LoneStarCon 3

August 29 — September 2, 2013

ACADEMIC PAPERS SCHEDULE

Adapting Folklore in Speculative Fiction: Brazil and Space Opera

Saturday 10:00 - 11:00

Moderator: David Farnell

1. "Brazilian folklore in speculative fiction: three recent approaches" Christopher Kastensmidt, Centro Universitário Ritter dos Reis

Countless cases can be cited in which speculative fiction authors have used folklore and mythology for world-building/mythopoeia (Tolkien, for example) or placed mythological characters in modern settings (Neil Gaiman, Percy Jackson). While adaptations are common for European and Mediterranean mythologies (Norse, Greek, Egyptian, etc.), Brazilian folklore appears rarely, and remains confined, for the most part, to the country itself. This paper proposes a study of three recent Brazilian works, to see the approach being taken by authors in that country in integrating their own folklore into fiction.

The paper begins with a brief history of Brazilian folklore in fiction, citing landmark works such as Monteiro Lobato's *Sítio do Picapau Amarelo* ("Yellow Woodpecker Ranch") of the early twentieth century.

The paper then examines recent attempts at integrating Brazilian folklore into fiction, in the form of three novels by Brazilian speculative fiction authors. The three works to be studied include: *Anhangá: A Fúria do Demônio,* ("Anhangá: The Demon's Fury") by J. Modesto; *Cira e o Velho,* ("Cira and the Old Man") by Walter Tierno; and *Ouro, Fogo & Megabytes*, ("Gold, Fire, and Megabytes") by Felipe Castilho. These three books represent a wide range of material: from terror in Colonial Brazil all the way to video-game playing teens in the twenty-first century.

Whereas all three works are set in Brazil, they differ widely in their use of folklore. For each novel, the paper examines two areas: adaptation and integration. In terms of adaptation, the paper compares the original mythology (in its widely-accepted form) to the author's vision. In

terms of integration, the paper contrasts the different ways in which each author integrates the mythology into their work.

2. "Feminist Rewritings of the Ramayana and the Matter of Britain: Differences in Approach and Execution" Mary Anne Mohanraj, University of Illinois at Chicago

Using the recently-published anthology Breaking the Bow: The Speculative Ramayana, Nina Paley's film Sita Sings the Blues, and various Arthurian retellings, particularly Marion Zimmer Bradley's The Mists of Avalon, as starting points, this paper will compare re-envisionings of two cultural myths / tales – the Arthurian saga, also known as the Matter of Britain, and the Ramayana, which is both religious text and epic tale. I hope to offer a preliminary analysis of some of the differences in approach, particularly in terms of feminist retellings, between South Asian and British approaches to re-envisioning these oft-told tales. As part of the analysis, I'll discuss my own choices in rewriting Sita's story for my story, "The Princess in the Forest," which was published in Breaking the Bow.

Finding Ourselves and our Aliens in Graphic Media: Will Eisner and Jack Arnold

Saturday 11:00 - 12:00

Moderator: Michael Page

1."Will Eisner, Aliens, and the Military-Industrial Complex: Social and Scientific Ethics in the Graphic Novel Signal from Space" N. C. Christopher Couch, Trinity College

Signal from Space, also titled *Life on Another Planet,* was an early experiment in the graphic novel field by Will Eisner. After the publication of the pioneering *A Contract with God* in 1978, Eisner concentrated on overseeing reprints of his comic book series *The Spirit.* Eisner retained his faith in the graphic novel as a literary form, and decided to move from realist novels to what he saw as perhaps a more popular genre, the science fiction thriller. This was an experiment in several ways; it was also serialized fiction, appearing in a novel publishing format in comics, *Will Eisner Quarterly,* the first magazine named for a comics creator.

Signal from Space features a complex thriller plot, combining international intrigue with governmental malfeasance and scientific betrayal. Eisner uses an apparent first contact, a signal showing intelligent life from the Barnard's star system, as a plot device to set in motion rivalries in the American scientific establishment, jockeying for power and resources in the US military, and a cult with a charismatic leader exploiting the situation in Africa.

Eisner created a work that he hoped would be popular but, like *Contract* and his later novels set in New York's Jewish community, he created a work that takes a dark view of human nature

and society. Eisner's models were contemporary bestsellers dealing with military and social questions including *Fail Safe,* about nuclear weapons, and *Seven Days in May,* about a military coup in the United States. His complex plot is successfully structured like a bestselling novel of intrigue, but unlike his models, there is no favorable resolution of the social crises initiated by the apparent alien contact. Corruption succeeds, technology fails, and government, science and industry are intertwined in the ways predicted in Eisenhower's famous speech warning of the dangers of the military-industrial complex (a phrase which originally also included the word congressional). Eisner's one foray into science fiction resonates with his other work in complex ways and, though perhaps meant to chart a path to greater popularity for the new form he was exploring, does not fully adhere to the tropes of the thrillers he sought to emulate.

2. "Finding the Other Alien: The Search for Self in the SF Films of Jack Arnold" James Davis, Troy University

   Director Jack Arnold has been much lauded over the past 3 decades for bringing a touch of "The Cinema" to the world of low-budget sci-fi flicks of the nineteen-fifties. He is most often noted for the evocative nature of his panoramic shots, the poetic vision of his settings, his smooth, often brisk pacing, and his ability to coax solid and believable, though never brilliant performances from "B" actors. Bill Warren, in *Keep Watching the Skies,* recites a long list of Arnold's "striking, almost surrealistic. . . . vivid, superbly-composed and haunting images" (173). This reputation is all the more remarkable when we realize it is based on a mere seven SF films made during the decade, and three of them (*Revenge of the Creature*, 1955, *Tarantula,* 1955, and *The Space Children,* 1958) are good but nothing special, while one, *Monster on the Campus,* 1958—is downright bad. The other three, however—*It Came from Outer Space,* 1953, *Creature from the Black Lagoon,* 1954, and *The Incredible Shrinking Man,* 1957—are acknowledged masterpieces of the genre.

   Finding a strong common theme running through the films of a contract director making low-budget genre movies would seem at first glance to be a daunting task. However, in the introduction to *Directed by Jack Arnold*, Dana M. Reemes explains how for Arnold, "being a contract director was not so much a question of limitations as it was of opportunities for creative expression." Arnold could not control the scripts he was given to shoot, but one of the things he found he could control was the visual relationship between the characters and the script, the thematic value to be gleaned from the imagery *he* chose. One theme that appears to run through Arnold's best films is very familiar to students of twentieth-century literature: Who the hell am I? This theme is seen in SF in its own slightly peculiar guises, often growing out of interaction with literally "alien" Others, who are sometimes hard to recognize. Low-budget SF films, especially, often resorted to the cost-cutting device of giving the aliens the ability to take over the bodies of humans, resulting in several ready-made themes for the willing director—the loss of self to the homogenizing pressures of modern society, the loss of soul forced on us by a communist-type takeover, even the attraction of being able to escape from the daunting complexities of the modern world by being "taken over" (Sobchack 120-28). Arnold seemed to have a special attraction to the theme of "Who or what is the alien, and how does identifying it

and coming to understand it help me to better understand myself?" The harder the alien is to identify, the more soul searching the protagonist has to go through in order to understand what it is that makes us human, and thus differentiates us from the alien. Arnold uses this theme to great effect in several of his films.

Digital Future, Martian Future: Digital Fandom and the Changing Narratives of Mars

Saturday 14:00 - 15:00

Moderator: Christopher Couch

"Rhetorical Memory and Digital Fandom" Heather Urbanski, Central Connecticut State University

If *memory* is a classic rhetorical canon and franchise canon is a key, even defining, element of fandom, then what can the work of rhetoricians, classical as well as modern, help us see about twenty-first century speculative fiction fandom? This presentation will begin to answer that question by focusing on both on the targets of fandom (genre texts such as reboots) and the objects of fan memory (including fan fiction, fan art, and episode guides).

There are few words within fandom that carry as much weight, even reverence, as *canon*, which Karen Hellekson and Kristina Busse define as "the events presented in the media source that provide the universe, setting, and characters" of the narrative (10). This intractable, yet complex, set of features, events, characters, and even beliefs that defines our beloved franchises, however, relies on a complex human phenomenon: memory.

Yet, this fandom definition of *canon* relies on a much older one in function if not form: the classical rhetorical canon of *memory*, which is one of the five traditional elements along with invention, arrangement, style, and delivery. In the ancient rhetorical tradition, memory and *kairos* (the sense of time and place) are closely linked and, I contend, a focus on this double meaning for *canon* provides an incredibly useful lens through which to understand and appreciate the fan experience.

Conventional wisdom often sees memory as unnecessary in a print literacy culture, a view made even stronger, to some, with digital media resulting in nearly all accumulated knowledge being readily available. And yet when we look at memory through the fandom lens, there seems to be no question that this canon is still rhetorically relevant. Homage, inside jokes, and self-referential nods within genre texts, such as the recent resurgence of reboots, all require a robust fan memory to work. In many ways, this is nothing new. Classical rhetoric was predicated on rhetors training their memory of commonplaces and shared cultural stories. But in a digital age of convergence culture, how are these centuries-old concepts evolving and changing? In addition, how does the postmodern understanding of all knowledge, and memory,

as partial, mediated, and constructed complicate the classical conception of rhetorical memory?

Similarly, digital media has changed the nature, or at least the distribution, of memory objects produced by fandom. Fan memory is on display in nearly every aspect of fandom and it is an undeniable element of many of our practices, including fan fiction and fan art, where the reading and writing, consumption and production, of the activity cannot be separated from the need to remember the canon of the original narrative.

And yet memory is not without its complications, as Nelson Goodman and others have identified. We supplement and delete and distort our memories all the time, making it a problematic human phenomenon, a feature that I will also highlight and explore in this presentation.

When we look at in this way, then, the focus on memory shifts from the rhetor to the audience because the memory training of the speaker/producer isn't the main issue but rather it is that of the audience/fan. This blurring of definitive lines between producer and receiver is a rhetorical phenomenon that I have explored before (in *Writing and the Digital Generation*) and so this presentation represents a continuation of that work on the fandom experience.

This presentation combines modern interpretations and explorations of the ancient rhetorical canon of memory with the contemporary fandom concept of canon to examine the complex, perhaps even troubling, role of memory within the fan experience.

2. "Writing the Red Planet: Characteristics of the Modern Mars Metanarrative" Michelle K. Yost, University of Liverpool

Since 1976, any writer of Martian literature has had to take into account an ever-increasing amount of scientific information about the planet, and reconcile it with a creative heritage. This has resulted in a self-conscious construction of Mars literature as speculative realism sharing several common characteristics: informational paratext about Mars, scientific fact and history, and literary allusions to Burroughs, Bradbury, etc. Almost no novel set on Mars in the last three decades has escaped these self-imposed literary constraints lest they stray into the realm of fantasy. This presentation will explore the canon of post-Viking Mars novels and how they have incorporated these elements into a distinct megatext.

When Do We Give Up What Makes Us Human? Cyborgs and Monstrous Utopias

Saturday 15:00 - 16:00

Moderator: Karen Burnham

1. "The Crown of Being: Cyborg Theory in Fictional Practice" Sarah Wanenchak, University of Maryland-College Park

Cyborgs and the implications of their existence have long been a concern of speculative fiction. Calling into question the boundaries between human/ non-human, organic/ mechanical, and digital/physical, stories about cyborgs are one of the most powerful locations in which speculative fiction crosses into the realm of social theory and makes space for the imagining of new forms of life and identity that grow out of but also beyond the human. Perhaps the most well-known piece of theoretical work that explores the the implications of this kind of boundary crossing is Donna Haraway's *Cyborg Manifesto,* which makes speculative fiction into social theory by outlining the political boundary-transgressive nature of the cyborg-made-real, and suggesting ways in which cyborgs have powerful significance for a new and expanded kind of feminist theory that incorporates identities that not only transcend gender binaries, but binaries of almost every other kind. Haraway's writing also makes explicit the possibility for doing theory in a science fictional context, for using fiction as a location in which to work through concepts and ideas that may be difficult to grapple with in a practical non-fictional setting. In this paper, I explore this possibility further through a close examination of a single text: Catherynne M. Valente's science fiction novella *Silently and Very Fast*. I detail the points of intersection between the two texts, as well as the ways in which Valente draws out many of the ideas that Haraway's writing posits as areas for further theoretical work. Further, I outline the most significant common theme of the two texts, that of political boundary-transgression and the disruption of hierarchical identity categories and structures. Finally, I argue that Valente's text presents us with a powerful example of what social theory done through fiction looks like, and how it serves as a useful model for expanding on and enriching our understanding of theoretical texts that offer tremendous possibility for such expansion and additional exploration.

2. "Margaret Atwood and Paolo Bacigalupi: Achieving Utopia, Sacrificing Humanity" David Farnell, Fukuoka University

Since long before the term was coined by Thomas Moore in 1516, utopia has been the subject of human dreams and aspirations. Yet humans never manage to achieve it in any lasting way except in fiction, and even there the utopias depicted are usually quaint (cf. Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward*), repellant (Ignatius Donnelly's *Caesar's Column*), ambiguous (Ursula Le Guin's *The Dispossessed*), or so peaceful that the bulk of the story must place outside the utopian society (Iain M. Banks' Culture series) – without even considering dystopias, anti-

utopias, critical utopias, and all the other variations on utopias in which very few would seriously wish to dwell.

And then there are the utopias in which no human can dwell. This presentation will look at several twentieth- and twenty-first-century "monstrous utopias," utopian societies for which the price of entry is the loss of humanity, but will focus on two in particular: Margaret Atwood's Crakers and Paolo Bacigalupi's heartless immortals. In Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* (2003) and *The Year of the Flood*, humanity as a species must die to pave the way for its posthuman replacements. In Bacigalupi's "The People of Sand and Slag" (2004), humans have achieved immortality through "weeviltech" at the cost of allowing all other life on earth to die.

Both of these works, in the process of depicting the sacrifice of humanity required to achieve utopia, imply a quantification of just what it is that makes us human. Thus, in addition to exploring the nature of the utopias described in these works and comparing them with several other (more briefly discussed) monstrous utopias, this presentation will consider their implied definitions of the nature of humanity as well.

Cartography of Genre: Space Opera and the Academic Legacy of Jim Gunn

Saturday 16:00 - 17:00

Moderator: Christopher McKitterick

"Space Opera and the Greco-Roman Epic" Bob Cape, Austin College

Space Opera has ridden a wicked roller coaster ride of popularity from high status in the magazines in the 1920s and 1930s, to disparagement in the 1940s and 1950s and a shift to movies and an inadequate television that carried it along, weakly, into the 1960s, to being brutally satirized in the 1970s, to revival and popularity in print and on screen on an even grander scale in the 1980s that continues today (Westfahl). In this paper I will argue that it has been sharing this wild ride with an unexpected friend: Greek and Roman epic. The tribulations ancient epic has seen in print media—as translations or adaptations—and in film can be said to match those of space opera to a remarkable extent (cf. Solomon). Although elements from classical literature have been a part of SF from its beginnings, space opera and ancient epic share common interests in grand narratives, archetypes, an elevated style, and central philosophical questions about humanity. It is no surprise that the past 30 years has seen a fusion of the two forms.

After sketching a very brief history of the vicissitudes of these genres, I will focus on the screen renaissance, beginning with *Starwars* (I-VI: 1977-2005) and *Gladiator* (2000), touching on *Troy* (2004) and *Prometheus* (2012), and on the print revival with the novels by Dan

Simmons, *Ilium* (2003) and *Olympos* (2005), and the novella by John Wright, "The Far End of History" (2009). My purpose is to offer an overview of shared concerns in terms of themes and treatment, illustrating how the literary, philosophical, and archetypal elements from ancient epic inform space opera, and how the SF genre modernizes the issues, elevates them to a new, grander scale, and reanimates them with a renewed sense of wonder.

"A Key Cartographer of the Genre: Jim Gunn" Donald M. Hassler, Kent State University

When I was making my professional move from 18th-century studies to work on science fiction as a English professor academic, I had the opportunity to get to know Jim Gunn well when he was providing important leadership to the Science Fiction Research Association and when he conceived and carried out his 1988 publication *The New Encyclopedia of Science Fiction*. I was serving as a new and young officer of the fledgling SFRA during the time that Jim was President. I wrote a number of entries for his reference book that, as it turned out, had to compete with the Nicholls *Encyclopedia* and, consequently, did not receive the notice that it deserved. I attended several of his seminars in Kansas where he had Theodore Sturgeon helping him teach at the end of Sturgeon's life. Just at the beginning of this period, I also organized academic tracks for the 1982 and 1983 Worldcons in Chicago and Baltimore respectively and published small collections from those academic tracks that are still in print with Wildside Press. Since that seminal time in my own professional development, I have gone on to edit *Extrapolation* for nearly twenty years and to publish a good bit on the genre. I want now to write about Jim's inspiration and guidance in those years of development. He was a major force in establishing the growing respectability of the academic study of science fiction. One dictum that I remember well, among many from him, was the advice, "Don't write anything that you cannot sell twice." The very tone of this quip in the context of sober academic work as well as, even, the seriousness of it as advice characterizes some of the facets in Jim's work; and I think there is much that I can develop about this remarkable man.

Robert E. Howard: The Weird, West, and Worms

Saturday 17:00 - 18:00

Moderator: Donald M. Hassler

1. "Vaqueros and Vampires: Robert E. Howard and the Genesis of the Weird Western" Jeffrey Shanks and Mark Finn, Independent Scholars

Texas pulp writer Robert E. Howard (1906-1936) is best known as the creator of the heroic fantasy genre—or more colloquially "sword and sorcery"—the most famous example being his Conan of Cimmeria series. Howard invented the genre by introducing "weird" or supernatural elements into a pseudo-historical setting. By combining these disparate genre

elements he was able to craft a kind of fiction previously unseen in the 1920s. That accomplishment alone would be more than enough to ensure Howard a prominent place in the annals of popular culture, if not American Literature, but Howard actually did it twice in his career. Less well known is that Howard's standard practice mixing of seemingly incongruous elements and tropes led to the birth of another hybrid genre: the Weird Western.

By juxtaposing horror and supernatural elements such as vampires, animated corpses, lost races, and Native American mysticism with traditional Old West settings and stock characters, Howard subverted the genre expectations of his readers, and in doing so created a new iteration of the weird tale. "The Horror from the Mound," published in *Weird Tales* magazine in May 1932, is arguably the first weird Western, a fact that is unrecognized outside of Howard fandom. An influential story, it is directly responsible for the undead Western's modern incarnation in the work of Joe R. Lansdale and others. This chapter will contextualize "The Horror from the Mound," as well as other stories by Howard that can be classified as weird Westerns, in order to examine the cultural, economic, and biographical factors that led Howard to proactively engage in this early example of genre hybridity.

2. "Evolutionary Otherness: Anthropological Anxiety in Robert E. Howard's 'Worms of the Earth'" Jeffrey Shanks, Independent Scholar

After the 1859 publication of Darwin's On the Origin of Species, as Western culture was forced to confront and assimilate a new paradigm regarding humanity's position in the natural world, evolutionary theory permeated popular culture and had a significant effect on the literature of the Victorian and Modernist periods. In particular, pulp adventure fantasists like Edgar Rice Burroughs, H. Rider Haggard, Arthur Conan Doyle, and Robert E. Howard often made use of tropes like apes and ape-men, degenerative races and cultures, and atavists and throwbacks, tapping into this existential uneasiness that Virginia Richter refers to as "anthropological anxiety."

In "Worms of the Earth," published in the November 1932 issue of Weird Tales, and in several similar stories that make use of the Little People trope, Howard borrows from the 19th century anthropological theory of a race of Neolithic pygmies being the source of the legends of fairies, elves, and dwarfs. In these stories he explores the themes of cultural degeneration and physical devolution as both a cause and a result of racial and ethnic conflict. Using these themes, as well as the related concepts of miscegenation, assimilation, and contact with the Other through imperialist and colonialist endeavors, Howard utilizes early 20th century anthropological anxiety as an effective mechanism of horror fantasy.