

ContactZone

Rivista dell'Associazione italiana per lo studio della fantascienza e del fantastico

Non-human Narrators in Science Fiction

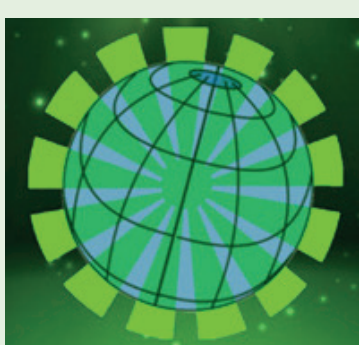
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ContactZone is an international double-blind peer-reviewed e-journal which publishes scholarly work on Science Fiction and the Fantastic connecting different languages, non-mimetic genres, and fields of study. It is the journal of the Italian Association for the Study of Science Fiction and the Fantastic. The areas of research range from literature to cinema, from media to comics and video games touching a wide spectrum of critical approaches, which includes literary criticism, ecocriticism, film studies, gender studies, cultural studies, postcolonial studies, linguistics, translation studies, critical race studies, queer studies. The journal welcomes papers from scholars, authors, teachers, and librarians supporting an innovative insight into texts written in English, but also in other languages, in order to promote a lively dialogue among critics and other specialists on an international level. *ContactZone* will focus on themes and topics dealing with the representation of imaginative and/or alternative worlds in the realms of science fiction and the fantastic.

Director: Luca Sarti

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Introduction

Non-human Storytelling in Science Fiction

Oriana Palusci and Valentina Romanzi
DOI: 10.26379/1731

We live in anxious times, driven by changes of such a scale that we struggle to take them in – mutating hyperobjects of sorts, to borrow Timothy Morton’s term (2013). War and political upheaval feature daily on the national and international news. Deadly viruses spread globally. The consequences of climate change are perceived worldwide. As humans, we cannot avoid considering the impact of such tremendous upheavals on our species. Yet, we are not the only inhabitants of planet Earth. The great metamorphoses caused by the Anthropocene have a devastating impact on the ecosystem: on animal and vegetal species becoming extinct at the highest rate in history, and on non-living entities, bearing the brunt of erosion, deforestation and reckless exploitation of resources. In the 1970s, James Lovelock formulated the Gaia hypothesis, which construes the earth as a complex selfregulating system: the theory “proposes that the responses of living organisms to environmental conditions ultimately bring about changes that make the earth better adapted to support life; the system would rid itself of any species that adversely affects the environment” (Martin and Hine 2016). Lovelock’s view of a holistic self-preserving mechanism for our planet is a beacon of hope in the darkness of our times.

Sentient Asteroids and Too Human Aliens in Fredric Brown's Fiction

Simone Pettine
DOI: 10.26379/1732

Abstract

Not infrequently the choice of a futuristic context has allowed to highlight some distortions in human behavior, proposing notable reflections within an underestimated “escape literature”. This is the case of numerous science fiction works by the American writer Fredric Brown (1906-1972), in which the alien unexpectedly becomes the narrator: in Brown's novels and short stories the voices of the non-human characters are often so good at sharing points of view, lifestyles and defects of the opposite (human) species that they are confused with it. This essay aims to answer at least two fundamental questions: what precise aspects does social criticism consist of in Brown's stories? To what extent does it prove to be indebted to the adoption of non-human narrators? We will proceed through the analysis of novels (*The Mind Thing* and *Rogue in Space*) and selected short stories (*Sentry* and *The Last Martian*).

Desire for Human Nature in Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go*

Amalia Călinescu

DOI: 10.26379/1733

Abstract

This theoretical study aims to show how clones portray humanity while outlining the therapeutic quality of Kazuo Ishiguro's sixth novel *Never Let Me Go*. The world depicted accepts human cloning as a form of preserving the human body. Although the narrating character Kathy and her friends, Ruth and Tommy, seem at peace with their destiny as donors, their burning desire to be treated as human beings underlies the dystopian nature of the novel. In the first part, social distortion is explained in connection with nature's golden ratio. Clones' interaction is then analysed with the help of Eric Berne's transactional analysis and the three ego states of each human personality. Kathy, Ruth and Tommy's lack of reaction towards the (ab)normality of genetic modification is identified as a form of the Daoist *Wu wei*, in the third part of the study. By learning to master her unfulfilled desire for human nature, Kathy will eventually let go.

Beyond a Strictly Anthropocentric Vision of the Nonhuman: Body Language in Kazuo Ishiguro's *Klara and the Sun*

Lena Crucitti
DOI: 10.26379/1734

Abstract

In the dystopian science fiction novel *Klara and the Sun* (2021), Nobel Prizewinning writer Kazuo Ishiguro gives a voice to a non-human narrator called Klara, an AF (Artificial Friend) who was bought to become the companion of a child called Josie. Through her narration, Klara demonstrates that she has superior observational abilities: she reads people through their facial expressions and gestures, and actively uses her body to communicate. Interestingly, human language, which is traditionally considered as “man’s identifying characteristic par excellence” (Agamben 2004: 37), is relegated to the status of a less efficient communication tool. As I will argue in this article, the questioning of the power of human language and the emphasis on body language as a major means of expression in the novel allow to escape from a strictly anthropocentric stance on the nonhuman.

The novel suggests that going beyond words is a necessity to displace the human perspective in the representation of other forms of being. *Klara and the Sun* features a wide range of different ontological categories: humans (in the traditional sense of the term), genetically engineered humans (children who have been ‘lifted’), traditional animals (dogs, birds, insects, etc.), posthuman animals (drone birds), different generations of AFs (B2s, B3s), etc. My article will approach the novel as a work that does not only blur the boundaries between the traditional categories (animals, humans, machines) but that questions the existence of such groups. Based on Joanna Bourke’s concept of ‘negative zoology’, I will demonstrate that the novel – mainly through Klara’s unique way of expressing herself and understanding the world – promotes the acknowledgement of the radical singularity of every single being, be it what we call a ‘human’ or a non-human entity.

Ann Leckie's *Ancillary Trilogy* and the Revolutionary Potential of Care

Wendy L. Wright
DOI: 10.26379/1735

Abstract

This article uses Ann Leckie's *Ancillary Trilogy* to explore the possibilities and limits of care as a means to liberation and a just world order. The narrator of the trilogy is Breq, the last remaining ancillary segment of the vast starship *Justice of Toren*. By exploring the connection between the deep knowing of the AI, the role of care as a mandate and a norm is explored through the frame of care ethics, a feminist theory of political order. Read through care ethics, the trilogy offers an imaginary in which care can transform individuals, create new worlds and new peoples. This generates space to reflect on the possibilities and limitations of care in the contemporary context of status, social inequality, and anti-democratic structures.

The Narrator Is(n't) Human: The Presence of the Human Body in the Nonhuman Narration of *Twin Peaks* and "The Metamorphosis"

Emily Scarrott
DOI: 10.26379/1736

Abstract

This paper explores the cross contamination of human and non-human voices in absurdist science fiction. Primarily, I will interrogate the collaborative humanto- non-human relationship of Margaret Lanterman and her Log in *Twin Peaks* (1990-1, 2017), in comparison with Gregor's experience as newly "other" in Kafka's "Metamorphosis" (1915).

The Log Lady is representative of the collision between the human and nonhuman. In her ongoing role as carer for her log, the Log Lady literally carries the capability of communicating with supernatural realms. Whilst the Log is, arguably, more informed about the occurrences in *Twin Peaks* than any key character, it is reliant on its human collaborator to become part of the conversation. Comfort (2009: 63) recognises how "unelaborated" their collective identity is: the community do not feel the need to provide any justification or explanation to the Log Lady's behaviours. Without sound or gesture, the Log's input leads the narrative, providing knowledge to human investigators which opens the pathway towards conclusion.

In contrast, although Gregor internally retains his human sense of self and understanding of the world, his newly physical otherness provokes a need to rethink the nature of the narrator. While the non-human Log relies on an intimate relationship with a human vessel to communicate, Gregor is able to express himself as an individual to close family members, he loses validity based on the nonhuman vessel which he inhabits.

Critically drawing on patriarchal understandings of the able human body as capital, this discussion explores the value assigned to narrators by their peers, based upon the humanness of the body through which they communicate.

Home Family Future: Authenticity, the Frontier Myth, and *Dawn of the Planet of the Apes*

Kara L. McCormack

DOI: 10.26379/1737

Abstract

This article explores the ways *Dawn of the Planet of the Apes* utilizes the meanings of the American frontier and wilderness to get at questions of authenticity and renewal. The film's narrative is told through the eyes of nonhuman protagonists to allow for a reflection on humanity and those institutions grounded in traditional, conservative values: masculinity, family, and the natural world. While the use of nonhuman heroes may be at first destabilizing for audiences, the narrative cultivates an intense empathy with the apes of the film's title. Indeed, by placing audience empathy squarely with the nonhuman primates – presented as the more natural and authentic beings the imagined wilderness represents – the film is able to more clearly critique the human exploitation and greed that led to diegetic social catastrophe in the first place. The symbolic appeal of the frontier is ever present, with its promise of a translation of the self and society into something purer and more real.

Review Essay

Climate Cassandras

Valentina Romanzi
DOI: 10.26379/1738

Abstract

Mark Bould's *The Anthropocene Unconscious: Climate Catastrophe Culture*, published in 2021 by Verso, has been the talk of the past few months among scholars of science and, to an extent, mundane fiction – and for a good reason. In less than 200 pages, *The Anthropocene Unconscious* spotlights one of the most overlooked yet permeating features of contemporary fiction: the ubiquitous presence of climate change. In its brevity and simplicity, Bould's book makes narrative elements often buried in the background surface and manages to convince readers of something so macroscopically evident that, from our often too narrow perspective, has mostly gone unnoticed.

Artwork
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Claudio V. Coccoli
DOI: 10.26379/1739