ABSTRACT

IAN WOLF. Zombies and Tulips: Predestination and Time Travel. (Under the direction of Professor Dr. Christopher Crosbie.)

Brooks Landon repeats Frederick Pohl when stating that “Science fiction is the literature of change” (xi). Indeed, even Robert Heinlein, one of the most well known science fiction writers of all time, supports this notion when he states, “I think that science fiction, even the corniest of it, even the most outlandish of it, no matter how badly it's written, has a distinct therapeutic value because *all* of it has as its primary postulate that the world does change” (*ibid.* 157). Pohl, Heinlein, and Landon's identification of this preoccupation, an interest in the manifestations of time's inexorable progression, as being the defining characteristic of the science fiction genre is certainly defensible; however, it is of equal importance to note that science fiction is also a reiteration of much older ideas. Despite this genre's teleological bend toward piercing the veil of time, science fiction also utilizes these expressions of change to represent familiar concepts. The development of a perfect human is one such concept, which has been the subject of thought and debate for millennia. By “perfect human” I refer more specifically to the choices a person makes as being the measure of perfectibility, as opposed to rampant cloning or genetic manipulation. Aside from the shifting definitions of what makes a perfect person, very little has changed in the discussion of the topic from the dawn of the Catholic church to now. Through science fiction's time travel narrative, the genre engages with the debates surrounding fate and free will, and as such, it becomes clear that science fiction and religion share the same ultimate goal: to develop a better kind of human being.