the chapter by W. David Hall, who argues that Agamben derives his 'coming community' from Benjamin as a secularized version of Paul's messianic community. The solution to the biopolitical reduction of people to bare life is 'a community composed of singularities, beings who coalesce around a pure belonging without identifiable qualities' (p. 215). Here, again, is the valorization of possibility as such.

Boscaljon's chapter concludes the volume. In it, Boscaljon offers an extended reflection on *Fight Club* particularly in terms of Jean-Luc Nancy's concept of the community. His utopian communities would be 'pools of nothing', 'no-places' without ideology or symbol, neither theistic nor atheistic, neither dogmatic nor over-sceptical; they would offer fragile but direct and unmediated experience that hopes only for its recurrence and that is grounded in human finitude. To a critical ear, such a longed for possibility may sound both as poetic and as unrealisable as the transcendent divinity lost in the Fall and sought in Christian theosis. Yet, while it may not fully satisfy, it is deeply expressive of hopeful longing for utopia.

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Religion in Science Fiction: The Evolution of an Idea and the Extinction of a Genre. By Steven Hrotic. London/New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014. x + 225pp. Hardback, £65.00. ISBN: 9781472533555

As a genre, 'science fiction' (SF) is usually associated with imaginative notions such as space/time travel, futuristic technology, extra-terrestrial life, and parallel universes. It may seem surprising, then, to encounter a work dedicated to exploring the role of religious narratives within SF. The label *science* fiction would appear to exclude anything relating to the transcendent, metaphysical, or mystical—notwithstanding Brian Aldiss' thesis in *Billion Year Spree* that SF is the religious literature of the modern age. Yet an analysis of the relationship between these two domains is precisely the aim of Steven Hrotic's new monograph.

For Hrotic, one of the intriguing paradoxes of the SF genre is that religion and science appear to have evolved a 'symbiotic relationship' since the 1920s, in contrast to much of the 'outside world', which continues to perceive them as mutually exclusive (p. 9). He believes that SF thus has much to contribute to the resolution of this religion/science tension, for, as a body of literature strongly identified with science, it can 'attempt to reconcile two different ways of understanding the world'. At the very least, SF might prompt us to '... discover that perhaps religion and science are not as inevitably opposed as we once supposed' (p. 2).

Hrotic starts the book by conceding that 'religion' is a complicated academic category. However, he settles on a working definition of religion as a 'social system ... which is legitimated by the claim of supernatural agency' (p. 11). He is keen to spell out the theoretical 'rules' for his study early on, which he does by delineating a cognitive anthropology for the study of narratives. In common with other cultural artefacts, he proposes, narratives can be perceived as collective mental 'schemas'—an epidemiology of representations interpersonally transmitted by, and shared among, members of a

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society. Over time, the most durable and pervasive of these mental schemas culturally 'evolve', and, taken in chronological sequence, narrative representations constitute a *metanarrative* told collectively by succeeding generations (p. 14). *Religion in Science Fiction* is thus an investigation of how the metanarrative of religion in SF can inform our understanding of the evolving mental schemas within the SF tradition.

The book comprises a chronological series of studies of individual SF texts that relate (at least in some sense) to religion or religious themes. Its historical sweep is broad—ranging from representations of religion in nineteenth-century proto-SF, such as Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein,* through to late-twentieth-century expressions of the genre. While I found much of this discussion informative, it was also necessarily terse, given the ambitious nature of the book. There is always a danger that dealing with authors consecutively can become banal and monotonous. However, Hrotic skilfully avoids this by ensuring that themes addressed earlier in the book are woven into subsequent discussion. His selection of material is also remarkably comprehensive: classic figures, such as Jules Verne and H.G. Wells, are dealt with engagingly, and the importance of lesser known novels, such as Orson Scott Card's *Speaker for the Dead* (1986), is helpfully explained for those unfamiliar with the genre.

A number of prominent SF authors, whose inclusion would seem absolutely essential in a book on this subject, are, however, insufficiently represented. L. Ron Hubbard, for instance, is not discussed at all; and Philip K. Dick only features in a footnote about the comparatively *far less* significant Roger Zelazny. Arthur C. Clarke's *Childhood's End* (1953) is included—but there is no reference to *The Nine Billion Names of God* (1953), *The Sentinel* (1948), or its immensely popular sequel *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968).

It is also difficult to take seriously Hrotic's bald assertion that no significant 'evolution' of SF's use of religion has occurred since Mary Doria Russell's *The Sparrow* (1996), given the fruitful offerings which continue to flow from the pens of Nalo Hopkinson and Kim Stanley Robinson.

A particularly problematic theme of the book is Hrotic's distinction between 'genre science fiction' (gSF) and 'mainstream science fiction' (mSF). The former, he says, is 'real' science fiction; however, while mSF might share certain superficial characteristics with gSF, it nonetheless lacks some 'ineffable quality'. We simply have to accept that 'some texts may *look* like science fiction superficially, but don't *feel* like real science fiction' (p. 19). The chief difficulty here is that Hrotic never adequately defines gSF, and his attempt to divide SF into these opposing categories looks woolly at best. Hrotic does recognise that this distinction is only likely to be meaningful within the SF community itself—and tries to use this to his advantage by defining gSF as literature produced and read by that bounded group. But it is clear that his distinction between gSF and mSF is self-imposed, arbitrary, and peculiar to this book.

It is all the more remarkable, then, that Hrotic proceeds to announce that gSF has now become 'extinct' altogether! Remarkable not only because he seems oblivious to the fact that he is shooting down a 'straw man' of his own making, but also because he is forced to exclude works which would, according to criteria he outlines elsewhere in the book, more than qualify as contemporary examples of gSF. For instance, he claims that one way to ensure that a work is correctly perceived as gSF is to have 'gatekeepers' who, through editing its major publications, define it as such. On what grounds, then, does Hrotic dismiss Steampunk, when it has clearly received the

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editorial approbation of Jeff VanderMeer, who has to date published no fewer than two Steampunk anthologies?

A key strength of the book is that it revives a number of SF authors, such as Fred Barclay, Leigh Brackett, and Arthur Jones—who, although now largely forgotten, are well worth rediscovering.

In spite of its limitations, this is an illuminating and well-researched volume, written from the perspective of a cognitive anthropologist, which teaches us much about the relationship between religious and scientific approaches to the world.

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