The Reception of Homer in Modern Science Fiction Literature

Sarah Gouldesbrough
The Queen's College
DPhil in Classical Languages and Literature

Abstract.

This thesis explores the varying ways in which science fiction (SF) authors of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries have adapted, reworked, and pulled apart the Homeric poems. The thesis draws on both reception and SF theory to highlight not only individual points of interest in the texts at hand but also wider theoretical similarities between the two disciplines.

Chapter 1: Polyphony deals with polyphonic narratives in the Bakhtinian sense, demonstrating how SF authors pick up on the multivocal nature of the *Odyssey* and exploit it to their own ends. Chapter 2: Genre examines the intricacies of the term 'genre' in both SF and classical scholarship; it discusses SF texts that fall into various 'subgenres'—feminist SF; military SF—and parallels them with similar concerns of classical scholarship. Chapter 3: Adaptation outlines patterns in how modern versions of the Homeric poems choose to preserve or alter their stories, and further discusses how a number of texts can in fact be read as dramatisations of certain theories of reception. Chapter 4: Megatext works with the theory of the SF megatext, demonstrating how this works as a reading strategy and paralleling it with wider theoretical discussions of the process of receiving a text. Chapter 5: Sense of Wonder analyses the wonder of the *Odyssey* and wonders if this is in fact a key reason why SF adaptations of the *Odyssey* are more prevalent than those of the *Iliad*. Chapter 6: Cognitive Estrangement discusses the major SF theory of cognitive estrangement, showing how the theory in fact has significant parallels with theories of reception and indeed perhaps with the process of scholarship in general.

The thesis demonstrates that SF receptions of the Homeric poems are a rich source of material for scholars, and argues that the productive interface between the two is one that is ripe for further study.

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Introduction.

In John Wyndham's novel *The Midwich Cuckoos* (1957),[1] a sleepy village in the English countryside is slowly taken over by strange children. These children have bright golden eyes, strangely translucent skin, and even as infants they demonstrate an unsettling ability to control the minds of the adults around them. As they grow up, they become so identical that even their human parents cannot tell them apart. Eventually they present a serious threat to the village and its inhabitants, responsible for six deaths and numerous injuries – but, with no way of getting close to them without falling under their compulsion, it seems that Midwich will never return to normality. Gordon Zellaby, an elderly writer who has lived in the village for decades, is as close to the children as anyone in Midwich; they trust him, and he cares for them. In the final pages of the novel, he goes to visit them, as he has been accustomed to do over the years, to show them a film about the Greek islands and talk to them about the culture of the Aegean. Among his film equipment, there is a mysteriously heavy box that the children themselves happily carry into their home. Zellaby addresses one of the identical girls as Priscilla, but she corrects him, reminding him that, in fact, her name is Helen. The mysterious box is a bomb, and Zellaby sacrifices himself to save the village – and, indeed, implicitly the world.

For the classicist, what is going to happen is clear even before the narrator witnesses the resulting explosion. The repeated mentions of stories of the Greek islands and the child who gives her name as Helen allude to the role that Zellaby and his mysterious box are playing, namely that of the Trojan Horse. As such, someone familiar with the myth of Troy knows that Zellaby and his box—which can also perhaps be read as a nod to the myth of Pandora—will bring nothing but trouble. The added emotional punch, however, of Zellaby going knowingly to his death, leaving behind his wife and young son, comes entirely from Wyndham's story which otherwise is mostly free of classical

[1] Later filmed as *Village of the Damned* (1960, dir. Wolf Rilla), with a 1995 remake of the same name set in North Carolina (dir. John Carpenter).

allusion.[2] So what does the allusion to the myth of Troy here add? Zellaby is elsewhere in the novel figured as a wise, slightly rambling old man: does that make him Nestor? He is also clearly cunning enough to plan the destruction of the children when no one else could: does that make him Odysseus? He is often characterised by his relationship to his wife, Angela, and their son, Michael: does that somehow make him Hector?

In reality, he is none of these things: he is Gordon Zellaby, a writer of (semi-mockingly capitalised) Works[3] who orchestrates the mass murder of a group of children who are aliens, yes, but children nonetheless. The classical allusion is not here to determine how we should understand Zellaby, but rather it acts as a subtextual parallel to his situation, giving the game away to the reader in the know and adding to the general ominous foreshadowing that runs throughout Zellaby's last interactions with his family and friends. *The Midwich Cuckoos* is not an *Iliad*, and the golden-eyed children are not the invading Achaeans – or, in this parallel, the defending Trojans. The parallel between the two stories is certainly intended and can in fact be important to the reader's experience of the text,[4] but it is not the be-all and end-all of Wyndham's novel.

It is this idea of the parallels between science fiction (henceforth SF) narratives and ancient texts that this thesis will discuss, focusing in particular on the Homeric poems, the *Odyssey* and, to a lesser extent, the *Iliad*. The thesis does not argue that Homer is SF or that the Homeric portions of these SF narratives are the only ones worth looking at; rather it explores the parallels between SF and ancient texts, some of which are explicitly drawn by the authors themselves but some of which map wider similarities between SF and Classics, both structural and theoretical. These parallels and thus the interactions between SF and Homer can be strikingly productive, offering authors an opportunity to

[2] The novel's final paragraph features a Latin quotation in a letter that Zellaby writes to his wife, Angela, to explain what he has done, *si fueris Romae, Romani vivito more* (220, sic); the quotation is again little more than decoration, and if it is anything, it is a nod to Zellaby's characterisation as an extremely well-read but rambling old man.

[3] Thus aligning him with a twentieth century tradition of lightly self-parodised author-narrators; cf. W Somerset Maugham's *The Moon and Sixpence* (1919).

[4] The idea of the individual reader's foreknowledge affecting their understanding of a text is further explored in Chapter 4: Megatext.

criticise and reflect on not only the ancient text but also contemporary reality. It is thus the argument of this thesis that the intersection of SF and classical literature is one that is important for both modern SF authors and classical critics, and that it is an underexplored field that warrants further study.

Definitions of SF.

What SF is may seem obvious: spaceships, aliens, unsettling golden-eyed children and the mysterious boxes that blow them up. However, anyone who dips so much as a toe into the turbulent waters of SF studies rapidly realises that this is not the case. In fact, defining SF is almost a subgenre of the genre itself.[5] As Veronica Hollinger (1999) puts it:

> is sf a narrative genre? a field of discourse? a mode of thinking? a body of literary texts? the compendium of mediatized entertainments which have grown up around the *Star Trek* and *Star Wars* franchises? Where exactly are its borders (does it have borders)? Is there something like an sf effect? When, if ever, should we call it science fiction, speculative fiction, sf? What do we do when we read sf? And what's it got to do with anything outside itself? (238)

It is thus important to offer at least a brief outline of the discussions that have gone on in the SF field as to what exactly it is they are working on, especially as the later chapters of this thesis will explore the links that can be drawn between three attempts at theoretical definitions of SF and various models of classical literature and indeed classical reception. Interestingly, this also introduces an early parallel between SF and classical studies. One of the main issues that SF scholars have with self-definition is that SF is not a homogenous body (Stableford, Clute & Nicholls 2015):[6] how can something that includes George Orwell's *1984*, the *Star Wars* franchise, and Isaac Asimov's *Foundation* series possibly be confined to a snappy academic label? In a similar sense, how can

[5] Parrinder (2003) describes definitions of SF "as a small, parasitic sub-genre in themselves" (2), Wolfe (1979) as "something of a Grail quest" (xiii); cf. LeGuin (1993: 21).
[6] This reference is without specific page number because it is solely available as a webpage; this is an issue common to a number of items of secondary literature throughout the thesis.

classical Greek drama, Roman statuary, early Christianity and classical reception all be studied under the label of 'Classics'? The difference between the two is that classical studies has had over two millennia[7] to come to terms with its fuzzy edges;[8] SF studies has only really been an academic discipline since the 1960s and 70s, so has yet to develop that same kind of self-confidence. That said, in practice it is not so difficult for SF critics to agree on what constitutes the centre of SF; it is the boundaries that get fought over.

Another, more basic, problem comes with nomenclature: what do we call this fuzzily-edged body of texts? 'Science fiction', or 'sci-fi', is the name that is used in wider literary circles, but the issue is in fact more complex. For one, 'sci-fi' (sometimes parodied as 'skiffy') has come to be a derided term among SF critics, mainly reserved for blockbuster films that display the trappings of SF (spaceships, aliens) but none of the more thoughtful criticism that the genre at its best can evince.[9] On the multiplicities of the term 'science fiction' itself, Judith Merril (1968) writes:

> *Science fiction* as a descriptive label has long since lost whatever validity it might once have had. By now it means so many things to so many people that… I prefer not to use it at all, when I am talking about stories. *SF* (or, generally, s-f) allows you to think *science fiction* if you like, while I think *science fable* or *scientific fantasy* or *speculative fiction*, or (once in a rare while, because there's little enough of it being written, by any vigorous definition) *science fiction*. (2)

The SF author Robert Heinlein famously preferred 'speculative fiction' (Heinlein 1971: 15), while 'structural fabulation' is the name put forward by the critic Robert Scholes (Scholes 1974). Scholars often try to bypass this difficulty via the abbreviation 'SF' (or 'sf'), but that in and of itself has its pitfalls. Damien Broderick (1995) observes:

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[7] Although, admittedly, most of the disputes have arisen in the last three centuries or so (cf. Lloyd-Jones 1982: vii-xiv).

[8] The language of the 'fuzzy set' is often used in contemporary SF criticism as a description/conception of the field (Bould & Vint 2011: 5); on SF as this "fuzzily-edged, multidimensional and constantly shifting discursive object" (Bould & Vint 2011: 5), cf. Luckhurst (2005: 6), Kincaid (2008a: 18), Seed (2011: 1), Wolfe (2011: 29), Hollinger (2014: 140, inc. bibliography).

[9] Cf. Wolfe (1986: 114).

> Sf, or sometimes SF, can stand for 'scientifiction', 'science fiction', 'space fiction', 'science fantasy', 'speculative fiction', 'structural fabulation' (just possibly including 'surfiction'), perhaps 'specular feminism' and, in sardonic homage to right-wing sf at its most florid, 'speculative fascism'.
>
> (3)

Broderick's list is a little tongue in cheek, but the point stands. 'SF' is almost, as Istvan Csicsery-Ronay, Jr. (1991) says, "an insignia, a non-name" (390); it can stand for so many things that, in the end, it stands for nothing, merely acting as the signifier of that vast, fuzzy genre that everyone understands has something to do with science and something to do with fiction.

Going too far down this particular rabbithole is maddening. It is important to consider the different things that writers and critics mean when they talk about SF or science fiction, yes, but every sentence of a thesis cannot contain a qualification of what might be meant by the term. This thesis will use 'science fiction' and 'SF', as these are the terms that are most familiar to a wider, non-SF audience, and because a thesis on the reception of Homer in modern science fiction frankly does not have space to laboriously ponder naming practice.

A brief outline of the history of defining SF, however, is instructive.[10] Early definitions were mostly put together by editors of the early American pulp magazines:[11] Hugo Gernsback attempted what is generally understood to be the first definition of 'scientifiction' in 1926 (later, in 1929, changed to the snappier 'science fiction'), describing the SF story as "a charming romance intermingled with scientific fact and prophetic vision" (quoted in Stableford, Clute & Nicholls 2015); in the 1940s, John W Campbell, Jr. built on this, arguing that SF makes use of scientific methodology, thus "[writing] up, in story form, what the results look like when applied not only to machines, but to human society as well" (quoted in Stableford, Clute & Nicholls 2015); Judith Merril, writing in 1966, described SF

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[10] There are several general accounts available, all of which are more detailed than this brief sketch: Bainbridge (1986: 16-19), Parrinder (2003: 1-28), Bould & Vint (2011: 1-19), Stableford, Clute & Nicholls (2015). The essays in Gunn & Candelaria (2005) discuss the issue more widely.

[11] Westfahl (1998) further discusses Gernsback (37-66) and Campbell (179-204) and their theories.

as "stories whose objective is to explore, to discover, to *learn*, by means of projection, extrapolation, analogue, hypothesis-and-paper-experimentation, something about the nature of the universe, of man, of 'reality' " (quoted in Stableford, Clute & Nicholls 2015). This language of 'speculation' and 'extrapolation' becomes very influential in later definitions of SF: Robert Heinlein, for instance, defines SF as "realistic speculation about possible future events, based solidly on adequate knowledge of the real world, past and present, and on a thorough understanding of the nature and significance of the scientific method" (Heinlein 1971: 22).[12] The 1960s and 1970s marked the beginnings of SF criticism as an academic discipline, with the founding of influential journals of SF such as *Extrapolation* (1959) and *Science Fiction Studies* (1973). Definitions of SF followed the same path, becoming more based in critical theory than classifications of texts (Stableford, Clute & Nicholls 2015); Darko Suvin's *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction*, published in 1979, and his definition of SF as "the *literature of cognitive estrangement*" (2016: 15, original italics; cf. Suvin 1972) was the most influential and still has a serious impact on contemporary SF studies.[13] Definitions of SF have continued to progress along academic lines, drawing on concepts as diverse as genre theory, narratology and postmodernism – but SF critics are in many ways no closer to a consensus than Gernsback was in 1926.

A sample of definitions of SF, in no particular order, might include:[14] the importance of the sense of wonder, sometimes referred to as the 'SF effect' (Mendlesohn 2003: 3); a didactic literature, concerned with teaching its readers new ways of looking at the world (Russ 1974: 113); a lyric mode that allows the representation of the unrepresentable (Chu 2010: 10); a search for the definition of mankind, based in scientific knowledge and cast in the Gothic or post-Gothic mode (Aldiss 1986: 4); a field characterised by 'icons', certain powerful images that resonate with us far beyond their immediate context (Wolfe 1979: ix); and as a literature of 're-visions' (Philmus 2006).[15] Damon Knight, an early SF critic, went for the simpler approach of "Science fiction is what we point to when

[12] Cf. Landon (2014) for the shifting meanings of 'speculation' and 'extrapolation'.
[13] Further discussed in Chapter 6: Cognitive Estrangement.
[14] Wolfe (1986: 108-11) lists thirty-three definitions; further lists can be found in Gunn (2015), Wilson (2015), M Jones (2017).
[15] Cf. pg.106.

we say it", as did Norman Spinrad, who opted for "Science fiction is anything published as science fiction" (both quoted in Stableford, Clute & Nicholls 2015). These two definitions initially seem like something of a cop-out—they are not actually saying anything about science fiction itself, rather more about the people who read and publish it—but they do raise the important points that, respectively, SF is usually easily identifiable by those who read it, and that SF (or sometimes SF/F, science fiction and fantasy) is an important publishing category. These definitions, Knight's in particular, have been influential in later scholarship. Edward James (1994), for instance, states that SF "is what is marketed as sf" (3); Paul Kincaid (2008a) opts for "[that] is science fiction which we point to and say: it has family resemblances with what we agree is science fiction" (20); and John Rieder (2010; cf. 2017) uses a formulation of genre theory to attempt to theorise (and perhaps legitimise) Knight's maxim.

There are almost as many definitions of SF as there are readers of SF, and an attempt to list *every* definition is far beyond the scope of this thesis. It is, however, instructive to consider three rough groups of definitions that have been influential in the discipline. The first is of critics who understand SF to be, instead of a body of literature, rather a kind of reading protocol or mode of discourse. 'Mode' as opposed to 'genre' is a key word in these kinds of analyses, a word which "implies not a kind but a method, a way of getting something done" (Hollinger 2014: 140). Samuel R Delany, for instance, discusses SF as "a particular sort of discourse, a particular sort of 'word machine', that performs certain functions" (quoted in Parrinder 2003: 19), while Istvan Csicsery-Ronay, Jr. (2008; cf. 1991) talks about "a mode of thought like science-fictionality, which is neither a belief nor a model, but rather a mood or attitude, a way of entertaining incongruous experiences" (10).[16] The mention above of SF as an important publishing category that people recognise when they see is also relevant to this discussion: wider contextual knowledge of the SF field is important to the understanding of individual SF texts. A similar kind of analysis is at work in Damien Broderick's *Reading by Starlight* (1995; cf. 1992), where he claims that "sf is written in a kind of code… which must be learned by apprenticeship" (xiii); this code can be cracked by knowledge of the SF megatext,

[16] Further examples of this kind of analysis are found in Angenot (1979: 18), Delany (1981: 238, 2009), Delany, Gregory & McCaffery (1987: 140-1), Benison (1992), Mendlesohn (2003: 1), Gunn (2005: 9), Kincaid (2008b).

a mass of "imaginary worlds, tropes, tools, lexicons, even grammatical innovations borrowed from other textualities" (xiii) that form the backdrop to any individual SF text.[17] Thinking about SF as a mode rather than a genre thus shifts the focus away from the text itself and towards the interface between reader and text, leading to Peter Stockwell's (2000) observation that "in its general poetics science fiction is basically reader-oriented" (222).

The second loose group is the idea of SF as a body of literature that introduces the reader to a world that is radically different to their own, and that it is precisely this radical difference that allows the reader to reflect back on the real world from a new perspective. This strangeness, referred to as 'estrangement' by Darko Suvin[18] and as 'fabulation' by Robert Scholes, is accompanied by an understanding of science and technology, transforming 'estrangement' into 'cognitive estrangement' and 'fabulation' into 'structural fabulation'.[19] The new world that an SF text introduces, attractively dubbed the novum by Suvin, is key to this understanding of SF, and can manifest in full world-building or in, for instance, neologisms on the level of the text's language.[20] This is thus a paradigm based in the importance of innovation and newness, most often *scientific* innovation; it is a paradigm that focuses on what we actually find when we read SF texts.

The third group consists of analyses that seek to understand SF not as a genre or a mode, but as a historio-cultural phenomenon. John Rieder's (2017) "historically oriented genre theory" (161) is a good example of this: according to his *Science Fiction and the Mass Cultural Genre System* (2017), the history of SF is not about formal devices or great innovations; instead it is "the history of a shifting set of conventions and expectations successively laying their various claims to definition of the genre and exercising their influence over an intersecting but heterogenous array of practices… that

[17] Further discussed in Chapter 4: Megatext.
[18] Cf. Chapter 6: Cognitive Estrangement.
[19] Examples of this kind of analysis are found in Amis (1961: 18), Merril (1971: 60), Suvin (1972, 2016), Scholes (1974: 29), Rabkin (1976: 119), Bainbridge (1986: 7), Malmgren (1991: 16), Shippey (2005), Delany (2012: 48).
[20] Stockwell (2000: 115-38), Kincaid (2000b).

draw upon vastly different resources and enact correspondingly divergent motives" (161). Rieder's analysis balances a modern understanding of genre with an awareness of the importance of historicity:

> Thus, while it is certainly possible to read the *Oedipus* of Sophocles as a piece of detective fiction, its historical relationship to the genre of tragedy, and to the system of genres and literary values elaborated in relation to classical tragedy, is a good deal more consequential. By the same token, texts that are usually considered science fiction could be read simply as examples of satire, romance, comedy, tragedy, and so on, but doing so, rather than elevating them to the status of 'serious' literature, strips them of an important aspect of their historicity. (2010: 199)

These kinds of analyses allow the various definitions of SF that have held sway over the years to exist alongside one another, becoming a part of SF's constantly shifting, multiform history.[21]

This is merely a taste of the various competing definitions and ideas of science fiction that circulate in the academic SF community. It is still a topic of much debate even now, but more and more attention is being paid to the fact that, actually, many definitions of SF have historically been more about politicising and indeed legitimising the genre and its study rather than definitions for their own sake. Many comparatively early definitions of SF, including Suvin and Scholes' attempts, have been criticised for attempting to delineate too narrow a 'canon' of SF masterworks: if SF were to adhere slavishly to Suvin's original ideas of cognitive estrangement, for instance, very little of what is commonly understood to be SF would 'count' as SF at all. The original point of this definition was an attempt to demonstrate to those outside the SF community that SF is worth study, that it is something more than merely invading aliens and exploding spaceships;[22] as Gary Wolfe (1986) puts it:

[21] Further examples of this kind of analysis are found in James (1994: viii-ix), Luckhurst (2005: 6), Mendlesohn (2003: 11), A Roberts (2006: 3), Milner (2012: 22), Latham (2014: 5).
[22] Cf. James (1994: 1).

> owing to the commercial origins of the genre and the perceived low esteem in which it was held, those undertaking to define it often disguised within their definitions *apologia* for the genre[23]
>
> (108)

As SF has become more established as an area of academic inquiry, particularly in the United States, this tendency has slipped out of SF scholarship – but it is still important to acknowledge that, in defining SF, "[there] is no such thing as a 'neutral' or 'objective' definition of the genre because the very features of what is named as SF emerge in the process of pointing and naming" (Bould & Vint 2011: 5); the act of defining reveals the priorities of the person writing the definition. Of the three groups of definitions discussed above, then, one highlights the role of the reader, one scientific innovation, and one the importance of the wider cultural landscape – and these definitions thus privilege, respectively, a reader who is aware of the broader SF canon, a thorough awareness of current scientific research, and the contextualising of SF within not only the broader cultural paradigm but also within the context of itself and its history. Defining SF is not just an amusing preoccupation of SF studies, therefore. It is also a key part of the history of SF itself.[24]

Histories of SF.

It is interesting to note that, as part of the *apologia* that Wolfe speaks of, it was common in early SF scholarship to trace SF's roots back to antiquity itself. This was most commonly to Lucian of Samosata's *True History*, but also to, among others, Homer's *Odyssey* and the epic of Gilgamesh. Judith Merril (1971), for instance, discusses SF's "classical antecedents" (59); Arthur C Clarke (1966) states that "there are science-fictional elements in the Odyssey and the Greek myths" (175); Darko Suvin (2016) finds parallels to SF in, among others, "the Greek and Hellenistic 'blessed island'

[23] This is not a manoeuvre confined to SF studies. Echoing Rieder's parallel, quoted above, detective fiction similarly attempted to define itself in relation to Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* or Voltaire's *Zadig*; cf. the discussion of 'illustrious ancestors' below.

[24] Westfahl (1998: 3) similarly argues that major works of SF criticism are thus more than simply commentary on the genre, but in fact become part of the genre itself.

stories, [and] the 'fabulous voyage' from Antiquity on" (372); C S Lewis (1982a: 85) parallels the practices of SF authors wondering about the nature of some far-off place with Homer's approach to Odysseus' katabasis; and Adam Roberts (2006) much more recently argues that "the roots of what we call science fiction are found in the fantastic voyages of the Ancient Greek novel" (vii). Interestingly, there is also something of a trope of giving Greek and Latin derivations for words commonly found in SF scholarship: Carl Malmgren (1991: 169), for instance, cites the Latin etymologies of 'science' and 'fiction' as proof that 'science fiction' is a valid label for the genre; and Seo-Young Chu (2010: 14-15) gives the classical derivations for 'verse' (Latin: *vertere*) and 'tropes' (Greek: τρόπος). Delany (2012) is a little more tongue-in-cheek when he makes the "somewhat fanciful argument that science fiction has grown up to compensate for the fact that, unlike ancient Greek and Sanskrit, modern Western (and Oriental) languages no longer have an optative mood" (53, n.1). There is thus a rich tradition of linking SF to the classical world in one way or another, whether as a true ancestor or as merely a source of linguistic interest to the modern critic.

Most recent SF criticism, however, tends to reject this as another move based in anxiety, attempting to show the worth of SF, this time by tying it to illustrious ancestors. In the words of Samuel R Delany (Delany, Gregory & McCaffery 1987):

> It's just pedagogic snobbery (or insecurity), constructing these preposterous and historically insensitive genealogies, with Mary Shelley for our grandmother or Lucian of Samosata as our great-great grandfather. … And in practical terms, most people who extend SF too much before 1910 are waffling. (138)

Damien Broderick (1995) further describes this manoeuvre as being "[like] parvenus attempting to purchase respectability by the adoption of extinct arms" (4); Brian Aldiss (1986) judges that it is the work of "science fiction fans with colonialist ambitions" (6); and Bruce Franklin (A B Evans et al. 2009) explains:

> Those of us who escorted science fiction into the formal parties of the academy in the mid-1960s labored hard to make it look respectable. That was one reason we documented its long pedigree and heritage from the literary canon. But most of us understood that despite some illustrious antecedents, true science fiction is essentially a modern… cultural phenomenon. (197)

The consensus of SF critics seems to be that, while there might be interesting parallels to be found between SF and classical literature, it is disingenuous to claim that classical literature *is* SF.[25] Some prefer to talk in terms of proto- or Ur-SF, often in fact somewhat unhelpfully conflating the two. David Seed (2011) offers a useful delineation:

> Origination in antiquity raises different problems of cultural practice, and such examples could best be thought of as 'ur-SF'. Works from the Renaissance or early 19th century are clearly much closer to the methods we now identify with SF and could be described as 'proto-SF'. (4)

By 'the methods we now identify with SF', Seed is nodding to the conviction of a number of critics that it is important that, for there to be science fiction, there has to be science;[26] this is often given as a reason why it is impossible that, for instance, Lucian's *True History* can be unproblematically identified as SF, as science in the modern understanding of the word was not around in the second century AD. Patrick Parrinder (2003) further argues that a text can be classed as proto-SF by "its relationship to the body of cognitions in its own day" (22), thus allowing that there are movements that we might think of as 'scientific' (analytic, research-based) that exist in antiquity, but that their historical situatedness disallows them the straightforward title of SF. This is an approach that fits in well with Rieder's attitude, outlined above: ancient texts can be Ur- or proto-SF and can have interesting parallels to the concerns and workings of 'true' SF texts, but they were published in a time

[25] Cf. Kincaid (2008a: 21), Philmus in A B Evans et al. (2009: 199), Wolfe in A B Evans et al. (2009: 203), Seed (2011: 3-4), Stableford (2016). On Lucian, Amis (1961) judges that "the sprightliness and sophistication of the *True History* make it read like a joke at the expense of nearly all early-modern science fiction, that written between, say, 1910 and 1940" (28), but merely states that Lucian is often cited as an example of early SF rather than giving his own opinion on the matter.

[26] Rabkin (1976: 119), Clareson (1995: 4-5), Stableford (2016). Cf. Clark (2005): "science fiction is concerned with the natural universe, and the technological capacity to manipulate or control it. *The Odyssey* is not science fiction, even if it is now possible to echo Odysseus' journey in a world of stars" (96).

that had no concept of science in its modern incarnation and so they cannot properly be included among the annals of SF history.

This, however, has not stopped classicists who work on SF from falling prey to the same manoeuvre. Formal published scholarship on the general interaction between classical literature and SF is slight, amounting to the work of S C Fredericks in the 1970s and 80s on the relationship between myth and SF (Fredericks 1977a, 1977b, 1980, 1982), five pages in Edith Hall's *The Return of Ulysses* (2008) listing Odysseuses, two articles by Sarah Annes Brown (2008, 2012), and Brett Rogers and Benjamin Stevens' edited volume *Classical Traditions in Science Fiction* (2015) and the essays therein; their introduction to this volume previously appeared in the *Classical Receptions Journal* in 2012.[27] Specific links between individual SF and classical texts are more commonly explored, eschewing overview in favour of analysis: see Rogers and Stevens (2012, n.33) for further details.[28] Fredericks' work draws parallels between SF and myth systems through the concept of estrangement, working from Suvin's roughly contemporary concepts (1982: 48), but nowhere attempts to claim that ancient myth *is* SF. Brown and Rogers and Stevens are another matter. Brown, for instance, states that SF is often traced back to Lucian (2008: 415), while only briefly acknowledging that this is a contentious issue.[29] Rogers and Stevens (2015b) go further in their analysis of the works of Adam Roberts and Darko Suvin:

> From this perspective, a work is meaningfully SF, and so open to being read according to SF studies heuristics, not in terms of its historical or cultural provenance, but in terms of how it engages with contemporary epistemologies; of particular interest is whether and how a work innovates with respect to such epistemologies. (12)

[27] There is also the transcript of a very interesting paper given by Antony Keen at the 2006 Classical Association conference on classifications of SF receptions of Classics, but this is (as yet) published informally on a blog rather than in print so has not been included here.

[28] To their list should be added, among others: Perris (2011), Laimé (2014), Grobéty (2014, 2015), Cooper (2018); the latter includes a brief discussion of a short story by Philip K Dick dealing with the myth of Odysseus (11-14).

[29] Keen (2015: 108-11) offers a far more nuanced (and persuasive) take on the topic.

They also argue against the conclusions of Brian Stableford's entry on "Proto SF" (2016) in the *Science Fiction Encyclopedia*, namely that SF in the modern sense originates in the eighteenth century at the earliest, when a modern concept of science came into existence:

> In our view, such a constraint risks excluding *a priori* the possibility of discovering other deeper commonalities among SF texts and certain classics. (12, n.16)

This seems more than a little reminiscent of the tactics used by early SF critics to legitimise their object of study. Where SF used Classics to make itself seem a part of a literary tradition going back millennia, here the claim that we can—and perhaps should—read classical texts as SF proclaims that studying classical reception in SF is not just a vain move, but rather a very important one.[30] This is perhaps a manoeuvre rooted in the perceived modern academic disdain for popular culture. Lisa Raphals (2016), reviewing *Classical Traditions in Science Fiction* for *Science Fiction Studies*, is similarly unconvinced:

> The volume's individual contributions are all well written and well argued, but the core argument, that science fiction is deeply rooted in classical traditions, is less convincingly demonstrated.
>
> (594)

The fact is that the majority of contemporary SF scholarship sees SF as something that originated somewhere between Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* in 1818 and Hugo Gernsback's first publication of the magazine *Amazing Stories* in 1926.[31] Classical texts, in particular Lucian's *True History* and Homer's *Odyssey*, are an important part of the prehistory of SF—and, indeed, of the history of SF's own self-definition—but that does not mean that we should read them as SF. This, *pace* Rogers and Stevens, certainly does not deny the "possibility of discovering other deeper commonalities among SF

[30] A similar manoeuvre appears in Rogers & Stevens (2017b) *vis à vis* fantasy. I am similarly suspicious of this, although if 'fantasy' is elided into 'fantastic' their argument perhaps has more legs in this case, as ancient authors such as Aristophanes certainly delve into the fantastic in their works. 'Fantasy', however, especially in the context of a book that claims to talk about 'modern fantasy', is not quite the same thing.
[31] Cf. G Jones (2004: 29-33).

texts and certain classics". Indeed, this thesis will draw a number of strong parallels between the two fields, some based in writing practice, others in more theoretical concepts,[32] but nowhere will it be argued that the *Odyssey* or the *Iliad*—or any other classical text—are SF texts in any meaningful way. Proto- or Ur-SF, perhaps, but the understanding of SF that this thesis will work from, following Rieder, is of SF as a publishing category and a cultural concept specific to the present day.

Homer, SF.

So what does it matter that the *Odyssey*, for instance, can be and has been described as proto- or Ur-SF? In purely practical terms, it means that there are a large number of SF *Odyssey*-adaptations in circulation. As Brian Stableford (2016) notes:[33]

> If any one imaginary voyage has had a far more than appropriate[34] share of influence on the genre it is Homer's *Odyssey*, of which there are at least five straightforward transmogrifications.

There are by now, in fact, a good deal more than five. Does Stableford's statement, therefore, mean that we should read *every* imaginary voyage as a reception of the *Odyssey*? After all, John Clute and Peter Nicholls (2017) do say that the *Odyssey* "stands paradigmatically at the head of the proto SF genre of the fantastic voyage", which in and of itself has been highly influential on modern SF (Stableford 2017a). This seems excessive, but has in fact apparently been a tempting thing for scholars to do. A famous example is that of Stanley Kubrick's film *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968), which has been read by, among others, Leonard Wheat (2000, in a somewhat bizarre interpretation) as an extensive allegory for the *Odyssey*. Arguably the film's subtitle invites such an interpretation; a subtler example is found in Christopher Nolan's film *Interstellar* (2014).

[32] Fredericks (1982), Brown (2008) and Rogers & Stevens (2015) all in fact explore similar theoretical parallels to the ones that this thesis will discuss; see, in particular, Chapter 6: Cognitive Estrangement.
[33] Cf. Lewis (1982: 93), Stableford (2004: 5), Clute & Nicholls (2017).
[34] The language here is interesting: who is Stableford to declare what is 'appropriate' or not? Issues of 'gatekeeping' and inclusionary politics are discussed throughout the thesis; cf. pg.150, n.185, pg.221, n.264.

Interstellar follows Joseph 'Coop' Cooper (Matthew McConaughey) as he attempts to escape an Earth ravaged by war and blight and find a new home for humanity among the stars. The temporal realities of interstellar travel—namely, that any realistic attempt at space travel would take decades—are painfully present throughout the film; this is complicated even further by how time warps around interstellar singularities, meaning that, on one of the planets they visit, the couple of hours that pass for Coop on the surface equate to twenty-three years on Earth. These lost years are invested with a real emotional depth by the fact that, by losing those years, Coop has lost the chance to watch his children grow up; in fact, it is Coop's relationship with his children, in particular his daughter Murphy, or 'Murph' (Mackenzie Foy as a child, Jessica Chastain as an adult), that forms the emotional heart of the film.

It is not an obvious *Odyssey*, nor is it foregrounded as such in the same way as is accomplished by the subtitle of *2001: A Space Odyssey* – although the film's similarities to *2001* have been noted by reviewers.[35] It is, however, quite possible to read *Interstellar* as an *Odyssey*. The initial parallels are fairly clear: it is the story of a man (Coop, Odysseus) separated from his family (Murph, Penelope and Telemachus), struggling to get back to them, while the vicissitudes of space-time (or Poseidon's wrath) keep him away; this parallel is strengthened by the fact that, in an early leaked draft of the script, Murph was male (L Hutchinson 2014). Further adding to the Odyssean parallels is the fact that the planet that causes Coop to lose twenty-three years is entirely covered in water a few feet deep, echoing the waters of the Mediterranean that cause Odysseus so much trouble on his way home. It is interesting that this 'version' of the *Odyssey* story offers a far more acceptable reason for Coop abandoning his family for so long: the real-world implications of the theory of relativity are a lot more palatable to a modern audience than a series of exotic adventures and affairs with divine women.[36]

[35] Ingram (2014), Phipps (2014), Shaw (2014).
[36] This kind of 'correcting' of an ancient narrative is discussed further in Chapter 2: Genre.

The similarities between the two narratives have not gone unnoticed by reviewers, either. Andrew Barker (Chang & Barker 2014) writes:[37]

> 'Interstellar' is thoroughly Homeric at heart: Set in the aftermath of a great war, a vessel is blown far out into the unknown by a powerful yet perilous force, and its pilot must draw on all his cunning to return back to hearth and home, knowing all the while that the passage of time may render it unrecognizable by the time he gets there.

Further, Jonathan Nolan, the writer of *Interstellar*, has cited the influence of the *Odyssey* on a key theme of the film, namely "one of the foundational ideas in literature, this idea of separation and return" (Nolan 2014). It is thus not only possible to read *Interstellar* as an *Odyssey*, but it is backed up by a number of contemporary reviewers and indeed by the writer of the film himself. So does that mean that we *should* read *Interstellar* as an adaptation of the *Odyssey*? What would that extra dimension add? Would it in fact add anything at all?

In the case of *Interstellar*, it does not seem to add much. Yes, it is interesting that the Odysseus-figure in the story has a far more 'acceptable' (to modern sensibilities) reason for his decades-long absence than Odysseus himself, suggesting that the modern adaptor feels compelled to correct Odysseus' behaviour. However, at the point at which Coop realises he has lost those twenty-three years, the audience's focus is far more on the deeply affecting scene where he breaks down watching the messages that his increasingly-bitter children have sent him over the years. At that point, we care about Coop, not Homer. In many ways, the relationship between the *Odyssey* and *Interstellar* is only one step up from that between the myth of the Trojan Horse and *The Midwich Cuckoos*: it creates an interesting tension between the two, but not much more. The two narratives proceed largely separately.

[37] Cf. Dzieza (2014), L Hutchinson (2014), Ingram (2014), Phipps (2014), Shaw (2014), Phillips (2015).

The same kind of surface-level relationship between Homer and SF can be found in a number of other modern SF texts, and the same question can be asked: what, if anything, does this relationship add? The television show *Star Trek: Voyager* (1995—2001), for instance, depicts a Federation starship flung millions of lightyears from Earth which then has to embark on a journey home that will take seventy-five years; it incidentally features a character named Tom Paris who is initially portrayed as a bad-boy ladies' man, and who is arguably defined throughout the series by his romantic relationships with women. Is the whole seven-year series thus an *Odyssey*? Is it then more or less important that there is an episode in the series' third season, "Favorite Son", which prominently features a retelling of the myth of the Sirens? Or is that simply a playful nod on the part of Lisa Klink, that episode's writer? Does it affect the analysis that there are episodes in other *Star Trek* television series with clear classical antecedents, for example "Plato's Stepchildren" and "Who Mourns for Adonais?", featuring Apollo as a character, in *The Original Series* (1966—69), and "Lethe" in *Discovery* (2017—)? Sticking with SF television, two of the spaceships in the *Stargate* franchise are named the *Prometheus* and the *Odyssey*; in the final episode of *Stargate SG-1,* "Unending", the protagonists are trapped in a time dilation field aboard the *Odyssey* for fifty years, unable to contact anyone they know and love left behind on Earth. This has echoes of *Interstellar*'s relativity-induced time loss; should we consider both *Odyssey* adaptations? Or, given that time dilation fields are a fairly common occurrence in *Stargate SG-1*, is this nothing more than a pleasing parallel? Shifting to comics, what about Scott Summers, the leader of the X-Men who first appeared in 1963, whose codename is Cyclops due to the visor that he wears to control his mutation?[38] Should we trace him back to an Odyssean context? Does it matter that the Cyclops is generally seen as a villain in the *Odyssey*, whereas Summers is more commonly a heroic leader? Were Stan Lee and Jack Kirby, the creators of Cyclops, attempting to subvert that Odyssean paradigm, or were they just borrowing an apt mythological name? The issue that is being raised here, for the purpose of this thesis, is the question of what kind of texts count, for lack of a better word, as *Odyssey* adaptations. There is nothing wrong with this kind of game, picking out superficial parallels between ancient and modern texts, but, apart from making a broader

[38] Cf. Hall (2008: 96).

statement about the pervasiveness of classical motifs in SF and indeed wider popular culture, it does not offer much more in terms of analytical interest.

As such, this thesis will deal with explicit, overt adaptations of the Homeric poems: this can manifest as straightforward retellings of the poems themselves in a science fictional idiom, often indicated by subtitles or external advertising materials; or it can be seen in complex ways in the texts themselves, including interaction with Homeric characters, engagement with issues of Homeric scholarship, and a high level of self-awareness of the text's antecedents. Furthermore, this introduction has discussed in varying levels of detail examples from novels, films, television programmes, and comics. Again for reasons of space, from now on the analysis of the thesis will generally confine itself to print rather than live-action media (novels, novellas, short stories, and comics), despite the prevalence of Homeric themes and imagery in film and television. However, as SF is a complex field that does not itself arbitrarily exclude television and film, additional examples and comparanda will often be given from other media both in footnotes and in the text of the thesis itself.

The thesis is organised thematically rather than chronologically or by author, drawing together examples from across the texts for discussion. The selection of texts is not intended to be comprehensive; rather it offers a sample of the kind of work available. The themes are those in the chapter titles—Polyphony, Genre, Adaptation, Megatext, Sense of Wonder, and Cognitive Estrangement—and the themes narrow as the thesis progresses. The first two (Polyphony and Genre) deal with broad theoretical concepts that are subject to discussion in both SF and classical studies; the third (Adaptation) deals with the interaction of SF and specifically classical reception studies; the fourth and fifth (Megatext, Sense of Wonder) deal with two SF theories and how they interact with classical studies and theories in the texts at hand; and the sixth (Cognitive Estrangement) deals with a specific theory of the structure of SF that intersects neatly with certain theories of classical reception.

Nowhere in the thesis will it be argued that the Homeric poems should (or indeed could) be read as science fiction, nor will it follow the example of Rogers and Stevens in insisting that SF is deeply

rooted in antiquity. The thesis will instead offer parallels and juxtapositions between ancient text and modern SF adaptation, exploring how these parallels are exploited by SF authors, questioning why it is that they are so important, and demonstrating that SF is most certainly a worthwhile site for classical receptions.

1: Polyphony.

The concept of polyphony was developed by the Russian literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin in his study of Fyodor Dostoyevsky's novels, the seminal *Problems of Dostoyevsky's Poetics* (published in Russian in 1963; translated into English in 1984). Polyphony plays a key role in Bakhtin's theory of dialogism, which he further explored in the essays in *The Dialogic Imagination* (1975; 1981), and has been a widely influential concept in literary criticism across the disciplines. Bakhtin's definition of polyphony in *Problems of Dostoyevsky's Poetics* is as follows (original italics):

> *A plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousnesses, a genuine polyphony of fully valid voices… a plurality of consciousnesses, with equal rights and each with its own world.*
>
> (6-7)

The theoretical definition of polyphony is thus multiple voices that are independent of one another and that are "*valid*" in their own right. However, Bakhtin further stresses that a key part of polyphony is not just the voices themselves, but also their interaction:

> These voices are not self-enclosed or deaf to one another. They hear each other constantly, call back and forth to each other, and are reflected in one another… And outside this dialogue of 'conflicting truths' not a single essential act is realized, nor a single essential thought of the major characters.
>
> (75)

Bakhtin's terminology is at times a little fuzzy—arguably "unmerged" and "self-enclosed" mean fairly similar things—but his general meaning is clear: polyphony means multiple voices that are independent in and of themselves but that interact with each other, and it is in the interaction between them that meaning, whatever that might be, is created. Furthermore, while Bakhtin spends a lot of time discussing actual dialogue in *Problems of Dostoyevsky's Poetics*, he also makes it clear that

polyphony is not limited to the spoken word but can be found in themes and the structure of the plot as well (40). A final important element of Bakhtin's polyphony, especially for the purposes of this chapter, is outlined thus, in his discussion of the serio-comic or 'carnivalesque' genres that are polyphony's natural home:

> Characteristic of these genres are a multi-toned narration, the mixing of high and low, serious and comic; they make wide use of inserted genres—letters, found manuscripts, retold dialogue, parodies on the high genres, parodically reinterpreted citations; in some of them we observe a mixing of prosaic and poetic speech, living dialects and jargon (and in the Roman stage, direct bilingualism as well) are introduced, and various authorial masks make their appearance. (108)

Many of the texts discussed in this chapter make use of such features as Bakhtin here outlines, especially inserted genres, or 'inset stories' as they will be referred to. The definition of polyphony that this chapter will be working from is thus: multiple independent voices, often represented through inserted genres, interacting in such a way that their interaction produces meaning for the text.

SF texts in general have something of a penchant for polyphony, particularly texts from the New Wave of the 1960s. This is perhaps suggested by Bakhtin's own definition above—"*each with its own world*"—as most SF texts are set in constructed worlds that are different to contemporary reality. Many classics of the genre could legitimately be described as polyphonic, and inserted genres in particular are very popular. At the start of every chapter of Frank Herbert's *Dune* (1965), for example, the joint winner of the Hugo Award for Best Novel in 1966, there is a short extract from various fictional future histories of the events that the novel is describing which ties in closely with the events of the chapter that follows. John Brunner's *Stand on Zanzibar* (1968), another Best Novel Hugo winner, goes even further.[39] Heavily inspired by John Dos Passos' *USA Trilogy* (1930—36), *Stand on Zanzibar* is littered with "slabs of close-ups, newspaper cuttings, conversation, jokes, and what the author calls 'Contexts' – bulletins of one sort and another", which "buttress the narrative, and greatly

[39] Murphy (1987) discusses polyphony in Brunner's works as a whole, especially *Stand on Zanzibar*; cf. Scholes (1975: 72-4).

increase its sense of density and complexity" (Aldiss 2001: 366).[40] More broadly, Philip K Dick's *The Man in the High Castle* (1963) features multiple narrative threads and points of view that have led the novel to be classed by, among others, Darko Suvin[41] as a form of "masterly polyphony" (1975: 8), although Suvin's use of the term is here admittedly untechnical.[42] On the theoretical side of things, Carl Freedman in his *Critical Theory and Science Fiction* (2000) engages directly with Bakhtin (30-43) and thus analyses the language of SF as having a "profoundly critical, dialectical character" (31); however, as John Feteke (2001) observes, this analysis is limited by his focus on Dick alone, as one SF writer, however influential, is not representative of the community as a whole.

Polyphony is also a current concept in classical studies, although John Peradotto (2002a: 66) has detected a tendency for classicists to discuss 'polyphony' in some detail but never attribute the idea to Bakhtin. Numerous scholars, however, have explicitly published on Bakhtin and Classics, on topics including: genre in Ovid (Farrell 1992); ritual behaviour and carnival license (Goldhill 1991: 176-85); lyric from archaic Greece to the present day (Blevins 2008); and Bakhtin's own discussion of Petronius and Menippean satire (Branham 2005a). The publication of two edited volumes (Branham 2002, 2005b) and the appearance of a special edition of *Arethusa* (1993: 26.2) on Bakhtin and Classics further attest to his popularity in the discipline.[43] Focusing on the subject at hand, despite Bakhtin's rejection of the idea of polyphonic epic (see below), Homeric scholars have taken to the fray, discussing under a Bakhtinian umbrella such issues as conflicting ideologies in the *Odyssey* (Peradotto 1993), the relationship between the poet and their tradition (Peradotto 2002a) and between heroic and epic time (Nagy 2002), the polyphony of Homeric language (Bonifazi 2012: ch. 3) and the "polyphony of contending voices" in the *Odyssey* (Felson-Rubin 1994: xi), and Bakhtin's rejection of epic itself (Kahane 2005). Bakhtin and polyphony are thus as much part of the fabric of classical

[40] Tad Williams' *Otherland* sequence, discussed later (pg.122-28, 178-81, 195-6, 208-211, 224-247) has a remarkably similar collection of news reports, interviews etc. at the beginning of each chapter, but this is not specific to the Homeric sections of the sequence so will not be discussed in the present chapter.
[41] Suvin will be further discussed in particular in Chapter 6: Cognitive Estrangement.
[42] Cf. DiTomasso (1999).
[43] Although some are more sceptical, e.g. Courtney (2001: 53, 166, n.11).

studies as they are of SF studies—not hugely surprising, given the seminal nature of Bakhtin's oeuvre—and this joint interest suggests that there is likely to be merit in putting the two side by side.

There is another factor, too, that suggests a discussion of polyphony in relation to SF adaptations of the *Odyssey* – and that is the *Odyssey* itself. It is true that in his broader discussions of dialogism, Bakhtin repeatedly denies that epic can be polyphonic in any true way.[44] However, Bakhtin was not a classicist, and classical scholars have ably demonstrated how classical epic and in particular the Homeric texts can be helpfully read alongside concepts of dialogism and polyphony.[45] Under the definition set out above, despite what Bakhtin might think, the *Odyssey* is very much a polyphonic text: it features multiple voices, both in terms of spoken voices and inserted genres, and the interaction of those voices enriches the text. Deborah Beck, in her analyses of formulaic speech introductions in the *Odyssey* (2005, 2012), has demonstrated that the speech of secondary narrators such as Odysseus and Menelaus differs in linguistic terms from person to person, indicating that there are different linguistic 'voices' on display in the text. Furthermore, her analysis shows that, in linguistic terms, Demodocus "has more in common with the main narrator of the poem than he does with his fellow characters" (2005: 226): not only does the poem differentiate linguistically between narratives and narrative voices, but there is even a hierarchy of sorts, with the bard Demodocus being more linguistically similar to the primary narrator than he is to his fellow secondary narrators, Odysseus and Menelaus. It will be helpful to use this terminology of primary and secondary narrators throughout this chapter, where primary refers to the main narrative of the text while secondary refers to voices within the text that can be inserted genres or simply the voices of the characters themselves. Such a distinction might seem at odds with Bakhtin's concept of polyphony which stresses the "*equal rights*" (original italics) of the polyphonic voices (1984: 7), but it is not used here with any connotations of superiority: the primary narrative is primary because it is the primary structuring force for the text, whereas the secondary narratives mainly supplement that larger structure, occasionally shaping it in their own way.

[44] E.g. Bakhtin (1981: 13-18).
[45] For Homer, e.g. Kahane (2005). On ancient epic in a broader sense, especially Roman epic, e.g. Solodow (1988).

In addition to this verbal polyphony in the *Odyssey*, it has been repeatedly noted by classical scholarship that the epic is full of secondary narratives that reflect and comment on the primary.[46] Such narratives include: Demodocus' three songs in Book 8, in particular the song of Ares and Aphrodite;[47] the songs of Phemius in Book 1;[48] the stories told by Helen and Menelaus in Book 4;[49] the 'Cretan Lies' of Books 14—19;[50] the recurring stories of Agamemnon's return home;[51] and the Telemacheia of Books 1-4.[52] Odysseus' recounting of his wanderings in Books 9—12 is not included here, because, despite the fact that he is a secondary narrator, for these three books his narrative effectively takes the place of the primary narrative. None of these secondary narratives is simply there as decoration, rather they all serve the purpose of enriching the primary narrative, offering implications of alternative outcomes to, say, Odysseus' return home which ramp up the tension for the listening audience. The straightforward plot of the epic is told through the primary narrative, but it is through these secondary narratives, these inserted genres or 'inset stories', that the primary narrative really comes alive. It thus seems fair to say that the *Odyssey* itself comes under the polyphonic aegis.

In fact, the polyphonic nature of the *Odyssey* has been commented on by two of the authors that this chapter will discuss. Katy Stauber (2012), the author of *Spin the Sky* (2012), observes:

> *The Odyssey* does intersperse the narrative with essentially short stories from previous exploits, so I tried to do the same thing in *Spin the Sky*. I admit, switching between storytellers can be hard on the reader, but I wanted to show how the classic story translated into a modern novel format.

[46] E.g. Segal (1994) and Olson (1995). On the broader narratology of the *Odyssey*, see the work of Irene de Jong, e.g. de Jong (2001).
[47] 8.75-82, 266-366, 499-520; cf. Olson (1989a), Alden (1997), Rinon (2006). Hunter (2012) in fact observes that "the relationship of the song to the wider context of the *Odyssey* was already discussed in antiquity, and in ways not far removed from some modern discussions, cf. Athenaeus 5.192c-e, Eustathius, *Hom*. 1597.46-47" (87, n.17).
[48] 1.155, 325-7; cf. Thomas (2014).
[49] 4.235-64, 266-89, 333-592; cf. Olson (1989b), Doyle (2010).
[50] 14.192-359, 462-506, 19.165-202; cf. Haft (1984).
[51] E.g. 1.35-43; cf. Olson (1990).
[52] Apthorp (1980).

Similarly, Matt Fraction (2014b), the writer of *ODY-C* (2014—):

> It's a story that depends on you knowing the other things that happened in those heroic myth sagas, so we're going to fold all those into [the narrative] – you're really going to get the story about the three ships that left Troy and how they found their way home. When I started to think about doing it, and re-read the 'Odyssey'—it's all out of order, you have to know what happened in three other things.

Fraction then goes on to comment that this kind of 'out of order' narrative is "exactly like comics", suggesting a correlation between the two media. Structurally, of course, this is not wholly true: while there are ambitious comics such as, for example, Neil Gaiman's *The Sandman* (1989—1996) that are narratologically complex and 'out of order' in an Odyssean way, there are other equally ambitious works that are fairly straightforward. What Fraction is referring to is the process of reading comics: comics are published in individual issues that tell a fragment of a wider story, and it is only once all of those individual issues are gathered together that the whole story can be known. Equally, when we consider, for example, the American superhero comic, characters and their stories can 'cross over' into the comics of other characters, meaning that knowledge of both comics is required to fully process the story. This is something that has spilled over into film in recent years, following the success of the Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU)[53] which features characters from a wider storyarc appearing in the mid- and post-credits scenes of individual films, often to confusion from the general public[54] but delight from comics fans. What Stauber and Fraction's observations indicate is that the polyphony of the *Odyssey* is something that the authors who adapt it are well aware of and something that they actively try to echo in their own versions of the ancient story. It is a remarkably technical element of the original text to be chosen for adaptation, suggesting a highly perceptive SF reading public, and in fact this prompts some rather sophisticated analyses.

This chapter will discuss four polyphonic adaptations of the *Odyssey*: first two novels, Katy Stauber's *Spin the Sky: An Orbital Odyssey* (2012), and R A Lafferty's *Space Chantey* (1968); then a comic

[53] The MCU can also fit quite nicely into the definition of a megatext, discussed below in Chapter 4: Megatext.
[54] Howard the Duck in the *Guardians of the Galaxy* (2014) post-credits scene springs to mind.

book series, Matt Fraction and Christian Ward's *ODY-C* (2014—), and a short story, Lannah Battley's "Cyclops" (1985). The authors of these texts vary in time, space, and gender, but the polyphony of their texts brings them together, growing from a simple means by which to tell a story to the very point of the story itself.

External Voices.

Spin the Sky and *Space Chantey* are, in many ways, very different novels. One was published in the 2010s, the other in the 1960s; one is written by a woman with no understanding of the ancient languages, the other by a man who read, among others, ancient Greek, Latin, and Irish for fun;[55] one is a feminist retelling of the *Odyssey*, putting Penelope on a par with the novel's Odysseus, while the other is a surreal, psychedelic version of the ancient text where the Homeric stories are warped and twisted beyond anything that the ancient bard could have imagined. However, they have one thing in common: their inserted genres, or inset stories. Both novels feature secondary narratives told in differing, individual voices which support and help to construct the primary narrative.

Stauber's *Spin the Sky* is set in a near-future world where Earth is surrounded by a network of space habitats[56] called 'orbitals'. These orbitals display a dizzying array of inhabitants with a wide variety of backstories, and it is this orbital network that plays host to the wanderings of the novel's Odysseus, Cesar Vaquero, in the aftermath of the Spacer War. Meanwhile, on the Ithaca orbital, his wife, Penelope, is beset by 'suitors' who are more interested in her as a business partner than as a potential wife. The story that plays out in general cleaves quite closely to the events of the *Odyssey* (although it veers off into pulp in the last few chapters), starting with Odysseus' return home to the Ithaca orbital and telling the story of his wanderings through both Cesar's own flashbacks and what the novel calls

[55] Lafferty (2015).

[56] The terminology is Westfahl's (2009), who distinguishes the space habitat from the more typical space station. Space habitats are constructed to look like Earth; their most common appearance is that of a small town from the US Midwest (110-32).

the 'Tales of my Father'. The Tales are transcripts of a series of recordings made by Trevor Vaquero (Telemachus) as he searches for news of his absent father; one Tale is a letter sent to him by an Admiral Maria Aeneas. They appear as separate chapters in the novel which interrupt the numbering of the major chapters—for example, the sequence goes 'Chapter Six', 'Manny's War', 'Chapter Seven'—and become fewer as the novel progresses, clustering in the first half more than the second. It seems fair to discuss these Tales as polyphony: they present different voices to that of the primary narrative; they are inserted genres (transcripts and a letter); they are strictly 'unmerged' with the rest of the narrative; and, as will be shown below, they contribute significantly to the overall story.

On the face of it, Lafferty's *Space Chantey* is a very different beast. This novel is set in what John Clute (2016b) describes as "a rambunctious, myth-saturated, never-never land future", far removed from contemporary Earth, in a universe where an asteroid belt is actually a herd of cattle and the Laestrygonians slaughter each other every day only to be reborn the next morning on a world that turns out to be Valhalla, the Viking afterlife. The plot loosely follows that of the *Odyssey* but the structure is quite different: instead of starting, as *Spin the Sky* does, with Odysseus' return home, *Space Chantey* begins in the aftermath of an unnamed ten-year war: "And after wars, men go home. No, no, men start for home. It's not the same" (6). *Space Chantey* focuses on the journey, on *Odyssey* 9—12; when Captain Roadstrum (Odysseus) finally gets to Earth, his homecoming lasts four pages before he leaves again, off to explore the universe once more. The primary prose narrative of the novel is interspersed with sections of rhyming couplets that are—intentionally so—"all dreadful doggerel and deliberately painful rhymes" (Cochrane 2014: 26); these secondary poetic sections appear at the beginning of every chapter and in the middle of most.[57] In fact, Andrew Ferguson (2011) has compared these couplets to Homeric hexameter:

> Lafferty's doggerel couplets work much the same way as Homeric hexameters: both are shaped primarily by the requirements of their form: the metrical variants in the latter… finds [sic] a

[57] For Lafferty's relationship with poetry in general, see further Cochrane (2014), Heavisides (2014). Webb (2015a, 2015b) describes Lafferty's use of rhythm as "the post-modern equivalent of the Homeric epithet" (2015a: 227) in that it triggers the reader to remember an earlier part of the text.

correspondence in the nonsense syllables of the former… that is, it provides a stock element the poet can introduce while anticipating the lines yet to come. (47-8)

Ferguson further describes the narrative voice "at the beginning of… *Space Chantey*" as bardic (6, n.7), most likely referring to the couplets that open the novel rather than the prose narrative.

Consider these opening couplets:

The Lay of Road-Storm from the ancient Chronicles
We give you here, Good Spheres and Cool-Boy Conicals,

And perils pinnacle and parts impossible
And every word the sworn-upon Gosipel.

Lend ear while things incredible we bring about
And Spacemen dead and deathless yet we sing about:—

And some were weak and wan, and some were strong enough,
And some got home, but damn it took them long enough! (5)

Coming as it does at the beginning of the text, these couplets almost act as a proem, detailing what is to happen in the rest of the novel: "*some got home, but damn it took them long enough!*" is a fairly good description of the voyage of any Odysseus, ancient or modern. The p-alliteration of "*perils pinnacle and parts impossible*" further echoes the similar π-alliteration of the *Odyssey* proem (πολύτροπον… πολλὰ / πλάγχθη… πτολίεθρον ἔπερσεν· / πολλῶν… / πολλὰ… πάθεν: 1.1-4), and the phrase "*some were strong enough*" perhaps even recalls the πολλάς δ' ἰφθίμους ψυχὰς of the proem of the *Iliad* (1.3), bringing a second Homeric proem into the mix. However, this proemical purpose does not continue throughout the rest of the novel; elsewhere these snippets of poetry are instead used to cover gaps in the narrative or to meditate in Lafferty's inimitable style on relevant parts of the text.

The omniscient narrator of the poems is not the same as the narrator of the prose narrative, and the way the poems are printed sets them apart from the rest of the text: indented and consistently italicised, as shown above, they are visually separate, reflecting the internal integrity of the various stories in the *Odyssey* itself. They also play a key role in the narrative, as will be shown below, as they are in fact extracts from the 'Chantey', a long poem that is repeatedly referred to throughout the novel that tells of the deeds of Captain Roadstrum and his crew almost as they are doing them. This poetical secondary narrative shows all the hallmarks of being polyphonic – but in a very different way to *Spin the Sky*'s 'Tales of my Father'.

These two novels have not received much by way of scholarly attention, although Lafferty, long obscure and out of print, has begun to experience something of a renaissance in the amateur SF community.[58] His style is difficult to get to grips with, but immensely rewarding once it is grasped: he is often referred to as a 'teller of tall tales',[59] and he operates within the oral tradition of the American 'tall tale' as much as he does within the traditions of SF and wider Western literature. Despite this resurgence, however, there is still only one academic article solely about Lafferty (Ferguson 2014) published in *Science Fiction Studies*: this is a reworked version of Ferguson's MA thesis, and, incidentally, the new version removes any discussion of *Space Chantey*. Classical scholarship shows a similar lack of interest: in *The Return of Ulysses* (2008), Edith Hall devotes a brief paragraph to Lafferty's novel, but little more. *Spin the Sky* receives no mention at all in SF and classical scholarship alike. This is perhaps not surprising, considering the novel's unliterary style, something which is traditionally unappealing to academic study, but it does not mean that the text is without merit.

[58] The Locus Foundation acquired Lafferty's literary estate in 2011 (Ball 2014), and has begun publishing (often in ebook format) works that have long been out of print. Further, a Lafferty fanzine called *Feast of Laughter* began publishing in 2014, reprinting critical essays and commentary on Lafferty's work, along with original pieces inspired by Lafferty and even some of the author's own previously-unpublished short stories.
[59] E.g. Aldiss (2001: 377), Surridge (2011), Walker (2014: 18), Ellison (2015: 12), May (2015: 101), Orszanski (2015: 116), Clute (2016b). On Lafferty's style in general, see Webster (2012), Webb (2015b).

One of the most important features of a polyphonic narrative is the way in which the secondary narratives help construct the meaning of the primary. This is something that we see in abundance in the texts at hand. In *Space Chantey*, for instance, the secondary couplets often contain information that is key to the reader's understanding of the wider story, effectively tying together the various episodes of Roadstrum's adventures into a cohesive whole. Lafferty described his novels as "short stories strung together" (Lafferty 1983: 79, quoted in Ferguson 2011: 49); in *Space Chantey*, it is the couplets that do the stringing. For example, these are the first two couplets of the poem that appears at the beginning of the final chapter:

> *More gory episodes omit we ken of them;*
> *The Chantey sings ten years filled up with ten of them.*
>
> *Of crewmen dead we weep, and what a row they had!*
> *And some had gotten home but none knows how they had.* (116)

The couplets thus bridge the gap between the events at the High Liars' Club in Chapter 7 and Roadstrum's final homecoming in Chapter 8; as such, they prove to be a vital part of the story's narrative structure. However, while these couplets mention what happened in those "*ten years filled up with ten of them*", they don't go into much detail. This can be simply read as a facet of this narrative voice, a voice that is more inclined to imparting information than describing in depth, but it also hints at another, more complex interpretation. The overt 'purpose' of these couplets is to fill in the gaps for the reader, to present another voice to tell the story – but here, in fact, the couplets are *not* telling that story. In the first line quoted above, "*More gory episodes omit we ken of them*", 'ken' is a Scots word meaning 'know' which has its own interesting literary history—it appears, for instance, in John Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1674): "At once as far as angels ken" (1.59)—and it here implies that the narrative voice does not know about those "*gory episodes*" at all. However, here this is not hugely significant: rather like the *praeteritio* of classical oratory, the mention of the "*gory episodes*" is enough to evoke their existence.

Elsewhere, however, matters are more complex. Consider the following example, which concludes Chapter 5. In the prose narration immediately preceding these lines, the crew of Roadstrum's hornet—his spacecraft—are facing imminent destruction, as an explosion is about to occur on board their ship in the depths of space. These are the couplets that follow:

The Chantey pleads a lapse and leaves a doubt of it.
We don't know how the hearty crew got out of it!

What tales you hear with reason may you doubt them all.
They could not be! And yet the men got out of them all.

Remember not the jokes they made to bluff it off,
What ghastly thing they suffered, and to sluff it off.

Withhold the question where such brave men cry a lot.
Remember also hornet-crewmen lie a lot. (90)

The polyphonic secondary narrative here overtly refuses to fulfil its purpose. Rather like Charlie Croker's 'great idea' at the end of *The Italian Job* (1969), instead of explaining to the reader in its customary jaunty style how exactly Roadstrum and his crew get out of this one, the secondary narrative "*pleads a lapse and leaves a doubt of it*". The cliffhanger is unresolved, and the next chapter picks up as if nothing ever happened. On the surface, this seems deeply unsatisfying – but a solution to this quandary is offered in the last line of Chapter 5: "*Remember also hornet-crewmen lie a lot.*" Lafferty writes in the tradition of the American tall tale, where fiction and exaggeration are more important than truth or realism – and with *Space Chantey*, an adaptation of the *Odyssey*, he is also writing in the tradition of one of the most famous silver-tongued tricksters in Western literature, Odysseus. Consider Helen's description of him in *Iliad* 3: οὗτος δ᾽ αὖ Λαερτιάδης πολύμητις

Ὀδυσσεύς, / … / εἰδὼς παντοίους τε δόλους καὶ μήδεα πυκνά (200-202). Here, the lie is perhaps the point.

A comparable example from contemporary popular culture is found in two episodes of the BBC television programme *Sherlock* (2010—), "The Reichenbach Fall" and "The Empty Hearse". At the end of "The Reichenbach Fall", Sherlock Holmes (Benedict Cumberbatch) fakes his own death by falling from the roof of a hospital, sparking intense debate among the viewing public as to how exactly he fell without dying. Throughout the following episode, "The Empty Hearse", numerous different theories are dramatised but all are shown to be fictitious – and, indeed, it is never revealed how exactly Holmes survived the fall, despite his claim that he in fact worked out thirteen different ways to escape that rooftop. It is the questioning and the deductive reasoning involved in trying to work out what happened—key to the Sherlock Holmes mythos in any incarnation—that is the point rather than any definitive 'answer', which would most likely be a disappointment. A similar manoeuvre is at play in *Space Chantey*: the reader's attention is deflected away from the 'reality' of the story, and is instead turned to the processes by which this story is being told. As such, the purpose of this polyphony is a little different: instead of simply telling the tale and supporting the primary narrative, these couplets are instead drawing the reader to deeper questions, ideas of the role of truth and fiction in storytelling, particularly in the context of an oral, folkloric tradition – or, with *Space Chantey*, two of them.

The polyphony of *Space Chantey* is thus not as easy as it might initially seem. *Spin the Sky* is similarly unstraightforward. Trevor's 'Tales of my Father' fill in essential details about the story of Cesar's past travels: they include an introduction to Cesar's crew and an account of his loyalty to them ("Prologue: Tinker Ship Captain"); a potted history of the Spacer War ("Manny's War"); the story of Cesar's time on Hedonia, a dystopian pleasure-orbital ruled by the cult leader Seersee, the Homeric Circe ("Escape from Hedonia"); a twisted version of the Sirens ("Voices in the Dark"); the tale of some surprisingly friendly giants, offering a new spin on the Cyclops story ("Where the One-Eyed Man is King"); and a letter from Admiral Maria Aeneas recounting Cesar's defeat of the twin

orbitals Scylla and Charybdis ("Between Scylla and Charybdis"). All of the stories are told by different voices, and all of them differ from the usual subjective third person present that the primary narrative favours. This is a technique that has drawn some criticism—Andrew Liptak (2012) dismisses it as "incoherent"—but others have been more positive, writing that it "[gives] the whole concept a very comprehensive and cohesive feel" (Jain 2012), and that, while the structure is "convoluted", the "overall feeling of the novel is that of a (Greek) mosaic in which every fragment fits right into its place" ('Odo' 2012). Lucie Armitt (1991: 135) has written that SF, despite its content, can be rather hostile towards innovative structures; this is perhaps where this resistance comes from. However, the structure of the novel is in fact highly effective, allowing Stauber to move nimbly between voices and perspectives in order to fully elucidate the "mosaic" of her text.

The Tales are by no means merely jolly asides, irrelevant to the events that are unfolding back on the Ithaca orbital. The true nature of Uri Mach (Eurymachus), for instance, one of Penelope's pestering potential business partners, is revealed in "Voices in the Dark" rather than in the main narrative. Trevor pesters Cesar himself, disguised as Jonas Ulixes (a nod to Odysseus' Latin name), for information about his father the night after one of the parties that Penelope regularly holds to try to keep her 'suitors' happy, and the transcript of this recording forms the "Voices in the Dark" chapter. In the previous chapter, Cesar met Uri Mach at this party and was inexplicably hostile to him; this Tale explains why. Cesar/Ulixes' account here ends with a simple statement, addressed to Trevor:

> Stories about your dad don't have happy endings. (119)

This statement operates on multiple levels. Initially, it foreshadows what might come to pass, much as the repeated stories of Agamemnon's death at the hands of Clytaemnestra do in the *Odyssey*, implying that everything might not turn out so well. Additionally, the fact that the voice that is saying this is recorded at the beginning of the Tale as Jonas Ulixes, not Cesar Vaquero, adds a level of dramatic irony: it is clear throughout the novel that Cesar is a damaged man, haunted by the devastation that he was forced to wreak on Earth to bring the destructive Spacer War to an end, and this statement

reminds the reader of this, layering the ominous voice of foreshadowing with the voice of a traumatised ex-soldier who is caught deep in his own self-hatred.[60] Through this, the statement acts as a reminder of who exactly is talking, as the narrator of the Tale has been talking about Cesar, not about himself. This short, polyphonic statement thus draws the reader's attention to the dramatic irony that the novel is constructing.

The straightforward polyphony of *Spin the Sky*'s Tales is thus undoubtable. What remains to be seen is the complexities. The in-text explanation of the Tales is that they are recordings made by Trevor as he searches for information about his father; as such, most of these recordings have been made before the story begins and are simply excerpted within the text at appropriate points. However, on two occasions this is not the case. One is with the "Voices in the Dark" Tale where, as discussed above, Cesar/Ulixes' story is recorded by Trevor during the course of the narrative. The second is more important. Trevor and Cesar, still going by Jonas Ulixes, are rescued by Mike, one of Cesar's old crewmates. Mike immediately recognises Cesar, and, while maintaining eye contact with him, offers to tell Trevor a story about his father. Trevor jumps at the chance. The story that Mike tells becomes "Where the One-Eyed Man is King", a reworking of the Cyclops incident from *Odyssey* 9. In accordance with the *Odyssey*, the story ends thus:

> Right before I closed the door, the giant asked Captain [i.e. Cesar], "Who are you?"
>
> Captain gave him a pitying look and said, "Jonas Ulixes," because that's the fake name he always gave to people when he didn't want to say his real name. Your dad always was shy about his past.
>
> What's the matter, kid? You just got all green and queasy looking. If you have to be sick, do it in that bucket next to your bed. (196)

This kind of final extra-diegetic reference is common in the Tales, nicely reflecting the original oral context of the transcripts. In keeping with the *Odyssey* and Odysseus' famous οὖτις / μῆτις pun, in this Tale Cesar gives a false name – but it just so happens that that false name is the one that he has been

[60] PTSD and issues of combat trauma will be discussed in Chapter 2: Genre (pg.78-104).

going under throughout the novel. The beginning of the next chapter depicts a reunion between father and son which is in equal parts awkward and emotional, giving a rather realistic take on what that meeting might be like. What we see happening here, then, is not just the secondary narrative—the Tale—providing a polyphonic perspective on either the characters' actions or, as with *Space Chantey*, the purpose of the text itself. Here the Tale is actually driving the action, prompting the reunion between father and son that the reader has been anticipating for the last twenty chapters. In the *Odyssey*, this reunion is prompted by Athena; in *Spin the Sky*, however, it is the secondary narrative. This stresses the fact that the secondary narratives of *Spin the Sky* are not subordinate to the primary narrative at all, but that they have a key part to play within the text: if they were excised from the novel, the story itself would be incomplete.

However, as much as the polyphony of *Spin the Sky* is integral to the novel, it does not go beyond the novel's boundaries: everything that happens, happens within the world that Stauber has created. In *Space Chantey*, however, things are a little different. The novel's primary prose narrative is set in the "never-never land" (Clute 2016b) that many of Lafferty's works take place in, and it is generally contained to that semi-mythic world. What this means is that we do not find references in the primary narrative to 'Earth' culture, only to the culture of the novel's myth – including, on many occasions, the Chantey-verse itself. In the secondary poetic narrative, however, cultural references abound. Here is a selection:

> *Where fiddlers scree'd and Rabelaisians loped it was.*
>
> *And Maybe Jones had walked the streets and hoped it was.* (7)

> *He propped the Universe, but propped it jerkily,*
>
> *For mighty Atlas after Georgie Berkeley.* (51)

> *As deft and devious as Ancient Niccolo—*
>
> *Now sing her song, strum harp, and pip the piccolo.* (90)

Where Dante doled "l'orrible soperchio

Del puzzo—e gran pietre in cerchio." (112)

In order, the references are to François Rabelais, the French novelist; George Berkeley, the Irish philosopher; Niccolò Macchiavelli, the Italian political theorist; and Dante Alighieri, the writer of the *Inferno*. The Italian quoted in the final extract purports to be straight out of Dante, but it is in fact a bastardised version of Canto 11.1-5:

> In su l'estremit à d'un'alta ripa
> che facevan <u>gran pietre</u> rotte <u>in cerchio</u>,
> venimmo sopra più crudele stipa;
> e quivi, per <u>l'orribile soperchio</u>
> <u>del puzzo</u> che 'l profondo abisso gitta…
>
> At the end of a high cliff, made by <u>great rocks</u>
> broken <u>in a circle</u>, we came above a crueller crowding;
> and there, because of <u>the horrible excess of stench</u>
> cast up by the abyss… (tr. Durling)

This is not just a manoeuvre designed to show off Lafferty's extremely catholic knowledge. By incorporating references to cultural artefacts that are outside the knowledge of the novel's characters, Lafferty is explicitly characterising the secondary narrative voice as somehow outside the scope of the story, as an outside voice intruding on the little world of the primary narrative, bringing with it the knowledge and input of a whole other kind of world. This is similar, in a way, to Demodocus' song of Ares and Aphrodite in *Odyssey* 8, where the bard demonstrates knowledge of the everyday world of the gods that would be out of range of the knowledge of any normal Homeric character. In *Space Chantey*, the fact that this 'other world' is in fact the reader's world serves as a distancing device, thus drawing a line between the reader and the text, encouraging the reader to identify with the secondary

narrative voice. Just as the active role that the Tales play in *Spin the Sky* elevates the importance of the secondary narrative, so this evocation of 'our world' elevates *Space Chantey*'s secondary poetic narrative to more than a match for the primary – but here in terms of closeness to the reader rather than impact on the overall shape of the narrative.

The polyphonic narratives of *Space Chantey* and *Spin the Sky* thus both fulfil the basic 'purpose' of a polyphonic narrative, namely to provide information that supports and completes the primary narrative, and both do so through 'inserted genres' that are clearly demarcated as being separate from the rest of the text, either through italicised poetic couplets or separate chapters that interrupt the regular chapter order. Another factor that has become clear through the analysis above is how both texts elevate the 'secondary' narrative to a position of clear importance, stressing that, while these inset narratives are supplementary to the main text, they are certainly not subordinate to it. Both create narratives that are a little unusual by mainstream SF standards in order to maintain this connection with the ancient text, and produce complex, stylistic choices as a result of this connection.

The two narratives are, of course, not identical. *Spin the Sky*'s Tales thin out as the novel progresses, giving way to the thrust of the primary narrative, whereas it is in fact a series of couplets that bring *Space Chantey* to its (sort of) end:

> *Destroyed? His road is run? It's but a bend of it;*
> *Make no mistake, this only* seems
>
> *the end of it.*
>
> (123)

The centralised layout here of the final four words deliberately echoes the FINIS or THE END that sometimes comes at the end of novels, thus containing the end of the novel as a whole within the secondary Chantey-narrative. Furthermore, there is only one secondary narrative voice in *Space*

Chantey, whereas *Spin the Sky* demonstrates a variety; equally, *Space Chantey*'s secondary narratives are all one genre, while *Spin the Sky*'s are a mix of transcript and letter. The different texts' narratives could also be read as paralleling different Homeric structures: the first set of couplets in *Space Chantey*, as discussed above, could be read as a proem, while *Spin the Sky*'s Tales could be read as a version of the Telemacheia, demonstrating Trevor's interest in his father and his investigation of his whereabouts in much the same way as the conversations that Telemachus holds with Nestor, Menelaus, and Helen in *Odyssey* 1—4. What this means is that polyphony is not a monolithic beast, and it is certainly not some kind of Procrustean template to be forced onto an unwilling text. *Spin the Sky* and *Space Chantey* demonstrate two comparatively straightforward versions of polyphonic narratives, perhaps echoing the fairly uncomplicated polyphony (in Bakhtinian terms) of the *Odyssey*, but even within those 'straightforward' narratives there are complexities aplenty.

Blurred Voices.

The second pair of texts to be discussed stretch the complexity of a polyphonic narrative to breaking point, and, as with Lafferty and Stauber's novels, they are strikingly different from one another. "Cyclops", published in 1985, is a short story by a little-known English author, Lannah Battley, whereas Matt Fraction, the writer of *ODY-C*, is an Eisner Award-winning American comic book writer who has authored runs on big-name Marvel properties such as *The Invincible Iron Man*, *Uncanny X-Men*, and *Hawkeye*. The media are different—one short story, one comic book—and one is not yet complete. As a result of the different media, the two texts focus on very different matters: as the title suggests, "Cyclops" deals exclusively with the origin of the Cyclops story in *Odyssey* 9, while *ODY-C* is much more wide-ranging, dealing with not only the *Odyssey* and the inset stories within it but also devoting thus far two issues to the *Oresteia* (#11—12), and including elements of stories ranging from *Moby Dick* to *One Thousand and One Arabian Nights*.[61]

[61] Cf. Fraction (2014d), Sava (2015).

However, there is one obvious point of contact between the two texts. Fraction and Ward's *ODY-C* is a retelling of the *Odyssey* in which virtually every character is turned into a woman. As Fraction (2014a) says:

> The complete inversion of the patriarchal structure reveals an awful lot about the story, the consequences, and what the tale of the Odyssey and the Iliad are [sic] really about. It shows how women have been treated for 26 centuries.

Similar manoeuvres are at play in Battley's "Cyclops", where it is revealed at the culmination of the story that Homa, the sister of one of the secondary narrators, in fact grows up to be Homer, the classical poet. Feminism and the position of women in the cultural narrative are thus at the heart of both of these texts,[62] even though the textual explorations of those issues are carried out in very different ways. Thus despite the fact that they might seem like an odd pair of texts to analyse alongside one another, in fact they are rather mutually illuminating.

ODY-C, as mentioned, is a 'genderbent' retelling of the *Odyssey*, tracing the *nostoi* of the three heroes of the Troiian War, Odyssia (Odysseus), Ene (Menelaus), and Gamem (Agamemnon). The adaptation of the names, in particular Ene and Gamem, formed from medial elements of the original names, further defamiliarises the characters. The planned structure of the series operates in a twelve-issue cycle: five issues following Odyssia, five following Ene, and two following Gamem (*ODY-C* #12: 25). This is based on Fraction's reading of the *Odyssey*, discussed above, where "you have to know what happened in three other things". Where the Homeric text has Menelaus recounting the story of his voyage home and characters alluding to Agamemnon's homecoming, *ODY-C* splashes those events across the page in lurid Technicolor. So far, twelve issues have been published; the thirteenth will begin the cycle again. The comic does not follow the structure of the *Odyssey*; rather it starts with the heroes leaving Troiia-VIIa (an allusion to the fact that the archaeological Troy VIIa is the most

[62] This will be discussed at greater length in Chapter 2: Genre.

likely to be the Troy of the Trojan War) and follows their journeys home.[63] This is not the first retelling of the *Odyssey* as a comic book[64]—Paul Streufert (2015: 19) has in fact suggested that there is a natural parallel between the *Odyssey* and the superhero comic book—but it is certainly one of the more innovative, with Christian Ward's artwork praised for its vibrant colours and its unusual structures: "It is visceral, vicious, vivacious, vivid" (A Brown 2015). The pages are rarely structured as typical comic book pages are, with clear gutters between the panels and margins around the edge of the page; instead the images spread across the whole page, with the result that, somewhat frustratingly, there are often no page numbers.

"Cyclops" is a little more traditional. It is a nineteen-page short story, published in an anthology of SF short stories written by female writers which relates the meeting of two women, one a pilot, the other an academic, on board a space station. During the course of their conversation, two inset narratives appear: one is the log of a captain who is forced to scour an undeveloped and uninhabitable planet, BK3, for resources to fix his damaged ship; and the other is the ancient account of "Aeneas, son of Philippos" (84), who tells the story of how he and his sister, Homa, encountered a group of giant, one-eyed monsters who slaughtered their flocks. Due to the unbreathable atmosphere on BK3, the captain and his crew are forced to wear spacesuits at all times – and Aeneas and Homa interpret the blank visor of the spacesuit as "one huge dark eye" (85). Homa (or Homer, as we know her) goes on to incorporate these monsters into her stories, and thus the short story acts as a temporally complex aetiology for the story of the Cyclops as it appears in the *Odyssey*. It is a text that operates on a number of different levels, and that, as will be detailed below, is at its core about the polyphonic creation of meaning.

Two features of these texts are relevant to the concept of polyphony that this chapter is exploring: their use of language, and their blurring of the boundaries between the supposedly 'unmerged' voices

[63] There is a five-page prologue to *ODY-C* only available on Christian Ward's Tumblr that details the fall of Troiia (Ward 2014).

[64] For a survey of previous comic adaptations of Homer, see Marshall (2016: 5-13). On specific texts, see Jenkins (2011, on two French adaptations), Baetens & Frey (2015: 124-5, 173 on Alison Bechdel's *Fun House*), Marshall (2016, on Gerry Duggan & Phil Noto's *The Infinite Horizon*).

that polyphony demands. Further, the boundary between this dualism itself will become a little fuzzy at times.

The language of *ODY-C* is one of its most striking features. Fraction's writing eschews the dialogue-heavy style common to most modern American comics,[65] preferring narration to speech – but he does not simply write in 'normal' prose. He writes in what he calls "dummy hexameter":

> English isn't like Latin, though (as I understand it anyway), and rather than long and short syllables we've got stressed and unstressed syllables. So I'm writing in what I'm calling dummy hexameter, trying to mimic dactylic hexameter with the stressed and unstressed words. Also (again, as I understand it, I might be wrong, because I am dumb), the last… uh… foot? Dactyl?... once it finishes its long-short-short requirement, could end with various different long-short patterns. So I'm writing in six, uh, fingers, of stressed-unstressed-unstressed and then riffing at the end of that sixth however I want. (*ODY-C* #2: 29)

Fraction's understanding of dactylic hexameter is, by his own admission, an amateur one: Latin *does* have stressed and unstressed syllables, but they are secondary to quantity in the construction of Latin hexameter; further, hexameter in fact always ends with a spondee, rather than "riffing" on the metre; and, of course, the Homeric poems are in Greek, not Latin. His intended effect, however, is to evoke a sense of the oral tradition, of an ancient poet reciting their story to a wondrous audience – and, by all accounts, he succeeds: "It feels less like reading and more like listening to a poet telling a story" (A Brown 2015); "this really does read like an epic poem from another culture" (Schedeen 2014). This is not the 'voice' that we expect from an American comic, and it marks the text as something rather more ambitious. However, the comic's voice is not solely that of 'epic': for every grandiose "Swimsleeping women who power the ship think of ten-thousand horses at once" (#1: 32), there is an "And so Ithicaa waits just a little more, I guess." (#1: 34). The colloquial "I guess" interrupts the

[65] On the style of comics, see especially McCloud (1994); cf. Eisner (1985) on the American tradition. Groensteen (2007, 2013) offers a more theoretical approach, primarily founded in the Franco-Belgian European tradition.

elevated, 'epic' dummy hexameter, layering another voice on top of the 'epic' one: that of the modern writer—perhaps even the modern reader, as the narration of the comic is sounding solely in the reader's mind—appearing simultaneously with the ancient one. This modern writer/reader is further stressed by the use of profanity. For instance, this is Hypnos, speaking to Zeus:[66]

> No, no Cousin-Thunder. I merely suggest that before Mother Night does it for you, get your fucking house in order. (*ODY-C* #5: 26-7)

Profanity is a common way to modernise a text in a particularly jarring fashion,[67] and it here further reinforces the modern voice that is layered on top of the ancient one. Thus we see in *ODY-C* a polyphony of voices within the language of the text itself, both modern and ancient, appearing side by side.

Furthermore, this is not the only instance of polyphony in *ODY-C*'s language. As mentioned above, issues 1—5 focus on Odyssia's story, issues 6—10 switch the focus to Ene and He (Helen), and issues 11 and 12 are devoted to the myths of the House of Atreus and Aeschylus' *Oresteia*, thus surpassing the Homeric text. The issues from 13 onwards will once again focus on Odyssia – but it is the *Oresteia* issues that are interesting here. Instead of dummy hexameter, they are written in limericks. These are the lines, for instance, that open #11:

> There once stood a house called *Atreus*
> Whose frantical assholes just slay us
> O ladies! O bros!
> It's a story for pros
> But chillax – because that's why you pay us. (*ODY-C* #11: 3)

[66] The line has specific Homeric pedigree: *Il*.14.258-61.
[67] Dan Simmons' *Ilium* and *Olympos* are excellent examples of this, and will be discussed further in Chapter 6: Cognitive Estrangement.

The tone is similar to that of the 'modern' voice discussed above ("assholes", "bros", "pros", "chillax"), and the awkward rhymes ("Atreus" / "slay us" / "pay us") are both traditional in limerick style and strikingly reminiscent of the doggerel verse found in Lafferty's *Space Chantey*. Similarly to *Space Chantey*, in fact, it is the shift in poetic style here, from hexameter to limerick, that introduces a new voice: despite the shared features with the 'modern' voice in the dummy hexameter, the fact that these issues are written solely in limericks sets them apart from the rest of the text. Just as, in the comic, the Aeschylean *Oresteia* intrudes upon the Homeric *Odyssey*, so the limericks of #11—12 intrude upon the dummy hexameter of #1—10, #13—, building up a polyphony of different poetic styles. However, it is Fraction's reason for this shift that is perhaps most revealing. He writes that, while researching these two issues, he came to the conclusion that:

> It's horrible. It's all so goddamn horrible all I could do was laugh. Because every single last person in House Atreus is *bugfuck*.
>
> Eschewing the dummy hexameter of the previous volumes for limericks underlined it. How can you take any of this seriously when you've got not one, but TWO different stews made of children? There once was a man from Nantucket. There once was a house called Atreus. Fuck it. Slay us.
>
> (*ODY-C* #11: 27)

The limerick form, most often associated with nonsense verse, underlines Fraction's reaction to the bizarre history of the House of Atreus. This thus suggests that, while the *Oresteia* tale is essential to the overall story of *ODY-C*, it is to be regarded within the text as something other, something alien, something practically insane. The jolly rhythms of the limerick set against the scenes of blood and slaughter and Ward's predominantly red colour palette in these two issues highlight this insanity. The contrast between the limericks and the dummy hexameter thus present the contrast between the insane and sane worlds, but knowledge of both is required to grasp the full story that Fraction and Ward are telling. They present different sides of the myths and the stories, and it is the interaction between the two that reveals the grisly extent of Greek myth.

There are thus multiple voices at play in *ODY-C*'s language even before we get to the kind of complex, more 'structural' polyphony that will be discussed later in this chapter. This contrast between the 'ancient' and 'modern' dummy hexameter voices is also instructive when it comes to Battley's "Cyclops". Here, too, we find Homeric language seeping through into the SF narrative. The first inset narrative in the short story takes the form of a log entry written by the nameless captain, which is characterised by the repetition of the number of the days: *Day 1*, *Day 2*, and so on.[68] The narration is 'modern' in that it bears no resemblance to the structure of ancient epic and does not attempt to mimic the rhythms or patterns of hexameter verse – yet at points an 'ancient' voice shines through. Consider, for instance, the captain's first description of their landing site:

> *Day 1:* We have landed in an area where a large expanse of water swirls against a jagged mainland fringed by promontories and rocky inlets. The sea is dotted with mountainous land masses which made touchdown a delicate business, but we managed a safe and uneventful landing on one of the larger islands. This gives good readings for minerals suitable for steelite.
>
> So far as we can tell, the population is small and well spread, a tribe of herders. We have seen their animals, which have thick curly coats above four spindly legs and give weird guttural calls.
>
> We feel certain that we were not observed when landing and have used the cragginess and a natural cave as part of our camouflage which is as near perfect as I have ever seen. (79)

This passage is clearly drawing on the description of the Cyclopes' island in *Odyssey* 9 (105-52). The "jagged mainland" echoes the landscape of the Mediterranean that Odysseus navigated, and the mention of "a natural cave" recalls, of course, both the Cyclops' own cave and indeed the cave and the stream of water on the island where Odysseus and his men land (140-2). In addition, the description of the sheep as having "four spindly legs" echoes the Homeric epithet for sheep, ταναύπους, *long legged*, which is in fact used to describe the Cyclops' sheep: τὰ μῆλα ταναύποδα (464). The "weird guttural calls" are reminiscent of the bleating goats that are mentioned throughout

[68] Interestingly enough, the number of days that action takes in Homeric epic has been a preoccupation of scholarship both ancient and modern: Lachmann (1865) discusses the ancient preoccupation with the number of days of the *Iliad*, and the time that Telemachus spends with Menelaus in Sparta has been discussed by, for example, Apthorp (1980: 1-12).

the Cyclops episode (μηκάδας αἶγας, 124). The language of the Homeric poem, this 'ancient' voice, thus shows through the 'modern' one, effectively interweaving the two. The linguistic polyphony of "Cyclops" is clearly less complex than that of *ODY-C*—not that surprising, considering the respective length of the texts—but it is no less important: "Cyclops" shows the reader a series of *Odyssey*s and Cyclopes layered on top of one another,[69] and the simpler linguistic polyphony here outlined provides a solid foundation for this more complex technique.

Polyphony on the microscopic level of the language is by no means the only polyphony that *ODY-C* and "Cyclops" have to offer – but their broader polyphony is not the sometimes straightforward, clearly delineated polyphony of *Space Chantey* and *Spin the Sky*. These are two texts that blur the lines between the primary narrative voice and the secondary polyphonic stories. Exactly how these texts accomplish this goal is at least in part suggested by the different media in which they operate. *ODY-C* is perhaps the most obvious example of this. The comics medium is not simply text with added pictures; it is the balance between the two and the effects that the combination of the two create which is where comics come into their own (Eisner 1985: 7-12; McCloud 1994: 153-5). *ODY-C* is no different. The polyphony that was outlined for *Space Chantey* and *Spin the Sky* is certainly present in the comic, with different stories in different voices intruding on the main narrative of the *nostoi* of the heroes of Troiia. However, this is differently expressed through the visuality of the comics medium itself.

A good example of this is the visual appearance of the comic's text. *ODY-C* eschews traditional speech bubbles in favour of text boxes throughout, often scattered across the page seemingly at random, giving "Fraction's script a staccato-y feel, like a crunchiness" (A Brown 2015). As the majority of the comic's narration is in the interweaving 'ancient' and 'modern' voices outlined above rather than spoken dialogue, this is what we find in the majority of cases: plain text boxes with fairly straight lines and black text on a white background (fig.1). However, when the characters speak, the

[69] G O Hutchinson (2007) observes that this kind of layering is a key element of the reception of the Cyclops in antiquity: "past texts gather beneath the present text like vast stilts" (36). On the reception of the Cyclops story, see S C Scott (1995), Roisman (2007), Hall (2007, 2008a: ch. 7).

colour of the text box changes, with different colours used for different characters (fig.2). Furthermore, again depending on who is speaking, Chris Eliopoulos' lettering can change: Hypnos, for instance, speaks in jagged, archaic letters that suggest runic script, creating a sense of the protomythic and precivilised (fig.3). This is not quite the kind of polyphony that we have been discussing so far—dialogue is not the same as inserted genres—but it is instructive to outline how *ODY-C*'s medium affects the reader's experience of the text.

The multiple storylines of *ODY-C*, outlined above, already hint at the possibility of polyphony, but in fact these storylines are more parallel than they are polyphonic. The five-five-two structure separates the narratives from each other, and, thus far, there has not been much of the kind of thematic polyphony that we see in the *Odyssey* itself: Ene and Gamem's journeys home are there as stories to be told, rather than, as in the *Odyssey*, as reflections on the possibility of Odyssia's own homecoming. However, that is not to say that the text is without polyphony, only that it is a little more limited. Issues six to ten, collected under the title *ODY-C: Sons of the Wolf*, turn to Ene and He and tell the story of their adventures post-Troiia. Ene leaves He on a world named Q'af, promising to return to collect him at a later date, and He entertains himself—and indeed, later in the text, ensures his own survival—by reading books and telling stories. The stories themselves are loose versions of ancient myths, and do parallel the concerns of the primary narrative of #6—10 in the polyphonic way outlined above.

At the beginning of #6, for instance, He reads the story of a 'wolf woman' who is pursued, captured, and raped by Herakles; when Herakles has finished with her, she then tells him a story based on Mesopotamian myth, where the goddess Inanna is raped by a farmer, Aletuda, and then wreaks her vengeance upon him. The lesson of this: "Boys who rape shall all be destroyed" (#6: 7). Rape and the subjugation of women, especially in folklore, are an important theme of the *Sons of the Wolf* issues (Sava 2015), and they are thus polyphonically explored in the opening pages of #6. The relevance of these stories to the primary narrative is explicitly stressed:

> Fables and stories and histories captured by beings from worlds long since dead, yet with echoing voices that shape and define those still living. He learns from them all. (#6: 7)

The first sentence here could almost be describing the very act of reception. As the outline above suggests, in these opening pages of #6 these stories are nested within one another: He reading a story of a woman who tells a story of her own could potentially be confusing for the reader, but Ward's text boxes and Eliopoulos' lettering save the day (#6: 3-7; figs.4-6), clearly delineating which words belong to which narrative. As such, the 'unmerged' part of Bakhtin's definition is preserved.

However, that is not the whole story. Consider the first page of #6 (fig.7). Ward's artwork spreads across the whole page, leaving no gutter and no margin. The top half of the page depicts He sitting with a book, surrounded by the mechanisms of Ene's ship, and the bottom half focuses in on what exactly he is reading. The curve of the panels that tell the inset story echo the way pages curve when a physical book is held open, and He's thumbs at the bottom corners reinforce this, almost as if the reader is peeking over He's shoulder to read. Furthermore, the different line colours between the panel in the middle of the page (black) and the three at the bottom of the page (blue) highlight the difference between the levels of the story operating here: the black-lined panel depicts He himself, showing the sorrow in his expression, with his downwards gaze a reminder of the fact that he is reading, whereas the blue-lined panels, something thus far unseen in *ODY-C*, imply the fictionality of what happens within those panels.

A further shift occurs when the wolf woman tells the story of Inanna and Aletuda. The panels on these pages are no longer lined at all, but instead have soft, wispy edges against a white background (fig.8). The design of the pages echoes the unmerged nature of the stories, as each is represented with different panels, colours, and lettering, but the overall structure of the pages does not reinforce those distinctions as firmly as we might expect. On the first page (fig.7), the difference in colour between the panel outlines is not quite as obvious as it is on the following pages, suggesting that we are to read the four panels as a whole. The way that the black-lined panel depicting He's face curves to fit with

the curve of the book-style blue-lined panels reinforces this suggestion: the reader sees He within the context of the stories that he is reading, caught up in them and perhaps even sharing in their implications. This is, of course, the thematic point of the inset stories in #6—10 – but, as *ODY-C* is presented in the comics medium, it is not solely expressed through the stories themselves. The art sends that message, as well, and the fact that the panel structure on the first page already associates He with the stories he is reading in fact presages the 'literary' implication of the text and indeed the final assertion of his learning on the seventh page.

Another page in issue 6 further underlines this kind of blurring. The next story that He reads, while waiting for Ene to finish negotiations with Hryar and Zhaman, the rulers of Q'af, is of the hunt for Humbabaddon, a monstrous creature whose name suggests both Humbaba, the Mesopotamian forest guardian, and Abaddon,[70] the angel described in the Book of Revelation. Consider the final page of this story (fig.9). A similar curved structure is used for the panels—this time spanning two pages, so in figure 9 we only see half of the 'book'—and again they are lined in blue, ostensibly separating them from *ODY-C*'s usual black-lined panels.

Lines are blurred here nonetheless. The two men who stand behind He at the bottom of the page are Hryar and Zhaman, Q'af's rulers, but they are also the men, shown in the panel above, who have been fighting Humbabaddon over the past three pages in the myth that He has been reading. The reality of *ODY-C* and the unreality of the stories that He reads are bleeding into each other. This is reinforced by the middle panel on the previous page, where Hryar's legs spill across two panels as he attacks Humbabaddon, and by the colour scheme of figure 9: the red-orange smear behind the panels, echoing Humbabaddon's blood, is mirrored in the colouring of the book that He is holding at the bottom of the page. This red-orange further echoes the colour of Humbabaddon himself, and especially the colour of his death, depicted in the first panel on page fifteen (fig.9). The colours associated with the inset story appear in the primary narrative, implicitly bringing the content with them. They reject the idea of

[70] Abaddon has precedent as a monster in SF/F popular culture: the eighth and ninth seasons of *Supernatural* feature a 'knight of hell' named Abaddon; Abaddon is a monster in the *Torchwood* episode "End of Days"; and Abaddon the Despoiler, Warmaster of Chaos, is an antagonist in *Warhammer 40K*.

clear-cut divisions between stories and voices through the colour and structure of what is laid out on the page.

The inset stories that create much of the polyphony of *ODY-C* are, by themselves, simply stories. They operate much like the inset narratives of *Space Chantey* or *Spin the Sky* or indeed those of the *Odyssey* itself, where speech is speech and narrative is narrative: they are unmerged and kept apart, preserving this link to the oral epic in these modern adaptations. However, Ward's art tells another story. Art blurs the lines, suggesting that He and the stories he reads are a part of the same whole and pulling the colours of a bloody, brutal hunt out to smear across the clean white of the comic page. It is the visual element that *ODY-C*'s medium brings to the table that allows the polyphony to be undercut and pulled apart in such a way, something that is not available to either the modern texts discussed this far or, of course, the ancient oral epic.

In fact, when we look at "Cyclops", a similar thing seems to be happening. The polyphony of Lannah Battley's "Cyclops" is rather remarkable. The frame narrative encompasses two inset stories that are different genres, one a ship's log, the other an ancient biographical record by a boy named Aeneas. The frame depicts the meeting between a pilot, the unnamed narrator—a nod to Odysseus' οὖτις / μῆτις pun—and Nella Nelby, an academic who specialises in Earth languages, particularly Latin and Ancient Greek (75). Nella has discovered a pair of documents that, when taken together, suggest that Earth may not be the "cradle of humanity" (76). This directly contradicts accepted academic dogma, and she is thus being pursued by Professor Beck, a colleague, who wants to suppress her discovery because it jeopardises "money…, grants, sponsorship, livelihoods but mainly… academic reputation and the opinion of future generations" (91). The inset stories—the captain's log and Aeneas' tale—take up fully half of the short story, indicating their importance to the text from a purely quantitive point of view, and it is through these inset stories that Nella Nelby's discovery comes to light rather than through simple exposition.

The story that unfolds in the tension between these narratives is that of a group of space travellers being mistaken for monsters by a pair of children. It thus becomes clear that BK3 is in fact Earth, and that if space travellers were visiting Earth back in the days of Homa/Homer then Earth is clearly not the cradle of humanity. This meaning is accomplished through the interplay of the two secondary narratives: the log first sets up the situation and explains what exactly the secondary narrator is doing on BK3, while Aeneas' story of his sister explains what's going on from the locals' point of view.

Neither narrative explicitly interacts with the other, and they are separated by roughly two pages of conversation between Nella Nelby and the unnamed narrator. Furthermore, the Aeneas narrative is separated from the primary narration by a clear line break both before and after the text, fulfilling the 'unmerged' requirement of Bakhtin's polyphony. However, the captain's log is a little more complex. To begin with, the primary narrator merely summarises the log for the reader:

> I scanned the readings, the navigational detail which seemed quite meaningless to a modern pilot, and the crew rotas. There seemed little of interest to be gleaned from these so I moved swiftly to the Captain's Remarks section. (77)

However, as the story progresses the primary narrator begins to directly relate the log's words to the reader in quotation marks:

> 'Our crew has been decimated in the strictest sense of the word,' wrote the Captain. (78)

Eventually the primary narration gives way to the secondary narrator, and all we get is the log's words, without quotation marks, as quoted above. The ending of the log is far more abrupt:

> There the record ended. (82)

At the beginning of the log, therefore, there is a gradual slippage between the primary and secondary voices, with one blurring into the other without anything like the clear distinction that we have seen before in other texts. Interestingly, the way in which the inset stories are delineated (or not) in "Cyclops" is through what we could think of as extradiegetic features: the blank lines that separate primary from secondary narrative in the case of Aeneas' story; the missing quotation marks and italicised day markers that slowly move the captain's log from the primary to the secondary narrative voice. It is the formatting of the short story as much as the actual content that determines that distance between the primary and secondary narrative voices—something unavailable to the oral poet of the Homeric poems—and while this is clearly not operating on the same level as the artistry of *ODY-C*, the comparison is instructive. Pure language can express unmerged polyphony; language *plus* appearance can blur those separating lines.

This is not the only polyphonic complexity of "Cyclops". As this analysis stands, there are two levels to the short story's polyphony, namely the primary and secondary narratives, expressed by the nameless pilot's first person narration and the two inset stories. However, there is a third level to this polyphony which encompasses not only further extradiegetic features of the short story itself but also the world outside the story, the tradition that Battley is writing in and the world which contextualises her text. We might think of *Space Chantey* in the same breath. A good example of this is in one of the lines from the captain's log quoted above: "Our crew has been decimated in the strictest sense of the word" (78). The phrase "the strictest sense of the word" is referring to the etymology of the word *decimate*:

> a) Chiefly *Roman Hist*. With reference to military punishment: to select by lot and put to death one in every ten of (a body of soldiers found guilty of desertion, mutiny, or other crime). … b) To kill, destroy, or remove one in every ten of. … c) More generally: to reduce drastically or severely; to destroy, ruin, devastate. (*OED*)

Battley's text is clearly referring to the "one in ten" part of the definition, and the classical context of the short story brings to mind the first definition above rather than the second. The text is thus explicitly evoking the Roman method of punishment rather than the more general implications of the word 'decimate' – and, of course, in the context of the short story, this is deeply anachronistic. If Homa is indeed the Homer that the Western tradition knows and loves, then in the time at which the captain was writing this log, the Romans and their definitions of words had not yet happened. A similar issue arises with the Homeric features in the captain's log discussed above: in the text, that log was written before the *Odyssey*, so how is the captain able to write a log that plays off ideas and phrasings that don't yet exist? The text offers no answer. I would argue that these anachronisms, so highlighted by the text itself, are in fact characteristic of this third level of polyphony: they are something within the text that the text itself cannot explain, that can only be fully appreciated with knowledge from outside the short story.

Another instance of this level of polyphony is a decidedly extradiegetic feature. The editors of *Despatches from the Frontiers of the Female Mind*, the collection that "Cyclops" appears in, include a short blurb about each author and their work at the beginning of their short story; this is part of the blurb for "Cyclops":

> *The central idea for this story was sparked off, over fifteen years ago, by 'those famous live television pictures of Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin bounding slowly on the moon's surface'.*
>
> (74)

The quotation marks around the latter half of the sentence suggest that they are Battley's own words. This adds another layer to the polyphony of the short story, contrasting the image of the moon landing, known to the reader, with the Cyclops of the Homeric poems and, through the different perspectives offered in the two inset stories, effectively uniting the two. In this understanding of the text's polyphony, there are three Cyclopes here—the monstrous Homeric ('Homaic') Cyclops, the short story's space men, and the image of Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin on the moon—but yet at

the same time they are one and the same. The only way to fully grasp the multivoiced nature of the Cyclops is to listen to all of the voices that are telling that story, whether ancient or modern, diegetic or extra.

In effect, the point of "Cyclops" is its polyphony. One reviewer complains that the story is "out of kilter" (Deighton 2013), presumably meaning that there is too little time devoted to the frame narrative of the unnamed pilot and Nella Nelby, but in fact the frame narrative takes up the exact amount of time it requires. It is the combination of all the different elements—the different voices—that is the point of the short story. Nella Nelby's escape from her domineering professor is not in question here; the process of polyphony, of piecing together the reality from separate little bits of evidence, a process clearly inspired by the polyphony of the *Odyssey*, is.

The polyphony of the Homeric *Odyssey* thus finds a home in these SF adaptations, working as they do within a field that has something of a predilection for polyphony itself. All four modern works construct their polyphony in similar ways, through inset stories, what Bakhtin would call 'inserted genres': *Spin the Sky*'s Tales of my Father; *Space Chantey*'s doggerel verse; *ODY-C*'s secondary mythic narratives; and the twin inset stories of "Cyclops". There are variations aplenty on this theme—*ODY-C* and "Cyclops" in particular display a kind of polyphony in their language—but all four texts work from the same polyphonic building blocks. The juxtaposition of the polyphony of the *Odyssey* and of the modern SF texts brings this into relief: it is a technical feature, shared by both, which allows a number of strikingly sophisticated interpretations to take place.

It is a noticeable feature of SF adaptations of Homer that the *Odyssey* is by far the most popular text to be chosen for adaptation. *Iliad*s do exist, of course, but they are far rarer than *Odyssey*s. A reason often given for this quirk of SF adaptation is that the *Odyssey* is a clear precursor of the fantastic

voyage narrative.[71] In the case of the texts discussed in this chapter, polyphony suggests itself as another. If the *Odyssey* is naturally polyphonic and SF has something of a penchant for multiple voices, then it would be only natural for SF authors to be drawn to the text that resonates with their own stylistic sensibilities – even if, on occasion, this can result in a text being seen as "out of kilter" or overly complicated. What this shows is the importance of the *Odyssey* to these authors, both in terms of its fantastic voyage-esque plot and its more technical, complex elements.

[71] Discussed in the Introduction (pg.20).

2: Genre.

Somewhat paradoxically, SF as a genre defies generic classification.

From an outsider's perspective, SF is a homogenous mass, all spaceships and aliens and other planets. In reality, SF is a lot more diverse.[72] There is a vast array of subgenres to choose from within the field, from planetary romance to cyberpunk. Part III of David Seed's *A Companion to Science Fiction* (2005), subtitled 'Genres and Movements', details Hard Science Fiction, The New Wave, Cyberpunk, Science Fiction and Postmodernism, and The Renewal of 'Hard' Science Fiction, while the section on 'Subgenres' in Mark Bould's *The Routledge Companion to Science Fiction* (2009) opts for Alternate history, Apocalyptic sf, Arthouse sf film, Blockbuster sf film, Dystopia, Eutopia, Feminist sf, Future history, Hard sf, Slipstream, Space opera, and Weird fiction. The list continues, subdividing more and more as SF writers and readers continue to write and read. Each of these subgenres operates by rules and traditions that are vastly different—hard SF and alternate history, for instance, are worlds apart—but they are immediately recognisable to the experienced reader of SF.[73] This in fact offers another arguable parallel between SF and classical studies: Classics is another area of study where completely alien 'subgenres', from ancient literature to Hellenistic history to Roman art, exist alongside one another in a whole that is viewed as homogenous from the outside but increasingly complex from the inside.

In fact, as SF theoretical literature has observed, it is almost misleading to talk of SF as a genre at all. As one commentator put it:

> Apples and oranges, carburetors and differential equations. How can one term fit them all?
>
> (Swanwick 2012: ix)

[72] This was discussed in relation to the varying definitions of SF in the Introduction (pg.8-15).
[73] Brooke (2012) offers a selection of essays outlining the habits and history of a number of the most popular subgenres, e.g. hard SF, space opera, alternate history, cyberpunk.

Some critics, however, still prefer to operate within the language of genres, such as Gary Wolfe in *Evaporating Genres* (2011).[74] In this work he discusses at length "the chronic instabilities of the fantastic genres" (6), detailing how SF, horror, and fantasy writers play off and with the market identities of their 'genres' to "subvert or transform" (7) the expectations of those genres, effectively leading to a kind of porous, osmotic 'genre' that is highly self-aware and highly adaptive. For instance, to come back to the two 'genres' mentioned above as highly distinct, hard SF and alternate history, it is entirely possible to imagine an SF story where real scientific theories (say, the multiverse theory) are used to explain how the reader finds themself in a world where Rome never fell, for instance, or where the Axis powers were victorious in World War II.[75] However, we run into a problem if we want to view hard SF and alternate history as the same thing. Hard SF is commonly thought of as SF that deals with the hard sciences, where "a relationship to and knowledge of science and technology is central to the work" (Cramer 2003: 187).[76] It is more a way of doing things than an element of the plot. Alternate history fiction, however, focuses entirely on the plot, extrapolating what might have happened were some major historical event to turn out differently. These two 'subgenres' of SF are thus not operating in particularly similar ways.

Wolfe is aware of this when he discusses the loaded nature of the word 'genre':

> In fact, the term 'genre' itself has accrued almost too many meanings to be useful: In one sense, it simply refers to market categories; in another, it refers to a set of literary and narrative conventions; in yet another, it refers to a collection of texts with perceived commonalities of affect and world view.
>
> (51)

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[74] Cf. Jameson (1973, 1987), who discusses the "structural repositioning" (1987: 49) of other genres within SF narratives.

[75] Charles Stross' *The Atrocity Archives* (2004) performs such a feat, showing the reader, via the multiverse theory, a parallel universe where the Nazis won WWII.

[76] Cf. Pierce (1993) and the rest of the articles in the special edition of *Science Fiction Studies* on hard SF (20.2, 1993, 145-240).

Despite this acknowledgement, ‘genre’ is still Wolfe’s preferred term. One of the most common alternative critical tacks is to look at SF not as a genre at all but rather as a mode, as “not a kind but a method, a way of getting something done… a way of thinking and speaking about contemporary reality” (Hollinger 2014: 140).[77] I mention this here because, as will become clear throughout this chapter, ‘thinking and speaking about contemporary reality’ is something that all of the texts discussed do to different extents, dealing with different subjects. They are, in a manner of speaking, submodes of a mode, fulfilling the same principle albeit doing so with different trappings – but how are we to classify those different trappings? As genres or subgenres? The argument goes round in circles. Discussing genre/mode in SF is thus a tricky business, not least because of the instabilities in the English language and the multiple meanings attached to the word ‘genre’. It might then seem a little disingenuous to use that word to title this chapter but I feel that genre and subgenre are still useful concepts to apply to SF texts – as long as the complex history of the terms in SF scholarship is properly acknowledged.

We can see the usefulness of the idea of SF subgenres for literary analysis in the American author John C Wright’s novella “The Far End of History” (2009), which appeared on *Locus* magazine’s 2009 Recommended Reading list[78] and was described by ‘Best SF’ (2010) as “a mind-bogglingly bravura piece of far future, galactic-spanning adventure”. The novella is a loose adaptation of the *Odyssey*, detailing the love affair of two sentient planetoids named Ulysses and Penelope – but all is not as it seems, as the Ulysses/Penelope consciousnesses are eventually revealed to be deep-cover disguises for two ancient enemies taken from Wright’s *The Golden Oecumene* trilogy (2002—3). The end of the story, however, sees those enemies opt for mutual destruction, and from their ashes arise Ulysses and Penelope once more. As the novella says:

> From these simple foundations comes our current culture. (542)

[77] Cf. pg.12-13.

[78] The list is available online at http://www.locusmag.com/Magazine/2010/Issue02_RecommendedReadingList.html. Last accessed 12/1/2017.

The love between Ulysses and Penelope is thus simultaneously destructive and creative, ending a war that has been dragging on for a thousand years and at the same time creating a whole new culture for historians, archaeologists and artists to commemorate. This is not simply an inventive and effective take on the reunion of Odysseus and Penelope in the *Odyssey* (destructive in the slaughter of the suitors, creative in that it unifies a household separated for many years); it can also be read as a meditation on two SF subgenres: hard SF, and utopian SF.

"The Far End of History" appears in a collection of fiction called *The New Space Opera 2*, and that title gives the reader an expectation of what they will find in the text. True to form, the novella as a whole is very much a space opera, spanning galaxies and generations with intergalactic flair. However, it is the descriptions of the two planetoids that take the reader beyond pure space opera. Ulysses, an artificial planetoid with a "honeycombed logic diamond occupying his vast interior" (508), is described in the technical, scientific language of hard SF:

> (The trip took twenty-two years and cost him, at his mass, 10^27 kilo-watt hours in the energy currency, and the tug did not even reach 2 percent of light-speed.) (508)

Hard SF is SF that engages closely with real scientific theory and practice – although some degree of extrapolation is always necessary, as faster-than-light and time travel are not currently scientifically possible. This is echoed here by the specificity of "10^27 kilo-watt hours" and the mention of "not even… 2 percent of light-speed"; further, the short sentence and simple clause structure give an impression of technical efficiency, placing Ulysses firmly within the world of hard SF.

Penelope, however, is a different story:

> Some of her were bound to the brain stems of millions of her pets, and she knew their passions and fears. Some of her were countless motes carried on the winds and fogs, so that she could feel the world breathe, and know the rhythms of rainfall. When she dispersed among the evaporations as

> chemical spores, she fell again as downpours along the contours of mountains, gathering messages encoded in atoms, swirling together as she rushed down rills and rivers, waking again to consciousness, as if after sleep, when this part of her settled to the bottoms of sea or lakes in sufficient mass. (503-4)

There are technical elements present in this description such as "chemical spores" and "messages encoded in atoms"—this is still science fiction, after all—but the overwhelming impression of this passage is one of a fertile, living landscape and of a consciousness at one with the patterns of this new world. In particular, the image of a river takes the reader further away from hard SF: following the course of a river is an intensely Romantic trope, and its evocation here serves to place Penelope in the context of a non-SF literary 'genre' that is closely associated with nature. The passage is further distanced from the world of hard SF by its literary flourish: we see alliteration ("rhythms of rainfall", "rills and rivers"),[79] similes ("as if after sleep"), and an elegantly-handled lengthy sentence that follows Penelope's passage as rainwater from the top of the mountains to the bottom of the sea. The focus here is on the beauty of the natural world, even if that natural world is artificially created, thus locating Penelope in the context of utopian SF. This is the breed of SF that imagines new, perfect worlds for our fractured, damaged humanity to inhabit, worlds where the beauty of the natural world reflects the peaceful harmony of the people who live there.[80]

Penelope and Ulysses thus represent respectively hard and utopian SF, two different subgenres of SF that seem worlds apart. On the evidence of "The Far End of History", however, it is the combination of these two different breeds of SF that produces true creativity and fertility in SF literature. Furthermore, the typical gendering of these two subgenres serves to echo the male/female roles of the *Odyssey*'s Odysseus and Penelope: planetoids are effectively genderless, of course,[81] but as hard SF is typically associated with male writers (Cramer 2003: 189) and there is a long tradition of feminist

[79] 'Rill' is further a strongly Romantic word; consider "Kubla Khan" (1816), "there were gardens bright with sinuous rills".
[80] For more on utopian SF, see James (2003); there is also a special edition of *Science Fiction Studies* on the topic (9.2, 1982, 115-220) which contains a number of useful articles.
[81] Although in the comic book tradition planetoids are often male, e.g. Ego, Unicron.

utopias in utopian SF (Russ 1995: 133-48; Lothian 2015: 70) these descriptions effectively legitimise Wright's use of male and female pronouns by linking his novella into the gendered history of SF literature and criticism.

It is thus clear that, while genre as a concept in SF studies is far from simple, there are benefits to be gained from adopting a genre-based approach in a literary analysis of SF texts. The way this chapter will build on this is by examining two different subgenres of SF, namely feminist/women's SF and military SF, and showing how the Homeric adaptations in question exploit the conventions of their respective subgenres to criticise the ancient texts. The following analysis is not pitting genre against genre in quite the same way as this introduction has done, but rather engages with the conventions and tropes of these two subgenres and thus shows how feminist and military SF engage in specific kinds of interaction with the Homeric texts: in the case of feminist SF, this is the agency (or lack of the same) allocated to female characters, via a characteristic technique of 'recentring'; and in military SF, the subgenre's penchant for damaged veterans of savage combat leads to a re-evaluation of Homeric heroism and indeed of Odysseus' own character. It is the use of the notion of 'genre' in this specific SF instantiation which allows such parallels between SF and issues of classical scholarship to become clear.

I will retain the use of the words 'genre' and 'subgenre' throughout, despite the complex nature of those terms, because they function as an effective shorthand for a relevant nexus of ideas: the conventions (and restrictions) of a subgroup of SF literature; the self-fashioning of that subgroup; and the audience to which that subgroup is generally marketed.

Feminist / Women's SF.

> squeaking dolls subject to instant rape by monsters—or old-maid scientists desexed by hypertrophy of the intellectual organs—or, at best, loyal little wives or mistresses of accomplished heroes

So Ursula K Le Guin (1989: 97), one of the seminal SF writers of the twentieth century, described the usual portrayal of women in male-written SF. It also quite neatly describes most all the women that Odysseus meets in the *Odyssey*: the maids, characterised by their laughter and their dubiously consensual sexual relationships with the suitors, are the squeaking dolls; Eurycleia is the desexed old-maid scientist, although scientific prowess has to be translated into noble birth and intense loyalty to Odysseus' household; and most of the other women the audience meets are the wife (Penelope) or mistress (Circe, Calypso, potentially Nausicaa, although the nature of her relationship to Odysseus is ambigious) of either Odysseus or some other accomplished male figure (Arete and Alcinous, Helen and Menelaus,[82] even Clytemnestra and Agamemnon). The Sirens, notably absent from this paradigm, are in their Odyssean cameo only feminine in their grammatical gender—νῆσον Σειρήνοιιν (12.167), τὰς (12.182), ἱεῖσαι (12.192)—and are nowhere described as the seductive women that later depictions show them as; as such, they are perhaps more monsters than women.

Feminist SF arose in the 1960s and 1970s as part of the SF 'New Wave', and was spearheaded by writers such as Monique Wittig, James Tiptree Jr. (Alice Sheldon), Marge Piercy, Ursula K Le Guin and Joanna Russ. As Jeanne Cortiel (1999) puts it:

> This revolution transformed science fiction from a bastion of masculinism to one of the richest spaces for feminist utopian thinking and cultural criticism. (1)

Feminist (or women's) SF is characterised by the rejection of male cultural norms and the concomitant questioning of traditional sexualities, gender roles, and indeed the gender binary. The extreme flexibility of SF, where unimaginable alien worlds are the norm, "offers a freedom to women writers, in terms of style as well as content, that is not available in main-stream fiction" (LeFanu

[82] Although in *Odyssey* 4 Helen is arguably the power behind the throne, giving the assembled heroes her special φάρμακον (4.220) to ease their woes.

1988: 2), allowing them to explore beyond the boundaries of the real world.[83] Feminist SF criticism often draws theoretical links between SF and mainstream feminist criticism, highlighting SF's "potentially subversive depictions of alternative worlds" and "the dialogic relationship between science fiction and contemporary feminist thought" (Melzer 2006: 4): this stresses the opportunity that SF affords feminist writers from a strictly theoretical perspective. This is not to say that women were not writing SF in the years before the arrival of the New Wave: they were, and in quite impressive numbers. Eric Leif Davin (2006) identifies at least two hundred and three female authors writing SF under their own names in the early pulps – although, as Lauren Lacey (2007) observes, he somewhat confuses the fact of women writing SF with the idea of a unified subgenre of feminist SF. Moreoever, a number of scholars, primarily Lisa Yaszek, are currently working on the untold history of women's SF before the 'revolution' that came with the New Wave.[84]

While, of course, different writers within a subgenre will inevitably take different approaches to their material, Jane Donawerth (1997) has summarised a number of the main trends in feminist SF:

> In response to a masculinist science that excludes women, women writers of science fiction have created myriad visions of utopian science. In response to the conventional character of the alien woman, women writers have taken her point of view and moved her to the center of their stories, in order to examine feminine experiences but also to analyze the processes of alienation. In response to the tradition of the male narrator, women writers have cross-dressed as male narrators, converting and punishing them and they have re-created gender to include alien sexualities and androgynous figures.
>
> (177)

The idea of 'recentring' the female characters traditionally alienated in early male-oriented SF is particularly pertinent when it comes to the texts that will be discussed here, all of which were touched on in Chapter 1: Polphony: Lannah Battley's "Cyclops", Katy Stauber's *Spin the Sky*, and Matt

[83] Cf. Clare (1984), Barr (1993), Hollinger (2003), Lothian (2015), and the two special issues of *Science Fiction Studies* on the subject (7.1, 1980, 1-113; 17.2, 1990, 129-258). S A Brown (2012) makes much the same point with regards to the nexus of SF, reception, and contemporary women's writing.
[84] R Roberts (1993), Yaszek (2008), Yaszek & Sharp (2016).

Fraction and Christian Ward's *ODY-C*. All of these texts recentre the feminine that was sidelined in ancient epic in radical ways, taking advantage of the flexibility afforded to feminist literature by the characteristics of SF to, as Matt Fraction (2014a) puts it, "[reveal] an awful lot about the story, the consequences, and what the tale of the Odyssey and the Iliad are [sic] really about… how women have been treated for 26 centuries". All of the texts discussed in this section of the chapter are versions of the *Odyssey*, some more faithful than others – and, of course, the *Odyssey* has not been without scholarly feminist criticism. The *Odyssey* has a greater number of female characters who play pivotal roles in the action than the *Iliad* does, so perhaps it is not surprising that this is the Homeric poem feminist SF has latched onto. There is not room here to discuss all of the feminist literature that has been written on the *Odyssey*—that would be a thesis in and of itself—but it will be instructive to consider how scholarship has approached one Odyssean feminist issue: Penelope.

John H Finley, Jr. (1978) famously stated that Agamemnon's judgement of Penelope in *Odyssey* 24 "comes near making our *Odysseia* a *Penelopeia*" (3). The sheer volume of scholarship on Penelope would seem to agree, but there are two themes that are more common than others. The most famous Penelopean problem is that the audience has no idea at what point she recognises Odysseus,[85] or indeed what she is thinking throughout the course of the epic:[86] this has led to her categorisation as 'indeterminate', most influentially in Marilyn Katz' *Penelope's Renown* (1991) and Nancy Felson-Rubin's *Regarding Penelope* (1994).[87] Another approach that scholars have taken is to see her as a foil for Odysseus[88] and virtually every other female character in the *Odyssey* as a foil for her.[89] In the text, the effect of this is to reinforce Penelope's importance: every other woman that Odysseus comes across—Nausicaa, Calypso, Circe, even the ghost of the story of Clytemnestra—is effectively building up to the introduction of Penelope, while the links drawn between Penelope and Odysseus both raise her standing, hinting that she has some of the qualities of a man, an admirable thing in the

[85] For a summary of scholarship on the 'Penelope Question', see Doherty (1995a: 31-52).
[86] A sampling of those who have tried to figure her out, through similes, dreams, or by just 'taking her seriously': Karakantza (1997), Anhalt (2001), Heitman (2005), Morrison (2005).
[87] Cf. Schein (1995), Felson-Rubin (1996), Peradotto (2002b).
[88] Doherty (1991), Bolmarcich (2001).
[89] Van Nortwick (1979), Levine (1987), Marquardt (1989), Wohl (1993), E Gregory (1996), Ingalis (2000), Fletcher (2008).

Homeric world, and highlight just how unique their relationship is. Scholarship has admirably explored both themes, but taken together they give a rather bleak picture of Penelope as a fully-rounded female character: she has no fleshed-out inner life that the audience can see, and her main role in the poem is to foil (or be foiled by) other characters. She is a cipher rather than a real woman – and this is true, to varying extents, about virtually all the female characters in the *Odyssey*.

This is what our modern authors try to fix: the marginalisation and cipherisation of women in the ancient texts. Battley's "Cyclops" does this through a twist ending: the short story drops hints throughout that the secondary narrator Aeneas' sister, Homa, is more than she seems—her naming of the Cyclops, for one, and her mention of Scylla and Charybdis (87)—but it is only in the final pages that she is revealed to be Homer, a "half-blind woman" who "became renowned as a story-teller and much in demand" (90). The twisting of the reader's expectations is the point, here, laying bare what was obvious from the beginning if considered in the right way. Furthermore, this retroactive twist grants Homa an astonishing amount of agency, far more than most real ancient women would have exercised: not only is she shown throughout the story as being infinitely braver and more resourceful than her brother, but with the final announcement of her poetic credentials she takes on the mantle of Homer him(her?)self, putting all of that power and influence in the hands of a young girl. It is a twist that smartly recentres the feminine around poetic excellence and influence, granting Homa a remarkable level of power and agency as it does so.

The idea of recentred agency is one that resounds throughout Stauber's *Spin the Sky*, too, particularly in the characters of Penelope and the maids. Stauber herself (2012) acknowledges her more proactive take on Penelope:

> It seemed to me that the woman liked ruling and didn't want to go back to being some man's property.

Her Penelope is a very physical creature, mending fences and mucking in to maintain the ranch that her husband Cesar abandoned her with. When she is kidnapped, she manages to free herself from her

captors' grasp before Cesar comes crashing in to rescue her, and even kills one of them, William Asner. Her reaction to this is remarkably calm:

> Finally, Cesar asks, "Did you kill Asner?"
>
> "I don't think so. I beat him up pretty good, but he was mostly alive the last time I saw him. Maybe I did, though." (279)

Furthermore, when the Ithaca orbital is under attack at the end of the novel and a number of Cesar's past adventuring companions come to help out, a number of contingents—Mr Filomus, the Vegan Vineyards, and the city of Barcelona—come explicitly to help out Penelope, not Cesar, for reasons ranging from personal friendship to her "help 'in that most delicate matter a few years ago.' " (286-8). Penelope is presented as an active, powerful agent in her own right, not simply as a woman pining for the husband who went off to war all those years ago.

Perhaps the most important change that Stauber makes to her Penelope, however, is giving her a voice. The novel's narrative point of view in the non-Tales chapters switches regularly between Penelope and Cesar, allowing the reader to get to know both of them in much greater detail than the external style of the *Odyssey* allows. In this version of the *Odyssey* there is no doubt about when Penelope recognises her long-lost husband because we experience her thoughts along with her. We come to know her as a rounded individual, desperately missing the husband who left her all those years ago yet deeply resenting him for leaving her alone for so long, wanting to stay faithful to him while struggling with her attraction to this handsome, helpful stranger who claims to have known her Cesar in the past. If at any point she lacks agency, it is because of the vagaries of her situation, not because she is a female character in a man's world. This is *her* world.

It is the voice that Stauber gives her Penelope that allows her to introduce the novel's most significant deviation from the plot of the *Odyssey*. Midway through the novel, Penelope is given a flashback chapter which details how she met and fell in love with Cesar and why she decided to leave Earth for

life aboard an orbital in the first place. When they first met, she effused to Cesar about "all the places she wanted to visit, all the sites [sic] she wanted to see and sounds she wanted to hear, all the experiences she wanted to have" (147): she left Earth because she wanted adventure and excitement. As a result, once the battle for the Ithaca orbital has been won, she tells Cesar that she wants adventure again:

> "I've been here for fifteen years. I'm tired of it. I want to see the spheres. I know you came back because you are tired of adventure and want to settle down, but I've been settled all this time. Now I want to act up a bit, see the sights, you know?" (306)

It is not unusual for the Odysseus-figure at the end of an *Odyssey*-adaptation to take to his wanderings again, echoing the *Odyssey*'s own prophecy that Odysseus' travels are not yet over: Roadstrum does this in *Space Chantey*, as does Odysseus in Dan Simmons' *Olympos* (2005). However, it is very unusual for a Penelope-figure to express the same wish – but because of what the reader knows about this Penelope's background and her character, it hardly comes as a surprise. In *Spin the Sky*, Penelope thus becomes a real person in her own right with her own voice and her own wishes and desires: she is patently more than a match for Cesar, and their happy ending—flying off into the stars together—feels like exactly what Penelope in all her instantiations has always deserved.

Penelope is not the only Homeric character who is strikingly reworked in Stauber's novel. Odysseus' maids get a raw deal in the *Odyssey*: they are hanged[90] by Telemachus as punishment for participating in sexual relationships with the suitors, even though it is far from certain that they had much choice in the matter (cf. *Od.*16.108-9, 20.318-9), and the pitiful description of their death—in particular their twitching feet: ἤσπαιρον δὲ πόδεσσι μίνυνθά περ οὔ τι μάλα δήν (22.473)—has roused the ire of many commentators and adaptors, in particular Margaret Atwood in *The Penelopiad*.[91] Their status as

[90] Fulkerson (2002) on the suitability of this death.
[91] Hardwick (2003: 90-1). David Drake, whose works will be discussed in the next section of this chapter, described the hanging of the maids as "unacceptable in a society that I (or anybody I want as a reader) would choose to live in" (Drake 2012c: xi).

slaves in the *Odyssey* reduces them to little more than playthings: they do not even own their own sexuality, being simply the property of their master (Thalmann 1998).

Stauber's maids, however, are very different. They are tough, practical women who are far more qualified than the men on hand to round up Penelope's cattle when they stampede (161-2); they share a close bond with Penelope (92); they treat as nothing a freefall that leaves male characters screaming and vomiting (153-4); and they are allowed to openly express their own sexuality, ogling Cesar on his first arrival at the ranch (42). Furthermore, they are *not* brutally hanged by the novel's version of Telemachus; rather most of them survive, and the only 'maid' to die, Julia, is explicitly mourned by Cesar himself:

> Cesar's vision blurs for a minute. Julia is dead. Poor little Julia, with her knife and smile, is all gone.
>
> He wonders who she was and if there is anyone to cry for her. No matter how much senseless death he sees out here in the void, it never stops getting to him. (172-3)

Cesar's grief foregrounds Julia's status as a mere supporting character,[92] wondering "who she was and if there is anyone to cry for her", but the fact that he grieves for her at all is a striking acknowledgement of the potentiality of her life and status in the story. Stauber thus rewrites her 'maids' as much as she rewrites her Penelope, allowing them abilities and a level of agency—both practical and sexual—that no Homeric maid would have dared to dream of.

Interestingly, Stauber does not stop with Odysseus' own household. *Spin the Sky*'s 'Tales of my Father' chapters allow the reader a glimpse of the world of the orbitals beyond Ithaca, and it is in these Tales that Stauber redeems those female characters in the *Odyssey* and the wider myth of the Trojan War who might be said to have 'negative' agency – that is, those female characters whose actions do nothing but bring down suffering and torment upon men. The Sirens are, despite their

[92] Interestingly, the proliferation of 'supporting characters' in the *Odyssey* was commented on already in antiquity; cf. Hor.*Ep*.1.2.27-31.

Odyssean origins, widely known in a "quintessentially misogynistic myth" as "dangerous seducers of men" (Braund 2012: 194; cf. Doherty 1995b, 2001), and many other SF *Odyssey* adaptations follow that route: attractive women feature in, for instance, Lafferty's *Space Chantey* and Tad Williams' *Mountain of Black Glass* (1999). *Spin the Sky*, however, takes a different approach: here, the Sirens take the form of a Hathor[93] Mining vessel commanded by Uri Mach, the novel's antagonist, who has implicitly commandeered the vessel. He orders one of the female crewmembers to attempt to seduce and destroy Cesar and his ship (115-9), but Cesar, of course, does not fall for the trick. The blame here is shifted from the 'Sirens' to Uri Mach; they are no longer wilful destroyers of men, rather they are abused and manipulated by a man. This conversely puts them almost in the position of the maids of the *Odyssey*: they are used for their sexuality—as the maids are by the suitors—rather than having any control over it. Stauber effectively removes their negativity, disallowing them agency at all but simultaneously redeeming them for their destructive Homeric actions.[94]

Stauber's depiction of Helen works in a similar way. The mythological and Homeric Helen is repeatedly blamed for the destruction and savagery of the Trojan War, as O'Gorman (2006) observes:

> The positioning of women as (authorities for) the cause of war enables the representation of Woman simultaneously as fragile, in need of protection, and as a scapegoat, bearer of blame for all evil.
>
> (195)

This encapsulates Helen very well: fragile, yet still wicked, simultaneously full of her own negative agency and yet always in need of a man to save her.[95] Stauber's Helen, however, much like her Sirens, is stripped of that negative agency. Manny, her Menelaus, who is in charge of one of the oldest

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[93] Hathor, the Egyptian goddess of fertility, is not a coincidental name here; she is sometimes portrayed in SF as very much a 'dangerous seducer of men', e.g. in the *Stargate SG-1* episode "Hathor" (season 1, episode 14).

[94] Petersen (2015b: 58-64) argues that the Sirenaca incident in Lafferty's *Space Chantey*, where the Sirens are in fact external protrusions of effectively a monstrous mountain, performs a similar function: "I suggest that Lafferty is (perhaps somewhat unconsciously here) subverting the Woman as Monster tradition in this mutation of the Siren myth." (59). *Space Chantey* is, however, not feminist SF in any definition of the term.

[95] Cf. *Il.*3.414-8.

and largest orbitals, refuses to pay his taxes, so Helen, a retired film star,[96] is arrested by the American authorities (56-63). This is the beginning of the Spacer War, the novel's Trojan War: it is begun over a woman, yes, but not because a woman abandoned her husband to run off with another man. In *Spin the Sky*, then, Helen lacks agency but is nonetheless absolved of her crimes, while Penelope, blameless in the *Odyssey*, is allowed, with no narratorial judgement, the freedom to kiss this mysterious stranger long before she realises who exactly he is.

This play with agency is something that we see in Fraction and Ward's *ODY-C*, too, here taken to the extreme. Fraction and Ward's solution to the problem of female helplessness in the *Odyssey* is to make most all the male characters female, simply transforming male agency into female. One reviewer in fact commented that *ODY-C*'s genderswap was a "superficial" change (Schedeen 2014), suggesting that in the world of the comic there is no difference between the suitability of Odysseus' actions for a man or a woman. *ODY-C*'s recentring of the feminine is very literal, passing over masculinity in favour of violent, aggressive femininity.

However, in *ODY-C* it is not enough to say that the feminine is recentred; rather, the masculine is also explicitly decentred, even marginalised. There are not many male characters in the comic, and most that have appeared thus far are characters who are also male in the *Odyssey*, such as Telemachus and Aeolus. One, however, is female in the *Odyssey* but male in *ODY-C*: Helen, or He. He is marginalised twice over, both in his sexuality and in the very way that his name is incorporated into the language of the comic. He is graphically and violently objectified both by his 'owner', Ene, and by the patrons of the brothel that he comes to work in as a cleaner on Q'af. He is depicted on the page as wearing a purple latex-looking gimp suit, with an animalistic nose ring covering the mouth, horns coming from his head, and chest fully exposed. His face is always mostly covered, even when the rest of his clothing is ripped and torn, and in virtually all panels his eyes are obscured. He is often shown on his knees, sometimes with a leash around his neck (fig.10). On the cover of #7 he is drawn in a pose

[96] Perhaps there is an echo here of the fairly common interpretation of Helen as Marilyn Monroe: cf. John C Wright's "The Plural of Helen of Troy", discussed below (pg.141-145, 219-222).

similar to that of a traditional pin-up girl, face coquettishly turned aside and hands touching his own body in an attempt to show it off (fig.11). Despite the fact that his face is always covered, it is stated that he was once prized for his beauty; when Odyssia wonders if his face really was as beautiful as rumour said, Ene replies:

> Once maybe, yes… Yet across it I carved my own name so that no one could want him again.
>
> (#1: 22.2)

He is objectified and brutalised far beyond the Homeric Helen, reduced to nothing more than a plaything in the eyes of the women of the story and eventually abandoned on Q'af by Ene, where, in #7, he is sexually assaulted. The intention of this is to draw attention to the brutality experienced by women both in Homeric times and also still today—"It shows how women have been treated for 26 centuries." (Fraction 2014a)—and it is the genderswap that allows this to be so startlingly realised.[97]

However, He is not merely objectified in a physical, sexual sense; he is also objectified in the very language of the text. The way Eliopoulos letters the comic means that 'He', the character's name, elides with 'he', the male pronoun (fig.12): the capitals used throughout disguise whether the name or the pronoun is meant. Thus on a purely linguistic level, He/he has no identity outside of his maleness, outside of his gender. It is a deep dehumanisation, and savagely reverses the marginalisation of the female that has marked both Homeric reality and (arguably) science fiction in general.

ODY-C thus graphically reverses the gender roles of the *Odyssey* – but Fraction and Ward are not content to stop there. One of the characteristic techniques of feminist SF, as mentioned above, is upsetting the gender binary and exploring alternatives to traditional Western gender roles. This is something that we see in *ODY-C*. One example is the depiction of Hera. Hera remains physically female in the comic and is still described as "all-mother Hera" (#5: 3.1) – but she has a beard (fig.13). This does not diminish her sensuality in any way: #5 retells the story of Hera's seduction of Zeus as it

[97] Cf. Sava (2015).

appears in *Iliad* 14, and the seduction is just as successful with a beard as it was without it. There is something very subversive in giving such a traditional marker of masculinity to a deeply feminine character, playing with gender roles that are so often taken for granted.

A more complex example of this is the figure of the sebex. It is made clear in #2 that the absence of men in this world is not an accident: Zeus slaughtered them all because of their predilection for violence (1-7). This is how Zeus introduces this story in #2:

> I am Zeus, first of daughters to Cronus the Maker, designer of Universe Prima.
>
> I am Zeus, who murdered her father in violent spite, in Olympus itself, on his bloody throne from which he created all things.
>
> *So let me tell you how I feel about my children.* (2.1)

The story of Zeus slaughtering all the men in the world is set in the context of real Greek myths—namely that of Zeus' murder of Cronus and, later, the Titanomachy—mythologising and so legitimising *ODY-C*'s version. With all the men gone, humanity is on the verge of extinction. Enter Fraction and Ward's Prometheus. Instead of the gift of fire, Prometheus brings the gift of the sebex, a third gender which is outwardly female with pink-purple skin that can fertilise a female ovum and bring it to term without any need for male sperm. The male and female characters of the comic are seen engaging in relationships with sebex as well as each other, thoroughly destabilising the gender binary that operates in both Homeric and modern society.[98]

It is thus clear that the *Odyssey* offers SF writers an opportunity to interrogate contemporary constructions of gender and sexuality, recentring the feminine and occasionally severely marginalising the masculine along the way. The echoes of classical scholarship on gender roles in the *Odyssey* is also clear. This recentring—which, as Donawerth observes, is central to the ideology of feminist (or women's) SF—often operates as a way to criticise the ancient texts, whether it be the

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[98] On the sebex, see Kirschenblatt (2016).

cruel treatment of the maids, the unjust victimisation of female sexuality, or the blame and abuse that Helen underwent for her actions in the Trojan War. It is a way to reallow these ancient characters the agency that their ancient patriarchal society took from them.

Military SF.

> The use of force is *always* an answer to problems. Whether or not it's a satisfactory answer depends on a number of things, not least the personality of the person making the determination.
>
> Force isn't an attractive answer, though. I would not be true to myself or to the people I served with in 1970 if I did not make that realization clear. (Drake 2012b: 665)

War is a constant in human history, from the semi-mythic Trojan War and its aftermath as depicted in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, to the First World, Second World, Korean, Vietnam, Gulf, Afghanistan, and Iraq wars that have been told and retold in the print, visual and digital media of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. War fiction is a genre in and of itself and includes many seminal works of literature, such as the poetry of Wilfred Owen and Siegfried Sassoon and novels like Erich Maria Remarque's *All Quiet On the Western Front* (1929) and Joseph Heller's *Catch-22* (1961), all of which reflect on and are inspired by real wars and often the author's real experiences of combat.

Military SF is very much a part of this narrative. Generically, it is descended from both space opera and future war fiction,[99] demonstrating in its very nature the inherent malleability of SF subgenres – and it is sometimes difficult to separate the space opera from the military SF. John Clute (2016a), for instance, discussing David Drake's military SF (see below), describes it as "military-sf tales set in a space-opera galaxy": this is not necessarily to say that Drake's works cross 'subgeneric' boundaries, rather that the generic markers, if you will, of space opera still play a large role in any work of military SF. While military SF does cross national boundaries, it is most obviously popular in

[99] On future war fiction, see I F Clarke (1992), Seed (2012).

America, where 'Futurist' conferences have even taken place between SF writers and military officials to discuss potential developments in real-life military hardware;[100] H Bruce Franklin (1988) has argued that this US-centrism is due to an innate aggression in US society.

As Brian Stableford and David Langford (2015) observe, military SF developed as a distinct subgenre of SF in the aftermath of the Korean and especially Vietnam Wars. The Vietnam War deeply divided the US SF community—as with the rest of the US—along pro- and anti-war lines: in 1968, the pro- ('Hawks') and anti-war ('Doves') factions in SF posted two adverts on opposing pages of *Galaxy Science Fiction*, the first listing all of the authors who opposed the US military's involvement in Vietnam and the other listing all of those who supported it.[101] This was a clear visual representation of the deep schism in the American SF community at the time, roughly split along generational lines: the 'Hawks' were mostly older, establishment authors, while the 'Doves' featured prominent New Wave authors and artists.[102] The development of military SF in the wake of such a destructive, divisive war has prompted equally divided opinions: some assert that "[while] a few of the authors who have written for these books are not coming from a far-right field politically, it is clear that many of them are committed to an extremely militaristic view of the present and future" (C H Gray 1994: 323), while others see the subgenre more as "hard hitting commentary on current events and politics" (Cipera 2008). The truth lies somewhere in the middle, and most often depends on who is holding the pen: Robert A Heinlein's *Starship Troopers* (1959), for instance, is aggressively right-wing and pro-war,[103] whereas Joe Haldeman's *The Forever War* (1974), written in the wake of his service in Vietnam, questions and problematises issues of militarism and the military-industrial complex.

As with most SF, military SF comes in all shapes and sizes – but there are some features which tend to remain constant.[104] Military SF—somewhat obviously—deals with an organised military, whether

[100] C H Gray (1994: 320-1). On further real-world ties between SF and world militaries, see Gannon (2003), Echevarria (2007).
[101] Incidentally, R A Lafferty appeared on the 'Hawks' list (Ferguson 2011: 38, n.37).
[102] Franklin (1990: 341ff.), Spark (1990: 115ff.).
[103] Although Paul Verhoeven's 1997 silver-screen adaptation is vehemently satirical.
[104] Cf. Davies (1990), Cipera (2008), Liptak (2010), Stableford & Langford (2015).

an institutional military such as an army or an air force or a mercenary force. Mercenary military SF is in fact remarkably common, and David Drake, one of the authors discussed in this chapter, is credited with helping to establish this trend (Stableford & Langford 2015). Due to military SF's origins in the Vietnam and Korean wars, "grunt soldiers were long considered central to the subgenre" (Stableford & Langford 2015); this is something that perhaps distances military SF from future war fiction, one of its predecessors, in that military SF is often more concerned with the down-and-dirty visceral experience of life on the front line than it is with advanced weaponry and combat tactics. None of the texts that this chapter will discuss—David Drake's novels *Cross the Stars* (1984), *The Voyage* (1994), and *The Warrior* (1991), and Gerry Duggan and Phil Noto's comic *The Infinite Horizon* (2007—12)—are excessively right-wing and militaristic. Instead they fall under the aegis of military SF that problematises war and conflict, refusing to shy away from the gory reality of war but at the same time never being content to simply accept it.

A single, usually-male soldier is the focus of many works of military SF, whose exploits and adventures the reader follows with horror and delight, characters such as William Mandella in *The Forever War* and Juan 'Johnny' Rico in *Starship Troopers*. The appearance of such a character in a military setting naturally evokes the archetype of the 'hero' – and the 'hero' is a well-known and much-discussed figure in ancient literature, too, in particular the Homeric poems. Military SF texts that adapt the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* are well aware of this fact, and they thus take great pleasure in deconstructing and reformatting Homer's ancient heroes for a modern age and a modern readership.

However, what exactly constitutes a 'hero' in the Homeric texts has long been a controversial issue, as, on the face of it, Achilles, the hero of the *Iliad*, and Odysseus, the hero of the *Odyssey*, are heroic in very different ways. The essential difference between the two has been roughly summarised as "brains versus brawn" (Langerwerf & Ryan 2010: 7), a judgement that goes back to Gregory Nagy's influential *The Best of the Achaeans* (1979), where he categorises the difference between the two as

an Iliadic, Achillean heroism based on βίη[105] and an Odyssean heroism based on μῆτις (42-9). According to his analysis, βίη is a deeply ambivalent quality: it can be a positive force if it is used in moderation, but if a hero *yields* to his βίη, to his violent impulses, that is a very dangerous thing indeed. In the *Iliad*, the ambivalent nature of βίη is focused in a single character, Achilles (319-20), while the *Odyssey* depicts good and bad βίη through different characters: Odysseus demonstrates good βίη; the suitors exhibit bad βίη (318-9).

Anthony Edwards' *Achilles in the Odyssey* (1985), on the other hand, roots Achilles' heroism in a "combination of youth, speed, and a premature death", while Odysseus' heroism fits a man "who is both wiley, and able to endure danger and hardship until his wit finds a plan" (16).[106] Margalit Finkelberg's "Odysseus and the Genus *Hero*" (1995) takes up Edwards' notion of the Odyssean hero enduring hardship, in combination with Jasper Griffin's *Homer on Life and Death* (1980) and Seth Schein's *The Mortal Hero* (1984), and outlines a distinction between the Iliadic concept of the hero—namely "one who prizes honour and glory above life itself and dies on the battlefield in the prime of life" (1)—and the popular idea of a hero, exemplified in the *Odyssey*, as someone who is defined by their suffering and their labours (3-5). As she puts it:

> As distinct from the Iliadic hero, who sets an example of how one ought to die, all Odysseus' life-experience demonstrates how one ought to live. (10)

The focus of Odyssean heroism thus shifts from a wily figure who is full of μῆτις to one who undergoes deep suffering throughout the course of their life. This is picked up by Erwin Cook's "'Active' and 'Passive' Heroics in the *Odyssey*" (1999), which depicts the traditional, popular hero, epitomised by Heracles, as the "Man of Pain" (149) and traces the interplay between this and Odysseus' aggressive, violent streak of Iliadic heroism. In general, scholarship on Homeric heroism thus characterises the heroism of the *Iliad*, 'Achillean' heroism, as based in martial force and a

[105] Although Achilles is a singer as well as a warrior (*Il*.9.186-90), and Phoenix taught him μύθων τε ῥητῆρ' ἔμεναι πρηκτῆρά τε ἔργων (9.443).
[106] Cf. A Edwards (1987: 149ff.).

glorious death, while the heroism of the *Odyssey*, 'Odyssean' heroism, is based in the ability to endure suffering and indeed to alleviate that suffering through one's own innate μῆτις.

More recent scholarship on the matter has shifted the vocabulary from 'heroism' to 'masculinity'; the connection between the two terms has historically been of interest to scholars including Simon Goldhill (*The Poet's Voice*, 1991, chapter 1) and Hans van Wees (*Status Warriors*, 1992). Barbara Graziosi and Johannes Haubold in their "Homeric Masculinity" (2003) define good Homeric masculinity as solidarity and cooperation among men, whereas bad 'excessive masculinity' is linked to individualism, where the hero does whatever he wants when he wants it – something which has also been seen as characteristic of the Iliadic hero.[107] Mark Masterson's "Studies of Ancient Masculinity" (2014) links Achilles' masculinity to his martial acts and his status among his peers, drawing together both Nagy's βίη and Graziosi and Haubold's collaborative masculinity.

No one has yet managed to come up with an all-encompassing definition of Homeric masculinity that fits every hero—much as no one has managed to wholly define either military SF or SF in general—because, of course, every hero is different and has different aims. There is, as such, not much point in trying to elicit a one-fits-all description of heroism from the previous survey – but, if I am to discuss the kind of play with heroism that occurs in Drake and Duggan and Noto's works, then some definition is needed. The most useful definition of heroism for this chapter's purposes is that given by Lydia Langerwerf and Cressida Ryan, when discussing the modern concept of heroism:

> In modern concepts of heroism, three aspects appear to be universal: a hero should possess courage, be prepared to sacrifice himself and benefit others. This is a heroism tied into a prioritisation of society over the individual. (2010: 16)

[107] Cf. Brooks (1977), Friedrich (1987); Redfield (1975: 104) discusses how the individual hero is inassimilable within a wider community.

This does not fit particularly well with either Achilles or Odysseus, but, as will be seen below, it does fit rather well with some of the heroes of modern military SF adaptations. This is not entirely surprising, as there is no evidence that Drake, Duggan, or Noto is particularly well-versed in classical scholarship on heroism, and because the idea of a selfless, self-sacrificing hero is one that is well-embedded in popular culture: the 'noble sacrifice', for instance, is a common trope of modern literature and popular culture.

However, that is not to say that ancient concepts of heroism are irrelevant when discussing these texts. As will be seen below, Drake's novel *The Warrior* is interesting in the context of Nagy's notion of heroic βίη. Moreover, the issues of combat strain and post-traumatic stress disorder that arise in *Cross the Stars*, *The Voyage*, and *The Infinite Horizon* sit in a complicated relationship with the popular archaic idea of a heroism based in suffering, as shown in the *Odyssey*.

The Damaged Hero.

The damaged hero is the hero who does everything that Langerwerf and Ryan say he should—he is brave, he sacrifices himself, and he helps others—but who commits acts of extreme, exaggerated violence in the process and who suffers because of it, both physically and psychologically. The primary examples of this kind of hero, who, loosely speaking, blends the violence of an Achilles with the suffering of an Odysseus, are Don and Ned Slade, the protagonists of (respectively) David Drake's *Cross the Stars* (an *Odyssey*) and *The Voyage* (an *Argonautica* of sorts). Don is an Odysseus and Ned a blend of a Telemachus and an Apollonian Jason, as he is Don's Telemachus-figure (although his nephew, not his son) in *Cross the Stars* but takes on Jason's plot in *The Voyage*. Both protagonists' narratives are characterised by extreme, detailed violence, and by the trauma that it inflicts upon them.

David Drake, the author of these two novels, is no stranger to war. He studied history and Latin at university level,[108] then, while training as a lawyer, was drafted into the US military and sent to fight in the Vietnam War, serving with the 11th Armored Cavalry (Blackhorse) division in Vietnam and Cambodia.[109] He has since become a prolific SF author, writing primarily military SF and space opera which is often based in his classical readings. This is something that the SF community is aware of: the cover art of *Onward, Drake!* (2015), an anthology of short stories written in Drake's honour, depicts the author dressed in the armour of a Roman soldier, surrounded by books and wayward sheets of paper. It is his years in Vietnam, however, that have exerted the greatest influence:

> The single greatest influence on my life was the Vietnam War. I wish that weren't true, but it is.
>
> (Drake 2009)

Drake's novels depict war and violence in a straightforward, unromanticised way, transporting the reader to the battlefields of far-off worlds and far-off skies. He does not shy away from graphic violence or long descriptions of weaponry and tactics, a technique which has led some to accuse him of right-wing militarism,[110] but, as David Hartwell (2012) observes:

> No one who reads Drake properly can imagine him advocating war. War exists and Drake chooses or is compelled to portray it as it is, and has been, and might be close up. This military SF is not military pornography but rather a form of horror fiction… It is not intended to deaden the sensibilities to the horrors of war, but to awaken them.

Drake thus writes military SF that shines a light on the realities of war while all the while creating "what is probably the most authentic military SF fiction of this era" (Hartwell 2012).

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[108] On his classical leanings and wide-ranging original-language reading (primarily Latin), including Ovid, Horace, and (quite remarkably!) Nonnus, see Drake (2001, 2011, 2013a, 2013b).

[109] Drake (2009).

[110] See Hartwell (2012) on Bruce Sterling's 1984 attack on Baen Books.

The authenticity of the military experience in *Cross the Stars* stretches not just to armour and weaponry, but also to the trauma that military service can inflict. The story follows Don Slade's efforts to get home, adapting and reworking various Odyssean episodes in an intergalactic SF setting. The novel roughly follows the structure of the *Odyssey*, beginning with Slade escaping from the Terzia (Calypso), crash-landing on Elysium (Phaeacia), and telling his tale to the listening Elysians. When Slade is welcomed by the Elysians, they take him to their Assembly Room and ask him to tell them of his travels. There is a mural across the wall of this room depicting the bloody happenings that eventually brought about the peaceful, utopian Elysian society, left there as "a warning, not a trophy" (173), a reminder that the Elysians could still sink back to that level of brutality if they let themselves. Slade's reaction to this mural is one of horror:

> More than Slade's eyes were absorbed. He could not have seen the objects on the black background more clearly: rusty iron, the golden gleam of a join brazed instead of welded, the silvery polish of the lands against the shadowed groves of a gun barrel. … His palms sweated and his heart began to race. "No," he whispered. It was not only other men in those tanks, it was him again. (56)

Slade slips between his present and his past, remembering and indeed re-experiencing the battlefields he has fought his way through. He physically shakes, and, for a little while, he lives those memories again:

> Slade shuddered to bring himself out of the waste of fear and memory where he had lived for the past moments. (58)

The flashbacks and the physical symptoms are strongly reminiscent of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), an illness common among war veterans that was fully brought into the public consciousness in the aftermath of the Vietnam War.[111] Slade is a hero, a good leader who had a distinguished military career, but the things he has done have had an irreversible effect on his mind. As he tells his

[111] For a discussion of the nature and symptoms of PTSD, see Shay (2003: 165-81).

stories to the Elysians, through a neural link they experience those things along with him—the violence, the killing, the hard decisions and the self-sacrifice—and comment on their morality from the detached position of an observer, but Slade is the one who has led a life of violence and so Slade is the one who suffers for it. This is not met with censure by the narrative voice; rather, the reader sympathises with Slade and grows to understand his position. This is not an uncommon manoeuvre in Drake's works:

> There is immense sympathy for the character who has done repulsive things in battle to win, and finds it difficult to live with himself afterward. There is much evidence in Drake's personal afterwords to his books that he identifies with that position and that it relates to his own military experience
>
> (Hartwell 2012)

There is, however, another source for Slade's reaction to the Elysians' mural: Odysseus himself. When confronted in *Odyssey* 8 by Demodocus' songs of the Trojan War, Odysseus famously mourns and shrouds himself in his cloak, turning away from his Phaeacian hosts: his spirit melts (τήκετο: 8.522) and he weeps (δάκρυ δ' ἔδευεν ὑπὸ βλεφάροισι παρειάς: 8.522) to be reminded of what happened in the war. Drake's version draws on the *Aeneid*, too, with the fact that this is a response to a mural (1.464-93). However, while Odysseus outwardly weeps, due to the external nature of Homeric narration the audience cannot be sure of what exactly he is feeling: we do not hear about his thoughts flickering back to the brightness of bronze spears or the heat of the sun on the plain outside the walls of Troy. The only hint that we get is the simile of the captured woman that describes Odysseus' weeping:

> ὡς δὲ γυνὴ κλαίῃσι φίλον πόσιν ἀμφιπεσοῦσα,
>
> ὅς τε ἑῆς πρόσθεν πόλιος λαῶν τε πέσῃσιν,
>
> ἄστεϊ καὶ τεκέεσσιν ἀμύνων νηλεὲς ἦμαρ·
>
> ἡ μὲν τὸν θνῄσκοντα καὶ ἀσπαίροντα ἰδοῦσα
>
> ἀμφ᾽ αὐτῷ χυμένη λίγα κωκύει· οἱ δέ τ' ὄπισθε

κόπτοντες δούρεσσι μετάφρενον ἠδὲ καὶ ὤμους
εἴρερον εἰσανάγουσι, πόνον τ' ἐχέμεν καὶ ὀιζύν·
τῆς δ' ἐλεεινοτάτῳ ἄχεϊ φθινύθουσι παρειαί·
ὣς Ὀδυσεὺς ἐλεεινὸν ὑπ' ὀφρύσι δάκρυον εἶβεν. (8.523-31)

Slade's flashback in *Cross the Stars* places him in a position of relative weakness, trapped by his past experiences and rendered helpless, literally 'living' in his memories. This simile serves a similar purpose: Odysseus is compared to a woman, helpless in the face of the man's world of war that has enveloped her life and destroyed her beloved husband (φίλον πόσιν), leaving her subject to a pitiful grief (ἐλεεινοτάτῳ ἄχεϊ) that will allow her no respite as she toils her life away beneath her captors' yoke. Odysseus is just as trapped and helpless as Slade is, suffering from the memories of the things that he has done – but in Homer this perhaps takes on a different light. As discussed above, suffering is often understood to be a key component of heroism in the *Odyssey*. Odysseus' weeping could be understood to fit within that pattern, as weeping is indeed an acceptable response to suffering in the Homeric poems (van Wees 1998). As such, Odysseus' reaction to his past military experience is not in fact a weakness, but enduring that suffering is rather a large part of what makes him a hero in the (or rather 'a') classical conception of the term. PTSD, however, is not integral to modern conceptions of heroism: modern soldiers must be strong and should not display grief or extreme emotion. When soldiers lose close comrades, they are told by their commanding officers not to 'lose it', to 'get their mind straight', and 'don't get sad, get even'.[112] It is noticeable that, in *Cross the Stars*, Slade does not cry, rather shakes and retreats within himself. Even when tears flowed freely in the ancient text, the modern veteran does not weep.

Cross the Stars uses the *Odyssey* to depict the aftermath of a military career and PTSD that is already long entrenched. *The Voyage*, by contrast, shows the process of traumatisation. *The Voyage* is as close to Apollonius' *Argonautica* as *Cross the Stars* is to the *Odyssey*: it follows the basic storyline, reworking Argonautic episodes into acceptable military SF counterparts, but where Apollonius ends

[112] Shay (2003: 63).

on Anaphe and never details Jason's return to Colchis, Drake finishes the story, taking Ned and his companions back to Telaria:

> partly because it is a major part of the myth, but primarily because I find it morally necessary—for me—to show precisely where certain courses of conduct and tricks of thought lead.
>
> (Drake 2012b: 665)

At the beginning of the novel, Ned Slade is a young ensign fresh out of training trying to make a name for himself and step out of the shadow of 'Uncle Don'. He persuades Lissea Doorman, the captain of the Pancahte Expedition, to take him along, and is thus merely another member of the crew. Captain Doorman is the one who has been ordered to complete an impossible task and is indeed the one who finds herself in a relationship with the novel's version of Medea, casting her as *The Voyage*'s Jason, but Ned—who as Telemachus in *Cross the Stars* goes by 'Teddy'—as the male protagonist of an *Argonautica* adaptation shoulders some of the burden, too. Drake, however, does not wholly follow in Apollonius' footsteps by subverting the heroism of his heroes;[113] rather Ned's journey from green recruit to experienced soldier charts the development of his combat trauma. As such, *The Voyage* could perhaps be described as a kind of Telemacheia: it has long been recognised that Telemachus grows up over the course of *Odyssey* 1—4,[114] something which is elided in *Cross the Stars*. Here he is finally given the opportunity to become a man – whatever that might mean.

The first few chapters of *The Voyage* see Ned continually compared to Don, his more famous uncle. His response to this is not exactly enthusiastic:

> "Slade?" Warson said in amazement. "You're *Don* Slade? Via, you can't be!"

[113] The heroism of Jason, notionally the hero of the *Argonautica*, is notoriously problematic, as he fails to prove himself as a warrior, fails to endure his suffering and find a way out of it, and only eventually succeeds through his seduction of Medea, a highly untraditional route to heroism. Scholars have been deeply puzzled by this: see Carspecken (1952: 110ff.), Lawall (1966), Beye (1969), Zanker (1979), Klein (1983), Hunter (1988), Jackson (1992), Clauss (1993), Pike (1993).

[114] Millar & Carmichael (1954), H W Clarke (1963, 1967), Eckert (1963), Austin (1969), Beck (1998), Allan (2010).

> Ned’s lips tightened. “You’re thinking of my uncle,” he said stiffly. “I’m not Don Slade, no.”
>
> (280)

This parallels how Telemachus is addressed by Nestor and Menelaus in *Odyssey* 3—4:

> σέβας μ' ἔχει εἰσορόωντα.
>
> ἦ τοι γὰρ μῦθοί γε ἐοικότες, οὐδέ κε φαίης
>
> ἄνδρα νεώτερον ὧδε ἐοικότα μυθήσασθαι. (3.123-5)

By the end of *The Voyage*, however, Ned has accomplished enough that he is recognised as himself, not just as the younger version of his uncle:

> “Slade?” he said. “*Edward Slade* of Tethys?” … “But blood and martyrs, Master Slade!” Wilson cried. “You’re the guy? You’re the one who took out two tanks with a submachine gun yesterday?”
>
> “Me?” said Ned as he walked out the door. “No, but that sounds like something my uncle Don might have done.” (660-1)

Ned has achieved exactly what he set out to do, perhaps even surpassing ‘Uncle Don’ in the estimation of those who recognise him – but he eschews that recognition and in fact refuses the prestigious post that Captain Doorman offers him, preferring the anonymity of a new planet and a new, non-military job. Over the course of the novel, Ned has grown into a skilled, experienced soldier, but that has come at a price, one which is in fact foreshadowed early on. Ned reflects on his uncle a number of times in *The Voyage*’s early chapters:

> Ned thought of the veterans of Hammer’s mercenary regiment whom he’d met, men and women whose scars were as often behind their eyes as on their skin. Veterans like Don Slade.
>
> (287)

> Don Slade had learned a lot of things in twenty years as a mercenary. From what Ned had seen in the brief periods the two of them were alone together, many of those were things neither Ned nor anybody else wanted to know. (292)

The trauma that we saw in *Cross the Stars* is thus echoed at the beginning of Ned's military career, and it grows in him little by little throughout the novel. In the aftermath of the assault on the Twin Worlds, where it is Ned's idea to disperse a lethal bioweapon across two planets, he is cold and hard (419); after he castrates a local lifeform as a show of dominance to prevent further attacks, he feels "alone, dissociated even from himself" (440) and refuses to believe that he was the person who committed that atrocity; when he is forced to kill a man he has spent time with in defence of his captain, he vomits over the side of the car (361); and finally at the end of the novel he voices his disgust with himself:

> [Ned] was choking. He swallowed. "Tadziki," he said, "they're the best there ever was. If I have grandchildren, I'll tell them I served with the Pancahte Expedition, with all of you. But when I see your faces, I think about things that I'm not ready to handle just now. Do you understand? Do *you* understand?"
>
> "As it happens…" the adjutant said. … "I do." (657)

Victory in war has cost Ned the optimism and confidence he was full of at the beginning of the novel, and the man who has emerged is tougher but wearier. At no point in either the *Argonautica* or the *Odyssey* does a hero express the sentiment of needing to get away from combat for a little while or of being incapable of handling the violent acts that they have committed. In the hands of a war veteran and a writer of military SF, however, glorious slaughter is balanced and moderated by the suffering and trauma that such glory can bring, demonstrating the shifting priorities between ancient and modern.

Writing about his own work, Drake says:

> I don't want kids joining the marines—or politicians voting to deploy those marines—because at the back of their mind they have the notion that real violence is clean and cute. Violence is sometimes necessary? Maybe; I won't advocate unilateral national disarmament until I'm willing to disarm myself, which at the moment I'm not. But the look and the sound, and smell of people killing one another – that should be clear to everybody.
>
> (quoted in Spark 1990: 127)

The 'message' of his work, if there is one at all, is that he does not want what happened to him to happen to anyone else – particularly young people, something which is often a preoccupation of Vietnam literature.[115] This is something that is picked up in the work of Jonathan Shay, a US psychiatrist who works closely with war veterans suffering from complex PTSD, particularly veterans of the Vietnam War. Throughout his *Odysseus in America* (2002), Shay repeatedly quotes his patients as saying that they "don't want other kids to be wrecked the way they were wrecked" (205; cf. xvi, 6), echoing Drake's sentiment: this kind of wartime trauma is not something to be proud of, rather it is something that needs to be known about and dealt with in order to properly heal.

The way that Drake's novels deal with combat trauma and PTSD chimes closely with Shay's wider analyses in both *Odysseus in America* and his earlier work, *Achilles in Vietnam* (1994). Shay finds a number of parallels between the stories of Achilles and Odysseus and the experiences recounted by his patients: *Achilles in Vietnam* describes the hardships of war itself that transform into PTSD, and *Odysseus in America* charts the difficulties that veterans face in returning home. Much as Drake does, Shay sees a deep trauma in Odysseus' character – although he is reluctant to name it PTSD, as Odysseus does not manifest any obvious PTSD symptoms (2002: 141ff.), instead preferring "pre-military trauma that settled him firmly in an I'll-get-them-before-they-get-me mentality before he even left for Troy" (142).[116] Furthermore, Shay (2003: 4, *passim*) writes extensively about the idea of 'communalisation of grief' as a way of treating and even avoiding PTSD and related symptoms by

[115] E.g. Oliver Stone's *Platoon* (1986).
[116] On the question of Odysseus' PTSD, cf. Minchin (2012: 96-7, esp. n.41, 43), Early (2014: 48ff.).

telling their story to a receptive and non-judgemental audience. Odysseus (and Don Slade) telling his story to the Phaeacians thus emerges as an act of catharsis and even therapy; indeed, Ned's admission of his horror at his own actions operates along the same lines.

Communal grief, however, is often not enough to fully eliminate the trauma of a warzone, and wariness, paranoia and flashbacks can recur throughout civilian life. This is something that is alluded to at the end of Duggan and Noto's *The Infinite Horizon*, a comic book retelling of the *Odyssey* that sets the story 'five minutes in the future' (an early title was *Odyssey 2020: The Infinite Horizon*), in an implied dystopia where major American cities are underwater and the government fights increasingly pointless wars in unnamed desert locations. As C W Marshall (2016) observes:

> the series, while not critical of the military, nevertheless encourages identification with the isolation of soldiers and the implications of foreign wars for their families (3)

The main character is never referred to by name—his men call him 'Captain', Penelope 'my husband', the back of the collected edition 'The Soldier With No Name'—in a clear allusion to the Οὖτις of the Cyclops episode. After he returns home to the Catskill Mountains in New York and clears his home of the men who have overrun it, he reunites with his family and returns to a life of peace. As a symbolic gesture of turning his back on war, he buries a bag of seeds that a dead comrade, Joe, carried with him and places his own combat knife in the hole along with them. On the bottom of page 180, the second to last panel shows the Captain's view of the hole he has dug with the caption "It was time to bury the past."; the final panel shows the Captain's introspective expression, captioned "My fight was over." The reader thus believes that after all that hardship, a life of peace awaits – but that is quickly negated. The top of the next page shows the Captain taking the knife from the ground and tucking it into his trousers, then kissing Penelope and walking home with his wife and son. The captions that accompany the images are key:

> But I knew better. I had something worth taking.

> A home. A family. *Love*.
>
> I had to be prepared for aggression.
>
> Living in peace carried its own *burden* for me. That was a quieter battle that we won after a few seasons. We had all the time in the world. I wasn't going anywhere. (181.1-5)

The Captain cannot come home and simply slip back into civilian life. He carries his experiences with him, the "*burden*" that he refers to, and it takes him "a few seasons" to deal with it: returning home is not a simple solution to everything that he has gone through, but it is a start. The idea of a "*burden*" that has to be dealt with before the Odysseus-figure can truly return home and be at peace echoes the oar that, according to Tiresias' prophecy in Book 11, Odysseus has to carry until he finds a land where the people have no knowledge of the sea and a fellow traveller calls the oar on his shoulder a 'winnowing-fan' (ἀθηρηλοιγόν, 11.128). That was a physical burden that prolonged Odysseus' suffering after the end of the *Odyssey* – but, in *The Infinite Horizon*, that physical burden has implicitly become a mental one that the Captain has to deal with before he can truly be at peace. The winnowing-fan is not discussed by Shay in *Odysseus in America*, but I would argue that it furthers his metaphorising of the story of Odysseus: even once the soldier is home he still has another task to complete, whether that task is to appease the gods or cope with his own combat trauma.

In military SF, the heroes of the *Odyssey*, both Odysseus and Telemachus, thus become vehicles for the authors' reflections on the trauma that war inflicts on those who wage it. Odysseus in particular is a figure who attracts analyses of PTSD, but his suffering is perhaps not as admirable in modern retellings of his story as it was for the ancient audience who prized suffering as a part of heroism. Maybe these adaptations of Odysseus instead offer some chance of catharsis.

The Hero Rewritten.

One of Shay's biggest criticisms of Odysseus in *Odysseus in America* is that, essentially, he is not a good leader:

> But we also know that as an independent troop commander, he doesn't keep control of his men (allowing them to get drunk and ignore his withdrawal order from Ismarus), shows impulsiveness and poor judgment (entering and then remaining in the Cyclops' cave, and perhaps attacking Ismarus to begin with), unable to delegate authority (sole helmsman for the nine-day sail home from Aeolia), and lacks consistent leadership backbone. (2002: 61)

Shay later phrases Odysseus' sins as a 'court martial' (236-7), and concludes by saying:

> As a staff officer, strategist, independent intelligence operative, and solo fighter, Odysseus was brilliant. As a troop leader, he was a catastrophe. Homer's great epics show him in full depth and perspective. (241)

One of the most shocking elements of Odysseus' leadership to a modern audience is the sheer number of men that he loses over the course of the *Odyssey*, leaving Troy with a whole fleet and stumbling alone back to the shores of Ithaca. The ancient text explains this away by saying in the *Odyssey* proem that his men died through their own foolishness (σφετέρῃσιν ἀτασθαλίῃσιν ὄλοντο, 1.7), but in many ways this feels very much like an exercise in handwaving, brushing aside the fact that Odysseus repeatedly keeps information from his men and leads them into pointless danger. All of this is quite contrary to the definition of modern heroism outlined above, where 'benefiting others' is key: Odysseus essentially benefits nobody but himself. As a hero of a modern adaptation, this side of Odysseus' character needs to be rewritten. We saw a similar manoeuvre earlier in Cesar's grief for the dead 'maid' Julia in *Spin the Sky*: instead of just moving on without a care, he actually expresses sadness and regret. In these military SF texts, this is instead explored through Odysseus' relationship with his men.

The Infinite Horizon provides a good example of this: the Captain's men drop like flies throughout the comic in true Odyssean fashion, but he grieves each and every loss. He is particularly close to one of

his soldiers, Joe, whose seeds he buries at the end of the story, and when Joe gives his life to save the Captain's seven pages are devoted to his death and send-off. The final two pages of that issue (151-2) are entirely wordless: the first page shows the Captain giving Joe's shrouded body to the sea in a sequence of four panels, and the second is a splash page of the Captain slumping over the back of his dinghy as Joe's body sinks in his wake, clearly devastated by grief (fig.14). In the world of *The Infinite Horizon*, a man's life is not something to be cast aside with a brief formulaic line as it is in the *Odyssey*:

> ἔνθεν δὲ προτέρω πλέομεν ἀκαχήμενοι ἦτορ,
>
> ἄσμενοι ἐκ θανάτοιο, φίλους ὀλέσαντες ἑταίρους. (9.565-6)

As discussed in the previous section, Joe's memory is further honoured by the Captain when he buries the seeds that he carried in a pouch around his neck on his return home. On the comic's final page, those seeds are shown to have grown into a mighty tree with Joe's gravemarker wedged between its roots, along with the caption: "I was home." (182; fig.15). The implication of this final page is that time has passed, allowing the Captain to shed the 'burden' that he spoke of, but that he never forgets the friend that he lost along the way. This echoes how, according to Shay, veterans might want to forget many things about their military service but they never forget the people they lost and often feel excruciating guilt if they do (Shay 2002: 76).

Drake's *Cross the Stars* takes this kind of improved leadership one step further. Don Slade, a highly decorated ex-mercenary who just wants to get home, accidentally ends up on board a ship populated by amoral fellow mercenaries and pirates who are shown to be deeply unpleasant individuals. He reluctantly agrees to lead them so that that everyone can get home safely. Despite the circumstances of their meeting, Slade becomes fiercely protective of his crew – which comes as a surprise even to him:

> To his back, Slade shouted, "I don't care cop about what you do with other ships. But you leave my people alone!"
>
> The tanker turned, panting with the release of tension. Captain Levine was staring at him.
>
> The tanker's face bore a look of surprise. It stemmed less from his success than from the possessive he had just heard himself use to refer to the cut-throats below. (89)

The Infinite Horizon's Captain mourns the death of a close friend, but *Cross the Stars*' Don Slade comes to think of a group of "cut-throats" as 'his'. It is easy for the Captain to care for someone he held dear, someone who was willing to give his life for him, but it is quite something else for Slade to declare allegiance to men that he at times openly despises – but he is their leader, and as their leader he has a duty to them that he has to fulfil.

Slade's leadership stretches even to the point of self-sacrifice, and as such Don Slade neatly fits the criteria laid out above for a hero: he is unfailingly brave; he helps his men; and he does so at his own expense. This is most obvious when he and his men are given passage aboard a transport ship crewed by a mysterious race called the Alayans. The Alayans fuel their spacecraft through a drive which uses human minds as fuel, but the process is highly likely to drive the human in question insane. The Alayans invite Slade to choose one of his people to send to the slaughter, reminding him that they are, for the most part, unreservedly wicked:

> No problem for Don Slade. No problem for Captain Slade, who had hosed innocents with cyan fire during more operations than he cared to remember.
>
> "All right," the tanker whispered to his clenched fist. "Take me."
>
> "You mean, Mister Slade—" began the mechanical voice. Its tone could not be hesitant, but the words' pacing was.
>
> "I mean use me in your drive, curse it!" Slade shouted as he spun around. "I—"
>
> He paused. The anger melted away from the fear it had been intended to cloak. Then the fear surrendered itself to the honesty of desperation. "There's none of them worth the powder to blow them away," the tanker whispered. "And I've sent men to die, the *Lord* knows… But these're mine,

> like it or don't. And it's all too much like deciding who to butcher so that the rest of the lifeboat gets another meal. I'm not going to do that." (154)

Slade refuses to sacrifice his men and instead goes in their place. This is not the action of a madman—his healthy fear demonstrates that—or indeed an Odysseus, but, in his mind, he has no choice. It is not the action of a good leader to send his people to their deaths, and Slade, whatever else he might be, is a good leader.

For modern authors, it seems, the Homeric Odysseus is not good enough. He might display all of the heroism that an ancient audience would require—ancient epic, after all, is not particularly concerned with the experience of the everyday soldier[117]—but he is significantly lacking in the self-sacrifice that we look for in a modern hero. The fact that this is foregrounded in these two *Odyssey* adaptations is surely a criticism of the source and a suggestion of what the text should be, demonstrating a striking fearlessness towards the sacrosanct ancient text, perhaps even a lack of respect. After all, from the perspective of a modern writer, the ancient Odysseus has not done much to *deserve* respect – but if he were around today, perhaps he, too, would show the leadership of a nameless Captain or a Don Slade.

The Anti-Hero.

A great deal of Shay's *Achilles in Vietnam* is devoted to the analysis of the 'berserk' state, where men lose all sense of self-preservation and plunge headlong into the enemy, wreaking massive amounts of destruction and most often losing their own lives in the process. Two elements are emphasised as key to the onset of this berserk state: the betrayal of 'what's right' by a commanding officer, and grief at the death of a special comrade who was substituted for the survivor (2003: 75). As Shay outlines, the parallels with Achilles are clear: he has his γέρας, Briseis, wrongfully taken from him by Agamemnon, and the death of Patroclus in his armour and his place drives him over the edge into

[117] Although minor soldiers do share the spotlight on occasion, usually when they die: *Il.*5.152-8, Vir.*Aen.*10.781-2.

madness and violent, bloody revenge. The idea of a berserk state also harks back to Nagy's idea of good and bad βίη: violence is a constructive force in war, but when a soldier or a warrior goes beyond constructive, helpful violence into violence that poses a mindless risk, constructive violence (good βίη) spills over into berserking (bad βίη).

Both of these ideas—the berserk state, and good and bad βίη—are at play in this chapter's final text, David Drake's *The Warrior.* On the surface, *The Warrior* is unrelated to Homer: it tells the story of Sergeant Sam 'Slick' Des Grieux, a tank commander, and his often-antagonistic interactions throughout the years with Sergeant, later Lieutenant Luke Broglie, his commanding officer; both men are enlisted in Colonel Alois Hammer's mercenary unit, colloquially known as the Hammer's Slammers. Des Grieux names his first tank *Warrior*, hence the title of the novel, and, as with many of Drake's novels, tank warfare features heavily. The novel is structured as three separate incidents in Des Grieux's career which trace the rapidly broadening gap between him and Broglie: Broglie's star waxes while Des Grieux's wanes. In the final incident, Des Grieux and Broglie end up on opposing sides of a conflict on an alien world and Des Grieux is the one who puts an end to Broglie's forces, effectively 'defeating' him – but the novel ends with Des Grieux alone and friendless, discharged from the Slammers, and implicitly quite insane. He wins the battle but loses the war.[118] There is no Troy in this novel and no ten-year wanderings to return home, but elsewhere Drake has stated that *The Warrior* is an adaptation of the *Iliad*, inspired by three lines of Horace's *Ars Poetica* (120-2) which he translates thus:

> *If you decide to write about far-famed Achilles, make him active, hot-tempered, inexorable, and fierce; let him deny that laws were made for him, let him think his sword rules all.* (2012a: 269)

[118] This parallels interestingly with Shay's (2003: 7-9) observation that the veterans he works with often react aggressively to the assertion that America lost the Vietnam War; they respond that the government might have lost, but they won *their* war, i.e. the war on the ground in Vietnam.

The Warrior's Des Grieux is Achilles by another name, active, hot-tempered, inexorable, and fierce. Furthermore, the repeated clashes between Des Grieux and Broglie quite intentionally evoke the famous quarrel between Achilles and Agamemnon:

> I used the milieu of modern warfare, of tanks rather than armored spearmen, and the background has no connection with the siege of Troy.
>
> But remember, Homer didn't say he was writing about the siege of Troy: *I sing the wrath of Achilles…* (2012a: 270)

The Warrior is thus an *Iliad*, taking what Drake sees as the essence of Homer's story—the wrath of Achilles—and translating it to the modern medium that he is familiar with.

However, the novel is not simply a retelling; as Hartwell (2012) observes, it is "Drake's criticism of the *Iliad*" – and this criticism is primarily accomplished through Des Grieux himself. In the first incident, when the Slammers are attacked, Des Grieux disobeys orders to remain with his comrades and instead orders his driver, Tess Kuykendall, to take him and their tank to the enemy who he promptly cuts to shreds. He is gloatingly victorious. However, by abandoning his position he allows his incompetent commanding officer, Lieutenant Lindgren, to be killed – and it is Broglie who swoops in behind him to clean up his mess. Des Grieux is thus demoted and punished for disobeying orders, while Broglie is promoted – but Des Grieux seems incapable of understanding why:

> "But…" Des Grieux whispered. "I *won*." (55)

In terms of the number of enemy dead, he was destructively successful – but he ignored orders simply because he thought he knew better, and in doing so caused the death of a superior officer. This is a pattern that persists throughout the novel: in the second incident, Des Grieux breaks ranks, destroys most of a city, and accidentally ends up in a prisoner-of-war camp, whereas Broglie keeps things together, follows orders, and is offered a promotion to major; in the third, although Broglie is now on

the other side of the battle, Des Grieux still disobeys orders—now given by Lieutenant Kuykendall, his former driver now promoted above him—and wreaks havoc and destruction, but is eventually discharged. He is chronically incapable of taking orders and instead prefers to rampage his own path through the enemy, much as Achilles slaughters through the last few books of the *Iliad* with abandon. However, while Achilles' bloody chaos ends with him still a leading light in the Achaean army, Des Grieux's ends in discharge and humiliation. His attitude is incompatible:

> Hammer stared up and down at Des Grieux. The Colonel's expression did not change. "So, you think he's a good soldier, do you?" he asked softly.
>
> "I think," said Broglie," that… if he'd learn to obey orders, he'd be the best soldier I've ever seen." (125)

Only Des Grieux cannot learn to obey orders, so he cannot stay with the Slammers.

The point here is that headstrong, impetuous, individual Achillean heroism does not work in a modern military organisation, where the chain of command is all-important. The *Iliad* "does not yet know an army as a unit, obedient to a single command, but only as a collection of tribes which have united for common action in war" (Albracht 2005: 23; cf. van Wees 1986), thus allowing Achilles his individualism, but that is not a model that Des Grieux can subscribe to. The novel is in fact aware of this:

> "A soldier's job is to obey orders, Slick," Broglie said flatly. "The time when heroes put on their armor and went off to single combat, that ended four thousand years ago. D'ye understand me?"
>
> (73)

Given Drake's classical background and meticulous attention to detail, this is not simply a throwaway line. It is a statement of purpose, a statement of the difference between modern and ancient warfare and of the difference between *The Warrior* and the *Iliad*. Des Grieux is a master of βίη, but because

he does not use his βίη cooperatively (cf. Graziosi & Haubold 2003) for the good of his regiment, he has no place in military society.

Des Grieux's bad βίη is further emphasised through the graphic nature of his violence. In the second incident, for example, Des Grieux orders his driver, Pesco, to take them right into the heart of the enemy's stronghold; in the process, the tank is hit and seriously damaged. Des Grieux survives. Pesco is less lucky:

> As soon as he opened the hatch, the smell told Des Grieux that his driver was dead. Pesco had voided his bowels when the fragment sliced off the upper half of his skull. The liters of blood his heart pumped before the autonomic nervous system shut down had already begun to rot in the warm compartment.
>
> Des Grieux swore. The hatch—the part of it that hadn't decapitated Pesco—was jammed beyond opening by anything short of rear-echelon maintenance. He didn't know what the *bloody* hell he was going to do with the driver's body.
>
> He released the seat latch so that the back flopped down. The remaining contents of Pesco's cranial cavity slopped over Des Grieux's hands. (110)

The passage is shockingly gruesome – and, in fact, could come out of any number of descriptions of Iliadic battles.[119] Compare, for instance, ἐγκέφαλος δὲ παρ' αὐλὸν ἀνέδραμεν ἐξ ὠτειλῆς / αἱματόεις (*Il.*17.297-8); the striking enjambement of αἱματόεις perhaps works in the same way as the ironic italicisation of "*bloody*" in the Drake passage above. This grotesque description comes just before Des Grieux's triumphant destruction of the enemy commander's tank, effectively linking the success of his mission with the bloody violence that he perpetrates, legitimising the gore with an 'ends justifies the means' mentality. However, it is later revealed that the enemy was just about to surrender when Des Grieux bombed the lead tank, undercutting his crowning glory—perhaps his *aristeia*—and rendering Pesco's gruesome death pointless.

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[119] Speaking about *Cross the Stars*, Drake (2012c) says that "you'll find hints of Homer's words as well as his story" (xi); it is reasonable to assume that *The Warrior* follows the same pattern.

Many of Des Grieux's actions in *The Warrior* characterise him as berserk, just as, as Shay (2003) argues, Achilles is in fact the prototype for the berserker:

> The *Iliad* charts the ambiguous borderline between heroism and a blood-crazed, berserk state in which abuse after abuse is committed. (77)

Des Grieux is reckless, risking his life in single-handed pursuit of the enemy; he is socially disconnected from those around him; he is frequently insane, fanatically angry, and cruel; he lacks fear; he is exalted by his own victories; and he is deeply indifferent to those around him (see Shay 2003: 82 for a full list of characteristics of the berserker). Berserkers often feel animalistic and beastlike, something which Shay links with Homeric lion similes (82-4; cf. e.g. *Il.*24.41-3); this analysis is supported by Michael Clarke (1995): "When Achilles likens himself to a lion, he is revelling not only in being a hero but in being a madman" (159; cf. Gottschall 2001). This is thus echoed in *The Warrior*:

> The tank wheezed and bucked like a choking lion. (111)

The names of Des Grieux's three tanks chart his increasing isolation and disassociation from society. *Warrior* is a name he chooses, demonstrating his commitment to the tank itself and, by extension, the regiment. *Gangbuster II* is a name chosen by someone else before Des Grieux takes command of the tank; he adopts it without objection but it is still someone else's choice. H271 is a newly-made tank's construction designation that Des Grieux doesn't bother to personalise because he has no intention of committing to such a connection. As such, tanks in *The Warrior* act as an extension of Des Grieux himself. An extended simile *à la* Homer would not fit with either the aesthetic of the novel or Drake's "spare and telling" prose (Clute 2016a), but attributing this echo of a lion simile to Des Grieux's tank both reinforces the connection between him and his armament and implies that his berserk state is so strong that it extends even to the inanimate objects around him. This berserk state can in fact last

several years and may well cause permanent chemical changes in the brains of those who ‘go berserk’, suggesting that Des Grieux’s implicit insanity at the end of *The Warrior* is a direct result of his crazed aggression. His bad βίη has effectively destroyed his mind as well as his military career.

In Shay’s discussion of berserking, he identifies the loss of a close comrade as one of the key triggers of a berserk state (2003: 80ff.). In the *Iliad*, of course, this parallels with the death of Patroclus, the final blow that drives Achilles over the edge. Des Grieux, however, has no Patroclus. He is a loner from start to end of *The Warrior*, and there is no indication that at some point in his past he experienced the kind of overwhelming grief that we see Achilles succumb to in the wake of *Iliad* 16. This effectively disallows any kind of sympathy for Des Grieux by making his berserk madness all about him rather than about a lost friend – but it also distances him from Achilles. The death of Patroclus is *the* turning point for Achilles in the *Iliad*. Until Patroclus dies, he is perfectly willing to eschew the glorious κλέος he is promised by prophecy and return to a quiet life of ignominious ease. Once Patroclus is taken from him, he is almost unstoppable in his grief.

However, I do not believe that this absence of a Patroclus-figure is an intertextually-pointed decision on Drake’s part. *The Warrior* does not ask us to compare Des Grieux and Achilles on a point-by-point basis. As the *Iliad* is about the wrath of Achilles, so *The Warrior* is about the wrath of Des Grieux – and the wrath of Des Grieux is rooted in a different world. This serves as a reminder that, although it is tempting as a classicist reading this text to make everything about the classical text, this is a modern story as much as it is an adaptation of an ancient one. The comparisons with the *Iliad*—the unacceptability of Achilles’ brand of heroism in a modern military setting, the echoes of ideas of good and bad βίη—are not so important that they override all other considerations, such as Des Grieux as a character and his relationship with his commanding officers. Broglie could conceivably be more sympathetic to Des Grieux if he were mourning a friend, or alternatively Des Grieux could have been himself diagnosed with grief-related PTSD and removed from the front line long before the events of the novel even occurred. Drake’s novel focuses on destruction and devastation, on the reality of

‘heroic’ violence when it is not used constructively, not grief, and it would be disingenuous to shoehorn the lack of Patroclus into an analysis.

It is thus through the varying tropes and habits of their different genres—military and feminist SF—that these texts adapt, question, and cherrypick the *Odyssey* and the *Iliad*. “Cyclops”, *Spin the Sky* and *ODY-C* recentre the feminine, rewriting characters who are mistreated and abused in the *Odyssey* into rounded, sometimes realistic women who are far more palatable to a modern audience – one of the key features, as we have seen, of feminist SF. *Cross the Stars*, *The Voyage*, and *The Infinite Horizon* take military SF’s penchant for problematising militarism and war and pull apart the notion of the hero, recasting the heroes of the *Odyssey* and the *Iliad* as far more modern figures, as better heroes and more damaged men than their ancient counterparts. *The Warrior*, on the other hand, translates Achilles fairly literally into a modern military setting and demonstrates effectively how he doesn’t fit: warfare has moved on since the Trojans and Achaeans fought each other around the walls of Troy. An important thing to remember in these adaptations is that they do not have to use every element of the original text, nor does every aspect of Homer have to be mapped onto these modern rewritings. Meaning and significance can be found in the resonances between individual points of the texts; the lack of something that might seem extremely important to a classical scholar does not necessarily detract from whatever the modern text is doing.

The notions of genre and subgenre, so problematised in relation to SF in the introduction to this chapter, thus prove to be useful concepts not only to group disparate texts together but also to tease out common themes in their interactions with the ancient texts. The genres discussed above are not the only genres at play in these texts: many Odyssean adaptations by their very nature strongly echo the fantastic voyage, a subgenre of SF of which the *Odyssey* “stands paradigmatically at the head” (Clute & Nicholls 2017), and space opera is a heavy influence in, for example, *Cross the Stars* and

The Voyage. However, it is the tropes of military and feminist SF in particular that allow the patterns in Homeric adaptation outlined above to become clear.

Once again, this chapter has shown the relative popularity of *Odyssey*-adaptations: out of seven texts discussed, five are solely Odyssean, one solely Iliadic, and one a combination of Odyssean and Argonautic. The genres that these modern texts are written in suggests a further reason why. Both feminist and military SF are concerned with problematising previous assumptions, whether those assumptions be sexist or militarist. The *Odyssey* provides a fertile field for those assumptions to be challenged, offering subjugated women, a violent post-war homecoming, and a hero who weeps to hear of his own military successes. This is not to say that the Homeric texts themselves challenge these assumptions—Penelope never makes a speech about women's rights, nor does Odysseus speak to the Phaeacians about the necessity of better treating PTSD—but, by depicting such an alien society, they give the modern writer something to work with.

3: Adaptation.

Adaptation—the process of texts and authors taking what they find in other texts and other authors and rewriting, recasting, receiving those finds in their own work—is an extremely broad theme, far too broad to be dealt with in a single chapter. As such, this chapter will not be demonstrating how and why every SF text that adapts the Homeric poems does what it does; rather it will focus on two specific processes of adaptation that appear in a number of texts. These are how closely the text cleaves to the plot of the original, expressed via the ideas of centrifugality and, in some cases, centripetality; and how these texts reflect on and in fact dramatise the process of adaptation – often in ways that echo scholarly attitudes to and theories of reception.

In the majority of cases, these are texts that are highly self-aware, that very much know what they are doing as they are doing it. This is a familiar manoeuvre for SF texts. Robert Philmus (2006) in fact argues for SF as a literature of 're-visions', a literature that self-consciously revisits and revises other texts.[120] Further, Heather Urbanski in *The Science Fiction Reboot* (2013), her study of reimagined SF franchises, observes that modern SF adaptations of older stories tend to be more aware of themselves and more self-conscious in their storytelling mechanics – and while her analysis deals exclusively with modern 'reboots', such as the silver screen revival of the *Star Trek* franchise (*Star Trek*, 2009; *Star Trek Into Darkness*, 2013)[121] and the small screen reworking of the 1970s *Battlestar Galactica* series (*Battlestar Galactica*, 2004—2009), the concept is not irrelevant to SF texts that adapt far older stories. As Urbanski herself notes, "reboots have been around, in many different types, for quite literally centuries" (9).

[120] Cf. pg.11.
[121] *Star Trek Beyond* (2016) was released after Urbanski's book.

The term ‘reboot’, used in this context to mean a new version of an older story that commonly changes some element of the original but shows no overt recognition of the older version[122]—it can and does have less specific implications in popular culture—is in fact an interesting word to consider in light of the language that is often used by classical scholars to talk about adaptation and reception, language that very often comes with that same ‘re—’ prefix. ‘Reception’ itself follows that pattern, although it is itself not without controversy: some scholars see it as too passive a term, and prefer ‘appropriation’ (Hall 2004: 61; Martindale 2007: 300). Furthermore, debates rage over the difference between ‘reception’ and ‘tradition’, particularly in the configuration ‘the classical tradition’: for some, preferring ‘tradition’ over ‘reception’ implies conservatism and elitism (Goldhill 2010: 58ff.) and focuses too much on the chronological impact of individual authors’ work (Hardwick 2003: 2-3), while for others ‘tradition’ is a “useful and indeed evocative term” (Budelmann & Haubold 2008: 14) that encompasses far more than ‘reception’ can (Silk, Gildenhard & Barrow 2014: 12-13). It has also been recognised, on the other hand, that ‘tradition’ is a multifarious term referring to a multiplicity of different concepts (Hardwick 2007: 313; Kallendorf 2007: 4; Budelmann & Haubold 2008: 14), one that is under constant debate and renegotiation (Goldhill 2002: 297). Once again, we have cycled back to ‘re—’ words (‘renegotiation’): this ‘re—’ terminology ranges from ‘reception’, one of the commonest terms, to ‘reflexes’ (Silk, Gildenhard & Barrow 2014), a word that “stresses the fact of descent without any implication of purposeful transmission or adjustment” (4, n.3), to Barbara Graziosi and Emily Greenwood’s (2007) eloquent assessment:

> Revision implies looking again and finding what one sees as inadequate. It carries in its wake a host of attendant verbs, all with undertones of rejection: rewrite, rework, and retell. The process at work is akin to recycling, where Homeric poetry and the epic cycle are scrambled to create a new and unfamiliar work with recognizable material. (11)

[122] The *Star Trek* reboots, mentioned previously, are interesting in this respect because they are presented—via the Romulan Nero’s meddling in time—as an active deviation from the canon of the original series. Nero’s name is obviously classical, but is more likely to have been chosen to fit in with the pre-existing classical aesthetic of the *Star Trek* universe’s Romulan and Reman races rather than as an explicit reference to the Roman emperor.

Further words that they associate with this technique are:

> rewrite, rework, revise, retell, recover, recycle, revivify, renounce, react, respond (10)

To this list could (and perhaps should) be added 'reboot', particularly for those working on popular culture and SF in particular.[123] Multiplexes and television schedules are at this moment in time brimming with reboots, with retellings of stories old and new, retreading old ground to the delight of new audiences: the reboot has become a part of popular culture, and it is certainly interesting that something with such a strong linguistic connection to the language scholars use for reception (revision, retelling) has struck such a chord in the contemporary imagination.

But again, that is a story that is a little too broad for this thesis. Turning from pop culture to academia, it will be helpful for the texts analysed in the second half of this chapter to provide here a brief overview of the patterns and themes in scholarship on what it is that we do when we receive (rewrite, recycle) a text. Much reception scholarship is originally grounded in the works of Hans Robert Jauss,[124] Wolfgang Iser, and Hans-Georg Gadamer, focusing on reader-response and the historically-situated status of the reader (receiver) of any text.[125] As William Batstone (2006) puts it:

> The point of reception is the ephemeral interface of the text; it occurs where the text and reader meet and is simultaneously constitutive of both. (17)

The most influential formulation of this theory in relation to classical reception is Charles Martindale's *Redeeming the Text* (1993), where he wonders whether "[*m*]*eaning… is always realized at the point of reception*" (3) and theorises the now-famous "chain of receptions" (7). For Martindale, the reader/receiver is the centre of the process of reception, and it is unimaginable for that reader/receiver to read the original text as it would have been read in its own time and context because

[123] 'Re—' terminology will be important to the analysis below.
[124] Jauss in particularly will be discussed further in Chapter 4: Megatext.
[125] Cf. Hardwick 2003: 1-11; Martindale 2007.

of the impossibility of scraping away all the interpretations of past readers (the 'chain of receptions') of that text. Outside of reception, Martindale later calls for an aesthetic approach to literary criticism in his *Latin Poetry and the Judgement of Taste* (2004), an approach that "acknowledge[s] the work's power and scope beyond the originary moment in an encounter which is always in the present" (182), thus further locating the meaning of a text in the interaction between text and reader. When defending this approach against the attacks of Simon Goldhill (Martindale 2010, responding to Goldhill 2010), he stresses the importance of a scholarly disinterested attitude, saying "I try to set aside purely personal interests in making the judgement of taste" (79). This seems a somewhat paradoxical statement: surely any judgement of taste is inherently personal and subjective.

Reception studies, however, is not limited to the works of Charles Martindale. Lorna Hardwick outlines a "model of engagement with classical texts and images as a vehicle for various kinds of cultural exchange and development" (2003: 109), and Joshua Billings (2010) focuses on the concept of Socratic erotics, leading to "*an understanding of the process of classical reception as essentially dialectical, characterized both by absence and presence*" (4, original italics). Furthermore Shane Butler (2016c) postulates the model of 'Deep Time'[126] as an analogy for reception studies, where the modern reader/receiver is placed face-to-face with the unthinkable timespan between the modern day and antiquity but is simultaneously confronted with the physical, contemporary presence of the long-distant past. Butler's approach echoes a common concern among classicists working on reception, namely that of the vast gulf between the present and the past (Kennedy 2006: 288) and the total inscrutability of the original text (Butler 2016b; Martindale 1993). As Martindale (2006) eloquently has it:

> We are not the direct inheritors of antiquity. (4)

Interestingly for the task at hand, this is a gulf that SF may well be uniquely qualified to cross, as Sarah Annes Brown (2008) analyses:

[126] Deep Time will be discussed further in Chapter 5: Sense of Wonder.

> SF's preoccupation with various kinds of time disruption, whether literal time travel or an alertness to the cyclical, gives a special edge to its engagement with the classics. The distinctions between past, present and future are compromised or collapse completely. (416)

SF's ability to collapse the distance between past and present is not solely limited to its predilection for time travel;[127] however, as will be shown later in the chapter, time travel is a simple, SF-centric means of getting around the usual difficulties that an adaptor of classical literature might face.

Adapting the classical is thus not an easy task, conceptually or in practice. Adapting *Homer* only makes the process worse. Homer's vast reception history "pile[s] on the page like seams in a rock" (Manguel 2007: 3),[128] leaving the would-be adaptor buried under the weight of all the adaptors that have come before. However, numerous critics have analysed Homer as in fact no longer fitting within a linear, classicising tradition (Graziosi 2008: 35-6; Graziosi & Greenwood 2008: 4; Haubold 2007: 46), as an author that has over the course of his history been "uncoupled from a position at the centre of western cultural hegemony… [and] is now regarded less as a cultural model and more as a source of rich diversity in poetry and experience" (Hardwick 2004: 361).[129] This is an idea that is echoed by Dan Simmons, the American author of two novels that will be discussed later in this chapter:

> By tapping into Homer's legacy, I gain more than 3,000 years of Western European literary tradition in which to forage and play. (2001)

The verbs "forage" and "play" are not particularly respectful terms, not the kind of language that indicates the author is planning a faithful rehash of the ancient texts he is dealing with.[130] At the same time, the mention of Homer's "legacy", a word bordering on reverence, and of the European "literary

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[127] This will be discussed further in Chapter 6: Cognitive Estrangement.
[128] Although Butler (2016a: 1) criticizes the metaphor.
[129] Cf. Solomon (2007), for the idea that the Trojan War was never Homer-centric.
[130] Aeschylus' alleged description of his work as τεμάχη… τῶν Ὁμήρου μεγάλων δείπνων (Ath.8.347e) is an interesting comparandum here.

tradition" indicates that this particular author still regards his classical predecessor as worthy of respect. This dichotomy of reverence and play is here seemingly unproblematic, and condenses the conflicted ideas in scholarship on the matter into an apparently coherent whole.

The idea of an ancient, revered text as something to be pulled apart and played with is not unique to Simmons. Thomas Jenkins (2015) observes:

> More than any other category, pop culture receptions interrogate the notion of 'what is a classic' with more savagery (and sometimes bravery) than other modes of discourse. (30)

S A Brown (2008) echoes this idea, describing the SF attitude to Classics as one marked by a "characteristic lack of anxiety or pedantry" (416): these are not texts that are slavishly devoted to a static, monolithic classical tradition; rather they are more than happy to take Hardwick's "source of rich diversity" and run with it. As discussed previously, SF has a close relationship with antiquity, whether by its numerous texts that rewrite ancient myth and literature, by its claimed (and controversial) roots in antiquity, or by proposed theoretical similarities between the two.[131] One of the ways in which SF is often linked to antiquity and to Homer in particular is by shared story patterns like the fantastic voyage; compare Edith Hall (2008a):

> In the case of the *Odyssey*, no later author [in antiquity] could ever again make a fresh start when shaping a narrative or a visual representation of a voyage, a metamorphosis, a run-in with savage monsters, an encounter with anyone dead, a father-son relationship, a recognition token, or a reunion between husband and wife. (8)

This has apparently been a problem of Homer's enormous influence since antiquity, so it is perhaps unsurprising that SF—so full of marvellous voyages—falls into the same trap. Again, Dan Simmons is closely engaged with the idea of the interrelationship between Classics and SF, arguing for "SF's

[131] Cf. pg.15-20.

kindredship to the great epics of our literary history" (Simmons 2003b) and wanting to "trace our heritage to Homer" (Simmons 2002). Whatever the reality of the scholarly situation, in practice SF texts often engage with antiquity, with those practices ranging from mere borrowings of classical art and images to extensive reworkings of ancient literature. Some scholars have attempted to codify these categories of adaptation;[132] however, codifications are inherently exclusionary and this chapter prefers instead to observe the details of those reworkings.

Despite the account of the difficulties of language relating to reception and its attendant activities in this introduction, this chapter will aim to use any such terms in relatively unloaded ways (as much as any academic term can be 'unloaded'). 'Reception' is not used as a polemical rebuttal to 'tradition', rather a catch-all for 'texts that receive and adapt'[133] – and 'adaptation' is not intended—in the vein of Edith Hall's preference for 'appropriation'—as a more active term than 'reception'. The bipartite structure outlined above—centrifugality/petality; dramatisation of reception—is also not intended to be comprehensive. It is a selection of texts and themes that illustrate the penchant of SF adaptations of Homer for reflecting on their own process of adaptation – and, as will become clear, these reflections have striking parallels in the reception theory and scholarship of the past few decades. The constellation of SF and Classics that this thesis is proposing is thus demonstrated to have some surprising consequences.

Spinning Out of Control: Centripetality/fugality.

Adaptations of the Homeric poems can do two things with Homer's plot: they can accept it, or they can reject it. This seems like a fairly obvious statement to start with, and in many ways it is—what other option is there if the new text is to remain a recognisable adaptation?—but it also provides a

[132] Keen (2006) offers the categories of 'Retellings', 'Allusion', 'Appropriation', 'Interaction', Borrowing', 'Stealing', and 'Ghosting'. For other models, see Fredericks' Promethean/Odyssean SF (1977b, 1980) and Aziza's descriptive five-point structure (2011).
[133] After all, as Budelmann & Haubold (2008) observe, it is something of a British habit to find 'reception' "the less problematic concept of the two" (14).

helpful guide that this section of the chapter will follow. Texts that choose to tackle Homer's plots, those of the *Odyssey* and the *Iliad*, demonstrate one of two courses: either, usually after a certain amount of time of textual fidelity, they go spiralling off into their own invention (centrifugality); or, despite everything that sends the centrifugal texts into orbit, they keep coming back to Homer's story (centripetality). The second is far rarer than the first. SF texts, in keeping with the "lack of anxiety or pedantry" discussed above—and in keeping with general problems of seeming original compared to the Homeric texts—seem to prefer the approach that gives them the freedom to explode the story into whatever they want it to be – but the one larger text that will be discussed as exclusively centripetal demonstrates interesting tensions between the story that it is trying to tell and the story that it is seemingly being *forced* to tell.

A fairly straightforward example of what is meant by the term 'centrifugality' is provided by Brian Stableford's *Dies Irae* trilogy, comprising *The Days of Glory* (1974), *In the Kingdom of the Beasts* (1974), and *Day of Wrath* (1974). Stableford, a British SF writer born in Yorkshire, is an excellent example of the practitioner-scholar so common in the SF community—he writes both fiction and non-fiction, both of which are highly regarded—but *Dies Irae* is an early work, and, as John Clute and David Pringle (2017) observe, has been "dismissed as cynical hackwork (not least by Stableford himself)". According to Stableford, the genesis of the trilogy was certainly unprepossessing:

> "My editor told me to jot down the plots of the *Odyssey* and the *Iliad* with lots of SF names and spaceships, and it would sell as a trilogy… it did too, people thumping each other with swords all over the galaxy." (Langford 1997)

Stableford further described his early works as "all extremely violent, very extravagant stories of action" (S Nicholls 1993: 165), and there is certainly a lot of sword-thumping in the trilogy. To be fair to Stableford, however, there is also a fair amount of weapons-thumping in the Homeric poems themselves.

To begin with, at least, the trilogy apes Homer in a way that goes beyond pure violence: *The Days of Glory* and *In the Kingdom of the Beasts* follow the plots of, respectively, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* remarkably closely, with the beginning of *The Days of Glory* even echoing the proem of the *Iliad*:

> THEME
>
> This book tells the story of the anger of Richard Stormwind, and its consequences; but it is more concerned with the vanity which prompted the anger, and why the consequences were so important.
>
> (5)

The layout of this quotation, namely a centred, capitalised 'title' ("THEME") followed by a section of prose text, is symptomatic of the structure of all three novels: there are no conventional chapters, only sections that follow this pattern, some which are just as short as this, others which can stretch to thirty pages. Here, "the anger of Richard Stormwind" is a replacement for μῆνιν… Πηληιάδεω Ἀχιλῆος (*Il.*1.1) and the mention of "This book" perhaps stands as a modern, novelistic version of ἄειδε, θεά (1.1), replacing the divine goddess with the physical object the reader holds in their hands. For the most part, this closeness continues as we pass from Richard Stormwind (Achilles) in *The Days of Glory* to Mark Chaos (Odysseus) in *In the Kingdom of the Beasts*: the SF characters follow the story-patterns that their Homeric predecessors set out for them.

Incidentally, one reviewer unfamiliar with the Homeric poems raises an interesting point about Mark Chaos, the Odysseus-figure:

> What I cannot believe though, is that Odysseus is anything like Mark Chaos, because Mark is a very typical Stableford protagonist: ambivalent, indecisive, and generally very unheroic.
>
> (Braidwood: undated)

The Homeric Odysseus is not that indecisive: he does take time to consider his options, but he tends to make decisions fairly quickly. Decisiveness apart, however, this kind of description in fact fits Odysseus rather well. It is interesting, however, that for a reviewer unversed in the Homeric poems a version of Odysseus that captures something of his original nature somehow doesn't quite sit right – yet another illustration of the idea that the ancient Odysseus does not fit with the modern concept of a hero.[134] Here, however, instead of 'fixing' Odysseus as we saw David Drake do with Don Slade, Homer's Odysseus fits right in with Stableford's usual characters.

Once we reach *Day of Wrath*, however, all fidelity to Homer is thrown out of the window; as S C Fredericks (1982) observes, the "plotting is complex and New Wave" (84). The story explodes into an interstellar war between the originally Homeric characters and the 'toys'—robots—created by Heljanita, the trilogy's rough equivalent to the Homeric gods; he is a member of a powerful, technologically advanced race flung back into his own people's past whose actions are in fact revealed to have started the whole plot. The story thus diverges wildly—centrifugally—from that of the Homeric poems, ending with a fundamental reshaping of space-time rather than the post-Homeric tales of the Epic Cycle. This pattern of adherence followed by rejection is one that we come across time and again in SF adaptations of Homer.

Odysseus in particular seems to attract this kind of centrifugal storyline. Two novels—Lafferty's *Space Chantey* and Stauber's *Spin the Sky*—end with the Odysseus-figure returning home to Ithaca, settling all of the problems he finds there, and then deciding that, actually, he doesn't want to stay at home with his family after all. He wants to go and explore the stars once more. Yes, Tiresias prophesies in the *Odyssey* that Odysseus will have to leave his family and wander for years after his return home to appease Poseidon (11.119-37), but this is not a wandering undertaken of his own free will. The wanderings in these two SF texts are. As discussed in Chapter 2: Genre,[135] in *Spin the Sky* it

[134] Cf. pg.92-97.
[135] Pg.71-72.

is Penelope who is the driving force behind this change, putting a feminist spin on the trope, but Cesar is more than happy to acquiesce, telling her:

> If you want to go, then I'm going to follow you. (307)

In *Space Chantey*, however, the story is a little more complex. The *Odyssey* lies just beneath the surface in *Space Chantey*, and not just because that is the text that Lafferty is adapting. Shadowy, maybe-Odysseuses crop up throughout the text. The first appears at the beginning of the novel, when, in the first meeting after a ten-year war where six hornet captains discuss what to do next, the sixth, unnamed captain—not Roadstrum—says:

> "For myself, … it is imperative that I get home. There may have been changes there. My wife is faithful within limits, but I do not know whether ten years transcends those limits. My children should have reached an interesting age." (7)

This is the Odysseus that we meet at the end of the *Odyssey*, conversely here at the beginning of his journey, concerned with home and family above adventure and glory. He is here an explicit contrast to Roadstrum, who in fact encourages the other captains to talk him *out* of plans to head home. Another Odysseus appears in the incident with the Polyphemians. The novel's version of Polyphemus' sheep is in fact men who are kept as sheep who don't realise that they are men. When Roadstrum attempts to stir them up against their Polyphemian 'owners', they respond:

> "Another man, another traveler talked to us as you have done. 'Early in the morning you must revolt,' he said. 'You must refuse to go where they herd you; you must refuse to be butchered. You must take up stones and clubs in your hands, and beat down the men who would take you to slaughter.' That's what the man told us." (81)

This is perhaps a less obvious Odysseus—the Odysseus of the *Odyssey* never tried to lead an uprising of sheep-people—but the mention of 'another man' coming and doing this before certainly echoes the last man who came and rose up against the Cyclops with the help of a flock of sheep.[136] This allusive "Another man, another traveler" is also reminiscent of Theocritus' *Idyll* 11, where the unlucky-in-love Cyclops wishes that some ξένος (61) might come and teach him how to swim so that he can join Galateia in the depths (60-2). Additionally, we could perhaps read the phrase "That's what the man told us" as an echo of the famous ὣς φάτο of Homeric speech patterns, although it could equally simply be a facet of the sheepish sheep-men's characterisation, meekly repeating everything that they have been told. The passage is thus steeped in Homer, further suggesting this link between the stranger and the original Odysseus.

There are other hints in the novel that this has all happened once before: during the Sirenaca incident, for instance, one of the crewmen asks Roadstrum if he will pour hot wax in their ears "as was done the first time" (67); the land of the Lotus Eaters is explicitly mentioned as a parallel for Lotophage, the novel's version of the Homeric incident (13); and when Tele-Max, the novel's Telemachus, tells Roadstrum about the suitors, he replies:

> "I will have to find the strength to face this. I wonder what I did about the suitors the first time. Wasn't there a first time?"
>
> "The first time, Papa? The story is that you impressed them by shooting an arrow through twelve holes in a row. Later you killed them."
>
> "What is an arrow, Tele-Max?"
>
> "I don't know either, Papa." (118)

There are thus layers upon layers of Homer and his later adaptors present beneath the surface in this novel, setting up a tension between what was and what is. This tension is most fully realised at the

[136] The palimpsestic nature of the Cyclops episode, discussed in Chapter 1: Polyphony (pg.50-51, 55-59), is a concern already in antiquity; cf. the distaste of Ovid's Achaemenides for having to do everything *iterum* (*Met.*14.167).

end of the story, when Roadstrum returns home for all of four pages, finds everything deeply dissatisfying after his novel's worth of adventure and excitement, and declares:

> "Peace will not be the end of my epic! An epic has already failed if it have [sic] an ending. I don't care how it ended the first time—it will not end the same now!" (122)

He then gathers what's left of his crew and takes to the stars once more. This is strikingly reminiscent of Dante's version of the story—a version that Lafferty is most likely familiar with, given the cantos of the *Inferno* he quotes in the novel's doggerel couplets—where Odysseus tells Dante that not even his love for his family could keep him from wanting to experience the world (Canto 26.90-99). Much like Dante, both Stauber and Lafferty cannot keep Odysseus confined to Ithaca: they unleash him on the universe once more, one, spurred on by the desires of his wife, as an expression of feminist independence, the other as a man shaking off the shackles of the version of his story that has already happened before.

The wilfulness of *Space Chantey*'s refusal to follow in the footsteps of Homeric epic is a good lead-in to the wilful, intentional centrifugality of *Ilium* (2003) and *Olympos* (2005),[137] an SF duology by the American author Dan Simmons. The duology is explicitly based on the *Iliad*[138] but introduces a whole host of other texts into the mix, including the other poems of the Epic Cycle, Shakespeare's *The Tempest* and Proust's *À la Recherche du Temps Perdu*: this is characteristic of Simmons' attitude to literature, where the boundaries of genres and texts are seemingly little more than suggestions.[139] Simmons read both translations of the text and contemporary scholarship to research the novels,[140] which, combined with his pre-existing knowledge from studying the Great Books course at

[137] For a summary of previous scholarship on the duology, see Grobéty (2014: 180, n.8).
[138] Not, as some have thought, *Ilium* based on the *Iliad* and *Olympos* based on the *Odyssey* (Simmons 2003b).
[139] Palmer (1999: 74), Senior (2012: 213) on this technique within the Hyperion Cantos. Simmons himself regularly talks about his practice of borrowing "tropes and protocols" (Simmons 2007) from other genres even in his seemingly-solid SF; cf. Chapter 4: Megatext.
[140] Simmons (2003c, 2009a, 2011a).

university,[141] has led to a "scholarly" (S A Brown 2008: 424) text, a text as steeped in Homer as it is in space opera.

The main character of *Ilium*, the principal novel to be discussed here, is Thomas Hockenberry, a twentieth-century Homeric scholar at an American university who finds himself reborn in a future recreation of the Trojan War, watched over by a pantheon of posthuman gods whose power is given by advanced technology, not magic. Hockenberry's task as one of many 'scholics' is to report on the progress of the war, to ensure that everything is proceeding according to the story that Homer sang in the *Iliad*, given a few minor variations in who gets killed when. The very premise of the novel is thus concerned with fidelity to the course of events of the *Iliad* – but fidelity is not what the reader gets. Hockenberry, disguised via the posthuman gods' technology as Paris, meets and sleeps with Helen of Troy – but, unlike any of the other Homeric characters in the story, she works out that he is not who he seems to be and forces him to tell her of the future fall of Troy.[142] Insistent that he must change the course of the war—something that he has in fact begun to realise himself—she then tells him:

> If you are going to change our fates, you must find the fulcrum. (252)

Hockenberry realises that the 'fulcrum' must be the embassy to Achilles that takes place in *Iliad* 9:

> As a scholar, I know in my soul that the embassy to Achilles is the heart and pivot of the *Iliad*. Achilles' decisions upon hearing the embassy's entreaties will determine the flow of all future events—the death of Hector, the subsequent death of Achilles, the fall of Ilium. (340)

He thus impersonates Phoenix and tags along with the embassy – which Simmons uses to explain the famous textual crux in *Iliad* 9, where Ajax, Odysseus and Phoenix are sent to entreat Achilles but the text's verb forms are in the dual. In a "sly metafictional play" (S A Brown 2008: 425), Simmons is

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[141] Grobéty (2015: 264, n.2).

[142] This is a moment that is in fact very in character for the Homeric Helen, who is known in the Homeric poems for recognising and identifying individuals (*Il*.3.396-8, *Od*.4.250).

very explicit about what is happening here, explaining the issue with the dual to his reader and then adding:

> It's as if the blind poet himself had been confused about whether there were two or three emissaries to Achilles and what, exactly, Phoenix's role was in the conversation that would decide all the players' fates. (341)

Hockenberry-as-Phoenix, however, is not chosen to join the embassy as Phoenix is in the *Iliad* at a meeting of the Achaean leaders. Instead he is passed over but then chases after the party, persuades a suspicious Odysseus to let him come and joins them in Achilles' tent – but he is so preoccupied with trying to remember Phoenix's speech from *Iliad* 9 that he misses his chance to deliver it. Achilles declares his firm intention to leave, the embassy departs, and Hockenberry is left stunned:

> Not only didn't I find the fulcrum and change things, now the entire *Iliad* has run off the rails. More than nine years I've been a scholic here, watching and observing and reporting to the muse and never once has there been a deep rift between the events in this war and Homer's reporting in the poem. Now… *this*. If Achilles leaves, which he shows every indication of doing come the dawn, the Achaeans will be defeated, their ships burned, Ilium saved, and Hector, not Achilles, will be the great hero of the epic. It seems unlikely that Odysseus' *Odyssey* will ever happen… and certainly not the way it's sung now. Everything has changed. *Just because the real Phoenix wasn't here to give his real speech? Or have the gods been tampering with this fulcrum before I had a chance to?* I'll never know. (382)

Ilium runs off the *Iliad*'s rails, diverting wildly from its source material and diving into pure SF space opera – and, from the text, it seems like this is what would have always happened, even if Hockenberry hadn't been persuaded by Helen to find the fulcrum and change history. The rest of the duology plays with what happens next, pitting Trojans and Achaeans against the posthuman gods in a

cinematic clash at the end of *Ilium*,[143] and, as we pass into *Olympos*, eventually dramatising the extremely literal fall of Troy when two parallel realities, that of the reality holding the Trojan War recreation, and the contemporary far-future Earth, are brought crashing into one another:

> Much later, the moravec engineers would tell me that the entire city of Ilium fell a literal five feet and two inches before landing on the soil of the present-day Earth. (748)

The duology ends with the citizens of Troy, the Achaean peoples, the contemporary human inhabitants of Earth and a pair of moravecs (robots) starting a new life on this new Earth. Hockenberry opens a pub.

This, of course, is not what happens in the *Iliad* – but that is the point. The duology, as so many others do, starts out following the course of Homer's poem but inevitably indulges in SF's centrifugal tendencies and goes off to do its own thing, albeit a thing that is strongly rooted in everything that Homer once wrote. However, with Simmons' duology, that is not the end of all things. The final chapter of *Olympos* shows one of the two moravecs, the now-blind Orphu of Io,[144] telling stories to children: he is just finishing off the tale of Gilgamesh, and, as the human characters look on, he begins to tell them the story of the *Iliad* in Robert Fagles' translation. That is how *Olympos* ends, with the first nine lines of Fagles' *Iliad*. Simon Perris (2011) acutely analyses this:

> Simmons has Homeric epic first engendering, then itself being sustained by, epic science-fiction… Simmons thus figures literary reception as survival.[145] (205)

This is far more centripetal than it is fugal. Furthermore, it is interesting to note that at several points when Hockenberry tries to effect significant change within the Homeric narrative—for example, as mentioned above, his efforts to change the outcome of the embassy to Achilles—he instead seems to

[143] Discussed further in Chapter 6: Cognitive Estrangement (pg.229-231).
[144] The resonances of a blind poet whose name echoes Orpheus are obvious.
[145] S A Brown (2008: 425-6) comes to similar conclusions when discussing the Hockenberry-as-Phoenix incident.

end up actually correcting the 'mistakes' in the narrative unfolding in front of him. For instance, when he insists on Phoenix being added to the embassy because that is what happened in the *Iliad*, he is, while trying to change the course of events, actually bringing the plot of *Ilium* back in line with what happened in the *Iliad*. His attempts are imperfect, of course, and he does change events in that he never manages to deliver Phoenix's speech, the speech that is "so wonderfully digressive and complicated that it reeks of Homer" (*Ilium* 341)—there are in fact several elements of Phoenix's speech that *do* suggest it was Homer's invention, particularly the remarkably apt version of the Meleager myth (9.527-99)—but in effect he (mostly) rights a wrong. S A Brown (2008) aptly describes this push and pull between *Iliad* and *Ilium*:

> Thus a circular effect is created, almost an uncanny charge, as it is hinted that Homer's own confusion about Phoenix's role in the embassy is somehow caused by *Hockenberry*, that Phoenix was not meant to join the party, that the fissures in the Homeric text represent a struggle at some level in the poet's mind between what was supposed to happen and Hockenberry's desperate intervention.
>
> (425-6)

The duology does demonstrate true centrifugality, spinning off from the story of the Homeric poems to explore worlds that are far bigger than antiquity, but it is also a little more complicated than that: at the end and in the actions of one of its protagonists it comes back to Homer, back to epic, back to the *Iliad.* The plot might leave the Homeric story in its dust, but in the world of the novels and indeed in the mind of their creator[146] that is not to say that the *Iliad* is unimportant. For the *Ilium*/*Olympos* duology, the Homeric text is a key part of the literary world – just maybe not the real one.

For the final text that this section of the chapter will discuss, the literary world is virtually more important than the real – and perhaps this is why this is the only text to be discussed which displays pure centripetality. The American author Tad Williams' *Otherland* series is a true behemoth, comprising four long novels and two short stories: *City of Golden Shadow* (1996), *River of Blue Fire*

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[146] "I have more respect for **The Iliad** now than I've ever had, and I've always thought it was possibly the finest piece of literature there was." (Simmons 2003b, original bold).

(1998), *Mountain of Black Glass* (1999), *Sea of Silver Light* (2001), "The Happiest Dead Boy in the World" (2003) and "The Boy Detective of Oz: An Otherland Story" (2013). Williams is primarily known for his fantasy fiction—his *Memory, Sorrow, and Thorn* trilogy[147] inspired George R R Martin to write *A Song of Ice and Fire*[148]—who has been so profoundly influenced by the works of J R R Tolkien that he has been occasionally dubbed 'the American Tolkien' (Silverlock 2011, T Williams 2012a, Kaszor 2014). His SF is no less ambitious and, particularly in Germany,[149] no less well received. The *Otherland* series is set in a near-future world where virtual reality (VR) is the norm and revolves around a highly-secure, hyper-realistic VR network known as the Otherland network. This network is made up of hundreds of different 'simworlds', some of which are completely new constructs (a world of flying people, a cartoon world set in a kitchen)[150] but most of which are based on existing fictional universes, most often classic works of literature including but most certainly not limited to Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*, H G Wells' *The War of the Worlds*, Coleridge's "Kubla Khan" and, of course, Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. Williams' self-confessed love of old stories (T Williams 2001b) leads to the creation of

> an epic in every sense of the word, and in some senses… a meta-epic, as other previously established epics such as the Odyssey and the Lord of the Rings are folded into the mix. (Morsi 2012)

The story of the main tetralogy follows a diverse group of characters trapped in the Otherland network as they flee their pursuers through the simworlds: among others, we have Paul Jonas, an English museum assistant with memory problems, Orlando Gardiner and Salome 'Sam' Fredericks, two young American teenagers, Irene 'Renie' Sulaweyo and !Xabbu, a Bushman, from Johannesburg, and

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[147] *The Dragonbone Chair* (1989), *Stone of Farewell* (1990), *To Green Angel Tower* (1993). More recently, Williams has published a stand-alone novel set just after the events of the trilogy, *The Heart of What Was Lost* (2017), and has begun a sequel trilogy, *The Last King of Osten Ard*, the first volume of which is titled *The Witchwood Crown* (2017).

[148] Silverlock (2011), Kaszor (2014).

[149] The German publishing house, Klett-Cotta, that published the *Otherland* series is one "primarily… known for literary fiction, for philosophy, for history, for some fairly academic high-end stuff", resulting in the books being considered not just as SF, but as literary fiction: "I quickly became more culturally significant than I had been up to that point in the States or England" (T Williams 2012b).

[150] "You've heard the joke, 'They threw in everything but the kitchen sink', well, I took that one step further and in *Otherland*: I **did** throw in the kitchen sink, and an entire kitchen world to go with it." (T Williams 2010a)

Martine Desroubins, a blind Frenchwoman. Many of the simworlds based on previous literary works are dark, twisted versions of their original narratives—the simworld based on Frank L Baum's *The Wizard of Oz* is a particularly memorable example of this—that have thoroughly diverged from their origins, and the path that our heroes take through them has no real relation to the plot of the originals.

The Homeric simworld, however, is different. We are first introduced to this simworld at the end of *River of Blue Fire*, when Paul Jonas, who has been wandering alone through simworlds for the past two books trying to make his way to the Trojan War simulation, washes up on the shores of Ithaca and is welcomed by a woman who claims that he is her "long-lost husband" (634). He thus takes on the role of Odysseus. Throughout the preceding story, Paul has wandered the simworlds looking like himself – but in this Homeric simworld for the first time, he is given a 'sim', a virtual projection that makes him look like someone else. In this case, as he takes on Odysseus' role in the story, so he takes on his sim. Paul arrives here at the end of Odysseus' tale, returning to Ithaca at the end of the *Odyssey* – but returning is not what Paul is here to do. He takes to the sea to travel to Troy, eschewing Odysseus' narrative in favour of his own – but Odysseus' narrative is apparently not happy to be left behind. In the first half of *Mountain of Black Glass*, Paul experiences the *Odyssey* in reverse: he leaves Ithaca, washes up on the shores of Calypso's island, gets caught in Charybdis' whirlpool while trying to escape Scylla, escapes the Cyclops and the Lotus-Eaters and eventually manages to return to Troy where, due to the cyclical nature of the simulations, the Trojan War is still on-going and he is whisked away, as Odysseus, to join the embassy to Achilles. He is forced to follow the story of his literary predecessor before he can accomplish his own goals, perhaps because the Odyssean nature of his overall storyline suggests his kinship to the character: wandering through worlds that he has no control over, pursued by powerful external forces and buffeted from danger to danger. Furthermore, at several points in the text he demonstrates the kind of cunning that Odysseus is known for. With Hector pushing right up to the Greeks' defensive wall, Paul is standing with Agamemnon, who comments on Hector's ferocity and how it must be impossible to defeat him in single combat:

> "Then we shouldn't fight him one to one," Paul said. … "We should drop a rock on him or something."
>
> Agamemnon looked at him oddly, and at first Paul thought he was going to be denounced for insufficient nobility. Instead, the high king said, "You are indeed the cleverest of the Greeks, resourceful Odysseus. Go and find Ajax and tell him to come to me."
>
> (*Mountain of Black Glass* 530-1)

Paul fetches Ajax who fetches a stone the size of a small car (533) and drops it on Hector's head. He is stunned, though not killed, and the day turns in favour of the Greeks.[151] Paul's similarities to Odysseus are also explicitly pointed out when he meets Renie and her companions:

> "You really are Odysseus," [Renie] said aloud at one point.
>
> [Paul] looked up, startled. "What do you mean?"
>
> "Just…" She was embarrassed she had spoken the thought aloud. "Just what you've been through. Lost and trying to find your way home through strange lands, persecuted by the powers-that-be…" She waved her hand, encompassing not just the battlefield but the whole of the network. "It's like you've become the character who's the most like you." (*Mountain of Black Glass* 577)

However, as the Homeric simworld is only one of many worlds in the Otherland network, it might be more rightly said that it is *Odysseus* who has become *Paul*.

In fact, all of the characters who enter the Trojan War simulation are given 'sims' much as Paul is, effectively clothing them in the persona of whichever character they have been assigned. Some, such as Renie and !Xabbu, are merely nameless soldiers, but others have more pointed identities. Martine Desroubins, for instance, whose real-world blindness has led to an increased sensitivity to the Otherland network, giving her almost prophetic qualities, becomes Cassandra. Further, Orlando and Sam, who the reader first encounters as they play a *The Lord of the Rings*-esque Otherland MMORPG

[151] Ajax does in fact throw a rock at Hector at *Il.*7.268-72.

named 'the Middle Country',[152] become respectively Achilles and Patroclus. Martine's similarities to her assigned character are fairly superficial, but Orlando and Sam present a more interesting case.

Orlando is uniquely suited to taking on the role of Achilles, perhaps even more so than Paul is to that of Odysseus. His sim in the Middle Country simulation is a tall, muscled barbarian warrior, and he is in fact the game's top player: fitting pedigree for an Achilles. However, it is not only his prowess in (virtual) battle that makes Orlando perfect for this role. Orlando's physical body is afflicted by progeria, the premature aging disease: he is thirteen years old but is dying of old age. From the moment the reader finds out about his progeria, it is a constant presence: he is physically weak, sometimes confused, sometimes unable to walk or even stand. It also ensures that Orlando acts just as Achilles did in the *Iliad*, staying in his tent, staying away from battle, but this time because, due to the progress of his real-world illness, he simply cannot muster the strength to get to his feet and fight. Orlando is thus is constantly aware of his own impending mortality – which draws an interesting parallel with Achilles himself. Thetis prophesies Achilles' death at Troy (*Il.*9.412-6), meaning that his presence in the *Iliad* is always intimately linked to his death – a different death to that which awaits Orlando, of course, but a death nonetheless.[153] The two characters are so closely linked that it becomes unthinkable that anyone else could ever be Achilles.

Sam, Orlando's friend, is perhaps a less natural Patroclus, and the choice of this role for her is more as a result of her closeness to Orlando than any natural Patroclean features. However despite this she is perhaps the character who follows her Homeric role more closely than any other, even Paul Jonas. While Orlando remains weak and powerless inside Achilles' tent, Sam-as-Patroclus watches the slaughter happening on the plain of Troy and reflects on what it means to be a hero:

> But one thing in particular that had stuck with her, and which she knew was as important to Orlando as anything else in the book [*The Lord of the Rings*], was what it meant to be a hero. He always talked

[152] A nod to *The Lord of the Rings*' Middle Earth, and perhaps also the Midlands of Terry Goodkind's *The Sword of Truth* series, beginning with *Wizard's First Rule* (1994).

[153] Further discussed in Chapter 5: Sense of Wonder (pg.208-211).

> about how the real heroes weren't like Bulk U Six in *Boyz Go 2 Hell* or one of those kind of things—not just people who could slaughter everyone else and make clever comments while they were doing it. Real heroes were like the characters in that man Tolkien's story, who did what they had to even if they hated it, even if it took their own lives away from them. (*Mountain of Black Glass* 546)

This is a nod to a famous passage from *The Lord of the Rings*:

> The brave things in the old tales and songs, Mr. Frodo: adventures, as I used to call them. I used to think that they were things the wonderful folk of the stories went out and looked for, because they wanted them, because they were exciting and life was a bit dull, a kind of a sport, as you might say. But that's not the way of it with the tales that really mattered, or the ones that stay in the mind. Folk seem to have been just landed in them, usually – their paths were laid that way, as you put it. But I expect they had lots of chances, like us, of turning back, only they didn't. And if they had, we shouldn't know, because they'd have been forgotten. We hear about those as just went on – and not all to a good end, mind you; at least not to what folk inside a story and not outside it call a good end.
> (696)

This is Samwise Gamgee speaking to Frodo Baggins: the implications of one Sam referring to another are surely not unintentional. As a result of her musings in *Mountain of Black Glass*, Sam decides to do exactly what Patroclus does in the *Iliad*, even if she is unaware of the fact that that is what she is doing: don Achilles' armour, lead the Myrmidons out to fight, and turn the tide of battle. She does not do so because she particularly wants the Achaeans to win; instead, it is because she cannot stand to watch the suffering continue and do nothing. Much as Patroclus did in the *Iliad*, she comes face to face with Hector and cannot stand against him – but her Patroclean end is averted, because Orlando wakes from his sleep to find her gone and realises what she has done. He saves her, kills Hector more by chance than design, and inadvertently brings about the fall of Troy.

Neither Orlando-as-Achilles nor Sam-as-Patroclus intends to complete the *Iliad* story that has been laid out for them and, unlike Paul, who has had a classical education and is constantly aware that he is

reliving Odysseus' adventures, neither of them has much prior knowledge of the Homeric poem to go on. The *Iliad* plays out almost as an accident of their characters, as a result of Orlando's progeria and Sam's Tolkienesque literary ancestry, so that we might say that, much as Odysseus becomes Paul more than Paul becomes Odysseus, so the plot of the *Iliad* is subsumed into the plot of the *Otherland* series more than the *Otherland* series follows the plot of the *Iliad*. This is shown particularly in Martine Desroubins' transformation into Cassandra: her role is an important one in the *Otherland* series and Cassandra is a particularly apt sim for her to adopt, but Cassandra herself is a minor character in the *Iliad*[154] and is thus afforded far more prominence in Williams' novels through her association with Martine. The story of the *Iliad* is admittedly not adhered to obsessively, as is shown, for instance, by Sam-as-Patroclus avoiding death at Hector's hand, but the centripetal direction of the storytelling is clear: instead of diverging from the path that Homer set out, Williams' story incorporates that path into itself, making its characters take on their Homeric roles as a way of getting to their SF futures.

The centrifugal urge in SF adaptations of the Homeric poems is perhaps a natural one. To boldly go where no one has gone before is one of SF's central tenets, and, when it comes to the *Odyssey*, it can only help that there is in fact a pre-existing literary tradition wherein Odysseus upped sticks and left Ithaca after the end of the poem. Centripetal urges are a little more difficult to explain, but in both of the cases discussed—Williams' *Otherland* series, and parts of Simmons' *Ilium* and *Olympos*—centripetality seems to be linked to literary history: on one hand the re-engendering of Fagles' translation of the *Iliad* and the fruitless attempts of a twentieth century scholar to change the future, on the other the storylines of characters who are both closely linked with previous literary characters (Orlando and Achilles, Sam and Sam) and travelling through a virtual recreation of specifically Homer's world. The other texts discussed—*Dies Irae*, *Spin the Sky*, *Space Chantey*—for the most part lack that kind of direct literariness, suggesting that centripetality is most natural in the most self-reflexive, self-aware of texts.

[154] She only appears once in person (24.699), although she is also mentioned in Book 13.

Where Do We Go From Here?: Dramatising the Process of Reception.

Literary self-awareness is certainly a prerequisite for the second half of this chapter. As has been shown, many SF adaptations of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* do what they do with a healthy degree of self-awareness: this can manifest in many different ways, from the off-hand comments of 'someone doing this before' that we find in *Space Chantey* to the scholarly main character of *Ilium* and *Olympos*, scrutinising every plot decision through the magnifying glass of a university professor. However, these texts can (and do) go further. The process of what happens when we do reception is foregrounded in the texts that will be discussed here, often via an SF trope such as time travel or the multiverse – and often these dramatisations echo theories and concepts of reception scholarship itself.

Again, a good place to start is Stableford's *Dies Irae* trilogy. At the end of *Day of Wrath*, the final book in the trilogy, the Odysseus-figure Mark Chaos is plucked out of danger by the vast consciousness of a living galaxy known as Planet Despair that he previously encountered at the end of *In the Kingdom of the Beasts*. Planet Despair then gives him a choice. It shows him two possible futures, each offered by a godlike time traveller: Heljanita, mentioned previously, and Darkscar, who has come back in time to try to stop Heljanita destroying everything Darkscar has created.[155] Planet Despair allows Chaos to not just ponder this in an abstract, detached way, but rather to actually *see* the realities which could unfold or not unfold, depending on what choice he makes:

> I watched the last ten years and the next ten years a hundred times over, with occasional fragments of times far beyond that range. I saw things which happened and things which never could have happened. (150)

[155] Hall (2008a) sees the time travel element of the *Dies Irae* series as a parallel for "the narrative complexity of the *Odyssey*, and the games it plays with linear time" (86). I am unconvinced: the novels are almost pure pulp, and time travel is a staple of pulp.

These possibilities are told over the course of several pages (150-53).[156] Chaos tells about different versions of incidents that the reader has witnessed over the course of the trilogy—the battle of Karnak, where Saul Slavesdream (Patroclus) came to the aid of the Beasts; the suicide of Robert Hornwing (Ajax), and the consequences that could have had; Chaos' own death, a hundred hundred times—and all of these variations are given equal footing: each one could have happened in the past, and, because of the control that Chaos currently has over the Time Wave, the force that will allow him to make his choice, each one still could in the future. That is the choice that Chaos is given, between two pre-determined futures – but, in the end, he refuses. He chooses neither future, neither side, rather:

> "I did the only thing I could, made the only meaningful choice, and I chose the universe which could work. I told Adam December to put things back exactly as they were in the instant that time went mad. …
>
> "Everything is as it was. The universe goes on from where it stopped.
>
> "It can work out its own future."
>
> "And is that your idea of an ending?" asked Planet Despair. "Is that your concept of creation?"
>
> "There is never an ending," I replied. "And there can never be a new creation. There is only change." (155-6)

Chaos chooses to let the universe write its own story, not to put an artificial end to a tale that can and should never end.

S C Fredericks persuasively interprets this as Chaos "[reasserting] the primacy of the human dimension over the cosmic" (89); it is equally possible to see that here reception is being envisaged as a process that allows the (re)creator to choose a third path, to pick their way between the pre-existing interpretations that have already been laid down and choose their own option. However, at the same

[156] All of these multiple worlds recall not just the multiverse theory that is so prevalent in SF, but also the notion of a multiform text that has caused so much debate in classical studies (cf. pg.153, n.192). This will be discussed further in association with the SF idea of the 'megatext' in Chapter 4: Megatext.

time that new path must always be based on what has come before, because, as Chaos says, "there can never be a new creation… only change". That said, there is a very specific reason within the text that Mark Chaos is the one given this choice. Chaos is in fact not real: he was created by Heljanita as a way to help him win his war, and as a result he is without memory or indeed real character. As Planet Despair explains, this is why he is the one who has been chosen to decide the fate of the future:

> You are a synthetic man; a man born without preconception and without the prejudices of childhood. You are a cold, dispassionate man. You are an empty man. You are the only man who has been able to see the truth for what it is, without the distortion of an identity shaped by personal history. You were always the only man who could choose when the time came. (142)

Mark Chaos is without prejudice, without external bias, but this is as a result of being without character or personality or history at all. He is, in fact, in a concept of reception grounded in aesthetics, the ideal receiver of a text. For Charles Martindale's aesthetic criticism that aims to "isolate the 'virtue'… of each artwork" (2004: 171) by "set[ting] aside purely personal interests in making the judgement of taste" (2010: 79), Mark Chaos is perfect, a figure wholly without bias or self-interest who can be trusted, in *Day of Wrath*, to find the 'virtue' in the choice laid out before him and choose the best solution. However, Mark Chaos is also very much a fiction of SF, where artificial consciousnesses are ten a penny. It is not possible in the real world to create someone from scratch: every real reader is always inescapably historically situated, always trapped within that famous "chain of receptions", and to believe otherwise is at best unwise.

Dies Irae thus provides a dispassionate, detached avatar for the reader of an adapted text, but this is an avatar that could only exist in an SF universe. This focus on the individual through whom the reader experiences the text—and indeed the act of reception—is also present in Simmons' *Ilium* and *Olympos* in the figure of Hockenberry. As previously discussed, Hockenberry is a reincarnated Homeric scholar who spends his days on the battlefield at Troy keeping slavish track of the course of the war that unfolds around him: he records his observations onto a "word stone" (36), hands them

over to the Muse, the terrifying overseer of his entire life in this new version of the Trojan War, then does the same thing the next day, and the next, and the next. It is never really explained why the posthuman gods are so interested in how this second Trojan War maps out, but Hockenberry keeps on going, nonetheless, trudging through the life that he has found himself living, narrating his thoughts and adventures to the reader in his subjective first person narrative. It is the *way* in which he examines the world around him, however, that is so interesting. Consider, for example, his initial description of Achilles in *Ilium*:

> Stronger, younger, even more beautiful than Agamemnon, Achilles almost defies description. When I first saw him at the Catalogue of the Ships more than nine years ago, I thought that Achilles had to be the most godlike human walking among these many godlike men, so imposing was the man's physical and command presence. Since then I've realized that for all his beauty and power, Achilles is relatively stupid—a sort of infinitely more handsome Arnold Schwarzenegger. (11)

The description starts out as we might expect, praising Achilles and lauding his extreme beauty and physicality. Further, it neatly interacts with Homeric scholarship in its relocating of the Catalogue of the Ships, reshaping the course of the Trojan War to fit a more realistic war, rather than the stylised conflict shown in the *Iliad*.[157] Then the reality of Hockenberry's long trudge sets in, however, and instead it is revealed that Achilles is actually more of a mindless bodybuilder.[158] The juxtaposition of "Achilles" and "Arnold Schwarzenegger" brings two times crashing into one another, altering the reader's perspective of an ancient character by the intrusion of such a modern reference. This is a technique that Simmons makes use of repeatedly throughout the novels, as, for instance, when Hockenberry diagnoses the plague that afflicts the Achaeans as typhus ("I suspect it is typhus. The Greeks are sure it is the anger of Apollo.": 3) or when he describes the Muse's voice as "more klaxon

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[157] Cf. Rood (2011). The relocation of various elements of the Homeric text to better fit a realistic war is explicitly discussed in the novel; cf. pg.175-176.

[158] *Ilium* was written and published before Schwarzenegger's stint as Governor of California, which may well have changed the comparison Simmons chose to use. Then again, as a political statement the description could perhaps work both ways. This Schwarzenegger comparison—and indeed the typhus reference—is further discussed in Chapter 6: Cognitive Estrangement (pg.239).

than calliope to my ear" (38),[159] each time stressing the personal nature of his opinion (the "I" juxtaposed with "The Greeks"; "to my ear"). By affording Hockenberry a first person narration that forces the reader to take his perspective, the novel dramatises the reception principle that traces back to T S Eliot (1921; cf. Martindale 2007: 298) that

> the past should be altered by the present as much as the present is directed by the past
>
> (4)

Hockenberry is the present, directed by the past in that he is forced to mindlessly track the progress of the Trojan War – but he is simultaneously the present, altering the past in that his first person perspective changes the way the reader looks at the ancient text. However, as discussed above, Hockenberry does not end up merely watching the way things turn out: he gets stuck into the mix, trying to change things even if the change ends up occurring quite separate to his interference. He is the new text, the modern reception, going back and altering (or trying to alter) the old.

Vincent Tomasso (2013) has analysed this as a manoeuvre expressed through technology and at least in part it is, but, on a deeper level, it is not just the technological trappings of SF that are being used to alter the reader's perspective on the text, and indeed the text itself. In fact, the technological trappings of the novel seem to *support* the older narrative. When Diomedes enters his *aristeia*, for instance, Hockenberry describes him thus:

> Now with my enhanced vision—enhanced by the contact lenses from the gods—I can see Athena across the milling no-man's-land of lances, preparing Tydeus' son, Diomedes, as a killing machine. I mean this almost literally. Like the gods themselves, and like me, Diomedes the man will now be part machine, his eyes and skin and very blood enhanced by nanotechnologies from some future age far beyond my short life span… Homer had written that Athena had "set the man ablaze,"[160] and now I understand the metaphor; using the nanotechnology embedded in her palm and forearm, Athena is

[159] Complete with satisfying pun on the name of the Muse of epic poetry, Calliope.
[160] *Il.*5.4-8.

> busy turning the neglible, latent electromagnetic field around Diomedes' body into a serious forcefield. (98-99)

The advanced SF technology is here used to explain the marvellous happenings of the Iliadic Trojan War in 'real' terms[161] rather than to change the course of the future narrative. Changing the course of the narrative is a harder task, one that is accomplished by the interpenetration of the new and the old rather than anything as straightforward as slapping the trappings of SF on top of the narrative of the *Iliad*.

In this reading, then, Hockenberry and his modern perspective act as the new text that, by getting involved with and interacting with the old (the story of the Trojan War), manages to change it. It is thus interesting that Hockenberry is explicitly and repeatedly characterised as a scholar, as an academic: he tells the reader as much himself, repeatedly mentioning the students he used to teach (37-8, 78-9). Aphrodite even reminds him (perhaps a little satirically) about the book he wrote in his previous life:

> "Your book ran to 935 pages and it was all about one word—*Menin*—do you remember now?" (47)

Arnaud Laimé (2014) goes further and analyses him as a satire of the twentieth century university professor:

> au langage un peu leste, faisant preuve d'une certaine xénophobie, pétri de culture télévisuelle, à l'humour teinté de légères traces de philistinisme (lassé qu'il est des noms à rallonge des Grecs) (127)

[161] This will be discussed further in Chapter 6: Cognitive Estrangement.

So is it significant that the character who tries to change the ancient text is an academic? In this reading, he can perhaps act as a metaphor for the modern scholar, a warning not to try to impose your own preconceptions on a text, to be aware of what you are bringing to an analysis, of your own horizon of expectations. It is quite a striking reminder of the importance of self-aware scholarship. Laimé also argues for Hockenberry as a blank, detached observer on the events of the Trojan War (133) because of his avowed apathy towards getting to finally witness pivotal moments in the *Iliad*, such as the initial quarrel between Agamemnon and Achilles:

> Will Athena actually appear to stop him, or was she just a metaphor for Achilles' common sense kicking in? I've waited my entire life to answer such a question and the answer is only minutes away, but, strangely, irrevocably… I… don't … give… a… shit. (4)

However, on this point at least, Hockenberry cannot be said to be a reliable narrator. He clearly *does* 'give a shit',[162] as his every subsequent action in the novel demonstrates, from sleeping with Helen of Troy to mourning for Astyanax, apparently slaughtered by his own mother. He cannot be the detached (aesthetic) scholar because he cares. The lesson here, to put it in such reductive terms, is one of self-reflection. An individual can alter a text, but they have to careful when they do so.

The individual as a metaphor for a process of reception—Hockenberry-as-text—is something that can also be seen in two novellas by John C Wright, "The Far End of History" and "The Plural of Helen of Troy". "The Far End of History" features Ulysses and Penelope as sentient planetoids, as discussed in Chapter 2: Genre,[163] but as the novella progresses the classical identities are revealed to be mere disguises for two characters from Wright's *The Golden Oecumene* series, namely Atkins (Ulysses) and Ao Ahasuerus (Penelope). They are representatives of two races that have been at war with one another for millennia, and they are the *last* representatives of those races: the war finished hundreds of years ago, but Atkins and Ao Ahasuerus have been in deep cover for all that time, lying in wait for

[162] This phrase is further discussed at pg.205.
[163] Pg.63-66.

one another. It is in the question of how both have been able to survive this long that the interest lies. Atkins is a copy of a copy of a copy of a general named Atkins who died long ago, as did his entire world, whereas Ao Ahasuerus is from a race that is eternally preoccupied with immortality, with preserving who they originally were and never changing a thing. They are both effectively immortal, yes, as Atkins' consciousness is continuously repeated in its identical form down the ages, but they are both static, unchanging – as are their attitudes towards the war that they have been tasked with winning. Alexandra Lianeri and Vanda Zajko (2008) write:

> We should perhaps be less fearful that the texts we value will not endure even if, in their future manifestations, we ourselves might not recognise them. (21)

Atkins and Ao Ahasuerus in "The Far End of History" are examples of what will happen if we give into that fear, caught irrevocably in the memory of how they used to be. Furthermore, if these two characters are read as metaphors for texts, the reception analogy becomes clearer: they both represent ways of preserving the text, one focusing more on the text as it originally was (Ao Ahasuerus), while the other takes the line that a text created once again from the same digital blueprint can be exactly the same (Atkins). However, as the novella progresses they both begin to realise that their way is not the right way: Ao Ahasuerus turns out not in fact to be an original, rather a copy; and Atkins eventually begins to realise that perhaps creating from a digital blueprint is not the same as preserving the original:

> "How could you burn your own home? Our common home?"
>
> "It is just an object made of matter. We have a digital copy. I can build another one."
>
> "And will you?"
>
> It was at that instant that Atkins saw what the Swan was saying, but it was many minutes, perhaps even years, before he agreed. (541)

Eventually, they commit mutual suicide – and from their ashes arise once more, quite unexpectedly, Ulysses and Penelope. Implicitly it is their method of continuation that is the preferred one:

> [Refugees] were shown whatever local version of Earth was made for the nearest star, for Penelope loved creating and re-creating Old Earth, a task she delighted in, since it was an endless task.
>
> (543)

Penelope—who 'does' reception rather than 'is' reception—'recreates' 'local versions' of Earth. She doesn't obsessively create the same thing over and over again, nor does she strive to keep everything the same as it always was; she adapts the original pattern to its current circumstance. It is thus interesting that this description seems to echo the Penelope of the *Odyssey*, continuously weaving and reweaving the same shroud to elude the suitors' advances (*Od*.2.96-110): in the ancient version, it is implicitly the same shroud that she is reweaving, but here her weaving expands outwards, abandoning the traditionally-female handcraft that Homer's Penelope is allowed in favour of acts of supreme creation. This is a model of reception based on adaptation and change, not stagnant staticism – and, in "The Far End of History", hers is the one that survives.

There is another character in "The Far End of History" who can be read as a metaphor for reception, and that is Ulysses himself. Throughout the novella, the story of these two lovers and their concealed inner depths is not told in a straightforward way, but is instead polyphonically pieced together from other people's accounts at a later date. This idea is first raised in the prologue:

> *This tale is among the ones we recite, reconstruct, and, from time to time, revive.* (502)

'Recite', 'reconstruct', 'revive': all 're—' words that would fit in rather well with the 're—' terminology discussed in the introduction to this chapter. Their story is further pieced together by references dotted throughout the text to other versions of this story that have happened before. For example, when Ulysses first addresses Penelope:

> Let us take the opening lines from Ao Aerolith Wolfemind One-Nine's famous sonnet-cycle on the topic (513)

And when Ulysses blushes under Penelope's gaze:

> let us imagine (as Alexander Scriabin, Hypothetical Revenant, imagined in his composition for color-clavier "The Blush of Ulysses"), a burst of reddish gold in D major (514)

Alexander Scriabin was a real Russian composer from the late 19th and early 20th centuries (hence his description as a "Hypothetical Revenant"), who has here been resurrected by the Golden Oecumene from some kind of a digital template; the historical Scriabin had synaesthesia, here evoked by the linking of colour and sound in "a burst of reddish gold in D major".[164] Ao Aerolith Wolfemind One-Nine, on the other hand, is clearly fictional, but "Wolfemind" is perhaps intended to evoke another famous artist's name, namely Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart. The story of Ulysses and Penelope meeting is thus a polyphonic one, with different voices—some real, some fictional—coming together to tell a single story – but it is when we reach the final description of Ulysses that the theoretical potential is revealed.

> Modern copies of Ulysses have been so often self-altered to fit the popular conceptions of this culture hero as to be valueless to the serious paleopsychologist or dramaturge. He remembers only the public version of the story. (543)

Contemporary reception studies often reminds us that it is nigh-on impossible to actually get back to the 'original' version of the text. For instance, Martindale (1993) writes:

[164] There is a possibility that 'Scriabin' is also a nod to Stanisław Lem's *Solaris* (1961), where the name Scriabin is given as one of the previous Solarist researchers.

> The 'strong' thesis is that our current interpretations of ancient texts, whether or not we are aware of it, are, in complex ways, constructed by the chain of receptions through which their continued readability has been effected. As a result we cannot get back to any originary meaning wholly free of subsequent accretions. (7)

Wright's Ulysses is a literal example of this. He is not just a text, he is a person – but a person who has been copied (presumably in a variation of the process used to copy Atkins) and altered (adapted) so many times that he himself cannot remember what he used to be. Again, we see an SF trope (artificial intelligence that can be digital recreated/copied) being used to reflect a theoretical evaluation of classical reception (the chain of receptions) – but here there is a deeper poignancy at play, because we are not dealing here with a text, however valuable that text might be. We are dealing with a person, a person that the reader has seen fall in love and get a second chance at life. In the hands of an SF writer, theory can seemingly become a little less dry.

For his next trick, namely "The Plural of Helen of Troy",[165] Wright moves from artificial intelligence to time travel. "The Plural of Helen of Troy" tells the story of a noir detective, Jake Frontino, plucked from the 1940s, who lives in Metachronopolis, a city outside time where characters from all periods of history mingle together freely. He is tasked by John F Kennedy with saving "One of the Helens of Troy. Helen of Troys?"—who is also Marilyn Monroe—from an unknown attacker; this assailant turns out to be JFK himself, albeit a future version. The story is told in reverse, starting with the 'Afterword' and proceeding through to the 'Prologue to a New Beginning', which certainly doesn't help with understanding the complex narrative: "convoluted" is a common word in reviews.[166] The gender politics of the novella are also a little dated: the narrator is "pretty sexist" (Buis 2015), and the presentation of Helen is unimaginative at best:[167]

[165] "The Plural of Helen of Troy" is available solely as an ebook without pagination, so quotations throughout the thesis will be without page numbers.
[166] Buis (2015), 'H.P.' (2015).
[167] Cf. 'Adult Onset Atheist' (2015), 'Arcane Gazebo' (2015).

> Helen, who is Marilyn, who is Everywoman, and who is an eternal object of man's desire, never a person in her own right, who is used and deceived and betrayed and passed from man to man
>
> (MacLeod 2015)

However, it is Helen as "an eternal object of man's desire" that is relevant here. Helen of Troy is, of course, notorious for her beauty: she is the face that launched a thousand ships, she is a dangerous beauty (Blondell 2009), she is beauty that invokes nostalgia and reverence (Maguire 2009: 78-92).[168] Her beauty is also stressed in "The Plural of Helen of Troy", occasionally by allusion to other writers; for instance, the narrator quotes "Kit Marlowe" – a double allusion, in fact, both to the Elizabethan playwright and Raymond Chandler's noir detective, Philip Marlowe.[169] This is how she is first introduced, before the reader even knows her name:

> the window held a beautiful girl, no, it held the beautiful girl, the most beautiful girl in history, the girl they called the Mistress of the Masters of Time

She repeatedly "mesmerize[s]" the men who gaze at her, and the narrator will not let her stay with him for fear of his own response to her. We later learn that her presence in Metachronopolis—and indeed, in history—is explicitly due to her extreme beauty:

> I thought everyone in Metachronopolis had heard the story. The Time Warden Ceuthonymus drew the film actress Elizabeth Taylor back in time and created an alternate history where she was Cleopatra, the Egyptian queen. It was a joke. So, to top him, the Warden Menoetius drew Marilyn Monroe into a timeline where she was Helen of Troy. And she proved to be a prettier Helen than the original, so other Time Wardens made copies of the time line. Then the Wardens got bored, as they do, and

[168] An SF short story by Lester Del Ray, "Helen O'Loy" (first published 1938), stresses the same point: Helen O'Loy (a shortened form of Helen of Alloy, a pun on Helen of Troy) is a robot, constructed to be as human as possible, who is introduced as "beautiful, a dream in spun plastics and metals, something Keats might have seen dimly when he wrote his sonnet" (1963: 49); she exists solely as a love interest for one of the male characters.
[169] E.g. *The Big Sleep* (1939).

> Marilyn was sent to do waitress and hostess jobs, or dime-a-dance gigs. Or worse. After I was [] scooped up by the Warden Iapetus,[170] he gave me one as a spare.

The speaker is John F Kennedy, whose historical affair with Marilyn Monroe is here evoked by the "spare" copy of Marilyn-Helen that he is given by one of the Time Wardens. The reason that Marilyn-Helen is so famous, the reason that she is so 'plural' in Metachronopolis—the reader meets at least six versions of her[171]—is because of her beauty: that is the reason that she is worth recreating.

The echoes of Martindale's (2004, 2010) interpretation of aesthetics, a conception of reading that focuses on the virtue and beauty of an object as a way of assessing its value, a clear. In "The Plural of Helen of Troy", Marilyn Monroe and Helen of Troy have been collapsed into one another via time travel because of their beauty; S A Brown (2008) has in fact noted that time travel gives an edge to SF's engagement with Classics.[172] This SF trope thus allows the collapsing of 1950s film star into prehistoric damsel in distress – and then the resulting Marilyn-Helen is copied, recreated, received—by JFK, quite literally—because of her aesthetic qualities. However, this is not a particularly positive process. She has become effectively immortal, yes, but she is also abused and disallowed autonomy over her own body, merely becoming a "spare" to be given to whoever is next deserving of reward. Jake rescues her from that fate and sends her on to the only person he thinks will be able to live with her without succumbing to her tempting beauty – namely "Old Homer", who "lives directly below [Jake], off the waste chute in the hall" and whose blindness makes him a safe pair of hands. Helen is thus a living, breathing example of a reception aesthetic based in beauty,[173] but we should perhaps not read too much into the demonisation of what happens to her: the unsubtle characterisation of the Time Wardens as greedy, immoral, selfish overlords is an important part of the novella and indeed the collection it appears in. However, it does hint at the possibility of reception as a destructive act as well as a creative one, an act that is performed solely for the benefit of the receiver: this is not a problem

[170] The Time Wardens are all named after Titans of varying levels of obscurity: Iapetus is the father of Prometheus, Menoetius is his brother, and Ceuthonymus may be another name for Iapetus. This is probably intended to suggest power, influence, and historical weight.
[171] Interestingly, cf. Naddaff (2010: 73) on the plural Helens of antiquity.
[172] Cf. Wittenberg (2013); Jones & Ormrod (2015).
[173] This will be discussed further in Chapter 5: Sense of Wonder (pg.212-217).

when dealing with a text because a text cannot feel pain or suffering – but the Marilyn-Helen of "The Plural of Helen of Troy" can.

It should be here mentioned that Helen is not the only Homeric figure to appear in "The Plural of Helen of Troy": as mentioned above, so does Homer. He is a blind old poet, living downstairs from Jake Frontino, who gets free drinks for singing stories about "a guy named Demodocus" and Little John saving Helen of Troy from Paris. However, Wright's Homer is not merely the figure from antiquity: he is also Homer Simpson. The main way that this is shown is through the character's love of doughnuts, one of Homer Simpson's defining characteristics:

> "You can stay will my pal, Homer. He likes doughnuts and he'll like asking you questions about how the war in Troy turned out."

To a modern, non-classicist audience more versed in popular culture than high, the name 'Homer' arguably more readily conjures up the character from the long-running television show *The Simpsons* (1989—) than it does the oft-called founder of Western literature. Despite the fact that "his name has more to do with the genteel fashion for assuming Graeco-Roman names in *ante-bellum* America than with any direct engagement with Homer epic" (Graziosi & Greenwood 2007: 7), Wright has here chosen to play off the 'horizon of expectations' of his readers,[174] combining the two Homers into a single background character who is immediately recognisable as simultaneously Homer and Homer Simpson to anyone who cares to look. There are thus multiple parallels for reception in "The Plural of Helen of Troy", perhaps appropriately, considering the multiple Helens of the title, drawing on both the horizon of expectation and more aesthetic conceptions of the reading process.

The final texts that this chapter will discuss are a selection of *bandes dessinées* (BDs), French-language comics that enjoy a cultural standing in France and Belgium far beyond that traditionally

[174] Cf. Martindale (1993: 5).

allowed to those in English-speaking countries.[175] BDs are not the same as the typical American comic book (Vessels 2010: 19-20), and in fact they and their proponents can be remarkably resistant to non-Francophone comic forms such as the comic book and the Japanese manga (Grove 2010: 133-6; Vessels 2010: 15).[176] The texts under examination all share the same *scénariste*, Valérie Mangin, but feature three different *illustrateurs*: Thierry Démarez, Dean Yazghi, and (briefly) Aleksa Gajic. *Le Dernier Troyen* (2004—2008), by Mangin and Démarez, tells the story of Aeneas' flight from Troy over the course of six volumes in a far-flung, SF future, mixing the *Aeneid* liberally with the *Odyssey*.[177] Ulysse—Odysseus—is a central character in *Le Dernier Troyen*, and it is through his relationship with Énée—Aeneas—that the BD explores ideas of reception and adaptation. *La Guerre des Dieux*, on the other hand, was begun by Mangin and Yazghi in 2004, but only a single volume of the planned six, *De Bruit et de Fureur*, was published. It is the beginnings of an adaptation of the *Iliad* but the pages of *De Bruit et de Fureur* only show traces of its SF roots, initially seeming more like straightforward historical fantasy. Both BDs are part of a wider series written by Mangin and illustrated by a number of different *illustrateurs* named *Les Chroniques de l'Antiquité Galactique*; *Le Fléau des Dieux*, dealing with an SF Attila's battles against Rome, is the other major album in the series.

Despite its brevity, however, there is a fleeting moment in *De Bruit et de Fureur* that bears mentioning. In one of the volume's few SF traces, Zeus, while chastising the other gods for their suggestion that they interfere in the course of the war, reminds them of what happened to their last opponent: "Nous l'avons vaincu et jeté dans un trou noir!" (20.4). Aphrodite, drawn with a coy smile, corrects him: "Dis plutôt que nous l'avons précipité dans le Tartare, c'est tellement plus romantique." (20.5). A black hole ("un trou noir") is replaced by Tartarus ("le Tartare"), hinting that these Olympians are not quite as straightforward as their Homeric predecessors. What's more, in the next

[175] For a general introduction to the BD, see McQuillan (2005); for a history of the form, Miller (2007: 15-70). Grove (2010) discusses the typical structure of the BD (15-40; cf. Groensteen 2007, 2013, Labio 2013: 14-5 on the '48CC' format) while simultaneously discussing how hard it can be to define (298).
[176] For further bibliography, see Labio (2013: 35, n.5).
[177] Interestingly, Filippini, Gienat, Martens & Sadoul (1984) observe that "L'héros a été… l'élément indispensable à toute bonne bande dessinée" (205), perhaps suggesting that the classical heroes are a natural fit for this form.

panel Zeus mentions how all the gods changed their names and appearances “pour nous adapter à cette époque archaïque” (20.6). In this brief sequence of panels, it is clear that the text is reflecting on the issue of ‘adapting’ (“adapter”) an ancient text into an SF one – or, to be more precise, it is viewing the issue the other way around. The first time that the reader meets the gods in *De Bruit et de Fureur*, they are not the anthropomorphised deities that we are used to, rather they are superhuman blue-green figures who treat the slaughter of the Trojan War like a game to be won or lost. Aphrodite and Zeus are not commenting on adapting an ancient text into an SF one; they are commenting on adapting their SF forms into ones appropriate for the ancient world that they have found themselves in, another illustration of the idea of the ‘present’ text affecting the ‘past’ one via the typically SF mechanism of time travel. The unfinished (and, according to bedetheque.com, abandoned) status of *La Guerre des Dieux* leaves us with not much more to be said.

Le Dernier Troyen, however, is far richer. This BD studies the relationship between old and new text through the lens of the relationship between the *Odyssey* and the *Aeneid* – or, to be more accurate, the relationship between Ulysse and Énée. This is articulated most clearly in Volume 4: *Carthago*. Ulysse starts *Le Dernier Troyen* out as a villain, conquering Troy and sneering while he does so.[178] Over the course of the three previous volumes, Ulysse has lost all of his own people and ended up with Énée’s band of survivors, but Énée (quite rightly) still holds him responsible for the destruction of Troy and keeps him as a prisoner. In Volume 4, they reach the planet Carthago, where Énée is welcomed gladly by Queen Didon. As he does in *Aeneid* 2—3, Énée tells Didon stories of his adventures: this is shown by a series of panels depicting Énée’s adventures in a style akin to that of red-figure Greek vase painting (fig.16). The panels on this page are strikingly regular, in contrast with the rest of the BD: Démarez’ panels are more commonly of different sizes, whereas here each Greek-style panel is the same size and neatly aligned to the others. This, plus the art style that is different to that of the main text and the artificial border illustration on each panel, marks these images (and hence Énée’s stories)

[178] It was suggested to me by Tony Keen that this might potentially stem from the tragic depiction of Odysseus, where he is a more conniving, negative character than he is in the Homeric poems (e.g. Sophocles’ *Philoctetes*). Mangin (2012a) does talk about “En Grèce…, c’était la tradition de chaque autour d’improviser librement autour des canevas généraux de la guerre de Troie et des voyages des héros survivants” (v), suggesting that she is aware of alternate versions of the myths although she does not explicitly talk about the tragedians.

as separate from the rest of the BD's narrative. The separation is initially unsurprising, as this kind of flashback sequence is uncommon within the Trojan narrative of *Le Dernier Troyen*.

However, in the wider context of the BD it takes on another significance. The first panel on the following page shows Ulysse protesting at the stories Énée is telling: "Des Cyclopes, des planets jumelles… Peuh! Mais c'est à moi que tout cela est arrivé, pas à Énée!" (161.1). Ulysse vehemently denies that these are Énée's stories, instead asserting that they are his adventures that that Énée is 'copying' ("Ton fils pourrait quand même inventer ses propres aventures au lieu de *copier* les miennes, Anchise.", emphasis added: 161: 4). The two events that he singles out—the Cyclopes and the twin planets, namely Scylla and Charybdis—have indeed not been covered in the pages of *Le Dernier Troyen*, which up to this point has been focusing more on Énée's adventures than Ulysse's – and within the world of the text, where Énée and Ulysee are not exactly friends, it is entirely plausible that Ulysse is right and Énée is 'copying' his stories to make himself look good. The unusual structure of the page thus marks Énée's stories out as different from the 'truth' that is depicted in the rest of the text, implying that Ulysse is in fact correct.

If we then consider Ulysse as a representation of the *Odyssey* and Énée of the *Aeneid*, it is entirely justified that the former could accuse the latter of 'copying' (*copier*): the *Aeneid* famously borrows heavily from the *Odyssey*. This is expressed visually in figure 16: two of the five Greek panels show monsters that appear in both the *Odyssey* and the *Aeneid* (Scylla and Charybdis, the Cyclopes), and one monster that appear in both the *Aeneid* and Apollonius Rhodius' *Argonautica* (the harpies). Only two are monsters that the reader has actually seen Énée face (Medusa, the Lotus). Mangin has chosen to show her Énée as 'copying' other people's achievements, and the language she chooses is not insignificant. Copying ("copier") implies that what is copied is inferior, perhaps even substandard, that it is a mere shadow of the original text.

This initially seems to be something of a damning indictment of reception in general, the *Aeneid* in particular, and even the *scénariste* herself. However, the wider relationship between Ulysse and Énée

subverts that simplistic analysis. They start out as diametrically opposed enemies: in Volume 1: *Le Cheval de Troie*, Énée is a noble hero, Ulysse a scheming trickster, and even by Volume 4 Ulysse spends most of his time with a slave collar around his neck, mocked and humiliated by his captors, the Trojans. However, Ulysse does not hate his captors, far from it: he is repeatedly shown to be in love with Énée. Mangin received a complaint about this aspect of the BD, accusing her of making Ulysse mannered and "trop gay" (2012b: x). However, as she writes, "je n'allais pas céder à des pressions homophobes" (x).[179] Ulysse's love for Énée is the driving force behind his actions in both *Carthago* (ensuring that Énée moves on from Carthago and Didon) and *Au-delà du Styx* (undertaking a katabasis to rescue Énée from the Underworld). Ulysse saves Énée repeatedly, guiding him back to his true path when he could have easily let him fail. This adds another layer to the Ulysse-*Odyssey*/Énée-*Aeneid* dynamic: the second text might be pejoratively 'copying' the first, but the first text is nonetheless guiding the second, affecting the path it takes, and it does this with an affection that might be called love.

An added complexity occurs in *La Louve Romaine*, a six-page story attached to the back of the original solo printing of *Le Cheval de Troie*, written by Mangin but illustrated by both Démarez and Aleksa Gajic. This is a version of the story of Romulus and Remus, where Romulus is the son of Rhéa Silvia, Mars' priestess, but Rémus is in fact Jule, Énée's son, left in Rhéa Silvia's care while his father leaves Italy "pour suivre son vieil ennemi Ulysse" (5.2). Why does Énée do this? Why would he leave his beloved son to go after Ulysse, the man who, as *Le Dernier Troyen* has shown, began as an enemy but became a grudging ally? Did he begin to reciprocate Ulysse's feelings? Or did Ulysse revert to his old scheming ways and commit some grave crime against Énée and his people? The text offers no answer, but it makes clear that, in Mangin's universe, Ulysse and Énée are forever bound together – we might even say, as Martindale does, 'chained'. The relationship between them is one of dialogue and interaction, of one character yearning for another, of one character chasing after another when he leaves. It thus bears a striking resemblance to the 'erotics of reception' proposed by Joshua Billings

[179] Cf. Lefebvre (2013), Scapin & Soler (2015) on the real-world implications of *Le Dernier Troyen.* McKinney (2008: 3-24) argues that the BD has always been a political artform.

(2010), an understanding of reception as characterised by "the dialectic of absence and presence that antiquity cannot but evoke" (22), as "conditioned by a desire that makes the relation to the ancient past simultaneously an imperative and an impossibility" (22). Mangin (2013) herself seems to feel the gap between past and present implied by Billings' erotics very keenly:[180]

> je me suis rendue compte que je n'arriverais jamais à représenter l'histoire telle qu'elle s'est reéllement passée.

So in *Le Dernier Troyen* instead of representing what really happened, she represents it as SF instead, and via the freedom allowed to an SF narrative represents the interplay between texts rather than what the text actually was. The relationship sketched in the BD between Ulysse and Énée, between the *Odyssey* and the *Aeneid*, between the old text and the new is exactly that, one marked by desire and loss, by the flowing, dialectic relationship between two characters who are simultaneously old as the hills and right at the beginning of their new (textual) lives.

'Adaptation' is thus a broad but useful umbrella for grouping these texts. The two facets of SF adaptations of Homeric texts discussed in this chapter—centrifugality/petality; and the dramatisation of the process of reception—can in fact lead to some (generalising) conclusions. While centrifugality is perhaps the most common way of dealing with the Homeric narratives, centripetality certainly does appear, even in centrifugal texts, and could tentatively be seen as a marker of self-conscious literariness in the texts it characterises. Hockenberry, Orlando and Sam are key characters in this respect. It is also interesting that when dramatising processes of reception, this dramatisation so often seems to happen through the characterisation of individuals: Mark Chaos as the disinterested aesthetic observer; Hockenberry as the new text changing the old; Atkins and Ao Ahasuerus as models for how *not* to do reception and Ulysses as the chain of receptions; Helen as the aesthetic text; Ulysse and

[180] This is a sentiment she has repeated several times (cf. Scapin & Soler 2015: 73).

Énée as both their respective ancient poems and the dialectical, erotic relationship between old and new.[181] It is certainly more interesting to think about these issues by personifying them thus, but it also blurs the boundaries somewhat: when the Time Wardens abuse Marilyn-Helen, are we to read that as a smear on the name of aesthetics?; when Ulysse accuses Énée of 'copying' his stories, should we see that as an authorial opinion or merely a facet of his character? The questions are unanswerable, but ought to be considered nonetheless. Overall, the texts discussed offer a selection of remarkably productive reworkings of Homeric stories, characterised in particularly SF ways – and the parallels that have been drawn between these SF adaptations and various theories of classical reception in fact foreshadow the links between SF and classical theory that will be outlined in the following chapters.

While this chapter has analysed a large number of *Odyssey* adaptations, it has also featured a significant selection of *Iliad*s: namely the *Iliad* sequences of Tad Williams' *Otherland* series, and Dan Simmons' *Ilium* and *Olympos* duology. Is it significant that both of these texts have been shown to exhibit centripetal tendencies? Perhaps not: two series (however many novels they contain!) are not enough to indicate a trend. Suffice it to say that the self-awareness that has featured in *Odyssey*-adaptations this far in the thesis can also be seen to be present in *Iliad*-adaptations. The *Iliad* seems to be a less obviously attractive text for the SF adaptor, featuring as it does fewer fantastic voyages and more guts spilling out into the dust, but for those adaptors who choose to tackle it, it provides fertile soil.

[181] Cooper (2018) performs a similar manoeuvre, analysing the figure of the 'wub' in Philip K Dick's "Beyond Lies the Wub" as "SF as Classical Reception" (20).

4: Megatext.

The SF megatext is a concept initially developed by Damien Broderick in “Reading SF as a Mega-text” (1992), further elaborated in *Reading by Starlight* (1995); the idea simultaneously (albeit briefly) appeared in Brian Attebery’s *Strategies of Fantasy* (1992: 107-9).[182] Broderick (1995) describes the megatext as follows:

> a specialised intertextual encyclopedia of tropes and enabling devices, an armamentarium evolved within that specific history of discursive crisis (xi)

He further clarifies the make-up of the megatext:

> a mega-text of imaginary worlds, tropes, tools, lexicons, even grammatical innovations borrowed from other textualities (xiii)

In other words, the SF megatext[183] is a vast pool of tropes and literary devices—and other stranger things—that forms the backdrop for every SF narrative, which every SF text is indebted to and necessarily engages with, sometimes combatively. The megatext is a continually growing entity: as Broderick says, it is constructed by “mutually imbricated sf texts” (1995: 59), so with every new SF

[182] Both Broderick and Attebery base their formulations on Brooke-Rose’s fantasy megatext (1981); Broderick further draws on Wolfe’s ‘icons’ (1979). Attebery has a parallel concept of ‘parabolas’ (2005), which Csicsery-Ronay (2008) describes as “a set of potentials grounded in the sf megatext, whose actual course in any given work is open” (216). Cf. LeGuin (1993: 19), Seed (2000), Csicsery-Ronay (2008: 84, 275, n.4), Broderick (2016).

[183] Broderick (1992, 1995) initially prefers ‘mega-text’ to the simpler ‘megatext’, used by, among others, Brooke-Rose, Attebery, Csicsery-Ronay and Seed – although his later writings on the subject (e.g. Broderick 2016) revert to ‘megatext’. The difference is so slight as to be meaningless. Broderick (1995) also suggests that perhaps ‘hypertext’ might have been a better word, “if the term had not been appropriated by software designers” (167, n.5).

text that is published, new texts and tropes and devices are added to the fabric of the megatext.[184] This means that, as Paul Kincaid (2008b) puts it:

> It can take time to learn to read science fiction, to learn how to pick up the clues to the world presented in the creation of new words or the shaping of metaphor-like phrases. (9)

Broderick (1995) is firmer:

> Still, unless you've read one or two of the most celebrated fictions of each of the authors named you will see only the shadow of my discussion. (xiv)

He denies, however, that this is "cruel and unusual" (xiv), instead asserting that it is a necessary prerequisite of reading SF: if the reader is truly to engage with an SF text, then a basic familiarity with the megatext—the history of SF, the history of all the texts written up to this point—is necessary.[185] Istvan Csicsery-Ronay, Jr. (2008), on the other hand, observes:

> That being said, it is important to note that the sf megatext is not the same for all competent audiences. Though it is not useless to speak of an ideal lexicon of sf elements, the competence of sf audiences is nonetheless profoundly influenced by social factors, especially class, nation, and gender. (275, n.4)

Another criterion to be added to Csicsery-Ronay's list might be age, as different writers and tropes come in and out of vogue with the passing of the years. The distinction made here between the 'competent' and the 'ideal' SF reader is a good one to bear in mind,[186] and undercuts some of the

[184] This formulation has echoes not only of Martindale's chain of receptions (2003), but also T S Eliot's "Tradition and the Individual Talent" (1919; in Eliot 1997).

[185] Broderick's attitude here echoes ideas of the 'gatekeeping' of SF that have surfaced throughout the thesis, e.g. pg.20, n.34, pg.221, n.264.

[186] There are instances of texts being written for both the competent and non-competent readers, often demonstrated through the inclusion of appendices or 'cheat-sheets' which explain the tropes and characters to the non SF-savvy reader, e.g. the Note to the Reader in Neal Stephenson's *Anathem* (2008: xiii-xvii): "If you are

somewhat elitist overtones of Broderick's casual dismissal of any criticism of the megatext. A reader does not have to have read every classic of the form to appreciate SF – but at least *some* 'competence' is required to get to grips with a literature that speaks of AIs and FTL as easily as it does characters and plots.

This focus on what the reader brings to the table is certainly reminiscent of themes common in reception scholarship, in particular Jauss' 'horizon of expectations'.[187] The difference here is that the SF megatext is a horizon confined to a particular type of literature (or film, or television,[188] or visual art,[189] or even radio and other types of audio media): knowledge of, say, the works of Charles Dickens will not help the individual trying to read Isaac Asimov's *Foundation* series – although in practice this is not a clear cut rule, as will be discussed below. This can come across as something of an exclusionary move—only those fully steeped in SF and its history are truly worthy to comment on it, or even read it in the first place—but it has in general been used more as a tool to attempt to define SF's nebulous borders. As Gary K Wolfe says in his discussion of SF 'icons' in *The Known and the Unknown* (1979):

> science fiction writers can in some measure be defined as science-fiction writers by the extent to which they partake of the set-pieces of the field (xi-xii)

Exchange "set-pieces of the field" for "megatext"—a term popularised after *The Known and the Unknown*—and this is a good formulation of what the megatext is often used as: a defining tool, a way of determining which text is SF and which is not. The 'incompetent' reader of SF can always brush up on their Delany/Zelazny/Asimov/Silverberg and come back.

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accustomed to reading works of speculative fiction and enjoy puzzling things out on your own, skip this Note" (xiii).

[187] The particulars of this theoretical structure, along with others, will be discussed at the end of this chapter.

[188] Broderick (2016).

[189] Frelik (2016); cf. the discussion of *Le Dernier Troyen* below.

The SF megatext thus lays out a model of SF as a literature that requires the reader's (and indeed the writer's) preknowledge but also their active engagement with the text, calling on what they know from their previous reading in the field to understand more fully the nuances and subtexts. Interestingly, Brett Rogers and Benjamin Stevens (2012) draw a similar parallel between SF and Classics, albeit coming from the point of view of Darko Suvin's cognitive estrangement:

> Both fields therefore constitute 'Knowledge fictions' that place demands upon the reader to supply additional knowledge, as it were cracking a code with which to make meaning that connects the sentence to the world. (138; cf. 2015: 18)

The theoretical parallels between the two, therefore, perhaps stretch further than has been previously noted. On this note, there is in fact a particular concept of classical scholarship that seems to have strong links with the concept of the SF megatext. This is the 'supertext' that has been theorised to lie behind performances of song in archaic Greece, what Ingrid Holmberg (1998) refers to as "one large universalizing text" (474). The supertext acts as a "mythological superstructure" (Burgess 2001: 197; 2004: 9), providing background and context for whatever small snippet of the tale is being told at any one time. As Andrew Ford (1992) puts it:

> the fiction that behind the telling of each story exists one divinely superintended tale, one connected whole that never alters, though parts of it may be performed in this or that time and place
>
> (40-1)

Jonathan Burgess (2001) describes:

> a multifarious, pervasive tradition of the Trojan War in the Archaic age that cut across lines of genre, media, function, class, and gender (4; cf. 1996: 78, n.8)

This broader mythological structure does not function simply as filler knowledge. John Miles Foley (1999) outlines how ancient bards would perform a single part of that wider text, but by doing so would conjure up the entirety of the rest of the unsung story:[190]

> a representative section or episode that implies the unsung entirety of the poetic tradition, a concrete part that stands for the always immanent whole (42)

This mythological supertext was named as such by Ken Dowden (1996: 50-1), in reference to the performance of individual episodes of the *Iliad*:

> The *Iliad* would on this supposition be the environment, the sense of total story, the 'supertext', within which Homer and his successors sang episodes to audiences. (51)

He also discusses the entirety of Greek mythology as an 'intertext' (1992: 7-9), in that

> it is constituted by all the representations of myths ever experienced by its audience and because every new representation gains its sense from how it is positioned in relation to this totality of previous presentations (8)

In Dowden's formulation, much as the SF megatext is being continually created and recreated with every new SF text that is published, so Greek mythology as a conceptual single entity is created by the interaction of each single instance of a myth being shaped by new hands.[191] This is taken further by Burgess (2002), who outlines how local versions of myths are a part of this supertext, too – and how this specific, localised version of a myth that is more broadly known in a slightly different way can affect our interpretations of early Greek hexameter poetry as multiform or not.[192] Dowden's

[190] Foley (1991: 11-2) makes this assertion in reference to texts wider than Homer. Cf. Nagy (1992: esp. 312).
[191] Both have echoes of Bakhtinian polyphony; cf. pg.26-7.
[192] On the thorny issue of multiformity, see Lord (1960: 99-101), Nagy (1996: 105-226, esp. 109-11), Burgess (1996, 2002). Finkelberg (2000) offers an insight into scholars' different interpretations of multiformity, and Currie (2015) discusses the question of the multiformity of the *Cypria*.

terminology is perhaps a little fuzzy: he classifies Greek mythology as an intertext, seemingly focusing more on the mythology's relationship to itself, whereas the relationship between the *Iliad* as a whole and the *Iliad* as its constituent parts is that of a supertext with its constituent texts. Given the prevalence of the terms 'intertext' and 'intertextuality' in other branches of classical scholarship, particularly work on Latin literature, it seems unhelpful to attempt to class yet another branch of classical literature as 'intertextual';[193] for this reason, the term 'supertext' will be preferred in this chapter. After all, the concept of the supertext as mapped out in Dowden's work—a larger text and its relation to smaller ones—is strikingly similar to the relationship between the individual singer and their work and the broader scope of the 'mythological superstructure' that exists behind it.

Equally striking are the parallels between the Archaic supertext and the SF megatext. Both propose a broad construct of tropes and background knowledge that contributes to the listener's/reader's understanding of the text at hand, and both are (or were) under continual construction by the texts that they interrelate with.

That is not to say, however, that the Archaic supertext and the SF megatext are exactly the same thing: the use of time travel, say, in two vastly different SF texts is not quite the same as both texts being a part of a larger overarching story. The Archaic supertext describes more what we might refer to now as a 'continuity', that is, a universe within which a number of different stories and tales take place; the SF megatext, on the other hand, is more a compendium—or "armamentarium", to use Broderick's term—of features that are common to any number of texts. Indeed, a more exact parallel might be the use of traditional features of Homeric narrative such as epithets and type-scenes: a poet recalls a neatly-metrical epithet to fit the poem at hand, just as the SF writer plucks an appropriate trope from their wider knowledge of the field.

[193] Cf. Burgess' (2009: 56-71) discussion of the workings of oral epic as a parallel for theoretical concepts of intertextuality.

This chapter is thus not trying to argue that the Archaic supertext and SF megatext are the same thing. This chapter is not even trying to argue that the SF megatext is always the same thing. However, these are theoretical concepts which in some cases bear striking resemblance to each other, and can certainly be mutually illuminating: a fuller comparison will come at the end of the chapter. What could perhaps be said to unite them all is a focus on interconnectivity and an awareness of the situatedness of human knowledge. The SF megatext, for instance, provides the background for an understanding of SF texts, and the Archaic, mythic supertext provides the background for an understanding of Archaic poetry and the world its contemporary audience inhabited.

Interestingly, both Brian Attebery and Damien Broderick make passing mention of myth and mythologies in their discussions of the SF megatext:

> mythology, which is the name we give to cast-off megatexts (Attebery 1992: 108)

> It is the creation of such a shared, icon-echoing, redundant and inconsistent mega-text in the collective intertextuality of those works we name 'sf' which gives this kind of writing its power, a power verging on obsession or dream and only available elsewhere in other somewhat comparable varieties of textuality: myth, fairytale, surrealism. (Broderick 1995: 62)

Attebery's brief mention is based around the idea that a megatext is a time-specific thing, that science is our current megatext because science and the scientific method are what our world and our understanding of that world are based on. Broderick's formulation, however, focuses less on contemporary reality and more on the 'power' of the network created – effectively once more bringing the focus of this kind of construct back to the individual who encounters it, and the effect it has on them.

This is the approach that this chapter will take to the SF megatext and its importance for the texts to be discussed. If the SF megatext is a broad "armamentarium" which exerts a kind of power on its

reader, which is required for that reader to fully understand the texts that they are attempting to read, then how does that manifest in more practical terms, and what's the point? If the SF megatext is a selective, perhaps exclusive entity, much as the Archaic supertext encompasses a set corpus of songs and mythological stories, then can individual megatexts form within the wider SF megatext? And how can the concept of the megatext be useful outside SF?

This chapter will discuss two subsets of the megatext: the megatext that is formed by the wider context of the author's own work; and the megatext that is formed by the wider context of (often classical) literature. This is expanding on the concept of the megatext—and indeed the supertext—as laid out above – but it raises another question. If a text is not just SF, namely if an SF text is drawing on classical sources, particularly the archaic sources common to the supertext of the Homeric poems, is the SF megatext as theorised by Broderick and Attebery in fact rather too small?

Keeping It in the Family: The Author's Own Work.

Writers of SF are not good at leaving their worlds alone. Duologies, trilogies and longer series proliferate on the shelves of the SF/F sections of bookshops, which is perhaps not surprising given that it is a field that specialises in world-creation. Why write only one novel within a world when you could write twelve? Isaac Asimov's Foundation series is a good example of this. Based (loosely) on the ideas of Edward Gibbon's *History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, it originally began with a trilogy: *Foundation* (1951), *Foundation and Empire* (1952), and *Second Foundation* (1953). The 'novels' are in fact collections of eight short stories published by Asimov in *Astounding* magazine between May 1942 and January 1950: *Foundation* collects the first four, *Foundation and Empire* the next two, *Second Foundation* the final two. However, starting in the 1980s, Asimov started writing again, adding two sequels (*Foundation's Edge*, 1982; *Foundation and Earth*, 1986) and two prequels (*Prelude to Foundation*, 1988; *Forward the Foundation*, 1993). Furthermore, references are made in the later books to other series by Asimov, including the *Galactic Empire* and

Robot series, implying that all three take place in the same universe. This further expands the scope of a series that began with a few short stories in *Astounding*. SF is good at multiplying itself.

SF authors who adapt classical texts are, it seems, no different. Several of the texts this thesis has already discussed have been set within the author's wider creation: John C Wright's "The Far End of History" is a part of his *The Golden Oecumene* series; David Drake's *Cross the Stars*, *The Warrior*, and *The Voyage* are extensions of his *Hammer's Slammers* universe; Valérie Mangin's *Le Dernier Troyen* takes place within the wider context of her *Chroniques de l'Antiquité Galactique* (each volume with a different *illustrateur*); and R A Lafferty's *Space Chantey* is part of a vast, overarching "ghost story" (Ferguson 2011: 3) which purportedly includes every novel and short story he ever wrote. In most of these cases, knowledge of the wider whole is not needed to understand the basics of the plots, but an awareness of what is going on in the wider universe certainly enriches understanding of the texts and indeed casts into sharper relief the position of the texts in question—and indeed the Homeric texts that they adapt—within their broader context.

"The Far End of History" begins with little indication that it forms part of a larger whole. Ulysses and Penelope are simply inventive characters within a standard space opera setting, playing out their lives according to a variation of the pattern set down by Homer before they explode out into Atkins and Ao Ahasuerus, characters from Wright's wider corpus. However, perhaps even in the beginning there is a hint of what is to come. One reviewer of Wright's *The Golden Oecumene* series—made up of *The Golden Age* (2002), *The Phoenix Exultant* (2003) and *The Golden Transcendence* (2003)—comments that it is written in "a quasi-classical/Shakespearean English style which he combines with future jargon"[194] in contrast to the plainer writing style which is more standard in modern SF.[195] This is something that passes over into "The Far End of History". The opening few pages of the novella talk about the "tale" (502) it is about to tell, a word edging on the archaic which, especially in conjunction with the opening line—"Once there was a world who loved a forest-girl." (502)—with its

[194] 'Free Northerner' (2014).
[195] On the classical elements of *The Golden Oecumene* series, see Marquis (2004).

connotations of fairytale and myth ('once upon a time…'), evokes a sense of older literature and indeed older times. This is further compounded by the lyricism of the prologue:

> The Doppler-distorted reddish smears from the boiling core of the galaxy, the tens of thousands of supernovae flaring into deadly magnificence, the ashy clouds that streak the Orion Arm as if the breath of dragons passed there, scattering constellations, and leaving nothing but sullen red dwarves and exhausted red giants behind, all portray an interstellar environment wasted by war.
>
> (502)

The register is simultaneously elevated fantasy and modern SF, combining the realities of space (red dwarves and red giants are types of star; "Doppler-distorted" alludes to the Doppler effect, or 'red shift') with the tropes of fantasy and more mythical types of literature (dwarves and giants). "Orion" is further both the hunter from mythology, perhaps nodded to by the following mention of "dragons"—the mythical Orion did not hunt dragons, but other mythical hunters certainly do—and the constellation named after him. This certainly echoes the style of *The Golden Oecumene*.[196] Consider, for example, the opening lines of *The Golden Age*:

> It was a time of masquerade. It was the eve of the High Transcendence, an event so solemn and significant that it could be held but once each thousand years, and folk of every name and iteration, phenotype, composition, consciousness and neuroform, from every school and era, had come to celebrate its coming, to welcome the transfiguration, and prepare. (1)

The archaisms ("eve", "but once", "folk") sit side-by-side with SF terminology ("phenotype",[197] "neuroform"), creating much the same effect as is found in "The Far End of History". Thus for the

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[196] Reviewers comment on the impenetrability of Wright's series to the non-SF-savvy reader: "if you're not used to SF-jargon or standard SF ideas it may be hard to comprehend" ('Free Northerner' 2014); "a certain amount of training may be required to fully appreciate Wright and meet him on the terms that he sets for his readers" ('Inchoatus' 2014). Both of these judgements echo the terms of the SF megatext laid out above.

[197] 'Phenotype' is a term found in scientific discourse, not just in SF, although it has been popularised by e.g. Dawkins (2006: 303-4). As SF is a field that owes its origin to speculative scientific discourse, I do not think that we need to necessarily draw a strict line between the two. Indeed, Attebery's original formulation of the megatext talks about both SF and science as the megatext of our time.

reader who is familiar with *The Golden Oecumene* series, who is immersed in the megatext, as it were, of Wright's wider work, perhaps there is an inkling as to what is to come already here. The playful mention of a "Golden Age" (520), which could, of course, simply be a reference to the more general concept of a golden age, is another nudge in that direction. The novella's context becomes clearer as the text progresses—various Oecumenes are mentioned, from the Golden to the Chrysopoeian—but it is when Atkins and Ao Ahasuerus appear on the scene that the reader truly realises what is happening: that this is not just a story set within a wider universe, but it is in fact a story that engages with that wider universe, that tells a little more of the tale and that plays with the notions—the recreation of the individual from a digital template, for instance—that are so prevalent in that wider literary corpus.

Simultaneously, however, the evocation of Wright's wider literary universe somewhat puts the Homeric texts in their place. If the novella were simply a reworking of the story of Odysseus and Penelope for a far-future, hard SF/space opera context, then it would speak to the privileging of the *Odyssey* in this new SF context. That is not what happens here. Ulysses and Penelope are nothing more than disguises for Wright's own creations, shells to be cast off once their purpose has been met, suggesting the primacy of the new over the old. On the other hand, though, when Atkins and Ao Ahasuerus agree on their mutual suicide:

> By the time she was done speaking, Ao Ahasuerus was obliterated, her memories and thoughts overwritten and deleted, and, in her thought-space, wondering, astonished to find herself alive, was Penelope.
>
> And Atkins felt Ulysses stir inside his thoughts and begin to wake. (542)

Ulysses and Penelope might be shells, but they are shells who are, in the end, granted a life and an importance all of their own. Privilege here is not a simple question of one text being prized above another; rather, *The Golden Oecumene* sits in a dialogic, complex relationship with the Homeric texts, interacting with them rather than simply placing a triumphant foot upon them. Atkins and Ulysses are

both the most important at different points in the narrative: it is not as straightforward as it could be. That said, such a dialogic relationship is still in a way an act of deprivileging, of putting the *Odyssey* on a par with *The Golden Oecumene*, something which a more traditional view of canon and literary text might not agree with. Perhaps we might think of this as 'contextualising' rather than 'deprivileging' – although perhaps to some to contextualise the Homeric poems is just as sacrilegious as to deprivilege them.

This is a manoeuvre that we can also trace in the novels of David Drake. All three of Drake's novels discussed in this thesis take place within the *Hammer's Slammers* universe—the 'Hammerverse'—a series of novels and short stories published between 1979 and 2015, beginning with the eponymous *Hammer's Slammers* (1979), a collection of short stories.[198] The Hammerverse has been so popular that it has also spawned a tabletop game and a supplementary roleplaying game, with figurines available of the vehicles and the infantry units featured.[199] The Hammerverse details the adventures of 'Hammer's Slammers', a mercenary unit commanded by Alois Hammer, whose background presence is the tie that binds the stories together:

> Indeed, in the end, Hammer's prime purpose… is almost setting, a backdrop against which we grow to understand the POV characters in each tale. (T Evans 2016)

Hammer is a megatext in and of himself, as it were, an indication of a wider 'always immanent' world that is just beyond the one-time reader's grasp: we have to delve deeper into the rest of the texts to provide the rest of the story.[200] The mere mention of Hammer's presence is enough to include *The Warrior* in this megatext, but in *Cross the Stars* and *The Voyage*, things are a little more complex.

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[198] Clute (2016a) provides a list, although he misses the short story "Save What You Can" (2015), published in the tribute anthology *Onward, Drake!* (2015); he also discusses Drake's involvement in 'shared universe' settings, where multiple authors collaborate within a single fictional universe (a megatext?).

[199] An outline of the tabletop game is available online at http://www.hammers-slammers.com/home.htm. Last accessed 16/5/2017.

[200] Will Eisner's character 'The Spirit' is a comparable example, and the *Mad Max* films seem to be going down a similar path.

The Hammerverse megatext manifests in *Cross the Stars* mainly through the inclusion of other characters from the wider (mega)texts. The first chapter is a conversation about Don Slade's fate that takes place between Alois Hammer—now President of Friesland, his own little world—and Danny Pritchard, a ranking member of the Slammers first introduced in "The Butcher's Bill", one of the short stories in the original *Hammer's Slammers* collection. Interestingly, the conversation takes the place of the Council of the Gods in *Odyssey* 5, juxtaposing Hammer and Pritchard with Zeus and Athena. The implications of this in relation to the deprivileging effect of the megatext are clear: gods become simply men, and men who have been shown over the course of the Hammerverse to be at best morally ambiguous.[201] Pritchard/Athena further comes to Slade's aid in retaking Tethys (the novel's Ithaca) for the stated reason that they are old comrades, implying Slade's presence across the rest of the Hammerverse. Continuing the idea of the equation of gods and men introduced in *Cross the Stars*' first chapter, Slade himself is almost elevated to the same level as Pritchard. Unlike Odysseus, who was merely Athena's favourite, Slade and Pritchard were close:

> We were—well, he did me a favor. We were friends, Don and me. (6)

Slade is not merely Pritchard's human pet; he is his friend, his peer, his equal. It is going too far to suggest that he is thus paralleled with the Homeric gods in the same way as Hammer and Pritchard, but for the reader savvy in the Archaic supertext it complicates the relationship between the Athena- and the Odysseus-figure.

The presence of Alois Hammer and Danny Pritchard thus shows that *Cross the Stars* is intimately interwoven with the rest of the Hammerverse. However, they are not the only characters from the wider Hammerverse who make appearances in *Cross the Stars*. During the equivalent of Odysseus' katabasis—Slade's fever dreams after the deal he strikes with the Alayans—Major Joachim Steuben strolls into the picture, a psychopathic addition to the Slammers' ranks who, in one of the original

[201] Much like Slade himself, as discussed in Chapter 2: Genre.

Hammer's Slammers short stories. "Hangman", shoots a child. In a surprising choice, he is effectively the novel's Anticleia:

> Joachim reached out with his right hand, his gun hand, and made as if to stroke Slade's cheek. The smooth palm did not or did not quite touch the tanker. (158)

The allusion is slight, but for a writer as classically-savvy as Drake it is a quiet nod to the moment in the *Odyssey* (11.204-8) where Odysseus attempts to embrace Anticleia but cannot touch her.[202] Like Hammer and Pritchard, Steuben is thus both a figure from the wider Hammerverse and a figure from the classical text – which is something that the text itself highlights. This is the initial description of Steuben in *Cross the Stars*:

> There could be no doubt that it really was Joachim Steuben. The uniform that rustled like a whore's undergarments; the boyishly-smooth face and the curly black hair, signs of wealth spent lavishly when they could no longer truly be signs of youth. The pistol in a cutaway holster high on Joachim's right hip, an ornamented bangle for a mincing queen—until he chose to kill. Joachim Steuben, slim and dainty as a white mouse… and the unit he commanded on the jobs for which no one else quite had the stomach, the White Mice. The Greeks, after all, had called their Furies the Kindly-Minded Ones.
>
> (157)

It is not common in *Cross the Stars* for "The Greeks" to be referenced quite so casually; in general, the novel does not display the same kind of self-reflexiveness as some of the texts discussed in the previous chapter. As such, this allusion to the Furies—the Eumenides—is striking.[203] The comparison between the euphemistically-named 'White Mice' and the 'Kindly-Minded Ones', as Drake's version has it, is apt: nice names masking not nice things. However, for this unusual reference to appear at a

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[202] The inability to touch a figure who comes from the broader megatext is echoed by the 'Hypertime ghosts' in *The Kingdom*, a DC Comics limited series; these are figures from parallel versions of Earth who can be seen, but cannot be interacted with or indeed touched. There is perhaps a link suggested between ephemerality and worlds that come close to each other but do not quite touch.

[203] I do not think that the reference is intended to point to Aeschylus' *Eumenides*; this is simply a nod to the figures of myth rather than their specific instantiation in the *Oresteia*.

point in the text where Drake is drawing from outside the text, and indeed a point in the *Odyssey* which can be seen to be engaging in dialogue with the *Iliad*—or at least with the wider stories of the Trojan War cycle—it brings Drake's Hammerverse megatext and the Archaic supertext into contact with each other, highlighting the work that Drake is doing in plaiting together these different versions and different contexts. Once again, this is a levelling technique that puts two vastly different spheres of knowledge on a par with each other, paralleling the archaic and SF universes of knowledge as they interact in this single text.

This is thus a very literary megatext, drawing on the tropes and incidents of previous literary texts to create the meaning of the current text. *Le Dernier Troyen*, on the other hand, shows us how a megatext can be created visually.[204] *Le Dernier Troyen* is set within Valérie Mangin's wider series, titled *Chroniques de l'Antiquité Galactique*; this comprises *Le Fléau des Dieux* (2001—2006), *Le Dernier Troyen* (2004—2008), *La Guerre des Dieux* (2010, abandoned), and *Imperator* (2012, abandoned). *Le Dernier Troyen* can largely be read independent of the other volumes, save for a few "clins d'oeil" (Lefebvre 2013). One of these is its 'audience', namely Auguste, the Emperor of a far-future version of Rome—the Rome of *Le Fléau des Dieux*—who is being told the story of the foundation of Rome by his bard, Virgile. It is never explicitly stated that Auguste is from the world of *Le Fléau des Dieux*, apart from the occasional mentions of the Galactic Roman Empire, and, in general, the knowledge does not hugely impact the story as it unrolls: *Le Dernier Troyen* simply becomes, as it were, background knowledge for the rest of the *Chroniques de l'Antiquité Galactique*.

However, there is a brief instance where the rest of the story—in particular, the antagonist of *Le Fléau des Dieux*—makes itself known. This is in Volume 4: *Carthago*. The final page of the volume depicts Virgile speaking with Auguste as they walk through a hall full of relics of the past, including an excellent mechanical elephant which is a clear allusion to Hannibal and the Punic Wars. Auguste finally, as an end to the volume, bids them leave this "miroir ensorcelé" (191: 6) and return to other pursuits. Virgile agrees, saying:

[204] Cf. Frelik (2016).

> Oui, ô Empereur, je ne suis pas sûr que nous ayons envie de tout connaître de l'avenir de Rome.
> Profitons plûtot de sa gloire présente! (191: 7)

The words themselves are unthreatening, but the image that accompanies them tells a different story (fig.17). Virgile stands in the foreground of the panel, apparently unconcerned, stance and expression relaxed, but in the background of the image is another figure, dressed in dark colours and mechanical armour, apparently advancing towards the viewer – and Virgile himself. This dark figure is surrounded by a green glow which contrasts sharply with the usual red-brown-gold colour scheme used by Démarez in *Le Dernier Troyen*, exemplified in this panel by the red cloth worn as part of Virgile's toga. The image is clearly one of menace, presumably—taking the mention of "l'avenir" into account—of a threat that is still to come, but the reader who is unfamiliar with *Le Fléau des Dieux* is left in the dark. This is all the more striking seeing as this is the final panel of the volume, thus ending the story of Énée's adventures with Didon on a distinctly sour note that is perhaps bewildering to the reader who is not familiar with Mangin's wider work.

This figure is Attila, and this very image is in fact the front cover of Volume 1: *Morituri te salutant*, the first volume of *Le Fléau des Dieux* (fig.18). The green glow surrounding the figure behind Virgile is the primary colour of Aleksa Gajic's colour scheme for *Le Fléau des Dieux*, and it is thus not only the character of Attila who is imported into the background (quite literally) of *Le Dernier Troyen* but also his dominant colour. In figure 17, it is the startling contrast between Virgile's red and Attila's green that makes the threat quite so ominous: even for the reader who has not read the rest of the series, it is clear what this figure represents, even if the specifics are a little hazy. Mangin's text thus demonstrates the creation of a megatext in a visual medium, how colours and images can be used in different ways to create a broader context than the written word and purely verbal allusions.

In terms of a literary megatext, however, the pinnacle is R A Lafferty. Perhaps as a result of the oral folk tradition that pervades his work,[205] Lafferty (quoted in Ferguson 2011: 3) has described his body of work as:

> one very long novel… a ghost story that is also a jigsaw puzzle. And the mark of my ghost story is that there is a deep underlay that has never attained clear visibility, never attained clear publication

Andrew Ferguson (2011) argues that this is a "new world that Lafferty is attempting to bring into being" (3), a world that spans everything he ever wrote. Others have commented on the apparent interconnectedness of Lafferty's work: Eric Walker (2014), for instance, has observed the repeated names that crop up throughout Lafferty's corpus, and John Clute (2016b) discusses his "stories and novels that nestled within larger (but often untold) tales and universes". A corollary of this expansive vastness is also Lafferty's apparent inability to bring things to a satisfying ending: both Andrew Ferguson (2011, 2014) and Damien Knight (2015) have commented on this feature of Lafferty's work, Knight describing the multiple published endings of Lafferty's *More Than Melchisedech* (1984) and Ferguson commenting, perhaps euphemistically, that:

> Lafferty's texts operate on a principle of radical openness. (2011: 13)

This has all culminated in the recent launch of 'The Institute of Impure Science, Online',[206] a Wikidot page, run by Ferguson, that is attempting to map out all the connections between Lafferty's novels and short stories, "thus demonstrating the overlapping, 'hypertext' quality of the worlds Lafferty created" (Petersen & Ferguson 2011).[207] A brief glance at the website's list of short stories alone—there are over two hundred—is enough to give a glimpse of the scope of the undertaking.

[205] He describes his relationship with the American tall tale in particular in Lafferty (2017: 209ff). Cf. Ferguson (2011: 4), Ellison (2015), Orszanski (2015), Clute (2016b).
[206] Found at http://lafferty.wikidot.com. Last accessed 16/5/2017.
[207] Cf. Montejo (2017) on Lafferty's 'bricolage' aesthetic.

Lafferty's *Space Chantey*, then, sits within a Laffertian megatext[208] in the very literal sense of the word: an enormous expanse of ongoing story, some written, some unwritten, some published, some unpublished. In fact, with the recent purchase of Lafferty's estate by the Locus foundation and the ongoing work of the editors of *Feast of Laughter*, some of Lafferty's many unpublished short stories are finally seeing the light of day. The Laffertian megatext is a megatext that is thus still growing and developing even after its creator's death, and it is a megatext that has certainly left its mark on *Space Chantey*. Characters from the novel crop up in Lafferty's other short stories: Maybe Jones, for instance, one of Roadstrum's crewmen, appears in "Maybe Jones and the City", while Roadstrum himself reappears in "Hound Dog's Ear". Lafferty's signature disdain for endings rears its head, too, with the last lines of the novel effectively rejecting an ending altogether:

> *Destroyed? His road is run? It's but a bend of it;*
>
> *Make no mistake, this only* seems
>
> *the end of it.*
>
> (123)

The pseudo-ending of "*the end of it*" is effectively undermined before it even happens by the italicised certainty of "*this only* seems".[209]

The placement of Lafferty's bizarre, disjointed version of the *Odyssey* within this epic 'ghost story' brings about a levelling of the playing field. As discussed in Chapter 3: Adaptation,[210] there is an almost 'ghostly' Odysseus who appears throughout *Space Chantey*, implying that everything that Roadstrum is now doing, a figure who may or may not be the classical Odysseus has already done. The *Odyssey* is thus a ghost within a ghost story, an echo of an echo that makes up only a fragment of

[208] Speaking about concepts such as the SF megatext and Wolfe's 'icons', Ferguson (2011) says: "The implications of this with regard to science fiction in general and Lafferty in particular are broad and deep, and will be elaborated in future work." (44, n.30).

[209] This quotation was previously discussed on pg.43.

[210] Pg.116-7.

a much larger megatext: the *Odyssey* is verging on irrelevant within the Laffertian megatext because there is simply so much more in there to do.

It seems to be easy for the Homeric texts to get lost within the context of a megatext made up of the author's own work – or at least, if not lost, then certainly deprivileged (although that is not to say devalued). However, this is not a straightforward process. As much as *Space Chantey* places the *Odyssey* as only one among a hundred possible worlds, it still follows the story patterns that Homer set down – and, equally, while Drake's *Cross the Stars* does bring the *Odyssey* down from its vaunted perch, it does so in a blaze of literariness, consciously weaving together Archaic supertext and SF-Hammerverse megatext to create a one-off, assemblage-esque megatext which encompasses this specific text and indeed all the texts that have gone before it. The privilege and status of the Homeric poems is a complex question here, and not one that has any easy answer.

The Megatext, Jim, But Not As We Know It: Wider Literature.

If the Homeric texts can get lost against the background of an individual author's work, then this perhaps does not bode well for the Homeric texts against an even broader literary background, encompassing all of classical literature and indeed reaching beyond. An evocative example of this kind of expansion is provided by Robert Silverberg's short story "After the Myths Went Home" (1969), which depicts a future world that has gained the ability to resurrect figures from ancient history – and, after the world has become bored of Antony and Cleopatra, from literature and myth, too:

> He brought forth Hector and Achilles, Orpheus, Perseus, Loki, and Absalom. He brought forth Medea, Cassandra, Odysseus, Oedipus. He brought forth Thoth, the Minotaur, Aeneas, Salome. He brought forth Shiva and Gilgamesh, Dionysus, Deucalion. The afternoon waned and the sparkling moons sailed into the sky, and still Leor labored. He gave us Clytemnestra and Agamemnon, Helen and

> Menelaus, Isis and Osiris. He gave us Damballa and Geudenibo and Papa Legba. He gave us Baal. He gave us Samson. He gave us Krishna. He woke Quetzalcoatl, Adonis, Holger Dansk, Kali, Ptah, Thor, Jason, Nimrod, Set. (274)

The list goes on. A number of these names are figures from Greek myth, particularly the myths surrounding the Trojan War: it even starts with Hector and Achilles, perhaps suggesting that, even among this proliferation of mythical figures, some familiar, some less so (Damballa, Geudenibo, and Papa Legba are *loas* from Vodou), those from Greek (and Trojan) myth are first in the cultural imagination. Silverberg himself is steeped in classical myth: his interviews with Alvaro Zinos-Amaro, for instance, collected in *Traveler of Worlds* (2016), are littered with throwaway references to classical myth, literature and history. It thus makes sense that his panoply of mythical figures would be rich in the classical world. Here, it seems, while the classical figures are very much on the same level as those from other mythological traditions—the tricolon of "Clytemnestra and Agamemnon, Helen and Menelaus, Isis and Osiris" in fact arguably rises through the Greek myth to the Egyptian—they are not wholly subsumed. Here, classical myth is a vibrant part of a vibrant whole – but still just a part, nonetheless.

This is a pattern that persists throughout the texts that provide (or at least hint at) the broader literary canon—as it is most often 'canonical' texts that are used—as a supplementary megatext. The Homeric texts are introduced as one of a number of canonical works, and while their importance is not necessarily slighted, they are certainly put into context. There are two ways that this manifests: first, more simply, through throwaway references to literary works, implying the presence of the megatext rather than constructing it outright; and second, more complex, by the construction of imaginary worlds where literary texts live and breathe alongside one another, sometimes interacting, sometimes sitting side-by-side for the perusal of the reader and indeed the characters in the story.

Passing Nods.

There are numerous examples of the first case in the texts this thesis discusses. A subset of these might be those that bring the *Aeneid* into play, for instance Katy Stauber's *Spin the Sky* and Lannah Battley's "Cyclops". In "Cyclops", the name of one of the second narrators, Homa's brother, is "Aeneas, son of Philippos" (84), subtly suggesting the *Aeneid* to the reader familiar with classical literature. *Spin the Sky*'s nod is no more overt: one of the 'Tales of my Father' is a letter, written to Trevor by one Admiral Maria Aeneas, depicting Cesar's ingenious defeat of the novel's Scylla and Charybdis (two menacing orbitals), which not only mentions Cesar's achievements but also alludes to the Admiral's own "wild adventures" and indeed her "story" (217). The megatext of broader classical literature is clearly evoked, but with a feminist twist that seems very in keeping with *Spin the Sky*'s broader associations with women's SF.[211] Admiral Aeneas' first name is not revealed until she signs off at the end of her letter, and no mention is made of her gender until that point: as such, that fact that she is a woman is a surprise for the reader, thus perhaps encouraging them to reflect on their assumptions that an Admiral must be a man. This in fact acts as a critique of the Archaic supertext: by this subtle genderflip, Stauber is able to push back against the assumption imposed by the supertext that Aeneas should be a man, while simultaneously drawing on the conventions of the women's SF subset of the SF megatext to put forward a world where Aeneas can be a Maria.

Not all allusions to a wider literary megatext necessarily come with such a political agenda, however. Brian Stableford's *Dies Irae* trilogy,[212] for instance, brings Christianity into the mix in its very title: 'Dies Irae' is a phrase whose most obvious resonance is with the Latin words of the Christian mass, taken from a thirteenth century Latin hymn of the same name:

> dies irae, dies illa,

[211] Cf. Chapter 2: Genre (pg.66-78).

[212] Like Drake (n.198), Stableford also contributes to 'shared world' settings, this time for Games Workshop's Warhammer novels (Langford 1997); S Nicholls (1993) further discusses his penchant for the subversion of clichés (165) and how his wide-ranging research has fed into his later, more complex sort-of-SF novels (168).

solvet saeclum in favilla,

teste David cum Sybilla.

The Latin is further translated in the title of the third and final novel, *Day of Wrath*, strikingly eliding the initial 'The' of the first novel's title (*The Days of Glory*) to follow the Latin more closely. The translation of 'irae' as 'wrath' is here perhaps also intended to evoke the opening μῆνιν of the *Iliad*, often translated in older versions as 'wrath' rather than 'anger' or 'rage'.[213] Whatever the intention behind the translation, the paralleling of Achilles' famous μῆνιν with the *dies irae* so closely associated with Christianity is surely pointed. There is no explicit mention of Christianity within the *Dies Irae* trilogy, but by the allusion of its title the text is automatically brought into contact with Christian doctrine. That is not to suggest that a Christian allegory of the trilogy is called for or even possible, but the question is certainly put in the reader's mind.

The allusions in Lafferty's *Space Chantey* to Dante, outlined above in Chapter 1: Polyphony,[214] operate in a similar way, bringing the *Inferno* into contact with both *Space Chantey* itself and the rest of the tradition the novel exploits. Here, however, this works in a more inward-looking way, almost, drawing as it does from cantos of the *Inferno* that refer to Odysseus' punishments. Instead of pulling in unrelated texts as Stableford does to broaden the novel's megatextual horizon, Lafferty here focuses on the receptions that have gone before him, consciously placing those texts in his intellectual orbit as part of *Space Chantey*'s megatext, thus enriching rather than broadening.

It is interesting that a number of the texts here discussed—*Space Chantey*, *Spin the Sky*, "Cyclops"—were also those discussed in Chapter 1: Polyphony, and that the instances of megatextual reference all take place within the secondary narratives of those texts. This perhaps suggests a link between the

[213] To name but a few, George Chapman (1611-15): "Achilles' banefull wrath resound"; John Dryden (1700): "The Wrath of *Peleus* Son, O Muse, resound"; Alexander Pope (1715): "Achilles' wrath, to Greece the direful spring / Of woes unnumber'd, heavenly goddess, sing!"
[214] Pg.42.

kind of world-creation that takes place in a polyphonic narrative and the world-creation that occurs on a wider scale between a text and its megatext.

The language being used and the discussion taking place here make it rapidly clearer that the focus the megatext puts on the reader that interacts with it—and, in the case of the Archaic supertext, the listener who listens to it—has strong parallels with theories of reception that place their stress on the interface between text and reader, or indeed performance and audience. These echoes further reinforce this concept's relevance to a study of classical reception in SF. It seems that, if Broderick is right to understand the megatext as an integral part of SF, then SF is a medium and indeed a readership that is continually conscious of its own reception, that is continuously aware of itself and, by extension, as the analysis of these texts is showing, continuously aware of its place within the broader context of (the primarily Western) literary tradition.[215]

The megatext, however, does not just have to be literary, as Mangin and Démarez's *Le Dernier Troyen* demonstrates. Mathieu Scapin and Matthieu Soler (2015: 68-72) outline how Démarez's art draws on influences from throughout the history of classical art to create a "passé futuriste" (68) for the BD, highlighting images in the text that draw on the François Vase, wider geometric and red- and black-figure Greek vases, archaic *kouroi*, and the Laocoön group. To this list should be added classical Greek statuary in general, as the BD's gods are drawn as classical statues, particularly Venus, whose hairstyle, bare breasts and drapery recall the Venus de Milo, albeit with arms restored (fig.19). Scapin and Soler's judgement is that:

> Si l'existence simultanée des vases de l'époque géométrique et classique n'a probablement jamais eu lieu, peu importe, tant qu'est maintenue une certaine vraisemblance, vue à travers le filtre du mythe.
>
> (72)

[215] This echoes the discussion in Chapter 3: Adaptation of SF's own concerns with and interest in the texts that it adapts, rewrites, reformulates.

They argue that this melange of art styles is part of the BD's creation of a new myth. In the context of the present discussion, it is clear that the art also draws on a visual megatext that includes both all classical art and, as spaceships and energy weapons are still prevalent and obviously recognisable, on the visual SF megatext which Paweł Frelik (2016) has recently argued for. Indeed, Démarez's work on *Le Dernier Troyen* is a striking vote in Frelik's favour, who argues that visual works have "channeled, remixed, and expanded fantastic imaginaries" (226); Démarez certainly fulfils that brief here, combining classical art and SF sensibilities in, for example, spaceships that look like triremes (fig.20), spacesuits with helmet-like crests (fig.21), and armour that combines the loosely 'classical' aesthetic with recognisable SF accoutrements (fig.22; note the glowing circles on the back of Énée's arm). This serves as a reminder not just that, as Frelik observes, a megatext can be a visual as well as a literary entity, but also of the same for classical reception. It is the images and their sources in this BD that, as Scapin and Soler argue, create much of the atmosphere in *Le Dernier Troyen*, blurring together SF and classical antiquity into a 'mythic' world where all of this seems perfectly natural.

Parallel Worlds.

The brief, 'implied' megatexts in the texts previously discussed are created through small gestures, through namedropping Christian terminology here, through an image from the François Vase on a futuristic wall there. As it is up to the reader to decode these images and references, piecing them together with their prior knowledge of sometimes multiple genres and media, all of this is very much centred on the reader, on the one who has knowledge of the megatext and who has the wherewithal to bring that knowledge to bear on the texts at hand. However, the final two texts to be discussed in fact take that stress off the reader, often explaining the worlds that they are creating rather than simply putting them out there to be understood, thus introducing a new twist to the relationship between SF megatext and Archaic supertext.

Dan Simmons' *Ilium* and *Olympos* duology creates a universe where texts not only actually exist, brought into physical existence by the sheer genius of their creators, but also *co*-exist with each other.

Homer's *Iliad* takes place alongside a warped version of Shakespeare's *The Tempest*—the characters Caliban, Setebos, Sycorax, Prospero and Ariel are all reworked for Simmons' SF setting but maintain their essential characteristics from Shakespeare's play—just as, when the Trojan War goes truly "off the rails" (*Olympos* 556), events start taking place that are plucked from the broader poems of the Epic Cycle, such as the arrival of Penthesilea and her Amazons. Other literary works are there in a more subterranean manner, too: Orphu and Mahnmut, the two moravecs, discuss at length Shakespeare's 'Dark Lady' sonnets and Proust's *À La Recherche du Temps Perdu*; the version of humanity that still inhabits this far-future earth is reminiscent of the Eloi from H G Wells' *The Time Machine*; Caliban's dialogue is taken entirely from Robert Browning's poem "Caliban Upon Setebos"; and the 'zeks' that aid Orphu and Mahnmut in their attempts to reach Olympus Mons on Mars are both the stereotypical SF 'Little Green Men' and—sidestepping into history—named after the slang name for prisoners in Soviet labour camps. This is not an exhaustive list of Simmons' allusions and references in the novels, but it serves as a good indication of the kind of megatext that is being created: it is vast, extensive, and encompasses the span of classical as well as more modern literature and history.

For anyone familiar with Dan Simmons' work, this is not surprising. He is known for his inability to work within a single genre, preferring instead to hop from SF to horror to historical fiction to thriller to his debut novel—*Song of Kali* (1985)—that won the World Fantasy Award, despite the fact that Simmons vehemently denies that it was ever fantasy. He also speaks repeatedly about the need to be intimately familiar with the "tropes, protocols and worthy predecessors" (Simmons 2015b) of any specific genre;[216] John Clute (2017) labels this "a love of generic competence for its own sake". Simmons also speaks about the importance of reading protocols, and of the reader's engagement:

[216] Cf. Simmons (2001, 2007), Senior (2012). S Nicholls (1993: 144-5) discusses the 'oral tradition' that Simmons enjoyed in his childhood and indeed in his early career as a teacher; given Lafferty's penchant for orality, discussed above, this perhaps suggests that an affinity with an oral tradition might nudge a modern writer towards megatextual formulations. In the context of the Archaic supertext that this chapter has discussed, this is maybe not that surprising.

> We're talking about reading protocols. We're talking about audience expectations, but also protocols—you want to get into a certain mode when you read a certain type of book. As a writer, I've exploited that with some of my science fiction. All the protocols are assumed, so now you can read. On the other hand, I take great pleasure in defying certain protocols and expectations…. When I find myself wanting to go a certain way as a reader, much less as a writer, because of that protocol, I like to violate it. I enjoy fiction that surprises me that way. (quoted in Senior 2012: 223)

Further:

> As with poetry, quality SF demands a much great collaboration on the part of the reader—a great sensitivity to detail, word-meaning, texture, and nuance, as well as a great involvement in ferreting out meaning. (2003b)

His *Hyperion* Cantos[217] has been read as exemplifying this tendency in his work. The first novel, *Hyperion* (1989), is structured as a loose echo of Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*, with a group on a pilgrimage across the galaxy telling each other their life stories, each of which echoes a different subgenre of SF.[218] Clute (2017) has in fact quite aptly described the *Hyperion* Cantos as "a Modernist examination of and hindsight honouring of the SF Megatext".

Simmons thus seems from both his works and his interviews to be a paid-up member of the megatext club. The deployment of this wider literary megatext in *Ilium* and *Olympos* works much as was shown in the first section of this chapter, to deprivilege the Homeric texts by contextualising them, by putting them into contact with, not in this case the author's wider works, but rather the wider works of Western literature:

> In doing this, no narrative is inherently superior to the other, but rather parallel: all of them exist individually. (Arjona 2013: 13)

[217] *Hyperion* (1989), *The Fall of Hyperion* (1990), *Endymion* (1996), *The Rise of Endymion* (1997).
[218] Palmer (1999: 75).

However, in the actual course of the text, it appears that some of these texts might be more equal than others.

It is a basic feature of the megatext concept that the reader must be familiar with the megatext in order to grasp the fuller meaning of the text at hand. Broderick stresses this in *Reading by Starlight*, and even Simmons himself is very particular about the knowledge that a writer requires to properly write for their genre readers. However, when *Ilium* plays with standard features of Homeric language—epithets, similes and the like—they are not simply parachuted in under the understanding that the reader will be able to comprehend them. Instead, they are explained by Hockenberry, the Homeric-scholar narrator:

> Achilles is referred to repeatedly as "swift-footed," Apollo as "one who shoots from afar," and Agamemnon's name is usually preceded by "wide ruling" or "lord of men": the Achaeans are "strong-greaved" and their ships "black" or "hollow" and so forth. These repeated epithets met the heavy demands of dactylic hexameter more than mere description, and were a way for the singing bard to meet metric requirements with formulaic phrases. (*Ilium* 43-44)

Hockenberry even on occasion describes the quirks of the Homeric text by reminiscing about his own days teaching as a university professor:

> Oh, I've witnessed many elements from Homer's poem that had been poetically misplaced in time, such as the so-called Catalogue of Ships, the assembly and listing of the all the Greek forces, which is in Book Two of the *Iliad* but which I saw take place more than nine years ago during the assembly of this military expedition at Aulis, the strait between Euboea and the Greek mainland. Or the *Epipolesis*, the review of the army by Agamemnon, which occurs in Book Four of Homer's epic but which I saw take place shortly after the armies landed here near Ilium. That actual event was followed by what I used to teach as the *Teichoskopia*, or "View from the Wall," in which Helen identifies the various

> Achaean heroes for Priam and the other Trojan leaders. The *Teichoskopia* appears in Book Three of the poem, but happened shortly after the landing and *Epipolesis* in the actual unfolding of events.
>
> (*Ilium* 3-4)

> Instead of insulting my students' attention spans, I explained to the class how these heroes had welcomed battle—how one of their words for combat was *charme*, which came from the same root as *charo*—"rejoice." I read to them a scene in which two warriors facing one another were described as *charmei gethosunoi*—"rejoicing in battle." I explained the Greek concept of *aristeia*—warrior-to-warrior or small-group combat in which an individual can show his valor—and how important it was to these ancients and how the larger battle would often pause so that the soldiers on each side could witness such examples of *aristeia*. (*Ilium* 78-9)

This description of the Homeric *aristeia* seems to somewhat confuse the set-piece duels of the early books (Paris and Menelaus in Book 3, for example) with the more standard *aristeiai* that follow: the battle does not stop to gawp at Diomedes slaughtering his way through the Trojans, for instance.[219] Once these initial explanations take place, the rest of the text is allowed to continue unencumbered by such descriptions – but the fact remains that these explanations of the Homeric text are apparently necessary in the novels, suggesting that a ready awareness of the Archaic supertext/Homeric megatext is not something that can be assumed of Simmons' target readership. The effect of this is potentially one of distance, of stretching the gap between the reader and their reading material – but is that strictly true here? Once these concepts have been introduced, they appear repeatedly in the story to follow but rather than still being strange or unusual, they are instead simply accepted. They become a part of Simmons' novels; in fact, they become part of the reader's megatext.

Ilium and *Olympos* thus seem to demonstrate the process of megatextual creation, the act of adding to the armamentarium, the lexicon, the intertextual encyclopaedia by engagement with new texts and

[219] Although the idea of the wider battle stopping to witness important moments of the narrative does crop up in modern *Iliad* adaptations: in episode 6 of the BBC series *Troy: Fall of a City*, "Battle on the Beach", for instance, both Greeks and Trojans (including Hector) step back and watch as Achilles carries the dead Patroclus from the battlefield.

new ideas. However, this is not the only way in which the concept of the megatext is useful for an analysis of Simmons' duology. A further literary element that is added to the mix is, as with Stableford's *Dies Irae*, Christianity. In *Ilium*, Simmons reworks the Homeric Zeus' discussion of the golden chain (*Il*.8.19-27) into a physical golden chain that his posthuman Zeus tosses to the other gods for a divine tug of war. Zeus wins, quite convincingly, demonstrating his superiority over his fellow divinities and quashing any ideas of helping the mortals on the Trojan plain. Cowed by her father, Athena then addresses him thus:

> Our Father, son of Kronos, who art in the highest throne of heaven, we know your power, Lord. Who can stand against you? Not us… (303)

This is a clear echo of the Lord's Prayer—*Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name*—but is here ascribed to a pagan deity, Zeus.[220] This here effectively elevates Zeus, lifting him above the rest of the squabbling Olympians and placing him on a level all of his own, especially considering the fact that it is Athena, one of the other gods, who addresses him as such, not, for instance, Hockenberry or one of the other scholics. This pre-eminence is mirrored in the text by the fact that, according to Hockenberry's admittedly unreliable narration, Zeus is the only one of the gods who actually knows how the Trojan War pans out in the *Iliad*: the others are in the dark as much as the Greeks and Trojans themselves. Zeus is addressed as the Christian God, and much like the Christian God he is omniscient – or at least more 'scient' than any of his fellows.[221] The inclusion of Christianity into the duology's megatext thus allows Zeus to be elevated by implication and association as much as by any explicit statement of his (pseudo-)divine power.

The question might be asked: how does any of this differ from simple allusion? Allusion is often construed as a relationship between two points: for example, *Ilium* refers to the Lord's Prayer in order

[220] Arguably a somewhat common move in nineteenth and twentieth century adaptations, namely having Zeus stand in for a monotheistic God-with-a-capital-G.
[221] Cf. Laimé (2014) on how Hockenberry's foreknowledge of the *Iliad* grants him "un avantage incomparable" (127)

to elevate Zeus above his fellow deities. The concept of the megatext, however, relies on audience participation, on the average SF reader being able to pick up this book and automatically understand the reference. It is not a relationship between two points (text – reference) but rather between three (reader – text – reference; which could conceivably be construed instead as reference – reader – text). The focus is shifted to include the reader as an essential part of the interaction. Thus a basic knowledge of the Homeric texts has to be added to the megatext assumed by *Ilium* and *Olympos*, but a basic knowledge of Christianity—or at least the way Christianity sounds—does not. In this way, the Homeric texts are in fact presented as exceptional within the novels, but not necessarily exceptional in a positive way: they are texts that the reader has to be prepared for, rather than texts included in the megatext that the SF-savvy reader can be assumed to be familiar with. This does not, however, mean that the Homeric texts are presented as either superior or indeed inferior to the other texts (taking the term loosely) that the novels adapt.[222] It simply means that, to a modern audience, they are different and have to be treated as such.

The status of the Homeric texts in a modern novel is a key one in Simmons' duology, but its resolution is one of indeterminacy rather than definite deprivileging. The complexities of Homeric status are further examined in this chapter's final text: Tad Williams' *Otherland* series. As previously discussed, the *Otherland* series is full of other texts: Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*; H G Wells' *The War of the Worlds*; a knowing pastiche of Tolkienesque fantasy; Frank L Baum's *The Wizard of Oz*; Egyptian myth; and a final nightmarish simworld cobbled together from broken fairytales and children's stories.[223] The *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* are just a single simworld in the middle of all this extravagance, and not even the final, supreme simworld at that. Williams in general certainly seems to subscribe to something like the concept of the megatext, although never specifically calling it such: he discusses having to "know your basics" (T Williams 2012a) before you can go about criticising other

[222] The characters from *The Tempest*, for instance, similarly to the nod to the Lord's Prayer, receive no explanatory introduction.
[223] Grimwood (1998) and Marcus (2005) both offer criticisms of this cornucopia of secondary sources, arguing that it gives the reader the feeling of having been there before. This is not an assessment that I agree with, as a lot of the enjoyment in the *Otherland* series comes from the games that Williams plays with the texts that have gone before.

texts, but at the same time warns that "even something wonderful should still not be swallowed whole without critical examination" (T Williams 2001b). We might thus expect the status of the Homeric simworld to be nothing more than another world for the characters to battle their way through to get to their final destination – and, in many ways, this is indeed the case. While the Homeric simworld is where all the disparate groups of protagonists finally meet up and join forces, it is the world *beyond* that, the world of the mountain of black glass, that is the one that is truly important. Once the recreation of Odysseus' travels and the Trojan War is behind them, it ceases to be a significant part of the story. It is simply one world among many.

However, this is not the Homeric simworld's only role in the text. Paul Jonas displays his flawed prior knowledge of the Homeric texts throughout his ordeal as Odysseus, texts he read and studied at school, and spends a good chunk of time trying to recall those "dim, spotty memories of Homer" (122):

> He struggled to summon up his Greek lessons from school days. If this place, this simworld, revolved around the long journey of Homer's *Odyssey*, then the king's house on Ithaca could only come into it at the beginning of the tale, when the wanderer was about to leave, or at the end when the wanderer had returned. (4-5)

This kind of reflection serves much the same purpose as Hockenberry's musings on the lessons he used to give in his prior life: it explains what is happening to the reader that might be unaware of Homer, therefore inserting Homer into the series' unique megatext. Another instance of this occurs when Paul encounters the Cyclops: he names himself "Nobody" because he

> remembered something about Odysseus using that name, and although he couldn't quite remember why he had, it had seemed like a good touch. (245)

Paul does eventually escape the Cyclops, but not quite in the way that Odysseus does in the *Odyssey*: in an attempt to distract the Cyclops from killing his companion, Azador, Paul splashes it with pitch, which then ignites and burns the creature alive. Paul's classical knowledge, although useful to the reader, is in fact of no practical help to him.

However, the fact that Paul studied these poems at school associates the Homeric poems with a kind of prestige that is implicitly not enjoyed by the other texts and their simworlds in the network – or, indeed, in the *Otherland* series as a whole. Paul's schooldays are repeatedly mentioned throughout the series, mostly in conjunction with his schoolfriend Niles, a stereotypical English aristocrat who has no money problems and seems to spend a good deal of his time shooting. Paul, however, attended the school where he met Niles as a scholarship student, and was very much a middle-class boy in an upper-class world.[224] Associations are thus drawn in the series between class status and the Homeric poems that in fact echo ideas in scholarship on the relationship between class and Classics,[225] thus potentially affording Homer a privileged position within both the Otherland network and the *Otherland* megatext. This is supported by the fact that it is explicitly stated in the series that the Homeric simulation was the first simulation created within the network (*Mountain of Black Glass* 342) and that it is thus at the "center of the story" (341). Equally, where other simworlds are twisted beyond recognition—'Pigzilla' is a feature of *Winnie-the-Pooh* ("The Boy Detective of Oz: An Otherland Story": 99-100)— as far as the reader can tell, the Homeric simworld proceeds intact.

In the *Otherland* series, then, Homer and the Homeric simworld are linked with upper-class, wealthy sensibilities, with the elite 'Grail Brotherhood' that set up the Otherland network in the first place and with the expensive education that Paul Jonas received in England. However, that is not to say that the Homeric poems thus occupy a privileged place within the narrative itself, because the overwhelming

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[224] Donna Tartt's *The Secret History* (1992) is an interesting comparandum, where the narrator's differing social class is a key element of the story.

[225] Cf. Stray (1998), Too & Livingstone (1998), Hall (2008b). The relationship between colonialism and a classical education is also touched on in the series with the character of Nandi Paradivash, who grew up in colonial India and in fact has a far better knowledge of Homer than Paul does (*River of Blue Fire* 332-3); cf. Goff (2005), Hardwick & Gillespie (2007), Bradley (2010) on colonialism in general; on colonialism in India, Trivedi (2007) and Vasunia (2013).

connotations of class and privilege in the series are strongly negative. Felix Jongleur, the richest man in the world, is the man in overall charge of the Otherland network, and he is the one who trapped Paul Jonas in the eternal hell that he experiences within the network. The reason that Paul came into contact with Jongleur in the first place is because they went to the same school:

> Paul struggled up onto his feet, legs weak, knees trembling. He could not sit across from the murderer any longer. Two years. Two years obliterated and his life ruined, for nothing. For a failed, insane project. Because he had gone to a particular school. It was the bleakest joke imaginable.
>
> (*Sea of Silver Light* 740)

The notional privilege of Paul's upbringing has in fact brought him nothing but pain and suffering. This is further stressed in the characterisation of Jongleur himself and of the Grail Brotherhood, the creators of the network and the Homeric simworld: they are the greedy, immoral one percent, willing to blithely sacrifice others for the sake of their own immortality. The Homeric simworld might have been their priority, perhaps preserved while others were destroyed because of its foundational importance in the Western canon—*The Wizard of Oz* is a nightmare playground but the *Odyssey* and the *Iliad* are hallowed ground—but that is not something that reflects particularly well on the Homeric poems themselves.

The Homeric simworld in the *Otherland* series thus seems to occupy a privileged position in the network, but whether or not that is a positive thing is questioned by the nature of the privileged few depicted in the novels. If Felix Jongleur is a proponent of the Homeric poems, for instance, then there are few others within the text who would like to be the same. In the wider megatext that we might more commonly refer to as 'the Western canon', the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* certainly enjoy a more illustrious status than, for instance, *Alice in Wonderland* or *The Wizard of Oz*, texts that are more commonly dismissed as children's stories. Williams' novels draw the Homeric poems into their megatext in order to simultaneously evoke that status, as it is likely that even if the reader is unfamiliar with the plot of the poems, they will have at least heard of them in the context of

canonical, distinguished literature, but then to undercut that status in an almost brutal fashion, associating the poems with individuals who are capable of extreme cruelty and destructive, ultimately fatal narcissism.

The SF concept of the megatext, then, is a useful analytical tool for texts that engage in the practice of reception. It takes a step away from 'allusion' in the sense of a two-way relationship between text and reference, and rather puts the reader themselves under the microscope, fashioning the content and understanding of the text around the predetermined knowledge that the reader—SF-savvy, classically-trained, both, or neither—brings with them to a text. The megatext, however, is not a monolithic structure: it bends and sways with the individual reader, and it is entirely possible for an individual text—such as Dan Simmons' *Ilium* and *Olympos*, or Tad Williams' *Otherland* series—to intentionally introduce new elements into the (or their?) megatext in order to enrich their readers' understanding.

An important factor of the megatext, it seems, in the reception of the Homeric texts is the democratising impulse that it brings with it. Whether the megatext is the author's creation or simply the assemblage of wider literature and history, the Homeric poems are more often than not on the same level as the texts that they are surrounded with. If they are not, then this process is problematised and questioned within the text through associations with class, education, and privilege.

This characterisation of the SF megatext has definite echoes of the Archaic supertext, discussed above, which forms the backdrop to the Homeric poems—and indeed the other poems of the Epic Cycle—in their original context: the focus on the reader/audience, for instance, and the questioning of texts and ideas that have gone before. However, the pointed questioning of the status of the Homeric texts of the kind that we see in Williams' *Otherland* series is without parallel: in the Archaic age, of course, the Homeric texts were only at the beginning of their afterlife, whereas the modern writer

facing the challenge of adapting Homer has to contend with the rest of the Western canon breathing over their shoulder.

Furthermore, it is not just the Archaic supertext that resonates with the SF megatext. Both —texts involve the creation of a broad, overarching network of tropes, ideas, stories and allusions, often with a democratising touch. This echoes the assemblage-theory set forth by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari in their monumentally dense *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980), a book that in fact sets out to represent the assemblage as much as it describes it:

> In a book, as in all things, there are lines of articulation or segmentarity, strata and territories; but also lines of flight, movements of deterritorialization and destratification. Comparative rates of flow on these lines produce phenomena of relative slowness and viscosity, or, on the contrary, of acceleration and rupture. All this, lines and measurable speeds, constitutes an *assemblage*. A book is an assemblage of this kind, and as such is unattributable. It is a multiplicity—but we don't know yet what the multiple entails when it is no longer attributed, that is, after it has been elevated to the status of a substantive. (1987: 3-4)

Deleuze and Guatarri instruct the reader to begin with whichever chapter of *A Thousand Plateaus* that takes their fancy, as all are interconnected and all are on much the same level as the other. The concepts of 'deterritorialization' and 'destratification' here mentioned are key throughout the work, ideas of levelling the interrelationship between different elements of knowledge, as is that of the 'body without organs', the deeper reality that underlies a whole formed from individual, fully functioning parts. The key notion of assemblage-theory is that of a network of knowledge without hierarchy, where everything connects to everything else and 'multiplicity' is more important than singular vision – but at the same time the network is self-contained and is even "elevated to the status of a substantive". The parallels with the SF megatext in particular—a democratising network of interconnected knowledge and readers—are suggestive.

However, the assemblage is not a creation with much of a focus on the reader: it is an entity rather than a way of looking at the world. Its stress on interconnectivity, on the other hand, and indeed the stress on interconnectivity in the SF megatext, has strong parallels with Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of dialogism, fully worked out in *The Dialogic Imagination* (1975), a theory that proposes that all language and all literature constructs its meaning from continual dialogue with every other word and text and meaning that that language can possibly contain. It is something of an unwieldy theory, with its vast interconnectivity surpassing the assemblage by far, but it echoes Deleuze and Guattari's concern with the connections between different kinds of knowledge and in particular stresses the importance of the situatedness of a literary work – and indeed knowledge itself.

That situatedness brings us back to reception theory and Hans Robert Jauss' horizon of expectations (e.g. Jauss 1970). The (often historical) context of a work is what is important to Jauss, a context which in fact has the ability to alter significantly the meaning of a work:

> A literary work is not an object which stands by itself and which offers the same face to each reader in each period. It is not a monument which reveals its timeless essence in a monologue. It is much more like an orchestration which strikes ever new chords among its readers and which frees the text from the substance of the words and makes it meaningful for the time (1970: 10)

The 'horizon of expectations' is introduced thus:

> The new text evokes for the reader (listener) the horizon of expectations and rules familiar from earlier texts, which are then varied, corrected, changed or just reproduced. (13)

Jauss' theory thus echoes the idea present in both assemblage-theory and dialogism of making connections between different facets of knowledge and literature, but veers back towards the megatext in its focus on the reader. Dialogism and the assemblage could (in a purely theoretical way) exist without the reader, but the megatext and the horizon of expectation are focused around the 'real-

world' interaction between reader and text. That is not to say that dialogism and the assemblage are completely disconnected from 'real' applications to texts—in practice, they are certainly not—but instead to highlight that the focus in those theories is more on the entity created itself rather than its interaction with a willing reader.[226]

There is a final theoretical structure that should be discussed here, one that has not been previously mentioned in this chapter: this is C S Lewis' notion of the medieval 'Model' of the world, set out in *The Discarded Image* (first published in 1964):

> This is the medieval synthesis itself, the whole organisation of their theology, science, and history into a single, complex, harmonious mental Model of the Universe. (2012: 11)

Lewis goes on to describe this 'Model' as the "medieval backcloth" (14) against which medieval authors wrote and created: the echoes of the SF megatext are certainly clear, as are those of the assemblage and (in a limited way) of dialogism. Furthermore, Lewis discusses the change in 'Models' in terms that echo Attebery's mention of mythology as "the name we give to cast-off megatexts" (1992: 108), but rather seems to suggest that we should try to see the value in these rejected Models/megatexts instead of pillorying them:

> We can no longer dismiss the change of Models as simple progress from error to truth. No Model is a catalogue of ultimate realities, and none is a mere fantasy. Each is a serious attempt to get in all the phenomena known at a given period, and each succeeds in getting in a great many. But also, no less surely, each reflects the prevalent psychology of an age almost as much as it reflects the state of that age's knowledge. Hardly any battery of new facts could have persuaded a Greek that the universe had an attribute so repugnant to him as infinity; hardly any such battery could persuade a modern that it is hierarchical. (222)

[226] Rieder (2010), in discussing a historicist approach to genre theory in relation to SF, in fact applies both Jauss' reception theory and Deleuze and Guattari's assemblage theory to the structure of the SF field (196).

This is strikingly reminiscent of Jauss' horizon of expectations, particularly the idea of a change in contemporary sensibilities leading to a change in the meaning of a text, whether actual or simply perceived. In this sense, in fact, perhaps Lewis prefigures Jauss – although there seems to be no evidence of either being particularly aware of the other. The concepts are not identical—Lewis makes a little more of the "violent death" (222) of an age's Model, whereas Jauss prefers to merely talk of a lack of "timeless essence" (10)—and they are certainly not identical to the other theoretical constructs discussed: assemblage focuses on the entity itself, dialogism is rooted in semiotics rather than medieval history, and the SF megatext is a more contained entity. The similarities, however, are perhaps more enticing than the differences.

The SF megatext; the Archaic supertext; the assemblage; dialogism; the horizon of expectations; the Model. I would imagine that this is the first time all six have been grouped together under the same roof. The similarities that have been traced above are not an attempt to suggest that all six somehow stem from the same root, but rather to show that similar concepts crop up throughout scholarly endeavour, from classical studies (the supertext) to non-Anglophone philosophy (assemblage; dialogism; horizon of expectations) to medieval history (Model) and, eventually, to SF (megatext). The juxtaposition of these disparate fields of study allows insight into the differences between each knowledge system, highlighting their strengths and weaknesses, so to speak, in what they choose to prioritise and what they choose to overlook. In comparison to these fields, some of which are extremely old, SF is new to the game, but yet it is thinking along the same theoretical lines, neatly situating itself within the context (the assemblage?) of other areas of academic study.

5: Sense of Wonder.

> ‘a sense of wonder’: another superannuated slogan of much SF criticism due for a deserved retirement into the same limbo as extrapolation

To the SF-savvy reader, it might seem to border on backwards to devote a chapter of this thesis to the sense of wonder. As Darko Suvin’s[227] (2016 [1979]: 101) scathing criticism, quoted above, shows, in certain SF circles the ‘sense of wonder’ has become something of a joke: it is mockingly abbreviated to ‘sensawunna’ or ‘sensawunda’ and derided as “the ‘gosh-wow!’ effect” (Sawyer 2005: 707); poorly-written, pulpy entries into the field can be brushed aside as “Sense of Wonder bug-crushers written with all the passionate élan of tax-instruction booklets” (L Shepard, quoted in Prucher 2007: 180). However, despite the disdain of some, the concept has in fact been remarkably tenacious, and has spawned a good deal of scholarship that is a little more thoughtful than Suvin’s dismissal might suggest.

The phrase ‘sense of wonder’ originated at the beginning of SF criticism in the late 1940s and early 1950s, mostly through the reviews of Damon Knight, although some assert that Sam Moskowitz was the true inventor; Moskowitz himself denies this (Moskowitz, quoted in Prucher 2007: 180). The term was potentially borrowed from the twenty-fifth stanza of W H Auden’s “In Memory of Sigmund Freud” (Delany 1981: 233):

> but he would have us remember most of all
> to be enthusiastic over the night,
> not only for the sense of wonder
> it alone has to offer, but also

[227] Suvin and his works will be discussed fully in Chapter 6: Cognitive Estrangement (pg.219-224).

because it needs our love.

Whatever the phrase's origin, it is most associated with the Golden Age of SF (Mann 2001: 508), although its effects have been traced back to, among others, Jules Verne (Mann 2001: 10). A number of early SF pulp magazines took the sense of wonder to heart in a very literal way, putting it in their titles—the American *Wonder Stories* (1929-55) and the British *Tales of Wonder* (1937-42), for instance—and the term emerges once again in early comic book characters. Wonder Woman is perhaps the most famous,[228] whose first appearance was in 1941; her enduring popularity has seen her comics published almost continuously since the 1940s and has spawned a number of live-action adaptations, notably the Lynda Carter television series (1975-79) and the Gal Gadot blockbuster film (2017).[229] In fact, much as Wonder Woman has survived into twenty-first century popular culture,[230] so the sense of wonder has made its way into twenty-first century scholarship. Suvin might have called for the sense of wonder's retirement in the 1970s, but academic texts published since the turn of the millennium still happily namecheck wonder in their titles: to name but a few, Artur Blaim's *Gazing in Useless Wonder* (2013), Jeffrey Allen Tucker's *A Sense of Wonder* (2004), and Gary Westfahl's *A Sense-of-Wonder Century* (2012).

The sense of wonder has been defined half a hundred times. It is "the sensation which… good sf should inspire in the reader" (Nicholls & Robu 2015); it is "the thrill of being forced into new ways of seeing things" (Sawyer 2005: 707); it is "the sense of inspired awe that is aroused in a reader when the full implications of an event or action become realized, or when the immensity of a plot or idea first becomes known" (Mann 2001: 508); it is "a feeling of awakening or awe triggered by an expansion of one's awareness of what is possible or by confrontation with the vastness of space and time, as brought on by reading science fiction" (Prucher 2007: 179); it is "a powerful experience of

[228] There was also a fairly obscure Marvel superhero named 'Wonder Man'.
[229] The term 'marvel' could arguably fall under the same conceptual umbrella, and has a similar popularity in superhero names: there are no fewer than four well-known Captain Marvels, one of whom, Billy Batson, sometimes retains the outlook of a young boy even in the guise of his alter-ego; cf. the discussion of the childlike sense of wonder below. Further, 'Marvel' is the name of one of the two major superhero comic publishing houses. Captain Marvel, interestingly, is getting a big screen reboot of her own (slated for 2019); she was alluded to in the post-credits scene of *Avengers: Infinity War* (2018).
[230] And scholarship: e.g. Sandifer (2013), Berlatsky (2014), Hanley (2014).

translation from the mundane to imaginary scenes and ideas that surpass the accustomed and the habitual" (Csicsery-Ronay 2002: 71); it is "awe at the vastness of space and time" (Hartwell 1985: 42); it is "emotional breathlessness as well as intellectual stimulation" (Moskowitz 1967: 5); it is a response to the 'icons' of science fiction and the meaning that they convey (Wolfe 1979: 23-7). An important facet of the sense of wonder is thus exactly that: it is a sense that is inspired in the reader, rather than any innate quality of the text at hand (Nicholls & Robu 2015, Sawyer 2005: 708, Landon 2002: 20).[231] As a result of this, particularly in the early days of SF criticism, critics looking for the sense of wonder often found it in unlikely places, in novels and stories that were not particularly well written (Nicholls & Robu 2015), leading to the concept being described as "the ultimate 'fudge factor' in explaining the popularity of science fiction stories" (Landon 2002: 19). This somewhat patronising outlook has also led to the sense of wonder being characterised as a phenomenon of youth (Hartwell 1985: 41-58), due in no small part to the fact that science fiction is stereotypically popular among young boys. Peter Nicholls and Cornel Robu (2015) eloquently rebut this attempt to diminish the concept:

> As we become older and at least in our own eyes more sophisticated, we are of course less likely to seek diamonds in dung-heaps. Perhaps younger readers find them more readily because, while they recognize a diamond when they see one, they haven't yet learned to recognize a dung-heap. In this respect the 'sense of wonder' *is* a phenomenon of youth – but that does not make it any less real.

Parallels can be drawn to C S Lewis' (1982) observation that focusing obsessively on what can be considered 'adult' (and therefore implicitly 'good') is in fact a somewhat adolescent pursuit:

> To be concerned about being grown up, to admire the grown up because it is grown up, to blush at the suspicion of being childish; these things are the marks of childhood and adolescence… When I was ten, I read fairy tales in secret and would have been ashamed if I had been found doing so. Now that I

[231] A classical comparandum occurs in Manilius, with an equal emphasis on the viewer: *quis caelum posset nisi caeli munere nosse, / et reperire deum, nisi qui pars ipse deorum est?* (2.115-6)

> am fifty I read them openly. When I became a man I put away childish things, including the fear of childishness and the desire to be very grown up. (59-60)

The dismissive attitude that critics demonstrate towards the sense of wonder is thus perhaps such an adolescent phenomenon: something can be valuable and interesting even if, to others, it might seem childish or unworthy.

The general idea of the sense of wonder, then, is a marvelling response to a text, most often an SF text, that is sparked by some kind of game-changing idea. The sense of wonder wonders at the vastness of the universe or the marvellous newness of a newly-discovered planet, at the idea of beings who live in environments that would destroy humanity or the majesty of the Star Destroyer gliding overhead in the opening shot of *Star Wars: A New Hope* (1977).[232]

A number of critics have attempted to quantify the sense of wonder further, mostly by linking it to theoretical concepts developed outside of science fiction.[233] Alexei and Cory Panshin in *The World Beyond the Hill* (1989) for instance, link wonder to transcendence, to an idea of "SF as expressing a yearning for transcendence of merely contingent social ties… in a vision of a higher order organized by emergent super-science" (Latham 1993: 174). Despite the book winning the 1990 Hugo Award for Best Related Work, it has met with some criticism: in a thundering review, John Clute described the Panshins as being

> so unutterably callow about the reified wet-dream they think of as transcendence, but which others might call fetish (5, quoted in Westfahl 2000)

Other clarifications of the sense of wonder that have gained minimal traction include Rosemarie Arbur's parallel with "mainstream literature's 'shock of recognition'" (Arbur 1982: 6) and Sharona

[232] Originally just *Star Wars*, later renamed *Star Wars: Episode IV – A New Hope*.
[233] This academic manoeuvre has come under fire by critics: Delany (1981: 234ff), Brooks Landon in Aldiss et al. (2006: 396).

Ben-Tov's description of wonder as "our tribute to nature's numinous aspect" (1995: 21);[234] a more recent analogy has been drawn by Alan Gregory between the sense of wonder and religious, specifically Christian, awe (2015; cf. Cramer 1994: 28), but this is perhaps too new a field of inquiry to be sufficiently judged at this point.

The two most persuasive—and indeed connected—elaborations of the sense of wonder are the notions of the paradigm shift or the conceptual breakthrough, and of the sublime. The paradigm shift/conceptual breakthrough[235] claims that the sense of wonder is evoked by a sudden shift in how the reader views the world around them, perhaps epitomised in the last line of A E van Vogt's classic novel *The Weapon Makers* (1947):

> This much we have learned. Here is the race that shall rule the sevagram. (224)

As Clute (2016c) observes:

> The word 'sevagram' appears only, [sic] as the very last word of *The Weapon Makers*; this resonantly mysterious slingshot ending, which seems to open universes to the reader's gaze, may well stand as the best working demonstration in the whole of genre sf of how to impart a sense of wonder.

Wonder at something becoming suddenly different, at the very nature of the world seeming to shift before your eyes, is a trope of much SF, and would seem to work very well as an explanation of how the sense of wonder works.

The relationship between the sense of wonder and the sublime is, in essence, what happens after the paradigm shift: the world shifts, blowing the universe wide, and the reader experiences a sublime sense of wonder because of that "sudden dislocation of scale", that "shift to a new position along the enormous span between cosmos and microcosm" (Nicholls & Robu 2015; cf. Robu 1988). The

[234] Evocative of the sublime, discussed below.
[235] Cf. P Nicholls (2000, 2016), Nicholls & Robu (2015, inc. bibliography).

equation of the sense of the wonder to the sublime also links SF into a discourse that arguably goes back all the way to Longinus' *On the Sublime*, although its modern formulation is most often ascribed to the eighteenth century philosopher Edmund Burke. The characterisation of the sense of wonder as the sublime is rife in SF scholarship,[236] and perhaps culminates in Istvan Csicsery-Ronay Jr's magisterial *The Seven Beauties of Science Fiction* (2008; cf. Csicsery-Ronay 2002). The fifth beauty is 'the science-fictional sublime' (125-53), and is described as follows:

> This is the so-called sense of wonder, a powerful expansion of quotidian awareness to the insight that the physical universe involves far more than anyone can imagine. (125)

The paradigm shift causes the wonder; the sublime is the feeling that the wonder creates.

Interestingly for a thesis concerned with the intersection between SF and classical literature, a comparatively new strand in reception studies has linked the moment of experiencing the vastness of the gulf between antiquity and the present day with the sublime. This is Deep Time:[237]

> Deep Time places us, on the one hand, face-to-face with almost unthinkable timespans: Playfair's 'abyss of time', which leaves him and the others 'giddy' and awestruck, outstripping even the limits of 'imagination' itself. But in a second moment, Deep Time confronts us with the no less awe-inspiring *presence* of the distant past, right before Playfair's eyes and, indeed, just beneath his feet
>
> (Butler 2016c: 3-4)

> Indeed, whatever its scientific trajectories, the cliff-side giddiness of Hutton and his associates looks very much like an experience of the sublime[238] (13)

[236] James (1994: 105; cf. 103-7), P Nicholls (2000: 12), Alkon (2002: 2), Sawyer (2005: 707), A Roberts (2006: 40), A P R Gregory (2015: 2).
[237] Cf. pg.109.
[238] James Hutton was an eighteenth-century Scottish geologist, and John Playfair a mathematician friend of his; Hutton's original concept of Deep Time was one of strictly geological time.

Deep Classics: Rethinking Classical Reception (2016) aims to provoke classicists to approach reception from a new angle, namely to understand that

> spatiotemporal 'tradition' is not just what happens to the past after the past, but an extension of the question of why the past, qua past, continues to compel our attention. (Butler 2016c: 15)

The example that is used to illustrate this idea of 'the past, qua past' as something that 'compels our attention' is illustrated by this experience of the sublime, a experience that—with its vocabulary: "giddy", "awestruck"—echoes not just the idea of the sublime but of the sense of wonder as well, if in fact we want to see a distinction between them at all. This seems to suggest an affinity between classical reception and SF itself, or at least between the reading experiences of the two.[239]

However, it is not just classical reception that evinces similarities with the SF sense of wonder. In an essay discussing early examples of science fiction, Brian Stableford (2004) says of the *Odyssey*:

> On the other hand, the 'sense of wonder' to which such works appeal is as fundamental to the aesthetic of SF as it is to the aesthetics of many other kinds of fantasy. (5)

The *Odyssey*, particularly Books 9—12, seems to display a call to wonder that is similar to that sense of wonder integral to SF. However, that said, there are only a few points in the text of the *Odyssey* itself where wonder is explicitly obvious. Hermes, for instance, marvels at Calypso's island in Book 5 (ἔνθα στὰς <u>θηεῖτο</u> διάκτορος ἀργεϊφόντης: 5.75), and the Cyclops is described as a θαῦμα (9.190) while Odysseus and his men marvel at his possessions (ἐλθόντες δ' εἰς ἄντρον <u>ἐθηεύμεσθα</u> ἕκαστα: 9.218); forms of the word θεάομαι are common to both of these examples, a word that can easily be translated as 'wonder'. Moving away from θεάομαι, the Sirens in particular are couched in language that evokes wonder, if not explicitly detailing it: they delight (τερπόμενος: 12.52), bewitch

[239] Chapter 6: Cognitive Estrangement will outline further theoretical similarities.

(θέλγουσιν: 12.40), and sound divine (θεσπεσιάων: 12.158).[240] However, while later literature might ascribe wonder to the *Odyssey*, in particular to Books 9—12, Odysseus himself is more likely to be shocked (e.g. κατὰ δ᾽ ἔστυγον αὐτήν: 10.113, at the Laestrygonian queen) or mournful (τὸν μὲν ἐγὼ δάκρυσα ἰδὼν: 11.395, at Agamemnon's ghost) than caught in the act of wonder. As SF scholarship outlines, wonder is in the eye of the beholder: Odysseus might have simply endured (ἀλλ᾽ ἔτλην καὶ ἔμεινα: 10.53), but a modern reader could prefer to wonder.

Interestingly, *On the Sublime* claims that the *Odyssey* is less sublime than the *Iliad* because the *Odyssey* is a product of Homer's old age and thus veers away from sublimity into romance (9.11-14). However, the treatise's description of the sublime nonetheless echoes many of the terms that have been used above to describe the SF sense of wonder: the sublime 'controls' (κρατεῖ, 1.4) and 'elevates' (ἐπαίρεταί, 7.2) the reader, much as the sense of wonder takes over the reader's imagination and brings them to a wider, perhaps even higher (following the Greek title: περί ὑψοῦς) understanding of the universe. *On the Sublime* further asserts that unusual things are always wondrous—θαυμαστὸν δ' ὅμως ἀεὶ τὸ παράδοξον (35.5)—and SF is nothing if not unusual. Furthermore, Lucian's *True History*, often claimed as form of proto-SF, is further said to be characterised by a sense of wonder, although S C Fredericks (1976) has argued that in fact the text "is touched with a sense of wonder in a strictly *fictional* manner because Lucian's ironic narrator constantly registers his amazement and incredulity at each new experience during his *voyage extraordinaire*" (50).

Fredericks' clarification here about the nature of the wonder in *True History* is instructive for how this chapter will approach the sense of wonder. This will not be an attempt to elucidate the sublime or paradigm shifts in the texts at hand. That would seem to be a somewhat pointless exercise, seeing as, arguably, what creates the sense of wonder is different for each individual reader. Rather this chapter will explore what role wonder and the sense of wonder play in these texts in three different ways, namely: how the texts dramatise wonder in a fairly straightforward sense, in terms of both language used and plot devices; how wonder can become a driver of plot and action; and how wonder is linked

[240] The Sirens were previously discussed at pg.73-74.

to beauty, and the consequences that has for not only the sense of wonder itself but also wider questions of aesthetics and aesthetic responses to works of literature. These comparative analyses will show that wonder is a complex force that can be seen as part of the *Odyssey* and also as a way of doing classical reception.

"Mouths Agape, Wondering What to Do": The Dramatisation of Wonder.

Fictionalised wonder is a recurrent theme in the texts that this chapter will discuss. This breed of wonder is demonstrated, much as Fredericks' description above suggests, by the characters within the text reacting to their surroundings, often as a result of paradigm shifts within their own intellectual horizons. A simple example of this can be found in Tad Williams' *Otherland* series, in particular during Paul Jonas' wanderings through the *Odyssey* simworld in *Mountain of Black Glass*:

> A part of him wanted to try to make sense of how this effect might work, to puzzle out the whys and wherefores of virtual sirens—he dimly felt there was something crucial to be discovered—but then, as the lure of the music grew a little less, a stronger, deeper emotion took a grip on him, an unexpected mixture of awe and delight.
>
> *Whatever this is,* he thought*, this network, this… whatever… it is really quite a magical world.*
>
> Somewhere in the failing darkness, perhaps with intent, perhaps as mindlessly as crickets scraping in the hedgerows, the sirens continued to create their terrible song. Safe now from its pull, Paul Jonas sailed slowly through a warm night in the ancient world, and for a little while gave himself over to wonder. (238)

Paul is confronted by the Sirens, figures that he knows from his boyhood studies of the *Odyssey*, but instead of wracking his brain to work out the specifics of the science behind them,[241] he instead

[241] It is interesting that the idea of inquiry and questioning is here linked to the sirens; after all, part of their attraction for Odysseus is that they promise to explain things (12.188-91). The nature of their song becomes a calling card for mystery in later tradition: cf. *quid Sirenes cantare sint solitae* (Suet.*Tib*.70), quoted at the

embraces the magic of his surroundings and ‘gives himself over to wonder’. He knows that the world around him is nothing more than a simulation, but for a little while he allows himself to believe that it is real, and worthy of marvel. The placement here of the word “wonder” at the end of the paragraph and indeed this section of the chapter is not coincidental. The description of “an unexpected mixture of awe and delight” is a good one for the sense of wonder, but the delaying of the loaded word here presents “wonder” as the concept—perhaps even the buzzword—that the reader has been waiting for. Furthermore, the idea of wonder as something to be ‘given over to’ is interesting. As will be seen later in this chapter, often when authors and readers speak of the wonder they experience in response to texts, it is an uncontrollable, giddy kind of wonder and excitement that cannot be subdued, can only be experienced.

Paul Jonas’ experiences in *Mountain of Black Glass*, then, provide an illustrative example of wonder, not only how it can be expressed in a text but also how it can manifest as an irresistible force within the one who wonders. This idea of the sense of wonder is also played with in Brian Stableford’s *Dies Irae* trilogy, particularly in the second volume, *In the Kingdom of the Beasts*. Incidentally, Stableford in his parallel career as a scholar of science fiction history has characterised “a vein of contemplative wonder” (Clute & Pringle 2017) as an essential element that distinguishes British from American SF (Stableford: 1985; cf. 2017b for examples): whether or not his analysis is correct, the fact that he writes on wonder in an academic sense suggests that it may well be a preoccupation of his fiction, too. *In the Kingdom of the Beasts* certainly supports this. As Mark Chaos (loosely) follows Odysseus’ wanderings, he wonders at the marvels that he sees:

> I can’t say that I agree with the girl’s metaphysical concept of identity with her world. But that’s probably because I don’t understand. I often make judgements when I don’t understand, even though it’s a mistake. But in this case, I came to no emotional conclusion. I was still lost in wonder when I reached the ship again. (47)

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beginning of Edgar Allan Poe’s “The Murders in the Rue Morgue” (1841), now recognised as the first modern detective story.

Confronted with a mode of existence that he simply cannot fathom, Mark Chaos 'loses himself' in wonder, again suggesting the intensity of the grip that wonder can have on the individual, while also positing a distinction between intellectual understanding and instinctual wonder. Instead of fumbling for a "conclusion" of some kind, instead he revels in the experience. This is much the same distinction as is figured in the example from *Mountain of Black Glass* above: Paul Jonas puts aside scientifically rationalising the simworld, and instead indulges in wonder.

The terminology of wonder continues throughout *In the Kingdom of the Beasts*: Chaos finds "clean air and open spaces things of wonder" (55), for instance, and Darkscar takes "great delight in showing off the wonders of his kingdom" (111), namely Planet Despair. Further, when Chaos descends into a great abyss on Despair:

> To learn humility, and to learn how big the universe is, one needs a change of perspective. I needed the chasms, which reduced the sky to a splinter of colored light, to teach me how far away the sky really is, and how tiny and fragile a man is. (113)

Chaos even explicitly says that Darkscar provokes "my sense of wonder by showing me what he could do and had done in a few short years" (114), namechecking wonder in a passage that is designed to showcase it. Less explicit but perhaps more playful is the novel's version of the Cyclops story, where the reader encounters this line:

> While we stood there, mouths agape, wondering what to do, the thing that was chasing Wandour appeared. (52)

The aural similarities between 'wonder' and 'Wandour'—one of Chaos' crewmates, Jose Wandour—are surely not coincidental, particularly coming as close together as they do here. The point is not that we are supposed to wonder at Wandour; rather this is something of a joke on the part of the author,

whose later academic credentials certainly suggest that, even when writing these novels in his early career, he was aware of the importance of the concept.

Namedropping, however, is not the only route to wonder – and it can eventually come to seem a little forced, a little stale. Perhaps the best way to show that sense of wonder being pricked is to actually show what our heroes are wondering *at*. This is a technique that emerges in particular at the end of *In the Kingdom of the Beasts*, when Chaos, on his travels through the universe, encounters a true alien life form for the first time in his life (153-55) and is thus "reborn with cosmic consciousness" (Fredericks 1982: 86). He describes the alien in as much detail as he can manage, but many of those details are essentially useless to a 'mundane' reading audience:

> The entity also had a face, but the face was not comparable to a man's face. This is the hardest thing of all to explain. *My* face is a part of my body, as distinct from my brain. It is closely associated with the brain, because it carries the sense organs of sight, smell and hearing. The entity's face was *directly* associated with the thinking element of the corpus. There were no sense organs. All sensation was directly involved with thought, and all expression was directly involved with thought. There was no intermediary – no censorship system. The entity perceived all and expressed all. (154)

Further:

> But the real alien, when I found it, was a totally new order of being. It was nothing I could understand. It was by no means repulsive, or admirable, in the way our imaginations have visualized the contact when it came. The being did not frighten me. We had nothing whatsoever in common except that we were both sentient and intelligent. (155)

It is far beyond human understanding to comprehend what Chaos means when he talks about a face directly associated with thought because it is something that is simply beyond our knowledge of the universe. This could be argued to be an evocation of the reader's sense of wonder in and of itself, but because the description is couched in Chaos' voice—most obviously because of the first person

narration, intentionally echoing the first person narration of *Odyssey* 9—12—instead it is Chaos' own wonder that we are experiencing. This shifts the focus away from the wonder itself to the character who is experiencing it, reminding the reader that, while this hyperspatial beast is a paradigm-shifting sublime creature, they are not the one who is coming face-to-face with it. Focusing the wonder through the prism of Mark Chaos keeps the story and the reader's attention tight on Chaos himself: *In the Kingdom of the Beasts* is the *Odyssey* of the *Dies Irae* trilogy, and so it is the Odysseus-figure that we should keep at the forefront.

Wonder, then, is expressed in these texts both by the vocabulary of wonder and by characters' reactions to the wondrous things that they experience. There is a certain separation at play here, however, between Paul Jonas and Mark Chaos' wonder and the reader's own: we wonder along with them, certainly, particularly in the case of the hyperspatial being in *In the Kingdom of the Beasts*, but it is not our own wonder that we feel. This is, paradoxically, perhaps a more guaranteed method of evoking wonder than the traditional way: if a writer creates a wondrous situation, whether through paradigm shifts or simply something very, very big,[242] then the reader is still not guaranteed to wonder at it because, as discussed, wonder is up to the reader, not the writer. However, if the writer shows their reader someone else caught up in wonder, especially if this character is already one that the reader empathises with, then perhaps the reader's wonder is more likely to rear its head. The archetypical moment of this in SF comes at the end of Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* (1982). The dying replicant Roy Batty (Rutger Hauer) marvels at the wonders he has seen, while Rick Deckard (Harrison Ford) and the viewer look passively on:

> I've seen things you people wouldn't believe. Attack ships on fire off the shoulder of Orion. I watched C-beams glitter in the dark near the Tannhäuser Gate. All those moments will be lost in time, like tears in rain. Time to die.

[242] 'Big Dumb Objects' or 'Macrostructures' are objects or constructions that are often linked to conceptual breakthrough and the sense of wonder. Cf. Langford & Nicholls (2011, 2017).

However, portraying a character in the throes of wonder works a little differently outside a purely literary text. Mangin and Démarez's *Le Dernier Troyen* is not overtly concerned with wonder in the same way as *Mountain of Black Glass* and *In the Kingdom of the Beasts*, in the sense that we do not get pages and pages of characters marvelling at their surroundings. This is perhaps linked to the fact that, while *Le Dernier Troyen* certainly incorporates the *Odyssey*, the *Aeneid* is more of a driving force: Énée is the main character, and it is his search for a new home after the destruction of the Troy-asteroid that forms the overarching plot. However, that is not to say that wonder is wholly absent. Throughout the text, whenever characters encounter something that might be thought of as 'wondrous', Démarez gives the reader a close-up of that character's face: their expressions are astonished, wondering, amazed, with wide eyes and open mouths (figs.23-5). Most often these 'wondrous' things are in fact the gods, appearing in the sky, who are demarcated from the mortals by their appearance: they look like classical statuary with empty, white eyes (e.g. fig.19). Taking the page as a whole, we see both the character's wonder and what they are wondering at at the same time, creating a sense of virtual overload: the gods are impressive in and of themselves, but putting them alongside the wonder of the characters within the story further elevates them in the eyes of the reader.

Figure 25 is interesting here if we consider the relationship between the sense of wonder and youth. The image shows Ulysse and Jule, Énée's son, marvelling at the apparition of virtually the whole divine pantheon in the skies above them – but, in fact, going by the usual rules of Démarez's evocation of wonder—wide eyes, open mouth—Jule is the only one who is truly wondering. Ulysse, on the other hand, is smiling: his expression is affectionate, perhaps even a little paternal. This highlights the age gap between them, further stressed by the craned angle of Jule's neck compared to Ulysse's slight tilt, the fact that Ulysse is kneeling down to put himself on Jule's level, and Ulysse's supportive arm around the boy's shoulders. If the sense of wonder is something that is most pronounced in youth, that fades with the advent of adulthood, then it makes sense that Jule is the one most obviously struck by wonder here. Of course, though, while Ulysse is not as obviously awestruck as Jule, that is not to say that he is unimpressed. "Tu n'es pas près de revoir ça," he says to Jule, implying that he understands the majesty of what he's witnessing – but at the same time, his priorities

are different. It is the luxury of youth to wonder at the world without consequence. Adulthood brings responsibilities with it that have to be cared for first – namely, in this instance, looking after a young child, ensuring that he is wondrous rather than afraid.

A contrasting approach to *Le Dernier Troyen* is neatly provided by Fraction and Ward's *ODY-C*. *Le Dernier Troyen*, despite its subject matter, is illustrated in a fairly true-to-life manner: excepting the exclusively warm colour palette, faces are drawn to look at much like real-life faces as possible, as are backgrounds and environments. *ODY-C*, on the other hand, deals in neon colours and distorted outlines, in a universe of images not found in nature – but its characters don't wonder at their surroundings as Jule and Andromaque do. The reader might marvel at the extent of the artist's colour palette but to the characters, that's simply how things are – and, to be honest, that may well be a source of wonder to the reader in and of itself: we wonder at their environment, and cannot grasp how they do not. What this goes to show is that the creation of wonder for a character is very different to the creation of wonder for a reader: we can share the characters' sensibilities, as we share Mark Chaos' in the face of the hyperspatial being he encounters in the *Dies Irae* trilogy, or, as in the colour splashes of *ODY-C*, we can be living in another world entirely.

One final instance of wonder remains to be discussed here, one that is in fact intimately connected with world creation itself. Simmons' *Ilium* provides a practically paradigmatic example of the paradigm shift, outlined above as a defining feature of wonder. The moravecs Mahnmut and Orphu are discussing quantum mechanics and quantum teleportation, the posthumans' favourite way of getting around, and they come to this conclusion:

> "A quantum-state standing wavefront," said Orphu. "Human consciousness exists primarily as a quantum state waveform, just like the rest of the universe."
>
> "And you're saying that consciousness itself created these other universes?" Mahnmut followed the logic, if it could be called that, but he was shocked by the absurd implications.

> “Not just consciousness,” said Orphu. “Exceptional types of consciousness that are like naked singularities in that they can bend space-time, affect the organization of space-time, and collapse probability waves into discrete alternatives. I’m talking Shakespeare here. Proust. *Homer*.”
>
> “But that’s so… so… so…” stammered Mahnmut.
>
> “Solipsistic?”
>
> “Stupid,” said Mahnmut. (420)

The two moravecs, however, don’t fully realise the importance of what they’ve discovered. At this point in the novel, while the reader is well acquainted with the Trojan War that Hockenberry is monitoring and (badly) attempting to alter, Mahnmut and Orphu’s storyline has yet to dovetail with Hockenberry’s. They have seen beings that look like Greek gods flying above them in high-tech chariots, but they haven’t yet trodden the plain of Troy or got down and dirty with the Achaeans and the Trojans. They have just thrown out a huge, game-changing paradigm shift with the realisation that genius literary consciousnesses can literally create parallel universes, but, to them, it is still only an abstract concept – albeit a striking one. To the reader, however, who has been experiencing one of those parallel universes for the past four hundred pages, it is a true ‘gosh-wow!’ moment, stressed even more so by the fact that “*Homer*” is the last of the three authors Orphu chooses to mention. The paradigm shift has come about as a result of the intellect and interactions of characters within the text, but it is only the reader who realises the true import of this shift, and only the reader who can feel the true sense of wonder the novel needs.

The interaction between character and reader in these texts thus provides a complex site of wonder. The reader can be simply a spectator to the wonder, swept away in Paul Jonas’ being swept away, or they can be part of its production – albeit, in the case of *Ilium*, in a strikingly collaborative manner. It is also interesting to note that it is in the case of two of the more straightforward *Odyssey* adaptations discussed—the Homeric passages of *Mountain of Black Glass* and *In the Kingdom of the Beasts*—that this character-focused evocation of wonder most commonly takes place. Stableford observes that the

sense of wonder is key to ancient texts like the *Odyssey*;[243] we can also perhaps say that that wonder is key to the popularity of the *Odyssey* for SF adaptors, and is something that they are compelled to retain in their modern rewritings.

"Why Does That Sound Less Exciting Every Time I Say It?": Plot and Character.

In some texts, however, wonder is not merely an incidental feature, not merely a quality to be evoked further to draw the reader into the story. In some texts, wonder plays a far more active role, driving the characters in new directions and, in some cases, further away from the original texts that they are adapting. A straightforward example of this is something that has been previously discussed in Chapter 3: Adaptation,[244] namely the centrifugal tendency in both Lafferty's *Space Chantey*[245] and Stauber's *Spin the Sky*. At the end of both of these novels, the Odysseus-figure decides that, actually, life back on the range in Ithaca isn't for him and takes to the stars once more. Lafferty foreshadows this decision in passages like this:

> "Eye, my eye, everything is wonderful with us. We are home in peace. We have wonderful Penny again. We have the world of our youth. We are honored and respected and one other word which I forget. We have come to the peaceful end of our journey. Why does that sound less exciting every time I say it?" (121)

Roadstrum attempts further reassurance:

[243] Quoted above, pg.193.
[244] Pg.115-116.
[245] Incidentally, Lafferty's work has been repeatedly described as a source of wonder for its readers (Surridge 2011, Webster 2012, Ellison 2014: 116, Case 2015: 192, Webb 2015b: 112-3); Petersen (2015a: 30) discusses the wondrous qualities of Lafferty's monsters. Clute (2016b), on the other hand, judges that Lafferty "was technically inventive, but lunged constantly into a slapdash sublime only skittishly evocative, and only occasionally, of anything like the traditional sense of wonder".

> “Eye, my eye,” he said as he took it into his hand. “All things are wonderful, and can you say that anything is wrong?” (122)

The eye disagrees. As a side note, it is possible that with “Eye, my eye” Lafferty is in fact punning on ὤ μοι, a phrase which Odysseus is inclined to use in the *Odyssey* to open speeches when under duress (e.g. 5.299: ὤ μοι ἐγὼ δειλός, τί νύ μοι μήκιστα γένηται;). Lafferty was a keen linguist, and the surreality of transposing a pathetic Homeric explanation into a bizarre conversation with an eye is rather Laffertian.

Eventually Roadstrum takes the only road truly open to him and blasts out once more to explore the stars – and the way this realisation is described echoes the uncontrollability of the sense of wonder elaborated above: it ‘explodes’ within him and without him (122), ‘erupting’ into the street and the world around him. The places that are here (ironically) described as wonderful are in fact anything but, and the truly wonderful places are still waiting for him beyond the confines of humdrum Ithaca. This is an idea that is in fact echoed wider in Lafferty’s corpus. In *Past Master* (1968), a novel in which a civilisation built on the precepts of Thomas More’s *Utopia* brings Thomas More himself into their midst, a character named Rimrock exclaims:

> “May the sense of wonder never leave me!” (73)

The sentiment is remarkably similar to Roadstrum’s rejection of the boredom of everyday life, and is here explicitly expressed by the ‘slogan’ that Suvin so sneeringly rejected. For Lafferty, it might seem, the wonder offered by SF and indeed, in the case of *Space Chantey*, by the *Odyssey*, is far more attractive than the alternative. Wonder in Lafferty becomes almost an aspect of characterisation: it is Roadstrum’s (and perhaps also Rimrock’s) desire for wonder that drives them onwards.

The same could be said of the character of Hockenberry in Simmons' *Ilium*. When the reader first encounters Hockenberry he is, above all else, bored.[246] Faced with the prospect of actually getting to know whether Athena appears to Achilles in *Iliad* 1 or is rather simply a Homeric projection of his subconscious, a closely-fought debate in Homeric scholarship,[247] he simply doesn't care – and his not caring is couched in the deliberate, emphatic phrase "I… don't… give… a… shit" (4).[248] Furthermore, while attempting to recall the simile at the end of *Iliad* 6 (506-11) that compares Paris to a stallion in full flight, Hockenberry's narration says:

> I remember writing a paper for a scholarly convention in which I'd analyzed Homer's metaphor of Paris racing along like a stallion breaking free of its tether, hair streaming like a mane back over his shoulders, eager for battle, blah, blah, blah. (212)

This passage serves the joint function of elaborating the simile to an audience that may not be familiar with it while simultaneously dismissing it is as unimportant, irrelevant – and also illustrating Hockenberry's lack of academic interest, in that he gets a metaphor mixed up with a simile. However, Hockenberry's apathy and boredom do not last forever. When he does in fact witness Athena appearing to Achilles in *Iliad* 1, this is what happens:

> It's at this instant, remembering the murderous gaze that Achilles had turned on Athena in the instant before she wrenched his hair back and cowed him into submission,[249] that a plan of action so audacious, so obviously doomed to failure, so suicidal, and so wonderful opens before me that for an instant I have trouble breathing.
>
> …

[246] Simmons has repeatedly expressed his own boredom with the idea of forever writing in the same genre (Simmons 2003b, 2009b, 2015a). Perhaps Hockenberry, trapped forever in the same text, is a reflection of that authorial boredom. Cf. Laime (2014: 131) on how Nightenhelser much prefers the "surprises" of his new life in prehistoric Indiana to his previous life as a scholic.
[247] Dodds (1951: 14), for instance, dismisses Athena as "the projection, the pictorial expression of an inward monition"; cf. Kirk (1974: 292); Redfield (1975: 76) is dubious about the nature of the gods through the epic. Pulleyn (2000: 176-77) offers the opposing view; cf. Feeney (1991: 366).
[248] This quotation was previously discussed at pg.135.
[249] Interestingly, this isn't quite the order of events in the *Iliad*: Athena grabs Achilles' hair before he ever has a chance to see her (*Il*.1.197-200).

> *I will do this thing.* The decision comes with the exhilaration of flying—no, not of flying, but in the thrill of that brief instant of zero gravity one achieves when throwing oneself from a high place and knowing that there is no going back to solid ground. Sink or swim, fall or fly.
>
> *I will do this thing.* (18-19)

The fact that "wonderful" crowns the crescendoing list of reasons why this is a dangerous plan is highly evocative, implying that it doesn't matter that this is a spectacularly stupid idea because it's just so wonderful. Dangerous or not, Hockenberry craves the wonder it may bring. Furthermore, the description of the exhilaration of "that brief instant of zero gravity" echoes the uncontrollable, irrepressible nature of wonder outlined above that, in fact, plays a part in Simmons' own history. As he says:

> When I was about nine my older brother came home for Christmas and he brought me three large boxes of Ace Science Fiction Doubles, and copies of *Fantasy & Science Fiction* and *Astounding*. I flipped out. I went berserk. I remember reading those books and magazines into the spring.
>
> That orgy of reading after Christmas when I was nine years old and the tremendous feeling of attendant richness and expansiveness was what I was trying to celebrate in *Hyperion*.
>
> (S Nicholls 1993: 154)

The adult Simmons' attitude to the sense of wonder is not quite so positive, however: he judges that, as SF grew out of "pulp entertainment fiction" and "the Robert Louis Stevenson brand of exciting, 'childlike' fiction", it "carries little of the serious weight that any era or brand of serious poetry must confront" (Simmons 2003b: 241-2) – although elsewhere he does depict SF as providing the pleasure of encounters with "new places, new peoples, and new thoughts" (Simmons 2003a).[250] The echo of the opening of the *Odyssey* here—πολλῶν δ᾽ ἀνθρώπων ἴδεν ἄστεα καὶ νόον ἔγνω (1.3)—is probably coincidental. That said, it is not necessarily all that relevant to what Simmons himself believes. The effect of Hockenberry's moment of wonder on his motivations and future actions in the novel is clear,

[250] Incidentally, Palmer (1999) explores the idea of galactic-empire fiction such as Simmons' *Hyperion* Cantos as a vehicle for the sublime.

even if, as discussed in Chapter 3: Adaptation,[251] his attempts to change the plot of the *Iliad* unfurling in front of him are not entirely successful.

Thus far, all the examples that have been discussed have demonstrated the effect of wonder on an individual's actions, effectively construing an experience of wonder as a turning point in a character's personal psychology. Williams' *Otherland* series, on the other hand, takes things a little further: here, characters who maintain their sense of wonder are in fact rewarded with a second chance at life. The *Otherland* series is marked by exploration of new, excitingly-strange worlds, worlds where everyone can fly, worlds where the whole world is made up of one vast house, worlds made out of old stories that everyone knows. The reader's reactions to these worlds is perhaps one of external wonder, and, as discussed above, wonder is explicitly evoked by none other than Paul Jonas as he voyages through the Homeric simworld. This is not, however, the only moment that the word 'wonder' appears in the text. Consider this passage from the *Otherland* short story, "The Boy Detective of Oz: An Otherland Story", spoken by Orlando Gardiner:

> *man, what was with those grail brotherhood people screwing up perfectly good children's stories, mr. k?... i mean, dzang! those old scanners turned the first version of kansas into a nightmare, ruined alice's wonderland and pooh corner—remember pigzilla?—and a bunch of other stuff besides. didn't those fenhead bastards ever hear of innocent childlike wonder?* (99-100)

As discussed, the sense of wonder has been argued to be a defining feature of childhood: indeed, David Hartwell (1985) once asserted that "the real golden age of science fiction is twelve" (3). It is thus interesting that the majority of the simworlds that are explored in the Otherland network are texts and 'worlds' that would typically be first experienced in childhood: Alice in Wonderland; the Wizard of Oz; mythology, both Egyptian and Greek (including, in abbreviated forms, the *Iliad* and the

[251] Pg.118-122.

Odyssey); the Ice Age and prehistoric man;[252] Middle Earth (via the Middle Country simulation). The list goes on. Indeed, in response to a question about what book he would choose to read again for the first time, Williams (2012a) himself said:

> Wow, tough one. The biggest single influence on me was reading the Lord of the Rings [sic] when I was about eleven, so probably repeating that amazing, immersive experience would be the most tempting.

Arguably, then, the reason that these particular simworlds were selected is because they are likely to hold a certain amount of nostalgic wonder for both the reader of the *Otherland* series and, perhaps, the creators of those simworlds themselves. The in-universe explanation is that the superrich of the world can pay to create a simworld in lavish detail: perhaps the worlds that they choose to recreate are those that afforded them a sense of wonder when they were younger. Orlando's complaint in "Boy Detective" is thus remarkably apt: worlds that were once vehicles of "*innocent childlike wonder*" have been tainted as their creators have aged, as their sense of wonder was corrupted by the sensibilities of adulthood.

As such, childhood is firmly linked with the wondrous simworlds that the characters travel through in the *Otherland* series, and Orlando himself is an interesting character to consider in this context. As discussed in Chapter 3: Adaptation,[253] he is afflicted by progeria and is thus, by his links to the doomed Achilles in particular, intimately connected with his own death. This is further underscored by the fact that, like Achilles, Orlando is in a way offered a choice between life and death. At various points throughout *Mountain of Black Glass*, Orlando, already weakened by his disease, passes out within the network and seems to slip into reality, witnessing himself comatose in his hospital bed with his parents grieving silently at his side. It is unclear whether this is a hallucination or is something that he is in fact actually seeing, but it is real enough in his mind. In the last of these liminal, hallucinatory

[252] The popularity of the *Ice Age* animated films is testament to this particular fascination, although the first *Ice Age* (2002) came out the year after *Sea of Silver Light* and so cannot have been a direct influence on Williams' work. Perhaps Jean Auel's *The Clan of the Cave Bear* (1980) might have been more of an inspiration?
[253] Pg.126.

experiences, a voice asks him to make a choice: he can go back and say goodbye to his family, or he can remain within the network, a choice that will most likely result in him dying without ever seeing his parents again.

> It was an impossible decision, but it could not be avoided. It was the single most terrible thing imaginable. (380)

He chooses to stay and protect his friends, and the next time he wakes up inside the network, he is in the Trojan War simulation and he is wearing the Achilles sim. The choice is similar to the one Thetis prophesies for Achilles (*Il.*9.412-16):

> εἰ μέν κ΄ αὖθι μένων Τρώων πόλιν ἀμφιμάχωμαι,
> ὤλετό μοι νόστος, ἀτὰρ κλέος ἄφθιτον ἔσται·
> εἰ δέ κεν οἴκαδ' ἵκωμι φίλην ἐς πατρίδα γαῖαν,
> ὤλετό μοι κλέος ἐσθλόν, ἐπὶ δηρὸν δέ μοι αἰὼν
> ἔσσεται, οὐδέ κέ μ' ὦκα τέλος θανάτοιο κιχείη.

Of course, the two are not identical: Achilles' choice is between living a long and unmemorable life or a short and glorious one, while Orlando's is between different ways of dying. The similarities, however, are suggestive: staying in a faraway place (Troy, the Otherland network) in order to fight (the Trojans, the Grail Brotherhood), or returning home (to Phthia, to reality) and seeing family members again (Peleus, Vivien and Conrad Gardiner).

The focus on family in the *Otherland* choice scene, achieved by depicting Vivien and Conrad grieving at Orlando's bedside, further ties this choice to Orlando as a character caught between life and death. Throughout the series, when referring to his parents Orlando always calls them by their given names, Vivien and Conrad, rather than as his mother and father. It is a mark of his self-perceived 'adulthood': he is unlike most children his age because he is dying and spends most of his time in a hospital bed

rather than at school, and as such he rejects the normal accoutrements of childhood, including the words 'Mom' and 'Dad'. However, when he is offered his choice by a perhaps-hallucinatory voice, he watches his parents and thinks:

> *Vivien and Conrad. Mom and Dad.* (379)

This is the first time he has voluntarily (and non-sarcastically) said this, and it serves as an affecting reminder for the reader that, whatever else he might be, Orlando is still a child. He is thus a liminal figure, caught between the adult life that he will never experience and the adult death that he cannot escape.

The choice that such a liminal figure makes is therefore important, and perhaps offers an opportunity to transcend that liminality. Throughout the *Otherland* series, Orlando is seen as fully throwing himself into every simulation that he encounters. This is particularly noticeable in *River of Blue Fire*, when Orlando and Sam pass through perhaps the most ludicrous simworld: an animated world based on a kitchen, where they team up with a matchstick named Chief Strike Anywhere to rescue his infant child (also a matchstick) and fight salad-fork crocodiles. Sam spends most of her time worrying about being trapped and laughing at the absurdity of it all, but Orlando throws himself into it, immersing himself in the world that he has found himself in rather than hanging back and rolling his eyes. Orlando is an active participant in the wonder of the network: he allows himself to be caught up in the adventure of it all, instead of rejecting it as a more world-weary adult (or indeed teenager) might.

In the end, Orlando dies, his physical body overwhelmed by the progeria. However, that is not the end of his story. He reappears in the Otherland network as a purely virtual individual, implicitly because of the strong engagement he had with the network while he was alive; he keeps all of his memories and characteristics but is no longer linked to his real body, no longer able to leave the network at all but still alive in some way. In this form, he is in fact key to the survival of his friends. He is a character who is marked by his liminality, by his status as trapped between life and death, between

childhood and adulthood, fated to never truly experience either – but by throwing himself into the wonder of the network, by immersing himself in it to such an extreme degree, he is given a new lease of life. In fact, he is the only character who has appeared as a central figure in short stories post-*Otherland*, namely “The Happiest Dead Boy in the World” and “The Boy Detective of Oz”: he is, of course, the titular ‘Happiest Dead Boy’ and the ‘Boy Detective’. Orlando transcends his liminality by surrounding himself with wonder – but that transcendence means that, instead of existing somewhere between childhood and adulthood, he remains forever a child. Inside the network, as shown in “The Happiest Dead Boy in the World”, he does not age, even as his friends and family outside do. The wonder of the *Otherland* network is a wonder rooted in “*innocent childlike wonder*” – and that is where Orlando must remain.

A similar dynamic is at play with the character of Paul Jonas. As discussed above, Paul explicitly gives himself over to wonder in the Homeric recreation, and he is also, like Orlando, shown throughout the series as being fully immersed in the network – although the reason for his immersion is that he does not entirely know that what is happening to him is in fact not real. He also spends the better part of four books afflicted by amnesia, his memories only coming back in flashes and fragments. However, much as Orlando’s immersion in wonder grants him a new chance at life within the network, so when Paul dies in the network he wakes up in his real body, an amnesiac once more, having forgotten all of the trauma he went through – but with a chance to start his life over. The difference between the two lies in their relationship to the network: Orlando was an avid user of virtual reality even before he got caught up in the adventures of the *Otherland* series, using a muscle-bound heroic avatar in the Middle Country simworld to escape the crushing reality of his life, but Paul was an unwilling participant all along. His immersion in the network resulted in his wonder, yes, but it was not a wonder that he tried to achieve, instead something that merely happened to him along the way. As a result, by dying they both achieve what they wanted all along: Paul, to return to his normal life, and Orlando, to live within the network for as long as he can.

Wonder, then, is not just a reaction in these texts, not just something to be felt, marvelled at, and then moved on from. Wonder can drive what characters choose to do and indeed what the plot does to them, whether that wonder is generated by echoes of Odysseus' adventures or by the wider context of an SF novel. It is again remarkable that *Odyssey* adaptations are so full of the sense of wonder—this section has added *Space Chantey* and *Spin the Sky* to the list of *Odyssey*-novels that depict their characters caught in the throes of wonder—but the analysis of Simmons' *Ilium* goes to show that the *Odyssey* does not have a monopoly. In *Ilium*, it could perhaps be argued that the true wonder comes from the juncture between ancient text and modern adaptation: for Hockenberry, the ancient text that he is following is dull and boring ("blah, blah, blah"), but the excitement and surprise of *changing* that text brings a wonder that sets his heart racing once more. *Ilium* perhaps figures reception as a wonder-making process, in particular receptions that alter the course of the ancient story. After all, it is certainly a paradigm shift for the classically-minded reader to encounter a text that depicts Achilles and Hector joining forces to wage war against the gods rather than against each other. As such, when Roadstrum and Cesar turn away from home to voyage among the stars once again, they are not just responding to wonder, they are in fact creating it, too.

"The Kind of Beauty That Punched You in the Solar Plexus and Followed It Up With A Haymaker to the Jaw": Beauty, Reception, Aesthetics.

The intersection between wonder and the process of reception is further examined in Wright's two classical novellas, "The Far End of History" and "The Plural of Helen of Troy", through the prism of beauty. The relationship between beauty and wonder is a close one: beautiful things are worth wondering at, worth marvelling at. As Elaine Scarry (2000) writes:

> Something beautiful fills the mind yet invites the search for something beyond itself, something larger or something of the same scale with which it needs to be brought into relation. Beauty, according to its critics, causes us to gape and suspend all thought. (29)

‘Gaping’ and ‘suspending all thought’ are familiar symptoms of the impact of the sense of wonder, suggesting that a parallel between wonder and beauty is not unwarranted. Scarry further writes, appropriately for this chapter:

> What is the felt experience of cognition at the moment one stands in the presence of a beautiful boy or flower or bird? It seems to incite, even to require, the act of replication. (3)

‘Replicate’ is not quite the same as the ‘re—’ words discussed in Chapter 3: Adaptation,[254] implying slavish recreation rather than a more fluid adaptation or reworking, but it still forms a part of that continuum of reception. “The Far End of History” echoes this idea of a beautiful object demanding reworking. Penelope is herself a recreation of Old Earth, and the descriptions of her are of a place of extreme beauty, both natural and artificial:

> So he seated himself (let us assume with a slight, purse-lipped smile) in a grove not far from the shore, perhaps on a tree stump or perhaps on a stone, and let us imagine that Penelope has placed a picturesque ruin, perhaps a circular colonnade, nearby, with marble Doric pillars rising ghostly in the un-moonlight, and their connecting architraves ornamented with a frieze of nymphs fleeing satyrs, a frozen footrace endlessly circling the grassy space embraced by the pillars. Here and there were tall, slim poplars, sacred to Heracles, or pharmaceutical trees whose bioengineered balms cured numberless diseases in a form of mankind long-extinct, but which were still kept for the fragrance of their leaves, or for the sentiment of things past. (510-11)

For the purposes of this chapter, it is certainly significant that the “circular colonnade” of “marble Doric pillars”, a clearly classical description, forms such a central part of this evocation of Penelope’s—and indeed Old Earth’s—beauty. The description of a “frozen footrace” perhaps echoes the eternal pursuit of Keat’s “Ode on a Grecian Urn” (17-18), while simultaneously calling to mind real classical art. Further, the novella describes how

[254] Pg.107-108.

> Penelope loved creating and re-creating Old Earth, a task she delighted in, since it was an endless task.
>
> (543)

The wondrous beauty of Old Earth thus proves 'delightful' for Penelope,[255] so much so that she is drawn to the task of "creating and re-creating" it over and over again. This certainly plays into Scarry's notion of beauty as something that demands replication, while at the same time the description of Penelope's own beauty implies that it is at least in part because of the world's past (Doric columns, satyrs and nymphs) that it is quite as beautiful as it is. "The Far End of History" thus establishes a link between beauty and recreation, and indeed between classical antiquity and beauty, suggesting that you could do worse than wondering at the classical past.

We find a similar collocation of ideas in "The Plural of Helen of Troy". This novella repeatedly and unsubtly stresses Marilyn-Helen's staggering beauty: she is introduced as "a beautiful girl, no, … the beautiful girl", and her beauty is described as "the kind of beauty that punched you in the solar plexus and followed it up with a haymaker to the jaw". As discussed in Chapter 3: Adaptation,[256] it is her extreme beauty that drove the Time Wardens to reshape Marilyn Monroe into Helen of Troy, and, in fact, it is her extreme beauty that drives them to keep her alive at all costs, even when she repeatedly tries to take her own life.[257] Further, when Jake Frontino sees her for the first time, he and his companion are "mesmerized" by her. Later, he explains a little more:

> But it was the sweet languid innocence that got you. She was the most beautiful of roses, without any thorns to defend herself. Inexpressibly lovely. Helpless. Vulnerable. I could see why men left their families and their nations and set off to war in her defense.
>
> Heck, if I'd had any ships, I would have launched 'em too.

[255] This phrase was previously discussed on pg.137.
[256] Pg.139-142.
[257] Cf. Blondell (2009), Maguire (2009: ch.2, 35-82) on the beauty of Helen of Troy.

> She had a certain something that made a man want to help her, protect her, devote his life to her. But the dark side of desire is that same something made other men want to take her, use her, possess her.

There is an air of the uncontrollability of the sense of wonder in this description, the implication being that this woman is so astonishingly beautiful that men cannot control themselves around her. This is emphasised by the juxtaposition of "I could see why men left their families and their nations and set off to war in her defense", a line extremely evocative of *Iliad* 3.156-8, where the Trojans remark on how it is οὐ νέμεσις that the Achaeans came running after Helen, with "Heck, if I'd had any ships, I would have launched 'em too", echoing the famous depiction of Helen from Christopher Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* (Act Five, Scene One) as "the face that launch'd a thousand ships", a line which is in fact explicitly quoted elsewhere in the novella. The juxtaposition of these two moments in the timeline of Helen's literary history reminds the reader of all the men over the course of that history who have reacted so violently, so destructively, so uncontrollably to her beauty. This is a sentiment that is repeated when Jake rescues her. Marilyn-Helen asks if she can stay with him for a little while, and he considers it:

> At first I would tell her to sleep on the floor, or maybe I would be the gentleman and take the floor and give her the couch. And then the next morning, I would tell her she had to be gone by that evening, and the next morning after that I would tell her the same thing and so on for a week until it became a joke between us. She would gaze into my eyes and smile and maybe kiss me on the nose and pour me a cup of coffee whenever I said it.
>
> And then, perhaps, when I was old, I would think back upon those days, and I would scour the city looking for an active crystal with the right time depth so I could go back and see her. And then…
>
> And then I would find myself in the same position as the man I'd just helped kill.

In the end, he resolves to take her to stay with Homer:

> *Homer is blind, so maybe he can stand to be around you and survive.* I did not say that part out loud, only to myself.

In "The Plural of Helen of Troy", Marilyn-Helen is an object of extreme aesthetic value, a value that is couched in the kind of wonder, perhaps even bordering on madness, that beautiful objects seem to provoke. In his *Latin Poetry and the Judgement of Taste* (2004), Charles Martindale outlines the kind of aesthetic questions that we should be asking of a text:

> 'is it beautiful, and if so how?' or 'what pleasure does it give, and how?' (10)

The phrasing of that second question, "what pleasure does it give", is particularly piquant in the context of Wright's novella. As reviewers have noted, Marilyn-Helen is not much of a character in her own right (Buis 2015, MacLeod 2015). Instead she is purely valued for the pleasure that she gives others, something made strikingly clear in her abuse at the hands of the Time Wardens, who are so enamoured of her beauty that they can afford to make spare copies to hand off to their latest favourites. This is highlighted by a scene in the novella where Jake witnesses a beauty contest "between five versions of Helen of Troy and her ancient rival Cleopatra". Marilyn-Helen is recreated (and indeed created in the first place) because of her beauty, supporting Scarry's assertion that beauty demands to be replicated, but this is a selfish reception, a selfish recreation: Marilyn-Helen has no interest in being recreated, and, in fact, she has no interest in being created at all. Marilyn-Helen was originally Marilyn Monroe, who was then spirited back in time to replace the original Helen of Troy because "she was a prettier Helen than the original".[258] When Jake calls her by the name that everyone else does, Helen, she replies:

> "That's not my real name," she said. "It's a stage name."

[258] Incidentally, this combining of the Helen and Marilyn figures operates in much the same way as the paradigm shift, discussed above.

Marilyn-Helen thus rejects the identity that she has been rewritten as, simultaneously rejecting the aesthetic assessment of her that focuses her worth solely in her beauty. This is, of course, not to say that an aesthetic criticism is necessarily an invalid one, but it does in fact serve to stress the fact that a purely aesthetic critique based in “a delight-inducing play of our mental faculties” (Martindale 2004: 16) is a very self-centred critique indeed. That is not necessarily a bad thing: it is in fact the definition of reader-response criticism. However, it certainly casts an interesting light on the process of an aesthetically-based process of reception when the object being received is in fact not an object at all.

Wonder is a multi-faceted concept, as is any concept that relies on the response it generates in its readership. This chapter has shown by the juxtaposition of the *Odyssey* and science fiction that, to a modern reader, wonder seems to be an important part of the ancient text. Thus wonder can be a driving force not only for character actions and development, as in the case of, among others, Simmons’ *Ilium* and Williams’ *Otherland* series, but it can also be a motivator for processes within texts that look a lot like reception itself: Penelope’s recreation of Old Earth in “The Far End of History” and Marilyn-Helen’s repeated rebirths in “The Plural of Helen of Troy”.

It is also interesting to note that many of the texts discussed that dive headfirst into the sense of wonder are fairly close *Odyssey* adaptations: Williams’ *Mountain of Black Glass*, Stableford’s *In the Kingdom of the Beasts*, Lafferty’s *Space Chantey* and Stauber’s *Spin the Sky*. The plots of these texts—or, in the case of *Mountain of Black Glass*, the plot of the Homeric portion of the text—follow the *Odyssey*, mostly Books 9 to 12, very closely, albeit most often translating Homer’s marvels into marvels that are a little more palatable to a modern SF audience. Thinking in terms of the sense of wonder’s association with childhood, this perhaps makes sense: the stories in these books are the ones that are most often first read by children, as they are more easily enjoyed than the more complex politics and interpersonal relations of the rest of the text. In this sense, then, wonder is another string to the *Odyssey*’s bow, even if, as discussed above, it is one that might not be truly innate to the

Odyssey itself. However, for the sense of wonder, a sense rooted in the reader, not the text, the *Odyssey* works in harmony with SF sensibilities and the union of the two can generate some rather wondrous results.

6: Cognitive Estrangement.

It is hard to measure the extent of the Yugoslavian-born Marxist critic Darko Suvin's impact on SF studies. His scholarly output is prodigious,[259] and his early attempts to define the limits of SF, however problematic they might now seem, have provided not only something for scholars to argue over but also a provocation for further study. Patrick Parrinder (2000c) describes Suvin's work as a "heuristic model" (48), as a demonstration of one way to deal with the concept of SF as a whole.[260]

Suvin's initial definition of SF came in his article "On the Poetics of the Science Fiction Genre" (1972), revised and expanded in the seminal *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction* (1979). His analysis claimed SF to be "the *literature of cognitive estrangement*" (1972: 372, original italics), where

> *SF is distinguished by the narrative dominance or hegemony of a fictional 'novum' (novelty, innovation) validated by cognitive logic.* (2016 [1979]: 79, original italics)

A later formulation:

> SF is defined by the interaction of estrangement and historical cognitions, and whose main formal device is a narrative chronotope and/or agents alternative to the author's empirical world.
>
> (2008: 116)

Overtly drawing on Ernst Bloch, Bertolt Brecht, and the work of the Russian formalists,[261] Suvin's premise is that the defining characteristic of SF is this novum. This is a bizarre, paradigm-shifting novelty that provokes a sense of estrangement in the reader, who is thus shocked into a new perspective on their own reality by this "intrusive novelty so strange, and at first inexplicable, that it

[259] Parrinder (2000b: 272-90) provides a list up to the turn of the millennium.
[260] Cf. Luckhurst (2005: 7), Stableford, Clute & Nicholls (2015).
[261] And, in the language of "chronotope", probably Bahktin.

deserves a category of its own" (Broderick 2015). The novum is not limited to SF: fantasy is another novum-rich genre, for instance. However, Suvin further stresses that the SF novum is set apart by being 'cognitively validated'. What this means is that the SF novum is something that could theoretically be scientifically valid: where fantasy might introduce, say, magic,[262] SF would introduce, say, faster-than-light travel, something that doesn't exist in our contemporary reality but that hypothetically one day might. It is the relationship between the novum and the reader's reality that creates SF's characteristic estrangement. As Suvin (2016 [1979]) puts it:

> its [SF's] specific modality of existence is a feedback oscillation that moves now from the author's and implied reader's norm of reality to the narratively actualized novum in order to understand the plot-events, and now back from those novelties to the author's reality, in order to see it afresh from the new perspective gained. (88)

This 'feedback oscillation'[263]—an appropriately pseudo-scientific term—between reality and the cognitively-validated novum is the effect of all good SF, in Suvin's definition. Further, Suvin stresses that the novum is a historically-situated thing (2016 [1979]: 97ff., 1985: 207)—what was groundbreakingly novel to the Victorians, for instance, is unlikely to be so for us—and in fact he distinguishes between 'true' and 'false' novums. In order to be a true novum and therefore a true work of SF, a novum must be at the forefront of genuine change, whether that change be scientific, political, cultural or intellectual; if the novum is merely a rehash of another novum, then the work is not truly SF.

It is this last part of Suvin's description that has made his work so controversial, because if 'true' SF is to be categorised according to *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction*, then SF is a narrow field indeed. As Roger Luckhurst (2005) observes:

[262] Although some fantasy does effectively cognitively validate its magic, e.g. the 'hard fantasy' of authors such as Lyndon Hardy.
[263] Cf. Suvin (1988: 203).

> Suvin's definition is, however, a profoundly prescriptive and judgemental formulation that often berates SF works for failing to measure up.[264] (7)

This is a common theme in criticisms of Suvin's work.[265] However, Carl Freedman in his *Critical Theory and Science Fiction* (2000: 17) attempts to rehabilitate cognitive estrangement somewhat by shifting Suvin's notion of the cognitively-validated novum, where 'cognition' is taken as the equivalent of real science, to the 'cognitive effect', loosening the definition enough to admit a broader spectrum of works. The difference can be seen in the example used above of FTL travel: it is arguable whether travelling faster than the speed of light is scientifically possible at all, so under Suvin's rules anything featuring FTL would be out on its ear; the same can be said about, for instance, time travel, a staple of an enormous amount of popular and more esoteric SF. FTL and time travel, however, would easily come under the umbrella of the 'cognitive effect', in that they give the illusion of being scientifically validated even when, according to our understanding of the universe, they may well be utterly unattainable. Furthermore, despite the harsh judgement quoted above, Roger Luckhurst himself attempts to justify Suvin's poetics by explaining that Suvin was writing right at the beginning of academic SF criticism, and that his strict delineation of what counts as SF was an attempt to legitimise the genre in a world that still saw it as little more than explosions, spaceships, and little green men (2005: 23).[266] Suvin's definition thus becomes a part of the history of SF, as John Rieder argues elsewhere (2010: 193).

Further complaints about Suvin's work include protesting his claim that cognitive estrangement is the 'formal framework' of the genre,[267] pointing out that the novum and its distancing effect are arguably essential to all literature,[268] particularly fantasy,[269] and arguing that instead of making the strange familiar, SF actually makes the familiar strange[270] – but, despite all the objections, cognitive

[264] Cf. pg.20, n.34, pg.150, n.185 on similar ideas of exclusion and 'gatekeeping'.
[265] Cf. e.g. Nodelman (1981: 25), Parrinder (2000c: 38), R Williams (2014: 620).
[266] Cf. pg.16-18.
[267] Spiegel (2008).
[268] Nodelman (1981: 26), Clute (2003: 403-4), Csicsery-Ronay (2008: 48).
[269] Stableford, Clute & Nicholls (2015).
[270] Spiegel (2008); Stableford, Clute & Nicolls (2015).

estrangement and the novum remain tenacious concepts in SF criticism. Recent studies engaging with the concept have been carried out on SF film (Mather 2002) and the works of William Gibson (Tomberg 2013), Philip K Dick (Mendoza 2014), and China Miéville (Weakland 2015). Furthermore, Suvin himself isn't wedded to the definition he created. As Parrinder (2000a) observes:

> Suvin's own later work anticipates the deconstruction of his earlier formalism. The concepts of estrangement, cognition and the *novum* are, in the end, richer and more important to him than the definition of a separate and coherent genre that they were initially used to define. (10)

Darko Suvin's theory of cognitive estrangement, then—of the cognitively-validated novum that sparks the oscillation of estrangement between reality and novelty—has become for modern scholarship more of a starting point than a coherent, persuasive overall definition of SF. As Mark Bould and Sherryl Vint (2011) put it:

> While many academics do not agree with Suvin—indeed, disagreeing with him is a considerable part of SF scholarship—he nonetheless set, to an extent, terms by which SF has subsequently been studied. (17)

In keeping with its importance to SF studies, Suvin's formulation has attracted the attention of scholars attempting to bridge the gap between SF and classical studies. S C Fredericks (1977a) links G S Kirk's 'dislocation effect', inherent in myth, to the estrangement that Suvin's definition claims for SF, describing it as "[an] imaginative freedom in the direction of estrangement" (54) – although his explicit engagement with Suvin is limited, as this article was written before the publication of *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction*. More recently, and more specifically, Brett Rogers and Benjamin Stevens (2015b)[271] use a combination of Suvin's work and that of Adam Roberts (2000) to justify grouping certain ancient works under the umbrella of SF, and, further, to draw general links between SF and the classical world:

[271] Cf. pg.18-20.

> In this way the future, too, is made into—fictionalized as—a foreign country. From this perspective, we may consider (classical) past and (modern SF) future as analogous in their (admittedly different) differences and distances from the present environment of the reader. (16)

Estranged difference as a commonality between the two fields is a persuasive argument, and one that offers an interesting perspective on some of the theoretical issues of the process of classical reception itself.

The links that Rogers and Stevens draw between the strangeness of SF and the strangeness of the classical world are interesting when viewed alongside Joshua Billings' (2010) recent 'erotics of reception' that argues that "Ancient Greece represents neither an origin nor an endpoint for modern artists, but a defining alterity" (21). Billings further discusses "the dialect of absence and presence that antiquity cannot but evoke", and notes that "[what] marks classical receptions is their engagement with the antiquity of the ancient and the modernity of the modern" (22). His formulation is as follows:

> It is the interplay of difference and similarity in the formation of modernity that makes the field of classical reception a potential meeting-place for different disciplines, periods, and traditions. Attention to the erotics of reception can help us to probe the encounters through which modernity comes to know its own 'proper'. Yet it is only by recognizing the absence at the heart of classical reception that we can fully understand antiquity's presence. (23)

Billings argues that this "absence at the heart of classical reception" is caused by the "defining alterity" of Ancient Greece, and that the erotics that this absence causes—that is, the recognition of "*the process of classical reception as essentially dialectical, characterized both by absence and presence*" (4, original italics)—is key to any understanding of the act of reception itself. This is all sounding rather familiar. For "defining alterity", read novum. For the dialectical character of reception that is characterised by an absence at its heart, read the oscillation between novum-world

and reality that creates a deep, lasting estrangement. Even Billings' assertion that "the erotics of reception can help us to probe the encounters through which modernity comes to know its own 'proper' " echoes Suvin's claim, quoted above, that his literature of cognitive estrangement helps the reader "to see [their own reality] afresh from the new perspective gained". Rogers and Stevens focus on the "differences and distances", claiming that a part of Suvin's formulation is at play in the modern reader/scholar's interactions with the classical world; Billings' essay, albeit with no obvious knowledge of Suvin, stimulates far more parallels between the two. It thus seems that, far from being the unlikely vehicle for classical reception that is often assumed, SF can in fact lay claim to, on a theoretical level, being far more of a natural fit for classical reception than any naturalistic genre.[272]

This chapter will examine Suvin's concepts of novum and estrangement in relation to the SF texts that the thesis has been discussing so far, outlining how the novum becomes somewhat more complex in texts that straddle the gap between two vastly different cultures: sometimes the novum is the interjection of Homeric scholarship into an SF context, but sometimes the dynamic is reversed and it is the SF setting that intrudes into the Homeric text. The first section of the chapter analyses this interplay of novums in relation to the deployment of Homeric narrative in Simmons' *Ilium* and *Olympos* duology and Williams' *Otherland* series, more so in the former than the latter. The second section is a little broader, and perhaps a little metatextual, reanalysing analyses from throughout the thesis in the light of the novum, estrangement, and the interaction between past, present, and future.

"I Understand Homer's Need to Rewrite All This": Homeric Narrative in Dan Simmons and Tad Williams.

Both Simmons' duology and Williams' tetralogy—in particular *Ilium* and *Mountain of Black Glass*—make use not only of the Homeric stories but also of Homeric language, albeit in translation as neither

[272] In an article discussing the interrelationship between Aristophanes, SF, comedy, and Philip K Dick, Cooper (2018: 4) draws similar lines of flight between Suvin's cognitive estrangement and various theories of comedy. His approach is similar to that undertaken in this chapter.

author reads Greek. To readers unfamiliar with the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* this can come across as stilted and artificial—Simmons himself has described his duology as "large and stylistically difficult" (Simmons 2001)—but it is arguably one of the strongest points of both works. Neither author demonstrates any knowledge of the finer details of Suvin's theory of cognitive estrangement, but Simmons does comment several times on the importance of strangeness in literature:

> My favorite commentator on all things literary—Harold Bloom—has said that the common element to all great literature, from Homer and Shakespeare and Goethe through Emily Dickinson to Mark Twain—is an ineffable quality of 'strangeness.' By that he doesn't mean deliberate post-modern weirdness or Ken Kesey wonkiness, but rather an indescribable, out-of-its-own-time, deep-to-the-literary-marrow differentness that great prose and poetry carries in itself and conveys to successive generations. (Simmons 2003a)

The importance Harold Bloom places on strangeness is discussed at length in his *The Western Canon* (1994):

> One mark of an originality that can win canonical status for a literary work is a strangeness that we either never altogether assimilate or that becomes such a given that we are blinded to its idiosyncrasies. (4)

Simmons further comments:

> [David Denby's] re-encounter with Homer's **Iliad** was profound—the poem shook him deeply and made him realize how alien the sensibilities in the tale were to him as a modern man, a liberal, and a husband and father. I think such encounters with the strange—especially the strange that challenges all your basic assumptions—is [sic] important, and I vowed then and there to re-immerse myself in the Iliad for some project. (Simmons 2003c, original bold)

Simmons' understanding in this second quotation of the *Iliad* as a work marked by strangeness echoes Billings' discussion of the "defining alterity" and "absence" of the ancient world. His mention of "the strange that challenges all your basic assumptions" further echoes the idea—in both Suvin and Billings—of the strange absence that sparks reflection on the reader's own reality.

Both Simmons and Williams are in fact well aware of the relationship their works enjoy with reality, sometimes not in particularly positive ways. Simmons was pilloried for the right-wing politics in his novel *Flashback* (2011) which depicted the decline of the US as a result of the Obama administration,[273] and Williams has spoken about how his intent in writing his magisterial fantasy trilogy *Memory, Sorrow, and Thorn*[274] was to "write a story that was ABOUT those kind of stories" (T Williams 2010c; cf. 2010b). In both cases the reading public somewhat missed the point: *Flashback* was in no way anti-Obama propaganda—in fact, an early version of the story pinned the blame on the Reagan administration—and instead of "beginning a dialogue with the SF/Fantasy field about Tolkien and his effect on the contemporary genre" (T Williams 2010b), the *Memory, Sorrow, and Thorn* trilogy was mostly read and reviewed as being somewhere between Tolkien homage and pastiche. What this goes to show is that neither author writes in a vacuum, but rather both understand that literature can and perhaps should be as much about the real world as it is about the fictions that they created. This is, of course, one of the key consequences of estrangement.

A good example of the interaction of various different novums and levels of interpretation is provided by the beginning of Simmons' *Ilium*. The novel in fact opens with a fairly close translation of the proem of the *Iliad*:[275]

> Rage.

[273] Simmons (2013). Cf. S Nicholls (1993: 143), Grobéty (2014: 177-246, esp. 245-6, 2015) on how and why Simmons' work relates to and engages with reality.
[274] Cf. pg.123, esp. n.147 on this trilogy.
[275] On proems in general, see Wheeler (2002); on the *Ilium* proem, see Perris (2011: 204-5).

> Sing, O Muse, of the rage of Achilles, of Peleus' son, murderous, man-killer, fated to die, sing of the rage that cost the Achaeans so many good men and sent so many vital, hearty souls down to the dreary House of Death. (1)

The translation follows that of Robert Fagles, who is one of six translators named in *Ilium*'s acknowledgements. The offset initial "Rage" is straight out of Fagles, as is the translation of οὐλουμένην as "murderous", and the phrase "House of Death", while admittedly elsewhere Homeric (cf. *Il.*23.19), is here one of Fagles' touches: the *Iliad* proem itself mentions Hades (Ἄϊδι: *Il.*1.3) but not his property. The phrase "man-killer", absent from the proem of the *Iliad*,[276] brings another post-Homeric author into play, namely W H Auden—also named in the acknowledgements—in his "The Shield of Achilles", which dubs the hero something similar—"man-slaying Achilles"—and even has as its last line "Who would not live long", perhaps the origin of Simmons' equally non-Iliadic "fated to die". This proem is thus not only Homeric but also post-Homeric, evoking the long tradition of Homeric adaptation and translation. However, it is a strange thing to find at the beginning of a novel marketed as SF. The Homeric tradition of a proem is thus a novum in an SF setting.

Hence the proem is here established as a novelty in an SF setting. However, that is not the end of the story, because *Ilium*'s proem continues:

> And while you're at it, O Muse, sing of the rage of the gods themselves,[277] so petulant and so powerful here on their new Olympos, and of the rage of the post-humans, dead and gone though they might be, and of the rage of those few true humans left, self-absorbed and useless though they may have become. While you are singing, O Muse, sing also of the rage of those thoughtful, sentient, serious but not-so-close-to-human beings out there dreaming under the ice of Europa, dying in the sulfur-ash of Io, and being born in the cold folds of Ganymede. (1)

[276] Although used at a significant moment of Achilles' hands: this is discussed at pg.233 below.

[277] This mention of the rage of the gods is reminiscent of the proem of the *Aeneid*—*tantaene animis caelestibus irae?* (1.11)—but this is likely coincidental.

Here, the SF element—“post-humans”, “true humans”, “not-so-close-to-human beings”—is an intrusion on the Homeric text, perhaps even a secondary novum – but it is the end of this paragraph that is particularly interesting. The “ice of Europa”, “sulfur-ash of Io”, and “cold folds of Ganymede” unite scientific realities, the staple of SF (Europa, Io, and Ganymede are three of the moons of Jupiter), with the classical world (all three are mythic figures, with Ganymede—20.232—and Europa—14.321—briefly alluded to in the *Iliad*). In the first two paragraphs of *Ilium*, the novum is first Homeric narrative, then SF, then the two are combined in a way that suggests they naturally share a close relationship.

The next two paragraphs, however, demonstrate a dramatic shift away from the ancient text:

> Oh, and sing of me, O Muse, poor born-again-against-his-will Hockenberry—poor dead Thomas Hockenberry, Ph.D., Hockenbush to his friends, to friends long since turned to dust on a world long since left behind. Sing of *my* rage, yes, of my *rage*, O Muse, small and insignificant though that rage may be when measured against the anger of the immortal gods, or when compared to the wrath of the god-killer, Achilles.
>
> On second thought, O Muse, sing of nothing to me. I know you. I have been bound and servant to *you*, O Muse, you incomparable bitch. And I do not trust you, O Muse. Not one little bit.
>
> (1)

Hockenberry’s voice intrudes into the detachment of the Homeric narrator[278] as a sort of a polyphonic novum, introducing a third novelty into the proem. He injects his own personality, playfully punning on the aural similarity between “O” and “Oh” but also, more seriously, appropriating Achilles’ rage for himself (“*my* rage, yes, of my *rage*”). The final and perhaps most significant departure from the *Iliad* that this proem presents us with is couched in Hockenberry’s voice, and again occurs in the close confines of Achilles’ epithet: first we had “man-killer”, a departure from the *Iliad* but still in keeping with prior interpretations of Achilles’ character, but now we get “god-killer”. In the *Iliad*, gods do not

[278] As categorised by de Jong (2004).

die – but there are so many jarring strangenesses in this proem that "the god-killer, Achilles" doesn't seem quite as out of the blue as it might otherwise have been. So, the Homeric proem is a novum to SF; SF terminology is a novum to Homer; and Hockenberry is a novum to them both. The term 'novum' thus becomes a way of expressing the moment of reception: where two texts collide, ancient and modern, they will act as novums upon each other. The strangeness—and thus the estrangement—created by the triplefold novums in the proem acts as a programmatic estranging device for the whole text: what unfolds will not be quite Homer, nor will it be quite SF, but some kind of syncretism of the two, complete with a radically different narratorial voice.

The Homeric Novum.

On the whole, however, the interaction of novum and reality in *Ilium* in particular is a little more straightforward. The most common pattern to observe is that of a Homeric narrative feature intruding into SF sensibilities – that is to say, where the Homeric narrative acts as the novum.

Simmons' manipulation of the catalogue form is a good example of this.[279] A long list of names, places, and numbers does not seem like a particularly natural fit for a modern novel, whether SF or naturalistic: in SF circles, such a passage would be interpreted as an 'infodump' and dismissed as poor writing. In this vein, the Catalogue of Ships in the *Iliad* is reinterpreted in *Ilium* into two long descriptive passages, one for the Achaean leaders (11-14) and one for the Trojan allies (198-99). However, that is not to say the novel is completely catalogue-free. Chapter 63 of *Ilium*, one of the final chapters of the novel, is a depiction of armies gathering for battle—on one side, the gods; on the other, the Greeks, Trojans, and their new moravec allies—and it is presented very much in the style of a Homeric catalogue. In *Iliad* 2 there is a break in the list between the catalogue of the Greek forces and their Trojan enemies; in *Ilium* there is a physical linebreak in the text between the catalogue of the gods (619-21) and of the human-moravec alliance (621-624). Equally, the repetitious way the gods

[279] On the style of Homeric catalogues: Beye (1964), Powell (1978), M W Edwards (1980). Cf. Minton (1962), Gaertner (2001), Sammons (2010).

are listed ("Aphrodite is here… Ares is here… Poseidon is here…") echoes the repeated οἵ τε / οἵ δε of Homeric catalogue style, and the obsessive details of troop numbers ("11,000 wild Lycians… 4,200 Ascanians"; cf. *Il.*2.863, 876-7)[280] are clearly modelled on how the *Iliad* gives the number of ships and men for many of the entries in its catalogue. These pages are presented as a riff on a Homeric catalogue, and they work exactly because of that: if this catalogue weren't presented as such a clear instance of the novelty of the Homeric text, then it would become nothing more than that dreaded infodump, cluttering up Simmons' otherwise clear prose.

That said, the *Iliad* is not the only source this catalogue is drawing on. The level of physical description in the novel is much higher than it is in the *Iliad*, ranging from small details such as the fact that Apollo's arrows are heat-seeking to broader depictions of characters' states of mind:

> Odysseus, apparently lost in thought, is looking out over the human and immortal battle lines and scratching his beard. (622)

This descriptive focus widens as the chapter progresses, moving from the details of individual characters to a powerfully evocative description of the sound—or *lack* of sound—of an army just about to tip over the edge into battle:[281]

> The silence is uncanny—there is no noise from either side except for the slow hiss of distant waves rolling in to the pebbled beach, the occasional whinny of a horse harnessed to a battle chariot, the soft sound of Martian breeze through the cliff rocks of Olympos, the air-hiss of flying chariots circling and the higher buzz of hornet fighters, the occasional inadvertent soft clank of bronze on bronze as some soldier shifts position, and the powerful, omnipresent negative sound of tens of thousands of anxious men trying to remember to breathe normally. (625)

[280] Parodied in the moravec army's "116 hornet-fighter aircraft".
[281] Possibly inspired by *Il.*4.429-31, where the silence of the approaching Achaean army is stressed.

The alternation between focused moments of contemplation of individual characters and wider evocations of the army as a whole plays out as a written representation of the kind of camerawork often found in modern cinema in the build-up to climactic battles, alternating between sweeping, bird's-eye panoramas and close-up shots of worried, determined and pensive soldiers.[282] Thus the effect of the Homeric novum—the catalogue—injected into the SF context is to show how, in fact, there are parallels to this strange kind of narrative structure in modern popular culture parlance, albeit parallels that might not seem obvious at first glance. The novum thus reflects on both Homer and contemporary reality.

A similar effect is at play in the use of martial type scenes in *Ilium*.[283] The *Iliad* is rich with books-worth of scenes of Homeric warriors killing each other, hurling spears from chariots and crashing to the dust with their eyes falling out of their skulls (e.g. 13.617, 16.741) – but such a parade of slaughter and death—much like the incessant list of the catalogue—can seem repetitious to a reader unfamiliar with the style, and thus out of place in a typical modern narrative. *Ilium* is aware of this. The narrative explicitly foregrounds how repetitious these scenes are, how it often feels like the same thing is happening over and over again, accomplishing this via not only by the apparent boredom of the scholics watching but also by explicit narratorial comments:

> The Greeks and Trojans are still killing each other. Big news. (105)

This kind of sarcastic comment acts almost as an apology for the style of the narrative that Simmons is adapting, foregrounding the fact that repeated, repetitious scenes of violent slaughter and mayhem are a Homeric novum interjected into the SF narrative. However, again the issue is not that straightforward, because scenes of repetitious, gory slaughter are in fact a staple of modern action

[282] The most obvious 'classical' examples are the opening scenes of *Gladiator* (2000) and the battle sequences in *Alexander* (2004). This kind of camerawork has strong parallels in fantasy film, particularly *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy (2001, 2002, 2003). There is perhaps a forerunner of this kind of idea in the *Iliad* itself, where the gods go to sit on a high peak and watch the action from there: Poseidon (13.10-12), Zeus (8.41-52); cf. de Jong & Nünlist (2004).

[283] For the formal features of Iliadic battle narrative, see Fenik (1968); cf. M W Edwards (1987: 78-81, inc. bibliography). For type scenes in general, see Lord (1960: 68-98).

cinema[284] so perhaps don't strike the reader as quite as strange as they might do. Simmons' estranging adaptation of ancient literary technique highlights how these ancient texts are doing things that might seem odd at first glance, but in fact echo remarkably closely in particular the tropes of modern cinema.

That said, not all of the Homeric novums Simmons scatters his novels with are quite so neat. Homeric epithets seem to be a little more difficult to process, as the first time that they appear in *Ilium*, Simmons is forced to have Hockenberry explain them:

> Achilles is referred to repeatedly as "swift-footed," Apollo as "one who shoots from afar," and Agamemnon's name is usually preceded by "wide ruling" or "lord of men": the Achaeans are "strong-greaved" and their ships "black" or "hollow" and so forth. These repeated epithets met the heavy demands of dactylic hexameter more than mere description, and were a way for the singing bard to meet metric requirements with formulaic phrases.[285] (43-44)

Thus explained, epithets reoccur frequently throughout the text: the Achaeans are "long-haired" (*Ilium* 335) and Achilles is "fleet-footed" (*Ilium* 178, *Olympos* 108) without this being remarked on as anything unusual. However, these epithets, corresponding roughly to the 'colourless' epithets picked out by Homeric scholarship,[286] are not the only way that this particular Homeric quirk appears in the text. Consider the following example:

> noble Hector, intent now on nothing more noble than hacking his way through Argive flesh to murder the retreating Odysseus (161)

[284] The three *The Expendables* films (2010, 2012, 2014), homages to action cinema of the 80s and 90s, and the two *John Wick* films (2014, 2017), an ex-hitman on a violent revenge spree, are two recent epitomes of the trend; *Hot Shots! Part Deux* (1993) explicitly parodies this with an exaggerated on-screen kill count. The bloody extended fight sequences in *300* (2006), *300: Rise of an Empire* (2014) and the television series *Spartacus* (2010—2013) are similar in nature and more explicitly classical, but are closer linked to the aesthetic of the graphic novel.
[285] This passage was previously discussed in Chapter 4: Megatext (pg.175).
[286] Parry (1971) for the distinction between fixed and ornamental epithets; cf. D H F Gray (1947), Whallon (1961), Rosenmeyer (1965), M W Edwards (1966, 1986, 1988), Vivante (1973), Bakker (1995).

δῖος, often translated "noble", is a common Homeric epithet applied indiscriminately to heroes including Hector, but here the question is raised as to whether it is actually "noble" in any way to kill with the kind of alacrity that Homeric heroes do. The Homeric poems themselves occasionally ask this question, such as the famous instance of Priam kissing Achilles' χεῖρας / δεινὰς ἀνδροφόνους (*Il.*24.478-9), the hands that murdered his son – which Priam himself foregrounds (24.506). This passage is most likely not what Simmons had in mind at this juncture: the function of the "noble Hector" quotation is rather to highlight the jarring nature of the epithet-novum, and indeed by extension the jarring nature of Homeric heroism in general.

The following example is interesting in this regard:

> Odysseus, the "long-enduring," can't endure this slaughter and decides that the greater part of valor must reside in the safety of his ships back on the beach. (336)

On the surface, it seems like the same manoeuvre is at play: the epithet is being quoted here to highlight the strangeness of the Homeric narrative, where a character can be described as 'long-enduring' and then in the next scene run for the hills. However, in fact this is exactly what happens in the *Iliad*:

> οὐδ' ἐσάκουσε πολύτλας δῖος Ὀδυσσεύς,
> ἀλλὰ παρήϊξεν κοίλας ἐπὶ νῆας Ἀχαιῶν (8.97-8)

Homer doesn't make the enduring/endure pun but compensates by giving Odysseus two epithets, neither of which is particularly appropriate to the situation, highlighting this moment of cowardice in an otherwise stoic character – but the fact that the *Iliad* is itself aware of this irony goes unmentioned

in *Ilium*.[287] An epithet perhaps works better for the modern text's purposes as a novum to be bounced off of rather than as a straightforward translation.

Homeric epithets are also raised in Tad Williams' *Otherland* series, particularly, as with the majority of the Homeric adaptation in the series, in *Mountain of Black Glass*. Williams' novels are less concerned with playing with Homeric narrative technique than Simmons', but his treatment of epithets deserves mention. Throughout most of the novel, Homeric-style epithets only really appear in direct speech. Phoenix, for example, in the embassy to Achilles:

> Please, faithful Patroclus, tell the noble Achilles that Phoinix, with bold Ajax and famed Odysseus, would speak with him. (473)

Some of these are close to true epithets ("famed" echoes τηλεκλυτός), whereas others ("bold", "noble", "loyal") are more general, and indeed more like simple description. These kind of pseudo-epithets function mainly to characterise the speech of Williams' Homeric characters as archaic and therefore different to that of the modern protagonists. One noun-epithet phrase, however, is a little different: οἴνοψ πόντος. The description 'wine-dark sea'[288] occurs several times in narrative that is not direct speech without much ceremony (19, 119), but at the beginning of Chapter 24, it receives a little more detail:

> *The wine-dark seas.*
>
> That was what Homer liked to call them, Paul remembered—one of the phrases, like 'rosy-fingered Dawn,' that came up again and again, to the delight of Classics instructors and the dread of bored schoolboys. It was a way to give form and shape to things, a way to help the bards remember as they passed along the old, strong words, generation after generation, before alphabets and books.

[287] A similar stress on this moment occurs at Ov.*Met.*13.63-7.

[288] The original Greek οἶνοψ is closer to 'wine-faced', but the famous English translation 'wine-dark' makes more sense in the context of Paul's schoolboy education.

> But they weren't just dark like wine, of course, these Homeric seas. As Paul sat on the raft through days of storm and sun, the sea proved itself even more changeable than the sky. There were moments it turned a blue so light and transparent it seemed to go ice-white at the edges; other times it grew as coldly opaque as stone. When the sun was low in the morning, it would sometimes bring the entire surface to dazzling fire, but then as it climbed overhead the sea might become a field of strangely mobile jade. When the great disk went down in the evening, burying itself in the tangerine clouds on the horizon, there would be a moment, an instant's flash, when the sea went black and the sky itself turned an unearthly green—the precursor to the appearance of the most splendid stars Paul had ever witnessed. (461-2)

The novum of 'wine-dark seas' is introduced in much the same way as it is in *Ilium*, explained as a result of the narrator's background and schooling, but here instead of becoming a reflection on, say, heroism, it acts as an estranging device for the colour of the sea itself. There is certainly something evocative about the phrase 'wine-dark sea',[289] but it is a stock literary phrase that, in the world of *Mountain of Black Glass*, cannot hope to encompass the true majesty of even a simulated sea. This is a technique that points out the limitations of the Homeric text—perhaps any written text—when contrasted with reality, but yet simultaneously brings the reader's attention back to the beauty and indeed the wonder of the world Paul is drifting through (as discussed in Chapter 5: Sense of Wonder).[290] The strangeness of the classical novum is exactly what allows the modern text this moment of reflection, and it is the contrast between the two that highlights the limitations of the ancient text as much as the literary flourishes of the passage at hand.

Epithets are not the only feature of Homeric narrative that are introduced as novums in this way. While true Homeric extended similes nowhere appear in the texts at hand,[291] Simmons' *Ilium* does play with shorter Homeric similes. Consider:

[289] It is, for example, the name of one of Patrick O'Brian's Aubrey-Maturin series (*The Wine-Dark Sea*, 1993).
[290] Pg.195-6.
[291] On extended similes and their relation to the rest of the narrative, see Minchin (2001: 51), M W Edwards (1987: 110) and Lyne (1989: 63-99) for surveys of scholarship. Cf. Fränkel (1921), Coffrey (1957), Shipp (1972), Moulton (1974, 1977), W C Scott (1997, 2009).

> Echepolus goes down, as Homer likes to say, like a toppled tower. (79)

The phrase "as Homer likes to say" isn't necessary here: "like a toppled tower" is as good a description as any to describe a soldier falling in battle. The inclusion of "as Homer likes to say" therefore not only foregrounds the fact that this description is being taken from Homer, it also hints at the fact that this exact description is found in the *Iliad*: ἤριπε δ', ὡς ὅτε πύργος, ἐνὶ κρατερῇ ὑσμίνῃ (4.462). Simmons' version of the breaking of the truce in *Iliad* 4 features a similar example:

> Cloaked head to toe, invisible to friend and foe but visible to this scholic, [Athena] slaps the arrow aside the way a mother flicks a fly from her sleeping son. (I think I stole that imagery, but it's been so long since I actually *read* the *Iliad*, in translation or the original, that I can't be sure.)[292]
>
> (76)

In both these cases, Hockenberry's narratorial comment turns a simple simile into a novum, which is interesting in the context of the idea of the SF megatext, discussed in Chapter 4: Megatext.[293] In a normal SF text, the novum is fairly obvious because the author can assume that the reader's knowledge of the world is fairly similar to their own: everyone knows that, for instance, time travel is (currently) impossible. However, in a text that straddles the border between SF and the classical world such as *Ilium*, that same kind of familiarity cannot be assumed and the novum is no longer a natural thing. The novum has to be pointed out as a novum, effectively explicitly created, because, realistically, most people who read *Ilium* are not then going to go and comb the *Iliad* for similarities.

By far the most common way, however, for *Ilium* to adapt Homeric similes is to translate them into description, much as Williams' *Mountain of Black Glass* does with epithets. A particularly striking example of this is provided by this line:

> The watchfires send sparks flying up toward the hard-burning stars. (346)

[292] He does steal the imagery: cf. *Il*.4.130-1.
[293] Pg.149-156.

To the naked eye, this is nothing more complicated than a nice bit of description. However, it in fact carries over imagery from a simile in *Iliad* 8:

> ὡς δ᾽ ὅτ᾽ ἐν οὐρανῷ ἄστρα φαεινὴν ἀμφὶ σελήνην
> φαίνετ᾽ ἀριπρεπέα, ὅτε τ᾽ ἔπλετο νήνεμος αἰθήρ·
> ἔκ τ᾽ ἔφανεν πᾶσαι σκοπιαὶ καὶ πρώονες ἄκροι
> καὶ νάπαι: οὐρανόθεν δ᾽ ἄρ᾽ ὑπερράγη ἄσπετος αἰθήρ,
> πάντα δὲ εἴδεται ἄστρα, γέγηθε δέ τε φρένα ποιμήν·
> τόσσα μεσηγὺ νεῶν ἠδὲ Ξάνθοιο ῥοάων
> Τρώων καιόντων πυρὰ φαίνετο Ἰλιόθι πρό. (8.555-61)

Watchfires appear in the general narrative while the stars are strictly part of the simile, but the version in *Ilium* neatly brings them together, erasing the Homeric context and claiming the imagery for the author's own. What this goes to show is that it is very easy for modern adaptors to eschew Homer-as-novum and instead just translate the ancient text in a way that better suits a modern idiom. The novum technique instead chooses to retain the oddity of the ancient text, the strangeness, all the better to contrast with the SF context and provide that oscillation between strange and familiar that provides SF (and perhaps also classical reception) with its motivation.

The SF Novum.

Homer, however, is not the only novum in these texts. It perhaps makes sense for the Homeric text to be the thing that is introduced as strange, seeing as both *Ilium* and *Mountain of Black Glass* are not only sold as SF[294] but written in the context of wider SF series. However, there are certain instances where it is in fact the reverse that is true: SF itself becomes the novum interrupting the flow of the (pseudo)Homeric text. This was mentioned above in the discussion of the proem of *Ilium*, where the

[294] Cf. pg.12.

initial Homeric feel is interrupted by "post-humans" and the moons of Jupiter: the jarring, estranging effect is thus created by the intersection of (ancient) past and (SF) present, and the subsequent oscillation between the two allows multiple points of reference to emerge for the attentive reader.

Another good example is provided by a reworking of an arming scene in Simmons' *Ilium*. This three-page adaptation (507-9) draws on the scene in which Achilles arms for battle following the death of Patroclus (*Il.*19.364-91)[295] and echoes many details of the Homeric passage: the plumes on Achilles' helmet "shimmer like flames" (*Ilium* 508; cf. *Il.*381-3); the action of him putting on each item of his armour is described in rigid succession; and the armour is tested thoroughly once it is on. The time that it takes Achilles to get ready is amusingly foregrounded by Hockenberry's narration:

> Waiting for Achilles to get dressed for war reminds me of the times I waited for my wife, Susan, to get dressed when we were late for a dinner party somewhere. There's nothing to do to hurry up the process—all one can do is wait. (507)

This brief intrusion of Hockenberry's previous reality introduces an SF element into a very overtly classicising passage, as Hockenberry's spotty memory of his first life is inexorably linked with his second life on the plains of Troy: the only reason he has the wherewithal to compare his wife getting dressed to Achilles readying for war is because of the SF situation that he has found himself in. This intrusion of SF—that is, SF-as-novum—into the Homeric text continues throughout the passage: Achilles' shield, for instance, "gleams like a heliograph mirror"; he reminds Hockenberry of "a catcher in Little League", "an NFL lineman" and a "*knight chavalieux* from the Middle Ages"; and Hockenberry mentions the poems later inspired by Achilles' shield, including "[his] favourite by Robert Graves".[296] The timeframes for these references are clearly wildly varied, ranging from the Middle Ages to the present day, but they are all unified by being the memories of an eclectic

[295] On this particular arming scene, see Armstrong (1958).

[296] It is likely that the poem that is meant is in fact Auden's "The Shield of Achilles", especially considering its use in the proem, discussed above; there is no famous poem by Graves on the subject, and the pertinent parts of *The Anger of Achilles* (1959) are in prose. This is either an error on Simmons' part or a nod to Hockenberry's sometimes-patchy memory.

university professor, plucked from his academic life by post-humans and left to fend for himself on the plains of Troy.

This is not the only moment in the text that Simmons uses this technique. Early in *Ilium*, when Hockenberry is describing the Achaean leaders for the benefit of his non-classical audience, he dubs Achilles "a sort of infinitely more handsome Arnold Schwarzenegger" (11).[297] Further, when he is reporting the plague that is devastating the Achaeans, he says:

> I suspect it is typhus. The Greeks are sure it is the anger of Apollo. (3)

Knowledge of Arnold Schwarzenegger and typhus[298] is not science fictional in and of itself, just as a memory of a woman named Susan getting ready for a dinner party is not a particularly common SF trope. It is the circumstances of those memories—namely, that they are the memories of a reconstituted Homeric scholar at the whim of an advanced breed of humans who have the audacity to take on the roles of the Greek gods—that makes them SF, and that thus interrupts the flow of the classical narrative with this SF novum. The oscillation of estrangement is thus created between old and new, between Achilles as a mighty warrior and as a woman late for a dinner party, depicting him as simultaneously gloriously violent and fussily fastidious, taking as much care over every buckle and gauntlet as the wife of a university professor might over her pearls.

A similar technique is found in Williams' *Mountain of Black Glass*, particularly in how he redeploys echoes of Homeric similes. There are no extended similes in *Mountain of Black Glass*, just as there are none in *Ilium*, but Williams seems rather fond of Homer's habit of comparing his warriors to various animals. Hector, for instance, is described by Agamemnon as "like a lion, roaring in the middle of a village, while all the dogs hide beneath the houses" (530) and this reoccurs two pages

[297] Further discussed above at pg.132.

[298] Cf. pg.132. As a side note, this moment of the *Iliad* is perhaps alluded to in the Danish-language Netflix Original *The Rain* (2018—), where a company named Apollon is responsible for a virulent, deadly disease that is transmitted through the rain.

later, where the narration says that he "seemed truly, as Agamemnon had called him, a lion among hounds" (532). There is no directly comparable Iliadic simile, but the general themes of lions and dogs are found repeatedly (for example, *Il.*12.41-6, 17.61-9). Furthermore, Ajax is twice compared to a bull (470, 531);[299] Agamemnon describes the Trojans as "like wild dogs" (581); the Greeks bay "like wolves" (630); and, in an unusual twist, the plumes of Agamemnon's helmet move "like a peacock's tail" (581). Peacocks are not commonly present in Iliadic similes but, to a modern reader, the juxtaposition of a high-plumed helmet of the kind often seen in sword-and-sandals films with the lofty, arrogant tail of a peacock is perhaps a natural one. Williams' animal similes are clearly inspired by the Homeric texts, although no more explicit explanation for them is given.

This is interesting when we look at two similes used to describe Hector:

> a jungle beast turned loose at a children's party (532)

> He moved like a jungle cat, stalking, slashing. (625)

The mention of a "jungle cat" or "jungle beast"—as most common 'beasts' in jungles are big cats—evokes the famous Homeric lion similes, used to demonstrate the violent peak of a warrior's wrath (M Clarke 1995) – which is, of course, exactly what these similes are doing, albeit with a different kind of big cat. Jungle cats don't make much of an appearance in the *Iliad* itself, but here they take the place of the more familiar Homeric lion similes, inserting a touch of the humid, oppressive jungle into the openness of the Trojan plain. The mention of "a children's party" in the first example further stresses the novelty of this idea, vaguely conjuring up the image of Achilles in a party hat, which then contrasts with the brutality of the slaughter that a wild animal would wreak on a real children's party. The novum, generated much as in *Ilium* by the wider knowledge of the characters who have found themselves in these SF scenarios, introduces a jarring disconnect between Homeric context and SF novum, locating meaning in the dialogue between the two.

[299] The Homeric Ajax never actually receives a bull simile, athough e.g. Agamemnon does: *Il.*2.480-3.

It might be argued that all this is describing is in fact the act of juxtaposing a Homeric feature with an SF one, or vice versa, and doesn't amount to anything more complex or theoretical than that. That is arguably true, but it elides the fact that juxtaposition—even if Suvin never explicitly says so—is a key element of cognitive estrangement: juxtaposition and contrast are a part of how the novum-reality relationship operates, as something cannot be shockingly novel if it has nothing to be shockingly novel in contrast to.

Shock is certainly key in a final instance of SF-as-novum in these texts: expletives. Simmons' *Ilium* is littered with bad language to an almost gleeful extent.[300] To give only a few examples, when Hockenberry asks his colleague Nightenhelser whether Pandarus gave "that endless speech" (referring to *Il.*5.179-16) before his death at Diomedes' hands, Nightenhelser replies:

> Pandarus just said 'Fuck me' when the arrow missed its mark. Then he leaped on the chariot with Aeneas, tosssed [sic] a spear that went right through Diomedes' shield and breastplate—but missed flesh—and said, 'Shit,' in the second before Diomedes' spear caught him right between the eyes. Another case, I presume, of Homer's poetic license in all the speech-making. (106)

Further, when Achilles rejects the embassy, instead of an eloquent speech his response is:

> fuck it and fuck him and fuck her, my dear comrades (379)

This contrasts nicely with *Mountain of Black Glass*, where all the simulated Homeric characters speak in a pseudo-archaic way, complete with mock-epithets and vaulted archaisms. The important thing to note here is that this isn't bad language in the mouths of, say, Hockenberry or Nightenhelser; it is bad language on the part of the Homeric characters themselves. From a realistic point of view, it would of course be far more likely that any 'real' Achilles or Hector fighting on the plain of Troy would swear,

[300] The bad language in Fraction and Ward's *ODY-C* operates in much the same way; cf. Chapter 1: Polyphony (pg.47-49).

and it is certainly what a modern audience expects from a soldier: characters such as Gunny Sergeant Hartman in *Full Metal Jacket* (1987) have cemented this pop culture stereotype.[301] However, the language of the *Iliad* has no room for the odd 'fuck', and many translations, ancient and modern, adopt an elevated register that is more 'appropriate' for such important, weighty subject matter. What this means is that when Achilles lapses into "fuck it and fuck him and fuck her", especially when juxtaposed with the elevated and polite "my dear comrades", the effect is estranging indeed: the reader's attention is drawn to the fact that, actually, warriors in the *Iliad* don't act like we might expect real modern warriors to act. Nightenhelser's comment in the first example, that Pandarus' speech in the *Iliad* is just a "case… of Homer's poetic license in all the speech-making", only highlights this. As Hockenberry says elsewhere in *Ilium*:

> I understand Homer's need to rewrite all this. (342)

Swearing is not a trait that is exclusive to SF, of course, but, as with the modern intrusions discussed above, it is the context that makes this SF-as-novum. None of this would have happened or be being recorded without the SF setting of the story.

In these texts, SF-as-novum is not as common as Homer-as-novum, which makes sense given the audience that these books were written for. However, both approaches create similar results, namely the kind of estrangement that encourages reflection both on the reader's reality and on the reader's knowledge of the Homeric text.

The Absent Novum.

It should be noted that, while both SF and Homeric novums are present in these novels, they are not *omni*present. In particular, features of Homeric narrative that could have been presented as novums

[301] The trope perhaps goes back as far as Rudyard Kipling's "In the Matter of a Private" (first published 1888), which depicts a soldier "whose vocabulary contained less than six hundred words, and the Adjective". There are nods to soldiers' crass speech in ancient authors (Suet.*Jul*.51; Herodian 6.9.5), though nothing as explicit as this.

are often simply introduced into the text without comment or question, much like the straightforward translation of epithets and similes discussed above. Similes and epithets, however, can both translate quite naturally into modern literary style, whereas other, more stylised Homeric features do not. Nonetheless, neither Williams nor Simmons shies away Homer in their own narratives.

For example, while Simmons' *Ilium* opens with a proem that is a masterpiece of novums, discussed above, this is not the only instance in the duology that a Homeric proem is referenced. In one of the novel's other storylines, set on a far-future Earth where a second version of Odysseus is travelling with a number of future humans, Odysseus is asked to recount his adventures:

> "You want me to sing to you of all my twists and turns, driven time and again off course, in the days since my comrades and I plundered the hallowed heights of Pergamus?" he replied, voice soft.
>
> "Yes," said Hannah.
>
> "I shall," said Odysseus. "But first, I think, Savi *Uhr* has some business to discuss with all of you." (225)

This is an archaised paraphrase of the *Odyssey* proem: it virtually translates the *Odyssey*'s ἐπεὶ Τροίης ἱερὸν πτολίεθρον ἔπερσεν (1.2), swapping "Pergamus" for Troy, and potentially alludes to Odysseus' description as πολύτροπον (1.1) in "all my twists and turns". The translation thus anticipates a tale of Odysseus' wanderings, but that anticipation is quickly subverted by him moving onto other matters. It acts as a joke, almost, as a knowing wink on the author's behalf towards the text that he is adapting. In a similar vein, at the end of *Ilium*, a future human named Daeman is asked how he managed to defeat the monster Caliban:

> "Rage," he said at last. "Rage." (633)

The allusion is to the μῆνιν of the *Iliad* proem, but it could equally just be a genuine answer to the question he is asked. However, coming where it does towards the end of the novel, it effectively sets

up a second stage in Daeman's storyline, a new beginning, as he goes from spoiled, pampered brat to selfless, hardened fighter. Linking him to Achilles via their shared rage is thus an effective way to highlight this shift in his character.

So why are these two references to proems not novums? The answer is that the novums discussed above are explicitly setting two texts and two contexts against one another: the *Ilium* proem, for instance, juxtaposes a Homeric proem and Hockenberry's SF interpretation of a Homeric proem so that the reader is forced to continually bounce—or oscillate—between the two, drawing meaning from one and imposing it on the other, and vice versa. With the two present examples, the creation of meaning is a one way process: *Ilium* draws on the Homeric text for its own ends, whether those ends are to contribute to Daeman's characterisation or simply to slyly wink to the reader who knows the *Odyssey* as well as they know their science fiction.

Williams' *Mountain of Black Glass* demonstrates a similar technique in its opening lines – although this time, it is not a proem. The very first words of the novel are "As she spoke", 'she' being Penelope addressing the man that she thinks is Odysseus but is in fact Paul Jonas. These words echo the famous ὣς ἔφατ' of Homeric narrative, used throughout the poems to end speeches, although the parallel is not exact as ὣς does not quite equate to 'as' as it is being used here, meaning 'while'. The echo effectively foreshadows the Homeric sequences that are to come throughout the novel, as well as how the text will rework and repurpose Homeric narrative itself to tell its story – but, again, it is a one-sided reference that only works within the boundary of the text.

We see this on a larger scale in *Mountain of Black Glass* when Paul Jonas arrives on Calypso's island:

> It was the nymph Calypso who awakened him.
>
> At first, as she stood with the morning light behind her, black hair moving as slowly in the wind as kelp in a sea current, he thought that the bird-woman had returned. When he saw Calypso's startling,

> coldly perfect beauty and realized that this was not the creature of his dreams, he was both disappointed and relieved.
>
> He rose to his feet, the pale sand of the beach covering him all over in a fine crust, and followed when she beckoned. She sang as she led him through meadows full of irises—a song of almost impossible sweetness, a thing of flawlessly contrived unreality.
>
> Her cave was nestled in a grove of alders and cypresses, its mouth bearded with grapevines. The sound of running water joined her song, and the two melodies twined, the crystalline chiming of sweet springs and her soft, clear voice lulling him into a waking sleep, so that for a long moments he could not help wondering if he had finally drowned and was being gifted with some last vision of paradise. (115)

This scene is intimately connected to the scene in *Odyssey* 5 when Hermes comes to Calypso's island to tell her to release Odysseus: alders and cypresses grow around her cave (κλήθρη… τε καὶ εὐώδης κυπάρισσος: 5.66); a vine runs around the cave's mouth (ἡμερὶς ἡβώωσα, τεθήλει δὲ σταφυλῇσι: 5.69), although the word "bearded" is a neat new addition; and all around there are meadows full of flowers, ἴα (5.72), a word that can be translated as either violets or irises. There are a few changes present here, such as the fact that, in Homer, the irises come after the description of the cave, whereas here they come before, and in the description of the streams. In the *Odyssey* there are four of them:

> κρῆναι δ' ἑξείης πίσυρες ῥέον ὕδατι λευκῷ,
> πλησίαι ἀλλήλων τετραμμέναι ἄλλυδις ἄλλη. (5.70-1)

However, in *Otherland* the number has not only changed (two instead of four) but has become attached to something else: it is now referring to the joint sounds of Calypso's singing and the "chiming" of the water. The fact that "the two melodies twined" is perhaps suggested by the twisting and turning of the four springs (τετραμμέναι ἄλλυδις ἄλλη), although it is never mentioned in the *Odyssey* that the springs touch and, indeed, the fact that they are ἑξείης would suggest that they stay separate. Were this reworking of a Homeric description an example of a novum, these changes would signify something, or they would induce the reader to try to make some meaning out of them.

However, presented as this scene is as a simple description of a beautiful setting—a *locus amoenus*, although not in any technical sense—the change comes across as little more than window dressing, as a mild deviation from the *Odyssey* that has no real impact on the way that the reader experiences the story.

Why does this matter? It demonstrates that, within the specifics of a text, estrangement—or indeed its parallel, erotics—does not necessarily dictate everything that happens. If every moment in an adapted text were to spark the kind of oscillating, dialectical reaction in the reader that these theories demand, then reading would be an unsettling experience indeed. As it is, if for every novum that estranges the text there is a passage that is working with it, then when the novum appears it is all the more striking. What all of this shows is that in the interaction between novum and reality there is a push and pull between what is important to the reader's pre-existing reality and what is important to the new reality being brought to bear by the novum, whether that novum be SF or Homer himself. It is always the relationship between the two that creates the meaning for the text – much as, in Billings' erotics of reception, it is always the dialectical relationship between the ancient past and the modern present that is key to the act of classical reception.

However, while the operations of Suvin's cognitive estrangement are a good parallel for those of Billings' erotics, the two are not quite identical. The parallel that this chapter has drawn between Billings' "absence at the heart of classical reception" and Suvin's "strange novelty" is not exact: the effects generated by "absence" and by "novelty" are different. Absence provokes a feeling of emptiness, of lack, of there being something missing—it is primarily a negative sensation—whereas novelty is a feeling of wonder, of inspiration, of introducing something new and exciting into a pre-existing worldview. In the examples discussed in this chapter, it often seems that the Homeric elements that are being introduced to these SF texts are in fact not there to stress the distance between the present day and the classical past. Instead they are there as something to be wondered at, as something strange and unusual that is nonetheless stimulating for the reader, rather than simply something to feel as absent. If, as Suvin argues and indeed has been a convincing argument for many

SF scholars, this feeling of novelty and innovation—and, thinking back to Chapter 5: Sense of Wonder, of wonder—is key to SF, then it seems that SF offers a platform for receptions of classical texts that are positive rather than negative, that prefer to build on what has come before than to lose themselves in its absence. This is not to say that this is an inherently 'better' approach, just that a relationship that is characterised by dialectic and oscillation does not necessarily have to be based in lack and need. Perhaps the reason that this wonder at the heart of classical reception is so easy to find in science fiction is because, as Rogers and Stevens observe, the classical past and modern SF can be seen as parallel in how they are both distanced from the reader's present. By contrast to the vagaries of Classics, however, SF is predisposed to choosing wonder over absence because it has acknowledged that it is already absent—as, in reality, all fiction is—and now has better things to be getting on with.

Estrangement in a Strange Land.

Cognitive estrangement, however, is not something that just takes place on the microcosmic level of a text's narrative. In Suvin's original proposal, estrangement is a conceptual process that encompasses an entire text – and, in fact, this is one of the problems that scholars have found with Suvin's original work, because it attempts to reduce a whole text down to a single novum, disallowing anything more complex. However, the broader processes of estrangement in texts are still worth analysing – and, as this section of the chapter will show, estrangement can be understood to be at the heart of virtually all the issues that this thesis has been exploring.

To pick up the thread of wonder, cognitive estrangement and the sense of wonder are in fact rather closely linked. The conceptual breakthrough, a key part of the operation of the sense of wonder, is a natural part of the process of estrangement, as the experience of conceptual breakthrough—or the sublime—is always in response to something that changes your perception of the world, thus

something groundbreakingly novel: that is, the novum.[302] Damien Broderick (2015) observes that the interconnectedness of the two concepts can thus lead less proficient SF writers to, while attempting estrangement, merely conjure the kind of 'gosh-wow!' effect that SF critics so deride – but when done properly, estrangement is in fact the effect that goes along with a good old-fashioned sense of wonder. We can see this in the example of Paul Jonas wondering at his surroundings in *Mountain of Black Glass*, discussed in Chapter 5: Sense of Wonder. The novum here is the loving recreation of the world of the Homeric poems within the Otherland network, something that contrasts both in its peaceful beauty with the frantic reality of Paul's existence up to this point and in its historical impossibility with the world of the reader's experience. In the instance when Paul "[gives] himself to wonder" (238), he is reacting to the novum that he is presented with in the only way that his exhausted mind knows how.

A more complex example of the interaction between wonder and estrangement is provided by Matt Fraction and Christian Ward's *ODY-C*. As discussed in Chapter 2: Genre, *ODY-C* is deeply concerned with matters of gender equality and, as Fraction (2014a) puts it, "shows how women have been treated for 26 centuries". This is accomplished in part by the genderswap—a radical novum in and of itself—but also through the comic's distinctive art style, briefly mentioned in Chapter 5: Sense of Wonder. Several commentators have remarked on the comic's art, noting that "Ward's pages don't look like anything else on the stands right now" (Sims 2014) and that "*ODY-C* has the excess, grandeur, violence, and strangeness of the original" (Quinn 2016); Fraction (2014c) himself says that the text "looks like a universe that Lady Gaga designed". A further oddity is added in #11—12, the issues dealing with Gamem's return home: instead of adopting a traditional nine-panel layout, Ward designed each page in these issues as a splash page (Ward 2016), creating a comic constructed of large, vivid images rather than, as is more traditional, sequential movements. The art on the page isn't the only visually strange thing about *ODY-C*, either: the first issue begins with an unusual eight-page foldout spread depicting, on one side, the victorious warriors' passage through the wasteland of their battlefield and, on the other, a detailed timeline of the mythic background leading up to the events of

[302] Cf. Mather (2002: 188), Csicsery-Ronay (2008: 56), Broderick (2015).

the comic. This was in order to "do something appropriately scoped and scaled" for "a story bigger than big" (Fraction 2014c) – and in fact Fraction and Ward originally wanted it to be ten pages long, but had to settle for eight when they were told that a ten-page continuous spread would "break the printing presses" (A Brown 2015). Every step of *ODY-C* has thus been taken with strangeness and newness in mind – and while strangeness in and of itself is not necessarily a stimulus for estrangement, it is also noted that the comic thus "gives a unique spin to an old tale" (Bezner 2015). As Alex Brown (2015) eloquently puts it:

> You know that moment when you put on a pair of really good headphones and suddenly that song you've heard a million times becomes this cacophony of notes and sounds and you can feel them interacting with and building upon one another? That's what the art is like. Dazzling, sublime, sumptuous, opulent… there just aren't words for how incredible Ward's art is.

This description—putting on a pair of quality headphones and suddenly hearing the music anew—is very much like the process of estrangement that this chapter has been engaging with, whereby something new allows the reader to gain a different perspective on something old and familiar, in this case, the *Odyssey* itself. The art is wondrous, yes, but it is the powerful estranging effect that it produces in the reader that makes it truly marvellous, and that estranging effect is what allows Fraction and Ward to comment so strikingly on a number of issues in not only the *Odyssey* but wider myth, ranging from gender roles to sexual assault. Wonder and estrangement work together to allow *ODY-C* to comment on the politics of the *Odyssey* in the manner that feminist SF demands.

To continue with the texts discussed in Chapter 2: Genre, David Drake's classical novels can be seen to operate in a similar way. Drake is no stranger to the connections that can be drawn between fiction and real life. In 1984, Bruce Sterling launched an attack on Baen Books, the publishing house that published Drake's military SF fiction, smearing Baen and the authors who wrote for it as right-wing and militaristic. As a result, as David Hartwell (2012) writes,

> Drake's fiction fell out of the serious discourse in the SF and fantasy field, with very little questioning of the accuracy or merits of Sterling's attacks, or the virtues of Drake's writing. It was military and that was enough.

Drake has further spoken about being "pilloried by the critics as pro-war because I didn't *say* I was anti-war" (Drake 2013b) and how he is "sometimes accused on believing things that I clearly don't believe" (Drake 2009), demonstrating a common but fundamentally misguided interpretation of his works. His works instead highlight the horrors of war, albeit in a manner that is far too straightforward for many critics – and, as discussed in Chapter 2, his subject matter is not limited to modern warfare. His Odysseus, Don Slade, with his Telemachean nephew, Ned, effectively rewrite the events and characterisation of the *Odyssey* into something that is more palatable to a modern reader because, as Drake (2012c) observes, speaking about the slaughter of the maids:

> This is only one example (although a pretty striking one) of normal behavior in an Iron Age culture which is unacceptable in a society that I (or anybody I want as a reader) would choose to live in. I might've been stupid enough to follow the structure of an ancient epic in a modern space opera, but I wasn't going to describe a hero with the worldview of a death camp guard.

Damning words indeed.[303] When confronted by modern SF (and indeed global) sensibilities, Odysseus' character has to change: he can no longer be the leader who does not care when his men die or the king who abides by the slaughter of his household staff. From this point of view, it is this rewritten Odysseus that is, to the classically-aware reader, the novum. Upon first looking into the novels of David Drake, particularly *Cross the Stars*, and seeing the structural parallels to the *Odyssey*, the reader expects Odysseus to act much as he usually does. However, when Slade proves himself willing to sacrifice himself for the men he reluctantly calls his own or loses himself in his trauma when confronted by the Elysians' mural, that oscillation springs up between the Odysseus that we remember (reality) and this changed Odysseus that the text presents us with (the novum), highlighting

[303] Cf. pg.72, n.91 for previous discussion of this quotation.

how Odysseus' actions, usually excusable because of the enormous temporal gulf, are in fact quite horrendous by modern standards. A similar example occurs with the character of Achilles in *The Warrior*. Where Achilles was (mostly) feted in the *Iliad* for his heroism and, as a consequence, his individualism was somewhat tolerated, Des Grieux is isolated and eventually ends up quite mad, which certainly offers the readers a striking new perspective on how exactly we should be looking at the 'hero' of the *Iliad*. In both these examples, the estrangement that is (perhaps) integral to SF offers the reader a new distance from which to view the ancient hero, and indeed from which to judge him.[304]

It is not just SF concerned with social justice that takes part in the interplay of estrangement. The examination of the process of reception that takes place in John C Wright's novellas "The Far End of History" and "The Plural of Helen of Troy", discussed primarily in Chapter 3: Adaptation and further in Chapter 5: Sense of Wonder, similarly operates within this paradigm, where it is the SF method by which these versions of classical figures appear that dictates their respective novums. Helen in "The Plural of Helen of Troy" is estranged through time travel, thus becoming a potent reflection on the trauma that a text can undergo by being repeatedly recreated. The fact that this 'text' is here a sentient human woman further estranges the idea, creating a powerful novum indeed. The *Iliad* cannot protest at its own mistreatment, but this Helen can – even though, as discussed in Chapter 5, all her protests (and attempted suicides) in the end accomplish nothing.

The paradigm is a little less dark in "The Far End of History". Here it is the various different ways of achieving the kinds of immortality demonstrated by Atkins, Ao Ahasuerus, and eventually Penelope herself that intrude as the novum, posing questions about what it is we do when we rewrite (rework, retell, recreate) an ancient text, whether we are giving it new life or simply trying to preserve it in its

[304] Hartwell (2012) outlines a similar technique in Drake's short story "Ranks of Bronze", where a Roman legion is abducted from Earth and set to work as intergalactic mercenaries: "By using SF as a distancing device, and by further using classical mercenaries as soldier characters, Drake constructs a fictional space in which he can investigate and portray certain kinds of human behavior, heroism, loyalty, cowardice, the strategic working out of detailed military actions and the impact on them of individuals behaving well or not, of high and low technology for killing functioning properly or not."

original state. This novum in "The Far End of History" is, much as the novum in Drake's novels, dependent on the reader's knowledge of classical literature and indeed of classical scholarship. It would not occur to readers who are not familiar with where the names Ulysses and Penelope come from to interpret these two sentient planetoids as representations of ancient texts—they would simply be two further characters in Wright's *The Golden Oecumene* saga—but, if the reader knows their classical pedigree, they become the classical novum that has wriggled its way into this modern SF text. This stresses the link between Suvin's historically-situated novum and many historically-situated, reader response theories of reception: both are dependent on the reader's interaction with the text.

In fact, to broaden the net even further, we can arguably view SF within this thesis as itself acting as an estranging device, as a novum, as a way to highlight the concerns that classical scholarship has about the *Odyssey*, the *Iliad*, and indeed about itself.

For instance, the polyphony of the *Odyssey* is thrown into sharp relief by the manoeuvrings of the first chapter of the thesis. Detailed examination of modern polyphonic *Odyssey* adaptations—especially as distinct from the rarer *Iliad* adaptations—highlights the fact that the innate polyphony (of a kind) of the *Odyssey* is in fact something that adaptors pick up on and choose to highlight in their own works. In this sense, then, the analysis of polyphonic works in Chapter 1 is the novum that estranges the *Odyssey* itself. We can see a similar manoeuvre at play in Chapter 5 with the discussion of the SF sense of wonder. The centrality of wonder to the *Odyssey* is arguably obvious, and is perhaps what encourages the stories of Odysseus' adventures to be told as children's tales – but it is through the discussion of this specific theory of SF—this chapter's novum—that this element of the ancient text becomes clearer.

However, the novum does not always simply cast new light on the ancient texts themselves. Consider the discussion of the interrelationship between the SF megatext, the Archaic supertext, and all the other variations on that theme in Chapter 4. Here, the SF theory of the megatext is the novum, and it

is through this novum's interaction with (and estrangement of) the Archaic supertext in particular that the striking similarities (and, of course, differences) between the two come into focus. Other scholarly contributions are put under the spotlight in Chapter 2, namely the preoccupations that we as academics have with issues of gender and heroism in the *Odyssey* and the *Iliad*. The issues are highlighted by the novums provided by the texts discussed, and perhaps the distance those novums provide allows us to reflect on how much of what scholarship discusses is actually present in the texts. Heroism is certainly a theme in the Homeric poems, for instance, but gender politics are perhaps more something picked out by scholars. The distancing offered by the novum can perhaps operate as almost an academic's conscience, too.

Further, as with the alignment between megatext and supertext, many of the 'objects' that have been estranged in the thesis have in fact been theoretical ones. Chapter 3 demonstrates this first, where a number of SF tropes (time travel, immortality, databank memories, hyperspatial entities) are used to effectively estrange the process of reception itself – with the added correlative that this estranging can also act as deprivileging, reducing the status of the Homeric texts in the eyes of their adaptors. Tad Williams' *Otherland* series demonstrates this very well. Chapters 4 and 5 operate in similar ways: the megatextual novum of Chapter 4 allows discussion of what a megatext might be in a classical space; and the wondrous novum of Chapter 5 leads to an elaboration of wonder as a parallel for the process of reception.

Then, at the end of all things, Chapter 6 thus becomes the thesis' own novum. After reading the chapter at hand, every other chapter in the thesis can be (and here is) reread in the new light of cognitive estrangement. The novum can thus be viewed as a useful heuristic tool to describe one approach to classical reception studies itself, the approach that views modern adaptations of ancient texts as a way to cast new light on those ancient texts themselves. This certainly fits with the nuts and bolts of Suvin's original theory: the modern adaptation is the novum that encourages the mental oscillation between new and old, eventually leading to the new perspective gained. However, this parallel loses something of the 'cognitive' from 'cognitive estrangement'. Suvin's original definition

of ‘cognitive’ was essentially ‘scientific’, something which has become watered down in the years after the publication of *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction*, coming to mean science-like, or science-ish. However, it is this ‘cognitive’ that is still key to this theory’s application to SF. If we extend the meaning of ‘cognitive’ to include ‘research-based’, then it seems like the comparison can hold remarkably well. This is not merely a vain move. When distinguishing between estrangement in myth and in SF, Suvin (1972) writes:

> Where the myth claims to explain once and for all the essence of phenomena, SF posits them first as problems and then explores where they lead to. (375)

This is what Suvin dubs the “cognitive glance” (375), and is therefore a valid cognitive move. Academia in humanities subjects—as much as it might like to imagine that it is offering ‘explanations for the essence of phenomena’—is rooted in finding problems and then exploring what those problems lead to. This is not to say that cognitive estrangement is a theory that should be applied to academic research as a general rule, merely that, in this specific instance, it works quite nicely.

Cognitive estrangement, then, as developed by Darko Suvin and as pillaged by the rest of the academic SF community, is a very interesting concept to consider in conjunction with classical reception. Both rely on a shock to the system, essentially, whether Suvin’s novelty or Billings’ absence, and both provide an opportunity to reflect back on the reader’s known reality via the vast gulf between that and the novelty/absence introduced. This chapter has traced the interaction of novum and reality, starting on the small scale with the quirks of Homeric narrative in the *Ilium* and *Olympos* duology and the *Otherland* series and stressing that, in fact, not every moment of an estranged text has to be estranging. The chapter then moved to larger, more metatextual gestures by exploring how cognitive estrangement can be used to describe the motions that the thesis as a whole has gone through.

As outlined above, Brett Rogers and Benjamin Stevens have argued for the similarities in terms of estrangement between SF and the classical world; this chapter's analysis suggests that, in fact, the parallels are closer between SF and the mechanics of classical reception. When adapting a classical text for a modern context, something is always going to be a novum, whether the ancient text is intruding into the new genre or vice versa. It is the interaction between those two different worlds that is what classical reception studies is in fact all about. Joshua Billings' model of an erotics of reception offers one way of understanding this interaction, as a "dialect of absence and presence"; on the evidence of this chapter, Darko Suvin's cognitive estrangement provides another.

Conclusion.

An endorsement by Thomas E Jenkins on the back cover of Rogers and Stevens' *Classical Traditions in Science Fiction* (2015) describes the book thus:

> This terrific volume explores the surprising refraction of the ancient world in the most—if you'll excuse the pun—alien of genres: science fiction. It proves that the intersection of technology and classical narrative has produced some of modernity's most startling meditations on what it means to be truly human.

As discussed in the introduction to this thesis, Rogers and Stevens attempt to argue for the integral relationship between those two 'most alien of genres', SF and Classics,[305] going so far as to assert that some classical texts can be fruitfully read as SF themselves. This is how they have attempted to bridge that gap between ancient and modern, to prove that, in fact, SF is not such an alien genre after all and that it merits further study by classical scholars.

This thesis has been arguing towards a similar conclusion, but has accomplished it by quite different tactics. Contrary to Rogers and Stevens' arguments, it does not seem to be particularly helpful to claim that classical texts can be read as SF texts in the strictly modern sense of the word. Yes, Lucian's *True History* sends men to the moon and Homer's *Odyssey* sends them on a fantastic voyage around the Mediterranean, full of monsters and magic, but neither text originates in a society with an understanding of modern scientific enquiry. There is even an issue with the 'fiction' part of 'science fiction': Thucydides, for instance, has few qualms about using Homer's account of the Trojan War as a fairly straightforward historical source (Thuc.1.3), even though from our modern perspectives both the *Odyssey* and the *Iliad* are usually considered to be fictional. The *Odyssey* and the *True History* are

[305] Although it has been discussed how problematic the word 'genre' is in relation to SF. Much the same could be said of Classics, too.

better understood within the context of their own times, as examples of, respectively, orally-based epic poetry and the ancient novel; the only thing really added if we are to class them as SF is their status as illustrious ancestors of the modern genre. Instead the approach that this thesis has taken is to put ancient and modern texts alongside one another, to explore points of commonality and indeed difference that can be seen between them, and to engage in the kind of cross-cultural, cross-temporal comparison that classical reception studies allows. Classics is not SF, and, on the whole, SF has not (yet) been awarded classic status. However, what this thesis has argued is that, in fact, SF is not quite as 'alien' a genre as it might initially seem.

This begins in Chapter 1: Polyphony with the observation that, given SF texts' penchant for creating polyphonic *Odyssey* adaptations, it may well be possible to describe the *Odyssey* itself as polyphonic. This is not a particularly novel claim, as polyphony has long been discussed in relation to the *Odyssey*, but it is the method by which this claim comes about that makes it interesting. The conclusion here, perhaps, is that the question of whether or not the *Odyssey* is polyphonic in and of itself is less relevant than how modern authors and adaptors perceive the ancient text. Stauber, Lafferty, Fraction and Ward, and Battley see a kind of polyphony in the *Odyssey* that is important enough for them to translate into their own often remarkably sophisticated adaptations. Given that polyphony of the kind discussed in this chapter is in fact remarkably common in SF narratives, perhaps this element of the ancient poem is something that further explains the comparative popularity of the *Odyssey* with SF authors. The juxtaposition of this common technical element of the ancient and modern texts, therefore, leads to suggestive analyses of not only the *Odyssey* itself, but also modern readers'—particularly modern SF readers'—reactions to it.

The reactions of modern readers of the *Odyssey* is a recurrent theme in Chapter 2: Genre, as well. Here, however, instead of merely picking up on elements of the *Odyssey* and the *Iliad* that work nicely with modern SF narrative tropes, the texts choose to question, problematise, and even in some way 'fix' the 'mistakes' of the Homeric poems. Focusing on SF's own understandings of its 'subgenres'—the word is used with reservations—the chapter explores these texts through the lenses

of feminist and military SF. Both 'subgenres' are particularly interested in addressing and sometimes redressing issues that crop up in the Homeric texts: the role of women in society; and how exactly a hero, ancient or modern, should behave. It is particularly interesting how closely these SF texts engage with their source material. Drake's novels in particular benefit from close analysis of the give and take between the various heroes that are constructed and deconstructed in this modern SF idiom. The fact that SF adaptations do not feel the need to slavishly adhere to the plot elements of the Homeric text can also be understood as a reflection of the inherent mutability of SF, something picked up on by a number of feminist SF critics, including Sarah LeFanu and Jane Donawerth. As a result, this chapter outlines a tripartite relationship between ancient text, modern SF author and modern SF itself, where the modern author draws on both the Homeric story and the idiom of SF to critique and analyse issues that are in fact still important today.

The next section of the thesis, Chapter 3: Adaptation, continues this idea of three-way relationships, albeit in a different form. It not only parallels Homer with SF adaptations of Homer, providing some very interesting readings of individual texts, but also parallels those SF adaptations with certain theories of classical reception, especially those discussed in Charles Martindale's *Redeeming the Text* (1993). The parallels between Homer and SF texts pick up again on the fact that SF authors are not afraid to throw the Homeric rulebook out of the window – but show that, in fact, the most sophisticated texts engage in a fascinating interplay between adherence and rejection that arguably complicates the canonical authority of the Homeric text. The parallels between SF texts and theories of classical reception further suggest deeper affinities between not just SF and Classics, as Rogers and Stevens argue, but in fact between SF and classical reception itself. These are texts that can play with time travel, with cloning, with scientifically-based foreknowledge and hindsight, concepts that are not usually available to mainstream literature, but concepts that are in fact ways of exploring the significance and indeed morality of the act of classical reception.

Theoretical constructs are a preoccupation of Chapter 4: Megatext. The titular concept becomes a more fluid entity, perhaps, than originally envisioned by Brian Attebery and Damien Broderick, and

can be used to recentre the act of reception: instead of a two-way relationship between text and reference, it imagines the reader, whoever they might be, at the centre of a web of prior knowledge and understood allusions. The parallels that this chapter focuses on, then, are those drawn between the SF megatext and wider conceptualised systems of knowledge: the Archaic supertext is the subject of the initial comparison, but, nodding to the work of the previous chapter, Hans Robert Jauss' horizon of expectations is also discussed, a concept key to the study of classical reception. The idea of different intersecting megatexts discussed in this chapter is also interesting when considering the various readers of these SF adaptations – and, indeed, of texts of classical reception more generally. Not every reader who comes to a modern adaptation, SF or not, is going to have an encyclopaedic knowledge of the ancient material, so, in these SF texts in particular, the author often lends them a helping hand, explaining as much of the classical megatext as is needed for the story to be understood. The takeaway of this chapter is the interplay between different understandings of reader response and reception, and indeed different names for that structure/process/concept. There are a number of such concepts already in existence, but the SF megatext certainly seems to have more to add.

Another SF concept dominates the next chapter, Chapter 5: Sense of Wonder. The sense of wonder is a nebulous concept, often derided by SF critics, but it is interesting that a discussion of this sense of wonder in SF Homeric adaptations casts light on the wondrous aspects of the *Odyssey* itself, suggesting another reason for the popularity of the *Odyssey* in SF. Not only is it polyphonic and linked to the kind of fantastic voyage narrative that has had such a strong influence on modern SF, but it is full of the sense of wonder, something that has been repeatedly and persuasively argued to be key to any lasting definition of SF. There is also a triangular relationship to be found in this chapter between wonder, the *Odyssey*, and various scholarly theories, not only Martindale's aesthetic criticism but also Elaine Scarry's work on beauty as a force that prompts repetition and revisiting. Can we thus base a theory of classical reception in ideas of wonder and beauty? When an author chooses to adapt a text, are they in fact choosing based on what they find wondrous, beautiful, and miraculous? Perhaps not entirely, but this chapter certainly suggests that it is a question to consider.

Chapter 6: Cognitive Estrangement, the final chapter of the thesis, dives headfirst into the complexities of Darko Suvin's definition of SF as a literature of cognitive estrangement – and some of the conclusions that are reached are estranging indeed. One of the most interesting parallels this chapter draws is that between Suvin's cognitive estrangement and Joshua Billings' erotics of reception, once more demonstrating the links between SF and specifically classical reception. It certainly seems that the concept of the novum is a productive way of phrasing the act of classical reception, especially building on its associations with wonder, established in Chapter 5. An interesting thread that thus emerges in this thesis is not just the parallels between SF and Classics, but also the parallels between the mechanics of SF and various theories of classical reception. SF is a literature that is intimately connected with rewriting the real world: as discussed in the introduction, many definitions of SF focus on how SF presents the reader with a radically different world in order to reflect back on contemporary reality. Both Chapter 2 and Chapter 3 in particular demonstrate how modern authors can use SF's flexibility to change the way that the ancient stories end. It is thus perhaps not that surprising that parallels can be drawn between a literature that specialises in change and an academic discipline that studies the act of changing an ancient text. The richness of the parallels between Suvin's cognitive estrangement and Billings' erotics in particular is striking.

In many ways, this has been a thesis more concerned with questions than with answers. Exploration of texts, parallels, and concepts has been prioritised over aggressive argumentation that Homer *is* SF or that SF *is* an important development in classical reception studies. The message of this thesis, to put it in such crude terms, is that the interplay between Classics and SF is a fertile site for further analysis and investigation – but also that there is not necessarily a straightforward interplay between 'Classics' and 'SF' at all. 'Classics' can refer to the classical texts, or it can refer to classical reception, or it can arguably refer to modern conceptions of classical texts, however accurate those conceptions might be. Similarly, 'SF' can mean modern SF texts, modern theories of SF, or modern constructions of what SF is supposed to be and indeed do. This thesis has offered an introduction to the kinds of analyses that the parallels between these various constellations of 'Classics' and 'SF' can produce, and has shown that these analyses can have significant consequences for our understanding of the SF texts at

hand, of aspects of the Homeric texts, and of ideas about how we conceptualise, to borrow a phrase from Paul Kincaid,[306] what it is we do when we do classical reception.

306 "What It Is We Do When We Read Science Fiction" (Kincaid 2008b).

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Figures.

Fig.1:
The standard *ODY-C* text box (*ODY-C* #1: 15).

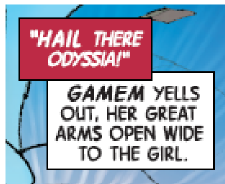


Fig.2:
The difference between standard and dialogue text boxes (*ODY-C* #1: 23.2).

Fig.3:
Hypnos' runic lettering contrasted with Poseidon's standard letters (*ODY-C* #5: 23.2).

Fig.4:
The usual lettering and text box style of the primary narrative (*ODY-C* #6: 3.1).

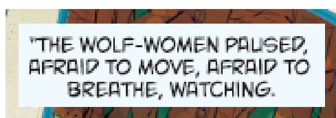


Fig.5:
The thinner lettering of the story of the wolf woman (*ODY-C* #6: 3.3).

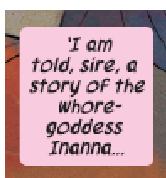


Fig.6:
The different lettering and background colour of the wolf woman's story of Inanna and Aletuda (*ODY-C* #6: 5.5).

Fig.7: He reads (*ODY-C* #6:3).

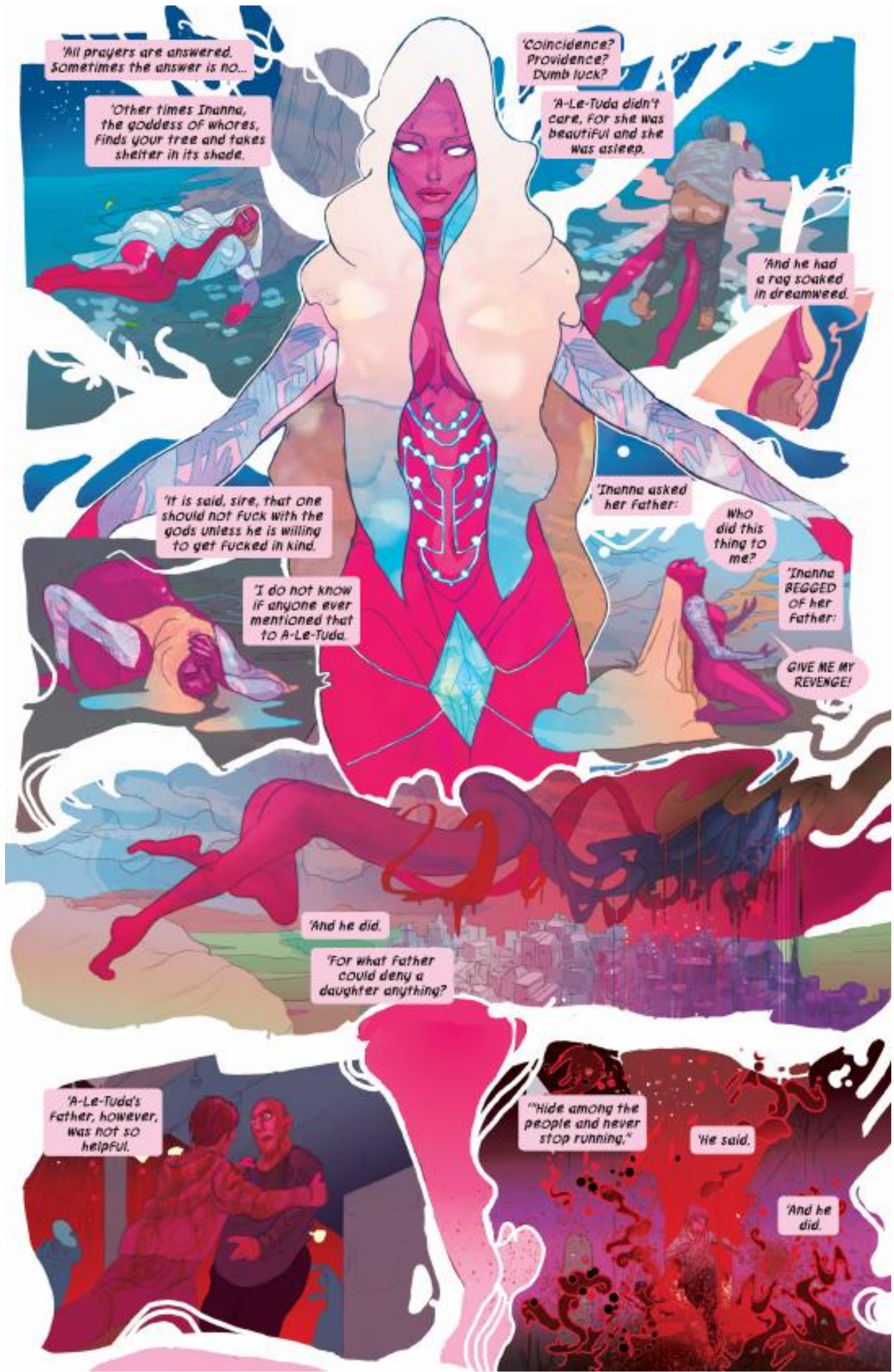


Fig.8: Wispy-edged text boxes (*ODY-C* #6: 6).

Fig.9: Zhaman and Hyrar step outside of the inset story (*ODY-C* #6: 15).

Fig.10:
The debased He (*ODY-C* #1: 21.3).

Fig.11:
He as a pin-up (*ODY-C* #7: cover).

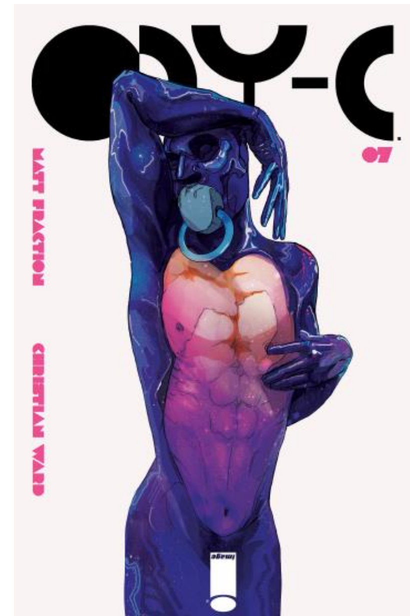


Fig.12:
He/he (*ODY-C* #6: 14.1).

Fig.13:
The bearded yet sensual Hera (*ODY-C* #5: 1.2).

Fig.14:
The Captain mourns for Joe (*The Infinite Horizon* 152).

Fig.15:
A tree grows around Joe's grave (*The Infinite Horizon* 182).

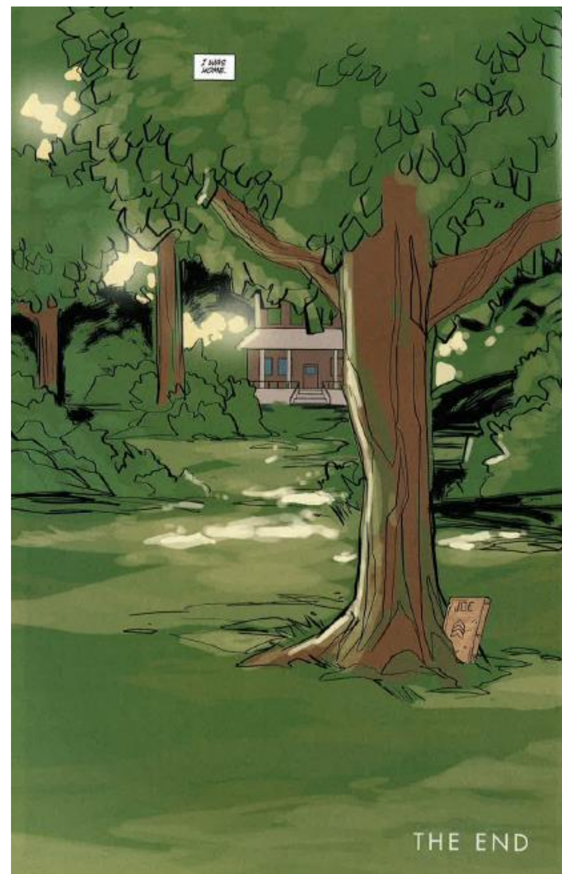
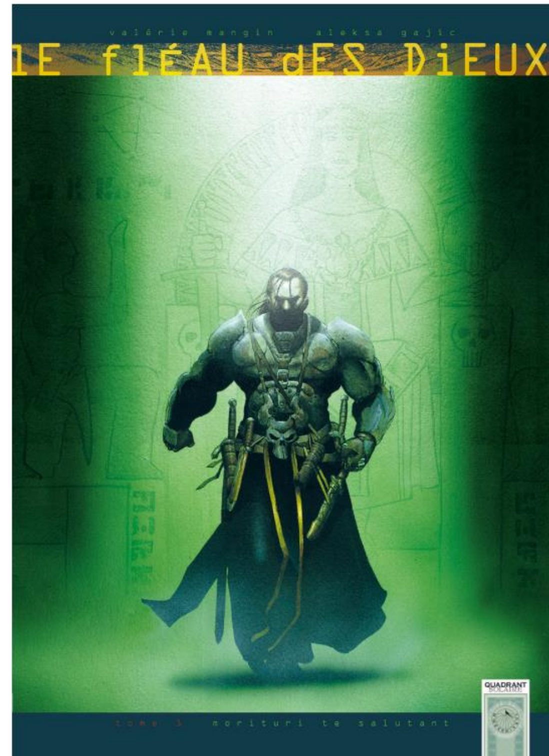


Fig.16:
Énée recounts his adventures in red-figure style (*Le Dernier Troyen: Intégrale* 160).

Fig.17:
Virgile and Atilla (*Le Dernier Troyen: Intégrale* 192.7).

Fig.18:
Cover of *Le Fléau des Dieux*.



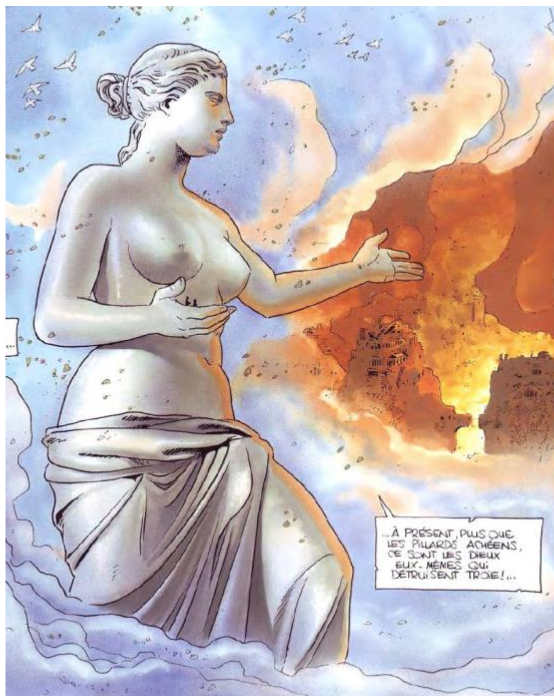


Fig.19:
Venus as Venus de Milo (*Le Dernier Troyen: Intégrale* 37.7).

Fig.20: Trireme-inspired spaceships (*Le Dernier Troyen: Intégrale* 3.7).

Fig.21: Crested helmet (*Le Dernier Troyen: Intégrale* 9.2).

Fig.22: Aeneas' armour (*Le Dernier Troyen: Intégrale* 52.6).

Fig.23:
Myrina appeals to Mars (*Le Dernier Troyen: Intégrale* 58.2)

Fig.24:
Andromaque marvels (*Le Dernier Troyen: Intégrale* 100.8).

Fig.25:
Ulysse and Jule (*Le Dernier Troyen: Intégrale* 249.1)