

Dunnett's Case Study of Arthur C. Clarke, Applied to John of Patmos: The Interplay of Literature and Landscape on Imagined Futures

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Abstract: In this paper I argue that two authors, John of Patmos, and Arthur C. Clarke are interesting case studies that exemplify the interplay of literature and landscape on imagined futures. Arthur C. Clarke and John of Patmos, who were considered as Prophets of their age, exhibited, in their texts, a connection to outer space trauma in an imagined geopolitical cosmic future. Oliver Dunnett's case study of Arthur C. Clarke provides a structure for addressing geopolitical cultures of outer space that demonstrate the importance of the geographical imagination in human futures (Dunnett 770). In examining Clarke's selected life and works, Dunnett structures his analysis in three areas: "imperialism, technology and tropicality" (770). This method and framework are useful as an interface for my own case study on John of Patmos. I engage in the same concerns but in the time of Roman imperialism. I will then apply Clarke's third law, "any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic" (21), to compare John's portents of the future, and his visions, as the practice of magic and astrology (McHugh 168) to Clarke's aspirations for the future. Although John's Island was in the Mediterranean, for the purpose of this study I consider the interesting aspects of tropicality that Dunnett's approach brings to my analysis, exchanging tropicality for a more general island geography. In these authors are the echoes of the Earth through the environment of "place, culture and politics" (Dunnett 770) providing the creative space to engage in the imaginary.

Keywords: Outer space, Apocalypse, Islands, Landscape, Imperialism, Clarke, John of Patmos

Introduction

Landscapes play significant roles in human preoccupations with real and imaginary journeys that extend to outer space. Furthermore, the delicate dramas and human traumas that were once considered

as worldly, or Earth-written, analysed through the field of psychoanalysis (Kingsbury 489) are set to be played out on a cosmic stage. Two authors Arthur C. Clarke and John of Patmos had a cosmic vision, of a “a new heaven and a new earth” (Rev. 21:1 NSRV) that provide fascinating case studies in the current turn to outer space as a human and social future. Separated by historical time and from different fields of knowledge their visions of a cosmic future are in fact drawn from geographical sites of trauma. In these two authors are the echoes of the Earth in the interplay of literature and landscape.

Drawing on the work of J. Theodore Bent who compares the text of the Book of Revelation with the geography of the island of Patmos, and its surrounding oceans, islands, and distant landscapes, reveals the extent of John’s imaginary of Earth traumas tied to a landscape in his geographical imagination. Hugh C. Prince, Derek Gregory, Dennis Cosgrove, Steve Pile, and Stephen Daniels provide the theories, methods, explanations, and trajectories for the geographical imagination. Furthermore, the Apollo astronaut photographs involve whole Earth images and the human as eyewitness (Cosgrove “Contested” 270) that are a consummation of John’s vision for the future. John’s text records an outer space or heaven for human activity. This paper considers that environments provided these authors with the creative space to engage in neocolonial imaginaries that explore an outer space future.

Writing Trauma: Geography and the Stars

The fascinating account by J. Theodore Bent, who visited the island of Patmos, compares the literary text of the Book of Revelation to the surrounding environment and landscape (813). Bent’s observations are vital in providing evidence for John’s “geographical imagination” (Prince et.al). Also evidenced in his writings are John McHugh’s claims that his text demonstrates his use of the stars. Therefore, an analysis of the Book of Revelation demonstrates John’s literary interplay with the landscape, and stellar cartography, as inspiration for his creativity while a prisoner on the Island of Patmos. The relevance of this approach is to consider the theory of the influence of a physical geography, a geographical imaginary, and a “geographical imagination” (Pile et.al.) as influences on

John's text. In the same vein as Arthur C. Clarke, island geography was a space for portents of the future of humankind. Moreover, Sigmund Freud argued that human beings are attuned to an "astronomical geography" (77), simply through their sleep cycles. Freud's term is useful when considering John's writings on Patmos tying together the relationship of landscape with John's use of the stellar systems. McHugh argues that John's writings in the Book of Revelation show evidence of Sargon's cosmic geography (Horowitz 5, 93), and "Mesopotamian star figures" appropriated and retold in Revelation 12 (167).

McHugh gives striking evidence for the use of Mesopotamian star charts in The Book of Revelation, chapter 12: 1-6, demonstrating their equivalence. Comparing the two writings he notes the inclusion in both of a Pregnant-woman (Pregnancy-goddess), Red-Dragon (Hydra), and the Child (Regulus), therefore, John's vision "corresponds exactly with the constellations and stars catalogued in Mesopotamian star atlases" (185). These are significant interplays with John's text. Robert Poole claims that Arthur C. Clarke, moved between fact and fiction (257), and the author of the Book of Revelation likewise has a similar approach to his cosmic vision of the future. John and Clarke are considered as Prophets of their age. John lived in an ancient time of Roman imperialism and is known as a Christian Prophet that writes of an apocalyptic future. Arthur C. Clarke was considered "the West's leading techno-Prophet" (Poole 255) in his visions for an outer space future. John was a prisoner on the Island of Patmos, whereas Clarke chose an imperial geography, the island of Ceylon that had been a British colony. Clarke's theories involve the necessity of a geostationary orbit that was offered by the isle of Ceylon/Sri Lanka for his visions for outer space technologies. From John's place of island geography, he created a veiled literary response as a script and as a guide for Christians living about 69 ACE. The landscape and the situation of Patmos were inspirations for his writings (Bent 813). The performance of the stars in their cosmic journeys across the heaven above him, were a map of future Earthly upheaval. Outer space became a new location for Messianic geopolitical performance.

John of Patmos, in ancient times, wrote The Book of Revelation as a response to his imprisonment by imperial Rome. In his island geography, place and space, landscape and nature became significant catalysts for a geographical imagination in his religious sensitivities (Prince 22; Gregory et. al. Dictionary 282). His writings provided a vision of a radicalised reconstitution of imperial power, the city, geography, and the religious conduct of life on Earth. This intersected with outer space. It is perhaps a strange approach to link his aspirations for Christians with outer space, but I will argue that it is relevant, evidenced in his writings, and displays the many influences and fields of knowledge that he incorporated into his texts.

The Geographical Imagination

Oliver Dunnett's analysis in *Imperialism, Technology and Tropicality in Arthur C. Clarke's Geopolitics of Outer Space*, demonstrates the geographical imagination has relevance in Clarke's creative and scientific work, like John on the Island of Patmos, this provides a valuable interface for assessing impacts of "imperialism, technology" (770), and island geography. Examining the Book of Revelation through the lens of Dunnett's tripartite structural analysis supports a method to explore John of Patmos and ascertain how environments of "place, culture and politics" (Dunnett 770) influenced his imperial thinking.

Hugh C. Prince argues that the geographical imagination gives rise to blatant fictions by writers (24). Although he maintains that "observations of reality remain the basis for geographical inquiry" (23), he cautions, through analogy, that abstract painting is a theoretical technique that is an indirect approach to the representation of reality. He argues that we read geography using observation told at the hand of the discoverer, calling into action sympathetic insight and imaginative understanding that is a creative art (22). Gregory claims the geographical imagination is a phenomenon possessing human sensitivities towards the significance of place and space (*Dictionary* 282).

John's visions, in the Book of Revelation, are sensitivities to both cosmic and geographical space. His whole Earth descriptions of the return of the Messiah are reminiscent of the views seen by

astronauts from space. Cosgrove claims that the turn to outer space in the Apollo missions brought new spaces for engagement. He recognised that outer space imagery, centred particularly in the Earthrise photograph, “was altering the shape of the contemporary geographical imagination” (Cosgrove “Contested” 271). John’s geographical imagination was drawn from the landscape in a vision of the world to be transformed. Stephen Daniels explains that the concept of the geographical imagination as a phenomenon that is: “the bigger picture of imagination...encompassing the condition of both the known world and the horizons of possible worlds...” (183). John’s prophetic writings encompass these two types of imagination, the island itself as the known world and the worlds of his imagination.

Comparison of Clarke and John

For these prophetic writers, place is central to an understanding of their world on the verge of changes in civilisation and human destiny (Poole 255). Dunnett reveals that for Clarke “the place of Ceylon/Sri Lanka became central to his understandings of space exploration, science and society” (771). For John the island of Patmos was central to an understanding of an unfolding “cosmic drama” (Koester 1) explored through portents and the imaginary overturning of Roman occupation through violent cataclysms and the return of Christ. His writings deconstruct imperial society that engaged in Greco-Roman festivals so that he could provide readers with a sense of a Christian future (Koester 5). In *Profiles of the Future: An Inquiry into the Limits of the Possible*, Clarke engages with the role of prophecy in his own writing and for the futurist. He provides evidence that prognostication (portents) in science is sometimes dismissed as magic, then argues that “the hazards of prophecy [are just a] failure of the imagination” (12, 19). What is clear is that for these authors prophecies of the future, environments, and their geographical imaginations are tied to their versions of outer space futures in interesting ways.

Dunnett claims that the way Clarke experienced island life influenced the production of his representational texts (775). The same claim can be made for John on the island of Patmos. Bent claims that “St. John must have been an eye-witness of some volcanic eruption” (814). John therefore

describes what he sees occurring in the landscape, the images of destruction, and transposes these events onto a future catastrophe.

Imperialism

Arthur C. Clarke and John of Patmos were considered as writers of prophecy in a particular geopolitical world formed by imperialism. Clarke, like John, believed that outer space would involve a one-world political geography that would result in a peaceful planet (Clarke 198). But these technical manifestations are just the continuations of the imperial project “the United States of Earth” (Clarke 199). Tariq Jazeel considers that the inception of a colonial Ceylon has an imperial island-imagination established by the British: “the production and articulation of an idea, or an imaginative geography” (400). Like the British, Clarke considered that Ceylon had strategic value for his imagined outer space future.

Clarke’s vision of the future is tied to this geographical imagination that is one of imperialism. This is a western hegemony as a model that absorbs all cultures and local knowledges. This colonial drive for conquest and more territory turned to engagements with outer space as a new frontier. Ancient Rome embodied the same drives for conquest and John as prisoner on the island of Patmos turned to literature to explore his creative imagination in the space and place of imperial repression.

John is situated on what we can consider as the other side of imperialism. A prisoner by command of the emperor. But John’s cosmic vision, and geographical imagination, is in fact another type of imperialistic view of the world. The return of Christ is not simply to renew all creation, it will superimpose a new civilisation on an existing world. The city of Babylon or the Roman empire is destroyed, and the New Jerusalem arrives fully formed as a centre of power and authority (Rev. 21:10-14 NSRV). Moreover, Denis Cosgrove in *Apollo’s Eye: A Cartographic Genealogy of the Earth in the Western Imagination*, claims that the writings of John in the Book of Revelation “crystallizes Christian concerns with origins and ends and with the liminal characters located at the edges of time and space...differ[ing] from Roman imperialism’s demarcated limes” (Cosgrove “Apollo’s” 59). John offers no demarcated limes, no designated territory, the whole Earth is conquered. John’s

imaginary moves from the boundaries of terrestrial occupied lands to celestial spaces beyond the control of the Roman empire.

John's writing of his visions should be considered as "a supernatural attempt to overthrow the power of the Roman empire" (Haywood 314). This is manifested by his prophecy that demonstrates that the Heavenly beings of John's court are more powerful than the Roman Emperor. Whereas the Romans transformed part of the world through Earthly contests, the Messiah would transform the world from the heavens. In John's writings, Earth is terraformed to Edenic wholeness, and the purposeful destruction of Roman civilisation is replaced by the New Jerusalem (Rev. 21:2 NSRV). The process of destruction prefaces the new civilisation that will overwrite the existing one, not unlike the images produced by science fiction and their extra-terrestrials, he is invited to "look" and view a profile of the future (Rev. 4:1 NSRV). John sees a cosmic future and an outer space dominated and occupied by extra-terrestrial beings. In John's description, a supernatural being sits on a throne surrounded by monstrous creatures. Familiar Earth animals are reconstituted in unnatural combinations of their body parts, including one with a human face. This cosmic space is also inhabited by a Priestly class of men in white robes that serve then bow before a throne. Jesus, or the Lamb, is the only one worthy to perform the commands from the scroll as a script that returns him to the Earth: a planned reinsertion like the trajectories of astronauts (Rev. 4-6 NSRV).

John's visions fall within the realm of fantasy kingdoms, science fiction narratives, that can draw on the apocalyptic genre and his text. He uses his writing as a theological weapon against imperial power (Haywood 311-312). John sees an apocalyptic future of geographical and cosmic upheaval of earthquakes, the sun and moon darkened, and the stars falling to Earth (Rev. 6: 12-14 NSRV). But Craig G. Koester suggests that "Revelation's critical view of Roman dominion cannot be adequately understood as a response to a heightened threat of imperial violence against the church" (7). This suggests that the threat that John perceived was more imaginary, arising from his geography, the geographical imagination, and subjective experience.

According to Koester, The Book of Revelation, has a specific purpose for the time in which it was written and the people for whom it was supposedly written, Christians. Koester states “The book’s visions seek to alter the way they see the political, religious, and economic dimensions of imperial life...” (5). Altered seeing would also be an important aspect of Clarke’s life as his writings imagine a future of an outer space occupied by humanity, spacecrafts, and satellite technology.

Technology and Magic Visions of the Future

Clarke’s interests were in both science and science fiction. This combination of the practical application of his imaginary was essential in his work on radar technologies during the second world war (Dunnett 771). In an interesting crossover with visions and prophecy, radar can see objects while far off and plot their position. Clarke also preconceived satellite technology that would beam visions back to Earth and allow for improvement in communications.

When reading John’s text there are technological aspects to his religious aspirations that links astronomical observations with human futures in outer space. His narrative includes a vast array of outer space experiences: a heavenly court where voices proclaim support for God’s directing the destiny of life on Earth (Rev. 4:8; 5: 9 NSRV), a Messianic mission to transform life on Earth (Rev. 5: 5 NSRV), and a full-formed city that descends through the atmosphere (Rev. 21: 10 NSRV). These geographical imaginations are similar constructions of outer space in *2001: A Space Odyssey*, a writing collaboration between Stanley Kubrick and Clarke. In the film the voice of gods at the watering hole is heard in the primitive court of man-apes that directs human destiny. The transcendence of both the man-ape “Moonwatcher,” and the astronaut Dave Bowman, who returns to Earth as a resurrected “star child” (the Messiah in his nativity) is a cosmic history. In the film, the monolith is a signpost, providing the movement through the story from the Earth, the moon, and into outer space as a heavenly calling. These are objects that become the portents for human transcendence (Mamber 60). But in the film, space itself is simultaneously an other-worldly dream, and banal space for corporate meetings on the moon and the cosmic dance of spacecrafts (Mamber 62).

Like Clarke, John's visions are creative writings that constructs another reality through a convergence of disciplines and traditions of knowledge. John takes knowledge literally from the stars by sharing in the narratives of Mesopotamian star charts (McHugh 167). John McHugh claims that John was imprisoned on the Island of Patmos because of "Astronomical prognostication" (168), reading in the heavens his portents (Rev. 12:1 NSRV).

In Imperial Rome practicing magic and astrology were grounds for banishment (McHugh 186). Revelation 12 seems to be evidence for John's banishment in his deliberate reading of the constellations as a map for the profiles of the future. Clarke also affirms that an engagement in places on Earth, its geostationary orbits, and outer space is necessary for human technological futures. John considered his prophecy as the visions of the future in the return of a cosmic Christ who arrives through the atmosphere, witnessed by all. He described the Messiah as "coming with clouds, and every eye will see Him..." (Rev. 1 7 NSRV). Thus, John's aspirations for simultaneous "seeing" align with Clarke's vision for satellite technology, his vision akin to magic.

The island of Patmos provided John with a setting from which he could view the stars as portents to imagine a Christian future. His geographical imagination is responding to his island geography that is evidenced in oceanic parallels. Natural phenomena such as volcanic eruptions on adjacent islands, were transubstantiated into beasts rising from the ocean (Bent 814). His visions can be matched to his island geography. As John looked upward from the territory of the island, the stars were a cosmic map of the world's future that would form his creation of apocalyptic upheaval culminating in the Messiah's return from heaven.

Ian Boxall proclaims that John receives visions that are "Unlike the gospels, the Apocalypse has little interest in the Earthly life and ministry of Jesus of Nazareth. Instead, it offers dramatic visions of the heavenly Christ..." (119). This cosmic Christ receives his instructions written on a scroll and leaves heaven at the head of an army that invades the Earth (Rev. 4-6 NSRV). The visionary text renders the imaginary of the future, like an epic science fiction film scene in apocalyptic films. Apocalyptic films as a genre demonstrate overwhelming power that Sean Redmond describes as

Stanley Kubrick and Clarke's collaboration film, the spectacular forces of [this] end-of-the-world dreaming..." (Redmond 48). John's apocalyptic genre and his visions are in fact a Christian imperial view.

Tropicality

Marcus Power claims that tropicality is an imperial view that refers to a "potent Western discourse[s], implicated in colonialism" (493). The privileging of European culture is contrasted with "otherness". However, tropicality encompasses not just the cartography of latitudinal lines, but "is a way of thinking metaphorically [through] certain types of experience, vision, and landscape or society" (Gregory et. al. Dictionary 777). Tropicality is the geographical production of the "other." Similarly, the Island of Patmos not only situated the author of *The Book of Revelation* geographically (Boxall 1), but it also situated him in relation to imperial Rome as a prisoner.

The island, whether tropical or in the Mediterranean, is often a site that can project imaginary states in the wake of domination, and imperial forces. Islands inherit the imaginary, particularly claimed as deserted for the purposes of imperialism, a "terra nullius", an unoccupied place and space. Gilles Deleuze and David Lapoujade claims that the "range of islands has no objective unity... it is subject to those human conditions that make mythology possible" (12-13). The importance of geography in the formation of myth is attested by Joseph Campbell. He saw in the geography of Egypt the symbology of its long shape that were the foundations of their myths (117). We also detect in John's vision the symbiosis of the geographic and cosmic imagination, a mythology fermented from his island prison. John responds to his island geography because he encountered through the motions of the Earth, moon, and stars in the heavens a rich and fertile ground for his imagination. The Earth moves through an "astronomical geography" (Freud) demonstrated in John's text of extending the geography of the island of Patmos into the cosmic plane. Dunnett claims that Clarke had interesting ways to reconcile his futuristic visions of spaceflight with the specificities of place noting that in Clarke's novel *The Fountains of Paradise*, he imagines a space elevator in Sri Lanka (780).

In Dunnett's paper, he adapts "cultural and cosmographical readings of tropicity in the context of late-imperial techno-science to consider a concept of 'cosmological tropicity' ... tropical spaces are more intimately aligned with heavenly movements of the cosmos..." (Dunnett 785). Similarly, in the Mediterranean Sea, John of Patmos expressed his place as the centre of imperialism in geography, on an island, a place for his geographical and cosmic imagination. John is reading the terrain and the cosmos from his geographical location as a key to the future of a space exploration as a new political configuration. John considered that Jesus held the stars in his hands (Rev. 1:16 NSRV), testifying to his power over outer space and having command of the angels (Rev. 1:19 NSRV). John's island, although situated in the Mediterranean, is a stage that he could fill with this cosmic imaginary born from the landscape.

The Geographical Imagination in Geographies of Outer Space

John's heavenly visions are likewise interesting ways to overcome his geography and his subjection to the imperialism of Rome, with another form of "the worship of 'man'" (Moore 76), through a transcendent hero. This has echoes of Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey*, the formula for transcending mortality and conquering space requires a male, who dies and is resurrected becoming something more than human. Both authors create visions in the occupation of outer space, by superior beings and superior technologies. These imaginaries provide platforms for encounters with and/or transformation through alien species that they encounter on the journey to immortality. The heavenly spheres, however, are somewhat pedestrian, and really Earth-spaces. John describes a throne with Elders and strange beasts that are waiting for the one who is worthy to open the scroll containing the mission. In *2001: A Space Odyssey*, Bowman is placed in a hotel room awaiting his death and resurrection as a "Star Child" who can move through the universe into our solar system until he overshadows the Earth.

Conclusion

In summary, Dunnett's paper addresses geopolitical cultures of outer space, suggesting that "geopolitical readings of outer space can be understood through investigating diverse aspects of place,

landscape and identity” (770). Using Arthur C. Clarke, he demonstrates the interconnectedness of “imperialism, technology and tropicality” that he argues formed his “geographical imagination” (770). In this same vein I applied Dunnett’s framing to John of Patmos, imprisoned on an island in the Mediterranean that generated his geographical and cosmic imagination concerning empire, magic visions, and his island geography. On Patmos, John developed the view that in the stars were the portents that were a cosmic window on the future. For John the Empire of Rome was a confrontation with geography in a charged political landscape where he imagined an outer space, or heaven, already inhabited by an extra-terrestrial who sits on a throne, strange creatures, a court of Elders and a Messiah who returns to Earth as conqueror (Rev. 4: 3-5, 19:11-16 NSRV). In the physicality and materiality of these islands of Ceylon/Sri Lanka and Patmos that represent imperialism, conquest or imprisonment/confinement, the imagination itself becomes a space of exploration. John’s island geography is all about vision that is tied to an immense cosmic and geographical space, that links heaven and Earth. The biblical text of a faith centred in geography, re-reads the natural world as portents and signs in imaginary encounters with the heavenly.

Both Clarke and John of Patmos demonstrate in their writings a cosmic imaginary tied to imperialism. They were considered as prophets forecasting the future for heaven and Earth. Their writings “can be understood as intimately connected to various conceptions of space and place” (Dunnett 771). They achieved a prophetic aim by exceeding their geography through visions of the cosmic transcendent man. Clarke and Kubrick in *2001: A Space Odyssey*, considered that “man” could only exceed his geography through a rebirth. The final shot in the film uses the images of the cosmic foetus that eclipses the Earth in size as a representation of human destiny. In a type of cosmic nativity, this image combines the fantasy vision of the exultation and immortality of man. Another vision of the phantasmatic cosmic figure for John was Jesus, immaculately conceived, transformed from lamb to lion. Jesus is transformed in biblical texts from mortal, meek, healer of Earthly disease, and servant of the people, in the gospels, to John’s Jesus, a superior being who is a conquering hero and shining figure of the cosmos (Rev. 1:16; 19:12 NSRV).

Clarke's imaginary vision of a superior alien power, in *2001: A Space Odyssey*, begins with the influence exerted through a monolith emitting voices. The indecipherable word holds the secrets to human progression through to immortality. In a similar pattern in John's text, "the word" (John 1:1), that is Jesus, created the world, then in the Book of Revelation, he returns at the head of an invading army to solve John's geopolitical concerns. Both authors encounter imperial geography that engages the geographical imagination portrayed in their writings.

What this case study demonstrates is that John of Patmos engages his geographical imagination in the same vein as Clarke where imperialism, technology, and islands were vectors, the essential elements in visions of human futures. The connections with outer space, like our current context, are hypothetical: The coming of a future that may never arrive. In the Book of Revelation, the geopolitical contest on Earth translates to the creation of encounters with beings and places in other worlds. Significantly, in imagined futures, Clark and John share interplays with literature and landscape that are clearly echoes of the Earth.

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