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Isiah Lavender III. *Afrofuturism Rising: The Literary Prehistory of a Movement.* New Suns: Race, Gender, and Sexuality Series. Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2019. xi + 230 pp. $29.95, paper, ISBN 978-0-8142-5556-8.

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Isiah Lavender III sets out to transform the way that readers perceive and classify works by African American authors that delicately unfold the personal histories, oppressions, and hopes of black people. The author's objective is a thorough examination of how specific mid-twentieth-century African American works were protoforms of Afrofuturism. Within *Afrofuturism Rising*, there exist references to contemporary occurrences of racial hope, strife, and injustice that the audience would have heavily ingrained in their memories. These occurrences include the xenophobia awakened through Trump's "Make America Great Again" campaign, the O. J. Simpson trial, and the Black Lives Matter movement that rose and grew around the killing of African American men and women, such as Trayvon Martin and Sandra Bland, at the hands of law enforcement. Lavender connects these events, which readers understand to be very real, to the narratives that novelists craft that readers often restrict to fantasy. For those who would find it challenging to categorize the African American canonical works Lavender asserts as Afrofuturism, the author lays out terms to convince skeptics of their place and role as pioneers in the literary genre early in his publication.

In his C*ritical Terminologies* section in the first chapter, Lavender introduces three key concepts—"networked consciousness," "transhistorical feedback loop," and "hope impulse"—that act as heuristics in determining Afrofuturist work and, subsequently, allow him to strengthen his argument of placing African American classics within the Afrofuturist subgenre. These concepts run throughout his work as tools to examine the enslavement of black people pre- and post-emancipation. As Lavender identifies and explains these terms, it becomes clear that they are common themes present in many black literary works but reworked with a futurist slant. For example, networked consciousness builds on abstractions well established in technoculture. More extensive interdisciplinary circles discuss historical feedback loop as recursivity and hope impulse as optimism, or simply, hope. Nonetheless, Lavender opts not to use these well-known discursive terms and adopts

his own. At times, it can be challenging not to be critical of Lavender's method or to be patient as he scrupulously develops several of his explications.

Lavender devotes the first three chapters of the publication establishing the argument that white alien invaders with their technologically advanced ships and devices came to the lands of African peoples and abducted and enslaved them. The notion can come off as far-fetched. Lavender chooses to create a transatlantic fantasy when truths about white colonialism and hegemony have been well recorded throughout history. It, furthermore, has been recorded fictionally in various ways—films, diaries, songs, and novels. These modes all have the possibility of fashioning a striking verisimilitude to the racial experience occurring during the time that makes the dichotomy between master and slave undeniably clear. Lavender's objective is not to capture an accurate historical description but to show readers how much the mystical, unreal, and unfathomable based within fiction, paradoxically, hold many truths about the realities reoccurring in histories of black people living under white supremacy. The mechanisms upholding this regime are continually working and mutating to do what they were designed to do: thrive on black oppression. As readers work through Lavender's explications that, at times, feel far-fetched, revisiting his words earlier in the publication may help make some deductions more reasonable. Lavender writes, "Afrofuturism has emerged to understand the science-fictional existence that blacks have *always* experienced living in the New World" (p. 9).

In part 2, Lavender applies an Afrofuturist grid to the works of three well-known authors, Zora Neale Hurston, Richard Wright, and John A. Williams. Each examination is presented as a case study. These fictional works, all featuring African American protagonists, seem fitting as their plot's range from being more or less aligned with the real: a woman reminiscing on aspects of her life and love affairs, a young man on the run for a heinous murder, and the dreams of an army captain critically injured after getting caught in enemy fire. They also have elements of the fantastical that Lavender takes the liberty to examine to persuade audiences that these novels fit within a similar subgenre of Afrofuturism that readers more associate with works by Octavia Butler and Samuel R. Delany. Lavender carefully unfolds each plot, which works as an extended summary for those unfamiliar with any of the novels. His reading of the three stories does involve more self-generated terms that Lavender introduces to the reader. He posits that Hurston's work focuses partly on "vernacular technology" and its relationship to forms of telepathy. In his chapter on *Native Son* (1940), Lavender carries Wright's description of Bigger's dark metallic hue to attribute the protagonist to being a cyborg. Lavender sees Captain Abraham Blackman's ability to jump through history to observe and manipulate events as literal and not deliria from a bedridden man on the verge of being a casualty of racism, imperialism, and warfare. Again, Lavender takes daring, applaud-worthy risks with his literary analysis; however, only with a generous reading will audiences accept his interpretations without deep reservations.

Lavender presents a condensed version of two case studies and analysis in his concluding chapter. The end of *Afrofuturism Rising* feels more like an abridged analysis than a concluding chapter. Readers are left with little attempt from the author to tie the body chapter case studies together and provide a more expected finish to his work. The chapter, nevertheless, lucidly and succinctly captures the points made in his lengthier body chapters on Hurston, Wright, and Williams by examining Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958) and Colson Whitehead's *The Underground Railroad* (2016). The first centers around white imperialism in the southeast Igbo region of Nigeria and the second, the enslavement of black bodies in America. Though more subdued than in his body chapters, there is an ever-present amount of stretching that Lavender does to make these classic novels fit an

Afrofuturist subgenre that may not have been necessary to convey his point. Both orality and intuition move from being Afrocentric epistemologies to signs of an Afrofuturist work. The conclusion also indicates that it is hard to find any novel on the black experience and interaction with white hegemonic structures that Lavender would not argue is Afrofuturist in some sense. Nevertheless, the conclusion demonstrates that when given less room to improvise, Lavender's imagination runs less away from him. The imaginativeness of Lavender's analysis may, in fact, be what is called from to see classic African American literature in a new light.