

Meeting Schedule

April 12, 2014 Start Time 1:30 PM (All please note the earlier start time for this meeting)

Presentation Francis Graham - "Time Travel--what physics knows and doesn't know."

Presentation: Geoff Glover - "Fables of Difference: African American Science Fiction from 1931 to 2006"

-Parsec Board of Director's Meeting

at The Squirrel Hill Library Meeting Room

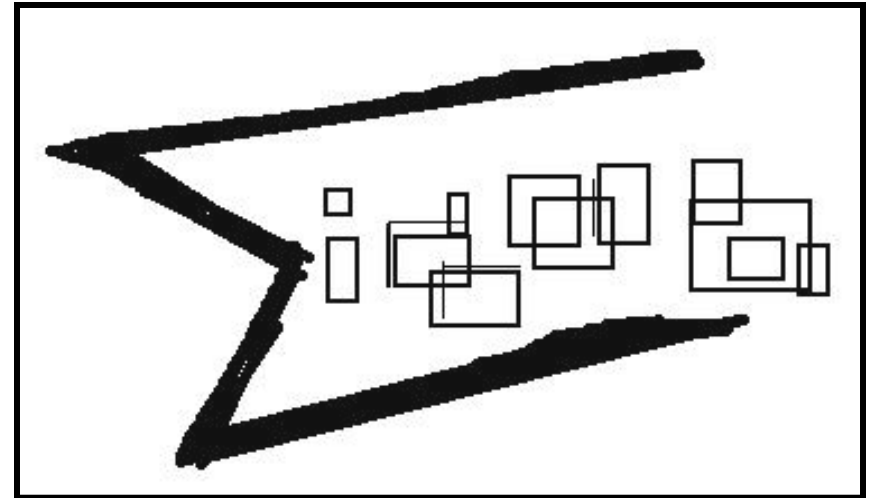
Sunday June 22, 2014 1:00 PM to 3:00PM

All members are welcome to attend.

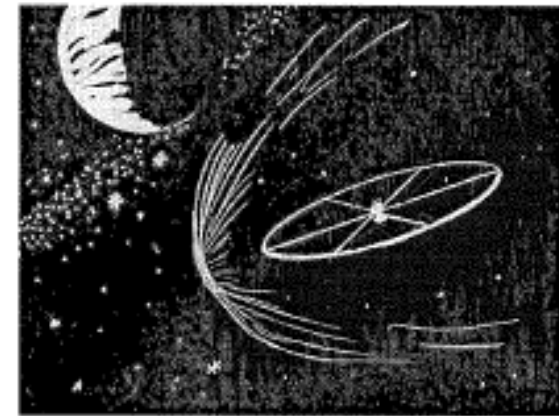
"Science Fiction is far more than a form of literature. To many of its readers, it is to some degree a way of life. Readers and writers together form a sort of extended family, in which a high degree of interaction and feedback exists." SF would not be the literature that it has been and has become without the tight integration with the fan base. With the possible exception of the Mystery Genre, there is nothing like it. I have always believed that the process of writing and reading are inextricably tied together in the creative process. SF and fandom bring that creativity to an enhanced level.

It is evidenced here at Parsec. Probably is the reason for Parsec. I see and enjoy all manner of world views, scientific poetic politic erotic fantastic, in all of you at every juncture when we converse and meet. What a messy wonderful group of people we are. Now is the time to join us! Financially and spiritually. You're already in-tune and interested. Take the plunge. Join Parsec. Come to our monthly meetings. The water can be like a mid-winters plunge in the Mon, cold but tremendously invigorating.

for we have sundered ourselves into factions, and each faction has fallen under the spell of the wisdom of our time, which goes something like "My low tolerance is in fact proof of how refined my moral and artistic senses are." Mmm, maybe – or maybe you just have the attention span of a fruit fly. Maybe you're just petty and bratty and get off on snideness. Maybe you need to learn patience and understanding. Maybe you need to become genuinely curious about how other people live. Because if you can do that, you're way ahead of any theme in any movie. That is our hope. That – is divergence.



April 2014 SIGMA-----No. 337.



M
A
G
S
A
I
L
!

CONTENTS

E. Mayne Hull by E.L. Davin.....2
March Minutes by Sec. W.B. Hall.....3
Treasurer;s Report by S-W. Smith.....6

Diversions (A Review) by W.B. Hall.....7
President's Capsule by J. Coluccio.....10
Announcements!!!.....12

BRIEF BIO.: E. Mayne Hull

By Eric Leif Davin

E. (Edna) Mayne Hull (1905-1975): Born in Brandon, Manitoba, Canada, Hull was the daughter of a Canadian journalist. In 1939 she married fellow Canadian and noted SF writer A. E. van Vogt (1912-2000), with whom she remained the rest of her life, pre-deceasing him. In 1944 they immigrated to the United States. Along with him she was Guest of Honor at the Fourth World Science Fiction Convention in 1946.

She began writing for John W. Campbell in 1942, for whom her husband was already writing. Much of her fiction was co-authored with her husband. About this she said, "The great problem was my almost total lack of scientific knowledge. To overcome this handicap, my husband and I figured out a story pattern which would bypass the need to show a science explanation." Thus, most of her stories centered around an unscrupulous interstellar businessman in a hyper-capitalist society and were collected in *Planets for Sale* (1954).

She stopped writing after 1950. That same year she and her husband converted to L. Ron Hubbard's Dianetics (later the Church of Scientology). Because of this, van Vogt, also, ceased writing, although he began writing again in the early 1960s.

Kravitzes get around, Lenny in *The Hunger Games* and now Zoe in this.)

For all that, I see great potential in the world of *Divergent*, yet I tend to doubt it will get met. Our world today is split into factions, but these movies may stay far too abstract to address that. Even that touchstone I mentioned, *The Breakfast Club*, brought up teenage stereotypes only to go a long way to reinforcing them. And while generalism is indeed dangerous and off-putting to those who adhere to set identities, will these movies truly sell the wonders of generalism, and in any case isn't it overkill to outright hunt and execute generalists? 1997's *Gattaca* was able to convey its culture of insidious discrimination more gently, yet more persuasively. Compounding my anxiety was the fact that I saw trailers for *The Giver* and *The Maze Runner* before this started. I once read Lois Lowry's "The Giver" and even reviewed it for Sigma – I forget whether you ever got to read that or not – and found it all right, if subtly conservative (thereby reminding me of L'Engle). I got a decidedly low-tech sense of Lowry's future world (although, rather fantastically, entire landscapes have been flattened) and was disappointed to see sleek airships in the trailer that looked like they were on loan from *Oblivion*. *The Maze Runner* likewise presents us with a vast and mysterious force basically treating grown kids like lab mice. Now please understand, I'm all for rallying audiences against being bullied by vast and mysterious forces – stop to consider the financial crisis we've just been through – but when all those forces ever seem to want to do is mess with your head, it starts feeling silly. For want of a Big Brother, a tyrant obsessed with total adherence to a distinct ideology, why would a great power scrutinize each citizen one at a time as if under a microscope? Whatever happened to the good old days when tyrants simply neglected or punished their citizens? I enjoy a good paranoid thriller, but I find paranoia difficult to exploit because it can feel too much like shameless vanity. "They" know I can topple their entire empire, oh no! "They" know I'm Divergent, oh no! Some are already saying we may soon be due for young adult dystopian burnout. I hope not. I hope my fears are wrong and that these projects continue to surprise me. I am thankful to be saved from superheroes and to get to entertain a thought or two. Yet the fact remains: We need an Orwell! . Yes, Orwell was never a YA author – but didn't we turn on to "1984" when we ourselves were YA? *Divergent* feels only accidentally relevant, (next page—>)

PRESIDENT'S CAPSULE by Joe Coluccio

One of my favorite poems by Walt Whitman is called "When I heard the Learn'd Astronomer" It outlines the disconnect between the scientist's model of the physical universe and the deep sky on a clear night. The interesting thing is that both the scientist and the poet are a bit wrong. The poet had no way of understanding, "When the proofs, the figures, were ranged in columns before me; When I was shown the charts and the diagrams, to add, divide, and measure them;" that those charts, diagrams and proofs could have a profound aesthetic sense.

The scientist had no interest in
"Till rising and gliding out, I wander'd off by myself,
In the mystical moist night-air, and from time to time,
Look'd up in perfect silence at the stars."

Enter SF to help heal the disconnect.

A word about SF and why I prefer to use it. Robert Heinlein first proposed the use of Speculative Fiction in an article in "The Science Fiction Novel" 1959, Advent Publishing, edited by Basil Davenport. The article was based on a lecture that Heinlein delivered at the University of Chicago. After some tortured logic about mainstream fiction and realistic fiction and fantasy fiction, he settled on the term Speculative Fiction. I believe that the field of discourse and the universe of fans comprises a much larger cosmology than the words Science Fiction can contain. The initials SF work for Science Fiction, Science Fantasy, Speculative Fiction. Go on, you can make up a few more all on your own.

Defining SF is a very difficult task as evidenced by the nearly four pages of definition found in John Clute's *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction*. I was casually flipping through Lester Del Rey's *The World of Science Fiction, 1926-1976: the history of a subculture* In the first chapter, Del Rey tries, as others before and after, to find a definition of Science Fiction. He comes up with this attempt (p.12)

PARSEC, PO Box 3681, Pittsburgh PA 15230-3681

www.parsec-sff.org Dues: Full member \$15 , Associate: \$3. Pres. J. Martin; Vice-Pres. K. Heston; Treasurer S-W. Smith; Secretary W. Hall; Commentator: K. Hayes; Editor: F. Graham.

Once more about thirty people showed, including Treasurer Sarah-Wade Smith. President Joe Coluccio – wearing a Weird Tales cover motif necktie he'd gotten from some place called Zazzle – got the meeting started around 1:58 with an extended metaphor which, being historical in nature, near-inevitably prompted a debunking from ex-President Eric Davin. Joe said that at something called the Newport Festival, dedicated to folk music, Bob Dylan started playing rock and the usually peaceable Pete Seeger was moved to sabotage him – or so goes the mythology. In fact, it may be safer to say that Seeger simply wanted the volume down. Whatever exactly happened, Joe's ultimate point was that change can be rough, but that's what Parsec is due to undergo. It sounds to him that we're looking for healing, openness, and a coming together.

Workshop Committee spokeswoman Diane Turnshek reported that Alpha is bringing together writers ranging from the ever-reliable Tamora Pierce to "space opera" writer Tobias Buckell. She wants to start a Young Adult fiction lecture series at Carnegie-Mellon, and she's looking for the hottest YA authors available. Speaking on behalf of Confluence, Lara Van Winkle confirmed that it's running July 25-27 and is open to general ideas, as well as means of getting more income, or even a more steady hotel. Barb "Mother of Parsec" Carlson spoke mainly on behalf of Steve Ramey, who should be able to not only announce our latest short story winner but put out the latest Triangulation in time for the con. Things seem okay this year, but next year may require more funding. Also, we are in the process of rehauling our webpage at www.parsec-sff.org and could use help. Projects under consideration: a calendar, a link to our library, and a chronology of Sigma pdfs. Our board meeting (which non-members can observe, though not contribute to) is June 26th 1-3 PM.

In older and more general business, Laurie Mann mentioned progress on the con flyers, Elizabeth C. Lyon announced that she does cover art, Eric gave away some free books, and Parsec T-shirts continue to be available. Looking ahead, a fellow named Jeff will be talking to us about African-American science-fiction. (continued next page—>)

Every month: The **second and fourth Tuesday** of every month we host the **WorD** (Write or) writer's critique group from **6:30-9pm**. You are welcome to join in by bringing your own writing to the group or by just showing up for a meeting! Organized by members of PARSEC,...

Ideas for more con panel topics can always be sent to conprogram@yahoo.com for consideration. Somehow editor Francis Graham did not speak to us on time travel (or ... did he???), but Joe read us a note wherein Francis apologized for failing to make it to a meeting which he had in fact managed (somehow) to keep.

The raffle ticket was selected by Mary Soon Lee's daughter Lucy, netting a fellow named Dave a picture of a kind of wolf-yet-hawk which I swear we've held onto for years.

Having given us "homework" last time, guest speaker Ellen Bishop was back for our answers. On the subject of favorites, Greg Armstrong cited Roger Zelazny, in particular "The Last Defender of Camelot." Chris Ferrier said she enjoys various shorts stories and enjoys good worldbuilding and cited "Rappacini's Daughter." She is *not* into "urban fantasy," with its profusion of all fantastical creatures from all traditions always turning up. Jim Mann spoke up for Cordwainer Smith, calling the work old and yet still feeling fresh. He cited the sense of wonder he got from what he considered an underrated Arthur C. Clarke story, "City in the Stars." (A movie called "Europa Report" got mentioned.) The discussion grew to encompass work by Samuel Delany and John Varley. Larry Ivkovich spoke up for a story called "The Bone Palace."

Heinlein's "The Moon is a Harsh Mistress" and Marge Piercy's "He She it" were also mentioned. Upcoming speaker Jeff praised C. J. Cherryh's Foreigner series.

As I personally wonder if the so-called "eco-thriller" will ever truly take off – and I've yet to meet a more compelling ecologist than Pardot Kynes, in the end matter of "Dune" – I was pleased when Bishop wondered about any strong entries in ecology. Honorable mentions went to "The Windup Girl," "No Blade of Grass" and "Stand on Zanzibar."

It continues to be hard to say where SF is "going" in terms of trends. There seems to be an ongoing rediscovery and reappreciation of our solar system, as well as more acceptance of Einsteinian constraints on star travel. Space opera, young adult, steampunk – all seem to be continuing to flourish.

in a while, but if superheroes then grow to monopolize Good, I think that suggests we have no real stake in Good, or that Good is precisely as abstract as a comic book. Compared to all that, dystopian adventures with an idea or two kicking around in them are most welcome.

But oh, it has been over sixty years and our dystopias still need a next Orwell.

Take *Divergent*, to at long last get around to the movie I'm supposed to be reviewing. Its history feels even vaguer than that of *The Hunger Games*. There was a war long ago. Chicago is walled off from the rest of the world and still looks like it's in serious disrepair. Someone – perhaps the character Raymond Cocteau from 1993's daffy *Demolition Man*? – has dreamed up a "perfect" society of five social factions: Abnegation (selfless, often holding political office), Amity (happy, farmers in harmony with Nature), Candor (starkly honest), Dauntless (the bold ones, soldiers and police) and Erudite (who I presume are erudite). It took me only a few minutes to wonder: where's the humor in this society? Candor and Erudite might have some sense of wit, but I assume Erudite wit would be dry, whereas Candor might be scathing and sniping. Where's the silliness? What would they make of the Marx Brothers, or Monty Python? Anyhow, that's how things are, and teenagers are subjected to a test to see which faction they belong to. At this point, we're already off to a weaker start than *The Hunger Games*. Author Suzanne Collins wanted to compare her Games to war, whereas this testing business which author Veronica Roth hands us feels, at most, like the SATs. Certainly, you can try to argue that the SATs are a scourge of tyranny, but it takes a little doing. Anyhow, Beatrice "Tris" Prior had better watch her back, because she carries traits from at least three factions. (And you would surely have to wonder: Don't we all, really?) That makes her *Divergent*, and this "perfect" society, represented by Kate Winslet as an Erudite, fears and hates *Divergents* – which doesn't really make any sense, but anyway, that's the driving tension.

I was very pleasantly surprised by how well I liked *Divergent*. Its perils and challenges were compelling and it connected with me on a gut level. I've seen the lead, Shailene Woodley, before. She has an interesting filmography, and while she's no J-Law (though, honestly, who could be?), Woodley is steadfastly game and winning and earnest enough to do her character justice, and as the focus of a questing saga is slightly more butch than Elijah Wood. (Wild to see her here with *The Spectacular Now* co-star Miles Teller – good movie, by the way – and even wilder to see the

think? Was Fred simply adding a touch of blue to a warning to kids about the perils of a Red Menace? I do wonder.

While dystopias became more simplified, stories generally became more self-centered, culminating in the “Which perception is real?” drama of Philip K. Dick.. After Orwell defined tyranny, J. D. Salinger defined alienation. Holden Caulfield feels adrift in a world of phonies and sellouts, dreading the arrival of adulthood and its endless predictable rituals. That theme would get sexed up in the breakout Mike Nichols movie *The Graduate*, then finally solidified into that teenage touchstone, John Hughes’s *The Breakfast Club*. Mind you, I enjoy and recommend those movies, but they do constitute an awkward launch pad back into the realm of dystopia, as if to say “Never mind the eternal Oceania-Eurasia-Eastasia war – what about the trials of my growing up?” I say our age cries out for another genuine Orwell, not just some Orwell-wannabe.

The *Hunger Games* movies are strong and competent enough in both conception and execution to keep gliding over the fundamental problem that their historical backstory is rather slapdash and very nearly fantastical. A nation named Panem, as in “bread and circuses,” signals “This is really just about the circus,” as indeed *Rollerball* (1975) was scarcely any deep examination of the prospect of corporate rule.

Yet at least those movies are well-prepared. As a wind in their sails they are propelled by a genuine literary phenomenon. They have some sense of geographic place and industrial base, and a vague pretension to class consciousness. They have J-Law. They even had, all too briefly, Philip Seymour Hoffman, who we will miss the hell out of.

Perhaps best of all, they’ve been a refreshing break from the current giant obsession of our time: comic book superheroes. Way back in director Sam Raimi’s first two *Spider-Man* movies the genre had some genuine heart and soul, but the more it drags out the more I regard it with a leaden sense of obligatory ritual and I would sooner watch the indie parody *Mystery Men* (1999) all over again. I worry, not so much about popular trends, but what they tend to negate. I think we can handle a lot of violent entertainment – so long as that’s balanced by other examples of problem solving. Likewise, it’s nice to see a superhuman fight for Good every once

All in all it was a good woolgathering session, and Joe said that next time the meeting would be moved up to 1:30. Apart from Eric Davin having shaved off his moustache, that seemed to be the biggest change.

In closing this, I would add: I keep bumping into more and more Parseckians reading. If you’re reading, you can toss a hundred words Sigma’s way reviewing a book – and I hold this invitation out to President Joe himself. Facebook is cool – but Sigma is posterity.



Ellen Bishop examines the exciting world of science fiction at the PARSEC Meeting at the Squirrel Hill Carnegie Library.

**The Parsec editor welcomes submissions.
Send by the 21st of the month to
francisgraham@rocketmail.com**

TREASURER'S REPORT!

By Sarah-Wade Smith, Treasurer.

As of March, 2014 continues to be a very prosperous year, thanks largely to the continued generosity of Timons Esiaias whose generous donations comprised about 2/3rds of this months income. Specifically, Tim has donated \$100. towards our short story prizes and another hundred to the Anne Cecil Memorial Fund, which also received another donation of \$10, I believe from Janet Fierst.

So, we received altogether \$210.00 in donations for this month, with \$110.00 of that for the Anne Cecil Memorial fund, which now, including these donations, stands at \$709.25 cents.

In other streams of revenue, the raffle brought in \$44.00, a testament to how very well the March meeting was attended. If memory serves, this is the largest take for a monthly raffle in several years.

We also had some ten memberships, three of them Associate for a total of \$113.00. I am very happy to note that four were people joining Parsec for the first time. Welcome to our new comrades. May they enjoy it immensely here.

In total, we took in \$368.00 this month, two thirds of it as noted above in donations.

According to our bank statement, we began this month with a balance of \$1922.65. After our deposit of the aforesaid

\$368.00, our balance is standing at \$2290.65. Personally, I feel glad to have our balance about \$2000 again.

As of this writing (10 March), we have had no expenses so far this month. I stress the "so Far" but hope it will continue.

Until next month, Tioraidh.

REVIEWS ————W.B. Hall

DIVERSIONS: *DIVERGENT* SHOWN WITH TRAILERS FOR *THE GIVER* AND *THE MAZE RUNNER*

George Orwell. J. D. Salinger. Madeleine L'Engle. Fred Rogers. John Hughes.

The above are widely varied talents, yet they have each in their own way tapped a distinct terror of the past century or so, the idea of a supreme assault upon one's sense of self. To my mind, the first and best of these was Orwell, drawing directly upon his familiarity with Stalinism while also intuiting the coming mind games of Mao. Orwell mastered a vision of the simultaneous regimentation of the political as well as the personal, and frankly I have found pretty much all other dystopias severely wanting ever since. Orwell understood that first comes conquest and then comes brainwashing, while later talents have demonstrated a sense of conquest and tyranny which is nebulous at best, merely an afterthought conjured to historically justify all that brainwashing. So long after Stalin and Mao, "1984" may seem ludicrous to today's young readers – at which point they may be gently pointed in the direction of, say, North Korea.

Mind you, others were concerned about this, but Jack Finney's "Invasion of the Body Snatchers" was a one-shot and his work wandered elsewhere. Madeleine L'Engle has to be cited out of respect, yet she may well represent the beginnings of the oversimplification of dystopia, with her planet Camazotz in "A Wrinkle in Time" and all those kids bouncing their balls in perfect synchronization. I would even argue that our own Fred Rogers tried to get in on the act, when his Neighborhood of Make Believe got visited by the nearly identical Paul and Pauline from the planet Purple. That gave old Fred an opportunity during his little debriefing to lament how sad it would be, to live in a world that's only purple, and everyone looks alike, and can only be named Paul or Pauline. It fit right in with his ongoing insistence that he loved each and every child's unique individuality. Yet I do think Fred tipped his hand a little when the Purple Panda showed up. A panda – distinctly Chinese, don't you