Language as a Familiar Alien in Science Fiction

or, as Riddley Walker Would Ask, *Wie Wood Eye Both Err Two Reed This?*

by

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To my friends and family, who love me

even when I am acting like a Familiar Alien.

Thanks to the stacks of the Graduate Library, where I have spent the better part of my undergraduate career. Though you've been very helpful to me, I hope to end our relationship in the very near future.

Last but not at all least, thanks to my family—and the friends who have become my family—for supporting me, for believing that I could write an honors thesis, and for not giving me a hard time about the many antisocial hours I spent locked in my room or in the stacks. Love.

Abstract

      This thesis looks at the effect of defamiliarized and defamiliarizing language in science fiction, and thus itself defamiliarizes language in an attempt to accentuate how, while science fiction often pays a marked attention to it, language has a unique and essential role in any work of literature. Science fiction is characterized by strange yet wonderful things and ideas that stretch the imagination: emotional robots, anti-gravity pills, time travel, and, of course, aliens, the universal indicators of the genre. In this thesis, I argue that there is something common to all of these science fiction tropes: that they are "Familiar Aliens," concepts grounded enough in reality to be recognizable, but odd enough to suggest an alternate world that can contain such extraordinariness. Furthermore, a Familiar Alien does not have to be a concrete object, situation, or idea; it can be language, the very substance of the story. A linguistic Familiar Alien, like all Familiar Aliens, functions as a special case of Victor Shklovsky's theory of *ostranenie*, or literature's technique of "making strange" an ordinary concept in order to help us, as readers, consider it without any of our habitual assumptions of that concept; a Familiar Alien draws attention to the essence of something by making the object *stranger* than it typically would be in regular literature. Language is an extremely versatile Familiar Alien because it can plausibly estrange us from an infinite number of ideas, including language itself, the very basis of most spoken communication, thought, and—perhaps most importantly in this case—literature. Ultimately I find that language is the archetypical Familiar Alien, and that science fiction can help us see just how vital it is to all literature, beyond merely being the medium through which it is expressed.

      I begin my examination of the linguistic Familiar Alien in my first chapter with stories that employ the device as decoration, either as neologism (for example, *Shockwave Rider*'s *sanded*) or Eric Rabkin's concept of transformed language, or ordinary language used in an unfamiliar context (*water* in *Dune*). In these cases, the linguistic Familiar Alien primarily serves to remind us that we are in a world somehow dissimilar from our own, but it can have a number of other significant effects, from questioning our associations with different cultures to alluding to important thematic issues, which in themselves are Familiar Aliens. In the second chapter, I shift to works that take on language as their subject, through discussions of an invented language and language as an entity (*Babel-17*), actual use of the invented language (*A Clockwork Orange*), or both (*1984*). I find that, in addition to having many of the same effects of intermittent uses of neologism and transformed language, this more obvious linguistic Familiar Alien defamiliarizes language itself, forcing us to see how many quintessentially human concepts tie in to it—things like culture, human interactions, processing information, thought, and reality. The third and final chapter examines the language of the post-apocalyptic novel *Riddley Walker*, which I find emblematizes the linguistic Familiar Alien. It strongly exhibits all of its potential qualities, contains ominous remnants of today's nuclear society, and furthermore defamiliarizes the human relationship with storytelling, and thus with any work of literature.

      Underlying all of the issues raised in my thesis is possibly the most unanswerable question of all: how do we connect to the language of literature? I conclude that the linguistic Familiar Alien, usually—but, as I demonstrate, not exclusively—found in science fiction, helps us to unravel this riddle by deliberately emphasizing linguistic strangeness. As readers we are thus compelled to think anew about literature's special dependency on language, and to recognize our individual duties to create personal meaning for it.

CONTENTS

Introduction

The Familiar Alien, Literally

In "Ylla," the second installment of Ray Bradbury's *The Martian Chronicles*, Ylla K jolts herself out of a daydream and attempts to relate to her unimpressed skeptic of a husband the most curious events she has just imagined:

> "I dreamed about a man."
>
> "A man?"
>
> "A tall man, six feet one inch tall."
>
> "How absurd; a giant, a misshapen giant."
>
> "Somehow"—she tried the words—"he looked all right. In spite of being tall. And he had—oh, I know you'll think it silly—he had *blue* eyes!"
>
> "Blue eyes! Gods!" cried Mr. K. "What'll you dream next? I suppose he had *black* hair?"
>
> "How did you *guess*?" She was excited.
>
> "I picked the most unlikely color," he replied coldly.
>
> "Well, black it was!" she cried. "And he had a very white skin; oh he was *most* unusual! He was dressed in a strange uniform and he came down out of the sky and spoke pleasantly to me." (Bradbury 4-5)

Yll and Ylla K are native to Mars, so logic requires that we label them Martians. Yet they sound like our neighbors, like our parents, perhaps even like our own selves, because Bradbury has constructed this passage with an all-too-conventional formula: an excitable, quixotic wife chided by her grouchy, unromantic husband.   If a reader opens this book directly to this page without

glancing at the cover, and if "blue" and "black" are replaced by "lime green" and "magenta," for example, that person might logically assume that the woman has dreamt of a Martian landing on Earth, even though she describes the reverse situation. By virtue of his novel's title alone, Bradbury has promised us aliens in *The Martian Chronicles*, but these aliens are little more than stereotypical middle-class Americans rendered more interesting because they happen to inhabit Mars.

Anyone who has walked by the science fiction section of a library or bookstore or happened to flip past the Sci-Fi channel on television likely knows that space aliens visit the world of science fiction much more frequently than they visit us in real life.[1] What one might not necessarily realize is how often these aliens resemble people. In most science fictions, even when an alien is depicted as an individual more peculiar than merely a man or woman with unusually-colored eyes, he will exhibit at least a few recognizable vestiges of humanity in his appearance, speech, actions, and/or attitudes. To create such a character, the author will often fuse one or more concepts that are usually known to readers, such as the idea of an evil villain or a lovable pet, with others that are wholly exotic to everyday experience, like the fancy that an extraterrestrial might invade Earth or that a robot could be affectionate; that writer will then imagine, and develop in writing, a world that allows for his literary creations to exist. Former editor of the prominent science fiction magazine, *Analog Science Fiction and Fact*, John W. Campbell, Jr., adds that "an honest effort at prophetic extrapolation from the known must be made" (qtd. in Eshbach 91)[2]; while the necessity of the "honesty" of the effort is debatable, this idea of *extrapolation*—"the technique of basing imaginary worlds or situations on existing ones

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[1] Although technically the term "alien" can be used synonymously with "foreigner," when I use the word I am referring explicitly to beings from outer space.

[2] The magazine has only had this title since 1960. For most of Campbell's tenure as editor, the magazine was called *Astounding Science Fiction*, a title preceded briefly by *Astounding Stories*.

through cognitive or rational means" (Wolfe 16), thus combining the familiar with the alien—seems to be a defining quality of science fiction.[3]

Other critics in the field tend to agree. In a collection of essays devoted entirely to and entitled *Speculations on Speculation: Theories of Science Fiction,* James Gunn calls science fiction's world one of "everyday experience extended" (9) while Gary K. Wolfe discusses Darko Suvin's theory of "cognitive estrangement," in which science fiction alienates the reader from reality, yet manages to differentiate itself from fantastic literature by keeping that reader "cognitively connected to [the natural world]" (15). Slightly opposed to him is Eric Rabkin, who in a separate work suggests that science fiction is the "branch of the fantastic that seeks plausibility against a background of science" ("Science Fiction and the Future of Criticism" 459). Peter Stockwell says simply that it is the "form of fiction in which the fictionalized world is foregrounded as being alternate to our own actual world" (254-255). An extensive compilation of academic theories of science fiction would be another project entirely, but these definitions are, in my experience, largely typical of critical opinion. While these scholars and their colleagues might disagree over specific details about the genre, I have found that they share a sense of, and celebrate, science fiction's unique combination of real and fantastic elements. Each of these interpretations allows for and encourages the expansion of such thrilling ideas as an alien invasion on Earth, a time machine, a computer that comes to life, or a drug that makes a rock look, taste, and feel like a strawberry, things that challenge our perceptions, things that we as readers expect from science fiction.

As such, I would like to contribute my own ideas to this unending debate, in naming in this thesis any significant aspect of a science fiction story that creates this simultaneously known

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[3] In fact, the first academic journal to seriously consider science fiction as a literary genre is called *Extrapolation*.

and unknown experience a Familiar Alien.[4] Furthermore, I believe that Familiar Aliens are more than only symptomatic of most tales generally accepted as science fiction; it is my position that an intellectual grasp of them is critical to understanding the genre itself. Although "aliens" are usually used colloquially to refer to living beings, a Familiar Alien does not automatically refer to a semi-earthly character. In fact, it is not even limited to being a *thing* in the story, as H.G. Wells' time machine and Ursula LeGuin's ansible are; nonetheless, as I will soon demonstrate, a *thing* type of Familiar Alien is often much easier to notice in science fiction, and is therefore a good jumping-off point for understanding how it functions.[5] A Familiar Alien also can be, however, a stylistic feature of the story—specifically, how the characters communicate among themselves, and how the story is narrated. Just as with characters, machines, and events, language possesses tremendous extrapolative potential. For an example, one can refer to the discourse of Yll and Ylla, two ostensibly alien creatures whose very rhetoric is anything but. In this case, the *familiar* is the marital bickering of frustrated couples, and the *alien* is the fact that even though Yll and Ylla seem recognizable and humanlike, they are in fact from Mars, and therefore we should be aware that their language is still "Martian" even if it is displayed in English. Here, Bradbury has extrapolated language only to an elementary level by merely implying that it is an alien language; a writer may actually do much more, from discussing language, to manipulating one or a few words, to putting his or her entire work through linguistic innovation. Regardless of method, the writer attempts to create something that is both strange

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[4] I am utterly indebted to Eric Rabkin for—among a thousand other things—this epithet, which emerged as a result of both hours of discussion with me and his immeasurable mental compendium of science fiction theory. His suggestion of this coinage really helped me to crystallize my own ideas for this thesis.

[5] For those unfamiliar with LeGuin's works, or the dozens they inspired that also make use of this contraption, an ansible is a device capable of sending information faster than the speed of light, making inter- and intra-planetary communication (faster than) a snap.

yet grounded enough in reality to be readable. Thus language can be used not only as the medium through which the author constructs the tale and communicates it to the reader, but as a Familiar Alien in itself.

The various ways in which language can serve as a Familiar Alien, its effects on the work as a whole, and its implications on all of literature are at the heart of my study, and I will return to them presently, but not before I address certain important theoretical issues. Namely, what is it about the Familiar Alien that makes good science fiction so uniquely compelling? Just because a story has aliens or telepathy or food-pills does not imply that it is an impressive piece of literature. The fusion of the ordinary and the exotic must be such that it achieves some sort of powerful effect on the reader if it is to deserve its status as a notable example of art, whether or not it is science fiction. The key to answering this query might lie in the work of Victor Shklovsky and his concept of *ostranenie*, or defamiliarization. Rendered literally into English, *ostranenie* is the process of "making strange," which, of course, is another way to say "making alien." It is therefore not very surprising that even though the Russian Formalist Shklovsky does not demonstrate a particular interest in science fiction, and instead concerns himself with literary art as a whole, his theories about literature's purpose and effects, and how it employs *ostranenie*, apply exceptionally well to many theories regarding science fiction.

In his innovative essay, "Art as Technique," Shklovsky seeks to delineate the qualities that distinguish art from ordinariness, specifically literary, poetic prose from blander, less compelling prose. In perceiving a common object, Shklovsky explains, we naturally and automatically default to a simple "algebraic" way of thought, in which symbols replace all things—we "do not see [objects] in their entirety but rather recognize them by their main characteristics" (11)—which "permits the greatest economy of perceptive effort" (12). Most of

us brush our teeth daily but we are unlikely to acutely sense the toothbrush handle's bright mix of colors, the feel of the cool plastic in our grips, the propelling oscillations of our arms to clean each tooth, the biting taste of spearmint on our tongues. All of the effort needed to actively register the sensations of this mundane morning and bedtime ritual, of course, would be silly, and the act does not necessitate nor deserve an imprint on our consciousness. Similarly, we read and digest unexciting, straightforward, non-artistic prose quickly and efficiently, and may forget it soon after. This "habitualized" process of gaining meaning is a highly effective way to process much information in little time, and accordingly is necessary for everyday life; however, it is the opposite of the experience of true art, which Shklovsky tells us celebrates prolonged perception.

Art, according to this critic, remedies our automatic route of knowing. He suggests that we value art for its ability to rejuvenate, and "make strange" a common act, object, or feeling that is otherwise rendered dull and lifeless by habit.[6] He writes,

> Habitualization devours work, clothes, furniture, one's wife, and the fear of
> war…And art exists that one may recover the sensation of life; it exists to make
> one feel things, to make the stone *stony*. The purpose of art is to impart the
> sensation of things as they are perceived and not as they are known. The
> technique of art is to make things "unfamiliar," to make forms difficult, to
> increase the difficulty and length of perception because the process of perception

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[6] The ideas behind defamiliarization were by no means entirely dreamt up by Shklovsky; however, he was the first to use such a concrete term to describe them. A hundred years before *Art as Technique*'s publication, for example, Samuel Taylor Coleridge writes on the essence of poetry: "To carry on the feelings of childhood into the powers of manhood; to combine the child's sense of wonder and novelty with the appearances which every day for perhaps forty years had rendered familiar…this is the character and privilege of genius." Given Coleridge's life as poet-philosopher, I would suggest that his specific idea of "genius" correlates with Shklovsky's artist, a *literary, poetic* genius. (Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *The Friend: A Series of Essays* [Oxford: Gale and Curtis, 1812].)

is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged. *Art is a way to experience the artfulness of an object: the object is not important…* (12)

Essentially, art slows down awareness to the point where we can appreciate the very process of perceiving. It prevents us from processing the object mechanically, and then forgetting that particular unmemorable experience of the object moments later. We are thus forced to rethink an object because the lag in cognition caused by defamiliarization requires us to acknowledge, if not surrender, our prior schema of that object. As a result, Shklovsky stresses, a creator can make the reader question his associations with an object and perceive it in an entirely new and refreshing way.

To illustrate the basic idea of *ostranenie*, he uses the example of Leo Tolstoy's short story "Kohlstomer," a tale narrated by a contemplative horse who is baffled by human behavior. He muses quite profoundly and profusely, for a horse or for a human, on the notion of property, of which only a brief portion is included here:

> There are people who call women their own, or their "wives," but their women live with other men. And people strive not for the good in life, but for the goods they can call their own. (Tolstoy qtd. in Shklovsky 15)

In these mere two sentences, defamiliarization is at work, and its primary agent is the horse's narrative voice. The institution of marriage and the desire for material things are commonplace to us, but the perspective of the horse renders them anew, as the horse has never owned or desired to own anything. His lack of distinction between owning an item and owning a spouse refigures the very concept of ownership, and the rights one possesses as an owner. Additionally, Tolstoy's wordplay with "good," which he uses to mean something positive and something that can be purchased in the same sentence, further assists in the passage's defamiliarizing effect; the

reader must reconsider his or her associations with "good" and then try to reconcile them within the context of the horse's point of view.[7] Thus, Tolstoy's tale of the horse is artful by Shklovsky's definition, for it causes the reader to temporarily abandon his usual conceptions about private property, goodness, and even the average horse.

Though Shklovsky lists several other devices through which defamiliarization can be attained, he does not claim that his list is definitive, insisting that "defamiliarization is found almost everywhere [art] is found" (18). He emphasizes that it is not a device in itself, but rather a reaction to one or more devices. Riddles, for instance, naturally defamiliarize:

> Every riddle pretends to show its subject either by words which specify or describe it but which, during the telling, do not seem applicable (the type: black and white and "red"—read—all over) or by means of odd but imitative sounds ("'Twas brillig, and the slithy toves / Did gyre and gimble in the wabe") (Shklovsky 20)[8]

He also notes that often erotic acts and body parts are euphemized, which similarly effects *ostranenie*; the metaphor can defamiliarize by linking an object with something wholly unrelated to it; a word can defamiliarize if it is used in such a way that its usual meaning jars with the meaning given by the text's context; the very plot can defamiliarize if it is constructed in a

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[7] Not knowing much Russian outside of my research for *A Clockwork Orange*, I cannot verify that a Russian equivalent of "good" exists that can, depending on context, simultaneously denote something that is excellent and a piece of merchandise; in fact I would suspect that this is not the case. Thus, this last bit of defamiliarization could be inadvertent on Tolstoy's part, and only have significance for the English-speaking reader.

[8] Shklovsky's translators and editors, Lee T. Lemon and Marion J. Reis, add the following footnote here: "We have supplied familiar English examples in place of Shklovsky's wordplay [because Shklovsky's Russian examples did not translate well into English]. Shklovsky is saying that we create words with no referents or with ambiguous referents in order to force attention to the objects represented by the similar-sounding words. By making the reader go through the extra step of interpreting the nonsense word, the writer prevents an automatic response. A toad is a toad but 'tove' forces one to pause and think about the beast" (Shklovsky 20).

manner that is incongruous with the typical expectation that stories proceed chronologically. Regardless of the device used, where there is effective defamiliarization, there will be art; its ability to prolong one's perceptions will necessarily reconstruct the reader's previously held notions of an object and make it fresh and exotic. Thus, we can have Tolstoy's talking horse considered as art, and only a few cognitive steps away stands a talking extraterrestrial.

Shklovsky never explicitly mentions science fiction as a strange-maker in "Art as Technique," but his theories are fundamental to the genre. If the quintessential quality of all good literature is its ability to make the familiar seem strange, then science fiction, which inherently harbors an intense concern for mixing the known with a very prominent alien, must provide exceptionally good exercises in *ostranenie*. Other genres use subtler devices to make the familiar seem strange, but science fiction does not just make the familiar strange—it makes it *very* strange. It is exactly this class of defamiliarizing agent that I am calling the Familiar Alien. Thus, one can easily locate a meticulously-crafted description of an ornate and luscious ball gown and head-dress, rendering it even more brilliant and unusual in the imagination than it would appear to the naked eye, in a novel such as *Anna Karenina*, another Tolstoyan classic—

> Anna was not in lilac, as Kitty had so urgently wished, but in a black, low-cut, velvet gown, showing her full throat and shoulders, that looked as though carved in old ivory, and her rounded arms, and tiny, slender wrists. The whole gown was trimmed with Venetian guipure [filet lace]. On her head, among her black hair— her own, with no false additions—was a little wreath of pansies, and a bouquet of the same in the black ribbon of her sash among white lace.[9]

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[9] Leo Tolstoy, *Anna Karenina*, Ed. Amy Mandelker, Trans. Constance Garnett (Spark Educational Publishing, 2003) 74.

—but he would be hard-pressed to find evidence that the wearer of the gown resides on the planet Kaitain, as Princess Irulan does in Frank Herbert's *Dune* series. Both dress descriptions would defamiliarize the reader's basic idea of a pretty young aristocrat or princess, as the case may be, but they employ different degrees of strangeness. While critics endlessly fight over the exact defining traits of a science fiction story, most will acknowledge that the genre relies on taking a commonplace concept and placing it into an unusual, fantastic context, like the Princess in her beautiful gown on Kaitain—or vice versa.[10] This mixing of what is known with what is fabricated produces a fresh, fantastical tale that stretches the bounds of the implied reader's imagination and questions the reader's perceptions without seeming disablingly implausible or painfully inaccessible.

We can thus return once again to Yll and Ylla, Familiar Aliens in the most literal sense of the term. After all, what is more Alien than an alien? They have unusual-sounding names and peculiarly-colored eyes, live in a house of crystal, and, of course, they live on Mars—but they are in most other ways a twosome that easily could, and does, appear in television shows, movies, books, and real life: bored with their spouses and themselves, aching to escape their banality. Despite Yll's patronizing skepticism, Ylla clings to her wild hope that an Earth-man—an alien to *her*—will land on her planet and whisk her away to romantic bliss; when her dream-prophecy comes true, Yll, ever the cantankerously jealous husband, finds the man and shoots him dead moments after his feet touch Yll's home planet. Leaving the reader to situate his knowledge of married life and UFO fantasies from the bizarre Martian landscape, this vignette therefore asks provokingly, what does marriage mean in today's world, or has it never really

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[10] One might rightly argue that most people do not really *know* what defines a princess, having little or no life experience with one. Direct knowledge of a thing is not necessary however; things that cultures have certain default expectations of—for example, that a princess should be young, virginal, and beautiful—also fit in my definition of things that are "known."

meant anything? Are unhappy unions more common than we want to admit? How valid is a fear of strangers? And, on top of it all, who are the real "aliens" implicated here—the Martians, or us, as people of Earth and of Ylla's dream? Shklovsky's defamiliarization is thus most certainly at work here: just as Tolstoy's use of the horse creates art by questioning our concepts of ownership, Bradbury's use of the humanized Martians makes art, specifically of the science fictive variety, by challenging our perceptions about the stereotypical "perfect" marriage and the deadly dangers of misunderstanding and fearing people that are different from us.

One might argue that these aliens are hardly "alien" enough. Certainly Stanislaw Lem was trying to avoid that criticism in writing *Solaris*, in which the extraterrestrial in question is defamiliarized to such an extent that it makes some of the humans who are attempting to connect to it go mad.[11] Yet an alien character in science fiction tends to fall towards the center of the spectrum between completely familiar and absolutely bizarre. For example, there are father-of-science-fiction H.G. Wells' Martians from *The War of the Worlds*, who bear little corporal resemblance to Bradbury's people-Martians. The narrator even confesses at his first encounter with these Martians that he expects to "see a man emerge—possibly something a little unlike us terrestrial men, but in all essentials a man," and he is sorely disappointed by the vile creatures that come out instead.[12] Nonetheless, he apprehends their humongous eyes, saliva-dripping V-shaped mouths, and greasy skin, and once they begin their awful yet scientifically brilliant business with the Heat-Ray and black smoke-equipped fighting-machines, the narrator realizes the truth of his earlier surmise they are, "in spite of their repulsive forms, intelligent creatures," relating to these vile creatures physically and mentally. As readers, we also can find similarities

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[11] Stanislaw Lem, *Solaris*, Trans. Steve Cox and Joanna Kilmartin (Orlando: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1987).

[12] H.G. Wells, *The War of the Worlds* (Plain Label Books, 1962) 26-32.

between ourselves and the Martians, and we understand that our mutual raw need to survive causes the aliens to treat us like cattle; to them, we *are* cattle, inferior in mental and physical capabilities and thus lower on the food chain. This questions our general assumption that our species is a dignified one. We can even detect familiar qualities in an alien as monstrous and loathsome as *Star War*'s Jabba the Hutt, who greedily and ruthlessly domineers his space-age Mafia like a future Don Corleone. These are but two of the innumerable unearthly characters who exhibit and therefore defamiliarize at least some degree of apparent humanness; they are simultaneously viewed by the reader as supernatural creatures and as recognizable entities. These tropes of science fiction demonstrate the central idea behind the Familiar Alien: juxtaposing the known with the fantastic refigures the known. One senses that there is something familiar in the somewhat—or very—strange creature from outer space, and its very alienness impels the reader to reshape his perceptions of *what* makes it recognizable.

Peter Stockwell notes that the effecter of cognitive estrangement in science fiction, what I am calling the Familiar Alien, is "occasionally linguistic or stylistic…but most commonly operates at the conceptual level" (255). As I have demonstrated, character and other "conceptual" aliens are excellent and quite obvious examples of Familiar Aliens, but I would argue that the stylistic aliens are just as worthy of notice and analysis. In some cases, they are much harder to imagine and create. When formulating a conceptual alien, the author must ostensibly extrapolate on the known by relying on scientifically plausible ideas, but really, as long as he includes enough familiarity in the alien, he can let his imagination run wild. Karel Čapek's postulate that a species of intelligent Newts will be discovered and enslaved by humans, and then eventually band and rebel in a full-blown war for dominance on Earth, is on one hand

utterly preposterous, but on the other hand sounds like an altered piece of history.[13] People do have a propensity for making slaves of one another on the pretense that the other race is capable of manual labor but not of their intellectualism, and the practice has indeed led to many local, national, and even international catastrophes. When creating a stylistic alien, however, as a writer does when he innovates language, he can only unleash his imagination to the point where a reader will still have a chance of understanding the story. He can include a glossary, and some authors do, but if he does not obey the science of linguistics' basic laws to some extent, he will be left with an unreadable, unpublishable manuscript. If, however, the writer effectively defamiliarizes language, he can potentially create a true work of art that is both a challenge to read and a delight to comprehend.

The significant effects of language as the Familiar Alien in science fiction—those that take language beyond the realm of communicating a story to helping to create the special defamiliarization that distinguishes the genre—are the focus of my project. There are roughly two categories into which artistic manipulation of language can be divided, and, as such, I have used them as a blueprint for my first two chapters. These categories range from language used to merely adorn the story to language *being* the story. Accordingly, Chapter One deals with novels that employ neologisms that have been created to describe a preexisting object. Neologisms such as these can often impel the reader to recognize the alien-ness of the world in which the story has been placed. They can defamiliarize rules of spelling and phonetics, and possibly the culture of the language off which the new word seems to have been based. These neologisms are usually ornamental rather than crucial to the story, with little to do with the tale's thematic elements. This chapter also deals with works that feature transformed language, a concept that I

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[13] Karel Čapek, *War with the Newts*, Trans. Ewald Osers (New Haven: Catbird Press, 1990).

have borrowed extensively from Eric Rabkin. Transformed language, which I will explain further in detail later, occurs when an author uses as material for a story language that he or she expects to be familiar to the reader, and then molds it to shape the alternate textual world. When transformed language is used as a Familiar Alien, it is used as the material that expresses the themes of the book, even though the themes themselves might not necessarily deal with linguistics. For example, in LeGuin's *The Left Hand of Darkness*, she communicates in four small yet jarring words—"the king was pregnant"—that our rules regarding gender and reproduction do not apply in her world, which the rest of the story confirms.[14] Thus in recognizing what familiar words and phrases have been defamiliarized, we are pushed to see what aspects of our own world have been modified.

Chapter Two looks at novels of science fiction that make a Familiar Alien out of language by actually taking it on as a subject, typically via one or more invented languages. Invented languages are the most complex sort of linguistic Familiar Alien, whether an author uses the idea of the invented language as a front to spark a broader discussion of language itself, as in Samuel Delany's *Babel-17*, or an author accomplishes the very difficult task of writing the novel in that invented language, as Anthony Burgess does with nadsat in *A Clockwork Orange*. Sometimes, as with George Orwell's Newspeak in *1984*, the author chooses to incorporate little bits of both approaches. Regardless, when language creates the very matter of a story, language effectively estranges itself from us. As a result, these novels strive to turn our relationships with it upside-down, encouraging us to consider what language is and how it deeply affects our interpretation of literature.

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[14] Ursula Le Guin, *The Left Hand of Darkness* (New York: Ace Books, 1969) 100.

This thesis' culminating chapter uses Russell Hoban's literary and linguistic masterpiece, *Riddley Walker*, as a case study featuring language used to—in my opinion—its utmost Familiar Alien potential. *Riddley Walker* uses language as a defamiliarizing device in nearly every way I have previously discussed: neologism, transformed language, a discussion of language, and the actual use of the language. Though this novel is initially tricky to read, the artistic rewards it offers are rarely matched by other novels, and learning how to read it is an adventure in itself. In *Riddley Walker*, we see language estranging us from assumptions about linguistics, cultures, violence, technology, love, hate, thought, and ultimately the very act of reading a novel. It helps us to see the fundamentality of language to all literature, not just to science fiction. By discussing the book, I hope to cement the importance and insightful capabilities of a linguistic Familiar Alien to science fiction and to our very lives.

Bradbury's Martians, Yll and Ylla, are Familiar Aliens in science fiction, but they are only the most basic of examples. The genre can, and does, produce much greater and more profound instances of defamiliarization. My thesis surveys and examines the type that I find the most compelling, those that work through language. It begins with novels that only use linguistic Familiar Aliens as flavoring and ends with novels whose study of language is paramount to all other issues in the novel. I hope to elucidate the various elements that can make language an effective Familiar Alien, and to nominate it as a valuable tool of understanding all literature, rather than merely the medium between a science fiction author and reader. In doing so, I feel that I am in a sense channeling the future musings of Riddley Walker himself:

> That's why I finely come to writing all this down. Thinking on what the idear of us myt be. Thinking on that thing what in us loan and oansome. (Hoban 7)

Chapter One

Language in the Background: Neologisms and Transformed Language

> *"...Would you care to try another word? Trash."*
>
> *"Why not? It doesn't matter that you're a skeptic. Not in the least. What was it*
> *again, trash? Very well…trash, trashcan, ashcan, trashman. Trashmass,*
> *trashmic, catatrashmic. Trashmass, trashmosh. On a large enough scale,*
> *trashmos. And—of course—macrotrashm! Tichy, you come up with the best*
> *words! Really, just think of it, macrotrashm!"*
>
> *"I'm afraid I don't follow. It's nonsense to me."*
>
> *"...macrotrashm is nonsense so far, yet we can already guess its sense-to-be, its*
> *future significance. The word, observe, implies nothing less than a new*
> *psychozoic theory! Implies that the stars are of artificial origin!"*
>
> *"Now where do you get that?"*
>
> *"From the word itself…"*[1]

In beginning a study of language's role as the Familiar Alien, it seems logical to begin with cases in which the defamiliarized language is not at the forefront of the issues explored by the novel. Compared with instances in which a study of language plays an important, if not essential, role in a story's substance, language is used here in a less central manner. Here, "fun with language"—as Myra Barnes playfully describes in her pioneering dissertation "Linguistics and Languages in Science Fiction-Fantasy" (37), which, along with Walter Meyers' *Aliens and*

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[1] Stanislaw Lem, *The Futurological Congress*, Trans. Michael Kandel (Orlando: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1985) 108.

Linguists, initially helped to inspire my own project—is used decoratively; the carefully crafted words and phrases enhance the world of the novel without directly informing it. Such lexical exploration can be of two varieties, neologisms and transformed language. Each is capable of shaping the reader's impression of the familiar, yet unfamiliar world, although the latter tends to matter more to the work thematically. Both types of language realize Meyers' general maxim that "If through the use of language the author adds an extra imaginative dimension and at the same time provides the reader with a new perspective from which to view his own society, something special has indeed been accomplished" (Meyers 8). What has been accomplished, of course, is Shklovsky's art.

Of these two categories of alienating language, the neologism is the simpler and more recognizable type, and is likely more of a "familiar" Familiar Alien to most readers. For the purposes of my thesis, I am referring to a very basic neologism at this point, the product of the specific type of manipulation of language that creates a new word for a concept—whether this concept exists in reality or only within the author's mind. As Barnes notes, science fiction has its own signature type of lexicon that may include "such words as *android*, *humanoid*, *space warp, hyperspace*" (11). Though not an earth-shattering revelation, it is worth pointing out that words like these are typically absent in literature outside of the genre, excepting those like *cyberspace* which have snuck into the common vernacular and accordingly are no longer true Familiar Aliens to us, just utterly *familiar*. In most cases, however, the neologism provides a subtle reminder to us that the world we are reading about is experimental in some way, and therefore not completely confined to our traditional laws of reality. Although these words often appear as technological jargon (something like *aurapsychomatic blastjectile*) or space creature talk (*qizzlxht!*), a word like *grok*, coined by Robert A. Heinlein in *Stranger in a Strange Land* to

describe a complex state of knowing—"understand[ing] so thoroughly that the observer becomes a part of the observed—to merge, blend, intermarry, lose identity in group experience" (213-214)—also fulfills the most basic duty of the neologism, creating in us a feeling of estrangement from the textual world and perhaps our own. By deviating from ordinary language, and not looking or sounding like everyday vocabulary, nearly any neologism can suggest the "otherness of a society" (Meyers 8).

The neologism is not merely a handy ornament in science fiction. Part of the reason we may expect science fiction to have strange new words may be an innate sense that the flow of history requires a parallel flow of language. The Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, which I review in the next chapter to facilitate my discussion of *Babel-17*, bases its argument in this very simple premise. Language is hardly a stagnant entity, and just as people who lived a century ago did not converse with the same exact words that we use today, it is logical that in another century or two, today's discourse will sound archaic if not unintelligible. As cultures merge or diverge, and new ideas and technologies emerge or deteriorate, vocabularies must inevitably and indefinitely morph to accommodate the passage of time. Thus science fiction, as a branch of literature intimately concerned with an alien—and therefore somehow changed—world, should have to reflect some linguistic change in order to help establish a degree of plausibility. After all, part of the science fiction writer's characteristic attempt to extrapolate involves making predictions about an alternate world that are nonetheless grounded in his reality, and this logically includes predictions about linguistics. That *cyberspace* (William Gibson's neologism for technologically-simulated reality in his acclaimed *Neuromancer*) has been adopted enthusiastically into contemporary vocabularies as a legitimate term is a testament to the accuracy of Gibson's speculation; history continually demonstrates that human advancement—and, logically,

deterioration—are mirrored by linguistic change.[2] Thus, in imagining new words for the

alternate world, I would suggest that the author effectively accomplishes two very significant

goals of science fiction; the new words both stake a claim for the world's plausibility while

maintaining its alien qualities.[3]

       We are therefore justified in expecting neologisms to some degree in science fiction.

Furthermore, just as Meyers notes that "It is only in bad science fiction that the alien being acts

like a costumed human, differing from the familiar only in appearance" (9), the best neologisms

cause alienation by virtue of more than just the fact that they *look* different from ordinary

language. New words work well as Familiar Aliens if they play off of the very concepts they are

based on, often creating slight moments of irony, as in John Brunner's technological dystopia

Shockwave Rider. The hero of the story, Nick, is in perpetual fear of being *sanded*—not from

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[2] The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines *cyberspace* as such: "The notional environment within which electronic communication occurs, especially when represented as the inside of a computer system; space perceived as such by an observer but generated by a computer system and having no real existence; the space of virtual reality." ("Cyberspace," *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed.)

[3] Gary Westfahl considers the prevalence of neologisms in science fiction to be so definitive of the genre that he has conducted a study to "examine the number and nature of *new words* in science fiction as one good way to examine the number and nature of its *new ideas*" (291). As theorists often characterize science fiction as a literature of new ideas—the prolific Isaac Asimov once argued that it is "a literature of ideas…the only literature of relevant ideas, since it is the only literature that, at best, is firmly based in scientific thought" (qtd. in Heinte vii)—the correlation between new words and new ideas might indeed be significant. Ultimately, he finds that neologisms are introduced at about the same rate as new ideas, about every 800-900 words. He also adds that "it is at least a remarkable coincidence" this statistic follows perfectly A.E. van Vogt's advice regarding the writing of science fiction: "Never forget that 800 word scene. It tells you better than abstract logic that it's time for another idea" (qtd. in Westfahl 292). Of course, "another" idea might not necessarily be a "new" idea in Westfahl's terms or for my purposes (a mere change of scenery works, too) and Westfahl's analysis does not survey nearly enough books for his theory to be considered valid; however, I believe this correlation is worth observing because it supports the postulate that perhaps the new, defamiliarizing ideas inherent to science fiction *require* new words to describe them. This would suggest that neologisms are worthy in their own right as tropes of the genre and not merely the least defamiliarizing linguistic Familiar Alien.

being buffed by grainy paper, but from being a victim of S-and-D, a reference to the popular

Vietnam War army strategy of "search and destroy" (49). Thus Brunner hints that the America

of this novel is one where violent, inhumane *sanding* is so frequent that it is colloquial. In

addition, some of the characters express agreement with each other by saying *sweedack*, a

flippant shortening of the French expression *je suis d'accord*: "Came south with the Canadian

hockey players" (35). Hence in Nick's recognizable yet strange alternate universe, Brunner

presents us with an idiom to the common vernacular that bears an uncanny familiarity to the

vapid teenager's "Sweet!" and inherently mocks the stereotype that all Americans believe

"Everything Sounds Sexier in French."[4] Perhaps the most sardonic of Brunner's neologisms is

his gender terminology, which has (d)evolved into a classification system based on slangy names

for sexual parts; a man is commonly called a *shiv*, and a woman a *slittie*, implying that language

that would be considered lewd today is now commonplace.[5] In all of these cases, the new words

intimate ways in which our known world has been altered to become the exotic world of

Shockwave Rider, ways in which the Familiar Alien is at work. Neologisms keep the imaginary

landscape from drifting too far from the present-day by challenging our associations with

concepts with which we are already familiar, creating brief moments of social irony whenever

possible.

As demonstrated by *sweedack*, neologisms need not be inspired by English. When a

neologism has origins in or mimics another tongue, it can estrange us from our associations with

the people or culture that that language represents. One of the best examples of a novel that uses

such foreign language-based neologisms, not to mention words and names that actually come

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[4] "Everything Sounds Sexier in French," *TV Tropes*, 5 Feb. 2009, 10 Feb. 2009, <http://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Main/EverythingSoundsSexierInFrench>.
[5] "Shiv" is short for "shiver," or a small splinter. I have no doubt Brunner intended additional irony regarding the magnitude of such organs, or what one might do upon seeing one.

from these same foreign languages, is Frank Herbert's geo-eco-sociopolitical epic *Dune*. The author's son, Brian, calls Herbert's use of language "eclectic" in his biography and notes that, while many of the words of *Dune* are "rooted in Arabic and Hebrew," many of them are also made of "combined syllables from two languages, two cultures, or even two religions" (B. Herbert 189). I would suggest subcategorizing these types of neologisms as Familiar Aliens Squared because in a sense they cause many of us to experience defamiliarization on two levels: not only do we realize that the world of the text is in some way changed from our own, as we do with the neologisms discussed from *Shockwave Rider*, but we also are made aware that even what is *familiar* about the linguistic Familiar Alien is still relative, as we have little knowledge of the sources of the words themselves. While there are plenty of polyglots and seasoned world travelers for whom this extra shot of estrangement may not apply, many English readers may only have vague, generalized associations about the language(s) and culture(s) that supply the roots of these words. An excellent example of a Familiar Alien Squared is the title *Kwisatz Haderach*, which in the text refers to the name of the Messiah; literally, it means the "shortening of the way." Some readers might recognize its resemblance to "kefizat haderech"—the Hebrew expression for the ability to move instantaneously from one place to another—and gain an extra level of understanding of *Kwisatz Haderach*, but even those without a working knowledge of Hebrew can still benefit from its boldly Jewish overtones. In the novel, the young and precocious Paul Atreides takes advantage of the Fremen's devout belief system, convincing both them and himself that he is their oft-prayed-for *Kwisatz Haderach*, "whose organic mental powers [will] bridge space and time" (F. Herbert 522). Armed with their support, he eventually seizes control of the entire Imperium—the entire universe—even though he is no older than eighteen, and even though there is no undisputable proof that he is the true Messiah. By giving

the Messiah a name that has actual ties to religion, Herbert can subtly question a literalistic interpretation of a messiah in past and present-day theistic thought without being too offensive toward any particular belief system. Furthermore, the fact that Herbert draws nearly exclusively on both Hebrew *and* Arabic for his religious terminology suggests that the belief systems associated with those languages may not be as incompatible as the media sometimes makes us believe.

Another culture that Herbert weaves into his tale through language is Greek, which may seem incongruous given the strong parallels that the novel bears otherwise to the climate, topography, and social issues found in the deserts of the Middle East. This move makes sense, however, in light of Herbert's efforts to make *Dune* a truly epic saga and align it with classic myth. In his son's praiseful words, "*Dune* ascended beyond the realm of science fiction, and has been called one of the greatest novels ever written by any author, and arguably the greatest novel of imagination ever conceived" (B. Herbert 171). Though his filial praise borders on gushing, the sheer number of the topics covered in the novel, from the complex relationships between religion, politics, ecology, technology, government, and humanity to the mythology that envelops and provides the core of the novel, indisputably makes the novel far more than a simple tale. By giving his protagonist the surname *Atreides*, Herbert connects his tale to the House of Atreus of Greek myth and thus to the *Oresteia*, both attaching to his story a greater universal significance and the suggestion that the events might unfold in a similar manner. Also, the Greek element that the language adds to *Dune* helps to defamiliarize the aura that surrounds myths; after all, despite Paul's weighty epithets of *Kwisatz Haderach* and *Atreides*, in truth he is just a boy.

Dune is also helpful to introduce the other type of creative language that many authors employ in science fiction as a way to estrange us from the text. This is Eric Rabkin's concept of language that has not been invented but *transformed*, which he describes in his essay "Metalinguistics and Science Fiction." Rather than just creating a new word, as the writer does with a neologism, he takes concepts that he expects his readers to be already familiar with, and infuses them with new meaning. Transformed language employs *our* language as material, and the context surrounding the transformed language to define it; it is therefore our own language that alienates us, not language that the author has imagined. Consequentially, there are no ostentatious spellings or flamboyant combinations of words to catch one's eye; transformed language is not detected by merely skimming the page. It can, however, potentially achieve a powerful effect, much greater than that of neologism, because transformed language tends to touch upon important thematic issues. As Rabkin argues, it is "by virtue of its less obvious nature" that "it can create a subtle and lasting impression on a reader and help to validate the areas of particular concern to the author" (87).

In *Dune*, transformed language often occurs in conversations about water, which is a commodity even more precious to the people of the violently arid Arrakis than is oil, or even diamonds, to us. Water is so scarce and costly on Arrakis that stillsuits, which recycle the body's sweat and waste products into water the wearer can drink again, are necessary for making long travels through the desert; the wealthy ritually spill water on the floor as they wash before a meal as a flagrant, profligate demonstration of their social status; for the Fremen, spitting at someone is not an insult, but a gesture of genuine respect. Thus it is not uncommon to find characters in *Dune* making statements such as these:

> "Your water is ours, Duncan Idaho…The body of our friend remains with your
>
> Duke. His body is Atreides water. It is a bond between us." (75)
>
> "It is said in the desert that possession of water in great amount can inflict a man
>
> with fatal carelessness." (104)
>
> "He sheds tears!"…"[Paul] gives moisture to the dead!" (251)
>
> "When the tribe shares the Water," she said, "we're together—all of us." (288)

Using transformed language, Herbert therefore revitalizes our associations with water. For those of us who do not have to expend much more effort than turning a faucet to get it, the discourse of the Fremen forces us to reconsider its true value, both in this distant world and in our own. As Frank Herbert's son Brian Herbert writes of his father's thought process, "The human body was, by weight and volume, predominantly water. And after all, he asked, what was life without water?" His effective use of language asks the same questions of us. Similar reverence of water can be found in Robert A. Heinlein's *Stranger in a Strange Land* (the novel of *grok*), where the Martian-born protagonist Smith is awed that "This brother wanted him to place *his whole body* in the water of life! No such honor had ever come to him; to the best of his knowledge no one had *ever* been offered such a privilege" (Heinlein 64). Again, the writer prods us to imagine water as something more than a ubiquitous drink or something to go swimming in, and recognize our society's tendency to take water, an absolutely essential component of our lives, for granted.

Transformed language is therefore a less readily apparent, but ultimately more profound, literary technique of using language to defamiliarize us as readers. As I mentioned earlier, science fiction readers expect neologisms to some extent, so we are consciously or subconsciously prepared for them. Even those familiar with only the Sci-Fi channel on television would likely agree that "New societies, new forms of life, are key elements in the

appeal of the genre" (Meyers 8). Neologisms such as Lem's "macrotrashm" immediately signal to us that we are being presented with such things, but the word "water" alone in the text of *Dune* bears little on any feelings of alienation. Because transformed language is only recognizable in context of the words and story surrounding it, it is therefore a subtler way of demonstrating the "new societies" and "new forms." We have to make a bigger effort to even catch the transformed language, let alone understand it; Shklovsky would certainly applaud this increased delay in full cognition, which enhances the alienating effect for which science fiction generally strives. Also, as Eric Rabkin points out, transformed language also has a greater capability of inherently telling us more about the world we have entered. Rabkin makes a key distinction between the two: effective use of transformed language may "handily oppose the value structure implicit in our present language to the value structure they implicitly suggest must emerge if things go on the way they are" ("Metalinguistics and Science Fiction" 86) while neologisms "do not engage a code of alternate values…nor do they create satire by opposing contemporary values to their future" ("Metalinguistics and Science Fiction" 89). Neologisms are clever in and of themselves, can suggest societal change, and can make ironic connections to cultures and ideas, but only transformed language, in using our own unadulterated language as its substance, can directly question our values now.

Ursula LeGuin is a master of effectively using transformed language, especially in her self-proclaimed "ambiguous utopia" *The Dispossessed*, which is set on two planets: Anarres, which may roughly pun on the "anarchy" of its sovereign-less government, and Urras, a planet divided into a capitalist half and an authoritarian socialist half that bears a strong resemblance to the Earth of the Cold War era. The novel observes the efforts of Shevek, a brilliant Anarresti physicist trying to reestablish a connection between the planets, which have hardly

communicated since Anarres was settled two hundred years prior to the book's beginning. Accordingly (ignoring the fact that LeGuin writes nearly entirely in English to ensure her readers' comprehension), we are told that the languages of both planets have drifted significantly to accommodate their changing belief systems; even though Shevek has studied the Iotic of Urras, which is more or less our contemporary English, a significant portion of this book centers on his struggle to understand their language and ideals from the framework of his language, Pravic, and his own beliefs and prejudices.

In a sense, then, *The Dispossessed* presents us with transformed language in two distinct ways. There is the transformed language that functions in the manner that I demonstrated with *Dune*, where LeGuin metamorphoses the meanings of our words to reflect the values of her new society. For example, the Anarresti philosophy severely frowns upon *egoizing*, a neologism for drawing attention to oneself as an individual rather than as a cog in the community machine; as Shevek explains, "if we don't give up our personal desires to the common good, nothing, nothing on this barren world can save us. Human solidarity is our only resource" (167). Anything that distinguishes an individual from the group antagonizes the ideals on which their society has been built. Therefore even "altruist," which today connotes a kind and charitable person, deeply insults an Anarresti because it suggests that the offender sacrifices himself in helping his community, rather than acting in what should be the mutual interest of every Anarresti.

The other way in which transformed language operates in *The Dispossessed* is through the Anarresti and Urrasti reactions to the language of the other. For example, on Anarres, there is no such thing as personal property, even in vocabulary. "Little children might say 'my mother,' but very soon they learned to say 'the mother.' Instead of 'my hand hurts,' it was 'the hand hurts me'" (58). Thus Shevek has difficulty understanding what "his" clothes are or even

the concept of "luggage" when he comes to Urras (12)—lacking possessions, he cannot comprehend having something "belong" to him. Similarly, when Shevek calls one of the Urrasti a "profiteer," "not a soul knew he had insulted Dearri with the most contemptuous word in his vocabulary; indeed Dearri nodded a bit, accepting the compliment with satisfaction" (224). Fundamental differences in their belief systems make communication difficult even when conversation is easy. In these cases and in many more, LeGuin defamiliarizes common words by infusing them with new meaning based on the context of the new society, and propounds this effect by including the reactions of the characters.

Thus, as I have demonstrated in this chapter, even when alienating language is not the main focus of a text, it can play a significant role in alienating us from the components of a story and shaping our interpretation of it. Neologism, as one of the main signifiers of science fiction, helps to suggest the "otherness" of a society and may also defamiliarize certain words, as in *Shockwave Rider*, or even entire cultures, as in *Dune*. Although transformed language operates on a subtler level than neologism, it is nonetheless just as, and likely more, effective. Evident in *Dune* and in *The Dispossessed*, it essentially separates us from our own vocabulary, using the surrounding society and core themes of the novel to extrapolate new meanings from the words. Both neologisms and transformed language work well as basic linguistic Familiar Aliens, even though they masquerade as ornamental details. Because it is just decoration, however, this use of language usually avoids overtly touching on a novel's important issues, to which even thematically-concerned transformed language can only allude. In the next chapter, I transition to a discussion of dually defamiliarized and defamiliarizing language that becomes an essential focus of a novel, and explore how it can directly question our associations with important ideas in the story.

Chapter Two

Language as the Foreground: Discussing and Creating Invented Languages

> *"Think of a language as the contour of a watershed, stopping flow in certain directions, channeling it into others. Language controls the mechanism of your mind. When people speak different languages, their minds work differently and they act differently. For instance: you know of the planet Vale?"*
>
> *"Yes. The world where all the people are insane."*
>
> *"Better to say, their actions give the impression of insanity. Actually they are complete anarchists. Now if we examine the speech of Vale we find, if not a reason for the behavior, at least a parallelism. Language on Vale is personal improvisation, with the fewest possible conventions. Each individual selects a speech as you or I might choose the color of our garments."[1]*

Kingsley Amis writes in his treatise of science fiction, *New Maps of Hell*, that science fiction is a literature meant for "people with technical training who want fictionalized shop talk" (60). While this may in some respects be a gross generalization for such a vast and multifaceted genre, and while it does assume that the writer has adequate "technical training" in the scientific field he is exploring—which is often, but not necessarily, the case—it does happen to acutely describe science fictions that take on language as their subject. Although not all authors who write about language in their novels are practiced in linguistics, the mere experience of being human usually requires an extensive daily practicum of at least speaking, listening, and thinking,

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[1] Jack Vance, *The Languages of Pao* (New York: Tom Doherty Associates, Inc., 1989) 70-71.

if not writing and reading as well. Thus an average reader, who may not know much about common science fiction topics such as physics and biology, possesses to some extent "technical training" in linguistics if only because language is a constant and pervasive force in daily life. This reader may therefore be as qualified to discuss the broad topic of language as an author himself, if not the science of linguistics; most people are certainly capable of pondering the questions that arise when a novel applies the principles of science fiction to language, making language an excellent, if perhaps under-explored, area of study for the writer. The novelist already writes in language—why not defamiliarize it as well?

When language is the focus of a novel, it most commonly manifests as an invented language—it is this very creation of a language that defamiliarizes the general concept of language. To invent and analyze a language that readers will be able to understand, an author must accomplish the difficult task of distancing himself from language, the very basis of his thoughts and medium. Then this author must objectively ask himself: what are the fundamental qualities of language, and how can I exploit them in order to ensure the comprehension of my readers? The author can then address his findings about language without even directly using the language in the text; even the mere idea of it might be enough to spark a discussion. We as readers are then presented with the author's musings on language, whether they are stated directly, implied through the invented language, or both, and we are invited—forced, in some cases—to similarly separate ourselves from our default assumptions about discourse. Thus, language is again a Familiar Alien, this time alienating us from, among many other things, our perceptions of various aspects of language itself.

In discussing language through the defamiliarizing lens of science fiction, a writer automatically creates a sort of linguistic Familiar Alien that is distinct from, though not entirely

unrelated to, the language of neologism or transformed language. Invented languages often necessarily include neologism and/or transformed language, and thus they can often help to season the new world, as does neologism, and estrange the reader from other important thematic concepts, as does transformed language. The effect of language's defamiliarization of itself, however, is one that is necessarily much more complex and profound than the effects of its components, as the study of language is directly connected to how we process our world, both only in the act of reading and in everyday life. There are three ways that a novel can approach an invented language: the novel that alludes to and discusses extensively an invented language without ever needing to use it (*Babel-17*), the novel that discusses an invented language and uses it intermittently (*1984*), and the novel that is actually written in the language (*A Clockwork Orange*). Each type has its own strengths and possibilities, and I will discuss them all in this chapter.

Novels that allude to invented languages have the potential to incite remarkably insightful examinations of language as a whole. One novel in particular, Samuel Delany's *Babel-17*, provides what Eric Rabkin describes as one of "the most intelligent discussions of language" ("Metalinguistics and Science Fiction" 84) in all of science fiction; similarly, in his introduction to the novel, Robert Scholes calls it "dazzling as a study of semiotics" (vi). The foundation centers on the quest of Rydra Wong (Delany's clever rendition of "right a wrong"), the novel's spaceship captain, poet, cryptographer, and ostensible linguistics instructor, to decipher what her government naively believes to be simply the code of the enemy: an enigmatic communication system known as Babel-17. That Delany uses Babel-17 as the novel's title is no coincidence; this "code," which Rydra quickly realizes is actually an entire language—it "has its own internal logic, its own grammar, its own way of putting thoughts together with words that span various

spectra of meaning. There is no key you can plug in to unlock the exact meaning" (Delany 10)—forms the material of the story. In some way or another it propels nearly all of its events, for Rydra's people cannot defeat their enemy until they can comprehend their language. Thus, with the human struggle to master this perplexing vernacular as the underlying force behind the space operatic subplot of an intergalactic war, Delany persistently focuses our attention on and asks us to refigure our perceptions of the topic of language itself.

First, even when scenes in the novel do not prominently feature Babel-17, Delany emphasizes how his story is primarily about language, and thereby contributes to the defamiliarization of language, through the characters' subtle physical movements. By closely, if not fanatically, detailing their significant head shakes, smiles, eyebrow raises, hand clenches, shoulder shrugs—and so on—he draws explicit attention to their body language. We readers typically receive this information through the eyes of Rydra, who is unsurprisingly as adept at reading people physically as she is at understanding them verbally: "She nodded, watching him press his shoulders downward, watching his triceps leap on the bone, then still. With each breath in the young, gnarled body the tiny movements sang to her" (70). Likewise, she bases her decision of her starship's pilot solely on his wrestling skills, and even notes the tiny detail of how the Butcher—an important character to whom I will return presently—"turned his hand so the thumb now pointed over his shoulder…and the gesture that had seemed rough took on an economical grace" (100). Her constant awareness of body language keeps the topic of language at the forefront of the novel even when it is not being outwardly discussed.

Also, the very name of the language acts as a Familiar Alien by contrasting our impression of Babel-17 with any associations we might have with the story of the original Tower of Babel. In Genesis, the Bible presents us with a prideful monolingual world. Lacking

language barriers, these people imagine that their greatness has no barriers, either, and they attempt to build a city centered around a tower "whose top may reach the heaven" that will win them glory rather than glorify their God.[2] Though in this moment all humans are united as one, their overreaching ambition angers God, who retaliates by flooding the world with so many different languages that the city of Babel becomes a city of babble; as a consequence, people can never again connect so completely and with such a singularity of purpose. In *Babel-17*, Delany places us in a world where one group of people is attempting to regain linguistic unity with another group, all the while imprinting this world with our ancestors' failure at Babel. Thus, even as we support Rydra's efforts to learn Babel-17, the image of the tower might remain uncomfortably prominent in our minds, and the desire for the hero to succeed and the warning against human ambition inevitably clash. With just the name of his novel's title and invented language, then, Delany prevents us from automatically assuming that a world with one language is better than a world with many languages—or the opposite—solely because of what occurs in the Bible or in his novel.

Delany's treatment of proficiency at probing and defamiliarizing language, however, materializes in his treatment of Babel-17. One way that he accomplishes this is through Rydra's own musings on the matter. As a poet and code-breaker, she possesses a clear love of language, as well as a purported deep understanding of the way it works, which both emerge frequently in her conversations and thoughts. Her discussions of linguistics, if not entirely accurate, at the very least frequently bring the subject of linguistic theory under focus.[3] Delany does not require

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[2] *The Holy Bible: King James Version*, Genesis 11:4.

[3] In *Aliens and Linguists*, Meyers asserts that Rydra's explanations of linguistic theory are "elementary and controversial" and "just wrong" (179). So appalled by the misinformation that Delany supplies to the reader, Meyers even compares *Babel-17* to "a building of magnificent design, marred throughout by substandard materials" (180). His initial point is worth

his readers to share Rydra's casual fluency with technical terms, but instead guides them through her thoughts, which often ask provoking questions of language. For example, during one instance in which she is attempting to deconstruct Babel-17, her thoughts wander to

> Abstract thoughts in a blue room: Nominative, genitive, elative, accusative one, accusative two, ablative, partitive, illative, instructive, abessive, adessive, inessive, essive, allative, translative, comitative. Sixteen cases to the Finnish noun. Odd, some languages get by with only singular and plural. The American Indian languages even failed to distinguish number. Except Sioux, in which there was a plural only for animate objects. The blue room was round and warm and smooth. No way to say *warm* in French. There was only *hot* and *tepid*. If there's no word for it, how do you think about it? (81)

Though this passage is a mere daydream for Rydra, it is dense with ideas for us. The lengthy list of noun cases visually proves her observation about how different languages vary so broadly in types and number of cases, which could be an interesting revelation for a non-polyglot. In addition, unless the reader is already familiar with linguistic jargon, labels like "abessive" and "adessive" might sound as alien as "abblgurk" and "addlgurk"; in this sense, these words function as neologisms, feeding our expectation that science fictions contain unfamiliar words, and focusing our attention on the strangeness of the words themselves.

These are small details, though, in comparison with the most thematically and universally significant moment in Rydra's reverie, her ultimate query: do we need language to think? She

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considering; no reader by any means should confuse *Babel-17* with an accurate linguistic textbook. Meyers neglects to acknowledge, however, that the tale is a science *fiction*. Delany does not concern himself too much with verifying theoretical details, and he does not need to; his discourses on language, albeit flawed, accomplish exactly what they should do: explain in a new way, and consequently defamiliarize, language.

asks this question in a daze here, but the issues it raises are absolutely fundamental to, and frequently visited in, the novel. This question is born out of Delany's "adoption of Whorfianism" (Malmgren 9), which has been noted by most of his critics, including Malmgren, Meyers, Rabkin, and Scholes. This Whorfian influence refers to the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, which is often linked with the theory of linguistic determinism and essentially postulates that language controls thought, which thereby molds one's conscious ideas and worldview. As Benjamin Whorf explains in *Language, Thought, and Reality*, "all observers are not led by the same physical evidence to the same picture of the universe, unless their linguistic backgrounds are similar, or can in some way be calibrated" (213). I mentioned in Chapter One that language has historically evolved with the passage of time, and that it is not absurd to imagine that this trend will continue indefinitely; the Sapir-Whorf theory provides a plausible explanation for this assumption—life changes, so language changes, so thought changes. While this theory has been hotly contested, and alternate, equally reasonable hypotheses exist, Rydra certainly subscribes to Whorf's.[4] At one point she states simply, "there are certain ideas which have words for them. If you don't know the words, you can't know the ideas" (Delany 110). Her challenge in learning the words of Babel-17, then, is to tap "into the unconscious, by making ego go where id had been" (Malmgren 14), distancing herself enough from her own language, and therefore thoughts, to comprehend what is so special about the mysterious tongue.

Rydra's initial breakthrough in understanding Babel-17 sparks when she finally realizes what is so bizarre about the aforementioned Butcher, who talks, acts, and even kills so automatically and emotionlessly that he seems directed by a computer program: "he can't say 'I'!" (Delany 101) What follows is pure Whorfian theory; as she learns about the Butcher's past,

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[4] For some examples, see the works of Noah Chomsky or Steven Pinker.

she gradually realizes that his only language is Babel-17, which controls him by containing a pre-set program that directs its victim to do the enemy's bidding. Without the word "I," he has no choice but to function as their weapon—he lacks the self-awareness that would enable him to be a person with freedom, rather than a living computer. Thus the simple concept of *self*, so natural and essential to our language and thought processes, does not exist in the Butcher or in Babel-17. By teaching this man-machine about *I*, Rydra liberates him from the mental prison of Babel-17, and by adding pronouns to the destructive language, she revitalizes it into something she confidently believes will end the war and bring peace with the enemy. Perhaps it will, however we should note the inherent paradox of the name of the new "Babel-18"; in Hebrew symbolism, eighteen is the numerical equivalent of the word "life," but we already know the fate of the original citizens of Babel, who were also linguistically united. In spite of this implied caution, Rydra's creation of Babel-18 purportedly will fix the world and ends Delany's extremely thought-provoking exploration of language.

Throughout the course of *Babel-17*, Delany prods us to reconsider and ask questions about non-lingual communication, human ambition, linguistics, and of course the Sapir-Whorf trifecta: the potential connections between language, thought, and reality. Furthermore, he accomplishes all of this without needing to make up a single word of Babel-17. Some writers, however, choose to experiment with inventing new languages to aid their broader discussion of language. In doing so, their use of a linguistic Familiar Alien goes beyond only using neologisms—although neologisms certainly play a significant role in their work—because they also treat language as an important subject. Thus, they invent a language *and* use it as a basis for discussion. A well-known text that illustrates this approach to language is George Orwell's *1984*, which includes both examples of and an examination of his invented Newspeak. Though

Orwell's concern with language is only one of many, and hence his alienation of language lacks the scope and depth of Delany's, it is interesting to compare and contrast his ideas with Delany's and to consider them on their own, as well.

The despotic Party of *1984*, a government headquartered in London but in control of the entire super-state of Oceania, apparently has adopted a theory about language similar to Rydra's. Accordingly, the Party has also created a tongue intended to be adopted by the masses and to influence thought, but its Newspeak will hardly bring Babel-18's expected peace and harmony to the universe; rather, the Party expects it to render all residents of Oceania complacent, mindless, and utterly unthreatening to the government. Free thought will be eliminated because there will be no words to describe it—Rydra's voice resounds again: "If you don't know the words, you can't know the ideas" (Delany 110). Analogously, the Appendix to *1984* entitled "The Principles of Newspeak," an ostensibly non-fiction tract that subtly establishes one final claim of plausibility for the novel while providing a more detailed explanation of the language from a historian's perspective, reports that the "purpose of Newspeak was not only to provide a medium of expression for the world-view and mental habits proper to the devotees of Ingsoc [Newspeak for "English Socialism," or the ideology of the Party], but to make all other modes of thought impossible" (Orwell 299-300). Or, as philologist Syme, the protagonist Winston Smith's "comrade"—friendship, unsurprisingly, is not endorsed by the Party—says excitedly, "'Don't you see that the whole aim of Newspeak is to narrow the range of thought? In the end we shall make thoughtcrime literally impossible, because there will be no words in which to express it. Every concept that can ever be needed, will be expressed by exactly one word, with its meaning rigidly defined and all its subsidiary meanings rubbed out and forgotten" (52). Armed with the

admittedly tenuous foundation of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, Orwell thus uses Newspeak to ask a provocative question of language: can it be used as a political brainwashing device?

It should be noted that in possessing such a profound, not to mention eloquent, awareness of the realities of Newspeak and Ingsoc, Syme is of course inherently opposing the Party's ideals of being oblivious in thought and brief in speech.[5] Winston himself realizes Syme's days are numbered: "He is too intelligent. He sees too clearly and speaks too plainly. The Party does not like such people" (53). It is therefore quite ironic that Syme, doomed yet enthusiastically compiling a definitive Newspeak dictionary, has a name that bears resemblance to the word "semantics"—just as he serves the Party to corrupt traditional meaning by vaporizing "obsolete" (51) words as if they never existed, so will the Party eventually corrupt Syme's very being by vaporizing him and all of his records, as if he, too, never existed. The irony of his name is even more pronounced in light of one critic's pithy interpretation of the Party's true goal for Newspeak: "Signs must be purged and purified of their meaning and bodies of their substance. And then they must be refilled: 'You will be hollow,' promises O'Brien [to Winston, later in the novel when Winston is apprehended for *thoughtcrime*]. 'We shall squeeze you empty, and then we shall fill you with ourselves'" (Courtine 70). The individual "filled" solely of Newspeak becomes the ideal mindless drone, so any individual in this society with too large a vocabulary and too profound a knowledge of the world condemns himself; thus, Syme's lack of an ability to destroy his own meaningful thought necessarily overrides his knack for destroying meaning for the dictionary. Just as Syme must end, semantics—meaning, insofar as we know today and in Winston's world—must end if the Party is to have its way.

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[5] We might even say he *groks* their ideology (see Chapter One).

Perhaps the most effective, albeit unsettling, aspect of Orwell's commentary on language, as manifest in Winston's conversation with Syme and in the Appendix, may just be how *logical* Newspeak is. Newspeak's pointed focus on eliminating the "vagueness and…useless shades of meaning" (Orwell 52) of Oldspeak (Modern English) makes the new language undeniably sensible in its terseness, and Orwell reinforces its efficacy by using it not only as a basis for discussion but in practice as well; it is this, the combination of explanation and actual samples of Newspeak, that make it an uncomfortably potent Familiar Alien. For example, Syme both explains and shows why synonyms and antonyms are extraneous:

> "If you have a word like 'good,' what need is there for a word like 'bad'? 'Ungood' will do just as well—better, because it's an exact opposite, while the other is not. Or again, if you want a stronger version of 'good,' what sense is there in having a whole string of vague useless words like 'excellent' and 'splendid' and all the rest of them? 'Plusgood' covers the meaning, or 'doubleplusgood,' if you want something stronger still…In the end the whole notion of goodness and badness will be covered by six words—in reality, only one word." (51)

Explanations such as these alienate us from the very merit of Oldspeak—our language. We might feel indignant at the alarming zeal with which Syme and his colleagues slash words from our vocabulary, but the man makes a significant observation here. Despite the loss of flowery language and purported loss of thought that Newspeak will cause, how can we argue with its superiority from a standpoint of clarity and brevity? The bare simplicity of the lexicon makes it frighteningly useful; because it is so literal, it requires little translation. Winston, for instance, is fated to become an *unperson* for *thoughtcrime*—knowing even the gist of the story enables one

to infer that Winston's existence will be erased for his heretic thoughts. Rabkin notes that the neologisms of Newspeak are in fact transformed language ("Metalinguistics and Science Fiction" 94), and indeed the new vocabulary does not require a glossary because it is built chiefly from our own words, combined to name concepts that mutate our idea of today's London into one of a totalitarian hell.[6] It is therefore interesting, and disturbing, to recognize that a few Newspeak words are both thematically crucial and have also sidled into contemporary discourse.[7] Specifically, *doublethink*, defined by Winston as to "know and not to know, to be conscious of complete truthfulness while telling carefully constructed lies, to hold simultaneously two opinions which cancelled out, knowing them to be contradictory and believing in both of them" (Orwell 35) is often used today to criticize the hypocrisy of corrupt governments and businesses.[8] That we use the word today does not necessarily mean that the Party's goals are finally being realized—we do not yet live under the threat that Big Brother Is Watching—but it does inspire a certain wariness. Newspeak fits *too* well into modern language; it makes *too* much sense. With Newspeak, Orwell is calling direct attention to this fact, urging us to get past our own "doublethink" and avoid simple, mindless complacency.

Although *1984* paints a bleak picture about the future of the world, Orwell leaves some room for hope, although his hope combats Delany's; in *Babel-17*, we actually want Babel-18 to triumph. The novel provides no evidence that Newspeak would ever successfully supersede

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[6] Other Newspeak words that use our vocabulary as foundation and can be categorized as transformed language include: *goodsex* (sexual intercourse for the sake of procreation), *sexcrime* (all other instances of intercourse), *issue* (the intended product of goodsex), *crimestop* (the act of forcing oneself to clear one's mind; avoiding thoughtcrime), and *joycamp* (forced labor camp).
[7] Just like William Gibson's *cyberspace*.
[8] Like *cyberspace*, *doublethink* has also made been adopted into the dictionary. The Oxford English Dictionary nearly copies its definition for the word straight out of *1984*: "The mental capacity to accept as equally valid two entirely contrary opinions or beliefs." ("Doublethink," *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed.)

Oldspeak, and if it would even have its terrible intended effect if it did. Not only do the characters of *1984* still converse in regular English—implying that Newspeak still has a long way to go before it becomes the dominant tongue—but "The Principles of Newspeak" is also written in the past tense of this same version of English, as if the era of Ingsoc and Newspeak has already ended. Also, Anthony Burgess maintains in his critique *1985* that "there is no guarantee that the State's creation of Newspeak could flourish impervious to gradual semantic distortion, vowel mutation, the influence of the richer Oldspeak of the proles [proletariat]" (47). He thus makes two important observations: first, that even a language as confining as Newspeak would be subject to the inevitable changes and mutations that come as time passes.[9] In addition, Newspeak is a language that originates with, and will therefore primarily influence, literate Party members; it would be nearly impossible to spread Newspeak to the lower class in any reasonable amount of time, and thus their Oldspeak would continue to persevere. Finally, Orwell is ambiguous about if he shares Delany's unconditional subscription to the Whorfian view, and certainly Meyers has a valid point in his assertion that "we have no evidence for, and much against, the belief that all the schools, newspapers, and dictionaries in existence can change the meaning of a word" (Meyers 164). Whether or not Newspeak will actually be effective in brainwashing is not really the issue here, however; the suggestion alone, combined with actual examples of the language, defamiliarizes language, encouraging us to question how severely a change in language might affect our consciousness.

Culminating this chapter, last and certainly not least, there are a few novels which not only feature an invented language, they are written mostly, if not entirely, *in* this language. This endeavor takes a considerable amount of skill, for the author must balance his or her enthusiasm

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[9] As I noted in Chapter One, this is why the presence of neologisms and transformed language in science fiction is not surprising in the first place.

for creating a seemingly new language with ensuring the implied reader's comprehension, lest the product be an unreadable text. As a consequence, there are few novelists who explore this realm of writing relative to the many writers who use defamiliarizing language as ornamentation, as I discussed in the previous chapter, to authors like Delany who discuss, but do not speak in, their invented languages and even to someone like Orwell who does a little bit of both. Anthony Burgess, however, chooses to meet the challenge, and he does so expertly in his dystopia *A Clockwork Orange*. With his creation of nadsat, the patois of the teenage narrator Alex and his fellow *droogies*, Burgess seamlessly combines modern language with linguistic Familiar Aliens that we have seen before, like neologisms and transformed language, into a unique invented language—though a more accurate term might be *constructed* language because, by true Familiar Alien convention, nadsat is fashioned from things the reader likely already has some degree of familiarity with. What is unique about Alex's vernacular, however, and any similarly invented-constructed language, is its ability as a complete entity to defamiliarize the process of reading. *A Clockwork Orange* thereby assumes a different approach to re-examining the relationship of language, thought, and reality: this time, the reader has to do some work.

A significant and certainly conspicuous feature of the construction of nadsat is how many of its neologisms function as Familiar Aliens Squared, like those we observed in *Dune*. Here, Burgess primarily bases his words on anglicizations of the Russian language, often changing or shortening the spelling of a word (*chelovyek* becomes *chelloveck* or *veck*) and/or adding English suffixes (*vidyet* becomes *viddy* and then *viddying*) to make it look more palatable to his primarily English-speaking audience. In his autobiography, he calls nadsat "a mixture of Russian and demotic English, seasoned with rhyming slang and the gypsy's bolo" (*You've Had Your Time* 37); he channels this explanation in the story through the words of Dr. Branom—who is "curing"

Alex of his capability to commit unprovoked acts of ultra-violence by brainwashing him to be unable to harm even a fly in self-defense—characterizing it as "odd bits of rhyming slang…A bit of gipsy talk, too. But most of the roots are Slav. Propaganda. Subliminal penetration" (*Orange* 114); his colleague snobbishly dismisses it as "Quaint…the dialect of the tribe" (114). These statements roughly condense a few key facts about nadsat: namely, that it is exclusively a teenage argot unshared with and scorned by adults (after all, *nadsat* is the Russian suffix for the numbers eleven through nineteen; it literally means "teen"), and, if we are to believe the doctor, that the youth of Alex's time have been affected enough by the State's propaganda to allow a mutated Slavic tongue to infiltrate their own dialect. To be sure, the story does not offer many clues as to how the oppressive, totalitarian State has come into existence, but Alex's language hints strongly that somehow the worst characteristics of American capitalist democracy and Soviet Communism, not coincidentally the two leading world powers of Burgess' time, have melded into one awful fascist tyranny. Worse, the constitution of nadsat implies that the State's immorality has trickled down to the younger set; Burgess revels in the "fine irony in the notion of a teenage race untouchable by politics, using totalitarian brutality as an end in itself, equipped with a dialect which drew on the two chief political languages of the age" (*You've Had Your Time* 38). Alex and his *droogies* have adapted the worst aspects of the State into their own guarded, ultra-violent anarchy, and this is absolutely mirrored in their cliquish use of nadsat.

Armed with the teenagers' Russified lingo, Burgess reminds us incessantly of the stereotypical American prejudices against the former Soviet Union, perhaps even more intensely than the language of *Dune* constantly calls attention to and questions our associations with the Middle East. As one critic bluntly states in a 1971 article, for "the Anglo-American reader the Slavic words connote communist dictatorship…without value and without hope" (Evans 409).

The Cold War ended nearly two decades ago, and as a consequence such antipathies have hopefully lessened, but the connection between what was once the largest communist superpower and the fundamentally un-Western—not to mention Western-feared—ideology of communism might never dissolve. Russophobia still boldly exists, especially in the media;[10] Meyers even alleges that, when science fiction writers reflect an influence, especially a negative influence, from a foreign language in future English, the "other language is almost certain to be Russian" (Meyers 19).[11] Furthermore, the qualities often and unfortunately stereotypically linked with Russians—specifically the brashness and the humorlessness—are exacerbated by their dialect, which to a naïve Anglo ear can sound harsh, abrasive, and flat.

Yet Alex, in spite of his vicious amorality and horrifying fetish for committing obscene acts of violence and rape, is not a completely abhorrent character. After all, as Burgess reminds us with such childish word substitutions as *appy polly loggy* for "apology," *baddiwad* for "bad," *eggiweg* for "egg," *guttiwuts* for "guts," *jammiwam* for "jam," and *skolliwoll* for "school," Alex is really only a fifteen year-old boy. In his brief moments of humanity, like when he discusses his profound love of classical music—although, admittedly, he says it makes him feel invincible, which hardly bodes well for his to-be victims—he may even be likeable. His last vestiges of childhood innocence clash with the violent nature of his speech and actions, and we realize that he deserves more than one flat judgment. In having Alex narrate *A Clockwork Orange* in a mainly Russian-inspired argot, then, Burgess creates a Familiar Alien Squared that prods us to

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[10] Anna Matveeva, "Battling Russophobia," *guardian.co.uk*, 13 Dec 2008, 15 Jan 2009, <http://www.guardian.co.uk>.

[11] Aside from *A Clockwork Orange*, Meyers provides three pieces of evidence for this assertion, all from short stories: *slavlang* from Sterling Lanier's "Such Stuff as Dreams" (1968), the *Novoe Washingtongrad* of James Blish's "This Earth of Hours" (1959), and the *sammy's dot* of Ursula LeGuin's "The New Atlantis" (1975). I would therefore not take this idea as pure fact, but it is certainly an interesting hypothesis.

acknowledge and reconsider our broad generalizations of an entire society as we work to come to an understanding of one very precocious, albeit dangerous, boy.

Another advantage that Burgess gains in employing a Familiar Alien Squared is his frequent opportunity to create defamiliarizing irony. We do not usually see Herbert taking such a liberty in *Dune* because he is writing an epic, serious novel, but it is well-suited for Burgess' purpose of designing a satiric dystopia that balances seriousness with biting, sometimes disturbing humor. This particular type of irony emerges when the writer combines the neologism with transformed language. For example, the nadsat word for work is *rabbit*, which not only affixes the image of a scurrying rabbit to the humdrum nine-to-five worker, but it also calls to mind a robot and a *rab*, the Russian word for slave—in this single word Burgess has infused new meaning into our concepts of "job" as well as "rabbit." Sex—which for Alex and his friends spells rape—has been reduced to a misogynistic and selfish act named only for the physical action: *in-out-in-out* or *plunging*. Most jarring, however, is the word Alex uses to praise things that are "good" or even "excellent": *horrorshow*. Although it is an anglicization of the Russian word "khorosho" whose definition matches Alex's, it can nonetheless be painful for us to stomach an image such as this, in which the narrator and one of his friends prepare to roughly violate an innocent woman:

> So he did the strong man on the devotchka, who was still creech creech creeching away in a very horrorshow four-a-bar, locking her rookers from the back, while I ripped away at this and that and the other, the others going haw haw haw still, and real good horrorshow groodies they were that then exhibited their pink glazzies, O my brothers, while I untrussed and got ready for the plunge. (23)

Indeed, such a situation truly would be a horror show.

Though the Slavic influence on nadsat, including the cruel irony it can suggest through transformed language, is undoubtedly one of the novel's most noteworthy stylistic features, what uniquely marks the language of Burgess' novel from any of the others in my discussion thus far is the trait mentioned earlier: the novel is written almost entirely *in* this strange new language. Evans notes that there "are about a dozen words on every page of the novel that are non-English" (406), and Barnes adds that "almost all of the altered words denote everyday actions and objects—man, woman, eat, drink, sleep, good, bad" (62). This bombardment of neologisms could lead to a great deal of confusion to an unprepared reader; as early as the middle of the second page, Burgess has slammed us with formidable sentences such as these:

> Our pockets were full of deng, so there was no real need from the point of
> view of crasting any more pretty polly to tolchock some old veck in an alley and
> viddy him swim in his blood while we counted the takings and divided by four,
> nor to do the ultra-violent on some shivering starry grey-haired ptitsa in a shop
> and go smecking off with the till's guts. (1-2)

Although some editions of this novel include a glossary to nadsat, Burgess specifically requested that *A Clockwork Orange* be published without one. In his autobiography, he explains that the "novel was to be an exercise in linguistic programming, with the exoticisms gradually clarified by context…A glossary would disrupt the programming and nullify the brainwashing" (*You've Had Your Time* 38). Thus, in order for us to read the novel as Burgess originally intended—or any novel written in a similarly invented-constructed language—we have no choice but to learn to read the language; in Burgess' words, we will be "brainwashed into learning minimal Russian" (38). While the effectiveness of the "brainwashing" is debatable, the author includes enough English words, context clues, and sometimes even outright definitions to make the task

of reading and understanding the novel a very feasible one. By the end of the first chapter, we are likely to be translating Alex's narrative to English with little difficulty.

But does the act of reading a language like nadsat affect our awareness of what is going on in the text? Even though we can decipher the nadsat patois, the 192 pages of the novel are inadequate for most readers to truly internalize the language, to the point where they read a sentence of nadsat with the same ability that they read a straightforward English sentence. The most adept nadsat reader would undoubtedly have an easier time reading something like, "Our pockets were full of money, so there was no real need to smack around an old man in an alley and watch him swim in his blood while we divided up his money by four, nor to mortally wound some shivering old woman in a shop and go laughing off with the contents of the cash register" than the above excerpt. Yet Burgess does not want to make the project of reading *A Clockwork Orange* such a simple one: he deliberately forces the reader to actively participate. Burgess describes nadsat as "a kind of mist, half-hiding the mayhem and protecting the reader from his own basic instincts" (*You've Had Your Time* 38), and I would suggest that in "half-hiding" the rampant violence, sex, and drug use that makes Alex's teenage society so deplorable, nadsat actually exacerbates the horrible reality (insofar as the world of the text) of what Alex and his friends are doing. For example, the first time we read of Alex and his *droogies* attacking an old man, the narrative does not immediately repulse us, as we are too busy trying to figure out what is even going on:

> Pete held his rookers and Georgie sort of hooked his rot wide open for him and
> Dim yanked out his false zoobies, upper and lower. He threw these down on the
> pavement and then I treated them to the old boot-crush, though they were hard
> bastards like, being made of some new horrorshow plastic stuff. The old veck

began to make sort of chumbling shooms—"wuf waf wof"—so Georgie let go of

holding his goobers apart and just let him have one in the toothless rot with his

ringy fist, and that made the old veck start moaning a lot then, then out comes the

blood, my brothers, real beautiful. (7)[12]

Zoobies…shooms…goobers…blood. Suddenly the childish language becomes sinister, and our

involuntarily gradual acknowledgement of the cruelty of this scene makes it much more awful

than if we had mindlessly skimmed it and skipped unsavory parts that became too graphic. The

"mist" of nadsat really makes us *think* about the violence, much as it does with the other

disturbing elements of this book like rape.

In the introduction to the 1986 reprint of the novel, Burgess calls the "curtain" of nadsat

to be an "aspect of his cowardice" (*Orange* x), but I think he is being facetious; in my opinion

his creation and use of nadsat is brilliant. With the ornamental use of neologisms and

transformed language, and/or in the discussions of language of the novels examined thus far, the

alienation happens only in the second step of the cognitive process of reading, in which we

extract and digest meaning from the words already read. For a novel such as this, however, the

very first step of the mental act of reading—poring over the words on a page and registering

them in our conscious, a step unblemished by the aforementioned types of linguistic Familiar

Aliens—is a "habitualized" practice by Shklovsky's terms, and it is that which is defamiliarized

and prolonged by the unending onslaught of the alien language.[13] In fact, nadsat often

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[12] I mentioned earlier that I find Alex to be an overall sympathetic character, but I will admit that I have done very little to prove my assertion; if anything, the excerpts I have included contradict my belief. The purpose of this thesis, however, is to analyze his language, not to vindicate or vilify him, so it is the reader's choice to accept my judgment. As Burgess says in the novel's introduction: "Eat this sweetish segment or spit it out. You are free" (*Orange* xi).

[13] I re-quote Shklovsky here: "Habitualization devours works, clothes, furniture, one's wife, and the fear of war…The purpose of art is to impart the sensation of things as they are perceived and

defamiliarizes both the processing and comprehension steps of reading during moments when it not only requires the reader's efforts to read as a whole, but also alienates our associations with specific words, like those flavored with Russian or a jolting word of transformed language like *horrorshow*. By alienating us from the process of reading, from the movement of the eyes to the final comprehension, Alex's nadsat may be the most effective Familiar Alien we have seen yet.

In this chapter, we have seen language advanced from a decorative extra to the starring role in the production of a science fiction novel, defamiliarizing everything that gets in its way. Although language, as a topic, is not one that the casual reader might automatically connect with the genre, it absolutely is a worthy candidate for science fiction-style examination. As a *less* Familiar Alien, as it were, than intermittent instances of neologisms and transformed language alone, this case of alienating language assists us in realizing how many other quintessentially human concepts tie in to language itself—concepts like culture, human interactions, processing information, thought, and reality. *Babel-17*, *A Clockwork Orange*, and *1984* employ three prototypical approaches to a focused study of language via discussion, direct use, and a combination of the two, respectively; each novel depends on its *ostranenie* of language to temporarily clear its readers' minds of their default associations with language. Thus primed, we are ready to think freshly about language and everything related to it, which, as we have seen, is nearly everything.

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not as they are known. The technique of art is to make things "unfamiliar," to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and length of perception because the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged" (Shklovsky 12).

Chapter Three

Riddleyspeak: Language of the Human Experience

> *The language of the debased and degraded future that Riddley lives in is bound to be full of uncomprehended remnants of what we have today; to have written that novel in received English would have been ridiculous*. (Russell Hoban qtd. in Haffenden 138)
>
> *In what language can one "sing the universe"?* (Dowling 181)

The task of reading Russell Hoban's *Riddley Walker* is no doubt a daunting one. It makes *A Clockwork Orange* seem not much more incomprehensible than *See Spot Run*. Like Burgess, Hoban eschews contemporary English in favor of writing in an invented language (Hoban and critics have dubbed it "Riddleyspeak") that suggests meaning far more profound than the superficial word on the page. Hoban, however, also manipulates our grammatical conventions in his new language, which lacks apostrophe marks, has an abnormal tense system compared to ours (*it wer* and *I ben*), and whose sentence structure seems haphazard at best: "Going on like that I wer and the rain stil dumming on the thatch the same when there begun a crackeling and like a roaring in the air or in my head I dint know which" (Hoban 61). Additionally, we can see that Hoban misspells even short and simple words—"were" and "been"—that Burgess would have left untouched. The entire novel seems to be written by a barely-literate child whose dependence on phonetic spellings and utter ignorance of modern-day linguistic rules can cause any reader profound frustration by the end of the first few sentences:

On my naming day when I come 12 I gone front spear and kilt a wyld

boar he parbly ben the las wyld pig on the Bundel Downs any how there hadnt

ben none for a long time befor him nor I aint looking to see none agen. He dint

make the groun shake nor nothing like that when he come on to my spear he

wernt all that big plus he lookit poorly. He done the reqwyrt he ternt and stood

and clattert his teef and made his rush and there we wer then. Him on 1 end of the

spear kicking his life out and me on the other end watching him dy. I said, 'Your

tern now my tern later.' (1)

Though our speaker's apparently crude and clumsy narrative style might tempt us to label him an

imbecile, however, his final insight on mortality hints that there is more to him and his language

than ungainliness. The steadfast reader will actually find that this boy, Riddley Walker, is the

most profound and thoughtful character in the story. Furthermore, his sagacity is expressed

through his potent language, which itself holds wisdom beyond Riddley's comprehension, but

not our own.

The Riddleyspeak of *Riddley Walker* presents the most complete linguistic Familiar Alien

that I have found thus far in science fiction, exhibiting all of its potential qualities that I have

surveyed in this thesis. Of course, there is always room for improvement, but *Riddley Walker* is

hard to surpass; Will Self's recent *Book of Dave* (2006), for example, attempts to mirror the

novel's linguistic pyrotechnics to create a benighted dystopia similar to Riddley's, but

unfortunately its finesse with phonological experimentation and its insights into humanity fall

short of those found in its predecessor.[1] One critic calls *Riddley Walker* a "marvel of lexical

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[1] As one reviewer writes, "Self's peasants' speech, though exotically spelt, is almost entirely a
sort of cockney, slightly old-fashioned even now; I wondered more than once how this most
dynamic of dialects was supposed to have frozen dead around, at a guess, 1970 and still be

inventiveness," and another (Anthony Burgess, no less) applauds that the novel "is what literature is meant to be—exploration without fear" (both qtd. in Mullen 391). I would amend Burgess' praise to *lexical* exploration without fear, and other critics agree that Riddleyspeak is "a protagonist in the book with its intrinsic relationship with theme and setting" (Maynor and Patteson 21). Few other novels are so fully imagined by their very language, and thus it is *Riddley Walker* that I originally used to test and develop my idea of a prototypical linguistic Familiar Alien. Riddley's tale has remained the paradigm for defamiliarized and defamiliarizing language throughout my study.

Presented as the journal of its title character, *Riddley Walker* chronicles the life of an adolescent boy in a post-nuclear holocaust wasteland version of England, roughly two thousand years after atomic bombs have annihilated civilization as we know it. In this novel and in reality human progress is lethargic at best, and Riddley's society still borders on primeval. Literacy is reserved primarily for government officials like the *Pry Mincer* and *Wes Mincer* and members of the new-world clergy like Riddley, who assumes his father's job as a *connexion man* when his father is accidentally crushed to death by a piece of ancient machinery. There is, in fact, no distinction between government and clergy anymore; as the *connexion man*, Riddley is expected to make a prophetic *connexion* at the end of every customary Punch and Judy-esque puppet show performed by the *Pry Mincer* and *Wes Mincer*, which multitasks as religious ceremony, propaganda distributor, and public entertainment. In these puppet shows, the performers present various versions of the Eusa (who symbolizes the everyman, but whose name clearly references

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spoken in the same form over 500 years in the future. It is quite unlike the brilliant fusion of invention and worn-down dialect which makes Riddley Walker so mesmerising." (Philip Hensher, Rev. of *The Book of Dave*, by Will Self, *Spectator Book Club*, 7 Jun 2006, 18 Feb 2009 <http://www.spectator.co.uk/books/22677/part_3/the-view-ahead-through-the-windscreen.thtml>.)

Saint Eustace and the United States) story: the myth that allegorically explains the *Bad Time*,

when man used his discovery of nuclear power to smite his enemies, and destroyed all of

civilization as a consequence.[2] This myth is central to the dogma and politics of Riddley and his

community of *Inland*-ers, warning them against the evils of forbidden knowledge. Eusa is said

to have split the *Littl Shynin Man the Addom* for his boss *Mr. Clevver* in order to learn the secrets

of the *1 Big 1*, or the atomic bomb; he is thereafter blamed for the devastation he caused, loses

his family (see footnote 2 on Saint Eustace), and is forced to observe all of the terrible ensuing

Master Chaynjis until he is finally put to death.[3] Ignoring the myth's cautionary message,

however, Riddley's government is hell-bent on regaining mankind's lost knowledge, though

admittedly they are at a disadvantage—according to *Pry Mincer* Abel Goodparley, "*Riddley we*

aint as good as them befor us. Weve come way way down from what they ben time back way

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[2] According to some sects of Christianity, Saint Eustace was a hunter who was compelled to convert to Christianity after seeing an image of Jesus being crucified between the antlers of a stag. He then lost his family, prayed vehemently, and recovered his family. Then, he refused to light incense for gods other than his and was consequently roasted to death with his family. For his actions he was ultimately declared a saint. Saint Eustace's story manifests itself in several ways in the story, and Hoban writes in his afterword about how seeing a portrait of the saint inspired him to begin writing *Riddley Walker*: "His wife had been carried off by pirates and now his two little sons are taken away, one by a lion on the right bank and the other by a wolf on the left bank. Eustace is all alone in the middle of the river, hoping for better times. Seeing him for the first time that day in 1974 I had a strong fellow-feeling. People ask me how I got from St. Eustace to *Riddley Walker* and all I can say is that it's a matter of being friends with your head. Things come into the mind and wait to hook up with other things; there are places that can heighten your responses, and if you let your head go its own way it might, with luck, make interesting connections" (Hoban 223). Connections…or *connexions*?

[3] Riddley's description of the apocalyptic *Bad Time* is too interesting not to include here: "They had the Nos. of the sun and moon all fraction out and fed to the machines. They said, 'Wewl put all the Nos. in to 1 Big 1 and that will be the No. of the Master Chaynjis.' They build the Power Ring thats where you see the Ring Ditch now. They put in the 1 Big 1 and woosht it roun there come a flash of lite then bigger nor the woal worl and it ternt the nite to day. Then every thing gone black. Nothing only nite for years on end. Playgs kilt people off naminals nor there werent nothing growit in the groun. Man and women starveling in the blackness looking for the dog to eat it and the dog out looking to eat them the same. Finely there come day agen then nite and day regler but never like it ben befor. Day bearht crookit out of crookit nite and sickness in them both…" (*RW* 20).

back. May be it wer the barms what done it poysening the lan or when they made a hoal in what they callit the O Zoan" (125)—and by the end of the tale they have managed to rediscover the *1 Littl 1*, accidentally killing people in the process. The *1 Littl 1*, of course, is gunpowder. Thus *Riddley Walker* leaves us with a questioning faith in humanity; there is little doubt that another Eusa will eventually design the *1 Big 1*, and thus civilization seems doomed to perpetuate an endless cycle of destruction by trying to know more than it should.

Though a grasp of the plotline is essential to understanding the novel, it is the Familiar Alien of Riddleyspeak that truly carries its message and makes it effective as an exemplar of linguistically-concerned science fiction. Like the neologisms that we have seen before, Riddley's words suggest how *Inland* has changed since it was today's England, but his lexicon is unique in that its very phonetics allude *graphically* to what changes have occurred, which we do not find in *Shockwave Rider*'s *sanding*, *sweedack*, or *shivs*; Hoban observes literally the maxim that linguistic change should reflect societal change, and thus many of his words come directly from English and then are mutated and even split apart—just like an *Addom*/Adam/atom—in such a manner that each old concept is infused with new, estranging meaning. This is evident in, for example, the title of the aforementioned *Pry Mincer*, a corruption of "Prime Minister" that suggests that the position simultaneously involves impudently investigating something and crudely hacking its meaning, which Abel Goodparley certainly does in his obsessive quest to learn the secrets of the *1 Littl 1* and *1 Big 1*, and which some world leaders today similarly might be accused of doing. Similarly, "experimenting" in Riddley's world is *spare the mending*, and indeed perhaps if the government followed its implicit warning and avoided delving too deeply into the secrets of its past, civilization would avert its condemned destiny. Because Riddleyspeak extrapolates from our language, it might seem that the neologisms often actually

blur into the territory of transformed language; however I would say that the language remains a combination between the two because the characters are not aware of the irony they are creating. To them, a *Pry Mincer* codes for their version of a Prime Minister and nothing more.

Cleverly (or *clevverly* as Riddley's people would say), Hoban also infuses Riddleyspeak with words that have technological significance to us now, but have since lost that significance; we therefore see how oblivious the Inlanders are to the reality of our computer-loving world, whose remnants the protagonist's post-apocalyptic society, however desultorily, has been built on. As the author said later in an interview, "the language carries in it the ghost of a lost technology and a lost scheme of organization" (qtd. in Haffenden 139). For example, the ever-conscientious Riddley constantly looks for *blips*—things bearing mystical meaning, not spots of light on a screen—in everyday occurrences. Of course, his use of the word accents the inherent similarities of the two concepts: just as blips on a radar screen code for the presence of something larger and more powerful (a plane, for example), so do *blipful* things suggest there is something much more weighty to an object or event. These separate ideas become even more inextricable when Riddley stumbles upon a relic radar screen and realizes, "Id usit that word times a nuff but never til then did I ever think of putting the word *blip* to a blob of grean lite" (RW 89). Other noteworthy pseudo-technological terms and phrases that Riddleyoften uses include *byting* for "biting," *inner fearents* for "interference" (not the electrical kind), *scatter my datter* for a "By George!" equivalent, and *pirntowt* for "printout," which in Riddley's sense of the word means deciding or concluding something, as in "I pirntowt we bes not go the straites way" (89). In these words and others Hoban reminds us what has been lost in the aftermath of overzealous technological ambition; the words remain but the original meaning is erased.

Apparently, then, the very language of *Riddley Walker* tells us things about mankind in the novel that the characters themselves are oblivious to. Jeffrey Porter writes in his excellent article "'Three Quarks for Mister Mark': Quantum Wordplay and Nuclear Discourse in Russell Hoban's *Riddley Walker*" that "language knows things that people do not" (451) and goes on to say that "locus of strangeness in Hoban's post-atomic world is language itself, which, like the world around it, has been transformed by universal decay" (456). I am inclined to agree with him on nearly all of these counts; however, I do not believe that Riddleyspeak represents a language in decay any more than our language today does, despite its extensive use of our own words decomposed. Instead, I see Riddleyspeak as a language of synthesis, piecing together the remnants of our culture into a tongue that reflects what humanity is and has been, just as Riddley's people search for pieces of ancient machinery to melt it down and reuse its iron. Riddley's transformed language-neologisms not only highlight the alien-ness of his society— they suggest truths about language and mankind. His culture seems relatively and despairingly crude, to be sure, but his language represents the amazing vitality, not the deterioration, of language itself; it stands for the eternal struggle to learn and progress that our ancestors faced, that we face, and that Riddley's society undoubtedly faces. Unfortunately, we can only look wisely at the past or, in this case, at a possible distant, dismal future; we have left the people of *Riddley Walker* with traces of our language but not the knowledge that comes with it, and we are forced to observe them making our same fatal mistakes. Thus when the Pry Mincer explains to Riddley his utter misinterpretation of the *Legend of St. Eustace*, the ancient document that serves as their Rosetta Stone—

> Any how I wer reading over this here Legend like I use to do some times and I
> come to "*the figure of the crucified Saviour*"…I dint have no idear what *crucified*

myt be nor up to then I handt give *Saviour* much thot I thot it myt mean some 1 as

saves only that dint connect with nothing. Id never put it to gether with saver like

in *savery*. Not sweet. Salty. A salt crucified. I gone to the chemistery working I

askit 1 Stoan Phist that wer Belnots dad what *crucified* myt be nor he wernt cern

but he thot itwd be some thing you done in a cruciboal…Which that crucified

Saviour or crucifryd salt that's our Littl Shyning Man him as got pult in 2 by

Eusa…[4] (Hoban 128)

—we should be simultaneously amused by its absurdity and terrified by his ignorance. By

making us privileged readers, then, one of the things that Hoban is effectively asking us through

the language is *why* we undergo this suffering if our knowledge of language and of life will

never correctly coincide with our place in time.

Riddleyspeak can also often be considered as an Familiar Alien Squared, as we have seen

in *Dune* and *A Clockwork Orange*, with its Cockney rhyming slang-like phonetic spellings and

sounds. Hoban seems to be trying to trick his reader into assuming that the ideas of *Riddley*

Walker will be as crude and simplistic as the words that are expressing them appear to be. Thus

we are often jolted when a thoughtful ray of wisdom cuts through the cloud of Riddley's

language:

I dont think it makes no diffrents where you start the telling of a thing.

You never know where it begun realy. No moren you know where you begun

---

[4] In this section of the book, Goodparley's mistaken logic causes him to construe the tale of the crucifixion of Jesus as a myth about splitting the atom, and thus a clue to the secret of the *1 Big 1*. Juxtaposing the story of Christ with their folklore additionally allows Hoban to imply that perhaps humans have a fatal inclination to destroy the power, through crucifixion or destructive explosion, that might otherwise be their savior.

your oan self. You myt know the place and the day and time when you ben got.

That dont mean nothing tho. You stil dont know where you begun. (8)

Though he speaks and writes in a dialect that seems uneducated by the standards of modern rhetoric, Riddley is actually a member of his era's intellectual elite; only the *connexion men* and the *Eusa show men* are taught to read and write. As readers, we should also try to see him that way. The bare primitiveness of his thoughts might even make them more poignant than they would be if Riddley used our vernacular instead, as we see in his meditations about the soul: "Seams like I ben all ways thinking on that thing in us what thinks us but it dont think like us. Our woal life is an idear we dint think of nor we dont know what it is. What a way to live" (7). Any biases we might have about Cockney, a tongue often unfairly stereotyped as crass and low-class, are likely to be repudiated by young Riddley's literacy and his penetrating wisdom.

As one might expect of a novel that I claim to fully realize the linguistic Familiar Alien, *Riddley Walker* discusses language in a theoretical sense as well, as *Babel-17* and *1984* do, although it does so much less self-consciously than the other two novels; Riddley and his people only have experience with *chemistery* and *fizzics* as sciences and thus do not approach language as a distinct topic to be dissected and analyzed, as Rydra and Syme do. Also, where *Babel-17* and *1984* examine the relationships between language, thought, and reality, *Riddley Walker*'s concern slants toward whether or not a story can express truth (which in the novel always appears as the distinguished capitalized *Truth*). Given the extent to which Riddley's people value storytelling, and how their myths completely pervade their dogma and day-to-day life, it is sensible that they would ponder the efficacy of the practice in both its written and spoken forms. When Riddley asks the *tel woman*, the female equivalent of a *connexion man*, which Eusa tale is the *strait* one, she tells him that it is the message of the myth that is important, not the actual

story: "You hear diffrent things in all them way back storys but it dont make no diffrents. Mosly they aint strait storys any how. What they are is diffrent ways of telling what happent" (20). His temporary companion the *Ardship of Cambry* (alluding to the Archbishop, and Hardship, of Canterbury) makes a similar point, that a story

> cudnt come out of no where cud it so it musve come out of some where. Parbly it ben in that that place from time back way back or may be in a nother place only the idear of it come to me there. That dont make no odds. That storys jus what ever it is and thats what storys are. (94)

In Goodparley's case, we can see the dangers of taking the Eusa story *too* literally; even though his *shaddermincer* warns him that Eusa is "realness right a nuff but he wont never be your kind of realness Abel. He aint nothing you can dig up like old iron he wernt never meant to be that" (41), the *Pry Mincer* still aggressively pursues the forbidden knowledge of *Addom*'s *seakerts* and winds up dead from a gunpowder explosion. Thus Hoban asks us: what is the *Truth* of *our* cultural myths? Is a story ever just a story—and, even if it is not, should we avoid a fate like Goodparley's and pretend that it is?

Though the *tel woman* and the *Ardship* possess a sophisticated view of storytelling in comparison to Goodparley, their opinions still leave Riddley unsatisfied, and the boy realizes that the only way he can discover *Truth* for himself is by writing down his thoughts. He explains in the beginning: "That's why I finely come to writing all this down. Thinking on what the idear of us myt be. Thinking on that thing whats in us lorn and loan and oansome" (7). He constantly reminds us that he is writing:

> [Eusa's story] wants to start a new peace of paper with a number to its self. (29)

> Looking at them words going down on this paper right this minim I know there aint no such thing there aint no only my self you all ways have every 1 and every thing on your back. (111)
>
> Which I fealt like sitting down to a tabel with a candl and putting some words on paper. (202)
>
> I have to stop here [writing] for a littl. (210)

Riddley's ultimate revelation, however, happens at his lowest moment, when he has "nothing only words to put down on paper" (161) and contemplates that sometimes "theres more in the emty paper nor there is when you get the writing down on it" (161). Essentially, he realizes that man is not supposed to know all of the world's *seakerts*. "Not to lern no body nothing I cant even lern my oan self all I can do is try not to get in front of whats coming" (204). He sees that while storytelling is a necessary and useful form of communication within his community, the most important story he will ever have is the one he is writing himself, the thinking and not the knowing; "Parbly I wont never know its jus on me to think on it" (220). In this novel's case, we can conclude that perhaps *Truth* requires more than the language of a story to express it.

Certainly some of our own truths—including truths more profound than our concepts of what English should look like—are questioned by the grotesqueness of Riddleyspeak. Hoban writes in his afterword that the language "works well with the story because it slows the reader down to Riddley's rate of comprehension" (225), and indeed, as nadsat affects our reading of *A Clockwork Orange*, Riddleyspeak prolongs our perception of what is going on in the story; we are forced to pay attention and read slowly, and inevitably consider familiar concepts anew as if through a child's eyes. Like nadsat, the language similarly defamiliarizes gore, although in this case it is not to highlight the brutish immorality of Alex and his *droogies*, but the crudeness and

pragmatism of Riddley's culture. Riddley recounts his father's accidental death so simply that he may as well have skinned his knee:

> We shiffit the [machine] and got Dad out from unner. Parbly it kilt him soons it come down on him he dint have no time to drown in the muck. He wer all smasht up you cudnt tell whose face it ben it mytve ben any bodys…I said, 'My dad ben kilt by some thing I dont even know the name of aint that a larf.'" (11)

After the gunpowder explosion that kills Goodparley and the alchemist he has employed to help him reclaim the *1 Littl 1*—named Granser, which is technically the colloquial blurring of "grand sire," but I would conjecture is also used by Hoban to potentially allude to the "grand answer" of Riddley's "riddle"—Riddley discusses the alchemist's mangled body with similar raw ingenuousness, which renders the scene even more gruesome; "Granser he wer like throwt a way on the groun he lookit emty like when you take your han out of a show figger [the puppets the Eusa show men use]. His head wernt with the res of him his head wer on a poal" (194). Riddley's language compels us to see death for the palpable part of life that it is, especially in his society—even when the death is caused by a terrible and utterly avoidable accident. At the same time, then, we are made uncomfortably aware of the awful consequences that our society's machines and gunpowder can have if handled badly. How terribly ironic it is that, all the while, Riddley does not even know what sort of *thing* has crushed his father. When Riddley's words abruptly stop and he laughs because he cannot describe his father's death, he thus unconsciously acknowledges a bitter reality: some things in the world transcend even his human power to name; additionally, as readers we are forced to pause for a moment and reflect on the fragmentary world we have left them with, a world they do not deserve. As a result, even the way we read the bizarre form of Riddleyspeak compels us to rethink our thoughts about death,

technology, and the relationship between the two by showing us the world through a child's eyes in a not much less childish society.

Echoing Ralph Waldo Emerson's maxim that language is "fossil poetry,"[5] Russell Hoban described it in an interview with John Haffenden as "an archaeological vehicle, full of remnants of the dead and living pasts, lost and buried civilizations and technologies. The language we speak is a whole palimpsest of human effort and history" (138). Riddleyspeak is the most complete Familiar Alien because it, more than any other linguistic Familiar Alien that I have surveyed in this thesis, truly compresses and expresses the experience of being human: the storytelling, the eternal quest for improvement, the triumphs, the failures, the beliefs, and the very act of thinking. While the novels highlighted in the previous chapter examine different significant aspects of language such as how we communicate and how language affects us, Riddleyspeak additionally presents the most thorough and clear vision of where humanity has been and what it easily could become. One critic believes that the novel demonstrates how language is the "main guardian of the memories of the nation," but here "an unreliable guardian, intent on cheating his wards of their inheritance" (Lecercle 19); however, we should not fault language. Through his language, Riddley takes us along on his journey to discover "what the idear of us myt be" (Hoban 7), and together we find that though we might not ever really know, language can only provide us with clues—making the interpretations, the *connexions*, is our lives' responsibility.

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[5] Ralph Waldo Emerson, *The complete works of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, Ed. Eric Waldo Emerson (Cambridge: University Press, 1903).

Conclusions

The Alien Beyond Science Fiction

        In Christopher Anvil's short story, "A Question of Identity," the characters are told to

subscribe to the following guideline when dealing with alien creatures: "Do not attempt to judge

an extraterrestrial race or its artifacts on the basis of human experience."[1] But how can they, or

we, help it? As human beings, we are compelled to internalize our impressions, to try to relate to

what we see, to make connections and *connexions* between whatever is in front of us and what

we already know. Thus we learn and thus we grow. The artist, if Shklovsky and his adherents

are correct, takes advantage of our instinct to reach out and encourages us to reassess our

automatic connotations of a relatively ordinary idea, making part of the concept seem somehow

exotic and accentuating its novelty. A Romantic poet sees a lone Grecian urn and feels obliged

to emphasize its eternality as a historian and a preserver of beauty and truth; a classic English

playwright tests our confidence in fate via a series of unfortunate events that leads to the suicides

of two young lovers who might only *think* that they are star-crossed; a Modernist writer

encapsulates the decline of the post-Reconstructionist Deep South in four disparate perspectives

on the deterioration of a prototypical family at that time, creating a patchwork narrative that

highlights that era's rise of pragmatism and abhorrence of unconventionality. Additionally,

because I just described these three famous works without using their titles, there is a possibility

that I briefly defamiliarized them for one or some of my readers; perhaps some of you acquired a

default set of associations with the works long ago but have not pondered the works themselves

lately. Our human desire to comprehend impels us to make sense of information by tying it to

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[1] Christopher Anvil, "A Question of Identity", *The Trouble with Aliens*, Ed. Eric Flint (New York: Baen Books, 2006) N. pag.

what we are already familiar with, and art—and maybe a thesis about a particular type of art—exploits this tendency, resisting such an ingrained classification of its subject and forcing us to see it anew.

Shklovsky's theory of Art as [a] Technique to discover the world in a refreshingly new way relies on *ostranenie*, or "making [the known] strange." "A work is created 'artistically' so that its perception is impeded and the greatest possible effect is produced through the slowness of the perception" (Shklovsky 22). It should therefore not be too difficult to see how the Familiar Alien, which inherently suggests that the known is made *stranger*, might be a plausible model for how most novels classified as science fiction operate. The extrapolative process that the writers of the genre undergo is purely Shklovskian; it takes things we are apt to have prior associations with and projects them into far-off planets and distant (or, as in the case of *A Clockwork Orange*, perhaps not-so-distant) futures, cloaking the familiarity of the ideas and objects in their newly acquired oddity. Inevitably, in the same manner that we readers interact with the previously mentioned forms of literature, we again strive to connect what we are reading to what we already know—enabling the science fiction to ask us what we ever knew about that concept in the first place.

Recall Ray Bradbury's Familiar Aliens, who are Martian aliens. Modeled after a stereotypical All-American couple, especially in their frustration with but complacency in their conventionality, Yll and Ylla defamiliarize picture-perfect marriages; Yll's reaction to Ylla's dream also implicitly suggests the dangers behind misunderstanding and fearing a foreign group of people, whether the source of their foreignness lies in another country or another planet. The aliens cause us to think, to worry, and to empathize. If we did not interpret science fiction in this way—if we seriously attempted to follow Anvil's characters' nearly impossible orders not to

"judge an extraterrestrial race or its artifacts on the basis of human experience"[2]—then we would risk missing most of the meaning of science fiction, and we would lose the opportunity to apply its ideas and lessons to our own lives. As a consequence of adamantly avoiding the tendency to regard Yll and Ylla as strange but relatable Familiar Aliens, we would no longer benefit from the conclusions we arrive at by comparing them with a typical American, tedious yet recognizable, married couple. They would become merely tedious; it is difficult to enjoy reading any story that we cannot connect to on some level. And then one would wonder, when we already have "Ode on a Grecian Urn," *Romeo and Juliet*, and *The Sound and the Fury* at our disposal, why should we waste our time reading science fiction at all?

Or, Riddley Walker-style, *Wie wood eye both err two reed this*?

Of course, as I have stated previously, I believe that some Familiar Aliens are more difficult to unravel than others, and accordingly merit a more comprehensive examination. I have found the linguistic Familiar Alien—which is not an alien in the sense of an otherworldly creature from *Star Trek*, but can certainly be used in a way that it "makes strange" a variety of everyday ideas including but hardly limited to language itself—to be intriguing enough to base an entire thesis on. Perhaps this is because language is such an integral and pervasive part of nearly every moment of conscious human life save infancy and early childhood; the work that can distance us from the very substance of our speech and thoughts must be truly special indeed.

I thus began this study by appraising individual cases of neologisms and transformed language in my first chapter, and noted not only how the mere presence of such ornamental language can suggest to us what has been altered in the world of the story (as in *Shockwave Rider*), but how it has the potential to imply irony, to question our biases toward another culture

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[2] See footnote 1.

(*Dune*), and to even—in the sole case of transformed language—subtly suggest thematically important societal changes by the utter normalcy of our words used in a not-normal context (*The Dispossessed*). Then, I shifted to more prominent instances of the linguistic Familiar Alien, where it typically appears as some manifestation of an invented language. When the invented language is discussed in a novel, whether it is used intermittently (*1984*) or not (*Babel-17*), I found that we are prodded to ask hard questions about the relative competence of our own language, as well as how it might affect or be affected by our thoughts and perceptions of reality. Often, Whorfian principles are discussed and tested. I also determined that novels actually written in the invented language can achieve the same estranging effects of ornamental neologisms and transformed language, but additionally alienate the very process of reading and comprehending information, thereby defamiliarizing the event being described and causing us to see it more clearly (*A Clockwork Orange*).

Finally, I looked at the novel that, to the best of my knowledge, lacks an existing equal in terms of a linguistic Familiar Alien: *Riddley Walker*, which, categorized alongside the aforementioned science fiction novels, belongs in the "all of the above" category. More complex and loaded with meaning than nadsat, Riddleyspeak is rife with neologisms and transformed language so thoughtfully constructed that they also suggest truths to us, as privileged readers, about the past, present, and future. Ultimately we know more about Riddley's language than he does himself. In addition, the seeming childlike crudeness of the language slows us down to Riddley's level of cognition, providing us with a practical lesson in the relationship between language and thought, and also creating the experience of seeing the world anew. Furthermore, Riddley and his society constantly speculate about the value of storytelling, our oldest and perhaps still our primary method of relaying information, and its capacity to relate truth; this

query is a universal one, and applicable to most literature. After all, what is literature if not a story expressed through language? Should we trust it? The totality of the effects of *Riddley Walker*'s language therefore elevates it from the "quaint dialect of the tribe" (Burgess, *Orange* 114) to one that encapsulates the history and future of mankind. In this sense, Riddleyspeak and Riddley's concerns with language combine to form a paradigmatic linguistic Familiar Alien.

At the risk of over-generalizing or cutting out meaning, I resist attempting to make one blanket statement that would effectively epitomize estranging language in science fiction; to be truthful I do not know if one such dictum is realistic. Language treated as a Familiar Alien refers to the aggregate of neologism, transformed language, discussions about language and its relationship to us, and invented-constructed language; these different materializations of sometimes defamiliarized, always defamiliarizing language can produce varied and likely an infinite number of effects on the reader, depending on the story. This thesis has shown some, but relatively few, examples of the possible actions of the linguistic Familiar Alien, from the ironic *sanding* of *Shockwave Rider* to the dangerous *seakerts* of *Addom* in *Riddley Walker*. In its unlimited potential, then, I would posit that language is the archetypical Familiar Alien. Humanized space creatures and tyrannical machines and bizarre experimental societies are all significant tropes of the genre, but none are quite as pervasive, adaptable, and universal as language, the necessary component of communication with other human beings and often with ourselves.

Furthermore, I do not mean to suggest that the concept of a linguistic Familiar Alien is exclusive to science fiction. It is most easily found in this genre because science fiction is generally characterized by its inclusion of some of the most unusual, exotic, and alien ideas

found in literature. Consider, however, this passage from James Joyce's challenging yet dense *Finnegans Wake*:

> The great fall of the offwall entailed at such short notice the pftjschute of
> Finnegan erse solid man, that the humptyhillhead of humself prumptly sends an
> unquiring one well to the west in quest of his tumptytumtoes: and their
> upturnpikepointandplace is at the knock out in the park where oranges have been
> laid to rust upon the green since devlins first loved livvy.[3]

Or the playful, intelligible nonsense of Louis Carroll's famous "Jabberwocky":

> 'Twas brillig, and the slithy toves
>
> Did gyre and gimble in the wabe;
>
> All mimsy were the borogoves,
>
> And the mome raths outgrabe. [4]

The respective authors of the passages deliberately heavily impede the process of reading in a manner that is reminiscent of Burgess and Hoban; we thus are compelled similarly to make an effort to comprehend the tenor extending beyond the text. Visually, the four works look more alike than not, but *Finnegans Wake* and "Jabberwocky" are not concerned with depicting an alternate society, as the other two novels are. Interestingly, the genius of Carroll's poem lies in the fact that it has no real dictionary meaning, only the one that we create ourselves from its vague skeletal context; the enigmatic *Finnegans Wake*, to its credit, has been praised as one of the most realistic and human novels of all time for its keen layering of puns and allusions to man's history and mythology, and for its astonishing representation of the chaotic human mind.

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[3] James Joyce, *Finnegans Wake*, Ed. John Bishop (New York: Penguin Classics, 1999) 3.
[4] Louis Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland and Through the Looking-Glass*, Ed. Hugh Haughton and Sir John Tenniel (New York: Penguin Classics 2003) 132.

Such is the power of a linguistic Familiar Alien: the most fantastic and bizarre uses of language can have the greatest effect, even prodding us to find meaning in apparent gibberish.

Literature that is not associated with science fiction also can defamiliarize the concept of language through a discussion of it, like those we saw in *Babel-17* and *1984*. Recall, for example, Caliban's Whorfian malediction to Prospero in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*:

> You taught me language, and my profit on't
>
> Is, I know how to curse: the red plague rid you,
>
> For learning me your language![5]

Or Boris Pasternak's *Dr. Zhivago*, whose title character's theory of writing poetry faintly echoes Shklovsky's idea that art, here in the form of language, is a technique:

> The dominant thing is no longer the state of mind the artist seeks to express but the language in which he wants to express it. Language, the home and receptacle of beauty and meaning, itself begins to think and speak for man and turns wholly into music, not in terms of sonority but in terms of the impetuousness and power of its inward flow. Then, like the current of a mighty river polishing stones and turning wheels by its own movement, the flow of speech creates in passing, by virtue of its own laws, meter and rhythm and countless other relationships, which are even more important, but which are as yet unexplored, insufficiently recognized, and unnamed.[6]

By making language itself their shared subject, these excerpts alienate us from our habitual associations with it, the former emphasizing language's ability to influence hateful thought and

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[5] William Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, Ed. Robert Woodrow Langbaum and Sylvan Barnet (London: Arden Shakespeare, 1999) 21.
[6] Boris Pasternak, *Dr. Zhivago* (New York: Random House, 1997) 437.

the latter accentuating the majestic beauty inherent in the flow of language. Granted, some of these examinations of language are not as thoroughly disorienting as, for example, Syme's vilification of standard English's inadequacies as compared to Newspeak, but it is not necessarily the purpose of these novels to warn us about ourselves and our possible future. Instead, they strive to point out the essence, the *Truth* of things, focusing here on language. And that is precisely the crux of the Familiar Alien, be it linguistic or not.

In calling attention to the properties of language itself, the linguistic Familiar Alien is also closely allied with the concept of metalanguage, a device often employed by writers of metafiction, and defined by Patricia Waugh as

> a language which, instead of referring to non-linguistic events, situations, or objects in the world, refers to another language…the "other" language may be either the registers of everyday discourse or, more usually, the "language" of the literary system itself, including the conventions of the novel as a whole or particular forms of that genre.[7]

Accordingly we find such defamiliarizing references to language as this in novels like Clive Barker's *Mister B. Gone*, when the narrator asks if there is anything

> that is so available as words? If the preciousness of things is bound in some measure to their rarity, then how precious can the sounds we make, waking or sleeping, in infancy or senility, sane, mad, or simply trying on hats, be? There's a surfeit of them. They spew from tongues and pens in their countless billions every day. Think of all that words express: the seductions, threats, demands, entreaties, prayers, curses, omens, proclamations, diagnoses, accusations,

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[7] Patricia Waugh, *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction* (New York: Routledge, 1984) 4.

insinuations, testaments, judgments, reprieves, betrayals, laws, lies, and liberties. And so on, and on, words without end. Only when the last syllable has been spoken, whether it's a joyous hallelujah or someone complaining about their bowels, only then is it that I think we can reasonably assume the world will have ended. Created with a word, and—who knows?—maybe destroyed by one.[8]

His compelling question here and its naturally correlative queries relate intimately to my study as a whole. First: what is the value of words, so commonplace yet so elemental to our daily lives? Then some of the other ideas I have explored in my thesis: how can our habitual assumptions about ordinary events be altered by language? Can we express true meaning in storytelling, literally the sharing of words? Do we control our language or does it control us? What truths and secrets lie dormant in language? And finally: does language express the state of humanity, and can a linguistic Familiar Alien show this to us? Words are everywhere, in literature and in real life, and it is our opportunity if not our duty as humans to make the *connexions* that will allow us to think, learn, and grow—to contemplate and enjoy life.

Finally, as I have already stressed, language is the essential building block of all literature. Without language, no Familiar Alien, or defamiliarization of any sort, could exist. The Familiar Alien of science fiction serves to emphasize truths that we take for granted or have slipped into our unconscious—a corrupt government leader, perhaps, or an unfair bias we have against a culture. Giving language the same treatment helps us to recognize the centrality of language not only to the Familiar Alien, but to everything that goes into a literary work. Science fiction is more likely to use the linguistic Familiar Alien, or any Familiar Alien, because one of the purposes of science fiction is to stretch our reality and thereby make us question it. Works

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[8] Clive Barker, *Mister B. Gone* (New York: HarperCollins, 2007) 19-20.

that use the linguistic Familiar Alien do not rely on the transparency of their language to cause defamiliarization, as does, for example, Benjy's narrative of the fight between Quentin and T.P. in *The Sound and the Fury*:

> I wasn't crying, but I couldn't stop. I wasn't crying, but the ground wasn't still, and then I was crying. The ground kept sloping up and the cows ran up the hill. T.P. tried to get up. He fell down again and the cows ran down the hill. Quentin held my arm and we went toward the barn. Then the barn wasn't there and we had to wait until it came back. I didn't see it come back. It came behind us and Quentin set me down in the trough where the cows ate. I held on to it. It was going away too, and I held to it. The cows ran down the hill again, across the door. I couldn't stop. Quentin and T.P. came up the hill, fighting. T.P. was falling down the hill and Quentin dragged him up the hill. Quentin hit T.P. I couldn't stop…[9]

Benjy does not use made-up words or familiar words in startling contexts, nor does he delve into an analysis of the concept of language; this passage is alienating and artful because it encapsulates the indescribable pain of Benjy, whose mental disability permits him only to relate events. Thus the fact that he cannot stop crying resounds even more strongly with us as readers, who are tasked with drawing meaning from his simple and simple-minded descriptions; the descriptions themselves are composed of words that do not require extra effort to understand. With the linguistic Familiar Alien, however, science fiction actually includes us in the defamiliarizing experience by making the strangeness of language explicit and *showing* it to us, which we saw most evidently in *Riddley Walker* but is also apparent in our cognitive exertion to

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[9] William Faulkner, *The Sound and the Fury*, Ed. David Minter (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1987) 13.

understand a good ornamental neologism. In employing defamiliarized, defamiliarizing language, science fiction does the work that all literature has always had available to it: showing us and inviting us to contemplate both the ubiquity and immense power of words—whether those words are familiar or Familiar Aliens—and our incredible human capacity to interpret these words and think.

I thus conclude that the Familiar Alien is a significant and frequently present element in science fiction, and that language as a Familiar Alien—by alienating us from anything and everything including itself, the glue between ourselves and other humans and reality—is its most flexible, pervasive, and universally meaningful manifestation. Having reached this end, I cannot resist quoting Riddley one last time:

> The fires col
>
> My storys tol. (Hoban 20)

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