

of that utterly tiresome distinction that Margaret Atwood tried to introduce around the time of the publication of *Oryx and Crake* between “speculative fiction” (hers) and “science fiction” (not hers). But the default hierarchy remains in place elsewhere.

Oddly enough, there is hardly any discussion of the aesthetics of form and genre in a collection mainly focused on the novel, and most essays take up the thematics of science-in-society in fiction rather instrumentally. I think this is why Kim Stanley Robinson’s *SCIENCE IN THE CAPITAL* trilogy (2004-2007) features fairly regularly in the collection. It is fine if treated thematically, because the series wears its fieldwork into science research funding in Washington on its sleeve, but no one seems to notice that Robinson consistently distends and breaks open the aesthetic *form* of the novel in even his most “realistic” works. In fact, he has chosen increasingly to challenge the limits of the Realist novel. *The Ministry for the Future* (2020) might share our contemporary world and have “realistic” representations of intergovernmental agencies of science, but the book utterly explodes the traditional novel form for an overtly Bakhtinian array of registers, styles, and forms (the lecture, the transcript, the diary, the scientific report, etc.). And Robinson *has* to do that, because the traditional Realist novel does not have the scale in its characterological and domestic focus to address the climate crisis. These are familiar arguments to sf scholars. Sherryl Vint, in looking at works by Robinson or Nancy Kress or Paolo Bacigalupi, does an admirable job of quietly and politely dismantling the implicit divide that builds up in the collection very effectively, yet largely concurs with the presentist frame of the editors that the blurring of mainstream and sf literature has occurred only in the last 30 years. Victorianist or Modernist literary scholars and historians of science might well beg to differ.

There are some strong and informative essays here, nevertheless, including Carol Colatrella on novels depicting women in science through the lens of feminist science studies and a really useful essay by Uwe Schimank, “The Economization of Science,” that defines this as “the increasing importance of explicitly articulated economic considerations for financial costs and profits” (148). It is also helpful in general to witness the process of an attempt at canon formation for the “contemporary science novel” as you read through the collection. But to anyone interested in the embeddedness of science in society and cultural representations of science, the work undertaken in *Under the Literary Microscope* can only be a small portion of a much larger picture. The limits of the collection are announced from the title onwards, and it may be that the device really needed to explore this field is actually a macroscope.—Roger Luckhurst, Birkbeck College, University of London

**Wanna Be an Antiracist? Keep Science and Fiction Entangled.** Josie Gill. *Biofictions: Race, Genetics and the Contemporary Novel*. Bloomsbury, 2020. x+270 pp. \$115 hc, \$39.95 pbk.

Spending two weeks and 2500 miles of summer 2021 on the Great American College Road Trip™, I was struck that every institution I visited

with my high-school senior advertised itself as “interdisciplinary.” The term’s apparent meaning, of course, varied considerably. Most of our predominately undergraduate tour guides offered vague testimony to valuing classes outside one’s major; a few recognized that one discipline might helpfully supplement or critique another. None, however, ventured into the daring realms explored by Josie Gill’s tightly organized and consistently insightful *Biofictions*. Here, the often illusory nature of disciplinary boundaries themselves come under direct assault.

For Gill, unlike many critics of “literature and science,” the issue is not how stories reflect or contort facts. The question is not representation. Nor is the focus on how science “explains” stories. There is no attempt to turn literary criticism into a science in and of itself, whether via big data or distant reading. Instead of utilizing a Venn diagram, Gill is interested in the fundamental illegibility of separate “science” and “fiction” categories. Rather than place terms such as “genetics” and “literature” (or “the humanities,” or “the arts,” or “the liberal arts”) in binary opposition, she recognizes that each field and the forms of knowledge it fosters can only be deeply understood through others, as *constituted by* others. And this is not just a matter for abstract debate: Gill suggests that this realization is crucial for defeating the largest structures of contemporary racism.

In her opening words, Gill tells us that “This book is about the role of the conjured up, the imaginary and the fictional in the formation of racial ideas in contemporary genetic science. It contends that, contrary to the common assumption ... that the concrete findings of science are the opposite of the imaginary, fiction is integral to contemporary scientific conceptions of race” (4). The subjects she foregrounds are always already enmeshed; she is interested in the “complex entanglement of scientific and fictive forms,” “the imbrication of the factual and the fictional” (5). By rejecting approaches that elevate science as a purportedly neutral and unbiased judge of racial identity and ancestry, Gill shows that genetics and cultural visions of race—especially those embedded in literature—are inseparable forces.

Gill is well aware of the provocation here. The priests of personalized medicine and big tech who often fund the new science labs on campus rarely welcome implications that their studies might be vulnerable to narrative reversals, that the aging humanities buildings swiftly acknowledged by tour guides (perhaps alongside a tepid affirmation of technical writing skills) might offer more than distant commentary on the real action. Yet what Gill’s book demonstrates is how profoundly the very *self*-understanding of the sciences depends on narrative, metaphor, and mythology; most pointedly, she shows how the forces of systemic racism rely on repressing genetic science’s imbrication with fiction. Drawing on such thinkers as Jenny Reardon and Susan Merrill Squier, Gill concludes her introductory manifesto with this succinct mission statement: “to look to contemporary fiction as a source of knowledge, rather than simply understanding, of how race is formed and functions across scientific cultures” (30).

Marked by its literary signposts, *Biofictions* ranges from Alex Haley to Kazuo Ishiguro and from Zadie Smith to Colson Whitehead, culminating in the juxtaposition of Octavia Butler and Salman Rushdie. In the book's five chapters, Gill excels at uncovering tensions between form and content, as in her incisive demonstration that, "while Haley attempted to undermine the (pseudo) scientific anthropological and historical discourses that he recognized as problematic in their representation of Africa and Africans, this was embedded, in *Roots*, within a narrative which reproduced, without irony, the traditional modes of narration to be found in those texts" (47). While looking backward across half a century, Gill stays grounded in our moment of alternative facts, noting that while Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* (2005) was written well before the presidential runs of Barack Obama and Donald Trump, it already exposed how "in the context of post-racialism, race is always already present" (63). One of her most appreciable strengths is a constant awareness of comedy's many valences, as when she observes that in *White Teeth* (2000), "Far from trivializing racism through the novel's comic form, Smith uses that form to demonstrate the pitfalls of removing race from science" (92). In *Apex Hides the Hurt* (2006), "Whitehead comically shows how the language and imagery of multiculturalism come to be used for corporate ends" (108). And through her unique final pairing of Butler and Rushdie, Gill convinced me all the more deeply that "racism has biological effects which in turn create racial disparities in health; rather than biologizing social definitions of race, race is revealed as a social construct with biological consequences" (122).

Admittedly, I came to Gill's argument having recently wrestled with Ibram X. Kendi's work on antiracism, so I was well-prepared for her emphasis on how beliefs can rationalize already existing racist practices, rather than necessarily serving as preexisting foundations. Echoing Kendi while also quoting postcolonial theorist Bill Ashcroft, Gill notes how eighteenth-century tensions "contributed to an emerging science of race which was 'inextricable from the need of colonialist powers to establish dominance over subject peoples and hence *justify* the imperial enterprise'" (6; emphasis added). While most of Gill's book concerns itself with recent decades, this order of operations proves persistent. She doggedly peels back the irony by which efforts in the 1970s to show the political nature and social construction of scientific ideas led to a "movement away from anti-racism and towards a fight against the concept of race itself," meaning that "with the erasure of race, the possibility of racism could also be erased" (9). And by the turn of the twenty-first century, "it was the denial of the significance of racism at the heart of colourblind ideology that also, ironically, enabled the growth in research into the genetic basis of race at the same moment in time" (13-14). Indeed, this is a volume in which ironies abound.

I should warn fellow sf critics that they may occasionally wish for a broader concept of sf than the one at work here. Gill matter-of-factly notes of Ishiguro's novel, "nor can it be classified as science fiction" (61). Later, she somewhat laboriously observes, "Yet while [Butler's *Kindred*] is clearly not

science fiction in that, much like Ishiguro's approach to cloning in *Never Let Me Go*, there is no discussion of or interest in the scientific ideas which may have enabled Dana to travel through time, *Kindred* does, I want to suggest, bear the imprint of Butler's wider interest in bioscience, evident in her science fiction published both before and after *Kindred*" (128). More than a decade after John Rieder's "On Defining SF, or Not" (2010), it feels strange to hear that qualifying as sf requires explicit references to particular scientific theories or enabling technologies. Nonetheless, *Biofictions* makes an overwhelming case that the science of genetics and its ongoing conceptualization of race have been heavily shaped by fictional visions. Gill's book makes clear literature's inextricability from genetic biology's racial significance, and as a result, will likely strengthen its readers' antiracist resolve. That is an interdisciplinary vision that should be welcome on any campus tour.—**Everett Hammer, Western Illinois University**

**Butler in Three Acts.** Gregory J. Hampton and Kendra R. Parker, eds. *The Bloomsbury Handbook to Octavia E. Butler*. Bloomsbury Academic, 2020. 312 pp. \$175.00 hc, \$157.50 ebk.

It is difficult to deny Octavia E. Butler's immense influence on the genre of science fiction. From her earliest fiction, she changed the genre and the ways in which readers interpret their contemporary world. In their introduction, editors Gregory J. Hampton and Kendra R. Parker acknowledge this impact and encourage those interested in Butler to push boundaries (as Butler often did) and to see how her fiction extends out past traditional literary scholarship. What makes this collection unique is best iterated by contributor Kitty Dunkley, who poignantly concludes her piece with the observation that after nearly twenty years, "Only now might we discover that, perhaps, we are finally ready for Octavia E. Butler" (114). Both as a writer and as a friend, Butler was someone to cherish, as evident in Sandra Y. Govan's Foreword, a curious mix of personal and professional tales that allows the reader a more intimate view of Butler. Since Hampton and Parker divide their collection into three parts as a homage to Butler's XENOGENESIS trilogy (1987-1989), this review considers the essays in their assigned location, as acts of scholarship.

In chapter one of the first section, "Dawn," Steven Barnes discusses Butler's reliance on "biological research" (11) to recognize human beings as an inherently hierarchical society for whom difference results in a false sense of superiority both for individuals and for the species as a whole. Continuing the theme of the hierarchal nature of humankind, Heather Thaxter utilizes Butler's PATTERNIST series (1976-1984) to lead readers through an intriguing look at Butler's obsession with telepathy and immortality. In chapter three, Sami Schalk uses Butler's story "The Evening and the Morning and the Night" (1987) to urge black disability studies to adopt an "expansive crip theoretical understanding of disability and ability as a system of privilege and oppression" (49), and to take account of other marginalized groups as well. Joe Heidenescher's chapter four considers consent and free will in "Bloodchild" (1984) and "Amnesty" (2003) through a Marxist lens.