Prairie Group, 2024

Session 2

Kelly Asprooth-Jackson

“Evidence to Confirm What My Soul has Evidence Enough For”

[An excerpt from Rev. Dr. Kelly Weisman Asprooth-Jackson’s “Odyssey” (a personal narrative of one’s life and ministry, to be shared with colleagues), delivered to the members of the North-Central Analog Grouping of the Unitarian Universalist Religious Professionals Association at their Spring Retreat, Duluth, MN, February 11, 2049:]

> “…When I was an undergraduate, I spent most of my final year of college completing what the school I then attended called a Senior Project. My major there was in Political Studies. That was another peculiarity of that institution: rejecting out of hand the much more common term, “Political Science” for the pedantic but entirely fair reasoning that there is nothing particularly scientific about that discipline. My Senior Project was a book-length assessment of the history of foreign relations between the nations of Egypt and the United States, focusing on the era beginning at the end of World War II and ending at the beginning of the Iraq War. The era of the First Cold War, basically.
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> When I began writing, that term, “the Iraq War,” meant one particular, unambiguous episode of history. I finished the manuscript right about the time that American bombs began falling on Baghdad, creating a sudden ambiguity as to exactly which Iraq War one meant – the one from the early 90s, or the new one that would soon eclipse the first completely in the American imagination. Although explicitly not called a thesis, a Senior Project had to be defended along similar lines, and so I went before a panel of three

faculty members to do so. Most of their questions focused on facts I'd chosen to include or leave out, and which points I saw as being pivotal in the diplomatic history between the two states. But one of the questioners was unlike the others: he was the only member of the panel from outside the department, a comparative religionist rather than a scholar of diplomacy. And possibly because he knew that I was headed to seminary in the fall, he asked a question that was clearly off-script. It visibly bothered the other professors, and eventually my advisor broke in and moved the conversation along to a different topic, once it became apparent that I had no good answer for it. Here is his question: not the verbatim, but the gist: "You've done a fine job of laying out what happened. But what I don't see here at all, and I would very much like to know is, 'What do you think *should* have happened? What do you think should happen *now*?'"…"

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The central question I have been blessed with the challenge to address in this essay is this: "In an age of harmful misinformation, how does speculative fiction contribute to our understandings of truth?" I write this during the final months leading up to a US Presidential election. Living as I do, in a swing state, political advertising is beyond ubiquitous. It is very nearly every ad accompanying every video. By volume, campaign fundraising and organizing texts currently outnumber messages I receive from family, friends, and work colleagues. Enduring grossly dishonest messaging has become the price of daily living; as one example, an ad I encounter in high rotation attempts to stoke transphobic fears about who deserves to be protected from domestic violence in support of a party whose national brand is domestic abuse.

The political season magnifies the situation, but falsehood and manipulation were endemic long before it, and will continue to be long after it is has passed. And while I have my own deeply-held political beliefs that unavoidably inform my lens on the world, the dishonesty seems well-ingrained even for many causes I actually support. Another example here: somehow, earlier this year, the YouTube algorithm decided I would be a good target for a particular channel devoted to strategic coverage of the ongoing war in Ukraine. Its production values are slick, it is not apparently affiliated with any other journalistic organization, and its coverage is overwhelmingly one-sided. Not just in the sense that it favors one side in the conflict – in the sense that it is uniformly, overwhelmingly positive about the military outlook for Ukrainian forces, while predicting that total, catastrophic collapse is constantly just around the corner for the Russian Federation. It is something other than a source with a sharp slant or a strong perspective: it's a propaganda outfit, and just because it is propagandizing for the side I feel is just does not make it otherwise. It is still a contributing factor to an atmosphere of competing, conflicting realities.

Comedian, performance artist, podcaster, and cultural critic Jamie Loftus compares the algorithmic systems that shape so much of the media environment which surrounds us to a ringmaster.[1] A force which is difficult to ignore, thoroughly disinterested in the truth or falsehood of whatever is said or expressed, and motivated only to monopolize attention in the service of capitalistic profit. In doing so she specifically invokes the example of famous, human ringmaster characters, such as Vince MacMahon (the owner of World Wrestling Entertainment), and P.T. Barnum, our Universalist ancestor who made and lost several fortunes exploiting people whose appearances he could sell to crowds as spectacles to be gawked at. This parallels the structure of

our media environment (24/7, programmed to favor whatever stirs the strongest, most negative emotion in the audience) in which matters of fact – who did or did not say or do what, where, and when – are adjudicated as pure matters of opinion.

In considering this predicament, and what tool speculative fiction might offer to resist it, a few sentences came to mind. They come from the beginning of Indian author and activist Arundhati Roy's 2004 address, published under the title, "Public Power in the Age of Empire,"

> "When language has been butchered and bled of meaning, how do we understand "public power"? When freedom means occupation, when democracy means neoliberal capitalism, when reform means repression, when words like "empowerment" and "peacekeeping" make your blood run cold -- why, then, "public power" could mean whatever you want it to mean. A biceps building machine, or a Community Power Shower. So, I'll just have to define "public power" as I go along, in my own self-serving sort of way."[2]

Roy's words came up for me not only because they name the dread and the disorientation that comes with the total malleability of language in a time when basic facts cannot be commonly agreed upon – even as they are now fully two decades old, and date to a time that seems somehow a little less rootless. They also seem relevant because Roy's strategy for this, or at least her first step after naming the problem, is to make her own use of it. 'Words can mean whatever a speaker declares that they mean, so I will set down my own definition of these words on the fly, in the manner best suited to my needs at the moment.'

This is where the power of all fiction – but particularly of speculative fiction – begins, in aiding the pursuit of truth in a time of truthlessness. A work of fiction can make its own rules – again, speculative fiction all the moreso. And this allows the art, and the artist who created it, to

side-step debates about what is and what is not that might otherwise seem inescapable. A short story or a novel by definition is not a pure accounting of facts, but within the context of a given story, the truth can be as explicit and unambiguous as the author wishes.

There is a power in being able to explore truth within the understanding that one is not dealing literally in the truth. Unitarian Universalist author Kurt Vonnegut's novel Cat's Cradle includes a made-up, imaginary religion called Bokononism.[3] Any entirely fictional religion would be imaginary, but Bokononism is also made-up, because as its fictional founder and prophet – Bokonon – reminds its practitioners constantly: he made it all up. Nothing about it is real. Bokononists adopt it with this clear understanding: not because its stories and claims about the universe are factual (they are explicitly not), but because of the way that those stories and claims, and the practices that accompany them, make its practitioners feel. They find something true about life embedded in all those lies. In the same way, fiction can illustrate meaningful truths through events that never happened and characters who don't exist. Not being the truth frees the story to explore what could become true. Or, as the great speculative fiction author Ursula K. Le Guin put it:

> "The exercise of imagination is dangerous to those who profit from the way things are because it has the power to show that the way things are is not permanent, not universal, not necessary. Having that real though limited power to put established institutions into question, imaginative literature has also the responsibility of power. The storyteller is the truthteller."[4]

One very simple, concrete example – and this may seem too obvious even to point out, but I believe it is an important factor to consider. Within a story, the narrative voice determines

the truth. The author might choose to narrate from the perspective of a single character, they might provide an unreliable narrator, introduce conflicting accounts, or otherwise complicate things. But, by default, what the author says is true is true for purposes of the story. This can casually short-cut matters that would be the site of contentious debate in our own real world.

In adrienne maree brown's story, The River, the mayor of Detroit is a politically disappointing carpet bagger with nothing positive to offer the city.[5] Equal time does not have to be offered to his fictional supporters, or a rebuttal included after the main body of the story is over. This provides a space for the voice of the author's perspective or experience to live without interruption or gainsaying, potentially a rarity for authors who hold marginalized identities. One of the greatest tools that speculative fiction offers us for navigating our contemporary world of distorted and competing realities is to invite us outside of the constant work of defending facts as facts and of defending human experience – particularly the human experiences of queer folks, people of color, people who want or need to have abortions, etc. – as meaningful, as valuable, as simply real. To shift energy from defending the truth of the status quo (not justifying it morally) to the project of changing the status quo. Speculative fiction can provide an environment where debates over truth do not subsume and overpower the goals of mutual flourishing and positive change. With a taste of such an environment, we may be moved towards joining or founding communities where the same circumstances persist, and away from others in which they do not.

Morrigan Phillips' short story, "The Long Memory," deals with an imagined society in which certain people, Memorials, have access to the ability to remember events that took place in the same area around them, even decades or centuries before.[6] Memorials watch and hear and experience the events as they happened. The villain of the piece wishes to prevent, at all cost, a

possible future in which this power is fully democratized, so that everyone can access this objective record of the past, and not only a special class of trained professionals. A past which the powerful cannot control – editing and overwriting as the needs of power dictate – is a nightmare to the authoritarian. Particularly, a shared past, one which provides people with a common understanding of the world and their place in it. A strong foundation for the building of community.

In reading Phillips's story, it struck me how much like watching a video recording accessing the Long Memory seemed to be. And in that sense some small amount of the conditions for that fantastical scenario actually exist in our own current world. Human beings, all over the planet, have the means to create sound and video recordings of themselves and their experiences. Creating a shareable record of events as they happen has never been easier. War, genocide, environmental disaster: any of these can be experienced from afar with an intimacy that approaches what is described for the Memorials in the story. The challenges come in attention, interpretation, and the ratio of signal to noise.

The Long Memory, like many of the stories collected in Octavia's Brood, models strategies of resistance, as the residents of an island prison coordinate a hunger strike. Speculative fiction can be a repository for lessons in how to survive, a catalog of tools for the struggle. In this regard, at least, it is a neutral means for disseminating such practical information. After elements of the failed putsch of January 6, 2021 seemed to invoke some of its ideas, there was an uptick in popular awareness of the Turner Diaries, the white supremacist novel that fantasizes about the mass extermination of Jews, non-white people, leftists and liberals. That book has served not just as an inspiration, but as a clumsy sort of operations outline

for white terror since its serialized publication in the 1970s, including the 1995 Oklahoma City Bombing. The gallows erected outside of the capital building on January 6 can, in the opinion of historian Kathleen Belew and others, be seen as a gesture towards Turner's "Day of the Rope," a mass-execution of so-called "race-traitors."[7] The Turner Diaries are odious in their contents and heinous in their consequences. And, the book also has several elements relevant to speculative fiction: it imagines a future world, one the author wishes to see our own move in the direction of, and invites the reader to imagine and to work in the same direction.

I was initially tempted to ask here what it would be like – and if it would even be desirable – to imagine a Turner Diaries equivalent for those devoted to dismantling oppression rather than achieving its apotheosis through murderous force. I felt compelled by the question, but also unhappy with it. It felt dangerously close to that trite, false framework which holds that the right and left ends of the American political spectrum are roughly symmetrical. That ideas and manifestations on one side can be readily compared to those on the other. That there is not a dramatic difference between the two – not only in values and philosophy – but also resources, access to power, and the means and appetite for violence. This frame, this reflexive both-sides-ism, is a major reason for our badly distorted information environment.

But before I found a way to ask the question that I was happy with, I arrived at an answer for it that felt plainly obvious, at least to me from my particular perspective as a dweller on the progressive left. In so far as it is possible or desirable for there to be a left equivalent of the Turner Diaries, it is Octavia Butler's "Parable of the Sower." Her peri-apocalyptic story of social and environmental collapse birthing a new religion, and the need for both an individual determination to survive, and the necessary quest to build new community with those of good

will. The fragmentary excerpts from the foundational texts of the nascent Earthseed faith seem to be growing in popularity as bits of wisdom and challenge in some of the spaces where I move; in the next 30 years they might come to occupy the same lofty position in the liturgical repertoires of our congregations that Mary Oliver has held for the last 30. One of those, perhaps the most frequently repeated, reads:

"All that you touch
You Change.

All that you Change
Changes you.

The only lasting truth
is Change.

God
is Change."[8]

As we consider the utility of speculative fiction in addressing the persistence of misinformation and struggles over foundational facts, we should be prepared for the answer in that third line. "The only lasting truth is change." This is roughly the opposite of expecting strategies for winning the debate, cutting through the falsehoods, and restoring a sense of greater stability as to what is and what isn't that supposedly prevailed in the past. That is an expectation I know that I have, which is why I name it, and accepting that the only way out may be through –

taking as a given the absence of a broadly-shared narrative, and moving on without it – is a disturbing prospect to me. Just not so disturbing as giving up on the ambition of positive change overall.

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A pause here, at roughly the middle. Where are you, in this moment, on the challenge of truth: of finding it, of knowing it, of holding it in common with others? Is your highest goal stability of information; more agreed-upon facts, more broadly assumed? Or is your motivation to affect change, to improve your own life, the lives other people, other beings, the planet itself? Or is it some secret third thing?

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The Golden Age of Science Fiction – at least of English language sci-fi, and then almost entirely American English – is known for a number of well-earned cliches, and most of these center around white male protagonists (frequently transparent self-inserts by the white male authorship) indulging in some sort of fantasy about power or importance. Alfred Bester lampoons this well-worn pattern in his 1954 short story, "5,271,009."[9] (Bester knew the tropes of his genre well, as a product of the late Golden Age himself – he was the recipient of the first Hugo award, in 1953.) In that story, a relatively young, white, American man, overwhelmed by a sudden professional success, retreats into a world of juvenile fantasy. He becomes the key player in a series of outlandish scenarios.

First, the President of the United Nations arrives to inform him that a flash nuclear war, which he somehow managed to miss, has caused epidemic levels of sterility in men. He will have to repopulate the earth through the shear, now unparalleled power of his virility – an unthinkably

large number of women (we are told that they are beautiful, that they are virgins, and absolutely nothing else about any of them) are now waiting desperately for him to perform his sexual duties. In a later scenario, the self-styled protagonist is wrongfully imprisoned, persecuted for a secret insight only he has, which the world desperately needs, but which all of the experts refuse to consider. Next, he finds himself thrown back in time, and prepares to use his experience of the past to make the future his to mold (and to enrich himself in the process).

A flimsy excuse is repeatedly used to explain away each the ludicrous premise of each scenario – that it is all "on account of a mysterious mutant strain in his makeup which makes" him different. But every one of these fantasies turns immediately sour. The women he is meant to impregnate universally despise him. The scientists who refuse to listen to him arrive at his critical (and quite stupid) insight independently. He finds that he cannot recall his own personal history with the precision about dates necessary to avoid past mishaps or to place winning bets on sporting events. Every situation is a monkey's paw, like a speed run of the most acerbic episodes of the Twilight Zone imaginable. That mysterious mutant strain in his makeup which makes him different is just as hollow and silly as it sounds. Bester, the author, helpfully summarizes a message behind the whole operation, as another character addresses the delusional center of attention:

> "You are all alike. You dream you are the one man with a secret, the one man with a wrong, the one man with an injustice, with a girl, without a girl, with or without anything. Goddamn. You bore me, you one-man dreamers. Get lost."

The science fiction genre has thankfully moved along from that period defined by under-characterized protagonists who were special for being special, but that set of tropes still lives

within it. And they remain available to take on different meaning in different forms. David F. Walker's story, "The Token Superhero," echoes some of these cliches – Alonzo Ramey literally has a mysterious mutant strain in his makeup which makes him different.[10] He enjoys both fantastical physical powers and the fame and fortune which accompany them. But unlike the sorts of characters Bester satirized, Walker's Black Fist is not a blank slate. He has a context, and a community – which becomes the whole point of his continued work, by the end of the story. Even as a superhero, his life is not uniformly wonderful and easy, as he has to experience and navigate the afterthought status that mainstream comic book publishers afforded to Black heroes and other characters of color up until roughly the moment the first Black Panther film made a billion dollars. The wish-fulfillment does not erase the story's tension: it creates it. While the story exists for its own reasons – perhaps one of them being as a sort of parable about making a positive impact from within a problematic and limiting professional role – it at least inadvertently illustrates something about all those milk-toast Golden Age chosen ones. They had a context, too, and at least could have had a community. Their blankness is a product of their unexamined white-male-ness, taking for granted the assumption that that identity is the non-identity: the baseline, the standard, the norm.

In that vein, speculative fiction can challenge the reader to wrestle with the question of truth vs. assumption. In her speech accepting the National Book Foundation Medal for Distinguished Contribution to American Letters, Ursula K. Le Guin said,

> "We live in capitalism, its power seems inescapable - but then, so did the divine right of kings. Any human power can be resisted and changed by human beings. Resistance and change often begin in art."[11]

The context of this oft-repeated quote is more narrow and specific than I, at least, originally realized: the focus of Le Guin's remarks was the state of the publishing industry, and how, in the struggle between book-as-art and book-as-commodity, art was getting clobbered by commodity. But, as is so often the case with great writers, her words are far larger than the initial vision behind them.

If the world of Becky Chambers' novel, "A Psalm for the Wild-Built," is not a utopia, it's only because that setting – Panga – is technically something better.[12] The genre of utopia most often sees its idealized worlds as inherently flawed: perfection feels unnatural to human beings, and so any perfect state is inherently alienating and effectively unstable. Panga is cozy. It is home to a protagonist whose work can be summarized as "hospitality chaplain," but it is also a world that seems to be truly and legitimately free of crisis or strife. Money, material and energy resources, ecology, even labor: all of these massive areas of struggle and concern in our own world are presented as solved, up-front, in Panga. There is an awareness that they used to be problems in the past, but no more. Even in the previous extractive age, that came before the current solarpunk society, the most crucial detail shared is one of hope and aspiration. When machines created by humankind attained self-awareness, humanity collectively offers them full inclusion: a shared society in which human and robot will exist as equals. And then, when robots decline the offer, and choose to go their own way, withdrawing from all contact and connection with humans and their world – a world which doubtlessly relies heavily on the labor of robots – humanity accepts and respects that choice. Even in the 'bad old days' of the story's setting, human society chooses respect and tolerance over domination and exploitation.

On the one hand, in the context of our own present extractive age, where power and exploitation seem so thoroughly enmeshed, the tale of Panga's history strains credulity. But this is a well-established strategy of speculative fiction: to present a vision of the seemingly-impossible ideal, realized. Star Trek, particularly the original series and the Next Generation that followed it, are alike to Panga in this: a post-scarcity society in which class, ethnicity, religion, and any sort of concern about finite resources no longer create conflict or hierarchy within the human family. (It should be acknowledged here that, particularly in the case of Star Trek, conflicts related to difference seem largely to have been "solved" by suppressing those differences. The specifics of religion and culture almost never seem important to human characters – those are things that only concern the other-coded aliens of the setting. Even differences in language have been made to seem irrelevant through frictionless, automated translation.)

Settings like this can be challenging both for artists and for audiences – somewhat famously, writers for Star Trek: the Next Generation initially struggled to generate tension or drama when faced with the mandate of a future in which humanity had moved beyond conflict.[13] But in A Psalm for the Wild-Built, the relief and ease of the setting itself clears the way for a very expansive question: How might we as human beings live, if we were not constantly being ground down by colonization and its descendant evils, ecological upheaval, and late-stage capitalism?

Chambers's dedication says that the book is, "For anybody who needs a break." But the central character, Sibling Dex spends virtually the entire story ill-at-ease in what might be among the easiest worlds to inhabit ever imagined. Even periods of satisfaction are elided, as Dex goes

directly from their clumsy first effort at providing presence as a Tea Monk to being so hyper-competent at their calling that communities anticipate and celebrate their arrival, at which point they seem to grow almost jaded with the whole affair. Even hopepunk can have its power fantasies, of a sort. Dex spends the book working through and towards a greater understanding of their own small but gnawing sense of dissatisfaction, of not quite being in the right place or role. The break alluded to in Chambers's dedication is, it seems to me, a break for the reader. It is an escape, but not escapism, or at least it does not have to be. Chambers posits a world in which human beings – and perhaps we ourselves – would have greater spaciousness to discover and engage with the truths within themselves. Escapism would be engaging with such an idea only as a solo tea break in between bouts of the eternal grind. But to escape, however temporarily and incompletely, is to sample a condition that should make us hungry to share it generously. I am reminded of yet another quote from Ursula K. Le Guin, that "if we're partisans of liberty, then it's our plain duty to escape, and to take as many people with us as we can."[14]

Speculative fiction, especially short-form speculative fiction, sometimes offers a puzzle to the reader; potentially a nesting doll of puzzles. Dropped into an unfamiliar world, time, or situation, sometimes deluged with jargon or fully-imaginary terminology, the reader must work out what is going on in the little time allotted before the story comes to an end. The sub-genre which relies in whole or in part on in-world documents – in-universe journal fragments, dictionary entries, book excerpts, etc. – magnifies the project.

Alexis Pauline Gumbs's short story, "Evidence" is one of this type; consisting entirely of an itemized set of in-world documents, presented as though they are pieces of evidence in a court case. All of them appear to relate – so far as I can tell – to conversations an imagined version of

the author is having across time with herself and with one or more descendants. The puzzle element – the opportunity, if not requirement, to try to sift through the hints and tidbits, sort out a timeline, divine what specific meanings might be behind imagined words and terms – is a practice in critical thinking. Weighing evidence, comparing and contrasting different perspectives. Trying to develop some opinion as to the deeper meaning beyond the surface of a text. While it may not be the purpose for which an author puts pen to page, the format does help to build skills that can be applied to ostensibly factual texts: employed when consuming news media, political rhetoric, religious scripture, and every other expression of language that can be fictionalized. Trying to understand the imaginary worlds of speculative fiction can be a training ground for trying to arrive at the truth in the actual world.

Back to Evidence. One of the exhibits is a collection of notes for a history dissertation focused on our own era or perhaps near future. The notetaker closes with the following plaintive question set:

"Question: What if I can never find evidence of what the people did to break the silence? Am I looking to the past in vain? Am I looking to the past to confirm what my soul has evidence enough for?"[15]

This may be a coming together of the theme of accepting that much or most of the truth is malleable (Parable of the Sower), with the deep need to know things with certainty for the work of justice, as represented in stories like The Long Memory. In these questions, the quest for truth is urgent and motivating, but a definitive end to that quest may not be possible. In its absence, an inner certainty – "what my soul has evidence enough for" has to come to the fore. Not necessarily as a replacement for the external truth embodied by documentary evidence, but as the

truth which can persist between the gaps and inconsistencies in the former. The common word for the evidence contained in one's soul is, I believe, faith.

The Czech playwright, velvet revolutionary, and eventual politician Vaclav Havel wrote extensively about the predicament of human life in a society where truth is subordinate to power. His circumstances were, of course, different from ours; in his context, facts were mangled and distorted by an entrenched, vertical authoritarianism. In ours, the worst actors are more multi-polar, more self-serving than aligned around a singular vision, and the authoritarianism we are faced with is more inchoate and diffuse. Still, we must contend as he did with ideologies which employ, in his words, "a system of ritual signs which replace reality with pseudo-reality."[16]

In his essay, "Power of the Powerless," Vaclav Havel provides the imaginary example of a green grocer, compelled to place a sign in support of the regime in the window of his store. It is a small act of coerced complicity, and when he reverses it and removes the sign despite the personal cost, it is an equally small act of rebellion. But it marks the profound difference between living a lie, and living in truth (Havel's phrase). Any great injustice depends upon a very large number of people living out a lie: pretending to believe what they do not believe, pretending that they are indifferent to people and things that they care about, and generally denying what is true in their heart out of fear or complacency. Any moment of living in truth, even a small one, threatens the unjust status quo because it points to the lie, and points out to everyone who lives in it the absurdity of that lie.

Speculative fiction can point towards the truth. It can help us build the tools for discerning the truth. It can give us solace and encouragement to persist without the certainty of the truth. And it can challenge us to imagine worlds that might become true, whether the cozy semi-utopia of Psalm for the Wild-Built, the still-figuring-it-out era after the silence broke in Evidence, or the tenacious hope among the ashes of Parable of the Sower – speculative fiction is at its most powerful where it reveals the absurdity of a lie and inspires its audience to live in truth. To challenge us with the sort of questions that even the most thoroughly established facts cannot answer on their own: 'What do you think *should* have happened? What do you think should happen *now*?'

[1] Loftus, Jamie, "takeru kobayashi vs. joey chestnut & the art of the narrative," podcast episode of "Sixteenth Minute (of Fame)," October 14, 2024.

[2] Roy, Arundhati, "Public Power in the Age of Empire," Seven Stories Press, New York, 2004.

[3] Vonnegut, Kurt, "Cat's Cradle," Dell Publishing, New York, 1963.

[4] Le Guin, Ursula K., "A War Without End," Essay accompanying Thomas More's "Utopia," Verso Books, Brooklyn, 2016.

[5] brown, adrienne maree, "The River," as collected in, "Octavia's Brood: Science Fiction Stories from Social Justice Movements," edited by Walidah Imarisha & adrienne maree brown, AK Press, Oakland, 2015.

[6] Phillips, Morrigan, "The Long Memory," as collected in, "Octavia's Brood: Science Fiction Stories from Social Justice Movements," edited by Walidah Imarisha & adrienne maree brown, AK Press, Oakland, 2015.

[7] Belew, Kathleen, as quoted in "From the Fringe to the Captial," podcast episode of "Code Switch," 1/13/2021. Transcript: https://www.npr.org/transcripts/955673514

[8] Butler, Octavia, "Parable of the Sower," Four Walls Eight Windows, New York, 1993.

[9] Bester, Alfred, "5,271,009," as collected in, "Starlight: The Great Short Fiction of Alfred Bester," Nelson Doubleday, Garden City, 1976.

[10] Walker, David F., “The Token Superhero,” as collected in, “Octavia’s Brood: Science Fiction Stories from Social Justice Movements,” edited by Walidah Imarisha & adrienne maree brown, AK Press, Oakland, 2015.

[11] Le Guin, Usula K., National Book Foundation Medal Acceptance Speech, November 11, 2014, accessed September 10, 2024: https://www.ursulakleguin.com/nbf-medal

[12] Chambers, Becky, “A Psalm for the Wild-Built,” Tor Books, New York, 2021.

[13] Landon, David, “Roddenberry’s Box,” blog post, July 8, 2012, accessed September 10.2024: https://futureprobe.blogspot.com/2012/07/roddenberrys-box.html

[14] Le Guin, Ursula K., “The Language of the Night: Essays on Fantasy and Science Fiction,” p. 204, Ultramarine Publishing, G.P. Putnam’s Sons, New York, 1979.

[15] Gumbs, Alexis Pauline, “Evidence” as collected in, “Octavia’s Brood: Science Fiction Stories from Social Justice Movements,” edited by Walidah Imarisha & adrienne maree brown, AK Press, Oakland, 2015.

[16] Havel, Vaclav, “Power of the Powerless,” as collected in, “Living in Truth,” edited by Jan Vladislav, Faber and Faber, London/Boston, 1987.