

Science Fiction and a Rhetorical Analysis of the 'Literature Myth'

Kris Rutten
Ghent University

Ronald Soetaert
Ghent University

Geert Vandermeersche
Ghent University

Follow this and additional works at: <http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb>



Part of the [Comparative Literature Commons](#), and the [Critical and Cultural Studies Commons](#)

Dedicated to the dissemination of scholarly and professional information, **Purdue University Press** selects, develops, and distributes quality resources in several key subject areas for which its parent university is famous, including business, technology, health, veterinary medicine, and other selected disciplines in the humanities and sciences.

CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture, the peer-reviewed, full-text, and open-access learned journal in the humanities and social sciences, publishes new scholarship following tenets of the discipline of comparative literature and the field of cultural studies designated as "comparative cultural studies." Publications in the journal are indexed in the Annual Bibliography of English Language and Literature (Chadwyck-Healey), the Arts and Humanities Citation Index (Thomson Reuters ISI), the Humanities Index (Wilson), Humanities International Complete (EBSCO), the International Bibliography of the Modern Language Association of America, and Scopus (Elsevier). The journal is affiliated with the Purdue University Press monograph series of Books in Comparative Cultural Studies. Contact: [<clcweb@purdue.edu>](mailto:clcweb@purdue.edu)

Recommended Citation

Rutten, Kris; Soetaert, Ronald; and Vandermeersche, Geert. "Science Fiction and a Rhetorical Analysis of the 'Literature Myth.'" *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* 13.1 (2011): [<http://dx.doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.1709>](http://dx.doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.1709)

This text has been double-blind peer reviewed by 2+1 experts in the field.

The above text, published by Purdue University Press ©Purdue University, has been downloaded 2205 times as of 11/08/14.

CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture, the peer-reviewed, full-text, and open-access learned journal in the humanities and social sciences, publishes new scholarship following tenets of the discipline of comparative literature and the field of cultural studies designated as "comparative cultural studies." In addition to the publication of articles, the journal publishes review articles of scholarly books and publishes research material in its *Library Series*. Publications in the journal are indexed in the Annual Bibliography of English Language and Literature (Chadwyck-Healey), the Arts and Humanities Citation Index (Thomson Reuters ISI), the Humanities Index (Wilson), Humanities International Complete (EBSCO), the International Bibliography of the Modern Language Association of America, and Scopus (Elsevier). The journal is affiliated with the Purdue University Press monograph series of Books in Comparative Cultural Studies. Contact: <clcweb@purdue.edu>

Volume 13 Issue 1 (March 2011) Article 5
Kris Rutten, Ronald Soetaert, and Geert Vandermeersche,
"Science Fiction and a Rhetorical Analysis of the 'Literature Myth'"
<<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol13/iss1/5>>

Contents of *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* 13.1 (2011)
<<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol13/iss1/>>

Abstract: In their article "Science Fiction and a Rhetorical Analysis of the 'Literature Myth'" Kris Rutten, Ronald Soetaert, and Geert Vandermeersche discuss what we can learn from science fiction about cultural literacy in general and literary culture in particular. From a theoretical and methodological perspective the authors start from the work of rhetorician Kenneth Burke. First, the authors conceptualize literature as "equipment for living" followed by a discussion of science fiction as "equipment for living" based on a description of the genre as "satire by *entelechy*." Second, they analyze a selection of science fiction narratives using the "dramatistic pentad" as an analytical tool. The focus of the analysis is on how literature as "agency" is located in a futuristic "scene." The article concludes with a discussion about how an analysis of the "literature myth" in science fiction narratives can be used to reflect on the rhetorical construction of cultural literacy.

Kris RUTTEN, Ronald SOETAERT, and Geert VANDERMEERSCHE

Science Fiction and a Rhetorical Analysis of the "Literature Myth"

The topic of cultural literacy and its relation to education has been a subject of academic and public debate for many years. Both conservative (back-to-basics) and progressive thinkers have pointed out the problematic nature of culture and literacy in our contemporary society. Cultural studies problematized the distinction between "high" and "low" cultural practices and new literacy studies focused on the politics of traditional — Western — notions of "literacy" and criticized the idea that literacy often only refers to reading and writing. The concept of multi-literacies was introduced to refer to different kinds of literacies related to different media and networks. This critical perspective problematizes traditional concepts such as the literary canon: one form of literacy related to one specific medium, the book, and literature as a major genre. Specifically the idea that the literary canon is "the best that has been thought and said in the world" (Arnold 6), has been criticized for its elitist perspective and corrected from — amongst others — feminist and postcolonial perspectives.

Harvey Graff has coined the concept "literacy myth" suggesting that policy makers have overstressed the importance of (a particular kind of) literacy. Literacy myth starts from the assumption that improved literacy leads necessarily to all sorts of good things: economic development, cultural progress, and individual improvement. From the perspective of literature and literary education, this can be related to what we conceptualize as the "literature myth." The assumption is often that reading literature — in particular canonized literature — will make you a better and smarter person, lead to individual improvement and collectively to social progress. There is a large corpus of scholarship about whether new media and the digital turn has impacted negatively levels and ways of reading literature, thus not only the knowledge base of society but cognitive capacities of the population at large (on this, see, e.g., Birkerts; Liu; López-Varela Azcárate and Tötösy de Zepetnek). In a parallel situation Brian Street criticizes how the literacy myth is used in literacy campaigns that present literacy as a panacea for solving all sorts of problems and we argue that the same can be said about the literature myth. Street confronts two models of literacy: the autonomous model based on the traditional view that literacy is divorced from the social context versus the ideological model based on the view that literacy is a socio-political construction. This last model emphasizes that literacy is best described as an engagement within specific contexts of human practice, so that literacy can be understood as a process of socialization. This provides a critical — for some a progressive — perspective because it situates literacy in the context of the power structures of society and institutions. Literary culture and literature education have also been located in the context of social structures. Terry Eagleton refers to the "ideology of literature" and claims that social structures as for example the nation state use literature as a "moral technology [that] consists of a particular set of techniques and practices for the instilling of specific kinds of value, discipline, behavior, and response in human subjects" (96-97). This technology produces a specific kind of knowledge which serves "certain functions of power" that are "vital to the ends of social order" (97). Eagleton emphasizes that this moral technology is not just the "simple communication of a range of practical moral values, such as authority is good or evil" (98), but that it is more subtle and elusive because it teaches one to "be" moral.

From these perspectives, literary culture (and high art in general) has been increasingly subject to criticism and correction. However, there is also a growing body of scholarship that defends this same literary culture. Not only from the back-to-basics point of view with a nostalgic longing for an elite status of literary culture, but paradoxically enough also from critical points of view that wonder if the deconstruction of the literary canon has not caused an (exaggerated) neglect of the possible added value of literature and art in general. In *The Company We Keep* Wayne Booth argues for a relocation of ethics to literature and our engagement with it in order to explore not only the potential dangers but also the ethical powers of works that are part of the literary canon. This raises questions about the possible "functions" of literature and art in our globalized, multicultural, and media saturated societies. Why is a literary culture important? Does knowledge about art and literature make you a "more rounded" human being or is it instrumental knowledge (related to the concept of the literature myth)? Moreover, what are the status and politics of cultural literacy in our technological society and knowledge

economy? In her book *Poetic Justice* Martha Nussbaum claims that novels can be read as metaphors that help in understanding the stories of others. She states that literature should be used to help citizens to orient themselves as cosmopolitans and to stimulate their moral imagination. More recently, she has argued that democracies need the humanities (*Not for Profit*) and in *On Nineteen Eighty-Four: Orwell and Our Future*, Nussbaum argues that by describing a world without literature (or only with censored literature), Orwell warns us of the dangers of a world without human emotions. Further, with regard to the corollary emotion, namely narration and reflection, James Paul Gee postulates that the research of narration can be an important source of inspiration for a critical reflection on (cultural) literacy, because "people make sense of their experience of other people and the world by emplotting them in terms of socially and culturally specific stories ... which are supported by the social practices, rituals, texts and other media representations of specific social groups and cultures" (<<http://www.schools.ash.org.au/litweb/page300.html>>). Overall, the argument is that literature can play a major role because emotions can be accessed and shared through literature. At the same time, literature can warn us of what happens if literary imagination is in danger, curtailed, or destroyed. Indeed, we can learn about our contemporary society from the worldview represented in science fiction texts such as *1984* because "social values and cultural practices encourage particular kinds of thinking and writing, making it essential ... to elaborate on the ideological climate in which texts are produced" (Hübler <<http://www.kbjournal.org/node/60>>). Science fiction has been described as a laboratory for experimenting with the imagination of time and space, of social and affective relationships between people: what kind of future do we imagine? Who is predicting this future? From what perspective is this future imagined? (see, e.g., Penfield; Shade). We argue that a rhetorical analysis of science fiction narratives offers possibilities to discuss contemporary attitudes toward literary culture and art in general, that is, what we refer to as cultural literacy.

From a theoretical and methodological perspective of literacy, we discuss next the work of Kenneth Burke (1897–1993). Burke was a literary theorist and rhetorician whose early work focused on analyzing literary texts which he used as a point of departure to comment on "the work itself, society and the nature of language and communication" (Brock 2). Central to his work is understanding culture as perceived via literary texts, and *vice versa*. From his analysis of literature and drama he introduced principles and methods for analyzing human symbolic action (see Brock). In his later works he used these concepts to construct a theory of the evolution of society and he developed a series of rhetorical methods to enact what he called sociological criticism. His more culture-oriented approach to rhetoric has been incorporated into the study of worldviews and his work has been inspiring for a growing body of scholarship that studies "how the symbols we use are at once a reflection, selection and deflection of socio-cultural realities" (Mahan-Hays and Aden 32). In what follows, we discuss representations of literary culture by applying the theoretical and methodological perspectives developed by Burke in an analysis of science fiction narratives. First, we introduce the concept of literature "as equipment for living." Next, discuss how science fiction narratives can be interpreted as "equipment for living" by describing the genre as satire by *entelechy* and we introduce the dramatic pentad as a tool of analysis. Finally, we look at representations of literature as equipment for living in a selection of science fiction narratives and discuss what can be learned from them about cultural literacy.

In *The Philosophy of Literary Form* Burke describes literature and the stories we tell and use in general as "equipment for living." Starting from a discussion of proverbs, Burke claims that people need to have a "word" for certain recurring social situations they are confronted with because social structures give rise to "type" situations. Proverbs "seek to chart, in more or less homey and picturesque ways, these 'type' situations" (*Philosophy* 294). The second step of his argument extends this analysis of proverbs to encompass the whole field of literature. He proposes to consider the most complex and sophisticated works of art (literature, but we broaden this idea to cultural narratives in general) as "proverbs writ large" (*Philosophy* 296). Similar to the function of proverbs, narratives can be described as a kind of "naming" that seek to chart "type" situations. Burke illustrates his argument with the example of *Madame Bovary* as the strategic naming of a situation, because "it singles out a pattern of experience that is sufficiently representative of our social structure for people to 'need a word for it'" (*Philosophy* 300). Starting from his description of literature as equipment for living, Burke understands the analysis of literature as a form of sociological criticism precisely because it seeks to

codify the various naming strategies which have appeared in art. In our case study, naming is done by science fiction narratives. Future perspectives dramatized in science fiction reveal much about the context in which these narratives are told: "critical and imaginative works are answers to questions posed by situations in which they arose. They are not merely answers, they are strategic answers, stylized answers" (Burke, *Philosophy* 1). According to Burke, art forms like tragedy or comedy or satire are moral acts which can be described as equipment for living because they "size up" situations in various ways and refer to corresponding attitudes. The way that narratives describe a strategy for encompassing a situation should not be understood as a literal prescription, but can be described as an "orientation" to a situation, providing assistance in adjusting to it. Therefore, a cultural analysis of narratives (and texts in general) cannot focus on a true meaning because "symbolic deeds in themselves are just meaning potentials and [the analysis] must begin precisely from this potentiality" (Lehtonen 88). Indeed, "many of our observations are but implications of the particular terminology in terms of which the observations are made ... observations about 'reality' may be, but the spinning out of possibilities implicit in our particular choice of words" (Burke, *Language* 46). Because narratives and other symbol systems are so complicated, rhetorical criticism uses many critical tools "that call attention to the many meaning- and motive-generating functions that language performs" (Brummett 179).

Although science fiction was not a major theme in his work, Burke describes science fiction narratives as social documents and focuses on what they might tell about our contemporary society (Burke, "Realisms"). Burke introduces the concept of *entelechy* to understand how speculative artists elaborate on the ultimate possibilities in their view of things and track down all possible implications of their insights ("Archetype"). *entelechy* can be described as the tendency of a potential to realize itself. The original concept referred to a biological process, trying to explain how biological outcomes are by nature preordained, for example the way a seed contains in itself the tree that it will eventually become (see Shouse <<http://www.kbjournal.org/shouse>>). Burke uses this biological concept by Aristotle to explain human's use of symbols. Analogically to a seed that preordains the tree, Burke argues that language causes or induces action and the goal of actions is preordained by the language use ("Archetype"). Based on his definition of *entelechy*, Burke proposes satire as a method of problematizing future developments, whereby satire by *entelechy* takes the following shape: 1) locate a paradigm beginning to take hold, 2) state clearly the rules and norms of that paradigm, and 3) describe what will happen if those rules and norms are applied to specific cultural artefacts by tracking down all the possible implications of this paradigm ("Why Satire"). Our claim is that science fiction can be described as what Burke calls satire by *entelechy* because much of science fiction dramatizes particular situations in terms of technological developments and analyzes technological trends in its day and age by following them "to the end of the line." Science fiction authors can be described as the "speculative minds" that Burke refers to who "glimpse certain ... possibilities in their view of things, and ... track down the implications of their insight, by transforming its potentialities into total actualization" (Burke, "Why Satire" 73). Eric Shouse, for example, starts from Burkes notion of *entelechy* to examine how futuristic satire can be understood as equipment for living to deal with the modern exigencies of biological and ecological disasters.

Burke introduces the theory of dramatism as a way to analyze how and why human beings use rhetoric and to what effect, starting from the study of drama. He develops the dramattistic pentad as an analytic tool based on the five basic elements of a drama and defines dramatism as "a method of analysis and a corresponding critique of terminology designed to show that the most direct route to the study of human relations and human motives is via a methodological inquiry into cycles or clusters of terms and their functions" ("Dramatism" 445). Literature, film, speeches, but also "simple statements of why people do things, even what they did, are potential material for dramattistic analysis" (Blakesley 32). The principal aim of Burke was to tease out the motive of social interactions — the motive being the reasons why people do the things they do: "what is involved when we say what people are doing and why they are doing it?" (*Grammar* xv). Every "rounded statement" about motives refers to the "act" (what happens), "agent" (the one who does the act), "scene" (the setting in which an act takes place), "agency" (the means by which the act is carried out), and "purpose" (the goal or objective of the act). In his later work, Burke adds "attitude" to name the state of mind that predisposed the agent to act with regard to the agent's attitude toward the act. This pentadic perspective is

a useful tool for analyzing a dramatic situation in general, but becomes more powerful when the key terms are combined to construct ratios. A ratio pairs two of the key terms and helps to define how the first term affects the second one. The dominant term reflects the motive behind a situation. Indeed, it is by discovering in a narrative, "an emphasis on one particular term, the relationship between the terms, and the nuances of language used in developing a term, that the pentad reveals something about the worldviews of the rhetor" (Hübler <<http://www.kbjournal.org/node/60>>). A pentadic perspective on science fiction implies that we inevitably focus on *scene* (time/space) as a major perspective or dominant term in the story. Next to scene, also agency seems to be a dominant term, when focusing on technological developments: "Though I have read little science fiction, I'd incline to say that its fantasies (in being a response to the vast clutter of new instruments with which modern technology has surrounded us) endow the realm of agency (or means) with an importance that it never had before as the locus of motives" (Burke, "Eye-Crossing" 330).

There is a growing body of research on literacy narratives, narratives that place the struggle of a character to become literate at the center of the plot (Eldred and Mortensen; Keroes; Williams and Zenger). As Bronwyn Williams and Amy Zenger argue, these narratives are often representations of the literacy myth: "Triumph of literacy films often echo the meta-narratives that permeate literacy education from kindergarten through college" (147). These literacy narratives are increasingly used in education to reflect upon the traditional views of literacy (e.g., Trier). In their research on representations of literacy in popular culture, Williams and Zenger note that there is little reading or writing in science fiction films. They suggest that "it is as if literacy is too prosaic an activity to present in such a futuristic world where information is more often communicated through holograms" (107). In contrast to Williams and Zenger, we argue that exemplary representation of (cultural) literacy can be found in science fiction and we problematize these representations from a rhetorical perspective.

A rhetorical perspective on science fiction implies looking at how in science fiction certain ideas are taken "to the end of the line" and in order to illustrate this hypothesis, we proceed with the analysis of a selection of science fiction narratives by focusing on ideas about reading books and literature. We start by analyzing three seminal works of science fiction literature: Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932), Orwell's *1984* (1949), and Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451* (1953). Next, we confront these seminal novels with more recent science fiction films and television series in which the reading of books is represented: *Star Trek* (1966-2005) and the film *Equilibrium* (2002). The analysis is done by applying different pentadic ratios to the narratives. The focus is on how literature is represented as equipment for living in these narratives. From the perspective of science fiction as a satire by *entelechy*, the aim is to study how ideas about the literature myth are "taken to the end of the line."

1984 is set in an authoritarian state (scene) in the near future and narrates the life of Winston Smith, a civil servant whose main task is to change the language in both journalist and political literature. At a certain moment he stops believing in what he is doing, so he begins to rebel against the totalitarian system in which everyone is watched and controlled by Big Brother. His rebellion starts with writing a personal diary and ends tragically with falling in love. The reading of books and literature is not a major theme in *1984*, but typical of this imagined society is that literature indeed will disappear: literature is censored and rewritten in "Newspeak" and the literature of the past will be destroyed. "Chaucer, Shakespeare, Milton, Byron — they'll exist only in Newspeak versions, not merely changed into something different, but actually changed into something contradictory of what they used to be" (Orwell 53). Books and literature are described as dangerous tools: "There were also whispered stories of a terrible book, a compendium of all the heresies, of which Goldstein was the author and which circulated clandestinely here and there. It was a book without a title. People referred to it, if at all, simply as the book" (Orwell 13). Writing also plays an important role as a tool or agency. Orwell created a scene in which there is a nostalgic longing for the use of a diary and all the instruments we tend to use for writing: "He went back to the living-room and sat down at a small table that stood to the left of the telescreen. From the table drawer he took out a penholder, a bottle of ink, and a thick, quarto-sized blank book with a red back and a marbled cover" (5). Newspeak is the tool with which the government tries to control and limit the thoughts and actions of citizens. The idea taken "to the end of the line" is what happens when a government can manipulate and control the language that is allowed. Indeed, newspeak implies a total control over language and meaning by a

government. *1984* can be interpreted as a satire on totalitarian dictatorship, but also as a satire on the language we use in general and political propaganda or spin in particular, showing how we get manipulated by doublespeak. Literature is presented as a tool (agency) to debunk and criticize this worldview.

Huxley's *Brave New World* confronts the reader with a mythical vision of the dangers of absolute social control by transforming human society into an inhuman system. Although not the major theme, art and literature play an important role in the story. The title already refers to literature: Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, where Miranda says, "O *Brave New World*, that hath such people in it." Intelligence, emotions, imagination have become second-place compared with other more important issues. More specifically, romantic relations and art are forbidden. All books have been banned except works about technology. The Controller argues that artistic and scientific freedom must be sacrificed to secure the ultimate aim of happiness of a society. This society offers quick and easy ways of feeling good through two major agencies: soma (a drug used to escape for a few hours), and feelies (a form of media-entertainment in which an audience can interact with a type of movie). From an agency-purpose ratio, drugs and media play an important role. *Brave New World* can be interpreted as a warning against the dangers of science and technology. The inhabitants of *Brave New World* can be described as emotionally illiterate and most of them feel comfortable with this kind of life. The result is that people no longer produce art or literature and most of them have stopped caring about it. From our perspective, crucial is the criticism against the fact that culture is replaced by mass entertainment which results into a loss of emotions and critical perspectives, that is, the loss of human autonomy. *Brave New World* is a seminal text and has become a major influence in the tradition of science fiction literature. The novel points to recurring fears within our society: "It is not a fear of monsters, or the symbolic expression of the nineteenth-century fear of technology" (Back 331). To be feared is that increasing control will destroy what distinguishes us as human beings: we could become the monsters ourselves and not even notice. This can be related to the central theme of this article, literary culture has withered in this dystopian society. But at the same time the power of literature as agency is emphasized. The Controller hides the works of Shakespeare's, yet Shakespeare is quoted throughout the novel by the "savage" John. John cherishes the souvenir of his mother who taught him to read with only two books at their disposal, a scientific manual and the works of "a man called Shakespeare. You've never heard of them of course" (Huxley 61). Shakespeare recurs several times in *Brave New World*. From discussions about him, we learn much about the attitude towards literary culture: "'Do they read Shakespeare?' asked the Savage as they walked on their way to the Bio-chemical Laboratories past the School Library. 'Certainly not,' said the Head Mistress, blushing. 'Our library,' said Dr. Gaffney, 'contains only books of reference. If our young people need distraction, they can get it at the feelies. We don't encourage them to indulge in any solitary amusements'" (Huxley 195). And we find in the novel further arguments against Shakespeare as an example of "great literature": "Our world is not the same as Othello's world. You can't make flivvers without steel — and you can't make tragedies without social instability. The world's stable now. People are happy; they get what they want, and they never want what they can't get" (259). Literature and art are said to cause unhappiness: "You've got to choose between happiness and what people used to call high art" (264). Thus, from an agency-scene ratio we can interpret this last perspective as a description of society (scene) without literature as agency. The presence of literature is said to create an unstable society. The idea "taken to the end of the line," is what happens when a society (scene) celebrates technology at the expense of art and literature (agency).

Future society represented in Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451* has outlawed books, because they are thought only to lead to political and social idealism which in turn leads to dissent, unrest and unhappiness. So, a scene-agency ratio is central to the story. Montag is one of the Firemen who has to locate and burn illegal books. He never questions his task until the schoolteacher Clarisse asks him if he ever reads any of the books he burns. His interest is raised and he steals and reads one of the books he has to burn. He ends up leaving his job as a fireman and joins Clarisse in an illegal colony of people (the Book People) who are devoted to keeping books alive by memorizing them. The novel ends with a nuclear holocaust and the Book People are presented as the idealistic hope for our civilization. This way, the story reads as an argument in favor of literary culture. In François Truffaut's adaptation of

the novel to film, the story is problematized with regard to attitude toward literature. Truffaut problematizes this idealistic mission by incorporating scenes in which for example *Mein Kampf* is also burned together with the classics. So, the idealization of all books is also questioned. Moreover, Oskar Wenner decides to start reading in front of his bewildered middle class friends. This act can be interpreted as an act of protest against a middle class life without books as equipment for living. Reading literature is presented as a protest, a revolutionary act or even a way of life.

In the different versions and episodes of the Star Trek sagas, known for the adventures of the crew of the enterprise, who "boldly go where no man has gone before" (*Star Trek*, *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, *Star Trek II: The Wrath of Khan*). In the series we find several examples of a defense of humanism in general and literary culture in particular. This humanistic perspective is often reflected in the character Picard, particularly in episodes of *Star Trek: The Next Generation*. In one of the episodes he reflects upon the problem of justice and comes to the conclusion that "there can be no justice so long as laws are absolute. Even life itself is an exercise in exceptions" ("Encounter at Farpoint"). Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, for example, is inspiring for Picard: "I know Hamlet. And what he might say with irony I say with conviction. 'What a piece of work is man! How noble in reason! How infinite in faculty!'" ("Hide and Q"). There is a sort of renaissance in space, a renewed attention for classic authors: "PICARD. The Homeric hymns, one of the root metaphors of our own culture. RIKER. For the next time we encounter the Tamarians? PICARD. More familiarity with our own mythology might help us to relate to theirs" ("Darmok"). Or, there is a nostalgic attitude towards books and the importance of classic literature: "KIRK. Oh, by the way, thank you for this. (He lifts a book). SPOCK. I know of your fondness for antiques. KIRK. (reads) 'It was the best of times, it was the worst of times...' Message, Spock?" (*Star Trek II: The Wrath of Khan*). Here, books are represented as agency, both as a manual that gives them clues for their odyssey through space, but also as tools that must remind them of what they really are: humans. Despite the obsession with technology, the added value of technology is often questioned from a humanistic perspective (agent-agency ratio): "Here you stand ... a perfect symbol of our technical society. Mechanized, electronicized, and not very human. You've done away with humanity, the striving of man to achieve greatness through his own resources" ("The Conscience of the King") and there are many examples of how technology is humanized (the agency-turned-agent), for example "My friend Data, you see things with the wonder of a child. And that makes you more human than any of us" (*Star Trek: The Next Generation*, "The skin of Evil").

The film *Equilibrium* (2002) represents a harmonious society. But for obtaining this harmony a price has to be paid: emotions are banned because they are said to be the cause of wars and chaos. Emotions are suppressed with drugs, but also by forbidding all actions and artefacts that might stimulate an emotional attitude. So, all great art — literature, music, paintings — should be destroyed. The major character, Preston, is an officer who has to locate and liquidate so-called "sense offenders." Not only books, but also paintings (the Mona Lisa) are burned. From a scene-agency ratio, we can problematize how the reading of literature and listening to classical music are located in a specific nostalgic setting as a contrast with the modernistic scene that is predominant in this future society. Sense offenders go underground to set up cozy and nostalgic places where they can listen to old records. These interiors with warm colors are contrasted to the cold modernistic architecture that is predominant. In this film, the major threat to society is not new technology, but older media: books, LPs and paintings, that are hidden in nostalgic interiors. In the beginning of the film we see how Preston discovers that one of his colleagues is hiding one of the confiscated books, more specifically poetry from W.B. Yeats (on this, see Partridge). He saved this book in order to understand the enemy, but the reading of the book changes his understanding of the world around him. Moreover, the reading of poetry has become an act of resistance. Emotions banned from society are re-discovered in books: "PARTRIDGE: You always knew. (Begins to read from Yeats) 'But I, being poor, have only my dreams. I have spread my dreams under your feet. Tread softly because you tread on my dreams.' I assume you dream, Preston."

When focusing on literature (and art in general) as agency, books are represented as tools that can provoke emotions from an agency-purpose ratio. Hence, the reason why the resistance is trying to save art and literature is to save "humanity," and this is of course why they need to be destroyed (act-purpose). Literature as equipment for living is represented in *Equilibrium* in a straightforward

way: because all emotions are banned, there are no wars anymore, but people have lost all "human" feelings (love, anger, happiness). Books are literally used as tools to provoke and stimulate human feelings. John Rodden asserts that a deeper understanding of the subtle dynamics of narratives can "shed a valuable light both on literature and on our lives" (149). We agree with Rodden that such a deeper understanding within the context of literacy culture should focus on the ways stories edify us and at the same time explore the implication of this instruction (or persuasion). Our claim is that the theoretical and methodological perspectives of Burke can provide tools to answer this question as suggested by S.E. Mahan-Hays and R.C. Aden: "working at the intersection of rhetoric and cultural studies may help to revitalize Burke's emphasis on the role of stories in human interaction, for cultural studies' focus on the 'popular' necessarily draws our attention to the narratives in everyday communication (i.e. vernacular stories, television shows, comic books etc.), and how those narratives are nested within larger cultural narratives" (47).

The above analysis of the selected narratives shows that the threat of traditional literary culture is an important theme. In the examples we have discussed, we are confronted with a range of binary oppositions. Principal among these is technology versus culture or science versus fiction: culture (art, literature) stands for higher values and technology for a threat of these values. Another important binary opposition is book versus other media: the book as the medium for our cultural heritage and other media as a threat to this heritage. From a pentadic perspective we identify scene as a dominant term and focused on the tension or ratio between scene and agency. Book and literature are presented as the foundation of our humanistic culture and the decline of book and literature is related to the decline of this humanism as a sort of inverted literature myth. Indeed, in much of science fiction there is nostalgia for a threatened humanistic tradition, a nostalgic longing for a destroyed or forbidden literary culture and it is exactly in this literary culture we find what it is to be human, or a humanist. Science fiction represents a logical and a temporal perfection of certain attitudes towards art and literature. At the same time, "entelechiatic satire is useful because of what it accepts as well as what it rejects" (Shouse <<http://www.kbjournal.org/shouse>>.). As such, satire by *entelechy* (or science fiction described as such) hits "upon a form of comic criticism that can point out the potentially destructive trends inherent in a given Order without promoting an equally destructive Counter-Order" (Shouse). It is important to emphasize this characteristic of satire, because it would be absurd to reject, for example, developments such as biotechnology and other advances in technology or medicine based on utopian/dystopian representations in science fiction narratives. Likewise, we argue that the exaggerated points of view about the status and politics of cultural literacy in our contemporary (technological) societies need to be confronted with counter-statements without reifying into Counter-Orders (Shouse <<http://www.kbjournal.org/shouse>>). A rhetorical analysis has the ability to "debunk the ideas the satirist seeks to disparage while also facilitating audience acceptance of more moderate versions of those ideas" (Shouse <<http://www.kbjournal.org/shouse>>). This debunking is essential for Burke, because "whatever the imagined paradises, ineradicable prisons would also be lurking" (Kastely 307). In a similar vein, Robin Wagner-Pacifici applies the pentad to analyze utopian societies: "In a utopian vision, all moments of the Pentad would be in perfect alignment. However, such perfect society does not exist and by closely examining all the ratios based in the pentad, it becomes possible to "locate the places where a dis-alignment reveals something significant about the inherent contradictions in the social world" (Wagner-Pacifici). Indeed, utopian societies do not exist and science fiction thematizes and problematizes these utopian visions.

Using Burke's pentad to analyze the role of technology in society can also focus on an agent-agency ratio. Humans (agents) are increasingly linked with and through the technologies (*agencies*) that they use. But as Mike Hübler shows, a lot of public discourse about technology seems to reverse this relationship between agent and agency, "a drama in which technologies appear to follow their own course as agents, using human beings as mere agencies" (<<http://www.kbjournal.org/node/60>>). Indeed, we can find this inversion in a lot of science fiction narratives. Thomas Frentz and Janice Hocker Rushing refer to the "Frankenstein myth" and "explore various ways in which human agents grow distant from their technical agencies in the drama of modern science fiction films" (Frentz and Rushing qtd. in Hübler <<http://www.kbjournal.org/node/60>>). These kinds of narratives "illustrate for them how a machine can be symbolically portrayed, not as a tool, but as an 'agency-turned-agent

with a purpose of its own" (Frentz and Rusching qtd. in Hübler <<http://www.kbjournal.org/node/60>>). In discussing the phenomenon of technological necessity – "the belief that whatever is technically possible must be technically explored" – Hübler refers to the work of Frentz and Rushing on the Frankenstein myth to suggest that "pure agency/efficiency is the perfect end (entelechy) towards which dystopian narratives of technology directs the agents of their drama" (<<http://www.kbjournal.org/node/60>>). We can relate this act of persuasion to a broad definition of rhetoric, trying to understand how "symbol systems tend to create "perfect" enemies to make catharsis effective" (Eddy 14). The perfect enemy here is a society obsessed with order and technology. Of course, because these symbolic deeds are "potentials" we need further research to study how these texts have meaning and which factors cause the meaning potentials of these texts to "actualize" (see Lehtonen). The narratives we analyze can be read as a warning for the future, hoping that the prophecy will not be fulfilled. Neil Postman stated that we do not necessarily need a Big Brother to ban books: "What Orwell feared were those who would ban books. What Huxley feared was that there would be no reason to ban a book, for there would be no one who wanted to read one" (vii).

In conclusion, while our framework and analysis is not meant to solve the above discussed issues, we argue that a rhetorical analysis of science fiction narratives offers possibilities to reflect critically on our contemporary attitude towards literacy, literary culture, and art in general. We argue that perspectives of the future dramatized in science fiction reveal much about the context in which these narratives are told and therefore can teach us something about cultural practices and social values.

Works Cited

- Arnold, Mathew. *Matthew Arnold, Culture and Anarch and Other Writings*. Ed. Stefan Collini. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1993.
- Back, Kurt W. "Frankenstein and Brave New World: Two Cautionary Myths on the Boundaries of Science." *History of European Ideas* 20 (1995): 327-32.
- Birkerts, Sven. *The Gutenberg Elegies: The Fate of Reading in an Electronic Age*. Boston: Faber and Faber, 1994.
- Blakesley, David. *The Elements of Dramatism*. New York: Longman, 2002.
- Bradbury, Ray. *Fahrenheit 451*. 1953. New York: Random House, 2003.
- Brock, Bernard L., ed. *Kenneth Burke and the 21st Century*. New York: State U of New York P, 1998.
- Brummett, Barry. *Rhetoric in Popular Culture*. London: Sage, 2006.
- Burke, Kenneth. *Language as Symbolic Action: Essays on Life, Literature and Method*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1966.
- Burke, Kenneth. "Dramatism." *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*. Ed. David L. Sills and Robert K. Merton. New York: Macmillan, 1968. Vol. 7, 445-52.
- Burke, Kenneth. *A Grammar of Motives*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1969.
- Burke, Kenneth. "Towards Helhaven: Three Stages of a Vision." *On Human Nature: A Gathering while Everything Flows*. By Kenneth Burke. Ed. William Howe Rueckert and Angelo Bonadonna. Berkley: U of California P, 2003. 54-65.
- Burke, Kenneth. "Archetype and Entelechy." *On Human Nature: A Gathering while Everything Flows*. By Kenneth Burke. Ed. William Howe Rueckert and Angelo Bonadonna. Berkley: U of California P, 2003. 121-38.
- Burke, Kenneth. *The Philosophy of Literary Form*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1973.
- Burke, Kenneth. "Eye-Crossing. From Brooklyn to Manhattan: An Eye-Poem for the Ear." *On Human Nature: A Gathering while Everything Flows*. By Kenneth Burke. Ed. William Howe Rueckert and Angelo Bonadonna. Berkeley: U of California P, 2003. 121-38.
- Burke, Kenneth. "Why Satire, With a Plan for Writing One." *On Human Nature: A Gathering while Everything Flows*. By Kenneth Burke. Ed. William Howe Rueckert and Angelo Bonadonna. Berkeley: U of California P, 2003. 66-95.
- Burke, Kenneth. "Realisms, Occidental Style." *On Human Nature: A Gathering while Everything Flows*. Ed. William Howe Rueckert and Angelo Bonadonna. Berkeley: U of California P, 2003. 96-120.
- Eagleton, Terry. "The Subject of Literature." *Cultural Critique* 2 (1986): 95-104.
- Eldred, Janet Carey, and Peter Mortensen. "Reading Literacy Narratives." *College English* 54.5 (1992): 512-39. *Equilibrium*. Dir. Kurt Wimmer. Los Angeles: Dimension Films, 2002.
- Fahrenheit 541*. Dir. François Truffaut. Los Angeles: Universal Pictures, 1966.
- Gee, James Paul. "The New Literacy Studies and the 'Social Turn'." *Schools on the web* (1999): <<http://www.schools.ash.org.au/litweb/page300.html>>.

- Graff, Harvey J. *The Literacy Myth: Cultural Integration and Social Structure in the Nineteenth Century*. New Brunswick: Transaction, 1979.
- Hübler, Mike. "The Drama of a Technological Society. Using Kenneth Burke to Symbolically Explore the Technological Worldview Discovered by Jacques Ellul." *KBJournal* 1.2 (2005): <<http://www.kbjournal.org/node/60>>.
- Huxley, Aldous. *Brave New World*. London: Doubleday, 1932.
- Kastely, James. "Kenneth Burke's Comic Rejoinder to the Cult of the Empire." *College English* 58.3 (1996): 307-25.
- Keroes, Jo. *Tales out of School, Gender, Longing, and the Teacher in Fiction and Film*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1999.
- Lehtonen, Mikko. *The Cultural Analysis of Texts*. London: Sage, 2000.
- Liu, Ziming. "Reading Behavior in the Digital Environment: Changes in Reading Behavior Over the Past Ten Years." *Journal of Documentation* 61.6 (2005): 700-12.
- Mahan-Hays, S.E., and R.C. Aden. "Kenneth Burke's 'Attitude' at the Crossroads of Rhetorical and Cultural Studies: A proposal and Case Study Illustration." *Western Journal of Communication* 67.1 (2003): 32-55.
- Marc, David. *Bonfire of the Humanities: Television, Subliteracy, and Long-Term Memory Loss*. Syracuse: Syracuse UP, 1995.
- Nussbaum, Martha. *Poetic Justice: The Literary Imagination and Public Life*. Boston: Beacon, 1995.
- Nussbaum, Martha. *On Nineteen Eighty-Four: Orwell and Our Future*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 2005.
- Nussbaum, Martha. *Not For Profit: Why Democracy Needs the Humanities*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 2010.
- Orwell, George. *1984*. London: Secker & Warburg, 1949.
- Penfield, Joyce. *Women & Language in Transition*. New York: State U of New York P, 1987.
- Postman, Neil. *Amusing Ourselves to Death*. New York: Viking-Penguin, 1985.
- Rodden, John. "How Do Stories Convince Us? Notes Towards a Rhetoric of Narrative." *College Literature* 35.1 (2008): 148-73.
- Shade, D.D. "What is Speculative Fiction?" *Lost Book Archive* (2008): <<http://fictionspeculative.blogspot.com/2008/02/dd-shade-what-is-speculative-fiction.html>>
- Shouse, Eric. "Suicide: or the Future of Medicine (A 'Satire by Entelechy' of Biotechnology)." *KBJournal* 4.1 (2007): <<http://www.kbjournal.org/shouse>>.
- Star Trek: The Original Series*. "The Conscience of the King." Dir. G. Oswald. Los Angeles: Paramount Television, 1966.
- Star Trek: The Next Generation*. "Hide and Q." Dir. C. Bole. Los Angeles: Paramount Television, 1987.
- Star Trek: The Next Generation*. "Skin of Evil." Dir. J.L. Scanlan. Los Angeles: Paramount Television, 1988.
- Star Trek: The Next Generation*. "Darmok." Dir. W. Kolbe. Los Angeles: Paramount Television, 1992.
- Star Trek II: The Wrath of Khan*. Dir. N. Meyer. Los Angeles: Paramount Pictures, 1982.
- Street, Brian. *Literacy in Theory and Practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1984.
- López-Varela Azcárate, Asunción, and Steven Tötösy de Zepetnek. "Towards Intermediality in Contemporary Cultural Practices and Education." *La intermedialidad / Intermediality*. Ed. Freda Chapple. Special Issue *Cultura, Lenguaje y Representación / Culture, Language and Representation* 6 (2008): 65-82.
- Trier, James. "Reconceptualizing Literacy through a Discourse Perspective by Analyzing Literacy Events Represented in Films about Schools." *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy* 49.6 (2006): 510-23.
- Wagner-Pacifici, Robin. "Et in Arcadia Ego." *Theory & Event* 3.3 (1999): 32-44.
- Williams, Bronwyn Thomas, and Amy A. Zenger. *Popular Culture and Representations of Literacy*. London: Routledge, 2007.

Author's profile: Kris Rutten teaches in the Department of Educational Studies of Ghent University. In current research he is exploring what it implies to approach education from a rhetorical and cultural studies perspective. His recent work has been published in the *British Journal of Social Work* (2010) and he has a forthcoming article in the *Journal of Curriculum Studies*. E-mail: <kris.rutten@ugent.be>

Author's profile: Ronald Soetaert teaches in the Teacher Education Program at Ghent University. His fields of interests include the study of rhetoric, media, literacy, and culture. In addition to numerous articles in Flemish and English, his book publications include *De cultuur van het lezen* (2006) (The Culture of Reading). E-mail: <ronald.soetaert@ugent.be>

Author's profile: Geert Vandermeersche is working towards his doctorate at Ghent University. In his work he focuses on the one hand on how aspects of literary culture and its ideals are presented, legitimated, and thought through in narrative fictions, ranging from novels, graphic novels and film. E-mail: <geert.vandermeersche@ugent.be>