

Editorial

Since the new millennium the genres of fantasy and science fiction film have dominated global box office figures. At the top lies *Avatar* (Cameron 2009), listed as the world's highest grossing film to date, and pertinent to this second issue of *Messengers from the Stars*, because, like the essays that follow, its multilayered narrative is effectively rooted in the past and retold through the future. If, as a number of scholars (Smith 2005: 69-70; Napier 2005: xi) suggest, world events of the millennium, notably 9/11 and the ensuing wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, have influenced the fortunes of these genres, so too has digital technology in the way that it has enabled increasingly credible futuristic and fantastic worlds. It is within this technologically-enhanced and fantasy-driven landscape of the new Millennium that the 2017 issue of *Messengers from the Stars: On Science Fiction and Fantasy* is located. Assembling diverse manifestations of fantasy and science fiction in the form of literature, ancient myths, television and film, this collection of essays variously addresses how we remember, reconstruct, perceive and theorise narratives that are now revitalised visually and/or narratively by technology. The essays engage with the futuristic retelling of ancient myths, the precursors to current technology-driven cinematic special-effects spectacle, shifts in established film theory, explained through recent computer-generated imagery, and the artificial intelligence encountered in recent science fiction narratives. The first of these, written by Gabriela Steinke, focuses on ancient myths compiled in *The Mabinogion*, a collection which constitutes eleven stories retrieved from medieval Welsh manuscripts. Steinke explores what happens to these myths in their futuristic retelling and recasting to future settings, and examines how present day concerns are articulated in this transposition.

Moving from mythological stories to cinematic display, Noel Brown's essay appraises the role of the film producer and special effects pioneer Ray Harryhausen in the development of the 'kidult' film. After explaining the meaning of the term 'kidult', and through analysis of Harryhausen's fantasy films, Brown argues that their intended 'kidult' audiences, together with dynamic action-adventure narratives and their propensity for spectacle, essentially rendered them the forerunners of the contemporary Hollywood fantasy blockbuster.

In this vein, Robert Geal goes on to explore how one might theorise recent science fiction films through the twin lenses of psychoanalysis and cognitivism. He considers *Godzilla* (2014) and *Terminator Genisys* (2015) to address the ongoing conflict between psychoanalytical and cognitivist approaches to film, these being generally considered

incommensurate. Geal argues that analysis of these films can demonstrate contiguity between the two apparently opposing paradigms, because they exploit similar dramatic pleasures that their respective proponents conventionally consider irreconcilable. For Geal, science fiction provides a particularly fertile ground for elucidating how both paradigms can co-exist and might operate.

The theme of cognitivism is examined somewhat differently in the final essay by Teresa Botelho who explores the depiction of the intelligent android in various forms through notions of consciousness and personhood. Botelho's article reflects on how such works express the hopes and anxieties associated with artificial intelligence by focusing on a range of literary, televisual and filmic texts including *He, She and It* (Piercy 1991), *Battlestar Galactica* (2004-9 Moore), and *Ex_Machina* (Garland 2015). She debates how these various texts project android identity from alternative perspectives, each expressing different claims about android agency, autonomy and the desire for similarity to humans.

These essays are followed with an interview by Ana Rita Martins and Igor Furão in conversation with award-winning science fiction author, Ken Macleod. We learn that Macleod did not set out as a writer, but as a scientist, and subsequently, became a computer programmer before becoming a full time author in 1997. The interview therefore inevitably begins with discussion about the impact of Macleod's scientific background on his science fiction writing. Macleod describes how, in fact, his childhood fascination with science fiction was an important factor in directing him towards science, and then led him to write short science fiction stories before working on a number of novels. As well as revealing Macleod's thoughts on the role that science fiction has in social criticism, the interview maps out his other significant influences, these including religion and the part that Scotland played in shaping the themes and motifs that he approaches in his writing.

The issue concludes with creative work by artist Miguel Santos entitled *Concerning the Pilgrimage of Brother Ianuarius*, a comic strip format piece that operates on a number of aesthetics and symbolic levels. Primarily, the work exhibits a mainly muted pastel palette except for the use of vibrant red, which is used to signify horror and bloodshed. The narrative features a monk as well as a number of grotesque eyeless monsters - attention to their many-toothed open mouths suggests that these vaguely humanoid creatures are cannibalistic, and render them, appropriately, akin to the 'Pale Man' of Guillermo del Toro's 2006 fantasy film, *Pan's Labyrinth* (the character itself being an intertextual reference to Goya's *Saturn Devouring his Son* [1819-1823]). In defending himself against one of these toothed monsters, the monk injures his hand on its teeth, which then seems to transform him too into one of its

hideous progeny, thereby, similar to the critical essays presented here, suggesting a process of cycle and transition.

With this concluding artwork, we invite you to enjoy the diverse critical and visual manifestations of fantasy and science fiction,

Frances Pheasant-Kelly