



Fafnir

NORDIC JOURNAL OF SCIENCE FICTION AND FANTASY RESEARCH

Volume 2, issue 2, 2015

journal.finfar.org



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

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

ISSN: 2342-2009 (online)

journal.finfar.org

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Fafnir – Nordic Journal of Science Fiction and
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Editorial 2/2015

Jyrki Korpua Hanna-Riikka Roine & Päivi Väättänen

Come we to the summer, to the summer we will come,
 For the woods are full of bluebells and the hedges full of bloom,
 And the crow is on the oak a-building of her nest,
 And love is burning diamonds in my true lover's breast;
 She sits beneath the whitethorn a-plaiting of her hair,
 And I will to my true lover with a fond request repair;
 I will look upon her face, I will in her beauty rest,
 And lay my aching weariness upon her lovely breast.
 (John Clare, "Summer")

As English Romantic poet John Clare so elegantly puts it in his poem, summer is here! It is also the time for the brand new issue of *Fafnir* to come and delight you, our reader - straight from the land of the midnight sun.

We have been lucky to have been offered articles and other texts by hard-working researchers of speculative fiction; therefore, interesting texts and topics are abundant in the second issue of this year. We present you two research articles, an introductory lecture (*lectio praecursoria*) of a Finnish doctoral defence, a conference report, and two book reviews.

In her article "Writing oneself into someone else's story - experiments with identity and speculative life writing in *Twilight* fan fiction," Sanna Lehtonen examines female protagonists in self-insertion fan fiction texts based on Stephenie Meyer's hugely popular *Twilight* novels and relates these representations to reader's comments about the stories. Lehtonen demonstrates that self-insertion fan fiction not only allows creative experimentation with gendered identities, but is also conditioned by hegemonic gendered discourses and the norms of the particular online community.

Julia Nikiel's article "Drowning in Rikki Ducornet's *The Fountains of Neptune*" is a case study of Rikki Ducornet's fantastic novel. In her discussion, Nikiel concentrates on the central role of water in the novel's poetics, its structure, and figurative language. Nikiel shows that in the novel, water is both a thematic element and a structuring principle.

We are also proud to present the first *lectio praecursoria* in the history of *Fafnir*, one by Aino-Kaisa Koistinen investigating the so called human question in science fiction television. It is based on Koistinen's doctoral dissertation titled *The Human Question in Science Fiction Television: (Re)Imagining Humanity in Battlestar Galactica, Bionic Woman, and V*, which she defended on April 11, 2015 at the University of Jyväskylä, Finland.

The 36th International Conference on the Fantastic in the Arts (ICFA) was held in Orlando, Florida on March 18-22, 2015. In her report of the conference, "The Dark Side of the Sheep, and

Other Animals,” Kaisa Kortekallio puts us on a ringside seat for interesting and thought-provoking discussions they had at the conference. Year after year, ICFA proves to be a conference which truly celebrates the diversity of the speculative fiction and its research.

In addition to the articles, *lectio praecursoria*, and conference report, this issue includes two literary reviews in two Nordic languages. In our Finnish review, Mika Lopenen discusses *Mahdollinen kirja*, the conference proceedings of KUTU seminar, the 15th conference of cultural studies at the University of Oulu. In our first text written in Swedish, Tommy Kuusela reviews Marian Warner’s *Once Upon a Time. A Short History of Fairy Tale*, which explores a multitude of tales through the ages and their different manifestations on the page, the stage, and the screen. Finally, in the end of the journal, you will find a call for papers for our issue 4/2015.

Our next issue is scheduled for September 2015. In the meantime, *Fafnir* wishes our readers a warm and relaxing summer (but gentler in its breeze than a dragon’s flame)!



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Writing Oneself into Someone Else's Story –
Experiments With Identity And Speculative Life Writing in *Twilight*
Fan Fiction

Sanna Lehtonen

Abstract: Fan fiction offers rich data to explore readers' understanding of gendered discourses informing the narrative construction of fictional and real-life identities. This paper focuses on gender identity construction in self-insertion fan fiction texts – stories that involve avatars of fan writers – based on Stephenie Meyer's Twilight novels. Self-insertion fan fiction stories can be considered a form of life writing where authors play with their identity in a virtual context in texts that mix documentary elements and fiction; a combination that is here termed as speculative life writing. While earlier studies have discussed self-insertion fan fiction as a potentially empowering form of resistance to conventional gendered discourses, or a space for (young) women to explore and play with their gendered and sexual identities, among fans themselves self-insertion fan fiction stories – especially stories involving 'Mary Sues', characters that are highly idealised versions of the author – are often ridiculed. By drawing on concepts from narrative theory, discursive psychology and feminist discourse theory, the paper examines female protagonists in selected self-insertion fanfics categorised as heterosexual romance and relates these representations to readers' comments about the stories. While self-insertion fan fiction as speculative life writing allows for creatively experimenting with gendered identities, it is also conditioned by hegemonic gendered discourses and the norms of the particular online community.

Keywords: fan fiction, self-insertion, life writing, gender, feminist discourse theory

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Online fan fiction – stories based on books, films, television series, and other cultural products, written by fans and published online for no profit – is an immensely popular form of what Henry Jenkins has called “participatory culture” (3) and what Lawrence Lessig characterises as “Read/Write culture” as opposed to “Read/Only culture” (28). Instead of passive consumption of cultural goods, participatory culture involves active spectatorship or readership that may take many forms, such as participating in discussions on publishers' and production companies' websites,

writing reviews, maintaining fan sites, producing one's own art inspired by published works, or producing fan art, texts, music, and videos that mix and edit existing cultural works. In fan fiction, fans create reimagined and adapted versions of their favourite stories by changing style, genre, plotlines, events, settings, characters, or relationships between characters.

Writing fan fiction is communal activity and often a collaborative process – apart from reading and giving feedback to one another, and revising one's own stories according to feedback, stories are often co-authored. Usually, longer stories are published chapter by chapter over a period of time and edited and developed further according to readers' feedback; as a result of these negotiations and rewriting processes the stories are often better characterised as “work in progress” rather than completed works (cf. Busse and Hellekson 7). Currently there is a vast amount of online fan fiction published on blogs, fan forums, and websites dedicated to archiving fan fiction stories. The largest online archive for fan fiction, FanFiction.net has been running since 1998 and currently hosts over two million registered users and millions of stories – the most popular book canon, *Harry Potter* alone features over half a million of fan fiction stories.¹

In fan fiction stories, writers may “fix” some aspects of the original story, for instance, by changing key plot elements or expanding the world of the original work by continuing plotlines, adding backstories, or, for instance, transporting the characters into a new setting. Fan fiction writers do not aspire to produce completely new stories; they enjoy creatively experimenting with the existing story-world and characters that they love (or, sometimes, hate). Through characterisation, fan fiction writers can also experiment with the textual construction of gender and sexual identity. Although fan fiction is usually based on introducing new scenes and story-lines featuring the “canonical” characters in the source texts (that is, the characters created by the author of the published text), it is also common to include new, original characters (OCs) in the stories, some of them functioning as avatars of the fan writers. These stories are often called self-insertions (or self-inserts) because a version of the writer's own persona is inserted in the text. The self-insertion stories provide rich data for a researcher interested in how young women construct their identities through writing that combines their real-life elements with fiction; a type of writing that I will call *speculative life writing*.

Most online fan fiction writers are not writing their full lives in fictional form but, often in rather short narratives, explore certain aspects of their lives and identities, such as gender, sexuality, or ethnicity.² Of different aspects of identity, gender and sexuality come to fore in fan fiction sites where the most popular story types involve various types of romantic pairings, be them heterosexual or queer. Considering the popularity of romance content, it may not come as a surprise that most fan fiction readers and writers are girls and young women (Busse and Hellekson 17; Warburton 120). Fan fiction sites are often viewed as safe, emancipatory spaces where participants can share their experiences as fans, experiment with their own writing in a supporting, interactive environment, and in their writing, play with their gendered and sexual identities in potentially empowering and unconventional ways.³

There has been an extensive amount of research on queer fan fiction – especially the so-called slash and femme-slash stories that pair homosexual characters – that clearly points out the subversive potential of fan fiction narratives in terms of gender and sexuality construction.⁴ There has been less discussion of how fan fiction authors reimagine heterosexual romance (see, however, Driscoll; Leppänen). When contrasted to queer fan fictions, heterosexual romance may seem more conservative – not that there is any consensus in regarding slash automatically subversive

¹ On FanFiction.net fans can publish their own texts and read and comment on other fans' writings, as regular reviewers or beta readers (experienced readers who give feedback on the story before it is published). The stories are categorised according to the ‘canon’, that is, the original, published work that the fan fiction stories are based on.

² See Black; Driscoll; Leppänen; Warburton.

³ See Bonnstetter and Ott; Leppänen; Warburton.

⁴ See, for instance, Busse and Lothian; Kustritz; Tosenberger; Willis.

(Warburton, 128; Hunting). In actuality, heterosexual romance fiction consists of a variety of gendered discourses, and writing and reading romance as activities have a long history of being associated with both moral conservatism and dubious immorality and subversiveness by researchers and general audiences alike (Driscoll, 80; Fletcher, 2; Murphy Selinger and Frantz, 2). As Lisa Fletcher suggests, romance as a genre is “irresolvably both ‘conservative’ and ‘progressive’ in its form and function” (2). It has been suggested that similar variety and associations exist in and relation to heterosexual romance fan fictions (Driscoll; Leppänen); the examples of *Twilight* fan fiction that I will discuss below also reflect this.

Drawing on feminist discourse theory, especially the work of Judith Butler, Sara Mills, and Mary Talbot, it is here understood that gender is (partly) discursively constructed through language and other semiotic resources. Also, while gender is not viewed as a binary structure (male/female) but as an identity category consisting of a range of different forms (femininities, masculinities, transgender), ways of doing gender are regulated by cultural norms – often in relation to sexuality. These norms may vary from one cultural context to another and breaking the norms may lead to sanctions but also to new, creative ways of doing gender. Writing, reading and rewriting romance are key discursive practices where norms for gendered and sexualised behaviour are created and maintained but can also be challenged and reimagined.

In my research, I have been interested in what kind of heterosexual female romance protagonists fan fiction writers create in their self-insertion narratives that mix aspects of their real-life selves and fantasy fiction. My focus has been on stories based on Stephenie Meyer’s paranormal romance series *Twilight Saga*.⁵ *Twilight* is a prototypical example of contemporary product marketed at and almost exclusively consumed by girls and young women. The *Twilight* franchise including the books, films, and spin-off products is, as Catherine Driscoll suggests, “popular culture *for* girls, *about* girls, and circulated *by* girls” (1, emphasises original) – although the series has been also hugely popular among adult women fans (Behm-Morawitz et al. 137; Erzen xxi). Like Driscoll, I emphasise the active role of girls as consumers – many of them do not merely read or watch the *Twilight* series but actively do something with it, such as rewrite the original stories in their fan fiction. The main plot in the *Twilight Saga* revolves around the teenage protagonist Bella and her relationships with two supernatural men – Edward, a vampire and Jacob, a werewolf. Thus the fan fictions also involve romance texts where writers often insert themselves into the text as a new female protagonist that has a romantic relationship with one of the fictional male main characters, although there is also a great number of stories where the romance takes place with one of the minor vampire or werewolf characters, male or female.

While I have collected a large corpus of the so-called OC romance fan fiction stories in the *Twilight* canon that involve various ways of rewriting heterosexual romance – ranging from parodies to stories featuring polyamory – this paper focuses on stories that have been explicitly labelled self-insertions by their authors.⁶ These form a specific group of OC stories that often attract a lot of criticism inside the fan community: self-insertion stories are judged as wish-fulfilment with idealised protagonists. From a feminist researcher’s point of view, self-insertion stories are especially interesting because the criticism that the stories attract suggests that fan fiction forums offer space for an open negotiation of the norms of the romance genre, which are, again, linked with norms concerning gender and sexuality. The scope of this paper is mainly theoretical – to suggest the possibilities that approaching self-insertion fan fictions as speculative life writing might add to the discussions of gender identity construction in, through and around (fantasy) fictions. I will illustrate my theoretical points by comparing three self-insertion fan fiction texts – produced by

⁵ I have collected my data on FanFiction.net that hosted over 200 000 fan fiction texts based on the *Twilight Saga* in July–August 2012 when I was doing my data collection – after *Harry Potter*, *Twilight* is the second most popular book fandom.

⁶ My larger corpus of OC fan fiction stories in the *Twilight* canon on FanFiction.net consists of 169 narratives. The selection criteria were that the stories were categorised as romance and OC narratives and had at least five reviews. Only 12 stories were explicitly labelled as self-insertions and half of those were parodies mocking the practice of writing self-insertion narratives.

authors who construct themselves as girls or young women online both in their fan fictions and on their author's pages – as well as the peer reviews attached to them. In the following, I will start by conceptualising self-insertion fan fiction writing as speculative life writing that, I argue, is a significant discursive practice of identity construction.

Fan Fiction, Identity and Life Writing

Children play make-believe games on the basis of stories and events that they have seen or heard, and insert themselves into these games as different characters. Professional musicians and athletes are trained to go through their performances in their minds – to tell themselves and act out mini-narratives of their performance, if you wish – so that they will be better prepared when the actual performance takes place. Students are asked to fill in study plans where they envision themselves as graduated future professionals and a stereotypical question in a job interview is “where do you see yourself in five years time?” – expected answers are speculative narratives in the first person. This kind of “what if this happened to me” story-telling is immensely meaningful for people not only in terms of practicing for a specific future event but also more broadly in terms of constructing their sense of self. It is obviously not the only ingredient in self-making but still an important one.

We learn from both real-world and fictional encounters, and the power of speculation and imagination guarantee that we do not need first-hand experience of everything to learn. Most people have never tried to set themselves on fire, and do not need to try it to be able to realise the consequences. Indeed, current neuropsychology talks about the “prospective brain”: we use the stored information in our brains – memory, that is – to simulate possible future events (see Schacter et al. 657). We do not need to remember and store events and things in our brain only for the sake of learning from the past but, crucially, to imagine the future. Our identities are also not only based on our past. We habitually write our whole lives speculatively towards the future, or, as Jerome Bruner suggests, “constantly construct and reconstruct our selves to meet the needs of the situations we encounter ... with the guidance of our memories of the past and our hopes and fears for the future” (67). All kinds of life writing with an orientation towards the future rather than the past, be it a personal plan for one's job development, a diary entry about hopes for the coming year, or a fan fiction piece where the writer tests how she might react in a fictional situation fall under the category of *speculative life writing*.

In self-insertion fan fiction stories, the authors construct their identities and romantic experiences through speculative life writing in a fictional (and virtual) context. On a conceptual level, this is not necessarily very different from authors producing (semi)autobiographical works, as Tom Cho's comparison of his own literary and fan fiction texts shows – for him self-insertion, or “making texts literally accommodate myself” is “the best way to write my identity into being” (n. pag.). For younger writers in particular producing self-insertion fan fiction may be a practice of learning “how-to” do romance by appropriating elements from (popular) cultural narratives of romance when constituting their own romantic experiences and emotions. As Margaret Wetherell suggests, “[r]omance is, supposedly, highly individual, yet it is also another of those moments through which the individual affirms their sociality and instantiates their culture” (135). Our understanding and performance of both experienced and written romance is based both on observations of real-life situations and (fictional) representations of romance in literature, films, tv-programmes, music, art, and advertisement. Fan fiction offers a venue where writers can mix elements from their real lives with a fictional setting to explore and speculate about aspects of their identity and their desires, hopes and fears in regard to romance. According to Sirpa Leppänen, “despite the fact these constructions are essentially fictional ... fan fiction forums provide [the writers] with virtual rooms of their own where they can investigate the questions, challenges and troubles they face in their real lives” (160). Also Jamie Warburton views fan fiction forums as

virtual rehearsal rooms where the author can “try on a variety of identities and test-drive them, as it were, in the social settings that she has observed in her favourite stories” (134).

It might seem that in a virtual, anonymous space (most writers use nicknames), authors can experiment with their identities in ways that are not necessarily possible in offline, face-to-face contexts, such as schools where performance of identity is constantly monitored and assessed by peers and adults. On the other hand, fan fiction sites have their own norms and practices, and author’s freedom to experiment with her writing is limited if she wants to attract devoted readers who read and review the stories. Among fans, self-insertion fan fiction stories – especially stories involving “Mary Sues,” characters that are highly idealised female heroes – are often mocked.⁷ Mary Sue stories are often disdained because they are (supposedly) written by younger members in fandom (Leppänen 159), although it is clear that Mary Sue stories are not only written by inexperienced writers, as evidenced by, for instance, research by those adult aca-fans – that is, academic scholars who are also fans – who discuss their own Mary Sue fan fictions in their articles (see Bonnsetter and Ott 2011; Willis 2006). As the mixed reviews to the examples discussed below show, there is hardly agreement on what kind of self-insertion characters are acceptable or what exactly makes a Mary Sue, or a realistic character, for that matter. I am interested in how the terms ‘Mary Sue’ or ‘realistic’ are used by fan fiction writers and reviewers and, in general, how the reviewers assess the original female characters in stories when they know that the characters are the author’s self-insertions.⁸ In other words, I am interested in the norms related to construction of gender identity that emerge through writing and reviewing self-insertion romance fan fiction.

To decide whether a fan fiction story includes a self-insertion character and can be deemed speculative life writing, paratextual information about the story is necessary – *paratext* referring to items surrounding a narrative but not part of it, such as book covers, prefaces, notes or author interviews (see Genette 1–2). This is true of all life writing, as Lydia Kokkola (57–58; 85) has demonstrated: on the textual level of a narrative there is not necessarily anything that separates fiction from life writing. Instead, it is the paratextual information – such as a book cover or an author interview – that tells readers if the protagonist is a real-life person that also exists or has existed outside the text and whether the story should be read as (at least partly) true, rather than completely made up.

Likewise, I can only treat fan fiction stories as self-insertion stories if the authors themselves explicitly provide this information. Since I have not interviewed any of the authors, I am relying on the information that they give in their Author’s notes attached to their fan fiction texts. Author’s notes are paratextual remarks providing contextual information about the story and the process of writing – they usually involve a disclaimer where the fan fiction author recognises the original writers of the works and often state the author’s motifs for writing the fan fiction story, or explain some elements of the story. They usually occur at the beginning of the whole text or each chapter, but can also be found elsewhere. Author’s notes function as framing devices that, like prologues or framing narratives in literary texts, “establish a context for evaluating subsequent events” (Dittmar 192). In cases where author’s notes involve an explicit mention of a self-insertion character, many readers take this as an invitation to interpret the story differently from purely fictional texts. Author’s notes that mention a self-insertion character may disturb those readers who want to read

⁷ See McGee; Beck and Herrling. This is also apparent on FanFiction.net where several forum threads are dedicated to Sue-bashing, with titles such as “Die, Mary Sue, Die spitting blood” or “Anti-Cliché and Mary Sue Elimination Society.” A number of other threads that use less violent terms discuss the flaws of Mary Sues, or give tips on how to avoid or revise Mary Sues in one’s stories.

⁸ Despite the common notion that self-insertion Mary Sue fan fiction stories are all over the place, due to the negative associations that OCs and Mary Sues have it is actually difficult to find stories where authors explicitly admit that they are writing a self-insertion story. This is also reflected in Warburton’s survey study where 48% of participants claimed never to base characters on themselves, 32% stated that they did and 20% said that they might have done it inadvertently (130).

the story purely as fiction, while for some readers the knowledge that the protagonist has a real-life equivalent may increase the level of involvement with the story.

The three pieces of fan fiction that I have selected for this paper are all explicit self-insertion stories – all three stories involve various degrees of adding elements of the writer’s self (as described by her) or personal life to Meyer’s fictional narrative. While none of the stories challenges the romance plot, they play with the construction of femininity and rewrite the female characters of *Twilight* by introducing original female characters that represent a range of different femininities. This happens partly in negotiation with readers who participate in co-constructing the character, at the minimum by relating to or identifying with her but often by offering suggestions on how the character should behave as the story unfolds. In the following, I will discuss some of the sections of the fan fiction stories that point towards the authors’ own lives rather than Meyer’s fiction and relate these both to the author’s own notes and reviewers’ reactions to the stories. I will pursue answers to the following questions: What kind of female protagonists do the authors construct in their heterosexual romance narratives? Apart from Meyer’s books, what gendered representations and discourses are they drawing on? How do they mix elements from their real lives with fiction? How do their readers react to their stories? On a more general level, I am interested in the writers’ and the commentators’ views of constructing gendered identities – what are regarded as realistic or likeable female characters and what does this say about young female writers’ and readers’ understanding of romance as part of the constitution of gendered and sexual identity?

Mary Sues vs. “Real” Young Women

The first story by darkviolet123⁹ is a typical example of a *Twilight* fanfic that puts an original character in the place of the canonical female protagonist, Bella, as the love interest of Edward. This is a self-insertion story where the author has made minimal changes to the original narrative – that is, the speculative life writing elements in her fan fiction are very few – yet some of those tiny, added details may be significant in terms of gendered identity construction, as one of the review comments discussed below suggests. The story follows Meyer’s *Twilight* very closely; the events proceed exactly in the same order and large sections are word-for-word copies from the original text, including dialogue and descriptions of characters – her self-insertion character is very much like Bella at the beginning of *Twilight*: shy, keeping to herself, clumsy, and rather passive in social encounters.

In her author’s notes at the beginning, darkviolet123 gives a synopsis of the plot and explicitly states that she is writing a self-insertion narrative: “[the protagonist] is persona of myself; ... [this is] what if I was her kind of Fan fiction.” At the end of her notes, she also tells her readers to keep their opinions to themselves if they are going to say that the protagonist is a Mary Sue. Also on her profile page, darkviolet123 describes herself as an ‘OC writer’ and expresses her persistence for doing it despite the negative feedback. Thus, regardless of the lack of reviews and a couple of extremely negative reviews, darkviolet123 has added seventeen chapters to her story. She does not add any further Author’s notes to the later chapters and thus does not comment on any of the reviews that she receives. This is unsurprising, since one reviewer calls her sad and shameless for turning herself into a perfect Mary Sue and pairing her with a fictional guy that would have no interest in her in real life. Another one labels the writer a “Suethor,” a term used by writers who portray Mary Sues in their texts and tells her in very harsh terms to delete her story and dream

⁹ Although all these stories are publicly available online and the authors can be assumed to be aware that their texts are public – they are eliciting reader responses themselves in a forum that is accessible to non-registered users – I have changed the authors’ nicknames and excluded names of stories and longer direct quotes to protect the authors’ privacy since I am here highlighting the real-life elements in their fictions and want to avoid any risk of including any features that might make the authors identifiable (cf. Freund and Fielding 332; boyd and Crawford 672–673). While this means that I have not included any longer passages from their texts for close reading, I have tried to paraphrase relevant contents of the fan fiction stories sufficiently for the analytical discussion.

instead of writing. These reviewers tell in pretty plain terms that wish-fulfilment stories featuring idealised female characters such as darkviolet123's self-insertion protagonist should not be published at all. A few other readers are more polite but do not like the story because it follows Meyer's text too closely.

However, other reviewers like the story, and several appreciate the fact that the author has tried to make *Twilight* her own by inserting an original character. Moreover, instead of an ideal Mary Sue, one reviewer finds that darkviolet123's protagonist is "original and REAL" – why this is the case is not specified, however. For another reader, the likability of the self-insertion protagonist lies in a small detail; she especially loves "the little drawing of Pokemon." This refers to a part of the story where the protagonist is drawing a "chibi" of "Mewtwo" at school before class. This tiny detail potentially changes the whole character in the eyes of a reader who likes anime and can relate to the protagonist – she has a favourite anime character, she is engaged in a typical anime-fan activity, and she knows what a "chibi" is.¹⁰ In this, darkviolet123's self-insertion protagonist is significantly different from Meyer's Bella whose literary interests are *Jane Eyre*, *Wuthering Heights*, and *Romeo and Juliet*. This might also make her more realistic from the perspective of a contemporary young reader. Moreover, in contrast to the two other stories below, darkviolet123's protagonist's appearance is not described as particularly beautiful – she is pale and plump; the character herself says that she is not pretty. All in all, even though darkviolet123's story is only a slight variation from Meyer's text, it allows her to speculate about romance through a character that is closer to herself than Meyer's Bella.

While darkviolet123's story is criticised for being too much like Meyer's book, writing a story that actually reports events from the author's everyday life and mixes them with fictional characters can also be tricky in relation to the norms concerning writing in the *Twilight* canon on FanFiction.net – at least if no effort is made to explain background information and details to the general audience. In my second example, the author Abbie.x brings the fictional vampires (and one werewolf) into her own school. This is a completely different example from the previous one, since here the author borrows only the characters from Meyer's work and inserts a significant amount of life writing into the story.

Like darkviolet123, Abbie.x explicitly describes her narrative as a self-insertion story in her opening notes: "[the protagonist] is based loosely around myself and [the milieu] is inspired by my little village." Her second chapter not only involves real people as characters and a setting that is based on a real-world place but mixes fiction and a documentation of real events, as the author explains in her notes preceding the chapter: "[this chapter is] based on real happenings in our ICT lessons". The author gives examples of what these include, ranging from specific learning activities to citing the teacher's utterances. The story is thus represented as being partly documentary – further supported by a review comment by the author's classmate who is amused by the possibility that their teacher might be reading the story online. The rest of it is speculative writing playing with the possibility that Emmett Cullen, one of the minor vampire characters in Meyer's books would become interested in the author's self-insertion character. The story is told from Emmett's point of view and, in his eyes, Lexie is portrayed rather idealistically: her complexion is "the colour of latte" and her eyes are "brown with a golden twist" and, as regards her personal features, she is "caring and friendly". She is also very good at juggling, and happy doing it, which captures Emmett's attention – thus she is a stereotypically portrayed beautiful and kind heroine with a twist; in any case she is represented as much more socially initiative than Meyer's Bella.

The question about whether the original characters are realistic does not enter the discussion in the reader reviews since the author claims to be reporting real *events*, mixed with the introduction of fictional characters in the classroom. Several reviews are positive but one reviewer finds the

¹⁰ In reviews that I have encountered while reading other fan fiction stories, readers often identify with small details, such as a character with the same name, the same hair colour, the number of siblings, place of origins, and so forth.

story confusing because it is “like an inside joke”. The reviewer seems to imply that a fan fiction site is not the place for personal life narratives that should be kept between those real-life friends who have shared the experience – in other words, too detailed documentation of real life events in fan fiction may go against the norms of the forum. Moreover, as one of the reviewers – the one that introduces herself as Abbie.x’s real-life classmate – indicates by being jokingly worried about one of the real-life teachers finding the story, telling about real events online is risky business since it may violate other people’s privacy and lead to consequences in one’s offline life. Abbie.x’s narrative is a curious mix of documentary life writing and fiction and, although it serves its author a chance to speculate about herself in a romantic situation, it finds a very limited audience on FanFiction.net. Many reviewers may crave for realistic characters (however that is defined) but they rarely want stories to be (partly) based on real events that have actually taken place in the author’s past. Obviously, the past leaves less room for speculation and to me it seems that one of the key attractions of self-insertion stories is to experiment with possible identities in the most unlikely situations.

While the first two examples have found limited audience on FanFiction.net, my last example is a fairly successful self-insertion story by NewBreakingDawn. The story is situated in the setting of the original novels but the author introduces completely new plotlines – in comparison to the examples above, it is yet another way of constructing a self-insertion narrative. This is a popular story with almost 400 reviews that the author has been updating during a time-span of four years finally ending up with a 26-chapter narrative. On her profile page, the author has added links to photos of actors and models who serve as stand-ins for the characters, and a link to her remix YouTube video featuring an actor and a model that represent the romantic pairing in her story – thus, in addition to Meyer’s books, she draws on other popular cultural resources to construct her original character. The romantic pairing here is one of the young male werewolves in Meyer’s books and an original character that is partly based on the author herself – this is not, however, revealed at the beginning of the story, where the character is only described as a party girl “with a bad attitude”. Yet, it is clear right from the start that the author shares her character’s desire for the werewolf Paul, as stated in her opening author’s notes: “I love Paul he is now my favorite werewolf I mean have you seen his actor!!!” Thus the story partly deals with the author’s own desires through the main character.

NewBreakingDawn opens each chapter with author’s notes that get more detailed towards the end as the author engages in a dialogue with the reviewers by answering to their comments one by one. It is in these later author’s notes in chapter sixteen that she reveals in her replies to reviewers that the protagonist, Alani, is like her not only in their shared passion for Paul: “most girls would be mad but [the protagonist] would be like me and laugh ... she is like me but not the height”. It seems that the author has been drawing on (an ideal version of) herself when creating Alani’s personality. In the cited example she is described as more relaxed than an average girl, and elsewhere in the story her humour, strong-mindedness and straightforward, even violent behaviour are represented as positive features. These features are also appreciated in the readers’ reviews. Moreover, as regards the protagonist’s appearance, the author posts an image of a Brazilian supermodel to suggest how she is supposed to look.

The combination of these features results in a character that shares a lot more with such female action heroes as Lara Croft or Buffy the Vampire Slayer than any of the female characters in Meyer’s books. Despite the clear Mary Sue potential of the character – she is good-looking, witty and funny – it is only the author herself who suspects that her self-insertion character might be a Mary Sue while her readers disagree: “I was a little scared she would be a Mary Sue in the beginning, glad she isn’t!” Indeed, what makes NewBreakingDawn’s protagonist a successful self-insertion is that most of the readers like her and can relate to her, mostly due to her personality features and behaviour: “refreshing to finally see a strong female character”; “I loved how [the

protagonist] punched [him] in the face”; “[the protagonist] isn’t your average imprint that is sweetness and girly shit like that ... a more realistic imprint.” While the readers deem the protagonist’s features “realistic,” they may also be associated with the girl power and “strong female hero” discourses circulating in popular culture since the 1990s. Thus, what is understood as realistic here may actually be realistic in the sense of *familiar* and *recognisable* in relation to other popular cultural discourses rather than how “real” people behave. Discussions about “realism” and “realistic” characters have to do with defining norms for the gendered behaviour of likeable heroes – here the author and her readers share the view that a successful female hero is not about “sweetness and girly shit.”

It is this shared understanding of norms that allows for another level of “realness” in the case of the self-insertion protagonist in NewBreakingDawn’s story: the reviewers’ emotional commitment to the story. This is evident in the great number of comments that are, in Black’s terms, “editorialized gossip,” talk where the reviewers discuss the characters and their reactions as if they were real persons (107). This is not life writing in the sense of reporting real-life events but is clearly speculative life writing in the sense that both the author and the readers are discussing their own, very actual desires and feelings in relation to a romantic scenario that is mainly drafted by the author but partly also the readers’ creation.

Speculative Lives, Modified Romances

Self-insertion fan fiction offers its writers (and readers) a semiotic practice where they can experiment with their romantic desires, hopes, and fears and experiment with their gendered identities through speculative life writing mixing real-life elements and fiction. Instead of labelling this kind of speculative life writing as wish-fulfilment narratives – as the critics of Mary Sues do – I would suggest that this kind of imaginative play with identities is a significant part of understanding and constructing selfhood that happens by drawing on various (popular) cultural discourses and making them creatively one’s own through speculative narratives. It seems to me that at least for some self-insertion fan fiction writers the call for reviews is as much a call for an acceptance of a part of their identity expressed through writing and a willingness to discuss their real-life fears and hopes in a safe, fictional surroundings, as it is a call for comments to improve their story. However, it is also important to bear in mind that there are limitations to the speculative play with identity: fan fiction forums are normative spaces where the popularity of a story is dependent on readers who appreciate its textual and narrative elements, including gendered characters.

Constructing textual selfhood in the above examples is intersubjective activity where the public representation of the gendered self is not only the writer’s creation but instead a textual construct negotiated together with readers and regulated by the norms and expectations of a particular online space and, more broadly, gendered discourses circulating in the surrounding society. In the three stories above, the degree of self-insertion varies but in each case it allows the author to create an original character that departs from Meyer’s creations – the three self-insertion protagonists here represent young women with various talents, personalities, and types of behaviour, ranging from an anime-enthusiast to a skilful juggler, and a bad-ass fighter girl. Thus, while all the plotlines follow some key conventions of romance – such as the notions of one true love and fate – there is a lot more variation in terms of the gendered conventions and tropes that the self-insertion characters are built on. In the above examples, also readers pay attention to the details of characterisation and are looking for signs that invite or discourage them to *like* the characters. For several readers a likeable female character that they can relate to (or identify with) does not have to be exactly similar to them or resemble their ideal girl. The element that signals familiarity and encourages identification can be minimal, such as a brief scene where character is drawing pokemons in one’s notebook, or more extensive, such as the female action hero trope that readers

are familiar with. In any case, the likeability of the character – and, thus, in self-insertion texts the likeability of (part of) the author’s persona – is negotiated together with readers, which makes the whole process rather different from private day dreaming and more like other public interactions where we learn to construct our identities in relation to other people and social norms.

Self-insertion fan fiction is thus a form of speculative life writing where the authors are actively looking for feedback for their imaginative construction of gendered selves – this is identity building in collaboration rather than isolation. More broadly, examining self-insertion fan fictions illustrate how gendered representations, discourses and norms become internalised not only by passively absorbing information but through actively producing speculative life writing. In speculative life writing, gendered discourses may be creatively reimagined and modified or faithfully reproduced, for the better or worse; either following or subverting romance conventions is not automatically a good or a bad thing. Whether conventional or radical, speculative life writing plays a significant role in our identity construction and fan fiction forums provide one venue where this identity work and negotiations around it are documented in writing – more work in this area is definitely called for.

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

Drowning in Rikki Ducornet's *The Fountains of Neptune*

Julia Nikiel

Abstract: In this article, I will argue that Rikki Ducornet's The Fountains of Neptune is metaphorically permeated by water both in the sphere of the themes it explores and on the level of the text's structure. After a brief historical sketch of the philosophical search for the first principle and the process of the emergence of the tetrad of archai, I will elaborate on the metaphorical potential of fire, water, earth and air and provide a list of works by North-American authors (with special emphasis on speculative fiction writers) which use the four elements as concretizing poetic patterns and controlling metaphors. Next, I will elaborate on the position of elements in Rikki Ducornet's Tetralogy and proceed to focus on the metaphorical potential of The Fountains of Neptune. To this end, I will first concentrate on the function of the sea as an identity-bestowing space in which people's lives are anchored and then proceed to analyze the concepts of surface and depth introduced in The Fountains of Neptune in connection with human emotions. I will examine the relationship between memory, past and the unconscious the novel introduces and then concentrate on water's power of purification and its connection with innocence, (re)birth, and femininity. Finally, I will investigate what influence water imagery and the notions such as formlessness or changeability have on both the language and the narrative flow of the novel.

Keywords: Rikki Ducornet, the four archai, elemental imagery, Gaston Bachelard, water, reverie, consciousness, imagination.

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The Four Archai

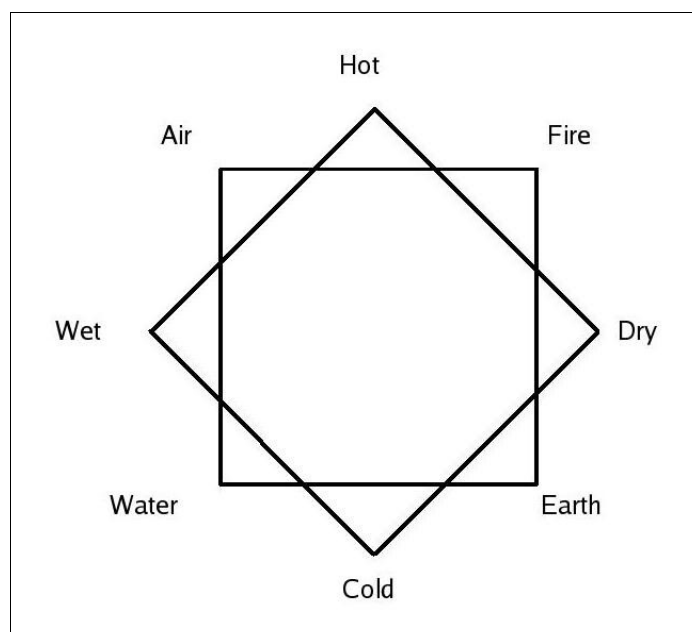
The earliest attempts at unveiling the character of the world date as far back as the 6th century BC. It was then, that in search of *arche*, the underlying principle of all natural things, ancient philosophers started to contemplate the structure of what in times of Aristotle came to be known as prime matter and what already in the pre-Socratic period had been thought of as the fundamental substance of the universe.

The first truly note-worthy philosopher who occupied himself with the search for the underlying principle was Thales of Miletus. Influenced probably by mythological accounts frequently describing creation as the process of emergence from the primeval ocean, Thales argued for the existence of one fundamental substance, water. The next thinker to wonder about the nature

of *arche* was Thales' disciple, Anaximander. Stating that water could in no way be the building material of its opposite, fire, he refuted his teacher's theory and posited that the first principle was the *aperion*, or the indefinite. Whereas Anaximander's cosmological hypothesis was centered on the concept of an immeasurable mass of unknown quality, Anaximenes, the second of the Ionian school of ancient philosophers, followed in Thales' footsteps and once again reduced *arche* to an infinite, yet specific, substance – air. As Malcolm Schofield writes in "The Ionians" (1997), Anaximenes thought that air "differ[ed] in thinness and thickness according to the substances which it constitute[d], and if thinned bec[ame] fire, if thickened wind, then cloud, then (thickened further) water, then earth, then stones" (58). Arguing the primacy of air, Anaximenes, just like his predecessors, was trying to reduce the multiplicity of the world's phenomena to a coherent, less perplexing pattern. His theory openly recognized the interconnectedness of fire, air, water and earth, and clearly emphasized the world's changeability. This line of thought was further explored in the writings of Heraclitus, according to whom, the ultimate substance was one that exhibited maximal changeability. Such changeability, Heraclitus argued, was inherent to fire. Heraclitus's exceptional interest in transformation and change resulted in his upward-downward path theory, which explained how in a series of fire's turnings one element is replaced with another.

By the early 5th century BC ancient philosophers had already arrived at a number of often mutually exclusive conclusions concerning the nature of the first principle. Still, it was not until a few decades later that rather than search for the superior stuff, the ancients began to perceive the physical world in terms of the coexistence of a number of prime substances.

The thinker who first proposed the theory of the tetrad of animate *archai* was Empedocles. Referring to the *archai* as the four *rizōmata*, Empedocles named them after four Greek deities Zeus, Hera, Nestis, and Aidoneus. The poetic and riddle-like statement caused controversies as to exactly which element corresponded to each of the gods. All the same, granting the elements divine names, Empedocles visibly hinted at their power and eternal character. According to him the elements remained in perfect equilibrium, but were being constantly set in motion by two opposite principles correspondent to the forces of attraction and repulsion: *philia* ('love', 'attachment') and *neikos* ('strife', 'hate'); according to Empedocles the interdependence of the two principles accounted for the processes of natural genesis (Wright 167).



The theory of the four *archai* reconciled the ideas of Empedocles' ancestors and came to prevail in Western thought for more than two millennia. Over time, it was slightly altered. In an attempt to adapt the notion of the elements to his atomic hypothesis, Democritus of Abdera stated that each element was in itself construed from atoms whose shapes varied according to the elements' differing properties. Plato, on the other hand, although not an atomist himself, proposed that the four elements, or *stoicheia* as he called them, had concrete, geometrical shapes – earth was shaped like a cube, fire a tetrahedron, air an octahedron, water an icosahedron. The shapes came to be known as polyhedra, the regular solids. To

the canonical tetrad of particles Plato added one more form, dodecahedron, thus extending the number of elements to five. The fifth classical element, aether, or the quintessence, was named by

Aristotle. Convinced that there was only one prime matter but simultaneously aware of this matter's remoteness and impenetrable character, Aristotle accepted the Empedoclean theory but rejected Plato's polyhedra and instead paired each of the four terrestrial elements with its primary quality: hot, cold, dry, or wet (Ball 7):

For Aristotle each element was endowed with two qualities. By inverting either of the qualities, elements were transformed into one another: as dryness turned into wetness, hot and dry fire became air; deprived of moistness, wet, cold water transformed itself into cold but dry earth.

The Empedoclean theory of elements remained at the center of philosophers' attention until the 17th century. In the meantime, however, there appeared new ideas about the character and changeability of the material world. The fusion of Greek philosophy and Egyptian chemical arts led to the emergence of alchemy, the science of transformation, which introduced not only the belief in the metals' maturation taking place in earth, but above all theories about the existence of the next three fundamental principles: sulfur, mercury and, slightly later, salt (Morris 4). Over the centuries, early alchemical attempts at transforming metals into gold or at obtaining the mythical Philosopher's Stone evolved into a scientific search of boiling, distillation, coagulation and melting, the search which culminated in 1869 when a Russian chemist, Dmitri Mendeleev, put forward the periodic table of chemical elements. A couple of decades later, Ernest Rutherford's atom model truly unveiled the face of *materia prima*, while the theories of combustion and of the four states of matter (liquid, solid, gas, plasma) explained the transitory character of all substance, making it finally virtually impossible for anyone to still perceive the world in terms of the four canonical *archai*. Nonetheless, in spite of scientific progress, the concept of fire, air, water and earth as the primal elements seems to have never loosened its hold on people's imagination.

Elemental Metaphors (and North-American Fiction)

As early as in the ancient times a link was established between the four elements and the so-called four primary colors – white, red, black and ochre. Implicative of equilibrium and unity, the fourness of the elements came to correlate also with the cardinal directions of the compass and with the so-called four “humours.” The humoral principle maintained that people's bodies are filled with four different substances – black bile, yellow bile, blood and phlegm – each corresponding to one of the ancient elements – earth, air, fire and water respectively (Ball 10-11). In the 2nd century, Galen, a Roman philosopher of Greek origin, developed these ideas into the theory of temperaments, claiming that each human temperament – melancholic, sanguine, choleric or phlegmatic – resulted from the prevalence in human body of one of the four fluids.

By the end of the Renaissance, scholars openly acknowledged the ability of the elements and temperaments to capture human imagination. In 1634, in his work “A Treatise of Health and Long Life,” a Jesuit savant Leonardus Lessius wrote that “[d]reams are nothing else but the Apprehension of the Fancy, when the Senses are asleep. . . . [I]n Sleep, so likewise in Waking,” Lessius argued “the Fancy of the most part apprehends Things agreeable to the Humour and Quality then prevalent” (71). In the 20th century, Lessius' hypothesis that the forms of people's dreams depend on the elements which dominate their psyches was embraced by a French philosopher Gaston Bachelard. In *Air and Dreams* (1988), *The Psychoanalysis of Fire* (1987), *Water and Dreams* (1999) and *Earth and Reveries of Repose* (2002), Bachelard analyzed the works of writers such as Flaubert, Nietzsche, Poe or Novalis in terms of the imagery they employed. As Anne E. and Colin Martindale point out, Bachelard “made it clear that the four elements can be seen as an imaginal vocabulary for the expression of ideas and feelings,” with writers using not only “one of the four elements but draw[ing] on all of them in order to express different moods, ideas, or emotions” (837). At first understood only literally, over the years the elements acquired figurative

meaning and, acting as concretizing metaphors, found their place in philosophy, theology, art and literature.

Literary manifestations of the four *archai* abounded already in the 16th and 17th centuries. Probably one of the first American authors to make use of elemental imagery was Anne Bradstreet, who employed the classical tetrad in her "Quaternions on the Seasons, the Humours and the Elements" (1962). Various references to the elements appear also in Herman Melville's *Moby Dick* (1851), William Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying* (1930), as well as in the poetry of Walt Whitman or, more recently, W.S. Merwin. The fourness of the elements provides as well the organizing principle of T.S. Eliot's *Four Quartets* (1943): "Burnt Norton," "East Coker," "The Dry Salvages," and "Little Gidding." The concept of the classical four surfaces also in many works by contemporary Native American authors, for example in Louise Erdrich's *Tracks* (1988). Nowhere else, however, is elemental imagery more visible than in the broadly-understood North-American fiction of the fantastic. Water functions as the structuring metaphor of, among others, Joan Slonczewski's *A Door Into Ocean* (1986) and *Daughter of Elysium* (1993), Peter Watts's *Starfish* (1999), Kara Dalkey *Ascension* (2002), *Reunion* (2002) and *Transformation* (2002), Laurie J. Marks's *Water Logic* (2007), and M.M. Buckner's *Watermind* (2009). Fire structures Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451* (1953), Don Callander's *Pyromancer* (1992), Michael Burns *Hot Planet* (1994), Laurie J. Marks's *Fire Logic* (2004), and Todd Vanhooser's *Garden of Fire: The Laughing Moon Chronicles* (2009). Air controls Bruce Sterling's *Heavy Weather* (1994), Richard Garfinkle's *Celestial Matters* (1996), Sherryl King-Wilds's *Daughter of Air and Storm* (2007), Simon Law's *Bringing Forth the End of Days* (2009), and Christian Cantrell's *Containment* (2010). Finally, the element of earth provides imagery for, among others, Frank Herbert's *Dune* (1965), Kim Stanley Robinson's *Red Mars* (1993), Octavia E. Butler's *Parable of the Sower* (1993), Greg Bear's *Slant* (1997), Walter J. Williams's *The Rift* (1999), Laurie J. Marks' *Earth Logic* (2004), and James Rollins's *Subterranean* (1999). Speculative fiction often features also the so-called elementals, magical spirits which correspond to the four natural elements and either act on their own or are manipulated by their masters, benders or weavers. Examples of elementals appear in the fiction of such North-American writers as Roger Zelazny, Poul Anderson, Jo Clayton, Bradley P. Baulieu, Tanya Huff, Elizabeth A. Lynn, Phyllis Eisenstein, or Pittacus Lore.¹

Rikki Ducornet's "Books of Nature"

Elemental imagery permeates also the so-called "Books of Nature," a speculative tetralogy of novels authored by a contemporary American writer, poet and painter, Rikki Ducornet. Bound by the classical concept of the four elements, Ducornet's *The Stain* (1984), *Entering Fire* (1986), *The Fountains of Neptune* (1989), and *The Jade Cabinet* (1993) interpret reality in accordance with Gaston Bachelard's theory of the four elements, "classif[ing] various kinds of ... imagination by their connections with fire, air, water or earth" (3). *The Stain*, the first novel in Ducornet's tetralogy, is structured around the opposition between the earthly realm of nature and the sphere of spirituality. In the novel earthboundness is equated not only with the living natural world, but much more significantly, with everything material, physical and sensual. *Entering Fire*, on the other hand, analyzes fire as the symbol of both good and evil, light and darkness. Contrasting passion with various manifestations of hatred and revenge, the book demonstrates that flames are a synonym of emotions and urges which nurture but also (self-)consume. In *The Jade Cabinet*, the element of air functions as a multifaceted metaphor for various aspects of human disposition, but also for magic and illusions and for the boundlessness of human spirit and fantasy. A figurative meditation on the transient nature of language and memory, the novel reflects upon the subjectivity of its characters'

¹ For an in-depth analysis of elementals in speculative fiction go to Nikiel, Julia. "Elementals." *The Ashgate Encyclopedia of Literary and Cinematic Monsters*. Ed. Jeffrey A. Weinstock. Farnham, UK: Ashgate Publishing, Ltd. 2014. 205-208. Print.

recollections and argues that far from describing reality, its narrative offers only a changeable, volatile translation of memories into words.

Whereas all three of Ducornet's novels use elements as their controlling metaphors, in "At The Heart of Things," interviewed by Sinda Gregory and Larry McCaffery, Rikki Ducornet confesses that it was in fact *The Fountains of Neptune*, the third book of her tetralogy, that made her fully appreciate how indebted she was for her "elemental fascination" to her readings of what she calls Gaston "Bachelard's great philosophical reveries on literature" (132). As she began working on *The Fountains of Neptune*, Ducornet turned back to *Water and Dreams*, the Bachelardian study of the ambivalence of water as the symbolic matter that reflects things off its surface and at the same time guards the mysteries of the abyss and of the deeply hidden, ongoing change. Inspired, Ducornet says, she "decided to convey all possible waters through *the* language, mood, and music *of the* [emerging] novel – salt and fresh, swift and still, calm and treacherous" (Gregory, McCaffery 132).

Below, I will endeavor to demonstrate that Rikki Ducornet's *The Fountains of Neptune* is metaphorically permeated by water both in the sphere of the themes it explores and on the level of the text's structure. Drawing on the theories of Gaston Bachelard and on the ideas proposed by, among others, Richard Martin, Allen Guttman, M.E. Warlick and Sinda Gregory, I will engage in a deepened analysis of Ducornet's *The Fountains of Neptune* and try to show the ways in which the novel *shows* rather than describes with words the story it tells; poetic, ambiguous, and complex, the images the novel projects crystallize and acquire meaning only when interpreted against the elemental symbolism of water.

Focusing first on the function of the sea as the almost animate, identity-bestowing space in which people's lives are anchored, I will proceed to analyze the concepts of surface and depth introduced in *The Fountains of Neptune* in connection with human emotions. To this end, I will examine the relationship between memory, past and the unconscious the novel introduces, showing that in the world Ducornet projects only by diving deep into the mind can one dissolve reality and salvage the forgotten and once drowned past. Subsequently, I will concentrate on the water's power of purification and its connection with innocence and (re)birth, stressing, simultaneously, the connection between water and femininity. Finally, I will investigate what influence water imagery and the notions such as formlessness or changeability have on both the language and the narrative flow of the novel. I will emphasize both the water's metaphorical potential and the inherent fluidity and mutability of literary language and demonstrate how the story in *The Fountains of Neptune* first meanders between narrators assuming as if a life of its own, and then explores the murky waters of the protagonist's damaged mind, in both cases effectively effacing the boundary both the characters and the readers draw between fiction and reality.

The Fountains of Neptune: A Summary

The narrative of Rikki Ducornet's *The Fountains of Neptune* begins in the 1960s, in a French recovery spa, where a postcomatose patient, Nicolas, is being treated by an elderly psychiatrist, "the world's only Freudian hydropathist" (121), doctor Venus Kaisertiege. Following the path of Nicolas's memories, the story drifts back in time to the years before the Great War and settles in a seaport village where young Nicolas is growing up under the care of his adoptive parents, Rose and Totor. Although it is never revealed what really happened to Nicolas's, or simply Nini's, biological parents, from the very beginning the story hints at their death being connected with some tragic event, which Nini does not remember, but which he witnessed as an infant and is now very eager to recall.

Believing that a good meal can compensate for every human misery, Nini's "Other Mother," Rose, spends most of her time in the kitchen, gorging Nini with food in an attempt to make him

fully forget his past. At the same time, Nini's adoptive father, Totor, takes him to local bars and taverns, where the boy is allowed to taste punch and listen to the old sailors' stories. It is in one of such pubs, the Ghost Port Bar, that Nini meets the old sailor and drunkard, Toujours-Là, and the mysterious storyteller and illusionist, Aristide Marquis. Throughout the novel, the fabulous stories told by Totor and Toujours-Là as well as the pantomimic "quiet play" performed by the Marquis continue to feed Nini's imagination and dreams. Whereas from Totor he learns about La Vouivre, a female sea monster whom sailors both love and fear, the Marquis teaches him that "[e]verything [in fact] is magic" (Ducornet, *Fountains* 37). However, it is Toujours-Là that introduces Nini to everything the boy is forbidden to know. He shows him the bar owner's wife committing adultery right under her husband's nose; on another occasion, drunk, he frightens Nini by violently killing the bar's pet monkey, Charlie Dee. Above all, however, it is Toujours-Là that tells Nini about the drowning of his mother, Odille, and about Nini's father's death by strangulation at the hands of Odille's lover, Thomash. The newly gained knowledge proves almost fatal to the nine-year old boy. In 1914, during a sailing trip with the Marquis, Nini leans over the side of the boat and sees the face of La Vouivre. Gradually, the face changes and in the reflection Nini recognizes Odille. Ready to forsake his life only to be close to his mother, Nini jumps into the water and drowns. Although he is rescued by the Marquis, he fails to wake up from what turns out to be a deep and prolonged coma.

The second part of *The Fountains of Neptune* details Nini's life after he awakens fifty years later deprived of both his past and any real knowledge about the present world. Living in a beautiful spa, with the help of his therapist, doctor Venus Kaisertiege, Nini attempts to gradually rebuild his past from the bits and pieces of memories he has managed to salvage. With Kaisertiege's help, he discovers the truth about Odille's promiscuity and the irresistible charm she held over sailors. He learns how his father's body was devoured by water, and how envious village women drowned Odille and then killed Thomash. When doctor Kaisertiege leaves for America, the Sandman, as Nini is now called, spends his mornings in the seashell-shaped bathtub, the Kaiser Milkshake, and together with his imaginary companion, Oliver, creates a dreamlike world, Kingdom d'Elir, whose safety he uses to rebuild his own life. Near the end of the book, village women invade the spa. Thinking of d'Elir as the devil's dwelling, they destroy it and force Nini and Oliver into the spa's garden, where they both stay until doctor Kaisertiege's return. Reunited with his therapist, the Sandman no longer needs Oliver's company and hence, the boy dissolves, leaving Nini and doctor Kaisertiege alone in the spa, working on *The Fountains of Neptune*, a book describing the Sandman's sleep and recovery. When Venus Kaisertiege dies, Nini continues living a solitary life, which he spends gardening, raking pebble paths and, above all wondering.

Living Water

In Rikki Ducornet's *The Fountains of Neptune* water is alive. What is more, it also bestows life on the surrounding world. On the one hand, it represents the unpredictable and capricious power of nature. On the other, it acquires the animacy of its aquatic inhabitants and passes their teeming virility to the seamen, people with whom throughout centuries it has developed a symbiotic and almost mystic relationship. In doctor Kaisertiege's spa water is domesticated, "tamed in basins, bathtubs, and wells" (Ducornet, *Fountains* 12). Outside the spa, it remains fierce and changeable; the weather constantly shifts and the calm sea always precedes wild storms. Thus, in *The Fountains of Neptune*, the air is pervaded "with pounding rain, fog, slush, drizzle [and] snow, ... creating a 'port and sky and sea all smeared together like a jam of oysters, pearl-grey and viscous'" (Warlick). Crowding under the surface, sea creatures stir the water, making Nini wonder at how lively and riotous the water seemed to him when he was a child – "riotous with startled fish, mating fish, rampageous, irrepressible fish. There were plenty of bugs in the water, too," Nini remembers,

“water scorpions, waterfleas, boat flies with red faces, and oval beetles bright as lockets. It was good beyond words to be out on that living water” (Ducornet, *Fountains* 111).

This living water Nini describes influences people to such an extent (as if through osmosis) that they acquire its qualities, learning simultaneously how to treat it with respect and even make use of its changeability. The identity-shaping power of the sea can be best observed on the example of Totor, the book’s main sea dog, described as not merely a man, but rather as “the perpetual glamour of the sea made flesh. Master of foam, of fish, of dancing ships Totor was a wolf, a sea-wolf” (Ducornet, *Fountains* 15). Nurtured by the sea, Totor stands as the epitome of power, strength and traditional manhood. Nevertheless, he himself is well aware of the fact that, just like other people, he is nothing more but a “raft[...] adrift, ... splinter[...] on the sea” (Ducornet, *Fountains* 49), floating at the mercy of this sea’s unpredictability. While the sea, and by metaphorical extension also human life, may be calm and inviting, it may also become rough, lure men into whirlpools, freeze and flood. It may swallow up and thus possess just as it once possessed the whole land, sparing only those who managed to moor their boats. Interestingly, in *The Fountains of Neptune* people tend to moor mainly in the past, by means of fabulation exploring the imaginative potential that has been always said to dwell thousands of leagues under the sea. For who are “sailors? All sea-talkers. The sons of mermen, [who] stalk stories as ... octop[i] stalk prey” (Ducornet, *Fountains* 15).

“As Totor speaks,” Nini says,
curly bearded Odysseus lumbers into the room to listen, and sea elephants, and Sindbad –
the sinister Old Man of the Sea Many times do I, set float upon the pure waters of
Totor’s love ... I swear I hear the surf beating against the window-pane. I sleep in a room
carpeted with sand. (Ducornet, *Fountains* 16)

“[T]he sea is fabulous because it comes ... from the lips of the traveler” (Bachelard, *Water* 153). To the traveler, on the other hand, the sea remains the never-ending promise of both purpose and inspiration.

Drawing from the Well

From the very beginning of *The Fountains of Neptune*, water – the novel’s controlling element – structures literary reality and serves as both the reference point and the metaphor for human life. At the same time, acting as the *arche* of all things – “*Rejoice! All Things Are Born in Foam!*” (Ducornet, *Fountains* 27) – it functions,” As Linda Gregory rightly notices, “to evoke a series of associations concerning the origins of memory, ... dream, [and] the self” (120).

In *Water and Dreams* Gaston Bachelard states that the “mirror a fountain provides ... is the opportunity for *open imagination*” (21). As discussed above, in *The Fountains of Neptune* this mirror seems to reflect the ambiguous surface of people’s existence where, as Ducornet writes, “[a]rm in arm, light and darkness dance upon the water” (*Fountains* 101), twitching around human rafts and splinters. According to Roch C. Smith, however, images born through reflection “are essentially visual. [T]hey create a serene world of surface contemplation. But it is in the tactile ‘heavy water’ ... that the real power of imagination ... is revealed” (83). It is this “heavy water” that offers what Bachelard calls “a deepened perspective on the world and ourselves. It allows us, to hold ourselves at a distance from the world. In the presence of deep water, you choose your vision” (*Water* 50). As the case of the Sandman seems to indicate, in *The Fountains of Neptune* vision can be regained only through one’s unconscious. Laden with the gravest experiences of one’s past, the unconscious seems to equal the heavy water, “the unsoundable source” (Caws 18) which has to be explored in order for a person to gain access to their self. This source in turn can be accessed only through dreams. Defined as tides of latent and deeply hidden emotions, dreams seem capable of

stirring one's subjectivity, washing away one's fear, and thus making it possible for the dreamer to put the waking world into a new perspective.

Living through something does not always imply direct participation. At times, to experience an event fully and to one's very core it is enough to simply witness it with one's own eyes. In "Optical Terror" Ducornet writes that "[v]ulnerable when open and closed, the eye is a paradoxical organ, ... it cannot give back what it has taken in. If a bad meal can be vomited or, with difficulty, digested, a horrific vision repressed, is made to fester" (23). In the light of this statement, it should come as no surprise that Nini's uncertainty about what happened in the past makes him deny the world he sees full optical clarity (Ducornet, *Fountains* 12). To use Guttman's words, "[w]ater takes the life of Nini's father. Water holds the secret of Nini's lost mother. In water, [thus], he seeks her – and very nearly loses his life in the effort" (187). As he allows himself to drown and subsequently plunges into a coma, Nini opens his mind to knowledge, to his drowned memories and to the answers which Totor and Other Mother have always concealed from him. After fifty years of struggling between "a desire for and a fear of consciousness" (Ducornet, *Fountains* 124), Nini wakes up not only able to access his previously submerged memories but most of all no longer terrified to do so. The power of dreams to unveil and heal is best explained by doctor Kaisertiege in a letter she sends to the Sandman. "The existential is always subjective," Kaisertiege writes, "All that is true is hidden deep in the body of the world and cannot be taken by force. It must be dreamed and attended and received with awe and affection" (Ducornet, *Fountains* 190). When all of this is done, the dreamer surfaces.

At a certain point of Ducornet's narrative, doctor Kaisertiege says that in order to "survive the world we must all be lucid dreamers" (Ducornet, *Fountains* 192). As suggested by Nini's long process of recovery, in *The Fountains of Neptune* the ultimate insight into the depths of one's unconscious enables one not only to surface, but also to see the world anew. As Nini recovers from his coma, "the smooth surface of [his] sleep is agitated, the stagnation of ... deep waters disturbed, ... muddy tides sparked with light" (Ducornet, *Fountains* 123). Nevertheless, the process of Nini's waking up is in fact never complete. Instead of fully entering reality, Nini chooses to remain only half-awake, suspended between reverie and nostalgia, a wanderer marooned in the imaginary Kingdom of d'Elir, a Froschlein (tadpole), as his doctor calls him, drifting between the past and the present. He calls himself a floater, and confesses: "I am only interested in the allusive messages of my dreams, the innumerable spaces of my memories, and the perpetual wanderings of my thoughts" (Ducornet, *Fountains* 219). The Kingdom of d'Elir seems to represent Nini's personal "attempt to embrace the entire world. To be at home everywhere at once" (Ducornet, *Fountains* 196). By bringing together reality and dreams, Nini begins to fully comprehend the fluid nature of time and history. This process of recognition is analyzed by Richard Martin, who at one point goes as far as to claim that in *The Fountains of Neptune* Nini's "juxtapositioning of dream-world and daily world result[s] in the literal ... liquefaction of the solidity of a past that has already been codified and should thus be unchangeable" ("The Tantalizing Prize" 198). It appears true that drawing on the analogy between water and various aspects of human consciousness, in her third elemental book Ducornet hints both at the immensity of the creative powers of human mind and at the considerable role the human unconscious plays in the creation of one's self-awareness.

In *The Fountains of Neptune* water acts, however, not only as a catalyst for accessing one's memory and identity but also as the agent of purification and rebirth. Half a century of dreaming allows Nini to recover his long forgotten past. It should be remembered though, that the protagonist's coma results from an urge to (re)connect with a very specific person – his mother, Odille. In this sense, Nini's leap into the water seems to represent his desire "to re-enter [Odille's] womb and become the alchemical homunculus. A tiny human fetus hidden in a jar behind the local bar mirrors [Nini's] desire to become the baby in the vessel The alchemical process suggested here," M.E. Warlick writes, "is that of *Albedo*, purification through an inundation of water that

clears all the blackness in the vessel.” Both his comatose sleep and the subsequent hydrotherapy that he undergoes in doctor Kaisertiege’s spa, and especially inside the shell-shaped womb-like bathtub, bring Nini back to the fetal state from before his birth, metaphorically immersing him in the amniotic fluid and (re)creating in this way the safe environment of the womb in which, by means of dreams, he can recover and cleanse himself of all he has lived through. “I want to reconstruct her [Odille’s] body,” Nini says,

to make a room which will be a tangible dream, her reflected memory. I want a room in which to sleep: white and black and quiet and perfumed. I want a sanctuary; I want to enter into the body of Odille. To sleep there as if suspended in water, my thoughts – water. (Ducornet, *Fountains* 205)

As Gaston Bachelard writes in *Water and Dreams*, “[o]ne dives into water in order to be reborn and changed” (144). When he eventually emerges, Nini not only remembers, but is also able to reconcile himself with what he experienced as a child.

Although water promises life and rebirth, it does in fact represent also the deathly allure of the bottomless depth, the abyss. Dualistic in its nature, water is the synonym of ambiguity, and as such remains in close relationship with the broadly understood feminine aspect of the world. In *The Fountains of Neptune* this association of water with femininity appears in connection with both Odille, who represents motherhood but also everything “beautiful, sexually-charged and dangerous” (Martin, “The Tantalizing Prize”), and the Vouivre, a man-devouring wyvern with a woman’s head and half the woman’s body. At a certain moment in the novel, Toujours-Là recalls a song devoted to Nini’s mother:

She was our sea of trouble
Our water of life
she was all our dirty weather;
everyman’s wife.
She was all our shipwrecks,
...
She drank us down like water –
our mischief was her cure; she!
Our mastaba and out lure!
O holiest of terrors –
Strongest drink and reddest meat –
the wasp’s nest of that woman’s sex
was sweet. (Ducornet, *Fountains* 155)

Years later, in her book entitled *The Fountains of Neptune*, doctor Kaisertiege quotes from *Virtuous Abyss*, a Gnostic text allegedly found in Syria in 1939:

Mistress of Archons, She
Delivers the world
from the filthy waters and
animates the mud.
She is the colour
of water, the
immortal, the immense
Humid Element.
She is Incorruptible Light.
Violent agitation.
Power, Chaos, and Plentitude.
The One Perfect Letter.
The Virtuous Abyss. (Ducornet, *Fountains* 169)

Comparing the two texts, Kaisertiege concludes that “the *Virtuous Abyss* is no other than the female aspect of Neptune” (Ducornet, *Fountains* 170) – the archetypal woman. “One might say,” Kaisertiege writes, “that the virtuous Abyss is Odille, all our Odilles: Goddess, Mother, Temptress. Her essential quality,” she adds, “is ambiguity” (Ducornet, *Fountains* 169). Nonetheless, to quote from Warlick, in *The Fountains of Neptune*, “Odille’s story is set in relief against the mythic tales of the Ogress, La Vouivre, and Revelation’s Whore of Babylon, all archetypes of feminine evil.” Of these, it is the water demon, La Vouivre, that has the most explicit affinity with the liquid element:

She’s amphibious She haunts the limpid eyes of the world ...: oceans, lakes, pools, ponds, and rivers. It is she you hear tapping at the window in the rain and breathing in the rushes by the river bank. She whispers in whirlpools and in the ooze of marshes, crouches in the shadows of drowned logs. . . . She is enchantment – a warm blooded aquatic animal. Crab and girl, serpent and siren. (Ducornet, *Fountains* 21)

La Vouivre is also the most dangerous of the female temptresses, for seen more than once she instantly punishes the sailor’s impudence with blindness, and enraged, she pulls a man in and drowns him in infinite depths. It should be noticed as well, that the seamen’s fascination with both Odille and La Vouivre seems to directly correspond with the relationship the sailors have with the sea itself. “What is the sea, for the man who has loved and left her?,” Ducornet wonders in *The Fountains of Neptune*, “She is fire-water, whisky, rum ... What is the ocean for the sailor who has loved and left her? The one lover who dissolves the night. A bottomless glass of moonshine” (15). Seen as a beautiful though capricious woman, the sea represents every sailor’s dream. At the same time, however, it devours and can be intoxicating to the point of becoming deadly.

Writing (into) the Water

“*The Fountains of Neptune* . . . is devoted to water, the element of deep emotions. [B]ecause water reflects, the novel is also about reflection and memory” (Warlick). Because water conceals and constantly changes, the novel talks about human deepest longings and about the fatal attraction of what can never be fully controlled. All the same, while water imagery and water itself clearly dominate the plot and the symbolic sphere of Ducornet’s novel, water’s status as the governing element in *The Fountains of Neptune* manifests itself also on the level of the book’s language and, even more conspicuously, in the book’s narrative structure and in the way this structure redefines the concept of fiction.

In *The Fountains of Neptune* water implies resemblances and analogies. It awakens multilayered associations and encourages the fluidity of meanings, functioning in this way as the source of multiple conceptual metaphors the book employs. When on Saturdays, Nini and Totor move around seaside bars, they say they “leap from one aquarium into another” (Ducornet, *Fountains* 23). When they finally settle, they “are marooned. The Ghost Port Bar . . . become[s] their island” (Ducornet, *Fountains* 29). Similarly, Rose goes to the port church not in order to prey, but “for the salty taste of gossip she gets after” the service (Ducornet, *Fountains* 20). In times of historical unrest “war is brewing” (Ducornet, *Fountains* 55). The lack of experience on somebody’s part is described idiomatically as the state of being “still wet behind the ears” (Ducornet, *Fountains* 57) and Cod’s wife’s infidelity does not just enrage, but rather liquefies her husband with fury (Ducornet, *Fountains* 69).

In addition to directly controlling the book’s figurative level, water affects the language of *The Fountains of Neptune* also by pervading it with ambiguity and fluidity. The former becomes discernible in the suggestiveness of the names Ducornet gives to her characters, and the latter reveals itself through the often comical linguistic cacology. While doctor Venus Kaisertiege dwells in her spa just like the mythic goddess Aphrodite did in the sea, the significance of La Vouivre

fluctuates between “the voeu ivre, the drunken vow, the promise given under intoxication, and the accusation, vous ivre” (Martin, “The Tantalizing Prize” 199) [you drunk!]. Nowhere else, however, is the complex nature of the names used by Ducornet more evident than in “the nickname of Nini’s foster father, Totor,” a nickname which, according to Richard Martin,

calls up echoes of various French words and phrases: *toto*, the louse, *le toton*, the small top inscribed with letters which can form random messages, *le taux tort*, the false rate subverting the exchange of communication, and, finally, *le taud tort*, the twisted tarpaulin, the nautical covering which denies its promise to grant shelter. (“Telling” 198-199)

Ducornet’s language can be ambiguous, it can be also fluid with one word freely replacing another so that the original meaning mutates unpredictably. In *The Fountains of Neptune*, this mutability of language is characteristic of the language Rose, Nini’s Other Mother, uses. Rose “speaks in malapropisms. [S]he met her husband at a fair, ‘in that insomnic device the ferret wheel’” (Guttmann 185), where she was “courted and sedated” (Ducornet, *Fountains* 19). According to her, La Vouivre can make a man “[b]lind as an old puss!” (“Blind as Oedipus, Rose, but never mind”) (Ducornet, *Fountains* 22) and when she condemns Odille’s relationship with Nini’s father, she call’s their love ‘Peruvius,’ her mistake, Martin argues, being “a particularly felicitous coinage [since it] brings together ‘pernicious,’ ‘spurious,’ and the exotic overtones of ‘Peruvian’” (“The Tantalizing Prize” 200).

“Water is the mistress of liquid language,” Bachelard writes, the mistress “of smooth flowing language, of continued and continuing language, of language that softens rhythm and gives a uniform substance to differing rhythms” (*Water* 187). Water is definitely a model for the language of *The Fountains of Neptune*. It is also the model for the novel’s structure. Multilayered, freely floating between two complementary parts – the shared narrative of the past and Nini’s personal story of recovery – the book appears to be a text whose elements move freely past one another provoking associations, welcoming multiple readings and hinting at the novel’s structural fluidity. Whereas the book is consistently narrated by its protagonist, the main narrative embrace other stories. As Martin observes, “the novel thus becomes a tale of embedded fictions and ... within the context of the book’ governing metaphor, water, tales told by sailors of the sea become insiders’ voyages through the oceans of the world of fiction” (“The Tantalizing Prize” 198).

Although at times the novel does give the reader a false impression of linearity, the truth is that in the first part of the novel the narrator not only constantly switches the perspectives from which s/he is telling the story, but also consciously blurs the fuzzy boundary between reality and fabulation. With each of the storytellers, the flow of narration is slightly altered, modified by the particular teller’s partial ignorance, intoxication (Totor), or amnesia (the Sandman), reluctance to reveal shameful secrets (Rose), or their innate tendency to fabulate (Toujours-Là, the Marquis). Therefore, upon entering the story “the reader is [instantly] confronted [with] the stressing of what Martin calls “th[e] fluid frontier between the narrative and its context, between the worlds of narrator and reader, of contrived fiction and accidental fact” (“The Tantalizing Prize” 202). Although Nini’s memories and Rose’s abrupt deflections effectively intensify the mysteriousness of the story, it is “[t]he trinity of tellers Ducornet employs” – Totor, Toujours-Là and the Marquis – that “cover a whole range of possibilities governed by the watery metaphor,” building “a fluidum of stories which, once told, elude retention” (Martin, “The Tantalizing Prize” 198).

Both Totor’s and Toujours-Là’s stories are being told mostly under the influence of “the hot ice of *eau-de-vie*” (Ducornet, *Fountains* 54) – alcohol. At one point in *The Psychoanalysis of Fire*, dwelling on the fabulating qualities of alcohol, Bachelard remarks that “[t]he alcoholic unconscious is a profound reality. ... It incorporates itself, so to speak, with that which is striving to express itself. It enriches the vocabulary and frees the syntax” (87). In *The Fountains of Neptune*, it is punch that unbridles imaginations and transforms the narrators’ tales into journeys through the lands of the

past and present – at one point, remembering his moments spent with Toujours-Là, Nini says: “[a]lthough I sensed that the mad steersman was about to ferry me across the starkest latitude of his imagination, already my own darkest waters were rushing out to meet his” (Ducornet 55).

The intoxicated mind tends to wander far beyond the truth, making it impossible to distinguish between what is and what could be – “‘Hah! My truth,’ Toujours-Là insists, ‘is whisky’s. [M]y brain is yellow like Hook Head in the moon and not always navigable. My tales ... are born in puddles of rum’” (Ducornet, *Fountains* 34). Hence, in *The Fountains of Neptune*, Rose scorns Totor for filling Nini’s mind with bogus nonsense and even the drunkard Toujours-Là pleads with Nini not to be frightened by what he is mumbling, because his stories are nothing but “the fault of Master Punch and no reality” (Ducornet 33). At times also, the stories become so suggestive that they astonish even the storytellers. When after Nini’s accident doctor Kaisertiege visits Totor, she finds him in pain and completely terrified by what happened, because over the years, “in his mind, Odille had grown into mythical proportions, Ogress and Vouivre combined” (Ducornet, *Fountains* 147). “In other words,” to quote from Martin, “what began for the teller as a fiction to frighten the listener has [in the end] become the narrator’s own horrifying obsession” (“The Tantalizing Prize” 199). Thus, mixing truth with lies, storytelling in Ducornet’s water novel bewitches reality. Moreover, whenever the Marquis dominates the scene, reality seems to morph into pure magic and the narrator turns into an illusionist who brings the world from underneath the surface where it lies hidden and expecting:

[B]ending over imaginary oars, the Marquis rows himself right out of his chair and around the room in an invisible boat which dips and rises, dips and rises, dips and topples over. Holding his nose, he tumbles extravagantly into deep water, and sinks. He surfaces, spitting, and shading his eyes as if from the sun, peers about until he sees me. When he does, he waves madly and paddles over to my chair. (Ducornet, *Fountains* 37)

[H]e places his naked feet down upon the floor, and as the air turns into thicker, mutable stuff, he grows grills, webbed fingers, and fins. Slowly, slowly he wades across the deepening waters of my room, first up to his ankles, then his knees, his loins, his heart. When the waters reach his chin, the Marquis, . . . tosses back his head and sinks beneath his hallucinated ocean to explore those subaqueous cities Totor has described to me so many times, springing the captive spirits I know are always there waiting. (Ducornet, *Fountains* 47)

The Marquis’s silent non-narratives introduce delicate changes into the rhythm of Ducornet’s story. Proving how easy it is to shape perceptions and transform the reader into the viewer, they appear to illustrate what Charlotte Innes calls “a deep, oceanic, open-ended feel” (810) of *The Fountains of Neptune*. All in all, every story is a procession of images which reach as far inside the imagination as they are allowed to.

In “Land of Delirium and the Elect,” Richard Martin rightly observes that in the second part of *The Fountains of Neptune*, the process of Nicolas’s waking up and the “narrative of his return to the ‘real’ world [invariably] absorb the reader in a self-contained universe of the mind” (23). Whereas, the Totor’s stories become Nini’s daily bread and the tales of Toujours-Là’s teach him to expect even the least unpredictable, it is the recollection of the Marquis’s silent pantomime that helps Nini understand that there is no such thing as illusion and that reality is always subjective. As “his dreamed life eclipse[s], [the Sandman] [i]s seized by vertigo. The fertile island of the mind g[ives] way to a barren and incomprehensible reality” (Ducornet, *Fountains* 131). In order to reconcile these two realms, the Sandman endeavors to rebuild his past, thus making his first-person singular narrative move erratically between letters, readings of the books he finds, splinters of his dreams and the bits and pieces of memories he begins to recognize. Finally, he begins his adventure in the Kingdom of d’Elir and his story instantly turns into “a liquescent narrative of the unstable

invasion of the everyday world by the realm of fantasy” (Martin, “The Tantalizing Prize” 198). As reality once again merges with dreams, the Sandman becomes the estranged “floating monster, both of the world and not of the world” (Ducornet, *Fountains* 220), his past and present both anchored in his own psyche.

Conclusion

For Rikki Ducornet, images are elemental. To capture them, McRandle writes, means “to capture the constant flux of a volatile world.” Invoked and contrasted, images allow meanings to emerge and truth to reveal itself – to see is to understand. Whereas on the canvas images materialize through colors and forms, in a novel they surface through figurative language which, charged, textured and agile, reflects all the turns and twists of the human mind. As language translates the world into images, it animates and seasons the reality it reflects with polysemy, ambiguity and considerable doses of bias, construing a narrative which assumes the role of a distorting mirror, mirror that simultaneously hyperbolizes and deludes. Asked by Geoff Hancock about the importance of symbolism in writing, Rikki Ducornet remarks:

I would say that books are mirrors – mirrors of the world, mirrors of ink. There are infinite meanings to be ferreted out. ... What makes [a] story ... interesting is ... the fact that so much is *hinted* at, so little actually *said* ... there are visions of distant horizons shifting, crevices and crags, unusual botanical specimens to be uprooted for a closer look.

According to Ducornet, the literary mirroring of reality leads to the construction of a fictional reality that arouses interest and invites the hunt, the *ferreting out* of implied meanings. “I don’t think that [image and meaning] can be separated,” Ducornet adds further in the interview with Hancock. “Once [Eve had] taken a bite all images were at once steeped in meaning. Isn’t that what *consciousness* is all about?” (Hancock), she asks. Without meanings, images are empty. Meanings, in turn, are bound to articulate themselves only through conscious reflection.

In “An Alchemy of Dreams and Desires,” M.E. Warlick writes that in Rikki Ducornet’s Tetralogy of Elements images “flow together like the molten surface of an anamorphic portrait that comes into focus only on its perpendicular reflective device.” The anamorphosis Warlick mentions concerns the fact that the images projected in *The Stain*, *Entering Fire*, *The Jade Cabinet* and *The Fountains of Neptune* can be fully understood only when analyzed in the context of Gaston Bachelard’s law of four elements, which ties literary language to the four classical *archai*, the fundamental forms of matter. As Gaston Bachelard claims in the introduction to *Water and Dreams*, the symbolism of each *archai* is linked with a specific kind of imagination and oneirism (5) which, when applied to literature, induce poetic images consistent with the chosen element’s symbolism. Reading Ducornet’s tetralogy, one reads (into) the four elements. Whereas each of Ducornet’s four novels develops a different, self-contained story, each is also anchored in an elementally imprinted environment and each uses an element as its concertizing poetic pattern, associating it with the abstract concepts of faith, love, imagination, memory, or language.

In *The Fountains of Neptune*, Rikki Ducornet translates the world into water. In so doing, as often happens during the process of translation, she comes up with a whole new world of meanings and contexts. Focusing upon the sea, endowing it with almost animate qualities and drawing on the frequently made association between water and life, *The Fountains of Neptune* investigates both the sea’s (life’s) surface and its depth, depicting the unpredictability of human life as well as the profundity of people’s inner world and emotions. Delineating the connections between dreams and memories, the novel points towards the intricate nature of the unconscious mind and at the same time demonstrates that only by acknowledging the past can one really rebuild one’s “world-self” (Ducornet, *Fountains* 216). The novel reestablishes also the symbolic connection between water

and femininity, likening a woman to a bottomless, irresistible abyss of ambiguity. The fact that water constitutes the centering metaphor of *The Fountains of Neptune* is discernible also on the linguistic and narrative levels of the text. Ducornet's ambiguous literary language and constant changes of the flow and even of the rhythmic structure of the book's story blur the distinction between reality and fiction, till they threaten to engulf one another. "Dew to dew," states one of the books protagonists, "All things dissolve" (Ducornet, *Fountains* 75).

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Fafnir – Nordic Journal of Science Fiction and
Fantasy Research
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Lectio praecursoria:
(Re)Imagining Humanity in Popular Science Fiction Television

Aino-Kaisa Koistinen

*Aino-Kaisa Koistinen (PhD in spe) defended her doctoral dissertation The Human Question in Science Fiction Television: (Re)Imagining Humanity in *Battlestar Galactica*, *Bionic Woman* and *V* at the University of Jyväskylä, Finland on the 11th of April 2015. This essay is a slightly edited version of the lectio praecursoria given by Koistinen before the defense.*

Keywords: gender, humanity, science fiction television, posthumanism, feminist theory

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According to Brian Attiebery, science fiction “can offer important insights into *the limits of the imaginable* and the ways those limits are changing” (15, emphasis added). As science fiction is not tied to representing the world as it is, the genre’s narratives are free to imagine how the world could be (see also Jackson 95, Larbalestier 8). In other words it is, within that genre, possible to imagine cultures and futures that differ from our lived realities but nevertheless comment on the culture within which they are born (see also Larbalestier 8-9). Because of this tendency to imagine different worlds and cultures, science fiction as a genre has proven to be a valid medium for analyzing the connections between representations and their cultural implications (see e.g. Graham, Vint 20).

To put it simply, by representation I refer to how something is portrayed in art or the media. It is a basic notion in cultural studies that representations do not only reflect but also actively comment on and construct the world in which they are created. This connects them to the cultural discussions relevant at the time of their production. It can therefore be said that representation is the meaning-making process through which we assign certain meanings to images, objects, and people and, while doing so, give meaning to the world we live in (see e.g. Graham 20-37, Hall, and Kellner). In the increasingly visualized and globalized world, the impact of popular culture’s representations has become remarkably strong. We encounter representations everywhere: in literature, films, television, and games, for instance. Science fiction, in particular, is a genre that has expanded to different mediums and platforms.

Ever since Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* (1818), often considered the first science fiction novel, one of the principal themes of science fiction has been the definitions of humanity, which have often been discussed in relation to aliens or machines.¹ The narratives of the genre have, over and over again, asked what separates us, humans, from non-humans and how can we, as human

¹ On *Frankenstein* see e.g. Aldiss & Wingrove 25-35, also Attiebery 12.

beings, live ethically together with the non-humans we share our world with. To put it differently, science fiction has always been interested in asking what I call the human question: who are we and where are we going? Science fiction narratives thus engage in a constant process of producing new notions and definitions of humanity, which I call the process of re-imagination.

These re-imaginings of humanity have produced compelling stories of human encounters with science and technology, which, in turn, have resulted in a strong connection between science fiction and science fact. Works produced within the genre have often influenced the imaginations of scientists, guided them towards discoveries and helped them sell their ideas to the general public (see e.g. Penley). Recently, as J. P. Telotte notes, the Intel Corporation has incorporated science fiction into its “Tomorrow Project” that investigates potential ways of building a better future for the human race. The scientists and technicians are expressly asked to read science fiction and become inspired by the genre’s ideas (186-7). Therefore, there is no denying that science fiction has an impact on how we are able to imagine our human lives and futures.

Asking the Human Question in Popular Science Fiction Television

In the doctoral dissertation examined today, I analyze the representations of humanity by studying popular science fiction television in relation to various theories, concepts and contexts. More specifically, I examine how certain North American science fiction television series negotiate “the limits of the imaginable” in terms of asking the human question.² In other words, I analyze how the boundaries of humanity are drawn in the original and remade, or “re-imagined,” versions of *Battlestar Galactica*, *Bionic Woman* and *V*.³

In the United States, science fiction has been a part of broadcast television from the late 1940s and early 1950s onwards – almost from the beginning of the medium (Johnson-Smith 1, Telotte 21-22). Although the production of science fiction television in the US hit a low point during the 1970s (Booker 67-68), science fiction has remained a significant genre in television production; many science fiction series, such as the various versions of *Star Trek*, have greatly affected popular culture around the world (see e.g. Telotte 1-20).

As Telotte notes, today science fiction television is more popular than ever. There are more science fiction television series available than ever before, and many so-called realistic genres are incorporating elements from science fiction and fantasy. Even reality television has, in a sense, turned to science fiction by producing more and more programs that deal with the wonders of science. It therefore seems that in today’s world permeated by technology science fiction television continues to speak to the viewers in a meaningful way (1-20). Science fiction television has also adapted well to the changes in television as a medium, and its narratives have expanded beyond television to blogs, fan sites, graphic novels and games.⁴

In my dissertation I focus on how gender, “race” and ethnicity – as well as certain human(ist) ideals often used to define humanity against the so-called non-human “others” – are negotiated. The original and re-imagined versions of *Battlestar Galactica*, *Bionic Woman* and *V* all include some sort of alien, machine or cyborg characters. Some of these characters are so human-like in appearance and behavior that they are able to “pass for human.” In the original and re-

² The thesis entitled *The Human Question in Science Fiction Television: (Re)Imagining Humanity in Battlestar Galactica, Bionic Woman and V* consists of three published peer-reviewed articles (Koistinen *Sukupuolijousto*, Koistinen *Passing for Human*, Koistinen *The Machine*), one article submitted to a peer-reviewed journal, and a part consisting of the introduction and conclusions of the study. The *lectio praecursoria* includes some selected excerpts from the thesis.

³ The re-imagined series include *Battlestar Galactica* (including the miniseries, US/Canada 2003, and the series US/UK 2004–2009), *Bionic Woman* (US 2007), and *V* (US 2009–2011). Their original counterparts are *Battlestar Galactica* (US 1979–1979) and *Galactica 1980* (US 1980), *The Bionic Woman* (US 1976–1978) and *V* (also known as *V: The Original Mini Series*, USA 1983), *V: The Final Battle* (US 1984), and *V* (also known as *V: The Series*, US 1984–1985).

⁴ On how science fiction has both adapted and contributed to the changes in television as a medium see Telotte 1-20, 179-188, also Geraghty 118-126, Johnson-Smith 71-73, and Tryon.

imagined *Battlestar Galactica*, machines called Cylons attack the human race. In the original version the Cylons are mostly robotic in appearance, but in the re-imagined series there are both human-like and robotic Cylons. In both versions of *V*, aliens called the Visitors attack the human race. The Visitors are lizard-like creatures disguised in a human-like skin. In the original and the re-imagined *Bionic Woman* a human woman is turned into a half-machine cyborg by inserting technological components called bionics into her body, thereby compromising her bodily integrity. It therefore becomes relevant to study how humanity is reflected and constructed against – or alongside with – representations of the non-human.

The re-imaginings of *Battlestar Galactica*, *Bionic Woman* and *V* have all tended to be studied separately from their original versions. My analysis therefore approaches them from a fresh angle, producing new knowledge of them and the cultural, historical, and industrial conditions of their production and reception. With the exception of the new version of *Battlestar Galactica* and the original *Bionic Woman*, the series have also attracted little scholarly attention. I examine the series in dialogue with feminist and posthumanist theories and situate them in the context of specific cultural-historical phenomena. The questions asked are: What kind of norms, conditions, and ideals emerge as “human,” or humane, in these series? What kind of bodies are represented as human and non-human, and how are these representations involved in the construction of cultural-historical, political and ethical understandings and interpretations of humanity? What kinds of developments or changes of the norms and conditions (or boundaries) of humanity are found when the re-imagined series are compared to the original versions?

During the research process, it was discovered that in order to fit the category of human, the characters in the series have to fulfill certain norms and conditions. Firstly, their bodies have to appear human, which mostly means inhabiting a recognizably gendered body with a white skin. Secondly, these characters must engage in “human,” or humane, behavior and have certain capacities that are considered human. This highlights the norms and conditions of humanity and the humanist ideals that shape the very understandings of recognizable humanity. In my analysis, human behavior and human capacities are found to be slightly different in each series. They nevertheless include heterosexuality, the capacity to feel love and pain, individuality, rationality, and certain ethical and moral acts, such as acting compassionately towards others.

It was also found that comparing the re-imagined *Battlestar Galactica*, *Bionic Woman* and *V* to their original counterparts highlights certain changes in the norms and conditions of how we are expected to live as gendered human beings. These changes become especially prominent in representations of female gender. The original series feature some active and independent female characters. *The Bionic Woman*, influenced by the rise of second wave feminism and the women’s liberation movement, is even centered on an active female protagonist.⁵ In the new versions of the series there are even more active and independent female characters and more women are seen in positions of power. The re-imagined versions thus resonate with the fact that since the 1970s and 1980s, when the original series were produced, women have increasingly integrated into society and political decision-making – which is, then, also discussed in the media.

In addition to the changes in how gender is represented there are differences in the ways humanity is defined against the non-human in the original and the re-imagined series. The original series tend to revolve around Cold War anxieties – themes of control, paranoia, and the threat of war – by projecting them onto the non-human, alien others. In the original versions of *Battlestar Galactica* and *V*, humans are attacked by deceitful and evil aliens or machines that are represented as an outside threat, creating allusions to the communist threat and the Cold War.⁶ The original *Bionic Woman* includes controllable female robots that are contrasted against the independent

⁵ On women’s liberation, genre television, and *The Bionic Woman* see e.g. Levine, 93–94, Sharp, and White.

⁶ On the original *Battlestar Galactica* and the Cold War see also Muir, *An Analytical Guide*; Muir, *SALTed Popcorn*; on the original *V* and the Cold War (and/or totalitarianism), see Booker, 91–93, and Johnson-Smith, 121.

bionic woman. In my analysis I interpret these controllable robots as a comment on the threat that communism was seen to pose to American individualist ideals during the Cold War.⁷ Each of the original series, however, also include scenes where the dichotomy of human and non-human becomes less clear, and the ethical and moral basis of certain human actions is questioned. The original *V*, for instance, positions its narrative of alien invasion in complex cultural discussions concerning the Second World War and the persecution of Jews, and its narrative resonates with cultural issues such as immigration, the ethics of torture, and the discussions on human rights in the 1980s. The original versions of *Battlestar Galactica*, *Bionic Woman* and *V* therefore not only articulate American individualist ideals of the Cold War or the Communist threat but engage in complex negotiations of the human question, contributing to our cultural understandings of ethical humanity.

The re-imagined series tend to discuss the human question in even more complex ways, creating connections to various cultural discussions. I elaborate how the re-imagined *Battlestar Galactica* and *V* comment on issues such as terrorism, violence, torture, and hate speech by aligning non-human characters with the threat of terrorism and the “enemies” in the War on Terror. Unlike in their original versions, the aliens or machines have, in the new versions, already infiltrated human societies – yet another allusion to the threat of terrorist infiltration. In both re-imagined series, however, the terrorist threat becomes a more complicated question as the series include scenes where both human and non-human characters engage in acts that are considered humane or inhumane. Thus, the distinction between “us” and “them,” humans and their non-human enemies, becomes problematic. This problem is explored in dramatic, violent encounters and scenes of torture between humans and non-humans.

I argue that the “others” that can pass for human beings invite the viewers to consider how enemies are defined and recognized during war. As Judith Butler argues, in war, enemies are considered different from “us,” even non-human (*Precarious Life*, *Frames of War*), but if the enemies are revealed to be just like us – or quite similar to us – how can we, then, define the enemy? Can our actions in war be based on our alleged difference from the enemy? In the context of war and violence these series thus challenge the viewer to consider how, during war, individuals are divided into those considered worthy of life and those that are not.⁸

The re-imagined *Bionic Woman* explores questions of control and surveillance more directly than the original version, posing questions as to what happens to the conditions of human life, such as freedom, individuality, and gender, when a human being is technologically altered. As our cultures are more and more permeated and defined by technology, these questions are timely and relevant. By subjecting the bionic woman to continuous technological control and surveillance, the re-imagined series asks whether it is ethical to assume control of certain individuals only because they are considered somehow different or non-human. In my analysis, I connect this to the political atmosphere of the War on Terror in the United States. I therefore conclude that all of the re-imagined versions negotiate concerns relevant to the post-9/11 culture, which makes them important speculative narratives that say something about our time.

Encountering “Otherness”

As the binary opposition between humans and non-humans becomes unstable, gender and other differences located in the body are also brought into question.⁹ This can have crucial consequences on how we treat the subjects and objects we consider somehow strange, different and “other.” I

⁷ On how cyborg narratives were used to comment on questions of individualism and the Communist threat in the 1970s, see Booker, 39-40.

⁸ On war and “livability” (who is considered worthy of life) see Butler, *Precarious Life*, and *Frames of War*.

⁹ On the formation of “non-human otherness” see e.g. Butler, *Undoing Gender* 1-4, and Wolfe 6-8.

draw connections between the original and re-imagined versions of *Battlestar Galactica*, *Bionic Woman* and *V* and a broad range of contemporary cultural discussions about how we encounter difference or “otherness” in our everyday lives. For instance, the negotiations of encountering difference create a link between these series and feminist and posthumanist discussions concerned with meeting “others” in an ethical way. The so-called others can, for example, be members of other cultures or non-human species.¹⁰ These questions are currently relevant and timely as they are brought to the foreground by the rising global tides of xenophobia, immigration, climate change, extinction of species, environmental catastrophes, wars (and new technologically operated warfare), cloning, and the patenting of life (such as animals and plants).

The fact that the re-imagined series are even more conscious of the ways they (re)negotiate the definitions of human/non-human highlights these cultural concerns. I thus suggest that the investigations of the human question in the re-imagined series are telling of contemporary anxieties considering the definitions of humanity, such as the “crisis of humanism.”¹¹ In various fields of study scholars have begun to turn their attention away from the human question to the question of the non-human, and have started to question the humanist ideals that place humans above other, non-human species (Åsberg 7-10). As the definitions of humanity have become more and more unstable in natural sciences as well as in philosophical debates, these science fiction series tap into some very relevant anxieties.

To conclude, it is clear that science fiction is a genre uniquely suited to deal with the anxieties surrounding the human question. Science fiction’s new worlds and futures help us understand our humanity and our relations to those we prefer to keep outside the category of “human.” It is, perhaps, science fiction literature that has been able to really imagine new understandings of humanity – or, re-imagine humanity. However, the impact of television narratives, particularly as they are able to reach a broad range of audiences, should not be overlooked. I argue that science fiction television, today more popular than ever before, is a vital part of popular culture and contributes to our shared cultural (re)imaginings of the human question.

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¹⁰ On these “others” see Ahmed, Åsberg, Butler, *Precarious Life*, and *Frames of War*, and Haraway.

¹¹ On the crisis of humanism see Badmington, and Braidotti.

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The Dark Side of the Sheep, and Other Animals:
Report from ICFA 36

Kaisa Kortekallio

A year or two ago, a fellow graduate student told me about a fabled overseas event called ICFA. “It’s a great conference,” she said, “there is one pool for humans and another one for alligators.” What she left unsaid is that you do not actually get to mingle with the alligators. Despite this major disappointment, the conference proved enjoyable for a young scholar interested in posthuman perspectives, posthumanist thought, and evolutionary theories in fiction. It was quite easy to dive through the program equipped with these filters, and emerge covered in enticing ideas. As the ideas are absorbed, they may induce quite interesting metamorphoses – perhaps allowing for tighter entanglements with the nonhuman in the future.

The Thirty-Sixth International Conference on the Fantastic in the Arts (a.k.a. ICFA 36) took place in Orlando, Florida, on March 18-22, 2015. The event brought together some 500 scholars, authors and editors of more than 20 different nationalities.

This year’s theme, “The Scientific Imagination,” was thoroughly examined in the keynote talks by Guests of Honor James Morrow and Joan Slonczewski, and Guest Scholar Colin Milburn. Already in the opening panel, chaired by Gary K. Wolfe, they touched upon a variety of topics that would soon prove central to the conference as a whole – the most central, perhaps, being the relation of *science* and *imagination* as complementary rather than oppositional modes of inquiry. “Science emerged from magic,” Morrow pointed out – listing alchemy, herbal medicine, and the psychological influence practiced by all witches and shamans as examples of early scientific thinking. Scientific thinking requires a certain amount of imagination, the ability to speculate on the potential.

On the other hand, Morrow proposed that the modern scientific method is based on restraining the imaginative aspect of thinking – it has to rely on only objective (that is, multiperspectival) observations of phenomena. A true empirical scientist, according to Morrow, is one who, upon seeing a white sheep on a meadow, says not “I see a white animal” but “I see an animal that is white on one side.” Speculation and extrapolation – including that of the science-fictional kind – enter the picture when one wants to know about the “dark side of the sheep.” Based on observations about earlier sheep, we can infer that it is likely that the other side of the sheep is white too. But only likely – it can be something else entirely. We have to keep checking.

Joan Slonczewski, being a biologist as well as a fiction author, raised the issue of *the nonhuman*. Natural-scientific research keeps telling humanity that “the universe is not about us”. This might also be what takes at least some science fiction apart from the more humanist mainstream fiction – it usually busies itself with something other than human-human relationships.

Depending on the perspective, humans can be seen as invasive animals, a geological force, or even a vector for microbial evolution. Provoking less discussion than one would expect, Slonczewski asserted that “microbes invented multicellular beings to have a vehicle for themselves.” Among the remarkably nonanthropocentric panelists, this was met with appreciative

nodding. Eventually, they did veer back to the realization that they are inescapably tackling human issues too – most centrally, the issue of epistemology. All panelists agreed on the cognitive value of the fantastic and the imaginative. The panel’s approach was best summed, perhaps, by Colin Milburn who presented speculative fiction as “another mode for engaging with scientific knowledge.”

Two days later Morrow and Slonczewski got together in another panel, along with author Kathleen Ann Goonan and moderator Donald E. Morse, to discuss the influence of Charles Darwin’s ideas in fiction. The course of discussion took them from H. G. Wells’ *The Time Machine* (1895) to gene therapy in less than two hours. Morse began with an introduction to *The Time Machine*, demonstrating that the particular form of sociological speculation in the novel – the evolution of humans into two distinctively different subgroups, the Morlocks and the Eloi – would not have been possible without the idea of natural selection, introduced by Darwin in *On the Origin of Species* in 1859.

Starting with Wells, fiction writers have applied evolutionary theory in their visions about human history and human future. Despite the tendency of both fiction and popular rhetorics of science to present evolution as progressive, not all evolutionary narratives have been utopian. James Morrow took up Kurt Vonnegut’s *Galápagos* (1985) as an example of a thoroughly antihumanist take on evolution, and an influential predecessor of his own novel *Galápagos Regained* (2015). The ethereal narrator of Vonnegut’s satiric novel reports a million years after a catastrophe induced by “the oversized brain” has killed off most of the human race. This future features the evolved descendants of humanity – seal-like, small-brained and happy, living on fish and seaweed in the Galápagos Islands. There is no war and no torture, for “how could you even capture somebody you wanted to torture with just your flippers and your mouth” (*Galápagos*, p. 118). As Slonczewski commented, in the USA of 1985 this might have seemed like a future to hope for. “In 1985, we had a headless president, and we were 10 minutes from destruction”. Happily for all, said Slonczewski, Reagan did learn from watching science-fictional disaster films – and finally established negotiations with the Russians.

Kathleen Ann Goonan proposed that “the evolutionary paradigm shift has not really happened”, as human cultures fail to grasp the concept of change. Goonan made the distinction between “change towards the better,” as in most models of technological or cultural progress, and the more Darwinian “constant change.” Goonan offered up Octavia E. Butler’s “God is Change” (from *Parable of the Sower*, 1993) as a suitable paradigm for understanding evolutionary change. In her Nanotech series as well as the more recent *In War Times* (2007) and *This Shared Dream* (2011), Goonan has explored both the biotechnological and the societal aspects inherent in the idea of evolution.

From the microbiologist perspective of Joan Slonczewski, evolutionary change is always also an interspecies phenomenon – and us such, pertaining mostly to life indifferent to human cultures. Organisms have swapped genes ever since the primordial soup, and still do. This fluidity between genomes renders the concept of “species” unuseful for microbiologists, and according to Slonczewski, it should do so for other biologists too. As a thought experiment, she proposed a redrawing of definitive boundaries: what if we thought of the Human, for example, not in terms of its genome but in terms of its *pan-genome* – the full complement of genes in all strains of the species, also counting for the genes in the microbiota? Slonczewski takes up the potential functions of microbes in her novels *The Children Star* (1998), *Brain Plague* (2000), and *The Highest Frontier* (2011).

Taking the discussion back to the historical perspective, James Morrow posited that the idea of evolution will never become naturalized in the same way as, say, the heliocentric worldview. For Morrow, this is because the concept of evolutionary change is too far from the subjective experience of a human individual. In their lives, humans perceive both stability of identities and goal-oriented

progression, but not the event of evolutionary change on a larger time scale. This is reflected in the ways the idea of evolution is translated into cultural practices, such as in the transhumanist agenda of positive intentional change. When asked about the potential of engineered evolution, Slonczewski replied that “we are already doing it.” Medicinal practices such as organ transplantation and genetic therapy will continue to change the ways humans live and reproduce.

Compared to the academic discussions on posthumanist thought going on in European conventions, the American take on “posthuman” and “posthumanism” appears to be more grounded in political and medicinal practices and debates. Scholars at ICFA also took up current television dramas: Sherryl Vint studied IVF practices and the diverse range of clone personas in *Orphan Black*, Stina Attebery discussed victimisation of indigenous characters in *Helix*. *The Walking Dead* and *The Hunger Games* were analysed in several panels, and the Whedonverse filled two panels all by itself. The recent proliferation of zombie figures in popular culture was perhaps best summarized by Dale Knickerbocker’s notion of the zombie as “the biological antihumanist posthuman” and “the antichild of critical posthumanism.” According to Knickerbocker, the zombie signifies both the domination of instrumental reason in the modern era and its failure to produce well-being: the ultimate result of the increasing instrumentalisation of the human has been dehumanisation.

In a panel on genetic experimentation in contemporary science fiction literature, biotechnological bodies were considered both in their viscosity and their sublimity. Alexandria S. Gray considered the bioengineered cheshire cats in Paolo Bagicalupi’s *The Windup Girl* (2009), concluding that their superior adaptability mocks natural evolution and produces a space she calls “estranged Eden” – a biotechnological garden beyond human control. Pelin Kumbet compared Kazuo Ishiguro’s *Never Let Me Go* (2005) with first person accounts from organ transplant recipients. Kumbet’s reading brought out the complex significance of organs: in both Ishiguro’s novel and the experiential accounts, organs were perceived to contain the essence of the donor, thereby rendering the transplantation procedure a ritualistic event that transforms not only the body, but also the soul of the recipient. Gerry Canavan’s reading of Kim Stanley Robinson’s *2312* (2012) approached the malleability of human bodies within a broader sociohistorical framework. The transhumanist society of Robinson’s novel features posthuman subjects with enhanced cognition and fluid gender identities, thereby connecting to the neoromantic notion of a “technological sublime”.

As ICFA is a setting where one does not need to begin one’s presentation by justifying the relevance of the fantastic, many of the presentations also discussed the shortcomings of particular SF/F works and the limitations of genres in general. Panels with titles such as “State of the Genre: Violence and Nihilism in Modern Fantasy” and “Tropes that Need to Die: Fantasy Clichés and Stereotypes” vented out some of the frustration critical readers feel when confronted with ethically irresponsible, unimaginative, and escapist fiction. This frustration was the driving force behind some of the most critical presentations in the conference, such as Jason Embry’s analysis of the representation of science in Ben Marcus’ *The Flame Alphabet* (2012) and Kenneth Calhoun’s *Black Moon* (2014); and Tony Vinci’s posthumanist reading of Lev Grossman’s *The Magicians* (2009). Embry claimed that due to the abundance of incapable and impotent scientist characters that fail before viral epidemics and environmental catastrophes, “the mainstream population does not know it can trust science”.

Vinci, in due symmetry, claimed that “delusion, instead of illumination, has become the goal of fantasy.” Taking Grossman’s novel as an example, he called for fantastic fiction that resists the escapist reading strategy. *The Magicians* features magical transformations into nonhuman animals, and, according to Vinci, produces the fictional experience of those animals in a way that does not reduce them to metaphors of human mental faculties. The nonhuman lifeworlds therefore dislodge the presupposed status of human subjectivity, rendering the human reader vulnerable to nonhuman others. This literary effect is not just a matter of detached contemplation, but of bodily experience.

Posthumanist approaches to literature could well benefit from considering Vinci's thought-provoking motto: "books can hurt bodies, and they should."

As the experiences converge, a conviction solidifies: that the potential of the scientific imagination in fantastic fiction lies not only in speculation about human societies and subjectivities, but also in the way fiction can bring us within a closer proximity to the nonhuman world – the ever-evasive dark side of the sheep. Or alligator.

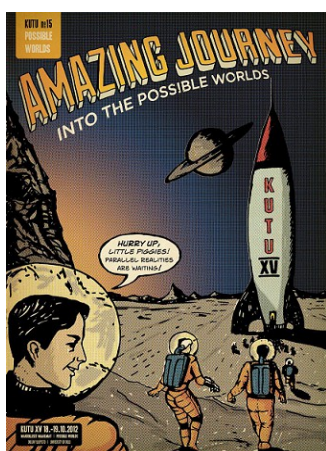
ICFA 37 (March 16-20, 2016) will take upon the theme "Wonder Tales," inviting proposals on fairy tale and myth as well as on the invocation of "sense of wonder" in fantastic texts. See www.iafa.org



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Kirja-arvio: Satu Koho, Jyrki Korpua, Salla Rahikkala & Kasimir
Sandbacka (toim.) – *Mahdollinen kirja*.

Mika Loponen



Mahdollinen kirja – Kulttuurintutkimuksen 15. seminaari
”Mahdolliset maailmat” Oulun yliopistossa syksyllä 2012.
Oulu: Oulun yliopisto, 2014. ISBN: 978-952-62-0485-7

Mahdollinen kirja on kiinnostava ja ajatuksia herättävä mutta temaattisesti ja aihealueellisesti hajanainen kokoelma. Enimmäkseen ansiokkaiden joskin osin pintaraapaisuiksi jäävien artikkelien ansiosta *Mahdollinen kirja* nostaa lukijalle kavalkadin erilaisia näkökulmia ja lähestymisportteja taiteeseen, historiaan ja ihmisyyden kokemiseen.

Mahdollinen kirja, Oulun yliopiston vuoden 2012 Kulttuurintutkimuksen seminaari KuTu 2012:n konferenssijulkaisu ilmestyi vihdoinkin loppuvuodesta 2014, konferenssikirjoille perin siedettävän kahden vuoden viiveellä.

Mahdollinen kirja on KuTu-konferenssin tavoin monitieteinen humanististen tieteiden laidasta laitaan, jopa haitaksi asti. Vaikka julkaisun artikkelit ovat enimmäkseen kiinnostavia, pienten konferenssijulkaisuiden ydinongelma näkyy kirjan koostumuksessa: jos mahdollisia julkaistavia artikkeleita on vähän, julkaisun (ja konferenssin) teeman noudattaminen julkaisussa on haasteellista. Kirjan monitieteisyys näkyy toisaalta etuna, toisaalta haittana: vaikka suurin osa artikkeleista on kirjallisuusanalyttisiä, muiden tieteiden kautta tulevat tekstit tuovat kirjalle toisaalta sen tarvitsemat kirjallisuustieteiden ulkopuoliset valaisevat näkökannat mutta samalla myös temaattista ja tieteellistä hajanaisuutta, jossa artikkeleiden linkittyminen saman julkaisun alle tuntuu ajoittain ongelmalliselta.

Tieteellistä hajaannusta korostaa temaattinen hajaannus: *Mahdollisessa kirjassa* tämä haasteellisuus näkyy temaattisena tilkkutäkkimäisyytenä, jossa osa artikkeleista ottaa konferenssin ”mahdollisten maailmojen” teeman mukaan puoliväkinäisesti pakotettuna, osa ei lainkaan.

Tieteellisestä hajaannuksesta ja temaattisesta ja kritiikistä huolimatta *Mahdollinen kirja* on kiinnostava teos. Suurin osa artikkeleista on kiinnostavaa luettavaa, ja niiden herättämät kysymykset pätevät laajalti artikkeleiden itsensä ulkopuolella.

Kirjan aloittaa Jenni Tyynelän esittelynomainen artikkeli, jossa Tyynelä vertailee modaalilogiikan ja fiktion mahdollisia maailmoja analyttisen kielifilosofian keinoin. Lyhydestään huolimatta teksti toimii erinomaisena tutustumisena kulttuuripuolella usein harmistuttavan vähään käyttöön jääneeseen filosofian työkalupakkiin. Ytimekkyytensä ansiosta Tyynelän alustus toimii konferenssijulkaisussa erinomaisena esittelynä mahdollisten maailmojen tematiikkaan.

Aihepiirin temaattinen hajaannus näkyy siirtymässä seuraavaan artikkeliin: loikka analyttisestä kielifilosofiasta Tomi Sirviön kirjallisuusanalyysiin Kimmo Sanerin novellista ”Valon takana leveä matto” on häiritsevä. Sirviön analyysi kärsii paitsi vanhentuneen, kiistanalaisen lähteen (Darko Suvin) käytöstä kyseenalaistamattomana auktoriteettina, myös lähtökohtaisesta tarpeesta yrittää tulkita Sanerin novelli hieman pakotetun oloisesti tieteiskirjallisuuden kyberpunk-alagenreen. Vaikka perustelut genremääritelmästä olisivat vakuuttavia, Sirviön teksti ei onnistu vastaamaan oleellisimpaan kysymykseen: entä sitten?

Kirjallisuusanalyysin linjalla jatkaa Ilmari Leppihalme, jonka kiinnostava analyysi Anu Kaipaisen romaanista *Arkkienkeli Oulussa 1808-1809* saa toivomaan, että kirjalla olisi ollut muutaman kierroksen pidempi editointivaihe: muutamalla lisäiterointikierroksella artikkeli olisi voinut muuttua kiinnostavasta erinomaiseksi. Nytkin, mikäli lukija selviää yli alkuvaiheen liki kymmenen sivun mittaisesta toistonomaisesta yhden virkkeen puolittaisesta käsittelystä, loppuartikkeli tarjoaa ajatuksia herättävää pohdintaa ja parhaimmillaan erinomaisen kiinnostavaa analyysia 60-luvun modernin elämän murroksesta, vaikka tekstin kytkentä julkaisun mahdollisen maailmojen tematiikkaan tuntuukin hieman väkinäiseltä.

Kirjallisuusanalyttista linjaa jatkaa Satu Kohon luenta Katja Ketun romaanista *Kättilö*. Koho keskittyy analyysissään paikan kokemiseen hahmojen tunteiden ja kerronnallisen tematiikan topologisina ilmentyminä. Kohon analyysillä ei ole juurikaan tekemistä julkaisun teemaan, mutta ansiokkaan luennan kohdalla sen antaa mielellään anteeksi. Kohon ansiokasta analyysia on ilo lukea; tulkinta avaa uusia tulkintaportteja, painottaen paitsi usein varjoasemaan jäävän topologisen kuvauksen merkitystä kertojahahmon kokemuksen kuvastajana, myös Ketun tekstin tulkintaa sotaromaanina sodan vaiettujen uhrien näkökulmasta.

Heta Marttinen jatkaa kirjallisuusanalyttistä näkökulmaa (siirtyen käytännönläheisestä analyysistä teoriavetoiseen) analysoimalla Peter Sandströmin autofiktiota *Manuskript för pornografiska filmer*. Marttisen kiinnostus kohdistuu epäluotettavaan kertojaan, kontrafaktuaalisuuteen sekä epäkertomisen käsitteeseen: fiktion todellisuuden raameissa mahdollisten mutta toteutumattomien vaihtoehtojen esittämiseen fiktiossa.

Tero Anttila siirtää painopisteen historiaan artikkelissaan mahdollisista menneistä maailmoista, kohdistuen kysymyksensä kärjen varhaismoderniin ruotsalaiseen myyttisten menneisyyksien etsintään. Kiehtova artikkeli esittelee Ruotsille luotuja myyttisiä historioita pääosin Olof Rudbeck vanhemman *Atlanticaan* peilaten. Anttilan mukaansatempaava teksti kuvailee vakuuttavasti varhaismodernin maailmankuvan särkymispisteistä ja pelastusyrityksistä keinotekkoisten historioiden avulla.

Brandisuunnittelija Tuomas Mujusen artikkeli retrosta ja retron estetiikasta on hämmäntävä siirtymä. Itse artikkeli on kiinnostava katsaus retron käsitteeseen ja retron myyvytyteen, ja artikkelin lukee ilolla: pätevän suunnittelijan katsaus suunnittelufilosofiaansa on valaiseva ja ajatuksia herättävä. Tähän julkaisuun sijoitettuna artikkeli vaikuttaa kuitenkin irralliselta sekä ympäröivien tekstien että julkaisun teeman kannalta.

Julkaisun päättävä Annamaria Marttilan ansiokas ja itsenäisesti luettuna kiinnostava ja hyvin rakennettu artikkeli aivovamman kokemuksesta kärsii samasta ongelmasta. Artikkeli on itsessään ajatuksia herättävä, mutta sen mukaanotto juuri tähän julkaisuun sirpaloittaa julkaisua entisestään. Marttilan tekstiä lukisi kuitenkin mielellään laajemminkin: Marttilan tutkimusalue avautuu lukijalle mielenkiintoisena ja jatkokysymyksiä herättävänä.

Vaikka suuri osa julkaisun teksteistä on miellyttävää ja kiinnostavaa luettavaa sellaisenaan, julkaisu jättää pieniä toiveita laajemmasta editointiprosessista. Useat artikkelit olisivat hyötynneet lisäiterointikierroksesta niin tekstin luettavuuden kuin sisällöllisten kysymysten kannalta: erityisesti julkaisun heikommät tekstit olisivat hyötynneet pienestä lisäpanostuksesta ja temaattisesta kiinteystyksestä.

Kritiikistä huolimatta Mahdollinen kirja on kiinnostava katsaus siihen laaja-alaiseen keinovalikoimaan, jonka kautta taidetta, historiaa ja ihmiskokemusta voidaan tulkita. Ehkä juuri hajanaisuutensa ansiosta kirja toimii erinomaisena käyntikorttina Oulun yliopiston KuTu-konferenssille: vaikka aasinsillat artikkeleiden välillä ovat paikoin todella häiritseviä, ne alleviivaavat humanistisen tutkimuksen laaja-alaisuutta.

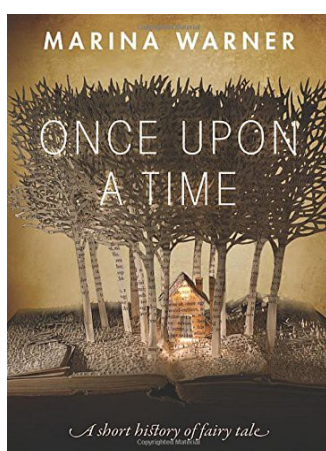


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Bokrecension : Marina Warner – *Once Upon a Time. A short history of fairy tale.*

Tommy Kuusela



Marina Warner. *Once Upon a Time. A short history of fairy tale.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014 ISBN: 978-0-19-871865-9.

I sin senaste bok tar litteraturprofessorn Marina Warner med oss på en resa in i sagornas värld, dels till den typ av sagor som kallas konstsagor, dels den typ som är rotad i muntlig tradition och benämns folksagor, fesagor eller undersagor. Vid sidan om en akademisk karriär är Warner en skönlitterär författare vars stil är medryckande, skarp och underfundig, samtidigt som hon behärskar konsten att balansera mellan akademisk och personlig prosa, på ett sätt som gör läsningen till en ren fröjd. Bokens undertitel understryker att det rör sig om en historisk översikt av sagor och att sammanfatta detta i en drygt 200 sidor lång bok är en tuff utmaning. Warner lyckas med bravur att beskriva sagor från Shakespeare till sagor i Hollywood-tappning, men en kritisk läsare märker att både medeltiden och äldre sagor förbigås. Jag uppfattar boken som en historia över konstsagor, alltså litterära eller litterärt bearbetade sagor med kända upphovsmän. Warners sagodefinition är bred och inbegriper såväl löst relaterade fantasyberättelser som litterära verk där kända sagomotiv använts. Boken är indelad tematiskt, istället för kronologiskt, vilket gör att varje kapitel kan läsas som en fristående essä.

De första tryckta samlingarna av folksagor var italienska och publicerades av Giovanni Francesco Straparola (*Le piacevoli notti* 1550-1555) respektive Giambattista Basile (*Il Pentamerone* 1634-1636). Warner menar att det inte är en slump att Straparola och Basile baserade sina sagosamlingar på öar eller hamnstäder som Venedig, eftersom det var där som resande från olika kulturer möttes och utbytte berättelser. Under 1600-talet blomstrade nedtecknandet av sagor i Frankrike och den samling som utmärker sig framför andra är Charles Perraults *Histoires et Contes du temps passé* 1697. Sagor traderades främst av kvinnor och en del av dem kunde använda sig av sagorna för att protestera mot orättvisor och rådande patriarkala normer. Denna form av inlindad samhällskritik följer med sagorna in i modern tid. Under början av 1700-talet översattes *Tusen och*

en natt till franska och kort därefter till engelska. Dessa österländska sagor slog ned som en bomb och blev oerhört populära, samtidigt som de skrämde en del konservativa kritiker vilka ansåg att sagorna var omoraliska och olämpliga inte minst för kvinnor. Insamlandet av sagor skulle få en storhetstid på 1800-talet och de mest framgångsrika från denna tid är bröderna Jacob och Wilhelm Grimm. Deras sagosamling hör till världens mest spridda böcker och finns i otaliga bearbetningar och översättningar. Deras samling, *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*, utkom under brödernas livstid i sju olika successivt utökade utgåvor (1812-1857). Från och med den andra upplagan, riktad till barn, fick sagorna sin nuvarande form. När bröderna började samla sitt material var deras land ockuperat av Napoleons styrkor. Det var mot en sådan bakgrund som de, i likhet med många andra nationalistiskt sinnade män i Europa, ville rädda den inhemska folkdiktningen, slå vakt om språket och bevara vad man ansåg vara en tysk folkanda. I slutändan skulle det visa sig att många av de historier som de samlade in varken var utpräglade tyska eller särskilt folkliga. Warner visar hur bröderna av olika skäl omformat sagorna. De kunde censurera sexuella anspelningar, men behöll blodiga och grymma skildringar eftersom de sades innehålla en god sensmoral.

Warner visar att många av Grimms sagor är gamla och att de alltid har omformats efter berättarens behov. Ett exempel är Rödluvan. Charles Perrault skriver i sin version att det kan gå illa för flickor som inte lyder sin mor och att det finns vargar som är håriga på insidan vilka lurar små flickor till sina sovkammare. Nazisterna lovsjöng bröderna Grimms sagor och var benägna att konstruera egna tolkningar av dem. Sagan om Rödluvan användes exempelvis i propagandasyfte, där vargen symboliserade judenheten, medan Rödluvan var det vilseförda tyska folket som räddas av en SS-officer. Feministen Angela Carter låter Rödluvan få utlopp för sin lust med en varulv i ett par egna berättelser som baseras på sagan. Carter har ett stort inflytande på Warner och det är uppenbart att olika former av "anti-tales", det vill säga att medvetet förvrida en gammal sagas optimism och förtrollning till dess motsats, inte minst med feministiska ansatser, överlag tolkas som positivt av Warner.

Warner förklarar att var och en som hör en saga också är en potentiell återberättare. I förlängningen leder det till att sagorna omformas och färgas av rådande värderingar, politik, könsroller, romantiska ideal och så vidare. Sagorna blir också omvandlade av nöjesbranschen, inte minst av Disney som tolkat flera sagor kända från Perrault, bröderna Grimm och H. C. Andersen.

Min största invändning mot Warners bok är att ytterst lite utrymme ägnas åt folkloristiska teorier om sagor. Warner menar att sagan används som en kod för sociala förhållanden och fungerar som metaforer och symboler för vardagslivet. Det är också något som folkloristen Bengt Holbek ansåg, bland annat i sin inflytelserika avhandling *Interpretation of Fairy Tales* (1987). Varken Holbek, eller framstående folklorister som C.W. von Sydow, Max Lüthi eller Alan Dundes, omnämns. Warner avfärdar de för folkloristiken viktiga uppslagsbanden *Motif-Index* av Antti Aarne, Stith Thompson och Hans-Jörg Uther, därför att hon menar att deras universella anspråk berättar väldigt lite om de enskilda sagornas historiska och sociala förutsättningar. Warner är också kritisk mot Vladimir Propps formalistiska metod och hon gör upp med psykoanalytiska teorier, inte minst Bruno Bettelheims inflytelserika *The Uses of Enchantment* (1976) får välförtjänt kritik.

I mitt tycke är Warners största begåvning att tolka sagorna utifrån sociokulturella och politiska förhållanden, där sagor kan visa och kritisera normer och värderingar. Ju mer fantastiska berättelserna är, desto större möjlighet har de att göra upp med allvarliga frågor och kritisera samtiden, menar Warner. Sagornas äldre former berörs ytligt, vilket är synd även om det knappast är lönt att i likhet med von Sydow försöka rekonstruera en urform av sagor som ett förstadium till myten. Däremot kan just den typ av index som Warner förkastar, vara en nyckel till förståelse av hur en typ av saga spridits i tid och rum. När sagorna nedtecknas lämnar upptecknaren, liksom den traditionsbärare som återberättat sagan, sitt avtryck på berättelsen. Den anpassas och omformas, efter smak och tycke, vid varje tillfälle den berättas. Sagens muntliga karaktär nämns, men utvecklas inte tillräckligt. Just framträdandet, berättandet av sagorna och hur berättaren interagerar

med omgivningen är en central aspekt för att förstå sagor, något som exempelvis Linda Dégh visat. Slutligen är jag överens med Warner om att sagan är flytande och flexibel och att den inte känner gränser eller barriärer och kan röra sig över tid och rum. Trots min kritik vill jag påpeka att *Once Upon a Time* är en välskriven bok och jag rekommenderar den helhjärtat. Boken är fylld av skarpa iakttagelser och uppmuntrar till att läsa både sagor och fler studier av Warner.



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