



FaFnIR

NORDIC JOURNAL OF SCIENCE FICTION AND FANTASY RESEARCH

Volume 1, issue 1, 2014

journal.finfar.org



The Finnish Society for Science Fiction and Fantasy Research
Suomen science fiction- ja fantasiatutkimuksen seura ry

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Supported by the The Finnish Society for Science Fiction Research and Fantasy (FINFAR)
(Suomen science fiction- ja fantasiatutkimuksen seura ry)

ISSN: 2342-2009 (online)

journal.finfar.org

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Editorial 1/2014

Jyrki Korpua, Hanna-Riikka Roine & Päivi Väättänen

At the foot of the mountain was a river, white and cold and still; and beyond it was a smooth and barren plain, lying silent and lonely in the pale moonlight. But in the distance was seen a circle of flickering flames, ever changing,—now growing brighter, now fading away, and now shining with a dull, cold light, like the glimmer of the glow-worm or the fox-fire. And as Siegfried gazed upon the scene, he saw the dim outline of some hideous monster moving hither and thither, and seeming all the more terrible in the uncertain light.

"It is he!" whispered Regin, and his lips were ashy pale, and his knees trembled beneath him. "It is Fafnir, and he wears the Helmet of Terror! Shall we not go back to the smithy by the great forest, and to the life of ease and safety that may be ours there? Or will you rather dare to go forwards, and meet the Terror in its abode?"

(Baldwin, *The Story of Siegfried*.)

Dear readers, do dare to go forwards, and meet *Fafnir – Nordic Journal of Science Fiction and Fantasy Research*! *Fafnir* enters the scene roaring, not to yield terror, but to boldly take part in topical discussions and debates in the field of science fiction and fantasy research.

Fafnir was founded hand in hand with the FINFAR Society, the society of science fiction and fantasy researchers in Finland. Science fiction and fantasy research has been done in Finland actively for decades, but before the autumn of 2013, there was no official, organized framework for the network and cooperation of science fiction and fantasy researchers besides an annual working seminar. Thus *Fafnir* is the product of a long tradition of close but unofficial networking of Nordic science fiction and fantasy researchers. In this issue, Liisa Rantalaiho recounts the history of FINFAR, a gift from fandom to academia.

Fafnir aims at serving as an international forum for scholarly exchange on science fiction and fantasy and for discussion on current issues on the field. In order to achieve this, the journal introduces and develops research focusing on science fiction and fantasy literature, audiovisual art, games, and fan culture by providing an interdisciplinary perspective into the research within these genres.

In addition to this, one of the objectives of *Fafnir* is to rejuvenate and join up the Nordic field of science fiction and fantasy research. Although *Fafnir* is not limited to Nordic issues and themes, they are regularly addressed in special issues. This first issue of *Fafnir* is a good example of this, as it introduces the proceedings of last summer's FINFAR seminar, held for the 14th time in July 2013.

FINFAR seminars are working seminars, in which mostly master's degree students and doctoral students present papers that are either a part of a future doctoral dissertation, a master's thesis, or a conference paper. During a FINFAR meeting, participants get feedback from both their peers struggling with similar issues and experts on speculative fiction.

Therefore, FINFAR meetings have provided an indispensable networking opportunity to students on science fiction and fantasy in Finland, and hopefully also more and more internationally in the future, as FINFAR meetings are being opened up and advertised more widely. Thanks to FINFAR, Finnish science fiction and fantasy researchers are quite thoroughly networked - even the editors of *Fafnir* have first met each other during a FINFAR meeting. In this issue, Katja Kontturi gives a more thorough account on last summer's seminar in her report on the meeting.

This first issue of *Fafnir* presents four articles that are fruits of the 2013 FINFAR seminar themed "Opposing Forces". All of the articles have been subjected to double-blind peer review process. Articles in this journal have been organised so that their themes range from opposition or resistance towards the so-called mainstream, from Samuel Delany's groundbreaking sf-rhetorics and William Gibson's post-cyberpunk fiction, through scifi fanfiction to J. R. R. Tolkien's poetics, which defined the genre.

In the opening article of this journal, "Opposing Forces and Ethical Judgments in Samuel Delany's *Stars in My Pocket like Grains of Sand*", Päivi Vääänen discusses the rhetorical and narrative strategies that are used to represent and deconstruct ideologies of sexuality, gender, and difference in Delany's novel. Vääänen places a specific focus on the *ethical* positioning of readers. Vääänen sees that by reading their way through the abundance of sexualities and opposing ideologies in the novel, readers can question, and perhaps change, their attitudes towards different aspects of gender, sexuality, and alterity.

Esko Suoranta, in his article "Agents or Pawns? Power Relations in William Gibson's Bigend Trilogy" sets out to explore the issues of agency and power in the so-called Bigend Trilogy, three novels *Pattern Recognition*, *Spook Country*, and *Zero History*. Article focuses on the forms of surveillance, power and its abuse, as well as possibilities of resistance. The focus is also on the contemporary context, the nature of global security apparatuses that have "cast an Orwellian hue on life in the 21st-century".

Hanna-Riikka Roine's article "What is it that Fanfiction Opposes? The Shared and Communal Features of *Firefly/Serenity* Fanfiction" ponders the ways in which the textual conventions and structures of fanfiction writing are connected with promoting and sustaining communality. Roine sees that fanfiction studies ought to put less emphasis on people-centred metaphors such as poachers and nomads. Significantly, as fannish activities centre on texts, it is necessary that we analyse the processes of both producing and disseminating stories. This also casts light on why the genres of fantasy and science fiction seem to offer a more fertile ground for fanfiction writers than some other source texts.

In the fourth and last article, "Good and Evil in J. R. R. Tolkien's *Legendarium*: Concerning Dichotomy between Visible and Invisible", Jyrki Korpua explores the complex relationship in Tolkien's fictive world and universe between mortal and immortal existence and imagery of light and shadow, good and evil, and physical and spiritual.

In addition to the articles and the FINFAR report, this issue contains a thought-provoking piece on the relationship between speculative fiction and mainstream literary theory by Dr. Merja Polvinen. Polvinen's "Peeking into the Neighbouring Grove: Speculative Fiction in the Work of Mainstream Scholars" calls for active and open dialogue between researchers and theories of these two fields. Next issue, *Fafnir* 2/2014, will be out in June 2014. Furthermore, we are thrilled to announce that the third issue of *Fafnir* is now open for submissions, see the call for papers at the end of this issue for details.

In the epigraph above, Fafnir the dragon wears "the Helmet of Terror". This very first issue of *Fafnir* challenges its readers to put on their thinking caps instead, and get engaged in the discussion!

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Opposing Forces and Ethical Judgments in Samuel Delany's *Stars in My Pocket like Grains of Sand*

Päivi Väättänen

Abstract: This article discusses the opposing forces of conservative and liberal ideologies in Samuel Delany's science fiction novel Stars in My Pocket like Grains of Sand (1984). In this article, I conduct a rhetorical analysis of the novel using James Phelan's notions of the rhetorical theory of narrative. Laying emphasis on ethical judgments that the novel evokes in the readers, I analyze the rhetorical strategies used in the novel to challenge its readers to reconsider and deconstruct the concepts of gender and sexuality. This article argues that the rhetoric of Stars in My Pocket works largely by juxtaposing conservative and liberal ideologies, societies, and characters. Readers are led to make ethical judgments, which may change during the process of reading. In the end, though, it is clear that the conservative ideology and characters representing it evoke negative ethical judgments, whereas their liberal counterparts are seen in a positive light. By evoking associations between the conservative societies and the world readers live in, Stars in My Pocket presents a compelling social critique of our treatment of otherness, which is as topical today as it was in 1984.

Keywords: Samuel Delany, Stars In my Pocket like Grains of Sand, deconstruction, the rhetorical theory of narrative.

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Simultaneous juxtaposition and deconstruction of identity categories and opposing opinions has often been an integral part of 20th-century identity politics, and Samuel Delany's novel *Stars in My Pocket like Grains of Sand* (1984) is no exception. In the galaxy of *Stars in My Pocket like Grains of Sand*, societies are following either of the two different and competing ideologies: the conservative "Family" and the liberal "Sygn". The main factor separating the two ideologies is their attitude towards gender, sexuality, difference, and the different alien species populating the numerous worlds in that galaxy. This article aims to show how Delany juxtaposes the two ideologies and societies following them, evoking associations between the narrative world and our world, and demonstrates which one of the opposing forces is preferable by inducing ethical judgments of certain characters and their actions. *Stars in My Pocket* is Delany's last science fiction novel to date,¹ and in many ways a culmination point of the themes present in much of Delany's fiction and critical work: identity, gender, and sexuality. Whereas Delany's early fiction was, in his

¹ Delany's science fiction novel *They Fly at Çiron* (1993) was published later, but it is a rewriting of a novelette published in 1971.

own words, “written as ‘heterosexually’ as any homophobe could wish” (Beam, “The Possibility of Possibilities” 3), his treatment of gender and sexuality had become more and more diverse up to the rigorously deconstructive *Stars in My Pocket*.

Even though science fiction until the 1960s did not pay much attention to exploring gender and sexuality (Attebery 5), questioning of these as stable categories was nothing radically new in science fiction at the time of the publication of *Stars in My Pocket*. During the late sixties, reflecting the changing attitudes in the Western world, science fiction in general had started to question the binaries of gender and sexuality. In addition to Delany, especially other feminist science fiction writers like Ursula Le Guin, Joanna Russ, and Marcy Piercy had been writing novels where sexuality and gender were given a twist in future societies or on other planets. Problematization of the issues continued during the last decades of the 20th century – to the extent that by the turn of the century, according to Attebery, gender had become “an integral part of the genre’s intellectual and aesthetic structure” (Attebery 10). There could still be room for more explorations of gender and sexuality, as Veronica Hollinger pointed out in 2000: even though science fiction as a genre would be ideal for providing “imaginative challenges to heteronormativity,” it often passes on that opportunity (198).

Changes in the surrounding society and topical issues in identity politics can be seen to be reflected in *Stars in My Pocket* as well. During the late 1960s and early 1970s, feminism and gay and lesbian rights had brought gender and sexuality to the agenda of the nation in the US, and by 1980, the pioneers’ work was bearing fruit: the gay community was being established “as a powerful minority” (Cruikshank 75), and especially multiracial feminist movement was strong during the decade (Thompson 344). At the same time, however, the gay and lesbian activism was confronted with a conservative backlash with the New Right and Christian Right leaders targeting gender and sexual liberation (Stein 116–117). This clash of liberal and conservative ideologies is vividly present in *Stars in My Pocket*.

Even though Reid-Pharr has lamented the “woefully underexamined” fate of *Stars in My Pocket* (390), the almost didactic nature of Delany’s novel has been noted by many. Science fiction scholars have written about their own reactions to the revelations Delany leads his readers to. Especially Carl Freedman and Mary Kay Bray have drawn attention to how the novel seems to “modulate its readers’ consciousness” (Bray 18). Bartter compares the narration of *Stars in My Pocket* to quantum mechanics and concludes that readers experience “a paradigm shift” regarding literature by being “exposed” to novels like *Stars in My Pocket* (336); Blackford, even though he does not seem to agree with all that Delany is trying to achieve with the novel, has pointed out that *Stars in My Pocket* is a “courageous attempt to dramatize explosive themes in the teeth of traditional social attitudes” (41). Broderick, while using *Stars in My Pocket* as an example of postmodern science fiction, and characterizes the novel as “a cognitive assault on late twentieth-century certitudes, or at least on what the text assumes by its activities are such smug prejudices” (140). Tucker concentrates on the racial thematics of the novel, while Reid-Pharr analyzes the connection between cleanliness and the gay identity, and Avilez looks at the novel from the queer perspective. In other words, there is no lack of material on the effects of *Stars in My Pocket*. The impetus for this article was the observation that so many others have also found *Stars in My Pocket* to be a novel that impacts its readers somehow, or is at least aiming to do so, but so far little attention has been paid to the overall rhetorical structure and strategy Delany uses in *Stars in My Pocket*, juxtaposing conservative and liberal ideologies and guiding readers towards certain ethical judgments. This article aims to combine the earlier observations with a rhetorical analysis of *Stars in My Pocket*, using James Phelan’s notions of the rhetorical theory of narrative.

The rhetorical theory of narrative analyzes narrative as a rhetorical act. According to Phelan, the rhetorical theory of narrative ultimately aims to account for how fictional narrative can “reinforce, extend, challenge, or sometimes change what we know, think, believe, and value”

(*Experiencing Fiction* xv). According to Phelan, authors craft their texts in order to elicit particular reactions in their audiences, and the interpretation of a text is conveyed through “the words, techniques, structures, forms, and dialogic relations of texts as well as the genres and conventions readers use to understand them” (*Experiencing Fiction* 4). In this article, the main focus is on ethical judgments those factors prompt readers to make.

In Phelan’s model, the audience of a narrative can be identified on four levels² (*ibid.*). For the purposes of this article, the most important ones are the authorial audience or implied reader and the flesh-and-blood reader, the actual reading individual. Both levels aim to give an account of readers’ interpretations of a fictional narrative. The concept of the authorial audience makes it possible to understand how readers can share the reading experience, while the concept of the flesh-and-blood reader can shed light on how different individuals can have different responses and interpretations” (Phelan, *Experiencing Fiction* 5).

The division of the audience levels can in practice be very slippery, or, using a term from the protagonist of *Stars in My Pocket*, “a fuzzy-edged phenomenon” – thus a clear demarcation between an interpretation by a certain flesh-and-blood reader and one implied in the authorial audience can be difficult to draw. In this article, I am mainly focusing on the authorial audience when analyzing the rhetoric of the text itself. What is the text trying to accomplish, what kinds of emotions to evoke? When discussing the interpretations of other critics and their reactions to the text, I am naturally referring to the actual, flesh-and-blood reading individual. In the model, reader responses are prompted by the text and thus are also indicators of what is going on in the text (Phelan, *Experiencing Fiction* 4). Therefore, the reactions of the flesh-and-blood readers can be used by the rhetorical theorist to shed light on the workings of the text’s authorial audience as well.

Despite the fact that *Stars in My Pocket* was published three decades ago, the issues it addresses are very much topical to this day, with gender equality and the rights of LGTB people still a hot topic all over the world. Therefore, even though the readers of *Stars in My Pocket* during the 1980s would most likely have been more sensitive to the themes in the novel, and the 21st century reader is likely to take the deconstruction of gender and sexuality as more self-evident, the novel’s authorial audience still speaks to a 2010s reader, as more recent examples of the flesh-and-blood readers’ interpretations show.

For a rhetorical analysis, the focus is on what can be found in the text itself, because each narrative establishes its own ethical standards. Therefore, as Phelan puts it, instead of assessing the text in the framework of pre-existing ethical systems “narrative judgments proceed from the inside out rather than outside in” (*Living to Tell* 10). A narrative’s ethical standards are largely manifested in and expressed by the characters in a narrative. Phelan argues that readers make interpretive and ethical judgments on characters, their actions, and the situations they are in during the process of reading, and those interpretations and judgments can and do change while the narrative progresses and characters and situations change³ (*Experiencing Fiction* 7). In the case of Delany’s *Stars in My Pocket*, it is also the readers’ outlook on the novel’s themes that are likely to change. In addition to crafted ethical judgments, Delany uses the science-fictional grotesque as a tool to deconstruct readers’ prejudices or preconceptions about gender, sexuality, and race. The science-fictional grotesque, as defined by Istvan Csicsery-Ronay, is a novum which breaks categories and creates confusion. According to Csicsery-Ronay, “[t]he grotesque obstructs the mind from completing its effort of quick understanding, arresting it when it wishes to get on with its routine of knowing, and forces it to learn something it is not sure it wants to know” (186). By exposing readers to radical

2 Phelan’s model, building on the work of Peter Rabinowitz, and consists of “the flesh-and-blood or actual reader, the authorial audience (the author’s ideal reader or ... the implied reader ..., the narrative audience (the observer position within the narrative world that the flesh-and-blood reader assumes), and the narratee, the audience addressed by the narrator)” (*Experiencing Fiction* 4).

3 Even though a narrative directs readers to adopt changing ethical stances during the process of reading, presently there is no compelling evidence for the permanence of the changes in flesh-and-blood readers’ ethical positions (eg. Suzanne Keen 16-26; Sanford & Emmott 233-234).

alterity in the form of grotesque genders, sexualities, and aliens, and thus providing his readers something to tackle with, Delany makes readers pause at certain key points in the narrative to make interpretations and connections they might otherwise miss.

Dystopian Beginnings

Stars in My Pocket like Grains of Sand begins with a 60 pages long “Prologue” narrating the life of “Rat” Korga, a young man living on a planet called Rhyonon. Korga is a misfit who has been in trouble with the law practically all his life, and at the beginning of the prologue, he is subjected to “radical anxiety termination,” a space age lobotomy that is supposed to make him happy. Instead, he becomes a slave, a “rat” working as a porter at different research stations under appallingly inhuman conditions – until one day his planet is destroyed in a mysterious holocaust, whose cause the readers never get to know.

The society of Rhyonon is sexist, hierarchical, and riddled with taboos, some of which seem very strange. For example, sex between a tall and a short person is forbidden, and homosexuality is illegal before the age of 27 – and seems not to be socially accepted after that either; it is an “unspeakable desire,” as one female character labels it (53). The whole society is riddled with oppression and power struggles. People seem not to be valued as individuals. No-one’s name is mentioned in the prologue; we find out Korga’s name and the name of his planet only afterwards. Instead, people are referred to as “the man,” “the woman,” or “the rat,” which implies that on Rhyonon, the most important factors differentiating people are their gender and their status in a hierarchical society. Women are lower in the social hierarchy; almost all prominent positions in the society are occupied by men. The society on Rhyonon relies heavily on the binary man/woman, and the roles and properties of each are strictly normative. Sexuality is a battlefield on Rhyonon, and sex seems to be mostly happening in terms of the power hierarchies: sadism is common, and “rat” trainers abuse rats sexually, thinking that it adds to their authority. Rhyonon is thus clearly displayed as a dystopian society; it is hard to think of anyone who would find the oppressive world a good place to live in. However, despite the negative ethical judgments in the beginning of the novel, the full extent of the dystopian nature of Rhyonon only sinks in completely later on, in comparison with a better society, which we are introduced to in the main part of the novel.

Critical Utopias and Ambiguous Genders

After the prologue, we take up with Marq Dyeth, an “Industrial Diplomat” who lives in an “urban complex” Morgre on planet Velm, which is home to two intelligent species: humans and the six-legged lizard-like evelmi. Despite antagonisms between the two species in the northern parts of Velm, in Morgre the two species get along fine. Marq’s work as an “Industrial Diplomat” takes him around the galaxy, where there are more than six thousand inhabited worlds and the variety of life forms, cultures and customs is immense. Through complicated circumstances, Marq meets Rat Korga, who has, as the sole survival, been rescued by the galactic organization “the Web” from the burning remains of Rhyonon, and they become lovers. When Marq shows Rat Korga – and the readers – around his home urban complex, through Marq’s narration Delany presents us a society where sexuality is not governed by norms or rigid regulations, as was the case on Rhyonon. Morgran society is egalitarian and people seem to be content with their lives. Everyone can fulfill his or her sexual desires in any way they choose to, regardless of the gender or species of the object of her desire – there are no moral judgments attached to any form of sexuality in the society. Whereas on Rhyonon people were categorized according to their gender or position in society, in

Morgre all are respected as individuals; readers do not even always get to know the gender or species of a character as Marq's narration does not necessarily reveal it; instead, we get to know them by their name, and as individuals and personalities.

Even if Rhyonon could be quite straightforwardly called a dystopia, to call Morgran society a utopia is not as simple. Traditional utopias tend to be guilty of extreme totalization, denying the possibility of further change: for Delany, utopias represent the “unimaginative exclusion of the singular” (McGuirk 177). Instead of imposing rigid structures and ready-made solutions on everyone, Morgran society avoids being oppressive or exclusive. It seems to negotiate the interests of the society and the individual quite well: it is a healthy society that guarantees good living conditions and freedom of choice for each individual, and contented individuals create a peaceful society. Therefore, Morgran society is better described as a critical utopia, which Tom Moylan defines as a text that “reject[s] utopia as blueprint while preserving it as dream” (10). Because critical utopias are neither perfect nor unified, they offer “recognizable and dynamic” alternative models (ibid.). Furthermore, according to Moylan, critical utopias highlight the differences between the original world and the utopian society, making the changes that would be needed to reach that society more evident (10–11). The society of Morgre is not only compared with the “original world,” but also with the dystopian Rhyonon. Looking back at Rhyonon after having been presented with a much more ethical society, readers are likely to see Rhyonon in an even grimmer light than before.

An important factor in creating ethical judgments of the two societies is the way the central characters experience them. When Marq and Korga discuss the differences between their worlds, Korga tells Marq about the laws concerning sexuality on his now destroyed home world: “On my world, sex between males was illegal until you were twenty-seven, although it went on pretty constantly anyway. What was completely illegal on my world was sex between a person your height and a person of mine [a tall and a short person]. For all genders.” (198.) As Tucker, too, has noted, the conversation between Marq and Korga points out the arbitrariness of such proscriptions against different sexual behaviors (258). When Marq asks the question which many readers have on their minds: “Whatever for?” Korga answers that “[i]t was a law – a law that, today, I understand. Thanks to the Web.” (198.) Being dependent on the dialogue between the two characters, readers are never provided any more information than Korga's answer to Marq. Without a valid explanation, readers are left wondering what exactly could be the logic of such a law. By leaving the oddity unexplained, Delany leaves his readers pondering on the motivations behind all laws regulating sexuality – including the laws of the readers' own society.

The narration in *Stars in My Pocket* often pauses soon after confusing passages like this, and has the narrator comment on the experience and prompting certain kinds of interpretations. After the dialogue between Marq and Korga, Marq asks (silently): “Will sex between humans ever lose its endless repeated history?” (199). The rhetorical question stands out in the novel due to its slightly preaching tone, and because Marq, living in a galaxy full of sentient beings, would probably not use the word “human” in a question like this. Therefore, this question is not just Marq's own frustrated thought but seems to be narrative commentary directed at the readers. These estranging moments foreground the fictionality of the text and nudge readers towards drawing the parallels between the fictional world and their own world. Since during these interruptions the narrator can be felt to talk directly to readers, this disruption of the realistic illusion of the narrative could also be seen as a metaphoric way of including readers in the narrative, as a narratee to whom the story is told, as if it was the narrator's acknowledgement of the flesh-and-blood reader's presence. As a result of the readerly enterprise of contrasting the societies of Morgre and Rhyonon, readers are likely to have the revelation Bray suggests: “When considering the ways in which the present and known world would have to be different for a society like Rhyonon's to exist, readers might well surmise that except for its alternative placement in time and space, Rhyonon already exists” (21). Carl Freedman

calls this comparison of the two fictional societies and the readers' reality "complex triangular estrangement," which is a result of contrasting Korga's world and his previous life experiences with Marq's, and then the readers' own "mundane earthly actuality" (160).

Simultaneously with setting the ground for ethical judgments of societies and characters, Delany sets out to deconstruct binary structures behind identity categories like gender, sexuality, and race. Reading *Stars in My Pocket* exposes readers to their own ossified models of thinking by setting cunning "traps" in the way of readers' interpretations in the comfort zone, and then deconstructs those thought structures. As has been suggested before, Delany has been greatly influenced by Jacques Derrida's notions about deconstruction (see e.g. Väättänen "Deconstructing Race"), and he even wrote an article on deconstruction and structuralism for science fiction readers in 1988 ("Neither the First Word"). Delany clearly used the insights gained in this process in his fiction. As a result, one could describe *Stars in My Pocket* as a deconstructive novel; however, it is not the text that is deconstructed during the process of reading but readers' prejudices or preconceptions about gender and sexuality. With the help of a fictional variety of English, which uses gendered pronouns and words like *man* and *woman* in an ambiguous way, *Stars in My Pocket* at times confuses readers by changing the logic of gender, sexuality, and language. In a scene early on in the novel, Marq meets two women in a corridor of a space station:

Both human, both female, . . . , two women strolled up to me. "I think that's him ..." one announced.

"Perhaps for you," said her friend. "For me, while she's quite a pleasant looking male..."

"I'm complimented." I smiled. I nodded. "But while I'm indeed male, this woman is going to refuse your proposition!" (70.)

Soon after the perplexing passage, the logic of Arachnian is explained to readers: all individuals of sentient species are called "women" and referred to with the pronoun *she*, while *he* "has been reserved for the general sexual object of 'she' during the period of excitation, regardless of the gender of the woman speaking or the gender of the woman referred to" (73).

Getting used to this new usage takes time and can be very disorienting: readers often cannot be sure whether a certain character being described in conflicting terms is male or female, and what clues to trust in making the judgment. For example a "woman" Marq meets at a conference is described as "tall," "bald," "towering and shirtless" (82), and there is a pendant hanging "on the bony place between her breasts." "She" has a "broad nose" in her "brown round face," which is "flattened by epicanthic folds" (82). After describing this character, Marq comments – seemingly on the conflicting political emblems she is wearing as well – that "[i]t all seemed ludicrously contradictory" (83). It is, however, hard not to read the comment as mirroring readers' responses to trying to pinpoint the "woman": is she Asian or African, a woman or a man – and, as she is obviously infatuated with a male character – is she thus straight or gay? One's interpretation depends on what features a flesh-and-blood reader finds most pervasive and dominant: physical features like tallness and breasts, cultural factors like hair style or clothing customs, or the gender of the person's object of desire?

Delany's usage of the fictional variety of English is best described as grotesque. Istvan Csicsery-Ronay points out (building on Geoffrey Harpham's ideas of the grotesque) that the science-fictional grotesque works by "present[ing] 'a certain set of obstacles to structured thought', and the mind is troubled, trying to find a solution to the problem posed by perceiving what it should not be possible to perceive" (186). The play on gendered pronouns and words denoting gender leaves in many cases a character's gender – and thus his/her sexual orientation – unresolved, exposing readers to their own conceptions of masculine/feminine traits. Whatever the interpretation, the character cannot completely fit any conventional identity category or cultural expectation.

Delany's narration and his ambiguous characters challenge the attentive reader in that they grotesquely "call into question the adequacy of our ways of organizing the world, of dividing the continuum of experience into knowable parts," as Csicsery-Ronay describes one of the effects of the science-fictional grotesque (186). As a result, readers may be, after a novel's length of these grotesque moments, more open to admit that categorization is futile: gender roles are artificial and sexualities multiple. Indeed, as Marq ponders after the first gender-confusion scene is resolved: "Or is it possible that women are just more complex than can be made out by starlight alone?" (74).

The same conclusion can be made of the aliens in *Stars in My Pocket*, the evelmi, who are in a way an incarnation of a grotesque gender. In addition to being lizard-like and six-legged, the evelmi have three genders: male, female, and neuter. Even though the "neutrality" of gender might evoke an association with asexuality, the neuters seem to be sexually active beings – by which they further complicate the idea that gender must be strictly connected to sexuality. Furthermore, humans and evelmi can and do have sex with each other, and have children together – usually through adoption or cloning, but sometimes producing genetically modified hybrid offspring. The evelmi, as well as the gender ambiguities of *Stars in My Pocket*, resist easy classification and question the meaningfulness of strict binary categories of sex, gender, and sexuality.

When discussing *Stars in My Pocket*, Damien Broderick notes that science fiction performs a transgression of gender and sexuality outlined by Jacques Derrida:

Were we to approach the area of a relationship to the other where the code of sexual marks would no longer be discriminating [... that relationship] would not be a-sexual, far from it, but would be sexual otherwise: beyond the opposition feminine/masculine, beyond homosexuality and heterosexuality which come to the same thing... this mobile of non-identified sexual marks whose choreography can carry, divide, multiply the body of each 'individual,' whether he be classified as 'man' or 'woman' according to the criteria of usage. (qtd. in Broderick 50.)

Delany takes advantage of the genre's potential to the full. In Delany's universe, sexuality has broken through the framework we are used to when thinking of sexuality: the most important defining factor of sexuality in *Stars in My Pocket* is not gender but each individual's personal tastes or desires that might not be linked to gender in any way. By presenting us his universe full of diverse sexualities, Delany has obviously wanted his reader to gain the insight that "when one begins to consider the range of diversities through the sexual landscape, the so-called normalcy of heterosexuality does not seem so 'normal' anymore" ("Aversion/Perversion/Diversion" 141). As GerShun Avilez puts it, in *Stars in My Pocket* the range of sexualities generate "cartographies of desire" and create "queer space" within the novel (126).

Shifting Ethical Judgments

Regardless of how positively *Stars in My Pocket* presents this new world of possibilities and new ways of thinking of gender and sexuality, the reading experience is confusing in all its grotesqueness: the evelmi do feel alien and the habits of the people of Morgre do seem weird at times. The ethical judgments readers are trying to come to terms with are mirrored by the reactions of those characters in the book who are visitors to Morgre: Rat Korga and an acquaintance family of Marq's, the Thants. In the beginning of novel, when the Thants make their first appearance, it is easy for readers to relate to them and adopt their attitudes towards Marq's way of life as, being strangers to the Morgran society, they find everything a little odd. As Broderick has noted, the Thants shun the Morgran "utterly casual, often homosexual and generally interspecific sexuality," like many of the novel's readers may do (140). They talk about "the local aliens," and especially the

youngest of them, Alsrod, who is visiting Morgre for the first time, asks a lot of questions and amusedly marvels at everything Marq tells her. The Thants seem to be unable to fully accept the fact that the evelmi are intelligent co-inhabitants in Morgre, but instead see them as animals and openly call them “lizards.” Rat Korga, on the other hand, despite never having been outside his home planet before, takes to the new world with an open mind. With Marq, he gets to know Morgran society and tries his best to adjust. As the parallels between Rat Korga’s world and the contemporary society begins to dawn on readers, it becomes easier and easier to adopt Korga’s point of view – to the point of Freedman describing him as “a kind of utopian Everyman” (161) who facilitates readers’ journey towards the kind of conclusions the text aims for.

Phelan argues that “[t]he default expectation for reading fiction is that authors will take ethical stands on the events and characters they represent and will guide us explicitly or implicitly, heavy-handedly or subtly (or, indeed, any way in between) to adopt those stands.” Furthermore, as Phelan points out, in some cases, the ethical judgments of characters work by clear contrast (*Living to Tell* 52). This is obviously the case with *Stars in My Pocket*: the desired ethical stand is apparent and created to a large extent by contrasting characters, societies, and attitudes against each other. Conservative and liberal ethical standards are polarized in the novel between the two coexisting or competing ideologies, the Sygn and the Family. For the conservative Family followers, the genders, families, and sexualities of the aliens break their (human) norms and thus make the aliens seem grotesque and unnatural. The followers of the Family cling to heteronormative ideals and strongly disapprove of the human–evelm relationships, as well as everything else that differs from their idealized view of the life of the human race on Earth a long time ago. In Marq’s words, they are “trying to establish the dream of a classic past as pictured in a world that may never even have existed [the Earth] in order to achieve cultural stability” (80). Quite symbolically, they cherish objects like “the platinum centimeter bars ... and plastic molecular models of human DNA, all lovingly imported (supposedly) from world to world,” conserving them in museums or “retreats” on worlds they colonize (96). Whereas the Family is devoted to conserving old ideals and morals, the Sygn is “committed to the living interaction and difference between each woman and each world from which the right stability and play may flower” (80). For the Sygn adherents, human–alien coexistence is quite natural, because all sentient beings are equal. The Sygn accepts change, adaptation, alterity, and cultural relativity as the basis of any functional society. Human and alien cultures fuse and produce interesting hybrids in all areas of the society, from architecture to offspring. In a Sygn environment like Morgre, everyone’s individuality seems to be respected and everyone is accepted as they are.

Central to both of the ideologies is their conceptions of a family, or a “nurture stream,” as they are called in a Sygn society. For the Family, the basic unit of society is the traditional nuclear family consisting of a father, a mother, and their children. The Sygn avoids that model, because for them, it “represents a power structure, a structure of strong and mediating powers, and subordinate powers, as well as paths for power developments and power restrictions” (119). In a Sygn society, nurture streams do not imply power structures or predetermined gender roles, but are based on “community and communion” between individuals regardless of their age, species, or gender (118). Readers learn later that the Family uses “focus families,” families who function as models for a whole world, when attempting to stabilize a society in turmoil – a term that undoubtedly invokes in many readers’ minds the conservative evangelical organization Focus on the Family, which promotes conservative gender roles and disapproves of LGBT rights. Founded in the late 70s, it was active during the time of publication of *Stars in My Pocket*. Making that connection evokes strong associations of what the values of a Family society and a “focus family” are, and on the other hand, by guiding readers to a negative ethical judgments of their actions and ideology, provides insight into the implications of that kind of ideology in real life.

Another indication of the way the contrasting ethical judgments work in *Stars in my Pocket* is the ethical judgments readers make of the outsider characters Rat Korga and the Thants towards the end of the novel. Phelan points out that “narrativity involves the interaction of two kinds of change: that experienced by the characters and that experienced by the audience in its developing responses to the characters’ changes” (*Living to Tell about It* 7). At the beginning of the novel, when readers met the Thants for the first time, they and their bemusement were quite easy to identify with. However, when they reappear towards the end of the novel, readers have had time to explore the Sygn ideology and follow Rat Korga’s adjustment to the new freedom provided by that kind of society. Even though the new liberal world pleases Korga, it still makes him slightly anxious, as his comment on his experiences and all the new things he has learned shows: “One burden of all this new knowledge is that old certainties crumble beneath it” (199). As Korga is originally from a world that resembles our own world, many of Korga’s old certainties are the same as the readers’, and those readers who by the end of the novel are willing to question their old certainties, become like Rat Korga, soaking in the sense of wonder at the new worlds and new ideas.

If many readers admit to being more like Rat Korga than one might have imagined in the beginning, the Thant family induce an opposite reaction with regard to identification and ethical judgments. When they return to Morgre, they appear bigoted and rude. At a party organized in their honor, they talk loudly amongst themselves, condemning the Morgran way of life as bestiality, a disease and an unnatural crime, “which can only be cured by the most primitive means: quarantine, fire, prayer...” (303). For the Thants, the depravity of the Morgran way of life is culminated in liberal sexuality: “Not only the males with the females, but the males do it with males, the females do it with females, within the race, across the races – and what are we to make of neuters – as if they had not even reached the elementary stage of culture, however ignorant, where a family takes its appropriate course...” (302). Their hate speech clearly echoes the prejudices and bigoted arguments in our contemporary world, to the extent that Freedman has described it as “Christian fascism” (158) and “the ‘equivalent of unabashed Ku Klux racism’” (159). This scene is obviously one of the most ethically loaded ones, as so many critics have reacted strongly to it. Broderick finds the Thants to be “unpleasant and ignoble” (144), and Bray notes that the Thants are “a visible reminder to readers of how far current social reality is removed from the possibilities ... manifest in Morgran society” (23). Tucker points out the racist connotations of the epithet “lizard-lover” the Thants use of Marq: for Tucker, it is a “term that models the fear of miscegenation, antipathy towards whites invested in black liberation” (266).

The intensity of the flesh-and-blood readers’ reactions can be explained by two factors in the novel’s structure, both having to do with the changing ethical judgments and the timing of the scene in the narrative. Firstly, by leading readers to certain ethical judgments, the novel entices readers to see the novel’s liberal universe as desirable, and the world of Rhyonon, the Family ideology, as well as the world we live in as narrow-minded and intolerant. Thus, having been exposed to the immense variety of sexualities in the new universe, the Thant/Family version of rigid heterosexuality seems like a hidebound attitude readers are not invited to join in (Broderick 144). Secondly, readers have learned to know the characters, whose lives these ideologies have had an impact on, and the Thants’ insults seem so harsh because they attack the way of life that makes the main characters justifiably happy. Furthermore, by having the Thants use rhetoric which resembles that of contemporary anti-gay discourse, the scene resonates strongly with regard to current state of affairs in the real world, both during the 1980s and the 2010s. Delany leads readers to see attitudes like those expressed by the Thants as extremely negative, only to realize that, actually, it is our own society – perhaps our own attitudes – that we have just disapproved of.

Conclusion

All in all, the rhetorical structure of *Stars in My Pocket like Grains of Sand* is based on contrast. Societies, characters, and ideologies are juxtaposed so that readers are led to make certain ethical judgments: negative judgments of the conservative societies and characters, positive judgments of the liberal ones – finally evoking the epiphany of parallels between the conservative ideologies and the world readers live in. This estrangement is typical of science fiction in general, as Moylan points out: science fiction and utopian literature are “meditations upon deep conflicts in the historical present that are displaced onto the terrain of an otherworldly locus so that the reader, consciously or unconsciously, can see her or his society and its contradictions in a fresh and perhaps motivating light” (32). Therefore, reading *Stars in My Pocket* means exposing readers also to the ethical shortcomings of the contemporary society. Martha Bartter notes, discussing Delany’s fiction in relation to the postmodern quantum paradigm, that the structure and rhetoric of the narrative do have an effect on readers in the end: “Having experienced *Stars in My Pocket* ... must change the way we look at the beginning of the book, at the relationships it explores, at ourselves. The world-view inevitably alters work, even as the work alters world-view” (336, emphasis original).

At the end of the novel, in the “Epilogue” named “Morning,” Marq is traveling to a distant world in a large space ship and he is reflecting on other trips he has made during his career as industrial diplomat. He remembers visiting “a society far more liberal than any [he]’d ever known” and how he felt when leaving it. This memory makes Marq ruminate on the effects of visiting a world different from one’s own: “To leave a world at dawn ... is to know how much you can want to remember; and to realize how much, because of the cultural and conceptual grid a world casts over our experience of it, we are victims to that truth against our will, once we tear loose from it into night” (338). In addition to providing a metaphoric description of the experiences of the readers who might still be trying to come to terms with the novel’s themes at the last pages of the novel passage, the passage – like many similar ones earlier in the novel – also directs readers to reflect on their experience and the “cultural and conceptual grid” now that they are leaving the world of *Stars in My Pocket*.

James Phelan describes the default ethical relation between the implied author and readers as one of mutual influence. Authors provide readers with “guidance to their particular value systems and to the ethical judgments that follow from those systems” and in return, receive the attention of their audiences. Readers, on the other hand, receive “reinforcements, challenges to, or disagreements with their own value systems” (*Experiencing Fiction* 53–54). *Stars in My Pocket* offers plenty of challenges and reinforcements. It aims at showing readers which side it is preferable to be on, mostly with the help of changing ethical judgments of the characters and their actions, especially the Thant family and Rat Korga, both outsiders in Morgre. In *Stars in My Pocket*, the followers of the Family ideology do not change – they take good care not to – but readers are, during the process of reading the novel, led to realize the evils that the Family-type ideology causes and perhaps to adopt the Sygn way of embracing difference. They are enticed to join in Rat Korga’s acceptance of this new liberal and liberating way of thinking and to reject the conservative Thant way. As Istvan Csicsery-Ronay put it, the science fictional grotesque “forces [the mind] to learn something it is not sure it wants to know” (186). This is exactly what *Stars in My Pocket like Grains of Sand* does to its readers. Negotiating one’s way through the abundance of sexualities, readers are invited to widen their horizons and to reconsider their own attitudes towards different aspects of gender, sexuality, and alterity.

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Fafnir – Nordic Journal of Science Fiction and Fantasy Research

journal.finfar.org

Agents or Pawns? Power Relations in William Gibson's Bigend Trilogy

Esko Suoranta

Abstract: The article explores power relations, resistance, and agency in William Gibson's Bigend Trilogy, his three latest novels to date. It analyzes Gibson's protagonists through Michel Foucault's observations on power. In the Bigend Trilogy, power relations between free individuals are turned into relations of constraint by various agents, most importantly by the advertising magnate Hubertus Bigend. Furthermore, Foucault's principle of the Panopticon is applied through modern surveillance technology, which plays a prominent role in the novels, to manipulate power relations.

Such manipulations lead to resistance in Gibson's protagonists who try to retain their agency in a world order that strives to dominate them. The characters appear as versions of John G. Cawelti's Western heroes and villains on the border between progressive order and independent chaos. The protagonists are not, in the end, invested in defeating schemes to dominate global power relations, but those that threaten their personal integrity. The article argues against Tom Henthorne's interpretation of the conclusion of the trilogy as dystopian and devoid of choice, claiming that the protagonists do not remain pawns in a game, but succeed in their resistance, emerging as agents on their own terms.

Keywords: Gibson, William; power; surveillance; agency, Bigend Trilogy

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Introduction

“[T]he actual conspiracy is not so often about us; we are most often the merest cogs in larger plans.” (Pattern Recognition 341)

The partially invisible and nearly untouchable nature of global security apparatuses has cast an Orwellian hue on life in the 21st century. In the post-Patriot Act era, and especially after the 2013 NSA leaks, it seems clear that we live double lives, the first as ordinary citizens going about our daily routines, the second as potential security threats whose every move, especially on the Internet, must be cataloged and processed by the powers that be. This is all for the greater good of national security, no matter how grave violations of the rights of privacy it might engender.

William Gibson's contemporary novels *Pattern Recognition* (2003), *Spook Country* (2007), and *Zero History* (2010) all predate the NSA revelations, but still deal with the zeitgeist of the world as a network of information, individuals, and powers that are worried about the subversive potential of the other two. The protagonists of the three novels find themselves under constant surveillance and are faced with an abusive attitude that threatens their personal security and integrity. In this essay, I explore how these violations lead to acts of opposition against these entities in terms of Foucauldian relations of power. Further, I analyze how the protagonists' characterization as, for example, "wild card[s]" (*Zero History* 24) and "rogue wave[s]" (*Zero History* 347), links them to John G. Cawelti's model of the Western hero whose existential choices veer on the border between progressive order and independent chaos.

Gibson has been called many things. After *Neuromancer*, his immensely successful 1984 debut, he has been recognized as the seminal cyberpunk author and one of the most important figures of science fiction in the late 20th century. His recent novels have so far distanced themselves from speculative futures and attached themselves more clearly to the present, resulting in opinions denouncing him as a science fiction author. To Gibson, however, there is no other way that "the actual twenty-first century" can be "unpacked [but] with the toolkit of science fiction" (*Distrust That Particular Flavor* 46).

Thus, it is not surprising that *Pattern Recognition*, *Spook Country*, and *Zero History* seem to bridge the supposed gap between speculative and realist. Their world is that of our own or, more accurately, an alternate recent history, as the books are set exactly a year before their respective publication. The narratives incorporate elements we recognize to be part of the immediate real – from global events like 9/11 and the market crash of 2008 to pieces of technology the impact of which has been revealed only in retrospect (e.g., iPods, social media, GPS and drone technology) – and those of the speculative (but conceivable) like print patterns on clothing that erase surveillance footage, computer programming predicting the state of the market, and EMP weapons used in corporate espionage.

Gibson's placement on the realist–postmodern continuum has been problematic due to this amalgam of real and speculative. Tom Henthorne notes that much of the academic discussion after Fredric Jameson attempted to categorize Gibson as a postmodern author in the early 1990s centered on debating the claim. According to Henthorne, some critics agreed that his settings might be postmodern, but that the action in his novels is resolved with realist and humanist techniques (4). Jameson has remained adamant and sees *Pattern Recognition* as a novel of "hyped-up name-dropping," where the usage of brand names "whose very dynamic conveys both instant obsolescence and the global provenance and neo-exoticism of the world market" marks a postmodern attitude (386–387). He cites Cayce's ability to intuitively know "by the opaque standards of her inner radar" (*Pattern Recognition* 12) whether a logo or brand works as suspending the novel "between Science Fiction and realism [lending] it . . . extraordinary resonance" (390). Brian McHale echoes Jameson's sentiments in saying that all science fiction is paradigmatically postmodern as it is ripe with "intertextual circulation" that is made open and visible (12).

Jaak Tomberg notes that Jameson's claim is mainly based on the general structure and motifs of *Pattern Recognition* and takes the argument one step further by looking at the actual poetics of the late Gibson canon. To him, the Bigend Trilogy does not merely include science fictional and realist elements that exist "side by side," but rather that the novels, even at the level of the sentence, register "as realism and science fiction *at the same time*" and that "the simultaneous feeling of utmost familiarity and utter cognitive estrangement" are at the heart of Gibson's style (267, emphasis original). Tomberg calls for new terminology for this "double vision" (281), but believes that the "contemporary technocultural immanence," which Gibson's novels have always dealt with, must intensify in actuality for such a single perspective to overcome the divide between realist and speculative in criticism (282).

Thematically, Gibson's world is one of hidden structures and influences, which are kept concealed and vague in equal measure by paramilitary stealth and astronomical fortunes. It is populated by unknown oligarchs, well-connected spooks, Special Forces fantasists, arrogant arms-dealers, and, most importantly, Hubertus Bigend, Belgian advertising magnate par excellence. In fact, the trilogy revolves around Bigend, although he hardly is the protagonist in any of the novels. He is a fleet-footed businessman, epitomizing the ideological atmosphere of the late capitalist 2000s and makes the most of global upheavals from a business perspective. The novels' events are hinged on the key historical turns of western society between 2000 and 2010, from 9/11 and the war on terror to, finally, the financial crisis of 2008 – an era characterized by doubts concerning both the European project of unity and increasingly successful global capitalism as a guarantee of prosperity.

The three historical events noted above act as the background for the narratives of the Bigend Trilogy. In *Pattern Recognition*, Cayce Pollard's father disappears in New York on September 11th 2001, launching her on a trajectory that brings Bigend and his advertising agency Blue Ant into her life. The war on terror, on the other hand, rages in the background as Hollis Henry in *Spook Country* becomes involved first with Bigend, then with covert agents, Garreth and the "old man" (239), on a mission to play a billion dollar prank on the security operatives bent on profiting on the Iraq War. In *Zero History*, we meet Hollis again, still grappling with Bigend's "dire gravity" (337), trying to pull herself free and finding it difficult, having lost half of her fortune in the market crash.

Veronica Hollinger suggests that the Bigend Trilogy differs from Gibson's earlier novels in its approach to futurity. For example, *Neuromancer* and *All Tomorrow's Parties* both end in "profound change . . . [a] transformation implied by some radical technological event," the AI Wintermute's attainment of consciousness in the former novel and virtual Rei Toei's emergence as a physical being in the latter, the repercussions of which are not discussed, as if they were impossible to imagine (461). These mark a "technological singularity [that] cuts us off from the historical past, leaving us stranded in difference" (462). Hollinger goes on to say that *Pattern Recognition*, in contrast, is an attempt to address this disjunction, symbolically brought on by 9/11, the events of which Cayce recalls in a chapter titled "Singularity" (462). The singularity thus becomes the starting point of her story, marking the time depicted in the novel as "postmodern time . . . time-after-the-end-time" that represents "our hesitation in letting go of the past and our anxiety that we are, in fact, on the other side of irrevocable change" (463). Later in the trilogy, the war on terror and the financial crisis emerge as the unforeseen repercussions of 9/11. They force the protagonists to navigate a world order they are inevitably unfamiliar with and to discover their capability of agency within it.

Gibson's protagonists, in contrast to the shadowy movers and shakers of his world, are somewhat commonplace and not as privy to the "world's hidden architectures" (*Zero History* 18). In *Pattern Recognition*, Cayce Pollard is hypersensitive to the special something that makes brand imagery effective, working as a freelance "piece of human litmus paper" to fashion designers and companies (13). She ends up working with Bigend to find the maker of mysterious film-footage segments surfacing online – a phenomena she has already followed through Fetish:Footage:Forum, an online community of enthusiasts. Similarly, in *Spook Country*, Hollis Henry is on the Blue Ant freelance payroll as an aspiring journalist (and former rock-singer), employed to find a cargo container sailing the seven seas and filled with \$100 bills, adrift and lost on their purported journey to rebuild Iraq. In *Zero History*, Hollis returns to Bigend's employment to find whoever designs and markets Gabriel Hounds denim, successfully "copying some of [Bigend's] weirder marketing strategies . . . improving on them" (100) to help him in "military contracting" (197). Both Cayce and Hollis start to work with Bigend willingly, much due to their own financial and professional needs, but quickly become aware of his unnerving practices of surveillance and his seeming

incapability of taking no for an answer. These practices are at the heart of Bigend's approach to power relations between free individuals: he consciously seeks to manipulate them to promote his own, usually hidden, agendas, restricting the freedom of his cooperatives in the process.

Wielding Power: Foucault and Gibson

In his afterword to Hubert L. Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow's *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, Foucault summarizes several features of his understanding of power that I employ in my analysis of the Bigend Trilogy. First, he makes the distinction between power relations and relations of constraint. To Foucault, power is not unidirectional, nor is it an object possessed by someone wielding it and lacked by its target. Rather, power is always a relationship between individuals in which "actions modify others," that is, "power only exists when it is put into action" (219). As a result, power is always exercised over free subjects and true power relations can only exist between them – if one of the counterparts were not free, the relation would be that of constraint, or slavery (221). This does not mean that violence and coercion (or consent at the other end of the spectrum) would be wholly absent from power relations, but to Foucault they are results or instruments of power, not its essence (220). As power exists only in the active interplay between subjects, it can open up "a whole field of responses, reactions, results, and possible inventions" (220). This field is marked by the intertwined nature of power's insistence and "freedom's refusal to submit" (221) that leads to "agonism . . . [that is] less of a face-to-face confrontation which paralyzes both sides than a permanent provocation," a relation of reciprocal struggle (222).

All in all, it would seem that different agents in the Bigend Trilogy seek to turn true power relations into relations of constraint and oppression. This is definitely the case with Dorotea in *Pattern Recognition*, when Cayce is antagonized by her as a competitor for Bigend's favor. She intrudes on Cayce's privacy by using information stolen from the records of Cayce's therapist to trigger her phobia of Bibendum, the original Michelin Man (96–98) and later sends "Prada clone[s]" (153) to follow and scare her away from working with Bigend's agency, Blue Ant. Dorotea's actions are aimed at incapacitating Cayce and restricting her actions in the interplay of power, in their case enacted in both the realms of fashion and advertising as well as that of the Fetish:Footage:Forum, to which both Cayce and Dorotea contribute.

A similar tendency is visible in Milgrim and Brown's relationship in *Spook Country*, but in their case, one has already oppressed the other. Brown is a security operative, working under an unnamed government agency, tasked to intercept coded text messages that could reveal the whereabouts of the precious shipping container which Bigend and Hollis also track. He has captured Milgrim, a translator of Russian turned prescription drug junkie, to help crack the codes in return of a steady supply of anxiety medicine.

To Foucault, "[w]hat makes power hold good, what makes it accepted, is simply the fact that it doesn't only weigh on us as a force that says no, but that it traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms of knowledge, produces discourse" (*Power/Knowledge* 119). If this were not the case, there would be no motivation to obey its impulses. With Milgrim, it would first seem that he is utterly devoid of any meaningful ways to oppose his captor. He spends most of *Spook Country* leashed to Brown, doing as he is told on their hunt for the container. Much of his interaction with Brown consists of nodding or remaining silent, even if he manages to consider escape fairly early: "How long was one expected to live one's life in the tautly strung fug of Brown's curdled testosterone?" (66). Gradually, his distaste for Brown grows and he attempts to flee when Brown's attention wavers, as he, too, gets closer to the secrets behind the container. Eventually Milgrim succeeds in regaining his freedom, accidentally attracting Bigend's surprisingly benign attention in the process (which becomes central in *Zero History*).

Brown's reliance on the threat of violence and "saying no" (as Foucault puts it in *Power/Knowledge* 119), leads to rebellion in the subject, as such tendencies of coercion do in the case of power relations between free individuals in the trilogy. The fact that Brown possesses coveted anxiety medication is what keeps Milgrim submissive, "makes power accepted" in Foucault's words, because, in this case, it "induces pleasure" (119). Still, Brown's overwhelming denials lead to Milgrim's resistance despite the pleasure, because it exists independently of his relation to Brown. Thus, the constraint is not productive, remaining "open to loopholes and resistances" (119) and it becomes possible for Milgrim to dream he "could . . . snag . . . Brown's bag, wherein . . . would be found the brown paper bag of Rize. And walk away" (234). In the end, when a chance presents itself after Brown crashes their car, he manages to "pocket the bubble-packs [of the drug]," in turn say "No" to Brown's order to stay put, and flee (419).

Bigend is by far the most important of all the characters invested in the global power relations that launch Cayce, Hollis, and Milgrim on their adventures. He too, even if not directly antagonistic to any of the protagonists, employs several means to keep them under surveillance and participates in introducing coercion into the power relations between him and those he works with. Their cell-phones ring at all hours as he checks up on them, he appears in hotel lobbies to hear reports, and his employees follow them around on motorbikes, on planes, and via radio-controlled drones. On top of that his chief of security taps cell-phones and hacks laptops, first under Bigend, then joining his enemies in the same capacity. Such measures impose a "lack of autonomy" (*Pattern Recognition* 171) that furthers the protagonists' dislike of Bigend.

Importantly, Bigend's all-encompassing surveillance network starts to resemble Foucault's Panoptic system in the course of the trilogy. In his genealogical account of the developments of disciplinary power, Foucault presents Jeremy Bentham's 18th-century notion of an ideal prison as the epitome of disciplinary power over individuals as docile bodies (*Michel Foucault* 134–135, 188–190). This model of the Panopticon, where a guard is positioned so that he is able to survey all the inmates without them knowing whether they are watched or not, results in the prisoners adopting ways of behavior where they essentially keep watch on themselves – even if no actual surveillance occurs at a given time. In *Power/Knowledge*, Foucault sums up the benefits of such a system as follows: "There is no need for arms, physical violence, material constraints. Just a gaze. An inspecting gaze . . . each individual . . . interiorising [it] to the point that he is his own overseer, each individual thus exercising this surveillance over, and against, himself" (155). Such a system is unavailable to Dorotea and Brown, whose techniques of power are limited to forms of violence, but to Bigend with his legions of henchmen and vast capabilities for technological surveillance, the whole world seems to become a part of his private Panopticon as regards Cayce, Hollis, and Milgrim. The invisibility of his surveillance apparatus has all protagonists repeatedly question their privacy and induces paranoia that they have to overcome in order to retain their agency and freedom. Bigend's Panopticon thus seeks to alter the basic foundation of the relation of power between him and the protagonists: to reduce it into a relation of constraint without the freedom Foucault holds prerequisite for true power relations.

This project of reduction compromises the protagonists' sense of personal integrity and security. While they begin to cooperate with Bigend of their own volition, both Cayce and Hollis come to find that the price of his patronage is too high. As Cayce gets closer to the maker of the footage, she realizes "how working for Bigend . . . has skewed her relationship to . . . the footagehead community" (*Pattern Recognition* 173), her tribe, so to speak, of like-minded people. Even her closest friends do not "know what she's up to, who she's working for" (173). In Hollis's case, she finds that Bigend's "capacity for risk-taking . . . [makes] him . . . so peculiarly dangerous to be around" (*Zero History* 23) and, when she first finds out that Bigend tends to keep secrets, that "[t]here was something about this, suddenly, that she really didn't like, and in some entirely new way. She imagined the bed a desert of white sand. Something circling, hidden, beneath its surface"

(*Spook Country* 44), likening him to the frightening Mongolian Death Worm “[o]ut there in the dunes” (453). According to Foucault, such impulses brought on by an acting power relation result in provocation and struggle, a refusal to submit (*Michel Foucault* 221–222), in other words, acts of resistance.

Different entities and individuals in the Bigend Trilogy further their hegemonic agendas by the coercive techniques of power. Some, like Dorotea and Brown are restricted to literal constraint and different degrees of violence in so doing. They do not have access to a Panoptic system, where a gaze would be enough to manage its targets, reducing them to docility. Their approach works to a point, but is not, as Foucault predicts, sustainable. Milgrim escapes with his drugs of choice, while Cayce succeeds in everything Dorotea tries to prevent. With Bigend and the invisible Blue Ant surveillance network, the need for direct violence is nearly eliminated. The protagonists can never be certain whether they are being watched and need to consider their actions with that in mind. However, the experiences of constraint and loss of autonomy that result from the all-encompassing nature of the system lead to the unease which lies at the heart of their ultimate opposition.

Characters as Agents and Pawns

The source of Cayce's and Hollis's resistance is the threat to their personal security and sense of self. Henthorne, however, does not see this as the most significant struggle in the trilogy. Rather, he interprets the protagonists' opposition in terms of Bigend's overall project, emerging in the course of *Zero History*, to discover “the order flow” (*Zero History* 177), the state of the markets at any given moment, the knowledge of which would result in control of the future (at least as far as doing business goes). To Henthorne, Bigend's ultimate success in this megalomaniac scheme marks the birth of a dystopia in which Gibson's characters lose their ability to resist domination. In Henthorne's interpretation, “agency itself is lost and all possibility of change is closed out” (51) and “gestures of resistance . . . become impossible . . . and people like Bigend obtain unprecedented power” (37).

However, this pessimistic interpretation of the loss of agency and the impossibility of change warrants closer scrutiny. First, it should be noted that Henthorne's view on power can be viewed through the Foucauldian ideas discussed so far. If we understand Bigend's obtaining of near-ultimate power as an increased capacity to turn real power relations between free individuals into relations of coercion (as his Panoptic impulses attempt to do), then, certainly, resistance becomes more difficult. Is Bigend really capable of attaining such a measure of force in relation to the protagonists, to Gibson's heroes, of the trilogy? The answer seems to hinge on the reading of agency as regards Cayce, Hollis, and Milgrim, respectively. Can it truly be said that they, as main protagonists of the three novels, end up in dystopia and lose their agency altogether?

In *Pattern Recognition*, Bigend insists on calling Cayce's cooperation with him “a partnership” (191), but theirs is an asymmetric relationship from the start. Still, while working with Bigend to discover the maker of the footage, Cayce realizes her complicity in the Blue Ant project that “gradually makes London and New York feel more like each other, that dissolves the membranes between mirror-worlds” (194) and leads to Bigend's triumph at the end of *Zero History*. After finding out that Bigend is creating interest in the footage for marketing purposes, Cayce feels “not foreign but alien, made so by this latest advent of something that seems to be infecting everything. Hubertus [Bigend]” (88). To protect the footage from this infection, she decides not to tell Bigend when she finally finds the Volkova sisters behind its production and instead warns them of him: “I won't be working for him, now. But others will, and they'll find you, and you have to be ready.” Cayce consistently tries to uncover, challenge, and resist the coercive system that tries to dominate her. When, without Bigend's knowledge, Cayce sends her first message to Stella Volkova

she has a “sensation of existing at some still point around which all else revolves” (257). The power dynamic shifts instantly as a consequence of her actions, but also becomes visible as she realizes the potential weight of her agency, even if her attempt at protecting what she holds dear fails and Bigend is able to turn the footage Cayce loves into an elaborate scheme to sell shoes, as becomes clear in *Spook Country* (139).

While the identity of the Volkovas and the integrity of the footage are compromised, many of Cayce’s various conflicts do get resolved at the end of *Pattern Recognition*. She reaches closure as regards the fate of her father, befriends the Volkovas in learning their role behind the footage, and shakes off her allergy to Bibendum and other symbols of corporate identity. This last resolution ends her career as the coolhunter-savante she has been, because it effectively deactivates her quasi-paranormal abilities that have made her so useful to Bigend and his pursuits. The end result is bitter-sweet: for the moment, she retains her independence and shakes off Bigend’s attempts to control her, but has to see the footage she values turned into a banality of advertising.

Cayce is met again in *Zero History*, in circumstances that bring out another element to the interpretation of her opposition’s success. She has become the designer of the Gabriel Hounds jeans Bigend has Hollis looking for and actually beats Bigend at his own game. She turns her “secret brand” (32) into a success story, but manages to keep it hidden from Bigend who is the true expert on guerrilla marketing. When Hollis finally finds her, Cayce is ready to go public with her designs, having enjoyed obliqueness long enough to keep Bigend at bay, so much so that “not being on [Bigend’s] side has actually become a big part of who she is” (346).

The importance of this existential quest of personal integrity debunks, in Cayce’s case, Henthorne’s pessimistic argument on the loss of agency. True, Cayce does not stop Bigend from succeeding in his most important project, that of discovering the order flow, but that is not, in fact, the most important enactment of resistance for her. Defeating Bigend’s pursuit for global leverage is never on Cayce’s agenda, really. Rather, she has chosen a strategy of avoidance to protect her own integrity. She maintains her agency and freedom, even using Bigend’s own strategies of obfuscation to her advantage, and is not forced into constraint in the new world order, remaining the Gabriel Hounds designer rather than a pawn on Bigend’s board.

In this respect, Hollis’s perpetual provocation resembles that of Cayce’s as she, too, feels a need to avoid Bigend and the influence he represents rather than oppose his overall schemes for control. Even when working on his projects, first trying to track down the elusive cargo container in *Spook Country*, she tries to convince herself that she is but a journalist and refuses to “think of herself as Bigend’s employee” (182) invested in “[t]he Bigend version” with “[p]irates, their boats, CIA maritime units . . . a shipping container” (183). Her likening of Bigend to the Mongolian Death Worm is much like Cayce’s idea of him as a creeping infection.

Hollis’s moments of resistance are also linked to her existential ideas of independence and, importantly, altruism. When she finally finds Cayce to be the designer of the Gabriel Hounds, she does not let her reveal her name, saying that “if you don’t tell me . . . I can continue to tell Hubertus that I don’t know your name” (*Zero History* 334). Earlier, Hollis sums up her stance on her employment, while explaining that she will not sacrifice someone else’s privacy to benefit Bigend: “Look, this is just a job for me, one I wish I didn’t have. Not even a job. Just Bigend bribing me to do something for him” (229). At this point, the power relation between her and Bigend has taken such characteristics that the pleasure or benefit of monetary income is not enough for Hollis to submit to Bigend’s will. As a result, Bigend never learns of Cayce’s identity behind the Gabriel Hounds, her integrity protected both by her own resistance and Hollis’s strategy of withholding information. Ultimately, then, Cayce resists the commodification that the footage succumbs to at the end of *Pattern Recognition*. The omission of her name marks her success in remaining outside Bigend’s Panoptic, reductionist system. It is also linked to what Jameson views as the core conflict in *Pattern Recognition*: the struggle between “postmodern nominalism” (387), the impulse to name

and commodify, and "systematic effacement" (389) of branded identity, resulting in Cayce's triumph at the end of the trilogy as she remains unnamed and in control of her integrity.

Hollis's volition to protect her own individuality reaches its apex when Bigend has his order flow project compromised after Gracie, his self-appointed adversary, kidnaps Bobby Chombo, the programmer responsible for the technological aspects of the venture. Bigend then decides that Milgrim has become expendable and plans to hand him over to Gracie (who harbors personal vengeance against Milgrim), but Hollis intervenes. She takes advantage of Bigend's momentary lack of leverage, threatening to bring the police and "the *Times* and the *Guardian*" upon him (281). She resorts to contacts she first met at the end of *Spook Country*, Garreth having become her love interest in the interim between the two novels. Garreth possesses the skills, the technology, and the contacts which Bigend desperately needs as Sleight, his chief of security, has shifted allegiances. Hollis promises Garreth's aid to Bigend if he agrees to spare Milgrim, terminate his search for the Gabriel Hounds, and relinquish her from his service. The three terms are "the least attractive" to Bigend, but he accepts nonetheless (387). This way, through her adamant opposition, the three conflicts that most seriously threaten Hollis's integrity and agency result in utter triumph of those values she finds the most important.

Despite Bigend's manipulative tactics, Cayce and Hollis remain unpredictable individuals whose force is embedded in their sense of integrity and independence. Bigend sees them primarily as "wild card[s]" who are exempt from "mediocrity inherent in professional competence" (*Zero History* 24) and thus best qualified for whatever enterprises he plans to execute. This potential is also at the heart of their capability to resist. Garreth, more privy to "the secret machineries of history" (154) than Hollis, summarizes this potential of opposition: "[Y]ou and the others . . . have formed a rogue wave without meaning to, and none of it could have been predicted" (347). What Bigend and his kind do, in turn, is to "try to surf" (347) that wave to their advantage, but, as noted in Cayce and Hollis's case, only partially succeed.

The examples of Cayce and Hollis show that even if we accept Henthorne's analysis of the world as dystopia at the end of the Bigend Trilogy, its ramifications are not as drastic to the protagonists as he claims. Even though global, and in this case capitalist, power relations shift and transform, there is no reason to posit that this results in the impossibility of agency and resistance. Rather, Bigend's success in controlling the world markets and making them serve his curiosity is a normal turn in the dynamic of power – an action on actions, resulting in a network of other possible actions and agonistic provocation. In fact, Henthorne appears to step into what Foucault calls the "'theory' of the weakest link" (*Power/Knowledge* 144), because it seems that to Henthorne resistance is successful only when it targets a component of the power structure whose destruction leads to the collapse of the system as a whole. In the context of the Bigend Trilogy, it seems unreasonable to expect that heroines like Cayce and Hollis would engage in such campaigns against the whole structure of the late capitalist relations of power and coercion represented by Bigend – and then succeed unconditionally. Nor should this be considered a failure to challenge and resist on their part.

Milgrim's situation is slightly different from Cayce and Hollis's, as his story begins in coerced captivity and he only gradually gains a sense of himself as a subject capable of making decisions of his own. In the course of *Zero History*, Milgrim is, with Bigend's help, in the better stages of withdrawal and pulls off maneuvers of greater caliber than he does in *Spook Country*. First, he cooperates with Sleight, Bigend's security specialist, in as asymmetric a relationship as he had with Brown earlier. However, it is Milgrim who realizes that Sleight uses Bigend's technological capabilities against him and joins his enemies. Milgrim independently succeeds in leading one of Gracie's goons into the rough arms of Russian bodyguards, managing to surprise Bigend and have him reevaluate Milgrim's capability to be proactive: "You're supposed to be relatively circumspect . . . Or, rather, not that you're supposed to be, particularly, but that I expect it

of you, on the basis of experience . . . You're changing . . . I'll factor it in, in the future" (266). In part, when Milgrim takes the initiative into his own hands, it escalates Bigend and Gracie's conflict, but also leads into Milgrim staying with Blue Ant by choice and working according to his capabilities – a result that he appears to find desirable, unlike Cayce and Hollis. This hardly appears as loss of agency or impossibility of change, as Milgrim's narrative, as a whole, is about change, a gradual opening from the confines of drug addiction to productive existence, where Milgrim voluntarily chooses to remain in Bigend's service. For once, he is not coerced into servitude as the trilogy ends, even finding out that the pills he has taken for the last months as part of his rehabilitation have been but vitamins and placebo, signifying a final release from constraints.

Henthorne's dystopian interpretation does not find much textual evidence when viewed at the level of the protagonists in the Bigend Trilogy. Rather, it seems that the characters' most important conflicts do not concern defeating such global shifts of power structures as that of Bigend's discovery of the order flow. Their most important struggles are about retaining agency, even when dealing with entities who would rather strip it from them and reduce them to Foucault's docile bodies. The world losing all possibility of change along with Bigend's success does not seem plausible either. On the contrary, his triumph remains but an action, even if a major one, on actions in the complex mesh of power relations. It does not halt the dynamics of power or make change impossible. Rather, it opens up a field of reactions and responses. Bigend does not appear as a sovereign, ruling with an invincible iron fist at the end of the trilogy. Even though his actions definitely create a new world order, that order is not in any way final or uncontested.

Gibson's Cowboys and the Changing Frontier

The choices the protagonists of the Bigend Trilogy make as regards Bigend's final victory in his order flow project can also be analyzed through John G. Cawelti's theory of heroes in the Western genre. According to Cawelti, Western heroes are typically in "a situation of divided commitment" (35). They align their actions with the order and the progress enacted by townsfolk, but do so with the means of the chaotic outlaws of the wilderness. Usually, at the end of their quests, they are offered a choice either to embrace the order they helped ensure and settle down, leaving their days of independent wandering behind, or to ride into the sunset, dismissing the rewards the order and the progress would grant them (53).

With Cayce and Hollis it seems clear that they reject the promise of the new world order Bigend engenders. They rather stay away from the "world of hidden architectures" (*Zero History* 18) he concerns himself with and value independence and privacy. They represent an inverted model of the Western hero, as their skills are those of progress (Cayce's aptitude in fashion and the leverage of Hollis's celebrity, for example), but their settling down, striving for a normal, uneventful lives, can be seen as another rejection of the values of progress Bigend and Gracie represent as agents whose scope of ambition is global and megalomaniac.

Milgrim, on the other hand, ends up at the heart of the new world order where Bigend acquires Bond villain "ekranoplan[s]" (*Zero History* 399), a "great deal of Iceland," and prescience of seventeen minutes of the future of the market (403), but Milgrim's fate does not appear as loss of agency either. Bigend sees skills in Milgrim that no-one else in the Blue Ant agency seems to have, from translating obscure Russian manuals to "thinking like a criminal" (400), and remains indebted to him for unexpectedly playing an important part in rescuing Bobby Chombo. At the end of the trilogy, Milgrim appears as a more literal version of the Western hero, with his capabilities of the criminal world in the service of Bigend's new world order, opting for the opposite than Cayce and Hollis. Milgrim leaves his chaotic existence as an outlaw addict behind to embrace the change Bigend promotes.

In Cawelti's terminology, Bigend most closely resembles a "banker-villain," representing "decent ideals of the pioneer gone sour," for whom "individual wealth and power" have become the most important values (33). There are important caveats to consider, however. First, while the banker-villain presents a threat to the existence of the orderly, progressive society, this does not ring quite true in Bigend's case. Much of it has to do with his goals which are parallel to those of the society in the Bigend Trilogy. In this context, unlike on the Western frontier, the amassing of individual power is synonymous with progress and order – in fact, paradigmatically the only way forward as a society. Without a doubt, Bigend is also a pioneer, breaking into new territory with his outlandish marketing strategies and his interest in the more obscure phenomena of globalized culture, from locative art in *Spook Country* to the footage in *Pattern Recognition*. He is the one-man dream team of late capitalist society, the ultimate self-made man, and a banker-villain whose villainy can be excused, for it epitomizes and promotes everything a consumption-obsessed world holds dear.

It could be argued that Bigend is not originally very invested in manipulating or dominating the late capitalist frontier, but rather is interested in its niche phenomena, like the footage and the Gabriel Hounds, out of curiosity. Certainly, dabbling in what could be called independent cinema or ultimate hipster jeans does not appear very nefarious. However, there is more to Bigend's curiosity than the mere pursuit of peculiarity for his aim is to unleash the potential he sees in such unique enterprises. The footage is turned into a successful marketing scheme, locative art is interesting as it shares technologies with espionage, and the excellence of design of the Gabriel Hounds appears as a key element in Blue Ant's venture to get into the market for military clothing in the United States. Bigend's curiosity appears sporadic, but its targets all serve to grant him control over different aspects of the frontier he roams. The precognitive ability he gains by discovering the order flow is not his ultimate goal – instead, it is a vehicle to ensure that the projects driven by his curiosity succeed.

The ideals of the frontier itself have gone sour in the Bigend Trilogy. Lone wanderers like Cayce, Hollis, and Milgrim are faced with the same choices as their counterparts in the Western genre, but the rules of the game have changed. Whereas the Western hero plays a role in the fate of whole towns on the frontier, Gibson's protagonists are no longer capable of opposing the abusive schemes of banker-villains like Bigend, whose machinations are actually supported by the values and realities of society. Their resistance is thus delegated to the existential level, where the most meaningful choice is to decide whether to take part in the movements that manipulate the power relations of free individuals into relations of constraint and seek to turn the world into a unified whole, subject to the unrelenting gaze of an electronic surveillance network. Such a network is applied both by the fictional Bigend and actually put into use by the governments of the most developed democratic states of the contemporary world. Gibson's protagonists prove that even in the face of such global manipulations of privacy and freedom, agency and individual choice are still possible, and everyone is able to choose their stance in the face of such adversity. Ultimately, the wielders of power in both our and Gibson's world are dependent on the individual. In the right position, at the right moment, it is the individual who has the capacity to expose, resist, and either bring down or elevate those who at times seem invisible and invincible. There is no underestimating the wild, the rogue, as even almighty Hubertus Bigend has to admit.

Conclusion

The power relations in the Bigend Trilogy incorporate several of Foucault's principles. They range from relations of constraint to real power relations between free subjects, where one counterpart attempts to introduce elements of constraint into the relation. These impulses of coercion are linked to the differing possibilities of access to the Panoptic systems of surveillance, which together account for much of the resistive sentiments in the protagonists of the three novels. While Cayce, Hollis, and Milgrim's agency is threatened throughout the trilogy, all of them manage to retain (or in Milgrim's case regain) their independence and successfully oppose the entities bent on domination. However, their opposition should not be analyzed against the success of Bigend's project in creating his new world order, the defeat of which is never an objective for any of the protagonists. On Gibson's frontier, rules have changed as the ideals of progress and order have been infected with the supremacist capitalist schemes of Bigend and his kind. In such a world, the protagonists' resistance becomes existential as they need to reevaluate the degree of their own participation in a world order that strives to coerce free individuals into submission.

The disposition to violent coercion is most pronounced in Dorotea's attempts to frighten Cayce into abandoning her search for the maker of the footage as well as Milgrim's captivity with Brown. Both Dorotea and Brown have only limited access to the Panoptic system Bigend employs and are thus forced to resort to techniques of power that consist of different degrees of violence. Their coercive plans are unproductive and prone to resistance, resulting in their failure, as Dorotea is unable to stop Cayce, and Brown's grasp on Milgrim is tenuous at best, prolonged only by his supply of the controlled substances Milgrim covets. Similar loopholes emerge in Bigend's power relations to Cayce and Hollis, respectively. The more he tries to control them, both openly and without their knowledge, the more they hang on to their independence and end up going rogue. They retain their agency and manage, even at the end of the trilogy where Bigend triumphs, to remain free of the constraint to which Bigend attempts to subject them. Milgrim too, even if his relationship with Bigend starts in constrained circumstances, becomes proactive, an independent agent in his own right, even if his choice is to join Bigend rather than avoid his influence at all costs. His volition replaces the need for coercion and Milgrim becomes, for the first time, a free subject in a real relation of power.

Bigend's triumph in learning the order flow marks another radical technological event Hollinger views as symptomatic for Gibson's earlier novels, an event beyond which it is impossible to glimpse (462). However, with 9/11 as the symbolical singularity at the start of the trilogy, the order flow event does not appear as unknowable as, for example, the AI Wintermute's coming into consciousness at the conclusion of *Neuromancer*. On the contrary, the protagonists of the Bigend Trilogy show that they can retain agency in a time-after-the-end-time, in the utterly changed reality of a post-9/11 world, where power dynamics are visibly in turmoil. Both Cayce and Hollis evade Bigend, the Panoptic overseer, gain a foothold in the new world order, and come to terms with their anxieties, maintaining their freedom, even when the rules of the frontier change again.

No matter how dystopian the Bigend Trilogy might appear, none of the protagonists remain pawns, but agent subjects, players in their own right, on their own terms. As such, the novels stand for the possibility of agency even at the face of the scrutinizing, coercing, and commodifying practices of governments and businesses in late capitalist society. Despite the fact that their overseers would prefer these practices to remain invisible, they have become more and more tangible as we have come to realize how life in the 21st century is starting to catch up with Gibson's speculative visions.

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What Is It That Fanfiction Opposes?
The Shared and Communal Features of *Firefly*/*Serenity* Fanfiction

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Abstract: The article challenges the models of resistance that are generally used as the primary way to understand the work of fandom. Instead, the article ponders the way in which the textual conventions and structures of fanfiction writing are connected with promoting and sustaining communality and maintains that fanfiction studies ought to put less emphasis on people-centred metaphors such as poachers and nomads. Significantly, as fannish activities such as fanfiction writing centre on texts, it is necessary that we analyse the processes of both producing and disseminating stories. The case study in the article is the fandom of *Firefly*, an American space western drama television series created by writer and director Joss Whedon. In addition to the devoted fan base, the case of *Firefly* is especially interesting due to the fact that the building of its fictional world and characters had barely got started when the show was cancelled, and the threads that had to be left hanging have actively been picked up by the fandom. Through the emphasis on the actual texts of fanfiction, the article also aims at casting light on why the genres of fantasy and science fiction seem to offer a more fertile ground for fanfiction writers than some other source texts.

Keywords: fanfiction, network culture, media fandom, science fiction, *Firefly*, *Serenity*

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Fanfiction is often seen as a democratic or liberating genre (e.g. Pugh). This premise has been used to underline various aspects of audience's freedom: for example, freedom to oppose certain interpretations deemed hegemonic and to break free of them, means to break down hierarchies between authors and readers and, on the whole, capacity to be an active player instead of being a passive receiver or consumer. One of the main reasons for an emphasis of this nature was the need of early scholarship to do away with the stereotype of a fan as an isolated "weirdo". Instead, the previously castigated category of fan was defended and rearticulated, and fans' role as active makers of meaning while talking about so-called ordinary entertainment highlighted. Another important factor in viewing fans as opposers or transgressors is the notion of textual poacher famously coined by Henry Jenkins, adapted from Michel de Certeau's work in *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984). In *Textual Poachers* (1992), the seminal text of fan studies, Jenkins argued that media fans are poachers, "readers who appropriate popular texts and *reread* them in a fashion that *serves different interests*, as spectators who *transform* the experience of watching television into a rich and complex participatory culture" (23; my emphases). As Jenkins's choices of words

clearly indicate, fanfiction writing, for example, can be seen as transgressing or subverting the source texts. Sara Gwenllian Jones (“Web Wars” 162) aptly notes that the figure of the “subversive fan” has become something of an orthodoxy for scholars to elevate fans to the status of modern-day Robin Hoods, busily snatching back “our” popular texts from the greedy global conglomerates who claim to own them.

As fan studies have expanded their scope, it has been increasingly recognised that the models of resistance are not the only way to understand the work of fandom.¹ In particular, Matt Hills has suggested that the concept of the textual poacher was strategic, “a rhetorical tailoring of fandom in order to act upon particular academic institutional spaces and agendas” (10). When it comes to analysing different features of fanfiction, the tailoring of this kind can have problematic repercussions. Juli J. Parrish notes in her recent article (4.10) that in the case of fan metaphors such as “poachers” what often gets highlighted is fans as people and, to some degree, the actions they take as fans. However, the creative processes in which those people engage are eclipsed – and, as I would like to add, so are the actual fan texts. Parrish herself does not look at a single fic, a work of fanfiction, in her article. Similarly, Bronwen Thomas argues that “close textual analysis is often denigrated on the basis that the identities and practices of fans cannot be abstracted from the sorts of texts they write, but must be analysed as socially situated practices and activities” (“What is Fanfiction” 2). In this article, I explore the ways how textual conventions and structures of fanfiction are connected to aims of sharing and promoting communality. I share my focus with both Parrish and Thomas, as I attend the processes involved in producing and disseminating stories instead of using solely people-centred metaphors such as poachers or nomads. In addition to such processes, I want us to pay more attention to the texts, both the so-called source texts and the fics being written by the fans. Why certain sources seem to offer a more fertile ground for fanfiction writers than others, and why these sources more often than not belong to the genres of fantasy or science fiction?

My case study in this article is the fandom of *Firefly*, an American space western drama television series created by writer and director Joss Whedon. *Firefly* debuted on the FOX network on September 20, 2002. The series is set in the year 2517, after the arrival of humans in a new star system. In short, it explores the adventures of a renegade nine-person crew on board a “Firefly class” spaceship *Serenity*, captained by gun-for-hire Malcolm “Mal” Reynolds. The influence of the Western genre is apparent not only in the depiction of harsh planetary environments, costumes and equipment, but also in the character roles and their social setting as part of a pioneer culture existing on the fringes of the star system. The only two surviving superpowers, the United States and China, have fused to form the central federal government, called the Alliance. Although the series received a good critical response and a positive reaction especially from the Whedon fans,² it was cancelled after ten of the thirteen produced episodes plus the two-hour pilot (“*Serenity*”) were aired. Despite its short life on television, *Firefly* has enjoyed exceptional success after its airing. It has a large fan base which is still growing and is self-styled as “The Browncoats” after the independence fighters in the series. The *Firefly* franchise has expanded from the original series to other media such as a feature film written and directed by Whedon (*Serenity*, 2005) and comics.³ In addition to the devoted fan base, the case of *Firefly* is especially interesting due to the fact that the building of its fictional world and characters had barely got started when the show was cancelled, and the threads

1 In short, fandom (consisting of fan plus the suffix -dom, as in kingdom) is a term used to refer to an active and participating subculture composed of fans. It encompasses all kinds of fannish practices, which usually are born as a part of a social network. It might sound like a new phenomenon, but Merriam-Webster dictionary, for example, dates its first known use as early as in 1903 (see <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/fandom>).

2 At the time *Firefly* debuted, Whedon was already well-known for creating *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, highly regarded television series which aired from 1997 until 2003.

3 As of 2014, seven comic book stories have been released under the *Serenity* title: two three-issue miniseries, two one-shot comics and three short stories. In addition to the comics, a novelization of the film *Serenity* has been published in 2006, and the *Serenity* tabletop role-playing game was released in 2005.

that had to be left hanging have actively been picked up by the fandom. In this article, I concentrate on the *Firefly/Serenity* fanfiction and the processes of producing and disseminating the stories through three viewpoints: a what-if moment, tension between the familiar and the original, and the double perspective offered by world-building.

An anatomy of What-if Moment

Fanfiction has drawn increased academic interest only during the last two decades – despite its relatively long history. Abigail Derecho (62) has brought up the difference between the “broad” and “narrow” definitions of fanfiction. The broad definition aims to argue that fanfiction has existed for thousands of years and includes, among others, ancient Greek and Roman literature, such as Homer’s poems. The narrower definition maintains that stories can be defined as fanfiction if they originate in a self-identified fan culture, implying that fanfic can only be a body of work that explicitly labels itself “fanfic”. The narrower definition therefore dates the origin of fanfiction to the births of fan societies around the works of Jane Austen and Arthur Conan Doyle in the 1920s, and media fandom to *Star Trek* fans in the 1960s. In short, fanfiction can be defined as new fictive texts written by fans “on pre-existing texts or fictional worlds” (Page & Thomas 277). Today it is mostly published on the Internet either on forums born around a specific fandom or forums specialising in fanfiction in general, such as fanfiction.net. These are the most common channels for *Firefly/Serenity* fics, as well, although it is important to note that there are also various sites for “reccing” (recommending) the best *Firefly/Serenity* fics for interested readers (such as recs in TV Tropes) and usually blog based communities for both beta reading⁴ and reccing (such as “Firefly/Serenity lovers” in Livejournal.com). Fics are typically sequels, prequels or stories where the world of the source text is expanded with the writer’s own storylines or characters. Perhaps for this reason, many of the biggest fandoms are related to serial narratives that trade on the idea of the plot as an “infinitely extended middle” (Fiske 180) as opposed to clear beginnings, middles and endings.

Especially in the case of expansion, writers can seize upon a single line or a similar detail to launch a book-length storyline. Therefore, Jenkins (*Textual Poachers* 156) has stated that while writing fics, fans are able to “stretch boundaries of the text”. The boundaries – as well as fanfiction on the whole – are inextricably bound up with the concept of canon. As Sheenagh Pugh puts it: “[O]ne thing all fanfiction has in common is the idea of ‘canon’, the source material accepted as authentic and, within the fandom, known by all readers” (26). Despite the fact that *Serenity* seemingly addresses all major plot points introduced in *Firefly* and closes them, the ending of the film does not so much establish a set of boundaries as offer a particularly fertile ground for sequels. The outset of numerous fics is presented briefly as “post-BDM” (the film is generally called “Big Damn Movie” by the fans) or as “post-Miranda”, which refers to the revelatory events on the planet Miranda in the film. For example, the currently nine-part series “Forward” published on fanfiction.net by the author Peptuck introduces its starting point simply: “Following the Miranda broadwave, there’s only one direction for Malcolm Reynolds and his crew to go.” Among the most important story arcs addressed in *Serenity* is the past of a young girl named River Tam, who was mentally and physically conditioned against her will by the Alliance scientists. Rescued by her brother Simon, the two find refuge aboard *Serenity*. During *Firefly* it is established that the Alliance desperately wants River killed, and that she has unexceptional abilities which are undoubtedly caused by her conditioning, while the film explains that she has been subjected to the government experiment in creating the perfect assassin. In *Serenity* River’s lethal skills are triggered, but in the

4 Beta readers are often the most important evaluators of fics. The inner hierarchy of fan communities is therefore reflected on the fic evaluation, as beta readers act inside the community as publishing editors of sorts.

end there is a sense that she has found her place as *Serenity* lifts off with her as Mal's co-pilot. What goes on inside her head is not, however, elaborated, and a good deal of *Firefly/Serenity* fanfiction takes this as its point of departure, as fans imagine what her new life might be like after she has "faced her demons".

Other starting points for "post-BDM" fanfiction are the deaths of two major *Firefly* characters, the mysterious Shepherd Book and the ship's pilot Hoban "Wash" Washburne, who is married to *Serenity*'s first mate, Zoe. On the one hand, fanfiction writers explore the remaining crew's feelings over their deaths in fics with introductions such as in the ficlet⁵ "Dinner Time", published on fanfiction.net by the author Jaime L. Hatheway: "It has now been a year since their battle with the Reavers and the Operative, and life continues on as usual; but the colors of the crew are gone." On the other hand, numerous writers have decided to explicitly write against the canon, and some of them explain this decision elaborately, as Peptuck does in the author's notes of "Forward":

As you can tell, Book and Wash are both alive and apparently survived the Big Damn Movie. I did this partially because when I originally wrote this prologue (and some of the subsequent chapters) it was missing "something". It wasn't until I included Wash and Book that things started to feel "right" again, and since they're as much a part of *Firefly* as any of the BDM survivors. I wanted to include them. Plus, Wash and Book rock *hard*. . . . How they survived and what they did for the rest of the movie's events may be elaborated [sic] upon later.

In a sense, this exemplifies the fans' complex and often ambivalent relationships with the source texts they draw on. A what-if moment is born as fanfiction takes something a text has offered us as inevitable – such as the deaths of Book and Wash – and unmakes it, thereby opening up a different set of possibilities. So, simply: What if they had not died? Another frequently posed what-if moment in *Firefly/Serenity* fanfiction is the romance of River and Jayne Cobb, a physically imposing brutish mercenary who in the series is contemptuous of Simon and River and even sells them out to the Alliance in one of the episodes. In fact, River/Jayne pairing or "ship" is so recurrent in *Firefly/Serenity* fandom that it is referred to with abbreviation "Rayne" in the same way that probably the most famous fanfiction pairing, Kirk/Spock is sometimes known as "Spirk". Notions of interpreting "against the narrative grain of the plot" (Bacon-Smith 232; my emphasis) or understanding fanfiction as "an actualisation of *latent* textual elements" (Jones, "The Sex Lives" 82; my emphasis) are often connected to the study of so-called slash fiction, a genre of fanfiction focusing on interpersonal attraction and sexual relationships between (fictional) characters of the same sex "against" the source text. When it comes to fanfiction, the legacy of *Star Trek* fandom is particularly visible in slash fiction, as it is commonly noted that current slash originated with the above-mentioned "Kirk/Spock" stories, generally authored by female fans of *Star Trek: The Original Series* (1966–69) (see Woledge). When the role of fanfiction as a transgressive force is emphasised, writing slash fiction can be viewed as "going further" with the source text's implications. This way, it is seen offering a voice for marginalised groups and revealing the subversive potential of seemingly safe or familiar fictional worlds (e.g. Thomas "What is Fanfiction" 7). The what-if moments also have something of a rhetorical function, as the fanfiction writers can use the elements not narrated or presented in the source text in order to underline the weight of their narratives. In this, they can be compared with "the disnarrated", delineated by Gerald Prince (2) as comprising those elements in a narrative which explicitly consider and refer to what does not take place. Compared to Prince's formulation, these elements (such as the possibility

5 Ficlet is a name for short, one-chapter fanfiction stories.

of Book and Wash mysteriously surviving) are obviously not explicit in the source text but created by fanfiction writers. Still, the rhetorical function is similar, and can be harnessed for subversive purposes among others.

As a series, *Firefly* is very character-driven – the centrality of characters is highlighted in the way how Whedon pitched the show: “It’s about nine people looking into the blackness of space and seeing nine different things” (qtd. in Brioux). It is not surprising, then, that most of the *Firefly/Serenity* fanfiction is centred around character stories, such as the mysterious past of River (“What did the scientists do to her?”) and Book (“How can a clergyman be familiar with firearms, hand-to-hand combat and criminal activity?”).⁶ Still, it is hardly fitting to say that the fans would be, Robin Hood-like, “snatching” the characters back from the creators. For one, most writers use slogans such as “Joss is boss!” as a disclaimer in the introductory sections of their fics to denote that they do not “own” the characters and to show their respect for the creator. Parrish (5.3) notes that although “the act of taking” is in some ways the very heart of fanfiction writing, we are just beginning the larger inquiry into the creative invention that is happening in addition to the borrowing of source material. She suggests using metaphors that focus not on acts of borrowing or stealing or recombining, but “on some other actions, perhaps appearing as random strategies and gestures” (ibid. 5.4). While I agree with most of her critique of the dominant position of metaphors focused on the taking, I do not approve her choice to use a notion such as Brownian motion concentrating on chaotic or random processes. The processes of writing fanfiction are, in my opinion, far from chaotic or random, and they can better be explored if both fan texts and socially situated fannish practices and activities are taken into the account. Therefore, for the students of fanfiction, it is crucial to consider what those elements or meanings which fanfiction “goes against” or offers an alternative to, are. Who defines *how* they are opposed?

The theories on audience responses might bring up a new viewpoint on fanfiction writer’s strategies of resistance and opening up the what-if moments. The model of audience developed by Peter J. Rabinowitz (1987) and modified by James Phelan identifies four main audiences and assumes that the flesh-and-blood reader (or viewer) seeks to “enter” the position of the authorial audience, the author’s “ideal reader” (or viewer). According to Phelan (4), this is what we as members of audience do in response to a narrative text. As a result, this means that the concept of authorial audience allows us to “consider the ways in which readers can share the experience of reading narrative” (5). Although fandoms, such as the one born around *Firefly* and *Serenity*, can take the laws of interpretation and meaning-making into their own hands and in this way break down conventional boundaries between the authors and the audience, they can also be seen to form their own shared interpretations, evaluations and therefore, their own cultural canon (Jenkins, *Textual Poachers* 18). In the larger context of fiction studies, then, it can be suggested that fandoms also form their own, shareable experience of “we as viewers” for viewing certain television series such as *Firefly*. This experience can be determined resisting or opposed to the experiences of viewing outside fandom – or contrasted to other shared experiences inside a particular fandom, as many fandoms are known for their internal strife.⁷ In the frame of audience response theory, responses of this kind might be termed social. But inherently subversive or, alternatively, random? Next, I explore these questions through the tension between originality and familiarity in fanfiction writing as I analyse the ways in which the strategies of resistance are actualised in fan texts.

6 However, the need to “flesh out” Book’s past in fanfiction is not so urgent any more as his mysterious backstory was revealed in the graphic novel *Serenity: The Shepherd’s Tale* (2010).

7 An illustrative example of such strife was the recent outrage among *Harry Potter* fans when the author J.K. Rowling made the surprise admission that she should not have paired Hermione with Ron Weasley. Her fans were quick to react, with “wailing and gnashing of teeth from the camp who support the series’ ending . . . and rejoicing from the readers who always wanted Hermione to end up with Harry” (see Flood).

Tellability and the Tension between Original and Familiar

Recognising responses such as “we as readers or viewers” as a part of larger social practices makes it possible to consider the role and the consequences of the shared nature of such responses. Metaphors and other notions emphasising the liberating or revolutionary characteristics of fanfiction overlook the fact that not only the most popular source texts easily form their own “fictional canons”, but also that fics themselves do so. As Kristina Busse and Karen Hellekson (9) suggest, the factor most important for the treatment of fan texts beside canon is *fanon*, the events and other elements created by the fan community in a particular fandom and repeated throughout the fan texts. Fanon often creates particular details or character readings even though canon does not fully support them – or, at times, outright contradicts them. However, it is crucial to note that canon and fanon are not opposite to each other, but parallel meaning-making strategies feeding each other instead. Above I already mentioned the way the pairing of River and Jayne has become such a recurrent development in the *Firefly/Serenity* fanfiction that stories imagining various ways how they might end up together are, as a matter of routine, categorised as “Rayne”. An interpretation deemed canonical (such as “River and Jayne are not lovers”) is often actualised only against fanonical interpretation (“River and Jayne are lovers”). In other words, their romantic relationship is a widely accepted part of fanon despite the fact that the canonical Jayne has a lingering crush on another female character aboard *Serenity*, the ship’s mechanic Kaylee.

Contrary to the attitude expressed by, among others, Parrish, I argue that we need to challenge the idea that creativity must involve “originality” in order to be pleasurable or worth doing. As Thomas (“What is Fanfiction” 13) points out, what keeps fans coming back to certain texts has to do with familiarity: it is the process of fleshing out the backstories behind familiar characters, situations, and events, or slightly shifting the perspective from which the familiar is to be enjoyed. This does not necessarily mean opposing the creators of canon, but making good use of the canon instead – and making good use of it together. The majority of fics keep to a principle where a *small* twist is added to a certain canonical formula or convention and thereby the perspective is *slightly* shifted. Now, I want to attend to the importance of the two emphasised words. Ruth Page (200) suggests in her recent study revisiting the narrative dimension of tellability in social media that as such contexts promote connection with others, the familiar narrative maxim for narrators to make their narratives tellable⁸ incorporates two dimensions: to tell stories in such a way as to enable face-enhancing involvement between narrator and audience, and to avoid telling stories which damage the face of the narrative participants. Therefore, creating too big a twist or shifting the perspective more than slightly might be damaging for fanfiction writers as these moves may breach the expected norms for tellability and create a socially divisive act (Page 201). “Rayne stories” offer an illustrative example, as the relationship between River and Jayne adheres to certain communally recognised conventions in the source text, and fics add their own twists and perspectives to these. This practice is most visible in the repeated use of certain storylines, situations and elements which are reworked in an appropriate way.

One of the recurring building blocks of “Rayne stories” is the incident in *Firefly* episode “Ariel”, where River suddenly slashes Jayne in the chest with a kitchen carving knife and Jayne responds by backhanding her. In the Rayne fanfiction, the incident is often contrasted with their present feelings to create (violently) romantic tension. In “Sealed with a Kiss”, a collection of ficlets “where River kisses Jayne” published on fanfiction.net by the author Jaycie Victory, the canonical incident comes up more than once:

⁸ With the “familiar narrative maxim” Page refers to pioneering work by William Labov, who recognised that narrative structures have two components: “what happened and why it is worth telling”.

He was so distracted by this observation, he didn't notice how close River was getting until she was standing right in front of him. He shifted from foot to foot nervily; last time River was this close, knives had been involved. (Chapter 2: "From This Slumber She Shall Wake")

Jayne's eyes were at war. Emotions flickering back and forth, vying for dominance. River could sympathise. She had gone through the same tumultuous process the first time he had taken her in his arms. Mistrustful of what he offered; wary since Ariel; contrite since the knife. (Chapter 9: "Kiss Me")

"Gorramit, girl, you talkin' 'bout when you damn near split me open with that butcher's knife? You wasn't helpin' – and I didn't kiss you! I knocked you on your ass as you ruttin' well deserved!" (Chapter 11: "A Kiss with a Fist")

The liberation fanfiction provides does not mean transgressing all boundaries, and it certainly does not mean engaging in random or chaotic processes. Instead, it seems to provide freedom to stretch and use certain communally recognised elements (such as the incident with the knife) and strategies (building up a romance between River and Jayne) to a purpose of your own. Fannish practices encompass certain strategies which in turn enable the writing of certain kinds of "transgressive" slash fiction, for example. In order to promote connection between other fans, the strategies used in fanfiction writing seldom deviate from conventions, formulas and other pervasively repeated fanonical elements. In other words, fandom and fannish practices provide their own canon – alternative perhaps, but a canon nevertheless.

In addition to noticing how certain elements and situations are repeated in the fanon, it is crucial to note that the source text's elements that are open to various interpretations need to form shareable points of reference. Questions such as "What did the Alliance scientists exactly do to River?" or, as an example of canonical romantic entanglement of *Firefly/Serenity*, "Why is it so hard for Mal and Inara to acknowledge their feelings for each other?" cannot be definitely closed. Inara Serra is a Companion, a high-society courtesan who leases one of Serenity's shuttles for transportation and living space. The unresolved attraction between Mal and Inara can, in Hills's words, be called "endlessly deferred narrative". Hills identifies endlessly deferred narrative as one of the family resemblances of cult texts and, by contrasting it with decentred narrative non-resolution of soap operas, argues: "The cult form . . . typically focuses its endlessly deferred narrative around a singular question or related set of questions" (134). One of the typical features of Mal/Inara stories is the repetition of the same elements which in the *Firefly* establish the endlessly deferred nature of their romance. In "Sunshine and Rain", written by virtualJBgirl and published on fanfiction.net, the tension between Mal and Inara is brought about in the novelistic ways closely reproducing the audio-visual narrative means used in the series. This is clearly visible in the fic when Mal discovers that Inara has been mistreated by someone:

She saw the shadow of wrath in his eyes.

His eyelids quivering.

His jaw stiffening.

She could feel his fingers slightly clenching her arm.

She closed her eyes.

Reacting on absolute instinct was his best way to show her his attachment to her. Once more, his silence, the depth of his glance and the touch of his hand let his weakness slip through instead of his words, so rare and evasive.

Despite a faithful reproduction of visual character traits (such as “jaw stiffening”), virtualJBgirl’s fic also shows why fans want to respond by “writing it all down” instead of creating their own fan edits for YouTube, for example. The narrative framing accompanying the actions of Mal and Inara encourages us to engage with the characters’ emotions and thoughts, beyond the level of what they actually do, in order to consider what they actually might mean, and what they may be thinking (Thomas, “Gains and Losses” 152). What about resistance, then? Catherine Tosenberger concludes in her article on the incestuous slash fiction based on the television series *Supernatural* and its pair of brothers that “the most resistant, subversive element of [this fic] is not its depiction of homoerotic incest, but its resistance on giving Sam and Dean the happiness and fulfilment that the show *eternally defers*” (5.12; my emphasis). In the *Firefly/Serenity* fanfiction, however, even the fics resolving the tension between Mal and Inara with a sex act, the familiar, endless deferring of their happiness is quickly resumed. “Firefly Untitled”, published on fanfiction.net by the author angiehodgins, begins with the description of how Mal and Inara end up having sex in Serenity’s mess, but already in the first chapter Inara leaves the ship. So, true resistance would be achieved by ending the deferral, but this might breach the expected norms. Ending the deferral by means of an explicit closure would also put an end to further writing.

In addition to the experience of “we as viewers” and the promotion of connections, the issue at stake in fanfiction is the structure of so-called network culture. This is a term coined by Jay David Bolter in 1991 to describe electronic writing culture. His description of “the electronic museum”, organised as a network, rather than a hierarchy, a space through which the visitor moves at will (231), fits sites such as fanfiction.net very accurately. Thomas (“What is Fanfiction” 19) notes that the message boards of fanfiction sites suggest that the readers’ engagement with the narrative entails much more than merely processing the words on the page (or, on the screen). Indeed, the fans may be said to participate in a form of “collective intelligence” (e.g. Jenkins, *Convergence Culture*), as they work through the elements of fics. The readers of Jaycie Victory’s “Sealed with a Kiss” ficlets have come up with numerous ideas for the author to elaborate on in future fics. Beawolf’s Pen (31 July 2013), for example, prompts an idea: “River gets captured and the crew comes to rescue her. Jayne gets to her first and the [sic] share a moment before Mal comes in a [sic] interrupts” and Irishbrneyes (7 July 2013) suggests “how about one where Jayne teaches River how to kiss, and how to do it right?!” Jaycie Victory shows a genuine willingness to respond to her readers’ comments: the next ficlet in the series after Irishbrneyes’s idea is called “Educating River” and the author’s notes goes: “This one is for Irishbrneyes. Hope you enjoy :)”. Irishbrneyes reacts quickly herself and happily comments (July 9 2013): “Squee! No way! A chapter just for me? You’re so AWESOME!”

All in all, I bring these up as I want to emphasise the idea that analysing stories defined as fanfiction without taking the larger fannish practices into account is rarely fruitful. As Cornel Sandvoss points out, fans seek out texts that give them pleasure of familiarity and that fulfil rather than challenge their expectations. It is important to note that a single fic does not change anything, as the new, “subversive” or “original” interpretations are made possible by the unashamed and recognisable repetition of structures, techniques, conventions and details.⁹ This repetition is the basis of fanon. Still, fanfiction proves that new meanings and features can be produced, but at the

9 It should be noted, however, that there are instances where the resistance of both fandoms and fanfiction can be quite forceful. Typically, the resistance is not related to cultural radicalism or ambition to challenge hegemonic stereotypes, but to severe disappointment in the way the source text or its elements are handled by its creators. Some *Harry Potter* fans, for example, refuse to write Dumbledore’s death in their fics – a reaction similar to the way how “Book and Wash are both alive” in various post-BDM *Firefly/Serenity* fics. More notable example of fan resistance is *Mass Effect 3*, the final act to one of the most acclaimed science fiction sagas in digital role-playing genre. Its ending was considered a huge disappointment to *The Mass Effect Trilogy* as a whole, and particularly outraged fans launched a campaign to get it changed – and, to some extent, succeeded.

same time, the strategies used in their production need to be socially shared and original attributions should not stray too far. In the final section of my article, however, I look at a category of fanfiction writing that is “all kinds of too far” but popular all the same.

Doubled Worlds: Can’t Take the Fun from Me

It is still often proposed that fan texts receive their (narrative) value in relation to the source texts. However, they should not be viewed as textual “parasites” – if anything, they live in symbiosis with their source, as they can also have their effect on the readings of source text or open new viewpoints to it. Sandvoss has suggested that instead of focusing on the value of a specific text, or abandoning altogether any notion of value, we should focus on what he calls the “spectrum of textuality” (31). From this basis, Thomas (“What is Fanfiction” 5) argues that the analysts might concentrate on exploring how a practice such as fanfiction can provide different perspectives on a fictional world familiar to fans or allow fans happily to move in and out of various fictional worlds – and also between the fictional world and the “real” world of their day-to-day existence. So, to restate what I have brought forward above, the strategy which enables writing of fanfiction can be called subversive or opposing, as the reader using it consciously resists adopting the position readily mapped out for her inside a fictional world, or seek out opportunities for making her own contribution. Immersive mode of reading is still not abandoned: as a writer, then, she can attempt to imagine the fictional events of that world from another point of view, for example.

An illustrative example of such resistance in fanfiction writing is provided by stories which fall into the category of Alternative Universe stories (AU) – or, in the terms of *Firefly/Serenity* fandom, “Alternate ‘Verse” stories. For instance, in the fic “Copper for a Kiss”, published on fanfiction.net by Lady Cleo, “fate takes a turn and Simon is unable to liberate River from the Academy, Jayne finds himself accidentally rescuing the crazy girl from her tormentors”. More often than not, however, humour or “wackiness” is an important feature of AU stories. The story “Firefly High” with twenty-four chapters by Ultrawoman, also on fanfiction.net, turns the crew of *Serenity* into present-day high school kids and recasts other characters as well: Inara, for example, is recast as the school guidance counsellor, whereas Adelai Niska, canonically one of the most dangerous enemies of Mal Reynolds, plays the part of school’s principal. As can be expected, most of the story events are centred around the familiar romantic entanglements, the main pairings being “Rayne”, 18-year-old high school senior Mal who is “close to ten years” his interest Inara’s junior, Simon and Kaylee, and Zoe and Wash.

What is the point of writing such stories as “Firefly High” and how come they do not breach the expected norms I mentioned above? Tisha Turk has argued that it is metalepsis, a transgression of the boundaries between the world of the telling and the world of the told,¹⁰ that so greatly contributes to the pleasure to be derived from fanfiction. She notes that for readers of fanfiction, “immersion in the fan text requires not only engaging in the pretense that the fictional world of the source text is real . . . but also engaging in the pretense that the fictional world of the fan work is part of the fictional world of the source text” (99–100). Therefore, the immersion is perhaps less in the source itself than in a (communal) way of reading or seeing. It seems, then, that the realms of the “real” and the fictional overlap as fans “enjoy flaunting the artificiality and surreality of their stories while also continuing to be engaged and immersed in the fictional worlds they help to flesh out and concretise” (Thomas, “What is Fanfiction” 9). In “Firefly High”, a two-part chapter titled as “Dance with You” remakes the events of *Firefly* episode “Shindig” as the formal society dance is turned into a homecoming dance, a traditional occasion of welcoming back the alumni of a school.

10 Metalepsis was initially identified by Gérard Genette as a narratological concept meaning “any intrusion by the extradiegetic narrator or narratee into the diegetic universe (or by diegetic characters into a metadiegetic universe, etc.) or the inverse” (234–235).

Obviously, the fans of the series can easily recognise the whole situation and can, for example, eagerly look forward to the moment when Mal ends up in a fight over Inara with Atherton Wing, recast as Inara's "creep of a fiancé" in the fic. However, there are numerous other events and details in the story for the fans to pick up on the way, such as this dialogue between Kaylee and Wash:

Kaylee looked around at all the happy couples filing on into the school and sighed.
 "Everybody's got someone" she lamented. "Wash, tell me I'm pretty" she urged him, and though his eyes remained on Zoe, he answered directly.
 "Were I not attached, I would take you in a manly fashion" he assured her.
 "Because I'm pretty?" she checked with a smile.
 "Because you're pretty" he confirmed even as he tried to lip read what Zoe and Mal were talking about across the way.

Originally, this exchange appears almost word for word in the *Firefly* episode "Heart of Gold" where Kaylee observes others at a brothel. The reviewers are happy that it appears in the story – bookwormdaisy (3 June 2010), for example, comments: "Yes! You worked the 'I would take you in a manly fashion!' Brilliant!" As Thomas notes, it is important to recognise that, while reading fanfiction, "what might otherwise appear as clumsy gaffes and anachronisms are in fact deliberate" ("What is Fanfiction" 18). The way single fics are reviewed and evaluated in comments highlights the way recurring textual elements of fanfiction and larger social practices are intertwined. As an example of the evaluation standards, the characters in fics can be deemed either "out of character" (OOC) or "in character" (IC) by the reviewers. These are terms which are used to demonstrate whether fanfiction writer's version of certain character is successful (IC) or not (OOC). The term IC is especially interesting as it entails the view that someone else than the creator of the source text can offer a "right interpretation" of a character. In the reviews of "Sealed with a Kiss", many readers of the ficlets comment on "how realistic" Jaycie Victory's characters are. For example, deanandjo4ever1 (July 6, 2013) comments "poor mal and simon their reactions were spot on hehe" and aumontalc (July 7, 2013) approves "the fact that Jayne only wants to kiss someone who means something to him like his Ma told him". In *Firefly*, Jayne's affection for his mother is made clear in the episode "The Message" when he proudly sports an orange and yellow knit cap with earflaps, simply because his mother made it for him, to "keep him warm". The cap, which humorously clashes with Jayne's brutish imago, is one of the recurring element in "Rayne stories": in one of Jaycie Victory's ficlets (Chapter 7: "Quid Pro Quo"), for example, River steals it and announces "the girl will give the topper . . . in exchange for a kiss. On the mouth." Jayne's knit cap therefore serves as a source of "knowing humour" typical for fanfiction writing, which importantly promotes connection with other fans, especially in the case of otherwise "wacky" AU stories such as "Firefly High".

Despite being blatantly humorous and thus militating against emotional involvement, fanfiction such as "Firefly High" allows its readers to approach it as "something more" than as an artificial construction following certain logic like the conventions of the source text. A way of reading such as this is often simplified as forgetting the synthetic nature of a work and accepting the world, its characters and events as "true" or possibly existing. In the process, the reader takes up a position "inside" a fictional world and visualises it, as Basched (4 June 2010) does while commenting on the events in the Homecoming Dance: "Ooooh the tension between Mal and Saffron what [sic] just unbearable! I love how you describe their expressions, I can totally see them!" Canonical Saffron, a crafty and amoral con artist known to seduce her marks, is introduced in *Firefly* episode "Our Mrs. Reynolds", in which Mal finds himself married to her in an obscure native ceremony, as she pretends to be a compliant girl trained to be a subservient wife in order to get hold of their ship. In "Firefly High", Saffron is recast as a sophomore who initially seems like "a

sweet little girl” but soon shows her true colours. She discovers Mal and Inara are having “an unseemly affair” and blackmails Mal into taking her as his date to Homecoming Dance: “The woman that tamed the wild Malcolm Reynolds would have status, might even make Homecoming Queen”. At the dance, their exchanges successfully both follow the conventions of the relationship between canonical Mal and Saffron and contribute to a wholly different fictional world at the same time:

“We both know why we’re here, and it ain’t ‘cause neither of us is fallin’ into love with the other” he insisted, helping himself to a cup of spiked punch and handing her one too with a definitely over-the-top bow for the benefit of any audience they might have.
“Stop being so obvious, *sweetheart*” she said through gritted teeth,
“Just playing my part like you asked, *darlin*” he replied with an overdone smile as they both drank.

From my point of view, what is interesting about fantasy and science fiction vis-à-vis fanfiction writing is that especially stories including so-called “speculative world-building” *already* rely on overlapping strategies or attitudes. These strategies or perspectives are shared by the users of all cultural artefacts, but they are perhaps not so easily recognisable in most of other genres. Building fictional worlds that can be perceived as self-contained entities compared with “our reality” is another expression of the repetition I have mentioned above. The elaborate, multidimensional and rich worlds that paradoxically are created by the means of works that are mostly cursory, flat and linear, inevitably bear certain interpretive attitudes or strategies which, in my opinion, contribute to the fact that speculative fantasy and science fiction are such a fertile ground for fanfiction writers. Hills (137) names hyperdiegesis, the creation of a vast and detailed narrative space, as an attribute shared by the cult texts and genres of fantasy and science fiction. He goes on to argue that in addition to rewarding re-reading due to its richness and depth, the role of hyperdiegesis is “also one of stimulating creative speculation and providing a trusted environment for affective play” (138). The terms such as hyperdiegesis – or, more simply, vast and detailed fictional worlds – alongside with analyses of the ways how the users respond to works of fiction can help us understand the double perspective fiction in general.

The speculative worlds of fantasy and science fiction can, at the same time, be perceived as possibly existing and experienced “from the inside, as if the events were happening to you” and recognised so obviously “made” according to certain strategies and perhaps even from familiar building blocks.¹¹ Fanfiction writing which self-consciously and openly uses repeated storylines and other such elements but, at the same time, aims at inviting the readers into a fictional world they love, makes this very visible. Turk talks of “the ongoing erotics of continuing the story” which enable the fan to immerse herself “not only in the original show but in some subset of fan works engaging it” (99). This is well highlighted in the comments left for Ultrawoman on “Firefly High”: BeckettFan (25 September 2009) urges the writer to continue as she would “love to see how they all end up friends or whatever” and dlsf (1 October 2009) comments “i love this! the idea is shiny! please write more!” In the light of interactions in the message boards and comment sections of fanfiction sites, it is also important to consider the fact that narratives can be processual, and there is no reason why endings would be more important than the act of deferring.

11 As a small side note, in the role-playing game research the highly popular tabletop game *Dungeons & Dragons* is often credited as the one “liberating” J.R.R. Tolkien’s world-building elements for a larger use.

Conclusion

In the cast reunion held to celebrate the tenth anniversary of *Firefly* in San Diego Comic-Con 2012, where ten thousand people lined up to get into the panel, Joss Whedon emotionally commented on why the fans of the series mean so much to him:

When you're telling a story, you're trying to connect to people in a particular way. It's about inviting them into a world. The way you've inhabited this world, this universe, you have become part of it. When I see you guys, I don't think the show is off the air. I think there's spaceships and horses – the story is alive. (Qtd. in Hibbert.)

Through all kinds of fannish practices, including fanfiction writing, *Serenity* is still flying despite the fact that the series was cancelled more than ten years ago. In this article, I concentrated on the features of fanfiction which promote communality and sharing. Typically, fanfiction has either been celebrated as a subversive force harnessed by modern-day Robin Hoods or bluntly dismissed as an adolescent trash. In my opinion, a middle ground between these two approaches is needed, and I hope that my analyses of the *Firefly*/*Serenity* fanfiction have contributed to building one. It should also be clear by now that research frames either focusing solely on the actual fan texts or completely ignoring them are not appropriate. Instead, it is important to pay attention to the fact that the fan texts do not result from chaotic or random processes despite the “continuous play” going on through them and despite that they can be selected and read across often in a random rather than directed fashion. One of the features illustrating this was the notion of why the genres of fantasy and science fiction lend themselves to source material of fanfiction writing.

As an expression of network culture, fanfiction sites and forums are less hierarchical than some more “traditional” modes of writing as there are almost no borders between authors and readers. However, the canonical (or, to be more precise, fanonical) nature of the actual fan texts hints that the meaning-making practices and writing strategies are far from random. It is in the very nature of fanfiction writing to aim at sharing one's enthusiasm, frustrations and creative aspirations on certain source texts in a responsive environment. It has already been noted that this nature is reflected on aspects of the interface, the design and navigation of fanfiction sites (see Thomas, “What is Fanfiction” 20), but it is also very much present in stories that are told. Ideally, the stories enable involvement between the author and the members of the audience and in this article I demonstrated how this is manifested in adding of *small* twists and *slight* shifts in the perspective. When it comes to networking and participating culture, perhaps the fact that the originally transgressive impulse of treating works of fiction as open-ended is being effectively mainstreamed is the most subversive contribution of them all.

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Fafnir – Nordic Journal of Science Fiction and Fantasy Research

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Good and Evil in J. R. R. Tolkien's Legendarium: Concerning Dichotomy between Visible and Invisible

Jyrki Korpua

Abstract: I discuss the Creation in The Silmarillion, which is at first supposedly good, but later becomes “marred” because of Melkor, who is at the beginning greatest of the angelic beings of Ainur, but later becomes the enemy and the symbol of pride and evil. From the cosmological view, the visible and invisible dichotomy is relevant. In Tolkien's legendarium, the physical appearance is the key to the creation of “two levels”: the visible and the invisible world. In the Silmarillion, for example, the Ainur can “change form”, or, “walk unclad” without physical form, but those among them who turn evil, such as Melkor, lose this power.

For Tolkien, a word to describe Good is light, whereas Evil is described as dark or black. Where Ainur are beings of light, evil forces are often described as shadows: Mordor, for example, is “Black-Land”, “where shadows lie”. In addition to this, Aragorn reports the assumed death of Gandalf by saying that he “fell into Shadow”. Gandalf says that if his side loses, “many lands will pass under the shadow”. As concrete examples of this juxtaposition from The Lord of the Rings, I discuss the beings of Balrog and Nazgûls, but also the Great Ring, the Elves, and characters of Tom Bombadil and Gandalf.

Keywords: Tolkien, Tolkien's legendarium, Good and Evil, Visible and Invisible, Mortal and Immortal

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This article discusses good and evil forces in J. R. R. Tolkien's (1892–1973) *legendarium*,¹ focusing mainly on the beginning of evil and on the aspects of juxtaposing physical with spiritual, mortal with immortal and visible with invisible.

The fundamental basis of Tolkien's *legendarium* is formed on three separate works: *The Hobbit, or There and Back Again* (1937), *The Lord of the Rings* (1954–55, six books, originally published in three parts) and *The Silmarillion* (1977). *The Hobbit* is a fantasy book and a children's book, basically about an episodic adventure,² written in a fairy-tale mode. *The Lord of the Rings*, on the other hand, is highly popular – one could say the most popular – quest-tale,³ an epic fantasy of

¹ Originally, a *legendarium* is a book or series of books comprising collection of legends. I use the word to describe all Tolkien's texts that deal with Middle-earth although I do know that sometimes in Tolkien studies *legendarium* is used to denote especially Tolkien's “Elvish legends” and *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit* are not considered a part of it. For me, all Tolkien's texts concerning both the legends of Elves (e.g. *The Silmarillion*) and fictive history of Hobbits (*The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*) form a complete and coherent *legendarium*.

² In some parts written in the spirit of medieval *roman d'aventures*. Not so much an epic quest, but a lighter *adventure*.

³ In some parts resembling medieval *chansons de geste*, epics about heroic deeds. Compared with *The Hobbit*, *The Lord of the Rings* is more a quest than an adventure.

the 20th century addressing grand themes such as world domination, apocalyptic visions, the battle between Good and Evil (and the poor individuals in the middle of this battle), heroism, and both success and failure. In *The Lord of the Rings*, the basic task and quest is to destroy the “One Ring” which in wrong hands can bring about the destruction of all Middle-earth. Then again, posthumously published *The Silmarillion* is a collection of Tolkien’s mythopoeic works edited by his son Christopher Tolkien. The mythologically oriented stories of *The Silmarillion* form the backbone of cosmogony and cosmology in Tolkien’s *legendarium*’s. All of these books form different angles and modes of the *legendarium*.

The Beginning (and the End) of Evil

At first, the Creation in Tolkien’s *legendarium* is supposedly “good”. The first expression of “evil” in the *legendarium* is in a way curiosity. Melkor, the greatest of the angelic beings of Ainur, becomes curious and impatient. At the beginning, the Creator Eru Ilúvatar places “the Flame Imperishable” at the heart of the World and declares: “And I will send forth into the Void the Flame Imperishable, and it shall be at the heart of the World” (Tolkien, *The Silmarillion* 9). The power of creation is within the flame. In an episode which could be seen as the first sign of Melkor’s forthcoming “rebellion” against Eru Ilúvatar, Melkor begins the search for the Flame in order to create something new. Melkor cannot find the Flame since it is “with Ilúvatar”:

He [Melkor] had gone often alone into the void places seeking the Imperishable Flame; for desire grew hot within him to bring into Being things of its own, and it seemed to him that Ilúvatar took no thought for the Void, and he was impatient of its emptiness. Yet he found not the Fire, for it is with Ilúvatar. But being alone he had begun to conceive thoughts of his own unlike those of his brethren. (Tolkien, *The Silmarillion* 9.)

This first sign of Melkor’s thoughts of his own” could also be seen as individualism. In the cosmogonical Music which creates the World, Melkor creates discords, which forces Eru to interrupt the Great Music at times. Tolkien writes that this first opposition against Eru’s thoughts as expressed by Melkor, and that some of the Ainur follow him on this “musical opposition”.

Some of these thoughts he [Melkor] now wove into his music, and straightway discord arose about him, and many that sang nigh him grew despondent, and their thought was disturbed and their music faltered; but some began to attune their music to his rather than to the thought which they had at first. (Tolkien, *The Silmarillion* 4.)

Later in *The Silmarillion* Melkor becomes The Great Enemy, Morgoth. Tolkien writes that “Melkor is the supreme spirit of Pride and Revolt, not just the chief Vala of the Earth, who has turned to evil” (*The Book of Lost Tales* 375). In *The Silmarillion*, Melkor symbolizes pride and evil.

Tolkien emphasizes that since the Music of Ainur, the world is “marred”. One of the motifs of Tolkien’s *legendarium* is that the life in the changeable world of Middle-earth can be described as “the long defeat”. This can be seen in *The Lord of the Rings* when Galadriel, ruler of the Elves of Lórien, discusses both her and her husband Celeborn’s past in Middle-earth. Galadriel sees her life as “the long defeat” saying: “He [Celeborn] has dwelt in the West since the days of dawn, and I have dwelt with him years uncounted; for ere the fall of Nargothrond or Gondolin I passed over the mountains, and together through ages of the world we have fought the long defeat” (Tolkien, *The*

Lord of the Rings 348). This vision is shared by Elrond, another Elf-character.⁴ In the chapter “The Council of Elrond”, Elrond melancholically reminisces the history of Elves and Men as “many defeats and many fruitless victories” (Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings* 236–237).

One might suggest that this motif of “loss” is a Christian and a Catholic one. One of the basic beliefs of Christian faith is that true mercy, salvation and happiness can only be found in afterlife. Alister McGrath discusses this eschatological vision in his *Christian Theology*, since for the Christian belief, it is characteristic that time is linear, not cyclical. McGrath writes that “[h]istory had a beginning; it will one day come to an end” (444–445).

Tolkien writes about the eschatological ending of the *legendarium* in a quite apocalyptic way although this ending has something to do also with the Scandinavian myth of Ragnarök.⁵ Tolkien writes that eventually the evil will come to final end and the world Men shall be “avenged”:

Then shall the last battle be gathered on the fields of Valinor. In that day Tulkas shall strive with Melko[r], and on his right shall stand Fionwë and on his left Túrin Turambar, son of Húrin, Conqueror of Fate, coming from the halls of Mandos; and it shall be the black sword of Túrin that deals unto Melko[r] his death and final end; and so shall the children of Húrin and all Men be avenged. (Tolkien, *Morgoth's Ring* 76.)

Elizabeth Whittingham has stated that although originally in *The Silmarillion* there is darkness and hopelessness, there later is an alignment with Tolkien's Christian worldview, which is founded on hope (9). Despite the view of “long defeat”, especially in the apocalyptic visions of both Last Battle and Arda Healed there is the ultimate hope underlying the *legendarium*. Whittingham also states that the stories of despair and defeat throughout *The Silmarillion* include a reason for hope and for the possibility of “ultimate victory” (9).

Visibility and Invisibility

In Tolkien's *legendarium* the physical appearance is relevant to the cosmology of “Two Levels”: the levels of the visible and the invisible world. In *The Silmarillion*, the immortal beings Valar and Maiar are able to take a physical form if they want to, but otherwise they are purely spiritual creatures. As for the Maiar, Tolkien writes that they were seldom “visible to Elves and Men” (*The Silmarillion* 21) and that the Valar could “change form”, or, “walk unclad” (*The Silmarillion* 78) without physical form. On the other hand, and quite interestingly, those of the Ainur who turn evil inevitably lose their power to change form or “unclad” themselves.⁶

For Tolkien, the word to describe good is light and the words to describe evil are dark, black, or shadow. Valar are beings of light, whereas evil forces, such as Sauron, are described as shadows. Tom Shippey discusses this as an important feature. Shippey goes on to ask whether the shadows exist. Shadows are the absence of light and therefore they do not exist,

4 Elrond is referred to as “Half-Elf”, or “Half-elven”, but this “halfness” is in no way an indicator of hierarchical “inferiority” in Tolkien's *legendarium*, since Elrond – although half human and half elven – has a divine background. His foremothers came from the immortal races of Eldar (Elves) and Maiar: “Elros and Elrond his brother were descended from the Three Houses of the Edain [Humans], but in part also both from the Eldar and the Maiar; for Idril of Gondolin and Lúthien daughter of Melian were their foremothers” (Tolkien, *The Silmarillion* 312).

5 See also: Whittingham 9 & 131.

6 For Morgoth's loss of this power: Tolkien, *The Silmarillion* 78. Sauron lost the power much later: in the beginning of the Second Age, Sauron “put on his fair hue again” (Tolkien, *The Silmarillion* 341), but after the Fall of Númenor – when his physical form was destroyed – Sauron lost his power of shapechanging: “he had wrought for himself a new shape; and it was terrible, for his fair semblance had departed for ever when he was cast into the abyss at the drowning of Númenor. He took up again the great Ring and clothed himself in power; and the malice of the Eye of Sauron few even of the great among Elves and Men could endure” (Tolkien, *The Silmarillion* 351.)

but they are still visible and palpable all the same. Mordor is “Black-Land” “where shadows lie”, or even: “where the shadows are”. Aragorn reports the assumed death of Gandalf to Galadriel by saying that he “fell into Shadow”. Gandalf himself says that if his side loses, “many lands will pass under the shadow”. Shippey also points out that many times in *The Lord of the Rings* “the Shadow” becomes personification of Sauron. (Shippey 146–147.)

Futhermore Balrog, one of the most defamiliar creatures in *The Lord of the Rings*, is also “a shadow”. In the chapter “The Bridge of Khazad-Dûm”, the monstrous Balrog is described with the words of dark and shadow:

Something was coming up behind them. What it was could not be seen: **it was like a great shadow**, in the middle of which was a dark form, a man-shape maybe, yet greater; and power and terror seemed to be in it and to go before it. . . .

The Balrog reached the bridge. Gandalf stood in the middle of the span, leaning on his staff in his left hand, but in his other hand Glamdring gleamed, cold and white. His enemy halted again, facing him, and the shadow about it reached out like two vast wings. It raised the whip, and the thongs whined and cracked. Fire came from its nostrils. But Gandalf stood firm.

‘You cannot pass,’ he said. The orcs stood still, and a dead silence fell. ‘I am a servant of the Secret Fire, wielder of the flame of Anor. You cannot pass. The dark fire will not avail you, flame of Udûn. **Go back to the Shadow!** You cannot pass.’ . . . (Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings* 321–322.) *Emphasis mine.*

Gandalf orders Balrog, “a great shadow”, to go “back to the Shadow”, to the emptiness. The origin of this terrible creature is described in *The Silmarillion*, where Tolkien writes about the Maiar spirits that fell and joined Melkor’s forces, “the Valaraukar, the scourges of fire, demons of terror” (*The Silmarillion* 23). Of the Valaraukar, Tolkien speculates in *The History of Middle-earth* that “[t]here should not be supposed more than say 3 or at most 7 ever existed” (*Morgoth’s Ring* 80), so Gandalf faces a rare enemy.

In *The Lord of the Rings*, the Nazgûl are also described as shadows. Originally, they were nine mortal men, who were given Rings of Power by Sauron and became his slaves and powerful undead forces. Tolkien writes that the Ringwraiths became invisible to mortal eyes, and they “entered the realm of shadows” (*The Silmarillion* 346). In *The Lord of the Rings*, it seems like the Nazgûl do not have physical shapes at all, but they can sense the physical world and affect it. This raises discussion in *The Lord of the Rings*:

‘Can the Riders see?’, asked Merry. ‘I mean, they seem usually to have used their noses rather than their eyes, smelling for us, if smelling is the right word, at least in the daylight. . .

‘They themselves do not see **the world of light** as we do, but our shapes cast shadows in their minds, which only the noon sun destroys; and in the dark they perceive many signs and forms that are hidden from us: then they are most to be feared. And at all times they smell the blood of living things, desiring and hating it. Senses, too, there are other than sight and smell. We can feel their presence – it troubles our hearts, as soon as we came here, and before we saw them; they feel ours more keenly. Also,’ he added, and his voice sank to a whisper, ‘the Ring draws them.’ (Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings* 185.) *Emphasis mine.*

Tolkien is addressing a difference between “the world of light” and the world of shadow. Randel Helms sees that the sense of smell that Nazgûl uses in *The Lord of the Rings* is a

reference to Heraclitus' notion, who commented that in Hades, the Greek Underworld, the souls of the dead, being but smoke, know each other only scent (91). The Nazgûl are no longer mortal, or living, since they are "undead". They have moved farther away from the "mortal senses". In Tolkien's *legendarium*, this same dichotomy between visible and invisible, and the effect on senses is evident also with the dichotomy between mortal and immortal.

Mortality and Immortality, and in-between of Good and Evil

In *The Lord of the Rings*, the One Ring turns its mortal user invisible to other mortal eyes. It "moves" its wielder into the shadow world, where the physical plane becomes blurred and invisible things become visible. When Frodo puts on the One Ring, he becomes invisible to mortal eyes, but visible to the eyes of Nazgûl, and they become visible to Frodo:

Immediately, though everything else remained as before, dim and dark, the shapes [Nazgûl] become terribly clear. He [Frodo] was able to see beneath their black wrappings. There were five tall figures: two standing on the lip of the dell, three advancing. In their white faces burned keen and merciless eyes; under their mantles were long grey robes; upon their grey hairs were helms of silver; in their haggard hands were swords of steel. Their eyes fell on him and pierced him, as they rushed towards him. (Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings* 191).

However the Nazgûl are not the only beings in Middle-earth who are able to see the "invisible". The dichotomy between physical and spiritual does not affect the immortal creatures. In *The Lord of the Rings*, the One Ring does not physically affect Tom Bombadil, who undoubtedly is also an immortal creature:

He [Frodo] slipped the Ring on. Merry turned towards him to say something and gave a start, and checked and exclamation. . . . Merry was staring blankly at his chair, and obviously could not see him. He got up and crept quietly away from the fireside towards the outer door. 'Hey there!', cried Tom, glancing towards him with a most seeing look in his shining eyes. 'Hey! Come Frodo, there! Where be you a-going? Old Tom Bombadil's not as blind as that yet. Take off the golden ring! Your hand's more fair without it. (Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings* 191.)

Earlier, when Tom Bombadil put on the One Ring, he did not become invisible: "Tom put the Ring round the end of his little finger and held it up to the candlelight. For a moment the Hobbits noticed something strange about this. . . . There was no sign of Tom disappearing!" (Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings* 191.) Later, during the Council of Elrond, Gandalf describes that Bombadil "is his own master", and "the Ring has no power over him" (Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings* 259), which points out the fact that the Ring affects mortals and that Tom Bombadil is not mortal. In *The Lord of the Rings*, Tom Bombadil is referred to quite prestigious or even divine names: he is called "the Master of wood, water, and hill" (122), and Frodo calls him "Master" almost every time addressing him (123, 124 & 129). When Frodo asks Bombadil's wife Goldberry who Tom Bombadil is, Goldberry answers in a quite Biblical way:

Fair lady! said Frodo again after a while. 'Tell me, if my asking does not seem foolish, who is Tom Bombadil?'
'He is,' said Goldberry, staying her swift movements and smiling. (Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings* 122.)

This expression of Bombadil as “He is” caused Tolkien some trouble with the Catholic readers and clusters because for some, the phrasing “He is” resembles too much the nomination God uses in *The Book of Exodus* 3:14, in Hebrew “ehje ašer ehje”, referring to Yahweh. In 1954, in a letter to Catholic book dealer Peter Hastings, Tolkien defended himself thoroughly and philologically:

As for Tom Bombadil, I really think you are being too serious, besides missing the point. (Again the words used by Goldberry and Tom not me as commentator). . . . But Goldberry and Tom are referring to the mystery of names. . . . You may be able to conceive of your unique relation to the Creator without a name – can you: for in such a relation pronouns become proper nouns? But as soon as you are in a world of other finites with a similar, if each unique and different, relation to Prime Being, who are you? Frodo has asked not ‘what is Tom Bombadil’ but ‘Who is he’. We and he no doubt often laxly confuse the questions. Goldberry gives what I think is the correct answer. We need not go into the sublimates of ‘I am that am’ – which is quite different from he is. (Tolkien, *The Letters* 191–192.)

Despite the answer, there is definitely something “godly” and “divine” in Tom Bombadil. Even in Tom Bombadil’s own answer to Frodo’s later question “Who are you” makes it clear that he is in fact not a *mortal*, referring to the fact that he was in (at least those parts of) Middle-earth before both the Big People (Humans) and little People (Hobbits), or Kings (referring to Númenorean Men), or Dark Lord (meaning Morgoth, the first Enemy, or Sauron):

Eldest, that’s what I am. Mark my words my friends: Tom was here before the river and trees: Tom remembers the first raindrop and the first acorn. He made paths before the Big People, and saw the little People arriving. He was here before the Kings and the graves and the Barrow-wights. When the Elves passed westward, Tom was here already, before the seas where bent. He knew the dark under the stars when it was fearless – before the Dark Lord came from Outside. (Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings* 129.)

The phrasing that Bombadil was here “before the Dark Lord came from Outside” hints that Bombadil has been in existence since the creation of Middle-earth. He is not an analogy of Christian or Jewish God, but in the cosmology he is a definite “power”, maybe a Spirit of Pacifism as Tolkien alluded in his letter to Naomi Mitchison in 1954, calling Bombadil’s view “a natural pacifist view”:

Tom Bombadil is not an important person – to the narrative. I suppose he has some importance a ‘comment’. . . . he represents something that I feel important, though I would not be prepared to analyze the feeling precisely. I would not, however, have left him in, if he did not have some kind of function. I might put it this way.

The story is cast in terms of a good side, and a bad side, beauty against ruthless ugliness, tyranny against kingship, moderated freedom with consent against compulsion that has long lost any object save mere power, and so on; but both sides in some degree, conservative or destructive, want a measure of control. [B]ut if you have, as it were taken ‘a vow of poverty’, renounced control, and take your delight in things for themselves without reference to yourself, watching, observing, and to some extent knowing, then the question of the rights and wrongs of power and control might become utterly meaningless to you, and the means of power quite valueless. **It is a natural pacifist view, which always arises in the mind when there is a war.** (Tolkien, *The Letters* 178–179.) *Emphasis mine.*

Tom Bombadil is written in the level of *myth*: he is a mythic figure of pacifism, an anthropomorphised view of “Peace”, but not a clear allegory of such. Tolkien suggested that

Bombadil shares “a natural pacifist view” which always rises at times of war. He also discussed that *The Lord of the Rings* is basically, as a narrative, a story of good versus evil and both sides are focusing on the concept of “control”. The modes and motifs of the epic are, as Tolkien phrases them above: “beauty against ugliness”, “tyranny against kingship”, and a “conservative or destructive” measure of control.

Another (non-human) character in *The Lord of the Rings* who can be discussed as an example of almost neutral position is the leader of Ents, Treebeard. At first Treebeard does not choose a side in the war although he declares that he is not on the side of Orcs. Treebeard comments on that saying: “I am not altogether on anybody’s *side*, because nobody is altogether on my *side*, if you understand me: nobody cares for the woods as I care for them, not even Elves nowadays” (Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings* 461).

In the end, Treebeard does not remain “neutral” in the War of the Rings. In *The Two Towers*, the Ents attack Saruman’s fortress of Isengard and in a dramatic scene Saruman’s power is destroyed by these creatures that symbolize “wild nature”. Simply put, in Tolkien’s mythopoetic vision, Saruman, symbolizing industrialization and mechanized “modernism” is “destroyed” by Ents, symbolizing counterblow of the Nature.

Physical and Spiritual

In my point of view, in the *legendarium*, the most interesting character relating to the dichotomies between good and evil, mortal and immortal, or physical and spiritual is Gandalf. In fact, in Tolkien’s *legendarium*, the physical and spiritual changes are central to the habitus of Gandalf.

In the second book of *The Silmarillion*, Gandalf is mentioned as a Maiar spirit called Olórin, who is fond of Elves, but rather stays unseen by them, or in disguise: “Wisest of the Maiar was Olórin. . . . he walked among them unseen, or in form as one of them, and they did not know whence came the fair visions or the promptings of wisdom that he put into their hearts.” (Tolkien, *The Silmarillion* 22). Later, Olórin becomes one of the Wizards, the Istari, who came over the Sea from the Undying Lands to help in a war against Sauron. He is described as the Chief of the Istari among with Saruman and “closest in counsel with Elrond and the Elves” (Tolkien, *The Silmarillion* 360).

In *The Lord of the Rings*, Gandalf is Sauron’s main enemy, The Champion of Light, sent from the West by the Valar. Tolkien even suggested in the posthumously published *Unfinished Tales of Númenor and Middle-earth* that Gandalf could have been Manwë, the King of Valar himself, disguised as a “regular” angelic being of the race of Maiar and after that taken a mortal shape (Tolkien, *Unfinished Tales* 540).

When Gandalf battles with the Balrog and falls into a pit, his physical shape dies. Later Gandalf explains to his friends that he was *sent back* to do his work: “Naked I was sent back – for a brief time, until my task is done” (Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings* 491). After rising from the “death”, Gandalf emphasises his disparity from the physical world in many occasions. When Aragorn, Gimli and Legolas mistake him for Saruman and try to attack him physically, Gandalf tells them that: “None of you have any weapons that could hurt me” (Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings* 484).

The opposing forces of *The Lord of the Rings* are given a different and more tragic ending. Sauron, after the destruction of the One Ring, rises for the last time as a huge shadow and then disappears with the breeze of wind:

[B]lack against the pall of cloud, there rose a huge shape of shadow, impenetrable, lightning-crowned, filling all the sky. Enormous it reared above the world, and stretched out towards them a vast threatening hand, terrible but impotent: for even as it leaned over them, a great wind took it, and it was blown away, and passed; and then a hush fell. (Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings* 928.)

Paul Kocher discusses the “deaths” of immortal beings in Tolkien’s *legendarium* and the similarities of the destruction of the Witch King of Angmar, the leader of the Nazgûl in the hands of Éowyn, and the death of Saruman in the hands of Grima. Both of the death scenes focus on perishableness. Kocher sees that Saruman’s death finishes his downward plunge. His spirit rising from the shrunken body is dissipated by a wind from the West and the spirit is dissolved into nothing. Kocher sees that this “nothing” is a repeated knell for the passing of the lords of evil in *The Lord of the Rings*, but that Tolkien is careful never to say anything explicit about that “nothingness” to which they go. (Kocher 79.)

On the other hand, when Frodo is attacked by the Nazgûl and is struck with the Morgul knife (Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings* 191), he is injured and evil magic pulls him into a shadow life. He is “beginning to fade”, as Gandalf later describes (Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings* 213). In the early version of the story, *The Return of the Shadow*, Gandalf says that Frodo would have himself become an undead person, if he would have put on the Ring: “they have made a wraith of you before long – certainly if you had put on the Ring again” (Tolkien, *The Return of the Shadow* 206).

In the story, Frodo is rushed in a hurry to the Elves of Rivendell to be healed. On their way, they encounter Elf-lord Glorfindel, who has ridden in search for them. When Frodo, who is at this point “beginning to fade”, sees Glorfindel, he sees the elf as he “really is”: “To Frodo it appeared that a white light was shining through the form and raiment of the rider, as if through a thin veil” (Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings* 204). Frodo sees the inner light of the Elf, the spiritual – and the immortal – power of the character. Frodo is about to be pulled into the “shadow land”, where invisible things become visible, and visible (physical) things invisible.

Later Glorfindel’s real being is again revealed, when almost completely “faded” Frodo is attacked by the Nazgûl in the Ford of Bruinen. Frodo, nearly unconscious at the moment, is rescued by a miraculous uprising of the river by Elrond, which bears the Black Riders into “the rushing flood” (Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings* 209). In his last senses, Frodo sees his friends and companions trying to come to his aid: “With the last failing senses Frodo heard cries, and . . . saw, beyond the Riders that hesitated on the shore, a shining figure of white light; and beyond it ran small shadowy forms waving flames, that flared red in the grey mist that was falling over the world” (Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings* 209).

Frodo’s mortal companions – three Hobbits Sam, Pippin and Merry, and Aragorn – are the small shadowy forms, the grey mist is the rest of the physical world, and “a shining figure of white light” is Glorfindel. This is later revealed when Frodo asks Gandalf of the incident:

‘I thought that I saw a white figure that shone and did not grow dim like the others. Was that Glorfindel then?’

‘Yes, you saw him for a moment as he is upon the other side: one of the mighty of the Firstborn. He is an Elf-lord of a house of princes. (Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings* 217.)

This is an informing passage. Gandalf’s words confirm Frodo’s vision to be a real one, as his words usually refer to a real knowledge of the cosmology in *The Lord of the Rings*. Frodo saw Glorfindel for a moment as he is “upon the other side”. Frodo was moving into a chthonic, demonic underworld, a plane for the shadows and undead. However at the same time, as his

vision of the physical world was fading, his vision of the things invisible for mortal eyes was evolving.

Nazgûl's evil powers, but also the power of the One Ring, have a "magical" capability to transfer their subject to "a shadow world", which is a plane of existence between, or perhaps even under,⁷ the physical "middle world" and spiritual "upper world". Tolkien describes that high Elves, those of the people of Eldar who have lived both in the Undying Lands of Valinor, and in Middle-earth, live in "both sides" – in the physical, and in the spiritual world (Tolkien, *The Return of the Shadow* 212).

In *The History of Middle-earth* Tolkien discusses this more thoroughly, when Gandalf describes Frodo why the Elves do not fear the Nazgûl: "They fear no Ring-wraiths, for they live at once in both worlds, and each world has only half power over them, while they have double power over both" (Tolkien, *The Return of the Shadow* 212). Basically, the Elves live in "two worlds": the physical and the unphysical.

This view for the dead, or undead, is shared in *The Lord of the Rings* by Legolas, who is an Elf of The Woodland Realm and son of Thranduil, King of Northern Mirkwood. Even though he is not one of the High Elves, Legolas says he "do not fear the Dead" when travelling with Aragorn to the Paths of the Dead, which is occupied by undead creatures (Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings* 764). For the immortal Elves, whose souls never leave the world, there is no need to fear the undead.

One can say that Tolkien's elves, as immortal creatures, are at the same time "physical" and "spiritual". In *Morgoth's Ring*, Tolkien even discusses how the Eldar, the High Elves, will eventually become completely invisible to mortal eyes. Their spiritual side will "consume" their physical side:

As the weight of the years, which all their changes of desire and thought, gathers upon the spirit of the Eldar, so do the impulses and moods of their bodies change. This the Eldar mean when they speak of their spirits consuming them; and they say that ere Arda ends all the Eldalië on earth will have become spirits invisible to mortal eyes, unless they will to be seen by some among Men into whose minds they may enter directly. (Tolkien, *Morgoth's Ring* 212.)

In Tolkien's *legendarium*, the Good and the Evil are opposing forces, but there are powers also between them: forces that are trying to remain neutral. Still, there are other opposing dichotomies, too. There are the dichotomies between spiritual and physical and between visible and invisible. These can be seen also as the great division: the dichotomy between mortal and immortal. Tolkien's *legendarium* unites these elements in a coherent cosmological vision.

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⁷ This could be the case if one compares this with the planes of existence (or "worlds") in Ancient Greek, Scandinavian or Finnish cosmologies, for example. In the Norse cosmology, the Underworld Hel and Niflheim are the places of the dead and in the *Kalevala*, the old Finnish underworld is described as Tuonela, the realm of dead. In the Greek mythology, the underworld is usually Hades. The world that humans and mortals inhabit is usually, both in Finnish and in Scandinavian mythology, called "middle-earth", Midgard in *Eddas*.

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Scholars Opposing Forces – Report on FINFAR 2013 Meeting

Katja Kontturi

The 14th seminar of Science Fiction and Fantasy Research in Finland (or more commonly known as FINFAR meeting) took place between the 4th and the 5th of July, in the summer of 2013. This time all the eager researchers of speculative fiction gathered in Helsinki since Finncon, the biggest fantasy and science fiction convention in the Nordic countries, was held there as well. The 6th floor of the Metsätalo building at the University of Helsinki smelled of coffee, sandwiches, and fruits as approximately twenty researchers and commentators spent several hours on both days engaging in conversation about opposing forces, which was the theme of this year's seminar.

This year we had a special guest commentator, Doctor Stefan Ekman from the University of Lund. A lecturer, scholar, as well as the leader of the fantasy literature section of the International Association for the Fantastic in the Arts (IAFA), Ekman was very honoured of being the guest of honour of both the FINFAR meeting and Finncon. The seminar's other international guest, science fiction critic and publisher Cheryl Morgan, has regularly been taking part in the FINFAR meetings, and was very much welcomed with her ultimate knowledge on speculative fiction.

Young scholars were also helped by speculative fiction experts such as Irma Hirsjärvi, Liisa Rantalaiho and Markku Soikkeli from the University of Tampere, Paula Arvas and Merja Polvinen from the University of Helsinki and Sofia Sjö from Åbo Akademi University. All the presented papers had two specialized commentators who gave pointers, advice, and well-argued criticism on how to improve the paper.

Young researchers, both Master's level and Doctoral students had prepared papers concerning their theses or articles they were working on. The idea of the FINFAR seminar is that all the papers are read in advance so the half-hour time is left for conversation and comments – not for reading the papers aloud.

Thursday, the first day of the seminar, was filled with comics and classics. After the welcoming words and introductions from the organizers, the seminar commenced with the presentation about Black Knight as an opposing force in Don Rosa's Disney comics by yours truly. Next, Hanna-Riikka Roine from the University of Tampere presented her paper on fan fiction. She discussed whether fan fiction is opposing the system of genre. Straight after Hanna-Riikka, one of the organizers, Päivi Vääänen discussed the liberal and conservative forces in Samuel Delany's *Stars in My Pocket like Grains of Sand*. One of the classics of fantasy, *Narnia* series by C. S. Lewis, was dealt with in Nicholas Wanberg's paper about race and related ideologies.

Overwhelmed by the great papers, the group of scholars took a comfortable lunch break in a nearby sushi restaurant discussing, perhaps, some academic matters as well as plans for the Finncon weekend.

Just before the coffee break, commentators were given papers on some of the biggest names of speculative fiction, when Tapio Salomaa talked about his paper on H. P. Lovecraft's vision on religion, and Jyrki Korpua presented a section of his future doctoral dissertation about J. R. R. Tolkien's *Legendarium*. Thursday was concluded with zombies: Marjut Puhakka's paper

commented on the differences between zombies and humans. The final paper reminded the scholars that there are very good fantasy authors also in Finland, as Emilia Uusitalo discussed the functions of naming and nomenclature in Anu Holopainen's series called *Syysmaa*.

After a long Thursday, the second day of the seminar was a bit shorter, so all the interested participants were able to go to Kaapelitehdas, where Finncon started at 2 o'clock. However, there were still quite a lot of interesting papers to talk about before the seminar was over. Esko Suoranta's presentation was about William Gibson's *Bigend* trilogy and dealt with individuals as opposing forces. Jari Käkälä, another organizer of the seminar, talked about Isaac Asimov's and Robert Heinlein's visions of future histories. The dichotomy between a man and a machine as well as between a man and a monster, was the main theme of the rest of the Friday. Minja Blom's paper concerned different vampire TV series and what kind of humanized aspects vampires might have. Aina-Kaisa Koistinen continued with science fiction TV series *Bionic Woman* and how it represented the cyborg body as a controlled tool.

Following a deserved coffee break, Kaisa Kortekallio from the University of Oulu and Jani Ylönen from the University of Eastern Finland both discussed humanist and posthumanist themes in their papers. Kortekallio's paper was about Simon Ings' *Hotwire*, and Ylönen discussed M. John Harrison's novel *Light*.

The discussion during the two-day seminar was vivid and rewarding for both the young scholars and the commentators, who were heard to say how much they enjoyed the papers. Stefan Ekman even commented how broad Finnish research on science fiction and fantasy is compared to Sweden. Perhaps this was the last comment they needed to begin the founding of the society of Finnish science fiction and fantasy research. Great things happen in FINFAR meetings.

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FINFAR – A Gift from Fandom to Academia

Liisa Rantalaiho

The official start of organized Finnish science fiction and fantasy fandom dates to 1976, and by the early 1980's several fanzines were in existence. However, it takes some 15–20 years for a generation of teenage fandom to grow up and start university careers. Some of them will gravitate towards literature studies and get the bright idea that they might actually make an academic subject of this thing they love, science fiction and fantasy. The mainstream literary culture, both generally and in academia, saw realism as the normal and respectable kind of literature. For a science fiction fan it was hard to find a university teacher who would show any interest in a study of speculative fiction, let alone know enough of the subject to advise their students.

This was also the experience of Vesa Sisättö, an active fan who had done his graduate work on fantasy without getting any advice of his teachers in the University of Helsinki. In the year 2000, the Millennium Finncon was to be in Helsinki, and Vesa, together with Kari Kanto, was in charge of the science programme. While Kari took care of the (natural) science lectures, Vesa decided to organize a meeting for others who were in need of peer support in their studies on speculative fiction. The pre-published programme of Finncon 2000 invited people who were doing their graduate studies in science fiction and fantasy literature to come and hear about what others were doing and to exchange tips and experiences with each other. The same notice was spread around the departments of literature in Finnish universities. It certainly worked: well over 20 interested persons gathered in an afternoon session and some of them presented their work. Alas, precise documentation of the meeting seems to be available no longer.

This was the first proper meeting of Finnish science fiction and fantasy researchers. There had been preliminary steps of some kind in the year before, when the 1999 Finncon in Turku had invited high school teachers of literature and university students to hear a series of lectures on speculative fiction. Nevertheless, the meeting in the Millennium Finncon in 2000 was the start of a continuing effort. People wanted to make researchers' meetings a regular thing in Finncons, and thereafter every Finncon has included a summer research seminar on speculative fiction. Once a meeting has also been organized in winter, namely as a working group in the conference of The Finnish Society of Cultural Studies.

The first meeting had gathered quite a lot of people; probably many of them had just wanted to meet others and talk about their experiences. The following meetings demanded more of the participants: everybody should bring a paper and present it. There was first a decided drop in attendance, but it has been slowly building up again. The precise documentation of papers is available since the Turku Finncon in 2004: there have usually been 7–9 papers in each seminar, varying from 4 (Turku 2004) to 14 (Helsinki 2013). That means a two-day seminar, during Thursday and Friday before the Finncon weekend. In the course of years, over 60 different researchers have presented their papers; so far only four of them have come from outside Finland.

Several aspects of the research meetings have stayed the same since the year 2006. By then, the name FINFAR, for Finnish Fantastic Researchers, was adopted, an e-mail list for news and information (scifi-res) was started and has been in regular use; since then a CFP in both Finnish and

English has been sent out early in January, all papers have been sent to all participants (by e-mail), and every paper has had two teacher commentators (plus of course the eager common discussion). The early meetings were just that: meetings for people who wanted peer support and were willing to present their own study, whatever the subject. Starting from 2006 the meetings – and CFPs – have been thematic, some connected to the theme of Finncon of the year, some separate from that. The themes have asked questions about borders, outsiders, utopias, YA literature, journeys, methodologies, theories, myths, aliens, and opposing forces in fantasy and science fiction. The meetings have usually been organized together with a local university institute or department, and held in the university rooms, even when the actual Finncon venue was elsewhere.

Some teachers have been involved from very early on: Irma Hirsjärvi from the University of Jyväskylä, Frans Mäyrä and Liisa Rantalaiho from the University of Tampere, and Markku Soikkeli from the University of Turku, later from the University of Tampere. When Matti Savolainen lived, he involved the University of Oulu, and several of his students have continued to be among the most active participants. Since the 2009 meeting, Merja Polvinen from the University of Helsinki has been a pillar of strength for FINFAR, and since the 2011 FINFAR-meeting in Turku, Sofia Sjö from Åbo Akademi has brought yet another university among the FINFAR circle. Occasionally, Merja Leppälahti from the University of Turku and Paula Aarvas from the University of Helsinki have also been teacher-commentators. What should especially be noted is that none of these teachers has been paid for their work, mostly not even for their expenses. That's fandom for you.

FINFAR has always been intimately connected to the Finncons. The meetings have often ended in participating in the programme of Finnish Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers Association FSFWA, where those of Finncon Guests of Honour who are authors give speeches or have panel discussions. Indeed, a valuable input to the FINFAR meetings has come from Finncon Guests of Honour, for some of the GoHs have actually been invited as researchers and/or critics of speculative fiction, like Farah Mendlesohn, Adam Roberts and Stefan Ekman. The most important of them, however, has been Cheryl Morgan, who has generously given her time and expertise as a critic to the FINFAR meetings since the year 2007. That's why she was also made the first honorary member of the official FINFAR Society.

The participating students have come from many disciplines, mostly from humanities and social sciences, but from a wide spectrum: Finnish language and literature, English language and literature, general linguistics, translation studies, folklore, religion studies, history, philosophy, sociology, media studies, cultural studies etc. Their research has covered literature, films, TV-series, comics, and included both textual and reception studies. However, during the years there have been two major changes, all because the students have grown up. This means that the first meetings usually included students doing their graduate work, but in the later years the majority have been on the postgraduate level, doing their doctoral dissertations. A necessary corollary to that has been the change to the use of the English language in the papers and the seminar discussions. Partly this has been necessary to enjoy the presence of international guests, but it has also meant a growing internationalization. This is a welcome and necessary development, but also a problem for FINFAR. We still have to consider how to reach the younger students and not scare them off.

Anyway, already by the year 2006 the situation was clear: we needed to find institutional support for the young generation of science fiction and fantasy researchers. The teachers would continue with their (unpaid) input, but where would the students get money to travel to conferences abroad? At that time, the Finnish academic scenery included thematic graduate schools financed by the Ministry of Education. Could FINFAR start one of its own? The trouble was that a fulltime professor in some university would have to take the responsibility, and there was no one available, all the even mildly sympathetic ones being too busy. This path petered out. After a few years it was clear that FINFAR was not just rambling along but actually producing good papers, good enough to reserve an international audience, and our research area ought to count as an academic field in itself.

What was the way to officially and publicly establish the status of FINFAR? During the meeting in Helsinki Finncon 2013 this all crystallized rapidly in a few interactions during one afternoon. This is how it went:

We should finally start our own scientific society and apply for membership in the central organization of Finnish scientific societies – The FINFAR society would need its own web pages, could the secretary of FSFWA help us? – Yes, easily, and he could also make the web pages for a journal – Great, we'll start our own scientific journal – And why not make it a Nordic one at the same time, we have the contacts already!

There it was. Some necessary formalities, and a few weeks later both the FINFAR society and *Fafnir – Nordic Journal of Science Fiction and Fantasy Research* were official.

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Peeking into the Neighbouring Grove: Speculative Fiction in the Work of Mainstream Scholars

Merja Polvinen

The last decade of literary studies has seen new and fruitful debates arise in many fields from cultural theory to poetics. However, among those debates there are a few that seem to be particularly interesting and promising in terms of trying to understand the beast we call prose fiction. These debates also happen to gravitate around issues that many of us would recognise as central to the study of speculative fiction. Admittedly, SF scholarship's relations with the mainstream of literary studies have been difficult in the past (see e.g. Wolfe), and one of the after-effects of that conflict may be a tendency to look for answers to our crucial questions amongst ourselves – within the (young) scholarly tradition formed specifically around speculative writing. In terms of building and strengthening that tradition, it is vital that we recognise its existence and its value as a field of research that carries its own particular brand of expertise. But no genre is an island, and there is much work done elsewhere in literary studies that resonates with some of the most interesting characteristics of speculative fiction.

I would like to pick up three discussions that might be particularly fruitful. The first is postmodernism and its legacy. What really was at stake in postmodern writing, and have those issues been resolved? How much real-world relevance does fiction have? The second debate revolves around the so-called cognitive approaches to literature, and their presentation of the role of fiction in human thought. What is it that we do when we engage with a fiction? Is it a process radically different from our everyday mental processes or from the logical structures of rational thought? And finally, a related question arises from our tendency to overvalue rationality itself. Emotion has been shown to be so essential to our decision-making processes that separating it from rationality is turning out to cause intractable problems to our understanding of the mind. What, then, might be the role of emotion in the history and the present of literary forms? How has the novel, the king of narrative forms today, developed through forms of sentimentalism and social realism to the variety of genres we have, and exactly what role do readerly emotions have in that development?

While similar questions have engaged those of us working on speculative fiction for a long time, SF scholarship has not, as such, taken part in the same conversation as the rest of literary studies. Without going into arguments about why that should be, I thought I would take these questions directly to scholars working in what is seen as the scholarly mainstream, and ask them how they see the role of SF in answering them. I therefore conducted a brief e-mail interview with three researchers representing the sharp end of the debates concerning postmodernism, cognition and emotion: Brian McHale, Jan Alber and Suzanne Keen.

McHale, currently Humanities Distinguished Professor at Ohio State University, is a giant in the field of postmodern literature. His 1987 *Postmodernist Fiction* is still the sharpest analysis of the issues at stake, and one of the most widely used university textbooks on courses focusing on postmodern literature. McHale's central arguments concern the processes of world-building in literature: the various structures of thought that an imagined world can be built on (e.g. his famous distinction between the epistemological dominant of modernism and the ontological dominant of

postmodernism) and the techniques through which a text constructs such a world for readers to imagine and experience (particularly its narrative structures).

“It’s long been my conviction that, of all the genres of popular fiction, SF is the one that sustains the most intimate connections with aesthetically ambitious postmodern writing,” McHale says. “The institutional ecosystems of the two kinds of writing differ, but not necessarily their poetics.” Many of his favourite SF works also bear witness to this close relationship: William Gibson’s *Neuromancer* and *Pattern Recognition*, as well as Colson Whitehead and Haruki Murakami, “novelists poised on the cusp between SF and the mainstream (wherever that might be located nowadays).”

McHale has also taken speculative fiction on board as a central element in understanding the processes of fictional world-building. “I am especially attracted by the proposition, advanced in a relatively restrained form by Carl Freedman, and in a bolder form by Seo-Young Chu, that SF ought to be regarded as the most typical kind of fiction. Fiction stages thought experiments, usually more or less constrained by current reality-models; SF foregrounds the very operations of thought-experiment, and in that sense lays bare the bases of all fictional world-building. Thus, if we want to understand fiction in general, we ought to begin from SF, which exposes for us, as in an x-ray, the deep structure of fiction. I find this idea powerful and exhilarating.” In a recent article (“Science Fiction”) McHale makes this argument with reference to his “once and future favourite” SF novel: Alfred Bester’s *The Stars My Destination* (1956). “My adolescent self loved it, and my aging-professor self sees no reason to disown it.”

An Associate Professor at the Department of English at the University of Freiburg, Jan Alber is one of the younger generation of scholars grappling with postmodernity and its aftermath. Alber has also been one of the foremost proponents of cognitive narratology, i.e. the study of storytelling from an angle formed in cooperation with the cognitive sciences. “I am fascinated by the fact that fictional literature (from the beast fable to the highly anti-illusionist works of postmodernism) consistently moves beyond real-world parameters by representing scenarios and events that would be impossible in the real world,” Alber notes. “I use the term ‘unnatural’ to refer to the physically, logically, or humanly impossible, and I am interested in manifestations of the unnatural as well as the question of what the proliferation of impossibilities throughout literary history tells us about the human mind.” Alber has edited and contributed to a number of collections mapping this new approach, including *A Poetics of Unnatural Narrative* from 2013.

Like McHale, Alber sees SF to be a particularly fruitful genre to study in conjunction with postmodernism. “[S]peculative fiction is clearly related to postmodernism, which is a more recent style or type of writing that correlates with a high degree of unnaturalness and, in addition, relates back to already conventionalized impossibilities in established genres (such as speculative fiction).” In his thinking, what is fascinating about SF is the paradox between its impossible content and the ease with which readers accept and are mentally and emotionally engaged by that content. “Speculative fiction is full of impossibilities that have already been conventionalized, i.e., converted into cognitive frames, and no longer strike us as being defamiliarizing. In other words, certain impossibilities have become a crucial aspect of the generic conventions.”

As a narratologist with a view on genre formations and the historical development of forms of storytelling, Alber is most of all interested in how such conventionalizations have happened, and “how the conventionalized impossibilities in well-established genres relate to the not yet conventionalized impossibilities of postmodernism.” Accordingly, his favourite works span the decades and form a continuum from Robert Heinlein’s “All You Zombies” (1959) to Shelley Jackson’s *Half Life* (2006).

My third contact, Suzanne Keen, is Thomas H. Broadus Professor of English and Dean of the College at Washington and Lee University in Lexington, Virginia. She has long been a scholar of the novel as a historical and constantly developing literary form, and is fascinated with the ways in which narrative fiction navigates social norms. *Victorian Renovations of the Novel* (1998), for example, shows how temporary and often fantastical story spaces function as “narrative annexes” through which

the text can represent things that cannot, as such, be talked about in the fiction of that time. Consequently, her “c19 realism always had a lot of George MacDonald in it.” Keen has also done brilliant work on the emotional relationships between authors, texts and readers in *Empathy and the Novel* (2007), in which she discusses Octavia Butler’s work, among other things.

For Keen, therefore, the segregation of realistic and fantastic genres is inherently problematic. Having absorbed much of the SF megatext through Samuel R. Delany, Ursula LeGuin and J.R.R. Tolkien, she “read Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children* when it came out more or less as genre fiction—by then I had read a lot of alternative timeline histories, and I recognized *MC* as a version of that kind of writing. I was primed to love Doris Lessing’s *The Memoirs of a Survivor*, a near future dystopia with a happy escape at the end,” and “was stunned to find that Lessing’s critics really didn’t know what to do with her speculative side.” Such works not only benefit from being read in connection with their speculative ancestry, but that ancestry itself affects how we understand the very form of the novel. “When someone offers a generalization about ‘the novel,’ I test it against my eclectic reading across the sub genres,” Keen notes. “That has been the source of many fruitful arguments.”

Alber, Keen and McHale have all been able to engage with speculative texts in their teaching and research. Of the three, only McHale has had the chance of teaching a specialised speculative fiction course for undergraduates every few years. Mostly they all incorporate individual texts in courses or other forms of teaching that also involve mainstream fiction. “Many of the graduate students on whose committees I serve,” McHale says, “incorporate speculative fictions in their programs of study, which gives me frequent opportunities to discuss SF with them.” “I just wedge them in whenever I feel they might liven up a syllabus,” notes Keen. “A little Neil Gaiman sitting next to the Rushdie.”

It is clear that combining mainstream and speculative fiction in a syllabus will be beneficial to the visibility of SF within literary studies. But the larger question is whether such an approach will be useful for those of us focusing on the unique features of speculative fiction itself. Can such a joint analysis tell us something concrete about SF, more than that its literary value should be acknowledged?

I believe that it can, but I’ll leave that as a cliffhanger for now. Most of all, however, I believe that the answers we seek concerning the specificity of SF can only be found by engaging with the theoretical work being done elsewhere in literary studies – especially when scholars in other fields turn to grapple with issues that clearly relate to speculative genres. Examining postmodernism, cognition and emotion from the perspectives offered to us by scholars such as Alber, Keen and McHale, and examining SF texts in conjunction with other genres may open up a new angle on our familiar debates. If the validity of SF as a genre is more widely recognised in the process, then all the better, and perhaps our expertise in speculative forms of fiction might even push the larger theoretical debates into whole new directions. But none of that can happen, unless the dialogue is as engaged, active and open as possible.

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This edition is scheduled for September 2014. The deadline for the submissions for the next edition is scheduled at 31 August (4/2014).

Best regards,
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