

Nonlinear Beings: Queer Alien Presence and the Vulnerability of the Human in *Del Naranja al Azul* and *Arrival*

“There are days that define your story beyond your life, like the day they arrived.”

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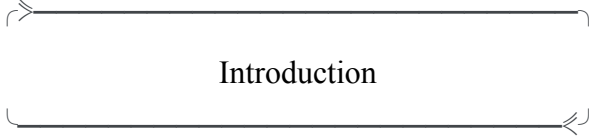
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Introduction

Initially, the soundtrack to the film *Arrival* and the song lyrics that head each chapter of the novel *Del Naranja Al Azul* seem vastly different in emotional tone, and they are, yet a certain strangeness ties them together. Spanish author Cristina Jurado posits herself as music supervisor for her own novel, beginning each of the 20 chapters of *Del Naranja Al Azul* with a different song lyric, in the center of the page. Three-quarters of the songs Jurado quotes have a high-energy, upbeat energy to them, often by rock artists, but scattered in between to head 4 of the chapters is something tonally different: Bjork songs. Bjork brings an important emotional resonance to Jurado's playlist. Her chosen Bjork songs evoke a complex emotion when listened to, an ethereal and discordant quality. Notably, the beeps and whirs in Bjork's "Hyperballad", which heads chapter 15, spin the listener around in a robotic chamber, while we ascend to tense violin.

Violin also plays a role in *Arrival's* biggest moment, the finale scene where the plot twist is revealed. "On the Nature of Daylight" by Max Richter is a haunting violin song that plays in the final scenes of the film *Arrival*. The piece is a real tear-jerker, deep and melancholy. The song sounds like a bittersweet ending, the perfect choice to convey the love and devastation felt by *Arrival* protagonists Louise and Ian. "On The Nature of Daylight" also has a circular feeling within its melody. Soundtrack composer Johan Johansson describes "these kind of... repeated cells and kind of circular motifs or looped motifs, and... this kind of overtone singing" that he hoped to convey through *Arrival's* music (Johansson qtd. in Blair). The use of the violin, for Johansson, reflects a circularity of narrative and time that is central to *Arrival*.

Both texts display through an eerie violin the ways in which life, love, and grief are circular. *Del Naranja Al Azul* explores post-pandemic grief while *Arrival* explores the love and grief of a mother, and both are catalyzed by the arrival of an alien species to Earth. These arrivals change everything. In *Arrival* and *Del Naranja Al Azul*, Dennis Villeneuve and Cristina Jurado convey alien arrivals which catalyze the rupture of normative structures that organize human society. The arrival of the aliens rupture the stability of the body, the romantic relationships between the protagonists, and the notion that humans are entitled to inhabit Earth the way they please. Among the ways the texts represent this change is a shift in narrative privilege from linearity to circularity, both spatially and temporally. The aliens' subversion of linear space and time creates room for the permeability of ideas, bodies, and norms. The fear felt by the humans puts them in a position to choose how they want to respond to the alien Other—either with vulnerability and compassion or rage and violence. Both texts emphasize the painful betrayals and glorious moments of connection that are bound to occur when one is vulnerable, and encourage doing it anyway. The fates of the protagonists in *Arrival* and *Del Naranja Al Azul* rely on one another, and although this necessarily involves suffering, interdependency is a beautiful part of what it means to be human.

One of the things that vulnerability allows us to see is how porous conceptual boundaries are, and the texts allow the reader to think about permeability through the rupture of material boundaries such as planets, buildings, brains, and bodies. It is for this reason that queer theory provides a useful lens for thinking through these texts, since queer theory has long theorized the undoing of conceptual boundaries. In conjunction with the radical transformation of individual characters by the alien species' presence, the two texts center a heterosexual couple whose relationship dynamic is completely blown apart by the arrival and communication of the aliens.


Both couples, Maya and Hugo in *Del Naranja Al Azul* and Louise and Ian in *Arrival*, find themselves first drawn intimately closer by their encounter with the alien, and then dramatically separated. These story arcs emphasize the precarity of limited linear thinking, and in my interpretation of the alien species as queer Others, reflect how what is different from ourselves can be so shocking and intense to confront that it can destroy elements of our life that we thought were in our control completely.

Del Naranja Al Azul by Cristina Jurado and *Arrival* by Denis Villeneuve explore fear and trust of others, as well as the Other, through the motif of physical vulnerability. The physical vulnerability of human characters is emphasized through their susceptibility to advanced alien technology, diseases, and death in *Del Naranja Al Azul*. This creates a complex tension, revealing the ways that fear can determine how humans approach an Other, and how the desire for connection can help overcome this fear. Only a few humans in each text are willing to become emotionally close with the alien species, and this usually involves allowing themselves to be physically vulnerable beforehand.

Further, the theme of emotional vulnerability is highlighted through complex friendships that characters in each text form with the Heptapods and the Bionauts. My definition of emotional vulnerability is simple; when I use the term, it refers to softness and emotional openness. This emotional vulnerability begins for Hugo and Louise with a strong and uncommon level of empathy for the aliens, and an olive branch of trust in their intentions. Their openness then leads to Hugo and Louise's lives being radically transformed, in different but complementary ways, by the ideas and culture of the Bionauts and the Heptapods. Butler's work on vulnerability and openness in the face of grief and loss sheds light on the complicated nature of emotional trust and attachment to the Other and the self.

The alien species' responses to human violence and retaliation reflects their symbolic subversion of traditional notions of power. Both the Bionauts and the Heptapods possess power through their advanced technology that far usurps human machines, yet choose not to use it maliciously because they intend to keep peace with humankind and integrate smoothly with humans. Both texts contrast this with the human response: violence. Human notions of power and control involve violence, while the alien species act in pacifist ways, attempting connection and bids for trust with humans over and over again. The message in both texts is that violence only begets violence, and the true abundant and lasting power is love in the face of fear.

In this thesis, I will give context for the thematically rich genre of science fiction and how these alien invasion stories came about. Next, I will summarize *Del Naranja Al Azul* and *Arrival*, including details that are relevant for understanding the emotional weight and key moments from each text. Then comes queer theory, the exploration of why aliens are metaphors for the queer through their rupturing of social norms. The effect of that rupture is the ensuing precarity of the romantic relationships in the text. When relationships falter, we are left with the individual; here I will begin my section on physical vulnerability of individual humans and how it relates to fears of the posthuman in the two texts. Finally, I will discuss vulnerability and intimacy, and the ways in which *Del Naranja Al Azul* and *Arrival* emphasize love, mourning, and emotional risks as necessary parts of what it means to be human. After all, alien encounters, as well as any encounter with some fear-inducing Other, often reveal to us much more about ourselves than we could have expected.



Science Fiction in Spain and the United States

Before an in-depth analysis of motifs within each text, it is important to understand the traditions and history of the remarkable genre which bore the film *Arrival* and the novel *Del Naranja Al Azul*: science fiction. Knowledge about the impact of science fiction, the way it has shaped thought, and its thematic intentions is fundamental as context for both texts. Additionally, science fiction texts in the United States and Spain often are thematically and stylistically different because they were shaped by different cultural, political, and economic factors, which I will discuss. Science fiction in the English language is commonly accepted as beginning with Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (Tymn 42). Subsequently, catastrophe stories evolved from Mary Shelley's *The Last Man* (1826) and H.G. Wells' *War of the Worlds* (1898), but modern science fiction stories tend to be much more concerned with society's response after a catastrophe than the event itself (Tymn 44). H.G. Wells explored the idea that there are limits to human progress which should not be tried, and strengthened science fiction's power as a genre by demonstrating that new technology and new scientific discoveries "would change people's view of their place in the universe" (Tymn 43). Today, sci-fi is the most popular specialized literary genre in the United States (Tymn 41).

The Industrial Revolution, with its "vision of a future altered by technology", created the space for science fiction to become a serious literary genre. The Hugo Award, today a prestigious award recognizing excellence in science fiction and fantasy each year, was named after Hugo Gernsback, who made the first U.S. magazine dedicated entirely to science fiction in 1926. The golden age of science fiction in the U.S., 1938-1950, introduced many themes that would

become central to the genre, like space travel, dystopias, and the impact of technology on society. Then, in the 1960s, British and American authors began to warn readers about “chaos and despair” threatened by war, and also established science fiction as an arena for commentary about society – akin to the very similar genre of speculative fiction, which makes societal commentary but lacks the detailed technological components and robotic pizzazz of science fiction. After World War II, the genre shifted more toward themes of human consequences of scientific development, and the fear that we might begin to become victims of these actions. Since 2000, the genre has been rampant with cli-fi (climate fiction) about anxieties surrounding climate change, as well as stories about surveillance and stories that center posthumanism (Hayles 2). These themes directly reflect anxieties in our age, especially about global climate change, the oversaturation of technology in our lives, and the fear of being replaced by a robotic Other. *Arrival* and *Del Naranja Al Azul* both strongly address concerns about the posthuman, defined by Hayles as the view that there are no differences between human and robot goals and bodies, that the human can be “seamlessly articulated with artificial machines” (Hayles 3).

Spain took longer to develop a tradition in science fiction, largely because of the huge impact of Cervantes’ *Don Quixote*. Sociologist and literary scholar Pablo Domingo attributes this to Cervantes’ “mistrust of fantasy” and emphasis on realism (Domingo 318). Additionally, the Spanish science fiction tradition began from foreign translations which made their way over to Spain, and the genre today has been influenced heavily by European and American authors (Domingo 318). Spanish science fiction on the whole shows “less focus on dystopias, robots, and political-cultural criticism” than its U.S. counterparts, although space was a popular theme throughout the 18th century (Moreno and Perez 216). But in the 1990s in Spain, novels about robots and artificial intelligence began to be published more often, and stories about identity and

difference became more popular in the 2000s-2010s (Moreno and Perez 226). Additionally, since the 2010s, a newfound interest in social and political questions has emerged in Spanish sci-fi literature. This is relevant because *Del Naranja Al Azul* (2012) explores alien intelligence, identity, and political questions.

Susan Sontag wrote an influential essay in 1965 called “The imagination of disaster” about science fiction films and their stereotypical layout. She explores how they contrast with science fiction in book or magazine form. This is pertinent to *Arrival*, particularly the notion that the strong degree of visual “credibility” can add a darkness to sci-fi film that books cannot convey. She emphasizes how visual representation can be more potent than linguistic description for demonstrating graphic bodily images or dramatic global catastrophe narratives. *Arrival* is never graphic or gory, but its detailed CGI certainly adds a credibility and presence of the Heptapods that might not be fully realized in a book form— this presence was certainly not fleshed out in Chiang’s short story which later became the film. Additionally, Sontag writes that “the science fiction film is concerned with the aesthetics of destruction, with the peculiar beauties to be found in wreaking havoc, making a mess” (Sontag 213). In *Arrival*, this can be seen with the visual of the bomb in the Heptapod, however, *Arrival* is decidedly less concerned with making a mess and far more concerned with emotional impact and visual *beauty*, rather than chaos. Most resonant is Sontag’s categorization of a motif that is more common in sci-fi films than one would like: the UN fantasy of a true United Nations, which goes hand in hand with the desire for a “good war” that does not admit moral failings (Sontag 219). This pacifist fantasy of a United Nations which functions perfectly allows films to explore war in almost a utopian way. *Arrival* portrays a utopian future flash-forward, wherein protagonist Louise attends a Global United Nations ball, a celebration of international unity and cooperation between countries.

Fantasy can help us escape, or it can normalize things that are “unbearable”, thus “neutralizing” reality (Sontag 225). *Arrival*, and science fiction films in general, both reflect our anxieties and seek to “allay” them (Sontag 225).

Further, *Del Naranja Al Azul* functions more like a science fiction film than a novel, with none of the technological depth or meticulous description of machines that makes the genre so tedious and precise at times. A lot of popular science fiction novels go overboard in their descriptions of tech so as to convince highly knowledgeable tech or engineering nerds that not only is this story plausible, but that the author has done their homework to make it plausible. *Del Naranja Al Azul* is written in bite-sized chapters that make the plot feel like movie scenes, and the writing is quite simple and straightforward, glossing over technological details tremendously in favor of banter within the characters’ dialogue. The novel even plays into one of Sontag’s key points about science fiction films: that “the generalized disaster fantasy releases one from normal obligations and allows for moral free rein to release terrible and bellicose fantasies onto the Other” (Sontag 225). Thus, although one is a written text and the other a film, *Del Naranja Al Azul* and *Arrival* share elements more than they differ.

Most notable for both alien stories is Sontag’s quote that all science fiction movies begin with “the arrival of the thing” (Sontag 209). This demonstrates how the alien encounter story is not a subset of science fiction, but a motif so common as to be nearly universal in science fiction. Aliens can appear in fiction in many different physical forms, with many different intentions for humans and Earth. The alien story is so often an exploration of a projection of Said’s notion of the Other, but this Other can look vastly different: “other as enemy, other as self, [or] other as other—and the most cognitively rewarding alien-encounter [science fiction] explores these various possibilities” (Malmgren 18).

Del Naranja al Azul was written in 2012 by Cristina Jurado, and it is the first book in the Bionautas series. Jurado became the first woman to win the Premio Ignotus for best novel upon the release of *Del Naranja al Azul*'s sequel *Bionautas*, published in 2018 (SFE). Jurado has since won 4 more consecutive Ignotus awards for her magazine *Supersonic*, and has published several award-winning sci-fi short stories. There are no scholarly articles published on *Del Naranja al Azul*, but it is very popular within the Spanish science fiction community (Goodreads). *Arrival* was directed by Denis Villeneuve, and released in 2016. It was adapted from a short story written by prolific science fiction author Ted Chiang. Chiang's original 1998 story, titled "Story of Your Life", won several prestigious science fiction awards including the Nebula award, the Theodore Sturgeon award, and the Seiun, "which is bestowed by the Federation of Science Fiction Fan Groups of Japan" (Rothman). *Arrival* garnered huge success upon release: "Costing \$47 million to create, it made more than double that sum at the U.S. box office and almost as much again internationally, for a total of \$198 million. Critical aggregator website Rotten Tomatoes gave it an accumulated review of 94% from 313 critics" (Norris). In its most incredible achievement, *Arrival* was nominated for 8 Academy Awards and won 1, for Best Sound Editing (Variety).

Arrival and *Del Naranja Al Azul* explore the alien arrival story in different ways, yet their visual motifs of ships made of technologically advanced materials, and the centering of a heterosexual couple are so similar that their covers look like knockoffs of one another (see Figure 1 and 2 on the page below). Both center the couple with distressed looks on their faces, as the alien or alien ship looms mysteriously in the background. These parallel images can help us understand the role that the alien plays in disrupting the relationships of protagonists in both texts.



Fig. 1: Cover of *Del Naranja Al Azul*, written by Cristina Jurado, 2012.



Fig. 2: Cover of *Arrival*, directed by Denis Villeneuve, 2016 (IMDb).

→ Plot Summaries

Del Naranja Al Azul begins two years after the arrival of the alien species called the Bionauts. The novel is narrated in the third person. The Bionauts' arrival was peaceful, but shortly after their "immense" ship landed, their bacteria, unfamiliar to humans, caused a pandemic which killed 99.9% of humanity (Jurado 122). This included all elderly people and

children, leaving behind a scattered group of people in their 20s-40s. Protagonists Maya and Hugo are former ex-lovers who are reunited to work together on a special mission to communicate with the Bionauts at their headquarters. They are members of two different groups, Maya the Resistance and Hugo the Trackers. The Trackers work with the Bionauts to provide supplies to them as well as attempt communications with them. The Resistance is opposed to the Bionauts' presence on Earth at all, and seeks to prevent them from settling on Earth permanently by stopping their access to resources and bombing their headquarters. Maya is recruited by the Trackers to help Hugo because she is an expert in languages who famously connected survivors of the pandemic together to form communities two years ago. Hugo has been working directly with the Bionauts for months, while Maya is terrified to meet them.

When Maya and Hugo arrive at the Bionaut headquarters, it becomes clear that the Bionauts are much more technologically advanced than humans, with their communication technology as well as the design of their ships and buildings. Additionally, since the pandemic, the Bionauts always wear bright orange HAZMAT suits and face masks to protect humans from their bacteria. Maya and Hugo meet Elio and later Siry, a brother and little sister who are their main point of contact for the human race. After their first meeting with the Bionauts, Maya and Hugo argue over the ethics of helping the Bionauts, Maya vehemently believing that humans have a right to defend themselves against alien takeover, since the pandemic was already so decimating. They come to learn that the Bionauts communicate with one another through the Neurotema, [Neurothema] (my trans.), a mental transmission network that eliminates the need for verbal communication. During their second communications meeting, the Resistance sets off a bomb at the Bionaut headquarters, which results in Maya getting a concussion and accidentally connecting to the Neurotema. The bomb causes tensions to escalate between humans and

Bionauts. However, despite a history of Resistance bombings, the Bionauts choose not to retaliate in order to maintain a peaceful relationship with humans. The Bionauts are physically identical to humans, but do not have emotions or strong sensations—they are less connected to their bodies as a result of the Neurotema. Eventually, the Bionaut Elio allows both Maya and Hugo into the Neurotema, where they witness conversations between the Bionauts about human and Bionaut tensions. In between meetings with the Bionauts, or “Bios”, as they call them, Hugo tries to pursue Maya romantically, while she is hesitant, and often teases him about her dissatisfaction with his stubborn personality that she discovered the first time they dated (which was before the Bionauts arrived). Maya and Hugo begin to rekindle their romance via conversations on long car rides to and from the Bionaut headquarters, and despite Maya’s initial annoyance and impatience toward Hugo, she slowly softens and finds herself falling for him again. They are supposed to meet for a date at the bar when Maya is suddenly kidnapped and sexually assaulted in the bar basement. She ends up killing her attacker, who was a member of Hugo’s team the Trackers, in self defense. Hugo helps her hide the body of her deceased assailant, and the Bionauts help them get rid of the body. At the same time, tensions in the human world escalate, with groups acting in tribal ways to kill one another, start gang-like fights, and there are rumors of cannibalism among some of the nomadic groups of survivors. Maya still feels suspicion about the Bionauts’ intentions as they continue to work together.

Some chapters feature the Neurotheme, the Bionauts’ neural communication method, and center conversations within it between Elio and Siry about what it means to be human. They discuss their own lack of feelings and sensations, and their jealousy of human depth of emotion. Elio and Siry also reminisce about their long journey on their spaceship before landing on Earth, and argue about whether the Bionauts should work with humans or against them to achieve their

goal of settling permanently on Earth. Once Hugo can help them acquire their necessary materials, “la colonizacion de la Tierra [ha] comenzado oficialmente” [the colonization of the Earth has officially begun] (Jurado 164; my trans.).

In the end, Maya is shocked to learn that Hugo has been working with Elio behind her back the entire time to create an antihistamine that will allow the Bionauts to roam around Earth without infecting humans, and without fear of disease themselves. Not only that, he has offered his own body as the first test run for the antihistamine. When Hugo becomes severely physically injured on a Tracker mission without Maya, the Bionauts insist that they will have to drain all his blood to ensure the preservation of the antihistamine they have created, since it is the only one. They are certain that their advanced healing technology will be able to save Hugo from wounding, the same way that it efficiently saves the Bionauts from all physical wounds. However, the novel ends with the lingering mystery of whether Hugo survives the antihistamine or dies, as Hugo and Maya’s last conversation occurs within the Neurotheme, and she loses him on the other end of the line. Maya feels betrayed by Hugo and decides to run away from every political group, both the Trackers and the Resistance, to be alone with her profound knowledge and lingering fears about the Bionauts. The novel ends with Elio offering to give Maya a ride in one of the Bionauts’ transporter shuttle when she suddenly realizes that he is completely without his mask or HAZMAT suit. It is the end of the fight against the Bionauts: the masks have come off, the walls have come down, and the Bionauts are going to start colonizing Earth outward from their headquarters.

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While *Del Naranja Al Azul* opens calmly and escalates in tension throughout, *Arrival* starts off with a heavy emotional weight: the film opens with a death. Dr. Louise Banks is

devastated as her daughter, Hannah, dies in a hospital from an incurable illness. When 12 alien ships suddenly appear around Earth, Dr. Louise Banks, an expert linguist, is summoned by a military colonel to help translate the alien language, an offer which she initially refuses. A military helicopter then shows up to her house in the middle of the night to bring her to a military base in Montana outside of one of the ships. Louise is assigned to work with physicist Ian Donnelly as a duo to translate the Heptapod language. She is given no debrief or information about the aliens before going through the physical sanitization process, donning an orange HAZMAT suit, and entering the zero-gravity vertical tunnel which takes her upward, face-to-face with the two Heptapods in the ship.

Louise is the only linguist around the world to fully translate and eventually begin to think in the Heptapod language, a non-linear language which reflects the simultaneous way in which the Heptapods experience time.



Fig. 3: *Arrival*, directed by Denis Villeneuve, 2016.

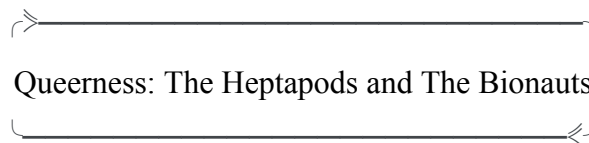
As she studies and deciphers their language more and more, Louise begins to experience intense daydreams about her own future, of her daughter, which she does not understand. These daydreams reach their climax at the same time as the story arc of the film. Military tensions

around the world escalate when a Heptapod symbol is mistranslated as “use weapon” (Villeneuve 1:06:50-58). Louise is the only one who believes that this word could really mean “tool”, and militia around the world prepare to declare war on the Heptapods in 24 hours (Villeneuve 1:19:00-1:19:45). Rogue soldiers at Louise’s base bomb the Heptapod ship, nearly killing Ian and Louise, and killing one of the Heptapods.

In a last-ditch attempt to take matters into her own hands, Louise enters the Heptapod ship alone and goes behind the glass for the first time. She communicates with the living Heptapod, named Costello by the humans, to ask in English why they came to Earth. Costello understands her because they have worked together for long enough to understand one another’s language. He explains that the Heptapods will need humans’ help in 3000 years, so they need the human race to be united. Louise discovers that each Heptapod ship around Earth contains one piece of the puzzle to understand the Heptapod language, and that in order to understand this gift fully, all of humanity will need to come together to share their knowledge peacefully. During this conversation, Louise realizes that she has been thinking and dreaming in Heptapod language, and that her intense dreamlike visions are of her own future, and of her unborn daughter with her coworker and friend, Ian Donnelly.

Louise returns to the military base as it is being evacuated in preparation for warfare with the ship. Through a vision of the future, wherein at a United Nations meeting, General Shang, military colonel of China, thanks Louise for telling him the message that saved the world, Louise and is able to get an esoteric message to General Shang. This message is the dying words of his beloved wife, which she knew only through her vision of the future. This message convinces him not to continue with the declaration of warfare and instead to unite all nations.

At the base, Louise asks Ian if he would change anything about his life if he could know his entire future. He says he would not, and she chooses not to reveal to him that she will bear his child, who will die young of a terminal illness. She also knows that not sharing this premonition with him will lead to him divorcing her, unable to accept the ethics of Louise's choice to have their daughter knowing she will suffer. She chooses to withhold the information anyway, and he confesses that he has started to fall for her as they have been working together. Louise goes on to write several best-selling books about the Heptapod language, teaching university classes about how to harness the power of the language to understand time in a non-linear, circular way. The film ends with Louise narrating to her daughter, telling her that this is the story of her life.



Queerness: The Heptapods and The Bionauts

A queer way of looking at the world can be defined as an atypical, or nonlinear approach. By approaching life open to ideas outside what is normative, and instead exploring concepts or connections that feel different, one can unveil “the social and power structures at play in our everyday lives” (Pollak Library). Queer theory is useful for exploring topics that are out-of-bounds, taboo, or just different from what one is used to. This is particularly useful for looking at the ways in which the Bionauts' and the Heptapods' respective arrivals to Earth catalyze the explosion of what is normal to the texts' heterosexual, human protagonists. In *Del Naranja Al Azul* and *Arrival*, the alien species serve as a metaphor for queerness. Humans are used to walking in straight lines, experiencing time in a linear fashion, and interacting with objects according to the laws of physics. When the Heptapods and Bionauts begin to move

through space and time in non-linear ways, interact with objects without touching them and communicate using unfamiliar languages, the protagonists of both texts encounter a fresh perspective on what it means to be normal and exist as a human. Further, they discover that nothing is normal after one's planet is invaded by aliens, and that the control they thought humans had over reality was a lie. Their relationship to time and space is not the only way to exist, which complicates notions of love, connection, and human purpose.

Edward Said famously coined the term of the Other in reference to a colonial and oriental Other (Burney 23). I use this term to describe a queer Other that has many similarities to Said's conception, especially its description of an Other that one cannot control or project fantasies onto. Burney writes that "Said critiques the Orient/Occident (East/West) binary as a deeply entrenched concept that colors 'our' perceptions, ideas, and representation of the Other" (Burney 32). Although of course the oppression of people Othered by the label of "Orient" is different to the oppression of queer people, my point is that specific norms color our perception of unfamiliar or foreign Others, and the aliens are certainly metaphors for foreign populations taken to an extreme as well as metaphors for queerness. Therefore, Said's conception of the Other as a construction based in fear is relevant for understanding the way the humans in both texts respond to the alien invasion, which poses both inspiration and threat to their culture and values, in a similar way that the Orient provoked both terror and inspiration in the people of the Occident.

Carl Malmgren explores the concept of the Other through alien encounters specifically, and he would argue that *Arrival* and *Del Naranja Al Azul* present the aliens as both "Other-as-self" and "Other-as-other", in his terms. This means that since human qualities like love and empathy exist within both Heptapods and Bionauts, they sometimes act as mirrors to the characters, but they are still "Other" because their primary purpose is to be very different

from humans. Ultimately, the confrontation with both Bionauts and Heptapods serves to highlight the strengths and “limitations of humanity”, and this ends up being the purpose of the alien presence (Malmgren 28). We can see how the aliens reflect a queer Other through the lens of queer spatiality.

In “Queer Phenomenology,” Sarah Ahmed discusses the idea of queer spatiality, how traditional ways of interacting with objects and spaces are normative, and how moving in atypical or non-linear ways can be seen as queer. The Heptapods and the Bionauts embody this, as their ways of interacting with space are radically different from human norms. The aliens’ movement through space and time is not linear, and this subverts human expectations of how space should be navigated and understood. Ahmed discusses how straight lines of direction and orientation in the world are “straightening devices”, maintaining a social norm of linearity and “straightness” both literally and in the sense of sexuality (Ahmed 92). This is a way of conditioning sexuality, as a force of energy, to land appropriately and directly at the opposite sex, and perpetuate the notion that the family lineage must continue in a straight line (Ahmed 84).

In *Arrival* and *Del Naranja Al Azul*, alien buildings and technology force the human protagonists to move in non-linear, atypical ways to interact with the alien species. The Heptapod ships in *Arrival* require the use of a suspended platform lift to access their opening, which is very high off the ground, and then humans have to float in an anti-gravity chamber and walk upside-down on the sides of the opening to enter the cave where the Heptapods reside behind a glass wall (Villeneuve 26:55-31:10). This is disorienting for the human characters, creating an environment where the aliens are in control of atypical and nonlinear forms of movement. In *Del Naranja Al Azul*, the Bionauts are capable of manipulating “(“materia que se

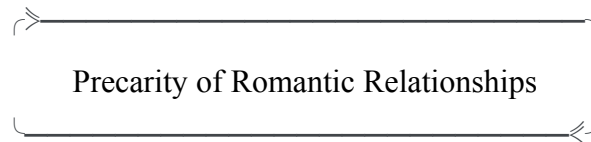
autoconfigura” [self-configuring matter] which composes their all-white, seemingly doorless and windowless headquarters (Jurado 175; my trans.). When Maya and Hugo enter for the first time, the wall dissolves to form a temporary door, which closes back up as soon as they have entered. The laws of physics do not apply to the Bionauts, causing an existential panic in the human characters, who do not understand how this could be. Once again, the alien species creates an unstable, unpredictable physical space where the humans encounter a queer way of being and living. In alignment with Ahmed’s writing, these non-straight ways of orienting in space are markedly queer.

Lee Edelman, an American literary critic, wrote a book called *No Future*, arguing for a queer perspective on political issues and history itself. Edelman is useful for understanding how a non-linear perception of time, such as the Heptapods’ circular experience of time, is inherently queer. The Heptapods are mysterious in origin, and one of the only things we understand about them by the end of the film is that they experience time in a circular way that corresponds to their complex, “semasiographic” (symbolic) language (Villeneuve 55:00-55:42). This means that they can see the future and the past although they still experience a present moment. Edelman discusses the concept of “reproductive futurism,” the subtle, politically conservative messaging by the U.S. government that everything should be done “for the children,” since the future is valuable and precious. This is a conception of time that keeps people stuck in the linear future, not the present. Edelman radically argues for a queering of this narrative, exploring what it would mean to not center hopes and dreams around children, and by extension, to break away from viewing history as strictly linear. This decentering of children as the goal and hope for our country toward a focus on the present aligns with the experience of queer couples who cannot have biological children, choose not to have children.

Therefore, we can read the Heptapods' circular experience of time as a way in which they are free from planning the future or analyzing the past, since the present is all they have. This radical acceptance of the present is inherently queer. The character Louise in *Arrival* leans deeply into this method of thinking through her mastery of the Heptapod language, and at the end of the film, radical acceptance of the present is how she copes with the knowledge that her future daughter will die young. Louise's life and mentality has been queered by the Heptapods through their nonlinear experience of time.

Similarly, the humans in *Del Naranja Al Azul* are forced to live in the present because of the Bionauts' arrival: their recent past involved a traumatic alien-induced pandemic, and their future is completely unknown. Constant tensions between human moral groups the Trackers and the Resistance require people to constantly fight for themselves and their tribe, requiring hypervigilance and a state of fight-or-flight. To make matters more dramatic, the only survivors of the pandemic were people in their 20s-40s, so the human protagonists truly have no embodied representation of their past (children) or their future (the elderly) to look to. All they have is the fluctuating present moment, and each other. The Bionauts experience sensation and emotion in unusual ways, not being able to feel emotions, and possessing the technology to quickly and rapidly heal all medical injuries. This means that their future is extended, so they need not worry about survival as heavily. Also, since it would take light-years for them to fly through space and return to their old planet, they are living in the radical present of having touched down onto Earth, unconcerned with their past. "Queerness can never define an identity, it can only ever disturb one" (Edelman 4), and the Bionauts' disturbing qualities, such as lacking emotional and physical pain, as well as introducing dissolving doors and self-transfiguring materials into human life, disturb what is normal.

Since both the Bionauts and Heptapods subvert norms of spatiality, temporality, and the emotional human experience, they force the human characters to confront the oddness of being human. This constant confrontation with queerness is ultimately what ruptures the two heterosexual relationships in *Del Naranja Al Azul* and *Arrival*, because the aliens' nonlinear manner of being in the world is too intense of an existential confrontation for one member of the partnership, while the other partner completely leans in.



Precarity of Romantic Relationships

This section will discuss the precarity of the heterosexual relationships in *Del Naranja Al Azul* and *Arrival*, and the ways they are complicated by the stressors of the alien arrivals. When Louise and Ian in *Arrival* begin working late nights at the military base together to decode the communications of the Heptapods, they grow very close, eventually forming an interdependency since they share such a passion for such important and intense knowledge. This connection is natural, as they are isolated on a military base in Montana while navigating life-threatening, terrifying situations together during their sessions in the Heptapod ship. Paralleling Louise and Ian, Maya and Hugo in *Del Naranja Al Azul* rekindle an old romance they shared when they begin a mission together at the Bionaut headquarters, and encounter queer and scary technologies together. While these romantic interdependencies are deep and involve trust that the other person will help them survive, they also have an inherent precarity to them, becoming tenuous and unstable as the story progresses.

Anthropologist Clara Han defines precarity as a “differential distribution of bodily destruction and grievability that emerges through specific social and political arrangements” (Han 337). I agree with Han’s specification of embodiment and loss being symptoms of one’s social environment, and would expand it to include that precarity entails vacillation and uncontrollability. The relationships of the protagonists in both texts are precarious because of the alien invasions that have preceded their coming together, and both relationships vacillate between closeness and pain in non-linear ways. In *Arrival*, Dr. Louise Banks, soft-spoken expert professor of linguistics, and Ian Donnelly, gentle and pragmatic physicist, have a slow-burn romance beginning as coworkers. They are brought ever closer by the unique bonding experience of being the only Americans selected to travel upward into the Heptapod ship to attempt communication, and are great friends, supporting one another in times of stress and laughing together while bouncing ideas around. Maya and Hugo were lovers long before the aliens arrived to Earth two years before the plot begins, and find themselves surprisingly reunited to work together despite being on opposing sides, with Maya working to stop the Bionauts from expanding around Earth and Hugo working to help them survive. Maya and Hugo exchange a lot of witty, flirtatious banter, wherein Maya pretends that she hates Hugo and finds him annoying, and Hugo continuously jokes about them being together. The relationships in both texts have a similar arc: distance, extreme closeness and trust, and then devastating betrayal.

In *Del Naranja Al Azul*, after Maya kills her rapist in self-defense by suffocating him with her clothing, she thinks to herself: “habia acabado con un animal, si, pero, al fin y al cabo, era un asesina. Igual que Hugo.” [she had killed an animal, yes, but, after all, she was a murderer. Just like Hugo] (Jurado 184, my trans.) This moment is when the tension between Maya and Hugo begins to become complicated. Maya and Hugo often have deep conversations on car rides

about what it means to be human, and their different moral beliefs. Maya previously shamed Hugo for killing a man, but finds herself in the same predicament: having killed someone out of self-defense. The reason that things have become so complex is because the alien invasions have created a completely lawless society in which Maya and Hugo live. There are no police for Maya to call, and no justice system to help her apprehend her attacker, so her only choice to survive is to kill him. After she does this, she begins to have empathy for Hugo's darker sides, and believes that this event has made them closer. But Hugo's loyalty in the end of the novel is only with the Bionauts, not her, emphasizing the consuming and emotionally painful precarity of Hugo and Maya's interdependency.

This moment demonstrates how dramatic circumstances like aliens invading Earth require couples to get real about their deepest values—to get very vulnerable—in order to maintain closeness and stay together. This is because of the increased danger and life-or-death scenarios which require rash and important decisions. Since Maya and Hugo are honest about their moral disagreements, they are able to joke and banter about even their deepest differences—until Hugo starts keeping very large and life-threatening secrets. Maya thinks she is making headway with Hugo by explaining to him the Resistance's perspective that humans owe the Bionauts nothing but punishment for the amount of humans they have killed. But it turns out that although Hugo listens to her perspective and her considerate monologues, he maintains a firm moral position that he is going to do anything he can to help the Bionauts, including allowing them to use his body to test their antihistamine. He puts his own life at risk to do so, loses the relationship with Maya, and possibly even loses his life due to this betrayal.

Similarly, in *Arrival*, Louise is not honest about her deepest values with Ian, which ultimately leads to their divorce. She chooses to have their daughter knowing that the daughter

will die young of an incurable illness, seemingly accepting that suffering is a part of life. In this decisive moment during one of the final scenes of the film, Louise embraces Ian as they are about to **leave the military base**, and asks him, “if you could see your whole life from start to finish, would you change things?” Ian replies, “Maybe I’d say what I feel more often”

(Villeneuve 1:48:02-1:48:22). Louise takes on a haunted and sad look in her eyes, and the audience understands that this is the moment she chooses not to reveal their family’s fate to Ian.

There is the question here of whether Louise had any power to change her future; after all, her visions of the future were seemingly always going to happen, since she knows the Heptapods have a circular view of time. But even if she had no choice to become pregnant with her daughter, she had the choice to inform Ian about her premonitory knowledge, and chose not to.

Perhaps she wanted to spare him from the burden of grieving before the death even happened.

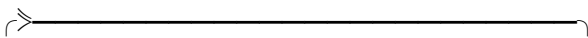
Perhaps she wanted him to enjoy the time with their daughter without her devastating illness looming over him the whole time. She narrates over the final scenes of the film, “despite knowing the journey and where it leads, I embrace it. And I welcome every moment of it.”

(Villeneuve 1:46:35-1:46:41) One can read her decision as selfless or selfish, but the fact remains that this choice caused their divorce.

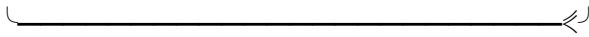
In both texts, when one member of a couple has a closer relationship to the alien invaders, it causes a rupture in their trust. Hugo maintains a loyalty to the Bionauts that precedes his loyalty to Maya, choosing the greater purpose of giving them the antihistamine to walk around Earth mask-less over honesty with the girl he loves. After Maya discovers where his loyalty lies, “[ella se siente] traicionada, como si todos los esfuerzos que había hecho por rescatarlo hubieran sido en beneficio de los Bionautas” [she feels betrayed, as as if all the efforts she had made to rescue him had been for the benefit of the Bionauts] (Jurado 276, my trans.).

Similarly, Louise is passionate about teaching and deeply understanding the language and the way of life of the Heptapods, so passionate that she chooses to isolate herself in her understanding of her family's future. One could read this as Louise choosing the intimate relationship with the Heptapods' enlightening way of being over her slow-burn lover, Ian. Ian also studies the Heptapod language, but from a physicists' perspective, lacking the comprehension Louise has. But this does not mean he did not try to understand—in fact, his insights are what lead Louise to her understanding of their circular conception of time in the first place. Thus, both Ian and Maya tried to understand their lovers, and tried to be included, but Louise and Hugo's obsession with helping the alien Other won out over their attempts at connection.

Ultimately, it is the intense encounters of queerness seeping into the world around them that causes the dissolution of the heterosexual relationships in *Arrival* and *Del Naranja Al Azul*. The protagonists slowly find themselves isolated by the ends of both texts. Although their relationships are one aspect of the story, the vulnerability of individual humans is also explored copiously throughout the texts through emphasis on the fragility and permeability of the human body.



Physical Vulnerability, Permeability, and The Posthuman



Physical vulnerability is a linear concept which gradually increases from the internal acknowledgement of risks associated with one's body, to physical challenge, to injury, to death. Both the Heptapods and the Bionauts challenge this linear conception with a more circular

conception. In science fiction literature, emphases on the physical limitations of the individual human body as well as the fragility of the body in the midst of advanced technology are metaphors for the presciently modern fear of the posthuman. This goes along with a fear of the elimination of humans by a superior Other. *Arrival* explores this through representations of the alien Heptapods' overpowering form, as well as their large and advanced technology, which creates a physical and intellectual threat to what it means to be human, and incites fear in the human population. To put one's body at physical risk in the film is to do so with the goal of communicating with the Heptapods to save humanity. Contrastingly, *Del Naranja Al Azul* explores the fragility of the body through its portrayal of a post-pandemic society. Further, the alien bodies of the Bionauts, identical to humans in physicality yet slightly better and more advanced in function, reflect fears of the posthuman, especially N. Katherine Hayles' articulation of the fear that the human can be "seamlessly articulated with artificial machines" (Hayles 3).

The body never has concrete boundaries in the first place, and is always permeable, as is demonstrated through the rape of Maya. Without her consent, her body's permeability was violated, on top of her already invaded country and planet. This extreme metaphor reflects the true suffering and horror of an invasion, of an unwanted arrival, amplifying the concerns of the permeable body. In fact, this concept of permeable bodies and invasion is a central concern of all human characters in *Del Naranja Al Azul* who have survived a devastating pandemic which killed 99% of the human population (Jurado 122). In the novel's society, the pandemic has created a distrustful post-disaster society wherein physical vulnerability is especially intimate because of the potential risks. Ever since the pandemic occurred, the Bionauts have secluded themselves in their white headquarters building, and chosen to wear orange HAZMAT suits and face masks whenever stepping outside. HAZMAT suits come in different colors, and orange ones

specifically are chosen to indicate a warning or a biological hazard (Kimmel). This visual choice is the same in *Arrival*: Louise and Ian wear orange HAZMAT suits every time they enter the Heptapod ship (Villeneuve). This color, while indicating a biological potential hazard, carries the connotation of danger, setting up a heightened tension between human and alien species because of the consistent visual reminder that the Other could hurt you. This echoes Butler's writing about the shoring up of the borders, wherein a response to a dangerous Other is blockades, regulations, and the arming of individuals (Butler 39). Although in the case of *Del Naranja Al Azul*, the shoring up with the HAZMAT suits is an incredibly necessary precaution given that 99% of humans were completely decimated by unwanted pathogens, the HAZMAT suits send a consistent visual message of "KEEP OUT" and attempts to prevent any physical vulnerability of the human characters.

In both texts, female protagonists experience intensified physical vulnerability compared to their male counterparts, emphasizing the simultaneous sensitivity and power of the female body in apocalyptic times. Both characters emerge at the end of their stories strong, independent, and more determined than ever because of the physical suffering they endure. However, both texts emphasize the increased vulnerability and risks associated with the embodied experience of womanhood.

Louise's experience with the foreshadowing of her own pregnancy, and the subsequent death of her daughter, reflect the intense vulnerability of motherhood. She deals with intense physical symptoms from the daydreams which foreshadow the events to come in her future: premonitions of joy, physical pain, and devastating emotional loss all at once. Maya's experience being sexually assaulted randomly in the middle of already tumultuous events reflects how the female body is vulnerable to objectification, sexualization, and sexual violence.

Both women's story arcs acknowledge them as women embodying precarious and permeable bodies- realities often more concrete and terrifying for women than men. Birth and sex, for women, enter the boundaries of one's body as particularly unclear and confusing, because of the way someone else's body can exist within yours in different and deeply vulnerable ways. Through the contrasting yet analogous invasions of their body, both Maya and Louise reflect fears about how "the posthuman self is an amalgam that has boundaries which consistently change" (Hayles 3). Fear of the posthuman reflects a fear of what is to come in the next phase of human life, one where information systems surpass the capabilities of the human mind. Maya and Louise's deeply painful embodied realities reflect the anguish and catharsis of being embodied, especially in the female form—realities that involve suffering, but are nonetheless beautiful at times (in the case of birth or consensual sex) and the necessity of embodied life for what it means to be human at all.

N. Katherine Hayles argues that the specific fear of the permeable posthuman body being "an amalgam that has boundaries which consistently change" emerged from scientific and technological discoveries which came to the conclusion that "information can circulate unchanged among different material substrates" (Hayles 1,3). Additionally, the construction of the cyborg was created as a "technological and cultural artifact after WWII" which led to "the historical construction of the human...giving way to the construction of the post human (Hayles 2). Hayles adds that to be posthuman, one does not need to be a robot or cyborg, one can merely be an unaltered Homo Sapiens to qualify.

Butler makes a strong case for 9-11 catalyzing the fear of the permeability of our bodies and our nation. Post 9-11, Butler writes, "our general response is anxiety; rage; a radical desire for security, a shoring-up of the borders against what is perceived as alien" (Butler 39). Both

scholars articulate in different ways a distinctly modern fear of the posthuman, as something that nonconsensually permeates our boundaries and has the ability to procreate without a body. Butler helps to see how the emotional responses of extreme rage, as we see via the violence of many characters in both texts against the aliens, can cause mass chaos in groups of people. This rage is an existential one, a fight to reclaim what it means to have a body with boundaries.

Protagonist Louise in *Arrival* is the only character in *Arrival* willing to put herself in physically vulnerable positions to the Heptapods, truly unafraid of them invading her physical body or overpowering her humanity with their high intelligence. This is clear when she completely removes her HAZMAT suit in the Heptapod ship in an attempt to show the Heptapods what a human body looks like, and then placing her hand on the glass where the Heptapods float behind (Villeneuve 44:40-46:50). Louise takes a huge risk in doing this, exposing herself to potential bacteria and harm, yet this risk pays off because she connects more strongly with the Heptapods and helps them understand what it means and looks like to be human. Later in the film, Louise goes completely behind the glass alone as a last attempt to save Earth from entering global warfare with the Heptapods. Her physical vulnerability pays off, allowing her to communicate with the Heptapods more directly and understand that their purpose on Earth is to unite humanity (Villeneuve 1:26:00-1:31:56). This moment of stepping behind the glass demonstrates Louise treating the Heptapods as equals, not as an Other, and not being afraid of their differences.

Hugo treats the Bionauts as equals in *Del Naranja Al Azul* as well, allowing them to enter into his mind using the Neurotheme technology, a physically vulnerable technology which enables him to communicate just like a Bionaut. The communication network called the 'Neurotema', or Neurotheme, in which the Bionauts communicate is communal, including

automatically uploaded and understood data and information stores for all Bionauts. In addition to the information archive there is the “chatroom” part which we see indicated by a different font in the novel. The “chatroom” allows the Bionauts to transmit their conversations, and “oyen las de los demás al conectarse al neurotema... difunde lo que piensan” [“they hear each other's {thoughts} when they connect to the neurotheme. ...they broadcast what they think”] (Jurado 167, my trans.). There are both one-on-one and group conversations in the Neurotheme. Hugo does not like connecting to their system because he feels very observed, since all their conversations are public, and “no hay intimidad” [“there is not intimacy”] in their communication, yet he does so to connect more deeply with Elio and Siry (Jurado 169, my trans.).

In both texts, the alien species put themselves at risk of physical vulnerability, too. The Bionauts trust Hugo so much that they allow him into the Neurotheme, and later in the text when they get to know Maya more, they allow her in, too. Notably, this does not just put the humans into a vulnerable state, but the Bionauts as well. By opening up their collective mind and conversations to human beings, they are trusting them deeply with sensitive information. The character of Siry is so fascinated and empathetic toward humans that she routinely reaches out to sweetly touch their faces with her hand, or go very close to their faces (Jurado 150). The Heptapods, by letting the humans into their ships, open themselves up to closeness, and to the bombing that occurs when the rogue soldiers at the Montana military base decide that the Heptapods are a threat (Villeneuve 1:10:14-1:16:00). At the very end of *Del Naranja Al Azul*, on the last page, the Bionaut character Elio finally removes the orange HAZMAT suit and plastic face covering that he and his species has worn for the rest of the novel. In this scene, Elio is freed from the suit which puts up boundaries to connection with humans, but now the Bionauts are

going to be able to blend in with humans completely, putting them in the same position for physical risk as humans. This might prevent them from harm, or it might increase their ability to be harmed.

In *Arrival*, the physical size and intellectual strength of the Heptapods creates a graphic visual metaphor for existential fears of planetary invasion and species extinction through its reflection of the smallness of the human form. The Heptapods' bodies are a hybrid of octopi and elephants, with tentacles that look like fingers. The similarities to these highly intelligent animals, as well as their wrinkled skin, evoke a creature intelligent enough to understand humans but self-confident enough not to prey upon humans, as neither elephants nor octopi are predators of humans. Their immense size also resembles that of a whale, and draws attention to the relative smallness of human beings. Since whales are another wrinkled, dark-colored creature who are wise yet do not harm people, the physical appearance of the Heptapods is far more vague and mysterious than scary.



Fig. 4: *Arrival*, Directed by Denis Villeneuve, 2016.



Fig 5: *Arrival*, directed by Denis Villeneuve, 2016.

However, the vague form of the Heptapod is always obscured in smoke, leaving questions about how exactly they move and think. Most of the time, it appears as if they float and fly around the white smoke behind the glass in the inter-ship cave where the humans communicate with them. But here, in the image above, we see a Heptapod standing upright, suggesting that they can move in several different ways and are more capable of adaptation to different environments than humans.

The Heptapods' similarities to squids appears most clearly in their method of communicating written language: they spray black ink into circular symbols. But the most important feature of the Heptapod language is the way that it confirms their intellectual superiority over humankind. Although their intellectual prowess is established early on by the arrival of their large ships, which have been engineered to cause no environmental or magnetic disturbance despite their enormous size, the elaborate language which Louise slowly translates over the course of the film emphasizes a somewhat *spiritual* superiority: the Heptapods experience time in a circular and simultaneous way rather than in linear moments.

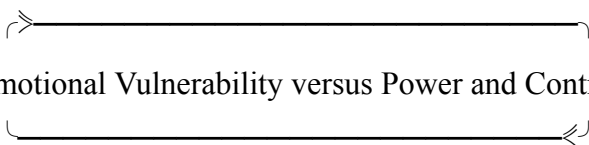
The Bionauts in *Del Naranja Al Azul* establish a similar intellectual superiority, mainly through their ability to create materials with special properties and mold them in any way that

they please (Jurado 167). Ultimately, intellectual superiority causes fear in humans because of the meritocracy of intelligence that has been perpetuated throughout Western tradition, from Plato to Descartes to the Enlightenment (Cave). “If we’ve absorbed the idea that the more intelligent can colonize the less intelligent as a right,” then the Heptapods and Bionauts should naturally take complete power over the human race (Cave). However, although the Bionauts do seem to want to integrate with humans, albeit not overtake them, the Heptapods of course do not have this goal. The Heptapods are temporarily visiting Earth, and simply want to recruit humanity for help in 3000 years’ time, so they are there to send a brief message and then depart back to wherever they came from, an undisclosed location that is never mentioned in the film or the short story.

The Bionauts are interesting, because they are physically completely identical to humans, differing in their lack of sensual experience and lack of emotions. In this way, they represent the *fear* of the posthuman, yet also pose a possibility for a non-linear conception of physical vulnerability. They do not suffer emotionally, and although they can suffer physically, they can quickly heal themselves with advanced medical technology, cutting short the impacts of both physical and emotional wounds. To lose emotions and sensuality is to lose a large part of the human experience. Yet the Bionauts view this as a strength, not a lack—they strongly value efficiency, practicality, and intellectual and technological advancement, seeing human emotion as ridiculous. Some Bionauts believe that there is no need to have physical contact at all, because even though it offers pleasure and connection, the risk of diseases and harm makes it not worth it (Jurado 85). Sontag writes about this as a common sci-fi film trope: “The aliens are always an ‘it’, always rigid, it is this regime of emotionlessness, of impersonality, of regimentation, which they will impose on the Earth if they are successful” (Sontag 221). This directly threatens the

embodied reality of what it means to be human, bringing in a huge existential threat. The most radical of the Bionauts (not including Elio and Siry, who are empathetic and curious toward humans) believe themselves to be humanity's next step for development. However, the twist is that despite this tremendous fear of invasion and takeover, "the biggest threat to man... [was] his own animality" (Sontag 222). So common of a conclusion that it made Sontag's list of common motifs, this twist flips the fear of the posthuman back on itself: what if the fear is really about an acknowledgement of the primal, crude composition of a human, and its inferiority?

While the physical vulnerability of the human and alien protagonists elucidates fears of the posthuman, motifs of emotional vulnerability in conflict with violence in these two texts grapple with distinctly human emotional struggles. When one experiences trauma, global catastrophe, or the loss of a loved one, there is a process of mourning that can involve violence. In addition to their copious trust in the Bionauts and Heptapods to not harm their physical bodies, Louise and Hugo simultaneously open themselves up emotionally to the alien species. Their radical softness is rewarded with reciprocity, forming deep connections to the alien Others that greatly impact the rest of Louise and Hugo's life. While these impacts involve pain for both characters, both texts emphasize how that pain can be beautiful, since experiencing deep suffering is a part of being human.



Emotional Vulnerability versus Power and Control

Through portrayals of individual loss and mourning, Villeneuve and Jurado convey the way that suffering is what makes us human. Emotional vulnerability is in a pushing-pulling

swing dance with physical violence in both texts, creating a polarity between two different responses to the encounter of another person or creature. Both texts highlight moments of both emotional closeness and graphic violence, each stronger and more dramatic because of the existence of the other. To be emotionally vulnerable requires one to be soft and open, and requires putting aside fears. In contrast, to be violent means to lean into fear, metabolize it into anger and anxiety and attack.

In *Precarious Life: Notes on Grief and Mourning*, Judith Butler writes that “loss and vulnerability seem to follow from our being socially constituted bodies, attached to others, at risk of losing those attachments, exposed to others, at risk of violence by virtue of that exposure” (Butler 20). Additionally, she asks questions about how people come to believe that radical violence is an option as a response to finding ourselves in vulnerable positions, and how we can move toward a “world anew” where it is not (Butler 17). Butler writes that “grief displays...the thrall in which our relations with others hold us, in ways that we cannot always recount or explain... in ways that challenge the very notion of ourselves as autonomous and in control” (Butler 23). Here, Butler highlights the way that loss can destabilize an individual’s sense of control over their own life. Both *Arrival* and *Del Naranja Al Azul* center losses, the loss of a child in *Arrival* and the loss of 99% of the human population to a pandemic in *Del Naranja Al Azul*, and these losses greatly shake the protagonists. Two choices are presented for both texts’ protagonists: use this loss as a catalyst for violence, or use it as a way to soften as much as possible.

Maya processes the losses she has experienced in the pandemic by joining the Resistance group, dedicated to fighting back against the Bionauts’ colonization of Earth. She has memories of bodies lying in the streets, and witnessed loved ones dying in a matter of hours after being

infected with the deadly disease from the Bionauts. These traumas give her a strong passion for protecting what is left of Earth's population, and she chooses to keep fighting. In contrast, Hugo seems unaffected by the losses he has experienced, often seeming numb to all emotion except his fascination with the Bionauts and his love for Maya. He metabolizes the great losses on Earth by giving in, letting go, and embracing the Bionauts as part of his reality. Hugo leads the effort to help the Bionauts acquire the materials they need to survive, and prioritizes this over all else. He becomes a violent leader of the Trackers, killing one of his own men as a punishment for thievery and appearing unafraid of other violent group leaders. Maya is strongly against violence until her sexual assault, when she is forced to kill her attacker. The responses of both characters show how fear and love, especially in the wake of loss, can become violence against one's own kind as well as the Other.

The bombs in each text serve as major, striking events that demonstrate to the audience the severity of violence that has become necessary— further, the loss of grip on reality that the most fearful humans are experiencing. And yet the wake of each bomb results in either loving communication or the bridging of misunderstandings, despite the characters we lose or who end up irreparably wounded. The bomb of the Heptapod ship in *Arrival* is the catalyst for Louise saving everyone from going to war. The bomb of the Bionaut headquarters in *Del Naranja Al Azul* is the catalyst for Maya joining the Neurotheme for the first time, entering a new level of communication and connection with the Bionauts. This is the push-pull of intimacy and violence, otherwise known as a cycle of violence, mourning, and reconnection. Here is another way in which the alien species catalyze a non-linear experience of the world: although they are not violent themselves, their arrivals cause this violent cycle to begin.

Notably, both alien species do not experience fear when faced with humans, and thus do not have the instinct for violence against them. The Bionauts Siry and Elio speak at length in Chapter 10 about human emotions, seeking to understand them. Since the Bionauts do not feel emotions, some of them believe that human emotions are a weakness and view them as unnecessary. The Bionaut Elio, however, has a deep understanding of the value of human emotions. He sees them as valuable for their ability to connect with others, a tool for intimacy that the Bionauts lack. The Bionaut protagonist Siry finds humans quirky and fascinating, but never scary, even after they bomb the Bionaut headquarters. In a similar manner, the Heptapods form a close connection with Louise by showing her her future when she learns their language, and choosing to focus on communicating with her alone rather than reacting to the violent bombing of the rogue soldiers. Although both alien species take measures to protect themselves after the bombings, they do not retaliate. Their affectionate nature toward humans allows them to remain peaceful even when the humans start attacking them. Because connecting with the humans is their primary objective, they tolerate the abuses, understanding that these are fear responses. For humans, it is understandably more challenging to let down their emotional barriers of fear and aggression, since they are the victims of the invasion, not the visitors.

When Louise learns about the loss she will experience later in her life, the death of her daughter, she does not turn to violence. Instead, she accepts her suffering as part of her life, and understands that she cannot change what is going to happen. She chooses to appreciate every second of time she has with her daughter by encouraging her to play and be happy whenever possible. Judith Butler writes, “if the attachment to ‘you’ is part of what composes who ‘I’ am... then I not only mourn the loss, but I become inscrutable to myself” (Butler 22). Louise’s mourning is incredibly complex, and it is up to the viewer’s imagination how Louise handles the

pre-grief before the grief, as well as how she lives her life after her daughter's death. But one thing is certain: Louise's acceptance of her fate is brave and beautiful. Louise understands that suffering is what makes us human, and that death is inevitable. The most we can do is enjoy the present, and appreciate the love that exists today.

Hugo is responsible for the Bionauts maintaining a relationship of peace with humans, and his compassion opens the possibility for mutual and symbiotic resource sharing. His compassion deters violence just by its simple presence, as when the Bionauts are deciding whether to retaliate against the human Resistance group who continually bombing their shelter, the Bionaut Elio brings up Hugo's empathy and kind treatment as an example of the potential for peace, and a hope for a future of union. Louise, on the other hand, saves Earth from mutually assured destruction via all human militaries around the world turning on one another. Her expert linguistic knowledge, willingness to understand the Heptapods, and willingness to put her physical body at risk lead to her acquiring a small piece of dialogue from the Heptapods that she passes on to the military general of China, right as he is about to wage war on the United States. She finds out years later that this small line of dialogue, a strange code that she was able to deliver to the general over the phone, was his wife's dying words. The pronouncement of those words rendered the general of China vulnerable, and reminded him of his lost love, and were powerful enough to convince him not to wage war. By emphasizing love and loss in the context of apocalyptic alien arrivals on Earth, both texts highlight how relinquishing aggression and attempts at control can lead to true connection.



Conclusion

In exploring the queering of traditional forms of human life, like movement through space and experience of linear time, Cristina Jurado and Denis Villeneuve encourage the audience to embrace the inherent queerness of even the most “normal” life. There is no true normal, and accepting people and nonhumans who are markedly different from ourselves is an exercise in empathy and locating common desires for love and connection across races, nations, sexualities, and even species. Simultaneously, understanding how physical vulnerability and permeability shape our daily experiences is valuable for discovering connection to nature and the world around us. And of course, relinquishing control to pursue emotional vulnerability and softness leads to deep love and interconnection to people in our lives. In this thesis, I have explored how in *Arrival* and *Del Naranja Al Azul*, Dennis Villeneuve and Cristina Jurado convey a narrative privilege of circularity over linearity through human encounters with aliens who suddenly land on Earth. These alien arrivals break apart the normative structures around the human characters, causing mass fear and chaos, and prompting a confrontation of human physical and emotional vulnerability.

Additionally, “literary texts are not, of course, merely passive conduits,” they are living documents that have complex meanings and can enact real ideological changes in the reader or viewer (Hayles 25), and *Del Naranja Al Azul* and *Arrival* leave a haunting emotional mark behind on the audience. Few pieces of media have impacted me as much as *Arrival* did when I first watched it in 2018. I was sobbing when Max Richter’s “On the Nature of Daylight” came on at the end of the film, and was deeply affected by Louise’s connection to the Heptapods and to her own future. I also found the union of all nations around the world incredibly moving. Although *Del Naranja Al Azul* is more stylistically punchy and less emotionally heavy, its

thematic questions about what it means to be human have lingered with me, as have Maya and Hugo and their unique friendships with the Bionauts. What's more, these narratives challenge viewers and readers to question their own vulnerability, and their own responses to unfamiliar Others.

When Ted Chiang wrote the short story that *Arrival* is based on, his creativity sprouted from an "idea... about accepting the arrival of the inevitable" (Rothman). These two alien encounter stories are profound metaphors for many different things, and perhaps the most poignant is the inevitability of death as a part of human life. An invasion evokes a fear of end times, the end of what was before. It creates a panic about the rupture of the past, and the replacement with something unfamiliar. An invasion allows the projection of these fears to go right onto the invading Other. But to really accept the arrival of the inevitable is to embrace suffering and the losses that, whether we want them to or not, arrive in our lives. This entails an acceptance of our own softness and vulnerability, which is a radical task that requires repetition, habit, and conscious work. Yet this task is ever worthwhile, because true connections can transcend traditional limits of space and time, as these are unworthy opponents for deep love.

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