mystery of the story. It also refers to the dynamics of forgiveness and the unforgivable with which the essay is preoccupied, since according to Derrida one can only truly forgive the unforgivable.[79] But it also evokes one of Derrida's abiding preoccupations in writing and speaking. In one of his earliest interviews he says, "I try to write (in) the space where the question of saying and intending to say (*vouloir dire*) is posed."[80] The phrase, "*Pardon de ne pas vouloir dire*," suggests a certain reluctance before speaking, writing, and meaning, a moment of silence and indeterminacy before the blank page. In his essay on Jabès, Derrida comments that "a poem always runs the risk of being meaningless, and would be nothing without this risk of being meaningless."[81] One never knows who or what impels one to write and mean, and what resists that imperative. "Literature would begin wherever one no longer knows who writes or who signs the narrative of the call."[82] Who tells the story of the Akedah: Abraham, God, or Abraham's descendants? Who reveals the secret? Is God the author of the text and the world, who tests and imagines, or Abraham who tests and imagines God? Similarly, in Kafka's letter to his father, Kafka imagines how the father would respond to him, and writes to himself through the father.[83]

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[76] Ibid., 158. Derrida communicates this through a pun: "*ne font plus qu'Un, oui, plus qu'Un,*" which means both "only one" and "more than one." Derrida is fond of this pun.

[77] Ibid., 157. "There is no literature that does not, from its very first word, ask for forgiveness. In the beginning was forgiveness. For nothing. For meaning (to say) nothing."

[78] Ibid., 121.

[79] Ibid., 126. What is unforgivable is Abraham's obedience to God, for which Abraham asks for forgiveness, in Derrida's rereading of Kierkegaard's third retelling of the story.

[80] J. Derrida, *Positions* (trans. A. Bass; Chicago, IL: Chicago University Press, 1981), 14.

[81] Id., *Writing and Difference,* 90.

[82] Id., "Literature in Secret," 134.

[83] Ibid.

And so, after a long detour, back to Science Fiction. Kripal writes of authors, such as Philip K. Dick and Alvin Schwartz, creator of Batman and Superman, who experienced themselves as writing under the dictation of alien powers. Schwartz realized "that when he wrote, and especially when he wrote, he was being written."[84] Dick wrote under the dictation of a Vast Alien Living Intelligence System, or VALIS for short. Much of the latter part of his life was spent recording and interpreting the revelations of VALIS.[85] Dick saw Science Fiction as a natural and secular Gnosticism,[86] that the human was alien to the world and imprisoned in it. Kripal quotes Dick: "I have never yielded to reality: that is what SF is all about. If you wish to yield to reality, go read Philip Roth; read the New York literary establishment mainstream writers [. . .] this is why I love SF. I love to read it; I love to write it. The SF writer sees not just possibilities but wild possibilities. It's not just, 'What if ---.' It's 'My God, what if---.' In frenzy and hysteria, the Martians are always coming."[87]

There is a book written by an alien intelligence, about a world imagined into being by that intelligence, populated with creatures, and in particular a celestial-terrestrial hybrid, who writes the book written by that intelligence, in which he finds himself imagined, conversed with, the subject of speculation, inquiry, hope and despair. He comes to save the world or to destroy it. It is full of possibilities, wild possibilities. It is our world, but seen through the eyes of that intelligence, seen through our eyes. It tells a story, a "superstory," which never ends, despite its ceaseless desire for an ending. In the beginning was forgiveness, as Derrida says, for nothing, for embarking on this adventure. Or in the beginning was language, words coming from the deep. Or in the beginning was a graph, as Egan tells us,[88] a diamond net of Indra, expanding, proliferating and tearing.

I study the Zohar with our former rabbi by Skype, looking at the text online, in Daniel Matt's critical edition. Not exactly Science Fiction, but with a sense of the transformation of human consciousness through tele-technology, the sense that our world is already a Science Fiction. The Zohar is an immense mystical commentary on the Torah, composed in Castile in the 1280s, but attributed to Rabbi Shimon bar Yohai, over a thousand years earlier. The book tells of the wanderings of Rabbi Shimon and his companions through an imaginary Palestinian landscape, in an imaginary language, Zoharic Aramaic. As they wander, they wander

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[84] Kripal, *Mutants and Mystics*, 240.

[85] Valis manifested itself in a pink light. P. K. Dick wrote 8,000 pages of his VALIS journal (*Mutants and Mystics*, 275).

[86] Kripal, *Mutants and Mystics*, 281.

[87] Ibid., quoted from L. Sutin, *Divine Invasions: A Life of Philip K. Dick* (New York: Carol Publishing, 1991), 4.

[88] G. Egan, *Schild's Ladder* (London: Gollancz, 2002), 1.

through the text, engaged in the adventure of interpretation and discussion. Every so often, they meet strange figures—a child, a donkey driver—who invariably turn out to be figures from another world, bearing supernal wisdom. The text is a cipher, for the secret life of God, for the world as alien. In a very famous passage, R. Shimon says that if the Torah is mere stories and ordinary words, he could write better ones (3: 152a)! But the only means of uncovering the garments of Torah, its hidden meanings, is through more stories.

The Zohar refers to fictitious books, including a book of Enoch. It is an ultimate book, originally given to Adam, containing all the secrets of the world.[89] But for that very reason, it is there to be superseded, for there is no ultimate book, not even the book of the Zohar itself. There are always more words, more interpretations, more worlds.

In Jonathan Glazer's film, *Under the Skin*, an alien, played by Scarlett Johansson, looks at the world as a strange place, as a piece of Science Fiction. Long sequences show her just watching street scenes, a shopping mall, footballs crowds, a nightclub, a swarm of girls who adopt her and take her with them, with a detached bewilderment compounded by sensory overload. She is on a mission to seduce men, take them to a field or a deserted building, and lure them into a liquid morass in which they are preserved alive and eventually dissolved to feed her planet, leaving their skin as a husk.[90] She is a predator, on the lookout for victims. The alienation is intensified by the Glaswegian accent of the natives, while she herself is well-spoken.[91] But she is also curious about the strange world she has come to. She gradually learns about human kindness and solidarity, as well as violence and horror. She switches sides, and tries to escape from her minder, a ruthless motorcyclist, who has presumably also come from her world. But she cannot become human: she cannot eat cake, she cannot have sex.[92] In the end the

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[89] See the fascinating discussion of the Zohar's imaginary literature in M. Hellner-Eshed, *A River Flows from Eden: The Language of Mystical Experience in the Zohar* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009), 365–67.

[90] One of the oddities of the movie is how much is left unexplained. A. Osterweil, "Under the Skin: The Perils of Becoming Female," *Film Quarterly* 67.4 (2014), 44–51, thinks that the object is to harvest human skins to clothe extra-terrestrials (45). There is no evidence for this. My grounds for thinking that the victims are turned into fodder for the alien's home world is that we do see a stream of plasma being channeled through a chute towards a brilliant light, which I associated with the initial sequence of the alien's advent.

[91] Ironically, one of the few other characters to speak a good standard English is a Czech tourist, though with a slight accent.

[92] Again, there are different interpretations of the scene in which she attempts to have sex with a man who helps her. Osterweil (50) thinks it is consummated; the author of the synopsis on the IMDb site believes that she discovers she does not have a vagina. This may well be the case,

two parts of her merge, as she is burned alive by a would-be rapist who discovers her secret. The union of her two selves is thus also a dissolution.

Scarlett Johansson, of course, is a superstar, a fallen angel, roaming the streets of Glasgow incognito. She is alien to the men she picks up, who have no idea of her true identity, either as an extraterrestrial (in the movie) or as Scarlett Johansson herself.[93] Yet she crosses the cultural divide with apparent ease, while retaining the aura, and the lure, of the well-spoken stranger. Her first line is often a variant on "I am lost. Can you help me?" Plus sex appeal, and the promise of sex. As an alien, she plays a human; as Scarlett Johansson, she plays an alien. An actress pre-eminently plays different roles; when at the very end she strips off her white skin to reveal a black figure underneath, we do not know whether that is her real self, whether there is a real self. Hence the title, *Under the Skin*. But for the audience, who know the secret, her appeal is compounded by her reputation as a sex-goddess. There is a certain amount of nudity. However, as the director, Glazer, says in an interview, she is "de-eroticized" in the film. In part this is an effect of masking, in particular by her black wig, and in part of her lack of engagement in sexual play. But it suggests too, that sexuality, both of the alien and of Scarlett Johansson herself, is also a mask. We are so involved with her life, her perceptions, her fascination with the mystery of her corporeality, as when she bleeds, and the sheer incongruity of a strange consciousness inhabiting an ordinary female body, that her sexuality recedes in significance. Even during the horrible rape scene at the end, although she is attacked as a woman, the irony is that we know she is something else.

I began with the angels who came down to earth, and correspondingly with the humans who became angels, as part of the machine for the making of gods. I ended with a super-star who falls to earth and learns what it is to be human, to experience compassion and horror. We are creatures who confabulate worlds, which reflect the duality of our selves in uneasy union. On the way, I wrote about Kripal's attempts to account for the paranormal and the fiction it produces in the discourse of religion and American popular culture. These may, as Kripal suggests, be metaphors for the strangeness of the mind as well as the expanding universe. But they also are consequences of the evolutionary transformation of humanity through language, which rendered us capable of speaking both of ourselves and of imaginary beings and worlds. The Bible, I suggested, is a foundational work of Science Fiction in our culture,

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though perhaps she simply cannot ultimately respond sexually, just as in a scene in which she attempts to eat cake, she chokes it up.

[93] Scarlett Johansson successfully maintained her anonymity throughout the shooting of the film. The scenes in which she picked up unsuspecting men were largely improvised, and none of them realized her true identity.

composed by a supernatural being through the minds of those who write him. It may provide the mythic underpinning for Kripal's metanarrative, with its tropes of liberation and apotheosis. But it is also something to be left behind, as spacecraft leave the mother-ship. Derrida thinks that all literature is a plea for forgiveness, and a re-enactment of God's primary act of retraction on Mount Moriah. It is also interpretation, which leads back as well as forwards, on the winding paths of Castile.

FASTER THAN A SPEEDING BULLET, MORE POWERFUL THAN A LOCOMOTIVE, ABLE TO RULE BY SENSE OF SMELL! SUPERHUMAN KINGSHIP IN THE PROPHETIC BOOKS

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"A shoot shall come from the stump of Jesse," proclaims Isa 11. This Davidide, says the passage, will possess Yahweh's spirit, divine wisdom and might; he will strike down enemies with the "rod of his mouth" (11:4), slay the wicked with his breath, and he will rule not with his eyes or ears, but with divine olfaction.[1] This king, whom the nations of the world will view with awe, is certainly no ordinary human being. He is a kind of Superman—the man after God's own heart morphed into the Man of Steel. Although he is to come from the same stock as King David, he is to be something that Judah has never seen, a completely righteous ruler who will usher in a new existence in which violence and evil will cease. That said, the Davidide of Isa 11 is not the only superhuman king in the prophetic books, nor is he the most powerful. Foreign kings, too, act as supermen, but these are typically less superheroic and more supervillainous in their characterizations. And then there is Yahweh, the king of super kings, who is, of course, no human at all. In the prophetic books, superhumanity is not uncommon.

The trope of superhumanity remains prevalent in today's literature.[2] Arguably, these days the trope is most at home in the realm of Science Fiction (SF), in which mutants, alien humanoids, cyborgs, and demigods regularly make appearances. Given the prevalence of this trope in the prophetic books and its prevalence in modern SF, in this paper I ask: Can SF, and especially a critical

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[1] On the difficult phrase והריחו ביראת יהוה in 11:3, see J. Unterman, "The (Non)sense of Smell in Isa 11:3," *HS* 33 (1992), 17–23; A. Shifman, " 'A Scent' of the Spirit: Exegesis of an Enigmatic Verse (Isa 11:3)," *JBL* 131 (2012), 241–49. Unterman encourages textual emendation (והרהו "and it shall teach him"), and Shifman suggests that הריח "scent/smell" should be interpreted metaphorically to indicate the Davidide's supreme discernment. I take the phrase as is, in line with the superhuman nature of the Davidide throughout the passage.

[2] Critical discussions of the trope, too, are becoming more widespread in academia. See, e.g., the recent volume by B. Saunders, *Do the Gods Wear Capes? Spirituality, Fantasy, and Superheroes* (New Directions in Religion and Literature; London: Continuum, 2011), which discusses Superman, Wonder Woman, Spider-Man, and Iron Man in relation to philosophical and religious discourses.

theory of SF, provide new insights into the function of these visions of superhuman kingship in ancient Judah? I think the answer is yes. Specifically I think that using SF heuristically can help us begin to reconstruct an ancient Judean understanding of kingship past, present, and future—i.e., how literate Judeans thought about their monarchic past in their postmonarchic present, and how this postmonarchic reality impacted the negotiation of Judean identity and Judean ideas about the future. In the end, I will suggest that the prophetic books, within their ancient milieux, actively participated in a sociopolitical discourse on imperialism and its potential function(s) in the cosmos.

GENRES, GENERIC TENDENCIES, AND SUPERHUMANITY IN THE PROPHETIC BOOKS

First, a definition of SF is necessary for practical purposes. Here I adopt Darko Suvin's basic understanding of the genre.[3] Suvin calls SF a "literature of cognitive estrangement." SF is fiction that creates a sense of difference; it defamiliarizes the familiar. One might argue, however, that myth, fantasy, and fairy tale also share this quality of estrangement. Suvin thus responds that SF is also fiction that has a cognitive view of social praxis; it is open to rethinking established norms and expectations in the real world. The "cognitiveness" of SF implies a reflecting *of* and a reflecting *on* reality, a process that is critical, even satirical. Myth, fantasy, and so on, typically lack this cognitive quality—the "Science" of SF. For Suvin, cognition is science in the broadest sense, thinking that attempts to expand the boundaries and capabilities of human knowledge and practice, perhaps something like the German *Wissenschaft*. Suvin's definition, though, is not without problems. Carl Freedman offers a helpful critique and modification of Suvin's theory that is worth mentioning.[4] He accepts Suvin's basic dialectic between cognition and estrangement in SF, but he problematizes it by showing how difficult it is to classify texts that are fuzzy in their presentation of cognition.[5] In essence, *all* fiction creates a sense of estrangement and has an element of cognition.[6] Freedman thus emphasizes what he calls the "cognition effect," that is, the "attitude *of the text itself* to the kind of estrangements being performed." Genre, for Freedman, is something that emerges from the text

[3] See D. Suvin, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction: On the Poetics and History of a Literary Genre* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979).

[4] See C. Freedman, *Critical Theory and Science Fiction* (Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press, 2000).

[5] This is especially true for pulp Science Fiction. Suvin warns against supposed SF that is actually myth or folk tale in SF garb (e.g., *Star Wars*); he is somewhat particular with what he thinks makes the cut as SF, even though one can utilize his definition to include just about anything.

[6] Cf. Freedman, *Critical Theory*, 20.

itself; it is a "tendency" that "happens within a text."[7] Therefore, in attempting to identify SF, one should ask: Is a dialectic between cognition and estrangement the dominant generic tendency within the text itself?[8]

Of course, by using a generic definition of SF as a starting point for thinking about biblical books and their ancient contexts—which is what I want to do—I am being anachronistic, drawing on generic tendencies mostly from our own contemporary sociocultural milieu. The ancient Judeans certainly did not conceive any of their texts as literature of cognitive estrangement. The prophetic book in particular has its own peculiar generic tendencies that informed ancient readings of the texts, as Ehud Ben Zvi has argued extensively.[9] Nonetheless, there are literary features in the prophetic books that display an affinity with certain brands of SF literature, and, in my view, one can therefore use SF criticism as an analogue—a heuristic tool—for thinking about the ancient sociocultural milieux of the prophetic books. As a historical critic (or critical historicist),[10] this is my primary interest: to probe the prophetic books as literary artifacts from ancient Judah, to improve our knowledge of the sociocultural discourses of this ancient society on the periphery of empire, and in turn to help us think about and learn from cultural interactions between societies in general.

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[7] Ibid. Suvin appears to have a similar understanding of genre: he claims that genre is not a metaphysical entity; it is a "socioaesthetic" category that functions as a heuristic model for criticism (Suvin, ch. 2). Still, Suvin sometimes treats genre as an absolute (e.g., his criticism of C. S. Lewis's SF; see Suvin, 26–27).

[8] Another insightful definition is Norman Spinrad's: "Science Fiction is anything published as Science Fiction" ("Introduction," in N. Spinrad [ed.], *Modern Science Fiction* [Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1974], 1–6 [1–2]). Spinrad's comment is a good reminder that genre is not entirely an internal tendency; how society markets and consumes a text also contributes to generic categories. G. Canavan, a scholar of 20th-century English literature, writes, "SF is, as much as it is anything else, a discrete, recognizable set of consumer practices and preferences": "Infinite Summer #7: Is *Infinite Jest* Science Fiction?" [no page number]; article accessible online: http://gerrycanavan.wordpress.com/2009/07/31/infinite-summer-7-is-infinite-jest-science-fiction/).

[9] E.g., E. Ben Zvi, "The Prophetic Book: A Key Form of Prophetic Literature," in M. Sweeney and E. Ben Zvi (eds.), *The Changing Face of Form Criticism for the Twenty-First Century* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), 276–97.

[10] In line with, e.g., F. W. Dobbs-Allsopp, "Rethinking Historical Criticism," *BibInt* 7 (1999), 235–71; and M. Nissinen, "Reflections on the 'Historical-Critical' Method: Historical Criticism and Critical Historicism," in J. M. LeMon and K. H. Richards (eds.), *Method Matters: Essays on the Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible in Honor of David L. Peterson* (Resources for Biblical Study, 56; Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2009), 479–504.

Some aspects of SF and its criticism, I think, can be helpful in this academic pursuit.

One such aspect is the concept of superhumanity in SF—supermen, superwomen, superheroes, supervillains. To be sure, one might raise the objection that superhero narratives in particular are not proper SF. Superheroes and their stories tend toward mythopoeia, mimicking the romantic mode of emplotment, in which the protagonist must overcome great obstacles, rising above the fray to heroic apotheosis.[11] But such a narrative can operate as cognitively estranged fiction when, from the perspective of its primary readership, it goes beyond the conservative, beyond the predictable and repeated patterns of myth, and conceives the known world in unknown fashion, in order to reimagine that known world.[12] Although not all superhuman and superhero narratives are SF, many do indeed have cognitive estrangement as their dominant generic tendency.

For example, one might think of Samson as a superhero, and a wonderfully complex one at that,[13] but his narrative is not exactly SF because, from the perspective of ancient Judean literati, the story is historiographical. The story represents an essential ideological stance toward Judean leadership in what is perceived to be actual Judean history, whatever that stance might be. Regardless of its historical veracity, historiography presents itself to its readership as a very real past in *the* real world. It wants to reify the world it presents in order to comment on that world. It is cognitive but not to the point of estrangement. Ancient historiographical literature, like myth, cannot be SF per se because the dialectic of cognition and estrangement do not dominate its concerns.[14] But prophetic literature, which stands with feet in the past and present but orients itself toward the imminent future, certainly creates a sense of both cognition and estrangement. The prophetic books imagine brave new worlds, so to speak, worlds that are strangely familiar but ultimately unknown—*unheimlich*—and in doing so they think on the possibilities and ramifications of these diverse futures.[15] Thus, when the prophetic books discuss superhuman figures, as they

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[11] On the romantic mode of emplotment, see H. White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973), 7–11, who draws on N. Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1957).

[12] Cf. Suvin, *Metamorphoses*, 35.

[13] Cf. S. Niditch, "Judges, Kingship, and Political Ethics: A Challenge to the Conventional Wisdom," in J. J. Ahn and S. L. Cook (eds.), *Thus Says the Lord: Essays on the Former and Latter Prophets in Honor of Robert R. Wilson* (LHBOTS, 502; New York: T&T Clark, 2009), 59–70 (67).

[14] However, Suvin acknowledges that the relationship between myth and SF is one of "double-mimicry" and "parasitism" (cf. *Metamorphoses*, ch. 2).

[15] E.g., Ezekiel's vision of the temple (chs. 40–48), or the vision of Zion in Isa 2:2–4 // Mic 4:1–4.

often do, especially with regards to kingship, one can think of the discourse in terms of SF. They are, in Suvin's terms, a cognitively estranged fiction that operates as a reflection *of* and a reflection *on* reality. In this way, they also reflect socio-mnemonic concerns, the search for meaning in the present and future via the past and vice versa.[16] The prophetic books mirror Yehud's complicated situation in a postmonarchic milieu, and they represent an attempt to navigate identity on the periphery of empire. But they do so by stretching the limits of the readership's known world.

In what follows, then, I will survey some examples of superhuman kingship in the prophetic books. In doing so, I will comment on the narrative structures inherent in these prophetic visions, i.e., the mnemonic frameworks that help construe understandings of kingship past, present, and future. And I hope to provide some insights into how these visions might have functioned as reflections *of* and *on* reality in ancient Yehud.

THE SUPERHERO KING, THE SUPERVILLAIN KING, AND YAHWEH

I begin with Yahweh, the quintessential superheroic king in ancient Judah. The deity's kingship over Israel and the entire world, I argue, is a given in the worldview of postmonarchic Judah. Throughout the prophetic books—as well as the Pentateuch, the Deuteronomistic books, Chronicles, the Psalms, and other books in the Judean corpus of literature—there is no doubt that Yahweh rules and ultimately controls all levels of the cosmos, from the commonest of humans to the most powerful kings to other gods. In Judah's postmonarchic, imperialized world, the Israelite deity is meant to be the emperor of emperors, the most heroic of all rulers.[17] Numerous oracles against nations and other prophetic

[16] Cf. the work of B. Schwartz, who, drawing on Clifford Geertz, argues that social memory is a model *of* society and a model *for* it: B. Schwartz, *Abraham Lincoln and the Forge of National Memory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000); id., *Abraham Lincoln in the Post-Heroic Era: History and Memory in Late Twentieth-Century America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008).

[17] Cf., e.g., the people's declaration of Yahweh's kingship after vanquishing Pharaoh and crossing the Reed Sea (Exod 15:18); also a number of psalms (e.g., Ps 93). On Yahweh's kingship, see, e.g., M. Brettler, *God is King: Understanding an Israelite Metaphor* (JSOTSup, 76; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1989). Note, however, that there are some problems with Brettler's understanding of Yahweh's kingship as purely metaphorical; cf. F. Landy, "On Metaphor, Play and Nonsense," *Semeia* 61 (1993), 219–37; and D. H. Aaron, *Biblical Ambiguities: Metaphor, Semantics, and Divine Imagery* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), esp. 33–41. See also J. A. Wagenaar, "King מלך," in *DDD*, 483–86, with further references. On Yahweh's empire and imperial contexts see, e.g., E. S. Gerstenberger, " 'World Dominion' in Yahweh Kingship Psalms," *HBT* 23 (2001), 192–210; and E. Ben Zvi, "The Yehudite Collection of Prophetic Books and Imperial Contexts: Some Obser-

declarations evince this thinking. One typical example from Jeremiah should suffice: Yahweh says, "At one moment I may decree that a nation or a kingdom shall be uprooted and pulled down and destroyed . . . At another moment I may decree that a nation or a kingdom shall be built and planted" (Jer 18:7, 9; NJPS). He has unmatched superpower over the cosmos and its inhabitants.

What is interesting about Yahweh's superheroic kingship in the prophetic books is the juxtaposition between him and other kings, especially foreign kings such as Assyria's and Babylon's, who act as super*villains*. Every superhero requires a supervillain that makes the heroic narrative possible. In such narratives, the superpower of the villain is, at least at first glance, comparable to the superpower of the hero. Often the villain's power mimics the hero's, and in some cases the villain might even appear to be the greater superpower. There is, for example, Agent Smith and Neo and their shared ability to manipulate The Matrix, or Superman's run-in with fellow Kryptonian General Zod. In the prophetic books we find similar juxtapositions. For instance, in the famous series of woe oracles in Isa 10, the Assyrian ruler boasts that his underlings are kings (10:8), and that in his great wisdom and cleverness he is able to remove the borders of peoples in order to plunder their wealth (10:13–14).[18] Having kings serve as underlings is an obvious parallel to the rule of Yahweh himself; only the deity has such power. Removing the borders of peoples is an antithesis to the creative works of the deity Yahweh; it is an act of *un*creation. These are not the actions of an ordinary human. Here the Assyrian king is clearly fashioned as a superhuman figure. The book of Isaiah, too, likens the king of Babylon to a celestial being who aims to sit in the heavenly assembly (14:12–14), and whose power shook the earth (14:16). In the Judean literature, these foreign kings—who of course had real-life antecedents in the ancient world and who, in written and visual representations, depicted themselves in similar ways—operate as typical supervillains, antagonists who, in their defeat, serve as foils to Yahweh's ultimate superpower and control over the cosmos.

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vations," in A. Lenzi and J. Stökl (eds.), *Divination, Politics, and Ancient Near Eastern Empires* (SBLANEM, 7; Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2014), 145–69.

[18] On the language of these statements, which evince knowledge of actual Assyrian propaganda, see P. Machinist, "Assyria and Its Image in the First Isaiah," *JAOS* 103 (1983), 719–37; cf. M. Chan, "Rhetorical Reversal and Usurpation: Isaiah 10:5–34 and the Use of Neo-Assyrian Royal Idiom in the Construction of an Anti-Assyrian Ideology," *JBL* 128 (2009), 717–33. See also the speech of the Rabshakeh, esp. in Isa 36:14–20, which may also have knowledge of actual Assyrian propaganda but is couched in Judean discourse (see, e.g., P. Machinist, "The *Rab Šaqēh* at the Wall of Jerusalem: Israelite Identity in the Face of the Assyrian 'Other'," *Hebrew Studies* 41 [2000], 151–68; and E. Ben Zvi, "Who Wrote the Speech of the Rabshakeh and When?" *JBL* 109 [1990], 79–92).

However, unlike Agent Smith or General Zod or other typical supervillians, the superhumanity of these foreign, villainous kings is not construed as *real*. One should note the god complex of Tyre's rulers, who, in the dirges of Ezekiel, see their beauty, wealth, and wisdom as divine-like (Ezek 28:1–19), but who are ultimately subservient to the Israelite deity.[19] Unlike Yahweh, the god who actually rules as king of the cosmos, these foreign kings are mere humans who think of themselves as gods. Even when some of these kings have what one might call real superpowers (e.g., Assyria), their power is dependent upon Yahweh's allowing it as part of his larger purposes. The prophetic books always present this juxtaposition as a conflict between the foreigners' *perceived* superhuman kingship versus Yahweh's *actual* superhuman kingship. The discourse is the foreign kings' ignorant word versus Yahweh's omniscient word, and obviously Yahweh is always correct. The king of Assyria thinks himself omnipotent, but in reality he is just Yahweh's tool, to be cast aside and destroyed when it is no longer useful (Isa 10:5–19). Likewise, the Babylonian king, despite all his perceived might, will suffer the same fate as any old human leader (Isa 14:4–21). And Tyre, who said of itself, "I am perfect in beauty" (Ezek 27:3), will sink in the seas, its hubristic king a horror to all who knew him (Ezek 28:19). The fleeting power of these human rulers is really just an extension of Yahweh's actual power. Only the fully divine can wield kings as pawns.

Given the nature of the supervillains' powers—fleeting, dependent upon Yahweh, and thus ultimately unreal—how triumphant is the superhero's victory over them? Does the foreign kings' lack of real power before Yahweh somehow undermine the deity's conquest? Agent Smith and General Zod, although destined to lose their respective fights, are legitimately powerful villains. However, when one absolutely controls the power of the enemy, one's victory over said enemy is rather superficial, like a bored child playing and winning a two-player video game, alone. Moreover, one should recall that Yahweh's control over the most potent supervillains, Assyria and Babylon, is a means to an end: he uses them to punish and refine his own chosen people! It is a rather complex and twisted superhero narrative indeed. Yahweh, the superheroic king of the world, masterminds the successful villainy of two superhuman kings against Israel, only to ironically humiliate and destroy the supervillains in the end. Texts like Isa 10, Jer 25 and 27, and Nahum make this explicit.[20] Somewhat like Christopher Nolan's

[19] Note also the metaphor of the Tyrian ship (Ezek 27), which, when read in the context of the emergent collection of prophetic books in late Persian Judah, is a subversion of Tyre's power with regard to Yahweh's emperorship. See I. D. Wilson, "Tyre, a Ship: The Metaphorical World of Ezekiel 27 in Ancient Judah," *ZAW* 125 (2013), 249–62.

[20] On Isa 10 and Assyria in particular, see, e.g., M. K. Y. Hom, *The Characterization of the Assyrians in Isaiah: Synchronic and Diachronic Perspectives* (LHBOTS, 559; New York: T&T Clark, 2012), ch. 6.

recent Batman trilogy of films (2005–2012), the hero Yahweh ostensibly becomes a villain in order to vanquish genuine villainy, and to extinguish evil in the world, including amongst his own people.

SF criticism can help us further unpack this complicated relationship between Yahweh, his people, and his supervillains. A key question in SF discourse has been: Is it ethically problematic that a superhuman like Superman, who commits himself to the care of humanity, does not once and for all eliminate evil and destruction from the world, even when he has the power to do so?[21] Umberto Eco, in his essay "The Myth of Superman," asks whether or not the triumph of honesty and goodness in the Superman stories is actually good at all.[22] At least in the older comic books, Superman has a pronounced *civic* consciousness—he rescues Metropolis from thieves, corrupt local administrators, etc.—but he has no political consciousness on a *cosmic* scale. Goodness is reduced to local charity. Why does he not use his limitless superpowers to bring about unprecedented political stability and economic wealth on Earth? Eco suggests that the civic focus is necessary for the structure of the narrative to work. If Superman ushered in a new utopian reality, then his overarching narrative would effectively come to an end, bringing his character entirely into the realm of myth.[23]

With the prophetic books we have different but not entirely unrelated questions. Why all these theatrics with supervillainous kings that have no real power, ironic reversals of fate, and so on? What does this say, in the end, about the nature of Yahweh's superheroism and kingship? And did any of this contribute to and/or emerge from parallel socio-ethical concerns or questions in late Persian-period Judah? What did all this mean for the intellectual discourses of Persian Yehud? The central problem is one of theodicy, a problem that postmonarchic Judean literati knew all too well, and how the question of theodicy related to the community's

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[21] J. Siegel and J. Shuster, the creators of the Superman comic, published their first short story as teenagers in 1933. Interestingly, the story, "The Reign of Superman," features a superhuman as a telepathic *villain*, not a hero. This Superman receives his powers from a potion concocted by a mad scientist.

[22] Trans. N. Chilton, *Diacritics* 2 (1972), 14–22 (22). For a critique of Eco's famous essay, see Saunders, *Do the Gods?*, 26–28. Saunders charges Eco with a rather thin reading of Superman, and with harboring an anti-capitalist agenda, and further suggests that the ethical problems raised by Eco are necessary for the narrative to work. Saunders, though, seems to miss the fact that Eco, despite his apparent anti-capitalistic reading, comes to a very similar conclusion regarding the needs of the narrative.

[23] However, Eco shows how the serial narrative, which plays with our standard conceptions of causation and time, has integrated sub-series such as the "Untold Tales" and "Imaginary Tales" in order to satisfy readers' curiosities with Superman's back story and certain "What if. . ." questions related to his powers.

social memory. Judah remembered what it perceived to be completely real superpowers in Assyria and Babylon. These giants of previous eras had literally wiped out peoples and kingdoms, including Judah's own monarchy. Memories of this past reality were malleable, but only to a certain extent.[24] One could not deny the fact that imperial powers had subjugated Judah and the entire Levant in the late Iron Age. The physical state of Jerusalem itself throughout the Persian period was a powerful reminder of this truth. In order to reconcile this reality with the concept of a universally omnipotent Judean deity, the literati *had* to understand Yahweh as a complex superhero who temporarily uses supervillainous powers to accomplish his goal of purifying his people, purging them of all evil. Otherwise, there is no way to account for the success of the villains. The negotiation of social memory required this narrative construction, which helped the Judeans come to terms with the theodicean conquest of Jerusalem and destruction of Yahweh's temple at the hands of Babylon.

Unlike the early Superman stories, the prophetic books *do* have a cosmic, political consciousness. They move towards unprecedented peace and prosperity for Israel, for those who follow Yahweh's torah. But because this movement is couched in prophetic vision, it does not run the risk of becoming a cyclical myth—Eco's reading of the Superman comic books does not apply here. The prophetic books *want* to usher in a new utopian reality, but the narrative is cast into the future and mostly avoids discussing detailed socio-historical mechanisms that would bring about the new reality. Further, the books do not settle on any one vision for the future. They offer a number of variations on major themes, making the future fuzzy and reflecting a multiplicity of views among ancient Judean literati. For Judah, the future was polyvalent.

KINGS, GODS, AND THE FUTURE(S)

One could successfully argue that the material I have covered so far—the juxtaposition of Yahweh's kingship with the supervillainous kingship of Assyria and Babylon—is more hero-myth than SF, more historiographical than cognitively estranged. This is because, from the perspective of the late Persian-period literati, these narratives are set in past-time. The downfalls of Assyria and Babylon have already come to pass. Thus, these narratives function as mythopoeic remembrances, memorials of Yahweh's superheroic might. We have not yet completely crossed the boundary into SF-like discourse. But the backstory, the setup of Yahweh's superheroic kingship, is necessary for understanding the corollary accounts of *future* superhuman kingship in the prophetic books.

[24] Cf. E. Ben Zvi, "Malleability and Its Limits: Sennacherib's Campaign Against Judah as a Case Study," in L. Grabbe (ed.), *'Like a Bird in a Cage': The Invasion of Sennacherib in 701 BCE* (JSOTSup, 363; ESHM, 4; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2003), 73–105.

The cycle of destruction-exile-return is seemingly complete, but the books have more to say.

As a prime example, I return to the series of interrelated oracles in Isa 10–12.[25] I have already noted how the power of Yahweh is juxtaposed with the power of Assyria, and how Assyria's boasting is an ironic affirmation of Yahweh's might and of Assyria's lack of any real power—here Yahweh is both superhero and supervillain. This is exemplified in the thematic link between 10:15 and 10:33–34: Yahweh asks rhetorically, "Shall the axe glorify itself over the one who cuts with it?" (v. 15) before he proceeds to fell the haughty trees (vv. 33–34). There is some playful ambiguity in the metaphors here, especially upon re-reading the passage. Assyria is clearly the axe, but it is also the lofty trees to be felled.[26] However, the lofty trees also signify Daughter Zion, Jerusalem (v. 32), who eventually receives the brunt of Yahweh's anger.[27] This is apparent after one reads 11:1, "A shoot shall come from the stump of Jesse," implying that the Davidic line in Jerusalem has been felled like a tree.

And here we have the emergence of the Davidide, mentioned at the outset of this essay, who will rule with his divine sense of smell (והריחו ביראת יהוה) (11:3).[28] Regardless of what 11:3 actually means, it is clear that this Davidide is superhuman, as I have already said. His superhuman rule is to be atypical to the extreme, and utopian peace between natural enemies will mark his reign (11:6–9; cf. 9:5–6). "In that day" (והיה ביום ההוא) (11:10; etc.), the dispersed remnant of Israel will emerge and gather, presumably in Jerusalem (cf. 12:6), to become the premier people of the world.

This vision for the future presents an understanding of superhumanity that is somewhat familiar to readers of SF. Some key questions in SF discourse have revolved around the social ramifications and ethics of superhumanity: Is the idea of an all-powerful superhuman socially sustainable? What would a superhuman think

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[25] On the intricacies of this passage, see esp. J. Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 1–39* (AB, 19; New York: Doubleday, 2000), 251–70, with further references. On its unity, see M. A. Sweeney, "Jesse's New Shoot in Isaiah 11: A Josianic Reading of the Prophet Isaiah," in R. D. Weis and D. M. Carr (eds.), *A Gift of God in Due Season: Essays on Scripture and Community in Honor of James A. Sanders* (JSOTSup, 225; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1996), 103–18, although I disagree with Sweeney's ultimately dating the composition to the late monarchic period. See also P. R. Ackroyd's classic discussion, "Isaiah I–XII: Presentation of a Prophet," in *Congress Volume: Göttingen 1977* (VTSup, 29; Leiden: Brill, 1978), 16–48, esp. 34–40 and 43–44.

[26] Cf. Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 1–39*, 261. See also the metaphor of Assyria the mighty cedar in Ezek 31.

[27] See Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 1–39*, 261, for references to those who see the trees as Assyria and those who see them as Judah/Israel. Blenkinsopp himself (261, 263) understands them to be only Assyria. Given the ambiguity of 10:33–34, I think it is either/or, that is, both readings are possible.

[28] See references above, in note 1.

about ordinary humanity, and would the superhuman feel any sense of duty towards it? Also, how would ordinary humanity react to a superhuman?[29] SF of the 1930s, 40s, and 50s (the so-called "Golden Age" of SF)—influenced by popular ideas about human evolution and by the personal preferences of editor John W. Campbell—mostly concentrated on the idea of a transcendent superhuman who would heroically lead humanity into the next phase of its existence, a view not unlike Isa 11.

Philip K. Dick's story "The Golden Man" (1953) subverted this normative view. The narrative centers on Cris Johnson, a teenaged mutant with unmatched strength, speed, agility, and with precognition. However, this mutant—described variously as "god" and "beast"[30]—has yet to establish communication with humans and is interested only in his own survival.[31] He has no concern for humans, and humans, realizing they have been "replaced," want to destroy him. The X-Men comics (originating in 1963) push the discourse even further. They contain variations on both the positive and negative takes on superhumanity and utilize the tension between them as the driving force in the narratives. Curiosities about the ramifications of Darwinian theory fueled such discourse among the writers and consumers of SF throughout the 20th century.

Obviously, the question of Darwinian evolution was not the pressing issue in Judean discourse and its contemporary milieu. First, one should note, kingship's connection to the divine, the core of its superhuman nature, was likely taken for granted in ancient Near Eastern society. At the very least, the ideal king was a human representative for the divine on earth, the deity's specially chosen one to rule all of creation (e.g., Darius, the special appointee of Ahuramazda). He could even be a kind of "son" to the deity (e.g., the depiction of Davidic kingship in Ps 2, or Assurbanipal's relationship with Ishtar [of Nineveh and of Arbela]). At most, the ideal king approached or occupied divine status himself (e.g., Shulgi of Ur; Pharaoh). Postmonarchic Judeans, though, were rethinking things. In the vision of Isa 11, they saw the Davidide as a transcendent human, Yahweh's special regent who would lead them into a new reality, but they conceptualized this Davidide as partially contrasting the normative ideology of kingship in the ancient Near Eastern world. The idea of a king who rules by sense of smell and who wipes out enemies with mouth and breath was subversive (Isa 11:1–5). Imagining a king who brought justice to the lowly and

[29] See B. Atteberry, "Super Men," *Science Fiction Studies* 25 (1998), 61–76.

[30] P. K. Dick is playing with the concept of "survival of the fittest" in relation to sexuality. All the males see Johnson as an animal or beast, while the females are enamored with his physique and see him as god-like.

[31] Perhaps somewhat akin to Nietzsche's nebulous concept of the *Übermensch*, who is disinterested in mere humans. Cf. Atteberry, "Super Men," 63–64.

who struck down the wicked was not out of the ordinary,[32] but the means by which the Davidide would accomplish this *was* unusual, especially when one compares it with the depiction of Assyria in the preceding chapter, within the same sequence of oracles.[33] Assyria, on the one hand, is the rod of Yahweh's anger (שבט אפי, 10:5), but its king relies on his own wisdom (חכמה), trusting in his own might (10:13). On the other hand is the Davidide, who will have the wisdom (חכמה) of Yahweh (11:2) and who will strike the land with the rod of his mouth (בשבט פיו, 11:3). The two kings are clearly in contrast. Isa 11 takes a somewhat ordinary or expected ideology, represented by the Assyrian king, and recasts it with an extraordinary vision of a future Davidide. The extraordinariness of the vision continues in 11:6–9, which extends the image of absolute peace and justice from the human realm into the animal kingdom. These verses also take common ancient Near Eastern themes and turn them into something different and new.[34] Negotiating its identity on the periphery of empire, Judah took stock images of imperial kingship and re-imagined them in terms of its own political reality. The future Davidide is a hybridized ancient Near Eastern king, both typical and atypical at once, imagined by a subjugated people without any real political power. Thus, Yahweh's goals for the Davidide are standard: peace, justice, righteousness. But the means of accomplishing those goals are not. The Davidide has no strong arm, no armies run by kings, but he will succeed nonetheless, with his preternatural gifts. He is an estranged cognition, a reflection of and on reality.

The community promulgated other images of future kingship, too. Keeping in line with the major trope of King Yahweh, texts like Isa 2:2–4, Mic 4:1–5, Zech 14:9, and others, imagine the deity alone ruling a utopian future. Still other texts speak of a future (super)human king or ruler under King Yahweh, but envision a range of possibilities concerning this king's power and function. Take just the book of Zechariah, for example. The (Davidic) "branch" of Zech 3:8 and 6:12 is conjoined with the high priest, reliant upon another of Yahweh's servants (thus making his relative political position rather un-David-like). Other passages in the book envision a more powerful kingly ruler, however. The human king of Zech 9:9–10 will humbly ride on a donkey but will also, with Yahweh's help, subdue the world. And Zech 12:8 states that the "house of David will be like a divine being, like the messenger of

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[32] Cf. H. Wildberger, *Isaiah 1–12* (Continental Commentaries; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), 463–64; Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 1–39*, 263–65.

[33] Note again that Judah's imagining of Assyria is comparable to how Assyria imagined itself. Cf. Machinist, "Assyria and Its Image."

[34] Cf. M. J. Chan and M. Metzler, "Lions and Leopards and Bears, O My! Re-Reading Isaiah 11:6–9 in Light of Comparative Iconographic and Literary Evidence," in I. J. de Hulster and J. M. LeMon (eds.), *Image, Text, Exegesis: Iconographic Interpretation and the Hebrew Bible* (LHBOTS, 588; London: Bloomsbury, 2015).

Yahweh before them [i.e., Israel]" (ובית דויד כאלהים כמלאך יהוה לפניהם).[35] In this passage Yahweh is king, as he always is, but the Davidic line is elevated to nearly divine status.

There is, too, the "democratization" of kingship in the people of Israel as a whole. Zech 12:8, in addition to calling the house of David divine-like, says that the downtrodden of Judah and Jerusalem will be "like David," i.e., like Yahweh's chosen king. In Isa 55:1–5, similarly, Yahweh elevates the downtrodden people collectively to a position of David-like rule over the nations.[36] This concept functions like a minority report in prophetic discourse, but it is connected to prominent passages elsewhere in the Judean corpus of literature (e.g., Exod 19:6). Such a view of political power would have been ideologically subversive in the imperialized ANE, putting strains on the cultural hegemony of empire, which, below the level of divinity, was an exclusively top-down system in which power descended from an individual ruler. Texts like Isa 55:1–5 contribute to the discourse the idea of a partially horizontal distribution of power, in which Israel as a whole, not just a single ruler, is given kingly (and, in Exod 19:6, priestly) might. To be sure, the idea is still imperial in structure—Israel is to be a sort of emperor to nations (Isa 55:5)—but the imperial leadership is granted to the people as a collective.[37] This vision, which is also certainly a cognitive estrangement, should perhaps receive more attention from scholars interested in the history of political thought and philosophy, who typically concentrate on Classical Greek texts to the detriment of ancient Near Eastern texts like the Hebrew Bible.[38]

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[35] Similarly, the book of Malachi calls Yahweh the "great king" (מלך גדול) (1:14), but also speaks of a powerful messenger (מלאך) who will purify the offerings in Judah and Jerusalem, perhaps keying itself to the image in Zech 12.

[36] Cf. O. Eissfeldt, "The Promises of Grace to David in Isaiah 55:1–5," in B. W. Anderson and W. Harrelson (eds.), *Israel's Prophetic Heritage: Essays in Honor of James Muilenburg* (New York: Harper, 1962), 196–207. See also, e.g., K. E. Pomykala, *The Davidic Dynasty Tradition in Early Judaism: Its History and Significance for Messianism* (SBLEJL, 7; Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1995), 38–41; and S. R. A. Starbuck, "Theological Anthropology at a Fulcrum: Isaiah 55:1–5, Psalm 89, and Second Stage Traditio in the Royal Psalms," in B. F. Batto and K. L. Roberts (eds.), *David and Zion: Biblical Studies in Honor of J. J. M. Roberts* (Winona Lake, IN.: Eisenbrauns, 2004), 247–65; each with many additional references.

[37] Also, there is still technically an individual ruler at the very top: Yahweh.

[38] Consult any history of political theory and one will find that most (if not all) begin with Classical Greece. E.g., C. Farrar writes, "The Athenians invented democracy. They were the first to confront its implications, including a gradual and partial separation of political from social or economic order. . . . Political life [in Athens] expressed a shared, ordered self-understanding, not a mere struggle for power; political status, the status of citizen, both marked and shaped man's identification with those aspects of human nature that made possible a reconciliation of personal

To conclude, then, I would like to suggest that these visions are a reflection *of* and a reflection *on* socio-political (re)figurations in ancient Judean cultural discourse, and that the polyvalence and multiplicity of these visions captures a particular moment of ingenious and lively debate in the discourse. The historical emergence of the prophetic books in the late Persian/early Hellenistic period caught Judean literati in the act, so to speak, of (re)formulating their political worldviews; hence the diverse takes on kingship past and future in the Judean literature.

In a recent article published online by *The Atlantic*, anthropologist Christine Folch explores the question of why the West loves SF, fantasy, and the combination of the two.[39] Drawing on the Weberian concept of disenchantment, Folch argues that we, in the West, have turned to these genres "in an attempt to re-enchant the world," to reinsert the speculative unknown—formerly mediated by religious discourse—into the heart of our science-oriented culture; in other words, to keep the fantastic alive in a culture in which the fantastic is seemingly explainable.[40] Superheroes, writes Ben Saunders, "deconstruct the oppositions between sacred and secular, religion and science, god and man, the infinite and the finite, by means of an impossible synthesis."[41] Cultures around the globe deal with dis- and re-enchantment in a myriad of ways, synthesizing all sorts of things that one might call fantastic and/or real. In the West, for whatever reason, we really like doing this with the genres

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aims with social order" (*The Origins of Democratic Thinking: The Invention of Politics in Classical Athens* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988], 7). By contrast, see G. P. Miller's interesting volume on political thought in ancient Israel (*The Ways of a King: Legal and Political Ideas in the Bible* [JAJSup, 7; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2012]). He proposes that the ancient Judeans had a complex and organized political theory at least a century before the ancient Greeks did. While his central thesis is difficult to defend, his work nonetheless breaks new ground in this area of research. See on this I. D. Wilson's review of Miller in *JHS* 13 [2013]: http://www.jhsonline.org).

[39] "Why the West Loves Sci-Fi and Fantasy: A Cultural Explanation" (13 June 2013, http://www.theatlantic.com).

[40] On disenchantment, see M. Weber, "Science as a Vocation" and "Religious Rejections of the World and Their Directions" in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1946), 129–56 and 323–59, respectively; see also id., "Intellectualism, Intellectuals, and the History of Religion" in *The Sociology of Religion* (Boston: Beacon, 1963), 118–37. For further discussion, see J. Landy and M. Saler (eds.), *The Re-enchantment of the World: Secular Magic in a Rational Age* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009).

[41] Saunders, *Do the Gods?*, 143. In addition, he states that the appeal of superheroes "emerges from out of the gap between the *is* and the *ought*, between the way things are and the way we'd like them to be," and that superhero-fantasy "is *not* the opposite of reality, but is rather another way of making sense of that reality" (ibid., 5; italics original).

of SF and Fantasy.[42] To quote Norman Spinrad, "Speculative fiction [i.e., SF] is the only fiction that deals with modern reality in the only way that it can be comprehended—as the interface between a rapidly evolving and fissioning environment and the resultant continuously mutating human consciousness. Speculative fiction . . . reflects the condition of the modern mind."[43]

I am not so sure that SF is the only sort of fiction that does this, but Spinrad's comment on the condition of the mind within a certain milieu is important. The Judeans of the postmonarchic era also faced a constantly changing environment that saw the succession of empires, the Egyptian revolt against Persia, and the rise of Alexander, among other sea-changing events. They lived in an imperialized world, and they maintained a postcolonial kind of existence, constructing their memories and their identity as a politically insignificant group on the outskirts of Achaemenid rule. The prophetic books give us fine insight into this ancient postcolonial process of cultural negotiation and synthesis. Of course, this is not to say that ancient Judeans were unique in this experience; many people groups found themselves in the same situation in this time period and throughout antiquity. But in the prophetic books we have detailed examples of how one peripheral people group in an ancient imperial setting actually dealt with questions of political thought and identification, and the avenues they explored for constructing a sociopolitical identity.

Specifically, within their cultural system, the Judeans seemed to have resisted certain aspects of imperial rule while embracing others. It must have been exceedingly difficult to think politically outside the imperial box, as it were, so Judeans imagined hybrid socio-political identities that promoted an absolute Yahwistic imperialism but at the same time began to rethink the hegemonic image of ancient Near Eastern imperial rule. Thus, Judean literati still thought of the cosmos in terms of a god-king and his chosen people who would be the conduit for peace and justice in the world, yet they were concomitantly disenchanted with normative (super)human kingship, as promoted by the Assyrians et al. In some cases this resulted in eliminating ideas of human kingship all together. However, it also produced at least one vision of a future superhuman Davidide with uncanny power to rule. And Yahweh was thought to be an uncanny god who transcended typical divine roles by functioning as superhero *and* supervillain, to accomplish his imperial purposes.

SF and SF theory, as I hope to have shown, helps bring some of these issues to the fore in our explorations of the ancient literary artifacts we know as the prophetic books.

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[42] E.g., the majority of the all-time highest grossing Hollywood films are SF or Fantasy.

[43] Spinrad, "Introduction," 3.

SCIENCE FICTION, THE BIBLE, AND THE NARRATIVE MODE

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INTRODUCTION

In discussing human cognition, the psychologist Jerome Bruner has described what he calls "two modes of cognitive functioning": the "logico-scientific" or "paradigmatic," and the "narrative." These serve, he tells us, two different functions; the first is associated with the scientific method and seeks "universal truth conditions," while the second, associated with narratives, looks for "particular connections between two events."[1] According to Bruner, this "narrative mode" is of particular value in analyzing the activities of human beings, since it is well-suited to giving and uncovering meaning.[2] And while the two systems differ in many ways, they are both human methods of dealing with complexity and understanding the world around us.

Empirical problems in human existence range from the simple (things like gravity, magnetism, or chemistry) to the complex (such as the weather, society, or psychology), and to understand how we deal with them requires that we begin with open and closed systems, and the brain. Often discussed in relation to complexity theory, an open system is any system that can be influenced by something outside itself, while a closed system is one that cannot be. With the exception of the universe itself (and even this is not certain), there are no truly closed systems in nature; every empirical thing is influenced by something else, meaning that the universe is nearly infinite in its potential complexity.[3] Closed systems, therefore, are typically abstractions, as we will see.

Brains, meanwhile, are clusters of cells found in certain types of animals, and over the past 600 million years or so, they have evolved to serve two basic purposes: managing bodily functions (such as body heat regulation in an endotherm) and interpreting and directing an organism's responses to the data that comes in through the senses. But since the physical universe is made up of a nearly infinite number of interconnections between open systems,

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[1] J. Bruner, *Actual Minds, Possible Worlds* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986), 11–12.

[2] Ibid., 13–14. See also D. E. Polkinghorne, *Narrative Knowing and the Human Sciences* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1988), 17–18.

[3] N. Johnson, *Simply Complexity: A Clear Guide to Complexity Theory* (London: Oneworld Publications, 2007), 14.

the empirical world therefore runs the risk of overwhelming the brain (which is finite, after all) with information, and so animals with brains have also evolved to edit this data down to a manageable level. Some of this editing is done by our senses (we do not see into the infrared, for example, since to do so provides us with no survival advantage), but much editing is done by our brains themselves, which transform the incoming data from open systems into closed systems with clearly delineated boundaries, making it manageable, even if incomplete. Because the human brain has reached a level of complexity that allows it to operate using abstractions, compounded by several orders of magnitude through our use of language, homo sapiens can engage in complex planning and weighing multiple hypothetical options.[4] Ultimately, the logico-scientific and narrative modes are such abstractions, ways of doing this editing.[5] The closed systems we create in our minds are thus frequently expressed in linguistic terms, a circumstance we regard as perfectly natural, tempting us to believe that the empirical world is closed and linguistic. However, the complex machinery of our brains also allows us, with some effort, to understand the universe as a set of open systems.

Because they are abstractions and methodologies, both the logico-scientific and narrative modes can be described in ideal terms; how they will be used by actual humans (who are not abstractions) will differ from these ideals, and it is in the latter sense that Science Fiction and the Bible serve best to illustrate them. The abstract features are summarized in Table 1.

[4] J. Haidt, *The Happiness Hypothesis: Finding Modern Truth in Ancient Wisdom* (New York: Basic Books, 2006), 15.

[5] The existence of other modes cannot be ruled out. For example, mystical experiences are frequently neither logico-scientific nor narrative, and they are difficult to express using language, to say nothing of mathematics; thus a "mystical mode" should probably be added to Bruner's two modes. This mode would seem to be most commonly expressed through art and ritual, which, lacking any single interpretation, can deal with more emotional questions, and therefore more complex questions, than systems such as mathematics and language. For a survey of recent scholarship on religious/mystical experience and neuroscience, see A. Taves, *Religious Experience Reconsidered: A Building-Block Approach to the Study of Religion and Other Special Things* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009).

Table 1: Logico-Scientific and Narrative Modes

Logico-Scientific Mode	**Narrative Mode**
Open-ended.	Closed-ended.
Conclusions are always tentative; therefore the Canon/Paradigm is always provisional.	Conclusions can be final; therefore a finalized, closed Canon is possible.
Lack of an author, or "invisible hand"; facts present themselves from outside the scientist, who interprets what is observed. The data cannot explain itself to the researcher.	Presence of a creator/author/ editor, or "invisible hand," who decides what will be included and what will be excluded. Through the author, the data can explain itself to the researcher.
Internal and external consistency; must account for all *known* data.	Internal consistency; should account for all *included* data, but not all data.
Seeks general, universal principles. Default to Parsimony.	Seeks specific rules for specific questions. Parsimony optional.
Causality is inherent in objects.	Causality is in the "invisible hand."
In presentation, tone should be emotionally neutral.	In presentation, tone may make use of emotion.

The recognition that the universe is open-ended is crucial to both science and the logico-scientific mode, and this understanding is one of the most important conceptual breakthroughs behind the scientific method. Because open systems are essentially infinite in their complexity, every conclusion reached via the scientific method must be tentative—this is what underlies both Karl Popper's criteria of falsification and Thomas Kuhn's theory of paradigm shifts and scientific revolutions.[6] A theory or paradigm may therefore be overturned if new evidence contradicts it. In contrast, narratives can never be fully open, because a completed narrative is an integrated whole, created for a specific thematic purpose, not to describe an open universe. Of course, this does not mean that narratives cannot be changed or influenced from the outside, as we will see; rather, we must say that narratives exhibit degrees of openness.

Because the logico-scientific mode is based on an understanding of the universe as made up of open systems, all conclusions derived from science must be tentative, meaning that they can be changed if new evidence or theories better explain the phenomenon. So regardless of how accurate Ptolemaic astronomy was, it could not account for all observed astronomical data and so was replaced by the Copernican system, and should enough evidence appear to support another view, Copernicus as well would be

[6] See K. Popper, *Conjectures and Refutations: The Growth of Scientific Knowledge* (New York: Harper and Row, 1963); and T. S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1962).

replaced.[7] Complete narratives, however, must be at least partially closed, though the degree of this will vary. Oral stories, for example, can and usually do change with each retelling, adapting instantly to new conditions, so a comedian telling a joke about the holodeck from *Star Trek* may tell the same joke in several different ways to different audiences, just as a clergyman may give a different sermon to different groups of parishioners who have different needs. These narratives are thus fairly open. Written texts, however, because they are fixed in place by the act of writing, can sometimes be changed and sometimes not, so a *Star Trek* fan may write down a piece of fan fiction, and then revise it as her opinion of the relationship between Captain Kirk and Mr. Spock changes, or rabbis may write different *midrashim* to interpret biblical passages in different ways. The physical text is closed, but can be altered, and so remains potentially open. Finally, a narrative may become canonical, meaning that it exists in a finalized, fixed form; there is general agreement among *Star Trek* fans that the filmed television episodes and movies represent what actually "happened" in the *Star Trek* universe, and which are therefore inviolable,[8] just as Jews and Christians hold certain books of the Bible and certain forms of those books to be canonical and sacred, and others not; the book of Genesis and Gospel of Mark are canon, for example, but not the book of Enoch or the Gospel of Thomas.[9] These narratives are therefore closed systems.

Further, a scientific theory or paradigm must account for all known data, and thus requires both internal (specific to the field) and external (all other fields) consistency.[10] An archaeological theory must also conform to the laws of physics and chemistry, for example. In a narrative, however, only internal consistency is required, and even this may be suspended for the sake of the story;[11] if the plot in *Star Trek* requires that the USS *Enterprise* travel faster than light so Captain Kirk can experience a new romantic conquest every week, or if the power of Yahweh needs to be demonstrated by stopping the sun (Josh 10:12–14), then the laws of physics will be suspended to achieve these effects, even if this results in real-world impossibilities.[12] In the narrative mode, the

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[7] Ibid., 68–69.

[8] Wikipedia, 2014. "Star Trek *Canon*," accessed June 25, 2014. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Star_Trek_canon.

[9] See K. van der Toorn, *Scribal Culture and the Making of the Hebrew Bible* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 233–64; and B. Ehrman, *Lost Christianities: The Battles for Scripture and the Faiths We Never Knew* (Oxford: Oxford Press, 2003), 229–46, for discussions of the process of canonization in its historical context.

[10] Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions,* 168.

[11] Bruner, *Actual Minds*, 12.

[12] Suddenly stopping the sun (or more accurately, suddenly stopping the rotation of the Earth) would cause virtually every object on Earth to fly from its place at its current rate of rotation (about 460 meters per

purpose of the narrative is not to describe the entire functioning of the universe so much as to make a specific point; in other words, in case of a conflict between the two, story reality trumps physical reality.

In fields where the logico-scientific mode is used in its purest form, it seeks to discover general principles that apply universally; these are the "physical" sciences such as physics and chemistry. Once found, such principles can then be applied to multiple problems and questions with high confidence. For this reason there is a tendency for science to default to parsimony, or the principle that the simplest explanation for something is most likely the correct one. Parsimony is extremely useful when we deal with processes that repeat themselves, such as physical laws, which tend to be simpler and more basic. Unfortunately, complexity theory is finding that parsimony breaks down as systems grow increasingly complex and processes become unique; as some have put it, "the whole is more than the sum of its parts."[13] This is the "parsimony–accuracy trade-off" familiar to philosophers of science.[14] So while we may say that every example of gravity works the same way, we must also admit that no two historical events (which are far more complex) are identical, since they involve things like multiple interacting causes and perfect storms. This renders parsimony less useful for the kinds of complex problems that human beings frequently face, such as social and psychological questions, which are highly context-specific; in other words, Occam's Razor does not shave people. Since, as a closed system, a narrative deals with specific questions with an "invisible hand" controlling what information is included, it need not and often must not use parsimony, which in turn gives it a potential advantage over a scientific theory when dealing with complex problems; think of the difference between explaining the interaction of two chemical elements versus the causes of the First World War.

A central feature of the logico-scientific mode is the belief that reality "speaks for itself"; there is no "invisible hand" at work. The

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second at the equator), including the water in the oceans and the air in the atmosphere. Needless to say, this would probably wipe out most life on the planet. If we argue that the author of Joshua believed in a flat, stationary Earth which the sun moved over, then stopping the sun would obviously not have been seen this way when the text was written. According to the theory of General Relativity, traveling at the speed of light would cause an object to achieve infinite mass, which would mean it would need infinite energy to propel it. Since the amount of energy in the universe is finite, this is impossible. *Star Trek* uses scientific sounding terminology such as "warp drive" to get around this problem, without ever really explaining what it is or how it works.

[13] M. Mitchell, *Complexity: A Guided Tour* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), x.

[14] H. G. Gauch, *Scientific Method in Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 318–19.

scientist does not invent her data, or selectively choose what data to study, since to do so would undermine the results of her work and could even turn it into pseudoscience.[15] In the narrative mode, on the other hand, an author or editor is creating an abstract closed system, and functions as an "invisible hand." This distinction has a direct and important impact on the understanding of causality. From a logico-scientific perspective, causality is assumed to be intrinsic to objects, meaning that in a protasis-apodosis construction (if X, then Y), the causality between X and Y is universal and can only be observed by the scientist; science *per se* does not cause events. In a narrative, however, causality is removed from the objects being observed and placed in the hand of the narrator, who is the "invisible hand." In a narrative this goes beyond mere observation: the author *can* invent data, even data that is wholly fictional, and must select what he wants to include. Though this can be a drawback in terms of representing the empirical world (where physical causality, at least, does seem to be inherent in objects), it does have advantages, since it moves the inquiry away from being a complex, open system and turns it into a closed, manageable one that our brains are designed to handle. As a result the world created by the author and/or editor of a narrative is never complete, but it can focus on a specific point or goal, which may be moral or psychological or even mere entertainment. This in turn allows the narrative to deal with singular problems of extreme complexity without having to contend with universal applications.

Finally, there is the issue of tone, which relates to emotion. Because the logico-scientific mode is inherently tentative, a scientific theory or paradigm is generally presented in an emotionally neutral way, while a narrative, freed from that restriction, is able to evoke emotion in its presentation; think of the difference between an article in a peer-reviewed journal and a novel. Modern neuroscience is more and more showing that the human brain is emotional before it is rational,[16] so if a problem is addressed through a

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[15] The point at which science becomes pseudoscience, known as the "demarcation problem," is a longstanding controversy in the philosophy of science. No single criterion to distinguish between science and pseudoscience exists, and many scholars have adopted an "I know it when I see it" approach; for a summary of the debate, see M. D. Gordin, *The Pseudoscience Wars: Immanuel Velikovsky and the Birth of the Modern Fringe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 7–14. A close look at pseudoscience shows that it typically makes use of the narrative mode rather than the logico-scientific mode, and the importance of a narrative to a theory should therefore be considered another criterion for the demarcation problem.

[16] See A. Damasio, *Descartes' Error: Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain* (New York: Penguin Books, 1994); and K. Berridge, "Comparing the Emotional Brains of Humans and Other Animals," in R. J. Davidson, K. R. Scherer, and H. Hill Goldsmith (eds.), *Handbook of Affective Sciences* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 25–51 (42–43).

narrative using powerful emotional language, it is often more likely to be believed than a scientific text, though cultural forces may influence which emotions are evoked in particular types of texts; as Johannes Sloek has noted, modern Western society has a positive view of scientific sounding texts, whether they are scientific or not.[17]

THE MODES IN PRACTICE

Both the logico-scientific and the narrative modes are human creations, and while they may be defined in the abstract, this will always differ from how they are applied by human beings. So while a narrative may become closed and canonical, written by an "invisible hand" of an author or editor, and therefore be more manageable, such an approach also carries a risk: truly closed systems resist evolution, and things that cannot evolve are vulnerable to Darwinian extinction. So if they are narratives with canons, how is it that *Star Trek* and the Bible are still with us? Both have limits on what changes are permissible, and some of those canonical elements are clearly maladaptive; witness the sexism that permeates the original *Star Trek* episodes, or the biblical embrace of slavery.[18] Witness those elements of both that are embarrassing or unclear: the ridiculous betting with "quatloos" from "The Gamesters of Triskelion" or Yahweh's attempt to murder Moses in Exod 4:24–26. In other cases the kinds of complex problems that the narrative may have originally intended to address can change to the point of non-recognition to a later audience, as with the Cold-War allegories found in early *Star Trek* (note "A Taste of Armageddon") or Paul's first-century understanding of homosexuality.[19]

So if canonical narratives cannot adapt, how do they survive? First, just as some species change very little if at all over long periods of time because they are well-adapted to their environments, some narratives cover broad human questions that remain valid even in radically different circumstances, remaining useful even after millennia. Questions of morality, for example, are central to human social existence: does the power to annihilate a world, as Yahweh displays in Gen 6–8, bring with it the right to do so? Does it bring with it the right to interfere with the free will of the natives, as Captain Kirk does on repeated occasions (again, note "A Taste of Armageddon")? Should a being with godlike powers be required to follow the same moral laws as the rest of us, as in Abraham's dialogue with Yahweh in Gen 18:23–32 or the conflict between the *Enterprise* and *Trelane* in "The Squire of Gothos"? Such questions

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[17] J. Sloek, *Devotional Language* (trans. H. Mossin; Berlin/New York: de Gruyter, 1996), 42.

[18] See D. Gerrold, *The World of Star Trek* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1973), esp. 114–15; and Lev 25:44–46; Eph 6:5–8.

[19] See R. Scroggs, *The New Testament and Homosexuality* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1983).

abound in biblical and science fictional narratives, and because they can suspend the laws of physics for the sake of narrative theme, the canonical stories remain relevant.

Further, we must make a distinction between a canonical narrative and the readers of that narrative. A narrative may be closed and governed by the "invisible hand" of an author or editor, but the reader, and especially groups of readers, remain open systems who will reinterpret the text to suit their needs, including ignoring some aspects of the canon that do not suit them. So *Star Trek* fans can just never mention the sexism of the horribly impractical miniskirts and lack of female commanders, or Captain Kirk as a Native American, or the quatloos or "Spock's Brain" (all of which make *Star Trek* more like its campy and terribly sexist rival *Lost in Space*), focusing instead on things like the implications of automation with "The Ultimate Computer" or the spread of weapons of mass destruction with "The Doomsday Machine." Jews and Christians can just overlook the repeated support for slavery in the Bible, or the genocidal violence of God in the books of Genesis, Exodus, and Joshua, and focus instead on the narrative of individual responsibility and redemption in Ezekiel or the capacity for redemption in Jonah. The narratives say what they say, but what parts are used, and how they are used, is up to their readers.

This raises an important point: simply because one narrative may become canonical and closed does not mean that the canon itself cannot evolve, and here there is a clear parallel between the logico-scientific mode and the narrative mode. Kuhn has described the very human process whereby the society of scientists undergoes a scientific revolution when a new paradigm replaces or supplants an old one.[20] Despite the fact that scientific conclusions are always supposed to be tentative, scientists often treat established paradigms as canons, just as religious authorities and Science Fiction fans spend a great deal of time arguing about what constitutes the meaning of their own canonical narrative texts, only to have those canons challenged by changes in society. So the early *Star Trek,* which reflected American gender roles form the 1960s, was horribly sexist, but the later series from the 1990s and 2000s showed women in pants and commanding starships. In the early books of the Bible, Yahweh is horrifically, genocidally violent, but in later books, like Jonah, he is forgiving and compassionate. In Ezek 18:1–3 he even expressly states that the canon is changing from corporate to individual sin in response to the Babylonian Exile. In each case both the canon and its interpretation evolved in response to social changes taking place among the fans/worshippers, since what was normal and acceptable when the first canon was written has been replaced by new needs and beliefs. Canonical evolution, therefore, as opposed to specific narratives, is an open system. Other forms of evolution take place outside the canon, including

[20] Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions.*

things like fan fiction, midrash, and interpretation. From this evolution come new narratives, some more open than others, as the whole system moves forward and does what it is intended to do: help humans, with our complex, ultrasocial brains, deal with extremely complex problems, including cultural ones.[21] Referring to narratives, Donald Polkinghorne describes a hierarchy of complexity involving what he calls the material, the organic, and the meaningful, each level of which influences the others and yet operates autonomously; narrative is one of the tools at the meaningful level.[22] The desire for meaning is a basic characteristic of human psychology and behavior, and following Herbert Simon's concept of hierarchy as a part of complexity theory,[23] we may conclude that the "meaningful" frequently deals with psychological and social problems, which are among the most complex known to us.

But the narrative mode does not operate only at the level of the individual. By providing explanations for complex social problems, it is also a part of human social behavior. We speak of "Judeo-Christian culture" as something different from "Islamic culture" or "Hindu culture" based on the different narratives at the root of each, and similarly, we see in Science Fiction fandom the emergence of subcultures based on the narratives of particular Science Fiction stories such as *Star Trek* and *Star Wars*.[24] Within these social groups, the trend towards canonization, combined with the flexibility of the narrative mode to produce widely divergent approaches to dealing with the same complex questions, can also produce both internal and external tensions. Internally, there is a debate over orthodoxy that is a result of canonization, and externally they can bring conflict between the followers of different narratives.

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[21] The term "ultrasocial" (also referred to as "eusocial") is used in biology to describe a species where multiple generations live collectively in societies and individuals practice altruism as part of their social roles. Ultrasociality occurs only rarely, but those species that achieve it tend to be tremendously successful. In addition to homo sapiens, they include ants, termites, and bees (which make up the majority of the Earth's insect biomass), as well as naked mole rats. Human ultrasociality is distinct from that found in the insect world in that it is based on culture and language rather than biological caste, and humans are therefore unique among ultrasocial species in their use of narratives. See E. O. Wilson, *The Social Conquest of Earth* (New York: Liverwright Publishing Company, 2012) for a full discussion.

[22] Polkinghorne, *Narrative Knowing*, 2–3.

[23] H. A. Simon, "The Architecture of Complexity," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 106.6 (1962), 467–82.

[24] The case of *Star Trek* is well-illustrated by the movie *Trekkies* (1999), and *Star Wars* by the movies *A Galaxy Far Far Away: Inside the Universe of a Phenomenon* (2000) and *Jedi Junkies* (2010), all of which are sympathetic portrayals of fandom. A humorous and slightly critical view can be found in the movie *Fanboys* (2008).

Orthodoxies are a natural part of human social behavior, and there is solid evidence that individual humans tend to modify their beliefs to fit the beliefs of groups to which they belong.[25] This results in both a desire to agree with authority figures in the group as well as a desire to make certain that other members of the group are also in agreement, defining "our group" as distinct from other groups. Since the narrative mode produces potential solutions to complex problems, its use of canonization often results in that particular solution being considered the only valid one. In the case of both Science Fiction fandom and religious groups, we see this in both arguments over what constitutes canon and what it means. In *Star Trek*, for example, there are repeated arguments over which captain was "better": Kirk or Picard, or whether the many *Star Trek* novels are canonical.[26] In the history of Christianity there are repeated arguments over the validity of Original Sin or the extent to which Christ was divine and/or human, as well as which of the Apocrypha are valid, or whether salvation can occur outside any particular church.[27] Historically, these arguments have ranged from mere academic disputes to outright bloodshed.

Externally, because of its flexibility in approaching social and psychological questions, the narrative mode often results in the same complex problem being addressed by two very different narratives, each with potentially equal value. Unfortunately, the trend towards canonization and orthodoxy can also lead to conflicts between groups with different narratives. In the case of Science Fiction an excellent example of this is the argument between *Star Trek* fans and *Star Wars* fans, not only over which of the two series is "better," but which often devolves into unsolvable arguments over who would win in a space battle: the USS *Enterprise* or the Death Star, Mr. Spock or Darth Vader.[28] As strange as these arguments may seem to an outsider, they make perfect sense when we consider that the fans who engage in them are reacting to perceived threats to their group identity, just as the historical and often bloody conflicts between Christianity and Islam are built on a conflict between two different narratives that deal with the same com-

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[25] G. L. Cohen, "Party Over Policy: The Dominating Impact of Group Influence on Political Beliefs," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 85.5 (2003), 808–22; J. Haidt, *The Righteous Mind: Why Good People are Divided by Politics and Religion* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2012).

[26] Wikipedia, 2014. "Star Trek *Canon*," accessed June 25, 2014. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Star_Trek_canon.

[27] See P. Jenkins, *Jesus Wars: How Four Patriarchs, Three Queens, and Two Emperors Decided What Christians Would Believe for the Next 1,500 Years* (New York: Harper Collins, 2010); and Ehrman, *Lost Christianities*.

[28] The internet abounds with websites and videos playing out this argument. For examples, see the following:
http://whowouldwinafight.com/star-trek-vs-star-wars/;
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=edqZK6Qitco#t=26;
http://www.stardestroyer.net/Empire/.

plex problems, each of which offers a sense of group belonging to its adherents. The group must be defended, after all.

Like the logico-scientific mode, the narrative mode is part of the mental toolkit that we use to deal with complex problems presented by the world we live in. While a form of the logico-scientific mode is probably common among many animals,[29] the narrative mode also has considerable antiquity and is equally natural to us; we have been telling each other stories to make sense of the universe since the Paleolithic, and it is worth noting that the results of scientific study are often presented in narrative form, especially to non-specialists, as in the popular television series *Cosmos*. It is common to find surprise and even despair in the scientific community over the rejection of the conclusions of the scientific method by people in the modern world; the continued belief in creationism is probably the most obvious example of this, but the same rejection is apparent in the continued popularity of all forms of pseudoscience.[30] But the reason so many reject science is not ignorance, as a few scientists are beginning to understand. Rather, it is the fact that the Enlightenment belief system and scientific method that is part of it carry their own limitations and difficulties, for how can science answer complex moral questions, complex social questions, questions that involve not particle physics or chemistry but rather what it is to be human, to have a purpose in living?[31] It is no coincidence that when scientific conclusions are rejected, it is almost inevitably in favor of conclusions coming from a system based on the narrative mode. Despite its frequent effort to seem scientific, Science Fiction actually shares far more with religion than science; both are based on narrative and both, when they are successful, seek meaning and answers to the kinds of complex problems that are at the root of being human. It is in this that their greatest value lies.

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[29] Chimpanzees, for example, exhibit many features of complex planning that requires logical thought. See W. C. McGrew and A. T. Feistner, "Two Nonhuman Primate Models for the Evolution of Human Food Sharing: Chimpanzees and Callitrichids," in J. H. Barkow, L. Cosmides, and J. Tooby (eds.), *The Adapted Mind: Evolutionary Psychology and the Generation of Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 229–43; as well as the recently published study by A. P. Melis and M. Tomasello, "Chimpanzees' (Pan troglodytes) Strategic Helping in a Collaborative Task," *Biology Letters* 9 (2013), http://dx.doi.org/10.1098/rsbl.2013.0009. Accessed November 20, 2014.

[30] See the essays in K. Frazier (ed.), *Science Under Siege: Defending Science, Exposing Pseudoscience* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); M. Shermer, *Why People Believe Weird Things* (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 1997; revised edition, 2002); and M. Pigliucci and M. Boudry (eds.), *Philosophy of Pseudoscience: Reconsidering the Demarcation Problem* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2013).

[31] See P. Kitcher, *Living with Darwin* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

HACKED AQEDAH—GENESIS 22 IN DIALOGUE WITH CONTEMPORARY POLITICAL SCIENCE FICTION

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INTRODUCTION

This article engages with Genesis 22—Aqedah—and a number of works that are put into relationships with it. Two works are the starting point: Erich Auerbach's *Mimesis*[1] and Douglas Rushkoff's graphic novel *Testament*.[2] Further, Yvonne Sherwood's 2008 article "Abraham in London, Marburg-Istanbul and Israel: Between Theocracy and Democracy, Ancient Text and Modern State"[3] about "theological-political translations"[4] of the Aqedah, which features Auerbach's *Mimesis* as one of three case studies. The present article feigns a reception history approach when describing how the "emptinesses" or "darknesses" of the biblical story are filled by contemporary re-readings of it.[5] However, I am not content with simply saying or showing that blanks are being filled in. In order to better understand *Testament* as a topical response to contemporary reality as well as a dialogue with the biblical Aqedah, Rushkoff's essay *Open Source Democracy*[6] is consulted (similar ideas about the Bible as open source are also found in Rushkoff's *Nothing Sacred: The Truth about Judaism*[7]). The Aqedah seems uniquely suited

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[1] E. Auerbach, *Mimesis: Dargestellte Wirklichkeit in der abendländischen Literatur* (2nd edition; Bern/Munich: Francke, 1959).

[2] D. Rushkoff and L. Sharp, *Testament*, 4 vols. (New York: DC Comics, 2006).

[3] Y. Sherwood, "Abraham in London, Marburg-Istanbul and Israel: Between Theocracy and Democracy, Ancient Text and Modern State," *BibInt* 16 (2008), 105–53.

[4] Ibid., 147.

[5] "The various directions the literary reception of the Aqedah has followed in literature over the centuries were largely determined, first, by the ways different adaptations have fill *in* the oft-noted silences in the scriptural account, placing language in Abraham's and the other character's mouths, and, secondly, by the ways such adaptations have filled *out* the omitted 'background' of which Auerbach spoke." E. Ziolkowski, "Aqedah: Literature," in *Encyclopedia of the Bible and Its Reception*, vol. 2 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2009), 542–58 (544).

[6] D. Rushkoff, *Open Source Democracy: How Online Communication is Changing Offline Politics*, eBook (Demos/Project Gutenberg, 2003). The version cited in this article can be accessed at the following address: http://library.umac.mo/ebooks/b17781486.pdf; accessed August 1, 2014.

[7] D. Rushkoff, *Nothing Sacred: The Truth about Judaism* (New York:

as a case study in support of Rushkoff's political agenda and, beyond that, may be an interesting pivot point in thinking about shaping discourse and "truth" in a networked world. I discuss how between Aqedah, *Testament*, *Mimesis*, and *Open Source Democracy* the ideas of "story," "emergence," and "open source" are developed. Another voice from current media criticism makes an appearance: Cory Doctorow also translates political ideas and activism into Science Fiction novels.[8] I attempt a reading with and after Rushkoff's Science Fiction-ized Bible that is not in the "good service of the Liberal Bible" as Sherwood calls it,[9] but rather in the spirit of a contemporary "Shareware Bible."

AUERBACH, RUSHKOFF, AND THE EMERGENCE OF THE STORY

Mimesis: Dargestellte Wirklichkeit in der abendländischen Literatur is a work of literary criticism written by Auerbach between 1942–1945 in Istanbul, where he was exiled from Nazi Germany. In chapter one, titled "Die Narbe des Odysseus" ("Odysseus' Scar") Auerbach compares the Odyssey and the story about the sacrifice of Isaac. In brief, he says that the Odyssey foregrounds everything: the reader is informed about absolutely every detail, yet the story remains uniformly superficial. Auerbach shows that in contrast to this wealth of information provided in Homer the Bible tells a very sparse story, of which he gives different examples. He describes how the story seems to beg for the reader's imagination to fill in the blanks:

> *Hinne-ni*, hier siehe mich—womit freilich eine überaus eindringliche Geste suggeriert wird, die Gehorsam und Bereitschaft ausdrückt—deren Ausmalung aber dem Leser überlassen bleibt. Von den beiden Unterrednern wird also nichts sinnfällig als die kurzen abgerissenen, durch nichts vorbereiteten und hart aufeinanderstoßenden Worte; allenfalls die Vorstellung einer Geste der Hingabe; alles übrige bleibt im Dunkeln.[10]

Auerbach keeps using this expression throughout the chapter: "bleibt im Dunkeln"—the details of this story remain in the dark (or in obscurity, as the English version sometimes translates).

One thought from Auerbach in particular inspires a comparison with Rushkoff's graphic novel:

> Die Geschichten der Heiligen Schrift werben nicht, wie die Homers, um unsere Gunst, sie schmeicheln uns nicht, um uns

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Crown, 2003) in which he describes Judaism in terms of "open source."

[8] E.g., C. Doctorow, *Makers* (Harper Collins, 2009); *Little Brother* (Tor Books, 2008); and its sequel *Homeland* (Tor Books, 2013).

[9] Sherwood, "Abraham in London," 150.

[10] Auerbach, *Mimesis*, 11.

> zu gefallen und zu bezaubern—sie wollen uns unterwerfen, und wenn wir es verweigern, so sind wir Rebellen.[11]

If we refuse to be subjected by the Bible we are rebels. Sherwood writes:

> [i]n Auerbach's telling, Gen 22 puts the reader in a pincer of a decision between *either* submission/subjection *or* rebellion, a long way from a literary feast of endless choosing laid out on the endless tablecloth of lacunae or white space [. . .].[12]

And: "the biblical becomes a sounding board for the oppressor and those who are 'sacrificed'. It functions as enemy and ally."[13] Throughout I am going to argue that since Auerbach's telling this "pincer of a decision" has shifted from this "either/or" towards a more participatory and nuanced perspective.

Douglas Rushkoff and Liam Sharp's graphic novel *Testament* is a near-future dystopian Science Fiction (SF) narrative which carries forward a fairly complex opinion about the Bible, storytelling, agency, and responsibility. It happens to be one example of biblical reception (or reaction) which illuminates the darkness of Gen 22 (among many other passages from the Tanakh as well as the book of Job). It also engages explicitly and implicitly with the Bible as a contemporary presence, with gods, and shifting antagonists and allies.

Rushkoff's point of view is consciously opposed to conceptual or real top-down hierarchies. In Auerbach's "poignantly contextualised and deeply mixed response," Sherwood writes, "God and the text become a figure for narratocracy and autocracy, the absolute force of the Nazi, while the non-characters within it become figures of the 'real' and the powerless victims."[14] Rushkoff does not ask about "either/or"—"either submission *or* rebellion," "absolute force" versus "powerless victim." He, too, is concerned with power and hierarchies, but mostly to argue that power of text (and textual medium) and divine top-down hierarchy are being (and should be) replaced with a bottom-up hierarchy, an idea consciously indebted to emergence theory. While I am going to introduce Rushkoff via a reading of filling in the dark, my underlying hunch is that Auerbach enables Rushkoff and already contains some of the shareware, open source, emergent, or hacker mentality, which, as I am about to argue, is surprisingly at home in the Aqedah.

In the graphic novel three storylines converge, one of them is the biblical story. The graphic novel medium dictates a near-perfect filling in of the blanks in text, dialogue, image, as well as generally accessible forewords and afterwords by Rushkoff in which he introduces interested readers to some principles of rabbinic inter-

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[11] Ibid., 17.

[12] Sherwood, "Abraham in London," 132.

[13] Ibid.

[14] Ibid.

pretation, network theory, and literary theory. Sharp's artwork presents a rocky desert terrain for most biblical settings, biblical characters wear desert-appropriate clothing, herd goats and sheep, dwell in tents, and speak contemporary English (that is, not KJV English which some comic book superheroes or -villains are known to lapse into when a biblical reference seems in order).

The second story is a super-story set in a divine realm with the characters Elijah, Melchizedek, Molokh, Krishna, Atum-Ra, and Astarte. The deities act between the panels of the story. Graphically their interference or interaction is indicated by subtle morphing of those areas on the page which depict actions in the divine realm into colors or objects in the panels of the other story-lines. For example, in one panel, the smoke of Abraham's fire when he is about the sacrifice Isaac leaves the panel and morphs into the figure of Molokh lurking above it. Rushkoff explains: "[The gods] live outside sequential time and, accordingly, are always depicted beyond the panels. If they try to interfere in the linear action by reaching into a panel, their arm or breath transforms into an element like water or fire."[15] Yahweh, by the way, is absent throughout: it turns out towards the end that all the deities created a unified god called Yahweh for fear of being abandoned by humans: humans had too much choice in gods and lost interest. Scarcity—monotheism—the gods realize, creates demand.

The third story, set in the near future, follows a group of young cyber activists who try to go off the grid. They refuse to follow a government order for surveillance-implants and commerce-induced brainwashing and are thereby turned into criminals in a world in which one powerful individual is trying to push for a world currency and an unspecified war looms as the backdrop to the story.

Volume one of Rushkoff's *Testament* is called "Akedah." Protagonists are the Stern family. Dr Stern is an idealist who has inadvertently helped to create current circumstances by inventing technology that is now abused by the powerful. Dr Stern sees his son Jake fall victim to a system that his idealism helped to create. Stern decides not to "sacrifice" his son to surveillance and draft. Dr Stern's substitute sacrifice is the family dog, who is implanted with the surveillance device instead of Jake, which allows Jake to escape and join an underground opposition movement.

There is no divine intervention as such in this storyline, but the appearance of the dog is paralleled in a panel with the appearance of angel and ram in the biblical parallel story. Rushkoff forces both stories into the graphic novel while the divine figures hover somewhere in between the panels of one story and the other story. This resonates conceptually with an observation by Sherwood about the biblical Aqedah as an "in-between story": "Israeli Akedah [. . .] became such a potent political myth because it was an over-

[15] Rushkoff and Sharp, *Testament*, vol. 1, 6.

determined liminal story positioned in the most acute of between-times, between nation and oblivion, life and death."[16]

I am going to outline below (esp. section 4) how current SF narratives work in a similar way, gauging what might be perceived as a cultural "in-between" moment on the threatened verges of environmental and economic collapse, dystopian privacy-invasions, or the terrifying prospect of data-loss amnesia.

Rushkoff's story about rebellion might be one instance of so-called biblical reception that fills the vague biblical story out in all its nooks and corners. As a cultural artifact it creates a sum made up of contradictory parts—biblical story, SF story, rebellion, obedience, pre-technological society, high-tech society—and finds lights to illuminate the darknesses diagnosed by Auerbach.

In current SF literature, especially the near-future material which imagines life in and after times of economic collapse, privacy intrusions, open source, Google, Silicon Valley hegemony, or social networks, similar themes and approaches appear and re-appear. I am going to cite two more examples, Doctorow's novel *Makers*[17] and Jim Jarmusch's film *Only Lovers Left Alive* (in section 4).

Doctorow's novel reads like a dystopian utopia set in a post-Google, post-Silicon Valley world, in which something like a cult for a metaphysical "Story" develops. People flock to so-called "rides" in abandoned WalMart superstores to which visitors bring discarded possessions, like plastic toys or convenience objects that went out of fashion. Little robots hover around and arrange the junk into displays. At first these rides are appealing because of their interactive nature, their rapid change, and a certain sense of nostalgia, too. Visitors can vote displays up if they like them, and down if they dislike them. In this way, the displays begin to evoke strong negative and positive emotions, prompting some to see a Story—with a capital S—made up of supposedly meaningless objects and feedback from the crowds who engage with the displays.

The character who invented these rides reacts confused when he first sees the Story emerge from the random assortment of refuse. His colleague explains: "People see stories like they see faces in clouds. Once we gave them the ability to subtract the stuff that felt wrong and reinforce the stuff that felt right, it was only natural that they'd anthropomorphize the world into a story."[18]

By arranging apparently meaningless parts, the world becomes a person-story or a story-person. "Anthropomorphizing" the world into a story might imply that the world-story is attributed with a person's agency, or maybe what it means is that humans play an active role in creating the story; it is not simply being told to them anymore by story-creators with a monopoly on story-production. Humans anthropomorphize the world yet at the same time it may

[16] Sherwood, "Abraham in London," 146.
[17] Doctorow, *Makers*.
[18] Ibid., 241–42.

seem as though the Story generates itself without the intervention of one creator. Humans only act on the local, micro-level when they bring objects and vote in favor of one display in many.

Doctorow's characters continue to discuss cultural studies: "All those Greek plays, they end with the deus ex machina—[. . .] You can't do that in a story today. [. . .] Today we understand a little more about the world, so our stories are about people figuring out what's causing their troubles and changing stuff so that those causes go away. Causal stories for a causal universe."[19]

Maybe the characters in Doctorow's novel are right in thinking about stories in such terms. Divine intervention may be out of fashion or out of epistemology. However, emergence theory seems a presence in this work as well as in Rushkoff's graphic novel. In very brief words, emergence theory, first described in the 19th century, briefly out of fashion in the mid-20th century, has recently made a re-appearance not just in philosophy but also as an open question in science:

> it recognizes that in physical systems the whole is often more than the sum of its parts. That is to say, at each level of complexity, new and often surprising qualities emerge that cannot, at least in any straightforward manner, be attributed to known properties of the constituents.[20]

Rushkoff explains his using emergence theory at length in his essay *Open Source Democracy*[21] when speaking about activism, human communities, and individuals in interactive networks. Transferring emergence theory onto society or cultural production seems to begin with questioning top-down hierarchies and realizing the power of the individual on the local level. Rushkoff's introductory example is an ant colony, which used to be perceived as a top-down hierarchy in which ants received commands from the top, the queen, but it has been recognized that "it is not a hierarchical system, they don't receive orders the way soldiers do in an army. The amazing organization of an anthill 'emerges' from the bottom up, in a collective demonstration of each ant's evolved instincts."[22] In human terms, challenging the notion of top-down hierarchy in a networked society, he writes:

> thanks to the feedback and iteration offered by our new interactive networks, we aspire instead towards a highly articulated and dynamic body politic: a genuinely networked democracy, capable of accepting and maintaining a multiplicity of points of

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[19] Ibid., 242.

[20] P. Clayton and W. Davies, "Preface," in id. (eds.), *The Re-Emergence of Emergence: The Emergentist Hypothesis from Science to Religion* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2006), x.

[21] Rushkoff, *Open Source*, 17–18, and *passim*.

[22] Ibid., 17.

> view, instead of seeking premature resolution and the oversimplification that comes with it.[23]

Divine intervention may not be *en vogue* in contemporary storytelling, but networked individuals and the emergence of something bigger than a sum of parts is a very popular topos. There is something preternatural about the idea of emergence, and maybe, for the time being, this might even be called a divine spark: between the individual constituents of a sufficiently complex system something new and unexpected develops, not even consciously. In pre-emergent readings of stories and the biblical story, we may choose to stick to dual categories: divine-human, powerful-powerless, dictator-victim, robotic-human, etc. A more contemporary way to look at a story would be to realize that it is made up not of dual categories but rather of a complex open system. "When aggregates of material particles attain an appropriate level of organizational complexity, genuinely novel properties emerge in these complex systems."[24]

On the way towards such a reading, one might be inclined to deny the story its divine spark in the form of a divine top-down hierarchy in which God intervenes at will. Sherwood reminds us that Auerbach, in his discussion of Gen 22 never gets to the divine intervention by angel and ram.[25] The graphic novel, too, is ultimately about gods and humans struggling over the right and the power to control the story. It progressively denies the divine agents their agency, but it does not write the gods out of the story. In *Testament* divinity is flamboyantly present even until the very end, when a goddess reaches into the story one final time to plant a semi-divine baby in the womb of a human protagonist.

Rushkoff's graphic novel tells many stories, and one is about realizing that despite perceiving oneself as just a powerless individual inside a cruel hierarchical system one is an active agent in change, which may begin on the micro-level. Rushkoff tells a story about successful rebellion by an unlikely crowd of young people, quite possibly with the objective to tease actual rebellion into this world. The graphic novel wants to make its readers aware of globalization, neoliberalism, sexism, capitalism, war, and—importantly—counter an attitude of "I can't do anything anyway." It wants to make available—at least philosophically—the option of opposition to the imposed feeling of powerlessness and opposition to following orders mindlessly. Rushkoff juxtaposes this story about rebellion with the darknesses and voids of the Bible that

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[23] Ibid., 18.

[24] C. N. el-Hani and A. M. Pereira, "Higher-level Descriptions: Why Should We Preserve Them?" in P. Bogh Andersen et al. (eds.), *Downward Causation: Minds, Bodies, and Matter* (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 2000), 133, cited in P. Clayton, "Conceptual Foundations of Emergence Theory," in *The Re-Emergence of Emergence*, 2.

[25] Sherwood, "Abraham in London," 129.

demands submission and interpretation, as Auerbach says, while it tells the story of Abraham who is obedient but drags along a seemingly powerless individual—Isaac—who turns into the enabler of dissent in a hacked version of the story.

UNDERMINING OLD AUTHORITIES

But why even engage with the biblical story when telling a SF story about future challenges in a networked society? It is of course absolutely not a necessity to start with the Bible—Doctorow tells his stories about open source networks and rebellion against artificial constraints imposed by corporations without the Bible. Rushkoff's ambitious hope is that in contemporary reality "the interactive mediaspace offers a new way of understanding civilisation itself [. . .]."[26] He hopes to enable such understanding by looking at stories, and who has the power to tell and control them, starting with the Bible:

> Since Biblical times we have been living in a world where the stories we use to describe and predict our reality have been presented as truth and mistaken for fact. These narratives, and their tellers, compete for believers in two ways: through the content of the stories and through the medium or tools through which the stories are told.[27]

In the past, Rushkoff says, those who listened to stories—whether presented by storytellers, priests, or those in charge of television programming—may have been captivated by the magic of the story as well as by the power that came with controlling the medium through which the story was told. In the present and the future, Rushkoff says, people are taking control of the story by taking control of the medium through which the story is told (as in Doctorow's novel, or as in fan-made episodes of e.g., *Star Trek*, whose creation is enabled by wider availability of technology and whose distribution is enabled by the Internet).

By taking this action, it is possible for present-day listeners or readers to re-claim the power to control the story. There is a now a generation of readers who are used to having full control over the story-telling medium. Paradoxically, clearly, in order to take control of the story and to express opposition to those who control it, it is necessary to acquire knowledge of medium and method first. Rushkoff's ideal present-day reader has dismantled the former "magic" by understanding the medium of storytelling, so in theory (I highly doubt everybody practicing story-telling these days is aware of it) the control of "the truth" is now no longer with the story-teller, but with each author-contributor in an ever-changing story. In the graphic novel Rushkoff uses the Bible to expose the

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[26] Rushkoff, *Open Source*, 2.
[27] Ibid., 4.

truth-making agenda of stories and their tellers, and uses it as an example of how to expose and break its power over those who did not use to realize that they are in control of the medium.

A CLOSER LOOK AT THE DARKNESS

In order to wrest the power away from former story-tellers—the media, the priest, the theologian—and to become a hacker in this ideal of open-source Bible, obviously, the Bible has to be approached. Auerbach's darknesses and voids are cracks that expose the source code for the modern-day Bible hacker. Auerbach's darknesses and unknowns provide opportunities to turn on a bright spot-light on the monsters in the Bible's closet. It is possible that in today's world we are afraid of but fascinated with the alien void of the Bible because it testifies to change and alterity.

There is the recent film by Jarmusch[28], which is set in the dark and—in my opinion—speaks about just this issue: dealing with fears of change, darkness, and emptiness. This fear seems to be a contemporary issue, and maybe the large volume of recently published speculative fiction about the near-future responds to a need for at least some answer to "Now what?" Interestingly, in many works (e.g., *Divergent*, *The Hunger Games*, *Only Ever Yours*)[29] the big collapse, the war, the catastrophe that brought about dystopian circumstances is the stuff of myth and legend about which the characters are selectively and propagandistically informed, if at all.

Jarmusch's film follows protagonists who are many hundreds of years old, who do not suffer from amnesia and are not as easily subjected to dominant myth-making. The film is not set in the future, either. A lot of it is set in present-day Detroit, a nearly empty city, with abandoned buildings that have served their purpose and are now inhabited by trees, wolves, urban farmers, and toxic waste. The characters witness epochal changes such as the decline of cities and civilizations with patience, melancholy, and calm resignation, because they have seen it happening so much. Clearly the film is juxtaposed with the expectations and knowledges of people with a shorter life-span. For them there is something haunting and yet appealing, something *unheimlich*, about half-illuminated darknesses like those we find in abandoned buildings or ancient stories. What makes them haunting is quite possibly their strong statement of having once been filled, but we do not live long enough to remember exactly with what they were once filled.

With regard to the Aqedah we assume that it was once filled with a culture's understanding that is neither entirely like our own, nor entirely other. There is something close and familiar, yet also

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[28] J. Jarmusch, *Only Lovers Left Alive* (Recorded Picture Company, 2013).

[29] V. Roth, *Divergent Series* (Harper Collins, 2011–2013); S. Collins, *Hunger Games Series* (Scholastic, 2008–2010); L. O'Neill, *Only Ever Yours* (Quercus, 2014).

infinitely removed—uncanny. Yet these biblical stories appear to be a presence that cannot simply be ignored, maybe because they are ancient artifacts testifying to our being controlled by stories, and as such they are, at least to Rushkoff, an important confrontation on the way to realizing that the story-control can be reclaimed. The Bible can be hacked by fan fiction just like *Star Trek*; by modern, new supposedly irreverent rewritings (or even so-called Bible-bashing) or supposedly irreverent papers[30] that quite possibly, in the end, only ever submit themselves to the totalizing imperative of the darknesses. But the pieces created from this *horror vacui* or fear of the dark add something unique and meaningful to contemporary culture that will speak about it in the future (maybe more than about the Bible).

SEEING THROUGH THE CRACKS

It does not seem unexpected now that Rushkoff would choose a dictatorial but porous biblical story about obedience to make his audience consider dissent as a political option in today's world. Throughout the graphic novel, divine omnipotence is progressively denied as the human protagonists discover their own creative powers: first, they create an Artificial Intelligence that threatens to destroy humanity. Then the human protagonist—through use of mind-expanding substances—discovers the gods beyond the panels.

Auerbach writes about God's calling Abraham in Gen 22:1:

> Wo befinden sich die beiden Unterredner? Das wird nicht gesagt. Wohl aber weiß der Leser, dass sie sich nicht jederzeit am gleichen irdischen Ort befinden, dass der eine derselben, Gott, von irgendwo ankommen, aus irgendwelchen Höhen und Tiefen ins Irdische hineinbrechen muss, um zu Abraham zu sprechen. [31]

God has to "break into the earthly sphere" ("aus irgendwelchen Höhen und Tiefen ins Irdische hineinbrechen") in order to speak with Abraham. In the graphic novel this happens literally: the gods reach into the story from above the panels of the graphic novel, from within their own parallel story.

Having broken through, they may have left a chasm, which the humans see. The gods just want to keep the story from being re-written. They—as everyone maybe—want to be and stay in control of change. But by intervening they have revealed to humans first their presence and then their technique of control. The humans actively decide to reclaim their agency—as terrifying as that may seem at first—and they discover their power to influ-

[30] Many remember Roland Boer's 2010 SBL paper about a prophetic sausage fest that (so Biblical Studies social memory has it) supposedly even sparked a tiny media uproar in Atlanta.

[31] Auerbach, *Mimesis*, 10.

ence their own story by relying on their new networked emergent organization rather than relying on the former top-down divine-human hierarchy.

The recent reactions to the story about Abraham's obedience and Isaac's un-informed consent spawns rebellion: against gods, against the Nazi regime, against war, against corporations, against the uncritical acceptance of the Liberal Bible. There are several explanations for why this particular story would provoke these reactions. One is that the Aqedah is suited for subversion, from a hierarchical story-telling perspective:

> The programmer creates a character we like and with whom we can identify. As a series of plot developments bring that character into some kind of danger, we follow him and within us a sense of tension arises.[32]

This is Rushkoff's description of the situation before taking back control of the story. If we plainly and simply apply this statement to the Aqedah as a story, there is a problem with identification: some might identify with Abraham at this point, who is arguably still the protagonist. Sarah is a part of this story (and appears in Rushkoff's lead-up to the story more than she does in the sudden transition into the story in Gen 22:1).[33] One may identify with young Isaac, the servants, or even the donkey. It would seem as though identifications might clash: are we with Abraham, do we want to please God? Are we with Isaac, do we want to survive or do we want our father to please God? With Sarah: do we want our husband to sacrifice our first-born son to please God who has just given us our son? Realizing, with Auerbach again, that the almighty story-teller says nothing about how Isaac feels and how Sarah feels might be the point at which the story can be turned and shifted. How is one to identify with these empty figures unless one begins writing or imagining their backgrounds oneself?

In the spacious yet totalizing story, there are darknesses and voids. In Auerbach's portrayal of the Odyssey nothing is left unsaid but thereby, paradoxically, the characters seem flat and static, as if nothing ever much changed. This story is a completely smooth surface. The Odyssey, Auerbach says, wants to please the reader.[34] The Bible wants to subject the reader, but in a contemporary reality of not subjecting to being told stories anymore, the Bible also hands the reader the tools for its own dismantling.

The Bible reader may fall into the cracks in the biblical story and enter a labyrinth of dark spaces. But these spaces inside the biblical labyrinth shift due to human agency as found in exegesis,

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[32] Rushkoff, *Open Source*, 5.

[33] Sherwood gives examples of Aqedah responses in Israeli culture, which voice a perspective akin to Sarah's (145) and others akin to Isaac's (144).

[34] Auerbach, *Mimesis*, 17.

metaphor, interpretation, and allegory. What this means in Rushkoff's terms is essentially that humans, by studying the Bible and adding evidence to the idea that the Bible enables agency and provokes engagement with it, have cracked the source code of story-telling power. Auerbach's darknesses—once filled with a different culture's understanding which may have fallen victim to amnesia over time—leave a gap through which we can see the code and in crumbling, shifting contemporary circumstances, the Bible is an easy enough victim for attack.

Readers are meandering in the cracks of a story about Abraham's obedience resolved by divine intervention—*deus ex machina*, with which Rushkoff's ideal readers who take charge of the story are not content anymore: thinking of rebellion is the next logical step. If a reader who has overcome the fear of her own agency and embraced it finds herself trapped in a totalitarian story, in a totalitarian regime, or in total capitalism—the most immediate reaction would be to write Isaac's opinion, and illuminate his story, because he seems trapped in his father's single-minded trajectory to Moriah.

Reading the story from a modern perspective—and just the story, not the original cultures behind it, not its original setting, not what it may have meant to its original audiences—Abraham seems to embody a past of yielding to top-down hierarchy, which is not embraced anymore. In a hacked version of the Aqedah, I write Isaac's story, while possibly locating divine intervention or divine sparks as emerging from the complex system between Isaac and the hacker, or between hacker and hacker altogether.

CONCLUSION

The Bible's dark empty spaces are often stuffed with contemporary stories or concepts (Sherwood's "right or wrong," "coercion," "decision," "country," "state," "theology," "politics," *passim*). What Rushkoff promotes in *Open Source Democracy* is not necessarily the abolition of concepts or dual categories, but rather an insight that some of these frameworks can be hacked by a networked individual, who will ideally make the code available to others—building on previous work, correcting each other's mistakes. Of course this is a utopian vision.

In the final chapter of the graphic novel, dystopia turns into a utopia of abundance for everyone. Rushkoff claims that he does not advocate future-oriented utopianism, but the ring of utopianism is still paradoxically present:

> an increasing number of people are becoming aware of how movements of all stripes justify tremendous injustice in the name of that deferred future moment. People are actually taken out of their immediate experience and their connection to the political process as they put their heads down and do battle. It becomes not worth believing in anything. This is why

> we have to advocate living in the now in order to effect any real change.[35]

In *Testament*, the shift to the concluding utopia is only made possible by consciously living through the dystopia and actively seeking to overcome it. There is no divine intervention here anymore. In this story, humans consciously expel the gods. Humans behave irresponsibly at first with their newfound creative power, but they re-claim their story and agency, overcome dystopia and achieve utopia. It is a surprisingly optimistic ending for Rushkoff and seems at odds with his critique of future-oriented movements.

One problem left unaddressed in Rushkoff's (very persuasive) agency-fest is the fairness of the network: who gets to participate and in which language, who has access to the education it takes to hack the code and to contribute to the open source solution. There may be an enthusiasm about divine sparks and the agency of the parts which constitute as well as mysteriously influence the whole, but it should be a cautious enthusiasm, because as with every utopia, it may not be everybody's utopia.

With regard to my case study, I admit that the reading of a hacked biblical Aqedah will not be possible for everyone or persuade everyone. It may take an initial willingness to discard top-down hierarchical ideas, which are embedded in the areas inside which one moves around so unquestioningly at times: academia, intellectualism, disciplines, method, theology.

Biblical Studies, Sherwood concludes her article, should "ask why there is such contemporary interest in the Bible and biblical themes such as sovereignty, messianism and sacrifice."[36] This question has been addressed here with a range of possible answers suggested by contemporary SF works: one has to engage with the themes to rebel against them; they are a haunting uncanny presence in contemporary society; and because they are currently being negotiated in different guises, again and still.

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[35] Rushkoff, *Open Source*, 24.

[36] Sherwood, "Abraham in London," 153.

OF GODS AND MONSTERS: SUPERNATURAL BEINGS IN THE UNCANNY VALLEY*

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H. P. Lovecraft begins his 1927 essay on the state and nature of supernatural horror in literature by writing that "the oldest and strongest emotion of man is fear, and the oldest and strongest kind of fear is fear of the unknown."[1] This is a bold claim, and Lovecraft was no anthropologist. But his statement is not unfounded in light of humanity's enduring preoccupation with the other. In sacred texts, the other may be a divine being; in Science Fiction, it may be a monster. The divine and the monstrous are surely fearsome and nonhuman. But we may press Lovecraft's assertion, and inquire of gods and monsters: is fear the only human response? And to what extent are they truly unknown? This study explores the fundamentally hybrid nature of the monstrous and the divine, and the essentially hybrid human response. The concept that links them at their most basic level is the uncanny valley.

1. THE UNCANNY VALLEY

HYBRID CONCEPTION

In 1970, in a Japanese journal called *Energy*,[2] roboticist Masahiro Mori theorizes that affinity for an object increases with the object's resemblance to a living human being. A human is more attracted to a humanoid robot than to an industrial lathe. This relationship is proportional up to a point. When one encounters an object the human likeness of which is very high, but still short of perfect, one experiences an eerie sensation. Affinity plummets, turning mathematically negative. Mori calls this drop an uncanny valley in one's sense of affinity. Overlooking the valley on the lower peak is a humanoid figure, on the higher peak is a living person, and at the bottom is a corpse or, deeper still, a reanimated corpse. The uncanny valley is populated by hybrid beings, which an observer cannot immediately recognize as human or nonhuman.

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* Presented at the 2013 annual meeting of the European Association of Biblical Studies in Leipzig, Germany.

[1] H. P. Lovecraft, *The Annotated Supernatural Horror in Literature* (ed. S. T. Joshi; New York: Hippocampus, 2012), 25.

[2] M. Mori, "The Uncanny Valley," trans. K. F. MacDorman and N. Kageki, *IEEE Robotics & Automation Magazine* 19.2 (2012), 98–100.

HYBRID RESPONSE

Mori makes no reference to the German writers Ernst Jentsch[3] or Sigmund Freud,[4] but his concept particularly recalls Jentsch's 1906 essay on the uncanny. For Jentsch as for Mori, the uncanny is interstitial, unresolved and unsolvable. An observer finds an object uncanny when she cannot master it, intellectually. But while Mori associates the uncanny only with feelings of repulsion, Jentsch adds an important observation on its tendency to attract. Children are drawn to the horrific thrill of ghost stories, and for intelligent adults, encountering the uncanny may be "an important factor in the drive to knowledge and research."[5] Besides fear and repulsion, the uncanny engenders fascination. Hybrid beings are met with a hybrid response. This phenomenon may not be universal, but it is demonstrable across a wide variety of literature and experience.

2. MONSTERS

HYBRID CONCEPTION

In its futurism, Mori's concept sounds like Science Fiction. It hints at a time when the uncanny valley may be overcome, and non-human objects made with perfect human likeness. Specifically, the production of humanoid robots is integral to many Science Fiction narratives; generally, interaction with residents of the uncanny valley is a kind of one of Science Fiction's most enduring subjects: humanity's encounter with the other.

The other of Science Fiction has various origins, from beyond the grave to beyond the stars, but when it violates the laws of the natural world as established by the narrative, it is a monster. Horror theorist Noel Carroll argues that category violation is the most basic trait of monsters.[6] He assumes that rigid categorical distinction is a basic feature of humanity's conception of its environment. That which violates the boundaries between categories is monstrous for Carroll. I argue further that the boundary that monsters most often violate is that which divides human from nonhuman. Monsters are uncanny by virtue of their partial anthropomorphism.

Space prohibits numerous examples, but this characteristic extends even to that class of monsters that has no ontological obligation to look human: aliens. The word implies that they are completely other, but this is rarely the case. An appropriate example is the monster from Ridley Scott's 1979 film *Alien*. It has human-like

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[3] E. Jentsch, "On the Psychology of the Uncanny," trans. R. Sellars, *Angelaki* 2.1 (1996), 7–21.

[4] S. Freud, "The Uncanny," in id., *The Uncanny* (trans. D. McClintock; London: Penguin, 2003), 121–62.

[5] Jentsch, "Psychology of the Uncanny," 9.

[6] N. Carroll, *The Philosophy of Horror or Paradoxes of the Heart* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 32–35.

arms and legs, but the wrong number of fingers and the wrong kind of feet. It has human-like teeth, but two sets of jaws and a grotesquely long skull, with no nose or eyes. Its form seems a mix of human, animal and insect, organic and inorganic. The creature's style, as designed by surrealist H. R. Giger, is "biomechanical." There are also connotations of human sexuality in its form and behavior, perversely combining the intimate with the unfamiliar. Although the creature is known as a "xenomorph," its shape is not totally foreign. Monsters, however alien, are conceived as human-nonhuman hybrids.

HYBRID RESPONSE

Monsters horrify by design. On some level, they threaten us physically. We are further repelled by monsters because they threaten us cognitively, since entities that violate our conceptual categories engender fear and loathing. But monsters are undoubtedly attractive. There are a number of reasons economic, political, and psychological why they should be popular to audiences of Science Fiction, but Carroll rejects many of these in favor of a simpler suggestion. Monsters are attractive because they invite curiosity. They invite curiosity because they are anomalous.[7] Their basic interstitiality is that they are almost-but-not-quite human. In Mary Shelley's 1818 novel *Frankenstein*, Victor is first afraid of the monster not because it might harm him, but because its appearance is a horrible mockery of a living human. Dead eyes stand in "horrid contrast" to healthy hair and teeth, the animation of dead flesh more hideous than a revived mummy.[8] But for readers, the monster's speech is articulate enough to find him charismatic, and his tragedy is human enough to find him attractive.

3. GODS

HYBRID CONCEPTION

In James Whale's 1935 film *Bride of Frankenstein*, Dr. Pretorius wishes a reluctant Henry Frankenstein to continue his work of reanimation. Pretorius proposes a toast: "to a new world of gods and monsters!" The doctor thinks that he and Frankenstein are the gods and their creations the monsters, but his thinking should be corrected. As anthropomorphic hybrids to whom we are attracted and repelled, it is the monster and his bride who are more like gods than are the mad scientists who created them.

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[7] Ibid., 188.

[8] M. Shelley, *Frankenstein* (ed. P. J. Hunter; Norton Critical Editions; New York: Norton, 2012), 35–36.

Mesopotamia

Divine hybrid beings are well known in Mesopotamian text and iconography.[9] Scholars usually refer to these *Mischwesen* as monsters or demons, and rarely as gods. But the divine determinative often appears before their names. Such mixed beings have some measure of divinity, and in first-millennium Babylonia they become the foci of cultic activity.[10] With very few exceptions they are partly anthropomorphic.

In a Neo-Assyrian vision of the underworld,[11] prince Kumma visits the infernal court of the god Nergal. He beholds a host of "minor" deities, including Namtartu, who has human hands and feet but the head of a *kurību*; deified Death, with human hands but the head of a *mušḫuššu* dragon; Alluhappu, part human and part lion. In total, Kumma reports that he saw fifteen deities (DINGIR.MEŠ). These beings are subservient to Nergal, but are certainly gods. Each is hybrid, and each is partly human in form.

Major Mesopotamian deities are usually anthropomorphic, though this is not always the case. Some might be partly animal in form. The lunar god Nanna/Suen is said to have horns, representing the crescent moon, and occasionally appears as a bull.[12] Some might be anthropomorphic, but not-quite human. In *Enuma Elish*, Marduk is born with four eyes and four ears.[13] A dialogue between Assurbanipal and Nabu states that the infant king suckled at Ishtar's four breasts.[14] In any case gods seem to be of enormous size, radically different from humans in dimension.[15]

Another physically nonhuman feature is the awe-inspiring luminosity that emanates from divine bodies. Mesopotamian deities appear to consist of or be clothed with a *melammu*, a physical expression of overwhelming power and terror.[16] It is often a fantastically bright effulgence, surrounding the deity and pulsing with

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[9] F. A. M. Wiggermann and A. R. Green, "Mischwesen," *RlA* 7 (1994), 222–64.

[10] T. Ornan, "In the Likeness of Man: Reflections on the Anthropocentric Perception of the Divine in Mesopotamian Art," in B. Nevling Porter (ed.), *What is a God? Anthropomorphic and Non-Anthropomorphic Aspects of Deity in Ancient Mesopotamia* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2009), 93–151 (97).

[11] A. Livingstone, *Court Poetry and Literary Miscellanea* (SAA, 3; Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 1989), 68–76.

[12] F. Rochberg, " 'The Stars Their Likenesses': Perspectives in the Relation Between Celestial Bodies and Gods in Ancient Mesopotamia," in B. N. Porter (ed.), *What is a God? Anthropomorphic and Non-Anthropomorphic Aspects of Deity in Ancient Mesopotamia* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2009), 1–52 (51).

[13] Enuma Elish I:95.

[14] Livingstone, *Court Poetry*, 34.

[15] Rochberg, " 'The Stars Their Likenesses'," 88.

[16] S. Z. Aster, *The Unbeatable Light: Melammu and its Biblical Parallels* (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2012), 22–121.

light.[17] A *melammu* may be rhetorically or analogically applied to persons, objects, or other phenomena,[18] but it is the particular property of the divine.[19] The source of this irresistible and terrible emanation, gods are like humans in shape, but unlike them in substance.

Finally, Benjamin Sommer has suggested that the conception of a "multiplicity of divine embodiment" exists in Mesopotamia.[20] Gods are able to inhabit a number of bodies in different locations, simultaneously, without being diminished. For instance, when a statue of a god is made divine through the *mīs pî* and *pīt pî* ceremonies, that god actually inhabits the statue. The statue becomes the deity's body, though not its only body; the god still resides in heaven and in as many statues as could be activated. This kind of embodiment is so unlike a human's, but the body remains anthropomorphic.

Israel

The Hebrew Bible also knows of formally human-nonhuman beings. The *kərūbîm* and *śərāpîm* are patently hybrid. The former possess human, bovine, avian, and leonine features.[21] The latter are evidently winged human-snake composites.[22] These beings are closely associated with God, and have divine parallels in Mesopotamia and Egypt, even if the biblical texts are unclear regarding their divinity.

Another class of beings is clearly divine, variously referred to as *ĕlōhîm*, *ēlîm*, *bənê hāʾĕlōhîm*, and *bənê ʾēlîm*. If they are the members of God's divine council, the Priestly creation account makes them fully anthropomorphic. In Gen 1:26 God says *naʿăśeh ʾādām bəṣalmēnû kidmûtēnû*, "let us make humanity in our image, according to our likeness." God is speaking with his divine council (there is no "*we* of majesty" in biblical Hebrew).[23] The primary meaning of the terms *ṣelem* and *demut* in biblical Hebrew is a material, not metaphorical, likeness. A non-literal sense of Gen 1:26–27 that does not diminish the physical connotation could be that humanity is like a "statue" of the divine. In fact, God's creating an image and then breathing life into it is not entirely dissimilar from the Mesopotamian ceremonies that enlivened the statue (Akk.

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[17] A. L. Oppenheim, "Akkadian *pul(u)ḫ(t)u* and *melammu*," *JAOS* 63 (1943), 31; E. Cassin, *La splendeur divine: Introduction à l'étude de la mentalité mésopotamienne* (Paris: Mouton & Co., 1968), 79.

[18] Aster, *The Unbeatable Light*, 60–66.

[19] J. Bottéro, *Religion in Ancient Mesopotamia* (trans. T. Lavender Fagan; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 38.

[20] B. D. Sommer, *The Bodies of God and the World of Ancient Israel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 19–24.

[21] Ezek 1:5–11; 10:15.

[22] Num 21:6, 8; Isa 6:2–7; 14:29; 30:6.

[23] Joüon and Muraoka, §114e n. 2.

ṣalmu) of a god. The priestly creation story reports that God, God's council, and humanity all have the same anthropomorphic form.

But the appearance of anthropomorphic divine beings is not always fully human. In Judg 13, an angel of the Lord (*malʾak yhwh*) announces the birth of Samson to Manoah's wife. They mistake this being for a man of God (*ʾîš hāʾĕlōhîm*), a term that otherwise refers to human beings. But Manoah's wife notices his nonhuman nature. She says that his appearance is like the appearance of an angel of God, which is "very fearsome" (*nôraʾ məʾōd*). The figure with whom Jacob wrestles in Gen 32 is called a man, but Jacob reckons after this encounter that he has seen *elohim* face to face. These beings have a human shape. But those who meet them recognize that there is something not-quite-human about them. Conceptually, if not morphologically, they are human-nonhuman hybrids.

Finally, there is the God of the Hebrew Bible. Gen 1:26–27 confirm that God has the same shape as the divine court and as humanity. But in the same account, God is formally unlike humans. The image of God, in which humanity is created, is both male and female. Formally, God has no one gender, or God has two.[24] This is Priestly theology, but Tikvah Frymer-Kensky argues that throughout biblical literature, the grammatically masculine God "is asexual, or transsexual, or metasexual," but in any case is completely divorced from sexual activity.[25] In this way, God has an anthropic shape but no anthropic gender, and is conceptually human-nonhuman.

Like the deities of Mesopotamia, God's body may be of superhuman size.[26] First 1 Kgs 6:23–28 measures God's throne as ten cubits high. In Isa 6, the temple is large enough to accommodate only the skirts of God's robe. God seems to completely cover Moses with an enormous hand to shield him from the passing divine body in Exod 33:22. Priestly texts actually envision a body of varying size. God is large enough to cover Mount Sinai in Exod 24:16–17, but small enough to fit in the holy of holies.[27] In later mystical literature, God's body has varying and unfathomably huge measurements.

God's human-like body may also be of a nonhuman substance. For some biblical writers the divine body is made of or gives off an incredibly bright light. Ezekiel sees the divine as flashing fire inside a great cloud, the center of the fire glowing like

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[24] Sommer, *Bodies of God*, 70.

[25] T. Frymer-Kensky, *In the Wake of the Goddesses: Women, Culture, and the Biblical Transformation of Pagan Myth* (New York: Ballantine, 1992), 188–90.

[26] M. S. Smith, "Divine Form and Size in Ugaritic and Pre-Exilic Israelite Religion," *ZAW* 100 (1988), 424–27.

[27] Sommer, *Bodies of God*, 71–72.

amber.[28] God himself has the "likeness of the appearance of a human," but gleams like amber, and is surrounded by fire and brilliance.[29] This stunning light is consistent with Priestly theology, where God appears in the midst of a cloud to spare onlookers from his body's brightness.[30] In a non-priestly text, 1 Kgs 8:11–12, the priests cannot withstand God's body as it appears in the temple in a dark cloud. In multiple traditions, God's body is human-shaped but inhumanly bright.

A final way that God's anthropomorphic body is unlike a human's is in its fluidity. Sommer argues that a Mesopotamian deity's ability to inhabit multiple bodies in various locations is also true of the biblical God in some non-Priestly, non-Deuteronomic texts.[31] In passages such as Judg 6 and Hos 12, God's identity overlaps with that of a *malak*. These texts may be speaking of a small-scale manifestation of God that does not fully exhaust God's person, divinity, or embodiment: an avatar.[32] Further, Jacob's anoints a stone in Gen 28:16–19 and calls the place Beth-El. In Gen 33:20, Jacob erects an altar and calls it "El, God of Israel." In Judg 6:24, Gideon names an altar "Yhwh, who is at peace." These episodes suggest that God can be bodily present in multiple nonhuman bodies.

On Anthropomorphism

Throughout the ancient Near East, deities seem to have been conceived from early times and rather consistently as anthropomorphic.[33] It is dangerous to try to determine the religious thought of pre-literate, pre-material societies, it is possible that there was a pre-anthropomorphic stage of religion, before the forces of nature were given human shapes.[34] This theory recalls Rudolf Otto's idea of the divine, the numinous, as something that "completely eludes apprehension in terms of concepts."[35] The divine is *ganz andere*, what Mircea Eliade calls "something basically and totally different. Like nothing cosmic or human."[36] If we accept this as true, then

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[28] Ezek 1:4.

[29] Ezek 1:26–28.

[30] Exod 16:10; Num 17:7.

[31] Sommer, *Bodies of God*, 38–57.

[32] Ibid., 40–42.

[33] D. P. Silverman, "Divinity and Deities in Ancient Egypt," in B. P. Shafer (ed.), *Religion in Ancient Egypt* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991), 7–87; W. G. Lambert, "Ancient Mesopotamian Gods: Superstition, Philosophy, Theology," *RHR* 207.2 (1990), 115–30 (120).

[34] T. Jacobsen, *The Treasures of Darkness: A History of Mesopotamian Religion* (New Haven, RI: Yale University Press, 1976), 9; Lambert, "Ancient Mesopotamian Gods," 117–18.

[35] R. Otto, *The Idea of the Holy* (trans. J. W. Harvey; New York: Oxford University Press, 1950), 5.

[36] M. Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion* (trans. W. F. Trask; New York: Harcourt, 1959), 9–10.

anthropomorphism is a secondary addition to the primary nature of the numinous. Any degree of human likeness makes a deity hybrid. Even a god who is fully anthropomorphic, and of the same size and substance as a human being, is not a human being at all. Gods should conceptually be "wholly other," but practically speaking they never are.

HYBRID RESPONSE

Otto provides a compelling model for the human response to the divine. Two essential qualities of the numinous are *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*. The divine is mysteriously frightening and fascinating. The *tremendum* is all that is repelling and dangerous about the divine, and the *fascinans* is that which attracts.

Both of these qualities are present in a god's physical manifestation. The brilliant *melammu* of Mesopotamian deities is a radiance that inspires terror in their enemies. This is an aspect of *tremendum*. But it is also the light of the celestial deities that illuminates the heavens. This is an aspect of *fascinans*.[37] Likewise, the physical presence of God and his attendant beings is terrifying and considered dangerous.[38] God plainly tells Moses in Exod 33:20, "No human can see me and live." But the sight of God's body is also desirable: Moses adjures God to show him God's *kabod* in Exod 33:18. Repulsion and attraction are sometimes present in the same episode, as in the commission of Moses in Exod 3.[39] The human response to the divine is essentially hybrid: a mixture of fear and fascination.

This hybrid response, which Otto calls "a strange harmony of contrasts,"[40] is parallel to the hybrid response to monsters. For some theorists, monsters are numinous, and encountering them is a religious experience. Otto notices the parallel. He writes that the monstrous (*das Ungeheure*) is the uncanny, and that this is "a fairly exact expression for the numinous in its aspects of mystery, awefulness, majesty, augustness, and . . . fascination."[41] Majesty engenders a "creature-consciousness," a feeling of dependence and religious humility.[42] Augustness is the aspect of the numinous that compels humans to do homage.[43] While Lovecraft's monsters are the objects of cult (even jokingly in real life), many others do not elicit these responses. Not all are numinous.

Gods and monsters are not equally numinous, but the numinous and the monstrous are equally uncanny. Monsters are not the

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[37] *CAD* M, 2:10–11.

[38] G. W. Savran, *Encountering the Divine: Theophany in Biblical Narrative* (JSOTSup, 420; New York: T&T Clark, 2005), 190–203.

[39] Ibid., 93–103.

[40] Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, 31.

[41] Ibid., 40.

[42] Ibid., 8–11.

[43] Ibid., 52.

ultimate "unknown," but combinations of human and nonhuman. It should be clear now that deities have the same kind of hybrid nature as monsters. If the uncanny valley sufficiently justifies the dual reaction to monsters, it should also explain the "strange harmony" of the response to the divine. Gods and monsters engender both fear and fascination not because they are holy, or numinous, or wholly other, but because they are disturbing and compelling combinations of the self and the other, the human and the nonhuman. Gods and monsters reside in the uncanny valley.

4. DEEPER INTO THE VALLEY

If the uncanny valley applies to ancient texts as well as to Science Fiction, there are a number of areas for further research. One is the degree to which a deity is uncanny. Does a more anthropomorphic or hybrid description put God deeper in the uncanny valley? Is God then more repellent or frightening? Jeremiah variously describes God's sword as an instrument that devours like a ravenous lion and becomes drunk with human blood, preparing God's sacrifice.[44] For Amy Kalmanofsky, the effect is both anthropomorphic and gruesome; she writes, "like a man eating a meal, God consumes his sacrificial victims. He first cuts then chews his victims into small pieces before he swallows."[45] Kalmanofksy argues that this is one of a number of scenes in Jeremiah that depict a terrifying and monstrous God.[46] God's monstrosity here is in his gory and visceral acts, for the performance of which he must be anthropomorphic. The repelling aspect of the deity is linked to his location in the uncanny valley.

Another potential application is in the cognitive dissonance the uncanny engenders. Strong uncertainty pervades some biblical depictions of a highly anthropomorphic divine being. In Gen 3:8, the embodied God takes a stroll through the garden, a terrifying situation for the recently disobedient humans. They hide, no doubt unsure of what God may do should he stumble upon them in their nakedness. The commander of the Lord's army in Josh 5:13–15 is surely divine, though he is described as a man (*ʾîš*). Joshua cannot tell if the being is friend or foe. In Gen 32, Jacob physically grapples with a divine being. This scene is rife with intentional ambiguity: is the being a friend or enemy? Is it a man, an angel, or God?[47] The uncertainty in these passages parallels the failure of the observer to achieve intellectual mastery over the uncanny valley's hybrid beings.

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[44] Jer 2:30; 46:10.

[45] A. Kalmanofsky, *Terror All Around: The Rhetoric of Horror in the Book of Jeremiah* (LHBOTS, 390; New York: T&T Clark, 2008), 57.

[46] Ibid., 51–67.

[47] S. A. Geller, *Sacred Enigmas: Literary Religion in the Hebrew Bible* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 9–29.

Finally, we may explore the concept from a different perspective. I have argued that God is consistently anthropomorphic. But since the Priestly creation account has humanity created in the image of God, we might say that human beings are actually theomorphic. As much as God is human-not-human, humanity is divine-not-divine. Those who wish to psychoanalyze the deity could ask, are human beings uncanny to God? As a result of its nature as almost-but-not-quite-divine, is God repelled by and attracted to humanity, fearful of and fascinated by it? Different degrees of God's anthropomorphism may tip the scales toward one human response. Does it follow that a greater degree of divinity in humanity would disturb the divine? God acts to keep people from becoming more god-like in the garden and at Babel. It may be that, as divine-not-divine hybrids, God finds human beings cognitively threatening. The uncanny valley in our sense of affinity is full of gods and monsters; perhaps God's uncanny valley is home to us.

WHAT HAS CORUSCANT TO DO WITH JERUSALEM? A RESPONSE AND REFLECTIONS AT THE CROSSROADS OF HEBREW BIBLE AND SCIENCE FICTION

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I consider it an honor to have been invited to respond to the articles in this special volume of the *Journal of Hebrew Scriptures*, dedicated to exploring the intersection of two of my research and teaching interests: the Bible and Science Fiction. The articles consistently surprise with their creative breaking of new ground. I find myself so appreciative of the insights and perspectives offered by the authors, that I fear I may risk failing to offer the kind of response that academic readers hope for, one that takes what seem like sound proposals and tries to undermine them, stirring up hornets' nests and sowing doubt and confusion. This response will be less of a counterpoint or debate, and more an attempt at synthesis. If there is one shortcoming of the contributions to this volume, it is only the inevitable one, namely that they were not able to interact with one another, having all written independently at the same time. Yet time and again, the articles pass through the same territory in different directions. And so, if I will not often disagree with these authors, I can genuinely hold out the hope that I might build interesting things at the crossroads of the trails that they blazed, which become possible precisely in light of a collective consideration of the work that each has undertaken independently.

If there is a dangerous pitfall at the intersection of religion in its various forms, and contemporary popular culture in its various forms, it is the tendency to merely notice interesting similarities and parallels, and perhaps to create superficial connections between the two, in ways that do justice to neither the religious literature nor the Science Fiction stories under consideration. While the articles in this issue do note interesting similarities and parallels, they are always ones which emerge naturally from the material being studied. Moreover, the contributors to the volume are never content to merely make note of connections, but dig deeper, to investigate what these connections can lead us to learn about each subject area or piece of literature in its own right. And so, as there are numerous themes which emerge time and again across the multiple articles, it will be my aim in responding to emulate their example, and to never be content to notice merely the obvious but superficial points of contact. It is rather my hope to draw connections in ways

that bring the contributors into conversation with one another, as well as with myself.

One point of intersection between the articles, as between the Hebrew Bible and Science Fiction, is around the foundational concept of canon. The very notion of defining a canonical corpus is always in the background, and often in the foreground, in the academic study of the Bible. This is especially the case when scholars who are also educators seek to make students aware that not only do the biblical texts they study have a prehistory, but so too does the process whereby they became a compilation. Students of literature, whether biblical or science fictional, often enjoy immersing themselves into the stories far more than they appreciate learning about the processes that went into their production, redaction, selection, or transmission. Drawing students' attention to these things in connection with the Bible is rather like exposing them to earlier drafts of their favorite novels, movies, or TV shows, or informing them about tensions between cast members, screenplay writers, producers, television network executives, and others whose influence can often be perceived in the final form of a movie or episode, once one has been made aware of it. Looking behind the curtain (or underneath the hood if one prefers an automotive analogy) reveals a messiness that some find detracts from their enjoyment. Part of the magic of cinema and television, of course, is the realism of the end result. But as with a good magic trick, learning how special effects were accomplished ought to enhance our appreciation, rather than spoiling our enjoyment. Until we understand the processes whereby stories that we love came to exist, and came to be found side by side with other texts, we cannot appreciate them fully. We at best enjoy only one facet of them, the finished product. And so the comparison of canon in relation to Bible and Science Fiction will bring methodological matters into the picture. There is a longstanding divide between academics using diachronic and synchronic approaches, and scholars in one field will benefit from considering whether the same divide exists in the same way in relation to other texts, and whether, to the extent the divide exists, there might be some benefit to building bridges across it.

The notion of canonicity looms large not only in the definition of Science Fiction itself as a genre, but also in relation to particular franchises. In relation to *Star Trek*, some may find problematic those movies or spin-offs about which Gene Roddenberry expressed reservations, or which were made without his involvement. And by way of contrast, many fans of *Star Wars* have been more enthusiastic about J. J. Abrams' *The Force Awakens* than about the prequels made by George Lucas himself. These specific examples connect with the broader discussion of canon referenced by Frauke Uhlenbruch, who uses recent controversy over the Hugo Awards as an example. We have witnessed in many domains, how those who previously were able to control the process of canon-

definition have resisted their loss of authority. The history of the biblical literature is no different, as we see that the widespread popularity of works lead to the inclusion of particular texts within the canon—and, conversely, as we see that the exclusion of certain works from the canon does not inevitably lead to their loss of popularity or influence.[1]

Many of these points are explored or at least touched on in Harold Vedeler's article, which seeks to at least engage with significant samplings relevant to the entire process not just of producing a canon, but preserving and using it. The fact that canons include details which are awkward fossils of a previous era creates issues for fans and believers, whether one is talking about slavery in the Bible or sexism on *Star Trek*. Vedeler writes,

> [W]e must make a distinction between a canonical narrative and the readers of that narrative. A narrative may be closed and governed by the "invisible hand" of an author or editor, but the reader, and especially groups of readers, remain open systems who will reinterpret the text to suit their needs, including ignoring some aspects of the canon that do not suit them. . .
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> In each case both the canon and its interpretation evolved in response to social changes taking place among the fans/worshippers, since what was normal and acceptable when the first canon was written has been replaced by new needs and beliefs. Canonical evolution, therefore, as opposed to specific narratives, is an open system. Other forms of evolution take place outside the canon, including things like fan fiction, midrash, and interpretation. From this evolution come new narratives, some more open than others, as the whole system moves forward and does what it is intended to do: help humans, with our complex, ultrasocial brains, deal with extremely complex problems, including cultural ones.

It is good that similarities between the ways canons are established, and the roles they play, in Biblical Studies and Science Fiction is getting more attention. What the similarities tell us, and what importance the differences have, is less clear. Just as we cannot be satisfied to note vague similarities between biblical archetypes and comic book heroes, we should not be satisfied just to notice the similarities with respect to canon. Vedeler takes some pioneering first steps in the direction of comparative canonical criticism, and other contributors to this issue also touch on this topic. But what is less clear is whether the canons of Science Fiction and Bible serve similar functions in relation to those by whom and for whom these canons are defined. Are Science Fiction fandom and religious

[1] I explore the subject of canon in relation to the Bible and Science Fiction in more detail in my forthcoming volume, *Theology and Science Fiction*, in the Cascade Companion series.

observance so different as to undercut any insights gleaned from comparison? Or is canon in the realm of Science Fiction closer to the biblical meaning than other genres of literature? As Ian D. Wilson notes in his chapter, discussing Darko Suvin's definition of Science Fiction, "ancient Judeans certainly did not conceive any of their texts as literature of cognitive estrangement." And it is to Wilson's credit that he spends a significant amount of time warning about the dangers of anachronism and of imposing an alien and thus inappropriate framework borrowed from elsewhere. Wilson thus also devotes significant attention to providing justification for the comparisons that he makes. He writes,

> [T]here are literary features in the prophetic books that display an affinity with certain brands of SF literature, and, in my view, one can therefore use SF criticism as an analogue—a heuristic tool—for thinking about the ancient sociocultural milieux of the prophetic books. As a historical critic (or critical historicist), this is my primary interest: to probe the prophetic books as literary artifacts from ancient Judah, to improve our knowledge of the sociocultural discourses of this ancient society on the periphery of empire, and in turn to help us think about and learn from cultural interactions between societies in general. Some aspects of SF and its criticism, I think, can be helpful in this academic pursuit.

Because this kind of comparison has been engaged in so infrequently in the past, it is far too soon to judge the long-term fruitfulness thereof. But one key element that emerges in both Vedeler's discussion of canon and Wilson's discussion of superheroes is exciting, namely that, in the very act of comparing the genre that they study most frequently in a professional capacity, with another genre that lies further afield, the interpreters are forced to become even more conscious of the methods and tools that they are using, and the assumptions that they bring with them, than is characteristic of scholars who remain more solidly within their disciplinary confines. If such self-awareness were to be all that resulted from working on Bible and Science Fiction together, that alone would more than justify the endeavor.

The theme of transcendence is another thread that runs through both the biblical literature and Science Fiction, and which also connects various articles in this issue. Francis Landy focuses in on the figure of Enoch, who can serve as an example of a human who transcends a mundane and sinful way of life by walking with God, transcends the terrestrial world by being taken up above, and eventually transcends human limitations as he takes on attributes of a celestial being in later Jewish mystical texts and traditions. Each of these points is mirrored in Science Fiction: transcendence of the ordinary, of the planetary, and of the human. And so it is perhaps not surprising that "apocalyptic" denotes a genre of Science Fiction story as well as a genre of biblical and extrabiblical literature—even

if some may balk at the suggestion that the two may in fact ultimately belong to one and the same genre at the end of the day. In connection with this theme, Landy explores whether the genre of self-conscious *fiction* separates the two. This question is important, both inasmuch as it may allow us to better understand the way fans of Science Fiction turn to their beloved stories seeking guidance for their lives in the present and hope for the future of our species, and also as it may enable us to envisage ancient authors doing something similar to modern ones in exploring realms of the imagination, not because they believed them to be true, but because they hoped them to be possible, or at the very least, because they knew that the very act of imagining a human being transcending the realm that normally circumscribes the sphere of the human, is itself an act of self-transcendence. The issues of pseudepigraphy and pseudoprophecy have made the scholarly study of apocalyptic literature controversial in the eyes of some conservative religionists. The possibility that they may belong to the genre of fiction, in a manner comparable to other literature that is widely appreciated in our time, is unlikely to set the minds of those individuals at ease, but it might help others to understand and appreciate challengingly difficult and often obscure apocalyptic texts in a new light, and once again, these comparisons may be even more helpful in the *teaching* of these materials, as in the context of our in-house scholarly conversations. Finding something familiar and contemporary as a starting point for comparison with things from other times and cultures has an established pedagogical usefulness that deserves mention in this context.

If words like "canon," "transcendence," and "apocalyptic" are immediately recognizable as straddling the domains of Bible and Science Fiction, the word "monster" may appear to belong to one exclusively, or at least far more so than to the other. For this reason, it is useful that Wilson's chapter on superheroes and supervillains in the Bible and Science Fiction is placed before Ryan Higgins' chapter. Both deal with the liminal realm in which monsters dwell. One thing that can make something seem monstrous is if it resides in the "uncanny valley"—that situation of being human enough that the entity's inhumanness is deemed "creepy." Supervillains are sometimes monsters in the sense of being repulsive and inhuman in their physical appearance. But more often they disturb us because of the fact that they look just like us, and yet seem to lack our moral sensibilities and values. Placing biblical characters ranging from God to the king of Israel to Satan on these spectrums, these chapters highlight how key plot elements in both the Bible and Science Fiction mirror one another. The Aqedah story is mentioned in this issue primarily in connection with an exploration of its updating in graphic novel form, and we shall return to it in that context later. But here we may note that Abraham's binding of Isaac also resides in the uncanny valley, with him and his son recognizably human, and yet Abraham's willingness to sacrifice him

seeming monstrous to modern readers (as well as many in generations before ours). Higgins even asks questions which engage in psychoanalysis of the character of God in the Bible: does God experience the uncanny valley, when dealing with entities that are not quite divine and yet neither are they entirely other? Is God "creeped out" by humans made in the divine image, in the way that we sometimes are by the robots we create in our own? But we must take another step further back and ask another layer of questions: If we detect psychosis or revulsion in the character of God, does that tell us about the divine, or only about the human authors who depicted God in this way? And what is the role of historical contextual analysis in this? Is attempting to understand the mind of an ancient character, or an ancient author, as unlikely to succeed as an attempt to understand a freshly-arrived alien from another planet?

There are few if any obvious tensions between the perspectives of the contributors to this issue. But many of the contributions are about tensions that arise not just at but across the intersections their articles explore. Often these tensions are not dichotomous, but three-way, as for instance in the case of the intersection between the Bible, science, and fiction. If science is defined in a manner that focuses on the discovery of that which is real and true, then fiction might seem more radically antithetical to it than the Bible does, as a compilation which includes fiction but also other genres besides. And where do the Bible and Science Fiction fall in relation to notions such as the paranormal? And when we turn our gaze upwards, where do gods and aliens, angels and superhumans, stand in relation to the Bible, science, and Science Fiction?

There are some who read either the Bible or Science Fiction expecting a glimpse of the way things really are. But one of the most important things that comes out of bringing the two together is a reminder that both are imaginative human products, which only tell us about the universe inasmuch as human art, born out of human insight, provides genuine clues about reality. Both explore matters of *transcendence*, and both do so through story. The articles in this issue provide some particularly helpful guides for those interested in surveying and studying these explorations in a comparative manner. That stories involving the divine bring transcendence into the picture is not surprising. But throughout history, including in very noticeable ways in our time, stories which evoke and explore the transcendent have come to be used to confine and constrain, placing limits on human exploration. Both sets of literature, to be sure, give voice to dogmatism in places.[2] But they do so as part of a larger conversation. And in both cases, the stories bring characters and scenarios into the picture, in conjunction with

[2] See the discussion of the treatment of religion in the original novel and also subsequent film versions of H. G. Wells' *War of the Worlds,* in D. E. Cowan, *Sacred Space: The Quest for Transcendence in Science Fiction Film and Television* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2010, ch. 4).

humans, which break into the realm of the mundane, upending and challenging it from beyond and in particular from above.

Of course, the difference between the pre-scientific context of the Hebrew Bible, and the emphatically scientific context of Science Fiction, should not be downplayed. But Science Fiction is as renowned for what it imagines despite little hope of realization, as for what it rationally expects might be feasible. Warp drive and transporters come to mind, as two updated models of fiery chariots that might whisk a twenty-fourth-century Elijah from Earth to some unexplored celestial realm. But so too do aliens who speak our language, at least in the presence of technology that instantly overcomes the likely hurdles in communication that would present themselves in a real-life encounter. The Jewish mystical tradition, taking the Hebrew Bible as its starting point, envisages humans ascending to encounters with heavenly things that words cannot express or hope to describe. As humans have found technological ways of physically ascending into the realm above, and taken our first few such steps in that direction, some have viewed this as a transgression into the divine sphere, akin to the building of the Tower of Babel. But in fact, such explorations have taken the divine and heavenly and shifted them into other dimensions and planes of existence altogether, so that they are now much more likely to be thought of as transcending human existence in more than a merely spatial way, as "high and lifted up." The highest heavens, physically speaking, are now known to be much further away than ancients imagined. And so whether one places God beyond the physical limits of our universe, or beyond physical existence altogether, transcendence has been enhanced through our space explorations. And as the physical journeys of astronauts are brought into intersection and comparison with the mystical journeys of the rabbis, we find that each offers a perspective that the other can learn and benefit from. If the astronomical crashes through the firmament and shows us light from faint distant galaxies, the mystics suggest that whether in space or in spirit, reality includes not just more than human words have expressed, but more than they can ever hope to express.[3]

The Hebrew Bible and Science Fiction are also close competitors when it comes to stories of supermen. If Samson and Superman got into a fight, who would win? Who traveled further, Enoch or Hal Jordan (better known as Green Lantern)? Could the Hulk have brought the walls of Jericho down as effectively as Joshua did? Or are such comparisons focusing on the wrong data? Is it Superman that is the focus of strength, or something outside him, whether that be Kryptonian genes he inherited, or energy from the

[3] On the connection between religion and spaceflight, see the recent volume edited by P. Levinson and M. Waltemathe, *Touching the Face of the Cosmos: On the Intersection of Space Travel and Religion* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016).

yellow sun in our solar system? A pair of scissors is easier to obtain than a piece of kryptonite, to be sure. But each in their own way, these stories highlight not only human strength, but also human weakness and dependence on outside forces beyond our control. And many of them express the longing not merely for an encounter with a power greater than ourselves, but for some of that power to be bestowed upon us. And in both kinds of stories, questions are asked about whether people who are fortunate enough to have such power would use it wisely.

The Hebrew Bible, like much ancient and/or religious literature, is often viewed with derision, both within Science Fiction narratives and by fans of the genre. This is primarily because of the element of the supernatural in the Hebrew Bible. Yet that term is noticeably absent from the texts in question, and even in the act of eschewing the supernatural, Science Fiction regularly embraces the *paranormal*, which may or may not be exactly the same thing in practice. As a result, apart from the matter of direct involvement of a single supreme God or the lack thereof, the differences are much less marked. Indeed, the kind of magical naturalism that was taken for granted by ancient people, and which has fallen out of favor in scientific circles, is embraced repeatedly in the realm of Science Fiction. If we can just find dilithium crystals, or kyber crystals, or a stargate built by aliens, we will be able to travel to other worlds, or wield a sword of light. The Jewish wisdom tradition, especially as taken up and explored further outside the Hebrew Bible, viewed the discovery of special properties of plants and other objects, and the study of celestial movements, as providing the potential to bring healing and insight, and perhaps more.[4] The hope was that through exploration and a process of trial and error, we might find substances, formulas, and/or incantations that would not only enhance our well-being, but give us power over other forces and other persons. This hope has been found at times in both the scientific and the religious realm. But as real-life science has made such discoveries increasingly unlikely, Science Fiction and religion have increasingly been placed on the same side, together with fantasy, in their common willingness to imagine that which research suggests is regrettably impossible.

Yet (as Landy reminds us in his chapter) there is also an element of suspicion towards and even demonization of science in the Bible and its reception history as well. The Bible attributes developments in metallurgy and music to the descendants of Cain (Gen 4:17–22). In the further exploration of the story of Enoch outside of the canon, more specific technological developments are attributed to teaching that is offered by rebellious angels. This isn't necessarily an indictment of science and discovery per se. Indeed, it is a scenario that has been explored time and time again in Science

[4] See for instance the Testament of Solomon, and also Wisdom of Solomon 7:17–21.

Fiction, namely the revealing of more advanced technology to people who have not yet developed it on their own. The fallen angels might be said to have violated a celestial "Prime Directive" which mirrors Starfleet's rule. And there are stories throughout the *Star Trek* franchise which have explored the negative impact of those who throw caution to the wind and become bestowers of magic, or even become gods, to the inhabitants of a planet that misinterprets the significance of their technological power. The Bible and Science Fiction have both managed to broach this topic in a nuanced way, warning of dangers inherent in certain kinds of transgressions of boundaries and rules, but also recognizing that such transgressions may at times be in the interest of the greater good.

The distinction we introduced earlier, between the supernatural and the paranormal, breaks down in practice, and not only when space travelers encounter gods known to past generations of humans. Why should faster-than-light travel be embraced as something that today seems impossible but one day might seem otherwise, and yet the possibility of divine action in miracles be rejected? When it comes to the realm of *stories*, neither involves greater suspension of disbelief than the other. But perhaps it is because of the very tendency of some modern readers, often referred to as fundamentalists, to insist on the literal truth of certain imaginative stories in the Bible, that those stories are viewed with hostility by others who enjoy their own more recently composed set of imaginative stories.

Human storytelling regularly hopes for the seemingly impossible. But speaking in this way about the matter privileges a particular scientific perspective. Vedeler's article on the narrative mode highlights the relevance of the work of psychologist Jerome Bruner to the subjects under discussion here. The approach of science looks for the universal and uniform, while storytelling has other functions, exploring the specific, the contextual, and the personal, focusing in on the connections between persons and events. There have been many debates about the legitimacy of other "ways of knowing" besides the natural sciences in recent years, with key proposed alternatives being religion and the arts.[5] And so the question of whether Science Fiction—apart from any purported science that happens to be embedded in it—provides access to something that can be called knowledge, is very timely indeed. By its very nature, this genre of literature and film must stand on the side of arts and religion in such a debate. Reality, Vedeler's article empha-

[5] See for instance the discussion in several places in *Science, Religion and Society: An Encyclopedia of History, Culture, and Controversy*, edited by A. Eisen and G. Laderman (New York: Routledge, 2015). For an example of an atheist scientist's polemic against the claim that religion may be another "way of knowing," see J. Coyne, *Faith vs. Fact: Why Science and Religion are Incompatible* (New York: Viking, 2015), esp. ch. 4.

sizes, is complex, too complex to deal with as a whole. And so, while the element of transcendence and the mystical (discussed earlier) seeks a connection with that whole, however ineffable, we also seek to find ways to subdivide and delineate smaller segments of reality in the hope that we may be able to speak meaningfully about them, whether in the form of a chemical formula or a well-told tale. As Vedeler writes,

> [S]ince the physical universe is made up of a nearly infinite number of interconnections between open systems, the empirical world therefore runs the risk of overwhelming the brain (which is finite, after all) with information, and so animals with brains have also evolved to edit this data down to a manageable level.

His article highlights a number of important points related to the scientific and narrative approaches to the world, and the relation between them. But what are we to make of the fact that, on the one hand, our brains are so wired as to be emotional first and rational second, if on the other hand, Western society tends to favor that which *sounds* scientific, irrespective of whether it genuinely is or not? Does this suggest that science may have come to predominate in our society in the way that it has not because of rational argument, or even because of its practical effectiveness, but because of *storytelling* related to science, such as we find in Science Fiction? And while Science Fiction and other science-related narrative has tugged at our heart strings and won our hearts, some religious apologists have focused on making what they claim are *rational arguments* for their religious beliefs. Perhaps perspectives from neuroscience and psychology, brought to bear on the Hebrew Bible and Science Fiction, will show that, however ironic it may seem, because narrative and emotion trump science and logic, sciency-sounding tales packing an emotional punch may have won victories for science, while dispassionate-sounding arguments in favor of religion may have undermined its persuasiveness, precisely by trying to show religion to be rational rather than emotional in character. As Landy writes in his chapter, "The oxymoron 'Science Fiction' is indicative. The more 'science' lays claim to the real, the more it is fictionalized, becomes the subject of the human imagination."

In addition to providing helpful analyses drawn from a range of disciplinary approaches, the articles in this issue also offer a great deal of helpful terminology, some of it borrowed from earlier scholarship, but others perhaps being new innovations that deserve to be adopted—such as the notion of a "Shareware Bible." Shareware refers to software that may be freely downloaded and circulated, much of which is open source. The access programmers grant to the source code of software of this sort distinguishes it from that which has stronger proprietorial claims on it, and which can only be accessed and modified through hacking. And so it is

through the lens of this computer programming analogy that Uhlenbruch's chapter asks us to reflect on the Aqedah—the story of the binding of Isaac in Genesis—and its science fictional retelling in graphic novel form. Midrashic reimagining of stories is a longstanding practice, one that sometimes reworks the details of the story itself, but more frequently re-envisions by adding details and filling in gaps. This possibility of adapting and recreating the biblical story does indeed suggest that the Bible is "shareware"—and not just in the sense that it is not under copyright. The Hebrew Bible has retellings and alternate versions embedded within its very pages. And so the question of canon can be brought into the picture once again. But in both biblical and Science Fiction canons, the choice of works for inclusion does not seem to aim at achieving a unified consistent whole that is free from contradictions. By including multiple different versions of stories, both kinds of narratives seem to invite readers to not merely read, but write, taking creative liberties as the stories become a starting point for their own explorations and reflections. The inclusion of multiple versions of the same story within the canon reveals the source code behind the texts, that these are not fixed divine words which have dropped down from the sky, but human products which include the flexibility to bend and shape them in new ways. And, in keeping with contemporary Maker culture, if the existing story cannot be adapted to your needs, you are invited to create one of your own, using the prototypes provided, or breaking their mold.

We suggested earlier that the Aqedah story might be said to reside within a kind of narrative "uncanny valley." Abraham the protagonist looks human enough to us that his willingness to sacrifice his son becomes that much more disturbing. Historical study can help us make sense of the story, to a certain extent. On the one hand, imagining ourselves into the realities of ancient life, in which the forces of nature were understood as expressions of the divine, and humans struggled to survive at their mercy, and children tended to die young, offering one's firstborn in a desperate attempt to appease the divine and ensure the survival of one's other children might seem to make a kind of sense. And on the other hand, as we listen to other voices within the Hebrew canon, we find that the Israelites once practiced child sacrifice, and later voices sought to stop the practice. This leads us to the possibility that, in this story, Abraham is being co-opted in support of that later stance, being made to serve as an example that ultimately argues against rather than for the practice of child sacrifice. But neither of these historical attempts at finding solutions ultimately resolves the problem that, within the framework of the story, Abraham is applauded not for his abandonment of an abhorrent practice, but for his willingness to engage in it. Its troubling character may be the very reason why the story is retold in so many different ways, and continues to provoke us to interact with it over and over again. Some retellings, of course, simply eliminate the elements that make

the biblical prototype so disturbing, becoming merely stories about the willingness to sacrifice one's child in the more modern sense of the word, in circumstances which make more rational sense to modern readers than Abraham's do. In one sense, such reworkings might seem to resolve the problem. Yet in another sense they leave the original every bit as mysterious, and perhaps render it even more so, precisely because the contrast with retellings that make better sense to us and which are more comprehensible further heightens the strangeness of the Genesis tale.

The climactic moment in the Aqedah story is of course when the angel of the LORD calls to Abraham to stop him from killing Isaac. This element—the deus ex machina—is discussed by characters in Cory Doctorow's novel *Makers*, where it is suggested that those kinds of endings, popular in antiquity, are no longer appreciated. But why are they no longer appreciated? Uhlenbruch's comment on this is noteworthy: "Divine intervention may be out of fashion or out of epistemology." The worldview of the present day tends to expect humans to need to sort things out for ourselves. Salvation may emerge, but typically it will come from within the process rather than outside it. As Uhlenbruch observes, "Divine intervention may not be *en vogue* in contemporary story-telling, but networked individuals and the emergence of something bigger than a sum of parts is a very popular topos." And yet nevertheless, the desperate hope for outside assistance—whether in the discovery of the power of a substance, or contact with a personal alien or deity—to effect longed-for salvation, remains with us, as seen time and time again in the attention given to biblical stories of this sort, and the composition of new Science Fiction stories along similar lines. The response by readers to stories of this sort not only in the past, but also in the present, suggests that we may not have changed as much as we sometimes like to think. But who or what we expect to save us makes a difference, as does whether we think we are being saved from a force outside ourselves, or from our very selves. Be that as it may, in the very act of retelling the story, Uhlenbruch suggests, the reader retakes control, claiming an agency which was something that Abraham seems to have sacrificed long before the story about the Isaac incident.

For the critical scholar, exploration of the Hebrew Bible's theological perspectives is, in a sense, a study in idolatry. Although these texts are famous for their polemic *against* idolatry, it can be argued that the attempt to turn the absolute into story, into words and ideas that the human mind can comprehend, is every bit as idolatrous as the depiction of God using stone and metal. As Landy writes in his article, "We imagine and create omnipotent forces that control us." And yet, just as we are deluding ourselves if we think that by avoiding the making of physical images we can avoid mental idolatry, so too we would be deluding ourselves if we thought that we could simply avoid thinking, imagining, or telling stories about the divine. Indeed, perhaps the issue with idolatry pertains

less to thinking or narrating, and more to the tendency after we have imagined or narrated to fix what our minds have made as hard and fast as if they were literally set in stone. The Bible sets its legal prohibitions of idolatry within a narrative framework of stories about God, hinting that, while fixed images seek to constrain God and so constrain us, our imaginations, and our possibilities, the narrating of God, when approached in an open-ended manner, invites us to explore, reflect, and grow. Theologies have the potential to be freeing or captivating. In his article, Landy echoes Henri Bergson's reference to "the essential function of the universe, which is a machine for the making of gods."[6] More precisely, the universe seems to be a machine for the making of people who make gods. And it is a machine for the making of people who make stories, about the divine and about ourselves. If some Science Fiction has attempted to desacralize the cosmos and remove the divine from the picture, the very act of imaginative storytelling, it may be argued, cannot but serve as symbol and sacrament pointing towards transcendent mystery.

Not that Science Fiction always succeeds in doing that, any more than biblical texts do. Science fiction has used tired narrative clichés just as religious literature has, and both kinds of literature have managed to produce works that continue to provoke and engage. Science fiction has the potential to disturb us every bit as much as ancient religious literature does, and sometimes in relation to the same topics. If Science Fiction asks whether we could tell if our deity were simply a powerful alien, religious literature—however much it may offer reassurances in places about the character of God—tells stories which make us wonder what sort of entity we are dealing with too. As mentioned earlier, Higgins' chapter explores the uncanny valley in which gods and angels reside, as like humans and yet disturbingly unlike us, but also the uncanny valley from the perspective of God as narrated in Genesis. Humanity is made in God's image, according to Genesis, and humans in turn try to envisage God in terms of our own image and likeness. Thus caught in an endless spiral, we find ourselves overwhelmed by the numinous and repulsed by the grotesque that is glimpsed at the edges of the cosmos and at the same time found lurking in the dark recesses of our hearts and minds. This is true in both Science Fiction and in the Hebrew Bible. And when two sets of literature turn humanity's gaze in the same direction, provokes reflection on our deepest questions, and evokes the same kinds of emotional responses both positive and negative, can there be any doubt that these genres, which might seem to some polar opposites, are in fact two sides of the same coin? It is with this same coin that we pay the price set for the redemption of our firstborn, expressing our

[6] H. Bergson, *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion* (London: Macmillan, 1935), 317. The reference to Bergson had been made in J. Kripal's work, which Landy was discussing.

gratitude for existence as contingent beings, and it is with this same coin that we pay our entrance fee to see a hopeful future for our children depicted on an enormous screen.

I suspect that some who study the Hebrew Bible will have reacted with dismay at the connection of as serious a subject as theirs with something as trivial as Science Fiction. And I suspect that some who study Science Fiction will have reacted with horror at the connection of as serious a subject as theirs with texts they associate with superstition and a variety of other things seemingly antithetical to the spirit of Science Fiction. Neither reaction is appropriate. Even if stereotypes and instinctual revulsion are connected with particular subjects, scholars should pay attention to them all the more. Moreover, these very prejudices are the kinds of things that cry out for serious academic study in their own right, not by scholars of ancient Hebrew texts or of popular culture, but perhaps of the sociology and the psychology of religion. Our desire to desacralize and to re-enchant, to find security and to explore, to understand and to stand in awe of mystery, find expression in a great many different kinds of stories that we tell. The enjoyment of them is part of our effort to understand ourselves. So too is our study of them.