

## Robert Heinlein's *Space Cadet* and the Young Adult Reader: Understanding the Real World through Narrative Transportation Approach

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**Abstract:** *Young Adult science fiction is a growing body of work in the science fiction genre that encourages its readers to envision, evaluate, and question contemporary and future real-world incidents. This paper explores the effect of narrative transportation on young adult readers of Robert Heinlein's Space Cadet, a YA science fiction novel. One of the main aspects narrative transportation theory examines is how literature fosters teens' understanding and awareness of themselves and of issues important to them. In this sense, Space Cadet engages the young adult reader with its narrative, its characters, and other significant sociopolitical notions like gender roles, the representation of "other," and the politics of racism. Thus, by being immersed in the narrative and engaging with the explicit and implicit themes represented in the novel, transported young adult readers, we argue, may participate in changing existing social and political notions and (re)constructing their individuality through absorbing the traits, beliefs, and responsibilities of the fictitious juvenile protagonist and his experience, as well.*

**Keywords:** character identification, gender roles, narrative transportation, other, politics,

### 1. Introduction

In a 1957 lecture titled "Science Fiction: Its Nature, Faults and Virtues," Robert Heinlein, a writer of fast-paced science fiction (sci-fi/SF) and young adult (YA) science fiction, defined sci-fi as "realistic speculation about possible future events, based solidly on adequate knowledge of the real world, past and present, and on a thorough understanding of the nature and significance of the scientific method." As such, sci-fi extrapolates from scientific and technological development, as well as speculates about futuristic concerns that require a considerable degree of suspension of disbelief. Likewise, YA science fiction follows the same trends but with a focus on issues and challenges that meet the needs of younger readers. What have so far been neglected in critical analysis of the genre are the implications of narrative transportation theory on the study of YA science fiction, which targets young adult readers. Since adolescence is a phase in which the individual goes through physical and psychological development, we believe that most adolescent readers are drawn to this subgenre for its liberating and transformative capacity. Scholars of YA science fiction have recently realized

that this literary subgenre has a unique effect on building the identities, behaviors, and beliefs of young adult readers. YA science fiction, as Guerra (2009: 276) puts it, offers teenagers “portraits of their culture and generation that demythologize scientific advance, capitalism and laissez-faire economics as moral imperatives and pose plot conflicts that may in reality or by analogy define the next several decades and beyond.” These cultural portraits are processed when young adult readers are drawn to a “narrative transportation” in which they become completely “absorbed into a story or transported into a narrative world” (Green and Brock 2000: 701). Consequently, they often challenge existing notions of their world, attempt to change their attitudes towards some usual experiences, have the ability to identify a positive future, and anticipate and hopefully evade frustrated real experiences. Therefore, we could claim that young adult science fiction texts move beyond aims of entertainment and education; they set a platform to youth readers to (re)view themselves and (re)shape their personalities. In this article, we will first review the extant research on narrative transportation theory. Then, we will focus on the sociopolitical themes represented in Robert Heinlein's (1948) *Space Cadet*, analyzed textually through narrative transportation. We propose that narrative transportation theory can provide a valuable framework for research on the role of YA science fiction—*Space Cadet* is an example—in shaping the personality of YA readers. These procedures happen when transported readers are immersed into the narrative, identify with the characters, question important controversial issues like gender roles, the representation of women as “other” and as “aliens,” and finally take role in shaping, if not changing, established sociopolitical concerns of their time.

## 2. Narrative transportation

We all enjoy reading or listening to stories, yet what makes stories haunting is when one enjoys the intensity of being lost in a story or absorbs the experience of its narrative, characters, and events. Researchers call this experience “narrative transportation” and, sometimes, they refer to readers or audience who absorb the narrative as transported readers/audience. Even though narrative transportation is an established theory, there is no point of reference how this theory comes about, its scholarly insights, what disciplines and research areas it covers, or what specific roles it has on readers (Kuijpers and Hakemulder 2017: 1). Narrative transportation theory has two main components: a) narrative—any kind of story, fictional, non-fictional, media, social media, and films—and b) the recipient—reader, listener, and audience. Narrative transportation theory is based on the argument that stories can “transport” recipients into an imaginary narrative world; their psychological state is diverted from the here and now real world into a fictional world (Green and Brock, 2000; Green, Chatham, and Sestir, 2012; Green and Clark, 2013; Green and Donahue, 2011; Green et al., 2008; Mazzocco, Green, Sasota, and Jones, 2010).

Green and Brock (2000) have tested a number of processes that lead to narrative transportation. They have identified three main psychological stages: First, readers may lose contact with the real world and may not differentiate

between the fictional narrative world and the real world. Second, transported readers may develop potential feelings or connections with time, place, events, and characters in narrative world, even though it is not real. Third, readers may encounter a change in their real-world attitudes, behaviors, and beliefs when they are transported back to the real world. In this paper, we are interested in applying a textual analysis of the last two psychological stages on young adult readers of Heinlein's *Space Cadet*.

Researchers interested in how stories affect readers' lives and behaviors have noticed that when readers experience narrative transportation, they become absorbed, emotionally and cognitively, by the story (Green and Brock, 2000; Green, Chatham, and Sestir, 2012; Green and Clark, 2013; Green and Donahue, 2011; Mazzocco, Green, Sasota, and Jones, 2010). One cannot deny the power of narratives in changing individuals' beliefs about ideologies framed implicitly or explicitly in the story. Thus, many studies conducted on narrative transportation have indicated the theory's role in persuasion process. Green and Clark (2012: 478), for example, suggest that "although transportation is not a necessary condition for influence, individuals who are more transported are more likely to show effects on attitudes and beliefs about social, health and consumer issues." They continue that "the persuasive power of narratives is observed even when participants know that a passage is fictional." Although transported readers are aware of the fictional realm of the narrative, they may fully absorb emotions, moral principles, cultural values, and beliefs found in the stories. The narrative should have a key feature to integrate readers in the narrative transportation. Green and Brock's (2002:321) initial study suggests that for narrative transportation and narrative persuasion to happen, transportation imagery process should be involved. They explain imagery as a process that involves the cognitive, emotional, and psychological process of story recipients (334). In other words, Green and Brock suggest that cognitive responses of story recipient and story quality can induce mental image (e.g. see with the mind's eyes and hear with the mind's ears) and, therefore, affect transportation and belief change (Green and Brock 2002: 334–335). Within this context, we can suggest that since a transported reader is mentally engaged with the story and responds emotionally to the story's content, narrative transportation is analogous to YA science fiction's "willing suspension of disbelief" that happens when a reader lets go of reality and joins the fictional world in the narrative. The narrative in Heinlein's *Space Cadet*, we argue, induces its adolescent readers to develop their own behaviors and to reflect on their future self.

### **3. Robert Heinlein's narrative technique**

Heinlein's pioneer innovation in YA science fiction novels, or what most scholars refer to as Heinlein juveniles, is linked to his distinctive technique in detailing an imaginary futuristic world that answers questions young adults raise about science and technology's epistemological presuppositions, humanity's ethical urge, and real-world issues. From the outset, Heinlein juveniles have three typical themes: adventure, science and technology, and sociopolitical concerns. The adventure

theme deals with young fictional protagonists facing problems while coming of age. The imagined innovative technologies depicted in Heinlein juveniles shed light, most of the time, on modern innovations of science/technology yet question some scientific theories. For example, *Space Cadet* (1948) predicted the invention of cellphones and microwaves. On the other hand, the Martian and Venerian life forms that appeared in *Space Cadet*, *Red Planet* (1949) and *In Between Planets* (1951) were far from the scientific truth. Themes related to the human experience are implicit in Heinlein juveniles yet vividly convey the message that Heinlein's YA science fiction novels have much to discuss concerning pivotal social and political issues rather than only being published for commercial or entertaining purposes. In *Space Cadet*, the fear instilled in people because of destructive military weapons like the atomic bomb implicitly reflects the impact of using the atomic bomb during WWII. As it appears in his novels, Heinlein, an ex-naval officer, revealed his frustration with the world's creation of mass destruction weapons, yet, in *Space Cadet*, he attempts to present some solutions to control these weapons. First, his adolescent space cadets join a military institution (the Interplanetary station) that trains them "not to fight, but to prevent fighting, by every possible means" (72). Second, although the military base is founded to defend the constitution of the solar federation, to restore peace, and to protect the liberties of its people, it "is not a fighting organization; it is the repository of weapons too dangerous to entrust to military man" (72). Admittedly, Heinlein's fourteen young adult science fiction novels introduced their implied readers to some of the real world's most timely political and anti-war concerns.

Limited research has been conducted on Heinlein juveniles by science fiction critics and scholars of YA literature, but as C.W. Sullivan III (1985:64) claims, "these novels are still 'contemporary' and are still among the best science fiction in the YA range." While past and contemporary analytical studies of Heinlein juveniles have been discussed extensively from a scientific, technological, environmental, and political lens (e.g. Bright, 2018; Erisman, 1997; Macdermott, 1982; Onion, 2016;), there are so far few studies that explore sociological and cultural issues in Heinlein juveniles beyond Zahra Jannessari Ladani's (2016) book chapter "Robert A. Heinlein in Historical and Cultural Context" and Fred Erisman's (1991) "Robert Heinlein, the Scribner Juveniles, and Cultural Literacy." In this article, our purpose and method is to give a textual analysis of *Space Cadet*, Heinlein's sixth novel and his second YA science fiction novel, to explore readers' identification with characters in the novel, and to offer an interpretation of narrative transportation on some implicit sociopolitical themes found in the text, which can foster younger readers' understanding and awareness of themselves and of their real world. When young adult readers become immersed into the narrative world of *Space Cadet*, they defy controversial social and political notions and (re)construct their individuality by absorbing the traits, beliefs, and responsibilities of the fictitious juvenile protagonist and his experience, as well.

#### 4. Young Adult reader's identification with character type

As stated earlier, readers and audience of a story experience narrative transportation once they get absorbed into the narrative and show empathy with the characters. In order for the audience to be transported into the narrative and the characters' intriguing patterns of behavior, they must feel involved with the characters and positively connect with the implicit and explicit messages embedded in the narrative (Green et al. 2004: 311). In this sense, the success of a narrative comes from the audiences' effective "identification with and empathy toward fictional characters" (Ibid).

Robert Heinlein, in one capacity, succeeded in creating believable characters that mirror the real culture in the way that young adult readers may identify with. In another capacity, Heinlein had the tendency to turn his thematic issues into a didactic exercise for young adult readers. His juvenile SF novels from 1948–1951 deal with adolescent space and adventure domination in which the heroes are initiated to manhood in outer space. Thus, through investigating the human experience, Heinlein's *Space Cadet* explores alternative possibilities and solutions to some crucial social issues and experiences that adolescents might consider ambivalent. Consequently, this initiation shows how the adolescent individuality is molded away from home and social docility that might affect the hero's creation of his personality. *Space Cadet* is about a teenager—Matt Dodson—who applies to join the prestigious Space Patrol. The whole novel investigates how Dodson succeeds in passing the physical, mental, psychological, and scientific tests, whether they are deliberately assigned by the Space Patrol or are the ones that he encounters in his adventure on Venus. Since Heinlein's YA science fiction novels assist in informing the reader of scientific and technological developments in a narrative mode, the writer deliberately wants juvenile readers "to identify" with his characters (Schulman 1999: 170). Therefore, we contend that Heinlein's teenage fans become inspired by the characters' heroic qualities, epic adventures, moral progress and idealistic aspects that help them comprehend the physical and emotional changes of their phase.

The novel begins with Matt Dodson reading the official letter sent to him by the Interplanetary Patrol. The letter states the patrol's approval of positioning Matt as one of its cadets and asks him to report to Terra Base for further examinations. When he reads that "the majority of candidates taking these final tests usually fail," "Matt folded the paper and stuck it back in his belt pouch" (9). Dodson's refusal to finish reading the sentence lies in his determination to eliminate any chance of failure in his new career. Predominantly, juvenile readers try to identify with the hero figures they read about, which reflects "the audience's fantasy image of themselves" (Spinrad 1990: 25). Most teenagers believe that failure is not in a hero's vocabulary since the word "failure" has emotionally debilitating effects. Predictably, Matt Dodson's refusal to accept the "chance of failure" may inspire the implied audience of the novel to hone their skills to focus on positive enthusiastic motivations rather than giving up. Moreover, the various tests that the hero of the novel undergoes and successfully passes reflect how teenagers, in real life, must go through different kinds of tests so that they could be prepared for

their future careers. And since the fictitious protagonist manages to pass those tests, teenage readers who identify with the hero may feel that they could acquire the same qualities and motivations the teen hero has obtained.

The young adult main protagonist Heinlein has created in *Space Cadet* is brave, compassionate, and patriotic. Heinlein also creates repulsive characters like Girard Burke. The existence of antagonists in a narrative is pivotal to earn readers' attention and, as Cohen (2001:245) believes, allows readers/audience to identify with characters' identity, goals, and behavioral patterns. Given that Dodson and Burke are fourteen and the implied readers of the novel are young adult, the novel advocates an unfailingly ethical hero, Matt Dodson, who succeeds in subduing evil forces that threaten the universe while criticizing Burke for his immoral and felonious acts. Norman Spinrad (1990: 22), in his book *Science Fiction in the Real World*, claims that "the universe of sci-fi, unlike the universe in which we unfortunately find ourselves, is relentlessly moral; good always triumph over evil, the white hats always triumph over the black." Although Spinrad's article was written thirty years ago, many researchers and writers of science fiction and its sub-genres still believe in their moralistic aspects (Blackford 2017; Dudek and Johnson 200; Oziewicz 2015). In this sense, those moral standards loom large in *Space Cadet*, emphasizing that transported teenage readers should absorb moral messages imbedded in the novel and should ideally participate in social change. In other words, young adult readers may easily identify with Matt Dodson and accept him as a reliable role model because "young adults continually imagine themselves as heroes" (De Vos 2003: 83). On the other hand, Girard Burke, Dodson's first roommate, is an arrogant candidate whose father is a wealthy capitalist spaceship builder. He is presented in the novel as an impetuous "bad guy" who does not fit the criteria of the good soldier. He starts some verbal fights with his peers, and nobody loves his pompous attitude, especially when he brags about his wealthy family. Influenced by the idea that good always triumphs over evil, the implied reader will come to realize that, as things work out, Matt Dodson is better suited for action and adventure, the other less.

While it is beyond the immediate scope of this article, it is worth mentioning that Heinlein's novel may posit a Marxist critique of class division. As Heinlein's "space future" novels are perceived as "a direct projection of the public/private culture" of America during Heinlein's time (Kilgore 2003: 109), Heinlein appears to incisively criticize a capitalist family structure that sets itself on the top of the social ladder, relying on money as a source of power to solve any problem. To Heinlein, "capitalism means you can get rich and do good" (qtd. in Shippey 2016: 266). However, characters recognized as capitalists, like Burke, shake the self-esteem of other unprivileged characters like Matt Dodson. Concerned that he might fail in fulfilling idealistic heroic traits (passing scientific, psychological, and emotional tests) and that he must be wealthy like Burke to be valued, Dodson decides to leave the Patrol. Wong, a high rank officer, persuades him to stay:

People tend to fall into three psychological types, all differently motivated. There is the type, motivated by economic factors, money . . . and there is the type motivated by 'face' or pride. This type is a spender, fighter, boaster, lover, sportsman, gambler; he has a will to power and an itch for glory. And there is the professional type, which claims to follow a code of ethics rather than simply seeking money or glory—priests and ministers, teachers, scientists, medical men, some artists and writers. The idea is that such a man believes that he is devoting his life to some purpose more important than his individual self. . . . Now we get to the point: the patrol is meant to be made up exclusively of the professional type. (114)

In this context, Heinlein presents the idealistic characteristics needed to be acquired by a military cadet. He seeks to persuade his readers that in a place where loyalty, good heart, allegiance, and profession count more, people like Burke do not belong to it. Burke might have intelligence and endurance, yet he relies on his father's wealth and power to become a space cadet. And later we learn that Burke is asked to resign from the academy because of his imprudent attitudes, and his thoughtless actions will cause Earth troubles with the natives in Venus. On the other hand, Wong's lesson to Dodson promotes the primacy of individual or small-group achievements to the teenager who aspires to real-world achievements.

Therefore, the teenage reader comes to believe that the hero's and the reader's experiences and problems are much alike. However, many critics argue that the experiences and themes represented in a work of art, in general, are reflections of the author's ideology and belief. Alexei Panshin (1968: 159), in *Heinlein in Dimension*, claims that the characters Heinlein has developed in his SF novels very much resemble Heinlein's personal identity or what Panshin refers to as a "Heinlein individual." He further suggests that the hero in Heinlein novels "has three central characteristics: his strength, his singularity, and his ability to teach himself. The youngest stage may be ignorant and naïve but that is an accident of youth and not a character deficiency" (169). Thus, the reader notices that the Matt who enters the interplanetary base is different from the Matt at the end of the novel. The former is naïve and innocent yet bright, clever and talented; the latter is more mature and responsible. This transition from naivety to adulthood happens under the supervision of a mentor. In the initiation stage that creates the hero's individuality, a mentor is needed to lead and advise the hero. However, at a certain point to prove the hero's decision-making skills and independence, the mentor leaves his apprentice in a traumatic situation so that the latter becomes responsible for every action he does; this stage prepares him to be responsible for his decisions when he becomes an adult. As one telling example, Matt's teachers and supervisors in the patrol base prepare him psychologically, scientifically, physically, and mentally to deal with any problem that he might face when he is on duty, but all were theoretical teachings. When Matt, Lieutenant Thurlow, and three other space cadets are sent to Venus on a mission, their ship touches down on a sinkhole after falling on the planet and Thurlow is in a coma after the accident. They get caught by the Venerians, who put them into prison,

and the cadets, at that crucial moment, with a comatose mentor, strive to get out from the predicament they are in. Matt must go through these stages to become mature, to bridge the gap between the new experience the teenager will get involved in and the theoretical world he is taught about. Furthermore, through absorbing Matt's mannerism and experience, young adult readers are able to acquire useful methods if they want to respond to a deep-seated life experiences and anxieties. Like Matt, young adult readers struggle through tough lessons and unfair teachers; something weird is going on at school, home, or any other strange place; hateful school mates cause troubles; boy heroes need kind mentors; and the list goes on. This will also broaden young adults' observation when it comes to criticize the world and the beliefs the implied readers think they already knows.

### **5. Gender roles, women as "Other"**

The narratives of Heinlein's young adult science fiction carry an implicit set of assumptions about sexism and gender stereotyping. Kilgore (2003: 106) asserts that "while the space juvenilia was titularly defined as 'boys' literature,' Heinlein did give some thought to the young women who read his work, even though they constituted a minority of his readers." Heinlein challenged the trend science fiction authors of his time adopted; most of their books have authoritative male protagonists while the female characters are either absent or are difficult to connect to. The absence of a female protagonist in most juvenile SF novels in the 1940s and 1950s is not a surprising issue since the general assumption, which later proved to be false, was that most writers as well as readers of this genre were male (Merrick 1997: 59). Moreover, in these novels, female characters are portrayed as weak, domestic, less intelligent, and feminine. Remarkably, Justin Larbalestier (2002: 13), in *The Battle of the Sexes in Science Fiction*, argues that "many of the battle-of-the-sexes texts insist that male and female characters act according to their true sex and act that sex properly." The place of women in those fictional masculinized world is culturally constructed and highlights the way gender structures in real life. Thus, early SF and young adult science fiction are receptive to contemporary cultural attitudes, but the transported reader has the agency to inspect, if not criticize, the ironic extremes of human norms, especially when it comes to gender stereotyping.

Heinlein's *Space Cadet* employs the subject of woman in a number of strategies that sometimes asserts or subverts readers' understanding of gender. Female characters are depicted as either representing the cultural construction of femininity or as the subverted other (aliens and race). In this sense, the reader notices that the novel reflects real-world gender categorization—earthly women are confined to romance and/or domesticity. For example, Tex, Matt's friend from Texas, brings pictures of his favorite girlfriends to the base and starts bragging about his relationships that his peers has not yet experienced. On the other hand, Matt's mother is a stereotypical domestic woman who does her house chores, serves her family, and is protected by her husband. The feminine qualities of such characters lay in their traditional gendered inferiority.

Women, furthermore, could signify everything that is ‘other’ to the implied audience of the novel—including aliens, people of color, other nationalities, or other ethnic groups. Booker and Thomas (2009: 86), in *Science Fiction Handbook*, argue that women in SF books are “represented as threatening alien Others . . . yet it is the figure of feminine alien Other, who threatens male dominance and is routinely vanquished in order to restore patriarchal order.” It is worth mentioning that *Space Cadet* was written a decade before the women’s rights movement of the 1960s. In the same perspective, De Witt Douglas Kilgore (2003: 107) argues that in Heinlein juveniles, “it is clear that the social and political contributions of women to his space future are confined largely within the sphere prescribed by reproduction, marriage, and domesticity.” However, we argue that Kilgore’s argument is inadequate and misleading. It is true, as stated above, that Heinlein’s portrayal of Dodson’s mother fulfills her prescribed gender role, yet *Space Cadet* provides an articulate account of a matriarchal, progressive society. The novel tells of a foil to planet Earth, an all-female civilization on Venus, where its residents are dubbed “little people” and men are repressed and inferior. There is some discussions among the main characters as to whether there are male Venerians. Oscar, who grew up in Venus, answers: “Sure! There are—the little people are unquestionably bisexual. But I doubt if we’ll ever get a picture of one or chance to examine one. . . . I go with the standard theory; the males are little and helpless and have to be protected” (174). In this scene, Heinlein highlights male characters’ anxiety about losing their power and domination to female rule. However, Heinlein is aware of those crucial fears, and in his novels, he attempts to give to his young adult male and female fans some social solutions to bridge the gap between both sexes, to eradicate symbolic images of gender discrimination, and to portray successful examples of matriarchal role. Ironically, the misunderstanding of the role of women in male-dominant societies reminds us of John Gray’s (2006) famous book *Men Are from Mars, Women Are from Venus*. The book asserts the notion that women and men are as different as beings from different planets. Gray adopts this metaphor to show that members of the two genders have diametrically different communication styles, emotional needs, and personal values to each other and that heterosexual couples can use this model to improve their relationship. It is worth mentioning, though, that Heinlein adopted this image before Gray did when he disrupted gender binaries by designing counter worlds that place men and women as complementary halves. Thus, although the cadets are overwhelmed with the role-reversal of gender and try to hold on to gender bias in an alien planet, they, eventually, manage to understand the Venerians’ differences, to get engaged with them, and to admire and appreciate their intelligence and way of life.

Especially riveting for Heinlein’s juvenile readers is the depiction of women as the other race. Heinlein “views race as a superficial difference” (Kilgore 2003:10). Kilgore’s statement suggests that Heinlein advocates anti-colonial ideologies. It would be fair to argue, therefore, that the transported reader can trace Heinlein’s imbedded messages on this subject: how a colonized society negotiates its identity, agency, and visibility against the colonizer; the interaction

between the colonizer and the colonized; the role of the character/reader to participate in positive and productive understanding of the other; yet, ironically, how Heinlein evokes white nationalism and patriotism.

The first account of racism that juvenile readers encounter in *Space Cadet* is the white race vs. other races. The former is figured in the image of patriotic space cadets whose job is to preserve peace on Earth by looking after the repository of mass-destruction weapons and by discovering other planets to prevent alien invasion. Other races, on the other hand, are depicted in the novel in the image of female aliens from outer space, Venus. Although some space cadets, like Burke, come to believe that these women aliens are inferior and their culture is believed to be misshapen, Heinlein presents them as civilized, friendly to Earthlings, and technologically and biologically superior. What transported reader will come to realize is that alien signification in the novel varies greatly from the prevailing SF tropes where aliens (the colonizers) are relentless and always attack Earth (the colonized) to dominate it. Heinlein, it seems, implicitly offers a historicized treatment of the American colonial/postcolonial/imperial context to the consensus reality of his implied readers, warning his white American readers not to blindly believe in their superiority over other races. This attitude hinders accepting others' beliefs and cultural heritage and leads to a clash between opponent races. This is indicated in the novel when some cadets question the conformity of the Venerians' civilization, especially when they compare it to the civilizations of their planet. The Venerians speak one language and are willing to die to protect one of them. Yet the most important lesson the young adult reader may get from this alien civilization is their moral progress. The natives have never seen human beings before. Burke who works in his father's "System Enterprises," a private space corporation, goes on a mission "to investigate a tip concerning ores of the trans-uranic elements" in Venus (116). When Burke undertakes "to negotiate exploitation rights with the local Venerian authorities," the queen, also called "the mother of many," disregards his offer, claiming that the swamp Burke is interested in is "tabu" (taboo) (117). Refusing to be turned down, Burke kidnaps the queen and holds her hostage in his rocket ship to force the Venerians to negotiate. In an act of vengeance, the locals attack Burke's ship and kill his crew while saving him for scientific research. However, the patrol cadets show up to save Burke and are also taken as hostages since they resemble the colonialist. One of the cadets, who was born in Venus and knows their language and customs, skillfully and diplomatically gains the matriarch's trust and convinces her that they are honorable and civilized, unlike Burke. Heinlein states that the "little people just don't have the cussedness in them that human have" (171); "They have never heard of the word war" (190), which reminds us, as well as his juvenile readers, that human's morality is at stake and needs considerable improvement. George Edgar Slusser (1977:9) believes that Heinlein "[strives] to create some new and (modern) form of didactic fiction" and that he derives his didactic mission from "particular set of actions" he notices around him. One of them is that "the initial promise of action is a promise that values will be tested, not just arbitrarily asserted." This novel follows up with Heinlein's didactic

attempts: Cadets question their own beliefs and conflict with the “other,” learn from other civilizations, and eliminate the prejudice they have towards the “Other.” In addition, since war has long been a part of the human experience, it shows such a contrast between the values of different civilizations. Thus, Burke’s attitude towards the Venerians reveals the imperial project of the American past and foretells America’s neo-imperial future. Although these examinations are implicit in the novel and the young adult reader might not immediately understand the calamities of the fictional racial encounters, these racial significations will definitely shape readers’ beliefs and ideologies of “us” and “other” once they absorb and follow the moral progress of space cadets and the Venerians. They will be more open to understand and accept other cultures and people who are different from them.

### **6. The politics of Heinlein's world in *Space Cadet***

The transported reader, on the other hand, might question Heinlein’s attempts to marginalize other nationalities in his novel, as well as in his other novels. We assume that although Heinlein directs his reader towards connecting with Matt Dodson’s heroic traits and denouncing Girard Burke’s bigotry towards female-alien, yet Heinlein implicitly preserves the privilege of leadership to American characters—Dodson, Burke, Jarman and Thurlow, to mention a few. On the other hand, of the multi-national society/gathering in the patrol, the Nazi and Soviet cadets are absent. This is due to Heinlein’s abhorrence of fascism and Nazism. In Heinlein’s late 1950s juvenile novels, *Starship Troopers* (1959) as an example, Soviet and Nazi soldiers are dehumanized since they are depicted in the image of monstrous aliens; US military cadets conquering them implies the victory in WWII. Moreover, the advocacy of militarism in this novel is not pro-war but pro-military in which Heinlein’s message is about the adolescent’s patriotic duty toward his country and the planet. In other words, Heinlein is aware of the top military, scientific, and technical brains of German and Russian scientists, but he wants to foreground the efforts, intelligence, and power of white American cadets, especially in controlling the nuclear weapon. This contradiction, again, of Heinlein’s beliefs reflects the people’s ambivalence that branches in the real world especially after the wars. On the other hand, the novel, covertly, describes one of the Cold War era’s cultural paradoxes: the celebration of the American individuality, superiority, and invulnerability against communist collectivism and anti-imperialist revolutionary movements in other countries that threatened the conformity, consensus, and economic and military hegemony of America.

Heinlein’s political beliefs as they appear in his works have been seen as conservative, militaristic, and libertarian. Bainbridge (2014: 153) notes that Heinlein was remarkable in using space "to frame stories with frankly radical political implications." He believes that Heinlein's ideological position was formed by three reasons:

First, [Heinlein] sought to compose interesting stories, which in the intellectual context of mid-twentieth century America required exploring unusual

perspectives. Second, like many others in science fiction community he really was a political radical, but his view point does not map easily onto the traditional left-right spectrum. Third, as an intellectual he wanted to explore hypothetical alternatives to every-day thinking.

Heinlein embodies the contradictions that have been developing in American culture since the Great Depression. Therefore, Heinlein wants his young adult readers to understand the culture that molds them in order to conceive a deeper meaning behind the surface presentations of his themes. As mentioned previously, the Venerians, or the little people, are presented as the “other,” either as “female alien” or as the “other race” that is classified as inferior to Earthlings. People tend to see the “other” as harmful, dangerous, vandal, and/or imperialist in one way or another, depending on the status of the “other” in the status quo. Societies struggle to gradually impart the idea of superiority and privilege into its populace while stigmatizing those unlike the dominant population as inferior. Heinlein's alien societies give different perspective of the “other” and provide colorful setting in order to “serve the didactic purpose of humbling the human species. Rather than simply being threatening monsters to outthink and outshoot, Heinlein's intelligent aliens teach his characters—and us—that the cosmos easily weeds out the morally or intellectually unfit and that human beings still have much to learn about controlling their baser instincts” (McGiveron 1996: 246). *Space Cadet* introduces an intelligent civilization as a counterpart to American superiority. It is a lesson to American young adult readers to accept the availability of intelligent species in the world beside the Americans. The Venerians' scientific development, which exceeds the human's technological progress, suggests that the imperialist is not necessarily the controller of the cosmos. The infrastructure of the “little people's” society might not be as great as the humans' Earth, but it possesses discipline, conformity, and complexity, contrasting with the weakness found in human society. The Venerian cities are built beneath lakes and are lit with some sort of “glorious orange cluster” (168). When the spaceship hits the land of Venerians, the cadets think they are lost in a Venerian desert. However, the hidden cities built under lakes will give protection to the “little people” against any attack. In addition, those aliens make little use of power; they hardly use metal; they produce a fabric that cannot be cut by the cadet's knives; and they create chemicals solutions that protect against a century of Venus's harsh weather (202, 212). One of Heinlein's main concerns in his novel is to encourage his implied reader to acknowledge the creative capabilities of the “other” (Ironically, the “other” here is neither a Nazi nor Soviet). He goes even further to suggest that in a world driven by war and xenophobia the condemnation and hatred of other races, like “little people”, is unjustified and should be reconsidered.

## 7. Conclusion

Fiction in general consists of the hopes, dreams, and fears of what is happening in society. Young adult science fiction embraces those concerns and transports them to the implied reader once he/she becomes absorbed in the narrative. Heinlein

juveniles, in specific, have embedded messages. They “spell out for young readers [Heinlein’s] vision of what their world could become—a society not necessarily free from flaws but one in which a broadly informed, diversely able, and responsibly active citizenry will deal capably with a world of continual and at times alarming change” (Erisman 1997: 95). In other words, as an acute observer and inspector of events occurring not only in America but in other parts of the world during his time, Heinlein in *Space Cadet* successfully presents controversial social and political issues that reflect the real problems young adult readers might encounter when moving from green adolescence to seasoned adulthood. He tries to give idealistic solutions to his juvenile readers based on his standpoint as an advocate of social and political reform, helping and preparing them to live and survive in a world of ever-continuing change and reminding them that there is always hope; that our world could be better.

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