THE HUMAN FUTURE? ARTIFICIAL HUMANS AND EVOLUTION IN ANGLOPHONE SCIENCE FICTION OF THE 20TH CENTURY
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Science fiction has commonly been defined as the 'literary genre of possibilities'. However, these many possibilities are precisely what keep both readers and authors dissenting when they try to categorise texts as science fiction. Traditionally, the genre, which flourished during the 20th century to become what we know of it today, has included texts that explore, among other topics, space travel, time travel, human and biological enhancements, extra-terrestrial existence, or non-corporeal life. Besides the great range of themes, which have exponentially expanded in the 21st century to include others such as artificial intelligence(s), quantum computing or climate crises, science fiction narratives often overlap with other generic categories as well, such as crime or detective stories to name a couple. It is because of this heterogeneity and versatility that categorising, defining, or deciding what science fiction is has become a rather complicated task. As stated by some critics such as Carl Freedman "[no] definitional consensus exists" (2000: 13) in the genre of science fiction and that is why the different definitions always depend on an analytical context. This idea is the premise of Stefan Lampadius's recent monograph *The Human Future? Artificial Humans and Evolution in Anglophone Science Fiction of the 20th Century* published in 2020. The author presents a very thorough and extensive but clearly illuminating analysis of some of the so-called seminal texts in science fiction written along the 20th century, most of them in English, by using the framework of evolution and evolutionary discourse as the metanarrative that encompasses these texts from a thematic perspective. Lampadius

claims and aims to demonstrate that all the selected texts present in some way instances of a recurrent motif in the genre, which will become his main analytical category in the volume, which is the artificial human. The author proposes a consideration of different instances or materialisations of the motif of the artificial human by (dis)placing it in relation to the all-encompassing metanarrative of Darwin's evolutionary theory and discourse.

One of the most noticeable aspects of the volume, which is one of its strongest points that clearly demarcates it from other recent studies that address the theme of evolution in literature, such as Emilie Jonsson's *The Early Evolutionary Imagination: Literature and Human Nature* (2021), is that it has been carefully devised considering the dialogical nature of literature and literary genres. It becomes clear from the Introduction (Chapter 1) that this study, as stated by the author on several occasions, builds on an interdisciplinary perspective that focuses on different social and cultural discourses that prevailed and marked the literary panorama of the 20th century. Ranging from sociology, psychoanalysis, philosophy, physics, gender studies, economy and industrialization, biology, ethics, or cybernetics and technology, Lampadius embraces the idea of cross-communication and influence among disciplines to reflect how science fiction can only be understood if we regard the genre as multi-layered, or as a "mega-text [that] works by embedding each new work" (15), almost working as a conglomerate of texts of different natures, and which will only make sense if the pertaining texts are not looked at in isolation but taken into account in the light of the multiplicity of their context. Even experienced readers in the field will appreciate Lampadius's approach to science fiction, as it combines deep "contextual analysis with close reading" (11) to provide a broader and more complete perspective of different texts in the genre, both best-sellers and not so well-known, showing how, being framed within Darwinian discourse, they can be read as texts that contain examples of the artificial human.

In addition, Lampadius's research aims to connect and create a continuum among other schools of thought that have similarly considered the role in literature of the man-made or unnaturally created being that the artificial human represents, for example by examining in depth the relevance of critics from movements such as Posthumanism or Transhumanism, something that might be appealing to scholars or readers interested in those trends. Furthermore, the idea of dialogue or cross-communication is also relevant from a structural point of view if we consider the overall distribution of the chapters in the volume. It includes a total of nine chapters, each focusing on a particular decade or moment in the timeframe of science fiction, chronologically ordered to offer a coherent and synchronised reading. However, even if the chapters are consistent and fully informative by

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themselves, as each includes an introduction and a conclusion and outlook, a complete reading of the volume will help readers understand Lampadius's continuous references to motifs, themes and especially other authors and theories mentioned in the different sections. The chapters, which are deep in understanding and very ambitious, complement each other, emphasising in this way the idea of communication and dialogue at different levels: thematically, within the genre of science fiction (and) among authors and disciplines, and structurally, within the volume chapters themselves.

The author presents in Chapter 2 a thorough and well-informed theoretical background from which he builds up the central idea of the artificial human, offering a commentary on the general influence that religious and the later Darwinian discourses had on the Anglophone literary tradition. This information is later expanded and made more specific depending on the subject of the chapter. No important gaps are left for the reader to find out elsewhere as Lampadius provides extensive and very illuminating, though at times overwhelming, footnotes with explanatory references. According to the author, 20th century science fiction contradicts religious discourse and heavily builds on Darwin's evolutionary theories, yet these texts, instead of celebrating this scientific discourse as ground-breaking, question or challenge natural selection as the guiding thread of human evolution (24). On the contrary, authors such as H. G. Wells, referred to by the author in several chapters as one of the founders of this literary genre (27), place the human as the actor/agent responsible for the guided evolution of humanity by means of technology, which results in the creation of the motif of the artificial Other. This motif is, according to Lampadius, the place where the "scientific narrative of evolution and the religious narrative of divine creation" (2) intersect, as the human is now the "God" figure that freely creates and alters evolutionary natural selection giving way to a new being, an artificially created —but not always improved— version of the human.

This hypothesis is positively tested in the analytical chapters which, as mentioned before, correspond to significant moments in 20th century science fiction. Chapter 3 looks at the artificial human in the decades of 1920s and 1930s in several works by H. G. Wells, Karel Capek (the only translated author), G. B. Shaw, Olaf Stapledon and C. S. Lewis. Lampadius carefully studies how writers keep responding to each other's views on artificiality in utopian, dystopian or even apocalyptic texts. The artificial human adopts the shape of robots or other species that have been mass created or modified to adapt to a new environment. Chapter 4 looks at *Brave New World* (1932) by Aldous Huxley, where Lampadius explores the parallelism between the social context and the fictitious literary world in which the proximity between utopia and dystopia, mass (re)production, consumerism

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and control are the factors that have shaped the artificial human of the 1930s. The Golden Age of science fiction is examined in Chapters 5 and 6, where, as expected, Isaac Asimov, Jack Williamson, and Philip K. Dick are presented as the authors that materialised artificiality in very different forms, sometimes in a positive way, as they go beyond the human realm and even place the artificial animal and the android within the scope of guided evolution. One of the highlights of the volume in this part is Chapter 7, as Lampadius analyses and situates *Neuromancer* (1984) in the framework of evolution while delving into other theoretical perspectives that marked the literary critical studies of the 1980s, such as Postmodernism, Cyberpunk, Cybernetics, Cyborg theory, artificial intelligence, corporeality, or gender studies. The artificial human is analysed in consideration of the body and its newly adopted capacity to live in a virtual space. The final analytical chapter, Chapter 8, presents a very interesting approach to the subgenre of hard science fiction with an analysis of Greg Egan's novel *Diaspora* (1997), in which the artificial human in the form of code is an entity that can live in both the physical and the virtual reality. In the last chapter, Chapter 9, Lampadius concludes and offers his positive opinion of the many possibilities offered by the artificial human for further literary studies in 21st century science fiction, as he signals how renowned authors such as Kazuo Ishiguro, Margaret Atwood or Ian McEwan have very recently published novels featuring the artificial human.

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Altogether, *The Human Future? Artificial Humans and Evolution in Anglophone Science Fiction of the 20th Century* is a fundamental contribution to the field of science fiction critical studies, as it not only considers seminal works of the genre taking an innovative and multi-layered approach to evolutionary discourse, but also shows the relevance of the analysis of the motif of the artificial human within that framework. This is shown to be a versatile and fruitful concept that articulates in divergent ways, showing how different technologies are exponentially affecting human evolution and how authors, consequently, have been portraying this in fiction. Something that is worth pointing out is that —despite the impressive scope of the research, seen for example in the way that the chapters not only focus on just one author or text but on many and that Lampadius at some points considers how authors contest and influence each other later in time— there is a lack of clarification about the criterion used for the selection of a corpus of texts by authors that are solely male. For a critical volume that analyses and focuses on the development of science fiction and the topic of evolution, the omission of female authors who also established the genre and who have works of fiction addressing the artificial human in relation to evolutionary discourse, such as Ursula K. Le Guin or Octavia E. Butler, is questionable. Examples are Le Guin's short story "Nine Lives" (1968) and Butler's *Xenogenesis* trilogy. The volume would benefit from a statement or clarification to specify why some female authors are simply not

mentioned or left out in the analysis. Finally, even if the text is generally accessible, there are some substantial digressions from the topic and the extensive explanatory notes are rather overwhelming, being at times far removed from the focus of the study of literature. Nonetheless, and considering that other authors have previously studied the motif of the artificial human from different perspectives —see Horst Albert Glaser, for example— the study serves as a reference text in evolutionary literary and critical studies in relation to the Anglophone literary tradition of the 20th century. It is an exceptionally well-informed study that fulfils what it promises by giving a heterogenous and multidisciplinary approach to the genre of science fiction.

Works Cited

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