

ACCEPTING ALIEN CONTACT: REWIRING THE COLONIAL SOLDIER IN JOHN SCALZI'S *OLD MAN'S WAR* SERIES

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Introduction: The Problem of How to Read On-Going Series

Science fiction is split between utopian and dystopian trends as regards the progression towards a possible future transnational global political merger. This depends on whether novelists believe in an "evolution towards a higher degree of civilization" or fear the emergence of new "states [that] reenact the dreams of global domination" behind imperialism (Mateos-Aparicio 2011: 100). In American SF in particular, "planet federations seem to endlessly reenact the myth of the Conquest of the West and the incorporation of new territories and people into the US federal political structure" (Mateos-Aparicio: 102),¹ rather than truly address the avowedly imagined transnational mixture of cultures and races in a transplanetary, interspecies context.

Here I would like to examine how these issues are considered in the series started by John Scalzi's *Old Man's War* (2005), a Hugo award nominee which also earned Scalzi the 2005

Sara Martín Alegre, "Accepting Alien Contact (in John Scalzi's *Old Man's War* Series)"



John W. Campbell Award for Best New Writer (even though he had actually debuted in 1999 with *Agent to the Stars*), not without some negative criticism. Stuart Carter complains that “Lacking any big surprises or really radical thinking; and since neither the big battle scenes nor the aliens’ opponents were outstandingly rendered, *Old Man’s War* eventually became (and this is surely the worst possible crime for any SF book!) not bad, but simply rather pedestrian” (2006: website). Indeed, Scalzi’s main feature as a writer, apart from his trademark terse dialogue, is his somewhat mechanical prose, as if he wrote linking the dots of a previously overplanned script. Scalzi is, nonetheless, fast becoming one of America’s most prominent SF writers, particularly after winning the 2013 Hugo Award for his ingenious *Redshirts: A Novel with Three Codas*. He is often hailed as Robert Heinlein’s main heir, something which might seem obvious given *Old Man’s War* many points of contact with Heinlein’s classic *Starship Troopers* (1959). Scalzi might turn out to be, however, actually Joe Haldeman’s heir as the later novels in the saga here under examination are closer to Haldeman’s pacifist *The Forever War* (1974), itself a post-Vietnam response to *Starship Troopers*.

Old Man’s War is the first volume of a series so far continued by *The Ghost Brigades* (2006), *The Last Colony* (2007, Hugo nominee), *Zoe’s Tale* (2008, Hugo nominee) and *The Human Division* (2013), the most recent addition and most likely, given its open ending, just one more step in the saga. A problem that affects the analysis of *Old Man’s War* is that, according to the author himself (Whyte 2006: website), the whole series must be considered in its totality. Certainly, the militaristic politics of this novel are subsequently reversed in *The Last Colony*, yet this poses the problem of the autonomy of any single book within a series,



particularly when the reader receives no warning at all about how to read it. *Old Man's War* deals undeniably with a protagonist and first-person narrator, John Perry, who totally supports the efforts of the Colonial Union to extend planetary human colonisation, if necessary by force, in territories occupied by other species.² This organisation could be defined, in Cerny's words, as one of those "transnational webs of power" (2010)³ that, while not a replacement for nation states, keep them trapped. Once back to civilian life in *The Last Colony*, Perry discovers that the manipulative, undemocratic Colonial Union is actually preventing Earth from entering a pacifist confederacy of alien races, the Conclave. He chooses then to betray the CU, a decision impossible to foresee when we first meet him as a committed soldier in *Old Man's War*.

In an interesting exchange with a blogger who questions the fuzzy politics of *Old Man's War* since "We have absolutely no idea of who is in charge of the army, or who appointed them, or how the policy might be changed" (Whyte 2006: website), Scalzi answers that, first, Perry is "an unreliable narrator" who doesn't understand his own role in the imperialist effort; second, that he left the politics of the Colonial Defence Forces and the Colonial Union "hanging out" as he prefers readers to fill in the gaps. "What I've found very interesting is the wide range of reader responses to *OMW*", he explains. "Your take on it is that it's right wing and militaristic, but I've also seen well-reasoned commentary to suggest that it is a *repudiation* of the right-wing militaristic point of view as well" (Whyte, original emphasis).

Since the author gives me, as his reader, free rein, I choose to focus here on *Old Man's War*, and secondarily *The Ghost Brigades*, *The Last Colony*, and *The Human Division*⁴ as a composite anti-militarist story defending the rights to full citizenship of the posthuman soldiers

manufactured by the Colonial Union, and of Earth's inhabitants to eschew territorial conquest in favour of diplomatic alliance with other species. An additional problem for my argumentation in relation to the ongoing nature of the series is that each new volume strikes a different balance as regards the thematic content. Thus, while at the end of *The Last Colony* the post-human body seemed to be the dominant theme, in *The Human Division* the conflict between aggressive and pacifist interspecies politics is back to the foreground. This is an inevitable handicap that scholars must face or else remain silent about (SF) work in progress, which should not be an option.

1. The Need for Diplomacy: Alien Resistance to Human Colonization

In the future that Scalzi imagines, Earth is reorganised, after the Continental War, under the aegis of the belligerent Colonial Union, developed when the discovery of skip drives makes multiverse travel possible. The United States, in punishment for having nuked India, are not allowed to send colonizers—a 'privilege' for which priority is given to citizens of non-white nations, and also of pacifist nations (like Norway). Because of this restriction the ironically named Colonial Defense Forces, actually an occupation army, employ as cannon fodder for its massive military force only US volunteers. Technoscience has failed to stop ageing on Earth, yet the CDF, seemingly preferring mature minds, has developed its own methods. All American citizens are invited to sign up at 65, when a DNA sample of their body is taken. If by the age of 75 they are still alive they can enlist for a term of 10 years and undergo a rejuvenation process. Although John Perry knows that he may perish in combat, he chooses, like most recruits, this



fate over dying in an old body: “I’m going to have a second chance to die young and leave a beautiful corpse” (*OMW* 47). Once the 10-year-term term is over, veterans may stay on or retire honourably, on condition, that is, that they never return to Earth to enlighten other potential recruits about their bizarre fate.

These elderly men and women know that their bodies will be modified but what they ignore is that actually their consciousness will be transferred onto a clone of their own 25-year-old self. Their personality and memories are directly downloaded onto a living brain with an identical DNA, as apparently consciousness cannot be recorded and stored.⁵ The original old bodies are discarded and, as we learn in *The Ghost Brigades*, recycled: “There are too many to bury. So we grind them up, sterilize the remains and turn them into plant fertilizer You could say our new colonies live off the bodies of the dead. Only they’re not really the bodies of the dead. They’re just the cast-off bodies of the *living*” (33, original ellipsis and emphasis).

The new self-healing, ever-young clones are still human but have been enhanced with selected alien and animal DNA, multi-function regenerative nanotechnology, and an inner computer—the BrainPal—capable of linking up with the brains of the other soldiers.⁶ Harry Wilson, a new recruit in *OMW*, and a 90-year-old veteran with 15 years of experience as a CDF soldier in *The Human Division*, describes his still young-looking body as a “pathetic phallacy” (285). As he adds,

“Just because I look like a human being doesn’t mean I am. This body has more genetic material that’s not strictly human than it does material that is human. And it heavily integrates machines as well. My blood is actually a bunch of nanobots in a fluid. I am and every other CDF soldier is a genetically-modified cyborg.” (285)



When he is asked whether he is still himself, Wilson speculates that he might actually be just be an illusion of his dead self, perhaps “a fake Harry Wilson” (285). He is worried, as he acknowledges, “in a metaphysical sense” (285) but not on a daily basis. Wilson, however, grants that the longer you live as a CDF soldier, the more you miss your old life and “The more you realize you made a hard bargain” (391), perhaps even a mistake. Yet he chooses to go on with his life as a soldier and forget about the past. Incidentally, Wilson’s own posthuman body and those of all his peers are muscled and sexy. Their singular green skin, which uses chlorophyll as an alternative energy source,⁷ also does away with the problem of race. As their (formerly Latino) boot camp sergeant shouts: “Look around, you assholes. Up here, everyone is green. There are no minorities. You want to be a minority? Fine. There are twenty billion humans in the universe. There are four *trillion* members of the other sentient species, and they *all* want to turn you into a midday snack.” (*OMW* 134, original emphasis)

Old Man’s War becomes quite an unconventional love story when Perry is rescued from death by Jane Sagan, a younger clone of his dead wife. Kathy, John’s wife for 42 years, enrolls at 65 but dies before she can become a soldier. Unknown to Perry, the CU has used her DNA sample to manufacture Jane. She, like all the super-soldiers of the Special Forces (or ‘ghost brigades’ as they’re dubbed since they’re made from the dead) are born already adult, unlike ordinary ‘realborns.’ In *The Ghost Brigades* (chapter 3), Scalzi explains that the Colonial Union discarded breeding babies for the Special Forces, as they found it easier to use ready-made adults than deal with individuals who might reject the purpose they had been bred for. Indeed, Special Forces super-humans take pride in having been born with a purpose and think hat

‘realborns’ lack one. Much superior to recycled soldiers like Perry, the ghost brigade super-soldiers have a pre-packaged mind, enriched at top speed by their enhanced capabilities. Although they have an autonomous consciousness, they’re not expected to have a ‘soul,’ hence their use as shock troops. Jane, logically, cannot remember being Kathy and is, actually, a peculiarly hostile and mature six-year-old woman when she meets Perry. His longing for Kathy’s companionship manages eventually to break down Jane’s emotional autism and dispel her anxiety that she and her colleagues are “the Frankenstein monster” (*OMW* 322).

The transnational⁸ and the transhuman mix in quite a complex balance, raising plenty of essential moral issues. The love story between Perry and Special Forces super-soldier Jane Sagan links both themes, introducing a very attractive complication. While Scalzi rejects the military uses of the posthuman body, he does not reject this body *per se* but, rather, celebrates it through Jane. Military SF provides a large field in which to explore the fictional representation of the soldier, an iconic figure in the imaginary of patriarchal US masculinities. Military SF can, however, be also pro-feminist, depending on whether the presence of women soldiers is read as progressive or not.⁹ Thus, whereas Scalzi starts off with a focus on patriarchal masculinity (how does it feel to be a pacific 75-year-old man reborn as a 25-year-old killing machine?), he eventually faces post-patriarchal femininity and posthuman reproduction (will Jane become a new Eve?).

CDF soldiers who choose to retire are given a young clone of their own body. In *The Last Colony* John and Jane finally enjoy conventional human bodies (her new skin colour remains unspecified) and the company of their teenage adoptive daughter Zoe. Undoubtedly, Scalzi

writes well about “the deeper companionate love of married couples, a subject not often explored in science fiction, at least not in the moving way that Scalzi explores it” (Lampton 2012: website). This married bliss, however, is jeopardised when Jane’s former superior, Szilard, secretly manipulates her body using nanotechnology. Pregnant with her husband’s child thanks to this manipulation, despite having been born sterile, Jane is set to become the mother of a truly new posthuman species (still to be written into the series, however). A message which Szilard sends her confirms that “She was a prototype. A version of Special Forces soldier designed entirely from the human genome. She is one hundred percent human, right down to the number of chromosomes. She’s *better* than human, of course, but human all the same (...)” (LC 313, original emphasis). Jane Sagan’s super-body raises thus the issue of whether woman specifically might become superior to man in a post-patriarchal future, which is seemingly fine by John Perry (and apparently by John Scalzi). Perry is awed when he first meets super-woman Jane and remains awed by her, as does the author.¹⁰

The Last Colony also raises two other very relevant issues regarding the transnational and the transhuman: one is the need to define citizenship in a posthuman culture; the other the need to separate humanity from the imperialist Colonial Union that represents it among non-human civilizations. Perry is aided (or, rather, stage-managed) to implement his own pacifist solution, precisely, by the scheming super-soldier leader General Szilard, whose own agenda consists of liberating his brethren-in-arms from their subjection to the CU. Scalzi, as Itzkoff argues,

(...) is concerned with a warrior class that feels increasingly estranged from the citizenship it is meant to protect. But he also contemplates how those citizens might someday become



mistrustful of the men and women duty-bound to do all their fighting for them, and even come to see them as slaves. (2006: website)

The issue of whether cyborg bodies can be full citizens has been already addressed from transhumanist positions (see Hughes 2004). Gray, more wary, calls for “a cyborg citizen Turing test to determine which entities can actually participate in our discourse community and which cannot” (2001: 24). Szilard seems to have this in mind when he decides to experiment with Jane Sagan’s body in order to check whether the ghost brigades can become human enough to be accepted as citizens. Her pregnancy, although questionable as proof of her full humanity, eases his fears. Nonetheless, Scalzi further complicates this issue with another posthuman, Lt. Stross—named tongue-in-cheek after British SF writer Charles Stross. He appears in *The Ghost Brigade* as one of the new vacuum-proof, turtle-like humans capable of living in space who nick-name themselves Gameran, after the Japanese film monster, but also ‘Homo Astrum.’ The militaristic abuse of the posthuman body by the Colonial Union is seemingly stopped, but Scalzi finally lacks room to clarify who will prevent other humans from creating posthumans. John and Jane’s baby suggests that is already happening, though, as I have noted, Scalzi has left this thorny topic aside for the time being.

According to Grewell “the term post-colonialism, given the continued proliferation of colonial narratives, even if projected into the universe, never has been an accurate descriptor. The galactic colonists are here, still.” (2001: 39) Following Grewell, Scalzi’s saga, however, would be one of the “rare cases, questioning, critiquing, or moving beyond the colonizing impulse” (26). I do not know whether these cases are rare or actually the standard, as Grewell’s focus is the much more conservative film SF. In *The Ghost Brigades*, though, the anti-colonialist

critique is transparent. Scientist Charles Boutin, Zoe's biological father, confronting here his super-soldier clone Jared Dirac highlights the key problem:

"But all you've seen is combat," Boutin said. "You've never been out where you weren't killing whatever the Colonial Union tells you to. And it's certainly true that the universe is hostile to the Colonial Union. And the reason for that is, *the Colonial Union is hostile to the universe*. In all the time humanity has been out in the universe we've never not been at war with nearly every other species we've come across. (...)" (GB 294, original emphasis)

Boutin explains that out of 603 known intelligent species, 577 are deemed hostile by the CU; this has adamantly refused to join the Conclave, the alien confederation that has been working for 20 years in that corner of the galaxy, joining together about two thirds of all known species. Jared chooses eventually to kill Boutin (and himself) to prevent the human massacre that Boutin is planning in order to destroy the Colonial Union. A decade later Perry, Zoe's new adoptive father, realises that a pacifist solution is needed instead of a frontal anti-CU attack.

When in *The Last Colony* he meets the Conclave's alien leader, General Gau, Perry understands that the Colonial Union has been lying, keeping Earth isolated from the colonies for 200 years with the sorry excuse of an alien virus. Unlike what the CU claims, the Conclave orders all colonies to evacuate conquered planets under duress but does not destroy them systematically; actually, many species contacted in this unorthodox way decide to join in. Perry sides with Gau, not without teaching him the hard lesson that human colonialism will not be stopped by force. As Gau explains, the Conclave was founded when diverse alien species realised that

"Our civilizations operate as a system, and our limiting factor is war. Remove the factor and the system thrives. We can focus on cooperation. We can explore rather than fight. If there had been a Conclave, perhaps we *would* have met you before you came out and met us. Perhaps we'll explore and find new races now." (LC 196)



Inspired by these words, Perry organises a trade mission of all Conclave nations to quarantine Earth, thus breaking the Colonial Union's dominion and giving humanity the chance to decide democratically whether to join the Conclave. This, unquestionably, connects with the current relationship between American citizens and their military. In McGrath's view, Scalzi is directly attacking George W. Bush's administration:

Rather than glorifying violence, promoting jingoism or pushing a dogmatic political viewpoint—as the critics of *Old Man's War* had it—Scalzi is offering a warning and a critique of the right-wing policies that have seen America embroiled in unwinnable wars. Violence is terrible and it is ultimately self-defeating, because in the absence of trust and in a universe where every side immediately chooses bloodshed over cooperation, every battle is merely the prelude to another war. (McGrath 2011: website)

In *The Human Division*, written under Barack Obama's administration, diplomacy is indeed the keyword, though diplomats move very slowly given the urgency of the situation, and are often hampered by the CU's own secret militaristic agenda. The mistrust between Earth and the CU has resulted in a formal split (the division of the title). Lieutenant Harry Wilson, "a glorified tech support" (261), attached to the CU's Diplomatic Corps, is a privileged witness of the failed efforts to convince earthlings to reconsider the CU's nature and task. Although the hawks claim that the CU has kept Earth free from alien interference (and that CDF service should be celebrated as duty), the doves believe that the only protection for Earth (unable to access space without the CU ships) is diplomacy.

In the 12 years since Perry's rebellion, the Conclave has grown, acting "as a single political entity, able to enforce its policies by sheer mass" (261). The Conclave does not allow unaffiliated races, like the human species, to engage in further colonization (though the CU



challenges this law by keeping 10 secret wildcat colonies, which it must eventually dismantle). The CDF's own view is based on worrying statistics: a 75% fatality rate of its troops over 10 years, past 90% in the last 14 years (even though most recruits stay on, choosing not to grow old). For the first time in CU's history, a draft might be necessary among the colonists (ironically, to quell rebellions in the colonies, quite frequent since the end of colonization). The colonies' breeding rate is, in addition, very low and, so, without the Earth's surplus population the CU faces collapse in at the most 8 years. Without an efficient CDF, all human colonies might be extinct in 20 years, after 200 years of continued space presence; unprotected Earth, in 30. The solution is not military, as Egan argues: "Bring Earth back into the fold, for the advantages of us both. Two: whenever possible, avoid conflict with the Conclave and unaffiliated alien races. Diplomacy is the best way to make that happen" (*THD*, 20). The stalemate between the CU and the Conclave remains, however, unsolved by the end of *The Human Division*, when a terrorist attack by an unknown third party destroys Earth Station, casting suspicions on both. Paradoxically, Scalzi leads his pacifist political views to a dead end in which some military solution must be found, ideally in alliance with the Conclave. This recalls, once more, actual American foreign policies, with hawkish demands 'forcing' Nobel Prize winner for Peace, Obama, to lead constant military intervention (and even face perhaps a Third World War instigated by Vladimir Putin, quite a possibility as I write, in May 2013).



2. Moderate Transhumanism: Celebrating the Posthuman Soldier

Scalzi's space opera¹¹ raises thus issues that mirror current political quandaries. I'll focus next, however, on how it also mirrors the current debate between transhumanist extropians and posthumanists in order to examine his key characters, the CDF soldiers. Posthumanism, as it is well known, refers to concepts actually at odds. On the one hand, posthumanism is the goal to which extropian transhumanism aspires; on the other, it is, in part, its humanist critique.

Transhumanism is a technophilic, Enlightenment-inspired movement in love with the idea that we *must* apply avant-garde technoscience to our bodies in order to improve them and even break away from uncontrolled evolution. Heavily smacking of eugenics, though also seductively tempting, transhumanism is, so far, limited by the actual achievements of science and technology. Yet, if we listen to its prophets Marvin Minsky, Hans Moravec, Ray Kurzweil,¹² or Nick Bostrom, we *are* on the brink of a singularity that will make us radically posthuman as genetically modified bodies enhanced with cutting-edge nanotechnology. It is easy to take the World Transhumanist Association (founded by Bostrom and David Pearce), the Transhumanist Declaration (see Bostrom 2005), or the *Journal of Evolution and Technology* as the works of cranks. Or worse, as Francis Fukuyama (2002) warns, as something downright dangerous for human dignity and sheer survival. Yet, it is hard to deny, for instance, point one of the Declaration: "Humanity will be radically changed by technology in the future. We foresee the feasibility of redesigning the human condition, including such parameters as the inevitability of



aging, limitations on human and artificial intellects, unchosen psychology, suffering, and our confinement to the planet Earth” (Bostrom 2005: website).

One of the key concepts in transhumanism, apparently originating in Moravec, is ‘uploading’, that is, the possibility that the human mind is the contents of software that can be installed in bodies manufactured as hardware, as happens to John and Jane. As Haney clarifies, there are “two models of consciousness”:

Those who equate consciousness with the thinking mind as an extension of body, nature and culture advocate the spread of posthuman technology as an inevitable feature of human civilization in the near future. On the other hand, in distinguishing mind from consciousness, this book suggests that while bionic technology can in some ways benefit the mind/body complex, it may in the long term undermine the accessibility of pure consciousness and jeopardize human nature. (168: 2006)

Eugene Thacker, a critic of transhumanism, is right to point out that “The blind spot of this thread of posthumanism is that the ways in which technologies are themselves actively involved in shaping the world are not considered” (2003: 76). Arguably, Scalzi’s saga considers precisely this problem, for in his universe the posthuman that John represents and the posthuman superhuman that Jane embodies are created exclusively for military use. We will see how academic critics of transhumanism react when neural implants capable of enhancing our brains are commercialised but, so far, business and avant-garde technoscience are engaged mainly in research to produce posthuman soldiers. American DARPA¹³ is pouring billions on the making of more efficient bodies for combat, not only externally but also internally: “Tomorrow’s soldiers” a 2012 newspaper headline announced, “could be able to run at Olympic speeds and will be able to go for days without food or sleep, if new research into gene



manipulation is successful” (Gayle: website). “The cyborg soldier,” Gray warns, “is the new reality. But cyborg soldiers die like normal humans, so the basic problem at the heart of contemporary war remains” (2001: 57). The Colonial Union, much aware of this shortage problem, resorts to complementing old citizens’ posthuman clones with the ghost brigades – never applying any of their finds to improving the colonists’ life much less that of humans on Earth.

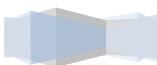
Nonetheless, as the title of Langdon Winner’s article reads, “Resistance is Futile” (2004). He, and pioneer analyst of posthumanism Kathryn Hayles, may be disgusted by the glee with which we embrace today the monstrous body that technophobia used to denounce, but nothing will stop the transhuman project. I do agree very much with Winner’s complaint that the critique of transhumanism needn’t be always taken as conservative and also with his melancholy warning that “One serious consequence of the move to abandon a vital concern for humans and their condition and to search for more exotic, posthuman ways of being is to remove the foundations on which some crucial moral and political agreements can be sought – an appeal to our common humanity” (2004: 406). However, the “alien chic” that Neil Badmington describes is here to stay, not only as “a defence mechanism, a trend with which ‘we’ reassure ‘ourselves’ that who ‘we’ are at a moment of immense uncertainty” (2004: 90) but as an active celebration of what Burfoote criticises as “biopleasure” (2003: 71), or “fetishism of the body as components” (49).

Scalzi’s saga participates no doubt of this biopleasure. None of Perry’s cohort, whether men or women, show signs of trauma when they wake up as posthuman, green-skinned



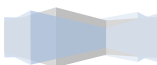
soldiers¹⁴—quite the opposite, they soon use their sexy new bodies in an orgy. Jane may be disgusted with the realisation that her long-ambitioned conventional human body has been tampered with, yet Scalzi glamorises her posthuman body. This puts Scalzi's saga on the side of the transhumanist extropians who celebrate the posthuman body and of the “biotechnology narratives that simultaneously dehumanizes, demonizes, and eroticizes human being” and that denigrate “human matter as dumb.” (Burfoot 2003: 48)

Who, indeed, wants to celebrate being dumb matter... except for the philosophical posthumanists? Among them, Cary Wolfe (2010) rejects transhumanism, explaining that “posthumanism in my sense isn't posthuman at all—in the sense of being ‘after’ our embodiment has been transcended—but is only *posthumanist*, in the sense that it opposes the fantasies of disembodiment and autonomy, inherited from humanism itself, that Hayles rightly criticises” (2010: xv, original emphasis). For Wolfe, posthumanism refers to the need to rethink how humanism must confront the displacement by technology of the human embedded in the ‘dumb matter’ body. Hayles, on her side, already described in 1999 the posthuman as a construction conditioned by “*how information lost its body*” (1999: 2, original emphasis) and by the (avowedly wrong) view that “In the posthuman, there are no essential differences or absolute demarcations between bodily existence and computer simulation, cybernetic mechanism and biological organism, robot teleology and human goals” (1999: 2). Without falling into the excesses of transhumanism, we may wonder why this is wrong, and, crucially, why the posthuman cannot be also posthumanist.



In current SF, as Scalzi's work shows, this is the question being asked within a newer genre framework, already labelled 'bio-cyberpunk' or 'biopunk.' The frequent invocation of the word cyborg¹⁵ in relation to the posthuman is, I believe, fast becoming obsolete. Or has been always obsolete from the very beginning, for, as Foster notes, the word 'posthuman' was actually introduced by cyberpunk's co-founding father Bruce Sterling in his 1985 novel *Schismatrix*, published one year after Gibson's seminal *Neuromancer*. Although Gibson's novel seemed to fit better the zeitgeist of a decade in which the PC was becoming an object of rampant consumerism, "the contrast between Sterling's differently embodied posthumanism and Gibson's disembodied cyberspace seems confirmed" (Foster 2005: xix). Not only confirmed but the basis for something much closer to our own zeitgeist. In Sterling's novel Shapers and Mechanists are opposed and contrasted, as the former prefer genetic modification and the latter bodily alteration through software and prosthetics. In Scalzi's saga, they merge in the unseen Franksensteins that manufacture John and Jane's biotech, or biopunk, bodies.

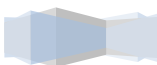
This is so because, in short, one thing is the "informatic essentialism" that, as Thacker (2003: 86) argues, articulates the vision of the extropian posthuman body typical of cyberpunk, and quite another 21st century biotech research. This, unlike "the discourses of posthumanism that seek to dematerialize the body (into software Minds, into informational networks), (....) presents us with a case in which informatic essentialism is utilized to redefine biological materiality" (89)—though I find this to be a variation on transhumanism. Scalzi's posthuman soldiers are not simple cyborgs, despite Harry Wilson's claim, but biotechnological bodies made up of trademarked organs, the children of the current "regenerative medicine" (Thacker: 90)



and not only of the 1980s computer. I would even stress that as regards computers we have totally missed the impact of wi-fi as opposed to the dated jacking-in of the console cowboy: there's a world of difference between, say, Neo jacking into the Matrix imagined by the Wachowski siblings and Jane's super-soldiers linking up via BrainPal wi-fi too fast for human thought.

Conclusions: Making Valid Points

I'll conclude then, by reinforcing the claim that John Scalzi's proficient and increasingly brilliant SF series raises issues of extreme importance, from a critique of the military uses of the transnational and the transhuman in a delicate interplanetary and interspecies context, to the ambiguous positioning that posthumanist thinkers must maintain as regards the unstoppable emergence of the posthuman body. As regards SF itself, Scalzi's saga seems symptomatic of the schism between the posthuman and the cyborg already present in 1980s cyberpunk and suggests that we need a new critical paradigm to address the biotech posthuman body of 21st century biopunk SF. Finally, since Scalzi is made "happiest of all" by comments that his saga is really a love story (Whyte 2006: website), I'll note that we need to wonder whether in John and Jane's married life we need to see a celebration of post-patriarchal love, with the fully human man rejecting militaristic violence and embracing the fact that, as we suspected all along, we women *are* super-women.



Notes

¹ For the connection between SF and the western see Mogen (1982, 1993) and Westfhal (2000).

² For an analysis of how 19th century imperialistic colonialism conditions the fantasies of SF, see Grewell (2001) and Rieder (2008). For a view of SF from post-colonialism, see Langer (2011).

³ I'm using the online edition available from my university (UAB) library, which has no pagination. The quotation can be found in Chapter 1.

⁴ *Zoe's Tale* retells the events of *The Last Colony* from the teenage perspective of Perry's adoptive daughter, an odd experiment aimed at attracting an audience of young adults to the saga.

⁵ The procedure, though, changes when in *The Ghost Brigades* (chapter 2) a recording of the soul of rogue scientist Charles Boutin is stolen and transferred onto a Special Forces body raised from his own DNA, Jared Dirac. Boutin learns to record souls by reverse-engineering alien (Consu) technology.

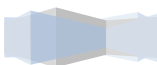
⁶ The soldiers' constant mental contact via their BrainPals and the much closer connection between the Special Forces soldiers seem to be aimed at contradicting Joe Haldeman's *Forever Peace*. In this novel this kind of communication is presented as the first step towards pacifism, on the grounds that total empathy with another human being prevents individuals from using violence against others. This, of course, is not true, as Scalzi shows.

⁷ It remains to be seen how this green skin will look on screen in the future adaptation of *Old Man's War*, currently being scripted by Chris Boal (brother of Mark Boal, Kathryn Bigelow's screen writer) and to be directed by Wolfgang Petersen, if the project materialises (Sneider 2012).

⁸ For solid definitions of transnationalism, see Hook (2004), Saunier (2009) and Vertovec (2009). For transnationalism and science fiction, see Chernaik (2005).

⁹ Defence Secretary Leon Pannetta lifted in 2013 the 1994 ban against women serving in combat positions in the US military, a ban that prevented them from climbing up the military hierarchy. Whether this is a victory for feminism or for military patriarchy remains to be seen.

¹⁰ In the "Acknowledgements" that close *The Last Colony* Scalzi writes that many readers in his acquaintance have connected Jane with his wife Kristine. Scalzi jokes that Kristine has never commanded any soldiers but he grants that "Jane's intelligence, strength and personal character are based on my wife's intelligence, strength and personal character" (2007: 319). The whole series he adds, are "her books. I just wrote them" (320). How Kristine may have reacted when seeing herself transformed into Jane is left to our imagination.



¹¹ For a definition of space opera, see Westfahl (2003).

¹² See, for instance, Hans Moravec's *Robot: Mere Machine to Transcendent Mind* (1999) and Raymond Kurzweil's *The Singularity is Near* (2005).

¹³ See Belfiore's critique of DARPA (2009) and the website of the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency itself at www.darpa.mil.

¹⁴ In Heinlein's *Starship Troopers* (1959) soldiers maimed during their Federal Service for the Terran Federation have access to avant-garde prosthetics and are protected by their awesome powered suits; they're both men and women, and of all nations. The protagonist, Johnny Rico, is Filipino, non-white. In Haldeman's *Forever War* (1974), conscripts in the millenary war with the aliens are initially in a similar situation, though Haldeman presents the powered suit as a real hazard, an "infernal machine" (18). Later, fully organic organ regeneration (of a very painful kind) becomes available with lungs and heart last to be conquered, the brain still an impossibility. Lt. Mandela's brave new world eventually includes babies born of artificial wombs and sophisticated biomechanic cyborgs, but not post-humans. Martin Caidin's novel *Cyborg* (1972) popularised the term and was also the basis for TV series *The Six-Million Dollar Man* (TV movie 1973, series 1974-78). See also Hantke (1998).

¹⁵ For a good but somewhat dated analysis of the origins of the cyborg, see Tomas (1995). As he notes, the word 'cybernetics' was introduced in 1947, 'cyborg' in 1964. For Tomas, the cyborg "is the product of a special problem in human adaptation: namely, how to exist in an environment that consists of pure information" (1995: 40). This is still valid but needs to be updated to include the impact of biotech and web 2.0 computers onto the cyborg body itself.

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