Bernard Beckett

Genesis

New Zealand (2006)

TAGS: Anaximander Bible Eve Greek Philosophy Pericles Socrates



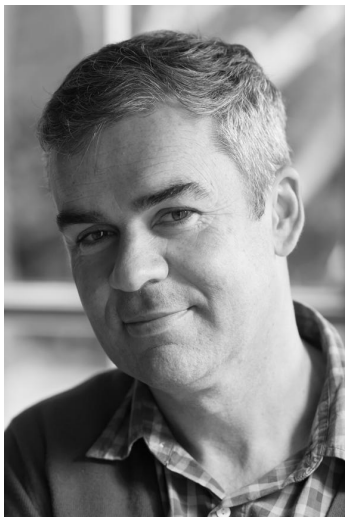


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General information	
Title of the work	Genesis
Country of the First Edition	New Zealand
Country/countries of popularity	New Zealand
Original Language	English
First Edition Date	2006
First Edition Details	Bernard Beckett, *Genesis*. Dunedin: Longacre Press, 2006, 150 pp.
ISBN	9780547225494
Awards	2007 – New Zealand Post Book Award – Young Adult Category; 2007 – Esther Glen Award, Library and Information Association of New Zealand Aotearoa.
Genre	Dystopian fiction, Fiction, Novels, Philosophical fiction, Science fiction
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Creators



Portrait of Bernard Beckett. Courtesy of The Text Publishing Company.

Bernard Beckett , b. 1967
(Author)

Bernard Beckett a New Zealand writer. Born in Featherston and lives in the Wellington region with his wife and three young children. He combines two careers as high school teacher (he teaches English, Drama, Mathematics and Science) in the Wellington region and author. His writing includes several novels (young adult fiction) and dramas. His novels have received a number of prices, including winner and finalist of the NZ Post book award.

Sources:

Profile at the www.bookcouncil.org.nz (accessed: July 4, 2018).

Official website and blog (accessed: July 4, 2018).

Bio prepared by Elizabeth Hale, University of New England, ehale@une.edu.au and Babette Pütz, Victoria University of Wellington, babette.puetz@vuw.ac.nz

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Additional information

Translation

Chinese: *Chuang shi ji 2.0*, trans. Tingting Lai, Tai be, shi: Yuan shen, 2011.

Croatian: *Postanak*, trans. Vlasta Jelašić Kerec, Zagreb: Ŝkolska knjiga, 2011.

Danish: *Genesis: roman*, trans. Sune de Souza Schmidt-Madsen, Copenhagen: Lindhardt og Ringhof, 2008.

Finnish: *Genesis*, trans. Kaisa Kattelus, Helsinki: Tammi, 2009.

French: *Genesis*, trans. Laetitia Devaux, Broche, 2009.

German: *Das neue Buch Genesis*, trans. Christine Gallus, Script5, 2009. Second edition in 2011. Audiobook in 2014.

Italian: *Genesis*, trans. Beatrice Masini, Milano: Rizzoli 2014, ebook.

Japanese: □□□□ [Sōsei no shima], trans. Onoda Kazuko, □□□□, Tōkyō : Hayakawa Shobō, 2010.

Korean: *2058*□□□□ [2058 jenŏsisŭ], trans. Bŏnadŭ Bek'es; Kim Hyŏn-u omgim, Seŏul: Naeinsaeng ŭi ch'aek, 2010.

Polish: *Genezis*, trans. Michał Alenowicz, Poznań: Zysk i S-ka, 2010.

Spanish: *Génesis*, trans. Gemma Rovira Ortega, Salamandra, 2009.

Turkish: *Genesis: roman*, trans. Nazlı Berivan Ak, Ankara : APRIL yayincilik, 2010.

Summary

Dystopian speculative fiction for young adults, with a philosophical focus. Set in the "Republic," an island country that has survived global turmoil (war between continental powers, and plague). Protagonist Anaximander is undergoing examination for entrance into the "Academy," and therefore into an elite life of inquiry and culture. Her special topic is Adam Forde, a rebel from a previous period in history and a hero from an early stage of the Republic. As a coastal guard, Adam has refused to shoot a refugee girl (Eve), who has been crossing the sea in a small boat. Instead, he kills his fellow guard and protects

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Eve. When he is captured and imprisoned, he is given the choice of death or participation in an experiment involving the development of Artificial Intelligence, in which he is required to debate with an android about the power of human vs Artificial Intelligence.

The novel is structured around a series of Socratic debates. Anaximander is questioned by the examiners, and she uses historical documents to reconstruct the debates between Art and Adam in a series of holographic presentations. Those debates focus on human vs artificial intelligence, the nature of humanity, and the power of free will. It emerges towards the end of the novel that Anaximander is one of a race of androids, built in the image of the original android, Art (who is built in the image of an orang-utan – as a rejection of the human species). Art wins his final debate with Adam by exhibiting free will and killing Adam. Yet Adam in turn wins, having infected Art with the virus of humanity (which could be represented as the love which enables Adam to rescue Eve, and also as the free will which enables Art to kill Adam). Though the Republic of Anaximander's present is now populated solely by androids, Adam's virus still infects members of the population. The Academy exists only to eliminate those members – like Anaximander herself – who are identifiable by their interest in Adam, and has deliberately hidden information about his death in order to do so. The novel concludes with Anaximander's death, as her tutor, Pericles, disconnects her "for the last time."

Analysis

Genesis reveals a preoccupation with free will, and makes connections to classical antiquity through references to Plato's *Republic* and other aspects of Greek philosophy and science. Anaximander is named after the pre-Socratic Greek astronomer; she meets another student, named Socrates; her teacher is named Pericles after the Greek Statesman. References to the *Republic* allude to the idea of the ideal state, ideas about justice and humanity, and to the form of the Socratic dialogue, which makes one of the novel's more distinctive qualities. References to the Bible through the novel's title, *Genesis*, to Adam and Eve, offer another way of thinking about the origins of humanity, and to ideas about creation (through God, through Man, and through Science). The challenge between Science and Religion is highly topical in the period in which Beckett writes (he is a science and drama teacher in Wellington, New Zealand). Further echoes of foundational science fiction texts occur in *Genesis* – Adam Forde's name connects to

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Huxley's *Brave New World*; the surveillance of the State to Orwell's *1984*; the debate about free will to Le Guin's *The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas*; and the elimination of weak or dangerous elements of society to Shirley Jackson's *The Lottery*; and Wyndham's *The Chrysalids*, in which New Zealand becomes an idyllic society to which escapees from a medieval dystopia can flee.

Genesis is one of many dystopian science fiction texts for young readers since 2001, reflecting a post-millennial anxiety and suspicion of power structures, which maps onto adolescent suspicion of authority (parental, educational, or institutional). As a New Zealand text it reflects some characteristic ideas about the nation's geographic isolation, and the nation's British cultural heritage, and connection to the Western Canon. It is possible to read The Republic as a futuristic New Zealand, isolated and monitoring refugee intakes (an obvious political reference to the contemporary Antipodean debates about migration and boat people). The novel was well received in New Zealand and the United Kingdom, and has been published in over 20 countries and translated into several languages, including German and Polish.

Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts

Anaximander Bible Eve Greek Philosophy Pericles Socrates

Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture

Coming of age Gaining understanding Humanity Individuality Intellect Knowledge Learning Love Religious beliefs Science Students Subjectivity Teachers Utopia and dystopia

Further Reading

Ball, Jonathan, "Young adult science fiction as a socially conservative genre," Jeunesse: *Young People, Texts, Cultures*. 3.2 (Winter 2011), 162–174.

Giffney, Sarah, "The Impossibilities of fiction: narrative power in Bernard Beckett's *Genesis*," *English in Aotearoa* 74 (Jul 2011): 64–70;

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