Chapter III

Gwyneth Jones: *White Queen, North Wind and Phoenix Café*

1. Introduction

By the time the first part in Gwyneth Jones’ Aleutian trilogy, *White Queen* was published in 1993; the alien had become one of the prominent themes in Science Fiction in order to pose difficult questions and to elucidate complexities of human identities in the field of creating writing. Let it be Ridley Scott’s *Alien*, a film introducing an elegant, nightmarish outer-space horrific alien, or Stephen Frears’ screen adaptation of Valerie Martin’s *Mary Reilly*, a retelling of R L Stevenson’s *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* from the point of view of a new character, Mary, Jekyll’s maid, the contemporary creative expression had begun appropriating the alien to address human concerns. As we have seen in previous chapters on Science Fiction and the Alien, a new generation writer in this period emphasized need of freedom to speculate on the future shape of human society and identity. As a result, without human beings, as a prominent writer of the time, Ursula K. Le Guin asserted “all the scientific ‘objects’, the methane-ammonia atmosphere and super-gravity tidal effects, remain comparatively lifeless.”¹ The present chapter is an examination of three novels: *White Queen, North Wind* and *Phoenix Café*, commonly known as Aleutian Trilogy written by Gwyneth Jones. The Aleutian trilogy, as we will see, reflects on human concerns: what we were, what we have been and what we
may become through the kaleidoscope of the future and past. Our study would include an analysis of a succession of literary experiments that the trilogy sets out to undertake in the genre of Science Fiction in her attempts of presenting human society while reflecting on the past and the future.

2. ‘Science’ in the Aleutian Trilogy

Strictly speaking, scientific worlds based on scientific laws do not exist in the trilogy. The novels are not particular about scientific material the way hard Science Fiction would be. Actually, Gwyneth Jones began to connect herself with Science Fiction not with the need of exploring scientific facts but to accomplish ‘an intense experience’. The various Science Fiction topics like the alien, futuristic world are seen by Jones as means to an end instead of ends in themselves. Alien worlds or forms of futuristic societies have existed as a space to explore and share Jones’ artistic concerns with the reader. Reaching beyond technicalities and the laboratory life, Science Fiction, for Jones, has been a passion for ‘the addictive stress of novelty, the pride of stepping onto our empty space’. Like many other artists and social scientists, Jones thinks that science and art cannot simply be theorised in their abstractions, but need be co-constructed through the lived daily discipline and creativity of practitioners’ crafts. While Gwyneth Jones’ journey as a Science Fiction writer initially started with reading, attending lab discussions, and interviewing scientists to assist her literary practice, she became increasingly fascinated with the material itself. As she puts it, “chills went down
her spine” when she first read Evelyn Fox Keller’s biography of Barbara McClintock, *A Feeling for the Organism*, because of the startling parallels between the life of McClintock and her fictional protagonist. Jones’ literary practice amounts to her independent discovery of the practices of scientific ethno methodology and the art-science interface.

Science in Jones’ Science Fiction has been a discourse built on certain logical principles that are rational. It is not that she wants to deal with facts and truth the way a scientist would use in presenting theoretical assumptions and it is also not the use of science that gives a text particular and privileged access to truth. Often the reverse is true. Jones calls our attention to Larry Niven’s *Ringworld* (1970), a classic ‘engineering feat’ Science Fiction novel that “reached prints in the first instance with terrible mistakes in its science.” Though Niven revised the novel for subsequent publication after fans pointed out a number of scientific impossibilities, Jones stresses on the point that Niven’s challenge was not in following scientific accuracy but in his “appearance of command over the language of science.” According to Jones,

‘Science’ in Science Fiction has always had a tacit meaning other than that commonly accepted. It had nothing in particular to say about the subject matter, which may be just about anything so long as the formal conventions of future dress are observed. It means only, finally, that whatever phenomenon or speculation is treated in the fiction, there is a claim that it is going to be studied to some extent scientifically- that is objectively, rigourously; in a controlled environment. The business of the writer is to set up the equipment in a laboratory of mind such that the ‘what if’ in question is at once isolated and provided with the exact nutrients it needs.
In this way, counter to the popular perception existing within the hard core Science Fiction that a writer has to rely on basic scientific laws, Jones does not care for validating scientific facts or ‘truth’ but to believe in scientific method and logical thinking that goes in ‘science’ as “an entry into a particular, material and often rational discourse.” 7 At the same time, she approves the scientific means of alienation as it fits the ideals of Science Fiction well in terms of its resulting worlds. She makes it clear in her interview:

I get an immense kick out of trying to understand the science that I want to use and trying to make these extraordinary situations seem real, emotional and complex -- for myself and for the reader. Then, writing a Science Fiction novel does not remain literature not only for entertainment but also to explore thought experiments towards locating human existence with the vast universe. 8

Going with this view, a writer does not have to deter from subjective desires while appropriating ‘science’ in Science Fiction. Science itself, and the exciting philosophical and theoretical developments in the structuralism and post-structuralism in the 1970s-1990s opened alternative scenarios rooted in her contemporary life by infusing ‘science’ with contemporary ideas, theories and critical social commentaries about issues of gender, race, class, and the survival of human species. The radical science and theories in evolutionary genetics of Lynn Margulis, Claude Shannon and Warren Weaver were the catalysts that enticed Jones to experiment with fictional tropes like the alien beyond their stereotypical constructions within the narratives of alien invasions,
mysterious demons, and piteous female victims. She “watched, thrilled as if I were observing a rare planetary transit, the tide of relativism that had risen from linguistics and from physics, from Einstein and Ferdinand de Saussure, as it swept through the disciplines.” Further, she says,

At the end of the 1980s, chaos mathematics was the Big Thing in science. It was time to talk of butterfly wings and hurricanes, fractals and strange attractors. The number-crunching machines had reached critical mass: scientists would now be able to interpret the patterns in disorder. They would tackle raw, nonlinear natural phenomena instead of being restricted to a limited (though useful) set of special cases. As the Berlin Wall tumbled and the Soviet bloc disintegrated miraculously, blessedly without bloodshed, it seemed as if the barrier between art and science was going as well. Science had lost its limits and its certain ties; artists had achieved equality with the men in the white coats; it was even possible for the women to stand alongside the men. We were all in the same boat, fishing for connections out of an ocean of boundless complexity, stringing them together by accidents of history, never knowing if we had the right answer, only knowing that something seemed to work. . . . This was the historical mood in which I wrote my trilogy.  

As we can see, Science Fiction, for Jones, is not about just a time and a place in the future, but about the contemporary world we live in today. With this approach, Jones ‘leaped to the task of creating the science/fiction of a European woman and an arts graduate, writing about the future of my now: my science-bothered, art impregnated society; my world, the place where I live’. After
spending ten or fifteen years ‘trafficking across the divide between art and science’, she

searched for the truth about gender-racial superiority, trying to uncover the deep structures of inequality in a Science Fiction series that became known as the Aleutian Trilogy (*White Queen*, *North Wind*, *Phoenix Café*). …As the Aleutian Trilogy proceeded, mapping measures of humanity and alien-ness in a future Europe, I found myself increasingly drawn to narrative images… where ideas about the nature of the world, technical skills, and poetics are fused.11

The present research focuses on Jones’ attempt of ‘mapping measures of humanity’ that draws her to create ‘narrative images’. In the subsequent part of our research, we will analyse Jones’ ‘mapping measures’ as seen in the Aleutian trilogy.

3. Technological Interventions and Defamiliarisation

It is a well-established fact that machines and technology are most widely associated with the genre of Science Fiction. In fact, one can easily consider technology as the necessary property in a Science Fiction novel. In identifying the genre, a piece of futuristic, extrapolated technology is seen as the most obvious *novum* in Science Fiction. As we are considering the idea of defamiliarisation as the quintessential characteristic of Science Fiction, technology plays a prominent role in defamiliarising the content and makes the familiar seem unfamiliar. More than this, the technology does not exist merely as a device in Science Fiction that is concerned about encounter with difference. Here, we would like to make a point that
technology in Science Fiction-a time machine or a space ship provides incarnation of difference and the ‘Other’.

The technology of Faster than Light (FTL) device is source in creating difference in Jones’ trilogy. A human character in the trilogy, Peeneminde Buonarotti has invented a type of FTL travel in the first part of the trilogy, White Queen and the basis for this travel is to transfer information and not a way to move matter at a speed that is faster than light. In line with Aleutian’s philosophy that consciousness is simply an arrangement of information, Peenemiinde develops the technology of the FTL that can transfer one’s consciousness to another location, providing that one can imagine the location. In the transformation, a new body- identical to one’s original body-is constructed from the materials at hand at the terminal point. When he/she wishes to return, an act of will can return the information-his/her consciousness back to the original point and your original body will be reassembled. The FTL works as for Aleutians as ‘it is the pattern of consciousness that ‘travels’. But it is commonly accepted by the humans and the Aleutians that humans are incapable of using the FTL technology as the Aleutians do, although the humans hope to modify it for their own use after the Aleutians leave. As Buonarotti tells,

For human beings, the experience is too much like a dream. Your mind/brain will enact meaning on what happens, as it does on the images that pass through your consciousness in sleep. It is impossible for a human being to take action in the visited world without falling into a psychotic episode. The dream becomes a nightmare, in which the traveler is trapped. I have found no way out of this impasse, and because of the way we construe our consciousness-the mind in the
machine-I am not hopeful that a way can be found. We humans may travel only as ghosts, shadows, spectators ... (275, *North Wind*)

However, at the end of the trilogy, in *Phoenix Café*, a group of young humans who are part of the Renaissance movement—the revival of human art and craft—reveal to have perfected the technology for human use. Buonarotti hides her invention in *White Queen* because she believes that humans cannot use the technology.

Another feature of the technology of FTL in Jones’ work is that it offers an opportunity to create slippages between real and virtual world and it encourages looking into real social world that is non-technological world. The broader idea of FTL is not just a material expansion with technological innovation but it is an extension of info-tech ‘progress’ that they are expected to achieve. In this sense, the FTL can be considered ‘alien’ to humans. At the hands of the FTL, the apparent distinction between humans and aliens gets deepened.

An impact of the FTL is not limited to the technology in the Aleutian trilogy but it has extended to the ‘language’ to communicate. Jones does not use technology as it is manipulated in the mainstream Science Fiction novel where the notion of technology exists as an extension of man, amplifying his power of aggression. In that case, communication exists as successful means to resolving conflict; the solution to any conflict was the physical combat and the means was the use of advanced technology as weaponry. From rockets to laser guns, visions of the future in the popular Science Fiction novel have remained technology oriented
power dynamic. A close look at the technology orientated popular Science Fiction shows that it rests on some questionable assumptions. In the first place, technology and its forms have always been ‘alien-centric’, involving matters of aliens’ self interest focusing on demonstrating power of creatures from the other world. However, unlike the technological fancies in popular Science Fiction, Jones projects the FTL and other resulting forms introduced through technology as a nuanced way of looking at interpersonal communication. Gwyneth Jones does not follow the popular model of the Bug Eyed Monsters (BEMs) and conflicting power dynamic between humans and non-humans. The Aleutian trilogy insists on the possibilities of communication for interspecies encounters. Accordingly, the idea of communication broadly is placed within the discourse of identity and it is elaborated throughout the trilogy.

3.1 The Common Tongue

Gwyneth Jones looks at the novum of Science Fiction technology as a place where a machine intersects with human body. This allows an invention of the techno-organic world and a sign system of the Aleutians to present, in Buonarotti’s words, their ‘own manner and tone to speak without words’. The innovative technology of the Aleutians produces new forms of the communication possible through sounds and ‘Common Tongue’. Similar to the human ways, the language they use among themselves is ‘the local English’ that is ‘heavily contaminated with French, besides Arabic and other unnamable African influences.’
In support of this communication, there are other interesting devices that emphasize on difference of the Aleutians from the humans. For example, the angled brackets < > are used to denote the verbal exchanges among Aleutians in their ‘Common Tongue’ and conventional punctuation marks “ ” are used to denote speech exchanged audibly. We think the Common Tongue as inventive way in Jones’ novels to dramatise the Aleutians differences. Jones uses the idea of the invented language- the Common Tongue as a front to spark a broader discussion of language itself. It is language not spoken as the narrator in White Queen says; Aleutians in the Common tongue do not speak language, not any language but they understood every word. The Aleutian trilogy ‘manufactures’ a new language of the Common Tongue that Jones employs as a way to estrange reader from the human world. Humans like Braemar are baffled by the idea of communicating without holding any ‘language’ when Agnes confirms that “< This is my language. Surely Common Tongue is the same everywhere? None of us has had any problem communicating>” (59, White Queen) Aleutians use this ‘language’ without making ‘noises, no throat-clearing. None of that mechanical, casual humming... They are naturally silent’. It seems that Jones does not see any parallel in known civilization when she notes Braemar’s response that she could think of ‘animal comparisons’ while understanding nature of Aleutians’ language. It is very natural for Aleutians to use the Common Tongue, the silent language of their expression and gesture. Braemar describes it in the following way:
Babies don't learn to speak in order to communicate. They get on perfectly happily without words as long as they're with people who know them ... Gesture, body language: when you know someone well, an educated guess. That's what the Aleutians have. (179, White Queen)

Basically, Science Fiction ‘fictionalises’ differences through creation of new words or phrases (neologism) and transforming human language that can often impel the reader to recognise the alien-ness of the world in which the story has been placed. The alien-ness of the alien becomes a linguistic and a stylistic feature in the story—specifically, how the characters communicate among themselves, how they look and how the story is narrated. The defamiliarisation covers range from language being the story to language to be used to merely adorn the story. Science Fiction develops alien character out of language by actually taking it on as a subject, typically via one or more invented languages through intervention of the technology. Eric Rabkin’s conceptualises the role of language in his essay ‘Metalinguistics and Science Fiction’ arguing that language in Science Fiction is not being invented but transformed. Rather than just creating a new word, as the writer does with a neologism, a writer takes a concept that she expects her readers to be already familiar with, and infuses it with new meaning. The transformed language, in this way, employs our idea of language as material, and the context surrounding it to define it. It is therefore, according to Rabkin, our own language that alienates us, not language that the author has imagined. Consequentially, as we can see in the Common Tongue, there are no ostentatious spellings or flamboyant combinations of words to catch one’s eye; the transformed language is not detected by
merely skimming the page. In fact, there is no language that can be shown when Aleutians communicate. It, however, potentially achieves a powerful effect, much greater than that of neologism, because the Common Tongue tends to touch upon dramatizing unfamiliar. As Rabkin argues, “it is by virtue of its less obvious nature” that “it can create a subtle and lasting impression on a reader and help to validate the areas of particular concern to the author.”

Jones does not rely on biology to determine unique identity; the aliens turn instead to culture through language. This process, of ‘learning to be oneself’ that forms the major component of the Common Tongue. As seen in Braemar’s comment quoted earlier, an ability to communicate without language exists among infants provided they are among people they know well and who know them well. Jones’ understanding of language, therefore, comes from the comprehension of world around than just use of words and hence, they do not speak in ‘in order to communicate’. Counter to the human understanding of language, the biochemical communicative aspect of the Common Tongue plays a key role and it is accomplished through ingestion of wanderers, the semi-sentient cells that are passed among the Aleutians. The wanderers are not only a method of communication among the Aleutians but also an embodiment, literally, of the Aleutian ideas about self and world. For Aleutians, everyone who is part of the same brood is part of the same biochemical life. In the Aleutian society, they discover and everyone knows one another well through intense study of the ‘character records’ of their own and other people’s lives.
The technological innovations and the Common Tongue remind us of *ansible*, an instantaneous communications device Ursula Le Guin invents in her novel, *The Dispossessed: An Ambiguous Utopia*. Le Guin, like Jones, raises an interesting point regarding idea of communication when no human mode is seen potential. *The Dispossessed: An Ambiguous Utopia* is set on two planets: Anarres and Urras, the twin inhabited worlds of Tau Ceti. Anarres, which may roughly pun on the ‘anarchy’ of its sovereign-less government, and Urras, a planet divided into a capitalist half and an authoritarian socialist half that bears a strong resemblance to Earth in the Cold War era. The novel observes efforts of Shevek, a brilliant Anarresti physicist who has been trying to reestablish a connection between the planets who has hardly communicated since Anarres was settled two hundred years prior to the book’s beginning. Accordingly, we are told that the languages of both planets have drifted significantly to accommodate their changing belief systems; even though Shevek has studied the Iotic of Urras, which is more or less our contemporary English, a significant portion of this book centers on his struggle to understand their language and ideals from the framework of his language, Pravic, and his own beliefs and prejudices. The novel is notable for the invention of the fictional ansible, an instantaneous communications device that plays a critical role in Le Guin's other important novel, *The Left Hand of the Darkness*.

In all, invention of a new mode of communication through the Common Tongue remains a source for establishing the defamiliarized world in the Aleutian trilogy. In imagining new world for the alternate world, Jones effectively accomplishes a very
significant goal of the Common Tongue to claim for the world’s plausibility while maintaining its alien qualities. The transformed language through the Common Tongue might be a less readily apparent, but ultimately it is more profound literary technique of to defamiliarise the readers. Gwyneth Jones does not stop at introducing new modes or technological devices in her narrative to defamiliarise the empirical reality. Further to this, the trilogy interweaves different cultures, brings them face to face to highlight differences. In the following part, we are going study such narrative strategies that contribute to encountering with differences.

4. Encountering Differences

The Aleutian trilogy is a story of contact between the ‘alien’ Aleutians and humans. In very general terms, there are two basic types of contact stories, and related plot-projections in a Science Fiction novel. The first type deals with the alien as a visitor to Earth or an invader of Earth and the second type chronicles experiences of the alien and the human in their encounter with the other. In the first type, aliens visiting Earth are well-meaning, friendly beings who drop by to help the inhabitants of Earth ‘mature’ become universal citizen. More often, in history of Science Fiction, the aliens who visit Earth are hostile beings or bug-eyed monsters (BEMs) bent on destroying the planet and its inhabitants, enslaving humans and imposing a foreign regime, or assimilating them into another being. The contact narratives, according to Greg Grewell, can be classified into three phases: the explorative, the domesticative, and the combative.\textsuperscript{13}
We will study the three phase development as narrated in the contact story of theAleutian trilogy: *White Queen*, *North Wind* and *Phoenix Café*. In the explorative phase, after Aleutians arrive at Earth, both are concerned with discovering each other’s worlds. In the second type, Aleutians domesticate at new land and they make it their home. Lastly, in the combative stage, the two parties: humans and aliens are in conflict with each other and in the end, Aleutians leave for their land. It is important to note that these phases are interconnected to each other and are not separate categories. Therefore, what follows here is the analysis of various narrative strategies Gwyneth Jones exploits in the trilogy. The narrative strategies include, on the one hand, the interconnecting phases of contacts between two worlds and on the other hand, demonstration of changing dynamic of unfamiliar and familiar spaces and characters that have come in contact with each other.

**4.1 Explore, domesticate and combat**

The extrapolative phase in the Aleutian trilogy begins in *White Queen*, the first part in of the trilogy. *White Queen* starts with the speculation set in 2038 in West Africa at the background of revolution going in United States. The novel narrates the period of the first contact and deals primarily with the misconceptions and misunderstandings that occur because humans and Aleutians each insists upon reader the Other through the standards of their own culture. The first Aleutians had arrived on earth under the command of the three captains: Rajath the trickster, Clavel the poet-the one they called the Pure One- and Kumbava the engineer.
They were a small party of private adventurers. The world from which they came is a ship lost in space, a wandering hulk that had blundered into the solar system by chance. The people of Earth didn’t know that. They welcomed the visitors with delirious excitement, hailed them as super beings, angels, saviours. Rajath the trickster had been quick to take advantage. He discovered that the ‘locals’ believed his people had traveled instantaneously across the galaxy from a fabulously advanced world of super beings. He eagerly agreed that this was so. The nature and location of the ship world out in orbit became a guarded secret. Then the aliens killed a human, and a terrifying standoff developed: terrifying both parties, but again the humans didn’t know that. Rajath had bullied his way through that emergency, and the ‘super beings’ seemed unassailable. Those few humans who saw the truth and dreaded the future were helpless. Meanwhile Clavel, the romantic young poet, had fallen in love with a ‘local’: a USSA journalist called Johnny Guglioli. Clavel believed that humans and Aleutians were one flesh, aspects of the same cosmic WorldSelf. He recognized Johnny as his ‘trueparent’, his genetic twin born in the previous generation and there, in Aleutian mythology, his perfect, fated lover. But Johnny loved a woman called Braemar Wilson, the secret leader of the anti-Aleutian resistance group called White Queen. Johnny was a friend to the aliens; he refused to join in Braemar’s plans. But then Clave tracked Johnny down and, overcome by passion, raped him. This incidence loomed large in the alien imagination, because of Clavel’s otherwise spotless reputation. It was hardly mentioned in the human records. But it changed Johnny’s mind. He and Braemar Wilson located the
Aleutian ship world and somehow got themselves out there, determined to blow up the aliens’ blue sun reactor. They could have succeeded. But the infant Government of the World, convened to deal with the aliens, had also located the ship. The saboteurs were detected. The humans, rightly or wrongly, decided to warn the Aleutians and Johnny and Braemar were caught. The aliens executed Johnny – a light enough sentence, in their terms, because they didn’t know that humans were not immortal. Braemar sent back to earth, escaped from custody and died from unrelated causes a few years later. That was the end of the tragic romance of the first contact.

_White Queen_ depicts Aleutians who are basically traders and explorers and they don’t wish their presence to be known. _White Queen_ is a narrative of discovery of the new world that opens with the Aleutians entering on Earth. In the discovery, Gwyneth Jones seems to be following the narrative strategy of presenting contrasts between two different worlds by putting them face to face and create a sense of wonder. However, first she starts with similarities between two worlds. For instance, for Agnes, a trip to the seaside when she was a child would be a ‘long way from where she lived now’. Everything goes as a familiar move as Johnny, a human character shares the seaside walk. But, it creates different set of expectations when Johnny queries that ‘if they had no population problem’ and Agnes finds the concept of population control puzzling. This allows the reader to foreshadow events with clues of ‘puzzling concept’ to put the reader in a specific frame of mind and invoke emotional responses. Basically, Aleutians do not believe in ‘permanent death’; they believe that the unique genetic
expression for each individual will return in the next generation. The reincarnated person will learn to become his self through studying the records of his previous lives, awaiting the ‘chemical event’ of recognition that allows the individual to know which of the people represented in the records he ‘is’. Once this moment of recognition occurs, the individual models his life on the example provided by the records and contributes his own records for the edification of future reincarnation of his ‘self’.

In the phase of domestication, the contact between terrestrials and extraterrestrials builds social relations between Aleutians and humans and the trilogy moves well beyond fixed, physically grounded alien/non-alien dichotomy as reflected in the main character, Sydney Carton in *North Wind*. The phase of domestication in *North Wind* deals with hermaphroditic and seemingly telepathic Aleutians who have settled on Earth. The main character is the ‘crippled’ Aleutian, Goodlooking aka Bella, a meek librarian who has discovered hidden inner strengths after being rescued from a mass execution by the Aleutians’ human translator, Sydney Carton. As the story line goes, *North Wind* is set approximately 100 years after first contact. The *North Wind* narrative addresses the process whereby extraterrestrials and terrestrials go through a process of selection, become accustomed to each other. Through an insightful narrative in the Aleutian world, *North Wind* chronicles Aleutians’ attempt of establishing and domesticating themselves within a small settlement at Earth. In this, humans are shown under the grip of ‘Aleutian fever’ as:

> When the whole giant planet was in the grip of ‘Aleutian fever’, there had been some locals who went to extremes. They cut off their noses,
they gave up talking aloud. They had their ‘male’ or ‘female’ bodies altered in imitation of the ungendered traders. They declared themselves immortal and searched human-moving-image records for traces of their past selves…They were called half-castes. (18, North Wind)

Finally, the combative phase cannot be considered as a different phenomenon than the exploration and the domestication phases. The phase comes in the last part of the trilogy, Phoenix Café, set in another 200 years in future after the North Wind narrative. Over this time period, relations between the Aleutians and the humans have become increasingly strained. Although it was not their original intent, Aleutians find themselves in the position of colonisers; as the result of their superior technology, they have usurped many of Earth’s political powers. Catherine, the main character in the novel, is ‘made’ from the genetic material of the (alien) Aleutian, Clavel (‘the Pure One’), which was altered in vitro to make her biologically human (and female). Her friends call her ‘Miss Alien-in-Disguise’. She thinks like an Aleutian; she remembers, as any Aleutian does, her past lives. She is the reincarnation of Clavel in a human body and through her, an attempt in the novels is to overcome the damage of the rape incident. Besides, other two main narrative threads in the novel cover the attempts of the human to use Aleutian organic weapons technology in their gender war and the discovery of FTL travel that is accessible to human by a human character, Helen.

In fact, it represents a late, progressive stage in a continuum whereby the earlier model-stages are subsumed as more efficient means of colonisation are developed. What differentiate the
combative from the other phases are not just the scale but also a collapsing of different times, and making the alien familiar and the familiar alien, the universe known and mapable. Generally speaking, the combative phase can be seen as the dominant model in alien-human contact stories. Basically, as a form, the combative phase approaches, conventionally, with an impulse of the whole-scale conflict: one civilisation battling it out with another for existence or sometimes for something less immediate such as territorial or trade rights. Additionally, the combative, as the name suggests, tends to be more action-packed, or violent, and usually it is a violence directed at the alien or ‘the Other’, howsoever they may be raced. However, although Jones follows the action-packed combative narrative, she subverts it by presenting the Aleutian – human narrative not as the bi-polar construction. She demonstrates the nuanced understandings of what it is to be alien or human being in the background of the other. At this stage, it would be help us if we present some of the details of characteristic features of the Aleutian trilogy like setting and characterisation that the three phase development offers.

4.2 Aleutia and Earth

Generally, while setting fictional narrative in futuristic Science Fiction, Earth has been featured in mainly two ways. One way has been to completely ignore Earth and create a new planet as in the space opera fiction. Another way has been to use Earth as one of the many settings in a complicated universe and explore a number of common themes through examination of outsiders’
perceptions of and interactions with Earth. In this, Earth is often depicted as a member of an interstellar community. Further, a usual attempt in Science Fiction has been to feature Earth at the centre of the community and prominent role to be played by Earth is to present herself as host of the alien invasion. While reasons vary, in most stories, it is because extraterrestrials are looking for a new world to colonise or otherwise dominate and they get Earth for their venture. Aliens in such narratives are often used to portray nearly all-powerful beings, placing the strongest forces on Earth at the receiving end of attacks that they can barely understand. This theme has been one of the long standing themes in Science Fiction since H. G. Wells’ The War of the Worlds. The War of the Worlds is split into two parts suggestive of Earth’s role in the fictional world, Book one: The Coming of the Martians, and Book two: The Earth under the Martians.

Gwyneth Jones’ Aleutian trilogy is not an exception to the practice of centering the contact narrative at Earth. However, although Jones sets the Aleutian trilogy on Earth, she doesn’t claim this to be an extraordinary place. Jones’ position in this regard is that she wants to locate her characters in ‘the place that matters’. She prefers Earth for her fictional exploration narratives because

Earth is the place that matters. This is where we live; this is where the adventures are going to happen. Space opera is very fine but it's not real, it’s a stage for infotainment and daydreams. I nearly always write about Earth.¹⁴

White Queen opens with Johnny Guglioli, the main human

¹⁴
character living at an imaginative location called Asabaland in Africa on Earth. John Guglioli is the twenty six years old trade union activist who is in the political exile. He is also an engineer-journalist (eejay) by profession and was married to Izabel when both were nineteen years old before getting divorced. Johnny is the victim of a freak medical error. He is infected with a petrovirus that had been developed at the turn of the century by the military, designed to dissolve into organic polymers. The virus is the chemical element of the ‘Class Q’ virus combined with a propensity to attack the protein based ‘living’ material at the heart of the most advanced modern data processing. This destroys the substance, ‘blue clay’ existing in the data processing material. After destroying, it replaces silicon as the key data processing material. Now, Johnny’s occupation is destroyed because he cannot work with computers or similar machinery as the ‘Class Q’ virus destroys the data processing capabilities. After his livelihood is ruined, living in Fo, the capital city of Asabaland, Johnny decides to chase unidentified foreign objects (UFOs) as a hobby. Asabaland since the end of the pagan times in the early thirteenth century by Christian reckoning had been Islamic then Portuguese then pagan again. Then for a formative period, it was the French colony then briefly a German; and finally the British colony. After the British, it has suffered a right-wing dictatorship, followed by the Marxist and economic collapse. In the mid-to-late twentieth century, Asabaland has lost fifty percent of its forest cover, and had a population explosion. Between 1985 and 2010, it has lost another 30 percent; and population was hacked back by unprecedented disease and famine. Linguistically, Fo has local
English that has been heavily contaminated with French besides Arabic and other unnameable African influences.

The geographical and cultural contexts of Asabaland make it clear that Jones does not choose Earth only as a geographical location. She sets it as the versatile tool to set the narrative on Earth and use it to accomplish multitude of objectives in the trilogy. Considering setting as one more character in the trilogy, Jones offers insight into any number of relevant issues in the trilogy. Paying close attention to the setting, the narrative often times enables us to understand why characters act the way they do. Another major strategy that Jones follows in the trilogy is of setting Earth at the background of Aleutia, the land of Aleutians. As a result, social and cultural influences of the two different worlds can be seen crisscrossing and dictating the behavior of characters. For instance, Agnes tells about her home planet, Aleutia that it has ‘blue sun’, ‘tiny moon’, ‘the park land’ and ‘the protected wildernesses’. This description comes in comparison with Earth as follows:

There was a fairly large proportion of desert, but it didn’t encroach. She told him about a trip to the seaside when she was a child. Though Aleutia resembles Earth, it is different from Earth.” Agnes tells Johnny, <Our planet is so like this one>, said Agnes. <Look up!> (on the screen, she pointed to the watery but potent rainy season sun.) <Your sun, its like ours, except ours in blue> (57, *White Queen*)

By locating its narrative as an interactive space between Aleutia and Earth, the trilogy presents ways in which cultures interact. By dramatising negotiations of aliens and non-aliens and their
radically different world-views and ways of life, the genre becomes what Mary Louise Pratt calls an ‘art of the contact zone’. A contact zone, according to Pratt, is “a space where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power, such as colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths...”15 In addition, through ‘the art of the contact zone’, Jones presents the contact narrative through different perspectives on Aleutians and humans.

4.3 Aleutians and Humans

Aleutians in the trilogy embody, like an alien character in the mainstream Science Fiction, the unusual peculiarities such as strangely sounding names, oddly coloured eyes and different ways of living. Aleutians have three rather short fingers, a thumb and the stub of a fourth finger. The ‘thumb’ is locked in a fist; pads on the outer surfaces form a thick horny paw. The nails are trimmed claws. The skin of hands and face looked faintly scaly, with visible pores and ‘goosebumped like chicken skin’. Bella’s foot is broad in the ball, ridiculously narrow in the heel, and had a kind of lockable arch. Her clawed toes are as long as fingers, and heavily padded underneath. Aleutians have landed at Alaska in light brown coveralls with but each of them having added form of decoration. One wears plastic clamshell fragments knotted in her hair; another has a ‘sealskin’ tunic strung with fringing and beads; and so on. They are uniformly slender but bulky in the trunk. Their hair are dark and lank, their skins medium light. They have no noses. They have reached the colonel’s office smiling grotesquely, showing
their open hands, the fingers pointing downwards. In the beginning, the main impact that Aleutians brings for terrestrials is an experience of fear. Colonel Everard, ‘sweats standing on his pasty face’ was shaking’ after he saw that Aleutians have landed and he become ‘sick as long a dog’ in the room that ‘had been pumped full of nerve gas’.

*White Queen* elegantly describes arrival of aliens at the Alaska USAF base. They have entered through a plane that ‘did not exist, it had never been in the sky. But there it stood’. The aliens in six figures have crossed the widow. The man wearing a light brown coverall is without any ID, unarmed, unaugmented, carrying no communication devices and they don’t speak, but their faces keep twitching. Humans hear a scrabbling sound, thrust the light at it and see a dark shape wriggling in one of the crumbled slit windows. She dropped to the ground. Dim light welled between her fingers from a short, red, glowing dumbbell. She came towards him, then stood and gazed for a long time. The strangeness of her face began to melt. The split up and concave nose became as invisible as the features, the beauty even, of the face loved and familiar. May be, he thought, she was trying to see him as humans too. (35, *White Queen*) The novel creates further eerie atmosphere as Aleutians suddenly join hands and begin to dance. After the Aleutians’ landing, humans react to the situation in typical human ways. Some are scared of the strange visitors. Some choose to make themselves over in the image of their beloved visitors while others actively dislike them and play an active role in ridding the planet of the threat. As the narrator tells,
Some people had longed to interfere, convinced that they could teach the benighted locals to abandon their superstitions and live in peace. Others had reminded the rest that they had no reason to feel superior. (7, North Wind)

Primarily, reasons for tension between Aleutians and humans in the Aleutian trilogy are hard certainties and the enduring, atmospheric mysteries that humans and Aleutians face after the Aleutians arrive at Earth. Both parties cling to feelings that they are alien to each other and fear that the other will take on his/her space. Especially, humans connect themselves with Aleutians with an assumption that the alien Aleutians are superior. As Johnny says, “it was a truism that the aliens who landed, whoever they were, had to be superior. Or else we’d be visiting them.” (71, White Queen) However, while reflecting on tension between Aleutians and humans, Jones does not stop at the human voice. Interestingly, she represents the alien Aleutians by presenting their own voices and narratives. Since beginning, the trilogy is narrated with the point of views of both humans and aliens. For instance, Jones deftly narrates the first meeting of Johnny and Clavel from both the perspectives:

The way she looked at him, shy and daring and doubtful, made her seem irresistibly like a high school Juliet. She thought it would be romantic to meet in the broken tower at midnight: now she wasn’t so sure. (78, White Queen)

This leaves impression in Johnny’s mind that Aleutians have the utterly disorienting sound. In another example, Ellen Kershaw, senior nursemaid, makes a short speech reminding everyone that
Aleutians should have used ‘the facilities’ before they left the helipad. The aliens would become uneasy if someone leaves the audience for no intelligible reason. Lunch would be served in the courtyard and Aleutians wouldn’t like to watch humans eat. Humans would think that aliens ‘don’t know how they shit. Or even if they do’. The basic assumption in showing the differences while creating parallels is that Aleutians would become ‘aliens’ if they are not human or earthlings are human because they are not aliens. For instance, Clavel’s legs inside the trousers move around and the joints can turn upside down. Agnes is ‘a wolf, a baboon with a semi-human face’ and she was above him seeming much bigger than her real size, the way ‘a big dog does when it gets too close’. Later, Clavel is compared with Johnny as if she ‘howled something and leapt up the wall and Johnny couldn’t jump like that’. Another example, while describing the Aleutian skin as having ‘no red or blue tones’ but ‘darkly olive, like the smoke from a fire of green wood and some a startling acid yellow; some very pale’, Jones prefers to make an observation that ‘the whole human range from indigo-black to milk-and-roses was missing’.

While aliens settle down on Earth, they go through several conflicts with the humans. The war against aliens in *North Wind* raises existential issues of aliens surviving on Earth. As Sydney reflects, ‘What did the horror of this night mean for his children? When humans have lost all rational fear of the aliens, what happens to Aleutian-lovers?’ (44, *North Wind*). *North Wind* takes forward the story through the adventures of Goodlooking and Bella as they escape across lands ravaged by the Gender Wars-ongoing battles that pit Traditionalists (who believe in male superiority) against
various Reformers. To a great extent, sexual reproduction has disappeared, and even humans who consider themselves Traditionalists reproduce through cloning. In time, Bella becomes the focal point in a deadly race to rediscover an instantaneous transmission device. Spotlighting the clash between human and alien cultures, Jones follows the intertwined fates of Bella, a crippled young Aleutian, and her human caretaker, Sydney Carton, a member of a fanatical pro-Aleutian enclave. While protecting Bella from a world increasingly hostile to her, Sydney secretly schemes with a spymaster known only as the Fat Man to locate an instantaneous travel device Johnny may have used to reach the Aleutians’ sunship. Unknown to all, Bella may play the key role in retrieving the device. In the last part of the trilogy, *Phoenix Café*, the Aleutians leave Earth to return to their home world, and it isn't entirely clear if that civilization will survive their departure. Catherine, ward of the Aleutian, Lord Maitri, has the body of a normal human being, but she's actually a reincarnation of the alien Clavel, who, three centuries earlier, was partly responsible for causing the Gender Wars. Reborn on Earth during the last days of the Aleutian occupation, Catherine is torn by guilt over her formative role in the problems between the two species. She seeks to expiate her guilt through a series of sadomasochistic sexual encounters with Misha Connelly, a young artist who may also be involved in a dangerous political movement. The tension between humans and aliens reaches to different level in the last part of trilogy, *Phoenix Café*. The combating situation does not remain the level of physicality though it existed as in the previous novels. The
conflicting situation between two identities becomes a prominent feature of the combative mode.

Goodlooking dropped to his four feet and ran. He reached his door, and was out in the corridor. Desperation gave him strength he had never possessed before. He ran through the hotel, his limbs giving way under him, reeling from one wall to the other along the corridors. He was aware of lamps darkened and fallen, of air that tasted of death. As he came to the main hall there was smoke everywhere; and flickers of fire. But he was not afraid of what happening there. Fear was behind him, in Sidney Caron’s face. (42, *North Wind*)

These conflicts occur when humans as well as aliens feel that their sense of self—who they are questioned and threatened. Their respective sense of self has been fundamental across different phases, not only to one's self-esteem but also to how they interpret the rest of the world. Jones in her skillfully and intelligently written trilogy focuses not on wilderness of aliens while exploring human-alien relations as it is often focused on in conventionally written contact narratives. An adaptation of the form of contact narrative provides Jones’ novels with a wider scope of exploring nuances of individuals as well as society that hold human and alien beings. Her focus is very much on an impact on each others' civilization, project, experiences and intellectual productions. Rather than limiting an alien into a character-type, they are shown as ‘strange’ live-beings having distinct physical and behavioral features separate from what human beings hold. Gwyneth Jones makes her point clear saying:
I wanted complex and interesting people who managed to have lives fully as strange, distressing, satisfying, absorbing, productive as ours, without having any access to that central ‘us and themness’ of human life.16

The ‘normal’ but ‘strange’ aliens, perhaps, give Johnny an impression of ‘the utterly disorienting sound of alien’s voice’ of Clavel. The narrator keeps us guessing about his meeting with Clavel. Johnny has fixed up a meeting with Agnes/Clavel at a fort. Surprisingly enough, Johnny thinks that Clavel doesn’t have a cleft palate. Her speech didn’t make any sense though he could sense it as normal and slightly nasal. She was very young of around fifteen years old.

5. In-Between-ness of Aleutians

After a detailed analysis of the three phases of the contact story of Aleutians and humans, changes and transformations that the characters and spaces go through, we realise that Aleutians are not just aliens. Hundred years after Johnny Guglioli tried to sabotage the Aleutians' orbiting sun ship, Earth is in the midst of a devastating ‘gender’ war, and the Aleutians provoke violent anti-alien sentiment for their misunderstood plan to aid humanity by leveling the Himalayas. The zone in which characters operate is the collectively imagined future. Jones documents transformations that the human beings and the Aleutians go through. The trilogy goes through a series of transformations and there is a generation of ‘purebreds’, ‘half-caste’ that challenge human perception
identifying and categorising living beings as human and/or non-humans.

At the hindsight, we would like to make an argument here that no alien is purely alien but they are always somewhere ‘in-between’ humans and aliens. They tend to fall towards the center of the spectrum between completely familiar and absolutely bizarre. Like ‘half caste’ Sydney or Michael Connelly in Phoenix Café, the narrator in H G Wells’ The War of the Worlds has also confessed at ‘in-between-ness’ in the encounter with the Martians and he expects to “see a man emerge—possibly something a little unlike us terrestrial men, but in all essentials a man,” and he is sorely disappointed by the vile creatures that come out instead. Nonetheless, the Wellsian narrator apprehends the aliens’ humongous eyes, saliva-dripping v-shaped mouths, and greasy skin, and once they begin their awful yet scientifically brilliant business with the heat-ray and black smoke-equipped fighting-machines, the narrator realises the truth of his earlier surmise that they are, ‘in spite of their repulsive forms, intelligent creatures’ relating to these vile creatures physically and mentally. Likewise, not only humans but also Aleutians in the Aleutian trilogy can be read as somewhere in between. Gwyneth Jones adduces,

Once my roughly humanoid aliens reached Earth, interrogation proceeded along traditional lines. I whisked them into my laboratory for intensive internal examination, with a prurient concentration on sex and toilet habits. In real life (I mean in the novel White Queen) the buccaneers resisted this proposal. They didn't know they were aliens, they thought they were merely strangers, and they didn't see why they had to be vivisected before they could have their tourist visas.
It means that even when an alien is depicted as an ‘alien’ species with unusual characteristics; it will exhibit at least a few recognizable vestiges of human being in its appearance, speech, actions, and/or attitudes. While sharing process in creating Aleutians, Jones says that

I didn't want my readers to be able to distance themselves; or to struggle proudly towards empathy in spite of the tentacles. I didn't want anyone to be able to think, why, they're just like us once you get past the face-lumps, the way we do when we get to know the tv alien goodies and baddies in Babylon 5 or Space Precinct 9. I needed them to be irreducibly weird and at the same time, undeniably people, the same as us.  

Jones’ observation on aliens in Science Fiction supports this view. She writes in *Aliens in the Fourth Dimension* that,

But whatever formal, articulate language our visitors use in real life, all the aliens we know so far speak human. They speak our human predicament, our history, our hopes and fears, our pride and shame. As long as we haven't met any actual no kidding intelligent extraterrestrials (and I would maintain that this is still the case, though I know opinions are divided) the aliens we imagine are always other humans in disguise: no more, no less.

Gwyneth Jones assumes ‘strange’ Aleutians (behavior, body movements) but gestures toward something known in order to make analogies or provide signs. She strategically makes her point regarding her choice of alien characters that aliens “had to be humanoid. I didn't want my readers to be able to distance
themselves; or to struggle proudly towards empathy in spite of the tentacles.\textsuperscript{21} Jones’ aliens are varied as described in \textit{North Wind} and they are, in certain moods, ‘entirely human’. It is described in \textit{North Wind} as follows:

\begin{quote}
Aleutians, widely as humanity in physical appearance and bulk: some big as bears, some elfin. Some of them looked like humans with drooping shoulders and happy hips, some were much weirder. Goodlooking’s \textit{occluded nasal}, as they called it when someone had nostril slits instead of a gap, and her slight build put her on the human end of the scale. In certain moods he could see her as entirely human. (31, \textit{North Wind})
\end{quote}

In another case, Bella’s clawed toes are as long as fingers, and heavily padded underneath. He worked the one-size plastic in his hands till they are soft. When he tried to ease them on, he discovered that her pads were raw and bloody. He knew that “they felt pain, the same as human”. The first meeting between an alien and human character in Jones’ \textit{White Queen} shows that aliens are not considered very different from human emotions. The aliens are ‘shy’, ‘daring’ and ‘doubtful’ and ‘like a high school Juliet’. The description would fit to any other normal human character. Jones’ novels establish the Science Fictional context towards creating alien worlds while including the human context by considering human characters. While dealing with alien worlds, human characters are not only token perceivers of the new environment. They are also having strong individualising qualities and they provide a ‘window’ to look at the alien world and familiarise with the unfamiliar. What is interesting in these novels is that the
novelists follow ‘schemes’ of human beings and human characters interact with the environment that can help realise alien world. In the same way, characters become more alive in their relationship with the objects and forces of their outer world.

6. ‘Other Humans in Disguise’: Aleutians and Colonisation

The in-between-ness of the Aleutian trilogy qualifies Suvin’s argument that unlike fantasy Science Fiction should be set in a realistic world, but one which is strange and alien. Science Fiction writer creates ‘strangeness’ in such ways that fictional and real world differ from each other while making the readers look back at themselves from the fiction’s twisted point of view. In this sense, it is in between. The uniqueness of Science Fiction and its plausible alien world would allow a Science Fiction writer to reflect on the knowledge of our own world. As Patrick D. Murphy observes, “the writing and reading of Science Fiction are intimately linked to and based on, getting people to think both about the present and about this world in which they live.” While relating Science Fiction with the real world in the readers live in, Murphy believes in its interconnections of the fictional alien world with the contemporary context and, therefore, “we have no alibi for avoiding addressing the results of our actions today.” Then, Science Fiction becomes literature of ideas. Darko Suvin emphasises that Science Fiction is senseless, without “a given socio-historical context: Outside of a context that supplies the conditions of making sense, no text can be even read.... Only the insertion of a text into a context makes it intelligible.”
Jones’ Aleutian trilogy is not just a formal expression in the genre of Science Fiction but it is the contextual positioning of Aleutians to reflect at the contemporary society. As Jones claims,

But whatever formal, articulate language our visitors use in real life, all the aliens we know so far speak human. They speak our human predicament, our history, our hopes and fears, our pride and shame…. the aliens we imagine are always other humans in disguise: no more, no less.25

As we have seen in the previous chapters, the reflexive new generation of writers of the post 1960s focused on expression of the Self and the Other in society rather than writing with the escapist galactic thrust. The new generation has influenced Gwyneth Jones’ writing and her writing too has remained open to explore fiction’s relations to the surrounding changes. As Jones suggests, reflection on Self/Other through aliens in Science Fiction texts provide dialogical and contested space in which a writer can examine the issues of the Otherness, the relationship of the privileged with the marginalized, and the power of normalization in relation to the notion of ‘human’. She writes:

In the 90s, when I was writing the *Aleutian Trilogy*, the struggle for women’s human rights and civil rights was a live issue. There was a UN Rapporteur on domestic violence, there was the battle for CEDAW -- remember that one? There was the Population Conference in Cairo in 1994 that made major headlines. (Not that the conferences have stopped, or the CEDAW treaty has gone away, but it was all real, with coverage, back then.) And this had opened a horrible can of worms, had made the extent of the secret holocaust visible: raising visions of
gender riots, vicious reprisals, and desperate Third World women turning to terrorism and getting good at it. So I wrote about a war, a cruelly destructive shooting war, between the "Traditionalists" (rich, male-dominated but with plenty of women supporters: militarist, shameless strip-mine capitalists; conservative; aggressive) and the "Reformers" (poor, female-ordered but with plenty of male supporters: progressive, utopian, environmentalist). Naturally, once the weapons are out, neither side wins and humanity loses. While the aliens (who, among other roles, stand for a future human race that has abandoned the gender divide) gain an empire. 26

It might seem reductive to trace the origin of the Science Fiction genre back to colonialist literature, but we can see here that Jones clearly indicates at literary imagination of the encounter of the human Self and the non-human Other forms a major source in shaping her novels within the framework of colonialism. Jones accepts it saying that,

When I invented my alien invaders ‘The Aleutians’ I was aware of the models that Science Fiction offered, and of the doubled purpose that they could serve. I wanted, like other writers before me, to tell a story about the colonisers and the colonised. 27

John Reider in his book, Colonialism and the Emergence of Science Fiction: Early Classics of Science Fiction observes that

Indeed, most historians of Science Fiction agree that Utopian and satirical transformations of encounters between European travelers and non-Europeans form a major part of the genre's prehistory, that the period of the most fervid colonial expansion in the late nineteenth century is also the crucial period for the emergence of the genre, and
that Science Fiction appeared predominantly in those countries that were involved in colonial and imperialist projects.28

Over and above, Jones says that ‘writers before me’ have also told ‘a story about the colonizers and the colonized’. Before Jones explored alien-human contact stories in the Aleutian trilogy in different ways, the idea of fictionalisation of the extraterrestrial life was already one of the most common forms in Science Fiction writing, and the theme of several seminal works. H G Wells, for example, had shocked readers with the possibility of Earth being invaded by aliens from Mars in his *The War of the Worlds*. The novel describes experiences of an unnamed narrator who travels through the suburbs of London as England is invaded by Martians. A E van Vogt had charted the voyage of a deep space survey ship that discovers a derelict and haunted alien relic in *The Voyage of The Space Beagle* (1950). A huge spaceship with a chemically castrated all-male crew of almost a thousand in Van Vogt’s novel is on a scientific mission to explore interstellar space encounters several, mostly hostile, aliens and alien civilizations. Meanwhile on board, revolutions, both political and scientific, take place. Another example, Edgar Rice Burroughs, a famous for popular Tarzan series, wrote *A Princess of Mars* (1912) depicting racially coded fights between the green Martians and the red ones. This book exemplifies that Science Fiction is a boy's adventure story, a colonialist literature whose setting is imaginatively relocated in the outer space. Robert Heinlein had also imagined an intergalactic battle for supremacy against an alien species in *Starship Troopers*. *Starship Troopers* was first published serially in the abridged form in *The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction* from October to
November 1959, as *Starship Soldier* and published hardcover in December, 1959. Often, these sorts of the alien narratives involve the fantasy of human control in two forms as: a fantasy projected onto aliens who intend to take over or enslave the human body. The development of theories of evolution brought the notion of the alien into a new context, dominated by ideas of adaptation to exotic environments. After the popularisation of ideas contained in Charles Darwin’s *Origin of Species* (1859), the idea of aliens became preoccupied with the idea of a struggle for existence whose losers must perish, and English writers soon began to imagine alien species locked in deadly competition with one another, as in Hugh McColl’s Mr Stranger’s *Sealed Packet* (1889), or as potential rivals of humankind, as in H. G. Wells’ *The War of the Worlds*. Wells’ alien narrative featured aliens as the would-be colonisers bent on the genocidal conquest of Earth. They have set a vital literary precedent by revealing untapped melodramatic potential of a uniquely exaggerated variety whose exploitation required the representation of aliens as loathsome monsters. Throughout these narratives, existential struggles between human and aliens have remained the central feature of fiction. However, aliens in the Aleutian trilogy do not follow the BEM tradition of aliens. In fact, prior to Jones, C S Lewis had played a significant role in breaking traditional BEM concept in his trilogy. The hero of *Out of the Silent Planet*, for instance, dreads his encounter with the life forms at Mars as:

His universe was peopled with horrors such as ancient and medieval mythology could hardly rival. No insect-like vermiculate or crustacean abominable, no twitching feelers, rasping wings, slimy coils, curling
tentacles, no monstrous union of super-human intelligence and insatiable cruelty seemed to him anything but likely on an alien world.  

The narrative shows that Lewis tried to break his readers of the mental conditioning which makes them assume that superhuman intelligence must go hand in hand with monstrosity of form and ruthlessness of will. Gwyneth Jones, following Lewis’ tradition of breaking usual readers of Science Fiction of the mental conditioning in the panics situation in a meeting of aliens and human beings exists no more.

Gwyneth Jones focuses on the correlation between real world cultural and political history – particularly that of colonialism, empire-building and warfare and, the fictional representation of the arrival of aliens, as invaders, messengers or explorers, from other worlds. Gwyneth Jones’s the Science-Fiction invasion narrative of the Aleutian trilogy reflects and enacts the processes of settlement, colonization, imperialism, and the struggles for territory, Lebensraum that have still been key motivating forces in the shaping of the narrative of the Aleutian trilogy. Lebensraum is a German word for ‘habitat’ or ‘living space’. One of the major political ideas of Adolf Hitler and an important component of Nazi ideology, lebensraum has served as the motivation for the expansionist policies of Nazi Germany. In his autobiography, Mein Kampf, Hitler shares his views on lebensraum stating that the Germans need lebensraum, a ‘living space’ with land and raw materials that it should be found in the East. Likewise, the Aleutians, coming from the land of Aleutia were looking at the living space of Earth to habituate. However,
Jones’ novel aspires to go beyond expansionist ambitions at the cost of interrogating into deeper concerns of complex relationships of coloniser and colonised. As she makes her point,

The possibilities of an outright \textit{lebensraum} struggle would soon be exhausted; a situation involving any extreme division between master race and slave race would be too clear cut. I needed something in a sense more innocent. A relationship that could grow in intimacy and corruption: a trading partnership where neither party is more altruistic than the other, whichever manages to win the advantage. Most of all, I needed something \textit{slow}. I needed to see what would happen to my experiment over hundreds of years: over generations, not decades.\textsuperscript{30}

The \textit{lebensraum} struggle has been a fundamental issue in the colonial discourse. Therefore, before going into analysis of the Aleutian trilogy, we will take a review of the concept of colonialism in brief that will help analysing the Aleutian trilogy. Like Science Fiction, colonialism and imperialism are complex and far from being simple. As far as our research is concerned, we are focusing on Western colonialism. As the history of the Western colonialism and imperialism is politically, economically, and culturally relevant to contemporary issues and, therefore, controversial, these terms themselves are no less contested. Throughout human history empires have been defined by the political domination of one or more territories by a powerful polity or state, often called an imperial metropole. The word, imperial in the English language is borrowed from the old French term \textit{emperial}, which was derived from the Latin word \textit{impera}\textquotesingle\textit{re}, meaning, to command, to rule and from there came the word \textit{imperium}, meaning power, mastery, and sovereignty. Imperialism
can be defined as “the domination and rule by a strong state over a subordinate state, territory and people that exist beyond the boundaries of the imperial metropole.” Throughout history, empires have possessed colonies. The English word, colony came directly or indirectly from the Latin verb *colere*, meaning to cultivate and till the land. The Romans established *coloniae* as their empire expanded, including *Colõn̄ia Agrippi̇na* or what is today called the city of Cologne, a beautiful German city on the Rhine. Colonies are dependent territories and populations that are possessed and ruled by an empire. ‘Colonialism’ refers to the processes, policies and ideologies used by metropoles to establish, conquer, settle, govern, and economically exploit colonies. In the age of Western colonization, as well as before, colonization meant not only ruling other peoples but also sending one’s own people to settle a foreign territory, or colony. It is known that history of Western colonialism is about rise and fall of colonial powers but the colonial history also demands an attention due to complexities of relationships between colonizers and colonized. Professor David B. Abernethy has provided us schemas by creating a chronology of five periods demonstrating the complexity of Western expansion, colonialism and imperialism, contractions and lastly, decolonialisation.

The discussion on Jones and colonialism throws light on the Aleutian trilogy in the sense that like colonizers Aleutians travel from the land of Aleutia, in the first phase, to take the possession of a significant portion of Earth. In this regard, Jones has made her intentions clear saying:
I planned to give my alien conquerors the characteristics, all the supposed deficiencies, that Europeans came to see in their subject races in darkest Africa and the mystic East—'animal’ nature, irrationality, intuition; mechanical incompetence, indifference to time, hapless aversion to theory and measurement: and I planned to have them win the territorial battle this time. It was no coincidence, for my purposes, that the same list of qualities or deficiencies [...] were and still are routinely awarded to women, the defeated natives, supplanted rulers of men, in cultures north and south, west and east, white and non-white, the human world over.  

The Aleutian trilogy implicates that in the contact narratives, a contact with alien race is a way to build the post-colonial discourse. As in the Science Fiction novels of Delany or Le Guin, Jones effectively demonstrates the possibility of alien-human narrative “to critique colonial forms of economic exchange and their inherent underpinning in discourses that produce both cultural, or, as Michel Foucault would say both statist and biologised and thus, institutional forms of racism, sexism and homophobia.” The Aleutian trilogy makes it clear in the beginning that the human- alien encounter is a consequence of mode of economic exchange that began constituting their relationships. Aleutians arrive on Earth as ‘traders’ and then, set up four trading posts at different places.  

As the Aleutian narrative goes along, Jones draws on history of colonialism. She analogises it through the effects on Earth’s cultures of seemingly technologically superior aliens. It has been narrative in Science Fiction that the root cause of being superior aliens is their superiority in terms of their progress. As a few critics like John Reider and Fredrick Jameson have articulated, the central
term that links Science Fiction to colonialism is the idea of progress. Thomas Clareson draws our attention to the fact that belief in progress is an absolute prerequisite to the formation of Science Fiction. "Progress", says Jameson “is the form of social memory demanded by capitalism, an awareness of qualitative social change that links the past to the present under the narrative logic of growth or development.” The techno-scientific world of Jones’ Aleutians, their advancement through devices like FTL is one way of highlighting codes of Other in all its diversity that is not ‘progressive’. Of course, Jones does not handle her Science Fiction world as with the belief that non-Aleutians are childlike innocents in need of “white men's protection.”

Jones’ trilogy is a reflection on relationships between coloniser and colonised. It seeks to create new vistas, explore new fields by going where no one has gone before. As a fiction writer, she has produces numerous demonstrations of the interdependent relationships among geographic exploration, commercial exploitation, and scientific expedition in the three centuries that trilogy is spread within. The commerce does not limit the human-alien exchange. They are not merely expected to adhere to commerce but also get into each other’s lives and their participation also includes ‘the exchange of both of merchandise and of bodies in sexual intercourse.” Further, she presents the post-colonial reality as faux vermin and surgically induced cleft palates become fashionable among humans imitating their conquerors. Articulating on the discourse of colonialism is mostly represented from one side of the contact: disadvantaged writers staking a claim in dominant cultural forms. Jones represents the
other side of the colonialism without losing any intensity and sincerity the disadvantaged position might bring in. Importantly, breaking standard construction of colonisers and colonised, the Aleutian trilogy allows multiple voices of outsiders and downtrodden to focus on reflecting on what it is to be human.