



Fafnir

NORDIC JOURNAL OF SCIENCE FICTION AND FANTASY RESEARCH

Volume 1, issue 3, 2014

journal.finfar.org



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

Submission Guidelines

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

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

Open-Access Policy

All content for *Fafnir* is immediately available through open access, and we endorse the definition of open access laid out in Bethesda Meeting on Open Access Publishing. Our content is licensed under *Creative Commons Attribution-Non Commercial 3.0 Unported License*. All reprint requests can be sent to the editors at *Fafnir*, which retains copyright.

Editorial Staff

Editors in Chief

Jyrki Korpua
Hanna-Riikka Roine
Päivi Väättänen

Managing Editor

Juri Timonen

Advisory Board

Merja Polvinen, University of Helsinki, Chair
Paula Arvas, University of Helsinki
Stefan Ekman, University of Gothenburg
Ingvil Hellstrand, University of Stavanger
Irma Hirsjärvi, University of Jyväskylä
Urpo Kovala, University of Jyväskylä
Frans Mäyrä, University of Tampere
Jerry Määttä, Uppsala University

Cheryl Morgan (publisher and critic)
Sari Polvinen, University of Helsinki
Liisa Rantalaiho, University of Tampere
Adam Roberts, Royal Holloway, U. London
Johan Schimanski, University of Oslo
Sofia Sjö, Åbo Akademi University
Peter Stockwell, University of Nottingham
Sanna Tapionkaski, University of Jyväskylä

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

Cover Photo: Arthur Rackham (illus.), "Siegfried Kills Fafnir," 1911, on Wikimedia Commons



Fafnir – Nordic Journal of Science Fiction and
Fantasy Research
journal.finfar.org

Table of Contents

Editorial 3/2014.....	5
------------------------------	----------

Peer-reviewed Articles

“Noble and Beautiful” – Universal Human Aesthetics in C.S. Lewis’s <i>The Chronicles of Narnia</i> NICHOLAS WANBERG	7
Into the Woods: Getting Lost and Meeting Witches IRIS GASSENBAUER.....	19

Essay

Discussions of Genre Interpretation in Johanna Sinisalo’s <i>Auringon ydin</i> and Finnish Weird HANNA SAMOLA & HANNA-RIIKKA ROINE.....	27
--	----

Book Reviews

Sanna Lehtonen – <i>Girls Transforming: Invisibility and Age-Shifting in Children’s Fantasy Fiction Since the 1970s</i> LIISA RANTALAIHO.....	36
Brian Attebery – <i>Stories about Stories: Fantasy and the Remaking of Myth</i> SANNA LEHTONEN.....	38



Fafnir – Nordic Journal of Science Fiction and Fantasy Research

journal.finfar.org

Editorial 3/2014

Jyrki Korpua, Hanna-Riikka Roine & Päivi Väättänen

Fantasy is a natural human activity. It certainly does not destroy or even insult Reason; and it does not either blunt the appetite for, nor obscure the perception of, scientific verity. On the contrary. The keener and the clearer is the reason, the better fantasy will it make.

...

Fantasy remains a human right: we make in our measure and in our derivative mode, because we are made: and not only made, but made in the image and likeness of a Maker.

(Tolkien, On Fairy-Stories)

The third issue of *Fafnir* celebrates fantasy. The articles, discussion and reviews in this issue postulate on questions of fantasy literature, fantastic milieus and the imaginative. They bring forward the idea Tolkien formulates above, that fantasy does not obscure our perception of the “real” world surrounding us, but rather can give us new insights into it.

In his article “‘Noble and Beautiful’ - Universal Human Aesthetics in C.S. Lewis's *The Chronicles of Narnia*,” Nicholas Wanberg analyses beliefs about human and humanoid aesthetics and discusses why and how these elements from Lewis's *Narnia*-series have historically been seen as racist.

Iris Gassenbauer's article “Into the Woods. Getting Lost and Meeting Witches” focuses on the subject of the woods as *topos* in the history of literature and in contemporary movies. The article discusses how the confusing spatial organisation of forests place them in juxtaposition with organised, more “civilized” areas and this allows the unknown, fantastic Other to emerge.

In their essay on Johanna Sinisalo's *Auringon ydin* (2013, “The Core of the Sun”), Hanna-Riikka Roine and Hanna Samola discuss the always interesting genre logics of so-called speculative fiction, pointing out how the novel combines several aspects of fantasy, from fairy tales to alternate society to science fiction.

In addition to the articles and the discursive essay, *Fafnir* presents two literary reviews. Liisa Rantalaiho reviews Sanna Lehtonen's book *Girls Transforming. Invisibility and Age-Shifting in Children's Fantasy Fiction Since the 1970s* and Sanna Lehtonen reviews Brian Attebery's *Stories about stories: Fantasy and the Remaking of Myth*. According to the reviewers, both books present new and important insights into fantasy.

This fantastic issue of *Fafnir* gives you a glimpse of just what kind of human right fantasy is and how many different angles there are to study it from. Whether it is an alternate world in the back of a wardrobe, mystical and scary forests, invisible children, or the core of the sun, all themes imply a sense of wonder as well as adventure and excitement - and the research on those fantastic speculations is equally exciting. Join us for an academic thrill with *Fafnir* 3/2014!



Fafnir – Nordic Journal of Science Fiction and Fantasy Research

journal.finfar.org

“Noble and Beautiful” – Universal Human Aesthetics in C.S. Lewis's *The Chronicles of Narnia*

Nicholas Wanberg

Abstract: C. S. Lewis believed that the best Christian writing should not aim to be original but should rather focus on borrowing and adapting from previous works. Unsurprisingly, Lewis's most popular work, The Chronicles of Narnia, shows the influence of a wide variety of sources. Beyond the better known mythological and Christian influences, the series also draws from Rider Haggard's works and the Lost World genre more generally. Many of these influences have led to accusations of racism against the works. To better understand such claims, this paper seeks to analyze one of the key elements fueling to such accusations, namely beliefs about human and humanoid aesthetics, which have historically taken on racist implications. In The Chronicles of Narnia, the narrator and characters alike treat questions of personal aesthetics as being objective assessments, and skin tone is shown playing a significant part in these judgments, with a certain variety of "fair" skin being ideal and deviations from this norm, whether becoming too red, too pale, too blue or too dark, being treated as unattractive. Aspects of the inner nature of characters is also frequently treated as being externally visible, and there is a strong, albeit imperfect, correlation between physical attractiveness and individual moral standing. Understanding these themes can lead to a better understanding of Lewis's works and serve as a warning for contemporary writers on the dangers of adopting themes uncritically.

Keywords: Narnia, aesthetics, racism, Lewis, adaptation

Biography and contact info: Nicholas Wanberg is a graduate of the English Philology program in the Department of Modern Language at Helsinki University. His current research focuses on the influence of evolving systems of modern thought, particularly racist thought, on the construction of fictional worlds.

C. S. Lewis considered true originality to be “the prerogative of God alone” (Lewis “Literature” 21). Writers and other artists might, he conceded, be “original” in the very limited sense of not following in the footsteps of any human predecessors (23), but human creation, according to Lewis, is something that occurs only under divine direction. Even acting without human precedent, however, was something Lewis treated as essentially the last resort of those who could do no better (25). Better than to be original in any sense was for an artist to work “in an established form and dealing with experiences common to all his race” (25). Lewis saw building off the great works of the past as a noble enterprise, far nobler, in fact, than building from scratch. With this in mind, it is no surprise that Lewis was once amused to hear *The Chronicles of Narnia* criticized as being

unoriginal (Watson 90). To Lewis, this must have come not as criticism but as praise, for being unoriginal was his full intention.

In the construction of *The Chronicles of Narnia*, Lewis's adaptation of other works is so in depth and takes such a broad sampling from other works and places that the scholarship attempting to document it is difficult itself to fully catalog. Mervyn Nicholson, to cite one example, has written numerous articles in recent years, pointing out various influences to the series, including finding highly in-depth links to such writers as E. Nesbit ("Scholarship"), Walter de la Mare ("Fairy Tales"), C. R. Martin ("C. R. Martin") and James Stephens ("James Stephens"), among others, and has even linked as remote details as the naming of a minor animal character to a historic admiral in the Royal Navy ("Mole Admiral"). Influences, religious, literary and mythological, behind the works form the basis of countless other scholarly works since the release of the series, and examples of studies of this type continue to accumulate (for a few, more recent examples, see Brazier; Bruner and Ware; Downing; Duriez; Greggersen; Jacobs; Muth; Ward). These influences are so extensive, in fact, that of all the many fantasy races found within the works, Nicholson identifies only one as being truly original, namely the "Marsh-Wiggles" ("Mole Admiral" 485).

Beyond influences from many diverse classic works and genres that are still followed and read today, however, Lewis also borrows from sources that have not stood so well against the tests of time. A great deal of critical ire has been roused by Lewis's inclusion of elements of the Lost World genre, for example, a genre most famous now for its racism and colonial worldview. In particular, the writings of Rider Haggard have been found to have had a strong influence on a number of scenes, themes and characters (Nicholson, "Scholarship") (though certainly not all such elements can be attributed there), including particularly strong influences on the construction and portrayal of the White Witch and the Calormenes. This portrayal of the Calormenes, Lewis's "wise, wealthy, courteous, cruel and ancient" (*Chronicles* 452) race of dark skinned peoples who dwell across a vast desert to the south of Narnia, has been the favorite target of these attacks.

From non-scholarly sources, recent accusations of racism directed at *The Chronicles of Narnia* have been championed by Philip Pullman, one of Lewis's most vocal critics (Ezard; BBC; Pullman). Kyrie O'Conner has expressed doubts over *The Horse and his Boy*'s adaptability to film on the same grounds, describing the work as "anti-Arab, anti-Eastern or anti-Ottoman." Others have been likewise quick to acknowledge problems related to matters of race within the books (for an example, see: Miller, *The Magician's Book*), and even while speaking in defense of *Narnia*, Gregg Easterbrook has described the Calormenes, whom he identifies as "the principal bad guys," as being "unmistakable Muslim stand-ins."

Although not giving as frequent or direct attention to such matters, the scholarly realm has been far from silent. Examples can be found such as James Russel's, who has seen the works as being an allegory of national and post-colonial myth, in which racial overtones are heavily applied (61–6), or that of Susan Rowland, who has seen even the Turkish delight as carrying an implicit racism of its own, while describing *The Horse and his Boy* as a "formidably anti-Arab story" (11).

Defenders of the works have likewise been found in both places. A keynote address offered by Devin Brown of Ashbury College, for example, offers a good close reading that comes far closer than most others in addressing the actual points that would determine the presence of racism in the works, and he argues thereby that the stories are not at all racist.¹ Mervyn Nicholn has also commented on accusations of racism directed toward Lewis, particularly with regard to *The Chronicles of Narnia*, calling them "at best an oversimplification and at worst a slander" ("Scholarship" 58). From my own study, and in terms of *The Chronicles of Narnia*, I would find

¹ His point, for example, that there are both good and bad dwarfs successfully pins the question down to a matter of racial determinism, as well as getting past the common mistake of identifying racism as being purely a matter of cruelty directed based on skin tone. He fails to notice in his analysis, however, that while there *are* good and bad dwarfs, their moral dispositions are divided into good and evil according to distinct sub-races (Red Dwarfs and Black Dwarfs, respectively), confirming rather than refuting racial determinism.

the prior charge of oversimplification to be quite accurate, while as for Lewis himself, I would, with few reservations, declare the latter.

A comprehensive study of race and related concepts found in *The Chronicles of Narnia* would fill at least a book, if not several volumes, and I have previously offered at least a preliminary look at such themes (Wanberg), but as such are typically not the same themes addressed by most of Lewis's critics, and as my space is now considerably more constrained, I will not review them here. Rather, my intent now is to address one of the two issues that most of Lewis's critics really are talking about when they talk about racism in *The Chronicles of Narnia*, namely beliefs about human (or humanoid) aesthetics.² In particular, my concern is with addressing the apparent belief in a universal ideal for humanoid appearance as found in the books, as well as looking at two of the specific trends that ideal follows. As many, if not most, elements in *The Chronicles of Narnia* are borrowings from other places, it seems likely that such elements are also borrowed, and contrasts between some such ideas and some of Lewis's other writings seem to confirm this. Moreover, the rules that govern at least one sub-pattern, namely correlations between beauty and high moral standing, are less consistent, so it is not unreasonable to speculate that they may be the result of themes borrowed from other places (a general ideal of attractive heroes and hideous villains, for example), rather than a specific belief on Lewis's part about the natural workings of the world.

In support of these goals for this analysis, discussion will begin by looking at the origins of beliefs in universal human aesthetic ideals in society. This will be followed by a brief analysis proving the existence of such ideals in *The Chronicles of Narnia*, followed by analysis of how this ideal relates first to skin tone and then to the connection between outward physical appearances and characters' inner nature.

A History of Absolute Beauty

Beliefs in an absolute aesthetic ideal, as they concern us here, had their origins during the Enlightenment, and as responses to such themes in *The Chronicles of Narnia* imply, they were often understood to have racial implications. During this period, as the so-called “racial sciences” were gaining most of their driving force, it was said that “science and aesthetics influenced one another reciprocally” (Mosse 40). A belief in the unity of the body and mind meant, therefore, that mental characteristics would be mirrored by outward physical traits (40). These ideas were widely influential, finding a place not only in physical anthropology, but also in criminology and other fields. According to these beliefs, a man or woman who was intelligent, civilized and morally upright would naturally be more attractive as a result, while one who was the opposite (being unintelligent, primitive or morally degenerate), would be less so. This led credence to racist beliefs. Since certain physical traits were passed on genetically and therefore were more common in certain population groups, those traits could be directly correlated to beliefs about the underlying abilities, temperaments and moral standing of those groups. If appearance is tied to ability and nature, and certain groups share a similar appearance, those groups must naturally, therefore, have similar levels of ability and a similar nature. Phrenology and physiology would take this to a new level, allowing features to be precisely measured and quantified, in order that individuals and races could be judged and even ranked according to their overall worth (40).

For many, such as the Reverend Charles Kingsley, the connection between inner nature and outward appearance was primarily moral in nature. As Conlin puts it, speaking of Kingsley, “[t]he body was a faithful representation of the soul within it” (180), and many later writers, such as Herbert Spencer, Alexander Bain and Henry Maine (180) would share this belief. The character,

² The other, as many of the quotes imply, being ethnocentrism, typically a question of whether Calormene culture is designed to reflect badly on some real world society.

Tom, in Kingsley's *The Water Babies* demonstrates this clearly, as Tom's various incarnations on the road back to humanity are earned only through degrees of moral development. According to this belief, one's level of ability, then, is less important in determining one's appearance than their moral standing. Of course, this has striking implications for its opposite, when failing to measure up to the supposedly universal aesthetic standard marks one not merely as incompetent but as morally defunct.

Any comparisons to a universal aesthetic standard must, however, assume that such a standard exists and must also be able to indicate what that standard entails. For this standard, most turned to the Ancient Greeks, so an individual's or race's worth was measured according to this standard of ancient beauty (Mosse 40). Victor Courtet de l'Isle specifically declared this to be a matter of comparing the faces of the members of various races to the statue of Apollo (Fredrickson 68). It should come as little surprise that a statue carved by a European man out of white marble should differ wildly in appearance from most individuals whose descent is geographically removed from that region, but it was taken for granted by many, nonetheless, that the ideal that this statue represented would be shared and appreciated by all, regardless of what features might be more common in their own region. This is far from an accurate assessment, of course, and even within Europe, the finer details of this supposedly universal ideal were frequently contested. Gobineau himself, hailed as the "father of modern racism," would go on to insist, for example, that in terms of physical beauty, it is those who are of mixed African and European descent who should be ranked highest (Biddiss 119), a far different standard than the one others sought after from the Greeks.

An Absolutely Beautiful Story

Qualitative judgments of personal appearance are common in *The Chronicles of Narnia*, and they are never challenged except out of jealousy or conceit, but this alone does not prove that the standard of beauty found within the works is universal. After all, if those present when the appearance of any individual is remarked upon do not happen to disagree, this by no means proves that others, who are not present, might not disagree themselves.³ To obtain the strongest possible evidence, instead, for a universal standard of personal aesthetics, it becomes necessary to look for cases where beauty or ugliness is declared when, if personal appearance were subjective, it should not be. In *The Chronicles of Narnia*, two scenarios display this most clearly. The first is a case where the standard of beauty is portrayed as transcending cultural boundaries (such that both cultures agree that the fashions and phenotype found in one are more attractive than that in the other), and the second is a case where a qualitative question of appearance must be resolved by an appeal to authority (by a simpleminded people who must choose the voice of reason over pride), rather than left as a matter of opinion. The first is the matter of the Calormenes versus the Northerners (Narnians and Archenlanders). The second is the matter of the Dufflepuds.

The Calormenes' dark skin and mostly stereotypically Arabic fashion, architecture and culture (with other, clearly non-Arabic influences) form a strong contrast to the light skinned and generically European fashioned Northerners. The differences are such that one (who believed in a subjective aesthetic standard) would expect that individuals raised in the different cultures to have very different aesthetic tastes, but in *The Chronicles of Narnia*, this does not appear to be the case. Northern things are typically portrayed as being superior to their Calormene counterparts, not the least by the Calormenes themselves, despite holding their Northern neighbors in contempt, a pattern that becomes especially pronounced with matters of personal appearance. For example, Aravis, a Calormene by both birth and upbringing, once decides, for example, that "Narnian fashions (at any rate for men) looked nicer" (Lewis *Chronicles* 255). Beyond just their clothing, the bodies of the

³ This is less clearly the case when, as at times in the stories, it is the omniscient narrator who comments, rather than a character in the scene, but such is still not definitive.

Narnians themselves are also glorified. Queen Susan's beauty is frequently praised, and Aravis's friend, Lasaleen, comments on this, saying: "I can't see that she's so very pretty myself.⁴ But some of the Narnian *men* are lovely" (250, emphasis original). That this extends to people of both sexes is reaffirmed by Shasta, who although a native of the Archenland by birth, has been raised in Calormen by a Calormene fisherman since a young age and *should* be expected to have adopted Calormene social values, and who has never seen another Northerner before. We understand from Shasta's perspective that "all of them, *both men and women*, had nicer faces and voices than most Calormenes" (234, emphasis added). Those who derive from a different cultural context here show clear signs of respecting this aesthetic ideal, even when the traits prized by it are alien to them.

By far the best example of this relative estimation of appearance, however, is demonstrated by the Tarkaan Andarin in a statement he makes while speaking to Shasta's foster father, the fisherman Arsheesh. Speaking to him of Shasta, as one dark-skinned man to another in the midst of a country filled with other dark-skinned persons, he says: "The boy is manifestly no son of yours, for your cheek is as black as mine but the boy is fair and white like the accursed but beautiful barbarians who inhabit the remote north" (207). Note in particular the phrase, "accursed but beautiful." The "barbarians who inhabit the remote north" are, according to the Tarkaan, not only "accursed," but also "beautiful." Even coming from a cultural context which he is, in the same breath, declaring to be free of light skinned persons, and in the very midst of expressing his distaste for such individuals, some strange admiration seems to compel him to declare them "beautiful," even when such praise is completely inappropriate to the context.

The Dufflepuds display this from another angle. Transformed from "common little dwarfs" (502) into single-footed "monopods" (502) by the magician Aslan has appointed to be their caretaker, the Duffers/Monopods/Dufflepuds seem at first glance to oppose the notion. While both Lucy and the Magician, at the very least, find the transformation amusing, and as absurd and impractical as the transformation seems, only the Dufflepuds themselves (at the urging of their Chief), claim to find the new form ugly. The Magician and even Lucy (who never saw the original form at all) both insist it is an improvement.

When it is first encountered, this differing of opinions appears to be a break with the belief in the universality of an aesthetic ideal for what are, or at least once were, humanoids. If there is a universal standard for beauty held and accepted by all, there should be no disagreements over whether or not someone or something is beautiful. If there is a disagreement, the standard must not be universal. Our first impression of the Dufflepuds, however, quickly proves deceptive. It is tempting to dismiss the disagreement as the result of differing objectives on the part of the two groups, since the Dufflepuds are concerned mainly with their beauty or ugliness, whereas the Magician says their old form was boring and finds their new form amusing, but even this doesn't seem to be the root cause of the disagreement. As we are constantly reminded, the Dufflepuds are incredibly stupid. They are, we soon find out, wrong. The Magician suggests as much when he says: "it's only they who think they were so nice to look at before. They say they've been uglified, but that isn't what I called it. Many people might say the change was for the better" (500). When asked if they were conceited, he answers: "They are. Or at least the Chief Duffer is, and he's taught the rest to be. They always believe every word he says" (500). According to the Magician, the Dufflepuds' change was purely for the better, and the Chief Duffer denies this only out of pride, instructing his followers to do the same. That Lucy accepts this explanation without questioning seems to indicate that the reader should do likewise, even though we cannot see the Dufflepuds to

4 We have substantial evidence to suggest that Queen Susan was, in fact, very attractive and that Lasaraleen is merely being petty by denying it, although it is a sort of pettiness that does not set her apart from some more sympathetic female characters, who are also prone to this same sort of behavior. A similar reaction is found, for example, in Polly's assessment of Jadis (Lewis Chronicles 34), where Polly claims not to have thought Jadis was attractive, contrary to the opinions of all other characters (Aunt Letty calls Jadis a "shameless hussy" (51) for daring to go around with bare arms, but she does not actually describe her as unattractive per se). Aravis's only being willing to concede superiority to male Narnian fashions, but not to female, may be seen in a similar vein.

judge for ourselves. By the chapter's end, in fact, as the group prepares for their final departure from the island, we see signs of the Dufflepuds overcoming their leaders' reservations and learning to appreciate the advantages their new form has to offer. The moral, in the end, is revealed not to be about the Magician having to learn to respect that others might have opinions that are different from his own, but rather it is about the Dufflepuds having to learn to respect the wisdom of those who know better than they. The story does not, therefore, turn out to be a challenge to the existence of a universal aesthetic ideal, but rather it bears another moral entirely, one which takes the universality of such an ideal for granted, which, in fact, relies on the existence of such a standard rather than opposes it.

"Fair and Beautiful"

If there is a universal standard for human or humanoid appearance within the stories, then it raises the natural question of what standard, exactly, is used to make such a judgment. Attractive characters are given many different, sometimes contradictory traits, such that many of them can be ruled out as being part of the ideal,⁵ as well as demonstrating that, likely, no single trait alone would account for it. One trait, however, does occur frequently and reliably enough in conjunction with such judgments to be worth discussion. Much to the indignation of Lewis's accusers, that trait is skin tone. Unlike a simple black/white dichotomy, however, the ideal for an individual's skin tone seems to assume a default, unmarked shade, what might be referred to as "fair" skin, and skin tones that vary from this default shade, whether from birth or more immediate, environmental factors, are portrayed as being less attractive, regardless of the way they vary from it. Characters can be *too* white, just as they can be too much of several other shades. In at least two cases, an individual can be found to still be counted as attractive, even when their skin tone is not ideal, but in each case, their skin tone is described a point against them.

One need not hearken back any further than the aforementioned case of the Tarkaan Andarin and the Fisherman Arsheesh to see one example of this (and certainly the most problematic of them). The sole trait used to distinguish between Shasta and Arsheesh and between the Calormenes and the "beautiful barbarians" is that Shasta and the Northerners do not have black skin but are "fair and white." Given that the barbarians are described as beautiful and the most significant way they can be distinguished is by skin tone, it is very difficult to find an interpretation of this line that does not imply an equivalence between the Northerner's beauty and their skin.

Other references to the same can be found that are not as individually troubling. When Jewel recounts Narnian history for Jill, for example, he lists only one queen by name, who seems to be famous only for her beauty ("so beautiful that when she looked into any forest pool the reflection of her face shone out of the water like a star by night for a year and a day afterwards" (716)). The woman's name, tellingly enough, is "Swanwhite" (716). Likewise, references to Narnians having "nicer faces . . . than most Calormenes" (234) or Uncle Andrew's fingers being described as "beautifully white" (16), may raise similar images.

One should bear context in mind in the cases of Uncle Andrew and Swanwhite, however. Being "beautifully white" does not, in context, imply "beautiful because they were white" but "white in a way that was beautiful," implying that the whiteness in question *possessed* a beautiful quality, rather than that it *was* a beautiful quality. Since the story, by the point of Uncle Andrew's description, had not introduced any non-white characters, the latter meaning in his case would be

⁵ For example, Queen Susan is described as having long black hair (Lewis *Chronicles* 194) and Queen Lucy as having golden hair (195), but both are described as being sought after as the potential brides of many kings and princes, suggesting that hair color, at least, does not factor in to the standard. That Susan is sought after by "kings" and Lucy by "princes" is most likely just a reflection of their relative ages, not status or appearance. Numerous attractive characters may be tall, blond, deep chested or any number of such things, but these traits are not mentioned together with appearance frequently enough to draw clear conclusions, although something might tentatively be suggested about squinting and having freckles (434).

absurd. Likewise, for “Swanwhite” to be a name denoting beauty in Narnian society, which was universally white, with only dark-skinned guests and not residents (679–80), it would imply that the beauty was found in whiteness of a particular type, not necessarily in whiteness itself (otherwise how would her beauty be different from that of her subjects?). To dismiss the name as a meaningless coincidence, however, would be to ignore Lewis's fondness for carefully chosen and particularly apt naming in general (Nicholson “Mole Admiral” 485), so the significance must be presumed intentional. Comparisons to Calormenes reflect unfavorably on blackness, but this does not mean that whiteness in general is necessarily desirable, only a particular type of it.

This is further demonstrated when circumstances occur, whether environmental effects, internal changes or so on, that result in a character's complexion straying from this idealized variety of whiteness. Whenever a character's complexion changes, it is treated as being unattractive. One place this is demonstrated is when Edmund is being seduced with Turkish delight by Jadis. “His face had become very red and his mouth and fingers were sticky. He did not look either clever or handsome, whatever the Queen might say” (Lewis *Chronicles* 126). Having a sticky mouth and fingers contributes to his not looking “clever or handsome,” but this is not all. Having a red face is listed among his unattractive (and not clever-looking) features, suggesting that the change of skin tone is also undesirable. Similarly, when Jill and Eustace enter Harfang after their journey through the cold, their faces have a bluish tint. This prompts the giant who greets them to say: “Blue faces . . . I didn't know they were that colour. Don't care about it myself. But I dare say you look quite nice to one another. Beetles fancy other beetles, they do say” (598). While the giant immediately attempts to cover for his misstep in having drawn attention to what is, apparently, an unattractive feature, saying that he doesn't care about it and suggesting in his assessment that beetles “fancy other beetles,” he clearly reveals his own opinion on the matter. The phrase, “But I dare say you look quite nice to one another,” despite its intent, nonetheless betrays the fact that they do not look nice to *him*.

Similar judgments are made, interestingly enough, upon two of Jadis's transformations, in the *Magician's Nephew*, first as she enters the Wood Between the Worlds and second when she partakes of the forbidden fruit. Firstly, when she enters the Wood, she becomes physically weak, is deprived of her magical powers and is later unable to recall the events of that time. As this happens, we're told that she “looked different. She was much paler than she had been; so pale that hardly any of her beauty was left” (44). Becoming pale is portrayed as unattractive here, but more significantly, it's portrayed as *so* unattractive that someone as beautiful as Jadis can be said to have “hardly any of her beauty . . . left” simply on account of that paleness. Secondly, Jadis's second transformation, as she partakes of the forbidden fruit, is portrayed as having a similar effect. She becomes more powerful and immortal but gains an aversion to the smell of the fruit, and as she does, Diggory notes that her face becomes “deadly white, white as salt” (93). When Jadis appears again, a long time later at the beginning of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, this paleness remains, and as before, she is described as being “quite beautiful,” but her beauty exists *in spite* of her paleness, rather than because of it (123).⁶

It seems, then, that if there is a trait which can be picked out as part of the universal ideal for personal appearance found within the books, skin tone seems to be the primary candidate, and the ideal favors fair skin over dark, but also fair over pale, reddish or bluish. The ideal, however, must entail more than skin tone. This is demonstrated in at least two ways. For one, judgments about appearance can be made when skin tone is not visible. An excellent example of this is provided by Aravis, who during *The Horse and his Boy*, views “[g]reat statues of the gods and heroes of

⁶ It does not seem possible that Jadis was any paler in the first case than the second, but she is described as retaining more of her beauty with the latter change than with the prior. This may be a coincidence, or it may be further evidence that her beauty is somehow artificial, stemming from her powers rather than a reflection of her natural state. See the speculation in the following section.

Calormen – who are mostly impressive rather than agreeable to look at” (230). Cast as statues, the skin tone of these heroes is probably not apparent,⁷ and therefore they must be unattractive for other reasons. For a second, two characters manage to be attractive in spite of their skin tone, even though, in each case, their skin tone is counted as a point against them. The example of Jadis has already been given, as she, despite being pale, manages to be otherwise “quite beautiful,” at least in the second incident, and may have some small trace of her beauty left in the first. If she can be beautiful despite being pale, other factors are clearly at play. The second character to do this is Emeth, who is described as being “rather beautiful in a dark, haughty, Calormene way” (728). One might read Emeth's description out of context as being “beautiful in a dark. . . way,” suggesting that there is another, dark way to be beautiful, different but equal in value to some supposed “white way.” This would imply, however, that “haughty” and “Calormene” would be seen as positive, or at least neutral, aspects of beauty, when the context of *The Chronicles of Narnia* suggests they are definitely not. Haughtiness is not portrayed as desirable, so to be beautiful in a “haughty way” would be to be beautiful *in spite* of haughtiness, not *because* of haughtiness. The same is implied for the “Calormene way,” as Calormene portrayals are almost always strongly negative. Any “dark way” to be beautiful must, in this context, be read similarly, as being beautiful in spite of one's darkness, rather than by drawing on it. Regardless, Emeth's example, like Jadis's, suggests that one can be beautiful (even “quite” or “rather” so) without having the necessary skin tone, making it clear that skin tone, while important, is not all that matters for beauty in the stories.

Beautiful on the Inside

While turning blue from the cold or red from drinking unspecified beverages accepted from strangers might seem perfectly mundane, the changes experienced by Jadis have more fascinating implications, for in *The Chronicles of Narnia*, there is a strong link between one's inner nature and one's personal appearance. This is seen in outward manifestations of internal changes, the treatment of aspects of one's temperament as externally visible traits, and in a strong correlation between appearance and moral standing.

Jadis's appearance changes correspond to the loss of her magic or the effects of eating the fruit, it is true, but in fact, throughout the stories, whenever the inner nature of a character is altered, particularly by magic, their outer appearance always changes to match. Individuals becoming royalty show strong evidence of this, with noted changes to their voices and appearance after assuming royal status (something that, in *The Chronicles of Narnia* is administered “by the will of Aslan” [654]). King Frank, for example, talks differently (82) and has a different look to his face (97) both within the first two days of being selected by Aslan, Peter's return to kingship on his second trip to Narnia is detectable from a quality of his voice (328), and Caspian takes on a “kingly look” (354) after assuming command of his armies, to name a few cases. Likewise, even the talking beasts, when they are transformed from normal beasts by Aslan, cannot simply gain the ability to speak, but they undergo changes in size as well, the larger becoming smaller and the smaller becoming larger, as gaining human-like intelligence also entails becoming more human-like in size to match.

When described later, talking beasts are said not only to look “larger” than normal beasts, but also to actually *look* “friendlier and more intelligent” (346) than their non-talking counterparts. This use of non-physical attributes as part of physical descriptions runs all throughout the books, and characters are frequently described with such traits as “wild,” “cruel,” “proud,” “fierce” or “solemn” together with the more obviously physical aspects of their descriptions. Nor is this limited to animals, and examples can be found with humans, dwarfs, centaurs and even statues.

⁷ It also makes a profound statement on the degree of the difference between Calormene and Northern appearance, when even Calormen's most idealized representations of their best- gods and heroes immortalized in art- are still not “agreeable to look at.”

When Lucy sees the monsters of Jadis's army by daylight for the first time, for example, she even describes them as looking “stranger and *more evil* and more deformed” (191, emphasis added) than they had appeared in the dark. This cannot be mistaken as bearing or expression, as it shows up even on sleeping characters, as seen in the case of Time. When the sleeping Time is viewed by Jill and Eustace in the Underland, he is described as being “far bigger than any of the giants, and his face was not like a giant's, but *noble* and beautiful” (616, emphasis added).

Furthermore, being both evil and deformed or both noble and beautiful, in the case of the monsters and Time, does not appear to be a coincidence. There is a strong correlation, throughout the stories, of good characters being attractive and evil characters being ugly. As one who follows the commands of Aslan (748–53), we can only assume Time to have a good moral disposition, and there is no doubting the villainy of the monsters. Just as the Calormenes are, on average (note the use of terms like “many” and “most” among the citations earlier), less attractive than Northerners, so are they also, on average, more evil.⁸ The heroes, to the contrary, are never described in anything but flattering terms (at least while they are heroes), and Emeth, the only dark skinned character to be described as attractive, is also incontrovertibly good.

The correlation is strong, yes, but it is not perfect. Skeptics might wish to point to the case of the good giants, for example. Good giants are described such that, on his first encounter with them, Shasta could “hardly bear to look at them” (287). This could be read as their being unattractive, making for a race that is hideous, yet good. Context (that this inability comes “though he knew they were on the right side” [287]), however, suggests that his response derives more from some natural repulsion to evil creatures than a reaction against their appearance, and we are not elsewhere given a clear indication that good giants are actually as unattractive as the evil varieties. Alternatively, two of the most evil characters in the stories (short of Tash himself), are clearly quite beautiful. Jadis and the Lady of the Green Kirtle are both witches of some similar variety (the nature of the link between them is unclear, but the link is explicit), are both evil and are both beautiful.⁹ Their beauty, however, may be unnatural. Jadis, it is true, is cursed with an unattractive paleness, and the Lady, when her true nature is revealed, transforms into a giant snake, but the deception seems deeper than that. Jadis was not always pale, for example, but her evil is much older than her paleness (although this origin was not planned until long after Jadis's first introduction). Rather, it is worth noting Lucy's experience when she is tempted by the magician's book to use its magic for evil. One of the temptations she faces is to use a spell to make her “beautiful . . . beyond the lot of mortals” (495). If this is to be a standard abuse of magic power, it would certainly explain the two witches' deviation from the norm. Indeed, it would explain why, when her power is lost to her, Jadis's beauty vanishes also, as well as why the loss of beauty with the paleness that accompanies the loss of her powers is portrayed as more severe than when she becomes pale later but retains and even enhances her abilities. Perhaps Jadis and the Lady are not naturally beautiful, only feigning such through the use of magic.

Such explanations delve into the realm of speculation, however. More appropriately, looking outside the text, the Lady can be seen to derive from Jadis, while Jadis can be seen to derive from the titular character of Rider Haggard's *She*. *She* was attractive, therefore Jadis is also. Jadis was attractive, therefore the Lady is. That Lewis felt it was more important to stay true to the borrowing than the pattern of morality and aesthetics has strong implications for the nature and origin of that pattern.

8 Although there are Telmarine villains, the Carlormene nobility, if not all Calormenes, are literally descended from Tash (the devil) (Lewis *Chronicles* 221), and sympathetic Calormenes are extremely rare.

9 To put it as Uncle Andrew says, speaking of Jadis, she is a “dem fine woman, sir, a dem fine woman. A superb creature” (Lewis *Chronicles* 49).

Conclusion

The Chronicles of Narnia, then, contain strong trends in humanoid aesthetics. The ideal for personal appearance is treated as universal, shared across cultures and phenotypes, and it treats individual skin tone as being significant to overall appearance, though the existence of other factors cannot be ruled out. Additionally, there is a connection between outward appearance and inner nature, with many inward traits being immediately visible as part of characters' physical descriptions, and at no point is the inner nature of any creature magically altered without some form of outward transformation to go with it.¹⁰ A correlation can be found between quality of personal appearance and moral standing, but it is imperfect, as at least the two northern witches fail to follow it.

This latter deviation can be treated as stemming from the same source that many of these themes likely derive from, being stylistic and thematic borrowings rather than bearing any sort of didactic intent. After all, while C. S. Lewis at least once suggested the possibility of beauty being as universal as he believed morals to be, transcending not only culture but humanity itself, he does so citing the ideal of a beautiful landscape, not a beautiful person (Lewis "Futilitate" 96–7), and he is otherwise keen to account for differences of taste throughout his writing. It seems unlikely that these themes appear in the stories on account of Lewis's own beliefs, therefore, but rather, they are another borrowing among many. If Lewis were trying to present aesthetics to the reader the same way he intends to present moral or Christian themes, one would imagine he would not allow his desire to accurately imitate his source to override that lesson, but he does allow it to be overridden, when the conflict occurs,¹¹ so borrowings must be assumed at play.

Understanding such themes can help to enrich our understanding of C. S. Lewis's most popular series, but they should serve as a warning to us, as well, and a call to greater awareness, both as readers and writers, urging us to caution in the sources we draw from and the themes we uncritically adopt. While it seems reasonable that few writers today would equate black skin to ugliness without serious consideration, themes of racial determinism have become the stock of much fantasy and even science fiction literature since, particularly among "non-human races." The borrowing of these or any other conventions from other stories or genres should be done with careful scrutiny. Where and to what extent any themes are appropriate to borrow is a question every writer must answer for themselves, but it is a question that must be asked, not a standard to be imitated blindly. Will our elves, centaurs and aliens behave in certain ways simply because they are elves, centaurs and aliens, and that's what such creatures do? If so, can we, as readers, continue to heed the ever-pressing call to avoid making such judgments about actual people? These are important questions, and they must be allowed the gravity they deserve. If such a great work as *The Chronicles of Narnia* can draw such critical ire a generation later from its own choice of borrowings, there is surely reason for caution in ours, lest the judgments of future generations also find us wanting.

¹⁰ Non-magical changes in appearance, of course, are not shown to influence inner nature.

¹¹ Even if Jadis and the Lady's appearances are artificial, the stories were not planned far in advance, and Jadis was introduced as an attractive-but-pale character two books before the idea of magic to make one beautiful was ever introduced. The decision to make her both evil and beautiful likely occurred in the absence of such mitigating factors.

Works Cited

BBC News. "Pullman Attacks Narnia Film Plans." *BBC News*. 16 October, 2005. Web. 3 June, 2013.

Biddiss, Michael D. *Father of Racist Ideology: The Social and Political Thought of Count Gobineau*. London: Cox and Wyman, 1970. Print.

Brazier, Paul. "C.S. Lewis and Christological Prefiguration." *Heythrop Journal* 48.5 (2007): 742–75. Print.

Brown, Devin. "Are The Chronicles of Narnia Sexist and Racist?" Calvin College. 28 March, 2009. Keynote Address.

Bruner, Kurt and Ware, Jim. *Finding God in the Land of Narnia*. Carol Stream: Tyndale House Publishers, 2005. Print.

Conlin, Jonathan. "An Illiberal Descent: Natural and National History in the Work of Charles Kingsley." *History* 96.322 (2011): 167–187. Print.

Downing, David. *Into the Wardrobe: C.S. Lewis and the Narnia Chronicles*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2005. Print.

Duriez, Colin. *A Field Guide to Narnia*. Stroud: The History Press, 2008. Print.

Easterbrook, Gregg. "In Defense of Narnia." *The Atlantic Monthly*. October, 2001. TheAtlantic.com Web. 3 June, 2013.

Ezard, John. "Narnia Books Attacked as Racist and Sexist." *The Guardian*. 3 June, 2002. Web. 3 June, 2013.

Fredrickson, George M. *Racism – A Short History*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002. Print.

Greggersen, Gabriele. "C.S. Lewis and the Rejection of the Tao." *Dialog: A Journal of Theology* 42.2 (2003): 120–5. Print.

Hitchens, Peter. "Philip Pullman." *The Mail*. 27 January, 2002. Web. 5 June, 2013.

Jacobs, Alan. *The Narnian: The Life and Imagination of C.S. Lewis*. New York: Harper Collins, 2006. Print.

Kingsley, Charles. *The Water-Babies: A Fairy Tale for a Land Baby*. Boston: T.O.H.P. Burnham. 1964. Print.

Lewis, Clive Staples. "Christianity and Literature." *C. S. Lewis: Christian Reflections*. Ed. Walter Hooper. Glasgow: Fount Paperbacks, 1981. Print.

-. *The Chronicles of Narnia*. London: HarperCollins, 2001. Print.

- - -. "De Futilitate." *C. S. Lewis: Christian Reflections*. Ed. Walter Hooper. Glasgow: Fount Paperbacks, 1981. Print.

Miller, Laura. *The Magician's Book: A Skeptic's Adventures in Narnia*. New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2008. Print.

- - -. "Far From Narnia." *The New Yorker*. 26 December, 2005 Web. 5 June, 2013.

Mosse, George. "Eighteenth Century Foundations." *Racism*. Eds. Martin Bulmer and John Solomos. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999. Print.

Muth, Benita. "Sir Thomas Browne, Screwtape, and the 'Amphibians' of Narnia." *Christianity & Literature* 59.4 (2010): 645-63. Print.

Nicholson, Mervyn. "C. S. Lewis and the Mole Admiral." *Notes & Queries* 55.4 (2008): 485-6. Print.

- - -. "C. S. Lewis and the Scholarship of Imagination in E. Nesbit and Rider Haggard." *Renascence* 51.1 (1998): 41-62. Print.

- - -. "C. S. Lewis, Fairy Tales, and Walter de la Mare." *Notes & Queries* 58.4 (2011): 581-3. Print.

- - -. "C. R. Martin and C. S. Lewis." *Notes & Queries* 58.1 (2011): 130-2. Print.

- - -. "James Stephens, C.S. Lewis, and the Goat-God." *Notes & Queries* 57.2 (2010): 228-30. Print.

O'Connor, Kyrie. "5th Narnia Book May Not See Big Screen." *Houston Chronicle*. 1 December, 2005. *IndyStar.com* Web. 3 June, 2013.

Pullman, Philip. "The Darkside of Narnia." *The Guardian*. 1 October, 1998. *The Cumberland River Lamp Post*. Web. 4 June, 2013.

Rowland, Susan. "Literature and the Shaman: Jung, Trauma Stories and New Origin Stories in *The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe*." *Journal of Jungian Literary Studies* 5.2 (2009): 1-13. Print.

Russell, James. "Narnia as a Site of National Struggle: Marketing, Christianity, and National Purpose in *The Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion The Witch and the Wardrobe*." *Cinema Journal* 48.4 (2009). Print.

Ward, Michael. *Planet Narnia: The Seven Heavens in the Imagination of C.S. Lewis*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2008. Print.

Wanberg, Nicholas. "Black Dwarfs: Race and Related Ideologies in C.S. Lewis's *The Chronicles of Narnia*." MA thesis University of Helsinki, 2013. Print.

Watson, George. "The High Road to Narnia: C. S. Lewis and his Friend J. R. R. Tolkien Believed that Truths are Universal and that Stories Reveal Them." *American Scholar* 78.1 (2009): 89-95. Print.



Fafnir – Nordic Journal of Science Fiction and Fantasy Research

journal.finfar.org

Into the Woods. Getting Lost and Meeting Witches.

Iris Gassenbauer

Abstract: The article examines different aspects of woods in fantasy as well as horror literature and aims to discuss the main functions of forests, also considering their traditional purposes in the realms of folktales. As the settings of supernatural, forests are closely linked to the genres of fantasy and horror. Because they lack man-made structures, they have potential for disorder, and this leads characters acting inside the forests into lostness and abandonment from every civilized system. The state of confusing spatial organisation helps the unknown Other to emerge, while courts, villages or other human residential areas can be juxtaposed with the wilderness of the forest. As folktale forests are typically settings of the supernatural, forests have traditionally been places of mythical adventures. When entering the woods, a hero-to-be begins the journey of his or her personal development and hero-shaping, as he or she faces the peculiar personages of the forest and fights his or her way through the manifold challenges. In addition to their function as settings where the Other emerges, forests also form isolated systems where the locus amoenus as well as the locus terribilis can be found.

Keywords: forests, locus terribilis, adventures, human lostness, nature-space

Biography and contact info: Iris Gassenbauer (Mag., Neue Deutsche Literatur) works on her dissertation ("Parallel Worlds in the Fantastic Children's and Youth's Literature") at the University of Vienna. She also works as a freelance writer.

Have you ever been to the forest, maybe on a late summer's Sunday when the light falls through the canopy of leaves in the right angle to make the insects shine? Have you ever been there and felt that beneath the raspberry bushes a bunch of fairies should linger to complete the picture? And then, maybe you have been to the forest when the light was down and every sound send shivers down your spine; and what a variety of sounds there is, in the woods, in the dark. Indeed, it seems not to be argued that forests have always been places closely associated with both men and the unknown, ever so intriguing Other. May it be a place of calm rest, or of exciting encounters, the woods have been and still are varying subjects of fantasy literature, film and fine arts.

Think back to the latest fantasy movie you watched which was set in one or the other medieval background and think about the inevitable forest and its creatures; or picture the last epic novel with its inherent maps. I dare guess that forests make up a good percentage of the whole setting and that they are the backdrop to friendly rides, hunting scenes or maybe even uncanny pursuits. In addition to this, there is a good chance that these forests are home to some supernatural beings. Even if the importance of the forest in modern, urban fantasy decreases, it still seems to appear in a large share of fantastic works. But before getting deeper into the subject of the wood in

works of fantasy, allow me a short glimpse into general philosophical reflections on forests to complete the picture.

When Michel Foucault developed the concept of *heterotopia*, he did not, primarily, have woods in mind. But understanding his construct as a way to describe spaces that consist of more meaning than the obvious one, we find the woods fitting perfectly into his deliberations. In six principles Foucault describes the constitution of heterotopias, defining them as being a constant of human groups, combining many places in one and being linked to a system of opening and closure (Foucault 321). Another fundamental feature of heterotopias is that they always fulfil a certain function: for example, being a somewhat holy place that is reserved for a special group of people or an isolated space with the purpose of allowing a certain action to take place. Seeing the topos of the forest as a heterotopia, for it constitutes a space that is separated and equipped with varying connotations, a question arises: what is the function of the forest in fantastic arts and media?

Chaos and Lostness

Forests have always been a form of landscape (of course, in the past centuries a bigger and more widespread one than it is today) that somehow constantly has been *there*, a more or less steady module throughout the ages that has not been a part of the urbanized structure of social order. One of the attributes that preponderates the wood-space is its natural lack of organised structure and this leads to the wood being conceived as a confusing area. This imagery entails different ramifications for the artistic implementation of the forest. Most common is the one which displays not only the physical forlornness of a figure being lost in the woods but also his or her mental state.

Ich hör die Bächlein rauschen,
im Walde her und hin,
im Walde in dem Rauschen,
und weiß nicht, wo ich bin. (Eichendorff 30)

I hear the brooklets brawling
in the wood back and forth.
In the wood, amidst the brawl,
I know not where I am.

The beginning of the poem “In der Fremde”, which could be translated as “In the Outland” written by Joseph von Eichendorff in 1833 expresses the feeling of loss of self in the nature-space at the highest grade. Concerning the “Her und Hin”, the “Back and forth” in the given translation, there are many interpretations, starting from nearness to remoteness of God to the total loss of any self-localization; a deprivation that grows over the border of just being strayed in the forest where no socially built rules seem to apply.

It is the same duplicity of the inextricable mental state and the inextricable environment that shapes the wood-metaphor in Dante Alighieri’s *Divine Comedy* when at the very beginning, the narrator gets lost in *Selva Oscura*, the dark forest.

Midway in the journey of our life
I came to myself in a dark wood,
for the straight way was lost.

Ah, how hard it is to tell
the nature of that wood, savage, dense and harsh
the very thought of it renews my fear! (Alighieri Inf. 1 1-6)

As this and the aforementioned example shows the forest is used as a space of loss of self in a double way: Loosing orientation in the unconquered nature space, and losing the civilized,

structured self, both pointing back to the feeling of overpowering by the force that lingers in the sublime landscape that Arthur Schopenhauer stresses (Schopenhauer 242); the force that is “incomparably superior to the individual and that threatens him with annihilation.” (242). In the context of arts, the wood therefore often functions as a visualisation of utter lostness of the figure, as displayed by Hartmann von Aue’s Iwein, a chivalric hero who loses his mind as well as his clothes when he can no longer stand the courtly pressure and escapes into the woods. Just after a period of time when he lives like a wild animal in the forest without knowing where he came from, he gains healing through a magical ointment, slays the dragon, kills the giants, saves a damsel and finally returns back to his initial courtly position. The chaotic forest-space offers no clear room for the description of the action (Schnyder 135) so that settings as glades, paths, streams or the like structure the space, while the undergrowth is seldom more than the location of lurking dangers.

The display of the *Other*

The incoherent forest-space enkindles the feeling of strangeness so it stands to reason that it functions as a setting where the unknown *Other* can manifest and take place. Concerning old German literature, it is not possible to imagine the contents of these epic works without the realms of forests (for it offers an opportunity for an undisturbed *Tête-à-tête*, invites to hunt, enables the one travelling incognito to preserve his anonymity and offers the one escaping a reliable shelter [Ackermann-Arlt 222]) which, while being an uncharted form of landscape, present the juxtaposition to every civilizing security of towns with the high likelihood of supplies of nutrition, information and the shielding walls of a room. As forests compose the socio-economic contrast of spacial construction, they also display the area of adventure (Peter 226). The marvellous happens in this natural space that is free of every civilizing, man-made structure. As soon as the chevalier leaves the court and enters the woods, the adventures begin and the fantastic, marvellous *Other* takes over. It is the place where hostile knights are met as well as giants, witches or dreadful creatures, and this very structure can still be found in fantastic literature and film, even though knights are often replaced by other, slightly modernised characters. While the *Other* has no (or at least not the same) supremacy outside, it dominates the realms of the nature-space, may it be in the form of affirmative forces that lead to healing, or threatening, dangerous subjects that shape a challenge for the hero who ranges the forest. One of the most important features of the forest in fantastic media is the fact that human legitimacies and sometimes even nature principles do not apply while time and space forms an unstructured cluster.

So it can be stated that the forest offers – due to its given disorganized constitution – a setting where the mystical *Other* that functions as a catalyst for the development of the characters as well as the storyline, spreads. At the same time, it establishes an excluded area which allows the hero to cross boundaries and therefore initiate the *sujet* (Lotman 330), a significant event.

Folktale Forests

The literary genre that makes use of the above mentioned features in a simplified but nonetheless extensive form is the *Volksmärchen*. The folktale displays the forest not only as one determined setting, but also as a location that can shift its connotation (Frost 323). That way fairy tale-forest are on the one hand places of pureness and quaint innocence. On the other hand, they are spaces of danger, where the characters are at the mercy of wild creatures and have to deal with a handful of hostile wonders. Forests are the landscape of wilderness, whereas fields and meadows always seem to stand in closer relation with human-made surroundings; upright people, therefore, inhabit the woods only if they work there. Following fairy tale logic, everyone else seems to be either forced to live in the cover of the forest because she or he is no part of the society or because she or he derives

from the wood. But most of the residents do not really want to live inside this excluded area: neither the outcasts, the witches and sorcerers nor all the old women that form the socially separated wood inventory (Jung-Kaiser 42). While the non-magical beings live outside the woods, in cabins, castles or even small villages, the realms of the forest contain what is left of an even older, more mythical and by all means more magical form of narrative material. Folktale woods originate from a tradition of mystified nature spaces and untamed wilderness. But they are seldom as complex as for example Tolkien's converted version of the Mirkwood or his creations of Lothlórien or Fangorn that all bear certain characteristics and are recognizable because of their distinct elaboration.

In fairy tales, especially the French and German ones, forests are always shaped person- and situation-dependent, for the action-based plot revolves around and sticks to the protagonist (Lüthi 27). These areas barely carry names and more often are just the right, opaque environment to harbour the supernatural. Fairy tales often function through the dialogue between non-magical and magical beings and that dialogue takes place outside of man-made comfort zones. In one of the Grimm Brother's most famous fairy tale, *Snow-White and the Seven Dwarves*, the young princess is sent out into the forest by her evil step-mother to get murdered by the huntsman.

She called a huntsman, and said, "Take the child away into the forest; I will no longer have her in my sight. Kill her, and bring me back her heart as a token." The huntsman obeyed, and took her away; but when he had drawn his knife, and was about to pierce Snow-white's innocent heart, she began to weep, and said, "Ah dear huntsman, leave me my life! I will run away into the wild forest, and never come home again." (Brothers Grimm 128)

As soon as the huntsman lets her go, the girl is part of the wilderness and can no longer get back to the social structure of her father's court. The way through the woods – the time period where the girl is neither in the presence of the huntsman nor of the dwarves – is in many movie versions a rich interval of forest-terror. In the 1937 Walt Disney movie or the latest screen adaptation *Snow White and the Huntsman*, the forest appears also (but admittedly not only) as an animated and hostile place, as long as the girl is forlorn and at the mercy of nature. The text presents this situation as a period of utter lostness: "But now the poor child was all alone in the great forest, and so terrified that she looked at every leaf of every tree, and did not know what to do." (Brothers Grimm 128) Snow White is lucky, for she is not, as the huntsman assumed, devoured by wild beasts but finds shelter in the home of the dwarves who, living in the wilderness, epitomise the *Other* as a shielding and helping instance. Hänsel and Gretel, on the contrary, are just deceived by the charms of the candy house that mocks safety in the middle of the nature space; the witch functions as the innermost fear of loss of self and destruction. Her house is set in the heart of the wood, into the farthest point from every civilized area and she abuses the trust of the children who have been sent into the forest to starve to death. We know that the only way the kids can escape the mighty old witch is for them to burn her alive before they get eaten themselves. This traumatising act takes place unseen in the wilderness of wood and witch house.

Like Hänsel and Gretel's nameless witch, other witches also inhabit forests and live between the trees and undergrowth with their mostly feral companions. For the Slavic area, Baba Jaga seems to be the most popular witch to dwell in her chicken legged house in the nature space. Due to her famousness she also became a part of fantasy literature, where she sometimes even is acting outside of the realms of the forest. In the fantastic novel *Monday begins on a Saturday* written by the Strugatsky Brothers Baba Jaga plays a role as well as in the *Hellboy* universe, where she appears as a somehow animalised, rather daunting creature. But of course not only witches inhabit the wood, witty and dangerous animals also do.

That way Little Red Riding Hood meets the wolf, when she wants to visit her sick grandmother, who lives in a house in the woods (instead of the wicked witch). A path leads to her destiny and for that score the wood is no longer absolute wilderness. When the wolf lures the girl

away from the trail into the wild, she loses track of time while picking flowers. It is the huntsman who constitutes a link between the wilderness and society and therefore unites both levels and acts as the liberating entity.

Overcoming the chaos

Forests form, as stated before, a realm that stands in contrast to the civilised structure. It is this seclusion that forges the right setting for adventures and thus operates as the needed contrast to any social and protective pattern. When the main character sets forth to face various challenges ahead, he or she has to cross borders to initiate the process of being shaped as a hero. As soon as he/she steps out of the collective safekeeping, he/she leaves the environment he/she is used to and enters the unknown and dangerous (Campbell 79). It is this first detachment that instigates the condition of liminality that transfers the hero-to-be into the uncertain state of experiencing adventures and proving himself worthy (or failing). Forests as climes of adventures inspired next to the classical monomythic journey, fantasy works of different genres. Of course role-plays and game books are also affected by the topos of the forest. Fantasy Forest for example is the name of a series that is partly set in the Dungeons and Dragons Universe. The first book, *The Ring, the Sword and the Unicorn* leads the main character – who acts through the instructions of the reader – into a magical forest and as a result of this into manifold adventures. While fighting his way through the disorder and averting threats, the hero will sooner or later be able to leave the disorganized nature space and enter society again as a strengthened being.

Of course, not all storylines follow the fulfilled hero-journey in which the forest is little more than a catalyst or an arbitrary display of a nature setting. With its attributes of the confusing, pathless unknown and the potential *Other* that derives from it, the demonstration of human inferiority prevails.

Forest terror

While folktale woods include places with negative as well as positive significance, woods have become the metaphor for the brute wild in the genre of horror, located far from every civilized space, where terrifying creatures and strange outcasts pose an unpredictable threat to everybody else. Horror tales display and embody terrors which are both physical and psychological and send the characters to confront these fears. Thus, “[h]orror is nurtured by the fears of death and pain, and in our dark fears of the unknown” (Wisker 2). The forest qualifies as a fitting space for horror for three reasons: it is, as stated before, an uncharted and therefore unknown and confusing setting, it harbours all kinds of entities that can, of course, expose a deadly threat, and it opens a fantastic plane, where the *Other* is staged.

The narrative structure of horror stories that take place in the woods often revolves around a group of people getting in the forest for one reason or the other and being later on confronted by some mystical, inexplicable danger. Often, there is only one survivor: the *evil Other* in the nature space. As Wisker sums up: “horror is located in both the real and the nightmarish imaginary” (Wisker 2). This is a reason why the means which carry horror within the story emanate often from the realms of the fantastic. In 1978, Sam Raimi directed *Within the Woods*, a short film that was, due to the visual violence, forbidden and later redone as *The Evil Dead*. Five students spend their vacation in the hills of Tennessee. In the isolated cabin where they stay, they find the “Sumerian Book of the Dead”. After reading it out loud, demons arise, possess some of the students and the foundation for 85 minutes of splatter and horror is laid. In 2011 the movie was adapted again in a remake running under the title *The Cabin in the Woods*. The original version was extended to include a governmental organisation that watches and directs the acting and dying of the young

people from an underground laboratory. The full range of horror arises in this somehow voyeuristic movie, but stays inside the secluded forest.

Another example of horror in the woods is perfectly presented by the pioneer movie of hand camera action: *The Blair Witch Project* (1998). Three documentary filmmakers stay in the woods of Maryland to collect material about the legend of the Blair Witch, who is said to reside in the forests. As the days go by, the juveniles get deeper and deeper into the solitude of the wild and finally find the house of the witch. It can be seen as an allusion to Hänsel and Gretel that the witch in the heart of the forest now grants no salvation; the witch who is the ruler over the nature space appears to be the end of the students' existence. Besides the elaborate marketing, the origin of the movie's story is also closely linked to the woods of Maryland. It is said, that the actors were sent out into the isolated state of wilderness with little equipment: "In order to have as little contact as possible with the actors during the making of the film, Sánchez and Myrick used a Global Positioning System (GPS) device to keep in touch with their actors." (Clinton, CNN.com) The Seneca Creek State Park, which served as shooting location and covers 6.300 acres of wilderness, is a nature space and this exposed the actors to a state of constant physical and mental strain, so it is also stated that: "near the end of the eight day shoot when the characters in the film were running low on food, the crew also cut back on the actors' rations for the day" (Clinton, CNN.com).

While the protagonists of *The Blair Witch Project* confront a threat that never becomes visible and instils fear by showing the terror of others (and therefore spreading to the empathetic viewer), the menace in *Wrong turn* (2003) is obvious.

Within the large woodland of West Virginia, a car accident happens after a young lad takes the short cut through the forest because of the crammed highway (and thus enters the nature space, like Little Red Riding Hood who also leaves the path to transgress into the forest.) He collides with the car of five young people and has to face the first dismay in a row, because the accident had been caused by a barb wire. The only dwelling in the almost impenetrable forest is the shack of three woodlanders, who pursue their cannibalistic passions and constitute the Monstrous in their looks and their acting. Like in fairy tales where the inhabitants of the forests differ from the "normal" people outside, the woodlanders deviate from predictability. They are malformed as a result of inbreed and thus constitute the combination of deformed ugliness and dangerousness in a manner typical of horror – and of course they slaughter one of the "intruders" after the other. The uncertainty concerning their true nature points back to the oscillation between categories which form the monstrous while grading is impossible (Overthun 50). The separate fragments of civilisation, like the shack or the tree house with a radio which is later set on fire and stormed by the woodlanders, bring only short dated shelter. Even the policeman, who could theoretically act like the folktale huntsman as someone who restores order, falls victim to the chase in the nature space which is governed by those who are closer to animals than to humans. In a manner similar to the evil which is never annihilated completely, the shack stays a lurking danger and with it the forest further on a wild, hunted area.

The danger emerges out of the forest, but it not always only stays in the realms of the woods like in the above mentioned examples; it sometimes encroaches on the civilized areas as well. In *Shallow Ground* (2004), a boy covered in blood who seems to be the culmination of a handful of murdered people, rises out of the forest to seek revenge, while in *Broken* (2006) a young woman is abducted and tormented by a man, and this torture of course takes place in the heart of a forest.

The function of the woods within horror excels in the representation of a space, where the unknown and threatening takes place and where nature outweighs any human reasoning. The setting of the nature space condemns the people acting in it to apply to the only rule given: the survival of the fittest. The display of hunt-like structures is therefore an organization of narration we often face in the genre of horror.

Shelter spaces

As stated, forests in the horror genre mostly present areas of the unknown and harmful where entities act in an irrational and deadly way, whereas in examples of the fantasy genre, forests often are areas of refuge and have positive connotations. The forest as the *locus terribilis* leaves the characters no chance to settle and to be safe. It sets up the opposite standpoint to the forest as *locus amoenus* which permits a heterotopic space of immunity and security.

While the forest can always be seen as the other side of social and urbanised structure, it of course allows a space of retreat. These escapist aspects apply to medieval literature like Wolfram's Parzival with Herzeloyde hiding herself and her son in the realms of the forest, and thus shielding him from every courtly pressure, and also to romanticised aesthetics where forests as clusters of pure nature make up a pristine unity. Therefore woods can also be seen as cathartic areas of sorts in the genre of fantasy. The mystical *Other* which inspires the forests is now a primal form of nature or even a godlike presence. Fantasy movies like *Merlin* (1998), or the popular productions like *Snow-White and the Huntsman* (2013) or *Maleficent* (2014), compose the enchanted forest as a delicate nature space which encompasses paradisiac conditions. As long as these often time-independent areas are unreachable by human influence, they offer a sanctuary of safety and healing powers.

Conclusion

Forests in fantastic media show different pictures of nature spaces and cannot be summarized in just one term. From what is stated above, we can deduce the most important functions of the forest in fantasy:

1. Forests form the social and economic juxtaposition to every human organised area and thus represent a nature space that is free of social rules and values. The only principle that applies is that the stronger one (or the one being in possession of some magical help) rules the situation. This separation constitutes the forest as a heterotopic space that permits the characters to slip into a liminal state when entering the forest.
2. Due to the lack of structure, it is hard to constitute narration. Paths, brooklets or meadows are needed to organize the nature space in favour of the storyline. Simultaneously, the confusing composition enables the mystical *Other* to take place. Characters who live in the forest are either part of the *Other* (in the form of magical beings) or breakaways who are no longer part of the society that dominates the outside.
3. The absence of structure and the presence of the *Other* function as a *locus terribilis*. The Monstrous lingers inside the nature space and motivates a storyline which conjures horror. The mystical threat, as well as the menacing nature, takes over to underline human inferiority. While the genre of horror uses forests first and foremost as spaces of unknown dangers and terror, fantasy includes different aspects to the woods.
4. Depending on the genre, the absence of structure and the presence of the *Other* also functions as the *locus amoenus* which offers a secret hideaway. In this case, the forest displays a pure and cathartic shelter which allows the characters to withdraw from society.

Works Cited

Ackermann-Arlt, Beate. *Das Pferd und seine epische Funktion im mittelhochdeutschen „Prosa-Lancelot“*. Berlin; New York: De Gruyter, 1990. Print.

Alighieri, Dante. *The Divine Comedy: Inferno; Purgatorio; Paradiso*. Trans. Mandelbaum Allen. Everyman's Library. One-volume edition, 1995. Print.

Clinton, Paul. *Fact and Fiction*. "Blair Witch" team gets happy ending. CNN.com, July 15. 1999. Web. January 2014.

Campbell, Joseph. *Der Heros in tausend Gestalten*. Frankfurt am Main: Insel Verlag, 1999. Print.

Eichendorff, Joseph Freiherr von. *Gedichte. Zweite vermehrte und veränderte Auflage*. Berlin: W. Simion, 1843. Print.

Foucault, Michael. "Von anderen Räumen." *Raumtheorie. Grandlagentexte aus Philosophie und Kulturwissenschaften*. Eds. Jörg Dünne and Stephan Günzel. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1967. Print.

Frost, Inke. „Märchenwälder. Der Topos Wald im europäischen Märchen und in seinen modernen Interpretationen.“ *Fremde Welten. Wege und Räume der Fantastik im 21. Jahrhundert*. Eds. Lars Schmeink and Hans-Harald Müller. Berlin, New York: de Gruyter, 2012. Print.

Grimm, Jakob and Wilhelm, *Grimm's Complete Fairy Tales*. With illustrations by Arthur Rackham. New York: Barnes & Noble, 2012. Print.

Jung-Kaiser, Ute [Hg.]. "Der Wald als romantischer Topos. Eine Einführung." *Der Wald als romantischer Topos*. Ed. Ute Jung-Kaiser. Bern: Peter Lang AG, 2008. Print.

Lotman, Jurij M, *Die Struktur literarischer Texte*. Trans. Rolf-Dietrich Keil. München: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1993. Print.

Lüthi, Max. *Das Märchen*. Bearbeitet von Heinz Rölleke. Sammlung Metzler, 16. Stuttgart: Metzler, 1990. Print.

Overthun, Rasmus. "Das Monströse und das Normale" *Monströse Ordnungen. Zur Typologie und Ästhetik des Anormalen*. Ed. Achim Geisenhanslüke, Georg Mein. Literatur und Liminalität. Bielefeld: transcript, 2009. Print.

Peters, Ursula. "Postkoloniale Mediävistik? Überlegungen zu einer kulturwissenschaftlichen Spielart der Mittelalter-Philologie." *Scientia Poetica. Jahrbuch für Geschichte der Literatur und der Wissenschaften*. Vol. 14. Berlin, New York: de Gruyter, 2010. Print.

Schopenhauer, Arthur. *The World as Will and Representation*. The Cambridge edition of the works of Schopenhauer. Vol. 1. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010. Print.

Schnyder, Mireille. "Der Wald in der höfischen Literatur. Raum des Mythos und des Erzählens." *Mittelalter*, Vol. 13 (2), pp.122-135, 2008. Print.

Wisker, Gina, *Horror Fiction. An Introduction*. New York, London: Continuum International, 2005. Print.



Fafnir – Nordic Journal of Science Fiction and Fantasy Research

journal.finfar.org

Discussions of Genre Interpretations in Johanna Sinisalo's *Auringon ydin* and Finnish Weird

Hanna Samola & Hanna-Riikka Roine

What would our life be like in the Eusistocratic Republic of Finland, the speculative society where the citizens have been domesticated by means of selective breeding? What would it be like to be a woman who does not meet the requirements and norms of the accepted female behaviour in this society? Finnish writer Johanna Sinisalo's (b. 1958) latest novel Auringon ydin (2013, "The Core of the Sun") invites its reader to ponder these questions. Among the questions that the reader is presumably asking is the question of the novel's genre. In this essay, we discuss the possible genre interpretations of the novel in relation to speculative and science fictional background.

Key words: speculative fiction, Finnish weird, genre, interpretation, Johanna Sinisalo

Biography: Hanna Samola (MA, Finnish literature) and Hanna-Riikka Roine (Ph.L., comparative literature) are both doctoral students at the University of Tampere.

***Auringon ydin*, a Generic Battleground?**

In the introduction of *The Cambridge Companion to Science Fiction*, Farah Mendlesohn states that science fiction is less a genre than an ongoing discussion. She continues: "The reader's expectations of sf are governed less by what happens than how that happening is described, and by the critical tools with which the reader is expected to approach the text" (1). Mendlesohn aspires to describe a feature peculiar to science fiction, the fact that texts are often written by those active in criticism and can be generated from the same fan base which supports the market. Indeed, the field of science fictional or speculative writing can be "a battleground" also from the viewpoint of readerly interpretation.

Auringon ydin is an interesting example of such battleground. In the marketing materials, Sinisalo and her novel are situated as "part of the rule-breaking 'Finnish Weird' genre".¹ The radical mix of real and fictional is intrinsic to Finnish Weird (*suomikumma*), and this feature is designed to challenge the tradition of realist writing which has dominated Finnish literary scene for a long time.² For example, various text passages making up Sinisalo's novel include genuine historical documents, such as an article on eugenics which was published in a Finnish magazine in 1935. Meanwhile, the back cover text presents the novel as "chillingly fiery dystopia".

¹ This is how *Auringon ydin* is presented in the "Top10+" section aimed primarily at foreign publishers on the pages of FILI – Finnish Literature Exchange. See <http://www.finlit.fi/fili/en/books/the-core-of-the-sun>.

² In addition to Sinisalo, contemporary Finnish writers such as Pasi Ilmari Jääskeläinen, Leena Krohn, Maarit Verronen and Tiina Raevaara have been mentioned in connection to writing of Finnish Weird.

The question of a novel's genre is not relevant only from the viewpoint of marketing. Mendlesohn (1) argues for the view of science fiction as a discussion. In our view, genre in general can be understood as an ongoing discussion, but of a different kind. The theory of Alastair Fowler (45) stresses the instability of genres and their ability to combine with other genres. He (20) states that a single work modulates the genre it takes part in. This makes genre less a means of classification than of communication between the author and the reader. All in all, the attempt to define the genres of a single work is to try to find different meanings to the work (22, 38, 256). The understanding of the nature of genre as communication is rather similar to Mendelsohn's view of science fiction as a discussion. Science fiction, as well as other genres, invite the reader to take part in a communication process with the work of art, the author, and the works and the tradition that a single work refers to.

Interestingly, Finnish Weird – as well as the literary (New) Weird movement worldwide – has been quite topical during the last decade or so. As among the defining features of such contemporary “weird fiction” are the crossings of generic boundaries and casual combinations of various types of texts, our essay also explores the nature or building blocks of such fiction. What kind of elements does Sinisalo's technique make use of and what do they bring to the readerly interpretation?

The Building Blocks of *Auringon ydin*

Auringon ydin takes place in the Eusistocratic Republic of Finland where the citizens have been categorised according to their sex into the groups of Eloi and Morlock women and Masko and Minus men. The novel focuses on describing the results of the selective breeding of women, and the life of men in the Eusistocratic Finland remains rather unexplained for the reader. Eloi women embody stereotypically feminine traits with their round heads, curvy bodies and tender characters. In short, they are presented as beautifully shaped but simple-minded, and their education encourages these features by limiting their possibilities to gain knowledge about the surrounding world. Meanwhile, Morlock women are depicted intelligent and independent, and this is why they are denounced as unfit to reproduce.

The Eusistocratic society portrayed in the novel shares some common features with the contemporary Finnish reality and the milieu of the novel, the city of Tampere located in western Finland, is partly realistic. The documentary material of the novel – for example, the article from the women's magazine *Kotiliesi* – is put together from both fictional elements and excerpts from genuine documents. The pseudo documents parody the language and style of the Statute Book of Finland, for example, and the scientific language is parodied as well.

The Short History of the Domestication of Women. State Publishing (1997). The juvenilization and pedomorphism related to the domestication of women is a process with scientific salience. Juvenilization is a natural way to back out of the evolutionary impasse which resulted from the inordinate independence and autonomy of women. (AY, 268.)³

Parodic texts that feign authentic documents along with the critical and exaggerating depiction of the faults of society and the play with stereotypes gives the novel its satiric mode. Satire is one of the ingredients in the genre mixture of *Auringon ydin* and the undertone of the novel is, on the whole, satirical. What are the other genres in this medley?

³ *Auringon ydin* has not yet been translated in English, and we have translated these excerpts from the novel ourselves. World English rights to the novel have been acquired by Grove Atlantic for publication in 2015 in the Black Cat imprint.

Speculative Fiction as the Basis of Eusistocratic Finland

[Hanna-Riikka Roine] Speculative fiction is, of course, one of the most obvious generic backgrounds to *Auringon ydin*. The genre of “Finnish Weird”, as well as the (New) Weird movement, has often been dubbed simply “speculative fiction” which has also been offered as an alternate name for science fiction in general. However, not all science fiction is speculative in this sense. The defining feature of speculative fiction, the thought experiment, the “what if”, which Darko Suvin (63) has famously called the novum, is crucial to Sinisalo’s novel as well. Mendlesohn notes: “It is here that sf most departs from contemporary literature, because in sf ‘the idea’ is the hero” (4).

[Hanna Samola] Sinisalo’s novel is indeed built around the thought experiment. One of the main ideas discussed is the possibility of the domestication of human beings in the same way humans have domesticated other animals. What would happen if only people with certain features were allowed to reproduce? Sinisalo combines the depiction of fictional and fantastic human domestication with documents addressing sterilization and the domestication of foxes.

[HRR] It is interesting that such thought experiment can speak to us despite the fact that it is highly fabulous. Robert Scholes has defined “fabulation” as any “fiction that offers us a world clearly and radically discontinuous from the one we know, yet returns to confront that known world in some cognitive way” (2). The point of discontinuity or dissonance with the known world is the Suvinian novum, but Scholes wants to emphasise the fact that despite discontinuity of this kind, sf can “confront” the world of our everyday experience. *Auringon ydin* confronts the known world by locating the events in the city of Tampere and its surroundings, for instance.

[HS] In addition to confronting the reader, there is also the sense of wonder which Mendlesohn (3) names as a crucial feature of the mode of science fiction. However, fabulation and the sense of wonder are the basic ingredients also in the genre of fairy tale. Jack Zipes states that fairy tales depict “magical instruments, extraordinary technologies, or powerful people who will enable protagonists to transform themselves along with their environment” (*The Irresistible Fairy Tale*, 2). He (ibid. 136) also argues that in fairy tale revisions, the naive morality collides with the complexities of contemporary social realities and that contemporary art often has a critical approach to the fairy tale topics. The way Sinisalo combines speculative fiction with the tradition of satire creates similar kind of collision.

[HRR] All in all, it can be suggested that one of the most important threads of Sinisalo’s novel is the attempt to confront our everyday reality and highlight some of its problems by means of such confrontation. The broad genre or mode of speculative writing alongside with the tradition of satire forms a basis for this, but *Auringon ydin* reaches out towards various other genres. You already mentioned fairy tales, shall we continue with them?

All the Better to See with! The Genre of Fairy Tale

[HS] The genre of fairy tale is used in several different ways in Sinisalo’s novel. The character types in the novel remind those typical in fairy tales, and the sense of wonder and miracle is one of the features of both *Auringon ydin* and the genre of fairy tale. One of the texts embedded in the novel is a fairy tale of a little girl named Punanna. This short tale is a version of the famous fairy tale called “Little Red Riding Hood” (in Finnish “Punahilkka”). According to Zipes (*Why Fairy Tales Stick*, 28, 39), “Little Red Riding Hood” is a story about sexual violence or the initiation of a young woman. He argues that the brothers Grimm and Charles Perrault altered the story about an initiation into a tale about sexual violence and the responsibility of a woman to prevent the violence. Versions written by Perrault and the Grimms have been dominant in western culture, and

they have had an influence on the way in which gender roles and sexual behaviour is depicted in literature. (Ibid.) What is the relevance of the fairy tale named “Pikku Punanna” in Sinisalo’s novel? [HRR] To begin with, the reference to this fairy tale is linked to other depictions of violence and abuse in Sinisalo’s novel. The protagonist Vanna/Vera’s sister, Manna/Mira is supposedly killed by her husband Harri, and Vanna/Vera believes that Harri murdered also their grandmother Aulikki. The story of Punanna is said to be part of the collection “The Most Beautiful Fairy Tales for the Eloi Girls” published by the Eusistocratic State. This can be understood as a parody of the way that fairy tales have been retold to meet the ideals of the time of their publication.

[HS] Interpretation of this kind presents the story of Punanna as a *mise en abyme*, which is analogous with the themes and character positions of the whole novel, and as such it provides us pointers for the genre interpretation of the novel. Punanna shares common features with the Eloi sister Manna/Mira. Among those features are the nasal sounds of their names, naivety, beauty, kindness, and willingness to marry a man. Unfortunately, Punanna can never successfully marry because she does not obey the wolf who turns out to be a handsome prince: “‘Because you disobeyed me and did not accept my proposal, but took medicine to your granny instead, I will abandon you right away!’ And so Prince Charming went away, and Punanna could never, never, ever marry.” (AY, 54.) This ending is interesting if we compare it with the previous tales. How would you interpret it?

[HRR] The ending of Punanna differs from the ending in the versions written by Perrault or the Grimms, but all these stories share an attitude towards women: the woman is to blame for what happens. “Little Red Riding Hood” has been understood as a warning to girls not to be disobedient (Zipes, *The Trials and Tribulations*, 1). In the classical versions, a young woman risks herself and her grandmother because of her naivety or disobedience. She ignores rule: “Do not talk with strangers”. What about the wolf? If Manna/Mira resembles Punanna, is her husband Harri the wolf of the story?

[HS] The all-seeing wolf/prince does not characterize only the behaviour of the murderous husband Harri. The wolf is also a symbol of the dystopian society, which controls and stalks its citizens. At the end of the Punanna tale, the heroine asks the wolf about the size of his eyes and ears.

“Grandmother, what big eyes you have!” Punanna said.

“All the better to see with”, the wolf replied.

“Grandmother, what big ears you have!” Punanna said.

“All the better to hear your thoughts with”, the wolf replied. (AY, 54.)

[HS] The wolf who hears the thoughts and sees everything around him behaves the same way as the paranoid State with its controlling Health Office. The wolf’s answer to the question about the size of his mouth combines control and the greed to own: “All the better to eat you up, melt you inside of me and keep you all to myself the rest of my life” (AY, 54). This answer could be read as a representation of a jealous husband, but it also depicts the way in which the Eusistocratic State holds people, especially women, in its grip and tries to forestall the possibilities of escape from the country.

[HRR] The Eusistocratic State really sounds like a classical dystopian society, wouldn’t you say?

Eusistocratia as a Dystopian Society

[HS] The genre of dystopia comes under the heading of speculative writing with its depiction of the possible future. Dystopia is often understood as a warning which can reveal the dangers that might follow from the contemporary policies (Gottlieb 27). This kind of social criticism brings dystopian literature close to satirical writing, and some critics approach dystopia as a subgenre of satire (Ryan-Hayes 202). Erika Gottlieb (10–15) discusses features common to dystopian literature. The

features of the western dystopian tradition include, among others, the vision of the society as a collective nightmare where individual cannot control her destiny, the depiction of the destruction of privacy, the importance of the knowledge of history that the nightmare system tries to hide or manipulate, the speculation with the hypothetical future, and the combination of features of tragedy and satire. These features, among many others, form the generic repertoire of the western dystopia. How does *Auringon ydin* relate to this tradition?

[HRR] The Eusistocratic State propagates that all democratic countries outside its borders are places of decadence and immorality. The borders of the state are closed, so people do not know what goes on in the world outside. The closed city with strictly guarded borders or walls is a common motif in dystopian literature. The way the Sinisalo's novel depicts an isolated state is not only a reference to the tradition of dystopian writing but also a satirical criticism towards the closed and propagandist societies and the rise of nationalistic thinking in the 21st century.

[HS] In Sinisalo's novel, people's behaviour is controlled by the state-led Health Office, which has banned the use of all stimulants and drugs. Among these drugs is chilli, but the reason for this prohibition remains unclear to the protagonist Vera/Vanna until the end of the novel. After using an extremely strong chilli, she understands that the plant is banned because its potential to widen the user's consciousness and give an access to other people's minds. Therefore, someone who uses a chilli of this kind can escape the dystopian reality to other dimensions. The name of the novel refers to the strong chilli cultivar which gives the powers of shaman to its user Vera/Vanna. Here, the references to the Finno-Ugric mythology and poetry give a certain Northern twist to the novel.

[HRR] Perhaps the user of chilli has an access to information that the State is willing to hide? In the dystopian tradition, the concealment of the information is often made possible by the restrictions of the used language. In the famous dystopian novel, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949) by George Orwell, the whole nation has to suffer from the results of the state-led attempt to make people more stupid by controlling the means of expression of the language. Does the Eusistocratic society limit the usage of language and literature?

[HS] *Auringon ydin* describes mainly limitations such as the way the women are permitted to read only literature dealing with family life, heterosexual love, or housekeeping. Misspellings are encouraged in the writing of girls, because mistakes are a sign of feminine tendencies. The ignorance of women who are indoctrinated into their weakness and the role of servant reminds me of one previous dystopian novel, *Swastika Night* (1937) by Katherine Burdekin. This novel depicts Europe where Nazis have had dominance more than seven hundred years. Strict gender hierarchies prevail in the extremely masculine Hitlerdom where all women must submit to men. Both *Swastika Night* and *Auringon ydin* speculate with political and cultural history and the notions of gender hierarchy at different times. The premises of this speculation are such that they bring Sinisalo's novel close to alternate history stories as well.

Exploring an Alternate Society

[HRR] Alternate history is typically defined as a genre of fiction consisting of stories that are set in worlds in which one or more historical events unfold differently from how it did in the known world. One of the most famous examples of an alternate history story is Philip K. Dick's *The Man in the High Castle* (1962), which explores the world after Nazi Germany's and Imperial Japan's victory over the Allies in World War II. Sinisalo's novel invites readers to take part in a thought experiment of similar kind, as a few details in the course of Finnish history have set things onto a different track.

[HS] *Swastika Night*, which I mentioned earlier, is a combination of dystopia and alternate history as well, and I interpret it as one of the intertexts of Sinisalo's novel. In Hitlerdom of Burdekin's novel, women have no human rights and they are the property of men: "They acquiesced in the

Reduction of Women, which was a deliberate thing deliberately planned by German men. Women will always be exactly what men want them to be. They have no will, no character, and no souls; they are only a reflection of men.” (70.) Women of Hitlerdom have been forced to behave the way men want them to, but their appearance differs radically from that depicted in Sinisalo’s novel. They are portrayed as disgusting and extremely ugly in the eyes of men. What is similar in the depictions of women in Burdekin’s and Sinisalo’s novels is the importance of women as child-bearers and their inferior role in the society. In Sinisalo’s novel, all women are patronized by men and by the “extreme welfare state”.

[HRR] It is an interesting comparison. As Sinisalo’s text consists of short, rhythmic segments, the portrayal of the “extreme welfare state” is created by relatively quick and scattered fragments. At its best, the technique is quite effective. For instance, the formula of dog temperament tests is placed in parallel with the education of Eloi women, and the breeding of femiwomen is illustrated with reference to Dmitri Belyaev, real-life Russian geneticist who strove to breed domesticated foxes:

There are some Luddites who have questioned the application of Belyaev's theories on the mankind. They have presented arguments that the breeding of femiwomen would be a procedure “in violation of human rights”. But has not the mankind done the same thing throughout its history? When women in the old days regulated their sexuality and used it as a kind of blackmail by making it into a limited commodity, they chose males who were aesthetically most pleasing, most muscular, behaved in a most “romantic” manner or were most well off and thus allowed only them to procreate. Belyaevism has been used to exactly same purpose, but instead of the selfishness of an individual its motivator is the greatest possible good – social peace. (AY, 138.)

[HRR] This illustrates the basis of effectiveness of speculative worldbuilding in alternate history novels, the method of logical working through of a particular premise. However, Sinisalo’s novel is not able to tap the full potential of such method, as *Auringon ydin* does not really describe the world “in action” through the viewpoint of the main characters. The fate of Vanna/Vera remains an individual case and does not open the Eusistocratician society up as a whole.

[HS] I agree. This also eats away the frightfulness of Eusistocratician Finland as a dystopian society. It is described as oppressive and horrible, but nothing truly chilling happens. On the contrary, the satirical elements often turn the general impression of many fragments humorous or comical. In many dystopian novels, the suffering of the main character evokes empathy in the reader, but for some reason the destinies of the protagonists of Sinisalo’s novel do nothing of the sort.

[HRR] The strategy of confronting the world of our everyday experience by the means of working through of speculative premises can also backfire or evoke interpretations that are possibly antithetic to the author’s message. Sinisalo’s novel details both physical and mental characteristics of Eloi and Morlock women, and in doing so it begs the question of their relevance to our known world.

[HS] I would say that the target of Sinisalo’s satire is not always made clear. This has partly to do with the fact that she has chosen to combine speculative worldbuilding and other genres with it. This kind of ambiguousness of satire is not necessarily lack in the novel. It makes us ask what is criticised in the text.

[HRR] Yes, you are right. For example, why are the traits that are traditionally perceived feminine (such as maternal urges, helplessness, impressionability, flexibility) presented in unfavourable light? Is the fact that the protagonist’s sister Manna/Mira is described as a stereotype of an “empty-headed blonde” based on the tradition of fairy tales, or is it an attempt to suggest that her traits are something despicable in general? As a result, the attempt to deconstruct the traditional role of a woman turns into a mockery of desire to have a child, for example.

[HS] The question of the main character's sister is quite interesting also due to the fact that Manna/Mira does not have a voice of her own in the text. Her thoughts and behaviour are narrated by Vanna/Vera who repeatedly emphasizes the differences between the sisters. It is Vanna/Vera who is the clever sister of the fairy tale, and Manna/Mira has to carry the role of the simpleton. Large parts of the novel consist of the speculation of Vanna/Vera. The other character narrator Jare does not have an importance as big as Vanna/Vera has. What we know about the world depicted in the novel has been filtered through the mind of Vanna/Vera, although part of the information is given by the scattered pseudo-documentary material on the pages of the novel.

[HRR] True. The novel even gives an appearance that Manna is more of a fabulation by Vanna/Vera than a real human being. It is as if Vanna/Vera were using a fairy tale formula you mentioned earlier, the opposition of stupid and clever sibling, in order to make sense of her sister.

[HS] And Jare can hardly be considered a character, his personality is virtually non-existent. Against him and Manna/Mira, the radical subjectivity of Vanna/Vera who feels herself as a different and an outsider in the society is remarkable. The reader is perhaps supposed to feel sympathy towards her and to accept her point of view. The question is, what happens to interpretation if the reader does not believe in the truth told by Vanna/Vera?

[HRR] If anything, it eats away the reader's belief to the alternate society of Eusistocratic Finland. If we can't trust her depiction of her sister, we can hardly relate to the horrors of the domestication of women. Maybe we should look at the novel and its depiction of the alternate society from a more intertextual point of view.

Science Fiction and Intertextuality

[HS] We mentioned earlier Mendlesohn's statement that science fiction is less a genre in the sense of a "body of writing from which one can expect certain plot elements and specific tropes" (1). Still, there are various clearly science fictional elements, tropes and themes used in *Auringon ydin* - direct references, even.

[HRR] Science fictional texts have been treated as mutually referential – participating in certain thematic discussions, for example. Alan Roberts takes notice of sf intertextuality and illustrates this with the film *Star Wars*. He suggests that one of the factors of sf fandom in particular is the knowledge of the history of the evolution of the form itself, and this gives the initiate a double reading or viewing experience: "[T]he text, such as *Star Wars*, can be enjoyed on its own terms and simultaneously be enjoyed as a matrix of quotation, allusion, pastiche and reference" (89). In this sense, the sf text is both about its professed subject and also, always, *about sf*. What kind of references there are in Sinisalo's novel, and why them?

[HS] Well, one of the most direct references in the novel is to *The Time Machine* (1895) by H. G. Wells, which is among the early sf classics. The terms Eloi and Morlock are borrowed from this novel, and the theme of human-led evolution and the selective breeding of human beings is crucial in both novels. In Wells's novel, Eloi are beautiful and light-minded creatures who live in the seemingly paradise-like world of the future. At the beginning of his time-travel, the protagonist admires the world of Eloi, but soon he finds out that all the dirty work in the future world is done by Morlocks, who live underground. Morlocks are described as ugly and violent and are discriminated against by Eloi people.

[HRR] The same topic is, by the way, explored also by another internationally renowned Finnish writer, Hannu Rajaniemi in his *Quantum Thief* (2010). An obvious intertext in the field of (dystopian) feminist science fiction is Margaret Atwood's *Handmaid's Tale* (1985), in which a totalitarian Christian theocracy has overthrown the United States government and taken away all of women's rights. For example, almost all women are forbidden to read.

[HS] The theme of biological manipulation of human beings connects the novel not only with *The Time Machine* but with the novel *Brave New World* (1932) by Aldous Huxley as well. This work has been categorized as one of the prototypical classics of dystopian literature. In the future London of *The Brave New World*, the reproduction and breeding does not happen in families but at the large factories. Gametes are fertilized on the conveyor belt. In the different parts of the belt, embryos are manipulated with the result of people belonging to different castes in the society. What is different in these novels is that in the World State of *Brave New World* traditional families have no value, but in Eusistocratia families and parenthood are valued and supported by the state.

[HRR] Besides the references of this kind, there are several other features that link Sinisalo's novel to the tradition of science fiction. For example, the phenomena of plant and animal kingdoms are given detailed explanations. However, some of the phenomena depicted are left without an explanation. How is it possible that Eusistocratia has succeeded in breeding the human population in a few decades with the result of the disappearance of unwanted features and the decrease of desired features of sexes?

[HS] You earlier mentioned that because science fictional texts can be mutually referential, they can participate in certain thematic discussions. On the whole, Sinisalo's novel obviously aims at connecting to the long tradition of discussing themes such as human-led evolution and selective breeding and update it with the questions linked to sexual discrimination and the idea of women's sexual power which has been fairly topical in Finland recently. Should we compile the pros and cons of her technique, in conclusion?

Conclusion

In this overview, we discussed Johanna Sinisalo's *Auringon ydin* from the viewpoint of generic interpretations which the novel evokes. We analysed various elements contributing to this medley in relation to the supposed targets of Sinisalo's satire, as the voice of the satirist is quite distinguishable throughout the reading experience. Another goal in our discussion was to explore the "anatomy" of the genre of Finnish Weird, which has been quite topical in the field of Finnish speculative writing.

One of the targets of the satirical criticism of *Auringon ydin* is the society which tries to control the welfare of its people with extreme means. Another target is neoconservatism with its traditional and normative conceptions of sexual behaviour and gender roles. The rise of nationalistic thinking and patriotism is also ridiculed in the novel. The intertexts written in the 1930s bring the political attitude of Europe of that period to the side that of Finland of the 2010s. Today's right-wing politics and the rise of extreme political parties are made implicitly comparable with the political situation of the 1930s Europe.

As we mentioned above, Sinisalo's choice to combine speculative thought experiment with the means of satire does not always work out, as the humoristic side to satire eats away the credibility of the described dystopian society. *Auringon ydin* is at its funniest (and hits its target) when it turns to confront the contemporary view of romantic relationships functioning like market, where certain kinds of men and women can be of better value than others.

All in all, the reading of *Auringon ydin* through various generic viewpoints brought out the diversity of the elements and possible reading strategies of the novel.

Works Cited

AY = Sinisalo, Johanna. *Auringon ydin*. Helsinki: Teos, 2013. Print.

Burdekin, Katherine. *Swastika Night*. 1937. New York: The Feminist Press of the City University of New York, 1985. Print.

Fowler, Alastair. *Kinds of Literature. An Introduction to the Theory of Genres and Modes*. 1982. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982/2002. Print.

Gottlieb, Erika. *Dystopian Fiction East and West. Universe of Terror and Trial*. Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001. Print.

Mendlesohn, Farah. "Introduction: Reading Science Fiction." *The Cambridge Companion to Science Fiction*. Eds. James Edward & Mendlesohn Farah. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003. 1–14. Print.

Roberts, Adam. *Science Fiction*. Routledge: London and New York, 2000. Print.

Ryan-Hayes, Karen. *Contemporary Russian Satire. A Genre Study*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995. Print.

Scholes, Robert. *Structural Fabulation: An Essay on Fiction of the Future*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1975. Print.

Suin, Darko. *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction: On the Poetics and History of a Literary Genre*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1979. Print.

Zipes, Jack. *The Irresistible Fairy Tale. The Cultural and Social History of a Genre*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012. Print.

- - -. *The Trials and Tribulations of Little Red Riding Hood*. London: Heinemann, 1983. Print.

- - -. *Why Fairy Tales Stick. The Evolution and Relevance of a Genre*. New York–London: Routledge, 2006. Print.

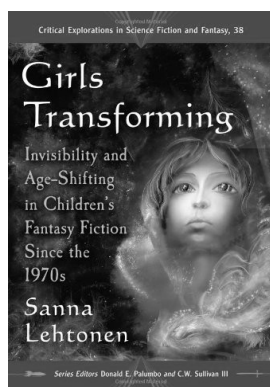


Fafnir – Nordic Journal of Science Fiction and
Fantasy Research
journal.finfar.org

A Book review:

Sanna Lehtonen – *Girls Transforming. Invisibility and Age-Shifting in Children's Fantasy Fiction Since the 1970s.*

Liisa Rantalaiho



Lehtonen, Sanna: *Girls Transforming. Invisibility and Age-Shifting in Children's Fantasy Fiction Since the 1970s.* Critical Explorations in Science Fiction and Fantasy, 38. Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Co., 2013. ISBN: 978-0-7864-6136-3.

Fantastic metamorphoses have always filled human mythologies, stories and fairy tales: people turn into animals, stones or trees, or their bodies stay ageless and then suddenly age. The themes of transformations are familiar in the world literature, and many writers use them also in contemporary children's and young adult fiction. There are many studies on bodily transformations in adult literature – Ovid throws a long shadow – but amazingly, only a few studies on such transformation in children's literature (notably Maria Lassén-Seger, 2006, and Shelley Chappel, 2007). Those see the earlier children's fiction as conservative and the newer as challenging conservative values.

Sanna Lehtonen's aim is to analyse the textual and narrative representations of fantastic bodily transformation in contemporary children's and YA fantasy novels, and how these are connected with representations of girlhood and womanhood. She concentrates on the fictional transformations of invisibility and age-shifting, and relates the analysis on feminist theoretical discourses on gender, identity, (in)visibility and aging. She wants to study how the bodily transformations are represented in the texts by textual and narrative means and how they are connected with representations of girlhood and womanhood. How do they affect power relations in the story world, who controls them? How do they function in relation to conventional children's fantasy and fairy tales, and how in relation to feminist discourses on invisibility, aging and gender? Her main material is post-1970s children's and YA fantasy novels, chosen on the basis that invisibility and age-shifting are central motifs in relation to the female protagonists. As Lehtonen notes, the selection is also restricted by accessibility and language barriers, so that most of the material is written in English. Even so, her primary material makes quite an impressive list. From many sources the most thoroughly analysed are several novels by Diana Wynne Jones (*Time of the Ghost*, *Howl's Moving Castle*, *Hexwood*) and Susan Price (*The Ghost Drum*, *Ghost Song*, *Ghost Dance*, *The Ghost Wife*).

Looking at the bodily transformations in the texts, Lehtonen uses motif and trope as her central analytical concepts. The transformations are motifs when they serve a strategic function in the narrative, tropes when they point to a metaphorical or metonymic interpretation. She makes a close analysis of the narrative, focusing on characterization: description, action, speech, and thought of the transforming females. She looks at focalization and gendered discourses by the narrator, the focalizer and other characters. She asks what the starting point is and where do the girls end up, what kind of femininities are seen at the beginning and at the end of the narratives. She asks whether narrative closure creates a causal relationship that seems natural rather than ideological, or are there disruptions in temporality that deconstruct the obvious. Lehtonen focuses on resonances between bodily transformations and feminist theoretical discussions. Her methodological framework is feminist discourse analysis, combining ideas of third-wave feminist theories such as performativity (Judith Butler), embodied materialism (Rosi Braidotti), narratable self (Adriana Cavarero) and especially queer theory (Judith Halberstam). However, instead of contrasting the waves of feminist theoretical discussions, Sanna Lehtonen emphasizes textual multivoicedness, heteroglossia, and the intertextual nature of meaning-making and language. Multivoicedness is the starting point of analysis of gendered discourses.

The book is divided into five main chapters, plus Introduction and Conclusions. Chapter 1, "Magic Cloaks and Potions", provides a broader context for the transformation themes in literature, both adult and children's literature. Chapter 2, "Witch Power", explores invisibility and age-shifting as narrative motifs associated with the female character's agency and empowerment, and how "the witch" has been rewritten in contemporary fantasy. It analyses mainly novels that use the so-called secondary world settings. Chapter 3, "Deconstructing and Reconstructing Female Subjectivity" takes up novels of fantastic realism in contemporary urban settings; the feminist ideas concern issues of agency, subjectivity and invisibility as powerlessness. Chapter 4, "Discourses on Gender, Power and Desire" analyses invisibility as power over others, relating it to the feminist discourses on gaze. Chapter 5, "Crossing Borders", relates age shifting to the ideas of queer theory, seeing the transformations as departure from conventional heteronormative life trajectories; as a specific example it considers the border crossings and transgender characteristics of shaman identity.

Looking at the bulk of the literary material, the main themes of gendered bodily transformations obviously concern female empowerment and subjectivity. Contemporary children's and YA fantasy is critical of gendered stereotypes, but the invisible and magically aged girls of the novels are multidimensional characters. Invisibility can be powerlessness and stand for a loss of subjectivity, but it can also give power over others and options of agency; age-shifting can be a curse, a possibility for empowerment or a playful identity. Either way, contemporary children's and YA fiction is indeed multivoiced and should not be categorized as simply liberal-feminist, radical feminist or queer-feminist. On the whole, Sanna Lehtonen has made an admirably thorough analysis on the subject of fantastic bodily transformations in contemporary children's fantasy. (A detail, however: why no reference to Tove Jansson's *The Invisible Child* in the overview of the literary background?) Her methodological ideas would certainly be useful to other researchers. For instance, what might the result be if somebody took up the same questions on fantastic bodily transformations of boys? The book is also very readable, quite a page-turner in several sections. It will make a good addition to a curriculum for students of science fiction and fantasy studies.

Works Cited

Chappell, Shelley. *Werewolves, Wings, and Other Weird Transformations: Fantastic Metamorphoses in Children's and Young Adult Fantasy Literature*. Sydney: Macquarie University, 2007. Print.

Lassén-Seger, Maria. *Adventures into Otherness: Child Metamorphs in Twentieth-century Children's Literature*. Åbo: Åbo Akademi, 2006. Print.

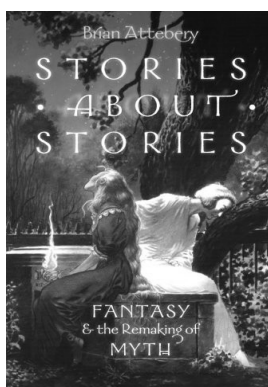


Fafnir – Nordic Journal of Science Fiction and
Fantasy Research
journal.finfar.org

A Book review:

Brian Attebery – *Stories about Stories: Fantasy and the Remaking of Myth*

Sanna Lehtonen



Attebery, Brian: *Stories about Stories: Fantasy and the Remaking of Myth*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2014. ISBN: 978-0-19-931607-6.

Fantasy, as we know, draws heavily on earlier mythological traditions. The various connections between fantasy and myth(s) have been thoroughly explored during the past decades, in philosophical explorations discussing the ontology and epistemology of fantasy, as well as in literary influence studies charting intertextual relations between earlier traditions and contemporary works. Indeed, most general studies of fantasy are likely to point out the relationship between fantasy and myth. Is there thus anything novel left to say about fantasy and myth? There is, as Brian Attebery's *Stories About Stories: Fantasy and the Remaking of Myth* demonstrates. Even though the project is characterised as a “history of fantasy as a history of mythopoiesis, modern myth-making” (4), *Stories About Stories* is not a philosophical speculation about fantasy *as* myth. It is also not a meticulous analytical exercise to note down all intertextual references to various mythological sources in specific works of fantasy during specific historical moments, but hovers somewhere in between these two approaches. *Stories About Stories* investigates “the way writers use fantasy to reframe myth: to construct new ways of looking at traditional stories and beliefs” (2–3) and does this by closely examining narrative strategies of rewriting in works of fantasy mainly from the past century. Apart from narrative strategies, the focus is on the functions and effects of rewriting: how are myths reworked and recontextualised in fantasy and to what effect? Thus, the book aims to illustrate how fantasy connects us with the myths of the past to understand the present – a very worthwhile endeavour.

As Attebery suggests, the book could be classified either as a literary study or a cultural history, or possibly both. It is definitely both as far as fantasy is concerned. However, while *Stories About Stories* is a brief cultural history of fantasy as a form of myth-making, or, perhaps, myth-breaking, the book is not a cultural history of myth, nor does it claim to be, even if at the beginning myth is defined very broadly “to designate any collective story that encapsulates a world view and authorizes belief” (2). In its broadest sense, this definition would, in my view, include a range of

contemporary and historical myths constructed in more or less realistic discourse, not only religious or fantastic narratives. Among other things, contemporary economic narratives of unlimited growth and endless progress or popular scientific stories about gender development often function like myths and, moreover, are myths reworked and challenged in many a fantasy and science fiction narrative. These are not, however, dealt with in *Stories About Stories*. Most of the time when Attebery is discussing the ways in which fantasy reweaves myths into new stories, he is referring to the rewriting and recontextualising of past and contemporary myths associated with religious or spiritual traditions. While the definition of myth is thus narrowed down, the range of genres included as potential mythological source materials for fantasy is broad: apart from religious narratives such as creation myths and stories of deities, these include legends, ballads, folk and fairy tales. In this sense, Attebery's study is a fairly conventional approach to rewriting of myth in fantasy – and as such it works excellently.

Similarly to Attebery's earlier well-known works, *Strategies of Fantasy* (1992) and *Decoding Gender in Science Fiction* (2002), *Stories About Stories* is an ambitious study that covers a broad range of literary fantastic works, examined through a critical framework combining insights and concepts from various traditions, ranging from literary philosophy and structuralist narrative theory to feminist and postcolonialist criticism. In a way, *Stories About Stories* is a sequel to *Strategies of Fantasy* – both rely on the logical-philosophical notion of the genre of fantasy as a “fuzzy set” and examine the various narrative strategies that are typically employed in works of fantasy. What *Stories About Stories* adds to the earlier work, apart from a range of more recent fantasy narratives, is a more intricate analysis of narrative strategies of *rewriting* and closer attention to the cultural context in which the rewriting takes place – unlike the previous book that was mainly a literary study, this one is truly also a cultural history of fantasy. *Stories About Stories* runs through a versatile selection of cases to illustrate key developments in fantasists' approaches to mythological source materials throughout the past two centuries, although the focus is on the late twentieth century. The corpus of primary texts ranges from nineteenth-century classics to contemporary works and includes both famous and less-known fantasists, such as the Inklings group and their contemporary Hope Mirrlees. All the texts discussed in detail come from the English-language tradition. The mythopoeic strategies of fantasy might look somewhat different if other language and cultural areas were included not only as source materials for English-speaking fantasists, but also active producers of their own fantasy works – this is not a concern of this study, however.

The book consists of eight chapters discussing the relationship between fantasy and myth at crucial historical points, and two brief interludes, the first dealing with generic distinctions and the second depicting fundamentalist Christian reactions to contemporary fantasy. The first chapter and the taxonomic interlude clarify the various concepts and terms, including “fantasy” and “myth”, and offer a concise historical account of the origins of fantasy as a genre in the nineteenth century. The rest of the chapters focus on the twentieth century, starting from the comparisons between the employment of the “mythic method” (43) among modernists and the Inklings, as well as between approaches to Christian mythology by C. S. Lewis and his nineteenth-century inspiration George MacDonald, and ending with developments occurring towards the end of the century: the growing popularity of angel stories, attacks on fantasy by Christian readers who interpret it literally, postcolonialism, and postmodernism. In between we read about the main trends in post-Tolkien fantasy during the 1960s and 1970s that in its myth-making and myth-breaking was relying heavily on the genre of romance (whether as a story of erotic desire, of an exotic adventure narrative, or of a discovery of one's hidden identity) and a Campbellian, colonialist approach to world mythologies. The main argument about fantasy as a versatile tool for modern myth-making builds up throughout the work – as the list above suggests, the strategies, purposes, contexts and outcomes of rewriting myths in fantasy have varied greatly through time, and even at any particular moment in history. It

is perhaps due to this versatility that each main chapter can also be read on its own as a specific case study. This is good news for those readers who are primarily interested in a specific historical moment, theme, or approach. However, there is also a feeling that sometimes the ties between the chapters are fairly loose; it is clear, for instance, that feminist, postcolonialist and postmodernist approaches to rewriting myths in fantasy have been occurring simultaneously and been intertwined, yet here these approaches are mainly treated separate from each other in different chapters.

Instead of trying to capture the variety of the examples and strategies that Attebery covers – for that I refer you to the book itself – I will put forward four main notions that I was left with after finishing the book. First, unlike the Campbellian idea of the monomyth suggests, all myths, all stories, and all fantasies are not the same. As Attebery demonstrates, it is often precisely the small details and cultural fine-tuning and (re)contextualisation that make all the difference; the very conscious *play* with strategies of *rewriting* and making old stories anew are employed to ensure that we are *not* reading the same myth or fantasy all over again. Neither is the purpose of rewriting always the same: myths can be rewritten to entertain, put forward religious views, present political satire, explore selfhood, present minority voices, reimagine gender or ethnicity, or just to ensure that the old stories are not forgotten. Second, even though this is a cultural history of fantasy, the progress of time does not necessarily neatly equal progress in fantasy as a genre – as in narrative strategies becoming more complex or in a growing political awareness about the cultural context in which stories are written. Attebery does end his discussion with works from the past few decades that employ either postcolonialist approaches or strategies of disruptive rewriting that some have labelled postmodernist but he terms “situated fantastic”, a concept inspired by Donna Haraway’s notion of “situated knowledge” (8; 187–188), and describes these as complicated and sophisticated forms of fantasy. Yet changes do not always occur in a one-way line. This is evidenced by Attebery’s own refusal to use the term postmodernist of strategies that “predate the current era” (8) and, for instance, by his comparison between the representation of women in progressive MacDonald and conservative Lewis. Thus the patterns of change may also be less predictable and chaotic – at least before someone connects selected dots to construct a history of development.

The two final notions have to do with cultural context. As playful and creative rewriting myths may be, fantasists do not create their works in a cultural vacuum – myths and stories do not come out of nowhere, nor do they disappear in the air after consumption without any consequences. This may seem pretty obvious. However, as Attebery illustrates through the case of Patricia Wrightson and her work appropriating Aboriginal motifs that was first met with international praise, followed by severe criticism and silence, storytellers, critics, and readers are hardly unanimous about in their opinion on where the lines of cultural appropriation and social justice and the borders of individual creativity lie. This is linked to my final notion: when discussing cultural context in which fantasy – as well as myth – is produced and interpreted, the context is often perhaps too readily assumed. The term “consensus reality” introduced by Kathryn Hume is now widely used when defining fantasy as a departure from it, yet, as Attebery points out, it is by no means clear that people living in the same culture at the same time will share a consensus of what is real. If 75 per cent of Americans believe in angels (p. 141), should we not be classifying the recent, popular stories of angels as realist fiction? This dilemma not only highlights challenges in drawing generic distinctions but also shows how fantasy and myth may completely overlap; someone’s fiction is another person’s firm belief, as evidenced by Attebery’s examples of fundamentalist Christian book censors and those members of Native American tribes who experience their myths living rather than dead. This overlap is also reflected in the incorporation of the narrative type of *memorate* – “a firsthand account of an experience, usually a supernatural or paranormal one, that links the teller to a traditional belief or legend” (p. 35) – to rewritings of myth in fantasy: by representing encounters with supernatural creatures or events through the perspective of an ordinary, contemporary character, mythological elements both disrupt and are incorporated into the everyday experience.

The pull of contemporary fantasy may have to do with the fact that it plays with the shifting notions of real and brings the impossible, supernatural or mythical close to us by mixing ordinary with extraordinary, and personal with cultural. However, in his discussion of the uses of memorate in fantasy, Attebery maintains that, unlike myth that aims at making us believe, fantasy, in its explicit fictionality, often allows its writers to “engage in a form of cultural criticism” (p. 116) and to show the constructedness of all myths and stories and the situatedness of knowledge and beliefs (cf. p. 188). Yet, at the same time, the act of rewriting mythological materials and weaving them into contemporary experiences and perspectives speaks of the importance of telling those stories, of the continuing significance of myth-making.

Attebery’s book is essential reading for all scholars interested in the history of literary fantasy. The accessible writing style that illustrates complex theoretical notions by close readings of specific works and personal anecdotes also makes it an easy entry point to the field for students. For those well versed in theories of fantasy, many parts of the book offer little new – yet it is perhaps exactly this sense of familiarity that makes Attebery’s fresh insights into the complex relationship between fantasy and myth even more prominent. It takes skill to start with a rather prosaic notion that “Fantasy is fundamentally playful – which does not mean that it is not serious” (p. 2) – and then use the rest of the book to demonstrate how looking into the playful seriousness of fantasy may work as an excellent strategy to explain the various functions and meanings of fantasy in exploring the human condition, be it in stories of goblins or gods, angels or aliens. A key feature of fantasy, as Attebery argues, is that it does not hide its fictitiousness. Unlike other discourses constructing (contemporary) myths ranging from religions to economic theory, fantasy does not put itself forward as literally true or authoritative. Herein lies the subversive edge of fantasy: in its rewriting, remaking and (re)breaking of myths, fantasy offers possibilities instead of absolute truths. *Stories About Stories* offers plenty of chances to be inspired by the possibilities of fantasy (again) and appreciate the importance that fantasy has in our cultural consciousness.