University of Alberta

The Steampunk Aesthetic: Technofantasies in a Neo-Victorian Retrofuture

by

Mike Dieter Perschon

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Comparative Literature

Fall 2012
Edmonton, Alberta

Dedicated to Jenica, Gunnar, and Dacy

Abstract

Despite its growing popularity in books, film, games, fashion, and décor, a suitable definition for steampunk remains elusive. Debates in online forums seek to arrive at a cogent definition, ranging from narrowly restricting and exclusionary definitions, to uselessly inclusive *in*definitions. The difficulty in defining steampunk stems from the evolution of the term as a literary sub-genre of science fiction (SF) to a sub-culture of Goth fashion, Do-It-Yourself (DIY) arts and crafts movements, and more recently, as ideological counter-culture. Accordingly, defining steampunk unilaterally is challenged by what aspect of steampunk culture is being defined.

Even the seminal steampunk texts of K.W. Jeter, Tim Powers, and James Blaylock lack strong affinities. In his review of Tachyon's *Steampunk* anthology, Rob Latham observes a "wide range of tonal and ideological possibilities" in the book's twelve short stories and novellas originally published between 1985 and 2007 (347). Steampunk works share a fantastic aesthetic that separates steampunk from neo-Victorian writing or just alternate history. Instead of viewing steampunk as a genre, steampunk might be considered an expression of features, which when combined, constitute a *style* or aesthetic surface. An understanding of steampunk as an aesthetic permits the requisite flexibility to discuss its diverse expressions.

Employing an evidence-based, exploratory approach, this study identifies three components of the steampunk aesthetic: neo-Victorianism, technofantasy, and retrofuturism. Unlike attempts to list ostensibly common themes or archetypes of steampunk, or simply catalogue recurring motifs or settings, this study will argue that these three components are found in the majority of steampunk works. For the purposes of concision, this study restricts the exploration to literary works, demonstrating how the components of neo-victorianism, technofantasy and retrofuturism are best suited for defining steampunk, inclusively accommodating a variety of steampunk narratives while exclusively drawing boundaries to avoid rendering the term meaningless.

Acknowledgements

My thanks to the following:

Dr. Irene Sywenky, for supporting the topic, the ideas, and me

My committee: Dr. Jonathan Hart, Dr. Peter Sinnema, Dr. Massimo Verdicchio, and Dr. Thomas Wharton

Dr. Jack Robinson, for thinking outside the conference box

The Bay Area steampunks, who were my first

Legion Fantastique, for the goggles that went on every trip

Lee Ann Faruga, for calling me a Canadian treasure

Liana K. and J.M. Frey, for challenging the ideas "live without a net"

Cory Gross and Krzysztof Janicz, for always making me think harder

Diana Vick and Alisa Green, for letting me share at *Steamcon* every year

Geomancer's Dungeon, for helping me steampunk Tolkien

Chris Garcia, for publishing the seeds of this project

Tofa Borregard, for giving me a proper introduction to the steampunk scene

Gail Carriger, for discernment on whose opinions matter

Kevin Steil, for friendship beyond the fandom

Sarah Shewchuk, for being a true colleague

Mom and Dad, for the love, prayers, and encouragement

Dan and Luella, for flying me south for research trips

Gunnar and Dacy, for waiting patiently until I finished

and Jenica, for helping me go the distance

Table of Contents

Contents

Introduction: The Goggled Gaze of Steampunk

Imagine Jules Verne as an inventor instead of an author. Imagine Captain Nemo's *Nautilus,* a submarine capable of speeds rivaling modern Seawolf class attack submarines, as a reality. Imagine Frank Reade as historical figure instead of fictional persona; imagine his steam-powered robots as a fact of the American frontier. Envision a world where the speculative dreams of Victorian and Edwardian writers like Edgar Allan Poe, H.G. Wells, and Edgar Rice Burroughs were realities instead of fantasies, and you begin to see the world through steampunk lenses.

When K.W. Jeter inadvertently coined the term "steampunk" in a letter to *Locus* magazine in 1987, he was ironically classifying the neo-Victorian stories he and fellow Californians James Blaylock and Tim Powers were writing. Despite such flippant beginnings, the term has demonstrated remarkable resilience, becoming *the* signifier for nearly every neo-Victorian work of speculative fiction since Jeter's own *Infernal Devices* (1987). It has been used to retroactively subsume pre-Jeter scientific romances such as Michael Moorcock's *Nomad of the Time Streams* (1971-1981), the '60s television series *Wild, Wild West* (1965-1969), and alternate histories such as Keith Roberts' *Pavane* (1966). Even the writings of H.G. Wells, Jules Verne, and their futurist contemporaries have been labeled steampunk. Online debates continue raging, seeking to define steampunk, with answers ranging from narrowly restricting and exclusionary definitions, to uselessly inclusive *in*definitions. Steampunk's growing popularity in books, film,

games, fashion, and décor, has only exacerbated the problem, as the term has evolved from a literary sub-genre of Science Fiction (SF) to a sub-culture of Goth fashion, Do-It-Yourself (DIY) arts, crafts, and maker movements, and more recently, as counter-culture.

The following study is an attempt to address the breadth of current steampunk expression while engaging in an exploratory inquiry to the question, "What is steampunk?" It seeks to answer this question with a more satisfactory and useful response than "Victorian science fiction," "yesterday's tomorrow today," or some other equally vague or limited definition. This project goes beyond the prescriptive definitions of SF scholarship, which have largely defined steampunk based on a limited set of evidence, most often the single text of William Gibson and Bruce Sterling's *Difference Engine*. While the study focuses primarily on literature, the approach to understanding steampunk is a descriptive one, describing a surface "aesthetic" for steampunk. Accordingly, I augment this literary exploration with the Steam Wars series of images, which apply the steampunk aesthetic to the immensely popular and therefore highly recognizable characters and technology of George Lucas's *Star Wars* series. While my conclusions about the steampunk aesthetic are the product of reading over sixty steampunk novels and short stories, I focus on particular texts in each section, providing further examples for readers to explore each feature of the steampunk aesthetic further, beyond this study. Again, this is necessary since so much of steampunk academia has focused on the subculture, the art, or a very limited set

of texts. Much academic writing on steampunk currently relies on outdated definitions, such as the *Encyclopedia of Fantasy*'s (*EF*)[1], Steffen Hantke's seminal 1999 article on steampunk, or subjective definitions from within the steampunk community, based largely on what steampunk fans desire steampunk to be, not necessarily critical reasoning.

Since no history of steampunk has been published in academia, I begin the study with a synopsis of steampunk's antecedents, its genesis, and subsequent growth. Unlike a number of scholars, I suggest that steampunk's direct inspiration was far more cinematic than literary, a likely reaction to the many film adaptations, pastiches, and knockoffs of the Scientific Romances of Jules Verne and H.G. Wells. While Verne, Wells, and a host of other Victorian and Edwardian writers have influenced steampunk fiction, cinematic elements from films such as Disney's *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea* (1954) and George Pal's *Time Machine* (1960) are ostensibly a more immediate influence on the seminal steampunk writers of the 1970s and 1980s.

In Chapter Two, I identify some of the previous problems of definition, address prescriptive definitions of steampunk which are no longer indicative of post-2000 expressions, and then show the added difficulty of drawing narrow boundaries for steampunk given its roots in the slippery genre of SF. This is further complicated by how steampunk, while dressed in the trappings of Victorian SF, often employs fantasy elements that render it a slipstream aesthetic,

[1] It should be noted that John Clute, editor of the *EF*, informed me on June 11, 2012 via Twitter that the article for steampunk in the forthcoming revised edition of the *EF* "awaits revision."

drawing from a variety of sources. It would be best to understand steampunk as using elements from all manifestations of speculative literature: SF, fantasy, and horror. It is most decidedly not Victorian SF, as many steampunk adherents claim, most likely out of a desire for a simple definition rather than any critical rigour. Steampunk is a postmodern, postcolonial phenomenon. Victorian SF is a modern, Colonial one. The aesthetic of steampunk gazes backward, looking at a fanastic past that never was. Defining steampunk is also complicated by the appropriation of the term by people wanting to make more of the –punk suffix than was ever intended. They conflate steampunk with radical political positions, such as anarchy, and have attempted to define "real steampunk" with these radical ideologies in mind.

Eschewing these approaches, I suggest that steampunk, as a postmodern phenomena, is a type of parody. Steampunk does not seek to reconstruct the past in literature, art, or fashion, but rather constructs something new by choosing elements from the Victorian and Edwardian past to create a style which evokes those periods. For purposes of concision, I identify this borrowing from Victorian, Edwardian speculative literature as *bricolage*. While that term has been used to denote serious work, I have appropriated the term to signify steampunk that lacks self-reflexivity about the ramifications of combining the disparate elements from a period of colonialism, ethnocentrism, and patriarchy. I distinguish *bricolage* from *detournement*. In this study, *detournement* will be understood as the highly

self-reflexive combination of these disparate elements in *bricolage*, which then seeks to invert the original meaning of those elements.

Instead of defining it as a genre, as earlier steampunk definitions have, I suggest considering steampunk as an expression of combined components which constitute the steampunk aesthetic. Throughout this study I use the term *aesthetic* to denote the surface style of steampunk, in agreement with Christine Ferguson's assertion that this is "perhaps the only definitive trait shared by most steampunks" (67). I am not using aesthetic in a philosophical sense, but as a design sensibility or "visual interface between retro-Victorian style and contemporary technology" (67). Understanding steampunk as an aesthetic permits the requisite flexibility to discuss its diverse expressions. Employing an evidence-based approach to the study of steampunk, I have identified three components found in almost all the sixty-plus steampunk novels I have read: neo-victorianism, retrofuturism, and technofantasy. These three components are best suited to describing what steampunk is, inclusively accommodating a variety of steampunk expressions while exclusively drawing boundaries to avoid rendering the term meaningless.

Imagine a pair of brass aviator's goggles, with intricate filigree and extra lenses on levers which can slide over other lenses to adjust one's view. These are the goggles of steampunk, nearly ubiquitous in the subculture, which one can find for sale at every steampunk convention: as prominent steampunk maker Thomas Willeford says of them in *Steampunk: Gear, Gadgets, and Gizmos, A Maker's Guide to Creating Modern Artifacts*, "Whether you are a dashing airship pirate (or

"privateer" if you prefer to feign an air of legitimacy), skywayman (not to be confused with the more mundane 'highwayman'), or simply the maddest of scientists, nothing screams STEAMPUNK! quite as loudly as a good pair of genuine brass goggles" (27). While there are detractors of Willeford's view, goggles are arguably the most common motif of steampunk fashion, and as such share affinities with cyberpunk's mirrorshades insofar as they are both *movement totems*, to borrow Bruce Sterling's term (ix**)**. But whereas cyberpunk's mirrorshades *hid* the eyes of the "crazed and possibly dangerous" sun-staring visionaries of cyberpunk, steampunk goggles imply a different way of *seeing* and *revealing*. Imagine three extra lens attachments to place over top of their standard smoked lenses. Now imagine that each of those lenses, once slid into place, will change the way you see things through the goggles. If we slide the first lens into place, you will note some subtle differences about my attire: my tie has been replaced by a cravat, my sweater vest by a waistcoat, and my wristwatch has transformed into an ornate pocket watch. This lens is the first feature of the steampunk aesthetic: neo-Victorianism.

The neo-Victorian lens reveals that Steampunk does not imitate, but rather *evokes* the nineteenth-century as resonant, not accurate, mimesis. In every alternate or secondary world, by fashion, architecture, or culture, steampunk's narrative *mise-en-scène* is reminiscent of the Victorian *era*, in the broadest sense of the terms. Steampunk utilizes a look and feel *evocative* of the period between 1800 and 1914, unencumbered by a need for rigorous historical accuracy. From

the very first steampunk works to recent ones, the steampunk aesthetic demonstrates an elasticity concerning temporal boundaries. Steampunk is set in the late Regency era, the Victorian era proper, and the Edwardian era. It is set in the future of those eras, and of our own contemporary one. In addition to temporal limitations, steampunk challenges geographic ones as well. While London is considered the quintessential steampunk locale, it is not always to the London of history, but the fantastic London of an alternate world, as in Philip Pullman's *Golden Compass* (1995), with anbaric lights, compass-like alethiometers for divination, and animal-shaped daemons all causing the reader to mutter, "I don't think we're in Cambridge anymore Toto." This is not the London of history, but rather, "London that Americans think about when they read fantasy, and not the actual London" (Kelleghan 16). This focus on London should not mislead us: steampunk left London as early as Richard A. Lupoff's *Into the Aether* (1974), and has since traveled across the globe. A sampling includes the United States in two of the stories in Paul Di Filippo's *The Steampunk Trilogy* (1995), as well as Cherie Priest's *Boneshaker* (2009); Europe in Scott Westerfeld's *Leviathan* (2009); Mexico in Al Ewing's *El Sombra* (2007); Canada in Lisa Smedman's *The Apparition Trail* (2007); Japan in Joe Lansdale's *Zeppelins West* (2001) and Michael Moorcock's *The Warlord of the Air*; and the skies above India, Australia, and Antarctica in Kenneth Oppel's *Airborn* (2004) and *Skybreaker* (2005). Beyond spaces in alternate versions of earth, steampunk settings increasingly include fully secondary worlds, such as Chris Wooding's *Retribution Falls* (2010)

or Ekaterina Sedia's *The Alchemy of Stone* (2008). Clearly steampunk is no longer confined to Britain, or even Ruled Britannia. How can it be, when the London of Philip Reeve's *Mortal Engines* (2001), is a seven-tiered, two-thousand-foot-high city on massive caterpillar tracks, roaming a post-apocalyptic earth?

This brings us to the second lens. Before you look through the lens that permits a mobile-city-eating-London, focus your attention on my hand. You can't see what I'm holding, because the first lens won't permit you: neo-Victorian lenses can't see iPhones, since the technology is too advanced for the lenses to translate. Slide that next lens in and suddenly you're seeing an object resembling a Star Trek tricorder seemingly crafted by Nikola Tesla and Charles Babbage. You are looking through the second lens of the steampunk aesthetic: technofantasy.

Unlike the inscrutable hard drive of an iPod, you can see wires and coils, cogs and gears exposing this device's inner workings. However, as we will see in chapter four, this is only exposure, not explanation: the brass punch cards of steampunk analytic engines are merely an aesthetic revelation, not a technological justification. Most steampunk gadgets and vehicles require some form of magical impulsion or cohesion to be rendered plausible. This merging of magic and technology not only permits the designs of DaVinci to be constructed, but to work; it permits safe airship travel at impossible speeds, using theoretical fuel sources such as aether or phlogiston; it permits self-actualized clockwork automatons in a world where positronic explanations are unthinkable.

While aether and phlogiston are windows into the history of science, steampunk's use of these elements varies in adherence to their respective historical theories. Historically, the work of alchemy led to chemical discoveries that were considered as fantastic as the miraculous aether often employed as fictional fuel in steampunk. This progression is likely why alchemy is steampunk's preferred magical system, since steampunk fans seem remiss to admit steampunk's connection to fantasy. Alchemy shares the *appearance* of modern scientific method, appearing less frivolous than high fantasy's inherently ambient magic.

Beyond alchemy, pure magic rears its head in steampunk as well: the scholarly "thaumaturgy" of China Miéville's *Perdido Street Station* (2000); the clockwork theurgy Hethor Jacques taps into in Jay Lake's *Mainspring* (2007), so by aligning himself to the wheels behind the worlds, he can perform miracles, transforming the frozen wasteland of the Antarctic into a blooming New England Spring; Steampunk automatons are rendered as kabbalistic golems in Ted Chiang's "Seventy-Two Letters" (2000) and Jay Lake's "The God-Clown is Near" (2007). Stephen Hunt's *Court of the Air* (2007) contains *mechomancers*, *fey-folk*, and *world-singing sorcery.* This is more than just Clarke's third law that "any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic." This is an often blatant use of fantasy magic masquerading as technology.

In short, the technofantasy lens allows you to see technology dependent on the abandonment of real-world physics. Technofantasy permits real world

elements like steam to produce nuclear energy output, as in Katsuhiro Otomo's anime *Steamboy* (2004). It is the Wardrobe to Narnia, dressed up like Bill Ferrari's Time Machine or Harper Goff's *Nautilus*. It looks like science, but works like magic.

So now you're seeing through a lens that evokes the past, and a lens that imagines impossible technology in that past. The third and final lens effectively combines these elements, but is more subtle than it appears. Shift the third lens into place. You'll see my outward appearance hasn't changed. The steampunk iPod still belches steam (or aether). If I was a woman or a person-of-colour, there might be a more noticeable change at this point, but since I'm a white male, there's little change on the surface. That's the retrofuturist lens you're using now, and we will direct our gaze there with rigorous scrutiny in the fifth and final chapter.

Steampunk retrofuturism is usually conflated with images of antiquated technology, of dirigibles and ornithopters, or steampunk maker Datamancer's brass-worked keyboards. Discussions concerning retrofuturism at conventions and online forums usually focus on technology. Yet steampunk retrofuturism is arguably more than just how the past imagined the future. Rather, it is the way *the present* imagines the past seeing the future. After all, it's rare the steampunk aesthetic accurately conveys the aspirations of the nineteenth-century. Steampunk technology's blend of past and future often ignores the ambitions of late Victorian progressives, less concerned with sky dreadnoughts and phlogiston powered

rayguns than with medical advancements and human rights. The nearly myopic focus of steampunk towards technology often misses the opportunity to investigate social possibilities, not just technological ones. If the Industrial Era proved anything, it was that massive technological change results in massive social change.

Thankfully, steampunk retrofuturism can be about more than technofantastic anachronisms, automatons, and airships. Even frivolous steampunk fiction engages in unintentional social retrofuturism when characters view the nineteenth-century from a twenty-first century perspective. SF scholar Rob Latham has identified *nostalgia* and *regret* as "typical retrofuturist emotions" (341). These terms provide a polemic for understanding retrofuturism's range of commentary on the past. As will be explored in Chapter Three, Latham's *nostalgia* and *regret* help differentiate between what Svetlana Boym calls the *nostos* and *algoi* of nostalgia: the "return home" and the "longing" (xv-xvi). When the impulse of steampunk retrofuturism is only *nostalgia/nostos*, it produces conservative expressions of steampunk where Colonial perspectives are revived, and potentially preserved. Steampunk becomes a romantic desire for a reality without the complexity of globalization. If, however, the impulse of steampunk retrofuturism is *regret/algoi*, there is an opportunity to rewrite the past, not in the naïve hope it can be changed, but rather that retrofuturist speculations can affect the present and future.

Recently, along with steampunk writer Cherie Priest and pop-culture scholar Jess Nevins, I have begun using the idea of a spectrum for talking about steampunk. The spectrum answers the question, "how steampunk is it?" not "is it steampunk or not?" If you look at the side of those goggles, you'll see a little dial attached to each lens' control – that's to govern intensity. With those dials, we can intensify each feature's presence in our goggle-gaze: if we turn down the technofantasy, turn up the retrofuturism, and crank the neo-Victorian, we will seeing the world of Cherie Priest's *Dreadnought* (2010), where the Civil War drags on in 1880. *Dreadnought* follows the adventures of Mercy Lynch, a nurse traveling cross-country on a monstrous steam engine to see her dying father one last time. It's a steampunk *Planes, Trains, and Automobiles* with zombies, Texas rangers, and a helluva heroine. Turn the technofantasy *up* all the way to eleven, play down the retrofuturism, leave the neo-Victorian, and you're looking at the world of S.M. Peters' *Whitechapel Gods* (2008), where a huge containment wall around the Whitechapel district has created a steampunk Inferno, complete with dark deities.

Steampunk seems a diverse sub-genre of SF, but is better understood as an aesthetic that has been applied to many genres, sub-genres, and hybrid-genres. Allegra Hawksmoor, editor of *Steampunk Magazine*, once lamented the possibility that steampunk is an empty aesthetic. When the aesthetic of steampunk is viewed as a lens, the possibility of emptiness is not a bad thing. A lens must be empty in order to be seen through; we need clear sightlines to fix our aesthetic

attention. The gaze is political in Moorcock, and whimsical in Blaylock. The definition of steampunk will remain contestable insofar as the focus is on content rather than style. However, if we see steampunk as an aesthetic gaze, then we retain the choice to turn that gaze upon political position, cosplay carnivale, or nostalgic narratives, naïve or nihilistic: these are not steampunk per se, but rather what become steampunked when the aesthetic gaze combining technofantasy and neo-Victorian retrofuturism is applied.

So slide the lenses in place, and adjust your dials. It's time to fly.

Chapter One: A History of Steampunk Literature

The coining of the term Steampunk in April of 1987 was the result of K.W. Jeter's tongue-in-cheek response to the question of categorizing the "gonzo" Victorian fantasies he, Tim Powers, and James Blaylock were writing:

> Personally, I think Victorian fantasies are going to be the next big thing, as long as we can come up with a fitting collective term for Powers, Blaylock and myself. Something based on the appropriate technology of that era; like "steampunks," perhaps. (qtd. in Prucher 221)

The coinage clearly played on the popularity of cyberpunk, and according to Jeter himself, was never intended as a serious signifier. In his address at the Steamcon Airship Awards Banquet, Jeter stated that he never imagined the term would grow to encompass the various artistic expressions represented by the current steampunk scene (2011). One might say he never intended it to become the "fitting collective term" it has become.

But the creation of a signifier indicates the existence of expressions requiring classification. By the time Jeter was inadvertently labeling not only his own Victorian fantasies, but as would come to pass, *all* Victorian fantasies, there were numerous examples to apply the term to. At the very least, a conservative estimation places steampunk's genesis with the first of James Blaylock's Langdon St. Ives short stories, "The Ape Box Affair," in 1978. Others posit an earlier beginning: Polish comic book writer Krzysztof Janicz, webmaster of *Retrostacja*, begins his steampunk chronology with Keith Laumer's alternate history novel

Worlds of the Imperium (1962). In a list of steampunk works "written before a word existed to describe them," the *Encyclopedia of Fantasy*'s earliest inclusion is Joceyln Brook's *The Crisis in Bulgaria, or Ibsen to the Rescue!* (1956) (895). At the 2009 Eaton Science Fiction conference, SF author Greg Bear offhandedly suggested Harper Goff's design of *The Nautilus* in Disney's *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea* (1954) as the birth of steampunk.

Kelly Link and Gavin J. Grant address the indeterminacy of steampunk's beginnings: "Depending on whom you believe, steampunk has been exploding into the world for the last hundred years (thank you, Monsieur Jules Verne) or maybe the last twenty-five (when the term was first used by K.W. Jeter in a letter to *Locus* magazine)" (vii). Whatever fuzzy boundaries one constructs for the origins of steampunk, a rising number of narratives written in homage, parody, or pastiche of Victorian and Edwardian scientific romances emerged in the 1970s, preceding Jeter's coinage of steampunk. Many steampunk aficionados agree with Nick Gevers' contention that British writer Michael Moorcock "pioneered the steampunk form with two major trilogies in the Seventies: *The Dancers at the End of Time* and *A Nomad of the Time Streams*" (9). [2] Other early British contributions include Brian Aldiss's *Frankenstein Unbound* (1973) and Christopher Priest's *The Space Machine* (1976). Steampunk got its start in France with Jacques Tardi's *Les Aventures Extraordinaires d'Adele Blanc-Sec* (1976),

[2] These two trilogies encompass the following individual titles: *An Alien Heat* (1971), The Hollow Lands (1974), and *The End Of All Songs* (1976), are collected as *The Dancers at the End of Time* (2000). *Warlord of the Air* (1971) *The Land Leviathan* (1974) and *The Steel Tsar* (1981) are

and in the United States with James Blaylock's "The Ape-Box Affair" (1978)[3] and K.W. Jeter's *Morlock Night*, which the *EF* posits as the "first genuine steampunk tale" (895). It seems counterproductive to seek a period earlier than the 1970s for the beginning of steampunk, since this open-ended retrospeculation has led to debates on whether Jules Verne and H.G. Wells should be considered steampunk writers. Nevertheless, pre-1970s fantastic fictions set in the Victorian era were obvious inspirations for the development of steampunk.

Antecedents and Inspirations

Steampunk's distant antecedents and inspiration undeniably lie in the fiction of the Victorian and Edwardian periods. Powers, Blaylock, and Jeter all admit to drawing from Henry Mayhew's *London Labour and the London Poor*; Blaylock articulated further particular inspirations from other Victorian writers:

> *Homunculus* was simply a variety of historical novel that I had written largely because I was crazy for *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* and because I had grown up reading Jules Verne and H.G. Wells, and my idea of science fiction had always had to do with backyard scientists and fabulous submarines and spacecraft that housed onboard greenhouses. (468)

---

collected as *The Nomad of the Time Streams* (1995). I reference the most recent omnibus editions of these works, released by White Wolf Inc.

[3] Like Moorcock's steampunk, Blaylock's early steampunk short stories and novellas have been collected into a single volume by Subterranean Press titled *The Adventures of Langdon St. Ives*.

While H.G. Wells and Jules Verne are often cited as the most likely nineteenth-century precursors to steampunk, they are only the two most conspicuous candidates. H.G. Wells's influence is widespread in steampunk, starting with Jeter's recursive-fantasy *Morlock Night* and Christopher Priest's *The Space Machine,* since both are ostensible sequels to Wells' *The Time Machine.*

Nick Gevers adds a number of Victorian and Edwardian authors to this growing list: Mary Shelley, Edgar Allan Poe, Jack London, M.P.Shiel, Arthur Machen, and the many penny dreadful and dime novels "that echoed these canonical works" (9). Steampunk draws inspiration from numerous nineteenth-century writers, and not all are the speculative antecedents represented by Verne and Wells. Gevers lists many authors from outside the speculative tradition whose work subtly informs the *mise-en- scène* and morality of steampunk:

> As a marriage of urban fantasy and the alternate-world tradition can arguably be traced back to the influence of Charles Dickens, whose vision of a labyrinthine, subaqueous London as moronic inferno underlies many later texts. Dickens's London, somewhat sanitized, also underlies the Babylon-on-the-Thames version of the great city created by authors like Robert Louis Stevenson, Arthur Conan Doyle, Bram Stoker and G.K. Chesterton in their fantasies—tales whose uneasy theodicy underpins much contemporary gaslight romance. The two categories, steampunk and gaslight romance, point to two ways of rendering closely linked original material. (Clute "Steampunk" 895)

A less popular and arguably contestable view was suggested by Jess Nevins in "The 19th-Century Roots of Steampunk," where he argued that steampunk's roots ultimately lay in the American Edisonades, stories about young American inventors traveling the "uncivilized parts of the American frontier or the world" in their fantastic machines:

> However, any history of the genre must go farther back than the 1960s. A proper history of steampunk must begin in the 19th century with dime novels, for it is there that steampunk's roots lie, and it is dime novels which the first generation of steampunk writers were reacting against. (3)

Mike Ashley echoes Nevins' position when he states that "it was the 'steam man' featured in the popular dime-novel adventures, starting with the *Steam Man of the Prairies* by Edward F. Ellis that brought the dawn of steampunk" (12). While I readily admit that the Edisonade's "lone inventor as a heroic protagonist," "variations of steam men and steam horses," and "a variety of electricity powered vehicles and weapons" have been commonly utilized in steampunk literature (Nevins "Roots" 3-5), like others, I am somewhat dubious that "modern steampunk writers are at all influenced by these long-out-of-print works, which used steam inventions as a way of visualizing Manifest Destiny through simplistic, optimistic 'cowboys-versus-indians' adventures" (Vandermeer ,"What is Steampunk?" 9). Only a handful of steampunk demonstrates the particular influence of the dime novels, such as Pynchon's *Against the Day*, Paul Guinan and Anina Bennett's *Boilerplate* (2009) and its sequel, *Frank Reade: Adventures*

in the Age of Invention (2012), and Joe Lansdale's short story "The Steam Man of the Prairie and the Dark Man Get Down: A Dime Novel" (1999). While Nevins' thesis is oft repeated at convention panels debating steampunk's antecedents, the proliferation of the idea arguably owes more to the presence of Nevins' essay in the Vandermeer's first steampunk anthology published in 2008 than any first-hand exposure to the Edisonades by most steampunk fans.

Further, while Nevins admittedly makes a strong argument for the Edisonade's influence on American science fiction, he undermines his own claim that "the first generation of steampunk writers were reacting against" American dime novels by openly admitting "few if any of the steampunk writers would have read the Edisonades" ("Roots" 8). Accordingly, the connection between the Edisonades and steampunk is tenuous, a connection better described as the link between steampunk and the pedigree of American science fiction.

What is far more common is what I, along with Howard Hendrix (and many others), have argued: that the novels of French writer Jules Verne have provided considerable steampunk inspiration ("Finding Nemo," "Verne among the Punks"). Verne's influence is felt more in the evocation of his *Voyages Fantastique* as corpus than as any specific work: "the memes and motifs of the Verne corpus are at least as essential to the development of both steampunk and the extraordinary voyage as anything originating in nineteenth or early twentieth century English or American sources" (Hendrix 1). Yet aside from Molly Brown's playful sequel to *De la Terre á la Lune*, "The Selene Gardening Society"

(2005), which imagines the members of the Boston Gun Club taking up gardening (having failed at melting the polar ice cap in *Sans dessus dessous*), steampunk relies less on direct references to Verne than it does on a general inspiration of the French author's approach to fantastic voyages.

While written texts cannot be ignored as steampunk's literary ancestors, the proliferation of cinematic adaptations of Victorian Scientific Romances following the success of Disney's *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea* in 1954 seems a more likely reason for steampunk's popularity. A nostalgic longing akin to the one Fredric Jameson speaks of regarding *Star Wars* is ostensibly in play for those whose Saturday matinee experience involved the twenty years between 1951 and 1971, when Verne films were released regularly (Taves 227), along with numerous adaptations of the works of H.G. Wells, Edgar Rice Burroughs, and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. In "A History of Misapplied Technology: The History and Development of the Steampunk Genre," Cory Gross charts the proliferation of these "Retro-Victorian Scientific Fantasies," noting how "Disneyland itself would be infused with Disney's nostalgia for the turn of the 20th century":

> . . . upon entering the park, the visitor must travel up a recreated Victorian American main street, or load on to one of the narrow-gauge steam trains. Perhaps, in addition to recognizing the capacity of Science Fiction to be serious entertainment, [Disney] also recognized that the Victorian Era was changing from the backwards past of our fathers to the gilded fairyland of our ancestors. (55-57)

In *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, Jameson calls these types of movies *nostalgia films*, and his description of them is strikingly similar to the way I envision steampunk's *evocation* of the nineteenth-century:

> . . . the nostalgia film was never a matter of some old-fashioned "representation" of historical content, but instead approached the "past" through stylistic connotation, conveying "pastness" by the glossy qualities of the image, and "1930s-ness" or "1950s-ness" by the attributes of fashion. (19)

Taking Greg Bear's suggestion concerning Disney's *Nautilus* seriously, it is likely that film adaptations of Verne's works had as significant an impact on steampunk as the original works they derive from. In "Hollywood's Jules Verne" from *The Jules Verne Encyclopedia*, Brian Taves argues that "Today, any Verne enthusiast's reading of the original works is bound to be intertwined with viewing the films. The Vernian "text" is no longer simply his novels, but the accumulation of impressions gained through many versions in the performing arts" (205). Richard Fleischer, director of the 1954 version of *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea* believed the Disney film to be the version of Verne's story "known today by most young people" (Frazier and Hathorne 39). Anecdotally, I find that most people who say they are a fan of Verne are referring to the film adapations, not the books. Taking this idea a step further, it seems likely that the seminal steampunk writers of the 1970s and 1980s were inspired as much by these cinematic

adaptations as they were by Verne's original texts. Taves chronicles the prolific period of Vernian cinema prior to the emergence of steampunk texts in the 1970s:

> For twenty years, from 1951-1971, an average of at least one new Verne film was released annually. The peak year was 1961, when four Hollywood Verne movies were released, as well as several imports, along with television broadcasts. (227)

Taves' study is limited solely to filmic adaptations of Verne's works, but the popularity of Verne adaptations gave rise to other celluloid period SF films, such as George Pal's version of Wells' *The Time Machine* (1960) and *First Men in the Moon* (1964), and Kevin O'Connor's Edgar Rice Burrough's adaptations: *The Land that Time Forgot* (1975), *At the Earth's Core* (1976), and *The People That Time Forgot* (1977). In addition to adaptation, many original films capitalizing on the popularity of the fantastic Victorian or Edwardian setting were made: *The Great Race* (1965), *Those Magnificent Men in their Flying Machines* (1965), *The Lost Continent* (1968), *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang* (1968), *Captain Nemo and the Underwater City* (1969), and *Warlords of Atlantis* (1978).

The impact of these films are often overlooked in brief histories of steampunk: Jeff and Ann Vandermeer leap from the "proto-steampunk" of the Victorian and Edwardian age to the 1970s and the emergence of "a true Godfather of modern steampunk," Michael Moorcock (2010: 9). Gevers likewise jumps from "the period literature that steampunk references" to Moorcock (9). Cory Gross is one of the few writers who have paid these cinematic Victorian

adventure films adequate attention in his article “A History of Misapplied Technology: A History and Development of the Steampunk Genre.”

Yet these films warrant attention in understanding the influences that shaped steampunk, especially when we take seriously Bear’s contention that steampunk starts with Harper Goff’s *Nautilus*, especially given the difference between the *Nautilus* designs in Verne and Disney. The design aesthetic informing the drastic differences between Verne’s *Nautilus* and Goff’s version were critically evaluated by James Maertens in an article contrasting the novel and the film version of *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea*:

> [Goff’s] decision to make a baroque *Nautilus* that looked like the Loch Ness monster was probably a wise choice from the standpoint of the film medium because it did produce a visually fascinating design that enhanced the sense of mystery and wonder surrounding the vessel. But it is *more interesting as an interpretation of the Victorian Age* than as a representation of Verne’s submarine design. The Victorian Age is mythologized as a period in which wealth and technical power were combined. *Acquisition, industry, and individualism all merge in the image of the high-speed machine appointed in velvet and brass*. Glimpsed only fleetingly at various points during the film, Goff’s *Nautilus* exteriors tantalize the eye of the viewer and give the same impression of elegant power as the rich interiors with their specimen cases, draperies, and polished brass instruments. This interior opulence is certainly not a

> departure from the comfortable submarine-yacht designed by Verne, but the *extension of the baroque to the exterior of the ship* and its machinery is. (Maertens 212-13, emphasis added)

Goff told Disney that he imagined Captain Nemo putting the cinematic *Nautilus* together "hastily and roughly" using the "only material available . . . the rough iron . . . salvaged from wrecks" (Frazier and Hathorne 35, 40). As such, the *Nautilus* design is a visual encapsulation of the steampunk aesthetic – the evocation of the past mediated by a backward gaze. In contrast to Goff's fantastic metal beast meant to signify the industrial style of a previous century, Verne's *Nautilus* is hydrodynamic, a plausibly utilitarian design. Goff's *Nautilus* evokes a sense of the past in a way a sleek, cigar-shaped cylinder could not have to 1954 audiences recently enamored by the advent of the real world namesake of Nemo's ship, the nuclear submarine *USS Nautilus*. Unlike the sleek design of the real-world *Nautilus*, the hull of Goff's design is rust-colored, further supporting his concept of the cinematic *Nautilus* being a hodge-podge slap-together of available, less-than-superior materials. To a 1954 audience, its shape was reminiscent of nineteenth-century ironclads, a mosaic of metal plates held together by thousands of rivets.

The influence of Goff's *Nautilus* is evidenced directly in three particular steampunk works: Thomas F. Monteleone's *The Secret Sea* (1979), Joe Lansdale's *Zeppelins West* (2001), Kevin J. Anderson's *Captain Nemo: The Fantastic Adventures of a Dark Genius* (2002), and Mark Mellon's *Napoleon*

Concerto (2009). In *The Secret Sea*, Monteleone describes the prow of the *Nautilus* as "a jagged sawtooth edge," and its conning tower as resembling "the head of a nasty sea-creature" (67). Likewise, in his parody of Nemo and the *Nautilus*, Lansdale describes a great dorsal fin like an enormous shark or prehistoric fish, with the "eyes of the fish" being "a great, tinted, double-bubbled water shield" (58). The cover illustration of the tale's "*Naughty Lass*" is an obvious homage to Goff. Mark Mellon, despite trying to achieve greater historical verisimilitude in his alternate history of Robert Fulton, whose real-world *Nautilus* was the world's first functional submarine, describes his ship-wrecking war-machine with several nods to Goff:

> Iron plates were bolted onto the wooden armature, laid fore to aft in overlapped layers like dragon scales. Glass eyes fixed in the beak, protected by a lattice of steel bars, accentuated the strange new ship's distinctly reptilian appearance. (72)

And finally, Kevin J. Anderson's steampunk recursive fantasy of Verne's *Voyages Extraordinaire* finds Nemo building this underwater vessel for despot Robur the Conquerer:

> The new armored vessel lay like a half-submerged predatory fish tied up against the pilings. Eyelike portholes made of thick glass stared from the control bridge within the bow. Overlapping armor plates reminded him of the scales of the shark he had fought while adrift on a raft of flotsam from

> the *Coralie*. Jagged fins like saw-teeth lined the dorsal hull, the better for causing severe damage to wooden-keeled ships traversing the Suez. (355)

All of these descriptions are closer to Goff's design of the *Nautilus* than Verne's original, which while initially mistaken for a sea-creature, cannot be mistaken as such close up, as Professor Aronnax discovers when first washed up upon the submarine vessel's hull: "That blackish back on which I was sitting was glossy and smooth, with *nothing* like overlapping scales" (47, emphasis added). While Aronnax first imagines the ship as shaped "like an immense steel fish" (48), Nemo clarifies that it is an exceedingly practical shape for ocean travel: a 70-metre long cigar-shaped cylinder (84).

The influence of Goff's *Nautilus* on the steampunk aesthetic is seen further in the proliferation of *Nautilus* designs at a website cataloguing designs that adhere somewhat to Verne's vision, unlike the *Nautilus* of the *League of Extraordinary Gentlemen*. While the site is devoted to displaying *Nautilus* designs which hold to Verne's spartan approach, there are numerous designs which clearly use Goff's *Nautilus* as their starting point. The online catalogue's inclusion of these designs verifies Fleischer's claim concerning the influence of the cinematic *Leagues*, which in many ways eclipses Verne's novel in the popular imagination.

Anecdotally, nearly every steampunk convention I have attended has featured items in the vendor or artist halls clearly based on Goff's design. The Vulcania Volunteers are a group of artists and craftsmen devoted solely to

producing replica models and blueprints inspired by Goff's design of *The Nautilus*. More obliquely, the "variety of disparate materials that can usually be found in any Steampunk conceived of device . . . wood, brass, rivets, gears, lenses, cast iron, etc." (Sean Orlando, qtd. in Willeford 6) are found in Goff's design. Take a Google perusal of steampunk art and compare it with Goff's *Nautilus* and you'll see what I mean. As Don Peri stated in *Working with Walt*, "Harper Goff is not widely known, but he left an indelible mark with his design of the *Nautilus*…" (193).

While the influence of Victorian and Edwardian literature on steampunk cannot be denied, an argument can be made for the equal if not greater influence of the Scientific Romance in the cinema of 1950s to 1970s on the seminal writers of steampunk fiction. It seems likely then that Jameson's idea of *nostalgia films* might apply to the impulse of steampunk writers, seeking to "gratify a deeper and more properly nostalgic desire to return to that older period and to live its strange old aesthetic artifacts through once again," whether that nostalgia be expressed by tributary pastiche or ironic parody (Jameson 197). We find both in the early steampunk of the 1970s.

Seminal Steampunk (1971-1994)

While the roots of steampunk may remain contestable, the 1970s blast radius of its inception is difficult to deny. Moorcock is arguably the first major SF writer of the 1970s to write what Jeter would later call "Victorian fantasies" with *The*

Warlord of the Air in 1971. The novel tells the story of Captain Owen Bastable, a loyal English army officer, traveling seventy years into the future to an alternate 1973 where the British Empire still holds sway. What is immediately notable about the paperback release of *Warlord* is the distance between Moorcock's steampunk vision and the marketing machine of the day. The first edition cover components sleek, silver air vessels that do not resemble lighter-than-air ships at all: they share greater kinship with the supersonic aircraft of the Cold War era than zeppelins or dirigibles. And while the first airship Bastable sees in the future has an envelope "constructed of some silvery metal," it is clearly still an airship with a gondola and four triangular wings at the stern: a rigid airship such as the zeppelins of the early twentieth-century. Later, Moorcock describes *The Rover*, an airship the novel's protagonist finds himself aboard following his removal from the British Airforce which shares even fewer similarities with the glossy vessels on the first edition cover:

> She was battered and needed painting, but she was as brightly clean as the finest liner. She had a hard hull, obviously converted from a soft, fabric cover of the old type. She was swaying a little at her mast and seemed, by the way she moved in her cables, very heavily loaded. Her four big, old-fashioned engines were housed in outside nacelles which had to be reached by means of partly-covered catwalks, and her inspection walks were completely open to the elements. I felt like someone who had been transferred from the Oceanic to take up a position on a tramp steamer. (80)

This old-world aesthetic is reflected better by White Wolf's omnibus release of Moorcock's Bastable books, *A Nomad of the Time Streams,* which features artwork by Chris Moeller, acting as the hand in the sketchbook of Bastable himself. His cover captures a number of the retrofuturistic concepts behind *Warlord of the Air* perfectly, as a fleet of airships from countries all over the globe drop lines of bombs, while Bastable stands in the foreground, looking pensively into the distance, dressed all in a Red uniform evocative of British colonial militarism.

It is this retrofuturistic, postcolonial gaze that has led some steampunk adherents to offer *Warlord of the Air* as exemplar of how a counter-cultural "punk" ethos was always present in steampunk. *Warlord of the Air* reads well as a straight adventure story until the final chapters, where Moorcock's political commentary switches from sub-text to narrative thrust, with a very satisfying alternate history which begs the question as to whether or not changing events in history effectively changes anything about intrinsic human nature, or perhaps even the destiny of certain nationalities or communities?. The ending, as is the case with several moments in the book, could be misconstrued easily by someone missing the heavy irony throughout.

While protagonist Captain Oswald Bastable begins his tale as a loyal servant of the British Empire, his journey eventually makes him an antagonist of it. Once he learns that "[t]he Indian starves so that the Briton may feast" (94), he finds himself gaining sympathy with the rebels within Dawn City, an

"international settlement" containing "exiles from every oppressed country in the world" (105). His conversion comes as a surprise, not so much to the reader as to himself: "I don't know when I had come to identify myself with bandits and revolutionists—and yet there was no mistaking the fact that I had. I refused to join them, but I hoped that they might win" (122).

Moorcock artfully delivers the impetus for Bastable's change via his decision to make a *fin-de-siècle* British citizen travel through time to a neo-Victorian 1974, so that the oft-used modern-man-travels-into-past is turned on its head. Bastable's manners and loyalty to the Crown are anachronistic enough to the modern reader, yet Moorcock takes the extra step of placing this anachronism within an alternate late-20th century, so that the reader finds the familiar just as defamiliarized as Bastable does:

> And for the first time I had a sense of loss. I felt I was leaving behind everything I had come to understand about this world of the 1970s, embarking on what for me would be a fresh voyage of discovery. I felt a bit like one of the ancient Elizabethan navigators who had set off to look for the other side of the planet. (83)

The familiar is made even stranger by Moorcock's choice of the nationality behind the rebellion against Empire: the novel's eponymous Warlord is Chinese. Again, the ties to what was occurring in global politics concerning the Vietnam War would have made Moorcock's novel a radical statement. The "Warlord of the Air," Shuo Ho Ti, also known as General O.T. Shaw, strikes the reader as

sympathetic in his acts of terrorism as Verne's Captain Nemo, yet his enemies are the colonial powers of France, America, and Britain. Unlike Nemo, who can be read as an enemy of colonialism long dead, Shaw is the enemy of colonialism still living, but under a different name.

It is this political aspect which makes Moorcock's *Warlord of the Air* so valuable to the study of steampunk: given that his books are early in the progression of steampunk, they potentially validate the investigation of current steampunk's poverty of a political subtext and commentary. However, turning our attention to the United States and the three Californian writers associated with steampunk's beginnings, the political subtext becomes less apparent.

Since K.W. Jeter is heralded as the "man who invented steampunk," newer readers of steampunk have a high bar of expectation concerning Jeter's first steampunk work, *Morlock Night* (1979). They expect it to be derivative of cyberpunk, because of Jeter's early-cyberpunk novel, *Dr. Adder* (1984), ignoring the obvious temporal distance between the two. Consequently, they mistakenly assume *Morlock Night* to be serious and political like Moorcock. I have heard it offhandedly suggested at conventions and in online forums that newer steampunk writing lacks the *gravitas* of earlier works. Jeter's *Morlock Night* as a perfect example of how steampunk has always been a mix of *gravitas* and *levitas*.

Serious readers of H.G. Wells' *The Time Machine* have further reason to raise the bar of expectation, since *Morlock Night*'s original cover boasted the book explains "what happened when the Time Machine returned." Fans of Wells'

serious social commentary are bound to be disappointed when they discover that Jeter's novel is simply escapist, page-turning fun. One of his characters self-reflexively warns the Wellsian faithful to avoid taking things too seriously here. After all, it's only a story: "My good fellow, don't get so excited over a mere story! Divert yourself with whatever sequels you care to imagine, but save such passion for reality" (9). The conversation surrounding this statement indicates that Jeter is diverging from *The Time Machine*'s agenda. *Morlock Night* is a sequel to *The Time Machine* in plot, not politics or ideology.

Further, as James Blaylock chronicles in "Parenthetically Speaking," his afterword to *The Adventures of Langdon St. Ives*, Jeter's *Morlock Night* was written not only as a sequel to *The Time Machine*, but also as part of a series "that would involve the reincarnation of King Arthur throughout history" (469). Although the series was scrapped, Jeter found a home for *Morlock Night* with DAW paperbacks. I was unaware of this when I first read *Morlock Night*, and was therefore surprised to find Merlin a major character, that magic was employed as an unabashed plot device, and that ultimately, the goal was to save Christendom. This seemed contradictory given previous informal discussions with steampunks informed me steampunk was *intrinsically* not fantasy, was political, and likely of an anarchic stripe because that is the way "original" steampunk literature was. Yet there I was, reading "original steampunk" with closer affinities to C.S. Lewis' *That Hideous Strength* than anything by Moorcock. I've glibly stated that the psudeo-Judeo-Christian influences outweigh the secular political ones in early

steampunk, though I have no interest in seeing any ideology conflated *a priori* with steampunk.

A naysayer might suggest Jeter is trying to be ironic with Merlin's early speech about the call of adventure to the hero:

> King Arthur is reborn every generation in time to intercede against the direst threat facing the cherished Christian and human ideals that are embodied in England more than any other place. It's a commentary on humanity's penchant for mischief, inasmuch as there's always a threat to Christendom. (41)

But this valorizing of English and Christian ideals is delivered with deadpan seriousness, despite the protagonist's incredulity. Before Excalibur is discovered, it seems a more cynical conclusion will be delivered. But by the book's end, all has been set right in a fictional universe where moral and spiritual good and evil exist, without ambiguous shades of gray muddying the waters.

Angry Robot books released a lovely new edition of *Morlock Night* in an omnibus with Jeter's other steampunk classic, *Infernal Devices* in 2011. The omnibus features cover art by steampunk favourite John Coulthart, one for each story: *Infernal Devices*, arguably the superior work on the front, and, despite being chronologically first in publication date, *Morlock Night* on the back. Coulthart's beautiful cover is fascinating in how it continues to promulgate a horizon of expectation for *Morlock Night* as pure science fiction. There is no explicit indication of the magical elements in the novel; while the Arthurian

elements are crucial to the narrative, they are as absent on the re-release as they were in Josh Kirby's art for the DAW edition. While Coulthart's approach is visually pleasing, it is unfortunate that the first edition's artist, the late Josh Kirby, was not alive to produce another of his crowded, overpopulated covers in the style he is famous for with Terry Pratchett's fantasy parodies, the Discworld novels. It certainly would have indicated the tone of *Morlock Night* better: unlike many of Jeter's other books, *Morlock Night* does not contain dark themes: it is a romantic adventure story filled with nineteenth-century tech and medieval magic.

While *Morlock Night* is light-hearted in comparison to Jeter's other early works, it is the epitome of seriousness compared to fellow Californian James Blaylock's steampunk writing. Blaylock's 1978 short story, "The Ape Box Affair," is arguably the first steampunk work written in the United States, preceding Jeter's *Morlock Night* by a year. In brief, the story is about an orangutan landing in St. James Park in an experimental spherical flying ship, where he is promptly mistaken for an alien: hilarity ensues in the intersections between the orangutan's adventures, and an attempt to deliver a jack-in-the-box to a child.

It's easy to imagine "The Ape Box Affair" shot in the silent era, and then played at the wrong speed, rendering the action a frantic aspect. The story has physical slapstick of the Keystones Cop variety, but is also riddled with dry, ironic statements about how Victorian Londoners might react to an "alien invasion." Contrast H.G. Wells' "Exodus of London" in *War of the Worlds* with

this line about the Lord Mayor's response to the "alien" in St. James' Park: "He rather fancied the idea of a smoke and a chat and perhaps a pint of bitter later in the day with these alien chaps and so organized a "delegation," as he called it, to ride out and welcome them" (15).

The most telling line of "The Ape Box Affair" comes halfway through the story, after highjinks and shenanigans have already reached a fever pitch: "It was at this point that the odd thing occurred" (21), as though the ape landing in St. James Park alone lacked oddity. This is the style of Blaylock's steampunk, utterly lacking a serious political subtext. Blaylock is not looking into the past to say something about the present. He looks to the past as a fun place to play, a place where aliens arriving in London are met with the hope for a smoke, a chat, and a pint of bitter, rather than the London of today, where an alien might be met by the military. In short, Blaylock's steampunk is a world where whimsy rules.

The second short story in *The Adventures from Langdon St. Ives*, "A Hole in Space," applies this whimsy to the concept of technofantasy. Blaylock openly admits Lewis's *Space Trilogy* as an influence on his work, and while reading "The Hole in Space," I recalled what Lewis said about technology in science fiction: "I took a hero once to Mars in a space-ship, but when I knew better I had angels convey him to Venus" (64). Blaylock takes the middle ground between those extremities, imagining the sort of solution to a black hole an eight-year old boy might, especially the sort disposed toward plugging up dikes.

Blaylock has shared the story of the origin of “The Hole in Space” at public appearances, and records it in “Parenthetically Speaking,” at the end of *The Adventures of Langdon St. Ives*:

> So there we were at O’Hara’s Pub, talking about something vital . . . K.W. [Jeter] rolled his eyes at something I’d said (something involving “science”) and suggested that given my curious notions of that subject I’d be likely to write a story in which someone plugged a black hole with a Fitzall Sizes cork. After a momentary silence I asked him whether, with all due respect, he was willing to let me have that idea or whether he wanted it for himself. He said I was welcome to it, and I went home and wrote ‘The Hole in Space.’ (469)

Here at the genesis of steampunk, as today, there is a decided absence of interest in real physics or astronomy. The technology here is far from the Hard SF John Campbell espoused. Blaylock describes the operations of St.Ives’s spacecraft with the same degree of rigour as his Fitzall Sizes Cork solution-to-black-holes: “There were gyros to ameliorate and fluxion sponges to douse.” When it is finally time to lift off, the Professor jabs buttons, and heaves on “a bloody great anti-something-or-other-crank with silver wires sprouting from it like tentacles” (40). As such, Blaylock remains a wonderful wrench in the great brass gears of those

who decry modern steampunk as "not being serious enough." Clearly one of streampunk's ostensible originators lacked this requisite seriousness.[4]

There is even less attention to technology in Tim Powers' *The Anubis Gates*. When I explained my PhD research project to Powers at the 2009 Eaton Science Fiction Conference, he asked bemusedly about *The Anubis Gates*: "So do you think it's steampunk?" Powers would again ponder the question at *Steamcon* later that same year. If steampunk is supposed to be a subgenre of science fiction, then Powers' contribution must be excluded, containing even less science than space opera. It involves time travel, so one might argue its relationship to Wells; but the time travel of *Anubis Gates* is affected through a scientific manipulation of holes created by magic, so it's some unholy hybrid of fantasy with unexplained science. However, as Powers openly stated during a panel at the Eaton conference, his books are more fantasy than they are science fiction, unless one allows for spiritualism as a form of nineteenth-century science. Since *The Anubis Gates* takes place in the early nineteenth-century, it was lumped in with Jeter and Blaylock's "Victorian fantasies" in Jeter's offhand remark in *Locus* which birthed the term steampunk. Consequently, *The Anubis Gates* forms part of a perceived steampunk canon.

At its core, *The Anubis Gates* is an adventure story. Like Jeters and Blaylock, Powers did not write a novel of ideas. This is, once again, not Moorcock's politically charged steampunk. It is pure adventure story, filled with

---

[4] It should be noted that although "The Hole in Space" has a 2002 copyright, it was originally written in 1977, shortly after "The Ape Box Affair," which is why

page-turning cliffhangers and contrived coincidences which permit the hero to survive his adventures. The protagonist of *The Anubis Gates*, Professor Brendan Doyle, joins a host of pulp characters who can take a severe beating and persevere. Powers is a superior writer of escapist fiction; he simply has no higher agenda, exemplified best by his comment at the Eaton conference regarding *Dracula*. He related how people often tell him Bram Stoker's novel is about the situation of women in the nineteenth-century, to which he replies: "Really? I thought it was about a creature that stays immortal by drinking blood!"

The Anubis Gates follows this philosophy, stubbornly resisting any reading deeper than "the good guy is now trying to escape from the bad guy," or "the heroine is now trapped by the evil sorcerous clown." The book jacket reads that "[o]nly the dazzling imagination of Tim Powers could have assembled such an insane cast of characters: an ancient Egyptian sorcerer, a modern millionaire, a body-switching werewolf, a hideously deformed clown, a young woman disguised as a boy, a brainwashed Lord Byron, and finally, our hero, Professor Brendan Doyle," which is no summary whatsoever. It is merely a cataloguing of the motley cast of *The Anubis Gates*, which might very well be the only way to tantalize a potential reader without giving away the novel's surprises.

The book jacket reveals *The Anubis Gates'* lack of concern with industrial technology, and its focus on thaumaturgic technology: magic. What *The Anubis Gates* reveals is that magic has always been part of the pastiche of steampunk—Doyle wonders at one point "how much of this Lovecraftian fantasy could be

---

it appears second in *The Adventures of Langdon St. Ives*.

true" (120). I am not arguing that all magic is steampunk then, but only certain types of magic, within a certain context. *The Anubis Gates* plays with Egyptian magic particularly, utilizing the nineteenth-century's generation and their subsequent fascination with the mummy's curse, as evidenced in the research of Dominic Montserrat and Roger Lockhurst. Accordingly, it is "contemporary magic" for the nineteenth-century, going so far as to behave within the boundaries of a nineteenth-century worldview, since the binding of the ancient Egyptian gods seems to have had something to do with the rise of Christianity: "They reside now in the the Tuaut, the underworld, the gates of which have been held shut for eighteen centuries by some pressure I do not understand but which I am sure is linked with Christianity" (11). I am not asserting that steampunk magic must apply such rules, but there is a verisimilitude gained in paying even only lip service to the vestiges of Christendom, if one wishes to write fiction taking place in the British Empire, or Colonial Europe in the nineteenth-century. China Mievelle's Bas-Lag can be as godless as its author wishes it to be, since it is a secondary world which echoes, not emulates, a Dickensian London. The setting of *The Anubis Gates* is London, and accordingly, despite potential differences accorded an alternate history, should reflect the reality of that historical setting.

Without belaboring the point, it must be remembered that magic is historically a precursor to science in Western culture. It is, if you will, proto-science, or even the science of its day. Accordingly, magic was a sort of technology in the Romantic, Victorian, and Edwardian period. Serious thinkers

such as William Butler Yeats and Evelyn Underhill were joining groups like the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn. The magic of these groups is precision ritual: a form of technology. The working magic of *The Anubis Gates* plays upon this real world analogy, but is as fantastic as steam, aether, or clockwork imaginings in steampunk texts.

Unlike the other examples of twentieth-century steampunk examined here, William Gibson and Bruce Sterling's *The Difference Engine*, arguably the most famous piece of first-wave steampunk literature, asks a counterfactual question, the hallmark of the alternate history genre: "What would it really look like if the computer had been a reality of Victorian life?" The book is often lauded—rightly so—for its gritty realism. The brief mention of an airship on the first page is about as high flying as this book ever gets. Reviews complain of the virtual absence of the Difference Engine itself, the lack of bombastic action present in Gibson's *Neuromancer* series, or the way in which the narrative jumps perspectives several times. These readers missed the point: the title of *The Difference Engine* refers to this alternate history's moment of the break, namely the creation of a working computer by Charles Babbage one hundred years before it happened in actual history. Gibson and Sterling's interest is not in the Engine, but the difference it has made in the lives of their characters. Everything about the setting and events is dominated by the changes wrought by the anachronistic innovation of the Difference Engine: Victorian London was squalid, but never this squalid. Gibson and Sterling are so meticulous with the creation of this alternate history, that an

extensive online resource, “The Difference Dictionary,” has been devoted to cataloguing places and characters from the book, contrasting their real-world histories with this alternate one. In short, *The Difference Engine* takes history very seriously, a rarity in steampunk fiction. As Hantke states, “the shaping force behind steampunk is not history but the will of its author to establish and then violate and modify a set of ontological ground rules” (248). Hantke explains this idea further, stating that steampunk seems to be a comment on the way in which the reality of the past is only available to modern readers as a textual phenomenon. Steampunk raises our awareness of the “textuality of history” by mixing “historical figures and fictional characters or when it fictionalizes historical characters” (248).

Stefania Forlini, an Assistant Professor in English at the University of Calgary, taught a course in steampunk in winter of 2010, comparing book pairs “that explicitly lend themselves to an examination of steampunk ‘borrowing’” (email). Among these pairs were Wells’ *The Time Machine* with K.W. Jeter’s *Morlock Night*, Charles Dickens’s *The Old Curiosity Shop* with Neal Stephenson’s *The Diamond Age*, and Benjamin Disraeli’s *Sybil* with Bruce Sterling and William Gibson’s *The Difference Engine* (ib.). Forlini is not alone in this last example: along with Csicsery-Ronay Jr. (109), Jay Clayton considers *The Difference Engine* a rewrite of Disraeli’s *Sybil*, changing the “industrial novel about the reconciliation of the classes” into a “historical fantasy that traces the roots of today’s information society back to Victorian England” (109). The

changes noted by Clayton are indicative of how steampunk rewrites Victorian texts:

> Sybil Gerard, the idealistic daughter of a Chartist agitator, does not marry her aristocratic suitor Charles Egremont but is seduced and abandoned by that ambitious politician; she becomes the lover of a minor character from Disraeli's novel, Mick Radley, who here is involved in international espionage and computer software theft. Events in Disraeli's novel, both large and small, are effectively transmogrified for the contemporary plot. The riot at Mowbray Castle in *Sybil*, for example, becomes a vast Luddite uprising in London in the later novel, and offhand references to horse racing in the first two chapters of Disraeli inspire a key episode at the races, this time of steam-powered gurneys. (110)

Clayton calls this chapter "Hacking the Nineteenth-century" as a reference to cyberpunk, the sub-genre of science fiction Gibson and Sterling were best known for at the time, but could as easily be called "Punking the Nineteenth-century." While I reject any etymological significance to the inclusion of the punk suffix in steampunk, it is fair to say steampunk writers perform a subversive act by taking historical or popular literary figures and placing them in situations contrary to their known personalities or histories. As Margaret Rose states, "'punk' evokes an irreverent attitude toward history and, through association with cyberpunk, an iconoclastic concern with the origins and conventions of [SF]" (321).

Rose catalogues “Jack the Ripper, Charles Babbage, Ada Lovelace, Queen Victoria and other royals, and the Romantic poets” as “[n]otable favorites who appear again and again in steampunk” (325). Steffen Hantke uses Paul DiFilippo’s *Steampunk Trilogy* (1995) to demonstrate how historical figures are “textually mediated” in steampunk, briefly referencing DiFilippo’s treatment of Walt Whitman, Emily Dickinson, and Queen Victoria as examples. Expanding on both Rose and Hantke’s lists of historical figures considered iconic in steampunk, fictional and blatantly intertextual references can be added as well. The *Steampunk Trilogy*’s second story, “Hottentots,” pays tribute to and satirizes H.P. Lovecraft, playing off of the pulp-horror author’s penchant for fear of the outsider, often read as racial othering in postcolonial criticism. DiFilippo’s treatment of this is clever: the story is about the invasion of Massachusetts by hybrid fish-men, reminiscent of Lovecraft’s short story “The Shadow Over Innsmouth.” These hybrid fish-men are characteristic Lovecraftian horrors, which postcolonial readings have taken as extrapolations of Lovecraft’s own suspicion of other ethnicities. Opposing this monstrous invasion is Swiss naturalist and white supremacist Louis Agassiz, whose xenophobic reactions to a Hottentot female married to a Frenchman seem to mirror those ascribed to Lovecraft, acting as a thematic signifier for the story’s monstrous hybrid fish-men. DiFilippo ends his trilogy of novellas with “Walt and Emily,” which Alison McMahan brilliantly summarizes:

> Walt Whitman's howling body electric collides with The Belle of Amherst's reserve and leads to Dickinson giving birth to Allan Ginsberg – or rather, an alien, doppleganger of Alan Ginsberg in an alternate reality that is only reachable in a ship fuelled by the aetheric milk from the breasts of a fake medium. ("Discussion")

These examples show how the steampunk past is often more literary than historical. As will be shown in the next chapter, while the steampunk aesthetic draws from the alternate history genre, it arguably relies as much on Victorian and Edwardian literature as it does Victorian and Edwardian historical events:

> The mix of the historical and the literary have been the game of steampunk since its inception [. . .] Steampunk offerings continue to utilize a mix of historical figures whose lives have become legend, and fictional heroes whose stories have become truth in the minds of their readers, carrying on the tradition of blurring the lines between fiction as history, and history as fiction. (Perschon, "Fictional Histories" 40)

Istvan Csicsery-Ronay Jr. also sees steampunk works as "not so much counterfactual, as, to use Matt Hills's term, counterfictional" (108). This is the difference between asking what might have happened had the computer been invented in the nineteenth-century and asking what would have happened if Sherlock Holmes had access to that computer. Csicsery-Ronay Jr. clarifies by using Sterling and Gilman's London in *The Difference Engine* (1991):

> Their focus is not on what might have been historically possible, which would presuppose the discourse of historical realism. Instead, they focus on the imaginatively possible, a dialectical mesh of fantasies of the Victorians' social, political, and cultural institutions, as both the Victorians themselves and the fin de millennium U.S. techno-bohemians might imagine them. (108-109)

While this counterfictional aspect of steampunk was to remain a hallmark of the aesthetic, the next generation of steampunk writers would depart from the first generation in a number of significant ways.

Steampunk Since the 1990s

In the fall of 2008, I interviewed Jeff Vandermeer, co-editor of Tachyon's *Steampunk* anthology of seminal steampunk. Vandermeer stated that in order for steampunk to innovate, it would need to write *against* itself, forming a self-reflexive criticism, and cited his short story "Fixing Hanover" as a potential example of what that might look like.

Insofar as "Fixing Hanover" criticizes steampunk, it does so with a strong understanding of what that term had come to represent. While first wave, twentieth-century steampunk was primarily expressed in textual and cinematic fictions, twenty-first century steampunk had expanded into visual art, fashion, and décor, spawning a sub-culture whose members self-identify as steampunks. K.W.

Jeter observed this shift in the introduction to the Angry Robot omnibus of his steampunk stories:

> …steampunk literature is a relatively small part of a larger enthusiasm. The concept has metastasized to the point where its cultural penetration is driven less by authors than by film studio art directors, costumers and special effects departments . . . If saying that one is into steampunk allows young women to attend science fiction conventions while laced into visibly complicated underwear, while their weedy boyfriends are bulked up by the heavy armor of period tweeds and vests, the inspiration is likely from the movies rather than any words on paper. (7)

The expectation may have been for the seminal steampunk of Moorcock, Jeter, Powers, Sterling, and Gibson to have a greater impact on the next generation of steampunk writers and artists, but this was arguably not the case.

> Although other steampunk works were written during this time, the "movement" such as it was, died out or became part of the mainstream of Science Fiction. Throughout the 1990s and early parts of the aughts, steampunk mostly took the form of comics and movies . . . and found expression through the nascent steampunk subculture. The subculture riffed off of popular movies and comics, the works of Verne and Wells, and the Victorian era itself, to create a vibrant fashion, arts, and DIY community . . . Mostly because of the spark and inspiration if this subculture, more and more writers are once again writing steampunk

fiction. However, it's very different from what came before.

(Vandermeer, "What is Steampunk?" 10-11).

The most visible and vocal of the steampunk subculture's expressions is arguably steampunk Makers, who create or modify real steampunk contraptions. Jake Von Slatt and Datamancer's steampunk computers are among the most famous examples, with contemporary technology removed from nondescript mass-produced plastic housings and placed inside wooden or brass housings of artful craftsmanship. In "Fixing Hanover," Vandermeer cleverly comments on Maker culture, and reveals some of the unspoken conceits behind an aesthetic rooted in anachronistic technologies combined with a period of colonial expansion.

"Fixing Hanover" is the story of a brilliant inventor/engineer who has retreated to a peaceful and somewhat backward village in reaction to the horror of witnessing how his inventions were being used in warfare. While this is an old concept in science fiction, Vandermeer's use of a steampunk automaton to guide us through this lesson oft-told but seemingly never-learned is original in how it references other works, achieving a sort of shorthand for the ideas in the story. The automaton washes up on a beach, giving the reader a mystery to uncover, but considering steampunk's roots in boys' adventure tales, specifically the Edisonades, it is also reminiscent of optimistic narratives like the film *Iron Giant* (1999). Boy finds robot, boy fixes robot, boy befriends robot: in "Fixing Hanover," man finds and fixes robot, only to have it bring destruction upon his home.

When the self-exiled inventor hero finally repairs the automaton (he takes to calling it Hanover), narrative impulsion is achieved through highly self-reflexive references to the steampunk aesthetic, specifically technofantasy: the inventor makes "several leaps of logic" and decisions "that cannot be explained as rational" (388). In response to the question "What does it do?" the protagonist ruminates, "Why should everything have to have a function?" The automaton's lack of apparent functionality mirrors some of the criticism leveled against steampunk Maker's inventions, decrying the point in making a laptop look nicer when it worked fine without the filigree. Within the context of the story, it is as though the inventor of highly functional devices prefers making pointless items of beauty: he has seen the dark side of functionality in the infernal devices whose function is violence. This ideology is subtly present in the narrative, so that when the automaton is finally fixed, one of the villagers "backs away from Hanover, as if something monstrous has occurred, even though this is what we wanted" (390). It's a move performed a multitude of times in film after film, book after book, and story after story, perhaps best embodied in Colin Clive screaming, "It's alive...Alive!" in the 1931 film version of *Frankenstein*.

"Fixing Hanover" makes for a great companion piece to Moorcock's first-wave steampunk *Warlord of the Air*, and could be viewed as inhabiting that same universe, from the perspective of a man who designed the technology that permitted the British Empire to continue to hold sway in Moorcock's fictional late twentieth century. This sentiment is also echoed in Thomas Pynchon's *Against the*

Day by the Chums of Chance upon witnessing the horrors of World War I. Vandermeer's passage begins with "They took me to His Excellency by airship, of course," which again feels self-reflexive, since airships are a steampunk icon. The narrator seems to be saying to the reader: "What else does one travel by in a steampunk story?"

> For the first time, except for excursions to the capital, I left my little enclave, the country I'd created for myself. From on high, I saw what I had helped create...The vision I had not known existed unfurled like a slow, terrible dream...I saw my creations clustered above hostile armies, raining down my bombs onto stick figures who bled, screamed, died, were mutilated, blown apart...all as if in a silent film. (Vandermeer 397-98)

In most twentieth-century steampunk adventures, the arrival of the airship signifies high-flying adventure. In "Fixing Hanover," airships are exposed as war-machines come to retrieve their creator and fly him home to make more.

> They come at dawn, much faster than I had thought possible...from behind my bars, I watch their deadly, beautiful approach across the slate-gray sky, the deep-blue waves, and it is as if my children are returning to me. If there is no mercy in them, it is because I never thought of mercy when I created the bolt and canvas of them, the fuel and gears of them. (399)

Blogger Cory Gross of *Voyages Extraordinaire* suggested a dichotomy of steampunk, contrasting the halcyon nostalgia of first-generation steampunk with

the dark melancholia of second-generation steampunk (2007). “Fixing Hanover” is clearly melancholic, rejecting nostalgia for a sober reflection on war.

This dark melancholia is present in a number of second-wave steampunk texts, notably in the beautiful filth of China Miéville’s *Perdido Street Station* (2000): the grime-infested descriptions of New Crobuzon depict a city somewhere between Doré’s visual renderings of London and the cityscape of films like *Dark City* and *City of Lost Children*. Miéville’s *Perdido Street Station* and its sequels are indicative of another shift in second wave steampunk: Jess Nevins characterizes early steampunk as *static*, “an essentially urban genre . . . limited to London’s confines” (9). The next generation of steampunk writers abandoned London proper for other areas of the globe, or in Miéville’s case, for other worlds entirely. Like Felix Gilman, Stephen Hunt, and Ekaterina Sedia, Miéville has constructed a fully secondary world that evokes the nineteenth-century.

This evocation is present in Miéville’s Dickensian interest in the “least of these,” the people who do not sit in the places of the high and mighty: people like the brilliant but iconoclastic alchemical thaumaturgist, Isaac Dan der Grimnebulin, whose interest is in Crisis energy. While Miéville’s world is easily placed under the steampunk umbrella, his world is highly original — where lesser writers are still playing with steam or aether, Miéville imagines a self-perpetuating energy source in Crisis theory.

Nevertheless, while Miéville is an eloquent wordsmith, the motivating plotline of *Perdido* is effectively a steampunked version of *Aliens*, *Blade II*,

Mimic, or perhaps all three. The plot is simple and familiar: there are nearly unstoppable monsters on the loose and Miéville's heroes must stop them despite overwhelming odds. This adventure storyline seems unconventional and elevated due to Miéville's eloquent word-smithing and well-rounded character-building. Any author who can make his readers connect with a hero who is severely flawed *and* sexually attracted to a woman with a scarab-beetle for a head must be commended at some level.

Despite all its serious dystopic elements, complex characterization, and ambivalent moral schema, *Perdido* is an adventure story: a monster hunt. The Slake Moths are appropriate monstrosities for a steampunk novel, since steampunk is pastiche patchwork of historical aesthetics. The Slake Moths are amalgams of the creatures in the aforementioned films, playing upon the indestructibility and otherness of Giger's *Alien*, the flight and dreamlike ability to lure prey of *Mimic*, with a penchant for hiding in sewers, leading to chases reminiscent of *Blade II*. One passage in particular permits the reader to see the adventure tale beneath the literary gilding of its neo-Victorian veneer, when a team of adventurers are hired to aid the heroes in their pursuit of the monsters:

> There were three of them. They were immediately and absolutely recognizable as adventurers; rogues who wandered the Ragamoll and the Cymek and Fellid and probably the whole of Bas-Lag. They were hardy and dangerous, lawless, stripped of allegiance or morality, living off their wits, stealing and killing, hiring themselves out to whoever and whatever

> came. They were inspired by dubious virtues. A few performed useful services: research, cartography, and the like. Most were nothing but tomb raiders. They were scum who died violent deaths, hanging on to a certain cachet among the impressionable through their undeniable bravery and their occasionally impressive exploits. (429)

Those familiar with roleplaying games will recognize nods to the stereotypical *Dungeons and Dragons* party in this description. These are steampunked *D&D* heroes. If a story has characters resembling this sort of hero, it's an adventure tale. In this case, it's a very well-written one, exploring themes of otherness, shame, community, belonging, transformation, and how these all relate to moments of crisis. Sadly, *Perdido*'s attention to these themes is more a hallmark of Miéville than it is steampunk fiction in general.

Contrary to Gross's estimation of second wave steampunk, there is as much unreflective nostalgia as brooding melancholia. For every steampunk text that uses the aesthetic to consider the human condition or postcolonial issues inherent in the Victorian and Edwardian settings of steampunk, there are several that ignore the shadow of Empire, racial and gender oppression, or anything that might tarnish the shiny veneer of steampunked Britannia. The best example of these unreflective texts is the *Pax Britannia* books by Jonathan Green, which not only contain some of the worst technical writing I have ever read, but are also indicative of the worst steampunk offers the writing world.

Unnatural History (2007) is the first of Green's *Pax Britannia* offerings. The back cover indicates the book's pulpy fare, describing the hero Ulysses Quicksilver as: "dandy, rogue, and agent of the throne. It is up to this dashing soldier of fortune to solve the mystery and uncover the truth before London degenerates into primitive madness and a villainous mastermind brings about the unthinkable." In Xavier Mauméjean's *The League of Heroes* (2005), a similar sort of hero is rendered ironically in Lord Kraven, who defeats an assailant while stopping to fix his tie in the mirror and consider the half-mustache his opponent's near-miss shot has left him with:

> Half a moustache suited Lord Kraven perfectly. It had, nevertheless, been a close-shave—Prince Spada's blade having nearly run him through the throat. The foremost hero of Albion fixed his tie, looked at himself in the mirror one last time and proceeded to shoot his attacker in the head. The bullet...continued through the wall, ricocheted against the Tower's metal frame and went on to kill Ambrosio Terracota, the Prince's henchman, splattering his brains across the floor. (9)

The ridiculously impossible shot is delivered to the reader with a certain tongue-in-cheek "winking at the camera," warning the reader against taking this too seriously. While Mauméjean maintains a gleefully ironic tone, *The League of Heroes* is not entirely whimsical. Before long, the heroes begin to question the ease of their consistent victories and the reasons for continuing the battle. Unlike

Green's Ulysses Quicksilver, Mauméjean's heroes are self-aware, and wonder at the simplicity of their steampunk world:

> "Yes, of course, I always forget that we are the good guys," he said with irony. "Always ready to defeat a new threat, to foil a new convoluted plot, to stop a new would-be world conqueror. But it all sounds very hollow right now. Consider our foes...They always tell us their plans in great detail after they capture us, they always make a last minute mistake which enables us to escape and defeat them... Yes, we win, but only until the next time, for they always return..." (65)

The League of Heroes also addresses past social injustices such as Bloody Friday in May of 1919, which takes place in May of 1916 in Mauméjean's alternate history, the event catalyzing one hero's departure from the League.

Jonathan Green, and other writers like him, such as George Mann in *The Affinity Bridge* (2009) and S.M. Stirling in *The Peshawar Lancers* (2003) write over-the-top characters without any sense of ironic tone. Ulysses Quicksilver is a pulp hero without any postcolonial sensibilities. While he has some rogue tendencies, he is still an unswervingly loyal agent of the Crown. He is a caricature of a number of other heroes, most notably Sherlock Holmes and James Bond — a mix of brains and brawn, neither of which are delivered well: the brains always seem to be something Quicksilver is lucky enough to stumble upon, rather than a logical deduction. The brawn is likewise without precedent until Quicksilver needs it. When hired by a beautiful woman to find her lost father, Quicksilver is

said to be unable to “resist a pretty face, and when that pretty face belonged to a damsel in distress it made any attempt at resistance even more futile” (57). If Green were clever enough to write with an ironic tone, one might swallow this sort of writing. Quicksilver is Moorcock’s Bastable without the narrative conceit of time travel to explain his idiosyncrasies. One wonders how such a cultural dinosaur could have survived a century.

On that note, Green has created an alternate history where the British Empire, and strangely, Nazi Germany have survived into the 1990s. However dubious the likelihood of the perpetuation of the Third Reich would have been without World War I, or in the presence of Britain as a still-powerful world Empire, one might be willing to let it stand for the sake of whimsy. Sadly, Green’s neo-Victorian ‘90s, while playfully amusing at times (he posits the alternate history of techno-thriller writer Michael Crichton as a major professor of Evolutionary Biology in the *Pax Britannia* world), reads like a catalogue of how the Victorian era is presented in the subculture of steampunk, which pays only surface attention to historical veracity. There are airships, Victorian slang (toadies and toffs), and of course, a “brown velvet frock coat” (13), but few explanations about why the world is still stuck in a very proper and British nineteenth-century. Because so little is known about the impetus for the setting of *Unnatural History*, we find it hard to imagine: what are the characters wearing? Are brown frock coats back in, or did they never go out of style?

Even with the continuation of the British Empire, societal change would have been more advanced. Britain before Victoria was very different from Britain after Victoria. The world of *Unnatural History* reads mostly like a historical neophyte's idea of what a steampunk universe would look like. And while steampunk is not always set in alternate real-world histories, they all reference it in some way. One of the ribbons at *Steamcon* 2010 in Seattle stated that "Steampunk needs historical accuracy like a dirigible needs a goldfish." Contrast this lack of historical accuracy with the use of Henry Mayhew's writings on the London poor in Jeter, Powers, and Blaylock's steampunk texts of the '80s. S.M. Stirling's alternate history *The Peshawar Lancers,* which imagines a twenty-first century where India and the British Empire have become an integrated nation in the wake of a global disaster, is a dense read because Stirling has done extensive world-building. This is a standard task for the writer of SF and Fantasy. If the imaginary world lacks verisimilitude, the story will suffer.

Historical accuracy becomes all the more necessary when the romantic adventure of steampunk inevitably collides with postcolonial issues of the Victorian era such as imperialist expansion, the treatment of indigenous peoples, ethnocentrism, or gender inequality. In Lisa Smedman's *The Apparition Trail* (2007), the prairie First Nations are granted everything the 1871 treaties promised, so that the hero can ruminate that "the children conceived on this night—and on all the nights hereafter—would never have to go hungry again" (259). Smedman's ending overwrites the treatment of First Nations people in

Canadian history. It may be admirable to wish atrocities away, but postulating easy fictional resolutions is not. While few assume an alternate history is "the way it happened," writers who choose rose-colored solutions lose the chance to draw attention to the way it *did* happen. Articles on steampunk by bloggers Jha Goh and Ay-leen the Peacemaker have pondered how persons-of-color go about negotiating the narratives of steampunk, when one of its foundations is a period of colonial oppression, slavery, and ethnocentrism, particularly in the area of Asian steampunk.

While the topic of steampunk and orientalism has produced online articles and forum discussion, steampunk fiction dealing with Asia as something more than the "Mysterious Orient" are still few and far between. This is odd since Moorcock's seminal *Warlord of the Air* treated the subject with far more sensitivity in the '70s than some in the next century. While *Warlord*'s protagonist Captain Oswald Bastable begins as a loyal servant of the British Empire, he eventually becomes its opponent. Once he learns that "[t]he Indian starves so that the Briton may feast" (94), he becomes sympathetic toward the Dawn City rebels in their "international settlement" containing "exiles from every oppressed country in the world" (105). Like Verne's Captain Nemo, the rebel leader Shuo Ho Ti, also known as General O.T. Shaw, commits potentially commendable acts of terrorism. The Warlord of the Air, the leader of Dawn City, is Chinese: a bold move, given the novel's release during the Vietnam War. But unlike many Asian

characters in steampunk, O.T. Shaw is not the companion of a Lawrence of Arabia leading the way to freedom: he is that leader.

Since *Warlord*, steampunk has either avoided Asian characters altogether, or rendered them the hero's sidekick, like the stereotyped Arab and Indian companions of Captain Athelstane King in S.M. Stirling's The Peshawar Lancers, or caricatures of the "Yellow Peril" in Jonathan Green's *Leviathan Rising* (2008). One of the exceptions to this is Miss Anna Fang in Philip Reeve's *Mortal Engines* (2000). Instead of being presented first as an "oriental," Fang is simply described as a woman in a red coat. It's only after she removes her sunglasses that Reeve describes her "dark and almond shaped eyes" (88). Anna Fang, a.k.a. Feng Hua, the Wind Flower is a legendary aviatrix, a dangerous sword fighter, and engineer of her airship the *Jenny Haniver*, which she constructed to escape slavery. In "Steam Wars," I have argued that if steampunk is to evoke the nineteenth-century, then the rebellion against Empire (ostensibly, British or at the very least, European) should be comprised of the colonial peoples, mirroring the racial makeup of the *Matrix* films' resistance. Reeve offers such a resistance in his Anti-Traction League, described as a mix of nations: "blond giants from Spitzbergen and blue-black warriors from the Mountains of the Moon; the small dark people of the Andean states and people the color of firelight from jungle strongholds in Laos and Annam" (275-76).

History as Fictive Playground

First and second wave steampunk share the blurring of the lines between history and fiction. The London of steampunk is not the London of Henry Mayhew's *London Labour and the London Poor*. Instead, it's the London of S.M. Peters' *Whitechapel Gods*, which is the London of *The Difference Engine* built upon until the city has become the mad, crane-littered skyline of London in *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen*, closely mirroring the densely cluttered visuals of the *Steampunk* graphic novels from Cliffhanger! comics, where London is literally divided between an underworld of the under classes and a paradise of the privileged. In *Whitechapel Gods*, the demarcation is horizontal instead of vertical, with all of Whitechapel surrounded by a retaining wall. However similar the London outside those walls might be to the London of history, the Whitechapel within is a world of pure fantasy, ruled by steampunk gods Mama Engine—whose abode resembles Mount Doom of J.R.R. Tolkien's Middle-earth—and Grandfather Clock, whose eyes are every clock face, the embodiment of pure reason: William Paley's watchmaker made literal. Instead of cholera, the environs of Whitechapel are stricken by the "clanks," a disease which leaves its carriers Victorian cyborgs, a mix of metal and flesh. This goes beyond simple alternate history: this is an alternate world, maybe an alternate universe, where powerful beings manipulate the laws of the physical universe.

The mix of the historical and the literary has been the game of steampunk since its inception: in Rudy Rucker's *The Hollow Earth*, Edgar Allan Poe visits

the interior of the hollow earth; Dracula weds Queen Victoria and takes over London in Kim Newman's *Anno Dracula;* and in Mark Frost's *The List of 7*, a young Arthur Conan Doyle meets a man who will become the inspiration for Sherlock Holmes. More recently, Thomas Edison and Nikolai Tesla engaged in their well-known competition of discovery in both Thomas Pynchon's *Against the Day* and Matthew Flaming's *The Kingdom of Ohio*, while Sir Richard Burton becomes John Carter, Warlord of Mars in Philip Reeve's *Larklight*. Steampunk offerings continue to utilize a mix of historical figures whose lives have become legend, and fictional heroes whose stories have become truth in the minds of their readers, carrying on steampunk's tradition of blurring the line between fiction as history, and history as fiction. When Steffen Hantke declared that "the shaping force behind steampunk is not history but the will of its author to establish and then violate and modify a set of ontological ground rules" (248), he wrote one of the most insightful observations about steampunk, based not only upon what he *knew* about pre-1999 steampunk, but in anticipating where steampunk would continue to go, not as historical fiction per se, but as speculative fiction—science fiction, fantasy, and horror, all mixed into one—that uses history as its toy box, not classroom.

Early steampunk draws from the fantastic fictions of the nineteenth and early twentieth century, as well as twentieth century cinematic adaptations of those original works. This process of inspiration cannot be neatly outlined; like the aesthetic it spawned, this process was haphazard, with steampunk creators

unwittingly drawing from a common stylistic tool/toybox. What is clear is that steampunk might not engage in a counterfactual question of how real history might have played out, but rather a counterfictional inquiry: what might have happened if the fictional histories of Victorian Scientific Romances had "happened" differently? What if Nemo were a historical figure, and Verne and he were childhood friends? What if Wells was present at Horsell Common when the Martian heat ray opened fire?

Benjamin Poore has stated that "the way we represent the past . . . tells us much about how we regard ourselves in the present" (2). But what exactly does steampunk's representation of the past via a counterfictional blending of the literary and historical say about the present? Poore argues that neo-Victorian theatre in Britain forms "a picture of how the UK has coped with the loss of international prestige," (7) which may account for the popularity of steampunk as an expression of Victoriana in the UK, but this only addresses neo-Victorian fiction, not the counterfiction of steampunk, and does little to explain why steampunk has attained popularity in countries as diverse as the United States, Canada, Japan, Poland, France, and Chile. Poore's idea that expressions of Victoriana may involve a loss "of belief in progress" (7) has wider application. Here, Poole echoes Louisa Hadley's inquiry into the question of why Victoriania remains popular in contemporary culture, with Hadley citing an interview with neo-Victorian writer Sarah Waters:

> This argument understands the present return to the Victorians as a backlash against the cultural fragmentation which accompanies postmodernism. In this incarnation, the Victorian era is constructed as a period when faith was possible and there was a confident belief in the progress of human society, in contrast to contemporary society, which is characterized by division and fragmentation, a loss of faith in the certainties of grand narratives. (13)

It might seem attractive to posit the same reason for steampunk's nostalgia for the Victorian era, but the neo-Victorian spaces of steampunk are rarely populated by clergy and cathedrals, often chronicle events which threaten seemingly stable social structures, and constantly undermine the idea of a grand narrative by the conceit underlying all steampunk: there are other possible worlds. As such, steampunk seems less mourning for the loss of progress than celebratory dancing-on-the-grave of a teleological worldview.

This should not be misunderstood as steampunk being flippant or frivolous in all its manifestations: "The various invocations of Victoriana that take place in Anglo-American steampunk can neither be deemed historically superficial in their entirety nor, for that matter, neutral, reduced to the status of Jameson's notion of blank parody" (Ferguson 81). Poore, responding to Robert Hewison's *The Heritage Industry*, states that the nostalgic impulse for neo-Victorian expressions disregards historical debates about what the Victorian age "really was like" in favor of "escapist entertainment . . . or to reinforce or resituate ideas of nationhood" (23). As I demonstrate in the next chapter, steampunk literature plays

on the spectrum between the escapist entertainments of texts intended as romantic adventures, the reification of Colonial or Imperial sentiments, and the resituating of those Colonial and Imperial sentiments by irony or parody.

Chapter Two: Prescribing Genre, Describing Aesthetic

The Aesthetic Approach

Pursuing the study of steampunk as a well-defined, cogent genre requires putting on a set of reading blinders, creating a canon within the canon, to arrive at thematic or narrative cogency: such approaches refuse texts that challenge a prescriptive definition of steampunk. This seems a dubious approach, as it assumes there is an essential definition of steampunk which texts must adhere to. Even if an acceptable list of steampunk motifs could be identified, a purely narrative-based definition of steampunk would be useless to academics studying steampunk as culture, visual art, or music. Instead of considering steampunk as a genre, I suggest understanding it as an expression of combined components comprising the style or aesthetic popularly understood and labelled as steampunk. As Victoria Nelson said when coining the idea of New Expressionism, "What I am identifying is not a school, or even a movement based in a few geographical locations: It is rather, a sensibility—an informal 'family resemblance,' in Wittgenstein's sense, lacking a true genealogy or traceable lines of influence" (214). An understanding of steampunk as an aesthetic permits the flexibility requisite to discussing its diverse expressions. As Jess Nevins states in his review of the *Journal of Neo-Victorian Studies*' special steampunk issue, "defining steampunk as a spectrum of constitutive tropes and motifs rather than a coherent and discrete literary subgenre will ultimately be a more critically profitable

approach" (517). Since no such definition had been provided, I seek to provide steampunk scholarship with one. My goal is to identify components consistently found in all steampunk expressions, clearly define these features, catalogue their ubiquity in steampunk texts, and investigate the impulse that draws steampunk fans to these features.

In compiling the reading list for my research, I did a number of searches for steampunk reading lists, including both the generalist approach of *wikipedia* and the more precise work of *steampunkopedia*. I tabulated the frequency the books appeared on each list, and compiled a list of recurrent works. I ended up with around 50 books and graphic novels, and while reading each one, I recorded major themes, characters types, settings, tone, tropes, and plotlines. Having read over 60 steampunk novels in their entirety, I am treating the texts as artifacts, and basing my conclusions on textual evidence. In the process of offering a critical vocabulary for the discussion of steampunk, identifying the aesthetic alone is the first and arguably most important step.

Unlike attempts to list ostensibly common themes or archetypes of steampunk, or simply catalogue recurring motifs or settings (EvilEgg, Falksen, Nevins, Vick), the three components I identify are found in the majority of steampunk works I examined. EvilEgg's list includes "retrofuturism" and "neo-Victorian," but contains over 70 "themes", including items as broad as "trains," and as narrow as "steam computers." Falksen's "Steampunk Style Test" lists "the Aristocrat, the Gadgeteer, the Scientist, the Explorer, the Officer, the Citizen, the

Air Pirate, [and] the Ragamuffin." Nevins's "Victorian Archetypes in a Steampunk World" lists Adventuresses, Aliens, Anarchists, Edisonades, Future War, Great Detectives, Human Monsters, Human-made monsters, and Yellow Perils. Vick's "Steampunk Litmus Test" looks more broadly at the commonalities: settings, power sources, scenarios and elements of steampunk stories. All such approaches are cumbersome, with taxonomies reminiscent of Vladmir Propp's "Functions of Narrative."

For the purposes of concision, I have restricted the investigation to narratives, primarily books, demonstrating how the components of neo-Victorianism, technofantasy, and retrofuturism are best suited for defining steampunk, inclusively accommodating a variety of steampunk narratives while exclusively drawing boundaries to avoid rendering the term meaningless. The only digression from a literary focus will be brief observations based upon my first exploration of the steampunk aesthetic used in steampunk versions of George Lucas' *Star Wars* universe. By contrasting a "steampunked" item with its original form, the differences allowed a distillation of the steampunk aesthetic. The steampunk *Star Wars* models and images provided the advantage of highly recognizable characters and vehicles to juxtapose against their steampunk counterparts. By comparing these steampunk versions of culturally iconic characters, I posited defining *components*of the steampunk aesthetic. This study confirmed that Clute and McAuley's description of steampunk as technofantasy was correct but incomplete, and that their attribution of anachronism as a key

component of steampunk was true only in cases where steampunk was set in an alternate history, not an alternate world. My conclusions from this study will be featured in each chapter detailing the three elements to help clarify how the aesthetic operates.

While I identified technofantasy as an aspect of the steampunk aesthetic early in my research (2008), the other two aspects of the steampunk aesthetic became concrete only after a period of concentrated reading and attendance at several steampunk conventions. Whereas some definitions of steampunk restrict setting to the nineteenth-century, I realized that even in cases when the setting was intended to be a form of the nineteenth-century, it was rarely historically accurate. This gave rise to the conclusion that steampunk *evokes* the nineteenth-century, not as realistic mimesis, but rather as resonant mimesis. That is to say, steampunk does not imitate, but rather evokes the Victorian period. So even when London appears in steampunk it is not the London of history, but an alternate, usually fantastical version of London.

Steampunk evocations of the nineteenth-century are arguably an example of Fredric Jameson's concept of the nostalgia mode in "Postmodernism and consumer society." Here, Jameson is speaking of George Lucas's first *Star Wars* film (1977) and *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1981) as films which satisfy a nostalgic longing to re-experience the "Saturday afternoon serial," the films of childhood:

> . . . it is a complex object in which on some first level children and adolescents can take the adventures straight, while the adult public is able

> to gratify a deeper and more properly nostalgic desire to return to that older period and to live its strange aesthetic artifacts through once again. (197)

Unlike the neo-Victorianism Dana Shiller defends against Fredric Jameson's critique of postmodern historical representations, the majority of steampunk *is* the "random cannibalization of all the styles of the past" Jameson feared (*Postmodernism* 18), which I am calling nostalgic *bricolage*. Focusing on aesthetics instead of specific political content or particular events, it is "nostalgia for the 'look' of the past without significant interest in its substance" (Shiller 538).

Further, I noted that steampunk novels were retrofuturistic, to use King and Krzywinska's term. In relation to steampunk, the term retrofuturism is likely to conjure up images of antiquated technology, of dirigibles and ornithopters, Harper Goff's *Nautilus*, or steampunk maker Datamancer's brass-worked keyboards. Discussions at conventions and online forums concerning retrofuturism are often couched in a technological framework. Yet steampunk retrofuturism is arguably much more: it is not, as it is often defined, merely how the past imagined the future. There is little about the steampunk aesthetic that realizes the aspirations of the nineteenth-century. Rather, it is the way *we* imagine the past seeing the future. In some ways, I am using the term *retrofuturism* to describe what Frank Kermode calls *temporal integration*, "our way of bundling together perception of the present, memory of the past, and expectation of the

future, in a common organization" (46). Technological expressions of retrofuturism are easy to spot: the discovery of computers such as the Analytic Engine of Gibson and Sterling's *The Difference Engine*: "The novel does not merely project the present onto the future (as cyberpunk generally tends to do) but actually takes the present and the future back into the past, by *projecting the cybernetic age onto the cultural reality of the nineteenth-century*" (Cavallaro 200, emphasis added). Retrofuturistic projections of the cybernetic age are common in steampunk, but an increase can be seen of projections of genetics or nanotechnology, decades or centuries ahead of time.

Since identifying the three *components*of the steampunk aesthetic, I have begun using the idea of a spectrum, which Jess Nevins identifies as a "more critically profitable approach" ("Defining," 517), citing steampunk writer Cherie Priest's rejection of the steampunk aesthetic as a binary: "If steampunk is regarded as operating along Priest's spectrum, texts will become 'more steampunk' or 'less steampunk' rather than regarded in a binary, is/is-not fashion" (517). Nevins notes the ongoing "endless attempts to define steampunk and time wasting arguments over those definitions," recognizing that without the identification of the "spectrum of constitutive tropes and motifs," any "profitable discussions of interpretation of meaning" will only result in more articles that identify steampunk based on a meager handful of texts, artwork, or fashion. Nevins notes that "if common usage has changed the definition of steampunk,

then critics must change their critical vocabulary and tools for discussing it" (518).

Effectively, Nevins is arguing that more critically productive approaches to studying steampunk cannot be taken while an adequate definition for steampunk remains wanting. I argue the aesthetic approach satisfies that demand, permitting Nevins's profitable discussions. Each feature of the aesthetic invites theoretical considerations, and all three together, offer a rich source for critical discussion.

Descriptive vs. Prescriptive Approaches to Steampunk Studies

My study of steampunk echoes Gary K. Wolfe's concern with the nomenclature of SF in general: "if the field is ever to establish a coherent critical vocabulary, scholars, fans, and writers each need to know what the others are talking about" (13). As will be seen, there is currently little consensus as to what steampunk is, and even where there is consensus, the proffered definitions have limited utility. I am aware of the difficulties of establishing such a vocabulary—boundaries are slippery in SF and fantasy. Nevertheless, I am in agreement with Maria Nikolajeva when she states that "[a]lthough drawing clear-cut borders between myth, folktale, fairy tale, literary fairy tale, high or heroic fantasy, science fantasy, and so on, is impossible and not always necessary, some basic generic distinction is desirable for theoretical consideration" (138).

In the discussion thread "The steampunk or not topic" on *Gothic Steam Phantastic*, Moderator Yaghish posted his observation that "[i]t's kind of weird that most discussions among steampunks are actually about the definition of the genre," citing examples of people who "come up with art and stuff…then ask 'was that steampunk (enough)?'" Yaghish went on to suggest that "it's better to make a solid definition of steampunk, and then see what fits in and what does not, instead of bending the definition with each cool and hip gadget found anywhere on the internet or elsewhere." Effectively, Yaghish was taking what Jess Nevins calls the "prescriptivist" approach to defining steampunk ("Defining," 513). That is, someone should construct a definition of steampunk, and others should adhere to that definition. This erroneously assumes steampunk is an ontic rather than semantic reality.

In "Prescriptivists vs. Descriptivists: Defining Steampunk," Nevins identifies two approaches to defining steampunk: the prescriptivists, who adhere to Jeter's definition of steampunk in *Locus* or Peter Nicholls' in the 1993 *Encyclopedia of Science Fiction*, and the descriptivists, "whose preferred definition of the term is far broader than Jeter/Nicholls and reflects its current (shambolic) status rather than its past (traditional) use" (513). Nevins rightly identifies me as the "most descriptivist" (515) of the *Journal of Neo-Victorian Studies* articles in the steampunk issue, though this was not always the case. When I began my research, I looked to the definition by Clute and McAuley in the EF, but soon found it was ill-suited to how newer steampunk had expanded

since 1997. Interviews with early steampunk writers Tim Powers, James Blaylock, and Rudy Rucker were equally useless for application to current steampunk, as the writers knew little about current steampunk literature, let alone fashion or art.

A lack of scholarship on steampunk further muddied my studies. Until Rebecca Onion published "Reclaiming the Machine: An Introductory Look at Steampunk in Everyday Practice" (2008), the only significant academic study of steampunk had been Steffen Hantke's "Difference Engines and Other Infernal Devices" (1999). While a number of articles made mention of steampunk in passing (Kelleghan, Latham), or drew attention to particular works as examples of steampunk (Fast, Gordon, Kendrick, Quigley), the broader corpus of steampunk texts remained unattended. In the rare instance when the attempt was made to look at a broad range of steampunk texts, it amounted to little more than a rehashing of Hantke's article (Sakamoto): while Hantke remains crucial to the steampunk scholar for his theoretical observations, "Difference Engines and Other Infernal Devices" is limited by its 1999 publication, with the majority of steampunk texts being published after 2000, and the expansion of steampunk into its divergent expressions beginning in 1999 and reaching a critical mass somewhere between 2005-2007. Textual studies in steampunk remain limited, as Margaret Rose noted in 2009: "Up to now, academic discussion of steampunk fiction (see Clayton, Hantke, Spencer, Sussman, Tatsumi, and others) has been almost completely confined to discussion of William Gibson and Bruce Sterling's

The Difference Engine" (319). Despite Rose's misgivings about the myopic attention paid to *The Difference Engine*, she limits her own discussion of steampunk to a single anthology of steampunk stories, *Extraordinary Engines*, published in 2008. Other studies are either of single works or series without any attention to steampunk per se (Bullen and Parsons; Gordon; Kendrick), or steampunk readings of nineteenth-century texts (Fast; Hendrix; Perschon, "Nemo"), but with the exception of, "Steampunk: Technofantasies in a neo-Victorian Retrofuture," my own condensed version of this study in *Postmodern Reinterpretations of Fairy Tales: How Applying New Methods Generates New Meanings*, no extensive academic exploration of steampunk literature has been published. Consequently, as Ferguson suggests, conclusions about steampunk remain incomplete, imagining steampunk "as a diffuse but ontologically consistent phenomenon dedicated to one central objective" (68), while the reality shows something far more complicated. While each study is "convincing in relation to specific texts and art works, these compelling arguments nonetheless smooth over and conceal important ideological divisions when projected onto steampunk practice *en masse"* (68). This is precisely why, despite Nevins' dismissive evaluation of the descriptivists approach as "shambolic" (513), I have endeavored to approach my study of steampunk in an exploratory manner.

It became clear that in order to construct a definition of steampunk, I would need to immerse myself in primary research. In short, many of my findings and conclusions are original. Given that I am a descriptivist, my work is evidence

based. From a purely academic viewpoint, there is no data for “steampunk.” It does not exist outside the media and culture products which we label as steampunk. I am not recommending every item arbitrarily labeled steampunk by RandomUser#2341 on a forum to be immediately accepted as steampunk. Instead, we can cross-index the various lists of what aficionados consider steampunk to determine whether an artwork is likely to be considered a product of steampunk culture, thereby perhaps arriving at a working definition of what constitutes steampunk art. In a personal interview at *Steam Powered*, the 2008 California steampunk convention, Jeff and Ann Vandermeer, co-editors of the *Steampunk* anthology, discussed how the subculture emerged from visual steampunk elements found in films and graphic novels, themselves inspired by steampunk literature. In an online forum thread, Jeff explained that “the key to understanding the subculture is to realize it did not come to steampunk through the literature. Instead it arose largely independent of it and is closely allied with the DIY culture” (darkfantasy.org). Defining steampunk by associating it with narrative genres ignores how steampunk has evolved from a purely narrative expression, to one used by visual arts such as fashion and décor. One does not necessarily speak of genre or narrative when analyzing steampunk fashion. Accordingly, defining steampunk unilaterally is challenged by what aspect of steampunk culture is being defined: the literature, the fashion, the bricolage artworks, or anti-authoritarian punk subculture?

The Diverse Toolbox of Speculative Literature

Any one of these aspects proves troubling to define precisely. Focusing solely on steampunk writing, we have already seen that steampunk as literature is diverse in its expression, and always has been. When I began my research, defining steampunk seemed a straightforward enough task: I would determine what prescriptivist scholars and critics said steampunk was and proceed from that definition. I would construct a starting point of "what steampunk is" by consulting the *OED* and *EF* and subsequently study works within those definitions. However, this proved more complicated than I initially imagined, especially after comparing steampunk literature, fashion, and art with these prescribed definitions.

The *OED* defines steampunk as "a subgenre of *science fiction* which has a historical setting (esp. based on industrialized, nineteenth-century society) and characteristically features steam-powered, mechanized machinery rather than electronic technology" (emphasis added). Any use of *science fiction* for clarification in definition is immediately problematic, given the challenges in determining genre boundaries for SF. James Patrick Kelly cites a Turkish website, "Definitions of Science Fiction," that offers 52 "different and sometimes conflicting attempts to characterize [SF]" (343).

While steampunk is admittedly widely understood as a subgenre of SF, it lacks the conformity to "generally accepted scientific knowledge" (Csicsery-Ronay Jr. 49) usually associated with SF. At times, as will be explored extensively in chapter four, there is a flagrant disregard for rationality, such as

James Blaylock's whimsical "Fitzall Sizes" cork solution to the problem of a black hole in "The Hole in Space" (43). In works such as Ekaterina Sedia's *The Alchemy of Stone*, steampunk seems close to a scientific fantasy, with a "presentation of supernatural phenomenon in materialist language" (Csicsery-Ronay Jr. 73). While magic is often couched in quasi-scientific terms such as alchemy (Ekaterina Sedia's *The Alchemy of Stone*), geomancy (Clay and Susan Griffith's *Greyfriar*), and thaumaturgy (China Miéville's *Perdido Street Station*), it cannot be strenuously argued that more than a handful of steampunk texts are much concerned with science, unless it be the "science" that posited aether or phlogiston as actual elements. Consequently, one can find steampunk texts categorized by publishers as SF (Cherie Priest's *Boneshaker*) or fantasy (Gail Carriger's *Soulless*). Another common misconception about steampunk is that it is a type of alternate history. Yet steampunk is not an attempt to recreate the past, or even to perform counterfactual thought experiments, as Steffen Hantke proposed (1999, 246). While aspects of alternate history are present in certain steampunk works such as Scott Westerfeld's *Leviathan* trilogy (2009-2011), Stephen Hunt's Jackelian series (2007-2012) takes place in an entirely secondary universe that resembles our own only insofar as Tolkien's Middle-Earth might be said to resemble Medieval Europe.

Like the OED, the *EF* states that steampunk is a "term applied more to science fiction than to fantasy" but admits that many stories categorized as steampunk "cross genres" (895). The *EF* makes a distinction between steampunk

and "gaslight romance" (390-91), citing the presence of technofantasy in steampunk, and a focus on recursive fantasies and the supernatural in gaslight romances; the *EF* laments the "growing habit whereby almost every fantasy which deals with the Gaslight Period is labelled steampunk," and suggests that it is useful to limit the use of steampunk as a signifier to "what are in effect historical technofantasies" (390-91). Yet both entries indicate the difficulty of such limitations, stating that "the two categories . . . point to ways of rendering closely linked original material" (895). According to the *EF*, both categories share the setting of "a romanticized, smoky, 19th-century London," and lists alternate worlds, fantasies of history, "recursive fantasies featuring iconic figures from the gaslight era" and an examination of the Victorian period and its tropes "with a modern or Postmodernist sensibility" as shared features of steampunk and gaslight romances (396). Despite the *EF*'s suggestion to limit steampunk's use to historical technofantasies, Cory Gross lists a "plethora of terms … Victorian Science Fiction, Scientific Romance, Industrial Age Science Fiction, Industrial Fantasy, Voyages Extraordinaires and Gaslamp Fantasy." All have failed to replace steampunk, which continues to be "accepted by many … simply by its popularity and the sheer weight of its use" ("Varieties" 60) as the signifier for Victorian/Edwardian SF/F. The veracity of Gross' claim can be seen by how Phil and Kaja Foglio's web comic *Girl Genius* is frequently labelled steampunk, despite the authors' preference for the term "gaslamp fantasy."

The steampunk anthology *Extraordinary Engines* defines steampunk as "a particularly engaging, entertaining, as well as thematically resonant, subgenre of science fiction, fantasy, and horror" (Gevers 7). These three branches of popular fiction were outlined by John Robert Colombo in his essay "Four Hundred Years of Fantastic Literature in Canada": SF, fantasy, and Weird. Colombo concedes that these genres are "more distinct in theory than in practice, but … do represent different approaches to storytelling." According to Colombo, SF deals with realism, and a "reasonable change" resulting from a scientific discovery or technological innovation. Fantasy traditionally eschews realism, and shares kinship with legend and myth, describing "heroic action in a world that is not out own." For Colombo, the term Weird Fiction denotes what is popularly referred to as horror, which he characterizes as a liminal space between the quotidian world and "the world charged with imaginative values." Unlike SF, Weird fiction's change is unreasonable, and the result of something "non-scientific in nature" (30). Colombo explains his taxonomy further by suggesting modes of transportation as a means of understanding how the three genres are distinct from each other: SF would use a "rocket ship, spaceship, or starship, perhaps even a flying saucer;" Fantasy a "a flying carpet or a steed that is the descendant of Pegasus;" Weird Fiction, "levitation or sudden appearances and disappearances without rationale." Colombo then suggests that readers of these genres do not "expect to encounter in a given novel or story both sleek spaceships and winged steeds, as consistency and appropriateness are required, and then muses on the

possibility of “interchangeability” between the genres (31). Steampunk represents this interchangeability, drawing liberally from all three of these traditions, creating an intertextual blend of “mixed ontologies” (Hantke 246).

The *OED* defines SF as “Imaginative fiction based on postulated scientific discoveries or spectacular environmental changes, freq. set in the future or on other planets and involving space or time travel.” In its section on fantasy, the *OED* states only that it is “A genre of literary compositions,” perhaps eschewing a fixed definition for the same reason John Clute and John Grant state in the *EF*: “The term “fantasy” is used to cover a very wide range of texts, movies, visual presentations, and so on” (viii) They quote Brian Atterbery as saying that fantasy is a “fuzzy set.” Nevertheless, they proceed to posit a “rough definition” of what they mean by fantasy:

> A fantasy text is a self-coherent narrative which, when set in our reality, tells a story which is impossible in the world as we perceive it; when set in an otherworld or secondary world, that otherworld will be impossible, but stories set there will be possible in the otherworld’s terms. An associated point, hinted at here, is that at the core of fantasy is *story*. Even the most surrealist of fantasies tells a tale . . . Two of our editorial team have argued extensively elsewhere that fantasy art is, at its heart, a narrative form. (viii)

While it could be argued that a “science fiction” or “fantasy” aesthetic could be applied to other genres as I suggest steampunk can, it would not change the fact

that both SF and fantasy already exist in generic traditions which utilize recurring themes and tropes. Steampunk texts do not have recurring themes and tropes in the way that SF and fantasy do. Instead, steampunk has recurring settings that evoke the nineteenth-century; the setting inherently contains the fashion and accoutrements of the period. Steampunk recurrently focuses on technology, but the attitude towards this is ambivalent, and therefore the themes are varied. Steampunk repeatedly combines this evocation of the Victorian era and techno fetishism in a backward glance, but that glance is likewise ambivalent, wavering between nostalgia and regret. If steampunk contains themes consistent with SF and fantasy, it is because the aesthetic has been applied to one of or both of the genres.

When Ekaterina Sedia asks questions about gender and identity through her automaton protagonist in *The Alchemy of Stone*, it is not because steampunk as a genre often explores gender and identity, but because SF has been looking at gender and identity through artificial life forms for the past century, from Asimov's *I, Robot*, to Heinlein's *Friday*, to the Cylons of the re-imagined *Battlestar Galactica*, to Bacigalupi's *The Windup Girl*. When Kenneth Oppel writes a coming-of-age story in his *Airborn* trilogy, it is not because coming-of-age stories are inherent to steampunk: it is because he is working off a much larger tradition of adventure stories targeted at the young adult reader. *The Court of the Air* has orphaned protagonists, but *Boneshaker* has a mother pursuing her son to rescue him. There are revolutionaries against the established order in

Whitechapel Gods, and loyal agents of the Queen in *The Affinity Bridge*. There is alternate history in *The Difference Engine*; there is an alternate world in *Perdido Street Station*. These are found in SF and fantasy in general: they are not restricted to steampunk.

Despite ostensibly lacking a pragmatic utility, the term steampunk has clearly proven useful in describing a certain type of literary tradition or aesthetic approach, or it would not have survived 20 years. Our current culture is alarmingly fickle—if the word steampunk had not captured some sense of the matter it was intended to indicate, it would have been discarded. Somehow, it does what Clute and Kaveny seem to be implying it does not. Despite being "inelegant, inaccurate and clunky" (Vick), steampunk stubbornly continues as the catch-all term for speculative fiction evoking the Victorian/Edwardian eras.

Since steampunk refused to go away and be replaced, the resurgence in popularity in the mid 2000s led to an ongoing attempt to arrive at a cogent definition for the term. Some steampunk fans claim steampunk does not need a definition: they know steampunk "when we see it." But the question persists: what elements produce that recognition?

Victorian Science Fiction

Some, such as J.D. Falksen and Diana Vick, both prominent steampunk personalities, define steampunk as "Victorian science fiction" ("Steampunk 101" 30, "Litmus Test"). Both Falksen and Vick qualify their use of this term: Falksen

says "[h]ere, 'Victorian' is not meant to indicate a specific culture, but rather references a time period and an aesthetic: the industrialized nineteenth-century" (30). Vick concedes that period works by writers like Verne and Wells should not be considered steampunk. But this is problematic, since this classifier already denotes the "science fiction" of the Victorian period, including any number of works listed by Paul Alkon in his *Science Fiction Before 1900*: Edgar Allan Poe's "Balloon Hoax" and "Mesmeric Revelation" (1844), Jules Verne's *Voyages Extraordinaires* (1863-1905), Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886), Mark Twain's *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* (1889), and numerous writings by H.G. Wells (1895-1914). While it may evoke these works or the period in which they were written, steampunk is not Victorian science fiction.

In 2010, an anthology of late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century speculative short fiction was released titled *Steampunk Prime*. In his introduction, "When Steampunk was Real," editor Mark Ashley boldly claims that Victorian and Edwardian SF *is* steampunk. While he concedes Edward Ellis's *Steam Man of the Prairies* as a "progenitor" of steampunk, he is not using this term in a grandfathering sense that SF scholarship uses Verne or Wells when constructing a lineage for the SF genre. Rather, avoiding all ambiguity, Ashley asserts this is where steampunk *began*: "steampunk was well under way by the 1880s, but came into its own in the 1890s" (10).

Contrary to Ashley's position, which is likely rooted more in marketing decisions than academic rigor, I firmly contend that steampunk is a postmodern phenomenon. In a slight turn of irony, Ashley himself provides my linguistic reason for making such a distinction, in his introduction to the very first short story in *Steampunk Prime*, where he does the same with terminology concerning robots:

> We should not call these steam men or automata by the name robots. That word did not pass into the English language until the translation of Karel Capek's 1920 play Rossum's Universal Robots in 1923 ... For the steampunk period they were automata and, as the essence of steampunk, they feature in our first two stories. (12)

In one paragraph, Ashley establishes and transgresses his rules of nomenclature. We are advised to avoid anachronistic terms for these nineteenth-century artificial beings: call them automata, not robots. By the same standard, *Steampunk Prime* should have been called *Scientific Romance Prime*, as the term steampunk "did not pass into the English language" until K.W. Jeter's coinage.

There are those who would protest such an approach, by retroactively subsuming works into genre distinctions, regardless of when they were written. This approach is unhelpful in establishing coherent shorthand for discussing steampunk. It seems analogous to the suggestion that *The Eddas* and *Beowulf* are high fantasy. Tolkien used these as inspiration to write *The Lord of the Rings*, but that does not make them high fantasy, an arguably twentieth-century innovation.

However, there are other reasons for rejecting Victorian and Edwardian period speculative fiction as steampunk: there is nothing retrofuturistic or neo-Victorian about it, two elements that are key to the steampunk aesthetic. Mark Hodder illustrates this in his novel, *The Strange Affair of Spring-Heeled Jack*, when the enigmatic Jack names Sir Richard Burton one of the great Victorians, to which Burton replies, "What the hell is a Victorian?" (126). In Hodder's London, Victoria was assassinated: accordingly, there are no Victorians. But this passage comments on steampunk at large: contemporary historians labeled nineteenth-century British citizens Victorians: they would not necessarily have thought of themselves as such. This is the perspective of the backward gaze, which is intrinsic to steampunk: literary or popular, political or frivolous, steampunk is a commentary on some facet of the nineteenth-century, even when it is not situated there.

What Ashley has collected in *Steampunk Prime* is not retrofuturistic, but futuristic. In George Parsons Lathrop's "In the Deep of Time," the technology of the future dismisses the dreams of the nineteenth-century: "They are on an entirely different plan from the flying machines which were announced but had not yet come into use when I was last alive" (104). While Victorian and Edwardian speculative fiction contains elements steampunk emulates, they remain antecedents to steampunk: decidedly *futuristic*, not *retro*futuristic. These works are the SF of their day, not the nostalgic recreation of a romanticized past. As Steven Marcus states, "as we try to understand the past we try to understand

ourselves in relation to the past" (xix). There is a difference, and I think it is wrong-headed to claim Victorian and Edwardian speculative literature as steampunk, or to use terms like *Victorian Science Fiction* that might lead someone to assume this is the case. Steampunk is, at the earliest, a mid-twentieth-century innovation.

Not Enough Punk: The Ambivalent Ideology of Steampunk

Mark Ashley also refers to steampunk as "steampowered science fiction" (9). Likewise, a good number of articles and forum discussions have been devoted to determining what constitutes the "steam" in steampunk, focusing on considerations of both historical and anachronistic technology: the advent and heyday of steam technology occurred in or around the nineteenth-century, therefore steampunk must take place in the nineteenth-century. Oddly, the inverse is also argued: because steampunk takes place in the nineteenth-century, it must include steam technology to be steampunk. The trouble with either argument is that steampunk literature and art is often lacking in steam technology: steampunk writers and artists are more likely to rely on the technofantasy fuel sources of aether and phlogiston and the like than coal and the production of steam.

It also betrays a hopelessly narrow view of the type of technology steampunk works often employ. When Gail Carriger's *Soulless* was first released, detractors stated it was not "steampunk enough." Justification was often on the technical end: the book was set in Victorian London, but where was the

anachronistic technology, the retrofuturistic mechanical innovations? This simplistic approach to determining what was or was not Steampunk bothered me, since it used an exceedingly narrow understanding of technology. At my first panel at a Steampunk convention, "Victorian Technology" with Christopher Garcia and J. Daniel Sawyer, we discussed medicine and chemistry at length. At the time, both were rare in Steampunk narratives outside a nod to Moreau or Jekyll and Hyde. Spiritualism was also a "science" in the Victorian era. In the dabblings of the Hypocras Club's theories of the soul, Carriger effectively deals with these less-taken roads of steampunked, nineteenth-century technology.

Nevertheless, there were those in the Steampunk community who continued to act as naysayers to *The Parasol Protectorate* series. I suspect a number of factors contributed to these dismissals: the series was marketed as a romance, and "real steampunk" could not be romance (this by the "serious" Steampunk aficionados, who wish to exclude any silly girls from their tree fort), there was not enough science (as though there was a rigorous attention to science in Steampunk at the time), and it had vampires and werewolves. This last objection was a variation of the "not enough science" argument which only underscores how ignorant the scene was of its own conceits; despite usually being used as a catch-all substance for making impossible technologies work, aether was somehow scientific, but werewolves and vampires were not, despite Carriger's pesudo-scientific treatment of them in her alternate world. In short, I found the arguments unconvincing, especially as I got further into my own

research. There are precious few steampunk works outside *The Difference Engine*, Cherie Priest's *Clockwork Century* and J. Daniel Sawyer's "Cold Duty" (2010) that use steam as the motive power in their technology. To limit what constitutes steampunk in this way is far too restrictive, as will be explored at length in chapter four.

More difficult to put to rest, the "punk" suffix is the proverbial chestnut of steampunk culture, producing seemingly endless ruminations upon the absence or presence of a counter-cultural punk attitude in steampunk. Issues one and seven of *Steampunk Magazine* contained particular articles devoted to putting punk "back" into steampunk (Ratt, 1 Killjoy "Moving Train" 5-7), as though it had been there at the outset and then disappeared. The prevalence of this misconception led Rebecca Onion to speculate an origin for it in her article "Reclaiming the Machine: An Introductory Look at Steampunk in Everyday Practice." She writes that "many of the people who participate in this subculture see reading, constructing, and writing about steam technology as a highly libratory countercultural practice" and then adds, "hence the addition of the word 'punk'" (139). This mistakenly implies there was intentionality in Jeter's statement: an uncorroborated conclusion. Both Tim Powers and James Blaylock have verified in personal conversation that Jeter was almost certainly making a joke. And yet, articles and forum threads continue to appeal to the punk suffix, conflating it with political activism and postcolonialism (Goh, Killjoy, "Politics"), or in certain cases, "self-declaredly radical and openly anarchistic North American branches"

of the steampunk subculture (Ferguson 70). These arguments often resort to literary foundations, citing Michael Moorcock and Alan Moore as examples of steampunk writers who espouse anarchism. By the same logic, I could argue steampunk as inherently Christian: Tim Powers is a Catholic, James Blaylock admits Christian writers C.S. Lewis and Charles Williams as inspirations ("Meet James Blaylock"), and Jeter's *Morlock Night* is about a battle to preserve Christendom.

It has been said often that there "isn't enough punk in steampunk" by way of contrast to cyberpunk, but what did the punk in cyberpunk actually mean? Was it really a reference to the 1970s DIY culture of the UK? Was it about the Sex Pistols or the Dead Kennedys? There is definitely an aspect of cyberpunk concerned with cultures which could be construed as punk, so long as the term punk was being used in an expansive way. A narrow definition of punk would not allow cyberpunk to be punk, anymore than steampunk is punk. What does Greg Bear's "Petra" in the cyberpunk anthology *Mirrorshades* have to do with punk?

What is particularly galling about advocates for steampunk as a social movement is that their manifestos tend to insist that their expression of steampunk is "real," while others are reactionary and escapist, a problem Christine Ferguson addresses in her article on steampunk ideology:

> The New York City-based Catastrophone Orchestra and Arts collective . . . in the inaugural issue of the U.S.-based *Steampunk Magazine* . . . insists on a symbolic political function for steampunk, one that it elevates to the

> status of authenticating *sine qua non.* 'Real' steampunk is the angry opposite of an uncanny neo-Victorianism imagined as wholly reactionary and escapist. It is certainly nothing new for subcultures to invoke some kind of 'Other' against which to define and manufacture their own authenticity, but this foil has habitually come in the form of an imagined mainstream . . . For the Catastraphone collective, steampunk's other is not the so-called mainstream or even the contemporary, but rather another cultural form of Victoriana whose external aesthetic trappings are too close for comfort. (71)

Ferguson's assessment of the politically driven camps of steampunk subculture echoes my humourous breakdown of steampunk subculture's "tribes," where I called radically political steampunks "TruePunks," who "are usually a mix of leftist and anarchist politics, and dismissive of those who see steampunk as a hobby or something 'fun'" (9). What becomes clear when investigating the friction between groups in the subculture is the breadth of diversity among steampunks. They are drawn to steampunk by a variety of attractors: fashion, literature, politics, nostalgia, and as with other subcultures, often seek to shape steampunk in their own image. In my own experience, this has manifested as disappointment at how many steampunks have no connection to the literature that inspired the subculture. In others, such as the Catastraphone collective, offense is taken with steampunks who have no inclination to engage in politically charged debates around their hobby. Depending on one's proclivities toward exclusionary

behaviours, a valorisation of some groups occurs: Makers are the "true" steampunks, while those who simply glue cogs together on jewellery are pretenders. These general examples, and Ferguson's precise one, are representative of actual conversations I have either taken part in or been eavesdropper to, both in person and online. Ferguson sums this dichotomy up concisely when she says that "for some of the subculture's trackers, a steampunk without an explicitly ideological/heroic edge is inevitably a derivative one" (75).

This line of thinking clouds the steampunk scholar's inquiry, as already evidenced by Onion's erroneous assumption that the 'punk' in steampunk is the result of a conscious decision on Jeter's part to associate the term with political activism and postcolonialism. If a steampunk scholar were to proceed as though this "agenda setting, first wave criticism" (Ferguson 68) were correct without engaging in extensive primary research, she would likely find herself in error. Nor is this association with steampunk and politics limited to scholarly explorations of steampunk subculture. In his introduction to Ann and Jeff Vandermeer's *Steampunk*, Jess Nevins betrayed his own bias towards second-wave steampunk when he denounced it as having abandoned the politics of the seminal works:

> Steampunk, like all good punk, rebels against the system it portrays (Victorian London or something quite like it), critiquing its treatment of the underclass, its validation of the privileged at the cost of everyone else, its lack of mercy, its cutthroat capitalism . . . But most second generation steampunk is not true steampunk – there is little to nothing "punk" about

> it. The politics of the punk position have largely disappeared from second generation steampunk, and most of it is more accurately described as "steam sci-fi" or, following John Clute, "gaslight romance." (10)

Here we see the same prescriptivist approach I have already outlined, where a so-called expert determines what the "true" expression is, and dictates this idea to others. Were there some homogeneity to the seminal steampunk texts that supported Nevins's contention that first generation steampunk attends to these concerns, I could concede an original ideology to steampunk. But first generation steampunk, as has already been demonstrated, does not possess such ideological uniformity. Neither is any second generation steampunk I am aware of guilty of the sins Nevins attributes to it, "with its steam machines used against the American natives in Westerns, and steam-powered war machines being used in the service of the British army conquering Mars" (10). Perhaps this is simply an "almost perfect recapitulation of the Hebdigean thesis" whereby Nevins can posit steampunk as a "once-'authentic' and homogeneously oppositional subculture" which, upon reaching critical mass, "is infiltrated by the media, and abandons its political edge" (Ferguson 75). But this would require us to accept two fallacies: that steampunk was intrinsically political at one time, and that it has ceased to be so. While many second-wave steampunk works deny Nevins' accusation, Ferguson notes how, ironically, "Nevins' assessment is . . . somewhat undone by its placement":

> The collected stories that follow in the VanderMeers' anthology testify abundantly to the continued presence of political critique and dystopic anti-romanticism in contemporary steampunk writing. Ted Chiang's 'Seventy-Two Letters' (2000) is particularly notable here. Set in a fiercely class-stratified Victorian future in which Kabbalah has replaced computing as the primary information technology, it follows the efforts of radical nomenclator Robert Stratton to create an automatous engine that will liberate the poor from mindless, back-breaking work. At the same time, he must fend off the manoeuvres of a menacing scientific elite, who seek to use his inventions to eugenically restrict the breeding of the underclass. The question that arises after reading the story is not if it retains first-generation steampunk's political edge, but rather how it would be possible to read Chiang's second-generation story in any other way. (86)

Yet even Ferguson, despite seeing this hole in Nevins's argument, assumes he is correct in the statement that all seminal steampunk was intentionally ideological. She states that first-wave steampunk "is characterised by texts which adopt the framework of alternative history to explicitly condemn nineteenth- and twentieth-century systems of power and domination," adding that, despite fantastic elements, these works' "socio-political targets are nonetheless unmistakeable and relatively unambiguous." Like so many other critics, she cites only Moorcock's *Warlord of the Air* as exemplar (73). As was demonstrated in the previous

chapter, while Moorcock's steampunk is admittedly political, it is but one of many early steampunk works, and arguably in the minority in its serious engagement of postcolonial criticism.

I would suggest that political steampunks speak from a position of regret, one of the emotions Rob Latham identifies as "typical" to retrofuturism (341). The political stance of steampunk is often a reaction to colonial attitudes and the hegemony of Empire. While resistance to these ideas existed in the Victorian period, its presence in steampunk is more the product of hindsight, a backward glance on the part of a postmodern individual considering history. This is crucial in our understanding of steampunk: the direction of the gaze, into the past, not the future per se. Yet even this glance can be ambivalent, since Latham balances retrofuturist regret against nostalgia, the romantic longing for an idealized past. As will be shown later in the chapter on retrofuturism, both these emotions are expressed in steampunk literature. The aesthetic does not demand one or the other, but permits the use of both, sometimes complexly in the same work, which speaks to the elasticity of the steampunk aesthetic. As was demonstrated in the previous chapter, there is room for both the nostalgic whimsy of Blaylock, and the regret-filled ponderings of Moorcock. As Ferguson notes, "the real and substantial commitments—political, historical, emotional, and aesthetic—of individual steampunks have not crystallised into collective subcultural tenets" (67). This ambivalence toward the supposed oppositional politics is only the beginning of

the complexity surrounding limiting the boundaries for what constitutes steampunk.

Mirroring the Mirroshades

A tacit association is sometimes made between cyberpunk and steampunk, given a number of shared authors (William Gibson, K.W. Jeter, Rudy Rucker, Bruce Sterling) and the temporal proximity of both as 1980s phenomena (Ancient Mariner; Squidoo; Brothers Handmade; Steampunk Resource). Contrary to these comparisons, steampunk does not share cyberpunk's "nihilistic and dystopian ethos" (Novotny 104), and only occasionally echoes particular cyberpunk themes, such as a distrust of corporations analogous to the opposition to Empire. However, cyberpunk and steampunk clearly share what Patrick Novotny calls a "postmodern sensibility of cultural eclecticism, fragmentation, indeterminacy, and parody" (99). The affinities are broad ones, encompassed by Novotny's use of the terms *bricolage* and *detournement*. Novotny uses these terms to discuss cyberpunk alone, but many of his statements ring true for steampunk, both first and second waves. Precision terms describing both cyberpunk and steampunk style tend to fail, since both exhibit cyberpunk's incorporation of "a wide range of popular culture forms and literary styles" (113). Accordingly, analyses such as J.E. Remy's web article, "The 'Punk' Subgenre," have investigated the punk approach in the various subgenre writing styles given the suffix "punk" in the 1980s, tend to be very limiting in their application:

> The suffix "-punk" started to appear in the names of a variety of subgenres of speculative fiction by authors who wanted to break from traditional modes of writing and denote a concurrence between subgenres that makes use of "punk" tools. These tools include the free thought of postmodern literary techniques such as confessional poetry, stream of consciousness, non-linear storytelling, linguistic calisthenics, and literary appreciation beyond the academic. Themes are typically countercultural, focused on underground movements, marginalized groups, and anti-establishment tendencies . . . Settings are gritty, downbeat, and shocking and urban locations where lives are enhanced by technology and information . . . Some "punk" subgenres have been criticized as being overly categorized and unnecessary . . . but the nontraditional style has provided new expressive techniques for contemporary literature. (web)

While Remy may be correct in regards to the "cult following" subgenres of "cyberpunk, splatterpunk, timepunk, and mythpunk," it is only on very rare occasions that one sees these particular non-traditional writing styles employed in steampunk fiction. Paul DiFilippo's *Steampunk Trilogy* works with some of these, but many steampunk novels are written as very traditional narratives. Perhaps one could take the ethos of this avant-garde approach to writing and apply it to the art or music that has been labelled steampunk, or even posit that the inclusion of anachronistic elements in steampunk costuming is transgressive, since it often introduces modern approaches to its neo-Victorian style. But even in those art

forms, there are those who adhere to more traditional approaches in their steampunk expressions. While fashion designers Autumn Adamme of *Dark Garden* corsetry and Kate Lambert of *Steampunk Couture* deviate from Victorian styles by adding modern flourishes, companies like *Gentlemen's Emporium* are devoted to a higher degree of historical accuracy.

A more profitable approach is found not by looking for narrative or micro-stylistic similarities between cyberpunk and steampunk, but in paying attention to their shared traits as postmodern fiction, whereby the writing "punk," if one wishes to use that term, can be found in the use of parody as "the transgression of aesthetic and representational norms" (Novotny 100). Both cyberpunk and steampunk employ *bricolage* and *detournement* in the creation of this postmodern parody.

Early in my study of steampunk, I suggested *pastiche* as a useful term for understanding the mash-up of many elements in steampunk. While a number of steampunk writings attempt to imitate earlier styles or a particular author's work, as evidenced by Forlini's pairings for a steampunk course syllabus, many steampunk writers combine elements from various story traditions, not necessarily a single story or author in particular. Accordingly, *bricolage* seems a stronger candidate to describe steampunk, indicating a patch-work of diverse elements. Novotny, summarizing Jim Collins' *Uncommon Cultures: Popular Culture and Postmodernism*, uses *bricolage* to denote "the transgressive activity of individuals who are able to appropriate cultural styles and images for their own ends" (102).

Perhaps more extensively than cyberpunk, steampunk exemplifies Novotny's postmodern *bricolage*, as it "extracts 'found' materials out of their original context and juxtapositions them in other representational settings" (100), engaging in the postmodern novel's "poaching" of multiple genres (McHale 25). Whether it is called poaching, pastiche, bricolage, or detournement, the constant is the act of appropriation. I am engaging in my own act of appropriation, using the terms *bricolage* and *detournement* to indicate how a steampunk artist's act of appropriation is impelled by nostalgia or regret.

Appropriation sometimes moves on to what Novotny calls *detournement*, "the appropriation of existing cultural fragments in such a way as to alter and invert their meaning" (100). Building on Novotny's argument, I suggest that steampunk always involves *bricolage*, the weaving together of dissociated elements to create something new, but only occasionally moves on to *detournement*, since it often lacks what Csicsery Ronay Jr. calls the "political-aesthetic motives of alienated subcultures" common to cyberpunk (267). When steampunk involves both *bricolage* and *detournement*, it has the potential to engage in a more sophisticated postcolonial commentary, of the sort critics like Nevins, Goh, and Killjoy demand, as shown by Pablo Vasquez's conflation of *detournement* with community as ideological weapons in "Steampunk: The Ethical Spectacle." But it must be stressed that this is a *potential*, not *inherent* aspect of steampunk. Responding to Bruce Sterling's accusation that current steampunk is "formalist masturbation" in the Atompunk mailing list, Michael

Doyle claimed that "*detournement* is exactly what were [sic] in the business of here," before speaking to the spectrum of steampunk collage:

> Bad steampunkers just randomly stick gears on shit, while really good steampunkers [like the folks behind the Sultan's Elephant for example] arrive at something truly remarkable and new through the byzantine design process of understanding, problem defining, contextualizing, recontextualizing, narrative writing, re-recontextualizing, etc.

While Doyle is speaking of physical steampunk art, the idea clearly holds true for steampunk narratives as well, as evidenced by Jess Nevins' estimation of the need for political subtext in *true* steampunk. While I am uninterested in entering the discussion for what constitutes the seemingly transcendent idea of *true* steampunk, a conversation that strikes me as far too reminiscent of arguments among evangelical Christians for what constitutes a *true* Christian, I am interested in delineating a spectrum of intent on the part of steampunk artists and writers using *bricolage* and *detournement*. The spectrum should not be read as valorising one of these positions over the other: I enjoy Blaylock's whimsical *bricolage* as much as Moorcock's political *detournement*.

Greg Broadmore's *Doctor Grordbort* series provides a strong example of this spectrum. At the purely surface level, the Grordbort books and the art that inspired them are set in a fictional world which draws upon 1930s space opera and serials, the figure of the Great White Hunter, and present-day gun culture in the United States. Those three elements, seen only as *bricolage*, without any

gestures toward *detournement* would likely end up being read as perpetuating misogynist, patriarchal, and ethnocentric attitudes: the series often implies that owning one of Doctor Grordbort's weapons will make males more manly and, therefore, more desirable to women. The hero of the series, Lord Cockswain, cavalierly travels to alien worlds and murders the inhabitants to mount their heads as trophies. However, Broadmore's heavy use of ironic tone renders the use of these elements parodies: As one advertisement in *Doctor Grordbort's Contrapulatronic Dingus Directory*, a catalogue for a line of rayguns and other retrofuturistic weapons boasts, owning a "Goliathan 83 infinity beam projector" will "settle your woes."

> Is that wife backchatting and a vote-mongering?
>
> Man servant not fulfilling his "duties"?
>
> Perhaps your daughter's buck-tooth suitor's giving unwanted grief?
>
> Make their posteriors clench with anxiety by flexing your new Goliathon!
>
> *Some say its ambient radiations increase the manhood.**
>
> *tumefacterous growths not covered under warranty. (4)

It would be difficult to miss Broadmore's lampoon of machismo and gun culture in his consistent references to phallic compensation through possession of a Big Gun. But this lampoon is achieved in the pages of the catalogue and its sequel, *Victory: Scientific Adventure Violence for Young Men and Literate Women*, in meticulously detailed images of ornate rayguns. The gun designs are strangely realistic, combining elements of real-world firearms both current and antique,

with space opera rayguns that borrow from the designs of *Buck Rogers* and *Flash Gordon* serials and comic strips.

The move from *bricolage* to *detournement* is the difference between technological retrofuturism and what I call social retrofuturism, whereby the original meanings of aspects of the Victorian era are transformed in steampunk; for example, women and people-of-colour are granted agency: "*Detournement* . . . constitutes the process of cultural representations and significations becoming subverted into their opposite" (Novotny 100). However, steampunk appropriation of Victorian and Edwardian elements does not immediately signify a move toward *detournement*. Steampunk collage can simply be the unreflective use of these elements, producing at best, a whimsical tale such as James Blaylock's "Ape-Box Affair," or at worst, a reification of colonial values, such as the Yellow Peril stereotype of Asian villains in Jonathan Green's *Leviathan Rising*.

Broadmore's approach to appropriation echoes Thomas Pynchon's use of the all-boy airship crew, the Chums of Chance, in his epic *Against the Day*, which Brian McHale calls a parody of boys' adventure novels such as Tom Swift. McHale points to Pynchon's use of "corny idioms, the conspicuous clichés . . . the patriotic bunting and uniforms, the intrusive and patronizing narrator, the overfastidious scare quotes" (16) as stylistic markers for Pynchon's parody. The Chums are arguably a fiction-within-fiction, larger-than-life in much the same way Broadmore's Lord Cockswain is, mirroring stereotyped heroes of Victorian and Edwardian adventure stories. As the embodiment of the boy's adventure

story, their adolescent fervor gives the first pages of the book a lighthearted and optimistic tone—one can almost hear the Sousa March while reading the first page.

While *Against the Day* is a *bricolage*/*detournement* of the highest caliber, pulling from many Victorian/Edwardian genres for its inspiration such as dime novel Westerns, Edwardian detective fiction, African and polar adventure, scientific romance, and British "shocker" Spy Fiction (McHale 18), Pynchon uses the Chums as a particular fiction-within-fiction, the embodiment of optimistic hope, perhaps. As McHale has noted, "[t]he Chums almost never interact directly with protagonists of the other genres . . . [f]rom the perspective of the other characters, they are *fictitious*, heroes of a series of novels" (22). There is one moment in the dime-novel Western thread of *Against the Day* which demonstrates this. A son is reading a dime novel, "The Chums of Chance at the Ends of the Earth," one of the Chums' many published adventures while trying to get his father's corpse home for burial:

> The cover showed an athletic young man (it seemed to be the fearless Lindsay Noseworth) hanging off a ballast line of an ascending airship of futuristic design, trading shots with a bestially rendered gang of Eskimos below. Reef began to read . . . For the next couple of days he enjoyed a sort of dual existence, both in Sorocco and at the Pole . . . At odd moments, now, he found himself looking at the sky, as if trying to locate somewhere in it the great airship. As if those boys might be agents of a

> kind of extrahuman justice who could . . . even pass on to Reef wise advice . . . And sometimes in the sky, when the light was funny enough, he thought he saw something familiar . . . "It's them, Pa," he nodded back over his shoulder. "They're watching us, all right. And tonight I'll read you some more out of that story. You'll see." (214-15)

The text is ambiguous enough to allow for both the possibility that the Chums are actually fictional characters, or that they are real denizens of the world Reef Traverse inhabits. *Against the Day* plays with both concepts. The world of Reef Traverse is real and gritty, while the world of the Chums is one of high adventure and wild speculative inventions and journeys. Yet both these worlds are tied together through the network of characters who have passing contact with the Chums. Despite inhabiting the same universe, the Chums remain somehow more fictional than Reef or his family, almost aware of the fact that they inhabit a novel. The "exact degree of fictitiousness" possessed by the Chicago Fair is what permits "the boys' access and agency" while the "harsh nonfiction world waited outside the White City's limits" (36). Later, engaged in a digression away from their lives as an airship crew, they sojourn at Candlebrow U., where "the crew of the Inconvenience would find exactly the mixture of nostalgia and amnesia to provide them a reasonable counterfeit of the Timeless" (406). McHale sees the distance between Pynchon's "parody of juvenile-inventor fiction" and the reader's reality as essential to Pynchon's use of them near the end of the book, qualifying them "to serve as estranged witnesses of the horrors of the Great War" (36-37):

> It is a measure of Pynchon's sophistication as a cognitive cartographer that he also takes into account his own historical position— which is to say, our historical position as latter-day readers of these early-twentieth-century popular genres, looking back from the distance of a century at the world on the eve of the Great War. Pynchon introduces his, and our, historical perspective into the picture through his parodic and revisionist handling of the popular genres in *Against the Day*. (McHale 36)

Again, it is the backward gaze which informs the third element of the steampunk aesthetic, *retrofuturism*. We will deal with this episode in the Chums' adventures at length in Chapter Five. The backward gaze of steampunk is closely tied to *bricolage* and *detournement* through Latham's retrofuturist emotions of nostalgia and regret. As I stated in the introduction, I use these terms to differentiate between two modes of nostalgic response.

As is well documented, *nostalgia* was coined in 1688 by Johannes Hofer to denote a physically disabling longing for home (Bonnett 5; Boym 3; Davis 1; Glazer 53-36). The term has since come to mean a longing for the past: the experienced past of the individual as well as a more general sense of loss in a past that may lie outside the realm of personal experience: ". . . in light of the word's great vogue in recent years, it is conceivable that . . . in time [nostalgia will] acquire connotations that extend its meaning to any sort of positive feeling toward anything past, no matter how remote or historical" (Davis 6-8). While nostalgia is relatively easy to define, its usefulness is contested. While recent scholarship has

begun exploring nostalgia's radical possibilities (Bonnett, Boym, Glazer, Hutcheon, Ladino), the perception of nostalgia as conservative and reactionary persists (Bonnett 4; Glazer 7). Even among scholars investigating radical iterations of nostalgia, tendencies in nostalgia include a conservative position. Boym contrasts the conservative *nostos,* or restorative nostalgia with *algoi*, or reflective nostalgia: "Restorative nostalgia manifests itself in total reconstructions of monuments of the past, while reflective nostalgia lingers on ruins, the patina of time and history, in the dreams of another place and another time" (41). Both Bonnett and Glazer explore the idea of radical nostalgia, while Ladino uses the term *official nostalgia* for conservative, "totalizing metanarratives of return that posit coherent origins as points on a progressive timeline leading to the present day" and *counter nostalgia,* which "envisions the "home" as fractured, fragmented, complicated, and layered; to "return" to this sort of home is to revisit a dynamic past and to invert or exploit official narratives in ways that challenge dominant histories" ("Longing for Wonderland"). In all of these cases, it is admitted that while there are conservative, potentially paralyzing nostalgic tendencies, nostalgia has the potential to be radical and potentially mobilizing. Further, each of these scholars agrees that nostalgia's radical tendencies involve irony and appropriation. Given the pejorative nature of nostalgia in many scholar's perceptions, I have chosen to refer to the conservative longings for the past simply as nostalgia. I use regret, Latham's other retrofuturist emotion, to denote potentially radical tendencies in steampunk nostalgia. These two

tendencies will be further demarcated by associating *bricolage* with conservative "nostalgia" and *detournement* with radical "regret." These tendencies will be explored in each chapter, demonstrating that the neo-Victorianism, technofantasy, and retrofuturism of steampunk can be put to both conservative and radical ends.

Chapter Three: Aesthetic I Neo-Victorianism

Steam Wars and Neo-Victorianism

At the outset of this and the following chapters dealing with the three *components*of the steampunk aesthetic, I will begin the discussion by demonstrating how I first discerned the three *components*in my study of the steampunk Star Wars images[5]. The online phenomenon of steampunk Star Wars images and models was started by digital artist Eric Poulton, in turn inspired by a Steampunk Lightsaber featured in *Wired* magazine online (Beschizza 2007). Poulton's first image, of a Steampunk Darth Vader, appeared at Poulton's blog on February 5, 2007. By the time *Ain't It Cool News*, a popular fan news site, featured Poulton's re-imagined images on March 23, 2007 (McWeeny) the artist had completed three more images. The following day, the high profile attention on Poulton's images prompted Roberto Ortiz of the *CG Society Forum*, a "'Society of Digital Artists,"' to challenge forum members to create concept art for a hypothetical "Star Wars: Steampunk" game. The thread was so popular that submissions continued long past the contest deadline, with a second challenge being issued in 2009. The popularity of Steam Wars in steampunk circles has only grown since, with cosplayers coming to general fan conventions like *Dragoncon* in costumes inspired by or directly based upon the 2D art produced by the artists in my study.

[5] For the purpose of concision, steampunk Star Wars re-visions will be referred to in this paper by the term Steam Wars, the name for Sillof's line of steampunk modified Star Wars action figures.

I restricted my analysis to the works of Poulton and six artists from around the globe: Marcel E. Mercado, Daniel Helzer, and Sillof, United States; Miljenko Simic, Croatia; Björn Hurri, United Kingdom; and Alister Lockhart, Australia. With the exception of Sillof, all of these artists work in a two-dimensional digital medium. While Steam Wars has been re-visioned in 3-dimensional digital art as well as physical models, I have included only Sillof's modelling work, given that he is the only artist to modify the entire cast of major characters in all three of the original Star Wars films "in an antiquated Victorian style" (Sillof.com 2007).

As I introduced in the previous chapter, Steampunk is less concerned with recreating the past than an idea of the past, a nostalgic romanticism of what the Victorian era represents, not how it actually was. Like steampunk, *Star Wars* is invested with a nostalgia that "does not portray a real past but rather evokes a sense of cultural past" (Wetmore 7). It is this sense of cultural past Steffen Hantke refers to in steampunk when he says that "Victorianism, what little there is of it in the conventional sense, appears not as a historical given but as a textual construct open to manipulation and modification" (248). Inasmuch as steampunk plays with counterfactual histories, it also purports to "[take] the visual qualities of the Steam Age and [reapply] them to modern political and social sensibilities" allegedly with the result that, although "steampunk enthusiasts like the grandeur of the British Empire" they are not necessarily "willing to accept the racism and colonialism upon which it was built" (G.D. Falksen qtd. in Poeter 2008). The invocation of the term Victorientalism is a clear indication of why steampunk

needs to deal with this horizon in a more complex fashion than just saying that we can engage in Orientalism because steampunk happens in a past that never existed. While anti-racisism and anti-colonialism may be the stated intention of steampunk, the expression can often be quite different, as seen by Nic Ottens' editorial in *The Gatehouse Gazette*:

> Unlike our present day of interconnectedness, globalization and what-not, up until the nineteenth-century, the Orient was very much a place of mystery, inhabited by people alien to Europeans' experience, an exotic, cruel, and barbaric refuge for Western imagination. Critics of Orientalism have done much to cast shame upon our often patronizing and bizarre representations of Eastern life and tradition, but fortunately for those incorrigible aficionados of Oriental romance, *steampunk allows us to reject the chains of reality and all the racism and guilt associated with it*, to explore anew this imagined world of sultans and saberrattling [sic] Islamic conquerors; harems and white slavery; samurai, dragons and dark, bustling bazaars frequented by the strangest sort of folk. Isn't this, after all, steampunk's very premise? To delve into a past that never really was. ("Editorial" 3, emphasis added)

Sadly, the Steam Wars images occasionally reflect Ottens' view. To accurately reflect the anti-racist claims of steampunk, Steam Wars images should ostensibly offer versions of Lucas's characters and universe which write (or draw) against the grain of *Star Wars* films' "construction of the Rebellion as predominantly

white" while creating a world "in which Asians are evil and no humans of color are presented as either worthwhile role models or active role models for viewers" (Wetmore 6).

The obvious target for assessing how well Steam Wars deals with the issues of race and ethnicity is Eric Poulton's *Jabba the Hutt*, which renders the galactic crime-boss in a *bricolage* of Orientalist imagery, a mix of yellow peril and middle-eastern exoticism. The image spurred a lively debate as to whether the use of racial stereotypes in recursive fantasies such as steampunk was acceptable or not. Is reiteration of the racial stereotyping found in original works of pulp or Victorian fiction permissible as homage to those genres? The consensus deemed it anachronistic to ignore the stereotypes, but warned that it remains the responsibility of current artists and writers to provide subversive, counter-cultural approaches to issues of race in such works. Poulton admitted his steampunk Jabba was based on Ming the Merciless from Flash Gordon ("Stereotypes"), a character in turn based upon Fu Manchu, both representative of the early twentieth-century fear of Asian influence as agent of moral corruption in North America. Poulton admirably conceded that although his "intentions weren't racist…intentions are largely irrelevant when it comes to illustration" ("Stereotypes").

In all Steam Wars images, the Rebellion is a Eurocentric one. Marcel E. Mercado's Red 5 Luke depicts a recruitment poster with a stars-and-stripes backdrop reminiscent of American propaganda posters during World War II. Building off of Delacroix's *La liberté guidant le people*, Mercado's Leia Leading

contains the obvious addition of stars to the red, white, and blue flag Leia carries in emulation of Lady Liberty. This construction of a WASP Rebellion is further established by the images of Imperial figures and ships, often cast as Prussian Eastern Europeans. In addition to papal robes, Mercado's Palpatine has an Eisernes Kreuz hung from a chain around his neck; nearly every Steam Wars image of Vader exchanges the iconic samurai-styled helmet with a version based on Prussian design, sometimes augmented by Prussian military garb. In Sillof's line, Vader and every Imperial soldier wears a gas mask, an innovation first used in war by the Germans in WWI. While this may arguably be a superior choice from a purely design standpoint, imagining the Prussian East as Empire and the American or British West as Rebellion or Resistance does not represent the historical realities of the Victorian period.

To illustrate what would elevate the *bricolage* of these images to *detournement*, I will engage in a brief exercise in recursive fantasy based upon Marcel E. Mercado's version of Ben Kenobi. Here the venerable Jedi Knight is imagined as *bricolage* of Alec Guiness, the historical Richard Burton, and the fictional Allan Quatermain of *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen* (Moore & O'Neill). The once great Jedi is pictured "Hooked to the hookah pipe" beside text which asks the question, "What will happen once our intrepid heroes decide to fight? Will he be too passive to help join their plight?" followed by an invitation to "Join us for a rousing tale of Wonder and Discovery" (system404).

This pulp-style advertisement is much like the ones found throughout Moore and O'Neill's graphic novel, establishing a link of homage or inspiration. The Allan Quatermain of *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen* is an opium addict, and Mercado states that he had originally intended his Obi-Wan to be smoking opium, but chose the hookah for "design purposes." If Moore and O'Neill's Quatermain is conflated with Mercado's steampunk Kenobi, then it should be concluded that Kenobi, as evidenced by the combination of English tweed with Indian turban, has broken ties with the Empire he once served, which in Mercado's image is arguably the Steam Wars equivalent of Britain. Further, to incorporate the intention of Lucas's idea of the Empire as "[a] very powerful and technological superpower trying to take over a little country of peasants" (qtd. in Wetmore 2), the Empire should be British: while a Germanic-inspired empire echoes the design aesthetic of Lucas's Empire, the British Empire has the distinction of having been, at its height, the largest in human history.

Revolt and resistance occurred throughout the British Empire's history, but the Indian Revolt of 1857 was particularly devastating to the British conceptualization of the colonial Empire as indestructible (Chakravarty 4). Given the hookah and the turban, it can be conjectured that the planet Tatooine, where Lucas's Kenobi went in self-exile, is India in the Steam Wars secondary universe; one might even conclude that all outer rim planets are the Orientalized East of Victorian England in Steam Wars, since Hurri's Master Yoda is also pictured smoking a hookah. Accordingly, the denizens of Tatooine should reflect this

aesthetic choice. Ergo, a steampunk Luke and Leia should be presented as Indian, or Vietnamese. In Leia's case especially, this choice would have an historical precedent: Lakshmibai, the queen of Jhansi, was one of the principal leaders in India's Sepoy revolt of 1857.

What is clear from the Steam Wars images is that steampunk evokes the nineteenth-century, but does not seek perfect replication. This steampunked space opera gives one a sense of the nineteenth-century, but is obviously not attempting to realistically mirror the nineteenth-century.

Accordingly, in applying neo-Victorianism to steampunk expressions, I am using it in a less restrictive fashion than recent studies such as Ann Heilmann and Mark Llewellyn's *Neo-Victorianism: The Victorians in the Twenty-First Century* do. There, the authors seek to take the "loosely defined" term of neo-Victorianism and limit it to "texts (literary, filmic, audio/visual) [which are] is some respect . . . *self-consciously engaged with the act of (re)interpretation, (re)discovery, and (re)vision concerning the Victorians*" (4). Heilmann and Llewellyn admit that not all neo-Victorian texts are progressive, but seek to prescribe a definition of neo-Victorianism which sees the 'neo-' prefix as an indicator of innovation. While I find their position laudatory, its application in steampunk circles is potentially dangerous, as it ignores a tendency salient to purely neo-Victorian and steampunk works:

> To suggest that all neo-Victorian texts . . . are progressive (politically, culturally, aesthetically, literarily), and always represent the 'new,

> modified, or more modern style', just because they appear 'in conjunction with a genre', is problematic. There are plenty of texts that might fit these broader terms of neo-Victorianism by genre alone but which are also inherently conservative because the lack imaginative re-engagement with the period, and instead recycle and deliver a stereotypical and unnuanced reading of the Victorians and the literature and cultures. As Christian Gutleben notes, there is a danger in the balance between correcting 'historical injustice' and what can be 'construed cynically as the compliance with the hegemony of the politically correct'. This is a significant issue because the divide between parody and innovation, pastiche and reinterpretation is a an important demarcation that separates genres on the border between neo-Victorian texts and historical fiction set in the nineteenth-century. (Heilmann and Llewellyn 6)

Again, despite a difference in terms, we see steampunk's tension between *bricolage* and *detournement*. To unreflexively appropriate elements from the nineteenth-century may unwittingly produce either a resurrection of the ideology of empire, or a romanticized, politically correct whitewashing of historical injustices. Steampunk narratives have greater potential to make these errors than mainstream neo-Victorian literature, since the novum of technofantasy permits radical alterations to historical events. This will be explored further in the chapter on retrofuturism, since it is through the backward gaze of retrofuturism that steampunk engages in the ethical discourse Heilmann and Llewellyn advocate.

"Resembling, Reviving, or Reminiscent of the Victorian era"[6]

For my purposes, steampunk neo-Victorianism is simply the broad appropriation of the nineteenth century in the same fashion Cora Kaplan broadly defines Victoriana: "a complementary miscellany of evocations and recyclings of the nineteenth century, a constellation of images which became markers for particular moments of contemporary style and culture" (3). Mike Ashley argues for the era of steampunk evoking the period between 1880 to 1914, when "[t]he wonderful visions and hopes of the Victorians became overtaken by the real world, especially by the First World War" (12). I agree that the Great War is, inasmuch as steampunk has one, the end of the era steampunk evokes, use of rigid zeppelins notwithstanding. But steampunk draws from earlier periods of the nineteenth-century as well. Simon Joyce speaks to the difficulty of the term Victorian, which is necessarily compounded when conflated with neo-Victorianism, though Joyce's problem addresses the distance between the complexities of British citizens in the period we label Victorian, and the idea of the Victorian found in steampunk: "If, after all, it seems improbable to imagine that all British citizens behaved in a comparable manner between 1837 and 1901, that improbability is only magnified when we extend it to the global citizens of an empire 'on which the sun never set'" (166). Joyce goes on to identify this problem in James Morone's *Hellfire Nation*, "which aims to read U.S. history through its attitudes toward sin" wherein

[6] The OED defines Neo-Victorianism in this way, and the idea is central to how I use the term as a feature of the steampunk aesthetic.

Victorian "tendencies" are said to last in the United States from 1870-1929 (167). If more ostensibly rigourous approaches to the study of Victorianism find it problematic to construct an idea of the Victorian era, how much more so popular manifestations such as steampunk which seek only to evoke that period?

Accordingly, this is not a study of Victorians or Victorianism, but rather a study of steampunk's hodge-podge appropriation of elements from the Victorian period. We cannot even say it is a study of Victoriana, since steampunk draws from other nineteenth-century cultures beyond the Victorians. Whatever dates are drawn as demarcations, steampunk neo-Victorianism refers to the use of nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century society, culture, and technology as collage elements. Non-speculative neo-Victorian writing is characterized by an adherence to realism that steampunk rarely cleaves to. Either by rigourous attention to historical detail or emulation of Victorian writing style, neo-Victorian fiction is committed to a strong sense of verisimilitude, whereas steampunk, by virtue of its fantastic novae, is challenged to do so. Even in the cases of *The Difference Engine* or *The Adventures of Langdon St. Ives*, where nineteenth century writing styles are imitated to some degree, the presence of anachronistic technologies or fantastic occurrences undermine the sense of realism found in texts characterized as neo-Victorian. Given Hadley's use of "pseudo-Victorian" to denote fictional "Victorian works" by neo-Victorians, which borrow and emulate Victorian writers (157), I have wondered at the possibility of replacing neo-Victorian with hyper-Victorian to describe the steampunk aesthetic, to speak to

the hyperbolization of Victorian elements in steampunk. However, this is addressed in the discussion of Technofantasy. When Steffen Hantke declared that "the shaping force behind steampunk is not history but the will of its author to establish and then violate and modify a set of ontological ground rules," he wrote one of the most insightful observations about steampunk, based not only upon what he *knew* about pre-1999 steampunk, but in anticipating where steampunk would continue to go, not as historical fiction per se, but as speculative fiction—science fiction, fantasy, and horror, all mixed into one—that uses history as its playground, not classroom.

This ludic approach can be seen in Kenneth Oppel's world-building for his wonderful young adult novel, *Airborn*, as well as its sequels. The motivating question for this series, and many other steampunk works, might well have been the same posed at the *Steampunk Fashion* livejournal site, when username macaodghain posted an exploration of the "Victorian in Steampunk":

> The Victorian era was a time of incredible development in terms of manufacturing, technological development, and discovery. From the Jacquard Loom (a very early punch-card-controlled device) in 1800, to the steam locomotive in 1814, to the diesel engine in 1892, and all of the various strange and wonderful things in between, it was a time of what appeared to be unlimited potential.
>
> Steampunk poses the question, "What if that potential had indeed been unlimited?" ("Victorian in Steampunk")

Airborn conveys a child-like sense of adventure, positing an early twentieth-century with a future horizon of unlimited potential instead of the Great War and the Great Depression. *Airborn*'s opening line "Sailing towards dawn" reminded me of the last line of Pynchon's *Against the Day*, "They sail toward grace." And if there was ever a spiritual brother to Pynchon's "Chums of Chance," it would be Matt Cruse, the boy-hero of Airborn. Matt was born on an airship, the literal reference of the book's punning title, and as a result, feels no fear while aloft. The open sky seems "the most natural place in the world" to him (14).

Unlike the airship of *The Year the Sky Fell*, which is all-too-obedient to the laws of physics, the airship Matt Cruse serves aboard is the result of unlimited potential, of retro-futuristic imaginings: the *Aurora*, including cargo and passengers, "weighed over two million pounds" and measured "nine hundred feet from stem to stern, fourteen storeys high" (31-32). This makes it longer than the *Hindenburg*, the largest airship to ever fly, and capable of a far greater amount of gross lift. Oppel explains this amazing engineering feat in technofantasy terms, through the invention of a fictional gas, hydrium: "There's fancy math to explain all this, of course. It had to do with hydrium being the lightest gas in the world. Much lighter than helium and even lighter than hydrogen" (32). This is what the Hindenburg could have been without concern for the cost of fuel, without the national tensions Germany faced before and during World War II. It is the Zeppelin, developed without the shadow of the Nazi party.This is all possible because Oppel places the *Aurora* in a time before the cynicism and doubt the

Great War produced. This is the Gilded Age; this is the time of Victorian optimism. It is an adventure tale of hair-breadth escapes—but they are always escapes, in the tradition of the Saturday matinee serials of yesteryear.

Due to this broad reference to the Victorian era in steampunk, finding a term for this historical referent of the steampunk aesthetic was difficult. I have settled on neo-Victorian as an umbrella term for the Belle Epoque, the Gilded Age, the Victorian and Edwardian era, and *fin de siècle:* these periods are characterized by the overlap of industrial advancement, artistic innovation, social revolution, optimism, and decadence. I rejected Nineteenth-Centuryism, which the *OED* defines as "The distinctive spirit, character, or outlook of the 19th century; a feature or trait suggestive of the 19th century," because unlike "Victorian era," the words nineteenth and century are immediately connotative of temporal limitation, whereas *Victorian*, while still a temporal reference, is evocative in terms of style and culture. I also rejected neo-Industrialism, as I felt it put too much emphasis on the technology of steampunk when combined with Technofantasy. I concede that neo-Victorian is insufficient beyond approximation, but it is a foundational concept to work from.

Limiting the steampunk aesthetic to the British Empire or Victorian era ignores or excludes many important steampunk works. Instead, I loosely employ neo-Victorian as "resembling, reviving, or reminiscent of, the Victorian era" (*OED*), in the broadest sense possible. Steampunk utilizes a look and feel

evocative of the period between 1800 and 1914, unencumbered by rigorous historical accuracy.

> Common to all of these forms of expression is an understanding that there is no such thing as Victorianism—there are only interpretations of it. Consequently, questions about when exactly the Victorian period begins or ends, whether the term can be properly applied to countries other than England, or which figures define it most clearly or are in turn defined by it, fall under the jurisdiction of interpretive authority and its ideological agenda. (Hantke 247)

This takes into account the various ways steampunk accesses the nineteenth-century: as resemblance when the temporal setting is the nineteenth-century, as in *The Adventures of Langdon St. Ives*; as revival when there is a move to being "like people used to be," in future settings like *Fitzpatrick's War*; and as reminiscence when it only feels like the nineteenth-century in secondary world settings as in *The Court of the Air*. I chose neo-Victorian over a number of other possible terms because it was the most inclusive and the least cumbersome.

However, as we saw in the previous chapter, simply associating steampunk with the Victorian era without any caveat or qualification misrepresents a number of steampunk works. Admittedly, at inception, steampunk settings were often Victorian, but a number were set in other times and spaces outside Victorian England. Temporally, while Jeter and Blaylock set their

scientific romances in London during the late Victorian period, Tim Powers's *The Anubis Gates* was set in Regency London in 1801. Second wave steampunk continues to challenge the temporal limitations of the Victorian period by moving into the Edwardian period: Scott Westerfeld's *Leviathan* trilogy begins with the assassination that began the Great War; Kenneth Oppel's *Skybreaker* makes reference to the boarding of "the *Titanica*" as a past event (183). Some steampunk is set far in the future of the Victorian era: both Clay and Susan Griffith's *Vampire Empire* series and S.M. Stirling's *Peshawar Lancers* take place in a twenty-first century recovering from a cataclysmic event, and still resembling the nineteenth-century in many ways. Both of these books are set outside London, in spaces that evoke the British Raj. Numerous spaces beyond England have been explored in steampunk: Italy in Gail Carriger's *Blameless*; the Australian outback in Arthur Slade's *Empire of Ruins*; the breadth of America in Cherie Priest's *Clockwork Century* series; New York city in Matthew Flaming's *The Empire of Ohio*; the Canadian prairies in Lisa Smedman's *The Apparition Trail*; the wide world in Pynchon's *Against the Day*, Westerfeld's *Leviathan* series, and Oppel's *Airborn* series. Outside pseudo-historical versions of earth, steampunk settings increasingly include secondary worlds, such as the fantasy take on the American frontier in Felix Gilman's *Half-Made World* or the clearly Victorian fantasy of Ian McCleod's *Light Ages* and *The House of Storms*. Steampunk is no longer spatially confined to the British Empire.

Consider the example of London in S.M. Peters' *Whitechapel Gods*, which is the London of *The Difference Engine* built upon until the city has become the mad, crane-littered skyline of London in *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen.* Further, this is not the London of history, but rather, "London that Americans think about when they read fantasy" (Kelleghan 16). In steampunk, London is not a city: it is *the* City. It has become steampunk archetype rather than historical setting. Doložel states that "[a]n ineradicable relationship exists between the historical Napoleon and all fictional Napoleons, between the actual London and all the fictional settings called London" (788). The London of steampunk is not the London of Henry Mayhew's *London Labour and the London Poor*, but rather the London of the *Steampunk* graphic novels from Cliffhanger! comics, where the city is literally divided between an underclass underworld and a paradise of the privileged. In *Whitechapel Gods*, the demarcation is horizontal instead of vertical, with all of Whitechapel surrounded by a retaining wall, trapping the underclass inside. However similar the city of the upper classes outside those walls might be to the London of history, the Whitechapel within is pure fantasy, ruled by steampunk gods Mama Engine, whose abode resembles Mount Doom of J.R.R. Tolkien's Middle-earth, and Grandfather Clock, whose eyes are every clock face, and as the personification of pure reason is God as clockmaker embodied. Instead of cholera, the environs of Whitechapel are stricken by the "clanks", which leaves its carriers Victorian cyborgs, a mix of

metal and flesh. This is not alternate history so much as an alternate world, an alternate universe.

Alternate Histories, Alternate Worlds: Counterfactual, or Counterfictional?

The evocation of the Victorian era has led some to state that steampunk is a type of alternate history. While this statement is not necessarily false, it can be misleading, as alternate history is most often conflated with the idea of a counterfactual break in history. Steampunk, while it sometimes uses this device, just as often is engaged in explorations that are less rigorous in their attention to the importance of historical events.

Nearly every person who reaches adulthood will have likely engaged in the self-reflexive activity of asking the question, "What if?" The question arises from a polemic of nightmare and fantasy (Rosenfeld 11), of regret or nostalgia, for a past more terrible or wonderful than the present. The literary genre of alternate history plays with the same question on a larger scale, asking the "what if?" question to major events in history, and extrapolating possible alternate historical outcomes. The practice of writing alternate history is not a new one, dating back to antiquity with Greek historian Herodotus's speculation concerning the "possible consequences of the Persians defeating the Greeks at Marathon in the year 490 BCE, while the Roman historian Livy wondered how the Roman empire would have fared against the armies of Alexander the Great" (5). Lubomir Doležel states that the alternate history is a "useful cognitive strategy" given that

"the acquisition of knowledge about the past … is such a complicated task that no available avenue should be left unexplored. If the consideration of counterfactual, possible courses of history can enhance our understanding of actual history, we have no right to ignore this strategy" (800). Marie-Laure Ryan states that if we assume that possible worlds (of which alternate history is a sub-category) are "constructs of the mind, we can classify them according to the mental processes to which they owe their existence" (19). The mental process which predicates alternate history would be the "hypothetical," a type of possible world resulting from the "what if?" question.

Alternate histories do not employ history merely as a backdrop to narrative events, nor to create a heightened sense of verisimilitude in a pure work of fantasy. Rather, as Karen Hellekson states in her definitive article, "Toward a Taxonomy of the Alternate History," the narratives of alternate history "revolve around the basic premise that some event in the past did not occur as we know it did, and thus the present has changed" (248). Based upon this link to the past, Hellekson provides a narrower taxonomical scope for the classification of alternate history. She classifies alternate histories "according to the nature of the historical inquiry, not according to the nature of the story told" (250), and states that alternate history can be systematically categorized within four models of historical inquiry: the eschatological, which is "concerned with final events or an ultimate destiny" (*Alternate History* 97); its opposite, the genetic or cause and effect; entropic, wherein the alternate history is never given "permanence"; and

the teleological, which "focuses on design or purpose" ("Taxonomy" 250). While any of these models may be the focus of an alternate history, "the genetic model lies at the heart of every alternate history because the alternate history relies on cause and effect" (251).

Hellekson's classification system is based upon the "moment of the break" or divergence which causes the alternate history. She argues that counterfactuals are practically useful to the study of history because they "foreground the notion of cause and effect that is so important to historians when they construct a narrative" (*Alternate History* 16). It is primarily the "moment of the break" or "point of divergence … some variable in the historical record [which] would have changed the overall course of historical events" (Rosenfeld 4) which stands as the "one property" by which the fictional universe of alternate history differs from "our own system of reality" (Ryan 33) and therefore from other historical and speculative fiction.

For example, an alternate history does not postulate that the historians "might have got it wrong," as is the case in Josephine Tey's *The Daughter of Time*. Alternate histories create a secondary ontology wherein a single occurrence changes the entire course of that world's history. To say that Richard III did not murder his nephews is simply an alternative perspective on a set of accepted historical facts. A narrative wherein Richard rescues those self-same victims from the Tower of London and achieves victory at the Battle of Bosworth Field would be an example of alternate history. It should also be noted that the moment of the

break, while it may be benign or mundane, generally affects a major historical event, since “exceptional events are more salient, and are thereby more available and more likely to be mentally mutated” (Roese & Olson 61). For a work to be classified as an alternate history, it should contain a clearly established moment of break which transforms a readily recognizable historical event, thereby setting off a chain of cause and effect resulting in a different version of present reality.

Hellekson suggests that the “‘moment of the break”‘ as the defining feature of alternate history can be expressed in three categories. The first, called nexus stories, involves time travel, occurs at the moment of the break, and focuses on “a crucial point in history, such as a battle or assassination” (*Alternate History* 5). This type of alternate history is rarely employed in steampunk, though there are examples, such as Felix J. Palma’s *The Map of Time* (originally published in Spain as *El Mapa del Tiempo*), which imagines author H.G. Wells and Bram Stoker caught up in a time-travel tale involving the Whitechapel Jack the Ripper murders, and more notably, Mark Hodder’s *The Strange Affair of Spring-Heeled Jack*, which imagines a time-traveler who unwittingly aids Edward Oxford, Queen Victoria’s would-be assassin in 1840. The death of the Queen is the moment of the break, resulting in a history where explorer Sir Richard Francis Burton is an agent of the Crown and poet Algernon Charles Swinburne is his sidekick.

What is fascinating about Hodder’s book and its sequels is that the characters are aware the universe is not quite right, and seek to rectify the

situation: in both *The Strange Affair of Spring-Heeled Jack* and its sequel, *The Curious Case of the Clockwork Man*, Burton visits a gypsy fortune teller, who is "increasingly aware" of Burton's "original path," and not just his, "but that which were all destined to tread until the stilt man drove us from it" (55). The stilt man the gypsy speaks of is the time-traveler who accidentally aided the death of Queen Victoria; in seeking to put things right, he also makes Burton aware of the wrongness of this alternate history, telling him "This is not the way things are meant to be . . . Do you honestly think the world should have talking orangutans in it?" (126). This encounter leads the agent of the Crown to reflect that "he and his double . . . existed at a point of divergence" (140), which sets him on a path to put history on its proper path, especially after he receives a prophetic vision showing him a terrible conflict which "spreads across the entire world, with the British Technologists' steam machines on the one side and the German Eugenicists' adapted flora and fauna on the other" (254). An example of the German Eugenicists' technology serves to underscore that, despite instances of sophisticated exploration of the importance of historical events, steampunk remains utterly fantastic. Take the introduction of a new vehicle built from the carapace of an insect, grown "to the size of a milk wagon" by the Eugenicists:

> "It's not a species of vehicle, it's a species of insect; and not just any insect, but the one held sacred by the ancient Egyptians! They are being grown on farms and summarily executed, without so much as a by your leave, for the express purpose of supplying a ready-made shell! And the

> Technologists have the temerity to name this vehicle the Folks' Wagon! It is not a wagon! It's a beetle! It's a living creature which mankind is mercilessly exploiting for its own ends. It's sacrilege!" (211)

This is a wonderfully wild and whimsical moment of humor via steampunk technology, followed by Burton's observation that the "exploitation of the working classes by the aristocracy" is more monstrous than the construction of this steampunk VW Beetle. The scene is exemplary of how Hodder's steampunk blends gonzo gadgetry with humor, strong character voice, social commentary, and a comprehensive awareness of the historical implications of his ideas.

Hellekson's second category, the true alternate history, takes place "years after a change in a nexus event, resulting in a radically changed world" (*Alternate History* 7). A domino series of causes and effects produce narratives set in "worlds dramatically discontinuous with reality" (8). The discontinuity with reality could occur in a world grounded in primary physics, as is the case in *The Difference Engine*, which asks serious counterfactual questions and diligently pursues speculative answers and, due to its popularity, has led many to assume all steampunk is likewise as rigorous. I am of the opinion that despite being perceived as a seminal work of steampunk, *The Difference Engine* is an exception, not the rule of the relationship between steampunk and alternate history: *Locus* was more emphatic in their assessment in their May 1991 issue, asserting that "*The Difference Engine* is *not* steampunk, because it is a work of hard SF" (qtd. in Prucher 221). Jay Clayton would seem to agree, since "[a]ll of

the information technologies portrayed by Gibson and Sterling existed in some form or other during the reign of Queen Victoria" citing the progression of Charles Babbage's work on the actual Difference Engine, and his later designs for the Analytical Engine, "which is the true ancestor of today's computer" (110-11). While Difference and Analytical Engines make frequent appearances in steampunk fiction—sometimes under a different name, such as Turing device, in reference to mathematician and computer scientist Alan Turing; they are rarely given the sense of verisimilitude Gibson and Sterling imbue their Difference Engine with. This verisimilitude is less the result of any intricate explanation of the Difference Engine's workings, but rather the attention the authors pay to the likely outcomes the advent of the computer one hundred years early might have visited upon Victorian London. The majority of steampunk is not as concerned with such retroactive speculations, but rather with telling a "ripping good yarn", a phrase that could be pulled from the jacket-blurbs of any number of steampunk novels. What Sterling and Gibson did was to create a strong work of alternate history, wherein "anachronism, in the literal sense of something out of its proper time" is raised to a "methodological principle" (Clayton 113). But something is not anachronistic in the universe it belongs in, and more often, steampunk does not posit a moment of the break in history, but rather a whole new world with its own physical laws, cosmology, and occasionally species as well.

Hellekson states that certain alternate histories contain more severe discontinuities, including "different physical laws" (8). This type of alternate

history describes numerous works of steampunk fiction which either ignore the physical realities of their technological divergence, or create fictional substances that overcome physical reality. One of the best examples of such a break is found in Jay Lake's *Mainspring* and sequels. Unlike other alternate histories which might suppose a break in a verifiable historical event, Lake's fictional conceit in *Mainspring* is far more cosmic, occurring at the moment of creation. When God "hung Earth in the sky on the tracks of her orbit around the lamp of the sun" (43), it was on a very real, not abstract track: *Mainspring*'s Earth is bisected by a massive gear, which serves as a colossal brass wall, separating the world into the oppressive, industrialized Northern hemisphere, and the Edenic, pre-industrial Southern hemisphere. The historical ramifications of such a break are obviously further reaching:

> On the other side of the Equatorial Wall lies the southern Earth. It is vastly different from our contentious, industrialized Northern Earth. Where we have smoky mills and laboring children and great cities of brick and wood, the Southern Earth has cathedral forests whose dwellers live free of misery, without even the need of labor for their daily fare. Where we have competing empires shaking the very air with the thunder of their cannon, the Southern Earth shakes to the thunder of hooves as great beasts migrate across endless plains. Where England and China each struggle to bend Creation to their will, the Southern Earth abides comfortably in the lap of God's world. As man was meant to do. (162)

The inclusion of a massive, physical proof of the existence of a clockmaker God permits Lake to have angels trouble the flights of his steampunk airships, and grants protagonist Hethor Jacques a type of clockwork magic to assist him on his quest: Hethor is himself a precision instrument, gifted at hearing the sounds of the gears and machinery which keep the earth on its great brass track orbiting the sun. While he is in the Northern Earth, his "sense of time was always with him, always accurate" (46). While crossing the Equatorial Wall, he is deafened by close proximity to movement of the orbital track. He does not regain his hearing until reaching the Southern side of the Wall, at which point he begins to hear the sound of gears in everything, discovering that "[a]ll Creation was artifice, was it not?" (208). Hethor's powers are not an anachronism: they belong in the world of Lake's radical break.

Lake's radical break seems very close to Hellekson's final category of the parallel worlds story, based in quantum physics, which "implies that there was no break – that all events that could have occurred have occurred" (5) but "simultaneously" on timelines parallel to primary history (47). The difference is that a parallel worlds story is concerned with travels between these worlds, as in Joe Lansdale's *Flaming London* and "The Steam Man of the Prairie and the Dark Rider Get Down," where rips in time, formed by H.G. Wells' Time Traveler, have opened passages between different time streams:

> These Marses, these universes, these dimensions, it's like there's a train on a track, and under the track is another train, and they're alike and run the

> same way, but inside the train, people do different things. Sometimes the same people, or apes, or insects, or creatures, but these beings are multiplied, taking different paths unaware of their counterparts, or their differparts. And say alongside the train, if you could slice into its metal skin, slice it real thin, you would find there's another train in there, running parallel with the first train. Each train (each universe) and its contents . . . believes it is the Union Pacific and no other Union Pacifics exists. But if you could hold a special mirror to the top of the train, you would see that, in fact, there's a train on its back, its smokestack meeting the stack of the other, and its wheels turning on a track that is touching ground that should be sky in the other universe . . . Say there's a warp in the track. A bad warp. Call it trouble with the universe. Maybe a black hole caused it. Something we don't understand yet. Time(s) and Space(s), for whatever reason, begin(s) to collapse on itself. So this train, running on its track, hits the warped stretch and bumps up into the train below. Or maybe the warp throws the train off the tracks, and the train on the bottom, and the one on the top, and the ones on the sides, all come together. Now, finally, they are aware of each other. And it's not a happy awareness. (105)

What is particularly clever about Lansdale's explanation, beyond his consistently simple, down-home narrator's voice, is that he playfully demonstrates that such lesions in the space-time fabric are merely a means to an end, of telling a story

where Jules Verne and Mark Twain can find themselves in the company of a giant ape like King Kong, battling Martians in a giant steam-powered automaton. The reason for ruptures in the universe can give the appearance of science through an appeal to quantum physics as in Philip Pullman's *Subtle Knife*, which posits a blade as thin as an atom, or disregard physics completely in favor of getting to the "fun" of high-flying adventure, as in Nathalie Gray's *Full Steam Ahead*, where an unexplained and convenient vortex in the middle of a storm transports a modern woman through space and time to a steampunk world. In 1999, Steffen Hantke stated that "[h]ardly ever is steampunk concerned with the transition from narrative universe into another," setting steampunk into Nancy Trail's "fantasy mode," a typological framework wherein "the natural domain is altogether absent or it is a framing device, a domain...with a very limited function" (footnote 4, 254). Hantke was correct insofar as pre-2000 steampunk is concerned, but in addition to *Full Steam Ahead,* Katie MacAlister's *Steamed,* another steampunk romance, and Canadian author Rob St. Martin's *Sunset Val: A Thrilling Tale of Airship Piracy*, a young adult steampunk adventure, are also in this category of parallel worlds, or crosshatch fantasies as the *EF* calls them, noting, "normally one of these worlds is our own and the other (or others) some form of secondary world" (237). The transition from one narrative universe into another is a buffer point for readers unfamiliar with speculative concepts like parallel worlds: beginning in this world provides an anchor for neophyte readers, who can discover the steampunk world along with the protagonist.

The *EF* calls these alternate, not parallel, worlds, and while the semantics are unimportant, the divorce from Hellekson's taxonomy is necessary. As demonstrated, alternate history is often an aspect of steampunk; however, steampunk is not always alternate history. A key difference exists between steampunk and alternate history: while alternate history may posit a moment of historical divergence that abandons laws of the physical universe, steampunk sometimes takes place in worlds that resemble our own only insofar as they evoke the nineteenth-century in the way I have been speaking of in this chapter. This difference between alternate history and the alternate worlds of steampunk may seem minimal, but I contend, as the *EF* does, that it is "crucial":

> If a story presents the alteration of some specific event as a premise from which to argue a new version of history … then that story is likely to be sf. If, however, a story presents a different version of the history of Earth *without arguing the difference*—favorite differences include the significant, history-changing presence of magic, or of actively participating gods, or of Atlantis or other lost lands, or of crosshatches with otherworlds—then that story is likely to be fantasy. (Clute "Alternate Worlds" 21, emphasis added)

The inclusion of fantasy elements in a world resembling ours is better understood insofar as steampunk goes, as an alternate world, not an alternate history. The inclusion of fantasy elements does not mean, as Clute states, that steampunk is only fantasy and not SF. Steampunk is neither SF nor fantasy, but an aesthetic

both genres employ. Steampunk is most commonly conflated with fantasy and SF because, unlike mainstream neo-Victorian expressions, steampunk's style is fantastic, not quotidian.

Consider also the secondary world of Christopher Wooding's *Retribution Falls*, a tale of airship pirates. Wooding's series is not alternate history at all. And while *Retribution Falls* does not immediately betray its neo-Victorian feel, what is certain is the sense of another world, one which is not my own. One of the major characters, Crake, is a "daemonist," which is effectively an alchemist. Daemonists are contrasted with charlatan diviners in one scene where Crake explains that people want to see daemonists hanged, because what they do works. "It's a science," he tells the sky-pirate Captain Frey (109). This is the approach of technofantasy: it is the science of an alternate history or secondary world wherein the physical laws are radically different from our own. Consider the following description of a daemonist's workshop:

> Plome, like Crake, had always leaned towards science rather than superstition in his approach to daemonism. His sanctum was like a laboratory. A chalkboard was covered with formulae for frequency modulation, next to a complicated alembic and books on the nature of plasm and luminiferous aether. A globular brass cage took pride of place, surrounded by various resonating devices. There were thin metal strips of varying lengths, chimes of all kinds, and hollow wooden tubes. With such devices a daemon could be contained. (70)

Likewise, the manner of the airships in *Retribution Falls* is indicative of an alternate or parallel world: in reality, airships are a failed technology that require fictional motive power or construction materials to be made viable. Wooding even describes the *Ketty Jay*, the airship of the novel's sky-pirate crew as an "Ironclad," a term that evokes images of the Thunderchild from Wells's *The War of the Worlds*, or the vessel the *Nautilus* sinks in the second half of *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea*. It evokes the nineteenth-century; however, while evoking the past, the *Ketty Jay* is not merely a copy of a Graf Zeppelin. While it seems to have the overall design of real-world airships and is thus prone to the same threats they are, it is described as having "the notoriously robust Blackmore P-12 thrusters" (159), engines capable of taking the airship through a storm beyond the capabilities of a heavier-than-air-craft. Compare this with the opening chapter of Kenneth Oppel's *Skybreaker*, where the airship is at the mercy of the wind, and you will understand how Wooding has made his air transport both a thing of the past and the future: it bears more than a passing resemblance in spirit to Han Solo's *Millenium Falcon*, as a cargo-combat conversion meant for smuggling.

Aside from the inclusion of airships, little details such as the antiquated décor, clothing, and implements in this secondary world further convey *Retribution Falls* neo-Victorian features. The hero carries a cutlass and, along with his crew, uses revolvers (not blasters); bounty-hunting Century Knights wear armor and carry swords (along with ballistic weapons like "twin lever-action shotguns" (74)) that lend a traditional, ceremonial aspect to their costume, which

includes a “tricorn hat” for one (74); at one point, the characters visit a town where “electricity hasn’t caught on here yet” (69); where electricity has “caught on,” the bulbs are in a “black iron candelabra” (39); one of the pilots has a “ferrotype of his sweetheart” (49), another wears a “black waistcoat” (206); settings are lit by a “single oil lantern” (268); an airship is a dreadnought (323). The aesthetic is the past, and taken on the whole, a hyper-Victorian style.

In addition to appropriating Victorian historical elements for its collage, steampunk appropriates Victorian literary elements, sometimes synthesizing both in a counterfictional, not counterfactual way. This appropriation and synthesis most often manifests in steampunk as recursive fantasy, rendering steampunk a highly intertextual aesthetic. In the *EF*, recursive fantasy is described as “exploit[ing] existing fantasy settings or characters as its subject matter.” Recursive fantasy can be parody, pastiche, or revisionist re-examinations of earlier works such as fairy tales, pulp adventures, or extraordinary voyages. These texts also play with what the *EF* calls “the flavor of true [recursive fantasy],” whereby “‘real’ protagonists [encounter intersecting] worlds and characters which are as ‘fictional’ to them as to us” (805). The cover of Xavier Mauméjean’s *La Ligue des héros*—or *The League of Heroes* as translator Manuella Chevalier renders it—by French comic artist Patrick Dumas shows Arthur Conan Doyle’s Sherlock Holmes, Mauméjean’s original protagonist Lord Kraven (who is a pastiche of British heroes loyal to Crown and country), Edgar Rice Burrough’s Tarzan, and English Bob, who appears to be an homage to Captain America’s

sidekick Bucky, standing in a line, ready to save the world. Along with other numerous literary heroes, the League is united in battling the forces of evil, led by J.M. Barrie's Peter Pan, in a wonderful role-reversal whereby Pan's nemesis Captain Hook is made hero, not villain.

In Rudy Rucker's *Hollow Earth*, Edgar Allan Poe takes the voyage Arthur Gordon Pym arguably did at the close of his tale, being pulled down in to the interior of the hollow earth. In Kim Newman's *Anno Dracula*, Van Helsing and his cohorts fail in their mission, and the King of vampires gains a literal throne by wedding Queen Victoria and ruling London. In Mark Frost's *The List of 7*, a young Arthur Conan Doyle meets a man who will become the inspiration for Sherlock Holmes. Sir Richard Burton becomes John Carter, Warlord of Mars in Philip Reeve's *Larklight*. Captain Nemo, the boyhood friend of Jules Verne, meets Phileas Fogg and a host of other Vernean heroes in his adventures through the pages of Kevin J. Anderson's *Captain Nemo: The History of a Dark Genius*.

Neo-Victorianism as *Bricolage* in Steampunk Literature: Joe Lansdale

As we have seen, the appropriation of Victorian elements in steampunk literature can range from meaningless *bricolage* to meaningful *detournement*. While there are numerous examples of steampunk that refuse to engage in *detournement* to their detriment, I will save those examples for the chapter on retrofuturism, where we will see that the presence of active *detournement* results in social commentary. Instead, I turn to the example of Joe Lansdale's steampunk books, *Zeppelins West*

and *Flaming London* as examples of gonzo *bricolage* that seek only to entertain. Both are great examples of what I mean by neo-Victorian, since *Zeppelins West* is not directly concerned with Victorian culture, but draws upon historical and literary figures from that period for its recursive fantasy. Additionally, the book evokes the Belle Epoque decadence of the turn of the century and the marginal shift from the Victorian to Edwardian period.

The first 35 pages of *Zeppelins West* are a dizzying homage and parody of nineteenth-century heroes, both fictional and historical, introducing alternate versions of Annie Oakley, Sitting Bull, and Wild Bill Hickock, all traveling in Buffalo Bill Cody's Wild West Show to Japan by airship. This replacement of horse-drawn carriages for the Wild West show only scratches the surface of Lansdale's anachronistic deviations (and deviances): A post-decapitation Buffalo Bill is on the hunt for a body for his still-living head, which currently swims in a Mason jar filled with pig urine. The jar can be affixed to the body of a steam man, designed by Frank Reade, the real-life author of numerous Eddisonades. In steampunk, Reade is often rendered as the inventor of the technological marvels he only imagined in real life: in Paul Guinan and Anina Bennett's *Boilerplate: History's Mechanical Marvel*, Reade invents automata and rescues American citizens from Peking during the Boxer Rebellion in a helicopter airship (86). Lansdale blends historical and literary moments and characters without much attention to verisimilitude or veracity: Sokaku Takeda, the "soon to be ruler of Japan," slowly cutting slices off a captive to consume them: Frankenstein's

monster, captive and bound, is believed to possess Viagra-like powers if eaten. It's a perfect example of "gonzo" writing, which is one of the words K.W. Jeter used to explain what he, Powers, and Blaylock were up to when he coined "steampunk." Beyond those first 35 pages, Lansdale takes the reader on a literary who's who: before the book is done, he will borrow characters and plot devices from Verne's *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea*, H.G. Wells' *Island of Doctor Moreau*, Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, and Frank L. Baum's *Wizard of Oz*. In *Burning London*, the sequel to *Zeppelins West*, Verne and Wells become characters, joining forces with Mark Twain to battle the alien invasion from Wells's *War of the Worlds*.

Flaming London is largely told from the vantage point of Ned the Seal, a modified pinniped made self-aware by Dr. Momo's (a parody of Dr. Moreau) experimentation. Ned is a clear reference to Captain Nemo's pet seal in Disney's *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea*, who aside from providing comic relief for younger audiences, befriends Ned Land. The first chapter following the epigraph demonstrates the wild tone swings Lansdale regularly engages in, moving from the voice of Ned the Seal to a tribute to the opening chapter of H.G. Wells's *War of the Worlds*. The Martian attack is rendered with the same sense of impending doom as in Wells, but before we can take the material too seriously, Lansdale spends the next four chapters chronicling Ned the Seal's rescue by a down-on-his-luck Mark Twain visiting his friend Jules Verne. The following scene exemplifies Lansdale's approach to these moments:

> The seal snapped both thumbs against his flippers and made a kind of whistling sound with his mouth, then slapped both fingers against the pad and took hold of the pencil with one thumb and flipper and made a writing motion.
>
> "Now I've seen it all," Verne said.
>
> "Not if he actually writes something, you haven't." (21)

The arrival of the Martian cylinder is uproariously funny, even without a familiarity with Wells's original text, as Lansdale centers his humour on an episode involving one man "giving a play by play" to the crowd gathered around the impact crater left by the Martian cylinder:

> "It's opening," said a short stocky man in the back of the crowd. This was, of course, obvious...As there was little to see other than the cylinder, he took it upon himself to describe the steam coming out of the interior of the device, and was quick to describe it in excruciating detail, as if everyone present was blind.
>
> "See the steam coming out. More steam than before. A lot of steam's coming out," he said.
>
> This was true.
>
> "Now the lid has fallen off. See that?"
>
> Everyone saw that.
>
> "Now there's some light. Do you see the light."
>
> The light was pretty obvious. Red and yellow.

> "There's something moving in there. Do you see the shadow?"
>
> Suddenly, without warning, a little man in the crowd screamed something impossible to understand, leaped on the explainer and began beating him.
>
> "We see it. We see it, you dumb bastard." (27)

The attacker is incarcerated in a police wagon, but after the police experience a few moments of the explainer's penchant for the glaringly obvious, resort to violence, and free the original attacker: "Should he awake," said the officer, "one word from him, and you have our permission to finish what you started" (29). Moments like these are when Lansdale reminds me somewhat of Terry Pratchett, if Pratchett was an irascible cuss with affection for scatological humour.

Flaming London is filled with literary references, without any pretensions to being literature. It is a barrage of recursive fantasy for the classic SF and horror of yesteryear: as with Zeppelins West, the cast is a who's who of boyhood favorites: Wild West stories, Jules Verne, Passepartout, Mark Twain, a certain giant gorilla, flying monstrosities, Martians, as well as a few characters who cross over from Lansdale's short story, "The Steam Man of the Prairie and the Dark Rider Get Down: A Dime Novel." These last characters introduce the idea of rips in the fabric of time and space that have been created by H.G. Wells's Time Traveler. Unlike many instances of steampunk, Lansdale draws attention to why things are not as they "should be," a reference to the idea that steampunk universes exist in histories gone off-kilter. *Flaming London* ends with the

remaining heroes setting off from the ruins of a Martian-ravaged London to fix these fractures, and seek to set things right.

Neo-Victorianism as *Detournement* in Steampunk Literature: Felix Gilman

While no less diverse or imaginative, a more serious use of neo-Victorianism can be found in Felix Gilman's *Half-made World*, a fantasy based in the nineteenth-century history of the United States: a mix of weird Western, frontier narratives, and steampunk. The book's evocation of the nineteenth-century is simple: the setting is a fully secondary world with a strong foundation in the fictions of the American frontier wherein "Tombstone, Arizona, may as well be a hard day's ride from Dodge City, Kansas, and 1895 [is] more or less the same as 1875" (Mead 54). Gilman's steampunk West is much like the London of steampunk, the vision of the West as we see it in our imagination, but not necessarily "rooted in a particular time or location" (Mead 54). As such, it is a clever weaving of familiar, but not necessarily accurate, American "history" with unfamiliar fantasy elements. The setting is the year 1889, but the story takes place in Koenigswald, a country that has never existed; while Koenigswald is a real world Germanic surname, Gilman reveals Koenigswald was "one of the Council of Seven Nations that had jointly sent the first expeditions West, over the World's End Mountains, into what was then un-made territory" four hundred years earlier (23). Gilman continues to use names that feel familiar, evoking nineteenth-century America: the Red Valley Republic, the Flint Hills, Humbolt, Jasper City. This familiarity

helps ground the reader in this secondary world, where a war is being waged between the advanced technology of the Line and the supernaturally enhanced warrior of the Gun. Both sides are comprised of human agents ruled by metaphysical powers, referred to as demons or spirits.

Gilman makes the forces of the Gun familiar to the reader by casting their representative, John Creedmore, in the shape of the archetypal cowboy and the gunslinger, who are "central characters in both the American national identity and the myth of the West" (Mead 53). Creedmoor is the spiritual descendant of Stephen King's Roland of Gilead, who is an amalgam of Tolkien's exiled king, Aragorn, and Clint Eastwood's spaghetti western hero, the Man with No Name. Creedmore lacks Roland's nobility; he does not shoot with his eye, mind, or heart, but with a revolver housing a demon in addition to six bullets: "The weapon—the Gun—the temple of metal and wood and deadly powder that housed his master's spirit—sat on the floor by the bed and throbbed with darkness" (39). The Gun and its demon provide Creedmoor with miraculous healing abilities, preternatural senses, and bullet-time reflexes. Without it, he is merely an old man. With it, he is one of many Agents of the Gun, in the service of the spirits of the Gun, disembodied powers that seem to feed on violence. Gilman is unclear about the motivations behind the Gun's machinations, keeping the cabal of spirits outside the frame of action in a mysterious and distant "Lodge."

Creedmoor is an excellent example of what I mean by neo-Victorian in regard to steampunk. An *evocation* of the nineteenth-century, potentially bearing

little to no resemblance to the reality it references. Creedmore is a *bricolage* of Eastwood-roles, combining romanticism for the "myth of the indestructible hero" in Eastwood's early Westerns (Saunders 123), as well as regret for the consequences of violence, as expressed in the classic revisionist Western, *Unforgiven* (1992). Creedmoor both repulses and attracts us – insofar as our nostalgia informs us, he is a gunslinger, a hero of the "old West." However, Gilman regularly reminds the reader that a man allied to the Gun is a monster, a villain, an outlaw.

The opponents of the Gun are the Line, whose powerful spirits also inhabit technology: thirty-eight immortal Engines viewed as Gods by members of the Line. The world of the Line is mediated to the reader through Sub-Invilgator (Third) Lowry, who is literally a cog in the great machine. He works in a small office, a "tangle of pipes and cables" poking through the walls, a job which "occupied a position somewhere in the middle range of the upper reaches of the Angelus Station's several hundred thousand personnel… a hierarchy that was almost as complex and convoluted as the Station's plumbing" (41). The dehumanized Linesman is representative of both nineteenth and twentieth-century fears of a loss of individuality in a world where people are reduced to numbers. At one point, an Agent of the Gun derisively tells Lowry, "I won't ask your name, Linesman. It does not matter. Your kind have no names" (246). The Angelus Station, located in the city of Gloriana, a city of the Line, conveyed to the reader through the eyes of the novel's heroine, Dr. Lyvset Alverhuysen, or "Liv" as she

is most often called. Alien as she is to the world of the Line, Liv sees Gloriana as a nightmare sprawl of “shafts and towers” suggesting a “vast indifference to the natural world” (107). Liv provides the middle ground between the Gun and the Line, indifferent to the agendas of both, on a journey to a dubious house of healing on the “farthest western edge of the world” (24).

The technology of the Line, specifically the train engines which are steam, not diesel or the ultra-futuristic Maglev, directly reference the historical nineteenth-century: “The Line reduced the world to nothing” (121), and a few pages later, “The Engine obliterated space, blurred solid earth into a thin unearthly haze, through which it passed with hideous sea-monster grace” (127). These words echo those of journalist Sydney Smith regarding the coming of steam power: “everything is near, everything is immediate—time, distance, and delay are abolished” (qtd. in Keep 137)

This idea of the abolition of time and space is reflective of nineteenth-century views of technology, since Smith’s words were often quoted near the end of the nineteenth-century, and Gilman’s characters are representative of the ambivalence seen in nineteenth-century poetry toward that technology. William Blake’s attitude toward technology in the “Preface to Milton” is discussed by Matthew Surridge when he describes Blake’s “dark satanic mills” as “poetry shaped by steam,” written in reaction to massive change imposed by industry (blackgate.com). We may add “To a Locomotive in Winter” by Walt Whitman, and “I Like to See it Lap the Miles” by Emily Dickinson to the ranks of steam-

shaped poetry. In “Walt Whitman and the Locomotive” by G. Ferris Cronkhite and “Emily Dickinson’s Train: Iron Horse or ‘Rough Beast’?” by Patrick F. O’Connell, both Whitman and Dickinson are read as deifying the train: Whitman as worshiper, Dickinson as heretic reprobate of the rails. Whitman’s poem is akin to a hymn, praising the steam engine’s “ponderous side-bars” and “knitted frame,” “steadily careering” through winter storms, unhindered by nature’s worst: a force of nature itself. Dickinson’s enigmatic verse likewise highlights the power of the locomotive, but as a force of destruction. She writes with irony in the words, “I like to see it lap the miles / And lick the valleys up.” The locomotive, like some giant monster, is consuming the landscape, not merely traveling through it. O’Connell sees the final lines as references to Christ’s advent, and suggests Dickinson is painting the train as a “fraudulent divinity” (474).

Dickinson’s poetry parallels the attitudes of those who oppose the industrial sprawl of Gilman’s fictional Line. When Gilman first introduces Creedmoor, the Agent of the Gun is reflecting upon the impact the Line has made on nature: “Now, to his great annoyance, the hills were being flattened and built over by the Line—farms replaced by factories, forests stripped, hills mined and quarried to feed the insatiable holy hunger of the Engines” (33).

By contrast, the Line could be considered somewhat analogous to Whitman’s worship of the locomotive. The Line is populated by servants like Lowry, who experiences *the mysterium tremendum*—literally, holy terror—of Rudolph Otto’s *Idea of the Holy* in the presence of an Engine: “And the thing

itself waited on the Concourse below, its metal flanks steaming, cooling, emitting a low hum of awareness that made Lowry's legs tremble" (44). Lowry contrasts landscape "properly shaped by industry" with the "formless land, waiting to be built" (71), recalling the devastation of the American countryside in Dickinson, where the locomotive can "pare," or split a quarry without effort. The spread of industry changes the face of the world; wherever the Line goes, it seeks to tame the "panoramas" of the unsettled West, a place of "Geography run wild and mad" (25). Elsewhere we read that "the Line covers half the World" (37). Steampunk technology is not rendered with the romanticism of *Girl Genius* here: the machines of the Line "bleed smoke" and "score black lines across the sky" (35). Industrial technology is blight, not blessing, in this alternate world. The coming of the Line is the loss of unshaped, untrammeled Frontier.

When I began my study of steampunk by reading Thomas Pynchon's *Against the Day*, I wondered if its theme of the loss of frontier, of unexplored and untamed spaces, was also a theme intrinsic to the steampunk aesthetic. When the Chums receive orders from the "Upper Hierarchy" to "get up buoyancy immediately and proceed by way of the Telluric Interior to the north polar regions" (114), the average reader, unfamiliar with the term Telluric, might assume the Chums have been told to go over a landmass referred to as the "interior" of some country. However, as the *Inconvenience* is passing over an Antarctic landscape which has given way in the past to "tundra, then grassland, trees, plantation, even at last a settlement or two, just at the Rim" the reader

realizes the interior they are headed towards is an opening into a hollow earth. (115). Arriving at the Rim, they discover that it "seemed to have become *noticeably smaller"* (ibid.).

The shrinking Rim of the hollow earth's entrance is but one of the vanishing mythic landscapes of "The Light on the Ranges." In an earlier discussion, a scientist observes how "the Western frontier as we all thought we knew it from song and story [is] no longer on the map, but gone, absorbed—a dead duck" (52). Pynchon illustrates the point with an analogy: the manner for dispatching cattle in the Union Stockyard is compared with the disappearance of cowboys who once roamed the frontier, as they are edged out by industrialization. Even the Chums of Chance find their own world of adventure becoming tenuous, when "Cheerfulness, once taken as a condition of life on the *Inconvenience*, was in fact being progressively revealed to the boys as a precarious commodity these days" (54).

This theme of the loss of frontier, of the spaces of adventure resonates with ideas in steampunk art and literature: the nostalgia for spaces, both exterior and interior, which enable a greater buoyancy of spirit and amibition. It is the mindset of the West before the sinking of the *Titanic*, which often found expression in the Gernsback SF pulp fiction of the 1930s and 1940s, but lacked a commensurate reality in the wake of two World Wars and the Atomic era. Randolph St. Kosmo, the leader of the airship crew Chums of Chance, makes the observation that people would have once "all been stopped in their tracks,

rubbernecking up at us in wonder. Nowadays we just grow more and more invisible" (529). Upon the ground, Darby Suckling asks "who are these strange civilians creeping around all of a sudden?" to which Chick Counterfly replies, "The Authorities." Darby Suckling concludes that these Authorities are "Surface jurisdiction only. Nothing to do with us" (550). As civilization becomes more defined, there is less room for adventure, and adventurers or adventuresses.

By limiting a steampunk study to Pynchon and Gilman's steampunk offerings, one might conclude that steampunk's use of neo-Victorianism is concerned with the loss of frontier. And restrictively, that would be largely correct. However, if we include Joe Lansdale's steampunk in that study, the importance of the loss of frontier is reduced. To return to where we began this chapter, on the subject of colonial ethnocentrism, some steampunk is very concerned with engaging in an act of subversive *detournement*, taking the racial attitudes of the nineteenth-century and inverting them. But this is not always the case. Knowing that steampunk literature encompasses both ends of that issue highlights the importance of an exploratory study of steampunk, which expands the field of inquiry beyond five or six works. If my five or six works included a selection of any five books from Jonathan Green's *Pax Britannia* series, one might conclude that steampunk is a naïve, nostalgic expression that reifies outdated Victorian attitudes. However, if one limited her study to Gail Carriger's five-book *Parasol Protectorate* series, the conclusion might be that steampunk is

a whimsical satire of the Victorian era and its attitudes. The meaning of steampunk changes with the focus of the works studied.

What we see in this element of the steampunk aesthetic is steampunk's reference to the history of the nineteenth-century. It does not always take place in a historically Victorian time and/or space, but rather seeks to ground the reader in an imaginative world by evoking that space and/or time. It is not necessarily mimetic, but always resonant. Steampunk works vary in how rigorous they are in referencing history. What we have already seen, and will continue to see as we move into the discussion of technofantasy is that this reference to history is woven into the design style of the weapons, vehicles, and gadgets of the steampunk aesthetic.

Chapter Four: Aesthetic II – Technofantasy

Magic Cloaked in Science

Technology is ostensibly central to the steampunk aesthetic. The *OED* identifies technology as a defining feature of steampunk, explaining the genre as "science fiction which has a historical setting (esp. based on industrialized, nineteenth-century society) and characteristically features steam-powered, mechanized machinery rather than electronic technology." But unlike hard SF, the technology of steampunk is a matter of aesthetic form, not scientific function. Exposure, however, is not explanation: when steampunk automatons are revealed to be only cogs and gears, it does not explain how the clockwork being has become self-actualized. Precedent does not increase performance: airships abound in steampunk, but were abandoned in reality, due not to unpopularity, but their impracticality. While steampunk concedes these problems, it rarely resorts to a scientific argument to solve them, choosing instead to imagine fantastic solutions. Steampunk technology, on the whole, is fantastically improbable, especially in its literary manifestation. That is to say, if you were to bring the technology of steampunk out of a book and into our world, it wouldn't work very well once it ran out of phlogiston or aether, or when you tried to invoke whatever arcane powers it runs on. Lavie Tidhar's steampunk summary includes an interesting thought on the interplay between magic and technology in steampunk:

> The underlying theme of all fiction within the Steampunk sphere resorts to that moment whereby technology transcends understanding and becomes, for all intents and purposes, magical…the true strength of Steampunk is the way in which the [magic and technology] coexist: where technology becomes magical, magic becomes rigorously scientific. The resulting tension is at the core of Steampunk. (2005)

Both *A Companion to Science Fiction* and the *EF* use the terms "technological fantasy" or "technofantasies" to define steampunk (Bould 217, Clute & Kaveny 391). This is the most appropriate term to describe the neo-Victorian *novum* of the steampunk world: "The concept of the novum, introduced in sf studies by Darko Suvin, refers to a historically unprecedented and unpredicted "new thing" that intervenes in the routine course of social life and changes the trajectory of history" (Csicsery-Ronay Jr. 6). In sf, this novum is "usually a rationally explicable material phenomenon," whereas in the majority of steampunk, the novum is irrational and inexplicable to the modern reader.

At its most rational, steampunk imbues real-world steam power with qualities it does not possess; at its least rational, steampunk forgoes any attempt at verisimilitude and replaces coal, water, and steam with magical or utterly fictional substances. Accordingly, the technological innovations of steampunk are best described as technofantasy, the second feature of the steampunk aesthetic:

> In simplest terms, technofantasy is fantasy that has scientific/technological trappings, or uses

> scientific/technological tools: it is distinguished from science fiction in that there is no attempt to justify such use in scientific or quasiscientific terms (sometimes there is a bit of gobbledygook, but both creator and audience know this for what it is)... (Grant 935)

Technology is central to the aesthetic of steampunk, but unlike other science fiction, steampunk technology is a matter of stylistic form, not scientific function. In steampunk, technology is laid bare, brass clock gears exposed for the viewer to see. Robert Smith, lead singer of steampunk band Abney Park, commented on this externalized technology in steampunk: "When the iPod, a white plastic box with one button, is winning awards for beauty, mankind has lost its sense of what beauty is" (qtd. in Von Busack 2008). Phil Foglio, creator of the webcomic Girl Genius, credits this "magic box" approach to modern technology as the impetus behind the turn to steampunk, stating that people are feeling the nostalgic loss of a time when understanding "how things worked" was simpler (2008). Rebecca Onion, echoing both artists, states that "[s]teampunks see modern technology as offensively impermeable to the everyday person, and desire to return to an age when, they believe, machines were visible, human, fallible, and above all, accessible" (145).

While this may be true of the "object-based work" Onion refers to, an attempt at reclaiming a "human connection" with a "perceived 'lost' mechanical world" (138-39), such accessibility in most steampunk art and literature is

illusory: though steampunk technology's hidden workings are accessible, it relies more on alchemical theories than real-world physical sciences. Perhaps recognizing this very tendency, the *EF* suggests a definition that considers "what are in effect historical technofantasies" (Clute & Kaveny 391).

Given how steampunk "focuses on technology as the crucial factor in its understanding and portrayal of Victorianism" (Hantke 247), it is unsurprising to find numerous Steam Wars images concerned with the "technological anachronism" of steampunk (Clute & Kaveny 391). Accordingly, Star Wars seems uniquely suited to a steampunk aesthetic: as one blogger commented, "*Star Wars* is already about anachronistic technology", citing the presence of the lightsaber battles as swordfights, space battles as dogfights and Chewbacca's bowcaster as a crossbow (D "Steampunk Star Wars" 2007).

Steam Wars: Automata, Aether, and Airships

Many steampunk gadgets and vehicles require some form of magical impulsion or cohesion to be rendered plausible. The protocol droid C3P0 rendered in the steampunk aesthetic demonstrates this tendency to externalize but not explain, to grant emotions to a machine whose decision-making processes are effectively the same as those of a calculator. Sillof's version of C3P0 employs "exposed gears, pulleys, and hinges" with "a burnished antique gold finish, rather [than] the classic polished finish." Marcel Mercado's image of C3P0 and his companion R2D2 was inspired by a clock maker's website that "uses a lot of gears and old

moving pieces to decorate mantle clocks" (2007). In both cases, a steampunk modification of the droids involved revealing the technology within. While the clockwork elements indicate how the droids could be made to move, the "antique" craftsmanship cannot account for artificial intelligence, unlike the wires of Lucas's C3P0 which act as indicators of modern computers, providing audiences with a short-hand explanation for how the droid can speak and think.

Steam Wars images of lightsabers provide further illumination. Although subsequent works such as *Star Wars: The Visual Dictionary* reversed engineered a theory behind the power source of the Jedi's traditional weapon, the original three films lacked any such exposition on the lightsaber's inner workings. Likewise, Poulton's Lord Vader carries a lightsaber without apparent power; explanation is provided by corresponding text exposing the whimsy of the weapon. Poulton substitutes the term lightsaber for "the Phlogisticated Aether Torch, more commonly referred to as the phlogisabre" ("Lord Vader"). The *OED* defines Phlogiston as "[a] hypothetical substance formerly supposed to exist in combination in all combustible bodies, and to be released in the process of combustion." Like Aether, Phlogiston often appears as a power-source in steampunk works and culture, despite lacking any real-world scientific value. It is cited as power source in some of Greg Broadmore's retro-rayguns.

Sillof's Luke Skywalker, Obi Wan Kenobi, and Darth Vader all feature tubes connecting their lightsabers to a power pack worn like an over-the-shoulder satchel, a design idea repeated in Daniel Helzer's image of Luke facing Vader in

Cloud City. The tubes are a visual explanation for how the lightsaber is powered, but are inconvenient from the perspective of combat, threatening to entangle the wielder. The lightsaber held by Allister Lockhart's *Steam Darthe* removes the elegant grace of Lucas's lightsaber, which seemed to be nearly weightless. Lockhart's lightsaber resembles a superheated bar of iron, a ponderous threat of both heat and impact.

This clunky industrial approach is common in steampunk technology, and likely posed an interesting challenge to Steam Wars' artists. Given the films' penchant for high-speed space battles, how does one steampunk ships that run at light-speed? Compare Lucas's blockade runner in *New Hope* with Daniel Helzer's Steam Wars version: Helzer's *Blockaid Runner* looks nothing like its namesake, resembling a flying barge with a paddle-wheel affixed to the side. Miljenko Simic's *Tie Fighter* could have been titled "Tri-fighter," since it shares design elements with fixed-wing tri-planes of the early twentieth-century. Likewise, the X-wing as rendered by Simic in *Steam Star* would be a much slower machine than its cinematic counterpart, propelled as it is by four rear-mounted airscrews with bi-plane-style X-foils. None of these designs have real-world potential for flight; they simply "look cool."

While these designs strain real-world physics, Chris Doyle's "Falcon of the Millennium" abandons it completely. Several online discussions about the steampunking of the *Millennium Falcon* debated the best Victorian iteration of the ship whose superior speed was established by the distinction of having "made the

Kessel Run in less than twelve parsecs" (New Hope). How can one apply a clumsy design aesthetic to a ship which is supposed to be one of the fastest in the galaxy? The difficulty of creating a satisfactorily rapid transportation in steampunk style has left the *Millennium Falcon* largely untried in steampunk Star Wars images. The schematic diagram and documentation justifying the design choices and construction of Chris Doyle's LEGO model of the "Falcon of the Millennium" posits the spaceship as tramp-trader, complete with open air wooden decks, lateral and horizontal propeller engines, and rope netting for cargo, all reminiscent of a famous rapid mode of steampunk transportation, the *Albatross* from Jules Verne's *Robur the Conqueror*, a design that, if not impossible, would at the least be impractical.

In instances when steampunk technology could, or—from a historical perspective—did work, history is often ignored in favour of high adventure, as demonstrated by the steampunk airship. Next to brass goggles, the airship is quite possibly the image most evocative of the steampunk aesthetic. Without exception, Lucas's Imperial Star Destroyers are rendered as airships in Steam Wars. Allister Lockhart's Steampunk Destroyer exemplifies the "contradictory mix of fascination and repulsion the airship evoked" in the British imagination during the Great War (De Syon 99), illustrating a duo of monstrous airships in a sepia toned sky, "an uncanny mix of machine and natural entity, bridging the sublime and the grotesque, the awe-inspiring and the monstrous" (Freedman 51). Black smoke, ostensibly from coal fires, belches forth from the rear of two zeppelins, seemingly

modelled upon the Graf Zeppelin of the "golden age" of airship travel in the 1920s and 1930s.

While the "golden age" of airship travel did not occur until the start of the twentieth-century, these lighter-than-air ships have an iconic value within the steampunk visual aesthetic: at *Steam Powered*, the 2008 Northern California steampunk convention, one could purchase an official looking "airship license," t-shirts from "airship institutes" in Germany, France and the United States, while members of steampunk band Abney Park claim to be airship pirates aboard a lighter-than-air craft named *Ofelia*. The airship as sublime cultural object is explored at length in Ariela Freedman's "Zeppelin Fictions and the British Home Front," in which she demonstrates how both dread and awe combined in the British imagination so that "the smooth skin of the Zeppelin became a screen for the projection of fantasies of apocalypse and redemption" (48). Like the nuclear bomb at the height of the Cold War, the airship was an unrealized threat, more effective as imagined terror than realized weapon. The relative uselessness of the airship in combat was one of the factors leading to the end of the use of zeppelins in the twentieth-century, again underscoring the historical reality that the "Zeppelin's impact was more imaginative than actual" (Freedman 48). The airship once again reveals steampunk's ambivalent relationship with real-world history.

This ambivalent relationship is further revealed by how rare the steam-train appears in the Steam Wars images, despite Hantke's conviction that the

name “steampunk” esteems the “steam engine as the most appropriate icon of the past” in describing the genre’s main focus on anachronistic Victorian technology (1999, 247). Amidst the myriad steampunk airships and ground forces in Miljenko Simic’s “Steam Star,” a rail-vehicle follows a track down a snow-covered slope. Aside from this instance, the Steam Wars images overlook the reality of the steam locomotive and its railways as more than “simply a technological achievement” in the nineteenth-century.

Italian artist Marco Rolandi’s “Rail Haven”[7] might be a more “historically” accurate steampunk revision of the starships of Lucas’s fictional universe. The steam train was “a symbol of the new world of machines and industry” (Keep 139). While it was claimed that the steam train and the telegraph had “annihilated space and time,” the truth was this claim had more to do with how the new technologies had “transformed the social sphere than as an accurate reflection of their material effects” (138). Like the airship, the steam train represented the power of technology as evocative symbol rather than concrete reality.

This disregard for the realities of physics or history is taken a step further in Eric Poulton’s *Massive Solar-Orbiting Electro-Mechanical Analytic Engine, Mark 6*, which imagines Lucas’s Death Star as a moon-sized clockwork hybrid of antique globe and pulp-SF death ray. Poulton’s accompanying text states that the station is the product of research into “Arcane Mathematics, the mathematical

[7] Not a Steam Wars image. It is included as exemplar of the potential of rail travel in a Steam Wars secondary world.

study of the Force," as well as using the Force as its energy source (Poulton 2007). Lucas's magical Force as potential energy source might seem contrary to the *EF*'s limitation of steampunk as technofantasies. However, the *EF* suggests "books which fit directly into the form developed by Tim Powers, K.W. Jeter and James P. Blaylock from models derived from Michael Moorcock, Christopher Priest and others" (Clute & Kaveny 1997, 391) to clarify what is meant by technofantasy. Newer steampunk works utilize alchemy or occult ritual to develop steampunk technologies, as demonstrated in Ekaterina Sedia's *The Alchemy of Stone*, the story of a clockwork woman who becomes an alchemist. Her fanciful commissions include creating an elixir to extend the lives of gargoyles, and a "fragrance that would cause regret" (19). To this example we again add the god-like Victorian Wintermute of Sterling and Gibson's *The Difference Engine*; the mysterious disease that transforms men into machines in S.M. Peters' *Whitechapel Gods*; the magical manipulation of creation made clockwork in Jay Lake's *Mainspring*; the divining alethiometer of Pullman's *The Golden Compass*; or mathematics as the power to alter time and space in Thomas Pynchon's *Against the Day*.

Steampunk technologies often require some level of "magic" in order to be rendered plausible. Based upon the Steam Wars images, it seems that steampunk technology is exposed to act as visual hyperbole, communicating the purpose of the technological object. While steampunk has long been considered a sub-genre of SF, its technology is far closer to magic than to hard science. But

rather than simply use the term "magic," steampunk continues to give the appearance of SF by rendering the magical as alchemical formulae.

Magic and Alchemy in Steampunk

Alchemy appears as a major element in Ekaterina Sedia's *The Alchemy of Stone*, *Gordon Dahlquist's Glass Books of the Dream Eaters*, and steampunk anime *Full Metal Alchemist*, to name just a few. Alchemy shares the *appearance* of modern scientific method, appearing less frivolous than high fantasy's inherently ambient magic. Despite appearances, steampunk employs many fantasy elements: discarded theoretical substances, such as phlogiston and aether, entirely fictional substances like the "hydrium" of Kenneth Oppel's *Airborn*, or the gravity-canceling cavorite, of both *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen* and Xavier Mauméjean's *The League of Heroes*, borrowed from H.G. Wells' *The First Men in the Moon*. In an interview with Lisa Binion at *Bella Online*, Ben H. Winters explains groznium, the element of technofantasy in *Android Karenina*: "Oh, it's made-up as all hell. Groznium is the mysterious and entirely imaginary metal discovered beneath the Russian soil in the time of Ivan the Terrible. In fact, Ivan the Terrible, in Russian, is Ivan Grozny." While aether and phlogiston are windows into the history of science, steampunk's use of these elements varies in adherence to their respective historical theories. In Ian R. MacLeod's *The Light Ages*, the description of aether mined from the ground like petroleum is far afield from the idea of "a material, mechanically structured substance … which occupies

even those regions we think of as being completely empty" (Dear 3). The following passage demonstrates how steampunk writers often attach a magical nature to their theoretical substances:

> But aether is like no other element, and it shuns all physical rules. It is weightless, and notoriously difficult to contain … Strangest of all, and yet most crucial to all the industries and livelihoods it helps sustain, aether responds to the will of the human spirit. (30)

With aether, England is able to accomplish miracles: "Boilers which would otherwise explode, pistons which would stutter, buildings and beams and bearings which would shatter and crumble, are born aloft from mere physics on the aether-fuelled bubbles of guildsmen's spells" (30). Without aether, steam engines would halt, "wyreglowing" telegraphs would fall silent, and architecture would collapse.

Some might argue such alchemical references are still SF because they seek to emulate the speculations of scientific romances in the nineteenth-century. Yesterday's magic is often today's science, evidenced by the natural philosophers of the eighteenth century becoming the chemical scientists of the nineteenth; alchemy was considered science, not magic:

> Unlike the more rigid, discipline-based, institutionalized science characteristic of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, nineteenth-century science is both chaotic and unregulated. In the first three decades of the century, science was still closely

> allied, at least in the public imagination, with magic, alchemy, and the occult. (Willis 10)

Rigorous experimentation, not dabbling with otherworld spirits, was going to be the key to transmuting lead into gold. Richard Morris mentions Robert Boyle, "widely considered the founder of the science of chemistry," in the preface to *Last Sorcerers: The Path from Alchemy to the Periodic Table*: "But Boyle was an alchemist as well as a chemist, and he spent the greater part of his life seeking the Philosopher's Stone, the elusive substance that could supposedly transform base metals into gold" (ix). Morris also refers to Gottfried Leibniz, "whose interest in alchemy eventually led to his involvement in the production of a new element, phosphorous, from human urine" (xi). If this constitutes science, many historical fantasies could be subsumed under the umbrella of SF.

In Christopher Wooding's *Retribution Falls*, one of the major characters, Crake, is a "daemonist," which is effectively an alchemist. Daemonists are contrasted with charlatan diviners in one scene where Crake explains that people want to see daemonists hanged, because what they do *works*. "It's a science," he tells the sky-pirate Captain Frey (109). This is the approach of technofantasy: it is the science of an alternate history or secondary world wherein the physical laws are radically different from our own. Consider the following description of a daemonist's workshop:

> Plome, like Crake, had always leaned towards science rather than superstition in his approach to daemonism. His sanctum was like a

> laboratory. A chalkboard was covered with formulae for frequency modulation, next to a complicated alembic and books on the nature of plasm and luminiferous aether. A globular brass cage took pride of place, surrounded by various resonating devices. There were thin metal strips of varying lengths, chimes of all kinds, and hollow wooden tubes. With such devices a daemon could be contained. (70)

I have encountered naysayers to the idea of technofantasy in steampunk when presenting at steampunk conventions; they hold that the technology of *Star Trek* and *Star Wars* is also technofantasy, therefore proving that steampunk is simply a sub-genre of SF. Admittedly, *Star Trek* and *Star Wars* are technofantasy. This is the reason hard-SF aficionados chafe at the conflation of these space operas with the work of SF giants like Arthur C. Clarke and Isaac Asimov. This derision of popular television and cinematic space operas has given rise to derogatory terms like "syfy" now. This project clearly argues that *Star Wars* and steampunk share a similar attitude toward technology. But in the case of *Star Trek*'s dilithium crystals, we are dealing with a fictional substance based in scientific speculation, as evidenced by theoretical physicist Michio Kaku's *Physics of the Impossible: A Scientific Exploration into the World of Phasers, Force Fields, Teleportation, and Time Travel*, which explores the relationship between real-world technological innovation and science fiction. Given Kaku's discussion of phasers and real-world lasers, one can conclude that SF like *Star Trek* is making an attempt to sound scientific. Steampunk rarely tries. Bess, the powerful automaton of *Retribution*

Falls does not have a positronic brain; it is not a droid or robot, it is a *golem,* created through the art of daemonism in a ritual mixing equal parts *Frankenstein,* Cthulhu mythos, and anime *Full Metal Alchemist*.

As another example, consider the following passage from Frank Herbert's *Dune,* where Jessica Atreides is taking "The Water of Life" and synthesizing its poison. The passage is a mix of mystical and chemical language: "an abrupt revelation," is understood as the awareness of "a psychokinesthetic extension of herself." And while the mystical elements remain, the process is ultimately conveyed through science:

> The stuff was dancing particles within her, its motions so rapid that even frozen time could not stop them. Dancing particles. She began recognizing familiar structures, atomic linkages: a carbon atom here, helical wavering...a glucose molecule. An entire chain of molecules confronted her, and she recognized a protein...a metyhl-protein configuration. (297)

Dune presents an excellent contrast for looking at how technofantasy is used in steampunk vs. hard SF. Insofar as *Dune* contains elements of technofantasy, they are woven in with hard speculations about ecology, evolution, human consciousness, and astrophysics. These speculations contribute directly to the narrative of *Dune*.

Contrast these speculations with those of *Retribution Falls*, where the art of daemonism serves as marker of difference - daemonism is outlawed, which renders the daemonist Crake an outsider. Outlaws and outsiders are related to

Retribution Falls' central theme of community and belonging, but this relationship is not intrinsic to how Wooding constructs daemonism as technofantasy. Crake is ultimately an exile from hearth and home because of an experiment gone horribly wrong, not because daemonism is a ritual practice that encourages loneliness. Contrast this disconnect between technofantasy and theme in *Retribution Falls* with the spice *melange* of *Dune*, which *is* inherently connected to the novel's ecological theme. I am not implying that the technofantasy of steampunk *cannot* be used to further a novel's conceptual aspects. I am demonstrating that, in the case of *Retribution Falls*, they do not. In my reading of steampunk, this lack of connection between technofantasy and theme seems to be the rule, not the exception. Consider that *Moorcock* uses the airships of *Warlord of the Air* as a signifier of imperial colonialism. The airships communicate a period of time when Britain was a significant world power. They are not just modes of transportation; they are indicators of bigger ideas, as are the airships of Scott Westerfeld's *Leviathan* series.

Scott Westerfeld's Leviathan – A Living, Breathing Airship

In Scott Westerfeld's *Leviathan*, the opposing sides of World War II are divided into the Darwinist nations of Britain, France, and, Russia, allied against the "Clanker" nations of Germany, Austria-Hungary, and the Ottoman Empire. Westerfeld's vision of these two technological approaches to signify the sides in the Great War brought a whole new approach to industrial-era technofantasy in

2009. The *Leviathan* series begins with conventionally industrial steampunk technology as exemplified by the Clanker Stormwalker before moving on to the Darwinist fabricated beasts, most notably the massive ecosystem of the whale-as-airship Leviathan. The Darwinist technology of weaving life threads, effectively splicing DNA, was something new to steampunk, yet maintained a decidedly neo-Victorian link to nineteenth-century interest in Darwin's paradigm-changing theories.

The looming war between the Darwinists and Clankers is emphasized in the opening lines of *Leviathan*, as Alek, son of Franz Ferdinand, archduke of Austria-Hungary, is engaged in a war of miniature toys representing the two powers. This wargame is interrupted by the arrival of Otto Klopp, his piloting teacher, and Count Volger, his fencing instructor, who tell him to get dressed for a night lesson in piloting a Clanker walker. Alek is suspicious of this lesson in the middle of the night, with his parents away in Sarajevo. For even an amateur historian of the Great War, the reason for this intrigue is immediately evident, though not Klopp and Volger's intentions. Alek is further amazed to find that he is to pilot a Cyklop Stormwalker, "a real engine of war" standing "taller than the stable's roof, its two metal feet sunk deep into the soil of the riding paddock" with a "cannon mounted in its belly, and the stubby noses of two Spandau machine guns [sprouting] from it head, which was as big as a smokehouse" (8). Westerfeld's use of real historical devices, such as the Spandau machine guns and the engines of the Stormwalker, developed by the Daimler-Motoren-Gesellschaft

(who later developed the Mercedes- Benz), gives the novel a strong sense of verisimilitude in the description of this quintessential steampunk vehicle. It is necessary for Westerfeld to create a believable secondary world, for while the Clanker devices are marginally fantastic, the fabricated beasts of the Darwinists are undeniably technofantasy: genetically altered animals, the result of nations in a history where Darwin's scientific discoveries of natural selection were unimpeded by conservative ideology. Westerfeld's counterfactual "what if?" question seems to be, "what if Darwin had been branded saint instead of heretic?" In *Leviathan*, it is the conservative groups who are derided as "Monkey Luddites":

> A few people—Monkey Luddites, they were called—were afraid of Darwinist beasties on principle. They thought that crossbreeding natural creatures was more blasphemy than science, even if fabs had been the backbone of the British Empire for the last fifty years. (31)

The answer comes in stages, through the adventures of Deryn, a teenage girl masquerading as a boy in order to join the British Air Service: first, she witnesses "lupine tigeresques," massive crossbreeds of tiger and wolf which are powerful enough to pull an "all-terrain carriage" (28); then, the Huxley ascender, a hydrogen breathing organism that serves the same purpose as a hot-air-balloon, "made from the life chains of medusae—jellyfish and other venomous sea creatures" (32); before finally revealing the Leviathan itself:

> The thing was gigantic—larger than St. Paul's Cathedral . . . The shining cylinder was shaped like a zeppelin, but the flanks pulsed with the motion of its cilia, and the air around it swarmed with symbiotic bats and birds . . . The Leviathan had been the first of the great hydrogen breathers fabricated to rival the kaiser's zeppelins...The Leviathan's body was made from the lifethreads of a whale, but a hundred other species were tangled into its design, countless creatures fitting together like the gears of a stopwatch. Flocks of fabricated birds swarmed around it —scouts, fighters, and predators to gather food...According to her aerology manual, the big hydrogen breathers were modeled on the tiny South American islands where Darwin had made his famous discoveries. The Leviathan wasn't one beastie, but a vast web of life in ever shifting balance. (69-71)

Aside from being a wonderful device of organic technofantasy and brilliant contrast to the machines of the Clanker nations, the Leviathan can also be read as an analogy: this hydrogen-breathing airship which is both living organism and ecosystem, is not a speculation upon actual genetic science, as hard science fiction would be; it is a visual representation of social and environmental concerns, wherein the lives of everyone and everything on board are connected: a balance must be maintained in order for the ship to remain in working order.

Westerfeld foreshadows this idea of the Leviathan as a "vast web of life" in the opening chapters, demonstrating how the Clanker and Darwinist protagonists already think about their respective technologies in metaphors that

foreshadow their eventual alliance. Alek compares the Cyklops Stormwalker with "one of the Darwinist monsters skulking in the darkness" (8). Upon seeing the *Leviathan* for the first time, Deryn sees the "countless creatures fitting together like the gears of a stopwatch," comparing her nation's organic technology with that of the Clankers (71). Already, Westerfeld is subtly telling the reader that, although they seem to be at war, we cannot forget that they are all ultimately human, and that he intends on getting at least some of the Clankers and Darwinists together to forge an alliance.

By the time this accord is reached, Westerfeld has made several references to the necessity of interaction and cooperation, of living in the "vast web of life." Dr. Barlow, the granddaughter of Darwin, explains this web of connections to Deryn while touring the ship:

> "You see, my grandfather's true realization was this: if you remove one element—the cats, the mice, the bees, the flowers—the entire web is disrupted. An archduke and his wife are murdered, and all of Europe goes to war. A missing piece can be very bad for the puzzle, whether in the natural world, or politics, or here in the belly of an airship." (195)

Dr. Barlow's use of the murder of Archduke Franz Ferdinand and his wife as a real-world example is contrasted by the dramatic irony of Deryn's statement to Alek later in the book: "Your family's no business of ours" (329). The message is clear – Alek's identity as Franz Ferdinand's son is irrelevant - his family would still be her business at some level: we are all each other's business.

When the Leviathan is forced to crash-land in the Swiss Alps, near where Alek and his companions have retreated to, Count Volger laments: “the highest mountains in Europe, and the war reaches us so quickly. . .What an age we live in.” He concludes that the Leviathan’s crew will not last long, due to the scarcity of food, shelter, or fuel on the glacier. Alek’s response is immediate, once again underscoring Westerfeld’s message of interconnection: “But we can’t leave shipwrecked men to die!” Count Volger’s cold reply reminds us of a lesson the world has yet to learn in terms of webs of connection, common humanity, and trust: “May I remind you that they’re the enemy, Alek?” (227).

Westerfeld does not frame the Great War as an event caused by a single action—assassination—but rather a massive wave that broke with Franz Ferdinand’s death. Nevertheless, Alek sees the War as his fault, and believes it is his destiny to bring peace. In *Goliath*, the third book in the trilogy, Deryn explains that the War “would have gone on, year after bloody year, no matter what you did” (530). As with the airship *Leviathan*, everything is connected, but not in a way that finds history being changed by one person’s actions. Instead, change requires community, a web of connection. As Deryn reflects, “every time one of them had fallen — in the snows of the Alps, in Istanbul, on the stormy topside, in that dusty canyon — the other had been there to pick them up” (386).

In the second book, *Behemoth*, the technofantasy elements convey one of the other ideas the Darwinist beasties and Clanker machines represent: embracing difference. This idea was already in place at the end of *Leviathan*, as the wounded

airship/whale returned to the air through the aid of the exiled Clankers and their Stormwalker engines. *Behemoth* opens with the Leviathan flying southward to deliver Dr. Barlow's cargo of mysterious eggs, still relying on the Stormwalker engines for propulsion. The opening scenes are focalized by the exiled Austrians, Alek and his guardian mentors, the latter continuing to display disgust at the fabricated creatures that make up the Leviathan. By contrast, Alek already finds himself wondering if he is "turning into a Darwinist," admiring the beauty of the Darwinist technology during a battle with Clanker ironclads (13). Even Klopp seems to admire the Leviathan itself as it turns away from the danger of a "real" Tesla cannon—the epitome of a steampunk infernal device if ever there were one—commenting that "The beast knows it's in danger" (27). Despite these movements away from the polarity of the Clanker perspective, Count Volger replies to Alek's inquiries about trusting the Darwinist with his characteristic suspicion.

Yet upon arriving in Constantinople, it is the Darwinist Deryn whose point of view is challenged: she has "never seen a Clanker city before," and finds it difficult to conflate her affection for Alek with her mistrust and apprehension about "a place like this, full of machines and metal, hardly alive except for human beings and their bedbugs" (96-97). The idea of difference is pushed from the alternate world of Clankers and Darwinists, as Westerfeld engages in a masterful infodump via dialogue between Deryn's ship-mate Newkirk and Dr. Barlow:

> "Do you reckon we'll find corned beef in Constantinople?" Newkirk asked hopefully.
>
> "Is-tan-bul," Dr. Barlow said, tapping her riding crop against her boot once for each syllable. "That's what we must remember to call this city. Otherwise we shall annoy the locals."
>
> "Istanbul?" Newkirk frowned. "But it's 'Constantinople' on all the maps."
>
> "On our maps it is," the lady boffin said. "We use that name to honor Constantine, the Christian emperor who founded the city. But the residents have called it Istanbul since 1453."
>
> "They changed the name four hundred-odd years ago?"
>
> Deryn turned back toward the windows. "Maybe it's time to fix our barking maps." (99-100)

In *Leviathan*, Clanker and Darwinist settings were largely focalized by characters who see those spaces as respectively normative. For Deryn, the living airship-ecosystem is the way things should be, and the same is true for Alek in his cramped Stormwalker. In *Behemoth*, both characters are forced to see the value in the technology of the "other side." Bovril, the beastie hatched from Dr. Barlow's eggs is noteworthy, since both Alek and Deryn find themselves interacting with it at length at different points in the book. Bovril is given the name of the beef tea created by John Lawson Johnston in the early twentieth-century (bovril.co.uk), arguably the Edwardian equivalent of naming one's pet *Spam* or *Jello*, perhaps underscoring this talking loris' genetically engineered roots. The following scene

is indicative of how the Bovril creature underscores the theme of difference, when an Ottoman character has done something with Bovril neither a Clanker nor Darwinist ostensibly would:

> "You named it Bovril?" she asked Alek.
>
> "I named it in fact," said the girl in slow, careful English. "This silly boy kept calling it 'the creature.'"
>
> "But you're not supposed to name beasties! If you get too attached, you can't use them properly."
>
> "Use them?" Lilit asked. "What a horrid way to think of animals." (330)

The irony of this conversation is how attached Deryn is to *The Leviathan*, which is named, after all. She is blind to her own affection for the ship, owing perhaps to its size and complexity. Bovril's diminutive size permits a micro-engagement with a fabricated beastie, and from that emerges a problematizing of "using" fabricated animals as technology. Unlike *Leviathan*, Bovril cannot be used as a weapon nor mode of transportation, while Westerfeld's construction of this charming creature would defy even the most callous individual to refuse naming it. So while Clanker technology is bad for all its cold dispassion, one begins to wonder at the ethics of the Darwinist nations and the technology of fabricated beasts.

Technofantasy as signifier of difference is furthered by the space of Ottoman territory, which is neither entirely Clanker nor Darwinist. The Ottoman airship utilizes Clanker technology, but its design is Darwinist, imitating the

shape of a falcon. The Orient-Express is described as “a strange crossbreed of Ottoman and German design” with an engine suggesting “a dragon’s face” and “unadorned” “mechanical arms” that “move as smoothly as the wings of a soaring hawk” (307). The animal and mechanical metaphors which represent the two sides of the Great War in *Leviathan* are problematized in Istanbul. Since Istanbul is undecided as to which side it will support in the coming conflict, the city acts as a liminal space. Consequently, the action in Istanbul causes the characters to wonder about their certainty of the world views they have grown up with, which are in turn shaped by the technology of their nations.

Deryn and Alek’s relationship becomes suggestive of the solution to the war, a putting aside of techno-ideological differences to work toward the common goal of peace. Westerfeld weaves the technofantasy of an airship ecosystem with an impossible romance between an exiled prince and a girl masquerading as a boy, and then tying all of that to the way a person’s actions affect the greater movements of history. It is apt then, that Westerfeld takes his readers around the world in his biotech airship, since this is a timely message for a global village, with the challenge to put aside our own “Clanker” or “Darwinist” ideals, to cross divisive national boundaries, clasp hands, and pick each other up. “We save each other,” Deryn says in *Goliath*. “That’s how it works” (533).

Not all the technofantasy elements of *Leviathan* and *Behemoth* are meant to underscore difference: Westerfeld is first and foremost a teller of tales. Deryn’s Spottiswoode Rebreather, “the first underwater apparatus created from fabricated

creatures" is a wonderful Darwinist invention, "practically a living creature, a set of fabricated gills that had to be kept wet even in storage" (*Behemoth* 255). The Rebreather is a melding of Verne with H.R. Giger, biomechanical SCUBA gear. Despite any high-minded interpretations, it remains that the technofantasy of Westerfeld's trilogy is meant to delight. An airship as a giant floating whale would be endearing to young adult readers without any deeper reading, an excellent example of how steampunk technology is often more about enchantment than engineering.

Technofantasy: the Liminal Space Between Faith and Reason

The most scientifically rigorous steampunk still tends toward soft SF, "science fiction in which there is little science or awareness of science at all" (Wolfe 21), and the most "gonzo" steampunk to be technofantasy. Regardless of nomenclature, the steampunk aesthetic clearly inhabits a space between fantasy and SF. Steampunk is science fantasy, that liminal fiction combining "elements or tropes of both science fiction and fantasy" (Prucher 170).

We find this balance of science and magic presented as near-allegory in *The Alchemy of Stone*, where a perfect dichotomy of technofantasy exists in the polemicized conflict between the societies of Mechanics and Alchemists:

> "The Dukes had always insisted that both alchemists and mechanics are represented in the government," Mattie said. "They represent two aspects of creation—command of the

> spiritual and magical, and mastery of the physical. Together, we have the same aspects as the gargoyles who could shape the physical with their minds." (Sedia 69).

Sedia perfectly captures the tension in steampunk between science and magic. I have included discussions of how alchemy is often used in steampunk because of its historical relationship with chemical science, but in *Alchemy of Stone*, it operates as one end of a spectrum for changing the world. So long as the Mechanics and Alchemists remain in opposition, there is chaos.

Steampunk often plays in the tension between the physical and spiritual, between science and faith: as the narrator of *The Kingdom of Ohio* self-reflexively states, "It is about science and faith, and the distance between the two" (Flaming 6). In *The Dream of Perpetual Motion*, a steampunk novel-of-ideas, this "distance between" is symbolized by the Dynamo, "the desire to know," and the Virgin, "the freedom not to know." The Dynamo is logic, the "unstoppable engine," while the Virgin is "faith and mysticism; miracle and instinct; art and randomness." To the polemic these two contrasts represent, a solution is offered:

> Instead of seeing these two kingdoms of force as diametric opposites, always in conflict, as this industrial age has taught us…we have to find a way to allow them to coexist. We have to find a way to marry the Virgin to the Dynamo. (Palmer 187)

It could be argued that the steampunk aesthetic *is* this marriage, a unity of absurdity, a merging of opposites to create a ludicrous middle path. As we have

seen, at its least sophisticated, steampunk technofantasy results in escapist fiction with a nostalgia for pre-digital, obviously mechanized technology. At its best, steampunk technofantasy juxtaposes knowledge and ignorance, rational and irrational, science and magic, which "motivates an interplay, rather than a resolution, among the elements" (Gill 455).

By existing between polemics, steampunk remains an aesthetic of possibility, a utopian impulse. This is likely why steampunk writers do not draw upon an aesthetic toolbox beyond World War I, since the optimism of the late nineteenth-century and the early twentieth was replaced by a dark pessimism born of the Great War's atrocities. Nowhere is this clearer than in the adventures of the crew of the airship *Inconvenience* in *Against the Day*. Pynchon introduces the *Inconvenience*'s "Chums of Chance" as wide-eyed youth filled with a love of high adventure: boy geniuses with a canine companion no less genius. They travel above, on, and even through the globe, paragons of duty to their High Command, and stalwart advocates of justice. Near the end of the book, the Chums investigate "an updraft over the deserts of Northern Africa unprecedented in size and intensity" (1018). The Chums find themselves traveling toward an alternate Earth, simultaneously rising above the one while descending towards the other. They avoid crashing into mountains "with the usual 'inches to spare,'" (1020) a self-reflexive, intertextual nod to the adventure stories Pynchon echoes. As they sail over the alternate-Earth, they witness trench warfare, with its atrocities alien to their experience.

The entire section of their flight over the trenches underscores the loss of innocence the Great War represented to the optimism of the Victorian and Edwardian eras:

> "All through the growing region now, the countryside is torn up with trenches."
>
> "Trenches," Miles said, as if it were a foreign technical term . . . "Those poor innocents," he exclaimed in a stricken whisper, as if some blindness had abruptly healed itself, allowing him at last to see the horror transpiring on the ground. "Back at the beginning of this...they must have been boys, so much like us...They knew they were standing before a great chasm none could see to the bottom of. But they launched themselves into it anyway. Cheering and laughing. It was their own grand 'Adventure.' They were juvenile heroes of a World-Narrative—unreflective and free, they went on hurling themselves into those depths by tens of thousands until one day they awoke, those who were still alive, and instead of finding themselves posed nobly against some dramatic moral geography, they were down cringing in a mud trench swarming with rats and smelling of shit and death." (1022-24)

As they narrowly avoid artillery shells, one of the Chums declares, "We signed nothing that included any of this" (1026). This negative epiphany mirrors steampunk's self-imposed limitation of inspiration beyond the Great War. World War I can be read as a signifier of the industrial West's loss of innocence: the

optimism prior to this loss is part of the attraction of steampunk. It evokes a time when technology had not yet produced the tank, or mustard gas, or the atom bomb. It evokes a time when frontiers, and therefore, possibilities still existed, and were externalized in fantastic voyages like those Pynchon honors and lampoons with his Chums of Chance:

> It is a measure of Pynchon's sophistication as a cognitive cartographer that he also takes into account his own historical position— which is to say, our historical position as latter-day readers of these early-twentieth-century popular genres, looking back from the distance of a century at the world on the eve of the Great War. Pynchon introduces his, and our, historical perspective into the picture through his parodic and revisionist handling of the popular genres in *Against the Day*. His parody of juvenile-inventor fiction reflects our distance from the Chums' "boys'-book innocence" (418) about technology and history— an innocence that also qualifies them to serve as estranged witnesses of the horrors of the Great War. (McHale 25-26)

In the wake of their disillusionment, the Chums are cast adrift without fuel, only to be rescued by the Sodality of Ætheronauts, a sorority to match the Chums' fraternity, who fly on waves "passing through the Æther" on wings comprised of "thousands of perfectly-machined elliptical 'feathers'" (1030).

> And now here were these five boy balloonists, whose immediate point of fascination was with the girls' mode of flight. There were great waves

> passing through the Æther, Viridian explained, which a person could catch, and be carried along by, as the sea-wind carries the erne, or as Pacific waves are said to vary the surfers of Hawaii. The girls' wings were Æther-aerials which sensed in the medium, all but microscopically, a list of variables including weighted light-saturation index, spectral reluctance, and Æther-normalized Reynolds Number. "These are in turn fed back into a calculating device," said Viridian, "which controls our wing parameters, adjusting them 'feather' by 'feather' to maximize Ætheric lift. . ." (1030-31)

These wings are an excellent example of technofantasy, given how Pynchon mixes metaphor with technical terms, all of which give the sense of plausibility. But such wings are only plausible in a universe where Æther is a real element. Beyond the technofantasy, the arrival of these steampunk angels underscores Pynchon's religious themes: Kathryn Hume has framed the Chums' airship journey as a pilgrimage, through the spiritual seeking of Miles Blundell, one of the crewmen (175). This pilgrimage ends when the Chums "[blunder] into [a] flying formation of girls, dressed like religious novices in tones of dusk" (1030). These girls, a mix of steampunked-flying-nun and angel arrive "with no advance annunciation" to come to the Chums' rescue in a "moment of spiritual perplexity" (1030). The Christian imagery is thick here; Hume has characterized *Against the Day* as Pynchon's most overtly religious work, of a particular stripe: Catholic anarchism, which "bears some kinship to Marxist-inflected liberation

theology from Latin America, which combines social revolution (sometimes with violence) and Catholic doctrine" (169).

These steampunk angel-wings are not a singular technofantasy of Pynchon's, but are also found in the "armatures" of the *icarus* caste in Dru Pagliasotti's *Clockwork Heart*. In both cases, the steampunk angel-wings are contrivances that are strapped on. In other cases, clockwork wings are part of an angel or demon's body (Lake 1; Palmer 72). Angel and fairy wings abound in steampunk fashion and cosplay, from the Victoria's Secret catwalk to steampunk conventions. These wings are utterly fantastic, divorced completely from any concession to aerodynamics.

The Chums find themselves smitten not only by this "wandering sisterhood," but by their fantastic wings as well, powered by luminous Æther: "'Fumes are not the future,' declared Viridian. 'Burning dead dinosaurs and whatever they ate ain't the answer…'" (1031). At story's end, the Chums, convinced at the inferiority of fossil fuels, have updated the engineering of *Inconvenience*, based upon the wings of the Ætheronauts, utilizing light as a vaguely defined "source of motive power—though not exactly fuel—and as a carrying medium—though not exactly a vehicle" (1084). The Chums and the Sodality are now paired in matrimony. The book closes with these enigmatic lines:

> *Inconvenience*, once a vehicle of sky-pilgrimage, has transformed into its own destination, where any wish that can be

> made is at least addressed, if not always granted. For every wish to come true would mean that in the known Creation, good unsought and uncompensated would have evolved somehow, to become at least more accessible to us. No one aboard *Inconvenience* has yet observed any sign of this. They know – Miles is certain – it is there, like an approaching rainstorm, but invisible. Soon they will see the pressure-gauge begin to fall. They will feel the turn in the wind. They will put on smoked goggles for the glory of what is coming to part the sky. They fly toward grace. (1085)

The odd conflation of steampunk's nearly ubiquitous goggles and hinted-at parousia, an impending collision into grace echo the "door in the sky" of Victoria Nelson's *The Secret Life of Puppets*. She argues that films like *The Truman Show*, *Dark City*, and *The Matrix* all contain a moment where the hero exits the current world to find another reality beyond it. Nelson believes this moment operates symbolically as an analogue for how postmodernism has rejected scientism, the "one-sided worldview" dominating Western culture in the past three hundred years. But rather than engaging a pendulum swing back to "a fundamentalist Dark Ages," Nelson advises a more ambivalent middle-path, a mix of both "Platonism and Aristotelianism, idealism and empiricism, *gnosis* and *episteme*" (288). Quoting Cyril Connolly's statement that it is erroneous to assume "we can either

have a spiritual or a materialist view of life," Nelson concludes that "[t]ruth does lie in recognizing both" (289).

Consequently, we could read the steampunk aesthetic as an expression of this ambivalent tension between empiricism and faith: on the surface, it is science and magic blended to make technofantasy; history and fantastic worlds blended to make a retrofuture. On a deeper level, it appears to be a reaction to the modernist imbalance that lauded hard facts over feeling, that "elevated one element of the Western dialectic at the expense of the other" (288), resulting in the problem Nelson explores throughout her book: the unspoken prohibition towards the religious impulse in the dominant Western intellectual culture resulting in the "ontological equivalent of a perversion caused by repression" (19). Steampunk enthusiasts claim that steampunk technology points to a time when the machine was understandable, when technology was something a person could take apart, manage, and put back together. What steampunk literature and film seem to suggest instead is that steampunk technology seeks to restore a sense of wonder to the perception of the world. This is expressed through the reminiscent musings of the protagonist's father in *The Dream of Perpetual Motion,* who delivers several speeches about the disappearance of miracles, saying, "there's nothing left that's miraculous anymore, and that's your loss for being born too late" (35). He contrasts miracle and invention by stating that inventions are comprehensible, and miracles are not. Miracles imply a lack of complete understanding about why something works the way it does. If the workings of a mystery to one man can be

understood by another, it is not a miracle - it is an invention. With the death of miracles—God—the world becomes more frightening because it can ostensibly be understood, and yet ultimately, is not:

> But here is a paradox: that mysteries such as these provided not disquiet for us, but comfort. Because they granted us permission, and in fact made it necessary, to believe in a God to Whom all mysteries had solutions. With belief in God comes the certainty that the world that He masters has an order. That every single thing in it at least makes sense to Someone [...] When the machines came, and when they drove away the angels from the world, they ruined everything [...] And without a God to comprehend this world in its entirety, what surety do I have that at its heart it is not chaotic and [...] therefore meaningless? (36-37)

Nelson explores this idea in *The Secret Life of Puppets* where she argues that Western culture has sublimated the elements of spirituality into its genre fictions: horror, SF, fantasy and the like: “Because the religious impulse is profoundly unacceptable to the dominant Western intellectual cutlure, it has been obliged to sneak in this back door, where our guard is down” (18). Insofar as steampunk involving self-aware Turing devices, Difference Engines, or automata, we find a thread connecting steampunk with cyberpunk: the exploration of the ghost in the machine concept, metaphysical questions imbedded in metonymic machines.

Consider the self-aware automaton of steampunk. Even a cursory look at steampunk art will convince the steampunk neophyte that the automaton is a

favorite representation of steampunk's industrial technofantasy. Consider the cover of Jess Nevins' *Fantastic Victoriana*, with its giant robot sporting a top hat menacing London. The automaton of Ted Chiang's "Seventy-Two Letters" is effectively a kabbalistic golem. The robot pugilist of James Lovegrove's "Steampunch" appears to be self-aware. Lea Hernandez's Clockwork Angels in her *Texas Steampunk* books are all so real that they are mistaken for people. The protagonist of *The Alchemy of Stone* is clearly self-aware; these automata are related to Shelley's monstrous creation who is given artificial life, but gains a sense of soul in the bargain. In steampunk, it would seem, there is clearly a ghost in the machine.

Steampunk automata are representations of this idea, echoing Nelson's explorations of twentieth-century automata speculative fictions by way of the medieval golem and the marionette or puppet. Sedia's Mattie encapsulates all of these ideas: automata, the puppet-girl, the idea of artificial life, of a soul within the brasswork. Mattie is a wonderful combination, a Kleistian version of Pinocchio and Cinderella—as the little ash girl, not Disney princess—wondering about identity while toiling in the dirt to make a place for herself in the world.

Mattie considers herself a "female" automaton, because she was "created as one," and because of the clothes she wears: "The shape of them is built into me—I know that you have to wear corsets and hoops and stays to give your clothes a proper shape. But I was created with all of those already in place, they are as much as part of me as my eyes. So I ask you, what else would you consider

me?" (18, 83-84). Her questions can be read as an echo of Donna Haraway's "Manifesto for Cyborgs," which considers the cyborg is a "creature in a postgender world," and heralds "the cyborgs populating feminist science fiction" as problematizing "the statuses of man or woman, human, artifact, member of a race, individual identity, or body" (192, 220). They can also be read using Judith Bulter's explorations of Foucault's speculations on the possibility of transcending sexuality as a "specific attribute of sexed persons," since Mattie does not *need* to think of herself as any gender. Despite this potential freedom from a "sex-desire" paradigm, Mattie later becomes involved in a sexual relationship with a young man that continues to see her framed as "a sexually differentiated Other" (Butler 11). Because she identifies with females, Mattie sees herself as other women in her society, without agency, despite involving herself directly in the events that are going on around her, allowing Sedia to explore issues of female agency in patriarchal societies, in this case, one that echoes the nineteenth-century. This exploration is carried out consistently in Mattie's character: she is intelligent enough to have become an alchemist, yet naive about emotions like love; she is simple and childlike, yet she is also an old-soul, wise about the way in which she has been made. Where others are horrified by the restrictions her creator Loharri has 'programmed' into her, she considers the way in which those restrictions keep her from harm.

It would be easy to see Mattie as simply a steampunk echo of cyberpunk. Cyberpunk was constantly playing with self-aware artificial intelligences, from

William Gibson's supercomputer Wintermute in *Neuromancer* and its sequels, to the Puppet Master of *Ghost in the Shell*. But Science Fiction in general has always been fascinated by the idea of the man-machine becoming something more than an anthropod difference engine, all the way back to Asimov, and further still, to Kleist or the Jewish golem. The idea of the female robot or cyborg as an exploration of the marginalization of women is not new to science fiction either. While numerous studies have been written on this subject, focusing on a number of variant SF expressions of the robot/cyborg form, we need only look at Mary Ann Doane's survey of the female body as automaton/robot/gynoid: Doane begins with *L'Eve future*, an 1886 French Edisonade before moving onto films such as Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* (1926), Ira Levin's *The Stepford Wives* (1972), and Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* (1982) to see that this has arguably been a perennial theme in science fiction, from Hoffman's clockwork doll Olimpia in *Der Sandman* (1816) to EVE in Pixar's *WALL-E* (2008). Sedia's interest in the automaton as an expression of gender and identity is not a hallmark of steampunk: it is a hallmark of science fiction. What Sedia has done is taken the questions any feminized, self-actualized artificial life form (a technofantasy) would have and dressed them in neo-Victorian trappings. Arguably, while the first two *components*of the steampunk aesthetic may give way to serious readings, they are simply the collage elements an artist or writer uses to make their steampunk work. The artist's position in history, that is, effectively looking *backward* to the Victorian period, either mimetically or resonantly, to imagine how nineteenth-

century people looked *forward*, produces the third feature, retrofuturism. Simply, the combination of neo-Victorianism with technofantasy produces a retrofuturistic style. However, this is only a surface understanding of what retrofuturism can accomplish in steampunk art and literature.

Returning to *The Alchemy of Stone*, Sedia is less concerned with telling her reader how the machine ticks than she is with exploring what makes the soul inside that machine tick. The *Alchemy of Stone* is not a counterfactual exploration asking what would happen if steampunk robots existed, but rather, an exploration of how certain people are marginalized as less than human. It is a parable of sorts, challenging readers to reflect on the marginalization of women and ethnic minorities through the utterly fictional persona of Mattie. She is described as having "little interest in politics—why worry about something she would never have an impact on?" (39). She responds to a human woman's complaint of patriarchal exclusion with the statement, "I'm a machine. No one explains anything to me either" (69). As a member of the "emancipated automata," Mattie is a rarity, just as emancipated women were in the *fin de siècle* period steampunk often draws from. This is a more complex form of retrofuturist speculation. As will be demonstrated in the next chapter, this use of nineteenth-century motifs alongside twenty-first century ethics is what I call social retrofuturism, and is arguably the space where steampunk engages most artfully in *detournement*. The first two *components*of the steampunk aesthetic combine to form a particular type

of retrofuturism, which, once again, can either be used as simple collage, or as *detournement*.

Chapter Five: Aesthetic III: Retrofuturism

Beyond the Retro/Techno Discussion

The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines retrofuturism as "the use of a style or aesthetic considered futuristic in an earlier era," and lists architectural references in the 1980s as early instances of the term's use. The fictional architecture of Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* has been called, though Scott used the term "retro-fitted," to describe the sets' architectural ambiguity:

> …the movie's most praised feature embodies similar ambiguity, a similar fusion of low and high, of primitive and advanced. Almost unanimously, critics have praised *Blade Runner*'s sets . . . the buildings inhabited by common people are old buildings with futuristic fittings applied to them. Scott called [this] aspect 'retro-fitting,' to achieve a 'layered' effect. Old buildings . . . were encrusted with futuristic devices, decoration, and debris. (Colwell 129)

In relation to steampunk, the term *retrofuturism* likely conjures up images of antiquated technology, dirigibles and ornithopters, Harper Goff's *Nautilus*, or Datamancer's brass-worked keyboards. Discussions concerning retrofuturism at conventions or online forums are often couched in a technological framework. A quick Google search for retrofuturism links to pages like the *Web Urbanist*'s "Steampunk Styling: Victorian Retrofuturism at Home" or *Smashing Magazine*'s "Retro Futurism at its Best: Designs and Tutorials." In both cases, the art and

photography reveal a myopic conflation of the term retrofuturism with technological objects, such as steampunk style motorcycles or interior decor.

Consequently, steampunk's backward gaze becomes uniformly associated with technology. The nostalgia and regret Rob Latham identifies as "typical retrofuturist emotions" (341) are likewise often associated with the retrofuturism of steampunk art and literature. It is arguably this nostalgia for a "perceived 'lost' mechanical world" that Rebecca Onion references concerning steampunk Makers and artists (39). In his review of the special issue of *Neo-Victorian Studies* devoted to steampunk, Jess Nevins calls such interpretations of steampunk artworks "programmatic intent," and suggests critical approaches need to move beyond materiality as an essential feature of steampunk ("Defining" 516). I agree: while technology is undeniably foundational to the steampunk aesthetic, discussions of steampunk retrofuturism should encompass more than technofantastic anachronisms, automatons, and airships; the ambitions of late Victorian progressives were more concerned with medical advancements and human rights than with sky dreadnoughts and phlogiston powered rayguns.

Filippo Tommaso Marinetti and the Italian futurists were unabashed technophiles of the machines they used and praised in their *avant-garde* art, but they were also interested in the social change such art would produce. Similarly, steampunk retrofuturism is arguably much more than just nostalgia for hands-on approaches to technology; it is not, as it is sometimes understood, how the past imagined the future. There is little about steampunk retrofuturism that realizes the

historical aspirations of the nineteenth-century. Rather, it is the way *we* imagine the past seeing the future. While these imaginings often take shape as technofantasy dirigibles and clockwork beings, they can also be used as detournement to reimagine the social spaces of the past.

The Difference Engine is an excellent example of how a technological focus in a discussion of retrofuturism might prove detrimental to significant analysis; the actual Difference Engine is seen only briefly in the novel. Instead, Gibson and Sterling spend most of the book working through the social, political, and cultural ramifications of the Difference Engine as counterfictional novum: "a stone thrown into the pool of social existence, and the ripples that ensue" (59). The focus of retrofuturistic speculation should not simply be the stone, but the ripples.

A Self-Rescuing Princess: Retrofuturism in Steam Wars

I follow in the footsteps of LeeAnne Richardson in her study on New Women in colonial adventure fiction, where she states, "The relationship between the women who imaginatively ventured into the territory of feminine emancipation cannot be studied separately from the men who imaginatively adventured into the outreaches of empire" (3-4). Steampunk literature, arguably due to its antecedent roots in such adventure stories, often blends these two journeys, as evidenced in Emilie P. Bush's *Chenda and the Airship Brofman* (2009), where a young woman is cut loose from the domestic sphere by her wealthy husband's death, but her

considerable inheritance permits a journey of exploration and adventure. Other notable examples of blending feminine emancipation with steampunk adventure include *The Glass Books of the Dream Eaters* by Gordon Dahlquist (2006), *All Men of Genius* by Lev AC Rosen (2011), the *Leviathan* trilogy by Scott Westerfeld (2009-11), and *The Innocent's Progress* by Peter Tupper (2010).

This emancipation through a life of adventure is found in the Steam Wars images in the character of Princess Leia. In the introduction to *Misfit Sisters: Screen Horror as Female Rites of Passage,* Sue Short makes the incisive statement about contemporary media, saying that "while the male journey from adolescence to adulthood is relatively commonplace, the female passage towards maturity has been virtually ignored" (4). As an example, Short cites the *Star Wars* saga, pointing out that while Luke Skywalker grows from "simple farmhand[…]to a man equipped[…]to battle the forces of evil and earn his place as a true hero," his twin sister Princess Leia "has no equivalent claim to Luke's destiny" despite their shared parentage (4-5). As Short notes, Leia "shows no propensity towards using the Force and even seems to diminish in her assertiveness as the trilogy develops" (5).

Lucas stated in interviews that Leia was intended to be a different sort of fairy tale princess, not simply a damsel in distress. Yet aside from being a crack shot with both blaster and wit, Leia is continually relegated to requiring rescue. Her need for rescue is reversed when she attempts to rescue Han, but the success of the rescue is ultimately in Luke's capable, fully-trained, Jedi hands. Leia goes

from successfully infiltrating Jabba's palace to metal-bikini clad slave girl to wait passively for her twin brother to arrive and rescue her. One wonders how the final chapter of the *Star Wars* saga might have been different had Leia been given the equivalent of Luke's link to the Force. What if, during the opening moments of *Empire Strikes Back* (rather than at the end), Leia sensed Luke's call from the frozen wastes of Hoth? Her sudden awareness of Luke's location on the outside of Cloud City would be a further clue to her Force sensitivity; imagine the speeder bike chase scene if both Leia and Luke had been wielding lightsabers against the Imperial troops, or the final moments between Vader and Luke given completed by Leia's presence. As the films stand, there's really no narrative point to Skywalker twins. *Return of the Jedi* would have carried more weight in its title alone if Leia was Jedi as well, the damsel in distress completely inverted when she successfully rescues Han in the opening moments, then Luke at a crucial point in his struggle with Vader, reversing the roles these two heroes played to her heroine in *New Hope*.

The Steam Wars Leia alternately reiterates and revises Lucas's Princess. Sillof's first revision is simply a pre-Victorian version, despite intentions to remake her as a "[1800s] revolutionary woman" based upon "the famous Romanticism paintings of Lady Liberty leading the French in battle" with "the obvious corset" added just to ensure it was consistent with the "steampunk style" of the other figures; the presence of the gun in her hand is the only indication she is a revolutionary. The artist's *Slave Princess Leia* transforms the heroine from

damsel to dominatrix in distress, but distress nonetheless. Daniel Helzer does little better, despite a slave outfit evocative of Toulouse-Lautrec's paintings of the Moulin Rouge. His Leia is a coquette on a chain, not a plucky princess with the courage to lead a rebellion. These works only gloss the character with a Victorian veneer. They are not images of steampunk heroines.

Other Steam Wars revisions take Leia a step further towards being a steampunk heroine, but fall short of the mark. In *Leia_leading*, Marcel Mercado succeeds where Sillof fails, presenting Leia as Eugène Delacroix's *La liberté guidant le people*, uttering a cry of defiance, brandishing the flag of the rebellion, and charging into battle with her pistol raised. However, this is merely an update of Lucas's Leia, who leads the ground assault in the third film, but remains tertiary to Luke's battle with Vader, and the assault on the second Death Star.

Eric Poulton presents Leia as a woman of sophistication with an edge of bravado, as evidenced by the way "Lady Leia Organa, Princess of Alderaan" wields her formidable pistol. More importantly, Poulton's Leia is dressed in late nineteenth-century clothing with a low-neckline exposing a lace bodice. Her foot protrudes from beneath her dress, revealing a high black leather boot. Her stance displays an element of swagger. It is a pose one might associate with Lucas's Han Solo. She has full lips and a sensuous mouth, indicating sexual agency in addition to her political identity. Poulton's narrative blurb about Lady Leia posits her as a "fiery, confident personality [with a] sharp intellect…a very strong and influential diplomat[,] extremely critical of Imperial policies" and includes biographical

information such as studies at a private school, and a stint in the military before joining the "Resistance" (Poulton 2007). While this Leia has the propriety requisite with the historical era Poulton is drawing from, one comment on Poulton's blog post lauded it as "even more heroic and interesting than the movie version," and is the closest representation of a steampunk heroine offered in the images thus far.

Björn Hurri's Leia encapsulates these variant aspects nicely in a single image. Hurri's Leia, like the others, holds a pistol with a confidence belying her ability with the weapon. The weapon and ammunition belts around her hips attest her proficiency with the weapon as more than just a fashion item, afterthought, or item of desperate necessity despite lack of capability. Her attire is a hodge-podge of masculine and feminine elements, the requisite goggles indicating her role in the high-flying adventure amongst her male counterparts is neither incidental nor inferior.

The brass goggles of steampunk fashion are so pervasive an aspect of the steampunk aesthetic that, while I was pondering how to create a steampunk costume to attend *Steam Powered* the 2008 Northern California steampunk convention, friends commented I could wear anything, so long as I included goggles. *Brass Goggles*, one of the foremost steampunk blogs purports to be "a blog and forum devoted to the lighter side of all things Steampunk," conflating this purpose with a concrete denotation of brass goggles as "a practical, sturdy, example of protective eyewear," suggesting that the brass goggles serve as a

symbolic marker for the alternate way steampunk imagines history. The goggles speak to the aesthetic of literal high-adventure that the steampunk hero requires sturdy eye-protection for feats of derring-do at high altitudes. The brass, ornate frames of the steampunk goggles indicate a desire for the ornate and opulent in steampunk aesthetics. Goggles are a symbol of steampunk's neo-Victorian nostalgia, a technofantastic lens to focalize the alternative visions of steampunk heroism. In Steam Wars, the heroes wear goggles.

These nigh ubiquitous "classic goggles of steampunk" (Sillof 2007) appear in a number of Steam Wars images, figuring most prominently in Sillof's action figures and Björn Hurri's Steam Wars images. Sillof makes mention of the goggles as being a "staple" of his Steam Wars line, including them in the design of both heroes and villains. The Steam Wars heroes (Luke, Han, Leia and Chewbacca) are all rendered at least once wearing round aviator's goggles: Han and Chewbacca sport goggles in both Sillof and Hurri's versions; goggles are worn by Mercado's *Red Five Luke*, and Sillof's Luke from *New Hope*, but are conspicuously absent from Sillof's Jedi Luke Skywalker.

In *New Hope*, Luke is the only Rebel pilot competent enough to negotiate the trenches of the Death Star and bring victory. Han Solo and his first mate Chewbacca are pilot and co-pilot of the *Millennium Falcon*, one of the fastest ships in the galaxy. Accordingly, their Steam Wars iterations wear aviator's goggles. The Luke of *Return of the Jedi* has exchanged his naive and optimistic goal of becoming a pilot for the Rebellion for the stoic discipline of a Jedi Knight.

The Steam Wars iteration of this Luke has discarded his brass goggles, symbol of lofty idealism for the steampunk-within-steampunk technological anachronism of Jedi armor and weapon. Clearly, one cannot take life too seriously with brass goggles on. Most notably though, while the Star Wars trilogy posited a trio of heroes—Luke Skywalker, Han Solo, and Princess Leia, it was initially only the male characters who have been given the goggles in the majority of Steam Wars images.

In Hurri's image, the open neck of Leia's shirt (which appears to be a man's), exposes the cleavage of breasts augmented by her leather corset, and could be taken as objectification if it weren't for the ubiquity of gratuitous cleavage amongst steampunk costumes at *Steam Powered* and *Steamcon*, a symbol of sexual agency among the women of the fashion culture. While they are often arrayed in traditional Victorian attire, Steampunk heroines swagger with as much bluster as their male counterparts, and are expressive of their sexuality in overtly sensual ways.

One of the expressions of the *fin-de-siècle* New Woman phenomenon we are about to explore was the rational dress campaign, "which rejected the physically confining clothes deemed suitable for 'respectable' women" (Ledger, "Ibsen" 82), specifically recommending abandoning corsets (Cunningham 2; Perkin 97). It is interesting to consider that the hope of the New Woman, as reflected in the rational dress campaign, was to get *out* of a corset, while — if the

number of booths at steampunk conventions selling corsets are any indication — the hope of many steampunk women is to get *into* one.

One particular scene in Ora Le Broq's *Steampunk Erotica* (2010) echoes the distance between steampunk fashion and the Rational Dress movement in which many New Women participated. In a kinky strip tease, the protagonist sheds both clothing and the trappings of the society in which she has been raised: "Having stripped down to the essentials, Mina could now begin to rebuild" (130). Discarding her "constrictive" boarding school uniform, she constructs a costume more suited to high-flying adventure:

> A small leather jerkin with numerous straps and pockets fitted snugly over a severe shirt. It was *practical* for the pockets and rings that she filled with small tools and knives, as well as cartridges, a revolver and electro-thermal grenades that could destroy solid objects for up to one hundred yards ... A leather great coat went over the top. It was rather too regimented for Mina's liking, with a severe cut and standardized style, but it *would be warm* and it had built into it a power pack and holster for a Laserton gun ... a pair of skin-tight leather gloves on her hands almost finished her preparations, but before she moved on, Mina selected a pair of Opti-Zoom goggles and slipped them around her neck, where they dangled in place of the discarded boater. *Suitably* dressed, Mina walked past the unconscious form of the baron, barely glancing at him as she passed and

> she set out to destroy the baron's dream of world domination. (126-31, emphasis added)

Clothing herself afterward in steampunk attire suited to foiling diabolical villains, the heroine is effectively reborn. The transformation of Mina from schoolgirl to steampunk heroine through attire reads like moments in evangelical Christian fiction where people get saved: steampunk fashion is not just cool, it will change your life. Whether one finds this idea plausible is immaterial: in the universe Le Broq has fashioned, Mina's transformation of self is visualized symbolically through steampunk fashion.

George Parsons Lathrop's "In the Deep of Time" (1897) is an excellent example of the distance between late Victorian aspirations and steampunk retrofuturism. Lathrop's Time Traveler, sent forward by the Society of Futurity, finds a decidedly un-Victorian future. Where steampunk nostalgically revisits the fashion of the nineteenth-century, Lathrop's Time Traveler summarily rejects it. Contrasting Eva Pryor, his love interest from the nineteenth-century, and Electra, a modern woman, the Time Traveler is clearly attracted towards Electra's futurist fashion, which seems pulled from the set of Michael Anderson's *Logan's Run* (1976):

> Charming though Eva was in her way, she had perhaps placed herself at a disadvantage by having insisted on keeping her nineteenth-century costume. The angular slope and spread of her skirt, her unnatural wasp waist, the swollen sleeves, and the stiff, ungainly bulge of her corsage had

> a grotesque and even offensive effect. The extraordinary tangle, also, of artificial flowers, wings, and other rubbish that she had carried on her head—for she still wore her hat—was as barbaric or savage as the head-dress, of some early Norse warrior or Red Indian chief.
>
> To all this Electra presented a refreshing contrast of harmony, with grace and dignity and style of dress modern, yet classic, womanly, yet suggesting the robes of a goddess. (Lathrop 99)

This is but one of several such rejections in this story of the very style and aesthetic that steampunk currently embraces. This lighthearted example reinforces how steampunk retrofuturism is a present-day romantic vision of how the past viewed the future, since the temporal spaces of steampunk are rarely concerned with precise historical accuracy.

Verne's Lady Monroe, as played by Natalie Rantanen of the Legion Fantastique of San Francisco is an exemplar of the feminine steampunk aesthetic as expressed through fashion. At the *Steam Powered* steampunk convention, she appeared one day in traditional East Indian attire, based on attire Verne's character would have worn in the mid 1850s. The dress contains all the proper Victorian underpinnings (chemise, stockings, corset, bloomers, petticoats,) and a crinoline with extra petticoats for the correct shape, completed by an Indian sari and jewelry, all gold dipped and made of Swarovski crystals or traditional glass beads. The last day of the convention she appeared in a mix of feminine and masculine attire: men's black underbust racerback vest, tight trousers, leather

boots, and top hat with goggles attached; a gothic tailcoat with gold accents and buckles from a Lolita shop in Japan, brandishing dual functional ball and powder pistols. At the 2008 Dickens Fair in San Francisco, Rantanen modeled for Dark Garden, makers of custom corsets, reclining on a couch in Victorian lingerie consisting of a silk brocaded facsimile of a late nineteenth-century corset, ruffled can-can shorts called "spankies," and black stockings with red silk bows, while holding either a sword or a blunder-buss style raygun (Rantanen). Save for her blonde hair, these images could be of the Steam Wars Leia: the traditional princess, the woman of adventure, and the sexual woman of agency, not held captive, but holding her admirers captive. Spiritual sister to Rantanen's Lady Monroe, Hurri's Leia would have enticed Jabba with her wiles before killing him, so that by the time Luke arrived, she would have been drinking tea while waiting for Han to thaw from his carbonite freeze, the steampunk damsel without distress.

Useful Troublemakers: The New Woman in Steampunk

The steampunk novels of Cherie Priest and Gail Carriger deal with these damsels without distress through what I call the *social retrofuturism* of their counterfictions. Carriger's humorous *Parasol Protectorate* series (2009-2012) features protagonist Alexia Tarabotti, later Lady Maccon, a spinster-turned-aristocrat whose lack of soul renders her a *preternatural*, the opposite of the *supernatural* werewolves, vampires, and ghosts. Preternaturals negate the supernatural, posing a potential threat to members of those societies, or aid to

those who need to govern them. The series mixes comedy, horror, adventure, and romance; while the novels contain episodic plotlines, the series is primarily character-based, relying on readers' investment in Alexia's relationships with supporting characters, primarily the werewolf agent of the Crown, Lord Maccon, to keep interest.

By contrast, Priest's *Clockwork Century* (2009-2011) is a gritty alternate reality where the American Civil War has ground on into the 1880s. Unlike Carriger, Priest's series does not feature a single character as protagonist throughout, but maintains a thread of continuity with the spread of a zombie plague. Minor characters from one novel become major characters in the next: major events from one story become distant news in another. Yet consistently, all of Priest's steampunk novels feature strong female protagonists: Briar Wilkes, a factory-working mother who pursues her son into walled Seattle to rescue him (*Boneshaker*); Mercy Lynch, a war-time nurse who travels across the United States to see her dying father a final time (*Dreadnought)*; Maria Isabella Boyd, actor-turned-Pinkerton Agent (*Clementine*); and mixed-race prostitute Josephine Early successfully rescuing a submersible prototype to sway the balance of the war (*Ganymede*).

Carriger and Priest's novels are counterfictions, "exercises in pastiche and homage that work through a detailed appropriation of their originating texts' structures, literary devices, and fictional worlds" (Hills 451). Admittedly, neither author works from a single canonical or authoritative text as Kim Newman does

with Stoker's *Dracula* in *Anno Dracula* (1992), but Carriger's playful engagement with the intertextual canon of vampire texts spawned by Stoker's is undeniable. The world of Alexia Tarabotti owes much to other fictional universes, from the nineteenth-century novels of Jane Austen to the cinematic franchise of *Underworld* (2003). Priest plays on the mythos of the Wild West and the American Civil War, blending these with zombie fiction. And in both cases, intentionally or not, the series act as intertexts for the steampunk New Woman, the damsel without distress.

The *Parasol Protectorate*: "I Would So Like Something Useful to Do."

In the first chapter of *Soulless* (2009), book one of the *Parasol Protectorate* series, Alexia Tarabotti confronts Lord Maccon, a werewolf and head of the Bureau of Unnatural Registries (BUR), a sort of Victorian X-Files, about his tendency to dismiss her: "Do you realize I could be useful to you?" (21). Alexia's desire for "something useful to do" (22) echoes the words of Mary Wollstonecraft in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*:

> How many women thus waste life away the prey of discontent, when they might have practiced as physicians, regulated a farm, managed a shop, and stood erect, supported by their own industry, instead of hanging their heads surcharged with the dew of sensibility? (149)

Alexia's need to be useful to the BUR, and later the British Empire, provides a character arc that parallels the aspirations of the New Woman. Instead of wasting

life away, “the prey of discontent,” Alexia transforms from a twenty-five year-old bluestocking spinster into an adventurer, “a lady who scurried about whacking at automatons and climbing into ornithopters” (Carriger, *Heartless* 60).

By the end of the first book, she is one of three members on Queen Victoria’s advisory Shadow Council. In response to her vacuous sister’s involvement in the suffragette movement, Alexia considers how her own vote “counted a good deal more than any popular ballot might” (44). Besides, as Pykett notes, “[t]he extent to which women in the 1890s self-identified as New Women is difficult to quantify” (“Foreword” xi). Instead of creating a nineteenth-century suffragette, Carriger creates a woman with the sort of agency necessary for her to appeal to twenty-first century readers used to female protagonists portrayed by Sigourney Weaver as Ellen Ripley in the *Alien* film franchise (1979-1997), Sarah Michelle Gellar in the *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* television series (1997-2003), or Trinity from *The Matrix* (1999). Alexia embodies new forms of femininity, even for the fantastically different society of Carriger’s alt-world London. She enjoys reading and pursues scientific knowledge at a time when “[e]ducation in itself was generally thought deleterious to female health” (King 18). And while she enjoys the attention of her husband, she does not need him in order to survive, or to some degree, even thrive in Carriger’s neo-Victorian alternate world.

Consequently, when this steampunk New Woman is mistakenly accused of being a Fallen Woman, another fictional staple of the Victorian era, she does not, like Gaskell’s *Ruth* (1853), resort to self-destruction or self-loathing. Alexia

is the antithesis of the "innocent young victim" or the "fallen Madonna" Ruth represents (Watt 19-21). At the close of the second book, *Changeless* (2010), Alexia discovers she is pregnant; her husband Lord Maccon believes the child must be the result of infidelity, as popular opinion holds that a supernatural, arguably being dead, cannot produce natural offspring. In a rage, he casts her out. The third book, *Blameless* (2011), finds Alexia in the role of Fallen Woman, rejected by Lord Maccon for assumed adultery, newly with child, and firmly at the center of "The Scandal of the Century" (10). Her subsequent altercation with upper-class London's gossip mongers demonstrates how "Lady Alexia Maccon was the type of woman who, if thrown into a briar patch, would start to tidy it up by stripping off all of the thorns" (8), deflecting a society busybody's invective with sharp wit:

> "Lady Maccon, how dare you show your face here? Taking tea in such an obvious manner [. . .] in a respectable establishment, frequented by honest, decent women of good character and social standing. Why, you should be ashamed! Ashamed to even walk among us [. . .] you should have hidden your shame from the world. Imagine dragging your poor family into the mire with you [. . .] Why, you might have done them a favor by casting yourself into the Thames."
>
> Alexia whispered back, as if it were a dire secret, "I can swim, Lady Blingchester. Rather well, actually." (57)

It is essential to note Alexia's combative response to Lady Blingchester and her ilk, lest we be tempted to misinterpret Alexia's later actions in *Blameless* as flight. Alexia's response to her husband's dismissal of society's gossip and reproach is not retreat: despite becoming the Fallen Woman, she ignores her dirty laundry, leaves London, and goes on a quest. Admittedly, some motivation is derived from an attempted assassination by ballistic ladybug automata, but seeking a solution without her husband's assistance further supports my notion of steampunk women as damsels without distress. That is not to say there is a lack of page-turning crises once Alexia crosses the English Channel, but she and her steampunk sisterhood do not require the rescue of a Prince Charming to deal with these situations. They have inherited the earth prepared by the likes of Xena and Lara Croft.

Yet this passage is noteworthy for another reason. Perhaps more than any crisis Alexia faces over the course of her adventures, her pregnancy provides further points of intersection between steampunk retrofuturism and the New Woman. While the feminist movement of the *fin de siècle* was neither as unilateral or cohesive as the "references to the apparently singular" idea of the New Woman might suggest (Ledger *Fiction and Feminism* 1; Kranidis 13, 62-63), I am nevertheless appropriating the "unifying vision of the New Woman as a figure who privileged independence over family and who rejected social and sexual roles predicated on a politics of sexual difference" (Richardson 8) since this is a common representation of the New Woman (Cunningham 2; Hedgecock 192; Ledger *Fiction and Feminism* 23; Pykett *Improper Feminine* 140), and as

such the one most likely to inhabit steampunk narratives. It is Alexia's rejection of sexual and social roles over the course of her pregnancy which is of interest to this inquiry, both in the sex act that leads to the pregnancy, and the way Alexia deals with her so-called delicate condition.

Critics of steampunk, such as fantasy writer Catherynne M. Valente, in her article under username yuki-onna, "Here I Stand, With Steam Coming out of My Ears," have decried the lack of historical accuracy, calling for greater attention to be paid to the darker side of Eurocentric colonialism and hegemonic patriarchy. I suppose there are some who would say Carriger has ignored the popular Victorian ethics inherent in Gaskell's *Ruth* which held that "[t]he fallen woman was a stain on society and had to be punished, either by the intolerable pangs of conscience or by death, preferably both" (Cunningham 21). After all, Alexia does not end up in a work house or as a prostitute after Lord Maccon casts her off. Alexia's path may lack the pathos and gravitas of nineteenth-century Fallen Woman narratives, but her journey nevertheless challenges Victorian ideas about feminine roles.

In *The Victorian Woman Question in Contemporary Feminist Fiction*, Jeannette King identifies two ideologically influential images that divide the Victorian woman into "polarized extremes": the Madonna and the Magdalene. These Biblical allusions "played an important part in the popular imagination . . . Images of the Madonna and of angels therefore contribute to the formation of the Victorian feminine ideal" (10). As a sensualist, Alexia is the inversion of that ideal, averse to chastity and lacking the requisite soul for a spiritual life. By

contrast, imitation of the Madonna produced "a highly idealized picture of a woman as disembodied, spiritual, and, above all, chaste" (10). Alexia is Magdalene insofar as appearances of the day go—she is sexually forward with Lord Maccon before they marry, and enjoys sex with him once they do. Both actions are scandalous in a nineteenth-century context:

> Chastity, moreover, meant for many not only a lack of sexual experience, but a lack of sexual feeling, or 'passionlessness'. Associated with the rise of evangelical religion between the 1790s and 1830s, the ideology of passionlessness made it possible for women to attain the apparently impossible goal of emulating the virgin mother: mothers were able to remain sexless, 'virgin' in a sense, because they remained sexually unaroused. (King 11)

Alexia not only explores sexual passion, but is so prone giving herself over to it that she and Lord Maccon engage in a moment of lovemaking while both are trapped and in danger:

> When Alexia finally dropped back, they were both panting again.
>
> "This has got to stop," she insisted. "We are in danger, remember? You know, ruination and tragedy? Calamity just beyond that door." She pointed behind him. "Any moment now, evil scientists may come charging in." (292)

It is this more wanton side of Alexia's character that alerted me to the connections between Carriger's books and the New Woman. Alexia exhibits tendencies of

both the pre-vampire Madonna and post-vampire Magdalene personas of *Dracula*'s Lucy Westenra. In her excellent study of the New Woman and *Dracula*, Carol Senf identifies Stoker's scene between Jonathan Harker and the three vampire women as a "reversal of sexual roles, a characteristic frequently associated with the New Woman" (40). Alexia engages in such a reversal twice in *Soulless*, initiating the first liaison with these brazen words: "I am going to take advantage of you" (164). Yet ultimately it is Alexia's Magdalene nature that produces Prudence at the end of *Blameless*, a miraculous child able to temporarily steal a supernatural's powers through touch.

Alexia's pregnancy is another exaggerated refutation of the common wisdom of the Victorian mindset: "Discussions of the female reproductive system also tended to take a pathologised view of the female body as a whole, seeing women as semi-permanent invalids. A standard American work on female diseases, published in 1843, stated that women were liable to twice as much sickness as men, most of it stemming from the womb" (King 17). Alexia does not just remain active during her pregnancy. She investigates a potential threat on Queen Victoria's life. While in labor, she evades a clockwork automaton, stages a retaliatory attack upon it, and negotiates the sensitive politics between werewolves and vampires before finally giving birth to a baby daughter. After all her exertions and going into active labor, she realizes a young werewolf is in danger and endeavors to save him. One of her servants objects, reminding her, "But my lady, you're about to, well, uh, give birth!" To which Alexia replies, "Oh

that's not important. That can wait" (350). Even in childbirth, Carriger's humor conveys the strong sense of agency her heroine possesses. Once again, Alexia flaunts conventional wisdom in a manner akin to the hyperbolic action of epic heroes. She is the New Woman amplified and exaggerated, refusing to simply be domestically useful, but determining to be as useful, if not more, then the men around her.

The *Clockwork Century*: "Put Me Where I can make the Most Trouble."

Dreadnought begins with an epigraph of author Louisa May Alcott's statement, "I want something to do," when she announced "her intention to serve as a nurse at the Washington Hospital during the Civil War" (Priest 9). Later in the same novel, fictional nurse Mercy Lynch asks, "What about me, Captain? Where can you use me?" in the middle of a firefight between two armored trains (345). Priest's heroines are clearly as interested in being "useful" as Alexia is, but the grittier tone of Priest's series is the least of contrasts to Carriger's *Parasol Protectorate* books. Carriger provides a steampunk New Woman from polite society, whereas Priest chooses ones from the fringes of civilization. Unlike Alexia, Priest's heroines move from the domestic spaces of matrimony and maternity into the wild blue yonder. *Boneshaker's* Briar Wilkes is admittedly a mother, but one who abandons all to find her lost son in a walled Seattle peopled with outlaws and zombie revenants. While Mercy Lynch of *Dreadnought* is certainly returning home to see her dying father, the journey there is perilous and

violent. Maria Isabella Boyd of *Clementine* is likewise a woman entirely apart from the domestic sphere, having left a trail of ex-husbands in her wake. All of Priest's female protagonists are largely unconcerned about liaisons with the opposite sex.

Priest imagines her heroines this way in defiance of the expectation that all female leads need a romantic interest, instead filling the lives of these women with epic challenges common to the male action hero. In *Clementine,* after being told to stay out of the way and be quiet while the male crew of an airship engage in aerial combat, Maria Isabella Boyd demands the captain make her useful by putting her "where I can make the most trouble" (123). Her request finds her operating a Gatling-gun turret: in order to get into the chamber, she is forced to divest herself of her bulky undergarments. In a gunfight, petticoats can only get in the way; it seems likely that unlike Alexia Tarabotti, Priest's heroines prefer Rational Dress to Victorian finery.

Priest's retrofuturism is tied to the intricate matrix of race and gender in the nineteenth-century. Her trump card is strong female characters transcending nineteenth-century gender stereotypes and limitations, without oversimplification. Her setting of America permits her to posit spaces where equality of gender and race is not sidetracked until the Suffragette or African American civil rights movement, but finds purchase on the frontier of a nation still in the process of becoming. This is not to say her heroines have it easy. Unlike many steampunk writers, Priest does not cut corners laying the tracks for her alternate history:

while her heroines are strong women, they do not live in a world of egalitarian emancipation.

While Priest is clearly neither sexist nor racist, many of her characters are. Priest has not just researched the events of nineteenth-century America, she understands how people thought at the time. Her characters live and breathe in the complex web of post-abolition laws and pre-abolition prejudices. When Mercy Lynch attends to an injury in the "colored car," her fellow white passengers cast disparaging glances. Shortly after, Mercy faces the stigma of being a "woman traveling alone" (*Dreadnought* 113) nearly costing her accommodation for the night and resulting in the following epiphany: "Before long, she came to the conclusion that she was not much more out of place in the colored car than in the rich car, where her fellow passengers were high-class ladies who'd never worked a day in their lives, with their trussed up offspring and turned-up noses" (125). In *Ganymede* when a well-intentioned soldier awkwardly inquires if one of Josephine Early's girls is a prostitute, Josephine replies, "We are what we are, and we use the tools at our disposal." When the soldier gallantly states, "But she shouldn't have to," Josephine upbraids him by saying, "She *chooses* to" (112). The proliferation of steampunk heroines who are prostitutes is not incidental. It is rooted in history, if books like Henry Mayhew's *London Labour and the London Poor* (1851) are any indication. Priest does not valorize the profession of prostitution, but rather concedes its existence, creating round characters who make hard choices to survive in a hard world.

Here we see Priest subverting the adventure novel's justification of the "subaltern's subordinated status" (Richardson 1) through the steampunk New Woman's point-of-view. LeeAnne Richardson notes that New Women fictions focalize their narratives from the subordinated perspective, "interrogating the inequities of a system that assumes and asserts the very things adventure novels champion: male superiority, the right to dominate and rule others, paternalistic ideology" (1). By giving subordinated ethnicities and women a voice, Steampunk retrofuturism creates a space for remembering history in the way Nietzsche "located the problem of the worth of history [. . .] in the problem of the value or need which it serves" (White 348). Steampunk writers choose to "remember" and "forget" the past in ways which "sculpture[s] the past" into "the kind of image" these authors impose upon it, as preparation for "launching [themselves] into the future" (349). This is problematic insofar when such an approach white-washes or ignores historical atrocity, but also powerful when used to highlight inequities or injustices.

Priest has openly stated similar intentions in writing the *Clockwork Century* books. In a personal epigraph to *Ganymede*, Priest dedicates the book "to everyone who didn't make it into the history books . . . but should have" (5). She makes her intentions abundantly clear at her website in the post, "Steampunk: What it is, why I came to like it, and why I think it'll stick around":

> When mainstream society members don't see people who are different from them (in pop culture, in history books, in their neighborhoods), they

> get the impression that those people don't exist … or if these Others do exist, then they aren't very important. But with its time-travel/history-altering underpinnings, steampunk has the capacity to un-write some of the rules that created the Other in the first place. It offers a voice to those who were marginalized, allowing them to stand up and say, "I was here. And I absolutely, defiantly reject the implication that I wasn't." It's open to everyone — including those whose historical representation got left out, written out, or killed out of hand.

Priest gives voice to women who never existed, and by doing so, gives voice to those who still do: "Historical fiction by women is part of the wider project, pioneered by second wave feminism, of rewriting history from a female perspective, and recovering the lives of women who have been excluded or marginalised" (King 4). While some might decry the exaggerated spaces of adventure in which these voices find utterance, I am not alone in underscoring the importance of strong, independent female heroines: "To the extent that media images and role models have an impact on what we deem acceptable or desirable, it is important to construct alternatives to media images and role models that perpetuate oppression" (Marinucci 75).

Priest constructs these alternatives in each book, notably placing many marginalized ethnicities in the thick of the action, not simply as tokenism, but as viable characters with agency. Consider Josephine Early, mixed-race madame, who orchestrates the subterfuge of hiding a prototype submersible in the thick of a

battleground, before arranging for a crew to sail it out of hiding to safety. When compatriot Andan Cly asks why she did not "stay home where it's warm and dry and . . . safe?" Josephine replies:

> I've worked entirely too hard these last few months, planning and plotting, and buying every favor I can scare up to get this damn thing out to the admiral. I'm not going to sit someplace warm and dry and safe while the last of the work gets done. I intend to hand this craft over myself, and shake the admiral's hand when I do so. This was *my* operation, Andan. *Mine.* And I'll see it through to the finish. (*Ganymede* 282)

Repeatedly, Priest's heroines have to inform their male counterparts they "want something to do." They are not interested in being sidelined, left behind, or told to mind the kitchen, the children, or their manners. Priest's heroines cuss and shoot as well as any man, but this is not their defining trait. They are not simply "gals with guns," an image which—popular interpretations aside—does not embody emancipation or empowerment. Mercy Lynch can wield pistols, but she is most useful as a healer. Despite being cast in a somewhat traditional role as nurse, she ultimately undoes the machinations of *Dreadnought*'s primary villain, who lays the blame for his failure firmly at Mercy's feet. Briar Wilkes becomes the first female sheriff in the Wild West, but is still romantically attracted to airship pirate Andan Cly. They are more than just the Angel in the House or the Fallen Woman. Like Alexia Tarabotti, they are the mix of beatific and bitch, the complex combination that makes a character recognizable as human, which is the source of

their retrofuturistic vision. While the New Woman of nineteenth-century literature may have elevated career over family, the desire for female emancipation produced by late nineteenth-century realities being both a "condition of possibility as well as its condition of impossibility" (Comitini 530), the romanticized New Woman of steampunk can have career and family, and does it all while foiling an assassination plot on the queen or delivering a high-tech prototype of underwater vessel to Union forces.

Conservative Nostalgia, Radical Regret

William Gibson once called nostalgia "*the* conservative modality" (interview) from which we might extrapolate that regret is arguably a radical modality, one which seeks change. Historically, the idea of the New Woman can be understood as the *hope* for social regeneration, a striving towards a future through the conception of "new, or newly perceived, forms of femininity which were brought to public attention in the last two decades of the nineteenth-century" (Richardson and Willis 1). Gail Carriger and Cherie Priest have created female characters who act as intersection points for the concept of the New Woman, as historical reality and fictional imaginary. These examples initially may seem too playful for a serious study of the New Woman, but they are, in fact, amplified expressions of subtler ideas. At the very least, they are an indication that the singular focus of steampunk on technology is missing an opportunity to investigate social possibilities, not just technological ones. And while neither Carriger nor Priest are

as fastidious in their investigations into the ramifications of the fantastic upon their alternate worlds as Bruce Sterling or William Gibson were in *The Difference Engine*, they are certainly more attentive to their leading ladies.

These counterfictional works are unconcerned with the counterfactual inquiry of "what would have happened to the Suffragette movement if . . . ?" but, in the case of Carriger, with "what would it be like if the New Woman had a relationship with a werewolf, a being possessing social standing while simultaneously being the object of social derision?" Likewise, Priest seems less interested in the historical ramifications of an extended American Civil War so much as asking, "What would the New Woman do if she ended up working as a Pinkerton?" Nevertheless, these counterfictions have a value to them. Gail Cunningham notes how quickly the New Woman disappeared from fiction, but is confident the latent effect of those fictions upon reality could still be seen:

> The old stereotypes of the female character, with the strict moral divisions into what Charlotte Brontë had defined as 'angel' and 'fiend', were gone forever as female sexuality became a legitimate study for the novelist [. . .] Feminist demands for freedom of expression, for smashing of taboos, had helped to drag the English novel out of its cocoon of stifling respectability and behaviour which had previously been denied it. (Cunningham 156)

Cunningham highlights the speed with which "women were [. . .] packed off back to the home; ideas about free motherhood, sexual liberation or self-fulfillment through work were condemned to lie dormant for more than a half a century

before sprouting once more in the modern Women's movement" (Cunningham 156). She then wonders whether the same thing has happened to the modern woman, if they have been presented with, in the words of H.G. Wells, "a sham emancipation" (157).

That was in 1978. In 2005, Jeannette King's ruminations on the Victorian Woman in contemporary fiction seem to indicate that the New Woman may still have some useful trouble to stir up:

> Gender is as politically charged an issue now as it was at the end of the nineteenth-century, and continues to be debated in both the popular and the academic press. If we are in the middle of another shift in what we know and think about gender, in the 'post-feminist' mood that prevails at the beginning of the twenty-first century, we need to know how our beliefs came about, and how much has been excluded or forgotten in what we know. (6)

The retrofuturist vision of the steampunk New Woman can imagine a revolution of gender in ways the Victorian New Woman never could. Neo-Victorian writers will only be able to write about *what was*, or, in the rare case when their characters seek to break convention, their tales will likely end in tragedy. The steampunk New Woman, however, is not the New Woman as she was imagined in the nineteenth-century, or even reimagined by neo-Victorian writers in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries: she has far more agency than those women, often due to her access to steampunk technofantasy gadgets and weapons, and is

given the option to have her proverbial cake and eat it too. The New Woman of the nineteenth-century "was (and remains) a shifting and contested term . . . a mobile and contradictory figure or signifier" (Pykett "Foreword" xi), and so it seems that the steampunk New Woman further stirs these already muddied waters: she can be the Madonna and the Magdalene, the Angel and the Fiend: useful to have around, but a handful of "trouble" as well. As Angeline, the enigmatic cross-dressing Native princess from *Boneshaker* states, "We don't have too many women down here inside the walls, but I sure wouldn't mess with the ones we've got" (Priest 382).

Once again though, I am forced to caveat these conclusions by reminding the reader that we have only explored the concept of social retrofuturism in a limited number of texts, focusing largely on the New Woman: Paul Guinan and Anina Bennett's *Boilerplate* also deals with the New Woman, but addresses a host of other turn-of-the-century issues as well. *Boilerplate* is a coffee table book about "the world's first robot soldier," a sort of *fin de siècle* Forrest Gump. Upon first glance, the combination of Anina Bennett's documentary-style prose and Paul Guinan's nearly flawless Photoshop-fakery may cause the casual reader to wonder, "Is this for real?" As such, it is a brilliant, albeit completely unintentional hoax. If one is foolish enough to buy Boilerplate as historical reality, then one would be equally foolish enough to think that all the war-time bombast and "boy's adventure story" homages were jingoistic, nostalgic praise for some dark

moments in American history. The key to reading Boilerplate is found in a quote from Lawrence of Arabia under the header, “Documents are Liars”:

> Remember that the manner is greater than the matter, so far as modern history is concerned. One of the ominous signs of the time is that the public can no longer read history. The historian...learns to attach insensate importance to documents. The documents are liars. No man ever yet tried to write down the entire truth of any action in which he has been engaged. All narrative is partis pris...We know too much, and use too little knowledge. (115)

In conversation, Bennett told me that the finding of this quote was cause for excitement: it is clearly a self-reflexive moment, a slight “winking at the camera” to make the reader stop and consider the document (lie) they are holding in their hands. The difference between Boilerplate and other historical coffee table books is that Boilerplate knows it is a lie, admits it is a lie with the preposterous nature of its hero, and then goes on engaging in a balancing act between narratives of its fictional robot, creator, creator’s sister, and narratives of American history: there is enough reality in both the text and the images that the reader is constantly wondering where history leaves off and fiction begins. *Wikipedia*, dubious historical source that it is, suddenly becomes the companion to Boilerplate, as the reader enters name after name or event after event, trying to know “what really happened.”

It all happened, albeit without a Mechanical Marvel created by Archibald Campion. All references to Campion, his sister Lily, Edward Fullerton, and Boilerplate are pure fiction, creations of Guinan and Bennett, while others, such as Frank Reade Jr., "creator of the Electric Man" are bits of recursive fantasy: Reade Jr. was the son of the hero of the Steam Man of the Prairie Edisonades (his father is involved in building a steam-powered body for Buffalo Bill Cody's pickled head-in-a-jar in Lansdale's *Zeppelins West*). These fictional characters are thrown into the histories of Nikola Tesla, Theodore Roosevelt, and Pancho Villa, to name a few. But like Forrest Gump, Boilerplate is merely present at pivotal events in U.S. history. His presence changes nothing. Unlike alternate histories where counter or contra-factual possibilities are explored, Boilerplate posits no point-of-change. The premise of the book is that Boilerplate himself is a somehow forgotten piece of history, the mechanical marvel you never heard of: at Boilerplate's unveiling at the World's Columbian Exposition, "simultaneously the best and the worst place to introduce an invention as innovative as Boilerplate," the robot is obscured by wonders such as hamburgers, picture postcards, and the Ferris Wheel (22-27).

If it seems preposterous the world would forget a robot meant to replace human soldiers over chewing gum, one need only to consider what makes front page news these days. Consider how North America in the early '90s was more concerned with pop artists Milli Vanilli lip-synching than with the siege of

Sarajevo. By saying that Boilerplate got lost in the entertainment morass of the Columbian Exposition, Bennett might be saying we are missing something too.

Bennett and Guinan's detournement becomes clearer when considering an image of Boilerplate fighting at "The War in the Soudan" (46-47): Boilerplate is shown, gun in hand, and charging side-by-side with British troops into ranks of Sudanese soldiers. The caption beside the image reveals that "Boilerplate never participated in infantry charges such as the one in this poster. Rather, the robot helped build the rail line depicted at the top of the illustration, in the background" (47). Given that the poster is a bricolage of fact (an actual poster celebrating the 1896-98 Sudan campaign of Gen. Horatio Herbert Kitchener) and fiction (the Boilerplate figure), we need to ask why Guinan bothered to go to the trouble of digitally compositing Boilerplate into the image. Further, why have Guinan and Bennett created a book that is at the same time so historically accurate (Guinan worked with primary historical sources for his research of the 1871 "First Korean War") and yet so clearly fictional?

The answer is nowhere as clear as page 65, where Boilerplate is pictured standing with young coal miners, opposite a page titled "Childhood's End," detailing the "harsh life of child workers" in industrial America. While the image without Boilerplate, coupled with the historical facts, is powerful enough, most of us would readily admit we are unlikely to purchase a coffee table book about child labor. Of course, Boilerplate is about more than just child labor. It is about the Panama Canal, and how 27,500 workers at the Canal died of malaria and

yellow fever. It is about The Boxer Rebellion, and the situation of women in America at the turn of the century. But these events are told from the perspective of Archie and Lily Campion, along with their mute mechanical marvel. Lily Campion acts as the voice of moral outrage towards child labor while Boilerplate stands dumbly behind the children, looking out at us, impotent to do anything about this undeniable historical reality:

> Seldom have I seen true fury burning in my brother's eyes...Though we do not speak of it, I know that he and I feel a kinship with this children, having been orphaned ourselves. We are fortunate that we were never reduced to such piteous desperation as these waifs who spill their blood that we may have fine gloves and warm parlors. (65)

Boilerplate's presence in these images is a powerless one within the narrative of the text. Archie Campion's dream of replacing human soldiers with an army of Boilerplates is never realized. And yet, the robot is potentially very powerful, should the reader have ears to hear and eyes to see.

Paul Guinan was the Artist Guest-of-Honor at *Steamcon* in 2009. There was no small irony to Guinan's presence at a fan convention with the motto "Steampunk needs historical accuracy like a dirigible needs a goldfish." But as the cliché goes, if we ignore history, we are doomed to repeat it. Boilerplate not only acts as a commentary on the past, it also acts as a commentary on the present: the issues dealt with in its pages are still dealt with today. And while the average steampunk fan might hesitate to pay $30 for a book on the Pullman labor

strikes, she will shell out $30 for a well-packaged hardback about a Victorian-era metal-man, and in doing so she may learn something about how history speaks to the present.

Bricolage and Detournement – Nostalgia vs. Regret

Here I return to my reference to Heilmann and Llewellyn's narrow conception of neo-Victorianism, wherein "texts (literary, filmic, audio/visual) [which are] in some respect . . . *self-consciously engaged with the act of (re)interpretation, (re)discovery, and (re)vision concerning the Victorians*" (4). In Chapter Three, I stated that such impulses in steampunk are the feature I have labeled retrofuturism. This is the component wherein the first two components are combined. To have neo-Victorianism alone is the work of A.S. Byatt. To have technofantasy without neo-Victorianism is George Lucas's *Star Wars.* To combine the two is to construct a retrofuturist gaze, which is immediately a revision of the Victorian era. However, this does not immediately imply reinterpretation or rediscovery. We might say that a lack of reinterpretation or rediscovery is the nostalgic impulse. As mentioned in Chapter One, Jonathan Green's steampunk world is pure nostalgia without a hint of regret, lacking a reinterpretation of the Victorian world: men are still the agents of power, women are often merely objects of erotic desire or romantic diversion, Asians are bad, Caucasians are good.

I imagine Latham's nostalgia and regret as the ends of a spectrum parallel to the impulses of collage and detournement. Steampunk's nostalgic impulse combines neo-Victorianism, the feel of the nineteenth-century, with industrial technofantasy. Steampunk's melancholic impulse, regret, is actively aware of how that combination implies certain things: if one evokes the period of the British Empire, then the dark side of colonialism is an inherent facet of that evocation. Regret/detournement in steampunk, being aware of these problems, can uncover them, and often makes them the focus of the story. However, even when attempts are made at reinterpretation or rediscovery, there are many instances where that attempt is thwarted by what might be called an insufficient response to regret. That is to say, it has the appearance of regret, but is still closer to nostalgia on the spectrum.

Lisa Smedman's *The Apparition Trail* makes a strong case study for what I mean. Smedman's novel is one of those rare instances in steampunk literature where one could look up nearly all the characters and settings and get actual historical information. *The Apparition Trail* takes place on the Western Prairies of Canada in the late nineteenth-century. In the first half of the book, readers are introduced to the clairvoyant Corporal Marmaduke Grayburn of the North-West Mounted Police, who is summoned to headquarters in Regina to meet with Sam Steele. He is conveyed there by air-bicycle, a thoroughly technofantasy contraption somewhere between a bike and an airship, powered by a perpetual motion machine. When they near their destination, Grayburn and his pilot are

nearly undone by a supernatural storm that takes the shape of a monstrous raven. Following his aerial adventures, Grayburn meets with Steele and becomes a member of the secretive Q-Division: "Q— for query" (16), a sort of Mountie X-Files. Grayburn is sent to investigate the disappearance of John McDougall, a missionary, as well as the disappearance of the Manitou Stone, a Cree holy object. Grayburn journeys across Saskatchewan and Alberta by means technological and supernatural. Coincidences increase, as does the historical cast – the book is effectively a prose collage of late-nineteenth-century prairie history by the end.

Like other steampunk writers, Smedman provides a technofantasy explanation for her steampunk tech. Seven years prior to the events in the novel, a comet struck the moon, causing it to rotate on its axis, so that the dark side now faces earth. Grayburn conjectures that this change in the moon's aspect has led to the perpetual motion machine finally working, and perhaps also to the realization of First Nations magic.

Beyond this highly improbable source of both technological and metaphysical change, using steampunk technology in a Canadian setting is somewhat problematic, as Canada is not known historically for industrial technological advancements of this sort. While Smedman knows her history well, the inclusion of heavy-industrial technology is anachronistic to Canada, even in an alternate history. Suzanne Zeller's *Inventing Canada: Early Victorian Science and the Idea of a Transcontinental Nation*, focuses on how Victorian geological, geophysical, and botanical sciences moved Canadian science beyond "the

eighteenth-century mechanical ideals that forged the United States" (back cover). The geographical disparity of Canada forced a different type of technological innovation than manifested in the United States: "Victorian science in Canada revealed deep roots that were not always British or American…" (xi). Zeller notes that "[v]isions of the future were more often expressed through organic rather than mechanical analogies" (7), a tendency likely precipitated by the need to cultivate the British North American wilderness. According to Zeller, the primary scientific interests were related to map making and inventory, of "the promise of a means to locate good soils for agriculture and valuable mineral deposits for mining and industry, to cope with climate, and to make commercial use of plants and other natural resources" (3). While I have strenuously argued that steampunk is not seeking historical accuracy, it must be admitted that the resonant mimesis of steampunk London should not be identical to steampunk Canada, or China.

Further, in "The Northern Cosmos: Distinctive Themes in Canadian SF," Robert Runte and Christine Kulyk agree with Colombo's assertion that Canadians produce more fantasy than science fiction, contrasting us with "the nation of pragmatic technocrats to the south" and citing a Canadian distrust of technology as an inhibitor to Canadian hard SF (44). Smedman gets around these problems of history by using two approaches to alternate history as laid out by Karen Hellekson: she mixes the nexus story, where there is a "moment of the break" from real history, with the true alternate history, which sometimes "posit different physical laws" as the result of the moment of the break (5). The moment of the

break is a comet striking the moon in 1877, resulting in a change in physical laws. This change permits, among other things, a perpetual motion machine to exist.

Sadly, Smedman applies the same imaginative rigor to her social retrofuturism, rendering her ending far too neat and tidy to be representative of the treatment of the Cree in the signing of Treaty Six in real history:

> They wanted the terms of the original treaties honoured—especially those dealing with the provision of cattle and flour, to stave off winter famine. They wanted their traditional hunting lands kept clear of settlers. Instead of being confined to reserves, they wanted free range over all of the land except that which had already been settled by whites . . . The North-West Mounted Police detachments and trading posts that had already been erected in their lands could remain, but all new settlement had to be approved by the Indians. (257)

The treaty council agrees to everything, given that they face the threat of "every man, woman and child in the North-West Territories [becoming] the victim of Indian magic of the most diabolical description" (257). If the CPR is to be built in this alternate history, then Big Bear's terms must be met. And they are, fully, and unreservedly.

It is somewhat admirable to wish away historical atrocities such as the treatment of the Cree following treaty six. But to imagine a magical solution that erases the struggles of a severely marginalized people is dangerous ground for the alternate history writer. While no one is going to assume this is real history,

Smedman loses the chance to draw attention to some of Canada's darker moments, despite including a disclaimer with the real history at an Afterword. Smedman's ending is certainly motivated by regret, but it is a romanticized regret buried in a nostalgic fantasy of how the past "should have been."

I contrast Smedman's alternate history of the Canadian prairies with Kurt R.A. Giambastiani's equally fantastic *The Year the Cloud Fell*, which shares a number of affinities. Both *The Apparition Trail* and *The Year the Cloud Fell* begin with their protagonists—one a Mountie, the other a captain in the U.S. Army—in the air, buffeted by storm weather. The difference between how the two handle it is crucial: in *The Apparition Trail*, the storm is supernatural, the method of flight is a perpetual motion air-bike, which requires a different face of the moon to shine on the earth in order to work, and the hero suffers air sickness, but lands safely; in *The Year the Cloud Fell*, the storm is natural, the method of flight is a prototype airship that works like a real airship does, and crashes much as real airships often did, and as a result the protagonist is wounded and taken into captivity.

Compared to the airships in Kenneth Oppel's *Skybreaker*, Chris Wooding's *Retribution Falls*, Michael Moorcock's *Warlord of the Air*, and Philip Reeve's *Mortal Engines*, Giambastiani's airship is an abysmal failure, flying for less than 20 pages of the novel's 336 before crashing. The airship of *The Year the Cloud Fell* is an anachronism in 1886: historically, it will not exist until 1906. But it will exist, whereas the airships of the other books will either never exist, or may

yet exist: they are products of fantasy and future speculation, and as such are not anachronisms. They belong in the fictional world created for them. Giambastiani does not need fictional fuels or the dark side of the moon to fly his airship, because the world is based in real-world physics. This is not an alternate world where the laws of nature have been changed, as in *The Apparition Trail*. It is an alternate history, positing several crucial breaks in history.

Giambastiani utilizes a familiar plot line, a technique echoing the familiar history he subverts. Nearly everyone in North America has a sense of the part George Armstrong Custer played in American history, so Giambastiani's use of Custer's fictional son, Geroge Custer Jr., as the protagonist is the standard defamiliarization of the familiar speculative fiction so often produces. The plot line is *Dances With Wolves*, but only to a point:

> Only a short time ago he, too, had felt as they did, equating the Cheyenne's primitive existence with unabated savagery. But he had discovered instead a people with history, religion, government, and law. Their lives were violent at times and their technology was crude, but their ideas were not, and it was the ideas, he discovered. that defined a people. Would we have been so proud, he wondered, had we lost our Revolution? Do we really judge ourselves not by the successes of our generals, but by the loftiness of our ideas?
>
> No, he thought. We see only the vanquished and the victor. Ideas are a casuality of war and the commodity of historians. (248)

Giambastiani uses the familiar white-goes-native storyline to allow his ending to come as a surprise. He leads the reader right up to the door of the standard "final battle" trope of so much adventure fiction, and then subverts that as well.

Giambastiani maintains the complexity of real-world history in the forefront of *The Year the Sky Fell*, never allowing a simple solution to salve the reader's conscience of the relationship between First Nations and the rest of North America. This is not an escapist fantasy, a daydream where we can smile and "wish it were so," and feel a catharsis that fools us into thinking we've done away with the complex problems surrounding First Nations' issues. Instead, Giambastiani reminds us that such resolution is a conversation, such as the one between George Custer Jr. (One Who Flies) and Storm Arriving, a Cheyenne warrior:

> Storm Arriving smiled. "You have changed since I first met you."
>
> "Have I?"
>
> "Yes," he said. "You talk more like one of the People. I understand you much more now than I did before."
>
> One Who Flies laughed. "The same is true for me," he said. "Now, when I hear you speak of the spirits of the earth or the sky, I feel as though I almost understand." He pointed to Storm Arriving's chest and the fresh scars left by the skin sacrifice. "I even think I might someday understand that. Someday."
>
> "But not today," Storm Arriving said.

"No," George said with a sad smile. "Not today." (265)

Conversation means slow change. Revolution brings fast, but ultimately false change. Change the ideas of a person, you have won. Change the rules about ideas, and you've only achieved suppression, which usually leads to further revolution, and no conversation. Giambiastini ends *The Year the Cloud Fell* with room for a sequel, but this has more to do with his tackling the complexity of his alternate history fairly than it does with simply looking to produce another book. For *The Year the Cloud Fell* to end differently, to end in the neat and tidy fashion of *The Apparition Trail* is to seek a fairy-tale ending to a history we know was not "happily-ever-after." In *The Apparition Trail*, the First Nations people are granted everything the treaties in 1871 promised, so that Grayburn can ruminate that "the children conceived on this night—and on all the nights hereafter—would never have to go hungry again" (259). At the end of *The Year the Cloud Fell*, George Custer Jr. warns the Cheyenne nation that they have only delayed their destruction. The United States "still consider this land to be part of their nation. All they have agreed to do so far is not to kill you for defending your homes" (335). The history of the American frontier has been radically reimagined, and yet the outcome of the clash of cultures between the colonizers and the colonized remains the same.

This is not to suggest steampunk writing need be unnecessarily heavy-handed or serious: Karin Lowachee deals with issues of colonialism in *The Gaslight Dogs*, and Felix Gilman concedes the wrongful treatment of First

Nations in *The Half-made World*. Both are page-turning adventures set in completely secondary worlds – they do not *need* to echo these dark moments of history, and yet choose to. The inclusion of such attention does not detract from the ostensible "fun" of these works. *The Apparition Trail* would not cease being fun reading if it lacked such an optimistic, dare I say, rose-coloured ending: it would be fun and insightful as well. When we re-imagine the past, it is important to treat the dark corners of history with the complexity the real issues resulting from those events demand. Anything less is the *appearance* of regret without any real conviction.

Conclusion

At my most pedantic, I refuse to think of steampunk as a genre. When I am sitting with folks having drinks at a con, I let the term slide, since it's abused so much in North American parlance. Whenever someone refers to genre and fashion in the same sentence, I cringe. However, beyond all my academic proclivities, I champion the understanding of steampunk of an aesthetic, not a genre, for reasons related to playing nice in the online sandbox.

To understand steampunk as a genre is to invite the tyranny of personal taste. Look at online forum discussions on steampunk literature to see what I mean: someone joins the discussion to say they're reading Gail Carriger's *Soulless*, only to be told that is not *real* steampunk, but paranormal romance in the Victorian era. Or someone bemoans Jay Lake's use of "magic" in the last half of *Mainspring*. Often, the definition of steampunk literature is tied directly to someone's personal likes and dislikes. Those who have mistakenly assumed steampunk is science fiction are nonplussed by secondary worlds and fantasy elements; those who simply want romanticism and high adventure eschew the serious-minded, perhaps heavy handed rigors of solid alternate history; one person says Guy Ritchie's *Sherlock Holmes* was certainly steampunk: another says absolutely not. Digging further, we find a number of arbitrary standards have been assigned to the moniker of steampunk, further clouding the difficulty of defining an already troublesome compound word.

As we have seen, some try to explain the term via *steam* and *punk,* respectively. “Steam” implies the industrial revolution and the nineteenth-century. “Punk” means oppositional politics, or avant-garde styles. Articles abound advocating for more steam, or more punk. Some say if the work lacks steam, it cannot be steampunk, eliminating over half the literature on my shelf, including a number of seminal works such as Tim Powers’ *Anubis Gates*. I have offhandedly said there are very few steampunk tales describing technology using steam power: usually, we see aether, phlogiston, cavorite, or some other fictional substance that will let the writer/artist/creator really take their flight of fancy where they wish. Few steampunk writers have chosen to be constrained by the limitations of steam technology. More often, we see the argument that if there’s no punk, if it is not opposing Empire, it cannot be steampunk. Out the window go K.W. Jeter’s *Morlock Night* and James Blaylock’s *The Adventures of Langdon St. Ives,* along with any number of recent steampunk works. The argument goes that any book *not* engaged in postcolonial criticism of the British Empire is not *true* steampunk. I admittedly played around with such approaches early in my research, and abandoned them in the first few months. Steampunk as a term is a joke that gained cultural commodity. It’s here to stay, but it’s ultimately pretty meaningless. More power to those writers and artists who want more steam (historical accuracy) or punk (socio-political critique), but it does not *need* to be there for the work to be steampunk.

This thesis is the culmination of reading numerous steampunk novels, seminal and contemporary alike, attending a number of steampunk conventions both at home in Canada and south of the border in the States, watching steampunk films, reading steampunk comics, and perusing countless steampunk artworks online. The three components of steampunk I posited in this project were present in all those representations of the steampunk scene.

We have seen how steampunk is a combination of all three of these features, in varying amounts. The first feature, neo-Victorianism indicates steampunk's *evocation* but not accurate *re-creation* of the nineteenth-century. Only the most exclusive aficionado of steampunk would demand steampunk occur in nineteenth-century Victorian London. Instead, steampunk is the *suggestion* of this period, but not necessarily place or even time. Steampunk can occur in any time, and any locale (in this world or a secondary one), but it repeatedly *suggests* the nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century to us in one way or another. Another way of saying this would be Industrial Era, but this places too much focus on technology, whereas neo-Victorian can be inclusive of the fashion, customs, architecture, *and* technology of this period.

Avoiding invoking the Industrial Era in the first feature is a way of keeping it separate from technofantasy, which simply put, is technology that appears scientific, but is never explained using the physical sciences. Even when steam or electricity is the motive power of steampunk technology, there is rarely a Vernian attention to how this would *actually* work. There are only a handful of

books labeled steampunk that take the time to think through how their technology would work. Most often, it just *does*. When there is an explanation, there is a change in the way the physical universe operates. Mark Hodder does a fantastic job of explaining the lack of rational explanation for steampunk technology in a self-aware fashion in *The Case of the Clockwork Man*: "Prognostication, cheiromancy, spiritualism—these things are spoken of in the other history, but *they do not work there*…" to which Burton adds, "there is one thing we can be certain of: changing time cannot possibly alter natural laws" (57). Nevertheless, steampunk regularly violates natural laws, but under the guise of technology, and is therefore mistaken as a form of pure science fiction, when it might be better to understand steampunk as science fantasy.

The third and final feature is retrofuturism, which in addition to being our present-day imagining of how the past saw the future, is the combination of the first two features. While retrofuturism is sometimes mistakenly understood as actual prognostication from the nineteenth-century, as in the works of Jules Verne, a study of what nineteenth-century people hoped for in their own speculative fiction produces the conclusion it was *anything* but what we're seeing in steampunk. Speculative writers of the nineteenth-century looked ahead to the end of steam, the rise of electricity, and perhaps more saliently to the steampunk aesthetic, the loss of the corset in women's fashion. Retrofuturism should be understood as how *we* imagine what the past hoped for in their future. It's what we often refer to as the anachronism in steampunk, though this is often a

misnomer in steampunk literature: after all, what is anachronistic about a secondary world's inclusion of these advanced technologies in a quasi-Victorian society? That is not *our world*, so there's nothing inherently anachronistic about such technology, save by the comparison to our world. Even most steampunk that takes place in "our" world lacks anachronism: the use of steampunk elements in Jay Lake's *Mainspring* Earth is not anachronism: it *belongs* there. That is why Mark Hodder's novels are so brilliant – the characters understand their world is wrong. Things are not the way they're *supposed* to be. That is anachronism. But the airship *Leviathan* in Scott Westerfeld's young adult series is not anachronism: it is a part of the alternate world he has created.

Steampunk scholarship should be far more interested in how steampunk plays with retrofuturism in the socio-political sense, as in the novels of Cherie Priest and Gail Carriger, where we see the "New Woman" mentioned in Bram Stoker's *Dracula* fully realized in the characters of Maria Isabella Boyd and Alexia Tarabotti. Again, this seeks to balance the conflation of steampunk with technology.

My final year of research really demonstrated the advantage of taking the aesthetic approach. The need to label a story or artwork "steampunk" effectively vanished. Rather, one can discuss how much of each aspect it uses, and what it does with those aspects. Arguments over whether *Firefly* is steampunk become moot. The question becomes, "how much of the aesthetic does it utilize, and in what way does it do so?" If all three components are present, it is a clear use of

the steampunk aesthetic. If one feature is missing entirely, it is possible we are dealing with something other than steampunk: perhaps it is pure neo-Victorian fantasy, as in the case of Susannah Clarke's *Jonathan Strange and Mr. Norrell.* Or maybe it's just retrofuturist technofantasy, as in Alex Proyas' *Dark City,* which evokes the pulp era, not Victorianism. Is Harry Potter steampunk? No, but aspects of the steampunk aesthetic were employed by the design folks involved in the later film adaptations.

Further, the aesthetic approach can be applied to literature, film, music, fashion, and art. It enables a way of discussing steampunk without being elitist-exclusive or needlessly inclusive. This bothers some: they do not want their steampunk to be an empty aesthetic. From my perspective, the steampunk glass is not half-full or half-empty: it is empty, awaiting the artist to fill it with something. Want your steampunk to have more punk? Fill the aesthetic with your activism. Want your steampunk to have more steam? Make your aesthetic accurate. Just looking for a good time? Then add some absinthe to your aesthetic, and let loose the dirigibles of war (or exploration) and head for the horizon. Implicit in retrofuturism's malleability as either nostalgia or regret is the elasticity of steampunk as an aesthetic: these three lenses can be trained upon myriad types of stories, serious and whimsical alike. Consider the goggles steampunk rose-coloured glasses, which change the look of whatever we cast our gaze upon. Look at an adventure story, and the goggles give you Scott Westerfeld's *Leviathan*; look at a romance and the goggles give you Kady Cross's *Girl in the Iron Corset*

(2011); look at space opera and you'll see Philip Reeve's *Larklight* (2006); look at a western and get Felix Gilman's *Half-made World*. Superheroes? *The Falling Machine* by Andrew P. Mayer (2011). Scary vampires? *Anno Dracula* by Kim Newman (1993). Sparkly vampires? *Soulless* by Gail Carriger (2009). Both? *Greyfriar* by Clay and Susan Griffith (2010).

Colleagues often ask me, "What does steampunk *mean*?" At one point, I would have said, "Steampunk doesn't mean anything." Anecdotally, that statement is *Steampunk* magazine editor Allegra Hawksmoor's worst fear concerning steampunk: that the aesthetic is empty. Returning to the goggled gaze from the introduction, I am reminded of "Radioactive Man," an episode of the Simpsons which became an inside joke among steampunks. In the episode, Arnold-Schwarzenegger-parody Rainer Wolfcastle, having donned protective goggles, finds them useless against a wave of nuclear waste. As he is carried away by a radioactive wave, he yells out, "My eyes! The goggles do nothing!" We might say the same of the goggles of steampunk, that they do nothing. But as we have seen, the steampunk aesthetic does something – it places a neo-Victorian, technofantastic, retrofuturistic veneer onto the stories, art, and fashion which employ it.

Nevertheless, steampunk cannot, as some adherents have professed, "be anything you want it to be." While steampunk can be applied to anything, the interpretations of that application are limited by the aesthetic's elements. Due to the aesthetic's broad potential of application, this study should be considered a

work-in-progress, an initial attempt at suggesting directions for further, more focused studies in steampunk. As Stefan Hantke noted in regards to the definition of steampunk, "[c]onsidering how quickly steampunk has fragmented into a bewildering variety of styles, critics would be best off considering their own definitions as working hypotheses, tentative, evolving fictions in themselves" (1999, 253). Likewise, the steampunk aesthetic offered by this exploratory reading of online Steam Wars images and steampunk literature is a working hypothesis, a descriptive examination of these fictions as they evolve. The aesthetic matrix presented here is prescriptive insofar as my own preference for *detournement* in steampunk, but is ultimately intended as a set of descriptive terms for a literature, art, and fashion culture in vaporous flux, not necessarily a recommendation for what makes for "true" steampunk.

Steampunk is largely a floating signifier, but, like any signifier, it has a limited range of meaning and interpretation. Steampunk is clearly concerned with technology, but the meaning of that concern changes with the application of the aesthetic. While it's fair to say that for steampunk Makers steampunk is about a return to comprehensible mechanization and artful craftsmanship, this is not necessarily the case in steampunk apparel. For those who take it seriously as a counter-culture fashion statement, there is agreement with the idea of hearkening back to a time when clothing was hand-made, when many dresses were one-of-a-kind, and when you bought clothes made to last. However, for the cosplayers and costumers, steampunk is an opportunity to be creatively expressive, to construct a

persona through the confluence of clothing and accessory. It is hard to see plastic robot arms painted to look like brass as a counter-culture fashion statement. For others, steampunk is an opportunity to work at historical reenactment: a number of steampunk convention attendees are people who take part in Civil War reenactments, or have worked as extras in period film. They are black powder aficionados, people who have always had a strong interest in nineteenth-century history.

Some would note that all these examples indicate a nostalgic longing for the past. And there are a number of avenues that steampunk's particular brand of nostalgia might take us. Steampunk's neo-Victorianism might lead one to conclude that the attraction to steampunk has something to do with the temporal proximity of the nineteenth-century to our own time, fulfilling Fred Davis's assertion that true nostalgia requires proximity of experience (8). Bonnett admits the importance of attachment through temporal proximity, so that the glory of Rome exerts less nostalgic influence than the Victorian or Edwardian era (6). Louisa Hadley would agree with both:

> At the most fundamental level, the Victorians hold a central place in the contemporary cultural imagination because of the position they occupy in relation to the twentieth century. Close enough for us to be aware that we have descended from them and yet far enough away for there to be significant differences in life-styles, the Victorians occupy a similar place to our grandparents. (6-7)

So perhaps the nostalgia for steampunk involves some perceived attachment, a similarity between our culture and that of the nineteenth-century, that the upheaval of industrial innovation is somehow analogous to the contemporary digital revolution.

Others might echo Linda Hutcheon in seeing the inaccessibility of the past as the attraction to the nostalgia of steampunk. While Hutcheon was speaking of general expressions of nostalgia, her description of the "irrecoverable nature of the past" could easily be applied to the spectacular imaginings of steampunk: "This is rarely the past as actually experienced, of course; it is the past as imagined, as idealized through memory and desire. In this sense, however, nostalgia is less about the past than about the present" ("Irony, Nostalgia, and the Postmodern"). Here then, steampunk becomes commentary on the present, given the short temporal distance between the contemporary age and the nineteenth century. The imagined attachment to the Victorian and Edwardian eras grants enough familiarity to ground readers, while the otherness of those periods distance the reader enough to create a subversive space for ironic commentary. Hutcheon sees the power of this nostalgic impulse emerging from "its structural doubling-up of two different times, an inadequate present and an idealized past" (ibid.). The idealized past of the steampunk world, speak of the nostalgia for the Victorian era as a "golden age" from which the present had somehow fallen, as in the political appropriation of the term Victorian by Margaret Thatcher in the 1980s (Hadley 8). Again, however, Hutcheon emphasizes the importance of

intent: “it is the element of response--of active participation, both intellectual and affective--that makes for the power” (“Irony, Nostalgia, and the Postmodern”).

This is the tension that has played throughout this project: steampunk as an aesthetic has the potential to be either conservative nostalgia, radical regret, or some combination of the two. So once again we are left with ambivalence: the ambivalence of neo-Victorianism, which plays on the tension between historical accuracy and romanticized resonance; the ambivalence of technofantasy that exists in the space between reason and faith; the ambivalence of retrofuturism that plays on the tension between a nostalgic longing for an idealized past and a regretful, melancholic awareness of how actions affect the future.

Appendix: A list of primary sources for steampunk studies

The following is a list of primary sources that might be deemed essential to literary steampunk studies. I compiled this list based largely upon the popularity of these texts, not necessarily their scholarly or literary merit. While Dexter Palmer's *The Dream of Perpetual Motion* might be more conducive to ostensibly serious textual rigour, its influence on the steampunk aesthetic is marginal.

Seminal Steampunk

Warlord of the Air by Michael Moorcock (1971): This is widely considered a seminal work of steampunk, and is often cited for its political subtext. It is still in print in an omnibus edition from White Wolf Publishing. The omnibus includes the sequels to *Warlord*.

Infernal Devices/Morlock Night omnibus by K.W. Jeter (2011): Angry Robot books released both of Jeter's first steampunk works in an omnibus that includes a new foreword by Jeter, and an afterword by Jeff Vandermeer, co-editor of the first steampunk anthology and *The Steampunk Bible*.

The Adventures of Langdon St. Ives omnibus by James P. Blaylock (2008): While this edition from Subterranean Press is now out-of-print, it is the only comprehensive collection of Blaylock's early steampunk writing, both short stories and longer works. Titan Books is reprinting *Homunculus* and *Lord Kelvin's Machine* in 2013, for those who cannot locate a used copy of this collection.

The Difference Engine by William Gibson and Bruce Sterling (1991): No discussion of steampunk can be considered complete without some mention of this novel. While it is not widely appreciated due to its difficult nature, it remains one of the best-known early steampunk books.

Second Wave

Against the Day by Thomas Pynchon (2006): While Pynchon's epic novel contains many other styles of narratives, the adventures of the Chums of Chance clearly owe a debt to the steampunk aesthetic. Those looking for a very serious and dense work of literature to study steampunk through need look no further. That said, it is not widely read within steampunk circles, so should not be part of a literary assessment of steampunk as a popular phenomenon.

(It must be noted that the following three books were arguably part of the *avant garde* of a steampunk publishing explosion, but demonstrated their superiority with other works released subsequently through the enduring popularity of the series each book started.)

Leviathan by Scott Westerfeld (2009): Along with its sequels, this Young Adult novel is one of the most widely read works of steampunk. While the plot is straightforward, Westerfeld's technofantasies have a thematic resonance that transcends any formulaic plot elements.

Boneshaker by Cherie Priest (2009): In addition to catalyzing Priest's career, *Boneshaker* popularized the genre for readers outside the subculture, and while it

was not the first to do so, was arguably the book that reminded fans that steampunk could take place in the American West.

Soulless by Gail Carriger (2009): While it continues to be reviled by critics who hold that steampunk should be serious, the tremendous popularity of Carriger's *Parasol Protectorate* series cannot be denied. While I have yet to gather statistics, it is my impression that these books, and this first one in particular, are the most widely read steampunk works in the past five years.

Stormdancer by Jay Kristoff (2012): Since it was released late in the process of writing my dissertation, I was unable to include Kristoff's first book in the *Lotus War* series in my discussion of East Asian steampunk and the problem of Victorientalism. Beyond simply being an excellent work of fiction, Kristoff's *Stormdancer* provides an interesting secondary steampunk world based on nineteenth-century Japan.

Anthologies

Steampunk, edited by Ann and Jeff Vandermeer (2008): For a study of steampunk before the 2009 boom in popularity, one cannot do better than the first of the Tachyon series of steampunk anthologies. This book includes everything from an excerpt from Moorcock's *Warlord of the Air* to short fiction by Jay Lake written in 2007. It's an excellent resource for someone looking for a survey of steampunk from its first-wave inception to second-wave innovation.

Works Cited

20,000 Leagues Under the Sea. Screenplay by Earl Felton. Dir. Richard Fleischer. Prod. Walt Disney. Perf. Kirk Douglas and James Mason. 1954. Disney DVD. 2003. Film.

Aldiss, Brian. *Frankenstein Unbound*. New York: Random House, 1973. Print.

Alkon, Paul. *Science Fiction Before 1900: Imagination Discovers Technology*. Toronto: Maxwell Macmillan Canada, 1994. Print.

"alternate history." Prucher 4.

"alternate world." Prucher 6.

Amend, Myke. *The Rescue.* Acrylic on Mahogany panel. Private collection, Robert Smith, Seattle. 2008. Print.

Ancient Mariner. "Top 10 Steampunk Games." *Cult Software Blogspot*. 27 January 2011. Web. 29 May 2012.

Anderson, Kevin J. *Captain Nemo: The Fantastic Adventures of a Dark Genius*. Titan Books, 2011. Print.

Ashley, Mark,ed. *Steampunk Prime: A Vintage Steampunk reader*. New York: Non-stop Press, 2010. Print.

At the Earth's Core. Dir. Kevin O'Connor. 1976. Film.

Bachalo, Chris, and Joe Kelly. *Steampunk: Drama Obscura*. New York: Cliffhanger Comics, 2003. Print.

Bachalo, Chris, and Joe Kelly. *Steampunk: Manimatron*. New York: Cliffhanger Comics, 2001. Print.

Bear, Greg. “Steampunk and Extraordinary Voyages.” *Eaton Science Fiction Conference*. University of California Riverside. May 2, 2009. Panel Discussion.

Bennett, Anina and Guinan, Paul. *Boilerplate: History’s Mechanical Marvel*. New York: Abrams Image, 2009. Print.

Bennett, Anina and Paul Guinan. *Frank Reade: Adventures in the Age of Invention*. New York: Abrams Image, 2012. Print.

Beschizza, Rob. “Steampunk Lightsaber.” *Wired*. 31 January 2007. Web. 23 December 2008.

Binion, Lisa. “My Interview with Ben H. Winters.” *Bella Online*. Web. 26 July 2012.

Blaylock, James P. “James P. Blaylock: Impractical Machines.” *Locus* April 2010: 57-58. Print.

Blaylock, James P. *The Adventures of Langdon St. Ives*. Burton: Subterranean Press, 2008. Print.

Blaylock, James P. *The Digging Leviathan*. New York: Ace Books, 1984. Print.

Blaylock, James P. “Meet James Blaylock.” *Steamcon* steampunk convention. Hilton, Seattle. 20 November 2010. Public interview.

Bonnett, Alastair. *Left in the Past: Radicalism and the Politics of Nostalgia.* New York: Continuum, 2010. Print.

Bould, Mark. “Cyberpunk.” *A Companion to Science Fiction*. Ed. David Seed. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2005. Print.

Boym, Svetlana. *The Future of Nostalgia.* New York: Basic Books, 2001. Print.

BrassGoggles.com. Brass Goggles. 7 December 2008. Web. 24 December 2008.

"Brief Steampunk FAQ." *Brass Goggles*. 28 April 2010. Web. 26 June 2012.

Broadmore, Greg. *Dr. Grordbort's Contrapulatronic Dingus Directory*. Milwaukie: Dark Horse, 2008. Print.

Broadmore, Greg. *Victory: Scientific Adventure Violence for Young Men and Literate Women*. Milwaukie: Dark Horse, 2009. Print.

Brook, Joceyln. *The Crisis in Bulgaria, or Ibsen to the Rescue!* London: Chatto & Windus, 1956. Print.

Brown, Molly. "The Selene Gardening Society." Vandermeer, *Steampunk* 147-164.

Brownlee, John. "Marcel E. Mercado's Steampunk Star Wars." *Wired*. 19 June 2007. Web. 23 December 2008.

Bullen, Elizabeth, and Elizabeth Parsons. "Dystopian Visions Of Global Capitalism: Philip Reeve'S Mortal Engines And M.T Anderson'S Feed." *Children's Literature in Education* 38.2 (2007): 127-139. Web. 22 Jan. 2012.

Bush, Emilie P. *Chenda and the Airship Brofman*. Norcross: EmitoneB Books, 2009. Print.

Butler, Judith. "Revisiting Bodies And Pleasures." *Theory, Culture & Society* 16.2 (1999): 11-20. Web. 13 June 2012.

Captain Nemo and the Underwater City. Dir. James Hill. 1969. Film.

Carriger, Gail. *Blameless*: *The Parasol Protectorate: Book the Third*. New York, Orbit Books, 2010. Print.

---. *Changeless: The Parasol Protectorate: Book the Second*. New York, Orbit Books, 2010.

---. *Heartless: The Parasol Protectorate: Book the Fourth.* New York: Orbit Books, 2011. Print.

---. *Soulless: The Parasol Protectorate: Book the First*. New York, Orbit Books, 2009. Print.

Cavallaro, Dani. *Cyberpunk and Cyberculture*. London: Athlone, 2000. Print.

Chakravarty, Gautam. *The Indian Mutiny and the British Imagination.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005. Print.

Chiang, Ted. "Seventy-Two Letters." Vandermeer, *Steampunk* 165-212.

Chitty Bang Bang. Screenplay by Roald Dahl, et al. Prod. Albert R. Broccoli and Stanley Sopel. 1968. Film.

Cioffi, Frank. *Formula Fiction? An Anatomy of Science Fiction, 1930-1940*. Contributions to the Study of Science Fiction and Fantasy 3. Westport: Greenwood Press, 1982. Print.

The City of Lost Children (*La Cité des enfants perdus*). Dir. Jean-Pierre Jeunet and Marc Caro. Screenplay by Gilles Adrien and Jean-Pierre Jeunet. Sony Pictures Classics, 1995. Film.

Clayton, Jay. *Charles Dickens in Cyberspace: The Afterlife of the Nineteenth-century in Postmodern Culture*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2003. Print.

Clute, John (JohnClute). User Warning, though: STEAMPUNK entry in SFE awaits revision, maybe within the next few weeks. Glad the EoF was helpful. *Twitter.com*. 11 June 2012. Web. 21 June 2012.

Clute, John. "Alternate Worlds." Clute and Grant, 21-22.

---. "Steampunk." *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy*. Eds. John Clute and John Grant. New Jersey: St. Martin's Press, 1997. 895-896. Print.

Clute, John and Roz Kaveny. "Gaslight Romance." Clute and Grant, 390-391.

Clute, John, and John Grant, eds. *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy*. New Jersey: St. Martin's Press, 1997. Print.

Colombo, John Robert. "Four Hundred Years of Fantastic Literature in Canada." *Out of this World: Canadian Science Fiction and Fantasy Literature*. Ed. Andrea Paradis. Kingston: Quarry Press and The National Library of Canada, 1995. 28-40. Print.

Colwell, C. Carter. "Primitivism in the Movies of Ridley Scott." *Retrofitting Blade Runner*. Ed. Judith B. Kerman. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1997. 124-131. Print.

Comitini, Patricia. "A Feminist Fantasy: Conflicting Ideologies in *The Odd Women*." *Studies in the Novel* 27, no. 4. (1995): 529-543. Web. 26 June 2012.

Cronkhite, G. Ferris. “Walt Whitman and the Locomotive.” *American Quarterly* 6.2 (1954): 164-172. Web. 21 June 2012.

Cross, Kady. *The Girl in the Steel Corset*. Don Mills: Harlequin Teen, 2011. Print.

Csicsery-Ronay Jr., Istvan. *The Seven Beauties of Science Fiction.* Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2008. Print.

Cunningham, Gail. *The New Woman and the Victorian Novel*. London: MacMillan, 1978. Print.

D. “Steampunk Star Wars II.” *Llama and My Stegosaurus*. 21 August 2007. Web. 23 December 2011.

---. “Steampunk Star Wars.” *Llama and My Stegosaurus*. 4 August 2007. Web. 23 December 2011.

Dahlquist, Gordon. *The Dark Volume*. New York: Bantam, 2009. Print.

Dahlquist, Gordon. *The Glass Books of the Dream Eaters*. New York: Bantam Dell, 2006. Print.

Dark City. Dir. Alex Proyas. Screenplay by Alex Proyas, David S. Goyer, and Lem Dobbs. New Line Cinema, 1998. Film.

Darkgarden.com. Ed. Autumn Adamme. Dark Garden, 2012. Web. 21 June 2012.

Davis, Fred. *Yearning for Yesterday: A Sociology of Nostalgia*. New York: The Free Press, 1979. Print.

Dear, Peter. *The Intelligibility of Nature: How Science Makes Sense to the World*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006. Print.

Di Filippo, Paul. *The Steampunk Trilogy*. New York: Four Walls Eight Windows, 1995. Print.

Doane, Mary Ann. "Technophilia: Technology, Representation and the Feminine." *Liquid Metal: The Science Fiction Film Reader*. Ed. Sean Redmond. New York: Wallflower Press, 1995. 182-190. Print.

Doležel, Lubomír. *Heterocosmica: fiction and possible worlds*." Baltimore: Parallax, 1998. Print.

Dolezel, Lubomir. "Possible Worlds of Fiction And History." *New Literary History* 29.4 (1998): 785. Web. 26 June 2012.

Doyle, Christopher. "The Falcon of the Millennium." *Reasonably Clever*. Web. 14 January 2012.

Doyle, Michael. "[Atompunk] Futurismic detournement, aka 'formalist masturbation'." Online posting. 16 December 2008. Atompunk Mailinglist. Web. 29 May 2012.

The Empire Strikes Back. Dir. Irvin Kirshner. Story by George Lucas. Twentieth-century Fox Corporation, 1980. Film.

Evans, Arthur B., Terry Harpold, Rob Latham, George Slusser. "The 2009 Eaton Sequence." *Verniana* 2 (2010): 74-76. Web. 22 Jan. 2012.

EvilEgg. "SteamPunk: A List of Themes." *Writing.com*. 2007. April 18, 2010. Web. 5 June 2012.

Ewing, Al. *El Sombra: Pax Brittania Series*. Gardena: Abaddon Press, 2007. Print.

Falksen, G.D. and Anonymous. “The Steampunk Style Test.” *Hello Quizzy.* April 18, 2010. Web. 26 June 2012.

Falksen, G.D. Essay. “Steampunk 101.” *The Art of Steampunk*. By Art Donovan. East Petersburg: Fox Chapel Publishing, 2011. 30-33. Print.

Fast, John. “Machinery of Blood: Melville’s ‘The Bell Tower’ as Ambiguous Steampunk Horror.” *New York Review of Science Fiction* 20.1 [229] (2007): 18. Print.

Ferguson, Christine. “Surface Tensions: Steampunk, Subculture, and the Ideology of Style.” *Neo-Victorian Studies*. 4:2 (2011): 66-90. Web. 26 June 2012.

First Men in the Moon . Screenplay by Nigel Kneale. Dir. Nathan H. Juran. Prod. Charles H. Schneer. 1964. Film.

Flaming, Matthew. *The Kingdom of Ohio.* New York: Amy Einhorn Books, 2009. Print.

Foglio, Kaja and Phil. *Girl Genius: Omnibus Edition #1*. Seattle: Studio Foglio, 2006. Print.

Foglio, Phil. Personal interview, 1 November 2008.

Forlini, Stefania. “Re: introductions.” Message to Mike Perschon. 29 Oct. 2009. E-mail.

Frazier, Joel, and Harry Hathorne, “*20,000 Leagues Under the Sea*: the Filming of Jules Verne’s Classic Science Fiction Novel” *Cinefantastique* 14: May 1984, 32-53. Print.

Freedman, Ariela. “Zeppelin Fictions and the British Home Front.” *Journal Of Modern Literature* 27.3 (2004): 47-62. Web. 13 June 2012.

Frost, Mark. *The List of 7*. New York: Avon Books, 1993. Print.

Full Metal Alchemist. Enix. 2001-2003. Television.

Garcia, Christopher, Mike Perschon, and J. Daniel Sawyer. “Victorian Technology.” *Steam Powered: The Northern California Steampunk Convention*. 1 November 2008. Panel Address.

Gaskell, Elizabeth. *Ruth*. 1853. Oxford edition. Edited by Alan Shelston. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985. Print.

Gentlemensemporium.com. Gentlemen’s Emporium, 2012. Web. 21 June 2012.

Gevers, Nick, ed. *Extraordinary Engines: The Definitive Steampunk Anthology*. Lenton: Solaris, 2008. Print.

Gevers, Nick. “Introduction.” *Extraordinary Engines: The Definitive Steampunk Anthology*. Ed. Nick Gevers. Nottingham: Solaris, 2008. 7-11. Print.

Giambastiani, Kurt A. *The Year the Cloud Fell*. New York: Roc, 2001. Print.

Gibson, William & Sterling, Bruce. *The Difference Engine*. New York : Bantam Books, 1992. Print.

Gibson, William. Interview by August C Bourré. CNQ: *Canadian Notes & Queries*. 17 August 2011. Web. 14 June 2012.

Gill, Sam. “Play.” *Guide to the Study of Religion.* Eds. Willi Braun and Russel T. McCutcheon. New York: Cassell, 2000. 451-464. Print.

Gilman, Felix. *The Half-Made World*. New York: Tor, 2010. Print.

Glazer, Peter. *Radical Nostalgia: Spanish Civil War Commemoration in America.* Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2005. Print.

Goh, Jaymee. "There is Totally Punk in Steampunk." *Tor.com*. 19 October 2009. Web. 1 May 2010.

Good, Joseph. "'God Save the Queen, for Someone Must!': *Sebastian O* and the Steampunk Aesthetic." *Neo-Victorian Studies* 3:1 (2010): 208-215. Web. 22 Jan. 2012.

Gordon, Joan. "Hybridity, Heterotopia, and Mateship in China Miéville's *Perdido Street Station*." *Science Fiction Studies* 30.3 (2003): 456-476. Web. 22 Jan. 2012.

Gould, Stephen Jay. *Time's Arrow Time's Cycle: Myth and Metaphor in the Discovery of Geological Time*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987. Print.

Gray, Nathalie. *Full Steam Ahead*. Red Sage Publishing, 2010. E-book.

The Great Race. Dir. Blake Edwards. 1965. Film.

Green, Jonathan. *Leviathan Rising: Pax Britannia Series*. Gardena: Abaddon Press, 2008. Print.

---. *Unnatural History: Pax Britannia Series*. Gardena: Abaddon Press, 2007. Print.

Griffith, Clay & Susan. *The Greyfriar*. Amherst: PYR, 2010. Print.

Gross, Cory. “A History of Misapplied Technology: The History and Development of the Steampunk Genre.” *Steampunk Magazine*. 2 May. 2007: 54-61. Web. 15 Dec. 2011.

---. “Varieties of Steampunk Experience.” *Steampunk Magazine*. March 2007, 60-63. Web. 24 May 2012.

Gunn, Eileen. “The Difference Dictionary.” *sff.net*. 2003. Web. 10 May 2012.

Hadley, Louisa. *Neo-Victorian Fiction and Historical Narrative: The Victorians and Us.* New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2010. Print.

Hansen, Adam. “Exhibiting Vagrancy, 1851: Victorian London and the “Vagabond Savage”.” *A Mighty Mass of Brick and Stone: Victorian and Edwardian Represenations of London*. Ed. Lawrence Phillips. New York: Rodopi, (2007): 61-84. Print.

Hantke, Steffen. “Difference Engines and Other Infernal Devices: History According to Steampunk.” *Extrapolation* 40.3 (1999): 244-254. Web. 22 Jan. 2012.

Haraway, Donna. “A Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, Technology, and Socialist Feminism in the 1980s.” *Thinking Gender*. Ed. Linda J. Nicholson. New York: Routledge, 1990. 190-233. Print.

Hedgecock, Jennifer. *The Femme Fatale in Victorian Literature: The Danger and the Sexual Threat*. Amherst: Cambria Press, 2008.

Heilmann, Ann, and Mark Llewellyn. *Neo-Victorianism: The Victorians in the Twenty-First Century*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010. Print.

Hellekson, Karen. “Toward A Taxonomy Of The Alternate History Genre.” *Extrapolation*. 41.3 (2000): 248-256. Web. 5 June 2012.

---. *The Alternate History: Refiguring Historical Time*. Kent: Kent State University Press, 2001. Print.

Helzer, Daniel. *Blockaid Runner*. Digital Art. *DanielHelzer.com,* 12 April 2007. Web. 26 June 2012.

---. *Sketch 354*, Digital Art. *DanielHelzer.com,* 15 April 2007. Web. 26 June 2012.

---. *Slave Princess Leia*. Digital Art. *DanielHelzer.com,* 5 April 2007. Web. 26 June 2012.

Hendrix, Howard. “Verne among the Punks, Or ‘It’s Not Just a Victorian Clockwork.’” *Verniana*. 2 (2009): 81-88. Web. 22 Jan. 2012.

Herbert, Frank. *Dune*. 1965. New York: Ace Books, 1995. Print.

Hernandez, Lea. *Cathedral Child*. Fullerton: Image Comics, 1998. Print.

---. *Clockwork Angels*. Fullerton: Image Comics, 1999. Print.

Hills, Matt. “Counterfiction in the Work of Kim Newman: Rewriting Gothic SF as ‘Alternate-Story Stories.’” *Science Fiction Studies* 30.3 (2003): 436-455. Web. 26 June 2012.

“History.” *Bovril.co.uk.* Web. 30 July 2012.

Hodder, Mark. *The Curious Case of the Clockwork Man*. Amherst: PYR, 2011. Print.

---. *The Strange Affair of Spring Heeled Jack.* Amherst: PYR, 2010. Print.

Hunt, Stephen. *The Court of the Air*. London: Harper*Voyager*, 2007. Print.

---. *Kingdom Beyond the Waves*. London: Harper*Voyager*, 2008. Print.

---. *The Rise of the Iron Moon*. New York: Tor, 2009. Print.

Hurri, Björn. *Steampunk Star Wars: Chewbacca*. Digital Painting. *Gorillaartfare.com*. 3 October 2008. Web. 26 June 2012.

---. *Steampunk Star Wars: Han Solo*. Digital Painting. *Gorillaartfare.com*. 1 October 2008. Web. 26 June 2012.

---. *Steampunk Star Wars: Master Yoda (Second Pass)*. Digital Painting. *Gorillaartfare.com*. 9 October 2008. Web. 26 June 2012.

---. *Steampunk Star Wars: Princess Leia (Second Pass)*. Digital Painting. *Gorillaartfare.com*. 17 October 2008. Web. 26 June 26, 2012.

Hutcheon, Linda. "Irony, Nostalgia, and the Postmodern." *www.library.utoronto.ca*. 19 January 1998. Web. 2 August 2012.

Jagoda, Patrick. "Clacking Control Societies: Steampunk, History, and the Difference Engine of Escape." *Neo-Victorian Studies* 3:1 (2010): 46-7. Web. 22 Jan. 2012.

Jameson, Fredric. "Postmodernism and Consumer Society." *Postmodernism and its Discontents: theories, practices*. Ed. Ann Kaplan. New York: Verso, 1988. 192-205. Web. 22 Jan. 2012.

---. *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1991. Print.

Janicz, Krzysztof. *Retrostacja* (*Steampunkopedia: Analogue Collection: MMIII-MMX)*. July 2010. Originally published at www.steampunk.republika.pl 2003-2010. Web. 26 June 26, 2012.

Jenkins, Henry. *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture*. New York: Routledge, 1992. Print.

Jeter, K.W. *Dr. Adder*. New York: Bluejay Books, 1984. Print.

---. *Infernal Devices: A Mad Victorian Fantasy*. New York: New American Library, 1987. Print.

---. *Morlock Night*. New York: Daw Books, 1979. Print.

---. On Steampunk and "Steampunk". *Infernal Devices and Morlock Night*. Botley: Angry Robot, 2011. Print.

---. *Steamcon Airship Awards Banquet*. Seattle. 14 October 2011. Address.

Jones, Jason B. "Betrayed by Time: Steampunk & the Neo-Victorian in Alan Moore's *Lost Girls* and *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen*." *Neo-Victorian Studies* 3:1 (2010): 99-126. Web. 22 Jan. 2012.

Judson, Theodore. *Fitzpatrick's War*. New York: DAW Books, 2004. Print.

Kaku, Michio. *Physics of the Impossible: A Scientific Exploration into the World of Phasers, Force Fields, Teleportation, and Time Travel*. New York: Doubleday, 2008. Print.

Kaplan, Cora. *Victoriana: Histories, Fictions, Criticism.* New York: Columbia University Press, 2007. Print.

Keep, Christopher. “Technology and Information: Accelerating Developments.” *A Companion to the Victorian Novel*. Eds. Patrick Brantlinger and William Thesing. Toronto: Wiley-Blackwell. 2004, 137-154. Print.

Kelleghan, Fiona. “Interview with Tim Powers.” *Science Fiction Studies.* 25.1 (1998): 7-28. Web. 26 June 2012.

Kelly, James Patrick. “Slipstream.” *Speculations on Speculation: Theories of Science Fiction*. Eds. James Gunn and Matthew Candelaria. Toronto: The Scarecrow Press, Inc. 2005, 343-351. Print.

Kendrick, Christopher. “Monster Realism and Uneven Development in China Miéville’s The Scar.” *Extrapolation* 50.2 (2009): 258-275. Web. 22 Jan. 2012.

Kerman, Judith B., Ed. *Retrofitting Blade Runner*. Bowling Green: Bowling Green State U Popular Press, 1997. Print.

Kermode, Frank. *Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction*. Cary: Oxford University Press, 2000. Web. 22 Jan. 2012.

Killjoy, Margaret (Magpie). “Steampunk Will Never Be Afraid of Politics.” *Tor.com*. 3 October 2011. Web. 24 May 2012.

Killjoy, Margaret. “You Can’t Stay Neutral on a Moving Train (Even if it’s Steam-Powered).” *Steampunk Magazine*. April 2010: 4-7. Web. 26 June 2012.

King, Geoff, and Tanya Krzywinska. *Science Fiction Cinema*. London: Wallflower, 2001. Print.

King, Jeannette. *The Victorian Woman Question in Contemporary Feminist Fiction*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005. Print.

Kranidis, Rita S. *Subversive Discourse: The Cultural Production of Late Victorian Feminist Novels*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995.

Kulyk, Christine and Robert Runte. "The Northern Cosmos: Distinctive Themes in Canadian SF." *Out of this World: Canadian Science Fiction & Fantasy Literature*. Ed. Andrea Paradis. Kingston: Quarry Press & The National Library of Canada, 1995. 41-50. Print.

Ladino, Jennifer. "Longing For Wonderland: Nostalgia for Nature in Post-Frontier America." *Iowa Journal Of Cultural Studies* 5. (2004): 88-109. Web. 22 July 2012.

Lake, Jay. "The God-Clown Is Near." Vandermeer, *Steampunk* 97-106.

---. *Mainspring*. New York: Tor Books, 2007. Print.

The Land that Time Forgot. Dir. Kevin O'Connor. 1975. Film.

The Lost Continent. Dir. Michael Carreras. 1968. Film.

Langford, David. "Recursive Fantasy", Clute and Grant, 805-06.

Lansdale, Joe R. *Flaming London*. Burton: Subterranean Press, 2006. Print.

Lansdale, Joe R. *Zeppelins West*. Burton: Subterranean Press, 2001. Print.

Lansdale, Joe. R. "The Steam Man of the Prairie and the Dark Man Get Down: A Dime Novel" Vandermeer, 107-145. Print.

Latham, Rob. "Our Jaded Tomorrows." *Science Fiction Studies* 36.2 (2009): 339-349. Web.

Lathrop, George Parsons. “In the Deep of Time.” Ashley, *Steampunk Prime* 89-128.

Laumer, Keith. *Worlds of the Imperium*. New York: Ace Books, 1962. Print.

Le Brocq, Ora. *Steampunk Erotica*. Squamish: eXtasy Books, 2010. E-book.

Ledger, Sally. *Fiction and Feminism at the Fin de siècle.* New York: Manchester University Press, 1997.

---. “Ibsen, the New Woman, and the Actress.” Richardson and Willis 79-93.

Lewis, C.S. *That Hideous Strength*. 1945. Toronto: Simon and Schuster, 2009. Print.

Link, Kelly and Gavin J. Grant. “Introduction.” *Steampunk! An Anthology of Fantastically Rich and Strange Stories*. Eds. Kelly Link and Gavin J. Grant. Somerville: Candlewick, 2011. vii-viii. Print.

Lockhart, Alister. *Steam Darthe*, Digital Painting. *i71.photobuckiet.com*, 4 April 2007. Web. 26 June 2012.

---. *Steampunk Destroyer*, Digital Painting. *i71.photobuckiet.com*, 3 May 2007. Web. 26 June 2012.

Lovegrove, James. “Steampunch.” Gevers. *Extraordinary Engines* 15-42.

Lowachee, Karin. *The Gaslight Dogs*. New York: Orbit, 2010. Print.

Lupoff, Richard. *Into the Aether*. New York: Dell, 1974. Print.

MacAlister, Katie. *Steamed: A Steampunk Romance*. New York: Signet, 2010. Print.

MacLeod, Ian R. *The House of Storms*. New York: Ace Books, 2005. Print.

MacLeod, Ian R. *The Light Ages*. Toronto: Pocket Books, 1997. Print.

Maertens, James W. "Between Jules Verne and Walt Disney: Brains, Brawn, And Masculine Desire In "20,000 Leagues Under The Sea." *Science Fiction Studies* 22.2 (1995): 209-225. Web. 16 May 2012.

Mann, George. *The Affinity Bridge*. New York: Tor Books, 2009. Print.

Marcus, Steven. *The Other Victorians: A Study of Sexuality and Pornography in Mid-Nineteenth-century England*. New York: Norton, 1974. Print.

Marinucci, Mimi. "Feminism and the Ethics of Violence." *Buffy the Vampire Slayer and Philosophy: Fear and Trembling in Sunnydale.* Ed. James B. South. Chicago: Open Court, 2003. 61-75. Print.

Mauméjean, Xavier. *The League of Heroes*. Manuella Chevalier, Trans. Encino: Black Coat Press, 2005. Print.

Mayer, Andrew P. *The Falling Machine*. Amherst: PYR, 2011. Print.

Mayhew, Henry. *London Labour and the London Poor*. Toronto: Penguin Classics, 1985. (1851-52). Print.

McHale, Brian. "Genre as History: Pynchon's Genre-Poaching." *Pynchon's* Against the Day *: A Corrupted Pilgrim's Guide*. Ed. Jeffrey Severs. Blue Ridge Summit: Rowman & Littlefield Education, 2011. 15-28. Print.

McMahan, Alison. "THE STEAMPUNK TRILOGY by Paul Di Filippo: A discussion by Alison McMahan." *www.alisonmcmahan.com*. 27 May 2010. Web. 10 May 2012.

McWeeny, Drew. “Holy Crap... This Is A Really Groovy STAR WARS Slice Of Fandom!!” *Ain’t It Cool News*. Web. 26 June 2012.

Mead, Robert A. “Ambivalence and Myth In The History And Literature Of The Southern Plains.” *Kansas History* 30.1 (2007): 52-63. Web. 1 June 2012.

Mellon, Mark. *Napoleon Concerto: A Novel in Three Movements*. Sierra Vista: Treble Heart Books, 2009. Print.

Mercado. Marcel E. *By the Grace of the Sith: Emperor Palpatine*. 27 April 2007. Web. 26 June 2012.

---. *Droids*. 15 May 2007. Web. 26 June 2012.

---. *Leia Leading*. 11 July 2007. Web. 26 June 2012.

---. *Lord Vader*. 26 April 2007. Web. 26 June 2012.

---. *The Mos Eisley Taverne: Rolicking Good Times*. 9 June 2007. Web. 26 June 2012.

---. *Poor Old Man Ben*. Digital Painting. *system404.net*. 25 October 2007. Web. 26 June 2012.

---. *Red 5 Luke*. 30 Apr 2007. Web. 26 June 2012.

Miéville China. *Perdido Street Station*. New York: Del Ray Publishing, 2000. Print.

Monk, Patricia. “Not Just “Cosmic Skullduggery”: A Partial Reconsideration Of Space Opera.” *Extrapolation*. 33.4 (1992): 295-316. Web. 26 June 2012.

Monteleone, Thomas F. *The Secret Sea*. New York: Popular Library, 1979. Print.

Moorcock, Michael. *A Nomad of the Time Streams: A Scientific Romance*. Clarkston: White Wolf, 1995. (1971-1981). Print.

Moorcock, Michael. *The Dancers at the End of Time.* Clarkston: White Wolf, 2000. (1971-1976). Print.

Moore, Alan and Kevin O'Neill. *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen, Volume One*. La Jolla: America's Best Comics, 2000. Print.

Moore, Alan and Kevin O'Neill. *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen, Volume Two*. La Jolla: America's Best Comics, 2003. Print.

Morris, Richard. *Last Sorcerers: The Path from Alchemy to the Periodic Table.* Washington: Joseph Henry Press, 2003. Print.

neo-Victorian, *adj*." *The Oxford English Dictionary*. 2nd ed. 1989. *OED Online*. Oxford University Press. 27 April 2010.

Nevins, Jess. "Introduction: The 19th-Century Roots of Steampunk." Vandermeer, *Steampunk* 3-12.

---. "Prescriptivists vs. Descriptivists: Defining Steampunk." *Science Fiction Studies* 38:3. (2011): 513-518. Web. 29 May 29, 2012.

---. "Victorian Archetypes in a Steampunk World." *Pyramid Magazine*. July 19 2002. Web. 26 June 2012.

Newman, Kim. *Anno Dracula*. New York: Carroll & Graf Publishers, 1993. Print.

Nikolajeva, Maria. "Fairy Tale and Fantasy: From Archaic to Postmodern." *Marvels & Tales* 17.1 (2003): 138-56. Web. 26 June 2012.

"Nineteenth-Centuryism." *OED online*. March 2003. Web. 22 December 2008.

Novotny, Patrick. “No Future! Cyberpunk, Industrial Music, and the Aesthetics of Postmodern Disintegration.” *Political Science Fiction.* Eds Donald M. Hassler and Clyde Wilcox. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1997. 99-123. Print.

O’Connell, Patrick F. “Emily Dickinson’s Train: Iron Horse Or ‘Rough Beast’?.” *American Literature* 52.3 (1980): 469. Web. 21 June 2012.

Onion, Rebecca. “Reclaiming the Machine: An Introductory Look at Steampunk in Everyday Practice.” *Neo-Victorian Studies* 1:1 (2008): 138-163. Web. 5 June 2012.

Oppel, Kenneth. *Airborn*. New York: HarperCollins, 2004. Print.

Oppel, Kenneth. *Skybreaker*. New York: HarperCollins, 2005. Print.

Oppel, Kenneth. *Starclimber*. New York: HarperCollins, 2008. Print.

Ortiz, Roberto. “Star Wars: Steampunk.” *CG Society: Society of Digital Artists.* 24 March 2007. Web. 23 December 2008.

Ottens, Nic. Editorial. *Gatehouse Gazette* March 2010: 3. Web. 10 May 2012.

Pagliosotti, Dru. *Clockwork Heart*. Rockville: Juno books, 2008. Print.

Palma, Felix J. *The Map of Time*. 2008. Nick Caistor, Trans. New York: Atria, 2010. Print.

Palmer, Dexter. *The Dream of Perpetual Motion*. New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2010. Print.

The People That Time Forgot. Dir. Kevin O’Connor. 1977. Film.

Peri, Don. *Working With Disney*. Jackson : University Press of Mississippi, 2011. Print.

Perkin, Joan. *Victorian Women.* New York: New York University Press, 1995. Print.

Perschon, Mike. “Fictional Histories and Historical Fictions: Collisions of the Real and Imaginary in Steampunk.” *Locus* 65, no. 3 (September 2010): 40. Print.

Perschon, Mike. “Finding Nemo: Verne’s Antihero as Original Steampunk.” *Verniana* 2 (2010): 180-193. Web. 22 Jan. 2012.

Perschon, Mike. “Steampunk Tribes.” *Exhibition Hall.* March 2010: 8-10. Web. 25 May 2012.

Perschon, Mike. “Steampunk: Technofantasies in a neo-Victorian Retrofuture.” *Postmodern Reinterpretations of Fairy Tales: How Applying New Methods Generates New Meanings.* Ed. Anna Kérchy. Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 2011. 83-106. Print.

Peters, S.M. *Whitechapel Gods*. Toronto: Roc, 2008. Print.

Poeter, Damon. “Steampunk’s subculture revealed.” *SFGate*. 6 July 2008. Web. 28 December 2008.

Poore, Benjamin. *Heritage, Nostalgia, and Modern British Theatre: Staging the Victorians*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2012. Print.

Poulton, Eric. “Steampunk Star Wars: Death Star.” *ericpoulton.blogspot.com*. 10 March 2007, Web. 22 December 2008.

---. “Steampunk Star Wars: Jabba the Hutt.” *ericpoulton.blogspot.com*. 28 February 2007. Web. 22 December 2008.

---. “Steampunk Star Wars: Lady Leia. Princess of Alderaan.” *ericpoulton.blogspot.com*. 19 March 2008. Web. 22 December 2008.

---. “Steampunk Star Wars: Lord Vader.” *ericpoulton.blogspot.com*. 5 February 2007. Web. 22 December 2008.

---. “Stereotypes in Character Design”. *ericpoulton.blogspot.com*. 6 March 2007 Web. 22 December 2008.

Powers, Tim. *The Anubis Gates*. New York: Ace Science Fiction Books, 1983. Print.

Priest, Cherie. *Boneshaker*. New York: Tor, 2009. Print.

---. *Clementine*. Burton: Subterranean Press, 2010. Print.

---. *Dreadnought*. New York: Tor, 2010. Print.

---. *Ganymede*. New York: TOR, 2011. Print.

---. “Steampunk: What it is, Why I Came to Like it, and Why I Think it’ll Stick Around.” *The Clockwork Century*, 8 August 2009. Web. 22 Feb. 2012.

Priest, Christopher. *The Space Machine*. Hammersmith: Harper & Row. 1976.

Pringle, David. “What is this Thing called Space Opera?.” *Space and Beyond: The Frontier Theme in Science Fiction.* Ed. Gary Westfahl. Westport: Greenwood Press, 2000, 36-47. Print.

Prucher, Jeff, ed. *Brave New Words: The Oxford Dictionary of Science Fiction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007. Print.

Pullman, Philip. *The Golden Compass*. New York: Random House, 1995. Print.

Pykett, Lyn. "Foreword." Richardson and Willis. xi-xii.

---. *The 'Improper' Feminine*. New York: Routledge, 1992. Print.

Pynchon, Thomas. *Against the Day*. Toronto: Penguin, 2007. Print.

Quigley, Marian. "A Future Victorian Adventure: the Mysterious Geographic Explorations of Jasper Morello." *Screen Education* 54 (2009): 125-129. Web. 22 January 2012.

Rantanen, Natalie. "Re: Rundown of Costumes." *Facebook.com.* Message to the author. 28 December 2008. Web. 15 June 2012.

Ratt, Margaret. "Putting the Punk Back Into Steampunk." *Steampunk Magazine*. April 2007: 1. Web. 24 May 2012.

Remy, J.E. "The 'Punk' Subgenre." *Die Wachen*. Web. 7 June 2011.

Reeve, Phillip. *Larklight: A Rousing Tale of Dauntless Pluck in the Farthest Reaches of Space*. London: Bloomsbury, 2006. Print.

Reeve, Phillip. *Mortal Engines*. 2001. New York: Harper Collins, 2005. Print.

"retro-futurism, *n.*" *The Oxford English Dictionary*. 2nd ed. 1989. *OED Online*. Oxford University Press. Web. 28 March 2010.

Return of the Jedi. Dir. Richard Marquand. Story by George Lucas. Twentieth-century Fox Corporation, 1983.

Reynolds, David West. *Star Wars: The Visual Dictionary*. New York: DK Publishing, 1998. Print.

Richardson, Angelique. *Love and Eugenics in the Late Nineteenth-century: Rational Reproduction and the New Woman*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003. Print.

Richardson, Angelique, and Chris Willis, eds. *The New Woman in Fiction and in Fact: Fin-de-Siècle Feminisms*. New York: Palgrave, 2002. Print.

Richardson, LeeAnne. *New Woman and Colonial Adventure Fiction in Victorian Britain*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2006. Print.

Rigney, Ann. *Imperfect Histories: The Elusive Past and the Legacy of Romantic Historicism*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001. Print.

Roberts, Keith. *Pavane.* 1966. New York: Ace Books, 1982. Print.

Roese, Neal J., and James M. Olson, Eds. *What Might Have Been: The Social Psychology of Counterfactual Thinking*. Mahwah: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1995. Print.

Rolandi, Marco. *Rail Haven*. Digital Painting. *CGPortfolio*, February 2008, Web. 26 June 2012.

Rose, Margaret. "Extraordinary Pasts: Steampunk as a Mode of Historical Representation." *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts* 20.3 (2009): 319-333. Web. 26 June 2012.

Rosen, Lev AC. *All Men of Genius*. New York: TOR, 2011. Print.

Rosenfeld, Gavriel. *The World Hitler Never Made: Alternate History and the Memory of Nazism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005. Print.

Ross, Sharon. “Retro Futurism at its Best: Designs and Tutorials.” *Smashingmagazine.com.* 8 June 2009. Web. 8 March 2012.

Rucker, Rudy. *The Hollow Earth*. 1990. Austin: Monkeybrain Books, 2006. Print.

Ryan, Marie-Laure. *Possible Worlds, Artificial Intelligence, and Narrative Theory*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991.

St. Martin, Rob. *Sunset Val: A Thrilling Tale of Airship Piracy*. Montreal: Weird and Wondrous Books, 2010. E-book.

Sakamoto, Michaela. “The Transcendent Steam Engine: Industry, Nostalgia, and the Romance of Steampunk.” *The Image of Technology*. Pueblo, CO: Society for the Interdisciplinary Study of Social Imagery, Colorado State University-Pueblo, 2009. 124-131. Print.

Saunders, John. *The Western Genre: From Lordsburg to Big Whisky*. London: Wallflower Press, 2001. Print.

Sawyer, J. Daniel. “Cold Duty.” *Podthology: The Pod Complex*. Ed. Timothy Reynolds. Dragon Moon Press, 2010. 34-60. Print.

“science fantasy.” Prucher, 170.

Sedia, Ekaterina. *The Alchemy of Stone*. Prime Books, 2008. Print.

Senf, Carol A. “‘Dracula’: Stoker’s Response to the New Woman.” *Victorian Studies* 26.1 (1982): 33-49. Web. 26 June 2012.

Shiller, Dana. “The Redemptive Past in the Neo-Victorian novel.” *Studies in the Novel* 29.4 (1997): 538-560. Web. 26 June 2012.

Short, Sue. *Misfit Sisters: Screen Horror as Female Rites of Passage*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2006. Print.

Sillof. "Steam Wars: The Empire Strikes Back." *Sillof's Workshop*. 2006-2007. Web. 22 December 2008.

---. "Steam Wars: A New Hope." *Sillof's Workshop*. 2006-2007. Web. 22 December 2008.

---. "Steam Wars: Return of the Jedi." *Sillof's Workshop*. 2006-2007. Web. 22 December 2008.

Simic Miljenko. *Steam Fighter*. Digital Painting. imageshack.us. 27 April 2007. Web. 26 June 2012.

Simic, Miljenko. *Steam Star.* Digital Painting. imageshack.us. 6 May 2007. Web. 23 December 2008.

Slade, Arthur. *The Empire of Ruins*. Toronto: Harper Collins, 2011. Print.

Smedman, Lisa. *The Apparition Trail*. Calgary: Tesseract Books, 2007. Print

Spencer, Nicholas. "Rethinking Ambivalence: Technopolitics and the Luddites in William Gibson and Bruce Sterling's The Difference Engine." *Contemporary Literature* 40.3 (1999): 403–29. Web. 26 June 2012.

Star Wars: *A New Hope*. Dir. George Lucas. Screenplay by George Lucas. Twentieth-century Fox Corporation, 1977. Film.

Steam Boy. Dir. Katsuhiro Otomo. Screenplay by Sadayuki Murai and Katsuhiro Otomo. Sunrise Studios. 2004. Film.

Steam Powered: The California Steampunk Convention, 31 October – 2 November 2008.

"Steampunk." *OED online*. March 2003. Oxford University Press. 22 December 2008. Web. 26 June 2012.

"Steampunk." Prucher, 221.

"Steampunk: Combining 19th century Victorian with Steam Engine Components." *Brothers-Handmade.com.* 2012. Web. 29 May 2012.

Steampunk Couture.com. Ed. Kate Lambert. Steampunk Couture, 2012. Web. 21 June 2012.

The Steampunk Resource." *Fragrancex.com*. Web. 29 May 2012.

"Steampunk Styling : Victorian Retrofuturism at Home." *Weburbanist.* Web. 8 March 2012.

"Steampunk – what is it?" *Squidoo.com*. 2012. Web. 29 May 2012.

Stephenson, Neal. *The Diamond Age, or A Young Lady's Illustrated Primer*. New York: Bantam Books, 1996. Print.

Sterling, Bruce. "Preface." *Mirrorshades: The Cyberpunk Anthology*. Ed. Bruce Sterling. New York: Arbor House, 1986. vii-xiv. Print.

Stirling, S.M. *The Peshawar Lancers*. New York: ROC, 2003. Print.

Stoker, Bram. *Dracula*. 1897. Norton Critical Edition. Eds. Nina Auerbach and David J. Skal. New York: W.W. Norton, 1997. Print.

Stypczynkski, Brent. "No Roads Lead to Rome: Alternate History and Secondary Worlds." *Extrapolation* 46 (2005): 453-468. Web. 22 Jan. 2012.

Surridge, Matthew David. “Steampunk Thoughts: The Novels of Felix Gilman.” *Black Gate*. 16 January 2011. Web. 1 June 2012.

Sussman, Herbert. “Cyberpunk Meets Charles Babbage: The Difference Engine as Alternative Victorian History.” *Victorian Studies* 38.1 (1994): 1–23. Print.

Tardi, Jacques. *Les Aventures Extraordinaires d’Adele Blanc-Sec: Adèle et la bête*. 1976. Tournai: Casterman. 1993. Print.

Tatsumi, Takayuki. “Comparative Metafiction: Somewhere between Ideology and Rhetoric.” *Critique* 39.1 (1997): 2–17. Print.

Taves, Brian. “Hollywood’s Jules Verne.” *The Jules Verne Encyclopedia*. Eds. Brian Taves and Stephen Michaluk. Metuchen: Scarecrow Press, 1996. 205-48. Print.

Those Magnificent Men in their Flying Machines. Dir. Ken Annakin. 1965. Film.

Tidhar, Lavie. “Steampunk”, *The Internet Review of Science Fiction*, February 2005, Web. 8 November 2009.

The Time Machine. Screenplay by David Duncan. Dir. George Pal. Prod. George Pal. 1960. Film.

Tupper, Peter. *The Innocent’s Progress and Other Stories.* Cambridge: Circlet Press, 2010. E-book.

Valente, Catherynne M. “Here I Stand, With Steam Coming out of My Ears.” *Rules for Anchorites*, 3 November 2010. Web. 13 Feb. 2012.

VandeerMeer, Ann and Jeff. Personal interview, 1 November 2008.

---. “What is Steampunk?” Introduction. *Steampunk II: Steampunk Reloaded*. San Francisco: Tachyon Publications, 2010. Print.

---, eds. *Steampunk II: Steampunk Reloaded*. San Francisco: Tachyon Publications, 2010.

---, eds. *Steampunk*. San Francisco: Tachyon Publications, 2008. Print.

Vandermeer, Jeff. “Fixing Hanover.” Gevers *Extraordinary Engines* 377-400.

---. Weblog comment, “Blog For A Beer: Steampunk.” K. Tempest Bradford, *Dark Fantasy,* 25 October 2008. Web. 24 December 2008.

Vick, Diane. “Frequently Asked Questions.”,*Steamcon.* 20 October 2009, Web. 14 November 2009.

---. “A Steampunk Litmust Test.” *Tea & Automatons*. 26 April 2010. Web. 26 June 2012.

Von Busack, Richard. “Boiling Point.” *Metroactive*. 29 October 2008. Web. 27 December 2008.

Warlords of Atlantis. Dir. Kevin O’Connor. 1978. Film.

Watt, George. *The Fallen Woman in the 19th Century English Novel.* Totowa: Barnes and Noble, 1984. Print.

Wells, H.G. *The First Men in the Moon*. Champaign: Project Gutenberg. (1901). Web. 26 June 2012.

Wells, H.G. *The Time Machine*. 1895. Peterborough: Broadview, 2001. Print.

Westerfeld, Scott. *Behemoth*. Toronto, Simon Pulse, 2010. Print.

Westerfeld, Scott. *Goliath*. Toronto, Simon Pulse, 2011. Print.

Westerfeld, Scott. *Leviathan*. Toronto: Simon Pulse, 2009. Print.

Wetmore, Kevin J. *The Empire Triumphant: Race, Religion and Rebellion in the Star Wars Films*. Jefferson: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2005. Print.

White, Hayden. *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-century Europe*. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1990. Print.

White, Hayden. *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-century Europe*. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1990. Print.

The Wild, Wild West. CBS. 104 episodes. 17 Sept., 1965-4 April, 1969. Television.

Willeford, Thomas. *Steampunk: Gear, Gadgets, and Gizmos, A Maker's Guide to Creating Modern Artifacts.* New York: McGraw Hill, 2012. Print.

Willis, Martin. *Mesmerists, Monsters, And Machines : Science Fiction And Theculture*s *Of Science In The Nineteenth Century*. Kent, Ohio : Kent State University Press, 2006. Print.

Winters, Ben. *Android Karenina.* Philadelphia: Quirk Books, 2010. Print.

Wolfe, Gary K. "Coming to Terms." *Speculations on Speculation: Theories of Science Fiction.* James Gunn and Matthew Candelaria, eds. Oxford: Scarecrow Press, 2005. 13-22. Print.

Wollstonecraft, Mary. *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman.* Edited by Carol H. Poston. New York: Norton, 1988. Print.

Wooding, Chris. *Retribution Falls: Tales of the Ketty Jay 1*. Gollancz, 2010. Print.

Yaghish. Sadler, R. “Re: The steampunk or not topic.” 24 February 2007. *Gothic Steam Phantastique Forum*. Web. 15 June 2012.