

Zoom Chat Week 13: Tom Sweterlitsch, *The Gone World* (Parts 1-2)

Discussion of Epigraph (from Dante's *Inferno*)

Lina: It's still very much in flux, like time travel doesn't really make understanding situations much easier

Kyle: To me it seems like a focus on the future is useful only when you live in the present. Living completely in the future is just anxiety inducing.

Sierra: I had same line of thinking as Kyle. It is saying that we should live in present and do things now to shape our future. We can't rely on the future

Taylor: Exactly, like we're always using "when I graduate" as motives for doing things but we never live in the present

Samantha: It's kind of like a paradox, as to me it sounds like he's saying we have a clearer vision of the future than the present. It's ironic because the future depends on the present, and if the present isn't clear, how can the future be?

Zoe: @taylor that's literally my personal crisis right now

Rhi (sent by email): 1. Why do you think Sweterlitsch chooses to write Part Two (2015-2016) from the first-person point of view instead of sticking with the third-person point of view? How does this affect the reader's experience? 2. Throughout the novel, Sweterlitsch frequently brings up the topic of religion. My question is, how are science and religion similar? Do you think that beliefs rooted in science could be considered another form of religion? How is the intertwining of these two topics reflected in the novel, particularly regarding the Terminus?

Maria (sent by email): On page 32, Moss reveals a portion of her worldview: "death might still be a mystery, but the entirety of people's lives could be summed up in file folders, in weights, in measurements." How is this idea reflected or not reflected in the lives of the characters so far? What does this show about the personality and beliefs of the main character, Shannon Moss?

Whitney: We kind of already discussed this but... In this story, the people in the possible realities are just possibilities. I am wondering how then does that 1 reality the person travels to correlate to the present reality? I was also wanted to discuss the moral compass of the things they try to travel to the future and solve. We saw the reaction of the people who discovered the end of the world and they tried to prevent it by committing suicide. Wouldn't this act be futile though because in some other reality another end of the world could occur right? I like how complex this story is, but I think the author chose not to give too much explanation of how everything works. I think this author took a similar open-ended approach to the future home of living god.

John: On page 123 and 124, Shannon discusses religion and resurrection with Nestor. In what ways can time travel serve as a resurrection? Do you see similarities to the "resurrection time travel genre" and Avengers Endgame? Also, as an additional question, what is the significance of Nestor believing in God but considering him a "parasite?"

Josie: Why are the ships named after astrological signs? What is the literature significance of this reference and what is the author trying to relate it to in the novel?

Natalie: What was the purpose of setting the book in West Virginia and rural Pennsylvania? How does time travel relate to apocalypses?

Lina: 1. What do you think the quantum-tunneling nanoparticles (QTNs) are? Sentient alien lifeform? Or non-sentient alien virus? 2. How can hypothetical futures become a bit of reality when a time traveler brings back an echo to terra firma? How are they able to pass over from illusion to real?

Taylor: The author portrays Shannon's PTSD as an ingrained part of her character, especially with the gory opening scene of the novel. The author also hints at some discrimination she faces, being a woman with a disability (basically the entirety of page 35 thru 44) Do these factor in to her large decision making, like the decision to make the jump into Deep Space to find out more about Marian, or to have a sexual relationship with someone in the future who she knows in her own present? Is the author saying anything by making Shannon one of the few leading women in all of the situations she faces, a woman with a disability and trauma beyond belief?

Brooke: Shannon writes the phrase "LIFE IS GREATER THAN TIME" as she reminds herself of her assignment. What implications does this line have for the nature of time travel? Do you think this is how time travel will actually feel if we achieve it?

Kyle: This book is unique in that the cause of the apocalypse is a singular event that is expected to occur in the future. The Terminus is assumed to be the end of the world and, because of time travel, people know about this event. Does the knowledge of the end of the world bring about apocalypse before its time?

Grant: Why do you think the Terminus is constantly moving closer to the present? Do you think Shannon traveling to the future is actually useful in figuring out who committed the murders or do you think it is doing more harm than good because of the danger Shannon is and has been putting herself in?

Miles: Wow! So many questions... I think Sweterlitsch does a good job of explaining enough to keep from alienating the reader with confusion, but this novel is still a wild ride. I keep on getting caught up on the philosophical implications of "Inadmissible Future Trajectories" – entire universes that seemingly fundamentally don't really exist or matter. This sort of time travel story is different than any other I've read or seen before. What are the moral and nihilistic implications of IFTs? The novel explores them but I keep on thinking about just how extensive, and weird, they would be.

Tim: On Page 99, they talk about curing cancer in future IFT's. Can time travelers bring stuff that was created in IFT's, like cures, and bring them back to the present or other IFT's?

Robert: What added pressure does Shannon Moss face with having the capability to travel through time in this novel? If you had this same capability, how would you address this added pressure?

Zoe: How did Sweterlitsch come up with such a dark opening to the novel? What motivated him to start that way and will the novel lighten up in the second half?

Reed: Why do the characters in the book emphasize the collection of information when going to the future rather than the collection of resources. Even if that resource would be in form of collecting additional scientists for resources or physically collecting cancer curing technology

Sierra: Since this novel has heavy themes of time travel, my questions will center around that theme. How do our decisions, given enough time, change the future before us? What lengths will people go through to try to preserve the things that they love? Taking these questions into account how do you think Moss's future will come to an end? What things do you think Moss will do given her exceedingly resilient figure

Victoria: When they time travel, the future may change. Would it even be worth time travel, knowing that the future may look completely different in your timeline? Is Shannon using her ability to understand time travel to its potential?

Victoria: My typos are a mess sorry lol.

John: @Kyle It seems like your question is whether or not knowledge of future tragic events can bring about a "self fulfilling prophecy" before the tragedy is expected to occur. I would say that such a scenario is easily possible. It just depends on how the society reacts to such knowledge.

Kyle: I'm curious about Tim's question too. Can they bring back information or mass from IFT?

Samantha: Why do you think Shannon takes the name of her friend Courtney, and how do you think finding Marian Mursult is helping her cope with the trauma she has from losing her? I just find this subplot of their relationship to be interesting.

Alexis: My question is generally about my own curiosity towards Shannon as a character. I find it interesting that there seem to be two different motivations for Shannon: one being trying to find out when terminus begins, and the other discovering Marian Mursult, hopefully alive. Shannon seems to have a strong, gut feeling that Marian is still alive, and I think this motivation is a really cool force to drive her decisions, despite so much evidence that she's most likely dead. Since Shannon's character is so intertwined with the concept of endings, do these motivations serve as a juxtaposition to the possibilities of time travel just skipping over endings or re-define the concept of an ending as a possibility within multiple universes?

Alexis: This novel makes me want to run the other direction from time travel as a real possibility.

Sierra: @Tim I'm very curious about this myself. Like are people allowing to bring things back? I would think no, like yeah you can bring back knowlege because once you know something that can't really be taken away from you. But I would think that objects would stay in thier own time. For example if you make cure for cancer or make something in the future, if you go back in time, well that thing doesn't exist in that time so I would think you couldn;t bring it back becuase it wouldn't exsit

Tim: @Robert Some of the Pressures that Shannon would have is trying to reduce her impact on as many IFT's as possible.

Tim: @Sierra Yeah, it reminds me of Back to the Future Part 2 where Biff goes into the future, grabs the sports winners almanac, and then goes back in time to give it to his 1950's self.

John: @Miles I definitely understand how IFTs could be ruled by nihilism. If the consequences of that IFT will not pan out over the long course of history, people would be motivated to do whatever they please because their world could end at any time. Any progress the inhabitants of the IFT make towards careers, relationship, or other lengthy endeavors would be erased if the time traveler returned to Terra Firma timeline. However, this would be more prominent if the people were AWARE that they were in an IFT. However, I think nihilism would still be present to some extent, regardless of if they are aware of an IFT.

Taylor: Is it explained how they KNOW the IFT is completely erased when the person from the past leaves?

Kyle: No idea haha

Taylor: I'm thinking of her whisk analogy, I think the timeline would still exist when the person from the past leaves, it's just inaccessible because you can fall into hundreds of "doors"

Samantha: On the matter of her PTSD, perhaps she makes risky or questionable decisions to have a sense of control, because so many things are not in her control. Also, she may be making strong decisions to unravel the idea that disabled women are weak women that cannot make their own decisions anymore.

Taylor: I like that @samantha

Grant: @Samantha, I think she takes the name of her friend Courtney because she views saving Marian as her saving someone when she couldn't save Courtney her friend. I think helping try to save Marian has helped Shannon cope with and deal with the trauma of losing her friend Courtney

Sierra: @Brooke, I think that phrase implies that life will always have more meaning that time. I think it's ment to show that life is controls what heppens not time. Time is a human made flow

and flow that will always happen, time is inconsequential, life is not. Time doesn't drive the future, life does and what you do with does.

Taylor: I completely forgot this side note: Did anyone else notice the change in perspective from 2015 to 1997, First person to third?

Sierra: @Taylor I noticed that as well and I was wondering what the purpose of that was

Whitney: @taylor I think one of the people absent today mentioned that in their question

Lina: Yeah that was weird^^

Brooke: @Sierra That's a really good thought! I agree that's how I kind of took it as well. In certain ways, I think it might tie in to Shannon's want for control. If it were time that had control over events, she would have much less control

John: A 2015 with two Marty McFlys! Imagine that!

Samantha: My brain is no

Whitney: which makes it low stake although questionable moral wise to hook up with nester

Brooke: It's so hard to wrap your head around all this

Lina: I do think it is interesting how the IFTs don't have another version of Shannon because in that IFT she disappeared

Alexis: Ant man should visit for our discussion on quantum realities haha

Tim: I think I was just considering a very specific case.

Samantha: @Alexis I don't think ant man would drop in unless there were orange slices involved lol

Lina: Wait do you know him Alexis?? xD

Robert: @samantha I feel that lol

Whitney: the whole kill yourself to prevent things blows my mind because do they realize that there's other realities that could be much worse?

Lina: Well the Marion thing is in terra firma, so some things are set in stone it seems

Lina: ick ick ick

Josie: This book reminds me a lot of that Tom Cruise movie when they fight crime that happens in the future. Minority Report is what it's called if anyone is interested lol

Robert: I think it does more harm than good. The less time she spends in the present, the less time until Terminus arrives to the present.

Sierra: I honestly think her traveling through time is creating more harm than good. For example she has a hard time dealing with all the changes that she causes in the future and he is unsure of her actions, as some of the information she has brought back causes a new technology to be formed that could lead to the virus happening sooner.

Josie: Shannon's mom is an example of how those little particles won't stop. She continues to get worse and worse

Taylor: It's like elaborate spontaneous combustion [QTN Infection]