



universität
wien

MASTERARBEIT / MASTER'S THESIS

Titel der Masterarbeit / Title of the Master's Thesis

„The Hero's Journey everlasting“: The story-telling and
narratological impact of immortality on Science Fiction
literature

verfasst von / submitted by

Julie Kirsteen Walker, BA.

angestrebter akademischer Grad / in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts (MA)

Wien, 2018 / Vienna 2018

Studienkennzahl lt. Studienblatt /
degree programme code as it appears on
the student record sheet:

A >066 844<

Studienrichtung lt. Studienblatt /
degree programme as it appears on
the student record sheet:

Masterstudium Anglophone Literatures and Cultures

Betreut von / Supervisor:

ao. Univ.-Prof. Dr. Eva Zettelmann

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I would like to thank my husband Wuli Walker, who supports me tirelessly (and proofreads) everything I attempt.

Many thanks also to Angelika Hierzenberger-Gokesch and Steffi Lietze for proof reading, important advice and emotional support. Any mistakes remaining are my own.

Special thanks to Rocco Prumer and Arno M. Scharinger, for formatting aid and technical support. Thanks also go to Thomas Happ for no-nonsense support and advice, and Daniel Blauensteiner for gentle encouragement.

I would also like to thank my Dad, who encouraged me to pursue literature and writing. He is missed. Last but not least, I would like to thank Dr. Eva Zettelmann for her valuable feedback and excellent advice.

Thank you!

Table of Contents

1. INTRODUCTION: SCIENCE FICTION AND IMMORTALITY.....	7
2. IMMORTALITY: WHO WANTS TO LIVE FOREVER?.....	9
2.1. What is immortality?.....	10
2.2. The importance of the “natural body”	11
2.3. An immaterial and immortal soul?.....	12
2.4. Bundle theory.....	12
2.5. Dualism and Bundle Theory in SF	13
3. NARRATOLOGY IN SCIENCE FICTION	15
3.1. Brief overview of narratology.....	15
3.1.1. Pieces of story: Narremes	15
3.1.2. What really makes the story? Nucleus and catalysers	16
3.1.3. Paratexts	17
3.1.4. Masterplots.....	18
3.2. Why narratology?.....	19
3.3. SF as a narratological cross-media phenomenon.....	20
3.4. Worlds Apart. A formalist approach.....	21
3.4.1. Why does SF need its own narratology?.....	21
3.4.2. SF made by creator and reader.....	22
3.4.3. Novum as instigator of SF	22
3.4.4. Problems with Malmgren.....	24
3.5. Excursion: Suvin and SF as Estrangement	24
3.6. Joseph Campbell and the Monomyth.....	25
3.6.1. Campbell’s stages	26
4. MY MODEL: THE HERO’S JOURNEY EVERLASTING	28
4.1. The Stages for the Hero Everlasting	28
4.2. Immortality and its effect on the Everlasting Hero.....	34
4.2.1. The role of immortality in a story	34
4.2.2. The effects of immortality in a story	35
5. NARROTOLOGICAL ASPECTS OF IMMORTALITY: FOUR EXAMPLES.....	37
5.1. <i>Wild Seed</i> by Octavia Butler: Immortals change the course of human history.....	37
5.1.1. Doro’s eugenics – a result of immortality or immorality?.....	38
5.1.2. Immortality as a parasitic half-life and a way to give back	39
5.1.3. Whose journey, whose story?.....	40
5.1.4. Stages in <i>Wild Seed</i>	41
5.2. <i>Altered Carbon</i> by Richard K. Morgan: New bodies, old stacks.....	44
5.2.1. Immortality as an influence on society and the individual: The Meths	45

5.2.2. Immortality as part of narrative	47
5.2.3. Do cortical stacks provide real immortality?	51
5.2.4. Stages in <i>Altered Carbon</i>	52
5.3. <i>Ubik</i> by Philip K. Dick: A half-life on ice.....	55
5.3.1. Immortality: a social advance between life and death	56
5.3.2. Is <i>Ubik</i> still a Hero's Journey?	59
5.3.3. Stages in <i>Ubik</i>	59
5.4. <i>The Man from Earth</i> by Jerome Bixby: A 14,000-year-old Cro-Magnon philosopher.....	62
5.4.1. Is <i>The Man from Earth</i> Science Fiction?	63
5.4.2. Who is the protagonist of <i>The Man from Earth</i> ?	64
5.4.3. Arguments for and against immortality.....	66
5.4.4. Stages in <i>The Man from Earth</i>	69
6. IN CONCLUSION: NOTHING BUT TIME.....	71
7. APPENDIX A: Charts for Everlasting Hero Stages.....	73
8. APPENDIX B: Chart for Effects of Immortality	76
9. BIBLIOGRAPHY	78
10. GERMAN SUMMARY/ABSTRACT	90

1. INTRODUCTION: SCIENCE FICTION AND IMMORTALITY

My life closed twice before its close

*My life closed twice before its close –
It yet remains to see
If Immortality unveil
A third event to me*

*So huge, so hopeless to conceive
As these that twice befell.
Parting is all we know of heaven,
And all we need of hell.*
Emily Dickinson¹

Science Fiction (SF) has been the genre of dreaming and imagination since its inception. While, as Andrew Milner said, it started to crystallise as its own separate topic in 19th century Europe (Milner 25), there were works which were arguably SF long before that. Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516), a political satire about a fictional society, can be read as an early example, much like *Gulliver's Travels* (1726) by Jonathan Swift. The latter also draws a parallel to a sub-genre of SF, the incredible journey (James and Mendlesohn 197). Much like a lot of early pulp fiction, Swift's Gulliver travels to unknown places and discovers things that no human has ever laid eyes on before. At the time of writing, earth was still a place which offered an exciting unknown, with large parts unexplored and uncharted. 19th and 20th century writers found themselves going to further extremes such as the bottom of the sea or the core of the earth – as in two of Jules Verne's seminal works, *Journey to the Centre of the Earth* (1864) or *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea* (1870) – or looking to the stars for new and unexplored territories². The vastness and mystery of space has yet to release its hold on the imagination, 200 years later. Even with the most up-to-date developments, we still know next to nothing about what is out there, making narrative possibilities endless.

One of the problems with space is its virtual limitlessness³ dwarfing us and our brief existences, which leads us to the idea of immortality in SF. While not merely dreamed up as a concept to match the boundlessness of space, there are certain parallels to be drawn. How else could one hope to transverse the stars and experience what would take us a thousand lifetimes? Countless works draw these parallels, making a bid for not only individual immortality, but for that of humanity as a whole.

¹ Poets.org

² One famous example would be Edgar Rice Burroughs' *A Princess of Mars* (1917)

³ We have strong scientific theories that it is not limitless or static, of course (Hawking 35). However, for the intents and purposes of humans and their short lives, it might as well be.

Of course, there are other uses for immortality, and they are not merely limited to space travel. Immortality as a concept has been around in folk tales and myths for thousands of years (Frazer 524). Gods are often portrayed as immortal, and there are numerous examples of humans being deified, or made immortal as rewards or as the case may be, punishments⁴ – depending often on what form their immortality takes. But SF has taken the idea and given it a scientific core, making the effusive possibility of outlasting the 70-odd years of reasonable health that can be expected, as even in today's world, our time is generally short.

Depending on the type of narrative then, immortality has a different meaning – like with the Gods of old, it can be prize or punishment, and it can fulfil or damn the recipient.

How, then, to go about examining the effect of immortality on SF? There are some models available, some more promising than others, defining a specific narratology for SF. In this paper, I will pursue two questions: *How is immortality explored and depicted in SF*, and *does SF narrative change to accommodate concepts of immortality, and if so then how?*

I will refer to Darko Suvin and Carl D. Malmgren for their approaches to SF narratives in particular, as well as to Joseph Campbell's famous model for the examination of narratives from a more general perspective.

In lieu of a structure for this specific issue, I have designed an experimental model to illustrate my theory of immortality as influential on SF narrative. Before getting to the examination of immortality, however, I needed a narrative framework to contextualise the SF stories I analyse. For this purpose, I adapted the model created by Campbell for *The Hero With A Thousand Faces* (1949), which he used to expound his theory on the existence of the so-called Monomyth. I will not attempt anything as sweeping and grand as that, but offer it rather as a suggestion for a possible organisation of SF narratives involving immortality. I make no claim to the universal applicability, but merely draw parallels and refer to similarities between the four works I analyse. The narrative structure thus set up, I will then examine the types of immortality, their effect on the story and the characters, and their function for the narrative. The works in question – three novels and a movie script – differ considerably, and were selected to illustrate how immortality has different faces in different narratives. In addition, I have included a quantitative study of around 50 other works of SF – including a few games – where the narrative and the immortality models can be applied. Hopefully, this paper will illuminate some of the special effects immortality can have on SF.

⁴ More often punishments, as many of these myths have implicit morality tales. One of the more famous of these is Sisyphus.

2. IMMORTALITY: WHO WANTS TO LIVE FOREVER?

*Do not go gentle into that good night,
Old age should burn and rave at close of day;
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.*

*Though wise men at their end know dark is right,
Because their words had forked no lightning they
Do not go gentle into that good night.*

*Good men, the last wave by, crying how bright
Their frail deeds might have danced in a green bay,
Rage, rage against the dying of the light. [...]
Dylan Thomas⁵*

Living forever is one of those deep-set yearnings that almost everyone has felt tugging at them at one time or another. The desire to persist after the end of our incredibly short lives is at the core of many religions and belief systems. It informs how we handle death, as many cultures and religions involve elaborate ceremonies to usher the departing into the presumed next realm of existence (Eriksen 139). When facing that inexorable despair following the loss of a loved one, many of us will comfort ourselves with one of many variations on “they are in a better place” or “I’ll see them again someday”, as the idea of existence ending abruptly is unthinkable for many (Russell 14).

When the western world reached its Age of Enlightenment, it was simultaneously pushed forward in technological, cultural, social and psychological ways, but also thrown back into a deep spiritual crisis⁶. These were repeated and intensified in the industrial revolution, and again at the advent of modern science. Broadly speaking, the potential loss of God left a gaping hole in the world view, which for many, could only be poorly replaced by scientific advancement⁷. Over time, more and more people came to accept the paradigm shift (although many still struggle to this day) and in the modern world, atheism is no longer uncommon. However, the loss of God also meant the loss of eternal life – for how can there be a religious afterlife without a deistic intervention?

Instead, the focus on improving intangible life shifted to extending tangible life (Harari 21). While the idea of prolonging life through scientific process is hardly new, it has never been as immediate as

⁵ Poets.org

⁶ “[...] Der tolle Mensch sprang mitten unter sie und durchbohrte sie mit seinen Blicken. ‚Wohin ist Gott?‘ rief er, ‚ich will es euch sagen! *Wir haben ihn getötet* – ihr und ich! Wir sind alle seine Mörder! Aber wie haben wir das gemacht? Wie vermochten wir das Meer auszutrinken? Wer gab uns den Schwamm, um den ganzen Horizont wegzuwischen? [...]“ (Nietzsche 126)

⁷ This is a fascinating philosophical debate, some of which is summarised in Bertrand Russell’s *History of Western Philosophy* (1961). Some of the leading minds on the subject include Baruch Spinoza (Russell 552), John Locke (Russell 617) or David Hume (Russell 634).

it is today amid rapid technological advances. Especially the increasing potential of artificial intelligence and the advance of digital space have ushered in an entirely new consciousness regarding potential immortality (Harari 29).

In this chapter, I will discuss some basic tenets of immortality in religion and philosophy, and then some of the technological aspects which bleed over into science fiction (and vice versa).

2.1. What is immortality?

“If any idea of immortality is to be wholeheartedly and extensively believed and acted upon, it must possess the three attributes of emotional efficacy, imaginative reality, and intellectual acceptability.” (Lamont 15)

One of the important issues to establish ahead of a discussion on immortality is what exactly is meant by the term. There is a vast body of literature on the subject, and a great many variations on opinion. At a superficial level, there is a difference between an eternal life, and the existence in the afterlife. In this paper, both types of immortality will be discussed, *Ubik* (1969) by Philip K. Dick is arguably a quasi-religious view of an afterlife, while *Altered Carbon* (2002) or *Robots at Dawn* (1983) both feature examples of technological advancements making if not real immortality, then at least greatly extended lifespans possible.

A more precise subdivision into categories could be made as such⁸:

- the so-called astral body, which looks like the physical body. Astral bodies are often a more spiritual or religious concept than philosophical, and as such are more likely to be found in fantasy literature than in SF⁹.
- resurrection or rebirth. One of the central tenets of the three largest monotheistic religions, Christianity, Judaism and Islam, rests on the concept of resurrection for Judgment Day, so that the people in their bodies can be judged by God¹⁰. This suggests that the soul remains in its incorporeal state awaiting judgment day. This is not immortality in the same way as continuous living, however, as the person's existence ends when they die, only to resume later.
- the immaterial soul, which, as opposed to the astral body, is imperceptible by the living.

⁸ Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Chapter 2.

⁹ Features in stories such as Anne Rice's *The Tale of the Body Thief* (1993), but also in SF or SF-Fantasy works such as the Star Wars franchise.

¹⁰ Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Chapter 3.

2.2. The importance of the “natural body”

There is a great difference between a mind and a body, because the body, by its very nature, is something divisible, whereas the mind is plainly indivisible...insofar as I am only a thing that thinks, I cannot distinguish any parts in me...Although the whole mind seems to be united to the whole body, nevertheless, were a foot or an arm or any other bodily part amputated, I know that nothing would be taken away from the mind. (Descartes 97)

Humans have constructed elaborate rituals to join the circumstance of death with that of life. Even in modern society, there are often small but complex social ceremonies which vary depending on religion or cultural background, denoting the beginning and ending of life – one need only consider all the social affections involved in, for example, childbirth and said child’s introduction to society, or the rites involved in dying and death (Eriksen 140).

Notable in many cases is the careful treatment of the body after death – especially in open coffin funerals, the deceased is painted and dressed to resemble the way they looked when they were alive. This harkens back to a belief that a complete, preserved body will ease the transition into the afterlife, although this is a more explicit thought in some religions than in others (Lamont 22). Going a step further, the preserved body might suggest the possibility of resurrection, as is referred to in many major religions (Russell 452).

This also ties into the idea, at least in part, of the body criterion of personal identity (Olson 1). While Christianity presupposes a soul, the idea that the body must be resurrected for Judgement Day implies that the bodily integrity is in some way fundamental for immortality. The case is similar in both Judaism and Islam, where a Messianic Age will also see the return of the dead to the living.

However, the question would be how literal this form of immortality can be taken. Natural science takes a very sceptical view of prolonging the age of the physical body for eternity (Harari 25), and this concept becomes even more outlandish when considering a literal resurrection of those long dead. In religion then, it might be suggested that the preservation and preparation of bodies is often a more symbolic matter (Forstrom, ch. 1) than a literal belief in physical resurrection. In philosophy, there is less discussion of physical resurrection or immortality, but rather a focus on the psychological, the mind and or possible soul. However, one famous philosophical question still begs mentioning in the context of the body criterion, and this is the Ship of Theseus paradox¹¹, which asks whether an object which has had all its components replaced – like the planks of a ship – is still the same object. The same question can theoretically be posed about the body, as cells are constantly being replaced (Harari

¹¹ Internet Encyclopedia of Immortality, Chapter 6.

290). This paradox is very interesting in a SF context, both in stories about cybernetic replacements, and in terms of technology like the Star Trek transporters, which disassemble animate or inanimate matter down to its molecular level, and reassemble it at the desired designation¹². Whether or not this means that the people are still the same on the other side, or a kind of complex imitation, is a matter of debate within the community¹³. This concept and others will be examined in more detail at a later point in this paper.

2.3. An immaterial and immortal soul?

The concept of a soul is most likely as old as conscious thought, dating back to the first time humans considered death and the beyond¹⁴. The idea of having a component of existence which is intangible and unaffected by the weaknesses of the physical body is hugely compelling for short-lived conscious beings, and as mentioned above, a core component of many if not most religions. In religious theory, the soul can of course be corrupted or lost, mostly as punishment or some trickery, but the threats to the soul, while considered to be far worse, are far fewer than those to the physical body (Harvey 355).

In some belief systems, the soul rather than the body is resurrected, or rather reincarnated into a newly-born body. This is also often tied to a moral system, which weighs the deeds in life and rewards or punishes them with the kind of body they return to in the next life (Keown 40). Beyond organised religion, there are entire subsections of parapsychology and esoteric beliefs concerning past lives and accessing memories from (Shermer and Linse 206). These kinds of pseudo-scientific examinations suggest that there is still a wide-spread longing to know for certain one's own immortality. Making contact with what are presumed to be past life memories gives a kind of personal continuity or comfort which is very hard for science or reason to duplicate.

2.4. Bundle theory

The distinction above is of course problematic in its own right, following Plato's Dualism concept¹⁵ of the difference between body and mind, the two being units distinct from one another, but both complete in and of themselves. More modern theories take a far less humanist approach, suggesting the integrity of self, the core of a person, simply does not exist. To quote the philosopher David Hume,

¹² Forbes

¹³ Reddit

¹⁴ Encyclopaedia Britannica, Death: The Cultural Background

¹⁵ Internet Encyclopaedia of Philosophy, Chapter 5

a person is “nothing but a bundle or collection of different perceptions, which succeed each other with an inconceivable rapidity, and are in a perpetual flux and movement” (Hume 178), a ‘bundle theory of the self’¹⁶.

Perhaps even more devastatingly, Yuval Noah Harari details how humans are not only little more than a collection of impulses and impressions, but also how we could theoretically be almost entirely replaced by machines. These would not only be aware of why we do what we do, but could even predict our movements and thoughts better than we could ever hope to, provided enough data is harvested and processed. In modern life, where almost everyone is virtually transparent due to social media, online tracking and mass data collection, this is no longer the abstract concept it once was. Most humans are at the mercy of those very few holding the data access, and the future is looking increasingly uncertain for free will – providing such a thing ever existed in the first place (Harari 368).

What then, is the meaning of life? Liberalism maintains that we shouldn’t expect an external entity to provide us with some ready-made meaning. [...]

The life sciences undermine liberalism, arguing that the free individual is just a fictional tale concocted by an assembly of bio-chemical algorithms [...] There momentary experiences do not add up to any enduring essence. The narrating self tries to impose order on this chaos by spinning a never-ending story, in which every such experience has its place, and hence every experience has some lasting meaning. [...] Medieval crusaders believed that God and heaven provided their lives with meaning. Modern liberals believe that individual free choices provide life with meaning. They are all equally delusional. (Harari 305)

2.5. Dualism and Bundle Theory in SF

This concept is less explored in SF, but still require some amount of consideration, if only as part of an intellectual experiment. Immortality throws an interesting light on bundle theory. If one considers someone who lives either eternally or at least for a vastly longer time than a normal human being, would it not be more logical to assume that they would change unrecognisably over time; not merely physically and ideologically, but also become entirely different people?

Someone who, when gradually stripped of all that is familiar, his friends, family, environment, maybe even believe system and worldview, would eventually adapt to the external circumstances? The idea that the humanist-religious core of a person, an entity which seems relatively unlikely in the first place, could withstand the twin assault of shifting external circumstances, and the chemical effects of the body, seems unlikely. This and other effects would most likely contribute to a complete change

¹⁶ Internet Encyclopaedia of Philosophy, Chapter 6

of personality over time, begging the question whether immortality – the eternal life of a Plutonian person, with a distinct and unchanging soul – is theoretically still possible.

In the 2007 film *The Man From Earth*, protagonist John Oldman is allegedly 14,000 years old. A university professor at present, he tells his unbelieving colleagues the story of his life, which includes incredible exploits. However, he can no longer remember his original name, or what kind of man he was back before he realised that he could not die. He talks about some of the key experiences, but there are obviously entire centuries which he does not touch upon. But what happened then would have been highly relevant as well, and left some kind of mark on him, even subconsciously. How can he say for certain that he has not become someone new, not once, but hundreds of times, in reaction to his particular environments?

Similarly, there is the question of uploading consciousness to a digital state. When removed from the physical world and all known forms of interacting with the environment, is there really so much left of us, some philosophical core that persists even in the face of utter annihilation of the senses? This concept, often set up in SF stories¹⁷, is only sometimes followed all the way through to the grimmest possible conclusion – a complete loss of self. For the most part, the idea of uploading consciousness is simply a plot device.

Of course, the argument of a spark of a personality, a kind of permanent centre, is a far more compelling narrative, both in terms of real life and in fiction. The idea that we are nothing more than a collection of impulses and reactions is mostly too unsettling to contemplate (Harari 291), and if it is found in literature, then most likely in more nihilistic or experimental stories. Despite this, it is a relevant idea worth holding to contrast with the mind-body dualism which is often displayed in SF stories, as a counterpoint to traditional storytelling. It pays to ask oneself, when contemplating immortality – what exactly is it that is living, either for a great deal of time or indeed for all eternity? The body? The soul? An astral projection? Or perhaps the human essence is too much in flux for it to have anything of permanence at all. This concept will remain more of a thought experiment, and in the following chapters, I will attempt to quantify and analyse the effects immortality has on SF stories, as viewed through a narratological lens.

¹⁷ For examples, see *Transmetropolitan* (1997-2002), *Neuromancer* (1984) or *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968).

3. NARRATOLOGY IN SCIENCE FICTION

In *The Cambridge Companion to Narrative* (2007), Marie-Laure Ryan sketches an approach to a definition of narrative.

A definition should support, even entail, statements like these, but it does not have to spell them out:

Narrative is about problem solving.

Narrative is about conflict.

Narrative is about interpersonal relations.

Narrative is about human experience.

Narrative is about the temporality of existence. (Herman 24)

This is as good a frame of reference as any for the aspects of narrative, while avoiding delving too deeply into numerous definitions in this paper.

3.1. Brief overview of narratology

Narratology has a long tradition as an analytical tool, reaching back as far as Aristotle's *Poetics* (c. 335 BC). Aristotle created a rigid framework for how drama has to work, limiting characters, time frames, plot points and locations to a specific and exact predetermined formula (McKee 186). In modern narratological analysis, the approach is often more descriptive than prescriptive, and continues the search for underlying building blocks inherent in different stories, looking for similar structures and trying to create formulas which can be used as frameworks for different types of narratives (Abbott 46).

While there are multiple approaches to narratology and narrative structure, some elements are widely referenced and used and will indeed play a role in the analysis of the SF texts in later chapters. I will attempt to reiterate a few of these elements here.

3.1.1. Pieces of story: Narremes

Multiple attempts have been made to define roughly universally applicable "building blocks" for stories, so-called "narremes", which function to narratology like morphemes to morphology (Bonheim 2).

However, due to the complex nature of narrative blocks, there is yet to there is no form so far which is accepted as academic canon. Some authors argue it is an impossible undertaking. "[T]he semantic system that underlies narrative texts cannot be distinguished from the system of the supporting

medium: it is because we know what words mean that we can make sense of written or oral stories, and it is because we know what images represent that we can make sense of a comic strip or a silent movie.” (Herman 25). The *Cambridge Introduction to Narrative* refers to the idea of story types, such as the “Cinderella” story, arguing for similarities with the “King Lear” story (Abbott 21). Arguably, a non-fiction work such as a documentary or even (at a push) a CV or another legal form could also contain elements of such a Cinderella-type story. While one can identify the elements that make a story a certain type of story, based on a core story, so to speak, it is not possible to make this dependent on words or images alone.

While narremes are an intriguing idea, they are only of limited use for narratological description. However, they give rise to the idea of more abstract narratological building blocks, which while also limited, are a useful tool for finding underlying patterns, as we will see in chapter four.

3.1.2. What really makes the story? Nucleus and catalysers

Another central tenet of narratology is defining the core elements of a story, and deciding which can be stripped without it losing its central meaning (Abbott 23). This can be a challenge faced by people adapting stories across media, and trying to balance the problems inherent in every form of medium. This can be a subjective issue¹⁸. But the question often becomes an exercise in how much can be taken out of the story without it losing its shape entirely and collapsing.

Both Roland Barthes and Seymour Chatman argue for a distinction between constituent and supplementary events. Barthes uses the terms ‘nuclei’ (*noyaux*) and ‘catalyzers’ (*catalyses*) for this distinction, and Chatman uses the terms ‘kernels’ and ‘satellites.’ (Abbott 22)

According to Roland Barthes, “[a] nucleus [constituent event] cannot be deleted without altering the story, but neither can a catalyser [supplementary event] without altering the discourse. (Abbott 23)

To expand on the example from before, there are some very basic elements that connect King Lear and Cinderella, which are central to both stories. One is the relationship between the characters – Cordelia, like Cinderella, is maltreated by her cruel sisters, eventually turned out into the cold. However, both characters are rewarded in the end for their goodness and loyalty. It could be argued

¹⁸One need only consider a hugely popular franchise like Harry Potter. Due to film constraints, many details and side-plots in the novels were cut from the eight movies. Formally speaking, the filmmakers kept the central points of the story. However, some people argue that the essence of the series is in its details, which made the movies quite hollow and lacking in spirit by comparison. This is an example of how hard it is to say, definitively, what is a core part of narrative and what is not. Like much of narratology, it is a negotiation between creator and consumer.

that these two elements – the character relationship, and the reward for kindness – are nuclei for these stories. Without them, they would be different stories entirely.

3.1.3. Paratexts

Paratexts are a useful term in narratology, used to denote texts about the narrative which are however not directly related, “material that lies somehow on the threshold of narrative” (Abbott 30). These can include news about publications, posters, blurbs, DVD extras and other external material which informs the text. According to Abbott, paratexts can transform narratives without changing a word. “[...] The phenomenon is a vivid reminder that, though we may call things like texts, books or films ‘narratives’, where the narratives actually *happen* is in the mind.” (Abbott 31)

There are numerous examples of how paratexts can colour the reading of a narrative without changing the story. From scandals involving the creators to controversial teaser posters to meme and gif culture – there are countless ways in which the reading of a text can be reinterpreted.

Excursion: grapholect

There is an interesting term which functions as a kind of subgroup of paratexts and is used by Carl D. Malmgren in *Worlds Apart*, a text which will be discussed in a later section of this chapter. Malmgren refers to a definition by Eric Rabkin describing a way of defining stories in the context of their time. The term he uses is “grapholect”.

It happens in SF that narrative motifs or entities which, at the time of their inscription, represent a departure from the author's empirical environment become actualized in a later empirical environment (e.g. submarines, space flight, atomic energy). In this respect, it is also useful to borrow from Eric Rabkin the term *grapholect* to designate a writing practice whose discourse is diacritically marked by the imprint of a specific historical, sociological and cultural matrix. (Malmgren 8)

This is an especially relevant type of information, as it requires the reader to consider external circumstances under which the work was created. Works must be considered in the context of their time and their creators, lest they be examined from a purely modern or unreflected perspective and lose some of their value. This is clearly not infallible; after all, a reader cannot ever fully put themselves in the position of a writer who died hundreds of years ago¹⁹.

¹⁹However, grapholects can come with pleasing side effects for modern readers, such as marvelling at the farsightedness of some authors, like Jules Verne.

3.1.4. Masterplots

This is a large issue, which can only be insufficiently covered in this short segment, but I will attempt to give a rough outline. There are dozens, maybe hundreds of so-called “masterplots” which are in some ways not unlike Jung's collective unconscious (Abbott 47). These plots are stories that we as humans in society, mostly unconsciously, apply to our own lives and the world around us. It has been said that we only accept information in form of narrative (Abbott 6), and thus, we see our own lives to a certain extent as going along predetermined lines. Archetypes such as the unappreciated mother, the entrepreneur who made her own fortune, the estranged father, the less-loved child, the kindly grandmother, or the wild woman who came to a bad end – all feature in these kind of masterplots. Archetypes and masterplots help describe the stories we tell ourselves, whether consciously or subconsciously, and when we hear others repeat them, feel connected (Abbott 46). This can be as mundane as the way the media portrays events (i.e. “Husband kills wife in jealous rage” as an example for the jealous lover metaplot), or stories attached to stock market shares – in order to convince people they are worth investing in, even if they are perhaps fiscally irresponsible. Masterplots can be found virtually everywhere.

In the *Cambridge Introduction to Narrative*, reference is made to how people may adhere to their masterplots, even if they are nonsensical in face of the facts. Indeed, this might be one theory as to why some unexpected political decisions are made. Canny politicians are able to tap into these narratives and give them back, reflecting something culturally innate and thus achieving their goals. Following narratives spares one from uncomfortable and complicated truths, while masterplots offer certainty of what comes next. But while this is an issue of dubious merit in for the messiness and unpredictability of real life, it serves the author well to know and understand where these plots come from and how to use them. There is a balance between leaving the audience without anything familiar to hold onto, and thus probably alienating them, and using a masterplot element in such a basic form that it becomes a stereotype or a cliché, and perhaps boring the audience²⁰.

This is one of the strengths of SF. It can breathe fresh life into stale, but ingrained and well-loved stories, letting new generations experience them again. In an ideal case, it will also fulfil one of SF's core purposes, which is to explore new ideas.

²⁰Some stories manage to walk this fine line, such as the original Star Wars movie in 1977. The story is a completely straightforward Hero's Journey, as George Lucas dreamed it up after reading Campbell. But his framing of the story, and the world he built, was so exciting and innovative and new that it completely changed the movie landscape and SF media for good.

3.2. Why narratology?

SF, like other genres, adheres to numerous conventions, which apply, if not universally, then often quite broadly. I might well accuse romance literature or thrillers of repetitiveness, but SF is often guilty of a similar “sin”. SF readers come to their preferred genre with a set of expectations, and are often irritated if they are not fulfilled (Abbott 58). One of these is the trust in the author to explain their world, if not immediately then eventually. At least, the author is expected to give enough to the reader so they can fill in the negative space – that room left intentionally by the creator by not describing every detail, but rather letting the reader have just enough information so they can create a picture of their own. This process of filling negative space is one of the aspects which makes media enjoyable, as the reader or viewer must do some mental work of their own, and the experience becomes that much more of a joint effort, giving it dynamic and realism.

In SF, the world is often not clear from the outset. Stories often start in medias res, in an unfamiliar setting with unquantifiable characters and strange situations. Someone unfamiliar with SF might put the book down earlier, but experienced readers will be more patient, trusting the author to explain it to them eventually.

Genre dictates how texts are read and interpreted, according to Heta Pyrhönen (Herman 109), meaning that there are certain criteria which SF media needs to fulfil to be recognised as such. If it does not fulfil these conventions, then a debate will almost inevitably ensue about the genre affiliation. While there is a kind of consensus on what makes a SF story, it often does not stand up to much scrutiny. In his writing handbook *How to Write Science Fiction and Fantasy* (1990).

Orson Scott Card discusses the issue of categorisation at length. While his approach is more of a hands-on work book for budding authors than academic, it still paints a worthwhile picture of the world of SF writing and its unusual fan base.

[D]espite the science fictions community's enormous appetite for stories with very bad thinking and worse writing, it remains the community most willing to sample something new. [...] In the long run, then, whatever is published within the field of science fiction and fantasy *is* science fiction and fantasy, and if it doesn't resemble what science fiction and fantasy were twenty years ago or even five years ago, some readers and writers will howl, but others will hear the new voice and see the new vision with delight. (Card 12)

Looking at the complexities of SF, it could be argued that the narratological-analytical framework is essential to approach a definition of genre building blocks. While it is nearly impossible to define what plots, characters or storylines make a SF story, if broken down into its components, it is possible

to attempt to capture the essence of the medium by taking the stories apart and isolating the similar frameworks and elements, something for which narratology is designed. For this subject matter, I believe that narratology can offer the most comprehensive analysis on this topic.

3.3. SF as a narratological cross-media phenomenon

One of the most captivating aspects of SF is how it has always steadfastly refused to adhere to one medium (Milner 7). On the one hand, it is necessarily informed by developments in the real world, and SF writing shifts and adapts to reflect changes, fears and hopes about the future. On the other, there has been a near-continuous feedback loop between media – one need only look at the *Star Wars* or *Star Trek* franchises, which span movies, books, series, games, comics and toys respectively. Perhaps unlike other genres, SF is at its best when it jumps from medium to medium, spanning many, if not all possible art forms (Milner 7). SF films were among the first films, and *Le voyage dans la lune* by Georges Méliès in 1902 is still considered an enduring classic.

Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818), which is considered by most to be the first ever SF novel, is a good example of the trans-mediality of SF. *Frankenstein* hauntingly reflects the anxieties of the time, when people were on the one hand dazzled by the high-magical possibilities opened by science, but were also fearful of man losing his place in the universe by toying with powers he is not supposed to. This is one of the aforementioned masterplots, best represented by Johann von Goethe's *Faust* (1808). But Shelley's version of man overreaching his boundaries is a good example of what SF did differently, even then. Man is not punished by God or the Devil, but rather by his own creation, a creature which – according to the monster itself – would have had a far less tragic fate had the creator been a man with more integrity. Thus, while Faust makes a pact with the Devil to achieve greatness, and thus makes himself the puppet of a fate – albeit a fate he himself determined – Dr. Frankenstein has no one but himself to face for his misdemeanours. He had no need of supernatural intervention to build his creature, but the consequences were far messier and unpredictable. However, Dr. Frankenstein may well have lost a piece of himself after a fashion as well. This concept is often part of the dreadful warning in many SF stories, from *Space Odyssey 2001* (1968) to the *I, Robot* (2004) story collection to the modern TV series *Black Mirror* (2011-2018). All these and many others reflect the real world, suggesting solutions or sometimes just holding a magnifying glass over a problem.

But not all SF is about dire warnings, and the intertextuality applies to the full range of SF media. In *Locating Science Fiction*, Andrew Milner summarises this as follows:

There are of course real differences between SF in print and SF in film, radio or television [...] Gelder's distinction between Literature and popular fiction simply will not work for this genre in which, for example, the first issue of Hugo Gernsback's *Amazing Stories*, which is generally credited as the first American SF 'pulp' magazine, included reprints of stories by Poe and Wells, both of whom would later figure in Bloom's Western Canon. This is the same Poe who inspired Baudelaire and Verne, and the same Wells who inspired Zamyatin and Capek. Capek's *R.U.R.* is one of only six Czech texts to be included in Bloom's canon, but it also bequeathed the word 'robot' to SF and provided the BBC with the script for the world's first ever SF television broadcast, Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, which also figures in Bloom's canon, almost single-handedly established the dominant paradigm for the post-war SF dystopia, as exemplified in Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451* and Golding's *The Lord of the Flies* [T]he binary between Literature and popular fiction is almost entirely an artefact of Literary modernism, designed to valorise form over content, and cannot be applied to SF which, by contrast, is a genre of ideas and therefore privileges content over form." (Milner 13)

These aspects of narratology discussed here barely scratch the surface of the available research and writing on narratology and its impact on academic research into story-telling. However, they are enough to contextualise the analysis of the individual works. But narratology research alone is too broad to cover many of the specific issues which are so central to SF. For this purpose, the next chapter will discuss narratological analysis as specific to SF.

3.4. Worlds Apart. A formalist approach

3.4.1. Why does SF need its own narratology?

One of the central underlying tenets of Malmgren's work on narratology in SF is that the genre requires its own narratological examination, given its fundamental difference from other genres. He cites Hugo Gernsback, the creator of the first SF magazine, *Amazing Stories* (1926-present day). Gernsback, who coined the slightly awkward term "scientifiction" before it was replaced with the more palatable "science fiction", emphasised the importance of science in science fiction. "It is the policy of *Science Wonder Stories* to publish only such stories that have their basis in scientific laws as we know them, or in the logical deduction of new laws from what we know [...]" (Malmgren 11) Malmgren himself underlines this, saying:

The science in SF is not merely a matter of embellishment; it informs the epistemology of the narrative, subtends the rhetoric of the fiction, and constrains the aesthetic configuration of the tale. A SF world is thus to a certain extent heterotopic; It incorporates supernatural, estranged, or non-empirical elements but grounds those elements in a naturalising discourse which takes for granted the explicability of the universe. (Malmgren 10).

So, SF needs its own brand of narratology to help reflect its core conceit of science, something exclusive to this genre. The underlying scientific principle, which is inherent in SF, according to Malmgren, requires a special kind of academic treatment.

3.4.2. SF made by creator and reader

Malmgren also asserts that science fiction is a joint labour between creator and audience (Malmgren 11). Many authors leave something akin to the negative space discussed above for the readers to fill in, and without which the stories might not make as much sense. A novel like *The Man in the High Castle*, only makes sense if the reader²¹ is aware of the actual events of World War Two. Without that knowledge, much of the novel's poignancy is lost. "An (sic!) SF is [...] less a reflection *of* rather than a reflection *on* empirical reality. [P]art of the attraction of the genre rests in the fact that systems of correspondence between real and fictional worlds are generated primarily by the labour of the reader. The reader knows he or she must work to achieve cognitive satisfactions." (Malmgren 11)

However, the creator must leave some common ground for the audience to tread upon, lest the reader is entirely lost. SF stories almost always have recognisable elements, stories or characters at their core. Some might be so close to reality that the SF element only changes one aspect of the world (such as in *Flowers for Algernon*, published in 1966) or the story could be so alienating that there are only one or two elements for the audience to hold onto (such as *Accelerando* by Charles Stross, published in 2005).

3.4.3. Novum as instigator of SF

Once established that creators cannot go beyond a certain framework without risking losing the audience, Malmgren goes on to describe how SF requires a "novum" to be introduced by the creator. "SF is characterized by the introduction of a novum into one of these four systems, a factor of estrangement which transforms the basic narrative world into a SF world." (Malmgren 16)

Malmgren then describes four systems by which nova are delivered, as well as two types of novum "delivery". These are as follows (Malmgren 16).

- **Actants:** This primarily covers alien encounter stories, such as *E.T.* or *Alien*. This novum introduces an alien or a monster into a system where they were not previously found. However, it is correctly referred to as actant rather than actor, as this novum does not necessarily refer to a human. It could

²¹Or, as the novel has now been made into a TV series, the viewer.

also well be the human introduction into an alien society, in which case the humans play the role of the alien.

- **Social Order:** This represents change in the existing real world social order to create a SF setting and includes dystopian stories such as *The Handmaid's Tale* by Margaret Atwood (1985), *The Hunger Games* by Suzanne Collins (2008) or the genre-defining *1984* by George Orwell (1949). The world is changed, sometimes subtly, sometimes to the point where it is barely recognisable, and the stories often function as a kind of cautionary tale or criticism. Of the four novum systems, this one above the others requires the mental work on the part of the audience, as the story might lose some or all of its weight without a certain knowledge of the world it is designed to juxtapose.

- **Topography:** In Malmgren's definition, a novum in the topography covers a wide range of possibilities, from so-called "gadget SF" (Malmgren 19) of discoveries which affect mankind in some important way, to an entirely different world, making the setting itself the novum. These can range from any kind of story from *I, Robot* by Isaac Asimov (1950) to *Dark Eden* by Chris Beckett (2012). As one might imagine, there can be a lot of cross-over with alien encounter novum stories.

- **Natural Laws:** A novum introduced into the natural laws of the world transforms the story into something Malmgren refers to as "science fantasy".

"Science fantasy is created when a novum is inserted into the system of natural laws or into the scientific epistemology. It is thus an unstable hybrid form combining features of SF and fantasy." (Malmgren 20). This form is "impure" according to the author, as it goes against one of the principle tenets of SF – the basis in science. Stories like *Star Wars* would fit into this category.

The two forms by which novum are delivered are extrapolation and speculation (Malmgren 11). Extrapolation involves "[...] creating a fictional novum by logical projection or extension from existing actualities." (Malmgren 12). Speculation, on the other hand, "[...] involves a quantum leap of the imagination, itself the product of poetic vision or paralogic, toward an entirely *other* state of affairs." (Malmgren 12). Thus the novum and their delivery method can be combined to describe any number of SF stories.

3.4.4. Problems with Malmgren

There are clear problems with the theory of novum as Malmgren describes them. Among other things they are often too restrictive and generic, only reflecting a very narrow definition of SF. The novum as described by Darko Suvin in his famous essay on Estrangement and Cognition (Suvin 15) allows for a more in-depth look at the concept of the novum, and its application in SF.

3.5. Excursion: Suvin and SF as Estrangement

Darko Suvin is considered one of the foundational figures of modern SF literature analysis. His essay, *On the Poetics of the Science Fiction Genre*, published in 1972, left a lasting mark on the field. He is mentioned here briefly, as this form of analysis would be amiss without comment.

Suvin's influence can be registered in the way his definition of science fiction as 'the literature of cognitive estrangement' has become ubiquitous in scholarly introductions to the field, which frequently introduce Suvin's critical work *before* mentioning H.G. Wells, Jules Verne, Mary Shelley, Hugo Gernsback [...] In a subfield famously devoted to squabbling over definitions and policing generic boundaries, Suvin's definition has become a kind of consensus starting point, a place where we might at least begin to speak to one another. (Suvin xxiii)

Suvin's stance uses the attitude of "estrangement" as first put forward by the Russian Formalists ("ostranenie") on non-naturalistic texts and further developed by playwright Bertold Brecht's "Verfremdungseffekt" (Suvin 18), citing Brecht's *Short Organon for the Theatre*: "A representation which estranges is one which allows us to recognize its subject, but at the same time makes it unfamiliar." (Suvin 18).

This is the basic tenet of Suvin's theory, that the estrangement in SF is a core part of the framework (Suvin 19). SF then is used to offer a kind of alternative view on the world. If the author's empirical environment (Suvin 17) is the baseline, so to speak, the SF world is a variation, or a contrast to that. This contrast or comparison is only the starting point however, for SF according to Suvin will then follow the questions posed by its world, and see where they lead (Suvin 20). This is in contrast to how myth and fairy tales function, as exemplified below.

Where the myth claims to explain once and for all the essence of phenomena, SF first posits them as problems and then explores where they lead; it sees the mythical static identity as an illusion, usually as fraud, at best only as a temporary realization of potentially limitless contingencies. It does not ask about The Man or The World, but which man? In which kind of world? And why such a man in such a kind of world? As a literary genre, SF is fully opposed to supernatural or metaphysical estrangement as it is to naturalism or empiricism. (Suvin 20)

In brief, Suvin's novum is not merely to set apart SF from other literary genres, but serves to create the estrangement needed for SF to have the necessary impact on readers and viewers. In the case of this paper, the estrangement often takes the form of immortality, that elements which we can identify, but is unsettling and unnatural all the same.

3.6. Joseph Campbell and the Monomyth

Campbell was an author who researched primarily in comparative mythology and religion. His work has had far-reaching effects in popular culture, and in his time, popular in the academic circles as well. However, since the 50s and 60s, Campbell has fallen in the favour of academia, and with good reason. Not only did his scientific method leave much to be desired, to be put mildly, and his rhetoric lacking in the usual academic caution, but he has faced accusations of anti-Semitism, racism and fraud (Segal 461). One need only consider the opening paragraph of one of his possibly most relevant works, *The Hero with A Thousand Faces* (1968).

Whether we listen with aloof amusement to the dreamlike mumbo jumbo of some red-eyed witch doctor of the Congo, or read with cultivated rapture thin translations from the sonnets of the mystic Lao-tse; now and again crack the shining meaning of a bizarre Eskimo fairy tale: it will always be the one, shape-shifting yet marvelously constant story that we find, together with a challengingly persistent suggestion of more remaining to be experienced than will ever be known or told. (...) Religions, philosophies, arts, the social forms of primitive and historic man, prime discoveries in science and technology, the very dreams that blister sleep, boil up from the basic, magic ring of myth. (Campbell 1)

In many ways, that paragraph summarises quite a few of the issues with Campbell. Even disregarding the informal delivery, his stance and opinions were outmoded even for the 1950s and 60s (Campbell 255). In addition to the well-founded accusations, Campbell's Catholic background also plays a decisive role in his world-view. His stance is decisively Eurocentric just as the anthropology of the period was attempting to undo damage done by early ethnologists (Eriksen 18). His attitude towards women as well as non-white people is questionable at best, and dangerous at worst, as it reinforces harmful stereotypes with pseudo-science (Campbell 1). Finally, and most damningly, he smooths stories from all over the world into one core myth, which is Eurocentric, Catholic and male (Campbell 23, Eriksen 6). He envelops cultures and beliefs into a neat package which is tantalising perhaps, and appealing to an innate desire to see patterns where there are perhaps none, like in the pareidolic case of the man on the moon. But even in the best case scenario, this is naïve. Among other things, basing one's worldview on the modern Christian belief system will never function correctly, as imposing a

relatively young system upon much older ones is bound to be erroneous²². In addition, Campbell leans heavily on Sigmund Freud's teachings, which are more of a historical artefact than a scientific basis by today's standards.

Campbell's problems are not limited to the religious or cultural, however. He also struggles with the concept of the woman as a hero on equal footing as the male hero. Rather, female heroes are relegated to fulfil roles pertaining to motherhood rather than anything else. Consider the following passage:

The world-generating spirit of the father passes into the manifold of earthly experience through a transforming medium – the mother of the world. She is a personification of the primal spirit named in the second verse of Genesis, where we read that “the spirit of God moved upon *the face of the waters*.” In the Hindu myth, she is the female figure through whom the self begot all creatures (...) In mythologies emphasizing the maternal rather than the paternal aspect of the creator, this original female fills the world stage in the beginning, playing the roles that are elsewhere assigned to males. And she is virgin, because her spouse is the Invisible Unknown.” (Campbell 255)

Without wishing to delve into feminist theory, this stance is problematic at best. The female hero is often given a far more passive role in many stories around the world, but this confident generalisation is once again harmful. There is no doubt that Campbell's Hero of the book title is male; there is only a slim chapter discussing the possibility of female heroes (Campbell 255), and even then, women often merely represent the world, which, as discussed throughout *The Hero with A Thousand Faces* (1949), is the male hero's job to conquer.

In summary, then, one might wonder, why deal with Campbell at all, in light of the outdated and controversial stances taken in his writing. I think there is some value to the model itself, once it is modified to encompass more possible story aspects²³ and stripped of its problematic aspects and claims to universal truth. The model, in its bare bones, offers a possible collection of narremes, which can be applied widely and with an eye to modern cultural, social, gender and religious diversity.

3.6.1. Campbell's stages

In *The Hero With A Thousand Faces*, Campbell lists 17 stages in the heroic journey, starting with a “Call to Adventure” and ending with “Master of Two Worlds” and “Freedom to Live”. Not every

²²A similar example perhaps is the Grimm brothers' utterly sanitised collection of fairy tales. The original stories, while often more violent and sexual, had richer and more complex meanings, serving as more than parables or fables. In some stories, you can almost see how awkwardly the brothers inserted the Christian beliefs into stories not originally conceived for a Christian God.

²³Stories outside of the limited scope of myths are after all usually considerably more complex.

story has every element, but according to Campbell, the core elements and steps always remain the same.

Campbell's stages in their entirety are as follows.

Departure

1. The Call to Adventure
2. Refusal of the Call
3. Supernatural Aid
4. The Crossing of the First Threshold
5. Belly of the Whale

Initiation

6. The Road of Trials
7. The Meeting with the Goddess
8. Woman as the Temptress
9. Atonement with the Father
10. Apotheosis
11. The Ultimate Boon

Return

12. Refusal of the Return
13. The Magic Flight
14. Rescue from Without
15. The Crossing of the Return Threshold
16. Master of Two Worlds
17. Freedom to Live

While these appear to be fairly open, the stages are actually quite limiting, especially when adhering to the sequence. In the following chapter, I will offer an alternative reworked version of the model, which is perhaps more fitting for the task at hand.

4. MY MODEL: THE HERO'S JOURNEY EVERLASTING

After a discussion on narratology and immortality, we now turn to the application in the SF genre. Immortality plays a role in SF which is almost as relevant as it is in religion or philosophy, and is often a key element holding the narrative pieces together. But before adding immortality to the equation, it is necessary to set up a model for SF stories.

This model will have to come with a disclaimer for Vladimir Propp (Barry 226), as well as Campbell and Malmgren, who were both discussed already. While the Propp model is an elegant tool, I believe it to be too restrictive for the types of media analysed here. It is sufficient for more formulaic stories like fairy tales and myths, but not enough for more modern or complex media.

Carl D. Malmgren notes in *Worlds Apart*,

The genre is thus characterized by a fictional world whose system of actants and topoi contains at least one factor of estrangement from the basic narrative world of the author, and by a discourse which naturalizes that factor by rooting it in a scientific episteme. The factor of estrangement, or *novum*, at once defines the genre and determines the range of aesthetic and cognitive functions that it is able to serve. (Malmgren 10)

The novum is one of the central elements of Malmgren's postulation on SF, which is also a useful tool, which I have taken as a point of reference for the Hero's Journey through space.

In the next chapter, I will define my model, and then add a quantitative study, using around 70 examples, in the appendix.

Once this is established, I will exemplify how immortality affects the model in its different stages, and examine if and how this underlines my theory about the impact of immortality on SF. This will also be supported by a chart with several dozen practical examples.

4.1. The Stages for the Hero Everlasting

Departure

"They say that weightlessness can cause disorientation, especially in children, whose sense of direction isn't yet secure. But Ender was disoriented before he left Earth's gravity. Before the shuttle launch even began." (Card, Ender 28)

1. Call to action – internal or external

The Hero leaves her familiar environment or has a novum visited upon her. She is either literally removed from her home, or something unexpected happens to her, meaning that this departure can be either physical or mental in nature. The home is often as not a foreign environment to the reader – removed either by time or location – but ideally the protagonist is used to make clear to the reader

that the alien environment is the innerfictional norm. In *Borne* (2017) by Jeff VanderMeer, Rachel lives in a nightmarish post-apocalyptic city, but it is the arrival of Borne, a weird undefined plant-like creature, which is the noteworthy event, rather than the environment. Some stories have more complex “calls” such as *Ubik* (1969) or *Slaughterhouse Five* (1972). But the departure is mostly given at the beginning of the SF story, be it a literal or metaphorical one.

2. First glimpse of new world

This step introduces the novum to the reader, be it the world or the event changing it. From a writing perspective, this can be delivered via exposition, description or immersion. In more modern SF writing, this step can occur interchangeably with the introduction of the hero²⁴.

The step can often be quite literal, with a space trip or stepping into a time machine. In an ideal case, the reader or viewer is given a moment to let the new world or event make an impression, drawing them into the story.

Especially visual media such as TV or games can exploit the possibilities offered by this narrative step. Consider the scene in *Prometheus* (2012) where the eponymous ship approaches the planet LV223. The shutters open and reveal a beautifully rendered planet, bringing the viewer onto the ship and letting them experience the first glimpse as close to first-hand as movies can allow. Another good example is in *Mass Effect 1* (2007), when the player first approaches the Citadel. The game allows a few moments for the player to take in the massive space station, which functions as a diplomatic centre of the Mass Effect universe, as well as a touchstone for the player and the scene of the game finale.

3. Alienation/Re-alienation/First threshold and despair

Alienation is arguably one of the most prevalent themes in SF. The novum shifts and changes, or a new aspect presents itself, and the protagonist is at sea. This could present itself as a kind of culture shock, such as in *Stranger in a Strange Land* (1961) by Robert Heinlein, where protagonist Valentine Michael Smith literally retreats into himself when overwhelmed, in a kind of SF edition of Paris syndrome. Another particularly dramatic example would be *Dawn* (1987) by Octavia Butler, when Lilith realises that her home is gone, as are any rights or liberties she has as a human being. She is at the mercy of the thoroughly alien Oankali, who will only allow the few human survivors to reproduce human-Oankali hybrids. In the case of *Dawn*, Alienation occurs before the First Glimpse, as Lilith is

²⁴Or even replace the hero entirely, letting the novum of the environment be the centre of the story, like in *The Martian Chronicles* by Ray Bradbury.

utterly shocked by the appearance of the aliens, and it takes her a long time to become comfortable enough to venture forth into the new world with them.

This stage represents the sense of desperation, of isolation, that heroes are often faced with in the new world or situation. This is particularly common in SF Noir or Cyberpunk stories, where the hero is faced with overwhelming odds, often in the form of massive faceless corporations or influential nemeses. Examples would be *Snow Crash* (1992) by Neil Stevenson, or *Neuromancer* (1984) by William Gibson. Both protagonists are very small players in worlds far more powerful than them. In *Neuromancer*, Henry Case, a hustler, is struggling to stay one step ahead of his employer and pull off a heist at the same time. Hiro Protagonist of *Snow Crash*, a hacker and pizza delivery guy, is tasked with averting a massive crisis. Both of them have early low points where the situation seems impossible – the first snow crash Hiro experiences, and Case’s meeting with Molly after a series of increasingly unlucky occurrences.

In terms of narrative progression, the Alienation/Despair stage also often coincides with the end of the first act²⁵.

Initiation

Now here is a very odd thing: A flogging isn’t as hard to take as it is to watch. I don’t mean it’s a picnic. It hurts worse than anything else I’ve ever had happen to me, and the waits between strokes are worse than the strokes themselves. But the mouthpiece did help and the only yep I let out never got past it.

Here’s the second odd thing: Nobody even mentioned it to me, not even the other boots. So far as I could see, Zim and the instructors treated me exactly the same afterwards as they had before. (Heinlein 112)

4. First Steps to Enlightenment

Traditionally, this would be the Road of Trials, and in some ways, this is still the case in many SF stories. This is the phase where the hero gets past his initial low point. This would mean the second half of gruelling training for some kind of physical challenge, after the earlier struggles. Comparable with a training montage in a movie, this stage lets the reader or viewer feel more optimistic about the hero’s chances again. Of course, this is not limited to physical obstacles. In the Noir stories, the detective will reach some kind of rapport with their contacts. The hacker will overcome her first few

²⁵ A good example from film would be Luke Skywalker discovering the murdered bodies of his aunt and uncle. This is if one considers *A New Hope* a standalone movie. If one were to consider the first Star Wars trilogy one cohesive unit, then Obi-Wan Kenobi’s death at the end of act two in Episode Four could arguably be the first moment of real despair, and combined with the Alienation stage.

obstacles. In *Who Fears Death* (2010) by Nnedi Okorafor, this stage occurs when Onyesonwu has her first few successes as a shamanistic student. In the movie *Gattaca* (1998), this occurs when Vincent, an in-valid and thus segregated from the “valids”, manages to pull off an elaborate heist to gain employment in the field he has always dreamed of working in.

5. Meeting with Temptation

While this stage can be the traditional encounter with a femme fatale or a dangerously charming stranger, it can also be expanded to include meetings with allies or enemies in disguise. The sexual appeal is optional; these new characters can also have other reasons to draw the hero’s attention. In *The Man in High Castle* (1962) by Philip K. Dick, Juliana’s encounter with Joe qualifies for this stage. Joe represents something she desires, and she is almost made complicit in a murder, which she then averts. In *Oryx and Crake* (2003) by Margaret Atwood, the appearance of Oryx completely rearranges the lives and fates of Jimmy and Crake. She fills several roles, not only that of temptress, but also of accomplice and victim of Crake’s ultimate plan. Finally, the temptation does not need to be character at all, but rather something the protagonist wants, whether tangible or intangible. It can be their freedom, money, fame, or something even more abstract, like inner peace.

6. Inner World/Outer World

This is the stage where the events of the story begin to coincide with some part of the hero’s inner life, or with the life that came before. There can be an encounter with some relevant person from the past, or an extended flashback. In *Ender’s Game*, this occurs during Ender’s visit back home. Sometimes, this inner/outer world aspect is the motivating factor to move the hero out of their homes, and the disconnect is repeatedly revisited as the story progresses. In *Forever and Forever* (1997) by Charles Sheffield, Merlin Drake’s motivation to find a cure for his wife, Ana, is the driving force behind his quest which takes him further and further into an alien future. In the midst of the novel, he encounters a clone of Ana, and dreams repeatedly. While she is supposed to be the same Ana as the one sleeping on ice, she is not quite, and thus serves as a unification between Drake’s inner and outer worlds, reminding him what he is doing and why.

7. Further Alienation/Second Despair

The second cause of despair is often deeper and more profound than the first one. More has occurred, more risks have been taken, and the stakes are higher. This is the point when the odds really seem hopeless. A hero is stripped of her powers, her allies are kidnapped or dead, and the situation appears to have no solution. Alternately, this is the moment the protagonist realises that they may never

understand or assimilate to their new and alien environment, often causing a certain anguish of its own. In *The Forever War* (1974) by Joe Haldeman, William Mandella is trapped in a stasis field surrounded by enemies and forced to use medieval weaponry to fight his way out. In *The Martian* (2011) by Andy Weir, Mark Watney encounters several of these moments, where his environment overwhelms him, and he is forced to use everything he has, mentally and physically, to overcome the odds.

It is worth noting that while many SF stories resolve this step in a positive way, others use this as a stepping stone on the way down. More nihilist stories like *I Have No Mouth and I Must Scream* (1967) by Harlan Ellison, or horror-SF like the *Alien* franchise use the end of the second act to start the downward spiral. Another example is the controversial *Flowers for Algernon* by Daniel Keyes. The point where Charlie Gordon starts losing his artificially-improved intelligence again, at the beginning of the third act, marks the beginning of the end for his new life.

Onwards and Upwards

I thought my eyes were fooling me, as they had been doing often, and paid scant attention to the dim meaningless commotion of the air until, suddenly, I caught a glimpse of a small, wan, dead sun overhead. And looking down from the sun, straight ahead, I saw a huge black shape come hulking out of the void towards us. Black tentacles writhed upwards, groping out. I stopped dead in my tracks [...].

'What is it?'

He stared at the dark monstrous forms hidden in the fog and said at last, "The crags...It must be Esherhoth Crags. (Le Guin ch. 18)

8. Glimmer of Hope

After the low point, the hero is thrown a bone by the story, and the tone is set for the rest of the finale. Depending on the genre or type, this is either the promise of improvement, or as in a lot of horror, the false hope given to make the final fall much further. In Noir SF, this might be the moment when the detective or investigator picks up a clue – not necessarily revealing it to the audience – an ally who was presumed dead returns, or the hero has some brilliant last minute idea. In *Ready Player One* (2011) by Ernest Cline, Ogden's real-life appearance is the glimmer of hope for the heroes, who are outmanned and outgunned by the cooperation IOI. In *Fahrenheit 451* (1953) by Ray Bradbury, Guy Montag's meeting with the exiled drifters after his escape marks the moment which suggests how the story will end.

9. Alienation loses grip/final struggle

The showdown is the moment the hero gets to shine. Through military cunning, long practised skills, a good heist or even just dumb luck, the hero faces their final test, which in modern SF can be far more complex than just a plain showdown or final boss. Although this is a very classical story trope, it can be found in every kind of writing. Modern SF examples are best exemplified in visual or interactive media, TV season finales or boss battles in games. In good SF series, the final battle is ideally an accumulation of all that has gone before. In *Babylon 5* (1994-1998), there are several moments in Captain John Sheridan's timeline which would qualify as the final battle – but most notably his negotiation with the Vorlons and the Shadows, where he convinces them to leave the galaxy once and for all, and the final battle for earth at the end of season 4²⁶.

10. Master of two worlds, at home in neither

After a grand final showdown, an epilogue is in order. Various incomplete plot points have to be wrapped up, allies must be mourned or celebrated, and romantic subplots must reach their conclusion. Unlike in Campbell's model, however, the hero often does not or cannot return home. Their home might be destroyed, or lost in time, or so changed that it might as well be a new place entirely. However, the hero often fulfils the role of "home", representing the balance of the universe in themselves, another character or an object. In *Forever and Forever*, Drake's "home" is long gone, but as long as he has Ana, he has something to go back to.

11. Freedom to continue

This point only occurs in some stories, as a kind of second epilogue. It is especially prevalent when the author or authors are attempting to set up a sequel, which occurs more often than usual in SF stories, books, games or movies.

Unlike with fairy tale and myth, where the actions of the protagonist must often be very literal in order to deliver the parable as clearly as possible, SF stories are often more abstract. The protagonist of SF often does not go somewhere and do something, but rather travels in a more metaphorical sense. Character development does not always occur as a result of external action, and plot progression is not tied to circumstance. As a result, while this model can be applied to the examples featured in the

²⁶The final struggle in video games often takes on a more mechanical and fascinating aspect. In the final battle, ideally, the player must use all the knowledge they accumulate in the process of playing – both mechanical and mental – to defeat the final enemy. *Mass Effect 1* is a good example for this, where the player must use both their skill with the keyboard and mouse (or controller) as well as their knowledge of enemy weak spots to defeat Saren.

analysis part, it should not be mistaken for a generally-applicable rule. Modern SF is hugely diverse, and in the age-old problem of narratology, there is no key which applies to every story – thankfully, as it would certainly grow tedious. This model is closer to a thought experiment than any kind of guideline, and should be treated as such. The chart in the appendix will serve merely to show its usefulness and how it applies to many stories within the genre.

4.2. Immortality and its effect on the Everlasting Hero

As discussed in the previous chapter on immortality, the concept has manifold religious and philosophical dimensions. For the purposes of this paper, however, this notoriously difficult concept must be boiled down to story elements which are reproducible and can be applied with a minimum amount of arbitrariness. These narrative “blocks” are divided into roles and effects, and are as follows.

4.2.1. The role of immortality in a story

1. As reward/goal

This is a common tale, and has been around since the very first SF story. A quest for immortality can go several ways, depending if the author is aiming for a cautionary or a transhumanist tale. Often there is a sense of “be careful what you wish for”, where immortality has unpleasant or unexpected side-effects. One particularly example would be *Time Enough For Love* (1973) by Robert Heinlein.

2. As side effect (freezing/time loop/travel)

This occurs relatively frequently in SF. One of the big dreams in the SF of the 50s and 60s was jumping through time as can be seen in the cult TV series *Dr. Who*, where an almost-immortal alien travels backwards and forwards through time and space, occasionally on a mission of mercy, but mostly just to explore. Another dream, which was based on certain scientific advances at the time, was an ability to freeze someone, so they might be defrosted some time in an undetermined future. A grim example is Mandella in *The Forever War* (1999), whose continued missions take him and his team further and further forward in time as their ship moves through an interconnected series of “colapsars”, which have a huge relativistic impact on their lives. Every time he returns home, life is less familiar to Madella, encouraging him to go out on further missions, and thus leaving him lost in a cycle which takes him further and further away from the life he knew.

Another kind of immortality can be when the hero is caught in a kind of time loop, an example of which can be found in almost every SF TV show, from *Stargate* to *Star Trek*. A slightly more complex kind of time loop occurs in *Slaughterhouse Five* (1969) by Kurt Vonnegut. The protagonist Billy

Pilgrim is left skipping backwards and forwards through his own life, achieving a kind of immortality by that route.

3. As part of progress

In a lot of visions for advanced worlds, humankind has managed to prolong its life beyond the real-life average of 70-odd years. In some versions, it might be an extension into eternity, in others it is just an increase to hundreds of years, like in Isaac Asimov's *Robot* series. In the *Culture* series, the eponymous society which consists of inter-bred humanoid species has achieved a kind of immortality, barring accidents with the help of technological advancement.

4. As a curse

Perhaps the most varied and interesting of the roles immortality can play. The curse of immortality can be tied to any of the three previous roles. Immortality can become an enormous burden for heroes and antagonists alike. A particularly grisly example are the victims of AM in *I Have No Mouth and I Must Scream* (1967). Another would be the rumoured immortals in *Changing Planes* (2003) by Ursula Le Guin, who suffer eternal agonies after being bitten by a fly which curses them with immortality.

Characters may grow tired of their long lonely lives, and give up their immortality willingly. Others might be able to stop their death, but not their deterioration – not a pleasant option.

4.2.2. The effects of immortality in a story

This is difficult to quantify, as the uses of immortality are varied in SF literature. For the purpose of the proposed model, however, I will attempt a rough division into four types, which cover many of the occurrences.

1. Awe-inspiring

The immortality does not affect the hero, but rather a different character – a mentor, a love interest, an enemy – and their vastly different life span gives them a God-like or at least royal kind of distance to the protagonist. This distance can at a later point be narrowed, perhaps as the character gets to know the immortal better, or loses their respect. This is certainly the case in *Altered Carbon* and *The Robots of Dawn*.

2. Disassociation from mankind

This is often the case when the immortals in question are the protagonists. Losing their human side (if they were human in the first place, which is hardly a given in SF) is a rich mine of story-telling for SF authors. This is an especially effective story-telling trope if the hero started out aiming for immortality as a reward (see above), and it becomes a curse by the disassociation from the rest of the human race.

3. Thought-provoking

This effect is a meta excursion from the mind of the writer to the reader. Sometimes SF authors decide to tackle the more philosophical side of immortality, leaving the hero and the reader or viewer with a deeper reflection on the nature of life or the afterlife. One of these is clearly the strange *Ubik*, or Stanisław Lem's Ijon Tichy stories, where the hero encounters immortality in several forms, all of which are horrific in different ways.

4. Alienating

This is the flipside of awe-inspiring. Alienating immortality is more likely to frighten or disturb the hero than inspire in him any sense of amazement. In a lot of cases, this could be because the form of immortality is so alien that it is hard to grasp for the still entirely human mind. In the graphic novel series *Transmetropolitan* (1997-2003) by Warren Ellis, Channon is horrified and distressed when her technophile ex-boyfriend Ziang decides to have his consciousness downloaded into a cloud of nanites, effectively achieving immortality and leaving her behind.

These are only a few points, but cover some of the main aspects of immortality as portrayed in SF. In the following chapter, I will commence my analysis of the selected literature.

5. NARROTOLOGICAL ASPECTS OF IMMORTALITY: FOUR EXAMPLES

I have selected these following four works to analyse under the viewpoint of my proposed model: *Wild Seed* (1980) by Octavia Butler, *Altered Carbon* (2002) by Richard K. Morgan, *Ubik* by Philip K. Dick and *The Man from Earth* by Jerome Bixby. Each of these works offers a different view of how immortality is portrayed in SF texts. In this analysis, I will attempt to identify the effects and types of immortality, and in each conclusion, break the stories down along the lines I have drawn with my model.

5.1. *Wild Seed* by Octavia Butler: Immortals change the course of human history

Tell me how you killed the seven.'

She got up and went outside. It was dark now – deep, moonless darkness, but Doro did not doubt that Anyanwu could see with those eyes of hers. Where had she gone, though, and why?

She came back, sat down again, and handed him a rock. "Break it," she said tonelessly.

It was a rock, not hardened mud, and though he might have broken it with another rock or metal tool, he could make no impression on it with his hands. He returned it to her whole.

And she crushed it in one hand.

He had to have the woman. She was wild seed of the best kind. She would strengthen any line he bred it into, strengthen it immeasurably. (Butler, *Seed* ch. 1)

This is how Doro and Anyanwu, the complicated protagonists of Octavia Butler's first *Seed to Harvest* novel, *Wild Seed*, first meet. This first novel of the *Patternist* series sets in motion a story which leads to the eventual evolution of humankind into two super- and subhuman factions, with the remains of the old humans scattered or enslaved. Because the entire *Patternist* series would completely exceed the framework of this paper, I have decided to focus on the incipient novel. In the later stories, the focus shifts away from Doro and Anyanwu (both die in the second novel) and the concept of immortality becomes secondary to the other abilities developed by the post-humans. I will have to allow myself some freedom of analysis, however, due to the question of whether *Wild Seed* is actually SF. While the overall series is clearly SF, the first novel feels ambiguous, like it could be a mixed SF/fantasy parable.

The importance of Butler's work in SF can hardly be overstated. Her approach to a field and a genre dominated by white male authors and critics was ground-breaking. She weaves brilliant and oppressive narratives which handle a plethora of topics, including race and gender, environmentalism, transhumanism, slavery and many others. For the purposes of this paper, I will eschew a more comprehensive analysis and stick closely to the aspect of immortality.

5.1.1. Doro's eugenics – a result of immortality or immorality?

The story begins, as stated above, with the encounter between Doro and Anyanwu. Doro is an immortal mutant, who has already lived for thousands of years, and has no body of his own – he has to “jump” from one to the next to survive, eradicating the essence of the bodies’ original owners in the process. This terrifying ability is what he uses to keep his countless children and grandchildren in line, as his preferred body targets are his so-called “witches” – people who either descended from him, or have developed their own unusual abilities, such as mind reading, healing, or absorbing memories from objects. Doro’s encounter with Anyanwu is surprising to him, because she, the eponymous wild seed, eluded his attention for 300 years. Anyanwu, presumed but never proven to be related to Doro, can “look inside” bodies including her own, manipulating cells to change her appearance and heal herself and others. She also possesses inhuman strength. Right from the start, we realise that these two main characters – who share the story – are complementary or rather antagonistic to one another.

According to Maria Aline Ferreira in her essay *Symbiotic Bodies and Evolutionary Tropes in the Work of Octavia Butler*, both Anyanwu and Doro can be seen as “protogenetic engineers in their creation and transformation of themselves and of other people.” (Ferreira 408)

Doro’s greatest interest in this world is his breeding programme, and indeed, for the most part, all he ever cares about. He aims to create a society of superhumans who will satisfy his desire for bodies and for sexual partners. While this is never made explicit in the novel, his eugenics programme is implied to be entirely selfish. The brutal irony of this comes into force when Doro is defeated by one of his most promising children in *Mind of my Mind* (1977), who then goes on to found the “Pattern”, a psionic network connecting all the people like her, and starting the society which, by *Patternmaster* (1976), the last novel chronologically (but the first in terms of publication) runs the world in a kind of analogy for white supremacy, only more terrifying, as the privilege is anchored not in an arbitrary skin colour, but rather in who has terrifying mental powers and who does not.

Doro’s treatment of humanity like cattle is only made possible by his longevity, but does not appear to be the catalyst. The basic cruelty of his nature is at odds with the generosity and nurturing spirit of Anyanwu, who, given the same undying nature, chooses to heal rather than harm – which is allowed her as she does not have to murder others to survive. Doro kills his “failures” - children by him or his descendants which do not fit his scheme – until Anyanwu stops him. Her compassion contrasts with his callousness. While Doro feels guilt and pain over the deaths of his “special ones” (Butler, *Seed* ch. 9) views this culling as something necessary.

For hundreds of years, Anyanwu helps him reluctantly in his endeavours, but the tensions between the two of them increase as he continues to try and subjugate her, until they are at emotional war with each other. When Anyanwu runs away, leaving Doro's settlement, it takes him a century to find her again, and when he does, he cannot bring himself to kill her – too deep is his loneliness as an immortal. Instead, he allows her to continue, mostly on her own terms, though his cruelty is unabated in regard to other people.

5.1.2. Immortality as a parasitic half-life and a way to give back

Doro stepped past the young man and toward a boy-child of about seven years who had been watching the men talk. Before the young man or the young child could react, Doro collapsed. His body fell almost on top of the boy, but the child jumped out of the way in time. Then he knelt on the ground and took Doro's machete. People were beginning to react as the boy stood up and leaned on the machete. The sounds of their questioning voices and their gathering around almost drowned out the child's voice when he spoke to the young man. Almost. The child spoke calmly, quietly in his own language, but as Anyanwu heard him, she thought she would scream aloud. The child was Doro. There was no doubt of it. Doro's spirit had entered the child's body. And what had happened to the child's spirit? (Butler, *Seed* ch. 2)

Much like in *Man from Earth*, Doro and Anyanwu's immortality is the central novum of the story²⁷. However, John Oldman's story is stripped down to the bare bones, only discussing his immortality for what it is, as the changes that he attempted to make in the course of his extraordinarily long life were – as far as he told his captive audience – entirely with good intention. In addition, due to the fact that everything he did over 140 centuries was narrated rather than shown, it loses some of its impact. While the most interesting thing about John is his longevity, the most interesting thing about Doro and Anyanwu's immortality is what they do with their time. Doro's gift is his curse at the same time, as he can live forever, but is forced to kill to survive, as he tends to use up the bodies he steals. However, after centuries of casual murders – starting with the accidental slaughter of his own parents and his village – Doro appears for the most part to be untouched by this part of his ability.

“Doro looked at people, healthy or ill, and wondered what kind of young they could produce. Anyanwu looked at the sick – especially those with problems she had not seen before – and wondered if she could defeat their disease.” (Butler, *Seed* ch. 8)

²⁷Because it is not explained, *Wild Seed* might not immediately strike the reader as SF. However, due to the nature of the later works, and the strong undercurrents of bioengineering, eugenics, and other topics handled predominantly in SF rather than fantasy, it can in my opinion be safely referred to as SF.

Anyanwu meanwhile has an entirely different approach to her own immortality. Her longevity is more of a blessing, as she is not forced to kill so she might survive. However, instead of using her abilities to kill or maim – which would be easy, seeing how she can “see” down to the cellular level – she positions herself as a healer and a teacher. She is keen to have her own community, and she achieves it after leaving Doro: first among dolphins, whose company give her the kind of freedom she had not experienced in centuries, and then with her own plantation, where she collected strange and gifted people like herself. When Doro does find her, he is consternated at how her “colony” has produced such talented witches. But Anyanwu never aims for any kind of breeding – rather, she wants a family and a place and people to care for. Every time a child dies, she still feels it, which contrasts sharply with Doro’s indifference. Only twice do we see Anyanwu kill, once in self-defence and once after a man attempts to rape a child, then kills one of her children and attempted to murder another.

‘If I got a child by Anyanwu, maybe he’d have that other kind of sight. I’d rather have her than your Virginians.’

Doro laughed aloud. It pleased him to indulge Isaac, and Isaac knew it. Doro was surprised sometimes at how close he felt to the best of his children. And, damn his curiosity, he did want to know what sort of child Isaac and Anyanwu could produce. ‘You’ll have the Virginian,’ he said. ‘You’ll have Anyanwu too. I’ll share her with you. Later.’

‘When?’ Isaac did nothing to conceal his eagerness. ‘Later, I said. This is a dangerous time for her. She’s leaving behind everything she’s ever known, and she has no clear idea what she’s exchanging it for. If we force too much on her now, she could kill herself before she’s been of any use to us.’ (Butler, Seed ch. 4).

In addition to being completely disconnected from humanity, Doro is also a master manipulator. In this brief but important conversation with Isaac, Doro makes Isaac feel like he is part of the plan, where in truth, only he holds all the strings. His children support him, but no one overreaches the immortal father of the secret communities. Anyanwu’s “curse” is that she loses all of her family and friends over and over, leaving her with the questionable company of Doro.

5.1.3. Whose journey, whose story?

She was drifting towards the light, watching it grow as she moved nearer. It was a distant star at first, faint and flickering. Eventually, it was the morning star, bright, dominating her otherwise empty sky [...]

The sun’s light enveloped her, and there was no darkness anywhere. [...] There was nothing to see except blazing light. [...] It was as though he touched her spirit, enfolding it within himself, spreading the sensation of his touch through every part of her. She became aware slowly of his hunger for her – literal hunger – but instead of frightening her, it awakened a strange sympathy in her. She felt not only his hunger, but his restraint and his loneliness. The loneliness formed a kinship between them. [...] She was like a child beside him. But child or not, he needed her [...]. (Butler, Seed ch.13)

In essence, Anyanwu and Doro represent two possibilities for immortality. One is cruel, power-hungry and aspires to a kind of godhood, while the other wants her freedom and to give back. Anyanwu seldom has to fight to establish her dominance, while Doro is forever making moves large and small which people who have experienced oppression in their own lives might identify with all too well. While it is tempting to describe both of them as the protagonists of *Wild Seed*, Doro is clearly the antagonist, as he represents all the illness of the world which Anyanwu seeks to heal. However, Butler is still careful to leave them both space to develop and both are still human after a fashion. Doro, despite the countless atrocities he commits, still has the narrative opportunity to be someone who can force a kind of connection with Anyanwu. Anyanwu is strong and complex character, whose resolve of spirit – something which features in many of Butler’s books – allows her to endure through centuries of pain and suffering.

There is of course also a greater issue at stake – one of many – namely, the outlook to change the world. It is through Anyanwu’s eyes that we even get a glimpse of a utopia amid the grim dystopian SF futures that Butler envisioned. The entire *Patternist* series suggests a weariness of the world and how humans, even in possession of amazing powers, cannot think of anything better to do with them than kill and torture each other (Canavan 282). Anyanwu’s experiences as an animal would warrant at least their own essay on ecofeminism, but for the purposes of this paper, it is sufficient to say that this view of humans and animals as part of a sliding scale rather than binary opposites is an aspect of immortality which is seldom discussed.

In the *Patternist* books, dolphin life offers the brief, tantalizing possibility of a social order where violence and power (elsewhere asserted as inescapable facts of human history) are finally irrelevant. Among the dolphins, at least, strength seems not to beget domination, and genuine historical difference becomes possible – dolphin life as a more peaceful, fuller life, barred perhaps to we who have had so many bad teachers, but from whose radical otherness we might nonetheless be able to learn. (Canavan 283)

This experience – a peace that seems hardly possible as a human – could never have been experienced by Doro, even if he did have Anyanwu’s power of transformation. Despite his great age, he could not comprehend the concept of a peaceful undisturbed life without pushing any agency on the world around him.

5.1.4. Stages in *Wild Seed*

As mentioned above, while Anyanwu is the protagonist of the story, she shares much of her space with her antagonist. This means that some of the stages apply to one or both of them, but we get a clearer sense of Anyanwu’s emotional and spiritual journey than of Doro’s.

Departure

1. Call to action – internal or external

This occurs very quickly, as Doro stalks up to Anyanwu's house, to take her away from her home and to America. The parallels between the white slavers and Doro are implicit, as a kind of shadow movement mirroring the mass transport of African men, women and children being dragged to the New World.

2. First glimpse of new world

Arriving in the port in America, Anyanwu has a literal glimpse of the new world as she encounters a culture she has never encountered and people she has never seen before. She does not quite experience culture shock, but it is a close thing.

3. Alienation/Re-alienation/First threshold and despair

This step occurs when Anyanwu finds out that Doro intends for her to marry Isaac and not him. She was lured along with the hope that she would be with Doro, and is horrified that she is to be bred like cattle. Her entire trip gains a retroactive dark cast.

Initiation

4. First Steps to Enlightenment

Arguably, this could be Anyanwu making her mental peace with the life she lives, while never quite forgiving Doro for his abuses. As the years with Isaac wear on, Doro grows increasingly angry with Anyanwu, but she, once she realises she is unique among his descendants, learns to resist him in small ways.

5. Meeting with Temptation

Anyanwu's strange meeting with Thomas, an isolated man who is half-mad due to his ability to hear thoughts, is one of the early catalysts in her resistance against Doro which culminates in her escape. Doro's casual murder of Thomas to hurt her drives her closer to the edge.

6. Further Alienation/Second Despair

When Anyanwu and Thomas' daughter Nweke, goes mad during her transition, she kills Isaac and almost kills Anyanwu. Before he dies, Isaac accidentally kills Nweke as well, leaving Anyanwu without her beloved husband and her youngest daughter. Shortly after this, she flees and becomes a dolphin, where Doro cannot track her.

Onwards and Upwards

7. Glimmer of Hope

Interestingly enough, this glimmer of hope could also apply to the reader, not just to Anyanwu. When Doro finds her again, she is living a gentle life on a plantation, surrounded by children and people who are equally unable to fit in with normal society. However, the moment Doro arrives, her fragile peace is shattered, as she realises bitterly that she can never be entirely free of him.

8. Alienation loses grip/final struggle

This is less about alienation, and more about a series of decisions made by Anyanwu in the third act of the story. First, her decision to kill Joseph, who was planted by Doro, but murders her son Stephen. She leaves for a time to recover from the pain of losing Stephen, and when she returns, her friend Luisa is dead. Then, when Doro returns with more children to be integrated, she decides to commit suicide, but stops at the last moment. Without meaning to in any explicit way, Anyanwu takes back control from Doro, making her life and her community very unmistakably hers.

9. Freedom to continue

After her final decision to remain alive, Doro becomes curiously pliant towards her. He asks her for permission before taking breeding action, rather than simply forcing it upon her and her family. When she moves to California, he is angry, but does not attempt to punish her for it. In the end, as Anyanwu takes an English name, Emma, he is amused and not annoyed that she continues to shape her personality outside of his influence. In the next book, *Mind of My Mind*, the relationship between the two of them has further softened. While they still occasionally are lovers, Doro for the most part leaves Anyanwu alone, only occasionally fostering children upon her to care for. In the end, Doro remains antagonist to the next heroine, Mary, and when he dies, his death is a central plot point. Anyanwu dies “off-screen” which, considering how she lived her life, does not seem a cruel end.

5.2. Altered Carbon by Richard K. Morgan: New bodies, old stacks

“It didn’t look like much, impact-resistant casing streaked with blood and barely the size of a cigarette butt with the twisted filaments of the microjacks protruding stiffly from one end. I could see how Catholics might not want to believe this was the receptacle of the human soul.” (Morgan ch. 6)

Altered Carbon, the first of a SF trilogy, fully embraces the post-cyberpunk noir genre. The world is grim, dark and exhausting, and the characters which inhabit it are hard-boiled cynics with little hope or joy. The protagonist, super-soldier “Envoy” Takeshi Kovacs, is a convict with PTSD who is dragged halfway across the galaxy to solve a crime which at first appears to be solved. Of course, if this were the case, there would be no story – although an exploration of Morgan’s world would almost be fascinating enough in its own right – and so Kovacs stumbles into a web of deceit and conspiracy far greater than he expected. The story is a combination of Kovacs’ view of the present and flashbacks to his complicated and violent past.

More than any of the other entries in this analysis, *Altered Carbon*’s narrative centres around its immortality conceit. The central concept of the novel is the artificial system developed to prolong human life, possibly indefinitely. Morgan’s concept is that the human consciousness is saved on a so-called “cortical stack”, implanted into the spine at the age of one, which records the personality and experiences and can then be transferred to other “sleeves” as bodies are now referred to. This novum is an especially jarring one, for in our “zero” world (Suvin 23), much of our identities is unavoidably attached to our physical bodies. Freed of this particular issue, the story world becomes an entirely different place. According to Suvin, real SF takes a concept for an estrangement and sees where it goes (Suvin 23), and here, *Altered Carbon* succeeds where many others fail. It successfully explores what impact its core concept would have on its environment²⁸. Morgan delves into what it would mean, if bodies were expendable, and the consciousness/mind (the exact mechanics of which he wisely does not go into, as the level of technological description is already sufficient for the suspense of disbelief in this type of SF story) could at least theoretically persist forever. There is no utopian stance on immortality, and no unrealistic expectations about any sudden improvement in human behavior. Instead, he takes the depressing opposite route: the possibility of immortality brings

²⁸This is something early pulp SF often fails to introduce successfully. Often, the worlds are only superficially changed, because the novum is only introduced but not thought out in its entirety. One example is Ray Bradbury’s *Fahrenheit 451*, where the novum – TV taking the place of literature, and the criminalisation of books – is only superficial. Bradbury’s novel can be read as a dire warning about the evils of television (an interpretation given weight by Bradbury’s own admission), but in terms of narrative, it does not have that much of an impact on the story. The world of *Fahrenheit 451* is far closer to our own than it should be in light of the massive change to the social order. A world where books were banned would be different in many ways, not least in terms of information distribution, which are not reflected in *Fahrenheit*.

inhuman monsters with it – the super-rich so-called “Meths”, a reference to the biblical Methuselah, who lives for hundreds of years.

For the purposes of this analysis, I will use both the novel by Morgan as well as the 2018 TV series based on the Kovacs books. The fact that the original and the adaptation differ significantly is an enrichment, in this case, as it allows illumination of different aspects of the same world.

5.2.1. Immortality as an influence on society and the individual: The Meths

No one is more affected by the ability to change “sleeves” than the Meths, the super-rich members of the *Altered Carbon* universe. With the help of remote backups and highly expensive clones, the rich have removed themselves almost entirely from the rest of the human race. Their ideas of entertainment are horrifying in their utter disregard for human life, and many of them can no longer fathom the idea of life as finite. For some, becoming a Meth is aspirational, while others believe that the disassociation from the rest of mankind is worse than death. In the TV series, Reileen Kawahara (unlike in the book, cast as Kovacs’ long-lost sister) has become a Meth in the interim while Kovacs was being kept on ice. Her personality change, and her indifference to all regular humans, is used to exemplify the dangers of immortality²⁹. When weighed against one of our most human desires in our reality, that to escape death, this is a compelling argument against that ancient dream of eternal life. The idea that we could lose all of what makes us ourselves over time, is something which gives pause. This refers back to the concept of SF as a reflection upon ourselves.

Whether island or valley, whether in space or (from the industrial and bourgeois revolutions) in time, the new framework is correlative to the new inhabitants. The aliens – utopians, monsters, or simply differing strangers – are a mirror to man just as the differing country is a mirror for his world. But the mirror is not only a reflecting one, it is also a transforming one, virgin womb and alchemical dynamo: the mirror is a crucible. (Suvin 17)

However, the Meths’ attitude towards humanity and the brevity of natural life is only one side of the story. The general populace is understandably either disdainful, afraid of or angry at the Meths, who run their world from above³⁰, remaining untouchable, as shown in this story, even by the law. Only a great effort on the part of Kovacs and his companions allows for some justice to be served. However, the irony is clear – had Kovacs not been employed by the prominent Meth Laurens Bancroft, then there would have been no case against him or any other Meth.

²⁹It must be added that the TV series, while visually impressive, is less philosophically interesting than the novel, with many of its characters and concepts “dumbed down”.

³⁰In the TV series, this is literal, and to great visual effect. The Bancrofts live at the top of a spire above the clouds, separating them physically from the grimy streets and their inhabitants below.

The fear and disgust of the Meths is demonstrated early in the novel, when Kovacs first encounters Bancroft and his wife.

Old.

With sudden and suffocating pressure, it was all around me, the reek of it pouring off the stones of Suntouch House like damp. Age. I even caught the waft of it from the impossibly young and beautiful woman in front of me and my throat locked up with a tiny click. Something in me wanted to run, to get out and breathe fresh, new air, to be away from these creatures whose memories stretched back beyond every historical event I had been taught in school. (Morgan ch. 4)

Narratively speaking, this has impact. By evoking school, the author compels the reader to cast her mind back to her own schooling, to her own history lessons. It forces the reader to consider what this kind of age means, without resorting to figures. In less than a paragraph, a piece of world-building has effectively been lodged in the mind of the reader very early on in the story, so that she, like Kovacs and the other regular short-lived humans, will observe the Meths with suspicion.

Altered Carbon does not tar all Meths with the same brush, or the story would have far less tension. The characters we meet are still human after a fashion, and they do connect with the regular human characters and admit to human emotions such as shame, anger or jealousy. However, they never lose their sense of alienness, making them unenviable and isolated, almost characters to be pitied rather than aspired to. This is a good case of immortality as a part of progress, showing not just the technological, but the social consequences of developing a system for prolonging life beyond the body. This thought experiment is grim, but rings true to us because we are familiar with human atrocity. Unlike with a utopia like *Star Trek*, which represents something we would like to believe about ourselves, cyberpunk in general and *Altered Carbon* in particular show the dirty underbelly of human society, set free by technological advancement and unfettered by conscience and law. While not exclusively a warning about the future (most modern SF is far too complex for that) there are still echoes of admonishment, a reminder about the importance of checks and balances, and trying to keep legal development abreast of technological advances – something which we are failing at spectacularly, even in our mundane reality.

Finally, Meths are also an example of immortality as a curse, brought upon themselves. They cannot let go of life, but continue to drift away from reality. In addition, this curse is upon everyone else, as the Meths represent some of the core problems of the *Altered Carbon* universe, most notably the

social and economic injustices, and how the cheapness of human life is no more than a minor annoyance for some, but devastating for most.

John D. Schwetman also visits this issue in his article *Romanticism and the Cortical Stack*.

Perhaps the greater threat to humanity is simply the potential success of our information technologies in reaching the goals that Victor Frankenstein first set for his research in Mary Shelley's nineteenth century. Morgan's fiction presents a scientific establishment that has almost conquered death through the technology of the cortical stack, and it has drained life of much of its value in the process. After all, the cortical stack reifies the soul and thus conceptually coarsens it. (Schwetman 137)

5.2.2. Immortality as part of narrative

According to Suvin and Malmgren, the novum is not just an element which defines the SF story, but is also the core of the narrative itself. "An SF narration is a fiction in which the SF element or aspect, the novum, is hegemonic, that is, so central and significant that it determines the whole narrative logic – or at least the overriding narrative logic – regardless of any impurities that might be present." (Suvin 87)

As stated before, immortality is not just the novum in *Altered Carbon*, but a novum which is at the centre of the narrative logic, as Suvin puts it. Not only the plot, but the entire world hinges on the concept of cortical stacks and their resultant effect on society. To illustrate, I will reiterate some highlights in the storytelling.

Sleeves

The whole concept of slipping in and out of different bodies – be they regular human, cloned or synthetic – will fill some people with excitement, and others with revulsion. The ability to outlive the frailties of the human body is one of the more tantalising ones, but Morgan is at pains to show the deeply disturbing aspects of re-sleeving, especially from one flesh-and-blood body to another. This is exemplified several times, most damningly with Kovacs. The envoy was sleeved into the body of an allegedly dirty cop called Riker, who was on stack for 200 years. Kovacs does not seem to think too much about the body he is wearing until he is caught and tortured by enemies of Riker. Only then, after a traumatic near-death experience, does he stop and inquire about his body. When it becomes clear that Riker was the lover of Ortega, the cop he is working with, it changes their relationship. The book touches on the odd nightmarish idea of someone else walking around literally wearing someone else's skin, in several instances. One case is a husband whose wife is put on ice for criminal activity.

One day, he sees someone else walking around in her body, killing his hopes of getting her back any time soon. Morgan allows these moments to sink in, without explaining them exhaustively to the reader. All the possible situations will slowly dawn upon readers as they progress through the book, creating a fascinating mental space shared by writer and reader.

Envoys

First, there is the protagonist and his Envoy training. His unit was developed in reaction to the practice of re-sleeving people from one body to the next. The process of adjusting to a new body is often problematic psychologically as well as mentally, rendering much of the military training pointless. As a result, envoy training involves not only neurachem upgrades (which enhance the physical senses) but also rigorous training linked to the consciousness. This means that the Envoys, who have a kind of legendary super-soldier status, are able to transition more easily through the essentially traumatic process of changing bodies. Due to extensive training, the Envoys have perfect memories, are able to assimilate rapidly to their environments, have supernatural reflexes and skills of observation, as well as superior mental strength which helps them withstand torture, making them formidable mercenaries and assassins.

However, even with all these prerequisites, Kovacs struggles to adjust to his new sleeve at the outset of *Altered Carbon*, as his violent death at the hands of the intergalactic authority, the protectorate, is still clear in his mind. As far as he is concerned, it only just happened, even though he has been in storage as information for decades. “I came thrashing up out of the tank, one hand plastered across my chest searching for the wounds, the other clutching at a non-existent weapon. The weight hit me like a hammer and I collapsed back into the floatation gel.” (Morgan ch. 1)

This is followed by the problems of re-sleeving even for super-soldiers. While Kovacs is able to adapt rapidly, the change still remains shocking for him.

This is always the toughest part. Nearly two decades I’ve been doing this, and it still jars me to look into the glass and see a total stranger staring back. It’s like pulling an image out of the depths of an autostereogram. For the first couple of moments all you can see is someone else looking at you through a window frame. Then, like a shift in focus, you feel yourself float rapidly up behind the mask and adhere to its inside with a shock that’s almost tactile. It’s as if someone’s cut an umbilical cord, only instead of separating the two of you, it’s the otherness that has been severed and now you’re just looking at your reflection in the mirror. (Morgan ch. 1)

Morgan's description is not unlike some of the symptoms of depersonalisation disorder, where the sufferer cannot recognise themselves, and indeed feel separate from their body³¹. Kovacs is thus in a kind of permanent state of disassociation, the price he pays for changing sleeves constantly. Since leaving his own sleeve, decades ago, Kovacs has, not unlike the Meths, lost a certain touch with reality.

The trauma of the re-sleeving process is not completed immediately after the process. In the following passage, towards the end of the first act, Kovacs experiences what could be described as a mild psychotic break. "Psychoentirety rejection, they call it. Or just fragmenting. It's not unusual to get some tremors, even when you're an experienced sleeve-changer, but this was the worst case I'd had for years. For long moments I was literally terrified to have a detailed thought, in case the man in the mirror noticed my presence." (Morgan ch. 12)

However, it must also be noted that Kovacs' adjustment problems do not only serve a purpose within the narrative, but also as part of the metanarrative opportunity. If Morgan allowed Kovacs an easy transition, then he, the author, would be missing a valuable opportunity to contextualise the concept of changing sleeves. In addition, when creating a character with as many advantages as Kovacs, it is a wise narrative decision to give him some weaknesses, and this one – the disconnection with the body – helps to humanise a super-human.

Catholics

The dystopian future vision would most likely be incomplete without some form of religious fanaticism, and in *Altered Carbon*, the Catholic church fills this role. Catholics have been adapted to suit the cyberpunk environment, and perhaps unsurprisingly, strongly oppose the "resurrection" of stacks into new sleeves. This makes them supremely vulnerable to murder and real death, as Catholics are legally not permitted to be resurrected, even to testify. In the course of *Altered Carbon*, the so-called Resolution 653, which would allow the resurrection of Catholics to testify to their own murders regardless of faith, plays an increasingly important role. The idea of permanent death is already profoundly alien to the people of this society. After witnessing the murder of a prostitute, Kovacs ponders her choice – such as it was – to be Catholic and thereby consign herself to real death.

I spent most of the journey feeling sorry for the girl, and worrying at the Catholic madness like a dog with a bone. This woman's stack was utterly undamaged. Financial considerations

³¹In the TV series, this scene is well-executed, considering the complexity of the description. The television scene is also far more dramatic, but perhaps this is a symptom of the medium.

aside, she could be brought back to life on the spin of a disc. On Harlan's World, she'd be temporarily re-sleeved for the court hearing, albeit probably in a synthetic, and once the verdict came down there'd be a Victim Support supplement from the state added to whatever policy her family already held. Nine cases out of ten, that was enough money to ensure re-sleeving of some sort. Death, where is thy sting? (Morgan ch. 12)

In this case, the author's critical stance on religion could reasonably be construed as one of the main motivations for the introduction to the narrative. Happily, however, it ties in well with the story and serves as a foil for the central conceit, answering the question of how death looks in a world where dying might be abolished altogether. In addition, it raises the spectre of souls, and asks – without posing the question directly – about the relationship of humanness and the physicality of the body³².

Torture

Due to the transitive nature of the physical bodies, the effects of wear and tear, abuse and dismemberment lose their horror for people. In certain circles, this means that extracting information becomes that much harder without the threat of real death. To solve this “problem”³³ virtual spaces are created where the cortical stacks are directly accessed, and the torturers can visit any number of horrors on the victim. They can be murdered, over and over, until they lose their minds, and the subjective time within the virtual space allows it to be performed rapidly in the real world. These virtual spaces can also be used for other purposes such as for psychotraumatic therapy, but in keeping with the grim and bitter tone of *Altered Carbon*, there is more focus on the torture. When Kovacs is inevitably brought in for torture, he is only saved by his Envoy training, which helps him get “to the next screen” (Morgan ch. 13).

Body experimentation and sexual gratification

As reiterated several times, the impermanence of the body lends itself to almost unimaginable changes. The opportunities for body modification – up to gene-splicing and human-animal hybrids – are virtually limitless. Fighters slip into the bodies of monstrous bio-organic fighting machines, prostitutes can be murdered by their johns, only to be re-sleeved, paid handsomely, and brought back to do it again. In the limited space of the novel, Morgan writes just enough to allow the reader's

³²As so often, the TV series states the question directly posed by the mother of Kristin Ortega, who is a Catholic. She berates her daughter, a lapsed Catholic, about the re-sleeving of her grandmother into a criminal's body to celebrate the Day of the Dead. The series also raises the question of the soul, as Ortega's mother claims there is no entry to heaven for people who have been re-sleeved.

³³For the purposes of this story, we will suspend disbelief, and disregard the facts of our “zero” world, where it has been repeatedly proven that torture is an ineffective system to extract information. It can still be effectively used as a dramatic narrative device.

imagination free rein in his world. There are many unanswered questions about gender and race issues, which remain unaddressed, but could make for fascinating further exploration.

5.2.3. Do cortical stacks provide real immortality?

While Morgan stays away from any discussion of how exactly cortical stacks work, it can be agreed that the human mind and consciousness can be stored on the stack, which is transferred. However, there is the issue of the needlecast transfers, where the information making up the essence of the human is beamed from one place to another, sometimes even hundreds of lightyears away. The information is not gone from the original place, but has been copied. This raises the same question as cloning, or with the Star Trek teleporters – did the original consciousness survive, or is the new copy merely convinced that they are the “real” person because they have all the thoughts and memories up until that point?

In our postmodern sophistication, we may have embraced romantic arguments about the creative nature of perception. But does that really prevent us from imagining the plight of a wandering, dead soul of Takeshi Kovacs, who looks down from the void on the usurper who has taken over his identity and reputation and continues on with this life under the illusion he is the real Takeshi Kovacs? (Schwetman 138)

This is also poignantly reflected in the SF survival computer game Soma. The player character, Simon, is tasked with launching the ARK, a spaceship containing the consciousnesses of numerous people, in an attempt to save the human race. The following exchange takes place after a nail-biting countdown for Simon and his disembodied companion Catherine to be uploaded to the ARK.

Simon: I’m still here...? I’m still here. Catherine? Catherine?!

Catherine: I’m here.

Simon: What the hell happened – what went wrong?

Catherine: Nothing. They’re out there, among the stars. We’re here.

Simon: No, we were getting on the ARK. I saw it. It finished loading just before it launched.

Catherine: Yeah, I saw.

Simon: Then why are we still here?

Catherine: Simon. I can’t keep telling you how it works; you won’t listen. You know why we’re here, you were copied to the ARK, you just didn’t carry over. You lost the coin toss. We both did. Just like Simon at Omicron, just like the man who died in Toronto a hundred years ago.

Simon: No no no, this is bullshit! We came all this way. We launched the ARK!

Catherine: I know it sucks, but our copies are up there. Catherine and Simon are both safe on the ARK, be happy for them.

Simon: Are you crazy? We’re going to die down here, with those fuckers living it large on a spaceship! They are not us! They’re not us!

Catherine: I'm sorry you feel that way, Simon. I'm proud of what we did. We made sure that something of the hundreds of thousands of years of human history survived – that something lives on."³⁴

After this, the game ends. In the post-credit sequence, the player then briefly inhabits the new consciousness of Simon aboard the spaceship – safe and unaware of his other self's fate.

5.2.4. Stages in *Altered Carbon*

As mentioned in the introduction of the stages in chapter four, not every SF story will have all the story elements which match these stages. The ones which are present, I will analyse accordingly. *Altered Carbon* is already neatly divided into sections which roughly correspond to the Gustav Freytag's five-act dramatic arc:

- Part One: Arrival
- Part Two: Reaction
- Part Three: Alliance
- Part Four: Persuasion
- Part Five: Nemesis

It is followed by an Epilogue, which lines up more closely with the last step of the Hero Everlasting model than with Freytag's.

Departure

1. Call to action – internal or external

The call to action is fairly straightforward, and entirely involuntary. Kovacs is sent to earth in a needlecast transmission and tasked with an apparently-cleared crime to solve. The novum – potential immortality – is immediately introduced by way of sleeving and cortical stacks.

2. First glimpse of new world

Kovacs has a new world to contend with – he has never been to Earth before. In this case, the author lets the reader get a brief sense of superiority, as after all, we have all been to earth, before showing us that we might not be on as firm a footing as we thought. However, the conceit is not dropped, as

³⁴YouTube

Kovacs occasionally asks questions about Earth which we as readers in the 21st century would know (such as the average travelling time between New York and Tokyo).

3. Alienation/Re-alienation/First threshold and despair

Arguably, this would be the moment when Kovacs is kidnapped and tortured, as he is mistaken for the original owner of the sleeve he is currently occupying. Kovacs is equipped to handle this challenge, but not before falling into despair and being overwhelmed with PTSD flashbacks.

Initiation

4. First Steps to Enlightenment

As would be true to a noir narrative, the steps to enlightenment coincide with uncovering parts of the mystery. Kovacs discovers one thing after another, scattered throughout the novel, but arguably his first big discovery is the depths of the Meths' ugly sexual proclivities. While their lack of connection to humanity is clear from the beginning, Kovacs (and following him the reader) is faced with the same sinking disillusionment which the police force is already grimly familiar with.

5. Meeting with Temptation

In this case, it is a fairly straight-forward noir narreme. Kovacs is visited by Miriam Bancroft who not only makes an offer that very few would refuse, but also seduces him. Despite this, and in true noir manner, Kovacs turns her down. Were he made of less stern stuff, after all, there would be no satisfactory conclusion to the story.

6. Further Alienation/Second Despair

Kovacs is knocked out of his orbit entirely by the resurfacing of his old nemesis. She yanks the story around, pushing Kovacs in a new direction with a threat of harming his old girlfriend, whom he presumed dead until now (Morgan ch. 25)

Onwards and Upwards

7. Alienation loses grip/final struggle

“In SF, or at least in its determining events, it is not iconic but allomorphic: a transgression of a more than merely cultural, of an ontological, norm, by an ontic change in the character/agent's reality either because of his displacement in space and/or time or because the reality itself changes around him.” (Suvín 87)

For our protagonist in this story, this is especially poignant. With the help of a combat drug, he not only lowers his body temperature so as to remain undetected on a stealth mission, but also enhances his senses and suppresses his emotions to the point where his mental state is a kind of pop-cultural psychopathic. He can no longer distinguish moral from immoral behaviour (Morgan ch. 40). In an elegant move, Kovacs uses the accumulated knowledge he has acquired so far against Kawahara, whom he then proceeds to murder.

8. Freedom to continue

In conclusion, Kovacs is in fact free – he can be returned home via needlecast to find his girlfriend, leaving the new friends he made behind. Kovacs' adventures continue for two more books, but the novum of immortality fades to the background of the story in the second and third installments.

5.3. *Ubik* by Philip K. Dick: A half-life on ice

‘So that’s where we stuck Melipone’s ident-flag on the map. And now he – it – is gone.’

‘Did you look on the floor? Behind the map?’

‘It’s gone electronically. The man it represents is no longer on Earth, or, as far as we can make out, on a colony world either.’

Runciter said, ‘I’ll consult my dead wife.’

‘It’s the middle of the night. The moratoriums are closed now.’

‘Not in Switzerland,’ Runciter said, with a grimacing smile, as if some repellent midnight fluid had crept up into his aged throat. ‘Goodeve’. (Dick ch. 1)

Of all the media analysed in this paper, *Ubik* is easily the most puzzling. Like much of Philip K. Dick’s work, it is intellectually brilliant and challenging, but difficult to understand³⁵. The immortality aspect seems tangential to the rest of what is essentially an otherworldly experience, and yet it is an integral part of it. Unlike the other works analysed here, *Ubik* deals with immortality – of a sort – in the hereafter, but a hereafter created by technological advances. The reader’s journey follows unlucky Joe Chip and his companions into a strange world plagued by rapid decay and a fickle cruel god in the form of Jory, the angry dead teenager whose residual energy allows him to take control of this particular afterlife.

There are multiple possible readings of Dick’s work, as always. In an article titled “Coin-Operated Doors and God. A Gnostic Reading of Philip K. Dick’s *Ubik*”, Lee Braver views the novel through the lens of gnosticism. Due to the fact that Dick’s use of gnostic ideas was “well-known” (Braver 83), the author makes a good case³⁶.

Braver attempts to use the reading to contextualise the peculiar ways the novel contradicts itself.

Ubik is by no means Dick’s best-known or most popular work, but it has accumulated a small cult following. Thanks to the internet, people from all over the world can gather in newsgroups and on forums to discuss the finer details and background of complex and dense stories like this one. Some of the theories are incredibly well-thought out and would certainly warrant further academic study. Like *Wild Seed*, *Ubik* is an incredibly rich work, despite its relative brevity. Due to the constraints here, this chapter will attempt to focus on the immortality itself, and its effect on the characters and the world.

³⁵Unlike many of his other works, *Ubik* has not been adapted for film or television, which is not surprising, on reflection.

³⁶Dick himself embraced a similar reading (Braver 84).

5.3.1. Immortality: a social advance between life and death

Dick's depiction of immortality is unlike any which came before. In the following segment, I will attempt to summarise the concept behind half-life, before contextualising this novum in terms of the world where it is embedded.

Half-life

Did the moratorium finally manage to revive him? He wondered. And wired him to my phone? Runciter, as soon as he came around, would want to talk to me, probably before anyone else. But if so, why can't he hear me back? Why does it consist of one-way transmission only? Is it only a technical defect which will clear up?" (Dick ch. 8)

The concept of the half-life can perhaps be viewed not quite as immortality, but more as a postponement of death. In this world, there is the possibility to enter half-life – cryonic suspension which allows the deceased to continue to speak with the living. The characters find themselves in a sort of shadow world after death, a world which is partially created by technology, but remains largely unexplained. Over time, their connection to the real world fades, until they presumably fall entirely silent, becoming truly dead.

Ella, pretty and light-skinned; her eyes in the days when they had been open, had been bright and luminous blue. That would not again occur; he could talk to her and hear her answer; he could communicate with her ... but he would never again see her with her eyes opened; nor would her mouth move. She would not smile at his arrival. When he departed she would not cry. Is this worth it? he asked himself. Is this better than the old, the direct road from full-life to the grave? I still do have her with me, in a sense, he decided. The alternative is nothing. (Dick ch. 2)

However, unlike many of the other works, *Ubik* handles the quasi-immortality in a strange, almost religious and dreamlike way. As an example for how immortality shapes narrative, it is interesting, as it has little to do with the technological advances – which Dick deals with in his usual way, using his unique form of “technobabble” to set the scene enough for him to start exploring the more high-concept philosophical ideas which mark so much of his work. He focuses on the philosophical background of immortality without losing its SF edge.

The religious subtext permeates the story in several places, including during the first encounter with Ella, before her consciousness is overridden by Jory. The following is a conversation between Runciter and his wife, discussing a light she can see, which is considered a precursor to rebirth – another concept well-known in religious mythology, but never fully explained in SF terms.

‘Well, like they say, you’re heading for a new womb to be born out of. And that smoky red light – that’s a bad womb; you don’t want to go that way. That’s a humiliating, low sort of womb. You’re probably anticipating your next life, or whatever it is.’ He felt foolish, talking like this; normally he had no theological convictions. *But the half-life experience was real and it had made theologians out of all of them.*” (Dick ch. 2, italics mine)

Later, when Chip meets Ella and she gives him the eponymous Ubik to protect himself, this also has undertones of a divine visitation. While the text is not explicit, there is certainly some religious framing. One particularly telling part are the introductions to each chapter. Each one begins with an advert for Ubik functioning as a different product each time. The final chapter is headed by the following passage. “I am Ubik. Before the universe was, I am. I made the suns. I made the worlds. I created the lives and the places they inhabit; I move them here, I put them there. They go as I say, they do as I tell them. I am the word and my name is never spoken, the name which no one knows. I am Ubik, but that is not my name. I am. I always will be.” (Dick ch. 17)

It never does become clear what exactly Ubik is, though the chapter introductions suggest a banal metaphor for enslavement to commercial pleasures. Braver sees it again as a kind of metaphor for faith:

Ubik, the gift of the novel *Ubik*’s Redeemer figure, is an updated, modernized form of communion in convenient spraycan form. Although this form seems a bit blasphemous, like the drug communion of *The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldrich*, we must remember that the camouflage motif requires the Gnostic Redeemer to take on the form of the world he enters (“by adapting himself to the respective spheres and through a change in his outward appearance he outwits the demagurgic powers”). Since spraycans are a feature of our world, they make a perfectly sensible vehicle for salvation, no less so than science fiction as contemporary scripture. (Braver 101)

Societal aspect of immortality

Aside from the religious undertones, immortality in *Ubik* is clearly the product of social advance. This world clearly has advances beyond our own, including commercial space travel and rapid transit around the world, but also oddities like the coin-operated doors and run-of-the-mill psychics. At first it is implied that the cryonic suspension is only available for the affluent, as Runciter and the Swiss moratorium for Ella suggest. However, since Joe Chip and the “inertials” who worked for Runciter Associates are also in half-life after being killed by the blast, this then suggests that the option is also available to the less than extraordinarily wealthy³⁷.

³⁷ Then again, it might be part of the company’s health and insurance package. It is never explained.

An afterlife – created by whom?

In the final act of *Ubik*, Joe faces an exuberant Jory, who tells him that he consumes other half-lifers to prolong his own existence. The world around them was created by him, except for some of the elements beyond his control, such as the strange decay which causes objects and people to age and decay rapidly, and technology to return to earlier incarnations. Cars become increasingly old-fashioned, elevators become wooden and ornate, and so on. The decay of people is especially horrifying, as exemplified when Joe goes looking for his low-key love interest Wendy.

‘It can’t be an adult woman,’ said Joe. These could only be the remnants of a child; they were just too small. ‘It can’t be either Pat or Wendy,’ he said, and lifted the cloudy hair away from its face. ‘It’s like it was in a kiln,’ he said. ‘At a very high temperature, for a long time.’ The blast, he thought. The severe heat from the bomb. He stared silently then at the shrivelled, heat-darkened little face. And knew who this was. With difficulty, he recognised her. Wendy Wright. (Dick ch. 8)

Joe is rescued from Jory when Runciter appears and gives him *Ubik*, which delays his own decay. However, while Runciter has been appearing around the world, trying to get in touch with Joe in increasingly peculiar ways³⁸, he is not dead, and does not quite know what *Ubik* is or where it comes from. According to Braver, this makes for an unusual religious subtext.

Here we have something unprecedented in traditional Gnosticism – a partially ignorant Redeemer. Although Runciter is benevolent and does give them help [...] he lacks a complete grasp of the situation. [...] Indeed, we find out on the last page of the novel that he apparently shares their degraded condition, when he begins to experience Manifestations of Chip, implying that he is in half-life as well. (Braver 104)

Later, when Joe encounters Ella, she gives him a lifetime supply of *Ubik*, presumably insuring his immortality in face of the world-devourer Jory. She seems to know more, but does not elaborate much – only telling him that she and other half-lifers are working together to try and stop or at least curb Jory. There is no resolution for this, however, nothing suggesting that they are successful any further than giving unfortunates like Joe a preventative measure to inoculate themselves from the decay

³⁸These include coins with Runciter’s face on them, appearances on TV shows, phone calls where Runciter is talking, but cannot respond, and perhaps most eerily, in public toilet graffiti:

JUMP IN THE URINAL AND STAND ON
YOUR HEAD
I’M THE ONE THAT’S ALIVE. YOU’RE ALL
DEAD.
(Dick ch. 9)

which surrounds them. It raises many questions; not least what sort of half-life Joe really has to look forward to. Ella tells him to continue aiding Runciter after she disappears to reincarnate, thus putting him in the position of half-life advisor which she is now vacating.

5.3.2. Is *Ubik* still a Hero's Journey?

'I've heard of this,' Runciter said to Joe. 'It's a self-destruct humanoid bomb. Help me get everybody out of here. They just now put it on auto, that's why it floated upward.'

The bomb exploded.

Smoke, billowing everywhere in ill-smelling masses which clung to the ruptured walls and floor, sank and obscured the prone, twitching figure at Joe Chip's feet.

In Joe's ear Don Denny was yelling, 'They killed Runciter, Mr Chip. That's Mr Runciter.' (Dick ch. 6)

Ubik's narrative moves in slightly unpredictable ways, switching narrator after a few chapters when the bomb goes off, and switching back in the last. In between, there are passages where other characters narrate, before they step off-screen to die. "Decay vs. Runciter, Al said to himself. Throughout the world. Perhaps throughout the universe. Maybe the universe. Maybe the sun will go out, Al conjectured, and Glen Runciter will place a substitute sun in its place. If he can." (Dick ch. 9)

Due to this unconventional mode of storytelling, and the way the story starts with the ostensible death of the main character (who is apparently not really the protagonist, or at best, one of two), it might be tempting to believe that this Hero's Journey is reversed, or in some way entirely invalid, but in truth, the bare bones are still visible. *Ubik* still follows the journey formula, but remains more abstract. The complicated ending, which allows for multiple interpretations, still fits within the context of its own narrative, even though many readers struggled with it. A story like *Ubik* would lose its dreamlike philosophical quality if it were resolved beyond a doubt.

The heroes of this journey are connected to one another, so that the philosophical discoveries about life, half-life, immortality and the religious nature of the universe are shared. *Ubik* has less to do with personal journeys, one feels, and more with an intellectual exploration of a world which is barely seen and hardly understood. Dick allows the reader only a few confusing glimpses into his half-life world, before shutting the door for further questions.

5.3.3. Stages in *Ubik*

"'The UN ought to abolish half-life', Joe said. 'As interfering with the natural process of the cycle of birth and death.' Mockingly, Al Hammond said, 'If God approved of half-life, each of us would be born in a casket filled with dry ice.'" (Dick ch. 7) Due to the aforementioned complex nature of

protagonists, this is possibly the most complicated work in this paper to put through the analytical stages. The essential parts are still in place, but often in more surprising and philosophical ways.

Departure

1. Call to action – internal or external

The call in this story is to Runciter, when one of his “inertials” – people who can negate psychics, and are hired to protect his clients’ privacy – is registered missing. The interesting part here is that this Melipone, mentioned in the quote at the beginning of this chapter, never features again. This calls serves only to give the readers a view of the moratorium and the half-lifers, as well as the relationship with the living. It also gives the reader a first glimpse at Jory, who takes over Ella’s “frequency” as Runciter helplessly demands the moratorium attendants bring her back to the forefront.

2. First glimpse of new world

This is the moment when Joe Chip and his companions notice that something is amiss in their environment. There are multiple hints that the world is no longer the world they knew. Objects age increasingly rapidly, conjuring the idea of a kind of “half-life” as in nuclear physics, strange music plays, and all videos and phone calls are from Runciter, presumed either dead or in half-life. “Joe picked up the coffee cup, and found the coffee cold, inert and ancient; a scummy mold covered the surface. He set the cup back down in revulsion. What’s going on? He thought. What’s happening to me? His revulsion became, all at once, a weird, nebulous panic.” (Dick ch. 7)

According to Braver, this is the “paradigmatic phildickian moment”:

[T]he world Chip and the others experience begins to show cracks, leading them to question its reality. The three main features of this reality breakdown are 1) the acceleration of entropy, causing things and people to age rapidly and crumble, 2) the regression of technology to earlier stages, and 3) Manifestations of Runciter – that is, appearances of Runciter’s face or words in odd places. (Braver 89)

3. Alienation/Re-alienation/First threshold and despair

This is less the moment when Joe realises that he is dead, but rather when he finds out that his companions are decaying and dying around him. Death in the afterlife is coming for him as well, and he is fast becoming the only member left of his team.

Initiation

4. First Steps to Enlightenment

When Joe is rescued for the first time by Runciter, as well as when he learns that he can be protected by Ubik, and that Runciter still needs his help. However, Runciter only offers small comfort, as his knowledge about the half-life world is almost as sparse as Joe's.

5. Inner World/Outer World

This complex point occurs several times in the story, each time the narrative reverses. One example is when Joe discovers they are the dead ones, not Runciter. Another is the shift from believing Runciter is the ultimate saviour, only to learn that he is almost as ignorant as Joe himself. The final moment occurs as Runciter sees Joe's face and hears messages, implying the aforementioned reality shifts and questions.

6. Further Alienation/Second Despair

Joe begins to decay again, as Jory gloats over him, and the situation seems essentially impossible. Runciter's intervention feels like it was too little, in a world which was alien to him as well.

Onwards and Upwards

7. Glimmer of Hope

As Joe is rescued this time by Ella, she tells him about the resistance to Jory, the creation of Ubik, and her request for him to keep helping Runciter after she is gone. He is left with slightly more knowledge than before, and the reader has the sense that they have glimpsed a larger universe which will however remain hidden from them, since it remains concealed from Joe.

8. At home in neither

Finally, this most abstract point – the narrative goes back to Runciter, who is in the moratorium, conversing with Joe. In a last moment turnaround, he starts seeing Joe's face on coins, which raises the question of whose reality is real, a topic prevalent in many of Dick's worlds. Arguably, this last point applies to both Runciter and Joe Chip, as they are both in a strange space between life and death, or as in *Ubik*, life and half-life.

5.4. *The Man from Earth* by Jerome Bixby: A 14,000-year-old Cro-Magnon philosopher

JOHN. Would you really want to do that? Live fourteen thousand years?

HARRY. *(the Gershwin tune:)* “*But who calls that livin’, when no gal will give in, to no man who’s nine-hundred years?*”

ART. If I was healthy and didn’t age, why not?

LINDA. What a chance to learn!

[...]

HARRY. The more I think about it, it’s possible. Anything’s possible. One century’s magic is the next century’s science. They thought Columbus was nuts. Pasteur, Copernicus...

JOHN. Aristarchus, long before that. I had a chance to sail with Columbus, but I’m not the adventurous type. I was pretty sure the world was round - but still, he might fall off an edge someplace.

(Silence.)

ART. Look around you. We just did.” (Bixby 19)

The Man from Earth is an extraordinary creation in many ways. It was completed by writer Jerome Bixby on his deathbed, as a kind of pet project built from an episode he wrote for *Star Trek TOS* in the 1960s, titled “Requiem for Methuselah”³⁹. The *Star Trek* episode is about a man who claimed to be 6,000 years old. John Oldman, the protagonist of *The Man from Earth*, is allegedly 14,000 years old, although the movie never confirms or denies this for certain. There is a lot to be read into this SF thought experiment in minimalism, from the psychosocial to the philosophical and of course the question as to whether it really is SF at all. The entire movie takes place in and around the house which John is vacating, and mostly in his sitting room. The camera work is basic at best, apart from a couple of mildly artistic-looking shots, and the actor performance varies greatly, occasionally to the detriment of the movie. The film plays in real time, in keeping with the Aristotelian drama conventions. This setup might lend itself more comfortably to a stage, as it sometimes feels uncomfortably confining for a movie.

Why then examine this film, which cost around 200,000 dollars to make and looks like it, which has little action and does not answer a single question it raises? The reason is because among SF media, this is possibly the only example where the SF story is stripped bare of any paraphernalia, and left with immortality as the only novum in a world which otherwise very closely resembles our own⁴⁰. There are some stories which resemble it – modern vampire tales such as the works of Anne Rice, for instance, or the *Highlander* movies. But both of those and most other examples suggest a fantastical element, such as the invulnerability of the Highlander, or the existence of vampires, putting these and

³⁹Wayback machine: internet archive

⁴⁰The screenplay by Jerome Bixby even has a note at the beginning, saying that it plays in “the present”, rendering it timeless in its own way.

other firmly in the fantasy genre (or possibly horror, in the case of the vampires). *The Man from Earth* offers no explanation for John's fantastical longevity, but attempts to consider several – theological, biological, temporal or spiritual – through the questions of John's colleagues, who grow increasingly agitated as the evening progresses.

5.4.1. Is *The Man from Earth* Science Fiction?

“SF is, then, a literary genre whose necessary and sufficient conditions are the presence and interaction of estrangement and cognition, and whose main formal device is an imaginative framework alternative to the author's empirical environment.” (Suvin 20)

This question is of course partially rhetorical, or this film would have never made its way into this analysis. Despite this, I believe that the question is pertinent. Earlier, I attempted a definition of SF, but it is notoriously difficult to hedge in⁴¹.

In *Theorie der phantastischen Literatur* (2010), Uwe Durst lays out a model based on Toderov to describe the differences between fantastic and non-fantastic literature. He mentioned H.G. Wells's *The Invisible Man* (1897) which might be one the closest stories to *The Man from Earth* in its minimalist approach to SF. “In Wells' Roman *The Invisible Man* (1897) beispielsweise seien die Gesetze der fiktiven Welt mit denen der Wirklichkeit identisch, der Auftritt eines unsichtbaren Menschen ‘zerbricht die innere Ordnung der geschaffenen Fiktion.’” (Durst 37)

The introduction of the novum, when Dr. Griffin reveals his fascinating condition, is a break with the rest of the world, which otherwise was identical to ours, or rather, that of Wells at the turn of the century. This situates it firmly in SF territory, and then later additionally in that special horror of the late Victorian period which still remains so effective today.

But the next question, of course, is about the actual SF content of *The Man from Earth*. In *The Invisible Man*, there is no question within the narrative as to whether Dr. Griffin's invisibility is real. As far as the story is concerned, it is beyond doubt. But while John Oldman's immortality is strongly hinted at, it remains unproven. Is it still SF? Durst seems to think so. He cites Vladimir Solovyev: “Im wahrhaft Phantastischen wird immer eine äußere formelle Möglichkeit zu einer einfachen [natürlichen]

⁴¹I have an ongoing friendly feud with a colleague, who believes SF is a setting rather than a genre, and argues her point fairly. However, I still maintain that SF is a question of ideas, or nova, rather than just being used as set dressing. This is why I would not classify the recent action-adventure film *Passengers* (2016) as a SF film, despite it being set on a spaceship in a time far in the future. The concepts used, such as hibernation pods and commercial space travel, were nova in early SF, but as a result of their extremely widespread use, no longer can be considered hallmarks of original SF thought.

Erklärung aus dem gewöhnlichen, immerwährenden Zusammenhang der Erscheinungen offen gelassen, wobei aber diese Erklärung endgültig die innere Wahrscheinlichkeit verliert.“ (Durst 39)

Durst goes on to say:

Das dargestellte ‘übernatürliche’ Ereignis läßt (sic!) sich folglich, wie Tomasevskij kommentiert, “*doppelt interpretieren*”. Recht ähnlich klingen die Festlegungen M.R. James’ (1924): “It is not amiss to sometimes leave a loophole for a natural explanation; but, I would say, let the loophole be so narrow as not to be quite practicable.” Das Geschehen ist auf zweierlei Weisen erklärbar, nämlich zum einen in Beibehaltung naturwissenschaftlicher Gesetze, d.h. als Folge natürlicher Umstände; zum anderen durch Ursachen, die zur Naturwissenschaft im Widerspruch stehen. Die phantastische Literatur basiert auf dem ungelösten Streit zweier inkompatibler Erklärungsweisen.” (Durst 40)

Like much of horror literature, this SF leaves a “loophole” allowing for more than one possible interpretation. The tension created by the uncertainty is one of the main draws for this kind of story, be it something that appears to be supernatural horror, but turns out to be some more mundane sort of evil, or a man claiming to be a living Cro-Magnon and it turns out to be true.

“Der Zweifel über die Weltgesetze sei für das Phantastische konstitutiv, das Phantastische sei die *Unschlüssigkeit* (hésitation).” (Durst 41)

5.4.2. Who is the protagonist of *The Man from Earth*?

The entire concept of *The Man from Earth* hinges on John’s possible immortality. It influences the inciting incident, and it colours everything in the story, right from the first line:

(SETTING: Low desert in California. Winter. Late afternoon. An expanse of tan dirt, dotted with cacti. A small cabin a distance from the road, a log fence, an irregular patch of lawn.)

(A pickup truck is parked nearby; in it and near it are boxes of various items, many books, utensils, clothing, etc.)

[...]

(AT RISE: JOHN OLDMAN, wearing a sweater and jeans, lifts a box off the ground and hefts it into the bed of the truck.)

[...]

(We hear a car arrive O.S.; the door opens, closes. JOHN glances towards the sound...for a split-second, he looks impatient. He then waves at the visitor, DAN, who walks onstage wearing a warm winter jacket.)

DAN. *(coming up)* You don’t waste time.

JOHN. I try not to. (Bixby 9)

Immediately, the author sets up a kind of tension regarding time, which, especially upon reviewing, will immediately hit the viewer. The creators waste no time or dialogue, getting straight to the point of the film – time and the way its passage affects us. John attempts not to waste time – although he of all people can afford to.

ART. Ten Doctorates. Impressive. Have you taught them, John?

JOHN. Some. Look, you all might have done the same. Living fourteen thousand years didn't make me a genius. I just had time.

DAN. (*pondering*) Time...

(*A moment goes by. Everyone looking at DAN. He notices:*)

DAN. (*con't*) Oh. You can't see it, hear it, weigh it, you can't isolate it in a laboratory. It's our subjective sense of becoming – becoming what we are – instead of what we were a nanosecond ago – becoming what we will be in another nanosecond. The Hopi see time as a landscape, existing before and behind us. We move through it, slice by slice.

LINDA. Clocks measure time.

DAN. They measure themselves. The only objective referent of a clock is another one.

EDITH. Very interesting. What has it to do with John?

DAN. I wonder if he, somehow, exists outside of time, as we know it. (Bixby 54)

The film starts in earnest when John confesses to his colleagues that he is 140 centuries old. The quote cited at the beginning of the chapter marks the beginning of a conversation which lasts for almost the rest of the movie.

The discussion runs the gamut of philosophical, biological, psychological and spiritual, with varying levels of heat. His colleagues are a neat cross-section of academia – an anthropologist, a biologist, an art history professor, an archaeologist, a psychologist, and of course John and his girlfriend, Sandy, who are both historians. All the characters are complementary to the protagonist on several levels at the same time. The first is purely extra-personal and intellectual – between them, they can (and do) intelligently discuss the possibilities and ramifications of a man who does not die. The second level is the representation of inner conflict. As John listens patiently to each of them in turn, there are moments when the viewer suspects he has had every thought that they have on the subject of his immortality, and is thus just externalising his inner debate in a kind of social experiment. Finally, on the third, meta-narrative level, the side-characters as complementary to the main character are part of a literary device often used in writing, in order to better illustrate the conflicts within the main character. Consider the following passage from Robert McKee's acclaimed book on screenwriting, *Story*.

In essence, the protagonist creates the rest of the cast. All other characters are in a story first and foremost because of the relationship they strike to the protagonist and the way each helps to delineate the dimensions of the protagonist's complex nature. Imagine a cast as a kind of solar system with the protagonist as the sun, supported by the roles as planets around the sun, bit players as satellites around the planets – all held in orbit by the gravitational pull of the star at the center, each pulling at the tides of the others' natures. (McKee 379)

This very aptly describes the relationships between the supporting cast and the protagonist. But this still does not quite answer the question posed in the title of this chapter – who is the protagonist? Superficially speaking, the man who never dies, John Oldman, is the core of the story. He and his (at least to the other characters, alleged) immortality drive the narrative forward. In addition, he is the only character who has a certain amount of depth and dimension. The others, while interesting, are flat, more like sketches than fully-fleshed people, each with two to three possible modes. The psychiatrist Will Gruber is perhaps the most complex character after John, who has the most backstory and plot. He moves from amused to concerned to upset to cold anger to a mixture of joy and despair which proves to be fatal. The next most interesting character might be Dan the anthropologist, who runs the entire gamut of amusement to wonder to anger. The rest of the characters are far more two-dimensional, mostly notably perhaps Edith, the art historian, who is also a deeply Christian woman, or Art the archaeologist, who rides up on a motorcycle with a wide-eyed student on his arm, and is described in the character list as “desperately holding onto youth” (Bixby 6). These people mostly act in ways that are predictable for their characters, and yet without them, we the audience could not appreciate the story in its form. If we consider the second level listed above, then arguably then characters cannot really be separated from each other. Under a traditional viewpoint, we are certainly dealing with a lone protagonist surrounded by supporting or antagonistic characters. But under a more complex modern narrative analysis, I would argue that the mantle of protagonist is shared, at least a little bit, by these “satellites around the planet”, the side-characters who only exist in relation to the main character, creating a kind of loop.

5.4.3. Arguments for and against immortality

Throughout the entire film, the side-characters continuously come back to the question if John's story is true. It becomes increasingly unstable around the middle of the second act, where the different characters are at different levels of suspending disbelief.

DAN. Let me say something right here. There's no way in the whole world for John to prove his story to us, and there's no way to disprove it! No matter how outrageous we believe it is, and no matter how highly trained we believe we are, we absolutely can't disprove it. Our friend is either a caveman, a liar, or a nut. So while we're thinking about that, why not just go with it? He may jolt us into believing him, we may jolt him into reality.

EDITH. "Believing"?

ART. Whose reality? (Bixby 31)

The characters examine at length many of the theories which have been bandied about in academia and pop culture for decades. The biologist mentions a quirk in the immune system, allowing for "perfect detox" (Bixby 18), which is hardly a new idea, although probably scientifically outdated now, 11 years after the release of the film. However, the story is less about the theories, but rather about the characters' reactions to John's revelations. Each of the characters have their beliefs tested in their own ways, though the most strongly affected remain Gruber and Edith.

Edith's crisis

DAN. (*to EDITH, at first:*) Taken alone, the philosophical teachings attributed to Jesus are Buddhism with a Hebrew accent. Kindness, tolerance, brotherhood, love, and a ruthless realism acknowledging that life is as it is. Here and now. The Kingdom of God, meaning goodness, is on Earth. Or should be. That's where the Buddha brought it.

JOHN. And that's what I taught, but a snake made a lady eat an apple, so we're screwed. Heaven and Hell were peddled so priests were peddled so priests could rule through seduction and terror, so they could save our souls that we never lost in the first place. Hope is a bargain at any price. I threw a clean pass, and they ran it out of the ballpark.

EDITH. This is blasphemy! It's horrible! Who else were you? Solomon? Elvis? Jack the Ripper?

DAN. It's been said that Jesus and the Buddha would laugh or cry if they knew what's been done in their names.

HARRY. If there is a creator, maybe he feels the same way.

JOHN. I see rituals. Candles, processions, genuflecting, moaning, intoning, sprinkling water, venerating cookies and wine, and I think, "This isn't what I had in mind".

EDITH. That's Vatican flapdoodle! It doesn't have a thing to do with God! (Bixby 50)

Edith has the rather thankless role of a middle-aged spinsterish religious woman in a room full of more open-minded compatriots. She starts out with a playful warm relationship with John, which deteriorates rapidly at the mention of religion and Jesus. She forgives John by the end, but she makes up the emotional core of the story. She is the worst outcome in John's little experiment – the only person in his group of friends who is utterly hostile to him after his revelation, saying she feels like he has died for her. The resolution of her forgiving him at the end feels contrived, perhaps rushed, for the sake of closure. The viewer can appreciate her anger better than her final narrative turn.

Gruber's crisis

GRUBER. Are you a vampire, John? Even an unknowing one? Do you stand, alive and tall, in a graveyard you helped to fill?

DAN. *(hard)* That's going too far!

GRUBER. Bored? Perhaps lonely, because your heart cannot keep its treasures. Is that your doing? Have you had a wrongful life? Perhaps it is time to die.

(His hand, having moved back to his pocket, he now quickly draws out an old revolver.

GRUBER aims it at **JOHN**, unsteadily.)

(DAN takes a quick angry step. Then a more deliberate one, to stand over GRUBER.)

DAN. I don't know what John is doing, but I sure as hell don't like what you are doing! Knock it off, or I'll break your Goddamn arm!

GRUBER. Ah Dan, you sound like our football coach.

(GRUBER rises, still shakily aiming the pistol at JOHN.)

GRUBER. *(rising)* What do you think, John? A shot to the arm, perhaps we can watch it heal. A bullet in the head...what exactly would happen?

(JOHN holds his gaze at GRUBER, utterly calm, immobile. DAN shifts his weight between his feet, deciding when to make his move –)

(Suddenly GRUBER's arm drops.)

GRUBER. *(con't.)* I have papers to correct. Much as I dislike the job, it will be preferable to this. I leave you with it. (...) (Bixby 40)

As mentioned before, Gruber is the most complicated of the side-characters. He has a backstory – his wife died the day before – and a history with John, which only becomes clear to him in the final moments of the film, and shocks him so deeply that his already weak heart gives out. Between him and Edith, John's worst fears might be confirmed or surpassed – the revelation of his life result in losing the friendship of one person, and shocking another friend so badly he loses his life. They represent the reason why John has maybe hesitated for centuries to tell anyone about his condition.

The finale is at the urging of Gruber on behalf of Edith, and, perhaps less consciously on his own behalf as well. He is repentant of his actions, but still needs John to break the spell.

JOHN. The biblical Jesus said, "Who do you think I am?" He gave them a choice. I'm giving you one.

EDITH. ...*Were* you?

JOHN. If I said no, could you ever be sure?

(Ten seconds of silence. Only the intermittent wind, the crackle-pop of the fire. Then a sob, in the darkness.

EDITH. *Finally she's crying.*

LINDA tries to console her. *The sobs grow. Suddenly:)*

GRUBER. *(nods at CD-player).* Turn that off, please.

(**JOHN** *does so*)

This has gone far enough. It has gone much too far. These people are very upset. I don't believe you are mad, but what you are saying is not true! That leaves one explanation. The time has come when you must admit this is a hoax, a lie. Isn't that true, John? If you don't stop this now – if you can – I'll be convinced that you need a great deal of attention. I can have you committed for observation. You know that. I ask you now, I demand it, that you tell these people the truth! Give them closure. (*off JOHN's silence*). It is time. Please.

(**EDITH** *has been crying during the above, but less and less as she hears what's being said.*)

(**JOHN** *remains silent for a moment. But his expression, looking around, tells it all.*)

JOHN. End of the line. Everybody off. (Bixby 59).

At the end, he attempts to repair the damage by claiming it was all an elaborate hoax, but this only serves to further alienate his friends. In attempting to show his true nature, he finds himself alone once again, his experiment having failed drastically.

5.4.4. Stages in The Man from Earth

Unlike in the other works analysed in this paper, *The Man from Earth* has little in the way of physical movement. In addition, while John is clearly the protagonist, the side-characters can still be viewed as extensions of himself, his own inner nature fighting over truths and half-truths. Thus, these stages are by far the most metaphorical of all the works, and apply to different people at different times, rather than only one central character.

It must also be noted that many of the steps are repeated or run cyclically throughout the film. The despair/enlightenment steps, for example, follow each other in waves, and sometimes occur simultaneously in different characters. In the list below, they are simplified to allude to this.

Departure

1. Call to action – internal or external

John's departure from the college, and his colleagues throwing him a little going-away party, set off his desire – seemingly on a whim – to tell them about himself.

2. First glimpse of new world

John's mention of his knowledge of Columbus.

3. Alienation/Re-alienation/First threshold and despair

The first aggressive rejection by Edith, which clearly distresses John. She is calmed by the others. Another possibility would be the moment when John steps outside, and the others call in the psychiatrist.

Initiation

4. First Steps to Enlightenment

This is arguably when the side characters start to fall under John's spell – especially, Art, Harry and Dan. They want to know more. Gruber, however, storms out.

5. Further Alienation/Second Despair

This is both the scene where Gruber returns with a gun, and Edith's crisis of faith.

Onwards and Upwards

6. Glimmer of Hope

The discussion of religion in a straightforward and rational manner, where Dan and Harry strive to reassure Edith. For a while, it looks as though John can leave this group of people behind with an open heart and a clear conscience, something he seems to desire. Otherwise, the risk might simply be too great.

7. Alienation loses grip

When Gruber demands, or rather pleads with John to release them from his story, John decides to tell them it was a hoax. He admits that their interest in his possessions and their questions led him to it, and they react with some form of anger, disbelief or relief.

8. The man from Earth has no home. He is free to continue.

When the rest of the party leaves and the ambulance takes away Gruber, John remains alone with his girlfriend. She joins him in the car, but the fact that they cannot have a happy ending, as he reiterates once more, leaves them with a bittersweet finale, even as they drive off together.

6. IN CONCLUSION: NOTHING BUT TIME

Immortality is one of those great human dreams, and as the genre of dreaming, SF is one of the ideal places to explore the idea. I set out to examine how immortality was depicted in SF, and what if any possible narratological impact immortality had on the story. The types of immortality were well-depicted in the chosen works, and I endeavoured to analyse them according to the experimental model, which strove to fuse the approaches of theorists Suvin and Malmgren with the flawed but useful proto-model of Campbell to create a new toolbox for the analysis of immortality in SF.

As mentioned in chapter 3, immortality is one of the literary conceits, like one true love, which continues to capture the imagination of readers and viewers, as it touches on some of the most human of desires – to persist, in one form or another, as Dylan Thomas suggests. Whether in the disturbing *Wild Seed*, the melancholy *Man from Earth*, the deeply weird *Ubik* or the grim noir *Altered Carbon*, immortality occupies the centre of the story, and its biggest influence on the narrative is in its manipulation of how time is perceived. “Time and space are thus more than background elements in narrative; they are part of its fabric, affecting our basic understanding of a narrative text and of the protocols of different narrative genres. They profoundly influence the way in which we build mental images of what we read.” (Herman 52)

In the works which were analysed, the character’s understanding of time and the way they traverse the narrative spaces is strongly influenced by the fact that they have far longer life-spans than real-life humans. Their story time (Herman 54) is elongated and changed, and their actions and motivations are often driven by these facts. Kovacs of *Altered Carbon* moves through the world with far more confidence and recklessness than even an elite soldier in the real world would, because he does not fear death like we do. He knows that if he body is killed, he has a high chance of his cortical stack being discovered and him being uploaded into a new body – an unpleasant experience, but nothing like dying. In *Wild Seed*, Anyanwu can recover from almost anything, and defend herself against anyone, and Doro, until he is defeated at a mental level by his descendent Mary, can jump from body to body, stealing the life from any would-be murderer. Due to their extreme longevity, these characters are capable of making plans which can run for hundreds, even thousands of years, such as Doro’s genetic breeding programme. Their perception of time is also utterly altered by immortality, giving the storytellers new possibilities for narrative.

These two examples of immortality have aspects of being gifts and burdens both, as all three protagonists often leave their families and homes behind in history, as they move forward alone.

The situation is similar for John Oldman, the eponymous *Man from Earth*. His life is more complicated, as he does not appear to have any supernatural abilities, so he is forced to continuously move on, once every ten years or so. If one considers how many moves this means spread across the 14 centuries he has been alive, one might get a sense of how much he must have left behind over the millennia.

Finally, and oddest of all are Joe Chip and his compatriots in *Ubik*, whose world is coloured by the strange moratoriums, giving people a new lease on something like life. Like with *Altered Carbon*, the prospect of death is perhaps less terrifying, but unlike Kovacs' world, this condition is irreversible and marked by deterioration.

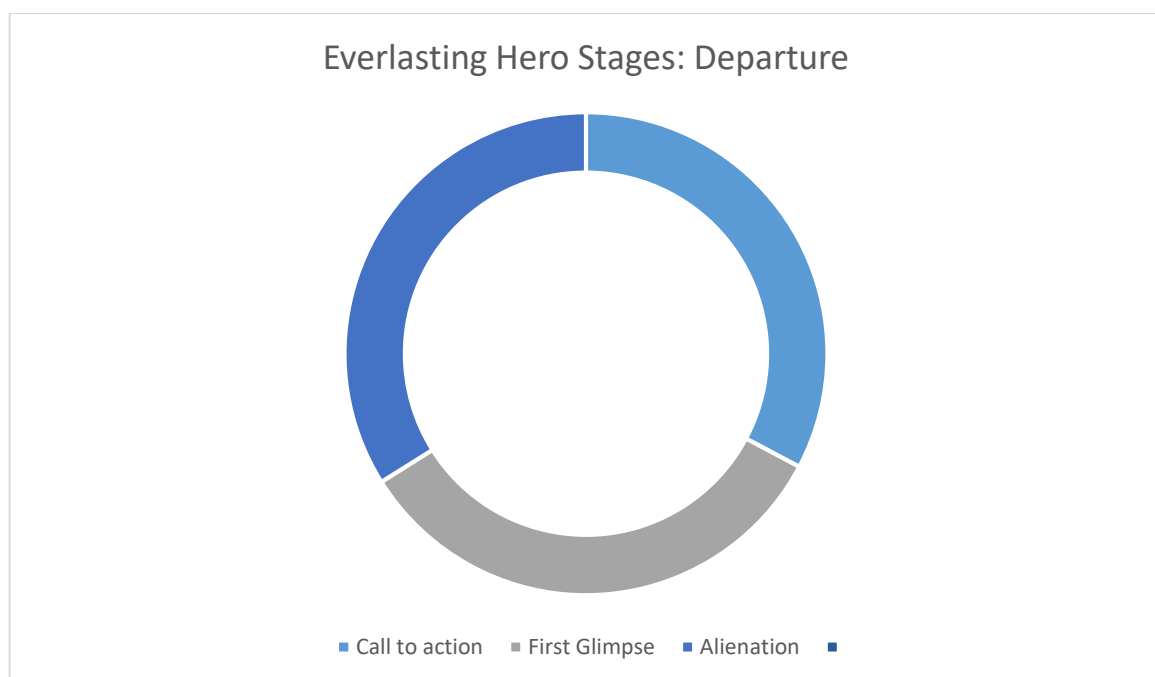
Marking the forms immortality took in SF media was a less challenging undertaking than attempting to isolate the exact narratological impact of immortality on SF literature. Since the model was designed for the examination of immortality-related SF fiction, a more extensive analysis would require a comparative model – for SF literature which does not contain immortality themes, but where the narrative blocks are similar enough to warrant some kind of meaningful comparison. In the Appendices, I have laid out the works in a chart offering a quantitative analysis of uses and application of immortality, as well as a comparative examination of the prevalence of the narrative blocks in relevant SF literature. For the purposes of this paper, however, I think it suffices to say the impact of immortality is undeniable but exceedingly complex, and that further study could yield fascinating new academic perspectives.

Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow
Creeps in this petty pace from day to day
To the last syllable of recorded time;
And all our yesterdays have lighted fools
The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle!
Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player,
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,
And then is heard no more. It is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
Signifying nothing. (Shakespeare 54)

7. APPENDIX A: Charts for Everlasting Hero Stages

The pie charts give a quantitative overview of the stages in the model, which offers a statistic overview of the distribution and frequency of the individual stages. The table is aimed at illustrating the exact steps per individual work.

Due to the relatively small sample size of the available works of SF involving immortality, it would be unwise to try and draw any absolute conclusions from this data. One might use the available information, such as the relative frequency of the Departure stages, compared to the more differing Initiation stages, to start a further, more in-depth study of the narrative framework of SF stories involving immortality. A wider study, as mentioned before, contrasting SF with immortality narratives with SF without them, could also yield interesting results.

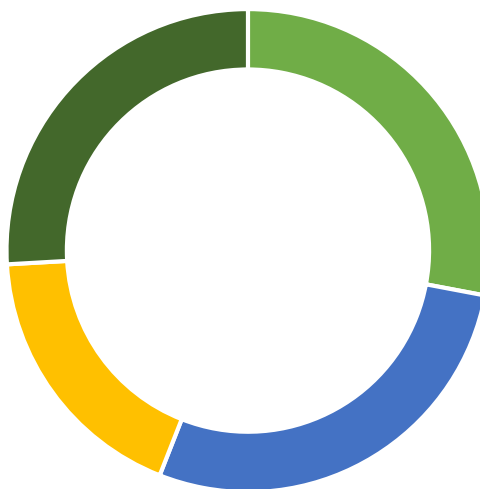


Everlasting Hero Stages: Initiation



■ First Steps to Enlightenment ■ Meeting with Temptation ■ Inner/Outer World ■ Further Alienation

Hero Everlasting Stages: Onwards and Upwards



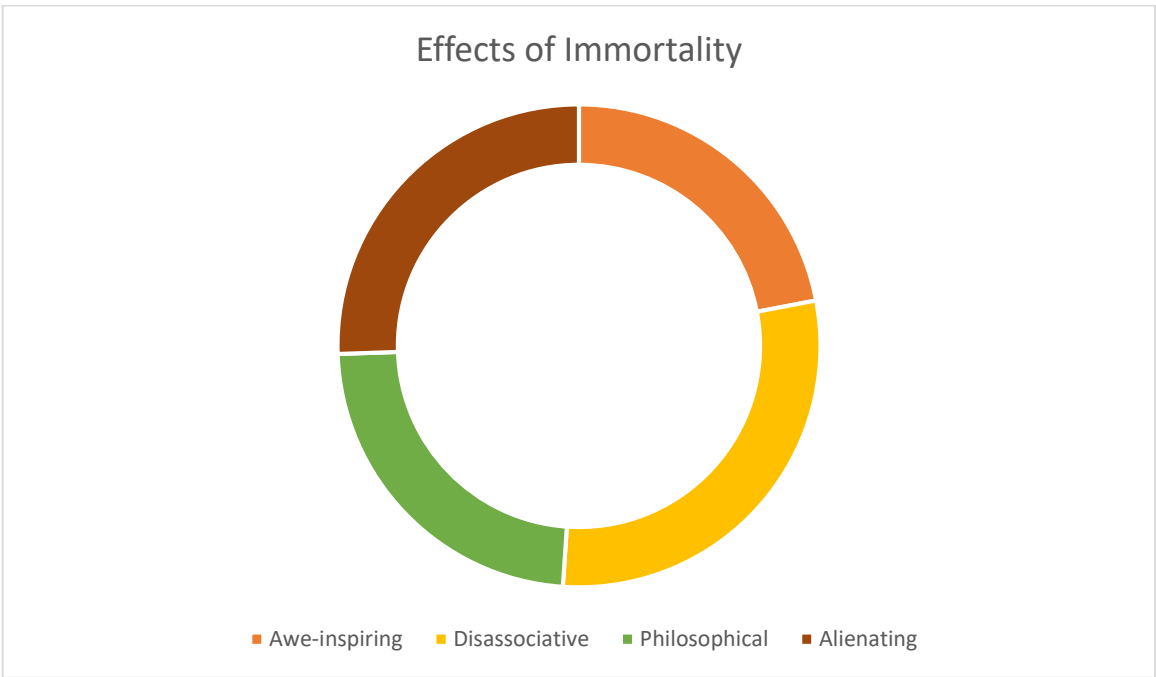
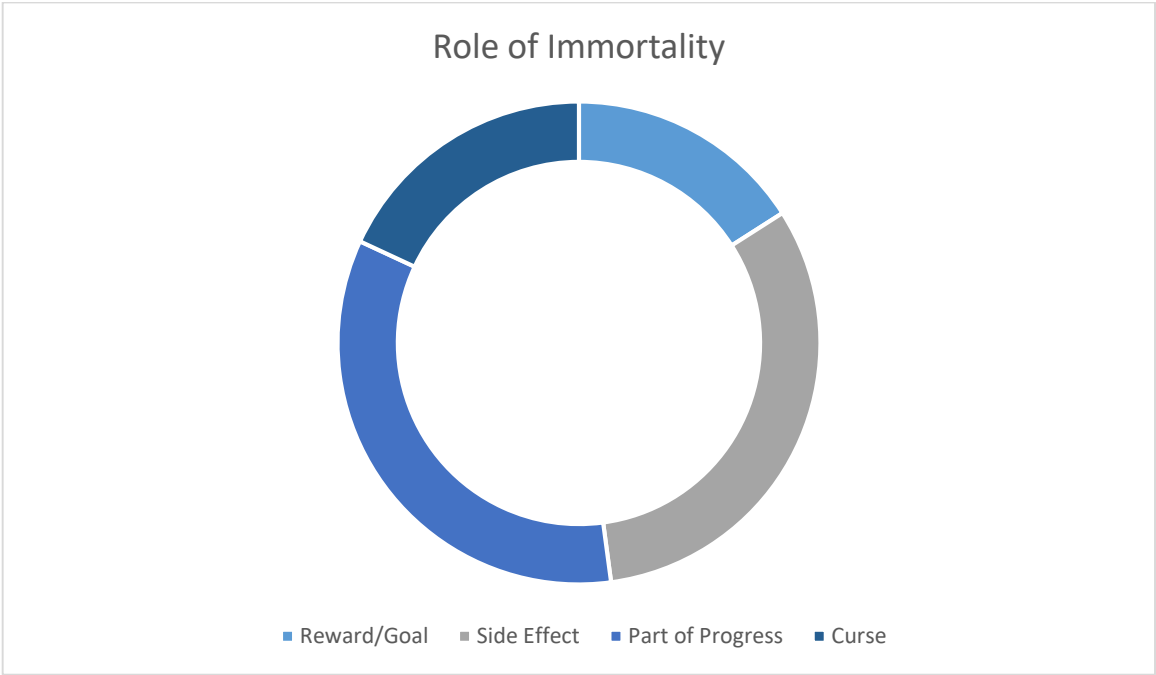
■ Glimmer of Hope ■ Final Struggle ■ Two Worlds ■ Freedom to continue

Appendix A. Hero Everlasting Stages

Author	Work	Departure			Initiation				Onward and Upwards			
		Call to action	First glimpse	Alienation	First Steps to Enlightenment	Temptation	Inner/Outer World	Further Alienation	Glimmer of Hope	Final Struggle	Master of two worlds	Freedom to continue
LITERATURE												
Adams, Douglas	Hitchhiker's Guide	✓	✓	✓				✓		✓		✓
Asimov, Isaac	Foundation Series	✓	✓	✓				✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	The Robots of Dawn	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Prelude to Foundation	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Amidon, Christine	The Immortality Virus	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓
Anderson, Kevin J.	Hopscotch	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Anderson, Paul	The Boat of a Million Years	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓				✓
Bridgy, Jerome	The Man from Earth	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓		✓
Burke, Octavia K.	Wild Seed	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
Bova, Ben	Stars, won't you hide me			✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
Cross, Ted	The Immortality Game	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
Dick, Philip K.	Ubik	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓	
Egan, Greg	Diaspora	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓
Ellison, Harlan	I Have No Mouth and I Must Scream	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Holderman, Joe	The Forever War	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Harrison, M. Joe	Light	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓
Hamilton, Robert A.	Pandora's Star	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	
Heinlein, Robert	Mechanica's Children	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Time Enough for Love		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓
Magary, Drew	The Postmortal	✓	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓	✓		✓
Moderie, L.E.	Gravity Dreams	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Moorcock, Michael	The Hollow Lands	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Morgan, Richard J.	Altered Carbon	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
O'Malley, Daniel	The Road	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Pohl, Fredrik	The World at the End of Time	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Reynolds, Alastair	Chasm City	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Scalzi, John	Old Man's War	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
	The Dispatcher	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓		
Schacley, Robert	Immortality, Inc.	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓		
Scheffeld, Charles	Tomorrow and Tomorrow	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Simmons, Dan	Hyperion Cantos	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Simmons, Jeff	The Electric Church	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓
Sterling, Bruce	Holy Fire	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓				✓
Stross, Charles	Accelerando	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓				✓
Vance, Jack	To Live Forever	✓	✓	✓				✓	✓	✓		✓
Van Vogt, A.E.	The World of Null-A	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Vornegut, Kurt	Slaughterhouse Five	✓	✓	✓				✓	✓			
Westerfield, Scott	The Rising Empire	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
Zelazny, Roger	This Immortal	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
TV SERIES												
	Battlestar Galactica	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Star Trek	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
	MinFits	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Dr. Who	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Stargate	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Ghost in the Shell	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Forever	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
MOVIES												
	Edge of Tomorrow	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	The Matrix Trilogy	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	The Fountain		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
	Cronos	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
	Immortal	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Man from Earth	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓		✓
	Prometheus	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
	In Time	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	The Arrival	✓	✓	✓	✓						✓	
	Jupiter Ascending	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓
	Self/less	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
COMPUTER GAMES / OTHER												
	Tides of Numenera	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Prey	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Soma	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

8. APPENDIX B: Chart for Effects of Immortality

Like in the previous appendix, the pie charts show distribution and frequency, and the table shows a more exact layout.



Appendix B. Effects of Immortality

Author	Work	Role of Immortality				Effects of Immortality			
		Reward / Goal	Side Effect	Part of Progress	Curse	Awe-inspiring	Disassociative	Philosophical	Alienating
LITERATURE									
Adam, Douglas	Hitchhiker's Guide								
Asimov, Isaac	Foundation Series			✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
	The Robots of Dawn			✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
	Prelude to Foundation			✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
Amsden, Christine	The Immortality Virus		✓	✓	✓		✓		✓
Anderson, Kevin J.	Hopscotch		✓	✓			✓	✓	
Anderson, Poul	The Boat of a Million Years						✓	✓	✓
Bixby, Jerome	The Man from Earth		✓			✓	✓	✓	✓
Butler, Octavia K.	Wild Seed		✓		✓	✓	✓		✓
Bova, Ben	Stars, won't you hide me		✓		✓		✓		✓
Cross, Ted	The Immortality Game	✓		✓				✓	
Dick, Philip K.	Ubik	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	
Egan, Greg	Diaspora			✓			✓	✓	✓
Ellison, Harlan	I Have No Mouth and I Must Scream				✓		✓		
Halderman, Joe	The Forever War		✓	✓			✓		✓
Harrison, M. Joe	Light	✓	✓		✓			✓	✓
Hamilton, Robert A.	Pandora's Star			✓				✓	
Heinlein, Robert	Mehtuselah's Children	✓		✓					
	Time Enough for Love				✓		✓	✓	✓
Magary, Drew	The Postmortal			✓	✓	✓	✓		
Modesitt, L.E.	Gravity Dreams		✓		✓				✓
Moorcock, Michael	The Hollow Lands		✓		✓		✓	✓	
Morgan, Richard J.	Altered Carbon	✓		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
O'Malley, Daniel	The Rook	✓		✓			✓		✓
Pohl, Fredrik	The World at the End of Time		✓			✓	✓		
Reynolds, Alistair	Chasm City		✓	✓			✓		✓
Scalzi, John	Old Man's War	✓		✓		✓		✓	✓
	The Dispatcher		✓			✓		✓	
Scheckley, Robert	Immortality, Inc.			✓		✓	✓	✓	
Scheffield, Charles	Tomorrow and Tomorrow		✓				✓	✓	✓
Simmons, Dan	Hyperion Cantos		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Sommers, Jeff	The Electric Church	✓					✓		✓
Sterling, Bruce	Holy Fire	✓		✓		✓	✓		
Stross, Charles	Accelerando	✓		✓			✓	✓	✓
Vance, Jack	To Live Forever	✓				✓			
Van Vogt, A.E.	The World of Null-A		✓		✓			✓	
Vonnegurt, Kurt	Slaughterhouse Five		✓				✓		
Westerfield, Scott	The Risen Empire		✓				✓		✓
Zelazny, Roger	This Immortal		✓						
TV SERIES									
	Battlestar Galactica			✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
	Star Trek			✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
	Misfits			✓		✓			
	Dr. Who			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Stargate			✓		✓	✓		✓
	Ghost in the Shell		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	
	Forever		✓		✓	✓	✓		✓
MOVIES									
	Edge of Tomorrow		✓			✓		✓	
	The Matrix Trilogy		✓					✓	
	The Fountain		✓		✓		✓	✓	✓
	Cronos	✓			✓	✓		✓	
	Immortal		✓					✓	✓
	Man from Earth		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Prometheus			✓		✓			✓
	In Time	✓		✓		✓	✓		
	The Arrival		✓			✓	✓		
	Jupiter Ascending			✓		✓	✓		✓
	Self/Less	✓				✓		✓	✓
COMPUTER GAMES / OTHER									
	Tides of Numenera	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Prey		✓	✓					✓
	Soma		✓	✓		✓			✓

9. BIBLIOGRAPHY

2001: A Space Odyssey. Stanley Kubrick. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1968. DVD.

Abbott, Porter H. *The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative*. 2nd ed. Cambridge: UP, 2010.

Adams, Douglas. *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*. 1979. New York: Del Rey, 2005.

Alber, Jan and Monika Fludernik, ed. *Postclassical Narratology: Approaches and Analyses*. Columbus: Ohio State UP, 2010.

Alderman, Naomi. *The Power*. United Kingdom: Penguin, 2016.

Alias. J.J.Abrams. Buena Vista Television,2001-2006. TV series

Alien. Ridley Scott. 20th Century Fox, 1979.

Allan, Kathryn, ed. *Disability in Science Fiction. Representations of Technology as Cure*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013.

Alsford, Mike. *What if?: religious themes in science fiction*. London: Darton, Longann & Todd, 2000.

Altered Carbon. Laeta Kalogridis. Netflix. 2018. TV Series.

Amsden, Christine. *The Immortality Virus*. Kingsport: Paladin Timeless Books, 2011.

Anderson, Keven J..*Hopscotch*. Boston: Spectra, 2003.

Anderson, Poul. *The Boat of a Million Years*. New York: Tor Books, 1989.

Asimov, Isaac. *I, Robot*. 1950. New York: Bantam Dell, 2004. Kindle file.

-----*. Foundation Trilogy*. 1951-1953. London: Everyman, 2014.

-----. *The Robots of Dawn*. 1983. New York: Random House, 1994.

-----. *Prelude to Foundation*. New York: Doubleday, 1988.

Atwood, Margaret. *The Handmaid's Tale*. 1985. London: Vintage, 2010. Kindle file.

-----. *Oryx and Crake*. 2003. Canada: Seal, 2004.

Babylon 5. J. Michael Straczynski. Warner Bros. Domestic Television Distribution, 1993-1998. TV Series.

Banks, Iain M. *Use of Weapons*. London: Orbit, 1990.

Barry, Peter. *Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory*. 2nd ed. Manchester: Manchester UP, 2002.

Battlestar Galactica. Ronald D. Moore. NBC Universal Television Distribution, 2004-2009. TV Series

Beckett, Chris. *Dark Eden*. Great Britain: Corvus, 2012.

Bova, Ben. "Stars, won't you hide me?" Future Crime. Ed. Ben Bova. USA: Tor. 1990.

Bixby, Jerome. *Man from Earth*. New York: Samuel French, 2008.

Black Mirror. Charlie Brooker. Channel 4/Netflix, 2011-present. Netflix series.

Bonheim, Helmut. "Shakespeare's Narremes." Shakespeare Survey 53: Shakespeare and Narrative. Ed. Peter Holland. Cambridge: UP, 2000. 1-11.

Booker, Marvin Keith and Anne-Marie Thomas, ed. *The science fiction handbook*. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009.

Bradbury, Ray. *Fahrenheit 451*. 1951. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2012.

Braver, Lee. "Coin-Operated Doors and God: A Gnostic Reading of Philip K. Dick's *Ubik*." *Extrapolation: A Journal of Science Fiction and Fantasy* 56.1 (2015): 83-110.

Burroughs, Edgar Rice. *A Princess of Mars*. 1912. USA: Project Gutenberg, 2013.

Butler, Octavia. *Seed to Harvest*. 2007. Great Britain: Headline, 2014. Kindle file.

-----, *Dawn*. 1987. New York: Warner, 1997.

Campbell, Joseph. *The Hero With A Thousand Faces*. 3rd Rev. ed. Novato, California: New World Library, 2008.

Canavan, Gerry. "Bred to Be Superhuman: Comic Books and Afrofuturism in Octavia Butler's Patternist Series". *Paradoxa* 25 (2013): 253-287.

Card, Orson Scott. *Ender's Game*. 1977. New York: Tom Doherty Associates, 1991.

-----, *How to Write Science Fiction and Fantasy*. Cincinnati, Ohio: Writer's Digest, 1990.

Clarke, Arthur C. *2001: a Space Odyssey*. 1968. New York: Ace, 2000.

Cline, Ernest. *Ready Player One*. 2011. Great Britain: Arrow, 2012.

Collins, Suzanne. *The Hunger Games*. 2008. London: Scholastic, 2009.

Connor, Kimberly Rae. "The Speed of Belief: Religion and Science Fiction, an Introduction to the Implicit Religions of Science Fiction." *Implicit Religion* 17.4 (2014): 367-77.

Cronos. Guillermo del Toro. Prime Films S.L., 1993

Cross, Ted. *The Immortality Game*. US: Breakwater Harbour Books, 2014.

"Death". *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. 2008. 30 May 2018.

Descartes, René. *Discourse on Method and Meditations on First Philosophy*. 1637. Trans. Donald A. Cress. Cambridge, MA: Hackett, 1999.

Dick, Philip K. *The Man in the High Castle*. 1962. London: Penguin, 2014.

-----, *Ubik*. 1969. London: London: Orion, 2010. Kindle file.

Dickenson, Emily. "My life closed twice before its close (96)". *Poets.org*. Academy of American Poets, 1996. 26 May 2018.

Dr. Who. Sydney Newman, C.E. Webber and Donald Wilson. BBC, 1963-2018. TV series

Durst, Uwe. *Theorie der phantastischen Literatur*. Berlin: Lit. Verlag, 2010.

Edge of Tomorrow. Doug Liman. Warner Brothers, 2014.

Egan, Greg. *Diaspora*. London: Millenium, 1997.

Ellis, Warren. *Transmetropolitan*. New York: Helix/Vertigo, 1997-2002. Graphic novel series.

Ellison, Harlan. *I Have No Mouth and I Must Scream*. 1967. New York: Open Road Media, 2014.

Eriksen, Thomas Hylland. *Small Places, Large Issues: An Introduction to Social and Cultural Anthropology*. 2nd ed. London: Pluto, 2001.

E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial. Steven Spielberg. Universal Pictures, 1982. DVD.

Ferreira, Maria Aline. "Symbiotic Bodies and Evolutionary Tropes in the Work of Octavia Butler." *Science Fiction Studies* 37.3 (2010): 401-415.

Forever. Matt Miller./Warner Bros Television Distribution, 2014-2015. TV series.

Forstrom, K. Joanna S. *John Locke and Personal Identity: Immortality and Bodily Resurrection in Seventeenth-Century Philosophy*. New York: Continuum, 2010.

The Fountain. Darren Aronofsky. Warner Bros. Pictures, 2006.

Frazer, James George. *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion*. 1922. London: Macmillan, 1983.

Fritsch, Matthias J., Martin Lindwedel and Thomas Schärfl, ed. *Wo nie zuvor ein Mensch gewesen ist. Science-Fiction-Filme: Angewandte Philosophie und Theologie*. Regensburg: Pustet, 2003.

Gattaca. Andrew Niccol. Columbia Pictures, 1997. DVD.

Gibson, William. *Neuromancer*. 1984. London: HarperCollins, 2010. Kindle file.

Goethe, Johann Wolfgang von. *Faust, eine Tragödie (Faust I)*. 1829. Frankfurt am Main: Surkamp, 2009.

Haldeman, Joe. *The Forever War*. 1999. Great Britain: Orion, 2010.

Hamilton, Robert A. *Pandora's Star*. London: Del Rey, 2005.

Harari, Yuval Noah. *Homo Deus: A Brief History of Tomorrow*. London: Vintage, 2017.

Harrison, John M. *Light*. London: Gollancz, 2002.

Harvey, Graham. *Shamanism: A Reader*. London: Routledge, 2003.

Hauser, Linus. *Weltuntergang, Weltübergang: Science-fiction zwischen Religion und Neomythos*. Altenberge: Telos, 1989.

Hawking, Stephen W. *A Brief History of Time: From the Big Bang to Black Holes*. London: Bantam, 1988.

Herbert, Frank. *Dune*. 1965. New York: Ace, 2010.

Heinlein, Robert A. *Starship Troopers*. 1959. New York: Ace, 2003.

-----, *Stranger in a Strange Land*. 1968. New York: Ace, 1987.

-----, *Time Enough for Love*. 1974. Kent: New English Library/Hodder and Stoughton, 1990.

-----, *Methuselah's Children*. New York: Gnome Press, 1958.

Herman, David, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Narrative*. 5th ed. Cambridge: UP, 2011.

Hume, David. *A Treatise of Human Nature*. 1738. Gloucester: Dodo, 2009.

Huxley, Aldous. *Brave New World*. London: Chatto & Windus, 1972.

The Imaginarium of Doctor Parnassus. Terry Gilliam. Lionsgate, 2009.

Immortal. Enki Bilal. First Look Pictures, 2004.

"Immortality." Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy. 1995. 26 May 2018.

<

www.iep.utm.edu/immortal/>

I, Robot. Alex Proyas. 20th Century Fox, 2004. DVD.

James, Edward and Farah Mendlesohn, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Science Fiction*. 8th ed. Cambridge: UP, 2010.

Keown, Daniel. *Buddhism. A very short Introduction*. 1996. Oxford: UP, 2013.

Keyes, Daniel. *Flowers for Algernon*. 1966. Great Britain: Orion, 2002.

Klein, Klaus-Peter, ed. *Zukunft zwischen Trauma und Mythos. Science-fiction: zur Wirkungsästhetik, Sozialpsychologie und Didaktik eines literarischen Massenphänomens*. Stuttgart: Klett, 1976.

Klimek, Sonja. *Paradoxes Erzählen: die Metalyse in der phantastischen Literatur*. Paderborn: Mentis, 2010.

Kraemer, Ross Shepard, William Cassidy and Susan L. Schwartz. *Religions of Star Trek*. Boulder: Westview, 2001.

Labahn, Michael and Manfred Lang, ed. *Lebendige Hoffnung – ewiger Tod?!: Jenseitsvorstellungen im Hellenismus, Judentum und Christentum*. Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2007.

Lake, Kirsopp. *Immortality and the Modern Mind*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1922.

Lamont, Corliss. *Issues of immortality: A study in implications*. New York: Holt, 1989.

LeGuin, Ursula K. *The Left Hand of Darkness*. 1969. New York: Ace, 2010.

----- . *Changing Planes*. 2003. New York: Penguin Putnam, 2005.

Lem, Stanislaw. *The Star Diaries*. 1957. San Diego: Mariner, 1985.

Magary, Drew. *The Postmortal*. London: Penguin, 2011.

Malmgren, Carl D. *Worlds Apart: Narratology of Science Fiction*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 1991.

“Man from Earth: Director/Producer’s Blog”. Wayback Machine Internet Archive. 30 May 2018.
<https://web.archive.org/web/20130522052901oe_/http://www.manfromearth.com/MFE-DirectorsBlog.html>

Man from Earth. Richard Schenkman. Anchor Bay Entertainment/Shoreline Entertainment, 2007.
DVD

Mass Effect. BioWare. USA: Microsoft Game Studios, Electronic Arts, 2007.

The Matrix. The Wachowski Brothers. Warner Bros Pictures, 1999.

The Matrix Reloaded. The Wachowski Brothers. Warner Bros. Pictures, 2003.

The Matrix Revolution. The Wachowski Brothers. Warner Bros. Pictures, 2003.

McKee, Robert. *Story: Substance, Structure, Style, and the Principles of Screenwriting*. 1998. Massachusetts: Methuen, 2014.

Milner, Andrew. *Locating Science Fiction*. 2012. Liverpool: UP, 2014.

Misfits. Howard Overman. Clerkenwell Films, 2009-2013. TV series

Modesitt, L.E..*Gravity Dreams*. New York: Tor, 1999.

Moorcock, Michael. *The Hollow Lands*. St Albans: Granada, 1981.

More, Thomas. *Utopia*. 1516. Trans. Clarence H. Miller. New Haven: Yale UP.

Morgan, Richard. *Altered Carbon*. 2001. Great Britain: Gollancz, 2008. Kindle file.

Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft*, 1882. Zeno.org. 30 May 2018.

<<http://www.zeno.org/Philosophie/M/Nietzsche,+Friedrich/Die+fr%C3%B6hliche+Wissenschaft/Dittes+Buch/125.+Der+tolle+Mensch>>

Okorafor, Nnedi. *Who Fears Death*. 2010. New York: Daw, 2014.

Olson, Eric T. "Is there a Bodily Criterion of Personal Identity?" *Identity and Modality*. Ed. Fraser MacBride. Clarendon P, 2006. 242 ff. U of Sheffield. 25 May 2018

<https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/polopoly_fs/1.101671!/file/BodilyCriterion.pdf>

O'Malley, Daniel. *The Rook*. New York: Hachette, 2012.

Orwell, George. *1984*. 1949. Middlesex: Penguin, 1970.

Orzel, Chad. "The Physics of Star Trek: Quantum Teleportation Versus Transporters." *Forbes* 19 Aug. 2015. 30 May 2018 <<https://www.forbes.com/sites/chadorzel/2015/08/19/the-physics-of-star-trek-quantum-teleportation-versus-transporters/#2c3621c2118b>>

Pohl, Fredrik. *The World at the End of Time*. London: Del Rey, 1990.

Prey. Raphaël Colantonio. Bethesda Softworks. 2017. Computer Game.

Prometheus. Ridley Scott. 20th Century Fox, 2012. DVD.

Pyle, Rod. *Blueprint for a Battlestar: Serious scientific explanations behind Sci-Fi's greatest inventions*. London: Aurum, 2016.

Reynolds, Alistair. *Chasm City*. London: Gollancz, 2001.

Rice, Anne. *The Tale of the Body Thief*. New York: Ballantine, 1993.

Rother, Rainer and Annika Schaefer, ed. *Future Imperfect. Science. Fiction. Film*. Berlin: Bertz + Fischer, 2017.

Ryan, Marie-Laure. *Possible Worlds, artificial intelligence, and narrative theory*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1992.

Scalzi, John. *Old Man's War*. New York: Tor, 2005.

-----, *The Dispatcher*. Burton: Subterranean Press, 2017.

Schermer, Michael and Pat Linse, ed. *The Skeptic Encyclopaedia of Pseudoscience*. Santa Barbara: ABC-Clio, 2002.

Robert Sheckley *Immortality, Inc.*, Belmont: Untreed Reeds, 2010.

Russell, Bertrand. *History of Western Philosophy and its Connection with Political and Social Circumstances from the Earliest Times to the Present Day*. 2nd ed. Oxford: Alden & Mowbray Ltd, 1961.

Schmid, Wolf. *Narratology: An introduction*. Trans. Alexander Starritt. Berlin: New York: de Gruyter, 2010.

Schweid, Richard. *Sehnsucht nach Unsterblichkeit: Jenseitsvorstellungen in Religion und Kultur*. Trans. Rebekka Meyer. Gütersloh: Gütersloh Verlag, 2008.

Schwetman, John D. "Romanticism and the Cortical Stack: Cyberpunk Subjectivity in the Takeshi Kovacs Novels of Richard K. Morgan." *Pacific Coast Philology* 41 (2006): 124-140.

Segal, Robert A. "Joseph Campbell as Antisemite and as Theorist of Myth: A Response to Maurice Friedmann". *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 67/2 (1999): 461-467.

Shakespeare, William. *The Tragedy of Macbeth*. c.1606. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008.

Sheffield, Charles. *Forever and Forever*. New York: Spectra, 1997.

Shelley, Mary. *Frankenstein*. 1818. U of Virginia Library, NetLibrary, 1996.

SHN Survival Horror Network. "SOMA: Longplay Ending Part 4 Full HD 1080p/60fps Longplay Walkthrough Gameplay No Commentary." Online video clip. *Youtube*. Youtube, 27 Sep. 2015. 26 May 2018. (48:00-49:15)

Simmons, Dan. *Hyperion*. New York: Doubleday, 1989.

Smith, Cordwainer. *Instrumentality of Mankind*. London: Del Rey, 1979.

Soma. Grip, Thomas and Jens Nilsson. Sweden: Frictional Games, 2015. Computer game.

Somers, Jeff. *The Electric Church*. London: Orbit, 2007.

Space: 1999. Gerry and Sylvia Anderson. ITC Entertainment, 1975-1977. TV Series

Stargate. Roland Emmerich. MGM/UA Distribution Co., 1994. Film.

Stargate SG-1. Brad Wright and Jonathan Glassner. MGM Worldwide Television Distribution, 1997-2006

Star Trek: The Original Series. Gene Roddenberry. CBS Television Distribution. 1966-1967. TV Series.

Star Wars IV: A New Hope. George Lucas. 20th Century Fox, 1977.

Star Wars V: The Empire Strikes Back. Irvin Kershner. 20th Century Fox, 1980.

Star Wars VI: Return of the Jedi. Richard Marquand. 20th Century Fox, 1983.

Stephenson, Neil. *Snow Crash*. 1992. London: Penguin, 1993.

Sterling, Bruce. *Holy Fire*. London: Orion, 1996.

Stross, Charles. *Accelerando*. 2005. New York: Ace, 2006.

Suin, Darko. *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction: On the Poetics and History of a Literary Genre*. Ed. Gerry Canavan. Bern: Peter Lang AG, International Academic Publishers, 2016.

Swift, Jonathan. *Gulliver's Travels*. 1726. London: Alma, 2016.

Taran, Leonardo and Dimitri Gutas, ed. *Aristotle Poetics*. Leiden: Brill, 2012.

TheParmaViolet. "'Le Voyage dan la Lune' George Méliès 1902 (Original version, silent and black & white). Online video clip. *Youtube*. Youtube, 23 Apr. 2013. 26 May 2018.

Thomas, Dylan. "Do not go gentle into that good night." *Poets.org*. Academy of American Poets, 1996. 26 May 2018.

Tides of Numenera. Kevin Saunders and Chris Keenan. Techland Publishing. 2017. Computer Game.

Vance, Jack. *To Live Forever*. New York: Ballantine, 1956.

VanderMeer, Jeff. *Borne*. London: Harper Collins, 2017.

----- . *Annihilation*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2014.

----- . *Authority*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2014.

-----. *Acceptance*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2014.

Van Vogt, A.E. *The World of Null-A*. Paris: Gallimard, 1953.

Verne, Jules. *Journey to the Centre of the Earth*. 1864. Herts, UK: Wordsworth Editions Ltd., 1998.

-----. *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea*. 1870. Herts, UK: Wordsworth Editions Ltd., 1998.

Vonnegut, Kurt. *Slaughterhouse Five*. 1969. New York: Random House, 2011.

Weir, Andy. *The Martian*. 2011. New York: Broadway, 2014.

Westerfield, Scott. *The Risen Empire*. New York: Tor, 2003.

Well, H.G. *The Invisible Man*. 1897. Marblehead, MA: Trajectory Classics, 2014.

“Why the transporter doesn’t kill you at one end and clone you at the other.” Reddit. May 30 2018.
<https://www.reddit.com/r/DaystromInstitute/comments/2zglxb/why_the_transporter_doesnt_kill_you_at_one_end/> Online discussion thread.

Wilhelm, Kate. *Welcome, Chaos*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1983.

Zelazny, Roger. *This Immortal*. New York: Ace Books, 1966.

10. GERMAN SUMMARY/ABSTRACT

Die vorliegende Masterarbeit präsentiert die Resultate einer qualitativen und einer quantitativen Analyse der Unsterblichkeit in Science-Fiction-Literatur anhand eines experimentellen narrativen Modells. Die Forschungsfragen lauten: „Wie wird Unsterblichkeit in Science-Fiction untersucht und dargestellt?“ und „Werden Science-Fiction-Narrative durch den Einfluss von Unsterblichkeit als Novum beeinflusst, und wenn ja, wie?“

Um diesen Fragen nachzugehen, war es zuallererst nötig, Unsterblichkeit als philosophisches und religiöses Konzept zu betrachten. Danach wurde ein narratologisches Modell der Science-Fiction anhand der Theorien Darko Suwins, Carl D. Malmgrens und Uwe Dursts erarbeitet. Zum Abschluss des theoretischen Teils wurde das Modell vorgestellt, dessen Gliederung von Joseph Campbells bekanntem Konzept der Heldenreise (*The Hero's Journey*) inspiriert wurde.

Im analytischen Teil werden vier Werke untersucht. *Altered Carbon* von Richard K. Morgan, *Wild Seed* von Octavia Butler, *The Man from Earth* von Jerome Bixby und *Ubik* von Philip K. Dick. Die Werke werden anhand des Modells analysiert und in die jeweiligen Kategorien unterteilt.

Zuletzt werden im Anhang in zwei Appendizes die quantitativen Analysen einer größeren Anzahl von Werken dargestellt, um die Streuung der Phasen und Ausdrücke der Unsterblichkeit zu veranschaulichen.