



Otherness in Adrian Tchaikovsky's *Children of Time*

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Introduction

Since the emergence of the genre, English-language science fiction has had an interest in the discovery of new worlds, new cultures, and new life forms. Such an exploration has been grounded in the idea of a cultural (or anthropological) centre from which the notion of what is known and unknown derives. The intellectual leap between these ideas of science fiction and a colonial mindset is not hard to make. The Darwinian evolutionary ideas of competition and race have had a major impact on both science fiction and colonialism and most scholars agree that colonialism is an important context for early science fiction (Rieder 2). According to Rieder (2–3), its history and situations are commonly alluded to in the motifs and plots of science fiction as the genre emerged in a European culture marked by imperialist expansion, and although “much early science fiction seems merely to transpose and revivify colonial ideologies, the invention of other worlds very often originates in a satirical impulse to turn things upside down and inside out” (4). For example, a white Western society of humans can become colonized by aliens. However, even in emergent science fiction the anthropological logic that “the indigenous, primitive other’s present is the colonizer’s own past” is “one of the key features” that links it to colonialism (Rieder 5). Since there is such a strong connection between these ideas, the concepts of the Self and the Other (the known and the unknown), commonly used in postcolonial theory, are useful tools for the analysis of science fiction (Kerslake 9).

A more recent novel that explores these concepts (the Self and the Other) through such themes as evolution, time, humanity, culture, colonization, and language is the Artur C. Clarke awarded space opera *Children of Time* by Adrian Tchaikovsky, published in 2015. The novel is set in a post-apocalyptic future where Earth is no longer habitable, and humanity has sent spacecraft to terraform and colonize new planets. Through the use of an enhanced virus, the

scientist Doctor Avrana Kern intends to accelerate evolution and intelligence, creating new humans from monkeys on a terraformed planet. The virus infects spiders instead, causing a new intelligent spider species to evolve. Spanning over thousands of years, the novel follows the story of Kern, the spiders, and the generations of humans aboard another spaceship on its way to the planet.

The alien, and alienness, is a common trope of science fiction, and it is often used as a mirror for humanity to measure itself against, and reflect itself in (Malmgren 15, Benford 54). In this essay, the concept of the Other is used to show how *Children of Time* explores this idea through different depictions of Otherness, which can be portrayed in various ways: as Monster, as Enemy, as Friend, as Self, or as Truly Other. My analysis will show how *Children of Time* explores Otherness through various forms and questions what it means to be human, as well as how the Other and the Self can be constructed.

In the following chapters, I will introduce the concept of the Other and its application to science fiction. I will give a brief overview of how colonial ideas can be evident and problematized in the genre, and, since the aim of using the concept of the Other can be different in postcolonial readings and in other readings of science fiction, discuss the possible distinctions. In this overview, the subgenre of alien encounters in science fiction will be presented, as well as the different categories of aliens, anthropocentric and unknowable, and how the theory applies to these categories. A previous reading of the novel and how it relates to my reading will be presented. In the analysis, I will show how Othering is at work and how Otherness is portrayed in the novel based on the categorisation of the Other commonly observed in science fiction. Lastly, I will discuss what the various portrayals of Otherness tell us about the conceptualisation of the Other, and thus what is said about the Self.

Chapter 1 – Contextualising *Children of Time*

1.1 The Other, the Self, Othering, and Otherness

The concept of the Other has its roots in philosophy and psychology. The term is used to define someone (or something) as separate from the Self (oneself). In philosophy, the Other is thus seen as necessary to define the Self, since the Self is what the Other is not, and vice versa (Honderich 673). Gisela Brinker-Gabler writes in her introduction to *Encountering the Other(s): Studies in Literature, History, and Culture* that the thinkers Foucault and Derrida were highly influential in defining these concepts, even though their ideas have also been criticized (4–5). Foucault’s interest was mainly in the constructed power structure between the Self and the Other, while Derrida focused on the idea of thought and how the subject understands itself through perceived differences (4). Another philosopher central in defining the concept is Emmanuel Levinas, who suggested that the Other is not only other in its perceived differences by the Self, but as the subject he is to himself (Khair 15). According to Levinas, as quoted by Kheir (171), “the other is alterity”, meaning the Other can never be fully understood by the Self. Furthermore, Patricia Kerslake writes in *Science Fiction and Empire* that the terms have been used in postcolonial theory, introduced by Edward Said, to theorize how the Self can also mean an *Us*, and the Other therefore a *not-Us* (8).

Othering is a construction in which certain characteristics are ascribed to the Other. In doing so, we by choice create representations that we choose to see as real (*Otherness*) to give the Other a place in our preferred social self-image (Kerslake 8). How the Other is perceived, its “degree of otherness” if you will (Kerslake 10), therefore depends on how you view yourself. This process requires a binary view that positions the Self at a centre, and the Other in its periphery (9). Kerslake argues that a “discussion of the Other is impossible without a primary definition of the Self” and poses the idea that “[i]f we inhabit the centre of our existence

(our world, life, knowledge), then the Other, who cannot inhabit the same place, becomes marginalised by definition: they cannot be us” (9). This construction of Self and Other is an ongoing process, and Brinker-Gabler states that “whatever can be experienced about otherness —for we can never possess the original— is always dependant on one’s own cultural background, one’s own system of perception” (3). This means that if the subject for example defines itself as human, it has already constructed an idea of there being something non-human, something Other, and the (perceived) characteristics the Other possesses are ascribed as such. In this process, the opposites of those characteristics (human) are ascribed to the Self, which in turn affects how Otherness is perceived.

In the afterword to his book *Orientalism*, Said writes that “the development and maintenance of every culture require the existence of another different and competing *alter ego*” and that “the construction of identity [...] involves establishing opposites and ‘others’ whose actuality is always subject to the continuous interpretation and re-interpretation of their differences from ‘us’” (332). This means, as previously stated, that the construction of the Self is an ongoing process of defining the Other, but it requires the acceptance of there being a Self in the first place. What is a human identity is thus not natural or stable (Said 332). Kerslake poses that “Said’s postcolonial contentions [...] are particularly useful tools in the analysis of SF [science fiction]” (9). It is with those words in mind, that I will continue with how the concept of the Other can be applied in the analysis of science fiction.

1.2 The Other in Science Fiction

As previously mentioned, the Darwinian ideas of evolution, race, and competition evident in colonialism are also important conceptual material for early science fiction (Rieder 3). The expansion of Europe’s commercial and political power in the fifteenth and the sixteenth

centuries shaped a Eurocentric world-view that came to form the “understanding of human evolution and the relation between culture and technology” in the centuries to follow, which “played a strong part in the works of [H. G.] Wells and his contemporaries that later came to be called science fiction” (Rieder 2). Although, according to Rieder (4), many early works of science fiction merely “transpose or revivify colonial ideologies”, others use the potential of the genre to satirically turn things “upside down and inside out”. He gives the example of Washington Irving’s *A History of New York by Diedrich Knickerbocker* from 1809 in which a race from the Moon arrives on Earth, finds humans to be savages and of the wrong skin color (white instead of green), and thus treats the humans much like colonizers from Europe treated indigenous people of other continents (4). However, as Rieder also points out, the “anachronistic structure of anthropological difference”, in which one species is more advanced, or evolved, still links science fiction to colonialism (5). Analysis of science fiction can therefore focus on how colonial ideas are evident, or problematized, in the works.

According to Kerslake, postcolonial contentions of the Other, and the definitions made by Said, are “particularly useful” in studies of science fiction (9). She argues however that there are some “important distinctions” between the Other in science fiction and the Other in postcolonial theory (10). Firstly, it is impossible for science fiction to perceive the Other in any complete sense (11). Although one might argue that it is a philosophical question whether the Other can ever be completely perceived by the Self, Kerslake bases this on the idea that postcolonial theory sheds light on how colonialism had constructed the Other, and it required that the European West acknowledged that it was not the centre of humanity (11). Kerslake suggests that if one accepts that humanity is not the centre in the narratives of science fiction, it (humanity) “would have lost the opportunity to gain further insights into itself” (11), and that the goal of using the concept of the Other in analyses of science fiction can therefore be to understand the Self rather than the Other.

Secondly, where “postcolonial theory challenges the silencing and marginalisation of the Other, SF [science fiction] takes the stand that such marginalisation is a key element of self-identification” (Kerslake 11). One example of silencing of the Other is the denial of a language. Kerslake notes that “[j]ust as silencing the Other is an imperialist colonial technique of repression, so too is the Other prevented from speech in SF, but for different reasons” (11). The – according to Kerslake – necessary Otherness of the alien is preserved when it is not able to construct itself through speech. In the same manner, the terracentrism (focus on Earth as centre) in science fiction serves as a way of comparing the human and the alien through misrepresentation (Othering). This resonates with the idea of the Other as a mirror to the Self. By seeing what we are *not*, we can understand what we *are*. This does not mean one should ignore apparent colonial ideas in science fiction, nor does it mean that reproduced imperial ideologies should be saluted, only that readings of science fiction can serve several purposes, one being to gain insight into the constructed Self.

Both of these arguments can be recognized in Carl D. Malmgren’s article “Self and Other in SF: Alien Encounters”. Ursula K. Le Guin wrote that science fiction with the subject at the center can “show us who we are, and where we are, and what choices face us” (116). In his article, Malmgren focuses on a genre he calls “Alien Encounter SF”, whose narrative is dominated by a confrontation with a “terran representative” and an “alien actant”, and that he means fulfills the requirements of human insight: “In general, the reader recuperates this type of fiction by comparing human and alien entities, trying to understand what it means to be human” (15).

Malmgren and Kerslake both identify different ways in which science fiction constructs alien Otherness. Malmgren separates what he calls “extrapolative encounters with anthropocentric aliens” from “speculative encounters involving unknowable aliens” (17), and also differentiates the Others based on their relations to humans, whilst Kerslake differentiates

between “the antropomorphised Other”, “the Other as Monster”, “the Other as friend or ‘same’”, and “the Other as Truly Other” (13, 20). The Other can thus be categorized into how it is portrayed in science fiction, by its “degree of Otherness”, or by the human response to it for example. The categories mentioned by Malmgren and Kerlslake which are relevant to my analysis will be defined in the following sections.

1.3 Anthropocentric Aliens and Unknowable Aliens

In “Aliens and Knowability” (1980) Gregory Benford differentiates between “anthropocentric aliens” and “unknowable aliens”. The former are defined by what he calls “exaggeration of human traits”, while the latter have an “essential strangeness” making them fully alien (53, 56). Referring to Benford’s classification, Malmgren notes that the definitions are based on the “*degree* of alienity”, meaning to which extent “the alien adheres to or departs from anthropocentric norms” (17). This degree is in its turn dependant on the observer’s self-image, about which Kerlslake writes: “Since all things outside the Self must be the Other then the degree of ‘Otherness’ rests in the ego and consciousness of the observer” (10). In other words, Otherness is subjective (as is all interpretations), and an interpretation of what is Other says as much about the interpreter as about the Other.

According to Benford the anthropocentric alien, being more or less human-like, serves as a “mirror” in which humanity can examine its problems from a new perspective (54). Kerlslake mentions the “antropomorphised Other”, which is an entity given human traits, emotions, or intentions (12). Both the anthropocentric and the antropomorphised alien, which arguably are quite similar (the latter focuses more on the human form), place the human at the center. In a similar manner, terracentrism is evident in how Earth is centralised in the human mindset (11). The antropomorphised Others can then, for example, reveal a terracentric

mindset when they are likened to something similar to (Terran) animals, which Kerslake argues is a misrepresentation of the Others that “denies them even the status of Otherness” (12). The traits given, such as when an animal is depicted with human emotions, or when an alien is likened to a domesticated pet, show us what our self-image is (mirroring).

The abovementioned perspective, however, neglects or rejects that the term human is in itself a distinction from the term animal, although most would agree that humans are also animals. Sune Borkfelt writes that the animal is “othered even from our thinking on otherness” (3) and refers for example to Levinas’ exclusion of animals in his considerations of the Other. Borkfelt continues by stating that the concept of the Other is based upon a human idea of knowledge (we define the Other based on what we know of him), and any non-human knowledge is thus unthinkable. Therefore, Borkfelt argues, “any attempt to know the ‘nonhuman animal other’ will necessarily have an element of colonization to it from the onset” (2).

The unknowable alien (whose Otherness is also a matter of degree) instead teaches us about our Self by examining what we are *not* (Malmgren 17). Benford writes about the unknowable alien in “Effing the Ineffable” (1987), stating that “one cannot depict the totally alien” (14). In other words, something completely Other could not be accurately portrayed using tools that are partly of the Self (human language for example), because by doing so, it would become partly not-Other. Science fiction’s virtue in trying to depict the truly alien is, instead of understanding the Other, to evoke a “sense of wonder” in the reader (Benford, “Effing the Ineffable” 15). Malmgren notes that an author who wants to portray the “alien alien” must focus on what the alien does instead of what it is (29). However, as Borkfelt notes, any epistemological claims would be subjective since they are based on anthropocentric ideas about knowledge (2).

How these different categories are given form by the author is defined by Malmgren as either “extrapolative” or “speculative” (17). If the author uses humans or Earth as the basis for the creation – as is the case with anthropocentric aliens – the author extrapolates, but a speculative act involves the problem of imagining something unimaginable, and by giving it meaning it has already become something slightly less Other (17). However, Malmgren argues that the speculative aliens, by being something more than an allegory, “explore the limitations of being human and suggest the possibility of transcending those limits” (17). In summary, both categories of Others could be useful in an analysis of science fiction. The anthropocentric alien can through its metaphorical allusions to humanity provide a mirror in which we can investigate ourselves, and the unknowable Other can through its distinct Otherness provide us with new perspectives on what we could become.

1.4 Various Representations of the Other

Sometimes it is not evident what the Other is. In the following sections, how the Other is defined, and what the basis for the various representations are, will be discussed.

1.4.1 Defining the Other

Kerslake notes that the view of the Other is based on where the observer stands (10). In literature, the perspective given by the author, and who (or what) that observer is, thus determine the subject (the Self). Malmgren suggests that through literature we (humans) can occupy the perspective of the Other, and thereby see ourselves as Other (25). However, Khair argues that narrating the Other “runs the danger of reducing alterity to more of the Self-same” (122). Even though science fiction could shift perspectives, and through this tell the (alien) Other’s story, it is also reliant on using the language of the Self (108).

Besides using different narrative perspectives, Kerslake suggests that the isolation of the Self could be created by distance (17). In science fiction the physically known and unknown can be billions of lightyears apart, but travel between these places can be made possible through technology. Interplanetary journeys can thus be a component of Othering. What is Self is the home planet (most often Earth), and what is Other is the distant galaxy or planet.

Time can work similarly. Since intergalactic travel in science fiction frequently requires technology that enables journeys lasting decades or even centuries, such as cryogenic sleep, Othering can be made by measuring time. If the present is the Self, the distant past or future can be the Other, and if the past is the Self, perhaps the present is the Other. Kerslake posits that if “we accept that the place of departure is the traveller's cultural ‘centre’, it is of interest [...] to question how far a person must now proceed before he or she reaches the indefinable edge of a nebulous periphery. At what point do we become Other?” (17–18).

These ideas align with the connection between evolution and Othering. As mentioned earlier, the view of the other as fundamentally same but at an earlier stage of evolution or civilisation is, as Rieder writes, “one of the key features that links emergent science fiction to colonialism” (5). He calls this an “anachronistic structure of anthropological difference” (5) which means that it is this logic of time that allows the Self to label the Other “primitive” or “savage”, and therefore place itself above the Other. Although the above is a problematization of defining the Other, some depictions are frequent in science fiction, which the following sections will show.

1.4.2 The Other as Monster

The degree of Otherness, and how the other is portrayed is as previously mentioned closely linked to the view of the Self (centre), but how that Other is represented can differ. *The Other as Monster* “illustrates difference as threat”, and usually has a “markedly non-human”

appearance, which according to Kerslake (13) serves as a reminder of the “terrestriality” and “physical limitations” of humanity. Kerslake marks that the Monster “provide yet another measure against which humanity may constantly redefine itself” (13), and gives the example of Grendel in *Beowulf*, who serves as a tool for Beowulf to prove his heroism with. However, she continues by referring to Gary K. Wolfe who writes that ideally the monster is not destroyed, but appropriated, meaning it should become part of the Self. After all, if the Monster can be destroyed, it will be less Other, since “mortality and death are also measures of humanity” (13).

1.4.3 The Other as Enemy

Another representation is that of *the Other as Enemy*. Unlike the Monster, this Other is given human traits, such as intelligence, but also enough negative traits for it to be seen as an adversary and enough exoticism for it to be perceived as Other. It is often seen as a larger threat than the Other as Monster, due to its similarities with the Self. As Khair notes: “For what is more terrifying, being confronted with the Other [...] or the realisation that the Other is related to your Self?” (159). The necessity to remove the threat is thus also more prominent: “Once clearly identified as aggressive, or implacable, or too ‘different’ to coexist peacefully with an enlightened humanity, then the Other becomes a legitimate target” (Kerslake 19).

Furthermore, the Other as Enemy is consistently seen as inferior since it reflects humanity’s heroism and superiority: “The Other is given a place in our preferred social vision of ourselves” (Kerslake 9). Malmgren gives an example of how the aliens in *Ender’s Game* are treated as enemies, based on the idea of evolutionary law: “survival of the fittest” (25), which is a viewpoint criticised in the book. A view of the Other as Enemy therefore justifies violence, since it is necessary in that perspective to ensure humanity’s survival. For humans to survive, the Other must be inferior. If we expand this concept to the idea of terracentrism, the

Other as Enemy also includes other planets and galaxies. In this view, humanity's need for survival legitimises terraforming and colonising other celestial bodies.

1.4.4 The Other as Friend/Self

The opposite of the Other as Enemy or Monster is *the Other as friend* or *the Other as Self*. One example is *the anthropomorphised Other*, which is given traits from the Self to diminish its Otherness (Kerslake 12), such as when an alien is given animal traits or an animal is given human traits. The Other as Friend/Self is a problematic image because it consists of paradoxes (20). Once the Other has been given enough similar traits as the Self, it is absorbed by the centre, becoming less Other. The alien would not be alien anymore. Kerslake writes that “According to Said’s idea of ‘us’ and ‘them’, one group’s knowledge of another is of necessity self-limited. The moment either group is aligned too closely with its alternative is the moment difference becomes similarity and when the Other emerges into ‘us’”(20). Similarly, Khair claims that “the Other, in order to be the Other, cannot be reduced to the Self” (168), and adds that many postcolonial narratives, in their pursuit to positivise the Other, instead replicate the structures of mainstream European thought, and thereby reduce the Other “to more of the same” (170).

One way of constructing the Other as Friend or as Self, however, is by allowing communication. Malmgren writes that “communication between species suspends the ‘law’ of Darwinian struggle; it allows the humanization of the other” (21). This is also why the construction of the Other as Enemy often entails denying the Other language (Kerslake 11). Therefore, to understand the Other as the Self, one must occupy the Other’s position, for example seeing the world from their eyes or through their stories (Malmgren 25). Once again, this can be problematic, as Khair notes: “When the Other is reduced to the language of the Self,

it becomes subaltern” (108). While communication might narrow the gap between Self and Other, the risk of erasing the Other persists.

Kerslate remarks that the concept of the Other as Self rests upon an anthropocentric worldview, in which science fiction has already positioned Earth at the centre: “Regardless of worthy intent, any text that attempts to relegate the Other to the position of ‘friend’ is guilty of the very crime it strives to prevent” (20). This means that the idea of seeing the Other as a Self from an earlier phase of evolution, or as a savage version of oneself, also presupposes that the Self is superior.

1.4.5 The Other as Truly Other

In contrast to extrapolative encounters, “speculative SF attempts in various ways to suggest the possibility of, and even to approach the condition of, ‘real’ ontological Otherness” (Malmgren 26). There is, however, the innate problem of describing something truly Other by tools of the Self (human language), because that would decrease its Otherness. Malmgren writes that one way in which science fiction authors try to deal with this problem is to describe the human response to the Other, and that it requires depicting the “‘disassociation of sensibility’ such an experience would entail” (27). It is also possible to describe what the alien *does*, instead of what it *is* (Malmgren 29). A third way is to render the limitations of human response to the alien (Malmgren 28). In contrast to the anthropocentric worldview in which the Self (humanity mostly) is often seen as superior, this perspective instead belittles the Self (human) and its inadequacy to understand the Truly Other. Authors commonly use metaphors to “parody and ridicule the pretensions” of humanity’s efforts in understanding (Malmgren 28). If, however, a character would understand the truly Other, the risk is that he would become alien to himself. Malmgren notes that the “encounter with speculative Otherness entails the

possibility of ‘falling through’ from one reality to another, of really radical change, of a fate that itself is ineffable” (31).

1.5 Earlier Readings

In the Bachelor thesis *Understanding the Monster – Challenging Negative Images of Spiders with Adrian Tchaikovsky’s Children of Time*, Dominique Desanges argues that spiders are depicted as empathetic characters while still retaining their spider characteristics. Drawing on previous portrayals of spiders and literature studies about animal narrators, Desanges argues in her reading that Tchaikovsky “expands upon the common themes of big bug films and turns them on their head” (10–11). This is because the novel familiarises readers with spider traits through frequent exposure, and also criticises human biases towards them.

Desanges points to the third person-narrative, the shifting points-of-view, and anthropomorphism as important elements in depicting the spiders as “relatable, appealing characters” (1). She argues that it is significant that a third person-narrative is used for all characters, since it enables an illustration of humans’ reactions to spiders, and vice versa, without favoring either side (2, 4). In a similar manner, Desanges points to the shifting points-of-view between these characters as important, because the reader can thus gain insight into the behaviour of the spiders, while simultaneously seeing humans in a new light. Furthermore, she argues that anthropomorphism of the spiders “allows for the text to more closely examine the differences and similarities between the worldviews of spiders and humans” (5).

In summary, Desanges points in her reading to how the abovementioned qualities of the text renders a positive depiction of spiders, in contrast to much of previous Western literature and film, and that it also allows for human readers to relate to the spiders. Through the novel, Desanges notes, “humans become more alien” and “spiders become more familiar” (11).

Chapter 2 – Otherness in *Children of Time*

The textual analysis in this essay aims to show how Otherness is portrayed in Adrian Tchaikovsky's *Children of Time*. I will begin by looking at how Othering is at work in the novel, and continue with looking at the different portrayals of the Other, as they are defined in the previous chapter: the Other as Monster, Enemy, Friend/Self, and as Truly Other.

2.1 Othering in *Children of Time*

There are several ways in which Othering is at work in *Children of Time*. Firstly, it can be derived from the title that time is an important theme in the novel. As previously mentioned, time can work as a method of Othering, by transporting the Self far enough from its centre (a specific time or place) so that it becomes Other (Kerslake 17–18). In science fiction, this is typically done by intergalactic travel or time travel. Similarly, time as in evolution can work as Othering, such as when the Other is seen as a Self from a different stage of evolution (Rieder 3). In *Children of Time*, both of these methods are used.

The travel through space and time is evident in the experiences of Doctor Avrana Kern, the scientist from “Old Earth” who conducts the nanovirus experiment on the planet referred to as “Kern’s world” (Tchaikovsky 3). By travelling far from her world (her centre) to the terraformed planet meant for the nanovirus, Kern has already distanced herself from the humans on Earth, whom she thinks of as “[b]ickering primates, the lot of them” (4). This Othering continues when she, through what is called “cold sleep” (15), keeps her body alive (mostly) in a suspension chamber for millennia. When the people from her original centre, Earth, come in contact with her thousands of years later, she can no longer think of them as her people: “*I do not recognize you. You are not human. You are not from Earth. [...] there is nothing of Earth in you*” (92). Although Holsten and the others on *Gilgamesh* try to convince

Kern they are from Earth and are human (Self) like her – “*We are the human race*” (96) – she persists in claiming them to be Other, “You are not from *my* Earth. You are not *my* humanity” (97). Thus, through her distancing from Earth in time and distance, she no longer sees Earth-based humans as part of her Self.

Othering through time is also evident in the journey of the crew on the spaceship *Gilgamesh* – particularly by the ship’s “classicist” (an expert on Old Earth culture and history) Doctor Holsten Mason’s story. In the first contact with Kern (who then speaks through an AI copy of herself), Holsten reflects upon the differences between his people and the projected image of Kern: “It was a face from an era and a society and an ethnicity that time had otherwise erased. The kinship between it and the crew of the *Gilgamesh* seemed tenuous, coincidental” (97). Further on, the use of suspension chambers also impacts how Holsten sees the people from his own crew. As he sleeps for different periods of time, biologically unaged, other members of his crew are awake for longer periods, causing a time dissonance between them. People originally (biologically) younger than him, are (biologically) older at another time. One time that he is awoken, he notices how a crew member, Isa Lain, has aged: “It struck him that there were lines on her face that were foreign to him” (127); another time, he notices the changes in her voice as she “sounded partly like the woman Holsten remembered” (320). Eventually, Lain, who was younger than Holsten originally, has the body of an old woman while he remains mostly unchanged. Her Otherness is made evident in the animal-like description of her hands “like bird’s claws, almost flesh-less” (520–521). Holsten thinks of time as “a weight that he seemed to have been cut free from” (313), which consequently leads to the Othering of those still affected by time.

Otherness defined by evolution, previously mentioned as seeing the Other as Self at a different stage of evolution, is also depicted in how Holsten regards people on *Gilgamesh* who are not part of his original crew. Between turns in the suspension chamber, Holsten notices that

a group of people never go into cold sleep. Instead, they have children, and their children have children, leading to generations living and dying on the ship (436). When Holsten wakes up to see these people watching him, he has difficulties seeing them as Self, instead, their Otherness is created by how they are depicted as less civilized or less evolved: “The whole scene had a weirdly primal feel to it, a resurgence of the primitive days of mankind” (314). Holsten thinks of them as “nothing but monkeys aping their long-vanished betters” (436), as “a hostile creature” (314), and as “lice infesting the ark ship” (318). Here, again, time plays a part in the Othering of people Holsten originally thought of as part of his group (Self). Similar to Kern’s view, when Holsten’s Self is transported in time too far from its original centre, the previous Self (us) becomes Other (them).

Besides using time for Othering, the novel uses different characters’ perspectives in alternating chapters. As previously mentioned, the reader can follow Kern’s and Holsten’s points of view, and besides that, there are also the spiders’ points of view. While Kern’s and Holsten’s perspectives jump in and out of time, placing their chapters with centuries or millennia apart, the spiders’ chapters follow generations of spiders. The spiders’ Selves are preserved in their names and their knowledge (189–190). Even though the individual spider can be new from chapter to chapter, they keep the names Portia (the main point-of-view), Bianca, Viola, and Fabian, and they share previous generations’ knowledge through what is called “Understandings”, a form of genetic knowledge (67). This structure allows the reader to see all generations of spiders as only four characters, limiting the Self to a species instead of an individual. Furthermore, the alternating perspectives allow for the Othering of both spiders and humans since the reader can identify with the different characters through their point-of-view. Desanges argues in her reading that this shift of perspectives allows for the normalisation of spider behaviour which could make the reader empathise with the spiders (1–2). Even though

my reading in part corroborates with Desanges's analysis, I would argue that the generated empathy depends on what aspects of the Other (the spiders) that the human empathises with.

As previously noted, the perspective of the Self defines the Other, and literature can thus enable the reader to occupy the Other's subjective point-of-view (Kerslake 10, Malmgren 25). While this is partly discernible through the various perspectives presented in the novel, the narrator for each perspective could be argued to be an additional Self presenting its knowledge of the world to the reader. In Kern's and Holsten's chapters, the narrator is strictly third person limited, whereas the narrator in the spiders' chapters is partly omniscient as well. The latter is particularly evident in the descriptions of the spiders, in which the narrator compares the spiders to humans, despite the spiders' initial lack of knowledge about humans. Desanges argues that the third-person narrator is significant for objective portrayals of both spiders and humans (2). However, I would posit that any thoughts or reflections attributed to the characters, whether human or spider, are filtered through the voice of the respective narrator, especially in the spider's chapters. Therefore, Othering is also evident in how the characters are described. Keeping this in mind, the following sections will present an analysis of how the Other is portrayed in the novel.

2.2 The Other as Monster in *Children of Time*

There are various depictions of the Other as Monster in the novel. Firstly, there are the spiders. They are initially portrayed as "markedly non-human", as the Other as Monster is classified by Kerslake (13), with the description of their physical appearance, for example in the introduction of the spider's main point-of-view character Portia.

Her small abdomen holds her book-lungs and the bulk of her gut. Her head-body is dominated by two huge eyes facing forwards for perfect binocular vision, beneath a pair of tiny tufts that crown her like horns. [...] her fangs are flanked by limb-like mouthparts. (Tchaikovsky 20)

Besides the descriptions, the omniscient narrator adds to the Othering of the spiders through the consistent comparison between spiders and humans, for example as in “Portia has no thoughts. Her sixty thousand neurons barely form a brain, contrasted with a human’s one hundred billion” (21), thereby placing humanity at the centre. The anthropocentric view is also visible in the assumption of the spider as Monster, for example when the virus has enlarged the spiders and they are described as “half a metre from fangs to spinners, an arachnophobe’s nightmare” (45). The narrator here displays knowledge of an assumed (human) fear of spiders. In Holsten’s chapters, this view is also dominant at first, such as in the humans’ first encounter with the spiders where they “had a moment’s glimpse of many bristling legs spread wide, two fangs like curved hooks striking savagely towards the camera with ferocious speed and savagery” (118). In her reading, Desanges points to this negative image of spiders evident in the text, and notes that this is a common portrayal in the European mythos. The lack of anthropomorphism evident in the European view of the spider, she writes, “leads to a disconnect between human and spiders” (4). Although, whereas Desanges’s reading eventually points to the positive of not “sacrificing” the “spider qualities” (1), I would argue that the depiction of spider as Monster is most frequently evident when those qualities are in focus.

However, the word choices “savagely” and “savagery” hint at something more than Monster, as they reveal an evolutionary connection between the human Self and the spiders. The spiders are indeed given human traits, transforming them into what Kerslake calls *the anthropomorphised Other* (12). This transforms the spiders into Other as Enemy, and Other as Self, which will be discussed further on.

Another way in which the Other is portrayed as Monster in the novel is when the spiders’ points-of-view enables humans (and other creatures) to be Othered. Although the spiders’ chapters are presented by an omniscient narrator – visible in the narrator’s knowledge – they otherwise follow a spider character’s limited point-of-view. As Rieder writes, science

fiction can “turn things upside down and inside out” (4), and that is what the novel does here. In the spiders’ first contact with a human being, a spider (one of the Portias) thinks of the human as a “creature”, “thing”, and “alien monster” (Tchaikovsky 230). The spiders do not think of the human as Enemy at first. Since they do not see anything of themselves in the human, it is “not a threat to be confronted, but a mystery to be unravelled” (231), and “no more intelligent than a Paussid beetle or a Spitter, and perhaps less” (237). Instead, humans are compared to animals the spiders use for food: “The dead giants were dissected and found to be essentially identical to mice” (235). The spiders are thus placed in the centre in their chapters, and what is Other is created by how it differs from their Self. For example, when human movement is compared to the spider anatomy, the narrator describes how “the giant was moving its extremities, the deft sub-legs that it used to manipulate objects, in a manner imitative of palp-signalling, as though it was trying to mimic the basic visual speech of the spiders” (236). This shift of perspective allows the reader to see the world, and herself, through the Other’s point of view, and thus in a way step into that Other’s Self.

2.3 The Other as Enemy in *Children of Time*

As previously shown, once the Other is seen as aggressive, too different, or too implacable to coexist with the Self, it becomes a threat (Kerslake 19). If the Other is seen as a Monster, it can be destroyed, since it shares no traits with the Self. However, when the Other exhibits sufficient semblance to the Self, it must first be categorised as Enemy to justify the destruction of it. This is evident in for example the dehumanisation of the Other in wars. As earlier noted, the principle of natural selection, the Darwinian view on competition between species, is closely linked to a categorisation of “us” and “them” (Rieder 3, Malmgren 20). In the novel, this is illustrated in the power struggle that puts spiders against ants, spiders against spiders, humans

against humans, and spiders against humans. Thus, in *Children of Time*, the Other is portrayed as Enemy in various ways.

To begin with, the spiders antagonise some other species they perceive as “something more than animal” (Tchaikovsky 102). Firstly, there are the “Spitters”, a different type of arachnid that share their world: “The two species have clashed over untold generations, each time with more understanding of the enemy” (50). The Spitters are Other as Enemy because they compete for the same space, and share some traits with the Portia’s people as “both recognize that the other is something less than kin but something more than prey” (50). As previously noted, recognizing something of the Self in the Other instils greater fear than perceiving the Other as entirely different. This is why the Spitters, although deemed “barely removed from a state of brute nature” (102) are seen as a threat. The narrator states that “to look into their small, weak eyes is nonetheless to recognize that here is a thing of intellect – and hence, danger” (102). To a human reader, the difference between spiders may not appear evident. However, the novel mirrors how humans frequently perceive the Other. Discernible here are for instance how humans throughout history have Othered people with different appearance to legitimise conflict. Thus, the Other (spider) could also be interpreted here as the Self (human), which will be discussed later.

Secondly, for many generations, the spiders fight massive ant colonies over territories (Tchaikovsky 102). In contrast to the Spitters, an individual ant “does not think” (103), instead, the colony is the Other, since there “is no intelligence within the colony, but there is such a hierarchy of interacting and co-dependent instinct that it seems to Portia that *some* manner of entity is behind a colony’s actions and reactions” (103). As will be discussed later, the colony is Truly Other in some ways, although due to the threat towards the spiders, they also view the colony as Enemy since “its very existence here endangers their people’s future” (104).

Some similarities between spiders and ants also contribute to the recognition of the Self, such as the previously mentioned ability to “think”, and their shared theological interest in the light in the sky (Kern’s pod) (110). However, the Other is consistently seen as inferior, which is mentioned by Kerslake (9) and Malmgren (25) as another element necessary to justify the violence. The spiders are described as “more intelligent than their enemies” (Tchaikovsky 137). Besides the level of intelligence, the spiders consider the ants to lack qualities highly valued in the spider community since “the ants work by nature. They have no inclination or capacity to consider the wider philosophy of life, and so such opportunity would be wasted on them” (179). Eventually, the spiders “tame” the ant colony through a chemical substance (211), by “converting them” (212) to their cause. As Bianca says, “*I have given them new minds, and henceforth they are our allies*” (213). The colonial mindset evident in human history is thus recognisable in the spiders’ way of dealing with the Other as Enemy. Here, the spiders’ treatment of ants, and their view of them as inferior, mirrors human practices of slave ownership or domestication of animals.

In comparison, a larger species of arachnids is not perceived as Enemy, due to its dissimilarity to the Self. They are described as “a species that the nanovirus has managed to gift with greater size and little else” (5), and that lacks the neural capacity to feel a “sense of self” (47) and the ability to “contemplate the universe” (48). Intelligence and self-awareness are thus traits closely connected to Portia’s people’s conception of Self. In turn, this relates to the view humans typically have of their Self, and might thereby, in the reader, generate a sense of identification with the spiders, which will be discussed further on. Additionally, there are species the spiders recognise themselves in, such as stomapods with which the spiders have “cautious, ritualized relations” (102), but that pose no threat since “the two species have nothing to compete over” (102).

Thirdly, the spiders also antagonise each other when the competition of resources between nests increase. Once again, the Self (in this case a group of spiders) perceives a threat to its existence. The groups (mainly from the cities Great Nest and Seven Trees) perceive the Other as adversary and inferior, since they do not share the same beliefs, thus “division spreads from local differences into a global fragmentation of ideology” (380), since they interpret the will of “God” (Kern) differently. This construction of the Other as Enemy serves to justify claiming resources.

Great Nest’s position is uncompromising. Demands are made for other resources belonging to Seven Trees and the allied cities: farms, colonies, laboratories. When Seven Trees protests, the speakers for Great Nest label them heretics. The Messenger has spoken. She has chosen Her champions. This is not a war: it is a crusade. (387)

A similar construction of the Other as Enemy is seen between humans aboard *Gilgamesh*, when two groups of people start fighting for control of the ship (122). The division between “us” and “them” is created when the captain decides one group should part with the ship to start a moon colony. The designated colonists, realising they will surely die there, then fight for survival:

We’re supposed to make a life down there, on the ice, inside those stupid little boxes the automatics have made. [...] Generations of ice-dwellers, forgetting and forgetting who we ever were, wasting away and never seeing the sun except as just another star. [...] while *you* – all you glorious star-travellers – get to sleep wrapped in your no-time, and wake up two hundred years later as if it’s just the next day? [...] And when *you* woke up, all of you *chosen* who weren’t condemned to the ice, we’d be dead. We’d be generations dead, all of us. (145)

As with the spiders, the confrontation between humans is driven by fear, and by division of ideologies between groups. In the language in the above example, Othering is discerned in for example how “you” is italicised.

When the humans arrive to Kern’s world aboard *Gilgamesh*, both species regard the Other as Enemy. Initially, both humans and spiders view each other as Monster, as previously

shown, but once they recognise a part of the Self in the Other, and fear the extinction of their species, the Other becomes Enemy. When Holsten encounters one of the spiders, this is evident as “he felt an unbearable shock of connection, as though it was trespassing on territory he had only ever shared with another human being before” (224–225). Similarly, when his crewmate Vitas experiences the same sensation, the fear of the spiders increases, and she says, “They’re *looking* at me” (582). As previously noted, the recognition of the Self in the Other is often more fearsome than the actual confrontation with Other (Khair 159).

For the spiders, the recognition of Self in humans follows their contact with Kern, whom they initially worshiped as a god called “the Messenger” but came to understand was of the same species as the humans. Bianca, through her genetic knowledge, remembers the contact with the Other that they first saw as Monster: “It seems so hard to believe that such a huge, ponderous thing could have been sentient, but apparently it was. More than sentient. Things like *that* – just as the Messenger had once been a thing like that – are the *ur-race*” (512). Through Kern’s warnings, the spiders learn that “the enemy is coming” (511), since the “survival of an entire species, of a whole planet’s evolutionary history, is now at stake” (515), and if they lose “then there will be no future for them and, with that severed tomorrow, all their yesterdays will be undone as well” (516). Once again, the perceived threat to survival of their species constructs the Other as Enemy.

Additionally, every (human) attempt at seeing the spiders as equal, as Self, is repressed as “‘They’re essentially a completely different form of life to us. They’re not like us at all, in any way.’ Holsten, listening, heard too much emphasis on those words” (544). Even considering the possibility that the Enemy could be Self is superseded by the Darwinian law.

“What if they’re sentient?” Holsten asked.[---]

“In that case,” Vitas considered, “it will only be in the sense that a computer might be considered sentient [...]

“No,” said Holsten patiently, “what if they’re actually sentient. Alive and independent, evolved?”

Exalted came the word inside his head. *The exaltation of beasts*. [...]

“Don’t be ridiculous,” Vitas snapped, and surely they all heard the tremble in her voice. “In any event, it doesn’t matter [...] Whatever we are ranged against, it is doing its best to destroy us. We must respond accordingly.” (555)

In other words, it is necessary to view the Other as inferior to the Self to justify the Other’s destruction, which was also true regarding the spiders’ view of the ants. As Kerslake notes, the Other must be constructed to fit into the Self’s “preferred social vision” of itself (9). As has been shown, the Self must recognise itself in the Other, while simultaneously experience an existential threat to itself, to view the Other as Enemy.

2.4 The Other as Friend/Self in *Children of Time*

There are several instances in which *Children of Time* depicts the Other as Friend or Self. This also leads to the aforementioned inherent problems, such as the risk of placing the Self above the Other, replicating European mainstream ideas, and reducing the Other to the Self, which this chapter will show.

To begin with, the view of the Other as a Self from an earlier stage of evolution is evident in Holsten’s narrative. The ship-born people on *Gilgamesh* are from his point of view “underdeveloped” (314), “degenerate savages” (368), and “monkeys” (369). Furthermore, Holsten thinks of their weapons as primitive – “these were the ancient tools of the hunter-gatherers” (319), and of their behaviour towards him as if he is more evolved: “They continued to regard him with that curious reverence, as though they had caged a demigod” (318). Later the group is repeatedly referred to as a “tribe”, which could give connotations to indigenous or primitive societies. Holsten’s view of the ship-born as further down the evolutionary ladder consolidates them as a Self from a different stage (Other), thereby placing him above them.

Similarly, Kern views the people on *Gilgamesh* as an underdeveloped Self. She speaks of them as “monkeys, nothing but monkeys” (97).

A similar representation is exhibited in the overall point-of-view of the spiders. Following numerous generations, the spiders’ tale is also one of evolution. The omniscient narrator constantly compares the spiders to the (Western) human Self, and its history. Due to the nanovirus, the spiders begin as mindless creatures (21) but evolve into explorers with the “ability to solve problems: physical, spatial, theoretical, social” (46). Then they domesticate other creatures (64), develop religion (133), create over-distance language (134), conduct scientific experiments (138), build cities (150), establish social hierarchies (179), discover astronomy (238), develop radio (305), build a satellite (482), and eventually becomes space-faring (513). This development echoes Western civilisation and its evolution from primitive to enlightened, thereby portraying the Other (spiders) as Self (human).

This echo of humanity in the spiders is also something Desanges notes in her reading, where she points to how “spiders serve as a reflection of the humans and their own society” (8–9). By allowing the reader to see through the spiders’ eyes, through their point-of-view, the Other can be, as Malmgren (25) argues, truly understood as the Self. In her reading, Desanges argues that the anthropomorphism evident in giving the spiders human traits “allow human readers to relate to them” (2). However, as both Kerslake (20) and Khair (168–170) note, this reduces the Otherness of the Other, and the (positive) image conveyed instead risks becoming a replica of the Self (humanity).

The final merging of the spider Other and the human Self is made evident towards the conclusion of the novel, as the nanovirus (through a plan devised by the spiders) infects the humans aboard *Gilgamesh*.

They [the humans] step down among the tide of spiders [...] There is no evident revulsion, no sudden panic. The humans [...] seem entirely at ease. One even puts her hand out, letting it brush across the

thronging backs. The virus in them is telling them all, *This is us; they are like us*. It tells the spiders the same [...] *We are like you*. (Tchaikovsky 592)

In this example, the anthropomorphic evolution is complete, as the spiders and humans have left their savage history and become fully empathetic towards each other. In the final chapter, Tchaikovsky points this out as “empathy – the sheer inability to see those around them as anything other than people too – conquers all, in the end” (598). Desanges argues that the purpose of this anthropomorphism is “not to make the spiders appear more like humans, but to bring more clarity to their spider nature” (13). Although the alterity of, supposed, spider and humans traits indeed could become more clear through anthropomorphism, it is because the reader recognises the Self, and thus also sees what is Other.

Another way in which the spiders (Other) mirror humanity (Self), albeit through reversed roles, is through the representation of gender. As pointed out by Rieder, science fiction often turns “things upside down and inside out” (4), and this satirical reversal makes the rereading of the Self (humanity) possible (6). In *Children of Time* this is evident in for example the female spiders' view of males. At first, when the nanovirus begins to evolve their species, males are seen as “prey/mate/irrelevant” (Tchaikovsky 22). Slowly, through many generations, they are seen as “ally” (22) but still far inferior to females, as Portia considers, “No need to give him his name. Females do not refer to males by name” (46). Even when they are given names, one of them is referred to as Fabian (100), they are lowest in the hierarchy, and restricted from social roles (138). Portia believes that the “idea of a male warrior is absurd [...] that way anarchy lies, the reversal of the natural order of things” (151). The motivation and intellect of males are also questioned. For example, Portia says to Bianca, “*But surely they must be constantly trying to court you*”, and she wonders, “what else did males actually want out of life?” (183). The (satirical) references to human gender stereotypes are particularly apparent in expressions such as “girls will be girls” (155).

The development of these roles mirrors (Western) human history as well, since gender inequality lessens as the spiders become more civilized. At first, males are often killed as prey (22), or after mating (23). Later, it becomes “frowned upon” to hunt males, since “[k]illing a male, sanctioned or not, is a world apart from killing a beast” (155). The unacceptable behaviour of killing a male under any other circumstance than after mating is seen by one of the females as “a mark of how far their species has come” (154). Eventually, the males manage to change traditions, by being useful in a war between rival spider communities, and thus Fabian demands equal rights, “‘*I want the right to live,*’ he tells them, as firmly as he dares, ‘*I want the death of a male to be punishable, just as the death of a female is – even a death after mating. I want the right to build my own peer house, and to speak for it*’” (394). Males acquire these rights, and towards the end of the novel they can hold different positions in society. However, they are still seen as “frail” (474), and the females are the leaders and generals (515–516).

Even though Othering is arguably also at work in the representation of males and females, the references to human gender roles through the reversed perspective, and the improved equality also evident in Western human history, allow the reader to reflect upon the Self and recognise parts of it in the Other. As with the spiders’ overall evolution, however, this also risks erasing or diminishing the Other’s Otherness.

Lastly, the question of what constitutes the Self, and what is Other, is illustrated in the artificial intelligence (AI) and human composite that is Kern. When she first goes into the suspension chamber in her pod above Kern’s world, she uploads “an image of her consciousness” named Eliza into the pod computer (19). It is an “imperfect copy”, but “able to react to external events in a simulation of [Kern’s] own best judgement” (19). At first, when communicating with Eliza, Kern thinks of it as Self since “she instinctively felt she should converse with it as though it was human” (26). Kern does not expect to stay in cold sleep for

long but ends up spending millennia in suspension, which causes her body to degenerate and her real consciousness to blend with the AI. In communication with *Gilgamesh* the uploaded consciousness, Eliza, and (the original) Kern's thoughts are displayed simultaneously side by side:

The Second Brin Sentry Habitat acknowledges your request for assistance. You are currently on a heading that will bring you to a quarantine planet and no interference with this planet will be countenanced.

Cold so cold so very long waiting waiting why won't they come what has happened can they all really have gone is there nobody nothing left at all of home so very cold coffin cold coffin cold nothing is working [...] (85).

As shown in the example, the AI responds coherently, while the original Kern part is depicted as a stream-of-consciousness.

The distinction between Kern and Eliza later becomes more and more vague as the stream-of-consciousness shows: "What are you doing what are you in my mind taking taking[...] Eliza Kerns has stolen me stolen mine stolen mind" (87). Even Kern herself does not know if the Other (AI) is Other or part of the Self: "*I am human. I must be human. Am I the system? Am I the upload? Is there anything of me left? Why can I not feel my body*" (98). Holsten is also unsure of what Kern is, as he explains, "I believe she's human. Or she *was* human, once. Perhaps some melding of human and machine" (197). Eventually, there are seemingly three distinct Selves, all part of Kern, and all simultaneously Other: Eliza, the AI-Kern, and the organic mind Kern. "Avrana Kern – or the thing that considers herself to be her" (455) reflects upon what she is when communicating with Eliza. Kern hears both Eliza and the stream-of-consciousness that is part of her, "if what she has touched is an organic mind, then *I must be ...*" (453–454). In the transformation described above, one can argue that something Truly Other can be discerned, which will be discussed next.

2.5 The Other as Truly Other in *Children of Time*

Malmgren observes an innate challenge in describing the Truly Other, as it necessitates using the tools of the Self (human language), thereby decreasing the Other's Otherness (27). That is something one must keep in mind when analysing depictions of this kind. Nevertheless, there are some examples of how *Children of Time* could be said to portray something Truly Other.

Firstly, the ant colony, as previously mentioned, could in some ways be considered Truly Other. Described as “a vast and flexible biological difference engine, a self-perfecting machine” (Tchaikovsky 103), the ant colony works mainly as a computer for the spiders (once domesticated). The colony becomes large enough to live inside, and eventually complex enough to hold the information that is AI-Kern.

[I]n a network of tunnels and chambers the geography of which is constantly being altered, dwells a colony of hundred million insects. Their interactions are not as fast as an electronic system built by human hands, but each insect's tiny brain is itself a capable engine for data storage and decision making, and the overall calculating power of the colony as a whole is something that even it cannot assess. [...]

There is more than enough room for the downloaded mind of Avrana Kern. (535)

Even though ants share some biological similarities with the human Self, the combination of them to form a super-computer transcends into something unknown. Machines and biological computers could be said to be Truly Other, which leads to the next example.

As earlier discussed, the boundaries between what is Self and what is Other regarding the compound of machine and human that is Kern are vague. It could be argued that, even though she is partly human, the newly formed mixture is also something Truly Other as the “distinction between living woman, uploaded personality construct and pod systems was not finely drawn” (307). Kern herself does not know if she is human anymore, since she thinks that “nowhere could she say where she herself ended and where the machine began” (308). Similarly, the Captain of the *Gilgamesh* uploads a copy of his consciousness to the ship's computer, which causes several “little AI programs that think they're still people” (325), and

he reflects upon the difference between them and his Self, “None of them *were* me – not enough of me” (376). In these examples, a part of the Self (something human) is still evident, which reduces their Otherness. Clearly, the idea of a conscious machine has traits discernible as both Self and Other, as long as the concept of consciousness is seen as something part of the Self (human).

Conclusion

In this essay, I have explored the representation of Otherness in Adrian Tchaikovsky's novel *Children of Time*. Utilizing the various portrayals of the Other often encountered in the genre – The Other as Monster, Enemy, Friend/Self, and Truly Other – I have analysed the techniques of Othering and the depictions of the Other in the novel. My analysis suggests that the novel draws upon several typical methods of Othering observed in science fiction, such as time, space, and reversed points-of-view, and that it contains all the categories mentioned. Furthermore, it also illustrates the multifaceted transience of this categorisation since Otherness is portrayed as something fluid and dependant on perspective. Finally, the novel also simultaneously questions and mirrors humanity through the portrayals of Otherness.

The fluid nature of Otherness is evident in how different characters or groups of characters can be portrayed both as various Others, and as Self. Spiders, for instance, are portrayed as Monster at first, then Enemy, and finally Friend/Self. This occurs due to two reasons. Firstly, the understanding of the Other changes the Self's perception of it. As, for example, the humans on *Gilgamesh* begin to recognise parts of themselves, such as intelligence and language, in the spiders, while still considering them a threat, they begin to perceive the spiders as Enemy. This illustrates how the Self constructs Otherness based on the knowledge of the Other and the need of the Self.

Secondly, when the Other, or the Self, transforms in some manner, the perception of the Other changes. The novel suggests that the original Self (me/us) can become Other (you/them), when transforming the Self or distancing the Self from a past time or place. The fluidity in portrayals emphasises the constructivist nature of the concept of the Other. It is a process of defining and redefining both the Self and the Other (Said 332, Kerslake 3), making the categorisations both multifaceted and transient.

The redefinitions mentioned are perhaps most evident in the evolving portrayals of the spiders. The Darwinian idea of evolution commonly seen in science fiction (Rieder 3) serves as a key element in the novel, as the plot revolves around a nanovirus accelerating the spiders' progression towards intelligent and social beings. In this aspect, the opportunity to examine the (human) Self's reflection in the mirror of the (spider) Other – suggested by Kerslake (11) and Malmgren (15) as one the virtues of science fiction – is particularly useful. For instance, all positive virtues ascribed to the spiders, such as language, intelligence, and empathy, are positive reflections attributed to humanity. The negatives, such as bestiality, indifference, and savagery are ascribed to the Other as Monster. This too, however, reflects the (human) Self, albeit the darker sides of humanity. As the spiders evolve, they become more and more similar to humans, and their evolution mirrors the evolution of the (Western) human civilisation.

In her reading, Desanges argues that the anthropomorphism evident in the portrayals of spiders serve to create empathy and familiarity with them among human readers (11, 13). My argument, which has been shown in the analysis, is that the humanisation in itself does not familiarise humans with spiders, but rather the reader can see a reflection of the Self in the spider characters. Consequently, any comprehension or empathy thus created, is not directed towards the spiders per se, but rather reflects a narcissistic affection for the humanity mirrored in them. Khair writes that many colonial narratives viewed the Other as flawed and the Self as superior, exemplified in the dichotomy of uncivilised versus civilised (171). The novel's utilisation of the nanovirus to civilise the spiders echoes this perspective. The European Self-image is thereby evident in Tchaikovsky's evolution of the spiders, presenting it as a positive development.

The novel also suggests that Otherness is dependent on perspective. As has been shown, who the Self is constitutes who the Other is. Through alternating chapters, the reader can put themselves into the point-of-view of both spiders, humans, and an AI-human compound, and

thus through that Self gain insight into how Otherness could be perceived. This way of turning things upside down is commonly used in science fiction (Rieder 4), but the novel raises the question of whether this is actually possible. Through the omniscient third person narrator of the spiders' chapters, the Self is not only the characters, but also the narrator. Therefore, what it knows about the Other and what it reveals through its voice is also relevant in the portrayals. Additionally, the novel is written in a human language which Khair notes reduces the Other to the subaltern (108). Khair also argues that narrating the Other risks replicating the structures of "mainstream European thought" (170), which is visible in the novel in for example how the spiders are anthropomorphised and compared to humans.

In conclusion, the various depictions of Otherness in *Children of Time* serve to ask questions about humanity, the Self, and the Other. It explores how we construct the Other, what that suggests about us, and what the boundaries that constitute the Self are, and it does so by drawing upon common portrayals of the Other evident in science fiction. In contrast to Desanges's reading, this analysis suggests that the novel's objective of cultivating empathy and understanding towards the spiders operates primarily at a superficial level. While the spiders indeed develop into more civilised beings than the human characters, this progression occurs through a transformation into the (European human) Self. Ultimately, *Children of Time* might not lead to a genuine understanding of spiders or the Other but could through its exploration of Otherness provide some valuable insights into what it means to be human, arguably one of the virtues of the genre.

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