



## **Terms and Conditions of Use of Digitised Theses from Trinity College Library Dublin**

### **Copyright statement**

All material supplied by Trinity College Library is protected by copyright (under the Copyright and Related Rights Act, 2000 as amended) and other relevant Intellectual Property Rights. By accessing and using a Digitised Thesis from Trinity College Library you acknowledge that all Intellectual Property Rights in any Works supplied are the sole and exclusive property of the copyright and/or other IPR holder. Specific copyright holders may not be explicitly identified. Use of materials from other sources within a thesis should not be construed as a claim over them.

A non-exclusive, non-transferable licence is hereby granted to those using or reproducing, in whole or in part, the material for valid purposes, providing the copyright owners are acknowledged using the normal conventions. Where specific permission to use material is required, this is identified and such permission must be sought from the copyright holder or agency cited.

### **Liability statement**

By using a Digitised Thesis, I accept that Trinity College Dublin bears no legal responsibility for the accuracy, legality or comprehensiveness of materials contained within the thesis, and that Trinity College Dublin accepts no liability for indirect, consequential, or incidental, damages or losses arising from use of the thesis for whatever reason. Information located in a thesis may be subject to specific use constraints, details of which may not be explicitly described. It is the responsibility of potential and actual users to be aware of such constraints and to abide by them. By making use of material from a digitised thesis, you accept these copyright and disclaimer provisions. Where it is brought to the attention of Trinity College Library that there may be a breach of copyright or other restraint, it is the policy to withdraw or take down access to a thesis while the issue is being resolved.

### **Access Agreement**

By using a Digitised Thesis from Trinity College Library you are bound by the following Terms & Conditions. Please read them carefully.

I have read and I understand the following statement: All material supplied via a Digitised Thesis from Trinity College Library is protected by copyright and other intellectual property rights, and duplication or sale of all or part of any of a thesis is not permitted, except that material may be duplicated by you for your research use or for educational purposes in electronic or print form providing the copyright owners are acknowledged using the normal conventions. You must obtain permission for any other use. Electronic or print copies may not be offered, whether for sale or otherwise to anyone. This copy has been supplied on the understanding that it is copyright material and that no quotation from the thesis may be published without proper acknowledgement.

*Handwritten signature*

**Estrange Conflict: Fragments of the Irish Troubles in the Science Fiction**

**of Bob Shaw and James White.**

**Submitted for Doctoral Degree**

**2016**

**Richard Howard**

**School of English, Trinity College, Dublin**



*PHD  
English*

**THESIS**

**11002**

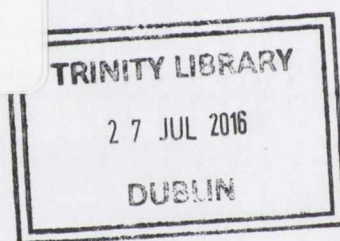
50652333



\* 5 0 6 5 2 3 3 3 \*

I declare that this thesis has not been submitted as an exercise for a degree at this or any other university and it is entirely my own work.

I agree to deposit this thesis in the University's open access institutional repository or allow the library to do so on my behalf, subject to Irish Copyright Legislation and Trinity College Library conditions of use and acknowledgement.



## Summary

A study of the work of the Belfast science fiction authors Bob Shaw and James White, two hitherto ignored authors in Irish Studies. Much written about Shaw and White has originated from British and American science fiction fandom, but this project assesses their work against the background of the Northern Ireland in which their work was produced. The thesis takes a broadly Marxist approach, in particular utilising the Marxist approach to the science fiction genre developed by Fredric Jameson, Darko Suvin and Carl Freedman, as well as drawing from Irish Studies, Science and Technology Studies, Utopian Studies, and Postcolonial Studies.

Chapter One sketches out the *a priori* conditions for the emergence of the science fiction form in Belfast, utilising historical texts, the work of Fredric Jameson on modernity, and also drawing from the discipline of Science and Technology Studies. It draws out the link between development and the science fiction of Shaw and White, pointing to the ideogeme of improvement through technology reflected in their work. The chapter also locates a connection between the de-industrialisation experienced by Belfast from the late 1970s onward, and the depiction of ragged technologies and alternative means of development in the later works of both authors.

Chapter Two examines notions of history in the work of Shaw and White, revealing fragments of identities dependent on history and narratives in which the process of selection involved in recounting history is highlighted. The chapter relies on Louis Althusser's notion of History as only accessible to us in fragments, as well as Georg Lukàcs's suggestion that the post-1848 bourgeois novel is marked by de-historicisation. Carl Freedman's conception of science fiction as the genre that stretches the boundaries of the bourgeois novel is used to consider ways in which the work of Shaw and White moves beyond the two-traditions paradigm of Northern Irish politics. While White's novels are found to counteract this tendency in their depiction of Catholic futures, Shaw's work is demonstrated as pushing at the horizon of identity and history, suggesting that both are mutable and open to constant change.

Chapter Three considers manifestations of the alien Other across the science fiction of Shaw and White. The chapter pulls together strands from Irish Studies, Science Fiction

Studies and theories of the animal Other, to tease out the implications of the alien in the fiction of Shaw and White. Depictions of the alien are revealed as attempts at depicting an ethical multi-species community in White's Sector General series, but the hybridity suggested by such a notion is shown as being resisted in the last instance by the author.

Chapter Four examines traces of the utopian impulse in the work of Shaw and White. It references Tom Moylan's work on the critical utopia, positioning the work of both authors as belonging to the era of that subgenre. For the main part focusing on White, the chapter critiques the work of the writer on space Frank White, who suggests that astronauts become inspired by a pacific vision he terms 'the overview effect' when looking back at the Earth from space. Positioning this viewpoint as a repressive utopian impulse, the chapter considers its implications for White's depiction of an all-knowing alien race in the novel *Underkill*, a race intent on intervening in the course of human history through terrorism and the manipulation of natural forces. The chapter contemplates the relevance of the novel as repressively utopian when considering the novel as an instance of Northern Irish science fiction written as a response to the Troubles.

## Contents

Introduction 1

Chapter One: A Proximity to Technology 22

Chapter Two: History and Science Fiction 84

Chapter Three: The Alien and the Other 154

Chapter Four: Utopias, Repressive and Redemptive 200

Conclusion 262

Bibliography 281

## Acknowledgements

First I would like to thank my supervisor Dr. Brian Cliff for all his input during this project. Without his genuine enthusiasm for the material, the work would have been a lot less enjoyable than it was. Acknowledgement is also due to the Irish Research Council for funding a project on Irish science fiction. I hope I used the funding well. I would also like to thank the community that circulates around the Science Fiction Studies MA at the University of Liverpool, especially Andy Sawyer and Chris Pak, who mentioned James White in passing outside the Sydney Jones library and inadvertently gave me an idea for a PhD. I would also like to acknowledge the staff on the English, Media and Cultural Studies BA at IADT, Dun Laoghaire for starting me on the path that led to this project. Thanks also to the various people I bounced ideas off over the last few years: Saul Philbin Bowman, Dennis McNulty, Declan Long, George Brennan, Stephen Hughes, Bobby Lowe, Mary Margaret Ryan, Ruth Doherty, Miles Link, James Little, Anne Thompson, Stephen O'Neill, and others I know I am forgetting. Thanks to my family for their support for these years, especially my brother Vin who, along with Laura O'Brien and Niamh Greevy, took on the task of proofreading. Finally, another thanks to my partner Niamh, who always lightens the load.

## Introduction

Catholic priests colonise a planet to spread the word of God to an alien race; robot chaperones break up courting couples on an interstellar starship; scenes of beauty are trapped in glass to be replayed at a later date; a political prisoner blinded by his captors invents a device that allows him to use the sight of others. These are some of the events depicted by the Belfast science fiction writers Bob Shaw and James White, who produced work from the mid to late twentieth century. Although much revered in some circles of science fiction fandom, Shaw and White have been relatively ignored by Irish Studies. Thus far, outside of the science fiction community, critical appraisal of the authors has been scant. Patrick Maume's critical essay on the two authors appeared in 2009, and Jack Fennell's *Irish Science Fiction*, published in 2014, dedicates just twenty pages to Shaw and White.<sup>1</sup> The dearth of critical examination of these two authors within the discipline of Irish Studies is something that this study aims to address. Shaw and White never seriously collaborated on fiction, but given their friendship and their employment at Shorts aircraft manufacturers, whenever they are critically appraised they are done so together, and this thesis is no exception.<sup>2</sup>

Shaw and White are the most prolific Irish science fiction authors.<sup>3</sup> They self-consciously produced science fiction, submitting their work for consideration to genre publications such as *New Worlds* and *Analog*, attending science fiction conventions, and engaging in science fiction fandom through their Irish Fandom group and science fiction fanzine *Slant*, produced with the help of their friend Walt Willis. The extra-literary element of science fiction is receiving increasing critical attention, with Andrew

---

<sup>1</sup> Patrick Maume, 'Futures Past: The Science Fiction of Bob Shaw and James White as a Product of Late-Industrial Belfast' in *No Country For Old Men: Fresh Perspectives on Irish Literature* eds. Paddy Lyons and Alison O'Malley-Younger (Bern: Peter Lang, 2009) pp. 192-214; Jack Fennell, 'The Wrong History: Bob Shaw, James White and the Troubles' in *Irish Science Fiction* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2014) pp. 152-171.

<sup>2</sup> Shaw and White did share a fictional alien called the Drambon, a round creature that has to roll to keep its blood in circulation. The alien was invented by Shaw and appeared in the fiction of both authors. See James White, 'The Secret History of Sector General' in *Ambulance Ship* (London: Corgi Books, 1986) xv.

<sup>3</sup> Fellow Belfast native Ian McDonald is at least as prolific in science fiction from the early nineties to the current era, but the thesis has chosen to focus on Shaw and White as the earliest example of Irish authors producing a large amount of material in the science fiction genre.



Milner suggesting the genre as a site of contestation with the fan community as an important component in its preservation and transformation.<sup>4</sup> Patricia Monk also notes that the genre of science fiction is based upon a consensus community of fans and practitioners.<sup>5</sup> The engagement of Shaw and White in this community more fully than other Irish science fiction authors marks their work out as central for any study of Irish iterations of the form.

It is also worth noting that no comparable science fiction authors arose south of the border in the same period. In a move that bears some comparison to the practices of science fiction fandom, in the 1930s the science fiction writer Joseph O'Neill, born in Galway and working in the Department of Education in the nascent southern state, did write to the father of science fiction H.G. Wells, enclosing a copy of his 1934 novel *Land Under England* and declaring that '*Land Under England* in so far as it has value, owes it to you more than to all other writers put together, because it is your works, the early ones as well as the later, that kindled my imagination to the point at which I felt that I wanted to create.'<sup>6</sup> But this is truly an exception, and there is no evidence that O'Neill was in any way interested when the writer and editor Hugo Gernsback, through his magazine *Amazing Stories*, began retroactively defining the science fiction field by combining the work of Wells, Verne, Poe and others into a tradition.<sup>7</sup> Shaw and White interacted with the international science fiction community, attended conventions, created fan groups, submitted work to the dominant magazines in the field, and enjoyed the recognition of luminaries and peers such as John W. Campbell, Brian Aldiss, and Ian Watson, amongst others. Indeed, such was Shaw's standing in science fiction circles, that his name was passed on by Arthur C. Clarke to film director Stanley Kubrick as a scriptwriting replacement for Brian Aldiss, who had been fired by the director at the preparation stages of Kubrick's adaptation of Aldiss's short story 'Super-

---

<sup>4</sup> Andrew Milner, *Locating Science Fiction* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2012) p. 40.

<sup>5</sup> Patricia Monk, *Alien Theory: The Alien as Archetype in the Science Fiction Short Story* (Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2006) xxxv.

<sup>6</sup> Cited in Robert Crossley, 'Dystopian Nights', *Science Fiction Studies*, 41 (1987) 93-98.

<sup>7</sup> Gernsback called this type of fiction scientifiction, a clumsy neologism that inevitably morphed into the easier to pronounce science fiction. For more on Gernsback and early twentieth-century pulp science fiction, see Brian Aldiss, *Trillion Year Spree: The History of Science Fiction* (London: Paladin, 1986) pp. 251-255; Adam Roberts, *The History of Science Fiction* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005) pp. 173-194.

Toys Last All Summer Long', the film that was eventually completed by Steven Spielberg in 2001 as *A.I.*<sup>8</sup>

Shaw and White's careers in science fiction emerged from their involvement in the group Irish Fandom, a small coterie of science fiction enthusiasts and writers that began meeting at the Belfast home of Walt Willis in the late 1940s. White and Willis set up the group in 1947, with Shaw joining them in 1950. Requirement for membership was simply a taste for science fiction literature. The group ignored sectarian divisions, but White remained its only Catholic member. Between 1948 and 1953, Willis and White produced the fanzine *Slant*, which was hand-printed on a letterpress machine, with White providing woodcut illustrations. Willis and Shaw later paid homage to this low-tech means of production in 1954's *The Enchanted Duplicator*, a light-hearted adventure story which follows the journey of a science fiction fan to the Tower of Trufandom to claim the titular Duplicator.<sup>9</sup> *Slant* and its successor *Hyphen* were publications strictly for those in the inner circle of science fiction fandom, featuring reports on conventions, book reviews and in-jokes between the members of the group. Throughout this period, Shaw and White also tried to establish themselves as professional science fiction authors. White wrote stories prolifically throughout the 1950s, selling work to *New Worlds*, *Nebula* and *Astounding*, including a serialised story set in Ireland called 'Tourist Planet', which would be expanded into his first novel *The Secret Visitors*.<sup>10</sup> Shaw sold his story 'Aspect' to *Nebula* magazine in 1954, a first contact narrative in which astronauts investigate alien architecture for clues as to the civilisation that constructed it.<sup>11</sup>

Shaw later dismissed his early work as 'juvenilia', and the author took a break from science fiction in 1956, the year he and his wife Sadie went to live in Alberta, Canada for two years. Shaw worked as a draughtsman by day, and a taxi driver by night, in an attempt to save enough money to purchase a house on his return. Shaw, born in Belfast in 1931, had trained as a draughtsman upon leaving school and, upon returning

---

<sup>8</sup> Shaw was in turn also fired by Kubrick for leaving the country to attend a science fiction convention. For Shaw's account of the encounter with Kubrick, see John Baxter, *Stanley Kubrick: A Biography* (London: Harper Collins, 1998) pp. 357-8.

<sup>9</sup> Walter Willis and Bob Shaw, 'The Enchanted Duplicator', [http://www.fanac.org/fanzines/Enchanted\\_Duplicator/Enchanted-00.html](http://www.fanac.org/fanzines/Enchanted_Duplicator/Enchanted-00.html) [accessed 21/1/2016]

<sup>10</sup> James White, *The Secret Visitors* (1957) (London: New English Library, 1971)

<sup>11</sup> Bob Shaw, 'Aspect', *Nebula* 9 (Glasgow: Peter Hamilton, 1955) pp. 55-66.

from Canada in 1958, went to work as an aeroplane designer for Short and Harland, eventually moving to a public relations position.

Having become a science fiction fan at age eleven, Shaw claimed that the genre provided a means to fulfil ‘the pressing need to escape from the suburban Belfast in the late 1930s.’ Describing his discovery of the stories of A.E. Van Vogt at age eleven as something of an epiphany, in an interview with the British science fiction journal *Foundation*, Shaw states:

Looking back on the experience, I could almost make a case for governmental control of the exposure of vintage Van Vogt to developing minds. The effect on me was much more devastating than LSD and much longer lasting—indeed, as far as I can determine, it was indelible. The boys’ paper science fiction had been intriguing, but not wholly satisfying, whereas in the Van Vogt stories there was a soul-glutting blend of new concepts, politics, sex, and adventure. His palette was sombre-hued, the brush strokes were broad, and the overall impression was one of sophisticated brooding maturity which I found totally irresistible. It is no exaggeration to say that the reading of that first story changed the entire course of my life.<sup>12</sup>

Shaw’s involvement with science fiction fandom was a pursuit that clashed significantly with what Brian Stableford calls the ‘dour culture of the Protestant work ethic in one of its narrower manifestations.’<sup>13</sup> Shaw’s mother did piece-work in a factory, while his father was a policeman and part-time gamekeeper.<sup>14</sup> Shaw described the resulting schism in the *Foundation* article, suggesting:

One side of my nature was fervently convinced that devotion to science fiction was the path to happiness; the other side was keenly aware of my father’s disappointment and shared his conviction that a life of industrious respectability in a recognised safe job was no more than the family’s due.<sup>15</sup>

Given Shaw’s technical and engineering background, and the status of science fiction as a technologically literate form, it initially seems incongruous that the author would utilise the genre as a means by which to escape the discipline of a working life in Belfast’s industrial sector. But Shaw perceived science fiction as offering access to an actual contingent reality more real than the everyday concerns of industrial Belfast.

---

<sup>12</sup> Brian Stableford, ‘Algebraic Fantasies: The Science Fiction of Bob Shaw’ in *Algebraic Fantasies and Realist Romances: More Masters of Science Fiction* (Rockville: Wildside Press, 1995) p. 26.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 26.

<sup>14</sup> Ian Shaw, ‘My Dad, Bob’, *Relapse* 19 (2011) p. 10.

<sup>15</sup> *Algebraic Fantasies*, p. 26.

Shaw saw the line of flight that science fiction provided as an escape *to* rather than from reality, believing that the genre called the values of his society into question, rendering them fantastical. Shaw proclaims that:

The world image presented by mundane 'realists' is one in which the invariants are things like mortgages, the TUC, engine wear, national insurance contributions, prostate troubles, Sunday, unemployment figures, newspapers, cemeteries, Harpic, ambition, season tickets, raincoats, Russia, suet, gas meters, greenfly, and so on. What the science fiction buff understands is that all these things are merely local phenomena of a very temporary nature, and that to get them in their proper perspective it is only necessary to step back a few thousand light years.<sup>16</sup>

For Shaw, mere reportage expressed the predictability of arithmetic whereas science fiction was an attempt to grasp the chaotic, unknown quantities of algebra. Shaw suggests that the science fiction genre introduces an element of contingency to mundane reality, causing the reader to question that reality and the structures that underpin it.

This juxtaposition of the mundane and the fantastic is a typical quality of Shaw's fiction, the fantastic invariably embodied by a fictional technology. Shaw's 1966 story 'The Light of Other Days' unpacks one implication of the fictional technology 'slow glass', a kind of glass that reduces the speed of light to such an extent that images of events are seen long after they have taken place. The story, Shaw's second published work following his return to science fiction in 1965, is an exemplary instance of the short science fiction form, has been anthologised widely and was nominated for a Hugo Award in 1967, arguably the most prestigious accolade in the science fiction field. Told in the third person, Shaw depicts a bickering couple walking through a rural landscape and arriving at a farm of slow glass windows soaking in the idyllic scene. The closure of the narrative, in which the owner of the farm is consoled by images of his deceased wife and child is typical of Shaw's concern with rehearsing the implications of technological change and how it interacts with quotidian individual lives.<sup>17</sup> Shaw's follow-up slow glass stories, 'Burden of Proof' and 'A Dome of Many-Coloured Glass' similarly consider the implications of slow glass for a high court judge and an American prisoner of war.

---

<sup>16</sup>*Algebraic Fantasies*, p. 27.

<sup>17</sup> Bob Shaw, *Other Days, Other Eyes* (1972) (London: Pan, 1978) pp. 25-34.

While interesting for many reasons, Shaw's attempt to draw out the implications of slow glass across the novella *Other Days, Other Eyes* are less compelling than the short work, the character of the inventor of slow glass Garrod as detective distracting somewhat from the science fictional premise.<sup>18</sup> The depiction of Garrod as all-knowing throughout the novel reduces the tension built up in slow glass stories that demonstrate the technology's effect on the everyman, in the form of the husband, the judge, and the soldier. However, the tension does return in the last third of the novel, when Garrod is seen losing control of his invention altogether. The novel's weaknesses could be traced to its status as a fix-up novel, a convention in science fiction publishing whereby a popular author joins a number of shorter works together to produce a novel.<sup>19</sup> However, the quality of *Other Days, Other Eyes* is a cut above mere hackwork, which cannot be said for Shaw's other fix-up novel *Ship of Strangers*, which meanders without direction after killing off its most interesting character, Candar the shape-changing alien, at the close of the second chapter.<sup>20</sup>

Other instances of Shaw's fictional technologies include the longevity treatment that allows humans to achieve something close to immortality in *One Million Tomorrows* (1970), the substance magniluct in *A Wreath of Stars* (1976) that makes invisible entities visible and threatens to undermine the social structure of the fictional African statelet Barandi, and the Hutchman trigger in *Ground Zero Man* (1971), a device with the ability to explode all nuclear weapons at once. In each case the technology drives the narrative, informing the actions of the protagonists and the societies of which they are part.<sup>21</sup>

Shaw's first novel *Night Walk* (1967) also expresses a concern with the effects of technology on the individual and society. The novel takes the form of a third person space adventure narrative, with the protagonist Tallon a prisoner on the planet Emm Luther. Despite being blinded, Tallon utilises technology both to make his escape and

---

<sup>18</sup> Bob Shaw, *Other Days, Other Eyes* (1972) (London: Pan, 1978)

<sup>19</sup> Edward James, *Science Fiction in the Twentieth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994) p. 64. James cites Shaw's hero A.E. Van Vogt as the inventor of the term 'fix-up', and suggests Van Vogt himself was a 'master of the form.'

<sup>20</sup> Bob Shaw, *Ship of Strangers* (New York: Ace Books, 1978)

<sup>21</sup> Bob Shaw, *One Millions Tomorrows* (New York: Ace Books, 1980); *A Wreath of Stars* (1976) (London: Gollancz, 1987); *Ground Zero Man* (New York: Avon Books, 1971)

to attempt to bring the universe to peace. This narrative of constant improvement through technology will be studied in the context of Northern Ireland in greater detail in the first chapter of the thesis. The orientation towards resolution in *Night Walk* is also interesting in a Northern Irish context, as is Tallon's origin in the organisation known as the Block, a terrorist organisation dedicated to maintaining a political link between Earth and its planet colony Emm Luther.<sup>22</sup>

Shaw's second novel, the interstellar war story *The Palace of Eternity*, is notable for its sympathetic depictions of alterity, as well as a jarring narrative leap whereby the protagonist Tallon is killed midway through the novel but continues to drive the narrative. Here the afterlife is posited, not as a supernatural state, but as a realm of transcendence as yet uncategorised by science.<sup>23</sup> The novel overturns a Manichean division between the alien race the Syccans and humanity, and this is explored in greater detail in Chapter Three, along with another depiction of alterity by Shaw in *Medusa's Children*.<sup>24</sup>

A formal convention that serves Shaw better than the fix-up is the science fiction trilogy. The Orbitville trilogy (*Orbitville* 1975, *Orbitville Departure* 1983, *Orbitville Judgement* 1990), affords Shaw the scope to fully consider the implications of the discovery of a habitable sphere constituting far in excess of the available land on Earth.<sup>25</sup> The three novels are well-constructed space adventures that, apart from their indulgence in technological novelty and their fast pacing, also contain reflections on the nature of history, property and progress that will be drawn out in the thesis. Each entry in the trilogy examines a different epoch following the discovery of Orbitville. The original novel focuses on Vance Garamond, the space pilot who discovered Orbitville. The second novel jumps forward two centuries later and centres on Dallen, a police officer whose investigations lead him from Orbitville back to a near-vacant Earth. The protagonist of the third novel, Jim Nicklin, lives on Orbitville in a low-tech community modelled on the American west of the early twentieth century, a stasis that

---

<sup>22</sup> Bob Shaw, *Night Walk* (1967) (London: New English Library, 1970)

<sup>23</sup> Bob Shaw, *The Palace of Eternity* (1970) (London: Pan Books, 1972)

<sup>24</sup> Bob Shaw, *Medusa's Children* (1977) (London: Gollancz, 1987)

<sup>25</sup> Bob Shaw, *Orbitville* (London: Gollancz, 1979); *Orbitville Departure* (1983) (London: Orbit Books, 1991); *Orbitville Judgement* (1990) (London: Orbit Books, 1992)

is undermined when the sphere of Orbitville begins to break apart. The refusal of Shaw's narrative to accept stasis will be key to the claims of Chapter Two of this thesis.

Shaw's other trilogy, *Land and Overland* (*The Ragged Astronauts* 1986, *The Wooden Spaceships* 1988, *The Fugitive Worlds*, 1989), depicts the non-metallurgical Kolcorronian society on the planet Lain, whose technology is based on wood and other organic components, what will be referred to later in the thesis as ragged technologies. This rudimentary technology, when taken together with the feudal structure of the Kolcorronians, means the trilogy often reads like fantasy rather than science fiction.<sup>26</sup> But in *The Ragged Astronauts*, Shaw scientifically describes the means of propulsion of the Kolcorronians' airships in their utilisation of the lifecycle of the brakka tree, which uses combustion as a means of reproduction. In addition, the means in which Shaw describes the Kolcorronians' journey to Overland, a habitable planet with which Land shares its atmosphere, reveals the novel as meticulous and impressive science fiction. By the close of the novel, Shaw has used the fiction to speculate on history, technology and ecology.<sup>27</sup> The novel gave Shaw his second Hugo Awards nomination in 1987. Like the Orbitville trilogy, Shaw uses the second novel of the trilogy to explore the implications of the first. In *The Wooden Spaceships*, the colonists from Land are coming to terms with their new existence on Overland, in particular its reflection on their religion, which held that Overland is where souls travel to when the body dies. The novel details a war with the remaining occupants of Land, with a wooden floating fortress built in the vacuum between the two planets. In an echo of Shaw's *The Palace of Eternity*, the novel incorporates supernatural elements into the science fiction narrative, the Kolcorronians making a further journey to another planet called Farland and encountering an incorporeal race called the Symbonites who are the origin of the Kolcorronian's belief in the transmigration of souls to other planets.<sup>28</sup> The final novel in the Trilogy, *The Fugitive Worlds*, follows the fate of Toller Maraquine II, a

---

<sup>26</sup> The boundary between the genres of science fiction and fantasy is a much-contested issue. Recent interventions by, among others, Mark Bould and China Miéville, have done much to highlight the permeable nature of this boundary. China Miéville suggests science fiction constitutes a subset of fantasy, and that claims for the 'scientific rigour' of the genre proposed by critics such as Dark Suvin are entirely spurious. For Miéville 'scientism' is simply science fiction's mode of expression when dealing with the fantastic. See China Miéville, 'Symposium: Marxism and Fantasy', *Historical Materialism*, 10 (2002) pp. 39-49.

<sup>27</sup> Bob Shaw, *The Ragged Astronauts* (1986) (London: Gollancz, 1987)

<sup>28</sup> Bob Shaw, *The Wooden Spaceships* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1989)

descendant of the original coloniser of Land, but the novel is an unneeded addition to the series, re-treading the terrain already covered by the first two novels, the fantastic failing to rise above the mundane as a result.<sup>29</sup>

Whereas Shaw was born and raised firmly within the traditions of Belfast Protestantism, White was born to a West Belfast Catholic family in 1928, and resided in the Andersonstown area of the city for most of his working life. White's interest in science fiction began with an encounter with the work of H.G. Wells at age ten, and then continued into early adulthood with White collecting American second-hand science fiction magazines in the Smithfield Market area of Belfast. According to Maume, these magazines were sold to the markets by American soldiers, stationed in the city for preparations leading up to D-Day.<sup>30</sup> While Shaw's science fiction epiphany occurred while reading the chaotic fictional realms of Van Vogt, White's major influence was E.E. Doc Smith, whose work White claims made him realise that there was no requirement for aliens to be evil in a science fiction story. White's early employment included working as a draper for various Belfast tailoring firms and a Belfast Co-Operative department store, before being appointed as a technical clerk at Shorts in 1965, where he later served as a publicity assistant and a publicity officer in the public relations department, offering his science fiction as proof of his ability to write.<sup>31</sup>

White wrote and published prolifically throughout the 1950s. In a piece of fan writing entitled 'Star Struck', John Berry, a fellow member of Irish Fandom, parodied White's fecund imagination with a parody of the author announcing that 'If I hurry home now, I'll just have time enough to bash out another chapter for Carnell before Peggy wakes up.'<sup>32</sup> Ted Carnell was the editor of the British science fiction magazine *New Worlds*, where White placed the majority of his early publications. The White stories published there, and in other venues such as *Nebula* and *Astounding*, show a science fiction writer attempting to find an individual voice, and are interesting in that they rehearse ideas that White would draw out with more precision in his longer work.

---

<sup>29</sup> Bob Shaw, *The Fugitive Worlds* (London: Orbit Books, 1989)

<sup>30</sup> *No Country for Old Men*, p. 194.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 197.

<sup>32</sup> Cited in Andy Sawyer 'Fables of Irish Fandom' in *Fic: Why Fanfiction is Taking Over the World* ed. Ann Elizabeth Jamison (Dallas: BenBella, 2013) p. 81.



1953's 'The Scavengers' for instance, depicts an intergalactic police force tasked with maintaining peace across the galaxies, anticipating the role of the Monitor Corps in White's Sector General series. The first Sector General story, simply titled 'Sector General', appeared in *New Worlds* in 1957, and contained a lot of the elements that White would draw out across the twelve novels of the series, ending with the novel *Double Contact* in 1999.<sup>33</sup> Sector General is described as a vast intergalactic space station that functions as a hospital for all known alien species. Recurring characters are introduced: O'Mara, the hospital's chief psychologist, and Conway, a young doctor just beginning to make a professional name for himself on board the station. The story also introduces the fictional technology the educator tape, a means with which surgeons gain the ability to operate on an alien species through the transferral of the sensory information, personality and knowledge of a medical expert of that species. The form of the narrative is also typical of the Sector General stories: a medical problem involving extraterrestrials is proposed, and then solved by the end of the narrative, which is invariably told in a comedic register. In the case of 'Sector General', Conway receives a tape of the radiation-eating gestalt entity the Telfi in order to perform an operation, forgets to erase the tape when the surgery is complete, and begins to take on the personality of the alien lifeform. Chapter Three will examine the story in more detail in a discussion of the depiction of alterity in White's work.

White's multispecies hospital is a utopian construction, an attempt by the author to critique the violent and militaristic subgenre of the space opera, which was becoming prevalent in the science fiction of the period.<sup>34</sup> Instead of scenes of intergalactic violence, White's Sector General Hospital depicts a collaborative enterprise between humanity and various alien races whose purpose is to treat the victims of warfare. White considered himself a pacifist, and writing of his motivations for creating the series, he writes:

Normally I do not like stories of violence or the senseless killing that is war...However, in a medical sf story of the Sector General type the violence is usually the direct or indirect result of a natural catastrophe, a disaster in

---

<sup>33</sup> James White, 'Sector General' in *Hospital Station* (1967) (London: Corgi Books, 1976); *Double Contact* (New York: Tor Books, 1999)

<sup>34</sup> Adam Roberts, 'Golden Age Science Fiction' in *The History of Science Fiction* (London: MacMillan, 2005) pp. 195-229.

space or an epidemic of some kind. And if there is a war situation...then the medics are fighting only to save lives...<sup>35</sup>

The avoidance of conflict is a concern that permeates White's novels both inside and outside the Sector General series, often leading to the contradictory and muddled conclusions that will be teased out in Chapter Four. But Sector General itself is an admirable attempt to depict cooperation in a multi-species environment. The first five Sector General novels, produced between 1962 and 1983, were fixups, and while episodic in structure, these were more successful than Shaw's forays into that particular form. The stable setting of Sector General allows White to flashback to origin stories for established characters, such as Conway and O'Mara, while using other episodes to introduce new ones, like the ambulance driver Fletcher, an expert in comparative technology and alien ship design who appears in 1979's *Ambulance Ship* and 1983's *Sector General*.<sup>36</sup> 1962's *Hospital Station* collected the initial 'Sector General' story with three other previously published works, and still stands as the best introduction to the Sector General universe. A second fixup novel *Star Surgeon* is interesting in that it introduces the concept of war to the series, with the hospital is under attack by hostile alien forces.<sup>37</sup> White's reframing of war as police action, and the prerequisite of violence in White's fiction, will be discussed further in Chapter Four.

In 1984 White took early retirement from Shorts, his vision impaired by the diabetes he had suffered his entire life. White and his wife relocated to Portstewart in Northern Antrim, and White began devoting all his time to writing science fiction. Of the full-length Sector General novels that began appearing with *Star Healer* in 1985, the middle period contains the most interesting work, the series taking time to transition from the earlier mosaic form of the fixup. 1992's *The Genocidal Healer* presents the ethical implications of intervention in an alien war through the character of Lioren, a medic of the Tarlan race who mistakes the violent reproductive rituals of the Crowsaggar as a disease and inadvertently decimates their population by inoculating them against it.<sup>38</sup> *Final Diagnosis*, published in 1997, has a Freudian aspect, with the

---

<sup>35</sup> James White, 'The Secret History of Sector General' in *Ambulance Ship* (1980) (London: Futura, 1986) xiv.

<sup>36</sup> James White, *Ambulance Ship* (1979) (London: Corgi, 1986); *Sector General* (London: Futura Publications, 1983)

<sup>37</sup> James White, *Star Surgeon* (1983) (London: Futura, 1986)

<sup>38</sup> James White, *The Genocidal Healer* (New York: Del Rey, 1991)

medical puzzle to be solved the xenophobia of the character Hewlitt, the narrative flashing back to Hewlitt's troubled childhood on the planet Etlan in the aftermath of a war in order to explain his condition.<sup>39</sup> The penultimate Sector General book *Mind Changer* concerns the retirement of O'Mara, introducing a sense of duration to what was up to then a static universe in which nobody aged. White evidently relishes the opportunity to tell the backstory of tough, self-made O'Mara in the novel, which appears in flashback sequences throughout the narrative.<sup>40</sup> The final Sector General novel *Double Contact* is a relatively pedestrian entry to the series, notable for the lengths that the Sector General crew go to avoid violent confrontation with the delicate, spider-like race they encounter.<sup>41</sup> When referring to the series, the science fiction critic John Clute writes that 'the depiction of goodness may lie the real genius of James White' and that in White's universe 'the Good is normal, and...the problem of Evil...is operable.'<sup>42</sup> Chapter Four will attempt to locate the prerequisite of violence that underpins the Sector General narratives, problematising White's preoccupation with simplistic notions of goodness.

White's standalone novels are similarly concerned with conflict avoidance and conflict resolution. However, his fiction is also concerned with technological breakthrough, first contact with alien civilisations, dystopian warnings and the difficult choices to be made when constructing a utopian society of the sort represented in Sector General, the latter of which will be fully explored in the final chapter of the thesis. White's first novel *The Secret Visitors* is a science fiction mystery in which the protagonist Dr. Lockhart unravels an interstellar conspiracy to use Earth as a tourist destination for extraterrestrials. The narrative is derailed somewhat by an overlong courtroom scene at the centre of the novel, interesting if only for the fact that Earth itself is in the dock. Also worth noting is White's locating the narrative in Ireland and peppering the text with Irish references such as Aer Lingus planes and a performance of 'Londonderry Air', the tune of which has become inextricably linked with the song 'Danny Boy'.<sup>43</sup> White's second novel, *Second Ending*, was released as part of Ace

---

<sup>39</sup> James White, *Final Diagnosis* (New York: Tor Books, 1997)

<sup>40</sup> James White, *Mind Changer* (New York: Tor Books, 1998)

<sup>41</sup> James White, *Double Contact* (New York: Tor Books, 1999)

<sup>42</sup> John Clute, 'Introduction', *General Practice: A Sector General Omnibus* (New York: Orb, 2003) p. 8.

<sup>43</sup> James White, *The Secret Visitors* (1957) (London: New English Library, 1971)

Books' doubles series, which matched two short science fiction novellas and published them together in one tête-bêche volume. White's novel was paired with *The Jewels of Aptor* by Samuel Delany, an African-American science fiction writer who stood out among his predominantly white peers both in terms of his race and his experimental style. White's novel holds its own with Delany's novel, evidenced by its nomination for a Hugo Award in 1962, losing out to Robert A. Heinlein's massively popular *Stranger in a Strange Land*. *Second Ending* depicts the gradual development of the technological capabilities of Ross, a doctor who has survived a nuclear cataclysm and, as the last man on Earth, must find a way to preserve the human race.<sup>44</sup>

1966's *The Escape Orbit* and *The Watch Below* are both narratives pulled together by the notion of containment. The former details the adventures of prisoners of war held captive by an alien race known simply as the Bugs. Two factions emerge among the prisoners: the Civilians, who wish to make a new life on the prison planet and forget about the war, and the Committee, who spend their time hatching escape plans. Evidently inspired by stories of prisoners of war in World War II, the novel also resonates with White's native Belfast in the naming of the Civilian settlement Andersonstown after the area in which he lived, and its depiction of a predominantly female workforce, a demographic peculiarity among Catholics in Belfast in the period.<sup>45</sup> The containment depicted in *The Watch Below* is based on an unlikely rather than science fictional premise. A pocket of air in the hull of *The Gulf Trader*, a ship sunk during World War II becomes the home of a group of survivors, who last for generations under the sea. White juxtaposes this narrative with the story of an alien race called the Unthan, escaping ecological disaster on their home planet. White clearly finds the *Gulf Trader* narrative more interesting, spending most of the novel drawing out the disputes and factions that emerge among the ship's inhabitants, mostly centring on the Game, a means with which the survivors remember personal and social histories.<sup>46</sup> The significance of the oral history of the Game will be considered in more detail in Chapter Two.

---

<sup>44</sup> James White, *Second Ending* (New York: Ace Books, 1962); published with Samuel Delany, *The Jewels of Aptor* (New York: Ace Books, 1962)

<sup>45</sup> James White, *The Escape Orbit* (1965) (New York: Ace Books, 1983)

<sup>46</sup> James White, *The Watch Below* (1966) (London: Corgi, 1967)

The most relevant of White's standalone novels to this thesis are the Troubles allegories *The Dream Millennium* (1974) and *Underkill* (1979), both set in a thinly-veiled future Belfast depicted as a gothic dystopia. Both novels are essential for any examination of Irish science fiction. *The Dream Millennium* is the more utopian of the two novels, a space adventure narrative focusing mainly on the crew aboard a starship captained by Brother Howard, a former astronaut who was subject to a religious revelation while on his first space mission. Howard plans to escape an Earth culture in decline, in particular the effects of the philosophy of the Maxxers, who espouse maximum violent response to conflict. Howard's ship travels through space carrying humans in suspended animation with which to seed a habitable planet. The human specimens on board have been carefully selected by Howard for their orientation towards peaceful conflict resolution. *The Dream Millennium* presumes that kindness and a propensity for nonviolence are genetically transmitted, and Chapter Four will consider the novel in light of White's pacifism.<sup>47</sup> It will do so with reference to White's sequel to the novel, 1979's *Underkill*. Once again, a violent future dystopian Belfast is depicted. But whereas in *The Dream Millennium*, the solution to Earth's conflict arises from the planet itself in Howard's plan for an exodus, *Underkill* proposes a solution from beyond the Earth, with the alien race the Trennechorans observing the planet from afar, diagnosing it with a malady, and making strategic interventions from afar in the shape of bombings, murders and natural disasters.<sup>48</sup> The novel will be examined in detail in Chapter Four for its repressive and redemptive utopian elements.

In White's latter career, Sector General novels began to overshadow his standalone work. The fixup novel *Federation World* is a minor work, covering science fiction subject matter more deftly by Shaw in his Orbitville Trilogy.<sup>49</sup> Of more interest is White's 1991 novel *The Silent Stars Go By*, an alternative history narrative that proposes a Hibernian Empire that discovered steam power in its prehistory and utilised it to power the ships that discovered America. White depicts a Hibernian Empire launching its first starship the *Aisling Gheal* in an attempt to colonise a recently-discovered habitable planet. Although White's protagonist on board the ship, Healer Nolan, is an atheist, priests and clerics dominate the narrative, and Chapter Two will

---

<sup>47</sup> James White, *The Dream Millennium* (1974) (London: Corgi, 1976)

<sup>48</sup> James White, *Underkill* (London: Corgi, 1979)

<sup>49</sup> James White, *Federation World* (New York: Del Rey, 1988)

consider White's depictions of Catholic futures across his fiction and its significance for the science fiction form in which he is writing. The novel is White's longest work, and despite being derailed somewhat by an overly drawn out jungle adventure in the centre, and a baffling conclusion in which a conniving Bishop is handed a world to convert to Catholicism, there is much of interest for the study of Irish science fiction. When Nolan returns to Earth's orbit and establishes contact with N.A.S.A., it is the timeline of our Earth to which he has returned. A priest called Father O'Neill and an engineer called Donovan are dispatched to translate the Gaelic and Latin with which Nolan communicates, and White insinuates that, having ensured peace on the new planet through Christianity, the return of the Hibernians will now sew that peace on Earth.<sup>50</sup>

In examining the fiction of Shaw and White, this study will take a broadly Marxist approach, utilising both cultural materialism and the Marxist approach to science fiction pioneered by the critic Darko Suvin. Suvin proposes science fiction as a radical form that utilises what he terms cognitive estrangement.<sup>51</sup> For Suvin, science fiction estranges the quotidian world, but unlike fantasy and folktales, the genre has a cognitive aspect, forcing us to think through the differences between our own world and the world of the text. Suvin suggests that this process has a politicising effect on the reader, allowing them access to a sense of history as a process, to a realisation of how social structures are subject to change through collective human effort and the application of technology.<sup>52</sup>

The work of Fredric Jameson will be at least as important to the thesis as the Suvinian perspective. Jameson has written extensively on the genre of science fiction,

---

<sup>50</sup> James White, *The Silent Stars Go By* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1991)

<sup>51</sup> Darko Suvin, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction: On the Poetics and History of a Literary Genre* (New Haven: Yale, 1980) pp. 7-9.

<sup>52</sup> *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction*, pp. 3-15. The work of Carl Freedman will also be relevant to the thesis. Freedman attempts to address comments from critics suggesting that Suvin's definition is too proscriptive, and that Suvin's cognitive estrangement infers that the science in science fiction should be rigorous. These critics suggest that a hierarchy of texts is formed by Suvin's theory, inevitably excluding the work of pulp writers and those that followed them, such as Shaw and White. Freedman nuances Suvin's position, suggesting instead that science fiction adopts a cognition effect. For Freedman, the cognition effect in science fiction constitutes the 'attitude of the text itself to the kind of estrangements being performed.' The science in science fiction for Freedman, then, need not be rigorous by modern scientific standards. See Carl Freedman, *Critical Theory and Science Fiction* (Middletown CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2000) p. 17.

an important early intervention suggesting that science fiction emerged as a formal means of resolving the contradictions of the nineteenth-century realist novel.<sup>53</sup> Jameson remarks that a philanthropic strategy was used to resolve narratives of poverty in many novels of the nineteenth century, with a rich benefactor or relative rescuing the deserving protagonist from penury. Jameson proclaims such narrative closures as ‘empty of content’, and suggests the emergence of the science fiction narrative as an attempt to resolve the contradiction by projecting it into the future. Following the structural anthropology of Claude Lévi-Strauss, Jameson proposes narrative as a socially symbolic act. In doing so, Jameson attempts to move Marxist criticism beyond a crude model of base/superstructure that views cultural texts as mere reflective instances of the superstructure, drawing from Louis Althusser to suggest ‘relative autonomy’ in elements of the superstructure such as literature, and to depict a cultural text as a site of both class tension and utopian impulses. For Jameson, cultural texts reflect, or transcode, the class struggle ongoing within the social structure, albeit in fragmentary ways. These instances of the political unconscious can be revealed through the analysis of narratives. This is an important insight that this thesis will build upon: narrative is a socially symbolic act, and what happens on the page matters, in even the most mass-cultural texts.

Shaw and White’s science fiction interacts with the period commonly referred to as the Irish Troubles in the way suggested by Jameson’s political unconscious. As will be shown, these fragments of the political unconscious reveal themselves in utopian outbursts, allegories of identity politics and narratives of collective religious exploration. This is not to say that the authors never explicitly address the conflict that raged around them. Indeed, as allegories of the Troubles go, White’s *Underkill* stands as not only one of the strangest but also one of the most direct, to the point of didacticism.<sup>54</sup> But as Aaron Kelly suggests of Jameson’s political unconscious in the context of the Troubles, what is at stake is not some representation of ‘truth’ about the conflict, but the apprehension of History as the experience of ‘necessity that lacerates literary production.’<sup>55</sup> Kelly is referring to necessity in a Marxist sense, the material needs that inform the dynamics of class struggle, propel History, and rise to the surface

---

<sup>53</sup> Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious* (Oxford: Routledge, 2002) p. 183.

<sup>54</sup> James White, *Underkill* (London: Corgi, 1979)

<sup>55</sup> *The Thriller and Northern Ireland*, p. 2.

in cultural texts. These lacerations, articulated by the necessity of the social structure, result in intermittent fragments of the political unconscious being revealed in narratives. Kelly suggests that Jameson's model allows that 'an analysis of Northern Ireland may proceed in terms, not of peculiarity and anomaly, but rather of specificity and intensity.'<sup>56</sup> With this in mind, it is not the intention of this thesis to draw out a picture of a science fiction peculiar to Northern Ireland, or to put forward a view that science fiction is somehow better equipped at accessing its truths. The aim, rather, is to produce readings of the science fiction of Shaw and White with the specificity and intensity that Kelly references, by detecting fragments which connect their texts to the milieu in which they were created.

Serious academic study of Irish science fiction is long overdue. Near the end of the writing of this thesis, the book *Irish Science Fiction* by Jack Fennell appeared to, at least in part, address this deficit. Fennell suggests that, to the casual eye, Ireland and science fiction are unconnected. But once located, Fennell writes that it is difficult to conceive of 'an Ireland that is not science-fictional to some extent.'<sup>57</sup> Ireland's relation to modernity rewards examination through a science fictional lens. The interventions of Ireland's neighbour to the east, and Ireland's continuing connection to the flows of international capitalism, have ensured that the country has long contained an element of the future-shock that is the stock-in-trade of the science fiction genre. Terry Eagleton suggests that the British colonial centre utilised its Irish 'mirror image' in order to experiment with changes proposed to services in the imperial centre such as education, health and the police force. According to Eagleton, England viewed Ireland as '...a mere fold in time in which the colonising nation could view its own imminent destiny.'<sup>58</sup> Ireland, the peripheral nation in this equation, becomes a blank canvas upon which to apply technologies and notions of the future that might be unpopular at the metropole. Like Eagleton, Fennell suggests that this situation led to the peripheries experiencing modernisation as 'a sudden and traumatic process' rather than a gradual phenomenon involving long conditioning.<sup>59</sup> For Fennell, this shock of the new is

---

<sup>56</sup> *The Thriller and Northern Ireland*, pp. 2-3.

<sup>57</sup> Jack Fennell, *Irish Science Fiction* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2014) p. 3.

<sup>58</sup> Terry Eagleton, 'Changing the Question' in *Theorising Ireland* ed. Claire Connolly. New York: MacMillan, 2003. p. 82.

<sup>59</sup> *Irish Science Fiction*, p. 7. Fennell also dedicates a chapter to the era of modernisation in the south of Ireland, tracing the phenomenon in Irish science fiction texts, including some in the Irish language. For



unavoidably science fictional, and explains the apparent incongruity between Ireland and the science fiction imaginary. If, as Aaron Kelly suggests, Irish Studies needs ‘a shift in emphasis when analysing Irish fiction from failed novels to radically decentred and nonhegemonic fiction’, then it is hoped that this thesis will be read in the spirit of Kelly’s call, framing science fiction as a thus far ignored area in the Irish Studies field, and as a lens through which to examine Ireland’s relationship with modernity.<sup>60</sup>

The thesis is divided into four chapters, covering themes that connect the concerns of Irish Studies to science fiction and the work of Shaw and White: technology, history, the alien and utopia. Chapter One will discuss the depiction of technology, modernity and progress in the work of Shaw and White. Drawing from historians such as Jonathan Bardon and Raymond Crotty, it will begin with a history of industrial development in the north of Ireland, from the time of the Ulster plantations, when the influence of English colonialism intensified, to the mid-twentieth century, when industrial nations began to shift towards a post-industrial mode. Taking industrialisation as a precondition for the emergence of the science fiction form, it will then attempt to detect an ideogeme of progress in the fiction of Shaw and White, tracing a narrative trajectory of improvement through engagement with technology in their texts. The chapter will also draw from the work of Patrick Carroll, a Science and Technology Studies (S.T.S.) scholar focusing on Ireland in the colonial period, and from the S.T.S. pioneer Bruno Latour, teasing out the implications of the depiction of inhuman agency and sentient technology found in the work of both Shaw and White. The thesis will nuance these readings with reference to Fredric Jameson’s work on structural semiotics, Benjamin Noys’s appraisal of Latour’s work, and Herbert Marcuse’s critique of technological rationality. David E. Nye’s detection of a technological version of Immanuel Kant’s sublime will support a discussion of how the technological sublime in the work of Shaw and White suggests a kind of transcendence achieved through collective human effort, rendering the human as the agent of sublime power. Finally, the chapter will consider the depiction of alternative development and ragged technologies in the later work of Shaw and White, a feature of their fiction that

---

more on the literary culture of post-modernisation Ireland see Conor McCarthy, *Modernisation, Crisis and Culture in Ireland 1969-1992* (Dublin: Four Courts, 2000).

<sup>60</sup> Aaron Kelly ‘Reproblematizing the Irish Text’ in *Critical Ireland: New Essays in Literature and Culture* eds. Alan A. Gillis and Aaron Kelly (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2001) p. 129.

coincides with a global shift towards post-industrialisation that had particular effects in the case of Northern Irish industry and its relationship to technology.

The second chapter will consider how Shaw and White deal with issues surrounding history and identity in their narratives. It will draw from the work of Richard Kirkland, who suggests that the mainstream Northern Irish novel is restricted by the limits of the bourgeois novel as outlined by Georg Lukàcs, restrictions that feed into the two-traditions paradigm that underpins typical analyses of the era known as the Troubles. Through reference to Carl Freedman's thesis that science fiction's historicising of the present supersedes these restrictions, this chapter will try to analyse ways in which Shaw and White stretch the limits of the bourgeois realist novel. Shaw's work will be discussed as challenging the two-traditions paradigm, while adopting what Kirkland terms a third non-aligned position that he suggests inevitably promotes bourgeois capitalism as a way to counter conflict. Shaw's later work will be discussed as superseding these limits. White's narratives, on the other hand, will be examined for their depiction of Catholic futures, in which priests and nuns populate the stars, maintaining Catholic sexual mores and spreading the word of the gospel to alien races. The chapter utilises Fredric Jameson's expansion of Louis Althusser's thesis on History. Althusser suggests that History (capitalised) is inaccessible in the same manner in which Jacques Lacan suggests the Real is inaccessible. What we grasp as history (lower case) are merely fragments of the fuller History to which we are not privy.

Chapter Three will discuss instances of the alien in the science fiction of Shaw and White. It will consider critical approaches to the alien in science fiction, marking the relevance of these theories to Irish Studies. The notion of the Other is an important one when dealing with identity and social structure in Northern Ireland, and the thesis will draw from sociological studies of Northern Ireland, locating instances where discussion of the Other shades into science fiction terminology. It will discuss ways in which Shaw and White attempt to reconceptualise the alien, both authors drawing out the motivations of hostile alien Others and positing technologies that allow access to alien subjectivities. Shaw himself theorises about human encounters with the alien, describing what he calls the 'arachnid reaction', in which deep-seated fear of the unknown leads to a hostile reflex when encountering the alien Other. To counteract the

arachnid reaction, Shaw's work attempts to give an extra dimension to the alien Others in his fiction, with characters becoming more sympathetic to alien motives as the narrative progresses. This sympathy for the alien, however, is prone to anxieties surrounding absorption and the loss of personal identity in a multi-species environment. In White's case, the depiction of a universal translator is an attempt to bridge the divide between the human and the alien Other, augmented by what I call 'worlding technologies'. These technologies that blend human and alien subjectivities come in the shape of the built environment of the space-going hospital Sector General and the educator tapes that implant an alien personality in the mind of the user. The hybridity implied by these technologies is resisted by White through the author's categorisation system for alien Others, and the ambiguity, but eventual persistence of the category of the human within his system as an Earth-centric category. The chapter will draw from Patricia Monk's comprehensive study of the alien in magazine science fiction, as well as Sherryl Vint's work on alterity and the animal Other. It will discuss the work of Shaw and White in light of Monk's distinction between a fictional depiction of an alien that rests upon mere Otherness, a depiction that Monk considers an insufficient depiction of alterity, and one that effects a true OtherSelfness that Monk considers more desirable, because it recognises a self in the alien. In regard to the fear of absorption by the Other, the chapter will draw from postcolonial theory's discussion of hybridity, as well as the work of Colin Graham and other Irish Studies scholars, to suggest ways in which the notion of a composite identity is resisted in the last instance by both Shaw and White, a resistance that maps onto reaction to the emergence of the civil rights movement in Northern Ireland, and later, to the Good Friday Agreement.

The final chapter will discuss manifestations of the utopian form across the fiction of Shaw and White, reflecting on the repressive and redemptive elements of the utopian impulse in their work in the context of Irish Studies. As will be shown, the issue of utopia is never far from any discussion of the science fiction form, utopia constituting an important component in the formal structure and proto-history of the genre. Of the two authors, White has been most outspoken about the utopian gesture represented by his science fiction, framing his work as a pacifist subversion of the ultra-militaristic subgenre of the space opera. As a result, the content of Chapter Four is weighted towards White's fiction, but the utopian impulse in Shaw's work will also be examined

in regard to the utopian realism embodied by the logic of nuclear deterrence. The manifestation of the overview effect in the work of White, the pacific revelation of astronauts as they observe the Earth from space, will be considered for its repressive and redemptive utopian elements. The chapter will draw on the work of Tom Moylan on the critical utopia and its manifestation in science fiction, as well as work on utopia by Lyman Tower Sargent and Raymond Williams. The chapter will draw out the repressive and redemptive modalities of the utopian impulse, and apply them to White's attempts to negotiate violent conflict through his science fiction narratives. It will show consistencies between White's narrative stance and the state response to conflict in the era of the Troubles in Northern Ireland in the shape of internment and enhanced interrogation. Finally, it will consider the rejection of nationalism by both authors, and the suggestion of nuclear deterrent as a kind of realist utopian stance, that points to the prospect of world annihilation as a catalyst for world peace.

This thesis introduces two prolific Irish science fiction authors to the discipline of Irish Studies, revealing fragments in their texts that connect their fiction to the social structure in which they were created. Inevitably, science fiction reveals fragments of the social structure left hidden in other forms of narrative and, through the themes of technology, history, the alien and utopia, the thesis orders these pieces, in an attempt to stress the importance of Irish science fiction to the study of Irish modernity.

## Chapter One

### A Proximity to Technology

Of all the authors that could be defined as 'Irish science fiction', Bob Shaw and James White stand out as not only the most prolific, but also as the two authors that most self-consciously created science fiction, connected to its fan culture and consistently sought and succeeded to have their work published by magazines and publishing houses that specialised in the genre. This chapter will attempt to explain why, by first examining the history of development in Belfast and the implications for Belfast science fiction of an engineering culture developing in the region. The first section will take a broadly Marxist and historical approach, touching on historical accounts of the history of Ulster, taking in the Ulster Plantations, the founding of Belfast and the industrial development of the region. Defining Ulster as the site of the emergence of engineering culture in Ireland, it will attempt to explain how an ideologeme of progress through technology informed the emergence of a science fiction tradition in the region. It will then attempt to trace the ideologeme of progress through technology in their work, locating the transcoding of engineering culture into narratives whereby protagonists gain increasing technical mastery. It will then utilise the field of Science and Technology Studies in an attempt to discuss issues such as inhuman agency and the science-fictional sublime. Finally, it will discuss the appearance of a developmental schema in the work of both authors, and the doubt cast on such ways of viewing the world in the wake of Belfast being exposed to post-industrial realities.

#### **Belfast and Technology.**

If, as Fredric Jameson asserts, the only satisfactory meaning of the term modernity lies in its association with capitalism, then the history of modern Ulster begins with the plantations.<sup>61</sup> Following the defeat of the Earl of Tyrone Hugh O'Neill in the early seventeenth century, England attempted to solve what it perceived as the problem of recalcitrant Ulster, the least Anglicised and most rebellious of the four provinces of

---

<sup>61</sup> Fredric Jameson, *A Singular Modernity: Essay on the Ontology of the Present* (London: Verso, 2002) pp. 12-13.

Ireland, by planting the region with subjects loyal to the crown. Ireland began to be perceived by England both in developmental and missionary terms, Jonathan Bardon suggesting that the aim of the English was to bring ‘civility, order and the Protestant faith to the barbarous people there.’<sup>62</sup> Sir Francis Bacon spoke in favour of the Ulster plantation, suggesting a plan for its completion with reference to classical models of colonialism such as the Roman colonies of Europe, Africa and Asia. In 1603, Bacon stated of Ireland that:

We shall reclaim them from their barbarous manners...populate, plant and make civil all the provinces of that kingdom...as we are persuaded that it is one of the chief causes for which God hath brought us to the imperial crown of these Kingdoms.<sup>63</sup>

As the Ulster Plantation got underway, what became known as the Ulster Custom was established, institutionalising inequalities between Protestant and Catholic farmers in regard to fair rent and fixity of tenure. In addition, once a contract was terminated Protestant farmers were entitled to compensation for improvements made to the land, while Catholic tenants received no recompense.<sup>64</sup> Protestant farmers were given a lease-for-life on land on which they were tenants, while Catholic tenants became ‘tenants at will’, any improvements made to the land legally becoming the property of the landlord.<sup>65</sup>

Bacon’s intervention in Ulster was made not only with religious sectarianism in mind, but also in the spirit of a preoccupation with scientific method that was an important element in later Enlightenment thought. The Baconian ideal of progress based upon scientific inductions and the accumulation of data would influence not only the plantations, but also the means by which governance on the whole of Ireland was established by England. Following the English Civil War (1642-1651) and Oliver Cromwell’s subsequent campaign in Ireland, the physician-general in Cromwell’s army, William Petty, began to apply the scientific method to his post-war role as Surveyor

---

<sup>62</sup> Jonathan Bardon, *The Plantation of Ulster: The British Colonisation of the North of Ireland in the Seventeenth Century* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 2012).

<sup>63</sup> Patrick Carroll, *Science, Culture, and Modern State Formation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006) p. 68.

<sup>64</sup> Raymond Crotty, *Ireland in Crisis: A Study in Capitalist Colonial Underdevelopment* (Kerry: Brandon Books, 1986) p. 51.

<sup>65</sup> Theodore W. Allen, *The Invention of the White Race: Racial Oppression and Social Control* (London: Verso, 1994) p. 122.

General of the Lands, People, Trade and Revenue of Ireland. As a surveyor, Petty was charged with apportioning land in Ireland as payment to those who funded Cromwell's army. According to Patrick Carroll, Petty saw Ireland as a 'white paper', an ideal laboratory in which to conduct experiments with statecraft, a chamber in which to test theories of governance. While developing what became known as the Down Survey, Petty discussed his task in explicitly scientific terms, stating 'the experiment should be made upon the corpus vile of Ireland.'<sup>66</sup> According to Carroll:

As anatomy was practiced using instruments to intervene in the materiality of the body natural, so political anatomy was a 'practice upon the politic' that looked to forging instruments for the material manipulation of 'lands and hands.'<sup>67</sup>

Carroll suggests that the application of the scientific method to the political situation in Ireland was a combination of a culture of engine science, government and colonial ideology. Carroll draws the term 'engine science' from the debates between Thomas Hobbes and Francis Boyle in the 1660s. Hobbes proposed contemplation and reason as adequate means for scientific method, while Boyle conducted experiments using scientific devices, such as his pneumatic engine, designed to prove the existence of a vacuum by removing the oxygen from a chamber containing a soon-to-be-deceased bird. Hobbes dismissed Boyle's work as 'engine philosophy', and the method became associated with a discourse of improvement that was countered by conservatives such as Hobbes and Edmund Burke.<sup>68</sup>

For Carroll, the pneumatic engine became the central emblem of new science in Ireland and England. He states: 'Ulster, in all the dimensions of material engineering and the culturing of nature, early stood as a testament to the colonial project.'<sup>69</sup> Improvement through engine science underpinned the ideology of the planters in Ulster, exacerbating the divide between the self-professed modernisers and a supposedly backward native culture. In Jameson's terms, this notion of improvement through

---

<sup>66</sup> *Science, Culture, and Modern State Formation*, p. 56.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 58.

<sup>68</sup> Carroll briefly discusses this debate, but for a more definitive account see Steven Shapin and Simon Schaffer, *Leviathan and the Air Pump: Hobbes, Boyle and the Experimental Life* (Princeton University Press, 1989)

<sup>69</sup> *Science, Culture, and Modern State Formation*, p. 66.

engineering constitutes an ideologeme, defined as 'the smallest intelligible unit of the essentially antagonistic collective discourse of social classes.'<sup>70</sup> According to Jameson, an ideologeme is:

An amphibious formation, whose essential structural characteristic may be described as its possibility to manifest itself either as a pseudoidea—a conceptual or belief system, an abstract value, an opinion or prejudice—or as a protonarrative, a kind of ultimate class fantasy about the 'collective characters' which are the classes in opposition.<sup>71</sup>

The city of Belfast was to play an important part in the proliferation of this ideologeme, and also for the growth of engineering culture in Ireland.

Bardon discusses Belfast firmly within this paradigm, suggesting that the city was the first in Ireland to experience industrial development, with the values of the Enlightenment growing deep roots.<sup>72</sup> Writing on Belfast in medieval times, Bardon remarks that the site on which the city was built had previously been 'little more than a village clustering round a castle.' Sir Arthur Chichester set about building a town on the site after 1605, replacing the ruin of the medieval castle with a Jacobean mansion he named Belfast Castle.<sup>73</sup> As the Ulster Plantation intensified, Scottish and English settlers began to inhabit the town. Bardon states that by the middle of the seventeenth century, the Scottish had made Belfast 'the most dynamic centre of trade in Ulster and, possibly, the fastest-growing town in Ireland.'<sup>74</sup> By the early eighteenth century, Belfast had become the fourth port of Ireland, selling goods all over the world. The city almost exclusively contained Protestant colonists from Britain, one inhabitant boasting: 'we have not amongst us within the town above seven Papists.'<sup>75</sup> However, as the industrial revolution got underway, the demographics of the city began to shift, as Catholics from the surrounding countryside drifted towards Belfast for work in the growing industries.

Raymond Crotty sees the industrial development of Belfast as ensuring the underdevelopment of the rest of the island of Ireland as yarn produced in the south was

---

<sup>70</sup> *Political Unconscious*, p. 61.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 73.

<sup>72</sup> *Plantation of Ulster*, p. 333.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 63.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 308.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 310.



sent north for processing, and profits made in southern agriculture were invested in northern industry. The arrival of industry to Belfast also exacerbated tensions between Protestant and Catholic workers, as industry developed in the nineteenth century. According to Crotty:

An indigenous linen industry was solidly rooted in agronomic conditions of production; in institutional arrangements that recognised the prescriptive rights of armed, Protestant, garrison tenants in the land they worked, while denying similar rights to disarmed, garrisoned, Catholic tenants.<sup>76</sup>

Theodore W. Allen suggests that this was a manifestation of the Ulster Custom in a 'proletarian mode', with Catholics excluded from the network of relations that ensured privileged access to employment rather than land.<sup>77</sup>

By the nineteenth century, Ulster was leading the world in linen production, with a switch to steam-powered factory production decimating domestic rural linen production.<sup>78</sup> This transformation was also to have another important effect on Belfast industry in the shape of the emergence of an engineering industry. According to Crotty:

The factory production of linen cloth required different machines from those used in the British textile industry. It was necessary, in order to transform Ulster's cottage linen industry into a factory industry, to design and then to build machines suitable for processing flax into cloth. Hence the development of Belfast's engineering industry.<sup>79</sup>

The dredging of the Lagan by the Belfast Harbour Commission in 1845 enabled large ships to navigate the river, producing a colossal island of mud where the Belfast shipbuilding industry began. Again, Crotty suggests that while Belfast industry forged ahead, its innovations had detrimental effects on development in the south of Ireland. Crotty states that:

Abundant, deep-water dock space within rapidly growing Belfast, a labour force already accustomed to the discipline of factory production, and engineering skills acquired in the linen-machinery manufacturing industry; these were substantial attractions for the newly emerging industry of iron-shipbuilding. Traditional wooden-ship building yards, including Dublin's, could not easily adapt to the new technology.<sup>80</sup>

---

<sup>76</sup> *Ireland in Crisis*, p. 52.

<sup>77</sup> *The Invention of the White Race*, p. 122.

<sup>78</sup> *Plantation of Ulster*, p. 336.

<sup>79</sup> *Ireland in Crisis*, p. 52.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 53.

Free from the regulations and traditions of the craft of shipbuilding in Dublin, as well as from the urban sprawl of the capital, Belfast offered 'both the space and the freedom to apply newly acquired local engineering skills to the highly innovative business of building iron ships in the nineteenth century.' Close identification between a Protestant working class and their co-religionist managers ensured minimal class conflict or industrial strife in an industry in which employers desired flexibility from their workers.<sup>81</sup> In an Ireland with a majority Catholic population, fear of being overrun had a unifying effect on the Protestant workforce across the class divide.

The Harland and Wolff shipbuilding firm was established in 1861, for Crotty a monument to Catholic/Protestant antipathy in Ireland that emerged from, as well as fed into, social dissolution in Ireland. Formed by Edward Harland, who had been turned down twice for applications to construct a shipbuilding site in Liverpool, Harland and Wolff was to become by the end of the nineteenth century the 'most important single employer of male labour in Ulster.'<sup>82</sup> Crotty critiques the notion that the success of Harland and Wolff lay in personal initiative and the Protestant work ethic, suggesting that the fortunes of the company were highly dependent upon the privilege of a Protestant garrison class.<sup>83</sup> By the early twentieth century, Belfast had become an important port for the British Empire, third only to London and Liverpool. Bardon paints a picture of Belfast as a technologically advanced city at the forefront of modernity, and integrated with the mainstream of British industry. He writes that Belfast:

Had the world's biggest linen mill, ropeworks, tobacco factory, spiral-guided gasometer, tea machinery and fan-making works, aerated waters factory, dry dock, handkerchief factory and shipyard launching the largest man-made moving objects on earth.<sup>84</sup>

---

<sup>81</sup> *Ireland in Crisis*, p. 53.

<sup>82</sup> Jonathan Bardon, *A History of Ulster* (Belfast: Blackstaff Press, 1992) p. 339.

<sup>83</sup> *Ireland in Crisis*, p. 53.

<sup>84</sup> *Plantation of Ulster*, p. 336.

But Bardon also points to the divided nature of Belfast society in this period, with more killed in street battles in the city than in the Robert Emmet, Young Ireland, Fenian and Land War conflagrations combined.<sup>85</sup>

As Belfast industrialised, its fate becoming entwined with the fortunes of international capital, the Irish literary revival emerged in the south, a movement that would, together with the push for Home Rule, exacerbate tensions between Catholics and Protestants, as well as exaggerate the sense of a fixed binary between an industrialised north and a supposedly agrarian and undeveloped south.<sup>86</sup> Yeats in particular was influenced by the English writer William Morris, whose utopian novel *News From Nowhere* imagined a future England that had rejected industrialisation and existed as an anarchist, agrarian idyll. This anti-industrial attitude fed into revival discourse, the influence of Morris leading Yeats to envisage Ireland as a country relatively uncorrupted by the industrialisation of developed nations, and as such a nation that could be harnessed as a defender of ancient values and pre-capitalist forms. Elizabeth Cullingford suggests that for Yeats, 'Irish conditions of life, especially the agricultural basis of her economy and her relative poverty, meant that the pastoral idyll of *News From Nowhere* was actually within reach.'<sup>87</sup> The agrarian ideal of the revival jarred with industrialisation in the north. Bardon suggests that many Catholic nationalists perceived Belfast as an aberration, bemoaning the corrupting influence of industrialisation.<sup>88</sup> Although ostensibly non-political, many contributors to revival discourse, such as Pádraig Pearse, were to play a key role in the struggle for Irish independence. Pearse's polemical essay 'The Murder Machine', for example, presented the system of education established in Ireland by the English as a process akin to industrial manufacturing, with children as 'raw material' to be worked upon.<sup>89</sup>

---

<sup>85</sup> *Plantation of Ulster*, p. 337.

<sup>86</sup> This is a problematic binary highlighted by Richard Kirkland's recent work on the Northern Revival, but still persisted as a mythic structure from which both sides could draw from well into the foundation of both states. In addition, Kirkland still marks an opposition between the Northern and Southern Revivals, suggesting that the Northern Revival was more Catholic in orientation, but less willing to reject outright industrialised modernity than its Southern counterpart. See Richard Kirkland, *Cathal O'Byrne and the Northern Revival in Ireland 1890-1960* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2006) p. 13.

<sup>87</sup> Elizabeth Cullingford, *Yeats, Ireland and Fascism* (London: MacMillan Press, 1981) p.24.

<sup>88</sup> *History of Ulster*, p. 403.

<sup>89</sup> Pádraig Pearse, 'The Murder Machine' in *The Murder Machine and Other Essays* (Cork: Mercier Press, 1976) p. 8.

Industrial interests in the north seemed to agree that the ideals of the revival and those of industry could not be reconciled. As a nationalist movement in part informed by revival thinking gained ground, northern Protestants and Protestant-led industry in Belfast resisted the push to establish Home Rule for Ireland. When the Home Rule Bill of 1893 was put forward, Harland and Wolff considered moving its business to Liverpool. In the same year, the Belfast Chamber of Commerce voiced a concern that an Ireland severed from Empire would stall industrial progress in the city. Echoing the ideologue of development through engineering culture, they stated:

All our progress has been made under the Union. We were a small, insignificant town at the end of the last century, deeply disaffected and hostile to the British Empire. Since the Union and equal laws, we have been wedded to the Empire and made a progress second to none... why should we be driven by force to abandon the conditions which have led to that success?<sup>90</sup>

Bardon adds that another fear for northern Protestants lay in the breaking of a 'labour aristocracy' in northern industry, with the likely prospect that a Dublin government would move to address the employment disparity between Catholic and Protestant workers.<sup>91</sup> When the passage of a third Home Rule Bill was interrupted by World War I, Harland and Wolff became directly tied to the cause of British militarism, constructing ships for the war effort.<sup>92</sup> Northern Ireland was partitioned from the south in 1920. The shipping industry experienced a decline in the post-war period, Harland and Wolff necessarily diversifying into other engineering areas. The extension of the port at Queen's Island made the site ideal for the construction of aeroplanes, and with the prospect of another war with Germany likely, in 1936 Short Brothers moved from Rochdale to Belfast, a fifty percent stake taken by Harland and Wolff in the new company Short and Harland. Short and Harland began the aviation industry in Belfast, playing a key role in Britain's rearmament programme, building Sunderland Bombers, Hereford Bombers and Bristol Bombays, as well as Stirling Bombers once the war was underway.<sup>93</sup>

---

<sup>90</sup> *History of Ulster*, pp. 404-405.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 406. Bardon suggests that with a share of the population in the region of almost a quarter, Catholics were represented in employment in key industries at between 6 and 10 per cent.

<sup>92</sup> Alvin Jackson 'Irish Unionists and the Empire 1880-1920: Classes and Masses' in *An Irish Empire? Aspects of Ireland and the British Empire*, ed. Keith Jeffery (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996) p. 128.

<sup>93</sup> *History of Ulster*, p. 549, 567.

It was into this milieu that Shaw and White were born and, having established the terrain upon which both authors worked, this chapter will now turn to a discussion of how the texts of Shaw and White were informed by technological development in Northern Ireland. We have seen how identity in Belfast, particularly in the Protestant community, became inextricably linked to technologies such as shipbuilding and the aviation industry in the middle of the twentieth century, and to an ideologeme of progress through engineering culture. In the spirit of Jameson's idea of *combinatoire*, a non-causal relationship between variables with History as the 'absent cause', the preceding account of technological development in Northern Ireland should not be seen as enumerating the 'causes' of Northern Irish science fiction, but rather as an attempt to map out the material, objective, *a priori* conditions for the possibility of its emergence.<sup>94</sup> Jameson follows Louis Althusser's diagnosis of structural causality over expressive causality. Expressive causality suggests that all phenomena can be explained through reference to the economy, but structural causality points to the fact that all phenomena are relational, existing simultaneously in a structure. Althusser suggests that 'every "simple category" presupposes the existence of the structural whole of society.'<sup>95</sup> Althusser draws from Spinoza to suggest History as an 'absent cause', a phenomenon that resists symbolisation in the same manner that Jacques Lacan suggests of the Real, concluding that 'history is a process, without a subject.'<sup>96</sup> For Althusser and Jameson, the structural totality represents this absent cause of History, a totality that can never be fully grasped. Jameson's formulation of the political unconscious suggests that fragments of this totality can be detected in cultural artefacts. For Jameson, a literary text is a socially symbolic act, resolving contradictions and societal conflicts on an unconscious level, transmitting the ideologeme with which a society makes sense of its structure. In the case of Shaw and White, fragments of the structural totality in which they worked can be seen throughout their fiction. The science fiction of both authors is laden with technology, signifying a proximity to technology in their working lives, and as the study will show, a privileging of the engineer as the driver of development.

---

<sup>94</sup> *Political Unconscious*, pp. 125-136.

<sup>95</sup> Louis Althusser, *For Marx* trans. Ben Brewster (London: Penguin, 1969) p. 196.

<sup>96</sup> Louis Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy* trans. Ben Brewster (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971) p. 122.

Patrick Maume detects a sense of the anticipation of the genuinely new in the work of Shaw and White, as well as an identification with British industrial culture, with the suggestion that their writings echo 'an era when it could plausibly be supposed that at some point in the future spaceships might be manufactured by Nissan-Vickers of Birkenhead.'<sup>97</sup> Jameson suggests that progress, modernity and technology are always connected, modernity operating as a narrative device that chronologises the present. For Jameson, the trope of modernity always contains a libidinal charge, a joyous anticipation of 'possessing the future.'<sup>98</sup> Crotty suggests that, after partition, the southern state continued the cycle of underdevelopment initiated when Belfast industrialised, confirming to northern Protestants that they were correct in resisting secession from the union with Britain, and the break with modernity that it implied.<sup>99</sup> The narrative device of modernity supposes endless novelty in its march of progress, a notion that connects to Ernst Bloch's idea of the *novum*, an innovation that makes us conscious of the fact that history is contingent, and can be transformed through human effort.<sup>100</sup> Darko Suvin applies the idea of the *novum* to the genre of science fiction, suggesting that the form utilises cognitive estrangement, inciting the reader to reflect on the contrast between their own world and the estranged world of the text. With a supposedly backward and agrarian neighbour to the south, Belfast was free to pursue the libidinal charge of modernity, chronologising its own fortunes against those of the southern state. As the historian Maurice Coakley writes:

Northern Ireland's rulers saw their state as a centre of advancement; not only was it the most industrialised part of Ireland, but it was an integral part of the United Kingdom and the British Empire, the heart of industrial progress and global civilisation. In separating from the rest of the island they had escaped not only the threat of Roman domination, but also economic backwardness.<sup>101</sup>

In *Colonialism and the Emergence of Science Fiction*, John Rieder suggests that an industrialised economy such as that drawn out in this opening section is the prerequisite for the emergence of the science fiction form. Rieder writes:

---

<sup>97</sup> *No Country For Old Men*, p. 211.

<sup>98</sup> *Singular Modernity*, pp. 32-35.

<sup>99</sup> *Ireland in Crisis*, p. 10.

<sup>100</sup> Ernst Bloch, *The Principle of Hope* trans. Neville Plaice, Stephen Plaice and Paul Knight (1959) (Boston: MIT Press, 1996) p. 200.

<sup>101</sup> Maurice Coakley, *Ireland in the World Order: A History of Uneven Development* (London: Pluto Press, 2012) p. 179.

The industrial economy demands a sector of the work force that has some scientific training, and the members of this middle class, technocratic-managerial milieu, or, perhaps more likely, the younger readers whose interests and education tended to direct them towards this milieu, seem likely to have comprised an important, perhaps even dominant, element in the reading audience of early science fiction. Science fiction's fascination with technological innovation surely would make sense in this connection.<sup>102</sup>

With this in mind, it is perhaps unsurprising that a small science fiction scene would emerge in the city of Belfast in the middle of the twentieth-century, initiated by members of this technocratic-managerial milieu.

This section has outlined the trajectory of Belfast commonly narrated by historians as a journey from wasteland to industrial titan, connecting this history to the emergence of a science fiction form in the region. Having prepared the terrain, the next sections will turn to the fiction of Shaw and White. As mentioned in the introduction to the chapter, our discussion of the authors will begin with a small amount of relevant biographical detail as, not only as an introduction to the authors in question, but as a demonstration of where they were positioned in the structural totality.

### **Bob Shaw and Engineering Culture.**

The introduction has already outlined Shaw's framing of science fiction as a means by which to escape the narrow sensibilities of industrial Belfast, but Shaw's own fiction utilises his quotidian reality as an engineer as material for speculations grounded in Belfast engineering culture. Shaw's science fiction novels are a socially symbolic act, a response to the development of industry in Northern Ireland that becomes transcoded into his science fictional narratives. The central characters in Shaw's novels are engineers and machine fetishists, often employed in the aviation industry in which Shaw himself worked, such as Breton the 'gadgeteer' who runs an engineering consultancy in *The Two-Timers*, the aviation entrepreneur Alban Garrod in *Other Days*, *Other Eyes* or Tarrant in *Medusa's Children* who is said to have 'a fondness for

---

<sup>102</sup> John Rieder, *Colonialism and the Emergence of Science Fiction* (Middletown CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2008) p. 27.

machines, whatever their purpose.’<sup>103</sup> Shaw’s ‘everymen’ are the typical autonomous individual subjects of bourgeois ideology, self-reliant and bearing what Richard Kirkland refers to as ‘a narrative of wisdom gained through the accumulation of experience.’<sup>104</sup>

In *Ground Zero Man*, Lucas Hutchman is a designer in the weapons industry who tinkers with personal projects independent of the ‘job that pays his salary.’ Shaw’s own role as a designer is reflected in the distinction Hutchman makes between a practical engineer with the ability to build a piece of technology, and those who simply produce blueprints. Shaw states that:

Some people had the blessed knack of controlling their circumstances and mastering materials—others, like Hutchman, had to be content with building beautiful edifices in logic, knowing all the while they were incapable of translating them into actuality.<sup>105</sup>

However, when Hutchman alights upon a theory for an ‘anti-bomb’ machine that he hopes will establish world peace, his narrative trajectory involves a transformation from a mere designer to a practical constructor of functional hardware. Stableford suggests that Shaw’s hallmark is the tension between the extraordinary and the mundane, and *Ground Zero Man* contrasts Hutchman’s inner world of experiment with his home life. Shaw shows Hutchman’s domestic existence: a troubled marriage, with a wife suspicious of the late hours he keeps while attempting to build his machine.<sup>106</sup> Shaw describes the technical considerations that pass through Hutchman’s mind as he sits at the breakfast table, staring upon the face of his daydreaming son:

Hutchman felt himself slide into a depressed unease as he considered the practical difficulties. His first requirement was for enough unstable praseodymium to produce, say, fifty millilitres of cestron. He would also need a crystal of praseodymium for use in the laser’s exciting circuitry, and the circuits themselves were going to be difficult to build. Hutchman had a little practical experience in electronics, but a machine to handle frequencies

---

<sup>103</sup> Bob Shaw, *The Two-Timers* (1968) (New York: Ace Books, 1979) p. 34; Bob Shaw, *Other Days, Other Eyes* (1972) (London: Pan, 1978); Bob Shaw, *Medusa’s Children* (1977) (London: Gollancz, 1987) p. 18.

<sup>104</sup> Richard Kirkland, *Identity Parades: Northern Irish Culture and Dissident Subjects* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2002) p. 122.

<sup>105</sup> Bob Shaw, *Ground Zero Man* (New York: Avon Books, 1971) p. 35.

<sup>106</sup> *Algebraic Fantasies*, p. 28.



in the  $6 \times 10^8$  Hertz bracket would employ tubular waveguides in place of wires. It's going to look more like a piece of plumbing.<sup>107</sup>

Hutchman succeeds in building his machine, and he holds the nuclear powers of the Earth to ransom, urging them to dismantle their nuclear arsenals under threat of their simultaneous and wholesale destruction. Here we see an instance of the ideologeme of progress through technology, with Hutchman pushing against the quotidian reality of nuclear proliferation through technological development. The narrative closure of the novel, which serves to thwart Hutchman's intentions, will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Four in the context of the utopian element of nuclear deterrent arguments.

The same ideologeme of progress through technological development can be seen elsewhere in Shaw's fiction. In Shaw's first novel, *Night Walk*, Sam Tallon is part of a network of political activists called the Block who are attempting to reunify the breakaway planet of Emm Luther with Earth. Having been blinded when arrested by the Emm Lutheran authorities, Tallon meets fellow Block members in the dreaded political prison the Pavilion, and begins to work towards a technological solution to his lack of sight. Technology and engineering culture are depicted as an important part of a prisoner's existence, with experimental work being carried out by prisoners in the workshop of the rehabilitation centre. In order to navigate the corridors of the jail, another blind prisoner, the doctor Logan Winfield, is constructing a sonar torch, with the help of the 'compulsive gadgeteer', Ed Hogarth. The doctor explains the technical workings of the torch to Tallon in detail, telling him that the device:

...generated a narrow beam of inaudible high-frequency sound and had a receiver to pick up the echoes; an electronic device combined the outgoing and returning sounds. The idea was that the sound generator would sweep repeatedly from about 80 to 40 kilocycles a second, so that any instant the outgoing signal would be at a slightly lower frequency than any of the echoes. Combining the two would produce a beat frequency proportional to the distance of any object in the torch's beam and thus allow a blind man to build up a picture of his surroundings.<sup>108</sup>

Shaw describes Winfield's method of establishing a theory for the device as a mixture between original work and material remembered from 'technomedical' journals. Even though Winfield's area of expertise is medicine, he is still adept at overseeing the

---

<sup>107</sup> *Ground Zero Man*, p. 31.

<sup>108</sup> Bob Shaw, *Night Walk* (1967) (London: New English Library, 1970) p. 28.

construction of a complex piece of technology, and evidently steeped in engineering culture.

For his part, Tallon is described as ‘an electronics expert’ by Winfield, but insists that having a degree in the subject does not necessarily make one deserving of that title. However, Tallon also proves himself a technological innovator when he conceives of a plan for restoring his sight. He asks Winfield if they could get access to two ‘peanut-size’ television cameras ‘used for bugging people’s apartments’, explaining that, since their optic nerves are still intact ‘it’s only a matter of converting the camera output to the right sort of signal and feeding it into the nerve endings.’ Tallon outlines the materials he needs, such as ‘microminiature’ components, access to appropriate journals, and the installation of an assembly robot in the workshop to put together the components. As the project develops, Shaw describes Tallon experiencing layers of his personality falling away, until he approaches a younger self whose only concern was science.<sup>109</sup> Shaw writes:

A younger Sam Tallon emerged, one who had been determined to carve out a career in domain physics...the contentment Tallon experienced was so profound, he began to suspect that a subconscious drive toward it had been his real motivation for initiating the artificial-eye project—not the desire to regain his own sight or help Winfield, but a powerful need to re-create himself as he was.<sup>110</sup>

Having spent time as a space traveller and political agitator, Tallon’s true self is revealed as an engineer, an inventor ‘wholly committed to the intellectual adventure’ that experimenting with the construction of artificial eyes entails. Tallon uses the technology to escape the Pavilion. Later in the novel, while standing on a train platform, he admires the ingenuity of the Emm Lutheran train system, Shaw describing the train as ‘a device whose simplicity pleased the engineer in Tallon.’<sup>111</sup> In *Night Walk*, the Pavilion’s inmates are steeped in engineering culture, the prison becoming a hotbed of technological innovation. This atmosphere allows Tallon to improve himself physically by restoring his sight, and to access his true self, a talented and inquisitive engineer.

---

<sup>109</sup> *Ground Zero Man.*, pp. 32-35.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 34.

<sup>111</sup> *Night Walk*, p. 60.

Shaw's fiction spins upwards from the mundane ground of Belfast engineering culture, escaping to a contingent reality of unknown quantities. His engineers and mathematicians are destined for greater things, increasing their technical proficiency over the course of the narrative. Hutchman daydreams about the technical details with which to bring about world peace, while Tallon locates his authentic identity through an engagement with technology and engineering. Both typify the ideologeme of progress through a proximity to technology, the minimal unit of ideology underpinning class relations as they developed in Northern Ireland. Following a brief introduction, the next section will attempt to locate similar tendencies within the fiction of Shaw's fellow Belfast native James White.

### **James White and Engineering Culture.**

White's fiction predates his employment at Shorts, but his early work depicts the human relationship with technology and engages in extrapolation regarding its future development, with protagonists gradually improving their technical skill over the course of the narrative in a similar way to the characters found in the work of Shaw, expressing the same ideologeme of progress through technological development that transcodes engineering culture into a science fictional mode. A feature on White in *The Belfast Telegraph* in 1966, makes the link between the writer's fiction, technology and engineering culture clear, suggesting that 'working in Short's he finds he can put his hands on technical journals to give him a bit of background information.'<sup>112</sup> Like Shaw, White grounds his speculations on technology and the future in the mundane world of Belfast engineering culture. For instance O'Mara, the Chief Psychologist from the Sector General series, joins the hospital as a structural engineer.<sup>113</sup> The narrative of White's first novel, *The Secret Visitors*, contains numerous speculative technological artefacts, including a recording device that can determine the truth of a statement, a cloak containing a 'refraction field' that renders the wearer invisible, and a helmet that enables the user to speak an alien language.<sup>114</sup> In White's second novel, *Second Ending*, Ross, a medical doctor who wakes from a deep sleep artificially-induced with a technique called hibernation anaesthesia finds that a nuclear cataclysm has rendered

---

<sup>112</sup> 'Strange Things Happen When Jim White Writes', *The Belfast Telegraph*, 7/3/1966. Bob Shaw wrote for *The Belfast Telegraph* during the period when this article appeared, but it is unclear whether the article was written by Shaw for his friend.

<sup>113</sup> *The Genocidal Healer* (New York: Del Rey, 1991) p. 58.

<sup>114</sup> James White, *The Secret Visitors* (1957) (London: New English Library, 1971) p. 36, 57, 58.

him the last man on Earth. Ross's only companions are robot helpers and, despite a lack of experience or technical knowledge, he studies their workings and sets about building himself an army of robots to search for fellow survivors.

Ross's engineering project becomes all-consuming; White describes Ross lecturing the robots:

Turning pages and jabbing his finger at sketches which he had not meant to discuss at this early stage, and babbling about submarines, helicopters, Archimedes and jet engines... In a disjointed and nearly incoherent way Ross was outlining what was to be his life's work, the goal which would keep him sane and make him as happy as it was possible to be in his position, and suddenly he could no longer keep his hopes bottled up.<sup>115</sup>

Just as Shaw's Tallon develops his skill as an engineer to regain his sight, Ross's quest to find human companionship leads him to become an expert in cybernetics. Ross becomes frustrated, the robots unable to understand the complex schematics he has drawn up, but soon the robots begin to work on each other, forming an information network that enables the sharing of data, and allowing them to quickly outstrip Ross in intelligence.<sup>116</sup> White writes that 'time and time again he had started arguments with them on such obtuse subjects as genetics, the continuous creation theory and moral philosophy, only to be confounded every time.'<sup>117</sup> Ross's engineering has improved his environment to the point of ensuring his own obsolescence. Through the use of the technique of hibernation anaesthesia, Ross is afforded a kind of immortality, witnessing the effects that his initial engineering work has had on the Earth over vast epochs. Ross contemplates the resulting growth of new plants across the Earth, and White suggests that he is 'not being conceited to think of it as his own, because he had found it a blackened corpse and he had brought life to it again.'<sup>118</sup> White hailed from a Catholic background, but in this instance his writing echoes Kirkland's assertion regarding Protestant writing on Belfast, suggesting that it 'returns obsessively to the mud and the swamps from which the modern city was claimed'.<sup>119</sup>

---

<sup>115</sup> James White, *Second Ending* (New York: Ace Books, 1962) p. 45.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 46.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 83.

<sup>118</sup> *Second Ending*, p. 73.

<sup>119</sup> *Cathal O' Byrne and the Northern Revival in Ireland*, p. 6.

At the close of White's narrative, the sun boils away the seas of the Earth, but while Ross is in hibernation, his robot creations locate a suitable planet for his survival, depositing him there with a race of peaceful and human-like aliens that White intimates could be suitable sexual partners for Ross.<sup>120</sup> Although Ross is trained as a medical doctor, his technical knowledge grows to such an extent that his creations locate and travel to a planet suitable for him to live on, allowing him to escape the destruction of the Earth. Once more, mundane engineering leads to progress and improvement, and in this case the implied preservation of the human race. The narrative trajectory of Ross is one of constant improvement through technology and transmits the ideologeme of progress through development.

Elsewhere in his fiction, White directly references Ulster industry. In *The Watch Below*, the conversation between crew members as they try to save the occupants of *The Gulf Trader* by creating pockets of air for the survivors, lets White show his knowledge of the structure of ships. White hands a key part of the exposition to one of the mates, who states:

The intercostals between the tank floor and the actual hull structure—it's like a single-layer egg-box running the actual length of the ship, with the walls in each division containing a three-foot hole to allow access for cleaning out the bilges and for the purpose of saving weight. The upper edges of these holes are about a foot from the roof of their compartments so that there could be a considerable volume of gas trapped there if necessary.<sup>121</sup>

The aviation industry is referenced in White's 1971 novel *Tomorrow is Too Far*, set in the Hart-Ewing aerospace company. In White's narrative, Carson, the chief security officer at Hart-Ewing, is investigating a possible conspiracy at the plant. When Carson finds notes for a space-drive project, White parodies his own and Shaw's writing efforts, the security guard pondering about whether he has just simply stumbled across 'some engineer author's notes for a science-fiction story.'<sup>122</sup> Like Hutchman in Shaw's *Ground Zero Man*, Carson is well aware of the division of labour involved in producing a piece of technology, and as a result is afforded a privileged position in the narrative. He reasons that:

---

<sup>120</sup> *Second Ending*, p. 100.

<sup>121</sup> James White, *The Watch Below* (1966) (London: Corgi, 1967) p. 46.

<sup>122</sup> James White, *Tomorrow is Too Far* (1971) (London: Corgi Books, 1973) p. 28.

At the top were the men responsible for the original idea or for developing someone else's original idea. In the middle were the people who helped break down the idea into large numbers of detailed drawings and the engineers who decided how best to convert these drawings into three dimensional metal on someone's bench. In this age of over-specialisation it was not expected that the man who produced the detailed hardware should understand, or even care, about the part his particular chunk of hardware played in the project as a whole.<sup>123</sup>

In order to uncover the conspiracy at the plant, Carson decides that he must piece together the project by interviewing the 'middle men' whose job it is to make sure the pieces fit together. While he reasons that those involved in assembling the piece of technology at the heart of the conspiracy would likely not be aware of the shape of the entire piece, with his own investigation, he attempts to grasp its totality by piecing together the involvement of each department. White also uses the narrative to critique the industry and general company practice, Carson's investigation leading him to the clerical supervisor Herbie Patterson, who tells him:

To understand what has been going on you would really have had to observe the temporary bouts of insanity which periodically overtake our masters—some of our masters, that is. The ones who spend fifty-one weeks in the year counting pennies and one week chucking thousands down the drain!<sup>124</sup>

At the module assembly and inspection area, Hutchman discovers that defective machine parts are not discarded, but diverted to other parts of the business. He surmises that the high level of defective parts produced is in fact part of the conspiracy, the parts diverted to supply the covert project.<sup>125</sup>

---

<sup>123</sup> *Tomorrow is Too Far*, p. 37.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 39. Shaw's perspective on engineering culture also allows him to critique the aircraft industry's attitude to safety in *Night Walk*. Tallon meditates on aircraft design on Emm Luther and concludes that: 'The civil aircraft were large, but carried comparatively small payloads owing to governmental regulations controlling their design. The fuselages were heavily armoured, and the wings were inefficient by Earth standards, because they carried the complete power, fuel, and control systems. In the event of a crash landing the wings, with their deadly fuel load were shed by explosive bolts. The planetary government had made flying safe on Emm Luther, regardless of economics, and in that respect had earned Tallon's reluctant approval. He wished the Temporal Moderator would display such good sense in the staffing of governmental agencies.' (p. 20); the same *bête noire* regarding aircraft safety is referenced in *Other Days, Other Eyes*. As Garrod witnesses the emergency landing of a plane, Shaw tells us that '...the Aurora shed its wings with their deadly load of fuel, allowing the fuselage to slither and skid ahead like a javelin thrown on a frozen lake.' (p. 13)

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 40.

Like Ross in *Second Ending*, Carson's investigation carries him on a narrative trajectory of increasing technical competence. The security guard works on the case in between handling routine paperwork, processing parking applications and security clearances, but Carson's proximity to aviation technology at Hart-Ewing has afforded him a foundation of technical knowledge that he builds upon over the course of his enquiries, allowing him to piece together the totality of the conspiracy. Having joined a local air club in order to track the movements of the apparently imbecilic pilot John Pebbles, Carson's first time in a cockpit results in the revelation that 'he did in fact know about dihedral, incidence, angles of attack, effect of controls and the theory of flight generally.'<sup>126</sup> The flying instructor recognises Carson's familiarity with aircraft and allows him to take over the controls during his first flight, and Carson quickly becomes adept at flying. White narrates a later flight with specialised jargon such as 'set trim. Set throttle to fast tick-over and check friction nut tightness again.'<sup>127</sup> While investigating a photograph of Pebbles in the Hart-Ewing library, Carson tells the librarian that he is writing a journalistic article about second generation space-flight 'making it unnecessary for astronauts to be supermen', a cover story betraying the security guard's increasing technical knowledge, as well as signalling his future direction.<sup>128</sup> At the closure of the narrative, Carson uncovers a secret space program at Hart-Ewing, and following a standoff with the conspiracy's security chief, Donovan, he becomes involved with the initiative, first as an unwilling guinea pig, then as an eager participant. The project is investigating the effects of time dilation in space travel, Carson contemplating that 'the present-day time traveller had to be an astronaut as well.'<sup>129</sup> Carson becomes both these things, and scanning over the material from the investigation, contemplating the paradoxes of time travel into the past, he makes a breakthrough, realising that the regression of Pebbles's mind to that of a child is caused by the shock of the erasure of recent memories when travelling into the past, resulting in a full amnesia that gradually recedes. The novel closes with Carson being offered the chance to man missions to Ganymede and Mars.<sup>130</sup>

---

<sup>126</sup> *Tomorrow is Too Far*, p. 52.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 76.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 126.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 158.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 172

Carson's proximity to technology at Hart-Ewing allows him to interact with engineering culture, leading to a growing technical proficiency, his narrative trajectory taking him from security officer to skilled pilot, eventually leading to a breakthrough in time travel philosophy, and a career as an astronaut travelling to far-flung planets. Like Shaw, White extrapolates from Belfast engineering culture, positioning his protagonists as constantly progressing through engagement with technology, expressing the minimal unit of ideology, or the ideologeme underpinning class discourse in Northern Ireland. Ross's increasing knowledge of cybernetics leads to the creation of his robot army, with which he manipulates nature and preserves humanity. The mere proximity of advanced technology to Carson at the Hart-Ewing aerospace company, allows the security guard to manoeuvre himself to the forefront of space exploration.

### **Science and Technology Studies.**

Shaw and White both describe networked relationships between the human and the technological in their fiction, and in their work technology often achieves a kind of autonomy that blurs the line between structure and agency, an aspect particularly relevant to the discipline of S.T.S. and in particular the work of Bruno Latour. Latour is a sociologist notable for his work with, among others, the English sociologist John Law with whom he developed Actor-Network Theory (A.N.T.) in the mid-1980s. A.N.T. seeks to explain a social phenomenon by mapping it as a relation between entities in a network. This materialist semiology suggests that all entities in a society, or 'actors', are simply nodes in a heterogeneous network of relations. According to Law and Annemarie Mol, 'linguistic semiotics tells us that words give each other meaning. Material semiotics extends this insight beyond the linguistic and claims that entities give each other being: that they enact each other.'<sup>131</sup> For A.N.T., the term social structure is a verb rather than a noun, suggesting the structure of a society is in constant negotiation, repeatedly needing to enact itself.

---

<sup>131</sup> John Law and Annemarie Mol, 'The Actor-Enacted: Cumbrian Sheep in 2001', in *Material Agency: Towards a Non-Anthropocentric Approach* edited by Carl Knappet and Lambros Malafouris (Toronto: Springer, 2008) p.58.



Latour states that ‘whenever you want to define an agent or actor, you have to deploy its attributes or network’, following the trace of its relations in order to explain how it has been enrolled as a node in the network.<sup>132</sup> For Latour, an actor is a network, whether human or non-human, and is defined by its relationship with other actors in a chain of differentiation. A controversial aspect to A.N.T. is the suggestion that non-human actors possess agency. While protesting that A.N.T. does not stand for direct symmetry between human and non-human actors, Latour reasons that:

After all, there is hardly any doubt that kettles ‘boil’ water, knives [sic] ‘cut’ meat, baskets ‘hold’ provisions, hammers ‘hit’ nails on the head, rails ‘keep’ kids from falling, locks ‘close’ rooms against uninvited visitors, soap ‘takes’ the dirt away, schedules ‘list’ class sessions, price tags ‘help’ people calculating, and so on. Are those verbs not designating actions? How could the introduction of those humble, mundane, and ubiquitous activities bring any news to any social scientist?<sup>133</sup>

Within the frame of A.N.T. neither the machine nor the human is privileged. Humans exist in social networks consisting of not only other humans but also material objects. Just as human beings have their preferences, so do other materials such as machines, the presence of a machine in a network meaning that its attributes influence the way that the network operates. Latour states that ‘if these materials were to disappear then so too would what we sometimes call the social order.’<sup>134</sup> For Latour, technology is most visible as a network when it malfunctions. Latour points to the explosion of the Columbia space shuttle as evidence of the way objects ‘flip-flop’ their mode of existence, the shuttle existing one minute as the most complex human instrument ever constructed, the next its network revealed in the dispersion of debris raining over Texas.<sup>135</sup>

Work has been done to historicise Latour’s work as the moment of its inception recedes. For instance, Benjamin Noys provides a historical appraisal of Latour’s work, situating it as the limit of thought that neo-liberal ideology can countenance. Noys

---

<sup>132</sup> Bruno Latour, ‘Networks, Societies, Spheres: Reflections of an Actor-Network Theorist’, <<http://www.bruno-latour.fr/sites/default/files/121-CASTELLS-GB.pdf>> [accessed 20 August 2013].

<sup>133</sup> Bruno Latour, *Re-Assembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005) p. 71.

<sup>134</sup> John Law, ‘Notes on the Theory of the Actor-Network: Ordering, Strategy and Heterogeneity’ in *Systems Practice*, 5.4 (1992) 379-393.

<sup>135</sup> *Re-Assembling the Social*, p. 81.

contends that Latour's suggestion that his theory appraises capitalist society as an anthropologist would encounter a non-Western tribe is highly ideological, and historically tied to the moment of neo-liberalism.<sup>136</sup> For Noys, Latour's theory reflects and 'perhaps inadvertently valorises contemporary capitalism', his approach merely reflecting how network-capitalism functions rather than providing a critique of it.<sup>137</sup> Latour's work represents a turn from the critical towards the merely descriptive. Noys quotes Latour, who remarks that within his theory there is 'no attempt at nesting all relations within one hierarchical order.'<sup>138</sup> For Noys, Latour's refusal to recognise a hierarchical order is problematic, implying that Latour 'does not deny local hierarchies, but does deny that there can be any global hierarchy.'<sup>139</sup> In other words, Latour's framework denies the existence of capitalism as a totalising force, and for Noys this renders his account merely partial.

Taking Noys's critique into account, it is possible to see Latour's method as a non-hierarchical re-articulation of the structuralism of A.J. Greimas that Jameson, following Althusser, negotiates in *The Political Unconscious*. Jameson refits structuralism by drawing from Althusser's notion of structural causality as a critique of Hegel and Hegelian Marxism's manifestation in Stalinism as expressive causality, the insistence on the primacy of the forces of production in driving historical change. Jameson applies this to Greimas's work attempting to recuperate it for its methodological importance. In the essay 'The Interaction of Semiotic Constraints', Greimas outlined a way of reading texts structurally, placing their elements in a hierarchy using a rectangle.<sup>140</sup>

Like Noys's reading of Latour, Jameson sees Greimas's method as 'static and ahistorical', but he sees the 'conception of levels and their homology is posited as a

---

<sup>136</sup> Benjamin Noys, 'The Discreet Charm of Bruno Latour or the Critique of Anti-Critique' in *(Mis) Readings of Marx in Continental Philosophy* eds. Jernej Habjan and Jessica Whyte (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014); See also Benjamin Noys, 'The Density and Fragility of the World: Latour' in *The Persistence of the Negative: A Critique of Contemporary Continental Theory* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010) pp. 80-105.

<sup>137</sup> 'Discreet Charm of Bruno Latour', p. 195.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 197.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 197.

<sup>140</sup> A.J. Greimas and Francois Rastier, 'The Interaction of Semiotic Constraints', *Yale French Studies*, No. 41 (1968), pp. 86-105.

methodological starting point, a set of categories to be explored rather than as a forecast of the shape of the result of the analysis.<sup>141</sup> Jameson reads Greimas's method as suggesting itself as 'transhistorical', attempting to posit itself as being applicable to any society, regardless of economic, social and historical circumstance, the semiotic structures articulated seeming to map out what Greimas 'takes to be the logical structure of reality itself.'<sup>142</sup> Jameson suggests that such systems can be subsumed within the project of Marxist criticism, remarking that:

The limits of the latter can always be overcome, and their more positive findings retained, by a radical historicizing of their mental operations, such that not only the content of the analysis, but the very method itself, along with the analyst, then comes to be reckoned into the "text" or phenomenon to be explained.<sup>143</sup>

For Jameson, such systems show the ideological limits of the society that produces them, the conceptual points beyond which the ideology of that society cannot go. This 'ideological closure' can be used as a starting point for a dialectical criticism that attempts to think through the text's presences and absences to the political unconscious of the text. In this appraisal, Latour's method becomes a strategy of containment in which the totality of History can be partially grasped.

Clayton Pierce has attempted to critique education practice by combining Latour's work with Frankfurt School critiques of the technologisation of society, in particular those of Herbert Marcuse. In 'Some Social Implications of Modern Technology', Marcuse suggests that the emergence of a Protestant individualism setting every human against each other became the guarantor of conformity and standardisation for our current technological society. Marcuse suggests that mechanised mass production in turn replaces the role of the individual, with the result that creativity and individualism become unnecessary, resulting in a situation where 'society becomes everything which isn't human.'<sup>144</sup> Marcuse opposes the conformity of technological rationality to the critical rationality that must be preserved if a slide into fascist totalitarianism is to be avoided.

---

<sup>141</sup> *Political Unconscious*, p.31.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 31.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 32.

<sup>144</sup> Herbert Marcuse, 'Some Social Implications of Modern Technology' in *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader* ed. Andrew and Eike Gebhardt (London: Blackwell, 1978) p. 160.

Pierce combines Marcuse and Latour to argue for a new approach to science and technology education in schools, replacing the mimetic link between the subject and technocapitalism with what he calls 'healthier and more rational forms.' For Pierce, Marcuse intersects with Latour in that A.N.T. allows us to concentrate on reconstructing our relationship with science and technology by making explicit its connectedness to social and political life.<sup>145</sup> But whereas the project of Marcuse is based on political agency and the need to transform an instrumental worldview to an emancipatory one, Latour's theory sees the notion of agency as an aberration, unable as it is to account for all the mediators involved in political and social reality. For Latour, critical theory provides only a partial account of the collective heterogeneous reality that contains both human and nonhuman elements mobilised into agency by the collective environment.<sup>146</sup> For Pierce, what unites Latour and Marcuse is a shared interest in transforming scientific and technological values, and a call for an anthropological conception of humans in a technological society. Both agree that science and technology plays a mediating role in human subjectivity, muting resistance to technological rationality.

It is in this spirit that the next section will engage with the work of Latour, attempting to draw out interactions between the human and technology, pointing out the structural limitations of the networked view of Northern Ireland and technology.

### **Inhuman Agency in Shaw and White.**

For Latour, sociologists of science need to consider the thought experiments of science fiction in their accounts, and science fiction often echoes aspects of Latour's work in S.T.S. With this in mind, the discipline of S.T.S. becomes a useful tool with which to locate and explore the ways in which the human relationship with the objects of science and technology are articulated in science fiction. For instance, White's fiction displays numerous instances of agency being afforded to technological artefacts. In *Dark Inferno*, a radiation counter is described as being unhappy, while in *The Dream Millennium* a computer is said to be 'hoping for the best.'<sup>147</sup>

---

<sup>145</sup> Clayton Pierce, 'Democratizing Science and Technology with Latour and Marcuse' in *Marcuse's Challenge to Education* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2009) p. 144.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 146.

<sup>147</sup> James White, *Dark Inferno* (1972) (London: Corgi, 1974) p. 58; James White, *The Dream Millennium* (1974) (London: Corgi, 1976) pp. 11-12.

However, a more extensive illustration of the relationship between human and technological agency is evident in *Second Ending*. The novel begins with Ross's revival from artificial sleep, from the beginning his agency lost to a collection of material objects. A bust of Beethoven with the pre-recorded voice of his friend Dr. Pellew dictates and narrates Ross's return to consciousness. White describes the voice as 'like a record with a faulty groove, the same words droned out over and over and over', the commands of the technological object repeating until Ross complies with its orders. The chair Ross sits in forces him from a lying to a seated position, the voice demanding that he must eat. White writes that Ross 'did not feel hungry, but doing what he was told seemed to be the only way of shutting off that maddening, repetitious voice.'<sup>148</sup> As Ross explores his environment, its tidiness offers hope for the existence of a cleaning crew staffed by fellow humans. But a folder found in an office informs him of the 'servo mechanisms' that have been maintaining order in the underground shelter, led by the robot Ward Sister. Throughout the novel, the power dynamic between Ross and the Ward Sister constantly flip-flops, as their attributes shift; whenever the health of the doctor deteriorates, he loses his agency to the machine until he recovers. The nun-like robot tells Ross:

A Ward Sister of my type has two choices of behaviour towards human beings...Towards patients we are friendly but authoritative, because we are better qualified to know what will and will not benefit them...when a human being is mobile and shows no marked signs of physical malfunction we treat him as our superior.<sup>149</sup>

One of Ross's first acts after regaining consciousness is to climb from the underground shelter to the surface of the Earth, the cuts and bruises he receives in the endeavour enough to cede his agency to the robot. White writes that 'until each tiny cut was healed and the last square centimetre of scab dropped away, Ross's every order was ignored.'<sup>150</sup> When Ross is ill the robot refers to him as 'Mr Ross', but when he recovers, he becomes 'Sir' and can give the Ward Sister orders accordingly. White's extrapolation of the human relationship with technology depicts a sliding scale of

---

<sup>148</sup> *Second Ending*, pp. 1-8.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 30.

agency between the human and the inanimate, illustrating Latour's thesis that in a technologically advanced environment, human agency often defers to objects.

A dark side to this human/technology network is revealed when Ross inquires about his fellow humans in hibernation. The Ward Sister tells him that when they attempted to wake them, the patients panicked, their struggles with the machinery sufficiently frantic to cause themselves fatal internal damage. Ross becomes angry at the thought of the machines repeatedly waking and killing the sleeping humans, and begins to beat the robot Ward Sister repeatedly with a spanner. White's description of the attack blurs the line between the robot and the human, Ross's reaction a result of interpreting the actions of the Ward Sister as akin to human agency. White writes that the spanner:

...battered in one of the flush panels, bludgeoning through the mass of delicate surgical and medical gadgetry underneath. From the wound multi-coloured blood spurted as underlying drug containers shattered, and three syringes on extensible arms sprang out and sagged downwards. Ross swung again.<sup>151</sup>

Ross perceives the effect of his actions on the robot as akin to the opening of wounds and the letting of blood. Reflecting on the fact that a teenage girl was one of the victims of the robot, he states 'an eye for an eye...and for a girl's life a dead mass of scrap iron.'<sup>152</sup> To end the assault, the Ward Sister knocks Ross unconscious by spraying an anaesthetic gas. When he awakens, a repair robot works on the Ward Sister, White writing that the appearance of its open panels and inner circuitry seeming 'vaguely indecent' to Ross.<sup>153</sup> Ross attacks the Ward Sister to seek retribution for the death of his fellow humans, interpreting automatic programming as agency. As Ross develops more robots, this confusion grows, Ross becoming increasingly threatened by the intelligence of his creations.

White's narrative registers an anxiety to combat this ambiguity, Ross attempting to enforce a strict demarcation between his own being and that of the machines. White

---

<sup>151</sup> *Second Ending*, pp. 38-39.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 39.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 39.

writes that, 'he had to remind himself forcefully that they were only tools. Complex, of course, but still only gadgets designed for his use or convenience. The idea was to use, not try to compete against, the things.'<sup>154</sup> Ross eventually develops positive feelings toward the Ward Sister, but still finds it difficult to maintain the division between the human and the machine, an ambiguity that continues to propel the narrative. When the robot nurse shows concern for Ross, White writes that 'the fact that her concern for him was an artificial, built-in feeling did not seem to matter.'<sup>155</sup> The relationship between Ross and the sister is symbiotic. The robot sister's reason for existence and source of pleasure extends from her ability to keep Ross alive; when the possibility of Ross's death is discussed, he detects a kind of emotion in her voice, White writing that 'in her emotionless, mechanical fashion Sister was frightened too.'<sup>156</sup> When Ross requests to be put into artificial sleep again, prolonging his own life also extends the life of the robots by increasing the period in which they have the purpose of protecting him, and so increases the pleasure that they experience. But the Ward Sister insists on waking Ross intermittently, and when questioned on the issue, tells him 'we feel that you are entitled to some pleasure too', an action that Ross interprets as evidence that the robot is becoming more human. White writes that:

Ross stared at the gleaming, ovoid body with its one fixed and one rotating lens and wondered incredulously what had become of the robot which had clicked irritatingly at him and droned, 'I am not programmed to volunteer information.' This robot had developed intelligence to the point where she was being troubled by something remarkably like a conscience! She had become so human a personality that Ross had forgotten when he had stopped thinking of her as 'it'. Suddenly he felt ashamed.<sup>157</sup>

Ross has come to view the Ward Sister as 'a near-human servant and friend', rather than 'an involved piece of machinery.' As centuries pass between his revivifications, Ross experiences grief as the machine slows down, making him feel scared and lonely.<sup>158</sup> Ross's attempts to situate the Ward Sister as a mere tool fail, its attributes convincing him of its agency and sentimentality, its decline into obsolescence causing him a very real human grief.

---

<sup>154</sup> *Second Ending*, p. 49.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 48.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 63.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 82.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 74.

Latour's thesis that in a society structured as a heterogeneous network of relations between humans and objects, humans often lose their agency to inanimate objects is expressed in White's *Second Ending*. Ross's agency operates on a sliding scale, deferring to the Ward Sister in the event of illness. Ross resists this fact in numerous ways, exacting retribution for deaths caused by programming rather than by intention. Ross's attempts to construct a strict demarcation between himself and the non-human are subverted by his symbiotic relationship with the Ward Sister, which he cannot avoid perceiving in human terms. This also points to the critique of technology by Marcuse, with an ambiguity surrounding the role of technology, an anxiety around the ceding of agency to technology that interacts dialectically with the role of Ross as the engineer of progress through technological development.

A similar anxiety is evident in the work of Shaw. In Shaw's *Orbitsville Judgement*, Jim Nicklin is a librarian and repairman in the town of Orangefield, a low-tech community modelled on American towns of the early twentieth century. Nicklin joins a travelling religious revival group led by the preacher Corey Montane, and when the group is attacked, Nicklin defends the party with a technologically advanced rifle, designed to appear old-fashioned, with a wooden stock, and a conventional trigger. The rifle produces no recoil when fired, has a computerised smartscope that ensures high accuracy, and rather than bullets, the weapon unleashes 'bolts of ultralaser energy.'<sup>159</sup> Nicklin's agency becomes impaired when he holds this sophisticated technology in his hand. In a passage that also positions Nicklin as one of Shaw's stereotypical gadgeteers, Shaw writes that:

The machine-lover, the game player in Nicklin took immediate control of his mind and body. He moved the intersection of the cross-hairs on to the nearer of the crawling figures and squeezed the trigger. A breath of heat touched his forehead and the figure abruptly lost its human outlines, becoming a shapeless smear which was further blurred by swirls of luminous pink vapour. A second later, its arrival delayed by the intervening two hundred metres, came a dull, soggy thud-thud.<sup>160</sup>

This symbiosis between Nicklin and the weapon leads to him killing a retreating man, the technology appearing to act ahead of human intention, as it positions itself on the

---

<sup>159</sup> Bob Shaw, *Orbitsville Judgement* (1990) (London: Orbit, 1992) p. 121.

<sup>160</sup> *Orbitsville Judgement*, p. 133.



next target. Shaw describes Nicklin as ‘under the spell of the smartscope’, as another foe falls within his ‘inhuman view’ and is dispensed with. Shaw writes that:

The knowledge that he had heard a man’s internal organs and torso exploding would have appalled Nicklin had he been in a normal state of mind, but the game was on—and the cross-hairs were already centring [sic] themselves on the second figure.<sup>161</sup>

This dehumanisation speaks of the anxiety of Marcuse on the subject of a technological rationality that supersedes critical evaluation. The dehumanisation is extended to Nicklin’s victims, the destruction of the target’s ribcage viewed as ‘snapping wide open like some spring loaded mechanical device.’<sup>162</sup> In *Orbitsville Judgement*, the technology/human network causes Nicklin to act in ways that transgress his personal moral boundaries. Later in the novel, having repaired the starship *Tara*, Nicklin is described moving through its interior, his relationship with the technological artefact reaching preternatural proportions. Shaw tells us that Nicklin moved:

...towards the prow of the ship with effortless speed, his progress aided by the fact that the engineered environment, so bewildering to others, was totally familiar to him. He knew every cleat, gusset plate and fastener so well that he could have located himself simply by remembering the irregularities in certain welds.<sup>163</sup>

Nicklin’s interaction with technology blurs the line between agency in the network of human and non-human elements. The attributes of the rifle deploy attributes in Nicklin that he finds morally reprehensible. His networked relationship to technology is highlighted by his almost-telepathic ability to navigate his way through the ship he has repaired.

Through Nicklin, Shaw’s narrative suggests that human relationships, embedded as they are in a network of heterogeneous relations of which technology is a part, can be profoundly altered with the introduction of a novel piece of technology to that network. While the example of Nicklin demonstrates this through his personal relationship with the advanced rifle, Shaw’s novel *Other Days, Other Eyes* extends the

---

<sup>161</sup> *Orbitsville Judgement*, p. 134.

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 134.

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 196.

implications to society. Stableford positions the novel as 'one of a bare handful of science fiction novels which convincingly demonstrates the power that technology has for transforming social relations.'<sup>164</sup> The novel expands on Shaw's fictional technology of 'slow glass', introduced with the publication of the story 'Light of Other Days' in the American science fiction magazine *Analog* in 1966. Slow glass is a kind of glass in which the speed of light is reduced to such an extent that events occurring within its radius are replayed many years later. In 'Light of Other Days', a bickering married couple meet the owner of a slow glass farm, 'a farm of windows', that register an idyllic landscape to be enjoyed as a decorative feature at a later date by the modern city dweller.<sup>165</sup> The couple choose a pane of glass described as 'ten years thick', but as the farmer is preparing their purchase they realise that the wife of the farmer that appears at the window of the farmhouse is in fact an effect of slow glass. The farmer goes on to tell them that his wife and child were killed in a hit and run car accident, the stored images of his loved ones acting as a consolation.<sup>166</sup> The attributes of slow glass intersect with the attributes of the countryside; scenes perceived as beautiful can be stored and placed in an urban environment. The technology also intersects with personal relationships, the moving image of a loved one through a pane of slow glass more lifelike and consolatory to the farmer than a photograph.

Shaw's second slow glass story, 'Burden of Proof', further extends the exploration of the impact of the slow glass *novum* on the network by applying the technology to matters of law. The story centres on a Judge Kenneth Harpur, adjudicator in a double murder and rape case made controversial by the presence of a five-year thick piece of slow glass at the scene of the crime. More than Shaw's earlier story, 'Burden of Proof' brings slow glass more directly into contact with public institutions and the built environment. A miserable rainy day in June is contrasted with the piece of glass blazing sunlight into a dank basement. Harpur had sent the accused in the case, Ewan Raddall, to the electric chair, but five years later the glass is being carefully monitored for final proof of Raddall's guilt.<sup>167</sup> Although Harpur is anxious to know whether his judgement was correct, he had been a vocal opponent to a proposed 'wait-

---

<sup>164</sup> *Algebraic Fantasies*, p. 35.

<sup>165</sup> *Other Days, Other Eyes*, p. 25.

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 33.

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 47-50.

and-see' policy in cases where crimes were 'witnessed' by slow glass, suggesting that fifty-year thick panels of slow glass would become standard criminal equipment should such a position be given any legal standing. Although Harpur professes a belief in the rigidity of the law despite the existence of slow glass, when Raddall's guilt is confirmed, the story ends with the line 'Harpur set the phone down with his eyes tight-closed, waited for peace.'<sup>168</sup> Whereas in 'Light of Other Days', slow glass is depicted as a kind of enhanced photograph which serves to remind the farmer of lost loved ones, 'Burden of Proof' amplifies the effects deployed by the *novum*, implying that slow glass is a technology that has the power to undermine legal institutions.

*Other Days, Other Eyes* further extends the implications of slow glass technology. In the novel, Shaw details the invention of slow glass by Alban Garrod, a scientist and aviation entrepreneur, who realises that the extra tough glass that he has developed is causing pilots to crash because of a delay in light passing through it. Shaw signals the power of slow glass early on in the novel, when he depicts Garrod using a piece of slow glass to hold the setting sun in his hand.<sup>169</sup>

Across the narrative of the novel, Shaw further expands the network that slow glass deploys; branded as Retardite, the material replaces cameras in espionage, agents placing tiny rods of slow glass in their pores 'like blackheads.'<sup>170</sup> As a result of this development, top-secret meetings must be held in darkness, and messages written in 'SpeedBraille' so as not to be detected by slow glass. Garrod himself is forced to read sensitive company documents underneath a cloak, Shaw writing that:

One of Garrod's private nightmares was that somebody would invent a sound recording device as efficient and ubiquitous as Retardite was for light, in which case confidential meetings might have to be held not only in darkness but in utter silence.<sup>171</sup>

Garrod attends a meeting at the Pentagon to discuss military applications for slow glass, and the room is sprayed with quick-setting plastic minutes before it begins to thwart any attempt to spy on the meeting with Retardite. Garrod's research chief Theo McFarlane perfects slow glass, innovating a process to speed up and slow down the rate

---

<sup>168</sup> *Other Days, Other Eyes*, pp. 59-61.

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 24.

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 36.

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 38.

at which light passes through. McFarlane is not overjoyed at his discovery, and when questioned by Garrod, he tells him that a piece of slow glass is now more effective than the most expensive movie camera in the world, with the result that he 'may never be truly alone again.'<sup>172</sup> Garrod uses slow glass to cure his wife's blindness, which leads to a calmer domestic life, echoing its use by the farmer in 'Light of Other Days.' But in the wider world the technology causes societal strife, as unions object to the installation of slow glass monitors in manufacturing plants, and civil rights associations object to the mandatory installation of a piece of slow glass in every automobile in order to monitor traffic accidents. The novel ends with the world being dusted with tiny particles of slow glass, Garrod proclaiming that:

From now on, anybody, any agency with the right equipment can find out anything about ANYBODY! This planet is one huge, unblinking eye watching everything that moves on its surface. We're all encased in glass, asphyxiating, like bugs into an entomologist's killing bottle.<sup>173</sup>

Here Shaw seems to demonstrate the endpoint of a society structured by technological rationality, with the ubiquitous slow glass producing a claustrophobic world of constant surveillance.

This section has utilised a critical take on the work of Latour to describe networked relations in the work of Shaw and White. It has shown how agency switches from human to technological objects in the work of White, casting doubt on the role of the engineer as master of technology, and echoing Marcuse's anxiety regarding a society based on technological rationality. In Shaw's work a similar anxiety is found in the suspension of critical rationality in Nicklin, as he dispenses with enemies at the seeming behest of his technologically-advanced rifle. In a similar sense, slow glass is shown to represent a technological artefact that appears to take on agency. This is not to be seen as a subscription for technological determinism. As Jameson suggests 'objects seem to lead an independent life of their own', but it is always the absent cause of History that asserts itself.<sup>174</sup> In *Other Days, Other Eyes*, this absent cause appears to become godlike at the close of the narrative, an all-seeing totality. This notion could be seen as an example of the science fiction sublime, in which technology reaches towards

---

<sup>172</sup> *Other Days, Other Eyes*, p. 93.

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 157.

<sup>174</sup> Fredric Jameson, *Marxism and Form* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1971) p. 197.

a kind of transcendence. The next section will first articulate what is meant by the science fictional sublime, before turning to the fiction of Shaw and White in an attempt to detect instances of this impulse in their work.

### **The Science-Fictional Sublime.**

Istvan Csicsery-Ronay draws from the idea of the science fiction 'sense of wonder' to suggest that in science fiction 'the powers and ideas of gods are made available to contingent physical beings', a notion that as we will see has implications for human agency defined against technological determinism.<sup>175</sup> Csicsery-Ronay also draws from both Edmund Burke and Immanuel Kant's notions of the sublime. For Kant, the mathematical sublime is encountered when an attempt is made to hold the totality of the infinity of the world in our minds. Given that an infinite totality is a contradiction, the failure of the imagination to encompass infinity gives the mind an idea of the vastness of the world. Csicsery-Ronay suggests that the mathematical sublime is reflected in the exposition of large concepts in science fiction, for instance the vast scope of Isaac Asimov's Foundation novels.

Kant's dynamic sublime refers to human response to the presence of powerful phenomena such as waterfalls, volcanoes and storms.<sup>176</sup> According to Csicsery-Ronay, we view these occurrences from a safe distance, our 'strategic recoil' evidence of a 'self-sacrifice of the imagination.'<sup>177</sup> Csicsery-Ronay suggests that the narratives of science fiction tend to be weighted towards the dynamic sublime, with individual subjects encountering phenomena of great magnitude or attempting to navigate their way through a profoundly altered world, usually following the exposition of the larger mathematically sublime concept as a framing device.

For Kant, technology is a manifestation of human reason, and as such has no part to play in a theory of the sublime. However, Csicsery-Ronay suggests that Burke's

---

<sup>175</sup> Istvan Csicsery-Ronay, JR., *The Seven Beauties of Science Fiction* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2008) p. 148; for more on the 'sense of wonder' in science fiction see Farah Mendelsohn's introduction to *The Cambridge Companion to Science Fiction* ed. Edward James and Farah Mendelsohn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008) pp. 3-4; for an overview of the origins and history of this resilient phrase see *The Encyclopaedia of Science Fiction*, [http://sf-encyclopedia.com/entry/sense\\_of\\_wonder](http://sf-encyclopedia.com/entry/sense_of_wonder) [accessed 7 July 2015].

<sup>176</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgement* trans. James Creed Meredith (Oxford: Oxford World's Classics, 2007) pp. 75-96.

<sup>177</sup> *Seven Beauties of Science Fiction*, p. 149.

earlier theory of the sublime, which, unlike Kant's, suggests that the sublime can be found in the products of human creation, allows for 'the possibility that human constructions can become sufficiently autonomous of their creators, and sufficiently overpowering, to educe sublime wonder themselves', an idea that Csicsery-Ronay extends towards a discussion of the technological sublime embodied by the creature in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, widely conceived as the earliest example of modern science fiction.<sup>178</sup>

David E. Nye discusses a particularly American technological sublime based on a concept of the nation's destiny in the conquest of nature. Beginning with natural wonders such as the Grand Canyon and Niagara Falls, Nye traces a reorientation in the American sense of the sublime to encompass manmade technology such as the Ford assembly line, skyscrapers, electrically lighted cityscapes, the Hoover Dam and the atomic bomb. Nye suggests that:

Whereas in a sublime encounter in nature human reason intervenes and triumphs when the imagination finds itself overwhelmed, in the technological sublime reason had a new meaning. Because human beings had created the awe inspiring steamboats, railroads, bridges, and dams, the sublime object itself was a manifestation of reason. Because the overwhelming power displayed was human rather than natural, the 'dialogue' was now not between man and nature but between man and the man-made. The awe induced by seeing an immense or dynamic technological object became a celebration of the power of human reason, and this awe granted special privilege to engineers and inventors.<sup>179</sup>

Whereas the traditional sublime resulted in a realisation of the insignificance of the individual human ego in the face of phenomena of great magnitude, the technological sublime locates the ability to create vast objects in humanity itself. Csicsery-Ronay suggests that this shift in sensibility, where 'the handyman, the engineer, and the inventor become the agents at the leading edge of history' provided the preconditions for modern science fiction.<sup>180</sup>

---

<sup>178</sup> *Seven Beauties of Science Fiction*, p. 152; for more detail on the origins of science fiction in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, see Brian Aldiss and David Wingrove, 'On the Origin of Species: Mary Shelley' in *Trillion Year Spree: The History of Science Fiction* (London: Paladin, 1986) pp. 29-65.

<sup>179</sup> David E. Nye, *American Technological Sublime* (Boston: M.I.T. Press, 1994) p. 60.

<sup>180</sup> *Seven Beauties of Science Fiction*, p. 158.

So far we have seen how a proximity to technology is transcoded in the work of Shaw and White, an ideologeme of improvement through technology articulated in the narrative trajectory of the ever-increasing technological competence of the main protagonists. We have also detected a critical node in the networked nature of humanity and technology in the work of both authors, with the constant switching of agency between the human and the technological pointing to anxieties in regard to technological rationalism. The technological sublime then, proposes the reinscribing of human agency into technological artefacts, in that the sublime objects of technology themselves are the product of human ingenuity. In the technological sublime then, humans transcend themselves by interacting with the highest technological achievements of humanity in a kind of transcendence from within rather than from some higher power. This iteration of the sublime echoes the Planter ideology behind the development of Belfast, what Kirkland refers to as the ‘heroic communal endeavour’ involved in reclaiming a barren land, reinscribing it into the story of human progress.<sup>181</sup>

Considering his technical background, it is no surprise that Shaw’s fictional depictions of engineering culture reflect aspects of the technological sublime. In *Ground Zero Man*, for instance, Hutchman displays a mastery over a complex missile guidance system called Jack and Jill, a feat achieved through rationality and mathematics.<sup>182</sup> Later in the novel, Ed Montefore, a worker at the Ministry for Defence, is described as having an ability with technology that borders on the supernatural, utilising it to communicate with engineers from another generation. Shaw writes:

It did not matter if the particular design was new to him, it did not matter if he was unaware of the machine’s purpose—if it was broken, he could lay his hands on it, commune with the ghosts of the men who had built that machine and all the others like it, and discover what was wrong.<sup>183</sup>

Hutchman’s invention of an anti-bomb machine recuperates a sense of the technological sublime from the atomic era. According to Nye, the prospect of nuclear destruction had the effect of undermining the technological sublime, the notion of humanity identifying with such a destructive technological object becoming absurd.<sup>184</sup> Hutchman’s formula

---

<sup>181</sup> *Cathal O’Byrne and the Northern Revival*, p. 6.

<sup>182</sup> *Ground Zero Man*, p. 10.

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 104.

<sup>184</sup> *American Technological Sublime*, p. 255.

for detonating all nuclear devices on Earth simultaneously gives humanity mastery over the technological sublime once more. The moment that Hutchman discovers the formula for the machine, he is described as seeing 'deeper than ever before into the mathematical forest which screens reality from reason.'<sup>185</sup> This forest is described as opening for a moment, just long enough for Hutchman to scribble the formula down. Hutchman seizes on this almost mystical moment, translating it into a plan for constructing the machine through the application of reason, affording him god-like powers. Shaw writes:

On the technical level the situation was diamond-sharp, uncomplicated. He was in a position to translate the figures scribbled on his charred sheet into physical reality. Doing so would necessitate several weeks' work on perhaps a thousand pounds worth of electrical and electronic components, and the result would be a small, rather unimpressive machine. But it would be a machine which, if switched on, would almost instantaneously detonate every nuclear device on Earth. It would be an antibomb machine. An antiwar machine. An instrument for converting megadeaths into megalives.<sup>186</sup>

Recognising the supernal power he has unleashed, Hutchman proclaims 'I can make neutrons dance to a new tune.'<sup>187</sup> The mathematician begins to embody a Promethean thinking, reasoning that once the plans for the machine have been disseminated, others will be able to use them to construct their own devices.<sup>188</sup> Hutchman also struggles with a god-complex as a result of his technical mastery, alternated with doubts about whether he can handle the responsibility he has been bequeathed; Shaw describes Hutchman hiding from the police after revealing the plan for his machine, his face depicted as a 'death mask of Christ' signifying that technology has allowed the mathematician to transcend. The soldiers that confront Hutchman at the climax of the narrative stare at the mathematician 'reverently' as he rests his finger on the button of his machine, an intimation of the sublime effect of the technology he has mastered, and the impotence of those without access to it.<sup>189</sup> Hutchman's interaction with technology involves not only constant improvement, but transcendence and access to the sublime.

---

<sup>185</sup> *Ground Zero Man*, p. 15.

<sup>186</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 14-15.

<sup>187</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.

<sup>188</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 54.

<sup>189</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 147, 155.



Access to the sublime enabled by technology is also depicted in Shaw's *A Wreath of Stars*, with an innovation in the manufacture of a material called magniluct rendering previously imperceptible aspects of the natural world visible. Glasses with magniluct lenses are sold for night-vision purposes, the astronomer Clyde Thornton buying a pair because of his appreciation for 'technical novelties', combined with a curiosity about a device that can turn 'night into day.' When observing the night sky through a telescope while wearing the glasses, Thornton locates a planet that can only be seen through magniluct. As well as affording vision in darkness, magniluct glasses allow the wearer to see anti-neutrinos, the particles that the sphere that becomes known as Thornton's Planet is made from. Boyce Ambrose, the director of a planetarium calls the planet 'a ghost world' that 'almost doesn't exist.'<sup>190</sup> In this instance of the technological sublime, technology enables humanity to penetrate the hidden parts of the natural world, bestowing the 'discreet immortality which is granted to the discoverers of new stars and planets' upon Thornton.<sup>191</sup>

The glasses also allow the aircraft engineer Gilbert Snook access to the sublime while working in the Arab state of Malaq. As Thornton's Planet drifts closer to Earth, tension grows in Malaq, where the popularity of magniluct glasses allows a large percentage of the population to see the planet. Snook, having previously been sceptical of the event, downplaying it as a mere 'optical illusion', is forced to change his mind when his friend Charlton insists that he view the phenomenon. Shaw writes:

Snook shrugged and put the glasses on. As he had expected, the sunlit sea appeared intolerably brilliant through the special lenses, but the sky was somewhat darker. He tilted his face upwards—and his heart seemed to lurch to a standstill. Thornton's Planet glared down on him, a vast hurtling ball, somehow frozen in its deadly descent, dominating the whole sky with its baleful radiance. An ageless and superstitious dread gripped Snook, paralysing his reason, warning him that all the old orders were about to be swept away. He snatched the glasses off and returned to a world of reassuring normalcy.<sup>192</sup>

Magniluct technology enables the sublime view of a planet made of anti-neutrinos bearing down upon the earth, a sight that overcomes Snook's sense of reason. In this instance of the dynamic technological sublime, an original sense of the sublime is

---

<sup>190</sup> *Ground Zero Man*, p. 13.

<sup>191</sup> *Wreath of Stars*, p. 8.

<sup>192</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 20.

recuperated, reason confronted by a phenomenon that leads to recoil of the ego, and a retreat to a safe vantage point of normality.

This return of the original sublime points to ambiguity surrounding whether the sublime phenomena associated with magniluct are manmade or natural. Snook remarks that the locals would likely point the finger at them for the inevitable collision between the two planets, considering that the science and technology that enabled Thornton's Planet to be visible came from the West; Snook remarks: 'we made the thing visible, therefore we made it exist.'<sup>193</sup> Returning to the work of Bruno Latour for a moment, a similar quandary can be detected that is resolved with Latour's suggestion that scientific facts are both created and natural. Discussing Louis Pasteur's discovery of the role of bacteria in the spread of disease, Latour not only implies a network of relations between agencies in France as responsible for the discovery, rather than Pasteur alone, but also concurs that Pasteur did not simply reveal a hidden fact of nature, but in addition created one. Latour states that Pasteur's trials with the anthrax bacillus, isolated from cattle in the French countryside, created 'a new object that retranslated the disease into the language of the laboratory.' Latour suggests that this new object was rendered unrecognisable from the original bacillus, becoming retranslated as a vaccine for use on cattle. For Latour, this conjures up the philosophical problem of whether the microbe existed before Pasteur detected it.<sup>194</sup> Citing passages concerning these discoveries in Pasteur's own memoirs, Latour suggests that Pasteur himself alternates between constructivist and realist positions, one moment suggesting that the breakthrough was an act of creation, the next referring to it as a discovery of something already in existence. Latour proposes a middle position for science: the entities that science reveals are real *because* of their manufactured nature rather than despite of it.<sup>195</sup> Elsewhere Latour extends this idea to scientific images, in particular the heavily-mediated representations of galaxies, atoms, light and genes that are generally accepted as images of 'the world itself.' But Latour makes the point that, when considering whether such objects are constructed or natural:

---

<sup>193</sup> *Wreath of Stars*, p. 20.

<sup>194</sup> Bruno Latour, *The Pasteurization of France* trans. Alan Sheridan and John Laws (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1993) pp. 76-80.

<sup>195</sup> Bruno Latour, *On the Modern Cult of the Factish Gods* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010) pp. 16-21.

It slowly becomes clearer that without huge and costly instruments, large groups of scientists, vast amounts of money, and long training, nothing would be visible in such images. It is because of so many mediations that they are able to be so objectively true.<sup>196</sup>

Latour concludes that a scientific discovery constitutes both a lifting of the veil of the natural world, and the construction of a scientific fact, mediated through instruments in the laboratory. In *A Wreath of Stars*, the phenomena associated with magniluct hold this position within the narrative, causing ambiguity surrounding the issue of its status.

Returning to the narrative of Shaw's novel, Snook leaves Malaq, arriving in the African statelet of Barandi, where magniluct glasses have become standard issue in the mining industry. Thornton's Planet having passed through Earth without physical effects, viewing the planet has become a mere novelty, albeit a novelty that renders the scientific community 'appalled at seeing the entire citadel of human science threatened by a casual, heedless visitor from infinity.'<sup>197</sup> In Barandi however, the position of the planet means that miners wearing the glasses can also view its inhabitants, the miner Harold Harper becoming convinced that he is seeing a ghost when a head appears from the rock floor of the mine. As Snook asks questions about the incident, he is reminded of the 'unmanning dread' that he felt on his first look at Thornton's planet, leading him to surmise that Harper has had a similarly unanticipated encounter with the unknown.<sup>198</sup> Harper's encounter with the sublime leaves the miner in need of sedation, and rumours run through the mining camp that blend the phenomena with local superstitions. Snook's Barandian friend Murphy explains that the miners had been herders and farmers a decade earlier and had never held any affinity with mining work. Murphy states:

As far as they're concerned, it's another world down there. A world they've no business to enter. All they need is a hint, just one hint, that the rightful inhabitants of that world are objecting to their presence and they'll refuse to go back into it.<sup>199</sup>

---

<sup>196</sup> *Wreath of Stars*, pp. 74-75.

<sup>197</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 25.

<sup>198</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 29-30.

<sup>199</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 34.

Snook is selected to find an acceptable explanation for the manifestations to persuade the miners back to work. While photographing the apparition in the mine, his powers of reasoning are once more overcome by a 'pounding dread', as a creature appears to rise through the floor, move through the tunnel and then continue through the ceiling of the mine.<sup>200</sup> As it passes through the ceiling, Snook is blinded by the 'cloudy luminescence' of the phantom, and quickly removes his magniluct glasses. Murphy questions Snook about the apparition, Shaw writing that his inquiries betray an anxiety for Snook to 'produce an immediate scientific explanation for the apparition and render it harmless.'<sup>201</sup>

In *A Wreath of Stars*, technology allows human access to a sublime experience of the natural world, its ability to reveal previously unseen entities confusing the status of scientific fact, and the position of the human in relation to the technological sublime. Murphy seeks to remove the visitation from the realm of superstition, to establish it as an object of science, thus allowing work to continue in the mine. Once again the status of the technological artefact changes, it being hoped that it can be transformed from an object transmitting sublime power to one that is demystified through scientific explanation, and therefore recuperated as an object of the technological sublime.

Shaw's *Orbitsville* also contains an instance of the technological sublime allowing access to a kind of transcendence at the centre of its narrative. Vance Garamond pilots the *Bissendorf*, a flickerwing, a type of starship that has debunked Einsteinian physics, disproving the time dilation effect and the idea of an impenetrable barrier to the speed of light. Shaw writes that once a flickerwing ship reaches a certain speed, it creates 'its own portable universe in which different rules applied', with time replacing the speed of light as the universal constant.<sup>202</sup> Flickerwings draw fuel from the particles contained in certain 'invisible galactic winds' that are created when a sun goes nova and destroys the planets in its vicinity. While flying the starship, Garamond contemplates whether his engines are 'feeding on the ghosts of dawn-time civilizations, obliterating all their dreams, giving the final answer to all their questions.'<sup>203</sup> In this

---

<sup>200</sup> *Wreath of Stars*, p. 38.

<sup>201</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 39.

<sup>202</sup> Bob Shaw, *Orbitsville* (London: Gollancz, 1975) p. 37.

<sup>203</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 44.

case humanity grasps the technological sublime, surpassing the limitations of Einsteinian physics, mastering the power of dead suns to explore the universe. However, rather than a realisation of the mastery of humanity, Garamond appears to experience a more traditional sublime effect. In a diary entry, the pilot writes:

I was taught at school that a man's brain is unable to comprehend what is meant by a light-year—now I know we cannot comprehend as much as a light-second. So far in this journey we have, in effect, encircled twenty-five Earths; but my heart and mind are suspended, like netted birds, somewhere above the third or fourth range of mountains. They have run into the comprehension barrier, while my body has travelled onwards, heedless of what penalties may fall due.<sup>204</sup>

In the face of the sublime effect of technology, Garamond's mind stalls, unable to comprehend the power that has been afforded to humanity through feats of engineering. While the barrier to the speed of light is broken in this new post-Einsteinian physics, the pilot's ego recoils and retreats from the presence of the sublime. Once more we see agency switch from the human to the technological as the subject shrinks from comprehension of the power of human technology.

Shaw's depiction of both the technological sublime, signifying human ingenuity in the face of previously immutable laws of physics, and the traditional sublime, as Garamond attempts to come to terms with the new reality that the technology creates, foreshadows the pilot's discovery of Orbitville, a colossal sphere that the pilot describes as a 'spaceship over three hundred million kilometres in diameter.'<sup>205</sup> Like Thornton's Planet in *A Wreath of Stars*, the status of Orbitville as a constructed or naturally-occurring phenomenon is ambiguous. An investigator contemplates the perfect sphere with a completely smooth surface, and suggests, 'nature doesn't operate that way—at least, not on the astronomical scale.'<sup>206</sup>

Garamond boards the sphere and notes that its skies are blue like those of Earth. But it is the scale of Orbitville that makes the biggest impression on the pilot. Shaw writes that 'on the edge of a circular black lake of stars, suited and armoured to withstand the lethal vacuum of interplanetary space—Garamond had his first look at

---

<sup>204</sup> *Orbitville*, p. 148.

<sup>205</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 49.

<sup>206</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 55.

the green and infinite meadows of Orbitville.’ Garamond experiences a dislocation and loss of identity, his vision ‘swamped’ at the impression of grassland ‘running on for ever’, but Shaw also describes a feeling of immediate acceptance at the scene, a notion that his entire life had been preparing for the moment. Shaw describes Garamond’s identity returning only when a fellow explorer boards the sphere.<sup>207</sup> When Orbitville is examined further, it becomes apparent to Garamond that it is the technological creation of an alien civilisation. Orbitville is a steel construction built around a sun in order to manipulate its energy and translate it into matter. Shaw describes the aliens as having ‘precise control over the most elemental forces of the universe’, creating an object that is ‘harder than diamond, immutable, eternal.’ The descriptions of the sublime continue, Shaw writing of the mysterious creators that:

When the sphere was complete, grown to the required thickness, they had again dipped their hands into the font of energy and wrought fresh miracles, coating the interior surface of the sphere with soil and water and air. Organic acids, even complete cells and seeds, had been constructed in the same way, because at the ultimate level of reality there is no difference between a blade of grass and one of steel.<sup>208</sup>

The harnessing of the sun by the aliens has given them a means to shape nature, manipulating matter to suit their needs. The sphere is left for humanity to explore, the builders of Orbitville said to have moved on ‘to a different level of their existence.’ Garamond predicts that the vastness of the artefact will have a levelling effect on human relations claiming that, in comparison to Orbitville, humans are ‘reduced to the ultimate, human electrons.’<sup>209</sup> In *Orbitville*, the technological sublime of an alien race is encountered as a traditionally sublime object that reduces the significance of humanity. Also implicit is the idea of succession, that humanity is now taking the mantle from another technologically advanced race. This echoes the notion of a developmental schema in the work of Shaw and White, which will be examined in the next section.

In Shaw’s sequel to the novel, *Orbitville Departure*, the narrative shifts forward two hundred years from the events depicted in the earlier novel. A statue of Garamond stands at the location where he first stepped onto the sphere, its expression

---

<sup>207</sup> *Orbitville*, pp. 62-63.

<sup>208</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 67.

<sup>209</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 146.

registering the 'awe combined with peace and fulfilment' that any visitor feels when entering from the blackness of space and encountering the sublime 'grassy infinities' within.<sup>210</sup> The scientist and Orbitsville expert Cavendish is described as also losing his identity in the 'numinous magic' of Orbitsville. After two hundred years of studying, the discipline of spherology is still attempting to penetrate the secrets of Orbitsville. Debate is still ongoing about whether the object is a piece of technology or an object of nature; evidence of god's mysterious workings or nature manifested in a way that humanity has not observed before. It is accepted among spherologists that the shell of Orbitsville is changeless, so when a green radiance arises from within the sphere, Shaw describes the reaction as a sublime awe that 'almost transcended the fear of death.'<sup>211</sup> The green light prefigures the appearance of the builders of Orbitsville, the Ultan, an alien race residing in another dimension. Conversing with the scientist Garry Dallen through mind-to-mind contact, they explain that as a race they are 'the ultimate embodiment of intelligent life' with 'complete mobility in time and space.'<sup>212</sup> According to the Ultans, mind propagates itself in galactic structures and increases the opportunity for mind to arise in other areas of the universe. They explain that Orbitsville was designed to attract intelligent life and transport it to the Region II universe, a parallel universe that the Ultan wish to seed with mindons.<sup>213</sup> The novel ends with a scientific renaissance based on the knowledge of mindons passed to humanity by the Ultans, a rejuvenated science that accepts immortality as a scientific fact.<sup>214</sup> The sublime technology of the Ultan is now in the hands of humanity. Shaw writes:

The Orbitsville phase had ended. In future when men set out to straddle the galaxy they would be searching for more than just areas of grass on which to pitch their tents. Equipped with superb tachyon ships, girded with mindon science, consciously immortal, they would have aims which could be incomprehensible to men of Dallen's generation.<sup>215</sup>

Just as the construction of the technologically sublime Orbitsville signalled the Ultan's rise to a new plain of existence, access to the technology of the Ultans allows humanity

---

<sup>210</sup> Bob Shaw, *Orbitsville Departure* (1983) (London: Orbit Books, 1991) p. 10.

<sup>211</sup> *Orbitsville Departure*, p. 68.

<sup>212</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 228.

<sup>213</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 223-232.

<sup>214</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 244.

<sup>215</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 251.

to achieve a kind of immortality, suggesting an increasing developmental trajectory on a cosmic scale.

### **The Developmental Schema.**

According to David Lloyd, in the nineteenth century British political economy perceived a 'time-lag' between the cultures of Britain and Ireland. Lloyd describes the pre-famine *clachan* system of subdividing land in Ireland as appearing illogical to the English coloniser in its confusion of innumerable plots and confusing access ways embodied in the phrase 'through-other.'<sup>216</sup> James Connolly christened the pre-capitalist social formation in Ireland, 'Celtic Communism', suggesting that the clan system placed an emphasis on the common ownership of property that was counter to the capitalist rationalisation that was imposed upon it by force.<sup>217</sup> Similarly, the historian Maurice Coakley suggests that 'the principle of the ascendancy of the collective...ran through all aspects of Gaelic law', and that the idea of individual land ownership was alien to the native Irish, who were more concerned with 'access to and rights over land', which depended on membership of a corporate grouping called a *slíocht*.<sup>218</sup> Rather than being seen as an alternative social formation, this practice was placed within a developmental schema, which positioned Ireland as backward.

In the case of Ulster, the plantation was seen as necessary to develop the region in line with this schema. In 1836, Henry Cooke addressed the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland and stated of the plantations:

Our Scottish forefathers were planted in the wildest and most barren provinces of our lands...the most rude and lawless of the provinces...Scottish industry has drained its bogs and cultivated its barren wastes, has filled its ports with shipping, substituted towns and cities for its hovels and *clachans* and given peace and good order to a land of confusion and blood.<sup>219</sup>

Lloyd points to the origin for this developmental schema in John Stuart Mill's notion of the 'magic of property', the idea that individual ownership of property leads to a

---

<sup>216</sup> David Lloyd, *Irish Times: Temporalities of Modernity* (Dublin: Field Day, 2008) p.4, 42.

<sup>217</sup> James Connolly, *Labour in Irish History* (Dublin: Dorset Press, 1983) xxvi-xxxii.

<sup>218</sup> Maurice Coakley, *Ireland in the World Order: A History of Uneven Development* (London: Pluto Press, 2012) pp. 28-29.

<sup>219</sup> Quoted in Terence Brown, *The Whole Protestant Community: The Making of A Historical Myth* (Derry: Field Day, 1985) p. 21.



more stable society. Mill influenced the Irish economist J.E. Cairnes, who argued that 'in the progress of nations from barbarism to civilization, there is a point at which the bulk of the people pass naturally into the peasant proprietor condition.' Lloyd suggests that in this historicist view of economic development, it was assumed that 'material conditions, social forms and moral character unfolded together.'<sup>220</sup> Lloyd's critique of this discourse of development echoes Marcuse's critique of technological rationality, as well as Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer's critique of the Enlightenment generally, which suggests that 'for the Enlightenment, whatever does not conform to the rule of computation and utility is suspect.'<sup>221</sup> According to Lloyd, subsistence living on the potato was seen by the British through a moral lens. In the post-famine era the *clachan* system would be eradicated, and replaced with an agricultural model based on English practice. Lloyd suggests that the Famine is read by historians within this developmental schema, with the event suggested as an 'inevitable Malthusian disaster that ultimately made way for the modernisation of the Irish economy.'<sup>222</sup>

Coakley also points to this impulse, suggesting that for some historians, British rule is perceived as 'civilised, rational and cosmopolitan' and Irish resistance rendered 'narrow, primitive and atavistic.'<sup>223</sup> Coakley locates the origins for this history of progress in the Scottish Enlightenment. With an industrial revolution underway to the south in England, and a culture in the Scottish Highlands that preserved elements of a 'pre-modern' clan system, it was hoped to ensure that Scotland followed the English model of progress. Coakley writes that Scottish theorists:

...developed the notion of a universal history divided into stages of development. History came to be perceived as progress, both in terms of the accumulation of knowledge and productive capacity as well as increased emancipation.<sup>224</sup>

As already observed, Kirkland suggests that this manifests in writing on Belfast in a Protestant preoccupation with the barren waste that preceded their arrival. It could be

---

<sup>220</sup> David Lloyd, *Irish Culture and Colonial Modernity 1800-2000* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011) p. 22.

<sup>221</sup> Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *The Dialectic of Enlightenment* (New York: Continuum, 1972) p. 6.

<sup>222</sup> *Irish Culture and Colonial Modernity*, p. 23.

<sup>223</sup> *Ireland in the World Order*, vii.

<sup>224</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1.

suggested that both Shaw and White also write from such a position, and both engage with a teleological view of development, albeit in ambiguous and conflicting ways.

For instance, in Shaw's *Night Walk*, when Tallon invents a device that cures his blindness, he situates the invention as the latest instance of the inevitable development of human technology, while also framing the device as an instance of the technological sublime, an innovation that extends human mastery over the natural world. Shaw describes Tallon sitting perfectly still:

...savouring the miracle of vision, feeling humbled by the sudden stark revelation of the pinnacle of human technology upon which his triumph was poised: the centuries of research into the complex language of glial-cell transients; the development of assembly robots and micro-Waldos; the growth of cybernetic philosophies that enable a man to incorporate a billion electronic circuits in a single chip of crystal and use only those that served his purpose, without his ever knowing which circuits they were.<sup>225</sup>

Tallon perceives himself as the latest inventor in the inevitable development of advanced technology.

But elsewhere, Shaw is ambivalent about such a view of development. In *The Palace of Eternity*, the Syccans are deemed a mystery to Earth's 'xenologists' because of their failure to learn anything from humanity's 'butterfly ships.' Unlike the use of Ultan technology by humans in *Orbitsville*, the Syccans appear unwilling to mimic the superior technology—in this case human—and progress to the next stage of technological development. Shaw writes that:

They were familiar with tachyonics, the branch of science which held a mirror to Einsteinian physics, dealing with particles which could not go slower than light. They had mastered the even more difficult 'tachyonic mode'—the technique of creating microcontinuums within which a spaceship composed of normal matter could display some of the attributes of tachyons, and thus travel at huge multiples of the speed of light. But—and in the early years the Federation had scarcely been able to believe its luck—the Syccans had never taken the next logical step in interstellar travel.<sup>226</sup>

Shaw describes a timetable for the lifetime of technical civilisation envisioned by the philosopher Von Hoerner. Earth is described as nearing a Type II category, which

---

<sup>225</sup> *Night Walk*, p. 37.

<sup>226</sup> *Palace of Eternity*, p. 29.

means it has advanced to the capability of channelling the radiation output of its star. The world that Shaw depicts in the novel is entwined with this teleological view, and is informed by a developmental schema that asserts the ideologeme of improvement through access to technology.

However, later in the novel, Tavernor considers the issue of progress and development again, with a more ambiguous conclusion. When contemplating the ways in which the discovery of the tachyon opened outer space to mankind, he reasons that it was also a development that closed the door on the future. Tavernor articulates the notion of a time-lag between cultures, concluding that although humanity could now travel the stars, the vastness of the universe means that the prospect of finding a like-minded intelligent race is improbable. Shaw writes that 'the spread of time was too great. The fleeting moments of galactic time when neighbours were at their technological crest rarely coincided.'<sup>227</sup> While still adopting a position informed by the idea of inevitable progress based on technology, Tavernor perceives human progress itself as stalled, technology bringing it to the brink of developmental possibility.

The resolution of the novel sees Tavernor discover that the invention of the butterfly ship is responsible for the destruction of an entity called an egon, which is the source of creativity in the universe. Having realised that the intimate relationship between the Syccans and the egon is the reason for their lack of curiosity about butterfly ship technology, Tavernor reflects on humanity's blind faith in progress, a predilection he refers to as 'mankind's stupendous insouciance in superimposing his own design on the fabric of the continuum.'<sup>228</sup> In *The Palace of Eternity*, the highest achievement in human technology is revealed as a destructive force, undermining the developmental schema that links the advance of a civilisation with the advance of technology. The rejection of the modern by the Syccans is framed as based on a reasonable objection to the ruination of creativity in the universe represented by the butterfly ship technology. Csicsery-Ronay suggests that the roots of this ambiguity surrounding technology in science fiction can be located in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, in which the products of the technological sublime embodied by the monster spill over into the grotesque and

---

<sup>227</sup> *Palace of Eternity*, p. 88.

<sup>228</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 108.

threaten unforeseen consequences.<sup>229</sup> The narrative closure of *The Palace of Eternity* will be examined again in Chapter Three of this thesis.

In *Night Walk*, Tallon sees himself at the pinnacle of human progress, the most recent example of the manifestation of human ingenuity, building on the achievements of the past. But *The Palace of Eternity* casts doubt on such a thought formation and the developmental schema of the Von Hoerner timetable for development. For the Syccans to embrace advanced human technology would mean to agree to the demise of their race.

By contrast, White's fiction often manifests an uncomplicated view of the developmental schema, evidenced in the medical science fiction series *Sector General* by both the fictional discipline of comparative technology and the description of a map that traces the progress of alien races. In *Ambulance Ship*, White introduces Fletcher, the captain of a ship called the Rhabwar which answers distress signals, bringing back alien casualties to the Sector General hospital. Like the role given Carson in *Tomorrow is Too Far*, White gives Fletcher the role of a detective; in the story 'Investigation' from the *Sector General* collection, Fletcher proclaims 'I am a policeman first and an ambulance driver second.'<sup>230</sup> Fletcher's area of expertise is alien ship design and comparative technology, his job to assess the safety of the Sector General staff when exploring alien vessels. White details the captain's ease with technology; Fletcher describes the Rhabwar in '...tones reminiscent of a doting parent extolling the virtues of a favourite offspring', as he lists the dimensions, performance and search capabilities of the vessel he commands.<sup>231</sup> When the Rhabwar answers the distress signal of a ship involved in an explosion, Fletcher arrives to find the ship reduced to debris. He orders the Rhabwar to approach each piece of wreckage, the Rhabwar's communications officer Haslam taking a reading with his sensors. White writes:

In the process they learned quite a lot about the design philosophy of the alien ship-builders from the way the structural members and bulkheads had been twisted apart by the accident. The dimensions of the corridors and compartments gave an indication of the size of the life-forms that had crewed the ship.<sup>232</sup>

---

<sup>229</sup> *Seven Beauties of Science Fiction*, pp. 152-155.

<sup>230</sup> James White, *Sector General* (London: Futura Publications, 1983) p. 84.

<sup>231</sup> *Ambulance Ship*, p. 9.

<sup>232</sup> *Sector General*, pp. 72-73.

Fletcher's discipline of comparative technology attempts to reconstruct the physiology and behavioural psychology of an alien race by studying one technological artefact, a single node in the network of which the alien is a part. Comparative technology suggests that the stage of technological development at which a race has arrived at determines how civilised that race has become.

In *Ambulance Ship*, this sentiment is extended from Fletcher's discipline to the whole Galactic Federation, White remarking that the considered opinion of its most advanced minds was that 'any species that had evolved to the point of social and technological co-operation necessary for them to travel between the stars had to be civilised.'<sup>233</sup> The crew in White's Sector General series refer to alien civilisations strictly within a developmental schema. *Ambulance Ship* depicts a map for human progress similar to that found in Shaw's *Palace of Eternity*. White describes a three-dimensional representation of the galaxy on which a '...tracery of golden lines grew more rapidly as contact, then commerce, was established with the highly advanced and stable cultures of Kelgia, Illensa, Hudlar, Melf, and, if any, their associated colonies.' The map displays connections between the Galactic Federation and 'the planets known to contain intelligent and, in their own sometimes peculiar fashions, technically and philosophically advanced life.'<sup>234</sup> Commerce is posited as evidence of an advanced and stable society, impossible between civilisations with social formations that deviate from that of the Federation. It is against this temporal axis that, when happening upon a wrecked ship, Conway suggests 'no race can rise from nothing to a spaceship technology in one hundred years, so the wreck could not have originated in that system.'<sup>235</sup> The Federation takes care not to interfere in the development of other races that have not discovered star travel. White writes that:

Another reason why the cultural contact people prefer meeting star travellers to planetbound species is that they can never be sure whether they are helping or hindering the newly discovered culture's natural development, giving them a technological leg up or a crushing inferiority complex.<sup>236</sup>

---

<sup>233</sup> *Ambulance Ship*, p. 157.

<sup>234</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>235</sup> James White, *Hospital Station* (1967) (London: Corgi Books, 1976) p. 164.

<sup>236</sup> *Sector General*, p. 140.

The Federation is also cautious about exploring other planets for fear of unleashing a disease on the host population, a caution that is also articulated in terms of technological development. Having happened upon a generation starship of human origin that has been lost for hundreds of years, Conway fears that if the bacteria on board is transferred to alien species it could 'cause the technology of many of its individual worlds to slide back into their particular dark ages.'<sup>237</sup> White's Sector General series posits a developmental schema that extends across galaxies. Both Fletcher's comparative technology and the Galactic Federation's means of mapping the planets, suggests that civilisation and technological development are coeval.

This developmental schema also extends to White's other fiction. The star-travelling doctor in *Dark Inferno* frames his own position as the pinnacle of human development, the advanced technology of human society enabling the doctor to escape into the stars, transcending that 'ultra-fast and strangely bored society.'<sup>238</sup> At the close of *The Escape Orbit*, the human survivors of an interstellar war with an alien race known simply as the Bugs, are told that they are now the repositories for the technical knowledge of the human race. The group's leader Warren tells them that they have 'obligations immeasurably stronger and deeper than any simple oath of service—the responsibility of the civilised person toward the savage, of the haves for the have-nots.'<sup>239</sup> Advising the survivors to keep their technology underground for a decade to make sure that the threat of the Bugs has passed, Warren tells them that they will be 'keeping alive the science of an interstellar culture and seeing to it that the kids who are beginning to clutter up the place learn a lot more than woodcarving—a whole lot more'<sup>240</sup> Warren tells them that after six or seven generations they will be ready to meet the Bugs again, suggesting that 'all around you will be the fragments of two promising interstellar cultures which met before either was ready for a meeting. Your job will be to pick up the pieces, all the pieces, and put them together again.'<sup>241</sup> As alluded to earlier, the genre of science fiction is often ambiguous as to the benefits of science and technology. In this instance, White suggests technology separates civilisation from

---

<sup>237</sup> *Ambulance Ship*, p. 111.

<sup>238</sup> *Dark Inferno*, p. 37.

<sup>239</sup> James White, *The Escape Orbit* (1965) (New York: Ace Science Fiction, 1983), p. 182.

<sup>240</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 183.

<sup>241</sup> *Escape Orbit*, p. 183.

savagery, and that therefore technological knowledge must be protected and passed down to future generations.

In *The Dream Millennium* an astronaut contemplates a planet that has developed nuclear capabilities, a planet considered an enigma because of the lack of evidence of its development through the stages that humanity came through to get to that advanced point. The astronaut asks the question 'why, on the long road to nuclear technology, it didn't pick up a few industrial ruins and sooty factory chimneys', concluding that the planet is most likely a colony of a more technologically advanced world.<sup>242</sup> In the same novel, White once again equates technology with civilisation, positing development and benevolence as equivalents, suggesting that developed societies do not react with hostility when encountering strange societies.<sup>243</sup> Brother Howard, a former astronaut who experienced a religious revelation while in space, has a vision for the colonisation of the stars by humanity, explained through the metaphor of ripening fruit that also suggests a temporal, developmental schema. Hoping to escape an increasingly violent Earth, Howard states:

Our growing ripening fruit is not free to expand indefinitely, you see. It is growing within a thick, strong skin which produces compression effects. Population pressure, diminishing resources, pollution as well as various psychological and social ills are together squeezing a culture which is rotten to the point of fermentation. One, and the most important result of this pressure will be that seedling or pip of our overripe fruit will be squeezed out.<sup>244</sup>

Stressing the importance of directing the seed towards fallow ground, Howard conceives the colonisation of space as part of a natural cycle. He states that '...we at the project think that the whole process is a natural one, and that our planetary fruit will emit its seed as naturally and inevitably as a caterpillar becomes a butterfly.'<sup>245</sup> Howard's plan rests on the selection of the most benevolent specimens of humanity to seed the stars, using technology as a means of leaving behind the violence on Earth, continuing human civilisation elsewhere.

---

<sup>242</sup> *Dream Millennium*, p. 188.

<sup>243</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 66.

<sup>244</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 153.

<sup>245</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 153.

*The Dream Millennium* will be discussed in more detail later, but for now we have seen its depiction of a progressing humanity illustrated through a developmental schema based on access to technology. Shaw's interaction with the same schema has been shown to be ambiguous, and subject to critique in the Syccan rejection of destructive human technology. White's fiction so far has been shown to have an uncomplicated engagement with the idea of development through technology, but the next section will consider the later novels of both authors, in an attempt to link an ambiguity surrounding the issue of progress to de-industrialisation in Northern Ireland and the global shift towards a post-industrial manifestation of capitalism.

### **Questioning Progress.**

Shaw and White's later novels increase the ambiguity surrounding the notion of progress in their fiction, contemporaneous with a decline of industry in Northern Ireland. Echoing the historical section with which this chapter began, this section will attempt to establish this link first by locating the trend towards a post-industrial economy in Northern Ireland, and then expanding on the phenomenon as one that effected capitalism in the West more generally.

Bardon states that of two hundred companies in production in Northern Ireland in the 1950s, only twenty survived into the 1970s. The shipbuilding industry had begun to decline after World War II, with competition from Japan and Germany meaning that Harland and Wolff had to scrap jobs and diversify into civil engineering. Between the 1950s and the 1970s Britain's share of the worldwide shipbuilding industry shrank from 40 per cent to 16 per cent, and shipbuilding in Northern Ireland suffered as a consequence. By the 1970s, the Conservative prime minister, Edward Heath had proclaimed that the government would no longer subsidise 'lame duck' industries, and Nicholas Ridley at the Ministry of Technology warned that 'it was not the Government's intention to continue to support British shipbuilding and assistance offered to Harland and Wolff must therefore be regarded as temporary.'<sup>246</sup> In the 1980s,

---

<sup>246</sup> *History of Ulster*, pp. 626-627. A *Belfast Telegraph* article of January 1969 is headlined 'Ulster Hit by "Famine" in UK Aircraft Industry' and complains that lack of government investment is driving technicians abroad. The article continues 'the great famine of the last century was responsible for much of the great exodus of the Irish to the United States. But today another kind of "famine" is causing a smaller, but nonetheless significant, new exodus' (p.7).



Short Brothers overtook Harland and Wolff as the region's largest manufacturer, but both companies struggled to turn a profit. Bardon states:

Official statisticians generally placed both Harland and Wolff and Short Brothers in the private sector but both were wholly owned by the Government and utterly dependent on massive subventions from the exchequer. These two concerns, accounting for around 10 per cent of all manufacturing employment, received about one third of all public resources going to industrial support.<sup>247</sup>

Both companies were eventually privatised in 1989, with Short Brothers being sold to the Canadian aerospace company Bombardier, and Harland and Wolff being sold to a consortium that included management and employees. In the late 1990s with reduced orders for ships and the prospect of profits from land development, much of the area at Queen's Island had been sold with the intention of developing the site as the 'Titanic Quarter', a tourist attraction based around the ill-fated ship that was built by the company.<sup>248</sup> This decline in industry problematises what Kirkland calls the mythic structure of the notion of Protestant development in Ulster based upon 'an irresistible development from philistine backwardness to a sense of hyperborean renaissance'.<sup>249</sup> This is reflected in the later work of both Shaw and White, transcoded as alternative technologies and paths for development.

Shaw left Northern Ireland in 1973, fearing the impact that the Troubles were having on his wife and children. White stayed in the province, taking early retirement from Short Brothers in 1984 because of ill health related to his diabetes.<sup>250</sup> Although by the 1980s both authors had little material engagement with the engineering culture of Belfast, the decline of manufacturing in Northern Ireland was just a local reflection of a trend affecting industrial countries in the period, a phenomenon that fed into the work of both authors. According to McAuley and McCormack, it had been clear that the traditional industrial base of Northern Ireland was becoming unviable since the mid-1950s, a trend that by the 1970s had become more pronounced, constituting a form of

---

<sup>247</sup> *History of Ulster*, pp. 786-787.

<sup>248</sup> William J.V. Neill, 'Rebranding the "Renaissance City": From "The Troubles" to Titanic Quarter' in *Urban Design and British Renaissance* ed. by John Punter (New York: Routledge, 2010) pp. 303-319.

<sup>249</sup> Richard Kirkland, *Literature and Culture in Northern Ireland Since 1965: Moments of Danger* (London: Longman, 1996) p. 55.

<sup>250</sup> *No Country For Old Men*, p. 200.

'deindustrialisation with a vengeance'<sup>251</sup> For David Harvey, the shift to a post-industrial economy resulted from the restructuring of capitalism after the crisis of profitability in the 1970s. The need for capital to maintain the rate of extraction of surplus value led to an attempt to avoid labour organisation by switching to a more fluid and dispersed system of accumulation, with the outsourcing of industrial production to areas previously untouched by global capitalism. Peripheral states became increasingly industrialised, and as a result financial services, consumer credit and access to profitable information became important industries in core countries, leading to a post-industrial effect in previously heavily industrialised regions.<sup>252</sup> In his location of this effect, Jameson draws from the economic theorist Ernest Mandel, who pronounced this post-industrial mode as 'late capitalism.' Jameson suggests that this mode of capitalism constitutes a rupture in the forward thrust of modernity, calling the certainty of development into question.<sup>253</sup> Kirkland suggests that such breakdown and heterogeneity have always had a role in Ireland. He cites the disappointment of Derry at being rejected as the site of a university in 1965, and suggests that the city had been 'denied a place within a linear developmental historiography.'<sup>254</sup>

David Lloyd suggests that for Britain, Ireland always represented a defiance of the historicist logic of development, revealing the truth that the non-modern and the modern in fact co-exist and are dependent upon each other. Lloyd writes that the Irish:

Represented the interpenetration of the most advanced capitalism with those other and recalcitrant formations that continually emerge at the interface of the modern and the non-modern, as its incommensurable by-products rather than its pre-history.<sup>255</sup>

In a Northern Irish context, Kirkland suggests that modernity is always dialectically dependent on older forms, needing the tension implied by the contrast with a culture it intends to replace.<sup>256</sup>

---

<sup>251</sup> J.W. McAuley and P.J. McCormack, 'The Protestant Working Class and the State in Northern Ireland: A Problematic Relationship' in *Ireland's Histories: Aspects of State, Society and Ideology* ed. Seán Hutton and Paul Stewart (London: Routledge, 1991) p. 18.

<sup>252</sup> David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995) p.159.

<sup>253</sup> Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, Or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (New York: Verso, 1991)

<sup>254</sup> *Literature and Culture in Northern Ireland*, p. 133.

<sup>255</sup> *Irish Culture and Colonial Modernity* p. 34.

<sup>256</sup> Richard Kirkland, 'That Car' Modernity, Northern Ireland and the DMC-12', *Field Day Review*, 3 (2007) 94-107.

The later work of Shaw and White subverts the notion of modernity, depicting non-modern societies, and suggesting alternate possibilities for human development beyond the ideologeme of progress through technological development and industrial capitalism. The shift to a post-industrial mode of production, and the resulting crisis in the notion of development, is transcoded in a depiction of 'ragged technologies' and alternative forms of development that increase the ambiguity surrounding the notion of progress in their fiction.

*Orbitsville* has already been examined for its manifestation of the technological sublime and its notion of technological progress, but in the centre of the narrative Garamond encounters an alien race who has developed through counter-modern means. Garamond and his crew become stranded from the rest of humanity and encounter an alien race called the Hummers, whose level of development is at first compared to that of a nineteenth-century town of the American west. A member of Garamond's crew, Ralston (dubbed a 'teleogeologist' by Shaw) voices the developmental schema by declaring the town 'rustic.' Garamond makes a reference to 'Mark Twain land', but then condemns such historicist notions as illogical, suggesting, 'we can't measure other cultures with our own yardstick.'<sup>257</sup> Ralston persists, observing the proliferation of internal combustion engines amongst them, and remarking: 'if that's the level they're at them won't be much use to us.'<sup>258</sup>

Attempting to assess the engineering capabilities of the aliens, Garamond studies the ships that the Hummer operate, observing that all the aircraft differ significantly in their design. Together with another crew member O'Hagan, Garamond surmises that they have happened upon a civilisation that developed without industrial production, the individual non-uniform appearance of the Hummer's machines signifying the handmade nature of their technologies. Garamond realises that, 'they've got airplanes, but no airplane factory or airport. They've got some cars, but no car

---

<sup>257</sup> *Orbitsville*, p. 152.

<sup>258</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 154.

factory or roads.’<sup>259</sup> O’Hagan agrees, positing that the aliens represent an alternative route for development. O’Hagan remarks:

They picked an entirely different road to ours. No specialisation of labour, no mass production, no standardization. Anybody who wants a car or a cake-mixer builds it from scratch, if he has the time and the talent.<sup>260</sup>

Garamond had noticed the aliens counting the human ships during their first encounter, O’Hagan suggesting that they must have been astonished at seeing so many identical versions of the same craft. The two consider that the aliens that came to watch their craft consisted of the ‘lunatic fringe’ of the race, gadgeteers more interested in their technology than in the entities controlling it. Assessing their prospects if they remain, O’Hagan concludes ‘I’d go crazy if I had to live beside somebody who kept inventing the steam engine every couple of years’, and they decide to leave.<sup>261</sup>

The Hummers represent the development of technologies without the institution of industrial capitalist production, the handmade nature of the Hummer machines representing a kind of technological subsistence, suggesting the persistence of the non-modern in a technological society. The Hummers problematise the ideologeme of progress through technology, and transcode the anxieties of a Northern Irish industry as it experiences a decline towards a post-industrial mode.

This element of Shaw’s work continues in his fiction into the 1980s. The first novel in Shaw’s Land and Overland trilogy, *The Ragged Astronauts*, appeared in 1986 and also mixes the non-modern and the modern, telling the story of the Kolcorrorns, a non-industrial, feudal society on a planet called Land that shares its atmosphere with a sister-planet called Overland. Land’s main resource is the brakka tree, from which it harvests crystals to use as fuel for its wooden airships. The brakka tree pollinates through a combustion process whereby halvell crystals mix with the substance pikon, causing an explosion that disperses the seeds of the tree. The Kolcorrorns collect both elements in this process to use as fuel. The novel opens with an airship in trouble, the philosopher Toller Maraquine viewing the distressed vessel from the ground and

---

<sup>259</sup> *Orbitsville*, p. 161.

<sup>260</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 162.

<sup>261</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 162.

ordering a message to be sent with a technology called a sunwriter. The sunwriter is a non-modern piece of technology, made of wood and glass that utilises the light of the sun to send a message.<sup>262</sup>

Land is also working towards developing rudimentary photography. Lord Glo hands Maraquine a piece of paper on which he has taken the image of Farland, a planet far outside Land's atmosphere. Glo discusses the difficulties of producing images on 'light-sensitive vegetable cells' upon which a picture fades after a few days. Glo foresees a day 'when everybody will carry light-sensitive material and will be able to make a picture of *anything* in the blink of an eye.'<sup>263</sup> The primary weapons used on Land are wooden swords, but Shaw also describes a new type of cannon to guard against the ptertha, balloon-shaped creatures whose very touch is fatal. The armaments used are also typical of a non-modern, ragged technology. Shaw writes that:

There were two of the anti-ptertha guns mounted on each side of the gondola, their barrels made of thin strips of brakka bonded into tubes by glass cords and resin. Below each weapon was a magazine containing glass power capsules and a supply of the latest type of projectile—hinged bundles of wooden rods which opened radially in flight. They demanded better accuracy than the older scattering weapons, but compensated with improved range.<sup>264</sup>

Like the Hummer's non-modern, subsistence technology, Land's ragged technologies also suggest an alternative route to development with innovations in communication devices, fuel and weaponry created without the emergence of industrial capitalism.

Shaw also describes the possibility of interplanetary flight in a non-industrial context. As well as his experiments with photography, the ageing philosopher Glo is also responsible for recommending that Land attempt to travel to Overland, a feat which the non-metallurgical society achieves through the construction of air balloons made of silk, linen and wood. Glo discusses the use of crystals from the brakka tree to create gas jets, particularly useful in the region between the two planets, where the pull of gravity from the two bodies results in a zone of no atmosphere in which the balloon will remain stationary. Shaw's description of the journey reads like a non-modern version of a N.A.S.A. space mission. Shaw describes Maraquine witnessing the awesome power of

---

<sup>262</sup> Bob Shaw, *The Ragged Astronauts* (1986) (London: Gollancz, 1987) pp. 9-10.

<sup>263</sup> *Ragged Astronauts*, pp. 41-42.

<sup>264</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 185-186.

their non-modern technology, a form of the technological sublime achieved without industrial development. Shaw writes:

By turning his head one way Toller could see Overland, mostly in blackness because of its proximity to the sun; and in the other direction was the mind-swamping convexity of the home world, serene and eternal, bathed in sunshine except at its eastern rim, where a shrinking curved section still lay in little night. He watched in rapt fascination as Overland's shadow swung clear of Land, feeling himself to be at the fulcrum of a lever of light, an intangible engine which had the power to move planets.<sup>265</sup>

Without industrialisation or the use of metals, Shaw's ragged technology is shown to take the inhabitants of Land to the peak of human achievement, allowing them to travel between planetary bodies and view their home planet from a distance.<sup>266</sup>

But Shaw questions even this non-modern form of development. Toller's brother Lain has decided that he wants to stay on Land, and visits a cave that a surveyor has recently discovered. Lain sees his action as symbolic, a sign that he is 'turning towards Land's past and away from Overland's future, confessing that he wanted no part of the migration flight or what lay beyond it.'<sup>267</sup> The wall of the cave contains a painting worked on by generations of artists that inspires a revelation in Lain. Shaw describes:

A labyrinthine montage in which the eye was compelled to wander unceasingly from semi-naked hunters to family groups to stylised brakka trees to strange and familiar animals, erotica, demons, cooking pots, flowers, human skeletons, weapons, suckling babes, geometrical abstracts, fish, snakes, unclassifiable artefacts and impenetrable symbols.<sup>268</sup>

Lain becomes overwhelmed by a 'sense of duration', a realisation that the development of the culture of Land is contingent and could have developed differently. The religion of Kolcorron teaches that Land and Overland have always existed and that the present order of things is not subject to change. For Lain, the painting is evidence of progression in the story of Land, proof that 'men had once existed in vastly different circumstances,

---

<sup>265</sup> *Ragged Astronauts*, p. 208.

<sup>266</sup> The utopian implications of 'the overview effect', whereby an astronaut views the Earth from space and is subject to a revelation regarding world peace, will be discussed in the final chapter.

<sup>267</sup> *Ragged Astronauts*, p. 208.

<sup>268</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 221.

that they had thought in different ways, and had shared the planet with animals which no longer existed.<sup>269</sup> Soon after the revelation, Lain is touched by a ptertha. As he dies, Lain realises that strangely coloured globes in the montage are the ptertha at a previous stage in their development, before they possessed the toxins that make them fatal to humans. He makes a connection between the harvesting of crystals from the brakka tree and the aggression of the creatures, positing a symbiotic relationship between the tree and the ptertha. The ptertha rely on the pollination discharge of the brakka tree for food, and so instinctively hunt down those who destroy the trees. At the beginning of the novel, Leddravohr boasts of ‘an abundance of brakka—sufficient to meet our needs for centuries to come’, but Lain realises the cost of harvesting the trees, an ecological conclusion that the resources they have been relying on are finite.<sup>270</sup> Before dying, Lain writes the information down, hoping to divert the course of development that Land has embarked upon.

Lain’s diagnosis of the problem facing Land is a reversal of progress as defined within the culture of Land. Lain proposes the cessation of harvesting of brakka trees and the preservation of the habitat of the ptertha as an alternative to fleeing Land for Overland, which will exacerbate the ptertha problem for those with no choice but to remain on Land, given that the plan involves the accelerated destruction of the forests. Within the non-modern context of the society on Land, the ideologeme of progress through technological development has already been problematised through the ragged technologies of wood and glass that the inhabitants use, and the institution of a space program without industrial capitalism. Shaw seems to prefigure these non-modern forms of development in *Orbitsville*’s Hummers who deviate from technological progress as a path to industrial capitalism by making bespoke technological artefacts. Shaw’s problematisation of the notion of technological progress was also prefigured in *The Palace of Eternity*, which saw human technology rejected by the Syccans as an aberration that would lead to their cultural demise. So far we have considered the work of White as accepting that technological progress and civilisation are coeval, but White’s work in the post-industrial era also began to problematise this notion of progress.

---

<sup>269</sup> *Ragged Astronauts*, p. 222.

<sup>270</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 63.

White's *The Silent Stars Go By* similarly points to alternative histories of human development, with a version of a medieval world dominated by a Hibernian Empire. The novel opens with the depiction of the beginnings of a Hibernian space program, as the *Aisling Gheal* starship is prepared for launch at the Hill of Tara. The pre-history of this alternative Ireland involves contact between the Gaels and the Egyptians, resulting in an advanced discovery of steam power. The technology has its origins in a visit by the traveller and philosopher Aidan, to Egypt in the second century BC. In his discourse in the court of the Pharaoh, Aidan hoped to gain some information for financial or military gain.<sup>271</sup> The Egyptian philosopher Hero demonstrates his 'aeolipile' to Aidan, a 'strange device that consisted of an enclosed three-legged kettle with two copper pipes projecting from the top.' A copper globe sits on the pipes and rotates when the water inside the kettle is boiled. Although Hero plays down the significance of the invention, Aidan sees the potential in applying its principles on a larger scale.<sup>272</sup> White writes:

And thus it was that Aidan the Enlightened, or the Accursed, brought to Hibernia the knowledge of a device that embodied the first, simple principles of steam-generated power, jet propulsion, and the beginnings of a technology that was to lead ultimately to the starship *Aisling Gheal*.<sup>273</sup>

Hero's invention is utilised to make 'heroes', mechanical steam-powered automatons that serve as warriors in Hibernian armies in the pre-Christian period, defending against raids by Saxon Britain, who wish to capture the machines to study them. The arrival of the heroes was welcomed because of their novelty and the distinction they offered to the owners, but the technology soon displaces the old ways of life and the practice of warfare 'fought by prior arrangement on a sunny afternoon.'<sup>274</sup> White depicts the north of Ireland as the region that first exploited the full potential of the heroes, suggesting that the warriors from the Northern Kingdom of Dalriada were '...armed with weapons and engines of war produced by the steaming, smoke-blackened cities of Emain Macha and Baelfairste that the thick-tongued Saxon mercenaries called Armagh and Belfast.'<sup>275</sup> After attacks on the southern kingdoms by the heroes of the north, the south realises

---

<sup>271</sup> *Silent Stars Go By*, p. 165.

<sup>272</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 167.

<sup>273</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 167.

<sup>274</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 86.

<sup>275</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 86.



that the only way to defeat the heroes is to innovate and construct better hero technology. This advance in technology eventually unites Hibernia, leaving other nations ‘...snapping like science-starved wolves at the Hibernian heels.’<sup>276</sup> As a result, the journey to the Americas by Saint Brendan in the sixth century is undertaken by the steamship *Sea Dragon* rather than the rowboat of historical record, and leads to a friendship between the Hibernians and the Native Americans, paving the way for a Hibernian Empire.<sup>277</sup> White’s fictional alliance joins the pre-modern Native American with a steam-powered Gaelic civilisation that insists on relating to them as equals rather than slaves.<sup>278</sup>

White posits a history of alternative development, describing a benevolent Hibernian Empire, establishing world hegemony, a Pax Hibernia based on steam technology, which eventually leads to the exploration of space and the discovery of a habitable planet. This post-industrial fantasy reflects an ideologeme of progress through technological development that has stalled, White’s narrative suggesting the possibility of other histories, introducing a sense of contingency that Darko Suvin highlights as a central function of science fiction.

We leave our examination of technology and development in the fiction of Shaw and White here, with White’s fantasy of a Catholic Hibernian Empire in the process of spreading itself across the universe, a notion that reverses the traditional view of technology in Northern Ireland, placing it in the hands of so-called pre-modern Celtic peoples.

This chapter has attempted to make a connection between the emergence of a science fiction form in Belfast with the history of technological development in the region, tracing an ideologeme of development through technology in the work of Shaw and White. We have considered Science and Technology Studies, in particular the work of Bruno Latour, as a means of marking the network between the human and the non-human in the work of Shaw and White, detecting anxiety about the loss of human agency to technological artefacts, as the pinnacle of human achievement becomes the

---

<sup>276</sup> *Silent Stars Go By*, p. 28.

<sup>277</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 107.

<sup>278</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 403.

ceding of terrain to technological determinism, a sense that also permeates the science-fictional sublime as the scale of human technological achievement threatens the individual subject causing it to recoil from its creation. The ideologeme of progress through technology reaches its apogee in the work of Shaw and White in the developmental schema that both draw from in their fiction, a notion that Shaw problematises and White appears to accept. However, with the idea of industrial development cast into doubt in the post-industrial era, both authors present non-modern forms of development in their fiction, in the shape of Shaw's ragged technologies and White's steampowered Hibernian Empire.

But in Northern Ireland, a proximity to technology is not the only dividing line between a culture with its roots in the seventeenth-century settlers and a native Irish ideal. The *a priori* conditions for science fiction in the region that, following Jameson and Althusser, we have suggested we can only grasp fragments of, are also the *a priori* conditions for what became known as the Troubles. The period in which Shaw and White began writing science fiction was one in which history was becoming increasingly important to the issue of identity in the region. The fiftieth anniversaries of both the Easter Rising and the Battle of the Somme in 1966 occurred in the midst of tensions between unionists and republicans that led to the resurgence of the Ulster Volunteer Force and the Irish Republican Army. Shaw and White estrange aspects of Northern Irish history, as well as religious and political identity in their fiction, and the next chapter will examine these estrangements in detail.

## Chapter Two

### History and Science Fiction

This chapter will examine how Shaw and White negotiate history and identity in their fiction. It will briefly outline the emergence of what is referred to as the Troubles, highlighting the effect of historical interpretation on those events, and considering Richard Kirkland's work on identity, history and the two-traditions paradigm in Northern Ireland. Kirkland's examination of this paradigm draws from Georg Lukàcs's work on the limitations of the bourgeois novel and, given Carl Freedman's suggestion that science fiction pushes against these limitations, the work of Shaw and White will be examined for ways in which it succeeds or fails to do so. This chapter will suggest ways in which Shaw and White's fiction typifies the bourgeois realist narrative that Kirkland detects, but also assess how writing within the science fiction genre overcomes the limits of bourgeois realism, the estranging aspects of the form embodying a critique of static identities and an articulation of historical process.

#### **Northern Ireland, History and Identity**

In the period in which Shaw and White began writing science fiction, the role of history in constructing identity was heightened in Northern Ireland. White published the novel *The Secret Visitors* in 1957, and placed his Sector General stories in *New Worlds* magazine through the rest of the decade, beginning to publish novels from 1962. After a short burst of activity in the 1950s, Shaw's career began in earnest with the publication of the story '...And Isles Where Good Men Lie' in *New Worlds* magazine in 1965. Both authors wrote prolifically through the period known as the Troubles.

Histories of the period often point to the anniversary of the 1916 Rising and the resulting tensions in Belfast as the beginnings of what became known as the Troubles. The 1966 fiftieth anniversary of the Rising was commemorated in Belfast with sizeable parades, and was feared by the British government as a flashpoint for the resurgence of violence, as were Unionist commemorations for the fiftieth anniversary of the Battle of

the Somme.<sup>279</sup> According to Diarmaid Ferriter, in the south the Easter Rising was commemorated officially with a benign emphasis on ‘pride in the past and confidence in the future’, but unofficially with an I.R.A. explosion destroying the monument to Lord Nelson in Dublin’s O’Connell Street.<sup>280</sup> In the same year, a new iteration of the Ulster Volunteer Force (U.V.F.), the group set up by Edward Carson in 1912 to combat Home Rule, was formed and subsequently banned by Prime Minister Terence O’Neill. North and south of the border, Ferriter suggests a preoccupation with history predominated, an impulse where ‘past grievances are used to justify current claims to justice.’<sup>281</sup> In both regions, the past was referenced in public demonstrations as a marker for identity in the present.

The sense of Northern Ireland as a place in which historical narratives dominate present reality seems to run counter to the notion, discussed in Chapter One, of Northern Ireland as a bastion of forward-thinking modernity on a pre-modern island. Northern Ireland is often discussed through this prism of exceptionalism, articulated as a place with a too-strong sense of its own history, trapped by what Seamus Heaney refers to as ‘anachronistic passions.’<sup>282</sup> In this account, Northern Ireland has not fully entered the era of modernity where identities have become more fluid. Instead, it harbours atavistic desires that constantly threaten to rise to the surface. Luke Gibbons suggests that in Irish political culture, the past is collapsed into an ever-receding present.<sup>283</sup> Eamonn Hughes notes that the Troubles began in the same year as the Apollo moon landing, reinforcing the contrast between a somehow pre-modern Northern Ireland and a technologically advanced global culture. Hughes references Glenn Patterson’s 1988 novel *Burning Your Own*, in which the event of U.S. astronauts arriving on the moon stands as a pre-echo of the British army entering Northern Ireland in 1969, the terrain

---

<sup>279</sup> Paul Dixon, *Northern Ireland: The Politics of War and Peace* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008) p.76.

<sup>280</sup> Diarmaid Ferriter, *The Transformation of Ireland 1900-2000* (London: Profile, 2005) p. 566.

<sup>281</sup> *Northern Ireland: The Politics of War and Peace*, p.1.

<sup>282</sup> Seamus Heaney, ‘Delirium of the Brave’, *The Listener*, 27 (1969) 757-759. Heaney is reviewing Thomas Pakenham’s history of the 1798 rebellion, *The Year of Liberty*, and suggests that ‘politicians involved in “the Irish Question” should read this book, and all others bewildered by the persistence of what appear to be anachronistic passions... whether in themselves or in their contemporaries’(758).

<sup>283</sup> Luke Gibbons, *Transformations in Irish Culture* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1996) p. 82.

likened to the moon as ‘territory seemingly even more distinct from, and alien to, the “modern world.”’<sup>284</sup> Hughes writes that:

This image of Northern Ireland, as a recalcitrantly regressive place somehow separate from the modern progressive world, has always been partially balanced by a weaker, and more often internally-generated, sense of it as a place in which the border being disputed is precisely that between modernising forces and ancient passions.<sup>285</sup>

The latter sense was discussed in Chapter One, the notion that the project of the plantations began a civilising and modernising process on the island of Ireland. But Hughes’s analysis is more complex, suggesting that, rather than being fixed in the past, Northern Ireland could stand as a message for a future in which an increasingly unified Europe conflicts with the fact of the continent being constructed of individual nations, each with a singular national identity to contest, and counter identities within them.<sup>286</sup> Terry Eagleton also sees the possibility of reading the contours of future global conflict in the scrying bowl of Northern Ireland, as previously colonised nations seek to develop their economies and come up against the contradictions of multinational capitalism.<sup>287</sup> In this sense the Troubles themselves are given a future-oriented aspect, warning of the confrontations of modernity still to come.

In attempting to think a way through the sectarian impasse, Richard Kirkland also rejects the notion of the conflict as one between modernity and regression, suggesting that:

Rather than search for the moment of revelation or propose an identitarian ‘solution’ through which the North can emerge into the daylight of a ‘modern’ sensibility, it is more productive to see such analyses as, in themselves, symptomatic of a form of theoretical despair.<sup>288</sup>

This despair stems from the two-traditions paradigm that dominates identity formation and political thought in the region. Kirkland suggests that the intractability of this

---

<sup>284</sup> Glen Patterson, *Burning Your Own* (Belfast: Blackstaff Press, 2008) pp. 145-147, 231-232.

<sup>285</sup> Eamonn Hughes, ‘Introduction: Northern Ireland—Border Country’ in *Culture and Politics in Northern Ireland* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1991) pp. 1-3.

<sup>286</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>287</sup> Terry Eagleton, *Crazy John and the Bishop* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1998) p. 327.

<sup>288</sup> Richard Kirkland, *Identity Parades: Northern Irish Culture and Dissident Subjects* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2002) p. 3.

paradigm of identity is almost self-evident, a critical project to 'move beyond this totality' having not yet begun.<sup>289</sup>

In Northern Irish fiction the two-traditions paradigm is often critiqued through the 'love across the divide' theme typified by Joan Lingard's young adult novel *Across the Barricades*, which centres on a cross-tradition relationship between the teenagers Kevin and Sadie.<sup>290</sup> In Glenn Patterson's *Fat Lad*, the character Anna relates a story to the protagonist Drew of her cross-tradition relationship with the Catholic Con when she was younger, for which she was beaten, tied up and shorn of her hair. Con became the victim of a sectarian killing, and Patterson elides any resolution that the relationship between Con and Anna may have represented by substituting the dead Catholic for the Protestant Drew. Patterson writes 'vast movements of peoples were communicated in the silence of a single kiss. Borders were crossed, identities blurred. Land masses rose and fell with their bodies.'<sup>291</sup>

Kirkland proposes that a more productive critical approach is not to stress the anachronistic nature of the utterances of identity in Northern Ireland, but to trace the contradictions contained within them, remarking that the 'symptoms of cultural and identitarian saturation' in Northern Ireland do not have their origin in irreconcilable differences, but in the contradictions of bourgeois ideology that underpin Northern Irish society on both sides of the sectarian divide. For Kirkland, identity always operates from within a paradox, in that it effaces history, even as it uses history to establish itself, relying as it does on a notion of stability rather than historical process. The notion of historical process is essential to the Marxist historiographical tradition that Kirkland writes within. As discussed in Chapter One, Louis Althusser suggests History as an 'absent cause', a phenomenon that resists symbolisation, with the conclusion that that it constitutes 'a process, without a subject.'<sup>292</sup> Expanding on Althusser's proposition, Jameson suggests that Althusser does not 'draw the fashionable conclusion that because history is a text, the "referent" does not exist', just that History is 'inaccessible to us

---

<sup>289</sup> *Identity Parades*, p. 3.

<sup>290</sup> Joan Lingard, *Across the Barricades* (1972) (London: Puffin, 1995)

<sup>291</sup> Glenn Patterson, *Fat Lad* (Belfast: Blackstaff Press, 1995) p. 273.

<sup>292</sup> Louis Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy* trans. Ben Brewster (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971) p. 122.

except in textual form, and that our approach to it and to the Real itself necessarily passes through its prior textualisation, its narrativisation in the political unconscious.<sup>293</sup> This sense of History as a process that resists representation, and its effect on identities based upon its fragments, will become relevant later in the chapter, in our discussion of the work of Shaw and White.

If we accept Althusser's view of a History that is only partially accessible, then identities reliant upon History can only be informed by a fragment of that History. From this perspective, an identity that draws from a static history mirrors an inability to access History, which can only be partially represented. The arguments around Irish historical revisionists are relevant here, given their claim to have effected a value-free historical method. According to Ciaran Brady, the founding revisionists Theodore William Moody and Robert Dudley Edwards were concerned chiefly with writing a 'purer, more scholarly Irish history', free from the ideological trappings of nationalism, questioning assumptions and placing the means of conducting historical research on a more scientific footing. Brady describes the project as an attempt to put paid to destructive myths of Irish history such as the sectarian myth of Ulster Loyalism and the nationalist aspiration for an island-wide republic. Brady's critique of this project is twofold: he critiques Moody and Dudley Edwards for a simplistic notion of the separation of myth and history that Claude-Levi Strauss had already dispensed with, and he criticises them for their naivety in justifying their methods as value-free historical science.<sup>294</sup> Brady suggests that Levi-Strauss had proved that myth and history were always intertwined, and that the work of history could not be separated from the values of the historian. Moody and Dudley Edwards began their project in the 1930s, but revisionism was to gain a fresh political impetus in the south during the years of the Troubles, the attempted debunking of nationalist myths utilised as a way of delegitimising the campaign of the I.R.A.

This one-sided utilisation of historical revisionism inevitably leads to questions surrounding its scientific basis. Terry Eagleton, for instance, asks why the findings of the so-called pure science of Irish revisionist historiography tended to point in the same

---

<sup>293</sup> *Political Unconscious*, p. 20.

<sup>294</sup> Ciaran Brady, "Constructive and Instrumental": The Dilemma of Ireland's First 'New Historians' in *Interpreting Irish History* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2006) pp. 3-31.

ideological direction. Eagleton suggests that any historical account of Irish history is unlikely to be free from strategic selection and sectarianism until the conflict in the North is resolved. Like Kirkland, Eagleton suggests that a 'euphoric leap into modernity' is an inadequate response and unlikely to leave behind the baggage of history.<sup>295</sup>

For Eagleton, all history is revisionist, based as it is on the needs of the present, an idea that is echoed in Jameson's notion of Marxist historiography. Jameson refers to Marxism as 'absolute historicism', suggesting that by analysing history through the prism of modes of production, Marxism transcends other methods of historiography, demystifying the ways in which claims are made to embody total unified systems. The shift in modes of production, for instance, from feudal society to early capitalism, is expressed in Marxist historiography in terms of a genealogy. For Jameson, Marxism unveils the ideology underpinning historical claims, and is distinguished from other kinds of historiography in that its master code is the absent cause of History, of which we can never achieve full representation. Lenin's *The Development of Capitalism in Russia* is given by Jameson as an example of an empirical history that was under no illusions about the status of history as a pursuit free from ideological content.<sup>296</sup> Unlike Irish historical revisionism then, in adopting the perspective of modes of production, Marxist historiography accepts that ideological content cannot be avoided when engaged in historical work.<sup>297</sup>

In a similar manner, Kirkland suggests that it is impossible to avoid speaking about identity when we speak about history and politics, that identity informs the sense of a past, present and future essential to the constitution of a political subject. For Kirkland, identity is a mediator for personal memory that orders the chaotic material of experience, working it into 'not merely a story but an explanation.'<sup>298</sup> Identity is ideological in this sense, a strategy of containment that can never fully explain the contradictions of a subject identity, but resolves the contradiction in the imaginary realm. For Kirkland, identity is 'an ideological response to temporal uncertainty:

---

<sup>295</sup> *Crazy John and the Bishop*, p. 312.

<sup>296</sup> Fredric Jameson, 'Marxism and Historicism', *New Literary History*, 11.1 (1979) 41-73 (65).

<sup>297</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 41-73.

<sup>298</sup> *Identity Parades*, p. 1.



identity becomes process as well as symptom, and, as such, a means of articulating a provisional political agenda.<sup>299</sup> Kirkland draws from Stuart Hall's theory of a decentred identity, proposing that identity has been superseded as a way of thinking about individual subjects, but that the need for the use of identities as definitions remains. Hall proposes identity as constantly operating 'under erasure' in a process never completed and always in the midst of emergence. For Hall, identity 'requires what is left outside, its constitutive outside, to consolidate the process.'<sup>300</sup> Identities are not essences then, but strategic positions. For Kirkland, identitarianism is 'not just a determined attempt to construct difference, but is an expression of difference negotiated through a framework of bourgeois ideology.'<sup>301</sup> In Northern Ireland, the identities of Unionist and Nationalist are made possible through this framework.

For Kirkland this is typified in the ideological limits of the realist narratives with which Northern Irish authors attempt to deal with the Troubles. Kirkland suggests that studying the Northern Irish bourgeois novel is not that much different from analysing the bourgeois novel in general, and that 'the bourgeois paradigm refigured in Belfast is only slightly different to its manifestation elsewhere.'<sup>302</sup> Kirkland links this form to Lukàcs's notion that the naturalism of the bourgeois novel formally reflects the failures of the 1848 revolutions in Europe, after which liberalism began to concern itself with a narrow class interest rather than a revolutionary program. Lukàcs's work stems from his idea of a 'genre-creating principle', in which an existent social mentality is forced to adopt a new position due to the intervention of social forces.<sup>303</sup> Whereas the historical novel that preceded the bourgeois novel inhabited a critical mode in its perspective of social totality, the post-1848 bourgeois novel was reduced in scope and less concerned with historical forces.<sup>304</sup>

---

<sup>299</sup> *Identity Parades*, p. 15.

<sup>300</sup> Stuart Hall, 'Who Needs Identity?' in *Identity: A Reader* eds. Paul Du Gay, Jessica Evans and Peter Redman (London: Sage Publications, 2003) pp. 15-30.

<sup>301</sup> *Identity Parades*, p. 16.

<sup>302</sup> *Identity Parades*, p. 122.

<sup>303</sup> Georg Lukàcs, *The Theory of the Novel* trans. Anna Bostock (London: The Merlin Press, 1988) p. 40.

<sup>304</sup> Georg Lukàcs, *The Historical Novel* trans. Hannah and Stanley Mitchell (London: Penguin, 1969)

This is reflected in the circular fatalism of realist narratives that attempt to deal with the Troubles such as the novels of Bernard MacLaverty.<sup>305</sup> In the novel *Cal*, Cal's inability to escape the past and the republican group he has joined foreshadow the inevitability of the novel's narrative closure, in which Cal accepts the beating he will receive from his arresting police officers gladly.<sup>306</sup> In the novel history is shown to be little more than the realisation of realpolitik, with Cal's childhood friend and school bully Crilly utilised by Father Durkin as a means to curb the trade in pornography at their school, and later by the republican Skeffington as an enforcer. Skeffington tells Cal: 'practical things have to be done. If you've a burst pipe you send for a plumber. If you have a war on your hands you send for the Mr. Crillys of this world. The hard men and the bandits are the real revolutionaries, if you see what I mean. They get things done, they punch the hole for us to get through later.'<sup>307</sup> MacLaverty's first novel *Lamb* also reflects a circular fatalism with violence as a core component. Brother Benedict ventriloquizes the silence that signals southern complicity in the Troubles. He tells Michael 'they are angry men with vision, Brother, and by God their anger is justified. Ireland has not much longer to suffer. Her misery will soon be over and we'll be a united country again.'<sup>308</sup> Benedict uses arbitrary violence to enforce discipline at the boys home, and Michael turns to violence at the close of the narrative in an attempt to redeem the life of the orphan Owen by drowning him at a moment of happiness. As he drives through Northern Ireland with his plan for Owen's death set, Michael passes through Strabane and perceives 'a town bent on self-destruction. Cutting off its nose to spite the British Government's face.' MacLaverty continues: 'The air was full of a savage and bewildered gloom and Michael drove away from the town with it still clinging to him.'<sup>309</sup> In *Lamb*, the violence of Northern Ireland is inescapable, permeating even the redemptive intentions of the benevolent Brother Michael.

Returning to MacLaverty's *Cal*, any potentially redemptive content is also undone by the circular pessimism of a narrative that stresses continuity rather than change. Cal contemplates republican activists giving their lives for an Ireland that will

---

<sup>305</sup> Bernard MacLaverty, *Cal* (1983) (London: Random House, 1998)

<sup>306</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 154.

<sup>307</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 18, 40.

<sup>308</sup> Bernard MacLaverty, *Lamb* (1980) (London: Random House, 2000) p. 9.

<sup>309</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 139.

never exist and decides that 'it was the people of Ulster who were heroic, caught between the jaws of two opposing ideas trying to grind each other out of existence.'<sup>310</sup> This sense of deadlock prohibits any opening onto the future in the novel. Cal's Italian lover Marcella tells Cal 'Ireland. It's like a child. It's only concerned with the past and the present. The future has ceased to exist for it', to which Cal replies 'it will only have a future when the British leave.'<sup>311</sup> Later Cal is described attempting to look into the future, MacLaverty writing that 'what he saw there made him close his eyes'.<sup>312</sup> Similarly in *Lamb*, Michael's decision to drown Owen occurs when he realises that 'Owen was without a future—either way.'<sup>313</sup> Cal's arrest and contemplation of violence from the arresting policeman suggests that in Northern Ireland when violence arrives, it comes as a relief, a means of avoiding the more troubling contradictions involved in contemplating the future.

The limits of realist fiction becomes relevant to the study of Northern Irish science fiction, when we consider the work of Carl Freedman, for whom science fiction represents a form that opens onto the future and supersedes the limitations of the bourgeois novel that Lukàcs detects. Freedman draws from Lukàcs to argue not only that science fiction occupies a formal position previously held by the historical novel, but also that the science fiction genre should in fact occupy a privileged position for critical theory. Freedman suggests that science fiction and the historical novel are both radical and historicising literary forms, serving to denaturalise the present and highlight the way in which historical forces shape the social structure. For Freedman science fiction opens onto the future and 'insists upon historical mutability, material reducibility, and utopian possibility.'<sup>314</sup> Freedman writes:

The future is crucial to science fiction not as a specific chronological register, but as a locus of radical *alterity* to the mundane status quo, which is thus estranged and historicized as the concrete past of potential future.<sup>315</sup>

---

<sup>310</sup> *Cal*, p. 83.

<sup>311</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 118.

<sup>312</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 142.

<sup>313</sup> *Lamb*, p. 130.

<sup>314</sup> *Critical Theory and Science Fiction*, xvi.

<sup>315</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 55.

Northern Irish authors such as Eoin McNamee and Ronan Bennett utilise historical narratives in their fiction. McNamee's *Resurrection Man*, *The Blue Tango* and *The Ultras* all apprehend the recent past of Northern Ireland.<sup>316</sup> However, as has been shown in MacLaverty's realist novels, a narrative like *Resurrection Man*, based on the murders perpetrated by the Shankill Butchers between 1975 and 1982, suggests a circular logic of tit-for-tat killing devoid of political motivation, therefore closing off any orientation towards the future and suggesting the continuity of history rather than anything approaching contingency. Ronan Bennett's historical narratives bear more potential to estrange, but Bennett points to the continuities rather than the radical alterities of the past, depicting moments of crisis in other places and times that chime with Troubles era Northern Ireland, such as Congo during the rise of Patrice Lumumba and the independence movement in *The Catastrophist* or seventeenth century England at a time when Protestantism was increasing influence in *Havoc, in its Third Year*.<sup>317</sup> The latter novel appears the most estranged from the present of the two novels, with its supernatural elements, dream sequences and setting in pre-industrial Britain, but Bennett is more concerned with demonstrating how the past mirrors the present, than with depicting alternative social structures. The protagonist John Brigge, a coroner and secret Catholic in a town of evangelical Protestants, serves as a stand-in for the minority Catholic population in Northern Ireland. Bennett uses history to detect the origin of the two-traditions paradigm and the siege mentality of Northern Protestants. The character Antrobus tells Brigge 'did you know there are five thousand papists in the town? Every one of them armed with daggers and ready at the command of the Pope to slit the throats of honest Protestants.'<sup>318</sup>

This critique of Bennett's use of history in *Havoc, in its Third Year* echoes Lukàcs's critique of Gustave Flaubert's *Salamambo*, set in Carthage in the year 3 B.C. Lukàcs suggests that Flaubert uses historical material as 'a pictorial frame within which a purely modern story is unfolded' and is uninterested in the social structure of the historical period he is depicting.<sup>319</sup> For Lukàcs, when the realist technique is applied to

---

<sup>316</sup> Eoin McNamee, *Resurrection Man* (London: Picador, 1995); *The Blue Tango* (London: Faber & Faber 2002); *The Ultras* (London: Faber & Faber, 2005)

<sup>317</sup> Ronan Bennett, *The Catastrophist* (London: Hodder Headline, 2004); *Havoc, in its Third Year* (London: Hodder Headline, 2005)

<sup>318</sup> *Havoc, in its Third Year*, p. 195.

<sup>319</sup> *The Historical Novel*, p. 225.

historical material it results in a 'frozen, lunar landscape of archaeological precision.'<sup>320</sup> Flaubert's novel was exhaustively researched and contains voluminous details regarding architectural features and the kinds of food eaten at the time. Flaubert utilises his historical research in a detailed description of the appearance of the magistrate Hanno, rubbing his leg with an 'aloe-wood spatula' and drinking 'a ptisan made of the ashes of a weasel and asparagus boiled in vinegar'.<sup>321</sup> But Hanno embodies modern bourgeois values, complaining about inflation and unrolling a papyrus to complain about government expenditure.<sup>322</sup>

Like *Salammbô*, Bennett's novel is meticulously researched, evidenced by the acknowledgements section which contains Bennett's reading list of historical texts on the Tudor and Stuart periods.<sup>323</sup> But Bennett draws on continuities between the present and the past rather than the radical alterity that its social structures represent. This results in a narrative closure that embraces the universal humanism evidenced in Brigge's encounter with the aftermath of a town fire that has dissolved 'differences of ranks, wealth and degree.'<sup>324</sup> The narrative of *Havoc, in its Third Year* resolves itself in this notion of universalism in death, as well as the supernatural, with Brigge surviving after death and reuniting with his deceased wife who tells him 'there was mercy and all men who sought it should have it.'<sup>325</sup>

We have seen how a static history informs the dominant identities in Northern Ireland. Part of the aim of this chapter is to assess the extent to which the science fiction of Shaw and White fulfils Freedman's assertion, providing a means of overcoming the limits of the bourgeois novel by opening onto the future and registering historical change.

### **History and Remembrance in Shaw.**

Strategies of identity dependent on history are both utilised and critiqued by Shaw and White in their science fiction. This section will discuss how this manifests in Shaw's

---

<sup>320</sup> *The Historical Novel*, p. 224.

<sup>321</sup> Gustave Flaubert, *Salammbô* trans. A.J. Krailsheimer (1862) (New York: Penguin, 1977) p. 46.

<sup>322</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 46.

<sup>323</sup> *Havoc, in its Third Year*, pp. 304-305.

<sup>324</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 294.

<sup>325</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 302-303.

Land and Overland trilogy and the novel *Other Days, Other Eyes*. In these texts, history stands as a guarantor for identity and truth, but is then problematised. In Land and Overland, the linear progression of history is questioned by Lain as he regards a cave painting. As will be shown, in *Other Days, Other Eyes*, the technology of slow glass is first suggested as a value-free means of accessing a visual record of events exactly as they happened, an issue that has implications for claims to an ideology-free historical practice. But subsequently, slow glass is shown to be an effective tool in ideological manipulation and criminal conspiracy. Ultimately, these works by Shaw show an awareness of our apprehension of History as fragmentary and incomplete.

In the first of the Land and Overland Trilogy, *The Ragged Astronauts*, as ecological crisis accelerates, history and posterity become important markers for identity among the royalty of the Kolcorronian race on the planet Land. After an argument regarding a vaccine for pterthacosis, posterity becomes the overriding issue, his father telling Leddravohr 'ours will not be the house which is remembered for turning its back on learning.' He bids his son goodnight by telling him: 'remember—the future watches.'<sup>326</sup> As already discussed in Chapter One, later in the narrative a cave painting shows Lain an alternative perspective of Land history, inspiring an ecological revelation that leaves him overwhelmed with a sense of duration, a sense of the position of his own culture in History. Whereas the Church of Land teaches that Land and Overland were poles for the continuous alternation of spirits between the worlds, this painting suggests a process of progression, opening up the idea of alternative histories to Lain. Lain thinks about the Bithian Heresy that was stamped out four centuries earlier; the theory stated that a life of virtue on one world would be rewarded on the sister planet. For Lain:

The Church's main objection had been to the idea of a progression and therefore of change, which conflicted with the essential teaching that the present order was immutable and eternal. Lain found it easy to believe that the macrocosm had always been as it was, but on the small stage of human history there was evidence of change, and by extrapolating backwards one could arrive at...this!<sup>327</sup>

---

<sup>326</sup> *Ragged Astronauts*, pp. 126-127.

<sup>327</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 221.

Lain's encounter in the cave opens him up to a sense of History in the way that Freedman argues for the science fiction form, articulating a world defined by flux and conflict, and highlighting the mutability of reality. In contrast to the static history of the Land royalty, Lain reads the cave wall in the same way that Lukács reads a prehistory of the present in the historical novel, extrapolating backwards as a way of tapping into the forces of historical process.<sup>328</sup> In this case, this sense of historical process serves to problematise dogma and opens up questions of progress and development to ecological questions as outlined in Chapter One.

The second volume of the trilogy, *The Wooden Spaceships*, also stages an opposition between history as reified identity and History as process. The ships that enabled the inhabitants of Land to escape to Overland have been confined to museums on the new territory. Toller Maraquine, having been a key figure in the expedition, cannot bear to look at the ships because '...the inert, mould-encrusted reality of the ships was incompatible with the inspirational dynamism of that high point in his life.'<sup>329</sup> The dynamism of the colonial project has been overshadowed by the obsolescence of the technology used to achieve its aims.<sup>330</sup> For the character Berise, this dynamism can be replaced by culture now that they have left Land. Berise warns Toller that:

You can't do what we did and get away without paying a penalty. We left our racial soul behind on the Old World. Do you know that in all the ships that took part in the Migration there was not one painting? No books, no sculptures, no music. We left it all behind us.<sup>331</sup>

She tells Toller that 'a race needs an armature of culture to support every other aspect of its being, and we no longer have one.'<sup>332</sup> At first Toller worries that he is '...an aesthete at heart, troubled by a growing awareness that his people lacked a cultural identity'. But he rails against the idea, declaring that 'no...the worm that eats out the core of my life is not concerned with poetry and art—and neither am I.'<sup>333</sup> Later he convinces King Chakkell to send an expedition to a third planet called Farland by promising him 'a harvest of history' should he plant the flag of Overland there.<sup>334</sup> Here

---

<sup>328</sup> *Historical Novel*, p. 179.

<sup>329</sup> *Wooden Spaceships*, p. 11.

<sup>330</sup> In this case, the land being colonised is empty.

<sup>331</sup> *Wooden Spaceships*, p. 145.

<sup>332</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 146.

<sup>333</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 147.

<sup>334</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 225.

it is militarism rather than culture that is posited as providing continuity, the harvest of history reaped by conquest, an apprehension of totality that presumes culture as a useless appendage of the colonial project.

Throughout the Land and Overland narrative then, history is depicted as a contestable narrative, an echo of the fragmentary nature of our access to History as outlined in the introduction to this chapter. The culture of the royalty on Land assert a static identity in which future identity will be dependent on the continuity of royal values. Lain accesses a history that suggests alternative versions of development and progress. Having arrived on Overland, culture is suggested as a means of grasping some kind of continuity of identity on the new planet, but Toller rejects the suggestion and instead invokes militarism and conquest as a way of guaranteeing immortality in history.

As already discussed in Chapter One, Shaw's story 'Light of Other Days' introduces the concept of slow glass, a type of glass in which the speed of light is reduced to such an extent that events occurring within its radius are replayed many years later. In the narrative, the owner of a slow glass 'farm' in the Scottish highlands, uses the trapped image of his wife and child as consolation for their death. The ability of slow glass to provide scenery is described as 'the exact emotional equivalent of owning land.'<sup>335</sup> As well as the emotional value that slow glass possesses as described in the narrative, slow glass also has material effects on the structure of society, seeming as it does to reveal events as they happened without mediation. The ability of slow glass technology to access the past in this way is explored in Shaw's second slow glass story 'Burden of Proof', which further extends the exploration of the impact of the slow glass *novum* by applying it to matters of law and public institutions.

The evidence contained in the piece of slow glass is described as 'perfect and incontrovertible', a pure sight that avoids the intrusions of ideology. Harpur himself is described as out of chronological step, Shaw writing that only the presence of other people 'prevented him from slipping into the past.'<sup>336</sup> Harpur made a name for himself

---

<sup>335</sup> *Other Days, Other Eyes*, p. 30.

<sup>336</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 49.



as the Iron Judge, a harsh defender of the law despite the ambiguities that slow glass brings. Harpur muses that the law exists 'solely because people believed in it.' The revelation that an innocent man has been put to death by the state has the potential to cause irreparable damage to public acceptance of the validity of the concept of law itself.

Harpur actually shrinks from viewing the unmediated reality of the crime through the glass for himself, Shaw writing that he 'simply wanted to hear the result; then have a long, long rest.'<sup>337</sup> At the closure of the narrative, the security guard Sam Macnamara, established earlier in the story as an Irish émigré, telephoning Harpur to confirm that his guilty verdict has been verified. Adopting the persona of the Iron Judge, he tells Macnamara that 'the presence of a peculiar piece of glass makes very little difference, one way or the other', but the security guard presses him, suggesting that the result must be a relief. Shaw writes 'Harpur realised, with a warm surprise, that the big Irishman was pleading with him. It doesn't matter any more [sic], he thought. In the morning I'm going to retire and rejoin [sic] the human race.' He admits that he will sleep well after hearing the verdict and the story finishes with the line 'Harpur set the phone down with his eyes tight-closed, waited for peace.'<sup>338</sup> Although Harpur professes a belief in the rigidity of the law despite the existence of slow glass, the peace that the judge expects after hearing what the unmediated truth depicted suggests a contradiction between his public and private personas. The unmediated access to truth that slow glass provides results in peace of mind for his private self, although his public persona denied the implications of slow glass technology. Whereas in 'Light of Other Days', slow glass was examined from a social point of view, being depicted as a kind of enhanced photograph to remind the farmer of lost loved ones, 'Burden of Proof' amplifies the estrangement that the *novum* of slow glass implies, suggesting that it is an invention that has the power to undermine legal institutions, affording as it does a purer access to the past and an accurate recording of past events free from ideology.<sup>339</sup>

---

<sup>337</sup> *Other Days, Other Eyes*, p. 57.

<sup>338</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 61.

<sup>339</sup> According to Patrick Maume, Shaw held a lifelong fear of losing his sight, triggered by an event from his childhood in which he witnessed a friend lose an eye in an accident on a building site. See *No Country For Old Men*, p. 200.

Kirkland detects a structural opposition between sight and ideology in Northern Irish fiction that could be suggested as present in Shaw's slow glass fiction. Kirkland expands on the logic of this binary by quoting a character in Robert McLiam Wilson's novel *Eureka Street*, who suggests that eyes are 'those democratic unideological things...giving witness, testimony'.<sup>340</sup> The possibility of the gaze is rendered as a moment of revelation, an access to the Real, or in Althusser and Jameson's terms, History itself. Slow glass seems to offer a technological version of this unideological witness to events, suggesting the possibility of a value-free position from which to view an uncorrupted History. But as Shaw extrapolates further on the *novum* of slow glass, the opposition between sight and ideology becomes problematised, as slow glass becomes prey to manipulation for both ideological and criminal purposes.

In 1972 Shaw published the slow glass novel *Other Days, Other Eyes*, the narrative centring on Alban Garrod, the US inventor of the material. Thermagrad, the precursor material to slow glass, was originally designed as a durable material to be installed in the windshields of cars and windows of aeroplanes, and the access to the recent past that it affords is first envisaged as a destructive force. At the test flight of the Aurora, the first plane to be fitted with the material, Garrod's wife Esther foreshadows destruction by suggesting that the windows render the plane 'short-sighted...like a bird with its eyes squeezed, trying to see.' As Garrod watches the flight, he notices latency in the reactions of the pilot just before the plane crashes into the runway. Later, experiments made by shining a lamp through a sheet of Thermagrad confirm that the material slows down the speed of light coming through it. The pilot of the Aurora crashed because he was out of step with his surroundings, 'seeing the world as it had existed one second in the past!'<sup>341</sup>

The ignorance of the pilot, unaware that he was witnessing the past, is the cause of his death, but Garrod transforms the significance of Thermagrad, reinterpreting it as slow glass, transforming the material from one that allows the past to violently disturb

---

<sup>340</sup> *Identity Parades*, p. 121; For source of quote, see Robert McLiam Wilson, *Eureka Street* (London: Random House, 1998) p. 214. The narrative trajectory of Aoighe, the most ideological character in the novel, goes from ideological support for armed struggle to a turnaround when confronted with the victim of a punishment beating. Referring to Aoighe, the last line of the novel reads 'she looked at me with clear eyes' (p. 395).

<sup>341</sup> *Other Days, Other Eyes*, p. 20.

the present, to one where the truth of the past can be apprehended. Before revealing his discovery to Esther Garrod, he tells her that she will be the 'first woman in the history of the entire human race to see her own face as it really is', slow glass described as a 'true mirror' in which the image of the face is not reversed.<sup>342</sup> What once unleashed a destructive anachronism into the world is transformed into a means of accessing a purer version of reality.

But as the narrative progresses, the notion of an unmediated perspective on History is undermined. Garrod turns amateur detective when his father-in-law Boyd Livingstone is accused of running over and killing a man while drugged at the wheel of his car. Garrod meets the police lieutenant Mayrick to discuss the visual evidence gathered at the scene. Although there were no slow glass panels present at the site of the crash, local residents of the upmarket area objecting to their use on the roadway, photographs of the aftermath of the accident seem to suggest Livingstone's guilt. Shaw writes that:

The pictures, all with certified time-recording dials in the corners, showed Livingstone, lying over the steering wheel of his car, close-ups of the dented fender, a shabbily-dressed dead man crumpled in an appallingly large pool of blood, and general views of the accident scene under floodlighting.<sup>343</sup>

The accuracy of Mayrick's visual information is secured by its reference to time, as well as the image it renders of the accident scene. The perspective afforded by the photographs is suggested as one of a value-free, unmediated reality. When Garrod inquires about the dark objects scattered at the scene of the crash, he is informed that they are 'caked mud dislodged from inside the wheel arch by the impact', to which the police lieutenant adds 'that's something your realistic movie-makers forget about when they're staging accident scenes.'<sup>344</sup> Here the unmediated reality that Mayrick accesses is vouched for by its detail, separating its reality from an event merely staged for a film camera.

Garrod walks away convinced of Livingstone's guilt, although the idea of him partaking in drugs jars significantly with Livingstone's public image as an anti-

---

<sup>342</sup> *Other Days, Other Eyes*, p. 22.

<sup>343</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 73.

<sup>344</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 73.

gambling advocate. When questioned by Garrod about the incident, Livingstone insists that he pulled over as soon as he realised he had been drugged. When Garrod mentions the visual evidence, Livingstone claims a more immediate experience of the event, replying: 'I don't care what photographs you've seen. I was there, and—even if somebody did half-poison me—I know what I did and what I did not do.'<sup>345</sup> This foregrounding of personal testimony over material evidence echoes Ciaran Carson's criticism of Seamus Heaney. Carson opposes instances of 'honesty of observation' in Heaney's collection *North* to the tendency of the poet to mythologise, evidence for Carson that Heaney 'doubts the worth of his own simplicity.' This opposition between a professed 'actuality' that is witnessed and a myth that stands in the way of this unadulterated truth, echoes the arguments of the historical revisionists, not least in Carson's description of Heaney's position as applying 'wrong notions of history instead of seeing what's before your eyes'.<sup>346</sup> This notion also relates to the opposition between sight and ideology that Richard Kirkland detects in Northern Irish fiction, which we have already discussed.

Returning to *Other Days, Other Eyes*, Garrod chooses not to trust what he sees, and arrives at an 'illogical conviction' that his father-in-law is telling the truth despite the seemingly conclusive evidence. He buys a piece of slow glass from a private residence on the avenue where the event occurred to investigate further, but as he stares at it for clues, he comes to a conclusion independent of the view that the material affords, described by Shaw in the terms of the 'eureka' moment of the scientist. Treating the problem as a proposition in pure mechanics, he reasons that the forces of action and reaction would obtain the same result if the man hit the car rather than the car the man. In a bizarre narrative turn, Garrod's proposes that Livingstone and the victim had been drugged, the perpetrator using a crane to lift the victim and slam him into the front of Livingstone's car at force.<sup>347</sup> He reasons that the crime can be detected by finding traces of drugs in the victim's blood, the mark of a hook in the victim's clothing, and finally checking the slow glass monitors leading into the area where the event took place to confirm that a breakdown truck had been present in the area. The insight results in the uncovering of attempts by a gambling syndicate to frame

---

<sup>345</sup> *Other Days, Other Eyes*, p. 76.

<sup>346</sup> Ciaran Carson, 'Escaped from the Massacre', *The Honest Ulsterman*, 50 (1975) 183-185.

<sup>347</sup> *Other Days, Other Eyes*, p. 84.

Livingstone, and although slow glass is given an ancillary role in the detection process, the narrative demonstrates a mistrust of claims to value-free truth through appeal to visual evidence, Garrod apprehending the totality of the situation through insight and scientific method, then consulting visual readings of the past to confirm his findings.

Slow glass begins as a technology that promises access to an unmediated truth analogous to Irish historical revisionism's claim to access a purer version of history free from ideological contamination. In 'Burden of Proof' this access to unmediated truth threatens the foundation of law, but Harpur's verdict is vindicated. This can be framed as a version of the sight and ideology opposition that Kirkland discusses, with access to visual information suggested as a means of sidestepping ideology. This sense of access to unmediated reality is undermined in the novel, with the strategic placement of slow glass in espionage suggesting the possibility of its use for reasons other than ascertaining the truth of events. Garrod also denies the sight node in the sight and ideology binary by refusing to believe the visual evidence at the scene of Livingstone's car accident, and relying on deduction and science to solve the case. Here the novel reintroduces the possibility that slow glass can be used for ideological purposes, that a so-called pure view of History merely reflects an ideological position.

This sense is increased with depicted innovations in slow glass technology as the narrative progresses. Garrod's business partner MacFarlane improves slow glass by developing a means to slow down the speed which images are released from it. He tells Garrod 'the boys have a section of slow glass in the rig right now and they're running it just like a home movie. Speeding it up to an hour a minute, slowing it down where they feel like it, almost freezing the images.'<sup>348</sup> Garrod apprehends the significance of the development, remarking that 'from today on a simple piece of slow glass is superior to the most expensive movie camera in the world. All that went before is nothing to what's coming.'<sup>349</sup> What is coming is the ability for slow glass to be used for ideological purposes, as images captured in the material can be selected and edited for their ideological impact. Shaw demonstrates this future in a chapter entitled 'A Dome of Many Coloured Glass' that originally appeared as a short story in the US magazine

---

<sup>348</sup> *Other Days, Other Eyes*, p. 93.

<sup>349</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 93.

*Fantastic* in 1972. In the narrative, an English-born private in the US airforce is held by the Chinese, and forced by a figure known as the Planner, to watch visions of the horrors of Western Imperialism. The Planner tells him:

Your journey will take you to My Lai and a hundred other similar places. In some cases what you see will obviously be filmed material, but as you get more up to date you will be looking through slow glass which was at the actual scenes. You'll be there, Larry. As far as the evidence of your eyes is concerned, you will really be present at all these places. Even when you're asleep you'll still be there, watching and watching.<sup>350</sup>

Here the opposition between sight and ideology is dissolved. Evans will actually be present at the scene of events of massacres, but the intent of the Planner is purely ideological, an attempt at changing the ideology of Evans to such an extent that he will change sides.<sup>351</sup> The immediate access that slow glass gives to historical atrocities, causes Evans to descend into madness, retreating into the past 'of a bygone century.' Shaw tells us that:

In the end, Evans was able to make the transition to psychosis smoothly. There had been a long journey, filled with pain and horror, but all that was behind him now. He was back in England, Queen Victoria was secure on her throne, and soon he would be home. There was only a short distance to walk.<sup>352</sup>

At the close of the narrative, slow glass is revealed as just as prone to ideological selection as photography or video. Far from providing a value-free and ideology-proof means of appraising the past, slow glass simply becomes the new terrain for the manipulation of perception and ideological struggle.

This sense is increased when Shaw returns to the narrative proper, which becomes a convoluted plot to frame a presidential candidate with strategic placing of frames of slow glass. Garrod is called to investigate the assassination of Jerry Wescott, a senator who would likely have been the next US president had his car not been vaporised by a laser cannon. Garrod is asked by Police Commissioner Chief Executive

---

<sup>350</sup> *Other Days, Other Eyes*, p. 99.

<sup>351</sup> Chapter Four will return to 'A Dome of Many Coloured Glass' again to consider the connection between torture practices used in the Troubles era during internment and China's 'brainwashing' practices on prisoners of war.

<sup>352</sup> *Other Days, Other Eyes*, p. 101.

Miller J. Pobjoy to attempt retrieval of information from a piece of slow glass burned in the attack, Garrod's assertion that the glass would be wiped of evidence countered by a reference to science and sight by Pobjoy: 'but can you, as a scientist—a scientist who hasn't even seen what we've got—make a positive statement to that effect?'<sup>353</sup> Ben Sala's attempt to frame his housemate Matt McCullough for the crime involved the complex use of slow glass to capture footage of him at the wheel of his truck, timed to place McCullough at the scene of the senator's killing. Replacing the windows of the truck with Retardite, Sala tells McCullough he needs help checking his steering and lies under the car telling McCullough to turn the wheel intermittently. Unbeknownst to McCullough at the wheel, he is seeing the surrounding garage as it was the day before while taking part in footage that will frame him for murder. The footage obtained, Sala used the new technique of slowing down the images to store them for future use. In this post-slow glass world Occam's razor does not apply, Garrod explaining that 'these days all murder plans have to be complicated.'<sup>354</sup>

Slow glass reveals images of the past without context that can still be manipulated for ideological or criminal purposes, undermining the opposition between sight and ideology. With the introduction of slow glass technology, what is seen cannot be trusted, greater efforts being made to manipulate perception that take the existence of the material into account. Whereas 'Burden of Proof' depicted slow glass as a technology enabling access to a value-free history, the narrative of *Other Days, Other Eyes* suggests that no such access is possible.

Another reversal occurs in the narrative when it becomes apparent that slow glass is fast becoming ubiquitous. Jane Watson informs Garrod that his investigation is a sham, the police are aware who committed the crime and are using Garrod for cover. Watson suggests that the police identified the killer with satellites fitted with slow glass, an innovation to which the public would have objections.<sup>355</sup> Later Garrod comes to the conclusion that the satellite story itself is a subterfuge. Shaw writes 'there are no satellites, he thought. No torpedoes carrying Retardite eyes down out of orbit. They

---

<sup>353</sup> *Other Days, Other Eyes*, pp. 114-115.

<sup>354</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 148.

<sup>355</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 131.

don't need them. Not when they're dusting the whole world with slow glass!'<sup>356</sup> The reason the identity of the killer is known is because slow glass is everywhere, dropped by the crop dusters that Garrod constantly sees overhead during his investigation, evidently delivering the tiny molecules of slow glass to the terrain below. He thinks of the dust clinging to 'trees, buildings, telegraph poles, flowers, mountain slopes, birds, flying insects. It would be in people's clothing, in their food, in the water they drank.' As already quoted in Chapter One, Garrod concludes that as a result 'anybody, any agency, with the right equipment can find out anything about ANYBODY!'<sup>357</sup> The dusting of the entire world with slow glass renders the access it affords to the past universal, confirming Garrod's worst fears at the beginning of the narrative.

Although Garrod claims ownership of slow glass and its exaggerated effects, Shaw's narrative closes with a suggestion of the broad sweep into a collective future that Freedman regards typical of both the historical novel and the science fiction form, depicting as they do the mutability of history and the potential to change its course through collective struggle. Slow glass provokes such a struggle from below by humanity, allusion having been made earlier in the narrative to striking post office workers objecting to the installation of Retardite in their workplace. Near the close of the narrative, Shaw writes of a victory for opponents of the technology, writing that 'a panic-stricken Government was forced by the people to create new legislation banning the production of slow glass.'<sup>358</sup> However, the revelation that other countries are accelerating its production of the material leads to an acceptance of the proliferation of slow glass. The closure of the narrative is ambiguous, Shaw suggesting that some kind of utopian endpoint has been reached through the spread of the material. Shaw writes:

In later decades, men were to come to accept the universal presence of Retardite eyes, and they learned to live without subterfuge or shame as they had done in a distant past when it was known that the eyes of God could see everywhere.<sup>359</sup>

The narrative reaches closure here, the expectation of surveillance promising a future without duplicity or ignominy, while leaving the tension between sight and ideology unresolved. The endpoint of slow glass is embodied in a kind of surveillance state, a

---

<sup>356</sup> *Other Days, Other Eyes*, p. 157.

<sup>357</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 157.

<sup>358</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 158.

<sup>359</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 158.



panopticon that ensures the good behaviour of its citizenry. Shaw fails to explore the implications arising from the possibility for the manipulation of the images that slow glass creates for ideological or criminal purposes.

History in Shaw's science fiction is a marker for identity, but this ideal is problematised in his texts. Having proposed the idea of history as integral to the idea of continuity of tradition in the Land and Overland series, the revelation of Lain suggests a panoply of histories that render the history of the monarchy a mere fragment of inaccessible History. On Overland, this struggle to define identity by relating to historical narrative becomes a contest between a static cultural pursuit and one that suggests a continuity between the military conquests of the past and those that will be carried out in the future. Shaw's slow glass technology initially seems to provide a more authentic view of the past, rendering as it does a view of events as they actually happened. Slow glass first supersedes the sentimental value of the photograph, then threatens to replace adjudication in criminal cases. The latter suggests the possibility of an ideology-free history that evokes the claims of the Irish historical revisionists. But as the implications of the technology are drawn out across *Other Days*, *Other Eyes*, the notion of a history free from the values of the historian comes under question, as slow glass is enlisted for ideological purposes as the sense of immediate reality it provides is used in an attempt to instil an anti-West ideology in a victim of torture, as well as utilised to frame someone for murder through the careful placement of slow glass panels.

### **James White's Psychic and Oral Histories.**

Continuity and memory are also central to identity in White's fiction. This section will discuss the recounting of the psychic histories of Earth to subjects kept in stasis during a space voyage in *The Dream Millennium*, the recounting of personal history as a means of accessing an accurate version of history in *The Watch Below*, and the oral history remembered and recounted by Nolan in *The Silent Stars Go By*.

The inhabitants of the starship in White's *The Dream Millennium* are visited by the collective memories of Earth while sleeping in stasis on an interstellar voyage. Brother Howard tells the travellers to try to remember the dreams for 'life, identity, continuity', and as a guard against the mental confusion and amnesia that space travel

manifests.<sup>360</sup> Having disobeyed a ship rule prohibiting two crew members being awake simultaneously, Devlin and Yvonne discover that they both have the same dreams about inhabiting the bodies of dinosaurs and trilobites. Initially, Devlin reasons that they were both given the same reading material before they left, but Yvonne reveals that she covertly read a 'historical romance' instead of the dinosaur book they had been given. Later in the narrative, Howard explains the source of their dreams in the fact that when a human is removed from Earth, they become a seed for the planet, their racial memory triggering 'the total knowledge of their ancestors or the people of the same sex with whom their ancestors came into contact with as far back as prehistoric times.'<sup>361</sup> These 'hauntings' have been breathed in by the subject throughout their entire life before space travel, and make themselves known when they leave the planet.<sup>362</sup>

The narrative closes with the discovery of a habitable planet. After drawing sketches as a means to befriend the alien race they find there, Devlin reflects on the fact that the human children born on the planet will be educated by this psychic history. White writes:

He thought about the absence of schools and what it would be like to have children educated, from a very early age, by dreams which stretched beyond their race's earliest recorded history. He thought of a non-human race sharing a world with his own people, perhaps sharing their racial dreams, and of what they might ultimately achieve together.<sup>363</sup>

Like slow glass, these hauntings are purported to offer a pure, unmediated view of history. Here, history is neutral, a natural phenomenon that is breathed in, transmitting its lessons to humanity on interstellar journeys and ensuring continuity of identity on a planet colonised by humanity. This sense of history as integral to identity in the present is explored elsewhere in White's fiction.

In *The Watch Below*, members of an alien race called the Unthan are kept in stasis through the process of hibernation anaesthesia in order to make an interstellar voyage. The captain of the ship Deslann contemplates those in suspended animation,

---

<sup>360</sup> *Dream Millennium*, p. 13, 19.

<sup>361</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 203.

<sup>362</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 205.

<sup>363</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 222.

wondering whether their thought patterns continue in stasis, providing a 'tenuous link between an outwardly dead body and the living soul.'<sup>364</sup> It is discovered that those in cold sleep are subject to the deterioration of their memories when they are thawed and re-frozen, the results of a cumulative effect on the cells of the brain. The Healer aboard the ship explains that large segments of memory become unavailable and that those remaining are impaired. Comparing the process to the decaying of mental processes in aging, he tells Deslann and the crew: 'you will all have had experience with aged relatives, and noticed the gradual decaying of mental processes which seems to peel away the more recent layers of memory so that they live increasingly in the past.'<sup>365</sup> When thawed and refrozen too often, the deterioration of the subject's brain means that they cannot be trusted to navigate the ship or travel from one end of the ship to another.

Upon hearing about the condition, Deslann is haunted by memories of his late childhood, which he reasons is a case of autosuggestion brought about by talk of the destruction of memory. The captain's mind slips back to childhood, to the day when his archaeologist father took him on a journey overland using a 'landboat'. He recalls sleeping in a cave on one night of the journey and seeing the bones of the 'gas-breathing land-dwellers' of Unthan prehistory. In White's narrative the Unthan are aquatic, but the prehistory of their race includes intelligent land-dwellers, who breathed air and built vessels with which to float on water and hunt sea animals.<sup>366</sup> Although Deslann fears his memory is deteriorating from hibernation anaesthesia, his memories of childhood allow access to this prehistory, even as his personal sense of identity and history begin to fade. Like the psychic histories of *The Dream Millennium*, these memories of experiencing an encounter with the fossilised remnants of the past provides a sense of racial continuity.

Memory, history and identity are also given a central position in a contrasting narrative in the novel involving humans stuck inside a sunken ship. In this narrative, White attempts to broach the subject of the sectarian impasse, letting the reader know indirectly that the sunken boat *The Gulf Trader* contains both Catholic and Protestant

---

<sup>364</sup> *Watch Below*, p. 18.

<sup>365</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 36.

<sup>366</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 39-40.

survivors, and that the sectarian division is starting to somewhat destabilise. As children are born, debate begins about how much, and what kind of, religious instruction should be taught.<sup>367</sup> The Ten Commandments are discussed as something that everyone can agree on. But when the Catholic catechism is brought up, and Jenny quotes the line ‘who made the world?’ her husband replies ‘Harland and Wolff made the world!’ The outburst has a double meaning, referring to the ship as the world in which the survivors live, as well as a reference to the idea of the Protestant work ethic and its role in Belfast industry. The event also indirectly alerts the reader to a cross-community marriage, suggesting the experience on the ship has led to the softening of the divisions between Catholic and Protestant, the couple having been wed aboard the ship earlier in the narrative.<sup>368</sup>

Having attempted to mitigate sectarian division early in the novel, the pressure of the science fiction narrative sparks off more conflict, this time between those who see their new world as static and immutable, and those who believe that historic processes continue. On *The Gulf Trader*, the survivors pass the time, and hang on to their identity, by playing a memory game. White explains that:

It would begin by the victim being asked to remember all that he or she could regarding a date in their past chosen at random, which was usually nothing at all, at first. But then the other four would question the victim closely until some small fact would be remembered, and they would persist, for days if necessary, until the memories of that tiny segment of their lifetime were recovered intact.<sup>369</sup>

Like Shaw’s slow glass, the Game affords access to a more accurate rendering of historical narrative, recalling the revisionist project, the suggestion that memories are recovered intact downplaying the subjective aspect to memory and personal history. Those tasked with remembering the past are described as its victims, interrogated by their peers until a more comprehensive rendering of the historical events of their lives emerges.

---

<sup>367</sup> *Watch Below*, p. 89.

<sup>368</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 99.

<sup>369</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 91.

Eventually the game extends to remembering whole books, leading to a 'philosophical war' surrounding the interpretation of the Game, based on its status as an unadulterated record of history or a subjective version of events. White writes that:

On one side were the old people and the majority of women, all of whom believed that the material handed down through the years by way of the Game was fact, solid, immutable fact containing precisely the same degree of reality as, say, the recollection of the first stumbling words of one's own child only a few years away in time. Some of these people were so fanatical in their beliefs that there were times when they confused remembered fiction with remembered fact. But the other side went to the opposite extreme, being fanatically cynical about practically everything.<sup>370</sup>

Having attempted to resolve the sectarian binary earlier in the narrative, here another opposition emerges between a bourgeois sense of history as static and 'immutable' and a critical perspective that privileges change and historical process. As the portholes in the *Gulf Trader* are covered over with sea life, the survivors can no longer see the world around them and become more isolated, their worldview becoming entirely dependent on the Game. White suggests that the material world that surrounds them 'became secondhand facts, or part of the Game, and took the first step towards becoming fiction.'<sup>371</sup> The ship is sharply divided on the issue of whether the Game is fact or fiction, but the division on the ship between young and old breaks down after a tragic death, and both sides reunite and develop a new version of the Game.

This new unity has a rallying effect on the inhabitants of the ship, the emergence of a larger collective identity affording strength to the group. White writes that 'it was as if some heavy, invisible load had been lifted from them by the simple fact of them being reunited. The whole, as the trite old saying had it, really was greater than the sum of its parts.'<sup>372</sup> This new consensus inspires the emergence of a new economic philosophy aboard the ship that is applied to the Game. White states that 'some of this data included dialogue on the planning, preparation and execution of four separate escape attempts, and they were without doubt the most stirring passages in the whole

---

<sup>370</sup> *Watch Below*, p. 117.

<sup>371</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 131.

<sup>372</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 134.

history of the Ship.<sup>373</sup> The Game once more becomes a solace, a cultural indulgence that makes life bearable on the Gulf Trader. White tells us that:

During the Game life became tolerable, and even exciting and happy. It allowed them to forget the short period of nightmare each day when they walked barefoot over cold metal harsh with rust, shivering in the scraps of hair and plant fibre they called clothing.<sup>374</sup>

The Game orders the chaos of life on the ship, its access to history felt to be unadulterated truth feeding the identity of those on board, and allowing them forget the material conditions of their existence. It functions as a way of explaining the predicament of the inhabitants, and as such constitutes an ideology, a strategy of containment or ideological closure. In Althusser's model, ideology is the approximation of some truth about the totality that, given the limitations imposed by historical process, stands in for the deeper truth it exists to deny.<sup>375</sup> But when the inhabitants of the ship realise that their resources are running out, and that the end of their world is imminent, White tells us that:

It was the first time the Game had not been played, the first night that their phenomenal minds and tremendous memories had not been able to lift them out of the discomfort of the here and now and into the bright, happy worlds of music and fiction and history, even of past Ship history.<sup>376</sup>

The survivors on the ship are forced to confront the necessity at the foundation of their material circumstances, the ideological closure imposed by the Game beginning to break down. An outside force, the alien Unthans, who have not been part of the worldview described in the Game, eventually rescues the survivors on *The Gulf Trader*.

History in White becomes a guarantor for identity in the present, but is subject to breakdown as it becomes contested. In *The Dream Millennium*, history is a process of nature, breathed in and activated when the subject has left the Earth in a process that ensures continuity between Earth-life and the life of human colonists on other planets. *The Watch Below* offers a more nuanced depiction of the relation between history and identity. The Unthan's memories deteriorate while in sleep stasis, and Deslann uses

---

<sup>373</sup> *Watch Below*, p. 133.

<sup>374</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 141.

<sup>375</sup> *Lenin and Philosophy*, pp. 127-186.

<sup>376</sup> *Watch Below*, p. 149.

personal history to access the prehistory of his race. On board the sunken ship, the humans play the Game to maintain continuity. The sectarian binary is repressed but returns as an opposition surrounding the interpretation of the Game as immutable fact or myth. Both of these interpretations of the reality of living in the ship are interrupted by arrival of the Unthan. In the case of *The Watch Below*, it is oral recitation that guarantees identity and provides the means for an attempt at assimilation between the differing viewpoints on the ship.

Oral history is also depicted by White as an important means by which identity is transmitted in *The Silent Stars Go By*, but also as an impure process prone to ideological selection and omission. In the prehistory of White's Hibernian Empire, mechanical entities called heros [sic] battle with the native Irish who fight to save their older traditions. The healer Orla treats the soldier Dairmuid [sic] in a field hospital and refuses to let him divulge his name, seeing history and identity as a source of violent conflict, and attempting to create a place of non-identity in the hospital. She tells Dairmuid:

I have no wish to know the name of your family, your tuath, or its King, or the names of anyone here. To know these things is to know what as well as who you are, whether you are Followers of the Old Way or supporters of the heros. Here there will be no names, no boasting about past battles, no arguments and recriminations, and no continuance in words of this stupid and increasingly dishonourable war!<sup>377</sup>

In this instance, identity is seen as historical, chronologising the subject, fixing it as either existent in the present moment or in a nether region between the present and observance of the 'old way'. Names for Orla lead to tales of past battles, anachronistic passions that inevitably lead to violence. Here history is depicted as a space to be contested that leads to a struggle for possession of its narratives, stories that can provide justification for current actions. For Orla, the only choice is to insist that the hospital remains a place of no history.

In the same novel, the crew of the starship *Aisling Gheal* are required to be trained as teachers in the oral tradition. As there will be no power source on the planet

---

<sup>377</sup> *Silent Stars Go By*, p. 95.

to power the communications equipment with which the colonists will arrive, they will be heavily reliant on oral communication. Queen Maeve suggests of the colonists that:

They will inherit the mantles of the bards, of the legendary Homer, of Seamus the Wise, and of the great poet Far Falling Water, and they will be able to recall and recite, accurately and in meticulous detail, not only the exploits of the great men and women of our past and present, but the elements of the science, technology, and culture which has made our Earth what it is today.<sup>378</sup>

Like the Game in *The Watch Below*, oral tradition is situated as a means of providing a more accurate rendering of history and propagating scientific knowledge in meticulous detail. But as the narrative progresses, the sense of the purity of this history is undermined, echoing Eagleton's claim that there is no such thing as a value-free history. Conversing with a librarian, Nolan discusses his role on the colony planet of bringing 'healing, enlightenment, and knowledge' to the colonists, and is alerted to the fact that he and the other teachers may have to transform history in the transition from written history to oral. The librarian tells him that:

You and the other teachers may be forced to edit, alter, or perhaps attempt to improve or simply not pass on certain areas of knowledge. This leads to the interesting question of who will decide, for practical as well as philosophical reasons, on the precise contents of the teaching syllabus.<sup>379</sup>

This view of history runs counter to Queen Maeve's utopian notion of an accurate and meticulous oral history. In White's future Hibernian Empire, history becomes a site for the contesting of worldviews, becoming fluid and open to interpretation. Nolan must define the meaning of the enlightenment that he must visit on the colonists, and alter history accordingly.

The atheist Nolan is given his first test at oral teaching by Bishop O'Riordan, who asks him to recite the story of Brendan's journey to America from memory, saying 'may the Holy Spirit guide your tongue in the path of truth.' White describes a combination of 'research and imagination' that projects itself in Nolan's mind as he tells the story of Brendan, Nolan's favourite historical character described as a navigator, traitor, heretic and exile. When Nolan finishes his recounting, O'Riordan

---

<sup>378</sup> *Silent Stars Go By*, p. 19.

<sup>379</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 27.



admonishes him, suggesting that he dwells too much on the feelings of the characters, and that no historian could do that with any accuracy.<sup>380</sup> O’Riordan suggests concentrating on action rather than character, the story of Brendan having been opened up to interpretation in its instance as an oral form, the atheist Nolan highlighting the rebellious character of the monk, with O’Riordan urging a more conservative reading.

Here, oral history is shown to be contested in the selection process and the delivery of the historical material. The atheist Nolan concentrates on how an individualistic Brendan rebelled against the Church, while O’Riordan prefers a broader historical approach concerned with the listing of historical action without speculations surrounding the ideological intention of the historical actors. As History in an Althusserian sense is inaccessible to both Nolan and O’Riordan, both can only offer fragmentary interpretations that serve their purposes in the present.

The story of Brendan’s encounter with the Native Americans is an important founding myth of the Hibernian Empire and the Pax Hibernia that it maintains. Nolan draws from the myth throughout his journeys in the New World. Nolan becomes part of a group stranded from the main body of colonists of the planet, victims of a plot by O’Riordan to prevent those of faiths other than Christianity from reaching the colony. As they journey through the forests of the planet, Nolan is asked by his fellow travellers to tell the story of Brendan, and his own version of the story informs his actions in the colonial situation.

In Nolan’s version of the story of Brendan, the monk is shown relating a history constructed with the needs of his present in mind. Brendan refers to the Alonquin as brothers and when they object he lists the attributes they have in common. Both cultures have a story of a Great Flood, the particulars of which differ, but the heart of which remains the same.<sup>381</sup> In Nolan’s telling of the story, the natives also tell Brendan of a ‘lost land of order and great beauty, filled with people who were brave in war, noble and forgiving in peace, and wise beyond the imaginings of we who came after them.’ In order to stress the commonality between the Hibernian and Indian races, Brendan

---

<sup>380</sup> *Silent Stars Go By*, p. 32.

<sup>381</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 395.

draws a parallel between their story and the story of Tír Na n'Óg. Brendan pushes the comparison further, suggesting a common ancestry between the Celtic races and the Native Americans when he tells them 'until I came among the Redmen...I had not known that some of our people had escaped to the West, and braved the dangers of the Great Sea to settle here.'<sup>382</sup> When questioned by Malcolm about whether he believes these things to be true, Brendan replies that he would 'like to believe them.' Malcolm remarks that lying to get them out of trouble is fine but 'marrying the legends of Atlantis with the Biblical flood' will likely result in excommunication from the church, and suggesting that the 'savages' of America are long-lost relatives of the Hibernians will likely anger Connair the High King.<sup>383</sup>

Brendan's creative telling of history is the foundation upon which the friendship of the Hibernian Empire and the Native American is based, its concern with unity and kinship having implications for the closure of White's narrative. Brendan's narrative displays the mutability of oral history, which can be adapted to the needs of the present, utilised to create meanings that make sense of the world. Once again, history is shown as a subjective pursuit responding to the values of the historian, with History in an Althusserian sense inaccessible, forever prone to the ideological needs of the present.

Brendan's narrative becomes the mythic pattern with which Nolan structures his own journey on the New World. At key points in the narrative he tells the story of Brendan, attempting to placate the despair of the survivors by suggesting that, like their own experience on the new planet, when the monk reached the Americas 'it was not as Brendan had foreseen it, but a great, epoch-making anticlimax.'<sup>384</sup> Like Brendan, as the leader of the stranded colonists, Nolan often employs untruths to set the group at ease. When their ship catches fire soon after landing, he tells them that he set it on fire deliberately to alert the main ship as to their location. He tells Brenner: 'of course I tell the truth...but there are times when it is better for everyone if I do not tell all of it.'<sup>385</sup>

---

<sup>382</sup> *Silent Stars Go By*, p. 399.

<sup>383</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 400.

<sup>384</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 327.

<sup>385</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 257.

When Nolan's colonists complete the journey to the main body of the mission, he considers whether or not to reveal O'Riordan's plan to strand those of other faiths. He asks whether the issue will start a civil war and reasons that 'surely the sectarian massacres and excesses of religious violence practiced by the overzealous followers of the gentle Christos belonged to the past.'<sup>386</sup> He considers that 'there were many historical precedents that showed the binding power of a common hatred between individuals and racial or religious groups.'<sup>387</sup> Nolan decides against revealing O'Riordan's plan, concluding that hatred lacked permanence and stability as a unifying force. Professing to act to save the colony, Nolan mimics the original lie of Brendan's visit to the Americas, a lie that laid the foundation for the Pax Hibernia.

The tagline of White's novel reads 'Earth's first colony was planned to be an Eden—and only Nolan could save it from that fate', but Nolan chooses to leave the colony in the hands of O'Riordan, who relishes the opportunity to convert the Ull, the alien race that Nolan encountered on his journey, to Christianity.<sup>388</sup> O'Riordan makes much of great wrongs leading to divine ends, telling Nolan:

Healer I am truly ashamed and can only comfort myself with the thought that out of the great wrong I did by sending your lander off course came an even greater good. For now you have indeed shamed me by returning good for bad, by presenting me with the greatest challenge that a missionary priest has ever been asked to face, the conversion of an entire world.<sup>389</sup>

O'Riordan asks that Nolan and Dervla return to Earth to allow him to continue with his missionary work. He tells them 'I must do it without interference...and without the constant threat of betrayal by you.'<sup>390</sup> Despite O'Riordan's treachery and the potential death of the colonists through his actions, Nolan agrees to return to Earth without revealing the truth of the Monsignor's plan. Nolan admires the noble lie with which Brendan laid the foundation for the Hibernian and Westland Empire, and so chooses the stability of the new colony over the truth.

---

<sup>386</sup> *Silent Stars Go By*, pp. 412-413.

<sup>387</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 259.

<sup>388</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 428.

<sup>389</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 428.

<sup>390</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 428.

White's fiction displays the importance of historical narrative to identity in the present, but this history is shown to be contested terrain. The mutability of history is expressed in the struggle over the meaning of the Game in *The Watch Below*, which contests the status of history itself. This oral form of historical narrative is also depicted in *The Silent Stars Go By*, first proposed by Queen Maeve as an accurate rendering of events, but seen to be mutable and open to interpretation once put into practice on the new world. The atheist Nolan chooses stability over the truth, choosing a version of history on the new world that will ensure the survival of the colony, allowing a Christian narrative to flourish on the New World. In this he follows the mythic structure of the story of Brendan, whose lie regarding the shared racial heritage between the Native Americans and the Irish laid the foundation for the Hibernian Empire and the stability it presides over. This narrative closure echoes historical revisionism's attempt to locate a history free from conflict, but also speaks from a Catholic standpoint as an articulation of confession and forgiveness. Following their confrontation, Nolan appears to absolve O'Riordan, concluding that the Monsignor is 'a good man, a kindly, non-violent, and highly dedicated priest who was doing what he considered to be the right thing for the future preservation and the moral health of his flock.'<sup>391</sup> White's fiction often utilises a Catholic imaginary in its depictions of the future, and investigating these instances serves to shed light on the narrative closure of *The Silent Stars Go By*. It is this aspect of White's fiction that we will turn to next.

### **James White's Catholic Futures.**

In an article for *Locus* magazine in 1993, White confirmed his status as a practising Catholic, and his science fiction narratives show a concern with extending the values of the Catholic Church into the universe, depicting the interaction of people of faith with a technological or alien environment.<sup>392</sup> White's futures are invariably Catholic futures, populated with intermediaries such as priests and bishops, as well as nuns and other members of the Catholic faith community. This section will discuss instances of the Catholic imaginary in White's fiction, suggesting that the portrayal of space-going clergy, and technologies of sexual surveillance embody a line of defence that serves to

---

<sup>391</sup> *Silent Stars Go By*, p. 431.

<sup>392</sup> James White, 'Full-Time Hobbyist', *Locus*, 386 (1993) p. 4.

protect bourgeois norms of sexuality against the ability of science fiction to question bourgeois subjectivity.

White's depiction of Catholic futures and religious imagery begins with his first novel. In *Second Ending*, upon waking Ross fears the Ward Sister, a robotic nun who visits in the dark who Ross soon begins to think of as his guardian angel.<sup>393</sup> The story 'Grapeliner' in the collection *Deadly Litter* gives an elderly nun, Sister Gallagher, a central role in a space mission. The discovery that space travel renders the traveller impotent means the pursuit has been neglected by the young. Sister Gallagher is said to possess 'the severe, fragile beauty of an octogenarian nun...and a gentle, well-bred quavering voice.'<sup>394</sup> Later in White's career, his 1988 story 'Sanctuary' resulted in *Analog* magazine putting a nun on its cover for the first time, the narrative detailing the arrival of an extraterrestrial to an Irish convent and the aging Sister Augustine's struggle to keep the media and military away. The nun invokes the convent rule of sanctuary in order to protect the alien, White implying that, trained as the sisters are for the African missions, the nuns are the ideal subjects to handle first contact with an extraterrestrial. The alien agrees, selecting the nuns as arbiters between Earth and future extraterrestrial visitors.<sup>395</sup>

In the Sector General stories, the character Lioren is given the religious name 'the Padre' by White. Although the alien is said to pray to a god he no longer believes in, he still keeps the sanctity of the confession given to him by the terminally ill Mannen, despite the potential role sharing the information could have in curing Mannen's psychic malady.<sup>396</sup> Lioren also tells Hellishomar, ashamed of an act he committed '...from my recent studies I know that there is one factor common to all the religions practiced throughout the Federation, and that is forgiveness for sins.'<sup>397</sup> Pantheism has also been eradicated from White's future, with Lioren suggesting that in this universe the gods across the planets have much in common. Catholicism's sense of good and evil is universalised, Lioren suggesting that 'it is generally believed that

---

<sup>393</sup> *Second Ending*, p. 31.

<sup>394</sup> *Deadly Litter*, p. 16.

<sup>395</sup> James White, 'Sanctuary' in *The White Papers* eds. Mark Olson and Bruce Pelz (Framingham: NESF Press, 1996) pp. 79-104.

<sup>396</sup> *Genocidal Healer*, p. 118.

<sup>397</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 134.

where there is God there is also the Devil, or some evil and less well defined entity or influence which constantly seeks to undo God's work'.<sup>398</sup>

Nuns, priests and bishops are given a central role in White's space-going futures. Their experience with first contact between cultures on Earth is depicted as making them ideal for similar situations between humans and those of extraterrestrial origin. White generalises religious thought in his Sector General series, suggesting monotheism and a belief in good and evil as common traits throughout the universe.

White's work also articulates and attempts to negotiate Catholic sexual attitudes, although as Diarmaid Ferriter points out, in Northern Ireland the issue of sexuality has often led to unity between Protestant and Catholic Church leaders on issues such as abortion, same sex marriage and family planning. Ferriter articulates this with reference to the journalist Eamonn McCann's note that 'if there's one thing Catholic and Protestant reactionaries in the North can unite on, it's that young people mustn't be allowed to enjoy sex.'<sup>399</sup> In a study of the role of Catholicism in the area of sexuality in the south of Ireland, Michael G. Cronin suggests that by the 1960s the discourse surrounding sexuality had shifted from one of public morality inspired by the crisis of liberalism in the post-World War I period, to a stress on the sense of fulfilment achieved through a life of chastity until marriage.

White's fiction shows traces of the earlier public morality discourse, with sexuality seen as a threat to the stability of society, and self-regulation promoted as necessary to prevent a slide into chaos.<sup>400</sup> In 'Grapeliner', for instance, Sister Gallagher confronts a woman who is sunbathing topless aboard the spaceship. Gallagher complains: 'I told her how many married men we have aboard, and explained that when she attracts more than her fair share of the Steward's attention it means that the other passengers get less which creates bad feeling and eventually ruins a trip for everyone.'<sup>401</sup> Writing on Catholic sexual mores as manifested in the Irish Free State,

---

<sup>398</sup> *Genocidal Healer*, p. 163.

<sup>399</sup> Diarmaid Ferriter, *Occasions of Sin: Sex and Society in Modern Ireland* (London: Profile Books, 2009) p. 487; Eamonn McCann, *War and Peace in Northern Ireland* (Dublin: Hot Press Books, 1998).

<sup>400</sup> Michael G. Cronin, *Impure Thoughts: Sexuality, Catholicism and Literature in Twentieth-Century Ireland* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012) p. 13.

<sup>401</sup> *Deadly Litter*, pp. 24-25.

Cronin suggests that, although sexual attitudes such as these are usually seen from a position of the tradition and modernity paradigm, it is more accurate to position the attitudes of the Church in this period as a concern with creating the subjects of liberal capitalism. Cronin states 'from this perspective, the Free State was not giving legislative power to a traditional, puritanical psychosis concerning sexuality, but promoting a regulatory ideal of sexual behaviour and a norm of bourgeois subjectivity.'<sup>402</sup> If we accept Cronin's thesis, then the depiction of Sister Gallagher's regulation of sexuality on board the spacecraft stands as an attempt to enforce monogamous bourgeois subjectivity, a norm that, if we accept Freedman's thesis, science fiction has the ability to transcend. A closer examination of White's fiction reveals the proliferation of this tendency.

Another issue that inevitably provokes a reading of White's work as embodying Catholic values is the recurrence of the issue of celibacy, an important distinction between the requirements for Catholic and Protestant clergy since the Counter-Reformation in the sixteenth century. In *Dark Inferno*, stewards aboard a starship are required to remain celibate for the duration of the trip to a new off-world colony. Mercer, a doctor serving as a steward aboard the starship, receives a veiled sexual proposition from a passenger called Miss Moore, who questions him about his celibacy. Asking what the officers will do for amusement with only 'computers and textbooks', Miss Moore says 'I realise that you are all highly trained and disciplined supermen, but four months of self-imposed celibacy in a space-going monastery cell...I mean, is it necessary?' A flustered Mercer reflects that on the *Eurydice* 'temptation was anything but subtle', before being rescued by the single mother Mrs. Mathewson who quips 'maybe our supermen are only interested in superwomen.'<sup>403</sup> Celibacy is a common theme across White's novels. In *The Genocidal Healer*, the alien doctor Lioren's chastity is explained as vocational, a 'dedication to the healing arts' that precludes him from 'indulging in any pleasure which would allow emotional factors to affect the clinical objectivity of his mind.'<sup>404</sup> Similarly in *The Silent Stars Go By*, the clerics that crew the *Aisling Gheal*, as well as the Healers on board the ship, are expected to remain

---

<sup>402</sup> *Impure Thoughts*, p. 53.

<sup>403</sup> *Dark Inferno*, p. 41.

<sup>404</sup> *Genocidal Healer*, p. 34.

celibate. This prohibition is extended to the rest of the passengers, because 'the effects of long-term hibernation anaesthesia on a recently conceived human foetus, about which we have no data, had also to be considered.'<sup>405</sup>

As Cronin suggests, in this public morality discourse the only legitimate end for human sexuality is human reproduction.<sup>406</sup> In this Catholic future, technological advances in contraception are notable by their absence, the sole solution to an unwanted pregnancy being the regulation of the bodies of the inhabitants of the ship. Where there is an advance in sexual technology, it is in the realm of surveillance and regulation. A chaperone polices sexuality aboard a starship in White's *Hospital Station* in the form of a robot programmed to detect when sexual mores are being transgressed, particularly sexual relations before marriage.<sup>407</sup> Conway articulates a sense of guilt when on a date with the nurse Murchison, asking his date 'do you ever think of something...then feel horribly ashamed?'<sup>408</sup> Later at the close of their date, Conway and Murchison embrace, interrupted by the robot chaperone, who requests that they return to their separate quarters.<sup>409</sup> Technology is harnessed as a means of articulating the public morality discourse, enforcing the rational control of sexual urges.

Returning to *Dark Inferno*, White describes the wild abandon that is the alternative to a social formation regulated through tightly-controlled sexual norms, as the ship leaves the atmosphere of Earth. The majority of passengers aboard the *Eurydice* are leaving Earth because of its increasing 'neo-puritanism', and White describes the effect that the distance from that culture has on their behaviour, as well as its effect on the way the environment of the passengers has been built:

The cabins would even be roofed over so that crew members, moving along the weightless axis between control and the power module aft, would not be able to see the sort of things which were reputed to go on in passenger-carrying spaceships. People tended to forget the rules when they were far

---

<sup>405</sup> *Silent Stars Go By*, p. 68.

<sup>406</sup> *Impure Thoughts*, p. 53.

<sup>407</sup> *Hospital Station*, p. 45.

<sup>408</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 64.

<sup>409</sup> *Hospital Station*, p. 84. This robot chaperone also appears in White's novel *Star Surgeon* (1983) (London: Futura, 1986). Once again the robot interrupts a display of affection from Conway towards Murchison. after two minutes and forty eight seconds (45, 84). Also recurring in *Star Surgeon* is Conway's question 'do you ever think of something, then feel horribly ashamed for having the kind of dirty mind which thinks thoughts like that?'(64).



from home, his instructor had warned him, and the degree of forgetfulness was in direct proportion to the distance.<sup>410</sup>

In this instance, sexuality is linked to a disregard for the rules when the influence of the regulatory ideals of Earth's sexual morality is disrupted. However, the policing of sexuality is asserted when the passengers are forced to abandon the starship. White describes the emergency procedure designating three people to each escape pod, the third acting as a 'chaperone.'<sup>411</sup> After a day in the pod, a Mr and Mrs Corrie are about to engage in sexual activity when a message across the loudspeaker reminds them of the dangers of giving in to their urges. The message declares: '...refrain from unnecessary physical exertion. Rest, conserve your food and air. Exercise should be purely intellectual. I have suggested, and a few of you have devised, some useful question and answer games.'<sup>412</sup>

Mental exercise then, is proposed as a means of diverting sexual energy. The message through the loudspeaker speaks the same morality as Sister Gallagher in White's earlier story. In White's futures, sexuality is to be regulated through technology such as robot chaperones, but technology has not advanced as far to ensure bodily autonomy in the form of contraception. Chastity is seen as essential to ensure dedication to a task. As Cronin suggests, bourgeois subjectivity is enforced in this way. This serves to short-circuit the critical aspect of science fiction that possesses the ability to transcend this subjectivity.

Similar to *The Silent Stars Go By*, White's 1974 novel *The Dream Millennium* also describes the seeding of a new world with colonists vetted for their Christian countenance.<sup>413</sup> In this future, attitudes are loosening in the Catholic church, Brother Hand described as '...one of the new, relaxed breed of clergymen who occasionally swore or cracked jokes or talked a bit dirty if the situation seemed to warrant it.' However, the agnostic star traveller Devlin is said to prefer '...the ministers of the religions he did not believe in to be the proper, old-fashioned kind.'<sup>414</sup> Similar to

---

<sup>410</sup> *Dark Inferno*, p. 24.

<sup>411</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 55.

<sup>412</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 93.

<sup>413</sup> In this novel White describes a benign form of space colonialism in which only empty planets will be targeted for plantation.

<sup>414</sup> *Dream Millennium*, p. 49.

White's other starship fiction, couplings on board are strictly prohibited, again because of the possibility of conception, White once again failing to register any technological advances in contraception.<sup>415</sup> At the climax of the narrative, Howard explains that he was one of the first astronauts to leave the Earth's atmosphere, and that he was subject to experiments in cold sleep. He tells Devlin that 'as a result of those cold sleep experiences I became convinced that I had had my nose rubbed very firmly in a form of after-life, and I'm afraid I caught a severe dose of religion.'<sup>416</sup> On board the ship, Devlin's contact with the ghosts of Earth's history mentioned earlier lets him relive mundane and glorious lives, but also detect the flaws in people's personalities, flaws that betray White's Catholic values. White writes that:

Some of the flaws he observed were minor and easily overcome. Others were major and overcome with extreme difficulty, and many were impossible to overcome no matter how hard the individual tried. The flaws ranged from petty dishonesty, selfishness, minor-key destructiveness and character assassination in otherwise normal individuals up to the bright, fuzzy helpless struggles of a short-lived mongoloid and the perverted intensity of feeling experienced by men deeply and emotionally involved with other homosexuals.<sup>417</sup>

But the supreme Christian virtue for White is forgiveness, the author concluding that that 'when viewed with complete knowledge, Devlin could no longer be sure what, if anything, was a perversion.' Drawing from the philosopher Baruch Spinoza, White still remains within Catholic teaching when he posits that 'to understand all was to forgive everything', an ideological closure in which all identities are but purgatorial states of being awaiting grace.<sup>418</sup>

White's reflection of a social structure guided by Catholic public morality discourse suggests an ideological limit that can be traced in the limited estrangement performed in these instances of his fiction. We have already made reference to Freedman's theory of science fiction as possessing the ability to transcend bourgeois subjectivity, but it would be useful to examine Freedman's thesis in more detail. Freedman draws from Darko Suvin, who proposes science fiction as the genre of

---

<sup>415</sup> *Dream Millennium*, p. 112.

<sup>416</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 202.

<sup>417</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 176.

<sup>418</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 176.

'cognitive estrangement', suggesting that science fiction operates through estranging the world of the reader, provoking them to cognitively map the difference between the world of the fiction and their own everyday reality.<sup>419</sup> Freedman suggests that:

The first term refers to the creation of an alternative fictional world that, by refusing to take our mundane environment for granted, implicitly or explicitly performs an estranging critical interrogation of the latter. But the critical character of the interrogation is guaranteed by the operation of cognition, which enables the science-fictional text to account rationally for its imagined world and for the connections as well as the disconnections of the latter to our own empirical world.<sup>420</sup>

For Freedman the term science fiction should only apply to those texts where cognitive estrangement is not only present, but to instances where cognitive estrangement dominates the text.<sup>421</sup> In terms of identity then, the White texts in question perform a weak estrangement limited by the public morality of Catholic ideology. Although the depiction of robot helpers aboard a spaceship performs a radical estrangement from mundane reality, the use of such devices in the narrative to police sexuality, as well as the failure to imagine alternatives to sexual abstinence, suggest what Freedman calls 'weak cognition'.<sup>422</sup> In this instance the estrangements of science fiction are used to enforce public morality and inform the creation of the self-regulating bourgeois subject. This is not to say that White's notions of identity are somehow pre-modern articulations of Catholic Irish tradition. As Cronin points out 'moral politics itself is a modern phenomenon', and it could be suggested that what White is expressing is the sense of an alternative modernity estranged from mundane reality, but maintaining the sexual regulation of moral politics.<sup>423</sup>

Returning to *The Silent Stars Go By* with this in mind, the closure of the narrative begins to make sense. The clergy that crew the *Aisling Gheal* represent a Catholic future, the ecclesiastics in the crew given the task of passing on the science, culture and philosophy of Earth, and O'Riordan hopes to use this to set up a colony of

---

<sup>419</sup> *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction*, pp. 3-15.

<sup>420</sup> *Critical Theory and Science Fiction*, p. 17.

<sup>421</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 22.

<sup>422</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 73.

<sup>423</sup> *Impure Thoughts*, p. 60.

the 'True Faith.'<sup>424</sup> Religious bodies are afforded a privileged position in regard to science in the world of the novel. The driving force behind the *Aisling Gheal* is Cardinal Keon, described as a 'priest-scientist and statesman.'<sup>425</sup> Keon entered the Church after a defeat in the election that crowned Maeve High Queen, joining an order devoted to the 'scientific and technical disciplines' and White describes his rise in 'both ecclesiastical and scientific rankings' as 'deservedly rapid.'<sup>426</sup> Keon captains the *Aisling Gheal*, the majority of its crew, referred to as 'officer-ecclesiastics', are drawn from the priesthood and are celibate like Keon.<sup>427</sup> Science and religion are closely connected in this future. While touring America to promote the *Aisling Gheal*, the crew are mobbed by autograph hunters and Nolan feels for the rest of the crew. White writes that:

They were priest-academics and specialist members of the Church's various scientific and technical confraternities, and their laboratories had been as cloistered as any monastery... But the people crowding in on them knew only that they wore the uniform of the starship, with all that that implied, and cared nothing for their ecclesiastic rank.<sup>428</sup>

The atmosphere of faith also has an effect on the unbelievers on board the ship. Nolan is purported to be an atheist, but his inner life shows residual elements of a Catholic structure of feeling, not least in his insistence on categorising sins as either venial or cardinal. O'Riordan reminds him that as an atheist Nolan does not commit venial sins, he 'collects minor bad habits instead.'<sup>429</sup>

The mission of the *Aisling Gheal* is articulated as a colonial undertaking by Queen Maeve before the launch of the starship. But once the *Aisling Gheal* begins to move away from Earth O'Riordan, described as the 'real captain' earlier in the narrative, begins to privilege the religious mission of the ship rather than Maeve's concern with spreading the Hibernian Empire into the stars. O'Riordan begins to hermetically seal the craft as a means of stressing that psychologically they are no longer part of Earth, remarking that '*Aisling Gheal* is the only world we have until we

---

<sup>424</sup> *Silent Stars Go By*, pp. 224-225.

<sup>425</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>426</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>427</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 36.

<sup>428</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 46.

<sup>429</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 120.

reach the new one.<sup>430</sup> O’Riordan compares the dedication of the crew to the ship to a ‘vocation to the priesthood’ and encourages those on the ship to take a voluntary vow of silence.<sup>431</sup> Adamant that the history of Earth must be left behind, that talking is psychologically undesirable, and that the crew of the ship should spend their time quietly contemplating the future, the Monsignor seeks to monopolise memory aboard the ship, urging people not to speak of past events.<sup>432</sup> Here, O’Riordan attempts to rupture history’s persistent influence on the present. O’Riordan is positing a future divorced from the past, in which the Christian religion survives as the only sense-making system. If we apprehend White’s novel as an alternative modernity, this moment finds an echo in Jameson’s assertion that moments of rupture in the narrative of modernity require:

A powerful act of dissociation whereby the present seals off its past from itself and expels and ejects it; an act without which neither the present nor past truly exist, the past not yet fully constituted, the present still living on within the force field of a past not yet over and done with.<sup>433</sup>

As the ship leaves behind the influence of the Hibernian Empire, O’Riordan’s rejection of its culture continues. A screen shows a film beamed to the ship from Earth showing the Tower of Tara and the Imperial City as a fanfare sounds, Queen Maeve briefing the crew ‘to be about the business of God and Hibernia’, but O’Riordan rebels and orders the signal interrupted. The speech is cut short as part of O’Riordan’s desire to sever emotional ties with Earth. As soon as the connection is cut, O’Riordan reveals his true plan. He announces: ‘Now I am giving orders, not advice. Henceforth you will accustom yourselves to the idea that you are no longer of Earth, and you must believe in this idea until you can accept it as you do your own name.’<sup>434</sup> Like *Dark Inferno*, the greater distance the starship moves away from the Earth, the more culture changes aboard the ship. While most of the crew are in cold sleep, one watch-keeper is assigned to a shift of three years, O’Riordan’s given reason for an enforced vow of silence as psychological preparation for those keeping watch to develop habits of solitude and quiet. O’Riordan warns that resuscitating a fellow officer is forbidden except for

---

<sup>430</sup> *Silent Stars Go By*, p. 133.

<sup>431</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 134.

<sup>432</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 145.

<sup>433</sup> *Singular Modernity*, p. 25.

<sup>434</sup> *Silent Stars Go By*, pp. 148-150.

emergencies, the penalty for the contravention of this regulation described as ‘the ultimate excommunication’, an ecclesiastical term for a ‘summary execution.’<sup>435</sup>

As already discussed, Nolan is betrayed by O’Riordan, but returns to Earth rather than confront the Monsignor, citing the stability of the nascent colony as a reason to leave the alien race the Ull in the hands of a proselytising clergyman with a record of reckless disregard for life in the pursuit of his Christian ideals. Although history is shown as a contestable discipline in which competing ideologies clash in the face of the unrepresentable absent cause of History, Nolan chooses the missionary Christian narrative of O’Riordan. This section has attempted to contextualise this narrative closure by examining the Catholic futures that White employs across his work. It has located the nuns, priests and bishops of White’s fiction, suggesting that they represent enforced bourgeois subjectivity in the mode of Catholic sexual morality, and serve to frustrate the potential of science fiction’s cognitive estrangement to transcend these limitations. For White, a Catholic perspective provides stability, and even an atheist can share this belief. Having discussed how White’s work frustrates the transcendence of these limitations, the chapter will now turn to the work of Shaw, in an attempt to locate a critique of Unionism, and an attempt to transcend its limitations through science fiction.

### **Bob Shaw and the Non-Aligned Identity.**

This section will concentrate on Shaw’s novels *Night Walk*, *Orbitsville*, *Orbitsville: Departure*, and *Orbitsville: Judgement*. It will discuss how Shaw uses science fiction to attempt to transcend the two-traditions paradigm, by critiquing Unionism and suggesting a future of abundance that will render imperialism and totalising identities obsolete. This will be discussed as a manifestation of the non-aligned identity, a tendency that Richard Kirkland detects in fictional representations of Northern Ireland. It will also discuss how Shaw pushes beyond the limits of the form of the bourgeois novel, depicting historical process as constantly in flux, and suggesting contingency and subjectivity as integral elements to the process.

---

<sup>435</sup> *Silent Stars Go By*, p. 151.

Shaw's first novel *Night Walk* contains numerous estrangements of Unionism and colonialism, but is more ambiguous than White about its sympathies. The novel takes place in a future in which Earth has established a means of travelling to other planets through the utilisation of null-space, an 'incomprehensible but not irrational' geometry used as a means for a spacecraft to randomly jump to any position in the universe. As outlined in Chapter One, Tallon works for the Block, a secret organisation that agitates for the planet of Emm Luther to maintain a political link to Earth, analogous to the wishes of Unionists to remain part of the United Kingdom. The inhabitants of Emm Luther have established a semi-theocracy on the planet, but it is unclear whether this is a tactical estrangement made to critique the Protestant or Catholic state. Patrick Maume suggests that the target is the Catholic Papal monarchy, Shaw's choice of naming the group Lutherans a diplomatic choice to avoid making a direct critique of Catholicism. Shaw also describes the Lutherans naming a planet they discover Aitch Mühlenburg, a veiled reference to the German Lutheran and American colonist Henry Mühlenburg.<sup>436</sup>

While there are ambiguities surrounding the analogous status of the Lutherans, as already highlighted, the quotidian origin of the Block seems clearly to be an estrangement of Ulster Unionism. According to Peter Shirlow and Mark McGovern, 'in terms of its ethnic construction, Unionism is explicitly linked to a sense of achievement, in which the allegory of Protestant forefathers...importing civilisation to Ireland continues to play a pivotal role.'<sup>437</sup> We have already discussed this notion in Chapter One as a manifestation of the ideogeme of development, and it is echoed again in the narrative of *Night Walk* when a fellow prisoner and Block recruit speaks to Tallon with the familiar Unionist themes of destiny and toil:

I came here from Louisiana when this planet was first reached. It wasn't called Emm Luther in those days, of course. I put a lifetime of hard work into this world, and I love it. So when it broke away from the empire I worked to bring it back to its true destiny.<sup>438</sup>

---

<sup>436</sup> *No Country For Old Men*, p. 199.

<sup>437</sup> Peter Shirlow and Mark McGovern, 'Introduction' to *Who are the People?: Unionism, Protestantism and Loyalism in Northern Ireland* ed. Peter Shirlow and Mark McGovern (London: Pluto Press, 1997) pp. 6-7.

<sup>438</sup> *Night Walk*, p. 25.

Another prisoner, Ed, gains Tallon's admiration because of his inability to accept defeat, echoing the phrase 'no surrender', coined by Edward Carson on Ulster Day in 1912, and a persistent utterance in Unionist discourse.<sup>439</sup> The prison doctor informs Tallon that 'Ed was born on this planet, but he was very active in the old Unionist movement at one time and didn't have enough sense to quit when the Lutherans took over.'<sup>440</sup> Tallon brings up the notion of violence to his fellow prisoner, asking: 'I take it when you get down to the practical details of working to bring a world back to its true destiny, the job includes getting rid of obstinate politicians?'<sup>441</sup> In explaining the tactics of the Block as sabotage and terrorism, Shaw gives the organisation a Loyalist rather than a mainstream Unionist colouring, associated with paramilitary activity, an aspect of the group that Tallon begins to question. Maume may be correct in detecting Catholicism as the target in Shaw's Emm Lutherans, but Shaw's main target appears to be the Block, described as a Unionist movement, their members making clear their attachment to toil and development through hard work and promising no surrender to the separatists.

Tallon's ethical conundrum surrounding the violence of the Block creates pressure on Shaw's narrative. Indeed, Shaw's concern with critiquing political violence through his protagonist subscribes so many doubts about the Block to Tallon that it becomes difficult for the narrative to cohere, it being unclear why he ever became affiliated with the organisation in the first place. Tallon has doubts about the Block's project from the beginning of the narrative, citing the vastness of space as a barrier to any attempts at a unified identity. Unlike White's space-going Catholics, Shaw questions the ability for continuity—religious, political or otherwise—in the face of such expanse.

Outer space has been brought within the reach of humanity by the discovery of null-space. Where habitable planets are discovered, portals are constructed that enable other craft to follow by a process referred to as 'flicker-transit', during which the subject is unconscious. Through these means worlds are colonised and trade lanes established. Tallon muses that:

---

<sup>439</sup> *History of Ulster*, p. 439.

<sup>440</sup> *Night Walk*, p. 28.

<sup>441</sup> *Ibid.*, p.25.



Eighty thousand portals there were between here and Earth, representing unaccountable millions of light years; curtains of star systems, layer upon layer of them, made it impossible to pick out even the loose cluster of which Sol was a part. Too far; much too far. Loyalties were stretched too thin over those distances. Earth, the need for new portals, the Block—at this distance, what did it all mean?<sup>442</sup>

Following the discovery of null-space, Tallon suggests that a unifying identity based on territory is impossible, that the loyalties inspired by the identitarian imperative begin to dissolve under the pressure, echoing Thomas Richards's remark that 'an empire is by definition and default a nation in overreach, one nation that has gone too far, a nation that has taken over too many countries too far away from home to control them effectively.'<sup>443</sup> For Tallon, the exploration of interstellar space should put an end to political strife. Having escaped from prison, Tallon walks through the 'neat bungalows' of the Emm Luther town of Testament, marvelling at how 'Earth-like' the surroundings are, prompting him to ask himself:

Why should a man choose one planet and say, this now I will put above all others? If he survived the psychic disembowelment of the flicker-transits and arrived on yet another miraculous green orb, why shouldn't that be enough? Why carry with him the paraphernalia of political allegiances, doctrinal conflicts, imperialism, the Block?<sup>444</sup>

For Tallon, the potential of null-space is not being fully utilised. In Tallon's view the conflicts of imperialism can be resolved by the potential access to abundance that null-space offers, the possibility of unlimited verdant worlds on which humanity can expand.

Tallon seems unaware that the myth of expansion is a foundation of imperialism itself, a means of resolving contradictions in the metropolitan society by exporting them to other territories.<sup>445</sup> He laments the lack of a philosophical shift to match the potentiality of null-space, complaining that travelling through null-space is:

The only form of travel ever devised that doesn't broaden the mind. People shunt their bodies right across the galaxy, but mentally they're still inside the orbit of Mars. If they were made to sweat it out without shots, to feel

---

<sup>442</sup> *Night Walk*, p. 6.

<sup>443</sup> Thomas Richards, *The Imperial Archive: Knowledge and the Fantasy of Empire* (London: Verso, 1993) p. 1.

<sup>444</sup> *Night Walk*, p. 57.

<sup>445</sup> Jack Snyder, *Myths of Empire: Domestic Politics and International Ambition* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991) pp. 1-21.

themselves being spread thinner and thinner, to know what flicker-transits really mean—then things might be different.<sup>446</sup>

For Tallon, if the subject were conscious during the process of travelling through null-space, the true philosophical import of the process would be revealed. Tallon apprehends null-space as a technique with the potential to access a liminal space between Earth culture and a future way of life as yet undefined. This idea of an undefined cultural space finds an analogue in anthropology. Victor Turner draws from Arnold Van Gennep's study of pre-modern societies to suggest three stages in rites of passage: separation, margin and aggregation. Separation involves the detachment of the individual from an earlier fixed point in the social structure. This results in the emergence of a liminal point in which the state of the ritual subject is ambiguous, after which aggregation reunites the subject with the culture in a new state.<sup>447</sup> Tallon's suggestion implies that such a liminal space exists when travelling through null-space. Tallon hopes that cognisance of the implications of this liminal space would lead to the advent of a new state of being once the null-space traveller arrived at their destination.

But this appeal to the construction of a liminal space between identities also echoes Kirkland's description of a non-aligned identity in Northern Irish culture. According to Kirkland, this actually constitutes a third identity that is reliant on the Protestant/Catholic divide for its potency, while in the same moment insistent that this binary must be transcended. According to Kirkland:

The seductive power of this ideology derives from its coherence, its assertion of a third way beyond binary oppositions of Northern Irish life; and yet it is, at the same time, entirely dependent on—and therefore must continually reassert—this vision of eternal atavism it simultaneously wishes to dismiss in order to justify its own position.<sup>448</sup>

For Kirkland, such a position remains unable to comprehend or critique the inequalities of power that intersect the sectarian divide, for doing so would disrupt the binary with which the non-aligned identity draws its power.<sup>449</sup> Just as Tallon's means of

---

<sup>446</sup> *Night Walk*, p. 94.

<sup>447</sup> Victor Turner, *The Forest of Symbols Aspects of Ndembu Ritual* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1967) pp. 93-102.

<sup>448</sup> *Identity Parades*, p. 137.

<sup>449</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 138.

superseding imperialism relies on an imperialist notion of expansion, Kirkland sees the non-aligned identity as complicit with the march of postmodern capitalism, a thought echoed in Brian Graham's remark that the Unionist privileging of the link to Britain over all other concerns was shown to be bankrupt in the light of the emergence of the European Union as a global power.<sup>450</sup> For Kirkland, the non-aligned identity as it is expressed in Northern Irish literature, is constantly frustrated by the limits of the bourgeois novel, manifesting in an inability to imagine an alternative reality to that of sectarian division, leaving the novels 'poised uneasily between the known and the unknown.'<sup>451</sup>

The non-aligned identity in Northern Irish fiction often ignores the British component to the conflict in the region. This is demonstrated in MacLaverty's *Lamb* when Michael meets a man in a pub in London who admits he used to be in the British Army only after Michael declares his 'loathing of all factions of the war in Ulster.'<sup>452</sup> Colin Bateman's comedic crime novels typify another aspect of the non-aligned identity in their grotesque parodies of the aesthetics of working class sectarianism on both sides of the divide. Bateman's fictional town of Crossmaheart in the novel *Cycle of Violence* is used to offer a bourgeois critique of Catholic and Protestant identities by dissolving their differences. Crossmaheart has been built as an overflow town for the Belfast population from both communities. Bateman writes that 'nothing very much concerned them, besides fighting and rowing and collecting their unemployment cheques' and that the council had 'transferred scum from slums into scum with immersion heaters.'<sup>453</sup> Bateman's crime narrative involves the journalist Miller investigating the abuse of his girlfriend Marie and the death of her ex-boyfriend. Miller's inquiries involve interviews with representatives on both sides of the two-traditions paradigm, allowing Bateman to pass judgement on the hypocrisies on both sides.

When change that dissolves static identities is acknowledged in the novels of Glenn Patterson, it arrives with the onset of postmodern, multinational capitalism. In

---

<sup>450</sup> Brian Graham, 'Ulster: A Representation of Place Yet to Be Imagined' in *Who are the People?: Unionism, Protestantism and Loyalism in Northern Ireland* ed. Peter Shirlow and Mark McGovern (London: Pluto Press, 1997) p. 44.

<sup>451</sup> *Identity Parades*, p. 123.

<sup>452</sup> *Lamb*, p. 120.

<sup>453</sup> Colin Bateman, *Cycle of Violence* (1995) (London: Headline, 2013) pp. 38-39.

*Fat Lad*, Drew returns to Belfast from England to work for Bookstore, a multinational bookselling chain. Belfast is described as 'in the process of casting itself anew', Patterson listing global chains such as Next, Body Shop and Tie Rack to demonstrate.<sup>454</sup> Again, Drew's non-aligned identity rests on condemnation of the aesthetics of working class sectarianism on both sides. At university, Drew's iconoclastic identity is described as 'a welcome change from the ardent republicans and staunch loyalists and their coteries of Irish wannabees.'<sup>455</sup> While back in Belfast, Drew sees the collection of wood for a July bonfire and reflects: 'The working class Protestant's annual burnt offering to the great dead hand of Ulster Loyalism which had kept them, as much as their Catholic neighbours, in their slummy places for half a century while erecting the vast, mausolean pit of Stormont.'<sup>456</sup> Indeed, the conflict is depicted as a tourist attraction when the English Bookstore executive James arrives, Drew contemplating that seeing the sights in Belfast involves 'a ghoulish fairground ride up the Shankill and down the Falls, gawping at murals and fortified bars' and James concluding that he expected 'more destruction frankly.'<sup>457</sup> Drew's presence in Belfast is dependent upon the vagaries of global capitalism, and when Bookstore merges with a Swiss chain, the Belfast branch closes and he returns to England.<sup>458</sup> The novel ends with Drew and a Bangladeshi man witnessing the disposal of a bomb from World War II in a park in Northern England, this narrative closure suggesting multinational capitalism, a globalised world and the resulting fluid identities will displace the two-traditions paradigm.<sup>459</sup>

This notion also becomes the organising principle of Patterson's *Black Night at Big Thunder Mountain*, its protagonist Raymond abandoning his life as a Belfast Loyalist in order to travel for building work throughout the European Union. Again, Raymond is used to position the conflict in Northern Ireland as parochial compared to global developments. Patterson writes 'it was 1967, the globe was contracting under the all-seeing eye of the satellite, but Belfast was still world enough for him.'<sup>460</sup> Raymond's eventual acceptance of globalisation leads to a job constructing Euro

---

<sup>454</sup> *Fat Lad*, p. 5.

<sup>455</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 235.

<sup>456</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 142.

<sup>457</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 224-225.

<sup>458</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 275.

<sup>459</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 307.

<sup>460</sup> Glen Patterson, *Black Night at Big Thunder Mountain* (London: Minerva, 1996) p. 93.

Disney in Paris. Patterson's description of the site suggests an indeterminate space between national identities. Pieces of wood act as signs between the lots designating 'O'Connell, Sauciehall Street, Scheiss Strasse, Piccadilly Circus', West African labourers work alongside Americans and Europeans, and Moroccan music leaks from the headphones of a Taiwanese Walkman.<sup>461</sup> Patterson proposes hybridised identities based on consumption, the German canteen assistant Ilse Klein whistles the Irish rebel song 'Kevin Barry', having heard the tune while drinking in Irish bars in Berlin.<sup>462</sup> Flashback sequences to Ilse's life in a post-Berlin Wall Germany signify Patterson's critique of exhausted utopian horizons, as does the character Sam, a heavy amphetamine user who grew up in a commune in the United States, and whose obsession with Disney is proposed as a kind of rebellion against the counterculture of the 1960s.<sup>463</sup> Patterson critiques the two-traditions paradigm by dissolving the identities of Raymond, Sam and Ilse into the globalised identity based on consumption that Disney represents. Patterson seems to suggest that the real commune is Euro Disney, a corporate entity with the necessary fluidity with which to encompass all identities, so long as identity is tempered with a postmodern scepticism. Sam's acceptance of fluid identities is amphetamine induced and results in a vision of a world 'suddenly multiple and mosaic, teeming with possibility and chance', with Sam realising that 'there was more than one way of looking at everything.'<sup>464</sup> However, Sam's vision grows increasingly narrow, and it is his excessive identification with the Disney brand—causing him to threaten to blow up the Big Thunder Mountain Railroad ride at Euro Disney—that leads to his death at the novel's hallucinatory climax.<sup>465</sup>

Patterson's *The International* also attempts to push beyond the two-traditions paradigm by centring its narrative on a bi-sexual barman Danny. Danny's status as the son of a Catholic and Protestant whose 'native faiths had somehow cancelled each other out' echoes the love across the divide theme discussed earlier in the chapter.<sup>466</sup> Patterson draws from history in the novel, the narrative being set on the eve of the first meeting of the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association 1967 in the International

---

<sup>461</sup> *Black Night at Big Thunder Mountain*, p. 22; p. 201.

<sup>462</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 49.

<sup>463</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 68-69.

<sup>464</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 170.

<sup>465</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 206.

<sup>466</sup> Glenn Patterson, *The International* (1999) (Belfast: Blackstaff Press, 2008) p. 27.

Hotel where it took place. In the novel *The International* hotel represents what Michel Foucault terms a 'heterotopia', a non-space in which identity can be recreated.<sup>467</sup> In this spirit Patterson writes 'forget the cinema...in a hotel you could act out the fantasy yourself.'<sup>468</sup> Ultimately the framing of the Civil Rights movement as the origin of the Troubles, and the movement's association with the heterotopia of the hotel, suggests that the ideals of the movement were unrealistic in the concrete world outside the hotel. The novel, written in response to the 1994 ceasefire by the I.R.A. and other paramilitaries, tends to fall into the circular fatalism detected in other Northern Irish realist novels earlier in this chapter. There is also a sense of Irish exceptionalism in its depiction of the footballing legend Ted Connolly recounting a friend's trip to Dublin during the Easter Rising commemorations in 1966. Connolly's friend declared that the Irish were 'walking backwards into the seventies' and he compares this with the soccer world cup held in the same year when nationalities that were at war with each other two decades before could put differences aside and celebrate the event together.<sup>469</sup> Again, Patterson uses a globalised institution to represent an opportunity to efface identity, but only if the Irish preoccupation with history can be overcome. Ironically, the novel's resolution hinges on remembering, with Danny contemplating the killing of the Catholic barman Peter Ward and remarking that 'we're powerful people for remembering here, I hope that's one thing we don't forget.'<sup>470</sup>

Kirkland suggests that Northern Irish novels tend to a technique of naturalism that Lukàcs points to as a symptom of the failure of the 1848 European revolutions, after which the bourgeoisie began to tend to its own narrow class interests instead of agitating for general emancipation. In the novels considered here, this narrow bourgeois class interest manifests in the acceptance of globalised capitalism as a solution to the deadlock of identity in Northern Ireland. But if we accept Freedman's thesis about the possibilities for science fiction to transcend such limitations, it might be suggested that Shaw's novel stands as a critique of bourgeois norms. We have already considered the Block as an estrangement of Unionism, Tallon's rejection of their program a recognition of the impossibility of the persistence of identity over the vast expanse of

---

<sup>467</sup> Michel Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces', *Diacritics*, 16.1 (1986) 22-27.

<sup>468</sup> *The International*, p. 50.

<sup>469</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 193-194.

<sup>470</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 241.

space. In a moment, the thesis will consider Shaw's *Orbitsville* series as an instance of the author transcending the limitations of the bourgeois novel in the way that Freedman suggests. But as the narrative of *Night Walk* comes to a climax, it might be suggested that Shaw leaves little room to speculate about what comes after all identities, including the non-aligned identity, cease to have relevance.

Having performed a random jump in his ship, the *Lyle Star*, to avoid a laser weapon fired by the Lutherans, Tallon is stranded with his Lutheran nemesis Cherkassky and attempts to impress the logic of the non-aligned identity upon him. Tallon tries to convince his enemy that, with no prospect of ever finding Earth, there is no reason to carry on their ideologically-motivated vendetta. Despite the fact that he was aboard the *Lyle Star* when his allies fired, Cherkassky continues to fight and is killed by Tallon.<sup>471</sup> The tendency for Tallon to question binary identities increases when he discovers a means of jumping through null-space to any selected point in the galaxy, a discovery that removes the random element from the procedure, an innovation that Tallon feels will allow Earth access to an infinite number of habitable planets, increasing the potential for material abundance.

Reaching Earth, Tallon is threatened with destruction by Seely, his superior in the Block. Tallon loses his patience, Shaw writing that 'those 35,000 light-years had drained him of the last vestiges of tolerance for the politico-military system in which he had spent most of his life.'<sup>472</sup> Tallon suggests a future in which the class that Seely represents has become irrelevant, the discovery of null-space astrogation severing the link between identity and place irreparably. Tallon tells Seeley:

You are out of date...you and the portals and the Block are all part of ancient history. From now on we are through squabbling over a handful of worlds found by pure chance. Every planet in the galaxy is open to us, and there is going to be room for everybody. Even for you and your kind Seely, although you'll have to change. Nobody is going to stay and play soldiers in your backyard when a hundred thousand new planets are out there for living on.<sup>473</sup>

Empire is suggested as anachronistic when compared with the discovery of a means to plot a direction through null-space, replacing a reliance on random chance with rational

---

<sup>471</sup> *Night Walk*, p. 126.

<sup>472</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 138.

<sup>473</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 141.

choice. Tallon reads into his discovery the resolution of contradictions in the sheer volume of territory available for human expansion, the dissolving of what Kirkland describes as the classic opposition of personal responsibility and communal affiliation 'recontextualised by the looming presence of a mode of being that will render both alternatives redundant.'<sup>474</sup> For Kirkland, the irresistible mode of being in Northern Irish fiction is postmodern capitalism, a force that promises to dissolve all identities and replace stasis with flux. In Shaw's novel, the irresistible mode becomes expanse, the discovery of more territory allowing for the resolution of conflicts on the home planet.

The narrative of *Night Walk* closes at this point, Tallon's discovery yet to be disseminated to wider humanity, and the question still open as to what Earth will achieve having further populated the universe. Tallon concludes that 'the mother world would grow old some day, and become infertile; but by then her children would have grown up around her, tall and strong and fair. And they would be many.'<sup>475</sup> Although Tallon's admonition of Seely could be read as an anti-imperial resolution to the narrative, enabled by an advance in technology, Tallon's imagination once again falls back on imperial figures. The resolution of the novel suggests a colonial future for humanity in outer space as the Earth becomes uninhabitable, insinuating that the rate of extraction and environmental exploitation would remain unaffected by the fresh perspective that null-space astrogation affords. The control of null-space remains merely a means for accessing new territories for human expansion. Shaw's attempt to describe a form of life after the discovery of null-space astrogation turns to the ideological closure of a benign colonialism, an attempt to suggest that colonialism can be practised more humanely as long as those perpetrating it are possessed of the correct amount of heroism and individualism.

Tallon's narrative trajectory moves from an identification with Unionism, and a group affiliation with the Block, to the emergence of a non-aligned individual subject who rejects all identity formations. This rejection results in the embracing of human expansion without limit. Given that Shaw's narrative ends here, it might be useful to look at some of Shaw's texts in which the narrative begins with the discovery of

---

<sup>474</sup> *Identity Parades*, p. 123.

<sup>475</sup> *Night Walk*, p. 143.



abundance and the rejection of centralised power, and build to more exaggerated estrangements of human society as it populates other areas of the universe.

One such novel is Shaw's later trilogy *Orbitsville*, which begins on a future Earth under the rule of a monarchy. Vance Garamond is a captain in the Starflight Exploratory Team, an organisation whose aim is to find habitable planets for the Queen of Iceland, the country having become the major industrial power on Earth.<sup>476</sup> Garamond muses on the power of the queen early in the novel, Shaw telling us that:

At quiet moments on the bridge of his ship Garamond had often thought about how the sheer massiveness of her power had locally deformed the structure of language in exactly the same way as a giant sun was able to twist space around itself so that captive worlds, though believing themselves to be travelling in straight lines, were held in orbit.<sup>477</sup>

This image of monarchical and imperial power explains why Garamond's search for other planets is expressed in terms of colonialism, or even fascism, Shaw referring to the process as a 'quest for lebensraum.'<sup>478</sup> But the colonial adventure of which Garamond is a part is coming to an end, Shaw telling us that 'they were all dressed up with a superb ship. But a century of exploration by the vast Starlight armada had proved one thing. There was nowhere to go.'<sup>479</sup> However, as mentioned in Chapter One, when Garamond is forced to flee the Earth following his involvement in an accident that causes the death of the Queen's son, he makes a discovery with transformative potential for relations on Earth, a colossal sphere he christens *Orbitsville* that could resolve economic and political contradictions on Earth.

Shaw's narrative describes a colonial encounter with a fresh world ripe for expansion. Unlike a planet, it is the inner circumference of *Orbitsville* that is habitable, the view afforded rendering the whole territory visible from any position within the sphere. As highlighted in Chapter One, from this vantage point, Garamond's identity is immediately dissolved in the expanse of green grass and shimmering water, only

---

<sup>476</sup> Shaw uses Iceland as a location in another story '...And Isles Where Good Men Lie' which will be discussed later. Given that his stories set in Iceland contain no geographically-specific information, it might be suggested that the attraction of the country for Shaw as a location lay in the close resemblance of the word Iceland and Ireland.

<sup>477</sup> *Orbitsville*, p. 16.

<sup>478</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 32.

<sup>479</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 36.

returning when his partner Lieutenant Kramer crawls into the sphere.<sup>480</sup> Garamond sees ‘ancient buildings, low and ruinous’, the first sign that the sphere might already be inhabited, unseen because ‘time had robbed them of the appearance of artefacts, clothing the walls with moss and climbing grasses.’<sup>481</sup> Despite these signs of habitation, and the potential that the whole sphere is an artificial construction, Garamond and Kraemer immediately apprehend the sphere in colonial terms as territory to be claimed, Kraemer suggesting that they are looking at ‘as much living room as you’d get on a million Earths.’<sup>482</sup> Garamond increases this estimation of territorial abundance they have happened upon to ‘five billion Earths’, to which Kraemer replies ‘one each for every man, woman and child in existence.’<sup>483</sup> Like Shaw’s earlier novel *Night Walk*, the narrative of *Orbitsville* apprehends abundance as a resolution to contradictions on Earth. As the territory for human expansion increases, Garamond hopes that the power of the Queen described earlier will dissipate.

This notion of an empty world ripe for colonisation could be suggested as a reference to the colonisation of America. Indeed, Brian Aldiss suggests that the work of Shaw is the most mid-Atlantic of science fiction writers produced in the United Kingdom.<sup>484</sup> However, it could be suggested that the similarities between the author’s work and American science fiction also lies in the shared histories of Northern Ireland and North America. According to Jonathan Bardon, for some time Ulster and North America were equal in their attraction to settlers from England and Scotland, with Ireland positioned as the easterly island of Britain’s Atlantic Empire. Bardon states that ‘as late as 1680 the physician and cartographer Sir William Petty could not make up his mind whether America or Ireland offered the better prospect.’<sup>485</sup> For Bardon an echo of this is found in the place-name of town Virginia in Cavan, in the seventeenth century a part of Ulster. Bardon suggests that ‘Virginia in America and Virginia in Co. Cavan were founded at the same time and in the same spirit.’<sup>486</sup> Both were named after Queen Elizabeth I, dubbed the ‘virgin queen’ because of her sexual abstinence, linking the idea

---

<sup>480</sup> *Orbitsville*, p. 63.

<sup>481</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 63-64.

<sup>482</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 64.

<sup>483</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 64.

<sup>484</sup> *Trillion Year Spree*, pp. 479-480.

<sup>485</sup> *Plantation of Ulster*, p. 317.

<sup>486</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 317.

of a pure queen to an unsullied land. As Bardon points out, the planting of Ulster and the colonisation of America were often compared, one commentator suggesting that the planting of Ulster would bring more good to the King than ten times as much land in the Virginia in the Americas.<sup>487</sup> According to Bardon, the Scotch-Irish took their experiences in Ireland and used them to:

Play a pivotal role in the shaping of the United States. They and their forebears had long experience of building fortifications in hostile territory, of felling timber and clearing the land for the plough and of engaging woodkerne, tories, raparees and other native Irish who resented their intrusion. They were to become energetic pioneers in the 'back country', pushing the frontiers of European settlement in North America inexorably westwards.<sup>488</sup>

In this way, the colonisation of America and Ireland share a similar rhetorical space, with the hardships encountered in uncivilised environs said to improve the character of those at the vanguard of the process of colonisation.

According to Bardon, the plantation of Ulster was held to be just on the grounds that the land was relatively uninhabited.<sup>489</sup> Bardon suggests that in the Ulster plantations 'prospective planters had been assured that the lands they had applied for were 'utterly depopulated', but that 'soon they found that this was not so.'<sup>490</sup> In these terms, Garamond and Kraemer's encounter with Orbitville also enacts what John Rieder calls a fantasy of appropriation. Science fiction has one of its roots in lost-race fiction, a form that provided the foundation for the fantasy of appropriation that the discoverer's fantasy enacts, the notion that there is a previously inaccessible 'virgin territory' to be exploited by the explorer. Rieder draws from Slavoj Žižek to propose various 'ideological fantasies' in the colonial mindset, shielding attitudes that are disavowed in theory but supported in practice.<sup>491</sup> In the fantasy of appropriation, or the discoverer's fantasy, it is known that a particular land is occupied, but the invader acts as if it were empty before their arrival. For Rieder, science fiction and the colonial mindset are inseparable, the form bearing 'the persistent traces of a stubbornly visible

---

<sup>487</sup> *Plantation of Ulster*, p. 133.

<sup>488</sup> *Ibid.*, xi.

<sup>489</sup> *Ibid.* p. 130.

<sup>490</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 253.

<sup>491</sup> Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London: Verso, 1989).

colonial scenario beneath its fantastic script.<sup>492</sup> Rieder positions the form as coming into being in countries most heavily involved in imperialist projects, with the suggestion that, with the volume of unexplored territory on Earth shrinking rapidly, science fiction writers invented other exotic places or turned their eyes towards the planets rather than colonies overseas.<sup>493</sup>

In Shaw's *Orbitsville*, the immensity of Orbitsville and its apparent emptiness enacts a fantasy of appropriation that, like Tallon's hope for null-space in *Night Walk*, expresses a desire that the amount of land available will resolve any contradictions in the system of private property back on Earth.<sup>494</sup> There is conflict between the Queen and Garamond about the connection of the new world to the nation in whose name it was found. A struggle ensues over naming the world, the Queen designating it Lindstromland, after her own family name, with Garamond insisting on calling the sphere Orbitsville. The Queen is determined to appropriate the land in line with capitalist modes of extraction and exploitation, insisting on parcelling up and selling land on Orbitsville, but for Garamond the sheer size of the planet makes the idea of exploitation and property obsolete.

Marx discusses a similar tension in the early colonisation of America, suggesting that the truth about capitalist relations were discovered in the act of colonisation. Marx references a colonist who arrived in America with seed and workers to set up a business, but soon found himself with perishing seeds and no workers, because the social system that supported capitalism had not yet been transported to the new world, demonstrating that 'capital is not a thing, but a social relation between persons which is mediated through things.'<sup>495</sup> Garamond resists the imposition of the social relations of Earth, suggesting that:

Even if it wasn't a disguised land charge, the transportation fee should be abolished...because we now have all the land we can use. In those circumstances it is intolerable that there should be any kind of economic brake on the natural and instinctive flow of people towards the new land.<sup>496</sup>

---

<sup>492</sup> *Colonialism and the Emergence of Science Fiction*, p. 15.

<sup>493</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>494</sup> Orbitsville is in fact far from empty. As already noted in Chapter One, Garamond comes across a race called the Hummers living there, and later in the narrative a race called the Clowns are encountered. This fact does nothing to decelerate the colonisation process.

<sup>495</sup> Karl Marx, *Capital Volume I* trans. Ben Fowkes (London: Penguin, 1990) pp. 932-934.

<sup>496</sup> *Orbitsville*, pp. 76-78.

Like Tallon, in critiquing the Queen's monetisation of bringing colonists to the sphere, Garamond reaches towards a post-scarcity future, where a natural human inclination to pursue freedom from necessity is dependent on colonial expansion.

But there is also ambiguity surrounding Garamond's conception of Orbitstville. Garamond is also prey to the same feelings of ownership as the Queen, admitting that:

The weirdest thing about it is that I feel possessive...I keep lecturing people about the inconceivable size of Orbitstville, telling them that it couldn't be controlled by a thousand Starflight corporations—yet I have a gut-feeling it's my personal property.<sup>497</sup>

Garamond suggests that the entire population of an overcrowded Earth should be moved to the sphere, seeing the discovery of Orbitstville as offering a technologically-enhanced egalitarian future, the planet becoming the ultimate frontier, in Shaw's words '...a place where a man and his family could load up a solar-powered vehicle with supplies, plus an "iron cow" to convert grass into food, and drive off into a green infinity.'<sup>498</sup>

At this point in the text, the horizon of the narrative is suspended at the same point as the closure of *Night Walk*. Orbitstville represents the chance to enact a kinder colonialism that echoes the fantasy of appropriation, an ideological closure that suggests that given the circumstances, colonialism can be revisited as a benign enterprise, territorial abundance inspiring a new sense of commonly held land, while also encouraging the rugged individuality of the American pioneer or the Northern Irish planter.

But running alongside this sense in *Orbitstville* is the radical assumption of mutability that Freedman argues for science fiction as a genre, an assumption that positions terms such as the 'economic' as contingent and dependent on historical processes. In *Orbitstville*, Shaw pushes the cognitive estrangement further than in his first novel. The close of the narrative of *Orbitstville* posits a future where the variable

---

<sup>497</sup> *Orbitstville*, p. 80.

<sup>498</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 81.

contradictions of identity and class struggle are dissolved in abundance, the logic of non-alignment imposed through the sheer scale of the available land. Shaw writes:

Time is a measurement of change, evolution is a product of competition—concepts which were without meaning or relevance in the context of the Big O. Absolved of the need to fight or flee, to feel hunger or fear, to build or destroy, to hope or to dream, humanity had to cease being human—even though metamorphosis could not take place within a single season.<sup>499</sup>

This realm of freedom from necessity that has been created through the discovery of Orbitville has even rendered evolution obsolete. Shaw describes a slow transformation of humanity as it adapts to the new reality of abundance. At first ‘a thousand new nations were born’ on Orbitville, all ‘free to develop and flower in their own separate ways’, but the immensity of the sphere dissolves the need for nationalism, a symptom of the old social order, as well as the practice of trade between Earth and Orbitville. The novel ends with the lines ‘the quietness of the last long Sunday fell over an entire region of space. Orbitville had achieved its purpose.’<sup>500</sup>

Although the close of the narrative suggests stasis, as humanity is absorbed by the expanses of Orbitville, the radical estrangement of Shaw’s novel privileges a critical perspective that acknowledges change and continuity, while alerting the reader to the historical forces that define the social structure, suggesting human history as contingent and mutable.<sup>501</sup> *Orbitville* builds on the non-aligned narrative of Tallon in *Night Walk* by suggesting what would happen if unlimited resources were at the disposal of humanity. In this way, Shaw’s novel overcomes the limitations of the bourgeois novel that Kirkland discusses, suggesting a historical process in which static identities are dissolved in the flux of History. This sense of historical process pushes the conclusion of the narrative past the restricted horizon of the bourgeois novel by suggesting a posthuman future.<sup>502</sup> Orbitville dissolves static identities reliant on a static sense of history, Shaw highlighting the process that would end sectarianism without putting the onus on individual morality.

---

<sup>499</sup> *Orbitville*, p. 186.

<sup>500</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 187.

<sup>501</sup> *Critical Theory and Science Fiction*, p. 44.

<sup>502</sup> *Political Unconscious*, pp. 182-183.

Any implied stasis in the closure of the narrative of *Orbitsville* is undone by the remaining two novels of the series, with Shaw utilising the future-oriented aspect of science fiction to reflect further historical processes changing human relations on Orbitsville. The narrative of 1983's *Orbitsville Departure* opens two centuries after *Orbitsville* at Garamond Park, Vance Garamond having become a lauded historical figure. Garamond's colonial awe as he climbed through the Orbitsville portal and witnessed the 'grassy infinities' within, has become reified history in the shape of a bronze statue in the park. The conflict between the Queen and Garamond around the naming of Orbitsville has been rendered irrelevant, the sphere commonly referred to as Optima Thule. The prehistory of the sphere is reckoned as lying twenty thousand years before, when a race referred to as the Primers discovered the structure and attempted to impose the logic of ownership upon it by sealing all entrances to its interior bar one.<sup>503</sup> Although the closure of *Orbitsville* points to the inevitability of an anarchistic future given the scale of the structure, the social relations of Earth have begun to be instituted, with the establishment of the Optima Thule Metagovernment to regulate the sphere and its relationship with Earth.<sup>504</sup>

Despite the suggestion of stasis at the close of the earlier novel, historical forces have not ceased, signalled by the historian Cona Dallen, who is writing a monograph on the history of Judean settlements on Orbitsville.<sup>505</sup> The nationalism that was claimed as superseded in the first novel is still recurrent. Cona Dallen researches her book *The Second Diaspora*, and asks herself whether 'the fate of a single nation is a truly insignificant fleck in the vast mosaic of history.'<sup>506</sup> Her husband reflects on the imbroglios of history, concluding that 'Cona, as a professional historian, had the sort of mind which could cope with vast areas of complexity, confusion and conflict, whereas he yearned for a dawn-time simplicity which was never forthcoming.'<sup>507</sup> The dawn-time simplicity that Dallen yearns for is an echo of the earlier novel's suggestion of stasis, a resolution to conflict that never arrives.

---

<sup>503</sup> *Orbitsville Departure*, p. 12.

<sup>504</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

<sup>505</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

<sup>506</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 25.

<sup>507</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 47.

Back on Earth there is an attempt to preserve the planet as a tourist destination for inhabitants of Optima Thule, an enactment of the domination of the present by the past in bourgeois society as it begins to colonise the new territory.<sup>508</sup> Dallen muses:

In the early years of the migrations, for example, nobody had planned actually to abandon the cities of the home world and let them sink into decay. There had been too big an investment in time. Mankind's very soul lingered in the masonry of the great conurbations, and hundreds of them—from York to New York, Paris to Peking—had been designated as cultural shrines, places to which Earth's children would return from time to time and reaffirm their humanity.<sup>509</sup>

This reification of history comes in the shape of fragments of older identities. In the cities of these simulacra of the past of human society, the streets are periodised, each one referring to a particular decade of the preceding two centuries. Shaw describes 1990 Street, where 'solid images of cars and other vehicles—all of late 20<sup>th</sup> Century design—moved purposefully ahead of him, and seemingly real people in the costume of the period thronged the sidewalks and went in and out of stores.'<sup>510</sup>

But the future-oriented aspect of the science fiction narrative form allows Shaw to transcend the horizon of the bourgeois novel. Shaw suggests that the abundance of Orbitville has resulted in a decrease in crime. Shaw writes:

In the two centuries since the discovery of Optima Thule, to give Orbitville its constitutional name, there had been a general and steady decrease in traditional crime. Most crimes had involved property in one way or another, and as the race had been absorbed by a land area equivalent to five billion Earths—enough to support every intelligent creature in the galaxy—the basic motivations had faded away. Keeping pace with that change, many vast and complicated legal structures had become as obsolete as barbed wire, and progressively fallen into disuse.<sup>511</sup>

Shaw points to the origin of crime in the structure of property relations, rather than in the individual subject, with the result that the extreme abundance of Orbitville renders prisons obsolete.

---

<sup>508</sup> Karl Marx, *The Communist Manifesto* (Oxford: Oxford World Classics, 1998) p. 19.

<sup>509</sup> *Orbitville Departure*, p. 47.

<sup>510</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 33.

<sup>511</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 76.



In the *Orbitsville* sequels then, historical process continues, while an adulterated access to History in Althusserian terms remains impossible. The history of the discovery of *Orbitsville* outlined in the first novel has become reified in statues and the ghostly simulacra of past centuries. Where the process of History continues is in the changing human relationship to the material world.

This process also continues on Earth away from the simulacra of bygone eras. The discovery of *Orbitsville* has led to the relative emptying of Earth, but the end of history that the first novel seemed to propose has proved illusory, class struggle continuing on the abandoned Earth. Those who refuse to be coerced into leaving have formed themselves into communities and, calling themselves Independents, are barely subsiding on what humanity has left behind. An Independent named Beaumont, who feels that they are not getting enough support from the Metagovernment, is questioned by Cora Dallen's policeman husband (referred to simply as Dallen by Shaw). Dallen refers to the irony of a group calling themselves Independents looking for help from the government, but Beaumont replies 'we made a contribution', suggesting that to the Independents *Orbitsville* is still inextricably linked to conditions on Earth, the planet whose social structure and mode of production enabled the mass emigration that emptied the Earth.<sup>512</sup> Dallen presumes coercive force on the part of the Independents, proposing that:

There were parts of the world where human labour had again become valuable, where the petty chieftains of the new age—men who could feel their power growing as *Orbitsville* lost interest in Earth—prevented their slave subjects from taking the big trip.<sup>513</sup>

But the policeman is forced to reappraise his perception of the Independents as 'mulish disgruntled adults' when he tracks Beaumont to an Independent community, the presence of children alerting him to the fact that these communities are more complex than he suspected and not based primarily on domination but on collectivity. The city of Cordele had been kept depopulated for a year, the time limit after which the people who decide to reside there are considered non-existent by the Metagovernment. Dallen realises that 'children were bound to arrive, officially non-existent children,

---

<sup>512</sup> *Orbitsville Departure*, pp. 44-46.

<sup>513</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 108.

disenfranchised, not entitled to education or even the most rudimentary health care.<sup>514</sup> Although unacknowledged by the Metagovernment, history continues on Earth, with groups of dissidents forging new strategic identities by banding together in the cities for mutual support. Although Orbitsville had been proposed a means of resolving contradictions in the abundance of newly-available territory, on a planet Earth with a surfeit of empty land, a class struggle continues between the government and a class of people left on Earth.

The inhabitants of Orbitsville are still unable to comprehend the totality of which they are a part; the foundation of necessity that defines their social structure remains a mystery, feeding into anxieties about how permanent the structure is. Shaw writes that visitors and new settlers are uneasy at the thought that ‘without the enclosing skin of ylem, the enigmatic material of which the vast sphere was formed, the inner layer of rock, soil and vegetation would quickly succumb to instabilities and fly apart.’ But long-standing residents of Orbitsville, who trust in the durability of their home, do not share this anxiety, and presume its stability.<sup>515</sup> Despite two centuries of examining the substance that makes up the shell of the sphere, the science of ‘spherology’ has had no success in solving the enigma of Orbitsville. Shaw writes that ‘after millions of man-hours of study, spherologists knew the material’s thickness, its albedo, its index of friction, and very little more.’<sup>516</sup> Spherology is described as a field offering ‘less to pragmatic researchers than to poets and mystics.’<sup>517</sup>

Shaw’s imaginary science of spherology shares a similar narrative space to Polish science fiction author Stanislaw Lem’s science of Solaristics from his 1961 novel *Solaris*. In Lem’s novel, the science of Solaristics concerns the study of a vast sentient ocean that constitutes the planet Solaris, which communicates by reflecting human thoughts and memories back onto the scientists who are attempting to understand it. Like the mystical connotations of the science of spherology, the science of Solaristics is framed by the scientist Muntius as something akin to a religious revival.<sup>518</sup> For

---

<sup>514</sup> *Orbitsville Departure*, p. 110.

<sup>515</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

<sup>516</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 68.

<sup>517</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17.

<sup>518</sup> Stanislaw Lem, *Solaris* trans. Joanne Kilmartin and Steve Cox (1961) (London: Faber, 2003) pp. 180-183.

Freedman, Lem's novel is an attempt to problematise pre-critical common sense and to point to the impossibility of establishing an unproblematic theory of reality, the critic stressing that Lem's target is dogmatic positivism rather than science itself. Writing on *Solaris*, Freedman suggests that science fiction has the ability to incorporate philosophical speculation in a way lacking in the post-1848 realist novel. For Freedman, *Solaristics* points to the 'dialectic *provisionality* of all genuine knowledge and cognition' even in so-called hard sciences.<sup>519</sup>

It is this notion of provisionality that Shaw develops in the *Orbitsville* trilogy, as the limitations of the science of spherology undermine the non-aligned stance that informed the colonisation of *Orbitsville*. The inhabitants of *Orbitsville* are visited by a green radiance that sweeps across the sphere, the spherologist Cavendish apprehending the globe in a religious mode, seeing it as a manifestation of a divine engineer. Although he ruminates on the fact that soon humanity will disappear into the interior of the 'infinite meadows' of the sphere, the green light that begins pulsing through its surface has equal implications for everyone on the globe, rendering the inhabitants a collective subject once more.<sup>520</sup> The substance ylem that makes up the sphere had been thought to be inert, but as it becomes agitated and lights up, the spherologist's scientific instruments start to fail. Dallen arrives at *Orbitsville* after a trip to Earth and sees that 'the enigmatic material of its shell—black, immutable, totally inert in two centuries of mankind's experience—was suffused with a pulsing green light.' The previously-thought immutable shell of *Orbitsville* is proved mutable. For Freedman, this recognition of mutability is science fiction's critical strength, which Shaw enforces by suggesting that Dallen possessed 'a primitive unquestioning faith in its permanence and immutability' but that 'now the unthinkable was happening.'<sup>521</sup> Those who have presumed stasis and articulated an identity based on a solid sense of place are thrown into crisis by events on *Orbitsville*. An identity based on history and place becomes provisional when the foundation that underpins it is undermined and historic process continues.

---

<sup>519</sup> *Critical Theory and Science Fiction*, p. 98.

<sup>520</sup> *Orbitsville Departure*, p. 100.

<sup>521</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 211-213.

At the closure of the narrative, Shaw pushes this provisionality, the sphere disappearing completely as Dallen, waiting to dock just outside the planet's orbit, looks on in awe at the green glow of Orbitville with 'superstitious awe.'<sup>522</sup> An entity appears and makes contact with Dallen, identifying itself as an Ultan, the race that created Orbitville. The Ultan tell Dallen that the universe they inhabit is not Totality, that there are four dimensions: two travelling into the past, and two travelling into the future. Reality is explained as consisting of gravitons, relating of matter, and mindons, relating to the mind. Matter relies on mindons in order to facilitate action and drive history forward, a reference to Hegelian philosophy prefigured earlier in the novel when Dallen is accused by Silvia London of being a dialectical materialist, the branch of philosophy developed by Marx and Engels by drawing from Hegel's dialectics.<sup>523</sup> The Ultan states that 'it is the thinker in the quietness of his study who draws the remotest galaxies back from the shores of night.'<sup>524</sup> Orbitville is revealed to Dallen as an instrument with which to gather mindons to relocate to a parallel universe that has an overabundance of gravitons. As such, Orbitville becomes, not a device to promote the stasis of a non-aligned identitarian future, but a means of instilling mindon identity into inert gravitons, bringing more sectors of the universe within the sway of historical process and human identity formation. Struggle even exists amongst the apparently supernatural entities, another Ultan making its presence known to Dallen and objecting to attempts to impose will upon a Totality that should be left alone to evolve. The unfolding of history is not posited as inevitable, but must be completed through praxis. At the close of the narrative, Dallen is asked to be that praxis, by propelling a fellow crew member Mathieu against the shell of Orbitville, sending the sphere into the next region of the universe. While Dallen deliberates, the sphere disappears, undermining the foundation of Orbitville identity completely.

At the narrative closure of Lem's *Solaris*, the scientist Kelvin strands himself on the ocean planet Solaris to study it in depth, admitting that he still knows nothing of the subject he has studied all his life.<sup>525</sup> Freedman suggests that the climax to the narrative is typical of the dialectic view that the novel embodies, proposing that it is

---

<sup>522</sup> *Orbitville Departure*, p. 223.

<sup>523</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 134.

<sup>524</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 232.

<sup>525</sup> *Solaris*, p. 214.

'the provisionality of the quest that is most important and that possesses essential epistemological dignity.'<sup>526</sup> This provisionality is stressed at the close of *Orbitsville Departure*. Although it appears that a great truth has been revealed to Dallen at the close of the novel, in its details the knowledge that the Ultan impart is reminiscent of an earlier point in Dallen's narrative, where Silvia London and her husband Gott McPherson give instruction on McPherson's theory of a universal schematic.<sup>527</sup> This highlights the subjective nature of contact with the Ultan, Dallen basing his experience on the knowledge he had gleaned earlier. Like contact with Solaris in Lem's novel, communion with the Ultan differs according to the subject, its effects ranging from the particle physicist Glaister's encounter with 'cameos of cold logic, engraved in permafrost, with the black ice of eternity showing through', to a pronounced autism that prevents the subject from taking part in any attempt to recall information about the encounter.<sup>528</sup>

In the final volume of the trilogy, *Orbitsville Judgement*, the provisionality that *Orbitsville* represents is pushed even further by Shaw. Beginning the novel in the sleepy market town of Orangefield, a community centred on technology from the early twentieth century, Shaw focuses on the town librarian, Jim Nicklin, as he comes into contact with the historical forces that are transforming the basis of existence on *Orbitsville*. The narrative trajectory of the novel is so close to that of its predecessor that we need not be exhaustive in outlining it here. Nicklin joins a group of millenarians led by the preacher Corey Montane, who read the changes on *Orbitsville* as evidence of an impending catastrophe, and seek to leave the sphere. The narrative closes with another transformation, as the green lights that have been appearing on the sphere begin to cut through the surface, sundering *Orbitsville* into 650 million new planets, described as a 'world cloud.' Like Dallen, Nicklin has a subjective mystical experience while witnessing the event, while also sensing that humanity has become 'a civilisation jarred out of its age-old complacency.'<sup>529</sup> The event opens up History to the inhabitants of *Orbitsville*, Shaw writing that 'the image of the world cloud, beautiful in its symmetry,

---

<sup>526</sup> *Critical Theory and Science Fiction*, p. 101.

<sup>527</sup> *Orbitsville Departure*, pp. 88-90.

<sup>528</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 243.

<sup>529</sup> *Orbitsville Judgement*, p. 254.

was his past, present and future.<sup>530</sup> Nicklin draws a conclusion reminiscent of Hegel's notion of 'world spirit', with all minds taking part in a process that will eventually combine. Shaw writes that 'they were all immortal, and would all partake in a grand scheme of evolution and assimilation which would lead to the ultimate convergence of Life.'<sup>531</sup> Like the close of *Solaris* and *Orbitsville Departure*, Nicklin explains his experience with a crossover of ideas from religion and science, comparing the universe to the 'ultimate structure' and as such indistinguishable from God. He describes how Corey Montane would 'use the vocabulary of religion' but that he himself 'preferred the vocabulary of science.' When asked if he saw God Nicklin simply states 'I saw what everybody else saw.'<sup>532</sup>

Freedman suggests that such a viewpoint can only be rescued from accusations of solipsism through the Marxist theory of praxis, which finds the foundation for concepts by testing them and is embodied in Marx's thesis that 'philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways; the point, however, is to change it.'<sup>533</sup> Freedman concludes that '...the largest questions of the universe may time and again baffle the best efforts of dialectical reason...but...only dialectical reason is capable of genuinely posing such questions at all.'<sup>534</sup> In *Orbitsville Departure*, the questions posed by Dallen's encounter with the Ultan find their praxis in a renaissance in mindon science, a science unlike any discipline before it, that accepts immortality as a fact and is described by Shaw as 'exuberant, optimistic, mystical, life-centred, full of wild cards'.<sup>535</sup> The close of the book sees a collective humanity waking from the slumber evoked by the abundance of Orbitsville, historical process continuing as a result of the new scientific practice. Shaw writes:

The Orbitsville phase had ended. In future when men set out to straddle the galaxy they would be searching for more than just areas of grass on which to pitch their tents. Equipped with superb tachyon ships, girded with mindon science, consciously immortal, they would have aims which would be incomprehensible to men of Dallen's generation. But there was nothing wrong with that, he reasoned. It was a sign that mankind was on the move

---

<sup>530</sup> *Orbitsville Judgement*, p. 258.

<sup>531</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 276.

<sup>532</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 281.

<sup>533</sup> Karl Marx, 'Theses on Feuerbach' in *The German Ideology* ed. C.J. Arthur (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1970) p. 123.

<sup>534</sup> *Critical Theory and Science Fiction*, p. 111.

<sup>535</sup> *Orbitsville Departure*, p. 244.

again, and he should feel nothing but gladness that he had contributed to the process of vital change.<sup>536</sup>

Initially apprehended as a means by which to end history, *Orbitsville* instigates the next stage in human history, but Shaw ends the narrative here.

If Kirkland suggests that mainstream Northern Irish fiction remains limited by bourgeois ideology, then reading the work of Shaw through Freedman might suggest that the *Orbitsville* trilogy transcends these limits. The incomprehensibility stressed at the closure of *Orbitsville Departure* echoes the conclusion Kirkland arrives at in *Identity Parades*, asserting that the question of what comes after identity politics is unanswerable. Declaring a commitment to historical process, as well as a resistance to 'bourgeois ideology's domination of the now', Kirkland concludes that:

Overwhelmed as we are by the identitarian imperatives of the present, we cannot yet transcend the totalitarian nature of identity's response to history, cannot, in other words, enact the utopian political critique as it is often desired; but then, as Debord insists, 'the critique which goes beyond the spectacle must *know how to wait*.'<sup>537</sup>

By this account, science fiction is an impatient genre that stretches the closure of the bourgeois now in an attempt to transcend it. The non-aligned identity expressed in *Night Walk* and the *Orbitsville* series is forced through the narrative pressure of the genre of science fiction, and transformed into a commentary on human history and stable identity. The *Orbitsville* series, in particular, pushes at the horizon of identity and history, suggesting that both are provisional, mutable and open to constant change.

This chapter has considered the influence of history and identity on the work of Shaw and White. We examined Althusser and Jameson's suggestion that History is inaccessible and only available to us through fragments, a notion that calls the Irish historical revisionist claims to scientific method into question. All histories are open to the ideology of the historian engaging in historical work. These incomplete fragments of History inform identities that are strategic and conditional. In Northern Ireland, these identities are informed by the two-traditions paradigm, and the third non-aligned identity that Kirkland detects. This formation reveals the bourgeois ideology that

---

<sup>536</sup> *Orbitsville Departure*, p. 251.

<sup>537</sup> *Identity Parades*, p. 166.

underpins the political situation in the North of Ireland, an ideological limitation that, according to Freedman, the genre of science fiction can overcome. Shaw and White achieve this to differing degrees, depicting the importance of history to identity, but problematising the connection through reference to contested histories, oral traditions, and the selection process in historical endeavours, all of which introduce a possibility for the ideological contamination of history and the destabilisation of identities based upon it. Here the science fiction of Shaw and White transcends the limitations of the bourgeois form of the novel, but there is also resistance to this tendency. This resistance is found particularly in White's depictions of a Catholic future dominated by bishops, priests and nuns, regulated by sexual surveillance technologies, a regulation that Cronin suggests as essential to the creation of the bourgeois subject. By contrast, Shaw attempts to critique a Unionism fast becoming irrelevant in a post-British Empire world, first drawing from a non-aligned identity, but eventually transcending the bourgeois novel through a depiction of the historical processes that will eventually dissolve a static sense of identity.



## Chapter Three: The Alien and the Other

This chapter will discuss instances of the alien in the science fiction of Shaw and White. It will begin by considering some critical approaches to the alien in science fiction, marking their relevance to Irish Studies. It will then discuss the work of Shaw, locating instances within the narratives in which an initial conception of the alien is proven false, and attempt to connect such narratives to Irish history. Next it will discuss the issue of absorption, the fear of losing one's identity through acceptance of the alien. This will be examined as manifesting in the work of Shaw as a fear of transference of personality through technological means, and a fear of becoming embroiled in a composite identity. Before discussing a similar tendency in the fiction of White, it will examine the author's attempt, in his Sector General series, to depict a multispecies environment. In White, what I call worlding technologies, technologies that compensate for the failings of translation by allowing the user to embody an alien viewpoint, become a site for anxiety surrounding the loss of identity. Finally, the chapter will consider White's categorisation system as a means of controlling the border between the alien and the human.

### **The Alien in Science Fiction and Ireland.**

Before framing the alien in the context of Northern Ireland, it will be useful to more generally discuss the form in which the phenomenon manifests in the genre of science fiction. Along with technology, the alien is the predominant theme in science fiction, with stories of first contact between the human and the extraterrestrial, vividly drawn accounts of alien civilisations, and intergalactic warfare staples of the genre. The alien in science fiction acts as a border that defines the human, as well as a boundary that can provoke an attempt to see through the eyes of an Other. Humanity itself is defined by the border between itself and its Others, with the extraterrestrial as the ultimate marker of this distinction. The philosopher Peter Szendy draws from Kant as a 'thinker of the border' to suggest that 'it is on the basis of the extraterrestrial that humanity could be embodied'.<sup>538</sup> But the attempt to imagine the truly alien throws up singular challenges

---

<sup>538</sup> Peter Szendy, *Kant in the Land of Extraterrestrials* trans. Will Bishop (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013) p. 78.

for science fiction. According to Gregory Benford, successfully describing the alien is an impossibility, the alien becoming more familiar as it is described, eventually becoming shorn of its alterity. For Benford, when writers do so, they are attempting to express the ineffable.<sup>539</sup> Mark Rose agrees, writing that ‘the alien can be gestured toward—the text can provide signs that represent the idea of alienness—but the alien itself in its radical otherness cannot be directly portrayed.’<sup>540</sup> For Fredric Jameson, it is this undefinability that gives imagining the alien its utopian charge. Jameson likens attempts to render the truly alien to attempts at articulating a social system beyond the logic of capitalism.<sup>541</sup>

In her study of the alien in science fiction, Patricia Monk posits the phenomenon as both metaphor and archetype. Monk states that ‘considered as a class, the aliens of science fiction constitute an exemplum of the Other at its most extreme, which has developed contemporaneously with the psychological and sociological theories of the individual self and of individual and collective alienation.’<sup>542</sup> But Monk distinguishes between alterity and Otherness in fictional instances of the alien. For Monk, alterity constitutes a concept of OtherSelfness, a recognition of sapience in humanity that is simultaneously cognitive of how sapience might manifest in other kinds of being.<sup>543</sup> For Monk, Otherness is the not-Self, located in the monster of terrestrial origin that reminds humanity of its origin in beasts. While the monster evolves on Earth, true alterity is not terrestrial and therefore falls outside our concept of the human. Monk quotes George E. Slusser and Eric S. Rabkin, who suggest that the alien is ‘the creation of a need—man’s need to designate something that is genuinely outside himself, something that is truly nonman, that has no initial relation to man except for the fact that it has no relation.’<sup>544</sup>

---

<sup>539</sup> Gregory Benford, ‘Effing the Ineffable’ in *Aliens: The Anthropology of Science Fiction* ed. George S Slusser and Eric S Rabkin (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1987) pp. 13-25.

<sup>540</sup> Mark Rose, *Alien Encounters: Anatomy of Science Fiction* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981) p. 78.

<sup>541</sup> *Archaeologies of the Future*, pp. 119-141.

<sup>542</sup> *Alien Theory*, xiii.

<sup>543</sup> *Ibid.*, xiv. Following Monk, this thesis will use the phrases alterity and OtherSelfness interchangeably. Monk’s use of the term is derived from the study of the alien in magazine science fiction, and differs from other uses of the term, such as Julia Kristeva’s use of alterity and otherness in her analysis of pregnancy.

<sup>544</sup> *Alien Theory*, xiv-xv.

For Monk, in science fiction Otherness is necessary to produce alterity, but not sufficient on its own. Alterity begins with Otherness but must become more radical in order to achieve true alterity, a term Monk uses interchangeably with the term OtherSelfness. Monk suggests that full alterity 'requires the awareness of the Self in the nonhuman other, and the process of this recognition is played out in the writing and reading of the science fictional alien.'<sup>545</sup> For Monk, a description of alien Otherness in a science fiction narrative fails to develop into alterity when a comparison between the alien and human norms is upheld throughout.<sup>546</sup> In analysing science fictional instances of the alien, Monk defines OtherSelfness against mere Otherness. For Monk, the depiction of OtherSelfness embodies radical potential, whereas the depiction of mere Otherness does not. This idea will become useful later when attempting to theorise about manifestations of the alien in the fiction of Shaw and White.

The work of Sherryl Vint is also useful in this respect. Similar to Monk, Vint also reads the alien Other depicted in science fiction as a border. Vint suggests that the alien figure often stands in for the human relationship with animals, marking the boundary between what is considered human and what lies outside the human realm, a notion that Jacques Derrida suggests the physical animal itself serves.<sup>547</sup> The notion of contact with the Other is central to Vint's work on science fiction. According to Vint, science fiction is '...structured by a dialectical tension between our desire to communicate with a non-human sentience and our fear of otherness as something that necessarily threatens the self and hence must be destroyed', a notion that will become central to our study of the fear of absorption by the alien later in the chapter. Vint draws from the philosophy of Martin Buber to suggest that some depictions of alien encounters in science fiction take the form of an I-Thou relationship in which the alien is a sentient subject as complex as the human, while others objectify the Other, reproducing an I-It relation.<sup>548</sup> This notion could also be mapped onto Monk's analysis

---

<sup>545</sup> *Alien Theory*, xv.

<sup>546</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 101.

<sup>547</sup> Jacques Derrida, *The Animal that Therefore I Am* ed. Marie-Louise Mallet, trans. David Wills (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008) pp. 1-51. For Derrida the distinction between the human and the animal is the foundation of Western metaphysics. Derrida suggests that philosophy had to jettison the animal in order to establish itself.

<sup>548</sup> Sherryl Vint, *Animal Alterity: Science Fiction and the Question of the Animal* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2010) p. 163. Martin Buber, *I and Thou* trans. Walter Kaufman (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1979).

of the alien, with the I-It relation as mere Otherness, and the I-Thou relation recognising selfhood in the Other.

Vint also draws from the philosopher of alterity Emmanuel Levinas, who discusses the importance of the face-of-the-other as a foundation for philosophy in ethics. Levinas writes of his experiences in a slave labour camp in Germany during World War II, in which a dog the prisoners named Bobby appeared, and built up a relationship with those held captive by the Nazis. Levinas considers that while the guards treat them as less than human, the dog responds to them as humans. However, Levinas sees the dog's response as insufficient, echoing the philosophy of Descartes by defining the dog as an automaton merely reacting to their presence rather than a sentient entity eager to interact with another sentient lifeform.<sup>549</sup> Vint suggests that the reluctance of Levinas to recognise an ethical face-of-the-other in the dog, arose from an anxiety that it would have made him complicit with Nazi ideology, which was attempting to construct a notion of Jewish people as animalistic. But Vint remarks that it is not necessary to view the animal/human boundary as always having such a reductive effect on the category of the human. Vint suggests that beyond this boundary lies the question of the ethics of a multi-species community.<sup>550</sup> For Levinas, animals live outside ethics in a struggle for life, but for Vint, the interaction between the dog and the prisoners suggests a foundation for the ethical multi-species community she talks about, and she draws a parallel between the encounter and the depiction of the alien Other in science fiction.

The alien in science fiction, then, is a signifier for the boundary between what is human and what lies outside. In addition, the fictional alien encounter can prescribe means of inhabiting multi-species spaces in an ethical manner, a notion that, as will be shown, the science fiction of White in particular reaches towards in his Sector General series. This ethical multi-species encounter can also be mapped onto notions of postcoloniality in Irish Studies. Before returning to the fiction of Shaw and White, this section will examine the subject of the alien and the Other within that discipline.

---

<sup>549</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, 'The Name of a Dog, or Natural Rights' in *Difficult Freedom: Essays on Judaism* trans. Seán Hand (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1990) pp. 151-153.

<sup>550</sup> *Animal Alterity*, p. 80.

Extraterrestrial and Irish Studies might initially appear to be strange bedfellows, but the idea of the extraterrestrial alien emerges in one of the canonical texts of Irish literature. In the 'Ithaca' section of James Joyce's *Ulysses*, Leopold Bloom and Stephen Daedalus urinate in Bloom's garden, while Bloom looks up and contemplates the firmament, speculating that:

...a more adaptable and differently anatomically constructed race of beings might subsist otherwise under Martian, Mercurial, Veneral, Jovian, Saturnian, Neptunian or Uranian sufficient and equivalent conditions, though an apogean humanity of beings created in varying forms with finite differences resulting similar to the whole and to one another would probably there as here remain inalterably and inalienably attached to vanities, to vanities of vanities and all that is vanity.<sup>551</sup>

Colin Graham writes that 'Bloom's often touchingly instinctive inclusivity here reaches an "apogee" in that it extends even beyond the human to the literally "alien", the ultimate of alterities, and collapses into the humility of "vanity"'.<sup>552</sup> Graham reads Bloom's contemplation of the stars and the alien as his liberation from linearity, demonstrating his ability to apprehend the past, present and future. But Bloom's impulse to humanise the aliens by projecting human vanity upon them is also interesting in relation to Monk's theorisation of the alien in science fiction. Rather than an OtherSelfness, another mode of being with its own relationship to its environment, Bloom detects a mere Otherness, projecting human norms of vanity onto his speculated alien race.

The form of the 'Ithaca' section is also relevant, structured as it is on the Catholic catechism, which inevitably raises comparisons with Catholic tradition around the notion of the extraterrestrial. The idea that intelligent life exists on other planets was a notion that united the realms of science and theology for many years: science because the existence of millions of stars suggested a 'plurality of worlds', statistically likely to be inhabited; theology because of the belief that a divine being would not create such possibilities for life without fulfilling them.<sup>553</sup> Viewed through Monk's opposition

---

<sup>551</sup> James Joyce, *Ulysses* (1922) (London: Penguin Books, 1992) p. 821.

<sup>552</sup> *Deconstructing Ireland*, p. 74

<sup>553</sup> Don O'Leary, *Irish Catholicism and Science: From Godless Colleges to the Celtic Tiger* (Cork: Cork University Press, 2012) pp. 64-68. Although not official Catholic doctrine, the debate around extraterrestrial life and Catholicism continues, with all sides agreeing that its discovery will not change the central tenets of the faith. For more, detail see David A. Weintraub, *Religions and Extraterrestrial*

between OtherSelfness and the Other, Catholic tradition took these potential OtherSelves and rendered them merely Other.<sup>554</sup> Taking Monk's theory into consideration, Bloom resists true alterity and reaches towards mere Otherness, the notion of universal humility rendering the alien as all too human. In conceptualising an extraterrestrial alterity, Bloom does not reach far enough in constituting an OtherSelf inhabiting the stars.

In considering the work of Shaw and White as Northern Irish science fiction, it is worth keeping Bloom's rehearsal of an encounter with the alien Other in mind. The concept of the Other is an important one in critical studies of Northern Irish culture, both for studying relationships within the region and how the region is perceived internationally. As Aaron Kelly suggests in his study of the Troubles thriller, Northern Ireland is often perceived as a site of 'pure, unresolved otherness', a depiction which serves to mystify the conflict and downplay the role that Britain has played in it.<sup>555</sup>

As will be seen later in the chapter, Shaw and White's depictions of alien Others engage with the concept of Otherness and alterity, marking the alien as a boundary, a foundation for multi-species ethics, as well as a source of anxiety surrounding a fear of absorption by the Other. In Northern Ireland it has been noted that the notion of the Other often provides a 'negative pole' around which identity circulates, usually in the guise of religion.<sup>556</sup> The sociological analysis of Claire Mitchell bears this out. Mitchell suggests that Northern Ireland in the era in which Shaw and White worked was amongst the most religious societies in Western Europe. In 1961 only 384 of its 1.5 million population identified themselves as non-religious. Mitchell draws from the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu to suggest religious identity as *habitus*, a concept Bourdieu proposes as the means by which we unconsciously reproduce social categories and meanings through our thinking and behaviours.<sup>557</sup> These unconscious behaviours feed

---

*Life: How Will We Deal With It* (Springer, 2014) and Marie I. George, *Christianity and Extraterrestrials?: A Catholic Perspective* (Lincoln: iUniverse, 2005).

<sup>554</sup> This notion is dramatised in White's *The Silent Stars Go By* with O'Riordan's plan to convert the entirety of the alien race, the Ull, to the Christian faith (428).

<sup>555</sup> *The Thriller and Northern Ireland Since 1969*, pp. 143-144.

<sup>556</sup> Alan Finlayson, 'Discourse and Contemporary Loyalist Identity' in *Who are the People?: Unionism, Protestantism and Loyalism in Northern Ireland* ed. Peter Shirlow and Mark McGovern (London: Pluto Press, 1997).

<sup>557</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice* (California: Stanford University Press, 1990) pp. 52-65.

into common sense knowledge, in the case of Northern Ireland Mitchell suggesting that this *habitus* manifests not as a self-definition, but as a notion of the characteristics of the Other.<sup>558</sup> Elsewhere, Peter Shirlow and Mark McGovern note that ‘worldviews in Northern Ireland are, in a range of ways, profoundly affected by the central binary opposition of the “collective self” and the “collective other.”’<sup>559</sup> This sense of a border between identities inevitably leads to science fictional metaphors to describe the form of the Other. Mitchell references an interview with a Protestant woman from Belfast who tells of her ‘first contact’ with Catholics when she was eleven years old, before which she had thought of them as ‘ginger-haired squinty-eyed aliens.’<sup>560</sup> Here, the notion of first contact, a science fictional formulation articulating an encounter with an extraterrestrial Other is mapped onto an encounter with the cultural Other, defined against the self through reference to physical characteristics.

The notion of a border defining the self and the alien Other applies to Ireland as a whole, and is in fact a function of identity formation itself. Declan Kiberd’s application of postcolonial theory to Ireland suggests that England created the idea of Ireland as everything that the colonial power was not. Kiberd draws from Edward Said’s *Orientalism*, a study of the process of recognition that occurs in encounters between the coloniser and colonised, the latter constructed as an exotic, uncivilised and childlike Other incapable of self-government.<sup>561</sup> Religion became an integral element in the constitution of identities on both sides of this formation. As Richard Kirkland notes, Lord Lyndhurst’s comment that the Irish were ‘aliens in blood, in language and in religion’ was embraced by modern Irish nationalists, who used the notion of radical difference as the foundation of their project.<sup>562</sup> This radical difference was inevitably articulated through the mode of religion. Writing in 1949, Seán O’Faoláin described Catholicism as ‘a standard for a common dissatisfaction with English rule, the first metaphor, the first symbol, of an emergent bud of political nationalism in Ireland.’<sup>563</sup>

---

<sup>558</sup> Claire Mitchell, *Religion, Identity and Politics in Northern Ireland: Boundaries of Belonging and Belief* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2006) p. 93.

<sup>559</sup> Peter Shirlow and Mark McGovern, ‘Introduction’ to *Who are the People?: Unionism, Protestantism and Loyalty in Northern Ireland* ed. Peter Shirlow and Mark McGovern (London: Pluto Press, 1997) p. 15.

<sup>560</sup> *Religion, Identity and Politics in Northern Ireland*, p. 65.

<sup>561</sup> Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin, 2003).

<sup>562</sup> *Cathal O’Byrne and the Northern Revival*, p. 32.

<sup>563</sup> Seán O’Faoláin, *The Irish* (London: Penguin, 1969) p. 72.

This religious and cultural Othering also has its roots in politics and economics, which dialectically feed into religious and cultural impulses. Joseph Ruane and Jennifer Todd suggest that religious difference in Ireland became 'conflictual and lasting because it was the basis of access to resources and power', and that Ireland's integration into the emerging British Empire introduced a tendency towards polarisation.<sup>564</sup> This has resulted in an overlap between religious and political identification. Ruane and Todd suggest that, because of this overlap between political and religious difference, 'even if an individual stressed only one dimension of difference, he or she could still identify fully with his or her community in opposition to the other.'<sup>565</sup>

The alien in science fiction and the alien in Irish Studies crossover significantly then. Bloom gazing at the stars, imagining aliens possessed of human humility invites comparisons to Monk's assessment of the alien in science fiction, on her terms embodying a failure of Bloom's imagination to construct a concept of OtherSelfness. Sociology suggests a negative pole around which identity circulates in Northern Ireland, with identities constructed around ideas of the Other, resulting in the notion of the human Other as the alien Other. Ideas of Ireland itself are constructed within this opposition, England defining itself against its neighbour to the west, an idea that resonated with the perception of an irresolvable Otherness underpinning the conflict in Northern Ireland.

Science fiction written in such a milieu then, cannot help but become a mediation for the structures, relationships and notions of Otherness that underpin Northern Irish society. This chapter is an attempt to explore how the form of the alien in the science fiction of Shaw and White interacts with and is informed by a society of identities structured by such a system of borders, whether the physical border of partition, or the social borders of religion, class, and culture. Shaw and White both use the figure of the alien to question perceptions of Otherness, prescribe solutions for multi-species ethics, and attempt engagement with true alterity. Postcolonial theory is invaluable for discussing this fiction, and the chapter will examine the ways in which

---

<sup>564</sup> Joseph Ruane and Jennifer Todd, *The Dynamics of Conflict in Northern Ireland: Power, Conflict and Emancipation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) p. 12.

<sup>565</sup> *Dynamics of Conflict*, p. 30.



the authors use the encounter with the alien Other to negotiate the colonial experience, either recalibrating its tendencies through the technique of estrangement, or directly critiquing the excesses of its ideologies. The truly alien is ineffable, but the attempt to render it is charged with utopian energy. Even when failing to produce true alterity in Monk's terms, Shaw and White's attempts to apprehend the alien Other throw up alien forms that mediate hopes and anxieties that need to be studied in the context of Northern Ireland.

### **Bob Shaw, the Other, and the Arachnid Reaction.**

As already discussed in the last chapter, Carl Freedman suggests that science fiction is the genre that resonates most with the 'rigorous self-reflectiveness of critical theory'.<sup>566</sup> In *Orbitsville*, Shaw echoes this critical perspective by stepping back from the fictional narrative and theorising about the human reaction to the alien Other. This impulse is embodied for Shaw in what he describes as 'the arachnid reaction', the instinct toward revulsion that some people experience when encountering a spider. Shaw's anxiety is that such an impulse will emerge in the event of humanity making contact with an alien race, and that 'the worry is that they might be intelligent and friendly, even beautiful, and yet might trigger off hate-and-kill reactions in us simply because their shape isn't already registered in a kind of checklist we inherit with our genes.'<sup>567</sup> Referencing Shaw and the arachnid reaction, Monk suggests that this instinctual fear of strangeness can be countered in science fiction through the optimism of an empathic approach to the alien, an approach that is evident throughout the fiction of Shaw.<sup>568</sup> This sense of becoming self-reflexive when engaged in discourse with the alien stretches across Shaw's science fiction. Shaw's approach to alterity highlights differences between the alien and the human, both in physical and cultural orientation, but tends towards a narrative trajectory whereby an original conception of Otherness, or arachnid reaction, is revealed as erroneous. Through this narrative trajectory Shaw moves from a depiction of mere Otherness to one of OtherSelfness.

An interesting example of this is the alien invasion scenario in '...And Isles Where Good Men Lie', the first story that Shaw published professionally. The narrative

---

<sup>566</sup> *Critical Theory and Science Fiction*, xvi.

<sup>567</sup> *Orbitsville*, p. 95.

<sup>568</sup> *Alien Theory*, p. 162.

deals with the colonisation of Earth by aliens, a science fiction staple since H.G. Wells inverted the colonial position of the British Empire in *The War of the Worlds*, opening the novel with the suggestion that Martians have long been looking on at Earth, and contemplating an invasion unbeknownst to its inhabitants.<sup>569</sup> In Shaw's narrative we follow John Fortune, a Lieutenant Colonel who made his name fighting off an invasion of an alien race called the Nessters. The Nessters are Othered by Shaw in his descriptions, compared to mechanical devices rather than any organic form, Shaw describing the aliens as 'fifteen-foot-long armoured bulldozers', which downplays a sense of alterity or OtherSelfness in the entities by comparing them with inanimate objects. Shaw writes:

Looking back on it, he was not sure when he had begun to realise the truth about the Nessters. At first there had been no time to think. The big ships had begun to land at random points across the Earth and each one poured out several hundred black scaly nightmares whose bacteria-laden breath was usually enough to kill any nearby human who was not properly masked.<sup>570</sup>

Unlike Wells's Martians, who are defeated by the Earth's atmosphere, the Nessters are toxic to human life, their presence irreconcilable with existence for humans on Earth. But there is also doubt about whether the aliens are as deliberately malignant as their actions would suggest. Fortune has perfected a means of killing Nessters, but begins to sympathise with the alien colonists. He asks himself why it was relatively simple to kill the Nessters, questioning why a technologically advanced race were making such a bad job of taking the planet, and concluding that he 'had made his name slaughtering unarmed families of immigrants', the Nessters described as 'innocents walking blindly to the slaughter.'<sup>571</sup>

Fortune has fled to Iceland to avoid the slaughter of Nessters, realising that even knowing the truth, humanity will not stop resisting their presence. He calculates that Iceland is one of the least likely places for the Nessters to land. Shaw describes a kind of anti-colonial mindset taking hold on Earth in combating the encroaching aliens, as well as a corresponding determination from the extraterrestrial colonists to keep arriving:

---

<sup>569</sup> H.G. Wells, *The War of the Worlds* (1898) (London: Penguin Classics, 2005).

<sup>570</sup> Bob Shaw, '...And Isles Where Good Men Lie' in *Tomorrow Lies in Ambush* (1965) (London: Pan Books, 1975) pp. 37-64.

<sup>571</sup> *Tomorrow Lies in Ambush*, p. 40-41.

For Earth was not going to stop killing Nessters and the Nessters were not going to stop arriving. One ship had been landing every twenty-two hours for five years and still the caravan stretched right out beyond the Solar System, beyond the farthest reach of Earth's deep space probes.<sup>572</sup>

One theory of how Nessters find Earth suggests that they send a probing device ahead, a technique that Fortune compares to tramps marking the gateposts of friendly houses, a signifier that casts the alien invaders as the dispossessed.<sup>573</sup> Fortune concludes that '...all that was necessary was to rub out this particular chalk mark with an orbital interceptor and the tramps would stop coming to the door.'<sup>574</sup>

Fortune's mathematician friend Geissler eventually locates the device and destroys it, Shaw writing that 'the beautifully designed alien mechanism, which had been transmitting one millisecond pulses of intelligence every ninety-three minutes, finally fell silent.'<sup>575</sup> The Nessters are described as barely registering the change. Shaw writes that:

There was no disappointment on board Nesster ship 1753 as it changed course, for they had not known of the imminent landing and, in any case, had long since forgotten how they had lived before the Journey. Gently the great caravan of ships swung towards the next suitable star. The new leg of the Journey would take eight hundred years, but the Nessters were a patient race. And they built very patient machines.<sup>576</sup>

The Nessters are possessed of a long view of history, and merely deviate from their current direction in an attempt to find shelter from necessity. The importance given to the notion of a 'Journey' suggests a cataclysmic event resulting in an exodus from the home planet of the Nessters. Within this ideological closure, Shaw reaches towards a nonviolent anti-colonialism that, instead of entering into the exchange of violence and expropriation, simply uses mathematics to disrupt the symbolic structure that enables the Nessters to locate Earth.

The notion of the Nessters as a dispossessed, albeit technologically superior, race, fleeing scarcity on their home planet, and incommensurable with the way of life

---

<sup>572</sup> *Tomorrow Lies in Ambush*, p. 41.

<sup>573</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 44.

<sup>574</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 44.

<sup>575</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 64.

<sup>576</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 64.

they find on Earth suggests a science fictional estrangement of the Planters who arrived in Ulster from Scotland in the early seventeenth century. The Nessters as a form of life are irreconcilable with the culture they come into contact with on Earth, mirroring the incompatible colonial encounter between the way of life of the arriving Planters and the expropriated inhabitants of Ulster discussed elsewhere in the thesis. Bardon suggests that dispossessed Presbyterians began arriving in the region in the period before the Plantations got underway.<sup>577</sup> After the Battle of the Boyne in 1691, land prices dropped. In the same year, freak weather conditions caused volcanic ash to rain down on Scotland causing what was termed the Little Ice Age, which ruined the crops of many poor farmers there. During the 'Seven Ill Years' that followed, many survivors left Scotland for Ulster, to avail of the cheap land. According to Bardon, these Scottish Presbyterians arrived daily and began to dominate the region, replacing the native Irish tenants that remained through a process of primitive accumulation. Bardon writes that they began 'occupying the towns and villages, seizing the farms in the richer parts of the country and expelling the natives.'<sup>578</sup>

As mentioned, Shaw's recalibration of the colonial relationship recalls H.G. Wells's *The War of the Worlds*. John Rieder positions *The War of the Worlds* as an important instance of reversal in the relationship between colonialism and science fiction, Wells switching the position of the white Western narrator from that of the dominant to that of the dominated. Rieder writes of the novel that:

The narrator no longer occupies the position usually accorded to the scientific observer, but instead finds himself in that role historically occupied by those who are looked at and theorized about rather than those who look, analyse, and theorize.<sup>579</sup>

Drawing from the work of Laura Mulvey on cinema, Rieder defines the reversal of this 'colonial gaze' as 'autoethnography', an attempt to see the colonial encounter from the position of the colonised.<sup>580</sup> For Rieder, 'the Wellsian strategy is a reversal of positions that stays entirely within the framework of the colonial gaze and the supposed

---

<sup>577</sup> *Plantation of Ulster*, p. 82.

<sup>578</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 301-307.

<sup>579</sup> *Colonialism and the Emergence of Science Fiction*, p. 7.

<sup>580</sup> Laura Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' in *Screen*, 16.3 (1975) 6-18.

anachronism of anthropological difference, but also highlights their critical potential.’ Rieder suggests that science fiction:

Pictures a possible future instead of the past—and setting the hierarchical difference between observer and observed swinging between the poles of subject and object, with each swing potentially questioning and recoding the discursive framework of scientific truth, moral certitude, and cultural hegemony.<sup>581</sup>

Science fiction, then, is a genre that can stage a reversal of the opposition between the coloniser and the colonised, but leaves the structure of this opposition intact.

In ‘...And Isles Where Good Men Lie’, Shaw effects the reversal that Wells’s novel achieves. As well as noting the anthropological difference between the alien and the human, Shaw adds a new dimension of sympathy for the coloniser in an attempt to resolve the contradiction at the level of narrative. The moral certitude condemning the actions of the Nessters is questioned and decoded by the story. When given the ‘time to think’, Fortune decodes the truth of the story of the Nessters. Like Wells’s Martians, the Nessters are fleeing climatic change on their home world, but whereas at the end of Wells’s novel the Martians are killed by a virus in the atmosphere of Earth that makes it impossible for them to survive, the Nessters are simply deviated from their course through interference with the technology with which they have located Earth. Fortune attempts to locate, and eventually finds, a way to deflect the gaze of the coloniser and manages to articulate a non-violent anti-colonialism. Instead of an imaginary solution to a real contradiction, the story holds the contradictions dialectically, Fortune feeling sympathy for the colonial gaze of the Nessters fleeing their home world, while also taking into account the anti-colonial position that acknowledges the harmful effect that the creatures have on native humanity. The pressure of narrative closure and the resources of science fiction forces a synthesis involving scientific research and mathematics.

In ‘...And Isles Where Good Men Lie’, Shaw rehearses a reversal of Northern Irish history using science fictional estrangement to suggest benign intentions on the part of an alien Other, reframing an initial arachnid reaction in the societies in which

---

<sup>581</sup> *Colonialism and the Emergence of Science Fiction*, p. 7.

the alien Other encroaches. In this respect the Nessters represent Otherness rather than alterity, with Fortune imposing human norms upon the aliens in order to decode their behaviour. In this reading the colonial gaze is not only maintained, but justified. Having initially presented the aliens in a manner consistent with the arachnid reaction, Shaw reverses this position by suggesting that the Nessters are victims of a natural disaster. The Nessters are framed as dispossessed intergalactic vagrants, rather than the advance guard of a colonial conquest that both their relentlessness in arriving on Earth, or their deadliness to humankind, would suggest.

Shaw reverses the position of the colonist in the case of the Nessters, an alien invasion recoded as a mass migration that is nevertheless depicted as deleterious and undesirable for humanity. In relation to Northern Irish cultural politics, Shaw could be echoing what Kirkland refers to as the 'equal legitimacy thesis', in which 'the different traditions of the province are granted equal validity regardless of the hierarchy of power validated by partition'.<sup>582</sup> In this thesis, the power dynamic between the parties is left unconsidered, just as in Shaw's '...And Isles Where Good Men Lie' a solution is sought that diverts power rather than confronts it, becoming embroiled in the actions and reactions of power dynamics. The narrative of the Nessters could be equated with the reversals of revisionist history, the presumed invader recast as an interplanetary mendicant seeking shelter. Bardon performs such a reversal in his history of Belfast, describing how 'the original citizens of the town and their descendants were soon swamped by immigrants from the overcrowded and impoverished countryside seeking work in the mills, engineering works and shipyards.'<sup>583</sup> Here the relatively recent arrivals are given 'citizenship' of Belfast, those displaced become 'immigrants' and the economic and political power behind the reasons why the countryside would be overcrowded and impoverished is neglected.

Another recalibration of the alien Other occurs in Shaw's *The Palace of Eternity*, the Syccans with which humanity is losing an intergalactic war initially appearing to have no objective but to kill humans. As discussed in Chapter One, any technology that falls into Syccan hands is immediately destroyed rather than studied as

---

<sup>582</sup> *Literature and Culture in Northern Ireland*, p. 113.

<sup>583</sup> *Plantation of Ulster*, p. 335.

a means of increasing technical knowledge. Tavernor's negative impression of the race is informed by being the sole survivor of an attack by the Syccans on the town Masonia when he was a child. He is described as having joined the army with the sole purpose of killing Syccans, and his encounters with the aliens are accompanied by graphic descriptions of their physicality. Shaw describes a creature with triple-segmented legs, spraying mist from its 'nozzle' over a window, Tavernor glimpsing 'the wide-set eyes, the two breathing mouths fluttering in the shoulders, and the vertically-slitted eating mouth on the central abdomen.'<sup>584</sup> The description of the Syccans grows more visceral, with references to incontinence and weakness. Shaw writes:

When excited, the Syccans were less prepossessing than ever—the secondary arms unclasped themselves from the vertical gashes of the eating-mouths and waved feebly, while grey-and-white excrement spattered from their lower guts.<sup>585</sup>

Here the description flits between an appreciation of an OtherSelf, and an arachnid reaction repulsed by the alterity of the Syccans.

But running alongside these descriptions are direct comparisons between the war-like behaviour of the Syccans and humanity, Tavernor reasoning that although the race is superior to humanity in 'force of technological arms', humans would favour cultural discourse with an enemy rather than attempting to eradicate their opponents so definitively, as the Syccans seem intent on doing.<sup>586</sup> In the distribution of intelligence, the Syccans are also compared to the human, the average Syccan described as a 'near-moron', with Tavernor reasoning that 'there was no real need for their intelligence to be distributed as evenly as among humans—some kinds of society would function most efficiently if they were composed of mindless serfs guided by a few brilliant demagogues.'<sup>587</sup> From this perspective, the Syccans are described as a 'finely-honed blade for the destruction of all other life', representing 'psychosis on a cosmic scale.'<sup>588</sup> In response, humanity feels that it must destroy the entire race. Tavernor states that if somebody has to be a coloniser, he would prefer it to be man; in Tavernor's opinion

---

<sup>584</sup> *Palace of Eternity*, p. 151, 156.

<sup>585</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 163.

<sup>586</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 156.

<sup>587</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 158.

<sup>588</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 158.

'all that any intelligent being could do was back its own kind to the hilt, against all comers, believing implicitly in its own destiny'.<sup>589</sup>

Tavernor's attitude echoes the stance on extraterrestrial alterity critiqued by Stanislaw Lem in *Solaris*, the psychologist Kris Kelvin remarking that the limit of the human imagination when encountering alien Otherness, is embodied in an impulse to 'rule them or be ruled by them.'<sup>590</sup> Lem suggests that in the post-Wells alien invasion story, the idea that an alien power with the technology to assemble an armada of starships would mobilise their resources in order to take over Earth is a naïve assumption. Lem remarks that because the cost of such a mission would always be higher than the value of what could be expropriated on Earth, aliens in invasion narratives are instead depicted as motivated to attack Earth for sheer amusement.<sup>591</sup>

However, once again the closure of Shaw's narrative displays a reversal in the perception of the conflict: once again the discursive framework of moral certitude surrounding the behaviour of the alien Other is decoded. As noted in Chapter One, the butterfly ships that the humans use are responsible for destroying egons, entities that allow Syccans to communicate with their central mind mass. The discovery provides a rationale for the relentlessness of the Syccan fight, and their destruction of any human technology that falls into their hands. The reversal allows Tavernor to see himself from the perspective of the Other. Seeing himself in the eyes of the Syccans, Tavernor turns his knack for visceral description on the human race itself and imagines an instance of auto-ethnography, where the imaginary alien subject reconstructs the encounter with the human from its own point of view:<sup>592</sup>

---

<sup>589</sup> Ibid., p. 159. Comparisons could be made between Tavernor's speech and Enoch Powell's famous 'Rivers of Blood' speech to the West Midlands Area Conservative Political Centre in 1968, two years before the publication of Shaw's novel. Powell's suggestion that 'in this country in fifteen or twenty years time the black man will have the whip hand over the white man' echoes Tavernor's contention that someone must hold the monopoly on colonial violence. See Enoch Powell, 'Enoch Powell's Rivers of Blood Speech', *Telegraph.co.uk* <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/comment/3643823/Enoch-Powells-Rivers-of-Blood-speech.html>> [accessed 20 July 2015].

<sup>590</sup> *Solaris*, p. 166. The starkest example of this in Shaw's work is the children's novel *Killer Planet*, (1989) (London: Pan Macmillan, 1992) in which an alien is told 'enjoy your triumph while you can, alien. Because our kind will not tolerate your existence. Sooner or later—we will destroy you.'

<sup>591</sup> Stanislaw Lem, 'About the Strugatsky's Roadside Picnic' trans. Elsa Schieder and Robert M. Philmus in *Microworlds* ed. Franz Rotetnsteiner (London: Mandarin, 1985) p. 247.

<sup>592</sup> *Colonialism and the Emergence of Science Fiction*, p. 10.



You have reason to hate the Syccans... but think how we must have looked to them. No obscenity could describe us in their eyes—hideous, pale-skinned mongers of true death. And their egon-mass warned them that Man's instinct was to occupy the whole volume of space, filling it with dark wings which would eventually scour the galaxy of true life, robbing the Syccans of their immortality.<sup>593</sup>

From the Syccan perspective, Tavernor suggests that the Otherness that humanity embodies is indescribable, an ineffable alterity.<sup>594</sup> Humanity's thirst for expansion is seen from the Syccan perspective as the proliferation of death.

Upon discovering that human technology is destroying the Syccans, the expansionists of Earth realise that they have a perfect opportunity to win the war. In a plan that gives the lie to Tavernor's suggestion that given the choice humanity would prefer communication with their enemy rather than definitively eradicating them, they conspire to fly butterfly ships directly to the Syccans' home planet in order to destroy the egons inhabited there. At the close of the narrative, the Syccans have fled, having been warned of the plan for their extinction ahead of time through means of their mass mind.<sup>595</sup> Tavernor's suggested border between the behaviour of humanity and the alien Other speaks to what Vint describes as the flattering portrait of the human that is constructed through 'exclusions and projections', which we will return to later when discussing White's categorisation system.<sup>596</sup> In the attempt to categorically destroy the Syccans—essentially an act of genocide—Tavernor's appraisal of the human character is proven to be a selective and flattering evaluation.

In *The Palace of Eternity* an initial arachnid reaction is proven wrong with the discovery of the egon mass. As a result the human is perceived as Other, and the ideology that underpins the notion of the human is unmasked. But the encounter with the Syccans has also transformed the category of the human. The discovery of the egon mass of the Syccans has resulted in the discovery that humans also share a mass mind, a fact that Tavernor considers early in the novel when contemplating the philosophy of

---

<sup>593</sup> *Palace of Eternity*, p. 171.

<sup>594</sup> The race of the humans involved in the war with the Syccans is highlighted by Tavernor's reference to 'pale skin', Shaw presuming a racially pure future for space colonisation.

<sup>595</sup> *Palace of Eternity*, p. 171.

<sup>596</sup> *Animal Alterity*, p. 101.

'panspermism' which is described as 'the concept of ubiquitous life' and a 'justification for believing that every mind in existence was linked to every other mind that had ever been'.<sup>597</sup> Tavernor, having in a bizarre plot twist died two-thirds into the narrative, finds himself posthumously conscious and interacting with the egon mass.<sup>598</sup> Tavernor is told that:

The egon-mass contains every mind ever to have existed on Earth. genius, fool, scowling ape, dreaming dog, murderer, saint, savage, physicist—all are there. Tremulously beautiful egons of infants who died in the womb mingle on equal terms with Caesars, giving as much as they receive, making their own special contribution to the egon mass, for—to achieve completion—Earth's world-mind must assimilate every fragment of eligible life.<sup>599</sup>

The egon mass erases the boundary between human and animal, with 'dreaming dog' and 'scowling ape' sharing the space with humanity, suggesting a immaterial version of Vint's ethical multi-species community. The destruction of egons is affecting humanity, as egons are the seat of inspiration whereby an artist, engineer or other creative mind working on a problem can make contact with the egon-mass and find inspiration. Tavernor realises that the reason why the war has not been won more easily by humanity, is the destruction wrought by the butterfly ships on humanity's egons, inhibiting its collective inspiration.<sup>600</sup> Although through the philosophy of panspermism every mind that has ever been is linked, including animals, humanity does not commune with Syccan minds in the egon mass, the Syccans re-Othered in the final denouement. Butterfly ships destroy both human and Syccan egons, but Shaw separates the human egon mass mind from that of the Syccans. The egon mass that humanity engages with dissolves the border between human and earthbound animal, but leaves the border between human and the extraterrestrial intact.

In summation then, Shaw's fiction counters the arachnid reaction with an empathic approach to the strangeness of the alien Other. In '...And Isles Where Good Men Lie' this manifests as a kind of revisionism, where the motivations of a deadly alien invader are explained, and a nonviolent means of countering their invasion through mathematics is envisaged. In *The Palace of Eternity*, the recalibration of the

---

<sup>597</sup> *Palace of Eternity*, p. 10.

<sup>598</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 107.

<sup>599</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 109.

<sup>600</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 109-110.

alien explains the origin of violence in the Other in the threat of extinction that human technology embodies. Humans are shown as possessed of a mass mind, but a strict demarcation remains between the alien mass mind and the mass mind of humanity. The closure of Shaw's narrative registers an anxiety to define in-groups from out-groups. The boundary that emerges at the climax to *The Palace of Eternity* suggests a fear of being subsumed by the alien Other that manifests as a separation between the human and the Syccan mass minds. This need to define the in-group from the out-group suggests a fear of absorption by the Other that is also evident in Shaw's other work which, after a brief examination of the anxiety surrounding cultural absorption and hybridity in Ireland more generally, will be discussed in the next section.

### **Absorption and the Alien.**

The desire for a border between the minds of the Syccans and those of the human in the *egon* mass discussed in the last section signifies a fear of absorption by the Other that runs through the fiction of both Shaw and White, an anxiety that is also detected by Irish cultural studies. Richard Kirkland reflects this in his reading of James Simmons's work for *The Honest Ulsterman*. Kirkland suggests that Simmons views the Republic of Ireland with the same suspicion with which he views marriage, considering it 'a clash of irreconcilable forces between himself and the exotic other which leaves room only for the possibility of betrayal.'<sup>601</sup> This fear of absorption is also echoed in Northern Irish politics, such as the desolation that the Unionist MP Harold McCusker described experiencing at the 1985 Anglo-Irish Agreement and its rendering of his constituents as 'Irish-British hybrids'.<sup>602</sup> This sense of hybridity inevitably invokes postcolonial studies and Homi K. Bhabha's notion of the 'third space' between the culture of the coloniser and the colonised, or indeed in an Irish context, Mark Patrick Hederman's attempt in the journal *Crane Bag* to suggest a specifically Irish creative space called the 'fifth province' where 'things can detach from all partisan and prejudiced connection.'<sup>603</sup> Declan Kiberd sees such a sense of hybridity as influencing the Good Friday Agreement of 1998. According to Kiberd, the agreement speaks to 'some entity for which we have no name', further remarking that 'much of the language is vague,

---

<sup>601</sup> *Literature and Culture in Northern Ireland*, p. 68.

<sup>602</sup> *Making Sense of the Troubles*, p. 165.

<sup>603</sup> Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 2004) p. 312; Mark Patrick Hederman, 'Poetry and the Fifth Province', *The Crane Bag* 9.1, (1985), 110-119.

even “poetic” because it offers a version of multiple identities of a kind for which no legal language yet exists.’<sup>604</sup>

Central to the agreement is the recognition of the right to self-determination of the majority of those in the region, an attempt to accommodate both narratives in the conflict, and to recognise the right for the people of Northern Ireland to identify themselves as ‘Irish or British, or both.’<sup>605</sup> Contrary to Kiberd’s analysis, Máiréad Nic Craith remarks that the agreement embodies a frustrated potential for hybridity, suggesting that it involves the reification of cultural traditions as homogenous and fixed qualities in a two-traditions paradigm. Nic Craith also points to the failure of the agreement to accommodate other identities, such as Northern Ireland’s Indian and Chinese population. Nic Craith’s critique connects with Graham’s criticism of Kiberd’s vision at the close of *Inventing Ireland*, in which Kiberd reimagines Ireland as a patchwork of identities, a vision that Graham suggests leaves nationalism intact, and in fact subsumes alternative identities beneath it.<sup>606</sup>

This would suggest that the refusal of the Other still underpins the agreement, more firmly maintaining borders that enforce the categories of the self and Other, or that, faced with Kiberd’s nameless entity, identity reverts back to an older sense of self. This could be related to the idea of the human mass mind depicted at the close of *The Palace of Eternity*, which is said to be inclusive of all identities apart from the fellow sentient beings, the Syccans.

Graham suggests that domination by the idea of the nation is typical of the application of postcolonial theory to Ireland in general and that this prevents a more radical interrogation of Irish identity from taking place.<sup>607</sup> Postcolonial theorists such as Frantz Fanon saw the postcolonial nation as an ‘ethically and politically proper readjustment of the wrong of colonisation’, but what Graham calls the ‘teleology of

---

<sup>604</sup> Declan Kiberd, *Irish Classics* (London: Granta, 2000) pp. 628-630.

<sup>605</sup> Máiréad Nic Craith, *Plural Identities Singular Narratives: The Case of Northern Ireland* (Oxford: Bergham Books, 2002) p. 19.

<sup>606</sup> *Inventing Ireland*, p. 653; *Deconstructing Ireland*, p. 86.

<sup>607</sup> *Deconstructing Ireland*, p. 82. Graham critiques not only Kiberd, but also Seamus Deane, David Lloyd and John Hume as all thinkers purporting to adopt post-nationalist sensibilities, while privileging the nation over all other identities.

nationality' is being challenged in the discipline of Subaltern Studies.<sup>608</sup> This discipline's critique of post-colonial nationalism proposes that subaltern groups such as peasants, the working class, women and marginalised ethnic groups continue to be dominated in the post-colonial state. In the case of India, it is suggested that the modern Indian nation is a product of British rule, and that it adopts the colonial structures which independence was supposed to replace.<sup>609</sup> Graham suggests that the Subaltern Studies approach to postcolonial theory embraces 'the "liminal spaces" of colonial discourse, marginal areas, where the ultimate opposition of coloniser and colonised breaks down through irony, imitations and subversion.'<sup>610</sup> Graham points to Edward Said's reading of Rudyard Kipling's *Kim* as an example, citing the protagonist's Irish origin and military family allow him to 'act as a monad within the regulating framework of the colonial system.'<sup>611</sup> For Graham, this points to Bhabha's position beyond Said's *Orientalism*, which suggests that a native can resist the domination of the colonial culture through appropriation.

The notion of appropriation also brings up the idea of absorption, as the culture being appropriated reacts to protect the border between itself and an alien identity, a narrative strategy that will later be shown to be important in the work of Shaw and White.<sup>612</sup> The 1960s civil rights campaigner, and eventual British M.P., Bernadette Devlin discusses the civil rights movement in terms reminiscent of Bhabha's notion of 'mimicry', a form of resistance that repeats the culture of the coloniser. Bhabha posits that the repetition of the colonial worldview by the colonised can have consequences unintended by the colonial power, and this is displayed in Devlin's account of the civil rights movement in Northern Ireland.<sup>613</sup> Devlin writes that the civil rights movement abandoned the issue of partition and instead began petitioning the British government for equal rights. Devlin writes 'let's go and ask for British democracy. If they're going

---

<sup>608</sup> *Deconstructing Ireland*, pp. 81-83.

<sup>609</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 83.

<sup>610</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 86.

<sup>611</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 86.

<sup>612</sup> Aaron Kelly suggests a similar relationship between the British establishment and Northern Irish Loyalists in which contradictions are produced by 'dominant and subjugated articulations of Britishness.' Kelly suggests that 'the representation of a neutral, civilised English subject regulating an obscure tribal war is threatened and destabilised by the subordinate, displaced, yet itself eventually displacing, gaze of Loyalism.' See *The Thriller and Northern Ireland Since 1969*, p. 50.

<sup>613</sup> *Location of Culture*, pp. 125-127.

to make us British by law, we must be British by standard of living as well.<sup>614</sup> Previous chapters have discussed the barbarian/civilisation thesis, in which a native Irish culture was set against a modernising influence from without, an ideogeme of improvement through technology asserting itself in the region of Belfast. Ruane and Todd suggest that, running alongside this was a fear of degeneration through contact with Irish culture.<sup>615</sup> Added to this was the anxiety that allowing Catholics to integrate into the order would give them the opportunity to overturn it, a concern that coloured reactions to the civil rights marches of the 1960s.<sup>616</sup> As Ruane and Todd state, the civil rights marches were so provocative to Unionists because:

They deliberately ignored sectarian constructions of territoriality, symbolically united the diverse cultural strands in the Catholic community—culture-blind youthful idealists, traditional nationalists and those who were willing to manipulate cultural tensions to provoke a crisis in the state.<sup>617</sup>

If we were to articulate mimicry in a science fictional sense: when the alien begins to mimic the self, the self experiences a crisis and begins to police the border between the alien and the self more stringently.<sup>618</sup>

This fear of subversion from within by an alien Other runs through the work of Shaw and White. Shaw's work points both to the attraction and the repulsion of becoming absorbed in a composite identity. In *The Palace of Eternity*, part of the horror expressed at the Syccans' way of life is the fact that they exist as mindless automatons led by a few intelligent specimens. Another group mind appears in *A Wreath of Stars* in the shape of the Avernians, a telepathic race that instil a fear of absorption in the human telepath Snook, who insists 'I'm not going to let any blue monster shove its head inside mine', before relenting and losing his grasp of the human conception of time as a result.<sup>619</sup> Shaw's fiction also posits an interaction with alien Otherness as advantageous, but there is a concurrent anxiety regarding the position of the self in such

---

<sup>614</sup> Bernadette Devlin, *The Price of My Soul* (London: Pan Books, 1969) p. 90.

<sup>615</sup> *Dynamics of Conflict*, p. 27.

<sup>616</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 41.

<sup>617</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 185.

<sup>618</sup> This is the premise of John W. Campbell's story 'Who Goes There' in which a shape-changing alien stalks a research base in the arctic. The alien changes to resemble various members of the research team, and they are forced to conduct blood tests to define the alien from the human. See 'Who Goes There' in *The Best of John W. Campbell* (London: Sphere Books, 1976) pp. 70-127.

<sup>619</sup> *Wreath of Stars*, p. 94, 105.

an exchange, manifesting as a fear of absorption. This extends to those of Shaw's novels that do not have extraterrestrial alien beings as a central concern. *Ground Zero Man* begins by questioning the role of empathy in a world increasingly connected by technology. Lucas Hutchman concludes that 'perhaps the greatest and most dangerous mistake an inhabitant of the global village can make is to start feeling responsible for his neighbours ten thousand miles away. No nervous system yet evolved can cope with the guilts of others.'<sup>620</sup> This recalls Fredric Jameson's theory of cognitive mapping; in a globalised world, an individual's attempt to map the global power structure is always partial, but the attempt in itself is a utopian act.<sup>621</sup> Bhabha suggests that such an attempt involves a 'prosthetic injunction', a requirement for the human body to change in order to comprehend the magnitude of totality.<sup>622</sup>

Prosthesis becomes a central component of the narrative of *Night Walk*, together with an anxiety surrounding the breaching of the border of the self. In the novel, the blindness of Tallon is overcome through the invention of a prosthetic device that allows him to map and traverse his environment through the eyes of others. Tallon's subjectivity becomes dependent on the gaze of the Other. For as long as he is being observed, Tallon can see where he is going. This creates a doubleness in Tallon, Shaw describing Tallon's body in one place, and the eyes of an Other situated elsewhere, observing Tallon. Tallon's prosthetic invention allows him to see himself as the Other sees him. Shaw writes: 'he held out his hand and noticed that *other* Sam Tallon perform an identical movement.'<sup>623</sup> Tallon is dependent on the gaze of Others to function as he did before he became blind, and in addition sees himself as an Other in the process. When he completes the construction of the device, he abandons his cane, and asks his fellow prisoner Ed Hogarth to watch him while he walks to the door. Shaw writes:

Tallon decided to rely entirely on the eyeset. He left his sonar and cane on the bench, then walked to the door. As he moved he concentrated on the image of his own receding back, as seen by Hogarth, and was able to guide his hand accurately to the door handle.<sup>624</sup>

---

<sup>620</sup> *Ground Zero Man*, p. 20.

<sup>621</sup> Fredric Jameson, 'Cognitive Mapping' in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1990) pp. 347-360.

<sup>622</sup> *Location of Culture*, p. 311.

<sup>623</sup> *Night Walk*, p. 37.

<sup>624</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 39.

When outside, Tallon realises that Hogarth's vision is now a handicap and he puts the device into a 'search and hold' mode to look for other eyes to see through. Shaw writes that 'men were moving toward the mess hall in twos and threes, and almost immediately Tallon was looking through the eyes of another prisoner.'<sup>625</sup> The first eyes the device locks onto are useless, the prisoner's eyes fixed to the floor, so he finds the eyes of a tall man and Shaw describes Tallon gesturing to himself using the man's vision. Shaw writes that Tallon 'put his arms up and waved, as though to a friend, and saw himself—a tiny figure standing at the entrance of the second building to the right of the mess hall.'<sup>626</sup>

Tallon's prosthetic technology introduces a doubleness into his sense of self, with a dependence on the Other that borders on a composite subjectivity. In order to map his totality, Tallon is reliant upon the eyes of Others, his perception disjointed as it switches from person to person.

Tallon uses prosthetic technology to cognitively map his environment, but this leads to anxiety about the border between his personality and those whose vision he adopts. Elsewhere in his work, Shaw makes clear the connection between the sense of sight and subjectivity. As a child, Shaw witnessed a friend almost lose an eye in an accident on a building site, and an obsession with sight and references to blindness resonate through his fiction. In *Other Days, Other Eyes*, a surgeon remarks that 'people are their eyes, you know. It's a kind of instinctive recognition of the fact that the retina is an extension of the brain.'<sup>627</sup> This sense of the eyes as the seat of human subjectivity begins to manifest as a fear of absorption in *Night Walk*. When attacked by Cherkassky aboard the Lyle Star, Tallon uses his assailant's eyes to fight back and kill his enemy.<sup>628</sup> As Cherkassky dies he realises how dependent he is on the eyes of his nemesis. Shaw describes the 'sole remaining gateway to light and beauty and stars' close forever.<sup>629</sup> Without his enemy, Tallon is left alone in a world of darkness. A fear of absorption by

---

<sup>625</sup> *Night Walk*, p. 39.

<sup>626</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 40.

<sup>627</sup> *Other Days, Other Eyes*, p. 104.

<sup>628</sup> *Night Walk*, p. 124.

<sup>629</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 126.



the other sets in as Tallon considers whether he has been affected by the emotional state of the entities that he has utilised for the purposes of sight. Tallon wonders whether 'using Cherkassky's eyes had made him a ruthless killer, an instrument that turned the little man's own feral instincts back on himself in a new manifestation of poetic justice.'<sup>630</sup>

Prosthesis becomes a means of cognitively mapping the world, but also poses a threat to the self. Throughout the novel, Tallon has used the eyes of animal Others such as squirrels, rats and dogs, as well as his enemy Cherkassky. Although the device provides a means by which to see the self through the eyes of the Other, and sympathise with the view of Others, it is also accompanied by a fear of absorption by the Other. Tallon defeats Cherkassky by utilising his eyes, but this dependence on his enemy leads to an anxiety that the practice encroaches on his subjectivity, Tallon fearing that Cherkassky's violent personality has the ability to cross the border between the two. As Northern Irish science fiction then, *Night Walk* suggests that an interaction with the Other can be advantageous, but also displays an anxiety about the borders of the self, refusing hybridity in the last instance.

In *Medusa's Children*, an even more sinister illustration of hybridity and absorption emerges. The narrative concerns the Clan, a group of humans surviving in air pockets beneath the ocean. Part of the culture of the Clan concerns a mythic system based on a colossal creature called Ka, a Lovecraftian entity formed as a composite of any life that comes into contact with it.<sup>631</sup> A member of the Clan, Myrah, contemplates the implications of the myth of Ka, Shaw writing that:

She objected to the elaborate myths, supposedly based on the account of a remote ancestor, ascribing to Ka fantastic powers which included the ability to absorb other beings, still alive, into his own body and then send them abroad as his servants. In particular, she disliked the notion that dead humans, after their gradual descent into darkness, were assimilated by Ka and partially revitalised, thus achieving a kind of afterlife.<sup>632</sup>

---

<sup>630</sup> *Night Walk*, p. 134.

<sup>631</sup> H.P. Lovecraft's story 'The Call of Cthulu' (1928) depicts an aeons-old God slumbering beneath the sea, readying itself to awaken and rule the Earth. It is the founding story of Lovecraft's Cthulu Mythos. Lovecraft's brand of 'cosmic horror' exerts an influence over some areas of science fiction. See H.P. Lovecraft, *The Call of Cthulu and Other Weird Stories* (London: Penguin Classics, 2002)

<sup>632</sup> *Medusa's Children*, p. 61.

Myrah objects to the idea of a corporate identity in which individual subjectivity is extinguished. However, later when Myrah is attacked by Ka she surrenders, Shaw writing that she ‘...yielded with a guilty pleasure, grateful that the escape was being made so easy, and so desirable. She drew the living tissue of Ka into her mouth and lungs.’<sup>633</sup> Myrah initially perceives Ka’s body as something possessing no life, but becomes aware of its sentience when she is absorbed by it. Shaw writes that ‘the black core of the world—the entity she had taken to be an inanimate mountain of coral—spread its arms to receive them.’<sup>634</sup> Consisting of numerous composite beings, Ka is a creature who absorbs ‘...others of his own general kind, establishing tenuous but effective neural links which made their motor systems into extensions of his own.’<sup>635</sup> When attacked itself, this structure is advantageous in the protection it gives the body of Ka. For instance, when a hail of subatomic bullets strikes Ka’s body, Shaw writes that ‘his colonial structure enabled him to survive by discarding units which were destroyed or irreparably damaged.’<sup>636</sup> Myrah feels the doubleness of absorption, a cycle of attraction and repulsion, consisting of the fear of becoming subsumed and the allure of the safety that the hybrid identity entails in this instance.

The land-dwelling farmer Tarrant also becomes part of the body of Ka, Shaw likening his new status to ‘a cell in the body of a human being.’ Shaw writes that Tarrant ‘retained all the autonomy that was necessary for him to continue functioning in an efficient manner, but his activities were subordinate to the needs of the gestalt being that was Ka.’<sup>637</sup> This ‘Ka-Tarrant matrix’ becomes fixated on destroying the only weapons with the capability of ending Ka’s existence, the nuclear-powered Bergman machines. Ka has bypassed Tarrant’s critical faculties, rewarding behaviour advantageous to itself with feelings of well-being, leading Tarrant to commit rape and to attempt the theft of nuclear weapons. Once again, fear of absorption is doubled with the attraction of the safety of becoming part of a composite being. Shaw writes that ‘Tarrant tried to imagine an existence without the companionship of the sentient black jelly which nestled within his right lung, feeding its messages of comfort directly into

---

<sup>633</sup> *Medusa’s Children*, p. 82.

<sup>634</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 81.

<sup>635</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 87.

<sup>636</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 88.

<sup>637</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 113.

his nervous system. He drew back from the bleak prospect, and the desperate urgency of the situation began to bear down on him.<sup>638</sup> Tarrant finds the prospect of life as a minute piece of a corporate identity alluring, but upon being released from the Ka matrix, he is horrified at the things he was capable of. Shaw writes:

His jaw clamped and tears welled into his eyes as he recalled some of the horrors of his Ka-existence. He had been prepared to kill a whole family to gain perhaps an hour, and the people, the children, had been nothing to him. He had been more inhuman than the Horra themselves. He had left two nuclear weapons in an unlocked building, where they could be found and tampered with by children. And there had been other things. Using a helpless woman like a... Tarrant gave a deep sigh and huddled himself up in the blankets, rocking from side to side in the chair.<sup>639</sup>

For Monk, the alien in science fiction constitutes ‘radical content’, destabilising any narrative in which it occurs.<sup>640</sup> Here the alien destabilises the previously heroic character of Tarrant, causing him to commit acts inconsistent with his character; these acts drive the narrative of the novel, resolving in Tarrant’s questioning of his behaviour once freed from the influence of Ka.

In *Medusa’s Children*, becoming part of a hybrid identity can entail committing acts repugnant to the individual identities that make up the composite body in order to protect that corporate identity. Myrah feels this doubleness of absorption, the dread of becoming part of a composite identity disappearing once she is absorbed by Ka and appreciates the creature as a place of safety. The character of Tarrant is destabilised through interaction with Ka, performing acts repugnant to Tarrant once released from the corporate identity.

This formulation aligns with the classic fear of the mob articulated by Edmund Burke’s critique of the French Revolution.<sup>641</sup> In an Irish context, Seamus Deane suggests that fear of the mob involves ‘traditional piety against a revolutionary threat that produces, by perversion of the ‘normal’—even to the contamination of blood—the

---

<sup>638</sup> *Medusa’s Children*, p. 117.

<sup>639</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 130.

<sup>640</sup> *Alien Theory*, p. 65.

<sup>641</sup> Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* ed. L.G. Mitchell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

ghastly miasmatic crowd.’<sup>642</sup> Deane suggests the idea of inchoate mob as an integral part of European colonialism and class division in the metropolises. Whereas the history of the nation is ‘grounded in history, precedent, stability, religion’, the mob is seen as a site of ignorance and violence that requires regulatory technologies to control it.<sup>643</sup> This also resonates with discussion of White’s fiction in the last chapter, with space travel requiring regulatory technologies in the shape of robot chaperones, reinforcing bourgeois norms in regard to sexuality. While it was shown that White resists the formal potential of science fiction to transcend bourgeois norms in his Catholic futures, here Shaw resists the radical potential of depictions of the alien Other, by resisting notions of hybridity and OtherSelfness.

Across Shaw’s work there is anxiety surrounding the borders of the self, the Other and the alien Other. For Tallon in *Night Walk*, an exchange with the Other that enables him to adopt its sense of sight is advantageous, but anxiety manifests surrounding the absorption of the identity of the Other. *Medusa’s Children* also points to the attraction and repulsion of a composite identity, detailing the inhumanity that can occur when individual identity is lost to an alien Other. Ultimately, while Shaw’s engagement with the alien Other initially embraces OtherSelfness, it resists the hybridity and instability suggested by such an encounter in the final instance.

### **White, the Other and Absorption**

Before discussing the issue of absorption in the work of White, it would be useful to discuss the range of Otherness found in the Sector General texts, as well as the purpose it serves from an authorial position. This section will examine White’s attempt to build a fictional ethical multi-species community in the Sector General stories, and the way in which White describes a built environment that promotes cooperation between alien Others. This cooperation is promoted through technology. White depicts a universal translator, a central computer that translates alien languages to the language of the individual user. The insufficiencies of translation in articulating the being of the alien is compensated for through what I call worlding technologies, taking the form of

---

<sup>642</sup> Seamus Deane, *Strange Country: Modernity and Nationhood in Irish Writing Since 1790* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997) p. 92.

<sup>643</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 147.

environments constructed to be habitable for various alien species, and in educator tapes, a means of incorporating an alien ontology within one's own personality. The latter results in anxieties surrounding absorption by the alien Other, with the site of alien sexuality as a significant border between the human and extraterrestrial Other.

As already noted, White's Sector General stories attempt to depict how alien Others with differing biological necessities can be held together within the same space, echoing Vint's idea of an ethical multi-species community. The built environment of Sector General is equipped to translate alien languages, with those on board carrying a translation device connected to a central computer that converts the various alien utterances into the language of the user without inflection. In this way, the 'musical trills and clicks' of the Cinnruskin Prilicla are transmitted as 'flat, emotionless English', betraying the Anglocentric nature of White's fictional universe.<sup>644</sup> The 'universal translator' is a science fiction trope first introduced by Murray Leinster in his 1945 story 'First Contact', a useful device for negotiating difficulties of communication between humans and the aliens they meet and, according to Vint, evidencing a desire that drives much science fiction, namely 'the desire to communicate with another—and thereby confirm its sentience and prove that humans are not alone in the universe.'<sup>645</sup> Vint draws from Ludwig Wittgenstein's comment that 'if a lion could talk, we could not understand him' to suggest that a reliance on language alone is insufficient when aliens encounter one another and attempt to communicate.<sup>646</sup> Vint writes:

When aliens meet, they can exchange words and might seem to be sharing a common sense of their meaning, but individual words offered by either species are grounded in concrete and material histories that are not shared.

White assumes what Thomas Richards refers to as a 'confidence in the communicational transparency of knowledge...inherited from the Victorian positivists.'<sup>647</sup> For Vint and Wittgenstein, language creates a world specific to the language user, a world that cannot be transferred through translation. As Monk suggests, 'communication with a truly alien being would be as near to impossible as

---

<sup>644</sup> James White, *Major Operation* (1971) (London: Futura Publications, 1987) p. 5.

<sup>645</sup> *Animal Alterity*, p. 71; Murray Leinster, 'First Contact' in *The Best of Murray Leinster* (London: Corgi Books, 1976).

<sup>646</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986) p. 225.

<sup>647</sup> *Imperial Archive*, p. 75.

makes no significant difference'.<sup>648</sup> Language, then, is proposed as an ineffective medium for communication with alterity, failing to transfer the full ontology of an alien being.

But Sector General's multi-species hospital also utilises what might be termed worlding technologies as compensation for the failings of the translator. Technology and the built environment are used to integrate the bodily cultures of the various life forms in the hospital, with no one physiological structure being privileged. In *The Genocidal Healer*, the whole structure of a ward on Sector General is modified solely for the purpose of an operation on Hellishomar, a member of the colossal race the Groalterri.<sup>649</sup> When traversing the corridors of the hospital, oxygen breathers are often required to take shortcuts through corridors that necessitate the wearing of protective equipment, designed as the corridors are for breathers of chlorine or other substances.<sup>650</sup> White describes the hospital as a 'spaghetti shaped building' where:

Each corridor containing an Earth-type atmosphere, for instance, was paralleled above, below and on each side—as well as being crossed above and below at frequent intervals—by others having different and mutually deadly variations of atmosphere, pressure and temperature. This was to facilitate the visiting of any given patient-species by any other species of doctor in the shortest possible time in case of emergency, because travelling the length of the hospital in a suit designed to protect a doctor against his patient's environment on arrival was both uncomfortable and slow.<sup>651</sup>

The furniture on board Sector General also reflects the varied physiologies of the alien life forms that work and are cared for on board. The canteen has furniture catering for all known alien species, but White is anxious to point out that the seating arrangements do not constitute a form of segregation. Cross-species conversations often involve the use of a seat made for a physical form alien to the user. In *The Galactic Gourmet*, the Tralthan Gurronsevas has his first experience of the Sector General dining hall and notes that 'many of them were occupying tables and using utensils that had been designed for entirely different life-forms, seemingly for the purpose of conversing with other-species friends.'<sup>652</sup> In *Hospital Station*, White writes that 'although it was divided

---

<sup>648</sup> *Alien Theory*, p. 22.

<sup>649</sup> *Genocidal Healer*, p. 187.

<sup>650</sup> James White, *The Galactic Gourmet*, (New York: Tor Books, 1996) p. 4.

<sup>651</sup> *Hospital Station*, p. 50.

<sup>652</sup> *Galactic Gourmet*, p. 20.

up into sections for the widely variant life-forms present, Conway could see many tables where three or four different classifications had come together—with extreme discomfort for some—to talk shop.’<sup>653</sup> In the same novel, White also describes ‘an enormous Tralthan table with benches which were a shade too far from the table’s edge and one in the Melfan section which was cosier but whose chairs resembled surrealistic wastepaper baskets.’<sup>654</sup> The furniture on Sector General then, promotes cross-species cooperation, the need to sacrifice personal comfort in order to converse with acquaintance-Others encourages empathy between alien groups.

White’s furniture finds a real-life analogue in Northern Irish politics and the tactics of conflict resolution employed there. McKittrick and McVea describe how the Northern Ireland Constitutional Convention arranged by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland Merlyn Rees in 1975 inspired a similar attempt to utilise furniture arrangements in order to minimise confrontation. They write:

Before convention members got together at Stormont, Rees ordered workmen into the chamber to rearrange the furniture in the hope of encouraging them to think in terms of consensus rather than confrontation. Curved cross-benches were installed to make the point that Unionists and nationalists should aim to meet each other in the middle. The UUUC’s [United Ulster Unionist Council] overall majority ensured, however, that the creative carpentry was in vain.<sup>655</sup>

White’s first reference to the furniture on Sector General predates the convention by over a decade, but this is not to say that Rees was in some way influenced by White’s fiction. For one, Rees’s innovation did not attempt to treat the opposing sides as different species. But the point is rather that science fiction and conflict resolution both attempt to assay the future, to predict outcomes and, in the case of creative carpentry, use that information to minimise the possibility of conflict. White’s speculations around furniture designed for aliens attempts to reduce conflict by creating empathy between the various species on board Sector General.

White’s version of creative carpentry reaches towards what the philosopher of inter-species ethics Ralph Acampora terms ‘shared embodiment’ or symphysis, a

---

<sup>653</sup> *Galactic Gourmet*, p. 124.

<sup>654</sup> *Hospital Station*, p. 10.

<sup>655</sup> *Making Sense of the Troubles*, p. 112.

concept that addresses the human relationship with animals. According to Vint, the concept provides:

A better ground for communicating with animals...because the materiality of both shared and distinct embodied experiences enables humans to recognise similarities and acknowledge differences, thereby ensuring that while we use our imaginative capacities to connect with animal being, we do not inadvertently erase the specificity of such beings in a presumption that animals are identical to humans.<sup>656</sup>

In other words, shared embodiment allows us to pass through Otherness and arrive at a realisation of alterity, the OtherSelfness of the alien in Monk's terms. Whereas the seats at Stormont were designed to encourage interaction between two communities of the same species, in Sector General seating provides a link to the materiality of the alien Other. This material link, or symphysis, is described as 'the sense of sharing with somebody else a somaesthetic nexus experienced through a direct or systemic (inter)relationship.' Acampora points to the 'densely physical orientation' of such a relationship, rather than the 'airy, psychic notion of sympathy' used by moral theorists.<sup>657</sup> However, unlike Rees's creative carpentry, in White's fictional universe this shared embodiment is successful in encouraging cross-species cooperation. As Vint suggests, Acampora's concept provides a foothold for communicating with an animal for which there is no shared language. In this instance, furniture becomes a worlding technology communicating the bodily experience of the alien Other. The furniture on Sector General offers a way to sympathise with the alien Other, partially translating alien experience, rendering it understandable while retaining a notion of the OtherSelf of the alien.<sup>658</sup> While the universal translator interprets alien languages, worlding technologies such as the furniture on Sector General translate the bodily experience of the alien Other, promoting a sense of the alien as an OtherSelf in Monk's terms.

In White's Sector General narratives, the inadequacy of language is compensated for in the somaesthetic nexus provided by the built environment of Sector

---

<sup>656</sup> *Animal Alterity*, p. 80.

<sup>657</sup> Ralph Acampora, *Corporal Compassion: Animal Ethics and Philosophy of Body* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2006) p. 76.

<sup>658</sup> In *The Galactic Gourmet*, Gurronevas, a member of the alien race called the Tralthan, practices a kind of symphysis, White describing him 'placing his six feet as gently as possible against the floor so as to minimize undue noise and vibration, a politeness he practiced among lower-gravity entities in confined surroundings, he moved further into the room' (p.7).



General. This bodily sympathy is enhanced, but also begins to break down, as a result of the educator tapes, another worlding technology that translates the embodiment of an alien Other. The failures of language translation in mediating between the worlds of the human and the alien is evident in the Sector General fiction in the need for the educator tapes, the means by which surgeons operating on diverse life forms can attain knowledge of the alien they are performing surgery on by implanting the personality of an expert of that species into their mind, resulting in what White calls a 'double-mindedness'. Those wishing to achieve the level of Diagnostician have to prove themselves mentally stable enough to retain up to ten educator tapes simultaneously.<sup>659</sup> White describes the effect that the tape has on the mind of the individual surgeon:

In effect the Diagnostician subjected himself or itself voluntarily to the most drastic type of multiple schizophrenia, and with the alien other components sharing their minds so utterly *different* in every respect that they often did not even share the same system of logic.<sup>660</sup>

The educator tapes, then, are a worlding technology that translates the embodied experience of an alien Other, allowing access to the OtherSelfness of various lifeforms for the purpose of performing surgery. They are part of the somaesthetic nexus of Sector General, a technology that promotes symphysis between the surgeon and those operated on. White's comparison between the effect of the tape and mental illness, however, suggests an anxiety in the process, occurring in narratives in which the educator tapes become the central focus.

But the use of the educator tapes leads to a fear of absorption comparable to that found in Shaw's work, as the dividing line between the alien Other and the human becomes permeable. In these narratives, a fear of absorption manifests as the tapes allow access to an Otherness that threatens to destroy the self of the user, the psychological border between species breaking down. After transfer of the alien personality, the subject feels the alien alter ego taking over, White writing that the subject 'must try to maintain flexibility of mind and adapt to these alien, sometimes very alien, impressions as quickly as possible.'<sup>661</sup> White describes Conway watching a human surgeon in the canteen attempting to parley with the alien personality now

---

<sup>659</sup> *Hospital Station*, p. 152.

<sup>660</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 125.

<sup>661</sup> *Major Operation*, p. 74.

occupying the same space, the surgeon having to force himself to eat a 'perfectly ordinary steak':

Conway happened to know that this man was engaged on a case which necessitated using a large amount of the knowledge contained in the Tralthan physiology tape which he had been given. The use of this knowledge had brought into prominence within his mind the personality of the Tralthan who had furnished the brain record, and Tralthans abhorred meat in all its forms.<sup>662</sup>

Here, the personality of the alien intrudes on the user of the educator tape, a struggle ensuing surrounding behaviour and attitudes to diet. Just as Shaw's *Night Walk* articulated anxiety surrounding the transference of personality through prosthesis, White's educator tapes begin to manifest a similar sense of invasion by the alien Other through technology.

When Conway himself receives the tape of the group-minded radiation-eaters the Telfi in order to perform an operation, the advice to immediately erase the tape after surgery slips his mind. Like Ka in Shaw's *Medusa's Children*, the Telfi exist as a composite body, White describing the race as a gestalt made up of one hundred specialised units that serve as its mind and multiple body. White writes:

Some of the units were blind deaf and perhaps even dead cells that received or recorded no sensory impressions whatever, but there were others who radiated waves of such sheer, excruciating agony that the group-mind writhed and twisted silently in sympathy.<sup>663</sup>

The insertion of the educator tape into Conway's mind creates a somaesthetic nexus between him and the Telfi. Conway physically feels the pain coursing through the corporate body of the Telfi, until he cures the entity by separating sixteen of the infected units into specially-shielded bottles. After the operation, White describes Conway's reaction to the tape:

By the time he had reached the Radiation Theatre, he felt himself to be two people—an Earth-human called Conway and the great, five-hundred unit Telfi gestalt which had been formed to prepare a mental record of all that was known regarding the physiology of that race.<sup>664</sup>

---

<sup>662</sup> *Hospital Station*, p. 125. Later in the series, White reveals that the inhabitants of Sector General are in fact all vegetarian, the meat eaten on board the ship synthetic.

<sup>663</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 42.

<sup>664</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 46.

Like Tarrant's absorption of the mental process of Ka in Shaw's *Medusa's Children*, Conway begins to reason like the Telfi gestalt, considering that '...it must be nice to be a Telfi, to soak up radiation all the time, and the rich and varied impressions of a corporate body numbering perhaps hundreds of individuals.'<sup>665</sup> Here a double barrier is broken down, once between the identities of Conway and the Telfi, and again between Conway's sense of individuality and the Telfi's sense of collective consciousness. The notion of a collective identity becomes irresistible to Conway and he longs for a corporate existence, experiencing an urge to embrace members of the Monitor Corps police force on board Sector General, a section of the community he usually loathes, as well as a desire to be surrounded by people 'exchanging ideas and impressions so that he would not feel so terribly alone.'<sup>666</sup> The educator tape has translated the bodily world of the Telfi to Conway, manifesting in a symphysis that renders the barrier between self and Other permeable. Conway is confused between the human world and the world of the Telfi, and is found collapsed in the kitchen area of the hospital, attempting to soak up heat from the oven.<sup>667</sup> Later, Chief Psychologist O'Mara tells Conway that the needs of the Telfi overcame his own, and that the necessity for the Telfi to consume hard radiation, and intense heat and light, as well as its desire for mental connection to a group mind became transferred onto the nearest human equivalents.

So far we have considered worlding technologies as a means of compensation for the inadequacy of language translation in transferring the bodily experience of the alien Other. Technologies such as the built environment and the furniture on Sector General promote a symphysis between the various species who inhabit the hospital. But as alien personalities are transferred through means of the educator tapes, anxieties are raised surrounding the threshold of the self and the alien Other, anxieties that manifest as a fear of alien sexuality as the educator tapes become central to White's narratives.

This is in evidence in a later novel in the series, *Star Surgeon*, in which Conway is entrusted with multiple educator tapes, and anxieties about absorption into a

---

<sup>665</sup> *Hospital Station*, p. 48.

<sup>666</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 52.

<sup>667</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 52-53.

corporate identity increase, resulting in a confusion around alien sexuality. In the novel, White pushes human/alien hybridity further, leading to the emergence of anxiety surrounding the border between the two. The translator malfunctions while Sector General is under attack, rendering communications on the ship 'an alien babel', and Conway volunteers to act as a translator for the doctors by receiving the educator tapes for seven different alien species simultaneously.<sup>668</sup> A device for translating language, the universal translator, is here replaced by a technology that translates world, the educator tape. As the narrative progresses, it cautions against the removal of the barrier between human and alien conceptions of world, manifesting as a fear of absorption. Acting as a conduit for communication in the hospital, Conway lets the personality of an alien whose speech he needs to translate come to the fore of his brain, then suppresses it when the translation is complete.<sup>669</sup> Conway's use as a 'seven way Rosetta Stone' means that he receives, not only information vital for the ship to defend itself against attack, but other details of alien embodiment such as feelings of fear, hunger and sexual desire.<sup>670</sup> Of the identities Conway receives, the empathy of the Cinnruskin has the most profound effect, its extreme sensitivity beginning to affect his thought process with a mixture of the empathy of the Cinnruskin with the plethora of alien sexualities residing in his body. White describes Conway's increasing panic, writing that '...the memories welled up in a dark, turgid flood. Petty, shameful, secret memories mostly concerned with sex—and that, in e-ts [sic], was alien, so alien that he wanted to scream.'<sup>671</sup> Only by thinking 'normal, human thoughts' about his lover Nurse Murchison can Conway spare himself from the 'seven different hells' of alien sexual experience. Conway's personal history involves an incident in which he 'fell in love with a six-legged crab Melfan', because his brain was affected by a tape of that species,<sup>672</sup> another novel informing the reader that 'alien sexual fantasies were enough to make the host mind wish...that it was dead.'<sup>673</sup> Sexual transgression is a common fear associated with the educator tapes across White's Sector General narratives, and White's stress on 'normal' human sexuality on board Sector General is also an echo of

---

<sup>668</sup> *Star Surgeon*, p. 115, 123.

<sup>669</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 124.

<sup>670</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 128-129.

<sup>671</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 133.

<sup>672</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 41.

<sup>673</sup> James White, 'Countercharm' in *The Aliens Among Us* (1966) (London: Orbit, 1988) pp. 1-21.

Conway's embarrassing dalliance with the Melfan is also mentioned in *The Genocidal Healer* (79) and *Star Surgeon*, (41).

our discussion in Chapter Two, of the role Catholicism played in establishing norms of bourgeois subjectivity.

The educator tapes alleviate the failings of the universal translator in negotiating the shared space of alien Others on Sector General. The tapes are a worlding technology that renders the thought process of an alien OtherSelfness accessible. However, hybridity of consciousness is also suggested as a dangerous state of mind, the receiving of an educator tape compared to volunteering to be stricken with a mental illness, and primacy is placed on the restoration of individual race subjectivity. Just as Graham suggests of Irish postcolonial theory, hybridity is only accepted with the assurance that the borders between identities are maintained. The border between the alien Others on board Sector General is therefore policed, with the technology being used by surgeons alone, and the amount of tapes any one person can receive strictly limited. When confronted with the hybrid identity that the educator tapes enable, race identity is privileged. The educator tape operates as symphytic technology, opening up the lifeworld of an alien Other to the user, but the access it affords to subaltern subjectivities is rejected, with anxieties surrounding mental stability and sexual morality leading to fear of the technology.

*Star Surgeon* questions the border between the human and the alien explicitly, with Conway inhabited by seven alien Others and experiencing sexual thoughts that, considering the sentience of the creatures involved, test the boundary between miscegenation and bestiality. This border is unambiguously shut by White; there are no mixed marriages between alien Others on board Sector General. But White's concern to counter militaristic science fiction with stories that show the human and the alien Other in cooperation means the series repeatedly examines the border between alien and human subjectivities. The translator, the built environment and furniture and the educator tapes are all means of exploring the ethics of a multi-species community, encouraging cooperation and promoting a hybrid culture on board Sector General, while an anxiety lingers about what else escapes across the border between the alien Other and the human in the exchange. This anxiety polices that border, but is not the only element of the Sector General novels that serves this function. The next section will consider White's system of alien categorisation as another means of maintaining that divide.

### **Categorisation in White.**

In the Sector General series, one of the means by which the border between the human and the alien is policed is through a categorisation system, a system that White termed 'comparative e.t. philosophy'. This section will examine how White's taxonomy separates alien Others, questioning its claim to offer a counter-anthropocentric means of categorising the alien by analysing White's use of analogues in animals, his tendency to present alien life as a monoculture, the impulse to archive and the category of the human that underpins the system and in the last instance undermines it.

White created his taxonomy of alien Others by developing the system E.E. Doc Smith designed for his *Skylark of Space* stories.<sup>674</sup> According to Carl Malmgren, Smith's system is an alphabetical sliding scale of Otherness, with humans denoted by the letter A, and degrees of Otherness signified through the trajectory towards Z.<sup>675</sup> In contrast, White's system uses a combination of letters that suggest the interaction of a particular species with the world of its origin. In 'Notes on the Classification System', White explains:

The first letter denotes the level of physical evolution. The second letter indicates the type and distribution of limbs and sensory equipment, which in turn gives us information regarding the positioning of the brain and other major organs. The remaining two letters refer to the combination of metabolism and gravity and/or atmospheric pressure requirements of the being, and this is tied in with the physical mass and the protective tegument, skin, fur, scales, osseous plating, and so on, represented by the relevant letter.<sup>676</sup>

White's classification System denotes water breathers with the letters ABC, warm-blooded oxygen-breathers with DF, oxygen-breathing insectiles with GK, light gravity, birdlike species with LM and chlorine breathers with OP. The rest of the alphabet is taken up with 'the more exotic, the more highly evolved physically, and the downright weird types.'<sup>677</sup> The latter come close to Monk's definition of alterity or OtherSelfness,

---

<sup>674</sup> E.E. Doc Smith, *The Skylark of Space* (London: Panther Books, 1974).

<sup>675</sup> Carl Malmgren, 'Self and Other in SF: Alien Encounters', *Science Fiction Studies*, 20.1 (1993), 15-33.

<sup>676</sup> James White, 'Notes on the Classification System' in *The White Papers* ed. Mark Olson and Bruce Pelz (Framingham: NESFA Press, 1996) pp. 365-366.

<sup>677</sup> *Ibid.* p. 366.

existing outside the frames of reference for human biology, physiology and psychology. White refers to this type as ‘the weirdies—radiation-eaters, frigid-blooded or crystalline beings, entities capable of changing physical shape at will, and those possessing various forms of extra-sensory powers.’<sup>678</sup> White’s categorisation system is a fictional scientific means of categorising alien Others, describing the environment and atmospheric requirements of a particular species, but also pointing to species that exist outside scientific knowledge such as shape-changing entities and creatures with supernatural abilities.

Although White’s system is constructed as a counter-anthropocentric means of articulating Otherness, within the narratives of Sector General the aliens are also described in traditional science fiction terms, often compared to animals. As already noted, Sherryl Vint suggests that aliens in science fiction often stand as metaphors for the human relation to the animal, and White draws from animals to describe his alien Others. For instance, the AUGL from the planet Chalderoscol is described as ‘...heavily plated and scaled, and slightly resembled a forty-foot long crocodile except that instead of legs there was an apparently haphazard arrangement of stubby fins and a fringe of ribbon-like tentacles encircling its middle.’<sup>679</sup> Although the alien population of Sector General are proposed by White as at least as sapient as humans, White uses the word menagerie to describe the hospital, a word that suggests a place for housing animals rather than beings given an equal footing with humanity in regard to intelligence. This sense of the alien as animal is also in evidence in *Star Surgeon*, when O’Mara finds Conway attempting to speak in an alien language and jokingly asks whether he is trying to increase morale by doing ‘animal impressions.’<sup>680</sup> O’Mara’s position as chief psychologist on board Sector General, charged with detecting initial signs of xenophobia in the multi-species environment, is rendered somewhat problematic by this comment.

Patrick Maume remarks that animals provided the inspiration for White for the aliens in his Sector General stories, noting that ‘advised by a friend who was a lecturer

---

<sup>678</sup> *Hospital Station*, p. 81.

<sup>679</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 49.

<sup>680</sup> *Star Surgeon*, p. 120.

in animal reproduction, White imagined an amazing variety of possible alien biologies, together with an elaborate classification system where mankind was carefully inserted in the middle rather than the top.<sup>681</sup> Lem critiques this tendency in science fiction, referring to the practice as 'a ruthless exploitation, ransacking, in its search for inspiration, history textbooks and the Linnean system alike, in order to provide lizards, cuttlefish with grasping arms, crabs, insects, and so forth with intelligence.'<sup>682</sup> Monk quotes the science fiction historian John J. Pierce who, writing on White's Sector General series, remarks that 'after a while, one begins to wonder why aliens should look like caterpillars, sea urchins, and the other Earthly analogues favoured by White.'<sup>683</sup> White's Otherness then, relies on quotidian comparisons, with animals providing a template for expressing the ineffable. For the most part then, the form of White's aliens in the Sector General narratives articulate Otherness, but not the OtherSelfness of alterity in Monk's terms. Although the categorisation system is meant to express a counter-anthropocentric means of defining the alien, those on Sector General fall back on Earthly analogues to describe Otherness.

Another issue that Lem discusses is the tendency for aliens in science fiction to be uniform across the race. Lem asks why alien cultures in science fiction rarely reflect the diversity of human cultures, instead displaying a 'depressing uniformity which borders on monotony'.<sup>684</sup> Again, despite White's intentions, the Sector General series is no exception to this tendency. The alien societies depicted in the Sector General stories exist as monocultures, White ignoring the plethora of cultures existent among humanity alone, an issue reflected in the already noted 'flat, emotionless English' of the universal translator. The caterpillar-like Kelgians, for instance, are uniformly rude, their race biologically determined to speak their mind at all times. Together with the tendency to create animal analogues for alien Others, the uniformity of the aliens depicted also adds to a reduction in the sense of OtherSelfness in the alien.

---

<sup>681</sup> *No Country For Old Men*, p. 198.

<sup>682</sup> Stanislav Lem, 'About the Strugatsky's *Roadside Picnic*' trans. Elsa Schieder and Robert M. Philmus in *Microworlds* ed. Franz Rotetnsteiner (London: Mandarin, 1985) pp. 248-249.

<sup>683</sup> *Alien Theory*, p. 110.

<sup>684</sup> *Microworlds*, p. 248.



Monk's critique of the depiction of the hospital environment in the series reflects this. Monk reads the novels as relatively conservative, with the medicine practiced on board the ship categorised in a way familiar to a large modern hospital, with departments such as obstetrics, paediatrics, geriatrics, surgery, internal medicine.<sup>685</sup> In this way, the alien body is posited as analogous to the human body.<sup>686</sup> This drawing of the alien through analogy arises from the limits of human experience in encountering true alterity that Benford and others discuss. White's counter-anthropocentric categorisation, then, is offset by the tendency to use Earthly animal analogues in descriptions of alien Others, for his alien Others to display uniformity across their species in regard to personal traits, the type of medicine practised, and in similarities in layout in regard to Sector General and a hospital on Earth.

But White's categorisation system also inevitably echoes the notion of the archive. Colin Graham, drawing from Thomas Richards, suggests the archive as an 'impulse to catalogue, collect and place the data and signs of the material world in the sanctity of the archive' which 'winds and then unwinds itself through the colonial and postcolonial.'<sup>687</sup> Richards notes that the archive represents the fact that 'the state must not only confront its extraterritorials but must territorialise them'.<sup>688</sup> White's categorisation system echoes imperial discourse surrounding the territorialisation of the Other, creating a space as a 'collectively imagined junction of all that was known or knowable'.<sup>689</sup> Richards suggests that the British Empire indulged in 'fantasies about an empire united not by force but by information.'<sup>690</sup> Richards notes that 'if the motto of Renaissance humanism was "nothing human is alien", the motto of Victorian morphology now became "nothing alive is alien."<sup>691</sup> White's taxonomy of alien Others seeks to domesticate the alien in a similar way, bringing it within the realm of human knowledge, leading to the depiction of Otherness, but not OtherSelfness.

---

<sup>685</sup> Patrick Maume notes the influence of White's wife, who worked as a nurse at the Mater Hospital, Belfast. See *No Country For Old Men*, p. 198.

<sup>686</sup> *Alien Theory*, p. 177.

<sup>687</sup> *Deconstructing Ireland*, p. 12.

<sup>688</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 20.

<sup>689</sup> *Imperial Archive*, p. 11.

<sup>690</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1.

<sup>691</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 48.

Formally, White's alien Others are indebted to the animal kingdom, but in their inner lives reflect an origin in human behaviour. Chapter Two has already discussed White's suggestion of monotheism as a universal standard for religion. White's view of the alien also presumes other phenomena as universals, a tendency that for the most part means that his aliens achieve Otherness but not alterity, or OtherSelfness in Monk's terms. In *Final Diagnosis*, Hewlitt switches on a television and sees Tralthan and Melfan comedy shows that are described as looking more like something from the horror genre.<sup>692</sup> In White's universe, extraterrestrials will make television shows, no matter how different their psychology or physiology is to humans. White's interactions between aliens also points to a curious fascination with the Other as a universal trait. When the SRTT arrives at Sector General, Conway is eager to have a look at its appearance, but hesitates, fearing that Prilicla might feel that it is an insult to look at a member of another species solely to satisfy curiosity. A moment later, the dragonfly-like Prilicla asks to see the visitor for the same reason.<sup>693</sup> Monk remarks that '...producing humanlike sapient behaviour in a biologically familiar nonsapient form works to the detriment of otherness.'<sup>694</sup> In these instances, alien Others that have already been created from Earthly analogues, lose their Otherness by being shown bearing human cultural tendencies and human curiosity.

As discussed earlier, when under the influence of the educator tapes, Conway asserts his identity against alien sexuality by forcing himself to think 'normal human thoughts'. But the category of human is universalised by White, with destabilising consequences for the category itself. White's alien Others, even entities bearing potential for true alterity, refer to themselves as human and consider all other beings non-human. The SRTT, one of White's 'weirdies', is an amoebic creature that can extrude any limbs, sensory organs or protective tegument necessary to the environment in which it finds itself, evoking Thomas Richards's notion of the shape-changing form that challenges Darwinian science.<sup>695</sup> When an SRTT makes an appearance in *Hospital Station*, White explains the meaning behind its categorisation, and ensures the reader understands the Otherness of the creature, writing that 'the double T meant that both its

---

<sup>692</sup> *Final Diagnosis*, p. 31.

<sup>693</sup> *Hospital Station*, p. 116.

<sup>694</sup> *Alien Theory*, p. 109.

<sup>695</sup> *Imperial Archive*, pp. 48-49.

shape and physical characteristics were variable, R that it had high heat and pressure tolerance, and the S in that combination...If there had not actually been one waiting outside, Conway would not have believed such a weird beastie could exist.'<sup>696</sup> But when the SRTT ship approaches and is asked to identify and classify those on board, the alien replies 'human', White explaining that 'all intelligent races refer to their own species as humans and think of all others as being non-human, so that what you call yourself has no meaning.'<sup>697</sup> As already noted in our discussion of Shaw's *The Palace of Eternity*, Vint suggests: 'The category 'human' is constructed from exclusions and projections, an effort of purification that offers a more flattering portrait of the range of 'natural' human behaviours than those to which our history testifies.'<sup>698</sup> Here, human is posited as a universal category that refers to the means through which any alien Other defines itself. But as the category is used in White's narratives, its meaning is shown to be prone to ambiguities and instability.

White attempts to estrange ideas of the human by subjecting the human form to science fictional techniques of description which render the human as Other. When Conway is under the influence of seven educator tapes, he views his own body as a 'shapeless, puny monstrosity.'<sup>699</sup> In *The Galactic Gourmet*, the Tralthan chef Gurronsevas's observation of the human Captain of the ambulance ship *Rhabwar* has a similarly estranging effect on perceptions of the human form. White writes:

The hairy crescents above the eyes and the head fur showing below the uniform cap were an identical shade of metallic grey, the eyes never looked away nor did they blink, and its words carried the self-assurance that went with the habit of command.<sup>700</sup>

This estrangement of the human form continues when *Rhabwar* lands on the desolate planet of Wemar, with its kangaroo-like and extremely undernourished alien race the Wem. When the insect-like Prilicla makes contact with a Wem called Tawsar, the alien tells him:

---

<sup>696</sup> *Hospital Station*, p. 116.

<sup>697</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 116.

<sup>698</sup> *Animal Alterity*, p. 101.

<sup>699</sup> *Star Surgeon*, p. 128.

<sup>700</sup> *Galactic Gourmet*, p. 164.

We have not seen the creatures from the other starship, but they have given us word-pictures of themselves. They are strange, upright creatures without a balancing tail, some of them covered in fur and others with fur only on their heads.<sup>701</sup>

These estrangements of the human form give us an account of the human seen from the perspective of an alien Other, pointing to differences in physical characteristics between the Wem and the human, alluding to the lack of a tail in the human and the inconsistency of hair across individuals of the species.

White, then, attempts to recalibrate the category of human, suggesting that even those alien Others referred to as 'weirdies' in the classification system consider themselves human. This estranging technique is added to by the rendering of the human form as an alien would comprehend it.

But this sense of the alien as human and the human as alien is subject to ambiguity and destabilisation. In *The Galactic Gourmet* for instance, O'Mara's habit of eating alone is described to the Tralthan chef Gurronsevas as O'Mara not wanting to appear 'human after all'. Gurronsevas replies 'I do not understand...is there an emotional problem involved, a crisis of identity perhaps? If the Chief Psychologist does not wish to be thought of as human, to which other species does it believe itself to belong?'<sup>702</sup> Here the term human is strictly designated to those of Earthly origin, a designation that is also corroborated by White's categorisation system. The category DBDG includes inhabitants of the planets Earth, Etlan, Nidia and Orlogia, but the inhabitants of Earth are the only species whose name is hyphenated with the word 'human' attached to their planetary identity in White's tabulation.<sup>703</sup>

Later in *The Galactic Gourmet*, the category further unwinds into an aporia again surrounding the alien race the Wem. When Gurronsevas befriends a member of the Wem, and is frustrated in his attempts to help them improve their diet, Prilicla asks him to remind himself of the status of the race he has encountered:

You have been accepted as a friend by these people, much more so than any of the medical team. But do not assume, because you have grown to like and

---

<sup>701</sup> *Galactic Gourmet*, p. 182.

<sup>702</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 64.

<sup>703</sup> *White Papers*, pp. 372-374.

respect one of them, that they are human. They are not human, whether your yardstick is Earth-human, Cinnruskin-human, or even Tralthan-human like yourself; they are Wem-human. That difference, compounded by something we have said or done wrong, is the reason why they are no longer our friends.<sup>704</sup>

Here the category of the alien as human is problematised, the sense of the alien as Other that had been repressed by the universal category of human is reintroduced. Aliens who are human on their own terms live in cultures that are incommensurable with Earth-human culture. A wider category of human that includes the alien is suspended in this instance. This suspension of universal humanity also occurs in *Star Surgeon*, in which Sector General is under attack by an Empire of human-like entities. Having retrieved a damaged enemy ship, Conway examines a dead body inside and concludes that it was '...a once-living, thinking and feeling entity who was now too badly damaged even to classify with any degree of accuracy. But enough remained to show that it was not and never had been a human being.'<sup>705</sup> The 'alien human' can become 'not human', when the exclusions and projections with which such categories are created clash with the notion of the human subscribed to by the Earth human who is speaking. In these instances the category of the alien is reintroduced, the border between the human and the alien Other raised once more. The privileging of the Earth human is observed most starkly in 'Occupation: Warrior', a story which serves as a prequel to the Sector General series. In the story, White suggests that the forces of the Monitor Corps are 'composed of humans because only in that species was to be found the mental toughness which could force a man to do unpleasant, even wrong, things for the greater good.'<sup>706</sup>

The category of the human then, unravels White's categorisation system. What began as White's attempt to create a counter-anthropocentric system is broken down through its reliance on Earthly analogues, comparing the alien Other to terrestrial animals. Shape-changing alien Others that possess the potential to destabilise the taxonomy that White sets up are neutralised through their identification with the notion of the human. Having used estrangement in an attempt to render the human as alien,

---

<sup>704</sup> *Galactic Gourmet*, pp. 284-285.

<sup>705</sup> *Star Surgeon*, p. 108.

<sup>706</sup> James White, 'Occupation: Warrior' in *The Aliens Among Us* (1969) (London: Futura Publications, 1988) pp. 160-217. White intended 'Occupation: Warrior' to be part of the Sector General series, but was persuaded by the editor Ted Carnell that its dark tone made the story incompatible with it. The Monitor Corps are renamed the Guards in the narrative, but the name of the alien race the Kelgians provides a link to the Sector General universe.

and the alien as human, White raises the border between the two in the last instance, as the exclusions and projections that inform the category of the human assert themselves.

This chapter has discussed instances of the alien across the science fiction of Shaw and White against the backdrop of Ireland and Northern Ireland in the period of the Troubles, and the notion of a border defining the self from the Other. Science fiction's potential to depict Otherness is used by the two authors to question initial arachnid reactions to the alien Other. Shaw reaches towards a kind of autoethnography in '...And Isles Where Good Men Lie' that articulates the motivations of hostile aliens, but his echo of past conquests in the context of Northern Ireland fails to register the issue of power dynamics in the region. *The Palace of Eternity* performs a similar manoeuvre, depicting an Otherness whose selfhood, or Otherselfness, becomes better understood over the course of the narrative. But the notion of a mass mind combining the alien and the human is resisted by Shaw in a narrative closure that retreats behind the border of the human self. This fear of absorption manifests in other of Shaw's work, with the narratives of *Night Walk* and *Medusa's Children* registering both the attraction and repulsion of becoming part of a composite identity. This notion is echoed in Northern Irish politics in the fear that addressing the civil rights issues of Catholics, attractive in that it would lessen civil strife, would create a hybrid identity intolerable to the majority population. This fear of absorption is also in evidence across the novels of White's Sector General series, which attempt to assimilate alien Others within a multi-species ethical community. Sector General's architecture, furniture and technologies all serve to further this end. But with the voluntary schizophrenia embodied in the educator tapes, White creates a site of anxiety surrounding the border of the self and the alien Other, particularly in the realm of alien sexuality, and the border between the alien and the Other is reassembled. This border is also in evidence in White's categorisation system, which promises a counter-anthropocentric system, but privileges the human in the last instance in the attempt to preserve the category of Earth human.

## Chapter Four

### Utopias, Repressive and Redemptive

This final chapter will discuss the utopian impulse in the work of Bob Shaw and James White. As will be shown, the issue of utopia is never far from any discussion of the science fiction form, utopia constituting an important component in the formal structure and proto-history of the genre. Of the two authors, White has been most outspoken about the utopian gesture represented by his science fiction, framing his work as a pacifist subversion of the ultra-militaristic subgenre of the space opera. As a result, the reader will find the content of the chapter weighted towards White's work. But Shaw's engagement with the idea of utopia will also be considered, both as a tool with which to contrast and support a study of the utopian impulse in White, and as a means through which to examine Shaw's rejection of nationalism and embracing of nuclear proliferation as the best possible hope for peace. The latter will be discussed in the final section of the chapter, but the chapter will begin by discussing manifestations of the utopian form across the fiction of Shaw and White, reflecting on the repressive and redemptive elements of the utopian impulse. It will then turn to the notion of the overview effect in the work of White, a condition said to affect astronauts who look back at the Earth and become inspired with visions of human unity. White's use of the overview effect will be used as a vantage point from which to conduct a critical examination of the author's pacifism as it manifests across his work, with a particular emphasis on his Sector General series.

#### Utopias in Shaw and White

As Raymond Williams notes, science fiction texts invariably bear the imprint of utopian fiction. Williams draws a link between the two genres in that both forms display altered worlds. In the case of science fiction, worlds are altered by technological or sociological change.<sup>707</sup> Lyman Tower Sargent usefully sums up the origins of the word utopia:

The word *Utopia* or *outopia* simply means *no* or *not place*. *Topos* means place; 'u' or 'ou' means 'no' or 'not.' Thomas More, inventor of the word, punned on *eutopia* or *good place*, and we have since added *dystopia* or *bad*

---

<sup>707</sup> Raymond Williams, 'Utopia and Science Fiction', *Science Fiction Studies*, 5. 3 (1979), 203-214 (203).

*place*... Thus, the primary characteristic of the Utopian place is its non-existence combined with a topos—a location in time and space—to give verisimilitude.<sup>708</sup>

The dystopia, or *bad place*, is often discussed as in opposition to utopia, but Williams suggests that the genre of the dystopia still contains a utopian charge with the ‘mode of desire’ of the utopia switched to a mode of warning.<sup>709</sup>

Thomas More’s sixteenth-century text *Utopia*, the book that provided the name for the genre of fiction which proposes how an ideal society would function, consists of a conversation between a narrator from More’s England and an inhabitant of a fictional island called Utopia in the Atlantic Ocean governed with a legal and political system that has reached a state of perfection.<sup>710</sup> Fredric Jameson notes of More’s text that: ‘as with the imaginary construction of the chimera, a Utopia is constructed out of already existing materials’, describing More’s fictional island as a synthesis between the traditions of ancient Greece, the medieval era, the Incas and the intellectual Protestantism of the public sphere of the early sixteenth century.<sup>711</sup> A utopian tradition also emerged in nineteenth-century France, when utopian socialists such as Saint-Simon and Charles Fourier drew up schemes for social systems that reached beyond relations based on the capitalist model. Although Marx and Engels debated the utopians, declaring that their plans were futile without an accompanying theory of revolutionary praxis, the imprint of utopian thought remains in the work of later socialists such as H.G. Wells and William Morris, key precursors of modern science fiction.<sup>712</sup> Works such as Edward Bellamy’s *Looking Backward* (1888), Morris’s *News From Nowhere* (1890), and Wells’s *A Modern Utopia* (1905) all draw from the genre, their narratives, like More’s, all featuring a guide from the host society showing the narrator around the utopian society and explaining the social system in detail.

Carl Freedman suggests that the distinction between scientific socialism and its utopian counterpart that Engels draws out is an analogue of the distinction between

---

<sup>708</sup> Lyman Tower Sargent, ‘The Three Faces of Utopianism Revisited’ *Utopian Studies*, Vol. 5, No. 1 (1994) pp. 1-37.

<sup>709</sup> ‘Utopia and Science Fiction’, p.205.

<sup>710</sup> Thomas More, *Utopia* (London: Penguin, 2003) pp.1-113

<sup>711</sup> *Archaeologies of the Future*, pp.24-25.

<sup>712</sup> Friedrich Engels, *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific* (1880) (London: Bookmarks, 1993).



science fiction and utopian literature. Engels suggests that utopian plans are useless without a scientific analysis of how society can be transformed through class struggle. Whereas utopian literature outlines the plans for a changed society without the notion of how the transformation could take place, for Freedman, the contours of science fiction also include a demonstration of how the transformed society of the text has reached its current state of estrangement from quotidian reality.<sup>713</sup> For Freedman then, science fiction is scientific in the same manner that Marx and Engels claimed for their project of scientific socialism, reflecting the struggle that produces change from one world system to the next. Science fiction does not simply display an altered world, it demonstrates how worlds are altered.

Although neither Shaw nor White created a straightforward science fictional utopia, their work utilises figures from the genre. For instance, the protagonist Rayner Jerome in Shaw's *Fire Pattern* visits an alien city and is accompanied by a guide who explains the entire social system under which the extraterrestrials there live.<sup>714</sup> Later as he wanders the city alone, the description of infrastructure recalls the utopian novels *News From Nowhere* or *Looking Backwards*, as Jerome notes the 'huge caverns which corresponded to public squares or which housed air, water and protein production plants.'<sup>715</sup> In Shaw's *The Shadow of Heaven*, the journalist Victor Stirling returns from a visit to a commune above the Earth called the Ile and, as in More's *Utopia*, compares the society there to his own. Stirling remarks that upon returning to Earth, 'the basic facts of survival had not altered. He still had to earn money, eat, and provide shelter for himself—even though these considerations had not been so important on the Ile.'<sup>716</sup> In addition, a recurring feature of the narratives of White is a plan for a perfect society, from O'Riordan's hope for a new Eden in *The Silent Stars Go By*, to Brother Howard's careful selection of personalities for the seeding of a new Earth in *The Dream Millennium*, both of which will be examined in more detail later.

---

<sup>713</sup> *Critical Theory and Science Fiction*, pp. 84-86.

<sup>714</sup> Bob Shaw, *Fire Pattern* (1984) (London: Panther Books, 1985) p. 114. This tendency in utopian fiction is critiqued in H.G. Wells's *The Time Machine* with the time traveller remarking: 'In some of these visions of Utopias and coming times which I have read, there is a vast amount of detail about building and social arrangements, and so forth. But while such details are easy enough to obtain when the whole world is contained in one's imagination, they are altogether inaccessible to a real traveller amid such realities as I found here' (40).

<sup>715</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 140.

<sup>716</sup> Bob Shaw, *The Shadow of Heaven* (1968) (London: Corgi, 1978) p. 129.

Jack Fennell suggests that one of the central themes of Shaw's work is that 'Utopias are found, not created', a rejection of the notion of a completely planned and controlled society. This echoes the position of the critical utopias of the 1960s, which coincided with the acceleration in output of Shaw and White.<sup>717</sup> Tom Moylan traces the origins of the critical utopia in the counterculture of that decade. According to Moylan, 'the deep conflicts of the 1960s, rooted in an affluence that hinted at the end of scarcity and in an experience of the repression and exploitation of nature and humanity needed to achieve such affluence, significantly awakened a subversive utopianism.'<sup>718</sup> For Moylan, the critical utopias of science fiction writers such as Samuel Delany, Ursula Le Guin and Joanna Russ used the genre not only to critique society, but also to critique the genre of the utopia itself. For Moylan, the critical utopia is sceptical of the notion of a blueprint for a perfect society, but preserves the aspect of hope that underpins utopian thought.<sup>719</sup> This notion of hope is drawn from the utopian theorist Ernst Bloch, for whom hope is the quality that ensures that humanity is in constant progress, oriented towards some notion of a better collective future.<sup>720</sup> Shaw and White both share the scepticism and hope of the critical utopia to varying degrees. The extent to which either author could be suggested as writing within a subversive or countercultural position will be examined later in the chapter.

Utopian thought and Northern Ireland intersect in surprising places. Later, we will discuss Aaron Kelly's suggestion of repressive and redemptive aspects to fiction that uses the Troubles in Northern Ireland as a backdrop, but the utopian impulse can also be detected in the realm of industry. The DeLorean car, produced in the Belfast suburb of Dunmurry in the 1980s, is referred to by Richard Kirkland as 'the car from nowhere', a reference to Morris's *News From Nowhere*. Kirkland suggests that the DeLorean was perceived as the ultramodern declaring itself in 'the wreckage wrought by atavism and the outdated traditional.'<sup>721</sup> The DeLorean car is seen as a means

---

<sup>717</sup> *Irish Science Fiction*, p. 170.

<sup>718</sup> Tom Moylan, *Demand the Impossible: Science Fiction and the Utopian Imagination* (New York: Methuen, 1986) p. 10.

<sup>719</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.

<sup>720</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 21; See also Ernst Bloch, *The Principle of Hope* trans. Neville Plaice, Stephen Plaice and Paul Knight (1959) (Boston: MIT Press, 1996).

<sup>721</sup> *Field Day Review*, Vol. 3 (2007), pp. 94-107.

through which to reach towards a futuristic technological utopia amidst a society perceived to be falling back into ancient tribal loyalties. It seems ironic then that by the time the DeLorean car received its maximum cultural visibility by appearing in the science fiction film *Back to the Future*, the DeLorean company had been bankrupt for three years due to both the unpopularity of the car's design, and the mismanagement of funds by the company owner John DeLorean.<sup>722</sup> Vivian Carol Sobchack remarks that the car was used in the film to represent a kind of 'defunct futurism', suggesting that its appearance 'signifies the instantaneous transformation of the "new" into the "classic," the future into the past.'<sup>723</sup> This serves as a reminder perhaps that nothing dates so fast as technological futures, whereas thought formations considered atavistic often persist.

The wreckage wrought by the atavism the DeLorean car was set against also forms the backdrop for White's 1979 dystopian novel *Underkill*. White's dystopic vision of Belfast chimes with the gothicised version of the city that Kelly detects in thrillers that use the Troubles as a setting for their fictions. Kelly suggests that working class Belfast in such texts becomes dehistoricised as 'some lapsed and abandoned cartography of otherness from which the thwarted ethics of the bourgeois, pastoral subject withdraws.'<sup>724</sup> In *Underkill*, when a child is knocked down in the street by an ambulance, the dystopian aspect and the breakdown of ethics is evident, White writing:

He had been very lucky in receiving prompt and expert attention to his injuries sustained in an area of the city where road traffic accident cases, victims of muggings, rioting, and the unwanted very old or very young were left to lie and die until the waste reclamation squads or a cannibal club removed them during the night.<sup>725</sup>

The novel takes place on Earth after a catastrophe referred to as the 'power down', as fuel shortages mean that energy can be used only at pre-selected times. The chimerical aspect of the utopian novel is in evidence, with the novel responding critically to both the conflict in Northern Ireland and the energy crisis of the late 1970s. The narrative also echoes utopian texts in that White attempts to depict an average day in the city

---

<sup>722</sup> For more on the DeLorean, see Nick Sutton, *The DeLorean Story: the Car, the People, the Scandal* (London: Haynes Publishing Group, 2013)

<sup>723</sup> Vivian Carol Sobchack, *Screening Space: The American Science Fiction Film* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2001) p. 248.

<sup>724</sup> *Thriller and Northern Ireland*, p. 25.

<sup>725</sup> *Underkill*, p. 12.

early in the narrative, describing the events of a typical rush hour. White connects the propensity for rage among the inhabitants of the city as they travel home to the power shortages. Rush hour has become increasingly violent, as workers cycle home to take advantage of the small window of time in which they can use power.<sup>726</sup> White writes:

It was then that the power demand peaked to maximum as the tenants returned home from work. The building's twenty elevators were constantly in use carrying capacity loads. All of the lighting was in use while they jostled their way along the corridors to their boxes, warmed their food issue or made a hot drink, but not both, and indulged briefly in socialising before lights-out. During these activities they used vast quantities of air and produced a very large amount of body heat.<sup>727</sup>

White's gothicised Belfast is a warning of further decline and social unrest. The note of hope or redemption in White's novel originates from a more sinister quarter that will be looked at in more detail later in the chapter.

Shaw's *The Shadow of Heaven* is similarly dystopic, but set in the United States. In the novel, Shaw seems to critique a puritan utopian ideal that seeks to restart civilisation, while leaving behind a ruined Earth in the process. Like White's *Underkill*, the novel takes place on an Earth in which scarcity has been exacerbated. In Shaw's novel, the source of the disaster is the release, by an unknown terrorist group, of a chemical that has destroyed the nutrients in the majority of the Earth's soil. This act of ecological sabotage has led to the dispensation known as 'the compression', with populations becoming more concentrated near the sea and areas unaffected by the chemical. The novel takes place in the 'East Coast conurbation', described as 'a single building stretching from above Boston right down to Miami, and which included New York, Philadelphia and Baltimore in its basement layer.'<sup>728</sup> Space is at a premium in the inhabitable areas of Earth, so there are sanctions on the number of children allowed to be born. In order to meet the need for food in this post-cataclysm society, discs of land float above the Earth dubbed 'International Land Extensions' or Iles.

While searching for his half-brother, the journalist Vic Stirling uncovers a conspiracy by a group called the Receders who wish to colonise the Iles. The reputation

---

<sup>726</sup> *Underkill*, p. 62.

<sup>727</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 43.

<sup>728</sup> *Shadow of Heaven*, p. 12.

of the Receders is that they are 'a religious, semi-left wing group who seemed to be against just about every feature of present-day life', the religious element stressed by their conducting meetings at the Receders Chapel. The leader of the Receders, Mason Third, is said to be a lawyer and a preacher with political ambitions.<sup>729</sup> There is also a utopian impulse driving the Receder movement. At a meeting of the Receders, Stirling witnesses the group discuss the Iles as heaven, a place above the Earth that they aspire to arriving at one day. This materialist heaven appeals to Stirling on an emotional level, as he remembers his father discussing the place with him when he was a child. Shaw writes:

Nobody lived on Heaven, or on any of the other Iles, largely because the government psychologists had made it clear they could make life in the Compression seem acceptable only if everybody was in it together. So the thin clean air of Heaven, high above the winds that carried the herbicidal dusts, was reserved for the agricultural robots which tilled its soil.<sup>730</sup>

The Receders are a utopian group who wish to turn the Iles into their perfect society. In attempting to reach the material Heaven that the Iles represent, they reject the scarcity prevalent on Earth.

Having followed the conspiracy to the Iles where the Receders have established a secret commune living off the food grown there, Stirling is exposed to the material reality of the heaven of his imagination, a realisation that corresponds to the scepticism of the critical utopia. Stirling's half-brother, John Considine, has become the leader of the Receders on the Ile. Considine has renamed himself Jaycee, to which Stirling asks 'do I detect a religious connotation there?'<sup>731</sup> Stirling becomes cynical of the dictatorship that his half-brother has established on the Ile, noting the lack of ambition of its inhabitants, as well as the limited number of inhabitants the soil could sufficiently feed. Jaycee hatches a plan to fly the Ile to the moon, but he is thwarted by Stirling. At the close of the narrative, Mason Third, now elected to the Administrator role, informs Stirling that the Iles are to be scrapped, their defence consuming as many resources as they produce. Instead, Third plans to colonise Venus with the aid of a specially-

---

<sup>729</sup> *Shadow of Heaven*, p. 33.

<sup>730</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 26.

<sup>731</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 73. In *Irish Science Fiction* Jack Fennell suggests Jaycee as an exaggerated Charles Manson figure. It might well be asked why such a comparison should be made when there are as likely candidates closer to home, who combined religious millenarianism with political rage.

developed strain of algae, with which it is hoped to render the atmosphere of Venus habitable. Third tells Stirling: 'Your brother had the germ of an idea when he suggested taking Ile 23 to the Moon. Those floating anachronisms have a future ahead of them as factories for the production of Nostoc algae.'<sup>732</sup> The narrative ends with Stirling accepting a job as a press officer on one of the eighteen Iles that will be sent to Jupiter, effectively ending both his attachment to Earth, and fulfilling his notion of the Iles as a kind of material heaven.

In *The Shadow of Heaven* then, Shaw's protagonist starts from a position of perceiving the Receders as a sinister conspiracy espousing impossible utopian politics, but he also becomes attracted to their utopian mission to set up a society on the Iles. Upon arriving at the Iles, Stirling realises that freedoms there are just as curtailed as they are on the post-catastrophe Earth. The close of the narrative however, suggests an alliance between the utopian Receders and Stirling, with his agreement to take part in a mission to populate space. This narrative closure of the promise of abundance through space travel is echoed in the novels *Night Walk* and *Orbitsville* discussed in Chapter Two. In the context of Chapter Two, this closure was considered as a means of resolving the contradictions of an imperialist society. In *The Shadow of Heaven*, the promise of abundance serves this purpose, but also articulates a utopian impulse. In other words, Shaw's novel expresses both the scepticism and the hope of the critical utopia.

This double aspect of the utopian impulse can be mapped onto Kelly's suggestion that texts can be possessed of both repressive and redemptive elements. As Kelly suggests of popular culture, individual texts can possess varying degrees of redemptive or repressive possibilities, corresponding to both a utopian and an ideological formation.<sup>733</sup> Despite the progressive thrust of utopian thought, the form itself can also contain repressive elements. Kelly finds a repressive element in the stereotype of the terrorist found in the Troubles thriller, divorced from historical context as a means of demonising a whole section of the community in Northern Ireland.<sup>734</sup> For Kelly, a corresponding redemptive element can be found in the expression of a

---

<sup>732</sup> *Shadow of Heaven*, p. 170.

<sup>733</sup> *Thriller and Northern Ireland*, p. 3.

<sup>734</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 32.

conspiratorial ideologeme in the Troubles thriller, which points to a notion of collectivity, albeit in a distorted fashion.<sup>735</sup>

This notion of conspiracy as utopian is echoed elsewhere in studies of Northern Irish cultural texts. Neal Alexander connects Northern Irish fiction in the period to Fredric Jameson's theory of the 'conspiratorial text'.<sup>736</sup> Jameson developed the theory in relation to film texts such as Alan J. Pakula's *The Parallax View* (1974) and David Cronenberg's *Videodrome* (1983). For Jameson, the conspiratorial element is evidence of a 'political unconscious' at work in a text, an impulse to cognitively map the totality of a world system so vast that it cannot be adequately encompassed by human perception.<sup>737</sup> Jameson states that the conspiratorial text involves a '...collective effort at trying to figure out where we are and what landscapes and forces confront us in a late twentieth century whose abominations are heightened by their concealment and their bureaucratic impersonality.'<sup>738</sup> For Jameson, the conspiratorial text is a 'wild stab' at the truth of the world system, an attempt to cognitively map totality whose value lies not in the credibility of the conspiracy theory itself but solely in the utopian desire to cognitively map totality at all.<sup>739</sup> This sense of a totality barely perceived has implications for Irish culture. David Lloyd articulates the atmosphere of conspiracy in Ireland in the colonial period as one where '...antagonism mixes with dependence and autonomy is constantly undermined by the perceived influence of alien powers.'<sup>740</sup> In a Northern Irish context, one way in which this has manifested is in Catholic civil rights activists demanding concessions from a state they feel represents interests alien to their own, as we have already considered in the last chapter.

The conspiratorial ideologeme can be seen in operation across the works of Shaw and White. In Shaw's *The Shadow of Heaven*, Stirling investigates and uncovers the Receder conspiracy to inhabit the Iles, joins the plot, and finishes the narrative

---

<sup>735</sup> *Thriller and Northern Ireland*, p. 102.

<sup>736</sup> Neal Alexander, 'Remembering to Forget: Northern Irish Fiction After the Troubles' in *Irish Literature Since 1990: Diverse Voices* eds. Scott Brewster and Michael Parker (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009) pp. 272-287.

<sup>737</sup> Fredric Jameson, *The Geopolitical Aesthetic: Cinema and Space in the World System* (Indiana University Press, 1992) p. 2.

<sup>738</sup> *Ibid.*, p.3.

<sup>739</sup> *Ibid.*, p.3.

<sup>740</sup> David Lloyd, *Anomalous States: Ireland and the Post-Colonial Moment* (Dublin: Lilliput Press, 1993) p.78.

having become an agent for seeding other worlds with humanity. Similarly, in White's *Tomorrow is Too Far*, discussed in Chapter One, Carson assembles the totality of a conspiracy at the Hart-Ewing factory, and is then similarly enrolled in the conspiracy himself.

But as *The Shadow of Heaven* highlights through the narrative trajectory of the Receders from utopian idealists to harsh dictators, utopian thought can also manifest in a repressive mode. This repressive aspect is exemplified by More's originary text, which contains a moment of primitive accumulation prior to the inception of the country of Utopia, whereby lands were expropriated from natives who refused to live by Utopian rules.<sup>741</sup> Bill Ashcroft suggests that this episode in More's book, coming as it does before the establishment of the British Empire, shows the ideology of colonialism and imperialism deep within the English psyche.<sup>742</sup> Although we might question the means by which Ashcroft became privy to what constitutes an English psyche, his suggestion that the colonial aspect to utopian fiction is the 'fatal flaw' of the genre is convincing. More's text displays an imperial impulse in Utopian thought, a belief that the world can be made a better place, with a refusal to contemplate the effects on the human material being worked upon to achieve the end goal, an impulse that has echoes in White's *Underkill* which will be discussed in more detail later. Ashcroft draws out the colonial comparison in More's *Utopia*:

Here is the colonial process defined: the land was conquered; its name was changed; the indigenous inhabitants were 'civilized'; what was previously 'wasteland' was cultivated; and the land was physically reconstructed. The attitudes and assumptions necessary for large-scale settlement are here outlined. Above all, force is necessary for the establishment of a civilized society; land must be cultivated and reconstructed to be considered properly colonized; and the seal of this is the renaming of colonial space. Land that is not tilled and rendered fruitful is resumed [sic]. If any of Utopia's neighbours choose not to cultivate the ground, or maintain ground cultivated by the Utopians, they are promptly invaded.<sup>743</sup>

For Ashcroft this link between 'utopian unworldliness, property, and the total rule...focuses the deep colonial impulse in utopia.' In utopian thought, then, a redemptive modality is inevitably accompanied by a repressive modality.

---

<sup>741</sup> *Utopia*, p. 60.

<sup>742</sup> Bill Ashcroft, 'Critical Utopias', *Textual Practice*, 21.3 (2007), 411–431.

<sup>743</sup> *Textual Practice*, p. 415.



Edward Said suggests that the redemptive elements of the colonial mission are designed to be beneficial to the coloniser, with little regard for the effect on the colonised, writing that 'as human material, the Orient is less important than as an element in a Romantic redemptive project.'<sup>744</sup> Moylan suggests a similar utopian aspect to colonialism, remarking that the phenomenon allowed for the evils of European life to be set aside for an existence in a fresh territory, a utopian impulse that, as we have shown, drives Shaw's *The Shadow of Heaven*. Moylan remarks:

For social experimenters such as the Puritans, for entrepreneurs such as fur trappers and slavers and merchants, and for writers of travel narratives and utopian novels, the Americas especially offered space in which the imagination could work out alternatives that broke the bounds of the historical status quo.<sup>745</sup>

In an Irish context, a utopian impulse can be detected in Jonathan Bardon's account of Edmund Spenser's assertion that Ireland could not be reformed, but instead should be replaced. Bardon writes that Spenser felt that 'the existing commonwealth should be razed to the ground, and a perfect, new one should be built on its foundations.'<sup>746</sup> Jameson refers to this impulse as world reduction, a desire for a blank slate that he describes as 'the first moment of destruction and sweeping away' that allows for a utopian vision to be realised.<sup>747</sup> This moment of sweeping away leaves the prospect of creating a utopia in which humanity 'is released from the multiple determinisms (economic, political, social) of history itself: in which it settles its accounts with its ancient collective fatalisms, precisely to be free to do whatever it wants with its interpersonal relationships.'<sup>748</sup>

Ashcroft uses Utopian repression to question postcolonial utopian projects, inferring that any such projects are inevitably contaminated with the colonial legacy bequeathed to the utopian impulse. But a response to Ashcroft by Eoin Flannery suggests a more complex interaction between the redemptive and repressive modalities of the utopian impulse, Flannery arguing that an emancipatory postcolonial utopian

---

<sup>744</sup> *Orientalism*, p. 154.

<sup>745</sup> *Demand the Impossible*, p. 4.

<sup>746</sup> *Plantation of Ulster*, p. 128.

<sup>747</sup> Fredric Jameson, *Seeds of Time* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994) p. 90.

<sup>748</sup> *Archaeologies of the Future*, p. 275.

impulse exists, pointing to the Irish situation by way of example. For Flannery, postcolonial studies itself holds this emancipatory impulse, its critique of modernity constituting a utopian position.<sup>749</sup> Flannery refers to Luke Gibbons's assertion that the ideals of the United Irishmen of the late eighteenth century represent a 'postcolonial Enlightenment' that is 'supportive of indigenous cultures, [and] ... respects the cultural currency of the so-called "traditional" or "obsolescent" societies.'<sup>750</sup> The cross-cultural egalitarian ideal of the United Irishmen sought to include these Others within its democratic vision of Ireland. Flannery quotes Gibbons, who suggests that:

Part of the postcolonial...critique of the Enlightenment has been precisely its condescension, if not racist hostility towards 'native' cultures: by gesturing towards new versions of cultural interaction and religious tolerance, the United Irishmen may be seen as pre-empting this critique but without rejecting the powerful emancipatory vision of the Enlightenment in the process.<sup>751</sup>

Flannery's essay suggests that through the valence of postcolonialism, utopian thought becomes an impulse of hope for an inclusive future rather than a blueprint for a perfect society.

Ashcroft and Flannery's exchange recalls Kelly's suggestion of the redemptive and repressive modalities in popular fiction. But also key is the sociologist Karl Mannheim's proposal of an opposition between utopia and ideology, with ideology constituting an acceptance of the current social order and utopian thinking advocating constant transformation of that order.<sup>752</sup> For Moylan, this opposition between ideology and utopia, while valid, is an oversimplification, creating binary oppositions of two concepts that are in fact affected by the compromises of the other. Moylan draws from Jameson to suggest that the ideological is necessarily utopian, requiring an element of hope for the future in order for it to exist as an effective and alluring thought formation, and that the utopian is necessarily ideological, requiring the maintenance of a rigid concept of how the world works. This ideological closure would suggest that settling for the status quo as the best of all possible worlds is itself a utopian ideal, as well as

---

<sup>749</sup> Eoin Flannery, 'Ireland, Empire and Utopia: Irish postcolonial criticism and the Utopian impulse', *Textual Practice* 24.3 (2010) 453–481.

<sup>750</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 464.

<sup>751</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 464.

<sup>752</sup> Karl Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia: An Introduction to the Sociology of Knowledge* (New York: Harvest Books, 1936)

suggesting that believing oneself to be in the midst of great change for the better can also be a heavily ideological position. This gives both ideology and utopian thought a double aspect. Utopia is not merely a challenger to ideology, but must contain ideology in order to be effective. Moylan states that 'midwifed by authors of many persuasions and abilities, utopia has both reinforced the emerging economic order and attacked it as the official promises failed to meet the real needs of people's lives.'<sup>753</sup>

Ashcroft and Flannery's debate expresses this double aspect of the utopian impulse. A repressive imperial impulse, informed by the requirement for the eradication of whatever predates the perfect society, is balanced with a postcolonial redemptive impulse that positions inclusion as an ultimate value. In vulgar terms, we might suggest that the two-traditions paradigm in Northern Ireland is based on the utopian impulse embodied by the work ethic of the Planters, who see themselves as applying honest work to bring fruit to a barren land, and also the utopian ideals of the United Irishmen as outlined by Gibbons, who wish to unite the island across racial, religious and cultural lines. As we will see in this chapter, both the impulse to seed a barren land, and the utopian impulse to unite and totalise humanity, are in evidence in the work of Shaw and White, and both impulses hold repressive and redemptive modalities. This is unsurprising, as these are the impulses that drive the genre of science fiction, the wish to improve conditions through the application of technology, and the attempt to display the shift from one totalising system to another. It is doubly unsurprising in that both authors were writing against the backdrop of a society instilled with the histories and ideologemes that both redemptive and repressive modalities create. The logic of the Planter became the foundation of the Northern state, the impulse to totality across lines of religion became a founding myth of the Republic, both becoming historical repositories from which to draw rhetorical resources for political agitation in Northern Ireland.

A reference from *The Watch Below* demonstrates the operation of the double aspect to the utopian impulse in White's fiction. The Unthan are fleeing an ecologically-ruined planet in search of a new home, their mission framed as both a colonial and utopian task. White writes:

---

<sup>753</sup> *Demand the Impossible*, p. 5.

The truth was that none of them knew what would happen in detail, only that they would be close to a world which was cool and almost completely covered by tremendous oceans, and that they would have to map and investigate those oceans and choose sites for the initial settlements which must be at the correct depth and as free as possible from inimical life-forms, and that they must establish themselves securely enough and in enough time to guide in the main body of the Fleet...But now he would share nothing except a lifetime of work and worry and hope which was so faint at times that it verged on outright deception.<sup>754</sup>

The utopian impulse here is both redemptive and repressive. White describes a future goal that those tasked will never get to see. Their share of what they are working towards becomes a narrow hope. The impulse remains redemptive in the will to establish a settlement to continue the project of the Unthan race, repressive and ideological in that those working for that outcome will never enjoy the fruit of their labour.

True to Moylan's description of the critical utopia, in *Dark Inferno*, Mercer is wary of using the word utopia to describe the world that has been built on the colonies, White writing that 'Mercer was too cynical to believe that the people of the Jovian colonies had built a utopia for themselves, it was simply that they had been very thoroughly screened.'<sup>755</sup> But as seen in the case of More's *Utopia*, this notion of selection and planning can be an integral part of the utopian vision and one that traces a line through White's work. For instance, as noted already, O'Riordan's 'colony of the true faith' in *The Silent Stars Go By*, is planned through the removal of non-Christians from the main party of colonists in an attempt to instigate 'an Earth which did not know the Fall.'<sup>756</sup> This exclusionary perspective on utopia is highlighted in the suggestion that through careful selection, the vices of 'happy powder' and prostitution will not be transplanted to the new world.<sup>757</sup> The notion of utopia as a selection process is also found in *The Dream Millennium* with Brother Howard carefully selecting the crew for his mission to seed a new world, like the Puritans leaving a violent and fallen world behind and beginning anew. Howard explains that, in a world of deviant identities he has been attempting to find the required people to seed the new world.<sup>758</sup>

---

<sup>754</sup> *Watch Below*, p. 78.

<sup>755</sup> *Dark Inferno*, p. 29.

<sup>756</sup> *Silent Stars Go By*, p. 240.

<sup>757</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 24.

<sup>758</sup> *Dream Millennium*, p. 113.

This notion of a select few with the knowledge to bring about a transformation in human society recurs across utopian fiction and the science fiction that came after it, whether in H.G. Wells's idea of a class of technocratic 'samurai' who will lead a future perfect society, or hard science fiction's faith in the problem-solving scientist.<sup>759</sup> In the post-space travel era, this emphasis on a select group is translated into what the writer on space travel Frank White calls 'the overview effect', the idea that those who have travelled into space and looked back upon the Earth are a chosen few privy to a vision of a harmonious and pacific human future.<sup>760</sup> This effect becomes part of the utopian charge of science fiction in the era of space travel, and is utilised by Shaw and White in their fictions. The next section will discuss the overview effect and its implications for how the science fiction texts of Shaw and White interact with Northern Irish culture and history and, particularly in the case of White, how an interaction with the overview effect exaggerates the repressive modality of the utopian impulse.

### **The Overview Effect**

The requirement for an outside threat to unite humanity is an often-used trope in science fiction, spanning at the very least the period between H.G. Wells's *War of the Worlds* in 1898 and Alan Moore's comic book *Watchmen* in 1986. The trope has also been utilised in the political arena. Peter Szendy, for example, quotes Ronald Reagan as remarking that 'perhaps we need some outside, universal threat to make us recognise this common bond. I occasionally think how quickly our differences worldwide would vanish if we were facing an alien threat from another world.'<sup>761</sup> For Szendy, this idea of being watched from outside the Earth gives humanity a position from which to view the human race as a whole. Szendy draws from Kant who suggests that:

If the course of human affairs seems so senseless to us, perhaps it lies in a poor choice of position from which we regard it. Viewed from the earth, the planets sometimes move backwards, sometimes forward and sometimes not

---

<sup>759</sup> H.G. Wells, *A Modern Utopia* (London: Penguin, 2005); Andy Weir, *The Martian* (New York: Random House, 2014)

<sup>760</sup> Frank White, *The Overview Effect: Space Exploration and Human Evolution* (Reston: American Institute of Aeronautics and Astronautics, 1998)

<sup>761</sup> *Kant in the Land of Extraterrestrials*, p. 14.

at all. But if the standpoint selected is the sun, an act which only reason can perform, according to the Copernican hypothesis, they move constantly in their regular course.<sup>762</sup>

Being afforded a perspective on the planet as a whole, then, lends the viewer a privileged point from which to view human action, allowing the viewer to perceive humanity as one rather than a panoply of races and cultures. As Patricia Monk notes, the N.A.S.A. photograph 'Earthrise', taken of the Earth from the surface of the moon in December 1968, changed human perceptions of the world and the conception of the human place in the universe forever.<sup>763</sup> The utopian aspect of such a notion is clear, with the implication that a perfect and unified human system free from conflict would arise should such an outside perspective be universally acquired.

The writer on space travel Frank White terms this perspective 'the overview effect' and suggests that those who have viewed the Earth from space are afforded a privileged perspective on politics and human conflict.<sup>764</sup> F. White begins his book looking down at Washington from his seat in a plane, observing that 'I knew that people down there were making life and death decisions on my behalf and taking themselves very seriously as they did. From high in the jet stream it seemed absurd that they could have an impact on my life. It was like ants making laws for humans.'<sup>765</sup> For F. White, the human settlement of other planets is a foregone conclusion with major implications for politics on Earth. F. White suggests that those who live in space settlements will be possessed of this overview effect constantly, perceiving as folly the limited ideologies that those on Earth are trapped within.

Through interviews with former astronauts, F. White attempts to suggest that this new perspective has the potential to bring about peaceful solutions to disagreements on Earth. Michael Collins, the astronaut who circled the moon while Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin walked upon its surface, is quoted as saying:

---

<sup>762</sup> *Kant in the Land of Extraterrestrials*, p. 56.

<sup>763</sup> *Alien Theory*, p. 319.

<sup>764</sup> Frank White, *The Overview Effect: Space Exploration and Human Evolution* (Reston: American Institute of Aeronautics and Astronautics, 1998) The author will be referred to as F. White throughout the chapter to avoid confusion with James White.

<sup>765</sup> *Overview Effect*, p. 3.

I think the view from 100,000 miles could be invaluable in getting people together to work out joint solutions, by causing them to realise that the planet we share unites us in a way far more basic and far more important than differences in skin colour or religion or economic system. The pity of it is that so far the view from 100,000 miles has been the exclusive property of a handful of test pilots, rather than the world leaders who need this new perspective, or the poets who might communicate it to them.<sup>766</sup>

But the astronaut Gene Cernan's account departs from a sense of a perfect perspective when he remarks that he 'reared back and looked at Earth with no local frame of reference at all.'<sup>767</sup> We might well ask why the lack of a local frame of reference is suggested as a positive aspect of space travel and how exactly it might lead to benevolent humanitarian ends.<sup>768</sup> But for F. White, the experience of space travel affords universal insight to the traveller, offering a vision of one people living on one world, a fragile and insignificant Earth, an insight that the writer feels will inevitably lead to the diminishing of nationalism and political ideology. F. White's hope is that as more and more people experience space travel, this insight will become more influential in human culture and have a pacifying effect.

In a Northern Irish context, Colin Graham discusses the same phenomenon as the 'Gagarin point of view', in reference to the Soviet Cosmonaut who became the first human to venture into outer space.<sup>769</sup> Writing about post-Belfast Agreement artwork from Northern Ireland, Graham suggests that 'there is often an emphasis on a fleeting moment of understanding, or belonging, or the creation (or re-creation) of community; and occasionally the fragility of such work means that it finds itself thrown into a kind of orbital perspective, that of the local spaceman.'<sup>770</sup> Graham discusses the work of the artist Seán Hillen, in particular his use of the figure Newry Gagarin, an astronaut character that is cut and pasted into montages of Irish Troubles imagery in works such as 'Newry Gagarin #6', in which the astronaut floats above a twelfth of July parade in

---

<sup>766</sup> *Overview Effect*, p. 37. In a suggestion that echoes the fiction of James White, Collins suggests that the best crew for an Apollo mission would be a philosopher, a priest and a poet, before adding that 'unfortunately, they would kill themselves trying to fly the spacecraft.'

<sup>767</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 41.

<sup>768</sup> Indeed, Kim Stanley Robinson's Mars Trilogy more convincingly depicts a culture of space travel in which ideological and political conflicts are transmitted to Mars colonies by their human colonists and played out there. See Kim Stanley Robinson, *Red Mars* (1993), *Green Mars* (1994), *Blue Mars* (1996).

<sup>769</sup> Colin Graham, 'Gagarin's Point of View: Memory and Space in Recent Northern Irish Art', *The Irish Review* 40/41 (2009), 104-113.

<sup>770</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 108.

Belfast, or 'Newry Gagarin Crosses the Border', in which Gagarin is depicted floating above the checkpoint and observation towers policing movement between Northern Ireland and the Republic.<sup>771</sup> For Graham, the figure of Gagarin is an attempt by Hillen to find an outside perspective on the conflict, and simultaneously a comment on 'the impossibility of untainted knowledge, of clarity of image, in Northern Ireland.'<sup>772</sup> Here, the overview effect is posited as an angle from which to view the conflict in Northern Ireland, an attempt at understanding the situation from an estranged position.

James White often proclaimed himself a pacifist in interviews, and from the beginning, his fiction utilises the overview effect, with a planet seen from space inspiring a revelation of beauty and simplicity, often together with a resulting conviction that lasting peace can be achieved. White's first novel *The Secret Visitors* has Lockhart's realisation that 'the Earth from eighty miles up, was beautiful.'<sup>773</sup> In *Tomorrow is Too Far*, as Carson prepares for a space launch, he remarks to himself that 'for the chance of looking out of a window, which might very well get steamed up anyway, he was going to risk his life.'<sup>774</sup> Again in *Dark Inferno*, the act of looking back at Earth from space is posited as valuable in itself with the suggestion that 'the television pictures of this had only been a shadow of reality and, one way or another, a man could pay an awful lot to see scenery like this.'<sup>775</sup> A view of the Earth from space is also depicted as enhancing human life, White writing that 'human life seemed to grow more and more valuable the farther it was removed from Earth.'<sup>776</sup> For an example of the limitations of the overview effect, aliens watching the Earth from space in *The Watch Below* remark on how peaceful the planet is, unaware that WWII is taking place on its surface. White writes:

From space the Earth was a serene and beautiful world circling a young and relatively cool sun. The great ice caps, the tremendous stretches of ocean and the dazzling white carpets of the cloud layers were blurred both by distance and atmospheric haze so that outwardly it was a planet of great beauty and peace. It would have required a telescope of fantastic power and definition to resolve the tiny sparks on the night side which were torpedoed ships or bombed and burning towns, and on the sunlit hemisphere the disturbance

---

<sup>771</sup> Seán Hillen, *Irelantis* (Dublin: Irelantis Publishing, 1999).

<sup>772</sup> *Irish Review* 40/41, p. 109.

<sup>773</sup> *Secret Visitors*, p. 53.

<sup>774</sup> *Tomorrow is Too Far*, p. 145.

<sup>775</sup> *Dark Inferno*, p. 28.

<sup>776</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 37.



caused by the waging of World War Two was also of too minor a nature to register over interstellar distances.<sup>777</sup>

*All Judgement Fled* betrays the influence of H.G. Wells's *War of the Worlds*, an Earth finally unified by the malignant attention of an alien race. In that novel, Berryman asks 'is some superhuman extraterrestrial intelligence already brushing our minds with unfelt tendrils of thought, sizing us up, judging us and perhaps with us the whole human race? Or is some bug-eyed buggler sitting at a rocket launcher just waiting for us to come into range?'<sup>778</sup> Echoing the quote from Ronald Reagan, in White's novel the discovery that humanity is not alone in the universe creates unity on Earth, with White suggesting that, 'the realisation came that their world had changed, that it was no longer the world but just a world with all that that implied.'<sup>779</sup>

In White, the overview effect unites humanity against alien threat or provides a perspective with which to view the Earth as a whole and aesthetically beautiful planet. Like Seán Hillen's Gagarin character, White utilises the overview effect to describe a humanity realising its own insignificance in the face of the magnitude of space. In the *Locus* article, White suggests that he writes science fiction as a means of escaping the realities of the 'frustrating and dangerous and tragic place' that he sees Northern Ireland as, and, as will be shown, the overview effect is an integral component of this impulse to find an outside perspective on the conflict.<sup>780</sup>

But it could be suggested that any perceptions inspired by a view of the world as a globe are contaminated with the prejudices of the nations that have achieved that aim through technology. As Thomas Richards suggests 'by definition, anything "global" is Western', so the conflicts deemed insignificant are those that do not chime with Western advantage.<sup>781</sup> Similarly, F. White suggests that the overview effect will have a depoliticising effect on human consciousness, but in practice the so-called revelations that are provoked by it are deeply ideological. For instance, F. White quotes from the Apollo astronaut Russell L. Schweickart who writes 'there you are—hundreds

---

<sup>777</sup> *Watch Below*, p. 7.

<sup>778</sup> *All Judgement Fled*, p. 42.

<sup>779</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 145.

<sup>780</sup> *Locus*, 386 (1993) p. 74.

<sup>781</sup> *Imperial Archive*, p. 41.

of people in the Mideast killing each other over some imaginary line that you're not even aware of and that you can't see.'<sup>782</sup> F. White emphasises what he sees as the apolitical nature of the overview effect, but the conflicts that the viewer conceives of as inconsequential while occupying its privileged position, reveals much about the politics of the viewer.

The overview effect places an emphasis on losing contact with local conditions and observing a broad picture of humanity that privileges the effacing of historical circumstance. David E. Nye points to a similar perspective in the American technological sublime, whereby skyscrapers promote a kind of 'concrete abstraction', allowing the viewer to triangulate their position within the cityscape they observe from the perspective the sheer height of the skyscraper affords. Nye's insight that the element of the technological sublime sensed at the dawn of the skyscraper combined both awe and pacification, providing 'Olympian views that appeared to transcend politics' also connects suggestively to the ideological content of the notion of the overview effect.<sup>783</sup> Like this form of the sublime, the overview effect only appears to transcend politics, and remains heavily ideological. Another element of the overview effect appears to be a lack of empathy, a phenomenon that has a sinister connotation when applied to the context of military hardware. As H. Bruce Franklyn suggests:

One of the distinguishing features of the warplane as an instrument of genocide is the dissociation it offers from its own effects. The interior of the plane does not even seem to be in the same universe as the victims on the ground. Divorced from the carnage it wreaks, the warplane becomes an icon of power, speed, beauty, cooperation, and technological ritual.<sup>784</sup>

The concrete abstraction allows for a feeling that the object being viewed is mere material to be worked on, a common theme in the fiction of White as the overview effect winds itself through his fiction. In this way, the overview effect echoes the repressive element of the utopian impulse as expressed by Ashcroft, the moment of primitive accumulation and world reduction that is required before a utopian project can be established.

---

<sup>782</sup> *Overview Effect*, p. 11.

<sup>783</sup> *American Technological Sublime*, p. 223.

<sup>784</sup> H. Bruce Franklin, *War Stars: The Superweapon and the American Imagination* (Oxford University Press, 1988) p. 119.

An example of the repressive utopian aspect to the overview effect can be found by returning to White's *Underkill*, in which the overview effect combines with a medical discourse, and leads to the manipulation of Earth from a distance by alien forces instilled with a repressive utopian impulse and bolstered by concrete abstraction. We have already considered the dystopian aspects of the novel, but this element is countered in the narrative by an alien race called the Trennechorans, who attempt to cure humanity of its supposed sickness by instigating acts of terror in this thinly-veiled future Belfast. Observing Earth from afar, the privileged view of the Trennechorans has enabled the race to diagnose a malady in humanity. White writes 'when Trennechoran probes discovered intelligent life on Earth during the sixteenth century, it was already apparent that the dominant species and its culture were in the advanced stages of a terminal illness.'<sup>785</sup> Here, the overview effect offers an advantageous position from which to view humanity and the ills affecting it.

The overview effect as conceived by the Trennechorans leads to the framing of humanity within a medical discourse, a way of speaking about the intractability of human conflicts and possible interventions. The interventions the Trennechorans perform, involving acts of terrorism and political manipulation, are effected through the 'injection' of clones, described benignly as 'brave, resourceful, ethical antibodies' that will 'neutralise the disease which was killing the planet'.<sup>786</sup> The Trennechorans have split into two opposing but complementary ideological formations termed the Lukes and the Johns. Whereas the approach of the Johns involves intervention through education, the Lukes accuse their compatriots of moral cowardice, and are said to have come to a realisation that the Trennechorans have not been proactive enough in combating problems on Earth. The manifestation of the overview effect opined by the Lukes is described as 'when in doubt, cut it out' by White, who continues by remarking that 'if an individual or a population was giving trouble they preferred to remove rather than re-educate.'<sup>787</sup> The tactics of the 'ethical antibodies' of the Lukes involve bombings and murders, in an attempt to remove 'uncontrolled growth, cancerous, adipose, and emotionally desensitised tissue which must be excised.'<sup>788</sup> White uses an

---

<sup>785</sup> *Underkill*, p. 139.

<sup>786</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 139-140.

<sup>787</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 141-142.

<sup>788</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 169.

intensive care manual to expand on the view of Earth that the aliens have, writing that ‘...its purpose is to maintain accurate, continuous observations of the patient’s vital functions, and to treat or support a failing or failed biological system. Ideally it should maintain life until the precipitating causes of the failure can be identified and successfully treated to allow the affected system to gain control.’<sup>789</sup>

Humanity in *Underkill* is reduced to mere material to be worked upon with the utopian intentions of the Trennechorans, inspired by their overview effect to manifest their interventions in a repressive mode exacerbated by their reliance on concrete abstraction. Said’s observation regarding the redemptive role that such intervention plays for the culture of the redeemer is echoed in the fact that the actions of the Trennechorans are a means to atone for an earlier encounter with the planet Plessat, a planet on which the Trennechorans had also detected a malady, but that was the subject of such a protracted debate regarding suitable intervention that the inhabitants of the planet perished. The Trennechorans suggest that a repeat of this on Earth would mean ‘the philosophical ruin’ of Trennechoran culture.<sup>790</sup> The intention of the Trennechorans to cut into society on Earth with surgical precision echoes Patrick Carroll’s discussion of William Petty, already discussed in Chapter One, for whom the ‘instruments of government were the means to cut into the body politic and act on its constitutive parts.’<sup>791</sup> The Trennechorans use surgical and medical discourse to legitimise their work, repressive utopian discourses that are also apparent in Frank White’s articulation of the overview effect, exemplified by a quote from the Apollo astronaut Edgar Mitchell who divulges that on a lunar expedition he felt that ‘humanity might be like a malignant growth, a cancer on planet Earth.’ Expanding on the metaphor, Mitchell states ‘beneath that blue and white atmosphere was a growing chaos that the inhabitants of earth were breeding among themselves—the population and technology were growing rapidly out of control. The crew of spaceship earth was in virtual mutiny to the order of the Universe.’<sup>792</sup>

---

<sup>789</sup> *Underkill*, p. 170.

<sup>790</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 169.

<sup>791</sup> *Science, Culture and Modern State Formation*, p. 60.

<sup>792</sup> *Overview Effect*, p. 85.

Those in possession of the privileged perspective of the overview effect presume themselves privy to the order of the universe, as well as the steps required to maintain it. This is not such a pacific stance as F. White would suggest. In *Underkill* it is difficult to detect whether the text approves of the methods of the Trennechorans, or if they represent a fantasy of the conflict in Northern Ireland, an attempt to shape an understanding of the conflict through estrangement, whereby terrorism becomes a necessary means of curing a sick humanity. An old man called Hesketh confronts some Lukes as they are about to destroy a housing block and is told that 'future generations will admire our daring, our self-discipline and our strength of character which enables us to be ruthless so that a great good would come.'<sup>793</sup> Hesketh's response appears to be voicing White's own feelings regarding the Troubles, disparaging 'self-appointed freedom fighters', but as we will see, the closure of the narrative suggests a more complex reading, and one that renders White's purported pacifism ambiguous. When pressed by the old man on the innocent civilians that will die in the attack, the Luke speaks with the utopian detachment of the overview effect in its repressive mode, telling him:

Don't be tiresome, old man... Next thing you'll be asking what did any of them ever do to deserve this? Individually we have nothing against them. We'll be very glad if a few are able to survive. But for the ultimate good they, as a group, have to die. It is part of a greater plan and it is necessary... it will have to be done again and again until our object is achieved, no matter how distressing we as individuals find the work.<sup>794</sup>

As the project accelerates, the novel begins to frame the project in terms of a concrete abstraction and medical discourse. At the close of the novel, a Trennechoran declares:

The surplus and diseased tissue will be removed, using various mass-destruction techniques such as the thermonuclear devices already available on Earth, flooding, famine, controlled earthquakes, fire, disease, and various combinations of these. Isolated pockets of infection will require special measures, but these will be the responsibility of the local and Trennechoran B Guardians using the terrorist and communal violence weapons. In many cases it will be necessary to drastically reduce the numbers of a city population while allowing key groups and classes of individuals to survive, and this requires careful manipulation of the socio-political forces involved so that they will be self-cancelling. Your own city is such a case and, as the operation proceeds, you will be aware of the self-elimination of excess population in this way.<sup>795</sup>

---

<sup>793</sup> *Underkill*, p. 46.

<sup>794</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 49.

<sup>795</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 169-170.

At the close of the novel, in a first person narrative voice, White writes of ‘so much diseased tissue which must be removed as quickly and efficiently as possible, for the good of the patient. For the need of the patient!’<sup>796</sup> The narrative closes with the ‘operation to save Earth’ proceeding, as a jaded nurse and doctor return to their duties to deal with the casualties.<sup>797</sup> At the close of the narrative of *Underkill*, the perspective of the narrator has fused with that of the Trennechorans who are perpetrating the necessary violence. In White’s narrative in *Underkill*, violence perpetrated to cure the malady affecting Earth is justified, whether that violence manifests as an instigated ‘natural disaster’ or takes on the formal appearance of terror in a Northern Irish context. The resolution of White’s novel cedes to the morality of the repressive utopianism of the Trennechorans, giving in to the logic of concrete abstraction that renames terrorist attacks as surgical interventions.

Fennell suggests that in White ‘the material causes of violence, and the ideologies that excuse it, are unimportant because only the results are of any consequence—death, maimed bodies and shattered minds’, but this analysis is only half correct in the case of *Underkill*.<sup>798</sup> It is true that White’s fiction is uninterested in the social factors that churn up conflict, but what Fennell neglects is the fact that it is the position of the Trennechorans that is vindicated in the narrative. A quotation from White’s interview with *Locus* is instructive. White remarks of Northern Ireland:

The people are very nice, regardless of whether they’re Protestant or Catholics or whatever. But it’s these poisonous few, who keep it all boiling over and won’t allow anybody to settle. Most of the stories, I write about the sort of characters and the sort of world I would like to live in. I’m trying to escape from reality.<sup>799</sup>

White’s pacifism will be discussed in more detail in the next section, but suffice to say for now that, in *Underkill*, the pacifist White becomes embroiled in a contradiction. Maimed bodies and shattered minds are tolerated as long as the cause is a peaceful one, and as long as those affected are part of the poisonous few who are responsible for the

---

<sup>796</sup> *Underkill*, p. 175.

<sup>797</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 176.

<sup>798</sup> *Irish Science Fiction*, p. 164.

<sup>799</sup> *Locus*, 386 (1993) p. 74.

malady of mankind. When viewed through the prism of the overview effect, human life becomes a body examined for malignant growths to be excised.

This medical discourse is also apparent in Northern Irish politics, a way of speaking that manifests in a repressive form of utopianism that attempts to define and remove what White refers to as the poisonous few. Eight years before the publication of *Underkill*, the last prime minister of Northern Ireland Brian Faulkner defended the practice of internment by remarking that 'you can no more deal with such deep rooted terror without toughness and determination than you can excise a deep seated tumour without cutting the flesh. It is not a pleasant business. Sometimes innocent people will suffer.'<sup>800</sup> Faulkner introduced internment in the province in 1971, having been involved in a previous experiment with internment as Minister for Home Affairs in 1959. The instigation of Operation Demetrius in 1971 involved the mass arrest and imprisonment of those suspected of membership of the I.R.A., but those arrested also included civil rights activists, trade unionists and other elements felt likely to protest the measure. According to McKitterick and McVea:

It later emerged that more than a dozen suspects had been given special experimental interrogation treatment. They were subjected to sensory deprivation techniques which included the denial of sleep and food and being forced to stand spreadeagled against a wall for long periods. Taped electronic 'white noise' sounds were continuously played to complete the disorientation.<sup>801</sup>

John McGuffin suggests that such acts served the purpose of perfecting the use of sensory deprivation techniques on civilians, as well as gleaning information regarding subversive groups. McGuffin traces the history of the techniques used by the British in Northern Ireland from the early years of the Soviet Union, when Chinese and Koreans were eager to use psychological manipulation to convert American and British prisoners of war to communism. McGuffin suggests that experiments on military volunteers failed because an element of fear was not present. With Northern Ireland as an experimental laboratory, test subjects were available with the adequate levels of both stress and fear required to conduct the experiment.<sup>802</sup>

---

<sup>800</sup> *Making Sense of the Troubles*, p. 69.

<sup>801</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 68.

<sup>802</sup> John McGuffin, *The Guineapigs* (London: Penguin, 1974) pp. 11-42.

Faulkner's defence of the reaction of the state to the threat posed by paramilitaries could have come from the pages of White's *Underkill*, published in 1979, eight years after Operation Demetrius. What Faulkner and White express is a kind of state of exception, in which, through the introduction of extralegal measures, the state is returned to some undefined ideal of order and normality. Aaron Kelly traces this discourse in the Northern Irish Troubles thriller, detecting a recurring trope whereby S.A.S. characters advocate a shoot-to-kill policy for dealing with the I.R.A. Kelly writes that such narratives seek to 'legitimise subsequent action of otherwise dubious legality by the hero or the state in repairing the status quo.'<sup>803</sup> In support of this, Kelly quotes Walter Benjamin who suggests that 'the tradition of the oppressed teaches us that the "state of emergency" in which we live is not the exception but the rule.'<sup>804</sup>

According to Giorgio Agamben, the state of exception has a close relationship with the notion of civil war. Echoing Benjamin, Agamben writes 'because civil war is the opposite of normal conditions, it lies in a zone of undecidability with respect to the state of exception, which is state power's immediate response to the most extreme internal conflicts.'<sup>805</sup> Agamben suggests that the state of exception has become 'the dominant paradigm of government in contemporary politics', a paradigm that operates at the 'threshold of indeterminacy between democracy and absolutism.'<sup>806</sup> In this indeterminate space, those seized by the US in the war on terror, for instance, become neither prisoners nor people accused, but simply detainees. David Lloyd suggests a continuum comprising the contemporary iteration of the state of exception and that of Northern Ireland in the period of the Troubles. According to Lloyd, practices in Northern Ireland during the period of the Troubles had wide-ranging implications, its state of exception seeping into politics in both Britain and the U.S., including the introduction of 'enhanced interrogation techniques' that, in another echo of White's *Underkill*, were 'shaped by psychological and medical practice.'<sup>807</sup> Lloyd terms this

---

<sup>803</sup> *Thriller and Northern Ireland*, p. 16.

<sup>804</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16; Walter Benjamin, 'Theses on the Philosophy of History' in *Illuminations* ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1985) p. 257.

<sup>805</sup> Giorgio Agamben, *State of Exception* trans. Kevin Attell (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005)

<sup>806</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 2-3.

<sup>807</sup> *Irish Culture and Colonial Modernity*, p. 13, 184.



repressive modality 'interrogation modernity'.<sup>808</sup> According to Lloyd 'the dominant logic of civilisation has always allowed for the practice of violence against those whom it regards as the uncivilised or the enemies of civilisation.'<sup>809</sup> This gives civilisation a repressive utopian colouring, echoing More's *Utopia*, in which those occupying the ground on which the perfect society is to be built are brutalised or banished.

Technologies of interrogative modernity and torture leave a trace in the work of White, not only in the relationship between the Trennechorans and the subjects of their Earthly project. Darius Rejali suggests that the existence of a truth serum used in interrogations is a myth believed by some human rights activists, and the patients in the hospital in White's *Underkill* are treated with truth serum in order for them to recall their experiences, a total recall medication that is allowed to be given forcibly to citizens who were not under arrest.<sup>810</sup> The serum is said to cause 'severe mental confusion and a pounding headache which did not respond to any of the known palliatives.'<sup>811</sup>

Turning to the work of Shaw for a moment, traces of interrogative modernity and torture can also be detected. The scene of torture in the slow glass story 'A Dome of Many-coloured Glass', previously discussed in Chapter Three, with its ideological battle between the Planner and the Private reflects the origins of many sensory deprivation experiments in China's concern with converting prisoners of war. As McGuffin remarks, during the Korean War, the term 'brain-washing gained popular currency', and the techniques used in turn inspired US attempts to develop similar technologies. In 'A Dome of Many-coloured Glass', slow glass becomes a torture device with which to broadcast the failings of the ideological position of the tortured subject directly into the person's eyes.<sup>812</sup> Much as the Trennechorans' hope to shape human material speaks of a repressive utopian impulse, the Planner's wish to alter the perception of the captured US soldier also represents a repressive modality. Rather than

---

<sup>808</sup> Lloyd also detects a redemptive Utopian impulse in the space of the prison during this period in the communities forged by those incarcerated. For Lloyd this constituted a space containing the 'discontinuous living on of practices scheduled for annihilation'. But Lloyd suggests that this Utopianism was imagined from 'the damaged conditions of actual human existence' rather than any plan for ultimate perfection. See *Irish Culture and Colonial Modernity*, p. 17.

<sup>809</sup> *Ibid.*, 195.

<sup>810</sup> Darius Rejali, *Torture and Democracy* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2007) p. 38.

<sup>811</sup> *Underkill*, p. 67.

<sup>812</sup> *Other Days, Other Eyes*, p. 94.

execute the prisoner, the Planner hopes to have him confess to the crimes of his country and to send him back. Shaw writes of the Planner's appraisal of his prisoner: 'the softness, the obvious lack of political or social will, had been an affront to the Planner's whole existence, and something had prompted him to mould the clay which had been placed in his hands.'<sup>813</sup> The Planner's technique of torture involves showing the soldier how his enemies have seen him, with slow glass bearing testimony to the crimes of imperialism. Shaw's description of Evans is that of a medically-tortured subject, with Doctor Sing engaged to help the Planner in operating the technological torture device. Shaw writes: 'Evans now had brilliantly glowing multi-coloured discs in place of eyes. Sing picked up an object like a black flashlight, moved its slide and pointed it briefly at the prisoner's face. The jewels came to life, swirling with microscopic movement.' Shaw describes the resulting display as 'Atrocityville for a full twelve hours', Sing announcing that the Planner's prisoner has escaped into psychosis as a result.<sup>814</sup>

This element of Shaw's story offers an analogue to McGuffin's detailing of the psychological trauma of those on the receiving end of the experimental interrogation techniques during the internment process in Northern Ireland. McGuffin explains how prisoners subjected to white noise experiments suffered audio hallucinations, becoming convinced they could hear the voice of Ian Paisley or the sound of traditional Irish music in the wall of sound. In Shaw's story, Evans escapes into a nostalgic past inspired by Francis Hastings Doyle's poem 'The Private of the Buffs'. The poem details the capture of a British soldier by the Chinese during the Opium Wars of the nineteenth century.

The figure of the tortured body and the notion of the state of exception are also found in Shaw's *Orbitsville Departure*, when the policeman Dallen discovers a bomb plot and considers whether to follow procedure or pursue the case through more extra-judicial means. Dallen decides that following procedure will give the terrorist the advantage. Shaw writes: 'the orthodox course would be to produce identification...But handling the situation that way, legally and properly, would have an inevitable consequence—a near-complete victory for the terrorist infiltrator.'<sup>815</sup> When Dallen

---

<sup>813</sup> *Other Days, Other Eyes*, p. 95.

<sup>814</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 100.

<sup>815</sup> *Orbitsville Departure*, p. 39.

catches the 'bomber', he comments on his 'standard-issue Zapata moustache', echoing Kelly's suggestion that stereotypes of the terrorist 'do not emerge out of situations of representational surety or truth...but rather emerge out of a crisis in representation where a different reality is too complex to understand.'<sup>816</sup> Subsequently, the narrative presents a 'ticking bomb' scenario, as Dallen places the bomb, described by Shaw as a 'silver phallus', underneath the bomber and asks for the information to defuse it.<sup>817</sup> Dallen's performance is designed to emasculate the perpetrator, eroticising the act of torture. According to Lloyd: 'where the detective was among the erotically charged vernacular icons of modernity, the victim of torture has begun to occupy the imaginary identifications of the contemporary subject.'<sup>818</sup> In regard to the ticking bomb scenario, Lloyd suggests that the torturer is presented as the ethical citizen, a presentation which Lloyd suggests constitutes a pathological condition driven by fear. Lloyd suggests that this constitutes 'a breakdown of the subject position of modernity that has been underwritten throughout its history by both an ethical and an aesthetic commitment to disinterest on the part of the spectator.'<sup>819</sup> The ticking bomb scenario, then, embodies the state of exception, challenging a modern notion of justice that presumes disinterest on the part of lawmakers. In Shaw's novel, the ethical torturer becomes judge and jury for the criminal, a trespass on the value of the separation of powers that Lloyd suggests as a foundation of modernity.

Kelly suggests that the figure of the 'disenchanted outsider' who, while working for the authorities, chooses to work outside the law is a standard figure in crime fiction that also finds a specific articulation in the instance of the Troubles thriller. Kelly suggests this narrative as a 'terrorising the terrorists' discourse, but remarks that both a repressive and redemptive modality operate within its confines. According to Kelly: 'while the repressive modality vents an often rampant racism demanding the structural elimination of Irishness and Irish characters, the whole premise of 'terrorising the terrorists' divulges an effort to adopt the values and wish-fulfilments encoded in the ideologeme of the Terrorist—an ideologeme invoking allegories of community, of assured masculinity, of national commitment.'<sup>820</sup> For Kelly, the figure of the terrorist

---

<sup>816</sup> *Thriller and Northern Ireland*, p. 32.

<sup>817</sup> *Orbitsville Departure*, p. 42.

<sup>818</sup> *Irish Culture and Colonial Modernity*, p. 188.

<sup>819</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 192.

<sup>820</sup> *Thriller and Northern Ireland*, p. 49.

becomes a substitute for the loss of the sense of masculinity implied by the end of empire, resulting in a yearning for the collective formations and value systems from which the figure emerges. An ambiguous version of this figure emerges in *Underkill* as Inspector Reynolds thwarts an explosion at a nitrates plant on Tamar Street, firing into a crowd of Trennechorans disguised as human terrorists. Reynolds asks himself whether 'he was just another symptom of the disease afflicting his society or if he was contributing in a small way towards its eventual cure'. He concludes that the targets are 'human-like things who intended wiping out large numbers of human beings...and eliminating them should not bother him.'<sup>821</sup> Here Reynolds adopts the medical discourse and locates himself as either symptom or cure, engaging in the concrete abstraction of the overview effect. The intention of these 'human-like' things is identical to the intention of Reynolds—to cure the malady infecting humanity. When Reynolds adopts the position of 'terrorising the terrorists', he shares in the values and wish-fulfillments of the Trennechorans, estranged from local conditions through the overview effect.

The overview effect is a utopian notion with a repressive and redemptive mode. As it manifests in the fiction of White, the overview effect combines with a medical discourse that amplifies its repressive modality, allowing White's narrative to coalesce into an acceptance of violence in order to curb the excesses of a sick humanity. This Gagarin perspective purports to sit outside ideology, but as seen by the examples given by F. White, loss of contact with local conditions renders it a deeply ideological position, in which a dehistoricising tendency feeds into a sense of concrete abstraction that has real life analogues in the governance of Northern Ireland, and the way in which issues such as internment and torture are discussed. White's narrative in *Underkill* adopts the position of the overview effect, both in its acceptance of the medical discourse of the Trennechorans, and, as just shown, in the response of the Police Inspector Reynolds as he summarily executes suspected terrorists.

The repressive element of this utopian impulse is strong, as a desire for a peaceful totality calls for the violent eradication of deviant elements, those White refers to as the poisonous few. This impulse to world reduction aims to clear deviant elements

---

<sup>821</sup> *Underkill*, p. 133.

that stand in the way of creating the perfect society. As a consequence, White's fiction identifies with the authority imposing order rather than with those suffering violence, state-sponsored or paramilitary. In *Underkill*, terrorism is rendered acceptable when reframed as a kind of violence that imposes order. The utopian aspect to White's writing is inextricably linked to his purported pacifism, and any study of the writer's work would be incomplete without examining how pacifist principles manifest in his science fiction. The next section will attempt to do so.

### **Pacifism and White**

White has declared himself a pacifist in interviews, and opined the nonviolent aspects of his work, so it might be useful to look at this claim in more detail, in particular how a commitment to nonviolence is expressed across his fiction. As will be discussed in this section, White's pacifism manifests as a utopian gesture. But before turning to White's fiction, it would be useful to briefly examine the tradition of nonviolence, a tradition that in the West can be traced back to the Sermon on the Mount in which Jesus exhorts a crowd to love one's enemies and turn the other cheek when struck. Early Christians were known for their militant dedication to the principle of nonviolence, an example being the execution in the year 295 of the Roman Maximilianus for refusing to serve in the army, citing the incompatibility of violence with his Christian beliefs.<sup>822</sup> The nonviolent aspect of Christianity became compromised as the religion attained mainstream acceptance after the conversion of Constantine in 312. Saint Augustine's 'just war' theory became the definitive statement on this compromise, a theory that sought to explain why violence was justified in certain circumstances. Thomas Merton remarks that Augustine 'taught, against the express words of the early Church Orders, that it was possible to serve in the army and in spite of this to please God.'<sup>823</sup> In effect, Augustine's theory broke the link between Christianity and nonviolence, but sects such as the Quakers continued the tradition.

---

<sup>822</sup> Timothy D. Barnes, *Early Christian Hagiography and Roman History* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010) p. 379.

<sup>823</sup> Thomas Merton, 'Preface' to P. Regamey O.P., *Non-Violence and the Christian Conscience* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1966) p. 15.

In the nineteenth century, Henry David Thoreau argued for the principle of civil disobedience when faced with a corrupt government.<sup>824</sup> The Indian proponent of nonviolence Mohandas Gandhi was influenced by the Western tradition of nonviolence represented by Thoreau and Jesus as depicted in the Sermon on the Mount, as well as the Hindu tradition of nonviolence encapsulated by the notion of ahimsa, variously translated as ‘soul force’, an imperative to ‘do no harm’ and a directive of nonviolent resistance to injustice.<sup>825</sup> Gandhi’s resistance to British colonial rule in India involved the withdrawal of voluntary association with British government organisations, civil disobedience and the withholding of taxes. In 1930 Gandhi organised a challenge to the British monopoly of the salt market by urging people to take salt from the sea and engage in illegally buying and selling millions of pounds of the substance.<sup>826</sup> There is some debate about whether India’s independence in 1947 would have come about without Gandhi’s nonviolent confrontations with the British Empire, but we are merely outlining some principles of nonviolence so as to compare with elements of White’s fiction, not attempting to judge the efficacy of the technique.<sup>827</sup> White cannot have been ignorant of the teachings of Gandhi, or their inspiration to the US Civil Rights movement led by Martin Luther King Jr., which in turn influenced the Civil Rights campaign in Northern Ireland.

Nonviolence shares some formal affinities with utopian thought, particularly in its iterations as prefigurative political practice. This is encapsulated by the preamble to the constitution of the leftist organisation The Industrial Workers of the World (I.W.W.), which articulates the goal of the group as ‘forming the structure of the new society within the shell of the old.’<sup>828</sup> David Graeber suggests that such prefigurative thought and practice seeks to ‘expose, subvert, and undermine structures of domination but always, while doing so, proceeding in a democratic fashion, a manner which itself

---

<sup>824</sup> Henry David Thoreau, *Civil Disobedience* (Rockford: Presa Press, 2003)

<sup>825</sup> Haridas T. Muzumdar, ‘Gandhi’s Nonviolence’ in *A Peace Reader: Essential Readings on War, Justice, Non-Violence and World Order* ed. Joseph Fahey and Richard Armstrong (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1987) p. 215.

<sup>826</sup> Ronald Sider, *Exploring the Limits of Non-Violence* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1988) p. 15.

<sup>827</sup> Ward Churchill suggests that the weakening of Britain after two world wars had as much effect as the interventions of Gandhi stating that “...while the Mahatma and his followers were able to remain ‘pure’, their victory was contingent upon others physically gutting their opponents for them.” See Ward Churchill, *Pacifism as Pathology: Reflections on the Role of Armed Struggle in North America* (Oakland: AK Press, 2007) p. 55.

<sup>828</sup> *Rebel Voices: An IWW Anthology* ed. Joyce L. Kornbluh (Oakland: PA Press, 2011) p. 13.

demonstrates those structures are unnecessary.<sup>829</sup> In this iteration, the notion of ends and means becomes conflated, the ends and means becoming identical with each other. In a similar fashion, the prefigurative nature of nonviolence works under the assumption that violent opposition to injustice results in a cycle of ever increasing violence. P. Regamey suggests that 'in the tragic history of mankind it seems that the energy used in destruction never disappears. If you put violence into anything that you do, an equal or greater amount of violence will be found in its outcome.'<sup>830</sup> Gandhi expressed this link by suggesting that 'there is as close a link between the means and the end as between the seed and the tree' and his techniques of nonviolence were as much about shaming the enemy regarding their own brutal ends and the violent lengths they would be forced to take to maintain order in India.<sup>831</sup> In nonviolent theory then, the purpose of this prefigurative approach is to demonstrate how a world without violence would function, while simultaneously resisting repression. The utopian element of such a position is articulated by Leo Tolstoy, another key proponent of nonviolence, who compares the hope for a nonviolent future to the campaign to abolish slavery, suggesting that 'Thomas More could not imagine even a Utopia without slavery. So also men of the beginning of this century could not imagine the life of man without war.'<sup>832</sup>

Having briefly explored aspects of pacifism and nonviolence, and made connections between that body of thought and utopian thinking, the chapter will now turn to the fiction of White, and attempt to detect and assess instances of nonviolence and pacifism across his work.

In an essay titled 'The Secret History of Sector General', White outlines the reason why he chose to write in the usually violent subgenre of the space opera, remarking that 'normally I do not like stories of violence or the senseless killing that is war...however, in a medical sf story of the Sector General type the violence is usually

---

<sup>829</sup> David Graeber, *Fragments of an Anarchist Anthropology* (Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press, 2004) p. 7.

<sup>830</sup> P. Regamey O.P., *Non-Violence and the Christian Conscience* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd) p. 54.

<sup>831</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 201.

<sup>832</sup> Leo Tolstoy, *Writings on Civil Disobedience and Non-Violence* (New York: New American Library, 1967) p. 15.

the direct or indirect result of a natural catastrophe, a disaster in space or an epidemic of some kind.<sup>833</sup> But White also allows for the presence of violence, suggesting that ‘if there is a war situation...then the medics are fighting only to save lives and the Monitor Corps, like the good little policemen they are, are fighting to stop the war rather than win it—which is the essential difference between maintaining the peace and waging a war.’<sup>834</sup> White’s ambiguity surrounding the definition between police action and acts of war will be discussed later, but for now it should be restated that White’s fiction allows for the use of violence. We have already touched on what could be read as a repressive utopian modality in White’s pacifism, with the desire for peaceful totality in *Underkill* leading to the sanctioning of authoritarian violence. Within this modality, nonviolence is seen as an impossible ideal. As outlined in the last section, White’s narrative in *Underkill* appears to support both state violence and the violence of an outside alien authority perceived as having a clearer view of Earthly behaviour. We could relate this to Richard Kirkland’s remark that bourgeois ideology refuses to acknowledge its own complicity with the power and the violence that constitutes its own existence. Kirkland suggests that the bourgeois novel ‘offers a liberal iconoclasm while concomitantly forbidding the discussion of certain key prerequisites.’<sup>835</sup> White’s work seems to be affected by a similar impulse, the urge to condemn violence without questioning the authority that holds a monopoly on its use. As will be shown in the section, despite White’s purported pacifism, violence is often framed as the prerequisite in the worlds of his fiction.

This impulse has also been detected in other instances of science fiction that attempt to embody pacifist principles. For instance the work of Isaac Asimov, who also attempted to promote pacifism through his science fiction and suggested that ‘violence is the last refuge of the incompetent.’<sup>836</sup> Mark Rose notes of Asimov’s Foundation series, that although the cycle appears to eschew violence, it is political power itself that propels the narrative and violence is unavoidably implicated as a result.<sup>837</sup> Patricia

---

<sup>833</sup> James White, ‘The Secret History of Sector General’ in *Ambulance Ship* (1980) (London: Futura, 1986) xiv.

<sup>834</sup> ‘Secret History of Sector General’, xiv.

<sup>835</sup> *Identity Parades*, p. 11; In his critique of nonviolence, Ward Churchill suggests that this tendency is an element of pacifism itself, a fear of confrontation that manifests as a ‘profound desire for business as usual’ (p. 50).

<sup>836</sup> *Alien Encounters*, p. 13.

<sup>837</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 13-14.



Monk discusses a preoccupation with war in science fiction of the period in which White began his career. Under the guardianship of the American editor John W. Campbell, science fiction reached a consensus that war is a universal phenomenon that will likely affect alien races as much as humanity. Monk writes that in science fiction, 'any sapient species will understand war as a method of defending their autonomy as a species and of defending and extending their territory and economy and that this will extend for the intraspecies to the interspecies level of interaction.'<sup>838</sup> White's work attempts to provide an alternative to this vision, but the narrative pressure of the form of the space opera ensures that violence returns as a central component of the texts. White's purported pacifism is problematic when reading the Sector General novels in particular, with White devoting much time to critiquing pacifism itself rather than attempting to trace the structural causes of organised violence, or attempting to prefigure a society structured without violence. Before analysing manifestations of pacifism across the eleven novels of White's Sector General series, this section will first attempt to locate the ambiguous approach to pacifism across White's standalone novels.

It is not until 1991's *The Silent Stars Go By* that a direct nonviolent response in a Gandhian mode appears in White's work in a flashback scene depicting Brendan's arrival in America. When Brendan attempts to teach the children, the older children begin to commit violence against him and White writes:

When they tried to beat him or goad him to anger, he sat down cross-legged in native fashion and remained impassive until they tired of this unsatisfactory sport. He had already observed that a stoic impassivity in the face of physical or mental pain was accepted behaviour among these people, and that those who displayed weakness were accorded little respect. But when they treated him with consideration, they quickly learned that he would perform for them, by doing tricks or making grass animals or wooden models, and that was much more fun for the children as well as being more reassuring to their mothers.<sup>839</sup>

Here White reaches towards a Gandhian sense of strength through non-violence, but it is significant that in White's fiction, this occurs only in relation to an encounter with children.

---

<sup>838</sup> *Alien Theory*, p. 189.

<sup>839</sup> *Silent Stars Go By*, p. 334.

Elsewhere in White's fiction, pacifism is depicted as a subversive phenomenon, but White's position remains ambiguous. In *The Escape Orbit*, pacifism is seen as a subversive position in the midst of the war with the Bugs, with the officers Kelso and Sloan complaining that the sentimental peace songs the soldiers sing are 'bad for morale.'<sup>840</sup> Kelso declares that 'Hutton's people are the worst offenders, singing about peace and Christmas...and...some of the words are anti-war-pacifist stuff, and downright subversive! "Where have all the flowers gone?" indeed! Suppose the commando units get infected with this sort of tripe...!'<sup>841</sup> Warren replies that anything that makes his men want to go home is good for the war effort. Here, pacifism is co-opted as a reason to fight a war. At the close of the narrative, the conflict ends because of a lack of resources. Hubbard, a Political Officer, states that 'it isn't over, exactly—but it amounts to the same thing. Neither side has the resources, technical, material or personnel, to go on with it.' But refusal to fight on the part of soldiers is also cited as a reason for cessation, White writing that 'it being the accepted thing these days to refuse rather than to force battle with the enemy.'<sup>842</sup> Soldiers refusing to fight in this way is a rare occurrence in White's fiction.

In the narrative of *The Watch Below*, it takes generations before violence as a means of solving disputes surfaces among the Unthan. A disagreement about the misdirection of a ship carrying cold sleepers leads to the manslaughter of the captain Helltag by Haynor. The subsequent appointment of Haynor as captain sets a precedent for '...the solution of problems, or the resolution of difficult situations, by physical violence' with the result that 'for the flagship civil war was not many generations away.'<sup>843</sup> The senior Unthan captain, Gunt, suggests that the survival of their race means facing up to ethical dilemmas, dilemmas which are given a colonial colouring. Gunt declares that:

The answer is ethically unsatisfactory, but it is this. If we had been the kind of race which accepted Fate quietly and philosophically we would have stayed on Untha while our seas boiled away and us with them. We aren't and we didn't. This is a fight for the survival of our race, and as Senior Captain of

---

<sup>840</sup> *Escape Orbit*, p. 121.

<sup>841</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 121.

<sup>842</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 139.

<sup>843</sup> *Watch Below*, p. 116.

the Fleet my duty is clear. It is unfortunate that we are forced into fighting other intelligent beings, potentially friendly beings perhaps, and that the struggle to survive in a strange environment has become a war with no foreseeable end. But we must fight and we must put every effort into fighting effectively, otherwise we might just as well have stayed at home...<sup>844</sup>

Here we see an instance of the repressive utopian moment, as a settler logic insists that accommodation is unlikely with any inhabitants found on a planet located as a possible home. This echoes Jameson's notion of world reduction, in which a land is cleared to make room for a utopian project. To make the process smoother, Gunt advises against communicating with humanity, proclaiming:

I don't want to hear any more talk about communicating with these things. We must be realistic. They are alien people, so much so that they may have nothing in common with us. Even if we did by some chance share a common outlook or philosophy or even a dislike for something there will be no time to find out about it. To them our arrival is an act of war and in the interests of survival we must proceed as if it is war!<sup>845</sup>

But in this case, the repressive mode of utopian thought becomes inverted, with White's narrative suggesting a more peaceful approach to alien invasion on Earth. A civilian expert on Earth argues against attacking the approaching aliens, recommending an attempt to communicate with them, positing that 'survival in its fullest sense requires co-operation rather than conflict.'<sup>846</sup> When the aliens approach the *Gulf Trader*, an Unthan called Heglenni finds herself unable to destroy the sunken ship. White writes that:

Self-preservation, the survival of one's self or one's race, was the Prime Law. Another law was that enemies must be destroyed. Even the enemies themselves agreed on this. But Heglenni had not only been unwilling, she had been unable to kill the gas-breathers in the wreck, and her feelings in the matter had gradually been transmitted to the communications officer. Basically it was a feeling of rebellion against natural and inevitable laws, reinforced by the strange but true fact that Heglenni felt much more understanding and affection for the grotesque, spindly gas-breather Wah-Lass [Wallace] than she did for Captain Grunt.<sup>847</sup>

---

<sup>844</sup> *Watch Below*, p. 142.

<sup>845</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 143.

<sup>846</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 156.

<sup>847</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 171.

Here, White's pacifism takes on a Christian aspect. In *The Silent Stars Go By*, Christianity is explained as 'a strange unworldly sect', whose members must 'love and not hate their enemies'.<sup>848</sup> In *The Watch Below*, the Christian decree to love one's neighbour bridges the gap between humanity and an alien species, the Unthan overcoming centuries of conditioning to arrive at a decision not to kill those in the sunken ship, overturning what are presumed to be natural laws of competition between alien races. The novel's resolution describes a non-violent accommodation between humanity and the Unthan based on the fact that there is no territorial competition between the two races, as the Unthan are sea-dwelling creatures.<sup>849</sup>

Like *Underkill*, White's *The Dream Millennium* is a thinly-veiled allegory of the Troubles, featuring a dystopian near future city undergoing a crisis caused by an abrupt energy shortage referred to simply as 'when the lights went out.' Although the presumption is that the crisis is planet-wide, White concentrates on activity in an unnamed city. The city contains a group called the Maxxers, inhabitants who subscribe to a violent 'maximum response' philosophy which prescribes a violent response to even the slightest impingement, as well as a group called the sheep, who stress a more peaceful existence. White writes that the future era in question should be a scientific golden age, but that the philosophy of maximum response has corrupted society to such an extent that four deaths a day is deemed acceptable. Once again, White writes of the poisonous few, writing that 'we have enough to eat, there is plenty of entertainment, lots of interesting things to do with one's spare time, and there would be no sickness if the hospitals weren't so overcrowded with nutcases who tried unsuccessfully to carve each other up or botched the job on an innocent bystander.'<sup>850</sup> The narrative also posits violence as a necessary means of existing in the world of the fiction. A shopkeeper tells Devlin:

Some of us have to wear belts, Doctor. As a salesman I must wear one to talk to armed executive-level people that I have to do business with. If I went dressed as a sheep they wouldn't let me in to talk at all. At the same time, if I went in with too many studs on my belt they would think that I was the touchy kind who would as soon fight as sell, or the type who sells by intimidation, and I wouldn't get many more appointments.<sup>851</sup>

---

<sup>848</sup> *Silent Stars Go By*, p. 96.

<sup>849</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 172.

<sup>850</sup> *Dream Millennium*, p. 178.

<sup>851</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 41.

Here, the threat of violence is a requirement for the shopkeeper to be taken seriously in a business in which it is necessary to deal with armed executives.

Early in the narrative of *The Dream Millennium*, violence is posited as a symptom of both structural issues and something intrinsic to the human condition, White writing that 'hunger and blind instinct were still driving people to acts of violence.'<sup>852</sup> However, later in the novel it is the latter notion that is reinforced, White suggesting violence as a factor of personality rather than environment. Brother Howard's plan to seed another world with humanity involves selecting human specimens without a predilection for violence. Howard tells Devlin and Patricia:

I consider both of you suitable for further indoctrination—as crew members rather than colonists. The major factors in reaching this decision are that both of you are intensely dissatisfied with your present life-styles and would like escape from them, and neither of your personalities is basically violent. More simply, you would like to change things but are unwilling to hurt people to do it.<sup>853</sup>

Here, pacifism is based on a sense of biological exceptionalism. Those who reject violence are presumed to be genetically predisposed to that position, with the structural causes of violent unrest ignored. In *The Dream Millennium*, pacifism is presumed to be genetically transmittable.

Elsewhere when White shows an aversion to violence in his fiction, he focuses on moral dilemmas associated with a pacifist stance in conflict situations. These problems are often solved through inventive ways of combating an enemy, echoing Mark Rose's observation regarding Asimov's fiction, that political power propels the narrative, no matter the pacifist intent of the author. In the story 'Grapeliner', a confrontation between an Earth starship and violent telepathic aliens is averted when the captain of the starship convinces some of his crew that they are holding containers of acid with which to attack the aliens. The aliens ignore all the crew apart from these would-be attackers, allowing the captain to get close enough to engage them in peaceful discourse.<sup>854</sup> *Double Contact* sees the Sector General crew make contact with a spider-

---

<sup>852</sup> *Dream Millennium*, p. 16.

<sup>853</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 91.

<sup>854</sup> *Deadly Litter*, pp. 7-46.

like race whose technology, in the form of gliders, tools and ships, comes organically from materials they spin, the delicate nature of their bodily structures and their resistance to the presence of the Sector General crew making for a precarious situation. Prilicla warns the crew that ‘...if we are ever to establish friendly relations with these people, which from personal contact I consider to be a strong possibility, you must not use any weapons against them that will generate heat. I’m thinking of signal flares, normally non-harmful pyrotechnics, or any form of radiant energy that would cause an electrical discharge. As well, you must not allow any of their sea or airborne personnel to fall in the water.’<sup>855</sup> White goes to great lengths to avoid violent conflict in the narrative, with the crew attempting to fend off the alien gliders rather than destroy them. But the truce between the Federation and the aliens at the close of the narrative is underwritten by the threat of violence, in the shape of a Sector General cruiser that remains in the vicinity of the planet. White writes ‘only once, when it seemed that the negotiations might degenerate into physical violence, did the sector marshal order it [the cruiser] to make a low pass over the medical station, to remind anyone who might be thinking of using muscle instead of mind, where the real strength lay.’<sup>856</sup> Having gone to elaborate lengths to avoid violent conflict in the narrative, this demonstration of coercive power at the close of the narrative reinstates violence as the prerequisite for peaceful solutions.

*Double Contact* is the final volume of White’s Sector General series, the eleven volumes of which stand as White’s pacifist science fiction opus. Brian Stableford suggests that the series constitutes the ‘first explicitly pacifist space opera series’, so it is surprising that even such limited instances of what might be termed ‘nonviolent combat’ as found in *Double Contact* are relatively rare across the series.<sup>857</sup> In *Star Surgeon*, White writes of the crew that ‘pacifists all, they waged a constant, all-out war against suffering and disease whether it was in individuals or whole planetary populations.’<sup>858</sup> But war is also acknowledged as a necessity in the Sector General universe. In a sentence reminiscent of Augustine’s theory of the just war, as well as the

---

<sup>855</sup> *Deadly Litter*, p. 213.

<sup>856</sup> *Double Contact*, p. 296.

<sup>857</sup> Brian Stableford, ‘James White’, *Historical Dictionary of Science Fiction Literature* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2004) p. 386.

<sup>858</sup> *Star Surgeon*, p. 5.

medical discourse discussed in relation to *Underkill*, the narrative states that ‘there were times when the diagnosis and treatment of a diseased culture, entailing the surgical removal of deeply-rooted prejudice and insane moral values without either the patient’s co-operation or consent could, despite the pacifism of the doctors concerned, lead to the waging of war. Period.’<sup>859</sup>

White’s concern with both order and nonviolence leads to an attempt to articulate a form of non-extremist pacifism, a notion inextricably linked with his idea of a poisonous few whose excesses ruin society for everyone else. White throws his net wide in describing just who the poisonous few are in Northern Irish society. Although nonviolence often takes the form of obstructive protest in the face of injustice, in White’s fiction, protestors are often ridiculed or accused of having a lack of moderation. For instance in *Dark Inferno*, the captain of the ship is described as looking ‘like a gang of professional protestors had worked him over.’<sup>860</sup> Returning to *Underkill* for a moment, the interventions of the Trennechorans are aimed at inspiring ‘self-control’ among the population of Earth, but White writes that ‘despite the John efforts at winning the minds of the locals, and the many acts of minor surgery performed by the Lukes on selected areas of malignancy, the local racial and ideological groupings refused to act with moderation.’<sup>861</sup> A similar intolerance of protest itself beset the Civil Rights Movement in Northern Ireland in the late 1960s. In her memoir of the period, Bernadette Devlin recalls that protestors taken to be treated for injuries at Altnagelvin Hospital, were greeted with the remark ‘if he was one of those demonstrators, he didn’t get hit hard enough’, Devlin adding ‘such was the impartial attitude of those ministering to the sick.’<sup>862</sup> The attitude to protest found in White’s narratives share much with this conclusion, the protestor and the poisonous few regarded as one and the same.

In the first Sector General novel, *Hospital Station*, this attitude to protest leads to pacifism itself being critiqued rather than violence. For the purpose, Doctor Conway is framed as a militant pacifist who dislikes members of the Monitor Corps, a force

---

<sup>859</sup> *Star Surgeon*, p. 6.

<sup>860</sup> *Dark Inferno*, p. 57.

<sup>861</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 141.

<sup>862</sup> *Price of My Soul*, p. 98.

whose status teeters ambiguously between police force and army. White describes Conway's initial encounters with the Monitors:

The presence of one affected him rather like the close proximity of a carrier of a contagious disease. And while Conway was proud of the fact that as a sane, civilised and ethical being he could never bring himself actually to hate anybody or anything, he disliked Monitors intensely. He knew, of course, that there were people who went off the beam sometimes, and that there had to be somebody who could take the action necessary to preserve the peace. But with his abhorrence of violence in any form, Conway could not like the men who took that action.<sup>863</sup>

White uses Conway's distaste of those who commit acts of violence to critique a militant pacifist position, framing such a belief as petulant and given to sarcasm. This petulance is typified in a scene where three companies of Monitors arrive with combat fatigue, and Conway asks sarcastically whether that means 'they've grown tired of killing people'.<sup>864</sup> White frames Conway's aversion to violence as a pathology, the Chief Psychologist on board, O'Mara, on hand to provide a diagnosis, suggesting that the doctor is a 'self-righteous bigot who made no pretence at hiding his feelings of defilement at the touch of an uncivilised brute of a Monitor.' The psychologist ponders how a person harbouring such feelings could be intelligent enough to attain a position at the hospital.<sup>865</sup>

Conway's narrative trajectory leads him to question his original position on the Monitors when he is confronted by a member of the force. The Monitor tells Conway: 'your trouble is that you, and your whole social group, are a protected species', and links Conway's pacifism to a petit bourgeois social strata containing 'artists and musicians'. The Monitor proclaims:

Most of you live out your lives in ignorance of the fact that you are protected, that you are insulated from childhood against the grosser realities of our interstellar so-called civilisation, and that your ideas of pacifism and ethical behaviour are a luxury which a great many of us simply cannot afford. You are allowed this luxury in the hope that from it may come a philosophy which may one day make every being in the Galaxy truly civilised, truly good.<sup>866</sup>

---

<sup>863</sup> *Hospital Station*, p. 44.

<sup>864</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 54.

<sup>865</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 53.

<sup>866</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 62.



Pacifism is suggested as a 'high ideal' that needs to be tempered with realism, in one of the Monitor's words 'a little grey and white with the black and white.'<sup>867</sup> Pacifism is tolerated as a luxury in the universe of Sector General, its prefigurative aspect reduced to a childish and ignorant dream that has no real power in itself.

One might ask why the first target for critique in White's pacifist opus is pacifism itself, rather than the military or an underlying structure that causes violence. White argues explicitly against pacifism: Conway is set up precisely to represent the most childish and stubborn form of argument against violence, with White explicitly advocating the position of the Monitors. Pacifism in Sector General is rendered as an impossible ideal early in the series, ethical ways of life a luxury enabled by the violence committed by the Monitors. Whatever we might say about such an argument, it could hardly be seen as constituting a pacifist position. There are many instances across White's fiction in which pacifism itself is critiqued rather than violence. White instead puts forward his own vision of a measured nonviolence, a pacifism self-reflexive to the point of functioning as an apologia to violence. In *The Dream Millennium*, for instance, Brother Howard remarks 'in short, I'm suggesting that the universe might not be a pleasant place, and that us pacifists, by insisting that it should be, are seducing the race from its rightful path'.<sup>868</sup>

In *Star Surgeon*, the line between nonviolence and military action becomes completely blurred, with Sector General shedding its non-violent aspect and becoming a military base in the war against an alien empire.<sup>869</sup> Conway's conscience is once again torn, White's narrative lending a more sympathetic aspect to his objections to violence. White writes:

Every time he thought of the tremendous structure which had been dedicated to the highest ideals of humanity and medicine being made into an engine of destruction, geared to a hellish and unnatural ecology wherein it produced its own casualties, Conway felt angry and sad and not a little sickened by the whole ghastly mess.

---

<sup>867</sup> *Hospital Station*, p. 63.

<sup>868</sup> *Dream Millennium*, p. 180.

<sup>869</sup> *Star Surgeon*, p. 6.

Conway attempts to enforce a pacifist atmosphere at the hospital now transformed into a military base, proclaiming that 'if there is any way to tell the difference between a Corpsman and one of the enemy screaming, I don't want to know about it...'<sup>870</sup>

Conway's trajectory from militant pacifism to reluctant acceptance of war is mirrored elsewhere in the Sector General universe. In the story 'Accident', White gives the pre-history of the Sector General hospital as the aftermath of a war between the Federation and the alien race the Orligians. Again, White's concern is with a pacifism that has been taken to extremes and a form of protest that threatens the established order. The peace activists MacEwan and Grawlya-Ki are depicted leaving a television studio on the planet Nidia, where they have broken up the production of a play that glamorises war. A Colonel greets them and tells them that they face deportation because their 'peacemongering activities of late have become much too...warlike'. Here White seems to be suggesting that protesting against cultural texts that promote war is itself equivalent to a warlike position. The Colonel suggests that the supporters of MacEwan and Grawlya-Ki's peace movement are 'more interested in taking part in a riot than in promulgating your ideas.'<sup>871</sup> The Colonel tells them they are to be sent to the planet Traltha, regarded as a peaceful planet, but MacEwan, seemingly speaking from a left-wing tradition, observes 'on Traltha...commercial warfare never stops. One kind can lead to another.'<sup>872</sup> The Colonel tells him 'you are frightening yourselves without reason and...maintaining the peace is our concern. We do it quietly, discreetly, by keeping potentially troublesome entities and situations under control, and by making the minimum response early.'<sup>873</sup> Once again, the prospect of violence is regarded as a means of guaranteeing peace in the Sector General universe, with protest and a militant pacifist stance critiqued.

This prehistory of the series foreshadows the establishment of the Monitor Corps police force. As noted in Chapter Three, the Monitor Corps are exclusively drawn from the human population, so MacEwan proposes they find something all the species

---

<sup>870</sup> *Star Surgeon*, p. 141.

<sup>871</sup> *Sector General*, p. 4. This idea abounds in White's fiction. For instance, in *Tomorrow is Too Far*, Carson meditates on the violence of a recent anti-war protest, concluding that 'there was nothing so ruthless as a militant pacifist.' (p.139).

<sup>872</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>873</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

of the universe can agree on, a common ground that will lessen the inevitability of war. When MacEwan saves a life on Nidia, the Colonel alights upon the idea of medicine and healing as the unifying system around which such a development could coalesce. The Colonel becomes inspired by the idea of establishing a universal hospital.<sup>874</sup> Here, Sector General is posited as a collaboration between pacifists who have deserted what White sees as their extremist tendencies, and the intergalactic police force the Monitor Corps, whose function is to maintain the 'Pax Galactica'.<sup>875</sup>

This notion of the Monitor Corps as a police force rather than a military is also drawn across White's Sector General novels, but becomes problematic as the series develops. White's approach to war within the universe of Sector General circulates around the issue of definition rather than the persistence of violence and efforts to bring about its cessation through nonviolent means. The conflict between the Etlan Empire and the Federation in *Star Surgeon* is referred to as police action rather than war. The Corpsman Dermot tells Conway:

The Corps is a police force, remember? We are trying to think of this as a disturbance, a riot on an interstellar scale where as usual the casualties among the rioters outnumber those of the police. Personally I think it is past the time when anything will make them see the truth and a full-scale war is inevitable, but I do not want to hate them. This is the difference, Doctor, between maintaining peace and waging war.<sup>876</sup>

In *Final Diagnosis*, a novel that takes place chronologically after the events of *Star Surgeon*, the conflict still does not register as a war, although White also tells us in that novel that it represents a demonstration that war is sometimes necessary. Major Stillman of the Monitor Corps suggests:

There has been only one interstellar war...the one between Earth and Orlogia, whose cessation brought about the formation of the Galactic Federation. Since then it has been generally accepted that interstellar warfare for economic or territorial gain is logistically and economically impossible. It costs too much and there are too many uninhabited planets just waiting for colonisation.<sup>877</sup>

---

<sup>874</sup> *Sector General*, p. 31.

<sup>875</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 32.

<sup>876</sup> *Star Surgeon*, p. 144.

<sup>877</sup> *Final Diagnosis*, p. 193.

Here can be detected the discourse of abundance negating the need for conflict that we discussed in relation to Shaw's *Night Walk* and *Orbitsville*, a notion of peace through territorial expansion. But White seems aware of the slippage in the system of definition between the concepts of police action and war, and the text registers an anxiety surrounding their definition. In *Double Contact*, for instance, a Monitor Corps Captain warns that 'we might have the beginnings of a war—pardon me, a police operation against the same persons unknown.'<sup>878</sup> In *Star Surgeon*, Conway observes that calling a violent situation a riot or a battle has no effect on the casualties flooding into the hospital.<sup>879</sup> In the universe of Sector General then, war has been abolished merely through a process of redefinition rather than a technique of nonviolence. The characters of the Sector General narratives are often shown to be aware of this process of redefinition, but are depicted as powerless to resist violence.

The ambiguities inherent in defining police action and military action feed into a reading of White's novels as Northern Irish science fiction. We have already discussed the ambiguous nature of the process of Operation Demetrius, its rounding up of those suspected of subversive activities inevitably leading to comparisons with Britain's colonial legacy. McGuffin notes the ambiguity inherent in the Demetrius arrests themselves, remarking that 'in all the excitement everyone overlooked one thing—all the arrests were completely illegal, since no police accompanied the soldiers who, even under the Special Powers Acts, had neither the authority nor the legal power to make the arrests.'<sup>880</sup> The separation of intervention into police action and military action is addressed by Thomas Richards, who discusses the division of coercion and force in the Victorian colonial system, writing that 'the use of coercion ruled at the metropole, enshrined in the activities of the police, while the use of force was relegated to the colonies, where armies were stationed.'<sup>881</sup>

In Northern Ireland during the Troubles, the division between coercion and force, police action and military action, made for a radical undecidability about the status of the conflict, exacerbated by the logic of the state of exception. The proximity

---

<sup>878</sup> *Double Contact*, p. 66.

<sup>879</sup> *Star Surgeon*, p. 145.

<sup>880</sup> *The Guineapigs*, p. 46.

<sup>881</sup> *Imperial Archive*, p. 140.

of the region to the governing power indicated the logic of a police response, while the intensity of the conflict invoked more militaristic solutions. Peter Szendy draws on the philosopher Carl Schmitt, who suggested that, following the Geneva Convention, all wars attain the status of police actions against the danger of another generalised global civil war. Echoing the overview effect, Schmitt writes that ‘humanity as such cannot wage war because it has no enemy, at least not on this planet.’<sup>882</sup> This repressive utopian configuration suggests no outside to a unified global culture, and stands as a concrete abstraction akin to the presumed insights offered by the overview effect.

In this configuration, humanity is proposed as a unified mass with no recognised political or territorial differences. As a result, war is reframed as police action, or keeping the peace, with the coercion that traditionally regulated the metropole combining with the force that ruled the colonies. It is this dispensation that governs the entire known universe in the Sector General narratives. In a Northern Irish context, the ambiguities of such a stance can be seen. In a contested space, British response to the conflict flits between police and military action, with the army being sent to arrest people during the internment process, blurring the line between the two concepts. With this manoeuvre White is able to reconcile his pacifism with the existence of violence.

White’s version of pacifism related in the Sector General series, then, is explicitly connected to the threat of violence embodied in a police force with military capabilities. The change in definition between military action and police action underwrites White’s interest in writing pacifist science fiction. This concern with policing leads inevitably back to a recurring trope in White’s fiction, the trope of the poisonous few despoiling society for the majority, and a benevolent outlying force willing to intervene. White’s view seems to promote an idea of innate human aggression that jars significantly with his purported pacifism, the utopianism of *The Dream Millennium* suggesting that a more peaceful world can be constructed through a process of weeding out those genetically predisposed to violence. If nonviolence is truly a prefigurative impulse that embodies the change it aspires to make, then this process of reduction cannot be held within its tradition. White’s depictions of nonviolent resistance are ambiguous. Brendan’s confrontation with a group of children in *The*

---

<sup>882</sup> Kant in the Land of Extraterrestrials, p. 34.

*Silent Stars Go By*, for instance, suggests that nonviolent technique is useless in the realm of adult politics. Across White's other standalone fictions we see nonviolence manifest as a reason to fight, a means through which to overcome an enemy, an ignorant dream that is impossible in practice, and a genetic predisposition that must be weeded out from the population. White's pacifist opus *Sector General* is similarly left lacking in regard to positive examples of nonviolent resistance, with reliance on the threat of violence proposed as the only means of keeping order in the universe. White's chosen medium of the violent and militaristic space opera subgenre explains why the author fails to abandon violence as a solution and imagine a universe built upon nonviolent principles. A redemptive science fiction told from a non-militaristic point of view might have provided a better perspective through which to examine resistance to violence through nonviolent action.

So far, this chapter has discussed the repressive and redemptive utopian impulse in the work of Shaw and White. The overview effect was seen as enforcing a repressive mode of utopianism in White's fiction, an impulse that extends into White's purported pacifism, as demonstrated in both the *Sector General* series, and the author's standalone novels. Finally, the chapter will look at utopia and nationalism in Shaw and White's fiction, examining how both authors articulate ways to think about national identity in a future in which such divisions have dissolved, and the role of nuclear weapons in that vision of a post-conflict world.

### **Nationalism, Internationalism and the Nuclear Imaginary**

The conflict in Northern Ireland has been seen as a clash between two 'competing nationalisms' and Shaw and White both use their fiction to critique nationalism in favour of a gesture towards a unified, planetary identity that echoes the utopian overview effect discussed earlier in the chapter.<sup>883</sup> In Chapter Two we discussed Richard Kirkland's analysis of a non-aligned identity that asserts itself as rejecting both sides of the competing identities paradigm. Kirkland notes the propensity for Northern Irish literary critics to prematurely announce the demise of the old order of the two-traditions paradigm and the emergence of new postmodern forms to deal with a new

---

<sup>883</sup> Joanne McEvoy, *The Politics of Northern Ireland* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008) p. 13.

reality, suggesting that these critiques take a position from outside history where it is presumed that the division can be observed more clearly.<sup>884</sup> Kirkland suggests that such a position constitutes a utopian perspective. Similarly, both Shaw and White's science fiction envisage a space beyond which nationalism and xenophobia become redundant. For instance, Shaw's *Fugitive Worlds* critiques the violence that results from a 'tribal thinking' that 'has no place among civilised communities', while in *Orbitsville*, Garamond states that 'it would be a tragedy if earth were to export attitudes such as nationalism' to the fresh, uninhabited planet.<sup>885</sup>

But it is White that give this theme the most central position in his fiction. In the Sector General series, nationalism and xenophobia are inextricably linked, both leading inevitably to violence. The violent past of human civilisation is broached in *Double Contact* by Fletcher, who remarks: 'I can't help thinking about the bad old xenophobic days on Earth...and how we would have reacted towards an apparent invasion from the stars. We would certainly not have tried to talk, or even to think about talking. We would have gathered our forces, as these people seem to be doing, and hit the horrible invaders with everything we had.'<sup>886</sup> But although in this later Sector General novel White suggests that nationalism and xenophobia have been eradicated in the Sector General universe, there are signs that it survives in cultures that have become planet-bound and stubbornly refuse to become part of galactic culture. Once again, utopianism is expressed as the preserve of those with the elevated and transcendent perspective of the overview effect.

An example of White's critique of nationalism can be seen in 'Occupation: Warrior', a story intended to form part of the Sector General series that the editor Ted Carnell recommended White distance from the cycle because of its dark tone. In the narrative of 'Occupation: Warrior', nationalism is associated with the lower classes.<sup>887</sup> A truism of Northern Irish politics is that the middle classes on both sides of the two-traditions paradigm cared little for the particulars of the conflict, and that it was within

---

<sup>884</sup> *Identity Parades*, p. 84.

<sup>885</sup> *Fugitive Worlds*, p. 177; *Orbitsville*, p. 173.

<sup>886</sup> *Double Contact*, p. 243.

<sup>887</sup> *Ambulance Ship*, xii.

working class communities that the conflict took hold.<sup>888</sup> 'Occupation: Warrior' reflects this, White writing that:

Not only on Earth but on practically every other world in the Galactic Union the set-up was essentially the same. At the bottom of the social scale were the malcontents, who were generally neither too ethical nor well-educated, and grouped into settlements which varied in size from a large town to tracts of territory which took up a respectable slice of a continent. And they were intensely, almost fanatically, proud of their glorious past. Because they believed that only among themselves was to be found the drive, idealism and sheer ruggedness of character that had typified the race in the past, they thought of themselves alone as being truly representative of their respective species.<sup>889</sup>

Those who disagree see themselves as galactic citizens rather than clinging to their planetary identity.<sup>890</sup> We could relate this urge for humanity to embrace a galactic identity to the notion of cosmopolitanism and globalisation. Peter Szendy links such notions to the overview effect, drawing from Derrida to suggest that the notion of the view from space suggests the imminent arrival of the 'citizen of the world.'<sup>891</sup> This suggests a totalising and utopian aspect to cosmopolitanism. Carl Schmitt proclaims that such a unified civilisation feels 'destined by nature to develop...into a cosmopolitan society that is constantly threatened by disunion but generally progresses toward a coalition.'<sup>892</sup> Also relevant to cosmopolitanism are the ideas circulating around the definition of police and military action discussed in the last section. In such a globalised and cosmopolitan society there would be no army, only a police force.

But the notion of cosmopolitanism is a divisive one. Karl Marx linked cosmopolitanism to a newly-emerging global bourgeoisie, and proposed his own internationalism in opposition to it. Marx writes that:

As money develops into international money, so the commodity-owner becomes a cosmopolitan. The cosmopolitan relations of men to one another originally comprise only their relations as commodity-owners. Commodities

---

<sup>888</sup> Mark McGovern and Peter Shirlow 'Counter-insurgency, De-industrialisation and the political economy of Ulster Loyalism' in *Who Are the People?: Unionism, Protestantism and Loyalism in Northern Ireland* (London: Pluto Press, 1997) p. 189. McGovern and Shirlow make the point that the increase in Catholic employment in the British civil service tended to reduce Irish nationalist sentiment and align an emerging Catholic middle class with the British state, while a corresponding decrease in traditionally Protestant employment in shipbuilding and manufacturing increased the likelihood of identification with Loyalism.

<sup>889</sup> *Aliens Among Us*, p. 171.

<sup>890</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 171.

<sup>891</sup> Jacques Derrida, *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness* (London: Routledge, 2001).

<sup>892</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 48.



as such are indifferent to all religious, political, national and linguistic barriers. Their universal language is price and their common bond is money. But together with the development of international money as against national coins, there develops the commodity-owner's cosmopolitanism, a cult of practical reason, in opposition to the traditional religious, national and other prejudices which impede the metabolic process of mankind. The commodity-owner realises that nationality 'is but the guinea's stamp', since the same amount of gold that arrives in England in the shape of American eagles is turned into sovereigns, three days later circulates as napoleons in Paris and may be encountered as ducats in Venice a few weeks later. The sublime idea in which for him the whole world merges is that of a market, the *world market*.<sup>893</sup>

Similarly, in a Northern Irish context, Aaron Kelly draws from Manuel Castells to suggest an opposition between the cosmopolitanism of the elite and the tribal enclosures of working class communities.<sup>894</sup> For Castells, the cosmopolitan state of mind in the globalised world causes an urban dualism that

opposes the cosmopolitanism of the elite, living on a daily connection to the whole world (functionally, socially, culturally), to the tribalism of local communities, retrenched in their spaces that they try control as their last stand against the macro-forces that shape their lives out of their reach. The fundamental dividing line in our cities is the inclusion of the cosmopolitans in the making of the new history while excluding the locals from the control of the global to city to which ultimately their neighbourhoods belong.<sup>895</sup>

With a similar perspective, Terry Eagleton suggests that 'the rich have mobility while the poor have locality. Or rather, the poor have locality until the rich get their hands on it. The rich are global and the poor are local.'<sup>896</sup> Discussing Eoin McNamee's *Resurrection Man* in this context, Kelly questions the opposition of tribal atavism and cosmopolitanism. For Kelly, McNamee's text displays how such tribalism does not have an organic source, but must be performed in a highly stylised manner. Kelly suggests that late capitalism attempts to preserve a cosmopolitan sense of totality for an elite few, tribalism as much a product of this culture as globalisation.<sup>897</sup> This sense of a view of totality as the preserve of a select few echoes the idea of the overview effect, already discussed, and suggests that cosmopolitanism manifests as a repressive utopian impulse, ignoring the local conditions that it has played a significant role in creating.

---

<sup>893</sup> Karl Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1971) pp. 152-153.

<sup>894</sup> *Thriller and Northern Ireland*, p. 105.

<sup>895</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 105; Manuel Castells, 'European Cities, the Informational Society, and the Global Economy', *New Left Review*, 204 (1994) 18-32 (p.30).

<sup>896</sup> Terry Eagleton, *After Theory* (London: Penguin, 2003) p. 22.

<sup>897</sup> *Thriller and Northern Ireland*, p. 106.

White's narrative in 'Occupation: Warrior' describes an outlet given to such tribalism by the Guards who set aside planets on which those who wish to express their violent nationalism are allowed to engage in conflict with the nationalists of other alien races, thereby shielding the interstellar version of cosmopolitanism from their excesses.<sup>898</sup> The armies involved are chosen through a selection process whereby the enemy selects the soldiers they wish to fight from the opposing force. This inevitably results in the weakest and least willing to fight being selected. The narrative follows a plot by a nationalist called Dermot, who feigns feebleness in order to be selected by the Kelgian opposition, and then sets about stirring up nationalist fervour among the lacklustre recruits he has to fight alongside. White outlines the trajectory of those such as Dermot from potential intergalactic citizen to insular, planetary nationalist through a guard, who tells Dermot:

From what I have seen of your abilities I would say that you were once a bright but lazy young man studying for his Galactic Citizenship who became bored with such dry and difficult subjects as extra-terrestrial history, sociology and ethics—as well as the subjects which must be mastered if a Citizen is to meet with and understand the alien and at times visually horrifying entities making up our civilisation—and turned to the history of Earth for escapist reading. You had access to books and records ordinarily denied to all..., but instead of evaluating them properly you began to actually live in them, have daydreams about them, and so on.<sup>899</sup>

Instead Dermot has used the skills he gained as a potential citizen to guide and influence the other soldiers. He tells the guards: 'I am taking men who are lacking in all the finer qualities—courage, self-discipline, unselfishness, a code of ethics—and encouraging them to get used to and like the killing.'<sup>900</sup> In Kelly's terms, Dermot's stance represents a rejection of the macro forces of cosmopolitanism, and a utopian move towards a graspable totality, albeit in disfigured form. Once again, two utopias are expressed side by side, each with their repressive and redemptive modes.

The contradictions between these two modes remain unresolved in White's narrative. Once again, the rejection of violence is based on an accommodation with it,

---

<sup>898</sup> As already noted in the last chapter, White's editor Ted Carnell suggested changing the name of the Monitor Corps to the Guards in 'Occupation: Warrior', as a way of distancing the darker tone of the story from the Sector General universe.

<sup>899</sup> *Aliens Among Us*, p. 201.

<sup>900</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 197.

manifesting as a 'let them kill each other' discourse. In White's narrative, freedom from coercion is more important than nonviolence. A guard tells Dermod 'but you're free, man! Freer than at any other time in all of history. You do exactly as you please. You can ride to Hell on horseback if you want to—we'll even supply the horses—so long as you don't insist on taking others with you who do not really want to go.'<sup>901</sup> This echoes White's perception of the poisonous few in society, who can be removed in order to create a harmonious dispensation. In this instance of the poisonous few ideologeme, the despoilers are gathered together and encouraged to dispense with each other. Typically, White depicts Dermod as seeing himself as oppressed. Expressing his discontent in nationalist identitarian language, Dermod tells a Guard: 'We, and our opposite numbers on other planets and of other species, are a persecuted minority which you are obviously bent on wiping out because we are proud, stubborn, independent and a source of annoyance to you because of these qualities.'<sup>902</sup> But over the course of the narrative, Dermod changes his position on war and nationalism, disgusted by how easily his human army exterminated their Kelgian opponents. Dermod is told by a Guard that it is too late for repentance, and that the war Dermod has intensified will set off a chain reaction among all the known planets. The Guards tell Dermod that the influence of their force will soon be gone and that 'we can look forward to galactic civilisation falling apart into a mass of single, mutually antagonistic worlds.'<sup>903</sup> The narrative closes with Dermod entering the Guards to atone for his crime. The narrative trajectory of 'Occupation: Warrior' then, has Dermod reject an insular planetary nationalism and embrace the cosmopolitanism of the galactic federation, accepting its vision of totality.

Looking elsewhere in the early fiction of White, we see an instance of a kind of internationalism. An early story, 'The Ideal Captain' in the *Deadly Litter* collection, posits that a resolution to the nuclear standoff could be found in an outer-space cooperation that seems to point to a form of internationalist cooperation rather than cosmopolitan expansion, not least in the fact that White names the secret project of cooperation between the space missions of nations Potemkin.<sup>904</sup> The name Potemkin is an allusion to the uprising by Russian sailors on board the battleship Potemkin in

---

<sup>901</sup> *Aliens Among Us*, p. 202.

<sup>902</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 203.

<sup>903</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 216.

<sup>904</sup> *Deadly Litter*, p. 47.

1905, seen as a precursor to the Russian Revolution of 1917.<sup>905</sup> In White's narrative, the 'ideal captain' of the title is, unbeknownst to the crew of the spaceship *Mizar*, a hologram that changes its appearance and personality depending on which crew member is observing or engaging with it. The subjective aspect to this technology has led to positive feedback being passed by the hologram captain to the crew members involved in an international conspiracy. As a result, they intensify their plot to internationalise the space race by sharing information with both the Russians and the Americans.<sup>906</sup> The protagonist Surgenor, the only crew member to know the truth about the captain, begins to uncover the conspiracy and, terrified of an incident that would 'touch off the Hell-war', he confronts the crew.<sup>907</sup> The crew explain the origins of the organisation to him: '...the first instance had occurred a long time ago; two ships belonging to mutually unfriendly nations had found themselves in trouble together. They had helped each other out and kept quiet about it, and had decided in the process that being unfriendly was stupid.'<sup>908</sup> The organisation shares technological information and resources across nations, White writing that 'there was no classified information in space.' They explain that equipment bound for the British section of the Mars colony might be needed elsewhere. White writes that 'theoretically there were three separate colonies on Mars: the Russian, American and British. In actual fact each colony was made up of equal numbers of Russians, Americans and British. And no matter where a Mars-bound ship put down, it was home.'<sup>909</sup> While on Earth, heavily armed powers engage in a dangerous standoff, morally sound individuals in space come to the conclusion that they should join this secret brotherhood of 'traitors.'<sup>910</sup>

We have just considered two iterations of utopianism in the early stories of White. In 'The Ideal Captain', the iteration of the overview effect contains a redemptive modality, with differences between nations transcended on a practical plane, material considerations taking precedent over market pressures and rivalry between nation states, with each space colony distributed materials according to need. White's precursor to the Sector General series, 'Occupation: Warrior', however, contains a

---

<sup>905</sup> Richard Hough, *The Potemkin Mutiny* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1960).

<sup>906</sup> *Deadly Litter*, p. 76.

<sup>907</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 92.

<sup>908</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 94.

<sup>909</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 95.

<sup>910</sup> *Deadly Litter*, p. 95.

repressive modality based on the ideas of cosmopolitanism. In that narrative, and in the Sector General narratives built upon its foundation, planetary identity is seen as regressive, and any utopian content contained therein is denied. Those attempting to retain a planetary identity are encouraged to kill those from other planets attempting the same. Violence once again is proposed as a guarantor for peace for the largest amount of people.

Another means through which to achieve lasting peace between nations advocated in the work of Shaw and White is the proliferation of nuclear weapons, a discourse that gives nuclear deterrent a utopian charge. According to Joseph S. Nye 'two centuries ago Immanuel Kant suggested that peace among nations might come about as a result of three things: the increasing destructiveness of war; the spread of republican governments; and the growth of commerce and trade.'<sup>911</sup> Rather than the latter two propositions alluded to by Kant, Shaw and White advocate for the framework of increasing destructiveness, a framework described by Richard K. Betts as one in which 'the spectre of apocalypse becomes the guarantor of peace.'<sup>912</sup> Betts calls this group utopian realists, people who believe that 'nuclear weapons can produce the permanent peace that liberals have always believed in and realists have always said is impossible.'<sup>913</sup>

The time in which Shaw and White worked at the Shorts manufacturing plant was a time of high tension in world geopolitics. Before Shaw and White took up employment there, Shorts was involved in the manufacture of the Sperrin jet bomber, a precursor to the V-Bombers which comprised Britain's strategic nuclear strike force.<sup>914</sup> Although the V-Bombers were eventually manufactured elsewhere, and Shorts turned its attention to civilian aircraft, there is a sense of Cold War anxiety in the work of both authors, not least in the manifestation of the conspiratorial ideologeme discussed in the opening of this chapter. According to G.R. Sloan, Northern Ireland's strategic importance to N.A.T.O. was made more vital by the declaration of a Republic in the

---

<sup>911</sup> Joseph S. Nye, *Nuclear Ethics* (New York: Macmillan, 1986) p. 123.

<sup>912</sup> Richard K. Betts, 'Universal Deterrence or Conceptual Collapse? Liberal Pessimism and Utopia' in *The Coming Crisis: Nuclear Proliferation Interests and World Order* ed. Victor A. Utgoff (Cambridge: M.I.T. Press, 2000) p. 52.

<sup>913</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 152.

<sup>914</sup> C.H. Barnes, *Shorts Aircraft Since 1900* (London: Putnam Aeronautical Books, 1989) p. 32.

south by the Taoiseach John Costello in 1948, as well as by the refusal of the Republic to join N.A.T.O. when approached by the United States in 1949. Sloan suggests that 'from the early 1950s it was the provision of air bases, naval facilities and communications that increasingly underlined Northern Ireland's prominent part in the Cold War.'<sup>915</sup> This prominent part mainly consisted of naval communications. At the beginning of the Troubles, Sloan suggests that N.A.T.O. bases were replaced with British bases, as Britain committed more troops to the region. But the emergence of what Sloan terms the 'second Cold War', sparked by the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, created a new emphasis on protecting the sea lines of communication of which Ireland as a whole was an integral part. Sloan suggests that the Republic became partially involved in some aspects of the second Cold War, with Britain leasing a back-up communication system from the Irish Department of Posts and Telegraphs.<sup>916</sup> The peace activist Patrick Comerford describes a break-in by members of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (C.N.D.) at the nuclear bunker at Mount Eden in Belfast in 1983, which led to the discovery of a map of Ireland covered with the image of mushroom clouds at strategic areas of Ireland suggested as possible sites for Soviet strikes.<sup>917</sup>

Throughout the period in which Shaw and White were active then, Northern Ireland found itself interpellated into the geopolitics of the Cold War and the logic of deterrent. This is fertile ground for the science fiction imagination. John Rieder suggests that science fiction developed within an international context of the imperial competition that gave birth to the modern arms race.<sup>918</sup> The predictive ability of science fiction authors is often exaggerated, but it is significant that their accurate predictions are often in the realm of military hardware, such as H.G. Wells's anticipation of the tank in 'The Land Ironclads' and the Belfast author Robert Cromie's depiction of an atomic explosion in his 1895 novel *The Crack of Doom*.<sup>919</sup> H. Bruce Franklyn suggests a kind of feedback loop between science fiction and the weapons of war, a suggestion that reduces the redemptive modalities of the form that Kelly sees in popular literature

---

<sup>915</sup> G.R. Sloan, *The Geopolitics of Anglo-Irish Relations in the Twentieth Century* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1997) p. 250.

<sup>916</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 262.

<sup>917</sup> Patrick Comerford, *Do You Want to Die For NATO?* (Dublin: Mercier Press, 1984) p. 24.

<sup>918</sup> *Colonialism and the Emergence of Science Fiction*, p. 28.

<sup>919</sup> H.G. Wells, 'The Land Ironclads' in *Complete Short Story Omnibus* (London: Gollancz, 2011); Robert Cromie, *The Crack of Doom* (London: Digby, Long & Co., 1895).

more generally, and that Marxist theorists such as Suvin and Jameson would detect in science fiction in particular. For Franklyn, science fiction acts as a conduit for 'some of the most obscene rituals in the cult of the superweapon.'<sup>920</sup> But the idea of the superweapon also carries a utopian charge in its promise to rid the world of war once and for all. By increasing the destructive capabilities of technological weaponry, utopian realists suggest that peace between nations becomes more likely.

Discussing narratives that deal with Cold War issues, David Seed suggests that 'representations of atomic energy and nuclear weapons were unusually complex rhetorically', balancing a wariness of the destructive capabilities of the new energy source with a recognition of its potential benefits.<sup>921</sup> The science fiction of Shaw and White seems to downplay these complexities, for the most part supporting an ambiguous stance of deterrent and payoff in the form of residual nuclear technologies. References to the benefits of possessing a nuclear arsenal occur often in the work of Shaw and White. White's 'The Ideal Captain' refers to the 'peace of the powder keg', a reference to a stockpile of weapons as a deterrent to starting a 'Hell war.'<sup>922</sup> As a spaceship launched by a British space program flies over Canada, it sends a message reading 'this is Her Majesty's Space Vessel Mizar, for Mars on a colonial supply cruise...we are not contemplating dropping an atomic bomb on you.'<sup>923</sup> *The Silent Stars Go By* similarly talks about 'mutual obliteration' as a deterrent against warfare, while *Underkill* suggests that nuclear weapons are a positive development, reminding people as they do of their ultimate fragility. In *Underkill*, it is the all-wise Trennechorans who are responsible for introducing nuclear weapons to Earth, believing that 'the mere possession of the means of their own self-destruction, either by nuclear or biological weapons, would bring the Earth population to its senses.'<sup>924</sup> This is believed by the Trennechorans to lead to a realisation that 'self-discipline and intelligent unselfishness on the widest possible scale was needed if their world, the only one they had, was to be saved', an impulse close to the sense said to be arrived at through exposure to the overview effect.<sup>925</sup> White neglects to address the fact that the introduction of nuclear

---

<sup>920</sup> *War Stars*, p. 168.

<sup>921</sup> David Seed, *Under the Shadow: The Atomic Bomb and Cold War Narratives* (Kent: Kent State University Press, 2013) p. 2.

<sup>922</sup> *Deadly Litter*, p. 77, 92.

<sup>923</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 50.

<sup>924</sup> *Underkill*, p. 142.

<sup>925</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 142.

weapons by the Trennechorans has not in fact had the desired effect, with the malady of violence as prevalent as ever, and requiring further Trennechoran intervention. The utopian ideal that connects nuclear proliferation to world peace ignores local conditions in the same manner as the overview effect. The Cold War saw a cessation of violence between superpowers, but the emergence of proxy wars in Vietnam and other less materially wealthy regions of the globe.

But even a post-nuclear cataclysm becomes a harbinger of utopia in White's first novel. *The Secret Visitors* takes place on a post-nuclear war Earth, but rather than registering the adverse effect of the weapons on the planet, White instead suggests that the cataclysm was exactly what the planet required. White writes that:

Far from causing the collapse of civilisation, the war seemed to give it an explosive boot in the pants. Scientific advances came thick and fast; because there were no longer multitudes to be thrown out of work, industry became fully automated, and the world seemed well on the way to becoming a Utopia—except for the nervous tendency for people to build deep instead of high.<sup>926</sup>

Here, the tension that Seed discusses between the utopian energy of nuclear power and nuclear war anxiety are synthesised. In an iteration of White's poisonous few ideologeme, the use of nuclear weapons, rather than their existence as a deterrent becomes utopian, clearing the world of excess population and provoking innovations in industry. The death of the majority of the world's population becomes an opportunity, with technology promising that a fully mechanised utopia will be forthcoming, a fantasy of world reduction in which White disregards the tremendous violence unleashed to achieve its ends.

Similar combinations can be found in the work of Shaw, with the future depicted in *The Shadow of Heaven* envisaging the continuation of the Cold War standoff until an anonymous group causes an ecological disaster, with a resulting paradigm shift in global affairs. Shaw writes that 'the second mistake had been in the assumption that—if war came—America, Russia and China would fight it out among themselves in one or another of the few simple permutations possible. In the real event, America, Russia,

---

<sup>926</sup> *Secret Visitors*, p. 8.



and China had found themselves on the same side; and they never did find out for certain who the opposition was. The enemy had assembled his forces, struck, and retired to safety before any of the Big Three discovered the war had started.’<sup>927</sup> Here, in a reiteration of the overview effect, a bigger enemy than any of the Cold War antagonists strikes and unites humanity.

In *The Two Timers*, Shaw suggests that nuclear weapons have stopped humanity from playing out its most savage impulses. Shaw lampoons General Theodor Abram, who has not set foot on a battlefield in decades, even though he was trained for ‘fighting with broadsword and mace.’ Shaw writes that ‘if the ultimate conflict was ever joined he would not be required to press any buttons; the tools of his trade were made of paper, not steel; but he was a warrior nonetheless because the burden of responsibility for technical preparedness was such that only a patriot and a hero could have borne it.’ Abram is described as having two sets of enemies: ‘one was the nation against whom his own people might some day be called to arms; the other set was represented by his own missiles and the technicians who designed and maintained them.’ The Cold War is emphasised by Shaw in the narrative as an era of stability and peace, brought about by the ingenuity of scientists; Shaw writes of Abram that ‘during his years in office he had developed a profound dislike for the scientists and engineers who had inflicted his present circumstances on him, and he took every opportunity to show it.’<sup>928</sup> In this figuration of deterrent as utopia, nuclear weapons are posed as being pacifying in themselves, preventing old soldiers like Abram from realising their violent fantasies.

Shaw’s *Ground Zero Man* promises to critique the proliferation of nuclear weapons, with the protagonist Hutchman inventing a device that can detonate all the world’s nuclear arsenal at once, in an attempt to provoke the nuclear nations to disarm by the fact of the device’s existence. Early in the novel, we hear that a nuclear weapon has been exploded over Damascus, but Shaw does not name the nation responsible. The fact is used as a narrative spur for Hutchman to create his anti-bomb machine, and throughout the novel, he reflects on the devastation of Damascus. A sense of Cold War anxiety is introduced in the opening of the novel, echoing Neal Alexander’s connection

---

<sup>927</sup> *Shadow of Heaven*, p. 13.

<sup>928</sup> *Two-Timers*, pp. 118-119.

between Northern Ireland and the ideologeme of conspiracy. Hutchman states that ‘my finger rests lightly on the black button. The street beyond this window looks quiet, but I am not deceived—for my death lies out there, waiting.’<sup>929</sup> Hutchman sets up the anti-bomb device, intending to blackmail the nuclear powers into disarming their nuclear arsenals.<sup>930</sup> But later in the narrative, Shaw complicates the issue of nuclear proliferation, pointing to the limitations of a position advocating for complete disarmament. Hutchman begins to have doubts about the project, coming to a realisation that dismantling the world’s nuclear arsenal is a more complex process than he had envisaged. Shaw writes:

Hutchman was suddenly struck by the vastness of his own presumption. He knew absolutely nothing of the practical detail design of H-bombs—supposing that in his theoretician’s sublime ignorance he had not allowed enough time for the warheads to be broken down into sufficiently sub-critical concentrations? What would happen in a Polaris submarine under an Arctic icecap? And was it possible that a power which had been considering a nuclear attack against a hostile neighbour would be prompted to act while there was still time?<sup>931</sup>

Shaw’s theoretician is struck by the practicalities of nuclear disarmament, and the prospect of disarmament creating pockets of opportunity in which the so-called delicate balance of deterrent could be thrown into chaos.

The novel ends with Hutchman’s plan a failure, the states mathematician concluding that ‘nuclear weapons were not discarded, as I had so myopically expected. They were simply redesigned to allow for the possibility of a Hutchman Trigger being in existence.’<sup>932</sup> Indeed, Shaw makes the point that Hutchman’s intervention may have made things worse. Hutchman concludes that:

This, then, was the sum total of my achievement—that I diverted many billions of any currency you care to mention into an unnecessary detour in the arms race. How many human lives does that represent in terms of hospitals not built, of aid programs cancelled, of food and medical supplies never shipped? How many withered babies have been buried in shoe boxes because of me?<sup>933</sup>

---

<sup>929</sup> *Ground Zero Man*, p. 5.

<sup>930</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 57.

<sup>931</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 149.

<sup>932</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 159.

<sup>933</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 159.

The novel's horizon of peace lies in shreds at the close of the novel, which ends with the line 'what is the use of trying?'<sup>934</sup> Having begun with a proposition to end nuclear proliferation through a device designed to detonate all bombs on Earth simultaneously—itsself hardly a pacifist solution—Shaw's narrative closes with the conclusion that any attempt at disarmament is futile.

Franklyn points out that the imagining of nuclear devices in fiction was seen as a way of America avoiding becoming an old style military nation, a vision that motivated Thomas Edison to look for 'a device to ensure peace.'<sup>935</sup> In this view, the threat of force represented by the ultimate weapon would promote such fear, that the U.S. would never have to fight a war with personnel, tanks and planes like older military nations. Hutchman's threat to explode every nuclear bomb on the planet is not a pacifist solution to nuclear standoff, but redolent of the same logic of deterrent and mutually assured destruction that maintained the Cold War status quo.<sup>936</sup>

We leave our discussion of *Ground Zero Man* here with the utopian realism of Shaw, and the assurance that, in a world of nuclear proliferation, the stakes of nationalist aggression between countries ensures a guarded peace. We have seen glimpses of a utopian impulse to move beyond this position, from White's tentative foray into internationalist politics in 'The Ideal Captain', to the cosmopolitanism that is resisted but eventually conceded to in the narrative of 'Occupation: Warrior'. Given the role of Northern Ireland in N.A.T.O. and the employment of Shaw and White at Shorts during the period, it is unsurprising that the Cold War looms in the background of the fiction of both authors. Nuclear technology is, for the most part, expressed as a positive development in their fiction, whether as the 'explosive boot in the pants' that White suggests in *The Secret Visitors*, or as a means of safeguarding against older forms of aggression manifesting themselves in Shaw's *Ground Zero Man*.

Utopia in the fiction of Shaw and White then, manifests in both its repressive and redemptive modes. Both authors share a conspiratorial ideologeme that reaches to articulate a utopian totality impossible to grasp, their protagonists uncovering

---

<sup>934</sup> *Ground Zero Man*, p. 160.

<sup>935</sup> *War Stars*, p. 71.

<sup>936</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 151.

conspiracies and becoming willing accomplices. In White, horizons of hope persist, but these can manifest as repressive utopian impulses inspired by the concrete abstraction of the overview effect in which humanity becomes a tumour to be excised. In White's fiction this leads to a circular argument in which violence is accepted against a select population of troublemakers so that order is restored. As we have seen, this state of exception has profound consequences both for Northern Ireland and the wider world.

## Conclusion

This thesis has considered the science fiction of Bob Shaw and James White as, among other things, a reflection of engineering culture in Northern Ireland, an estrangement of history and the identities informed by its narratives, an attempt to recalibrate an encounter with the alien Other, and a manifestation of the utopian impulse in all its contradictions. As noted in the introduction, the purpose of the thesis has not been to suggest the peculiarity of Northern Irish science fiction when compared to science fiction produced elsewhere. Rather, the aim of the thesis was to reveal fragments in the work of Shaw and White that connect their texts to the milieu in which they were created, producing readings with the specificity and intensity that Aaron Kelly suggests the utilisation of Fredric Jameson's political unconscious provides. Partition, and the tensions and discourses that fed into it, no doubt had an effect on the way in which Northern Irish, or more specifically Belfast, science fiction developed. The subgenre developed with a direct connection to the international science fiction community, in the same manner in which the industries of the region connected to international capital. As touched on in the introduction, this interaction with the global genre of science fiction makes Northern Irish science fiction in the mid-twentieth century quite unexceptional in relation to the wider international field. However, when studied through the prism of the political unconscious, fragments are revealed that articulate tensions specific to Northern Ireland, regarding development and modernity, history and identity, the borders of the self, and the multi-faceted nature of utopian thinking.

As pointed out by John Rieder, Fredric Jameson, Andrew Milner and other critics, the genre of science fiction is inextricably linked to industrial capitalism and the project of modernity, and as such, when we study iterations of the form across Ireland as a whole, it throws light on the history of uneven development across the island. The position of this thesis has been that the shock of the new in Ireland's encounter with modernity, inferred by Jack Fennell, and its relation to the science fiction generated on the island, has a different colouring in its Belfast manifestation.<sup>937</sup> As noted in Chapter

---

<sup>937</sup> *Irish Science Fiction*, p. 4.

One, the binary of a rural south engaged in the Irish cultural revival and a developed north focused on industrial production, is problematised by the existence of a Northern Revival. But industrialisation, and the fates of the pieces resulting from partition, do go some way to explaining how the science fiction form took hold in Belfast, quickly connecting itself to the wider international science fiction community, and to the publishing centres of the industrialised world such as London and New York, in much the same way as companies such as Shorts or Harland and Wolff enmeshed themselves with the fortunes of international capitalism. As noted in the introduction, no careers in science fiction comparable to that of Shaw and White emerged from the south in the period in question, or indeed have emerged since.

The thesis began by attempting to sketch out, not the cause and effect relation between Belfast industry and Belfast science fiction, but the *a priori* conditions for the emergence of the science fiction form in the region. It suggested that Shaw and White's position within the structure of industrial Northern Ireland became transcoded into science fiction that transmitted the ideologeme of progress through technology. This ideologeme is articulated through characters such as Tallon in Shaw's *Night Walk*, his true engineering self revealed through interaction with advanced technology in a high security political prison, or the security guard Carson in White's *Tomorrow is Too Far*, adept at connecting the pieces of industrial process together and privy to advanced technical knowledge merely through the proximity to technology that his job affords him. The notion of structural causality was nuanced in the thesis with reference to the theory of networks suggested by Bruno Latour, and ways in which characters in the fiction of Shaw and White cede agency to technological artefacts were considered. This points to the anxiety surrounding technological reason that Herbert Marcuse articulates. As the last man on Earth, the agency of Ross in White's *Second Ending* flip-flops between himself and the robot Ward Sister, leading to anxiety about the status of technology and its ability to become an actor itself. Nicklin also recognises this in Shaw's *Orbitsville Departure*, as the technologically-advanced rifle positions itself on retreating enemies leading to Nicklin shooting them in the back, an act that he finds repugnant when the element of technology is subtracted. We could relate this to Fredric Jameson's remark that under industrial capitalism objects appear to have a life of their

own.<sup>938</sup> Jameson, following Althusser, points to History as the real force moving these objects, both human and nonhuman. If we consider Benjamin Noys's critique of Latour's work, we might consider the work of Jameson and Althusser as somehow completing the networked picture that Latour draws out, with History as its absent cause. In this way, Latour's work is retrieved from its historical context: the era of neo-liberalism.

The networked relationship between the human and technology is raised to a higher level by the idea of the technological sublime, a notion that crosses over easily to the science fiction sublime and the 'sense of wonder' the genre is typically seen as possessing. The thesis has shown the flip-flop of agency between the technological and the human, and David E. Nye's suggestion of the technological sublime privileging human ingenuity in creating the sublime objects of technology, repatriates agency to the human in the technology/human network. But as manifested in the work of Shaw and White, the technological sublime is also subject to anxieties surrounding human agency and fears of technologies becoming monstrous and out of control. In Shaw's *Orbitsville*, Garamond encounters the technological sublime of an alien race, and marvels at the ingenuity required to create an artificial planet on such a scale, falling back on an earlier sense of the sublime and losing his personality in the vastness. Access to the sublime sight of the neutrino planet in *A Wreath of Stars* leads to ambiguity about whether the planet has been created or discovered. Latour's work is also useful here, in analysing the dual status of the objects of science and technology as both 'natural' phenomena and 'created' artefacts, adding a note of ambiguity to the ideologue of progress through advanced technology and scientific discovery.

The idea of the technological sublime is useful in detecting moments in which the characters in science fiction feel that humanity has reached a pinnacle in technological innovation, representing a supra-manifestation of the ideologue of improvement through technology. In the fiction of Shaw and White, this ideologue also manifests in various teleological developmental schema that underpin their created universes, such as the timetable for the lifetime of a technical civilisation in Shaw's *The Palace of Eternity*, in which a race moves through different modes of technical ability.

---

<sup>938</sup> *Marxism and Form*, p. 197.

In that novel, the validity of such a schema is thrown into disarray by the Syccans' rejection of human technology, an act that is shown by the closure of the narrative to be one of self-preservation rather than belligerence. White's view of the developmental schema is less nuanced than Shaw's, with the fictional discipline of comparative technology suggesting that the level of civilisation embodied in an alien race is inscribed in their technologies. White also proposes a map for progress linking technological advance to preparedness for contact with the wider space community. These developmental schemata transcend the ideology of the Planters, who saw their intervention in Northern Ireland as a civilising act that developed the wilds for human habitation. This notion of the forward thrust of modernity, linked throughout Chapter One to an ideologeme of progress through technology, is thrown into doubt in the era of late capitalism, as a Belfast firmly embedded in the ebbs and flows of global capital began to experience post-industrialisation, with stable employment and the identities dependent upon it sacrificed to shore up a crisis in profitability. This 'de-industrialisation with a vengeance' is itself reflected in the later work of Shaw and White, with alternative developmental paths and ragged technologies suggesting a kind of progress not based upon teleological development, or at least not using human technological development as a yardstick with which to measure progress.

Chapter Two analysed the strategic identities that rely on history, and their manifestation across the science fiction of Shaw and White. The notion of history was considered through the work of Fredric Jameson, who, drawing from Louis Althusser, suggests that History (capitalised), is inaccessible, an absent cause that can only be grasped in fragments by historians, or detected erupting to the surface in cultural texts. This view of history became relevant to the chapter's discussion of revisionism in Irish historical work, and its claim to achieve a value-free, scientific method, an idea which had particular relevance to Shaw's approach to history in his narratives. Shaw and White's work was shown as often typifying the bourgeois realist narratives that Kirkland detects in Northern Irish fiction more generally. But the form of science fiction, as articulated by Carl Freedman through an examination of Georg Lukàcs's work on the historical novel, was shown to push against the limits of this narrative closure, suggesting a radical alterity that treats the present as the history of the futures it depicts. Shaw's *Land and Overland* trilogy was suggested as depicting a society in which history is used to inform a sense of static identity, a notion that is then



problematised by Lain's encounter with a cave painting that suggests a deviant historical narrative, opening Lain up to History as a process that can never be fully represented. Shaw's slow glass was considered as a substance that offers a 'perfect and incontrovertible' view of historical events, embodied in a piece of the substance being guarded round the clock in order to safeguard the secrets it holds relevant to a murder case. Slow glass echoes the work of Richard Kirkland on the structural opposition between sight and ideology in Northern Irish discourse, an opposition that places the witness in a position beyond ideology, an idea that also echoes the claims of the Irish revisionist historians to have found an ideology-free historical practice. The implications of slow glass that Shaw unpacks across the slow glass novel *Other Days, Other Eyes*, however, cast doubt on the ability of the substance to provide an unadulterated truth, it being shown prone to manipulation for criminal and ideological purposes, the notion of a value-free history contaminated by the possibility that slow glass can be tampered with, or used as an explicit accessory of ideology, in an attempt to change the ideological orientation of a prisoner of war.

White's fiction offers a similar ambiguity surrounding history and the identities that are dependent upon it. In White's *The Dream Millennium*, the history of Earth is shown as a natural phenomenon that manifests when a human leaves Earth, a pure and unmediated history that is breathed in throughout a person's life and triggered once they leave. But values are also transmitted through this supposedly natural phenomenon, Devlin apprehending homosexuals he encounters in the process as labouring under a perversion, and in need of forgiveness, typical of the Catholic futures envisaged by White, discussed later in the chapter. The depiction of the Game in *The Watch Below* offers a link between the alien race the Unthan and the human inhabitants of a sunken ship. The Unthan Deslann reflects on the history of his planet in order to mitigate the effect that space travel has on his memory. But the relation of the Game to history is not so clear cut, as the practice of rendering an accurate history from memory is shown as prone to omissions and conflicting interpretations. White brings this aspect into deeper focus in *The Silent Stars Go By*, with the oral tradition of knowledge transfer used in the colonisation of a new planet shown to be heavily selective, once more opening up the possibility for a so-called pure and unadulterated history to become a conduit for ideological content and invention. Indeed, the mythic pattern that Nolan uses to structure his own journey on the new planet borrows from the story of Brendan's

journey to the Americas, and the untruths, omissions and inventions with which the monk laid the foundation for friendship between the Native Americans and the Irish. The narrative closure of *The Silent Stars Go By* has Nolan the atheist accept that the ideology on the new planet will be a Catholic one, and this was shown as part of a tendency in White's fiction to depict Catholic futures. This feature of White's fiction mitigates against the radicalising tendencies of the science fiction form proposed by Suvin and Freedman. White depicts technologies that regulate sexual behaviour on board space ships, for fear of the effect of space travel on any resulting offspring, but fails to envision any developments in contraceptive technology. This points to a tension in White's work in which the estrangements of science fiction, and their position on the present as mutable, are dampened by the restrictions of bourgeois subjectivity in its Catholic mode.

In this instance, White's science fiction cedes to an identitarian imperative, but for his part, Shaw attempts to critique Unionism within the narrative of *Night Walk*, albeit in preference for the non-aligned identity that Kirkland suggests is just as dependent on the two-traditions paradigm in Northern Ireland. Tallon's travels through space convince him to reject a Unionism that would attempt to incorporate any planet that humanity colonises, but the narrative falls back on colonial impulses, with the promise of abundance mitigating contradictions on the home planet. *Orbitsville* was also examined for its colonial figures, and its suggestion that the abundance of a new world reduces the centralised power of a monarch back on Earth. The estranging effect of *Orbitsville*, as well as the massive scope of the novel and its sequels, present a view on history as a process, the present rendered mutable and subject to change, whether through human effort, technology, or simply the contingency of events. The *Orbitsville* trilogy privileges provisionality, tapping into the ability of the science fiction form to stress the mutability of present political, economic and social structures. In doing so, Shaw transcends the limits of the bourgeois novel, with historical flux suggesting uncertainty for any strategic identity dependent on history for its legitimacy.

Whereas Chapter Two considered how Shaw and White negotiate their own identity through their science fiction, Chapter Three attempted to locate how the identity of the Other manifests across their work. The Other has become an important concept for Irish Studies, particularly the area of the discipline influenced by

Postcolonial Studies, and studying the work of Shaw and White as Irish science fiction throws up instances of the alien Other that speak to discourses well established in the discipline, and embody estrangements of those discourses. Using the work of Patricia Monk on the alien in magazine science fiction, the chapter attempted to locate instances of mere Otherness, considered by Monk to be a picture of the alien lacking depth, and OtherSelfness, a term that has the same meaning as alterity for Monk, and describes a depiction of the alien that recognises another self in the alien Other. Shaw attempts to reverse the negative polarity of the alien Other by presenting a narrative where an original arachnid reaction to the presence of the alien is nuanced and reversed by thinking through the motivations of the alien Other. Two manifestations of this reversal were considered. 'And Isles Where Good Men Lie' was considered as a kind of science fiction revisionism, in which the Nessters provide an estranged stand in for the Planters, their project of colonisation reframed as one of exodus from climatic disaster, the colonists redrawn as refugees. In reference to Richard Kirkland's remark surrounding the equal legitimacy thesis, the chapter noted that this estrangement fails to register the power dynamic behind the plantations. In *The Palace of Eternity*, a similar reversal occurs, with the frenzied fighting and anti-technology stance of the Syccans revealed as having a foundation in the genocidal effect of the human's butterfly ship technology on the mass mind of the Syccan race. But in locating this OtherSelfness in the Syccans, and even empathising with it, the human plan to use the information to completely eradicate the Syccan race, and a narrative closure whereby the Earth and the Syccan mass minds are kept separate, represents the return of the arachnid reaction, with a strict demarcation between the human and the alien Other.

This strict line of definition between the alien and the human reveals a fear of absorption by the Other in the fiction of Shaw and White, and the thesis considered the relevance of this notion to the Good Friday Agreement of 1998. The sense of hybridity in the agreement detected by Declan Kiberd is critiqued by Máiréad Nic Craith and Colin Graham, who suggest that the settlement merely maintains reified identities and submerges diversity within a two-traditions structure. Graham critiques Kiberd through reference to Subaltern Studies, a strand of Postcolonial Studies that highlights the tendency of post-colonial nations to submerge the identities of Others within a national identity in this way. The tactic of mimicry outlined by Homi K. Bhabha, in which the culture of the coloniser is utilised by the colonised for strategic advantage is suggested

as one sense in which a true hybridity crosses the boundary of identity. The fiction of Shaw and White displays the crossing of boundaries in this way, as well as a concomitant fear of subversion from within by an alien Other. In *Night Walk*, a prosthetic technology that allows Tallon to see through the eyes of an Other becomes a site for anxieties surrounding the border of the self, as Tallon considers whether the personality of his nemesis Cherkassky has been transferred in the exchange. In *Medusa's Children*, the allure that Tarrant feels in regard to becoming part of a composite identity is balanced with the realisation that the loss of self involves committing acts he finds repugnant. These Shaw narratives suggest hybridity through technological or means unknown to science, but resist the absorption of self in a composite identity, a reflex the thesis connected to a fear of the mob, an impulse that was found to be more pronounced in the work of White.

White's Sector General narratives describe a wide range of alien Others, requiring various technological means to achieve an ethical multi-species community, which also becomes a site of anxiety surrounding the border of the human self. The universal translator translates the language of an alien Other, but fails to register the OtherSelfness of the alien. This species barrier is breached by the structure of the hospital, which requires the inhabitants to experience alien environments in the process of navigating its many rooms, and by the use of creative carpentry in the dining areas of the ship, which forces different alien species to feel the embodiment of the alien Other, a phenomenon that was linked to Ralph Acampora's term *symphysis*, a word the philosopher uses to describe a somaesthetic nexus containing many Others in sympathetic coexistence. The educator tapes are the most extreme form of this nexus, inserting the ontology of an alien directly into the mind of the user. This technique, described as voluntary schizophrenia, becomes a site of anxiety about the border of the self, with alien sexuality in particular becoming an obsession for Conway while under the tape's influence.

Finally, the chapter turned to the categorisation system used by White in the Sector General series, which was discussed as a means to further police the boundary between the human and the alien, and as a means of structuring anxieties the narrative registers surrounding alien sexuality and the border of the self. White's system, proposed by the author as a counter-anthropocentric means of cataloguing Otherness,

is undermined by the animal analogues with which White creates his fictional aliens, and the presumed continuity between the physiology, culture and psychology of the alien and the human, leading White's aliens to articulate mere Otherness rather than OtherSelfness in Monk's terms. The position of the human in the categorisation system also speaks to the sense of a border, with aliens merely thinking of themselves as human, while not possessing the traits necessary to be considered unambiguously human. In Shaw and White, the estrangements enabled by contemplating the form of the alien breach the border between the self and the Other, but often result in a description of mere Otherness, rather than the OtherSelfness of an alien race. In addition, the border between the human and the Other is reassembled in the last instance, in anxieties surrounding the loss of identity and leakage between the personalities of the human and the alien, as well as, in White's case, a categorisation system that strictly polices the border between the human and the alien Other.

Chapter Four examined instances of the utopian impulse in the work of Shaw and White by first introducing the concept of utopia with reference to the work of Tom Moylan, Lyman Tower Sargent, Raymond Williams and Carl Freedman. Some formal affinities between utopia and the work of Shaw and White were noted, in particular the critical utopias of the 1960s as located by Moylan. White's 1979 novel *Underkill* was examined as an instance of dystopia as a warning about possible futures if certain trends within Northern Ireland and the wider world continue, an impulse which is in itself a utopian gesture. Shaw's *The Shadow of Heaven* was analysed as an instance of critical utopia, with its protagonist Stirling at first sceptical of the Receders' plans for a material heaven on the Iles, but eventually joining the group himself in its plan to colonise space. Utopia was shown to possess a double aspect corresponding to repressive and redemptive modes, and drawing from a debate between Bill Ashcroft and Eoin Flannery, the chapter considered the possibility of a utopian impulse in line with Imperialist ideology, and an opposing impulse that echoes a post-colonial, inclusive ideology. This double aspect was shown in White's *The Watch Below*, as an alien race fleeing ecological disaster labours to found a colony, the benefits of which they will never see themselves. An instance of repressive utopianism was also highlighted in a recurring theme across White's fiction, in which a careful screening process denies undesirable individuals access to a new society on another planet.

This notion of an elite with a perfect insight regarding the direction in which humanity is heading is particularly pronounced in White's novel *Underkill*, which was considered from the perspective of the space writer Frank White's notion of the overview effect. F. White suggests that those who have travelled into space gain a privileged vantage point from which to view events on Earth, and the alien race the Trennechorans in the narrative of White's *Underkill* have a similar ability to detect the malady affecting Earth, as well as the proper means with which to cure it. The overview effect was shown as a highly ideological notion, involving a selection process in which certain conflicts on the ground are deemed meaningless, a manoeuvre that necessarily reflects the culture and ideology of the observer. As Colin Graham has noted, attempts have been made to effect a similar 'Gagarin effect' by artists in Northern Ireland, in particular Seán Hillen. Whereas Hillen's iteration of the overview effect estranges images of the Troubles by juxtaposing them with the imagery of space flight, White's *Underkill* places the overview effect at the disposal of an alien race who are tasked with locating what White calls 'the poisonous few' and eradicating them through terrorism, natural disasters and other violent acts. Although White identified as a pacifist, this iteration of the overview effect renders his pacifism ambiguous, with violence tolerated in the narrative for its tendency to further the utopian ideals of the Trennechorans. In this repressive utopian mode, humanity becomes mere material to be worked upon and improved, with undesirables defined as diseased and cancerous material to be excised.

This medical discourse was shown to have analogues in William Petty's appraisal of Ireland in the colonial period, and in Northern Irish politics in the period of the Troubles, with Prime Minister Brian Faulkner comparing internment to the kind of emergency procedures necessary to battle cancer. Internment was examined as an example of a state of exception, in which extraordinary measures are taken in order for the state to return to a state of normality, a state of normality that, as David Lloyd suggests, is left undefined. Lloyd's suggestion that internment ushered in an era of repressive interrogative modernity was seen reflected in the Chinese setting of Shaw's 'A Dome of Many-coloured Glass', with the Planner's use of slow glass as part of his torture techniques echoing the origin of techniques used against the subjects of internment as outlined by John McGuffin. The figure of the tortured body is also seen elsewhere in Shaw's fiction, the narrative of *Orbitsville Departure* depicting the policeman Dallen threatening a stereotypical terrorist with violence in a ticking-bomb

scenario. Lloyd suggests that scenarios such as this breach the requirement for disinterest on the part of the law, and as such break with the ethical subject position of modernity. The figure of the tortured body in this scenario is an analogue of emergency procedures introduced to restore normality to Northern Ireland, and within the framework set up by the chapter, stand as a form of repressive utopianism in which human bodies become mere material to be worked on to achieve this end. As Walter Benjamin, Giorgio Agamben, and others, have articulated, the state of exception becomes normality, and techniques developed in Northern Ireland influence extra-judicial actions by countries in the post-war on terror period.

The next section returned to the subject of pacifism in the fiction of White, the author's purported support for non-violence the central utopian impulse in his work. Non-violence was shown as making scant appearance across White's work, even in the Sector General series, the author's pacifist opus. Like other science fiction authors who espouse pacifism, such as Isaac Asimov, White's concentration on power dynamics and military conflict leave little scope for depictions of societies prefigured through non-violent principles. The Federation in the Sector General series was shown to use an underlying threat of violence to discipline planets it comes into contact with. In addition, across the Sector General narratives, rather than critique violence, White critiques pacifism itself, depicting the philosophy of nonviolence as unrealistic and childish, and positioning those who protest against violence as violent individuals. The Federation's claim to have eradicated war was demonstrated as merely a process of redefinition, with war articulated as police action, a notion that also echoes the definition of the role of the British army in Northern Ireland in the period of the Troubles.

War as police action is related to the idea of humanity as one race, a notion that echoes the utopianism of the overview effect, in which local differences are elided by an outside agency. The thesis connected this idea to an opposition between cosmopolitanism which becomes the preserve of the mobile rich, and a localism of the poor, defined by the opposition as tribalism. In 'Occupation: Warrior' this tendency is drawn out over a galactic scale, with those clinging to a localised planetary identity encouraged to engage in violent conflict with tribalists of other planets, an iteration of White's notion of the poisonous few who spoil society. By contrast, 'The Ideal

Captain', an earlier White story, reaches towards a form of internationalism, with cooperation between soldiers of different nations laying a foundation of peace, and suggesting the possibility of an international collective with the ability to challenge power in the context of the space race, mitigating against nuclear threat. White does not pursue these possibilities in his later fiction, with the prerequisite for violence becoming more dominant in his narratives.

An underlying threat of violence as a guarantor for peace is also found in the nuclear imaginary that both Shaw and White engage with, in which the potential violence of competing nationalisms is quieted by the threat of nuclear war, a narrative closure made doubly significant by the employment of Shaw and White at Shorts, a firm with links to the arms industry. This nuclear utopianism is expressed by White as a safeguard against a nationalism he associates with the lower classes, and we considered the manifestation of nationalism as an attempt at utopian collectivity, albeit in a disfigured form. Shaw's vision of nuclear deterrent in *Ground Zero Man* takes place as an adjustment of the original total disarmament position of the protagonist, and his attempt to force a halt to nuclear proliferation with a device that simultaneously explodes the world's nuclear arsenal. The close of Shaw's narrative takes up a position of utopian realism, with nuclear weapons proposed by the protagonist as the only means of keeping peace in a world of potential conflicts.

It has not been the aim of this thesis to suggest exceptionalism on the part of Northern Irish science fiction. The science fiction of Shaw and White bears the influence of a genre defined by a consensus community of writers, editors, fans and publishers. Instead, this thesis has attempted to locate fragmentary instances of the political unconscious across the texts of Shaw and White, moments when the milieu in which the authors created becomes apparent, the 'necessity' of the social structure in which the texts were written revealed. The thesis has argued for exceptionalism in the case of the genre of science fiction itself, however, following the work of Darko Suvin, Fredric Jameson, Carl Freedman and others in suggesting that science fiction narratives differ from those of more realist forms. As such, the fragments revealed in the study of Northern Irish science fiction differ from those unveiled in the study of other narrative forms.



This thesis has shown how Shaw and White's science fiction transcodes an ideologeme of improvement through technological development, but also registers anxieties surrounding the position of the human in the human/technology network. The depiction of ragged technologies and deviant developmental histories articulated a sense of post-industrial malaise in Northern Ireland, as a crisis of profitability led to a shift in global capitalist development. The historical and critical aspect to the genre creates tension in their work, in the case of Shaw's *Orbitsville* a tension that overcomes the limits of the bourgeois novel, the impatient genre of science fiction just stopping short of answering the question of what comes after identity. In White's case the critical aspect of science fiction is dampened by the bourgeois norms imposed by Catholic values, the narrative presuming a continuation of these values in a space-going human culture. Science fiction's preoccupation with the alien Other threatens the border of the human and the alien in their fiction, a potential that is resisted by both authors, with narrative closures that impose a strict delineation between the human and the alien in the last instance. The fear of the mob, anxiety regarding alien sexuality, and the attraction and repulsion of hybrid identity, all map onto the discourses of identity formation in Northern Ireland, providing science fiction analogues for attempts at conflict resolution. In the urgency of the conflict situation in Northern Ireland, utopian thought is given an additional charge. Both authors display the varied and contradictory attributes of the utopian impulse in its repressive and redemptive modes, White's narratives advocating repressive utopian methods to somehow cure humanity, and suggesting the threat of violence as a guarantor for peace. These narrative closures are reflections of White's notion of a poisonous few, spoiling the lives of those with no interest in politics, and are echoed in the material history of internment, enhanced interrogation and extralegal actions that connect Northern Ireland to the current climate of the War on Terror. Shaw's utopia is embodied in the threat of nuclear annihilation, proposed as the best hope for peace, a kind of utopian realism that dismantles any hope for nuclear disarmament at the close of *Ground Zero Man*.

Although science fiction cannot claim access to any sense of a purer truth than other types of narrative fiction, the fragments of the social structure that are articulated in an analysis of the form differ from those found in realist narrative. It is important, therefore, that the subgenre of Irish science fiction becomes an object of analysis for Irish Studies. Much work remains to be done on the study of Irish science fiction

through the lens of Irish Studies. Jack Fennell's 2014 volume on the subject suggests the beginning rather than the end of a long overdue conversation on the subgenre.

Notably absent from Fennell's book is the Galway born author Joseph O'Neill, who was a close friend of W.B. Yeats and worked as Permanent Secretary of the Department of Education in the early Irish state. The work of O'Neill certainly deserves wider consideration in Irish Studies. O'Neill's science fiction works are *Wind from the North* (1934), a time travel narrative centred on an alternative history of the Battle of Clontarf, *Land Under England* (1935), in which it is discovered that the Romans never left England and survive beneath Hadrian's Wall, and *Day of Wrath* (1936), a future war narrative.<sup>939</sup> It is *Land Under England* that is most relevant to Irish science fiction studies. The novel details the adventures of young English man Anthony Julian, as he follows his Rome-obsessed father into a secret cavern beneath Hadrian's Wall; his father's obsession has led to the discovery of a hollow earth beneath the wall to which the Roman civilization has retreated; as a result of its isolation from the rest of humanity the civilisation has evolved telepathic mind-control techniques in order to control its subjects. Like the works of Shaw and White, the novel has garnered attention from science fiction scholars, but has been neglected by Irish Studies. As a result the novel, critics such as Brian Aldiss posit the novel as a warning against fascist movements sweeping across Europe in the 1930s.<sup>940</sup> As recently as 2009, the science fiction scholar Mark Bould cited the novel as an 'anti-Nazi subterranean adventure about a totalitarian society reduced to mindless automatons.'<sup>941</sup> While it has to be acknowledged that O'Neill's novel was influenced by events in Europe to some extent, when the novel is reframed through the lens of Irish Studies, it is the rise of Eoin O'Duffy's Blueshirts that inevitably comes to the fore. The fact that Fennell names the 1930s as the period when 'Ireland became paranoid', but fails to mention O'Neill's deeply paranoid novel demonstrates that more work remains to be done on Irish science fiction, or at the very least O'Neill's work itself.<sup>942</sup> A study of O'Neill's novel through the lens of Science Fiction Studies and Irish Studies would enrich our understanding of the emerging Irish

---

<sup>939</sup> Joseph O'Neill, *Wind from the North* (Dublin: Browne and Nolan, 1934); *Land Under England* (1935) (London: New English Library, 1978); *Day of Wrath* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1936)

<sup>940</sup> *Trillion Year Spree*, 247-248.

<sup>941</sup> Mark Bould, 'Left SF: Selected and Annotated, If Not Always Exactly Recommended Works' in *Red Planets* eds. Mark Bould and China Miéville (London: Pluto Press, 2009) p. 260.

<sup>942</sup> *Irish Science Fiction*, p. 107.

state, a period in which anti-communist and anti-fascist scares added to the 'frenzied and paranoid' atmosphere.<sup>943</sup>

Fennell does give an analysis of the Belfast author Ian McDonald, focusing on what Fennell calls his 'parochial' science fiction works, in which McDonald extrapolates from a country in the developing world, imagining how it will be affected by technology and geopolitics into the future.<sup>944</sup> The most famous of McDonald's novels in this area is 2004's *River of Dreams*, the winner of a British Science Fiction Association Award for best novel. The novel imagines a future India split into smaller and smaller states, a notion reminiscent of Eamonn Hughes's suggestion, discussed in Chapter Two, of the conflict in Northern Ireland as a harbinger of future conflicts of identity rather than a sign of atavistic passions.<sup>945</sup> McDonald's first parochial work was the future-Kenya novels *Chaga* (1995) and *Kirinya* (1997).<sup>946</sup> This was followed by the future-India works *River of Dreams* and the short story collection *Cyberabad Days* (2009), after which Brazil, in *Brasyl* (2007), and Turkey, in *The Dervish House* (2010), were depicted through McDonald's futurological lens.<sup>947</sup> McDonald's parochial works blend advanced technology with local traditions, such as the blurring of the line between nanotechnology and djinn mythology in *The Dervish House* and the A.I.s named after Hindu deities in *River of Gods*.

What makes McDonald's work interesting for Irish Studies is the connection between these works and his Irish Trilogy, the implications of which Fennell's book fails to fully tease out. McDonald's Irish Trilogy comprises *King of Morning, Queen of Day* (1991), *Hearts, Hands and Voices* (1992) and *Sacrifice of Fools* (1996).<sup>948</sup> In many ways, the first section of *King of Morning, Queen of Day*, entitled 'Craigdarragh', rehearses many of the ideas that McDonald expands upon in the parochial novels. The novel depicts three generations of the same family, beginning with the story of Emily Desmond, told in epistolary form. Emily is a teenager living in Sligo in 1913 who is

---

<sup>943</sup> Diarmaid Ferriter, *The Transformation of Ireland 1900-2000* (London: Profile, 2005) p.364

<sup>944</sup> *Irish Science Fiction*, p. 172.

<sup>945</sup> Ian McDonald, *River of Dreams* (London: Simon & Schuster, 2004)

<sup>946</sup> Ian McDonald, *Chaga* (London: Gollancz, 1995); *Kirinya* (London: Gollancz, 1998)

<sup>947</sup> Ian McDonald *Cyberabad Days* (London: Gollancz, 2009); *Brasyl* (London: Orion, 2007); *The Dervish House* (London: Gollancz, 2010)

<sup>948</sup> Ian McDonald, *King of Morning, Queen of Day* (London: Bantam, 1991); *Hearts, Hands and Voices* (London: Gollancz, 1992); *Sacrifice of Fools* (London: Gollancz, 1996)

influenced by the poetry of W.B. Yeats and becomes convinced that she is communing with faery folk on the grounds of her parents' estate. McDonald juxtaposes excerpts from Emily's diary with entries from her father Edward, an amateur astronomer and dedicated scientific rationalist. While observing the night sky, Edward predicts that the arrival of Bell's Comet into the Earth's atmosphere heralds the arrival of extraterrestrial beings. McDonald cannily destabilises genre categories, setting the flights of fancy provoked by Edward's astronomy against the concrete circumstances of the Home Rule crisis, inspired in part by the Gaelic Revival that so obsesses his daughter Emily. McDonald also evokes a conspiratorial ideologeme, with a conversation between two members of the Royal Academy outlining a plot to thwart Edward's attempt at contacting aliens by interfering with its funding. McDonald's novel is also interesting for the fact that it prefigured studies of the relationship between Ireland and science, such as those by Nicholas Whyte and Don O'Leary, by almost a decade.<sup>949</sup>

The latter sections of *King of Morning, Queen of Day* are set respectively in a Free State Dublin in which vagrant characters inspired by Beckett attempt to redraw the 'mythlines' that underpin reality, and a cyberpunk influenced future Dublin open to a globalised culture obsessed with Japanese anime and rave drugs. While not as successful as the 'Craigdarragh' section of the novel, both contain useful connections to the parochial works and their tendency to intersperse technology with local traditions. 1992's *Hearts, Hands and Voices*, the second novel of McDonald's Irish trilogy, is a far future allegory of the Irish War of Independence in which identities in the conflict is given an estranged counterpart. The Confessors, an estranged signifier for the Catholic identity, possess an ability to breathe life into inanimate matter resulting in organic entities called 'organicals' with which they provide themselves with houses, vehicles and food. The origins of the Confessor's nanobiological technology lies in the distant past and is referred to as The Green Wave, a time when the Confessors learned the cell-names of living things and began utilising them to create a society of abundance. In contrast, the Proclaimers signify the Protestant identity, their civilisation known by the artificially made glass cobbles of their cities. McDonald utilises science fictional estrangement to propose the Listeners as a resolution to the conflict, a

---

<sup>949</sup> Nicholas Whyte, *Science, Colonialism and Ireland* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1999); Don O'Leary, *Irish Catholicism and Science: From Godless Colleges to the Celtic Tiger* (Cork: Cork University Press, 2012)

commune drawn from both traditions that use organic and artificial technologies. An important aspect of Listener culture is a modification of the Green Wave virus with which the Confessors manipulate genetic material. Those infected with this modification are incapable of racial hatred, and become capable of intimate communication without the use of speech. The protagonist Mathembe interprets the virus as a 'love plague' that is passed through bodily fluids, 'a disease that makes its victims incapable of violent aggression towards each other and simultaneously reconciles them through intimate identity with each other.'<sup>950</sup>

With the conflict in Northern Ireland still ongoing, McDonald tellingly ends the narrative of *Hearts, Hands and Voices* before the full implications of the virus are developed. When McDonald returned to Irish material in 1996's *Sacrifice of Fools*, it was to take a sceptical look at the peace process then underway. McDonald imagines a Belfast in the midst of a power-sharing arrangement between London and Dublin. When an alien race called the Shian arrive on Earth, Northern Ireland must take its fair share of refugees. McDonald uses the Shian customs of sexuality, community and education to undermine binary identities in Northern Ireland, critiquing the neglect of alternative identities by the Good Friday settlement. The least interesting of McDonald's Irish Trilogy, *Sacrifice of Fools*' combination of postcoloniality and futurology nevertheless make it essential for any study of Irish science fiction. It is this combination that it shares with the other novels in the Irish Trilogy, and connects them to McDonald's parochial novels, which performs the same estrangements on Kenya, India, Brazil and Turkey. McDonald's novels articulate the local and the global, the postcolonial and the futuristic, while refusing the stasis of realist fiction. More work needs to be done with McDonald's fiction to integrate his parochial novels with the Irish Trilogy.

As Fennell's work demonstrates, the effects of globalisation has seen more and more science fiction published on the island of Ireland. As well as Ian McDonald's work—a continuation of sorts of the Belfast science fiction tradition of Shaw and White—Fennell outlines interventions in the subgenre of cyberpunk that have been

---

<sup>950</sup> *Hearts, Hands and Voices*, p. 299.

made in the south from the 1990s to the present, as well as one-off 'literary' science fiction texts such as Kevin Barry's *City of Bohane* (2011) or Mike McCormack's *Notes From a Coma* (2005).<sup>951</sup> These fictions take part in a globalised and postmodern science fiction community in which the boundaries between the genres of science fiction, fantasy and horror have become increasingly blurred, as well as the boundaries between various film and literary texts, and the peripheral culture that circulates around them.

Another related tendency that Fennell's text allows us to locate is the proliferation of Young Adult (Y.A.) science fiction coming from Ireland in the wake of successful dystopian young adult (Y.A.) novels such as *This is How I Live Now* (2004) and the three volumes of the Hunger Games series (*The Hunger Games*, 2008, *Mockingjay*, 2009, *Catching Fire*, 2010), as well as their film adaptations. Successful science fiction Y.A. novels such as *Epic* by Conor Kostick and Louise O'Neill's *Only Ever Yours*, as well as Irish language science fiction aimed at younger readers such as Iarla Mac Aodha Bhúí's *Domhan Faoi Cheilt*, point to a tendency in Irish publishing to present science fiction as a non-adult genre.<sup>952</sup> Even where science fiction and adult themes meet, as in Francis Stuart's *A Compendium of Lovers*, anxiety remains around the genre. The blurb on the back of Stuart's novel reads: 'the theme of classic thoroughbred racing is not a surprising ingredient of a Francis Stuart novel, but when carried on under the extra-terrestrial influence, are we into science fiction? In actuality we are not, because Stuart bases each unnerving step on the propositions of respected, if controversial astro-physicists, loosening the line between imagination and reality.'<sup>953</sup> How Stuart's scientific speculations differ from science fiction is not fully explained. We can only surmise that a calculation has been made to pre-empt serious adult readers who would be turned off by science fiction material. This tendency could be seen as being echoed by Declan Kiberd in a talk given to the Trinity College Postgraduate Seminar in 2014 when discussing children's literature itself. Kiberd suggested that 'we give the things we think we don't need to children', referencing the Victorian habit of passing the fashions of yesteryear, such as sailor suits, long johns and curly hair, onto

---

<sup>951</sup> Kevin Barry, *City of Bohane* (London: Random House, 2011); Mike McCormack, *Notes From a Coma* (London: Vintage, 2006)

<sup>952</sup> Conor Kostick, *Epic* (Dublin: O'Brien Press, 2004); Louise O'Neill, *Only Ever Yours* (London: Quercus, 2015); Iarla Mac Aodha Bhúí, *Domhan Faoi Cheilt* (Indreabhán: Cló Mhaigh Eo, 2000)

<sup>953</sup> Francis Stuart, *A Compendium of Lovers* (Dublin: Raven Arts Press, 1990)

children long after they have been deemed outmoded for adults.<sup>954</sup> If this is true, then it appears that the Irish think they have no need of science fiction. Indeed, given the increasing popularity of children's literature as an area for academic study, it appears that children's literature itself is assigned a more respectable position than science fiction.

With this in mind, this thesis concludes that the examination of Irish science fiction is important for Irish Studies, not simply because it exists, but because of its potential to enrich our understanding of Irish modernity. Irish literature's obsession with the past is often excoriated, most recently and vociferously in the author Julian Gough's blog post 'The State of Irish Literature' in which he bemoans what he sees as the continuing obsession with the past in Irish literature. Gough declares that 'if there is a movement in Ireland, it is backwards. Novel after novel set in the nineteen seventies, sixties, fifties. Reading award-winning Irish literary fiction, you wouldn't know television had been invented. Indeed, they seem apologetic about acknowledging electricity...'<sup>955</sup> If we accept Gough's thesis in regard to mainstream realist fiction and its relationship with the past, the question might be asked why a form of Irish fiction whose narratives open onto the radical alterities of the future has been ignored for so long. If, as Carl Freedman suggests, the potency of science fiction depends upon its ambiguous relation to the literary canon, then the study of Irish science fiction could prove rewarding in interrogating Irish literature in English, Irish Studies, Irish canon formation, Irish modernity and beyond.

---

<sup>954</sup> Declan Kiberd, 'From Lilliput to Narnia: Children's Literature', *Trinity College*, 11 December 2014 <<https://www.tcd.ie/English/literary-arts/Podcasts/Declan%20Kiberd.mp3>> [accessed 21 July 2015]; Kiberd also proposes children's literature as a missing aspect to postcolonial studies in an interview with Yulia Pushkarevskaya-Naughton. See 'Comparative Literature in Ireland and Worldwide: An Interview with Declan Kiberd', *Estudios Irlandeses*, 5 (2010), 129-142.

<sup>955</sup> Julian Gough, 'The State of Irish Literature', <http://www.juliangough.com/journal/2010/2/10/the-state-of-irish-literature-2010.html> [accessed 22 February 2016]

## Bibliography

### Primary Texts

- Bob Shaw, *The Ceres Solution* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1981)
- , *Dagger of the Mind* (1979) (London: Victor Gollancz, 1981)
- , *Fire Pattern* (1984) (London: Panther Books, 1985)
- , *The Fugitive Worlds* (London: Orbit Books, 1989)
- , *Ground Zero Man* (New York: Avon Books, 1971)
- , *Killer Planet* (1989) (London: Pan Macmillan, 1992)
- , *Medusa's Children* (1977) (London: Gollancz, 1987)
- , *Night Walk* (1967) (London: New English Library, 1970)
- , *One Million Tomorrows* (New York: Ace Books, 1980)
- , *Orbitsville* (London: Gollancz, 1975)
- , *Orbitsville Departure* (1983) (London: Orbit Books, 1991)
- , *Orbitsville Judgement* (1990) (London: Orbit, 1992)
- , *Other Days, Other Eyes* (1972) (London: Pan, 1978)
- , *The Palace of Eternity* (1970) (London: Pan Books, 1972)
- , *The Ragged Astronauts* (1986) (London: Gollancz, 1987)
- , *The Shadow of Heaven* (1969) (London: Corgi Books, 1978)
- , *Ship of Strangers* (New York: Ace Books, 1978)
- , *Terminal Velocity* (1975) (London: Victor Gollancz, 1991)
- , *The Two Timers* (1968) (New York: Ace Books, 1979)
- , *Tomorrow Lies in Ambush* (London: Pan Books, 1973)
- , *Warren Peace* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1993)
- , *Who Goes Here?* (1977) (London: Victor Gollancz, 1979)
- , *The Wooden Spaceships* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1989)
- , *A Wreath of Stars* (1976) (London: Gollancz, 1987)

- James White, *Ambulance Ship* (London: Corgi, 1986)
- , *Code Blue Emergency* (London: Futura, 1989)
- , *Dark Inferno* (1972) (London: Corgi, 1974)
- , *Deadly Litter* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1964)



- , *Double Contact* (New York: Tor Books, 1999)
- , *The Dream Millennium* (1974) (London: Corgi, 1976)
- , *The Escape Orbit* (1965) (New York: Ace Science Fiction, 1983)
- , *Federation World* (New York: Del Rey Books, 1988)
- , *Final Diagnosis* (New York: Tor Books, 1997)
- , 'Full-Time Hobbyist', *Locus*, 386 (1993) 4, 73-74
- , *The Galactic Gourmet* (New York: Tor Books, 1996)
- , *The Genocidal Healer* (New York: Del Rey, 1991)
- , *Hospital Station* (1967) (London: Corgi Books, 1976)
- , *Major Operation* (1971) (London: Futura Publications, 1987)
- , *Mind Changer* (New York: Tor, 1998)
- , *Monsters and Medics* (London: Corgi, 1977)
- , 'Occupation: Warrior' in *The Aliens Among Us* (1969) (London: Futura Publications, 1988)
- , *Second Ending* (New York: Ace Books, 1962)
- , *Sector General* (London: Futura Publications, 1983)
- , *The Secret Visitors* (1957) (London: New English Library, 1971)
- , *The Silent Stars Go By* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1991)
- , *Star Healer* (London: Futura Publications, 1987)
- , *Tomorrow is Too Far* (1971) (London: Corgi Books, 1973)
- , *Underkill* (London: Corgi, 1979)
- , *The Watch Below* (1966) (London: Corgi, 1967)
- , *The White Papers* eds. Mark Olson and Bruce Pelz (Framingham: NESF Press, 1996)

#### Secondary Texts

- Acampora, Ralph, *Corporal Compassion: Animal Ethics and Philosophy of Body* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2006)
- Adorno, Theodor, and Max Horkheimer, *The Dialectic of Enlightenment* (New York: Continuum, 1972)
- Agamben, Giorgio, *State of Exception* trans. Kevin Attell (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005)

- Aldiss, Brian, and David Wingrove, *Trillion Year Spree: The History of Science Fiction* (London: Paladin, 1986)
- Alexander, Neal, 'Remembering to Forget: Northern Irish Fiction After the Troubles' in *Irish Literature Since 1990: Diverse Voices* ed. by Scott Brewster and Michael Parker (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009) pp. 272-287.
- Allen, Theodore W., *The Invention of the White Race: Racial Oppression and Social Control* (London: Verso, 1994)
- Althusser, Louis, *For Marx* trans. Ben Brewster (London: Penguin, 1969)
- , *Lenin and Philosophy* trans. Ben Brewster (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971)
- Ashcroft, Bill, 'Critical Utopias', *Textual Practice*, 21.3 (2007), 411–43
- Asimov, Isaac, *Foundation Trilogy* (London: Everyman, 2010)
- Bardon, Jonathan, *A History of Ulster* (Belfast: Blackstaff Press, 1992)
- , *The Plantation of Ulster: The British Colonisation of the North of Ireland in the Seventeenth Century* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 2012)
- Barnes, C.H., *Shorts Aircraft Since 1900* (London: Putnam Aeronautical Books, 1989)
- Barnes, Timothy D., *Early Christian Hagiography and Roman History* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010)
- Barry, Kevin, *City of Bohane* (London: Random House, 2011)
- Baxter, John, *Stanley Kubrick: A Biography* (London: Harper Collins, 1998)
- Bellamy, Edward, *Looking Backward* (London: Penguin Books, 1986)

- Benford, Gregory, 'Effing the Ineffable' in *Aliens: The Anthropology of Science Fiction* ed. George S. Slusser and Eric S. Rabkin (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1987)
- Benjamin, Walter, 'Theses on the Philosophy of History' in *Illuminations* ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1985)
- Bennett, Ronan, *The Catastrophist* (London: Headline, 2004)  
 —, *Havoc, in its Third Year* (London: Headline, 2005)
- Betts, Richard K., 'Universal Deterrence or Conceptual Collapse? Liberal Pessimism and Utopia' in *The Coming Crisis: Nuclear Proliferation Interests and World Order* ed. Victor A. Utgoff (Cambridge: M.I.T. Press, 2000)
- Bhabha, Homi K., *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 2004)
- Bloch, Ernst, *The Principle of Hope* trans. Neville Plaice, Stephen Plaice and Paul Knight (1959) (Boston: MIT Press, 1996)
- Bourdieu, Pierre, *The Logic of Practice* (California: Stanford University Press, 1990)
- Brady, Ciaran, "Constructive and Instrumental": The Dilemma of Ireland's First 'New Historians' in *Interpreting Irish History* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2006)
- Brown, Terence, *The Whole Protestant Community: The Making of A Historical Myth* (Derry: Field Day, 1985)
- Buber, Martin, *I and Thou* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1979)
- Burke, Edmund, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (Oxford: Oxford World's Classics, 2008)  
 —, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* ed. L.G. Mitchell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009)

- Campbell, John W., 'Who Goes There' in *The Best of John W. Campbell* (London: Sphere Books, 1976)
- Carroll, Patrick, *Science, Culture, and Modern State Formation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006)
- Carson, Ciaran, 'Escaped from the Massacre?', *The Honest Ulsterman*, 50 (1975), 183-186.
- Castells, Manuel, 'European Cities, the Informational Society, and the Global Economy', *New Left Review*, 204 (1994) 18-32.
- Churchill, Ward, *Pacifism as Pathology: Reflections on the Role of Armed Struggle in North America* (Oakland: AK Press, 2007)
- Coakley, Maurice, *Ireland in the World Order: A History of Uneven Development* (London: Pluto Press, 2012)
- Comerford, Patrick, *Do You Want to Die For NATO?* (Dublin: Mercier Press, 1984)
- Connolly, James, *Labour in Irish History* (Dublin: Dorset Press, 1983)
- Cromie, Robert, *Crack of Doom* (London: Digby, Long & Co., 1895)
- Cronin, Michael G., *Impure Thoughts: Sexuality, Catholicism and Literature in Twentieth-Century Ireland* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012)
- Crotty, Raymond, *Ireland in Crisis: A Study in Capitalist Colonial Underdevelopment* (Kerry: Brandon Books, 1986)
- Crossley, Robert, 'Dystopian Nights', *Science Fiction Studies*, 41 (1987)
- Csicsery-Ronay JR., Istvan, *The Seven Beauties of Science Fiction* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2008)

Cullingford, Elizabeth, *Yeats, Ireland and Fascism* (London: MacMillan Press, 1981)

Deane, Seamus, *Strange Country: Modernity and Nationhood in Irish Writing Since 1790*  
(Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997)

Delany, Samuel, *The Jewel-Hinged Jaw: Notes on the Language of Science Fiction*  
(Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2009)

Derrida, Jacques, *The Animal that Therefore I Am* ed. Marie-Louise Mallet, trans. David  
Wills (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008)

——, *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness* (London: Routledge, 2001)

Devlin, Bernadette, *The Price of My Soul* (London: Pan Books, 1969)

Dixon, Paul, *Northern Ireland: The Politics of War and Peace* (Basingstoke: Palgrave  
Macmillan, 2008)

Eagleton, Terry, *After Theory* (London: Penguin, 2003)

——, 'Changing the Question' in *Theorising Ireland* ed. Claire Connolly (New York:  
MacMillan, 2003)

——, *Crazy John and the Bishop* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1998)

Engels, Friedrich, *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific* (1880) (London: Bookmarks, 1993)

Fennell, Jack, *Irish Science Fiction* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2014)

Ferriter, Diarmaid, *Occasions of Sin: Sex and Society in Modern Ireland* (London: Profile  
Books, 2009)

——, *The Transformation of Ireland 1900-2000* (London: Profile, 2005)

Finlayson, Alan, 'Discourse and Contemporary Loyalist Identity' in *Who are the People?:  
Unionism, Protestantism and Loyalism in Northern Ireland* ed. Peter Shirlow and  
Mark McGovern (London: Pluto Press, 1997)

- Flannery, Eoin, 'Ireland, Empire and Utopia: Irish postcolonial criticism and the Utopian impulse', *Textual Practice*, 24.3 (2010), 453–481
- Foucault, Michel, 'Of Other Spaces', *Diacritics*, 16.1 (1986) 22-27
- Franklyn, H. Bruce, *War Stars: The Superweapon and the American Imagination* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988)
- Freedman, Carl, *Critical Theory and Science Fiction* (Middletown CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2000)
- George, Marie I, *Christianity and Extraterrestrials?: A Catholic Perspective* (Lincoln: iUniverse, 2005)
- Gibbons, Luke, *Transformations in Irish Culture* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1996)
- Goody, Alex, *Technology, Literature and Culture* (Cambridge: Polity, 2011)
- Gough, Julian, 'The State of Irish Literature',  
<http://www.juliangough.com/journal/2010/2/10/the-state-of-irish-literature-2010.html>  
 [accessed 22 February 2016]
- Graeber, David, *Fragments of an Anarchist Anthropology* (Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press, 2004)
- Graham, Colin, *Deconstructing Ireland: Identity, Theory, Culture* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2001)
- , 'Gagarin's Point of View: Memory and Space in Recent Northern Irish Art', *The Irish Review*, 40/41 (2009), 104-113
- Graham, Brian, 'Ulster: A Representation of Place Yet to Be Imagined' in *Who are the People?: Unionism, Protestantism and Loyalism in Northern Ireland* ed. Peter Shirlow and Mark McGovern (London: Pluto Press, 1997)

- Gramsci, Antonio, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 2005)
- Greimas, A.J., and Francois Rastier, 'The Interaction of Semiotic Constraints', *Yale French Studies*, No. 41 (1968), pp. 86-105.
- Hall, Stuart, 'Who Needs Identity?' in *Identity: A Reader* edited by Paul Du Gay, Jessica Evans and Peter Redman (London: Sage Publications, 2003)
- Harvey, David, *The Condition of Postmodernity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995)
- Heaney, Seamus, 'Delirium of the Brave', *The Listener*, 27 (1969), 757-759
- Hederman, Mark Patrick, 'Poetry and the Fifth Province', *The Crane Bag*, 9.1 (1985), 110-119
- Hillen, Seán, *Irelantis* (Dublin: Irelantis Publications, 1999)
- Hough, Richard, *The Potemkin Mutiny* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1960).
- Hughes, Eamonn, 'Introduction: Northern Ireland—Border Country' in *Culture and Politics in Northern Ireland* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1991)
- Jackson, Alvin, 'Irish Unionists and the Empire 1880-1920: Classes and Masses' in *An Irish Empire?: Aspects of Ireland and the British Empire* edited by Keith Jeffery (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996)
- Jameson, Fredric, *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions* (London: Verso, 2006)
- , *The Geopolitical Aesthetic: Cinema and Space in the World System* (Indiana University Press, 1992)
- , *The Political Unconscious* (Oxford: Routledge, 2002)
- , 'Cognitive Mapping' in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Basingstoke: MacMillan Education, 1988)

- , 'Marxism and Historicism', *New Literary History*, 11.1 (1979), 41-73
- , *Postmodernism, Or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (New York: Verso, 1991)
- , *Seeds of Time* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994)
- , *A Singular Modernity: Essay on the Ontology of the Present* (London: Verso, 2002)
- Joyce, James, *Ulysses* (1922) (London: Penguin Books, 1992)
- Kant, Immanuel, *Critique of Judgement* trans. James Creed Meredith (Oxford: Oxford World's Classics, 2007)
- Kelly, Aaron, *The Thriller and Northern Ireland Since 1969: Utterly Resigned Terror* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005)
- , 'Reproblematising the Irish Text' in *Critical Ireland: New Essays in Literature and Culture* eds. Alan A. Gillis and Aaron Kelly (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2001)
- Kiberd, Declan, 'From Lilliput to Narnia: Children's Literature', *Trinity College*, 11 December 2014 <<https://www.tcd.ie/English/literary-arts/Podcasts/Declan%20Kiberd.mp3>> [accessed 21 July 2015]
- , 'White Skins, Black Masks: Celticism and Negritude', in *The Irish Writer and the World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005)
- , *Inventing Ireland* (London: Verso, 1996)
- , *Irish Classics* (London: Granta, 2000)
- Kirkland, Richard, *Cathal O'Byrne and the Northern Revival* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2006)
- , *Identity Parades: Northern Irish Culture and Dissident Subjects* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2002)
- , *Literature and Culture in Northern Ireland Since 1965: Moments of Danger* (London: Longman, 1996)
- , 'That Car': Modernity, Northern Ireland and the DMC-12', *Field Day Review*, 3 (2007), 94-107
- Kornbluh, Joyce L. (ed.), *Rebel Voices: An IWW Anthology* (Oakland: PA Press, 2011)



Kostick, Conor, *Epic* (Dublin: O'Brien Press, 2004)

Latour, Bruno, *The Pasteurization of France* trans. Alan Sheridan and John Laws (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1993)

——, 'Networks, Societies, Spheres: Reflections of an Actor-Network Theorist', <<http://www.bruno-latour.fr/sites/default/files/121-CASTELLS-GB.pdf>> [accessed 9 July 2015]

——, *On the Modern Cult of the Factish Gods* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010)

——, *Re-Assembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005)

——, *We Have Never Been Modern* trans. Catherine Porter (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1991)

Law, John, and Annemarie Mol, 'The Actor-Enacted: Cumbrian Sheep in 2001', in *Material Agency: Towards a Non-Anthropocentric Approach* ed. Carl Knappet and Lambros Malafouris (Toronto: Springer, 2008)

Law, John, 'Notes on the Theory of the Actor-Network: Ordering, Strategy and Heterogeneity' in *Systems Practice*, 5.4 (1992), 379-393

Leinster, Murray, 'First Contact' in *The Best of Murray Leinster* (London: Corgi Books, 1976)

Lem, Stanislaw, 'About the Strugatsky's Roadside Picnic' trans. Elsa Schieder and Robert M. Philmus in *Microworlds* ed. Franz Rotetnsteiner (London: Mandarin, 1985)

——, *Solaris* trans. Joanne Kilmartin and Steve Cox (1961) (London: Faber, 2003)

Levinas, Emmanuel, 'The Name of a Dog, or Natural Rights' in *Difficult Freedom: Essays on Judaism* trans. Seán Hand (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1990)

Lingard, Joan, *Across the Barricades* (1972) (London: Puffin, 1995)

Lloyd, David, *Irish Times: Temporalities of Modernity* (Dublin: Field Day, 2008)

- , *Irish Culture and Colonial Modernity 1800-2000* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011)
- Lukàcs, Georg, *The Historical Novel* trans. Hannah and Stanley Mitchell (London: Penguin, 1969)
- , *The Theory of the Novel* trans. Anna Bostock (London: The Merlin Press, 1988)
- Mac Aodha Bhuí, Iarla, *Domhan Faoi Cheilt* (Indreabhán: Cló Mhaigh Eo, 2000)
- MacLaverty, Bernard, *Cal* (1983) (London: Random House, 1998)
- , *Lamb* (1980) (London: Random House, 2000)
- Malmgren, Carl, 'Self and Other in SF: Alien Encounters', *Science Fiction Studies*, 20.1 (1993), 15-33
- Mannheim, Karl, *Ideology and Utopia: An Introduction to the Sociology of Knowledge* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1954)
- Marcuse, Herbert, 'Some Social Implications of Modern Technology' in *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader* ed. Andrew and Eike Gebhardt (London: Blackwell, 1978)
- Marx, Karl, *Capital Volume I* trans. Ben Fowkes (London: Penguin, 1990)
- , *The Communist Manifesto* ed. Dave McLellan (Oxford: Oxford World Classics, 1998)
- , *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* ed. Maurice Dobb (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1971)
- , *The German Ideology* ed. C.J. Arthur (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1970)
- Maume, Patrick, 'Futures Past: The Science Fiction of Bob Shaw and James White as a Product of Late-Industrial Belfast' in *No Country for Old Men: Fresh Perspectives on Irish Literature* edited by Paddy Lyons and Alison O'Malley-Younger (Bern: Peter Lang, 2009)
- McAuley, J.W. and P.J. McCormack, 'The Protestant Working Class and the State in Northern Ireland: A Problematic Relationship' in *Ireland's Histories: Aspects of*

*State, Society and Ideology* ed. Seán Hutton and Paul Stewart (London: Routledge, 1991)

McCann, Eamonn, *War and Peace in Northern Ireland* (Dublin: Hot Press Books, 1998)

McCarthy, Conor, *Modernisation, Crisis and Culture in Ireland 1969-1992* (Dublin: Four Courts, 2000)

McDonald, Ian, *Brasyl* (London: Orion, 2007)

———, *Chaga* (London: Gollancz, 1995)

———, *Cyberabad Days* (London: Gollancz, 2009)

———, *The Dervish House* (London: Gollancz, 2010)

———, *Hearts, Hands and Voices* (London: Gollancz, 1992)

———, *King of Morning, Queen of Day* (London: Bantam, 1991)

———, *Kirinya* (London: Gollancz, 1998)

———, *River of Gods* (London: Gollancz, 2007)

———, *Sacrifice of Fools* (London: Gollancz, 1996)

McEvoy, Joanne, *The Politics of Northern Ireland* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008)

McGuffin, *The Guineapigs* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1974)

McCormack, Mike, *Notes From a Coma* (London: Vintage, 2006)

McLiam Wilson, Robert, *Eureka Street* (London: Random House, 1998)

McNamee, Eoin, *The Blue Tango* (London: Faber & Faber 2002)

———, *Resurrection Man* (London: Picador, 1995)

———, *The Ultras* (London: Faber & Faber, 2005)

Merton, Thomas, 'Preface' to P. Regamey O.P., *Non-Violence and the Christian Conscience* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1966)

Miéville, China, 'Symposium: Marxism and Fantasy', *Historical Materialism*, 10 (2002), 39-49

Milner, Andrew, *Locating Science Fiction* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2012)

Mitchell, Claire, *Religion, Identity and Politics in Northern Ireland: Boundaries of Belonging and Belief* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2006)

Monk, Patricia, *Alien Theory: The Alien as Archetype in the Science Fiction Short Story* (Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2006)

More, Thomas, *Utopia* trans. Paul Turner (London: Penguin, 2003)

Morris, William, *News From Nowhere* ed. David Leopold (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003)

Moylan, Tom, *Demand the Impossible: Science Fiction and the Utopian Imagination* (New York: Methuen, 1986)

Mulvey, Laura, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' in *Screen*, 16.3 (1975), 6-18

Muzumdar, Haridas T., 'Gandhi's Nonviolence' in *A Peace Reader: Essential Readings on War, Justice, Non-Violence and World Order* ed. Joseph Fahey and Richard Armstrong (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1987)

Neill, William J.V., 'Rebranding the "Renaissance City": From "The Troubles" to Titanic Quarter' in *Urban Design and British Renaissance* ed. by John Punter (New York: Routledge, 2010)

Nic Craith, Máiréad, *Plural Identities Singular Narratives: The Case of Northern Ireland* (Oxford: Bergham Books, 2002)

- Noys, Benjamin, 'The Discreet Charm of Bruno Latour or the Critique of Anti-Critique' in *(Mis) Readings of Marx in Continental Philosophy* eds. Jernej Habjan and Jessica Whyte (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014)
- , 'The Density and Fragility of the World: Latour' in *The Persistence of the Negative: A Critique of Contemporary Continental Theory* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010)
- Nye, David E., *American Technological Sublime* (Boston: M.I.T. Press, 1994)
- Nye, Joseph S., *Nuclear Ethics* (New York: Macmillan, 1986)
- O'Faoláin, Seán, *The Irish* (London: Penguin, 1969)
- O'Leary, Don, *Irish Catholicism and Science: From Godless Colleges to the Celtic Tiger* (Cork: Cork University Press, 2012)
- O'Neill, Joseph, *Day of Wrath* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1936)
- , *Land Under England* (1935) (London: New English Library, 1978)
- , *Wind from the North* (Dublin: Browne and Nolan, 1934)
- O'Neill, Louise, *Only Ever Yours* (London: Quercus, 2015)
- Patterson, Glen, *Black Night at Big Thunder Mountain* (London: Minerva, 1996)
- , *Burning Your Own* (Belfast: Blackstaff Press, 2008)
- , *Fat Lad* (Belfast: Blackstaff Press, 1995)
- , *The International* (Belfast: Blackstaff Press, 2008)
- Pearse, Pádraig, 'The Murder Machine' in *The Murder Machine and Other Essays* (Cork: Mercier Press, 1976)
- Pierce, Clayton, 'Democratizing Science and Technology with Latour and Marcuse' in *Marcuse's Challenge to Education* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2009)

- Pushkarevskaya-Naughton, Yulia, 'Comparative Literature in Ireland and Worldwide: An Interview with Declan Kiberd', *Estudios Irlandeses*, 5 (2010)
- Regamey, P., *Non-Violence and the Christian Conscience* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd)
- Rejali, Darius, *Torture and Democracy* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2007)
- Richards, Thomas, *The Imperial Archive: Knowledge and the Fantasy of Empire* (London: Verso, 1993)
- Rieder, John, *Colonialism and the Emergence of Science Fiction* (Middletown CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2008)
- Roberts, Adam, *The History of Science Fiction* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005)
- Robinson, Kim Stanley, *Blue Mars* (London: Harper Collins, 1996)
- , *Green Mars* (London: Harper Collins, 1994)
- , *Red Mars* (London: Harper Collins, 1993)
- Rose, Mark, *Alien Encounters: Anatomy of Science Fiction* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981)
- Ruane, Joseph and Jennifer Todd, *The Dynamics of Conflict in Northern Ireland: Power, Conflict and Emancipation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996)
- , 'Why Can't You Get Along With Each Other?' in *Culture and Politics in Northern Ireland* ed. Eamonn Hughes (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1991)
- Said, Edward, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin, 2003)
- , 'Preface' to *Orientalism: 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition* (London: Vintage Books, 1994)
- Sargent, Lyman Tower, 'The Three Faces of Utopianism Revisited', *Utopian Studies*, Vol. 5, No. 1 (1994), pp. 1-37, Penn State University Press.

- Seed, David, *Under the Shadow: The Atomic Bomb and Cold War Narratives* (Kent: Kent State University Press, 2013)
- Shapin, Steven, and Simon Schaffer, *Leviathan and the Air Pump: Hobbes, Boyle and the Experimental Life* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989)
- Shirlow, Peter and Mark McGovern, 'Introduction' to *Who are the People?: Unionism, Protestantism and Loyalism in Northern Ireland* ed. Peter Shirlow and Mark McGovern (London: Pluto Press, 1997)
- Sider, Ronald, *Exploring the Limits of Non-Violence* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1988)
- Sloan, G.R., *The Geopolitics of Anglo-Irish Relations in the Twentieth Century* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1997)
- Smith, E.E. Doc, *The Skylark of Space* (London: Panther Books, 1974)
- Snyder, Jack, *Myths of Empire: Domestic Politics and International Ambition* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991)
- Sobchack, Vivian Carol, *Screening Space: The American Science Fiction Film* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2001)
- Spivak, Gayatri, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1990)
- Stableford, Brian, 'Algebraic Fantasies: The Science Fiction of Bob Shaw' in *Algebraic Fantasies and Realist Romances: More Masters of Science Fiction* (Rockville: Wildside Press, 1995)
- , 'James White', *Historical Dictionary of Science Fiction Literature* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2004)
- Stuart, Francis, *A Compendium of Lovers* (Dublin: Raven Arts Press, 1990)

- Sutton, Nick, *The DeLorean Story: the Car, the People, the Scandal* (London: Haynes Publishing Group, 2013)
- Suvin, Darko, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction: On the Poetics and History of a Literary Genre* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980)
- Szendy, Peter, *Kant in the Land of Extraterrestrials* trans. Will Bishop (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013)
- Thoreau, Henry David, *Civil Disobedience* (Rockford: Presa Press, 2003)
- Tolstoy, Leo, *Writings on Civil Disobedience and Non-Violence* (New York: New American Library, 1967)
- Turner, Victor, *The Forest of Symbols Aspects of Ndembu Ritual* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1967)
- Vint, Sherryl, *Animal Alterity: Science Fiction and the Question of the Animal* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2010)
- Weintraub, David A., *Religions and Extraterrestrial Life: How Will We Deal With It?* (Springer, 2014)
- Wells, H.G., 'The Land Ironclads' in *Complete Short Story Omnibus* (London: Victor Gollancz, 2011)
- , *A Modern Utopia* (London: Penguin Classics, 2005)
- , *The Time Machine* (London: Penguin Classics, 2005)
- , *The War of the Worlds* (London: Penguin Classics, 2005)
- White, Frank, *The Overview Effect: Space Exploration and Human Evolution* (Reston: American Institute of Aeronautics and Astronautics, 1998)
- Whyte, Nicholas, *Science, Colonialism and Ireland* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1999)



Williams, Raymond, 'Utopia and Science Fiction', *Science Fiction Studies*, 5. 3 (1979), 203-

214

Wittgenstein, Ludwig, *Philosophical Investigations* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986)

Žižek, Slavoj, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London: Verso, 1989)

#### Newspaper Articles

'Strange Things Happen When Jim White Writes' (unaccredited), *The Belfast Telegraph*,

7/3/1966

'Ulster Hit by "Famine" in UK Aircraft Industry' (unaccredited), *The Belfast Telegraph*,

8/1/1969