Submission Guidelines

Fafnir is a Gold Open Access international peer-reviewed journal. Send submissions to our editors in chief at submissions@finfar.org. Book reviews, dissertation reviews, and related queries should be sent to reviews@finfar.org.

We publish academic work on science-fiction and fantasy (SFF) literature, audiovisual art, games, and fan culture. Interdisciplinary perspectives are encouraged. In addition to peer-reviewed academic articles, *Fafnir* invites texts ranging from short overviews, essays, interviews, conference reports, and opinion pieces as well as academic reviews for books and dissertations on any suitable SFF subject. Our journal provides an international forum for scholarly discussions on science fiction and fantasy, including current debates within the field.

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Fafnir – Nordic Journal of Science Fiction and Fantasy Research

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Editorial 3–4/2017

Bodhisattva Chattopadhyay, Aino-Kaisa Koistinen & Jyrki Korpua

We are happy to introduce the double issue 3–4/2017 *Fafnir – Nordic Journal of Science Fiction and Fantasy Research*. The issue is partly a themed issue, as it includes articles and essays submitted to our special issue on fantasy and reception (3/2017). In addition to these, the issue also provides articles from themes outside reception.

As it is a double issue, we also have not one but two prefatory essays. The first prefatory by Irma Hirsjärvi and Urpo Kovala, "Two Paths to Fantasy Studies" introduces the themed section and describes the establishment of the field of fantasy studies in Finland, and its paths, through two members of the Fafnir Editorial Board. It also sets the tone for Fafnir and its singular contribution to science fiction and fantasy research in the Nordic region, as the journal enters its fifth year in 2018. The second prefatory by Geoffrey C. Bowker, "My Time with Science Fiction" (for issue 4/2017), discusses the concept of time in science fiction, and Bowker's own fascination with the possibilities offered by the genre.

We also have three articles. The first article, themed for the special issue, is Tanja Välisalo's article "Engaging with film characters: Empirical study on the reception of characters in *The Hobbit* films" presents the results on Välisalo's work in the global Hobbit project. The article discusses how audiences engage with fictional characters, and suggests new modifications to existing theories on audience engagement. Matthew Larnach in "Exploring David Eddings' application of military logistics in *The Belgariad*" carefully investigates the feasibility of Eddings' fantasy scenarios to show how the lack of historical research in general around the issue of logistics in medieval settings also affects fictional representations of those settings. Finally, Katherine Tucker in "Violence, Politics and Religion: Cosmic War in *Game of Thrones*" draws upon the cosmic war theory developed by Mark Juergensmeyer to explore how George R. R. Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire* series and the tv show illustrate the dangers of mixing religion and politics in modern day America.

For the special issue, we also have an essay "Thinking and theorising disappointment: a report from The World Hobbit Project" by Emeritus Professor Martin Barker, who has a long career in reception studies, including the Lord of the Rings Project and The Game of Thrones Project (ongoing). The essay deals with one particular aspect of audience engagement, that of disappointment with fiction, and provides a wide range of viewpoints to theorizing it.

The final section of our special issue is a report from Worldcon 75 (held in Helsinki, Finland in fall 2017). Esko Suoranta writes about the most intriguing papers presented at the event's academic track that was, this time, centred on estrangement to honour the 100th anniversary of this Viktor Shklovsky's concept, a topic highlighted by Merja Polvinen in our previous prefatory article.

In our book reviews section, Päivi H Väätänen provides a succinct and incisive review of *Gender Identity and Sexuality in Current Fantasy and Science Fiction* (2017), edited by Francesca Barbini, a collection she calls "burningly topical and very much needed."

In this double issue, we are also starting a new series of introductories of interesting projects and networks relevant to science fiction and fantasy research. The first one to be introduced is the international Monster Network which focuses on everything dealing with monsters and the monstrous. We also continue our engagement with major science fiction and fantasy research collections around the world, and this time we interview Sephora Hossein, who presents the Merril Collection in Toronto, Canada in her capacity as head of the collection. From this issue on, we give them a separate section, entitled snapshots.

The ending of year 2017 marks an end of an era in *Fafnir*, when the last of the founding editors, Jyrki Korpua, will leave the journal. We the other editors of *Fafnir* wish Jyrki all the best in his future endeavours!

We also have a number of new announcements for our readers. Starting 2018, the FINFAR board has decided to bring down the number of issues of *Fafnir* annually to two instead of four. We believe this would help us work with a larger number of essays per issue, as well as give more time for the peer-review process. We are also looking into the possibilities of bringing at least a selection of essays from the journal into print.

Starting from issue 1/2018, Laura E. Goodin joins Team Fafnir as new Editor-in-Chief. Laura brings to *Fafnir* over a decade of editorial experience with other journals, including *Journal of University Teaching and Learning Practice* and the *Australasian Journal of Educational Technology*. In addition to her editorial experience, she has also curated and managed the production processes of speculative works, including "The Cabinet of Oddities" which paired composers with speculative-fiction writers to create new musical works. Laura is also an author, and has published spec-fic novels, radio and stage play scripts, libretti, and poetry. Laura holds a PhD in creative writing from the University of Western Australia, and has attended the 2007 Clarion South workshop.

Also from 1/2018, Dennis W. Wise joins Team Fafnir as Reviews Editor. Wise holds a PhD from Middle Tennessee State University with a focus on the work of J. R. R. Tolkien and the political philosopher Leo Strauss. He has published numerous articles in journals such as *Tolkien Studies*, *Mythlore*, *The Journal of Tolkien Research*, and *Fastitoc*. Wise currently serves as a lecturer at the University of Arizona.

We look forward to welcoming them both in the next issue.

Live Long and Prosper!
Bodhisattva Chattopadhyay, Aino-Kaisa Koistinen & Jyrki Korpua, Editors-in-chief, *Fafnir – Nordic Journal of Science Fiction and Fantasy Research*

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Two Paths to Fantasy Studies

Irma Hirsjärvi & Urpo Kovala

Fantasy studies is a broad field as it is, and possible inroads to it, especially these days, are numerous. In what follows, we "look backwards" at how we ended up doing research on fantasy and its reception. Those paths are different but have crossed a few times. And at the end, we also look at other paths that are having their beginnings as we speak.

Irma Hirsjärvi (IH): I learned to read at the age of four. My literary appetite was voracious and I remember reading The Bible, a children's picture dictionary, old Lutheran texts, and even *The Old Man and the Sea* by Ernest Hemingway – all this before I was six. When I interviewed Finnish sf fans for my doctoral thesis, they told me quite a similar story. Furthermore, many of them mentioned having become aware of this exceptional genre called science fiction through Edgar Rice Burroughs' Mars series. This was my case, too, when I read my first Mars book at the age of nine. However, in my doctoral dissertation (2009), it was also shown that reading habits are different with my generation and the younger ones, who have a narrower literary taste but who use the media more extensively. The difference between my generation and the younger ones is also visible in finding other fen. We only found each other as adults, through magazines and sf-clubs. The young today find their networks in childhood, through media.

Urpo Kovala (UK): As for me, I was never a fan of fantasy or sf in any strong sense of the term. I did read them, but hardly more than anyone else doing relatively much reading. The first book of my own was, I think, *Peukaloisen retket* (*Nils Holgerssons underbara resa genom Sverige*) by Selma Lagerlöf. Later favourites were *Winnie the Pooh*, *Gulliver's Travels*, Jules Verne, Lewis Carroll, *Tiitiäisen satupuu* (*The Tumpkin's Wonder Tree*) by Kirsi Kunnas - and *Asterix*, which I'm still almost a fan of. Tolkien came up only in my student years, with e.g. Samuel Butler's *Erewhon*, which is one of my favourites. The focus has definitely been on older literature, although I did read some sf proper – Le Guin, Heinlein ja Asimov above all.

IH: It is interesting that I did not recognize in me the affective nature of a fan that was expressed in the interviews of the Finnish sf fans I later studied. I was really interested in sf, but not so much in the authors. Sf was fun, but not "all" sf. Then I accidentally met Kirsi Kunnas, the writer of that nursery rhyme book *Tiitiäisen satupuu* that you mentioned above, which was read to me as a kid, and which I had read to my kids and my grandchildren. This elderly lady was also the mother of two major Finnish rock musicians (in the band Eppu Normaali), and at the moment I saw her, the tender memories of reading the book, and the memories of the deeply meaningful (for me, obviously) rock music of her sons went through my mind, simultaneously, in a second. It literally wiped me off my feet, and really taught me a lesson about meaningful media relations.

Back to the years preceding the arrival of fandom studies in Finland. It was a time when feminist research was forbidden in our department, that of Comparative Literature, University of Jyväskylä. The early feminist scholars in the department were spreading the new ideas through reading groups and workshops, and I knew only a couple of seminar papers and one master's thesis on sf or fantasy to have been done in Finland. We did translations of feminist texts and tried to read the works of J. R. R. Tolkien in English to be able to get any information about the things that we were so interested in. Thanks to Sirkka Heiskanen-Mäkelä we were able to form our own reading group around Tolkien and fantasy. Simultaneously I followed the activities of the amazing Research Centre for Contemporary Culture at the University of Jyväskylä. Under the leadership of professor Katarina Eskola the centre had created a wide network of cultural studies scholars, and it seemed to constantly have such interesting seminars and events, like the visit of the inspiring mass media researcher, professor James Lull.

All this (and several heated discussions around, e.g., the total absence of women in the lectures on symbolism in literature) encouraged me to suggest writing my MA thesis about Ursula K. Le Guin's *The Dispossessed* as a feminist utopia. Thanks to professor Sinikka Tuohimaa, the topic was accepted. After my graduation I was chosen to work in the Council of Central Finland to run EU projects on cultural tourism in Central Finland for four years. But time passed, and meanwhile Urpo was following the most interesting thingies...

UK: I got the very first impulse to launch fandom studies in the mid-90s, in a conference arranged at the then University of Joensuu in Finland. There Matti Savolainen, literary scholar, commented on the extensive reception studies presented there and asked – without using the term "fan" – couldn't you, even for once, try and turn your gaze to special audiences, for instance those of horror literature? I thought – why not, as soon as I'm done with my PhD thesis, I'll set up a project like that.

Actually I tried it out foolhardily long before defending my dissertation (which was a theoretical treatise on contextualism). In the early 1990s, I had spotted the rise of a new research orientation, fandom studies, and got access to a couple of books, at least *Science Fiction Audiences* by Henry Jenkins and John Tulloch. Aware of Irma's active involvement in sf fandoms, I suggested launching together a research project in which she could take up a doctoral dissertation on sf fandom. We did write a research proposal, which however – understandably, from today's perspective – did not get us any funding. It was almost ten years later that Irma could finally start her dissertation project in practice in 2003.

At around that same time, in 2002 and 2003, I edited the first Finnish-language textbook on fandom studies, a collection of articles called *Kulttikirja* (Cult book, SKS 2003), together with Tuija Saresma. For that volume, Irma wrote an article called "Star Trek phenomenon in the light of fandom studies" and I a theoretical piece on fandom research. A bit later Irma and I launched what would become a tradition of fandom studies conferences – the first one was arranged in 2006 and the latest to date in 2016 with the topic "the rise of nerd cultures".

IH: As a single parent of two kids it was practically impossible to take up postgraduate studies until I got funded by The Finnish Cultural Foundation in 2003. That was practically a miracle. Our local sf society arranged a successful series of sf and fantasy events at the Jyväskylä Arts festivals, and we became an active agent in an international fandom network. During the first year of my PhD work, I was also involved in creating the Finncon Society, ensuring that the rising support of literary foundations for the society and the annual funding of the Ministry of Culture to the Annual Finncon-event (Finnish science fiction and fantasy convention) were administered properly. So I was simultaneously a member of the fandom family and doing my research on it. No wonder the international Aca-fan web pages felt like a familiar venue.

For me, sf has been a revolutionary genre, full of societal critique, but also the land of freedom, as a human and as a woman. Radical feminist groups landed in Finland in the early 80s, and I joined the activities. It must be said that it was from feminist research that I got the best kicks for research on reception. I ended up asking again and again what is audience, what is reception, how do readers and fandom and media intertwine, how do the power of the production machines, writer, and fandom converge, what do we talk about when we talk about culture, and whose culture? Now I see that when we wrote the first project proposal, there were no proper words yet to describe what we have later been doing, to make a convincing proposal.

UK: At the beginning of the so-called fantasy boom in the early years of the 21st century, the department of Art and Culture Studies, University of Jyväskylä, arranged a lecture series on fantasy, which turned out to be a huge success. Partly on the basis of the lectures, Irma, Kristian Blomberg and me compiled a collection of essays and offered it to BTJ Kirjastopalvelu for publishing. The result was two volumes, *Fantasian monet maailmat* (Worlds of fantasy, 2004) and *Totutun tuolla puolen* (Fields of fantasy, 2005). The third volume, an English-language one, independent of the lecture series, was in the works, but was never finished.

A continuation of sorts, however, to those volumes and to the extensive reception and audience studies carried out at our homebase, Research Centre for Contemporary Culture, was the comparative research project "Young people reading fantasy", which was part of the Baltic Ring project of the writers houses in the Baltic sea area, funded by the Culture 2000 programme. The project looked at the reception of one short story ("The Kerastion") by Ursula Le Guin among secondary school students in six countries of the Baltic Sea region. There were one or more local researchers in each country – in Finland, Erkki Vainikkala and us two. As a natural continuation to this project, Irma received an invitation by Martin Barker to carry out the Finnish part of his extensive "World Hobbit Project" audience research project.

IH: While writing my PhD, I was shuttling between literary studies and youth, reception and media studies, and looked at the fandom phenomenon through meaning making, economy, reception, and social networking. In all of them, fantasy seemed to be a very interesting factor. The experiences in international sf fandom, fellow researchers of fantasy and my work in different projects have all influenced the way I see fantasy as an essential part of everyday life and society. During my PhD project – mostly funded by The Finnish Cultural Foundation – I was also funded by the Academy of Finland in professor Tuomo Lahdelma's project "Cult – community – identity". Later, I was a Finnish representative in European Union *COST* initiative "Transforming audiences, transforming societies", and a researcher and coordinator of the comparative "Global Comparative Youth Media Participation" project, which was led by Professor Sirkku Kotilainen and included researchers from Finland, Egypt, India, and Argentina. This has all been instructive and even transformative for me, but I wish to be able to return to utopias, as they are a hot topic just now, in this long dystopian time. Keijo Lakkala is currently editing a collection of articles on utopias and I wish to contribute to the volume.

During the last years the most demanding job has been the almost three years long attempt to get funding for the Finnish researchers in the "World Hobbit Project" led by Professor Martin Barker at the University of Aberystwyth. The funding for the Finnish sub-project "Uses of Fantasy" was garnered from The Finnish Cultural Foundation and the scholars funded were Tanja Välisalo, Aino-Kaisa Koistinen, Maria Ruotsalainen, Jyrki Korpua and me, with Urpo Kovala, Jani Ylönen ja Minna Siikilä taking part as non-funded members. As a consequence of our participation in that project, we are also in in Barker's next global "Game of Thrones Research Project".

The GoT project is really something else. Fantasy is characterised by a strong livedness, and in the past few decades, also with adults, a clearly articulated fandom. One might think that the

global fantasy media spectacles started with *Star Wars*, which was enhancedly subcultural and a thing for children, youngsters, and nerds. But that is not the whole story. Due to the new media, the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy had a global online audience, and following that phenomenon gave us old fans/fan researchers some extra heartbeat. At the same time in Finland there was this rapidly emerging anime thing with dressing up and hoards of fans. It was actually introduced here in Finland by sf fans – and eventually turned the field of the Finnish fantasy fandom upside down. Now we have ended up in a situation where it is almost a routine thing to set up a multidisciplinary research project on the reception or audiences of a global fantasy text.

Along with the media spectacles, there is a renewed need to understand the audiences and reception of fantasy, not the least because of the participatory cultures connected with it. What we need is basic research – cases on which to ground fandom theory. Thinking about Barker's projects on the audiences of the two Tolkien trilogies and now *GoT*, it feels like we are facing something new. They allow us to combine the study of transnational audiences, the use of widely different materials, and qualitative and quantitative research.

UK: Of us two, I think I am the brakeman – irritatingly suspicious of hard-and-fast generalisations, a priori conclusions, and anything even vaguely reminiscent of hype. Fantasy, as any genre, has multiple determinations, and fantasy studies, as any research, require a degree of perspectivism – just as you suggest above. I also agree that the main "affordance" of these genres has to do with the indirect representation and analysis of contemporary society. My main interest is perhaps in the meaning production aspect in the reception of fantasy and the cultural functions of fantasy. These things, among many others, are looked at in the "World Hobbit Project" and the "Game of Thrones Research Project" led by Martin Barker and others. But in addition to exciting and fruitful contextualisations, it is important to keep the analysis of devices and resources of expression in the picture as well.

IH: Finfar, the Finnish Society of Science Fiction and Fantasy Researcher, founded in 2013, and the refereed journal *Fafnir* that it publishes, together constitute a significant turning point in the Finnish field of fantasy studies. Science fiction activist Juri Timonen's offer to make a website for the society (made in the night out of the Helsinki Finncon) was pondered on for a moment, and after I phoned professor emerita Liisa Rantalaiho and researcher Merja Polvinen, the plan for setting up the society was made. The founding meeting was held in Tampere in 2013. The society started to gather together young researchers into yearly seminars and supported their activities and international mobility.

It has indeed been inspiring to follow the careers of a whole legion of promising fantasy researchers. For instance Sanna Lehtonen's (now Tapionkaski) doctoral dissertation and her studies on fantasy literature for children and youth were of high international quality from the first beginning. Together with Jyväskylä "nerd scholars" and a number of games studies scholars, these researchers now constitute something of a new school of fantasy research of their own. Our research group taking part in the "World Hobbit Project" produced perhaps the most insightful analysis in the project, based on the Finnish materials. Jyrki Korpua, who defended his doctoral thesis on J. R .R. Tolkien in 2015, is now editing a collection of articles on fantasy research, aimed for the general audience, together with Tanja Välisalo, Urpo, and me. Both Jyrki and Tanja, who is expert in transmediality, game studies, and the furry phenomenon, were part of the Hobbit project as well. Maria Ruotsalainen comes from game studies and her cup of tea is web analysis, and Aino-Kaisa Koistinen focuses on media and popular culture, science fiction (especially in TV series), gender studies, and posthumanism.

The Finnish sub-project of the "World Hobbit Project" also includes Minna Siikilä, who is doing her doctoral dissertation on the Internet debates over the intertextual relations between

Tolkien, Rowling, and Paolini, and Jani Ylönen, who is writing his PhD thesis on the issues of humanity, ethics, and societal critique aroused by gene technology in contemporary science fiction. Comics research is in the picture as well, with two scholars who work with comics at our department. Katja Kontturi defended her doctoral thesis on Disney comics as postmodern fantasy in 2014, Essi Varis is doing her dissertation on comics characters, and Oskari Rantala is writing his thesis on the narrative techniques and medial self-awareness of Alan Moore's comics. The list of topics covered by these scholars illustrates well the versatility of contemporary fantasy and Finnish science fiction studies: science fiction, feminist posthumanism, gene technology, gender, dogs, ethics, monster theory, representation…

IH and UK: Looking at young fantasy scholars in Jyväskylä and elsewhere, it would not seem all that far-fetched to speak of a new generation of fantasy studies. That generation would be characterised above all by multidisciplinarity, interest in inter- and transmediality, the use of many different kinds of research materials, and a focus on the multiaspectuality of fantasy and its potential for cultural critique. The approach has extended far beyond aesthetic analysis, in a narrow sense of the term, to include versatile, theoretically informed contextualisation. Theoretical horizons increasingly consist of new materialism and posthumanism as well as feminist approaches. Genres studied cover not only fiction but also games, movies, comics, and metatexts such as Internet discussions. Accounts of reception, fandom, and consumption are often combined with analyses of productional aspects. Methodwise, digital information gathering and combinations of qualitative and quantitative data are typical.

Fantasy is thus studied in connection with the material world, including market economy with its forces and counter-forces, and even advertising does not escape the critical and analytical gaze. This new generation of scholars, it seems, can both identify as and study (fantasy) fans and nerds without having to do the apologetics of the first generation of fandom scholars.

It has been exciting and rewarding for both of us to follow this new phase. Just like fictional heroes – and now you have to excuse a degree of pomp – have evolved from adventurous hulks to thinking human beings, fantasy scholars have come out from the margins and entered the avant garde of the human sciences.

Biographies: Dr Irma Hirsjärvi is an independent scholar in connection with Research Centre for Contemporary Culture projects. She is one of the founding members of Finfar, member of the editorial board of the publication series Nykykulttuuri (Contemporary Culture), columnist and politician. Her PhD was about the literary community of science fiction fans, and she has worked in several EU cultural and research projects as researcher and coordinator. Her interests are in science fiction and its audiences, fandom, activism, political populism, and feminist utopias.

Dr. and docent Urpo Kovala works as Senior Researcher at the Research Centre for Contemporary Culture, University of Jyväskylä. He is member of the advisory board for Fafnir *and editor in charge of the publication series Nykykulttuuri (Contemporary Culture). His earlier research interests were in the areas of theory of meaning, contextualism, and cultural translation studies. His present work has to do with reception and fandom studies, fantasy, and the study of cultural discourses and rhetoric in connection with populism and activism.*

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Engaging with film characters: Empirical study on the reception of characters in *The Hobbit* films

Tanja Välisalo

Abstract: Characters are important for the audience reception of films, but little empirical research on actual audiences has been conducted on the topic of character reception. Are characters important for all audiences, and if not, what are the possible reasons and implications? How do audiences construct their engagement with characters? I argue that in addition to elements in Murray Smith's classic model, structure of sympathy, other elements should be included when studying character engagement. This article presents an empirical study on the reception of characters using the Nordic responses (4,879 total) drawn from the global audience survey on The Hobbit fantasy film trilogy (Jackson, An Unexpected Journey; The Desolation of Smaug; The Battle of the Five Armies). Based on the data, this study identifies two additional elements of character engagement. Firstly, aided by Anne Jerslev's model of emotions attached to fictional universes, the making of fictional characters is recognized as an essential element of character engagement, something audiences are drawn to. The second element is formed by connections outside the story, such as other works of fiction, conventions of the fantasy genre, and discussions and debates about the films. Including these contextual elements results in a more comprehensive understanding of emotional engagement with characters.

Keywords: characters, engagement, The Hobbit, audience reception

Biography and contact info: MA Tanja Välisalo is writing her dissertation in the field of contemporary cultural studies on the topic of virtual characters in media fandom. In her master's thesis she investigated the early history of television fandom in Finland. Her research interests include identity and materiality in fandom, transmedia audiences and ludification of culture. Välisalo works as a university teacher in the Faculty of Humanities at the University of Jyväskylä teaching e.g. courses on game studies and digital technologies.

Characters have a central role in the reception of fictional content. In films, characters are important in carrying the plot and building empathy in the viewers (Mikos et al.). While fictional characters in general and film characters specifically have been theorized by many researchers (e.g. Forster; Phelan; Smith; Michaels) and research on film stars has a long tradition as well (e.g. Dyer) there is still relatively little empirical research on the reception of film characters.

This article presents an empirical study on the audience reception of characters of the fantasy film trilogy *The Hobbit* (Jackson, *An Unexpected Journey*; Jackson, *The Desolation of Smaug*; Jackson, *The Battle of the Five Armies*). The multiple protagonists as well as the plethora of other characters create opportunities for diverse modes of character reception. *The Hobbit* film series also provides an excellent case for analysing the reception of film characters, because it is simultaneously an adaptation of a classic fantasy book *The Hobbit, or There and Back Again* (1937) by J. R. R. Tolkien as well as a prequel to the earlier film trilogy *The Lord of The Rings* (Jackson, *The Fellowship of the Ring*; *The Two Towers*; *The Return of the King*; from now on *LotR*) also based on Tolkien's books. *The Hobbit* films are in fact a part of a "Tolkien universe" (Koistinen, Ruotsalainen & Välisalo 364) comprised of the aforementioned works as well other works by Tolkien, and the multitude of works and products created around them. The films, thus, provide audiences with several possible interpretational contexts, including the films themselves as well as the book they are based on, Tolkien universe, and the fantasy genre in film and fantasy literature.

I will approach the character reception of *The Hobbit* through the following questions: Are characters important for all audiences? How do audiences construct their engagement with characters? I seek answers to these questions by analysing survey data collected from the Nordic countries as part of a global audience study survey on the reception of *The Hobbit* film trilogy.[1]

Theoretical approaches to character reception

When beginning to study audience reception of characters one cannot avoid the concept of *identification*. While the concept has been widely used to describe audience response to fictional characters, it has also been criticized by researchers, often because of its undefined nature and its function as "a blanket term covering too diverse a range of practices" (Rushton and Bettinson 165; cf. Cohen 254; Barker, "Identification" 354). An influential approach by Murray Smith (*Engaging* 75, 81–84) based on cognitive theory and textual analysis suggests replacing identification as a concept with *engagement*. Smith created what he called a "structure of sympathy" with three levels of engagement with characters: recognition, alignment, and allegiance. By *recognition*, Smith refers to the viewer's process of constructing a character, a necessary process for the other two levels: *alignment* consists of the ways the viewer gains access to the feelings, knowledge and actions of the character; *allegiance* refers to the viewer's moral evaluation of a character, how the viewer relates to the attitudes and values of the character. A viewer may align with a character but not necessarily ally with them and vice versa. Smith also differentiates between empathy and sympathy for a character: while sympathy is "acentral imagining," imagining from outside the character, empathy, "central imagining", consists of a range of mechanisms including involuntary reactions like the startle response, motor and affective mimicry of a character, and voluntary simulation of the character's perceived emotions (Smith, *Engaging* 96, 99, 103).

Smith's theory was an important step towards understanding different levels of reception of film characters. Still, excluding his mention of star system as an influence on character reception (*Engaging* 119, 193), Smith's model does not help us understand the impact of contextual factors outside the films themselves. Martin Barker ("Identification" 360) has criticized Smith's approach for dismissing the existence and meaning of spectator's previous knowledge or perceptions. Barker has called for retheorization of the audience-character relationship ("Identification" 374).

Anne Jerslev (207) has noted based on her empirical research on the audiences of *LotR* film trilogy that, following Ed Tan's concepts of fiction emotions and artefact emotions, emotional engagement with films can be divided into two main categories of 1) emotions attached to a

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[1] Barker, Martin, et al. The World Hobbit Project. Online-Survey. Aberystwyth, United Kingdom. 2014–2015.

fictional universe, and 2) emotions attached to the making of a fictional universe, with the former further divided into emotions attached to the narrative, and emotions attached to the mise-en-scène, that is, the visual realization of the films. Fiction emotions attached to the narrative, such as absorption in the story, or pity or joy for a character, are for Jerslev empathetic, and fiction emotions attached to the mise-en-scène, such as enjoyment of landscape, are non-empathetic; making of the fictional world is marked by mostly non-empathetic artefact emotions, such as admiration of technical skills (Jerslev 214–215). In her study, Jerslev (207) noted that enjoyment of films consisted of both kinds of emotional responses, empathetic and non-empathetic.

I argue that audiences conceptualize and structure their own responses to film characters in ways that are only partially mapped by Smith's theory, but can be understood more comprehensively by combining it to Jerslev's model. Even though Jerslev (215) associates characters with empathetic emotions, I will argue that there are also non-empathetic emotions connected to characters, thus resulting in a more comprehensive understanding of emotional engagement with them.

Character-oriented audiences

To delve into the reception of *The Hobbit* characters I used data collected from the audiences themselves. For this study, I used both quantitative and qualitative data gathered as part of *The World Hobbit Project*, a global audience study survey (see Appendix 1) on the reception of *The Hobbit* film trilogy. The survey gathered 36,000 responses from 48 different countries through opportunistic recruitment.[2] My analysis is based on the data from Nordic countries consisting of the responses from Finnish, Swedish and Danish participants.[3] The data includes 1,191 Danish, 1,614 Finnish and 2,074 Swedish, altogether 4,879 responses.

In analysing the data, I used a mixed-methods approach combining qualitative and quantitative methods. To the written responses, I applied open coding, where codes are based on the data instead of existing theories or models, to identify different categories among the responses (Given 86). Coding was chosen due to its ability to reduce the massive amount of qualitative data. Coding also enabled descriptive statistical analysis of these responses, as well as cross tabulating between qualitative and quantitative data, the latter derived from the closed questions in the survey.

When studying the reception of *The Hobbit* characters in the survey data, the first step was to identify the respondents who found characters somehow meaningful for their viewing experience. I did this by analysing the responses to the question Q7 "Who was your favourite character, in the book or the films? Can you say why?" Altogether 4,075 participants (83.46%) mentioned favourite characters,[4] typically one (55.93%) or two (17.24%). Even though a direct question is likely to elicit mentions of favourite characters, the amount of responses to this open-ended question along with the multitude of descriptive comments demonstrates the significance of characters for the respondents.

Are there differences between the respondents who chose a favourite character and those who did not? For now, I will call these two groups *character-oriented (CO)* and *non-character-oriented (NCO)* audiences. The names of these groups are not meant to indicate a comprehensive approach to characters by these respondents but rather represent a practical division of the data into

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[2] More on the recruitment of respondents, see Barker & Mathijs.

[3] Responses from Norway and Iceland were excluded from the data because of the small amounts of responses in comparison to other Nordic countries.

[4] This includes respondents who, instead of or in addition to naming a particular character, mention groups of characters, such as elves, dwarves or hobbits. Altogether 561 respondents left the question unanswered, with 246 respondents expressing that all characters were their favourites, or that they could not choose a favourite character.

respondents who articulated attachment to characters and to those who did not. At the very least, these groups differ in relation to how important characters are for their engagement with *The Hobbit*.

Comparison of demographic data (see Table 1) reveals that somewhat more of CO respondents belonged to youngest age groups, that is, under 26 year-olds, in comparison to NCO respondents. A more significant difference can be found in connection to gender with a clear majority of "males" among the NCO respondents and a small majority of "females" among the CO respondents. When taking both age and gender into consideration "female" CO respondents were younger (56.57% in the youngest age groups) than "male" CO respondents (48.42%). These results could indicate that "male" audiences are less likely to find a particular character or characters meaningful.[5]

Table 1. Character-oriented and non-character-oriented audiences by age and gender (N=4,879)

	Character-oriented (n=804)			Non-character-oriented (n=4,075)			Grand Total
Age	**Male**	**Female**	**Total**	**Male**	**Female**	**Total**	
6–15	5.74%	7.17%	6.53%	2.39%	3.97%	2.99%	5.94%
16–25	42.68%	49.40%	46.38%	40.84%	47.68%	43.41%	45.89%
26–35	22.30%	22.54%	22.43%	23.71%	23.18%	23.51%	22.61%
36–45	17.16%	11.09%	13.82%	16.53%	11.26%	14.55%	13.94%
46–55	8.47%	6.41%	7.34%	9.36%	10.60%	9.83%	7.75%
56–65	2.62%	2.76%	2.70%	5.38%	2.65%	4.35%	2.97%
66–75	0.98%	0.53%	0.74%	1.79%	0.66%	1.37%	0.84%
76–85	0.00%	0.04%	0.02%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.02%
86–95	0.00%	0.04%	0.02%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.02%
Over 95	0.05%	0.00%	0.02%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.02%

Ratings of the films were very similar by both, CO and NCO respondents, so attachment to a character does not seem to have a connection to how the respondent evaluated the films (see Figure 1). The situation is different when it comes to the book *The Hobbit, or There and Back Again*. CO respondents were much more likely to have read the book and also more likely to have read the book more than once (48.25%) in comparison to NCO respondents (35.95%). CO respondents were also much more likely to rate the book *excellent* than NCO respondents (see Figure 2). These statistics indicate that being familiar with a character before seeing them on the screen had an influence on the importance of characters in the reception of *The Hobbit*. Similarly, CO respondents rated the *LotR* films as *excellent* more often in comparison to NCO respondents (see Figure 3). This difference could be the result of re-engaging with familiar characters but it can also echo the derived from re-entering a familiar fictional world.

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[5] The survey only gave options "male" and "female", so the choice of gender may not coincide with the gender identity of all respondents.

Figure 1. Ratings of The Hobbit films by character-oriented and non-character-oriented audiences. (N=4,879)

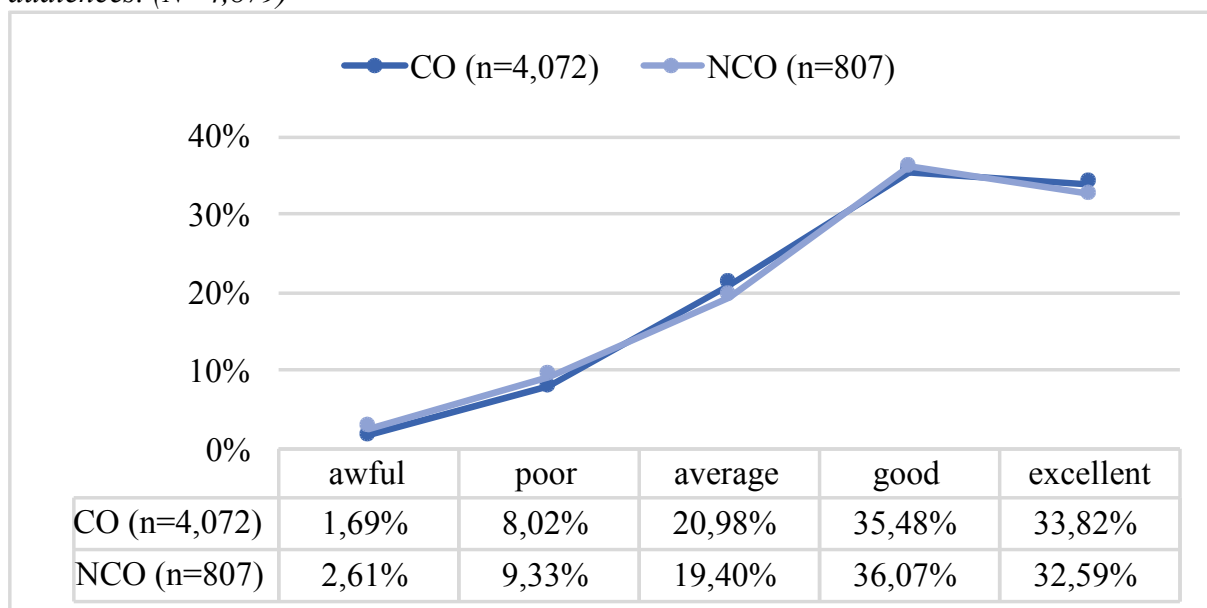|	awful	poor	average	good	excellent
CO (n=4,072)	1,69%	8,02%	20,98%	35,48%	33,82%
NCO (n=807)	2,61%	9,33%	19,40%	36,07%	32,59%

Figure 2. Ratings of The Hobbit, or There and Back Again by character-oriented and non-character-oriented audiences. (N=4,879)

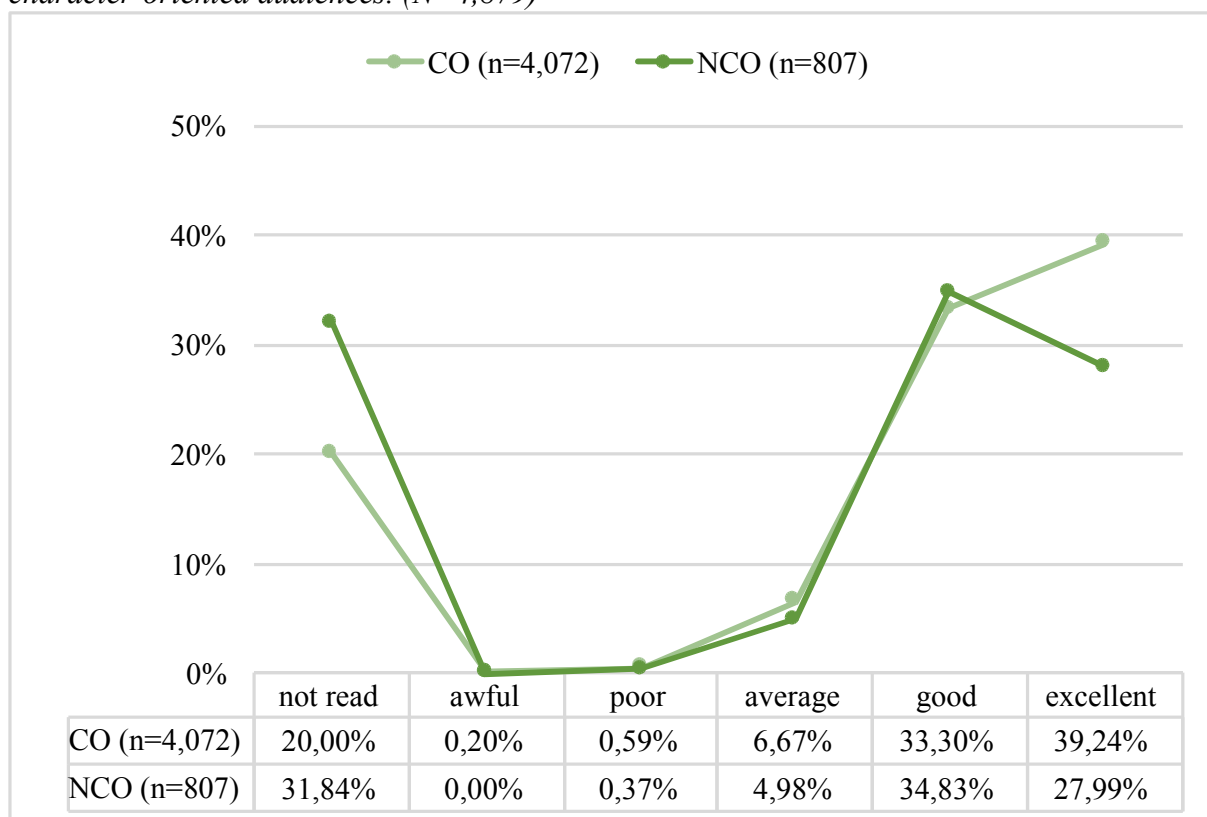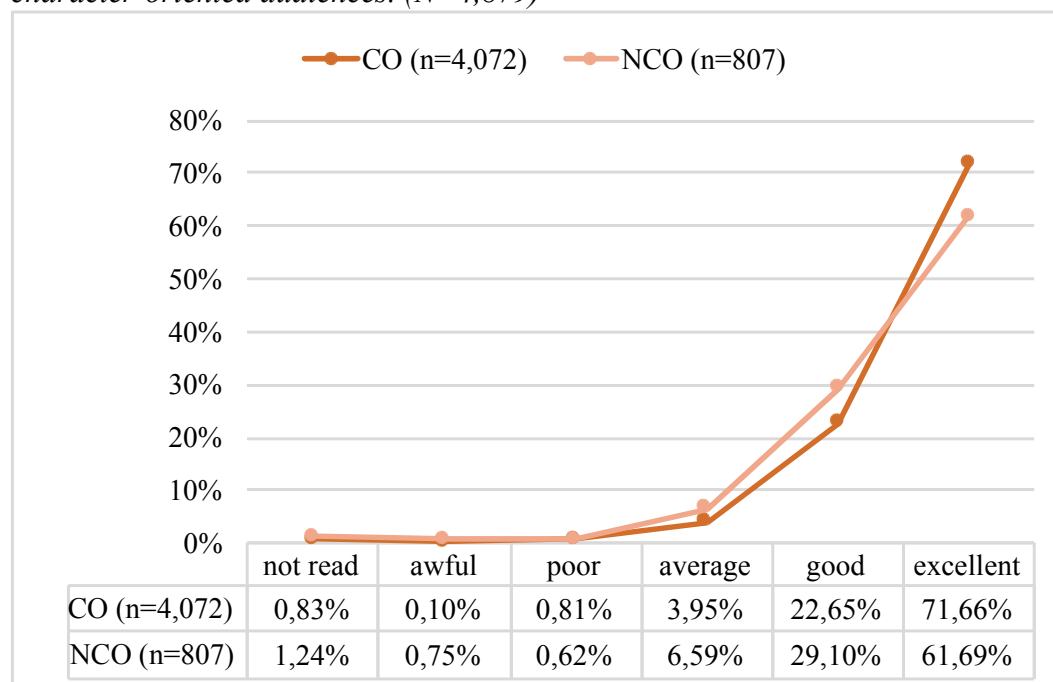|	not read	awful	poor	average	good	excellent
CO (n=4,072)	20,00%	0,20%	0,59%	6,67%	33,30%	39,24%
NCO (n=807)	31,84%	0,00%	0,37%	4,98%	34,83%	27,99%

Figure 3. Ratings of The Lord of the Rings by character-oriented and non-character-oriented audiences. (N=4,879)

	not read	awful	poor	average	good	excellent
CO (n=4,072)	0,83%	0,10%	0,81%	3,95%	22,65%	71,66%
NCO (n=807)	1,24%	0,75%	0,62%	6,59%	29,10%	61,69%

CO and NCO respondents exhibited differences also in their engagement in other activities connected to the films. In the survey, the question pertaining to these activities (Q12) included several options: producing fan art, blogging, role-playing, writing fan fiction, collecting merchandise, seriously debating the films, commenting online, gaming, making fan videos, and visiting filming locations. These activities have been previously characterized as transmedial user practices, which, in addition to being mediated in some way, are defined by their ability to give new entrance points to the storyworld of *The Hobbit* (Koistinen et al. 357–358). The majority of CO respondents (67.09%) had taken part in some of these activities, while the same was true for less than half of NCO respondents (47.26%). The most popular activities were the same for both CO and NCO respondents, seriously debating the films and commenting online, as was the least popular activity, making fan videos. Commonly character-centric activities, such as producing fan art and writing fan fiction (Jenkins 235), were almost exclusive to CO respondents.

Making comparisons between CO and NCO respondents indicates that previous knowledge of the storyworld makes characters more meaningful for film audiences, whether or not they liked the film. In addition, participating in other activities was more common for CO respondents. These results show a connection between using multiple entrance points to the fictional storyworld and stronger engagement with characters, thus, making division of audiences into character-oriented and non-character-oriented audiences plausible. Next, I will go on to analyse how *The Hobbit* audiences articulate their orientation towards characters.

Reception of *The Hobbit* characters

Who were the favourite characters of *The Hobbit* audiences and why? The characters mentioned most often were, not surprisingly, Bilbo (1933 respondents), the name character of the films and the book, a home-loving hobbit taken on an unexpected adventure, and the wizard Gandalf (1088), also

a central figure in *The Hobbit* book and films. In addition to them, twelve other characters were mentioned by a significant amount of respondents (see Table 2).

Table 2. Favourite characters in The Hobbit mentioned by at least 2% of the respondents (N=4072).

Character	Mentions	% of all respondents (N=4,879)
Bilbo	1933	39,62%
Gandalf	1088	22,30%
Thorin	476	9,76%
Legolas	352	7,21%
Smaug	332	6,80%
Kili	299	6,13%
Thranduil	241	4,94%
Tauriel	191	3,91%
Fili	178	3,65%
Gollum	169	3,46%
Beorn	145	2,97%
Bard	136	2,79%
Galadriel	124	2,54%
Radagast	103	2,11%

Explanations given by the respondents for their choice of favourite characters give insight into how audiences engage with characters and how they construct this engagement. The stated reasons for choosing a specific character as favourite are diverse, from short matter-of-fact mentions to long explanations, or something in between. Through data-driven analysis I identified eleven categories of character engagement.[6] One mention of a character could include elements from several different categories. For example, the following was categorized into *physical and personality traits, embodiment of character type,* and *scenes and events*.

> Legolas. As a forest elf he has qualities that people do not have such as a superior vision and hearing, he moves silently and is unmatched with his bow as well as in a close combat. That he as a prince chooses to leave the elf king to search his own way indicates character. That he also overcomes his own prejudices about dwarfs is a sign of characteristics of self-awareness and ability to change. It gives Legolas as a character even more life. (#16750)[7]

Empathy/sympathy category includes responses where an empathetic or sympathetic response to a character's emotions, actions or circumstance was explicitly indicated, often expressed as "identifying" with a character. This category is the largest in the data (2324 mentions of a

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[6] Similar categories were used by Martin Barker ("Identification"; "Legolas") in his earlier study on *The Lord of the Rings* audiences and they were used to iterate the categorization in this study: the categories of *actor/performance* and *technical creation* were separated whereas originally I used one category of *character realization* to describe these responses.
[7] In this article, when I use citations from the survey data I will give an identifying number (*#00000*) for each respondent.

character), and Bilbo (848) is the character mentioned most often. Jyrki Korpua (245) has suggested that hobbits in Tolkien's works function as mediators between Middle-earth and the reader, familiarizing us with the world of fantasy. This is also evident in the responses, with Bilbo described as 'identifiable' or 'relatable'.

> Best character is Bilbo, both in the book and the movie adaptation, as we can identify ourselves as him, unlike the wizards, dwarves and elves.... (#12261)

Typical responses in the category of *physical and personality traits* (2050 mentions) consist of lists of adjectives, for example "Gandalf is old, wise and therefore good" (#34607), or "Thorin was surly but good inside" (#7728). Physical traits are usually mentioned in concurrence with personality traits, while personality traits can be mentioned alone. Mentions of physical traits of the actors were categorized as mentions of *actor* or *performance*.

Actor/performance category (1040 mentions) holds references to the portrayal of a specific character in these films as well as references to a specific actor as a reason for the choice of favourite character. Mentions of Martin Freeman (424), the actor of Bilbo, dominate this category. When details of the acting style are mentioned, they fall in line with aspects commonly considered central in an actor's performance: gestures, facial expressions, and voice (Marcell 59). There are also mentions of the attractiveness of the actors. Barker has noted how among *LoTR* audiences mentions of sexual attractiveness were centered on the character of Legolas and how these responses often included mentions of the actor Orlando Bloom as well ("Identification" 372; "Legolas" 112). Among *The Hobbit* audiences similar engagement is evident in mentions of Legolas, but especially elven king Thranduil (Lee Pace) and dwarf Thorin, as in the description of Thorin as "an interesting character and, being played by [Richard] Armitage, very handsome" (#31889).

Character adaptation from the book (390 mentions) is connected to several different characters with comments ranging from very positive to very negative ones. Critical attitudes are connected to the reduced or expanded role of the character in the film adaptation or the perceived infidelity to Tolkien's work in the character design. For example, one in four respondents (34) naming Beorn as their favourite are disappointed in the small amount of screen time he has or the way his character looks in the films, whereas the adaptation of Thorin is mentioned (40) as a successful one with the character gaining depth or becoming more interesting.

References (313) to *a particular scene or event* are made in connection to both the book and the films. Respondents mention dialogue as a source of pleasure in certain scenes, such as the scene from the first film (*An Unexpected Journey,* 2012), where Bilbo and Gollum exchange riddles. Mentions of beautiful or "epic" (#857) fighting scenes by Legolas or Thorin are made as well. In addition to particular scenes, there are references to events unfolding over longer periods, such as the romance between dwarf Kili and elf Tauriel.

Character development is mentioned (231) almost exclusively in connection to Bilbo (181) and Thorin (36), whose journeys are seen as both physical and psychological. Bilbo's journey is described as that of finding himself or changing as a person for the better, and these narratives are sometimes accompanied by mentions of respondents identifying with him (13). Slightly darker descriptions concern Thorin following his goal of reclaiming his home, his descend to greed and madness, and his victory over his inner struggle**.**

Embodying a character type (220 mentions) is a category with responses describing a character as being a favourite due to how they represent a particular fictional character type. *Type* means both a cinematic stereotype such as a hero or a mentor that easily delivers the role of the character to the audience (Michael 10), and more often, a narrative stereotype from the fantasy genre (Schweinitz 283–284). The respondents were very aware of narrative stereotypes in fantasy and considered it a merit to the characters if they adhered to these models (Herman et al. 126) of

wizards, elves, dragons and other creatures. Responses in this category indeed included several different fantastical species, with most mentions for Gandalf (70), dragon Smaug (44) and Legolas (33).

Character's central role in the narrative (181 mentions) is a category consisting mostly of mentions of Bilbo (131) including simple statements of "he's the main character" (e.g. #8301). This category also includes descriptions of the story being told from his perspective, in both the book and the films. There are also similar mentions of Gandalf (40) but with a slightly different tone – he is characterized as someone who is more important to the story than he seems.

Mentions of favourite characters are sometimes accompanied with references to Tolkien's other works, for example *The Silmarilllion* (1977). Indeed, many respondents referred (182) to the whole of *Tolkien universe*, formed by the books, the films and other media products. These mentions are frequently connected to Gandalf (63).

The most common references to Tolkien universe are mentions of *LoTR* films (180), mostly in connection with Legolas (55) and Gandalf (57). Respondents offer their familiarity with the characters as reason for liking them, or they express enjoying the new information about these characters provided in the *The Hobbit*. It is also worth noting that some respondents mention favourite characters who in fact do not appear in *The Hobbit* films or the book, even though they are created by Tolkien, such as Aragorn (23) and Tom Bombadil.[8] References to *LotR* also include comparisons between the protagonists of *LotR* and *The Hobbit*. This indicates that the respondents consider these two trilogies strongly intertwined.

When *technical creation* (108 mentions) is given as a reason for choosing a favourite character, it usually refers to the animated characters of the films, Smaug in particular (65), but also to the make-up and design of the characters. The respondents might express criticism towards computer animation in general, but still feel that a particular animated character makes an exception.

Different interpretational contexts are actualized in these categories. *The Hobbit* films and the book *The Hobbit, or There and Back Again* form a single interpretational context, as seen in the categories of particular scenes or events, character development, central role in the narrative, physical and personality traits, and character adaptation from the book. The second context is Tolkien universe comprising of all his works and their adaptations and transmediations, evident in the categories of connections to *LotR* and connections to Tolkien universe. The third context of fantasy film and fantasy genre is present in categories embodiment of character type and technical creation.

Constructing character engagement

How do theories of audience engagement reflect on *The Hobbit* audiences responses to characters? When considering Murray Smith's structure of sympathy, it is readily evident that different categories are connected to different levels of this structure. As described above, Smith's model of character engagement is constructed of three levels: recognition, alignment and allegiance, where recognition is the basis for either alignment, allegiance, or both. Recognition is, for Smith, a typically automated process of conceptualizing an individual agent that is continuous or re-identifiable; it is usually focused on physical traits, including body, face, and voice, and is sometimes aided by language, such as a character's name (*Engaging* 110, 116-118). Generic schemata concerning fantasy or adventure films may activate expectations about the characters (Rushton and Bettinson 170), which is evident in responses to the category of *embodying a*

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[8] Aragorn is mentioned in the third *Hobbit* film (*The Battle of the Five Armies*), where he is referred to by the name Strider.

character type, where conforming to a narrative stereotype was a sign of a plausible character and a source of pleasure for the respondents, as in the following quotations:

> In both the book and the films I liked Smaug for its character. A traditional fantasy dragon, who likes treasures and riddles. (#25592)

> Smaug because he is the best dragon I have seen in films. (#17218)

> He is exactly as I imagined a dragon. (#16949)

While recognition is merely the foundation for other processes of engagement, in the audience perception it is clear that this particular form of recognition, based on former knowledge of the genre and its stereotypes, can be pleasurable for audiences.

Alignment with a character is produced by two features of the narrative, spatio-temporal attachment, which can be described as the way narration follows a particular character, and subjective access, access to the character's thoughts and emotions (Smith, *Engaging* 142). In the *The Hobbit* data, alignment is most obvious in the categories connected to the narrative: character's *central role in the narrative, character development,* and *particular scenes and events*. In the first category, the choice of Bilbo is explained by him being the main character, the story following him, in what is an obvious case of spatio-temporal attachment. One of the respondents was even very conscious of the personal effect of narration for their own reception: "I tend to sympathize with the main character" (#16765).

Smith (*Engaging* 187-189) considers allegiance to a character a result of a cognitive and emotional process, where the viewer morally evaluates a character and has an emotional response and a specific moral orientation towards the character. It is not always possible to distinguish *sympathetic* and *empathic* stances from the written responses. Indeed, for Smith, empathy and sympathy are intertwined in a sense that "we flit rapidly in and out of characters empathically, moving with imaginative agility through a variety of perspectives which are then aggregated and interrelated to produce the structure of sympathy" (Smith, "Further" 232). Nevertheless, the responses in this category are telling of an allegiance with these characters, for example:

> Thranduil Oropherion, elven king of Mirkwood. I have a fascination of elves in general, and Thranduil truly captured me. He has a back story that captured my feelings, plus he is so fantastically gracious and beautiful. It was also interesting after *LotR* trilogy to see Legolas' family, home and backstory. (#7697)

Despite the usefulness of the structure of sympathy in understanding character engagement and how actual audiences construct it, some of the responses to *The Hobbit* survey have elements not fully addressed in Smith's model. Returning to Jerslev's (214-215) model of emotional responses to films sheds light on these elements. The model can be applied to characters, resulting in a division of 1) emotions attached to a fictional character, both a) empathetic and b) non-empathetic, and 2) emotions attached to making of a character, mostly non-empathetic in nature. Empathetic emotions are defined in more detail by Smith – in fact, Jerslev uses "empathetic" in a way that encompasses Smith's "sympathetic" and "empathic" responses, but it is her introduction of non-empathetic emotions that is especially valuable here. One category of *The Hobbit* responses specifically is better understood by applying Jerslev's model rather than through Smith's phenomenology, and that is the category of *technical creation*:

> Thanks to wonderful CGI (it's not all bad after all) Smaug was just as magnificent and massive as I had always imagined him to be. (#30870)

> Smaug. Amazingly made in the film, and really good voice acting. (#8265)

> In the film my favourite was Thranduil even though his role was small, because I think Lee Pace is a good actor and this character's make-up and character design in general were a perfect success. (#32844)

The emotions attached to Smaug and Thranduil in these examples are non-empathetic in nature. They are not emotions born from recognizing, mimicking or responding to the character's emotions but are directed to the "spectacle" of the film (Jerslev 214), and to the creation of that spectacle. Non-empathetic emotions manifest as admiration for the skills needed in technical creation of characters and character design, as well as for the results of those skills. These responses contradict Jerslev's claim of characters being solely connected to empathetic emotions.

Actor/performance category is clearly connected to making of the character and shows the effects of the star system – but perhaps not quite as clearly as Smith described it: "the process by which we evaluate characters and respond to them emotionally is often framed or informed by our evaluation of the star personae of the stars who perform these characters" (Smith, *Engaging* 193). Actor or performance is most often mentioned in connection to the most popular characters, Bilbo (424 mentions) and Gandalf (172). Also in the responses to question (Q3) where the respondents could choose an actor they particularly liked as a reason for seeing the films, their actors were mentioned most often, Martin Freeman (Bilbo; 11.82% of respondents) and Ian McKellen (Gandalf; 10.96%). Even though both of these actors are well known, respondents do not mention their other works or describe their star personae, except for brief mentions of liking the actor already before *The Hobbit*. Indeed, there were overall very few mentions of other films or works by *The Hobbit* actors, in addition to *LotR*. Instead, the mentions of actors focused on admiration for their performance, also non-empathetic in nature, as in this response: "I must praise Richard Armitage for his character acting of Thorin, it is not easy to play crazy" (#17364).

Character adaptation from the book is the third category connected to making of character, and includes, as well as in the previous ones, evaluating the skills of the creator, be it an actor, director, or writer, named in some responses but merely implicated in others. Respondents express emotions such as admiration for the creators – or disappointment when the adaptation of a book character they liked failed to fill their expectations in the films. Even though these responses are analysed as non-empathetic, they can be as passionate as the responses in other categories (Jerslev 213).

Emotions connected to characters also derive from connections outside the text. Characters in *The Hobbit* are adaptations from *LotR* films as well as from Tolkien's book, and this forms the first, most obvious connection. The most popular characters Bilbo and Gandalf were familiar to audiences from *LotR*, and Gandalf, Legolas and elf Galadriel (Cate Blanchett) were even portrayed by the same actors. Legolas makes an intriguing example as those mentioning him were exceedingly generous in evaluating the films, with 62.39% giving an *excellent* rating to *The Hobbit* (all CO respondents 33.84%), and as many as 40.17% had not read the book (all CO respondents 20.00%). Attachment to Legolas originates exceptionally strongly from *LoTR* films and effects audiences' perceptions of the character in as well as well their engagement with *The Hobbit* films in general.

Other *connections to Tolkien universe* include references to narratives, places, and names not mentioned in *The Hobbit* films or the book. Using these enabled respondents to distinguish themselves as Tolkien connoisseurs, as this respondent referring to Gandalf as a favourite character without actually mentioning the character's name: "Mithrandir - for having patience with mortals and elves" (#2763).

Another manifestation of outside contexts occurs in the category of *embodying a character type*. Connections to the fantasy genre as well as awareness of narrative stereotypes of the genre are evident in this category. In addition to the pleasures of recognition mentioned above, further

connections to narrative stereotypes outside fantasy genre were significant for the respondents. Tauriel, a new character created for the films, was criticized for representing the stereotypical female role of a love interest and becoming subordinate to the romance plot. Criticism was evident in question (Q9) "Did anything particularly disappoint you about the films?", where 401 respondents (8.39%) mentioned Tauriel. Even though genre-specific character stereotypes were welcomed by the audiences, this stereotype was seen as a negative one, foreign to the fantasy genre. It differs from the narrative stereotypes described above in that it occurs also outside of the fantasy genre, reflecting the everyday lives of audiences (Schweinitz 287–288). The negative perception was strengthened by Tauriel being a new character created for the films, which was also commented on by the respondents. The case is a reminder of the existence of negative emotions connected to character engagement. Nevertheless, altogether 191 respondents also mentioned Tauriel as a favourite character:

> Tauriel was a welcome addition to the macho crowd, and a wonderful role model for girls watching the film. (#1080)

Respondents specifically mentioned that the films needed strong female figures and the story should be "updated" (e.g. #34433). Doing so they drew from cultural discussions of gender representation in films as well as indicated comparisons between *The Hobbit* and other films, thus, connecting their reception of characters to contexts beyond narrative stereotypes of the genre discussed earlier. Even the respondents mentioning Tauriel as favourite were often quite aware of the general criticism towards her addition to the story. This brings forth the final contextual element, *discussions and debates* about the characters.

Even though social context undoubtedly influences all audience-character relationships, specific debates of the fan community are mentioned repeatedly in *The Hobbit* data: the addition of Tauriel and Legolas to the story, the romance between Tauriel and Kili, and the handsome youthful appearances of some of the dwarves. The mentions of these debates are not surprising considering that character-centric user practices, such as writing fan fiction and creating fan art, have a strong social element, being based in fan communities and their interpretative practices (Jenkins 156, 248–249; Kaplan 151). Indeed, the significance of social context in connection to character reception needs further research in the future.

Conclusions

To understand audience engagement with *The Hobbit* films I analysed the responses of nearly 5,000 Nordic respondents to a reception study survey. Firstly, I identified segments of character-oriented and non-character-oriented audiences in the respondents, with the former being the majority in this data. Those mentioning a favourite character were more often familiar with *The Hobbit* book or other parts of the Tolkien universe and more likely to participate in other activities connected to the films, such as commenting online or writing fan fiction. Even the respondents who gave low ratings to *The Hobbit* films were more likely to name a favourite character, if they had enjoyed other parts of Tolkien universe. The results indicate that characters are not equally important to all audiences, but vast storyworlds and transmedia universes increase engagement with characters. Further analysis of the actual processes is needed in order to understand how characters are positioned in audience engagement with fictional worlds. Indeed, the object of transmedia research has in recent years moved from transmedia production towards transmedia audiences (e.g. Evans; Harvey). The results of this study pose the question of whether character engagement described here is perhaps unique to fantasy film or transmedial production, and is character engagement different in nature or intensity in, for example, other film genres or stand-alone films with original scripts and characters.

Audiences construct their engagement with film characters in ways that are only partially mapped by Smith's structure of sympathy, but can be understood more comprehensively using Jerslev's conceptualization of emotional attachment, which includes non-empathetic emotions. In *The Hobbit* data this is evident in emotions connected to *making of characters*, that is, technical creation, character design, actor's performance, and character adaptation. *Contexts outside the text*, including connections to *LotR* films, the whole of Tolkien universe, narrative stereotypes, and fan communities, provide another new element to character reception. These results support Barker's demand for retheorization of the audience-character relationship to encompass diverse forms of character engagement. Indeed, further research should include deeper analysis of these contextual elements of character engagement to form a comprehensive understanding of emotional engagement with characters. Research should also look more in depth into the concept and cultural practices of non-character-oriented audiences. Who are the audiences who could not choose a favourite character? Does their engagement with films differ from that of other audiences?

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Appendix

THE WORLD HOBBIT AUDIENCE PROJECT

1. What did you think of the *Hobbit* films overall?

- Awful   - Poor   - Average   - Good   - Excellent

2. Can you sum up your response to the films in your own words?

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3. Please choose *up to three* reasons for seeing *The Hobbit* films, from among the following:

- I wanted to experience their special features (eg, high frame rate, 3D)
- I am connected to a community that has been waiting for the films
- I love Tolkien's work as a whole
- I like to see big new films when they come out
- I wanted to be part of an international experience
- I love fantasy films generally
- There was such a build-up, I had to see them
- I was dragged along
- I knew the book, and had to see what the films would be like
- I love Peter Jackson's films
- No special reason
- An actor that I particularly like was in them:

    - Richard Armitage   - Cate Blanchett   - Orlando Bloom
    - Benedict Cumberbatch   - Martin Freeman   - Ian Holm
    - Christopher Lee   - Evangeline Lilly   - Sylvester McCoy
    - Ian McKellen   - James Nesbitt   - Jeffrey Thomas
    - Aidan Turner   - Hugo Weaving   - Another? Please specify:

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4. Which of the following come closest to capturing the *kind of films* you feel *The Hobbit* trilogy are? Please choose up to three. (They are in random order.)

- Children's story   - Fairytale   - World of fantasy
- Prequel / sequel   - Star attraction   - Part of Tolkien's legend-world
- Multimedia franchise   - Family film   - Digital novelty cinema
- Action-adventure   - Peter Jackson movie   - Literary adaptation
- Stunning locations   - Coming-of-age story   - Hollywood blockbuster

If you are unsure what we mean by one of these, hover your cursor over it, to see a short explanation.

Is there another? Please specify:

[ ]

5. Are there any of these that you definitely would *not* choose? Again, please pick up to three.

- Children's story
- Prequel / sequel
- Multimedia franchise
- Action-adventure
- Stunning locations

- Fairytale
- Star attraction
- Family film
- Peter Jackson movie
- Coming-of-age story

- World of fantasy
- Part of Tolkien's legend-world
- Digital novelty cinema
- Literary adaptation
- Hollywood blockbuster

6. Can you tell us why you've made these choices in Questions 4 and 5?

[ ]

7. Who was your favourite character, in the book or the films? Can you say why?

[ ]

8. What element of the films impressed or surprised you most? Can you say why?

[ ]

9. Did anything particularly disappoint you about the films? Can you say why?

[ ]

10. Do *The Hobbit* films raise any broader issues or themes on which you would like to comment?

[ ]

11. Do you think there are people who would share your ideas about *The Hobbit*? What are they like?

[ ]

12. Have you taken part in any of these other activities connected with *The Hobbit* films?

- Producing fan art
- Role-playing
- Collecting merchandise
- Commenting online
- Making fan videos

- None of these
- Blogging
- Writing fan fiction
- Seriously debating the films
- Gaming

- Visiting filming locations

13. What is the role that you think fantasy stories can play today? Choose *up to three* which are nearest to your opinion:

- They are a way of enriching the imagination
- They are a way of experiencing and exploring emotions
- They are a source of hopes and dreams for changing our world
- They are a way of escaping
- They are a form of shared entertainment
- They allow us to explore different attitudes and ideas
- They are a way of creating alternative worlds
- No particular role

14. How important was it for you to follow stories and debates around the films?

- Not at all   • Slightly   • Reasonably   • Very   • Extremely

15. Which stories or debates have most interested you?

16. What did you think of the *Lord of the Rings* films overall?

- Not seen   • Awful   • Poor   • Average   • Good   • Excellent

17. Have you read *The Hobbit*?

- Had it read to me   • Read once   • Read more than once
- Still reading   • Not read at all   • Planning to read

18. If you did, what did you think of it?

- Not read   • Awful   • Poor   • Average   • Good   • Excellent

19. In which formats have you seen the *Hobbit* films? Please pick as many as are relevant for each film.

	Original cinema release	Dubb-ed	TV	Sub-titled	IMAX	3D	48 fps	DVD/ Blu-Ray	Down-loaded	Stream on demand	Mobile device	Not seen
Unexpected Journey												
Desolation of Smaug												
There and Back Again												

20. In what format do you *prefer* to see films like *The Hobbit*? (Please pick up to two.)

Cinema release	IMAX	Home theatre system	DVD/Blu-Ray	TV	Stream on demand	Down-loaded	Mobile device	Doesn't matter

21. Is there anything particular about you personally that would help us understand your feelings about the book or the films of *The Hobbit*?

Finally, a few simple facts about yourself:

22. In which year were you born? [Pull-down year list, beginning 2014 back to 1915]

23. Are you:

- Male   • Female

24. Which of the following comes closest to describing your position?

- Student
- Professional
- Home/child-care
- Service work

- Clerical/administrative
- Industrial labour
- Agricultural labour
- Unemployed

- Creative
- Executive
- Self-employed
- Retired

25. What level of education have you reached?

- Primary school
- University degree

- Secondary school
- Higher qualification

- Vocational qualification

26. What are your top three most common cultural activities? They can be of any kind – sports, reading, gardening, surfing the internet, whatever.

27. What are your three all-time favourite cultural or media experiences or products? Feel free to name any kind that you like.

28. What is your country of residence? PULL-DOWN LIST

29. What is your nationality? PULL-DOWN LIST

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Thinking and theorising disappointment: a report from the World Hobbit Project

Martin Barker

> For me they will always be the films that could be absolutely amazing but they weren't. … I criticize these movies because I love them and I wanted them to be perfect because they could but they didn't. [Participant #11884, World Hobbit Project]

> They had a chance to be AMAZING! and they didn't take it. Shame. [#26046]

An awful lot of viewers were pretty disappointed by their experience of the *Hobbit* film trilogy (Jackson, *An Unexpected Journey*; Jackson, *The Desolation of Smaug*; Jackson, *The Battle of the Five Armies*). Although the box office total was certainly high – most wanted to give it a full go – ratings were much lower. Rotten Tomatoes has critical ratings declining across the three films from 74% to 59%. A smaller but still significant drop happens in their audience ratings. The experience of disappointment has to be one of the most ordinary and widespread among audiences for all kinds of culture – yet it is, as far as I can see, one of the least thought about. Disappointment ranges, clearly, from passing "dohs" for a meal that isn't as good as taste-buds were prepared for, to full-scale let-downs when something dramatic – with long build-up, perhaps, and sky-high expectations – just isn't anywhere like as good as hoped. But this ordinariness hides complex processes and important implications. It isn't even clear what kinds of mental process are involved. One important social psychological theory links disappointment to appraisal, stressing that the negative emotion requires an associated evaluation – it both causes and colours it (see for instance Levine). Disappointment sits awkwardly with a number of contemporary conceptualisations of audiences. "Active audience" theories have little to say about it, since the disappointment can arise from "lie back and let it happen" modes as much as from engaged ones. It is clearly distant from "resistance" accounts, since disappointed audiences have evidently *gone looking* for something which fails to arrive (although it may bear some relation to the combination of "frustration and fascination" that Henry Jenkins (247) has long identified in fans' responses).

Disappointment is different from dislike or disapproval (although it can combine with them in particular cases). For a start, intense criticism and dismissal can be highly pleasurable – as Mark Kermode has hilariously demonstrated in his writings about the pleasures of the total put-down review (see Kermode). Public demonstrations of hatred and rejection can be the site of real pleasure (dissing makers, demonstrating critics' nous). It's hard to see any such possibilities of pleasure associated with disappointment. In fact that is not just absence of pleasure, but *denial of expected pleasures*, a real double whammy.

My particular interest happens to be in disappointment with films, but I know no reason to think that these are in principle different from those associated with other media and cultural experiences. There are many strong examples of disappointment with films, including the strong (if

still mixed) reactions against the fourth *Star Wars* film, *The Phantom Menace* (Lucas). That became very visible because of the public presence of *Star Wars* fandom. Reboots of superheroes have generated many such reactions. More mixed, but still easily exemplified, would be reactions of let-down to Ridley Scott's directorial follow-up to *Alien* (1979), *Prometheus* (2012). Much less noticed, but just as interesting in their own way, were the reactions against Richard Kelly's *Southland Tales* (2006) by many fans of his *Donnie Darko* (2001). Readers of this essay will no doubt have their own favourite examples to hand. Twice in my research career I have run headlong into this phenomenon. The first encounter was in my research (with Kate Brooks) into audience responses to *Judge Dredd* (Cannon, 1995 – see Barker and Brooks). For very many fans of the comic book source of Dredd, Sylvester Stallone's presentation of this iconic character was just horrible – but their telling of their dismay proved very revealing. This alerted me to a *methodological* advantage for audience researchers – that asking people to say what might have disappointed them brings into open view what they *hoped* would be the case, and thus their criteria of evaluation. For this reason in a series of subsequent projects I have tried to include a question about disappointment.

The second and more recent "hit" was of a different order. The 36,000 responses to the World Hobbit Project's (2011–2013) questionnaire disclosed a cascade of disappointments, a phenomenon which to this point no one in the research team has really tackled. The scale and density of the materials which this project gathered mean that in this essay I can attempt an over-arching frame for this issue.

Existing theory and research on disappointment

It took a while to locate the fields where such work had been done – and perhaps the most striking feature was the *high degree of separation* between fields that this revealed.[1] Questions, concepts, methods and findings only occasionally crossed over. There were, first, a number of isolated, random forays. So for example "disappointment" crops up in isolated reports on the (in)effectiveness of laboratory exercises in physics education (Zwickl et al); and on reverse migration (Cuecuecha). In a few cases, however, it was possible to identify emergent traditions, with distinctive questions, concepts and debates.

1. *Psychoanalytic approaches.* One of the most substantial pieces of work I had recommended to me was Ian Craib's book *The Importance of Disappointment*. Craib's book (which draws heavily on the work of Melanie Klein) was a substantial intervention into the fields of psychoanalysis and psychotherapy, challenging what he saw as a tendency to devalue the worth of, for instance, grief at death – by developing scales for pathology, and measuring people's mourning against the supposed 'right ways' to grieve. Craib was effectively identifying early on the problems with 'wellness' theories and practices, and is a harbinger of later, stringent critiques of these (see for instance Kirkland; Cederström and Spicer; also DeGrandpre; Davies). Writing as a practising therapist, Craib illustrates the ways in which members of his groups experienced and responded to what they felt to be a *pressure* to deal with loss "properly". Craib's point is clear: such therapies try to deny that life can be "disappointing", harsh, and cruel.

A good deal of Craib's book is given over to thinking about the ways people have to work at constructions of their "self" in contemporary society. His argument is against theories and practices of therapy aimed at resolving conflicts which work with a "conception of the omnipotent and self-constructing self" (Craib, 132). Instead, he suggests, there is endemic internal conflict within

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[1] Matt Hills, commenting on a draft of this essay, has suggested that this separateness may be part of the increasing "micro-specialisation" that characterises a great deal of academic enquiry. I fear he may be right.

people, between the "fragmented and isolated self" characteristic of mobile late modernity, and that impossible vision of a self-constructing identity (166). What emerges for me from Craib's study is how deeply disappointment is rooted in the conditions of our lives – irrespective of whether his essentially psychoanalytic account is the most productive for thinking this.[2] And the *management* of disappointment is freighted with ideological elements. The *management of emotions*, and especially "negative" ones, has become a substantial business in its own right.

The main difficulties I have with this account are two-fold. First, while they constitute an interesting *defence of disappointment* as a necessary part of human life, they don't easily support any detailed investigation – other than therapeutic – into the social role of disappointment (although I must admit that this conclusion is part-challenged by the recent rise of "psychosocial studies": see for instance Whitehouse-Hart; Woodward; Wetherell, "Tears, Bubbles and Disappointment"). Second, precisely because of its psychoanalytic emphasis, with its search for roots in childhood and child/parent relations, there is a turn away from exploring the cultural and political functions of disappointment (apart from occasional applications to concrete situations, as for instance Clancy et al's application to management motivation contexts).

2. *Behavioural Economics.* The largest body of work on disappointment has emerged from the major changes which took place in consumer and marketing theories in the 1990s. Part of this change was the rise of the notion of the "experience economy" (see Pine and Gilmore), that people spend not simply to acquire goods, but to express desire and find pleasure (Belk et al.) – and that this therefore encompasses things like holidays, sporting and cultural activities and the like, as much as shopping. Another was a shift in the ways in marketers understood brands, towards notions of "engagement", and the attachments people can feel towards them (see for instance the American-based Advertising Research Foundation's attempt at a definition of this). This led to a rising interest in what happens when people become disaffected, through unhappy experiences, with branded encounters – and, by implication, what might help *manage* them to stop consumer drift. This led to explorations of the differences between "disappointment" and "regret". Researchers argued that regret could mean that the *consumer is partly to blame*. Problems were the outcome of some mistake on their part, the consequence of a risk they'd taken rather than with what they have acquired. Again, there were implications: how to implicate consumers, to make them feel guilt and responsibility, rather than attach blame. A steady flow of researches have tried to unpick the conditions under which people might feel the two emotions.[3]

3. *Utopian studies.* Consumer research has been happy to borrow concepts and approaches from other fields, and one such field has been that of utopian studies. For a great deal of its history, the study of utopias – large or small – has taken attachment to these to be positive things. But just occasionally, when particular "utopias" have evidently crashed, the question of people's disappointment in them has surfaced. One such moment came when the philosopher Ernst Bloch – one of the early pre-eminent theorists of the value of ideal scenarios – had finally to admit that Stalinism (as particularly exemplified in East Germany) was anything but utopian. He had "escaped" to West Germany, and taken up a post at Tübingen University, where he gave an opening Address. His address asked the question: what happens when hope fails? But his answer was that it didn't really fail – as when he writes (in his *Literary Essays*, p. 342) that "concrete hope does not

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[2] There are points in his book where plausible and wise comments on particular situations spill over into a kind of talk that I find both unpersuasive and unhelpful – for instance when he is talking about the challenges of passionate love, and he declares that such love necessarily also involves "hate" – the solution being to "employ rational abilities to stand back (but not avoid)" these powerful emotions (Craib, 176). This seems to me therapy-speak at its worst.

[3] See among many others the work by Zeelenberg and colleagues (e.g. Zeelenberg et al.; Yu and Dean; van Dijk et al.). And for a pretty open acknowledgement of the interventionist goals of this in the *Harvard Business Review*, see Haas.

surrender when setbacks occur: with a renegade spirit, it even gambles on whatever has been negated up to now ... True disappointment, in a way that is equally immanent, becomes wiser through injury". This is more declaration of faith than something of empirical help (for more on Bloch, see McManus).

Recently, though, consumer researchers have looked to bits of utopian theory to flesh out their understanding of people's motivations and emotions in consumption. McLaren and Brown for instance argue that:

> utopianism is not just associated with impossible imaginings but rather that it has a crucial critical function enabling us to engage with and question reality. In particular, this critique was manifested in three major themes that emerged from the findings: consumer perceptions of the over-commercialisation of high street shopping; their fears over a loss of identity; and a nostalgic yearning for a return to tradition. (McLaren and Brown, 367)

This virtual co-option does point up the potential value of this area for thinking about disappointment. It is in the next fields that we can see more fully the value that can be gained.

4. *Fan studies.* The meteoric rise of fan studies from the early 1990s has seen a proliferation of theories and approaches – mostly, early on, concerned with the nature of fan pleasures and involvements. An early exception came from Will Brooker who, in his 2002 study of *Star Wars* fans, investigated the conflict between those pro- and anti-*The Phantom Menace*. Brooker nicely shows the ways in which this battle focused a good deal around the issue of who "owned" the *Star Wars* mythos. Defenders of the film awarded George Lucas creator's rights over its development. Critics saw the fictional universe as now belonging to the fan-world, who had validated it through their attachments. This emphasis on ownership battles has been interestingly extended by Lesley Goodman to look at debates over the meanings of authorship. (See also Sheffield and Merlo.) But some of these ideas have been nuanced by Richard McCulloch (forthcoming) in his study of Liverpool FC football fans' complaints about the club's fortunes – finding that some of the complaints are effectively "sponsored" by the club, rather than simply generated outside. But certainly the understanding of fans' disappointments is a rich site for ongoing exploration. Some of this can be seen to be emerging from explorations of "anti-fandom", a complex set of phenomena found at work in the kinds of intense and angry debates which regularly proliferate on fan sites (on this see for instance Gray). But I would still want to argue that there are features to "disappointment" which differentiate it from other kinds of negative response.

5. *The sociology of expectations.* In a 2006 essay, Mads Borup and three colleagues introduced a Journal special issue on the role of scientific and technological innovation, and surveyed developments to this point. Mostly taking a constructivist approach (that meanings and understandings are an essential aspect of social processes), they examine how cycles of claims and promotion frequently result in failure and disappointment – as the increasing valency of science and technology development builds high hopes on possibilities of 'breakthroughs', in fields such as nano-technology, biomedicine, or robotics – leading to 'alternating cycles of hype and disappointment' (Borup et al., 291). They consider the role played in these cycles by localised "images of the future", suggesting that these tend to be uplifted versions of the present – "now made better", as it were. This gives shape to publicity drives, and also helps to manage uncertainties (what are the potentials? who should be trusted? how might the discoveries be developed? what funding should be invested?, and so on). I find real value in this emphasis on "generative" images of the future, and how they may work through specific, contextualised discourses of hope and change. But the expression "now made better" surely understates what happens. In work on the promises of nano-technology, for instance, several authors have noted the operation of expressions

such as "fulfilment of its potential" – suggesting an unfolding pathway of development, a destination that must be reached (see for instance Selin). This cautions that we may need to think carefully about the specific ways in which, in a very different field like "fantasy", there may be implicit or implied future-promises.

6. *Ordinary language.* Finally, I want in particular to note the important work of a Dutch philosopher, Bas Levering. In two striking essays ("The language of disappointment"; "Disappointment in teacher-student relations"), Levering has approached "disappointment" through the lens of ordinary language. He uses the concept to make concrete how an "ordinary language" approach allows us to undertake a conceptual analysis of disappointment. He draws out the centrality of *expectations* which are frustrated, on issues which matter ("people are only disappointed in important things" Levering, "Disappointment in teacher-student relations", 66). Using deliberately ordinary examples, he unravels the ways feelings and language are yoked together (for example asking, intriguingly, whether I can *feel*, but not *be* disappointed).

Levering's essays, though clear and thoughtful, have a difficulty. With one exception – some passing remarks on the differences between being "disappointed", and being "disillusioned" – he doesn't fully follow his own strictures about considering the ordinary operations of "disappointment". For there are in English a range of terms that, all slightly differently, address frustrated expectations. And a consideration of the differences among them reveals more about their conceptual logic. Consider the following (no doubt incomplete) list of semi-cognate expressions for "disappointment":

Anti-climax	Discontented	Dissatisfied	Let down
Betrayed	Disenchanted	Exasperated	Nonplussed
Disabused	Disillusioned	Fed up with	Outraged
Disconcerted	Dismayed	Frustrated	Regretful

Each of these can be used in contexts where people wish to express disappointment (and some, of course, can be used in other contexts as well). But each one tends to trigger other associations. For instance, to be "nonplussed" is to add an element of bewilderment to disappointment – hinting that the speaker cannot make sense of what has happened. ("Disconcerted" holds something of the same – it suggests that the frustrating experience was not to be expected.) To be "disabused", on the other hand, is to have illusions ironed out. To feel "regret", meanwhile, hints at the speaker's *knowingness*, that s/he may have "seen this coming". To feel "betrayed" is to feel cheated by someone one had trusted, and who should have known better. And so on.

I would argue that there are at least four dimensions which can be activated in discourses around disappointment: *intensity* (eg, from "fed up" to "shock"); *expectedness* (from "regret" to "disconcertedness"); *recognition of causes* (from "let-down" to "nonplussed"); and *possibility of action* (from "disillusioned" to "discontented"). There may well be others.

From this literature review, what I want to carry forward in particular is a number of elements: that disappointment is a *dynamic* evaluation, consequent on the construction but then frustration of expectations; that because of this it is not simply a negative emotion. Rather it is a mobile combination of feelings and evaluations, its form and intensity potentially made available to researchers through the language of their articulation (relatedly, see Wetherell). In small or large ways it can turn risky but important images of a future, a form of "now made better or differently". And disappointment is *particular*. It has features which separate it from other negative responses. It is worth mentioning here I Q Hunter's opening up of what might be called "logics of boredom" in his argument for the potential redemptive qualities of cult classics: that people who adhere to "bad

films" like *Showgirls* (Verhoeven), or *Plan 9 from Outer Space*, can often be adopting transformative tactics for turning negative into complicated positive responses (see Hunter). This is quite different from what I believe is happening with disappointed responses to *The Hobbit* film trilogy.
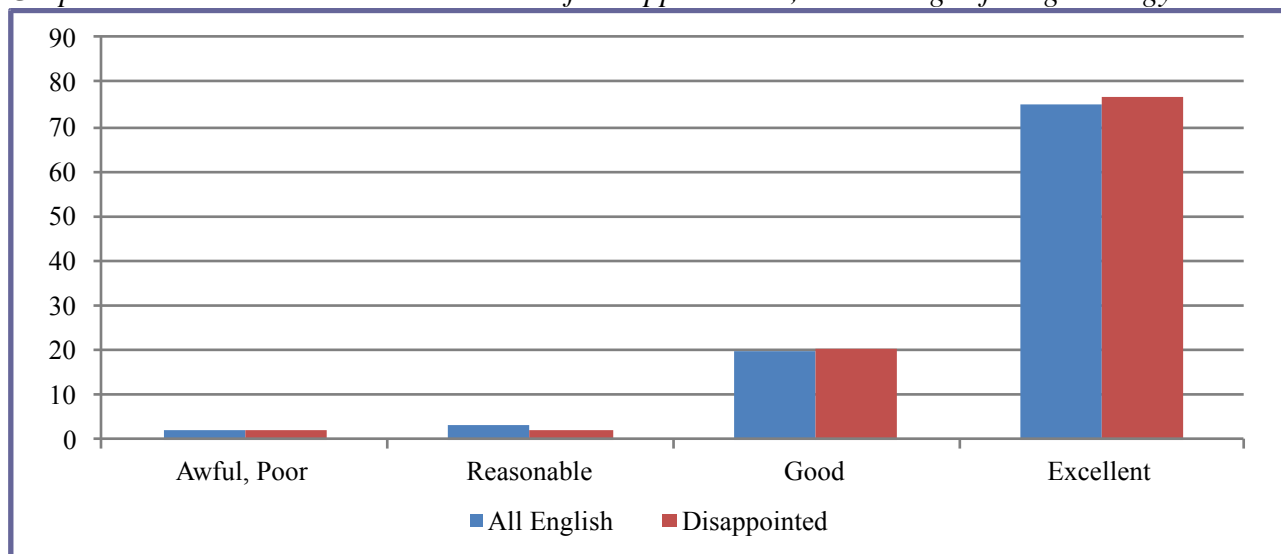
Disappointment with *The Hobbit*

> Peter Jackson has revealed in a new video that he "didn't know what the hell he was doing" with *The Hobbit* movies. After the great success of the *Lord of the Rings* movies, *The Hobbit* was a complete let-down. (Naahar)

> If you've already seen the first two *Hobbit* movies, you should absolutely stick it out and watch this one. Just remember to keep your expectations low and smoke a little twist of Hobbit herb to make the whole thing go down easier. (Newitz)

The Internet is still alive with critical commentaries on the *Hobbit* films, the vast majority contrasting them unfavourably with the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy (Jackson). The extent to which the *Lord of the Rings* films provided the baseline for evaluating the *Hobbit* trilogy can be gleaned from the following: while 22.6% of our respondents had not read the book *The Hobbit*, only a miniscule 1.2% had not seen the *Rings* film trilogy. There can be little doubt that the general response to the *Hobbit* trilogy was one of let-down. Global box office receipts and IMDb ratings for the two trilogies alone tell a powerful story. Across the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy, box office takings rose from $887 to $1141, while for the *Hobbit* trilogy they fell from $1017 to $955. Similarly, IMDb ratings on the first trilogy stayed high (8.8 for the first film, 8.9 for the third), while for the second trilogy they fall from 7.9 to 7.4). But lack of enthusiasm does not in itself indicate disappointment (let alone say anything about its causes). One Graph from our research project reveals more on this:

Graph 1: Relations between Declarations of Disappointment, and Ratings of Rings Trilogy.

Sample: all English-language respondents. Search terms and totals: "disappoint …" [592], "let down" [123], "not as good as" [47]. Total = 760.

The almost exact fit between declarations of disappointment at the *Hobbit* and high praise for *The Lord of the Rings* is uncanny, and will return shortly in relation to some otherwise puzzling responses.[4]

The precise grounds given for disappointment were immensely varied. A Table of reasons, drawn from a sample of 100 responses, revealed the following:

Table 1: Sample of grounds indicated for being disappointed with The Hobbit.

Elements	Themes
The introduction and character of Tauriel…	The length and number of films…
Fili's & Kili's deaths…	Too much/poor CGI…
The introduction and character of Alfrid…	Too many battles…
The introduction and the character of Azog…	A lack of songs…
The depiction of the Goblins…	Dull music…
The giant 'worms'	Disrespect for the books…
Smaug's quick death…	Not appropriate for children…
Beorn's virtual absence…	The dwarves badly done…
Specific plot-holes (e.g. Thorin's funeral)	Lack of diversity…

But for each one of these positively asserted, others can be found which say things such as "I didn't mind Tauriel" or "I don't object that they changed things from the book". This simultaneously indicates both a personal position *and* their awareness of a wide opinion to the contrary – a point which Matt Hills (forthcoming) has explored extensively, and to which I return shortly.

This showed too in people's preferences across the three film-parts. While overall the third film attracted the most criticism, it is still the case that quite a number varied from this, as these quotes show:

> I found the first two disappointing in their theatrical versions, in pacing and character development. [#33744]

> I was extremely excited for all three films and was extremely pleased with the first and the third (a tad disappointed by the second). [#17996]

But just knowing which elements or films provoked disappointment doesn't much advance our understanding of the phenomenon. For that, we need to attend to *how people expressed* themselves, discursively. If we do so, at least three tendencies become visible: (a) there are forms of expression which reveal how criteria of judgement are deployed, or, against what standards the films are being judged; (b) there are expressions which reveal how much disappointment is the *presumed* response. These two both show their roots in the ongoing public debates about the films, and in particular the ways in which this trilogy was being compared with the decade-earlier *Rings* trilogy. And this provides a tricky point of connection with the third (c), a kind of complaint which appears to show an *inconsistency* on the part of some respondents. This is a risky analytic position to take up, but a possible *solution* to the inconsistency is very revealing.

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[4] One further indicator of the extent to which the *Rings* films were a template for judging the *Hobbit* comes from answers to our final questions, where we asked people to nominate their three favourite cultural experiences. *The Lord of the Rings* was named by 24% of all English-speaking respondents – more than six times as many as the next most mentioned (*Star Wars*).

(a) Consider the following illustrative answers to our "Any disappointment?" question:

> Yes. I found the narrative exhausting. Too much action, too many climaxes, too much being saved in the nick of time. I wasn't invested in the risk because I didn't really believe there was any. I didn't really feel drawn to the characters. Also, seriously, this could have been 1 film. [#29594]

> Adding the cringeworthylovestory. Even though adding a female elf was risky, I wasn't completely against it. But this romance was awkward and unbelievable. Legolas and Gimli were supposed to be the first close Elf-Dwarf friendship, and this took that away. Too much Legolas, waaaayyy too much Legolas! A cameo would have been great and fun for the fans, but this was ridiculous. Especially in the last movie. [#33842]

> They were really, really overly long. It was totally unnecessary. AND! OK, Tauriel is a really cool and interesting addition, but could the filmmakers not come up with a more interesting story arc for a female character than 'love triangle'? What about her struggle to be taken seriously as a warrior and archer? What about her defying authority and having to leave her home and risk disappointing her community? I mean, come on filmmakers! Girls are way more interesting than that! [#35343]

> First two films you never truly believed the characters were in danger, the over-the-top stunt sequences (ie, falling unscathed down a cavern, barrel riding, an intelligent dragon not even causing any damage whatsoever). This was not the case in *LOTR*, where you truly believed their lives were at stake. [#9587]

A number of criteria are involved here. First, while Tolkien's book provides a background against which to consider changes, there is little purism. Rather, the question is whether changes and introductions are *proper* ones. And the measure of "properness" is the *relevance to people today*. OK, have Tauriel, but have her as a "proper contemporary woman", facing and overcoming recognisable dilemmas. It is thus taken as given that the wall between the fantasy-world and ours is permeable. Aligned with that is the objection that while intertextual referencing (*Hobbit* to *Rings*) is fine, it needs to be controlled. The films must keep their own *integrity*. Then there is the complaint about endangeredness, which frequently couples with discontent with the role played by CGI – if digital manipulation is too evident, there is a loss of *seriousness*. If characters are not visibly at risk, emotional investment in their future is reduced. How can they be *cared about* if they cannot be harmed? The comparison with *Rings* is again important. That some sense of *jeopardy* must attach to the characters is a common complaint. This suggests that fantasy is for many seen to be governed by rules of a kind of "realism".

(b) One striking feature of many responses in our huge database is the number that take disappointment as a for-granted starting point – whatever their personal views might be, as in these:

> Obviously, compared to the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy, they aren't as good. But still, they were good movies, were as close to the original work of Tolkien as the *LotR* adaptation was. [#21349]

> Dominated by mediocrity. Could have been much stronger but were obviously dogged by creative apathy and corporate meddling. [#26351]

The use of words such as "obviously", or "clearly", or "unsurprisingly" marks out how, for many people, it was just "known" that they were not good enough. In the reverse direction, the numbers of respondents who found nothing disappointing about the films is almost vanishingly small.

Among 7662 English-language respondents, just 220 (2.9%) declared no disappointments.[5] And a number of these acknowledged that this was *in the teeth* of a perceived expectation, as here:

> Nothing really disappointed me. I understand that some people may have been expecting *The Hobbit* films to be more similar to *The Lord of the Rings* series, but they are both made very differently, which I liked. [#1782]

> Nothing disappointed me about the films, per se, but it was some of the fans' reactions. Some said that Peter did a bad job and they couldn't even come up with good arguments why he did a bad job. [#13204]

> Nothing disappointed me about the films; it was clear they weren't meant to be close to the book and were just an interpretation. [#18880]

How such people came to be not disappointed turns out to be a mix of three predominant elements. Some – as above – simply insisted on accepting Jackson's judgement (rather like those defenders of George Lucas). A number took a very special course to which I return later. A third group played a tactical game, of knowing that disappointment was almost certain, but wanting to maximise their enjoyment:

> I went in with unrealistically high expectations, so they were a little disappointing at first - but then I got to thinking, and I have decided to love them. [#25496]

> I liked the characters enough to invest in them emotionally. Not as good as the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy, but great entertainment. Didn't match my experience of the book – but I see them as another expression of the Tolkien phenomenon – I'm able to divorce the two experiences. [#25945]

"Disappointment" became something *manageable*, over which a degree of *choice* could be exercised. Although it involves emotions, these are not the whole deal. Rather, as appraisal theory insists, these are emotions dependent upon committed evaluations. The above two respondents absolve the films by either by rethinking the investment involved, or by recategorising them. Tactical cognitive decisions have allowed them to manage their feelings.

(c) But if the above cases reveal a kind of successful tactical reframing, others reveal what can happen when a person *cannot* for some reason do this. Here are two critiques of the *Hobbit* films:

> Well, what about 'Why an original female character was used as a love interest and plot device?' Also, I don't really want to use the word in a conversation about elves and dwarves … but when one race is being glorified for something they literally weren't a part of, while the other race gets ignored and slaughtered in the story about their heroism and bravery, there's a word for that… [#13924]

> I am a bit confused about the only 2 poc *[persons of colour]* I saw. One black woman and an Asian woman, I believe. I understand the general approach that everyone in Middle-earth is white but … it felt odd. Look at *Game of Thrones*. What a representation. [#7652]

Taken on their own, these point towards a political critique of representations in the *Hobbit* trilogy. The difficulty with *simply* taking them in that way is another feature of these two respondents: both of them rated *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy "Excellent" even in retrospect (suggesting that the shift is not due simply to increased salience around debates about "race" and gender). Yet surely exactly

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[5] Keyword search terms were *Nothing*, *Not at all*, and *Not that I can think of*, within answers to our question "Did anything disappoint you?".

the same critique could be mounted of that trilogy, if not more strongly (even if tokenistically, the *Hobbit* films moved away from the insistent presentation of evil as black, and made moves to include more female characters). Given this additional rather puzzling conflict, how might we make sense of the deployment of these criteria in this case? For this, we need to take seriously the notion that "disappointment" is an inherently time-based response, and look back to the formative experience offered by *The Lord of the Rings*.

The Lord of the Rings as exceptional experience

If *The Lord of the Rings* provided a significant template against which to measure *The Hobbit*, it is worth asking if there are any specific qualities in the responses to the earlier trilogy that might help account for the unusual features of disappointments with the later one. And I want to propose that it was in fact the loss of some other very particular experiences which the *Rings* films provided, that made the *Hobbit* films *blameable*. What that "lost" experience was, is to me indicated by the high levels of use, especially in people's first answers, of languages of *astonishment*. Almost 1500 of the English-language respondents to our *Lord of the Rings* project[6], in answering just one open question in our survey, used at least one – and often more than one – of a range of terms indicating that the experience had *outrun expectations* and had become *almost unsayable*, as here:

> There really are no words that I can think of that describe this film. It is beyond words. Seeing it was like a spiritual experience for me. I left the theater in a daze. It wasn't until almost 24 hours later that I could even gather my thoughts enough to give a coherent response to anyone who asked me how I liked it. I have never felt like this after seeing any other movie. [*Lord of the Rings* Participant #7882]

Consider also the fact that a fair number of answers to this question simply listed a number of these words, as here: "Amazed humbled scarified moved astounded grateful tired completed[7] happy sad blissful agony." [*LotR* #4976] Something in the encounter with *The Lord of the Rings* on film outran easily available language. It was an unexpectedly intense experience, and as a result almost unsayable. It involved an unprecedented range of emotions and other response-elements. Therefore people did not immediately have the evaluative equipment, or the overt criteria, to make full sense of their experiences. They needed time, talk, introspection, and comparison with other experiences, which of course we could not readily capture in our survey snapshot.

In a 2009 essay on the role of *The Lord of the Rings* films as "spiritual journey", I considered in detail one woman's responses, reported to us in a long telephone interview. She told us that she had deliberately seen the final film twice: once with two female friends, where they had laughed and complained about the lack of viable female characters; and then a second time on her own, during which her relations with the film altered completely. Her criteria of evaluation shifted, from a combination of Tolkien-faithfulness and feminist objections, to one of commitment to the hard life choices made by Pippin, and best exemplified in one scene which she recalled in harrowing detail, ending "And I cried!".

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[6] Keyword search terms were: *awe*, *dumbfound*, *staggered*, *overwhelm*, *wow*, *incredible*, *amaze*, *astonish*, *astound*, *humbled*, *beyond belief*, addressed to English-language answers to Q2: "Can you tell us why you have given this rating?".

[7] I have discussed in some detail the significance of the use of the word "completed" in an essay on the concept of "visualisation" (see Barker, "Envisaging 'visualisation'").

Looking back from *The Hobbit*

Earlier I hinted at a third way in which some people declined to be disappointed. I return now to this. Almost by accident, something emerged from investigation of the *Hobbit* database which can throw light on this puzzle. Late in our questionnaire we asked people to tell us anything about themselves which might throw light on their other answers. In a light-touch first investigation of these, I stumbled across this answer:

> I'm originally from Syria, I'm Arabic but my Mam is Russian. You can imagine the awful society there, I never felt like I belonged there or fit. I always loved the American cinema, and *The Lord of the Rings* was the main reason why, these movies were my only escape from my awful reality and the life I had in my home. Well let's just say it was getting beaten up from my crazy dad every day, and I watched the *LOTR* about a million times. Actually that's how I learned English, my favorite language. I memorized every scene and every word. I lived under this cruel unjust war for almost five years. You can only imagine going to work every day and risking your life just to eat and live under bombing & shooting every day. We left my crazy dad, and I'm now in Russia, thank god, but still I'm waiting for my mam to come :-(So the *Hobbit* movies were my only way out to step into another wonderful great world that Peter Jackson has created, so yes these movies had such an impact on my life. [#13508]

This edited version (the original is over 300 words) grounds this young woman's relationship with both *The Lord of the Rings* and *the Hobbit* films in a horrible, dangerous life-world. It would be easy to reduce this to the word "escape", given the last sentence of her answer, and that would not denigrate her involvement. But consider her answer to our question: "Are there any broader themes you would identify within the films?":

> The honest friendship that is so rare in our time now, and the fact that every person no matter where he lives or how small he is can be brave and make a difference in the world.

Independently of me, a number of other researchers within our research network began to notice other answers similarly finding cultural and political themes (see for instance Hasebrink and Hasebrink; Hipfl and Kulterer; Mikhaylova et al.). Over a period I assembled a list of respondents making these kinds of wider connections, exemplified by comments such as these:

> In the third part an issue appears that is surprisingly topical: the question how to deal with people in need who have lost everything and ask for help. In the film these are the people from Lake-town, in our presence these are the refugees from Syria and other areas of crisis. Europe should ask itself whether it, as the dwarfs, actually wants to remain seated on its treasure of gold, entrenched behind walls, or whether they should help these people as much as possible. [#2888]

> I found one topic very interesting, which is also debated in the real world. In fact, in the film the dwarfs have been expelled and did not get any help from other 'tribes'. A highly topical issue is the refugees from Lampedusa who do not have a home either, and are seeking for asylum. In my view these two events are similar and make me think why in the film all parties help each other and fight together, while here the biggest part of the population keeps complaining about 'foreigners'.[#20880]

> I am from a tribe called Yotvingians that was nearly destroyed and had to incorporate to a country nowadays called Lithuania. Lithuania itself was a huge empire during middle-ages and now we're a small country of 3 million people who managed to escape the Soviet Union and preserve our traditions and language which is one of the oldest living languages in the world. So yes I feel like Thorin – robbed of what belongs to me (us rather than me). [#9060]

Since these were located by some element of chance, I cannot be sure how many more there are likely to be – but with an emergent group of 40 it seemed worthwhile to see whether they deviated from the main corpus of responses in any particular ways. The results were startling, to say the least. A couple of small but still interesting tendencies, first. This group were slightly *younger* than our overall cohort (62% vs 52% in the 16-25 category) and more likely to nominate "Tolkien" (77% vs 70%) or "the books" (64% vs 52%) among their reasons for viewing the films. But these differences paled into insignificance when compared with discovering that 72% of this group (vs 35% overall) rated the films "Excellent". This matched closely with one other wide discrepancy: answering our question about the role(s) they see fantasy playing, 69% of this group chose "Hopes and dreams for changing the world", as against 35% for the overall cohort. Yet this group showed *less* interest in fantasy as a "genre" (38% vs 44%) than the total cohort.

What do these results suggest? This group was *not* disappointed. And an important part of the especial value they found was the films' capacity to *address analogical real world situations*. "Fantasy" is valued as a medium through which difficult-to-think-or-speak situations and events can be addressed. This allowed them to belay any other concerns they may have had about the films, because of an overriding value they offered.

Conclusions

What do these results permit us to say about the meaning, status and operations of disappointment? With all the cautions that have to accompany the complicated evidence I have called on here, the following points look right:

1. In relation specifically to *The Hobbit*, it is apparent that although disappointment was rampant, a high level of *good will* was in place when the films were released. People's memories of *The Lord of the Rings* had led them to trust Peter Jackson to do his best with the adaptation. The concerns that sprang up and circulated (for example, over extending to three films, over the High Frame Rate, over the romance with the "female elf") didn't entirely deplete that good will. But – faced in the end with the films – very many people felt let down. There was a wide range of particular complaints and dislikes, as we have seen. But equally important was a sense of something larger having been lost, a sense of missed opportunity to repeat the "high" of *Lord of the Rings*.

Several options became available at this point. The most extreme was simply to stop going – perhaps, thereby, protecting more of the special magic of the *Rings* trilogy.[8] The second option was to blame. Everything that could be judged wrong, was wrong. Jackson, New Line Cinema should be ashamed. If only a different director … If only greed hadn't ruled …[9] A third option was to

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[8] "They completely failed to capture the magic of the book. And added in silly elements from the LOTR, which didn't bring anything to the movie, it just dragged it out. The casting was awful, the makeup design on the dwarves stupid. A lot of the sequences looked like they were copied from LOTR. As far as I'm concerned it was a complete disaster, mainly because it was just plain boring. I couldn't bring myself to go to the third one, life's too short." [#31138]

[9] "Greedy studio wanted to make more money so they divided very short kid's book into three long films. Therefore most of the plot is made up. Worst thing about the Hobbit films is CGI. LOTR was made with love and precise care, while everything in The Hobbit is CGI from orcs, horses, buildings to country and even some characters. It all looks like a very shabby video sequence. There are no memorable quotes, scenes, music, poor acting. The fights with CGI orcs and CGI Legolas are not thrilling at all and they are way over the top. Sequences like barrels on the river or anything with Radagast are ridiculously bad. Basically what Jackson did this time is that he said 'screw everything' and just made another Beowulf film set in Tolkien's

tactically downsize expectations. This was never going to be *The Lord of the Rings*, so take it for what it can be: a half-decent action movie, with some weird decisions and inconsistencies. A fourth option was to grit teeth, ignore the tide of argument, and insist that there *was* a continuity between the two trilogies. Other people just weren't looking at this in the right way. That continuity was provided by the focus on *small people*, and *small peoples*.

Our research doesn't provide any basis for saying how widespread each of these is. But it clearly shows how each operates.

2. In relation to fantasy more broadly, any statement of implications has to be particularly tentative. But the following are certainly compatible with what our research reveals. Cautiously, I spell these out as follows. First, fidelity to the original source does not have to be a major issue – enthusiasts *expect* to see stories brought up-to-date. But what *counts* as being "up-to-date" is a topic of debate.

Enthusiasts expect a *seriousness of purpose* in contemporary fantasy – which doesn't of course rule out clever moments of humour, playfulness, and referencing – and a sense of *riskiness* (not all victories will be easy, many will suffer and "all men must die", in the scale of conflicts that alternative worlds involve). But at the same time characters – however deeply embedded and structured within the narratives of their fictional worlds – are going to be measured against the rules, codes and issues of our world. Be it gender, or race, kinds of motivation, or ways of behaving, fictional characters have to be *recognisable* in relation to our world. The dilemmas of "other worlds" must be comprehensible enough for audiences to associate with, even as they are played out in contexts and ways that look and feel vastly different.

3. What does it show, finally, about "disappointment" per se? At the beginning of this essay, I quickly surveyed five fields which had begun to theorise "disappointment". I want briefly to consider the essay's implications for each of these.

I believe that our findings confirm and expand Bas Levering's epistemological account. Disappointment is inherently historical.[10] A present disappointment gets its meaning and force from a build-up of prior expectations and discursive frames. Detailed combinations of experiences, learning, hopes and wishes, publicity and promises encountered have to be processed. They have to generate a complicated template with evaluative criteria primed for the new cultural encounter.

Therefore disappointment is much more than just an emotion. It is the outcome of a sort of test failure. To the extent that a person may have been forewarned (by public circulation of leaks, gossip, debates, reviews, and the like – another aspect of the historical process), they can *decide* whether to lay aside their template, and operate with another. But there have to be strong countervailing reasons to do so. The wished-for response has to *matter* to a person, for it to become operative. And there has to be someone who could be *held responsible*. Accidental or over-determined failure will not spark evaluative templates into life in the same way.

Leaving aside the issue of psychoanalysis' general concepts, it is certainly pertinent to ask how people's strong reactions to particular features of *The Hobbit* may be rooted in their personal histories – as long as those histories are understood to be socially and historically constructed. To identify oneself as a "Yotvingian", for instance, and to carry that into one's engagement with the films, is to carry a highly charged but particular measuring device. It remains to be seen whether psychoanalytic approaches can really deal with such particularities.

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universe. It's all slack, poor CGI, Hollywood blockbuster with no value. It's a shame that the same director made the LOTR masterpiece." [#14738]

[10] This point has been extensively developed by Hills (forthcoming), in an examination of the ways fans of Dr Who create an emotional affiliation with "my Doctor" – who may not be the first they encounter, but who becomes the measure for all the other incarnations they may subsequently encounter.

Behavioural economics' desire to divide and manage emotions comes up sharply against the ways in which we have seen audience members *tactically navigate* their sense of disappointment. Are individuals willing to forgo annoyance for the sake of managed pleasure? I suspect that the issue at stake is the degree to which people are willing to *compartmentalise* their experience. If something is restricted in its implications, then impulses to blame or forgive, or to find fault in oneself, are easier to manage. What we see with *The Hobbit* is fluctuating degrees of evaluative separation vs penetration.

The utopian impulse is clearly strong in some viewers. And it clearly carries over for many from their experience of *The Lord of the Rings*. The phenomenon of "hope" in relation to the earlier trilogy is something I have addressed in an earlier (2015) essay. But it looks as if, for some at least, it is a relatively shapeless and easily dissolved gain – retreating from which leaves them hunting for the right criteria to apply.

Finally, in relation to the sociology of expectations, what seems most important is that the *Hobbit* films were so widely evaluated for their "continuity" with *The Lord of the Rings* – not by Tolkien's books in some purist sense, but by a sense of how this kind of fantasy might have renewed pertinence. At stake, then, is what the *genre* is perceived to be capable of. For a large proportion, this condemned the films, and created quite a lot of antagonism towards Peter Jackson and New Line Cinema. But this was not particularly the result of promises made by either of these parties. It was more the accumulated hope and hype of the earlier trilogy that "sank" *The Hobbit*.

"Disappointment" is a richly complex phenomenon, deserving of much more work than I have been able to give it here. I hope others will feel an impulse to tackle it from other angles.

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Biography: Martin Barker is Emeritus Professor at Aberystwyth University. Across a lifetime of research he has addressed many topics and areas including: contemporary British racism; children's comics; media scares; the Iraq war film cycle; and livecasting to cinemas. In the last 20 years he has particularly focused on the study of film audiences. These have included studies of audiences for: Judge Dredd; Crash; Being John Malkovich; Alien; *and screened sexual violence (funded by the British Board of Film Classification). He was Principal Investigator for both the International* Lord

of the Rings *Project (2003-4) and the World* Hobbit *Project (2014-5). He is currently participating in his 'final' major project, a study of the reception of* Game of Thrones.

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Conference Report: 100 Years of Estrangement at Worldcon 75 in Helsinki, 9–13 August, 2017

Esko Suoranta

A hundred years since the original publication of Viktor Shklovsky's seminal "Art as Technique" (alternatively known as "Art as Device"), the academic track of the 75th World Science Fiction Convention picked Shklovsky's idea of *ostranenie* as its theme. For Shklovsky "art exists that one may recover the sensation of life; it exists to make one feel things, to make the stone *stony*" (11, emphasis original). In other words, art deautomatizes our habitual perceptions of the world. It manages this through *ostranenie*, defamiliarization or estrangement, which Shklovsky demonstrates with Tolstoy's prolonged description of flogging a horse in which the everyday act is made strange. In science fiction criticism, Darko Suvin uses similar terminology in his *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction* (1979) to explain the special nature of science fiction (SF) as fiction of cognitive estrangement where new, science-fictional devices, or *novums,* make it possible to imagine the world differently. In addition to Shklovksy, Suvin was influenced by Bertolt Brecht's *Verfremdungseffekt* that disrupts the received ways of observing theater, leading to a distanced and intellectual empathy that was, according to Brecht, necessary to get the audiences to change the world (Brecht and Bentley 130–136).

Worldcon's academic track, *100 Years of Estrangement,* saw these various aspects of estrangement interrogated over the course of five days, 19 sessions, and some 60 papers. The presenters came from all over the world with a pleasing number of PhD candidates and independent scholars among them, while the organizers lauded the quality of the programming for its adherence to the theme of estrangement. In addition to giving my own paper, I was in the communication team for the conference and thus got to follow a good deal of the proceedings.

A fair number of the sessions, like the "Uses of Fantasy (i.e., the World Hobbit Project)," "SF and Gender," and "Environmental Anxieties" gathered delightfully large audiences also from the non-academic con-goers. While most papers focused on science fiction and fantasy (SFF) written in English, sessions like "SF in China" but also papers on Finnish SFF and Soviet children's literature brought a touch of internationalism suitable for the World Science Fiction Convention.

Most presentations centered around close-readings and the analysis of instances of estrangement, but did so over several media from literature to comics and film with a variety of approaches, like posthuman, ethical, and educational, on estrangement in SFF. One of the popular topics was non-human representation. For example, in "The Posthuman" session, Jani Ylönen discussed the cute cyborg killer pets of *We3*, while Clare Wall argued that Margaret Atwood's *Madaddam Trilogy* and Larissa Lai's *Salt Fish Girl* deconstruct anthropocentrism of human-animal relations. Additionally, totally-not-robots of Redditt, monsters, aliens, and cyborgs were at the heart of "The Poetics and Politics of Posthumanist Estrangement(s) in Speculative Fiction" panel.

While the conference abstracts remain (as of October 2017) at the Worldcon programme website, I would like to highlight two great papers. First, Tiffani Angus's terrific (and funny) "Where Are the Tampons? The Estrangement of Women's Bodies in Apocalyptic and Post-Apocalyptic Fiction" that did not really flatter the works she studied in their handling of women as embodied beings in conditions of post-apocalyptic scarcity. While, for example, childbirth can be found in Angus's corpus, they most often happen off-stage without a description available for the reader, sometimes very easily for a setting like a post-apocalyptic wasteland, at others with plain weird results. Overall, Angus argues that SFF cannot get stories right if things like women's bodily experiences are misrepresented. Second, I'll mention Marian Via Rivera-Womack and her "Defamiliarization and the Ecological Sublime in Contemporary Weird Fiction" that connected Brian Catling's *The Vorrh* and Jeff VanderMeer's *Annihilation*. According to her, both are modern weird/gothic texts where an obsession with architecture has been replaced by one with nature. Where in the gothic tradition nature was the domain of the sublime, for Catling and VanderMeer it is made strange through the monstrous and becomes a space with fluid boundaries.

One of the most fruitful discussions to emerge over the course of *100 Years of Estrangement* was around the overall significance of science fiction and fantasy as fiction of estrangement. What is it that works of SFF achieve through their use of estranging techniques? Already on the first day of the conference, Andrew M. Butler raised the question of the subjectivity/universality of estrangement. To highlight this, he recapped his first reading of *Gattaca* during which he experienced estrangement at the invocation of "Detroit Riviera," leading to speculations over the storyworld and its history that could have led to the Detroit area becoming like the French Côte d'Azur. It became clear, however, that the Detroit Riviera refers to a Buick model rather than a science fictional resort. Butler went on to ask whether his experience of estrangement becomes invalid due to this confusion.

Several presenters seemed to veer toward thinking that at least the effect of estrangement in SFF was somewhat universal. For them, estranging fiction has the potential for making the reader see the world in a new light, for offering insight into differing realities and, as a result, for different politics, be they ecological, posthumanist, or less cis-heteronormative, to name just a few possibilities.

What remained unanswered, however, was the degree of power for such fiction. Clearly, science fiction has the potential, especially through techniques of estrangement, to bring readers to the verge of a revelation and possibly action as a result. But the amount of readers to which this applies remains in question as does the probability of the next step – does the increased consciousness of injustices brought on by fiction result in action to resist them? Jo Lindsay Walton was even more skeptical than this, asking in a blog post whether our "deep normative structures" are in fact not interrogated but reinforced by SF works like *We3*, *Oryx & Crake*, or *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* – a selection of examples that are generally understood to be both estranging and "good" SF (Walton 2017). What if even SF that successfully estranges does not dismantle harmful categories?

To me, one of the most intriguing case examples of such questions came from Essi Vatilo's "Climate Change in a Chromium World. The Power of Estrangement in Ted Chiang's 'Exhalation.'" In Vatilo's interpretation, Chiang's story manages through estrangement to become a text of climate fiction with potential to re-frame the climate debate without becoming burdened by it, that is, a story that does not merely go through the motions of the debate, but offers a genuinely new take on the whole issue. Significantly, "Exhalation" strives to such a direction, but it does not in fact mention *climate change* as such and does not seem to take part in any real-world discourses around it. While its robotic characters realize that the way they respirate is detrimental to the habitability of their world in an irreversible way, the drama is cast not in terms of complex ecosystems but a rather more technical apocalyptic scenario. According to Vatilo, this has led to a number of critics framing

the central tension of the story in terms of entropic heat death rather than climate change – an interpretation that brings about a different set and scale of questions with regards to the survival of species and the actions one could take to avoid such disasters. Where entropic heat death is not something to fight, climate change certainly is.

Vatilo did note that this subtlety of the text and its estranging techniques makes the issue of climate change easy to either dismiss or miss altogether. This way, Vatilo's take on "Exhalation" brings out both Butler's question of the subjectivity of estrangement and Walton's concern over its politics, while shedding light onto a short story that appears to have been deeply misunderstood despite – or even because – of its craft and mastery of science fictional literary techniques. If even so-called sophisticated readers can miss out on such central messages of an SF story, how can we rely on estranging literature to engage with a variety of readers and hope for it to influence their politics for, say, a sustainable future?

As these questions and their implications show, the study of estrangement is not over and done with. The presentations at *100 Years of Estrangement* hopefully build the foundation for its next steps. After all, Suvin's *Metamorphoses* turns 40 in two years and clearly there is a call for new attempts to theorize the ins and outs of cognitive estrangement and Shklovsky's *ostranenie* with regards to what SFF and the scholarship around it have become in the 21st century. At this hundred-year mark, the ground is more fertile than ever for the next hundred years of studying the strangely imagined.

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Biography: Esko Suoranta is a PhD scholar at the University of Helsinki, working on his thesis Allegories of Late Capitalism: The Future Worlds of Contemporary Anglo-American Fiction. *His interests include science fiction, contemporary fiction, postmodernism, technoculture, and the ephemera of late capitalism. His other job is to raise funds for UNICEF. You can reach him on Twitter as @Escogar.*

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My Time with Science Fiction

Geoffrey C. Bowker

When I first encountered Doris Lessing's *Canopus in Argos* series, I was blown away by the scope of the vision. What we humans experienced as part of a flurry of froing and toing, was seen in the broadest scope of time and analyzed at leisure. Or rather with its own, different, urgency. Life is not a unified thing, it is always only present 'under a description' (Hacking, 1995) which includes action, but the hardest learning path for the historian (or at least, me) to take is that which involves sensitizing to different temporalities. Sometimes this can be just 'gee whiz' – the enormous timescales of Iain Bank's *Culture*, each its own nested doll of precisely the same dreary story, but each enticing and spangly at the same time. Sometimes it's in the multiplicity of temporality in the present – as in the many, shadowy presents of Philip José Farmer's *World of Tiers* or M. John Harrison's *Things that Never Happened.*

But it's not just that stories go at different paces, it's how they do it. It is hard for me as an historian to grasp this. Life is about temporalities rearing up around us, capturing or rejecting us. Philp K. Dick's characters help: they have a strange relationship with time. As a whole. For example, in *The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch* a precog attempting to understand a possible future he foresees where he is progressively more deeply entwined in a world where the whole idea of a possible future (of change, of his story continuing) is being effaced.

Changing someone's time ecology is changing their ontology. This is the very stuff of history: most commonly expressed as the search for the correct (or most interesting) unit of analysis. Each way we understand past life, we people it with different creatures, collectives and institutions – often in ways of course to tell the same stories, transposed. So I often turn to science fiction (an odd phrase; I inhabit science fiction) to learn about and think living in other ontologies – transforming. *Monkey* by Wu Cheng-En, which may miss some of the formal attributes of science fiction, is amazing on transformation. Monkey is simultaneously the trickster figure, the comic/fool, the Great Monkey King and an already Enlightened Being. (When he is the latter, it is his Enlightened self casting rays back into the past, much as Baudrillard talks of the future atomic war rippling back into the present, but nicer.)

If there's one phrase that gets historians nodding sagely and muttering in low approving tones it's that: "It might have been otherwise". It is easy to think that life is 'mundane' – we have so many routines, prepared meals and narratives that it's easy to wear life like a set of familiar clothes. But what's historically interesting to me is that life is always, ever, beautifully, insanely strange.

No medium other than science fiction explores this particular strain of the natural enchantment of the world.

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Biography and contact info: Geoffrey C. Bowker is Donald Bren Chair at the School of Information and Computer Sciences, University of California at Irvine, where he directs the Evoke Laboratory, which explores new forms of knowledge expression. Recent positions include Professor of and Senior Scholar in Cyberscholarship at the University of Pittsburgh iSchool and Executive Director, Center for Science, Technology and Society, Santa Clara. Together with Leigh Star he wrote Sorting Things Out: Classification and its Consequences*; his most recent books are* Memory Practices in the Sciences *and (with Stefan Timmermans, Adele Clarke and Ellen Balka) the edited collection:* Boundary Objects and Beyond: Working with Leigh Star. *He is currently working on big data policy and on scientific cyberinfrastructure; as well as completing a book on social readings of data and databases. He is a founding member of the Council for Big Data, Ethics and Society.*

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Violence, Politics, and Religion: Cosmic War in *Game of Thrones*

Katherine Tucker

Abstract: Religious violence and religious politics are highly intertwined concepts whose coexistence presents a danger to the current American political and religious systems. The Song of Ice and Fire *series by George R.R. Martin and the accompanying television show,* Game of Thrones*, provide a case study with which to view this relationship between religion, politics, and violence, and then apply the findings to America's political landscape. The storylines of Stannis Baratheon, Daenerys Targaryen, and the Faith Militant illustrate the notion of cosmic war and serve as an exploration of potential impending violence from the mixture of religion and politics in modern America.*

Biography: Katherine Tucker is pursuing her undergraduate degree at Transylvania University where she studies religion and international affairs. She may be reached at katherinehtucker@gmail.

Religious violence dominates the modern news cycle and appears to have permeated everyday life. From cases of religiously motivated terrorism to religiously inspired acts of smaller scale violence, the appropriation of religion to justify violence runs rampant in American culture. The supposed reemergence or worsening of religious violence has prompted many scholars to dedicate their efforts toward alleviating this violence. Religious violence in and of itself is difficult to define due to the overlapping nature and goals of religion, politics, and culture. The spectrum of scholastic work on the definition of religion ranges from narrow definitions of religion that must include some divine figure to broad interpretations which include liberalism, nationalism, sports, capitalism, and other ideologies under the umbrella of religion (Cavanaugh 3). Some scholars such as Jonathan Z. Smith even question whether religion exists outside of an academic concept. Thus, in order to discuss religious violence on any clear terms, a definition of religion must be provided. For the purposes of this paper, Martin Marty's definition of religion from his book *Politics, Religion, and the Common Good*, will be employed. Per this definition, there are five distinct features of a religion: it focuses our ultimate concern, builds community, appeals to myths and symbols, uses rites and ceremonies, and requires followers to behave in certain ways (Cavanaugh 4-5). Therefore, religious violence may be defined as violence that is a result of the pursuit of these five qualities.

However, violence is only one reason why religion receives media attention- religion's involvement with politics is the other major reason that religion consistently appears on the news. Political issues such as abortion, Planned Parenthood, public schools, same-sex marriage, and transgender rights have become imbued with religious language and often are seen from a religious

perspective. The religious right, a large voting bloc of evangelical Christians, is often fundamentally opposed to those on the left who seek to secularize America. Further complicating the situation, as scholar William T. Cavanaugh describes, "it is impossible to separate out religious from economic and political motives in such a way that religious motives are innocent of violence" (Cavanaugh 1). Religion has become so integrated into politics and vice versa that it is difficult to distinguish between political motivations and religious motivations. Critics of religiously informed politics warn that this integration is a violation of the First Amendment and a threat to the religious freedom of America. Thus, though the ideal of separation of church and state exists, religion and politics are interwoven and co-existing parts of American culture, practically negating distinctions between church and state.

In order to better understand the relationship between religion, politics, and violence, a fictional series presents the opportunity to explore this concept and learn how to mirror it with the American religious landscape. Fantasy and science fiction series allow the audience to understand, digest, and respond to difficult issues by establishing consequences of complicated storylines (Dyson 8). The *Song of Ice and Fire* series by George R.R. Martin and the accompanying television show, *Game of Thrones*, provide a unique lens through which to view this relationship between religion, politics, and violence, and then work through the findings to better understand the real world. The findings are both definitive and enlightening for real world problems. Sentiments of cosmic war lead to the mixture of religion and politics in the *Game of Thrones* series, which results in dangerous violence. The storylines of Stannis Baratheon, Daenerys Targaryen, and the Faith Militant illustrate this notion of cosmic war and serve as an exploration of potential impending violence from the mixture of religion and politics in modern America.

Game of Thrones as a Case Study

Game of Thrones provides a unique case study that would be impossible to carry out in the real world: the series begins with an entirely secular government. Not only does religion play no role in politics, religion is used only as a ceremonial tool and regularly holds no meaning to the practitioners. Under Robert's rule, the religion of the Seven serves as a prop to legitimize marriages and other sacred events that are highly politicized, but otherwise is non-existent in the political life of the kingdom and is utilized by politicians only for show (*Game of Thrones*). Not only are traditional forms of religion missing, but concepts that are not normally labeled as religion that perhaps could fall under the umbrella of religion, such as nationalism, are absent as well. Even if one agreed with the notion of nationalism being a religion, nationalism does not exist in the Seven Kingdoms, further creating a secular dynamic in the series. There is some nationality on the local level such as the reverence for House Stark or desire for independence in the Iron Islands, however these fragmented regions' distinct cultures and identities exemplify the Targaryen failure to unify the Seven Kingdoms into a single, cohesive nation state. Though technically unified under a single ruler, each former nation exhibits loyalty to their own people rather than the unified kingdom as a whole, removing nationalism from the state level. Thus, *Game of Thrones* presents a secular government at the beginning of the story and allows for the reader to see the transformation of the political structure as religion is introduced into the equation. It offers an examination of the dangers of such an intertwined system and the failure to address the violence that arises from the system.

Cosmic War Theory

One of the theories that *Game of Thrones* explores for readers and viewers is cosmic war theory, a religious theory most written about by scholar Mark Juergensmeyer. Juergensmeyer defines cosmic

war as "an imagined battle between metaphysical forces- good and evil, right and wrong, order and chaos- that lies behind many cases of religion-related violence in the contemporary world" (Juergensmeyer, "Cosmic War" 1). This struggle of cosmic war creates an all or nothing conflict that offers a holistic worldview for those that accept the struggle and demonizes the enemy, which justifies violence against the worthless or evil foe (Juergensmeyer, "Cosmic War" 9-11). In distinguishing between cosmic war and regular war, there are three major circumstances in which war may be perceived as a cosmic war: when it is a battle to protect basic identity and dignity, when losing is unthinkable, and when the struggle cannot be won in real time (Juergensmeyer, "Cosmic War" 15-16). Only one of these factors is required to elevate the conflict to cosmic war- all three do not have to be present. In his book *Terror in the Mind of God*, Juergensmeyer identifies several real life examples of cosmic war, including Christian abortion clinic bombers, Aum Shinrikyo in Japan, militant Sikhs in India, the Christian Identity movement, and the Kach party in Israel (*Terror in the Mind of God* 153). *Game of Thrones* is perhaps a better example of cosmic war than any of these real life examples as the constraints in a fantasy series are less binding than those of the real world. Within *Game of Thrones*, the storylines of Stannis Baratheon, Daenerys Targaryen, and Cersei's conflict with the Faith Militant all exemplify different aspects of cosmic war theory. More importantly, these examples of cosmic war illustrate how cosmic war both leads to the entanglement of religion and politics and how the entanglement of religion and politics leads to cosmic war, creating an unending cycle of excessive violence. Through this example, cosmic war becomes a conduit for understanding how religion, politics, and violence mingle in the American political system.

Stannis Baratheon's Cosmic War

Stannis Baratheon's cosmic war exemplifies how the mixture of religion and politics feeds cosmic war and how cosmic war feeds the mixture of religion and politics, both of which result in violence. Stannis' plotline is the most overt example of cosmic war as his cosmic war is directly related to what most audience members would identify as an established religion. In order to understand Stannis' plotline and the implications, one must first understand the religion that prompted him to turn a question of lineage into a cosmic question of good and evil.

Stannis' closest advisor is a "sorceress, shadowbinder, and priestess to R'hllor, the Lord of Light," named Melisandre, or the Red Woman (*A Clash of Kings* 20). The religion of R'hllor began in the east in Essos and is spreading in the western kingdom of Westeros via priestesses and a traveling band of followers headed by Beric Dondarrion. The faith worships the Lord of Light in a dualistic portrayal that pits light against darkness and good against evil and blends elements of human sacrifice, necromancy, and fanaticism (Hardy 417). The Red Woman believes that Stannis is the second coming of the hero Azor Ahai and as such "Stannis embodies the power to save the land by driving its supernatural enemies back into the far north and uniting its peoples in a way as much prophetic as it is heroic" (O'Leary 9).

Though Stannis was relatively close to accepting a cosmic war state of mind at the time of his introduction of the second book (or second season of the show), he did not immediately buy into worshipping the Lord of Light. He questioned "how many swords will the Lord of Light put into my hand" and openly scorned the religion of the Red Woman (*A Clash of Kings* 19). He only employed the religion of R'hllor as a power measure in the beginning, using "religion to increase his army (hard power) and to justify his claim according to god's will (soft power)" (Ruiz 44). Stannis capitalizes on the devout converts that make up his army by motivating them with religious speeches, even when he himself does not believe in the religion. In this way, religion augments Stannis' blood claim to the throne in the eyes of his men, legitimizing his fight for power. This

elevates his fight for the throne to a cosmic level in the eyes of his men and the believers who fight for his cause. Juergensmeyer's definition of cosmic war frames struggle as a battle between forces of good and evil that justify violence, which is exactly how Stannis and Melisandre frame the religion of R'hllor. Followers quite literally worship the light, a fire god who is destined to fight the evil force of darkness. The prayer of the religion, "the night is dark and full of terrors," justifies the violence that Stannis' army carries out because they are fighting evil and darkness, which must be defeated at all costs ("The North Remembers"). Through this type of language, Stannis convinces his men that they are not just fighting for him to sit on the throne, but to defeat the forces of evil that Renly and the other contenders for the throne present since they are not followers of the one true god. Since, to R'hllor's followers, "the universe is a battleground between R'hllor and his evil opposite: a god whose name must not be spoken, and is only ever described at the Great Other," and only the return of Azor Ahai can end the fighting, Stannis convinces these followers that he can end the mystical fight and bring peace as the second coming of Azor Ahai (Wittingslow 119).

Stannis takes this cosmic war to a new level when he begins to actually believe in the religion of R'hllor. When Stannis is defeated at the Battle of Blackwater Bay, Melisandre convinces him that he lost the battle because she was not present and therefore he was not supporting the Lord of Light (*A Storm of Swords*). As a result, Stannis begins to rely more heavily on dark magic and the Lord of Light to win the throne. He allows the Red Woman to make a blood sacrifice from the illegitimate son of Robert Baratheon to kill all of the remaining "kings" competing for the throne (*A Storm of Swords*). By the end of the fifth season of the show, the Red Woman has successfully convinced Stannis that he is Azor Ahai incarnated and needs the favor of the Lord of Light to win the throne. Stannis has bought so far into the religious element that he sacrifices his own daughter by burning her alive as a way to win the Lord of Light's favor before a major battle ("The Dance of Dragons"). He would not have allowed his own daughter to be killed unless he truly believed that the magic would win him the favor in the Lord of Light, meaning that he obviously must believe in the Lord of Light.

These actions elevate the cosmic war to an even higher level in which he meets two of Juergensmeyer's standards for cosmic war- that losing would be unthinkable and that the battle is to protect basic identity. In burning his own daughter alive, Stannis expresses exactly how unthinkable losing would be- he would rather kill his own daughter than lose the war. Because he has elevated the conflict to a cosmic war level in which he must win the throne to protect the realm from the incoming threat of the White Walkers, winning the throne takes precedence over all else, including his loved ones. Embedded within this line of thinking is the elevation of a good versus evil dichotomy. Stannis and his army are the good who will protect the kingdom, while the White Walkers are the evil, mystical creatures who seek to overrun the kingdom and create an army of the undead (*Game of Thrones*: The Complete Fifth Season). In this sense, Stannis is also fighting to protect the lives and basic identity of realm, which is another indicator that the conflict has been elevated to cosmic war status. Stannis believes that he is the only way to stop the White Walkers, who he believes would seek to kill every living person within the kingdom. The White Walkers threaten the way of the life in the kingdom and pose a danger to every person in the realm, and as such Stannis views himself as protecting lives and their way of life.

The importance of Stannis' cosmic war lies in its ability to illustrate how it both caused religion and politics to become intertwined and how it resulted from the entanglement of religion and politics. Stannis' cosmic war was a catalyst for the entanglement of religion and politics because it allowed him to make a religious argument as to why he deserved a political decision. Even though Stannis possessed the best claim to the throne as the next eldest brother of Robert, he did not rely on his bloodline- he relied on the religious justification that he was favored by the Lord of Light. By relying on a religious claim for a political position, Stannis effectively violated the secular nature of Westerosi politics and made religion a legitimate reason for political power. This

merging of religion and politics, in turn, fed his cosmic war by convincing him that only a messianic figure capable of stopping the White Walkers should earn the throne. Such thinking served to justify Stannis' willingness to sacrifice humans and fight bloody battles during his quest for the throne and reinforced his binary worldview. This cyclical nature of cosmic war both promoting and feeding off of religion's mixture with politics is evident in the American political system as well, as will be discussed below.

Daenerys Targaryen's Cosmic War

Daenerys Targaryen fights a less overtly religious type of cosmic war than Stannis, which serves to send a different message than Stannis' cosmic war. Daenerys does not depend on an established religion like Stannis did; she creates her own type of religious following and a quasi-religion of her own which she then uses to justify a good versus evil cosmic war.Daenerys inadvertently forms a pseudo-religion based on morality as a result of her encounter with slavery. Revolted by the cruelty inflicted on the Unsullied soldiers-being taken from their mothers at age five, taught to kill and brutalize on command, forcibly castrated, and initiated into the ranks of the Unsullied when they kill a baby- Daenerys buys the entire Unsullied army and frees them, resolving to end slavery (*A Storm of Swords* 318). Daenerys moves from city to city in Slaver's Bay liberating slaves and punishing the former masters who owned slaves. But, every time Daenerys moves on from a city, "the old order reasserts itself and new kinds of sectarian killing and guerilla warfare emerge in resistance to the changes she tries to bring about (Larrington 201).

     This locks Daenerys and her Unsullied troops in a battle with the immoral slavers, which she prioritizes over her quest for the throne. The mother of dragons becomes mother of the slaves, the poor, and the oppressed as Daenerys begins to devote more of her time to her morality campaign. This moral fight becomes Daenerys' cosmic war- her fight of good versus evil is not based on established religion, like Stannis, but based on a morality that she expects all of her subjects to adhere to. She turns slavery and oppression into a cosmic battle that it is her duty to win, even at the cost of her quest for the Iron Throne. Daenerys' cosmic war is enabled by the large following of freed slaves that she accrues, many of whom see her as a messianic figure. Because of this following and Daenerys' preaching about morality, she fits the formerly stated definition of religion. Her leadership meets all five factors of a religion- she focuses the ultimate concern on morality, builds a community of former slaves, appeals to the myths and symbols of her dragons and Targaryen lineage, employs ceremonies such as the crucifixion of the masters and the fighting pits, and requires her followers to behave in a certain moral way.

     Further heightening Daenerys' power of her pseudo-religion is her portrayal as a messianic or god-like figure. Numerous supporters believe that Daenerys is the second coming of Azor Ahai. In the television show, when Tyrion Lannister arrives in Slaver's Bay, he takes a moment to listen to a red preacher, a woman with the same fiery style as Melisandre, who preaches to a crowd of onlookers that Daenerys, not Stannis, is the savior ("High Sparrow"). In the novels, Tyrion comes across a red priest, Benerro, who preaches that Daenerys is "Azor Ahai returned… and her triumph over darkness will bring a summer that will never end… death itself will bend its knee, and all those who die fighting in her cause shall be reborn" (*A Dance with Dragons* 313). On his deathbed, Maester Aemon declares "Lady Melisandre has misread the signs… *Daenerys* is our hope," issuing a prophetic charge to Samwell Tarly to ensure the safety of Daenerys (*A Feast for Crows* 744). Even though Daenerys may or may not be aware of how others view her as a messianic figure, the reader or viewer is made aware of the possibility of her divine status, elevating her message that she proclaims. Whether or not Daenerys truly is a divine figure is irrelevant; the mere worship of her as

such validates her message and builds upon the pseudo-religious persona she has already cultivated for herself.

Once it is established that Daenerys' rule may be classified as a religion, her cosmic war becomes readily apparent. Much like Stannis, she espouses a cosmic good versus cosmic evil sort of rhetoric that leads to two polarized sides. Daenerys clearly draws battle lines when she states that "slavery is real. I can end it. I will end it. And I will end those behind it… They can live in my new world, or they can die in their old one" ("Mockingbird"). The weak, oppressed, and former slaves form the good contingent of society while the slavers and masters form the bad contingent of society whom must be defeated. She meets two of the three factors that can transform a regular war into a cosmic war- the battle is a basic battle for dignity and losing would be unthinkable. Whether because of her own oppression under her brother or because of her extraordinary empathy, Daenerys takes this assault on the dignity of slaves as an assault on all of society and thus fashions a cosmic war out of this fight for humanity. Her war also meets the requirement that losing is unthinkable. The cosmic war over slavery and human rights is so important to Daenerys that she delays her quest for the throne in order to eradicate slavery. After purchasing the Unsullied she possessed an army large enough to make a bid for the throne, yet she chose to stay and liberate Slaver's Bay instead (*A Storm of Swords*, Martin).

The cosmic war that Daenerys and the followers of her self-made religion pursue provides yet another example of how cosmic war promotes the entanglement of religion and politics, which leads to violence. Prior to her decision to liberate slaves and to develop an image of herself as the breaker of chains, Daenerys faced solely political choices and pursued her goals with a solely political mindset. With the creation of pseudo-religion, however, she injects religion into every political decision she makes, and the result is an explosion of violence. Prior to her religious convictions, Daenerys had sought entirely political solutions to her problems that involved relatively little violence, such as bartering, manipulating, and impressing her enemies. But, once she develops a religious mindset, she infuses her politics with her moral religion and she commits massive amounts of violence in the name of politics and religion. She sacks the cities of Yunkai, Astapor, and Meereen, all of which involve killing soldiers, politicians, and slavers. After she witnesses 163 crucified child slaves on the way to Meereen, she crucifies 163 slave masters when she gains control of the city as retribution ("Oathkeeper"). Most violent of all, in the television series, when the masters and Sons of the Harpy try to regain Meereen from Daenerys's control, she releases her dragons on their forces and watches as her dragons eat soldiers, burn the masters alive, and sink ships carrying thousands of men ("Battle of the Bastards"). Her decision to allow religion to interfere with politics, her choice to let her moral religion influence every political decision she makes, results in unparalleled violence and justifies her use of the same ruthless violence she tries to prevent.

Cersei Lannister and the Faith Militant's Cosmic War

As ruthless as Daenerys' actions may be, she is considerably less cruel and inhumane than Cersei Lannister. Cersei's battle with the Faith Militant is the final example of cosmic war in the series and exemplifies how cosmic war can result from the volatile mix of religion and politics. Cersei, who serves as the Queen Mother for the majority of the series, seeks power in any and all forms, even when it places characters she loves in danger. When Cersei's son, Tommen, is crowned king and wedded to Margaery Tyrell, Cersei feels her hold over her son slipping and names the High Sparrow the new High Septon and reinstates the Faith Militant, a military group who defend the primary religion in the city, the Faith of the Seven. After Tommen merges the church and the state, Cersei's war against the Faith Militant escalates quickly, culminating in the explosion of the Sept, which

kills all of the sparrows, Margaery, and, ultimately, Tommen (*Game of Thrones*: The Complete Sixth Season).

Cersei's war against the Faith Militant constitutes a cosmic war from both Cersei's point of view and the High Sparrow's point of view. From the Faith Militant's point of view, their battle with the political elite attempts to restore faith to the kingdom and save the citizens from their sins. Their mission is a fundamental battle of good versus evil- the politicians have corrupted the city by removing faith from the lives of the people. Thus, they are good and noble in their quest to return King's Landing to a faithful city and the Lannister politicians are evil in that they let the populace fall into a sinful life. The Faith Militant raise the issue to cosmic proportions by insisting that it is a matter of morality and spiritual salvation, heightening the stakes of the issue to a battle that cannot be won in real time and is unthinkable to lose.

Cersei, likewise, also elevates the conflict to a cosmic war level through her determination to gain more power. Cersei comes to frame good and evil in her life in terms of power. She tells her son Joffrey that everyone who is not a part of their family is an enemy in order to maintain a small circle of power within those she feels like she can control ("Lord Snow"). Through such a worldview, Cersei creates two sides- the good side, which is composed of the few family members she trusts, and the bad side, which is anyone she does not feel like she can manipulate to her own benefit. She takes this dichotomy to a cosmic level when she plots a war against the Faith Militant because she views the conflict as a protection of her basic identity as a power-player and a conflict that is unthinkable to lose. Cersei's does not take issue with the Faith Militant's religious beliefs per se, but their infringement upon the power of the crown and their competition for her son's ear. In this way, Cersei expands the meaning of the conflict and elevates it above regular conflict to a cosmic conflict that she must win. She distinctly illustrates how unthinkable losing would be when she barely mourns her dead son since it brought her to the precipice of being Queen- she would sacrifice her own children in order to win her war for power ("The Winds of Winter").

Cersei's cosmic war is the product of the entanglement of religion and politics, and results in extreme violence that could have otherwise been avoided. Though Cersei frequently kills or silences her rivals prior to the Faith Militant incident, she never commits such large acts of violence in the name of a war of any kind. However, as soon as she allows the mingling of religion and politics by reinstating the Faith Militant, violence ensues. The mixing of religion and politics stimulates the cosmic war by introducing two sides with fundamentally incompatible aims: the side that wants to promote religion and the side that wants to preserve the power of the crown. Once the cosmic war was triggered by the Faith Militant's imprisonment of Cersei, violence quickly follows- the Mountain smashes a man's head against the wall when he mocks Cersei, Jaime rallies the Lannister army, and Cersei blows up the sept full of the Faith Militant (*Game of Thrones*: The Complete Sixth Season). Cersei's slaughter of the Faith Militant is the final and most dramatic example of how the mixture of religion and politics promotes cosmic war, which leads to violence.

Connecting Fantasy to Reality

This paper has argued the existence of a relationship between the mixing of religion, politics, and violence in *Game of Thrones*, but the application does not end with the series itself. The proliferation of television and mass market book series has allowed media to become a cultural currency with which consumers may reflect upon issues in their own society. As Newcomb and Hirsch noted in the 1980s, "contemporary cultures examine themselves through their arts… ritual and the arts offer a metalanguage, a way of understanding who and what we are, how values and attitudes are adjusted, how meaning shifts," prompting television to focus on "our most prevalent

concerns, our deepest dilemmas" (Newcomb and Hirsch 562). Thus, popular series such as *Game of Thrones* allow for reflection on real issues such as religious and political violence.

Further, as a fantasy series, *Game of Thrones* makes statements not just about the world of Westeros, but also about the real world. Science fiction and fantasy serve as a mirror for the real world that illuminate real problems. Put simply, "in sci-fi and fantasy, we can see far into the future as events play themselves out over vast expanses of time. As a narrative art form, fiction has endings. Stories are complicated. We can see the consequences" that are not readily apparent in real life circumstances (Dyson 8). Fantasy books and shows like *Game of Thrones* allow the audience to make connections and build understanding that is too complicated to see in the real world. In this sense, fantasy becomes a way to discuss complex issues in a way that the brain can process- "we can use these other worlds as inspiration for thinking about what kinds of evidence bearing upon our theories might become available if we could see far into the future, relive the past as it happened, and alter fundamental parameters of technology and biology- all of which is beyond us when looking at the real world" (Dyson 8). The issues of cosmic war, the entanglement of religion and politics, and ensuing violence presented in *Game of Thrones* serve as a reflection for those same issues in real life.

Therefore, the connections between religion, politics, and violence in this paper do not merely apply to *Game of Thrones*, but to the American political scene as well. Just as the mixture of religion and politics both created and resulted from cosmic war in *Game of Thrones*, the same can be said for the American political and religious institutions. Although many Americans believe that the government is secular, the simple truth is that America is far from a secular nation. There may not be an official national religion, but Christianity serves as a de facto national religion. From small examples like the references to God on paper money and in the Pledge of Allegiance to larger examples like the fact that the American calendar follows Christian holidays, the American culture is ripe with religious messages. A 2006 survey by the Pew Research Center revealed that two-thirds of American adults consider the United States a Christian nation (Straughn and Feld 280). After the events of September 11, 2001, the claim that America is secular was further weakened by another Pew survey that found that "in light of the perceived moral threat to the nation, 70 percent of Americans in 2001 said they wanted to see religion's influence on American society grow" (Heclo 83). President George W. Bush perpetuated this religious infusion by evoking God's favoritism of America as a defender of freedom to justify the invasion of Afghanistan and other foreign intervention (Carlson and Ebel 41). Yet, simultaneously, the concept of separation of church and state also exists as a foundation for the country and a principle of American freedom.

The coexistence of these two dichotomous ways of thinking has more or less divided Americans into two camps- the religious people who wanted religion to play a larger part in government and the generally liberal thinkers who wanted to embrace true secularism. What began in the late 1970's and early 1980's with the rise of the religious right and involvement of right-wing group in politics has expanded into a large scale cosmic war of epic proportions between the religious right and the secular left (note these are general political affiliations- not all religious or secular advocates fall in line with the expected party). The danger of such a cosmic war is clearly illustrated in *Game of Thrones*: exponential violence in order to win the all-important war. Some of this violence has already come to fruition through right wing radical attacks, however, before expanding upon that, the development of the cosmic war must first be examined. It should be noted that the examples of violence predominantly focus on the right due to the religious nature of the attacks- the left perpetrates violence as well, but it tends to be secular violence, which is not relevant for the purposes of this paper.

The entanglement of religion and politics greatly expanded in the 1980's as the religious right became a powerful voting bloc for the Republican party. The Moral Majority, created in 1979 by Reverend Jerry Falwell, was a political action committee whose platform was "pro-life, pro-

traditional family, pro-moral, and pro-American" based off of Falwell's Christian teachings (Falwell 387-388). Falwell believed that if he could get Christians to the polls then he could change the negative direction that he perceived the country to be heading in. Whether or not he changed the moral compass of the nation is debatable, but he did successfully help Reagan get elected in 1980 and form a large evangelical constituency within the Republican party (Sutton 21-22). This was the birth of the modern day religious right, a bloc of evangelical voters who persist today and focus on political issues like Planned Parenthood, abortion, gay marriage, pornography, and education. And, many that are a part of this religious right view secularists as the literal devil. Modern Christian nationalists and Republicans "speak of any attempts to defend church/state separation as part of a 'war' on believers," creating a legitimate war between the religious defenders and the secular defenders (Goldberg 17). This war that the religious right wages on the secular population mirrors Stannis' cosmic war. The religious right views themselves as the saviors of the country in that they are the only people with the power to save the country from the current path of destruction. This is exactly how Stannis comes to view his quest for the throne- he needs to win the throne because, as the second coming of Azor Ahai, he is the only person with the capacity to save the kingdom from the destruction of the eternal fight between good and evil and the impending invasion of the White Walkers. All other contenders for the throne become obstacles in his noble quest, just as many secularists are viewed as literal agents of the devil impeding the noble Christian vision in the eyes of the religious right.

To be entirely fair to the religious right, the secularists view the religious in no less demonizing terms. Many secularists believe that the religious right and social conservatism are "the combination of repression, populism, and paranoia," and treat all evangelicals involved in politics as such (Goldberg 54). Both sides disagree, and the extremes of both sides bitterly oppose one another, setting up the perfect conditions for each side to a proclaim that the other side is fighting a war on their ideals. This type of demonization mirrors how Stannis describes the non-religious contenders for the throne, how Daenerys describes the slavers, and how Cersei and the Faith Militant describe each other. The two American political sides are attacking each other in the same way these *Game of Thrones* characters attacked one another- this should stimulate thought about the type of dehumanization that each side could potentially employ, and the characters did employ, which ultimately justifies violence.

The conflict between the secularists and the religious right is not just a regular war, but constitutes a cosmic war. Both sides view the battle as something much larger than simply affecting political policies; the religious view it is a battle of morality while the secularists view it as a battle for freedom and human rights. Both of these viewpoints elevate the conflict to a higher plane and prescribe higher meaning to the outcome of the "war." On the religious or fundamentalist side, the morality and spirituality of the country is jeopardized by the secularists; they "see their stand against the tidal wave of change as honorable, right, life preserving, and a life calling" (Emerson and Hartman 131). This is the same view that Daenerys holds throughout the series- her war protects her vision of morality for Slaver's Bay by fighting to end slavery. Just as Daenerys made all of her choices revolve around her moral war, the two fundamentally opposed sides in American politics make sure that "every political issue- indeed, every disputed aspect of our national life- is a struggle between good and evil," and elevate the struggle to a good versus evil dichotomy, transforming the conflict into a cosmic war in which violence is bound to ensue (Goldberg 4). This leads to the mentality of cosmic war in which losing is unthinkable because it is a matter of salvation and the battle is about basic morals. The secularists view the conflict as having equally high stakes because they believe that secularism stands for freedom, human rights, and democracy, all of which transcend the political plane to a higher meaning as well. These two groups antagonize one another, creating a vicious cycle of cosmic war.

And, conflict already has ensued. Timothy McVeigh, an extreme Christian, detonated a bomb at the Federal Building in Oklahoma City in 1995 (Juergensmeyer, *Global Rebellion* 151). His act was motivated by a Christian Identity novel, *The Turner Diaries*, in which the "hero" bombs a federal building to combat the evil government who seeks to deprive Christians of their freedom by creating a more secular society (*Global Rebellion* 188). This action parallels the Faith Militant's belief that the Lannister family actively sought to deprive the Seven Kingdoms of religion through their secularization. And, like the Faith Militant, McVeigh turned to violent means to deliver his message.Reverend Michael Bray set several abortion clinics on fire in 1985 to protect God's creations that the secular government was destroying, and his friend, Paul Hill, murdered abortion doctors several years later (Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God* 20-22). More recently, Christians have lashed out against Muslims, refugees, and homosexuals in an attempt to govern who may participate in American politics. These smaller episodes of violence mirror Cersei's build up in her war against the Faith Militant when she attempts to assert that only her family members may hold power. Just as American Christians want to dominate the sphere of political power and exclude outsiders in order to enforce laws favorable to Christianity, Cersei sought to exclude from politics anyone that she could not manipulate in order to maintain her power. While this began with relatively minor violence such as individually killing her opposition, it escalated into murdering the entirety of the Faith Militant. These *Game of Thrones* parallels offer a space for viewers to work through potential real world violence- these incidents of violence by the radical Christians could continue to escalate so long as the cosmic war continues, and the cosmic war would continue until Americans recognize the reality of the political climate.

Some may argue, as scholar William T. Cavanaugh has, that religion cannot be separated from politics and therefore this argument is invalid because it recognizes religion and politics as two separate entities. This criticism would be a misunderstanding of the argument being made. This paper is not necessarily asserting that religion and politics are separate; after all, as Cavanaugh points out, politics could also be classified as a religion under Marty's definition of a religion that this paper has utilized (Cavanaugh 4-5). Instead, this paper argues that a contingent of Americans views the nation as a secular nation while simultaneously advocating for increased religion in politics, and fails to understand that the entanglement of religion and politics- be that because politics is a form of religion or not- undermines this "secular" claim. Americans need to understand and face the reality of living under a non-secular government, or else the blindness to the mingling of religion and politics could cause more violence. This is not to say that the mixing of religion and politics is inherently bad or evil, but to say that the blindness to the situation is akin to denying the situation and will perpetuate the violence. This leaves Americans with two choices- recognize the current system that exists and learn to peacefully coexist within a non-secular atmosphere, or eliminate the interactions between religion and politics on a national scale and work to create a truly secular government. So long as Americans continue to deny the reality of the political climate and fail to pursue one of these two options, violence likely will dominate both political and religious rhetoric, feeding discontent and continuing the cycle of violence.

Conclusion

Recognizing problems such as this one may be difficult, but fantasy media like *Game of Thrones* serve to help enrich our understanding of elusive concepts and function as a building block for bettering society. This paper has examined *Game of Thrones* as a lens for understanding the mixture of religion and politics in the American context. In *Game of Thrones*, sentiments of cosmic war lead to the mixture of religion and politics, which results in dangerous violence. The examples of Stannis Baratheon, Daenerys Targaryen, and the Faith Militant illuminate this notion of cosmic war and

allow exploration of potential impending violence from the mixture of religion and politics in modern America. The cosmic wars in American politics are real and dangerously misunderstood, and until Americans stop denying the non-secular nature of the government, these cosmic wars will continue to generate violence, just as they did in the *Game of Thrones* series.

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"Exhaust my wagon horses today, you won't eat tomorrow": Exploring David Eddings' application of military logistics in *The Belgariad*

Matthew Larnach

Abstract: In The Belgariad, *David Eddings devotes an extraordinary amount of attention to the subject of military logistics. References abound to supplies, and their importance to soldiers in the field, and Eddings clearly intends to base his invented universe upon sound logistical foundations. But could these logistical systems, so elaborately described by Eddings, function in practice? To answer this question this paper applies logistical modelling methodologies to two scenarios that feature prominently in* The Belgariad. *These models study the logistical structures Eddings describes, determining whether they could have feasibly supported and sustained the vast armies that feature in his universe. It discovers that Eddings' employment of logistical concepts, whilst admirable, is highly inconsistent in practice. However, by further examining the wider scholarly material fantasy authors interested in the topic might draw upon, it concludes that the field provides fantasy authors with a highly fragmented and confusing picture of the operation of logistical systems within medieval contexts.*

Biography: Dr Matthew Larnach completed his PhD in Medieval History at the University of Sydney in 2017. His research primarily focuses upon Historical Geography, and in particular how, through the use of logistical modelling, we can better understand how Middle Age society interacted with, and perceived, the surrounding physical environment. His PhD Thesis examined the continuing use of Roman roads in the Medieval Balkans, and has presented papers at the Leeds International Medieval Congress and the Australian Early Medieval Association Conference.

Military logistics, by its very nature, can be a tedious subject. It is inherently a study of numbers: soldiers and material, carrying capacities and supply lines. It does not naturally command attention the way, say, battles and politics can. It is not surprising then, when such issues are occasionally relegated to the side-lines in fantasy literature. These books are written to entertain after all. It is more surprising, however, to discover that even amongst the ranks of professional historians the subject of logistics has traditionally received scant recognition. Since fantasy authors regularly draw influence from history, to explore how logistical concepts are depicted in fantasy literature it is necessary to also examine how historians treat the subject as well. In doing so it will be seen that

the adage that "amateurs study battles whilst professionals study logistics" might not be so accurate after all.

This paper studies the depictions of medieval military logistics within the fantasy literature of David Eddings. Eddings notably possessed personal military experience, serving in the national guard for three years and spending a further two on deployment at a US Army base in post-Second World War Germany (Nicholls 77). He subsequently devoted a surprising amount of attention to the subject of logistics, and his novels are replete with copious references to supplies and their importance to armies in the field. This paper explores two scenarios in particular; the first is the invasion of Mishrak ac Thull that forms part of the climax of *The Belgariad* series, and the second is the siege of the Stronghold, an important incident in the pre-history of the events described in *The Belgariad*.

Employing modelling techniques, these scenarios will be examined in terms of their logistical feasibility. These models balance numerous different variables, including carrying capacities of soldiers and animals, and daily food and water requirements, in order to estimate how long an army could sustain itself in the field. They inevitably require certain assumptions to be made as, for instance, for all the logistical detail Eddings provides, he never relates the nutritional value of Sendarian wheat. However, as predictive models they are powerful tools for examining and assessing the movement of armies through space.[1]

In any case, the intent is not to laboriously pick Eddings' work to pieces, but rather to broadly explore whether he was able to maintain coherent consistency in the use of military logistics as a narrative element within the fantasy world he describes. In turn, these examples will be used to compare how contemporary medieval historians approach the subject of logistics, in order to analyse the resources fantasy authors interested in depictions of logistical structures in their universes might draw upon.

"Gritty realism"

Eddings contends that he knew from his teens he would be a writer, although commercial success eluded him till his forties (Eddings, and Eddings, *The Rivan Codex* 27). His major influences were what he calls the "Medieval Romantics", Chaucer and Sir Thomas Malory in particular, and by his own admission in populating his world Eddings largely drew upon popular Anglo-Saxon, Scandinavian and Germanic mythologies (Eddings, and Eddings, *The Rivan Codex* 10-23). Drawing upon his college education in contemporary American fiction, Eddings interestingly asserts in the preface to a repackaged compilation of *The Belgariad* that, in his opinion, "high fantasy lacked the gritty realism of *The Grapes of Wrath* or *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, so in a sense, our fantasies have been an experiment in form – "Realistic Fantasy", perhaps, or Fantastic Realism, take your pick" (*The Belgariad, Vol. 1* ix).

One example of this "gritty realism" is the inclusion of "pickpockets, thieves and prostitutes" into the narrative, which Eddings argues pushed the "boundaries of prissiness" that he felt overly inhibit the work of J. R. R. Tolkien (Nicholls 80). However, Eddings himself acknowledges that many of these characters, and the stereotypical "Good vs. Evil" plot of *The Belgariad*, are little more than well-worn clichés (*The Belgariad, Vol. 1* ix). Critics have therefore tended to dwell upon the shortcomings of Eddings' characterisations. In particular his reliance upon a derivative Medieval Romantic setting has elicited accusations of eurocentrism, in which a "White

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[1] These models are largely derived from the equations developed by John Haldon. See Haldon, *Warfare, State and Society in the Byzantine World, 565-1204*, Appendix 3.

Saviour" defends the established order from collapse at the hands of an exotic, "Oriental", other (Young 45).

However, an overlooked aspect of Eddings' "gritty realism", or "Realistic Fantasy", can be found when we turn our attention to logistics, for here a surprising wealth and depth of detail abounds. Eddings devoted as much, if not more, attention in his novels to the subject of logistics as he does to the actual fighting; of the need to properly water and rest mounts, the difficulties of moving soldiers and material in the field, and the necessity of maintaining coherent lines of supply. There is even a reference to the importance of sanitation and field latrines: not exactly a common topic in fantasy literature (Eddings, *Enchanter's End Game* 70). But is all this attention given to logistics mere window dressing, added to provide a veneer of complexity, or do they describe scenarios that are practically feasible?

Logistics and medieval historiography

That Eddings drew largely upon his own military experience is supported by the fact he would certainly have found little reference to logistical issues in the texts of the 'Medieval Romantics' which heavily influenced his work.The significant influence of Eddings' wife, Leigh Eddings, who also possessed military experience, must also be acknowledged and David credits Leigh with the addition of many logistical details (*Riven Codex* 351).

Medieval texts as a rule only very infrequently refer to the subject of logistics. Amongst those few that do are Byzantine *Taktika*, military manuals written for the benefit of inexperienced generals, which were themselves heavily influenced by the Roman strategist, Vegetius. Others are works written with a clear instructional purpose, such as Odo of Deuil's, *De profectione Ludovici VII in orientem*, an account of the mistakes made during the Second Crusade that led to its ultimate failure. Although even here the author typically attributes the failure of the expedition to Byzantine machinations, rather than poor logistical planning.

Otherwise, references in medieval sources to logistics are few. One compelling reason arguing for the scarcity of such material is that the authors of medieval texts were typically not experienced soldiers themselves, or indeed often have any practical military experience whatsoever, but rather were court or church educated scholars with little interest in the minutiae of waging war. Their depictions of war, and life on campaign, drew heavily upon their own classical literary influences, such as Herodotus, Thucydides, and Livy, and therefore typically focused instead on politics and battles, and continued the classical tradition of inventing heroic pre-battle speeches to enliven their accounts.

A further explanation is that the audience of these sources were likewise little interested in such matters. The audience of these texts is always an important consideration, and material that might be considered uninteresting or unimportant was in danger of either being ignored, or deliberately cut by scribes. The great twelfth century historian, William of Tyre, suffered from both. His history of the Crusader States, *Historia rerum in partibus transmarinis gestarum* (History of Deeds Done Beyond the Sea)*,* was written with a didactic purpose: to warn against the threat Saladin posed if he was allowed to continue his consolidation of power. His audience, however, were only interested in hearing (for medieval texts were read aloud to an audience) of the great and noble deeds of the Franks in Outremer, and thus his warning went unheeded. Furthermore, an entire chapter of his *Historia*, devoted to his experiences in Italy in 1169-70, was deliberately cut from the manuscript by subsequent copyists, and thus has subsequently sadly been lost to history (Davis 70-77).

Logistics and contemporary historiography

The scarcity of logistical material in primary sources has, in turn, directly impacted upon scholarly study of the topic. Such is their paucity that it has been claimed that those historians interested in military logistics have already mined medieval texts to exhaustion for all the information they can provide (Pryor xii). It will be noted that many of the references in this work draw upon Roman examples, since unlike in classical studies the modern study of medieval logistics has moved little beyond its formative stages. In 1977 Martin van Creveld gave the discipline a jolt with his seminal *Supplying War: Logistics from Wallenstein to Patton*, which, particularly through the employment of hypothetical mathematical modelling, challenged many of the assumptions historians have long held on military logistics. Historians have subsequently busied themselves with refuting many of Creveld's methods, stimulating lively debate on the topic for the first time since the early twentieth century.

Yet it is still the case that only very few historians have given the topic of medieval logistics serious consideration. Indeed, it has been argued that most studies of medieval history are conducted in a logistical vacuum (Pryor xii). Why it remains so lamentably under-explored is an interesting question. Part of the answer is no doubt the fact that logistics is inherently a rather dry topic, and therefore tends to be avoided. This is not an unfair assessment, and has been demonstrated in practice. Prior to the outbreak of the First World War, lecturers at the Imperial War College in Britain mostly taught their charges, future staff officers, the works of classical strategists such as Clausewitz and Jomini. This is because this was a topic that interested them personally, and one their students evidently preferred to study. Too late it was found, after the outbreak of war, that Britain had a surfeit of officers versed in the principles of grand strategy, but not in the application of more mundane staff work. This resulted in widespread organisational chaos for British forces on the continent until an adequate logistical administration could be improvised (Brown 17-41).

A further argument is that contemporary western scholars have little patience for either physical geography or logistics because science and technology have, to an unprecedented degree, liberated them from dependence on either (Pipes 2). Today we have little personal familiarity with the importance of supplies, fodder or water, because the modern world has largely rendered such considerations redundant. Travelling vast distances is now a trivial exercise, which can lead to historians, and fantasy authors alike, falling guilty of equating medieval horses with modern cars, capable of travelling hundreds of kilometres and only pausing periodically to refuel. This, at least, is one charge that Eddings largely avoids.

Another argument is that the modern historiographical orientation of medieval studies does not easily allow the study of physical geography, and by extension examination of the practical difficulties associated with moving pre-modern armies through geographical space. Contemporary historiography is heavily influenced by what has been called the "Cultural turn"; the study of micro-histories and interactions of people within extremely narrow temporal and spatial limits (Suny 1479). Logistics does not easily lend itself to such discourses, and its study is therefore almost entirely absent from modern academic curriculums. The orientation of contemporary academia towards cultural histories also explains how, whilst Eddings work has received copious criticism from social and cultural perspectives, his employment of logistics as a narrative element has to date been entirely ignored.

Contemporary medieval historiography has therefore largely eschewed the study of military logistics. The few works that exist on the subject tend to focus on disparate sections of the whole topic, and often largely disagree with one another on central issues, such as required daily rations for soldiers and animals, or the relative importance of water whilst on campaign. The study of military logistics in the ancient world is somewhat richer, with dedicated treatments of Alexander

the Great's campaigns, or the logistical infrastructure of the Roman Empire, although even here vast blind spots remain, and the study of water logistics, for instance, remains almost entirely untouched.

Consequently, for the fantasy author, such as Eddings, who wishes to employ more grounded examples of logistical structures in their own work, there is not much of a foundation to draw upon. This lack of available information has no doubt played an important role in the relative absence of sophisticated logistical structures in modern fantasy fiction, as many authors understandably lack either the practical experience or literary influences to feel confident in treating the subject adequately. The impact of this lack of readily available information becomes especially evident when we examine depictions of logistics within *The Belgariad* in closer detail.

Scenario One: The invasion of Misthrak ac Thull

The first scenario to be examined concerns one of the culminating events of *The Belgariad*. To briefly summarize: to distract attention from a small group of heroes who are attempting to sneak into enemy territory carrying a vital artefact, an army is raised and marches upon the enemy directly. A secondary goal of the campaign is to cover the movement of a fleet of warships as they are ported overland, till they could be launched into the Sea of the East and thereafter prey upon the enemies' shipping.

The army that is assembled to perform this task is vast, gathered over many months from the major population centres of the 'Good' nations; Cherek, Drasnia, Sendaria, Arendia, Algaria, and Tolnedra. It moves "like a great sea", marches in a column "a mile wide", and the supporting baggage train stretches back "miles into the horizon" (Eddings, *Enchanter's End Game* 68, 70, 80). Clearly, we are dealing with enormous numbers here. Cleverly, however, Eddings declines to ever give a fixed number to the army's size. Numbers have had an intoxicating effect on historians ever since Herodotus' incredulous calculation of Darius' invading Persian army at more than five million soldiers (480). Such numbers, however, often only serve to highlight the author's inability to grasp logistical realities. If Heredotus' figure had been correct, for instance, it has been calculated that the baggage train accompanying Darius' army would have stretched from Greece back to Persopolis (Delbrück 118-120). By declining to give a fixed number to the forces involved, Eddings escapes similar accusations of over-enthusiasm. At least on this occasion.

Whilst this complicates the task of investigating the supply demands of this force, the sheer detail Eddings provides on the logistical arrangements made makes an estimation possible. Assembling and maintaining this grand army required a monumental logistical effort which, the narrative makes clear, touched upon all aspects of society, with those who were not directly involved in the fighting instead occupied in the supply effort; obtaining provisions and equipment, and moving them to the front where they were needed (Eddings, *Enchanter's End Game* 87).

The detail Eddings provides as to the functioning of the logistical apparatus which supported this army is surprisingly deep, but does it all work in practice? Let's assume that the army consisted of 30,000 infantry and 5,000 cavalry, and was accompanied by a further 15,000 camp followers, such as waggoneers, blacksmiths, medics, pages, and so on.[2] This gives a total size of 50,000, which given the fantasy context is probably too small, and is far smaller than the army which shall be considered in the second scenario, but provides a round total to work with. In a medieval context this would have been an extremely large and unwieldy force, for reasons that shall soon become apparent.

The lynchpin of the enormous supply effort necessary to sustain this force were hordes of slow moving four-wheeled wagons, which either accompanied the army itself, or carried material to

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[2] A 3:1 or 4:1 ratio of soldiers to camp-followers was standard in Roman legions.

pre-arranged supply depots. Such wagons are extremely efficient at moving material over long distances, far better than pack animals, and were used extensively by Roman legions for this purpose. Indeed, the famous Roman highways which crisscrossed much of their empire were constructed to allow them to accommodate such heavy wagons in all seasons of the year (McCormick 76). In *The Belgariad* universe the role of the Roman Empire is assumed by the Tolnedrans, and it is their great highways which carry this tremendous weight of traffic.

The supply effort was coordinated around two main supply depots. The first was located on a river, within lush open fields, and near to the friendly fortress which will be discussed further in the second scenario: The Stronghold. The second was located on the edge of hostile territory, on top of a mile-high cliff known as the Escarpment. This supply strategy focused upon the collection of 30 days of supplies at the first depot, and two weeks of supplies at the second, with this 45-day total regarded as the army's "margin of safety" (Eddings, *Enchanter's End Game* 81).

The first supply depot, described as a "virtual city of tents and stacked equipment", was fed by wagons and flat-bottomed barges that plied the Aldur River (Eddings, *Enchanter's End Game* 80). The latter involved the collection of supplies in the Western nations, transporting them by wagon overland along the Great North Road to the town of Aldurford, and then porting them upriver (for the Aldur flows to the north) to the first supply depot. Manoeuvring barges against the current is difficult, but could have been achieved either by poling, or drawing the barges by teams of horses or oxen located on the river banks. The supply depot itself was highly organised, with streets readily laid out so that once the barges arrived they could be quickly unloaded onto waiting wagons and efficiently distributed.

Eddings describes a highly sophisticated supply collection and distribution system. His knowledge of the operation of supply depots is likely drawn from his own military experience, and the employment of river barges renders the entire operation at least functionally believable. Transporting material by water is far more efficient than overland, and historically has always been preferred for this reason. Wagons, on the other hand, are quite slow moving, and when pulled by oxen are only capable of reaching 2 kilometres per hour. When pulled by horses, as was the case here, they can reach speeds of 4.5 kilometres per hour, in line with standard infantry marching rates (Roth 211). However, this does not include the time needed to rest, water and feed the horses, which further slows progress. Eddings acknowledges this necessity and notes that when wagons were used the horses were rested every hour (*Enchanter's End Game* 69).

As Eddings makes no reference to foraging, it is assumed the army carried with it its entire supply needs. Rations would have largely consisted of wheat, baked into the typical soldiers 'biscuit', which is twice baked bread that is extremely hardy and long lasting, if not terribly appetising. There is no consensus as to how much wheat the average soldier required per day in the field, with estimates ranging from as low as 750 grams to 1.7 kilograms. A rough estimate of 1 kilogram of wheat per day is sufficient, meaning 50,000 soldiers required 50,000 kilograms of wheat per day (Haldon 124-6). This diet would be supplemented with meat and vegetables, and Eddings mentions that Algarian horsemen provided the army with a ready supply of fresh meat (*Enchanter's End Game* 80).

Next, we have the equipment the army brought with it. Eddings relates that "boots, arrows, spare swords, and the like" were all required (*Enchanter's End Game* 80). Also necessary were such items as tents, spare harnesses, lances, horse shoes and blacksmithing tools. If we compare it to the equivalent needs of a Roman legion in the field, its *impedimenta*, a force of 50,000 would have required approximately 250,000 kilograms of equipment (Roth 81-4*)*. Another vital item armies carried with them is money. During the Third Crusade, for instance, the money soldiers brought with them constituted an important, and extremely cumbersome, component of the army's

baggage train (Murray 364). Eddings, however, makes no mention at all of money being carried with the army, and so it will be discounted in this model.[3]

Finally, we need to consider the dry fodder requirements of the horses, such as barley, millet or oats. Dry fodder is an essential component of a horse's diet, especially those that are being heavily worked, such as was the case here. An estimate of the daily needs of medieval horses, which were typically smaller than modern horses, is 2.5 kilograms per day (Haldon 283). 5,000 cavalry would actually total 10,000 horses, as each required at least one remount, a detail Eddings also notes when he mentions they were occasionally ridden by the infantry (*Enchanter's End Game* 119).[4] This, therefore, equates to 25,000 kilograms of dry fodder per day.

Thirty days of supplies at the first depot, therefore, amounts to 1,500,000 kilograms of food, 750,000 kilograms of dry fodder, and 250,000 kilograms of equipment, giving a total of 2,500,000 kilograms. If the four-wheeled wagons Eddings describes were fundamentally the same as those used by the Romans, they could each transport approximately 650 kilograms, so the depot would take 3,846 wagon loads to fill (Bachrach 717). It then would require a further 115 wagon loads each day to continuously maintain thirty days of supply at hand. This clearly entailed an enormous effort, and Eddings describes the roads of the Western nations as being swarmed with caravans of wagons, all directed towards meeting this enormous demand (*Enchanter's End Game* 69).

This analysis is sufficient for the first supply depot but the second introduces two new factors. This depot was located in extremely arid terrain, described as being comprised of "rock, sand, a few thornbushes and no water" (Eddings, *Enchanter's End Game* 102). Whilst at the first supply depot the lush grassland and adjacent river would have provided plentiful green fodder and water, at the second these would need to be provided for the army. Horses require about 7 kilograms of green fodder, and approximately 30 litres of water, per day. For soldiers on the march there is no fixed consensus as to how much water is required, but 6 litres per day might be considered reasonable. These two new requirements therefore add 600,000 litres of water per day for the soldiers and horses, and 70,000 kilograms of green fodder. To assemble 15 days of supply, on top of food, equipment, and dry fodder, equals 11,425,000 kilograms. Or 17,576 wagon loads.

Clearly matters are now becoming much more complicated, but even here Eddings might be accorded the benefit of the doubt. Much of this supply was moved from the first depot to the second in ships. These were placed in cradles, drawn by horses, then through a complicated series of pulleys lifted up the side of the escarpment. Indeed, as noted, one of the main objectives of the entire campaign was to get these ships into the Eastern Sea, where they could prey upon the enemies' supply lines. So, with the extra carrying capacity provided by these ships, even this monumental supply effort may be regarded as feasible.

One final calculation here needs to be made, and that is the army then took a week to march from the second supply depot to where the ships were to be launched into the Mardu River. This was across the same barren, waterless, plain, and so all necessary supplies would need to be carried with it. This includes water, and Eddings explicitly states that water was carried in the accompanying wagons (*Enchanter's End Game* 119). To make this final calculation easier it will be assumed that all non-essential equipment was left behind in the camp, with soldiers only bringing that which they could carry on their backs.

The army therefore would have required 4,795,000 kilograms to sustain it on its week-long march, or 7,376 fully loaded wagons. This is an incredible number of wagons for a medieval army to take into the field. The Byzantine Emperor Manuel II Komnenos is estimated to have taken 3,000

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[3] Eddings uses money, and soldier's pay in general, as a strong motivating factor that compels the Tolnedran legions to join the campaign. But thereafter the subject is never raised again.

[4] War horses were seldom ridden whilst on campaign in order to avoid injury, and were instead lead by a squire. The remount would be ridden instead.

wagons on a campaign into Asia Minor in 1176, which slowed progress to the extent that it directly contributed to the disastrous defeat the army suffered when ambushed at the Battle of Myriokephalon (Haldon 198). To further put this into perspective, if the road the army followed was only wide enough to allow two wagons to travel side by side, the baggage train alone would be approximately 36 kilometres long.[5]

However, once again the ships which were being pulled to the river could have also been used to carry supplies, dramatically cutting down on the number of wagons needed. Once the force reached the Mardu River, and the ships launched, the wagons were left behind, as they threatened to only slow the army down (Eddings, *Enchanter's End Game* 119).

This entire scenario, therefore, whilst extremely complicated logistically, was not perhaps utterly impossible in practice. If the army had been smaller than the 50,000 estimated here, its supply demands would naturally have been reduced. Larger and they would explode to simply unworkable proportions. This analysis is also far from comprehensive. One factor that has not been considered is the fodder and water needed to supply the wagon horses, or those drawing the ships. This introduces the ultimately fatal law of diminishing returns, as the benefit of each additional wagon declines in proportion to the increased water and fodder requirements they introduce. But as a simplistic model this suggests that the scenario Eddings describes was at least plausible, if not enormously complex.

Scenario Two: The siege of the Stronghold

The second scenario under consideration is of a far different nature. It concerns an event that occurred some 500 years prior to those recounted in *The Belgariad.* In it, the evil god Torak invaded the West with a vast horde of Angaraks under his command.[6] This army descended upon the Stronghold and after failing to take it by storm, settled down to siege it for eight years. After this time, with the army reduced to half its number, the siege was lifted.

Far less detail surrounds this event than does those described above in *The Belgariad*, but enough to still analyse it logistically. Especially since, unlike in the first scenario, we have hard numbers for the size of this army. At the beginning of the siege it numbers 500,000 soldiers, and so by the end, worn down by hunger and attrition, only 250,000 remained. Further, we know that as it marched to the Stronghold, this army rounded up almost the entire cattle herd of Algaria and butchered it for food. At this time Algaria was the chief supplier of beef to all the other Western kingdoms, and as a result suffered economically for many years after the siege, till its herds were repopulated. Eddings even relates that the beef shortage in the West led to the economic rise of the Kingdom of Sendaria, which could sell its pork at great profit instead (Eddings, and Eddings, *Rivan Codex* 176). As usual, Eddings has a keen eye for logistical detail.

Nevertheless, this scenario is far less plausible than the one previously described. In *The Belgariad* it is specifically stated that this army gave up the siege owing to a shortage of supplies. As the character Silk describes it, "They say that his army was like a sea of Angaraks dashing itself to pieces against the walls of the Stronghold. They might still be here, but they ran out of food" (Eddings, *Castle of Wizardry* 50). This account is corroborated by Lady Polgara, who spent much of these ten years in the Stronghold itself, thus Eddings cannot be excused of employing the common trope of an 'unreliable narrator' (Eddings, and Eddings, *Polgara the Sorceress* 648).

Using the same modelling as before, the besieging army of half a million soldiers, over eight years, would have required 1,460,000,000 tonnes of food as a bare minimum to sustain itself, or 2.2

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[5] Roman highways were seldom wider than 5.5 meters, which was just enough to allow two wagons to pass each other.
[6] The Angaraks populate the eastern continent in Eddings' universe, which is under the dominion of the God Torak.

million wagon loads. The captured cattle would have undoubtedly helped, and an ox provides, on average, 200 kg of meat once butchered (Roth 29). A mere 7,300,000 head of cattle, then, might have been sufficient to sustain this army.

It must also be considered that the besieging army was itself under siege. The Algar horsemen still retained control over the grasslands and regularly raided the besiegers camp. The Stronghold itself merely served as a convenient target for invaders; most of the Algar population did not reside there, but rather lived as nomads in the grasslands where they could more effectively employ their favoured hit and run tactics. These raids, therefore, would have prevented foraging, or relief columns from reaching the besiegers. It also would have prevented the besiegers from growing large scale market gardens to sustain themselves, such as the crusaders did during the three-year long Siege of Acre (1189-1191).

Clearly this is an impossible scenario, and if it was to be modelled realistically the besieging army would have run out of food far sooner than it did. Eight years is simply an absurd amount of time for a pre-modern army, particularly one of this size, and without the benefit of canned food and mechanization, to lay siege to any one location. Given that further supplies would need to be shipped across the Sea of the East from Mallorea, the scale of this enterprise is akin to the Allied supply commitment to the D-Day invasion, except undertaken without any of the benefits of modern technology and over a far longer period. The question is why Eddings allows this episode, which forms a vital part of the history of the realms he is describing, to appear completely and utterly untenable by any realistic calculation.

"Good" vs. "Bad" Logistics

The answer lies in how Eddings employs logistics as a narrative device. The first scenario centres around the personality of King Fulrach of Sendaria. Whilst all the other kings present in the army are more concerned with matters of battlefield strategy, he is the only one who gives the mechanics of supply any serious consideration whatsoever. An overweight and timid character, he is the most unwarlike monarch present, but on account of his 'logistical genius' proves to be the most important by far, and thus earns the respect of the other kings. In comparison, in the second scenario the god Torak, described as being an awful general who simply throws away his soldiers in pointless attacks, gives no thought at all to the influence of logistics. Even his subordinates, the Grolim priesthood, are unconcerned with supplying their armies and view their soldiers as disposable chaff.

In Eddings' literature logistics is used to supplement the Good vs. Evil dichotomy that underlines his universe. The Good generals devote attention to logistics, and therefore are ultimately unencumbered by it, whilst Bad generals ignore it, and it subsequently decimates their armies. In the first scenario all King Fulrach needs to do is acknowledge the problem the supply issue represents, and in *The Belgariad* he is described as simply "giving a few orders", and thereafter logistics ceases to be a problem (Eddings, *Enchanter's End Game* 69). Torak never deigns to acknowledge the importance of supply and his army subsequently starves. In treating the question of supply in this manner, Eddings downplays the sheer complexity of the supply issues that confronted the Good generals in the first scenario, and in the second ignores the clear fact that it was from the outset a logistical impossibility, no matter how diligent the commanding general may or may not have been.

It is notable that Eddings could have instead simply used magic to solve the problem of supply. J. R. R. Tolkien, for instance, used lembas, effectively a "magic" type of the soldier's biscuit described above, and with which he would have been highly familiar from his time on the Western Front during the First World War, to overcome an otherwise unsolvable logistical dilemma; how were the diminutive hobbits to sustain themselves as they crossed the wastes of Mordor given they

could not feasibly carry enough food to last the whole journey? The God Torak could similarly have just magically created the food his army needed. But this would have run counter to Eddings' setting where magic, even in the hands of Gods, had its limits. It also would have been at odds with Eddings' deliberate choice to make questions of supply a central tenet in the believability, or the "gritty realism", of his invented universe.

Therefore, whilst Eddings admirably adheres steadfastly to the primacy of logistics over magic in his fictional universe, and was clearly highly familiar with logistical nomenclature, the inconsistent application of logistical principles suggests he was not overly familiar with how such concepts worked in practice. Undoubtedly this was because his practical experience of logistics was drawn from modern usage, a consequence of his own military experience, rather than the medieval contexts his stories describe.

Certainly, Eddings appears to believe that pre-modern armies could carry with them all the material they needed whilst on campaign. Contemporary logistical modelling, of the style demonstrated here, has effectively disavowed this notion, and it is instead now believed that medieval armies could carry with them no more than a few weeks' worth of supply at best, with twenty-four days being an upper limit. If it had to carry green fodder, an army could transport no more than five days' worth at the most (Haldon 168-70). This hard limit is exceeded slightly in this discussion since the army Eddings describes made ample use of wagons, but these were little used in the medieval world; the road networks of this period simply could not cope with such heavy vehicles, and pack animals were extensively employed instead. Eddings circumvents this issue by fusing the well-maintained road network of the Roman empire with his otherwise medieval setting. Nevertheless, wagons are not nearly as efficient as modern trucks and lorries, and so a certain degree of creative licence is needed to envision the scenarios Eddings describes actually functioning in practice.

Consistency and World Building

It is this degree of creative license that undermines Eddings attempt to build his fictional universe upon sound logistical foundations. As Tolkien argues in his essay "On Fairy Stories", believable fantasy depends on internal coherence, "upon the nature of Faërie: the Perilous Realm itself, and the air that blows in that country", and rather than operating counter to our own powers of reason, "the keener and the clearer is the reason, the better fantasy will it make." (Tolkien 114) Or put another way, "fantasy is a construction of meaning ... successful fantasy narrative is notable for its strong inner coherence; its rules are not those of the ordinary world, but it never breaks them" (Le Guin 85).

Tolkien himself rendered a world so detailed it is possible to physically map the journey of the Fellowship of the Ring with extraordinary detail. This is impossible in *The Belgariad*, as the narrative and chronology lack sufficient detail to accurately place the actors geographically with any consistency. Eddings' inspiration in creating the world of *The Belgariad* stems from a map of his own creation, which he dismissively refers to as a "doodle", whilst the maps which accompany the books lack any sort of scale. Similarly, he asserts that whilst "geography is interesting ... it needs people to flesh it out, and people need all the assorted 'ologies' to explain why they're doing all these particular things to each other" (Eddings, *The Belgariad, Vol. 1* ix).

It is evident that Eddings' identification of his own works as examples of "Realistic Fantasy" is, in part, owing to his employment of a diverse roster of characters which hail from a vast variety of different backgrounds. Geography is never more than a secondary concern, a backdrop against which these characters interact. Therefore, rather than being grounded in a coherent geographical context, in Eddings' universe logistics exists as an extension of the

personalities of those characters which inhabit it. Thus, in the fate of their respective armies the calm methodical approach of King Fulrach is contrasted with the impulsive mentality of Torak.

It is consequently unsurprising that when examined closely vast logistical incoherencies can appear. As demonstrated in this paper, when subjected to reasoned analysis even important scenarios, such as the siege of the Stronghold, can appear, at best, highly implausible. Ultimately, despite the author employing a wealth of detail, this lack of consistency in the application of even basic logistical principles serves only to undermine the very "gritty realism" that Eddings is attempting to convey.

Conclusion

A solid logistical grounding is not a prerequisite for enjoyable fantasy literature. The subject can tacitly be treated in a casual manner and not ultimately impact upon most reader's satisfaction in the story. However, it can also enormously enrich a setting, providing context and meaning for a character's actions, and lending credibility to the movement of armies through space beyond that of merely moving chess pieces on a board.

But when detailed narratives concerning the question of logistics are presented as being intrinsically important to the plot, such as they are in the works of David Eddings, it becomes more necessary to ensure they describe at least logically feasible scenarios. The vast disconnect in plausibility that exists between the two scenarios described here serves only to undermine the factual believability of the universe Eddings created. Logistical structures in this world are revealed as being not governed by practical realities, but rather the creative needs of the author, and are therefore beholden to his will, working when he needs them to and failing when the plot dictates that they should.

Nevertheless, it would be remiss to judge Eddings' use of logistics too harshly. Whilst he may have been inconsistent in his application of even basic logistical principles, the attention he devotes to the subject and the importance it holds as a plot point within his narratives is in itself laudable. Eddings was clearly familiar with the operation of logistical structures in practice, largely as a consequence of his, and his wife's, own military experience, and errs only when he attempts to extrapolate aspects of these systems into a medieval context he is less familiar with.

Despite occasional missteps, Eddings should be commended for attempting the difficult task of trying to place his fantasy universe upon a justifiable logistical foundation. For it is the case that any fantasy author who turns to the works of professional historians in order to present a more detailed picture of pre-modern military logistics in their own work will find a limited, and often contradictory, corpus of material to draw upon. To even approach the subject therefore requires a great deal of research, patience and, ultimately, courage.

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Welcome to The Monster Network

Ingvil Hellstrand (University of Stavanger, Norway), Line Henriksen (University of Copenhagen, Denmark), Aino-Kaisa Koistinen (University of Jyväskylä, Finland), Donna McCormack (University of Surrey, UK, and the University of Bergen, Norway), and Sara Orning (Norwegian University of Science and Technology, NTNU)

Studies and writings on the monster have a long historical trajectory, but currently we are witnessing an unprecedented resurgence of interest in the figure of the monster. Not only has popular culture given rise to ever-increasing representations of monstrosity, but also the media and politicians are repeatedly evoking the dreaded monster through descriptions of fearful 'foreigners' and 'terrorists' who supposedly endanger our daily lives. They roam the in-between, making borders and boundaries tremble and shatter; whether these be borders of nation states or bodies, or categories of race, gender, sexuality, ability, class, self and other. Rapid technological and scientific developments make the monster rear its head: bodies are explored and modified by biotechnologies to an extent that challenges our understandings of what is human, what is animal and what is something completely different. Within the areas of communication and tele-technologies, systems and networks are developed to take on an uncanny sense of agency, where their movements and actions cannot be predicted or necessarily traced. The monster lurks in all of these details: a hybrid creature of popular culture and politics, technology and biology, fact and (science) fiction. In this sense, the monster seems to embody a promise of disturbances and change, as Donna Haraway argued in her 1992 text "The Promises of Monsters".

The renewed interest in the monster has given rise to what is referred to as Monster Studies: a new and increasingly popular interdisciplinary area of research, art, medicine, political science, psychology, computer science, and literature that invites us to think with and through the figure of the monster. This cultural and academic interest in monsters and the monstrous led to the founding of *The Monster Network* – an interdisciplinary and international community aiming to unpack the complexities that haunt our times as an academic, cultural, ethical and political task. The Network connects those with an interest in monsters and the monstrous. The aim of the Network is to spark international collaborations between artists and scholars by organizing conferences, workshops, publications, symposia and public events as well as creating a space for discussions and information on all things monstrous.

Key research questions and methodology

For thinking critically in these monstrous times, the figure of the monster can refer to the representations of the monstrous in fictional narratives, the semiotic-material processes used to render certain bodies as monstrous, or metaphorical companions used to tackle complex theoretical and methodological questions. What does the monster promise? What contradictions, uncertainties,

anxieties, desires and disturbances haunt the shifting landscapes of monsters? How might the monster help unsettle and rethink traditional ontology, epistemology and ethics? In other words: how might the monster help one think and imagine the world differently?

In this sense, the monster is very much connected to the realms of science fiction and fantasy, the genres of imagination and estrangement. However, the monster is not only a creature of fiction, but its tentacles reach to the very real everyday practices that can have crucial consequences on both human and non-human lives. Monsters are about differences, and we want to explore what kinds of questions the monster and the monstrous bring in this contemporary moment. Central to thinking about the monster and Otherness is the issue of increasing migration, border control and use of biotechnologies for reproductive assistance, which make up the structural backdrop for intense debates about personhood, citizenship and national belonging.

What do we do?

The Monster Network is an independent non-commercial research network that aims to serve as a creative and interdisciplinary platform. Since 2014, we have hosted a number of workshops and conferences that engage with these pressing issues, collaborating with several artists such as Tove Kjellmark (Sweden), Liv Bugge (Norway), Trine Mee Sook (Denmark) and Erich Berger (Finland/Denmark). Our work has been generously funded by Riksbankens Jubileumsfond and the OPSTART-grant (Nordic Culture Fund). In 2016, we organized the international conference *Promises of Monsters*, which gathered over 60 participants from all over the world to discuss the potential of monstering both our thinking and academic and artistic practices. For the last two years, we have put together a Halloween-event with researchers and artists, in which we have addressed questions of monster methodologies and contemporary ethical and political debates about belonging and Otherness.

We are currently preparing a special issue of Somatechnics based on the *Promises of Monsters* conference. We are also planning another conference on *Political Monsters,* a writing workshop for both academic and creative writing, and planning different projects involving care robots in fact and fiction, organ transplantation, evolutionary theory, ecocriticism and hauntology, and concepts of assisted nature. We dream of making our own Monster Network Podcast-series. We have our own website, and our social media platforms on Facebook and Twitter which have spawned an interactive international community.

Who are we?

The ghostly tentacles of the universe brought us together on a panel on the figure of the monster at the Somatechnics conference *Missing Links: the Somatechnics of decolonisation* in Linköping in 2013. It became clear that the panelists and a member of the audience shared a desire for more monster work, and so the ghosts were made flesh as we delved into what was to become today's Network. In May 2014, we launched the Monster Network with an event at the Centre for Women's and Gender Studies at the University of Bergen. We continued on to do a panel at the *Voices in Nordic Gender Research* conference in Roskilde, Denmark in 2014. The popularity of the panel emboldened us to go on to bigger things such as the conference *Promises of Monsters* in Stavanger, Norway. As we write, our Halloween event in 2017, *Strange Blood? Nordic Belonging and Otherness*, is underway.

The founding members of The Monster Network are Ingvil Hellstrand (University of Stavanger, Norway), Line Henriksen (University of Copenhagen, Denmark), Aino-Kaisa Koistinen (University of Jyväskylä, Finland), Donna McCormack (University of Surrey, UK, and the

University of Bergen, Norway) and Sara Orning (Norwegian University of Science and Technology, NTNU). Together we have published extensively on the monster and the monstrous, the strange and estranged, the normal and abnormal, the human and the non-human.

Open-ended invitation

We therefore reach out our tentacles as a form of an open-ended invitation across and through the disciplines and creative practices. This piece attempts to challenge traditional academic writing, and therefore we have tried to write with collective voices, thus sharing our feminist, decolonial kitchen-table aims of constructive and anti-discriminatory dialogue on and around the monster and the monstrous. We are devoted to communicating with a broader public beyond academia, and all of our events are open to the general public. We are always looking for creative and critical engagements with the figure of the monster and the concept of the monstrous. If you want to add a monster in the form of a poem, a short story, an article, images or something completely different to our blog, then you are more than welcome to contact us or join us on Facebook. We look forward to future collaborations and hopeful interactions.

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Links and contact info

Website (to be launced soon!): https://themonsternetwork.com/ (in the meantime, see our current website: https://promisesofmonsters.wordpress.com/)
Twitter: @_MonsterNetwork
Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/groups/535617899880706/
Email: promisesofmonsters@gmail.com

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Merril Collection of Science Fiction, Speculation and Fantasy: Interview with Sephora W Hosein

Bodhisattva Chattopadhyay

Sephora W Hosein (Senior Department Head and collection Head of the Merril Collection at the Toronto Public Library).

Bodhisattva Chattopadhyay/Fafnir
Could you briefly introduce the Merril Collection and its history?

SWH
The Merril Collection began with a donation in 1970 by SF author, Judith Merril, of her personal collection of 5 000 books. The collection was named the Spaced Out Library. The collection continued to grow and was relocated from its original space once before finally finding a home in its current space, inside the Lillian H. Smith library branch of the Toronto Public Library, in 1990. It was renamed The Merril Collection of Science Fiction, Speculation and Fantasy. Today the collection has grown to nearly 80 000 items, including approximately 5000 graphic novels, several magazine and periodical titles including pulp magazines, a smaller collection of non-fiction titles, a small collection of French titles, manuscripts, art, small press books, and the world's largest collection of tabletop role playing games.

Bodhisattva Chattopadhyay/Fafnir
Could you give us an insight into archival material or unique research collections at the Merril that may be of particular interest to researchers in science fiction and fantasy?

SWH
The aim of the collection is to continue to collect one of everything that is written in English, or has been translated into English, that is speculative in nature. We try very hard to fill in any gaps in the collection and actively collect full runs of series. We have a very large, comprehensive collection of primary source material that people travel from around the world to use in their research. We have had visiting academics from Australia, the U.K., and the U.S. this year alone.
     Some unique items we have include:
- A first edition of *The Ship That Sailed To Mars* by William Timlin, from 1923. Only 2000 copies were ever printed, and today only 200 exist in North America.
- A first edition of *La Vie Électrique* by Albert Robida, from 1893.
- Several original editions in English and French written by Jules Verne
- A first edition of *Dracula* by Bram Stoker, from 1897
- Possibly the only existing copy of the *Codex serafinianus* in North America

The wealth of the collection is comprised of fiction titles, including books, novels, and anthologies. Book covers are kept intact as they are important to bibliographic researchers.

The periodicals include critical journals and fiction, and are collected comprehensively. Fanzines are treated as periodicals, and the pulps in our collection date mostly from 1926 onward, with a few published earlier.

Bodhisattva Chattopadhyay/Fafnir
Could you tell us about some of the research activities at the Merril? What kind of research facilities and support does it provide?

SWH
The collection is maintained under strict environmental controls, in closed stacks. The stacks are humidity, light, and temperature controlled. The reading room is reserved primarily for researchers using collection materials, and is maintained as a quiet study space. No food or beverages are allowed inside the reading room, and all visitors are asked to store their bags and coats in free lockers that are provided. Anyone using collection materials is asked to register and show identification. The materials are all reference, so they must remain inside the reading room at all times.

We have several finding aids available to the public, including the online catalogue, series list (providing chronological and suggested reading orders), a list of graphic novels, and a a list of role playing games.

We have several PhD candidates who use the collection in their research, and we strongly encourage scholars to send us their dissertations once completed, and they are interfiled with the collection materials.

The staff are very enthusiastic and knowledgeable, and we encourage questions and feedback from the public.

Bodhisattva Chattopadhyay/Fafnir
What kind of research events, public events and dissemination events have been held in the past or are planned? Are there any particular conventions and events that the Merril is associated with? Alternately, is it possible to organize events in association with the Merril Collection?

SWH
Past events at the Merril have featured renowned writers and artists including Guy Gavriel Kay, Charles de Lint, Neil Gaiman, John Scalzi, Cory Doctorow, Terry Gilliam, and Joe Hill.

I started working in the collection in June 2017, and during my time here we have had several events:

- A panel discussion featuring 10 authors who contributed to 2 anthologies *The Sum Of Us: Tales of the Bounded and Bound*, and *Where the Stars Rise: Asian Fiction and Fantasy*.
- An author talk from Canadian fiction author Joe Mahoney, including a reading from his novel *A Time and a Place*
- A presentation and reading from renowned Klingon linguist Dr. Lawrence M. Schoen
- A screening of *The Northlander* and subsequent Q&A period with Métis director Benjamin Ross Hayden
- A movie night featuring a screening of the original 1954 *Godzilla*

There are several events planned for 2018, including a series of gaming workshops. As Merril owns the largest collection of tabletop RPGs, we are planning to host a series of afternoons

when people can come and learn more about them, and hopefully inspire them to start their own groups.

Bodhisattva Chattopadhyay/Fafnir
As the Head Librarian of the Merril Collection, could you tell us about yourself, and your particular interests in science fiction and fantasy? Looking ahead, what is your particular vision for the future of the collection, especially as a research space?

SWH
My interest in SF and Fantasy began at a very early age. My father was a film projectionist, so I saw a lot of films, and quickly became enchanted with those in the SF/Fantasy genre. I was always an avid reader too, and to this day love reading. My interests are all over the SF/Fantasy map and also extend to many popular franchises – *Dune, Doctor Who, Star Wars, The Wheel of Time, Star Trek, LOTR,* Steampunk, Arthurian themes, Vampires, Vikings, Horror, Fairy Tales, Magic, etc.

I consider SF/Fantasy to be the most inclusive type of fiction because it allows us to conjure the world(s) in which we wish to live. It has always fueled my imagination, and given me a way to think of the world as more than the way that I see or hear it. It offers alternative ways of being and allows us to make sense of that which sometimes seems very senseless.

My goals for the collection include collecting as many gems as our budget supports, and to build upon the great work that has been done to make this a world class collection. I will continue to strive for an inclusive, well-rounded collection – one that supports indigenous initiatives, one that celebrates Canadian content, and one that encompasses as widely as possible all that is fantastic in literature.

I also aim to increase awareness of the collection, welcome more visitors, and to continue to grow and provide the resources and materials that make us an excellent research destination.

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A Book Review:

Gender Identity and Sexuality in Current Fantasy and Science Fiction

Päivi Väätänen

Gender Identity and Sexuality in Current Fantasy and Science Fiction is the first publication of Academia Lunare, Luna Press Publishing's academic branch for fantasy and science fiction, and it is a promising one. The book consists of ten original contributions with various perspectives and different foci, which proves to be one the collection's strengths: the book as a whole offers a solid general overview of the broad questions of gender identity and sexuality in the speculative genres.

    The articles complement each other by offering slightly different starting points. An author's point of view is prominent in two of the articles. In her article, Juliet E McKenna uses concepts that are more familiar from discussing gender-balance and gender equality in the workplace (for example the sticky floor and the glass ceiling) to explore discrimination in science fiction and fantasy publishing. A J Dalton, partly from the point of view of a fantasy author, discusses "gender-identity and sexuality in current subgenres of British fantasy literature" and points out the history and conventions of a genre and subgenre to certain extent limit the choices an author has, and how the polarization of societies is reflected in what kind of fantasy literature audiences demand.

    A survey of the diversity of characters and representation is the overarching theme in four of the articles. Anna Millon's article "Bikini armour: women characters, readers and writers in male narratives" studies female character representation in fantasy fiction, whereas Hazel Butler explores the representation of bisexual characters in fantasy literature and television. Cheryl Morgan's article outlines "how the transgender tipping point has influenced speculative fiction," that is, how the changing attitudes towards trans people and non-binary genders are influencing science fiction and fantasy, enhancing both the quality and quantity of representation of trans people in the genres. Shifting the focal point to the world of card games, Rostislav Kůrka shows how the non-binary nature of gender and sexuality is taken into account in the card game *Magic: The Gathering* and its story, and how things have changed during the twenty decades of its existence.

    Lorianne Reuser's article "Subversion, Sex, and Violence: Rape as Narrative Tool in *A Song of Ice and Fire*" feels especially topical while reading it in the middle of the #metoo campaign. Furthermore, touching on genre conventions and traditions, Reuser's feminist critique of the novels and the HBO television series demonstrates how fiction rebelling against one set of conservative traditions (in this case "sanitised, fairytale-like fantasy" [176]) may still be lacking in other areas. The aspect of film adaptation is present also in Jyrki Korpua's article where he discusses Tolkien's female roles and changes to them in Peter Jackson's cinematization of *The Hobbit*. In Korpua's analysis, the spotlight is on audiences and the reception of the character of Tauriel, based on data

gained via the World Hobbit Project. Alina Hadîmbu, too, discusses the later-added character of Tauriel, alongside with Rey, the female lead of the latest *Star Wars* films, when assessing whether these new female characters are "gender balancing in otherwise male-dominated fictional worlds or [whether they have] a greater purpose". Finally, more traditional literature scholarship in the collection is represented by Kim Lakin-Smith's article. In its exploration of the feminine grotesque using Lacanian concepts, it is linked to the theme of representation as it studies how the analysed novels represent "the societal and psychological complexities of real pubescent girls" (152).

All in all, Barbini has put together a collection of articles that is quite diverse in its topics and perspectives yet manages to be coherent. As such, *Gender Identity and Sexuality in Current Fantasy and Science Fiction* becomes a contemporary assessment of the current state of the speculative and recommended reading for anyone interested in these questions in the speculative genres – or perhaps especially for those who are not yet familiar with these aspect of fantasy and science fiction. On a more trivial note, there are a few small typological and stylistic issues that may catch a reader's attention; for example, the rather old-school editor in me is not convinced that allowing the use of contractions like "isn't" and "won't" is necessarily the best possible editorial decision – although I presume that it is a deliberate move to downplay the level of strict academic-ness. The fact that a review needs to pick on these does indicate, though, that actual shortcomings of the collection are minor indeed.

To conclude, even though quite a few books and articles on gender and sexuality in the speculative genres have been written during the last decades, this collection a concise overview of the state of the art as it is now, and what questions are topical at this point in history. In recent years, we have seen the "gamergate" controversy attack women gamers and game developers, the "Sad Puppies" distorting the Hugo Awards voting, the #metoo campaign revealing the extent of sexual harassment in the film industry amongst others, and pay gaps in the workplace addressed prominently at least in the British mainstream media. Echoes of all of these evils can be heard in the articles. Thus, it is obvious that the collection is burningly topical and very much needed.

Biography: Päivi Väätänen is a doctoral candidate at the University of Helsinki, Finland, and she is currently working on her doctoral dissertation on genre and identity politics in African American science fiction. She has published on narrative ethics and the phenomenon of afrofuturism, and recently an article titled "Educating by Unreliability: Expositional Manipulation in Science Fiction" in Worlds of Imagination *(2017).*

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Call for Papers: Fafnir 1/2018

Fafnir – Nordic Journal of Science Fiction and Fantasy Research invites authors to submit papers for the upcoming edition 1/2018.

Fafnir – Nordic Journal of Science Fiction and Fantasy Research is a peer-reviewed academic journal which is published in electronic format two times a year. *Fafnir* is published by The Finnish Society for Science Fiction and Fantasy Research (FINFAR) from 2013 onwards. *Fafnir* publishes various texts ranging from peer-reviewed research articles to short overviews and book reviews in the field of science fiction and fantasy research.

The submissions must be original works, and written in English (or in Finnish or Scandinavian languages). Manuscripts of research articles should be between 20,000 and 40,000 characters in length. The journal uses the most recent edition of the MLA Style Manual (MLA 8). The manuscripts of research articles will be peer-reviewed. Please note that as *Fafnir* is designed to be of interest to readers with varying backgrounds, essays and other texts should be as accessibly written as possible. Also, if English is not your first language, please have your article proof-read by an English language editor. Please pay attention to our journal's submission guidelines available in: http://journal.finfar.org/for-authors/submission-guidelines/

The deadline for submissions is 31 March 2018.

In addition to research articles, *Fafnir* constantly welcomes text proposals such as essays, interviews, overviews and book reviews on any subject suited for the journal.

Please send your electronic submission (saved as RTF-file) to the following address: submissions@finfar.org. You should get a reply indicating that we have received your submission in a few days. If not, please resubmit or contact the editors. For further information, please contact the editors: aino-kaisa.koistinen@jyu.fi and bodhisattva.chattopadhyay@ikos.uio.no. More detailed information about our journal is available at our webpage: journal.finfar.org.

This edition is scheduled to be published in June 2018.

Best regards,
Bodhisattva Chattopadhyay, Aino-Kaisa Koistinen & Jyrki Korpua
Editors, *Fafnir – Nordic Journal of Science Fiction and Fantasy Research*